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**Navigating the Ambitions and Alliances of the  
Southern Transitional Council: A Comprehensive  
Analysis of Statehood Pursuits, Political  
Participation, and Interactions with Regional and  
Global Stakeholders**

Thesis submitted in partial fulfilment  
of the requirements of the degree of  
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## **Abstract**

This thesis explores the extent to which the Southern Transitional Council (STC) in Yemen has manifested itself as a partner of the Arab coalition and its aspirations to take the lead in regional and international politics and conflict resolution through the Yemen crisis. It also uses Qualitative Content Analysis to analyze fourteen interviews with key stakeholders and experts from various political parties in Yemen such as STC, General People's Congress, Islah and independent activists. Moreover, it indicates the development of the STC, its identity, regional and international influence, contemporary presence, and the role of its military forces. It provides insights into the complex dynamics shaping the STC's relationships with various actors, including the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia (KSA) and the United Arab Emirates (UAE), as well as the challenges and opportunities it faces in achieving its goals. Findings reveal that the relations between the STC and the regional powers are controversial. This thesis argues that the legitimacy of the STC and its participation in the Yemeni reconciliation efforts require the mechanisms of understanding and common interests with the Arab coalition led by KSA and the UAE. The great strength of the Arab coalition and its global presence in the Middle East makes it a necessary partner for the STC.

*Keywords: STC, Yemen Crisis, PLC, Conflict, Southern Issue, Identity, Political participation, Regional, International actors, Intervention.*

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*To the land and the sea,  
and the thick salty air, home of  
the free*

*It is my dusky past  
that a bright future I seek  
I live with hope  
as I type on this sheet  
For a dignified South  
in harmony and in peace.*

*It has been my driver  
for this thesis*

## LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

CRC	Consultation and Reconciliation Commission
EIP	European Institute of Peace
ESNDT	External Southern National Dialogue team
GCC	Gulf Cooperation Council
GPC	General People's Congress
ISIS	Islamic State of Iraq and Syria, branch formed in Yemen in 2015
KSA	The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia
NSM	The New Social Movement Theory
PDRY	People's Democratic Republic of Yemen
PLC	Presidential Leadership Council
QCA	Qualitative Content Analysis
SNDC	Southern National Dialogue Committee
SR	Southern Resistance
STC	Southern Transitional Council
UAE	United Arab Emirates
UK	United Kingdom
UN	United Nation
UNSC	United Nation Security Council
YAR	Yemen Arab Republic

# 1. Introduction

The Yemen crisis is not since the Arab uprising; there have been internal civil wars for over three decades. Geopolitics play a significant position in the Middle East, as well as international actors. Yemen's location as a crucial strategic depth of the Arab Gulf and Red Sea region has caused international interventions (BBC, 2020). The thesis investigates the case study of the Southern transitional council resulting from the Yemen crisis that started with the Houthi takeover of the country in 2015 and the Arab coalition intervention. The coalition efforts are directed and intensified towards ending the war, a peace process, and political settlement (Brehoney, 2020). The STC, which represents the Southern issue, has undertaken a larger part and responsibility in this war. The STC went from being a marginalized entity, labelled as a spoiler, to a military and political force, and recognized as a key player which led to a major change in the current form of the state (Al-Hamdani, Lackner, 2020).

Opinions have differed as to why the war began, with some scholars arguing that the war in Yemen is a proxy between Iran, KSA, the UAE and other less visible foreign actors, all competing for their interests (Schulpen, 2020). Other scholars have argued that the roots of the conflict are internal, including corruption, political manipulation by groups such as GPCs, Islah party (the Muslim Brotherhood), and the failure of the policy elite to resolve the Southern issue (Juneau, 2020). After the ongoing conflicts and change of governments, efforts of peace processes and reconciliations, a new government was established called the Presidential Leadership Council (PLC) in April 2022. The STC is part of it and consists of a president of seven deputies, including the President of the STC, to govern the country for the transitional period, make the most significant political gain for the STC and a position of power which not many could have imagined two years ago (Radman, 2022).

This thesis examines the factors that led to the STC's formation, its relationship with the coalition led by KSA and the UAE, its objectives, mandate, and political participation within the Yemen political context. The STC, founded in May 2017, from its initially limited influence in certain liberated Southern regions to its participation in the highest political level of the country, the PLC. The STC had political goals since its formation, with regional affiliation and recognition. The complications of finding sustainable solutions and comprehensive peace, and supporting the

political parties to the conflict; through many escalations and repeated attempts to conclude a truce agreement in the areas of the line of fire between the Southern governorates controlled by the STC and the legitimate government on the one hand, and the Northern areas under Houthi control on the other making raising the puzzle: “How has the intervention on regional and international powers affected the continuation of the conflict between the warring parties in the Yemen crisis?”. Likewise, the thesis examines how to understand the new political entity, the STC in the Southern Yemen, which bears the demands of independence from the unified state, in addition to having become part of the PLC in Yemen. However, analyzing the extent of the impact of war, political entities in Yemen, raise an interesting research question: “To what extent has the STC manifested itself as a partner of the Arab coalition, and how does it aspire to take the lead in regional and international politics and conflict resolution?”.

The finding highlights that the partnership between the STC, and the Arab coalition countries has generated controversy. One perspective views the STC as a crucial partner within the Arab coalition, actively engaged in the fight against the Houthis. However, another viewpoint characterizes the STC as a sponsored entity that merely follows directives from regional powers. The STC faces numerous challenges, including navigating political and military tensions with Northern parties and enduring international criticism stemming from internal conflicts. In its pursuit of stability and development in the Southern regions, the STC strives to enhance its relations with international actors and resolve internal disputes. Additionally, the study examined the STC's initiatives to foster Southern cohesion and reinforce Southern identity across its various roles, positions, and principles. The STC seeks to promote comprehensive reconciliation within the Southern ranks, with the ultimate goal of representing the collective voice of the majority of Southerners.

The thesis highlights the STC power and its efforts to participate in the peace process in Yemen. Furthermore, the regional interventions of the Arab coalition led by KSA and UAE support the recognized government and anti-Houthi political entities in Yemen (Brehoney, 2020). The STC commits to confronting the Houthis and contribute with international and regional actors in formulating a solution to the Yemen crisis, together with political entities bearing different identities and ideologies (UK, 2022).



Moreover, the civil war in Yemen and regional and international interventions made Yemen an open battlefield that fostered the creation of new political identities. The STC, which was an extension of a peaceful civil movement in South Yemen, claimed the independence of the Southern Yemen and its return to the pre-1990 borders (Forster, 2017). To understand the primary factors and realities that led to the formation of the STC and its leadership and political role in the Southern regions and the war in Yemen. The thesis investigates through interviews with the elites of the STC, various political parties, local actors, political activists, and NGOs. It focuses on their views and understanding of the force behind the reality of war, the correlation between the Southern issue and its main representative, the STC, and its participation in the PLC and political peace process.

## 1.1 Historical Overview

In the early 19th century, a conflict arose between the British and Ottomans over control of North and South Yemen. The Ottomans eventually relinquished control of North Yemen to the Hashemite Mutawakkilite Kingdom Zaydis in 1918. In 1962, a revolution against the imamate began, leading to the establishment of the Yemeni Arab Republic in 1968 (Brehony, 2011; Doran, 2020). In the South, the struggle against British colonialism culminated in the establishment of the People's Democratic Republic of Yemen in 1967, a country that followed a radical Marxist ideology and had close ties with the Soviet Union (Hill, 2017). The People's Democratic Republic of Yemen and the Yemen Arab Republic frequently engaged in conflict and internal wars due to political and ideological differences. However, the state of South Yemen sought unity with North Yemen, leading to their unification in 1990 (Schwedler, 2002).

Yemen's unification led to political conflicts between the Southern Socialist Party and former President Saleh's regime, resulting in a war involving religious groups. The Northern regime under Ali Abdullah Saleh exemplified the centralized, oppressive, corrupt, and unjust regimes, primarily characterized by tribal authority and corrupt political elites who maintained influence even after unification (Day, 2012, pp. 58,63). The Islah Party, affiliated with the Muslim Brotherhood, issued a takfiri fatwa against Southern opponents, accusing them of being non-Islamic communists. This religious discourse escalated violence and led to human rights abuses, including targeted attacks and kidnappings by the General People's Congress and Islah Party. International organizations reported these violations, which had long-lasting impacts on Southern Yemen's relationship with the central government and the Muslim Brotherhood (Carapico, 1994; Molyneux, 1995).

The 1994 civil war resulted from the Saleh government's violations against Southern leaders, leading to the disengagement announcement by Ali Salem al-Beidh, former PDRY president. Saleh's rejection of this decision widened the gap in Yemeni unity. Post-war, the Saleh regime and Islah Party created a false history, undermining Southern identity and violating Yemen's democratic rights. Instead of utilizing Southern institutions based on order and law, the Sana'a regime favored tribal systems, chaos, possession, neglecting infrastructure, resource allocation, corruption combat, and justice for the Yemeni people (Schmitz, 1995, pp. 33-36; Young, 2012, pp. 754,759). Additionally, constitutional changes and laws were implemented to

prevent Southerners from voicing their concerns regarding the central state's violations and rejecting the unified state, the Penal Code of 1994's such as "*Article (125): Anyone who undertakes an act with the intent of violating the independence, unity or territorial integrity of the Republic shall be punished by the death penalty*" (Yemen, 1994).

The ongoing violations, exclusion, and marginalization led to the domination of Southern lands and institutions and replaced the Southern army with Northern military units. Following the 1994 war, the Southern Peaceful Movement, a liberation movement, emerged in 2007. The movement comprised former Southern military officers forced into early retirement after the 1994 war (Day, 2010). The peaceful Southern liberation movement persisted with demonstrations in Aden, Mukalla, and other Southern governorates, advocating for the restoration of the Southern state and self-determination. Despite arrests and killings by the Saleh regime, the movement continued and supported their Northern counterparts in Sanaa during the Arab uprising to change the Saleh regime in 2011 (Lackner, 2019).

After the Arab uprising that led to worsen the long-standing issues in Yemen, including the transition of power from the Saleh government to the Hadi government. The comprehensive national dialogue aimed at reuniting conflicting parties and implementing the outcomes and ended in 2014, facilitated by the United Nations and GCC countries, aimed to address the country's challenges. However, the political crisis following the outcomes of the national dialogue was caused by the Houthis coup against the Hadi government, which further intensified the factors leading to the war they started in Aden in 2015, political turmoil, and security instability (Schulpen, 2020).

The STC was founded on May 4, 2017, under Aidarous al-Zubaidi. It represented the interests of the South Yemeni population, particularly in their claims for renewed independence from the territory that constituted the PDRY until 1990. The STC was formed in response to President Hadi's dismissal of South Yemeni governors and cabinet ministers in April 2017 (Forster, 2017). The STC is based on the Southern Movement, which has existed since 2007 and has a Leadership Council of 28 persons and various departments to enable the building of state structures in South Yemen. The National Assembly, consisting of 303 representatives from South Yemen's political and civil spectrum, was formed on November 30, 2017. The STC pursues a participatory approach and gives access to all decisions taken by the council. Positions were

distributed following a consensual decision-making process, and the STC has established offices worldwide (STC, 2018).

Endorsed by many masses support rallies across the Southern Governorates, the STC was considered a legitimate representative, which held the vast majority of the People's support. Furthermore, the STC was a viable partner to the Coalition Intervention spearheaded by the Kingdom of KSA and the UAE working together with Counter Terrorism, as well as the Anti Houthi fronts; whom are group backed by Iran, that conducted a coup to the capital city of Sana'a in late 2014 (Brehony, 2020). The strength of the STC is also represented by the military aspect that came from the Southern resistance. The Southern military forces formed from the Southern resistance (SR) when the Southern fighters took up arms to fight the Houthi-Saleh alliance as they invaded the Southern Yemen in March 2015, then joined the STC after its formation in 2017, represent a coalescence of the military and political wings of several factions within the Southern Movement-Al-Hirak (Baron, 2019).

## **2. Literature review**

Since the beginning of the war in March 2015, different political movements emerged in Yemen. The most significant movement that gained magnitude was the STC. However, research on the STC remains minimal. This section will present the academic discourse around the STC and the ongoing conflict in Yemen. This chapter consists of three main themes, regional and international interference, the rise of the STC, and the contemporary role of STC's in conflict.

### **2.1 Multiculturalism and the formation of identity**

The notion of identity (Mead, 1934; Erickson, 1959) is of utmost importance in comprehending the concept of the "self" within society. The concept of identity has been extensively explored by social scientists from various disciplines. Klandermans and de Weerd (2000) distinguish between two levels: individual personal level and collective group level. At the individual level, they draw on Tajfel and Turner's (1979) differentiation, which suggests that individuals have both personal and social identities. Personal identity refers to self-definition based on personal attributes, while social identity refers to self-definition based on membership in social categories. Melucci (1989) refers to collective identity as a dynamic and interactive understanding of the opportunities and limitations that arise from collective action. It is a process that emerges through the repeated activation and negotiation of relationships between individuals and groups.

In a similar vein, Anderson (1983) explores the concept of nationalism and the formation of modern nations from a collective identity perspective by arguing that nations are not natural or objective entities but rather socially constructed and imagined communities. Anderson (2006) further emphasizes the role of print capitalism and the rise of vernacular languages in creating a sense of shared identity among individuals within a nation. Anderson suggests that the idea of the nation is a product of collective imagination, as individuals envision themselves as part of a larger community with shared history, symbols, and aspirations. Hall (1990) refers to cultural identity as a collective sense of self, encompassing a shared culture that lies beneath numerous superficial or externally imposed identities. It represents a deeper, authentic core that unites individuals with a common history and ancestry. Crenshaw (1990) used the intersectional identity concept to stress

that individuals have multiple social identities that intersect and interact, shaping their unique experiences within society. Fukuyama (2018) view that the modern understanding of identity rapidly transforms into identity politics wherein individuals seek public recognition of their worth.

While Fukuyama (2018) explores how various factors, such as globalization, multiculturalism, and social media, have influenced the formation and expression of individual and group identities, Cook-Huffman (2008) stressed that the development of national identity is directly shaped by wars, conflicts, and external threats. Ricarte (2023) prop exhibits the construction of identity in prolonged conflicts exhibits distinctive features as a result of the multi-generational nature of these circumstances. Overall, and as noted earlier, the concept of identity is multifaceted and has been approached by various social scientists from different perspectives. Definitions provided by social scientists shed light on the complex nature of identity, encompassing personal, social, collective, cultural, national, and intersectional dimensions. Understanding these diverse definitions contributes to a comprehensive understanding of identity and its significance in social sciences.

## 2.2 The regional and international interference

According to some theorists, the Yemen crisis finds its roots in different aspects: Identity, ideology, religion, and the regional and international actors' intervention (Day 2020, Parker 2021, Pack 2019, and Baron 2019). These scholars have used various research methods, including qualitative research and discourse analysis, to understand the complexities of the conflict in Yemen. These scholars have focused on different aspects of the conflict, such as the history of Yemen, the political and economic instability, the military and security imbalance, the unity between North and South Yemen, the civil war, and the Southern Movement. In addition to these scholars highlights the perspectives of international actors involved in the conflict in Yemen.

Day (2020) provides a comprehensive chapter on the origins of the STC and the political dynamics surrounding its creation. Day said that the STC came to life on May 2017, and came to power in Aden after battling forces loyal to President Hadi in August 2019, which resulted in a divide between the UAE and KSA. Day also stated that the main enemy of the STC is the Yemeni Muslim Brotherhood, also known as Al-Islah, which created tension between the Arab Coalition as President Hadi, who was supported by the Arab Coalition led by KSA, was allied with Al-Islah to fight the Houthis in the North. Day also explored the dynamics that affected the history and formation of the STC where KSA was supporting the internationally recognized government the UAE supported the STC. Furthermore, Day pointed out the concepts of actor relationships and explores the interactions of the international dynamics behind the Yemen crisis and how the human tragedy unfolded (Day, 2020). Furthermore, the STC showed alliance with KSA and the UAE during the Qatar blockade in 2019 and showed support to the Western counterterrorism policy. In the literature review example you provided, Day (2020) utilize qualitative research methods to understand the Yemen crisis. While the specific theoretical concepts used by the authors may not be explicitly stated in the provided information, we can infer some relevant concepts based on their approach and objectives.

Similarly, Parker (2021) employing the concepts of transformative, non- transformative, intervention and democratic argues that the war in Yemen had intervention from the regional power, especially KSA and UAE, and both crown princes Mohammed bin Salman and Mohammed bin Zayed formed policies for Yemen crisis called a "non-transformative" policy the North to address a material threat embodied in the Houthis and "transformative" in the South to

counter Islamist threats that could spread to the UAE, by assessing these different intervention policies amid divergent threat perceptions (Pack, 2019). Parker discusses Yemen's multifaceted conflict that led to a reformative intervention that began in March 2015, and differences between democratic and autocratic interveners, unilateral vs multilateral interventions, and the influence of international or domestic factors on intervention decisions (Ibid).

Likewise, Baron (2019) utilizing the concept fragmentation of Political and Armed Factions, explores the historical context of the conflict, tracing its roots back to the 1990 unification between the PDRY and YAR, which led to power struggles and regional disparities by conducting an in-depth analysis of the political, social, and economic factors contributing to the ongoing crisis in Yemen. The author stated the role of regional and international actors, particularly the involvement of KSA and the UAE in the military coalition against the Houthi rebels (Baron, 2019, pp. 19-25). Moreover, Baron also discusses the conflict's dynamics and attempts to broker peace agreements and the challenges of achieving a sustainable political resolution, arguing that the fragmentation of political and armed factions complicates the peace process. The author highlighted the complexities of the Yemeni crisis and the rise of terrorist groups such as al-Qaeda (AQAP) and the Islamic State ISIS (Ibid).

In contrast, Pack (2019), uses the concept of geopolitical and quantitative content analysis to investigate the deteriorating situation in Libya following the Arab Spring and subsequent civil wars post-2014, in the aftermath of Gaddafi's regime. The article examines the emergence of armed groups vying for power, including revolutionaries, the Muslim Brotherhood, and Haftar's forces, which are backed by the UAE and other Arab nations, such as Egypt, in their fight against the Muslim Brotherhood and terrorism in the Arab region (Pack, 2019). The author delves into the complex dynamics of Libya's second civil war, exploring the role of militias in shaping the political landscape and the consequences of foreign involvement in the conflict. The author offers insights into the competing interests of local and international actors, highlighting the challenges of achieving stability and unity in the country by analyzing the intricate relationships between these factions and the broader geopolitical context. In conclusion, the article examines the intricate relationships between various armed groups and foreign actors and their impact on the country's stability in the post-Gaddafi era (Ibid).



Salisbury (2016) *Impact on Stability and Economic Development* discusses the conflict dynamics in Yemen that led to Saudi Iranian regional intervention. The author argued that the Houthi ally with Iran raised KSA's ire for its Interference in the Yemen war. KSA has consistently sought to maintain a dominant role in regional security and protect its borders. Salisbury indicated that the conflict impacted the Yemeni stability of economic development and increased the hardship of citizens (Salisbury, 2016). The interventions of the regional actors were not only from military aspects but also peace initiatives. The Sana'a Center for Strategic Studies (2020) indicated that peace initiatives started by KSA and the Riyadh agreement from several perspectives. The deal started at the STC's and Yemen's legitimate government's request from KSA. Sana'a Center examined the Riyadh agreement from a practical and narrative standpoint. The article also discusses the provisions of the Riyadh Agreement that stipulate the inclusion and recognize the STC as a critical player in the ongoing conflict that wants to impose authority of the situation in the Southern governorates. Sana'a Center also indicated the animosity between the Southern Council and the legitimate government, and the Riyadh Agreement's terms cannot be implemented as intended (Center, 2020).

In conclusion, the literature review indicated that the scholars provide a comprehensive understanding of the conflict in Yemen and the different perspectives that scholars have presented to explain its root causes. The literature review also highlights the challenges of achieving lasting peace in Yemen and the complexities of the conflict, which are shaped by the historical, political, social, and economic factors that have contributed to its ongoing nature.

## 2.3 The Rise of the STC

As the STC is a major factor in the current conflict in Yemen that was formed in 2017 to represent the Southern cause, various academics, including Heibach (2021), Lokenberg (2022), Salisbury (2018), and Forster (2018), have studied its rise within the conflict resolution from different perspectives using various methods. These scholars examined the STC's historical and political backdrop, legitimacy, international recognition, and involvement in the Yemeni conflict. Heibach and Lokenberg discussed the STC's historical and political foundation and international recognition of how it came about as a response to the marginalization and internal factors that led to the Southern movement (Al-Hirak). Heibach (2021) and Lokenberg (2022) argued the role of the regional powers that supported the STC politically and militarily.

On the other hand, Salisbury (2018) and Forster (2018) explore the marginalization of Southern issues from the Yemeni government over the years and the complexity of the Yemen crisis that led to the rise of STC in the political landscape. Salisbury and Forster used the concepts of legitimacy and recognition to clarify the STC's use of violence to support the Arab coalition (Salisbury and Forster, 2018). The scholars also highlighted the interference of regional actors in supporting STCs rise and emphasized the critical role that UAE provided to STC fighting the Islah party (Muslim brotherhood) in Yemen. Scholars discuss the implications of the support by increased military capabilities to STC and leverage locally, regionally, and internationally. Despite the STC's increased power and international recognition, its role in the Yemeni conflict remains contentious. The scholars add that STC is the legitimate representative of the South of Yemen cause, meanwhile others dispute its leadership claim for its interests and implement the regional actor agenda. The STC's future leadership position and agency are also closely tied to the interests of Abu Dhabi.

In conclusion, the scholars' indicated the valuable insights into the rise of the STC and the complicated dynamics of the Yemeni conflict which helps the understanding of how the STC emerged and gained power and its potential implications for conflict resolution. Moreover, the peace process and its participation in the political sphere in managing external relations with regional and international actors.

## 2.4 The STC's Role in the Conflict

This part explores the Yemen crisis from various perspectives, including political, economic, military, and social aspects. It emphasizes the role of the STC in the conflict and highlights the works of Clausen (2018), Sharp (2019), Egel et al. (2021), Juneau (2020), Sana'a Center for Strategic Studies (2020), and Dahlgren (2018) as key references.

Clausen (2018) argues that the Yemeni conflict is primarily a struggle for control of the state rather than a conflict between the state and a non-state actor. The article used the concept of Struggle for Control of the State and indicated the central focus on power dynamics and control over the governance of Yemen. The author traces the rise of the Houthis and the fragmentation of the Yemeni state, emphasizing internal roots rather than external rivalries. Sharp (2019), agreeing with Clausen (2018), provides an overview of the protracted conflict in Yemen, discussing the involvement of multiple parties, and highlighted the Fluid Alliances and Loyalties that recognizes the dynamic and shifting nature of alliances and affiliations among different factions in Yemen including the Houthis, the legitimate government, the STC, and the Arab coalition led by KSA. The article highlights the devastating impact on Yemen's population, infrastructure, and institutions, as well as the humanitarian crisis and the erosion of central government. Unlike others, Egel et al. (2021) present empirical analysis based on Rand Corporation's research, focusing on the challenges of negotiating an enduring peace agreement in Yemen. The study emphasizes the need for inclusivity and addresses unresolved political and economic grievances, particularly in Southern Yemen. In relation to the previous scholar, Juneau (2020) examines the Emirati intervention in Yemen, specifically in South Yemen, and suggests that the UAE's involvement was motivated by military, political, and ideological factors, including support for the STC and opposition to the Islah party.

The Sana'a Center for Strategic Studies (2020) evaluates the failure of the Riyadh agreement, which aimed to bring together the legitimate government and the STC. The article highlights the evolving political landscape and the hostility between the STC and the legitimate government, emphasizing the complexities of achieving a lasting peace. Dahlgren (2018) focuses on the STC in Southern Yemen and its role in the ongoing conflict. The article highlights the complex relationships between Yemeni factions and foreign actors, particularly the UAE's involvement. It traces the origins of the conflict to Southern Yemenis' dissatisfaction with

exclusionist politics and the formation of the Southern Movement or Hirak. The article discusses the STC's efforts to consolidate power in the South, its alliance with the UAE, and its pragmatic approach to building political support. The author concludes that the STC's emergence and the involvement of various Yemeni factions and foreign actors, including the UAE and KSA, have contributed to the Yemeni conflict.

Overall, the literature review addresses the multifaceted nature of the Yemen crisis, explores the role of different actors, and emphasizes the challenges of peacebuilding and resolving political and economic grievances. In conclusion, the STC's role in the Yemeni conflict is significant, driven by the dissatisfaction with exclusionist politics and influenced by regional actors like the UAE. The academic discussions by Clausen (2018), Sharp (2019), Egel et al. (2021), Juneau (2020), Sana'a Center for Strategic Studies (2020), and Dahlgren (2018) offer valuable insights into the complexities surrounding the STC's involvement, the challenges of peacebuilding, and the humanitarian crisis in Yemen. Addressing the STC's demands, along with the political and economic grievances in Southern Yemen, is crucial for achieving a sustainable resolution to the conflict and ensuring long-term stability in the country.

The contrasts and debates of most scholars who used historical context analysis, comparative analysis, discursive analysis, and quantitative and qualitative analysis in the literature review. The qualitative analysis used by Lackner (2019) to discuss the civil war in Yemen, which led to a crisis and caused a great dilemma in the Arab region through the threat to Arab national security, Lancker covered the problems identified the lack of understanding of different identities at the time of unity as a significant contributor to decades-old problems that were only exacerbated by the 2011 revolution, but did not cover the STC national and political identity, which will be one of the methodologies given by this study mainly through a different perspective and the most crucial concept that led to the Yemen crisis and emerged new entities that play a key role in the political area such as STC.

Moreover, Day (2020) indicated that during the civil war in 1994, Southern issues and institutions experienced ongoing violations, exclusion, and marginalization, including replacing the Southern army with Northern military units. In response, the Southern Peaceful Movement (Al-Hirak) emerged in 2007, leading to calls for self-determination and disengagement of the unification in Yemen. Day also said that the STC came to life on May 2017 and explored the

dynamics that affected the history and formation of the STC, where KSA supported the internationally recognized government, and the UAE supported the STC. Furthermore, Day pointed out the international dynamics behind the Yemen crisis and how the human tragedy unfolded. However, Day did not touch on the STC towards the Southern cohesion, the STC nature, its mandate, manifestation, and perception among the Yemeni political parties.

The STC is one of the most critical actors in the political dynamics in Yemen, and due to the literature reviews, which were collected to research the thesis methodology, the literature was collected with detailed methodologies to verify the views of the regional and international interference, the Rise of the STC and the STC's Role in the Conflict. To conduct research data materials with the use of the QCA method in the context of the study of STC that examined to investigate through, Books, journal articles, and official documents. Even though the role of the STC in the Yemeni conflict, drawing from the works of (Clausen, 2018; Sharp, 2019; Egel et al., 2021; Juneau, 2020; Sana'a Center for Strategic Studies, 2020; Dahlgren, 2018). The STC's political context, regional actors' role in supporting the STC, the challenges of peacebuilding, and the humanitarian crisis in Yemen. The political context of the STC (Clausen, 2018; Sharp, 2019) provides comprehensive overviews of the Yemeni conflict, emphasizing the struggle over control of the state and the fluid alliances and loyalties of various actors.

While prior literature shed light on how identity is affecting conflicts and is affected by conflicts, little is known about this relationship in some contexts. Moreover, previous work on the conflict in Yemen (e.g., Forster, 2018; Heiback, 2021; Lokenberg, 2022; Salisbury, 2018) do not examine it through the identity lens. Previous scholars focused mainly on the current role of the STC and its historical background; however, the identity of the STC remains untackled. Thus, the thesis aims at filling the gap by adding a unique angle and examining the research question in the context of Yemen from an identity perspective. The thesis will discuss interpretations and understandings that shape the STC's position within the Arab coalition and its aspirations in regional and international politics.

### **3. Theoretical Framework (Social Constructivism)**

This section has three sub-sections that discuss the theoretical approaches, social constructivism, new social movement, and military theory. This section will discuss these theories and how they will be used to analyze this research. Social constructivism as a theoretical framework allows for examining complex social interactions. It emphasizes the individual differences in the acquisition, selection, interpretation, and organization of information, requiring teachers to acknowledge that each learner constructs knowledge differently (Adams, 2006, p. 245).

This thesis explores the STC's identity construction of social interactions and communication between the STC, the Arab coalition and other political entities. This involves uncovering the socio-cultural context in which the STC's partnership with the Arab coalition is formed and negotiated. Furthermore, this thesis also explores the socio-cultural factors, including knowledge construction, which influence the STC's strategies for conflict resolution and regional politics. From a social constructivist point of view, this thesis examines how the STC's aspirations to take the lead in regional and international politics and conflict resolution are shaped by social processes and consensus-building within the organization and with external actors. It also investigates the discourses and communication strategies that STC employs to gain support and legitimize its internal and external objectives. It is important to acknowledge that the fluid nature of the STC's position within local, regional, and international politics may change over time in response to evolving social contexts.

The social constructivist perspective provides valuable insights into the complex social processes that underpin the STC's partnership with different actors. This approach emphasizes the importance of social interaction, language, and the socio-cultural context in understanding these dynamics. Constructivist scholars study norms and rules in their institutionalization and acceptance. Finnemore and Sikkink's (1998) "life cycle" perspective examines the evolution of normative structures over time. Actors engage in strategic social construction to revise rules through practice, reflection, and debates, aiming to modify norms that shape state identities and interests related to legitimacy (Barnett, 2014, p. 159).

### **3.1 The concept of Identity**

The social constructivist approach states the identity construction of social interactions and communication between the STC, the Arab coalition and other political entities. This thesis uses the concept of identity as paramount in comprehending social and political phenomena (Fierke, 2013). This study employs a constructivist perspective to investigate the formation and role of the STC in Yemen, consequently shedding light on the intricate nature of identity within conflicting circumstances. Moreover, conceptualizing identity from a constructivist perspective indicates that social structures and norms form an identity, significantly influencing actors' behavior (Ibid). Constructivism further acknowledges the potential for social identities, including political parties and groups, to transform over time (Halperin and Heath, 2017). Its understanding of the STC identity nature presented the Southern issue. Constructivists argue that identity and interests are deeply related to a crucial role in shaping the material world and its manifestations. This reflects the STC and how it manifests itself in front of the Arab coalition and among the Yemeni political parties. A comprehensive understanding of actors' behavior of STC and the social milieu necessitates the recognition of identity as a fundamental component of STC political components.

Furthermore, the constructivist approach highlights that political identity is closely tied to nationalism, self-determination, and the pursuit of rights (Baylis, 2014; Fox, 2013). The analysis of the STC's political conduct within society underscores its objectives of achieving self-determination and independence (Fox, 2013). Brubaker and Cooper's (2000) assessment of the constructivist approach to identity raises concerns about majorly using the concept of "identity" within the social sciences and humanities. They support greater precision and differentiation in their conceptualization, recognizing identities' fluid and multifaceted nature (Brubaker and Cooper, 2000). Moreover, they discuss the limitations of traditional definitions of identity and advocate for a broader conceptualization. That is, their understanding of identity challenges essentialist and static conceptions, emphasizing the socially constructed, historical, and dynamic aspects of identities. Their perspective encourages a more nuanced and contextual analysis that goes beyond simplistic identity categorizations. This thesis uses the concept of identity and indicates that identity and interests are inseparable from the world of social meaning, which is relevant to forming the STC's identity.

Moreover, El-Ojeili further argues that identity may indicate a fundamental transformation of The STC's identity and the Southern issue, highlighting the complexity and contestations that arise when different actors hold differing views on the significance of identity (El-Ojeili, 2012, p. 100.101). This thesis also investigates the STC's identity, political participation, and objectives from a constructivist lens providing valuable insights into its regional affiliations and political activities (Radman, 2022; UK, 2022). The constructivist framework facilitates understanding the STC's aspirations in regional and international politics and its role as a partner in regional dynamics and peace processes. A closer examination of its relationship with the Arab coalition led by KSA and the UAE sheds light on the STC's involvement in conflict resolution efforts.



### 3.2 The New Social Movement

As the social constructivist approach explores the significant role of the concept of identity and its relation to explaining the STC formation, mandate and objectives, and relations with KSA and UAE. The NSM theory provides a valuable framework for understanding the transformation of social movements, particularly in distinguishing between traditional and contemporary forms. Contemporary movements prioritize society and identity, operating within civil society and focusing on everyday life. However, there are limitations to NSM theory, including the possible overestimation of actors' independence in constructing their identities and an overemphasis on democracy. State-centric theories may provide additional insights, particularly in cases like Islamism (Tuğal, 2009, pp. 424,425). Despite these limitations, NSM theory remains an important tool for studying social movements and exploring identity creation. Scholars can identify similarities and differences by comparing specific movements with NSM theory and examining their implications. Incorporating NSM insights enhances our understanding of contemporary social movements while recognizing the need for ongoing refinement (Ibid).

Della Porta and Diani (2006) argue that proponents of new social movements, such as Melucci (1996) and Offe (1990), have revised their positions over time. Critiques of new social movements theory include the assumption of universally applicable attributes and the novelty of specific characteristics. However, these theories provide frameworks for understanding social conflict and its relationship to structural transformations ( Della Porta and Diani, 2006, pp. 11-112). The shift from traditional interest groups to new social movements has influenced political participation, with various forms of protest politics gaining popularity. These movements challenge existing notions of politics and society, seeking transformations in worldviews and identities. Political systems, culture, and interactions with authorities influence the complex relationship between collective action and identity. Understanding these dynamics is crucial in evolving political landscapes (Ibid).

Buechler (1995) argues that new social movement theories provide alternative perspectives for analyzing contemporary collective action, emphasizing symbolic action, autonomy, postmaterialist values, collective identities, socially constructed grievances and ideology, and the significance of submerged networks (Buechler, 1995, pp. 442,443). These theories offer valuable insights into diverse forms of collective action in today's world. However, challenges arise in

distinguishing between "new" and "old" movements and establishing clear criteria for categorization (Ibid, p. 448). Furthermore, Buechler (2007) highlights that New Social Movement Theory (NSMT) focuses on the cultural sphere, shifting the emphasis from instrumental political struggles to contests over meanings, symbols, and identities. NSMT responds to the unique characteristics of post-industrial, information-based, postmodern, or advanced capitalist societies (Buechler, 2007).

Rucht (1988) highlights the New social movement (NSM) theory as a crucial focus among NSM theorists, departing from earlier social movement theories centered on class-based struggles and economic factors. NSM theorists prioritize autonomy, self-determination, and decentralized, participatory, and egalitarian organizational structures. They emphasize the importance of flexible and dynamic forms of organization that promote greater participation and diverse tactics (Melucci, 1989, 1994; Gusfield, 1994). Additionally, NSM theory recognizes the significance of symbolic action in civil society as a key arena for collective action. This shift acknowledges the importance of cultural and symbolic issues alongside traditional political and state domains, reflecting a broader social movement activism towards identity, culture, and representation causes (Cohen, 1985; Melucci, 1989). Pichardo (1997) argues that the central discussion among scholars revolves around the NSM paradigm, emphasizing the need for an in-depth understanding of NSMs. Dalton et al. (1990) claim that contemporary social movements differ significantly from past movements. Kauffman (2001) highlights identity claims as a distinctive feature of NSMs, challenging state domination and potentially leading to an "anti-politics of identity." In contrast, Offe (1985) argues that NSMs employ disruptive tactics aligned with their ideological orientation to mobilize public opinion.

Durac (2015) discusses the frequent invocation of the NSM approach in analyzing the Arab uprisings of 2011. Social movement theory (SMT) has been used to explain the unpredictable nature of the protests, the absence of pre-existing networks, power fragmentation, cross-class coalitions, and the spontaneous nature of the uprisings. However, the shift from social movements to coalitions of movements has had significant consequences for post-uprising political dynamics. NSMs serve as a theoretical framework for analyzing various social and political movements in different contexts (Durac, 2015).

The thesis employs social movement Buechler (1995) framework to understand the STC movement and whether it differs from other traditional political movement in Yemen and if the STC has unique characteristics, values, or goals that set it apart from other regional political entities. The STC's roots in a peaceful civil movement (Al-Hirak) for Southern independence may indicate its novelty. The other challenge is defensive, which is determining whether new social movements are primarily defensive, reacting to broader social forces. The STC's objectives and actions are whether it is primarily defensive within the Yemen crisis reacting to broader social and political forces or can also be proactive and progressive. The political versus cultural movements, whether new social movements, which often focus on cultural issues, are inherently apolitical, the challenge lies in understanding how the cultural orientation of these movements interacts with political processes and whether they can influence political change (Ibid). The STC is a political movement focused on power dynamics and institutional change representing the identity of Southern Yemen and the STC's goals of Southern independence and its role in the PLC of the political aspects.

### 3.3 Military Theory

Angstrom and Widen (2015) highlight the evolution of military theory, which expanded beyond officer training to civilian academic institutions during the Cold War. The authors explore the multifaceted nature of military theory, encompassing field-specific texts, history of ideas texts, individual-centred texts, and art of war texts. They emphasize the importance of understanding different problem areas and themes in analyzing warfare effectively, including applying military power and force in various contexts, such as deterrence, coercion, and pursuing military and political objectives ( Angstrom and Widen, 2015).

Barany (2020) argues that the military's response plays a crucial role in the outcomes of uprisings, with factors such as military characteristics, regime directives, societal dynamics, and external influences shaping their reactions. The military's support or suppression significantly impacts the success of revolutions, highlighting the complexities of predicting outcomes. Kurzman (2012), Gause (2011), and Nassif (2020) examine social movements, revolution contagion, and the military's role in the Middle East, emphasizing the significance of military backing in revolutionary outcomes (Kurzman, 2012; Gause, 2011; Nassif, 2020). While Barany's study offers valuable insights, inconsistencies remain. They understand that factors like the state, society, military, institutions, and foreign interventions assist in predicting revolutionary movements (Barany, 2020). Morady (2011) discusses the Iranian Green Movement's military support despite being a civil rights movement, reinforcing the importance of considering a state's political history in assessing revolutionary movements (Morady, 2011).

Utilizing the military theory framework that Angstrom and Widen (2015) posited, this thesis will explore the extent to which the STC has manifested itself as a partner of the Arab coalition and its aspirations to lead in regional and international politics and conflict resolution. The systematic documentation of military theory will analyze how the STC, and its military, and security forces gained control over the Southern regions following liberation from the Houthis, enhancing their political and leadership role in the conflict.

Drawing on Barany's (2020) work, the thesis will explore the influence of various factors, such as military, regime, societal, and external factors, from the Southern resistance that turned

into the Southern military forces that support the STC. The theoretical framework will help understand the complex interplay of factors shaping the STC's partnership with the Arab coalition, led by KSA and the UAE, and their military operations supporting the STC's affiliated forces in the Yemeni conflict. The thesis will also examine the role of military institutions in determining the outcomes of uprisings and revolutions, as highlighted by (Kurzman, 2012; Gause, 2011; Nassif, 2020; Morady, 2011). These scholars advocate reevaluating assumptions and deepening the understanding of the military's role in identity and politics. By applying the military theory framework, this study will assess the STC's partnership with the Arab coalition and its aspirations to lead in regional and international politics and conflict resolution while also considering the complex factors influencing military responses and outcomes in the context of the Yemeni conflict.

## 4. Methodology (Qualitative Content Analysis-QCA)

Considering the importance of producing reliable answers to introduce the data collected to answer the RQ: "To what extent has the STC manifested itself as a partner of the Arab coalition, and how does it aspire to take the lead in regional and international politics and conflict resolution?" through a data collection process employing qualitative content analysis and interviews. The methodology is shaped by theoretical frameworks, specifically social constructivism, and new social movements, which provide valuable insights into understanding the STC's role as a partner within the political leadership, conflicting parties, and the Arab coalition. By applying these theoretical perspectives, the thesis enhances the comprehension of gathered opinions and the reliability of the findings (Halperin and Heath, 2017, pp. 346-356).

Kracauer (1952) introduced QCA as an approach focused on discovering latent meanings within texts, distinguishing it from traditional content analysis. QCA emphasizes interpretation and understanding, with coding based on human interpretation. The field of qualitative research has gained momentum, exploring the qualities and experiences of life. In the digital era, qualitative inquiry has expanded, embracing creativity, and transcending traditional scientific paradigms. The growing community of qualitative researchers brings enthusiasm and contributes to the field's ongoing evolution (Kuckartz, 2014; Mason, 2018). Moreover, according to Della Porta and Keating "*Qualitative analysis has also been used to highlight causal effects by focusing on striking cases where the impact is clearest, and the detailed mechanisms can be examined. In this way, social scientists can proceed from correlation, where the same causes are associated with the same effects, to explanations of why and how*" (Keating, 2008).

Qualitative research is highly considered for its ability to explore complex concepts and hard-to-reach populations, providing in-depth insights (Halperin and Heath, 2017, p. 14). While there may be concerns about the generalizability of qualitative findings, it is important not to exaggerate the advantages or disadvantages of different research approaches (Ibid). QCA method focuses on observable elements, while qualitative content analysis extracts deeper meanings and motives (Weber, 1990). Both methods require carefully considering data and analysis procedures and the use of various techniques, and software like NVivo can assist in organizing and analyzing data (Burnham et al., 2004; Halperin and Heath, 2017, pp. 346, 351)

The thesis used a coding system by NVivo, and importing qualitative data into QCA software is a straightforward process. QCA analyzes studies based on interviews since they allow for text editing. Certain types of texts, such as focus group transcriptions, online survey responses, and internet forum texts, can be imported into software in a pre-structured format (Kuckartz, 2014, pp. 131,132). The main advantage of using QCA software is that the codes are automatically recorded into a code system and remain linked to the individual text passages, enabling easy navigation between the analysis and the data. Furthermore, the software's NVivo coding feature preserves respondents' original wording, which is crucial for qualitative research.

The lack of previous work in understanding the role of STC, as well as its relationship with the Arab coalition led by KSA and the UAE, its partnership with other political parties, and the underlying causes of the conflict. It is essential to move away from identity perspective and other causes and different aspects of the emergence, evolution, the mandate of the STC, and the perceptions of the STC among political parties in Yemen, have resulted in a limited understanding of the situation. Furthermore, it is crucial to examine the STC's approach to the political process from qualitative data, such as identity, as well as unity between the two states of North Yemen and South Yemen, which was followed by security imbalances in governance within the Arab project. Therefore, this research study will cover these aspects that were not previously explored in a detailed and transparent manner, providing a comprehensive understanding of the contemporary influence of the STC within the Yemen crisis.

## 4.1 Sampling and Data collection

The thesis used semi-structured interviews, which are a form of qualitative interviewing. Qualitative interviewing encompasses in-depth, semi-structured or loosely structured approaches distinct from unstructured interviewing. Open-ended questions within a structured interview schedule do not fall under qualitative interviewing (Mason, 2018, pp. 109,110). Qualitative interviewing can take various forms, such as face-to-face, group, focus group, or online interviews, and it aims to develop unexpected themes. The co-production of meanings and understandings between the researcher and interviewees is integral to qualitative interviewing (Mason, 2018). Semi-structured interviews provide deeper insights into participants' experiences but present challenges in comparing and generalizing results due to varying questions and non-standardized data (Halperin and Heath, 2017, p. 289).

The selection criteria for informants in the thesis comprised experts and elites with practical experience in various domains, including the Southern Transitional Council, the Yemen crisis, politicians, military leaders, researchers, and political and civil society activists (NGOs). Moreover, the geographical division of Yemen was considered to ensure the inclusion of diverse opinions and perspectives, along with representatives from the STC and the legitimate government in Yemen. Of the fifteen informants selected, two were women, and thirteen were men, reflecting the current situation in Yemen and the limited participation of women in political and peace processes. This composition of informants was chosen to obtain a comprehensive understanding of the situation of the STC while acknowledging the gender dynamics at play in the country. It is noteworthy that women's political participation in Yemen is limited, and this is why I was able to reach to only two influential women in the Yemeni political scene.

According to Halpern and Heath (2017), *“Online interviews are increasingly used as a data-collection method by social scientists. These can be a useful technique for the data collection on sensitive items, and they eliminate interviewer bias. But online interviews are a far less personal type of interview than other types; they are not an appropriate tool for exploratory studies, which require intensive interaction with interviewees in order to gain better insight into an issue”* (Halperin and Heath, 2017, p. 287).



Data collection was conducted through virtual interviews with fourteen interviewees via Zoom or Google Meet with political leaders, three from STC, political experts, political activists, and civil society organizations. The duration and timing of the interviews ranged between 60 to 90 minutes. After conducting the interviews, I spent one month writing and translating the transcripts, and analyzing the data. I asked all interviewees to contact me if they have any additional information or if they wished to retract anything that was said in the interview. However, no one contacted me after the interviews.

## 4.2 Informants profiles

	<b>Date</b>	<b>Informants</b>	<b>Title</b>
1	09/03/2023	Major General Ahmed Saeed Bin Break	President of the National Assembly of the Southern Transitional Council, and the former governor of Hadramout Governorate.
2	05/03/2023	Dr Saadaldeen Ali Talib	Former Minister of Industry and Trade of Yemen from 2011 to 2014, and former member of Parliament of Yemen. In 2007 elected by parliament as a member of the first anti-corruption commission in Yemen, the Supreme National Authority for Combating Corruption. Dr Talib has written several papers on Yemen's democracy and the Hadhramaut diaspora. Currently a member of the DCF (Development Champions Forum) think-tank on Yemen's economy.
3	27/03/2023	Ahmed Omar bin Farid	Head of the External Southern National Dialogue team (ESNDT) of the STC.
4	04/03/2023	Brigadier General Khaled Al Nasi	Southern military writer and analyst, former 119th Army Brigade commander in Aden and military from 1992 to 2016.

5	02/03/2023	Dr Saeed Al-Gariri	Writer and Professor of modern literature at Hadramout University.
6	24/03/2023	Hani Ali Salem Al-Beidh	Writer and political critic, political activist, and former diplomat, and son of the former president of the People's Democratic Republic of Yemen (South Yemen) Ali Salim Al-Beidh.
7	17/03/2023	Rasha Jarhum	A member Of the Consultation and Reconciliation Commission (CRC) of the Presidential Leadership Council of the Yemeni Government.
8	20/03/2023	Thanos Petouris	A Regional Advisor at the European Institute of Peace (EIP). Expert with the Yemen team with longstanding expertise in Southern Yemeni politics. He is in charge of research for the Institute's Southern Dialogue Process and plays a central role in relationship management with Yemeni and international stakeholders since early 2021.
9	28/02/2023	Farida Ahmed	Executive Director of South24 Center for News and Studies, researcher, and journalist in political affairs. She worked as an independent journalist since 2006 with multiple media agencies in writing and editing news and presenting and producing televised reports.
10	06/03/2023	Dr Shawki Alkadhi	PhD in international law and a member of the Parliament (Islah party), and a representative of the Rights and Freedoms Committee.
11	19/03/2023	Sheikh Yahya bin Afrar	A member of the General Council of the of Al-Mahra and Socotra Governorates. A member of the external Southern National Dialogue Committee (SNDC). Grandson of the last sultans of Al-Mahra and Socotra.

12	12/03/2023	Salem Ali Al-Awlaqi	Vice President of the Youth and Student Department in the General Secretariat of the General People's Congress Party.
13	07/03/2023	Saleh Alnoud	A representative of the STC in the UK.
14	10/03/2023	Abdulwahab Alkebsi	<p>The Managing Director for Programs at the Center for International Private Enterprise (CIPE), a non-profit affiliate of the U.S. Chamber of Commerce and one of the four core institutes of the National Endowment for Democracy (NED).</p> <p>A renowned expert on democracy and market reforms as well as on Middle East politics, Alkebsi has been interviewed or quoted in The Wall Street Journal, The Washington Post, The Washington Times, U.S. News &amp; World Report, United Press International, PBS, CNN, CNBC, BBC, Al-Jazeera, Al-Arabia, Al-Hurra, MBC, Abu Dhabi TV, ANA, Nile TV, and many others.</p>

### 4.3 Ethical Considerations

As a Southern Yemeni woman who is writing a thesis about the STC, I had some ethical considerations regarding the data collection process. Most ethical guidelines require participants to voluntarily sign a consent letter to understand more about the research prior to the interview. Ethical behavior helps protect individuals and communities and help reduce the probability of causing harm to the interviewees, as well as increase mutual respect and virtues in the world (Israel, 2015). Although I prepared a consent form to be signed, I soon realized that it was difficult given the limited internet access in Yemen, the participants' busy schedule, and hesitation given their position. Thus, I opted for verbal consent at the beginning of each interview which were all recorded.

Ethical considerations emerge at all stages of any research project. According to Israel (2015) in social science research, various types of harm can manifest in multiple ways, *“psychological distress, discomfort, social disadvantage, invasion of privacy or infringement of rights”* (Israel, 2015, p. 124). Most of the participants deal with the stress of Yemen's crisis and political injustice. I kept this in mind the whole time and I made sure to emphasize to the participants that the interview was completely voluntary, and they can withdraw at any point of the research. Additionally, I stated that the participants can choose not to answer any question. It is noteworthy that some participants were especially welcoming since this research tackles an important political issue that has been around for decades now, i.e, the Southern political identity.

In adherence to the ethical considerations of the research, it is important to acknowledge that interviewees were not asked any personal questions. Instead, open-ended questions were utilized, and permission was sought to disclose their names. *“Consent is therefore often understood as an ongoing process, which is verbally negotiated. It is important that the researcher is as open and transparent as possible about their identity as a researcher and explains the objectives of their work. Consent should not be regarded as a one-off event and should be re-established over time during the course of fieldwork”* (Halperin and Heath, 2017, p. 324). As a result, the research process was overt and transparent, with verbal consent obtained from the participants prior to conducting the interviews.

#### **4.4 Reflecting my influence as a researcher**

As a South Yemeni human rights defender and researcher, who has worked with civil society organizations since 2011 in South Yemen, it raised the opportunity to reach out to prominent political elites for conducting relevant interviews. I stand as a defender of women's equality rights and the human right to self-determination for South Yemen. Both my beliefs and ambitions allow me to unlock closed doors, as well as uncover hurdles and obstacles in the way of rights and freedoms. I was born before the unification between PDRY and YAR, so I grew up with a diverse Southern identity and I witnessed the injustice and unfairness, including prohibiting Southern people from owning their Southern identity. Thus, this research to me is an amalgamation of the political Southern identity that was limited for decades.

However, it is noteworthy that the Southern Yemeni political scene and decision-making remains male-dominant. Women in Southern Yemen, including myself, fight for their inclusion in political spaces and decision-making. There is a patriarchal narrative that limits women's political rights during the times of war, however; it is not acknowledged that inclusive peace is sustainable peace. Future research that I am considering will be looking into Southern Women political participation during the war. In this regard, I was born and grew up in different states. The thesis is also aware that me being from the South Yemen might also influence the research itself and make it open to bias. However, to avoid bias, I have interviewed various diverse perspectives to prevent information bias.

## 4.5 Limitations

Consistent with the approach espoused by Day (2020), this thesis adopts a QCA methodology. This decision reflects the limitations of quantitative analysis in addressing the complex, multifaceted questions central to the study's objectives. While QCA is valuable for identifying patterns in numerical data and surface-level content, it must fully capture the details inherent in the research problem. By employing a QCA approach, the study seeks to delve beneath the surface of the text to highlight the underlying motivations, transcript interviews, meanings, and purposes that shape the phenomenon under investigation. In doing so, it aims to provide a nuanced, multifaceted understanding of the research topic. Undoubtedly, the time constraints imposed on this research project significantly hindered the research process.

One of the major limitations of this study is the limited and complicated access to the political elite, including those who refused to participate in this research. Despite the study's capacity to provide in-depth insights and analysis, there is a persistent concern that qualitative research findings may not be applicable beyond the specific context of the research. Acknowledging that these strengths and limitations are not absolute or inherent to any particular research methodology is important. It is essential not to overstate or exaggerate the advantages and disadvantages of different research approaches (Halperin and Heath, 2017, p. 14). It is important to acknowledge the limitations of this research not only as part of this thesis's requirement, but to also pave a way search.

## 5. Findings

This thesis section outlines the study findings, deduced from accumulated data coded with fourteen interviews in the table below. It explores the various themes and sub-themes that assisted the thesis analysis. The table outlines the different themes discussed in the interviews, how many informants mentioned each theme, and the frequency of the theme's appearance in the interviews. The themes covered three main analysis themes, the emergence and evolution of the STC, the identity and the nature of the STC, and the contemporary influence of the STC. It presents the findings from interviews conducted. It indicates that the informant's understanding of the historical and political context of the STC's formation, the influence of identity in shaping the STC, and debates on the nature of the STC as a political party or movement are important topics discussed during the interviews. The findings also highlighted the STC's approach to political processes, Southern cohesion, and its participation in the PLC. Moreover, the findings explored the STC's support from Southern entities and influencers, its opponents, and adversaries, the STC's territorial control and military influence and the loyalty of Southern forces to the STC. Furthermore, the findings identified the informant's knowledge of the STC contribution to the Arab project, ties with regional actors such as KSA and UAE, and stance on the Riyadh Agreement. The role of international actors in Yemen's peace process is also discussed. The findings shed light on the STC's involvement in the Yemeni crisis and the various factors that influence the emergence and evolution of the STC.

<b>Themes of interview</b>	<b>How many Informants mentioned the themes during the interview</b>	<b>How many times the themes appear in the interviews</b>
<b>The Emergence and Evolution of the STC</b>		
- The Historical and Political Context of STC's Formation	13	17
- The STC's Mandate and Objectives	12	14
- The Influence of Identity in Shaping the STC	13	14
- Debates on the Nature of the STC is Political Party or Movement	14	26

<b>The Contemporary Influence of the STC</b>		
- The STC's Approach to Political Process	13	15
- The STC's Approach to Southern cohesion	13	13
- The STC's Participation in the PLC.	14	15
- Perceptions of the STC among Political Parties	13	16
- The STC's Support from Southern Entities and Influencers	14	14
- The STC's Opponents and Adversaries	14	16
<b>The Military Aspects of the STC</b>		
- The Loyalty of the Southern Forces to the STC	14	14
- The STC's Territorial Control and Military Influence	14	14
<b>The STC's Regional and International Role</b>		
- The STC's Contribution to the Arab Project	14	15
- The STC's Ties with Regional Actors (KSA and UAE)	14	18
- The STC's Stance on the Riyadh Agreement	14	16
- The Role of International Actors in Yemen's Peace Process	13	16
- Additional insights and considerations related to the STC	6	6

In conclusion, this findings table sheds light on the informant's comprehension of STC's partnerships with different local, regional, and international actors. It has inferred the interviewees' awareness of the STC's identity and their role in the political process and perception among political parties. This table also provides essential insights into the STC and its impact on Yemen's political and military landscape.



## **6. Analysis**

The analysis examines the role of the STC in the Yemen crisis. Specifically, it will showcase the perspectives and experiences of experts, political leaders, and civil society activists to answer the research question: "To what extent has the STC manifested itself as a partner of the Arab coalition, and how does it aspire to take the lead in the regional and international politics and conflict resolution?" The analysis will focus on three themes, each with sub-themes to address the research question. Firstly, the emergence and evaluation of the STC. Secondly, identity and nature of the STC. Thirdly, the contemporary influence of the STC. Finally, the discussion of the themes and sub-themes. The ultimate goal of this analysis is to gain a better understanding of the STC's emergence and evolution, mandate, identity, political process, and its relationship with the Arab coalition, as well as the broader international community's role in resolving the Yemen crisis.

### **6.1 The Emergence and Evolution of the STC**

The STC emerged in 2017 as a political movement representing the interests of the South Yemeni population, particularly in their claims for renewed independence of the territory that constituted the PDRY until 1990. This section of the thesis explores the emergence and evolution of the STC, its mandate and objectives, the influence of identity in shaping the organization and the nature of the STC as a political party or movement.

The NSM concept highlights the shift of contemporary social movements towards targeting society and everyday life, prioritizing identity formation and self-definition, and operating predominantly within civil society (Tuğal, 2009). The lack of political representation and the need for a credible political body or carrier to represent the Southern issue meant that the formation of the STC is viewed as a response to this need. The NSM theoretical approach emphasizes the role of culture, symbols, and identities in the arena and means of protest (Della Porta and Diani, 2006). The informants discuss the importance of creating a unified voice for the Southern cause, with multiple perceptions of the solution and also touch on the role of historical specificity, with references to the PDRY period and the post-1994 period. Some informants highlight the role of external factors and powerful entities in forming the STC.

According to Alkebsi, status the formation of the STC was prompted by various political challenges, such as Yemen's bad governance, corruption, and social and economic exclusion of the South. These challenges pushed many people in South Yemen towards self-rule, given their history of independence." This means that emergence of the STC in Yemen was a response to political, social, and economic challenges that have persisted in the Southern Yemen. The STC gained significant support among the Southern Yemeni population due to a growing demand for greater autonomy and renewed independence.

Likewise, Alnoud and Al-Gariri expressed the same narrative saying that "Southern anti Unity sentiments increased after the 1994 and slowly developed until the Southern Peaceful Movement (Al-Hirak) began in 2007 which escalated in its demands but despite the formation of groups and organizations within the movement lacked a credible political body or a successful initiative to unify the various groups and organizations into a unified body capable of representing the revolution politically". Al-Gariri discuss the formation of the STC "*The challenge faced by the Southern issue, is that it did not have any political component able to represent it, it was multi-headed, and the international community always presented this point as negative and that the South were not united, so it was necessary to unifying the Southern voice*". In this regard, the formation of the STC in Yemen was a response to a range of political, social, and economic challenges that have been long-standing in the Southern Yemen. The need to unify the Southern voice was emphasized, given the obstacles presented by international actors who always highlighted the need to unify the and Southern position.

In relation to the STC formation the majority of the informants agreed that the formation of the STC in Yemen was prompted by unresolved issues related to power centralization, systematic oppression of Southern leadership, bad governance, corruption, and social and economic exclusion, which have persisted in the region and contributed to political, social, and economic challenges. The informants also highlighted the importance of unifying the Southern voice and creating a credible political body or carrier to represent the Southern issue and pursue self-rule or renewed independence for the region. Overall, the quotes from informants support the argument that the STC emerged as a political movement representing the interests of the South Yemeni population, particularly in their claims for renewed independence, the STC as political entity was shaped by the historical and political context. Alkadhi being the only informant

disagreeing on this, he stated that *“the STC's formation was influenced by both internal political challenges and external geopolitical interests. The organization faces internal divisions and external pressures that impact on its goals and strategies.”* This showcases that the formation of the STC was primarily driven by internal issues, as well as external geopolitical interests, as described by Alkadhi.

### **6.1.1 The STC's Mandate and Objectives**

The importance of social interaction, interpretation, and understanding in constructing knowledge is a central tenet of Social Constructivism, as Adams (2006) described. Thus, the significance of norms and rules in shaping the STC's goals and strategies aligns with the constructivist focus on the evolution of normative structures over time, as discussed by Finnemore and Sikkink (1998) cited in Barnett, (2014). The informants who contributed to thesis highlighted the close connection between the STC and the A-Hirak movement that started in 2007 as described in the historical overview section, with a direct genealogy connecting its leaders to the movement. The STC emerged as a more politically organized faction that gained support from regional powers and significant segments of the Southern politicians and the public. Despite political assassinations and the loss of leading members of the movement, the STC is considered to be the most successful faction within the Al-Hirak movement in terms of longevity and power. The STC's mandate is to achieve Southern independence from Northern Yemen and reestablish a Southern state on the borders before the unification of two countries in 1990. The PDRY period is discredited in the minds of most Southerners, who blame it for the unity and the incorporation of Northern elements in the government. However, the informants also highlighted the internal divisions and external pressures that affect the STC's goals and strategies.

The STC aims to restore the Southern state with complete sovereignty and ensure the well-being of the Southern people. Jarhum stated that *“The primary demand of the STC is to reclaim the Southern State and ensure the well-being of the Southern people. This demand is clearly stated in their political vision, and the National Southern Dialogue Team is working on self-determination to develop the South State into federal governance.”* This indicates that the STC is

taking active multi-track steps towards achieving its overall objective including formulating the details of what the Southern State will look like through the ongoing Southern dialogue.

Similarly, Bin Break argued that the STC's mandate includes managing political, security, and economic affairs in the Southern areas under its control, he states: "*After the STC took control of all the Southern governorates, which are approximately 85% of the land, it became important militarily and security in reality, although multiple terrorist forces, including al-Qaeda and ISIS, were spawned to oppose it. The STC had to confront the Houthis on the one hand, confront terrorism led by al-Qaeda and ISIS, and also confront the Northern political forces that tried to control the wealth and power in the South.*" This indicates that the STC's rise to power in the Southern governorates, which account for a significant portion of the Southern land, the STC has become a crucial player in the military and security realms after taking control of the majority of the Southern governorates. Despite opposition from terrorist groups, the STC established its regional authority, indicating its success in consolidating power. The STC had to contend with additional security challenges, such as the Houthis and political forces from the North seeking to control the wealth and power in the Southern territories. It has had to navigate the complex political landscape to consolidate its regional power.

The STC's mandate is derived from a popular mandate, expressed through public support, and establishing a national assembly. According to Alnoud "*The mandate is a popular mandate which was formalized through the establishment of the national assembly of the STC, giving people in all regions of the South a voice through representatives nominated to the assembly, which is to work for the re-establishment of the Southern state.*" Alnoud highlights the significance of the national assembly in providing a platform for the people of the South to have their voices heard and contribute to the re-establishment of the Southern state. This assembly provides a platform for individuals from all regions of the Southern territories to have a voice through their representatives. Moreover, the STC is committed to democratic principles and processes, as evidenced by its efforts to establish a representative body that reflects the people's will. Moreover, the creation of the National Assembly underscores the STC's popularity and legitimacy in the Southern territories. It highlights the significance of popular support in the region's political dynamics.

In contrast Alkadhi argues that "*The STC has a primary goal of disengaging the two countries that united in 1990, the PDRY (South Yemen) and the Arab Republic of Yemen (North*

*Yemen). The STC also aims to weaken the legitimate Yemeni state in its fight against the Houthis, asserting that the STC sees Houthi Dominance in the North as preferable to a unified Yemeni state.”* He emphasized that the STC attempts to disengage South Yemen from North Yemen. Its objectives are driven by a desire for regional autonomy and self-determination and a strategic concretion that seeks to exploit the ongoing conflict in Yemen to advance its political objectives. However, these objectives may come at the expense of the broader Yemeni society, potentially exacerbating the already fragile political and humanitarian situation in the country.

In conclusion, the informant’s assessment reveals a strong connection between the STC and the Al-Hirak movement. The STC has gained political organization and support from regional powers, Southern politicians, and the public. However, challenges like member losses and political assassinations in Aden have arisen. Internal divisions and external pressures affect the STC's goals and strategies. Southerners largely discredit Northern influence in the government. Addressing underlying issues is vital for a sustainable solution benefiting all Yemenis.

### 6.1.2 The STC's Regional and International Role

By applying the Social Constructivism framework to the STC's Contribution to the "Arab Project" it can be noted that the different interpretations of the Arab project by the informants are a product of their social interactions, interpretation, and understanding of the situation. The informant's perspectives on the Arab project are influenced by their social and political context, personal experiences, and interactions with regional actors. When it comes to the Arab project, it refers to the Arab coalition led by KSA that interfered in the Yemen conflict in 2015.

The informants suggest that the Arab project is not a well-defined concept and lacks consensus on its viability and effectiveness. However, other informants still perceive it as an essential framework for regional cooperation and development. The informants suggest a lack of consensus on the existence and viability of the Arab project. Some informants claimed that the Arab project had lost its appeal and had begun to lose its features due to the endless Arab-Arab differences, conflicts, and regional interventions. Talib stated that "*The Arab project is not well-defined, and it seems more propaganda than a concrete plan.*" Likewise, Ahmed also argued that "*the Arab project is currently absent for many reasons, including the conflicts that erupted in the region, especially after the so-called 'Arab Spring' in 2011, which allowed many countries to intervene to achieve their ambitions and expansion, including Iran and Turkey*". These underscore the informants' shared belief that reveal a lack of agreement on the existence and feasibility of the Arab project, with skepticism regarding its definition and perception as more of a propaganda tool than a tangible plan.

However, other informants still perceive the Arab project as an essential framework for regional cooperation and development. Al-Beidh stated that "*the idea of the Arab project as a vision and a broad framework with its horizon and positive future dimensions is required for our Arab region, the most important of which is that it be a civilized economic, developmental and defence renaissance project.*" Same narrative has been expressed by Bin Afrar "*there is Arab resistance against Iran's project and its interventions in the region.*" These statements advocate for the importance of the Arab project as a means of fostering regional unity and progress, despite the challenges and differing opinions. However, the pro-STC highlighted the importance of the

Arab project for future dimensions of the Arabic region, including security, economic, developmental, and defense renaissance against foreign interventions in the region.

Regarding the role of the STC within the Arab project, the informant's opinions diverged. Bin Break argued that "*the STC's entry was to support the Arab project and, therefore, the revival and liberation of the North. These efforts will not succeed without the participation of military factions on the ground.*" The STC representative Delve into that the STC's presence and success on the ground had shaped its coordination and support from regional powers. Its desire for recognition and alignment with the Arab project remains a crucial consideration. Similarly, Al Nasi stated that "*the Southerners are part of the Arab battle.*" He indicates that the role of the STC within the Arab project is complex, and its presence and success on the ground may impact its coordination and support from regional and international actors.

In conclusion, political activists and elites hold differing opinions on the viability and definition of the Arab project and the role of the STC. Views range from considering the Arab project crucial for regional cooperation to finding it less appealing due to ongoing conflicts. Similarly, opinions on the STC's involvement vary, with some deeming it essential and others disagreeing. These differences stem from individuals' information processing and experiences with regional actors, shaping perspectives on conflict resolution and the Arab project.

### 6.1.3 The STC's Ties with Regional Actors (KSA and UAE)

The STC's approach to political and social change and its efforts to establish relationships with other countries. The informants introduced various perspectives on the STC's relationship with KSA and the UAE. According to Alkadhi stated that *“The UAE is the primary sponsor of the STC, having established and armed them with over 200,000 fighters and supporting them in all decisions, including the bombing of the Yemeni army”*. This contends that the UAE plays a significant role in supporting the STC militarily and politically. Other informants noted that the STC's relationship with regional actors dramatically influences their ability to achieve their goals. Independence is limited as their relationships with regional actors often dictate their actions. Others suggest that the STC needs more political and management expertise to further its cause and better strategies its vision towards the political processes with regional powers.

On the other hand, Alnoud argued that *“The STC's relationship with regional partners has been pivotal and crucial to achieving the military success achieved. The relationship was mutually beneficial, and the STC benefited from military and political support, particularly from the UAE and KSA to a lesser extent.”* Parallel opinions were presented by Bin Break *“The STC is aligned with the Arab coalition in protecting the region, combating terrorism, and preserving Arab national security. It has established military, social forces and considers itself a partner in the coalition.”* The pro-STC point of view argues that the STC asserts that the relationship with the UAE and KSA brings mutual benefits, with the STC receiving military and political support. The informants' perceptions of KSA's position towards the STC vary, with some seeing it as supportive while others view the STC as a threat to KSA's interests. Additionally, informants note the STC's efforts to establish relationships with countries like Britain, but its strongest bond remains with the UAE.

In conclusion, there is a recognition that the STC's relationship with KSA and the UAE is multidimensional and evolving; The various factors, including regional politics and interests, influence it and its goals within the Arab coalition and the wider regional and international politics.



#### 6.1.4 The STC's Stance on the Riyadh Agreement

Adams (2006) argues that social constructivism theoretical framework emphasizes individual differences. The STC's identity within the Arab coalition is recognized from regional politics and its role within the Riyadh Agreement. Petouris claimed that the Riyadh Agreement “*The first document that recognized the STC regionally and internationally.*” Building upon this perspective, Al-Beidh noted that “*The Riyadh Agreement aimed to settle differences between the STC and the legitimate government. However, its implementation was hindered by opposing political projects and the intentions of some political forces.*” This contends that the Riyadh agreement is the first official document that was recognized and legitimated. The STC as a political entity within Yemeni politics went to the broader region and accepted by other governments, international bodies, and differing interpretations of the terms of the agreement, particularly around the military aspect. The informants argued that the implementation of the Riyadh Agreement had also been affected by the psychology of the Southern people, which might have given them the right to have their voices heard by one of the Southern political entities.

The regional powers actors need to understand the Southern issue perspective and the roots of the conflicts. The STC faces challenges from the regional actors, and there is pressure to exclude some concepts that the STC believes regarding the Southern cause. Furthermore, some parties and forces involved in the Riyadh agreement have acted in bad faith or need more credibility, which has emptied the content and spirit of the agreement through various practices. Moreover, the disagreements among the eight members of the PLC that STC part of it are another obstacle to the progress of conflict resolution. The STC only considers outcomes that serve them the most, leading to delays in implementing the agreement. Other informants believe the STC's actions have hindered efforts to restore stability and address the Houthi threat. Other informants argued that the STC justified the call to reclaim the Southern state, and obstruction of the implementation of agreements between components of legitimacy has further destabilized the region. In conclusion, the informants reveal challenges facing the implementation of the Riyadh Agreement, including interpretation differences, actions between different political groups, and political projects. Moreover, a collaborative and pragmatic approach is necessary to overcome these challenges.

### 6.1.5 The Role of International Actors in Yemen's Peace Process

The Yemeni conflict has been ongoing for over eight years, and various stakeholders, regional and international actors have tried to resolve the crisis. However, the success of these efforts has been limited, and there are several reasons for this. According to informants such as Alkebsi, Bin Farid, Ahmed and Al-Awlaqi argued that the international community, including the UN and significant powers, must do more to resolve the conflict in Yemen. There needs to be more political will and resources to cover the crisis. Regional actors such as KSA and Oman have demonstrated more urgency and ability to address the peace process and raise questions about the international actors' priorities and commitments to resolving regional conflicts.

When it comes to the international community contribution to the peace process in Yemen, Jarhum stated that *“The UN's actions contributed to the resorting to arms by the groups on the ground, and the formation of the STC was a result of mismanagement by the UN mediation process, as they ignored the Southern issue.”* This indicates that effective mediation is vital in resolving conflicts and the need to consider all parties' interests and demands in the Yemen conflict and its complexity, with various demands from different actors. Moreover, the informants highlighted and emphasized the need for the international community to separate these demands and understand the conflict and its roots that led to the war in Yemen for a peaceful resolution, potentially through a referendum and mediate in a meaningful way to reduce any upcoming conflicts and inclusive, participatory approaches to resolving them. The informants also raised concerns about the international community's interests and lack of sincerity in resolving the conflict, with the file handed over to regional actors.

In conclusion, the Yemeni conflict is a multifaceted issue that requires a participatory approach to resolve it. The international community, including the UN, UNSC and regional and international powers, must demonstrate more political will and resources to address the crisis, consider all parties' interests and demands, effective mediation, including all the voices, and understand the root causes of conflicts for the peace process.

## 6.2 Identity and the Nature of the STC

The concept of identity is associated with statehood, independence, and self-determination for the South, the STC's identity and representation of the Southern issue are highly debated among scholars. In line with Fierke (2013) stated that, “identities may be formed in conflict” (pp. 190,191). Brubaker and Cooper argument is that the concept of identity can have intellectual and political costs if the political, economic, and social problems that are causing tensions in a region have exacerbated, leading to issues of identity, wars, and conflicts (Brubaker and Cooper, 2000). This concept indicates that identity and interests are inseparable from the world of social meaning, which is relevant to the formation of the STC’s identity. The STC's identity and the issue of identity to the Southern cause highlight the difficulties and contestations that arise when different actors hold differing views on the significance of identity. The Southern National Dialogue Table has emerged as a means to reach a consensus on the issue of identity and determine the future of the Southern issue.

Pro- STC informants argued that identity is a sophisticated and vital matter with the STC and the Southern issue. The STC's identity and representation of the Al-Hirak peaceful movement related to the Southern cause and its identity that started in 2007 are highly debated, since the concept of identity is related to government system and the future bodies of the Southern state. While according to Baylis and Fox, the concept of identity is closely tied to statehood, nationalism, self-determination, and pursuit of rights (Baylis, 2014; Fox, 2013). Al-Beidh stated that “*Identity is a significant aspect that strengthens the sense of belonging and motivates the people of the South to protect their land and cultural heritage. It unifies the people of the Southern country and serves as a social incentive for collective action based on a just cause.*” Which emphasizes that a strong sense of identity motivates individuals to protect their land, cultural heritage and fight for independence or autonomy. It fosters collective action towards achieving shared goals and provides a sense of belonging and solidarity which is a powerful driving force that unites individuals and communities to pursue common aspirations.

There is disagreement among Southerners on the issue of identity, with some wanting to stay associated with Yemen and others wanting to change their identity altogether, according to Talib “*The STC's identity has shifted from a national identity to a more localized and exclusive identity, leading to struggles among various groups trying to be represented.*” This implies that

the STC's focus has shifted from representing the broader Southern identity to representing more specific and narrower group of people, which has caused difficulties in adequate inclusion and representation of groups from different Southern regions within the Southern issue. On the other hand, other informants do not share the same point of view and consider the differences between the North and South identities as insignificant.

In conclusion, identity plays a crucial role in shaping the STC's representation of the Southern cause. However, contradicting perspectives on the significance of identity among stakeholders complicates the issue. The STC's exclusive political track and policies has led to exclusion of some groups in the Southern issue. While identity is crucial in motivating Southern people to protect their culture, territory and to seek independence from the YAR. The Southern National Dialogue Table has emerged as a platform to address identity and determine the future of the Southern cause. However, differences in identity between the North and South and the STC's focus on a specific group can intensify existing tensions and challenges which represents an intellectual and international cost. Therefore, nuanced understanding of identity is essential.

### 6.2.1 Debates about the Nature of the STC

Informants' perspectives on the STC nature can be analyzed using the social constructivism lens (Adams, 2006; Barnett, 2014). It emphasizes the construction of knowledge through social interaction and interpretation, which is reflected in the informants' varying views on the STC's identity and its nature. The informants expressed various opinions regarding the nature of the STC. Some argue that the STC must clarify its identity as either a political party focused on advocating the rights of Southerners within a unified Yemen or a movement advocating for independence of the South of Yemen. However, other informants stipulate that the STC is more than a political party, as it possesses military and security forces that elevate it to the status of a substate entity. Bin Farid asserted that *“The Transitional Council was founded to defend the Southern issue and its people and achieve a strategic goal, which is to restore the state of the South on the borders of May 22, 1990, and if this goal is achieved, the council will have two options, either to turn into a political party, and this option is the most likely, or to dissolve itself and distribute its members to the parties in the arena, and this option seems illogical in my opinion”*.

A similar viewpoint was shared by Talib *“The STC goes beyond being a political party, as they have military forces, which elevates them to a substate entity.”* This indicates that the STC's future is still determined and dependent on achieving its strategic goal. If the goal is achieved, the council may transform into a political party, but if not, its future remains to be determined. The STC has characteristics beyond a typical political party, such as the ability to exert control or influence over territory through its military forces. Other informants view the STC as a political umbrella movement that brings together various Southern political components and parties. In contrast, others view it as a political body and a national entity representing the Southern issue among other entities. Moreover, there are differing views on the long-term sustainability and future of the STC in the light of external factors such as regional power dynamics, the global geopolitical climate and the asportation of the Southern people. While other informants believe that the STC will eventually transform into a political party, others argue that the STC's structures are more comprehensive than those of a typical political party and it is not legally recognized as one. Finally, the informants have no consensus regarding whether the STC is a political party or movement.

In conclusion, the STC's rise, development, and ongoing discussions about its nature mirror the historical grievances of the Southern cause. Informants presented diverse points of view on the STC, emphasizing that it surpasses being a political party by encompassing security forces and facing various challenges. Its nature is arguable, with a restricted mandate to accomplish its objectives. The future of the STC is uncertain, with two potential outcomes rather its transition into a political party or the dissolution of the movement.

### 6.2.2 The STC's Approach to Political Process

Brubaker and Cooper (2000) perspective of identity in a social and political context and its relationship to social and political action show that the STC is an example of a group with a collective identity seeking political goals through both political and military action. The challenges faced by the STC in managing contradictions and maintaining credibility highlight the importance of identity as a core aspect of individual reflecting deep foundational elements of the self. The informants recognized the need for the STC to engage politically to achieve its goals and gain international legitimacy.

The historical context of the Southern issue, which has been on the table for a long time, is highlighted, with the STC being its new name and having new emerging leadership. According to Al-Beidh *“The current political process in the South is imposed due to complex circumstances and the failures of the previous legitimate government, worsening situations, and increased suffering of the people. Legitimacy structuring is urgent but has also become bait to manipulate the STC for the benefit of powers not aligned with the STC's interests locally and regionally.”* This shed light on the current political process in the South is due to multiple factors, including failures of the previous government, worsening situations, and external powers manipulating the STC. Similarly, Bin Break *“The STC want to be the partner of the Arab alliance. We are under pressure from forces present in the Arab coalition. Therefore, STC can have political, diplomatic, economic, and political dimensions global and local.”* This indicated that STC aims to align itself with the Arab alliance and is pursuing political, diplomatic, and economic dimensions of politics locally and globally. The STC faces pressure from within the Arab coalition, indicating potential tensions and conflicts that could impact regional politics.

The STC's ambitions and potential are to play a role in the broader Arab political landscape. Same narrative Al Nasi *“The STC recognized that achieving goals with regional powers cannot be accomplished solely through military means. Therefore, STC pursues a dual approach to military presence and political process.”* This pointed out that STC recognizes that achieving its goals in partnership with regional powers necessitates a dual military presence and political engagement approach. It underscores the importance of combining military and political means to succeed in complex regional contexts. Furthermore, the informants reveal the pressure from the

Arab coalition led by KSA, UAE and the international community to address the Southern issue through the peace process and negotiation.

According to Bin Farid “*The STC believe that achieving political goals through dialogue, negotiation, and international sponsorship is much better than achieving it by force.*” In line with Al-Gariri “*The STC succeeded in restoring the South's legitimacy on the ground by entering the political track, the South was able to regain its right to representation among the parties with the Yemeni conflict.*” Same narrative has been expressed by Bin Afrar “*the vision of the STC that the South will be restored by politics instead of fighting, wars and loss of lives*” This suggests that force alone may be insufficient for sustainable political outcomes in convoluted contexts. The STC strategic thinking emphasizes collaboration through dialogue and negotiation to build coalitions, establish partnerships, and achieve mutually beneficial outcomes which establishes the STC as a legitimate regional political actor.

On the other hand, Talib argued that the STC joined the political process by pressure “*I think two things that STC joined the political process is the politically forced to join and also the driver is basically personal glory, achievements and gain.*” He shed light on multiple factors that may influence the STC's decision to join the political process, including external pressures and personal motivations, and contribute to a deeper understanding of the tangled dynamics involved in the STC's political decisions. Other informants argue for the need for military action when there are no political solutions. The informants also identify the challenges faced by the STC in managing contradictions and maintaining its credibility in front of society and its popular base in the South. Finally, some informants mention the need of personnel and financial power in addition to skills for the STC to take over the government in the Southern governorate.

In contrast, others stress the importance of the STC's military presence in gaining political power. According to Alnoud “*The STC sought to distance itself from any attempts to label it as militias and rather presented itself as a credible political force able to engage with the international community constructively.*” Same narrative had been expressed by Ahmed “*The most prominent dilemma for the STC was the lack of legitimate political cover for the region and the international community, it was of great importance for the STC to engage in the political process within a legitimate entity internationally recognized as a political and military force that has proven itself significantly*”. She indicated that the STC sought to enhance its credibility and



legitimacy domestically and internationally through constructive engagement with the international community. However, a key challenge faced by the STC in its approach to politics was the lack of legitimate political cover for the Southern region.

In conclusion, the STC reveals a complex and multifaceted approach towards achieving its goals and gaining international legitimacy. The STC recognizes that achieving its goals requires a dual military presence and political engagement approach. While external pressures and personal motivations may have influenced the STC's decision to join the political process, the STC emphasizes collaboration through dialogue and negotiation to build coalition and achieve mutually beneficial outcomes. However, the STC faces challenges in managing contradictions and maintaining credibility in front of society and its popular base in the South of Yemen.

### 6.2.3 The STC's Approach to Southern cohesion

The concept of identity is highly relevant to the STC's approach towards the Southern national dialogue. However, the STC's identity and representation of the Southern issue are highly debated, and this could exacerbate tensions and conflicts if not adequately differentiated from other problems. The informants highlighted that the STC's efforts to promote Southern cohesion are crucial to addressing the complicated position of the Southern issue.

Talib stated that *“the STC has failed on the Southern cohesion, it has a very localized and exclusive leadership that is unclear about its plans and strategies.”* This point of view that the lack of clarity has contributed to confusion and undermined the STC's credibility as a political force representing Southern interests. Al Nasi indicated that *“At the Southern cohesion level, there are issues of regionalism and marginalization of pioneers in the Southern movement and political forces, that may cause a rift in the Southern national fabric. The STC formed a committee to unify Southern visions, but progress has been slow, and support is weakening. The council needs to attract all political components in the South to address these issues, particularly in the eastern provinces such as Hadramout.”* This suggests that there is a division in the Southern national identity caused by regionalism and the marginalization of unincluded political elites' representative from the Al-Hirak movement. The STC is critical in addressing these issues in the eastern provinces of the Southern regions, such as Hadramout. This likely means that the situation in these areas is particularly dire and requires urgent attention to prevent further divisions and conflicts within the Southern movement.

In this regard, Bin Afrar stated that *“The STC initiated a broad dialogue with the entire Southern spectrum and presented itself as the sponsor of this dialogue without conditions and without complete containment in order for everyone to come.”* This indicated that the STC was committed to fostering the perception of Southern unity and collaboration among various political groups, entities, and factions in the Southern regions. Moreover, the phrase "without complete containment" suggests that the STC is not trying to control or dictate the dialogue's outcome but is open to a range of perspectives and ideas and building relations that support Southern cohesion, creating an open platform for dialogue and engagement and filling the gaps.

Furthermore, other informants argued that there are varied viewpoints regarding the STC's involvement in the Southern issue and its efforts to foster Southern cohesion. This includes debates on the STC's promotion of self-determination among different Southern political groups and discussions on conflict resolution and the interference of regional and international actors in Yemen's political agenda. Other informants also question the STC's legitimacy and the Southern national dialogue that STC initiated as part of its political game to gain more support. However, to promote Southern cohesion effectively, it is essential to engage in constructive dialogues with diverse Southern entities and address identity-related matters with clarity and differentiation to prevent the escalation of tensions and conflicts.

In conclusion, the STC's pursuit of Southern cohesion requires focusing on the complexities of the Southern issue, particularly concerning identity. Clearing the challenges and engaging in productive dialogue with various Southern entities is crucial for fostering unity and reconciliation. The STC's efforts to represent Southern interests and initiate credible political discussions were acknowledged by some informants.

### 6.3 The Contemporary Influence of the STC

The NSM theoretical framework provides valuable participation of the STC in the PLC. According to NSM theory, social movements are characterized by decentralized, participatory, and egalitarian organizational forms that allow for greater participation and diversity of tactics (Melucci, 1989; 1994; Gusfield, 1994). Therefore, the STC's participation in the PLC indicates the means of achieving legitimacy and cooperation, securing greater recognition among the local, regional, and international actors, advocating for the Southern issue, and ensuring that the South's interests is represented are addressed in the Yemen crisis.

The informants argued that the STC's participation in the PLC is essential for ensuring that the Southern issue is pointed out in the Yemen political arena. Alkebsi stated that "*The STC joined the PLC to ensure adequate representation for the South and gain a bigger platform, given its strong military presence and infrastructure in the region. This move is expected to promote political stability and cooperation.*" Parallel opinions were presented by Bin Afrar "*The stage needs the STC to be part of the legitimacy because it signed the Riyadh Agreement to take its equity in the government and must be present in all circles of the political process.*" This designate that the STC's participation in the PLC is viewed as a means of achieving stability, great power, sovereignty, legitimacy and cooperation within Yemen's political landscape and advocates for the Southern issue are equally represented.

Moreover, the informants argued that the STC's participation in the PLC was a step towards securing greater recognition, more significant influence over policy, a better position to advocate for the Southern issue, and the ultimate step to show that it is a partner to the government. As well as the significance of decision-making results in war and peace are concerned. On the other hand, other informants discussed that the STC's participation in the PLC is a part of the political game to take legitimacy. The STC regained legitimacy and was not considered as a non-legitimate actor, to solve the issue of the South and restore the Southern legitimacy that had been taken after the war of 1994.

In conclusion, the STC's participation in the PLC is considered essential for representing and addressing the interests of the South in Yemen's political landscape. The STC's inclusion in the PLC is observed as a means of achieving stability, cooperation and securing greater recognition

domestic legitimacy, regionally, and internationally. While others view the STC's participation in the PLC as an opportunity to have power in decision-making, particularly in areas such as peace and war. Others view it to legitimize the STC's role in Yemen's political landscape and address longstanding issues related to the South.

### **6.3.1 The STC Complex Positioning Political in Yemen**

The perceptions of STC were various among political parties, the supporters, and the opponents or adversaries, was essential implications. From the constructivist approach, the concept of identity is relevant in understanding the different perceptions of the STC among different political parties and entities in Yemen. The fluidity and multiplicity of identities can be seen in the differing opinions, manifesting in solidarity, shared dispositions, or collective action (Brubaker and Cooper, 2000). El-Ojeili (2012) argues that the concept of identity understands the contemporary discourse that primarily concerns questions of similarities, difference, and problems of society (pp. 100,101). which reflects the perceptions of the STC among different groups in Yemen.

The informants argued that the STC had been viewed as a de facto force because of its military power and significant role in Yemeni politics. Moreover, it indicated that STC does not represent all of the South. Other informants contend that the perceptions among the Yemeni political parties are divided on the STC. Some parties are supportive, and others, particularly the Northern parties, view it as a threat to Yemen's unity and the achievement made in 1990. Some informants discussed the nature of traditional parties in Yemen, such as GPC and Islah (Muslim brotherhood), that had been influenced, and had declined, allowing non-partisan groups like the STC to gain ground, and become active in the political arena.

The informants suggest that the STC enjoys varying levels of support from different Southern entities and groups. Some informants describe the STC as the most prominent and substantial political and military entity in the South, with good relations with other Southern parties that share its ultimate goals of independence and restoring the Southern state. However, there are also concerns about the STC's credibility and level of support in specific regions and among certain groups, as competition persists along former political and tribal lines. Moreover, other informants shared differences of opinion regarding the STC's methods and organization, and that it should involve all Southerner political groups and improve its security and administrative aspects. In contrast, other informants identified STC as the only legitimate serum for the Southern issue and the Southern voices. They argued that most Southern parties agreed on the ultimate goals that the Southerners sought to achieve, and many supported the STC's efforts in the inter-Southern national dialogue.

The informants discussed their point of view on the primary adversaries of the STC are the Houthis, the Islah Party (Muslim Brotherhood), the GPC party, other Northern parties, and forces. Furthermore, some informants pointed out that local Yemeni forces, such as those responsible for the Yemen war in 1994, who oppose the restoration of Southerner sovereignty and the independence from the Yemen state. Other informants indicated that terrorism is also a significant opponent.

In conclusion, the different perceptions of the STC among different political parties and entities in Yemen are viewed as a de facto force and significant role in Yemeni politics. Moreover, it indicated that STC does not represent all the South of Yemen voices, so there is various support from pro-STC supporters. Furthermore, the main adversaries of the STC are terrorism, Houthi, Islah Party (Muslim Brotherhood) and the GPC. The STC and its supporters view the other Northern parties and forces are a threat to their goals and objectives.

### **6.3.1 The Military Aspects of the STC**

The military aspect of the Yemen conflict had a significant role. STC is considered one of the key players regarding the forces loyal to political entities outside of the legitimate government. Barany (2020) states that military responses to uprisings largely determine their outcomes. The factors influencing the military's reaction can be grouped into military, regime, societal, and external factors. The loyalty of the Southern forces to the STC is a topic of debate among different informants for this thesis. Regarding military factors, some informants indicated that the loyalty of Southern forces to the STC is unclear as different military and security groups controlled different areas in the South of Yemen after the STC formation in 2017. In contrast, other informants claim that the loyalty of the Southern forces to the STC is considerable, especially at the security and military levels. The level of loyalty may depend on the origin of the military and security forces with different military groups. Some were formed in 2015 when the Houthi-Saleh alliance started the war in Southern governorates that are called SR. Others have been formed under the Arab coalition led by KSA and UAE who are in charge for the structure and financial support. However, some pro-STC informants suggest that their allegiance to the Southern issue is a common denominator between the STC and the Southern forces.

Moreover, different informants provide varying accounts of the areas under the control of the STC. Aden is generally acknowledged as an area under the STC's control, in addition to Lahj, Al-Dhalea, Socotra, Shabwa, large parts of Abyan, and the coastal part of Hadramout. However, other informants argued that the STC's military control is limited to specific areas within these governorates and that the STC's Influence may also extend to areas where it does not have a military presence which will lead to more power for STC.

In conclusion, the loyalty and control of Southern forces to the STC are shaped by a complicated interplay of various factors within the Yemen conflict resolution, requiring a deep understanding of these factors, the specific context of war, and the roots of the military establishment in which the STC operates. Thus, the extent of the STC's control in the South of Yemen remains contentious. The extent of loyalty varies among military and security formations, and it is difficult to determine the exact level of support that the STC enjoys among Southern forces.



## 6.4 Discussion

Since the outbreak of the Arab uprisings, countries such as Syria, Libya and Yemen have not experienced political, economic and security stability. This thesis focuses on entities and their connection to identity in the Yemen crisis. Fierke (2013) argued that "identities can be formed in conflict". Social constructivists argued that identity has political and social connotations associated with conflicts, tendencies, and the demand of nationalism to establish their states, such as the right to self-determination (Brubaker and Cooper, 2000, pp. 4, 5). Identity is one of the main causes of conflict in Yemen. The Southern Peaceful Movement started in 2007 after the civil war in 1994, which Southerners viewed as a violation of their rights and the occupation of their state, known previously as a PDRY (South Yemen), causing the rise of a nationalist movement of their former state (Müller, 2015).

According to Francis Fukuyama, nationalism is connected to identity and is the most critical denominator in which nationalism has been active worldwide in recent decades. Politics of resentment based on a sense of dignity and identity, with its main political power, emerges as a mechanism to restore "stolen people's rights"; mainly focused on the Middle East, Eastern Europe, and the United States (cited in Shah, 2019, p. 340). Moreover, Yemen is one of the countries affected by the Arab uprising and has not witnessed political, military and security stability for decades. In light of the conflict and the emergence of different political, ideological, and religious entities, one of these components is the STC, which is a by-product of the Southern peaceful movement which developed into STC, a political and military entity, and de facto authority since its formal establishment in 2017.

The identity was prominent even in the name of this political entity, the "Southern" Transitional Council, referring to the aspiration of the people in Southern Yemen to restore their state and restore the previous identity that does not carry the political identity of the state of Yemen. Many Southerners came to associate themselves with the identity of South Arabia, which was established by British colonialism in 1963 and continued until 1967. It included some sultanates and sheikhdoms under the name of the Union of South Arabia, the entity referred to in the Independence Charter. Before that, the name Yemen did not exist as a political name and was only assumed over the South since independence from British rule in 1967 and consolidated during the rise of Arab nationalism (Kilner, 1967).

The fact that the Southerners associated with the alliance was due to the Arab national identity that rejected non-Arab regional interventions such as Iran and Turkey. The war spawned political identities, of which the STC was one of those components that had a prominent role, not only because of the Sunni Arab national identity but because of the efforts of the STC to achieve independence and restore the Southern state. The results also showed that the STC faces challenges dealing with political and military tensions with the Northern central political parties and components. It also seeks to improve relations with regional and international countries and settle internal conflicts to achieve stability and development in Southern Yemen. On the other hand, the STC is under much international scrutiny due to internal conflicts and ongoing disputes with the internationally recognized Yemeni government.

Through all the complexities and roots of the conflict that have decades in the Yemeni crisis, identity played not only in the establishment of the STC but in presenting itself as a partner of the coalition and a key party in the conflict and supporting it as a supporter in the various Southern governorates, the STC was not the only component that represents the Southern issue, but there are other Southern components, but the military support that the STC received from the Saudi-led Arab coalition had the largest share of the support. It has been pointed out that identity is closely connected concerning relations, as the STC views KSA and the UAE as partners. At the same time, KSA and the UAE identified it as an ally, especially has a different relation with STC when it comes to the fight against the Muslim Brotherhood in Yemen, represented by the Islah Party. Therefore, the UAE supports the STC militarily and securely. It also supports other parties in Yemen, such as Tariq Saleh's forces, who defected from the Houthis when they turned against Saleh and killed him in 2017.

Moreover, KSA also considers the STC after the Riyadh Agreement, the first official document to recognize it as a legitimate entity within Yemeni politics and being part of PLC. KSA also considers the STC a military and geopolitical ally that shares with it its war against the Iranian wing in Yemen, namely the Houthis (Ansar Allah), in addition to protecting its borders in the first place, as well as regional security, since the areas controlled by the STC are important strategic sites. Furthermore, various factors, including regional politics and interests, influence relations with regional and international actors and are characterized by complexity and sophistication.

The Findings also indicated that the STC needs more political and administrative experience, as its political experience is at most seven years compared to other Yemeni parties, such as the GPC, which ruled Yemen for over three decades. The peace process in Yemen and the role of the international community where have made many efforts, but it is limited. The international actors must understand the roots of the conflict, represented by different identities, including the identity that the STC and the resistance had tried to claim since the 2015 war when the Houthi-Saleh alliance swept through areas in Southern Yemen. The identity also affects the nature of the STC. It is a matter of controversy, as the Yemeni components belonging to the Northern governorates see it as a movement calling for the secession of the South from Yemen. At the same time, its supporters pointed it out as a political umbrella that seeks to achieve goals by restoring the Southern state with full sovereignty with the pre-1990 borders through a combination of military, political and diplomatic means.

Moreover, STC established a national general assembly, and his supporters considered a parliament to discuss the issues related to Southern governates with various bodies, not only at the local level but with different regional actors, and to update them continuously. There are also questions about whether the STC represents the whole South as it claims, and others view it as only influential in certain regions. STC military forces make it a different entity, a de facto authority for the Southern state, distinguishing it from a typical political party. The study highlights the military capabilities of the STC and notes that several factors affect the loyalty of Southern forces to the STC, including military, systemic, community, and external factors. The findings showed that the supporters of the STC could not achieve legitimacy in Southern Yemen and participate in Yemeni reconciliation efforts without the acceptance of the Arab coalition, given the coalition's great strength and global presence in the Middle East. Moreover, the STC relies heavily on the Arab coalition, acting as regional and international mediators and peacebuilders.

## 7. Conclusion

By using qualitative content analysis and interviewing elites and stakeholders to understand the STC identity and its manifestation towards the regional and international actors within the Yemen political dynamics, this thesis leads us to the following conclusions. Firstly, the STC was formed in 2017, as a descendant of the Southern peaceful movement (Al-Hirak) which began in 2007 in response to several factors, including centralization, marginalization, and the political, social, and economic challenges that faced the Southern Yemeni people after the 1994 war. The movement demanded the restoration of The Southern state and the disengagement of unity between the Yemeni republics PDRY and YAR, which unified in 1990. The STC is considered to be the political and military umbrella of the Southern peaceful movement and turned into a Southern military resistance in 2015 when the Houthi and Saleh forces stormed Aden.

Secondly, the STC aims are to achieve the independence of the South and the re-establishment of a Southern state. Thirdly, the STC has been able to maneuver itself to be in a position where it was able to secure political and military support from the UAE and KSA. It was regarded as a party to the conflict and was given legitimacy in the Riyadh Agreement, which brought together anti-Houthi components to end Yemen crisis.

Fourthly, the partnership between the STC and the countries of the Arab coalition is controversial, one viewpoint regards the STC as a decisive partner in the Arab coalition to fight the Houthis whereby another view is that it is simply an entity that has been sponsored and only receives orders from regional powers.

Fifthly, the STC faces challenges dealing with political and military tensions with the Northern parties and receives international criticism due to internal conflicts. Moreover, the STC seeks to improve its relations with international parties and settle internal disputes to achieve stability and development in Southern regions. The study also analyzed the STC's initiatives towards Southern cohesion raising the Southern identity in all its roles, positions, and principles while promoting comprehensive Southern reconciliation and unification of the Southern ranks to represent the voice of most Southerners. At the same time, opposition voices criticize its work, which some informants define as regionalism and the seizure of power. The thesis findings presented that the concept of identity is strongly related to the formation of the STC, the political

process, and the different perceptions of the STC among the various political parties and entities in Yemen.

Sixthly, the thesis also searched for the primary opponents of the STC, namely the Houthis, the Islah Party, the GPC Party, the Northern central parties and forces, and terrorism. This thesis discussed the relationship of the STC as part of the internationally recognized PLC, and its relationship with PLC members. The thesis presented different angles for peace endeavors, and the role of international actors needs to be more effective in the Yemen reconciliation and peace processes. This study shed light on the importance of many aspects that were not discussed in depth in previous studies concerning the STC and its various partnership from different levels and angles, its political identity, goals, and mandate, so it is imperative to furnish pathways for recontextualizing the prevailing contention, thus necessitating recognition and more comprehensive scrutiny in subsequent scholarly investigations.

## 7.1 Recommendations

1. **The STC Leadership and Strategy:** The STC has an apparent deficit in strategic vision and leadership regarding including women in decision-making participation. Moreover, a coherent strategy that includes more youth and political leadership to deliver hope and meet people's aspirations is urgently needed.

2. **Role of STC:** Despite establishing itself as a critical political, military, and security entity, the STC's administrative, economic, and service delivery performances have raised concerns within the loyalty of the Southern governates. The STC must influence Yemeni parties towards resolving the Southern issue in line with majority demands and adopt more adaptive policies that reflect the current realities.

3. **STC Restructuring and Resource Optimization:** The STC needs to address its unique political and geopolitical challenges via more internal restructuring and fostering the Southern national dialogue. A national project for a Southern political national front is also essential. Firm actions, especially for resource optimization and empowerment of the Southern people, are crucial.

4. **Institutional Reform and Education:** A demand for increased control over Southern institutions, reform, and educational investment has emerged due to widespread ignorance in Southern governorates and significant challenges, including the health system and terrorism.

5. **Focus on Economic Prosperity:** The economic plight of Southern people characterized by misdirected wealth and widespread corruption demands international and regional attention. Regional actors are urged to promote prosperity and respect the people's rights to their resources.

6. **Enhanced STC Organization and Strategy:** The STC is advised to revise its approach, foster more substantial decision-making partnerships with different groups, resolve internal issues, and adopt a more organized and strategic planning approach.

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# **Appendix I**

## Interview Questions

Can you provide some information about yourself? Are you an STC representative or political party, government or independent or pro-STC?

### **Identity and the development of the STC**

What were the political challenges that prompted the STC to be found?

From your point of view, what is STC's mandate?

How does the concept of identity affect the establishment of the STC?

There has always been a debate on whether STC is a political party or not. What are your views on that?

### **The regional and international role**

What is your view on the "Arab project," and how the STC has contributed to it?

How do you assess the position of the STC on the difficult implementation of the Riyadh Agreement?

What is your assessment of the contribution of the international actors (UN and UNSC members in bringing an end to the war and support the peace process in Yemen crisis?

How do you assess the relationship between the STC and the regional actors and the impact of that on the STC's independence to achieve its goals?

### **The contemporary presence of the STC**

Who do you regard as the main opponents or adversaries of the STC?

How do other political parties view the existence of the STC?

What prompted and motivated the STC to engage in the political process, as opposed to taking up arms, especially in the context of Southern liberated governorates?

How has the STC regard Southern cohesion, and what steps have been taken to promote that?

How much support does the STC enjoy from other Southern entities and prominent influencers for the goals it seeks to achieve?

What are the reasons behind the STC joining the PLC(PLC)?

Does the STC have a long-term future, or is it a transitional measure to reach a certain goal, such as the PLC?

### **Military forces**

How loyal are the Southern forces on the ground to the STC?

What areas can be said to be under STC control militarily?

Do you wish to add anything?



# Appendix II

## NVivo coding system



