The bad news stories pour out of Yemen. Military action against al-Qa'ida in the South of the country makes slow, painful progress in an area of the country aflame with separatist zeal and anger at the North. Sana'a witness clashes between troops loyal to the vengeful former President 'Ali 'Abdallah Salih, unseated by diktat of the Gulf Cooperation Council, and those of the incumbent. And, more than ever, Yemen seems capable of splitting back into the forms it once inhabited; either a separate North and South Yemen or a patchwork of tiny tribal fiefdoms notionally unified as Yemen. But Charlie Pratt reports a quiet optimism.

For those citizens trying to scratch a living in the wreckage of the economy bequeathed by Salih, Yemen is due to exhaust its aquifers and run out of viable water by 2017, 44% of the country is starving and estimates from the Yemeni Ministry of Labour are that 50% of the population are unemployed. Little wonder that the tent city built by the protesters in the early days of the Arab Spring has become permanent, a monument to the worries and desires of Yemeni citizens.

Yet at the heart of these crises, a small, unexpected shred of optimism emerges in the form of the new President, 'Abd-Rabbuh Mansour Hadi; a man confounding expectations to slowly overcome Salih and with the potential to enable this country to overcome his poisoned inheritance.

With little known about him prior to his election, Hadi was viewed as a Salih apparatchik, a Southerner who betrayed his roots following the 1986 South Yemen civil war to opt for a pensioned position in 1994 as VP of the unified Yemen under Salih. As if keen to prove the analysis wrong, Hadi has instead proven surprisingly independent, brave and resourceful in power. Like Yemen itself he seems to be reborn amongst the wreckage.

Perhaps due to his quiet, near silent approach, international media has begun to focus on the food and economic crises that beset Yemen, critiquing action the military against AQAP as a distraction from its grinding reality. In a country where 40% of the population live on below $2 a day, it seems uncomfortably redolent of the regime he replaced to focus on AQAP and clashes with his rival rather than putting food and jobs first.

Many outlets see an American hand in his actions, one that seeks security ahead of resource and political stability. They would be wrong to. Hadi may be only taking small steps on resource and economics, but this is all his circumstances permit him to. On his ascension to power, the only two issues that he had ability to combat were in front of him; Salih's presence in Sana'a and AQAP's presence in the South, both exerting a dissonant influence on the future of Yemen.

Similarly, this situation left him only two options; acquiesce to Salih and fight AQAP only when forced to, as Salih once did, or seek to depower Salih and subjugate AQAP. Recent events indicate that Hadi has chosen the latter option. He chose this course because he cannot yet

achieve anything else. Without his own security, without political stability in the capital and without the territorial integrity of Yemen, Hadi is utterly powerless, a static target for revenge attacks from the turmoil that came before him.

The presence of Salih and his family in Sana'a, particularly son Ahmad 'Ali, remains the foremost threat, politically and physically, to Hadi. For the duration of his reign, Yemen was a country built entirely around Salih, a state in which every problem and every solution could be found at his door, and in which every political player and tribal leader was inextricably linked to him. His presence in the country sustains this system and he remains a powerful presence in Hadi's party, the General Peoples Congress. Along with his son Ahmad Ali, the head of the powerful Republican Guard, he remains the most potent enemy to Hadi, a man he once thought bought off.

In Sana'a, the recent clashes between government troops and those loyal to Salih do not show Salih's belligerence but Hadi's new assertiveness. His steps to force Republican Guard commanders to report to him, and not Ahmad 'Ali, along with his removal of the President's nephew Ammar from his position as head of the Central Security Forces were a direct challenge to Salih. Perhaps realising that he is in a position to do so due to the support of 'Ali Muhsin al-Ahmar, the influential head of the First Armoured Division, Hadi's actions precipitated the brief clashes. In doing so, Hadi emerged the winner, strengthening his position at home.

In the South the same is true, as the actions of Yemeni security forces against AQAP in May and June reaffirmed government control of key towns in the restless provinces of Abyan and Lahij. Far from taking Salih's ambivalent approach to AQAP, Hadi has instead challenged them. At the same time, he has reversed Salih's antagonistic position to the South and sought conciliation with its citizens and even its secessionist movement, al-Hirak; his decision to hold a Cabinet session in Aden on June 19 was extraordinary in this sense.

His actions are not perfect. Zinjibar in Abyan has particularly suffered heavily in anti-AQAP action, and Government responses to al-Hirak are still marked by brutality. But in his actions, he seems to recognise that the existence of AQAP in Yemen, living as it did within the gaps between the state and the tribes was more the fault of chronic underdevelopment, resource failure and corruption than any groundswell of radical Islamist feeling. If he can rein in his security forces and utilise his natural standing as a Southerner there remains hope for a united, peaceable Yemen yet.

These two successes have been capitalised on by Hadi as he launches a National Dialogue designed to reconcile the various interest parties, rebel groups and political conflicts that threaten to tear Yemen apart; from the Huthis in the North to al-Hirak in the South, the mildly Islamist al-Islah to the democratic youth.

At the same time as Hadi's bravery has wrought him success, it throws up further issues; a situation that he should become used to. Despite his progress, despite his authority, Hadi's position remains precarious. He lacks tribal support in the North and the South is burning with dissatisfaction and anger. Though he may soon neuter Salih, he will not neuter the system that he created.

For Hadi, nothing will be simple. With every issue in Yemen complicated by tribal allegiances and distended loyalties, Hadi will rarely have a simple decision to make, nor an ardent support to base to rely on. As the protesters remain in the streets, so their patchwork of demands and backgrounds echo the issues that face Hadi. From food to water, secularism to Islam, secession to tribalism, Hadi faces issues that cannot be ignored, ones that grow more complex and pressing each day. Yet until he has guaranteed the end of 'Ali 'Abdallah Salih's legacy and challenged the poisoned inheritance he has left in the form of a leviathan bureaucracy, tangled tribes and internecine conflict, he cannot guarantee the future of Yemen.

Where his support is lacking, the role of the West is critical in securing his position. In this sense, the recent donors conference in Riyadh was heartening, not just for the $6.4 billion dollars pledged, but because of the focus on development alongside security. This broader focus must remain at the core of Western policy towards Yemen, signalling the end to a tawdry obsession with security.

Within their focus on development, Western governments could do much worse than supporting Hadi to entrench his position and proclaiming the reforms that he seeks to make. At the same time they must continue guaranteeing aid in the short term to solve the looming resource crisis; more secure leaders than Hadi have been undone by the hunger and thirst of their people.

Without real international support, without political stability and without unified institutions and support capable of turning Hadi's orders into reality, Yemen will remain the tinderbox it is. The future of Yemen is about more than the future of its people. Its role in the wave of democratisation and Islamism spreading across the region is critical. Amongst the wreckage that 'Ali 'Abdallah Salih left, there is the faintest hope that a fragile, young, inexperienced country may heal its wounds and move forward.