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**Fighting Al Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula on All Fronts:
A U.S. Counterterrorism Strategy in Yemen**

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A U.S. Counterterrorism Strategy in Yemen**

by

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Report

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Dedication

I dedicate this report to my parents who introduced me to the wonders of world travel. Thank you for your endless support and encouragement no matter what adventure I take on.

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Abstract

Fighting Al Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula on All Fronts: A U.S. Counterterrorism Strategy in Yemen

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The United States needs a long-term counterterrorism strategy in Yemen. Nearly three years in, the faltering Yemeni transition threatens to fall apart in the face of an economic crisis, ongoing internal conflict, and al Qaeda attacks. Unchecked, a failed Yemeni state will provide al Qaeda with a larger recruiting base and an expanded area for operations. To prevent this nightmare scenario, the United States should integrate military restructuring, political reform, and economic development policies into its greater strategy to counter al Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP). This report describes the dynamics of the 2011 Yemeni uprising, the subsequent political transition, and the simultaneous evolution of AQAP. The report then analyzes these phenomena in the context of U.S. national security policy to determine a long-term counterterrorism strategy in Yemen. To succeed in defeating AQAP and stabilizing Yemen, the U.S. government must engage with its Yemeni partners and regional actors; invest in Yemen's military restructuring, political transition, and economic reforms; and continue to attack AQAP through direct action operations and in tandem with Yemeni armed forces.

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Chapter 1: Why Yemen Matters

Since 2011, the U.S. government has referred to al Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP) as the greatest threat to the homeland. The focus of U.S. counterterrorism turned to AQAP following the failed Christmas day bombing of 2009. Trained and equipped by the terrorist group in Yemen, Umar Farouk Abdulmutallab attempted to blow up Northwest Flight 253 over Detroit using a bomb device hidden in his underwear.¹ The failed attack caught America by surprise and prompted a renewed counterterrorism effort against the al Qaeda affiliate based in Yemen. In fall of 2010, AQAP again attempted to attack the U.S. homeland using parcel bombs that were intercepted in Britain and Dubai.² The United States responded with an escalation in drone strikes against key AQAP leaders.

Since 2010, substantial social movements and political changes have taken place in Yemen and changed the environment in which AQAP operates; yet the U.S. government has done little to alter its counterterrorism approach in the country. The U.S. government has evident strategies for countering al Qaeda and for engaging Saudi Arabia, but it lacks a systematic approach to Yemen.³ U.S. deference to its economic ally Saudi Arabia has limited U.S. support for Yemeni political and economic change thus far.⁴ But as the continuing volatility in Yemen shows, regional security depends on political and economic stability that can only be achieved through comprehensive reform.

¹ Peter Baker, "Obama Says Al Qaeda in Yemen Planned Bombing Plot, and He Vows Retribution," *New York Times*, January 2, 2010, <http://www.nytimes.com/2010/01/03/us/politics/03address.html>.

² Eric Schmitt and Scott Shane, "Saudis Warned U.S. of Attack Before Parcel Bomb Plot," *New York Times*, November 5, 2010, <http://www.nytimes.com/2010/11/06/world/middleeast/06terror.html?pagewanted=all>.

³ "U.S. Faulted for Not Doing Enough in Yemen," Narrated by Eric Westervelt, Morning Edition, *NPR*, June 21, 2011, <http://www.npr.org/2011/06/21/137303514/u-s-faulted-for-not-doing-enough-in-yemen>.

⁴ Ibid.

Popular uprising against the Saleh regime in 2011 created a security vacuum in Yemen that was seized by AQAP. Since its 2011 expansion, AQAP has been pushed back from several southern governorates, but the group still maintains freedom of movement through large areas of the Yemeni state. The current security, political, and economic conditions in Yemen are ripe for state collapse, which would allow AQAP to resurge. An undeterred AQAP is a serious threat to the United States.

The United States has approached Yemen primarily as a theater of operations for the War on Terror while largely neglecting Yemeni political turmoil and humanitarian concerns.⁵ As troop withdrawal in Afghanistan continues, the United States is nearing a turning point in the War on Terror that could potentially change the execution of its counterterrorism operations. Yemen's current transition provides the United States with an opportunity to reassess its counterterrorism policy and apply a new strategy at a critical moment. The United States needs a clear and comprehensive strategy to combat AQAP in the long term. Engagement with the Yemeni government and investment in its political transition are necessary steps towards stabilizing and securing Yemen.

The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia (KSA) has been actively involved with U.S. counterterrorism operations against al Qaeda and maintains the most powerful outside influence on Yemen. After the May 2003 al Qaeda attacks in Riyadh, the Saudi government cracked down on the terrorist group's network in the kingdom.⁶ As a result of the Saudi government's counterterrorism success, the Saudi Arabia al Qaeda group reformed in Yemen as AQAP in 2009. The group's failed 2009 assassination attempt against Prince Nayef bin Abdelaziz Al Saud, director of the kingdom's counterterrorism

⁵ Shelia Carapico, "Of Transitology and Counter-Terror Targeting in Yemen," *Muftah*, April 22, 2014, <http://muftah.org/transitology-counter-terror-targeting-yemen/#.U6RZIRZlhZ6>.

⁶ Michael Jacobson, "Saudi Efforts to Combat Terrorist Financing," *The Washington Institute for Near East Policy*, July 21, 2009, <http://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/view/saudi-efforts-to-combat-terrorist-financing>.

campaign, highlights the threat the organization poses to the kingdom.⁷ Saudi-Yemeni relations encompass much more than mutual security concerns. For decades Saudi Arabia has been involved in the internal affairs of Yemen through its provision of aid and loans to the Yemeni government as well as to select tribal groups who support Wahhabi institutions and Saudi security interests along the border.⁸ Since the fall of President Saleh, however, Saudi influence in Yemen has weakened.⁹ Additionally, the Kingdom's role in the ongoing conflict with the al Houthis in Yemen prevents it from being an honest broker in negotiations. Yet, given the KSA's strong ability to influence the Yemeni political system and economy, any U.S. strategy must draw on Saudi diplomatic, security, and financial resources.

Saudi Arabia and fellow Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) states have a keen interest in defeating AQAP and establishing a stable and secure Yemen. The GCC interests, however, do not align with the democratic aspirations advocated by many Yemeni activists. The United States has supported the GCC-brokered political transition in Yemen, but that transition has not produced the changes demanded by the Yemeni people. The U.S. government must take on a greater role in ensuring the realization of the Yemeni transition, regardless of the pressures of its GCC allies.

⁷ Christopher M. Blanchard, "Saudi Arabia: Background and U.S. Relations," *Congressional Research Service*, June 14, 2010, 1, <http://fpc.state.gov/documents/organization/145596.pdf>.

⁸ Sigurd Neubauer, "Tensions at the Saudi-Yemeni Border," *Carnegie Endowment for International Peace*, October 8, 2013, <http://carnegieendowment.org/sada/2013/10/08/tensions-at-saudi-yemeni-border/gpez>.

⁹ Farea al-Muslimi, "Saudi Arabia Losing Influence in Yemen," *Yemen Times*, August 7, 2014, <http://www.yementimes.com/en/1805/opinion/4180/Saudi-Arabia-losing-influence-in-Yemen.htm>.

Chapter 2: Background

In a region flush with wealth, the Republic of Yemen stands apart as the poorest Arab state. The Yemeni people face an economic crisis, failing government services, and water shortages. In addition to these structural challenges, the Yemeni government is engaged in a number of ongoing conflicts: the al Houthi insurgency in the North, a secessionist movement in the South, and attacks and occupation by AQAP throughout the country. This chapter outlines the structural issues and the two internal conflicts that have contributed to a growing humanitarian crisis in Yemen. The challenge posed by AQAP is addressed in depth in Chapter 4.

STRUCTURAL PROBLEMS

Yemen's population is young and growing. In a country of 25 million people, more than half are under the age of eighteen, and 70 percent are younger than twenty-five.¹⁰ The population growth rate of Yemen, despite a significant decrease over the past two decades, remains one of the highest in the world at over two percent.¹¹ The majority of Yemenis, about 70 percent, live in rural areas, though urbanization is on the rise.¹² Unemployment in the country is estimated at 35 percent;¹³ however, in rural areas and among young people and recent graduates the rate jumps to between 60 and 70 percent.¹⁴ The combination of a young, dependent population and high unemployment has led to

¹⁰ Helen Lackner, introduction to *Why Yemen Matters: A Society in Transition*, ed. Helen Lackner (London: SOAS Middle East Issues, 2013), Location 880.

¹¹ "Population Growth (annual %)," *World Bank*, updated November 5, 2013, <http://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SP.POP.GROW>.

¹² "Middle East: Yemen," *World Factbook*, Washington, DC: Central Intelligence Agency, Continually updated, <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/ym.html>.

¹³ *Ibid.*

¹⁴ Lackner, *Why Yemen Matters*, 961.

high rates of poverty; approximately half of the Yemeni population lives below the poverty line.¹⁵

The increasing population already overwhelms the nation's public health and education systems. Food insecurity rates among Yemen's most critical problems, with one-third of Yemenis suffering acute hunger.¹⁶ Fifty percent of children in Yemen suffer from chronic malnutrition,¹⁷ and six percent die before the age of five.¹⁸ Youth (defined as 15-24 years) literacy rates are encouraging: 96 percent for male and 76 percent for females.¹⁹ Yet low secondary school participation rates of 49 percent and 27 percent bode poorly for developing a skilled labor force.²⁰ The UN Human Development Index listed Yemen as 160th of 184 countries when considering factors of life expectancy, educational attainment, and income.²¹ Yemen's per capita GDP of \$2,500 ranks as one of the lowest in the world.²² The economy relies on remittances, amounting to about \$3 billion a year, from Yemeni expatriates working in Saudi Arabia.²³ However, since the Saudi kingdom began cracking down on illegal and migrant workers in November 2013, Yemeni officials estimate that between 300,000 and 400,000 Yemenis have been deported.²⁴

¹⁵ Ibid., 904.

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ "At a Glance: Yemen," *UNICEF*, December 31, 2013, http://www.unicef.org/infobycountry/yemen_statistics.html.

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ *The Rise of the South: Human Progress in a Diverse World*, Human Development Report 2013, United Nations Development Program, 146, http://hdr.undp.org/sites/default/files/reports/14/hdr2013_en_complete.pdf.

²² "Country Comparison: GDP - Per Capita (PPP)," *World Factbook*, Washington, DC: Central Intelligence Agency, Continually updated, <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/rankorder/2004rank.html?countryname=Yemen&countrycode=ym®ionCode=mde&rank=187#ym>.

²³ Khaled Fattah, "Yemen's Insecurity Dilemma," *Yemen Times*, February 11, 2014, <http://www.yementimes.com/en/1754/opinion/3471/Yemen's-Insecurity-Dilemma.htm>.

²⁴ "Down and Out," *Economist*, December 10, 2013, <http://www.economist.com/blogs/pomegranate/2013/12/deported-yemeni-migrant-workers>.

Yemen's economic problems are largely the result of the country's "contentious politics and its lack of institutional development."²⁵ Having relied on oil exports to prop up the economy and the government budget for the past two decades, the country is now experiencing a slow and painful adjustment away from oil export dependence. A steady decrease in oil production and frequent attacks on pipelines have cut export revenues significantly. In addition to being a standard tactic of AQAP, attacks on Yemen's energy infrastructure, oil pipelines in particular, have become the regular course of action for tribesmen looking to pressure the government into providing jobs or settling land disputes. As a result of frequent oil field shutdowns, Yemen has faced severe fuel shortages intermittently since 2013.²⁶ Power outages and fuel shortages have led once again to repeated protests in Sana'a. In 2013, for the first time in nearly 30 years, Yemen spent more on importing oil than it earned in oil exports.²⁷ Oil reserves in the country have declined to an estimated 3 billion barrels.²⁸ Yet despite the decreasing revenues, oil and natural gas resources still make up more than 90 percent of exports and 70 percent of the state budget.²⁹ The Yemeni government lacks the institutional means for effective tax collection to cover the loss of income. Former president Saleh's use of personal networks and patronage prevented institutional development within the government and stifled

²⁵ Charles Schmitz, "Building a Better Yemen," *Carnegie Middle East Center*, April 3, 2012, 1, <http://carnegieendowment.org/2012/04/03/building-better-yemen>.

²⁶ Ali Ibrahim Al-Moshki, "Diesel, Propane Shortage Lead Gas Stations to Shut Down," *Yemen Times*, March 18, 2014, <http://www.yementimes.com/en/1764/news/3611/Diesel-propane-shortage-lead-gas-stations-to-shut-down.htm>.

²⁷ Peter Salisbury, "Tribal Attacks and Lack of Investment Plague Yemen's Oil Industry," *Financial Times*, March 25, 2014, <http://www.ft.com/cms/s/0/d56b775c-a772-11e3-9c7d-00144feab7de.html#axzz37kFDnPtY>.

²⁸ Mohammed Hatem, "Yemen Oil Revenue Falls Below Cost of Importing Fuels," *Bloomberg*, August 26, 2013, <http://www.bloomberg.com/news/2013-08-26/yemen-oil-revenue-falls-below-cost-of-importing-fuels.html>.

²⁹ Fattah, "Yemen's Insecurity Dilemma."

market competition. Instead, businesses relied on relations with the Saleh family to procure state contracts.

Years of poor governance have also contributed to dangerous water shortages in Yemen. Estimates suggest that the country's renewable sources can supply 2.1 billion cubic meters per year, yet current annual extraction is estimated at 3.5 billion cubic meters.³⁰ The World Health Organization estimates that reasonable living conditions require 1,700 cubic meters of water per capita. In comparison, Yemen has annual renewable water resources of about 90 cubic meters per capita. The disparity leaves more than half of the population without access to clean water and sanitation.³¹ These water problems stem more from poor management than scarcity.³² Ninety percent of Yemen's water use goes towards agriculture, though the industry makes up only ten percent of the country's GDP.³³ Technological advances are needed to increase irrigation efficiency, but such changes require extension services. Stricter regulation and oversight are needed to control well drilling and prevent groundwater contamination in urban areas. Developing and implementing water policy poses a serious challenge to the transitional government.

Wealthy qat farmers are likely the biggest hurdle to realizing new water policies. Qat, a tree whose leaves provide a stimulant effect when chewed, is a cash crop that dominates Yemeni agriculture. Import restrictions on qat protect Yemeni farmers from external price competition, and as a result, qat production has surpassed coffee production in the country.³⁴ Irrigation of the lucrative crop takes priority over community

³⁰ Lackner, *Why Yemen Matters*, 931.

³¹ Fattah, "Yemen's Insecurity Dilemma."

³² Schmitz, "Building a Better Yemen," 7.

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ Peer Gatter, "The Politics of Qat," *Foreign Policy*, February 18, 2013, http://www.qat-yemen.com/Unterseiten/Gatter_Qat_Foreign_Policy_2013.pdf.

water needs in some regions,³⁵ and the widespread use of pesticides on qat trees leads to water contamination. Qat not only contributes to water problems in Yemen but also plays a role in the country's economic and political problems.

Socially, Yemeni life centers upon qat, and the daily chewing practice is one of the few common customs that Yemenis share. Despite Western regard for qat as a drug, there are no control laws for the stimulant in Yemen, and nearly three-quarters of Yemeni men chew qat leaves.³⁶ On average, Yemeni families spend 10 percent of their budget on qat, while poor households spend closer to 40 percent.³⁷ In some southern governorates, households spend 11 times more on qat than they spend on education and up to six times more than they spend on health care.³⁸ Such statistics illustrate the plant's harmful impact on economic and social development.

Qat also has great influence in the Yemeni political system. In the 1970s and 80s, President Saleh used qat tax exemptions and qat-farming subsidies to gain favor with certain tribal groups.³⁹ These qat regulations enriched tribal leaders who spent their wealth on armed militias and infrastructure projects that undermined local government authority. Illicit qat trade between Yemen and Saudi Arabia is a \$1 billion business that helps finance the al Houthi rebel military in northern Yemen.⁴⁰ Despite its detrimental impact on Yemeni society, qat is an ingrained social norm, and the practice of qat chewing accompanies most business and political meetings. To attract voters during

³⁵ Gerhard Lichtenhaler, "Customary Conflict Resolution in Times of Extreme Water Stress: A Case Study of a Document from the Northern Highlands of Yemen," in *Why Yemen Matters: A Society in Transition*, ed. Lackner, (London: SOAS Middle East Issues, 2013), Location 4880.

³⁶ Gatter, "The Politics of Qat."

³⁷ Ibid.

³⁸ Ibid.

³⁹ Nadia Al-Sakkaf, "Politics of Qat by Peer Gatter: Changes in Qat Politics Following President Saleh's Ascent to Power," *Yemen Times*, July 24, 2014, <http://www.yementimes.com/en/1801/report/4137/Politics-of-Qat-by-Peer-Gatter-Changes-in-qat-politics-following-president-Saleh's-ascent-to-power.htm>.

⁴⁰ Gatter, "The Politics of Qat."

election time, Saleh distributed free qat at political tents. He used the “qat weapon” again during the 2011 uprising to encourage demonstrators to rally in his support.⁴¹

Under Saleh’s 33-year rule, the General People’s Congress (GPC) party dominated the Yemeni political system. The primary opposition party, Islah, allied with the GPC during the 1994 civil war, but the two parties split after 1997.⁴² Co-founded in 1990 by Muslim Brotherhood members and Yemen’s most powerful tribal leader, Sheikh Abdullah al Ahmar, the Islah party brings together Islamists, tribal groups, and the Salafis, a conservative sect of Sunni Muslims.⁴³ In 2002, Islah along with the Yemeni Socialist Party (YSP) and three minor parties formed an opposition alliance called the Joint Meeting Parties (JMP).⁴⁴ Internal divisions among the parties and within the parties themselves have prevented the JMP from communicating a clear political platform and gaining widespread support. Islah, currently Yemen’s second largest political party, has been engaged in conflict since the early 2000s with the al Houthis, a Shiite Muslim group in northern Yemen. In July 2014, Islah leaders began signaling reconciliation with the GPC as a way to counter the al Houthi expansion in northern governorates.⁴⁵ Since the 2011 uprising, the GPC has fractured into two camps: continued supporters of Saleh and supporters of Hadi. As Yemen’s political transition advances towards presidential and parliamentary elections, these ongoing political shifts will have a big impact on Yemen’s future leadership.

⁴¹ Ibid.

⁴² “Who’s Who in Yemen’s Opposition?” *Al Jazeera*, February 28, 2011, <http://www.aljazeera.com/indepth/spotlight/yemen/2011/02/2011228141453986337.html>.

⁴³ Farea al-Muslimi, “Yemen’s Brotherhood: Early Losses and an Unknown Future,” *Al-Monitor*, September 25, 2013, <http://www.al-monitor.com/pulse/originals/2013/09/yemen-brotherhood-losses-unknown-future.html>.

⁴⁴ “Who’s Who,” *Al Jazeera*.

⁴⁵ Ali Ibrahim Al-Moshki, “Islah Moves Closer to GPC in Light of Recent Houthi Expansion,” *Yemen Times*, July 17, 2014, <http://www.yementimes.com/en/1799/news/4113/Islah-moves-closer-to-GPC-in-light-of-recent-Houthi-expansion.htm>.

CONFLICT

al Houthi Rebellion

The al Houthi movement, led by the al Houthi family, represents members of the Zaydi Shiite population who reside in northern Yemen, primarily in the Sa'ada governorate bordering Saudi Arabia.⁴⁶ The al Houthis assert that they have been marginalized by the Yemeni government and cite socioeconomic inequalities and regional underdevelopment as reasons for their revolt.⁴⁷ The al Houthis also object to Saudi-supported Salafi proselytizing in the Sa'ada governorate.⁴⁸ Since 2004, the Yemeni government has fought against the al Houthis in six successive wars, commonly referred to as the "Sa'ada Wars."⁴⁹ The Saudi military has participated in the conflict in support of the Yemeni government. In 2009, the Saudi military intervened across the Yemeni border, in response to reported infiltration of al Houthi rebels in southern Saudi Arabia.⁵⁰ Since the last truce in 2010, the al Houthi movement seized control the governorate of Sa'ada and expanded into the neighboring governorates of Hajjah, Amran, and al Jawf.⁵¹ Though Tehran has denied any Iranian involvement in Yemen, anonymous American officials reported in March 2012 that Iran had shipped arms to the al Houthis and other rebel groups in Yemen.⁵² In May 2013, the leader of the al Houthi's political party, Ansar

⁴⁶ Jeremy Sharp, "Yemen: Background and U.S. Relations," *Congressional Research Service*, February 6, 2014, 1, <http://fas.org/sgp/crs/mideast/RL33003.pdf>.

⁴⁷ Kristian Coates Ulrichsen, "The Geopolitics of Insecurity in the Horn of Africa and the Arabian Peninsula," *Middle East Policy Council* Vol. XVIII, no. 2, (Summer 2011), 5, <http://www.mepec.org/journal/middle-east-policy-archives/geopolitics-insecurity-horn-africa-and-arabian-peninsula?print>.

⁴⁸ Sharp, "Yemen: Background," 1.

⁴⁹ Katherine Zimmerman, "Yemen's Pivotal Moment," *AEI's Critical Threats Project*, February 2014, 5, <http://www.criticalthreats.org/yemen/zimmerman-yemens-pivotal-moment-february-12-2014>.

⁵⁰ Sharp, "Yemen: Background," 1.

⁵¹ Zimmerman, "Yemen's Pivotal Moment," 5.

⁵² Alexis Knutsen, "Yemen's Counter-Terrorism Quandary," *AEI's Critical Threats Project*, June 26, 2014, <http://www.criticalthreats.org/yemen/knutsen-houthi-counterterrorism-quandary-june-26-2014>.

Allah, met with the Iranian ambassador in Sana'a; yet, the al Houthis deny allegations of Iranian support.⁵³

Conflict involving the al Houthis broke out again in late 2013. In Dammaj, Sa'ada the al Houthis targeted a Salafist school that has produced radicalized Sunni youths.⁵⁴ In January 2014, the Yemeni government negotiated a ceasefire in Dammaj in which non-local Salafists were exiled to another governorate.⁵⁵ Counter to the additional negotiation attempts by the Yemeni government, the al Houthis have led a largely successful military offensive.⁵⁶ In February, the al Houthis defeated the Salafi-supported al Ahmar clan, the lead family of the powerful Hashid tribal confederation. In July 2014, after months of attacks against tribes and the Yemeni military and multiple broken ceasefires, the al Houthis took control of the capital of the 'Amran governorate, 'Amran city, located less than 50 kilometers from Sana'a.⁵⁷

Factionalism within the Yemeni military and elements of competing support from Saudi Arabia and Iran exacerbate the al Houthi conflict. If the al Houthis persist in their attacks or move on Sana'a, the Yemeni government will have to pull military resources away from the fight with AQAP to combat the rebellion. AQAP proved capable of seizing such an opportunity to establish safe havens in 2011 when Yemeni military troops were withdrawn from the South. An enduring al Houthi conflict threatens to further destabilize Yemen politically and strengthen AQAP in the process.

⁵³ Ibid.

⁵⁴ Nasser Al-Sakkaf, "Salafis Forced to Flee Dammaj, Government Forces Unable to Protect Them, They Say," *Yemen Times*, January 16, 2014, <http://www.yementimes.com/en/1747/news/3365/Salafis-forced-to-flee-Dammaj-government-forces-unable-to-protect-them-they-say.htm>.

⁵⁵ Ibid.

⁵⁶ Ibid.

⁵⁷ Amal Al-Yarisi, "Houthis Take Control of Amran City," *Yemen Times*, July 10, 2014, <http://www.yementimes.com/en/1797/news/4090/Houthis-take-control-of-Amran-city.htm>.

Southern Movement

The Southern Movement represents a diverse group of constituents with aligned interests but little consensus. Prior to unification in 1990, the North and South of Yemen existed as two separate states: Yemen's Arab Republic (YAR) and the People's Democratic Republic of Yemen (PDRY), respectively. The two states developed distinctly. The YAR, a deeply religious, Islamic society, was controlled by heavily armed tribal confederations. The PDRY took on a more secular form of governance and was ruled by the Yemeni Socialist Party (YSP). During the Cold War, the YAR supported the West, while the PDRY was the Soviet's strongest Arab ally. Unification of the two states was negotiated under their respective leaders, Ali Abdullah Saleh and Ali Salim al-Beedh, in 1990. Following a three-year transition period and a National Dialogue of Political Forces, elections were held in which the northern parties dominated. Relations between the YSP and the dominant northern party, the General People's Congress (GPC), worsened and eventually the state broke down in civil war in 1994. After only two months of fighting, Saleh and his supporters won decisively.

After 1994, several factors exacerbated the discord between northern and southern Yemenis. Saleh appointed northerners to high-level political and security positions based in the South. Northerners also made land grabs throughout southern Yemen. Neglected by the official government, Aden, the southern capital and Yemen's major seaport, struggled economically. Many former military and security officers from the South were forced to retire without pensions.⁵⁸ In 2007, these officers organized a peaceful movement demanding the reinstatement of their positions or full payment of their earned pensions.⁵⁹ As the movement gathered momentum, other southern groups joined to form

⁵⁸ Lackner, *Why Yemen Matters*, 789.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 797.

a loose coalition called the Southern Movement, or al Hirak al Janoubi. The Movement aims generally at asserting southern grievances but is split between groups willing to work with the new transitional government and more radical factions that favor complete secession. Early on, Saleh responded to Southern Movement protests with force, spurring even more confrontation over the next several years. Militant groups within the Southern Movement have sustained low-level conflict against the Yemeni government since the 2011 uprising. Since late 2013, violence in the South is on the rise as the Yemeni army and Southern Movement supporters continue battle over administrative authority.

Chapter 3: Transition

The accumulating grievances of the Yemeni people erupted in protests against President Saleh in January 2011. After 11 months of civil unrest, a weakened Saleh signed a GCC-led and U.S.-backed initiative that stipulated the uncontested election of former vice president Abd Rabu Mansour Hadi and the formation of a national dialogue to draw up a new constitution. Now nearly three years into the political transition, the GCC Initiative has yet to address many of the grievances of the Yemeni street.

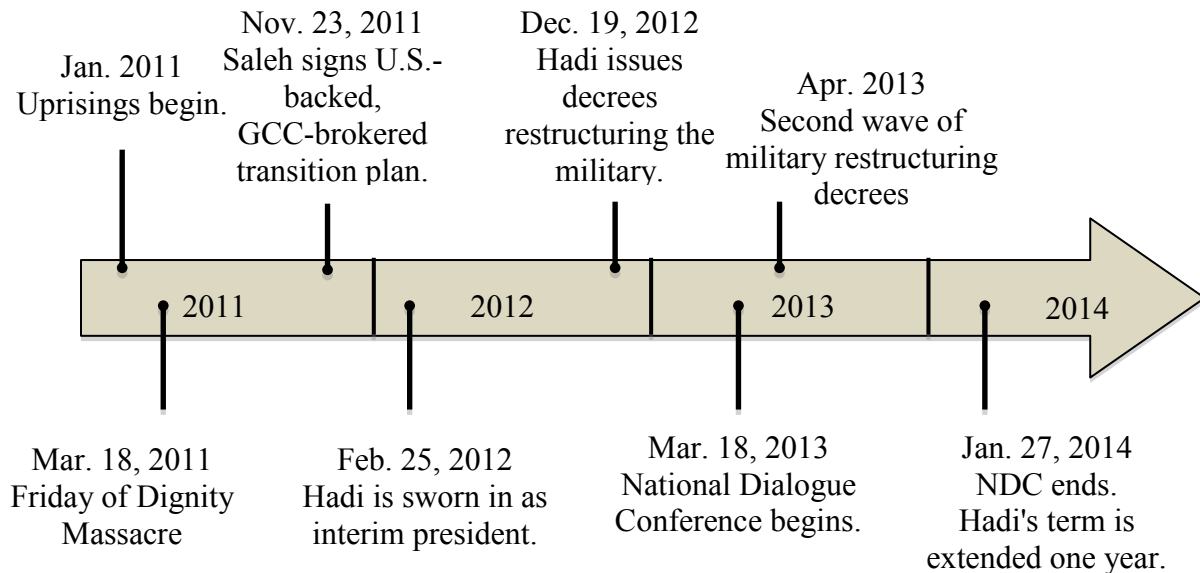


Figure 1: Yemen's Political Transition⁶⁰

UPRISING

Provoked by increasing economic hardship and insecurity and encouraged by the Arab Spring movements sweeping across the region, the Yemeni people took to the streets in late January 2011. The widespread movement brought together disparate

⁶⁰ Adapted from Sharp, "Yemen: Background," 3.

factions of Yemeni society: the al Houthis, the Southern Movement, soldiers, opposition groups, women, and youths. Early on in the movement, women and youths took leadership roles in the public occupations and through cyberactivism. For her role in the nonviolent protests, Tawakkol Karman became the first Arab woman, the first Yemeni, and the youngest laureate to be awarded the Nobel Peace Prize.⁶¹ The movement by the people was largely peaceful, a significant feature given the common nature of personal arms in Yemen.⁶² Yet President Saleh responded to the demonstrations with violent force. Over the 11 months of protests and civil unrest, more than 2,000 people were killed.⁶³

The violent turning point in the uprising came on March 18, 2011. From the rooftops surrounding Change Square in central Sana'a, Yemeni security forces fired on tens of thousands of pro-democracy demonstrators. More than 40 demonstrators were killed in what became known as the Friday of Dignity Massacre.⁶⁴ Days later, General Ali Mohsen al Ahmar, a key commander in the Yemeni army, defected and publicly supported the protest movement.⁶⁵ Other military commanders followed suit. The defections resulted in a split of the military forces. The First Armored Division, or Firqa, led by General Mohsen supported the demonstrators, and the Republican Guard, commanded by President Saleh's son, Ahmed Saleh, defended the regime.

The protestors demanded democratic change. In April 2011, the Coordinating Council of the Youth Revolution of Change, a leading organization of the civilian

⁶¹ "Meet the Laureates: Tawakkol Karman," *Nobel Women's Initiative*, nd, <http://nobelwomensinitiative.org/meet-the-laureates/tawakkol-karman/>.

⁶² Shelia Carapico, "Yemen between Revolution and Counter-Terrorism: a Critical View of U.S. Policies," in *Why Yemen Matters: A Society in Transition*, ed. Helen Lackner, (London: SOAS Middle East Issues, 2013), Location 1305.

⁶³ Sharp, "Yemen: Background," 1.

⁶⁴ "Yemen Declares 'State of Emergency,'" *Al Jazeera*, March 18, 2011, <http://www.aljazeera.com/news/middleeast/2011/03/2011318115434957754.html>.

⁶⁵ "Top Yemeni General, Ali Mohsen, Backs Opposition," *BBC News*, March 21, 2011, <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-middle-east-12804552>.

movement, published a declaration of thirteen demands. The first of these demands was to “remove the current regime peacefully and remove all its figures and all members of the President’s relatives from all leadership posts in the military and civil institutions.”⁶⁶ United by their demands, demonstrators across the country chanted: “Down with the president’s thugs,”⁶⁷ “Time for change,”⁶⁸ and “Leave!”⁶⁹

In May and for a third time, Saleh rejected the GCC-brokered and U.S.-supported agreement requiring him to step down.⁷⁰ After Saleh’s refusal, fighting broke out between Saleh’s Republican Guard and the al Ahmar clan, the lead family of the Hashid tribal confederation. The Hashid is the most powerful tribal confederation in Yemen, and its members mostly live in the North. The violent power struggle between the Saleh family and the al Ahmar family overshadowed the peaceful protest movement. In June, President Saleh was wounded by an attack on the presidential palace, which he accused the al Ahmar family of orchestrating. Saleh temporarily transferred power to vice president Hadi while he sought medical treatment in Saudi Arabia for burns he received in the attack.

Amid the regular violence between pro- and anti-government forces, daily demonstrations continued in Sana’a and Taiz over the following months. Simultaneously the Yemeni government was losing control to domestic insurgencies in governorates across the country. In the North, al Houthi forces fought against supporters of the Islah

⁶⁶ Atiaf Alwazir, “Demands of the Revolutionary Youth,” *Woman from Yemen* (blog), April 28, 2011, <http://womanfromyemen.blogspot.com/2011/04/demands-of-revolutionary-youth.html>.

⁶⁷ “Yemen Protests Enter Fifth Day,” *Al Jazeera*, February 15, 2011, <http://www.aljazeera.com/news/middleeast/2011/02/2011215101053354193.html>.

⁶⁸ “Yemen: Tens of Thousands Call on President to Leave,” *BBC News*, January 27, 2011, <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-middle-east-12295864>.

⁶⁹ Dexter Filkins, “Yemen’s Protests and the Hope for Reform,” *New Yorker*, April 11, 2011, http://www.newyorker.com/reporting/2011/04/11/110411fa_fact_filkins?currentPage=all.

⁷⁰ Robert F. Worth, “Yemeni President Wounded in Palace Attack,” *New York Times*, June 3, 2011, http://www.nytimes.com/2011/06/04/world/middleeast/04yemen.html?pagewanted=all&_r=0.

party over the administration of the Jawf governorate. Meanwhile in the South, tribesman fought to stave off AQAP militants in multiple cities of the Abyan governorate.

On his return to Yemen in late September, President Saleh publicly announced his intention to transfer power under the GCC plan but gave no timeline for the transition.⁷¹ In the final two months before their president signed the agreement, the Yemeni people protested against Saleh and against an initiative clause that granted him immunity from prosecution. Across the country, civilian demonstrators continued to endure violent clashes with Yemeni security forces. Protests against Saleh's immunity persisted in the months following the signing of the GCC Initiative.

GCC INITIATIVE

First presented in April 2011, the GCC-brokered initiative granted President Saleh immunity from prosecution in exchange for him ceding power. Saleh held off signing away his position as president until November 2011. In addition to transferring power to vice president Abd Rabu Mansour Hadi, the accord called for the formation of a national unity government divided between the opposition and Saleh's ruling party, the GPC.⁷² The agreement also stipulated that competing political factions and civil leaders convene a national dialogue to settle issues of the political transition and that legislative and presidential elections take place in February 2014.⁷³ The elections have since been pushed back due to instability and a prolonged National Dialogue Conference.

⁷¹ "Yemen's Saleh Seeks Polls for Power Transfer," *Al Jazeera*, September 25, 2011, <http://www.aljazeera.com/news/middleeast/2011/09/201192516385569489.html>.

⁷² Atiaf Alwazir, "Yemen's GCC Initiative: Cosmetic or Comprehensive Change?" *Al-Akhbar English*, November 30, 2011, <http://english.al-akhbar.com/node/2088>.

⁷³ "Yemen: The Road to National Dialogue," *Al Jazeera*, September 20, 2013, <http://www.aljazeera.com/news/middleeast/2013/03/20133177443663835.html>.

The GCC Initiative removed the head of the regime, but fell short of fulfilling calls for regime change. Rather than institute sweeping changes, the initiative retained the Yemeni government system and left additional recommendations up to the National Dialogue Conference. The agreement lacked the authority to restructure the military and security sectors led by Saleh family members. Though perhaps a diplomatic necessity, the immunity condition quickly became the most contentious aspect of the initiative, with hundreds of thousands of protestors demanding that the provision be revoked.⁷⁴ Despite his removal from official office, Saleh still resides in Yemen and has been accused of obstructing the implementation of the GCC Initiative. President Hadi accused Saleh of organizing attacks on oil pipelines and the power grid in order to cause economic and political turmoil for the new administration.⁷⁵ After reports of interference from Saleh supporters, the UN Security Council has gone as far as authorizing sanctions against anyone attempting to derail Yemen's political transition.⁷⁶

Yemen's movement is the only Arab Spring to result in a negotiated solution;⁷⁷ however, slow implementation, stagnation of progress, and outright obstruction threaten to upend this achievement. The initiative relies on President Hadi's ability to promote inclusion and enforce reforms. In addition to facing hostility from both the recently ousted parties and the newcomers who want in power, the new president's administration shoulders the bulk of the transitional burden. In order to keep the initiative alive, the United States must find ways to empower the Yemeni government and advance reforms

⁷⁴ Ibid.

⁷⁵ Robert F. Worth, "Even Out of Office, a Wielder of Great Power in Yemen," *New York Times*, January 31, 2014, <http://www.nytimes.com/2014/02/01/world/middleeast/even-out-of-office-a-wielder-of-great-power-in-yemen.html>.

⁷⁶ "UN Authorises Sanctions Regime for Yemen," *Al Jazeera*, February 27, 2014, <http://www.aljazeera.com/video/middleeast/2014/02/un-authorises-sanctions-regime-yemen-20142274529215764.html>.

⁷⁷ Fattah, "Yemen's Insecurity Dilemma."

before political competition and reluctant tribal leaders overwhelm the Hadi administration.

NATIONAL DIALOGUE CONFERENCE

The National Dialogue Conference (NDC) began on the two-year anniversary of the March 18th Friday of Dignity Massacre. Tasked with negotiating agreements on the political transition, the conference brought together 565 representatives from various political groups and regions. Originally scheduled to last six months, the conference was extended in September 2013 with the hope of achieving consensus on a number of issues.

From the outset of the conference, the General People's Conference (GPC) received the most allotted seats with 112.⁷⁸ The Southern Movement, Islah party, and Yemeni Socialist Party accounted for 85, 50, and 37 of the original seat allotments, respectively, while 35 seats were slotted for the al Houthis. Women accounted for over 28 percent of the representatives; youths (under the age of 40) and civil society members represented 15 percent and 7 percent, respectively.⁷⁹ The distribution of seats in the dialogue signaled to many that the conference was not "designed to fulfill the aspirations of the youthful uprising."⁸⁰

Several groups argued against the inclusion of so many GPC members in the conference. A number of key southern activists chose not to participate in the NDC and rejected the process outright. In the days before the conference, thousands of southern

⁷⁸ "Yemen National Dialogue Conference Begins," *BBC News*, March 18, 2013, <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-21828527>.

⁷⁹ Lackner, *Why Yemen Matters*, 859.

⁸⁰ Project on Middle East Political Science, "POMEPS Conversations 35 with Shelia Carapico," *POMEPS* video, 5:02, April 16, 2014, <http://pomeps.org/2014/04/16/pomeps-conversations-35-with-sheila-carapico-41614/>.

separatists gathered in Aden to protest the NDC.⁸¹ Tawakkol Karman, an Islah party leader and prominent Yemeni activist, initially declined to participate in the conference but later accepted a seat after a reorganization of the committees.⁸² The al Houthis participated in the NDC through their political wing, Ansar Allah.⁸³ However, after the assassination of one of their representatives, Ahmed Sharaf al Din, on January 21, 2014, the al Houthi bloc withdrew from the conference, just three days prior to its conclusion.⁸⁴

The NDC divided negotiations between nine working groups or subcommittees: state building, good governance, military and security affairs, the Southern issue, the Sa'ada issue, development, rights and freedoms, national issues and transitional justice, and special entities (which focused on the rights of vulnerable populations).⁸⁵ All nine working groups comprised representatives from each of the different constituencies. Each working group published an independent final report of decisions and recommendations.

The 10-month long NDC concluded on January 24, 2014 with a final comprehensive report of over 1000 recommendations but no agreements on the critical Sa'ada or southern issues. The prolonged dialogue set back the transition timeline. The conference approved a one-year extension to President Hadi's term, previously set to expire in February 2014, during which the new constitution will be drafted.⁸⁶ National

⁸¹ "Strike Hits Yemen ahead of National Dialogue," *Al Jazeera*, March 18, 2013, <http://www.aljazeera.com/news/middleeast/2013/03/2013317174716611403.html>.

⁸² Tawakkol Karman, interview by Sadeq Al-Wesabi, "Tawakkol Karman: 'Saleh and his Aides Obstruct the Transition Process, Their Immunity Will Be Annulled,'" *Yemen Times*, June 10, 2013, [http://www.yementimes.com/en/1684/intreview/2476/Tawakkol-Karman-\"Saleh-and-his-aides-obstruct-the-transitional-process-their-immunity-will-be-annulled\".htm](http://www.yementimes.com/en/1684/intreview/2476/Tawakkol-Karman-\).

⁸³ Zimmerman, "Yemen's Pivotal Moment," 6.

⁸⁴ Ibid.

⁸⁵ "National Dialogue Conference-Yemen," *National Dialogue Conference*, 2013, <http://www.ndc.ye/default.aspx>.

⁸⁶ Ali Saeed, "NDC Extends Hadi's Term for One Year on a Day Marked by Assassination," *Yemen Times*, January 21, 2014, <http://www.yementimes.com/en/1749/news/3388/NDC-extends-Hadi's-term-for-one-year-on-a-day-marked-by-an-assassination.htm>.

elections are to be held within nine months after the new constitution is approved by referendum.

Shortly after the conclusion of the NDC, a separate presidential committee announced a plan for a new federal system of six regions: four regions will be located in the North and two regions will be located in South Yemen. The al Houthi movement and southern secessionists have heavily opposed the six-region plan. The general agreement on federalism lacked clear delineation between federal, state, and district authorities and responsibilities.⁸⁷ The development of the federal system and its implementation now falls on the Constitution Drafting Committee (CDC) that was named by Hadi in March 2014.

The current administrative system in Yemen includes the central government in Sana'a, governorate-level councils, and district-level councils.⁸⁸ Under the proposed federal plan, the central government remains intact; a new regional level is added; the current governorate level becomes the state level; and the district level is kept on as the local tier of government.⁸⁹ The CDC now must determine if the district-level organization and authorities should be determined by each region or defined in the new constitution.⁹⁰ Establishing the role of local government and enabling district-level councils within the new federal system will be crucial to fulfilling the Yemeni transition.

⁸⁷ The Stream, "Yemen: Transition and Turmoil," *Al Jazeera* broadcast, February 19, 2014, <http://stream.aljazeera.com/story/201402192044-0023488>.

⁸⁸ Rafat Al-Akhali, "Will Decentralization in Yemen Marginalize Citizens?" *Atlantic Council*, January 29, 2014, <http://www.atlanticcouncil.org/blogs/menasource/will-decentralization-in-yemen-marginalize-citizens>.

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*

⁹⁰ Rafat Al-Akhali, "The Challenge of Federalism in Yemen," *Atlantic Council*, May 2014, 3, <http://www.atlanticcouncil.org/publications/issue-briefs/the-challenge-of-federalism-in-yemen>.

MILITARY REFORMS

Due to the critical role the military played in former president Saleh's regime and its importance in the ongoing fight against AQAP, military reforms form a crucial component of the Yemeni transition. Patronage, corruption, and factionalism prevent the Yemeni armed forces from securing their state. President Hadi has already taken a step in the right direction by issuing a number of restructuring decrees. Following through on their implementation and engaging additional power brokers in military reform serve as the next steps.

After rising to power through the military, President Saleh maintained his position using an extensive patronage system through which he stocked the government and military with his kin and loyal supporters. After state unification in 1990, Saleh excluded southerners from high-level positions in the armed forces and instead appointed an increasing number of his family members, which inadvertently weakened Saleh's relations with his tribal support base.⁹¹ Later, U.S. counterterrorism support and funding allowed Saleh to abandon patronage ties to some tribal and political alliances.⁹² By working with the United States, Saleh rebuffed members of the Islah party and Afghan Arab jihadists who had assisted him in winning the 1994 civil war.⁹³ In coup-proofing his regime with family members and external financing, Saleh consolidated his power at the expense of marginalizing former allies and segments of the Yemeni population.

Saleh used the military as his primary tool of insulation. In 1996, Saleh appointed his son Ahmed Saleh to head of the elite Republican Guard. In more recent years, Saleh granted his son Ahmed a number of significant political and economic portfolios as a way

⁹¹ Adam Seitz, "Ties that Bind and Divide: The 'Arab Spring' and Yemeni Civil-Military Relations," in *Why Yemen Matters: A Society in Transition*, ed. Helen Lackner, (London: SOAS Middle East Issues, 2013), Location 1799 and 1766.

⁹² *Ibid.*, 1884.

⁹³ *Ibid.*, 1900.

to raise his status domestically as well as with Western diplomats.⁹⁴ Despite a constitutional mandate for elections, many Yemenis feared Ahmed Saleh was being groomed for succession. Rumors allege that president Saleh incited the al Houthi rebellion in order to discredit General Ali Mohsen al Ahmar, the primary rival to Ahmed Saleh's future presidential claim.⁹⁵ In proven examples of military manipulation during his presidency, Saleh turned U.S. security concerns into an opportunity to fortify his forces against internal conflicts. In 2009, Saleh used U.S. counterterrorism funding and a U.S.-trained and equipped counterterrorism unit to fight domestic conflicts against al Houthi factions in North Yemen.⁹⁶ During the 2011 civilian uprising, U.S.-backed counterterrorism units were pulled out of regions threatened by AQAP and were instead used to protect the Saleh regime.⁹⁷

Practically immune from civilian oversight under Saleh's rule, the military sector has been plagued by corruption. The Yemeni military includes about 60,000 active soldiers and 40,000 reservists, which makes it the country's largest employer.⁹⁸ However, experts estimate that up to one-third of the 100,000 listed troops are "ghost soldiers," men who do not actually work for the Yemeni military but whose military paycheck and allotted equipment are appropriated by military elites and tribal sheikhs.⁹⁹ Many tribal leaders serve as officers and receive pay and supplies without performing actual work.¹⁰⁰

⁹⁴ Farea al-Muslimi, "Yemen's Military Earthquake," *Al-Monitor*, April 15, 2013, <http://www.al-monitor.com/pulse/originals/2013/04/yemen-military-president-hadi-factions.html>.

⁹⁵ Seitz, "Ties that Bind and Divide," 1940.

⁹⁶ Ellen Knickmeyer, "Yemen's Double Game," *Foreign Policy*, December 7, 2010, http://www.foreignpolicy.com/articles/2010/12/07/yemens_double_game.

⁹⁷ Jeremy Scahill, "Washington's War in Yemen Backfires," *Nation*, February 14, 2012, <http://www.thenation.com/article/166265/washingtons-war-yemen-backfires#>.

⁹⁸ Seitz, "Ties that Bind and Divide," 1862.

⁹⁹ Fattah, "Yemen's Insecurity Dilemma."

¹⁰⁰ International Crisis Group, "Yemen's Military-Security Reform: Seeds of New Conflict?" *Middle East Report*, no. 139 (April 4, 2013), 30,

Additionally, payment to tribal soldiers is passed through their leader, which renders soldiers loyal to the tribal leader rather than the nation.¹⁰¹ The Hadi administration has followed this tradition and has paid the tribal militias, called popular resistance committees, in Abyan without integrating them in to the military or police force.¹⁰²

Recent mutinies against new commanders further disable the current Yemeni force.¹⁰³ The enduring patronage networks of former commanders and fractures along religious, tribal, and political lines have triggered troop rebellions across the country, including in governorates under threat by AQAP. In the fight against Ansar al Sharia, the AQAP insurgency, local tribes have served as the primary defensive force.¹⁰⁴ The popular resistance committees have proven effective in combating AQAP militants in the short term, but the tribes' discontent with the Yemeni government prevent the militias from serving as a dependable partner to the military forces. Addressing tribal grievances must become a priority in order for the government to unite the tribal militias' efforts against AQAP and engage the groups in the political transition.

In April 2012, only a few months into his interim term, President Hadi issued a number of military appointments that ousted members of the Saleh network.¹⁰⁵ Later in December, Hadi continued with his restructuring by establishing five military branches: the Army, the Air Force, the Navy and Coastal Defense Forces, the Border Guard, and

[http://www.crisisgroup.org/~media/Files/Middle%20East%20North%20Africa/Iran%20Gulf/Yemen/139-yemens-military-security-reform-seeds-of-new-conflict.pdf](http://www.crisisgroup.org/~/media/Files/Middle%20East%20North%20Africa/Iran%20Gulf/Yemen/139-yemens-military-security-reform-seeds-of-new-conflict.pdf)

¹⁰¹ Ibid.

¹⁰² Ibid., 31.

¹⁰³ Sasha Gordon, "Mutiny in the Yemeni Military," *AEI's Critical Threats Project*, July 10, 2013, <http://www.criticalthreats.org/yemen/gordon-mutiny-yemeni-military-july-10-2013>.

¹⁰⁴ Sasha Gordon, "Tribal Militias in Yemen: Al Bayda and Shabwah," *AEI's Critical Threats Project*, February 7, 2013, <http://www.criticalthreats.org/yemen/gordon-tribal-militias-yemen-al-bayda-and-shabwah-february-7-2013>.

¹⁰⁵ Sasha Gordon, "Yemen's Military Shake-up: Weakening Ousted Saleh's Network," *AEI's Critical Threats Project*, April 12, 2012, <http://www.criticalthreats.org/yemen/gordon-military-command-graphic-april-12-2012>.

the Strategic Reserve Forces.¹⁰⁶ The change placed the command and control of the forces under the Defense Ministry, as opposed to in the hands of powerful commanders.¹⁰⁷ Under the new structure, the Republican Guard and First Armored Division (Firqa) have been dissolved and absorbed into the Strategic Reserve Forces, which also houses Special Operations, Missile Defense Command, Presidential Protective Forces, and the counterterrorism units.¹⁰⁸ This shake-up removed two of Hadi's key political rivals: Ahmed Saleh, head of the Republican Guard and son of former president Saleh, and General Ali Mohsen al Ahmar, commander of Firqa.¹⁰⁹ Hadi also removed several more of Saleh's family members, including his nephew who was the head of the Central Security Forces.¹¹⁰

President Hadi issued another round of decrees continuing with the reform of the armed forces in April 2013.¹¹¹ Ousted from official positions in December, General Mohsen and Ahmed Saleh had nevertheless maintained their powerful commands unofficially. To minimize obstruction to the transition and capitalize on the strengths of the two powerful figures, President Hadi appointed General Ali Mohsen as military advisor to the president for matters of defense and Ahmed Saleh as ambassador to the United Arab Emirates, a foreign post. Several members of former president Saleh's regime have also been assigned to foreign posts as military attachés. Additionally,

¹⁰⁶ International Crisis Group, "Yemen's Military-Security Reform," 21.

¹⁰⁷ Katherine Zimmerman and Sasha Gordon, "Yemen's Military Restructuring: Removing Saleh's Network," *AEI's Critical Threats Project*, December 20, 2012, <http://www.criticalthreats.org/yemen/yemens-military-restructuring-removing-salehs-network-december-20-2012>.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid.

¹¹⁰ "Yemen's President Shakes Up the Army," *Al Jazeera*, December 20, 2012, <http://www.aljazeera.com/news/middleeast/2012/12/2012122053621353659.html>.

¹¹¹ Sasha Gordon, "A New Wave of Military Restructuring Decrees in Yemen," *AEI's Critical Threats Project*, April 11, 2013, <http://www.criticalthreats.org/yemen/gordon-new-wave-military-restructuring-decrees-yemen-april-11-2012>.

President Hadi appointed prominent military leaders to serve as regional commanders to the new seven Military Districts, which were also given new headquarters.¹¹²

The reforms passed by President Hadi demonstrate progress in the military sector. Greater challenges, however, have yet to be faced: enforcing laws regulating personnel, integrating tribesman, ensuring transparency and civilian oversight, and developing a national security strategy that works within the mandate and size of the Yemeni military.¹¹³ Tackling these issues will require support from the United States and other international partners.

¹¹² Ibid.

¹¹³ International Crisis Group, “Yemen’s Military-Security Reform,” i.

Chapter 4: The Evolution of AQAP and U.S. Counterterrorism

Al Qaeda is a dynamic, transnational network of Islamic terrorist groups. The Obama administration has acknowledged that fighting al Qaeda requires destroying its leadership, dismantling its component organizations, and countering the ideology that inspires its members and unites the network.¹¹⁴ Affiliate groups and their relations to the original core al Qaeda organization in Pakistan have grown and changed over time. The Obama administration defines affiliates as groups aligned with al Qaeda that have expressed intent to target the United States or the West.¹¹⁵ Al Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP) is one of six affiliate groups of al Qaeda; it is the most active and is considered by the U.S. intelligence community to be the greatest threat.¹¹⁶

The first section of this chapter describes the structure and development of AQAP and the U.S. approach to counter it. The second section details AQAP's 2011 operational shift towards insurgency and the responses by the U.S. and Yemeni governments. The final section focuses on the ongoing violence in Yemen committed by AQAP and the continued threat the organization poses to the U.S. homeland.

THE ORGANIZATION

On October 12, 2000, a small fishing boat loaded with explosives rammed the U.S.S. Cole in the harbor of Aden, Yemen. Perpetrated by al Qaeda, the terrorist attack killed 17 crew members, wounded 39 others, and ripped a hole forty-feet wide in the U.S.

¹¹⁴ Katherine Zimmerman, "The Al Qaeda Network: A New Framework for Defining the Enemy," *AEI's Critical Threats Project*, September 2013, 7.

¹¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 11-12.

¹¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 14-15.

Navy destroyer.¹¹⁷ The deadly attack against the U.S. military embodied the David-and-Goliath style fight that al Qaeda emir Osama bin Laden was waging against the United States. Over the next decade, U.S. investigators and officials worked with their Yemeni counterparts to kill and capture hundreds of al Qaeda operatives in Yemen. Despite the general success of U.S. and Yemeni counterterrorism during that time, prison breaks and remote safe havens allowed al Qaeda to maintain a hold in Yemen.

In January 2009, the al Qaeda groups in Saudi Arabia and in Yemen merged to form al Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP).¹¹⁸ Nasir Wuhayshi, one of 23 al Qaeda members who escaped from a Yemeni prison in 2006, has led AQAP as its emir since the group's formation.¹¹⁹ In 2013, Wuhayshi was appointed as al Qaeda's general manager, an elite leadership position within the global network.¹²⁰ In this additional role, Wuhayshi coordinates military and media activities and manages communication with affiliates and associate groups.¹²¹ Said Ali al Shihri, a former Guantanamo Bay prisoner who was released from Saudi custody in 2007, served as second-in-command of AQAP until he was killed by a U.S. drone strike in 2013.¹²² In 2014, Saudi national Ibrahim al Rabish assumed the role of deputy leader.¹²³ Initially, the U.S. intelligence community assessed

¹¹⁷ Raphael Perl and Ronald O'Rourke, "Terrorist Attack on USS Cole: Background and Issues for Congress," *CRS Report for Congress*, January 30, 2001, <http://www2.gwu.edu/~nsarchiv/NSAEBB/NSAEBB55/crs20010130.pdf>.

¹¹⁸ Ulrichsen, "Geopolitics of Insecurity," 2.

¹¹⁹ "Al Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula," *Al Jazeera*, December 29, 2009, <http://www.aljazeera.com/news/middleeast/2009/12/2009122935812371810.html>.

¹²⁰ Thomas Jocelyn, "Al Qaeda's General Manager Threatens America in Video of Large Gathering," *Long War Journal*, April 17, 2014, http://www.longwarjournal.org/archives/2014/04/a_video_released_by.php#.

¹²¹ Thomas Jocelyn and Bill Roggio, "AQAP's Emir also Serves as al Qaeda's General Manager," *Long War Journal*, August 6, 2013, http://www.longwarjournal.org/archives/2013/08/aqap_emir_also_serve.php#.

¹²² Bill Roggio, "AQAP Confirms Deputy Emir Killed in U.S. Drone Strike," *Long War Journal*, July 17, 2013, http://www.longwarjournal.org/archives/2013/07/aqap_confirms_deputy.php#.

¹²³ Sama'a Al-Hamdani, "The Foreign Policy Essay: Is Yemen's Government Complicit with Al-Qaeda?" *Lawfare Blog*, May 11, 2014, <http://www.lawfareblog.com/2014/05/the-foreign-policy-essay-is-yemens-government-complicit-with-al-qaeda/>.

AQAP to be focused on targeting solely the Saudi and Yemeni governments, rather than the United States.¹²⁴ With the failed bombing attempt by Abdulmutallab over Detroit in December 2009, AQAP demonstrated its readiness to attack the American homeland, and the U.S. government officially designated the group a Foreign Terrorist Organization in 2010.

AQAP is a complex organization. The group has a shura council, which serves as an advisory board to the emir, a media wing (al Malahem Foundation), and a military wing.¹²⁵ In 2011, the group introduced Ansar al Sharia, an insurgency wing of AQAP. Al Malahem Foundation publishes *Inspire*, an online English-language magazine that promotes the al Qaeda brand and ideology. Since 2010, the group has released 12 issues of *Inspire*; the most recent came out in March 2014.¹²⁶ Wuhayshi has described the use of media as “our most important weapon.”¹²⁷

Estimates of the number of AQAP fighters vary from a few hundred to a few thousand. While serving as Assistant to the President for Homeland Security and Counterterrorism, John Brennan addressed the question of AQAP numbers by presuming that there are several hundred “hard-core, committed, full-time fighters” as well as an additional number of part-time combatants and tribal fighters that may join based on the group’s presence in their area.¹²⁸ While the exact numbers are unknown, foreign fighters make up a notable contingency of AQAP fighters. The well-known American operative

¹²⁴ Zimmerman, “The Al Qaeda Network,” 15.

¹²⁵ *Ibid.*, 9.

¹²⁶ Thomas Jocelyn, “Al Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula Releases 12th Issue of Inspire Magazine,” *Long War Journal*, March 17, 2014,

http://www.longwarjournal.org/archives/2014/03/al_qaeda_in_the_arab.php#.

¹²⁷ Bill Roggio, “Wuhayshi Imparted Lessons of AQAP Operations in Yemen to AQIM,” *Long War Journal*, August 12, 2013, http://www.longwarjournal.org/archives/2013/08/wuhayshi_imparts_les.php#.

¹²⁸ John O. Brennan, “U.S. Policy Toward Yemen” (presentation at the Council on Foreign Relations, Washington, D.C., August 8, 2012), <http://www.lawfareblog.com/2012/08/transcript-of-john-brennans-speech-at-the-council-on-foreign-relations/>.

Anwar al Awlaki operated out of Yemen before being killed by a U.S. drone strike there in 2011. Yemeni security services have reported as recently as May 2014 that AQAP militants captured or killed in Yemen hail from Pakistan, Algeria, Saudi Arabia, Russia, and France.¹²⁹

While it is clear from AQAP's consistent media promotion that the group actively engages in global recruitment, the factors compelling domestic recruitment in Yemen have been frequently debated. Many U.S. news sources, including *The New York Times* and *The Washington Post*, have reported that drone warfare creates hostility towards the United States and that blowback from the strikes creates more al Qaeda recruits.¹³⁰ After conducting interviews with tribal leaders and other sources in Yemen, Christopher Swift found that economic need serves as the primary factor driving al Qaeda recruitment in Yemen.¹³¹ This conclusion points to the need for the U.S. counterterrorism strategy to target economic grievances in addition to security concerns.

AQAP's sphere of influence reaches beyond the Arabian Peninsula. Wuhayshi's position as al Qaeda general manager has provided the AQAP affiliate with increased influence in the global network. Through its media wing, AQAP regularly releases videos and other publications that provide commentary on global events and promote al Qaeda propaganda. The organization maintains close ties with al Shabaab (an al Qaeda affiliate in Somalia) and al Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb.¹³² Reports of AQAP activity in Egypt

¹²⁹ Bill Roggio and Oren Adaki, "Pakistani, Algerian, French al Qaeda Fighters Killed or Captured during Yemeni Operation," *Long War Journal*, May 10, 2014, http://www.longwarjournal.org/archives/2014/05/pakistani_algerian_f.php?utm_source=rss&utm_medium=rss&utm_campaign=pakistani-algerian-french-al-qaeda-fighters-killed-or-captured-during-yemeni-operation#.

¹³⁰ Christopher Swift, "The Drone Blowback Fallacy," *Foreign Affairs*, July 1, 2012, <http://christopher-swift.com/publications/the-drone-blowback-fallacy>.

¹³¹ *Ibid.*

¹³² Zimmerman, "The Al Qaeda Network," 20.

allege that the group supported the development of an Egyptian cell, Jamal Network.¹³³ A January 2014 report published by the U.S. Senate Select Committee on Intelligence affirmed the group has also supported operations across North Africa.¹³⁴

From 2009 to 2011, the United States employed targeted drone strikes against key AQAP leaders. During this time, President Obama did not approve signature strikes (attacks aimed at broader areas like training camps)¹³⁵ in Yemen to avoid unnecessary involvement in a domestic conflict.¹³⁶ President Obama has significantly expanded the use of targeted drone strikes against terrorist leaders in Yemen, yet he continues his predecessor's considerable reliance on his Yemeni counterpart—first Saleh and now Hadi.¹³⁷ Such a strategy has produced limited success in part due to the unreliability of the local partners.

A NEW PHASE

Interested in establishing an Islamic state in the south of Yemen, Wuhayshi wrote a letter to Osama bin Laden requesting permission to seize territory in Yemen.¹³⁸ The al Qaeda leader denied Wuhayshi's proposal by stating it is not “the right time” nor is there “enough steel” to support an attempt to reestablish the Islamic caliphate.¹³⁹ Months later, in the heat of the Yemeni uprising, the Yemeni military force split, and Saleh

¹³³ Ibid., 21.

¹³⁴ Jocelyn, “Al Qaeda's Video.”

¹³⁵ Jo Becker and Scott Shane, “Secret ‘Kill List’ Proves a Test of Obama's Principles and Will,” *New York Times*, May 29, 2012, http://www.nytimes.com/2012/05/29/world/obamas-leadership-in-war-on-al-qaeda.html?pagewanted=all&_r=1&_

¹³⁶ Gregory Johnsen, *The Last Refuge: Yemen, al-Qaeda, and America's War in Arabia*, (New York: W.W. Norton, 2013), 280.

¹³⁷ Zimmerman, “The Al Qaeda Network,” 5.

¹³⁸ Johnsen, *The Last Refuge*, 271.

¹³⁹ Greg Miller, “Bin Laden Document Trove Reveals Strain on al-Qaeda,” *Washington Post*, July 1, 2011, http://www.washingtonpost.com/national/national-security/bin-laden-document-trove-reveals-strain-on-al-qaeda/2011/07/01/AGdj0GuH_story.html.

consolidated his remaining power by pulling troops back to the capital. The ensuing security vacuum provided Wuhayshi with an opportunity to take on territory in South Yemen. By April 2011, AQAP had taken control of the city of Jaar and had begun implementing public works projects.¹⁴⁰ During the spring of 2011, AQAP militants defeated a limited number of Yemeni and tribal forces and seized towns throughout the Abyan governorate. To repair the notorious reputation AQAP had earned in Yemen, its leaders introduced a new name, Ansar al Sharia, along with this new phase of operations.¹⁴¹ Referred to as AQAP's insurgency wing, Ansar al Sharia effectively governed areas seized by AQAP and implemented Sharia law, including corporal punishment, across Abyan.¹⁴²

The United States and Saudi Arabia responded to the AQAP takeover with an expansion of drone strikes.¹⁴³ After President Hadi assumed office in February 2012, the U.S. and Yemeni governments initiated an intense counterterrorism offensive in the southern region. In Hadi the United States found “a more willing partner in the effort to disrupt AQAP's ability to conduct international attacks and to fight a domestic insurgency.”¹⁴⁴ Former Coordinator for Counterterrorism at the U.S. Department of State Daniel Benjamin described Hadi as “everything his predecessor wasn't in terms of his determination, his understanding of the threat... his determination to destroy Al Qaeda.”¹⁴⁵ Beginning in May 2012, a year after the Ansar al Sharia insurgency took hold, the Yemeni military moved to retake the cities of Zinjibar, Jaar, and Shaqra. At the same time, departing from its previous “surgical approach”, the Obama administration

¹⁴⁰ Johnsen, *The Last Refuge*, 272.

¹⁴¹ Ibid.

¹⁴² Ibid., 279.

¹⁴³ Ibid., 282.

¹⁴⁴ Sharp, “Yemen: Background,” 8.

¹⁴⁵ Sharp, “Yemen: Background,” 9.

authorized signature strikes, now called Terrorist Attack Disruption Strikes (TADS).¹⁴⁶ The offensive has been effective at driving Ansar al Sharia out of its Abyan strongholds, yet its withdrawal does not signal the defeat of AQAP.¹⁴⁷

In May and August of 2012, Wuhayshi wrote two advising letters to al Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM).¹⁴⁸ In the letters, Wuhayshi shared the lessons learned from AQAP's attempt at governance. He advised the leader of AQIM to implement Sharia law gradually, delay declaring an Islamic state, and refrain from protracted campaigns that exhaust funds, men, and equipment.¹⁴⁹ Wuhayshi also claimed that the short-lived insurgency was worth the losses incurred because AQAP gained exposure as well as guerrilla warfare experience.¹⁵⁰ According to Wuhayshi, the popular resistance committees and "spies" that provided target information to the United States proved to be AQAP's greatest challenges.¹⁵¹

CONTINUING ATTACKS

The counterterrorism success in Abyan has not prevented AQAP from continuing to attack the Yemeni government and security forces across the country. The organization has returned to its earlier tactics of suicide bombings and assassination attempts.¹⁵² Even before the Yemeni offensive in the South, AQAP had taken to attacking the new administration. The day of President Hadi's inauguration, February 25, 2012, AQAP

¹⁴⁶ Johnsen, *The Last Refuge*, 288.

¹⁴⁷ Andrew Michaels and Sakhr Ayyash, "AQAP's Resilience in Yemen," *Combating Terrorism Center*, September 24, 2013, <https://www.ctc.usma.edu/posts/aqaps-resilience-in-yemen>.

¹⁴⁸ Roggio, "Wuhayshi Imparted Lessons."

¹⁴⁹ Ibid.

¹⁵⁰ Ibid.

¹⁵¹ Ibid.

¹⁵² Zimmerman, "Yemen's Pivotal Moment," 10.

executed a suicide bombing that killed 25 troops in southeast Yemen.¹⁵³ A week later, on March 4, AQAP militants penetrated a military base in Abyan.¹⁵⁴ The militants killed 185 soldiers and seized several armored personal carriers while only losing about 25 of their own fighters.¹⁵⁵ A Yemeni journalist reported that Yemeni military officials had leaked intelligence information concerning the base to AQAP fighters, which allowed for such a devastating attack.¹⁵⁶ Between April 8 and 14, clashes between the Yemeni army and AQAP resulted in 220 deaths.¹⁵⁷ On May 21, the eve of Yemen's National Day, a suicide bomber dressed in military uniform attacked a group of soldiers rehearsing for the parade in Sana'a.¹⁵⁸ AQAP claimed the attack, which killed approximately 100 soldiers and wounded hundreds more. Earlier that month the CIA thwarted an AQAP plan to blow up a U.S.-bound plane.¹⁵⁹ Attacks and threats continued in 2013 and 2014 with less frequency but still achieving deadly destruction. The first six months of 2013 saw more than 85 military, intelligence, and security officer assassinations.¹⁶⁰ Threat of a planned attack by AQAP led the United States to close 21 diplomatic facilities in the Middle East and North Africa during the first week of August 2013.¹⁶¹

¹⁵³ "Yemen: The Road to National Dialogue," *Al Jazeera*.

¹⁵⁴ Bill Roggio, "AQAP Overruns Yemeni Army Base, Seizes Armored Vehicles," *Long War Journal*, January 16, 2014, http://www.longwarjournal.org/archives/2014/01/aqap_overruns_yemeni_2.php#.

¹⁵⁵ "Heavy Yemeni Troop Losses Reported in Raid," *Al Jazeera*, March 6, 2012, <http://www.aljazeera.com/news/middleeast/2012/03/2012356504141349.html>.

¹⁵⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁵⁷ "Yemen: The Road to National Dialogue," *Al Jazeera*.

¹⁵⁸ "Al Qaeda Claims Deadly Yemen Suicide Blast," *Al Jazeera*, May 21, 2012, <http://www.aljazeera.com/news/middleeast/2012/05/201252175919491219.html>.

¹⁵⁹ Lisa Lundquist, "US Disrupts Latest AQAP Airline Plot," *Long War Journal*, May 8, 2012, http://www.longwarjournal.org/archives/2012/05/yesterday_the_associ.php.

¹⁶⁰ Fattah, "Yemen's Insecurity Dilemma."

¹⁶¹ Chris Lawrence, Barbara Starr, and Tom Cohen, "U.S. Issues Global Travel Alert, to Close Embassies Due to al Qaeda Threat," *CNN.com*, August 3, 2013, <http://edition.cnn.com/2013/08/02/politics/us-embassies-close/>.

AQAP has become increasingly effective at carrying out complex attacks.¹⁶² Complex attacks involve the simultaneous use of at least two classes of weapon systems against one or more targets.¹⁶³ On December 5, 2013, the group attacked the Yemeni Defense Ministry using a suicide vehicle-borne IED to breach the gate, followed by a second vehicle carrying militants disguised in military uniforms.¹⁶⁴ The ensuing gunfight killed 56 people and injured more than 200 others, including employees of the al Urdhi hospital inside the compound.¹⁶⁵ After Yemeni state television aired footage of the attack, AQAP's military commander, Qasim al Raymi, publicly apologized for attacks on the hospital and vowed that the group would pay restitution for civilian deaths and hospital expenses. Since the attack, AQAP has made a point of avoiding civilian deaths, though it still justifies the targeting of government officials.

A week after the attack on the Defense Ministry, a U.S. drone hit a wedding convoy and killed 12 men.¹⁶⁶ The international community picked up the story in defense of the victims' families. Information on the target of the strike has been limited and unclear. Whether or not a justified target was hit, unintended civilians were killed in the strike. The Yemeni government has since compensated the families, but through its propaganda, AQAP has been able to capitalize on the fallout against the United States and bury its own bad publicity from the Defense Ministry attack.

¹⁶² Zimmerman, "Yemen's Pivotal Moment," 10.

¹⁶³ "ISAF Violence Statistics and Analysis Media Brief," *Afghanistan International Security Assistance Force*, September 29, 2011, <http://www.isaf.nato.int/article/isaf-releases/isaf-violence-statistics-and-analysis-media-brief-sept.-29-2011.html>.

¹⁶⁴ Zimmerman, "Yemen's Pivotal Moment," 11.

¹⁶⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶⁶ Iona Craig, "What Really Happened When a US Drone Hit a Yemeni Wedding Convoy," *Al Jazeera*, January 20, 2014, <http://america.aljazeera.com/watch/shows/america-tonight/america-tonight-blog/2014/1/17/what-really-happenedwhenausdronehitayemeniweddingconvoy.html>.

On March 29, 2014, AQAP released a video of members celebrating a recent prison break.¹⁶⁷ In the video, Wuhayshi threatens the United States in an address to a public gathering of over 100 people. Such a large and open assembly of AQAP confirms that the Yemeni military is currently incapable of securing the state from the terrorist group. The bold gathering has led some to suggest that some Yemeni government officials and military officers are in collusion with AQAP.¹⁶⁸

Less than three months after the release of the AQAP meeting video, a rising al Qaeda rival, the Islamic State of Iraq and al Sham (ISIS) quickly and violently advanced across northern Iraq. Originally organized as al Qaeda in Iraq (AQI) following the 2003 U.S.-led invasion, the terrorist group formally split from al Qaeda in February 2014 after nearly a year of open defiance. In April 2013, AQI emir Abu Bakr al Baghdadi announced that AQI and the al Qaeda affiliate in Syria, Jabhat al Nusra, would merge and operate under the new ISIS name.¹⁶⁹ Global al Qaeda emir Ayman al Zawahiri publicly rejected the move by Baghdadi, yet Baghdadi refused to comply with Zawahiri's command.¹⁷⁰ Conflict between the leaders and a divergence in strategy eventually led al Qaeda to renounce ISIS completely.¹⁷¹ The subsequent rise of ISIS under Baghdadi has created competition between the two Islamic terrorist organizations.

¹⁶⁷ Jocelyn, "Al Qaeda's Video."

¹⁶⁸ Al-Hamdani, "Complicit with Al-Qaeda?"

¹⁶⁹ Zimmerman, "The Al Qaeda Network," 23.

¹⁷⁰ Zachary Laub and Jonathan Masters, "Islamic State in Iraq and Greater Syria," *Council on Foreign Relations*, June 12, 2014, <http://www.cfr.org/iraq/islamic-state-iraq-greater-syria/p14811>.

¹⁷¹ Liz Sly, "Al Qaeda Disavows Any Ties with Radical Islamist ISIS group in Syria, Iraq," *Washington Post*, February 3, 2014, http://www.washingtonpost.com/world/middle_east/al-qaeda-disavows-any-ties-with-radical-islamist-isis-group-in-syria-iraq/2014/02/03/2c9afc3a-8cef-11e3-98ab-fe5228217bd1_story.html.

After ISIS's dominant offensive in Iraq in June 2014, the group declared the establishment of the Islamic Caliphate under Baghdadi.¹⁷² On the one hand, the success of ISIS, which is now simply calling itself the Islamic State (IS), reinforces al Qaeda's own goals and has unofficially been supported by AQAP religious leader, Ma'amoun Hatim, and some AQAP foot soldiers.¹⁷³ On the other hand, AQAP is losing potential foreign recruits, and some AQAP fighters have defected to IS.¹⁷⁴ While AQAP publically remains neutral towards the rival group, pro-IS and anti-IS sentiments among AQAP members could threaten the unity of al Qaeda's strongest branch. The success of IS could motivate AQAP to adopt similar, more violent tactics and retake territory in an effort to establish its own caliphate.¹⁷⁵

These recent events and regional developments confirm that the AQAP threat to the region and the U.S. homeland is still real and unrelenting. U.S. drone strikes have succeeded in killing AQAP leaders, but these deaths have not stopped the terrorist organization from continuing attacks. Enabling the Yemeni military will help to limit AQAP capabilities, while facilitating political reform and economic development will provide needed stability to the armed forces and simultaneously shrink AQAP's influence as an economic and social welfare provider. The following chapter analyzes these policy choices as part of a U.S. strategy for countering AQAP in Yemen.

¹⁷² Aaron Y. Zelin, "ISIS Is Dead, Long Live the Islamic State," *Washington Institute for Near East Policy*, June 30, 2014, <http://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/view/isis-is-dead-long-live-the-islamic-state>.

¹⁷³ Ibid.

¹⁷⁴ Ibid.

¹⁷⁵ Abdulmajeed Al-Buluwi, "Saudis See Houthi Gains in Yemen as Advance for Iran," *Yemen Times*, July 24, 2014, <http://www.yementimes.com/en/1801/opinion/4136/Saudis-see-Houthi-gains-in-Yemen-as-advance-for-Iran.htm>.

Chapter 5: Developing a Strategy

A strategy describes a systematic approach to achieve a goal. The goal of U.S. counterterrorism operations is to protect American citizens and the homeland. In Yemen, this goal equates to two primary objectives: defeat AQAP and stabilize Yemen to prevent safe havens and further regional insecurity. Breaking down these overarching objectives into specific military, political, and economic objectives provides a focused list of aims that can be assigned and evaluated more easily. These three sectors are interconnected and failure to achieve objectives in one area undermines the success achieved in another.

This chapter begins by listing the necessary objectives for defeating AQAP and stabilizing Yemen. The second section then explains the tactics required of the U.S. government to achieve the outlined objectives. The third section specifies a long-term counterterrorism strategy that integrates the military, political, and economic sectors. The chapter concludes by exploring the likely implications of the recommended strategy.

OBJECTIVES: WHAT TO DO

To effectively tackle the challenges of insecurity and instability, the U.S. strategy must be built of objectives that address the circumstances specific to Yemen. The objectives should be narrow in agency, deep in impact, and measurable. Though this report lacks the scope to assign values and specifics to the objectives, the agencies to which these objectives would be assigned have the expertise to properly designate indicators and evaluative measures. In order to defeat AQAP and stabilize Yemen, the U.S. government must ensure the achievement of 12 objectives: four military, three political, three economic, and two overlapping objectives. Overlapping objectives do not clearly apply to one primary issue area but instead rely on the functions of multiple

sectors. While all objectives require coordinating efforts between agencies and foreign governments, overlapping ones present the greatest challenge.

Military-specific Objectives:
• Take out key AQAP leaders
• Degrade the AQAP network
• Prevent AQAP from securing safe havens
• Prevent and disrupt AQAP attacks

Table 1: Military-specific Objectives

Eliminating the leadership of AQAP hinders the group’s capability to organize and execute operations; however, in isolation, the deaths of key AQAP operatives will not lead to the destruction of the organization. Defeating AQAP requires weakening its networks of communication and resources. This objective entails breaking communication lines, hampering mobility, and cutting off sources of funding, weapons, and recruits. To prevent AQAP from advancing or recovering, military or tribal forces must secure vulnerable territory. Local communities must have means of security to prevent AQAP militants from invading and occupying. Stopping AQAP attacks involves developing a stronger Yemeni military force, fostering closer relations with local communities, and infiltrating the terrorist organization.

Political-specific Objectives:
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Facilitate the provision of services by the Yemeni government
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Prevent human rights abuses and repression
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Facilitate democratic reforms

Table 2: Political-specific Objectives

The Yemeni political transition has stagnated. As long as the grievances of the Yemeni street remain unanswered, insecurity and political turmoil will continue. The lack of human services ranks at the top of the list of grievances. Yemenis want access to clean water, sanitation, hospitals, schools, and reliable sources of electricity and fuel. Rather than providing aid directly to people, the United States should assist the Yemeni government to provide these goods and services in order to build trust between the citizens and their government. This objective applies in particular to governance at the district level where people have direct access to their government. In combination with service provision, the Yemeni government must demonstrate a capability to protect its people from human rights violations and prevent repression. Such a mandate requires inclusion of the opposition groups in the political transition. Answering the calls for democratic reform is a step in this direction. The U.S. role in encouraging and aiding the Hadi administration and the current Constitution Drafting Committee is a critical element to the transition. Editor of *Yemen Times*, Nadia Al-Sakkaf, expressed the opinion of many Yemenis in her op-ed published after the conclusion of the NDC:

We cannot trust this government to implement the outcomes of the NDC as the outcomes take power away from the political parties that make up the current government. As it is, this government is so severely dysfunctional that it can't even implement day-to-day business, let alone a new agenda that requires a complete country makeover.¹⁷⁶

To achieve stability, the United States should not only encourage but must push the Hadi administration to fulfill the elements of the Yemeni transition in a democratic manner and timely fashion.

Economic-specific Objectives:
• Stabilize the economy
• Create jobs
• Provide worker-training programs

Table 3: Economic-specific Objectives

The struggling Yemen economy threatens to collapse the entire state. Shortages and unemployment continue to feed uprising and insecurity. Economic reforms are needed to promote growth and stabilize the economy. Billions of dollars have been pledged to Yemen and can be used to create jobs, minimize inflation, and assist with the easing of subsidies. Yemen has an abundance of unskilled and half-skilled labor. Job training can open up employment opportunities abroad and domestically. The United States should encourage the coordination of GCC states, European countries, donor groups, and the Yemeni government in these endeavors.

¹⁷⁶ Nadia Al-Sakkaf, "Celebrating Yemen's Success But Keeping Future Challenges in Mind," *Yemen Times*, January 30, 2014, <http://www.yementimes.com/en/1751/viewpoint/3417/Celebrating-Yemen's-success-but-keeping-future-challenges-in-mind.htm>.

Overlapping Objectives:
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Counter the al Qaeda ideology
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop the Yemeni military

Table 4: Overlapping Objectives

Radical Islamist ideology maintains that the West is at war against Islam.¹⁷⁷ Al Qaeda espouses this narrative, as do a number of radical Islamists who are not associated with al Qaeda or with violent extremism. Countering this ideology involves both a military approach against AQAP media operations and a political approach aimed at shaping the narrative and affecting the broader radicalized audience. From the military perspective, the United States must disrupt AQAP’s ability to disseminate material. Both military and political agencies should strive to limit potential propaganda fodder, such as Yemeni civilian casualties. The objective also requires the U.S. government to disprove the radical narrative that declares all Muslims are under attack by the West and alleviate conditions that make Yemenis susceptible to radicalization and al Qaeda recruitment, in particular.¹⁷⁸

By different means, both military and political advisors can assist in improving Yemeni military forces. Military aspects of the objective include training troops, counseling commanders, and providing equipment. Politically speaking, military restructuring reforms must be passed through the government and should involve input from tribal groups and civil society. Increasing transparency and accountability in the military falls on both the armed forces and the government sector.

177 Steven R. Thompson, “Countering the Narrative: Combating the Ideology of Radical Islam,” *Luce.nt: A Journal of National Security Studies*, (2012), 18, <https://www.usnwc.edu/Lucent/OpenPdf.aspx?id=130>.
178 Ibid.

TACTICS: HOW TO DO IT

The U.S. government has approached Yemen in two forms: employing surgical strikes and facilitating the political transition to prevent state collapse.¹⁷⁹ These approaches have been successful in killing AQAP leadership and staving off immediate state failure, but additional effort is needed to decisively defeat AQAP and stabilize Yemen.

Military

Neither the American public nor the Yemeni people wish to see U.S. troops in Yemen. This constraint limits the operational tactics available to the American military and requires that Yemeni forces carry out the on-the-ground military operations necessary to defeat AQAP. Hostile reactions and international criticism of the U.S. drone program also weaken American credibility in Yemen. Backlash has not only come from human rights groups and civil society organizations; in December 2013, Yemen's Parliament passed non-binding legislation to end all U.S. drone strikes.¹⁸⁰ Christopher Swift argues that it is not the drone strikes themselves with which the Yemenis disagree; they oppose foreign intervention and would prefer if the Yemeni military asserted control over the state.¹⁸¹ However, as AQAP movements and ongoing attacks demonstrate, the Yemeni military's current level of competence proves insufficient for defeating the terrorist group.

¹⁷⁹ Katherine Zimmerman, "Recipe for Failure: American Strategy toward Yemen and al Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula," *AEI's Critical Threats Project*, February 17, 2012, <http://www.criticalthreats.org/yemen/zimmerman-recipe-for-failure-american-strategy-february-17-2012>.

¹⁸⁰ Sharp, "Yemen: Background," 6.

¹⁸¹ Swift, "The Blowback Fallacy."

Given these circumstances, the United States should continue direct action operations in the form of surgical strikes and avoid authorizing the less-discriminate TADS. As drone strikes are the most prominent and potentially destructive component of the campaign against AQAP, strike commands should continue to come directly from President Obama; however, top Yemeni and KSA military officials should also be included in the decision-making process. The United States should not act unilaterally unless there is an imminent threat to the American homeland.

Removing AQAP leaders requires that Yemeni prisons be improved. AQAP has become adept at executing prison breaks, as showcased by massive escapes in 2006, 2011, and 2014.¹⁸² Improvements to prison security will allow for newly captured terrorists to be detained securely and will also permit the United States to transfer the more than 50 Yemeni detainees currently housed at Guantanamo Bay. Improving Yemeni prisons is a long-term endeavor that requires extensive negotiations between U.S. and Yemeni governments as well as Yemen civil society, yet the United States should not lose sight of the objective's importance in the long-term strategy to defeat AQAP.

The close relationships between the governments of Saudi Arabia, Yemen, and the United States should be utilized to share institutional knowledge, coordinate intelligence sharing, monitor borders and ports, and engage in joint military exercises. Breaking down AQAP communication and resource networks requires technical expertise and intelligence in addition to collaboration between local, regional, and global counterterrorism agencies. Covert operations to infiltrate AQAP entail close coordination between the three governments and have proven successful in the past. Joint efforts should be pursued to monitor the KSA-Yemeni border, the port of Aden, and other hubs of

¹⁸² Al-Hamdani, "Complicit with Al-Qaeda?"

human and weapons traffic. The Yemeni government, with U.S. military support, should monitor migration to and from the Horn of Africa and Saudi Arabia as well as internal migration within Yemen. This requires streamlining intelligence sharing and strengthening the coast guard and border patrols.

To capitalize on local knowledge and information, Yemeni and U.S. officials should develop relationships with local communities that can provide resident watchdog services. Local relationships are also key to eliminating safe havens. Officials must ensure that communities have access to security by organizing a standard operating procedure for communicating movement, threats, and attacks; developing local police forces; and training and strategically stationing quick reaction forces. Local economic development and government services further strengthen a community's resistance to AQAP and limit areas from serving as potential safe havens.

In addition to strengthening joint military efforts and improving community-military relations, the Yemeni military must secure its military bases and government buildings to deter further AQAP attacks. Intelligence serves as a fundamental tool to preventing terrorist attacks. The U.S. government should continue supporting military restructuring measures that strengthen Yemeni cohesion and ensure secure information sharing within the Yemeni military and police forces. Promoting public reporting may also provide the Yemeni government with a wider reach in less secure areas.

Political

Political objectives must be tackled with a multi-level approach that addresses needs at the national, regional, and district levels. Such a mandate requires extensive funding and manpower. Foreign donors and NGOs have pledged funds and provided aid

to the Yemeni people; however, in order to enduringly stabilize the state, the Yemeni government must be seen by its people as a reliable provider. State capacity in the long term cannot be developed if foreign groups and private agencies assume the role of the government.¹⁸³ Furthermore, the task must be performed in the local districts, as opposed to from the capital. To most effectively assist local government in this process, the presence of U.S. military and civilian personnel is required.

The United States has prioritized capacity building in Yemen since the spring of 2009, and both the Department of State and USAID have active presences in Yemen.¹⁸⁴ U.S. contributions in Yemen since November 2011 have mostly come as financial support, which surpasses \$630 million.¹⁸⁵ These funds have supported USAID reading programs; civil society groups working to implement and promote elections; and service provision in South Yemen.¹⁸⁶ The U.S. government also provides technical assistance to the Constitution Drafting Committee.¹⁸⁷ But these programs and donations alone are insufficient to achieve the necessary political objectives.

To improve government services and facilitate democratic reform, U.S. and Yemeni officials should engage in dialogue with local tribes. The United States should determine its priorities in each region and identify where its priorities overlap with tribal and national interests. Finding the “zones of mutual interest” requires in-person relationship building. Rapport building with regional and district administrations is a

¹⁸³ Ashraf Ghani, Clare Lockhart, and Michael Carnahan, “Stability, State-building and Development Assistance: An Outside Perspective,” *ISE Center and the Princeton Project on National Security*, 2014, 6, <https://www.princeton.edu/~ppns/papers/ghani.pdf>.

¹⁸⁴ Daniel Benjamin, “U.S. Counterterrorism Strategy in Yemen,” *United States Institute of Peace* video presentation, 8:50, September 8, 2010, <http://www.c-span.org/video/?295363-1/us-counterterrorism-strategy-yemen>.

¹⁸⁵ “U.S. Support for Yemen,” *U.S. Department of State*, February 28, 2014, <http://www.state.gov/p/nea/rls/2014/222781.htm>.

¹⁸⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁸⁷ *Ibid.*

long-term investment but one that can produce valuable returns. Many of the Yemeni people feel aggrieved by previous U.S. support of the Saleh regime and view U.S. intervention as an attack on Yemeni sovereignty. To mitigate any affront to the Yemeni people, Americans must make personal connections with local groups rather than impose reforms from a distance. American efforts to enable the Yemeni government must also promote inclusion and advance the democratic reforms recommended by the NDC.

The GCC Initiative stipulates a process for reform and political transition. If the process proves too time consuming and Yemeni people lose faith in the interim government, the political progress that has been made will be lost. The United States must work with EU and GCC political advisors and donors to promote transparency in the political transition process. The U.S. government must pursue agreements between the Yemeni government and the al Houthis as well as urge continued mediation with Southern Movement activists. Equally important, the U.S. government should continue assistance to the Constitution Drafting Committee. Without imposing conditions, the United States should push for a completed constitution within the one-year timeline (March 2014–March 2015) so that parliamentary and presidential elections may be held in 2015.

These tactics rely on a full and active staff from Department of State, USAID, Department of Defense, and Department of Agriculture. Additionally, the U.S. government can work through and with NGOs and private companies that act in accordance with its strategy. The U.S. government must be willing to take on the risks associated with local implementation. Security and development in Yemen cannot be achieved from behind a desk or merely through a bank account. Finally, priority must be given to empowering the Yemeni government rather than U.S. agencies or NGOs.

Economic

To prevent economic collapse in the short run, the Yemeni government relies on foreign aid and credit. The Friends of Yemen, a political donor group led by the governments of the United Kingdom, Saudi Arabia, and Yemen, has pledged nearly \$8 billion in aid over the past three years.¹⁸⁸ The Friends group has recently organized an Economic Working Group to ensure that aid is applied in accordance to the economic reform agenda.¹⁸⁹ Developed from a 2012 donors' conference, the Mutual Accountability Framework (MAF) outlines reform priorities for the Yemeni government and donors.¹⁹⁰ Following from the MAF priorities, the government must effectively manage its budget and encourage job creation.¹⁹¹ To achieve sustainable economic growth in the long term, the Yemeni government will have to enact broad economic reforms including simplifying business regulations, promoting labor market flexibility, and enacting energy and tax reforms.¹⁹²

Energy subsidies and public wages consumed half of the 2013 government budget.¹⁹³ Subsidy reform is desperately needed to lessen the burden on the government budget, but easing fuel subsidies amidst shortage protests is politically infeasible. Restructuring government and military employment could provide a more effective use of public wages. Redistributing government employees to the new state- and district-tier administrations could provide improved capacity at the local government level. Similarly,

¹⁸⁸ “Friends of Yemen’ Announce New Structure to Support Next Phase of Yemen’s Transition,” *World Bank*, April 29, 2014, <http://www.worldbank.org/en/news/press-release/2014/04/29/friends-of-yemen-structure-next-phase-transition>.

¹⁸⁹ Ibid.

¹⁹⁰ Nadia Al-Sakkaf, “Yemen has to Fulfill its Part, But So Do Donors,” *Yemen Times*, February 25, 2014, <http://www.yementimes.com/en/1758/business/3525/Yemen-has-to-fulfill-its-part-but-so-do-donors.htm>.

¹⁹¹ Ibid.

¹⁹² Mohsin Khan and Svetlana Milbert, “Yemen’s Economic Quandary,” *Atlantic Council*, August 22, 2013, <http://www.atlanticcouncil.org/blogs/menasource/yemen-s-economic-quandary>.

¹⁹³ Ibid.

military reforms should reorganize the pay structure under a formalized national system that can eliminate “ghost soldiers.” Payments to tribal militias should be structured under official police or security forces, rather than routed through tribal leaders. Even if the government does not save money with these reforms, civil service jobs will be better allocated, and fewer military wages will be siphoned off by tribal elites.

Securing the Yemeni energy infrastructure, a military and political endeavor, will also have positive economic effects. Attacks on oil pipelines cost Yemen an estimated \$1 billion in oil exports in 2012.¹⁹⁴ Protecting the infrastructure requires close coordination with local tribes. Policies that pay tribesman to protect the pipelines may actually lead to additional attacks by colluding tribal groups.¹⁹⁵ Bringing the tribesman under a formalized security force to protect the infrastructure could prove more effective than employing them off the record. Matching economic and political incentives to the long-term interests of tribesman may also lead to improved cooperation.

To support the Yemeni economy and create jobs in the short term, the U.S. government could set up a fund similar to other programs used in countries with ongoing conflict, such as the Iraq Security and Stabilization Fund (ISSF), the Commander’s Emergency Response Program (CERP), and Provincial Reconstruction Teams (PRTs). Implemented in Iraq and Afghanistan with varying levels of success, these programs allowed U.S. personnel to grant money to local projects that benefited the indigenous community. U.S. civilian and military personnel in Yemen can be authorized to distribute unconditional cash and resources to programs that facilitate development in local communities, particularly in rural areas. Development projects should be prioritized on a

¹⁹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁹⁵ Ali Saeed and Rammah Al-Jubari, “Oil Pipeline in Marib Sustains Multiple Attacks in One Week,” *Yemen Times*, December 26, 2013, <http://www.yementimes.com/en/1741/news/3289/Oil-pipeline-in-Marib-sustains-multiple-attacks-in-one-week.htm>.

regional basis according to the “zones of mutual interest” between tribes, the national government, and the U.S. government.

Targeting development projects that benefit multiple sectors should take precedence. For example, a project that partners with the Yemeni government to provide agricultural extension services supports both water efficiency and economic development. Projects that provide job training should also be prioritized. Concurrent with pursuing job-training programs in Yemen, the United States should pressure the KSA and other GCC states to loosen their labor restrictions and allow for Yemeni expatriates to take jobs in Gulf countries. Facilitating foreign investment from private American companies can also contribute to job creation as well as support Yemeni economic growth.

Overlapping

Countering the al Qaeda ideology is a long-term, global objective that centers on the AQAP affiliate’s pervasive and commanding media wing. Because other radical Islamists amplify the same narrative, multiple methods are required to tackle this objective. One tactic attacks the ideology head on by exploiting the al Qaeda narrative’s greatest weakness: the justified killing of Muslims.¹⁹⁶ Al Qaeda contends that Muslims who associate with the West or who are “impure” qualify as apostates and can therefore be killed justifiably. Such belief, however, is not widely embraced by the Muslim public. Civilian, and specifically Muslim, casualties produce a condemnatory effect against the attackers, as evidenced by the backlash from the Defense Ministry attack in which AQAP militants gunned down a number of hospital employees.

¹⁹⁶ Thompson, “Countering the Narrative,” 19.

Increasing transparency in the Yemeni military and in America's own drone program will increase the military campaign's credibility within Yemen and limit the possible manipulation of events by al Qaeda. Consistent with previous recommendations, restricting direct action operations to surgical strikes and bringing Saudi and Yemeni officials into the decision-making process will minimize civilian deaths and mitigate backlash against U.S. intervention. Military action can also be used to disrupt communication lines between AQAP and the Yemeni public as well as within AQAP and the greater al Qaeda network.

Public diplomacy is another element of countering the al Qaeda ideology. As a matter of policy, the U.S. Department of State supports initiatives and public figures that condemn radical ideology. The Department assists with programs that train Yemeni government employees and civil society groups to counter violent extremism through public-awareness events.¹⁹⁷ Partnering with credible Islamic leaders reinforces a counter narrative without rejecting Islam. The U.S. government should also encourage institutional protections from religious freedom. Likewise, the U.S. government must respect the role of Islamist political groups and public figures in Yemen.

Current social, political, and economic conditions in Yemen create an environment of heightened susceptibility to radicalization and al Qaeda recruitment. Though not intrinsic to radicalization, the conditions of poverty, unemployment, and repression can cause individuals to feel alienated and discontented with their circumstances. From this perspective of disadvantage, al Qaeda provides a collective identity that offers individuals a sense of power and significance. But even when

¹⁹⁷ "U.S. Support for Yemen," *U.S. Department of State*.

confined to the Yemeni context, specific drivers for violent extremism vary, which complicates the design of a countering violent extremism program.¹⁹⁸

Countering AQAP recruitment and ideology should be part of broader development efforts that are tailored and implemented at the district level.¹⁹⁹ Providing young men with employment and a voice in the Yemeni government will shrink AQAP recruitment opportunities, but these improvements must be structured to the needs of local communities as opposed to a national model.²⁰⁰ The multidimensional strategy recommended in this report serves a preventive course to reduce susceptibility to the al Qaeda ideology.²⁰¹

All of the proposed tactics hinge on a functioning Yemeni military. Currently the Yemeni military sector lacks unity, transparency, and accountability. To develop the institution and its forces, the United States should invest in military reforms and restructuring through the political sector as well as support the military directly with training and equipment. Already the U.S. government has publicly supported President Hadi's restructuring efforts and plays an advising role for the Yemeni Defense Ministry. The al Houthis and several Yemeni officials have objected to external interference in the military restructuring.²⁰² Many domestic stakeholders, i.e. tribal leaders, oppose reform because they benefit from the current system. The United States must integrate these domestic power brokers and political actors in the restructuring process and emphasize transparency so that all actors involved and the Yemeni public can oversee the reforms.

¹⁹⁸ Steven Heydemann, "Countering Violent Extremism as a Field of Practice," *United States Institute of Peace Insights*, no. 1 (Spring 2014): 9, <http://www.usip.org/sites/default/files/Insights-Spring-2014.pdf>.

¹⁹⁹ Thompson, "Countering the Narrative," 19.

²⁰⁰ Naureen Chowdury Fink, "Something Old, Something New: The Emergence and Evolution of CVE Effort," *United States Institute of Peace Insights*, no. 1 (Spring 2014): 7, <http://www.usip.org/sites/default/files/Insights-Spring-2014.pdf>.

²⁰¹ Ibid.

²⁰² International Crisis Group, "Yemen's Military-Security Reform," 29.

Unifying the military requires formalizing a national force that is paid and trained directly by the government. Under the remnant patronage system, salaries vary by unit and pass through commanders and tribal leaders before reaching the soldiers.²⁰³ The Yemeni government makes additional ad hoc payments to tribesmen who provide a variety of informal security services, such as fighting AQAP in popular resistance committees, protecting oil pipelines, or serving as informal border patrol. Instead of making payments to tribal militia and guard groups, the government should be using the money to fund and train proper police forces. Streamlining the military and security payrolls will help eliminate “ghost soldiers” but may require provision of alternative employment or compensation to the current benefactors. Some of this transition can be accomplished with the recent establishment of the new military headquarters and by establishing new bases that can employ tribesmen.

In working directly with the armed forces, the U.S. military should continue to train officers and soldiers as well as supply troops with equipment and weapons. To foster a long-term U.S.-Yemeni military partnership, officer exchanges and postings should require a minimum two-year duration. The extended time gives soldiers and officers an opportunity to develop connections, build trust, and cultivate an understanding of the Yemeni culture and Arabic language. Efforts should be made by both governments to ensure that intelligence, funding, and resources are used for counterterrorism against AQAP and not expropriated for use in domestic conflicts.

²⁰³ Ibid., 8-9.

STRATEGY: BRINGING IT TOGETHER

“The long-term battle against AQAP in Yemen must be fought and won by Yemenis.”²⁰⁴ John Brennan’s assertion accurately defines the premise underlying U.S. counterterrorism operations in Yemen. To ensure victory against AQAP, the battle must be fought on all fronts: military, political, and economic. In a strategy that interlaces these fields, the U.S. government must engage key stakeholders, invest in the reform process, and continue attacking AQAP.

Within Yemen, many groups will benefit from the defeat of AQAP and stabilization of the Yemeni state; however, the parties diverge on how these objectives should be achieved. Political parties, the military, tribal sheikhs, and civil society groups each have the influence to obstruct or assist with the Yemeni transition. Engaging all of these groups is the only way of realizing an enduring transition. The GPC and Saleh’s supporters must make room for opposition groups, including the Islah party, Southern Movement, YSP, and the al Houthis. Historical grievances and ongoing conflict between many of these groups make negotiations challenging, but as shown by the NDC, progress is possible.

Effectively incorporating regional and international partners in negotiations and the reform process is instrumental to instilling change. Due to its role in the conflict, the government of Saudi Arabia must be involved in resolving the conflict with the al Houthis. An agreement that does not consider Saudi interests will only fail later in the face of Saudi intervention. Delivering an aid deposit of \$1 billion, the KSA has already proven able to provide economic assistance to the Yemeni government and could additionally offer critical support in improving the Yemeni military.²⁰⁵ GCC members,

²⁰⁴ Brennan, “U.S. Policy Toward Yemen.”

²⁰⁵ “‘Friends of Yemen’ New Structure,” *World Bank*.

European countries, and the United States must work together in empowering the Yemeni government. Competing agendas will only slow progress. To aid collaborative efforts, the U.S. government should promote transparency and accountability between governments and agencies. The Yemeni government and donors, such as the Friends of Yemen and the World Bank, must publicize the principal transition initiatives so that funds and programs can be efficiently structured and prioritized.

The U.S. government must back its rhetoric of support with investments of funding and personnel. Because the needs of regional and district governments differ from the requirements of the central government in Sana'a, funding and personnel should be assigned according to geographic and transitional priorities. U.S. personnel should offer a range of support—advising, mediation, training, and outreach—in military, political, and economic sectors. Given the variety of roles required, personnel should be sent from the Department of State, USAID, the Department of Agriculture, as well as the Department of Defense. One form of structuring personnel outside of the capital is to organize Provincial Reconstruction Teams, as have been used in Afghanistan and Iraq. The teams comprise military officers, Foreign Service officers, development experts, and aid workers and aim to provide comprehensive services to a designated geographic area.

In tandem with its backing of political and economic development in Yemen, the United States must attack AQAP with continued direct action operations and ideological counterattacks. So long as AQAP poses a threat to the homeland and American citizens, the United States will actively combat the terrorist group. The U.S. government should work in cooperation with its Yemeni counterparts to develop a more capable state and more effective military partner for defeating AQAP and preventing safe havens.

U.S. strategy in Yemen should be led by the Department of State. As the diplomatic arm of the United States, the State Department is best positioned to oversee

the execution of this multifaceted strategy. Coordination under one lead agency will minimize replicate activity and promote a unified American effort rather than divergent ones. U.S. military and civilian personnel in Yemen should report to the ambassador, who will be charged with implementing the full strategy of the U.S. government. To manage the collaborative efforts of U.S. agencies, the Department will require a full staff in Sana'a as well as field agents that are able to support strategic efforts and programs outside of the capital.

The U.S. government needs to embrace the Yemeni transition by connecting disparate parties within Yemen and key partners worldwide, enlisting American personnel, and continuing direct action and the non-kinetic fight against AQAP. This systematic approach of engagement, investment, and attack integrates all three battlefronts: military, political, and economic. This strategy prioritizes the principles of inclusion, transparency, and accountability across the reform process. President Hadi and the U.S. government alone cannot fulfill the Yemeni transition; enduring reform requires involvement from all domestic stakeholders and proper civilian oversight.

IMPLICATIONS

The strategy recommended in this report requires a number of modifications to the current U.S. policy in Yemen. These changes require an increase in funding and an acceptance of greater security risks for U.S. personnel. The proposed strategy could also potentially lead to tension in U.S. relations with GCC countries. These implications present a challenge to policymakers, but when considered against the threat of AQAP and a failed Yemeni state, they should be judged as an advisable investment.

The year 2012 marked the first time the U.S. government provided more development assistance than security assistance to Yemen—\$198 million in economic and humanitarian aid compared to \$158 million in counterterrorism and other security aid.²⁰⁶ Over the last two and a half years, since the start of the transition in November 2011, the United States has given over \$630 million in assistance to Yemen.²⁰⁷ In comparison, during the 2013 fiscal year, the U.S. government gave more than \$1.4 billion to Egypt²⁰⁸ and granted Jordan over \$852 million in assistance—not including additional amounts for counterterrorism assistance.²⁰⁹ Though the appropriations battle may be contested, it seems clear that funds could be found to support an assertive U.S. policy in Yemen. Instead of handing over aid checks directly to the Yemeni government, the recommended strategy would use additional funding to finance U.S. personnel and provide mini-grants to local programs. The strategy also advocates for on-the-ground implementation across Yemen, which requires considerable security risks to be taken by U.S. personnel. The United States should be willing to assume heightened but limited exposure in the short term in order to establish improved security for all Americans in the long run.

The advancement of Yemeni security and stability is inextricably linked to its Saudi neighbor and the GCC. Resistant to democratic movements within their own borders, the KSA and other GCC states are uninterested in supporting Yemeni democratic initiatives and may be opposed to U.S. efforts to promote religious freedom

²⁰⁶ “Between a Drone and Al-Qaeda: The Civilian Cost of US Targeted Killings in Yemen,” *Human Rights Watch*, October 22, 2013, 28, <http://www.hrw.org/reports/2013/10/22/between-drone-and-al-qaeda-0>.

²⁰⁷ “U.S. Support for Yemen,” *U.S. Department of State*.

²⁰⁸ Jeremy Sharp, “Egypt: Background and U.S. Relations,” *Congressional Research Service*, June 5, 2014, 14, <http://fas.org/sgp/crs/mideast/RL33003.pdf>.

²⁰⁹ Jeremy Sharp, “Jordan: Background and U.S. Relations,” *Congressional Research Service*, May 8, 2014, 19, <http://fas.org/sgp/crs/mideast/RL33546.pdf>.

and to include women, youths, and opposition groups in the political reforms. The U.S. government must promote democratic reforms as an element of the Yemeni transition rather than as a regional initiative. Regardless of their stances on the issue of democracy, the GCC states are integral actors in the Yemeni transition and key allies to the United States; yet, recent diplomatic maneuvers in the Gulf region highlight growing friction between GCC members. In March 2014, Saudi Arabia, Bahrain, and the United Arab Emirates pulled their ambassadors from Qatar, and in the same month, Oman invited the president of Iran for a visit.²¹⁰ Evolving political dynamics in the Middle East, the war in Syria, and the Iranian nuclear issue greatly concern the GCC states and have heightened tensions within the loose coalition.²¹¹ The U.S. government must emphasize its support of the GCC and use its role as an “honest broker” to facilitate GCC collaboration on the Yemeni transition.

As outlined by President Obama in his address to the National Defense University in 2013, the United States must pursue a comprehensive counterterrorism strategy that includes “addressing the underlying grievances and conflicts that feed extremism... [and] supporting transitions to democracy.”²¹² To best support the Yemeni transition, the United States must engage Yemeni and regional stakeholders in the reform process; invest in the military restructuring, political transition, and economic development; and continue direct action operations against AQAP with the support of the Yemeni armed

²¹⁰ Simon Henderson, “Gulf Arabs in Crisis,” *Washington Institute for Near East Policy*, March 5, 2014, <http://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/view/gulf-arabs-in-crisis>.

²¹¹ U.S. Congress, House of Representatives, Committee on Foreign Affairs, *The Gulf Cooperation Council: Deepening Rifts and Emerging Challenges*, May 22, 2014, Testimony of Simon Henderson of the Washington Institute for Near East Policy, http://www.washingtoninstitute.org/uploads/Documents/testimony/Henderson_20140522_v2.pdf.

²¹² Barack Obama, “Remarks by the President at the National Defense University” (address at Fort McNair, Washington, D.C., May 23, 2013), <http://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/2013/05/23/remarks-president-national-defense-university>.

forces. Applying this clear and complete strategy will enable Yemenis to defeat AQAP and strengthen their country.

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