



Yemen: Background and U.S. Relations

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Summary

Unrest in the Arab world has amplified existing political tension in Yemen. Sustained mass protests and President Ali Abdullah Saleh's attempts to preempt a broad crisis with concessions have concentrated U.S. and international attention on the daunting array of political and development challenges facing Yemen. Congress and U.S. policymakers may be concerned with prospects for stabilizing Yemen and establishing strong bilateral relations with future Yemeni leaders.

With limited natural resources, a crippling illiteracy rate, and high population growth, some observers believe Yemen is at risk for becoming a failed state. In 2009, Yemen ranked 140 out of 182 countries on the United Nations Development Program's Human Development Index, a score comparable to the poorest sub-Saharan African countries. Over 43% of the population of nearly 24 million people lives below the poverty line, and per capita GDP is estimated to be between \$650 and \$800. Yemen is largely dependent on external aid from Persian Gulf countries, Western donors, and international financial institutions, though its per capita share of assistance is below the global average.

As the country's population rapidly rises, resources dwindle, terrorist groups take root in the outlying provinces, and a southern secessionist movement grows, the Obama Administration and the 112th Congress are left to grapple with the consequences of Yemeni instability.

Over the past several fiscal years, Congress has appropriated an average of \$20 million to \$25 million annually for Yemen in total U.S. foreign aid. In FY2010, Yemen received \$58.4 million in aid. The Defense Department also provided Yemen's security forces with \$150 million worth of training and equipment for FY2010. For FY2011, the Obama Administration requested \$106 million in U.S. economic and military assistance to Yemen. For FY2012, the Administration has requested \$115.6 million in State Department/USAID-administered economic and military aid.

In recent years, the broader U.S. foreign policy community has not adequately focused on Yemen, its challenges, and their potential consequences for U.S. foreign policy interests beyond the realm of counterterrorism. As President Obama and the 112th Congress reassess U.S. policy toward the Arab world, the political violence and uncertainty paralyzing Yemen throws the prospect of continued counterterrorism cooperation into question, to say nothing of U.S.-Yemeni cooperation in other economic or political reform efforts.

Whether terrorist groups in Yemen, such as Al Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP), have a long-term ability to threaten U.S. homeland security may determine the extent of U.S. resources committed to counterterrorism and stabilization efforts there. Some believe these groups lack such capability and fear the United States might overreact; others assert that Yemen is gradually becoming a failed state and safe haven for Al Qaeda operatives and as such should be considered an active theater for U.S. counterterrorism operations. Given Yemen's contentious political climate and its myriad development challenges, most long-time Yemen watchers suggest that security problems emanating from Yemen may persist in spite of increased U.S. or international efforts to combat them.

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Unrest in Yemen: Will Saleh Stay in Power?

Sixty-eight-year-old President Ali Abdullah Saleh, who has ruled North Yemen since 1978 and a united Yemen since 1990, has left Yemen for medical treatment in Saudi Arabia after an attack on his personal compound left him badly injured. Like many other long-time Arab rulers, President Saleh had been facing a sustained and broad-based challenge to his continued personal authority from a popular demonstration movement and its supporters within his government and security forces. First inspired by Tunisia's Jasmine Revolution and then galvanized by the overthrow of Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak, Yemen's young protest movement has managed over the course of nearly two months to maintain nation-wide demonstrations. The youth have in turn convinced established opposition parties, some tribal leaders, and other key elites, including some security force commanders, to join their cause. Despite an earlier pledge not to run for reelection when his term expires in 2013, President Saleh was not able to quell this popular uprising and, as demonstrations have continued and violent confrontations have taken place, his grip on power has loosened.

As of June 7, 2011, he officially remains Yemen's president, though he is in Saudi Arabia being treated for severe burns suffered after an unknown device exploded inside the mosque at the presidential palace in Sana'a. His vice president, Abd Rabbuh Mansur Hadi, is currently wielding executive authority, although the extent of his authority and control is not fully apparent. The opposition, Yemen's neighbors, and some members of the international community would like an immediate transition to take place based on a Gulf Cooperation Council transition plan. Under the plan, Vice President Hadi would govern for 30 days before handing power to a transitional presidential council, which would rule for 60 days until new elections are held. However, this time frame may be too short, since many of the details governing elections have yet to be agreed upon.

Many analysts doubt that President Saleh will be able to survive this latest challenge despite his acknowledged political acumen and ability to balance competing demands from tribes, Islamists, and international actors. Many Yemenis are hopeful that Saleh's ouster, if it takes place, will usher in a more democratic phase in Yemeni political culture and end several bloody insurrections in the north and south. However, leaders of Western countries and of neighboring Saudi Arabia are concerned that his abdication or overthrow would open up a power vacuum and jeopardize counterterrorism cooperation against Al Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula, which has presented the most lethal and direct terrorist threat to U.S. national security over the last three years. Regardless of the outcome of the current political intrigues, any future Yemeni leader will face the same overwhelming socioeconomic challenges that vexed Saleh. These challenges may limit the effectiveness of even the most well-intentioned and capable leaders, and political uncertainty may limit the willingness or ability of outsiders concerned about Yemen's stability to provide financial or material support.

Timeline of Protests

Initial Stages

Opposition protests began in Yemen's capital, Sana'a, on January 16, 2011. Using social media to organize, and motivated by images of revolt and repression broadcast prominently by *Al Jazeera*

and other satellite television channels, Sana'a University students comprised the bulk of the demonstrators, though they were led by more seasoned Yemeni democracy activists. Tawakel Karman, who is head of the non-governmental organization Women Journalists Without Chains and a member of the opposition Islah (Reform) party, has been a major figure in the protest movement.

Once major unrest broke out in Egypt on January 25, demonstrations in Yemen concurrently grew, culminating in a crowd of tens of thousands that gathered on January 27 in Sana'a. Two days later, protestors specifically began calling for the ouster of President Saleh, as demonstrators marched to the Egyptian Embassy chanting in Arabic, "Ali, leave, leave!" and "Tunisia left, Egypt after it, and Yemen in the coming future."

Well before the unrest in Tunisia and Egypt, Yemen's opposition parties had been angry over President Saleh's plans to amend the electoral law, form a new Supreme Commission for Elections and Referenda (SCER),¹ and even amend the constitution to allow himself to stand for reelection—all without opposition agreement. According to one journalist, "These were not spontaneous or popular protests like in Egypt, but rather mass-rallies organized by the opposition who are using events in Tunisia to test Saleh's regime. This is only the start of a fierce political battle in the run-up to Yemen's parliamentary elections in April."² As in Egypt and elsewhere, Yemenis are angry over the prospect of hereditary succession, since many believe that President Saleh has been grooming his son Ahmed for the presidency. After several days of protests in early January 2011, President Saleh denied that he was paving the way for his son to succeed him, stating that "We are against succession.... We are in favor of change ... and these are rude statements, they are the utmost rudeness."

In a surprise development intended to deflate protestors' momentum, President Saleh announced on February 2 that he would not seek reelection when his final seven-year term expires in 2013. He also announced that his son Ahmed would not succeed him. In addition, Saleh increased soldiers' salaries, announced that the Defense Ministry would hire an additional 40,000 recruits, and exempted public university students from paying remaining tuition fees. President Saleh then demanded that the opposition call off the planned "day of rage" protest set for February 3. Though President Saleh had made similar promises in the past, one Yemeni analyst believed that the political situation had dramatically altered. According to Abdul Ghani al Iryani, "The opposition is skeptical and think he's trying to buy time. But I think President Saleh is more sophisticated than that. He knows the situation and that the rules of the game have changed completely. There's no way he can backtrack from this."³ The "day of rage" protests were largely peaceful, and parallel protests in support of avoiding chaos and unrest occurred without incident or clashes.

For the next two weeks, youth demonstrations continued, albeit on a smaller scale. However, beginning on February 16, five days after President Mubarak of Egypt resigned, students at Sana'a University began to escalate their protests, camping out at a Sana'a location dubbed

¹ In December 2010, parliament passed an amendment to the electoral law that allowed the SCER to be comprised of judges rather than representatives appointed by members of parliament. The opposition opposed the amendment. The composition of the SCER has been contested for nearly three years, as members of the opposition charge that it is comprised of Saleh loyalists unwilling to make the electoral system free and fair.

² "Middle East: Yemen: Your Time is Up, Demonstrators Tell President," *The Guardian* (UK), January 28, 2011.

³ "Yemen's President Moves to Head off Unrest, Vows to Leave Office in 2013," *Washington Post*, February 2, 2011.

“Tahrir Square,” holding campus demonstrations, and urging citizens in other cities such as Taiz to come out en masse. The government responded by organizing pro-Saleh demonstrations, and both camps often clashed in street battles. Yemeni police, despite President Saleh’s calls to protect demonstrators, have suppressed youth demonstrators. Casualties have been heaviest in the restive southern port city of Aden, home to many southern secessionists who have blamed President Saleh for neglecting their region. Pro-Saleh loyalists have attacked young demonstrators with clubs, and those who have come to his aid have been provided with food, water, the stimulant-leaf *qat*, and cash “courtesy of Ali.”⁴

After witnessing sustained demonstrations and widespread condemnation of government-sponsored violence, the formal political opposition coalition, the Joint Meetings Party (JMP), and its primary member, the Islah Party, joined with the youthful protestors to form a much more effective opposition front against Saleh’s continued rule. Prior to the round of demonstrations that started February 16, the JMP had been largely placated by Saleh’s pledge to step down in 2013.

As the violence has subsequently grown, Saleh’s allies have abandoned him. On February 26, Hussein al Ahmar, a member of the most powerful clan in the Hashid tribe, the Al Ahmar family, announced at a tribal gathering in Amran governorate that he also was leaving the General People’s Congress (GPC) and would no longer support the president. Some experts have suggested that Hussein al Ahmar was grandstanding and that he has left the party before only to return later. Two days later, on February 28, Sheikh Abd al Majid al Zindani, a prominent Yemeni cleric with ties to Al Qaeda, also stated that he would no longer support the president and said, “An Islamic state is coming.” Just a week earlier, he had vocally supported Saleh, saying that “Change through street protests is rejected. It leads to chaos.... Change will take place, but through the ballot box.... We appeal to the nation to stay away from bloody confrontation.”

With scant resources at his disposal, President Saleh does not have many options for staying in power. On March 1, he called for the formation of a national unity government, a step that was immediately rejected by the opposition. A day later, he blamed the country’s unrest on the United States and Israel, saying “From Tunis to the Sultanate of Oman, the wave of protest is managed by Tel Aviv and under the supervision of Washington.”⁵ Saleh, like the deposed Arab presidents before him, appears to be growing desperate.

Negotiations Deadlocked, Unrest Increases, and Regime Crackdown Intensifies

Between March 3 and March 18, negotiations between Saleh and opposition forces remained deadlocked over the timetable for Saleh’s departure, with the president standing firm on his self-imposed 2013 deadline, and protestors calling for an immediate resignation. Meanwhile, public demonstrations continued to grow, and the security forces and Saleh’s allies responded with escalated levels of violence against the protestors. Following and mirroring measures used by other governments in places such as Tunisia, Egypt, Libya, and Bahrain over the past three months, loyalist police forces reportedly beat Yemeni journalists, and the government expelled at least four foreign correspondents. On March 8 and March 12, press reports stated that units under the control of the president’s nephew stormed the protestors’ makeshift tent city on the campus of

⁴ “Among the Thugs of Yemen,” *The Atlantic*, February 22, 2011.

⁵ Days later, Saleh formally apologized to the United States, expressing his “regret for misunderstandings.”

Sana'a University, killing several and wounding dozens of unarmed youth. Reportedly, between mid-February and March 18, at least 40 protesters had been killed.

Former regime supporters continued to switch their loyalties from Saleh to the opposition. To date, at least 18 lawmakers from the ruling GPC party have resigned. Moreover, several important tribes and tribal confederations have allied with the protest movement, and tribesmen have traveled to the capital to peacefully demonstrate against the government. Protests also continued in other parts of Yemen, including areas that had been previously considered bedrocks of regime support.

In order to assuage his supporters, President Saleh continued to make grand, but unspecified commitments to reform Yemen's political system, promising to establish a national committee to draft a new constitution that would empower the parliament over the executive branch and allow lawmakers to name cabinet posts. These changes, which probably would have been acceptable several months ago, were rejected outright by protestors and the formal opposition parties. The JMP had proposed its own five point plan, which called for Saleh's departure at the end of 2011 and the removal of many of his family members from the armed services. However, according to one Yemeni street protestor, "The president has to go, but he is facing demands for something he cannot do. How can he sack his son from the Republican Guards command?... How would he look sacking relatives one by one?"⁶

Friday, March 18: Over 50 Protestors Killed by Alleged Saleh Loyalists

On March 18, shortly after the conclusion of Friday prayers, plainclothes gunmen perched atop the rooftops overlooking Sana'a University and behind windows in adjacent buildings opened fire on protestors, killing an estimated 52 civilians and wounding hundreds of others. Two men from the Khowlan tribe were among the dead, as several prominent tribes had joined with demonstrators in recent weeks. According to one unnamed Yemeni official, "It seems like people saw what happened in Bahrain and thought you could do the same here.... But in Yemen it is going to be very bad — a disaster.... This will change everything, because the people killed have tribes."

Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton condemned the violence, stating that the State Department is "seeking to verify reports that this is the result of actions by security forces.... We call on Yemeni security forces to exercise maximum restraint, refrain from violence, and permit citizens to freely and peacefully express their views."

The March 18 bloodshed appears to have been a major turning point in the two-month revolt against President Saleh. The president immediately declared a state of emergency and dismissed his cabinet the next day, though reports of government brutality brought with them a wave of defections from Saleh's camp. Several Yemeni ambassadors resigned, including Abdullah Alsaïdi, Yemen's ambassador to the United Nations; and Yemen's ambassador to the Arab League, Abdel Malik Mansour. Several now-dismissed cabinet ministers also announced they were joining the opposition. Moreover, Shaykh Sadiq al Ahmar, the oldest brother of the prominent Al Ahmar family and titular head of the Hashid tribal confederation, issued a statement urging the president to leave peacefully.

⁶ "Saleh Pits Yemenis Against Each other in Bid to Stay On," *Reuters*, March 7, 2011.

Perhaps most importantly, on March 21, General Ali Mohsen and four other brigadier generals announced that they would support the protest movement. Mohsen has been a key ally of Saleh for decades, and his defection raised concern that the military and security services would fracture, raising the possibility of civil war if President Saleh and his relatives do not peacefully resign. Perhaps in an effort to deflect Yemeni and international condemnation against his government, the president hinted that he would be willing to step aside, saying on March 25 that “We in the leadership do not want power and do not need it, and we are willing to hand over power to safe hands — not to frivolous, sick, hateful and corrupt hands.”

Saleh’s Brinksmanship and Negotiations Over his Departure

In April and May, President Saleh began to more ominously warn Yemenis and the international community that his departure from the country would result in chaos and civil war. He also warned against plots against him, stating that “Those who want to climb up to power through coups should know that this is out of the question. The homeland will not be stable, there will be a civil war, a bloody war.” Most analysts believed that Saleh’s threats were part of a deliberate strategy to increase his bargaining leverage, as talks were underway over a possible peaceful transition of power.

In late April, the Gulf Cooperation Council offered President Ali Abdullah Saleh and the opposition a road map for a smooth transition of power. According to the plan, within a month of an agreement, power will transfer from the president to his Vice President Abd Rabbuh Mansur Hadi, a national unity government will form, and presidential elections will be held within three months of the initiation of the agreement. In exchange, President Saleh would receive immunity from prosecution for himself and his family.

President Saleh initially tentatively accepted the deal but with substantial caveats and conditions. The deal was to be signed in Riyadh on either May 1 or 2, but President Saleh then insisted that he would sign not as president, but in his separate capacity as leader of the governing General People’s Congress (GPC) party, a condition rejected by the opposition. Overall, the opposition has been divided over the deal’s acceptance, with the main opposition group, the Joint Meeting Parties (JMP), accepting it in principle, but many youth protestors and other regional factions (Houthis and Southerners) being against it altogether, demanding that Saleh not be granted immunity, particularly as his forces continue to kill demonstrators. The agreement also calls for the opposition to bring the street protests to an end, but the formal opposition claims that it lacks the ability to stop the protests.

Saleh Rejects Deal Amidst Growing State Repression

As the president continued to bargain with the opposition and GCC mediators over a possible transition, his security forces escalated their crackdown against Yemeni protestors. In the city of Ta’izz, there were daily reports of protestors’ deaths at the hands of security forces, as police fired tear gas and live ammunition into crowds. On April 27 in the capital, gunmen in civilian clothes firing from rooftops killed 11 protestors and wounded 130 others in the worst day of violence since March 18. The demonstrators had been marching against the tentative deal granting the president and his family immunity.

As violence grew, President Saleh’s behavior became erratic; he initially accepted but then suddenly rejected the GCC transition initiative three times between April 26 and May 22. There

has been much speculation as to why President Saleh refused to accept the GCC-brokered agreement. Some experts suggest that the transition did not clearly define a role for Saleh's extended family after his departure, and therefore left him no choice to fight not only for his own interests, but those of his larger clan, which is firmly entrenched in the security forces and other high government positions. According to one report, "When other relatives got wind of the deal, they caused a ruckus in the presidential palace, shouting and accusing the president of abandoning them, according to the family member and two people close to the family."⁷ Others speculate that President Saleh wanted guarantees that his rivals, the Al Ahmar family, would not simply usurp power should the president and his family voluntarily abdicate. According to one source, "It is offensive to President Saleh that his relatives will leave and the opponents will stay." Other observers assert that the president himself simply is incapable of relinquishing control over the presidency. President Saleh may have feared that despite pledges of immunity, he would be tried anyway; he may have feared suffering the same fate as former Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak, who resigned in February and is now facing prosecution along with his immediate family and inner circle of former political allies.

Intra-Elite Fighting and Looming Yemeni Civil War

Despite U.S. and Saudi urging to finalize a transition deal, President Saleh's repeated rejections of it culminated in open warfare beginning on May 23 between forces loyal to the government and tribal militias loyal to the Al Ahmar family. Many observers believe that President Saleh initiated attacks in order to wipe out his main rivals. Saleh's forces shelled Sadeq al Ahmar's compound in the capital along with a television station owned by the Al Ahmar family while his opponents fired mortar rounds at government-controlled buildings, such as the Interior Ministry. With parts of the capital under siege, the U.S. State Department ordered all eligible family members of United States government employees and some nonessential personnel to leave the country immediately.

Within days of the start of hostilities, reports indicated that over 100 pro- and anti-Saleh fighters had been killed in street battles in the Al Hasbah district of Sana'a. Government troops even fired mortar rounds at Sheikh Sadeq's compound while a group of tribal mediators were there trying to negotiate a cease-fire. The attack killed several prominent tribesmen and former allies of the president, further isolating him from his former base of political support. Republican Guard soldiers under the command of Ahmed Saleh, the president's son, continued to clash with opposition tribal gunmen, and reports spread that the president had ordered many of his remaining loyal troops to return to the capital, seal it off and prevent tribal reinforcements from joining the fight, and retake areas seized by forces loyal to Sheikh Sadeq al Ahmar. By early June, the international airport had to close down due to fighting nearby.

Saleh Leaves Yemen for Treatment in Saudi Arabia: Is this the End or Will Fighting Continue?

On Friday, June 3, during mid-day prayers, an explosion occurred in a mosque inside the presidential palace in Sana'a, wounding President Saleh. Though he issued an audio broadcast soon after, reports indicated that he suffered burns and shrapnel wounds to his chest. Dozens of other officials were reportedly either killed or wounded in the blast. Among those wounded were

⁷ "The Middle East: Family of Leader Stalls Yemen Talks," *Wall Street Journal*, April 1, 2011.

the speaker of parliament and the prime minister, who some reports suggest were blinded. President Saleh blamed the Al Ahmar family for the attack, which they denied.

On Sunday, June 5, official Yemeni sources confirmed that the president had left the country for medical treatment in Saudi Arabia. Reports of his departure led to widespread jubilation in the streets of Yemen, though sporadic clashes continued throughout the country and capital. Before his departure, the president delegated executive authority to Vice President Abdo Rabu Mansour Hadi. Although the Yemeni Constitution does not clearly define the basis for a temporary transfer of power should the president become incapacitated, Article 124 states that the president at his discretion may transfer some of his duties to his vice president. On June 7, U.S. State Department spokesman Mark Toner described Vice President Hadi as Yemen's "acting president," and said, "there is an interim government in place in Yemen, and there is a strong constitution, and that we believe that there is now an opportunity to move towards the peaceful transition that we've been urging."

U.S. Policy Response

Throughout the current domestic crisis in Yemen, the Obama Administration refrained from directly calling for Saleh's resignation but shifted to endorsing "transition" in line with the GCC roadmap and then outright in the wake of Saleh's departure. One unnamed U.S. official said that the Administration would not "speculate or try to predict the outcome." According to U.S. Deputy National Security Adviser Ben Rhodes, "I think our view is that there's clearly going to have to be a political solution in Yemen that includes a government that is more responsive to the Yemeni people.... That has been our consistent message to President Saleh." On March 18, Human Rights Watch urged the Obama Administration to immediately suspend military assistance to Yemen until President Saleh "ends attacks on largely peaceful anti-government protesters and prosecutes those responsible." In February, the Administration requested \$115 million in military and economic assistance for Yemen for FY2012. When asked if the Obama Administration was considering cutting aid to Yemen, Pentagon Press Secretary Geoff Morrell said in early April that "As far as I know it (U.S. military aid to Yemen) has not been.... Obviously we are monitoring the situation closely. It's fluid. And we are making determinations and evaluations based upon how it's developing."⁸

Throughout the political wrangling over the terms of the GCC-brokered transition initiative, reports indicated that the Obama Administration was pressing President Saleh hard to sign the deal. In his May 19 speech at the U.S. State Department, President Obama publicly urged President Saleh to sign the deal stating, "But if America is to be credible, we must acknowledge that at times our friends in the region have not all reacted to the demands for consistent change -- with change that's consistent with the principles that I've outlined today. That's true in Yemen, where President Saleh needs to follow through on his commitment to transfer power." Days later, President Saleh, who had finally promised again to sign the deal, instead reportedly orchestrated a siege of the Embassy of the United Arab Emirates in Sana'a where foreign diplomats, including U.S. Ambassador Gerald M. Feierstein, had gathered to be transported to a signing ceremony with the president. The "siege" by Saleh's supporters lasted several hours before government helicopters "rescued" the U.S. Ambassador and others and transported them to a signing ceremony where the president refused to sign the deal. On May 24, U.S. State Department

⁸ "U.S. urges Yemen transition, no aid cut-off-Pentagon," *Reuters*, April 5, 2011.

spokesperson Mark Toner remarked that “we believe that President Saleh still has the ability and the opportunity to sign this initiative and break this deadlock.”

After Saleh’s third refusal, other press reports indicated that the Administration was willing to increase its pressure on the Yemeni government. One senior Administration official reportedly said, “if he doesn’t sign, we’re going to have to consider possible other steps.” Some observers suggested that the United States could seek sanctions against the president and his inner circle at the United Nations Security Council. In early June, as street battles raged in Sana’a, John Brennan, Assistant to the President for Homeland Security and Counterterrorism, traveled to the Persian Gulf to confer with GCC leaders over how to return President Saleh to the negotiating table and restart talks over his departure.

After reports surfaced that President Saleh had been injured and taken to Saudi Arabia for medical treatment, fueling speculation that he may never return, the Obama Administration shifted its rhetoric and called for an immediate transition of power. According to Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton, “We think an immediate transition is in the best interests of the Yemeni people.... The instability and lack of security currently afflicting Yemen cannot be addressed until there is some process that everyone knows is going to lead to the sort of economic and political reforms that they are seeking.”

An Opportunity for AQAP?

As violence continues unabated and fear spreads of a power vacuum, many U.S. observers are concerned over Yemeni instability and the opportunity it would present for Al Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula, particularly on the heels of the recent successful U.S. operation that killed Osama Bin Laden. If the current situation were to devolve into widespread violence or be prolonged with Saleh’s leadership in the balance, the Obama Administration may fear that it would lack a Yemeni partner capable of acting on short notice if a terrorist plot were to be uncovered.

President Saleh himself has been well aware of U.S., Saudi, and international concern for continued counter-terrorism cooperation and, throughout the crisis, threatened to withdraw his forces from remote governorates in order to compel the international community into accepting his continued rule. In late March, the president ordered some army units to return to the capital and soon thereafter 110 people were killed in an explosion at an abandoned army weapons depot. Saleh stated that if he were forced from office, “Yemen will be a new Somalia.”

Despite Yemen’s growing instability, the United States has been able to take action against AQAP when the opportunity has presented itself. On May 5, the United States reportedly carried out an air strike in Shabwa province against a car believed to be carrying Anwar al Awlaki. Instead, the U.S. military hit a vehicle carrying two mid-level AQAP operatives, Abdullah and Mubarak al Harad, who were killed instantly. According to one unnamed U.S. official, “We were hoping it was [Awlaki].”

Amidst the uncertainty over Yemen’s political future, the U.S. officials are working to preserve future counter-terrorism cooperation. The extent of U.S. relations with the political opposition or military commanders outside President Saleh’s immediate family is unknown. According to Joshua Foust, a fellow at the American Security Project and former Defense Intelligence Agency analyst, “What happens to the [US] training mission, as well as the [intelligence] collection programs in place—no one knows if or how those would be affected by a new government. We

don't have good ties with the opposition movement, which is itself chaotic and will probably begin infighting soon anyway, so it's tough to call how they'll react."⁹ According to another report, "American officials privately concede they have only a marginal influence on Mr. Saleh's fight for his political survival and exit from power. At best, these officials say, the Americans are looking to identify and carefully support competent lower-ranking officers and civilian officials who could take over the security agencies if Mr. Saleh's relatives are forced to flee."¹⁰ Still other experts assert that U.S. Embassy officials in Sana'a as well as non-governmental organizations such as the National Democratic Institute have been reaching out to various political actors in Yemen for years and may be able to expand on those ties in a post-Saleh environment.

Currently, reports suggest that possible AQAP fighters or other Islamist militants have engaged Yemeni military forces in the coastal town of Zinjibar in Abyan governorate. In May, reports indicated that Islamist fighters had seized the town, though more recent reports indicate that army troops have engaged fighters there, resulting in dozens of casualties on both sides. The government also has conducted air strikes there.

Who or What Comes After Saleh?

President Saleh's recent departure for Saudi Arabia raises a number of questions over Yemen's political future, such as:

- What are the extent of President Saleh's injuries?¹¹ Will he be allowed to leave Saudi Arabia?
- Are President Saleh's sons and nephews still in Yemen and in control of the security forces? Do they have the political will to keep fighting and, if so, will their troops remain loyal?
- How much authority will Vice President Hadi yield and will he control the country's military and security forces?
- Will the vice president sign the GCC Initiative and begin a transition to a post-Saleh government?

If President Saleh never returns and his family is eventually forced from power, focus in Yemen may shift to the nature of the next government, as many demonstrators desire real reform. If an interim government is formed by either the military or the JMP with remnants of the GPC, its task will most likely be focused on amending the constitution to strengthen the legislative branch of government, establish agreed-upon electoral rules, and address issues of federalism and decentralization—the lack of which has fueled conflicts in Yemen's north and south. If the forces opposed to President Saleh are to successfully enact their desired reforms, much time may be required in order to negotiate a national consensus on constitutional reform before parliamentary and presidential elections can be held.

⁹ "The Dangerous US Game in Yemen," *The Nation*, March 30, 2011.

¹⁰ "Unrest In Yemen Seen As Opening To Qaeda Branch," *New York Times*, April 5, 2011.

¹¹ On June 7, new information revealed that President Saleh had suffered non-life threatening burns to over forty percent of his body and would require at least three to four months of recovery time. Reports suggest that the explosion inside the palace mosque may have been hidden inside the mosque's *minbar* or pulpit. See, "Yemeni Leader Severely Burnt, Raising Doubts About His Rule," *New York Times*, June 7, 2011.

Key Yemeni Political and Military Figures

The Saleh Family. President Saleh's son Ahmed is commander of the Republican Guards. He was born in 1970 and studied at Britain's elite military academy at Sandhurst. President Saleh's three nephews also hold senior positions in the military and intelligence services. His nephew Colonel Amar Saleh is deputy chief of the National Security Bureau (NSB), an intelligence agency formed in 2002 designed to work in closer cooperation with foreign governments.¹² Another nephew, Yahya Mohammed Abdullah Saleh, is chief of staff of the Central Security Organization (CSO), a division of the Ministry of the Interior which maintains an elite U.S.-trained Counter-Terrorism Unit (CTU).¹³ Tariq Saleh is head of the Presidential Guard, the Yemeni equivalent of the U.S. Secret Service. Finally, the president's half-brother, Ali Saleh al Ahmar, is commander of the Air Force.¹⁴

The Al Ahmar Family. One possibility is that a member of the Al Ahmar family would either head an interim government or run for president once a transitional process has been put in place. The family has members who may be acceptable to neighboring Saudi Arabia and much of the Hashid tribal confederation in Yemen. Sheikh Sadeq (alt. sp. Sadiq) al Ahmar, the eldest of 10 sons of the late Sheikh Abdullah al Ahmar (who was the speaker of Parliament, leader of the Islah party, and paramount sheikh in Yemen prior to his death in 2007), is the head of the family and may prove to be a key figure in the weeks and months ahead. He has already withdrawn his support from the president.

Hamid Al Ahmar, the longtime Saleh critic and member of the prominent Al Ahmar family, is another possible presidential candidate. Hamid Al Ahmar has condemned Saleh's ruling style, saying that "We believe that power should be distributed, not continue [to be run] as a one-man show." Unlike other opposition figures, Hamid Al Ahmar has sided with Yemeni protestors since the beginning of the unrest. Hamid Al Ahmar is a wealthy businessman who has benefited from his family's prominence in Yemeni society and its good relations with neighboring Saudi Arabia. According to one report, he is the chairman of Yemen's main cell phone company, SabaFon; owns Saba Bank and Al-Nas press institute; and is the proprietor of local Kentucky Fried Chicken and Baskin-Robbins franchises.¹⁵ One leader of the youth demonstrators remarked that "Someone like Hamid Al Ahmar wants to get rid of Saleh so he can have a larger piece of the pie.... We will either oust a dictator to get another dictator. Or there will be civil war in Yemen."¹⁶

¹² According to one recent report, the NSB was established to "provide Western intelligence agencies with a more palatable local partner than the Political Security Organization (PSO). The NSB is now responsible for dispensing \$3.4 million of U.S.-provided tribal engagement funds to support the campaign against AQAP. See, Michael Knights, "Strengthening Yemeni Counterterrorism Forces: Challenges and Political Considerations," *Policywatch* #1616, The Washington Institute for Near East Policy, January 6, 2010. In general, due to previous allegations of PSO sympathy and direct support of Al Qaeda, the United States government deeply distrusts that security agency and does not work with its units which are responsible for day-to-day security inside the country. See, "Yemen Security Agency Prone to Inside Threats, Officials Say," *Washington Post*, February 10, 2010.

¹³ Andrew McGregor, Yemen and the U.S.: Different Approaches to the War on Terrorism, The Jamestown Foundation, *Terrorism Monitor*, May 10, 2007.

¹⁴ *New York Times*, January 5, 2010, op.cit.

¹⁵ Open Source Center, "Yemen: Hamid al-Ahmar Emerges as Possible Presidential Candidate, OSC Analysis, March 10, 2011, Document ID# FEA20110311015480.

¹⁶ "In Yemen, a Wary Alliance of Students and Tribes," *The Atlantic*, February 25, 2011.

Major General Ali Mohsen. Commander of the First Armored Division, he defected from the regime on March 21. According to one recent analysis, “Given the number of men and the hardware under his command as well as his ability to marshal irregular forces (Mohsen has close ties with ‘Afghan Arabs’ and Salafi-inspired militants), he is surely being courted by all sides.”¹⁷ However, many of the youth protestors may look at Mohsen’s defection with suspicion, believing that his move is opportunistic in order to position himself as Yemen’s next ruler.

Vice President Abdo Rabu Mansour Hadi. 66-year-old Vice President Hadi is originally a southern Yemeni who was born in Abyan governorate. He is a former Army commander and minister of defense who spent four years studying military leadership in the Soviet Union in the mid-1970s. He is known as a loyal supporter of President Saleh, who found Hadi useful as a southern Yemeni with strong ties to the military.

Country Overview

Located at the southwestern tip of the Arabian Peninsula, Yemen is an impoverished Arab country with a population of 23.8 million. The country’s rugged terrain and geographic isolation, strong tribal social structure, and sparsely settled population have historically made it difficult to centrally govern (and conquer), a feature that has promoted a more pluralistic political environment, but that also has hampered socioeconomic development. Outside of the capital of Sana’a, tribal leaders often exert more control than central and local government authorities. Kidnappings of Yemeni officials and foreign tourists have been carried out mainly by dissatisfied tribal groups pressing the government for financial largesse or for infrastructure projects in their districts.

A series of Zaydi¹⁸ Islamic dynasties ruled parts of Yemen both directly and nominally from 897 until 1962. The Ottoman Empire occupied a small portion of the Western Yemeni coastline between 1849 and 1918. In 1839, the British Empire captured the port of Aden, which it held, including some of its surrounding territories, until 1967.

The 20th century political upheavals in the Arab world driven by anti-colonialism and Arab nationalism tore Yemen apart in the 1960s. In the north, a civil war pitting royalist forces backed by Saudi Arabia against a republican movement backed by Egypt ultimately led to the dissolution of the Yemeni Imamate and the creation of the Yemen Arab Republic (YAR). In the south, a Yemeni Marxist movement became the primary vehicle for resisting the British occupation of Aden. Communist insurgents eventually succeeded in establishing their own socialist state (People’s Democratic Republic of Yemen or PDRY) that over time developed close ties to the Soviet Union and supported what were then radical Palestinian terrorist organizations. Throughout the Cold War, the two Yemeni states frequently clashed, and the United States

¹⁷ Michael Horton, “Special Report from Yemen, Escalation of Violence Moves Yemen Closer to Civil War,” *Jamestown Foundation*, March 14, 2011.

¹⁸ The population of Yemen is almost entirely Muslim, divided between Zaydis, found in much of the north (and a majority in the northwest), and Shafi’is, found mainly in the south and east. Zaydis belong to a branch of Shi’a Islam, while Shafi’is follow one of several Sunni Muslim legal schools. Yemen’s Zaydis take their name from their fifth Imam, Zayd ibn Ali. They are doctrinally distinct from the Twelvers, the dominant branch of Shi’a Islam in Iran and Lebanon. Twelver Shiites believe that the 12th Imam, Muhammad al Mahdi, has been hidden by *Allah* and will reappear on Earth as the savior of mankind. For more information, see CRS Report RS21745, *Islam: Sunnis and Shiites*, by Christopher M. Blanchard.

Al Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula: History, Profile, and U.S. Counterterrorism Policy

A History of Al Qaeda in Yemen

In the late 1980s, after the U.S. and Saudi-supported Afghan rebels successfully ended Soviet occupation of their country, “Arab Afghan” volunteers, who fought alongside the *mujahidin* (Islamic fighters), returned to Yemen and were subsequently embraced by the government and treated as heroes by many Yemenis. Some veterans of the Afghan war were integrated into the military and security forces. More importantly, during the civil war of 1994, President Saleh dispatched several brigades of “Arab Afghans” to fight against southern secessionists.

Perhaps because the Yemeni government successfully co-opted some Islamist hardliners and employed them to reinforce regime rule and because Al Qaeda itself was building its own capacity to conduct global terrorist operations, Yemen was not a major theater of Al Qaeda operations in the 1990s. However, Yemen was part of Osama bin Laden’s vision for Al Qaeda. According to one account:

As attested by the Harmony documents and other primary sources, in 1989 Bin Ladin’s initial vision for al Qa’ida’s post-Afghanistan development was to establish and arm a jihadi movement in South Yemen in order to overthrow the South’s communist regime. Bin Ladin began pouring money into the country in the hopes of amassing arms and winning allies from among the leadership of Yemen’s Islamists in the North, but this effort proved to be an unmitigated failure.¹⁹

In spite of Bin Laden’s reported failure, one group, known as the Aden-Abyan Islamic Army (AAIA), was formed by a former Bin Laden associate and directly supported by the Yemeni government. It remained active throughout the 1990s.²⁰ This group, according to the *9/11 Commission Report*, may have been involved in a plot to kill U.S. Marines temporarily transiting through Aden on their way to Somalia as part of Operation Restore Hope in December 1992, in what is considered one of the earliest Al Qaeda-endorsed attacks against U.S. personnel. The explosions at two hotels in Aden killed two tourists. Later, the AAIA was responsible for the December 1998 kidnapping of 16 foreign tourists (four of whom died in a botched rescue attempt) and possibly the 2002 attack on a French oil tanker (*Limburg*) near the southern Yemeni port of Mukalla.

The USS Cole Bombing

Al Qaeda’s attack against the USS *Cole* in 2000 coupled with the attacks of September 11, 2001, officially made Yemen a front in the U.S. confrontation with Al Qaeda. On October 12, 2000, an explosives-laden motorboat detonated alongside the U.S. Navy destroyer USS *Cole* while it was

¹⁹ Edited by Assaf Moghadam and Brian Fishman, “Self-Inflicted Wounds: Debates and Divisions within Al-Qa’ida and its Periphery,” *Harmony Project: Combating Terrorism Center at West Point*, December 16, 2010, p. 80.

²⁰ One observer has speculated that it may have been used in the fight against southern rebels. See, Gregory D. Johnsen, “The Resiliency of Yemen’s Aden-Abyan Islamic Army,” *The Jamestown Foundation: Terrorism Monitor*, July 13, 2006, Volume: 4 Issue: 14.

docked at the Yemeni port of Aden, killing 17 U.S. servicemen and wounding 39 others. More than 10 years after the attack, many details remain a mystery. In 2000, agents from the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) found some of the perpetrators. One suspect, Abd al Rahim al Nashiri, a Saudi national of Yemeni descent who served as Al Qaeda's operations chief in the Arabian Peninsula, was captured in the United Arab Emirates in November 2002 and handed over to the Central Intelligence Agency. According to the *Washington Post*, Al Nashiri had spent several months before his capture under high-level protection by the Yemeni government.²¹ Another Al Qaeda member, Walid bin Attash (also referred to as Tawfiq bin Attash), was named by the U.S. Department of Justice as an unindicted co-conspirator in the *Cole* attack. Both Al Nashiri and Attash have appeared before military tribunals in Guantanamo Bay, Cuba, where they have been held for over eight years in U.S. military custody. Nashiri has yet to be tried because he was allegedly subjected to waterboarding, rendering his statements legally problematic. In October 2010, Poland, a country that allegedly hosted a CIA "black site," granted Al Nashiri the formal status of a victim.²² Attash's trial also has been delayed.

To the frustration of U.S. officials, a third organizer of the *Cole* bombing, Jamal al Badawi, has been held in Yemeni custody despite two successful escapes (April 2003 and 2006). After his second escape (in 2006 along with 22 other Al Qaeda convicts, in what many believe was an officially sanctioned prison break), Badawi turned himself in a year later, pledged his allegiance to President Saleh, and promised to cooperate with the authorities and help locate other militants. In October 2007, soon after his return to custody, the Yemeni government reportedly released Badawi from house arrest despite vocal protestations from the Bush Administration. Yemen has refused to extradite Badawi to the United States (Article 44 of the Yemeni constitution states that a Yemeni national may not be extradited to a foreign authority), where he has been indicted in the U.S. District Court in New York on murder charges.²³ According to one former FBI official, Badawi was "the guy who recruited the [USS *Cole*] bombers.... He was the local mastermind."²⁴ According to former U.S. State Department Spokesman Sean McCormack, "This was someone who was implicated in the *Cole* bombing and someone who can't be running free."²⁵

Yemeni officials claim, however, that Badawi is now cooperating with the government in attempts to capture a new generation of more lethal jihadists. According to Rashad Muhammad al Alimi, Yemen's interior minister, "The strategy is fighting terrorism, but we need space to use our own tactics, and our friends must understand us."²⁶ In 2010, the Yemeni government released another alleged operative in the *Cole* bombing, Fahd al Quso, who had confessed to his role in the attack and had served time in a Yemeni prison. In May 2010 AQAP produced a video entitled, "America and the Great Trap," in which Al Quso said that fighting the Americans was legitimate and that they were to be fought wherever they are found.²⁷ In December 2010, the United States government designated Al Quso as a Specially Designated Global Terrorist under Executive Order 13224, which targets terrorists and those providing support to terrorists or acts of terrorism.

²¹ "Probe of USS *Cole* Bombing Unravels: Plotters Freed in Yemen; U.S. Efforts Frustrated," *Washington Post*, May 4, 2008.

²² For over two years, Polish prosecutors have been investigating the CIA's use of secret prisons on Polish soil.

²³ A Yemeni court condemned Badawi to death in 2004, although his sentence was commuted on appeal to 15 years in prison.

²⁴ "A Terrorist Walks Free," *Newsweek*, October 27, 2007.

²⁵ "U.S. Officials Visit *Cole* Bomber ; He is 'in our Custody,' Yemen Says," *Washington Times*, October 30, 2007.

²⁶ "Yemen's Deals With Jihadists Unsettle the U.S.," *New York Times*, January 28, 2008.

²⁷ "Recent AQAP Threats against the U.S.," *Reuters*, January 11, 2011.

Initial U.S.-Yemeni Counterterrorism Cooperation

Though Al Qaeda-affiliated terrorist groups operated in Yemen nearly a decade before the 2000 *Cole* bombing, the United States had a minimal presence there during most of the 1990s. After President Saleh lent his support to Iraq during the first Gulf War, the United States drastically reduced its bilateral aid to Yemen. The U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) virtually ceased all operations inside Yemen between 1996 and 2003 with the exception of small amounts of food aid (P.L. 480) and democracy assistance to support parliamentary elections. In the late 1990s, though differing views over policy toward the late Saddam Hussein's Iraq continued to divide Yemen and the United States, U.S.-Yemeni military cooperation was revived as policymakers grew more concerned with Al Qaeda.

In 1999, the Clinton Administration reached a naval refueling agreement with Yemen at Aden harbor. After the *Cole* bombing a year later, some critics charged that this refueling agreement had placed U.S. vessels at risk in order to improve U.S.-Yemeni relations.²⁸

In the immediate aftermath of the *Cole* bombing, U.S. officials complained that Yemeni authorities were not cooperating in the investigation. After the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001, the Yemeni government became more forthcoming in its cooperation with the U.S. campaign to suppress Al Qaeda. Many analysts believe that President Saleh embraced the slogan of the “war on terror” in order to draw the United States closer to Yemen and extract as much intelligence and military support as possible. President Saleh requested U.S. military training and assistance in creating a coast guard²⁹ to help patrol the strategic Bab al Mandab strait where the Red Sea meets the Gulf of Aden.³⁰ A program was launched soon thereafter. The United States provided technical assistance, equipment, and training to the Anti-Terrorism Unit [ATU] of the Yemeni Central Security forces and other Yemeni Interior Ministry departments.

Despite its enthusiastic embrace of U.S. counterterrorism support, Yemeni authorities were sensitive to possible public backlash against deeper U.S.-Yemeni military cooperation. After 9/11, many Yemenis feared that the United States would target their country next. Nevertheless, President Saleh reportedly allowed small groups of U.S. Special Forces troops and CIA agents to assist in identifying and rooting out Al Qaeda cadres hiding in Yemen, despite sympathy for Al Qaeda among many Yemenis. According to press articles quoting U.S. and Yemeni officials, the Yemeni government allowed U.S. personnel to launch a missile strike from an unmanned aircraft against an automobile in eastern Yemen in November 2002, killing six alleged terrorists, including Qaid Salim Sinan al Harithi, the leader of Al Qaeda in Yemen and a key planner of the

²⁸ In testimony before the Senate Armed Services Committee, former CENTCOM commander and retired Marine Corps General Anthony Zinni said that “The refueling of that ship in Aden was my decision.... I pass that buck on to nobody.... I don't want anyone to think we ever in any instance, anywhere, in any evolution or event that took place in CENTCOM ever took a risk for the purpose of a better relationship with a country and put soldier, sailor, airman, marine at risk for that reason. Absolutely not.... At no time was this a gratuitous offer to be made just to improve relations with the Yemenis.” See, “Retired Commander takes Responsibility for Decision to Refuel Ships in Aden,” *Agence France Presse*, October 19, 2000.

²⁹ “Response to Terror: U.S. to Train Yemeni Soldiers in Hunt for Al Qaeda Suspects,” *Los Angeles Times*, February 12, 2002.

³⁰ According to the U.S. Energy Information Administration (EIA), the Bab al Mandab is one of the most strategic shipping lanes in the world, with an estimated 3 million barrels per day of oil flow.

attack on the USS *Cole*.³¹ Yemen arrested al Harithi's replacement, Muhammad Hamdi al Ahdal, a year later.

Al Qaeda's Resurgence

As President Saleh eased pressure on Al Qaeda, other more pressing conflicts inside Yemen arose to distract the attention of security forces there. The Al Houthi conflict began in 2004, requiring deployments to the north of significant military resources and manpower. At the same time, southern Yemenis grew more vocal with some calls for outright secession, and the government in response cracked down against such dissent, which also required significant new deployments of internal security forces. Meanwhile, at the regional level, U.S. involvement in Iraq created a new front for jihadists, some of whom would return to Yemen to replenish Al Qaeda's ranks there. In Saudi Arabia, security forces were waging an all-out campaign to thwart Al Qaeda-inspired militants, and some veterans of this fighting would eventually leave the kingdom for Yemen.

Over time, though U.S.-Yemeni cooperation continued, President Saleh eased pressure on Al Qaeda and its sympathizers inside the country as part of his delicate balancing of competing domestic and international interests. As mentioned earlier, 23 of Yemen's most wanted terrorists escaped a Public Security Organization (PSO) prison in 2006, in what many analysts believe was an inside job from within a Yemeni intelligence organization notorious for employing former "Arab Afghan" volunteers and other jihadists. In the spring of 2008, FBI Director Robert Mueller traveled to Yemen in order to discuss counterterrorism issues with President Saleh, including an update on the status of Jamal al Badawi and other known Al Qaeda operatives. A *Newsweek* report cited two unidentified sources who had been briefed on Mueller's trip that, "The meeting between Mueller and Yemeni President Ali Abdullah Saleh did not go well." Saleh reportedly gave no clear answers about the suspect, Jamal al Badawi, leaving Mueller "angry and very frustrated," said one source, who added that he's "rarely seen the normally taciturn FBI director so upset."³²

Overall, analysts observed that a new generation of Yemeni militants was emerging with support from nationals of other countries. Many of these Islamist militants either fought coalition forces in Iraq or were radicalized in the Yemeni prison system. Moreover, unlike their predecessors, this new generation of Al Qaeda-inspired extremists was more inclined to target the Yemeni government itself, in addition to foreign and Western interests in Yemen. According to one analyst:

The older generation, while passionate about global jihad, was more concerned with local matters, and more willing to play by the time-honored Yemeni rules of bargaining and negotiating in order to keep Saleh from destroying their safe haven. Not so with the new generation—they willingly criticize Saleh harshly, and seem immune to the lure of the negotiation room.³³

³¹ Before Al Harithi was killed by a U.S. unmanned aircraft, Yemeni forces had failed in their attempt to capture him. Soldiers who were sent to detain him were themselves captured by local tribesmen protecting Al Harithi.

³² "A Tense Impasse In Yemen," *Newsweek*, May 5, 2008.

³³ Brian O' Neill, "New Generation of al-Qaeda on Trial in Yemen," *Terrorism Focus*, Volume 4, Issue 39, published by the Jamestown Foundation, November 27, 2007.

Yemeni militants formed an affiliate of Al Qaeda, called, “The Al Qaeda Organization in the Southern Arabian Peninsula,” though most observers simply referred to it as Al Qaeda in Yemen. At first, the group issued several statements demanding that President Saleh, among other things, release militants from prison, end his cooperation with the United States, renounce democracy and fully implement Islamic law, and permit Yemeni militants to travel to Iraq to carry out *jihād*. The group’s leaders were part of the infamous 2006 jailbreak, in which 23 convicted terrorists escaped from a prison in the capital of Sana’a.

Al Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula, v. 2.0

In January 2009, Al Qaeda-affiliated militants based in Yemen announced that Saudi militants had pledged allegiance to their leader and that the group would now operate under the banner of Al Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP).³⁴ A previous Saudi Arabia-based version of AQAP was largely dismantled and destroyed by Saudi security forces after a long and costly counterterrorism campaign from 2003 through 2007. Some Saudi militants fled to Yemen to avoid death or capture, helping to lay the groundwork for a reemergence of the organization there in recent years alongside Al Qaeda figures who escaped from Yemeni custody and former Saudi detainees from Guantanamo Bay, Cuba, and the Saudi terrorism rehabilitation program.

AQAP operates both within the Arabian Peninsula and internationally. Some analysts also suggest that, with the encouragement of Al Qaeda leaders in Afghanistan and Pakistan, the group is expanding its ties with Al Shabaab in Somalia, though the extent of those ties is unknown. AQAP also may be working with other AQ affiliates. The *Washington Post* reported that France, with help from Saudi intelligence, recently broke up a joint AQAP-AQIM terrorist cell planning to carry out attacks inside France.³⁵

AQAP’s Current Goals

Overall, AQAP seeks to:

- **Attack the U.S. homeland.** Most counterterrorism analysts believe that of all of Al Qaeda’s regional affiliates, AQAP is the most active organization seeking to carry out a successful attack inside the United States.³⁶ As it has demonstrated both through Anwar al Awlaki’s indoctrination of American citizens³⁷ and the

³⁴ See OSC Feature FEA20090124809516, “Video Shows Saudi, Yemeni Al-Qa’ida Leaders Announcing Merger,” January 24, 2009; and, OSC Report GMP20090128666004, “Al-Qa’ida Amir in Arabian Peninsula Urges Targeting ‘Crusader’ Interests,” *Al-Jazirah.net* (Doha) January 26, 2009.

³⁵ “Al-Qaeda’s Yemen Affiliate Widens Search for Recruits and Targets,” *Washington Post*, November 30, 2010.

³⁶ It is worth noting that until the failed bomb attack against Northwest Airlines Flight 253 on Christmas Day 2009, most non-governmental observers believed that AQAP’s influence and ability to threaten U.S. and Western interests from Yemen remained limited. In assessing the AQAP threat to the American homeland, a May 2010 Senate Intelligence Committee report concluded that U.S. intelligence agencies previously saw AQAP (before the December 25, 2009, attempted airline bombing) as a threat to American targets in Yemen, not to the United States itself. See, U.S. Congress, Senate Select Committee on Intelligence, *Attempted Terrorist Attack On Northwest Airlines Flight 253*, 111th Cong., 2nd sess., May 24, 2010, 111-199 (Washington: GPO, 2010).

³⁷ Thirty-nine-year-old Yemeni American preacher Anwar al Awlaki has been either directly or indirectly linked to radicalizing Major Nidal M. Hasan (allegedly committed the November 2009 mass shooting at Fort Hood Army Base in Texas), Umar Farouk Abdulmutallab (the Nigerian suspect accused of trying to ignite explosive chemicals to destroy Northwest/Delta Airlines Flight 253 from Amsterdam to Detroit on Christmas Day 2009), and Faisal Shahzad (alleged Times Square failed car bomb), who allegedly told U.S. investigators that Awlaki’s online lectures urging jihad helped (continued...)

sophisticated bomb-making of Ibrahim Hassan al Asiri³⁸ and others, AQAP is trying to radicalize U.S. citizens and carry out an attention-grabbing terrorist bombing on U.S. soil. In the third edition of its online *Inspire* magazine released in November 2010, AQAP claims that the October 2010 air cargo bomb plot was part of a long-term strategy to launch many small-scale attacks against the United States. The group states that “This strategy of attacking the enemy with smaller but more frequent operations is what some may refer to as the strategy of a thousand cuts. The aim is to bleed the enemy to death.... It is such a good bargain for us to spread fear amongst the enemy and keep him on his toes in exchange of a few months of work and a few thousand bucks.... In such an environment of security phobia that is sweeping America it is more feasible to stage smaller attacks that involve less players and less time to launch and thus we may circumvent the security barriers American worked so hard to erect.”³⁹

- **Attack U.S. and Western Interests in Yemen.** Even before the Saudi-Yemeni merger, militants in Yemen targeted Western embassies in Sana’a, foreign oil companies and their facilities, and tourists. Two attacks on the U.S. Embassy in Sana’a in 2008 killed 17 people, including one U.S. citizen, and injured dozens of Yemenis. On April 26, 2010, AQAP carried out an unsuccessful assassination attempt against British Ambassador to Yemen Timothy Torlot, an operation that many experts believe was designed to demonstrate the group’s resilience in the face of a government crackdown following the Christmas Day attempted bombing. In October 2010, AQAP gunmen attacked a vehicle carrying five British embassy workers in Sana’a. The attack injured one British worker and two Yemeni bystanders. Britain's second-ranking diplomat in Yemen, Fionna Gibb, was in the car, but escaped uninjured. In December 2010, a U.S. Embassy vehicle was attacked by a man trying to plant explosives next to the car as it was stopped outside a pizza restaurant in the Hadda district of Sana’a. The attacker, a Jordanian citizen who was found carrying other weapons and false identity papers, was caught by Yemeni police before he could install and detonate the explosives.
- **Destabilize the Yemeni Government.** Unlike previous generations of Islamist fighters in Yemen who fought elsewhere, such as in Afghanistan, many of AQAP’s footsoldiers are more inclined to target the Yemeni government itself. Throughout much of 2010, AQAP’s activities inside Yemen have resembled the

(...continued)

inspire him to act. According to several reports, the Obama Administration has added Awlaki, an American citizen, to the CIA’s list of suspected terrorists who may be captured or killed. To date, Yemen has refused to extradite Awlaki (Article 44 of the Yemeni constitution states that a Yemeni national may not be extradited to a foreign authority), and his tribe has vowed to protect him. Another Muslim American who claims to have been in contact with Awlaki, 26-year-old New Jersey resident Sharif Mobley, was arrested by Yemeni authorities in March 2010. After his arrest, Mobley shot two security guards in a hospital while attempting to escape. In May 2010, the FBI arrested a Texas man named Barry Walter Bujol Jr. who had exchanged emails with Awlaki and was accused of attempting to obtain and deliver global positioning system devices, telephone calling cards, and a military compass for AQAP. He was arrested after boarding a ship bound for the Middle East with the equipment.

³⁸ Twenty-nine-year-old Saudi citizen Ibrahim Hassan al Asiri is believed to have created the explosive devices used in last year’s Christmas Day attempted bombing of Northwest Airlines Flight 253, in a 2009 attack against Saudi Arabia’s intelligence chief Mohammed bin Nayef, and the October 2010 air cargo packages destined for Jewish sites in Chicago.

³⁹ “FACTBOX: Qaeda Unveils “Strategy of a Thousands Cuts,”” *Reuters*, November 21, 2010.

kind of insurgent warfare witnessed most recently in Afghanistan, Pakistan, and Iraq. It appears that one of the group's goals is to use the popular hatred of the central government, particularly in the former areas of Southern Yemen, to fuel a popular insurgency that is capable of holding territory. To date, this strategy has succeeded in sowing a certain degree of chaos and violence in the provinces of Abyan and Shabwah, though many observers remain skeptical of AQAP's ability to evolve into a mass movement such as the Taliban.

- **Assassinate Members of the Saudi Royal Family.** Several of AQAP's top leaders are Saudi veteran combatants from conflicts involving Muslims in other regions or graduates of terrorist training camps based in Afghanistan who, upon returning home nearly a decade ago, turned inward against the Saudi royal family. Since their expulsion from the kingdom, they have used their positions within AQAP to strike back against the Saudi royal family, as was vividly illustrated by a failed assassination attempt in August 2009 against Assistant Interior Minister Prince Mohammed bin Nayef bin Abdelaziz Al Saud, the director of the kingdom's counterterrorism campaign. According to one report, two of Saudi Arabia's most powerful intelligence agencies, the Saudi General Intelligence Presidency (GIP), headed since October 2005 by Prince Muqrin bin Abdulaziz, and the General Security Services (GSS), which is attached to the Saudi Interior Ministry, have been working with Yemen's military and special forces units. In the lead up to the October 2010 failed air cargo bombing, Bin Nayef reportedly provided John Brennan, the Deputy National Security Advisor for Homeland Security and Counterterrorism, and Assistant to the President with critical information on the plot reportedly derived from a Saudi informant or an AQAP member who had recently turned himself in to Saudi authorities.⁴⁰

Tribal Support for AQAP?

For many U.S. observers, of greatest concern is the ability of AQAP to transform itself from what is believed to be a group of between 100 to 400 hard-core militants into a mass movement embedded into Yemen's age-old tribal structure. Some policymakers fear that if AQAP were to form permanent alliances with rural tribes, then U.S. objectives in Yemen may have to shift from providing limited support for the Yemeni government's counterterrorism efforts to helping President Saleh combat a much broader and more dangerous nation-wide insurgency. Determining the triangular relationship between the government, AQAP, and tribes may be key to assessing the relative strength of AQAP inside Yemeni society over the long term.

One school of thought rejects the idea that Yemen is becoming more like Pakistan, where the central government faces several revolts from Pakistani Taliban groups which have drawn their inspiration for fighting from Al Qaeda central in Afghanistan, but who are not subordinate to the commands of Osama Bin Laden and other top Al Qaeda leaders. According to Sarah Phillips, an expert on Yemen from the Centre for International Security Studies at Sydney University:

⁴⁰In December 2010, Saudi television aired the confession of Jabir Jubran al Fayfi, a senior AQAP commander who turned himself in to Saudi intelligence in October 2010. Al Fayfi reportedly provided details on the October 2010 parcel bomb attacks and AQAP plans to attack targets in France using a cell of North Africans. See, "The Saudi Spy Who Saved Chicago," *The National Interest*, January 3, 2011.

The more they [AQAP] require control of territory, the more likely they are to be in competition with the tribes; this is why al-Qaeda groups are unlikely to pose a systemic challenge to the states in which they exist. That changes, however, if the cells are prepared to accept client status of the tribe, as they have partially done in Pakistan. Even if al-Qaeda attempts to discursively and operationally align itself with the Yemeni tribes against the state, one of the group's broader objectives—establishing political control—consigns tribes to a subordinate status. This exclusion would likely put AQAP in confrontation with the tribes.⁴¹

Furthermore, some analysts reject outright the hypothesis that AQAP will develop mass tribal support in Yemen that will enable it to control territory and strike beyond the country's borders. Although many AQAP members are Yemenis, a significant portion are Saudi citizens and foreign fighters,⁴² who may be treated as temporary guests by a host tribe, but who would have to marry into the tribe to be considered full-fledged members. Although such marriages do occur, there is no public evidence that they are dramatically increasing, particularly between foreign nationals and Yemeni women.⁴³ Furthermore, there is no indication that large numbers of Yemeni tribesmen are open to Al Qaeda's ideological appeal. According to former U.S. Ambassador to Yemen Edmund Hull:

In 2002, Abu Ali al Harithi, then Al Qaeda's leader in Yemen, was killed by an American drone in a strike that was coordinated with the Yemeni government. By tribal custom, any perceived illegitimate killing would have been grounds for a claim by the tribe against the government. No such claim was made. In fact, when receiving the body for burial, one of his kinsmen noted that "he had chosen his path, and it had led to his death." This was not an anomaly. In my experience, there is no deep-seeded affinity between Yemeni tribes and the Al Qaeda movement. Tribes tend to be opportunistic, not ideological, so the risk is that Al Qaeda will successfully exploit opportunities created by government neglect. There are also family affinities—cousins, linked to uncles, linked to brothers. These do matter. But what matters most is the 'mujahedeen fraternity'—Yemenis with jihadist experience in Afghanistan, Iraq, Saudi Arabia or elsewhere. Finally, what would matter—and significantly—would be innocent casualties resulting from counterterrorism operations, which could well set off a tribal response.⁴⁴

However, others assert that while a permanent AQAP-tribal alliance is doubtful, there are many factors that could serve as the foundation for closer AQAP-tribal ties in the short to medium terms. Although central governing power in Yemen has always remained weak, many observers in

⁴¹ Sarah Phillips, *What Comes Next in Yemen? Al Qaeda, the Tribes, and State-Building*, Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, March 2010.

⁴² According to one analyst, based on a rudimentary analysis of known members of the organization, Yemenis make up 56% of the AQAP's total membership, Saudis 37%, and foreigners 7%. See, Murad Batal al Shishani, *Terrorism Monitor*, Jamestown Foundation, vol. 8, issue 9, March 5, 2010. Yemen's national security agency director, Gen. Mohammed al Anisi, says that AQAP is approximately 90% Yemeni, with only 10% foreign fighters rounding out the ranks. See, op.cit., *Wall Street Journal*, January 22, 2010.

⁴³ Experts note that one factor that led Sunni tribes in Iraq to break away from Al Qaeda in Iraq (AQI) and cooperate with U.S. forces was AQI's attempts to replace tribal customs with its own extreme version of Islamic law (*Sharia*) and arrange forced marriages between its members and local Iraqi women. According to one expert, "Al Qaeda in Iraq pushed too hard against the Sunni tribes that they relied on for support when they insisted on extracting oaths from the sheikhs to reject tribal legal traditions – a blatant infringement of tribal autonomy. Al Qaeda leaders also alienated themselves by attempting to impose themselves in marriage to prominent tribal families, despite cultural norms against women marrying beyond the clan." See, Sarah Phillips, "Yemen's Postcards from the Edge: al Qaeda, Tribes, and Nervous Neighbours," Centre for International Security Studies, Sydney University.

⁴⁴ "Al Qaeda's Shadowland," *New York Times*, January 12, 2010.

recent years have suggested that President Saleh's ability to secure tribal support in outlying provinces (such as Al Jawf, Marib, Abyan, Shabwa, and Hadramawt) has diminished considerably. This is true particularly in areas where oil is extracted, as local tribes often claim that they rarely receive revenues generated from oil produced on their lands. In the south, economic and political grievances are both evident, making the region somewhat more receptive to an AQAP presence. Some suggest that AQAP takes shelter in the largely Sunni tribal areas of the southern provinces, forcing it to sympathize with southern secessionists. According to AQAP analyst Barak Barfi, "Whereas the Taliban enforced an uncompromising form of Islam, AQAP has tolerated the un-Islamic practices of the clans that shelter it. Whereas al Zarqawi turned on his tribal hosts, AQAP has merely engaged in verbal spats with Yemeni tribes."⁴⁵ However, AQAP may be at odds with Al Houthi Zaydi tribes in the north. In November 2010, AQAP carried out a suicide bomb attack against a religious procession of Shiite rebels observing the festival of Al Ghadeer, a holiday which commemorates the appointment of Ali ibn Abi Talib by the prophet Muhammad as his immediate successor. The bombing killed 23 people.

To a certain extent, a connection between some of Yemen's tribes and AQAP already exists. Yemeni AQAP members tend to operate in their home provinces where they receive a certain level of protection from their host tribe. Protection is granted out of custom and not necessarily due to ideological affinity. Furthermore, this protection is not guaranteed and can become problematic if the tribe's security and well being are put at risk by government reprisals or attacks against AQAP suspects harbored locally, particularly if those suspects are foreign fighters.

Overall, it appears that at present, tribal leaders are using AQAP as a temporary lever to pressure the government for benefits, settle scores with rival, neighboring tribes, or to strike back against the government to avenge some perceived historical injustice. According to one observer, "All view AQAP as a means to pressure the regime, like kidnapping and blocking roads. They hope the damage the government suffers will persuade it to adopt policies more amenable to the tribe. The tribes also exploit the group to keep the regime weak. By putting the government on the defensive, al Qaeda attacks help the tribes preserve their coveted autonomy in regional affairs."⁴⁶

Profiles of Current AQAP Leaders and Other Radical Yemeni Islamists

Nasir al Wuhayshi. According to a number of sources, the leader of AQAP is a former secretary of Osama bin Laden's named Nasir al Wuhayshi (alt. sp. Wahayshi). Like other well-known operatives, Al Wuhayshi was in the 23-person contingent who escaped from a Yemeni prison in 2006. Al Wuhayshi's personal connection to Bin Laden has reportedly enhanced his legitimacy among his followers. After the fall of the Taliban in Afghanistan in 2001, he escaped through Iran, but was arrested there and held for two years until deported to Yemen in 2003. He led Al Qaeda in Yemen until it assumed the mantle of its Saudi counterpart and predecessor organization in January 2009 when he became the overall leader of AQAP, though he is not considered as charismatic as his Saudi counterparts.

Sa'id al Shihri. Al Shihri (alt. sp. Shahri), who is the deputy commander of AQAP, is a Saudi national and former Guantanamo detainee (#372). After his release in 2007, he participated in Saudi Arabia's deradicalization rehabilitation program. After leaving the kingdom and forming AQAP in Yemen, it was believed that his presence in Yemen would boost Al Qaeda's financing

⁴⁵ Barak Barfi, "AQAP's Soft Power Strategy," *CTC Sentinel*, vol. 3, no. 11-12 (November 2010).

⁴⁶ Barak Barfi, *Yemen on the Brink? The Resurgence of Al Qaeda in Yemen*, New America Foundation, January 2010.

and operational capabilities. Al Shihri's family also has been active in AQAP. His wife reportedly was married to an AQAP militant killed by Saudi security forces in 2005. As mentioned earlier, his brother-in-law died in a shootout with Saudi police in Jizan in October 2009. In June 2010, he called for abductions of Saudi ministers and royals.

Qasim al Rimi. Qasim al Rimi is AQAP's senior military commander and spokesman. Al Rimi is a Yemeni national who is known for his recruitment of new operatives. In AQAP video and audio tapes, he has praised attacks against the United States and threatened more. On May 11, 2010, Secretary of State Clinton designated Rimi a terrorist under E.O. 13224.

Ibrahim Suleiman al Rubaysh. Ibrahim Suleiman al Rubaysh (alt. sp. Rubaish) is a Saudi citizen who is described as AQAP's theological guide. Rubaysh is a former detainee at Guantanamo Naval Station, Cuba. He was incarcerated there until December 13, 2006, when he was transferred to Saudi Arabia and placed in the Saudi rehabilitation program for jihadists. At some point afterward, he fled to Yemen.

Uthman Ahmad al Ghamidi. Uthman Ahmad al Ghamidi (alt. sp. Othman Ahmed al Ghamdi) is one of the new Saudi leaders of AQAP. He also is a former detainee at Guantanamo who participated in Saudi Arabia's rehabilitation program. He was a soldier in the Saudi military before he went to Afghanistan to train with Al Qaeda and fight the Northern Alliance.

Anwar al Awlaki. Yemeni American Awlaki (alt. sp. Aulaji) is infamous for his role in radicalizing Major Nidal M. Hasan in the months prior to the mass shooting at Fort Hood Army Base in Texas. After the failed Christmas Day airline bombing, information suggested that Awlaki also may have played a role in radicalizing Umar Farouk Abdulmutallab. Awlaki was born in New Mexico in 1971, and he hails from a prominent tribal family in the southern governorate of Shabwa. Awlaki lived in Britain and in the United States, where he worked as an imam and lecturer at several mosques, including in Falls Church, VA. He traveled to Yemen in 2004, where he became a lecturer at Al Iman University. He was arrested by Yemeni authorities in 2006 and interrogated by the FBI in September 2007 for his possible contacts with some of the 9/11 hijackers. According to various reports, he began openly supporting the use of violence against the United States after his release from prison. On July 16, 2010, the U.S. Treasury Department designated Awlaki, pursuant to Executive Order 13224, for supporting acts of terrorism and for acting for or on behalf of AQAP.

Shaykh Abd al Majid al Zindani. One source of strain in U.S.-Yemeni relations is the status of Shaykh Abd al Majid al Zindani, an alleged Al Qaeda financier and recruiter whom the U.S. Treasury Department designated in February 2004 as a U.S. Specially Designated Global Terrorist. In the 1960s and 1970s, Al Zindani led the local Muslim Brotherhood affiliate in Yemen. In the 1980s, he was based primarily in Peshawar, Pakistan, and in Afghanistan, where he served as a spiritual leader to Osama bin Laden and an organizer of the Afghan-Arab "mujahedeen" who fought the Soviets. When Yemen reunited, he returned and became a leading figure in the main opposition Islah Party. Al Zindani also is the leader of Al Iman University located in the capital of Sana'a. U.S. officials have accused Al Zindani of using the university as a recruiting ground for Al Qaeda, as some student groups openly advocate for a violent jihad against the West. According to one report, the university has "a small contingent of students that veer away from the quietist trend of their colleagues. They tend to be foreign students that are drawn to Al Iman by Al Zindani's radical reputation." Yemen has refused to turn Al Zindani over to U.S. authorities, as many observers believe that President Saleh is protecting him for political purposes.

Current U.S. Counterterrorism Policy

For two years under the Obama Administration, U.S. counterterrorism strategy has been pragmatic; the United States partners with President Saleh and his security forces because there are no credible alternatives at the moment. In order to arrest AQAP members and strike AQAP targets inside Yemen's vast remote governorates, the United States requires access to Yemeni security agencies and officials and their cooperation in taking the lead on military operations in order to minimize any U.S. military footprint. The Obama Administration has repeatedly stressed that it does not want to fight a war in Yemen. In November 2010, Secretary of Defense Robert Gates said that "We don't need another war.... Our biggest tools particularly with respect to Yemen are the partnership capacity of the Yemenis themselves, and enabling them to go after these guys."⁴⁷ To secure Yemeni cooperation, President Saleh's government has shown some willingness to share intelligence and even attack AQAP targets with reported U.S. assistance, provided that the United States contributes some equipment, training, and financial assistance to Yemen's military and economy respectively.⁴⁸

Most experts believe that this cooperation comes with the full knowledge that Saleh's government is corrupt, its commitment to combating extremism is mercurial, and its ability to dispense patronage to key allies is reduced due to dwindling oil revenues. Thus, in order to make the best of a daunting policy challenge, the Administration has focused on short term security cooperation in conjunction with a more long-term approach to promoting development and good governance not just bilaterally but in partnership with the international community. Nevertheless, despite rhetoric about the U.S. commitment to tackling Yemen's bigger problems (i.e., water shortages, illiteracy, corruption), the bulk of U.S. attention, both diplomatically and financially, is directed toward counterterrorism and stopping AQAP from attacking the U.S. homeland.

The cooperation between the United States and Yemen has had mixed results. To date, some mid-level AQAP operatives have been killed or captured in the last two years. Although it is nearly impossible to qualitatively assess whether the United States and Yemen have significantly weakened AQAP, many analysts believe that the now two-year campaign has, at the minimum, put the organization on the defensive. Some militants have surrendered to provincial authorities while AQAP itself has released several videos eulogizing its martyrs and swearing revenge.

Nevertheless, almost all of AQAP's key leaders (mentioned above) are alive and most likely still able to plan and conduct terrorist attacks, albeit at greater risk due to heightened U.S.-Yemeni security cooperation. According to Al Qaeda expert Thomas Hegghammer:

Awlaki is most likely part of a small AQAP cell -- the Foreign Operations Unit --which specializes in international operations and keeps a certain distance to the rest of the organization. We are probably dealing with a classic case of functional separation of tasks: While most AQAP fighters are busy fighting Yemeni security forces and attacking Western targets in Yemen, the Foreign Operations Unit lies low and plans international operations slowly and carefully. The unit likely counts no more than 10 people and hides in a different physical location from that of the top AQAP leadership.... The Foreign Operations Unit is

⁴⁷ "US Will Help Yemen But No Plans For 'Another War': Gates," *Agence France Presse*, November 16, 2010.

⁴⁸ According to one article, after the attacks of September 11, 2001, former CIA Director George Tenet "won Saleh's approval to fly Predator drones armed with Hellfire missiles over the country." See, "U.S. Playing a Key Role in Yemen Attacks; Providing Data, Weapons Six top Leaders of al-Qaeda Affiliate Killed," *Washington Post*, January 27, 2010.

most likely staffed by people who know Western societies well, such as Awlaki and Samir Khan, as well as by a couple of expert bomb makers such as Ibrahim al-Asiri. Together they represent some of AQAP's most precious human resources. More to the point, they are not easily replaceable. The vast majority of AQAP members -- including its top leaders and ideologues -- have never spent time in the West and would not be very good at planning international operations. Global jihad requires worldly men. The 9/11 attack, for example, was coordinated by the U.S.-educated Khalid Sheikh Mohammed and led by the Hamburg cell. Al Qaeda in Yemen is short on this type of human capital, which is why virtually no Yemenis have thus far taken part in Islamist terrorist attacks outside the Muslim world. If the Foreign Operations Unit was somehow incapacitated, AQAP would arguably not have the capability, at least in the short term, to mount major attacks on the U.S. homeland.⁴⁹

In order to strike at more “high value” AQAP targets, some reports suggest that the CIA may increase its use of drones inside Yemen or place U.S. military units overseen by Joint Special Operations Command (JSOC) under its control.⁵⁰ Anonymous U.S. officials have said that Predator drones (possibly launched from either Djibouti, Qatar, or the Seychelles Islands) have been patrolling the skies over Yemen in search of AQAP leaders, but many of these leaders have gone into hiding. One report suggests that a major buildup of U.S. assets is occurring in Yemen with the arrival of additional CIA teams and up to 100 Special Operations force trainers, and the deployment of sophisticated surveillance and electronic eavesdropping systems operated by spy services including the National Security Agency.⁵¹ The U.S. military historically has maintained only a limited presence in Yemen, and as such, U.S. intelligence agencies may have limited knowledge of the local terrain and may need time before they are able to effectively employ all assets to their maximum capacity. In December 2010, Yemeni security officials said that they would establish provincial anti-terrorism units. The announcement came a day after John Brennan, Assistant to the President for Homeland Security and Counterterrorism, reportedly called President Saleh to stress the need for more Yemeni counterterrorism cooperation against AQAP.

As the United States seeks to weaken the AQAP organization, policymakers have been careful not to alienate local civilian populations. However, inevitably, counterterrorism operations have resulted in some civilian casualties. On December 17, 2009, Yemeni security forces with possible U.S. assistance carried out several raids and air strikes in Abyan governorate against AQAP terrorists and training camps, and though an estimated 14 AQAP members were killed in those air strikes, an estimated 35-42 civilians (mostly women and children) also were killed, many of whom were the relatives of AQAP members staying at the training camps. The United States and Yemeni governments again suffered “blowback” from the mistaken May 24 killing of Jabir Ali al Shabwani, a deputy governor from Marib governorate who allegedly had been killed along with four bodyguards in an air strike. Shabwani reportedly was serving as an intermediary between the government and AQAP and may have been en route to meet with AQAP operatives over their possible surrender.⁵² For several days following the attack, Shabwani's larger tribe, the Ubaydah/Abidah, attacked local oil pipelines, set up roadblocks, attacked government buildings, and clashed with the Yemeni army.

⁴⁹ “The Case for Chasing Al Awlaki,” *Foreign Policy*, November 24, 2010.

⁵⁰ “Yemen Covert Role Pushed,” *Wall Street Journal*, November 1, 2010.

⁵¹ “U.S. deploying drones in Yemen to hunt for Al-Qaeda, has yet to fire missiles,” *Washington Post*, November 7, 2010.

⁵² “Yemen Tribe in new Pipeline Blast over Airstrike,” *Reuters*, May 27, 2010.

For the medium term, the Administration has significantly increased U.S. economic and military aid, although Yemen's socioeconomic challenges far exceed current U.S. and international development efforts. In FY2010, the United States is providing an estimated \$290 million in total aid, and that figure is expected to increase in FY2011. The Defense Department also has proposed increasing its Section 1206 security assistance to Yemen to \$1.2 billion over a five- or six-year period.⁵³ In the past, the Yemeni government has cautioned the United States against overreacting to the terrorist threat there, though in recent months Yemeni forces have launched several large-scale campaigns against suspected AQAP strongholds in the Abyan and Shabwah governorates.

Whether U.S.-Yemeni security cooperation can be sustained over the long term is the key question for U.S. lawmakers and policymakers. For the time being, U.S. policymakers are counseling patience. According to John Brennan:

Achieving our shared goal of disrupting and dismantling the al-Qaida network in Yemen will require patience. We will need to draw on not just our cooperation with Yemen and other partner nations against al-Qaida but also refine and develop intelligence relationships, security-screening processes and Yemeni counterterrorism forces to address effectively the threat posed by al-Qaida.

Inevitably, at some point, disagreements arise over Yemen's tendency to release alleged terrorists from prison in order to placate tribal leaders and domestic Islamist politicians who oppose U.S. "interference" in Yemen and U.S. policy in the region in general. One report suggests that in the fall of 2009, U.S. officials met with President Saleh and showed him "irrefutable evidence that Al Qaeda was aiming at him and his relatives," and "that seems to have abruptly changed Saleh's attitude."⁵⁴ At times, the U.S. government itself bears responsibility for limiting its bilateral cooperation with Yemen. In the past, high-level U.S. policymakers have shifted focus to what have appeared to be more pressing counterterrorism fronts in the Middle East. Yemeni leaders have grown adept at sensing U.S. interest and have adjusted their level of cooperation accordingly. According to Abdel Karim al Iryani, a former prime minister, "The trust between the U.S. and Yemen comes and goes.... Everyone has his own calculations on what they want from this relationship."⁵⁵

U.S. Relations and Foreign Aid

Historically, close U.S.-Yemeni relations have been hindered by a lack of strong military-to-military ties and commercial relations, general Yemeni distrust of U.S. policy in the Middle East, and U.S. distrust of Yemen's commitment to fighting terrorism. Since Yemen's unification, the United States government has been primarily concerned with combating Al Qaeda-affiliated terrorist groups inside Yemen. Al Qaeda's attack against the USS *Cole* in 2000⁵⁶ coupled with the

⁵³ "More U.S. Funds Sought for Yemen's Forces," *Wall Street Journal*, September 3, 2010.

⁵⁴ "Is Yemen the Next Afghanistan?," *New York Times*, July 6, 2010.

⁵⁵ "Yemen Walks Fine Line in Aiding U.S.," *Washington Post*, January 5, 2010.

⁵⁶ In 1999, the Clinton Administration reached a naval refueling agreement with Yemen at Aden harbor. After the *Cole* bombing a year later, some critics charged that this refueling agreement had placed U.S. vessels at risk in order to improve U.S.-Yemeni relations. In testimony before the Senate Armed Services Committee, former CENTCOM commander and retired Marine Corps General Anthony Zinni said that "The refueling of that ship in Aden was my decision.... I pass that buck on to nobody.... I don't want anyone to think we ever in any instance, anywhere, in any evolution or event that took place in CENTCOM ever took a risk for the purpose of a better relationship with a country (continued...)"

attacks of September 11, 2001, a year later officially made Yemen a front in the so-called war on terror. Though Al Qaeda-affiliated terrorist groups operated in Yemen nearly a decade before the 2000 *Cole* bombing, the United States had a minimal presence there during most of the 1990s. After President Saleh lent his support to Iraq during the first Gulf War, the United States drastically reduced its bilateral aid to Yemen. USAID virtually ceased all operations inside Yemen between 1996 and 2003 with the exception of small amounts of food aid (P.L. 480) and democracy assistance to support parliamentary elections.⁵⁷ In the late 1990s, though differing views over policy toward the late Saddam Hussein's Iraq continued to divide Yemen and the United States, U.S.-Yemeni military cooperation was revived as policymakers grew more concerned with Al Qaeda.⁵⁸

During the early years of the George W. Bush Administration, relations improved under the rubric of the war on terror, though Yemen's lax policy toward wanted terrorists and U.S. concerns about corruption and governance stalled additional U.S. support. Yemen harbored then and continues to harbor now a number of Al Qaeda operatives and has refused to extradite several known militants on the FBI's list of most wanted terrorists. In 2007, after reports surfaced that one of the USS *Cole* bombers had been released from prison, the Millennium Challenge Corporation canceled a ceremony to inaugurate a \$20.6 million threshold grant, which was canceled a few years later.

In 2009, the Obama Administration initiated a major review of U.S. policy toward Yemen. That review, coupled with the attempted airline bombing over Detroit on Christmas Day 2009, led to a new U.S. strategy toward Yemen referred to as the National Security Council's Yemen Strategic Plan. This strategy is essentially three-fold, focusing on combating AQAP in the short term, increasing development assistance to meet long-term challenges, and marshalling international support in order to maximize global efforts to stabilize Yemen.

However, the United States remains concerned over Yemen's deteriorating human rights record, particularly as President Saleh's government combats terrorism and domestic insurgencies. There is concern that should violations continue, Yemen's reliability as a U.S. partner could come into question. According to the U.S. State Department's 2009 report on human rights in Yemen:

Serious human rights problems increased significantly during the year. Severe limitations on citizens' ability to change their government included corruption, fraudulent voter registration, administrative weakness, and close political-military relationships at high levels. The ruling and opposition parties denied opportunities for change when they agreed to postpone for two years April's parliamentary elections after the two sides failed to reach an agreement on electoral reform. There were reports of arbitrary and unlawful killings by government forces, politically motivated disappearances, and torture in prisons. Prison conditions were poor. Arbitrary arrest, prolonged detention, and other abuses increased, particularly with the ongoing protest movement in the southern governorates, where authorities reportedly temporarily jailed thousands of southerners during the year. The judiciary was weak, corrupt, and lacked independence. The government significantly increased restrictions on freedom of

(...continued)

and put soldier, sailor, airman, marine at risk for that reason. Absolutely not.... At no time was this a gratuitous offer to be made just to improve relations with the Yemenis." See, "Retired Commander takes Responsibility for Decision to Refuel Ships in Aden," *Agence France Presse*, October 19, 2000.

⁵⁷ Edward Prados, *The US and Yemen: A Half-Century of Engagement*, Center for Contemporary Arab Studies, Georgetown University, 2005.

⁵⁸ "For Yemen, an Evolving U.S. Relationship; As Both Seek to Improve Ties, Sanctions Against Iraq Remain a Point of Division," *Washington Post*, October 24, 2000.

speech, press, and assembly, and there were reports of government use of excessive force against demonstrators. Journalists and opposition members were harassed and intimidated. Academic freedom was restricted, and official corruption was a problem. International humanitarian groups estimated that more than 175,400 persons were internally displaced as a result of the Saada conflict. Pervasive and significant discrimination against women continued, as did early marriage, child labor, and child trafficking. The right of workers to associate was also restricted.⁵⁹

U.S. Foreign Assistance to Yemen

Over the past two years, U.S. military and economic assistance to Yemen has dramatically increased. For FY2011, the Administration is seeking \$106.6 million in foreign assistance for Yemen, a request well above previous amounts (\$42 million in FY2009 and \$67 million in FY2010). U.S. 1206 Department of Defense (DOD) assistance to Yemen also has increased in recent years. In FY2010, DOD is providing an estimated \$150 million in assistance to Yemen, well above the FY2009 level (\$66.8 million). Though the Obama Administration has increased aid substantially, it is worth noting that when compared to other regional recipients such as Israel (\$2.8 billion in FY2010), Egypt (\$1.55 billion in FY2010), Jordan (\$842 million in FY2010), and even the Palestinians (\$500.4 million in FY2010), U.S. aid to Yemen lags far behind.

Table 1. U.S. Foreign Aid to Yemen

(current year \$ in millions)

Aid Account (Foreign Operations)	FY2006	FY2007	FY2008	FY2009	FY2010	FY2011 Request	FY2012 Request
Economic Support Fund (ESF)	7.920	12.000	1.500	19.767 ^a	5.000	34.0	47.56
Foreign Military Financing (FMF)	8.415	8.500	3.952	2.800	12.500	35.0	35.0
Development Assistance (DA)	—	—	4.913	11.233	35.000	—	—
Nonproliferation, Anti-Terrorism, Demining, and Related Programs (NADR)	1.441	3.751	4.034	2.525	—	4.5	—
Global Health Child Survival	—	—	2.833	3.000	4.800	21.0	21.0
International Military Education and Training (IMET)	.924	1.085	.945	1.000	1.100	1.1	1.1
International Narcotics Control and Law Enforcement (INCLE)	—	—	—	—	—	11.0	11.0
Totals	18.700	25.336	18.177	30.325	58.400	106.600	115.66

a. Congress appropriated an additional \$10 million in ESF for Yemen in P.L. 111-32, the Supplemental Appropriations Act, FY2009

⁵⁹ See, <http://www.state.gov/g/drl/rls/hrrpt/2009/nea/136083.htm>.

Military Aid

Foreign Military Financing

The United States provides Yemen's conventional armed forces modest amounts of FMF grants mainly to service aging and outdated equipment. The FMF program is managed by the Defense Security Cooperation Agency (DSCA). According to documentation provided to CRS by DSCA, FMF grants help Yemen's Air Force to sustain their two C-130H aircraft originally purchased in 1979, as well as a handful of their serviceable F-5 fighter aircraft. The United States also has provided Yemen's Coast Guard, which was partially developed and trained by the United States, with fast response boats (Archangel and Defender Class) using FMF grants. FMF also funds Yemen's regular purchase of small arms ammunition, spare parts, and power generators. It also covers overseas transportation of equipment to Yemen, the costs of which can be high due to piracy attacks in nearby waters.

FMF funds also are used to supplement training for Yemen's Ministry of Interior Forces, specifically from the U.S.-funded Counter Terrorism Unit (CTU) inside the Central Security Force, an internal unit controlled directly by General Yahya Mohammed Abdullah Saleh, the president's nephew. Section 1205 of P.L. 111-383, the Ike Skelton National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2011, authorized the Secretary of Defense, with the concurrence of the Secretary of State, to provide \$75 million in aid (equipment, supplies, and training) to enhance the ability of the Yemen Ministry of Interior Counter Terrorism Forces for operations against Al Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula and its affiliates.

There are a number of reasons why FMF to Yemen has remained relatively low. Overall U.S.-Yemeni security cooperation has proven variable and inconsistent over time, making U.S. policymakers reluctant to commit long-term funding to the country. Second, in recent years, new foreign operations appropriations have been directed toward Iraq, Afghanistan, and Pakistan, in addition to maintaining regular aid commitments, leaving fewer funds available for other priorities. Finally, in the past, there has been some U.S. concern about Yemen's willingness and ability to abide by regulations on the end-use monitoring of U.S.-supplied equipment. In 2008, the United States and Yemen finally reached an End Use Monitoring Agreement. Speaking at the signing, then U.S. Ambassador to Yemen Steven Seche said, "Under this agreement, the United States and Yemen reaffirm their commitment to insuring transparency and fighting corruption.... Transparency, accountability, and oversight are key components of a free and democratic society. These principles, when properly valued and implemented, help build trust between allies as well as between governments and their citizens."

Non Proliferation, Anti-Terrorism, DeMining and Related Programs Funds (NADR)

Managed by the State Department, the NADR account (estimated at \$4 million per year) funds training programs for Yemeni criminal justice officials. According to notifications transmitted to Congress, FY2010 NADR funds were planned to "enable the government of Yemen to harmonize its criminal legislation with the international legal instruments against terrorism and enhance implementation of respected laws." NADR-funded workshops provide training in the investigation and prosecution of terrorist cases through the use of case studies and experience sharing with other countries.

International Counter Narcotics and Law Enforcement (INCLE)

Yemen is not a regular recipient of INCLE funds. For FY2011, the Obama Administration requested \$11 million in INCLE funds to

establish a robust rule of law program to improve Yemen's capacity to enforce its laws, expand the its presence and delivery of services, and contribute to the overall U.S. stabilization strategy. It will expand rule of law programming to additional districts and governorates in Yemen, which will help bolster internal security by providing equipment and training to the Yemen police to increase the capacity of the government to properly train and equip new cadets. Funding will also develop the capacity of the Yemen judicial system to promote the rule of law. Programs will aim to support the development of new counterterrorism laws and as appropriate, the criminal code.

International Military Education and Training (IMET)

Like most recipients, Yemen uses IMET funds to send its officers to the United States to study at select military colleges and institutions. IMET funds also have paid for English language instruction from the Defense Language Institute for Yemeni officers, including the construction of a language lab in Yemen. IMET funds typically support the training of between 10 to 20 students per year.

1206 Defense Department Assistance

In recent years, the Defense Department's 1206 train and equip fund has become the major source of overt U.S. military aid to Yemen. Section 1206 Authority is a Department of Defense account designed to provide equipment, supplies, or training to foreign national military forces engaged in counterterrorist operations. Between FY2006 and FY2007, Yemen received approximately \$30.3 million in 1206 funding. In the last two fiscal years, it has received \$221.8 million. As of mid-FY2010, Yemen is the largest global 1206 recipient, receiving \$252.6 million. Pakistan is the second-largest recipient with \$203.4 million.

In general, 1206 aid aims to boost the capacities of Yemen's air force, its special operations units, its border control monitoring, and coast guard forces. Approximately \$38 million of the FY2010 1206 assistance will be used to provide Yemen's Air Force with one CASA CN-235 medium-range twin-turbo-prop aircraft to transport its special operations units. The United States also has used 1206 funds to provide special operations units with training, helicopters with night-vision cameras, sniper rifles, secure personal radios, and bullet-proof jackets. Yemen's Coast Guard has received through 1206 funding patrol boats and radios and border security personnel have received armored pickup trucks.

Some observers and lawmakers have concerns regarding increased U.S. military aid to Yemen. Some fear that, despite required U.S. human rights training and vetting of Yemeni units, abuses committed by security forces may still occur or even increase. Others, particularly lawmakers, are concerned that U.S. equipment could be diverted by the Yemeni government away from combating terrorism and toward fighting domestic insurgencies. One January 2010 Senate Foreign Relations Committee report concluded that it was "likely that U.S. counter-terrorism assistance had been diverted for use in the government's war against the Houthis in the north and that this temptation will persist." The report stated that

This potential misuse of security assistance underscores the importance of enhancing the current end-use monitoring regime for U.S.-provided equipment. Indeed, the existing end-use monitoring protocols in place have revealed discrepancies between U.S. records of security assistance and those that are in the possession of Yemeni defense forces. The Defense Security Cooperation Agency (DSCA), the Department of State, and Embassy's Office of Military Cooperation (OMC) should work to reconcile these differences. In addition, they should conduct a thorough review of physical security and accountability procedures at the Yemeni Special Operations Forces (YSOF) compound.⁶⁰

Table 2. I206 Department of Defense Funding for Yemen FY2006-FY2010
(\$ in millions)

I206 Program	FY2006	FY2007	FY2008	FY2009	FY2010
Cross Border Security and CT Aid	4.3	—	—	—	—
Yemeni Special Operations Capacity Development to Enhance Border Security	—	26.0	—	—	—
Air Force Aerial Surveillance Initiative	—	—	—	5.9	—
Coast Guard Maritime Security Initiative	—	—	—	29.9	—
Increased Border Security CT Initiative	—	—	—	25.4	—
Explosive Ordnance Disposal Initiative	—	—	—	5.8	—
Special Operations Forces CT Enhancement Package	—	—	—	—	34.5

⁶⁰ U.S. Congress, Senate Committee on Foreign Relations, *Following the Money in Yemen and Lebanon: Maximizing the Effectiveness of US Security Assistance and International Financial Institution Lending*, committee print, 111th Cong., 1st sess., January 5, 2010 (Washington: GPO, 2010).

I206 Program	FY2006	FY2007	FY2008	FY2009	FY2010
Fixed-Wing Aircraft and Support for Yemeni Air Force to Support CT Units	—	—	—	—	38.0
Rotary-Wing Aircraft (4 Huey II) and Support for Yemeni Air Force to Support CT Units	—	—	—	—	52.8
Upgrades and Parts for approx. 10 existing Yemeni Air Force Helicopters	—	—	—	—	30.0
Total	4.3	26.0	0	67.0	155.3

Source: CRS Report RS22855, *Security Assistance Reform: “Section 1206” Background and Issues for Congress*, by Nina M. Serafino.

Economic Aid

Yemen receives U.S. economic aid from three primary sources, the Economic Support Fund (ESF), the Development Assistance (DA) account, and the Global Health Child Survival account (GHCS). In September 2009, the United States and Yemen signed a new bilateral assistance agreement to fund essential development projects in the fields of health, education, democracy and governance, agriculture and economic development. The agreement, subject to congressional appropriations, provides a total of \$121 million from FY2009 through FY2011.

USAID’s new country stabilization strategy for Yemen for 2010-2012 features, among other activities, two main programs, the Community Livelihoods Project (CLP) and the Responsive Governance Project (RGP). The CLP seeks to work with NGOs in local communities in Yemen’s rural governorates in order to expand access to freshwater, healthcare, and education. Its estimated budget is \$80 million for three years, plus up to \$45 million for each of two additional option years, for a total of \$125 million over five years. The RGP seeks to work with, according to USAID, “key Yemeni ministries, including Health, Education, Agriculture, Planning, Industry & Trade, among others, to address related but broader government policy, institutional, and capacity issues that will help the Government of Yemen be more responsive to the needs of its citizens.”⁶¹ Its estimated budget is \$27 million for three years, plus up to \$16 million for both

⁶¹ USAID, *Fact Sheet: USAID New Strategy for Yemen*, February 5, 2010.

additional option years, for a total of up to \$43 million over five years. The governance program was awarded to Counterpart International.

In FY2010, USAID obligated an additional \$12.8 million to support a containment and stabilization program for northern Yemen. According to USAID, funds provided “immediate community-based assistance in the governorates surrounding Sa’ada (Hajjah, Amran, northern districts of Al Jawf) in order to contain the Sa’ada conflict from spilling into these areas, support the current ceasefire, mitigate the possibility for a renewed outbreak of violence, and position USAID to enter Sa’ada to deliver similar assistance as the basis for future reconstruction should access open up.”⁶²

Democracy Assistance/Tribal Outreach

U.S. economic aid to Yemen also supports democracy and governance programming. For several years, U.S. democracy promotion organizations have run programs in Yemen’s outlying provinces to support conflict resolution strategies designed to end revenge killings among tribes. Some NGOs receive U.S. funding to facilitate discussions between tribal leaders in Mareb province and government officials, donors, and the private sector. U.S. assistance also works to monitor voter registration, enhance the electoral competitiveness of Yemen’s main political opposition parties, train members of parliament, and provide technical assistance to parliamentary oversight and budget committees. The State Department’s Middle East Partnership Initiative (MEPI) also provides small grants to a number of local Yemeni NGOs.⁶³

Yemeni Detainees at Guantanamo Bay

As of January 2011, approximately 173 prisoners remained incarcerated at the detention facility in Guantanamo Bay, Cuba, of which between 90 and 92 prisoners are Yemeni nationals. For years, efforts to repatriate and rehabilitate Yemenis in Guantanamo have stalled over U.S. concern that the Yemeni government, due to public pressure from Islamists, will be unable to both detain and monitor returnees for any lengthy period of time. To date, between 25 and 30 Yemeni detainees have either returned to Yemen or have been sent to a third country. The Obama Administration suspended repatriations to Yemen after the December 25, 2009, failed airline bomb attack by Al Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula. The United States is seeking other third party countries to accept the remaining prisoners, as there is a widespread belief, particularly among U.S. lawmakers, that many of them would return to militancy if under Yemeni government custody. Prior to the moratorium, an Administration interagency task force on Guantanamo had cleared 29 Yemenis to return home and conditionally cleared another 30 if Yemen’s security conditions improve.

For years, the United States and Yemen have discussed establishing a rehabilitation program in Yemen similar to the one operated by Saudi Arabia that uses clerics and social support networks to de-radicalize and monitor prisoners. Between 2002 and 2005, Yemeni Religious Affairs Minister and Supreme Court Justice Hamoud al Hittar ran an unsuccessful “dialogue” program with Yemeni Islamists in which he attempted to convince prisoners that *jihad* in Islam is for defense, not for offensive attacks. More than 360 militants were released after going through the

⁶² USAID, *United States Agency For International Development*, Advice of Program Change, CN#58, June 10, 2010.

⁶³ For a list of ongoing MEPI grants in Yemen, see <http://www.abudhabi.mepi.state.gov/abstracts/yemen.html>.

program, but there was almost no post-release support, such as helping the detainees find jobs and wives, key elements of the Saudi initiative. Several graduates of the program returned to violence, including three of the seven men identified as participants in the September 2008 bombing of the U.S. Embassy in Yemen.

Yemen is one of the poorest countries in the world and has repeatedly sought U.S. funding for any formal rehabilitation program. In January 2011, Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton traveled to Yemen where she was asked about U.S.-Yemeni cooperation in rehabilitating Yemeni detainees in Guantanamo. In her response, Secretary Clinton stated that:

The conversations between the United States and the Government of Yemen about the Yemeni detainees never stops. It keeps going. Some, as you know, have been released and returned home. Some were accepted by other countries. But we still have a considerable number of Yemeni detainees. And many of you may know that we used to have a very large number of Saudi detainees. And the Saudi Government stepped in and created a rehabilitation program that worked with imams and others to work with the young men, and to, in effect, challenge some of their ideas, some of the unfortunate ideas that they had been accepting. And it has worked quite well. We would certainly be open to something like that here in Yemen, as well. So, we are constantly in a conversation. But I can underscore for you, as a fellow lawyer, that President Obama is committed to closing Guantanamo, has made many, many steps toward lowering the population there, and will continue to do so.⁶⁴

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⁶⁴Press Release, Embassy of the United States Sana'a Yemen, "Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton, Town Hall with Amal Basha," Movenpick Hotel, Sana'a, Yemen, January 11, 2011.