



# Terrorism Monitor

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CIA Predator Drone

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## TUAREG REBEL LEADER RHISSA AG BOULA ARRESTED IN NIAMEY

A Tuareg rebel leader who was sentenced to death in 2008 has been arrested in Niger's capital of Niamey after returning from exile to negotiate peace with the government (Radio France Internationale, April 1). A veteran Tuareg rebel leader, Ag Boula was sentenced to death in absentia for his alleged role in the 2004 murder of politician Adam Amangue. Ag Boula, who arrived in Niamey in late March, appears to have severely misinterpreted the mood of the military junta which took control of Niger in February. The arrest has effectively squelched earlier speculation that Ag Boula's return was a sign he had reached a deal with the new government, the Conseil Suprême pour la Restauration de la Démocratie (CSRD) (L'Evenement [Niamey], November 29, 2009).

The military has recently arrested dozens of former members of ex-president Mamadou Tandja's administration, as well as over 600 individuals in an unrelated crackdown on crime (AFP, April 1). Ag Boula arrived in Niamey in the company of the main leaders of the various Tuareg rebel movements involved in the 2009 Libyan-mediated peace agreement—the Mouvement des nigériens pour la justice (MNJ), the Front patriotique nigérien (FPN) and Ag Boula's own Front des forces de redressement (FFR). All the leaders were covered by a government amnesty except Ag Boula, who remains under sentence of death (Jeune Afrique, April 1).



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With a brief interruption caused by a military coup, Ag Boula served as Tourism Minister in Niger's government from 1997 to 2004. A pioneering desert tour operator in the 1980s, Ag Boula is generally acknowledged to have performed well in that role (including a 2000 visit to the United States) before being charged in 2004 with orchestrating the kidnap and murder of Adam Amangue. He was convicted of ordering three men to carry out the murder, all of whom were sentenced to 20 years in prison (Radio France Internationale, July 14, 2008). There was speculation at the time of his 2004 arrest that his detention was intended to spark a new Tuareg rebellion, allowing the Forces Armées Nigériennes (FAN) to receive additional arms and funds from the U.S. military, which had just begun its Pan-Sahel Initiative, designed to secure the region against terrorists (see Jeremy Keenan, "Security and Insecurity in North Africa," *Review of African Political Economy* 108, pp.280-81).

While their leader sat in prison, Ag Boula's men took three police officers and a soldier hostage. The hostages were exchanged for Ag Boula's provisional release in 2005 in a deal mediated by the Libyans. Ag Boula fled to France, but when he announced he was returning to Niger in 2008 to join a new Tuareg revolt, his release was withdrawn and a sentence of death imposed following an in absentia conviction for Amangue's murder (Le Canard Dechaine [Niamey], July 14, 2008; AFP, July 14, 2008). In July, 2008 Ag Boula complained that the MNJ failed to retaliate for Tuareg deaths in a military offensive and left to create his own movement, the Front des Forces de Redressement (FFR) (RFI, June 1, 2008). Ag Boula's fate will depend largely upon the mood of the junta and their reasons for arresting him. At the time of his conviction the prosecutor stated that Ag Boula could opt to be retried if he returned to Niger, where most death sentences are eventually commuted to life imprisonment (AFP, July 14).

Also arrested was Major Kindo Zada, an ally of Ag Boula. A field officer, Zada was closely tied to the administration of President Ibrahim Bare Mainassara, who was assassinated when his bodyguard fired on him with a truck mounted machine gun at Niamey Airport in April 1999. Mainassara had himself taken power in a military coup in 1996. Major Zada deserted the army in 2007, leading dozens of his men and 20 pick-up trucks north to join the Tuareg rebellion (African Press International, July 22, 2007; AFP, April 1). Major Zada is reported to have been arrested on charges related to the 2000 kidnapping of then-Major Djibrilla

Hima Hamidou "Pele" by a group of officers loyal to Mainassara (TamtamInfo.com, April 1; Pan-African News Agency, June 12, 2000). Colonel Hima played an important role in the 1999 coup that killed Mainassara and is believed to have been a prime mover behind the latest military takeover.

#### ABDULLAH AZZAM BRIGADES COMMANDER

A communiqué from Salih Bin-Abdallah al-Qar'awi, a field commander in the Abdallah Azzam Brigades, was issued earlier this month. The commander discussed Lebanese issues in detail while promising further strikes on Israel (al-Fajr Media Center, April 4).

A native of Saudi Arabia, al-Qar'awi appears on the Kingdom's list of the 85 most wanted terrorist suspects. In 2004, al-Qar'awi went to Iraq to join the mujahideen. After fighting in the battle for Fallujah, al-Qar'awi became very close to the late Abu Musab al-Zarqawi, who gave him various tasks in Syria and Lebanon. Eventually he was captured by members of the Nusayri sect in Syria and turned over to Saudi authorities who imprisoned him for eight months. Al-Qar'awi was released when authorities could not prove he had fought in Iraq.

Al-Qar'awi went on to form the Abdullah Azzam Brigades (named for the Palestinian jihad ideologue Abdullah Azzam – 1941-1989), which were divided into various units, including the Ziyad al-Jarrah squad (named for the Lebanese 9/11 hijacker) which "specializes" in attacks on Israel. This group's first rocket attack on Israel took place a year and a half ago. Following Hizbollah's denouncement of the group's activities, al-Qar'awi has accused the Shi'a movement of cooperating with the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL) to protect Israel from attack. The jihadi commander claims the aim of the Ziyad al-Jarrah formation is to expel the Jews from Palestine and unite the Muslims of the "ring states" (Syria, Jordan and Egypt) in this effort. The movement also opposes an American presence in the Middle East, which has led to "colonization and Westernization."

Within Lebanon, al-Qar'awi denies having played any role in the wave of political assassinations afflicting that nation, for which he blames Hizbollah and Syria, with the support of Lebanon's military. Al-Qar'awi insists the Lebanese Army has come under the influence of the Shiite Hizbollah and Amal movements, leading to

arbitrary measures against the Sunni community that include torture, detention and murder.

Al-Qar’awi acknowledges that his group’s largely ineffective rocket attacks often miss their targets and are sometimes detected and disabled. Nevertheless, such attacks serve the larger strategic objective of disrupting Israel’s efforts to establish security. “It is true that we did not hit vital targets, but the most important thing is to keep attacking them [Israel]. This undermines their security and economy. Moreover, the attacks affect their political plans, including the Judaization of Jerusalem and the psychological normalization with the Muslim peoples.” Though al-Qar’awi accuses Hizbollah of protecting Israel (despite Hizbollah’s strong resistance to Israeli forces in the 2006 invasion of Lebanon), his own group has made only a few attempts to fire rockets across the border.

In October 2009, the Abdullah Azzam Brigades tried to fire five Katyusha rockets at the Israeli city of Kiryat Shmona. One rocket fired prematurely, which forced the team to abandon the mission and flee the area (Israeli fighter-jet response time to rocket launches along the Lebanese border is roughly ten minutes) (al-Fajr, October 29, 2009). Videos of Azzam Brigade launches against Israel have appeared on jihadi websites (al-Fajr, July 23, 2009).

There are many odd aspects to al-Qar’awi’s message that are inconsistent with al-Qaeda communiqués, for example the mention of Israel by name, the reference to Rafik Hariri as Lebanon’s Prime Minister (al-Qaeda does not recognize “apostate” regimes), the extensive discussion of the Special Tribunal for Lebanon (which has never been an issue for al-Qaeda), etc. (al-Nahar, April 7). Syrian Salafist leader Shaykh Omar Bakri questioned the authenticity of the message, saying, “I doubt that Qar’awi is still alive; the wording used in this message was not the work of a Salafist jihadi but of someone who is familiar with the intelligence world and has a vested interest in Lebanese politics” (Now Lebanon, April 9). A Lebanese security source suggested the message was part of an attempt to foment conflict between Sunnis and Shi’a in Lebanon, possibly as a substitute for “Israeli aggression” or as preparation for it (As-Safir, April 8). It was noted elsewhere that the bulk of the message seemed to focus on an “enemy” other than Israel. “The hostility shown toward the government, the Lebanese Army, and the Shiite sect—with Hizbollah and the Amal Movement as representatives—clearly reveals the forces that will be identified as enemies and targeted” (al-Akhbar, April 6).

## Taliban Exploit Shi’a-Sunni Divide in Pakistan’s Kurram Tribal Agency

By *Tayyab Ali Shah*

**K**urram Tribal Agency in northwest Pakistan continues to be a flashpoint of violence created by the volatile sectarian strife between Shi’a and Sunnis and the gradually strengthening hold of the Taliban in the area. Kurram Agency, the only Shi’a majority tribal agency in Pakistan, has been the scene of Sunni-Shi’a sectarian clashes every five to seven years since the creation of Pakistan in 1947, and even before that. However, those clashes were never allowed to continue for more than two to three weeks before tribal leaders and government authorities would intervene. The situation has taken an ugly turn since the arrival of the Taliban in the area three years ago. Militants have killed 3,100 people since July, 2007 (Dawn [Karachi], March 27).

Pakistani authorities have failed miserably in controlling the persistent violence. During the last two years, the roads in Kurram agency have remained closed and people have been trapped in their areas. The Shi’a community as a whole and some Sunni tribes like the Mangal in Upper Kurram find it extremely difficult and risky to move out of Kurram Agency. Shi’a cannot travel outside the agency through the Tal-Parachinar road connecting Kurram agency with Peshawar as it is controlled by the Taliban. The Mangal who live in Upper Kurram cannot get out of their area because they cannot travel through Shi’a populated areas for fear of being attacked and killed by the Shi’a. Relief and food supplies rarely reach the Shi’a areas due to the road blockades.

Both the Shi’a and Sunni people of Kurram agency have to travel through war-torn Afghanistan to reach Peshawar and other parts of Pakistan. There is a severe shortage of the basic commodities needed for everyday life and even if some items are available they are extremely expensive. Many government servants have gone unpaid for the last two years and some have even tried to commit suicide. [1] The government has been unable to open the road or provide security for the food supplies on a permanent basis. In the first week of March, a convoy of people escorted by security forces was attacked by suicide bombers, who killed 14 people and injured 25 others. (Geo TV, March 5). In the last week of March, six truck drivers who were returning from carrying goods to the Shi’a communities of Upper

Kurram were kidnapped and killed by the Taliban. A letter found in the pocket of one dead driver warned that anyone supplying goods to the Parachinar Shiite community would meet a similar fate (Samaa.tv, March 27).

Many natives of Kurram agency hold state policies vis-à-vis Afghanistan responsible for the death and destruction in Kurram. According to them, when ISAF strengthened its posts on the border with Waziristan in 2006-07 after the Pakistani government signed peace agreements with the local Taliban, al-Qaeda and Taliban fighters tried to pass through the Kurram agency to cross over into Afghanistan as Kurram provides the shortest route to Kabul. The Turi tribe and other Shi'a refused to give passage to the Taliban through their area and complained to the local authorities, who did not take any action. The Turi refusal to provide the Taliban this safe passage has led them to their current dire situation, in which they are being punished by the Taliban through continuous attacks and incessant blockades. [2]

Both Shi'a and Sunni elders hold individuals in official positions responsible for playing a role in the ongoing tensions in Kurram, in particular in Parachinar, the capital of the agency. Shi'a elders assert that two political agents of the area asked them to facilitate the Taliban's movement or be ready for the consequences (The News [Islamabad], October 19, 2009).

The government has continued to periodically attack and shell Taliban positions with gunship helicopters. Seven Taliban were killed in helicopter strikes by government forces in the third week of March (Daily Times [Lahore], March 22). There have also been bursts of internal fighting between different Taliban groups. In a recent incident, 21 militants affiliated with the group led by Mullah Toofan (a.k.a. Nur Jamal) were killed and 46 others made hostage when they exchanged fire with their rivals in the Mullah Rafiq group in the Nika-Ziarat area of central Kurram Agency (The News, March 19).

To defend themselves, all of the Kurram tribes have established their own lashkar (tribal militia), but these lashkars are no match for the Taliban. On March 20, Taliban forces attacked the Masozai tribal lashkar to avenge the death of 12 of their colleagues who were killed a day earlier when the lashkar attacked the convoy of Taliban commander Mullah Toofan. After several hours of fighting in which 15 persons were killed and around 20 were injured from both sides, the local tribal lashkar was left with no option but to surrender

to the Taliban. The Taliban accepted their surrender with the condition that the tribal elders would be loyal to the Taliban, would dismantle the current lashkar, would never raise another anti-Taliban lashkar in the area again and would support the Taliban's efforts in implementing Shari'a. After these guarantees and promises, Mullah Toofan freed 22 hostages taken from the Mosazai lashkar. [2]

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Notes:

1. Email interviews with Engineer Sadiq Ali Turi – a Turi native of Kurram Agency and Iqbal Hussain Bangash, a government official from Kurram Agency, March 31, 2010.
2. Email interview with Engineer Sadiq Ali Turi, Kurram Agency, March 31, 2010.

## CIA Drone Strikes in Pakistan's FATA Region and the "Loss" of Actionable Intelligence: A Pashtun Perspective

*By Farhat Taj*

**T**he Federally Administered Tribal Area (FATA) of northwestern Pakistan is under the de facto joint control of al-Qaeda and Taliban militants, except for the tribal agency of South Waziristan, which was recently retaken from the Mahsud Taliban network by the Pakistani army. Previously, the Taliban have been retaking the areas cleared by the army, like Bajaur and Mohmand. In response, the US has repeatedly attacked the militants in FATA with Predator drone strikes. One critic of the drone strikes, Marc Thiessen, has argued in Foreign Policy against this airborne assassination campaign on the grounds that the United States is killing terrorists that the CIA could instead capture and interrogate to get valuable information. [1]

It is of course an excellent idea to capture terrorists alive, obtain intelligence through interrogation and disrupt

their plans for terrorism. It has been done before with the capture of such high value targets as Khalid Shaykh Muhammad and Ramzi bin al-Shibh, both of whom were captured in Karachi after they fled FATA. But could the policy of capturing al-Qaeda be implemented in a place as inaccessible FATA, an area largely under the control of the Taliban and al-Qaeda?

The CIA has mounted joint operations with Pakistan's Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI) to hunt down senior terrorist leaders and take them to the United States for interrogation. Among those captured were men like Abu Zubaydah, Ammar al-Baluchi and others. There have also been unilateral ISI captures, such as the recent capture of the Taliban's number two, Mullah Baradar, who was captured outside of FATA in Karachi (Daily Times [Lahore], February 15). There have to date, however, been no captures of high-ranking al-Qaeda or Taliban figures in the lawless mountains of FATA. Could such joint operations be conducted in FATA? If yes, why have there not been any thus far? If there have been any, why weren't they successful?

Take the case of Waziristan in FATA. It is a territory that stretches over an 11,327 sq km area. There the Taliban and al-Qaeda have training camps, weapons depots, computer institutes and Shari'a courts; in short, a parallel government. They also have guesthouses where terrorists from all over the world come to stay for training or consultation. The local population is overpowered and helpless in the face of the powerful al-Qaeda and Taliban movements. Their tribal leaders have been slaughtered and strict Shari'a law enforced.

Of course capturing a small number of Waziristan-based terrorists would not eliminate the threat that they pose to the world. The strategic use of violence is the only apparent means available to destroy the terrorist infrastructure and kill the key terrorists running the Islamist Emirate. There are three avenues for the applications of violence in the tribal region:

#### 1) Military Operations by the Pakistan Army

The Pakistani military has had some successes in the agencies of Bajaur and South Waziristan, but at a cost. The military caused considerable collateral damage in the form of hundreds of civilians killed, property worth millions of dollars destroyed and hundreds of thousands displaced – yet the military did not manage to kill any leading Taliban commanders. [2]

Moreover, the people of FATA argue that under the garb of military operations, the ISI had in fact strengthened the terrorists (Daily Times, February 6). It was during these operations that much of the tribal leadership was eliminated by the Taliban and military. In many places, areas taken by the military have been returned to the militants through negotiations. Sadly, many local Pashtuns who have been caught up in the Pakistani military's clumsy invasions of Bajaur and South Waziristan have become disappointed in the army, and are terrified of it as well as the Taliban. Their perception is that Pakistani intelligence agencies have no desire to destroy the Taliban in their native land.

#### 2) U.S. Ground Forces in FATA

The other possibility is for U.S. forces stationed in neighboring Afghanistan to enter FATA and physically destroy al-Qaeda and Taliban strongholds in the area. Would they be able to successfully achieve this task? The terrain is difficult, there are tens of thousands of hardened enemy fighters there and U.S. forces may suffer great human loss. Even then, it could not be said for sure that they would be able to eradicate the militants' safe havens.

The people of FATA have suffered greatly under the control of the militants and in the military operations of Pakistan. Any collateral damage by American forces would not help the United States in terms of public diplomacy. Furthermore, Pakistan may not agree to the entry of U.S. ground forces into FATA. To do so would be political suicide for the Zardari government and would inevitably weaken Pakistan's already weak democracy.

#### 3) Drone Attacks

Pakistani authorities routinely denounce the U.S. drone attacks on FATA and demand that the United States halt them. (The News [Islamabad], May 24, 2009). They argue that the attacks are a violation of Pakistan's sovereignty and that the robotic assassination campaign has proven to be counter-productive in the war against terror by uniting the militants and the tribal people. [3]

There are, however, many reports that the drone strikes on FATA are carried out from air bases within Pakistan (The News [Islamabad], October 27, 2008; Times, February 19, 2009). U.S. officials say the strikes are carried out under an informal agreement with Islamabad that allows Pakistani leaders to criticize them in public, but Pakistan denies the existence of any such agreement (Reuters, January 13).

The drone strikes have killed several dozen al-Qaeda and Taliban leaders in FATA and the local people inform that the terrorists have sleepless nights due to the drone attacks. Far from being driven into the hands of the Taliban, many local people support the strikes (see Terrorism Monitor, February 19). People living in FATA where the drones operate particularly appreciate the precision of drone strikes. They say that when a drone appears in the skies above them, they are not disturbed and carry on with their usual business because they are sure that it does not target the civilians. The same people however run for shelter when a Pakistani jet appears in the skies because of its indiscriminate firing.

The author of this paper has interacted with hundreds of people in FATA on this issue. Most of them are confident that the drone technology is capable of eliminating the terrorists in FATA with little or no collateral damage. If the elimination of terrorists is the objective and there are no ulterior motives, then the United States has the backing of the majority of the people of FATA. It is highly impractical for the CIA, the U.S. military or even the Pakistani military to capture high value targets in this region, leaving drones as the only option.

## Conclusion

Al-Qaeda terrorists are spread all over the world and in many places they may be captured alive for investigations. FATA is not one those places. It is too remote, the United States is unlikely to introduce ground forces into this hostile land and the Pakistani army's sledgehammer approach has proven to be counter-productive. Simply put, force has to be used to demolish the Islamist Emirate in FATA, but it has to be precise. Drone attacks are described by many FATA Pashtuns as a God-send and an appropriate method of eliminating the militants. The destruction of the Taliban's Islamist

Emirate would send a strong message to the terrorists around the world that they will not be allowed to create sanctuaries that are safe from the reach of their enemies.

*Farhat Taj is a Pashtun native of FATA who has carried out research in the region for the Pakistan-based Aryana Institute.*

## Notes:

1. Marc Thiessen, "Dead Terrorists Tell No Tales, Is Barack Obama killing too many bad guys before the U.S. can interrogate them?" February 8, 2010 [http://www.foreignpolicy.com/articles/2010/02/08/dead\\_terrorists\\_tell\\_no\\_tales?page=0,1](http://www.foreignpolicy.com/articles/2010/02/08/dead_terrorists_tell_no_tales?page=0,1)
2. "Cost of Conflict in FATA," Planning and Development Department, FATA Secretariat, Peshawar, Pakistan, April 2009, <http://www.fata.gov.pk/downloads/costconflict.pdf>
3. Ibid

## Yemen's Dangerous Addiction to Qat

*By Michael Horton*

Yemen faces an abundance of complex and interrelated social, economic, and environmental problems. Yemen's many challenges are compounded by the country's addiction to qat. Large parts of Yemen's society and economy are organized around the consumption and production of this stimulant.

Qat consists of the tender leaves and shoots of the tree *catha edulis*, which contain the amphetamine cathinone. Qat must be consumed soon after being harvested because the cathinone begins breaking down after 24 hours. When chewed, qat brings about a state of mild euphoria in the user, often followed by insomnia. Qat is considered a Class 1 drug in the United States and is illegal. [1] It is grown and consumed in Kenya, Ethiopia, and Yemen. While Somalia and Djibouti both import and consume qat, Yemen is the largest net consumer of qat with more than 70% of Yemeni households reporting at least one user. [2]

There is much routine and ritual surrounding the chewing of qat. Before lunch, the earlier the better, Yemenis make their way to the qat markets found throughout the country to purchase a bundle of qat that ranges in cost from three to as much as 60 dollars. Then after lunch Yemeni men (Yemeni women also chew qat, though the percentage of women is thought to be considerably less) gather in their homes to chew. A qat session often lasts more than six hours.

### Changing habits

The tradition of qat chewing in Yemen goes back at least 500 years. There is some question as to whether the plant originated in Ethiopia or Yemen. Historically, qat chews only took place one day a week and qat consumption was limited to the wealthy and those who made up the sayyid and qadi classes, or those who were descended from the Prophet and those who were members of the educated elite. This pattern of consumption began to change in the 1970's with the expansion of the Yemeni economy. From this period until the first Gulf War, Yemen's economy benefited from the millions of dollars in remittances sent back by Yemenis working primarily in Saudi Arabia. The growing economy resulted in the increased consumption of qat by lower and middle class Yemenis along with a dramatic increase in qat cultivation. When the current Yemeni regime led by President Ali Abdullah Saleh decided not to back the U.S.-led coalition in the first Gulf War, Saudi Arabia canceled the visas of Yemeni workers, resulting in the return of eight-hundred thousand Yemenis. [3] Despite the loss of revenue from remittances and the subsequent decline in the Yemeni economy from the 1990s to the present, qat consumption and cultivation have continued to increase.

### Effects on the economy

While accurate economic statistics regarding qat are hard to come by, it is generally thought that the production and sale of qat accounts for 25% of the Yemeni economy; 20% of national employment is related to the production and sale of qat. A recent report produced by Yemen's Ministry of Agriculture estimates that Yemenis spend 1.2 billion dollars on qat annually. Qat has long since replaced coffee as Yemen's primary cash crop, the production of which has steadily declined since the 1960s (Yemen Today, November 21, 2009). In addition to declining coffee production, land where drought resistant grains and cereals were traditionally grown is increasingly being planted with

qat. The Yemeni Ministry of Agriculture estimates that qat production is expanding at a rate of four to six thousand hectares every year. Yemeni farmers can make up to five times more growing qat than grains. Most of the qat trade is controlled by syndicates that buy qat from the farmers and then distribute it to a network of dealers and middlemen across the country. As a result, most of any real economic gain is limited to the few who have the means to market the qat.

The Yemeni governorates levy a tax on qat (26sep.net, March 14). The tax is collected from dealers who pass through the governorate check points as they take the qat to market. Figures regarding how much of a tax is imposed and how much is collected are almost impossible to come by. However, government sources in Sana'a suggest the amount collected nationwide exceeds 20 million dollars. However, the same sources suggested that only a small percentage of this tax revenue makes its way into the official government budget, the majority being lost to corruption. [4]

In addition to the legal trade in qat, there exists a lucrative illegal market that provides high quality qat to buyers in Saudi Arabia. Qat is illegal in Saudi Arabia but there is considerable demand for the expensive and potent Shami qat grown near the Saudi border in the Yemeni governorate of Hajjah (Saba, March 20). It is not known how much money the cross-border trade in qat generates, however, sources in Sana'a estimate that smuggled qat generates revenues in excess of 30 million dollars per year. [5]

### Environmental pressures

While qat trees are moderately drought-resistant, yield increases three or four fold if the trees are irrigated. As a result, the number of wells dug throughout the highlands has increased dramatically. [6] Of an estimated 55,000 wells in operation, only a small percentage is state owned or regulated. This and the pressure of a high population growth rate have resulted in a severe water shortage (Yemen Observer, February 16; Yemen Post, June 28, 2009). According to the United Nations Development Program (UNDP), Yemen's population will exceed 40 million by 2025. Though Yemen has one of the world's lowest freshwater availability rates, the Yemeni Ministry of Agriculture estimates that 30% of Yemen's available water is being used for the irrigation of qat trees. A source within the General Authority for Rural Development estimated that the percentage was considerably higher than the official estimates.

The water shortage is particularly acute in Sana'a, where the UNDP estimates that the extraction rate from the aquifer that supplies Sana'a is 2.5 times the replenishment rate. Recent studies estimate that the aquifer that provides water for Sana'a could run dry by 2017. [7] The growth of the urban centers of Sana'a, Ta'iz, and to a lesser extent Ibb is placing increasing pressure on the important agricultural belts that surround all three of these cities. It is common for private tanker companies to raid unregulated wells just outside the cities so that they can provide their customers in the cities with water. In Sana'a, almost every house either has a private well or a water tank. The pressure being put on the surrounding rural areas has already led to a number of violent confrontations.

### Social problems

It is estimated that the average Yemeni household spends 10% to 30% of its income on qat. This would be a problem in any country, but the problem is particularly acute in Yemen, where the gross national income does not exceed \$900. In a traditional society such as Yemen's, men most often control the family's income. Many men place more importance on the day's qat purchase than on the needs of the family. This leads to much familial discord.

The amount of time spent buying and chewing qat every day also takes a toll on the country's productivity. In the 1960's, the Marxist government of what was then South Yemen estimated that more than four billion work hours were lost due to the consumption of qat. While at the time this was clearly more propaganda than fact, this estimate may now not be much of an exaggeration.

The effect of qat on users' health is a matter of some dispute. Most experts agree that while not physiologically addictive, qat does have a number of side-effects. Among these are insomnia, paranoia, hypertension, cavities, and a tenuous link with some oral cancers. There is growing concern among Yemen's doctors over the use of qat by children. It is not uncommon to see boys as young as 11 or 12 chewing qat. Some doctors believe that the side-effects of qat chewing are more pronounced in the young.

### Controlling qat usage and production?

The Yemeni government has made no real effort to control the consumption of qat. Some efforts have

been made to control or limit usage within the armed services. However, even this effort has been largely confined to certain elite forces. A number of private organizations have launched campaigns against qat but these have met with limited success. Much of the government's unwillingness to confront the issue of qat arises from the fact that it is now a crucial part of the Yemeni economy. If qat were made illegal or even if it were heavily regulated, the already fragile Yemeni economy would unravel. The short term shock would be unsustainable and there would likely be a countrywide revolt. Many of the highland villages, home to some of the most powerful tribes, are now largely dependent on the money generated by the sale of qat. These villages and communities function as mini-states and often possess arsenals worthy of mini-states. The Yemeni government does not seem to have any short or long term plans to counter the increasing consumption and production of qat. A recent program to restrict the planting of more qat trees in the governorate of Dhamar has not resulted in any measurable reductions in qat production (Yemen Observer, February 16, Yemen Times, March 5). The poor rains of 2009 and increasing cost of water have driven qat prices higher, thereby encouraging farmers to continue to produce qat and in many cases expand production.

### Conclusion

The Yemeni government faces a plethora of serious short and long term challenges. It is unlikely that it will at any point be able to tackle the country's addiction to qat. The Saleh regime is currently facing multiple separatist movements as well as the perennial threat posed by Islamic extremists. Given qat's popularity throughout the country, any attempts to tax or prohibit qat would result in further problems for the Saleh regime. Increasing food and water insecurity will likely lead to slow and sporadic measures undertaken at the local level to replace qat with food crops. These measures will almost certainly be driven by necessity rather than any governmental authority.

*Michael Horton is an independent analyst and Yemen expert.*

### Notes:

1. J.G. Kennedy, *The Flower of Paradise: The Institutionalized Use of the Drug Qat in North Yemen* (New York: Springer, 1987), p. 10-15.



2. Branko Milanovic, “Qat Expenditures in Yemen and Djibouti: An Empirical Analysis,” World Bank, January 2007.

3. Paul Dresch, *A History of Modern Yemen* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), p. 186.

4. Author interview in Yemen (November 2009).

5. Author interview in Yemen (December 2009).

6. Leonard Milich and Mohammed Al-Sabry, “The ‘Rational Peasant’ vs. Sustainable Livelihoods: The Case of Qat in Yemen,” *Society for International Development*, 1995.

7. Author interview in Yemen (December 2009) – also see: “Human Development Report: Yemen 2009,” United Nations Development Fund.