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Al-Shabaab militants in Mogadishu

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UNCLAIMED NEW YEAR'S DAY BOMBING IN ABUJA RATTLES NIGERIA'S POWER STRUCTURE

A New Year's Eve bombing within the confines of a Nigerian military base in the capital city of Abuja has damaged Nigeria's political stability, as various politicians and civil leaders seek to implicate each other as responsible for the unclaimed blast. The bombing, which killed four civilians (including a pregnant woman) and wounded 26, was the second terrorist attack in the nation's capital since October.

The attack targeted an open-air bar and restaurant at a so-called "Mammy Market," a civilian-run market attached to Abuja's "Mogadishu Cantonment" military base providing shopping and recreational opportunities. The explosion culminated a week of violence in Nigeria that began with a series of bombings on Christmas Eve in the Plateau State city of Jos, a common site for sectarian violence in recent years between the Muslim and Christian communities. Eighty people were killed in the Jos bombings and subsequent retaliatory attacks. This was followed by a bombing at a rally of the ruling People's Democratic Party (PDP) in Yenogoa in Bayelsa State and murders and church burnings in Maiduguri in Borno State (*Next* [Lagos], January 4; *Vanguard* [Lagos], January 3; *Daily Trust* [Lagos], December 30, 2010).

On January 3 the government of President Goodluck Jonathan responded to the violence by holding an emergency closed-door meeting of the nation's top security officials. Following the meeting, spokesmen announced a number of measures to be taken, including:

- The appointment of a special presidential advisor on terrorism.
- The installation of new closed-circuit television (CCTV) cameras in sensitive areas of Abuja, though existing CCTV installations proved of little use in the latest attack.
- New regulations regarding access to public and private establishments.
- The creation of a presidential committee on the control of explosives and incendiary materials.
- The creation of a presidential committee on public enlightenment regarding security measures.

A presidential spokesman indicated that police had been “directed to ensure the prompt arrest and prosecution of political thugs” (Next [Abuja], January 4). Jonathan’s government has invited American FBI agents and members of Israel’s MOSSAD intelligence organization to help investigate the Abuja bombing (*Vanguard*, January 3; *Abuja Leadership*, January 3).

The Movement for the Emancipation of Niger Delta (MEND), which claimed responsibility for a pair of car bombings in the capital last October, issued a statement through spokesman Jomo Gbomo denying any involvement in the attack at the Mogadishu Cantonment: “Bombings and attacks carried out by MEND are always preceded by a warning in order to prevent casualties and followed by a statement of claim... [MEND] condemns the deliberate targeting of civilians by any persons or groups for what so ever reasons” (AFP, January 2; *Vanguard*, January 2).

PDP primaries next week will be followed by what is expected to be hotly contested presidential, gubernatorial and parliamentary elections in April. With the political direction of the country in the balance, few seem able to resist the temptation to link political opponents to the ongoing violence.

The campaign organization of Jonathan’s main challenger for the PDP presidential nomination for upcoming elections in April, former vice-president Atiku Abubakar, denounced what it described as efforts by the president’s paid agents to link Abubakar with the Abuja bombing: “In a moment of national crisis, President

Goodluck Jonathan must demonstrate sobriety and cool-headed posture rather than losing his head to impetuous emotions... The President should allow security services to carry out intensive investigations instead of using the incident to frame up political opponents whom he perceives as stumbling blocks to his ambition” (*Next*, January 4).

Former military ruler of Nigeria General Ibrahim Babangida (1985-1993) has also complained of government attempts to tie him to the Abuja bombing, describing it as “sheer blackmail”: “It exposes the weakness in the system if private persons and former leaders who are enjoying their retirement are being linked to acts of terrorism or bombings. We all should agree that there is failure in governance rather than passing the buck, or finding very idiotic and flimsy reasons to label some distinguished persons as being responsible for such failures” (*Vanguard*, January 3; *Daily Sun* [Lagos], January 3). Various NGOs, as well as religious and labor leaders have alleged that the Abuja bombing is part of an attempt to create a state of emergency leading to the military’s return to power (*Nigerian Compass* [Lagos], January 4; *Daily Trust*, January 3).

The Sultan of Sokoto, Alhaji Sa’ad Muhammadu Abubakar, made an unfavorable comparison between the current state of security and that which existed under military rule. “We should blame the political class for getting us to this stage because it was not like this before,” Abubakar claimed (*Daily Trust*, December 30, 2010).

Nigeria’s intelligence services have come under strong public criticism for repeated failures to anticipate eruptions of sectarian violence in northern and central Nigeria. Army Chief-of-Staff Lieutenant General Azubuike Ihejirike acknowledged the failure, saying there is a need to “enhance intelligence operations” (*Daily Trust*, December 30, 2010). Meanwhile, Defense Minister Prince Adetokunbo Kayode promised the investigation would continue, saying, “The perpetrators are here, they are not from the moon and we will get them” (*Vanguard*, January 2).

MYSTERIOUS MURDER OF LEBANESE ISLAMIST MILITANT GHANDI AL-SAHMARANI

The late-December murder of Lebanese Islamist and Jund al-Sham commander Ghandi Sahmarani (a.k.a. Abu Ramiz) was an instructive example of the changing

balance of power in Lebanon's Ayn al-Hilweh refugee camp, which exploded in Islamist-inspired violence in 2007.

While political assassinations are far from unknown in the Palestinian camps, Sahmarani's death followed a different pattern from the usual shootings and bombings. Though exact details remain unclear, it appears that Sahmarani was brutally tortured for as long as 48 hours before his ultimate death by hanging or a gunshot to the mouth (Now Lebanon, January 3). There was no claim of responsibility for the killing. Sahmarani, a native of Tripoli, was closely tied to the Ayn al-Hilweh camp for over 20 years. Following the discovery of his body the Lebanese Army moved additional forces to the entrance of the camp, but the anticipated unrest never materialized (Naharnet, December 27, 2010; December 28, 2010).

Established in 2004, Jund al-Sham ("The Army of Greater Syria") is a splinter group of the larger Usbat al-Ansar ("League of Partisans"), an armed Salafist movement formed in the 1980s. Unlike a number of other Salafist groups operating in the Palestinian refugee camps, both Usbat al-Ansar and Jund al-Sham include native Lebanese members, like Sahmarani, as well as Palestinians in their ranks (Naharnet, May 31, 2008). The small group of roughly 50 Jund al-Sham militants joined the Fatah al-Islam movement in the bitter fighting against the Lebanese Armed Forces (LAF) that erupted in the Nahr al-Bared refugee camp in 2007 and later spread to Ayn al-Hilweh.

Sources within the camp say the brutal killing was not politically motivated, but rather came in response to allegations that Sahmarani had raped a number of married and unmarried women within the site (Now Lebanon, January 3). One Islamist leader who declined to be named told a Beirut daily that Sahmarani was killed "for moral reasons" after raping a married woman and videotaping her naked (*Daily Star* [Beirut], December 29, 2010). Lebanese radio reported that the killers had been identified and were part of Sahmarani's "inner circle" (Voice of Lebanon Radio, December 27, 2010).

Jund al-Sham has had frequent clashes with the secular Palestinian Fatah movement led by Palestinian president Mahmud Abbas (a.k.a. Abu Mazin) (*al-Hayat*, March 24, 2008). Fatah security official Mahmud Abd al-Hamid Isa "al-Lino" in particular has been in the forefront of efforts to rein in Jund al-Sham extremists, who have frequently endangered relations between the

Palestinians and Lebanese authorities. Al-Lino is a senior commander in Fatah's Palestinian Armed Struggle (PAS), which serves as a civil police force in the Palestinian camps. The camps are administered by Palestinian authorities rather than the Lebanese government under the terms of a treaty. Recently the Islamist factions have been cooperating with the PAS to restore order and security to the Palestinian camps, leaving little room for extremists like Sahmarani. Even other armed Islamist groups such as Usbat al-Ansar have participated in campaigns to disarm and dismantle the Jund al-Sham organization. Under pressure from all sides, many Jund al-Sham militants have fled to Europe, joined the jihad in Iraq, or returned to the ranks of Usbat al-Ansar.

Fatah's al-Lino issued a prompt denial of Fatah involvement in the killing of Sahmarani, describing it as "an incident shrouded in mystery" (*Daily Star* [Beirut], December 29, 2010). Though an Ayn al-Hilweh shop owned by a PAS major was bombed shortly after the discovery of Sahmarani's body, authorities were reluctant to make any connection between the two events. Authorities are likely correct in this; considering the circumstances and method of Sahmarani's murder, his near complete isolation, the general desire, even among Islamists, for security and the unsupportable nature of the allegations against Sahmarani, retaliation for his death would definitely be inadvisable for his few remaining supporters. His followers (if any indeed still exist) might be more likely to seek the services of human smugglers to emigrate to Europe, a path frequently taken by other Ayn al-Hilweh militants who have found themselves under pressure in the close confines of the camp. The new but largely powerless Jund al-Sham leadership will be under close scrutiny from Palestinian security forces, Lebanese intelligence and even their fellow Islamists in Ayn al-Hilweh.

The Role of Egyptian Militants in Developing al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula

By Hani Nasira

The role of Egyptian Islamists in creating al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP) can be traced back to the efforts of Dr. Ayman al-Zawahiri and the Egyptian Islamic Jihad (EIJ) organization to overthrow the Egyptian regime in the 1990s. Al-Zawahiri played no direct role in the EIJ's assassination of late President Anwar Sadat in 1981, but he is considered the architect of the organization's revival since his election as the EIJ Amir during a meeting of the group's leaders in Sudan in 1993. That move followed the Egyptian security forces' successful blows to the Tala'a al-Fath (Vanguards of Conquest, an EIJ offshoot), led by Ahmad Husayn 'Ujayzah, and the arrest in one night in January 1993 of 800 cadres of the organization, which led to the dismissal of 'Ujayzah and al-Zawahiri's unanimous election as a new leader.

Al-Zawahiri spent two years of his leadership targeting symbols and pillars of the Egyptian regime through the introduction of suicide operations, the 1993 attempts to assassinate Minister of the Interior Hasan al-Alfi and Prime Minister Atef Sidqi, and the failed plot to blow up an Israeli-U.S. tourist group in Cairo's Khan al-Khalili market in 1995. The latter operation ultimately resulted in the disruption of the last EIJ cell in Egypt, led by Adil al-Sudani and Ahmed al-Naggar, who were executed in Egypt in 1998 and 2000 respectively. Al-Zawahiri was then forced to halt operations in Egypt for lack of means to carry on.

Al-Zawahiri's biggest contributions to Islamist militancy remain his success in providing safe havens and new launch pads for the EIJ outside Egypt and globalizing the idea of jihad through integration with al-Qaeda in February 1998, leading to confrontation with the United States and its allies.

Yemen became the most important station in harboring, arming and training elements of EIJ (especially after its incorporation with al-Qaeda), using the country as a starting point for carrying out operations targeted at other countries.

Yemen is the oldest and most stable base for Egyptian jihadists and al-Qaeda members, unlike Sudan, where the militants could not stay for more than a few years. The Sudanese government asked al-Zawahiri and his jihad group to leave in 1995 following the organization's execution of two boys accused of homosexuality and espionage (one of the boys was Mus'ab, son of senior EIJ member Shaykh Abu al-Faraj al-Masri). [1]

The presence of the EIJ in Yemen started with Muhammad Sharaf and Muhammad al-Zawahiri, Ayman al-Zawahiri's brother. Sharaf led the EIJ in Yemen due to his long stay in the country prior to his migration to the United Arab Emirates, which extradited him to Egypt in 2002 (*Asharq al-Awsat*, March 12, 2002). Abu al-Faraj al-Masri was among the early leaders of the Egyptian jihad and in the 1970s migrated to Yemen where he enjoyed good relations with the Yemeni tribes. He was a member of the EIJ's Shura Council and at the time of his arrest he was in charge of the Shari'a Committee.

Muhammad al-Zawahiri migrated to Yemen in 1980 while working for the International Islamic Relief Organization. He remained in Yemen until 2000, at which time his wife and six children lost track of any news of him. Egypt then declared that the United Arab Emirates extradited him, most likely in 2000, and he remains imprisoned in Egypt (*Asharq al-Awsat*, February 29, 2004).

Among the early leaders in Yemen was Abdul Aziz al-Jamal, who is considered amongst EIJ's first generation. He was extradited to Egypt by Yemen in 2002 and is now a supporter of the "Revisions" of imprisoned EIJ leader Sa'id Imam bin Abdulaziz al-Sharif (a.k.a. Dr. Fadl) (see *Terrorism Monitor*, December 10, 2007).

Those elements active through the Relief Committees formed a spearhead for receiving training and preparing new elements for different operations. They were also in charge of gathering and stashing weapons. The organization expanded and grew stronger in Yemen following its integration with al-Qaeda in 1998, with the provision of financial support, stronger relations with the tribes and expanded recruitment.

Following the fall of the Tala'a al-Fath organization in 1993, Yemen became the primary refuge for Egyptian jihadists. Among those who migrated there were Mahmud al-Dib, Ahmad al-Naggar and Shaykh Ibrahim Muhammad Salih al-Banna (a.k.a. Abu Ayman al-Masri), all future leaders of the EIJ.

Following Muhammad Sharaf, the EIJ in Yemen was led by Mahmud al-Dib (1993), Ahmad al-Naggar (1994-1996) and Ibrahim Muhammad Salih al-Banna (1996-1998). However, after integration with al-Qaeda, the leadership was transferred to native Yemenis, including Muhammad Omar al-Awlaqi (1998-2006), Nasir al-Wuhayshi (2006-2009) and Qasim al-Rimi (2009-to present). Ayman al-Zawahiri moved to Yemen in late-1994 and stayed for about one year before traveling to Pakistan. Despite his physical absence, orders for the jihad organization continued to come directly from him.

Abd al-Mun'im bin Izz al-Din al-Badawi and Ibrahim Muhammad Salih al-Banna were in charge of the training and intelligence sectors of the EIJ, but al-Banna took sole control after al-Badawi travelled to Afghanistan and then Iraq, where he succeeded Abu Mus'ab al-Zarqawi as leader, using the name al-Muhajir. Al-Badawi remained responsible for the training and intelligence sectors for all al-Qaeda branches, and Osama bin Laden described him as a "legend" in the intelligence field (*Al-Jarida* [Kuwait], November 4, 2010).

After integration with al-Qaeda, the role of the Egyptian jihadists was limited to logistical, intelligence and training support, as leadership roles were shifted to Yemeni and Saudi elements such as Saudi Sa'id al-Shihri, who became the deputy of al-Wuhayshi and al-Rimi (*Al-Jarida* [Kuwait], November 4, 2010). With an expanded membership, AQAP continues to use Yemen as a launching point for al-Qaeda operations and recruitment efforts.

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Note:

1. Al-Maqreze Center for Historical Studies, Hani al-Siba'i, Jihad Story, on this link: http://www.almaqreze.net/hewarat/hewar006_1.html.

Al-Shabaab Desertions Increase in Southern Somalia

By Muhyadin Ahmed Roble

Disgruntled al-Shabaab fighters are increasingly deserting the radical Islamist group after years of fighting for the movement in southern Somalia. The deserters are mainly from southern Somalia's Hawiye clan, while the movement's current leader, Shaykh Ahmad Abdi Godane "Abu Zubayr," hails from the Isaaq clan in Somaliland, a largely peaceful, *de facto* independent state in northern Somalia. Most of the absconders fled from southern Somalia to neighboring countries while others joined the troops of Somalia's Transitional Federal Government (TFG).

On December 19, 2010, the TFG presented six al-Shabaab deserters to reporters at a press conference in Mogadishu. The six, who defected to government forces on November 19, 2010, included a number of senior commanders who had led al-Shabaab fighters in clashes against Somali TFG forces and African Union peacekeepers.

The defectors told local reporters that they joined al-Shabaab with the intention of safeguarding the rule of law through the holy Qu'ran, but later realized that the group was not following the teachings of the Shari'a. They then defected to the side of the government and sought forgiveness from the Somali people.

In discussing the reasons for his departure from al-Shabaab, former commander Muhammad Farah Ali said he was forced to kill his deputy commander when the latter was injured in the fighting and needed treatment abroad.

Muhammad Farah described the order as coming from Abu Mansur al-Amriki, an American al-Shabaab commander. Though Muhammad Farah regarded the order as unacceptable, he nevertheless carried it out for fear of his own safety before leaving the group: "If a fighter received a serious injury, they give an order to finish him because they would not have time to treat him. But if he received a small injury and was able to take up the gun again they will treat him." Muhammad Farah's account was similar to earlier reports that senior al-Shabaab commander Shaykh Mukhtar Robow "Abu Mansur" became infuriated with the movement's leadership when he learned one of his deputies had been

killed by fighters loyal to Ahmad Abdi Godane to ensure the wounded deputy would “die a martyr” (Jowhar, October 8, 2010; Wadanka.com, September 28, 2010; Suna Times, October 9, 2010; see also *Terrorism Monitor* Briefs, October 21, 2010).

The six men joined hundreds who had already left the militant force, such as 19-year-old Deeq Abdirahman, who defected from al-Shabaab last October. Deeq, who had never received any secular education, was recruited by the Islamic Courts Union from his madrassa in 2006 to fight against Somali warlords in Mogadishu. Deeq was eventually one of hundreds who received special training before joining a special wing led by Adan Hashi Ayro, an instrumental al-Shabaab commander who was himself trained at an al-Qaeda base in Afghanistan in the 1990s (Ayro was later killed by a U.S. cruise missile in central Somalia in 2008).

However, Deeq was forced to flee from Somalia by his former colleagues in arms and reached Nairobi in November after his relatives raised funds to assist his escape from al-Qaeda associated elements in Somalia. “They [al-Shabaab] called and threatened to kill me, saying, ‘We will slaughter you just as the infidels and people who have converted [from Islam].’”

Deeq began his journey from Mogadishu at the beginning of November, passing through al-Shabaab checkpoints in southern Somalia as he sought a safe place. “I decided to be brave because I was not able to get enough money for the airlines,” he noted.

In explaining why he deserted, Deeq says that he realized that the group is becoming more aggressive and threatens to kill every person who is not compliant: “They are all talking about killing people whether they are innocent or not. If you try to offer your comments you will face their wrath. The only option they have is killing, so I realized that their ambitions are not about religion.” According to the young man, al-Shabaab policy says if a person defects after working with the group for more than six months, he must be killed because he knows the organization’s secrets.

Twenty-one-year-old Muhammad Abdi, a junior al-Shabaab official, was one of those who had less luck in escaping the wrath of the militant organization, being assassinated only weeks after he deserted the group. His older brother, Ayanle Abdi, a businessman in Nairobi, said that Muhammad was killed as the family planned to bring him to Nairobi for safety. “We were aware of

the threat since he left them. They were accusing him of joining what they call ‘the enemy of God,’” said Ayanle. Armed masked men shot Muhammad Abdi as he was walking in the Madina district of Mogadishu in November.

Muhammad Abdi was a secondary school student when he joined al-Shabaab in 2007 to fight against the Ethiopian forces that ousted ICU fighters from southern Somalia. “The recruiters met him at his school. They told him to fight for religion and God and the promise of a salary,” said Ayanle. The former student then received six months of training in the southern coastal town of Ras Kamboni, an al-Shabaab stronghold.

Though al-Shabaab is believed to have roughly 3,000 fighters, mostly of local origin, there are also claims that the movement is increasingly reliant on foreign fighters migrating to the jihad in the Horn of Africa. Wafula Wamunyinyi, deputy head of the AU mission in Somalia, says Somalia is host to more than 2,000 foreign fighters from India, Pakistan, Iraq and elsewhere, who are providing funds and training for terrorist operations. [1] According to some deserters and government officials, such as former deputy speaker of parliament and Minister of Rehabilitation and Social Affairs Professor Muhammad Omar Dalha, a number of these foreigners, including al-Qaeda operative Fazul Abdullah Muhammad (a native of the Comoros Islands) and American native Abu Mansur al-Amriki, are among those who have taken over the group’s leadership. [2]

Al-Shabaab has implored Somali mothers to send their children for training at al-Shabaab camps. The group has also urged Somali youth to register at al-Shabaab offices for recruitment into the organization, which is involved in heavy fighting in Mogadishu and elsewhere in southern Somalia. The movement is now training hundreds of young men to replace losses due to combat and desertion.

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Notes:

1. Statement given at a press conference in Nairobi, August, 2010. See also *The National* [Abu Dhabi], August 24, 2010.
2. Interview with Professor Omar Muhammad Dalha, Nairobi, December 22, 2010.

The Tribes of Yemen: A Threat to Stability or Asset to Unification? Part One

By Michael Horton

“The tribes are Yemen and Yemen is the tribes,” is a saying that is often repeated by Yemenis from the north central highlands where the tribe and tribal life are most dominant. [1] In the wake of the “underwear bomber” and the “toner bombs,” Yemen has been the subject of intense and often simplistic media coverage. Newspapers and cable news networks have frequently described much of Yemen as a lawless patchwork of competing tribes. The headlines and erroneous descriptions lack real understanding of Yemen’s intricate social and cultural history. In much of Yemen, tribal affiliations and the complex social, cultural and legal structures that underpin tribal life define and shape families, communities and even regions. While parts of Yemen are not subject to the full control of the state, most are far from lawless. In many of these areas, it is the tribe and tribal government that predominate, just as they have for hundreds of years.

As the Yemeni government and the United States intensify their efforts to combat suspected al-Qaeda operatives in primarily tribal areas like Shabwa, Abyan and Ma’rib, it is essential that these efforts do not alienate and/or isolate potential tribal allies. Al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula’s (AQAP) attempts to enmesh itself within Yemen’s tribal matrix will be more successful if the Yemeni regime and its backers ignore the country’s tribal politics and history. The U.S.-led December 2009

attacks on suspected al-Qaeda encampments in Abyan and Arhab as well as the failed May 2010 attack that led to the death of Shaykh Shabwani in Ma’rib highlight the dangers of ignoring the tribal aspects of Yemeni society. [2] The attacks inflamed tribe vs. state tensions and acted as recruitment tools for AQAP and other Salafist-inspired groups. While the centrality and power of the tribes may be waning in some parts of Yemen, tribal identity and the kinship ties and allegiances that make up a Yemeni’s identity remain paramount for many. Understanding how Yemen’s tribes contribute to Yemeni society is a prerequisite to ascertaining how AQAP can or could expand its influence in Yemen.

Tribes and Non-State Government

The term “tribe” (*qabila* in Arabic), is not easily defined but it is helpful to note that the verb from which the word is derived can mean to accept or to give a friendly reception. The idea of acceptance and the protection and honor of one’s guests and allies continues to inform much of what it means to be a tribesman (*qabili*) in Yemen. Use of the term “tribe” in English often leads to an oversimplification of what actually constitutes a tribe. Every tribe is made up of a complex network of families and clans that are knitted together by shared lineages, customs and alliances. The families and clans that belong to a particular tribe are further bound by shared traditions of government and law which regulate both inter-tribal and extra-tribal relations.

Yemen’s tribes have a long and varied history of self governance that, like the written history of states, is characterized by periods of both enlightened and tyrannical rule. Some tribes developed highly efficient systems of delegatory government while others developed forms of government that were less well organized and more reliant on individual leaders. The traditions of government that developed were often dictated by the terrain and the customs of its inhabitants. For example, the tribes of the Razih Mountains in northwest Yemen have a long history of settled farming that necessitated more elaborate forms of government and tribal law (*‘urf*). As a result, they have maintained written records of legal cases and disputes that are used to establish precedent in contemporary quarrels. [3] Other tribes such as the Dhu Muhammad, whose territory encompasses the desert and scrublands of parts of Ma’rib and beyond, are unlikely to maintain written records and often have a more fluid system of governance that reflects their traditional dependence on herding and seasonal farming.

While the finer points of tribal governance and tribal law are highly varied, there are certain commonalities. In most parts of northern Yemen as well as some parts of southern Yemen, villages are overseen by headmen or *umana*. Elders (*ayan al-qabila*) administer clans that may inhabit a number of nearby villages. At the top is the shaykh who oversees the entire tribe. While this may sound pyramidal, it is not. Traditionally—and in much of Yemen this is still the case—the shaykh’s continued power and his position are dependent on the consent and good will of the elders who themselves depend on the goodwill and continued support of their constituents. While elders and shaykhs are mostly drawn from what are called “shaykhly” families (those families that have long produced the clan or tribe’s leaders), the shaykhs and elders can be replaced if they fail to fulfill their obligations to their constituents. The shaykhs, elders and headmen depend on the respect of those they administer. If the respect for any village, clan or tribal leader is lost, then his ability to negotiate truces, act as arbiter, or rule in cases of tribal law is lost, and, as a consequence, he will be replaced.

Inter-tribal relations and relations within the tribe and its clans and families are regulated by tribal law, which, despite regional differences, draws on a rich corpus of shared traditions and histories. As customary law, tribal law is adaptable, efficient and, in most cases, is preferred by tribesmen to both Shari’a (Islamic law) and constitutional law. In large swathes of Yemen, tribal law remains the primary code of justice. The government of Yemeni President Salih often falls back on tribal law to settle disputes between tribes and between tribes and the government. A recent example of Salih’s reliance on tribal law came when the Abida tribe and its allies threatened war on the government in the wake of Shaykh Shabwani’s death in May 2010 as a result of a botched missile attack.

The Wings of the Imamate

Many of Yemen’s northern tribes belong to one of two tribal confederations: the Bakil and the Hashid. The Bakil is Yemen’s largest tribal confederation, but it is historically not as well organized as the smaller but far more politically active Hashid confederation. The Hashid, traditionally led by members of the al-Ahmar family, is an influential actor in Yemeni politics. President Salih’s Sanhan tribe belongs to the Hashid confederation. This and Salih’s reliance on tribal politics to consolidate and increase his political reach have

ensured the continued prominence of the Hashid in all aspects of Yemeni society, especially in northern Yemen. Both the Hashid and the Bakil have rejected al-Qaeda efforts to recruit their members (*Saudi Gazette*, January 6, 2010).

Throughout much of Yemen’s history, the Hashid and Bakil confederations and the tribes that belong to them have acted as arbiters of power in northern Yemen, and in parts of southern Yemen as well over the last twenty years. The two confederations were often termed the “wings of the Imamate” because of the reliance of the Imam (the hereditary ruler and religious leader of the Zaidi Shiites of northern Yemen) on them to legitimize his rule and most importantly to expel invading forces like the Ottoman Turks in the 17th and early 20th centuries. However, the relationship between the tribes and the state (the Imamate in this case) was usually a balancing act between two powers that always threatened to overwhelm one another. The tribes, acting individually or as a confederation, often rebelled against the state when it was seen to be overreaching its authority, whether by imposing high taxes or infringing upon what was regarded as tribal territory or tribal spheres of influence. This tension between the state and the tribes has long characterized their relations in Yemen. The power of the state, like the power of the tribes and confederations, has waxed and waned. When the Imamate was able to finance a largely independent and loyal army, at times overseen by slaves who were often viewed as being more loyal because of their lack of tribal affiliations, the state was able to extend its reach well beyond the cities. However, the power of the state has never been even close to absolute in Yemen, where the mountainous terrain and the traditions of independence and self-governance have always acted against a strong state. Yemen’s deserts and mountains are still seen by many Yemenis as refuges from a government that is often thought to be corrupt, indifferent and inefficient. AQAP has attempted to exploit this situation by urging the tribes not to cooperate with government forces (*Yemen Post*, November 3, 2010).

The Salih Regime: The Patronage System and Declining Oil Revenues

Yemeni President Salih differs from many of Yemen’s rulers in that he is a member of the tribesmen class rather than a member of the *sayyid* class (descendants of the Prophet) from which the Imams were drawn. Perhaps because of his tribal roots, Salih’s rise to and

consolidation of power have both been characterized by adept management and use of Yemen's tribes and tribal alliances (Reuters, August 31, 2009). Salih is said to have a prodigious memory when it comes to familial, clan and tribal connections. Arguably to an even greater extent than the Imams before him, Salih has maintained his grip on power by manipulating Yemen's tribes. This manipulation has long relied on a patronage system that trades influence, money, jobs and government positions for loyalty. [4] The development of Yemen's oil industry financed the largess that has allowed Salih to increase the influence and power of his regime. This is not unique in Yemeni history. In the 1600s, Yemen had a monopoly on the export of coffee that generated the revenue needed to finance an extension of state power by way of a resurgent Imamate. However, the end of the coffee monopoly marked the beginning of the end of expanded state control. Yemen and the Salih regime are experiencing a similar decline in state finances as Yemen's oil production declines. Yemen's oil exports account for more than 75% of state revenue. Since its peak in 2002, oil production has dropped by 40% and some studies suggest that Yemen's oil reserves will be depleted by as early as 2017. The drop in revenue has already resulted in a contraction of the once generous patronage system (SABA, December 3, 2010). Shaykhs from less powerful tribes have already seen their benefits cut or eliminated by the regime in its attempt to reduce costs. During a recent trip to Yemen by the author, a number of shaykhs from "minor" tribes bemoaned the fact that the government payments for their bodyguards, most often their sons, had been reduced or eliminated. Others from more powerful tribes complained about the government trying to offer them Korean-made economy cars instead of the Land Cruisers they are accustomed to.

The reduction and in some cases elimination of government handouts has already resulted in increased tension between the state and some tribes. The curtailment of patronage is also seen by many shaykhs and their constituents as an assault on the honor of the tribe and its shaykh. While the Salih regime has long relied on policies that favor some tribes over others, the elimination of state subsidies to the heads of some tribes and not others threatens to cause increased tensions between the tribes themselves. The cuts in government largess are being further exacerbated by rising food costs fueled by global inflation and a devaluing Yemeni Riyal, which lost 30% of its value in 2010. While the cuts in state subsidies have increased tribal tensions, the patronage system itself has long acted as a destabilizing

force among the tribes. The shaykhs who are supported by the Salih regime are often able to act independently since they have the financial and at times military backing of the regime. The patronage system has also encouraged many shaykhs to live outside of their constituencies in Sana'a, where they are closer to the seat of power and better able to lobby for funds and jobs.

The Salih regime's inability to continue to fund its elaborate patronage system has caused it to shift toward more confrontational policies to ensure the authority of the state. Under the guise of fighting terrorism, the state has often moved troops into tribal areas, bombed recalcitrant tribes and shut down roads to force tribes to comply and submit to its rule. In a strategy adopted from the British, who carried out punitive bombings preceded by warnings in the protectorates, the Salih regime uses aerial bombings to punish tribes who are largely beyond the reach of its ground forces. This is an ominous shift from a policy that was once focused on largely non-violent co-option in order to maintain power and is certain to further destabilize the country.

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*Please see the forthcoming issue of *Terrorism Monitor* for "The Tribes of Yemen: A Threat to Stability or Asset to Unification?" Part Two.

Notes:

1. A discussion of the problematic term "tribe," its genesis, use and connotations are well beyond the scope of this article. For the sake of simplicity, the article uses "tribe" to describe the various groups and communities in Yemen that, in many, cases have long histories of association and cooperation. However, it must be noted that most "tribes" in Yemen are far from being monolithic societal structures. In many cases the groups that make up particular tribes, and the clans and families that are the building blocks of the tribes, are fluid with shifting loyalties and agendas that are dictated by local needs and conditions. Clans and families can and do change their tribal affiliations. It must also be noted that

while some tribes and clans may have common histories and lineages, that does not mean that the tribe or clan is in anyway a cohesive political entity.

2. For more background on the attacks see: <http://www.amnesty.org/en/for-media/press-releases/yemen-images-missile-and-cluster-munitions-point-us-role-fatal-attack-2010-> and Andrew McGregor, "Tribal Resistance and al-Qaeda: Suspected U.S. Airstrike Ignites Tribes in Yemen's Ma'rib Governorate," *Terrorism Monitor*, July 16, 2010.

3. See Shelagh Weir, *A Tribal Order: Politics and Law in the Mountains of Yemen*, University of Texas Press, 2007.

4. See Sarah Phillips, *Yemen's Democracy Experiment in Regional Perspective: Patronage and Pluralized Authoritarianism*, Palgrave Macmillan, 2008. Also note that the Government of Saudi Arabia has a long history of keeping many of Yemen's most powerful shaykhs on its payroll, notably the heads of the al-Ahmar family.