



# Terrorism Monitor

In-Depth Analysis of the War on Terror

VOLUME IX, ISSUE 3 ♦ JANUARY 20, 2011

## IN THIS ISSUE:

BRIEFS.....	1
ISLAMIST MILITANTS OF THE TNSM PLAN RETURN TO PAKISTAN'S SWAT VALLEY By Arif Jamal.....	4
OPERATION NEATH: IS SOMALIA'S AL-SHABAAB MOVEMENT ACTIVE IN AUSTRALIA? By Raffaello Pantucci.....	5
THE TRIBES OF YEMEN: AN ASSET OR IMPEDIMENT TO STABILITY? PART TWO By Michael Horton .....	7



Activists in Yemen's separatist movement

Terrorism Monitor is a publication of The Jamestown Foundation. The Terrorism Monitor is designed to be read by policy-makers and other specialists yet be accessible to the general public. The opinions expressed within are solely those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect those of The Jamestown Foundation.

Unauthorized reproduction or redistribution of this or any Jamestown publication is strictly prohibited by law.



For comments or questions about our publications, please send an email to [pubs@jamestown.org](mailto:pubs@jamestown.org), or contact us at:

1111 16th St. NW, Suite #320  
Washington, DC • 20036  
Tel: (202) 483-8888  
Fax: (202) 483-8337

Copyright ©2011

## SUDANESE ANSAR LEADER SADIQ AL-MAHDI REJECTS THE VIOLENCE OF THE “AL-QAEDA MENTALITY”

Sudan's leading opposition figure, Umma Party leader Sadiq al-Mahdi, has been increasingly vocal in recent weeks as public dissatisfaction grows in North Sudan over the role of the ruling National Congress Party (NCP) and its leader, President Omar al-Bashir, in losing the oil-rich South Sudan in a referendum on secession. In a recent interview with a pan-Arab daily, the former Prime Minister and hereditary leader of the Sufi “Ansar” (Helpers) of the western and central Sudan rejected the method of “direct individual violence” adopted by al-Qaeda. Sadiq gives three reasons used to justify extremist violence:

- The presence of foreign occupiers in Muslim lands.
- The presence of foreign usurpers, as in Palestine.
- The existence of social injustice (*al-Sharq al-Awsat*, January 9).

While Sadiq acknowledges that these problems must be dealt with even by “Islamic Centrists” such as himself, he rejects al-Qaeda's approach while questioning the perception of al-Qaeda as an hierarchical organization with a central leadership:

Many people believe that al-Qaeda is an organization; however, my opinion is that al-Qaeda is a mentality, and according to this mentality some people act in a decentralized way. It is not necessary that instructions come from al-Qaeda's leadership. There is a mentality based

on Islamic interpretative judgment, which in its turn is based on the implementation of these rulings, and anyone who does not agree to this is considered an infidel, whether he is a Muslim or non-Muslim; also [shedding] the infidel's blood is allowed.

Al-Mahdi has joined several other opposition leaders in giving the NCP government a January 26 deadline for the formation of a national unity government. The day was selected as the anniversary of the triumph of Sadiq's great grandfather, Muhammad Ahmad al-Mahdi, over Turco-Egyptian forces in Khartoum in 1885. The national unity government is required to negotiate relations with the new South Sudanese state and to resolve the Darfur issue and the arrest warrant of the International Criminal Court (ICC) for Sudanese President Omar al-Bashir on related war crimes charges: "The ICC issue has to be dealt with on a rational basis and not superficially by thinking that it can be ignored, and that it will be resolved and pass on its own." The Sudanese President was succinct in his response: "Whoever wants to overthrow the government can lick his elbow.... There will not be a national government" (*Sudan Tribune*, December 28, 2010).

Sadiq also criticized the United States for its support of Southern independence while ignoring the development of democracy in the North:

I believe that there is a fundamental dysfunction in the United States. The foreign policy is drawn up by "lobbies," and what these "lobbies" believe influences the policy of the U.S. Administration. "The lobbies" in existence today are interested in conducting the referendum and the birth of the South State without enough interest in what happens in the North State. This is despite the fact that any rational thinking considers it to be extremely necessary for the North State itself to be rational so that it does not contain any tendency to sabotage the South State.

The former prime minister went on to suggest that after the "failure of its policies" in Iraq and Afghanistan, the United States wants to present the secession of the South as "an achievement of its foreign policy." He fears that U.S. support for secession has taken little account of the need for the new state to exist in peace with North Sudan. "The United States ought to understand that the referendum cannot be allowed to be a cause for new wars," Sadiq stated.

Looking at the ruling National Congress Party (NCP) of Omar al-Bashir, Sadiq suggests that the party no longer speaks with one voice, with leading members advocating everything from wanting to get rid of the South to more effectively Islamize the rest of the nation, to those who declare the Muslim signatories of any peace treaty with the South to be infidels. "The NCP is close to becoming a 'vehicle of convenience' and not an institution; each passenger speaks in his own language."

However, Sadiq says that he does not regard al-Bashir as an extremist, but notes that "he can become enthusiastic. It is extremely possible that there are groups that have exerted pressure in this direction [i.e. religious extremism], and he responded to them."

Mubarak al-Fadl, Sadiq's cousin and leader of the Umma Reform and Renewal Party (URRP), was even more direct in his criticism of the NCP, saying it now feared a popular uprising in the North after using most of its oil wealth for "security and political functions"; "The National Congress Party is just using religion to support the police state and step up the oppression of the population... Al-Bashir is a military man who swore an oath to preserve the territorial integrity of Sudan and now he has to let the South go away. He cannot swallow that" (*Sudan Tribune*, December 21, 2010). Al-Fadl's opposition to the NCP began in 2004 after he was removed from his post as a presidential adviser. Though he has often clashed with his cousin Sadiq (much of Khartoum's political elite is related through blood or marriage), al-Fadl announced the dissolution of the URRP on the last day of 2010, saying he would now integrate his party with that of Sadiq Umma.

#### FORMER "AFGHAN ARAB" ALI AL-KURDI SAYS JIHAD AGAINST SOUTH YEMEN'S SEPARATISTS IS THE FIRST PRIORITY

A leading Yemeni jihadi and veteran of the post-Soviet struggle for power in Afghanistan has assumed the leadership of a possibly government-backed unity "committee" in the southern Yemeni port of Aden, where the Southern Mobility Movement (SMM) has been organizing a campaign to return the South to its former status as an independent state (Marib Press, January 3). In a recent interview, Ali al-Kurdi described the pro-unity plans of his new organization (*al-Sharq al-Awsat*, January 4).

According to al-Kurdi, an electrical engineer by trade, the Popular Committee for national unity that he chairs

does not receive any state funds (“the committee does not have ten riyals”), but is supported by those who suffered from the economic consequences of socialist rule in southern Yemen’s People’s Democratic Republic of Yemen (PDRY – 1970-1990). Al-Kurdi says socialist rule introduced “freedom of debauchery, alcohol drinking and the like” as well as enabling political persecution on the slightest of pretexts. The former mujahid is ambivalent about his relationship with the regime, on the one hand saying it would be an honor to collaborate with President Ali Abdullah Salih, while on the other recalling his numerous clashes with Yemen’s Political Security Organization (PSO) and a raid on his house that caused his sister to miscarry. He also recalls that it was the entry of Salih’s mixed force of tribesmen, former mujahidin and army regulars into Aden that prevented his execution by the Yemeni Socialist Party (YSP) in 1994.

Al-Kurdi has a long history as a mujahid, armed militant and suspected terrorist. After leaving the PDRY’s army in 1989, al-Kurdi says he left for Sana’a and moved on to Afghanistan after rejecting PDRY claims that he had been exposed to in the army that Afghani Muslims were fighting alongside the Soviets to drive out anti-Islamic mujahideen. Al-Kurdi claims to have carried out attacks in Khost, Jalalabad, Lugar and on the periphery of Kabul during his time in Afghanistan prior to his return to Aden in 1992.

Al-Kurdi was also charged but released as a suspect in the USS Cole bombing of 2000. He later complained of “dirty treatment” and beatings by “jailers and Shiite officials” (*Yemen Times*, February 26, 2006; Marib Press, January 2). Al-Kurdi was also charged with being a member of al-Qaeda in a 2006 trial of 19 alleged al-Qaeda operatives accused of plotting to assassinate Westerners and blow up a hotel used by American visitors to Yemen. The defendants were freed when the judge ruled Shari’a permitted jihad against the occupiers of Iraq (AP, July 9, 2006). Salih has deployed ex-mujahideen against the Southern separatists before, most notably in the 1994 civil war, when thousands of jihadis were recruited to fight Southerners in exchange for special consideration in post-war Yemen.

The ex-mujahid claims that AQAP has “no connection” to the core al-Qaeda organization, but was rather created by Sunnis who experienced persecution at the hands of (Zaidi) Shiites in PSO prisons. He denied any current relationship with al-Qaeda and downplayed its local significance as a militant group: “Al-Qaeda exists

as an organization in all countries of the world, but I rule out [this group] undertaking any operations in Yemen” (Marib Press, January 2).

Though his committee may be poorly funded by his own account, al-Kurdi and his followers are prepared to “repulse” SMM loyalists who might opt for violent resistance to the regime, even through the use of “martyrdom-seeking attacks.” Al-Kurdi asserts that “Jihad for Yemen’s unity takes precedence over jihad in Afghanistan and Palestine. And jihad against the SMM takes precedence over jihad against Jews and Christians.”

Al-Kurdi sees the separatist troubles of southern Yemen as part of a larger effort to divide and rule the Islamic world: “There is a conspiracy to divide Yemen, Saudi Arabia, Sudan and Iraq. Iraq has already been divided and now it is Sudan’s turn. The [conspirators] will then move on to Saudi Arabia and Yemen... Mecca and Medina’s turn will follow because Yemen constitutes the bulwark of Saudi Arabia. Even the Turks who formerly ruled Yemen viewed Yemen as such.

There are indications that a major campaign of assassination of senior Yemeni military officials has begun inside Yemen, with numerous officers and soldiers being killed in Abyan, Shabwah, Hadramawt and elsewhere (*al-Hayat*, January 9). Al-Turki blamed the officers and soldiers themselves, though not without assigning some blame to the SMM: “Frankly speaking, these officers and soldiers provide the justification for assassinations and lack of security, because some officers arrest people. When a person goes to prison, he is placed with al-Qaeda affiliated detainees. When such a person gets out of prison, he is angry and seeks revenge on the state. These are revenge acts by some citizens against security personnel. The SMM may be behind some attacks.”

## Islamist Militants of the TNSM Plan Return to Pakistan's Swat Valley

By Arif Jamal

Fear of a Taliban resurgence is rising among the people of the Swat valley, less than one year after the Pakistan army cleared the picturesque area (*Dawn* [Karachi] Feb 26, 2009). Many in Swat believe the Tehrik-e-Nafaz-e-Shariat-e-Mohammadi (TNSM - Movement for the Enforcement of Islamic Laws) may stage a comeback as soon as the snow melts this spring. Some believe the group will first strengthen its infrastructure and kill all potential resistance before making a move. However, most people think the militants are likely to retake the valley sooner or later if the army does not take action now.

The TNSM sent shockwaves throughout the world in 2009 when it took over the Swat valley and later occupied the adjoining town of Buner, creating fear of its continued march toward Islamabad. Instead of fighting and killing the militants, the Pakistani army chased them out of the valley in the winter of 2009-10, with few TNSM militants choosing to fight back. According to one resident of Mingora, a large number of the TNSM cadres have started coming back to their houses: "They are keeping a low profile at this time. We all know who is who in this town. They very often meet after sunset. It seems they are feeling the pulse of the situation before they strike." [1] Another resident of Swat confirmed that he had seen some TNSM members smuggling in arms at night:

The TNSM militants who are coming back to their homes are behaving differently this time. They look subdued so that they do not arouse anybody's suspicions. They are stockpiling arms and ammunition for some future activity. I have seen one van full of arms off-loaded at [a TNSM member's] house during the night. We are scared and cannot report it to police or army. We do not even know who is who [in terms of connections to the TNSM] in the police and army. [2]

The intentions of the top TNSM commanders, who remain inaccessible to journalists, are difficult to ascertain. However, the mid-ranking and low-ranking cadres are becoming more accessible to the local media.

A mid-level TNSM militant in Malakand told a local journalist that they have been ordered to go back to their homes and wait for orders. The same official said that the group has changed its strategy and wants to work peacefully as a result of the failure of its previous armed jihad. The journalist quoted the TNSM commander as saying; "Our elders have told us to continue our jihad in a peaceful way by winning over the population for now. We have been forbidden to take up arms although we have been asked to store them in the event of a crackdown by the security agencies." [3]

Other sources, however, have doubts about the peaceful intentions of the TNSM. A local resident related to one of the group's commanders said that he had been warned of speaking against the TNSM by his relative, as they "are about to rule Swat, Pakistan and the world." The same resident also said that Taliban members from outside the valley recently visited with Swat militants and they ostensibly held these meetings to plan another insurgency. "They seem to be putting in a lot of planning to avoid failure. They believe if they succeed this time, the army will not be able to dislodge them this time." [4]

Close analysis of the situation in Swat shows that the TNSM is working on a long term strategy. On the one hand, the group is setting up what can be described as sleeper cells, as the interviews with Swat residents reveal. On the other hand, the militants are killing politicians and members of civil society. In recent months the TNSM and the Taliban have killed more than one politician a week on average, mostly from the governing Awami National Party (ANP). [5] This strategy seems to scare all possible resistance either out of Swat or into submission. According to some officials, the targeted killings of ANP leaders in Karachi, where scores of ANP politicians have been murdered, are likely part of the same strategy. [6]

Some informed officials and politicians in Pakistan say that the army may allow, if not actually encourage, the TNSM and Taliban groups to take over the Swat valley to shift the focus from North Waziristan. The army has been postponing its promised military operation in North Waziristan under various pretexts for some time now. As U.S. pressure grows to go after the Islamist militants there, the Pakistani army is running short of excuses. Swat-II may be a diversion, a theory that has been confirmed by some officials. According to one such civilian official in Islamabad; "As the Western pressure on Pakistan to launch a military operation in North



Waziristan grows, the army may be tempted to let Swat fall to the extremists once more to deflect the attention away from Waziristan.” [7] This has been a common tactic used in the past by the Pakistan army in response to Western pressure. It would be difficult for the Americans to keep pressing for an operation in North Waziristan if Islamist militants become entrenched in Swat and threaten Islamabad.

*Arif Jamal is an independent security and terrorism expert and author of “Shadow War – The Untold Story of Jihad in Kashmir.”*

Notes:

1. Interview through a Research Assistant, Swat, December 2009.
2. *Ibid.*
3. Telephone interview with a local journalist, Malakand, December 2009.
4. Interview through a Research Assistant, Swat, January 2010.
5. Tabulated from Pakistani newspaper reports in the last two months.
6. Telephone interview with a civilian official in Karachi.
7. Telephone interview with an official in Islamabad, December 2009.

## Operation Neath: Is Somalia’s al-Shabaab Movement Active in Australia?

By Raffaello Pantucci

“Islam is the true religion. Thank you very much.” So declared Wissam Mahmoud Fattal, a 34-year-old Lebanese Australian former kick-boxer after he was convicted of participating in a plot to attack the Holsworthy Army base just outside Sydney (*The Age* [Melbourne], December 23, 2010; Australian Associated Press, December 23, 2010). The statement stood in contrast to Fattal’s earlier comments following his arrest when he shouted at the court, “Your army kills innocent people in Afghanistan and Iraq. You call us terrorists - that’s not true” (*Daily Telegraph*, August 5, 2009).

Fattal’s statement came at the conclusion of a lengthy trial that began after the August 2009 arrests and raids of 19 properties that concluded Operation Neath, one of Australia’s most substantial terrorism investigations to date (see *Terrorism Monitor*, September 10, 2009). Convicted alongside Fattal were Saney Edow Aweys, 27, and Nayef el-Sayed, 26, Somali and Lebanese naturalized Australians, respectively. Cleared of charges related to the plot were Yacqub Khayre, 23, and Abdirahman Ahmed, 26, both Somali-Australians.

Prosecutors alleged that the men were in the process of planning a *fidayin* or suicide-style attack on the Australian army base, in which they would use automatic weapons to wreak havoc until they were brought down. In a recorded conversation between Saney Aweys and a cleric in Somalia, Aweys outlined the plotters’ intention of attacking a barracks; “There are about six guys...20 minutes will be enough for us to take out five, six, ten...I don’t know. Until they will use up their weapons” (*The Age*, December 23, 2010).

Much of the media attention around the plot focused on the cell’s apparent connection to al-Shabaab militants in Somalia. Three of the men charged were of Somali descent and it was alleged that the group had sought to obtain a fatwa from clerics in Somalia to justify their actions. Furthermore, the case uncovered a network that was apparently responsible for funneling fighters and funding to the Somali extremist group.

At the center of the plot was Saney Aweys, a Somali refugee who retained a strong connection to his native land and the conflict it currently endures. In an attempt to deflect attention from his client Fattal, lawyer Patrick Tehan pointed an accusing finger at Aweys, declaring his “tentacles seem to be all over the place...he seems to be up to all sorts of activities” (*The Age*, December 24, 2010). Using seven different mobile phones registered under a variety of names, Aweys was the one who provided contacts with al-Shabaab networks in Somalia. It was apparently a phone call between Fattal and Aweys which first alerted Australian authorities to the danger posed by the cell (*Australian*, August 4, 2009). Fattal had expressed to an undercover officer his desire to achieve martyrdom fighting abroad in Somalia, which he described as the “true jihad.” Fattal, however, was unable to travel due to visa problems (*Australian*, September 23, 2010).

Early on in the case, Aweys was accused of facilitating the travel to Somalia of other Australian Somali's, including the missing Walid Osman Mohamed (believed to be in Somalia) and fellow defendant Yacqub Khayre, as well as sending money to the group. However, a decision not to prosecute was made on the grounds that the amounts were small and that al-Shabaab was not proscribed in Australia at the time (*Australian*, August 6, 2009). It is also possible that he was in contact with missing Australian-Somali suspect Hussein Hashi Farah, a man described in the press as the “mastermind” of the plot, who was last seen when he escaped from Kenyan custody after being picked up as he attempted to cross the Ugandan-Kenyan border (AAP, March 23, 2010; AAP, June 28, 2010).

Aweys was the key figure in seeking a fatwa from shaykhs abroad to condone their intended actions in Australia. As well as being in direct contact with Shaykh Hayakallah in Somalia, he also dispatched Yacqub Khayre, a young Somali-Australian and former drug addict he had taken under his wing, to Somalia to obtain the fatwa and (allegedly) to train with al-Shabaab. Khayre was something of an unreliable recruit, regularly fleeing from the camp and was described in an intercept between Somalia and Aweys as “a risk to you, us and the whole thing” (*Australian*, September 16, 2010). Khayre's defense successfully argued that the fatwa Khayre sought when he went to Somalia in April 2009 was merely to condone the conduct of fraud in obtaining money to support al-Shabaab (*The Age*, December 24, 2010).

These connections aside, it does not seem as though al-Shabaab was directly responsible for tasking the men to carry out jihad in Australia. Shortly after the initial arrests, al-Shabaab spokesman Shaykh Ali Mahmud Raage (a.k.a. Shaykh Ali Dheere) issued a statement dismissing reports that the detainees were in any way members of al-Shabaab, claiming the men were arrested solely because they were Muslims (Dayniile, August 6). While it seems clear that Australian police have disrupted a network providing support for al-Shabaab from their nation, it is not clear that this plot was indeed the beginning of a shift in the group's profile. This is somewhat tangential, however, from the perspective of Western security services, as what the case does highlight is that networks providing support for terrorist groups abroad can pose a potential threat at home. Described repeatedly as the key figure in the plot, the narrative painted by the prosecution was that Fattal had decided to turn his attention to Australia after having been thwarted in his attempts to conduct jihad abroad. He then used his connections to a network sending fighters and money to Somalia to turn those dreams into action, highlighting the very real risk that fundraising networks can pose for their host nations. The men are to be officially sentenced later this month and are likely to receive heavy terms.

*Raffaello Pantucci is an Associate Fellow at the International Center for the Study of Radicalisation (ICSR).*

## The Tribes of Yemen: An Asset or Impediment to Stability? Part Two

By Michael Horton

Since responsibility for the “underwear bomber” and “toner bombs” was claimed by al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP), the focus on the growth of al-Qaeda-linked organizations in Yemen has intensified. The two failed attacks have led to substantial increases in U.S. military aid to Yemen and to the increased covert involvement of the United States in Yemen.

Covert attacks by the United States, whose involvement was largely confirmed by diplomatic cables released by WikiLeaks, were never all that covert among Yemenis. After the December 2009 attacks, U.S. involvement was widely suspected and discussed by Yemenis in both Sana’a and Aden. The policies of increased military aid and covert missile attacks on suspected al-Qaeda targets are replete with risks. In the wake of the December 2009 cruise missile strike on targets in Abyan Governorate and the Arhab District of Sana’a Governorate, video and photographs of dead women and children alleged to have been killed in the attacks were widely circulated on the internet and in Yemeni newspapers. AQAP made liberal use of the images in its efforts to recruit Yemenis to its cause. After the May 2010 attack that killed Shaykh Shabwani of the Abidah tribe, AQAP called on members of both the Shabwani clan and the wider Abidah tribe to revolt against the government (*Yemen Post*, June 19, 2010). Both the December attacks and the May 2010 attack in Ma’rib Governorate that killed Shabwani took place in what can be deemed tribal areas where AQAP’s influence is supposedly the strongest and increasing. These “tribal” areas, namely Shabwa, Abyan, and Ma’rib, are some of Yemen’s most underdeveloped, despite, in the case of Ma’rib and Shabwa, being home to much of the country’s oil wealth. The state has never had a strong presence in any of these areas. The large but thinly populated governorates are in many ways ideal operating areas for organizations like AQAP. However, to operate in these areas, at least on any measurable scale, AQAP must have the approval of some of the tribes who reside in the areas.

AQAP - A New Tribal Patron?

An important question to ask is, “What does AQAP have to offer the tribes?” Many of the goals of AQAP

and the larger al-Qaeda organization (global jihad, re-establishment of the caliphate, imposition of Shari’a) are largely incongruous or irrelevant to many of the tribes and tribesmen that they might attempt to recruit. Global jihad and a new caliphate have little practical meaning for most of the inhabitants of regions like Shabwa, Abyan and Ma’rib, who are often far more concerned with issues like feeding their families, healthcare and schooling. While more general concepts like jihad do resonate with the tribes, the imposition of Shari’a, a key part of al-Qaeda’s political and religious platform, is something that has been opposed by most of the tribes, who prefer their own tribal law. At various points in Yemen’s history zealous imams have tried to impose Shari’a on the tribes with little success and much rebellion. The tribes’ subordination to the Islamic political authority suggested by the recreation of the caliphate runs counter to the tribes’ long history of self-government and political autonomy. Additionally, many of Yemen’s northern based tribes are Zaidi, a conservative Shi’a sect, and are therefore regarded as heretics by Salafists.

While much of al-Qaeda’s platform may not directly appeal to many of the tribes or tribesmen, its example of “resistance” to the Yemeni regime and the United States engenders sympathy within the tribes and other segments of the wider Yemeni populace. The authors of AQAP’s online magazine, *Sada al-Malahim*, have demonstrated their understanding of tribal customs by appealing to tribal understandings of honor, justice and autonomy in order to motivate the tribes to offer its operatives shelter. The attacks by both the Yemeni armed forces and the United States give some credence to the appeals, especially when civilian tribesmen are killed in military operations. In many cases the attacks on tribal territory, especially when conducted by outside powers like the United States, are seen as violations of tribal territory and honor. The 2002 U.S. drone attack on al-Qaeda operative Abu Ali al-Harithi in Ma’rib actually aided al-Qaeda’s operations in the area by making it a point of honor for many of the clans to harbor al-Qaeda operatives.

It is unlikely that AQAP will ever establish itself as a power over or even equal to the tribes in Yemen’s tribal areas. The organization’s goals do not align with those of most of the tribes and AQAP will suffer the same problems of legitimacy that the state faces. However, it is likely that some of the tribes and clans will use AQAP and its operatives as a kind of bargaining chip with the Salih regime to extract aid and largess. AQAP

will also benefit from a focus by the Yemeni government and its backers on military operations that excludes development efforts.

### The Competition for Tribal Loyalty

The Salih regime's transition from the long established oil funded patronage system to more combative and authoritarian methods of asserting state authority are unlikely to be successful. Throughout its history, Yemen's tribes have zealously guarded and fought to preserve their autonomy. As the Salih regime takes a harder line towards tribes that oppose it, it risks further destabilizing the country and the tribal framework which, in many parts of the country, remains the only source of order. In October, the Salih regime announced that as part of its efforts to combat AQAP it would begin offering arms to tribes who agreed to fight al-Qaeda (*al-Arabiya*, October 25, 2010). Yemen's main opposition group, the Joint Meeting Parties (JMP), issued a statement decrying the policy and warning it was tantamount to inciting inter-tribal war (*Yemen Observer*, October 27, 2010). Yemen is already the second most heavily armed country in the world after the United States, so more weapons are unlikely to contribute to security. The policy is another sign that the "soft" patronage system that once bought loyalty for the regime is being replaced with one that aims to create imbalances that the regime can use to its advantage.

The US's efforts to combat an emergent AQAP and to bolster the Salih regime with military aid and "scalpel" strikes on suspected AQAP targets also increase instability in the country by further delegitimizing the Salih regime in the eyes of much of the Yemeni public and by buttressing the anti-western rhetoric of groups like AQAP and the Houthis. U.S. efforts in the country are also likely to be hampered by faulty intelligence, an inability to accurately access intelligence received, and a regime whose first priority is its survival. There is a real danger that the military aid provided by the United States for counter-terror operations will be diverted to fights against other groups that oppose the regime. [1] This material, some of it obviously American-made, like the Humvees being provided to the Yemeni Army, could potentially turn groups against the United States that, in some cases, might ally themselves with some U.S. interests, and even encourage more sympathy with groups like AQAP.

### Conclusion

The current military aid and counterterrorism efforts will do little if anything to stabilize Yemen, which faces a host of grave environmental and economic challenges. Most of these challenges, from water shortages to a rapidly increasing population, are not easily dealt with and all require long-term strategies and solutions. The tribal nature of Yemeni society has existed for hundreds, if not thousands, of years and will remain long after the Salih regime has ended. This tribal structure is both an asset and an impediment to stability. It is an asset in that it often produces a functioning governmental structure that is responsive to local needs. The myriad tribes, their customs, laws and government have endured and in some cases offer viable and desirable alternatives to a regime that is beset with corruption and cronyism. However, it must also be noted that feuds between and within tribes are common and blood-feuds remain a scourge in parts of Yemen. The intertribal feuds, which will likely increase as the Salih regime's patronage network breaks down, are one of the primary impediments to stability in Yemen. From practical and ideological perspectives, AQAP has little to offer to Yemen's tribes and it is unlikely that the organization would be able to act as any kind of unifying force. However, if real development is not pursued, groups like AQAP will continue to find shelter and recruits among Yemen's overwhelmingly impoverished residents. It is clear that AQAP understands the importance of Yemen's tribes and that it is attempting to incorporate this understanding into its own efforts to recruit and expand in Yemen.

*Michael Horton is an independent analyst who specializes in Yemen and the Horn of Africa. He writes for Jane's Intelligence Review, Intelligence Digest, Islamic Affairs Analyst, and the Christian Science Monitor. Mr. Horton studied Middle East History and Economics at the American University of Cairo and Arabic at the Center for Arabic Language and Eastern Studies in Yemen. Michael frequently travels to Yemen, Ethiopia and Somalia.*

### Note:

1. See, "Following the Money in Yemen and Lebanon: Maximizing the Effectiveness of U.S. Security Assistance and International Financial Institution Lending," Committee on Foreign Relations, United States Senate (January 5, 2010).