



# Terrorism Monitor

In-Depth Analysis of the War on Terror

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Members of al-Shabaab  
in Mogadishu

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## NIGERIA'S BOKO HARAM ISSUES CONDITIONS AMIDST WAVE OF ISLAMIST VIOLENCE

A continuing wave of extremist violence sweeping northern Nigeria arrived in the Nigerian capital of Abuja on June 16, when a massive car bomb was only narrowly prevented from destroying the national police headquarters and most of the service's senior leadership. The attack was the most shocking of an almost daily series of bombings, random murders and targeted assassinations being carried out by the largely Borno State-based Boko Haram movement (see *Terrorism Monitor* Brief, July 22, 2010; September 19, 2010).

The incident occurred when a Honda Civic began to follow closely behind a police convoy bringing the Inspector General of Police, Hafiz Abubakr Ringim, and a number of other important police officials to the Abuja police headquarters. Thinking the vehicle was part of the convoy, guards allowed the Honda Civic into the compound. The two occupants of the car were allegedly carrying fake police identity cards. A quick-thinking traffic officer inside the compound diverted the car into a secondary lot, preventing it from exploding beside the building and likely preventing an enormous loss of life. As it was, the blast killed the attackers, the traffic policeman, three other men and destroyed some 40 cars immediately, with over 50 more incurring severe damage. The powerful blast broke windows and upended equipment throughout the seven-story police headquarters (*Vanguard* [Lagos], June 19). Examination of CCTV footage suggested that the car bomb may have been detonated by a timer or by remote control rather than being a suicide bombing (*This Day* [Lagos], June 20).

U.S. experts were called in to examine and identify the type of explosive used. A team of Abuja-based detectives raided a Boko Haram headquarters in the Borno capital of Maiduguri on June 20, arresting 58 suspects who were alleged to be celebrating the attack on the police headquarters. Among those arrested were a number of Somalis, Sudanese and Nigeriens. Some of the suspects claimed to have been coerced into Boko Haram membership (*Nigerian Tribune*, June 20).

Though the attackers failed to kill the police Inspector General, Ringim faced new problems after the bombing as many began to call for his resignation given his failure in preventing Boko Haram strikes (*Nigerian Tribune*, June 19). Nigerian president Goodluck Jonathan is under pressure from some quarters to implement sweeping changes in the police leadership.

The report of foreign nationals being arrested in Maiduguri fueled growing suspicions in some quarters that the Abuja bombing was made possible by the infiltration of foreign militants and organizations such as al-Qaeda. Sudan, Somalia and Iran have all been mentioned as possible sources of funding for Boko Haram, though no evidence of such funding has emerged as yet (*Business Day* [Lagos], June 20). Security services have been asked to monitor Sudanese and Somali nationals throughout Nigeria (*Vanguard*, June 20). Others suspect local politicians are sponsoring the militants as a means of disrupting security after losing in the April elections (*This Day*, June 20).

Boko Haram extremism is even becoming a danger to Wahhabist clerics, such as Ibrahim Birkuti, who was killed by motorcycle-riding gunmen outside his home in Biu (200 km south of Maiduguri) on June 7. Imam Birkuti had been critical of Boko Haram's violence (BBC, June 7). A sect spokesman recently said the group was also responsible for last month's murder of the brother of the Shehu of Borno, Alhaji Abubakar Ibn Garbai, one of Nigeria's most important Islamic leaders. Boko Haram has accused the Shehu of playing a role in the extrajudicial killing of sect members following the July 2009 Boko Haram uprising. The Shehu has denied any role in the killings (BBC, June 7; *Vanguard*, June 17).

Other targets have been more predictable. On June 10, Boko Haram gunmen killed the pastor of the Church of Christ in Nigeria and the church's assistant secretary in Maiduguri (*Vanguard*, June 10). Four people were killed in a Boko Haram raid on an unregistered drinking place in a suburb of Maiduguri on June 12 (*Next*, June 14).

The attack on the Maiduguri beer drinkers came only a few hours after Boko Haram released a list of conditions that must be met before the group will enter into a dialogue with the government. The Hausa language demands included:

- Unconditional release of all imprisoned members of Boko Haram.
- The immediate prosecution of all those involved in the killing of Boko Haram leader Malam Muhammad Yusuf after he was taken into police custody in July 2009 (see *Terrorism Monitor*, March 26, 2010).
- An investigation into the alleged poisoning of Boko Haram suspects awaiting trial.
- Implementation of Shari'a in the twelve northern states of Nigeria. These states adopted Shari'a codes in 1999, but their current application is not strict enough to meet Boko Haram's standards (*Next*, June 14).

More attacks followed the demands. Assaults on motorcycles sprayed a relaxation center in the Gomari district of Maiduguri with gunfire on June 19, killing five people (*Next*, June 20). On June 20, simultaneous attacks on a bank and a police station in Katsina by gunmen on motorcycles resulted in the deaths of five policemen and one private security guard. Boko Haram was a leading suspect in the attack, though their participation could not be confirmed (*Daily Sun* [Lagos], June 23). Unexploded bombs have also been found at a number of locations in the north (*The Nation*, June 14).

Boko Haram has clearly expanded its list of targets to now include Christians, traders from southern Nigeria, politicians, security officials, traditional leaders and Islamic clerics who dare to criticize the movement (*This Day*, June 17).

Nigerian president Goodluck Jonathan has described a "carrot and stick approach" as the government's policy in dealing with Boko Haram militants, saying he was open to dialogue with the group. Others have called for a general amnesty, as was applied to militants operating in the Niger River Delta (*Next*, June 19; *Vanguard*, June 20). Meanwhile, the government has begun to deploy a new Special Joint Military Task Force in Maiduguri. The task force will draw on security personnel from the military, police and state security services (*Vanguard*,

June 19).

#### YEMEN'S SHAYKH SADIQ AL-AHMAR DESCRIBES ARMED SUPPORT FOR A "PEACEFUL REVOLUTION"

Once a main pillar of support for the regime of Yemeni president Ali Abdullah Saleh, much of Yemen's Hamid tribal confederation has now come out in open confrontation to Saleh's teetering government. Complicating the new political alignment is the fact that President Saleh and his clan belong to "the people of al-Ahmar," the most powerful family in the Hashid confederation. The leader of the Hashid, Shaykh Sadiq al-Ahmar, recently told a pan-Arab daily of the reasons for the Hashid's political turnabout and described a path out of the current turmoil, while advising President Saleh not to return from his current hospitalization in Saudi Arabia.

Shaykh Sadiq is the oldest of ten sons of the late Shaykh Abdullah bin Hussein al-Ahmar (d. 2008), the former Hamid chief, Speaker of Parliament and a consistent supporter of the Saleh regime. In February, Shaykh Sadiq resigned from the ruling General People's Congress. By March 20, Sadiq was calling for the president to resign from office peacefully (al-Jazeera, March 20).

While describing the support of the Hashid and other Yemeni tribes for the "Yemeni people's peaceful revolution," Shaykh Sadiq acknowledged that many of the Hashid continue to support the regime: "There are always individuals benefiting from the regime and its gifts and they are from the Hashid and other tribes." As for those who have taken lives to defend the regime: "The blood is not forgotten until the killers are punished or pardoned by the victims' families. Those involved are known to the Yemeni people."

Nevertheless, Shaykh Sadiq asserts that the anti-regime protests are "a popular youth revolution and [an expression of] divine will." He praised the discipline of the young people and tribesmen (who have ample access to weapons) in confronting the regime's violent acts of repression "with bare chests." However, Shaykh Sadiq has not hesitated to support the "peaceful revolution" with armed force when required. On May 24, intense fighting broke out in the al-Hasbah neighborhood of Sana'a between the shaykh's tribal supporters and elements of the loyalist Republican Guard. The government responded to the clashes by issuing arrest warrants for all ten al-Ahmar brothers on charges of treason (al-Jazeera, May 26).

According to Shaykh Sadiq, the Hashid confederation abandoned its support of the president and his ambitious son, Ahmad Ali Saleh (commander of the Republican Guard) after it became apparent the regime was prepared to spill the blood of peaceful demonstrators to ensure the succession of the latter. This ended the *sharat Mu'awiyah* (Covenant of Mu'awiyah) between the Hashid leadership and the regime, which was intended to guarantee that the President's son would not succeed him, much as the original covenant called for Mu'awiyah (602-680), the first Caliph of the Umayyad Dynasty, to refrain from appointing his son Yazid as his successor (a pledge the Caliph broke).

Threats to Yemen's integrity from Southern secessionists and al-Qaeda militants were downplayed by the tribal leader in words that echoed accusations leveled by defecting General Ali Muhsin al-Ahmar last week: "There are no fears of secession in Yemen or fears from al-Qaeda. All these are tribulations planned and propagated by the regime which turned them into a bogey" (for Ali Muhsin's statement, see *Terrorism Monitor* Brief, June 17). The shaykh also believes that the political change promised by the revolution will succeed in meeting the demands of the Houthi rebels of north Yemen, as they are no different than the calls of other Yemenis for "stability, justice, security and development."

Shaykh Sadiq would prefer to see a solution to the political crisis through the use of constitutional means (i.e. the succession of Vice President Abd-Rabbu Mansur Hadi in the absence of the president), rather than the establishment of a transitional council. Of the vice-president, a southerner who is unrelated to the governing clan, Sadiq says "all the Yemeni people's sons and forces are with him. But it seems he is hesitant and we do not know the reason for his hesitation. We are in contact with him, support and back him if he leads Yemen to the shores of safety at this critical stage."

The shaykh concluded by advising President Saleh not to return to Yemen: "If it does happen... the clashes will increase and the cycle of violence and killing between the Yemenis will widen."

## Growing Financial Crisis Reversing al-Shabaab's Gains in Somalia

By Muhyadin Ahmed Roble

Even as Somalia's radical Islamist al-Shabaab movement announced its allegiance to the new al-Qaeda leader, Dr. Ayman al-Zawahiri, the movement has displayed signs of weakness that have led to the loss of territory in recent clashes in Mogadishu and in towns close to the border with Kenya (Shabelle Media Network, June 17; AFP, April 28).

Militias loyal to Somalia's Transitional Federal Government (TFG) have combined with peacekeepers of the African Union Mission in Somalia (AMISOM) to control 13 of the 15 districts in Mogadishu. Until recently, al-Shabaab had controlled most of the capital (Somalia Report, June 2).

TFG Information Minister Abdikarim Jama told Jamestown that TFG forces currently control three of four parts of the strategically important Bakara Market. [1] Author and politician Ahmed Shaykh Ali Burale said that the Bakara Market is the main source of funding for al-Shabaab. "I couldn't say the amount, but they receive millions from the market," Burale told the author. [2]

On June 4, TFG and AMISOM troops seized Damanyo (a.k.a. Shirkole Ofishiale), al-Shabaab's last military base in western Mogadishu, as well as the districts of Hodan and Bondere, both strategic districts within the capital. Colonel Paul Lokech, commander of the Ugandan contingent of AMISOM, said "Taking Bondere district has a high symbolic impact as the extremists no longer pose a direct threat to Villa Somalia," the location of the Presidential Palace and other major government buildings (*New Vision* [Kampala], June 5).

Helping pro-government forces is a growing financial crisis within al-Shabaab. Until recently, al-Shabaab fighters were regularly paid, which attracted defections from TFG units. These financially-induced desertions, however, have now halted according to former al-Shabaab commander Osman Gedi Ali, who deserted the Islamist movement at the beginning of the year. [3]

Another former al-Shabaab senior commander, Muhammad Farah Ali, said that the group had also lost funds from the Middle East and North Africa due to the ongoing political unrest associated with the "Arab

Spring." He did not indicate specifically where the money used to come from. Farah Ali told Jamestown in an exclusive interview that al-Shabaab is enduring its worst financial crisis ever. Funding problems have forced militants to abandon frontline areas in Mogadishu and southern Somalia due to a lack of ammunition (Somalia Report, June 7). "It's their worst time ever and it has really hit hard. The problem is lack of funds [and a] shortage of ammunition and bullets as well as fuel," Farah Ali indicated. "Every soldier is due to get \$30 whenever there is a fight, but the group now pays nothing." [4]

Al-Shabaab commanders are beginning to acknowledge the group's financial crisis, asking residents living under their control to contribute money and food to the movement. On June 6, al-Shabaab senior officer Mustafa Yusuf Abu Yonis urged farmers and residents in the Jubba region town of Buale, more than 80 kilometers north of the port city of Kismayo, to gather at a meeting meant to encourage the community to contribute to the militants' war against TFG and AMISOM forces in Mogadishu (Somalia Report, June 9). The commander told each farmer to bring ten sacks of flour as a contribution. Al-Shabaab is believed to be using part of the "donations" for food and is selling the rest to raise cash to buy ammunition. Similar events were reported in other areas controlled by al-Shabaab, including those in the Lower and Middle Shabelle regions of southern Somalia.

The militants have also imposed a new law which forces farmers to pay for water used to irrigate their lands in the Lower and Middle Shabelle regions. Shabaab forces were deployed around the river to stop farmers from watering their lands until their payment is confirmed, according to Musa Osman, a local farmer. [5]

A local journalist in Jowhar, Lower Shabelle's main town, told Jamestown on condition of anonymity that militants had also asked farmers to pay a tax of 200 Somali shillings for each hectare of land they held. Farmers living in the region's second biggest town, Balad, were forced to pay 400 shillings for each hectare, with 40 farmers who refused to pay being thrown behind bars. Two of them were later released after they paid fines of 45 million and 42 million Somali shillings, according to elders speaking from the city on June 6. [6]

According to former Shabaab commander Mustafa Yusuf Abu Yunis: "The shortage of money [has] damaged the morale of al-Shabaab fighters, who are



increasingly deserting to the government” (Somalia Report, June 9). Because of this loss the group is increasingly moving its assets, men and equipment out of Mogadishu, Information Minister Abdikarim Jama told reporters in Nairobi on May 28. [7] Not only a lack of funds but continuing disagreements among the group’s leaders have contributed to the crisis in morale, said former Shabaab commander Muhammad Farah Ali, who added that there are also problems with corruption and misuse of funds in the group’s leadership.

Contributing to the militants’ financial difficulties was last year’s loss of “protection” fees from three Somali World Food Program (WFP) sub-contractors and greatly diminished donations from the Somali diaspora, many of whom became alarmed with the group’s direction after the July 11, 2010 suicide bombings in Kampala that killed 74 civilians watching the Soccer World Cup final (Somaliweyn, April 2, 2010; see also *Terrorism Monitor*, November 18, 2010; *Terrorism Monitor* Brief, July 16, 2010).

TFG forces and African Union peacekeepers are continuing to take advantage of al-Shabaab’s financial woes, with Somali deputy prime minister and defense minister Abdihakim Mohamud Haji telling state radio that the TFG army and its Ugandan and Burundian AMISOM allies will continue to take out al-Shabaab elements across the country (Radio Mogadishu, June 6).

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Notes:

1. Author’s interview with TFG Information Minister Abdikarim Jama, May 28, 2011, Nairobi, Kenya. See also Garowe Online, June 12, 2011.
2. Author’s interview with Ahmed Shaykh Ali, author and politician, June 14, 2011, Nairobi. For the struggle for Bakara Market, see *Terrorism Monitor* Brief, May 27, 2011.
3. Author’s interview with former al-Shabaab officer Osman Gedi, May 25, 2011, Mogadishu, Somalia
4. Author’s interview with former al-Shabaab commander Muhammad Farah Ali, May 25, 2011, Mogadishu
5. Author’s interview with farmer Musa Osman, June 13, 2011, Jowhar, Somalia
6. Author’s interview with elders, June 6, 2011, Balad, Somalia. 45 million Somali shillings equals roughly

\$28,000.

7. Press conference with TFG Information Minister Abdikarim Jama, May 28, 2011, Nairobi.

## Turkistan Islamic Party Video Attempts to Explain Uyghur Militancy to Chinese

*By Raffaello Pantucci*

Almost completely overshadowed by the death of Osama bin Laden, jihadi publishing house Sawt al-Islam released a bilingual video from the Turkistan Islamic Party in mid-May. [1] The video recounted various historic grievances held by western China’s Muslim Uyghur people against Chinese communist rule while promising new efforts to achieve the independence of “East Turkistan” (China’s western province of Xinjiang). While the substance of the video is not that novel, the fact that it has been released with a narration in Mandarin Chinese would seem to mark a new twist for TIP, a group that has thus far largely restricted itself to publishing magazines in Arabic with occasional videos in Uyghur.

The video is delivered bilingually, with a speaker identified as Faruq Turisoon speaking Mandarin in the flat tones typical of some Chinese minorities. The language he uses is fluent and rapid, demonstrating a level of linguistic capability that would suggest he has at least lived in Chinese speaking communities for some time. The Uyghur version is dubbed over the Mandarin, while the Mandarin version has subtitles in simplified Chinese characters similar to those commonly used in Chinese television and cinema.

During the course of the video we see Turisoan standing before a group of eight heavily armed men brandishing machine guns and rocket propelled grenade launchers, with two men on horseback flying the black flag of jihad and the traditional blue flag of East Turkistan. The video is interspersed with footage from Abu Yahya al-Libi's October 2009 video called "East Turkistan: the Forgotten Wound," that was released in the wake of the rioting in Xinjiang in July 2009 (ansar1.info, October 7, 2009). The new video also contains footage of unknown men in Middle Eastern garb talking about the situation in China on television and what appears to be footage from a release by al-Qaeda in Iraq in response to the 2009 riots.

The video is in the format of a "Letter to the Chinese People," laying out Uyghur claims for independence and freedom for East Turkistan from the Chinese state (the region was independent of China for brief periods in the 1900s). In his speech, Turisoan repeatedly invokes China's experience with Japan to make the Chinese people understand Uyghur perceptions of their treatment at the hands of the Chinese.

Turisoan cites the Cultural Revolution (the 1966-1976 period when Mao unleashed a purge of capitalist elements that ripped China apart) and Tiananmen Square (the June 1989 incident when the People's Liberation Army cleared Beijing of protesting students) as incidents of when the Chinese government "wantonly killed" its own people. Added to this list he includes the rioting in the Xinjiang capital of Urumqi in July 2009 that left around 200 people dead (of both Han Chinese and Uyghur ethnicity) and an uncertain number of Uyghurs incarcerated or executed subsequently.

Within the context of Uyghur complaints, his statements are quite traditional, and in the video he highlights well-known Uyghur grievances with Chinese government family planning policies, the large-scale immigration of Han Chinese to Xinjiang and the supposed emigration of Uyghur women from Xinjiang to other provinces. [2] He also discusses the exploitation of Xinjiang's natural resources by the Chinese government and singles out the work of the Xinjiang Production and Construction Corps (XPCC), a group founded subsequent to the Communist Party's take-over of Xinjiang using demobilized Chinese soldiers to establish a foothold in the province. The XPCC still controls much of the province's economy.

The exact reason for releasing the video now is unclear. In the weeks prior to its publication, a report

in the Pakistani press claimed that Abdul Shakoor al-Turkistani, the supposed chief of the TIP, was elevated to the role of "chief of [al-Qaeda] operations in Pakistan," so it is possible that this video was a reflection of a new push by the group to assert itself (The News [Islamabad], May 21). However, given the relatively low interest that al-Qaeda or any other groups have shown thus far in the plight of the Uyghurs and the close security connection between China and Pakistan that has likely stymied Uyghur groups' efforts to carry out any attacks, it would be surprising if the release of this single video made much of an impact. During a visit last year to Beijing, Pakistani Interior Minister Rehman Malik confirmed the death of Abdul Haq al-Turkistani, the former leader of the East Turkistan Islamic Movement (ETIM – an alleged predecessor of the TIP), and declared that they had "broken the back" of the ETIM (*Dawn*, May 7, 2010; see also *Terrorism Monitor*, March 11, 2010).

It should be noted that at around the same time as the alleged meetings were taking place in which Abdul Shakoor al-Turkistani was elevated to his new role, the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) undertook a counterterrorism operation along the Kyrgyz-Tajik-Chinese border northwest of Kashgar in Xinjiang. The exercise took the format of forces hunting down a training camp on the Chinese side of the border and rescuing a bus full of hijacked citizens. Commenting subsequently, Vice Minister of Public Security Meng Honwei declared that there were "signs [that] the 'East Turkistan' terrorists are flowing back....the drill was designed against the backdrop that they are very likely to penetrate into China from Central Asia" (*China Daily*, May 9).

The video received no coverage in the Chinese media (or anywhere else for that matter), likely a reflection of a Chinese official desire to keep the information out of public circulation, but also due in part to the fact that the Turkistan groups have largely failed to conduct any successful attacks and remain low-level players in the world of global jihadism. Aside from some (disputable) claims of responsibility for small-scale and low-tech efforts to attack buses or airplanes in China, the group has not particularly demonstrated a capacity to carry out terrorist attacks within China or beyond.

Nevertheless, documents released by Wikileaks concerning suspected Uyghur militants detained in Guantanamo show that there is a contingent that has in the past moved from China to training camps in Central Asia in response to the oppression they believed

they faced. [3] When one couples this with the ongoing tensions between Uyghurs and Han Chinese that are clearly visible in parts of Xinjiang, it is easy to visualize the sort of potential for threat that exists. Whether this video in Mandarin is a direct threat that presages action is unclear, but it certainly shows the groups eagerness to continue to prove its existence.

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Notes:

1. <http://majahden.com/vb/showthread.php?t=17424>.
2. The phenomenon was described by Abu Yahya al-Libi in his October 6, 2010 video, “East Turkistan: The Forgotten Wound” (al-Fajr Media Center). Abu Yahya denounced “the forced displacement and transport of Muslim girls to the major inner cities of China. These girls are cut off from their families for many years, perhaps forever, under the guise of vocational training so that they are able to work in factories and elsewhere (so these atheists claim). Indeed, hundreds of thousands of these girls were displaced to drown in the sea of corruption, godlessness, longing for their homeland, and organized capture and dishonorable employment. This has left many Muslim women with no choice other than to kill themselves in order to escape the cursed law.”
3. See the Guantanamo records of Uyghur prisoners at <http://www.wikileaks.ch/gitmo/country/CH.html>.

## Tribes, Salafists and Separatists: Yemen’s Changing Political Landscape

By Michael Horton

While parts of President Ali Abdullah Saleh’s regime attempt to ensure their survival, Yemen’s multitude of opposition, tribal, and newly formed anti-government groups continue to vie for a role in whatever government might follow Saleh’s administration. As these various groups jockey for position in Sana’a, most of Yemen is suffering from ever increasing levels of political instability that threaten the ability of a future transitional government to reassert even limited state power.

After almost five months of protests and more than 400 dead, a way forward for Yemen has yet to be determined. The June 3 bombing of a mosque within the walls of the Presidential Palace by as yet unknown assailants and the subsequent departure of President Saleh to Saudi Arabia for medical treatment has done little to move the country toward the establishment of a transitional government. While Yemeni Vice President Abed Rabbu Mansur Hadi has officially become acting president in Saleh’s absence, it is unclear how much, if any, power Hadi wields. Hadi, who has always been a marginal figure within the regime, is being challenged by President Saleh’s son, Ahmed Ali Saleh, who heads the Republican Guard, and other members of the Saleh family.

### The Saleh Regime Fights for Survival

Rumors in Yemen run the gamut from “President Saleh is due to return within days,” to “President Saleh has finally agreed to formally cede power,” but meanwhile the struggle between anti-government forces and the remains of the Saleh regime continues (*Khaleej Times*, June 18). Following the mosque bombing that injured his father, Brigadier Ahmed Ali Saleh and his forces occupied the Presidential Palace. Acting president Hadi remains at his office in the Defense Ministry, guarded by troops loyal to defected Major General Ali Muhsin al-Ahmar (see *Terrorism Monitor* Brief, June 16).

Most of the members of what is left of President Saleh’s inner circle are backing Ahmed Ali Saleh, though to what end remains unclear. Ahmed Ali Saleh does not

have enough support within the Sanhaan (Saleh's tribe), let alone among Yemenis in general, to succeed his father. While Ahmed Ali Saleh commands the relatively formidable Republican Guard, his military assets would only enable him to assert control over a small percentage of Yemeni territory. However, the Republican Guard is well trained and has the most advanced equipment of any of Yemen's army units. It is unique in Yemen, in that it has a tight and formal chain of command that is well staffed. While the Republican Guard is not powerful enough to enable Ahmed Ali Saleh to succeed his father, it does put him in a strong position as a power broker and guardian of Saleh family interests, both political and financial.

In addition to the Republican Guard, the Saleh regime retains control of the Yemeni Air Force through the command of President Saleh's half-brother, Muhammad Saleh al-Ahmar. Control of the air force is of the utmost importance to the Saleh regime due to its ability to project power and punish those deemed enemies through punitive bombing. As a member of President Saleh's generation, Muhammad Saleh al-Ahmar is part of what may be considered the old guard within the Saleh regime. He has not always been on the best of terms with Ahmed Ali Saleh, who is still regarded by many within the regime as something of an upstart who has not served his time. It is certain that Muhammad Saleh al-Ahmar is being actively courted by both the opposition and, more importantly, by rival factions within the Sanhaan, notably the Qadhi clan, which is largely aligned with General Ali Muhsin al-Ahmar.

Regardless of whether or not his father returns to Yemen, Ahmed Ali Saleh and those close to him are preparing to fight while negotiations continue. The Republican Guard has reinforced its positions in and around Sana'a, Aden, and Taiz. All sides in the conflict continue to stockpile weapons and reposition arms (*al-Tagheer*, June 18). Negotiations between acting president Hadi and the Joint Meeting Parties (JMP), Yemen's coalition of opposition groups, are ongoing while the part of the Saleh regime led by Ahmed Ali Saleh seems intent on trying to regain control while thwarting any attempts to install a transitional government.

#### Moving Further Away from the Center: South Yemen

In many of the former governorates of what was the People's Democratic Republic of Yemen (PDRY), efforts are underway to form transitional councils, both at the local and regional level. While the Republican

Guard controls parts of Aden, much of south Yemen's security and governance are now dependent on these local councils and civil defense organizations. Most of the Saleh regime's military assets in the south have fled, defected, or been called away to Sana'a, Aden and Taiz. The lack of troops loyal to the Saleh regime has emboldened many southern groups dedicated to the secession of south Yemen.

While the leadership of the Southern Mobility Movement (SMM) maintains that it is dedicated to the peaceful resolution of what are deemed "southern issues," armed groups reportedly aligned with the SMM are patrolling some parts Mukalla and Aden, as well as manning checkpoints on the Aden to Mukalla and Mukalla to Seyun roads. An army colonel loyal to the Saleh regime was killed in Aden by a car bomb on June 16 (*Yemen Post*, June 16). While no group has claimed credit for it, the attack is likely a harbinger of what will come as various groups operating in the south attempt to assert control and settle scores. However, it should also be noted that much of the fighting in the south is between defected troops (many of whom are aligned with defected generals Ali Muhsin al-Ahmar and Mohammed Ali Mushin) and troops loyal to the Saleh regime.

While increased local control in the south is arguably a move in the right direction, the longer Yemen remains without a viable central government, the more entrenched secessionist groups and ideas will become in the south. The ongoing battle for power between parts of the Saleh regime and the al-Ahmar family (the leaders of the Hashid tribe and tribal confederation) is looked upon by southerners as a northern affair that does not involve them. Despite the rhetoric of some members of the SMM, secession is not a viable option for south Yemen. The Yemeni economy, especially its energy sector, is interwoven. However, the fighting between what are primarily northern political and military powers will continue to fuel the already popular idea that secession is the answer to the south's problems.

#### Houthi Control of Sadah

Despite years of fighting between Yemeni troops and Houthi rebels (followers of a strident interpretation of Zaydi Shi'ism), the largely Houthi controlled governorate of Sadah is now one of the most stable parts of Yemen. After the 2009-2010 round of war between the Houthis and the Yemeni armed forces, the government informally ceded control of much of the governorate to



the Houthis. Since the outbreak of the anti-government protests, the Houthis have acted to consolidate their control of the town of Sadah, the governorate of Sadah, and parts of the neighboring governorate of al-Jawf. The Houthis have been careful to cultivate and cement their relationships with a number of clans and parts of tribes that are opposed to the Saleh regime. Many of the members of these clans and tribes do not subscribe to the Houthis' interpretation of Zaydism but have aligned themselves with the Houthis for political reasons.

Apart from a few border posts, the Yemeni armed forces have almost no presence in Sadah and the local government is almost entirely administered by Houthi-led councils. The Houthis' nominal political party, al-Haq (a member of the JMP), has indicated that it and the Houthis are willing to participate in a unity government (Mareb Press, March 21; *al-Tagheer*, April 10). While the Houthis now enjoy a considerable degree of autonomy, that autonomy is not likely to be ceded without another costly war and the Houthis may prove more amenable to inclusion in a unity government than many of the groups operating within the Southern Mobility Movement (SMM).

#### An AQAP Takeover in Abyan?

It was widely reported by the Western and Arab media that al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP) had declared the southern governorate of Abyan to be an "Islamic Emirate." This announcement reportedly followed the looting of a small munitions factory by militants in the town of Ja'ar in March (*Yemen Post*, March 28). Since then, fighting in the governorate of Abyan has intensified. The port of Zinjibar in Abyan is now deserted and much of it has been leveled by artillery and aerial bombardment after its occupation by militants. Most of its population has fled as have thousands of other residents of Abyan. A camp has been set up near Aden for some of the roughly thirty thousand internally displaced persons (IDPs).

While AQAP has a presence in parts of Abyan and the neighboring governorate of Shabwa, it is doubtful that it has the ability to take and hold a town, let alone a governorate. Some of the militants fighting in Abyan have identified themselves as members of Ansar al-Shari'a (Supporters of Islamic Law). This group certainly has ideological overlaps with AQAP and it almost certainly hosts members with ties to AQAP. However, the conflict in Abyan is more complex than just AQAP or even Islamic militants fighting against the regime.

The conflict in Abyan is in fact multidimensional and highly political. The Saleh regime has long maintained ties with a range of militant Salafis. The links go back to the late 1980s and early 1990s when the "Afghan Arabs," mujahideen who had fought in Afghanistan, began returning home to Yemen. Many of these men were incorporated into the Yemeni armed forces and security services. The Afghan Arabs and militant Salafis played key roles in covert actions against the PDRY before unification in 1990 and again in the 1994 civil war that erupted when the south tried to secede. More recently, the Saleh regime recruited and deployed militant Salafis against the Houthis, whom the Salafis regard as heretics.

In a recent interview, Major General Ali Muhsin al-Ahmar accused the Saleh regime of orchestrating much of the AQAP threat and of allowing Islamic militants to take over parts of Abyan in order to manipulate the West, especially the United States (*al-Hayat*, June 12; see *Terrorism Monitor* Brief, June 17). As one of the key figures in the "re-integration" of Afghan Arabs and militant Salafis, this is a subject that Ali Muhsin al-Ahmar knows a great deal about. The Saleh regime, like many regimes, is well aware of the versatility and usefulness of terror and terrorist groups. The threat of AQAP has been lucrative in terms of the millions in military aid provided by the United States, and the Saleh regime's role as a partner in the "global war on terror" has earned it a great deal of international legitimacy. The threat of militant Salafis in areas like Abyan should not be downplayed but oversimplification is just as dangerous.

The conflict in Abyan could easily spread to other governorates as more tribesmen and even members of various separatist groups join in the fighting. Now that the United States is involved through its drone attacks on suspected militants, the conflict will almost certainly take on new dimensions as cycles of revenge are started and encouraged. The most recent drone attack, one of 18 reportedly launched in the month of June, resulted in six dead civilians (*Yemen Post*, June 18).

#### Conclusion

While the situation in Yemen may appear dire, outside of Abyan, violence has been relatively limited. This is not to downplay the deaths of well over 400 protesters, but it is in many ways a testament to the restraint of the Yemeni people. Most of the anti-government protesters have easy access to a wide range of weapons, yet most

have continued their peaceful protests even in the face of escalating levels of violence.

Even the opposing factions of the Yemeni armed forces have so far refrained from all but limited skirmishes. This restraint is likely due in part to the traditions of tribal law which have developed to limit and mitigate conflict and loss of life. It is also due in part to many Yemeni's keen awareness of what will happen if their country descends into civil war. The specter of neighboring Somalia stands as a stark reminder of what could happen. However, the longer Yemen remains without a real government, a government that aims to unify the country, the more likely civil war and fragmentation becomes. At some point the restraint shown by the vast majority of Yemeni people will be overwhelmed by the political and economic pressures being placed on the country.

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