



# Terrorism Monitor

In-Depth Analysis of the War on Terror

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## AL-QAEDA EXPANDS TO PUNTLAND IN ANTICIPATION OF OIL BOOM

Under military pressure from Kenyan forces, the African Union Mission in Somalia and various Somali militias and government forces campaigning in its traditional area of operations in southern Somalia, al-Shabaab has announced an expansion into Puntland, a semi-autonomous region in northern Somalia that has so far been better known as a center for offshore piracy than for Islamist militancy. Nevertheless, a dirty, low-level war of assassinations, bombings and clashes between Islamist gunmen and local security forces has been going on for several years.

The announcement, which follows last month's unification of al-Shabaab with al-Qaeda, came in the form of a proclamation from Yassin Khalid 'Uthman (a.k.a. Yassin Kilwe Yuma), the self-described "Amir of the Mujahideen in the Golis Mountains [an area of caves and rough terrain in northwest Puntland]" that his fighters have joined al-Shabaab and pledged loyalty to its leader, Shaykh Ahmad Abdi Godane "Abu Zubayr." The "Amir" was clear that his group was aligning itself with al-Qaeda: "I want to praise God for the unity of our Shabaab brothers with al-Qaeda fighters... I want to declare today that we are joined with our al-Shabaab brothers who are devoted to the jihad in Somalia" (al-Andalus Radio, February 26; al-Kataib Media, February 27). The new al-Shabaab/al-Qaeda chapter in Puntland may have announced its presence in a more material way on March 3, when at least nine people were killed at a Puntland security checkpoint near the commercial capital of Bosasso (25 miles from the Galgala region) during an attack by militants (Reuters, March 3).

Yassin Kilwe is thought to be part of the Galgala militia that operates in the Golis Mountains in a diminished capacity since it was targeted by a three-month military offensive by the Puntland Intelligence Service. [1] The militia, if not a formal part of al-Shabaab, has traditionally operated in sympathy with al-Shabaab's objectives.

Puntland frequently accuses neighboring Somaliland, with which it has several territorial disputes, of providing support for the Galgala Islamists, while Somaliland accuses Puntland of seeking military dominance in northern Somalia. The known leader of the Galgala militants is Shaykh Muhammad Sa'id Atam, who routinely denies any formal ties between his group and al-Shabaab, assertions that have been confirmed in the past by al-Shabaab spokesman Shaykh Ali Mahmud Raage "Ali Dheere" (VOA Somali Service, July 29). However, it was also Ali Dheere who welcomed the merger of the "Mujahideen in the Golis Mountains" with al-Shabaab (Dayniile, February 27).

Yassin Kilwe's claim to be Amir of the Galgala militants immediately raised speculation regarding the leadership role of Shaykh Atam, who has not made any statement since Yassin Kilwe's announcement (Raxanreeb.com, February 25). There were reports that many of the Galgala militants were unhappy with the merger with "a terrorist group," and Kilwe may represent a new faction that has split from the main Galgala group to join al-Shabaab/al-Qaeda (Somalia Report, February 28). A Puntland government spokesman said the merger "doesn't have any effect on Puntland's peace and tranquility and the armed forces who already made them weak are ready to fight them" (Puntlandi.com, February 26). The Puntland administration has said that they already knew that the Galgala militants were part of al-Qaeda (a common refrain in government comments on the militants) and security has been tightened in the areas of oil exploration operations (Dayniile, February 27). AMISOM is expected to make a decision within days on whether to deploy African Union peacekeepers from an expanded force in Puntland.

Canada's Africa Oil Corp. and its Australian partners Red Emperor and Range Resources began drilling in northern Puntland in January, the first oil operations in Somalia for two decades. The Nugaal and Dharoor fields are believed to have as much as 300 million to 4 billion barrels of oil, the first of which is expected to flow within a month (Reuters, February 25; Observer, February 25). There may be much more oil in offshore

fields off Puntland's coast. Galgala and other parts of the Bari region are also above the Majiyahan Ta-Sn Deposit, a zone rich in minerals such as Albite, Quartz, Microcline, Tantalite, Tapiolite, Cassiterite, Spodumene and Muscovite. Somali prime minister Abdiweli Muhammad Ali has promised a cut of his nation's natural resources in exchange for foreign investment and reconstruction assistance: "There's room for everybody when this country gets back on its feet and is ready for investment," though he also noted: "The only way we can pay [Western companies] is to pay them in kind, we can pay with natural resources at the fair market value." (Observer, February 25). Britain's BP has been mentioned as the foreign oil company of choice for Somalia's transitional government, but so far the firm has downplayed rumors it is working on a major deal for the offshore reserves. The British government has also denied charges that its sudden interest in Somalia (hosting international conferences on Somalia, providing humanitarian aid and reconstruction assistance, etc.) is part of an effort to gain commercial considerations for British firms in Somalia (Garowe Online, February 27).

Last week, al-Shabaab began sending internet and Twitter messages warning that "Somali oil carries death" (SAPA-AP, March 1). The movement has said that it is canceling the licenses of Western oil and gas firms operating in Puntland, possibly the first step in a new campaign of attacks on Western exploration facilities.

Note:

1. See Andrew McGregor, "Puntland's Shaykh Muhammad Atam: Clan Militia Leader or al-Qaeda Terrorist?," *Militant Leadership Monitor*, September 29, 2010, [http://mlm.jamestown.org/single/?tx\\_ttnews\[swords\]=8fd5893941d69d0be3f378576261ae3e&tx\\_ttnews\[any\\_of\\_the\\_words\]=atam&tx\\_ttnews\[tt\\_news\]=36982&tx\\_ttnews\[backPid\]=539&cHash=fa328428d5b609a8f08dc9e4994e3535](http://mlm.jamestown.org/single/?tx_ttnews[swords]=8fd5893941d69d0be3f378576261ae3e&tx_ttnews[any_of_the_words]=atam&tx_ttnews[tt_news]=36982&tx_ttnews[backPid]=539&cHash=fa328428d5b609a8f08dc9e4994e3535)

## GAZA'S HAMAS ENTERS ROCKY RELATIONSHIP WITH EGYPT AS IT TRIES TO RESHAPE ALLIANCES

With geo-political realities surrounding Gaza in flux due to the rise of Sunni political parties in the Middle East, the Syrian meltdown and the Iranian nuclear crisis, Ismail Haniyeh and the rest of the Hamas leadership are in the midst of a strategic reassessment of its alliance with Syria and Iran in favor of stronger ties to the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt and elsewhere. However, Hamas' historical ties to Shiite and Alawite political movements have led to sharp condemnation by Egypt's Salafists.

While in Cairo on a recent visit, Haniyeh was roundly denounced in a February 24 statement issued by Egypt's largest Salafist group, al-Da'wa al-Salafiya (The Salafist Call) that also condemned the Muslim Brotherhood for arranging his visit to Egypt in the first place:

We reject Haniyeh leading the prayer in Egypt's largest Sunni mosque after he shook hands with the Shiites. Egypt is the country of the Sunni al-Azhar [the world's preeminent Islamic university] and we do not accept a man who put his hand into the hand that kills Sunnis in Iraq and Syria... What is the difference between Jews, Hezbollah and Iran when they are all gathered in going against God's word and wish to break down Islam? (Bikya Masr [Cairo], February 25).

During his visit to al-Azhar, Haniyeh declared that his movement's resistance to Israel would continue so long as that nation persisted in aggressive policies and the occupation of the Palestinian territories (Egyptian Gazette, February 25). The Hamas leader was speaking at an event held in response to recent attacks on Jerusalem's al-Aqsa mosque by Israeli settlers under police protection (Ahrām Online, February 24; al-Jazeera, February 19).

Egypt is in the middle of a somewhat chaotic reassessment of its relationship with the United States that will ultimately have a great deal to do with its approach to Hamas. Some Egyptian Islamists were considering revising Egypt's peace treaty with Israel in the face of American pressure to release 18 American nationals accused of using foreign funds to instigate unrest in Egypt, allegedly under the guise of operating "civil society" NGOs. Washington threatened to halt

its annual contribution of \$1.5 billion to Egypt (\$1.3 billion of which is earmarked for military aid) unless the detainees were freed. Though the Egyptian leadership is no longer as pliable as it was under Mubarak and his cronies, they have yet to come up with a practical and viable replacement for these funds, which are generally regarded in Egypt as a payoff for maintaining peace with Israel.

Salafist preacher Muhammad Hassan responded to the American "humiliation" of Egypt by introducing an initiative to replace the American aid with local donations: "If America wants to cut military aid, very well; Egypt isn't less than Iran which is self-dependent when it comes to producing its own military equipment... The Egyptian people will not be broken anymore" (El Nahar TV, February 11; Ahrām Online, February 15). Egyptian Prime Minister Kamal el-Ganzouri and the Grand Shaykh of al-Azhar, Ahmad al-Tayyeb, have both come out in support of Hassan's initiative (Egypt State Information Service, February 17). However, Hassan's projection of \$1 million in private donations will leave a significant shortfall in making up the lost \$1.5 billion in U.S. aid.

Hamas has met unexpected criticism elsewhere in Egypt. On February 22, Egypt's former interior minister, Habib al-Adly, claimed in court that Hamas and Hezbollah had sent infiltrators into Egypt last year to foment political discontent and manipulate the Egyptian uprising against President Hosni Mubarak. Haniyeh responded to the charges immediately: "Hamas did not interfere in Egypt's internal affairs, either before the revolution or after" (MENA, February 22; AFP, February 22).

Hamas has since come out against the Syrian regime as its leadership relocates to Cairo, Doha and Beirut. Hamas, based on the Palestinian branch of the Muslim Brotherhood, found itself in the difficult position of being seen to back the Syrian regime's violent repression of the Muslim Brotherhood in Syria. Hamas deputy leader Moussa Abu Marzouk rejected the Syrian approach to political dissent but noted the Hamas position would have a price: "Our position on Syria is that we are not with the regime in its security solution, and we respect the will of the people... The Iranians are not happy with our position on Syria, and when they are not happy, they don't deal with you in the same old way" (BBC, February 28). Since 2007, Gaza has relied on Iranian financial aid for its continued existence in the face of Israeli military strikes and an economic blockade designed to force the democratically elected

Hamas government from Hamas. With less Iranian funding available, Hamas has been forced to raise taxes on imported goods to raise the difference, despite wide public opposition to such measures. Hamas may seek to replace essential Iranian funding with financial assistance from the Sunni-dominated Gulf states.

Muhammad Mursi, the leader of the Muslim Brotherhood's *izb al-urriya wa al-'Adala* (Freedom and Justice Party) welcomed the relocation of the Hamas leadership: "Egypt is the custodial mother of the Arab nation and the Palestinian cause in particular since the late forties and it's our duty to support the Palestinians" (Alresalah [Cairo], March 1).

After his return to Gaza, Haniyeh turned on Egypt, blaming it for crippling power shortages that have left many households and businesses with power for only six hours a day. The fuel shortage has led to the repeated shutdown of Gaza's only power plant and the region's 13 hospitals are running on generators with fuel provided on an emergency basis by the Red Cross (Guardian, March 1). The energy shortage has also led to a dramatic drop in available water as well as impacting the sewage treatment system. Gaza has suffered energy shortages since 2006, when Israel bombed the region's lone energy plant.

Currently, Gaza receives much of its fuel through a network of smuggling tunnels. Egypt, however, wants Hamas to import its fuel through the Israeli-controlled Kerem Shalom border crossing, where the Palestinian Authority rather than Hamas imposes import taxes. Besides the loss of revenues, the fuel would cost more than smuggled fuel and its availability would be subject to the whims of Israeli border officials. There are also concerns that the fuel issue is Egypt's way of pressuring Hamas to accept an Egyptian-sponsored unification with the Fatah-run Palestinian Authority in the West Bank (Reuters, March 2).

## Gulf States Consider Political and Military Union to Counter Iranian Security Threat

*Elie Issa*

With growing talk of a political confederation of the Arab states of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC), Saudi Arabia's Defense Minister, Prince Salman Bin Abdul Aziz, has raised the possibility of transforming the existing Peninsula Shield Force [PSF] into a "unified Gulf army" able to respond to external and domestic security threats. The Saudi prince made it clear that inspiration for this suggestion was the perceived threat from Iran: "Iran is our neighbor, but we draw a line when it comes to intervention in our internal affairs as 'Gulf Cooperation Council' countries. Whenever we feel that anybody is interfering in our internal affairs through internal mercenaries or people from outside, we will resist it appropriately" (Al-Seyassah [Kuwait], March 3; Arab Times, March 3). The PSF, with a permanent base in Saudi Arabia, was successfully deployed in March, 2011 to end violent street protests by Bahrain's Shiite minority (see Terrorism Monitor Brief, March 24, 2011).

The long-strained relations between Iran and Saudi Arabia resemble an updated replica of the U.S.-Soviet Cold War, including the involvement of both nations in geopolitical and economic conflicts, proxy military conflicts and covert intelligence operations. Saudi Arabia and Iran currently leads two ideologically, politically and religiously opposed regional blocs that could at any moment slip into lethal Sunni-Shiite confrontation, one whose impact would be magnified by the membership of both nations in larger competing world camps.

Sunni Saudi Arabia has close and long-standing political and economic ties with the United States and most other Western nations. Shiite Iran has ties with Russia and China despite certain ideological differences. Perhaps the most recent illustration of the on-going regional geopolitical row is Saudi king Abdullah's statement that "unnamed hands" targeting Islam and the Arabs are behind the political turmoil in Sunni-dominated states in the region (Saudi Press Agency [SPA], February 25). Saudi officials have long accused Iran of meddling in the internal affairs of the GCC and other Arab states without actually naming the Islamic Republic. Saudi Arabia has already lost one of its long-standing and



staunchest allies in the Middle East, meaning former Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak. The Saudi rulers are now facing two key challenges that might impact the kingdom's near-to-medium term outlook: the so-called "Arab Spring" and Iran's alleged nuclear ambitions.

But Iran is also following with concern the Syrian turmoil and the potential weakness of its key regional ally, President Bashar Al-Assad. The Saudi government, however, fears that if the Syrian turmoil escalates further it might develop into a civil war pitting the majority Sunni population against the ruling Alawite minority. In this scenario both the Syrian regime and Iran may try to destabilize the Saudi regime by empowering the two million strong Saudi Shiite minority. The latter is concentrated mainly in the Eastern Province (al-Sharqiyah), which holds the world's largest oil fields. Claiming institutionalized discrimination by the kingdom's Sunni rulers, the Shiite minority continues to wage sporadic street protests that are gradually turning into deadly clashes with the Saudi security forces. Last month, Saudi Arabia's Interior Ministry vowed to use "an iron fist" to end what it called Shiite violence in the Eastern Province (SPA, February 21; Reuters, February 21). The ministry reiterated claims that "foreign-backed troublemakers [read Iran]" were attacking its security forces and instigating violence. "Some of those few [who attacked security forces] are manipulated by foreign hands because of the kingdom's honourable foreign policy positions towards Arab and Islamic countries" (Kuwait Times, February 21).

The sensitive Eastern Province is of great importance to the Saudi government due to the strategic oil reserves and related infrastructure. On March 1, a report by Iran's state-run Press TV of an explosion on a pipeline in the Eastern Province sent crude oil prices to a four-year high of \$126 a barrel. The next day, however, the Saudi Interior Ministry denied the report, saying "there were no acts of sabotage in the kingdom" (Reuters, March 2). The Saudi government suspects that Iran is using the Shiite minority in Saudi Arabia and Bahrain as part of a regional proxy war to improve its negotiation position once the time for a deal involving Iran's nuclear program and the region's geopolitical power balance arrives.

The official U.S. position advocating a peaceful and negotiated solution to the Iranian nuclear issue may limit the force of Saudi rhetoric targeting its Iranian rival, but this does not mean that Saudi Arabia won't develop

its own "peaceful" nuclear program (see Terrorism Monitor, February 23). Saudi Arabia plans to build 16 nuclear power plants by 2030 worth \$100 billion in a bid to generate at least 20% of its electricity needs from nuclear energy. By 2021, Saudi Arabia is scheduled to have two nuclear reactors up and running. Two plants will then come on stream annually through 2030, each costing \$7 billion. In December, 2011 Prince Turki al-Faisal, a former Saudi intelligence chief and ambassador to the United States, said that his country might seek to acquire nuclear weapons to help counterbalance regional rivals Israel and Iran (AFP, December 5, 2011). Saudi Arabia has failed to convince Israel to abandon its nuclear weapons and now that Iran may be seeking to possess a nuclear bomb, the kingdom has to protect its people through all possible options, noted Faisal.

Developing its own nuclear power program is not Saudi Arabia's sole move to counter Iran's growing power in the region. In December, 2011 Saudi King Abdullah called on leaders of the GCC states to consolidate their alliance into a united "single entity" in order to confront what he called threats to national security. "No doubt, you all know we are targeted in our security and stability," said Abdullah at the opening session of a GCC meeting in Riyadh (SPA, December 20; Arab News, December 20). More recently, the GCC called on Iran to cease its "hostile" policies and interference in the affairs of the Gulf States (Bahrain News Agency, March 4; Gulf Daily News, March 5). Jordan and Morocco have also asked to join Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Bahrain, Qatar, Oman and the United Arab Emirates in the six-nation GCC. Such a potentially large alliance of Sunni Monarchies falls within Saudi Arabia's medium-term aim of creating a unified regional front against Iran.

Iranian rhetoric promising "not a single drop of oil will pass through the Hormuz Strait" is part of the regional geopolitical row and related bickering about Iran's nuclear power program (Iran State News Agency, December 27, 2011). The question is whether Iran can close the strategic maritime route through which nearly 17 million barrels of oil per day transited in 2011. The answer is not that simple; Iran has likely drafted various case scenarios to deal with a potential Israeli attack on its nuclear sites. From using conventional war methods to small but highly effective suicide speed-boats, Iran could certainly succeed in blocking all kinds of navigation through the Hormuz Strait for at least several days. In the meantime, Iranian missiles would likely hit strategic oil infrastructure in the UAE and Saudi Arabia. Such an apocalyptic scenario would most

likely prompt the U.S. Fifth Fleet to intervene to re-open the Hormuz Strait. The mere thought of this scenario would send crude oil prices soaring, based on the spike in prices that resulted from fear of even a temporary closure during Iranian war games in January. Mounting threats to the regional political and religious status quo from “Arab Spring” resistance movements and Iran’s aggressive nuclear program will continue to fuel moves towards greater political and military unity in the GCC states.

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## The Looming Storm in Pakistan’s Kurram Agency

*John Ty Grubbs*

Security has worsened significantly in Pakistan’s Kurram Agency this year. In the latest incident, Pakistani fighter jets responded to a series of attacks by bombing militant positions in the Kurram and Orakzai tribal agencies on March 1, killing an estimated 22 Islamist fighters (Dawn [Karachi], March 1; Central Asia Online, March 1). This rise in violence can be attributed to the area’s increasing strategic importance. Physically jutting into Afghanistan, Kurram is an attractive haven for fighters fleeing from drone strikes in North Waziristan and is the ideal entry point into Afghanistan for the Haqqani Network. Therefore, it is crucial for the Haqqani Network and the Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI) elements that support them to marginalize any group that could disrupt this flow of fighters (see *Terrorism Monitor*, December 16, 2010). The most significant obstacles are the Shi’a Turi and Bangash tribes and the Tehrik-e Taliban Pakistan (TTP) under the command of Hakimullah Mahsud (see *Terrorism Monitor*, April 17, 2010). Although the ISI has recently been able to break up and court portions of the TTP, the bloodshed has not abated in Kurram.

A significant coup for the Haqqani Network and the Pakistan security forces occurred in June of 2011. The TTP leader in Kurram, Fazal Saeed, announced that he was leaving the group and forming the Tehrik-e Taliban Islami (TTI). [1] Saeed explained the reasons behind his departure by stating, “I repeatedly told the leadership council [of the TTP] that they should stop suicide attacks against mosques, markets and other civilian targets... I have therefore decided to quit the TTP” (AFP, June 28, 2011). Coming from a man that recently took credit for the bombing of a Shi’a neighborhood in Parachinar that killed 43 civilians, this logic seems flawed (*Express Tribune* [Karachi], February 17; February 20). Haqqani Network representatives and Pakistan security elements had both sought to convince Saeed to abandon his anti-state agenda and join their fight. Similar agreements had been reached in recent years with Mullah Nazir in South Waziristan and Hafiz Gul Bahadar in North Waziristan (see *Terrorism Monitor*, April 2009). Given the increasing importance of Kurram, the recruitment of Saeed was critical. By altering his loyalties, he weakened the TTP and gave the Haqqani Network a buttress against Shi’a forces in the area.

It was no coincidence that shortly after Saeed's announced departure there was a Pakistani military offensive to clear "miscreants" in Central Kurram (*Daily Times* [Lahore], July 7, 2011). It was also no coincidence that Operation Azmari Ghero was opposed by leaders of the Turi and Bangash tribes, who have taken to calling Parachinar "the Pakistani Gaza" (*Dawn* [Karachi], December 12, 2011). Meanwhile, the Saeed-controlled western valley of Lower Kurram (a critical entry point from North Waziristan) was left untouched by Pakistani security forces (South Asian Terrorism Portal, February 21). This violence has left many dead and internally displaced, and has dashed hopes of opening the Sunni blockade of the Tal-Parachinar road, the only route by which the Shi'a of Upper Kurram can reach Peshawar and the interior of Pakistan.

Peace deals were established between Shi'a and Sunni tribal leaders in February and October, 2011, but it is unclear if these were valid attempts to achieve peace or a mere ruse intended to give Haqqani Network fighters some breathing room. Either way, both deals eventually collapsed and the Haqqani Network was able to continue using Kurram for entry into Afghanistan's Paktia province. Situated less than 100 km from Kabul, this is likely the access point of choice for Haqqani's "Kabul Attack Network," the group responsible for several major attacks in Kabul in 2011. The February peace deal was so critical to Haqqani Network operations that Jalaluddin Haqqani's brothers, Khalil and Ibrahim, were both reported to have attended the talks (*Dawn*, October 21, 2010).

Unfortunately, this sectarian bloodshed only constitutes a portion of the violence in Kurram. The TTP remains a potent anti-state fighting force, especially in eastern Kurram along the Orakzai and Hangu borders. In the last few months, the Pakistani Frontier Corps has suffered significant losses at the hands of the TTP (*Express Tribune*, February 2). Many of the battles are currently taking place in the Shahedano Dand area, a vital thruway for those coming from North Waziristan. Any hope of making peace with Hakimullah may have vanished after the TTP leader appeared in the execution video of former Pakistani Army officer "Colonel Imam" in January, 2011. Imam was a legendary member of the Special Services Group and the ISI (*Telegraph*, January 24, 2011). Hakimullah will likely not be forgiven for taking part in the humiliation and murder of such a revered mujahid.

## Conclusion

The lack of security in North Waziristan and the instability of the TTP have put increased pressure on an area usually known only for its sectarian battles. There is no end to the violence in sight for the Turi and Bangash tribes, who remain surrounded by sectarian enemies, and there will always be irreconcilable elements within the Pakistani Taliban. As Afghanistan's fighting season approaches, clearing areas of TTP and Shi'a elements will become more important for the Haqqani Network and their handlers, likely making 2012 the most violent year in recent history for the Kurram Agency.

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## Note:

1. For a profile of Fazal Said Haqqani, see *Militant Leadership Monitor*, August 1, 2011.

## Array of security challenges face Yemen's new leader - Abd Rabbu Mansur al-Hadi

Jeb Boone

In the opening days of his presidency, Yemen's new leader Abd Rabbu Mansur al-Hadi has as his priorities the restructuring of the military and the expulsion of al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP) and allied militant Islamist group Ansar al-Shari'a from the restive southern province of Abyan. However, Hadi's largest shortcoming, his lack of tribal connections, will prove to be a nearly insurmountable obstacle as he attempts to secure the country after more than a year of tribal and political upheaval.

Hadi is a relative unknown in Yemen and has worked in the background behind former president Ali Abdullah Saleh for the entirety of his political career. The new president was born in a small village in the former state of South Yemen and rose steadily in the ranks of the military. After the 1994 Yemeni civil war, Hadi was appointed vice-president by Saleh in an attempt to reconcile with the south after its defeat in the war and subsequent unification with North Yemen. His close association with the Saleh regime caused him to lose a great deal of credibility with southern Yemenis while simultaneously maintaining little sway with northern Yemen's powerful tribes.

Countering the influence of AQAP in rural Yemen hinges almost completely on the ability of the Sana'a government to coordinate and win the support of tribes in the areas most likely to see an AQAP presence. Without government troops, tribal shaykhs must become *de facto* representatives of Sana'a in their villages and areas of influence. Unless the government can count on the aid of powerful shaykhs in the governorates of Shabwa and Marib, AQAP may find itself operating with little to no resistance from government troops. Yemen's tribal structure was masterfully woven into the Sana'a government by Saleh and Hadi will struggle to maintain the complex web of tribal engagement.

### Restructuring the Military

One of President Hadi's first attempts to restructure Yemen's military was met with immediate resistance. Focusing on the military's ongoing fight against AQAP

and Ansar al-Shari'a in Abyan, Hadi quickly sought to replace Mahdi Maqula, military commander of government forces in southern Yemen. The commander refused Hadi's orders, insisting that he must receive orders from the commander of Yemen's northwestern forces, Major General Ali Muhsin al-Ahmar, before leaving his post. In the eyes of Maqula, his 13-year long stint as southern Yemen's military commander had been overlooked by Hadi and required that the order to step down instead come from a military commander with more clout in the armed forces (Yemen Press, March 2). Indicative of his lack of influence in Yemeni military and tribal politics, resistance to Hadi's orders has begun at the top of the military apparatus. Maqula was eventually persuaded to leave his post on March 3 and was replaced by General Salem Ali Gatan.

In the midst of the conflict among Yemen's top military commanders, militants went on the offensive on March 5, inflicting the largest number of casualties on Yemen's military since the conflict began with the seizure of Ja'ar and Zinjibar in the Abyan governorate a year ago (see *Terrorism Monitor*, August 11, 2011).

In a surprise attack following a sandstorm, AQAP and Ansar al-Shari'a militants raided several military bases outside of Zinjibar, inflicting a crushing defeat on Yemeni forces. Local journalists put the number of deaths in the raids at 139, including 107 soldiers and 32 militants. Many of the fatalities among the soldiers were reported to have been due to a lack of proper medical care for the wounded. Militants also captured 55 soldiers and, according to local journalists, paraded the captives down the streets of Ja'ar (AP, March 5). In the battle between militant Islamists and the Yemeni military, it would appear that the militants have the upper hand at this point.

Previous attempts by the United States and the United Kingdom to help the Yemeni government counter AQAP's influence in the country have been shown to be completely inadequate. Members of Yemen's counterterrorism unit in the Central Security Forces were among those that withdrew from Abyan last March as militants began making territorial gains in Abyan for the first time.



## The Struggle for Zinjibar

By late May, 300 armed men seized control of the Abyan governorate city of Zinjibar, sending residents and security forces fleeing. Several independent analysts hinted that withdrawing security forces was a way for Saleh to create diversions to challenges to his authority elsewhere in the country. Other defecting military commanders, including General Ali Muhsin, suggested that the military had not mounted a defense of Zinjibar and that Saleh purposefully ceded territory to militants to re-establish himself as an asset in Western counterterrorism efforts (see *Terrorism Monitor* Brief, June 17, 2011).

Among the seemingly insurmountable tasks facing a new Yemeni government will be dislodging the militants from Abyan and maintaining security in the governorate. Yemen's military faces several challenges, including an inability to supply and equip units after their deployment and the government's failure to pay its troops on a regular basis. In many cases, soldiers under fire simply desert their positions, feeling no compulsion to remain in the military when they are paid sporadically, if at all.

Key to Hadi's attempt to defeat the Abyan insurgency is reassigning the command of the Central Security Forces, headed by Ali Abdullah Saleh's eldest nephew, General Yahya Saleh. Yahya has proven time and time again to be an ineffectual commander who treats his post as merely titular. Known in Sana'a for his playboy ways and dissolute behavior, Yahya has expressed little desire to take part in the day-to-day management of the Central Security Forces, preferring instead to spend time in Cuba and Europe on vacation (Marib Press, February 3).

There appears to be unprecedented discontent within the military at the moment. Some 500 officers and men from the First Brigade of Marine Infantry (based in Socotra) protested outside the Vice-President's residence on March 1, demanding the dismissal of their commander, Brigadier Hussein Khairan, for alleged corruption. Rallies by Air Force personnel demanding the dismissal of Air Force commander General Muhammad Saleh al-Ahmar (a half-brother of the ex-president) were reported in Sana'a, al-Anad and Taiz (AFP, March 1). Units of the First Armored Division under General Ali Muhsin were reported on March 1 to have traded fire outside Hadi's residence with elements of the Central Security Forces led by the ex-president's nephew, Yahya Saleh (Reuters, March 1).

Hadi also faces the delicate challenge of maintaining good terms with the United States as anti-U.S. sentiment grows throughout the country. Beyond the general outrage directed towards American drone and missile strikes, Yemenis in urban areas like Sana'a and Taiz have called for the ouster of U.S. Ambassador Gerald Feierstein. Citing what they perceived as a failure to denounce violent crackdowns on peaceful protesters, Yemenis feel that they have been betrayed by the self-styled "Shaykh Feierstein" and are demanding another representative in Yemen. While the Hadi government has been rejected outright by AQAP and Ansar al-Shari'a, close cooperation between the U.S. ambassador and the Hadi regime is likely to foment further distrust of the new president among average Yemenis.

## Conclusion

As the political crisis winds down in urban Yemen, tribes are becoming the most powerful players in country. It is something that all players in the crisis will have to consider, including the United States. In a best case scenario, a federal system would provide those tribes local autonomy and adequate representation in Sana'a while remaining under the rule of law. However, restructuring the country as a federal system is something that can only take place far into the future if and when order is restored to the restive parts of southern Yemen.

In a worst case scenario, Yemen will not recover from the crisis and factions will continue fighting across the country. Either way, Yemen's tribes will play a pivotal role in the future of the country and it is in the best interest of the United States and the Hadi government to bring these tribes to the negotiating table. Whether dealing with AQAP or seeking a solution to the current political crisis, the tribes must be engaged. Politics and diplomacy in Yemen has always emphasized tradition, with all the usual pomp surrounding important meetings and negotiations. Ideally, Hadi will venture out into rural Yemen to forge new alliances between the Sana'a government and tribal Yemen.

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