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TAIZ

THE HEART OF YEMEN'S REVOLUTION

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JANUARY 2012

A REPORT BY THE CRITICAL THREATS PROJECT OF
THE AMERICAN ENTERPRISE INSTITUTE

Key Findings

- Taiz is as important a city as Sana'a to understanding the Yemeni Spring, yet its significance has been largely overlooked by the international community.
- Sana'a's efforts to bring Taiz under control have detracted from efforts to suppress al Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP) and its expansion in the south. Large troop deployments to the city have drawn on Yemen's already limited military resources.
- Militias led by local tribal leaders interfered on behalf of protesters in Taiz in June and fought government forces for months. The resulting violence drew more troops into the city and brought international condemnation on Yemen.
- The conflict in Taiz continued after President Ali Abdullah Saleh's signing of a transition deal on November 23, 2011. Moreover, sporadic violence against protesters threatens a local truce agreement. The Yemeni government will continue to allocate resources to Taiz unless local conflict is resolved.

Executive Summary

America's primary security interest in Yemen is the elimination of the sanctuary enjoyed by al Qaeda's virulent franchise, al Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP). U.S. strategy to achieve that goal continues to rely mainly on developing effective Yemeni security forces with the capability and will to eliminate AQAP's sanctuary and prevent it from returning. But the spread of the Arab Spring to Yemen at the start of 2011 led the Saleh regime—already at best an inconsistent partner in the struggle against AQAP—to reallocate scarce military and security resources to protect itself against protesters. The crisis in Sana'a has subsequently monopolized the attention of the U.S. and the international community, hindering the development of a real understanding of the situation on the ground throughout Yemen and, therefore, led to an overestimation of the importance of events in Sana'a. Although a political solution among Yemen's elites in Sana'a could be an important step toward achieving American objectives in Yemen, it is by no means clear that it would be sufficient. We must understand Yemen as a whole in order to consider the viability of the strategy now being pursued.

Events in Taiz, Yemen's third-largest city and former capital, have received scant attention in the West despite the role Taiz played in fueling the initial protests against Saleh. Taizi agitators were involved in the Yemeni Spring from the start, and the appearance of mass protests in Taiz jumpstarted Yemen's protest movement across the country. The city's importance to the regime

prompted some of the government's most brutal backlashes against participants and supporters of the movement. As government forces moved to clamp down on the incipient revolution, Taizi tribes stepped in to protect the protesters. Months of violence ensued. Rather than quashing the movement, the military presence in Taiz exacerbated the unrest and threatened the peaceful transition of power in Sana'a. The violence continued past President Ali Abdullah Saleh's signing of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) initiative on November 23, 2011 and finally abated in December when government tanks and tribal checkpoints were removed from the city.

The protest movement continues, however, notably in the December 2011 March of Life from Taiz to Sana'a that involved tens of thousands. Further, Yemeni military and security forces continue to crack down on peaceful protesters with lethal force, though less frequently than before. Should the conflict in Taiz re-ignite, Sana'a will likely respond with force again, regardless of who is in power there. The conflict in Taiz threatens to continue to distract the Yemeni government from confronting al Qaeda and could unravel a negotiated settlement in Sana'a as well.

Introduction

America's primary interest in Yemen is the sanctuary that the fractured country provides to a virulent al Qaeda franchise, al Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP). This terrorist group was formed by al Qaeda fighters driven out of Saudi Arabia in 2006 and local Yemeni al Qaeda figures. American-born AQAP leader Anwar al Awlaki died in a drone strike on September 30, 2011, but his death has not seriously damaged the organization within Yemen. AQAP's reach and capabilities have grown significantly in 2011, on the contrary, because of the collapse of the Yemeni state following the spread of Arab Spring uprisings to Yemen in January 2011.¹

The attention of Washington and most world capitals has been transfixed by the political dance in Yemen's capital, Sana'a, surrounding the departure of President Ali Abdullah Saleh from power. Saleh has ruled Yemen since 1978, and during his tenure he unified the country in 1990 and held the nation together through a civil war in 1994. The U.S. has relied on Saleh in its struggle against AQAP by supporting his counter-terrorism forces and some of his military forces while also conducting drone strikes against AQAP leaders. But Saleh has been an unreliable partner who has often released al Qaeda figures after their capture, among other things. Now his ability to control Yemen has largely collapsed. American and Gulf diplomats have worked hard to persuade Saleh to step down and facilitate the formation of a new governing coalition that would appease the protesters and restore some semblance of order in Yemen. But Saleh remains in Sana'a and continues to intervene in political and security decisions despite the formal transition of power on November 23, 2011 that occurred with the signing of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC)-brokered deal. Saleh's prolonged meddling continues to drive protesters to the streets throughout the country, severely distracting Yemeni security forces from the task of confronting the AQAP fighters who are expanding their sanctuaries and threatening the key port city of Aden.

The narrow focus on political dynamics in Sana'a is problematic not only because of the growing disconnect between events in Sana'a and the fight against AQAP, but also because it oversimplifies the political challenges that face any attempt to build a post-Saleh Yemeni state. In particular, it ignores events in Taiz, the former capital of Yemen and the point of origin for the anti-Saleh protests. If the path to refocusing on AQAP runs through Sana'a, the path to meaningful political settlement in Sana'a runs through Taiz.

Taizis sparked the Yemeni revolution and continue to fuel it. The outbreak of protests in this central city was the turning-point in the Yemeni uprising, and gave the deciding push of momentum that led the revolution to grow and spread to other parts of Yemen. As long as Taizis continue to oppose the government in Sana'a, the Yemeni government will not be able to resolve the ongoing uprising that threatens the stability of the weakened state.

Taiz also matters to international interests because of ongoing gross violations of human rights, including blatant attacks on civilians, destruction of an ancient and historically rich city, and the disruption of the most liberal, cultured, and civically-oriented population in Yemen. The alienation or destruction of this “beacon of education and enlightenment” would cripple Yemen’s chances of emerging intact from the ongoing unrest.²

The History of Taiz

Taiz is Yemen’s third-largest city, with a population between 500,000 and one million people, and lies 120 miles south of Sana’a.³ It is the capital city of Taiz governorate, a southwestern region of striking geography ranging from inland mountains to the Red Sea coast. This ancient city, which is surrounded by fertile land and connected by old trade routes to nearby coastal cities, was long a commercial hub and, in more modern times, a center of industry.⁴ The city’s vigorous economy created a strong mercantile class, which in turn helped establish Taiz as a cultured and educated metropolis. The thriving population also fostered a climate of modern liberalism in which, especially compared to other regions in Yemen, women’s rights flourished while tribal influence waned.

Taiz is one of the many regions of Yemen that the government in Sana’a has marginalized. President Saleh is widely believed to resent the “city of high living” (*balad al aish*) because of its relative cosmopolitanism.⁵ Saleh’s tribesmen and associates prospered from a Sana’a-based patronage system over the course of his 33-year rule, while Taiz suffered increasing economic decline. Taizis complain that they are treated as inferiors by the favored northerners, and this feeling has been exacerbated during the current Yemeni uprising by the presence of government troops who are mostly from the north.⁶

The Capital of the Revolution

The outbreak of mass demonstrations in Taiz ignited Yemen’s smoldering protest movement. The Yemeni Spring began slowly in early 2011 after the fall of Tunisian President Zine el Abidine Ben Ali. An inchoate youth movement emerged in dispersed protests displaying a populist nature not seen before in the country. The protesters’ grievances were similar to those in other Arab uprisings: unemployment, corruption, and lack of equal representation. The Yemeni street had witnessed many political protests organized by the opposition parties before the Arab Spring, but these were mostly orchestrated by the political elite. When a group of young, disillusioned Taizi youth organized scattered protests demanding the fall of the regime in January, however, they balked at the interference of political parties, which they saw as branches of a corrupt political system.⁷ The youth movement was demanding something different: regime change.



The Yemeni Spring blossomed when Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak was forced to step down on February 11, 2011. Thousands of Yemenis gathered in their city centers. In Taiz, the protesters followed the example set by those in Egypt's Tahrir Square: they set up tents in a central area and dubbed the spot "Hurriyah Square," or "Freedom Square."⁸

The fact that Taiz had entered the protest movement with such force was significant. Protests, even of the political kind, had not been as common in Taiz as they were in Sana'a or Aden. The spread of the incipient revolution to the peaceful city suggested that the size of the movement, and the extent of its support even among the elite and cosmopolitan of Yemen, was considerable. The educated Taizis were able to organize protests, and the movement itself, more effectively than their peers. They were often found at the center of the action as the Yemeni Spring spread to other cities.⁹ Taiz was not only the starting point of the protests; its delegations seeded movements throughout the nation.¹⁰

Saleh's regime took notice of the importance of Taiz as a center for protest and acted to quash the incipient movement. The movement reached a height on February 18 when an eight-day protest culminated in a "Friday of Rage."¹¹ A grenade thrown into a group of demonstrators from a

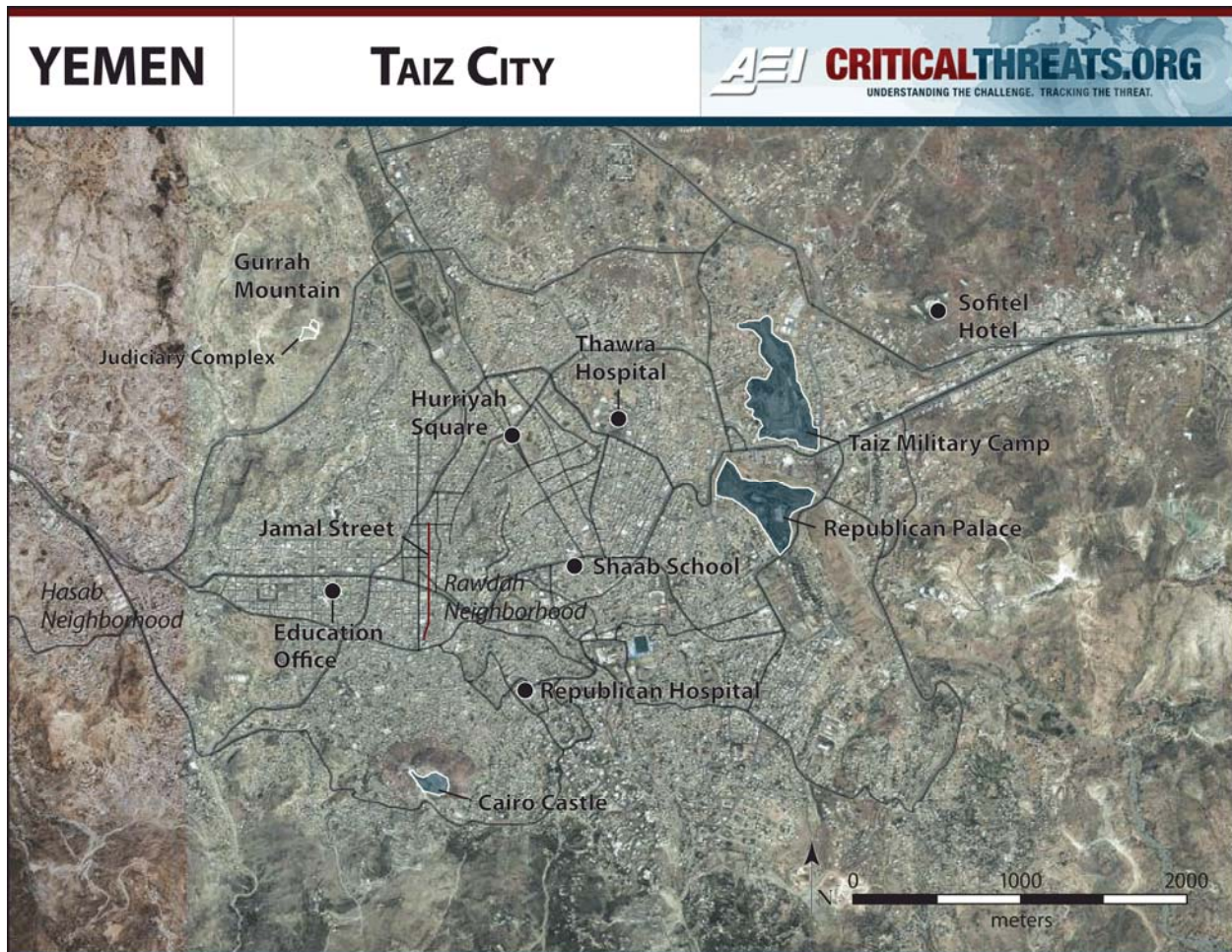
speeding car killed one protester. Officials at the American embassy in Sana'a remarked "a disturbing rise in the number and violence of attacks against Yemeni citizens" in protests across the country.¹²

In March 2011, a new regional head of the Central Security Forces (CSF), Abdullah Qairan, was transferred from Aden to Taiz.¹³ The CSF is a paramilitary force in Yemen. Qairan was a trusted insider of the Saleh regime; Saleh had given him command of Aden, one of Yemen's most important cities, which was threatened by a strong secessionist movement, called the "Southern Movement," that seeks to re-partition the country.¹⁴ The popular uprising had now apparently eclipsed the Southern Movement as the top threat to the country's stability in Saleh's view, and Qairan was sent to stop the problem at its source, in Taiz. The transfer was an indication to Taizis that the regime intended for an outsider to bring the city to heel ruthlessly and efficiently.¹⁵ Qairan is a northerner, a representative of the regions that prospered while Taiz went neglected. Since March Qairan has emerged as one of the most hated regime figures in the city, and has been blamed for a string of arrests, deaths, and instances of torture.¹⁶ Qairan and his associates conducted a steady campaign of violence against protesters in Taiz for three months. Reports regularly emerged of troops firing straight into crowds of demonstrators.¹⁷ The situation stagnated, until violence flared in May.

On May 29, soldiers loyal to the regime raided Hurriyah Square, the heart of the Taizi protest movement. The soldiers surrounded the camp area and moved in to disperse the thousands of demonstrators and burn several of their tents.¹⁸ Five people were reported killed in that attack, although within three days 50 more were dead.¹⁹ The attack was a reminder of the clearing of Pearl Roundabout in Bahrain in February and March.

Local tribes stepped in to protect the threatened movement at this point, although their absence earlier in the year had been a factor in Taizis' willingness to take to the streets. Hamoud al Mikhlaifi, a prominent tribal leader, announced in early June that he and his men would protect the protesters from future abuse.²⁰ Tribesmen descended on the city, some concealing themselves within sit-ins and marches, ready to respond if government forces attacked.²¹

The Taizi uprising has, by and large, welcomed the self-proclaimed "protectors of the revolution," and, at least until December 2011, had not exhibited the resentment of tribal interference that has characterized the Sana'a movement.²² Unlike Mikhlaifi's men, the Hashid tribesmen in Sana'a are widely resented by the capital's inhabitants. Government sources have linked the insurgent leader Mikhlaifi with the armed resistance in Sana'a, which is led by defected General Ali Mohsen al Ahmar. Some believe that Ali Mohsen is sending arms to support the Taizi uprising.²³ Mikhlaifi has denied any connection to the resistance leader in the capital, while in the same breath expressing admiration for Ali Mohsen's efforts.²⁴ Both sides have reason to dissemble, and the true connections remain unclear.



A general pattern of violence emerged after the tribes intervened in late May: tribal militants attacked government positions, and government forces retaliated by shelling neighborhoods (often residential) controlled by opposition forces. The Republican Guard, an elite military force, has tanks and heavy artillery in Taiz, while the tribal forces have not been seen using anything more advanced than rocket-propelled grenades (RPGs) and Kalashnikovs.²⁵ The Guard used its more advanced weapons to strike the neighborhoods of Taiz nightly. The conflict seemed to have evolved from a proxy war fought along the same lines as the struggle in Sana'a to a series of more violent and personal battles. The homes of tribal leaders were raided, their family members were targeted and killed, and their native tribal areas were hit in air raids.²⁶ A Yemeni government representative from Taiz commented that the conflict had diverged from the unrest in Sana'a because of these kinds of targeted, personal attacks.²⁷ Frequent skirmishes and territorial battles left Taiz and the surrounding countryside split into areas controlled by the Republican Guard and those occupied by tribal fighters.²⁸

Taiz is surrounded by soaring mountains and dotted with hills and dips, so taking control of the higher areas in and around the city offers significant strategic advantage. The Republican Guard and CSF camps on high ground around the city and al Janad military camp by the airport gave the

Republican Guard and CSF a strategic advantage from the beginning.²⁹ Al Janad military camp, only three miles from the airport, is a key location in the fight to control Taiz and has been a stopping point for military reinforcements arriving from the north.³⁰ As the fighting continued, the 33rd Brigade of the Republican Guard secured positions on Gurrah Mountain and Cairo Castle. From Gurrah Mountain army tanks and artillery could fire directly into Rawdah neighborhood, where resistance leader Mikhlafi has his compound. The Republican Guard also established a base near Thawra Hospital, a high point closer to the center of the city from which the Republican Guard has been able to shell Hurriyah Square and the surrounding areas.³¹ Government forces also deployed snipers in the buildings along the protest routes and attacked marchers as they passed.³²

Taiz was effectively under siege; on October 14 President Saleh ordered the entrances and exits of the city closed.³³ All roads leading from the city were effectively blocked by the intense fighting anyway, separating Taiz from the outlying towns and districts.³⁴ Republican Guard and security forces occupied hospitals and government buildings, curtailing or ending essential public services. Tribal forces fought to reclaim these buildings with limited success.

Escalation then Calm

The beginning of October was a turning point at which tribal forces began making significant gains. The end of November and start of December saw an escalation in violence and a succession of tribal victories both inside and outside the city. Tribesmen were able to reclaim government buildings such as the Education Office and Shaab School, which had been until that point temporary military barracks.³⁵ Significantly, the tribes took control of al Thakarah junction after the Republican Guard retreated from this position.³⁶ Thakarah Junction is the intersection of the two roads that lead from the airport to Taiz city. The position therefore allows significant control over the city's access points from the east.

The areas of Taiz governorate outside its capital have not escaped the conflicts of 2011. The port city of Mocha, once famous for the coffee that passed through its harbor, is still an important trading port, and skirmishes erupted along the western road connecting it to Taiz city.³⁷ Outlying areas that are home to local tribesmen who support the revolution, such as Ali Sarhan, were attacked in air raids.³⁸ Towns along the road connecting Taiz city to military camps and the international airport were also targets, as well as the northern road that arches over Taiz from Sharab Junction to the international airport.³⁹

Saleh signed the GCC deal on November 23, and violence in other regions of Yemen de-escalated. Violence continued for several days in Taiz after the signing, but then a ceasefire brokered by Taiz governor Hamoud al Soufi with the militias calmed the storm of skirmishes and shelling. Beginning in late December, a period of relative peace settled over the city. Reports starting as early as November indicated that the Republican Guard was pulling its tanks from its most valued

positions, notably Gurrah Mountain, that tribes had retreated from government buildings, and that checkpoints manned by the Republican Guard and tribal soldiers had been cleared away.⁴⁰ Such reports have been largely substantiated by a lack of reporting of shelling or street fights since mid-December. If the city has indeed been peaceful, the period is the longest that any ceasefire has lasted in Taiz since June 2011.

Protests continue to occur daily in the city, however, while local leaders have maintained their commitment to nonviolence.⁴¹ Local media friendly to the uprising report that the protests continue in the thousands and tens of thousands, although the few Western reporters who have made it to the restricted city tell a different story of numbers drastically decreased by government attacks and street violence.⁴² Nonetheless, developments such as the March of Life demonstrate that the Taiz resistance is strong, and that the anti-regime line still draws significant support from the city's inhabitants.⁴³

The Taizi protest movement is by no means ideologically unified, however. From the start of the protests in January, members of the Islamist opposition party, Islah, wanted the protesters to



change their platform to reform of the government rather than its overthrow.⁴⁴ Sultan al Samie, a prominent supporter of the protesters, is a member of the Socialist party, while another, Hamoud al Mikhlafi, is an Islamist. The Gulf Initiative also divided the movement: some protesters marched in support of the deal; others opposed it; still others call for the ouster of all current members of the ruling party and of those from the opposition who signed the GCC agreement.⁴⁵ This last “departure of all” camp is the largest, and has been a source of conflict among the demonstrators. Nor do all protests touch on the revolution in itself. Some have marched in opposition to teacher salary cuts alongside those calling for Saleh’s resignation.⁴⁶



Taiz's Protests: Who's Who

Opposition Figures

The fact that the resistance leaders were sons of Taiz drove the nature of the conflict and was a major factor in turning the conflict into a personal, bloody fight. Since May three personalities have emerged as the most prominent figures in the armed tribal movement: Hamoud al Mikhlafi, Sultan al Samie, and Sadeq Ali Sarhan.

- *Hamoud al Mikhlafi* is head of the Mikhlaf tribe, whose territory lies to the northwest of Taiz city.⁴⁷ Tawakul Karman, the Nobel Peace Prize recipient, is his cousin. Mikhlafi was born in 1964 in the Sharab district of Taiz governorate and studied at the Sharia and Law College in Sana'a University before becoming a political security officer in Ali Abdullah Saleh's regime.⁴⁸ He is a member of the Joint Meetings Party (JMP), the opposition coalition, and the Islah (Reform) party, the largest member party of the JMP. He failed in a bid for local office in 2006, and defected at the beginning of the protest movement in February 2011.⁴⁹ He now is the most visible of the tribal leaders in the Taiz resistance, and is often called the "sheikh of sheikhs" (a political, not religious, title) and leader of the tribal council involved in protecting Taizi protesters.⁵⁰

Mikhlafi's charismatic personality has drawn several men to his side and attracted followers from as far away as the surrounding governorates of Lahij and Ibb. These men have gathered at his compound in Taiz city. Mikhlafi has claimed to have thousands of tribesmen ready to answer his call, and it is clear that he commands a sizeable force. Tribal forces under Mikhlafi's command have been behind many seizures of strategic positions. Mikhlafi has asserted that still more men are ready to defect from the military and join his army.⁵¹ The threat Mikhlafi poses has not gone unnoticed by government forces. CSF and Republican Guard shells have often fallen in Rawdah, the neighborhood of Mikhlafi's home. He has escaped from a series of assassination attempts since he threw his support behind the protest in June.⁵² Republican Guardsmen have also targeted his family members and killed two of his relatives in June.⁵³ It is just this sort of attack on family members that has caused the violence in Taiz to spin out of control into a uniquely bloody battle.

- *Sultan al Samie*, another leader of a prominent tribe in Taiz governorate, is a member of the Yemeni Socialist Party and also commands a large number of men. He has sent his forces out alongside Mikhlafi in the fight against regime troops, although the exact nature of the relationship of the two men is unclear. They were seen jointly welcoming protesters from Ibb and have met at Mikhlafi's compound to discuss the resistance. They seem to wish to appear allied in their struggle for control of Taiz.⁵⁴ Samie, like Mikhlafi, occupies a large, high compound from which he oversees military operations.

- *Sadeq Ali Sarhan* was the commander of the First Armored Division's Air Defense Brigade. Sarhan was subordinate to General Ali Mohsen al Ahmar, who commands the First Armored Division. When Ali Mohsen defected in March, Sarhan returned to his home in Taiz governorate to support the struggle there. He has denied any connection with the fight in Sana'a and said that his decision to return to Taiz was a personal one, unrelated to political or military orders.⁵⁵ He has acted as a spokesman in truce negotiations with the government on behalf of the protesters and their tribal protectors, and his family home has also been a frequent target for shelling. In July a shell hit his home, killing his son.⁵⁶ The General People's Council (GPC), Yemen's ruling party, has accused Sarhan of waging a campaign of destruction in the city of Taiz.⁵⁷

The tribal leadership stepped in claiming that its goal was to protect the revolution, but the leaders' true motivation remains unclear to this day. They may have been genuinely provoked by the violence against a peaceful movement, but they also might be using the government aggression to promote their own ends, as some protesters worry.⁵⁸ According to tribal representatives, their forces responded "within hours" of the security force's attack on Hurriyah Square to join in a fight that they had until then supported only in words.⁵⁹ Although these representatives cite the May 29 burning of Hurriyah Square as the start of their involvement in the protest movement, government forces had been abusing and killing protesters for several months, and some news sources indicate that the fighting between tribal and government forces actually broke out six days earlier, on May 23.⁶⁰ Tribal intervention may have sparked a violent government crackdown, and not the reverse.

As before, it is difficult to determine whether Mikhlaifi or the army instigated the winter spurt of activity that coincided with the signing of the Gulf Initiative. Government representatives like Hamoud al Soufi have accused Mikhlaifi of trying to scuttle the formation of a new unity government, while tribal sympathizers blame President Saleh for ordering his army and security forces to provoke the armed tribesmen, hoping that an escalation of violence in Taiz would lead to the end of the GCC deal and allow him to remain in power. At the time, ruling party politicians in Sana'a intimated that they would withdraw from the deal if the bloodshed in Taiz continued.

Loyalist Figures

Murad al Awbali, Abdullah Dhabaan, and Abdullah Qairan are the government commanders controlling operations in Taiz. These three have commanded the Republican Guard and CSF in Taiz, and are often lambasted in pro-revolution media. The administration in Sana'a has yet another ally in Hamoud al Soufi, the governor of Taiz governorate.

- *Brigadier General Murad al Awbali* is the commander of the Republican Guard forces in Taiz.⁶¹ His men have taken stations in major hospitals and government buildings throughout the city. A committee tasked with restoring the peace in Taiz has recommended Awbali's resignation as a means of restoring a sense of security in the city's population and assuaging

the anger over the numerous civilian casualties at the hands of the Republican Guard in Taiz under his watch.⁶²

- *Brigadier General Abdullah Dhabaan* is the commander of the 33rd Brigade of the Republican Guard, which was stationed on Gurrah Mountain and other points surrounding the city for several months.
- *Brigadier General Abdullah Qairan* is the commander of security in Taiz governorate, and is particularly despised as a bloodthirsty outsider. He came to Taiz from Aden in March, it is believed, solely for the purpose of suppressing the uprisings in the city.⁶³ He and other members of the security apparatus are largely held responsible for the May 29 burning of Hurriyah Square, an event now called “the holocaust” by particularly pro-revolutionary elements. Qairan’s directive seems to have been to quash the revolution by any means necessary. Security forces under Qairan have collaborated with the Republican Guard on several attacks, and both appear united in their fight with tribal forces. Qairan was fired in early January 2012.⁶⁴
- *Hamoud al Soufi* is a Taiz native and sheikh, and has been loyal to Saleh over the course of the uprising.⁶⁵ Sarhan has accused him of “selling his conscience” to maintain his position of power in Saleh’s government.⁶⁶ As a son of Taiz, he is regarded with a bit more sympathy than non-Taizis like Qairan. He has been party to a number of failed truce agreements. In order to show that tribesmen were as responsible for the violence in the city as government troops, Soufi has allowed certain Western reporters limited access to the city, although so far not with the effect he desired.⁶⁷

Looking Ahead

The Taiz protest movement has not died down despite signs that a kind of peace has been restored to the city. The formation of a Unity Government and the nominal transfer of power to Vice President Abdul Rab Mansour al Hadi continue to be unpopular in the city, as does the decision of the GCC deal to grant immunity to President Saleh. The December 2011 March of Life from Taiz to Sana’a attracted tens of thousands of participants, and the fact that this protest has already drawn deadly retaliation from the army does not bode well for the immediate future. President Saleh’s final refusal to leave the country for medical treatment in the United States suggests that he may attempt to control the situation from the capital, another development that endangers chances of any sort of lasting truce in Yemen’s third-largest city. Republican Guard, Central Security, and tribal forces are still in the area; army reinforcements from Sana’a were sent in the last month, and there has yet to be any indication that they have quit the area. Taiz remains a charged and unhappy city, ravaged by months of all-out battle. Sana’a will have its attention on the city in the months to come.

Should the situation in Taiz flare up as it did over the summer and in late fall, even more resources would likely be reallocated to deal with the unrest. Sana'a has demonstrated, both before and after the GCC deal, that keeping Taiz peaceful is a very high priority. Since the GCC deal, a ceasefire has brought a tenuous peace to the city. The firing of Qairan, the hated chief of security, appeared in early January 2012 as a sign that the regime in Sana'a is beginning to crumble under popular pressure. This comes amidst a rash of labor strikes and acts of defiance by troops – and concessions from the regime responding to pressure to fire corrupt officials. But on January 9, unarmed men fired on protesters in Taiz, killing one.⁶⁸ Mikhlafi and his associates will likely interfere a second time if violence against demonstrators continues. If this happens, the government may not be able to prevent violence from erupting again.

Sana'a sent large deployments to Taiz and turned its attention from nearby Aden and Zinjibar, significant locations in the fight against al Qaeda-linked militants in Yemen. Reinforcements continued to arrive as late as December, demonstrating that Taiz is a threat whose importance eclipses that of the unstable southern regions in the minds of Yemen's leaders.⁶⁹ Since then al Qaeda actors have seized territory around Aden, and have been seen in Aden itself. If a political solution in Sana'a is not accompanied by a resolution of the crisis in Taiz, Yemen's leaders are likely to continue to be distracted from confronting the threat that poses the most immediate danger to the U.S.

¹ For further information on the expansion of al Qaeda's operating environment in Yemen in 2011, see: Katherine Zimmerman, "Al Qaeda's Gains in South Yemen," AEI's Critical Threats Project, July 8, 2011. Available: <http://www.criticalthreats.org/yemen/al-qaedas-gains-south-yemen-july-8-2011>

Frederick W. Kagan, "Al Qaeda's Yemen Strategy," AEI's Critical Threats Project, June 21, 2011. Available: <http://www.criticalthreats.org/yemen/frederick-kagan-qaeda-yemen-strategy-june-21-2011>

² Robert F. Worth, "Yemen on the Brink of Hell," New York Times Magazine, June 20, 2011. Available: <http://www.nytimes.com/2011/07/24/magazine/yemen-on-the-brink-of-hell.html>

³ The establishment of the Yemen Arab Republic moved the capital of north Yemen from Taiz to Sana'a in 1962. Sana'a then became the country of the Republic of Yemen when the Yemen Arab Republic and the People's Democratic Republic of Yemen, whose capital was Aden, unified in May 1990.

Tom Finn, "Is Taiz Going to be the Next Benghazi of Yemen?" Time, December 13, 2011. Available: <http://www.time.com/time/world/article/0,8599,2102183-1,00.html>

⁴ For example, the Hayel Saeed Anam and Company, based in Taiz, is Yemen's only industrial giant. See here for further information on the company: <http://www.hsagroup.com/en/home.php>

⁵ Robert F. Worth, "Yemen on the Brink of Hell," New York Times Magazine, June 20, 2011. Available: <http://www.nytimes.com/2011/07/24/magazine/yemen-on-the-brink-of-hell.html>

⁶ "A Once-Peaceful Yemeni City Under Siege," New York Times, November 2, 2011. Available: http://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2011/11/02/world/middleeast/20111103_YEMEN_GOBI_G.html?ref=yemen#1

⁷ Robert F. Worth, "Yemen on the Brink of Hell," New York Times Magazine, June 20, 2011. Available: <http://www.nytimes.com/2011/07/24/magazine/yemen-on-the-brink-of-hell.html>

⁸ Tom Finn, "Is Taiz Going to be the Next Benghazi of Yemen?" Time, December 13, 2011. Available: <http://www.time.com/time/world/article/0,8599,2102183-1,00.html>

⁹ Laura Kasinof, "Yemen's Awakening?" New American Foundation, December 1, 2011. Video available: http://newamerica.net/events/2011/yemen_s_awakening

¹⁰ "Do not bet on the movements of the international community and vulnerable people, the revolution will triumph with the choice of the people," Ansaru Allah, October 21, 2011 [Arabic]. Available: <http://www.ansaruallah.com/ar/index.php/yemenews/383-%D9%84%D8%A7-%D9%86%D8%B1%D8%A7%D9%87%D9%86-%D8%B9%D9%84%D9%89-%D8%AA%D8%AD%D8%B1%D9%83%D8%A7%D8%AA-%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%85%D8%AC%D8%AA%D9%85%D8%B9-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%AF%D9%88%D9%84%D9%8A-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%B6%D8%25B>

¹¹ "Yemen protests: Five killed at anti-government rallies," BBC, February 18, 2011. Available: <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-middle-east-12507889>

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