Yemen

Recent Significant Events



Click image to enlarge Current Situation

Yemen is increasingly unstable as an anti-government movement seeks to force President Ali Abdullah Saleh from power. The country's population faces high levels of poverty and unemployment coupled with low levels of education. Oil, the primary source of public revenue, will run out between 2017 and 2021 and Yemen's capital, Sana'a, will be without water in 2015. Corruption and resource constraints limit the government's capacity to properly address desperate socio-economic conditions. The government also faces multiple security threats: the northern al Houthi rebellion, the southern secessionist movement, and al Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula.

There is currently a ceasefire in place with the al Houthi rebels; however, the al Houthi rebels are backing the anti-government protestors. In the south, the Southern Movement has also voiced support for the protestors. The Yemeni military is now divided and major tribes renounced support for the government.

AQAP remains a threat. The current instability increases the group's operating space and it continues to attack government targets in Yemen and seeks to strike Western targets. Recent statements from the group have threatened Saudi Arabia, Yemen, and the West.

Al Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP):

AQAP formed in January 2009 as a merger between the Yemeni and Saudi al Qaeda branches. Operatives work in cells throughout the country and rely on tribal support for shelter. The group seeks to establish an Islamic state and has executed attacks on Western interests.



See <u>here</u> for more information.

Click image to enlarge

Al Houthi Rebellion: The al Houthi rebels, drawn from Yemen's Zaydi Shiite population, are primarily active in Yemen's northern Sa'ada and Amran provinces and have engaged in paramilitary activity against government forces and pro-government tribes. *See <u>here</u> for more information.*

Southern Movement: The Southern Movement is an umbrella group for southern-based secessionists who regularly demonstrate against the Yemeni government, protesting their perceived marginalization in the unified state. Parts of the movement engage in militant activities. *See <u>here</u> for more information.*



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Yemen Protests

Political unrest spread to Yemen, where protests have been held across the country calling for Saleh to resign. He has lost key tribal support and influential figures within the military announced their support for the protestors.

See *here* for more information.

Selected Recent Significant Events



- Over 50 people were killed when snipers
 opened fire on demonstrators in Sana'a on March 18.
- $\left\{ \begin{array}{c} \mathbf{2} \\ \mathbf{2} \end{array} \right\} \begin{bmatrix} \mathbf{0} \\ \mathbf{b} \\ \mathbf{b} \end{bmatrix}$
 - Clashes between al Houthis, supported by defected army units, and army loyalists have killed over 40 people.
 - Army defectors clashed with Republican Guard units on March 22 and March 24, killing at least four people.



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A roadside improvised explosive device killed a policeman and injured seven others in Aden on March 24.

Yemeni security forces killed 12 AQAP militants in Lawder on March 23.

Protest Timeline

15 JAN: Youth activists and opposition members initiated protests in Sana'a. 11 FEB: Thousands of Yemenis protested spontaneously throughout the country. 20 FEB: JMP rejected dialogue with the government and al Houthis join protests. 25 FEB: Massive protests occurred; participants included the al Houthis, Southern Movement, and general public independent of formal political parties. 01 MAR: JMP sponsored a political rally. 06 MAR: After Saleh rejected JMP's proposal, the JMP called for widespread protests and a peaceful transition. 08 MAR: Demonstrations occurred in areas traditionally loyal to Saleh. 10 MAR: Saleh ordered security forces to protect the protestors from violence. 13 MAR: Violence broke out at Sana'a, Aden, and Taiz protests. 15 MAR: Yemen deported four foreign journalists from the capital. 18 MAR: Over 50 protestors killed in Sana'a by rooftop snipers. 20 MAR: Saleh dismissed cabinet. 21 MAR: Mass defections occurred from government and military. 22 MAR: Emergency law passed. 25 MAR: Rival rallies occurred in Sana'a. 26 MAR: Negotiations for transition of power collapsed.

Yemen Protests

Overview

Student and civil society activists, the "youth," have called for President Ali Abdullah Saleh to resign since the Tunisian president stepped down. Protests have been occurring regularly since January in squares in the major cities, especially Sana'a, Taiz, and Aden, and eventually spread to areas that have traditionally been strong support bases for the regime.

A violent crackdown on March 18 in Sana'a killed over fifty protestors. Saleh declared a state of emergency that same day and dismissed his cabinet on March 20. On March 21, spurred by the events on March 18, mass defections from the regime occurred, including key military commanders, such as General Ali Mohsen al Ahmar, and tribal leaders, such as Sheikh Sadiq al Ahmar (*Hashid*) and Sheikh Sinan Abu Lohoum (*Bakil*).

Saleh offered to resign within the year, but the protestors demand he step down immediately. The youth movement has formed an umbrella organization and has laid out its demands.

For more, please see: "<u>Yemen Protests: U.S. Policy in Crisis.</u>" <u>Yemen Protest Briefing Slides</u>

Participants

Joint Meeting Parties (JMP): Composed of five opposition parties: Islah, Yemeni Socialist Party, al Haq, Unionist party, and Popular Force Union party. The JMP original sought sweeping political reform, but now calls for Saleh's resignation. It presented a five-point plan to Saleh. Youth Movement: It rejects JMP involvement in negotiations and has formed an umbrella organization to present unified demands. Islamists: Abdul Majid al Zindani, designated a terrorist by the U.S., has led a group of clerics in the protests and called for an Islamist state in Yemen. He submitted an eight-point transition plan. Tribes: Two of the most influential tribes, the Hashid and the Bakil, have withdrawn their support for the regime. Tribes in al Jawf have aligned with the al Houthi rebels against loyalist army units. Military: Key commanders within the military, including General Ali Mohsen al Ahmar, have defected and declared they will protect the protestors. Defected units have clashed with loyalist troops. Southern Movement and the al Houthis: Leaders called for solidarity with the "youth" movement. Click for more information on the Southern Movement and the al Houthi rebellion.

Al Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula

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Recent Significant Events

22 MAR: AQAP militants attacked Ma'rib checkpoint. Three militants were killed. Three soldiers died and two were injured in the attack. Some militants escaped.

22 MAR: AQAP militants ambushed army unit in Lawder in Abyan governorate. Twelve militants were killed and at least five soldiers injured.

17 MAR: Yemen's Defense Ministry reported two AQAP militants captured en route to Taiz, Ahmed Omar Abdul Jalil al Khadmi and Khalid Saeed Batarfi. Batarfi reportedly works with AQAP's media arm and was in charge of AQAP's Abyan and al Bayda military wing.

13 MAR: Suspected AQAP militants attacked a security patrol in Zinjibar, killing on soldier and injuring three others.



Click image to enlarge

History

Al Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP) officially formed in January 2009 with the merger of the Yemeni and Saudi al Qaeda branches and operates out of Yemen. Saudi Arabia has effectively denied al Qaeda a haven in the country since 2004. AQAP receives shelter from some of the Yemeni tribes and portrays itself as a protector of the people.

AQAP's primary goals are to establish an Islamic Caliphate within the Arabian Peninsula and to attack the West. The group is the most active operational franchise of the al Qaeda network and is responsible for the 2009 Christmas day attack and the October 2010 parcel plot. The group actively recruits in the Englishlanguage and publishes two regular magazine, *Sada al Malahem* (Echo of the Epics) in Arabic, and *Inspire* in English. Americans Anwar al Awlaki and Samir Khan are operational within AQAP and are credited with much of its Western outreach.

Estimates of AQAP's strength range from the low hundreds to several thousand operatives. Foreign fighters are believed to train for international operations, while Yemenis execute many of the attacks against Yemeni government targets.

Leadership



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Important Considerations Capabilities: AQAP has historically targeted western interests in Yemen; however, the Christmas Day attack and October 2010 parcel plot showed that the group has international capabilities. English-language outreach: AQAP is the first al Qaeda franchise to publish in English. Anwar al Awlaki, an Americanborn cleric, is hiding in Yemen with AQAP militants and advocates for the Muslim community to wage violent jihad. Guantanamo Detainees: Yemen continues to be a destination for former Guantanamo detainees, some of whom are part of the AQAP leadership. U.S. Policy: Saleh is a partner in the war on terror and the U.S. has provided various forms of assistance to Yemen.

AQAP ORGANIZATION CHART 2011:



* Director of National Intelligence James Clapper said that Awlaki has taken an increasingly operational role in AQAP since late 2009.

Al Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula Leadership clic

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Nasser al Wahayshi

Nasser al Wahayshi, also known as Abu Basir, is the senior leader of AQAP and once served as Osama bin Laden's personal assistant. He fled to Iran after fighting in the battle of Tora Bora in December 2001. Wahayshi was arrested in Iran in early 2002 and was extradited to Yemen in 2003 with eight others. He broke out of a maximum-security prison with 23 other militants in February 2006 in Yemen's capital city of Sana'a. He was officially recognized as al Qaeda in Yemen's leader on June 21, 2007, though he was likely serving as the head by mid-2006. Wahayshi oversaw the January 2009 merger of al Qaeda's operations in Yemen and Saudi Arabia and has since led the group's efforts to destabilize the Yemen and Saudi governments as well as AQAP's recent transnational attacks, such as the attempted Detroit airline bombing in December 2009.

On January 19, 2010, the U.S. Treasury and State departments designated Wahayshi as a terrorist under Global Terrorism Sanctions Regulations and Executive Order 13224, respectively. Wahayshi was featured in an interview in the first issue of AQAP's English-language

magazine, Inspire.

Said al Shihri

Said al Shihri, also known as Abu Sufyan al Azdi, is the deputy leader of AQAP. He was captured in Pakistan in December 2001 and was later sent to Guantanamo (#372). On November 9, 2007, Shihri was transferred to Saudi Arabia's terrorist rehabilitation facility. He is believed to have coordinated the September 2008 bombing of the U.S. Embassy in Sana'a. In January 2009. Shihri became the deputy leader of AQAP and on May 27, 2009, the Defense Intelligence Agency listed him as "reengaged in terrorism." On September 27, 2009, Shihri released a statement calling for donations to AQAP. On January 19, 2010, the U.S. Treasury

and State departments designate Shihri as a terrorist under Global Terrorism Sanctions Regulations and Executive Order 13224, respectively.

Recently, Shihri has called for the overthrow of the Saudi government and has ordered individuals working for Saudi princes or officials to assassinate them. He was featured in the fall issue of AQAP's English-language magazine, *Inspire*.

Qasim al Raymi

Qasim al Raymi, also known as Abu Hurayrah, is the military commander of AOAP. He was one of the al Oaeda suspects to escape in the February 2006 prison break, which is when he became the deputy leader of al Qaeda in Yemen. In a June 21, 2007 audio statement he announced al Qaeda in Yemen's reestablishment and named Wahayshi as the leader. Raymi is believed to have masterminded the July 2, 2007 suicide car bomb that killed eight Spanish tourists in Ma'rib province. He appeared in the January 2009 video announcing establishment of AQAP the and reportedly ran a training camp in Abyan. The U.S. Treasury and State departments designate Raymi as a terrorist under **Global Terrorism Sanctions Regulations** on January 19, 2010 and Executive Order 13224 on May 11, 2010, respectively. Raymi has recently spoken out against the Yemeni government and accused Saleh of serving U.S. interests.

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Al Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula Leadership

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Sheikhibrahim Iaiman al Rubais Sphitup/Leoder

heikh Anwar al Awlaki*

al Abab Shari'a Official

Hizam Mujali

Hizam Mujali was a commander in AQAP. He was reportedly a member of the 15-man cell that launched the attack on the French tanker, the *Limburg*, on October 6, 2002. In 2003, Mujali resisted arrest and killed a Yemeni police officer. He was one of the al Qaeda suspects to escape in the February 2006 prison break. He later turned himself in to the authorities and struck a deal with them renouncing al Qaeda in exchange for his freedom. He then reconnected with Qasim al Raymi.

On August 19, AFP reported that Mujali had surrendered himself after counterterrorism forces surrounded his hideout in Arhab, north of the capital.

Uthman al Ghamdi

Uthman al Ghamdi, also known as Uthman Ahmed Uthman al Umairah, is a Saudi commander in AQAP and a former Guantanamo detainee (#184). He served in the Saudi military as a soldier and is considered a deserter. He traveled to Afghanistan on a forged passport in early 2000 and trained for about six weeks in al Farouq camp. Ghamdi stayed in Kandahar for about six months and then fought north of Kabul for about fifteen months until the withdrawal in November 2001. He stayed in Tora Bora for a few weeks and then left for the Pakistani borders. Ghamdi was arrested at a checkpoint in December 2001 and handed over to U.S. authorities. Ghamdi was transferred to Saudi Arabia on June 24, 2006. Saudi Arabia listed Ghamdi as one of its most-wanted terrorists in February 2009.

Ghamdi recently appeared in a documentary-style video released by AQAP's media, al Malahem Foundation, at the end of May.

Mohammad Said al Umdah

Mohammed Said al Umdah, also known as Gharib al Ta'azi, is an AQAP commander. He was one of the al Qaeda suspects who broke out of the Political Security Prison in Sana'a in February 2006.

Recently, Umdah recounted AQAP operations in Aden and Ma'rib governorates during June and July in an audio recording produced by AQAP's media arm, the al Malahem Foundation.

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Sh. Ibrahim Suleiman al Rubaish

Ibrahim Suleiman al Rubaish is a Saudi cleric who serve as the spiritual leader for AQAP and is a former Guantanamo detainee (#192). Rubaish trained at the al Farouq camp in Afghanistan and fought in Tora Bora. He was captured near the Pakistan-Afghanistan border in late 2001 and was then handed over to American authorities. He was later transferred from Guantanamo to the Saudi Arabian terrorist rehabilitation program on December 13, 2006. Rubaish managed to escape across the Saudi-Yemeni border and re-connected with al Qaeda. In February 2009, Saudi Arabia added Rubaish to its 85 mostwanted terrorists list.

Rubaish has spoken out strongly against the Saudi government, accusing Saudi rulers of attempting to gradually move away from the Islamic identity of the country.

Sh. Anwar al Awlaki

Anwar al Awlaki is an American-born inspirational cleric in AQAP. He is a radical cleric who preaches in support of violent jihad against the West. Awlaki's lectures are readily available over the internet in English and have served as inspiration for many terrorists and would-be terrorists, including Faisal Shahzad, Umar Farouk Abdulmutallab, and the London 7/7 bombers, among others. The FBI investigated him for his connection to 9/11 hijackers.

After the Christmas day attack, Awlaki has been featured in AQAP media productions, especially in the new English-language magazine, *Inspire*. Awlaki has also delivered AQAP lectures in Arabic.

The U.S. State Department added Awlaki to its list of terrorism supporters under Executive Order 13224 for his role in AQAP on July 16. The CIA has listed Awlaki on its "capture or kill" list, despite his American citizenship.

Awlaki is currently believed to be in Shabwah governorate in Yemen under the protection of the Awalik tribe.

See <u>here</u> for a backgrounder on Awlaki.

Sh. Abu Zubair Adil al Abab

Abu Zubair Adil al Abab, is a *shari'a* official for AQAP.

He has spoken out against the Yemeni government, criticizing President Saleh's failure to implement *shari'a* law in Yemen.

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Al Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula Leadership

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Fahd al Quso

Fahd al Quso, also known as Abu Huthaifa, is a Saudi citizen, born in Aden, Yemen, who first appeared in AQAP media on May 26, 2010. Quso is believed to have trained in al Qaeda camps in Afghanistan in the 1990s. He is directly connected to the 2000 USS Cole bombing. Yemeni authorities had arrested Quso in connection to the USS Cole bombing, but he escaped from prison in April 2003 and was re-arrested on March 10, 2004. Quso was freed in 2007. He has been indicted in New York for his role in the October 12, 2000 USS Cole bombing. The U.S. is offering a \$5 million reward for information.

Quso was reported killed in a U.S. drone strike in North Waziristan in Pakistan on September 8. On December 16, Asharq al Awsat published an interview with him in which he dismissed as a rumor his presence in North Waziristan. Quso noted that he was safer staying in Yemen than going to Pakistan.

On December 7, 2010, the U.S. Department of State designated Quso as a Specially Designated Global Terrorist under Executive Order 13224, noting that he is actively engaging in terrorism and his connections to Awlaki, Wahayshi, and Shihri.

Ibrahim Hassan al Asiri

Ibrahim Hassan al Asiri. also known by the name Abu Saleh, is the main explosives expert and primary bombmaker for AQAP. Asiri is originally from Saudi Arabia, where he was imprisoned for attempting to join the Islamist insurgency in Iraq. He entered Yemen in 2007, when he met Nasser al Wahayshi. In February 2009 Asiri was first on Saudi's list of 85 most-wanted terrorism suspects. Asiri is credited with crafting the explosive device, worn by his brother, used in the attempted assassination of Saudi Deputy Interior Minister Mohammed bin Nayef August He is also credited to be 2009. responsible for manufacturing the bomb used in the 2009 Christmas day bombing by Umar Farouk Abdulmutallab and, most recently, the two parcel bombs attributed to AQAP that were discovered in London and Dubai in October 2010. Asiri is believed to be hiding in Yemen's Ma'rib governorate with AQAP leader Nasser al Wahayshi. He was interviewed in the September 2009 issue of Sada al Malahem, AQAP's Arabic online magazine.

On March 24, 2011, the U.S. Department of State listed Asiri a terrorist under Executive Order 13224. Return to Chart



Recent Significant Events The Southern Movement has been active in the country-wide protests.

14 MAR: Protestors seized weapons from a police station in Aden. Medics reported that at least six people had been shot in the head and that two others were critically wounded in clashes.

10 MAR: Security forces opened fire on demonstrators. At least six people were injured in Aden.

7 MAR: Security forces arrested over 25 protestors in Aden.

5 MAR: Over 20,000 people reportedly marched in protest in Aden.

1 MAR: Armed militants and security forces clashed in Radfan in Lahii governorate. At least two people were killed. Reports indicated that security forces shelled the city intermittently.

1 MAR: Over 30,000 people protested in Hadramawt governorate and at least 25 people were injured in clashes.

See the Southern Movement Tracker.



Click image to enlarge

Southern Movement

History

The Southern Movement is an umbrella southern-based for а movement Mass antisecessionist movement. government demonstrations in the major southern cities such as Aden, Zinjibar, and Dhaleh, characterize the movement. Smaller militant factions have targeted government personnel and buildings in the south and attacks often take the form of ambushes on convoys or grenade attacks on structures.

Secessionist strongholds are located in the former People's Democratic Republic of Yemen (PDRY) and the roots of the conflict can be traced back to the unification with the Yemen Arab Republic in May 1990. In 2007, southern military officers protested and demanded the reinstatement of their pensions. Others joined the retired officers and accused the Sana'a government of economic and political marginalization of the south; illegal land seizures; forced and retirements from civil and military positions.

On July 23, 2009, at least 16 people were killed at a demonstration in Zinjibar, sparking massive protests. Since then, the movement has increasingly gained popular support.

See here for a backgrounder on the Southern Movement.

Click to return to first slide.

Leadership

Ali Salem al Beidh: Beidh is a former Vice President of Yemen. Beidh led the south in its bid to secede from Yemen in the early 1990s but fled the country in 1994 when the secession failed. He remains the nominal head of the Southern Movement from his selfimposed exile in Germany. Beidh declared himself president of the south in 2009, but is reportedly in poor health. Tarig al Fadhli: Fadhli is widely seen as the day-to-day head of the Southern Movement. He fought in Afghanistan in the 1980s and was a one-time confidant of Osama bin Laden. Fadhli was part of President Saleh's government until he defected in 2009 to lead the Southern Movement. His bin Laden and Saleh ties. though, have created suspicion.

Movement Groups: The Southern Movement is decentralized, with five to seven groups most actively pursuing the Movement's cause. The largest, Fadhli's Council for Leading the Peaceful Revolution, has unsuccessfully attempted to merge the other groups.

Tamah Family: The Tamah family has played an influential role in the Movement, particularly Taher Tamah, who leads one of the more militant Southern Movement groups.

Recent Significant Events

The al Houthi rebels have been active in the country-wide protests.

20 MAR: Rebels seized two tanks, eight vehicles, and four artillery pieces from the 115th Infantry Division in al Jawf governorate. The troops were attempting to retake a military site the rebels had seized. Reports indicated a military aircraft crashed nearby, though it is not clear whether it was shot down.

18 MAR: Rebels ambushed a sheikh's convoy in Sa'ada governorate.

09 MAR: A spokesman said the rebels had not fired a single bullet in the last several weeks. "They have taken to the streets in Saada in their thousands like the rest of Yemen."



Al Houthi Rebellion

History

The al Houthi family belongs to the Zaydi sect of Shi'ite Islam and is of the Hashemite line (i.e. traces its bloodline to Mohammed). The Hashemite Zaydis ruled northern Yemen until 1962. Though Yemeni President Saleh is also Zaydi, he is not Hashemite and presents himself instead as a secularist. Saleh fears that Hashemite claims to an Imamate could damage his legitimacy with the Zaydis who dominate the government and armed forces.

Accordingly, the Zaydis have accused the Yemeni government of marginalization and formed a political and paramilitary group in the mid-1990s to counter the government. The group, which operates mainly in Yemen's northern Sa'ada and Amran provinces, ramped up protests against the government after Saleh aligned himself with the U.S. in the wake of 9/11. Authorities responded in 2004 by attempting to arrest, and later killing, the group's leader Husayn Badr al Din al Houthi. The two sides have fought on and off ever since.

A ceasefire has been in effect between the sides since February 11, 2010; however, the truce has been unsteady.

See <u>here</u> for a backgrounder on Yemen's battle with the al Houthi rebels.

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Leadership

Abdul Malik al Houthi: Abdul Malik assumed the leadership of the al Houthi rebellion after his father's death in 2006. Little is known about his personal life. Abdul Malik has ordered his followers in recent years to lay down their arms to respect ceasefire agreements with the government but has been unable to strike a lasting, long-term agreement with officials in Sana'a. Abdul has in the past alluded to the possibility of secession. He denies any connection between his group and al Qaeda.

Youssef al Midani: Youssef serves as the deputy leader of the al Houthi rebellion and is the cousin of Abdul Malik al Houthi. He has often been reported to have assumed the leadership of the group after erroneous reports of Abdul Malik's death.

Yahya al Houthi: Yahya, Abdul Malik's brother, is also an influential figure in the rebel movement and served as a Yemeni MP before fleeing the country. He currently lives in exile.

Mohammed Abdul Salem: Salem serves as the rebellion's spokesman. Little is known about his background.

See <u>here</u> for a profile of the al Houthi Movement.

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AQAP's Area of Influence in Yemen

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Southern Movement's Area of Influence in Yemen



Al Houthi Rebels' Area of Influence in Yemen Click to return to first slide.



For more information or to speak with the Critical Threats Project's Gulf of Aden analyst, please contact Katherine Zimmerman.

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