

# POLICY

No. 33



# PAPERS

December 2009

## YEMEN: THREAT ASSESSMENT

Yemen has served as a safe-haven for Al Qaeda Arabian Peninsula since 2001. As U.S. and Coalition Forces continue to drive insurgents out of Iraq and Afghanistan, terrorists are seeking refuge in the ungoverned, mountainous swaths of northwestern and eastern Yemen. The 30,000-strong U.S. troop surge will only expedite the transition of terrorists to places like Somalia, North Africa, and Yemen unless the United States and Yemen direct more resources to these dark corners. This threat assessment is a concise overview of the threats posed to the U.S. and U.S. interests in the region by terrorists in Yemen.

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PUBLISHED BY PAX AMERICANA INSTITUTE  
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**WHY YEMEN MATTERS:** Yemen is an integral U.S. partner in the War on Terrorism. Yemen has become a safe haven for Al Qa'ida, EIJ, PIJ, and Hamas. Iran is supplying weaponry to anti-government rebels in Yemen.

**\*\*2.3 / 5.0\*\***

### CIVIL UNREST [2.2]

In 1962, a revolution in Yemen ended a millennia of rule by Shiite Zaydi Hashemites, who claim descentance from the Prophet. The northern Zaydis region was then economically ignored. In 1994 civil war erupted when the Yemen Socialist Party, with ties to Bin Laden, fought for the secession of southern Yemen. Saudis assisted the Yemeni central government defeat the socialists, prompting Shiite Zaydis (now the Houthis) to decry the growing Sunni influence within Yemen.



Opposed to Yemen joining the West in the GWOT, the Houthis became violent and sought to overthrow the central government to restore a Shiite theocracy. Armed by Iran, attacks against government outposts in northwest Yemen have peaked since 2004. In October the Houthis began attacking Saudi villages along the border due to Saudi support for the Yemeni government. The Kingdom dispatched special forces and air strikes to crush the rebels; the Yemeni government, however, has been in a full-scale war with the Houthis since August. **A collapse of the government would create an extraordinarily dangerous haven for regional terrorist networks.**

### AL QA'IDA IN YEMEN [3.1]

In January 2009, Al Qa'ida Saudi Arabia publicly merged with Al-Qa'ida factions in Yemen, known as Al Qa'ida Arabian Peninsula (AQAP). This leads us to believe that AQ-Saudi has been quiet for several years and now plans to use Yemen for a new striking platform. AQ-Saudi did not bring a great amount of manpower to AQ-Yemen; however, additional financial resources from wealthy Saudi families will bolster AQAP's capacity. The two top leaders of AQ-Saudi were released from Guantanamo Bay in 2007. Upon release, they were processed through the Saudi rehabilitation program, deemed rehabilitated, and released into the public. They immediately rejoined AQ-Saudi and declared a merger with AQ-Yemen (AQAP). The deputy Chief of AQAP is also a released detainee from Guantanamo Bay. On 18 December 2009, the Obama Administration announced it was repatriating six more Yemeni detainees; this may prelude dozens more in upcoming weeks.

These Al Qa'ida movements pose a grave threat to U.S. citizens, facilities and interests in the region. The U.S.S. Cole was an apt reminder of this and sponsored attacks are continuing. The Saudi government has recently expressed its deep concern that AQAP will soon launch a renewed campaign against and within the House of Saud. New intelligence confirms this concern. An AQAP religious leader issued a fatwa calling for assassinations of the Saudi royal line. The border between Yemen and Saudi Arabia is unsecure. **Attacks on U.S. forces and facilities within the Kingdom will likely accompany attacks on the Saudis.**

### YEMEN THREAT PRÉCIS [2.3]

- Poorest nation in the Arab world.
- Tribal/Clan Society; Very little national unity.
- **Extreme civil unrest:**
  - Secessionist groups fighting for breakaway region in the South.
  - Government in full-scale internal war since August with Shiite rebels in the North seeking theocratic rule—displaced 155,000 people.
  - Islamic Army of Aden, strong links to Al Qa'ida, using terrorism to destabilize government.
- **Regional terrorist networks have moved into Yemen** for refuge, including Al Qa'ida Arabian Peninsula (AQAP) and Egyptian Islamic Jihad. Palestinian Islamic Jihad and Hamas operate legally within Yemen.
- Underground arms market in Yemen is vast. Weapons are extremely accessible. Three guns exist for every one person.
- It is common in the Yemeni countryside to see heavy artillery in front yards.
- **Attacks on U.S. in Yemen:**
  - Americans (Dec 1998)
  - USS Cole (Oct 2000)
  - Embassy (Mar 2002)
  - Americans (Dec 2002)
  - Embassy (Dec 2006)
  - Embassy (Mar 2008)
  - Embassy (Sep 2008)

## IRAN ARMING AL HOUTHİ REBELS

**The Houthis—formerly the Shi'a Zaydis—are currently engaged in a full-scale war with the Yemeni government.** The group was created in 1990 after the northern and southern parts of Yemen were united under a central government to form one nation. Initially these Shi'a rebels were not openly violent, but after the 9/11 terrorist attacks that changed.

**The Houthis were enraged when Yemen sided with America in the War on Terrorism.** That rage was compounded by growing Wahhabi influence from Saudi Arabia on the Yemeni central government. The rebels believe that America, Yemen, and Saudi Arabian Sunnis are conspiring against them. They are correct. This realization has forced them to take up arms and engage the central government in open warfare. Their goal is to restore Yemen to a Shi'a theocracy.

**Fighting has been non-stop since 2006 in northwestern Yemen, forcing the displacement of over 155,000 civilians.** This exodus from the northwest has created a humanitarian crisis as tent cities are erected to provide interim shelter. The Yemeni government has tried to arrange a cease fire with the rebels so international aid workers can gain access to the refugees, but the Houthis will not comply.

**Houthi Rebels are now attacking Saudi Arabian villages along the border.** This began in October and puts the Houthis in a two-front war. The House of Saud responded by deploying paratroopers and bombing Houthi strongholds along the border. The Saudis and Yemenis have requested additional U.S. support to control this escalating situation. Since 2002, the U.S. has provided the Yemeni government with weapons, equipment, and training from U.S. Special Forces.

The U.S. provided Yemen with \$66 million in FY 2009 and President Obama has pledged to increase support in FY 2010. **Additional contingents of Green Berets should be dispatched to Yemen to better train the Guard and to track and attack AQAP movements.**

**Iran has transferred over \$100,000 to Houthi rebels and is now supplying the Houthis with light artillery and small arms.** It is doing this to threaten Saudi Arabia's underbelly and help overthrow the Yemeni government. Using shipments from Eritrea as cover, Iran has been underwriting the rebels for over a year. To protect this supply route, **the Iranian navy has dispatched commandos and warships to the Gulf of Aden** under the guise of combating piracy. This presents a complicating geopolitical variable in current U.S. negotiations with Iran, as Iran has sternly warned nations not to get involved with the rebellion in Yemen.

To intercept arms shipments to Yemen, **the Saudis installed a naval blockade along Yemen's west coast on 10 November.** The blockade speaks to the severity of the situation, as Saudi Arabia rarely imposes force outside the Kingdom's border. The fighting, however, remains more than 600 miles from the nearest Saudi oil field and poses no danger at this time to oil production or shipment.

\* \* \* \*

**The top priority of U.S. policymakers regarding Yemen must be to make sure that the central government remains intact and effective in order to deny the restoration of an Iranian stronghold in the region or a safe haven for Al Qa'ida.**

## EGYPTIAN ISLAMIC JIHAD

The EIJ was founded by Ayman al-Zawahiri in the late 1970s and later reconstituted itself in Pakistan after leadership was expelled from Egypt. In 1998, EIJ merged with Al Qa'ida, and has assisted with numerous attacks against the United States. Al-Zawahiri is Osama Bin Laden's top lieutenant and has been indicted by the FBI for his involvement with the U.S. embassy bombings in Dar es Salaam, Tanzania, and Nairobi, Kenya. **EIJ has active cells in Yemen and remains under the leadership of Ayman al-Zawahiri.**

The first known Sunni suicide bomber attack was orchestrated by the Egyptian Islamic Jihad. **Their funding is known to come from Iran, Osama Bin Laden, and an assortment of cover companies and NGO's.**

## ISLAMIC ARMY OF ADEN (IAA)

The IAA is presumed to have been organized between 1995-1996. Its members vary in origin, but many are Afghan veterans of the Soviet Afghan War. Vincent Cannistraro, former head of CIA's Counter Terrorism department, stated that Khalid Almihdhar, a 9/11 hijacker, had very discernible ties to the IAA. **The group receives funding from Osama Bin Laden to ensure it remains committed to his goals.** The IAA operates primarily in the southern governances of Yemen around Aden. They focus attacks against Americans, British, and non-Islamic tourists. **The IAA has strong links to Al Qa'ida.** In '98 it kidnapped 16 Americans; in '00 it bombed the USS Cole; and in '02 it grenaded the British embassy.

## THREAT INDICES COMPARISON

To fully appreciate the risk, instability and insecurity in Yemen, a **panoramic review of other topical threat assessments is vital**. Each is highly-focused and provides great insight on very specific nuances of this threat.

For 2009, the *Foreign Policy Failed States Index* ranked Yemen #18 in the world for failed states (#1 being the worst). It is surrounded by three of the other top-20 failed states: Somalia (#1), Ethiopia (#3) and Sudan (#16). In 2008, Yemen ranked 21<sup>st</sup>; in 2007 24<sup>th</sup> and 2006 16<sup>th</sup>. **Its factionalized government scored an 8.9 in 2009, where 10.0 was disastrous** (down from 9.6 in '06), its security apparatus an 8.4 (down from 9.0 in '06) and its uneven development an 8.9 (down from 9.0 in '06). These decimally-noticeable improvements have been indiscernible in the real world.

The **Human Poverty Index** ranked Yemen 150 out of 177 countries, speaking to the country's economic catalysts for strife. **Freedom House** labeled Yemen as only "Partly Free", with direly needed reform to political freedoms and civil liberties. In our assessment, **this generous labeling is a misnomer** due only to the fact the government runs a small portion of the country, leaving the rest of it "partly free."

The 2009 **Human Development Index** ranked Yemen 153 of 177. Compiled by the United Nations, it is used to measure longevity, education, and standard of living.

\* \* \* \*

**Each index indicates Yemen is slipping toward an economic and governance catastrophe.**

## ECONOMICS, OIL, AND IRAN

Yemen depends heavily on oil production for state revenue. BP Analysts predict that its petroleum output will fall to **zero by 2017**. Down from 460,000 barrels a day in 2002 to 325,000 barrels in 2007, output has already decreased 12 percent since 2007. Yemen's oil export revenues hit \$2.6 billion in the first half of 2008, up from \$1.2 billion for the same period in 2007. **To ensure Yemen can derive wealth from what little oil remains, stability on the oil-rich Arabian Peninsula must remain a focus for the U.S. and partners in the region.**

Iran is exerting a strong influence in Yemen by arming tens-of-thousands of Shiite rebels. **If these rebels are successful in overthrowing the Yemeni government, Yemen will become nothing more than an appendage of the Iranian theocracy.**

With Yemen's crude refining capacity of 120,000 barrels/day, **Iran and Yemen would also become major oil partners, negating the efficacy of gasoline sanctions.**

**For More on Yemen:**

[\*NY Times\*: Yemen's Steep Descent](#)

[\*STRATFOR\*: Yemen Profile](#)

[\*Al Jazeera \[English\]\*: Middle East](#)

## NEW BRIDGE: AFRICOM THREAT

The Saudi billionaire and half-brother to Osama Bin Laden, Tarek Bin Laden, is heading the construction of a new bridge that **will connect the Arabian Peninsula (Yemen) to the African Horn (Djibouti)**. The project enjoys the full support of the presidents of Djibouti and Yemen. It would be the longest bridge in the world.

In the 1990s, Tarek Bin Laden was general supervisor of the **International Islamic Relief Organization (IIRO)**, a fraudulent Saudi group designated by the U.S. Treasury Department as having aided al-Qaeda and other terrorist groups' fundraising efforts. It is anticipated that about **100,000 cars and 50,000 rail passengers will cross the bridge daily** in addition to thousands of tons of cargo in trucks and rail wagons.

When completed in 7-9 years, **the bridge will physically link Al Qa'ida in Arabia to the various Muslim extremists in the Horn of Africa, posing a serious, long-term security threat to new U.S. Africa Command (AFRICOM) facilities, personnel and partners.**

\* \* \* \*

If Yemen is unable to preserve its government and retake desolate regions inhabited by AQAP within the next five years, **the completion of the bridge, ending one million Yemeni jobs, will occur at a time when Yemen has run out of oil, witnesses rampant unemployment as a result, and operates as a proxy state of the Iranian regime.** It is a compounding variable to an already bleak future.

<b>Population</b>	<b>2.55</b>
Age distribution	2.8
Gender distribution	2.8
Education Level	2.3

<b>Intelligence Capabilities</b>	<b>1.3</b>
Resources Committed	0.5
Technology	0.2
Cooperation w/Countries	2.1
Analysis Capabilities	1.5
Operational capabilities	1.8
Domestic vs. Foreign	1.2

<b>Military Capabilities</b>	<b>3.1</b>
Budget	3.1
Size of Military	4.4
Eqpmt: Qlty / Qnty	3.7
Training Level	2.9
Well Organized	2.9
WMD posture	0.0
C <sub>2</sub>	2.3
Weapon proliferation	4.6
Alliances	3.7

<b>Infrastructure/Force Projection</b>	<b>3.9</b>
Road/rail/sea/airways	3.5
Geography/terrain	2.8
Access to ports	4.7
Logistical supply chains	4.4

<b>Economy and Natural Resources</b>	<b>2.5</b>
GDP (per capita)	2.1
Dependence on For. Resources	2.6
U.S. Multinational interests	2.9

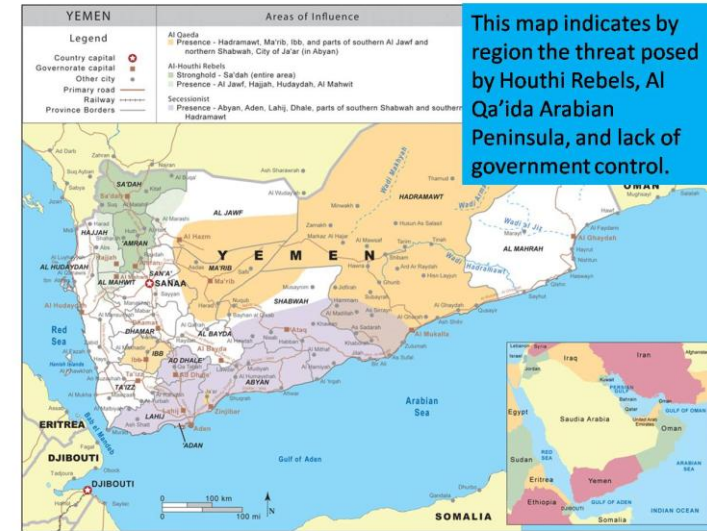
<b>Political Structure &amp; Stability</b>	<b>2.2</b>
Stability of Current System	3.2
Gov. Control of Military	0.3
Gov. Control of Territory	2.9
Level of Political Dissent	4.1
Corruption	2.5

<b>Public Relations / Media</b>	<b>1.1</b>
Int'l Perception/Prestige	1.2
Media	0.9

<b>Extremism/Culture</b>	<b>1.9</b>
Level of Civil Unrest	4.0
Public attitude toward U.S.	0.3
Ideology	3.6
Gov. tolerance of extremism	0.5
National strategic Aims/Goals	1.2

**OVERALL 2.3 / 5.0**

\* \* The ensuing 6 months will be vital to determine the longevity of the Yemeni government. If Houthi rebels overthrow the central government, Yemen would move into the high 3's. \* \*



Source: Country Watch

**Numeric Scale:** 0—5, where 1 constitutes a minor threat, 3 a moderate threat, and 5 represents imminent danger of warfare.



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The only thing necessary for the triumph of evil is for good men to do nothing.