

# The brutalization of terrorism in Yemen .. The fragile war against Al-Qaida (1)

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**Special File**

**Strategy Unit**



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## **Abstract**

The brutalization of terrorism in Yemen-the fragile war against Al-Qaeda (1)- is one of the reports that were issued by the Unit of Strategies at Abaad Center for Studies and Research. It focuses on the ISIS and the Al-Qaeda branches particularly the Al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP), which is the most dynamic group that is merged of the Al-Qaeda in Saudi Arabia and Yemen.

This study deals with the creation of terror groups and the new transformations in the war against the two organizations [ISIS & AQAP). It attempts to take apart the complex structures of such groups to unveil the two organizations that are considered on top of the most violent groups in the world.

The study could demonstrate the regional and international security concerns by tracing the emergence of the AQAP and the ISIL from the establishment to the present situation in one of the hottest areas of the world that is marked by less security and more violence and threats.

In the first chapter titled: Terrorism in Yemen... from the AQAP to the ISIS, the study traces terror in Yemen since the appearance of the Jihadists called Afghan Arabs until the emergence of Al-Qaeda and the combination of its two branches in Yemen and Saudi Arabia under the name of the Al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP), and then the emergence of the bloody version of terror that came out under the name of the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL).

The chapter discusses the appearance of the Al-Qaeda in Yemen from the point of establishment and military action in the country until the formation of the so-called Al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP) as a result of combining the two branches in Yemen and Saudi Arabia into one entity. The paper points out that the AQAP organization appeared in Yemen through the Yemeni fighters who returned from Afghanistan before Osama Bin Laden declared his Al-Qaeda organization.

It affirms that the AQAP is the most energetic among the other organizations operating in other countries and affiliated to the global Jihad ideology of Al-Qaeda.

The AQAP came due to similarity of ideology, the possession of the same capacities and training instruments and also their resilience to attract popular harbor that enabled it to overcome several mistakes committed by Al-Qaeda in other countries such as Iraq and Syria.

The study also highlights the creation of Daesh (ISIS) in Yemen that has never found an incubator environment in Yemen because it adopts the sectarian classification approach and uses terror in combating the rivals which did not help it to be accepted by the Yemeni social environment because such kind of bloody violence and the sectarian classification are widely unaccepted in Yemen, so the IS was rejected and condemned even by the AQAP itself.

The second chapter discusses the AQAP activities, its military capabilities, its influence sphere and its ability to recruit fighters. The study attributes the growing of AQAP influence to a number

of reasons: flexibility towards social norms that enabled it to gain new hideouts for protection and refuges for its supporters; the AQAP behavior towards political changes in the country provided an additional momentum for the organization to grow more; the secret US-Yemen-run black sites and prisons over the past years and the disastrous mistakes of the US drones against civilians made the organization capable to recruit new supporters who seek retaliation.

The lack of state's absence, weak economic infrastructure and the political conflict are all together used by the AQAP as a good opportunity to increase the external funding to the organization and make efforts to fight it fail.

The study confirms that the internal events and conflicts also contributed to the AQAP infiltration into local communities. The Houthi sectarian-based expansion that increased largely following the Houthi invasion of the capital Sana'a in September 2014, the authority ignorance of population concerns over the imposing of the Houthi ideology (Zaidi close to Shiite) in their Sunni areas (Shafiie) are also on top of factors that led to the AQAP expansion in Yemen. The US cooperation that remained active with Saleh and his allies the Houthis, contributed to increasing AQAP supporters.

These factors contributed collectively to pushing the AQAP and its supporters to defend tribal areas under the pretext of protecting Sunni areas against the Shiites. The ignorance of the people's concerns in Sunni areas and seeking a solution that keeps the power in hand of the Houthis increases the sectarian sorting that benefits no one, but the Houthis and the AQAP.

The study summarizes the AQAP presence in Shabwa, Hadramout, Al-Bayda and Abyan and how it uses the deserted area in Hadramout and the mountainous chain that links Shabwa, Abyan and Al-Bayda as a safe haven for protection against airstrikes.

It highlights that the AQAP has the competence to run each area independently so there was a disparity in terms of AQAP weapons from one place to another. In Hadramout for instance, the AQAP preserved millions of dollars during its management of Mukalla, from oil revenues, revenues of Mukalla port, in addition to millions it looted from the Post Office in the coastal city. In this context, the AQAP took control of weapons and heavy military equipment from government military camps following its takeover of Mukalla, the capital of Hadramout, when the Houthis were expanding in Aden with support from pro-Saleh forces following the 21 September 2014 coup and even during and after the UAE forces restored Mukalla on April 24 2016.

The third chapter of this study talks about the changes in the US role in Yemen.

Donald Trump came to the office in the United States of America and determined to eliminate terror groups that threaten the national security of his homeland. The Al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula [AQAP] is on top of such threats and that is why the new administration escalated its operations in

Yemen in a rapid and harsh way.

Combating the AQAP and the expansion of Iran and rebuilding US relations with the GCC states represent the key objectives for the new US administration. Therefore, we saw an increase in the US support for operations of the Saudi-led Arab Coalition against the Houthis. At the moment, the USA depends on intelligence from the UAE after the former shut down its embassy in Sana'a in February 2015.

The two countries even coordinate together ground operations in Yemen. However, this could create conflict of priorities as Abu Dhabi has determined to achieve other objectives related to the power and wealth and engaged in clearance with the political Islam in the southern Yemen, where the AQAP is largely present, as well as the UAE's attempts to dismantle the cohesion of the northern areas in order to weaken the power of its rivals in Marib via dividing the tribal structure.

The indicators of changes in the US role appears in a monitoring for the first 100 days of the Trump administration in Yemen that is equal to the entire period of Obama's term (8 years). The US attack against a village in central Yemen and the killing of dozens of civilians with no objectives achieved, reflects clearly the initial failure of what Trump wants to do in Yemen. The activities of the first 100 days reveal coordination between the Americans and intelligence apparatuses that still loyal to the former president of Yemen or the Houthis, to achieve the US objectives in the country.

The fourth chapter argues about the fight against terror through operations of the Saudi-led Arab Coalition that began in March 2015 against the Houthis. It focuses on military operations by the Saudi-led Arab Coalition against the Al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP) in southern governorates of Yemen. It highlights impacts of those operations on the AQAP as well as how the AQAP managed to expand in liberated areas because of grave mistakes made by the Arab Coalition which is led by Saudi Arabia and the government of Yemen.

Researchers believe that the military operations against the AQAP have been exploited by some parties so that weakened the seriousness of war against al-Qaeda in contrary to the 2012 fighting against the AQAP following the peaceful revolution in 2011. Prior that date, the regime of former president utilized the AQAP to increase his influence or to obtain training for forces commanded by his son.

The study highlights military operations against the AQAP in southern governorates that started in Aden, and then moved to Hadramout, Abyan, Lahj, Al-Dhalea and Shabwa. It focuses more on the military operations of the Saudi-led Arab Coalition in Shabwa that was declared on 3 August 2017 by the UAE army. The force that was authorized to fight the AQAP in Shabwa is just a militia that does not receive instructions from the internationally recognized government and it is known as

the Shabwania Elite Forces. Members of this militia were recruited according to tribal and clan standards. It committed grave human rights abuses in just one month, despite the fact that it never clashed with any militants of the AQAP who fled to mountainous or remote areas. It only took control of oil and gas fields as well as the state offices instead of combating the AQAP.

The study moves then to Taiz where the AQAP and the IS spread in the liberated areas due to dependence of the Saudi-led Arab Coalition on Salafi militias, close to al-Qaeda, and avoided the use of tribesmen whom the UAE and Arab Coalition believe that they could be affiliated to the Islah party. That provided a cover for the leader of the Salafi militia known as Abu Al-Abas to facilitate the AQAP expansion and recruitment in Taiz under the pretext of fighting the Houthis.

This is based on interviews, conducted by researcher of the Abaad Center, with officials and leaders of the popular resistance and the National Army to access information about the AQAP in the two governorates

The study concludes that the AQAP has expanded due to the mistakes of the Saudi-led Arab Coalition and the Yemeni legitimate government whose concerns were not right, in addition to their dependence on jihadists to fight against the Houthis. In addition, the UAE uses military operations against the AQAP as a cover for achieving its own objectives in the southern governorates targeting the internationally recognized government and taking control of oil and gas fields.

The study suggests that taking no serious actions against the AQAP in the southern governorates and pushing it towards the northern governorates and the Yemeni-Saudi border areas represents an upcoming threat against the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia and increases attempts to take control of other oil governorates.

The Abaad Center for Studies and Research believes that reading the development and emergence of the Al-Qaeda and other violence and terror groups and the factors behind AQAP's strength as well as foreseeing the future movements of AQAP or foreign powers that are effective in Yemen would lead to setting up new measures that take into account the complicated environment and avoid mistakes to save Yemen from terror. This could be done only by making a strong state that has an army and security forces with a full national dogma. The militias do not produce anything but militias that expand in geographically and turn the political conflict into complicated regional, ethnic and sectarian conflicts.

**AbdulSalam Mohamed - Abaad Center Chairman**

**Adnan Hashem - Researches Director**

## **The Study Methodology:**

This study is based on four descriptive-analytic-historical-explanatory approaches, and a case study, in addition to the use of content analysis for international and local documents, statements and press on the subject of the study. The study examines the background of the emergence of al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula and developments in its relationship with Yemeni society, and the size of such relationship and its nature. The study also goes on to discuss an analytical dialect about the reasons behind the strength of the organization and its relation to the emergence of the Islamic State Organization, and the relationship between the two organizations in Yemen.

The chapter of «al-Qaeda activity in Yemen and its military capabilities and areas of its influence» focuses on specific geography, including Abyan, Hadramout, Shabwa and al-Bayda where al-Qaeda has influence and training camps. In some areas of those governorates, al-Qaeda had “Islamic Emirates” and it took over those areas for various periods of time. In addition using the descriptive approach in this study that is based on interviews with tribal chiefs, local officials and citizens, almost 15 interviews in different months with analysis, the study used historical and indicative approaches to how the organization structured itself, its work, its relationship to people and its administration in those areas where it declared itself as de facto authority.

In the third chapter, the study uses analytical and descriptive methods in analyzing the nature of the change in the US position towards counter-terrorism operations in Yemen under the new administration. The Monitoring Unit of the Abaad Center participated in monitoring the first 100 days of the new US presidency. The study presents an example of the new US position that is a US attack on a village in al-Bayda governorate in January 2017 where dozens of civilians, mostly women and children, were killed along with an American soldier. The study relies on interviews with tribal residents and leaders to learn about the incident and its impact on the village community that witnessed raids throughout the year.

The fourth chapter of the study is devoted to the influence and impact of Al-Qaeda during the Arab Coalition and its intervention to confront the Houthis, and the readers views about this intervention in general. The study then goes on to read the first two cases in Shabwa governorate to confront the al-Qaeda organization, the nature of the operation and its consequences based on the military forces and the source of their funding, and the impact on the tribes and their solidarity with or against al-Qaeda; considering the operation in Shabwa the closest one to the time of the study, which began in August. The second case was in Taiz, which had never seen a systematic deployment of al-Qaeda before the Operation DecisiveStorm.

The study relies on telephone interviews and individual interviews with eight local authority officials and leaders of the Popular Resistance in the city in order to know about the size of the Islamic State “Daesh”, Al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula and the leaders of the two organizations, their financing methods and relationship, as well as their relationship to the battles against the Houthis. The interviews included telephone interviews with four senior officials and leaders of the Popular Resistance Committees and five civilians in neighborhoods where the AQAP organization is believed to exist.

## **The Study Duration:**

Chapter 1: Tracing terrorism in Yemen from the beginning of the nineties, from the first operation in 1992 until mid-2017.

Chapter 2: Addressing the military capabilities of al-Qaeda since the Houthis coup against the state on 21 September 2014 to September 2017.

Chapter 3: The change in the US role in Yemen has been noticed since the beginning of the anti-terrorism program after the events of September 11, but focused on the first 100 days of President Trump in office.

Chapter 4: Tracing the role of the Arab Coalition in the fight against terrorism since the launch of the Operation Decisive Storm on 26 March 2015 until September 2017.

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# Terror in Yemen from Al-Qaeda into ISIL



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## **Abstract**

This paper traces development of terror organizations in Yemen, starting with the appearance of the jihadist group named Arab Afghans, the creation of the Al-Qaeda Organization that later combined the two organizations in Yemen and Saudi Arabia under Al-Qaeda Organization in the Arabian Peninsula [AQAP] and finally the emergence of the bloody version under the name of the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL).

The AQAP is more dynamic and it was ensued from cross-pollination, its possession of capacities and training instruments and its resilience to attract popular harbor. These features entitled the organization to overcome several mistakes committed by Al-Qaeda branches in other countries such as Iraq and Syria.

The paper highlights also the formation of the ISIL that never found a popular support across Yemen because of its sectarian-sorting approach, using terrorizing methods in combating foes. Such traits are not socially accepted by wide percentage of the Yemenis that made the ISIL rejected and wicked even by the AQAP in Yemen.



## Preface

When the Soviet Union collapsed in the 1990s, most of the Arab «Mujahideen» returned to their countries, but their governments received them with security and intelligence apparatuses. Many of them were sent to cells and prisons. They were chased, kidnapped, and arrested without any charge only because they were (the Arab Afghans) who left their countries, with encouragement from their countries, to fight the American enemy at that time, the Soviet Union.

In Yemen, during the rule of former Yemeni President Ali Abdullah Saleh, and in Saudi Arabia, the returnees from Afghanistan were received in a climate of security precautions, but only after September 11 attacks on the World Trade Center in 2001 in the United States, the security precautions were intensified.

In this study, the origins of al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula were divided into the most important stages, before the integration, that is between 1997 and 2009, and after the integration, after 2009; in addition to the stage of the emergence of the Islamic state organization “Daesh” following the revolutions of the Arab Spring 2011.

**First: Before the integration stage (between nineties and 2009)**

**A. In Saudi (Al-Qaeda in the county of the two holy mosques):**

The planning for the organization started early with the start of the attack on the Arab Afghans in the second half of the nineties. It declared itself in the late 1990s, but it did not start operations until 2003, after it could establish training camps to accommodate those who joined it, but the blows that were led by the former Crown Prince, Prince Mohammed bin Nayef, were enough to end it within six years. Most of the organization's leaders and members relocated in Yemen that was suffering an ongoing deterioration of security and large breaking down as many areas had become out the control of the central state.

It was notable that the organization's military operations started before the announcement of the Al-Qaeda in Saudi, including a car bomb attack on the Saudi National Guard Administration that killed

six people, including five Americans, in February 1995; as well as the launch of a fierce truck bomb attack on a US military base in Khobar that killed 19 people and wounded 500 in June 1996. Armed militants also attacked the US Consulate in Jeddah and killed five staff. <sup>(1)</sup>

The founder of the organization, the global jihadist Osama bin Laden <sup>(2)</sup>, assigned the task of establishing the organization in Saudi Arabia to Yusuf al-Eyeri, nicknamed as «Al-Batar,» after his release from prison in 1998. The cells of the organization were formed at the beginning from two categories <sup>(3)</sup>:

**First:** Those who had been trained in Afghan camps and participated in the fighting.

**Second:** Those who did not carry weapons yet, and were unable to visit Afghanistan at all.

The commanders of the Jihadist groups made themselves free to train the second category militarily. The training sites were located in the valleys and outland areas.



The organization was divided into several committees, including Al-Shariah committee, the media committee, the finance committee and the military committee that was responsible for dividing the organization into brigades and battalions. A large group of those jihadists participated in attacks against US forces in Iraq after 2003.

It seems that Al-Qaeda in Saudi Arabia has adopted a «unitary» jihadist doctrine that calls for the unity of the nation to «confront the American extremism and US attacks on the Muslim world» - according to its literature and media outlets. This doctrine has led thousands of Saudi fighters to go to fight in Asian and European countries in the 1980s and in the mid-1990s, such as Chechnya, Afghanistan and Bosnia. This had a negative reflection after some of them had returned to their origin countries. For example, in Saudi Arabia, there was “Buraidah Uprising”<sup>(4)</sup> in the autumn of 1994 and continued until mid-1995. More than 110 members of an organization called the

Reform Movement, London-based opponent of the Saudi regime and its leaders, were arrested.

This uprising represented an important turning point in the history of the «jihadists» in Saudi Arabia where the followers of the Buraidah uprising believed that change by peaceful means is futile and that change by force in the Islamic countries has become a duty<sup>(5)</sup>.

This is what the jihad organizations had benefited from as the violence that followed the events of Buraidah uprising had targeted the government officials and institutions of a civil nature. The campaign that was launched by the organization after 2003 had targeted Saudi security headquarters or headquarters of US forces in the Kingdom, in addition to some violence actions that targeted civilians. The organization published an astonishing number documents between 2003 and 2004, making Al-Qaeda in Saudi Arabia one of the most violent groups that documented its activities.<sup>(6)</sup>



As a result of the so-called «Jihad in Iraq», the fighting against US forces and the fragmentation of the local movement, and weakening it through the Saudi military campaign against terrorism, al-Qaeda in the two Holy Mosques came to end quickly before the Saudi classic jihadists revive and re-declare their integration with al-Qaeda in Yemen in 2009 under the name (Al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula).

### **B- Al-Qaeda in Yemen**

Before Osama bin Laden announced the establishment of al-Qaeda under the so-called the Global Front for Fighting Jews and Crusaders in November 1998, Yemen witnessed the establishment of the first organized jihadi group in mid-1997, led by Abu Hassan al-Mehddar <sup>(7)</sup> under the name “Abyan-Aden Islamic army” that later announced its recognition of al-Qaeda’s leadership and carried out the kidnapping of 16 Western tourists on December 28, 1998. Four abductees were killed during their liberation attempt by the security forces. After the killing of Al-Mehddar, Khaled Abdul Nabi took over the leadership of the organization. He played a role in dialogue and understandings with the regime in 2003.

It is striking that after the end of the war in Afghanistan, the jihadists had early engaged in violence in Yemen. In 1992, the city of Aden witnessed attacks against hotels and tourist sites where US military personnel, who were operating in Somalia, were exist.

But the most significant operation of al-Qaeda was the targeting of the American destroyer USS Cole on October 12, 2000 off the port of Aden killing and injuring 47 American sailors, and again in a similar

attack on the French oil tanker Limburg off the port of Daba in Hadramout October 6, 2002. In 2002, after the September 11 attacks on the World Trade Towers in New York, a US drone killed the first leader in al-Qaeda Abu Ali al-Harithy. <sup>(8)</sup>

After the beginning of the intellectual dialogue between the Yemeni government and al-Qaeda in 2003, the organization’s attacks decreased and then returned to target oil facilities in conjunction with the presidential elections in September 2006 <sup>(9)</sup>. The most prominent operation maybe the attack on the US Embassy in Sana’a.

In January 2009, al-Qaeda in Yemen and Saudi Arabia announced their integration under the name of “Al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula” and selected Yemen as the headquarters of its leadership. The most serious operation was the attempt to target Prince Muhammad bin Nayef bin Abdul Aziz (former

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**Yemen witnessed the establishment of first organized jihadi group before Osama bin Laden announced the establishment of al-Qaeda**  
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Crown Prince), who was responsible for the file of terrorism in the Saudi Interior Ministry at the time.

### **Second Stage: After the integration (2009 until now)**

The targeting of Mohammed bin Nayef <sup>(10)</sup> represented another title of al-Qaeda organization in its new integration as the unification of the efforts of the two groups (in Saudi and Yemen) helped to develop and double its capacity. Yemen, with its geographical nature and its fragile governance, represented a fertile environment for the presence of newly born organization.

After the attempt by Nigerian youth Omar Abdul-Mutaleb to blow up a US passengers plane during a trip to Detroit on 17 December 2009 and accusing Al-Qaeda in the Arab Peninsula of being behind the attempt, Washington carried out a military operation

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**The targeting of Mohammed bin Nayef represented another title of al-Qaeda organization in its new integration as the unification of efforts of the two groups helped to develop and double its capacity**

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on 25 December 2009 that killed more than 50 civilians in Al-Majalah in Abyan. It was described by the Amnesty International as Al-Majalah massacre. Al-Qaeda's tactics have grown up and became even more dangerous when it attempted to assassinate the British Ambassador to Yemen Timothy Torlot on April 26, 2010, as well as the attempt to send explosives in a printer to two American associations in 2010 but the explosives were stopped at Dubai airport. Anwar al-Awlaki <sup>(11)</sup> who was released from the Yemeni Political Security prison after he was expelled from the United States and arrested in Britain, was accused of being the mastermind of these operations, which prompted Washington to kill him in September

2011.

The year of the Peaceful Youth Revolution in 2011 witnessed many new developments in favor of Al-Qaeda that exploited the weakness of the state and its relaxation, the manipulation of the former regime in controlling vast areas, and the announcement of the so-called Ansar al-Sharia for the establishment of an Islamic Emirate in Zanjibar in the southern governorate of Abyan and another emirate in Azan in Shabwa, in addition to presence in Hadramout and Baidha. Ansar al-Shariah was classified as one of Al-Qaeda's branches in the southern governorates<sup>(12)</sup>. It claimed responsibility for a series of military operations.

In an interview in April 2011, the leader in Al-Qaeda, Adel Al-Abab, called on his group of Mujahideen to fight for the establishment of Shari'a (Islamic law) in Yemen. Al-Abab preferred the name «Ansar al-Sharia» in confrontations with the local population, but he admitted that he feels that Ansar Al-Sharia is a part of al-Qaeda. He said it was part of the re-formulation of al-Qaeda in the Arab peninsula. Since then they have appeared in the southern governorates, including Abyan and Shabwa in 2011, and declared their emirate «Waqar» (the name was changed from Jaar) and they did not withdraw until after a counter-attack by the government forces and popular committees with a support from the US drones in mid-2012. Al-Abab claimed that his group was related to Taliban Movement in Afghanistan and Youth Movement in Somalia <sup>(13)</sup>. He was killed in a strike in August in 2012. <sup>(14)</sup>

Although the opportunity was favorable for the jihadists to take control of more governorates during the absence of the state in 2011, the movement of the peaceful change made them lose enthusiasm and the popular incubator. Many of them abandoned their arms expecting good results of the peaceful revolution, unlike the Houthi armed movement that went in two directions: imposing a situation by force as well as participating in peaceful demonstrations. In 2012, the Yemeni army managed to defeat al-Qaeda fighters in Abyan and Shabwa. In 2013, the Yemeni army launched operations against al-Qaeda in Hadramout and Baidha. However, the organization avenged by targeting the Ministry of Defense Hospital in Sanaa in December 2013 and killed more than 50 people.

The organization reappeared more forcefully after the Saleh-Houthi coup militias took over the capital Sana'a on 21 September 2014 and extended to the southern governorates in early 2015. Sana'a invasion and the poor administration of the popular committees that expelled al-Qaeda from Jaar and Zinjibar were main factors that enabled al-Qaeda to get a popular incubator.

Al-Qaeda returned to the international forefront after the attack on the French newspaper Charlie Hebdo in January 2015 <sup>(15)</sup>. However, in 2016, the Arab Coalition Forces <sup>(16)</sup> intervened in the anti-terrorism file in Yemen and liberated areas in Abyan and Hadramout from the control of Al-Qaeda-related Ansar al-Sharia.

After Donald Trump came to power in the United States, he gave instructions to launch military operations against al-Qaeda in Yemen, launching that by a landing operation in Yakla in Radaa district of al-Baidha governorate in January 2017. <sup>(17)</sup>

### **The Importance of Yemen for Al-Qaeda Organization**

Al-Qaeda has developed a vision for a strong and intensive presence in Yemen, especially after the blows against the organization by Saudi security that prompted al-Qaeda members in the kingdom to move to Yemen, as follows <sup>(18)</sup>:

- Yemen represents an environment where geography and demography cross together to create cells of insurgencies with a high survivability.
- The instability in Yemen before and after the end of the rule of the ousted president Ali Abdullah Saleh, and despite the rejection of all factions of

the Southern Movement all offers by Nasser al-Wahishi to make an alliance between al-Qaeda and the Southern Movement <sup>(19)</sup> through an audio recording broadcast on 13 May 2009 <sup>(20)</sup>; the conflict between the Southern Movement and the central government has provided a conducive environment for Al-Qaeda to extend in the southern governorates.

- Yemen is located in a central focal area, which poses a serious threat to the security of regional and international powers.
- The ability to expand horizontally by employing the tribal factor in Yemen and Saudi Arabia that would provide al-Qaeda with more supporters and expand the number of martyrdom seekers.
- The organization depends on a Hadith, which some see as a weak Hadith, mentions the Abyan-Aden army <sup>(21)</sup> so Al-Qaeda believes in the importance and sanctity of the presence in that part of the earth.
- According to the view of Al-Qaeda, the integration between the two branches of the organization in Saudi Arabia and Yemen is a way to eliminate the division and achieve the unity of the Islamic countries.
- The spoiling of religious, political and economic interests. Religiously, in the view of al-Qaeda, the dominant governments in both Yemen and Saudi Arabia are working to demolish the Islamic identity. Economically, Al-Qaeda believes that those governments, with a support from the United States, are seeking to seize the resources of the region which has the largest reserves of oil in the world. Politically, the organization hostiles the Arab governments because it believes that those governments are «brokers» who are working to implement the US policies in the region.
- Observers attribute the absence of «Daesh» in Yemen like Al-Qaeda to two main reasons. First: the lack of an incubator in the tribal community



because of its violent ideas; and second: Its direct confrontation with al-Qaeda.

### Third: The Organization of the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria (Daesh)

Daesh is a short name for an organization that calls itself “The Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant”. It has adopted a more violent strategy than al-Qaeda, but in practice it is one of the darkest faces of al-Qaeda. This organization was known after the revolutions of the Arab Spring 2011, especially after it took control of areas in Iraq and Syria, taking advantage of the war between the regime of Bashar al-Assad and his opponents.

In Yemen, a clear gap emerged between al-Qaeda organization and the Yemeni branch of the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria (ISIS), which led to clashes between the two organizations.

Despite the support from the leader in the media sector of the Al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula Mamoun Hatem to ISIL after the fall of Sana’a in the hand of the coup militias, however, he retreated before being killed in a drone strike in May 2015. The ISIL organization plays on the sectarian and regional factors and uses the most brutal attacks. In its attempts to expand and control, Daesh launched its declared operations by bombing the mosques of Al-Badr and Al-Hashosh in Sana’a on 20 March 2015. Daesh was not known before the Houthis and Saleh’s coup forces take over the capital Sana’a on 21 September 2014. The first audio recording of people from Yafei district of Lahj governorate, south of the capital Sana’a, claiming loyalty to Daesh on 10

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**Ineffectiveness of Daesh in Yemen as an organization because of collision with AQAP and its incapacity to find tribal incubator**  
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November 2014, almost two months after the Houthi invasion of Sana'a.

Despite numerous assassinations and suicide bombings that targeted officials and military personnel in Aden, the ISIL remained unclear and it was unable to emerge.

The year 2015 was the most prosperous year for Daesh in Yemen as it tried to prosper through exploiting the vacuum in the liberated cities of the southern Yemen.

Before the Yemeni Army, with a support from the Arab Coalition, began to chase members of Daesh in Aden and Lahj, the information indicated that the organization had more than 19 tanks, 10 of them seized after the battles with the Houthis, although Daesh did not participated in the battles, while the other nine tanks were bought from fighters in some factions of the armed Southern Movement. Every tank cost 10 million Yemeni riyals.

It is not known who leads the organization of ISIL in Yemen, but local sources pointed out to the researchers in Abaad Center for Studies that the commander of the organization in Aden called Abu

Mohamed al-Adani. But what is certain is that foreign experts were specialized in training Daesh fighters on killings and assassinations and cinematography of their operations so the organization became easy for breakthroughs.<sup>(22)</sup>

Former leader in Al-Qaeda Abu Hamza al-Zanjobari<sup>(23)</sup> attempted to establish a leadership to organize Daesh. He started by recording a video tape of the execution of 14 soldiers in a similar manner to the brutality of the organization of ISIL. In the beginning of 2015, al-Zanjobari tried to collect 200 members of his camp in Wadi Serf in Hadramout, but he engaged in conflict with al-Qaeda that killed about 15 of his followers, before being attacked by government forces to regain control of the area. Al-Zanjobari escaped with the remaining of his followers until he was killed in a raid by a US drone on Thursday, February 4, 2016.

Despite the failure of Daesh to establish a strong organization in Yemen, many attempts are taking place in Baidha, Aden, Abyan, Taiz, Hadhramout and Shabwa by groups, former leaders in al-Qaeda, some people who belong to jihadist groups and some



**Daesh turned into a point for infiltrators so it got foreign experts in training and television filming, but it failed to found an organization to contend Al-Qaeda**



personnel in security services are trying to impose a military reality under the name of Daesh to mix the cards in the liberated areas.

### Al-Qaeda's position towards the Islamic State organization in Yemen

The existence of the Islamic state organization in Yemen dates back to 2014 when Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi said that fighters in Yemen had pledged allegiance (a formal oath of allegiance) to him. At that time, the organization of the Islamic state was rapidly expanding throughout Iraq and Syria and was at the top of its popularity among the hardline Salafis. Early in November 2014, a number of al-Qaeda operatives in the Arabian Peninsula did split from al-Qaeda and joined the Islamic State organization in Yemen.

That split was an exotic idea for Al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP) and its bases so that Al-Qaeda announced its rejection of the declaration of Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi as a successor to the Muslims. The leader in al-Qaeda, Harith al-Nadhary, who was killed later, announced that the organization of the Islamic state was one of the Mujahideen groups but

he said the declaration of Caliphate did not meet the necessary conditions yet, and therefore, according to al-Nadhary, al-Baghdadi's declaration does not undermine the legitimacy of other Islamic groups operating in the arena. The speech appeared to be directed mainly to his supporters in Yemen before it was a response to al-Baghdadi's declaration.

The organization tried to delay the announcement of its position towards the dispute that took place between Ayman al-Zawahiri, the first man in al-Qaeda, and the organization of the Islamic state that announced the succession, but it recently announced its position to renew loyalty to al-Zawahiri and rejected the succession of al-Baghdadi.

The first operations of the Islamic state organization began in March 2015, which was an evidence of the increasing differences between the two organizations in Yemen. The so-called state of Sana'a, affiliated to the Islamic state organization, claimed responsibility for the recent bombings in Sana'a where four suicide bombers blew themselves up in Badr and al-Hashush mosques, Killing 142 people, while al-Qaeda acquitted the operation, and accused the Islamic





state organization of indulgence in bloodshed.

Fighting between the Islamic state and al-Qaeda in southern governorates was another sign that al-Qaeda feels the domination of ISIL in Yemen. The Islamic state organization, in criticizing al-Qaeda in Yemen, said that it is not an adequately «Islamic» organization.

### Why did the war against al-Qaeda in Yemen fail?

Under this heading, we can point to the importance of examining the reasons behind the failure of war against al-Qaeda until now, despite drone attacks and operations on the ground. Does al-Qaeda receive real and clear assistance?

You cannot answer Yes or No. The situation is much more complicated. One explanation for this situation is that since the US drone began strikes, the Yemeni government has become weaker allowing Al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula to take practical advantage of relatively ungoverned areas. The other explanation is that some drone attacks killed civilians, which supports al-Qaeda's idea that that Yemen is being attacked by a foreign force, and reinforced the attractiveness of Al-Qaeda for tribes to take revenge for their killed sons. <sup>(24)</sup>

This failure is a result of the failure of the West in realizing the way Yemenis deal with al-Qaeda. This can be explained in several points:

- The belief that the regime in Sana'a (during Saleh's

term) was necessarily driven to fight terrorist groups that challenge the regime. This is part of the truth in the Western mind, but Saleh thinks in a very different perspective. In 2011, Hamoud al-Hitar, the former minister of religious endowments, who led the government-sponsored dialogue with al-Qaeda, said that «Saleh is using al-Qaeda to blackmail foreign countries to get more financial support from them.» Similarly, many sources linked to Saleh told an American researcher that Saleh boasts of his control of AQAP and that the group therefore poses no serious threat <sup>(25)</sup>.

Al-Jazeera also broadcast a documentary film of Hani Mujahid, a member of al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula, who claimed to have been an agent of the Yemeni government. Mujahid claimed that Saleh's nephew, Ammar (head of the US-funded Yemeni National Security Bureau), warned of an imminent attack by al-Qaeda on the US Embassy in Sana'a in 2008, but to no avail.

The attack killed at least 10 civilians and guards. Mujahid also claimed that Ammar Saleh provided explosives used by al-Raimi in a suicide attack on a convoy of Spanish tourists in Marib 2007. Mujahid described al-Raimi as "the founder of the National Security Bureau in Yemen" and also claimed that «many of al-Qaeda leaders were under the full control of Ali Abdullah Saleh.»

- The idea of cooperation with the «corrupt» government was a bad idea. Despite the spread of al-Qaeda and its expansion within a wide public framework, a broad public opinion poll on 1005 people in March 2011 says that 86% of respondents

believe that al-Qaeda is "never popular" or "somewhat" in their local areas. At the same time, 96 percent said they did not agree with the Yemeni government's cooperation with the United States. The novels that Al-Qaeda is bad, but the domestic and international politics around are worse - in fact, keeps the group alive.

- The involvement of US forces in providing assistance to the Houthis, who tried to expand in the Shafi areas of Yemen, led the population of those areas to engage in loyalty with AQAP to prevent an armed militia, who oppose them ideologically, from spreading its influence. In addition, this (Western) force is part of the local grievances that were caused by the regime of Ali Abdullah Saleh, and then by the Houthis, at a time when the tribes rejected the presence of AQAP members in their villages during the period of relative calm in 2012-2013.

The Yemenis do not deny the danger of al-Qaeda or the organization of the Islamic state, but at the same time they understand this group and live with its individuals in their social environment. They are the sons of the tribes and villages, they are cousins. This is one of the reasons of the organization's survival, but at the same time the tribes appreciate the efforts of the state to keep security because when there is no state there is no sense of security. Al-Qaeda has simply succeeded in studying the characteristics of the Yemeni society while the Western regimes have failed to do so.

## Margins

- (1) Movements and parties / AQAP / Al Jazeera Net  
<http://www.aljazeera.net/encyclopedia/movementsandparties>
- (2) Ben Laden is the leader of al-Qaeda and its spiritual father was killed by an American operation.
- (3) Al-Qaeda organization in Saudi Arabia, its origins and its end, Sokaina, August 2014.  
<http://www.assakina.com/center/parties/50607.html>
- (4) The literature of the organization and reformers in Saudi Arabia call it an uprising.
- (5) Jihad in Saudi Arabia: The Story of Al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula, by Thomas Hegghammer, and translation by Amin Al-Ayoubi, (2013), Arab Network for Research and Publishing, pages 113114-.
- (6) Jihad in Saudi Arabia: The Story of Al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula, written by Thomas Hegghammer, and translation by Amin al-Ayoubi, (2013) Arab Network for Research and Publishing p. 25
- (7) His real name is Zain El-Abidine Abu Hassan Al-Mehdhar.
- (8) An American drone flew from Djibouti and killed Abu Ali al-Harithy, his real name is Qaed Salem Taleb al-Harithy.
- (9) The Brigades of Yemen's Soldiers, Al-Qaeda branch, announced that the branch of al-Qaeda in Yemen was behind the targeting of oil facilities in each of Safer in Marib, northern Yemen, and Dhaba in Hadramout
- (10) The operation was carried out by Abdullah Hassan Talie Asiri in Jeddah after he claimed to surrender himself.
- (11) Anwar al-Awlaki knew, in the political security prison, Nabil al-Thahab, who was arrested by the Syrian security services over charge of attempting to travel to fight in Iraq and handed him over to the Yemeni apparatuses. The relationship developed into marriage and Al-Awlaki joined the brother of Nabil, sheikh Tariq al-Thahab, who announced his loyalty to Al-Qaeda and took over Radaa historical castle in 2012.
- (12) Al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP)». Counter Extremism Project  
<https://www.counterextremism.com/threat/al-qaeda-arabian-peninsula-aqap>
- (13) Al-Qaeda and Ansar al-Sharia in Yemen, Beirut Center for Middle East Studies  
<http://www.beirutme.com/?p=2179>
- (14) Who is «Abu Zubair Al-Abbab» and how did an American drone assassinated him without the knowledge of the Yemeni authorities about his identity?!  
<http://www.barakish.net/news02.aspx?cat=12&sub=12&id=38317>
- (15) Voice recording for the legitimate leader in the organization Harith Al-Nadhary carries the slogan of the institution 'Malahem', that is attributed to Al-Qaeda
- (16) Arab Gulf forces, led by Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates, announced an Arab coalition in a process called 'decisive storm' to restore the Yemeni state from the coup.
- (17) The operation in Yakla resulted in the killing of one US soldier and civilians, including 10 women and six children.
- (18) The Arab Center for Research and Policy Studies, Ida2at website.
- (19) Carnegie for Middle East, «The Political Challenge of the Southern Movement in Yemen»,  
<http://carnegie-mec.org/publications/?fa=40652>
- (20) Listen to a voice recording published by Mareb Press  
[http://marebpress.net/news\\_details.php?sid=16554&lng=arabic](http://marebpress.net/news_details.php?sid=16554&lng=arabic)
- (21) The Prophet Mohamed was quoted as saying, in a controversial Hadith because of the weakness of its reference, "Twelve thousands fighters appear in Aden and Abyan and support God and His Messenger are better than the people between me and them."
- (22) The British newspaper, Daily Mail, published a video of an execution by the so-called «bulldozer of Daesh» who appeared in June 2014 in Iraq.
- (23) His real name is Jalal Mohsen Belaidi al-Marqashi. He was the head of al-Qaeda in Abyan and was known as the Emir of Zinjibar State, founded by al-Qaeda after it took over the southern governorate of Abyan in 2011.
- (24) Assisting Al Qaeda - By Sarah Phillips 30 August 2015  
<https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/yemen/201530-08-/assisting-al-qaeda>
- (25) Previous source- Sarah Phillips

Strategy Unit

Special File



مركز أبعاد للدراسات والبحوث  
Abaad Studies & Research Center

# AQAP in Yemen..

## Its Military Capabilities and Influence Areas



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## **Abstract**

This paper talks about the AQAP influence in Yemen, its settlements and its ability to mobilize fighters. A number of factors led to the AQAP expansion particularly its social resilience that gave the organization new hideouts that provide protection and refuge for its members. The AQAP behavior towards political changes in the country provided additional momentum for the organization as well as the secret US-Yemen-run prisons and the dangerous mistakes of the US drones against civilians made the organization capable to recruit new supporters seeking retaliation and revenge.

The lack of state control, weak economic infrastructure and the political conflict are all together contributed significantly to terror combating failure. The political conflict in particular provided a window for external funding for the AQAP that thwarted efforts of its elimination.

The accelerating events and fighting fronts contributed also to the AQAP infiltration into local communities. The sectarian-based expansion grew largely following the Houthis occupation of the capital Sanaá in September 2014. The authority ignorance of population concerns towards the Houthi ideology to be imposed in their Sunni areas is also on top of factors that led to the AQAP expansion in Yemen. The US cooperation that remains active with Saleh and his allies the Houthis contributed greatly to the increasing of AQAP supporters.

These factors contributed collectively to push the AQAP and its supporters to defend tribal areas under the title of protecting Sunni-areas against the Shiites. The ignorance of those communities and their demands for a solution to this problem supports only the sectarian-based expansion that benefits no one, but the Houthis and the AQAP.

Strong AQAP presence includes provinces of Shabwa, Hadramout, Al-Bayda and Abyan. It uses the deserted area in Hadramout and the mountainous chain that links Shabwa, Abyan and Al-Bayda as safe refuge for protection against airstrikes. The AQAP has recently possessed the competence to run each area independently that made disparity in terms of AQAP weapons from one place to another. In Hadramout for instance, the AQAP preserved millions of dollars during its management of Mukalla from oil revenues, revenues of Mukalla port in addition to millions it looted from the Post Office in the coastal city. It also took control of weapons and heavy military equipment from government military camps when it held control of Mukalla, the capital of Hadramout when the Houthis were expanding in Aden by support from pro-Saleh forces following the 21 September 2014 coup and even during and after the UAE forces took command of Mukalla on April 24 2016

## **Introduction**

At the global level, AQAP (Yemen) appears to be the most dynamic terrorist organization. The unrest or the lack of state and its institutions are not the only reasons, but the organization is constantly trying to penetrate the complex social structure to obtain a tribal incubator in a country with more than 60 million pieces of weapons. It also exploited the tribal norms, which are considered to be recognized by the courts in Yemen as preliminary judgments that can be appealed through the judiciary. This matter contributed to the creation of a social incubator for AQAP in some areas where it resided or ruled.

Al-Qaeda in Yemen could overcome the mistakes

that its peers in Iraq and others regions have made.

It tried to appear as a limited local extension that has nothing to do with the outside, so the organization imposed local leaders as an exterior leadership while the foreign leaders, especially those who came from Saudi Arabia, formed Shura council that rules from behind the curtains. The Yemeni society by its very nature is sensitive from any foreigner in the leadership hierarchy of any work that has a societal depth.

The way the organization selects the leaders goes in line with its attempts to penetrate into the depth of the tribe as reflected in attracting Tariq al-Thahab when AQAP entered Baidha and Abu Ali al-Harithy when it infiltrated Shabwa and Marib. Moreover, AQAP



attracted Jalal Baleidy Al-Marqashy (Abu Hamza Al-Zunjobary) in Abyan. Although this person was not qualified for leadership, it was the decision by the so-called Shura Council of the organization that ruled Jaar and Zanjibar in Abyan.

### **The Organization Expansion:**

In order to confirm the expansion of the organization and its increasing influence in Yemen, we can point out that the number of elements of the organization during the events of September 11, 2001 were a few dozen that the drones might hunt, but then they became hundreds and maybe thousands, who were deployed in some Yemeni governorates. This arises a question about the reasons that push some people to join the terrorist organization,

although the country did never enter the process of sectarian sorting until before 2014. There are many reasons besides the mistakes made during the war on (terrorism). The most important reasons are:

- a. Al-Qaeda attempts to infiltrate the tribal social system in its own enthusiastic literature (songs and poetry). The organization's methods of mobilization on the basis of the tribe and the relationship with the organization's leaders have already contributed to the expansion of the organization in the absence of the government institutions.
- b. The secrecy and black sites that were established by the CIA and the Yemeni intelligence services (The Political Security and National Security) have been a major factor of the radicalization of a large group of those who were arrested on suspicion of links to al-Qaeda. According to previous studies, torture, concealment and solitary confinement of those detainees was a key driver of their joining al-Qaeda. These intelligence services are working tirelessly outside the authority of the Yemeni and international law, so they commit catastrophic idiocy through torturing people, pushing those people to engage in AQAP for revenge.

These prisons seem to be returning in the governorates that were liberated from the Houthis and forces loyal to former president Ali Abdullah Saleh. In two separate investigations published in June 2017, Human Rights Watch and the Associated Press reported that 18 secret prisons in Aden (south of the country) and Hadramout are being run by the United Arab Emirates - the second largest partner

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**AQAP attempts to  
penetrate the tribal social  
system benefiting from  
secret prisons, black sites  
and mistakes by drones  
that changed suspects into  
effective associates**

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in the Arab Coalition supporting the internationally recognized government after Saudi Arabia - or at least by a paramilitary force affiliated to the UAE, with the knowledge of US investigators.

The details of those investigations indicate that those prisons are very similar to the American black sites. Washington announced that it gave up this program, although it remained secretly even in the era of former President Barack Obama.

c. The mistakes of UAVs, and these mistakes do not only leave a human tragedy but – because of the nature of Yemeni society - push for revenge. When the victims are children or women, tribal men engage in al-Qaeda as recruits for revenge, or at least make the tribal areas open to elements of the organization, including foreigners. Al-Majalah (2009) and the January 2017 massacre in the village of Yakla in Baidha (in the center of Yemen) clearly indicate the reaction of the local population, which seeks revenge, even children.

d. After the Houthi invasion of the Yemeni capital Sana'a (September 2014), the expansion of Houthis

on the basis of sectarian sorting, the attempt by the authorities to ignore the population who fear that Houthis impose their faith (Zaidi close to Shiites) on the Shafi areas, and the American cooperation with Saleh party and his allies of Houthis. All these factors have contributed to push the organization and its elements to defend “Sunnis” areas against “Shiites.” Therefore, ignoring the demands of people through a political solution that enables Houthis to retain greater power, will result in increasing the sectarian sorting that only helps the Houthis and al-Qaeda.

e. These reasons, along with the absence of the state; the complexities of economic and social conditions and the circumstances of war, represent fertile grounds for Al-Qaeda to mobilize and attract more fighters within its ranks. This is reflected in the AQAP influence areas, its military strength and combat capabilities and the number of its followers and supporters.

## AQAP's Areas of Influence, control and power

Al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula is deployed in several towns in most of the governorates of Yemen in the form of small gatherings. Each group - small or large - leads a person under the name of Emir - like the ruler or the first official - and the organization has several administrative divisions, including the training, Ifta'a, judiciary, security, explosives, finance, etc., that organize the work of the organization and its contacts with the Supreme Leadership of the organization, which is currently headed by Qasem al-Raimi (Abu Hurayrah al-Sanani).<sup>(1)</sup>

But the influence of the organization has increased over the past six years in four Yemeni governorates. Specifically three of them represent what can be described as the areas of the traditional spread of al-Qaeda in Yemen, in a geographical area more

than 70 thousand kilometers. Those governorates, including Baidha, Abyan, Shabwa and Hadramout, represent areas of clashes between government forces and elements of the organization.

The organization uses mountainous chains that form a sort of geometric shape between Abyan, Shabwa and Baidha as hides and training areas for new recruits because of the difficulty to be targeted by airplanes. They also have a tribal depth in those governorates to which some of their leaders belong. This deployment can be determined as follows:<sup>(2)</sup>

### a. Shabwa Governorate:

An oil governorate locates in the east of Yemen. It is one of the most prominent governorates where the AQAP organization has strong influence and the tribe presence is more than the presence of the state. The governorate has been marginalized by the successive governments under Saleh. This growing



structural imbalance in the country increased after the Houthis invasion of governorates, and security has become weak, so the organization uses Shabwa as a refuge to resolve differences between rival clans or between individuals who refer to the organization. Its area is about 47,728 km and it has coasts (neglected) that the organization has been able to use to obtain arms and reinforcements through the sea from similar groups in Africa.

The organization extensively centers in Azan and it used to have sites in Baihan. These towns were under the control of the organization taking advantage of the absence of the state as well as the Houthis extension to the governorates. As the government forces arrived, they experienced violent confrontations with AQAP which then withdrew its elements into rural areas and mountains. The government forces liberated the whole coast of Shabwa and deployed forces to continuously secure the country's maritime border in August 2016.

The elements of the organization dispersed in several locations (hides) between the towns of Mayfa'ah and Al-Saeed. On 3 March 2017, residents said that helicopters - believed to be American - deployed troops in the vicinity of the village of al-Mahdara in Al-Saeed where clashes and explosions were heard in conjunction with strikes by helicopters on targets in the region. The Pentagon denied the implementation of any aerial landing in that area. Several areas in the same town witnessed several American raids during March 2017, including the «Yashbam valley» and

several places around it. Shabwa is the governorate that witnessed a failed US landing that resulted in the killing of American journalist Luke Somers in the valley of Abadan in Nesab town in December 2014. A number of senior leaders of the AQAP organization are from Shabwa, including Anwar al-Awlaki, whom the United States described as one of the most dangerous leaders of the international organization. The Arab Coalition, via the UAE, has trained the so-called Security Belt forces to be deployed in the oil areas of Shabwa. This raised controversy about the presence of these forces in AQAP-run areas. Some information says that the organization gives a virtual victory for the UAE-trained elite forces in return for stopping any operation against the organization's

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**The organization's influence increased over the past six years in four Yemeni governorates, three of them represent what can be described as the areas of the traditional spread of al-Qaeda in Yemen**  
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members in Azzan and other areas while some information says that the UAE requested direct US support to pursue al-Qaeda in Shabwa and other governorates.

### **B. Abyan Governorate**

Abyan, south of Yemen, was known as the first stronghold of al-Qaeda in the 1990s when some jihadists returned to Yemen and were under the surveillance and observation from the Yemeni authorities until they disappeared in the rugged mountains of the governorate. Its area is about 21489 km. It is the eastern gateway to the Yemeni capital of Aden and one of the most important centers of the military and political weight in southern Yemen as President AbdRabbo Mansour Hadi and many of the country's military and security leaders belong to Abyan.

Abyan was the most prominent governorate that witnessed the influence of al-Qaeda which announced its "Emirates" in Zanjibar and "Jaar". The former president Ali Saleh was accused of handing over areas and camps in Abyan to extremists in 2011. The government forces liberated those areas from AQAP in August 2012, but they fell again due to the expansion of the Houthis, taking advantage from the coup in the center, which prompted the Arab Coalition to intervene to liberate those areas.

The organization is widely deployed in the rugged Marrakesh Mountains, the main stronghold of al-Qaeda since the mid-1990s, located between the coastal city of Shakra and the directorate of Ahur, almost 200 kilometers east of Aden. Abyan witnessed a wide bombardment in February 2017 from the American battleships based in the Arabian



Sea. The government forces, backed by the Arab Coalition, launched a large campaign in January 2017 to hunt down elements of AQAP in those mountains that witnessed wide-ranging clashes. The government forces were able to liberate the center of Abyan (Zinjibar) from elements of the organization in a military campaign that lasted between May and August 2016.

Many leaders in al-Qaeda in the Arab Peninsula are from Abyan, including the founder of Al-Qaeda in Yemen, Nasir al-Wahishy (Abu Basir), who was killed in a US raid in 2015, and Jalal Belaidi al-Marqashi, who was also killed in a drone raid in February 2016 as well.

Residents said on March 3, 2017, that US carried out air and sea troops landing in the village of "Mughan" in the Shakra coastal area overlooking the Arabian Sea in the town of Khanfar in Abyan.

Currently, in the second half of 2017, according to special information to Abaad Center for Studies, Al-Qaeda organization in Abyan relocated its members in the mountainous areas, away from the coastal areas, and could find safe hides in the bushes and farms in Ahur. It is also spread in «Amserat-Amein.» Al-Qaeda has also dispersed its elements in the training camps in Al-Maroun and Mughan in «Khoir Al-Marakesha», staying in small groups among civilians or in safe shelters. <sup>(3)</sup>

### **C. Al-Bayda Governorate:**

Al-Qaeda in the governorate of Al-Bayda was not as resonant as its fellows in Shabwa, Abyan and

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**The organization is widely deployed in the rugged "Marrakesha Mountains," the main stronghold of al-Qaeda since the mid-1990s**  
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Hadramout, but the organization started brightly in mid-2011 when elements of the organization killed a number of Yemeni soldiers in the town of Rada'a. Sheikh Tariq al-Thahab was accused of being behind the operation. In January 2012, the organization did rise up again when al-Thahab and a group of gunmen carried out an attack on the city of Rada'a and took over the Rada'a archaeological Castle, <sup>(4)</sup> Al-Amriya Mosque<sup>(5)</sup>, the Security Department of Rada'a and a number of vital facilities, while all the army and security personnel disappeared from the city. A tribal mediation resulted in the departure of AQAP elements from the government institutions in return for the release of brother of Tariq al-Thahab (Nabil) and Nasser al-Muthafari from the Political Security

prisons. AQAP elements actually withdrew to the neighboring town “Al-Rabee” but Tariq al-Thahab was killed days later by his brother Hizam al-Thahab in their village of Kaifah.

After the organization left Rada'a, some elements of the organization were stationed in a valley close to the center of Al-Bayda city, specifically in the village of Mamdud, which belongs to the town of Al-Zaher. Several raids were launched, killing about 14 people. In Al-Bayda, the organization began a new phase of revenge. A large number of officers, especially political security officers in the city - a branch of the Yemeni intelligence - were assassinated. In order to avoid oppositions with the population, the operations also targeted the Houthi leaders. These are most of the events in 2012.

After the appointment of Maj. Gen. Al-Dhahiry Al-Shadadi as governor of al-Bayda governorate (September 2012), he was able to reduce the influence of al-Qaeda by carrying out a number of

measures that would have reduced the organization within the governorate. In the town of Wold Rabee Kaifah, al-Shaddadi launched a battle with al-Qaeda in Kaifah and then a tribal mediation intervened and resulted in a treaty between the government and al-Qaeda to deport all the new arrivals from Kaifah. The Yemeni government was able to hold a political festival on the first anniversary of the election of Hadi as president in Al-Manaseh village, the birthplace of Tariq Al-Thahab. In the capital of Al-Bayda, al-Shaddadi managed to sign an agreement with the tribes of al-Zaher to expel elements of al-Qaeda organization, and that what has been really done. But what prompted the elements of the organization to return to fight in al-Bayda was the collapse of the state and the Houthis attacks on tribal villages based on a sectarian-reprisal motive. When the tribes faced the expansion of the Houthis, al-Qaeda elements returned to fight against the Houthis. Most of them were originally from the tribes and returned to defend their villages. When al-Qaeda took over the city of



Mukalla, the center of Hadramout governorate and consists of a strategic port (Mukalla Port), most of the members of AQAP organization left al-Bayda to Mukalla. The Houthi group invaded these villages and towns, and the tribesmen continued to fight as a popular resistance.

When Mukalla's government forces managed to liberate Mukalla from AQAP, the al-Qaeda elements returned to al-Bayda. The Al Humaiqan tribes attempted to prevent al-Qaeda from setting up any camps on their territories so it established a camp in the town of al-Soma'ah and another camp in the directorate of Ould Rabie. Early this year, the US airliners continued to fly over al-Soma'ah town and killed leaders of the first ranks in the AQAP organization, so al-Qaeda leaders and members began to leave the town. After multiple raids in March 2017, they left the town to unknown locations <sup>(6)</sup>. In the town of "Ould Rabie," two major operations took place. One of them was the US landing in the area of Yakla where several civilians were killed. On March 3, the area also witnessed raids by US aircrafts with

dozens of rockets that targeted many positions of AQAP pushing the organization leaders to leave the area, except those who belong to the same town.

The organization in al-Bayda has not military power like the one it had in the past five years, but its members, who are from the tribes of the governorate try to integrate among the tribes resisting the Houthi coup that is supported by the forces of the former president Ali Saleh, who exploited the war against the people of al-Bayda as an opportunity to avenge the tribes that obstructed the movements of Republican Guard Camps in 2011.

In the last few years, Al-Qaeda's military capability has fallen to the lowest level. It has only 20% of the power that it used to have before they were hit by the Arab Coalition and the United States, in addition to their field losses due to the war they are trying to engage in with the Houthis on a sectarian basis. AQAP tries to take its breath to fill its rows and win new supporters<sup>(7)</sup> from AQAP branches in neighboring governorates.

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**The organization in al-Bayda has not military power like the one it had in the past five years, but its members, who are from the tribes of the governorate, try to integrate among the tribes**

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| No | Name                                 | Way of killing |
|----|--------------------------------------|----------------|
| 1  | Tariq Ahmed al-Thahab                | Family dispute |
| 2  | Nabil Ahmed al-Thahab                | US drone raid  |
| 3  | Qaed Ahmed al-Thahab                 | US drone raid  |
| 4  | Sultan Ahmed al-Thahab               | US drone raid  |
| 5  | Mohamed al-Sabri                     | US drone raid  |
| 6  | Saleh AbdulMughni Abu Hamam          | US drone raid  |
| 7  | Abu al-Tufail al-Maribi              | US drone raid  |
| 8  | AbulGhani al-Rasas                   | US drone raid  |
| 9  | Nasr al-Hutaim                       | US drone raid  |
| 10 | Abu Mohamed al-Koor                  | US drone raid  |
| 11 | Yasser al-Silmi (Abu Muhager al-Ibi) | US drone raid  |
| 12 | Naser al-Muthafari                   | in an attack   |
| 13 | Jalal al-Saidi                       | US drone raid  |
| 14 | Abu Dujanah al-Sanani                | US drone raid  |
| 15 | Abu Barzan al-Kaifi                  | US drone raid  |
| 16 | Hamzah al-Sudani                     | US drone raid  |
| 17 | Osama al-Radfani                     | US drone raid  |
| 18 | Jarah al-Sanani                      | US drone raid  |
| 19 | Amar al-Hadi                         | US drone raid  |

#### **d. Hadramout**

Hadramout is located east of Yemen and occupies 36% of its area. It consists of 30 districts, with its capital Mukalla. It is bordered by Saudi Arabia from the north and by the Arabian Sea from the south. In 2015 and 2016, Hadramout seized the spotlight in terms of al-Qaeda, after AQAP took control of the city of Mukalla in a suspicious deal as the Army and security forces handed over camps to elements of the organization in April 2015. It is believed that

Saleh was behind the handover. Clashes erupted between al-Qaeda members and the local tribesmen. The clashes continued until the government forces liberated Mukalla in April 2016. The organization took over several government buildings, including the Presidential Palace and the headquarters of the Second Military Region. Al-Qaeda freed 300 prisoners from the Central Prison in Mukalla, including Khalid Ba-Tarfi, whose several photos inside the Presidential Palace were circulated

in social media. AQAP elements also attacked Mukalla Police Station and the building of the Local Authority of Hadramout.

The withdrawal of the Yemeni army from its sites allowed al-Qaeda to acquire very large quantities of advanced and sophisticated weapons, including RPG and armored vehicles.

Mukalla was transformed into a state governed by the AQAP organization with financial assets estimated at about \$100 million, which came from the looting of bank deposits and revenues of the country's third largest port. If the Islamic state in Syria took al-Raqqah as its capital, al-Qaeda in Yemen tried to take the coastal Mukalla city, southeast Yemen with half a million population, as its capital.

Al-Qaeda fighters have canceled taxes on residents and launched speedboats driven by fighters carrying

RPGs to impose charges on ships traffic. They also used to make propaganda videos about paving roads in the city and providing hospitals with their needs.

Yemeni government officials and local dealers estimate that al-Qaeda- in addition to taking over bank deposits- received about \$ 1.4 million from the National Oil Company and it was getting up to \$ 2 million a day from charges on goods and fuel shipments entering the port of Mukalla.<sup>(8)</sup>

The organization's control of Mukalla represented the largest material gain for al-Qaeda. The amount looted from the Central Bank and revenues from the port were sufficient to fund the organization and to allow it to operate, at the level it is operating now, for at least ten years.

Along with the port of Mukalla, the organization also took over the port of Shahr, and its militants began



to impose tariffs and custom fees on the movement of shipping and trade. The organization has turned into a commercial enterprise that sells fuel even to stations under the control of the Yemeni government. The organization has offered the government to sell it crude oil for a share of the profits. The government gets 75 percent, compared to 25 percent for the organization, but the government rejected the offer. Government officials in the Ministry of Transport estimated that the organization was earning \$5 million per day!

But the organization did not forget to win the people's friendship after receiving the money. The organization already started to make roads, and repair bridges. It used to show regular videos of its members and claim that it carries out such projects with funds from groups such as Ansar al-Shariah and the sons of Hadramout. It used such names as part of its efforts to assert its local origins.

In a video recording released on February 28, 2016, members of the organization showed up the delivery of free medical supplies and equipment to kidney and cancer units at a local hospital. The supply boxes were sealed with a label of a Western drug company. However, the organization was subjected to multiple drone strikes. More than 50 members of the organization in the city were killed in one air raid in January 2016.

In April 2016, the government forces launched a large-scale military operation to liberate Mukalla from the grip of the AQAP organization. The organization was expelled from the city and its members were

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**Many analysts believe that the UAE forces, with a green light from the United States, made a deal with al-Qaeda in return for their withdrawal from Mukalla, especially that AQAP members were not hit by the Arab Coalition or US drones, despite their withdrawal with a strategic weapon**

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distributed among other governorates. Many of them disappeared since the beginning of 2017 as the US strikes increased in remote villages, Shahr, Ghail Bawazir, Sayoun and different areas of Wadi Hadramout.

Many analysts believe that the UAE forces, with a green light from the United States, made a deal with al-Qaeda in return for their withdrawal from Mukalla,



especially that AQAP members were not hit by the Arab Coalition or US drones, despite their withdrawal with a strategic weapon that they got from the security forces, including the counterterrorism weapons, and weapons from stores of the 27 Mika Brigade and the 190th Air Defense Brigade in Al-Rayyan, and the Al-Adwas stores that contained Katyusha rockets. Those stores were considered the back of the former Eastern Military Region.

Many still fear al-Qaeda's return to Mukalla at any time as long as it is still possessing strategic weapons. Al-Qaeda still considers Mukalla as its central command area, although it has established camps in four areas in Hadramout:

1- A camp in the area of (Zamakh and Menukh), located in the north-east of Al-Abr border outlet, 90 km deep in the desert, between the Yemeni area of Khashim and Saudi area of Kharkhir.

2 - A camp in the area of Redat al-Sayyar, close to the Yemeni-Saudi border as well as to the Al-Abr border outlet. Members of gangs of drugs and bandits joined that camp. It is believed that many cases of the looting of passengers and incidents of banditry on the road of Al-Abr were carried out by these gangs under the protection of al-Qaeda.

3 – A camp in the Amad Valley in Shaab Mankhop, near Hadramout Valley.

4 – A camp in Bashdada in Rakhia Valley.

### **Losses of AQAP organization**

Since 2002, the American aircrafts have carried out 197 air strikes that killed several people on the Yemeni soil. There were 16 air strikes by aircrafts and 178 raids by drones. The US landing operation in Yemen took place only four times, the last one of which was the landing in Yakla in al-Bayda. It is hard

to say that the United States achieved its objectives in the four land operations. It lost or almost lost.

These attacks killed between 1019 and 1249 members of the organization, including senior leaders, including Nasser al-Wahishi, founder of al-Qaeda in Yemen and al-Qaeda general manager (killed in June 2015) and Anwar al-Awlaki, who was believed to be the head of foreign operations (killed in September 2011), al-Qaeda's Mofti, Ibrahim Salman al-Rabeesh, (Killed in April 2015), Harith al-Nadhari, the legitimate official of the organization (killed in January 2015), and Said al-Shihri, deputy Emir (killed in June 2013) <sup>(9)</sup>.

The organization counted its operations in Yemen against the Yemeni government forces, the Arab Coalition and the Houthis within one year up to 290 operations. (Note: the AQAP organization adopts the Hijri calendar and these statistics are for the year 1437 AH, so Abaad Center could not make sure about all operations). <sup>(10)</sup>

### **Driving the organization towards the Saudi border**

The military operations against al-Qaeda in southern Yemen seems to be a political cover. In the process of liberating Mukalla and the subsequent operation, announced by the UAE Army on August 3, 2017 in Shabwa governorate, indicate that no real operations occurred between elements of the AQAP organization and those forces. Reports say that AQAP withdrew and moved to Abyan and Al-Bayda, south and center, and to the northern governorates, specifically

the governorates of Al-Jouf and Marib, north and northeast of Sana'a. These two governorates are on the Yemeni-Saudi border.

This means that Washington and Abu Dhabi are deliberately or unintentionally increasing Saudi fears of the AQAP organization by pushing it toward the borders of the Kingdom that already faces the Houthis on its borders. There are attempts by AQAP to return to al-Bayda governorate that borders Shabwa and Marib where tribes and local authorities have concerns that the aim maybe the deployment of US-UAE troops to fight the organization in those governorates and the use of war on AQAP as a political cover to extend the influence of the UAE on oil fields in Shabwa and Marib, especially since the UAE has started to fund tribal groups to rebel against the State and local authorities in the tribal governorates, especially Marib.



## **Margins**

- (1) Qasem Al-Raimi (Abu Huraira Al-Sanani) was appointed as a successor to his predecessor Nasser Al-Wahishi «Abu Basir» who was killed in June 2015.
- (2) Abaad Center has got this information through the Center's researchers in the governorates covered by this report.
- (3) Tribal Sheikh and a local official talked to Abaad Center's researcher on 15 July 2017- Zinjibar.
- (4) A historical castle in the middle of the city and through which anyone can control the city.
- (5) A historical mosque built by the Sultan Al-Tahiri Amer bin Abdul-Wahab, Al-Tahiri State 855 - 923 AH / 1451 – 1517C.
- (6) A tribal Sheikh from Al Humaiqan tribe spoke to the Abaad Center's researcher on phone on 2 July 2017.
- (7) According to local residents, who lived with the leaders of the organization, in their talk to researchers of Abaad Center.
- (8) Special report – Al Qaeda came out from the war in Yemen .. Stronger and richer (Reuters, April 2016), date of reading, 15 March 2017. <http://ara.reuters.com/article/topNews/idARAKCN0X5289?sp=true>
- (9) Drone Wars Yemen: Analysis (International Security Data Site), date of reading 1 March 2017 <http://securitydata.newamerica.net/drones/yemen-analysis.html>
- (10) In October 2016, the organization published a video showing its military operations in Yemen, which was followed by the Center, and will be available for request by researchers and interested parties.

Strategy Unit

Special File



مركز أبعاد للدراسات والبحوث

Abaad Studies & Research Center

# US role changes in Yemen



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## **Abstract**

When Donald Trump came to the office in the United States of America, he determined to eliminate terror groups that threaten the national security of his homeland. The Al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula [AQAP] is on top of such threats and that is why the new administration escalated its operations in Yemen in rapid and rugged manner.

Combating the AQAP and the expansion of Iran and rebuilding USA relations with the GCC states represent the key objectives for the new USA administration. Therefore, we saw an increase of USA support for operations of the Arab-led Coalition against the Houthis. At the moment, the USA depends on intelligence from the UAE after the former shut down its embassy in Sanaá in February 2015. The two countries even coordinate together land operations in Yemen. However, this could create conflict of priorities as Abu Dhabi had been determined to achieve other objectives related to the power and wealth in southern governorates where the AQAP is largely present as well as combating political Islamist groups.

The first 100-day assessment report of the Trump administration in Yemen demonstrates indicators of US changes in Yemen that parallel with entire period of Obama's rule. The US attack against a village in central Yemen and the killing of dozens of civilians with no objectives achieved, marks clearly initial failure of what Trump wants to do in Yemen. The activities of the first 100 days reveal back coordination between the Americans and intelligence apparatuses that still loyal to the former president of Yemen or the Houthis, to materialize the US objectives in the country.

## Introduction

Since the United States began its intervention to counter terrorist organizations in Yemen, the former Yemeni regime has been trying to exploit US concerns, during the terms of former presidents George W. Bush and Barack Obama, to get training for the elite forces, under his son's leadership, in addition to financial resources that eventually went to a network of beneficiaries.

The country did not experience a real war against al-Qaeda until after the Popular Youth Revolution, but that war markedly receded after the Houthis advanced towards the Yemeni capital, Sana'a. The expansion of the Houthis in the Shafai areas gave the organization a new popularity and helped its elements in fighting against the Houthis. The mistakes of the Yemeni government and the United States also helped in increasing AQAP's popularity, especially after US attempts to consider the Houthis as a party to help them in the fighting against the organization. This prompted Al-Qaeda to benefit from some people who are angry with the Houthis in the absence of the state to face the common danger.

New US President Donald Trump was sworn in on January 20, 2017. The first military action against al-Qaeda in Yemen was via an air-and-ground attack that targeted- according the US novel - al-Qaeda gathering in the village of Yakla in Al-Bayda governorate on January 28, during which about 25 civilians, half of them children, and one US soldier were killed. The operation suggests that the new

American vision in Yemen is different from previous ones as demonstrated in the first 100 days of the Trump era.

## US Motives in Yemen

Donald Trump was not clear about his policy in Yemen during his election campaign. He mentioned Yemen only twice<sup>(1)</sup>. He neither talked about Yemen and the threats in the troubled country. He was talking about Saudi Arabia and its concerns about Iran, and Riyadh's funding for the war costs. However, most Western analysts and even Western officials look at Yemen as an important indicator of the policies of the "populist" man who came to power. This is what already happened in Yemen.

The Trump administration considered Yemen an ideal environment for implementing the new president's electoral promises, including the fight against terrorism, confronting Iran and restoring the traditional allies of the United States. Yemen is certainly so for several reasons:

- a. Yemen is strategically out of the circle of strong interest of Moscow – the opposite of Syria, the Crimea and Greece - and the penetration of Tehran into the policies of the country makes it difficult to increase for several reasons, including the geographical distance and other criteria linked to the social and tribal nature of the Houthis and Yemenis, unlike Syria where Moscow and Tehran are fully involved in the country's affairs.
- b. Confronting Iran. Yemen is a strategic axis in the Iranian plan to pressure on the Gulf States.

Yemen does not cost them money or arms like Syria and Iraq. At the same time, Yemen gives Iran good results in terms of its dominance. In order to stop this Iranian expansion along the international shipping corridors, Yemen would be an appropriate place for United States to prove the confrontation of Iran.

- c. Supporting the Saudi-led Arab Coalition in Yemen would be a rebirth of Washington's traditional old alliances. Yemen is the backyard of the Arabian Peninsula.
- d. By creating fruitful cooperation between the United States and the Gulf Arab states, Trump administration believes that Yemen will help in destroying al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula more easily with lower costs than in other countries where AQAP exists.
- e. Twenty percent of the world trade passes through the Bab al-Mandab Strait. The strait is very important for the European Union countries as their trade and oil tankers cross the strait, so closing or stumbling the strait will lead to enormous economic risks for those countries and their people. This fact will be a motive to support Trump's orientation in Yemen.
- f. The re-establishment of stability in Yemen creates international and regional optimism towards the new US administration and the files that were suspended under the administration of Barack Obama. A strong American return to the region could contribute to restoring Washington's

influence, which has receded slightly in the Middle East under Obama's administration, leading to imbalance in the Middle East and the emergence of new players who have fueled conflicts. <sup>(2)</sup>

### List of US targets in Yemen:

In general, Trump's list of targets in Yemen focuses on two things:

- Combating terrorism and attacking AQAP.
- To counter Iran's influence represented by Iran-backed militias of the armed Houthi group.

It targeted the organization and its strongholds

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**Saleh” has tried to”  
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leadership**  
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in the southern governorates, and its policy was clearer towards the Houthis in Yemen than the previous policy that used to hold the stick from the middle in dealing with the Houthi group and its ally former Yemeni president.

Washington relies on the United Arab Emirates to obtain intelligence as well as in its participation in military operations in light of the absence of US own intelligence folks in Yemen due to the closure of the US Embassy in Sana'a since February 2015. But this participation could be dangerous if it turns out that Abu Dhabi is exploiting Washington's dependence on it to expand its influence in Yemen in general - especially the south - which makes the American policy deviate from its designed goals in Yemen to meet the wishes of Abu Dhabi.

### **Monitoring US Military Operations in first 100 days of Trump in power**

In the first 100 days of the Trump's power, US aircrafts launched more than 100 raids in Yemen<sup>(3)</sup>, according to the Monitoring Unit at the Abaad

Center for Studies - close to the number of US strikes in Yemen in the second term of Barack Obama - as follows <sup>(4)</sup>:

#### **January 8:**

A US strike was carried out in al-Bayda, central Yemen, and killed the organization's member Abdul-Ghani al-Rasas. Confirmed by the Pentagon on Jan. 14, 2017

#### **January 12:**

The US Army said it had killed three members of al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP) in two strikes in central Yemen a week earlier. The US Central Command said in a statement that it killed an al-Qaeda operative in a strike on January 8, and two other militants of the group in a strike on December 29, 2016.

#### **January 21:**

Four al-Qaeda members were killed in a US drone raid in the southeastern of Sana'a. «US drone targeted a Toyota-Hilux car as it passed through

a remote area between al-Soma'a and Mukairas in al-Bayda.

**January 28:**

14 members of the organization were killed in a US ground attack on the village of «Yakla» in al-Bayda governorate.

**January 30:**

Two people, believed to be members of al-Qaeda, were killed in air strikes by a US drone in the central Shabwa governorate. Officials said the drone targeted a vehicle carrying two suspected al-Qaeda members in Bayhan of Shabwa.

Note: There were no air strikes in February.

**March 2:**

A US aircraft raided the house of al-Qaeda leader «Abdullah al-Thahab in the village of Yakla in al-Bayda. The raid missed the house and caused no casualties.

**2 and 3 March:**

The United States has carried out more than 30 air strikes against the organization's sites in Yemen, while local sources said that the United States carried out two air landings, the first was in Abyan and the second was in Shabwa. But the Pentagon denied any air landing in Yemen during the two days. In one day, the United States launched more than 25 air strikes on the al-Soma'a, and seven raids on suspected militant positions in the neighboring town of Kaifa.

There were no reports of casualties in al-Soma'a, while sources said that nine people were killed in Kaifa. AFP reported that three members of the organization were killed in these raids. In Shabwa, a US drone attacked a car carrying suspected al-Qaeda members in Al-Shuaib area in al-Saeed district, west of Ataq. The victims of the raid are Saleh Ali Nasser Atef Al-Ateeqi, Awad Mohammed Barasin Al-Ateeqi, Awad Ali Barasin Al-Ateeqi and Abu Bakr Awad Barasin Al-Ateeqi. Residents said that US forces carried out an air strike in the town of Mogan on the Arabian Sea coast, east of Abyan, south of Yemen. A raid also took place in al-Saeed valley area in Shabwa, east of Yemen, where clashes with al-Qaeda militants lasted for about half an hour.

**March 4:**

Two suspected al-Qaeda members were killed in a raid in Ahoor area, south of Abyan. The two suspected jihadists were on a motorcycle.

**March 5:**

A US aircraft launched five raids on the areas of Yashbam, Al-Mahdara and Al-Masshaa in al-Saeed district of Shabwa. It also bombed the village of Gaaer in the directorate of al-Soma'a in Al-Bayda (center) and the village of al-Ghail in Shabwa. The sources pointed out that violent explosions rocked the city of Rada'a in Al-Bayda because of the raids. The strikes also targeted the village of Yakla in al-Bayda.

**March 5:**

The American NBC TV said that Musaed al-Adani, the al-Qaeda chief in Abyan and the organization's explosives expert (it maybe means Aws al-Adani), may have been killed in a US air strike within the past 48 hours- two days before the report- according to two Pentagon officials.

**March 6:**

Residents found two charred bodies following a US raid on a moving vehicle in the Yashbum valley in al-Saeed district of Shabwa.

**March 6:**

Residents said that an air strike hit the home of an al-Qaeda suspect in the village of Nufan in al-Bayda and that another raid hit a mountainous area believed to contain a training camp in the village of Al-Saeed, southern Shabwa.

**March 6:**

Pentagon spokesman Jeff Davis said one of the former Guantánamo detainees was killed in an air strike on March 2. «We can confirm the death of former Guantanamo prisoner Yasir al-Silmi during a raid against al-Qaeda positions in Yemen,» the spokesman said.

**March 7:**

A US air strike targeted al-Qaeda in the central Yemeni governorate of al-Bayda killing two children, aged 10 and 12, a local official said. The source added that the two children were killed in the raid last Sunday, while they were herding goats

on a mountain road in the area of Yakla.

**March 8:**

A US aircraft launched a raid targeting al-Qaeda sites in the directorate of Mayfa'a in Shabwa, south of Yemen.

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**Most of Western analysts and even Western officials look at Yemen as an important indicator of the policies of Trump**  
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### **March 9:**

An air strike targeted a person on a motorbike, suspected of being an al-Qaeda operative in the town of Al-Wadea, the hometown of Yemeni President, in the south of Abyan, local sources said.

### **An attack is happening.. American turning point**

The ground attack by the US forces - supported by the elite forces of the United Arab Emirates <sup>(5)</sup> - on the village of Yakla in the central governorate of al-Bayda, represented a turning point in the US policy in Yemen to be different from the policy of the previous administration of Barack Obama. But this military operation – that the US administration claims that it has been planned for a long time since November 2016 and it was approved in a dinner banquet rather than in the operating room<sup>(6)</sup> - killed civilians including 10 children and six women, along with a US soldier, and injured three other soldiers and destroyed a US aircraft worth \$75 million.

The operation was carried out without the knowledge of the Yemeni government, and it was considered by the Yemeni Foreign Minister Abdulmalik al-Mekhlafi as an extrajudicial killing. The Yemeni government has asked the US administration to consult and coordinate with it in any coming operations or strikes against the AQAP organization. Yemeni President AbdRabbo Mansour Hadi is an ideal partner in the fight against terrorism for the neighboring Gulf States and America. During his tenure, President Hadi fought several wars against jihadist groups in the south of the country. The intelligence exchange between President Hadi's administration and the United States, US could target and kill senior leaders of the organization in the country that has been living in a conflict for more than three years.

#### **a. What happened in Yakla?**

Observers of the Abaad Center for Studies and Researches were able to reach the targeted village in the center of the country to understand how the attack happened through interviews with some



locals. The attack began early on January 29 and was followed by intensive US raids on the area amid the panic of residents of the small village of Kaifa in Radaa who believed that the bombing planes belonged to the Saudi-led Arab Coalition, supported by the legitimate government, as the Arab Coalition's aircrafts are the only aircrafts that are allowed to fly in the Yemeni airspace. The villagers did not believe that an American offensive started to creep into their houses at night. US Apache helicopters opened fire indiscriminately at anyone who tried to get out of his house, and within an hour the population was in the middle of the hell.

The American troops began the process of withdrawal when a plane MV-22 Osprey landed for the withdrawal of the attacking troops, but it failed when it suffered a sudden fault- according to the American novel, another plane intervened to transport Special Forces soldiers (American and Emirati). After the plane took off, it was destroyed by several missiles, according to local residents.

With the light of the morning, some of the houses were destroyed while the victims were still in the open air. The population began to count the dead bodies, the Abaad Center got the following list:

| Name                               | Age      | Male /Female |
|------------------------------------|----------|--------------|
| Ahmed Abdulelah al-Thahab          | 11 years | Male         |
| Asma'a Fahd al-Amiri               | 3 months | Female       |
| Hussein Abdullah Mabkhot al-Amiri  | 5 years  | Male         |
| Halima Hussein al-Eifah al-Amiri   | 5 years  | Female       |
| Khadijah Abdullah Mabkhot al-Amiri | 7 years  | Female       |
| Aisha Mohamed Abdullah al-Amiri    | 4 years  | Female       |
| Abdullah Ahmed Abad al-Zubah       | 17 years | Male         |
| Morsel AbdRabbo Musaed al-Amiri    | 6 years  | Male         |
| Nasr Abdullah al-Thahab            | 12 years | Male         |
| Nawar Anwar al-Awlaki              | 8 years  | Female       |
| Newborn child*                     |          |              |

(\*) Dr. Ameen Mabrouk, director of the 26 September Hospital in the area of Juba in Marib, 5 hours driving from the area of Yakla and the nearest hospital to provide care for newborns, said that the hospital received three injured from the raid - a young man was injured in his leg, a pregnant woman and a young girl. The woman, who was pregnant in her ninth month,

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**The ground attack by the US forces - supported by the UAE elite forces - on the village of “Yakla” in al-Bayda, central Yemen, represented a turning point in the US policy in Yemen**

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had a bullet in her abdomen. The hospital had emergency caesarean operation but the child did not survive. <sup>(7)</sup>

| No. | Name                             | Age     |
|-----|----------------------------------|---------|
| 1   | Fatima Abdullah Mabkhot al-Amiri | 25      |
| 2   | Lima Mohamed Husein al-Amiri     | 30      |
| 3   | Fatima Saleh Mohsen al-Amiri     | 38      |
| 4   | Thabiah Ali Abdullah al-Amiri    | unknown |
| 5   | Fatima Abdullah Saleh al-Amiri   | unknown |
| 6   | Salima Ali Ahmed al-Amiri        | unknown |
| 7   | Arwa al-Baghdadi (**)            | unknown |

(\*\*) Al-Baghdadi is a Saudi national. Her brother was arrested in his country and executed over charge of being linked to al-Qaeda. His sister Arwa was also detained and then she was released in return for a Saudi diplomat who was kidnapped in 2014, according to some sources.

Al-Qaeda released a list of 14 people whom AQAP said that the United States targeted after it put them in the list of al-Qaeda associates, including Abdullah al-Zubah, 17 years old.

According to the list of names, some names of victims are close to names of people listed in the US al-Qaeda targeted list as associates of al-Qaeda like Sheikh AbdulRaouf al-Thahab despite he appeared in videos several times denying that he has any links to al-Qaeda. So there are real fears that there is a methodological targeting of families of people accused to be members of al-Qaeda or providing facilities for al-Qaeda elements. US president in his electoral campaign allowed US forces to kill families of al-Qaeda members.

The daughter of Anwar al-Awlaki (8 years) was among the victims. Anwar al-Awlaki was killed in a US raid in 2011. She was the second one of al-Awlaki's kids to be killed after the killing of his son AbdulRahman (16 years) in October 2011, few days after killing his father.

Among the victims, there were the children and wife of AbdulElah al-Thahab, who was not there during the US strike.

### **b. Between Objectives and Results**

The United States said that it needed to carry out a ground operation on the Yemeni territory due to the importance of intelligence that it can get from the operation <sup>(8)</sup>. It pointed out that the operation was planned for in November 2016 but President Barack Obama preferred to leave the approval of the operation for his successor President Donald Trump who approved the operation during a dinner banquet with commanders in the US Secretary of Defense, despite they know about its dangers and results.

Some information indicates that the objective behind the operation was not to get intelligence but to target a gathering of al-Qaeda leaders in Yemen that will be in the village. The operation aims to capture or kill al-Qaeda leader Qasem al-Raimi, who appeared in an audio a week after the operation mocking at Trump and labeling him as "the White House stupid," saying that he got a "painful slap."<sup>(9)</sup> The United States denied that al-Raimi was the

target in the operation and continued to claim that the military operation was successful, although it admitted that civilians were killed. It claimed that it has got a “treasure of intelligence.”

The locals absolutely denied that leaders of al-Qaeda or Qasem al-Raimi were exist in the village, but two locals, asking for anonymity, told Abaad Center that “Qasem al-Raimi perhaps was in the village hours before the US operation as they saw an unfamiliar four-wheel-drive vehicle in the village at midnight.” But they are not certainly sure about the presence of al-Qaeda leaders in the village.

When al-Qaeda showed the list of names of victims- despite al-Qaeda did not claim that they are members of the organization- eight names on al-Qaeda list were not mentioned among names given by the locals to Abaad Center because those names were not known for the locals.

The United States did not present any evidence that it got real “intelligence” about attacks on international interest in Yemen and outside Yemen. In February 2017, the Pentagon posted on its website a video of what it was said to be intelligence from the operation in Yemen, but after that it was revealed that video was dated back to ten years and that it was posted by AQAP propaganda means. This increased doubts about the fact that the United States has got intelligence from the military operation in Yemen where one US soldier was killed and three others were wounded.

Early in March 2017, US media outlets quoted sources in Pentagon as saying that: “Cell phones,

laptops and other materials that were seized during the operation in Yemen are being analyzed, but they did not reveal any specific plans or result in any strikes against al-Qaeda extremists in Yemen or any other place.” This indicates that the United States could not, within 30 days, get any real intelligence from the seized devices, if it really

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**In the first 100 days of  
,the Trump’s power  
US aircrafts launched  
more than 100 raids in  
Yemen**  
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seized devices.

The village consists of a group of houses nearby other two small villages. It consists of 200 houses and 1000 people. Most of the victims were in the house of al-Thahab that the US troops attacked at the beginning, in addition to two neighboring houses for Abdullah al-Amiri and his son Mohamed<sup>(10)</sup>. The two houses that were attacked, (Al-Amiri) and (Al-Thahab), have been completely destroyed and bodies for women and children have been got out from under the ruins. It seems that devices have been buried under the ruins along with the families. It is difficult to expect that the devices have been taken from the houses amid fierce gunfire during the operation and sure it has become more difficult after the operation as the two houses have been destroyed and at least 20 neighboring houses suffered damages.

Although some details about the operation are still ambiguous, President Doland Trump tries to keep away from the policy of President Obama. The new president tries to achieve a rapid victory after he took power in January 20, 2017. But this change in the administration should aim anyway to avoid victims among civilians otherwise the US administration will get nothing from operations similar to the operation on January 29 in Yakla. While the US is talking about compensations for the families of victims and Commander of the US Central Command admitted that civilians were killed in the operation and claimed responsibility, the anger of the people of Yakla increased. They

rejected the compensations demanding revenge for the victims. This increases fears that such operations that target civilians create a suitable environment for violent groups and terrorists.

### **c. The operation coordination:**

The Yemeni government did not know about the operation and the locals say that telecommunications were suddenly cut off one hour before the military operation. The phone land lines and cell phones can be cut off only by the National Security in Sana'a that was loyal to former president Ali Abdullah Saleh and now loyal to the Houthi group that is not international recognized. This casts doubts on intelligence exchange between the Houthi group and the US forces as the US experts and intelligence men left Yemen before the beginning of the Saudi-led Arab Coalition military operations in Yemen on March 2015.

While the United Arab Emirates did not confirm or deny the participation of its forces in the operation- despite indications that they did- the possibility of coordination with the Houthis is still probable, especially as the talk about Yakla operation was in November, the same month when US Secretary of State John Kerry met with Houthi delegates in the Omani capital of Muscat in unprecedented move by the US diplomacy as they never meet with armed militias in light of their recognition of the legitimate government.

There is a talk about suspicious relations between



former president Ali Abdullah Saleh and al-Qaeda organization <sup>(11)</sup>. He previously provided US with misleading information- at least in one incident- to get rid of his opponents like what happened in the targeting of Jaber al-Shabwani, Deputy Governor of Marib, who was killed in a drone strike in 2010. After the strike, US officials said, "We think that we have been tricked." <sup>(12)</sup>

After the Yemeni government demanded that US coordinate with it in any coming military operation in Yemen, the US confirmed that all next operations came in coordination with the Arab Coalition and the Yemeni legitimacy represented by President Hadi. Information says that anti-terror campaign may be expanded to target other armed militias. The Houthis in Yemen maybe included, especially after they targeted ships in the international water, the campaign may also target other armed groups that a party in the coalition may desire to eliminate.

### Indicators of change in US position

The transition in the US position in Yemen is not related to the al-Qaeda confrontation only, but to the map of civil war in the country as well. Certainly, the United States looks at Yemen as a threat that it is one of its priorities, but the complexity and overlap of the situations in the country limits the US moves.

The administration of US President Donald Trump has identified the fight against terrorism, the cessation of Iranian expansion in the Middle East and the restoration of its old alliances as its priorities within its agenda for the first term of Trump (2017-2020). The American change since the beginning of the year can be noted as follows:

- The United States sent the destroyer Cole to the Yemeni coast after the Houthis targeted a Saudi frigate "Al-Madinah" on January 30. The Houthis used a remote-controlled boat in the attack, which raised US concerns. Commander of the Fifth US

Fleet in the Gulf did not rule out a military operation against the Houthis. <sup>(13)</sup>

- The Trump administration believes that the Houthi attacks on ships in the Red Sea bring the issue out of the state of internal conflict to a regional and international framework. The group has become a threat to international waterways. Obama administration has failed to neutralize waterways from conflict. Lawmakers in the US Congress are preparing a resolution dealing with the smuggling of Iranian weapons to the Houthis.

- US National Security adviser Michael Flynn, before resigning, described the Houthi group as a terrorist organization acting on behalf of Iran. «Yemen will be the first battleground in Trump's confrontation with Iran,» said Foreign Policy magazine. Fortunately, for Trump's allies in the Gulf states, especially Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates, Trump's National Security team seems to see the Houthis in the same way it sees Hezbollah. This means that the Houthi group is believed to be part of a major Iranian plan to build a strong Shiite alliance against its regional rival, Saudi Arabia.» <sup>(14)</sup>

- Trump granted the Pentagon broader powers to fight terrorism and carry out broader attacks in Yemen. A proposal was made over the collapse of a controversial bureaucratic structure set up by the Obama administration to launch deadly attacks. Therefore, the proposal to reduce measures and precautions to ensure the safety of civilians in such attacks would be binding. <sup>(15)</sup>

### The Results:

- The American operation in the village of «Yakla» was an adventure and relied on inaccurate intelligence, which led to the fall of a large number of civilians in the absence of a concrete military victory against the organization.

- The United States of America has shifted its policy in Yemen significantly and clearly as the country continues to be a focal point for terrorism, which is more concerned than the internal civil war.

- The White House is trying to stay away from the Obama administration's policies, and the new president is trying to get a quick victory since he has come to power (January 20). But this change in the

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**The transition in the US position in Yemen is not related to the al-Qaeda confrontation only, but the transition deeply appears in the map of civil war in the country**

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US administration must in any case aim to reduce civilian casualties, otherwise the administration will not gain anything from operations similar to the operation on January 29 in Yakla.

### **Recommendations:**

- Ignoring the civil war in Yemen and launching an undeclared military operation in the country against al-Qaeda makes the Yemeni crisis turn from the objective of restoring the state to humanitarian targets and fighting terrorism raising concerns about the expansion of regional and international interventions in the country as in Syria. Yemen is being swept away by the widening social divide that has given al-Qaeda an opportunity to take advantage of it for its sake.

- To reach a political solution to stop the militia-caused deterioration and giving the Yemeni State the exclusive right to possess heavy and medium weapons is the only way to uproot the AQAP organization - it will take time, but it is an effective way. Depending on militia movements to counter the AQAP organization makes the Yemeni state steps back to longer and bigger problems.

- The restoration of the state's security and military institutions ensures full confrontation with the organization and reaffirms the confidence of the people in the existence of the state that protects everyone and fulfills the demands of all its citizens. Without the existence of the state and restoring it, the country will remain a hotbed for wider regional interventions.

- The American policy of militarization in Yemen

will aggravate the state of regional and sectarian sorting out, and its dependence on the local allies in the Arabian Gulf and the Yemeni government is the safest way to face the organization in the country. The campaigns, carried out by the Yemeni government during 2016, were strong and fruitful. They targeted the organization and removed it from major cities. The remnants of the organization have been hunted in remote villages and towns.

- The Yemeni government should expedite the confrontation with the Houthis, restore the state and its institutions and extend its influence, and the United States of America should move in Yemen through the legitimate government as relying on inaccurate intelligence strengthens the influence of the organization, which exploits the US mistakes in increasing the number of those joining it. The United States must remember that its best achievements, in the fight against AQAP, were achieved in Yemen during its alliance with Yemeni President AbdRabbo Mansour Hadi, while its former alliance with Ali Abdullah Saleh was barbaric and served the organization alone.

- The US government ignorance about the regulations that prevent the killing of civilians increases the organization's popularity in Yemen. To have the power does not mean to use it unwisely. The battle with terrorism has been going on for 15 years, and every mistake that kills civilians increases the number of people joining the organization. The tribal norm prefers revenge rather than financial compensation.

## **Margins**

- (1) According to Abaad Center's monitoring
- (2) Assessment of a state by Abaad Center, April 2017 "Confronting Houthis in Yemen, an Iranian vision".
- (3) US drone aircraft launched in 24 air strikes in 2013 and 17 raids in 2014 and 24 air raids in 2015 and 42 air strikes in 2016.
- (4) The Monitoring Unit has relied on tracking these raids through credible media outlets (AFP, Reuters, BBC, CNN) and Yemeni news websites (Yemen Online Monitor)
- (5) Several US media outlets reported that the United Arab Emirates participated in the attack on the village of Yakla in al-Bayda on January 29, for example, CNN.
- (6) Several media outlets, including The New York Times, reported that US President Donald Trump had agreed to the operation at a dinner after taking office.
- (7) Human Rights Watch report on the operation issued on 24 February 2017, date of access (12 March 2017)  
<https://www.hrw.org/news/201724/02/yemen-us-should-investigate-civilian-deaths-raid>
- (8) White House Press Briefing 9# by Press Secretary Sean Spicer, 22017/7/ (date of access 12 March 2017)  
<https://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/201707/02/press-briefing-press-secretary-sean-spicer-2720179->
- (9) The Al-Qaeda leader in Yemen makes fun of the «new idiot» in the White House: CNN, February 2017, (date of access 12 March 2017)  
<http://www.cnn.com/middleeast/201707/02/pol-yemen-raid-alqaeda-1>
- (10) Human Rights Watch report.
- (11) A documentary broadcast by al-Jazeera TV, Al-Qaeda Detective, was broadcast in June 2015 and can be viewed on the following link:  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=p96ITMrwjjw>
- (12) Report by Wall Street Journal, USA, December 29, 2011 Yemen: US Doubts Intelligence that Led to Strike, (date of access 13 March 2017)  
<https://www.wsj.com/articles/SB10001424052970203899504577126883574284>
- (13) The US official told the Davines News on 19 February with a broad interview on the Houthi attack, dated March 16, 2017, New Houthi weapon emerges: a drone boat  
<http://www.defensenews.com/articles/new-houthi-weapon-emerges-a-drone-boat>
- (14) Foreign Policy Report: Yemeni is First Battleground in Trump's Confrontation with Iran 4 March 2017, (date of access 16 March 2017)  
<http://foreignpolicy.com/201703/02/yemen-is-the-first-battleground-in-trumps-confrontation-with-iran/>
- (15) American and British media outlets quoted senior officials in Pentagon talking about this, Guardian newspaper: Pentagon wants to declare more parts of world as temporarily battlefields 13 March 2017, (date of access 16 March 2017)  
<https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2017/mar/13/pentagon-military-commanders-temporary-battlefields-white-house>

Strategy Unit

Special File



مركز أبعاد للدراسات والبحوث  
Abaad Studies & Research Center

# Saudi-led Arab Coalition and terror combating



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## **Abstract**

This paper focuses on military operations by the Arab-led Coalition against the Al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP) in southern provinces of Yemen. It highlights impacts of those operations on the AQAP as well how the AQAP managed to expand in liberated areas because of grave mistakes made by the Arab Coalition which is led by Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates [UAE] to support the government of Yemen.

The paper suggests that combating the AQAP was serious only after the popular youth uprising 2011 and with the ascending of the current president to the office. The regime of former president utilized the AQAP to increase his influence or to get training for forces led by his son.

It highlights military operations against the AQAP in southern governorates that started in Aden, and then moved to Hadramout, Abyan, Lahj, Al-Dhalea and Shabwa. It discusses military operations of the Arab Coalition in Shabwa that was declared recently by the UAE army.

The forces that were tasked to fight the AQAP in Shabwa is a militia that receive instructions from Al-Riyadh and not from the internationally recognized government. Recruitment for this militia, known as the Shabwani Elite Forces, was based on tribal and regional standards.

It committed a large scale of human rights abuses in one month, while it has not engaged in any confrontation with the AQAP gunmen that have either moved up to mountains or remote villages. The Shabwani Elite Forces have just taken control of oil and gas fields as well as the state's offices instead of fighting the AQAP.

The paper explains also the situation in Taiz and how the mistakes of the Arab Coalition caused the spread of the ISIS there. In Taiz, the coalition depended on Salafi militants close to the AQAP to fight the Houthis and marginalized tribesmen in Taiz because the UAE believes that those tribesmen are affiliated to the Islah Party. This facilitated Salafi militias, led by Abu Al-Abbas to use the popular resistance as a cover for the AQAP expansion and new members recruitment.

Findings of the paper are based on interviews conducted by Abaad researchers with leaders of the Popular Resistance and the National Army in the two governorates.

The paper concludes that the AQAP expanded due to mistakes of the Arab Coalition and the legitimate government whose concerns were not right. The use of jihadists against the Houthis proved wrong results. For its part, the UAE uses military operations against the AQAP as a cover for achieving other objectives in the southern governorates that mainly target the internationally recognized government and take control of oil and gas fields. The paper says that taking no serious actions against the AQAP in the southern governorates and pushing it towards the northern governorates and the Yemeni-Saudi border represents a future threat against the Kingdom.

## Introduction

On March 26, 2015, Saudi Arabia announced an Arab coalition from several Arab and Islamic countries, on top of them are the Gulf Arab states, under the Saudi leadership in response to a request from Yemeni President AbdRabbo Mansour Hadi who fled from house arrest imposed against him by the armed Houthi group and the forces loyal to former President Ali Abdullah Saleh who carried out a coup against the legitimacy and put President Hadi under house arrest following the invasion of the Yemeni capital Sana'a in September 2014, which gave al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula and its branches and the Islamic state organization (Daesh) a chance to expand in the country due to the collapse of the Yemeni state institutions.

Since the end of summer in 1994, the Yemeni state has not witnessed like the current military mobilization,

the multiplicity of polarization, fighting and the spread of uncontrolled armed militias and groups. This is why Yemen lives in an exceptional state of complications that any coming authority will need decades to deal with and will have negative social and humanitarian impacts.

This paper attempts to discuss the possible continuation of war on AQAP and the future of confronting it by the government and militias that share control in the country.

Before the start of the study of fighting terrorism during the operations of the Arab Coalition, which was launched to confront the Houthis, we should refer to military operations after the popular youth revolution 2011-2015, as they were more serious in confronting the AQAP organization, and then the paper examines the military operations after the intervention of the Arab Coalition in March 2015 and so far.

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**Yemen lives in an exceptional state of complications that any coming authority may not be able to tackle for decades**

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### **First: Combating terrorism after the popular youth revolution 2011 through March 2015**

The Yemeni government, with support from Saudi Arabia and the United States of America, has been involved in a campaign to hunt al-Qaeda elements in the country since the beginning of war on terrorism. In 2011, a new organization called Ansar al-Sharia was declared as a branch of the AQAP organization in the southern governorates<sup>(1)</sup>. This branch claimed its responsibility for a group of military operations.

Yemen and the United States are officially cooperating in the war against al-Qaeda. Under the authority of former Yemeni President Ali Abdullah Saleh, the war against the organization was not serious - according to an American accusation, and his regime was accused of being lenient with al-Qaeda after a suspect of being behind the explosion of the US destroyer USS Cole could make an exciting prison break for the second time.

The government campaign began in 2001 and escalated on January 14, 2010, due to political considerations, but the process was only intensified after the overthrow of Ali Abdullah Saleh from power in 2011.

### **Wars against AQAP organization**

A mysterious war broke out in Abyan, east of Aden, during the Yemeni Youth Revolution 2011, and al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula participated in these battles. Battles were erupted between units of the Yemeni Army, local militias and tribal groups on one hand, and between al-Qaeda and Ansar al-Sharia on the other hand. In June 2011, the fighting spread from Abyan to approach the city of Aden. It is assumed

that AQAP planned for the escape of 63 prisoners from the Political Security prison in Mukalla, including some members of AQAP, but Saleh's former regime is also accused of being behind the escape of those prisoners<sup>(2)</sup>.

On 19 and 25 August 2010, the Yemeni Army launched a major offensive in the city of Lauder in Abyan, controlled by al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula, killing a number of al-Qaeda operatives, including local leaders of al-Qaeda, but operations against al-Qaeda were paralyzed when Saleh's regime started to hand over cities to al-Qaeda to influence the Popular Youth Revolution.

After the overthrow of Saleh and the election of his

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deputy AbdRabbo Mansour Hadi as president of Yemen under the power transfer agreement in 2012, the Yemeni Army launched an attack against militants of both Ansar al-Sharia and al-Qaeda in Abyan in order to restore the cities that were under the control of the armed groups, especially Zinjibar. The attack began in May 12, 2012 to restore all Abyan areas that were out of the state's control. The fighting continued until the liberation of Zinjibar was declared. During the fighting, 567 people were killed, including 429 members of the AQAP organization, 78 soldiers, 26 tribal fighters and 34 civilians <sup>(3)</sup>.

### **Second: After the Start of Military Operations of the Arab Coalition**

The military forces of the Arab Coalition entered Aden in July 2015 but were busy with fighting against the Houthis and securing the southern coastal governorate, which lasted about nine months in a row, during which al-Qaeda carried out several attacks targeting the Yemeni government and Yemeni officials. When the Yemeni authorities and the Arab Coalition focused on defeating the Houthis and former President Ali Abdullah Saleh, the terrorist

groups moved freely and took over the directorates of Aden where inhabitants could see al-Qaeda militants on the streets and inside the government institutions. The directorate of Mansoura, central Aden, is one of the areas that have seen a significant activity of al-Qaeda elements since July 2015 and became a major stronghold of al-Qaeda. The AQAP organization invested the killing of resistance leader Ahmed Idrissi in December 2015 to expand its activity and transformed Al-Mansoura into a closed military zone until April 2016 when the Yemeni forces could clear the area of the organization's presence <sup>(4)</sup>.

In July 2016, the organization launched an attack on the Sawlaban military camp in Aden, but another military campaign managed to liberate it after the organization took control of the camp and surrounded it from all sides.

The government announced a plan to eliminate the cells of the organization in Aden after al-Qaeda took control of a number of neighborhoods in the temporary capital and implemented daily assassinations that exceeded 30 operations in January 2016. It also targeted intelligence officers



**It is assumed that AQAP planned for the escape of 63 prisoners from the Political Security prison in Mukalla, including some members of AQAP, but Saleh's former regime is also accused of being behind the escape of those prisoners**



and judges, and reached to the Presidential Palace, and before that al-Qaeda attacked the headquarters of the government in the city. It also assassinated the former governor of Aden, who was killed with his bodyguards in a suicide bombing attack - the Islamic State (IS) claimed responsibility for the assassination<sup>(5)</sup>. This operation was followed by a military operation by the government Army to liberate al-Mukalla, the capital of Hadramout, eastern Yemen, from the AQAP organization. Late in April 2016, the operation succeeded to enter al-Mukalla city without resistance. At the same time, a parallel operation was launched to liberate Lahj governorate. On April 15, 2016, the government forces could liberate "al-Houta," the capital of Lahj. According to military sources, the AQAP elements fled to rural areas. A military operation also moved towards Abyan, southern Yemen, and freed several districts from al-Qaeda in August 2016, and then in Al-Dalea and Shabwa. In Taiz (central Yemen), the AQAP organization expanded in areas that were liberated from the Houthis. Although the AQAP organization was present in the southern governorates even before military operations of the Arab Coalition,

even in al-Dalea, but the presence of supporters of the organization in the governorate of Taiz was a dangerous precedent as the popular incubator of al-Qaeda in Taiz is almost non-existent.

This paper tries to read two important cases of al-Qaeda in the governorates of Shabwa and Taiz. The military operation in Shabwa governorate, announced in August 2017, provides a broader concept of the campaigns against the organization after military operations or al-Qaeda expansion, it is being discussed for its update. In addition to the presence of the organization in Taiz, and how it found an incubator on the path of confrontation with the Houthis before engaging actively in the organization and adopting the idea of jihad, the paper concludes by presenting the results and mistakes of the campaign in Shabwa and supporting the organization in Taiz governorate.

### Operations in Shabwa

On August 3, 2017, the UAE military announced the launch of a military operation against al-Qaeda in Shabwa to be carried out by the Abu Dhabi elite forces that were trained by Abu Dhabi with the participation of US forces. With the launch of the operation, media



said that elements of the AQAP organization withdrew to the mountains after the advance of these forces. The Shabwa operation repeats the scenario of the restoration of the capital of Hadramout, Mukalla, from the jihadist organization in April 2016, which resulted in the deaths of 800 elements within hours without the occurrence of battles or finding the bodies of those extremists <sup>(6)</sup>.

US drone has been flying periodically over Shabwa since the start of military operations (March, 2015), targeting dozens of elements and even leaders. This shows a significant activity for the organization that engages in a strong tribal environment, but certainly not enough.

The US Defense Department confirmed the participation of its forces in Yemen alongside with the UAE, but said the support was intelligence and logistical as well as a small ground force. But it did not rule out sending more troops to Yemen <sup>(7)</sup>.

It is noteworthy that this declaration- the start of military operation in Shabwa- was not from the Yemeni General Staff, which is supposed to be the main engine of the process, not in the name of the Arab Coalition, the partner with the internationally recognized government. It is clear that the announcement came from the UAE Army alone. The Pentagon confirmed the operation without even mentioning coordination with the Yemeni government. The statement issued by the UAE Army refers to several key points:

- A) The Shabwani elite force consists of tribesmen from Shabwa governorate
- B) The force received training from UAE forces
- C) will keep security in Shabwa governorate and confront the organization in the tribal areas

- D) The American presence in the process
- E) The military operation began against al-Qaeda
- F) Al-Qaeda fled from Mukalla towards Shabwa governorate
- G) The Shabwani elite force emerged for the first time via the deployment along the oil pipelines area in Shabwa in August 2016, and the next deployment was in the same month in 2017. The force is estimated at 2500 fighters, mostly tribesmen.

Points should be noted about the “Shabwani elite force”:

- 1) It is not subject to the authority of the Yemeni government or the Ministry of Defense, or the local authority in Shabwa but to the UAE leadership alone. The most prominent observation is that the military operation was not announced by any Yemeni entity.
- 2) Its fighters were recruited from some «selected» tribes and their deployment in other tribes to impose security may make the tribes clash with the «Shabwani elite force» as the criterion of recruitment was tribal, as indicated by the UAE Army statement. The recruitment included the tribes of Al-Wahidi, Bilabid, Bani Hilal and Belhareth in the districts of (Rezum, Mayfaah, Rawdah, Habban, Ataq, Markha al-Sufla, Osailan, Jordan, Arma, Dahr and al-Talh), while the tribes of al-Awalik (al-Saeed, Nesab, and Hateeb) were excluded. The tribes of al-Mesabain (Bayhan Al-Olya, Ayn) were also excluded, in addition to the directorate of Markha al-Olya, which was affiliated to Al-Bayda until 2002.
- 3) Since the recruitment into the militias, the army and Shabwa elite force is restricted to the Shabwa

governorate only, this force is regional and promotes the identity struggle and the division of the country. The ideology of this force is not based on a comprehensive national identity, so the state will face a complicated stage after the completion of the current crisis.

- 4) This force has been deployed in the oil and commercial areas, oil companies in the governorate, the gas fields, the centers of directorates and the headquarters of the local authorities. The aim of confronting al-Qaeda elements (hiding in the valleys, mountains and caves) is used just as a cover for the extension of Abu Dhabi power to these areas to manage those districts and the governorate of Shabwa.
- 5) The remaining of these forces outside the control of the Yemeni state may trigger clashes between tribes and government forces and these forces or

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between the elite force and tribes of Shabwa that reject the presence of the elite force in their areas.

This serves Al-Qaeda.

- 6) It is clear that the United States still relies on the UAE intelligence, despite the secret prisons <sup>(8)</sup>, and this encouraged US to be involved in Abu Dhabi plan to control the oil and gas fields, with Washington's awareness or unawareness of the real objectives of Abu Dhabi.

The Abaad Center for Studies and Research continued to observe the military operation against al-Qaeda in Shabwa for 30 days, since the beginning of the military movement, and reached the following result:

- There was no a real military operation against the AQAP organization and there were no clashes and direct confrontations with cells of the organization.
- After the arrival of this force, there was a campaign of demonization against tribes of "Al-Awalik", "Musabeen" and the sons of the directorate of Markha al-Olya that used to belong to al-Bayda before the administrative division in 2002, followed by a wide targeting of the people of these tribes. Human rights organizations say that only two days after the military operation was announced, the Shabwani elite force arrested Nasser bin Shafr al-Awlaki along with his family and relatives and took them in a helicopter to Balhaf in Dhawaran area, where the LNG exporting port is located, the main place for UAE activity <sup>(9)</sup>.

On August 8, the Shabwani elite force also raided the home of Hamza Mohammed Abdullah Fareed al-Awlaki in Ataq and arrested him and took him by a

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helicopter to the Balhaf area <sup>(10)</sup>.

- The Shabwani elite force activity focuses on the spread in the public utilities, the port of Balhaf and the protection of oil companies operating in the region, in addition to expanding the spread in areas mostly urban areas in the central districts.
- The activity of the «Shabwani elite force» focused on activities related to the government, such as giving the authorization to commander of those forces to restore the operation of the Balhaf port and restart the power station <sup>(11)</sup>.
- The activity of "Shabwani elite force" focused on chasing and detaining those who are believed to be associated with the political Islam in the governorate.

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**UAE fears that the Islah party may take control of Taiz pushed UAE to depend upon extremist Salafi militias that were infiltrated by Al-Qaeda to carry out assassinations and shrines bombing**

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- Chasing and arresting «popular singers and artists», as in the case of kidnapping the popular singer Fahd Saleh Mohammed Dian al-Awlaki, from the directorate of Markha in Khoura district of Shabwa.
- The Shabwani elite force is regularly accused by human rights organizations of being «contemptuous of law and human rights» <sup>(12)</sup>.

### **Al-Qaeda in Taiz**

The new occurrence is the existence of al-Qaeda in the governorate of Taiz as it has never existed and had weapons and carried out operations before. Although al-Qaeda was individually present in Taiz in 2011, it remained idle throughout that period. After the launch of the Arab Coalition's Decisive Storm, the organization appeared to be active in the fighting

against the Houthi militia and forces loyal to former president Ali Abdullah Saleh and gained a wide influence. Al-Qaeda appeared in Taiz when it claimed responsibility for the killing of the American citizen, Joel Sharm, in the city in 2012. Early in 2017, the US State Department announced \$ 5 million as award for any information about the American death <sup>(13)</sup>.

The organization's activities were verified to spread, recruitment and implementing some assassinations and suicide bombings and the bombing of shrines. The most prominent operations were the bombing of the shrine of Prophet Shoaib in August 2015 in the Jabal Sabr area, south of Taiz, and the bombing of the shrine of Wali Abdullah al-Tafil in the same month in Thoabat area, east of the city. The tomb of Sheikh Al-Khulani, west of Taiz, was also destroyed in November 2015 <sup>(14)</sup>.

The reason for the spreading of jihad organizations in Taiz is the serious mistake committed by the Yemeni government and the Arab Coalition, where extremist elements and groups were accepted to join the resistance against the Houthis under the justification: "the aims justify the means." In addition to fears of the United Arab Emirates that fighters associated to the Yemeni Islah party may completely lead confrontations with the Houthis.

In May 2017, the organization announced the establishment of an intellectual competition for the people of the city on the occasion of the Holy Month of Ramadan. Militants from the organization roamed the streets of the city of Taiz and distributed posters bearing the conditions of the competition and a list of prizes distributed between «weapons and computers»<sup>(15)</sup>.

### Abu Al-Abbas Brigades

Abu al-Abbas Brigades represent al-Qaeda in the Yemeni governorate of Taiz based on several ways to reach the organization - for new recruits. First: engaging in the battalions as a part of the popular resistance and then, after being trusted and filled with jihad ideology, they move to another stage within the attraction process of al-Qaeda.

This became clear through the existence of al-Qaeda cells in Taiz in the Brigades of Abu Abbas, that are run by (Adel Faree), namely: «The gang of truth», led by Radwan al-Odaini, and the Farouk Brigade, led by Moamen al-Mekhlafi, and the brigades in general, led by “Abu Abbas” himself. Some of them joined the Islamic state organization (Daesh) - a volatile entity that does not have a specific identity or influence areas, but many sources talk about its presence; and other terrorists joined the so-called “Ansar al-Sharia” - the state of Taiz, that is one of the branches of the AQAP organization and it is present in the same governorates where Al-Qaeda exists.

Abu Al-Abas Brigades is considered to be the stage of preparation and rehabilitation for al-Qaeda in Taiz through winning the legitimacy of resistance, the freedom of movement and mixing with people of various components for the purpose of attracting them to the organization. In order to show their influence, AQAP elements move on motorbikes and in vehicles in some streets and old zones of the city, raising the slogans of al-Qaeda and IS. They sometimes wear the Afghani dress and take photos for publishing. They also targeted most of former PSO officers (the Yemeni intelligence apparatus) as revenge for the past when several of them were detained, and

threatened security and military officers who were trying to perform their duties at their work stations <sup>(16)</sup>.

### The emergence and their areas:

As the people of the city began to confront the Houthis who came from Sana'a as part of their expansion, al-Qaeda figures (Ansar al-Sharia) began to move early in the Republican Zone, the old city of Taiz and parts of Al-Jahmaliya (east of the city). These geographical areas- with population density- have a demographical nature that is suitable for al-Qaeda expansion as the majority of population in those areas is loyal to former president Ali Abdullah Saleh. There is also a dispersal of gangs and Salafi centers. In addition, these areas can be closed from the south easily to secure them and carry out operations due to their narrow streets and the convergence of buildings.

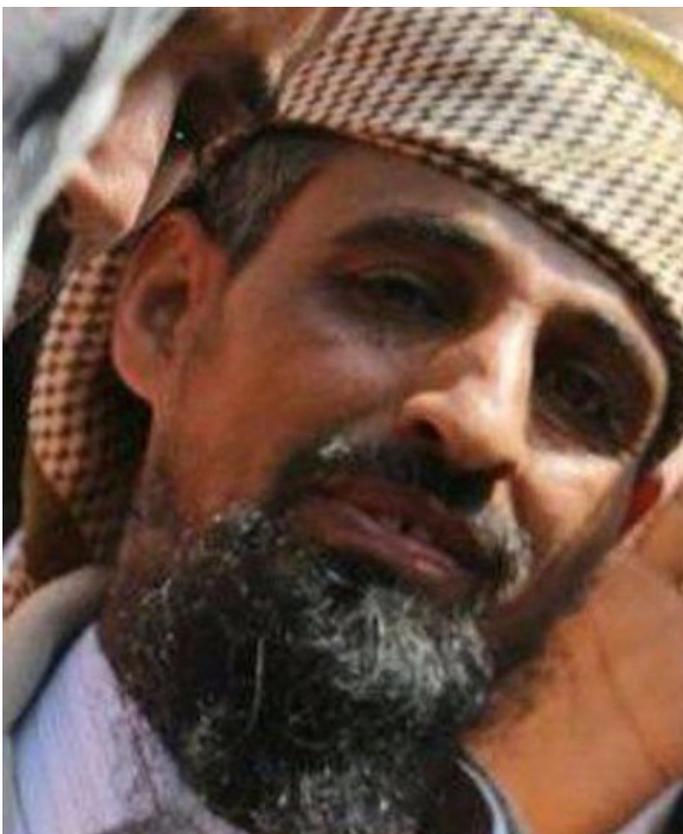
»  
**The new occurrence is the existence of al-Qaeda in Taiz as it has never existed and had weapons and carried out operations before. Although al-Qaeda was individually present in Taiz in 2011, it remained idle throughout that period**  
»

These elements found that the name of the Salafist resistance, led by Adel Farea, who is called Abu Al-Abbas, and others a good cover that gave them an opportunity to follow and hide under it at the same time. Because of their combating experience they obtained and their ability to plan for battles, compared to youth who joined the resistance to defend the city and confront the Houthis and forces loyal to them, many young people were impressed by them and they gained the sympathy of many people. From this point, al-Qaeda began the process of winning new elements with enthusiasm and rush as they considered battles between Shiites and Sunnis as religious, not political, because of the ideological feeding of Salafism from the beginning.

The organization was able by its newly incorporated elements to deploy in the fighting fronts and obtain

financial resources by looting banks and shops before they got support from the UAE. Their first invasions were against the branch of the Yemeni Bank for Reconstruction and Development <sup>(17)</sup>, and imposed levies on the merchants and began to pay for their associates more than the rest of members of the popular resistance on various fronts. In a statement during a mass festival, Abu al-Abbas said: «There is nothing wrong with obtaining the money of banks as the money belong to Muslims and go to jihad»<sup>(18)</sup>. They also began to attract those who sympathized with their ideology and were angry with the Houthis or have personal grievances, giving them the opportunity to announce themselves and to take Souk al-Sameel area, after liberating it from the Houthis, as a location to manage their movements <sup>(19)</sup>.

The real resistance continued to form and announced



»  
**In a statement during a mass festival, Abu al-Abbas said:**

**«There is nothing wrong with obtaining the money from banks as the money belong to Muslims and go to jihad»**

»

the establishment of a unified council of resistance and the Military Council, and the National Army began to rearrange its ranks. Despite this step, the official support of the Arab Coalition and the legitimacy to the National Army and resistance in Taiz was delayed while a parallel support from Abu Dhabi and Gulf figures and merchants to the Salafi trend continued to flow as they used to do in different areas of the conflict. As the funds flowed, elements of various trends also flowed and jihadists infiltrated to fight under the pretext of resisting the Rawafid (Shiite Houthis), so the organization began to expand and increase its popularity to become the richest and biggest among other resistance factions.

#### Targeting Strategic Areas:

According to journalists and politicians who spoke to Abaad Center <sup>(20)</sup>, what is certain is that al-Qaeda has not a specific battlefield in Taiz to fight regularly against the Houthis and Saleh's forces. Members of al-Qaeda suddenly appear during the battles erupt from time to time, wearing Afghani dress, and extending influence in any liberated area if it has a strategic importance.

The elements of the organization insist on the presence in the important places of the city and

»  
**These elements found that the name of the Salafist resistance, led by Adel Farea, who is called Abu Al-Abbas, and others a good cover that gave them an opportunity to follow and hide under it at the same time**  
»

checkpoints. For example, they rent apartments in different parts of the city and join individuals affiliated to Abu Abbas who center in the southern region at the foot of Sabr Mountain, stretching from the Jabal Al-Aswad Mountain, that is overlooking Al-Saleh Gardens, through Aqaqah area and hills that are overlooking the University of Taiz, and then Seenah, Al-Sawani, Al-Jumhori, Al-Noqtah Al-Rabe zone, Al-Jahmaliah zone, and Al-Askari, in addition to Al-Nasiriah, the old city of Taiz, 26 September Street



zone, Al-Janad Hotel zone, Al-Maliah zone, and Souk al-Sameel).

The fighters, dressed in Afghani uniforms, are always on orders from Abu al-Abbas and emerged during his recent surprise control of the Political Security Department (second half of 2017), Al-Qahira Castle, and the Security Administration in Taiz after differences between Abu al-Abbas and gunmen led by a young man called Ghazwan al-Mikhlafi.

At various times and for multiple reasons - most of them were fabricated or plotted by other parties-members of the organization (affiliated to Abu al-Abbas) used to close a specific area for a sudden deployment of their groups as a training on breaking into neighborhoods and buildings. These moves have been repeated more than once in more than one place in the center of the city. Every time they do so, they target a broader area <sup>(21)</sup>.

The Abu al-Abbas organization receives a huge financial support, which has contributed to the

strengthening of the status of his fighters in light of the interruption of salaries <sup>(22)</sup> and the deterioration of the living situation in the city as a result of the siege imposed by the Houthis. Their financial capabilities, which other factions of the popular resistance do not enjoy, enabled Abu al-Abbas group to attract a number of people in the resistance and the National Army. They formed a safe haven for any forsaken one, who was not accepted in the Army for whatever reason, or those who committed crimes and were rejected to join any faction or brigade <sup>(23)</sup>.

In view of the Table (1), we note that Ansar al-Shariah and the Islamic State Organization focus on the collection of weapons from battlefields and storing them, and carrying out their own operations. In addition, their areas are considered to be places for the manufacture of explosives and for training new members.

The table (1) demonstrates the extremist groups that are under the control of Abu al-Abbas

| Faction               | Number  | Leaders  | Place of presence   |
|-----------------------|---|--|---|
| Ansar al-Sharia       | Less than 100   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Ibrahim A., General Supervisor</li> <li>- Abu Abdulrahman al-Adani, Emir of Taiz state</li> <li>- Marwan R., Deputy Emir</li> <li>- Abu al-Shohada'a (father of martyrs)- his name is unknown</li> <li>Financial Chief and responsible for the file of deaths and injuries</li> <li>- Talal A.</li> <li>- Leader of Thoabat groups</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- al-Akama and Souk al-Sameel</li> <li>Contains laboratories for making explosives and training center</li> <li>The fronts where they fight are:<br/>Thoabat and Jahmalia al-Oliya</li> <li>• They widely infiltrated Abu al-Abbas groups and battalions of Decisive Movement (Jihadist Salafis) and work through them</li> </ul>  |
| Islamic State (Daesh) | On the process to be established and they are a few numbers compared to others, less than 30 elements | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Ahmed. S</li> <li>- Belal W. (Abu Walid)</li> <li>- Two others recently joined them, Harith L. H. and Hamam al-Saudi, after they were dismissed from Ansar al-Sharia</li> </ul>   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Al-Janad Hotel</li> <li>- Salaat al-Malikah</li> <li>- Site in the al-Jumhori zone</li> <li>• They do not fight in a specific front but they are carrying out special operations.</li> <li>• They are accused of being behind most of the assassinations and attacks against the popular resistance and the National Army.</li> <li>• They collect weapons and do looting actions.</li> <li>• They have a weapons cache in al-Turbah, outside the city of Taiz.</li> </ul> |

The table (1)

## UAE Funding

In addition to the looting and levies that Abu Al-Abbas groups depend upon as a resource of funding, Abu Al-Abbas also receives an open funding from the United Arab Emirates. The report of the Security Council's Experts Committee indicates that Abu al-Abbas Brigades refused to join the Yemeni army; and that official forces, including the Hadrami elite force, the Shabwani elite force, and the forces of the security belt that are all supported and funded by the UAE - were not subject to the authority of the legitimate government <sup>(24)</sup>.

The report adds that the conflict in Taiz strengthened the role of Abu al-Abbas with the direct support from the UAE. During his struggle against the Houthis, Abu al-Abbas allowed the deployment of the AQAP operatives in Taiz to strengthen his forces and restrict the political influence of the Islah Party <sup>(25)</sup>.

Not only that, but Abu al-Abbas is the primary responsible for the support of the coalition in Taiz. «At one point in early 2016, I received an invitation from the Coalition leadership to visit them in Aden to discuss the military situation in Taiz,» said a senior resistance official. «When I arrived there, I met with the commander of the Coalition forces stationed in Aden, he is one of the UAE forces. I explained to him the military and material needs to move forward in the confrontation fronts in Taiz, but I was surprised with his reply as he asked me to return to Taiz and call him from there to talk to Abu al-Abbas, and he directed Abu al-Abbas to give us some urgent military supplies and other things <sup>(26)</sup>.» In November 2015, Abu al-Abbas announced the arrival of two UAE and Saudi battleships carrying weapons to liberate

Taiz<sup>(27)</sup>.

## The Campaign Mistakes and Results

The legitimate authorities and the Arab Coalition, specifically the United Arab Emirates, have committed serious mistakes related to combating terrorism in the liberated governorates, which can be summarized as follows:

- Secret prisons run by the UAE or an affiliate in the governorates of Aden and Mukalla. Human rights organizations say there are 18 secret prisons, in addition to a prison at an Emirati base at the port of Assab in Eritrea <sup>(28)</sup>. These prisons, which resemble the black sites of the American intelligence, and the brutal torture mentioned in the testimonies of prisoners, represent a breeding ground for jihadists and involvement in terrorist organizations for revenge.
- The United Arab Emirates recruited tribesmen (carefully selected) in the southern governorates to form the elite forces and the security belt, which was considered by other tribes as an assault against them. Therefore, the violations against al-Awalik tribes in Shabwa were a turning point from war on terrorism in the governorate to confronting the Yemeni tribe and attacking the Yemeni social structure, which in its role will cause permanent obstruction to the fight against terrorism.
- The declaration of war against al-Qaeda through the UAE armed forces is the beginning of the losing approach to fight al-Qaeda, so that the Pentagon itself ignored the mention of the Yemeni army! which means that this process is carried out outside the framework of the authority and the internationally recognized government.



**The unserious war against al-Qaeda in the southern governorates pushed them toward the north areas on border with Saudi Arabia. This could constitute (the hell borders), if the Houthis take control of the north-west outlets and al-Qaeda takes control of the north-east outlets on borders with Saudi Arabia**



- The UAE-run elite forces and the security belt, in addition that they were formed on a regional basis, they are run outside the framework of the Yemeni army, and are not subject to the management of the Yemeni government, but to the UAE. The suspicion that UAE has its own objectives, outside the objectives of the Arab Coalition, clearly appears via the military forces that UAE maintains, estimated up to 30,000 Yemeni fighters.
- Al-Qaeda has weapons that enable it to fight for several years, if there is a favorable environment and a popular incubator. This is possible in light of the failure of the United States and UAE to understand the nature and cohesion of the Yemeni tribes. In al-Bayda, for example, members of the organization fight along with popular forces against the Houthis (who are Shiite while al-Bayda tribes are Sunni), so the absence of support for resistance against the Houthis in those areas enables al-Qaeda to continue to deepen its roots.
- The mistakes of the US and the Arab Coalition raids enhance the motive of revenge for the Yemeni tribes. The bombing of the village of Yakla in al-Bayda, January 2017, provoked reprisals among the tribes. The killing of 47 people, mostly civilians (women and children), was a catastrophic ground operation for the future of counter-terrorism, and the biggest crime is that another operation killed civilians months later in an area between Shabwa and Marib.
- The unserious war against al-Qaeda in the southern governorates pushed them toward the north areas on border with Saudi Arabia. This could constitute (the hell borders), if the Houthis take control of the north-west outlets and al-Qaeda takes control of the north-east outlets on borders with Saudi Arabia.

## Margins

- (1) Al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP)». Counter Extremism Project.  
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- (2) The escape of 62 members of al-Qaeda from Mukalla prison  
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- (3) Yemen army seizes third city after Qaeda pullout  
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- (4) A large public satisfaction in Aden after the cleansing of Mansoura from Al-Qaeda elements - Yemen Press (82016/4/)  
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- (6) Abu Dhabi from «Mukalla» to «Shabwa» ..Objectives and Risks - Yemen Net (72017/8/)
- (7) US Troops Are on the Ground in Yemen for al-Qaeda Offensive – (42017/8/)  
<http://news.antiwar.com/201704/08//us-troops-are-on-the-ground-in-yemen-for-al-qaeda-offensive>
- (8) The American Associated Press and Human Rights Watch have revealed in two separate investigations in the southern Yemeni governorates the involvement of UAE forces or instructions from the UAE leadership to torture thousands of political detainees under the pretext of counter-terrorism in 18 detention centers, including some secret prisons and another at an Emirati base in Eritrea. The United States was accused of involvement in such investigations to get statements under torture.
- (9) Condemnation of the targeting of a Yemeni tribe by UAE-run forces - Al Jazeera Net (112017/8/)
- (10) Previous Source
- (11) Commander of the Shabwani forces, Khalid al-Azmi, statement to the American website Mashareq (152017/8/)  
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- (12) Statement from President of the Sam Organization, Nabil al-Baydani, Al Jazeera Net, the previous source
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- (14) Youth are a valuable fishing for “Da’ash” and “Al Qaeda” in Taiz - the New Arab (42017/4/)  
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- (19) According to politicians, journalists and leaders of the Popular Resistance to researchers at the Abaad Center in Taiz.
- (20) Politicians, journalists, and Popular Resistance leaders spoke to researchers at the Abaad Center between July and August 2017.
- (21) The testimony of local officials to the Abaad Center researchers in Taiz (July 2017)
- (22) The interruption of salaries since August 2016 has led to an increase in human tragedy in the Yemeni governorates.
- (23) Testimonies of leaders in the Popular Resistance to the researchers of the Abaad Center in Taiz (July 2017)
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- (25) UN Report: Saudi Arabia and the Emirates funding militias in Yemen - Al Jazeera Net (202017/8/)
- (26) Abu Al-Abbas.. The UAE Arm to Reproduce the Aden Experience in Taiz - The New Gulf (212017/5/)
- (27) Two Saudi and UAE battleships carrying weapons .. To resolve the battle of Taiz - Middle East (62015/11/)
- (28) To get information, Human Rights Watch and the Associated Press relied on the families of abductees and former abductees, who were in those prisons, as well as government officials. The Yemeni government formed a committee after the results of these investigations were published late in June 2017. Despite the committee determined two weeks to announce the results, no one of the results has been announced until today, 30 August 2017.



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