

**The Islamic State Organization (IS)..
The Search For The Land of Caliphate**

special file

Strategy Unit

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مركز أبعاد للدراسات والبحوث
Abaad Studies & Research Center



مركز أبعاد للدراسات والبحوث
Abaad Studies & Research Center



00967737887778



telegram.me/abaadstudies



@abaadstudies



Abaad Studies & Research Center



AbaadStudiesYemen

abaadyemen@gmail.com



abaadstudies@gmail.com

info@abaadstudies.org

www.abaadstudies.org

Abaad Studies & Research Center : About Us

Abaad Studies & Research Center (Abaad) is a non-profit organization that has a license from Yemen's Social Affairs Ministry No. (436) issued on October 18 2010.

focuses on politics, intellect, democracy, election, political parties, terrorism, freedoms as well as economic and social issues.

Introduction and methodology

This study attempts to clarify the ambiguous picture of the organization of the Islamic State in Yemen in terms of: originality, strength, empowerment and spheres of influence. It is the first specialized study on the organization and its activities in Yemen based on field research and follow up of the propaganda means of the organization.

The study begins with reference to the formation of the nucleus of the Islamic State since the decision of five leaders of the second row in Al-Qaeda, including Yemenis and Saudis, to communicate with the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria for the purpose of declaring an entity in Yemen, and the announcement of military operations in 11 provinces, and the limitation of the presence of the organization to a few sites in al-Bayda. The study also discusses battles between the Islamic State and al-Qaeda as well as the source of power of each organization separately and areas of influence.



The study consists of two papers: the first is entitled (Passaging to the state of the organization through the war-caused vacuum). This paper examines how the Islamic State can use the Iranian-backed Houthi coup against the internationally recognized president and staging war that has lured terrorist organizations and sectarian and regional calls to seek footholds in the country. The second paper (Daesh and the Holy War with al-Qaeda) discusses clashes between the Islamic State and al-Qaeda and how the two terrorist organizations exploit the local and regional warring parties.

The study is based on several methods in collecting and analyzing the information: the primary research team consists of field researchers from Al-Bayda. The team visited some areas in which the Islamic State tries to establish camps and met citizens and elders from tribes of those regions. The team also conducted interviews with military personnel who are familiar with the activity of the Al-Qaeda organization and the Islamic State in Yemen in general and the activity of the organizers in the region of Qaifa in the central province of al-Bayda in particular.

The Monitoring Unit in the Abaad Center for Studies and Researches has collected and analyzed information on the activity of the Islamic State and al-Qaeda organization in the past periods, in addition to the history of terrorist groups. The Unit also reviewed some studies, researches and articles related to the Islamic State in Yemen. The study presents an analysis to some speeches of the two organizations on social media, visual and written publications, including declarations by both organization about launching attacks against each other.

Daesh ... Passaging to the State of the Organization through War-caused Vacuum



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Introduction

The beginning of the Islamic State organization in Yemen dates back to 2014 when the organization's leader Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi declared that fighters in Yemen had pledged allegiance to him (an official oath of allegiance). At that time, the Islamic State was rapidly expanding throughout Iraq and Syria and got a wide popularity among Salafist and jihadist factions. Beginning in November 2014, a number of al-Qaeda operatives in the Arabian Peninsula split and joined the Islamic State in Yemen.

The split itself was new within al-Qaeda, pushing the organization to announce, in the same month (November 2014), its rejection of the declaration of Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi as a Caliph of Muslims. The leader in al-Qaeda, Harith al-Nathari, who was later killed, announced that the Islamic State is a jihadist group and that the Declaration of Caliphate did not meet the necessary conditions, and therefore the declaration does not invalidate the legitimacy of other Islamic groups operating in the Yemeni arena. It appeared that the speech of al-Nathari was directed primarily to his supporters in Yemen before it was a response to al-Baghdadi's declaration.

It was a declaration of a state of tension between the two organizations, which has later developed into bloody clashes in the area of Qaifa in al-Bayda province of Yemen.

The Islamic State in Iraq and Syria was hit by the Washington-led international coalition. With the collapse of the organization in Iraq and Syria, Yemen, along with countries in the southeast of Asia and the Horn of Africa, is expected to be a homeland to the migration of the most dangerous members of Daesh in the world.

Establishment of the Islamic State:

The five leaders of the second row in Al-Qaeda organization, including Yemenis and Saudis, decided to communicate with the mother organization of the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria for the purpose of declaring an entity in Yemen. They are Nashwan al-Adani, Yemeni nationality, Abu Muhammad al-Najdi, Saudi nationality, Musab al-Jazrawi, Saudi nationality, Bilal al-Harbi, Saudi nationality, Okasha al-Adani, Yemeni nationality.

The meeting of the five leaders discussed the establishment of a branch of Caliphate in Yemen.

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Bilal al-Harbi continued to communicate with Saudis, whom he knows that they carry out organizational activities within the Islamic state organization in Iraq in order to adopt the five leaders as a branch of the organization in Yemen. In addition, Radwan Mohammad Qanan was sent to Syria to meet with the organization's officials and to present "loyalty" to Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi. The organization's branch in Yemen was approved by the end of 2014.

The Islamic State Organization officially announced its presence in Yemen in March 2015 in a high-tech video record that was spread over social media¹ and via an operation that targeted two mosques in Sana'a and killed more than 145 people. The Sana'a-based Islamic state claimed responsibility for the operation².

After the declaration, the organization of the Islamic state in Iraq and Syria has become at the height of its power and this reflected on the emergence of its branch in Yemen strongly, despite its modest size and limited supporters who split from al-Qaeda.

This emergence encouraged the Islamic state in Yemen to open training camps to receive fighters. The most prominent camps included "Abu Ahmad al-Saeedi Shelter" in the "al-Saeed" area of the province of Shabwa, the "Abu Ali al-Shaibah Shelter" in the area of "al-Raida" in the same province. The organization also opened training camps in Hadramout governorate where Abu Karam al-Hadrami was as a general coordinator. The organization also opened a training camp in Lahj, but it was later moved to Yafe.

Since the start of the process of mobilization

and the formation of the first nucleus of the Islamic state organization, the Saudi members have been controlling the decision on the movements of the organization, the combat projects and planning the expected operations because Saudi leaders have expertise in technical aspects, armament and planning. They also have the ability to find sources of finance and enjoy a broad relationship with the leaders of the Islamic state organization in Iraq and Syria. This has made the Yemeni leadership only a cover for the movements of Saudi leaders and an interface to establish camps and gain more fighters.



The Organization Leaders

Former leader in Al-Qaeda Abu Hamza al-Zanjubari tried to establish a leadership for the Islamic state, which began with recording a video of the execution of 14 soldiers in a manner similar to the brutality of the organization. In early 2015, he tried to gather 200 members of his camp at Wadi Dassar in Hadramout to announce his leadership of the organization, but he entered into disputes with al-Qaeda, which attacked him and killed about 15 of his followers, before the government forces attack them and regain control of this area. Al-Zanjubari fled away with the rest of his followers until he was killed in a US drone raid on Thursday, February 4, 2016³. "Radwan Qanan", this name raises many question marks, where he is believed to be the Emir of the organization in southern Yemen, believed to be the Emir of the organization in Aden only.

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On September 29, 2016, the Aden police announced that they had arrested him in a quality operation under the direct supervision of the Arab Coalition, after raiding his home in the Sira area of Crater in the Yemeni interim capital of Aden. A store of explosives was seized including TNT, explosive belts, remote detonators, medium weapons and large quantities of mortars and various types of detonators⁴.

But the man appeared on the list of US terrorism as "regional field commander of the Islamic state organization, south of Yemen, as of mid-2017."⁵ A Saudi newspaper reported that "Qanan" was killed in an air attack on elements of the organization in the city of Zanjibar⁶.

In terms of the positions within the organization, Abu Bilal al-Harbi appears as the spiritual father of the organization and the supreme commander as any decision or operation cannot be taken or carried out without his consent. Abu Bilal al-Harbi "Nasser Mohammed Awad al-Ghaidan al-Harbi, who was born in al-Qaseem on September 1974." In addition to al-Harbi, there is a leader named Musab al-Azdi, who has an administrative post that intervenes in all areas, in addition to security leader Abu Muhammad al-Najdi, a security official with an extensive control within the organization. They are Saudi nationalities.

The killing of "Abu Bilal al-Harbi" in a crackdown in the city of Mukalla in mid-2017 was a blow to the organization, which did not announce his death but a established camp in al-Bayda and named it "al-Harbi." The organization, like Al-Qaeda or the Islamic state, usually does give a name of a leader to a camp only in the event of his death.

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Since then, "Abu Sulaiman," Nashwan al-Adani, was the leader of the Islamic State. He is considered a member of the "Shariah Committee" in the organization besides al-Azadi and al-Najdi. These figures in the organization currently manage the administrative and military affairs (February 2019), in addition to the military commander of the organization Khaled Al-Marfidi.

He is a former mufti of the Southern Movement. He was a former fighter in Pakistan and Afghanistan and spent years in the US detention camp at Guantanamo. He joined the Islamic state in 2016 and became responsible for armament, car bombs and planning for assassinations against Yemeni officials in Aden.

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The Organization Strategy

With its announcement of its first operation in March 2015, the state in Yemen was collapsed by the Iran-backed coup of the Houthis against the internationally recognized authority. As the fighting intensified and the Arab Coalition was fighting against the Houthi coup, the organizations - like al-Qaeda and the Islamic State- tried to exploit the state of chaos to build training camps and recruit new fighters in their ranks. The Islamic state began to announce operations against al-Houthis to gain local sympathy, similar to its operations against "Shiites" in Iraq. Indeed, the speech of the organization in its first days (March-April 2015) comparing the Houthis to the Shiite militias in Iraq, did not push the people to sympathize with the Islamic State, but raised the concerns of the Yemenis, as the case of sorting the Yemeni society on sectarian bases has never got roots as happened in Iraq.

In the next three months, the Islamic state organization announced operations in 11 provinces, confirming its presence in seven states by launching small-scale attacks in the governorates of Lahj, Aden, Abyan, Shabwa, Saada, Sana'a, Ibb, Taiz, Jouf, Al-Bayda and Hadhramaut⁷. Al-Qaeda and the Islamic state took advantage of the chaos in the country when the Houthis controlled Aden airport and the air base, and the sudden withdrawal of forces loyal to the late President Ali Abdullah Saleh from the government camps, and took over the city of Mukalla in eastern Yemen on April 2, 2015 without fighting, and nearly 300 prisoners were released from a nearby prison⁸. The organization also said it attacked a government checkpoint in Hadramout and issued a video showing the execution of 15 Yemeni soldiers in Shabwa province on April 30, 2015⁹.

From what is mentioned so far, it is clear that the strategy of the Islamic state regulation was based on:

- Filling the vacuum and gaining a foothold in the Yemeni provinces, "Central" and "East", taking advantage of the collapse of the state and the fear of Yemenis from the Houthi sectarian influence.
- Its "cruelty" and the use of violence, including brutal executions by firing "RPGs" at soldiers, or slaughtering with knives.
- Sectarian sorting in an attempt to reproduce the Iraqi experience, although sectarianism is not the core of the dispute in Yemen and it has never suffered sectarian wars in the modern history.
- The competition to control "Sunni areas" with al-Qaeda, and the state of war between the two international organizations reflected on Yemen.

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In its strategy, the Islamic State has depended upon filling the war-caused vacuum, exploiting the collapse of the state after the coup, and upon its brutal methods and sectarian sorting
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The strategy of the Islamic state reflected negatively on the organization. Some Yemeni members of the organization have rejected this strategy and eventually led to a split from it and a return to al-Qaeda.

Presence areas

The organization of the Islamic state in Yemen is still limited, despite the size of its media propaganda. The presence of the organization retracted after the original organization lost its areas in Iraq and Syria and the failure of the "Caliphate" project, the idea that was more attractive.

Contrary to what was expected about the emigration of members of the original organization to Yemen, there was no any significant change in the activity of the organization in the country and its way of combat over the past two years.

The organization of the Islamic state is keen to be in the areas of al-Qaeda to benefit from the social incubator that was established by al-Qaeda for years to support the jihadist ideology. In a time when al-Qaeda was in control of the city of Mukalla (April 2015 to April 2016)

the Islamic state organization got safe shelters in Mukalla. When Al-Qaeda left Mukalla, the Islamic state did the same.

Between 2015 and 2016, al-Qaeda and the Islamic state were present in Aden, Yemen's interim capital, and launched major operations against the Yemeni government. The government announced a plan to eliminate the cells of the organization in Aden after the organization controlled a number of neighborhoods of the interim capital, Aden, and carried out daily assassinations that exceeded 30 operations in January 2016 that targeted intelligence officers and judges, and reached the Presidential Palace. Earlier, it targeted the government's interim headquarters in Aden and targeted the former governor of Aden, who was killed with his bodyguards in a suicide attack. The Islamic state organization claimed responsibility¹⁰.

However, intensive campaigns against the organization pushed it to depart. Early in 2017, the organization moved to rural areas of "Yafe", taking advantage of the role of military leader of the organization Khalid al-Marfidi, who was a Mufti in the Southern Movement. He descended from the same city and has supporters. After that the organization moved to Qaifa in Rada'a of Al-Bayda governorate.

In Taiz, the al-Qaeda and the Islamic state organizations are not exist. Although some individual events took place in the city in 2011, they were not attributed to an organization that conducts operations and appears before people. The situation changed in 2015.

The battalions of Abu al-Abbas, a body sponsored by the United Arab Emirates that provided it with weapons, ammunition and money, have become a cover for members of al-Qaeda and the Islamic state. The battalions have become an interface for both organizations for attraction and recruitment. New members join the battalions of Abu al-Abbas as a resistance against the Houthis but then, after new members become satisfied with the thought of 'Jihad', they are moved to another stage within the polarization of Al- Qaeda. And then loyalists to the Islamic state, within the ranks of Abu Abbas, recruit the new members in favor of the organization of the Islamic state.



Sources pointed out that the Islamic State in Taiz is still fluctuating without a specific identity or areas of influence, but many sources talked about its existence and that the number of its members reaches 30 elements, led by Bilal al-Wafi called Abu al-Walid. In addition to Hamam al-Saudi who joined them in 2017, after he was dismissed from al-Qaeda. Most of assassinations against the popular resistance and the National Army have been attributed to them. They collected weapons and practiced looting and robbery. They used to have a weapons storeroom in al-Turbah area, outside the city of Taiz¹¹. But information indicates that the Islamic State's member moved, with their weapons, to Qaifa in al-Bayda.

The beginning of the existence of the Islamic state organization in Al-Bayda

The first nucleus of the organization was in al-Had area of Lahj, which is adjacent to the province of al-Bayda, from the south-west, but the liberation of Lahj from the Houthis pushed the organization to move to al-Zaher of al-Bayda- Al Humeikan to locate there instead of al-Had. The Al Humeikan tribes, located 25 km from the city of Al-Bayda, joined the popular resistance and considered that the presence of armed groups in the Zaher, such as al-Qaeda or the Islamic state organization, might make them lose a lot of sympathy inside and outside Yemen and lose their sacrifices against the Houthis. So they decided to expel all terrorist organizations from al-Zaher. These organizations responded to the decision of the tribes and looked for other safe places and social incubators¹².

As a result, the leader of the organization, Khalid al-Marfidi, former leader of al-Qaeda, had to search for elsewhere. He and field commander Abu Abdullah al-Marfidi and a number of members, mostly from southern governorates, moved to Yakla area of the Sheriya district in Al-Bayda governorate. After the security campaign in Taiz between 2017 and 2018, a number of members of the terrorist organizations, some of them are affiliated with the organization of the Islamic state resorted to the area of Yakla, among them was the leader Abu Habib al-Taezi.

According to tribal leaders who are familiar with the composition of the Islamic state organization, most members of the organization are: ¹³

- Al-Qaeda militants
- Former prisoners and victims of the Houthi war, especially from the southern provinces

- Former soldiers of the Republican Guard, Central Security and National Security units of former president Ali Saleh, some out of revenge, some for guidance, control and espionage, and some are arms dealers.

- Unemployed youth were attracted, mostly from the directorates of the province of Al-Bayda.

Following the route of the organization's members from the north to Al-Bayda, they pass through Dhamar province, which is under the control of the Houthis, through the Ans area, to the Yakla area without any objection from the Houthis.

On February 25, 2017, the Islamic state organization fought its first battles with the Houthis in the province of Al-Bayda Bayda and managed to control the mountain (Hamat Likah), a very important strategic location.

The operation was quick and swift and did not receive any resistance from the Houthis or an attempt by the Houthis to restore the mountain, but the Houthis withdrew to another site opposite to Hamat Likah.

By taking control of the strategic mountain, the organization of the Islamic state gained a presence in the region with the possibility of recruiting members of al-Qaeda to join the Islamic state. The organization tried to present itself to the tribes in Qaifa with its ability to expel the Houthis from the three districts (Walad Rabie, Qarishiya and Rada'a).

During 2017, the organization was busy with training and building camps in the three directorates. The organization broadcast videos showing the strength of the organization and its expansion.

The videos have shown a few dozens of members in the camps. The organization managed to exaggerate about its presence despite its presence was limited. In October 17, 2017, an aircraft, believed to be an American, bombarded the Islamic state-controlled sites with 12 rockets. The Pentagon said that it targeted training sites for "Daesh" and killed dozens. But residents in neighboring areas said the raids did not kill elements of the Islamic state. The United States relies on intelligence from the United Arab Emirates to fight terror organizations in Yemen. The US strikes did not weaken the organization of the Islamic state, but later confrontations between the Islamic state and al-Qaeda depleted the Islamic state and thwarted many of its schemes in a geographical area with complex terrain.

The weapon of Daesh

The Islamic state, called "Daesh," emerged when the Houthis invaded Sana'a in 2014, caused the collapse of the Yemeni state and controlled the country and waged its internal wars against the internationally recognized legitimate government.

Before the invasion of Amran in July 2014,

and after the invasion of the capital Sana'a in September 2014, until the full coup against the legitimate authority and expanding to the rest of the northern provinces and launching war on the southern provinces in mid-March 2015; the Houthis had marketed its war against the state under the pretext of "war on Daesh"! ¹⁴

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The Houthis market themselves as participants in the war on terror in light of the collapse of the state institutions- similar to the Emirati model of forming militia in southern Yemen under the pretext of fighting terror.

As a militant group opposed to the ideology of both al-Qaeda and the Islamic state, the Houthi group is seen as attractive to the outside community, but in fact, it is pushing the local communities to sympathize with al-Qaeda, which presents itself as an enemy of the Houthis and the Islamic state, as happened in al-Bayda.

The Houthi armed group does not refer to the organization of the Islamic state in its own war, but promotes that all its opponents are "Daesh"! This is the slogan of the Houthi campaign since 2014 until today. They describe all those who oppose it as Daesh members, including the internationally recognized authorities.

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Why does the Islamic state organization fail?!

Al-Qaeda appears to be less violent in order to approach society at the expense of the brutality shown by the Islamic state organization, believing that this will undermine the Islamic state in Yemen and enable it to achieve gains on the ground later. Al-Qaeda in Yemen is the most dangerous branch of al-Qaeda in other countries as it enjoys flexibility to win the popular incubator.

In 2013, al-Qaeda apologized for its attack on a military hospital in Sana'a and killed 52 people.

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Al-Qaeda appears to be less violent in order to approach society at the expense of the brutality of the Islamic State, which makes it so difficult for the Islamic State to find a social incubator
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Since then, al-Qaeda has been more strategic about the targets it attacks. He has repeatedly condemned the Islamic state operations in Aden, including the attack on soldiers during the receipt of their salaries in 2017 and the killing of more than 100 recruits.

The radical understanding of Islam and indiscriminate violence of the Islamic state, makes it more difficult for it to get an incubator in the tribal areas. Unlike al-Qaeda, the Islamic state is unlikely to modify its ideology or tactics, so it loses many factors of its existence. In its criticism of al-Qaeda in Yemen, the Islamic state accuses al-Qaeda of being a very moderate organization and not "Islamic" enough¹⁵.

Unlike al-Qaeda, the organization of the Islamic state puts the foreigners in the leadership, which confirms their lack of understanding of the nature of Yemenis.

The Islamic state, with its small number of members, cannot withstand for a long time with the presence of the state that is fighting it, and it cannot implement simultaneous operations in several areas within the country. The Islamic state, which is still in the composition stage and has limited number of elements, does not have well-skilled elements in field of intelligence and internal systems, who are able detect spies, either the government intelligence services or the intelligence wing of al-Qaeda.

Weak armament, low funding and simple ability to innovate and plan for operations, force the Islamic state to retreat repeatedly.

The decision-making system within the Islamic state regulation, from top to bottom, is not flexible enough in the case of a new war campaign, so most members of the organization are gathered in one region. Unlike al-Qaeda, which gives broader powers to groups to make decisions and communicate with the leadership.



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- ¹⁵ Why Islamic State Has Failed to Expand in Yemen

Daesh and the Holy War with Al-Qaeda



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Introduction

The Yemeni geographic nature and the ruggedness of its terrains represented an attractive place for terrorist organizations, such as al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula and the Islamic State Organization (IS). Since the 1990s, mountains and population-free areas have been home to al-Qaeda fighters after they returned from Afghanistan.

Terrorist organizations often exploit security chaos and internal conflict to expand its influence. The subsequent phase of the Houthis' coup against the legitimate government was the best time for al-Qaeda to expand and the beginning of the Islamic State, known in media as 'Daesh'.

After September 2014, the two organizations were able to recruit new members. In fact, the Islamic State has already relied on dissidents from al-Qaeda. But IS's nature and the problems within its leadership have pushed the dissidents to withdraw from it and return back to al-Qaeda. Al-Qaeda noticeably celebrated the return of its members from the Islamic State, by the end of 2017 and during 2018, creating an angry reaction from the Islamic State in Yemen.

Contrary to the existence of al-Qaeda in several areas in Yemen, the Islamic State, which relies on media to exaggerate about its whereabouts, has receded and became limited to some areas in the central province of al-Bayda, sharing al-Qaeda its areas of existence.

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Unlike al-Qaeda that exists in several hideouts in Yemen, the Islamic State depends on media propaganda to exaggerate about its influence

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However, the differences between the two organizations resulted in tension until July 2018, when the Islamic State kidnapped some of al-Qaeda elements as they have passed from a check point that belongs to the IS. The Islamic State refused to release al-Qaeda prisoners and launched attacks on al-Qaeda sites, and Al-Qaeda responded. Thus, the widest battle between the two organizations in Yemen started.

The Status of the Islamic State Organization:

While al-Qaeda has a wide range of details about its origins in Yemen; researches are being conducted on its status, combat capabilities, methods of incorporation and spheres of influence and the reasons behind that, there is a little information about the status of the Islamic State and its branch in Yemen, as a branch of the "Caliphate State"

that collapsed in Iraq and the Levant. The organization's branch in Yemen will be of interest after the organization's call for its members, at the end of 2018, to head to Yemen and "join the State of Caliphate in al-Bayda"¹.

In a broader understanding of the organization, Al-Naba newsletter, the mouthpiece of the Islamic State Caliphate in Iraq and the Levant, published, in May 2018, the mourning of Abu Karam al-Hadrami, one of the founders of the organization in Yemen. This mourning tells the status of the Islamic state organization in Yemen as Abu Karam al-Hadrami, who was recruited in Saudi prisons, wants to become a suicide bomber within the state organization in Syria, but the organization persuaded him, according to Al-Naba, to stay in Yemen "to be the cornerstone of the Islamic state there."

Abu Karam was responsible for coordination and recruitment, according to the magazine: "He had the credit to shelter the brothers in Hadramout, to welcome guests, to receive young people and meet their needs, so that he became responsible for managing the organization in that state." And then he was assigned to "organize movements of the organization between the states, because of his proficiency in this mission and good performance. He used to meet the needs of the brothers and receive the dissidents, and transfer the Mujahideen." Then he moved with the organization to Qaifa in Rada in the province of al-Bayda. Abu Karam al-Hadrami was "distributing drinking water", according to the magazine.

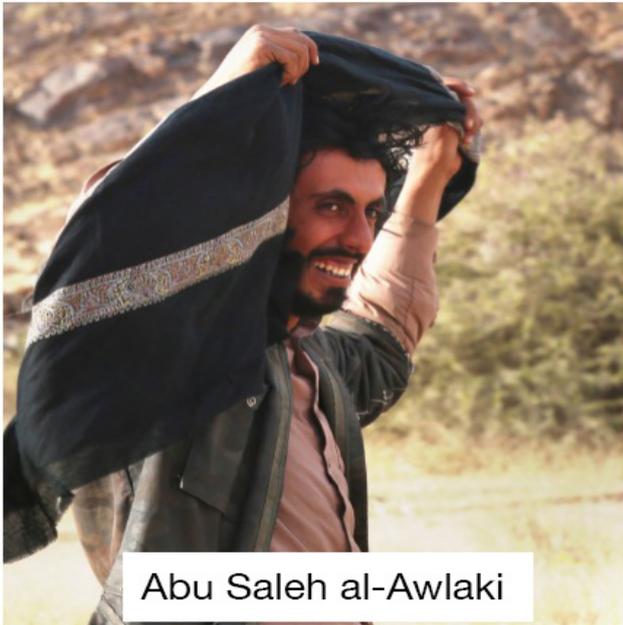


Abu Karam al-Hadrami

The mourning of Abu Karam al-Hadrami, who was killed in April 2018 with a shell rather than a suicide operation, as he wanted, is an indication of the status of the Islamic state organization in Yemen as follows:

- The organization in Yemen was founded by members who did not provide the "allegiance" to Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi. Those members came from Saudi Arabia, and received money and "sponsorship" through Saudis. This confirms the role of Saudi members of the organization in establishing the other branches of the organization. There is another story published by al-Naba newsletter about Abu Saleh al-Awlaki, who was working in marketing in Saudi Arabia. After the issue entitled "Caliphate Soldiers in Yemen" – the establishment declaration- al-Awlaki returned to Yemen to be the commander of the battalion "Friend."

He was killed when he blew himself up among six Houthis - according to the magazine².



Abu Saleh al-Awlaki

- The organization was established in Hadramout, in a desert and coastal geography where Al-Qaeda had an influence and used to rule the city of Mukalla, the capital of Yemen's largest province. The organization first appeared in Aden during the early stages of the Arab Coalition war against the Houthis.

- The move of the organization's members to sites in Qaifa in Rada, in the center of the country, and their inability to stay in Hadramaut

following the entry of Emirati forces in 2016 and early 2017 as the US air strikes increased. So the geography of Qaifa - as we will see later – was safer than the desert and Hadramout valleys.

- The organization lacks expertise as al-Qaeda, so it focused its attention on a figure such as Abu Karam al-Hadrami without any military and combat training as well as training on managing the organization's affairs. His recruitment was in prison and then he moved to Yemen.

The Conflict between the Islamic state and Al-Qaeda:

Fighting between the two jihadist organizations broke out in early 2014. Al-Qaeda leader Ayman al-Zawahiri officially announced the end of al-Qaeda's relations with the Islamic state, which renamed itself as the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria.

Before this announcement, the branch of al-Qaeda in Yemen had a gray position. It did not deny that some of its leaders had supported the establishment of the Islamic state in Yemen. It took months of internal meetings in preparation for declaring al-Qaeda position towards the organization of the Islamic state in Iraq and Syria. In mid-2014, al-Qaeda announced its abandonment and rejection of the allegiance. "The step of declaring the Caliphate is one-sided. It involves violations of Sharia, in addition that it is one the reasons of division among jihadists," said a statement read by the legal leader Harith al-Nathari.

Therefore, the supporters of the Islamic state organization within al-Qaeda did get out of the organization, but the schism was weak and did not affect al-Qaeda until Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi announced in September 2014 that he would receive an allegiance from the organization's branch in Yemen. Al-Qaeda has repeatedly rejected the methods of the Islamic state and removed the killing with "slaughter" from operations. The slaughter has become monopolized by the Islamic state organization. The al-Qaeda also rejected the targeting of mosques, government buildings and Yemeni military camps in the liberated areas, and considered the ideology as "perverse." ³



In November 2015, three Yemeni members of the Islamic state organization in "Deir ez-Zour" issued calls to al-Qaeda and its leader in the Arabian Peninsula (Qasim al-Raimi) to present allegiance to al-Baghdadi as a Caliph to the Muslims and to fight three identified parties: the regime of President Abd Rabbo Mansour Hadi, the Arab Coalition forces, and the popular resistance. They also attacked al-Qaeda and considered it as infidel⁴.

Al-Raimi was influenced by his predecessor, Nasser al-Wahishi, who denied the methods of the Islamic state before he was killed by a US drone in 2014. Al-Raimi went on his way, rejecting the Islamic state regulation and adhering to al-Qaeda, led by al-Zawahiri. During the subsequent period, al-Raimi carried out educational courses for members of the organization, warning against the Islamic state and criminalizing those who join it.

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In November 2015, three Yemeni members of the Islamic State in "Deir ez-Zour" issued calls to al-Qaeda to present allegiance to al-Baghdadi as a Caliph to the Muslims and to fight the regime of President Abd Rabbo Mansour Hadi, the Arab Coalition forces, and the popular resistance.

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The Islamic state organization's camps were bombed by US drone aircrafts in 2017. This seems to have caused the organization to lose some of its recruits while dozens of its elements returned to al-Qaeda⁵.

During the same year, the Islamic state and al-Qaeda organization were without any competition, in a good relationship without battles,

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The Islamic state organization's camps were bombed by US drone aircrafts in 2017. This seems to have caused the organization to lose some of its recruits

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according to Khalid al-Mutraf (al-Qaeda leader) in a recording published in the same year. It seems that Al-Mutraf's speech was right. The two organizations have united in finding plans to escape the US drone attacks that have continued since Trump came to the White House.

The tension of relationship between the two organizations increased in 2018 after the return of many fighters to al-Qaeda. The organization of the Islamic state repeatedly attacked al-Raimi, and described him in the April 2018 issue of "Al-Naba" as "the ribald of al-Qaeda in Yemen, called Qasim al-Raimi, explains to his followers the approach of al-Qaeda, thereby seeking to undermine the legitimacy of the Islamic state and offending its Mujahideen, because – according to his compound ignorance - they did something illegal." ⁶

The organization of the Islamic state believes that al-Qaeda commits many "sins" such as: the organization is close to the resistance and the National Army, and some of its members smoke and chew qat. In addition that al-Qaeda rejects allegiance to the Caliphate state- the continued difference between the two global organizations. Al-Qaeda believes that the organization of the Islamic state" is an intelligence group that serves the Houthis. Al-Qaeda calls the Islamic state as 'Khawarij' and sees that it is a major threat to the Qaifa region and to young people who support al-Qaeda ideology in the region." ⁷

The status of the Islamic state organization between the tribes of Qaifa and Houthis:

Al-Qaeda has a friendly relationship with the tribes of al-Bayda for several reasons: Most members of the organization are tribesmen. They did join al-Qaeda not for its ideology but because al-Qaeda is a fierce fighter against the Houthis, it possesses weapons and ammunition and own sites. Al-Qaeda did not attack the units of the National Army or the popular resistance. It considers attacks on the army or resistance as a violation of al-Qaeda approach. Al-Qaeda considers the battle in "Qaifa" as a fateful to the organization and its social incubator in other provinces.

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Al-Qaeda believes that the Islamic State makes a lot of sins and that it is an intelligence group that serves the Houthis

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In the tribal norms, the letting down has catastrophic consequences. Al-Qaeda presents itself as a representative of the jihadist ideology in a way that sympathizes with the surrounding society in contrast to the brutality of the Islamic state organization that is fixed in the consciousness of the tribes there.

Unlike al-Qaeda, the Islamic state organization engaged in confrontations with the tribes. Two years ago, the strategy of the Islamic state was keen to find a place for its camps in the area of "Qaifa" in al-Bayda to take advantage of the difficult geographical nature and the tribal formula of the surrounding society, which can be a popular incubator for it in the future. It did not forget also that its presence in the areas of difficult terrain between the camps of the legitimacy and the Houthis enable it to survive attacks. At the beginning, the Islamic state organization used its presence in Qaifa to confront the Houthis because it knows that the Qaifa tribe was generally opposed to the Houthi presence.

The region had engaged in confrontations with the Houthis in December 2014 - before the Arab coalition began. With arms, ammunition, training and good organization, the Islamic state could win some tribesmen who wanted to fight the Houthis, but that gradually changed over time.

There is no real authority for the Yemeni government - the legitimacy - in Qaifa and the popular resistance - which was later recruited in the National Army - is busy with confronting by the Houthis.

As a permanent war zone, the region represented a place of deployment. The Houthis benefited from the existence of a third party between their camps and camps of the legitimacy to justify kidnappings and brutal killings of the tribesmen as well as the continued justification of war under the pretext of combating terrorism. The positions of the organization were close to the Houthis positions, so it was able to expand its activity in light of turning a blind eye by the Houthis to the activities of the organization.

At least one tribal elder said that the Houthis, more than one time, have bombed the positions of the Popular Resistance during its clashes with elements of the Islamic state to reduce pressure on "the Islamic state" after it is being besieged in its positions, and prevented from expanding"⁸. On February 25, 2017, Daesh fought its sole battle against the Houthis and managed to control a strategic position on the mountain of Himat Likah in a swift operation without any resistance from the Houthis or any attempt to restore it.

Daesh fought one battle against the Houthis in al-Bayda and managed to control the mountain of Himat Likah without any resistance from the Houthis

The Islamic State established a camp in al-Dahrah of Qaifa that is connected to Yakla with a series of mountains. The family of Al al-Kabali are the leaders of the region and have relations with the Houthi group

This is what enabled the Islamic state to set up a camp in the area of Dhahra, which is relatively far from the area of Yakla, but it is connected to it through a mountainous chain. Sheikhs of Al al-Qabali are the leaders in the region and have links with the Houthis. Sheikh Ahmed Mohamed al-Qabali is brother of Saif al-Qabali, the leader in the Houthi group in al-Bayda. In May 5, 2018, Mahdi al-Mashat, head of the Houthis Political Council,

appointed Saif al-Qabali as a member of the Shura Council, while Mohamed al-Qabali n, Saif al-Qabali has become member of the Houthi Political Bureau. He has been involved in the Houthi movement since the beginning. In May 5, 2015, Mohamed al-Qabali⁹ and five senior Houthi leaders with reference leaders in the Shiite of Iraq.

The Islamic state organization executed three people from al-Bayda in 2018 after they were arrested en route to Marib to join the National Army. Many tribesmen infiltrate mountainous areas passing from the districts of Qaifa to escape from the Houthis in order to reach the Mahliyah district in Marib governorate and join the National Army. This event gave the Islamic state an importance for the Houthis, who have a camp about 3 kilometers from the camp of the Islamic state in the area of Dhahra in Ould Rabie in al-Bayda.

By the end of March 2018, the deputy governor of al-Bayda for Rada'a sector, Dr. Sinan Jaroun, decided to launch the first phase of the liberation of Qaifa area. He had two military battalions that came from Marib governorate to Ould Rabie and al-Qarishiyah. The Islamic state planned an ambush to control the weapons of the battalions and capture the soldiers. When the battalions arrived in the area of Yakla, the Islamic state organization attacked the government forces with three suicide bombers and a car bomb. Fierce clashes broke between the two sides during which 13 members of the Islamic state organization and 3 soldiers were killed. The battalions withdrew to Marib, after they became out of ammunition and the delay of support from the Arab Coalition, despite repeated request¹⁰.

This represented a dividing point between the Islamic state and the tribes of Qaifa, and made the organization ostracized by all its members,

and the tribes began to feel the danger of the organization's presence and that it threatens security.

What increased that feeling was the speech of the organization, which called the government army as "apostates" and the Houthis as "infidels." The organization criticized al-Qaeda's speech about "struggle", "liberation", "legitimacy" and "Houthis", and also criticized the non-adoption of a sectarian rhetoric against the army and the legitimate government at the end of November 2017¹¹. The Qaifa tribes believe that any Islamic group that rejects the legitimate government and attacks it is rejected to be in the tribal areas¹². In June 2018, the Islamic state organization proceeded to cut off a road between Qifa and Marib districts and detained 13 individuals,

all of them are members of al-Qaeda. This incident triggered a conflict between the two sides and almost daily warfare. The Islamic state rejected a mediation to release the detainees so mutual raids and ambushes began in July 2018, but al-Qaeda was late until December 2018 to announce confrontation with the Islamic state. The confrontation is still ongoing until this paper was written in May 2019.

What is the nature of the fighting zone between the two organizations?!

Before proceeding with the study of fighting and its methods, one must go to the geographical nature. As we have said so far, Qaifa of Rada'a is the remaining sphere of influence for the Islamic state organization in Yemen, unlike the presence of al-Qaeda in other neighboring provinces.

A. Qaifa Al-Bayda (Geography and Society):

The province of al-Bayda is located in the heart of Yemen and is in the middle of eight Yemeni provinces (Abyan, Shabwa, Marib, Dhamar, Lahj, Dhale and Sana'a). Thus it is located close to the most important oil producing provinces of Shabwa and Marib.

(The Yakla area), which was established by the Islamic state organization before the defeat by the Al-Qaeda, is one of the areas of Qaifa,

a rugged mountainous area far from the centers of services and population. The Qaifa tribe consists three tribes. Each tribe controls an entire district of Qaifa. The district of Al-Shareeh is controlled by Al Ghunaim tribe and its sheikhs are Al al-Jabri. The district of Ould Rabie, including the tribes of "Mahdi", and the sheikhs of this tribe are the family of "Al-Thahab", which is distributed between the al-Qaeda and the Houthis. It is characterized with struggle between brothers and cousins. This family is a tribal reference to the tribes of Qaifa.



The district of al-Qarishiya includes a number of tribal groups, which combine the same proportions and is affiliated to the tribe of Qaifa, and the sheikhs of this district are "Al Jaroun."

Agriculture is the sole source of income for the Qaifa tribes, including the cultivation of qat and exporting to other governorates. Most of the people work in agriculture. They have common tribal customs and norms. The number of educated people with bachelor degrees and postgraduate degrees is less than 5%.

There are no infrastructure institutions in Ould al-Rabie and al-Qarishiya, and the population is in separated groups - as in the most parts of Yemen - and there are many mountains and valleys that are not populated.

The topography of the towns of Ould Rabie and al-Qarishiya is characterized by difficult mountainous terrain, and most of them are high volcanic mountains such as Al-Tha'aleb Mountain and Al-Alib Mountain, which are under the control of the Houthis.

The area of Yakla, 200 square kilometers, is characterized by its high mountains, dense trees and the spread of wild animals, with a scarcity in the population. This area is located within the boundaries of Qaifa tribes. The area is administratively divided between the three districts. It borders Mahlya district of Marib in the east and Bani Dhabiyah district of Sana'a in the north. This far-off area represents a good place for camps, and for elements of the two organizations to hide from the surveillance of unmanned aerial vehicles (drones).

The Islamic state organization is located in two areas. The first one is Yakla, and the second is the Al-Zahra area, which belongs to Ould Rabie. They are concentrated in a mountain called Himat Likah. Al-Qaeda places are in the vicinity of the Islamic state. They are located in Yakla and in Bilad al-Jouf. They do not have a specific location like the Islamic state, but rather they are separated groups to avoid strikes by drones. Al-Qaeda appears to be more involved with the tribes and its men. Some al-Qaeda elements are originally members of these tribes and not from outside, unlike the Islamic state organization¹³.



B. Number of Members and Strength

Tribal elders and officials in Qaifa estimate that the number of elements of the Islamic state organization "range from 500 to 700 individuals, but after the organization entered into conflicts with the popular resistance and al-Qaeda, the number of its members has decreased to 400."

The current leaders are Khalid al-Marfidi, the commander-in-chief, Abu Habib al-Taiz, the religious judge, Abu Abdullah al-Marfadi, field commander, Abu Muhamed al-Adani, the security official¹⁴. In a video by the organization, there is another official in the organization, Nasser Al-Saqqaf, who has called for the immigration to the "State of the Caliphate in Al-Bayda".

Video tapes circulated by the Islamic state, show its elements carrying medium and light weapons in their hands as well as RPGs, moving on modern pickup vehicles.

One those videos show anti-aircraft weapons in the possession of its elements. Residents say that loyalists to the Houthis, to the Southern Movement and to "Tareq Saleh," nephew of the late Yemeni president Ali saleh and military commander who is fighting in the West Coast front against the Houthis, have sold weapons and equipment to the Islamic state organization through tribesmen loyal to them in "Qaifa".

In contrast, it is difficult to estimate the number of al-Qaeda members in the area of Qaifa, but most of those in the region do not adopt al-Qaeda ideology. They are motivated by the "tribe" and their enthusiasm for fighting with al-Qaeda

is because of their sympathy with the family of "Al-Thahab" which most of its members have been killed by US drones. The US raid in early 2017 on Yakla and the killing of dozens of civilians, including children and women, mostly from Al-Thahab family, prompted some tribesmen to engage with al-Qaeda organization.

The organization has weapons and ammunition, obtained from the invasion of the government camps in Mukalla. They controlled the city and managed to leave the city they ruled during the 2015-2016 with their weapons and millions of dollars that were acquired from the port of Mukalla, the branch of the Central Bank and the sales of oil.



C. Spies

Al-Qaeda published a video in September 2018 entitled "Prison of Spies", in which a group of spies who infiltrated the organization, from Saudi intelligence, spoke of the infiltration of al-Qaeda to topple its leaders, including al-Wahayshi, who was killed in an air strike in 2016. Among the testimonies, one of the spies said that he came to Yemen "to create a new group other than al-Qaeda in order to disrupt the organization and distort the image of jihad". He expressed his admiration of the ability of the organization to detect him. The men spoke with confidence and revealed precise details of their operations and methods of information delivery and coordination. Al-Qaeda has repeatedly tried to avoid spying over the past period until it issued a warning in 2017 against using mobile phones and the internet network.

He also issued a similar warning in 2018 against disclosing the organization's secrets to foreigners.

Al-Qaeda has a long history of detecting "spies", unlike the Islamic state organization that may be subject to spies who encourage it to counter al-Qaeda. On the other hand, the Islamic state organization expressed its fears of espionage and agents either from the intelligence agencies or from al-Qaeda. At the beginning of 2018, the Islamic state organization adopted a new strategy based on absolute secrecy in its internal formations and worked to liquidate a number of its followers or put them in prison for several months.



Many of them are accused of espionage, attempting to flee the camps, or still supporting al-Qaeda's ideas - or working with them. The organization imprisons its members in prisons that lack for elements of life". Food is forbidden for prisoners for up to twenty hours and prisons, which are isolated cells, lack for lighting and air conditioning." ¹⁵

How do arms reach to the Islamic state organization?!

The Islamic state organization in Yemen, as a branch of a larger organization, is under the supervision of the leader of the Islamic state organization Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi, who appeared on April 29, 2019, carrying the files of the organization's "states", including Yemen. He said that "Yemen gets funding from the organization,"

but this does not mean that the organization in Yemen has not found local ways to obtain funding for the continuation of operations.

The organization has medium weapons ranging from 23-mm machine guns, mortars, field guns, Kalashnikovs, and RPGs. Its members also have experience in manufacturing improvised explosive devices and car bombs. It also has a squad of suicide bombers.

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The organization has medium size weapons, machine guns, mortars and RPGs. In addition to experience in manufacturing improvised explosive devices and car bombs. It also has a squad of suicide bombers
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In order to know how the weapons reach the Islamic state, it is necessary to know the outlets that lead to the areas of its presence and its camps:

- **The first main outlet:** starts from the district of Rada'a and passes through the district of al-Qarishiya to the district of Ould Rabie. This outlet is under the control of the Houthis.

- **The second outlet:** starts from Anis district of Dhamar and ends in Ould Rabia. Most of these areas are under the control of the Houthis, while the rest of the areas, nearby Ould Rabie, are tribal areas or do not subject to direct authority.

- **The third outlet:** begins in Mahaliya that administratively belongs to Marib and passes through mountainous areas to the district of Ould Rabie, Shareeh and Qarishiya. The legitimate government, with its security services and armed forces run Mahaliya district. .

- **The fourth outlet:** starts from the district of Shareeh to the area of Yakla and the district of Ould Rabie. The district of Shareeh is under the control of the Houthis.

- **The fifth outlet:** starts from the district of Khawlan in Sana'a through the areas of "Bani Dhabian" to the district of Ould Rabie. The district of Khawlan is under the control of the Houthis. Therefore, it appears that four outlets are under the control of the Houthis and one outlet is under the control of the legitimate government.

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The organization can get weapons through five outlets. Five outlets are under the Houthis control and one outlet is under the control of the legitimate government
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In areas under the government control, there is a difficulty in transporting weapons because tribes and al-Qaeda militants are deployed in those areas. A number of informed tribal sheikhs pointed out that two arms dealers in the town of Rada'a have links with the Houthis, who use them to pass arms to the Islamic state organization inside Qaifa. The arms dealer is committed to delivering the shipment of weapons to the areas of the Islamic state¹⁶.

What are the parties controlling Qaifa areas?!

There are four forces that control the Qifa tribal areas: "the Houthis, the popular resistance and the National Army Brigades, Al-Qaeda and the Islamic State Organization".

The Houthis control most of the areas of Qaifa, then the army and the resistance, then al-Qaeda organization, and then the Islamic state organization.

The Islamic state, al-Qaeda, the Popular Resistance and the National Army, takes the Houthis as ostensibly a common enemy. The Islamic state organization has begun to launch attacks on the Houthis, but since its confrontations with al-Qaeda and the tribes, its attacks against the Houthis have been reportedly rare¹⁷- unlike al-Qaeda that regularly announces its operations against the Houthis.

On the ground, al-Qaeda, the Popular Resistance and the Yemeni Army seem closer in the overall goal of confronting the Houthis, while the Islamic state organization and the Houthi group meet in the prominent goal of confronting al-Qaeda, the resistance and the army.

Al-Qaeda and the Islamic state gain their presence in the Qaifa tribes from the presence of the Houthis to fight them. It seems that without the presence of the Houthis, there seems to be no survival for the two organizations.

Exchange of attacks between the two organizations:

The Monitoring Unit at the Abaad Center for Studies was able to monitor the announcements of al-Qaeda and the Islamic state about attacks exchange as follows:

A. Operations announced by the Islamic state organization against al-Qaeda:

-7 April 2019: 10 al-Qaeda members were killed during their attack on the Islamic state sites in the Awajah area of Qaifa in Rada'a.

-April 2, 2019: 10 al-Qaeda members were killed and wounded in an attack targeting their positions in the Khojan area in the upper Thi Kalib.

- March 26, 2019: the Islamic State organization announces control of al-Qaeda site in Al-Humeidah area entirely, Killing and wounding dozens of al-Qaeda members.

- March 25, 2019: two infiltrators from the Islamic state attacked the headquarters of al-Qaeda in the area of the upper Thi Kalib of al-Qarishiya. They first engaged in gunfire with the guards, but one of them managed to detonate his explosive belt inside the headquarters, killing 10, including leading figures, and wounding others. On the other hand, the Islamic State fighters attacked three sites of al-Qaeda in the areas of "Humaidah, Jalajel and Anah", north-east of al-Bayda. Confrontations broke between the two sides with various types of weapons, resulting in the control of the Islamic state on the area of Anah.



- **October 21, 2018:** A half-hour battle in two different locations with al-Qaeda, where two four-wheel drive vehicles were destroyed in the Qaifa area of al-Bayda.
- **October 7, 2018:** Attacks on al-Qaeda sites in Humeida area. The clashes continued for 4 hours. All types of weapons were used. The al-Qaeda ways of supply were also cut off by ambushes, snipers and bombs, which caused a motorcycle to crash and injure those on board. Several killed and wounded.
- **September 20, 2018:** One of the groups, loyal to the Islamic state, "Bayda of al-Muwahideen"¹⁸, accused al-Qaeda of risking the lives of civilians in its war against the Islamic state and causing the death of a young girl.
- **September 7, 2018:** The Islamic state organization released a video clip showing its Eid al-Adha celebrations in Hadramout.
- **February 19, 2019:** A machine of "al-Qaeda in Yemen" was destroyed in the lower Thi Kalib in al-Qarishiya
- **February 14, 2019:** An al-Qaeda member was killed in an attempt to thwart an attack in the Ould Rabie district in Zaaj.
- **November 12, 2018:** At least 10 al-Qaeda members were killed in an attack targeting their positions in the strategic Al-Khalif Mountain in Qaifa.
- **November 8, 2018:** Two al-Qaeda attacks were repulsed in a five-hour battle at the Awajah-Humeidah-Jalal. A number of them were killed.
- **February 5, 2018:** A four-wheel drive vehicle for al-Qaeda was destroyed in an attack in the village of Thi Kalib in the Qarishiyah.
- **October 23, 2018:** A member of al-Qaeda was sniped in the area of "Jalajel", which led to his death.

B. Operations announced by al-Qaeda against the organization of the state

- **April 17, 2019:** Ansar al-Sharia published a statement confirming the reason for the fighting that broke out between the organization and the Islamic state organization was the rejection of the Islamic state to release prisoners - who did not participate in the battles between the two organizations - in exchange for the release of prisoners from the Islamic state arrested during confrontations.

- **April 2, 2019:** Al-Qaeda attack on sites of the Islamic state in al-Humeida in Qaifa of Radaa.

- **March 26, 2019:** Al-Qaeda says it has responded to attacks by the Islamic state organization in al-Humeida and calls for the restoration of positions from the organization.

- **February 28, 2019:** Al-Qaeda detonates an explosive device in al-Humeida area, targeting an armored vehicle for the Islamic state organization.

- **February 27, 2019:** Al-Qaeda attacks the Islamic state sites in Zaaj.

- **February 12, 2019:** the destruction of a machine for the Islamic state with an improvised explosive device in al-Bayda.

- **January 22, 2019:** At least four members of the Islamic state organization were killed in two attacks in Al-Bayda.

- **January 15, 2019:** Sniper killed two members of the Islamic state organization in al-Bayda.

- **January 11, 2019:** artillery bombardment on the Islamic state-controlled sites and the killing of several of them in an ambush, three attacks within 24 hours.

- **January 8, 2019:** Two attacks and an ambush against the Islamic state organization in Al-Bayda

- **December 24, 2018:** Two attacks on the sites of the Islamic state organization in al-Bayda and destroying vehicles for the organization in three different areas.

- **August 29, 2018:** AQAP condemned the extremism of the Islamic state and its incitement to sedition and destruction in the countries- (Madad Bulletin – fourth issue – al-Malahim magazine).

- August 8, 2018: Al-Qaeda released a video of prisoners from the Islamic state organization captured in al-Bayda. They confessed that the Islamic state staged the fighting in response to a publication by IS's Amaq News Agency about confessions of al-Qaeda prisoners that al-Qaeda was the first to stage the fighting against the IS.

The Battles:

Al-Qaeda announced, in December 2018, the beginning of its battle against the Islamic state organization, according to a statement issued by "Ansar al-Sharia," the first official statement in this regard. The statement justified its battle with the Islamic state organization with the refusal of the Islamic state all mediation efforts to resolve the problems between the two organizations since the Islamic state abducted al-Qaeda operatives. The battle of March 2018 was the breaking point in relation between the tribesmen and the Islamic state organization, when elements of the Islamic state attacked the National Army battalions coming from Marib.

The tribesmen felt then that the organization had become dangerous. Al-Qaeda began quietly to build confidence with the tribes and expressed its willingness to stand with them in the fighting against the Houthi group.

Between January and March 2019, the Islamic state organization suffered a major human loss among its members - according to locals and a tribal elder who are familiar with the details. More than 120 members of the Islamic state organization were killed in attacks by al-Qaeda and tribesmen in return for 25 members of al-Qaeda.

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The Islamic State Organization suffered a big human loss among its members due to frequent attacks on its camps by al-Qaeda and tribesmen, making it lose its positions in Yakla
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In recent battles (end of March and April 2019), al-Qaeda and tribes launched attacks on the Islamic state-run sites, causing the Islamic state organization to lose its positions in Yakla, but it is still exist in other sites in other neighboring areas. Following the attack on the Islamic state organization and the damage to key sites in Yakla, the organization began to launch retaliatory attacks, the latest of which was a suicide attack on a grocery store in the upper Thi Kalib.

• At the end of March 2019, al-Qaeda and tribal elements attacked the Islamic state-controlled sites, seized weapons, military equipment and money amounted at 300,000 Saudi riyals (\$ 80,000). They liberated 30 soldiers loyal to the Yemeni government, who were prisoners

of the Islamic state as well as five elements of Al Qaeda¹⁹.

- In April 2019, some elements of the Islamic state organization fled to the area of "Sawadiyah" and others to the upper Qaifa. When they arrived, the tribesmen attacked them and clashes broke out. The elements of the Islamic state withdrew to uninhabited and unknown areas.
- In the beginning of May 2019, the tension increased between the organization of the Islamic state on one hand, and tribesmen and al-Qaeda on the other.



For this reason, there are three predictable scenarios for war between the two organizations:

- **The first is calm, truce and sharing in presence:** the return to calm and truce and agreement on priorities in the war and sharing influence is difficult to be predicted. The Islamic state organization believes that its presence and gaining momentum will come only from ending the competitor, Al Qaeda, which means that it will focus in future on the war with al Qaeda. It will attempt to infiltrate among the tribes that have been infiltrated by al-Qaeda before. It does not care about the fighting against the Houthis. The defeat of al-Qaeda is its priority. Al-Qaeda believes that the Islamic state organization is competing through its violent operations that spoil the effort made by al-Qaeda to penetrate the community. Al-Qaeda believes that the brutality of the Islamic state organization will make the government and the Arab Coalition,

with international support, launch a cleansing war against the two groups, so al-Qaida seeks to end the Islamic state organization.

- **The second scenario:** the continuation of battles until the victory of one of them. The remaining of polarization and confrontations between the two organizations until the defeat of one of them and the control of the other or that one organization will push the another one to leave the region to another region. This is closer to be done, especially after the Islamic state was defeated in Yakla and had to leave the region.

- **Third Scenario:** Military operations of the Arab coalition and the Yemeni government to eradicate the two organizations. The confrontations between the two organizations showed some areas of Yemen as camps for terrorist groups and this imposes responsibility on the Arab coalition and the Yemeni government to carry out counter-terrorism operations, with international support, in areas where the two organizations are fighting.

But this requires the liberation of al-Bayda governorate entirely and forcing the Houthis out of the province.

The possibility of achieving this scenario is weak, especially as the priorities of the Arab coalition and the government change from time to time. But the danger lies in the success of the Houthis plan to exaggerate the strength of the terrorist organizations, and getting support from foreign parties to carry out counterterrorism activities or putting pressure on the Arab coalition to engage the Houthis in battles against al-Qaeda and the Islamic state.

For the following reasons we can say that the strategy of the Islamic state organization in Yemen is close to the end:

- The Islamic state organization consists of the most radical members of al-Qaeda. However, the organization's leadership, Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi, did not trust the ability of Yemenis to manage the organization's branch in Yemen and provided it with Saudi leadership,

making a gap in the branch of Yemen.

- The Islamic State organization lacks for a leadership that can influence those members who split from al-Qaeda. This eventually led to the departure of most of those who joined the Islamic state organization and returned back to al-Qaeda because of the brutality of the Islamic state and the obvious extremism in its literature.

- The Islamic State regulation depends on media propaganda to exaggerate about its influence, despite the decline of its military operations between 2015 and 2019 significantly. The organization claimed responsibility for any operation against the Yemeni government forces, even if it was not the party that carried out the operation. This confirms previous suspicions on the decrease of assassinations by the Islamic state organization since the killing of the late Yemeni President Ali Abdullah Saleh by the Houthis in December 2017.

The Future of the Islamic State Organization:

Unlike al-Qaeda, which is trying to have deep roots in the society and has modified its strategy to gain the Yemeni tribes support, the organization of the Islamic state suffers greatly because of its reliance on violence and brutality in achieving rapid victories.

The organization of the Islamic state has receded into simple enclaves in the area of Qaifa, after it was rejected by tribes and it did not find social incubator there, despite its attempts to demonstrate presence in the region and attempts to mingle with tribesmen.

**”
The Islamic State
may suffer a lot as it
depends on brutality in
achieving victories. Its
future is risked by the
return of the legitimate
state and the end of the
Houthi coup
”**

There are also women fighters in the organization, brought to Yemen from Saudi Arabia and other countries, as a new headquarters for the organization following the loss of its presence in Iraq and Syria.

Therefore, the future of the Islamic state organization in the area of "Qaifa" is linked to the presence of the Houthis and the return of the legitimate state and its influence. The survival of the Houthis in the area represents a factor for the survival of the Islamic state, and the departure of the Houthis from the region is one of the factors that will lead to the departure of the organization from al-Bayda, as happened in Lahj. When the legitimacy liberated Lahj from the Houthis, the Islamic state organization departed the region. But this subjects to the factor of time. The longer the absence of the legitimate state and the absence of a military solution in Al-Bayda, the more the Islamic state can find ways to expand its influence in the region and deepen its roots, and what was possible before will become more difficult over time.

The Study References:

- ¹ Video entitled “You Cling Heavily to the Earth”, August 2018- the researcher watched it on time
- ² Al-Naba newspaper, 5th of Rabie Awal 1439, 11 November 2017
- ³ AQAP condemned “Daesh” attacks on the Yemeni Army
<https://alkhaleejonline.net/%D8%B3%D9%8A%D8%A7%D8%B3%D8%A9/%D8%AA%D9%86%D8%B8%D9%8A%D9%85-%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%82%D8%A7%D8%B9%D8%AF%D8%A9-%D9%8A%D8%AA%D8%A8%D8%B1%D8%A3-%D9%85%D9%86-%D9%87%D8%AC%D9%85%D8%A7%D8%AA-%D8%AF%D8%A7%D8%B9%D8%B4-%D8%B6%D8%AF-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%AC%D9%8A%D8%B4-%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%8A%D9%85%D9%86%D9%8A>
- ⁴ Audio record entitled “Al-Qaeda in Yemen... where are you going?” Three leaders in the organization in Deir ez-Zor talked in this audio including Khabib al-Adani and Abu Anas al-Sanaani
- ⁵ Locals told Abaad researcher that US drone fired 12 missiles at Daesh camps without any human losses at that time
- ⁶ Al-Naba (issue 126)
- ⁷ Tribal sheikhs, informed on the situation of the two organizations in Qaifa, talked to Abaad
- ⁸ Tribal sheikh in Yakla talked to Abaad researcher, March 2019
- ⁹ Al-Kabali appears on the Houthi-run al-Masirah TV as one of the Houthi leaders. He also appears in pictures with reference figures of Iraqi Shiite, including Amar al-Hakim, head of the Supreme Islamic Council in Iraq
- ¹⁰ Military officer and soldiers in Qaifa talked to Abaad researcher, February 2019
- ¹¹ Video published by the Islamic state organization in Iraq and the Levant, November
- ¹² Tribal sheikhs talked to Abaad, February 2019
- ¹³ Phone calls between people and sheikhs in the region and Abaad researcher, March 29, 2019
- ¹⁴ Previous source
- ¹⁵ Sheikhs and people in Qaifa, familiar with the status of the organization, talked to Abaad, April 2019

¹⁶ Two tribal sheikhs talked about that. One of them told Abaad in February 2019 that members
¹⁷ of the organization buy weapons for dollars and Saudi rials

Monitoring by Abaad

¹⁸ The organization of Muwahideen does not exist, but it is a name circulated by the Islamic state organization in an attempt to appear with support from community and tribes of al-Bayda, and to confuse the scene

¹⁹ Al Qaeda takes control of positions for Daesh in al-Bayda and releases 30 government soldiers
<https://almasdaronline.com/articles/165778>



مركز أبعاد للدراسات والبحوث Abaad Studies & Research Center



00967737887778



telegram.me/abaadstudies



@abaadstudies



Abaad Studies & Research Center



AbaadStudiesYemen



abaadyemen@gmail.com

abaadstudies@gmail.com

info@abaadstudies.org

www.abaadstudies.org