Yemen: The Law of the Tribesmen... Is there a “Pilot” in the Cabin?

Hichem Karoui, Paris III University, Sorbonne-Nouvelle (France)

Abstract: The Republic of Yemen born in 1990 from the union of the South and the North is threatened by a multidimensional internal struggle for power, dramatized by the increasing involvement of al-Qaeda and Iran. In this struggle, the tribes have so far succeeded to prevail on the central government, making of their occult alliances to radical Islamists and the kidnapping of foreigners the core of a merchant-like bargaining with the government. In this article, the author shows how this behavior has settled new rules in the political and social life of this country and how it may grow to threaten the state itself and undermine its supports, if the “law” of the tribe is allowed to dwarf the state.

Keywords: Middle East, Terror, Radical Islam, Tribalism, al-Qaeda, Yemen

1. Introduction

In January 2009, in a joint Yemeni-Saudi declaration, Nasser al-Wahayshi and Qassem al-Raymi along with former Guantanamo detainees Saeed al-Shihri and Mohamed al-‘Awfi, announced the establishment of al-Qaïda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP). The goal was to continue targeting the Saudi state and in the same time to launch attacks on shipping through the strategic Bab al-Mandab chokepoint on the Red Sea, through which millions of oil barrels travel toward Europe and the USA (Phillips and Shanahan, 2009; retrieved from: http://www.lowyinstitute.org/Publication.asp?pid=1192).

From the outset, the alliance with the Yemeni tribes seemed too enticing for al-Qaeda leaders, not to try to get a foothold out there. While al-Wahayshi called on the tribes “to resist pressure to grant the state control of their territories” (Phillips and Shanahan, 2009), al-Qaeda’s number two,
Ayman al-Zawahiri wanted them to support his organization like the tribes of Pakistan and Afghanistan. He said: “I call on the noble and defiant tribes of the Yemen and tell them: don’t be less than your brothers in the defiant Pushtun and Baluch tribes (...) How O noble and defiant tribes of the Yemen can you agree to let the Yemen be a supply center for the Crusade against the Muslim countries? (...) Be helpers of Allah, and don’t be helpers of Ali Abdullah Salih (...)” (Al-Zawahiri, 22 February, 2009; retrieved from: http://www.nefafoundation.org/miscellaneous/FeaturedDocs/nelazawahiri0209-2.pdf).

Al-Qaeda’s leaders appealed to the tribal honor, and it worked because nothing could be more “religiously” compelling for a tribesman than his sense of honor.

As the events unfolded, the alliance between AQAP and the tribes became as obvious as influential.

15 March 2009, a suicide bomber killed four South Korean tourists and their Yemeni guide. Three days later, a convoy of the victims’ relatives and South Korean investigators are targeted in another suicide attack, but only the bomber is killed.

18 March 2009, a suicide attack is attempted against a convoy of vehicles on the road to Sanaa International Airport.

28 August 2009, an assassination is attempted against Saudi Assistant Minister of Interior for Security Affairs, Prince Muhammad bin Nayef bin Abdulaziz.

25 December 2009, Nigerian student Umar Farouk Abdulmuttalib tries to detonate explosives in a plane over Detroit. AQAP claims responsibility for the attack.

Following these events, CENTCOM commander, then, Gen. David Petraeus “immediately visited Yemen and announced the American intention to double security aid to the country.” (Harris, A. May 2010; retrieved from: http://www.carnegieendowment.org/files/exploiting_grievances.pdf).

2. How Did the AQAP-Tribes’ Alliance Work?
“A partner relationship with a tribe,” said Phillips (March 2010) “requires personal, ideological, or goal alignment between the tribe and the outsider.” Although this alliance did not work as expected in Iraq and Somalia, because local norms conflicted with al-Qaeda’s internationalist and exclusive tendencies, in Yemen, it was different. One of the reasons is probably the fact that “militant jihadi ideologies had been fostered there decades before jihadis challenged the authority of the state.” (Phillips, 2010, retrieved from: http://carnegieendowment.org/files/yemen_tribes.pdf).

In the 1980s and 1990s, thousands of Yemeni nationals returned to their country after taking part to the Jihad against the Soviets in Afghanistan. Considering the poor conditions of the social-economic landscape, it was clear that they were not going to watch without further activism. Many of those who were called then “Arab Afghans” came back to their tribes. The protection of the tribe was granted to them, since they were considered heroes of the fight against the “Soviet unbelievers.”

Several examples show us how the tribes protected their members.

On 8 August 2009, armed men from the tribe of Arhab invaded the Directorate of security in their province and several police stations and government buildings, as a protest against Sanaa security forces, which have killed and injured two men of this tribe (Mareb Press, 2009, 8 August). It was not the first time that Arhab meddled with the government, on behalf of its own people or its allies. On that day, Arhab wanted the policemen who shot the tribesmen, to be tried by a court law. There are indeed very few places in the world where armed people could occupy the buildings of the security and police, to protest and threaten, without being arrested or shot down. But in Yemen, it seems possible.

The story deserves reflection. Actually, Arhab is a tribe and a province linked to Sanaa, which is in North Yemen. Until then, the main activity of al-Qaeda has been located in the South. But what if bin Laden’s organization, enough sure of its allies, thinks of expanding its influence to reach the capital itself? How could this be achieved without finding an outpost that eventually might grow into a stronghold near
Sanaa? Could this be done without the tribesmen’s support? That is hard to assert.

But watch what happened.

In March 2010, “Mareb Press” attributed to former members of al-Qaeda in Yemen that preparations were underway for several months to transfer the headquarters of the terrorist organization and the “departure lounge” of its members to the province of Arhab overlooking the capital Sanaa and its international airport, at only 15 kilometers to the north of the capital. Formerly affiliated to bin Laden’s organization in Yemen and released a few days ago upon a pledge that they will not return to working with al-Qaeda, the majority of those men belong to Arhab. They claimed that al-Qaeda leaders, Qasim al-Raimi and Nasser Louhishi and others have asked them in many of their meetings to follow through some activities that would pave the way to transferring the leadership H.Q. to the province of Arhab.

They said that the strategic location of Arhab provides the tribe with a unique position to carry out a number of strikes, which they described as least costing and least risky. They explained in this context that entering Sanaa from Arhab involves very few risks especially as regards the passage of car bombs or suicide belts, compared to remote provinces, like Maarab or Shabwah.

They added that the organization planned in earlier periods a number of important targets, such as foreign embassies as well as some Yemeni leaders and security stations in the heart of the capital Sanaa (Al-Jazeera Al-Arabia Center For Studies and Researches, 2010, 13 March, retrieved from: http://www.aljazeera-online.net/index.php).

Would all this make sense if we link it to the plot unveiled in June 2010 related to al-Qaeda attacks against vital installations in the same province (Maarib) that is home to much of the country’s oil resources and a key pipeline that ferries crude to the coast? Oil sources in Yemen declared the pipeline was badly damaged. The loss was estimated at 10,000 barrels a day. The announcement that authorities had foiled an al-Qaeda plot followed several days of gun battles between Yemeni forces and militants in Wadi Obeida, a suspected militant stronghold in Maarib.

Observe that the aforementioned “former” members of al-Qaeda would not have been released without the
intervention on their behalf of some leaders of Arhab, who, by the by, expressed their gratitude to Colonel ‘Ammar Muhammad Abdallah Salih, the deputy-director of the national security, for his collaboration.

So, let’s put it this way: those were men detained because of their involvement with al-Qaeda. Obviously, they have not been tried yet. Enter the tribe sheikhs. They ask for their release if they pledge to repent and leave their activism with al-Qaeda. The security Directorate believes them, and let them go. They are free. This is the latest in a series of security shortcomings.

3. The Need for a Scapegoat

In 2006, there were attacks against oil infrastructure in Maarib and Hadhramaut, whose responsibility will be simply acknowledged by al-Qaeda. Then in July 2007, a car bomb exploded near Balqis temple in Maarib, killing seven Spanish tourists and injuring many others.

In the morrow, speaking in a press conference, the Yemeni president said that although the intelligence services knew of al-Qaeda plans to strike petroleum infrastructure and government buildings, nothing leaked about a possible explosion at archaeological sites like Balqis temple. However, he added, the investigators thought the terrorist who killed the Spanish tourists was surely an Arab national.

As the days went by more information leaked to the media, and it appeared that the Yemeni government had no clue about how the operation happened or who did it. Now, if we cross-compare various versions of the same event, we will find that the perpetrators were two or more and not a single man, and that it was not necessary a suicide operation, but there were two cars (and not one), and some shooting before one of the cars was exploded, as reported one Spanish witness who had been lucky enough in escaping death on that day.

Three days after the event, an Egyptian resident in Yemen, Ahmed Basyouni al-Duwidar has been killed in his flat by the Yemeni security forces. He was the main suspect, according to the police. Several policemen have been injured in the shooting that took place before they killed him.
the flat, they found explosive devices and material, forged passports and cards, and other evidence that made them believe he was one of the leading terrorists that carried out the 2 July 2007 operation. According to the Yemeni military intelligence, the man was wanted by Egypt as he had been sentenced to 15 years jail, and recognized as a member of the Egyptian Islamic Jihad and al-Qaeda. That was the official version of the event.

But after investigation, the magazine *Al-Wasat* said that eleven days before they killed him upon receiving a phone call from one of Basyouni’s neighbors claiming that he was a terrorist, the Yemeni security services had interrogated him and searched his apartment. Furthermore, Basyouni was not hiding. He had a wife, and was known by a lot of people, and was working as accountant in al-‘Amoudi Company. Witnesses said to *Al-Wasat* there was no need to kill him. He was cardiac and suffering from diabetes. He could barely walk. So, how could he resist the security forces with grenades, as they pretended?

4. Who Was Responsible for the Mess?

That was not the only failure of the Yemeni security forces. Reports indicate several others of the same kind. One of the latest and perhaps the bloodiest happened in last December. The tragic event embittered the Yemenis and added gloom and sorrow to the fresh and frail security cooperation relationship that the United States and the Yemeni government have been trying to put on the rails, since the USS Cole bombing (October 2000).

With the US government more than doubling counterterrorism assistance to Yemen in 2010, an ad hoc fact-finding committee submitted to the Yemeni parliament a report saying that 42 civilians, mainly women and children, were killed in the 17 December airstrike in al-Maajala area of the southern Abyan province. “We apologize to those innocent citizens killed in the operation against al-Qaeda organization in Abyan,” Deputy Prime Minister for Defense and Security Rashad al-Alimi said on 3 March, in a statement during the parliament debate on the strike. “We
work, and anyone who works makes mistakes,” he added pointing out that president Ali Abdallah Salih had made orders to the government to pay compensation.

What was the US part in this tragedy? The question is still unanswered, as there is little information about American monitoring or direct military involvement in the operation. The US and Yemeni governments have worked together closely in using airpower against the Yemen-based branch of al-Qaeda, known as al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula, particularly in areas outside the central government’s authority where ordinary law enforcement operations are difficult. But “lack of a ground presence increases the risk of poor intelligence, and local actors manipulating intelligence for their own purposes,” Human Rights Watch (H.R.W.) said (8 March 2010, Yemen/ U.S.: Take steps to avoid airstrike tragedies, retrieved from: http://www.hrw.org/en/news/2010/03/08/yemenus-take-steps-avoid-airstrike-tragedies).

“Civilian deaths in counterterrorism operations can have a strikingly counterproductive impact,” said Joanne Mariner, terrorism and counterterrorism director of H.R.W. “The US has learned the hard way that such deaths can anger and alienate people who normally would not support groups such as al-Qaeda.” (8 March 2010).

The Yemenite authorities have said the airstrike targeted a meeting of leading al-Qaeda figures and that 30 al-Qaeda men were killed. Later, officials acknowledged only two al-Qaeda members were killed in the raid, according to the Yemenite Internet magazine “al-Sahwa.net.” (3 March 2010; retrieved from: http://www.alsahwa-yemen.net/arabic/section_5.htm) while H.R.W. said they acknowledged fourteen (HRW, 8 March 2010). The difference between the figures is important.

Sanaa has stepped up operations against al-Qaeda in the country since December, especially after the Yemen-based al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula claimed responsibility for the failed plot to blow up a U.S. passenger jet as it prepared to land at Detroit on Christmas Day.

Indeed, the Yemeni government apologized in March 2010 to the families of 42 civilians killed in the airstrike that targeted al-Qaeda figures in southern Yemen. Deputy Prime Minister for Defense and Security Rashad al-Alimi made the
apology in parliament, saying the government would pay compensation.

To apologize, in a country like Yemen, is certainly an act of absolute necessity for the rulers. It expresses distress more than serenity. Accompanied with pecuniary compensation, the action aims appeasement. But appeasement cannot be granted so easily.

The tribes have their rules and traditions since time immemorial. Generally speaking, the Shari'a (Islamic law) is invoked in cases of killing. If a man kills another, he has to pay the price. What the government did in this situation was not out of the ruler’s generosity: it is just about paying the “Diyya” (Koran term for compensation) to the heirs of the victims. The word means both “blood money” and “ransom.” A variation of the “Diyya” existed in pre-Islamic Arabia, where it was paid in terms of goods or animals rather than in cash.

Nonetheless, paying the “Diyya” does not happen in all cases. The Yemeni government does not acknowledge systematically all its mistakes. When it does, that means that they are too big to stay hidden.

Today, the biggest mistake might very well be still concealed, because it is just going unnoticed, so far. It is not the killing of people by mistake, but giving the tribes an authority that does not exist anywhere in the modern world. That authority is simply conflicting with the State. The consequences it involves might one day become so enormous that the tribes’ interests would overwhelm and swallow up the interests of the State. If it happens, that would be the end of Yemen as a unified republic. And al-Qaeda and other parties are certainly working with this objective in the mind.

At least two key issues complicate the U.S.-backed effort to curtail al-Qaeda in the region: the Yemen’s internal strife, and the own shortcomings of the intelligence and security apparatus. We talked previously of the latter. Now, what about the former?

5. The Internal Struggle
The old demon of secession dividing the Yemenis is still alive. The fiercely tribal population may provide a potential inroad for Islamic extremism in the whole region.

It is no coincidence that al-Qaeda found in this country an outpost for its militants, although the state officially distances itself from terrorism. Nevertheless, it is known that in order to rule such a country, the elite in power would make concessions to the tribes and alliances with them. Yet, the question is: are the tribes really as uncontrollable as some people think?

If the answer is: yes, they are out of control most time, then Yemen as a state, is in deep trouble, and almost surely candidate to top-rank one of the next indexes of “failed states,” issued by Foreign Policy and the Fund for Peace. In 2009 index, Yemen ranked 18, right behind North Korea and before Bangladesh. (22 June 2009; retrieved from: http://www.foreignpolicy.com/articles/2009/06/22/2009_failed_states_index_interactive_map_and_rankings). In the latest (2010), it ranked 15, preceded by Nigeria and followed by Burma (The failed States index 2010; retrieved from: http://www.foreignpolicy.com/articles/2010/06/21/2010_failed_states_index_interactive_map_and_rankings).

As we know, the tribal cleavages that seem to come into sight in the wake of the Afghan and Iraq wars are definitely not recent and not particular to these countries. The MENA region has been plagued with such cleavages since times immemorial. There is definitely not a single country that escaped the rule. However, the new states that emerged in the post-colonization era have strived each with this old demon (tribalism), and some have relatively succeeded in smothering it under the national anthem that enveloped the new elite in power.

“The identity conflicts that have beguiled Iraq and Lebanon are echoed from Rabat to Kuwait City,” observed Daniel Brumberg (2005-06). “Some of these conflicts run along ethnic-national fault lines, as in Morocco and Algeria, where Berber minorities have tended to reject collectivist notions of political identities based on Arabism or Islamism. Elsewhere in the Arab world, the cleavage is religious or sectarian, as in Bahrain, where a Sunni minority has dominated the Shiite majority through its control of the monarchy. By contrast, in Jordan a nationalist traditionalist
The cleavage between Palestinians and Bedouin tribal groups has loomed large and has sometimes become violent, a pattern that has been repeated in Yemen, where the effort of the tribal-Islamist North to impose itself on the South, many of whose elites inherited the modernizing, secular influence of the former Soviet Union, has bedeviled the country’s ‘unification’ since 1991” (Brumberg, 2005-06).

Thus, though all the Arab states share to some extent these latent and patent cleavages, in Yemen, the tribal cleavage (loyalty to the nation versus loyalty to the tribe) is doubled by another alongside the lines of modernity/Islamism.

6. Traditional Values and Deceptive Guidance

Moreover, the real danger may rely in the mindset that teaches to take pride in the values of tribalism. As a matter of fact, these values are often praised even by the ruling elite, likely by the opposition as well.

The danger does not consist in praising some positive traditional values (like hospitality, generosity, etc), but in deviating them for the sake of an “enemy construction” strategy: in this case, the “enemy” can be only the modern, secular West and the local elite standing for its liberal-democratic values.

Indeed, the old Arab tradition makes sure that hospitality is the first duty of the tribesmen: giving shelter and help to Muslims who ask for protection is indeed valued as a good and dutiful behavior, notwithstanding that the refuge-seeker might be a radical from al-Qaeda or any other jihadist organization. Plainly put: the Yemeni tribesmen do not consider they have a problem with radical militants fleeing capture in Afghanistan, Pakistan, Chechnya, Somalia, Algeria, or any other place. The Yemeni tribe’s sheikhs would not feel the U.S. security as their concern. They would not help the Americans unless the latter prove the wanted men are harmful to the tribe and not to the USA.

In this society, very often abiding by the law means primarily complying with the tribe’s rules. Many tribesmen have weapons. The civil wars that had ripped off the country
provided them with a legacy: as a rule, the government is always untrusty. This is anyway a belief they share with the rest of the Arab world. But in this country, like in the neighboring Iraq, there is also a tradition of violence.

Yemen continues to be plagued by tribal violence. The particularity of this country is the fact that hostage taking is used by the tribesmen in negotiations with the Yemeni government, not the foreign powers. Theoretically, it makes of this government almost an “unwilling accomplice” in the tribes’ game.

“Kidnappings have traditionally been used as a means for tribes to pressure the government to accede to their demands for resources or improved services,” says a report of Global Security. “Although a government crackdown in recent years has reduced the number of kidnappings, a couple of high-profile cases occurred in December 2008: three Germans were kidnapped in the Beit Bous area of Sanaa and released after one week in captivity and a South African woman and her two sons were kidnapped in Abyan governorate in southern Yemen and released unharmed a few days later.” (Global Security Report, retrieved from: http://www.globalsecurity.org/military/library/report/call/call_02-8_ch5.htm). Actually, the figures may be much higher and the situation more dramatic. “The U.S. State Department confirmed that 12 of its citizens were being held by Yemen (…) Al-Hayat said that U.S., British, French and Malaysian nationals were among the foreigners detained since a failed December attempt to bomb a U.S.-bound plane.” (Sudam, M. 7 June 2010). It is not sure that “most hostages taken in Yemen have been freed unharmed.” (Ghobari and Sudam, 25 May 2010) as some press reports claim. Actually, a “non-exhaustive review of Yemeni and international media reports reveals some 199 separate recorded incidents of armed violence between 1 September 2008 and 31 August 2009. These incidents account for 728 intentional deaths, 12 unintentional deaths, and 734 non-fatal violence-related injuries.” (YAVA, May 2010).

Nevertheless, even if we admit the assumption that most foreigners have been released unharmed, the question is about their kidnappers: have they always been arrested and tried, or have they bargained with the government without further punishment? If the hijackers could go free
and unpunished after obtaining what they wanted from the officials, and if they are released on behalf of a tribe’s sheikh, who makes the law in Yemen? The government or the tribes?

The issue is serious, because: 1) whatever the tribesmen say in defense of those rules, death occurred sometimes, whether it was deliberate or not, and hijacking foreigners is contrary even to the traditional values of hospitality and generosity besides the risks incurred; (Ghobari and Sudam, 25 May 2010) and 2) to indulge in negotiations with the kidnappers even if publicly it is assumed to be mediating on behalf of the Western governments, may have dark consequences on middle-term dealing with such an issue.

7. Cleavages and Iranian Influence

The main strife may follow the old lines of division. The historical tension in both the pre-modern and modern Yemeni states was between state power, representing urban and non-tribal populations derived from the Shafi’i (Sunni) peasantry who live in the fertile lands of lower Yemen, and northern tribesmen who herald from the harsh and barren lands of upper Yemen.

There is no question that these social tensions represent an ideal field for al-Qaeda to implant and grow its cells. This is not primarily because of the improbability for bin Laden to have a long time stronghold in Iraq, not even because of his proclaimed kinship with a Yemeni tribe, but mostly because of a strategic concern. “Having failed to topple regimes or establish permanent Islamic governments in Algeria, Egypt, Sudan, Yemen, and Afghanistan and with failure imminent in Iraq as well, bin Laden’s birthplace remains his last gasp opportunity. If he fails there, he will ultimately have failed in his broader strategy” (Bradley, 2005). Hence, his urgent and vital need to have a stronghold in Yemen, which shares with Saudi Arabia a border of 1,800 kilometer (1,100 mile).

Now, though one may rightly assume that al-Qaeda has an obvious interest in pushing the country toward secession precipitating the failure of the unionist state, maybe it is not the only party that would benefit from such a
development. As the recent events of the Huthi war proved it, Saudi Arabia was targeted by the Iranian probable manipulation of this group.

Indeed, the intensity of the fighting and mostly the kind of armament available to the Huthi movement raised questions about who was funding and supporting it. In October 2009, the Iranian role in arming the movement and pushing it to war came to the limelight. (Al Arabiya, Akhbar al Yawm, 2009). Likewise, the revelations about a Chinese arms shipping raised suspicion about possible allies to the Huthis inside the Yemeni government, as the contract was seemingly in the name of the Ministry of Defense. It was said it was forged, though. Yet, the weapons have disappeared after unshipping and nobody was able to say where (Al Jabali, 2010). Moreover, the way the Saudis have been almost forced to engage in fighting against the Huthis also pointed out to an Iranian influence. Indeed, nobody knew exactly at what date the Huthi fighters started infiltrating the Saudi border and for what reason they did so. But on 1 November 2009, the Saudis acknowledged officially that they clashed against the Huthis who have aggressed the border guardians. Since then, the war went wild. Another clue about the Iranian influence was the growing support in the Iranian media to the Huthi movement just after the fight began with the Saudi Armed Forces (Nassar, 2009). According to a “Yemeni highly ranked military source, Iran’s support to the Huthi movement is proved by the military plans and maps discovered with some prisoners indicating that Iran was planning to involve Saudi Arabia into a long attrition war.” (Al Jabali, 2010). Actually, many people in the Middle East think that regional supremacy has always been a cherished Iranian goal. Through a pretended Shiite solidarity (also labeled: the solidarity of the oppressed-mazloumin- which is part of the duodecimal dogma prevailing in Iran), Iran seeks to maintain an influence area, stretching over Iraq, Syria, Lebanon, and possibly other Gulf states, like Bahrain. The assumption that makes the elite shiver in the Gulf is: If Iran could extend its influence to Bahrain and most importantly to the East Saudi Arabia (reportedly containing 90% of Saudi oil), both populated by Shiites, with ultimately the conquest of the oil fields, as a strategic objective, Teheran would end up holder of half the petroleum
on earth. Something like the plan Saddam was projecting when he invaded Kuwait in 1990.

8. Is There a “Pilot” in the Cabin?

The issue has been complicated with some reports saying that President Ali Abdallah Salih used a number of trained activists of al-Qaeda in the fight against the Shiite secessionist insurgents in the south. Hence, some observers conclude that he is not a reliable ally to the U.S. in the struggle against al-Qaeda (NSSC, 2010, retrieved from: http://natourcenter.com/web/index.php). Was it true? Not easy to know. The Yemeni president needs various alliances to stay in power. If al-Qaeda is strong enough to help him with the tribes or against opponents and rebels, would he reject the help? Now, if he tried to get them under control, playing on the sympathy of some tribes, why did they threat him as indeed they did?

In the Middle East, there is still the notion of belonging to a clan, a tribe, a group that will protect one’s back. Many people in the West are not aware that although Osama bin Laden was a Saudi citizen (before he was deprived of his nationality), he is also Yemenite from his mother’s side. Thus, it is likely that he would find supporters and sympathizers in this country, if not for ideological affinities, at least for tribal reasons. However, it is no less probable that he expects the US intelligence to look for him within the reach of his mother’s tribe and its allies, in the first place.

The Yemeni president had pretty hard time to prove his ability to tackle the terrorist issue and deliver, under the U.S. pressure. But what are his priorities? Indeed, the internal struggle. On this level, like other leaders of the Middle East, he might be thinking that his primary duty is not toward the Obama administration, but his own interests: staying in power whatever the cost. It is hardly the abnormal behavior in the MENA region.

“On 17 July 2005, president Salih, who many believed would like to reign until the end of his days, declared that he would not be standing for re-election in 2006. Yet, In September 2006 citizens re-elected him to another seven-
year term in a generally open and competitive election, characterized by multiple problems with the voting process and the use of state resources on behalf of the ruling party. Salih has led the country since 1978. In the 2006 presidential election, held on 20 September, Salih won with 77.2% of the vote. His main rival, Faisal bin Shamlan, received only 21.8%.” (Global Security Report; retrieved from: http://www.globalsecurity.org/military/world/yemen/saleh.htm). The next presidential elections are scheduled for 2013.

In the internal struggle, reports talk about Human rights violations by the Yemeni government, especially with the Yemeni forces opening fire on unarmed protesters six times in 2008 and 2009, killing at least 11 people and wounding many others. Since December 2007, a report issued by Civil Society Organizations Forum on the Arab World said that democracy and freedom of expression have witnessed remarkable recession and that number of reporters, editors and intellectuals in Yemen, were abused through various forms: beatings, physical attacks, kidnappings, imprisonments and trials, and that they were banned from publishing (Sahwa, 2007). One may hardly say that the situation improved in 2010. As of January, Hisham Bashraheel, editor-in-chief of al-Ayyam, has been arrested. The clashes in the newspaper office raided by the security forces left two dead and seven injured. Yemen is a low-income country that is highly dependent on declining oil resources for revenue. Petroleum accounts for roughly 25% of GDP and 70% of government revenue. Annual real GDP growth has averaged 3-4% since 2000 (World Fact Book; retrieved from: https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/ym.html).

The country is one of the poorest in the Arab world. Half of its 24 million inhabitants live below the poverty line. Unemployment rates reach 25 to 37% - one of the highest in the Arab region – mainly hitting universities’ graduates. Indeed, in this country there are 350 000 unemployed with university Diplomas, with expectations of half-million unemployed in 2015 (Al Waqt, February, 2010).

9. Conclusion
The assumption that al-Qaeda overall activity in Yemen aims at fomenting a secession that would turn the South into a new haven for global terrorism should be seriously considered. Once two countries, Yemen unified in 1990. But since then, factions in both the south and the north have been waging battles against the government. “Al-Qaeda activists have blossomed in Yemen’s southern and southeastern provinces, because they are protected by tribal alliances and conservative communities with distaste for outside interference, including from the Yemeni government” (UPI, 2010). As we have previously hinted, the tribes have fewer objections against radical activists than against the government. They may even go to the extent of threatening and blackmailing it, according to their needs.

If the law cannot be enforced, the tribes will prevail, and if they prevail over the government and the civil society, Yemen is seriously threatened of falling in anarchy. Nobody among people of good sense in the region wishes this. Because we all know that in a country with such a record of violence and civil wars, the situation can get out of control any time paving the way for the downfall of the state, it is in the interest of all concerned parties to help Yemen get out of this crisis.
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