American Foreign Policy Council

YEMEN

QUICK FACTS

Population: 26,052,966

Area: 783,562 sq km

Ethnic Groups: Predominantly Arab; but also Afro-Arab, South Asian and European

Religions: Muslim 99.1% (65% Sunni, 35% Shi'a), others include Jewish, Christian, Baha'i, and Hindu

Government Type: Republic

GDP (official exchange rate): $61.63 billion

Map and Quick Facts courtesy of the CIA World Factbook (Last Updated August 2014)

Yemen is a fragile Gulf state home to numerous Islamist extremist groups, including al Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP), considered by some to be the most deadly of al Qaeda's many offshoots. Yemen is also a country replete with internal challenges, including political and economic instability, declining oil reserves, severe water shortages, internally-displaced persons (IDPs), and deep-seated ethnic and religious tensions.

Islamist extremist and separatist groups have taken advantage of Yemen's general instability to advance their political agendas and create terrorist safe-havens in lawless parts of the country. The Yemeni government, for its part, has coordinated closely with the United States on counterterrorism operations to target AQAP leaders, including through the use of U.S. drone strikes on Yemeni soil.

The economic, social and security issues that plague the Yemeni state, coupled with the internal political turmoil faced by the Hadi government, continue to render authorities incapable of providing effective governance and security to much of the country. Following a National Dialogues Conference which adjourned in February 2014, a select committee resolved to divide the nation into six regional governments enjoying a greater degree of autonomy. It remains to be seen whether this move will have a stabilizing effect, though it is notable that Islamist political groups have become more active participants in the country's political process as a result.

Islamist Activity:

Throughout its history, Yemen has served as a safe haven to opposition and terror groups of varying political stripes. Prior to the unification of traditionalist North Yemen and Marxist South Yemen in 1990, the latter was used as a sanctuary for a wide array of Palestinian and terror organizations with the support of local authorities. Since unification, this tradition of support for subversive groups and "freedom fighters" has continued, but radical Palestinian and leftist organizations have been replaced by extremist Islamist organizations, especially those in opposition to the Saudi monarchy.[1]

Yemen's demography, social inequity, tribal societal structure, prolonged civil conflicts, increasing sectarianism and the absence of an effective central government have created the conditions for the development of homegrown Islamist militants like the al-Houthis, as well as a safe haven for foreign fundamentalist and terror organizations like al Qaeda. Yemen's education system, which utilizes textbooks containing some degree of anti-American and anti-Israeli ideology, coupled with an employment rate around 35 percent, are factors which play into the vulnerability of young men to be exploited by Islamist militant organizations.[2]

Further compounding the problem is the accessibility of weapons through Yemen's vast underground arms market; roughly three guns are said to exist for every one person in Yemen.[3] The Yemeni political and social landscape is replete with tribal leaders and Islamist groups that have the arms and power to deny the Yemeni government a monopoly on the use of violence. Under these conditions, analysts have noted, "piracy, smuggling and violent jihad can flourish, with implications for the security of shipping routes and the transit of oil"[4] through the Red Sea to the Suez Canal.

In recent years Yemeni politics have been shaped by the ouster of the country's longtime autocratic president, Ali Abdullah Saleh, and the political transition that followed his departure. After 33 years in power, Saleh was removed from power following widespread anti-government protests in 2011. A U.S.-backed, Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC)-brokered transition agreement led to the election of a former vice president, Abd Rabu Mansour Hadi, who later presided over a National Dialogues

Conference to lay the groundwork for a new Yemeni Constitution. The National Dialogue Conference included a number of separatist groups and Islamist factions, including Sunni separatists in the south and Shi'ite Houthi rebels in the north.

Al-Qaeda

Al-Qaeda has a long-standing presence in Yemen. Yemenis ranked second only to Saudi Arabia in terms of its nationals serving as members of the mujahideen who fought the Soviet Union in Afghanistan in the 1980s, a war which constituted a key milestone in the consolidation of radical Islam in Yemen. Yemenis trained under al-Qaeda's high command in Afghanistan throughout the 1990s, up until the U.S. invasion of Afghanistan in 2001.[5]

From its inception until the late 1990s, al-Qaeda maintained training camps in various locations in Yemen.[6] A November 1996 autobiography of bin Laden provided to the Islamist journal *Nida'ul Islam* highlighted the terrorist chief's enduring interest in Yemen and mentioned his support for the mujahideen fighting the Communist party in South Yemen in the early 1980s and later in the early 1990s.[7] In 1997, bin Laden reportedly sent an envoy to Yemen to explore the possibility of establishing a base there in the event the Taliban expelled him from Afghanistan.[8] The al-Qaeda leader also listed Yemen as one of six countries "most in need of liberation" in 2003.[9]

In the immediate aftermath of 9/11, the Yemeni government implemented stiff counterterrorism measures and cooperated with the United States to eliminate al-Qaeda leader Abu Ali al-Harithi in November 2002.[10] By the end of 2003, however, Sana'a began to lag in its counterterrorism efforts and in February 2006 twenty-three al-Qaeda terrorists, including the mastermind of the 2000 USS Cole bombing, escaped from a Yemeni prison.[11] An October 2009 report by the American Enterprise Institute (AEI) asserted that:

> Many Western intelligence analysts viewed elements of the Yemeni security apparatus as complicit in the prison break. The more relaxed security situation in Yemen stemmed both from complacency and the government's perceived need to reallocate security resources to address other domestic threats. Such circumstances made Yemen a favorable alternative location for al-Qaeda to plan, train for, and execute attacks against the regimes of Saudi Arabia and Yemen, both of which it views as hypocritical, apostate puppets of the West.[12]

In the late 2000s, the view of Yemen as a fragile state on the brink of failure and a potential base of operations contributed to the formation of al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP), which represented a merger of Yemeni and Saudi branches of al-Qaeda. Yemen was a likely choice for the newly consolidated al-Qaeda movement after the Saudi government imposed a crackdown inside its borders following a series of terrorist attacks in the Kingdom between May 2003 and December 2004 against oil company offices, foreign targets, Saudi government offices, and security targets.[13]

Since its establishment, AQAP has emerged as one of the most active of al Qaeda's affiliates and since 2009 has been implicated in a number of terrorist operations, including: a suicide bombing against a group of South Korean tourists in Hadramawt and a South Korean diplomatic convoy to Sana'a; the attempted suicide bombing targeting Saudi Deputy Interior Minister Prince Mohammed bin Nayef; and the ambush and killing of seven Yemeni security officials near the Saudi border.[14]

AQAP has also claimed responsibility for the attempted Christmas Day 2009 downing of Detroit-bound Flight 253 by Nigerian extremist Abdul Farouk Abumuttalab.[15] The failed attack was followed by the September 2010 downing of a UPS flight in Dubai, although U.S. officials have found no conclusive connection between the crash and terrorism, as well as an attempted cargo plane bomb plot foiled in Dubai and the UK in October of the same year.[16] Within Yemen, AQAP uses kidnapping to terrorize and gain political leverage over foreign powers. The kidnapping of Saudi deputy consul Abdallah al-Khalidi at his home in the south Yemeni port city of Aden in March 2012 is one such example.

The number of Yemeni mujahideen claiming allegiance to AQAP is unknown, although Yemeni Foreign Minister Abu Bakr al-Qirbi claimed in late 2008 that Yemen was playing host to more than 1,000 jihadist fighters and al-Qaeda affiliates.[17] This number has increased significantly as AQAP and associated organizations active in Yemen, such as Ansar al-Sharia, have increased their power and influence in southern Yemen, which is quickly "becoming a top draw for foreign fighters, who used to travel to Afghanistan or Pakistan to wage jihad."[18] More recently, fighters have traveled from conflicts in Syria and Iraq to Yemen bringing with them new skills and tactics.[19] Even before the 2011 anti-government protests swept through Yemen, AQAP had been on a path to establishing links with tribes in the Marib, al-Jawaf and Shabwa governorates of eastern Yemen.[20]

In the wake of the 2011 uprisings, AQAP sought to capitalize on the political transition, increasing its attacks against government targets. Al-Qaeda associates seized key cities in the south, including the provincial capital of Abyan province, Zinjibar. Forces linked to al-Qaeda held Zinjibar from May 2011 until the Yemeni military, aided by tribal militias known as Popular Committees, were able to overrun the al-Qaeda "emirates" in late June 2012.[21] AQAP has found a more favorable political climate in the aggrieved Sunni south, though its mass appeal remains limited in a region historically dominated by socialism. Still, the south could potentially serve as a base for future operations against targets across the border in Saudi Arabia and beyond.

AQAP also conducts an international outreach strategy that is much more pronounced than other Al-Qaeda affiliates. Anwar Awlaki, the radical, American-born Muslim cleric who became a leading figure within AQAP, ran an online campaign from Yemen to recruit and aid Muslims in foreign countries to carry out attacks that led to over a dozen terrorist investigations.[22] Al Qaeda's English-language magazine, Inspire, has been produced in Yemen since 2010 and provides radicalizing literature

and instructions for planning and conducting terrorist attacks.[23] In March 2014, AQAP sent out a promotional video to glorify jihad and to honor al Shihri, a core Al Qaeda and AQAP militant.[24]

The growing threat of AQAP has not been lost on Washington. Senior policymakers and analysts testified before the House Homeland Security Committee in February 2011 that they "consider al Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula, with Awlaki as a leader within that organization, probably the most significant risk to the U.S. homeland."[25] In October 2011, the United States targeted and killed al-Awlaki.

In the summer of 2013, an intercepted conversation between the core al Qaeda leader, Ayman al-Zawahiri, AQAP chief Nasser al-Wuhayshi, and other al-Qaeda affiliated leaders, led the U.S. to close about 20 embassies and consulates across the Middle East and North Africa. U.S. diplomatic missions in Yemen were closed for almost three weeks.[26] More recently, a joint U.S.-Yemeni aerial offensive killed an estimated 55 militants and three high-level senior leaders in a three-day, unprecedented aerial campaign against in April 2014.[27] The attack may have been a response to the release of a video a few days prior showing a large gathering of militants celebrating another escape of AQAP members from a prison in Sana'a.[28]

Following an AQAP raid of the Yemeni Defense Ministry complex in which 52 people were killed, public opinion of AQAP fell sharply, so much so that military leader Qasim al-Raymi, issued a public apology.[29] However, shortly thereafter a missile fired from a U.S. drone struck a wedding procession, killing over a dozen people and sparking outrage among the Yemeni public.[30]

The Houthi Rebellion

Prior to the 2011 "Arab Spring" uprisings, Yemeni military and security forces were already spread thin, with the Saleh regime devoting considerable resources to suppressing a rebellion by ethnic Houthis of the Shi'ite minority in the country's north, long viewed by the Saleh government as its most direct security threat. The Houthis have been engaged in an on-and-off guerrilla war with the Yemeni government since mid-2004, leading to the death and displacement of thousands. The Saleh regime has accused the Houthis of receiving support from Iran and of "trying to reinstate the clerical imamate" (Shi'ite Islamic government) that ruled northern Yemen for roughly 1,000 years prior to 1962,[31] while the Houthis contend they are merely advocating "freedom of worship and social justice."[32]

Currently led by Abdul Malik al-Houthi, the younger brother of the group's founder, Sheikh Hussein Badreddin al-Houthi, the group has accused the Yemeni government of "widespread corruption, of aligning itself too closely with the United States, of allowing too much Wahhabi (fundamentalist Sunni) influence in the country, and of economic and social neglect in predominantly Shi'ite parts of the country."[33]

The origins of the contemporary conflict trace back to 2003, when followers of the group "Believing Youth" shouted anti-American and anti-Israeli slurs inside a Sa'ada mosque where then-president Saleh was attending service at a time when

he was trying to maintain strong relations with the West.[34] The Yemeni government responded by killing Hussein al-Houthi in a firefight in September 2004, and a rebellion ensued.

In the years to follow, the Yemeni government and Abdul Malik al-Houthi expressed their readiness for dialogue on a number of occasions. However, several resulting ceasefire agreements proved short-lived. The Yemeni government and Houthis fought six mini wars in the decade after 2004. In the fall of 2009, the conflict spilled over the Saudi border as Houthi fighters seized areas within Saudi Arabia and the Saudi military retaliated with air and ground forces to repel the Houthi incursion.[35]

Saudi Arabia has since launched an initiative to fortify its border with Yemen with motion sensors, infrared systems, and GPS trackers.[36] The initiative was launched in tandem with a March 2013 law that mandated the deportation of hundreds of thousands of illegal foreign residents.[37] The International Organization for Migration documents that almost 310,000 Yemenis returned to Yemen from Saudi Arabia between June 1, 2013 and February 28, 2014. A separate estimate found 27 percent of the deportees planned to return to Saudi Arabia when possible. Oman also perceives a security risk and is considering building a barrier along its own border with Yemen.[38]

As the conflict between the Yemeni military and the Shi'ite Houthis escalated, so too did accusations by the Yemeni government of Iranian involvement in arming the Houthis, though the evidence on this score is not conclusive. Overt, unofficial statements by Houthi officials to reporters,[39] recordings of conversations between smugglers and Quds forces,[40] and an intercepted Iranian ship off Yemen's southern coast carrying weapons including 10 Chinese anti-aircraft missiles originating from Iran have been wielded as evidence of Iranian involvement.[41] Tehran has vehemently denied these accusations and condemned Saudi Arabia's involvement in the conflict. Meanwhile, Houthi rebels have accused Saudi Arabia of supporting the Yemeni government and aiding its offensives, a charge which the Saudis have denied.[42]

The Houthis were among many groups that supported the anti-Saleh protests that erupted in January 2011. As the military shifted its resources to restoring security in the capital and combating a growing threat from al-Qaeda in the south, the Houthis were emboldened to expand territorially. This led to clashes with the Sunni al-Islah Party, as the two groups jockeyed for power and influence in the northern province of Al-Jawf.[43] Adding to the Houthis' list of adversaries, in January 2011 AQAP deputy chief Saeed Ali al-Shihri declared *jihad* against "Iranian-backed Houthi Shiite advocates."[44] Since the spring of 2011, there has been an increase in reports of sectarian clashes between Houthi militants and Sunni tribes in the northern province of Sa'ada.[45] Another spike in violent activity began in October of 2013 in al-Jawf province after Houthis accused Sunni Salafis of recruiting foreign fighters.[46]

Since Saleh was ousted from power in 2011, the reconciliation process under the supervision of President Hadi has granted the Houthis political recognition with 35 of 565 seats at the National Dialogues Conference.[47] The Houthis, however, have continued to exercise military force to expand their influence throughout the process.

The decision to divide Yemen into six administrative districts would provide Houthi majority control over one of these districts. While the Houthis are highly anti-Semitic and anti-American, they have not targeted Westerners and are generally not viewed by Western security analysts as a direct threat outside Yemen.

The Southern Secessionist Movement

Aside from the Houthi rebellion, the other major indigenous threat to the Yemeni government is the one posed by the resurgent southern secessionist movement. Yemen's Southern Movement, or al-harakat al-janubiyya (often called Hirak), is described by analyst Katherine Zimmerman of the American Enterprise Institute (AEI) as "an umbrella group for various southern anti-government factions that trace their roots back to the 1994 civil war between northern and southern Yemen."[48] The secessionists are not viewed as overtly Islamist in nature or agenda.

The Southern Movement poses less of a threat to state stability than do the Houthis, and has not yet demonstrated that it can sustain a violent insurgency. Indeed, the greatest threat from the movement derives from the fact that the bulk of Yemen's already scarce oil reserves are located in its southern provinces, which have historically served as a safe haven for foreign opposition and terrorist movements, including al-Qaeda.

The grievances expressed by the Southern Movement include: "economic marginalization (much of the country's oil revenue is generated in the southern provinces but believed to be distributed throughout the country); forced early retirements and insufficient pensions for military officers from the south; and restrictions on press freedoms in the south for newspapers advocating secessionist agendas."[49]

In 2009, the Southern Movement's more militant factions were implicated in assassination attempts on government officials, ambushes on security checkpoints and military convoys, and anti-unity demonstrations which periodically turned violent. Despite the occasional violent clashes between demonstrators and the military, prior to the 2011 anti-government uprisings the conflict was seen as manageable by the Yemeni government and reconciliation was still viewed as a real and achievable option.[50]

Emboldened by the success of popular uprisings throughout the region, by 2011 the Southern Movement tempered its calls for secession and joined youth movements, al-Houthi rebels and the Joint Meeting's Party (JMP) in calling for President Saleh's resignation.[51] While the Southern Movement's calls were answered when President Saleh resigned in November 2011, the Movement has since denounced the February 2012 presidential election—which had just one consensus candidate on the ballot, former Vice President Hadi—seeing it as a continuation of the Saleh regime's rule. Moreover, members of the Southern Movement, like others in Yemen, are frustrated with the fact that the Saleh family remains involved in the country's security affairs and politics, and continues to hold several influential positions and military posts, including President of the General People's Congress party (GPC).[52] Many of Saleh's relatives have been removed from prominent positions in response to these concerns, though many loyal to Saleh remain in key positions.[53]

In the National Dialogues Conference, the Southern Movement was allocated 85 of the 565 parliamentary seats, though several influential leaders refused to participate in the talks. A final NDC Agreement was reached in February 2014 which allowed the number of regions of the new federal government to be selected by a committee established by President Hadi. The select committee created four northern regions and two southern regions, which angered many in the south, most of whom had hoped for a two-region solution.

Islamism and Society:

Historically, Yemeni society has been divided along two main religious identities, the Shi'ite Zaydi sect followed in the North and Northwest, and the Salafi school of Sunni Islam predominant in the South and Southeast. Although no accurate and reliable statistics exist, Salafis are generally acknowledged to represent a majority among Yemen's population of 26 million, while Zaydis claim around 35 percent.[54] Zaydis are constituents of a Shi'a sect often described as moderate in its jurisprudence.[55]

In his studies of Islamism in Yemen, Laurent Bonnefoy of the Institut français du Proche-Orient found that "despite episodes of violent stigmatization orchestrated by certain radical groups, the vast majority of the population is at times indirectly (and most of the time passively) involved in the convergence of the once-distinct Sunni and Zaydi religious identities."[56] He cites one such example of this as former president Saleh, who himself is of Zaydi origin but never refers to his primary identity. Bonnefoy goes on to say that "at the grassroots level, many Sunnis do not mind praying in Zaydi mosques, and vice versa. Consequently, the religious divide only marginally structures political affiliations and adherence to specific Islamist groups."[57]

However, as anti-government protests threatened his presidency, Saleh drew on his Zaydi identity "in an attempt to rally Zaydi tribal solidarity against what he also allegedly framed as a Shafei-led protest movement," even going so far as to suggest that he could be the "last Zaydi president."[58] Such actions led to criticism that Saleh was "concentrating on solidifying tribal allegiances even at the cost of exacerbating sectarian divisions."[59] The increase in sectarian tensions in northern Yemen in recent years can be seen, in part, as a result of policies and governing strategies playing competing tribal and sectarian groups off of one another.

Islamism and the State:

In a March 2009 journal article for *The Middle East Review of International Affairs* (MERIA), Laurent Bonnefoy pointed to the "presence of a strong traditional 'civil society' in the form of tribal and religious groups, most of them armed or capable of opposing the state" as a source in "undermining the regime's capacity to monopolize all the levers of power and fulfilling any totalitarian dreams."[60] For years, the regime

maintained such power-sharing arrangements out of self-interest (i.e. weakening its enemies, dividing political and religious groups, etc.). Such arrangements, however, have been unable to withstand a range of endogenous and exogenous shocks.

In recent years, divisive policies and shifting political alliances have increasingly stressed an already fragile system, due in large part to the erosion of the legitimacy and power of the central government. Allegations of widespread corruption, a growing view of the government as a U.S. and Saudi puppet by Islamist groups, and widening economic and resource inequity all contribute to the government's domestic weakness. These trends became more pronounced following 9/11, as the Saleh regime sought to balance certain power-sharing arrangements with its emerging counterterrorism role and alliance with Washington. Since President Hadi's ascension to power, U.S. officials noted "a new determination [and] a new consistency in terms of what the Yemeni government is doing on the counterterrorism front."[61]

The unification of Yemen was initially built upon a partnership between the two former ruling parties of North and South Yemen, within the framework of a power-sharing coalition. However, the Vice President of the coalition government, Ali Salim al-Baid, who represented the south, fled to the city of Aden in 1993 and accused the government of marginalizing the south and attacking southerners. The conflict that ensued between leaders in the north and south paved the way for increased participation of Islamist groups in the government throughout the 1990s.

Sheik Abdel Majid al-Zindani was a key player during the initial infiltration of radical Islam into Yemen due to his role as a senior Islamic religious leader and prominent Islamist political figure. Zindani was a central activist in recruiting Yemeni mujahedeen members for the jihad in Afghanistan, as well as being himself a combatant against the Soviets during the 1979-89 war. Upon his return to Yemen, Zindani established the Islah Islamic movement, which later became the major political opposition party to former President Saleh's General People's Council.

After the first multiparty general elections in 1993, al-Zindani became part of the five-man presidential council, while the then-head of al-Islah, Abdallah al-Ahmar, was elected as speaker of parliament.[62] As tensions rose with the socialist leaders in the coalition, President Ali Abdullah Saleh agreed to govern with al-Islah. With the outbreak of war in May 1994 between the Saleh regime in the north and formerly Soviet-aligned separatists in the south, al-Zindani condemned the separatist movements in Yemen as a "foreign conspiracy," and stressed the need both for the unity of Yemen and for allegiance to the regime. Al-Zindani, along with the Islah party, was easily able to rally the returning veterans of the Afghan jihad behind the Saleh regime in the north as a continuation of the jihad that had been waged in Afghanistan against the Marxist regime.

After the victory of Saleh's regime over the southern separatists in July 1994, and with the reunification of north and south Yemen, Saleh rewarded the Afghan veterans for

their contribution by incorporating their leaders into the government.[63] One such example of this is Tariq al-Fadli, heir of the sultan of Abyan and former Afghan mujahedeen leader, who later was appointed by the president to the Majlis al-Shura, the upper house of the parliament. Veteran jihadists were thus able to strike what Bonnefoy describes as "a 'covenant of security' deal with the security services on their return home from Afghanistan," under which they would enjoy freedom of movement within Yemen in return for a promise of good behavior inside the country's borders. During this transition, greater participation by the Muslim Brotherhood could be seen in Yemeni politics, with al-Islah members holding several important ministries, including justice, education, trade, and religious affairs.[64]

Throughout the 1990s and into 2000, formal and informal integration of numerous Islamist groups into the state apparatus continued. Individuals identifying with various sects of Islam gained important posts in the army and security forces. As a result, repression of Islamist groups was limited, allowing for easy access to political and tribal elites for Salafists, Sufis, Zaydi revivalists, Muslim Brothers, and some individuals sympathetic to jihadist doctrines.[65]

Al-Islah remains entrenched in Yemen's political landscape and in numerous regions of the country. The party seems to have considerable support in the former Marxist South, where a strong anti-socialist movement favors Islamist candidates and platforms over the dominant Yemeni Socialist Party and is currently gaining influence in some areas of the north. Nationally, the Islamist party won an average of 18 percent of the vote during the 1993, 1997, and 2003 parliamentary elections.

Although a lack of electoral transparency reduces the significance of these numbers, the influence of al-Islah in Yemen is very significant.[66] During the transition and the NDC under President Hadi, al-Islah and the Yemeni Socialist Party were the two major parties in the Joint Meeting Parties (JMP), a coalition of former parties opposing the Saleh's GPC party. Al-Islah is now sharing power with the former ruling GPC party and has had a significant role, holding 50 seats in the NDC, negotiating and shaping the reforms that are currently being instituted by the Hadi government.[67] The addition of the Houthis to the NDC negotiations added to the list of Islamist groups represented in the post-Saleh government. However, it also put President Hadi at odds with many Sunni clerics, including Abd al-Majid al-Zindani, and some within al-Islah.[68]

Although there has been an increase in U.S.-Yemeni counterterrorism cooperation since the ouster of Saleh, and President Hadi has made statements openly supporting U.S. drone strikes against al-Qaeda,[69] the influence of Islamist groups in post-Saleh Yemen will continue to present Sana'a with a dilemma in its relationship with Washington, just as it did for the Saleh regime. On the one hand, the Yemeni government will continue to rely on foreign assistance, especially from the U.S. and Saudi Arabia, to address the security and economic challenges it faces in the years to come. On the

other, the support Yemen receives from such actors is likely to continue to play into the rhetoric of opposition and Islamist groups, such as AQAP, unless their demands are addressed by the transitional government, al-Houthi.

This dilemma was highlighted in meetings between the U.S. and Yemeni officials in the spring of 2012 on future counterterrorism cooperation against al-Qaeda and affiliated groups in Yemen, during which a U.S. request to expand drone strikes to "target groups of fighters who appear to be militants" was rejected by the Yemeni government.[70] At the same time, Sana'a acknowledged it was losing ground against AQAP, and requested an increase in U.S. military trainers and advisers, as well as authorizing an increase in counterterrorism operations, including drone strikes, "targeting individuals with known links to al-Qaeda."[71] The government is divided on the use of different forms of U.S. military involvement. On December 15, 2013, a large majority of Yemen's parliament passed a non-binding declaration to ban drone strikes in Yemeni airspace.[72] However, the United States continues to operate drones in Yemen with the support of President Hadi.

Elections for the new government are scheduled for 2015. Although reforms now underway have removed a number of Saleh loyalists and kin from key government and security posts, the Hadi government is not likely to make a clean break from the past power-sharing mechanisms which kept the former president in power for over 30 years. As such, Hadi will likely continue to consolidate his power by building networks which mirror those of his predecessor.

President Hadi made a statement in September 2012 indicating that his government would consider dialogue with al-Qaeda militants "on condition that al Qaeda announces its agreement to cast aside its weapons, repent of its extremist ideas that are far from Islam, and give up protecting armed elements from outside the country," adding that "mediators... pressured me to accept dialogue."[73] This is a departure from his presidential acceptance speech, in which he promised to "eradicate Al-Qaeda loyalists,"[74] and raises questions about the new Yemeni president's ability to withstand pressure to engage with Islamist extremists and terrorists.

ENDNOTES

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