

American Foreign Policy Council

YEMEN

QUICK FACTS

Population: 23,495,361

Area: 527,968 sq km

Ethnic Groups: predominately Arab; but also Afro-Arab, South Asians, Europeans

Religions: Muslim including Shaf'ī (Sunni) and Zaydi (Shi'a), small numbers of Jewish, Christian, and Hindu

Government Type: Republic

GDP (official exchange rate):
\$26.54 billion

Map and Quick Facts courtesy of the CIA World Factbook (Last Updated June 2010)



Throughout its history, Yemen has played the role of 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 safe haven 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 with radical Palestinian and leftist organizations being replaced by radical and extremist Islamic organizations, especially those in opposition to the Saudi monarchy.¹

Today, Yemen faces several complex and intertwined challenges: an economic crisis forced by declining oil reserves, severe

and expanding water shortages, an ever-increasing population of internally displaced persons (IDPs), “the strain on political stability posed by the impending transition of power in 2013 and multiple internal threats to security”² posed by the “al Houthi rebellion in the north, the Southern Movement in the south, and al-Qaeda elements throughout the country”³

Widespread anti-government protests in Yemen following the fall of the regimes of Zine el-Abidine Ben Ali in Tunisia and Hosni Mubarak in Egypt have added a new dimension to the daunting economic, social and security challenges faced by the Saleh government. “The combined impact of these issues could collapse the central government or render its security apparatus ineffective,”⁴ permitting al-Qaeda and other homegrown Islamist groups to operate freely within the country. The current situation has prompted fears, both at home and abroad, that protest movements could likewise push Yemen to the brink, with serious security implications well beyond the country’s borders.

ISLAMIST ACTIVITY

The al Houthi Rebellion

Although the Yemeni military and security forces have been spread thin to deal with a variety of security issues throughout the country, the Saleh regime continues to devote a considerable amount of its resources to suppressing the al Houthi rebellion in the north, which is viewed as the most direct security threat to President Ali Abdallah Saleh’s government. The Yemeni government accuses the Shi’a group of “trying to reinstate the clerical imamate” (Islamic government) that ruled northern Yemen for roughly 1,000 years to 1962,⁵ while the al Houthis assert they are calling for “freedom of worship and social justice”.⁶

The al Houthi rebels have engaged in a guerrilla war with the Yemeni government on and off since mid-2004, a conflict that has led to the death and displacement of thousands. Currently led by Abdul Malik al Houthi, the younger brother of the group’s founder Sheikh Hussein Badreddin al Houthi, the group accuses the Yemeni government of “widespread corruption, aligning itself too closely with the United States, allowing too much Wahhabi (fundamentalist Sunni) influence in the country, and years of economic and

social neglect in predominantly Shi'a parts of the country."⁷

The current conflict can be traced back to 2003, when followers of the group 'Believing Youth' shouted anti-American and anti-Israeli slurs inside a Sa'ada mosque where President Saleh was attending service, at a time when he was trying to maintain strong relations with the West.⁸ An uprising ensued after the Yemeni government responded by killing Hussein al Houthi in a firefight in September 2004.

The Saleh government, as well as Abdul Malik al Houthi, has expressed readiness for dialogue on a number of occasions, with several cease fire agreements being forged, but thus far all attempts at peace have ended in a resumption of violence. In mid-August 2009 the Yemeni military launched its sixth such operation against the group since 2004, dubbed Operation Scorched Earth, after al Houthi rebels had reportedly "taken control of large swaths of Sa'ada province, blockaded military installations in the north, arrested Yemeni soldiers, taken control of sixty-three schools, kidnapped teachers and foreigners, and attacked numerous government buildings and mosques."⁹ Throughout 2009, the conflict in the north between the Yemeni military and al Houthi rebels escalated; with the Saudi military joining the fight after an incursion onto Saudi soil by al Houthi rebels killed two Saudi border guards that November.¹⁰

The Saleh government has accused Iran of arming the Houthis. Western officials, however, say there is no firm evidence to support these accusations, and Tehran has vehemently denied them, while simultaneously condemning Saudi Arabia's involvement in the conflict. Meanwhile, the al Houthi rebels accuse Saudi Arabia of supporting Sana'a and aiding its offensives—something which the Saudi government has denied.¹¹

Since February 2009, a fragile ceasefire agreement has held between al Houthi rebels, the Saleh government and allied tribes in the country's north. It is hard to say how long the current ceasefire will hold, however, especially as anti-government demonstrations spread and heavy-handed tactics by security forces against protesters increase. The situation could also change drastically if President Saleh were to step down without a plan for transition and a power struggle on political, tribal or religious grounds ensued.

Al-Qaeda

Al-Qaeda has a long-standing presence in Yemen. Elements sympathetic to Osama bin Laden's *jihad* predated the actual formation of al-Qaeda in late 1989, with Yemenis ranking second only to Saudis as members of the *mujahedeen* that fought the Soviet Union in Afghanistan in the 1980s. That war constituted a key milestone in the consolidation of radical Islam in Yemen.

From its inception until the late 1990s, al-Qaeda is known to have maintained training camps in various locations in Yemen.¹² In an October 2009 AEI report, analyst Christopher Harnisch cites examples of al-Qaeda's enduring interest in Yemen stating that, "in a November 1996 autobiography bin Laden provided to the Islamist journal *Nida'ul Islam*, the al-Qaeda chief boasted about supporting the *mujahedeen* fighting against the Communist party in South Yemen in the early 1980s and again in the early 1990s.¹³ In 1997, bin Laden reportedly sent an envoy to Yemen to explore the possibility of setting up a base there in case the Taliban expelled him from Afghanistan.¹⁴ The al-Qaeda leader in 2003 listed Yemen as one of six countries most in need of liberation."¹⁵ Yemenites also "continued to train in Afghanistan under al-Qaeda's high command throughout the 1990s" and even up until the U.S. invasion of Afghanistan following the 9/11 terror attacks.¹⁶

In the immediate aftermath of 9/11, the Yemeni government implemented stiff counterterrorism measures, "including cooperating with the CIA to kill al-Qaeda leader Abu Ali al-Harithi in November 2002." By the end of 2003, however, Sana'a began to lag in its counterterrorism efforts; which "hit a low point in February 2006, when twenty-three al-Qaeda terrorists, including the mastermind of the 2000 *USS Cole* bombing, escaped from a Yemeni prison."¹⁷ An October 2009 report by AEI asserts 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.”¹⁸

Yemen has come to be viewed as a fragile state on the brink of failure. This potential opportunity has not been missed by al-Qaeda, which has long viewed Yemen as a potential base of operations. This view was a contributing factor in 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 to set up shop after the Saudi government imposed a crackdown inside its borders “following a string of deadly attacks throughout the Kingdom between May 2003 and December 2004” against oil company offices, foreign targets, Saudi government offices, and security targets.¹⁹

Since its establishment, AQAP has emerged as one of the most active branches of the bin Laden network. In 2009, AQAP was 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 of Saudi Deputy Interior Minister Prince Mohammed bin Nayef; and the ambush and killing of seven Yemeni security officials near the Saudi border.²⁰ AQAP has also claimed responsibility for the attempted Christmas Day 2009 downing of Detroit-bound Flight 253 by Nigerian extremist Abdul Farouk Abumuttalab.²¹ The number of Yemeni *mujahedeen* claiming allegiance to AQAP is unknown, although Foreign Minister Abu Bakr al-Qirbi claimed in late 2008 that Yemen was playing host to more than 1,000 *jihadi* fighters and al-Qaeda affiliates.²²

More recently, AQAP claimed responsibility for the September 2010 downing of a UPS flight in Dubai, although U.S. officials have found no connection between the crash and terrorism, as well as for an attempted cargo plane bomb plot foiled in Dubai and the UK in October.²³

Simultaneously, AQAP has worked to “establish links and put down roots with the tribes in the Marib, al-Jawaf and Shabwa governorates” of eastern Yemen.²⁴ The group has been largely successful in building alliances with tribes in the region, and currently feels little pressure from the Yemeni government. The result has been a new boldness on the part of AQAP, manifested through its

reconstitution in Yemen and greater activism beyond its borders, in the Gulf region.²⁵

The growing threat of AQAP has not been lost on Washington, with senior policymakers and analysts testifying 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.”²⁶

Al-Qaeda continues to use Yemen’s domestic conflicts and demographics to its advantage; to maintain a safe haven while the Yemeni government is focused on the more direct threat posed by the al Houthi insurgency, and now popular protests throughout the country, as well as waiting to capitalize, if the possibility presents itself, on the potential of Yemen becoming a failed state. In the event of a Yemeni failed state, AQAP’s capabilities could expand dramatically. Such a situation would enable AQAP to operate all the more freely, and in the absence of a central government, AQAP may attempt to fill the power vacuum. Many analysts view the failed state scenario as “perhaps the greatest appeal that Yemen holds for al-Qaeda” as it would provide the group “with the political and geographic space to operate unhindered; to plan and train for operations, set up training camps, establish safe houses, and shelter top leaders.”²⁷

The Southern Secessionist Movement

Aside from the al Houthi, the other indigenous threat to the Yemeni government is posed by the resurgent southern secessionist movement. Yemen’s Southern Movement, or *al-harakat al-janubiyya*, is described by analyst Katherine Zimmerman of 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.”²⁸ The secessionists are not viewed as Islamist by nature and have not used Islamist rhetoric.

The Southern Movement poses less of a threat to state stability than the al Houthis and has not yet demonstrated that it can sustain a violent insurgency. Indeed, the greatest threat from this movement derives from the fact that the bulk of Yemen’s already scarce oil reserves are located in the southern provinces as well as its

history of providing a safe haven to foreign opposition and terrorist movements, including al-Qaeda.

The Southern Movement has held massive demonstrations and has clearly stated its grievances to the Saleh government. The grievances expressed by the secessionists 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.”²⁹

The year 2009 witnessed a deteriorating security situation in Yemen with the Southern Movement’s more militant factions increasingly being implicated in assassination attempts on government officials and ambushes on security checkpoints and military convoys, as well as anti-unity demonstrations held by supporters of the movement, which have turned violent on occasion. Despite the occasional violent clashes between demonstrators and the military, as well as the threat posed by the more militant factions to government and military officials, the conflict is still seen as manageable by the Saleh government and reconciliation is still viewed as a real and achievable option.³⁰ However, recent events have required Sana’a to reassess this view.

Emboldened by the success of popular uprisings throughout the region, the Southern Movement has tempered its calls for succession and joined the youth movements, along with the Houthi rebels and Joint Meeting’s Party (JMP), in calling for President Saleh’s resignation.³¹ As demonstrations have increased in size and spread across major cities in Yemen, so to have violent tactics by security forces in an effort to put down protests. This is especially true in southern Yemen where the regime does not have the tribal support to maintain that it does in the north.

Although the southern movement is not motivated by Islamist ideology and extremism, it does present yet another security threat for the Saleh government, in addition to the al Houthi rebels in the north and al-Qaeda elements that are using Yemen as a safe haven and base to launch their global jihad. AQAP has been able to manipulate the hydra of a security situation in Yemen and thus far has been kept relatively insulated due to the security priori-

ties of the Saleh government, and a marriage of convenience with elements of the Southern Movement.

ISLAMISM AND SOCIETY

Historically, Yemeni society has been divided along two main religious identities, the Shi'a Zaydi sect primarily followed in the North and Northwest and the Salafi school of Sunni Islam mostly in the South and Southeast. Although no accurate and reliable statistics exist, Salafis are generally acknowledged to represent a majority among a population of 24 million in Yemen, while Zaydis claim around 35 percent of the population.³² Zaydis are constituents of a Shi'a sect often described as moderate in its jurisprudence.³³

In his studies Dr. Laurent Bonnefoy of the Institut Français du Proche-Orient, finds 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.” He cites one such example of this as President Saleh, who himself is of Zaydi origin but never refers to his primary identity.” Dr. 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.”³⁴

However, as anti-government protests have threatened his presidency, Saleh has drawn 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.”³⁵ Such actions have led to criticism that Saleh “is concentrating on solidifying tribal allegiances even at the cost of exacerbating sectarian divisions.”³⁶

In a November 2008 Chatham House report, journalist Ginny Hill describes Yemen as “an incomplete state where the majority of the population lives without regard to laws made in Sana'a. A corrupt, self-interested government that fails to provide the bare minimum of social services has little relevance and legitimacy outside, and

even inside, the major urban areas. With a nascent civil society sector and a flimsy middle class, Yemen is unable to generate sustained momentum for political change. Low literacy rates, unreliable public data and the absence of grassroots democracy inhibit a genuine national debate that would create sustained internal pressure for accountability and reform.”³⁷

These are just some of the factors that contribute to the appeal of *jihadi* groups in relatively “isolated, underdeveloped regions (such as Marib, Shabwa, al-Jawf, and Abyan) and among peripheral and marginal tribal groups who do not benefit from state investments and infrastructure. It is these specific regions that international donors are targeting in order to undermine violence and support for radical groups through the establishment of development programs.”³⁸

Many Western observers have focused on the role of al Iman University in Sana’a. The institution has been portrayed by locals as one solely dedicated to Islamic higher learning. But this has not prevented outside observers from charging al Iman with “being akin to a terrorist ideological training camp”. This view of al Iman University is primarily due to the fact that it is headed by Sheik Abdel Majid al-Zindani, “who is designated as a terrorist financier by the United Nation’s 1267 committee and as a spiritual advisor to bin Laden by the U.S. Treasury Department.”³⁹ It has also been supported by the history of some of its alumni, among them John Walker Lindh, the ‘Orange County Taliban’ who was captured in 2001 in Afghanistan and sentenced to 20 years in prison for his participation in the Taliban, and by the university’s reluctance to open itself up to outside observers.⁴⁰ In a journal article for the Jamestown Foundation’s *Terrorism Monitor*, Gregory Johnsen argues that the reality probably is somewhere in between the two arguments, with al Iman continuing “to straddle this divide as a legitimate religious institution and as a fundamentalist pipeline.”⁴¹

Yemen’s demography, social inequity, tribal societal structure, prolonged civil conflicts, and the absence of an effective central government has created the conditions for the development of homegrown

terrorist groups like the al Houthi, as well as a safe haven for foreign fundamentalist and terror organizations. 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 organizations such as al-Qaeda.⁴²

In a statement to the *New York Times*, Princeton University's Gregory Johnsen summed up how uprisings in Yemen could swing in favor of Islamist groups like al-Qaeda. He contended that although a group like AQAP is "nowhere strong enough to make a play for control of the state," should Saleh leave office, raising hopes for rapid change and those expectations are not met, "in a year, that could open the way for al-Qaeda to say, 'You tried Saleh, you tried democracy now you have to try the way of the way of the prophet and the rule of Sharia law.'"⁴³ Such a situation would not bode well for Yemen's neighbor to the north, Saudi Arabia, and certainly not for U.S. counterterrorism efforts.

Further compounding the issue 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.⁴⁴ 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, "piracy, smuggling and violent *jihad* can flourish, with implications for the security of shipping routes and the transit of oil"⁴⁵ through the Red Sea to the Suez Canal, further endangering security throughout the region and beyond.

ISLAMISM AND THE STATE

In a March 2009 journal article for *The Middle East Review of International Studies* (MERIA), Laurent Bonnefoy cites power-sharing as "one of the main features of Yemen's political system" which has also been a source of equilibrium in the country. He points to the "presence of a strong traditional 'civil society' in the form of tribal and religious groups, most of them armed or capable of oppos-

ing the state” as a source in “undermining the regime’s capacity to monopolize all the levers of power and fulfilling any totalitarian dreams.”⁴⁶ For years, the regime maintained such power-sharing arrangements out of self-interest (i.e. weakening its enemies, dividing political and religious groups, etc.).

More recently, shifting political alliances have put that system to the test, due in large part to the erosion of the legitimacy and power of the central government. Allegations of widespread corruption, an increasing view of the Saleh government as a U.S. and Saudi puppet by Islamist groups, and growing economic and resource inequity have all contributed to the government’s domestic weakness and have also wrecked the equilibrium that the power-sharing model had helped to maintain. Many of these issues have their roots in the fallout from the Afghanistan *jihad* and the unification of North and South Yemen in 1990.

Unification 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, that partnership did not endure, with the Vice President of the coalition government, Ali Salim al-Baid, representing the south, fleeing to the city of Aden and accusing the government of marginalizing the south and attacking southerners in 1993. The conflict that ensued between leaders in the north and south paved the way for increased participation of Islamic groups in the government throughout the 1990s.

Sheik Abdel Majid al-Zindani was a key figure during the initial infiltration of radical Islam in Yemen as a senior Islamic religious leader and prominent Islamic political figure. Zindani was a central activist in recruiting Yemeni *mujahedeen* members for the *jihad* in Afghanistan, as well as himself being a combatant against the Soviets during the 1979-89 war. Upon his return to Yemen, Zindani established the Islah Islamic movement, which later became a political party now headed by Muhammed Abdallah al-Yadum.

Laurent Bonnefoy describes Islah as a “conservative religious movement that calls for social reform in accordance with Islamic princi-

ples and is generally described as the Yemeni branch of the Muslim Brotherhood. This party was created in September 1990, bringing together Islamist figures, tribal leaders, and businessmen. The party leadership claims to accept the current constitution, thus appearing to recognize the need to operate within Yemen's democratic framework, but Islah qualifies its support for the constitutional status quo by insisting that *sharia* law should form the basis of all legal rulings. Yemen's constitution already conforms to this position, but it is a very loose interpretation."⁴⁷

After the first multiparty general elections in 1993, Abdel Majid al-Zindani became part of the five-man presidential council, while then head of al Islah, Abdallah al-Ahmar, was elected as speaker of parliament.⁴⁸ 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 southern separatists, 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 al 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.⁴⁹ One such example of this is Tariq al-Fadli, heir of the sultan of Abyan and former Afghan *mujahidin* 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;" where 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 jus-

tice, education, trade, and religious affairs.⁵⁰

Throughout the 1990s, and into 2000, formal and informal integration of numerous Islamist groups into the state apparatus continued, with important posts in the army and security forces being held by individuals identifying with various sects of Islam. As a result of the diversity of the security and political body's repression of Islamist groups has been limited, and has also allowed easy access to political and tribal elites for Salafists, Sufis, Zaydi revivalists, Muslim Brothers, and some individuals sympathetic to *jihadist* doctrines.⁵¹

Al-Islah is well-entrenched Yemen's political landscape and in numerous regions of the country. One region where al-Islah seems to have considerable support is in the former Marxist South, where anti-socialist reaction is strong and which favors Islamist candidates and platforms. Nationally, the Islamist party has won an average of 18 percent of the vote during the 1993, 1997, and 2003 parliamentary elections. Although lack of transparency reduces the significance of these numbers', the influence of al-Islah in Yemen is still significant and should not be ignored.⁵² Al-Islah, as one of two major parties in the JMP, a coalition of opposition parties (the other being the Yemeni Socialist Party), will have a significant role in negotiating and shaping any reforms, with or without President Saleh, as anti-government protests continue.

As anti-government protest become larger and more organized, and with security forces becoming more willing to use violence against demonstrators, alliances to Saleh's rule are being tested. Members of the ruling General People's Congress (GPC) have already begun to defect, once loyal tribal leaders have begun to speak out against the regime, and a longtime Saleh supporter added an 'Islamist element' to the turmoil taking grip when one of Yemen's most influential Salafi clerics, Abdel Majid al-Zindani, stood before protestors and pronounced that "an Islamic state is coming." Zindani went on to say that Mr. Saleh "came to power by force, and the only way to get rid of him is through the force of the people."⁵³

But while Zindani has publicly backed anti-regime protesters, he

seems far from cutting ties with Saleh. In fact, as head of the ulama council, Zindani is working with both the JMP and the regime on a compromise that would allow a peaceful transfer of power.⁵⁴ This is just one example of the balancing of alliances currently taking place as the Saleh's regime struggles to maintain its already loose grip on power.

The relationship of the Yemeni government with the United States is a double-edged sword for the Saleh regime. On the one hand, Yemen needs the financial, military and intelligence support to fight the Islamists living within its borders, whether AQAP or the al Houthi rebels. But on the other hand the support Yemen receives from the U.S. plays into the rhetoric of the al Houthi leadership and serves as a recruiting tool for both al Houthi and AQAP.

Saleh continues to walk a fine line with Washington; quietly receiving considerable political support and military aid from the U.S. while at the same time making statements accusing Washington of working to undermine Arab regimes in the region.⁵⁵ U.S. government officials, however, maintain that Saleh remains the best partner the U.S. has in its fight against AQAP.⁵⁶

As the Saleh government's relationship with the United States has grown, the alliance between Islamists and the Yemeni government has become increasingly strained. This shift could be viewed in the context of the 1994 transition from the north-south coalition to the north-Islamist alliance that led the Republic of Yemen throughout the rest of the 1990s. In this context, the continued alienation of Islamist organizations may well lead to further deterioration of the Saleh regime's capabilities and intensified conflict between the government and Islamic militant groups like the al Houthi.

As the regime's response to anti-government demonstrations has grown more violent, Saleh's allies in the ruling GPC have begun to break ranks, and traditional tribal support has dwindled. However, as of this writing, the president still appears to have the backing of the more influential tribal confederations in the Yemen, including the Hashid and Bakil. Saleh will need all the friends he can get to

weather the storm. This may mean distancing himself from Washington and its fight against al-Qaeda, in an effort to regain the support from al-Islah and other more Islamist supporters, who, along with the northern tribes, have historically been pillars of support for the Saleh government.

ENDNOTES

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