



# **A False Foundation? Al Qa'ida in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP), Tribes and Ungoverned Spaces in Yemen - Key Personalities, Origin and Evolution, Marib and al-Jawf Governorate**

*U.S. Military, Combating Terrorism Center at West Point, Department of Defense*

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Events in Yemen are moving at a rapid pace. Economic, environmental and political crises that have long limited Yemen's attempts at developing a strong centralized state now threaten to overwhelm the country. Protest movements similar to those that pushed out autocratic regimes in Tunisia and Egypt have plunged Yemen into deeper instability, and multiple competing factions are currently fighting for control of the government. Reports of rising Islamist militancy and a stream of terror attacks by al-Qa'ida in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP) have raised fears that soon large parts of the country may be overrun by jihadists intent on striking the United States.

Efforts to understand and evaluate appropriate policy responses to the multiple crises unfolding in Yemen have often met with a major challenge: the seemingly intractable nature of the terrorist threat against the U.S. homeland given Yemen's weak central government and growing instability. In this highly permissive environment there seem to be few practical solutions to degrade, much less eliminate, the capability of al-Qa'ida in the Arabian Peninsula to strike the United States.

Much of the scholarship and reporting on the group largely supports this view. Yemen's multiple sources of instability are often treated as interrelated with AQAP's success, tying weak state capacity, corruption, powerful tribes and limited political freedoms with the rising appeal of jihadist violence. While an emphasis on the causes rather than consequences of the country's many challenges is indeed critical for shaping U.S. policy in the country, analysis driven by al-Qa'ida in the Arabian Peninsula's external plots against the United States too often conflates defeating AQAP with solving Yemen's structural, political, and security crises. This approach causes authors familiar with Yemen's crises to prioritize long-term solutions to combat the group—often arguing that economic aid, political and social reform, and various types of tribal engagement are the only ways to reduce the conditions that produce AQAP fighters.

This report attempts to disaggregate the threat posed by al-Qa'ida in the Arabian Peninsula from the sources of instability surrounding it by exploring the group's strategy, tactics and objectives from the Yemeni perspective. This shift in analytical lens, from the global threat to the local context, is essential for understanding how the country's most prominent violent jihadist group has managed to persist for nearly five years. Only by examining the actions of al-Qa'ida in the Arabian Peninsula from the local perspective is it possible to discern the constraints and opportunities shaping the group's ambitions both inside and outside Yemen.

KEY AQAP PERSONALITIES \* CHAPTER ONE: AL-QA'IDA IN THE ARABIAN PENINSULA: PREDECESSORS, \* OBJECTIVES AND STRATEGY \* ISLAMIC JIHAD IN YEMEN (1990-1994) \* ARMY OF ADEN ABYAN (1994-1998) \* AL-QA'IDA IN YEMEN (1998-2003) \* AQAP: ORIGIN AND EVOLUTION(2006-2011) \* CHAPTER TWO: MARIB AND AL-JAWF \* MARIB GOVERNORATE \* AL-JAWF GOVERNORATE \* CHAPTER THREE: AQAP TRIBAL ENGAGEMENT \* CHAPTER

FOUR: CONCLUSION AND POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS \* APPENDIX: MAJOR TRIBES OF  
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