



Wadi Abidah:
The AQAP's Black Box in Yemen

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Introduction

The complicated relationship between the Al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP) and the tribes in Wadi Abidah in Marib governorate, northeast of Yemen, is a particularly important issue that needs to be acknowledged in order to understand the dynamics of the conflict in Yemen and the region in general. Due to its convenient geographical terrain and complicated tribal social structure, Wadi Abidah has turned into a safe haven for the AQAP. It serves something akin to a black box that collects the organization's secrets and is also a starting point for its armed operations outside the borders of Marib, including those against South Yemen since the 1980s.

This paper aims to explore the reasons that have turned Wadi Abidah into a fertile environment for AQAP's development, in addition to the common factors between the organization and the tribes. The paper also highlights how the AQAP has benefited from various forms of tribal protection. This is in addition to how this has helped consolidate the organization's presence in the region. The paper also analyzes the factors that have made Wadi Abidah a reliable bastion for AQAP and the way the latter has been able to build infrastructure and recruit tribal elements.

Furthermore, this paper points out the AQAP's success in turning Marib into a springboard for its operations in and outside Yemen and how it has made use of this strategic geographical location to carry out its attacks. The analysis explains how Wadi Abidah has turned into a theater for the drone operations launched by the US intelligence agencies because of the AQAP's presence.

A Hidden Battle in the Skies of Wadi Abidah

While the AQAP has escalated its operational activities in South Yemen governorates such as Abyan and Shabwa, the US drones have repeatedly targeted AQAP leaders in Wadi Abidah in Marib governorate.

The latest drone attack to target an AQAP operative was on August 26 this year when Saudi citizen, Othman Al-Najdi, responsible for military manufacturing and explosives in the organization, was killed¹ in Wadi Abidah. There have been conflicting reports about his fate after an MQ9 drone targeted his house. There are reports that Al-Najdi is alive, though he was injured, and was being hidden in ISIS safehouses.² The AQAP has not commented on his fate till the moment of writing this paper.

Since the beginning of the US drone activities in Yemen, Wadi Abidah has been one of the most attacked areas. The valley constitutes one of the most important AQAP sanctuaries in the governorate. This was clear when Khaled Saleh al-Din Zidane, the son of Al-Qaeda Leader Ahmed Saif Al-Adel, moved to Wadi Abidah. He died in a fire that broke out in his house in March this year during the first week of Ramadan.³

Following tightening of the noose on the organization in the central governorate of Al-Bayda, the AQAP has consolidated its presence in Wadi Abidah. Reports said that AQAP's new Leader, Saad bin Atef Al-Awlaqi, frequently visits Wadi Abidah and probably resides there permanently under the protection of some tribal figures who sympathize with the organization.⁴

In 2021, the AQAP exited Al-Bayda governorate following a Houthi military operation. However, exclusive sources revealed that the organization's withdrawal was a result of an agreement with the Houthis⁵ like what it did before

¹ The AQAP's military Manufacturing official killed by an airstrike in Marib(Al-Montasaf)

² How Does the Targeting of Abdulrahman Al-Najdi Reveal about the "Jihad Troy" and Serving Tehan's Agenda by the AQAP?(akhbaralaan.net)

³ Son of the Qaeeda Emir died in a fire that broke out in his house in Yemen(Al-Arabiya.net)

⁴ Batarfi's Death and Al-Qaeda in Yemen's New Emir: What Comes Next?(Sanaa Center)

⁵ Sources close to the AQAP spoke to "South 24 Center"

in Wald Rabi' district in the same governorate. A year later, the Southern forces⁶ were able to drive the AQAP elements out of areas in Shabwa and Abyan which were under the control of government forces affiliated with the Islah Party. Following this, some AQAP elements moved to rough mountainous strongholds. The majority headed toward Hadramout and Wadi Abidah in Marib as well as some areas in Al-Jawf governorate.

It seems that some AQAP leaders and elements reside in Wadi Abidah almost openly as they move freely and stay with their families in houses along with other residents. This has been evidenced by the targets of the US raids, one of which killed prominent AQAP leader Hamad Bin Hamoud Al-Tamimi inside his house in Wadi Abidah in February last year.⁷ Al-Tamimi was the Head of the AQAP's 'Shura Council' and one of its most prominent 'Sharia judges'.

Weeks before this operation, US drones killed⁸ Hassan Al-Hadrami, a senior AQAP operative responsible for manufacturing explosive devices, in Wadi Abidah at the end of January 2023. In January 2020, US drones successfully targeted the then AQAP Leader 'Qasim al-Raymi' in Wadi Abidah.⁹ Al-Raymi was one of the founders of AQAP, along with former AQAP leader Nasir al-Wuhayshi. Al-Raymi played a large role in "reviving the regional node of Al-Qaeda" and recruiting militants to AQAP, according to the US Department of State.

It is remarkable that AQAP has not carried out any operations in Wadi Abidah which is currently controlled by governmental forces affiliated with the Islah Party (Yemen's Muslim Brotherhood). Moreover, the organization's presence in Wadi Abidah has not declined. Rather, it appears to have increased after the Islah-linked government forces took control of the valley. Notably, Wadi Abidah has not witnessed any security or military counterterrorism operation, contrary to what has happened in South Yemen governorates, particularly Abyan and Shabwa and previously in Hadramout.

⁶ A Reading of «AQAP» Recent Message to Yemen's Tribes(South24 Center)

⁷ The AQAP admits the killing of one of its senior leader in Marib(alarabiya.net)

⁸ Yemen: The AQAP's explosive manufacturing official was killed(alarabiya.net)

⁹ "A Strong Blow to the Organization".. Report: A US Raid Kills the AQAP Leader(alhurra.com)



File: Aerial shot taken from Google Earth of Wadi Abidah, located in the southeast of the city of Marib, northeast of Yemen. (Google earth, by South24 Center)

Why Wadi Abidah?

In this regard, there is a question about the reasons and factors that have made Wadi Abidah the most important AQAP stronghold for Al-Qaeda. Observers believe that the organization's exploitation of Wadi Abidah can be attributed to some factors. These include the diversified geographical nature of Wadi Abidah, such as the vast farmlands and deserts which provide AQAP a safe haven. Additionally, the terror group has made use of the Wadi Abidah people's characteristic generosity, hospitality, and helping attitude for those who seek aid.¹⁰

Moreover, the AQAP has been able to penetrate the tribal structure in Wadi Abidah by attracting prominent tribal figures and using them to provide protection for its elements and leaders. This happened in Qefa in Al-Bayda and other governorates. Wadi Abidah is considered one of the oldest AQAP strongholds as it witnessed the first US drone strike when in November 3, 2002,

¹⁰ Wadi Abidah..The Hotbed of the AQAP and the Claw of the Army(okaz.com.sa)

a Predator drone killed the then leader of the Al-Qaeda in Yemen (AQY) 'Abu Ali Al-Harithi'¹¹, who was travelling in an SUV along with five other men. Al-Harithi, once Osama bin Laden's bodyguard, later became AQY leader. He was targeted by the US as he was suspected to have had a major role in the October 2000 bombing of the USS Cole in Aden that killed 17 US sailors. AQY was the predecessor to AQAP. Nasir al-Wuhayshi, who served as Bin Laden's secretary, took over Al-Qaeda's Yemen operations after Al-Harithi's killing. After AQAP was formed in 2009 with the merger of the Al-Qaeda branches in Yemen and Saudi Arabia, Al-Wuhayshi was named the Emir by then Al-Qaeda chief Ayman Al-Zawahiri.

In 2001, the security forces had launched a wide-scale military campaign¹² in the Marib forts to chase out AQY members and the tribal figures protecting them. This led to the killing of more than 12 soldiers.

In 2010, a military campaign was carried out against the AQAP in Wadi Abidah with an aim to arrest leaders of the organization, foremost of whom was 'Ali Bin Saeed Bin Jamil Al-Obeidi' (known as Mowahid Al-Marabi). This led to confrontations between the government forces and the AQAP. The campaign had to be withdrawn as the tribes sided with the AQAP elements.¹³

It is important to mention that the AQAP has benefited from the position of Wadi Abidah as an area outside the control of the central government in Sanaa. It has also made use of the tribes' hostility toward any official military presence inside their territories. The tribes oppose any military forces in Wadi Abidah aiming to pursue the AQAP or any other tasks. The organization's success in attracting tribal figures has made it more invincible in Wadi Abidah.

It can be said that the AQAP elements affiliated with Wadi Abidah became the most prominent members of the outfit who controlled Abyan and parts of Shabwa in 2011 and 2012. Even Ali Bin Saeed Bin Jamil was killed in Abyan by an American raid in 2011 along with two other AQAP elements.

¹¹ Yemeni Interior Minister Reveals the Role of His Government in Killing Abu Ali Al-Harithi(alwasatnews.com)

¹² The Yemeni forces continue chasing the AQAP members(aljazeera.net)

¹³ Yemen announces thwarting an AQAP plot in Marib((reuters.com)

Historically, Wadi Abidah has constituted a starting point for the “terrorist” operations against South Yemen under the pretext of fighting communists, even before the unity with the North in May 1990. For example, a recent publication¹⁴ affiliated with the Al-Qaeda mourned ‘Mowahid Al-Marabi’ by saying that “the Abidah Tribe particularly played a special role in fighting socialist communists in the 1980s and that convoys of Jihadists moved from Marib toward the fighting line in ‘Beihan’ to respond to the communist enemies”.

Geographically, Wadi Abidah, which is more than 130 km long, extends from Marib city to the borders of Al-Abr and Al-Wadiyah crossing. It is considered a fertile valley where several crops are grown, including various types of vegetables. It comprises about 100,000 people.

The Governorate where AQAP leaders have been Installed

Accordingly, it can be said that Wadi Abidah is the most important stronghold of AQAP. For this reason, senior AQAP leaders have been keen to remain there and also hold important meetings, especially those related to the installation of new leaders.

Following the killing of ‘Abu Ali Al-Harithi’ in the deserts of Marib, Nasir Al-Wuhayshi took over as chief of the Al-Qaeda’s Yemen operations in the same governorate. It seems that this happened again with Khaled Batarfi following the assassination of then AQAP Leader Qasim al-Raymi in Wadi Abidah in a US drone strike on January 31, 2020. Certainly, the current leader of the organization, Saad Atef Al-Awlaqi, was installed to succeed Batarfi in Wadi Abidah too.¹⁵

According to a report issued by ‘Sanaa Center’, “The last direct meeting between Batarfi and Al-Awlaqi was in January 2024, where debate raged over organizational and financial issues without reaching a conclusion. At the end of February 2024, Al-Awlaqi was invited by Khabib Al-Sudani for urgent consultations at one of the organization’s safe havens in Marib. But when he arrived, Al-Awlaqi was surprised to find that the reason for the invitation was not

¹⁴ Publications Affiliated to the Al-Qaeda.. Blood On the Arabian Peninsula((ketabonline.com)

¹⁵ Batarfi’s Death and Al-Qaeda in Yemen’s New Emir: What Comes Next?(Sanaa Center)

to reconcile with Batarfi, but to prepare him to take over the group's leadership." On March 10, 2024, the AQAP announced the death of its leader, Khaled Batarfi, and the appointment of Saad al-Awlaqi as his successor.

Marib governorate, especially Wadi Abidah, has played a crucial role in the survival of the AQAP in Yemen. The governorate was a starting point for the AQAP to control Abyan and parts of Shabwa in 2011 and 2012. Many AQAP elements have settled there after withdrawing from the above-mentioned two governorates in mid-2012. Many AQAP elements returned to Marib as it was safer for them. At that time, the organization issued a statement calling on tribes in Marib to receive and protect its elements.¹⁶

It is important to state that the AQAP withdrew from the main cities in South Yemen only to move to the mountainous strongholds in the same governorates. However, after the Southern forces launched military campaigns in these bastions, the AQAP elements headed to Wadi Abidah, where they enjoyed full protection. This highlights the importance of Wadi Abidah for the organization.

Armament Support

The relationship between the tribes and the AQAP in Wadi Abidah hasn't been limited to providing a safe haven and protection, but has extended to include supplying weapons. According to a paper published by 'South24 Center', some 'B-10' cannons used by the AQAP in 2010 and 2011 were borrowed from some sympathizing tribal Sheiks in Wadi Abidah.¹⁷

According to the paper, the AQAP probably received other weapons from the tribes on different occasions. In this regard, sources close to the organization do not rule out that the latter moved large amounts of heavy weapons seized from camps in Abyan and Shabwa to Marib, where they were sold to the tribes.¹⁸

According to information, a missile found with AQAP elements by the security forces in Sanaa more than a decade ago, and which was being prepared to target

¹⁶ The AQAP announces Withdrawing its elements from Aden and Abyan to Marib, Al-Jawf, and Saadaalealamy.net)

¹⁷ Research Paper: How and From Where Has AQAP Received Weapons?(South 24 Center)

¹⁸ Sources close to the AQAP spoke to "South 24 Center"

the plane of the then Saudi Interior Minister Mohammed bin Nayef Bin Abdulaziz during his visit to the Yemeni capital, was brought from the tribal areas in Wadi Abidah.¹⁹

In the visual publication released by the organization under the title 'Unpacking the Version I Won And The Lord Of The Kaaba-2'²⁰, the AQAP spoke about an unsuccessful operation that was scheduled to target Prince Nayef Bin Abdulaziz and his son Mohammed Bin Nayef along with other Saudi princes during the landing of their plane in Sanaa International Airport. It featured a training session on using missiles in a desert area in Wadi Abidah.

Prior to that, US officials had visited Sanaa to pressure the Yemeni government, during the era of former President Ali Abdullah Saleh, to destroy the air defense missiles for fear that the AQAP may seize these weapons and use them in attacks on civil airports.²¹

Some famous leaked WikiLeaks documents said that the US had concerns about the presence of dangerous weapons, including the portable anti-aircraft missiles, outside the Yemeni government's armories in a way that could threaten the American and Yemeni interests as well as global security if they fell into the hands of AQAP elements. The US was also worried about the missiles being smuggled to AQAP elements from the Yemeni official warehouses. Washington said that this had actually happened, and that the terror organization used them in its operations in Kenya, Saudi Arabia, and Yemen in 2001 and 2002.²²

The leaked American documents did not mention that a large number of these missiles had fallen into the hands of the Yemeni tribes after the 1994 civil war against South Yemen. Therefore, the then presidency assigned an officer in the Defense Ministry, called "Fekri Al-Emad", to negotiate with people and arms dealers to buy these weapons, especially the Strela (SAM2-SAM3) man-portable surface-to-air anti-aircraft missiles.²³

¹⁹ Exclusive sources spoke to "South 24 Center"

²⁰ download book unpacking the version i won and the lord of the kaaba 2 pdf - Noor Library (noor-book.com)

²¹ The US Is Behind Destroying the Yemen Air Defense Missiles(Iranian Nour News)

²² Yemeni documents talk about huge numbers of SAM missiles in the markets, with tribes and the AQAP (islamtimes.com)

²³ The previous source from the Yemeni newspaper "Al-Nas"

A New Chapter: The Houthis and the Islah Party

Along with the tribal role, the presence of the Islah Party in Marib as a de facto authority since 2015 has served as an additional protection for the AQAP. In late 2014, the Houthis invaded Sanaa and some Northern governorates without facing any notable resistance. However, the situation was different in Marib, where tribes gathered in traditional gatherings called 'Matareh', with the first such gathering taking place in Nakhla, north of Marib city. At the Matareh Nakhla, the tribes decided to resist the Houthis. The western front in the governorate (Sirwah) was a theater for the battle in which the AQAP participated effectively.

At this time, the organization had not bothered to conceal its participation in the battle and released almost daily news bulletins about the presence of its elements in the front along with the so-called 'Tribes of Ahl Al-Sunna', a mixture of tribal militants, Islah Party elements, and some army forces.

It continued like that until 2016 when Saudi Arabia sent forces to the governorate. According to informed sources, Riyadh asked Marib Governor, Sultan Al-Arada, to drive the AQAP elements out of the fighting fronts. Embarrassed by the presence of the AQAP terror elements within the Coalition-backed forces, the governor demanded that the organization not flaunt its flags or publish news about the participation of its members in the battles.²⁴

Nonetheless, former AQAP field commander Jalal Belaidi Al-Marqashi in 2016 revealed that the organization had participated in 11 fighting fronts affiliated with the popular resistance. In 2017, the then AQAP chief Qasim al-Raymi stated that the organization's elements had participated in fighting against the Houthi militia along with the Muslim Brotherhood and some affiliated with the Salafis.²⁵ Three years after this statement, Al-Raymi was killed in a US raid in Wadi Abidah.

²⁴ Exclusive sources spoke to "South 24 Center"

²⁵ Al-Qaeda's Shifting Alliances During the Yemen War (Sanaa Center)

The Arrest of the Organization's Sharia judge

In September 2023, the AQAP revealed news about the arrest of the organization's Sharia judge 'Abu Bishr'²⁶ by the security forces in Marib. Bishr had been arrested a year and a half ago in Marib. While news of his arrest by the security forces may contradict the hypothesis of the strong ties between the Islah Party and the AQAP, this operation probably had its special reasons that do not deny the existing reality of the undeclared relationship between the two parties. The presence of 'Abu Bishr' in the city of Marib, which serves as an AQAP bulwark in certain areas such as Wadi Abidah, reveals the organization's expansion and its growing freedom of movement inside the governorate.

The operation for his arrest raises several questions about the motives and circumstances. It is unlikely that the security forces carried out this operation independently. This is due to the existing ties between the AQAP, the Islah Party, and the tribes of Wadi Abidah. The arrest may be a result of foreign pressure, probably from the United States, after monitoring the senior leader's moves. In this case, the security forces probably carried out the operation to avoid accusations of leniency toward terrorist organizations.

Moreover, it is not unlikely that other parties that have no direct links with the Islah Party and are operating in secret inside Marib are responsible for carrying out such operations, especially after the establishment of the Presidential Leadership Council (PLC).

The AQAP's response to the arrest of Abu Bishr reflects its resentment for not releasing him yet. The AQAP had to reveal the information to ensure Abu Bishr's safety as long as he remains in the custody of parties affiliated with Islah. The organization probably fears that he has been moved to the custody of another body which isn't affiliated with the Islah Party.

However, the AQAP realizes that the security bodies affiliated with the Islah Party may take such measures to avoid accusations of taking a soft line on

²⁶ The AQAP announces the arrest of its Sharia judge(alaraby.co.uk)

counterterrorism. The organization previously issued a rare statement, apologizing for an attack that killed some police personnel in Abyan, before the Southern Transitional Council. (STC) took over control of the governorate.²⁷The AQAP described the operation as a “unilateral action” that doesn’t represent its general policy. The statement, which was apparently aimed to contain the ire of the police forces, recalled some operations that previously targeted the AQAP elements in Marib and Shabwa.

The friendly language of the statement, that addressed the police forces affiliated with the Islah Party at the time, points to the existence of an undeclared understanding between the two parties and that small disagreements won’t affect the main relationship.

Why Did AQAP not Carry out Operations in Marib

Despite the strong AQAP presence in Wadi Abidah, the organization has not been operationally active in most parts of Marib. This raises many questions about the tacit reasons behind this?

There are several reasons behind the AQAP’s refusal to carry out operations in Wadi Abidah. The first is that Wadi Abidah is outside the central government’s control and does not have governmental forces that can be targeted. Another reason is that the forces affiliated with the Internationally-Recognized Government that control the governorate are not among the AQAP’s targets. They are like comrades in arms who engage in joint wars against common enemies. The situation in Wadi Abidah is similar to what happened in Shabwa during the era of Mohammed Saleh Bin Adyoi (November 2018-December 2021), the leader affiliated with the Islah Party. Over this period, the AQAP did not carry out any operations.

Furthermore, the AQAP pays attention to the sensitivity of Wadi Abidah’s tribes towards carrying out any operations inside the valley. This explains the AQAP’s

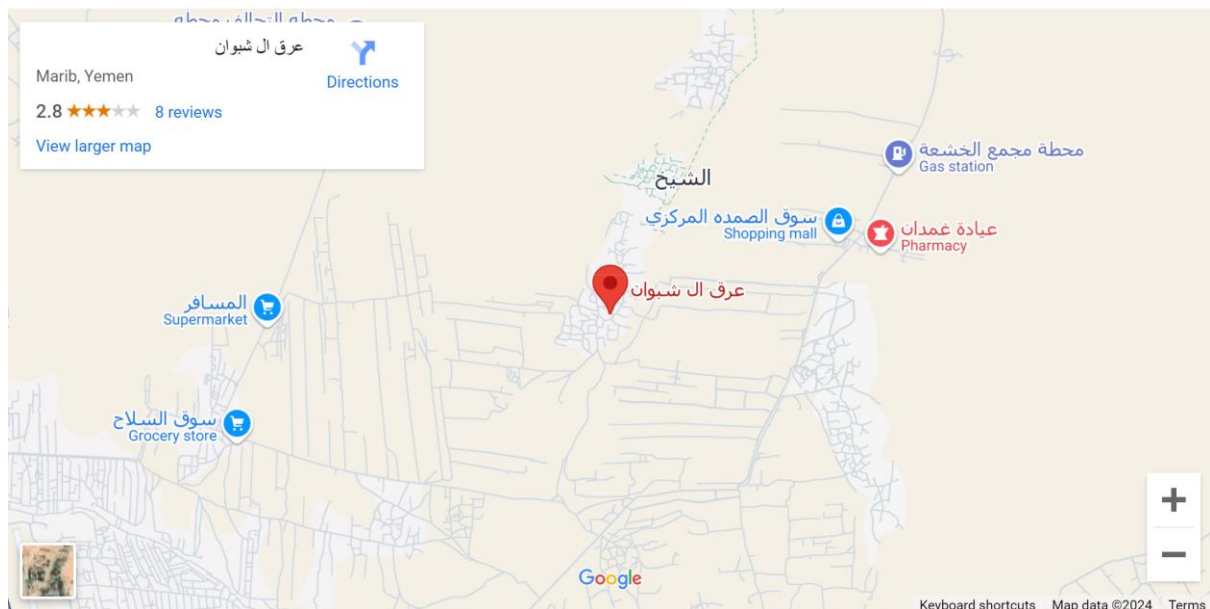
²⁷ Why AQAP Denied Involvement in Wadi Abidah Bombings?(South 24 Center)

denial of its links to the explosions that targeted persons affiliated with the governmental forces in December 2022.

It is also important to note that the organization considered these bombings as an attempt by a third party to damage its relationship with the governorate's tribes. A statement issued by AQAP urged the tribes to "trust their Jihadist brothers".²⁸, thereby suggesting the presence of a third party that seeks to create discord between the AQAP and the tribes.

The Areas of Presence

Although the AQAP usually operates and moves between areas in secret, which makes it difficult to track its movement, but, based on monitoring of the US raids and information derived from some sources, some of the areas in Wadi Abidah, where the AQAP is present include: Al-Samdah, Irg Al Shabwan, Hoson Al Jalal, Hadbaa Al Awshan, Al-Masil, and Al-Qulah.



A map projection of the 'Arq Al-Shabwan' area, one of the locations where Al-Qaeda is likely to be present in Wadi Abidah, Marib (Google Maps, provided by the South Center).

However, it is worth mentioning that this information sometimes is based on intelligence estimates that change from time to time and may be inaccurate in some cases.

²⁸The AQAP denies carrying out any targeting operation in Wadi Abidah in Marib(masa-press.net)

Summary

There are several factors that have made Wadi Abidah an AQAP safe haven. They can be summarized in the following points:

Geographical terrain: The area is characterized by rough terrain as well as caves and deep valleys. This provides a typical cover for the AQAP and its elements and makes it hard for the governmental forces to reach the hideouts.

The Tribes: The presence of strong and effective tribes in this region has provided the AQAP with protection and logistic support.

The Lack of State Control: The government's weak control on the region, especially amid the ongoing conflict in Yemen, has allowed the AQAP to move freely and expand its influence.

Poverty and Unemployment: The spread of poverty and unemployment in the area has made the youth vulnerable to be recruited in the ranks of the AQAP, which provides them with money and weapons.

Extremist Ideology: The organization has exploited the spread of extremist ideas among young people to recruit and mobilize them.

Old History of Conflicts: The region's long history of tribal conflicts and civil wars has created a fertile environment for the growth of extremist organizations.

The Islah Party and the Houthis: The Islah Party's big influence in the governorate and its ideological closeness to the AQAP have helped the latter to enhance its presence and facilitate the recruitment operations. Even if the Houthis fully control Wadi Abidah, the AQAP may coordinate with the Houthis to confront joint foes in South Yemen like what is happening in Abyan and Shabwa.²⁹

²⁹ Houthis team up with feared Al-Qaeda branch in new threat to Yemen (telegraph.co.uk)

Challenges

In light of the aforementioned points, the AQAP presence in Marib, especially Wadi Abidah, has constituted a big challenge to counterterrorism efforts in Yemen. There are several factors that make the relationship between the terror organization and the tribes a complicated one:

Joint History: The tribes have old ties with the AQAP. The latter provided the tribes with material and military support in their battles against the central government which has created a feeling of mutual loyalty.

Common Interests: The tribal interests sometimes intersect with the organization's ones such as opposing the central government or the other parties of the conflict.

Financial Promises: The organization provides financial and military support to the tribes which encourages the latter to furnish protection and support in return.

Therefore, tribal protection makes counterterrorism more complicated. It is difficult to target the AQAP elements without confronting the tribes that provide a safe sanctuary to the organization. Moreover, this protection enables the AQAP to plan and carry out its terrorist operations in addition to expanding its influence.

Regional and International Ramifications

The impact of the AQAP's presence in Marib, especially in Wadi Abidah, goes beyond the local borders to constitute regional and international threats. Wadi Abidah is considered a starting base for the AQAP's terrorist operations that can target other countries in the region. According to exclusive sources, the August 2009 operation that targeted Prince Mohammed Bin Nayef, Saudi Arabia's counterterrorism chief, inside his palace in Jeddah was prepared and arranged in Wadi Abidah in Marib. {In the group's first operation outside Yemen, the bomber, Ahmed al-Asiri, concealed a device containing the high-explosive pentaerythritol tetranitrate (PETN) inside his body and triggered it when he went to meet Prince

Mohammed bin Nayef in Jeddah. The AQAP bomber died in the blast, while the Saudi royal survived.}

Additionally, the AQAP can exploit its presence in Marib to recruit elements from other states which doubles the size of dangers. This expansion of the AQAP's capabilities may destabilize regional and international security as the organization may direct its activities toward external targets by using Wadi Abidah as a starting point.

Proposals and Solutions

To confront these challenges related to the AQAP in Wadi Abidah, some practical steps need to be adopted:

Dialogue and Reconciliation with the Tribes: Emphasis should be placed on enhancing dialogue and reconciliation with the tribes that embrace the AQAP or provide it with protection. There is a need to give these tribes economic and social incentives in return for their abandoning the protection of the organization's elements and instead supporting the political process.

Combating Poverty and Unemployment: To lessen the recruitment of young people in AQAP ranks, the desperate reasons, represented in poverty and unemployment, should be treated by providing job opportunities and basic services in the tribal areas. The economic development of these regions will be a decisive factor in cutting off the AQAP's recruitment sources.

Enhancing Governance and State Control: The capabilities of the central government should be consolidated, and the scope of its public services expanded in the remote areas that lack the presence of the state. The existence of strong governmental institutions in Marib and Wadi Abidah will contribute in curtailing the AQAP's influence and reducing its movement area.

Countering Extremist Ideology: Efforts should be made for spreading awareness and religious tolerance in addition to supporting the moderate religious

institutions to confront extremist ideas which are exploited by the organization to recruit and mobilize youth. Moderate educational and religious programs can play a big role in limiting the impact of AQAP.

International Counterterrorism Cooperation: Enhancing international cooperation and exchanging intelligence information about the AQAP activities in Yemen will be necessary to confront cross-border threats. This includes supporting the presence of counterterrorism forces in Marib.

Disengagement Between AQAP and Islah Party: This is considered one of the most important counterterrorism steps. Although the Islah Party is part of the legitimate authority in Marib, its links to the AQAP complicate the counterterrorism efforts by providing the organization with a political cover. The central government and the international forces should exert pressure for breaking this relationship by enhancing governance and supporting political alternatives.

Conclusion

Wadi Abidah remains a pivotal point in the dynamics of the ongoing conflict in Yemen as it provides the AQAP with a safe haven. This is a result of the complicated relationship between the organization and the tribes, the absence of the central government's control, and the collusion of some local forces. Addressing this situation requires comprehensive efforts, including enhancing governance, providing economic development, and engaging in dialogue with the tribes.

In light of the regional and international AQAP threats through its operations and expansion, international cooperation remains a necessity for counterterrorism in Yemen. Stability in Wadi Abidah will be part of the stability of Yemen and the entire region in general.

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