



## AL-QA'IDA IN THE ARABIAN PENINSULA: MOs & DEDUCTIONS

by James Spencer

### *EXECUTIVE SUMMARY*

There has been extensive discussion of and assertions about al-Qa'ida in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP), some of it deliberately inaccurate, some misreported, much sensationalised. The then Director of the National Counter-Terrorism Center (NCTC) Michael Leitner is often quoted as saying: "AQAP is now the greatest single terrorist threat to the United States." This is derived from his public testimony to the Committee on Homeland Security in which he stated "I actually 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."<sup>1</sup> Not only has Dir Leitner's "risk" become "threat", but the selective quotation omits both his previous comparative remarks (that AQ Prime in AFPAK have been so suppressed by UAV attacks that they are unable to mount coherent attacks), and also his reticence to rank AQAP as more or less of a threat than AQ Prime. Nor do the reports note that AQAP itself has not increased in capability or intent; it owes its new ranking to the diminished capability of AQ Prime.

As a result of this careless reporting, AQAP's Capability and Intent (which together comprise the Threat it represents) have been little addressed - at least in the public discourse - and less understood. This paper examines AQAP's low intensity operations in Yemen, analyses AQAP tactics, from that identifies an operational structure (and operating divisions), its various Intents and deduces its key weaknesses.

- Multiple concurrent uprisings in Yemen are ideologically unconnected
  - Periodically violent Zaydi Shi'a Revivalists (aka Huthis) in North & West
  - Violent Sunni Islamists & AQAP in South and Centre / East
  - Mostly peaceful, mostly secular Southernists (aka Hirak) in South West
  - Peaceful secular People (and more kinetic Tribes) throughout Yemen
- AQAP's kinetic capability against the West has been over-emphasised
  - Had broadly same capabilities in 02 & 06, pre al-Aulaqi & al-Wuhayshi
  - Kinetic threat mostly to Sa'udi royals and Yemeni security personnel
  - AQAP appear to have only one competent IED builder – al-'Asiri

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<sup>1</sup> "Hearing Of The House Homeland Security Committee - "Understanding The Homeland Threat Landscape – Considerations For The 112th Congress" (09 Feb 11) [http://www.nctc.gov/press\\_room/speeches/Transcript-HHSC\\_Understanding-the-Homeland-Threat.pdf](http://www.nctc.gov/press_room/speeches/Transcript-HHSC_Understanding-the-Homeland-Threat.pdf) accessed 11 Mar 11

- AQAP appears to be geographically and operationally divided into 3 groups:
  - Infantry group, seeking to take and hold ground from the government
  - Special Operations group, using various IEDs for spectacular attacks
  - Information Operations cell, seeking to induce attacks within the West
- Key threat is AQAP's inspiration to disenchant Muslims in the West
  - "Inspire" could be produced by many Islamists from anywhere in the world
  - Most of Inspire's technical content, so far, is already in the public domain
  - Has trained Western Islamists in Yemen but prefers to avoid signature
- AQAP's key weakness is alienating the tribes among whom they live
- AQAP appear to have limited funding, and conduct robberies to raise cash

### ***"Publication bias"***

Quite apart from the sensational headlines, there are several other reasons for the inexactitudes. These are important to understand as they help provide a "*qui bono*" diagnosis in discerning the likely perpetrators of an attack. The Yemeni regime has a financial interest in perpetuating the ominous spectre of AQAP, for they have seen US military aid increase five-fold in 2 years<sup>2</sup>, and many of the regime's inner members occupy senior counter-terrorist positions. This strategy began after Pres Ali Abdullah Salih returned from a trip to Washington in November 2005, where instead of being congratulated for eradicating terrorism, the Yemeni President was castigated for failing to achieve political and economic reforms. Visibly rising levels of corruption also meant that Yemen was judged not to have met Millennium Challenge entry criteria, and the World Bank reduced its loan package for similar reasons. A scant three months later, previously catatonic terrorism was resurrected when 23 accomplished *jihadis* mysteriously broke out of a high security prison in Sana'a.

Despite the on-going turmoil and the 03 June 2011 IED attack on the inner circle of the formal government, the financial incentive to the Yemeni Regime is likely to continue (unless a more transparent government succeeds) as AQAP represents a valuable source of "rent". In particular, commanders of the security services (who are likely to be political appointees) will benefit by diverting funds and materiel to their, and their clients', personal advantage.

The Salih regime also has a political interest in the continued menace of al-Qa'ida: he has (relatively) successfully presented his rule as the bulwark against al-Qa'ida, and intimated that any future Yemeni government would not be as amenable as his to US counter-terrorist activities. Finally, by designating domestic insurrectionists as part of the GWOT, the regime regard themselves as fully justified in using force (often US supplied) in suppressing their opponents: "The war against the Houthis is not a distraction from the CT [counter-terrorist] fight. It is the CT fight."<sup>3</sup> Similarly, the on-going feud between the Abida tribe of Ma'rib over the killing of one of their sheikhs in a missile strike on 25 May 2009 is frequently wrongly ascribed – often by anonymous sources - to al-Qa'ida.

<sup>2</sup> Sharp, JM "Yemen: Background and U.S. Relations" CRS (22 Mar 11) <http://www.fas.org/sqp/crs/mideast/RL34170.pdf> accessed 17 May 11

<sup>3</sup> Seche, S "Yemen's Counter Terrorism Unit Stretched Thin By War Against Houthis" Department of State / Wikileaks (17 Dec 09) <http://www.wikileaks.nl/cable/2009/12/09SANAA2230.html> 08 Dec 10

Meanwhile, Yemeni independent news website Marib Press reported that at least seven soldiers were killed in the terrorist attack and seven others were wounded as the assailants managed to seize two armored vehicles and a pick-up military truck.

The military forces fired back and shelled the village of Al Shabwan, home of the suspected militants, it said.<sup>4</sup>

It is unlikely that AQ would seize A Vehicles, which would be a readily identifiable, easily attacked target for US Unmanned Aerial Vehicles (UAVs) firing anti-tank Hellfire missiles; by contrast, *qabilis* would be delighted to increase their capability vis-à-vis the government. Further, while there are alleged to be al-Shabwanis among AQAP, it is unlikely that they would return straight to their home village, but logical for *qabilis* to do so. (The tribes are heavily armed, not only with small arms, but with support weapons as well, and are always looking to improve their capability.)

AQAP itself has an interest in claiming attacks: the purpose of terrorism is to terrify, which can only occur with the oxygen of publicity. High-profile attacks – successful or otherwise – inspire recruits to join, and stimulate sympathisers to provide funds. As AQAP also note in their Printer Bomb claim<sup>5</sup> (and Inspire “Special Edition”), by forcing the West to defend against every possible line of attack, they also increase the cost in money and civil liberties.

Lastly, it should not be omitted that counter-terrorist agencies (and particularly their contractors) also have a careerist interest in propagating AQAP’s image. In an age of shrinking budgets and headcounts, a new theatre represents a new lifeline for an agency, or continuation of a contract that might otherwise be ended.

## ***Overview of al-Qa’ida in Yemen***

AQ’s history in Yemen is relatively well-known, starting with what may have been AQ’s first operation: an IED attack on US Marines transitting through Aden en route to Somalia on 29 December 1992. Possibly as the result of an alleged ceasefire agreement with the government, the rest of the 1990s saw little AQ violent activity within Yemen, although it is likely that activity in support of external operations occurred. This period of relative calm was interrupted by the suicide bomb boat attacks on the USS THE SULLIVANS (03 January 2000), the USS COLE (12 October 2000), MV LIMBURG, and the MANPAD / HMG anti-air ambush on a Hunt Oil helicopter on 03 November 2002. These were followed by the killing of Sinan al-Harithi and several other key AQ members by a CIA Predator near Ma’rib on 05 November 2002. This seemed to strike a deathblow to AQ in Yemen, and US priorities vis-à-vis Yemen switched to human rights etc issues.

AQ(Y) A second incarnation of AQ (hereafter al-Qa’ida in Yemen (AQY), but also known as al-Qa’ida in the South of the Arabian Peninsula, and sometimes the Yemeni Soldiers Brigade) sprang into life with the 03 February 2006 escape of AQ prisoners from the Political Security Organisation’s high-security jail in Sana’a. These men were mostly second generation

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4 “Five soldiers killed in al-Qaida raid in Yemen's northeast Marib” Xinhua (28 Mar 11) <http://english.peopledaily.com.cn/90001/90777/90854/7333130.html> accessed 28 Mar 11

5 Cole, M “Al Qaeda Promises U.S. Death By A 'Thousand Cuts’” ABC News (21 Nov 10) <http://abcnews.go.com/Blotter/al-qaeda-promises-us-death-thousand-cuts/story?id=12204726> accessed 23 May 11

AQ members<sup>6</sup> who regarded Ali Abdullah's accommodating stance towards the US as treachery, and declined to abide by the alleged ceasefire agreement.

A spate of spectacular attacks followed, aimed mostly at the oil industry and tourism, thereby achieving international coverage of attacks on foreign citizens, and squeezing the Yemeni government's two main sources of foreign currency revenue. The two VBIED attacks against oil facilities on 15 September 2006 failed (and the cell responsible was rounded up soon after), but lower profile attacks on oil distribution facilities were more successful. The suicide VBIED attack on a party of Spanish tourists at Marib<sup>7</sup> (02 July 2007) and the shooting of two Belgian tourists and their guides in Wadi Du'an<sup>8</sup> (19 January 2008) were also successful.

AQ(Y) also conducted attacks against both the "Far Enemy" (the US) and the "Near Enemy" (the Yemeni Government). On 18 March 2008, AQ(Y) attempted to mortar the US Embassy, but missed and hit a nearby girls' school instead. There was also the complex attack on the US Embassy<sup>9</sup> in Sana'a on 17 September 2008. Not only did this spectacular involve a double SVBIED (possibly copying the *Jama'at al-Tawhid wal-Jihad* November 2003 attack against the Carabinieri in al-Nasiriyyah) but also a secondary shoot onto the immediate follow-up. They also mounted a mortar attack on 30 April 2008, which hit the Yemeni Customs Authority, but may have been aimed at the Italian Embassy, and one against the Presidential Palace<sup>10</sup> on 01 May 2008 which went unnoticed until it was claimed. Two months later, an AQY suicide car bomber was only partially successful in an SVBIED attack on Saiyun Police HQ<sup>11</sup> in late July.

AQAP After robust and sustained security pressure by the Sa'udi authorities from 2003 - 2007, coupled with a reasonably successful demobilisation programme, AQ in Sa'udi Arabia (known as AQAP) was effectively dislocated. Possibly following the counsel in a (weak) Hadith of the Prophet "to seek refuge in Yemen when chaos threatens", the survivors of al-Qa'ida in Sa'udi Arabia decamped to Yemen. In late January 2009 they – together with two important former GTMO detainees – merged with the still potent AQY, under the leadership of AQY's al-Shihri but keeping the name al-Qa'ida in the Arabian Peninsula.

Not long after the merger, the new AQAP launched an SIED attack against a party of South Korean tourists in Saiyun<sup>12</sup> on 15 March 2009, killing four Koreans. In a geographically and temporally displaced secondary attack on the responders, AQAP mounted a second SIED three days later in Sana'a against the Korean party investigating the incident. The attacker stepped on to the Airport Road between<sup>13</sup> the vehicles of the Koreans' packet and detonated his

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<sup>6</sup> ie not veterans of the Afghan campaign against the USSR, but later campaigns, such as Bosnia, Chechnya, Afghanistan and Iraq.

<sup>7</sup> "Yemen bomb kills Spanish tourists" BBC (02 Jul 07) <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/6262302.stm> accessed 19 Apr 11

<sup>8</sup> "Belgians killed in Yemen attack" BBC (19 Jan 08) [http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/middle\\_east/7196186.stm](http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/middle_east/7196186.stm) accessed 19 Apr 11

<sup>9</sup> "Al Qaeda blamed for U.S. Embassy attack" CNN (17 Sep 08) <http://edition.cnn.com/2008/WORLD/meast/09/17/yemen.blast/index.html> accessed 18 May 11

<sup>10</sup> "Yemen Soldiers Brigades claim responsibility for attacking presidential palace" Yemenonline (12 May 08) <http://www.yemenonline.info/news-594.html> accessed 05 Apr 11

<sup>11</sup> "Al-Qaeda claims car bomb attack on Yemen police compound" Deutsche Presse-Agentur (27 Jul 08) [http://www.monstersandcritics.com/news/middleeast/news/article\\_1419733.php/Al-Qaeda\\_claims\\_car\\_bomb\\_attack\\_on\\_Yemen\\_police\\_compound](http://www.monstersandcritics.com/news/middleeast/news/article_1419733.php/Al-Qaeda_claims_car_bomb_attack_on_Yemen_police_compound) accessed 15 Apr 11

<sup>12</sup> "Tourists die in Yemen explosion" BBC (19 Mar 09) <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/7945013.stm> accessed 19 Apr 11

<sup>13</sup> "Bomber targets S Koreans in Yemen" Al-Jazeera (18 Apr 09) <http://english.aljazeera.net/news/middleeast/2009/03/200931871130679609.html> accessed 18 Mar 09

device, killing himself but otherwise causing little damage. According to Ali Abdullah Salih, AQAP also tried to fire a SAM at his aircraft as he visited Aden in early 2009<sup>14</sup>.

### *Other Actors*

Confusingly, there are other actors in Yemen who also use kinetic means to further their political ends. Due to their similar backgrounds and the same availability of materiel, it can be difficult to discern responsibility for attacks. The actions of the Huthis in the north are rarely mistaken for those in the south, principally due to their geography, but also because they have fought more of a guerrilla campaign than a terrorist one. However, in the south, some sympathisers with Hirak (the Southern Mobility Movement / SMM) have militant tendencies and have been increasingly involved in terrorist activities as their peaceful protests have achieved little but repression:

The AlSahwa website quoted the sources as saying elements from the movement asked the owner of a motorbike to deliver food for a detainee at the building and the meal was an improvised explosive device that was set off when the motorcyclist arrived at the building.

However, the sources revealed the motorcyclist was a soldier from Sana'a Province and his motorbike was packed with explosives while he was shopping in the Dhale market.

On Tuesday, the authorities said 8 policemen were wounded when the motorbike exploded at the gate of the police office. The office suffered damages as well.”<sup>15</sup>

(Rather than an SVBIED - the soldier was killed in the explosion - this looks like an IED on a short-fused TPU, put in the motorcycle's saddlebags while the soldier was in the market. He probably stopped to chat at the barrack gate rather than going straight through and parking.) Hirak-aligned militants have also been accused of shooting attacks, CQAs<sup>16</sup> and even bombings, such as the come-on attack at al-Wahda Sports Club in Aden<sup>17</sup>. Interestingly, this suggests that nationalist terrorists are less concerned about causing collateral damage than Jihadis, possibly because they are more desperate, or because they are more settled in their communities.

In addition, there are further groups operating in southern Yemen which are neither tribal nor Southernist, but Islamist, yet not necessarily AQAP. The Islamists who stormed the

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<sup>14</sup> Seche, S “Saleh Sees Foreign Hand Behind Yemen,s Internal Woes” Wikileaks (31 May 09)  
<http://www.wikileaks.ch/cable/2009/05/09SANAA1015.html> accessed 18 May 11

<sup>15</sup> Security Sources Say Separatists Involved in Dhale Suicide Attack- Site Yemen Post (04 Aug 10)  
<http://yemenpost.net/Detail123456789.aspx?ID=100&SubID=2499&MainCat=3> accessed 06 Apr 11

<sup>16</sup> “Gunmen kill south Yemen intelligence chief: security” AFP (14 Aug 10)  
[http://www.google.com/hostednews/afp/article/ALeqM5jap3eBBxDaRhDuRcb7GD\\_gvhBoLw](http://www.google.com/hostednews/afp/article/ALeqM5jap3eBBxDaRhDuRcb7GD_gvhBoLw) accessed 14 Aug 10

<sup>17</sup> “Deadly twin bomb attack on Yemen sports centre: officials” AFP (11 Oct 10)  
<http://www.google.com/hostednews/afp/article/ALeqM5hSI6CY8K9AHxXmOnLPFrSdOLy-dQ?docId=CNG.aca2a7d7280bbf622f6d149ae826bb52.721> accessed 11 Oct 10

munitions factory in Jaar and supplanted<sup>18</sup> the government forces there have mostly been described as AQAP<sup>19</sup>, but in an interview with a local journalist, the leader denied this:

We have the same vision, the same goal, and the same fate of Taliban and Al Qaeda, but we are not linked with them organizationally,” Abu Basir told the Yemeni local journalist Abdul Khalek Al Hood.<sup>20</sup>

While it is possible Abu Basir is being economic with the actualité, the actions of his followers in “patrolling with three armored vehicles and a tank around Jaar city” goes against AQAP / generic terrorist MOs, especially since “a military plane was flying low over the central area of Jaar city.”<sup>21</sup>

There are also allegations that the Government, in addition to using its established forces, runs a counter-gang operation using former Jihadis against Southernists, just as it used Afghan Arabs against the Southerners in the 1994 Civil War. These allegations are given some credence by interviews with such individuals<sup>22</sup>, and by the unusual form of attack:

Yemeni officials told Reuters the retired officer was killed by a bomb placed under the driver's seat of his car on Wednesday night. He was retired but his brother worked with security forces.<sup>23</sup>

Other reports of the attack note that the two were en route to a secessionist meeting, which would give motive. Similarly, the “mine placed on the route of an antigovernment protest” in Lawdar “a town notorious for antigovernment feeling”<sup>24</sup> is likely to be a pro-regime attack.

To complicate things further, there are clashes between HIRAK-aligned personnel and some southern tribes<sup>25</sup>. This may reflect the killing by HIRAKIS of one of their tribesmen who was a soldier, or the tribally-based divisions between southerners which so scourged the PDRY.

### ***Discrimination of AQAP Operational Activity***

In something quite close to a set of accounts, AQAP themselves claimed 50 operations across Yemen in the last five months of 2010:

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<sup>18</sup> There is debate about whether the government forces withdrew in order to allow chaos to flourish, or whether the Islamists drove the government forces out. Given the tribesmen's easy defence of the cement factory, the former seems as likely.

<sup>19</sup> An official source initially described the Islamists as being the Aden Abyan Islamic Army – a grouping which had kidnapped and murdered western tourists, and with which the recently defected Maj Gen Ali Muhsin Salih had been associated.

<sup>20</sup> “We have the same goal and vision of Taliban and Al Qaeda, Jihadist leader says” Nasser Arrabyee (10 Apr 11) <http://narrabyee-e.blogspot.com/2011/04/we-have-same-goal-and-vision-of-taliban.html> accessed 11 Apr 11

<sup>21</sup> Al-Qaida of Yemen's Abyan force government army back to Aden Xinhua (10 Apr 11) [http://news.xinhuanet.com/english2010/world/2011-04/10/c\\_13822325.htm](http://news.xinhuanet.com/english2010/world/2011-04/10/c_13822325.htm) 11 Apr 11

<sup>22</sup> “Former ‘Afghan Arab’ Ali Al-Kurdi Says Jihad Against South Yemen's Separatists Is The First Priority” Jamestown Terrorism Monitor Vol 9 Iss 3 (20 Jan 11) [http://www.jamestown.org/programs/gta/single/?tx\\_ttnews%5Btt\\_news%5D=37385&cHash=021df43a9c](http://www.jamestown.org/programs/gta/single/?tx_ttnews%5Btt_news%5D=37385&cHash=021df43a9c) accessed 20 Jan 11

<sup>23</sup> Mukhashaf, M “Car bomb in south Yemen kills retired army officer” Reuters (15 Apr 10) <http://news.stv.tv/world/170519-car-bomb-in-south-yemen-kills-retired-army-officer/> accessed 19 May 11

<sup>24</sup> Holmes, O “Yemeni Mine Blast Raises Tension” Wall Street Journal (24 Feb 11) [http://online.wsj.com/article/SB10001424052748703408604576164134036195812.html?mod=googlenews\\_wsj](http://online.wsj.com/article/SB10001424052748703408604576164134036195812.html?mod=googlenews_wsj) accessed 24 Feb 11

<sup>25</sup> “Violent Clashes between Al-Maraqeshah and Gunmen of Mobility in Abyan” Yemen Post (23 May 10) <http://yemenpost.net/Detail123456789.aspx?ID=3&SubID=2211&MainCat=3> accessed 18 Jan 11

In a statement about the operations, released in a Al-Qaeda website, the organization said it executed 13 operations against security officers in five Yemeni governorates, six of them in Abyan in which 13 officers and soldiers were killed.

It claimed responsibility for assassinating three intelligent officers in the Eastern governorate of Hadhramout and the murder of deputy director of criminal investigation in Ma'reb governorate.

Al-Qaeda said in the statement that it kidnapped deputy director of political security department in Saada governorate, Colonel Ali Al-Hussam because "he was running networks spying against Muslims for 20 years. Up to 36 operations were carried out by Al-Qaeda militants in Abyan and Lahj governorates, it said.

Two operations were implemented in the capital, Sanaa, one against a bus carrying security forces and the other against the car of the deputy British Ambassador.<sup>26</sup>

These declared actions (with the exception of the attack on Col al-Hussam<sup>27</sup>) fall into two main stylistic divisions: what might be termed “infantry” operations and “spectacular” attacks. (Although not mentioned in AQAP’s report, there is also a third line of operation –Influence Ops – cf infra.) However, although the MOs have evolved, neither AQAP’s capability nor its intent have increased greatly over the decade, except for its capacity to influence abroad.

### ***Infantry Operations***

The attacks on Yemeni security officers have often involved Close Quarter Assassinations (CQAs), predominately against members of the Political Security Organisation (PSO). The PSO’s main role has been to deter, detect and suppress dissent against Ali Abdullah Salih’s rule. As such, they are relatively high profile (so readily identifiable), but live in their local communities and are thus vulnerable to attack when off-duty – the classic soft target attack. Indeed, in September 2010, al-Qa’ida released a targetting list, identifying 55 security personnel for murder<sup>28</sup>. Many of the CQAs have been drive-by shootings from motorcycles<sup>29</sup>, allowing for a quick getaway, although other killings have been on foot in the *suq*, or by following the targets home and killing them there. The governorates mostly concerned have been Abyan, Shabwa, Ma’rib, Hadhramaut and Lahij.

Another frequently used tactic has been assaults on Vehicle Check Points (VCPs) of which there are a great number, both on the outskirts of towns, and on arterial routes. Part of the reason for the VCPs is to increase security – they have intercepted various terrorists and traffickers - but it is as much to keep soldiers doing their national service occupied. As a result, not only are the soldiers poorly trained and led, but few resources are invested in the VCPs,

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<sup>26</sup> Gamal, A “Al-Qaeda in Arab Peninsula claims responsibility for 50 attacks in Yemen” Global Arab Network (02 Jan 11) <http://www.english.globalarabnetwork.com/201101018495/Yemen-Politics/al-qaeda-in-arab-peninsula-claims-responsibility-for-50-attacks-in-yemen.html> accessed

<sup>27</sup> other reports suggest that he was kidnapped in order to swap for arrested AQAP personnel

<sup>28</sup> “Qaeda threatens 55 Yemeni security officers by name” AFP (10 Sep 10)

<http://www.google.com/hostednews/afp/article/ALeqM5iHNPOzO5nA7xhRJEJz0ddefJGVnQ> accessed 10 Sep 10

<sup>29</sup> Ba Ziad M “Yemeni Intelligence Chief Assassinated” National Yemen (24 Oct 10 )

<http://nationalyemen.com/2010/10/24/yemeni-intelligence-chief-assassinated/> 16 Apr 11

making them static locations without the benefit of much protection, firepower or mutual support; in short- vulnerable.



Photo: al-Arabiyya

**Fig. 1: “Yemeni soldiers man a security checkpoint at the entrance of the southern province of Abyan in August”<sup>30</sup>**

The attacks on the VCPs bare a striking resemblance to a tribal raid. Most involve a relatively simple frontal assault, relying on surprise and weight of fire, before a rapid extraction, ideally with military booty:

At least 12 soldiers were killed and others injured in a suspected Al-Qaeda attack in Abyan Friday morning. “The attack took place in a checkpoint at Al-Makdashi village, Lowdar, Abyan province. [...] “Yemen Post sources confirmed that the attackers were aboard a pickup truck and showered bullets in large quantities, as RPG’s were also used in the attack.”<sup>31</sup>

Were the VCPs better established, with better protection, armed overwatch and cut-offs, it is likely that these assaults would fail more often, and be discontinued through attrition.

Linked to the assaults on the VCPs have been formal ambushes, often against soft targets, such as logistic movements<sup>32</sup> to and from VCPs and outposts, but sometimes against combat units, and even columns of armour.

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30 “Qaeda threatens 55 Yemeni security officers” al-Arabiyya (10 Sep 10)  
<http://www.alarabiya.net/articles/2010/09/10/118948.html> accessed 22 Feb 11

31 “12 Soldiers Killed in Abyan in suspected Al-Qaeda attack” Yemen Post (07 Jan 11)  
<http://yemenpost.net/Detail123456789.aspx?ID=3&SubID=2963&MainCat=3> accessed 07 Jan 11

32 “Security official in Al-Jawf governorate, assassinated” al-Motamar (16 Apr 07) <http://www.almotamar.net/en/2387.htm>  
accessed 16 Mar 11



Local sources told the Al-Sahwa website that the armoured vehicle overturned while escaping from an assault by militants in the Um Sarra area at 10:30 am.

On Friday, two ambushes in the district targeted water tankers and patrols escorting them killing at least 12 soldiers and injuring others.

Later in the day, a military commander was targeted while passing in the area along with other officials. Suspected Al-Qaeda militants planted a bomb on the road that exploded when the commander passed there.<sup>33</sup>

For such operations, AQAP tend to concentrate: there have been reports of 15 terrorists sighted fleeing the scene of an ambush. Such concentration suggests that the logistic patrols follow a set pattern in time and space, which has been observed and exploited. The apparent use of a secondary device (it is possible that it was a VOIED not initiated in the first ambush) suggests either that the commander has a habit of such follow-ups, or that there are few other routes.

Much seen in Iraq – and in many other locations – have been the Command Wire Improvised Explosive Device (CWIED) and the Remote Controlled Improvised Explosive Device (RCIED.) These tend to be weapons used by nationalist groupings, since they generally require at least passive consent of the local population for use, in that they normally take time to plant / lay, and the bombers must remain in the area until the attack is accomplished, before making their escape (an RCIEDer requires an escape route; the SIEDer does not.) There have been very few reported incidences of these devices being used:

Sadiq Bin Tayyir, head of a popular committee in the Shahir area, told Al-Shorfa that a mine was planted on the main road leading to the port on a route normally used by the company's employees. The mine was set to detonate when the employees passed through the area.

Tayyir said citizens noticed two people at the scene of the blast Tuesday morning. One individual wearing civilian clothing planted a mine on the side of the road. Another individual dressed in military garb was waiting not too far away, a sign that the bomb could have been detonated remotely, according to Tayyir.<sup>34</sup>

While it is possible that this was a command-initiated device, given the analysis of the route's use by Nexen employees, it is as likely that the loiterer was ready to go back to the road to flag down any vehicle which seemed about to go over a Victim Operated Improvised Explosive Device (VOIED) – possibly an anti-tank mine The sole incident<sup>35</sup> explicitly reporting an RCIED was against the house of the Governor of Ta'iz Province. Not only is that geographically and operationally discrete from the “infantry” MO, but the need for an RCIED (rather than a TPU initiated device) against a static target is puzzling; indeed, the original claim

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33 8 Troops Injured as Suspected Qaeda Attacks Rise in South Yemen Post (08 Jan 11)

<http://yemenpost.net/Detail123456789.aspx?ID=100&SubID=2969&MainCat=3> accessed 08 Jan 11

34 Darem, F “Local committees help in investigation of terrorist attack in Hadramaut” al-Shorfa (01 Apr 11) [http://www.al-shorfa.com/cocoon/meii/xhtml/en\\_GB/features/meii/features/main/2011/04/01/feature-01](http://www.al-shorfa.com/cocoon/meii/xhtml/en_GB/features/meii/features/main/2011/04/01/feature-01) accessed 17 Apr 11

35 “Yemen defuses bomb at governor's home” Reuters (28 Jun 10) <http://www.ynetnews.com/articles/0,7340,L-3912153,00.html> accessed 28 Jun 10

is sufficiently caveated as to make it unlikely that the device was a genuine RCIED, and indeed, possibly not AQAP-linked.

In January 2010, Salih Abd al-Habib Salih al-Shaush was caught at a Mukalla VCP:

He was riding a motorbike which was carrying two bombs and he was also wearing an explosives belt. His precise target remains unclear although it was suspected to be a major facility in Mukalla<sup>36</sup>

The assumption is that al-Shaush was a potential SIEDer (rather than delivering the belt to someone else), and the report does not mention the initiating system for the other two “bombs”. If this was an actual SIED attack, the two devices (if not wired to the main charge) may have been secondary devices to kill those in the immediate follow-up. This would risk additional civilian casualties (albeit in a town – not tribal – environment) unless the major facility was isolated from civilian population: a barracks or important factory, etc.

“Infantry” attacks do not seem to have used TPU initiated devices, despite Ibrahim al-‘Asiri using such devices in the Printer Bombs. These are ideal methods of initiating devices against static targets (such as barracks or police stations) since they give the perpetrator time to extract before detonation. As a result, they have been beloved of nationalist terrorists from the Fenian Dynamite Campaign in London in the 19<sup>th</sup> Century, through the 1930s / 1940s Zionist terrorist campaign in Mandatory Palestine to ETA etc in the late 20<sup>th</sup> Century.

This Yemeni experience is strikingly different from that of al-Shabab in Somalia where “[a]s a top commander for the Shabab, [Fazul Abdullah Muhammad] was instrumental in bringing roadside bombs, suicide bombs and other Qaeda tactics to Somalia’s battlefields.”<sup>37</sup>

## **Robberies**

There have been several incidences of cash-delivery robberies in the South (Lahij<sup>38</sup>, Abyan<sup>39</sup> and Hadhramaut), particularly in early 2011:

Hooded men attacked a vehicle carrying civil servants' salaries, killing five people including soldiers in the Al-Shihr region," 60 kilometres (35 miles) east of Mukalla, capital of Hadramawt province, security sources told AFP, without providing further details.<sup>40</sup>

While there has been some local rumour about these being “inside jobs”, this seems unlikely, since Regime insiders have rarely needed such charades to embezzle state funds. Further, violence during inside jobs is usually staged, not lethal. However, it is highly likely that there was inside knowledge of the move, rather than organisation of the assault. While both the

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<sup>36</sup> Yemeni forces thwart would be suicide bomber Maktoob (30 Jan 10)  
[http://business.maktoob.com/20090000427602/Yemeni\\_forces\\_thwart\\_would\\_be\\_suicide\\_bomber/Article.htm](http://business.maktoob.com/20090000427602/Yemeni_forces_thwart_would_be_suicide_bomber/Article.htm) accessed 09 Feb 10

<sup>37</sup> Gettleman, J “Opportunity in Somalia After Killing of Qaeda Militant” NYT (13 Jun 11)  
<http://www.nytimes.com/2011/06/14/world/africa/14somalia.html?emc=tnt&tntemail0=y> accessed 14 Jun 11

<sup>38</sup> Two Soldiers kidnapped in Lahj Yemen Post Staff (11 Feb 11)  
<http://yemenpost.net/Detail123456789.aspx?ID=3&SubID=3124&MainCat=3> accessed 12 Feb 11

<sup>39</sup> al Qadhi, M “Four killed in Yemen vehicle ambush” The National (10 Jan 11)  
<http://www.thenational.ae/news/worldwide/four-killed-in-yemen-vehicle-ambush> accessed 10 Jan 11

<sup>40</sup> “Five dead in attack on Yemen payroll convoy” AFP (26 Jan 11)  
<http://www.google.com/hostednews/afp/article/ALeqM5gQH5nFTPnNHRgqBbdX7Mj1KxYFMw?docId=CNG.32ed027d9136847068e1420850fb9209.11> accessed 27 Jan 11

Zinjibar and al-Shihr robberies might have been Islamist related, the Lahij attack (and the Aden Bank attempt<sup>41</sup>) was almost certainly by militant members of the Southern movement.

The hit-and-run nature of these attacks is like the CQAs and the assaults on the VCPs in the use of shock action, but it shows limited ability (or willingness?) to continue to fight. This, together with the location, suggests that this is an “Infantry” MO, not a “Special Operation”.

### *Analysis of Tactics*

CQAs in themselves are nothing new: the first recorded instances were by the Sicarii (the terrorist wing of the Jewish Zealot movement) against the Romans and their local agents in Arabia 2000 years ago. Maj Gen Haig records the Ottomans having a similar problem when they occupied Yemen in 1887: “the large garrison of Turkish soldiers [...] are not allowed to go into the narrow streets [of Sana’a] for fear of assassination.”<sup>42</sup> Haig also describes<sup>43</sup> the murder of a Greek on the road to Aden, 50 miles south of Sana’a. It is likely that this was an Asiatic Greek, and not improbable that he was a sutler, and this an early attack on the government’s logistic chain.

CQAs cannot be thus automatically ascribed to AQAP, however much that may suit various parties. Similarly, assaults on the VCPs – and indeed some of the ambushes – are similar in tactics and weaponry to those used by tribal militias. (One pointer towards discriminating between tribal and AQAP attacks is the probable reason for the attack: Yemeni tribes usually tolerate government security forces, and rarely attack without good reason, whereas AQAP often perceive military presence as reason for attack.)

Under Vehicle Improvised Explosive Devices (UVIEDs) are nothing new to South Arabia either: as part of their in-briefs to Aden, British administrators were advised to remove hub-caps from their cars as these represented ideal locations for explosive charges. The MO of the Shabwa UVIED attacks, while similar to another UVIED used on the same day in the same province against a member of the Judiciary Police, is completely different to AQAP’s normal CQA MO. Rather, both the device used and the precise targeting are akin to the contemporaneous sticky bombs in Iraq<sup>44</sup>, or the previous spate of UVIED attacks against prominent Lebanese in 2005<sup>45</sup>. It is reported that some members of the National Security Bureau are Iraqi former Ba’athists<sup>46</sup>, which might suggest that these UVIEDs are Government-enabled. (If not, it may be a new MO for AQAP.)

While CQAs and assaults on VCPs have been extensive in Iraq and Afghanistan, when performed by AQ-aligned groups, these have often taken the form of suicide attacks either person-borne (Suicide) Improvised Explosive Device (SIED), or Suicide Vehicle Borne Improvised Explosive Device (SVBIED.) By contrast, those groups favouring Timer / Power

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41 YA “Yemeni official accuses Qatar of interference” Saba (30 Apr 11) <http://www.sabanews.net/en/news240493.htm> accessed 30 Apr 11

42 Haig, Maj Gen FT “A Journey Through Yemen” JRGS Vol. 9 No. VIII, (Aug 1887) p.484

43 Haig, Maj Gen FT “A Journey Through Yemen” JRGS Vol. 9 No. VIII, (Aug 1887) p.487

44 Muir, J “Sticky bomb and silenced weapon attacks on rise in Iraq BBC (27 Oct 10) <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/mobile/world-middle-east-11634614> accessed 25 May 11

45 Whitaker, B “Syria blamed as booby trap kills journalist in Beirut” Guardian (03 Jun 05)

<http://www.guardian.co.uk/media/2005/jun/03/pressandpublishing.syria> accessed 25 May 11

46 Blomfield, A “US forges alliance with Saddam Hussein officers to fight al-Qaeda” Daily Telegraph (06 Jan 10)

<http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/middleeast/yemen/6943108/US-forges-alliance-with-Saddam-Hussein-officers-to-fight-al-Qaeda.html> accessed 09 Jan 10

Unit (TPU) initiated VBIEDs or shooting CQAs have tended to be nationalist in ideology – those with something to live for (and local communities to assist in their preparations and to cover their extraction.) Indeed, this is already an MO of HIRAK-aligned militants.

There has also been limited use of secondary IEDs (or shooting attacks): those that have occurred have tended to be in isolated locations where the risk of civilian casualties is much reduced. This may reflect the predominately rural areas where the militants operate (and where military response to an ambush is likely to be slower than the militants' withdrawal) or that the military's follow-up has sometimes been an artillery barrage. However, this has not been the case in solely HIRAK areas, in particular Aden.

Interestingly, there has been one attack on a patrol vehicle at VCP using what sounds like a hand grenade:

3 soldiers and 2 civilians were injured in the explosion that destroyed a security patrol in Yemen's Southern Abyan Province on Saturday. An explosive device was placed under the patrol when it stopped at a security checkpoint in southern Jaar city. The injured were near the patrol and were taken to hospital, with one soldier in critical condition.<sup>47</sup>

There has also been an RPG attack on a patrol vehicle near a qat suq in Zinjibar<sup>48</sup>. Unusually, these were in built-up areas with no overshoots, and involved civilian casualties. This change may reflect a developing MO, or be the acts of a non-AQAP grouping in Abyan.

RCIEDs are technically more far more complicated than CWIEDs, and many of the components normally used are less likely to be available in Yemen. However, there is ample Conventional Military Explosive (CME) in Yemen, either as uncased explosive, or in the form of mortar shells or anti-tank mines<sup>49</sup>; similarly there are no constraints on the constituent ingredients for most varieties of Home Made Explosives (HME.)

The technical knowledge to manufacture CWIEDs is certainly present in Yemen: the primary technical difference between an SIED and a CWIED is the length of the Command Wire. There may be issues over tactical geography (a lack of nullahs etc to prevent an immediate follow-up), or over availability of parts for RCIEDs. However, the fact that such weapons have not been used in "Infantry" attacks is surprising.

### *Deductions from Tactics*

The Infantry Operations contained in AQAP's 'accounts' are not only stylistically different from the Special Operations, but are also geographically distinct: confined to the five restive provinces of South and Central Yemen. This clear separation suggests that this is not merely a separate MO, but in fact a discrete grouping – an "infantry grouping", operating

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47 5 Wounded in Patrol Bombing in South Yemen Yemen Post (19 Sep 10)

<http://yemenpost.net/Detail123456789.aspx?ID=3&SubID=2594> 19 Sep 10

48 Blast kills 9 in Yemen, including 5 soldiers AP (04 May 11)

<http://www.google.com/hostednews/ap/article/ALeqM5hZavX5aQT4YEjlnRJ-z3qnCRoZQ?docId=9130a148bc2344f292d92647860c7054> accessed 04 May 11

49 eg "Terrorists flee Al-Jawf leaving weapons and explosives behind" al-Motamar (08 Dec 09)

<http://www.almotamar.net/en/7004.htm> accessed 09 Apr 11

independently, against Yemeni government targets. This tends to corroborate the assessments<sup>50</sup> that majority of AQAP foot soldiers are disaffected Yemeni tribesmen.

From this assessment – and the lack of suicide operations – it is likely that this Infantry Grouping is less Jihadi, and more nationalist in ideology. Its capability is bounded by the arcs of its direct fire weapons, while its intent seems focussed on the minions of the regime in Sana'a, rather than the West or Sa'udi Arabia.

The sudden need to secure large quantities of funds is interesting, since it suggests a sudden diminution in external sources, or an unexpected increase in funds needed – perhaps to pay for support from the local community, as was observed of Transnational Jihadis in Iraq<sup>51</sup>.

### ***“Special Operations”***

In addition to the “infantry” attacks, AQAP also mounts “Special Operations”: complex and creative attacks, usually using explosive devices (although direct fire weapons have been used: an RPG against a British Embassy vehicle, and machine guns against a Political Security Organisation bus in Sana'a<sup>52</sup>.) Rather than murdering district level Security and Intelligence personnel, the Special Operations strike High Value Targets – mostly those with international impact.

The attacks have been few in number, and varied in MO: several successful and unsuccessful SIEDs, an RPG shoot, a machine gunning, the two “Printer” TPU IEDs, and (allegedly) two Surface to Air Missiles (SAM) attacks. The attacks bear closer scrutiny, both successful and unsuccessful.

Both of the alleged SAM attacks (against Pres Ali Abdullah Salih<sup>53</sup> and Pr Muhammad bin Na'if<sup>54</sup>) were unsuccessful – indeed, in neither case does the weapon seem to have been fired. Both incidents – and a third rumoured in a DoS cable – took place in 2009, but none reported since then. The tactic seems to have been abandoned.

The suicide attacks on the Koreans, like those on the Huthis, appear to have been deliberate two phased operations, with a secondary device against responders. In the first attack, the tourists were approached by an attacker who detonated his device killing four Koreans and their Yemeni guide. The second SIED attack (on the Korean officials) took place three days later in Sana'a, when an attacker stepped between vehicles of the packet<sup>55</sup>, and detonated his device – to no harmful effect other than to himself.

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50 Levinson, C & Coker, M “Al Qaeda's Deep Tribal Ties Make Yemen a Terror Hub” Wall Street Journal (22 Jan 10) <http://online.wsj.com/article/SB10001424052748704320104575015493304519542.html> accessed 28 Jan 10

51 MacFarquhar, N “An Arab 'Martyr' Thwarted” New York Times (02 Nov 04) <http://www.nytimes.com/2004/11/02/international/middleeast/02lebanon.html?ex=1180584000&en=c0b645247080b834&ei=5070> accessed 27 May 07

52 The attack on the PSO bus stands out as being atypical: the MO and the lowly target is both more an “Infantry” MO; the only unusual issue being that this was staged in Sana'a. It therefore looks as if this was an out of area “Infantry” attack.

53 Seche, S “Saleh Sees Foreign Hand Behind Yemen's Internal Woes” US Embassy, Sana'a (31 May 09) <http://wikileaks.as50620.net/cable/2009/05/09SANAA1015.html> accessed 13 Dec 10

54 “Al-Qaida in Yemen claims failed attempt to shoot down Saudi plane in Sanaa airport” Xinhua (06 Oct 10) [http://news.xinhuanet.com/english2010/world/2010-10/06/c\\_13543908.htm](http://news.xinhuanet.com/english2010/world/2010-10/06/c_13543908.htm) accessed 10 Oct 10

55 Knowledge of the DTG of the move, and the make / model / colour of the Koreans' vehicles suggests a source within one of the Yemeni security organisations. It also suggests that the two attacks were pre-planned as one operation in two-phases.

Two of AQAP SIEDs have been concealed – that against Prince Muhammad bin Na’if, and the “Underwear bomber” Umar Faruq Abd al-Mutallab – and probably built to the same design. Strangely, there appears to have been no alteration to the Underwear bomber’s device, despite the fact that a successfully executed attack on Pr Muhammad had had limited effect in the room<sup>56</sup>, and only lightly wounded its target.

There appears to have been a third concealed IED suicide attack in 2010, against Lebanon’s

most prominent Sunni cleric, Grand Mufti Sheik Mohammed Rashid Qabbani in downtown Beirut. [...] Jihadists were blamed for the attack, which official sources said involved an assassin with explosives hidden inside his body to evade detection who would detonate them when he was close to the grand mufti.<sup>57</sup>

The Lebanese attack was disrupted before it could be launched, and no details of the device have yet been made public. It may be that the reports of the attack on Pr Muhammad were sufficient for Jihadis in Lebanon to design a low-profile SIED belt; or the design may have been sent from Yemen to Lebanon, which would imply more co-ordination between AQ groups than otherwise observed.

After other failed attacks (such as the two attempts on the World Trade Centre, and on USN ships in Aden etc) AQ have shown themselves ready to adapt their MO. That this adaptation does not seem to have occurred between the attacks on Pr Muhammad bin Na’if and the Underwear Bomb may mean that the design came from the North to Yemen, and that Ibrahim al-‘Asiri is a competent bomb maker, but – if he has limited understanding of the capability of explosive – not a bomb-designer. The existence of these links is alluded to in the Special Edition “Do you think that our research will only be used by al Qaeda of the Arabian Peninsula and won’t be shared with other mujahidin?”

### ***Attacks on the British Diplomatic Mission***

Probably the most interesting attacks have been the two attacks on the British Ambassador and the Deputy Head of Mission. Both of them occurred in almost identical locations, at almost identical times, against an almost identical target set, but with radically different MOs.

The time and place of attacks are, on the surface, relatively obvious. The new British Embassy is on the edge of Sana’a. This allows far more stand-off from the road – as there had not been in the Hadda Street buildings – and, as a purpose built set-up, enables far better security arrangements to be put in place for access to consular facilities etc.

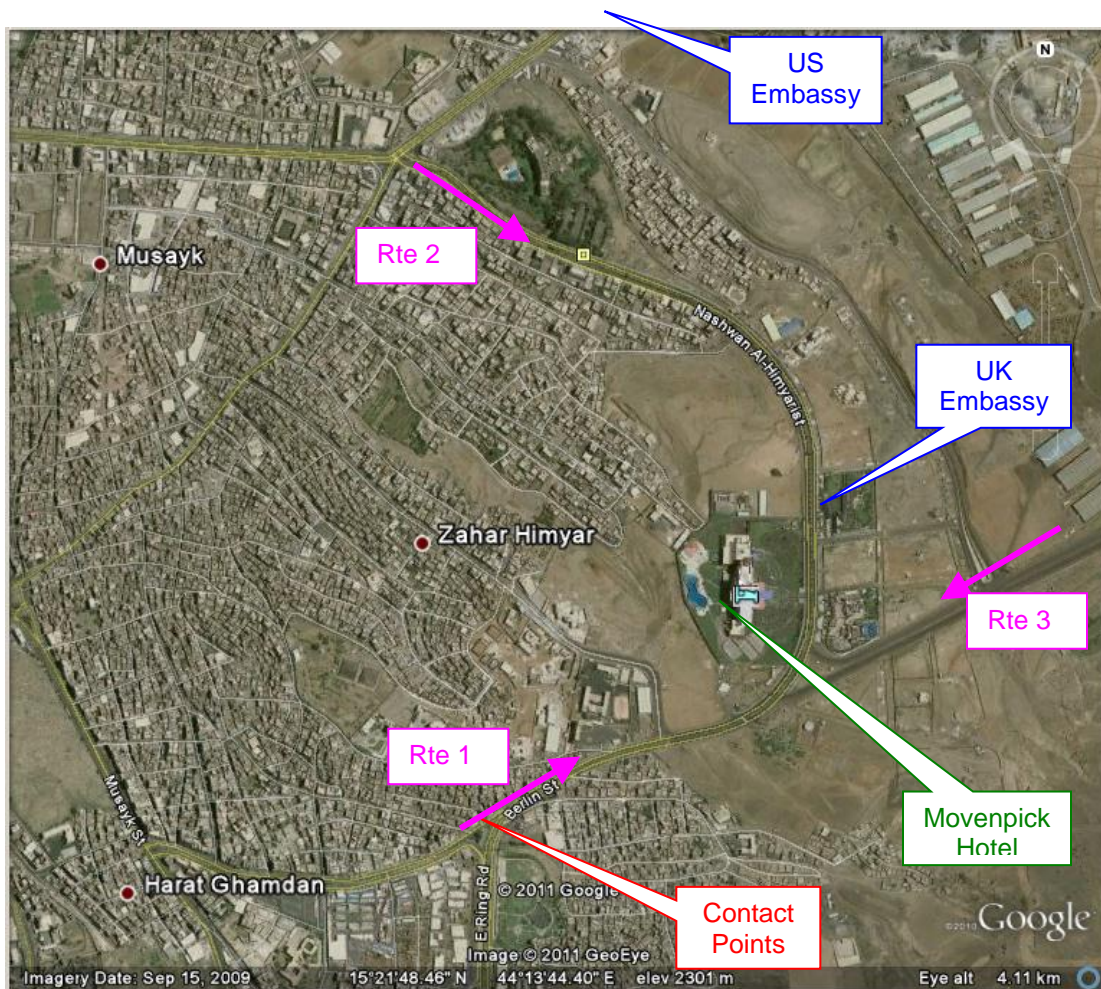
However, the new Embassy is also located in an area with other High Value Targets (notably the US Embassy, and the Mövenpick Hotel), with very few access routes (see Figure 2) to get to it, which means variation of route is more problematic. Similarly, with fixed office hours (and the need to co-ordinate a Protective Security Detail and convoy) timings are likely to have been routine, and a pattern set.

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<sup>56</sup> The blast did blow out the windows of Pr Muhammad’s house, so the full force of the explosion might have had a more devastating effect on the pressure hull of the aircraft had there been a full detonation.

<sup>57</sup> “Jihadist groups infiltrate Lebanon, Gaza” UPI (02 Nov 10)

[http://www.upi.com/Top\\_News/Special/2009/11/02/Jihadist-groups-infiltrate-Lebanon-Gaza/UPI-33581257200980/](http://www.upi.com/Top_News/Special/2009/11/02/Jihadist-groups-infiltrate-Lebanon-Gaza/UPI-33581257200980/) accessed 04 Nov 09



**Fig. 2: Area of attacks on UK Diplomats in general**

Although all eye-witness accounts should be treated with caution, this almost unavoidable pattern setting in time and space appears to have been noted and exploited:

Al-Qaeda, as it is evident from the two operations against the British diplomats, used the daily route of the diplomats, from their homes to the British Embassy through Khawlan Street reaching Noqom area.<sup>58</sup>

and:

Witnesses said the young man was seen to be dropped off by a black car with tinted windows five minutes beforehand.<sup>59</sup>

and:

<sup>58</sup> "Yemen, Britain And Al-Qaeda" National Yemen (31 Oct 10) <http://nationalyemen.com/2010/10/31/yemen-britain-and-al-qaeda/> accessed 16 Apr 11

<sup>59</sup> Spencer R, & al-Shorabi, M "Al-Qaeda blamed for suicide attack on British ambassador" D Telegraph (26 Apr 10) <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/middleeast/yemen/7635226/Al-Qaeda-blamed-for-suicide-attack-on-British-ambassador.html> accessed 27 Jun 11



“The two men were outside my house, they had guns and a grenade launcher hidden in a sack, they were waiting for the British to arrive,” Murshid al-Kumaim, the owner of a nearby house whose windows were shattered by the explosion, told Asia Times Online.<sup>60</sup>

It has been suggested that one reason for the choice of location is that there were road works to the South of the contact point, which therefore both slowed and streamed traffic. However, the attacks occurred beyond the road works; it is thus also likely that – as in most other theatres – more permanent features also figured in the calculation: the contact point was on a bend at the foot of an incline (see Figure 3.) Both of these are likely to have reduced the speed of the convoys to a more manageable engagement speed.



Photo: Times<sup>61</sup>

**Fig. 3: Photo showing initiation point (between policeman & car), slope, bend and backstop**

However, there is another, and more interesting, factor that may also be at work. The two attacks took place in much the same area, against almost identical targets, but each attack is slightly puzzling, in that it does not seem to learn from previous mistakes – normally an AQ hallmark. This would suggest that there is a specific reason for the choice of attacks, which the physical geography of the area corroborates.

The SIED attack against a diplomatic (and thus presumably protected) vehicle had been shown to be of minimal value in the successful, but ineffectual, 18 March 2009 attack on the South Korean follow-up party. Yet the same style of attack was repeated against the British Ambassador’s convoy. (Whether this attack would have been any more successful is moot, since this device was also initiated too soon, and therefore the focus of the explosive missed the

<sup>60</sup> Finn, T “Yemen attacks show al-Qaeda shift” Asia Times (09 Oct 10)  
[http://www.atimes.com/atimes/Middle\\_East/LJ09Ak02.html](http://www.atimes.com/atimes/Middle_East/LJ09Ak02.html) accessed 08 Oct 10

<sup>61</sup> Hider, J “Yemen Suicide Bomber Attacks British Ambassador” <http://www.sanfranciscosentinel.com/?p=70729> (26 Apr 10) accessed 27 Apr 10



vehicle.) Other options might have been an RCIED (although diplomats should be assumed to travel in vehicles that are physically and electronically protected) or a powerful CWIED, such as frequently used in Iraq and Afghanistan. The reason for using the SIED is probably due to the risk of civilian casualties in:

one of the most crowded areas in the capital where escaping is easy as attackers instantly melt away in the surrounding residential area where extremism is purported to hive.<sup>62</sup>

Since one drives on the right in Yemen, a vehicle travelling to the British Embassy would be on the East / South carriageway, and a CWIED beside that carriageway would fire into Nuqum neighbourhood. By contrast, a SIED (or RCIED) in the central reservation would have a large, uninhabited over-shoot to the south (see Figure 4, below), thus minimising the risk of collateral damage. The risk to the civilian population in Nuqum is further reduced by the retaining wall to the South-bound carriage way (see Figure 3, above), which would act as a back stop to the initiation point.

It would appear that similar concerns are at work for the attack on the Deputy Head of Mission. Whereas in Afghanistan and Iraq, the MO has often been to increase the charge in the device or to use an SVBIED (itself often far larger) for a subsequent attack, instead a completely different MO was used: a direct fire attack using an RPG. The choice of such a precision weapon is unusual, as it requires its firer to come into direct sight of the target, and therefore potentially to be attacked. However, such a device is much more effective in penetrating protected – or even armoured – vehicles, and its lethal area is relatively narrow, due to the shaped-charge (rather than blast) form of attack. However, it requires far more accuracy, and (if fired from behind) will destroy only the second vehicle in the packet, which may not contain the target.

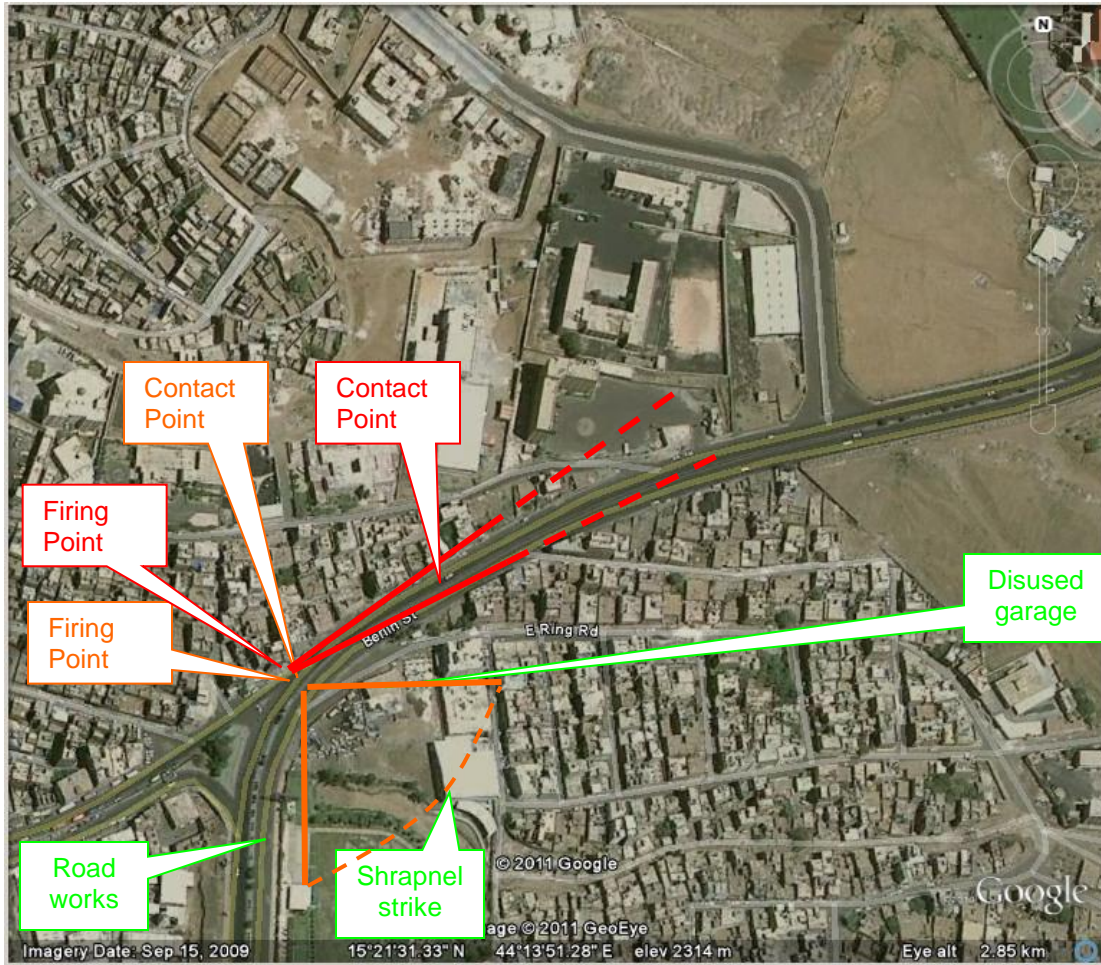
Often such an attack is coupled to a secondary device - either TPU or VOIED initiated – to catch the responders and / or to delay the immediate follow up. Yet again, no such device was used, further adding to the weight of suggestion that minimising civilian casualties is a major concern, despite this being in an area sympathetic both to AQ's cause and target:

Police reports estimate that at least 500 people from the impoverished neighborhood of Nuqum left to join the wars in Iraq and Somalia between 2002 and 2005.<sup>63</sup>

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<sup>62</sup> "Yemen, Britain And Al-Qaeda" National Yemen (31 Oct 10) <http://nationalyemen.com/2010/10/31/yemen-britain-and-al-qaeda/> accessed 16 Apr 11

<sup>63</sup> Finn, T "Yemen attacks show al-Qaeda shift" Asia Times (09 Oct 10) [http://www.atimes.com/atimes/Middle\\_East/LJ09Ak02.html](http://www.atimes.com/atimes/Middle_East/LJ09Ak02.html) accessed 08 Oct 10



**Fig.4: Route 1 Area in detail**

**Key: ORANGE denotes SIED attack on HM Ambassador, arms extend to 100m  
 RED denotes RPG attack on UK DCM, arms extend to 100m solid, 200m (dotted)**

### ***Printer Bombs***

The twin attacks using IEDs inside printers was a step change in MO. Not only was this a TPU-based operation (rather than SIED), but were also far more sophisticated devices than the “Underwear” bombs. Considerable thought appears to have gone into the IED’s design: PETN explosive was substituted for printer toner, while

The wiring of the device indicates that this was done by professionals,” said one official involved in the investigation [...]. “It was set up so that if you scan it, all the printer components would look right.”<sup>64</sup>

<sup>64</sup> Mazzetti, M & Worth, RF “U.S. Sees Complexity of Bombs as Link to Qaeda Group” NYT (30 Oct 10) <http://www.nytimes.com/2010/10/31/world/31terror.html?emc=tnt&tntemail0=y> 31 Oct 10

Both of these are surprising changes. Not only were the underwear bombs crude designs, but both showed attempts to evade screening, Abd al-Mutallab by embarking in an airport with laxer security, and al-‘Asiri’s brother by treacherously claiming to surrender (so not being searched as a token of good faith.) Yet the printer bombs show sophisticated understanding of how to defeat such security – and thus detailed understanding of how the scanners work. While it is possible that al-Asiri has design skills as well as manufacturing capability, the lack of adaptation noted previously is strange. Indeed, such a step change suggests that he may have received the design(s) from elsewhere – although similar devices have not been seen anywhere else as yet.

Another aspect to the printer bombs is the choice of initiation. There was some speculation about where the devices were intended to explode; the Jewish addressees leading to speculation that they were the intended targets. Yet had that been the case, the trigger would have been VOIED, or possibly a combination TPU & VOIED. Nor were other options for initiation (such as barometric or RCIED) used. If supply issues and scanner signatures are excluded, it appears that there was no particular target in mind, and that an initiation anywhere would have been spun as a success. The “Special Edition“ of Inspire seems to corroborate this: the intention claimed was to cause chaos and cost, rather than to target any specific location or asset.

### *Analysis of Tactics*

The SIED attack on the British Ambassador shows distinct signs of efforts to minimise civilian casualties: not only was there an extensive overshoot (into the park and derelict building), but the attacker also moved from his intended point of initiation. While this was probably to close the engagement range, it may also have been out of concern for the passers by.

Similarly, having failed to kill the UK’s Ambassador with a small SIED, one might have expected to see the Net Explosive Quantity increased to improve the lethality on the next attack. Instead, the far more risky RPG attack was chosen, probably to increase lethality while reducing the likelihood of collateral damage. This reading is corroborated by the overshoot: in the event of a miss, the RPG would land on mostly open ground at the foot of J Nuqum – also minimising the risk of civilian casualties.

An alternative to the risky direct fire attack – in the same location – might have been for a suicide attacker to force the convoy to halt, and then detonate a similar quantity main charge. AQAP’s inability to do so may suggest – if the collateral aspect is ruled out – a limited number of suicide volunteers<sup>65</sup>. This is unsurprising, as suicide operations are alien to the majority Zaydi / Shafa’i / Isma’ili *mathahib* of Yemen. Further, it is difficult to cast operations against the Yemeni government as defensive jihad in the way that attacks against the Multi-National Forces in Iraq could be so construed (indeed, some would-be suicide attackers in Iraq refused to attack Iraqi military and civilian targets for just such reasons.)

The limited use of explosive attack in this populated area suggests that AQAP’s position vis-à-vis the civilian population (90% of whom are tribal in origin) is far more tenuous than popularly thought.

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<sup>65</sup> Thus far, all suicide attackers in Yemen have been educated in KSA.

Given the limited numbers of suicide attackers, the lack of use of RCIEDs is curious. Islamist terrorists in other theatres have used RCIEDs, while al-Shabab in Somalia have used mobile phone-based RCIEDs<sup>66</sup> in their attacks, and given the apparent links<sup>67</sup> between the two groups it is strange that the technology has not been passed. It appears – despite the boasts of Ikrimah al-Muhajir – that the passage of information between different AQ franchises is currently limited.

### ***Deductions from Tactics***

In addition to the more domestic “Infantry” grouping, there appears to be a Special Operations grouping. It is likely that this is staffed by a more professional cadre of Transnational Jihadis, many of whom are veterans of operations in Bosnia, Chechnya, Afghanistan and Iraq. Some, like Sa’id al-Shihri, are former detainees of Guantanamo Bay and the Sa’udi demobilisation programme, while many other Sa’udis fled after the concerted crackdown on Jihadis in the Kingdom.

It is likely that the Special Operations grouping operates from a large city (or cities) where the necessary components will be more readily (and less obviously) available. Ta’iz, a large, industrial city in Middle Yemen (and in the Shafa’i Sunni area) would be ideal. Indeed, there has been an incidence of at least one accidental detonation of a SIED belt in Ta’iz<sup>68</sup>.

The Spec Ops grouping appears to regard Yemen as a haven, rather than a primary target. While some attacks have been mounted against Yemeni regime targets, most attacks have been against targets of secular, capitalist countries (either within Yemen or mounted from Yemen), and also against KSA targets.

The attack on Pr Muhammad was successfully implemented, and the attempted infiltration of Ra’id al-Harbi and Yusuf Muhammad al-Shihri – who carried with them two additional SIED belts – demonstrates the enduring hatred of many AQAP Spec Ops members for the Al Sa’ud. This intent is likely to persist whether the Special Operations grouping remain in Yemen, or are driven elsewhere (given the ineffectiveness of the demobilisation programme on them, it is unlikely that they will lay down their arms), and as with most such groups, their technical capability is likely to increase over time.

The lack of MANPADS attacks since 2009 may imply that an individual with the training to use the weapon is no longer active, or that the Spec Ops grouping have concluded that the MANPADS available (probably from the Yemeni Armed Forces) are unserviceable. There is also the possibility that the US’s MANPADS purchase programme has been completely successful.

### ***Influence Operations***

While it is possible to categorise AQAP by target areas (foreign and domestic), it seems relatively clear that the “foreign operations”<sup>69</sup> is further subdivided into kinetic and non-kinetic

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66 “KENYA-SOMALIA: Security risks overshadow aid delivery” IRIN (01 Aug 11)

<http://www.irinnews.org/report.aspx?reportID=93388> accessed 01 Aug 11

67 Dilanian, K “Somali terror suspect secretly held on Navy ship for two months” Los Angeles Times (05 Jul 11)

<http://articles.latimes.com/2011/jul/05/nation/la-naw-somali-detainee-20110706> accessed 15 Aug 11

68 “Anonymous Bomber Blows Self Up in Western Yemen, no Casualties” Yemen Post (26 Oct 10)

<http://yemenpost.net/Detail123456789.aspx?ID=3&SubID=2697&MainCat=3> accessed 28 Oct 10

69 The Special Edition of Inspire contains an article by “The Head of Foreign Operations”

lines of operation. Indeed, it seems most likely that these are independent organisations. The latter, termed here the “Influence Cell”, is run by Anwar al-Aulaqi with Samir Khan, who produce the e-zine “Inspire” and YouTube sermons, both in fluent American English.

It is not certain that this Influence Cell has ever formally merged into AQAP, although it emerged at a similar time and place, and tends thus to be counted as part of AQAP. Despite this, some have suggested that al-Aulaqi is AQAP’s leader, notwithstanding his lack of operational knowledge or any Jihadi credibility. Similarly, while al-Aulaqi is sometimes described as the spiritual leader of AQAP, Ibrahim al-Rubaysh occupies that role; al-Aulaqi’s true role is as publicist, apologist and inciter. However, he is not the only “talking head”: Sa’id al-Shihri (albeit in Arabic) called for Sa’udis to “form cells to kidnap Christians and princes from the Saud family and their top officials of ministers and officers.”<sup>70</sup>

Inspire has been plagued by problems: the initial version of the first edition was mostly garbled computer code<sup>71</sup>, and a subsequent version has been hacked, probably by a Western security organisation which substituted a recipe for cup-cakes for more a lethal formula. The content itself is (thus far) hardly sophisticated or novel – most of the technical information is already available from other sources (such as the Anarchist’s Cookbook), while “Top Tips” contain such gems as the need to gain sufficient speed before running someone over, or the suggestion a gun-attack on a random Washington DC restaurant might kill one of the 29,000 federal workers in the capital.

However, the purpose of Inspire is less to provide a terrorist instruction manual, and more to motivate potential Jihadis in the West to move from passive support to active support of operations – and possibly into full Jihadi activity. This is, unsurprisingly, of great concern to Western security services, which are unable to foil plots by preventing the terrorists from entering their countries, and indeed, find self-radicalised “lily-whites” hard to detect without patterns of association with known terrorists.

The division of Special Operations into two groupings by MO also reflects the probable dispersed location of the two groupings. The marker for this (and the clear cut division between the two groupings) is plainly demonstrated by the delay in issuing the Special Edition (20 November 2010) three weeks after the attempted attack (29 October 2010.) Not only was the AQAP story “scooped” by Western news outlets (and thus lost much impact), but it contained little in the way of more interesting photographs and accounts. The “exclusive” photographs appear to be original AQAP photographs (as they are not among those provided by the UK and UAE security organisations), but all three could have been faked<sup>72</sup> for the camera since none shows any IED components. One would have expected that if the Influence Operations cell were either co-located or intimately involved in the planning, then they would have had the Special Edition ready for release within the envelope of media interest, and to have taken more headline-grabbing photographs, which might also be of instructional use to would-be Jihadis in the West.

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<sup>70</sup> “Qaeda urges Saudis to abduct royals, Christians” AFP (04 Jun 10)

<http://www.google.com/hostednews/afp/article/ALeqM5iVvCReHwyf9tBzUQh0KWq4uqvEtg> accessed 05 Jun 10

<sup>71</sup> Apuzzo, M & Goldman A, “Al-Qaida launches English propaganda magazine” (01 Jul 10)

<http://www.google.com/hostednews/ap/article/ALeqM5hNGFqQIWGUDWxzyfckE2oP4M-5zQD9GLVGJ00> accessed 01 Jul 10

<sup>72</sup> The torn cover of the copy of Great Expectations in the Inspire Special Edition may be identifiable.

The main evidence that al-Aulaqi was involved in planning the attack hinges on a book review he wrote on *Great Expectations* (a copy of which was included in the package) and the authorship of the account by the unnamed “Head of Foreign Operations” in *Inspire*. Yet a Victorian classic like *Great Expectations* is relatively easy to acquire in Yemen, and the title of the book (if not the plot) is as symbolic as those of the consignees. Further, while the explanation of how the operation was concealed demonstrated reasonably good understanding of the scanners, this is not matched by their description in *Inspire* as “X-ray machines.”

It is probable that the dispersed location is motivated by Operational Security (OPSEC) concerns (cf below), since an unintentional release of material by the Influence Operations cell might compromise the Spec Ops cell. But since al-Aulaqi is probably not involved in the operational planning (there is some suggestion that he is involved in the selection of newsworthy targets) there is little need for any co-location. Indeed, given the Influence Cell’s logistic requirements (and al-Aulaqi’s family influence) it is probable that the Influence Operations Cell is in a city, perhaps Sana’a, where other AQ cells have been uncovered.

### ***Deductions from Tactics***

*Inspire* and al-Aulaqi certainly represent a genuine threat to the security of Western nations. However, it is highly unlikely that a Muslim will find *Inspire* by chance; rather someone already inclined against Western values is likely to seek the document out, and possibly become focussed in their extremism to violent extremism. Emphasis, therefore, must also be paid to avoiding the initial radicalisation (usually due to combination of exclusion from the host society, combined with its claimed lack of “ethical” foreign policy), as much as to disrupting and violent attack.

However, while al-Aulaqi is suitably biblical in appearance and speaks colloquial English, it would be a mistake to regard him either as unique, or his death as an end to Islamist Influence Operations into the West. Not only will his published work survive him, but other telegenic Islamist presenters will step up. His (and his successors’) claims must be refuted, and their ideas rebutted

### ***Operational Security***

One aspect of AQ globally has been the impressive amount of OPSEC shown. AQAP are well aware that they are being exhaustively targetted by a wide variety of collection systems: IMINT (particularly UAVs) and HUMINT:

The coordinator was Mohammed al-Ghazali, a Yemeni intelligence officer who was seeded by the Yemeni intelligence services as a spy among AQAP's militants and was used by the Saudi Interior Ministry as a coordinator of the Yemeni-Saudi coordinated intelligence operation.<sup>73</sup>

However, despite the clear understanding of SIGINT based tracking among AQ and AQI, AQAP appear to have been less aware that the targeting effort includes SIGINT:

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<sup>73</sup> “Al-Qaida in Yemen claims failed attempt to shoot down Saudi plane in Sanaa airport” Xinhua (06 Oct 10) [http://news.xinhuanet.com/english2010/world/2010-10/06/c\\_13543908.htm](http://news.xinhuanet.com/english2010/world/2010-10/06/c_13543908.htm) accessed 10 Oct 10

Saudi authorities “have been monitoring conversations of Al Qaeda operatives in Yemen very closely, and whereas before the attack they were hearing relaxed 20-minute phone conversations over cellphones, after the attack the phones went virtually silent,” Prince Nayef said.<sup>74</sup>

This laxity appears to have now ceased: “Yemeni intelligence units are facing troubles in tracing AQAP's movement because the terrorists have long time stopped using cellphones”<sup>75</sup>

Among the HUMINT roles has been attaching tracking devices to suspects' vehicles: among the missions given to the Al-Sahawat militias, was [...] implanting adhesive beacons which would direct military aircrafts towards suspected targets – an operation often referred to as “painting.”<sup>76</sup>

This tactic appears to be known to senior AQAP members, who are aware and take counter-measures:

The drone strikes on Thursday, aimed at American-born Anwar al-Awlaki, missed their intended target but killed two brothers affiliated with the Islamist terrorist group, after Mr. Awlaki and a traveling companion switched vehicles with them.<sup>77</sup>

What it was that caused the switch in vehicles is uncertain – perhaps an increase in UAV activity. However, the switch appears to show reasonable understanding of surveillance limitations / resolution in that the two individuals within the vehicle could only be identified, not recognised. It also demonstrates a self-centred ruthlessness: that the senior Jihadis were prepared to sacrifice their brothers-in-arms (and relations) to save their own skins.

### ***Tribal factors***

The role of the tribes in Yemen is important politically and operationally. However, as with AQAP, there is self-interest in emphasising the tribes' importance: the Regime can borrow US military might against the tribes; the tribes can increase their price for co-operation, and experts can wax lyrical about previously obscure topics.

AQAP are clearly present among the tribes, or at least the Infantry grouping as reports and pictures demonstrate: the *maqtab* on the right of the photograph below is of a pattern favoured in Shabwa. Yet often they set themselves visibly apart from the tribes, and indeed Yemenis. There are frequent references to the *shalwar camise*<sup>78</sup> of Afghanistan / Pakistan (which

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<sup>74</sup> Shane, S “Yemen Sets Terms of a War on Al Qaeda” NYT (03 Dec 10)  
<http://www.nytimes.com/2010/12/04/world/middleeast/04wikileaks-yemen.html?emc=tnt&tntemail0=y> accessed 04 Dec 10

<sup>75</sup> Yan “Airstrikes kill three al-Qaida militants in Yemen's Abyan: official” Xinhua (29 Jul 11)  
[http://news.xinhuanet.com/english2010/world/2011-07/30/c\\_131018795.htm](http://news.xinhuanet.com/english2010/world/2011-07/30/c_131018795.htm) 16 Aug 11

<sup>76</sup> “Shabwah: Mobilized Tribal Militias Track Al-Qaeda” National Yemen (31 Oct 11)  
<http://nationalyemen.com/2010/10/31/shabwah-mobilized-tribal-militias-track-al-qaeda/> accessed 16 Apr 11

<sup>77</sup> Sullivan, C “Why Yemen claims role in US drone strike on cleric Anwar al-Awlaki” CSM (07 May 11)  
<http://www.csmonitor.com/USA/2011/0507/Why-Yemen-claims-role-in-US-drone-strike-on-cleric-Anwar-al-Awlaki> 07 May 11

<sup>78</sup> Abdul-Ahad, G “Al-Qaida in Yemen: Poverty, corruption and an army of jihadis willing to fight” Guardian (22 Aug 10)  
<http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2010/aug/22/al-qaeda-yemen-ghaith-abdul-ahad> accessed 22 Aug 10



appears to be jihadi fashion) and occasionally, there are references to the jihadis wearing “their hair long like northern tribesmen”<sup>79</sup>, corroborated by photographs.



Photo: al-Arabiyya<sup>80</sup>

**Fig. 5: Fighters of al-Qaeda network in Yemen**

One cardinal issue too often overlooked when addressing “the tribes” sheltering AQAP is the ideological / religious motivation for doing so. In Iraq, most Sunni (but not the Shi’i) Arab tribes were prepared to ally with AQI, at least initially. In Yemen, there are similar lines of cleavage. The two main tribal confederations (Hashid and Bakil) are Zaydi (5er) Shi’a, to whom al-Qa’ida has a vitriolic ideological aversion; indeed, Sa’id al-Shihri declared his intention to wage jihad<sup>81</sup> against the Zaydis, beginning with an SVBIED attack on a Zaydi convoy<sup>82</sup>, and a subsequent SVBIED attack on the funeral. These tribes will resist the *Jihadis* vigorously on religious grounds.

While far fewer, there are also Isma’ili tribes in the Western Mountains, the Southern Uplands, and particularly on the northern border with Sa’udi Arabia, where the Banu Yam of Najran have a wide territory. Isma’ilis are counted not just as *rafidhin* or Rejectionists, but their mystic practises are regarded by many Salafis as especially heretical.

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79 Worth, R “Chaos in Yemen Creates Opening for Islamist Gangs” NYT (26 Jun 11)  
[http://www.nytimes.com/2011/06/27/world/middleeast/27yemen.html?\\_r=3](http://www.nytimes.com/2011/06/27/world/middleeast/27yemen.html?_r=3) accessed 27 Jun 11

80 “Yemen recruits tribesmen to hunt al-Qaeda” al-Arabiya (25 Oct 10)  
<http://www.alarabiya.net/articles/2010/10/25/123629.html> accessed 22 Feb 11

81 “Yemen al-Qaida commander declares war against Shiites” Xinhua (28 Jan 11)  
[http://news.xinhuanet.com/english2010/world/2011-01/29/c\\_13711741.htm](http://news.xinhuanet.com/english2010/world/2011-01/29/c_13711741.htm) accessed 29 Jan 11

82 “Al-Qaida claims attack on Yemen Shiites” AP (28 Nov 10) <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2010/11/28/AR2010112802485.html> accessed 28 Nov 10



Even among the Sunni tribes, there is what the Jihadis would regard as laxness. Thesiger records that the Saar of northern Hadhramaut “neither fast nor pray, saying that the prophet Muhammad gave their forefathers a dispensation from both.”<sup>83</sup>

The inherent incompatibility and potential for conflict extends to other areas as well. Many tribes are heavily involved in activities odious to the Jihadis. Yemen is as famous for the “narcotic leaf qat” as it is for being “the ancestral homeland of Osama bin Laden”; some estimates have as many as 80% of the male population chewing qat regularly, and its eradication is something even al-Shabab in Somalia failed to achieve. Then there is smuggling across the borders: sometimes lawful cargo (with a heavy tariff), but more often it is illegal / “immoral” (such as drugs or alcohol.) Yemenis are unlikely to give these up without a fight.

Further, as Sarah Phillips points out<sup>84</sup>, the Islamist edict that women should only leave their homes in Abyan veiled and accompanied by a close relative will require males of the family to engage in rather more physical labour than is their wont. Through such intolerant and alien behaviour, the Jihadis threaten entrenched tribal interests, and cast themselves as foreign forces. This is likely to turn the tribes away from AQAP – as happened in Iraq.

Taking service with the state as an *askar* (soldier) appears to have connotations of *hijra*<sup>85</sup>, albeit temporarily. WB Harris records the Ottomans’ “Arab auxiliaries, drawn principally from the Mshareg and Hadramaut [...] who did not care whom they fought against, or for what reason they were fighting, so long as they were paid.”<sup>86</sup> Fifty years later, Wilfred Thesiger’s companions (from much the same area) tell him: “they said at once that, acting under my orders, they would consider themselves to be *askar*, or soldiers, not bound by tribal custom”<sup>87</sup> Interestingly, this separation from tribal obligations may apply to becoming a terrorist as well; there is an account of a grieving relative saying that the dead terrorist knew what was coming to him, but that he intended to take no action.

Yet there are exceptions to this broad principle, in both directions: the al-Maraqisha tribe of Abyan governorate “stated that the tribe is capable of protecting its members, and that authorities have abandoned their responsibilities, and failed to provide security and facilities”<sup>88</sup> for Col Ahmad Ali Mitris, the Deputy Director of Political Security for Abyan, who survived an IED attack on his car. Similarly:

Colonel Ahmed Saleh Al-Sabehi, leader of tank detachment of Brigade 103 in Sa'ada province was kidnapped with eight of his bodyguards in Khamer district. Private sources said that the kidnapping of the leader, who belongs to Al-Sabeha tribe, Lahj, came as a response to the killing of a citizen from Hashed tribe who was killed in Ahowar district, Abyan, two months ago.<sup>89</sup>

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<sup>83</sup> Thesiger, W “Arabian Sands” London: Longmans (1959) p.189

<sup>84</sup> Phillips, S “Western policymakers shouldn't accept this Saleh spin” Guardian Comment is Free (10 Apr 11) <http://www.guardian.co.uk/commentisfree/2011/apr/10/yemen-saleh-al-qaida> accessed 10 Apr 11

<sup>85</sup> In particular, a renouncing of old loyalties and a formation of new ones with one’s brothers in arms

<sup>86</sup> Harris, WB “The Rebellion in Yemen” Edinburgh: Blackwood’s Magazine (Feb 1893) p.305

<sup>87</sup> Thesiger, W “Arabian Sands” London: Longmans (1959) p.183

<sup>88</sup> “Al-Maraqisha Tribe In Abyan Vows To Protect Members” National Yemen (20 Dec 10)

<http://nationalyemen.com/2010/12/20/al-maraqisha-tribe-in-abyan-vows-to-protect-members/> accessed 16 Apr 11

<sup>89</sup> Armed Men Kidnap Officer and Soldiers in Amran” Yemen Post (23 Feb 11)

<http://yemenpost.net/Detail123456789.aspx?ID=100&SubID=3179&MainCat=3> accessed 06 Apr 11

Occasionally – as with many tribal feuds – the skein is tangled, and there are cross-kidnappings:

At least two soldiers were kidnapped by armed men belonging to Southern Movement in Radfan, Lahj. [...] In return, tribal sources told the Yemen Post that armed group belonging to Anes tribe kidnapped four citizens from Lahj in response to the kidnapping of the two soldiers in which one of them belonged to Anes tribe.<sup>90</sup>

These apparent exceptions may be a change in tribal law, or merely reporting of extant custom which was less binding than law (as observed by Dresch in 1992.) The Huthis' attacks on the Jews would have been similarly unimaginable 100 years ago, as Habshush's account of meeting a heavily armed Jew in much the same area makes clear.

When the tribes wish (ie when it is in their interests), they will stand up to Jihadis, just as they would resist the Government (or other external forces) in a similar situation:

Also today local tribesmen prevented the armed militias from looting a local cement factory owned by a Saudi businessman. Meanwhile, the same armed militia successfully raided a government building and a local TV station, engaging in heavy clashes with the police.<sup>91</sup>

The clear inference of this event is that the *qabilis* care little for or what happens to the state's property, but a business which gainfully employs members of their tribe is clearly worth protecting. (As a Sa'udi-owned facility, and a cement factory, the Jihadis' will to fight for such an unimportant facility was limited.)

The terrorists seem to recognise their precarious situation vis-à-vis the tribes, and have even gone so far as to deny involvement in the killing of an important member of the security forces (whose name suggests that he was from a major Bakil shaikhly house): "Al-Qaeda denied it was behind the death of chief of staff of Brigade 315 Mohammed Al-Shayef and one of his men this month"<sup>92</sup> Such caution is well founded. Despite the nominal extra-tribal status of a terrorist, at a funeral of a AQAP member of the Tais tribe of Sa'adah, *qabilis* killed two AQAP members, and wounded another:

The sources said that the confrontations broke out during a mourn ceremony held for condoling one of al-Qaeda insurgents who was killed in gun fire exchange between al-Qaeda insurgents and between the security forces in Marib province last week.<sup>93</sup>

Presumably, the confrontation was over AQAP being regarded as responsible for the Tais relative's death, although altercations over religious funerary rites have occurred.

AQAP have also found the tribes to be far less biddable than they would like. Not only have the tribes – even al-Aulaq, who are believed to be sheltering Anwar al-Aulaqi – refused

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<sup>90</sup> "Two Soldiers kidnapped in Lahj" Yemen Post (11 Feb 11)  
<http://yemenpost.net/Detail123456789.aspx?ID=3&SubID=3124&MainCat=3> accessed 12 Feb 11

<sup>91</sup> "In Yemen the powers of the government drifting away" Arab Monitor (28 Mar 11)  
<http://www.arabmonitor.info/news/dettaglio.php?idnews=33374&lang=en> 30 Mar 11

<sup>92</sup> "Marib: governmental Mistakes against its people again and again; More Attacks Against Tribes" Yemen Post (28 Jun 10)  
<http://yemenpost.net/Detail123456789.aspx?ID=100&SubID=2339&MainCat=5> accessed 06 Apr 11

<sup>93</sup> al-Kibsi, M "Two al-Qaeda militants killed, one injured in north Yemen" Yemen Observer (09 Mar 11)  
<http://www.yobserver.com/local-news/10020928.html> accessed 09 Mar 11

AQAP's exhortation to join forces against the government<sup>94</sup>, but al-Aulaq have even conducted operations against AQAP in their territory (although the *qabilis*' dedication to the operation is questionable.) The government has also gained the tribes' co-operation against AQAP in al-Jawf and Ma'rib provinces, where they "cooperated with the Interior Ministry in the arrest of 30 suspected members of al-Qaida".<sup>95</sup>

Just as AQAP have not been successful in securing tribal agreement, so they do not always comply with tribal arrangements:

One respected figure of Abyan, Muhammad Ju'abul Sheikh, had brokered a truce between al-Qaeda group and the 111 Brigade based in Lawdar before the militant attacked the soldiers,<sup>96</sup>

While this is hardly surprising (and may denote a more confident AQAP) such a loss of face to an important shaikh is unlikely to endear AQAP to him or his tribe.

### ***Surrenders***

The reality of tribal activity in Yemen is rather different from the romanticised – even Orientalised – version of "unbreakable hospitality" so often presented. Tribes are, functionally, federal states within the union, of varying power and relevance. They are acutely aware of their relative status vis-à-vis the central government, and jihadis. The tribes usually act pragmatically, in the long-term interests of the tribe. This may mean protecting members or guests of their tribe, but it may mean repudiating them, or brokering an arrangement with authority to surrender the wanted person. This procedure applies to all disputes involving tribal members, even "ordinary" crime: "the tribes of Jada'an sent a message to the Tho Ghailan tribes asking them to repudiate Aborawia" [a well-known robber].<sup>97</sup>

In addition to the tribal cost ~ benefit analysis, factors which will increase the likelihood of a successful "extradition" are the rightness of the request: whether there is sufficient proof that the individual was guilty, and whether the accused is likely to get a fair trial. This has resulted in several high-level surrenders to the authorities. Interestingly, the cost ~ benefit analysis to the tribe outweighs the possibility of potentially serious sentences on the individual:

An al Qaeda leader in Yemen accused of aiding operatives in the 2002 bombing of a French-flagged oil tanker has surrendered to authorities [...] Hezam Mujali also had been sentenced to death in August 2004 for killing an army officer and he was charged with attacking a helicopter from the Texas-based Hunt oil company in November 2002.<sup>98</sup>

While terrorists have been executed for terrorist acts in Yemen, far more have been jailed, and many have been "rehabilitated" and paroled – often to return to terrorism.

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<sup>94</sup> "Yemeni Awalik tribe rejects al-Qaeda call to fight government" News Yemen (03 Nov 10) [http://www.newsyemen.net/en/view\\_news.asp?sub\\_no=3\\_2010\\_11\\_03\\_40194](http://www.newsyemen.net/en/view_news.asp?sub_no=3_2010_11_03_40194) 16 Nov 10

<sup>95</sup> "Yemeni forces nab 30 al-Qaida suspects" UPI (16 Jul 10) [http://www.upi.com/Top\\_News/Special/2010/07/16/Yemeni-forces-nab-30-al-Qaida-suspects/UPI-60651279294308/?pvn=1](http://www.upi.com/Top_News/Special/2010/07/16/Yemeni-forces-nab-30-al-Qaida-suspects/UPI-60651279294308/?pvn=1) accessed 16 Jul 10

<sup>96</sup> al-Mosawa, SM "Al-Qaeda in Yemen kills military amid tribal-brokered truce" Yemen Observer (27 Apr 11) <http://www.yobserver.com/local-news/10021137.html> accessed 27 Apr 11

<sup>97</sup> Ouda, A "Most wanted criminal in Yemen killed" Yemen Observer (02 May 10) <http://www.yobserver.com/local-news/10018615.html> accessed 02 Mar 11

<sup>98</sup> Yemen says a top militant surrenders CNN (19 Aug 10) <http://edition.cnn.com/2010/WORLD/meast/08/19/yemen.arrest/#fbid=JKXD3tDfF91&wom=false> accessed 19 Aug 10

## *Deductions*

The relationship between the tribes and most AQAP members is less concrete, and far more nuanced, than often supposed. The relationship in the rural areas seems based on self-interest (often financial), but is subject to the best interests of the tribe. As a result, High Value Targets (with the possible exception of a senior tribal shaikh such as Anwar al-Aulaqi) are likely to be the subject of negotiation rather than unbreakable sanctuary.

AQAP's foreign practices threaten both tribal custom, and entrenched interests in an otherwise impoverished environment. As such, they are unlikely to take root; indeed, the tribes may themselves expel AQAP should the terrorists become more intolerant of tribal practices. However, heavy handed (especially, foreign) counter-terrorist actions are likely to be counter-productive. Instead, a combination of tribally negotiated surrender and incentivisation is most likely to neutralise the "Infantry" threat. (The Special Operations group is most likely to be in a city, for logistic and OPSEC reasons, and thus to be out of tribal reach.)

## *Conclusion*

The "Infantry" grouping is predominately Yemeni and seems to be based on / among the tribes of al-Jawf, Ma'rib, Shabwa and Abyan. It is focussed on the Yemeni Government and security organisations, and demonstrates few capabilities beyond those available to other tribesmen. Their MOs try to avoid civilian casualties, probably to avoid alienating their tribal sponsors, in particular not using larger or secondary IEDs.

This more national Yemeni grouping AQAP are of little importance (or threat) to the West, or indeed Yemen. Since much of their cause seems to be anti-Regime, it is likely that with the demise of Ali Abdullah Salih's clique and system of patronage, much of the Infantry grouping's *raison d'être* will end, and where it does not, the tribes will drive them out as AQAP's presence will threaten potential investment and improvement. However, without an end to the current patronage system, it is likely that this grouping will continue to operate.

AQAP's more transnational Special Operations grouping is genuinely a threat – although more so to the Sa'udis than to the West for reasons of geography. Nevertheless, should the much demanded Security Sector Reform be a consequence of the demise of Ali Abdullah Salih, it is probable that much of the unofficial state co-operation (on which AQAP have depended to plan and mount their attacks) will end, and their attacks will thus become far harder to achieve.

From the Special Operations grouping's willing, but limited, use of suicide attackers, they appear not to have access to a large cadre of volunteers. From the limited tempo of attacks, AQAP also may not have many competent bomb-makers. Both factors suggest that if Ibrahim al-'Asiri (AQAP's main bomb-maker) is neutralised, much of the Special Operations groupings capability will be lost, although the comments in the Special Edition about bomb-making techniques being passed on are correct (if not yet demonstrated in Yemen.)

While al-Aulaqi is properly a cause for concern, he is neither alone in his cell, nor unique in his ability. Efforts must be made both to close down his transmissions and to counter his works through means that have proved successful in similar situations. al-Aulaqi's father is concerned for the well-being of his son, and may be able to induce him to surrender if the terms are tolerable. However, concentrating on al-Aulaqi as the sole cause of the problem – or even the

only enabler – rather than the spark which ignites the aerated fuel is to ignore the drivers of radicalisation among Muslims in the West.

The threat to the West (and KSA) posed by AQ Prime may have declined such that AQAP is now a greater threat; however while the latter's intent remains as viscerally destructive, its capability in absolute is currently limited. With a more transparent and egalitarian regime in Yemen, much of the passive support AQAP currently enjoys will evaporate, but this is highly likely to be reversed by the inappropriate or indiscriminate interference of external parties.

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