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Pushing Al-Qaeda out of Yemen Impossible Due to Its Ties with Government



Yemeni government fighters closing in on an al-Qaeda location in the Hadramawt province. Photo: Saleh Al Obeidi, AFP

Five days after President **Donald J. Trump** took office, he directed his first military action against the al-Qaeda group in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP), considered to be one of al-Qaeda's most dangerous branches. Despite the attempts to push al-Qaeda out of Yemen and the American drone operations aimed at degrading AQAP, all efforts have

Separatists from the Southern Resistance Forces, backed by the U.S. and the United Arab Emirates, managed to defeat the terrorist group in most of south Yemen. However, the al-Qaeda branch is stronger than ever in the north of the country.

For the legitimate government of President **Abdrabbuh Mansur Hadi**, cutting ties with AQAP is an almost impossible mission. The government takes advantage of the shared Sunni background with al-Qaeda to push them for the fight against the Iran-backed Shiite Houthis.

This means that al-Qaeda is engaged in every step of the process of liberating Yemen from the Houthis. It makes talking about a future Yemen without terror groups impossible. AQAP is burrowing deeper into the country every day.

Ties Between Government and AQAP

The reason why it's impossible to defeat al-Qaeda in Yemen today is the deep coordination on the ground between AQAP and Al-Islah, the Muslim Brotherhood's party in the country. Al-Islah is a crucial part of the Yemeni government.

The links between Al-Islah and Al-Qaeda go far back, and senior Al-Islah leader **Abdul Majeed al-Zindani** played a vital role in the bridge between the two parties. In 2004, the U.S. government labeled him as "Specially Designated Global Terrorist" for his ties with al-Qaeda founder **Osama bin Laden**. When the Yemeni army was about to start an offensive against al-Qaeda in Abyan in southern Yemen in 2012, Al-Zindani called for a halt. The Al-Islah leader is a close ally of President Hadi.

According to *Mareb Press*, a news outlet loyal to the government, Hadi met with Al-Zindani in 2018 and described him as "the heir of the Prophet." During the meeting, Hadi insisted for Al-Zindani to play a more prominent preaching role in Yemen, which would generate more violent thinking in the region.

Ties Between Army and AQAP

Another reason why it is unlikely AQAP will be defeated are the ties between Yemeni General **Ali Mohsen al-Ahmar** and the organization. Al-Ahmar is the most senior general of the Yemeni army in charge of all decisions on the ground in North Yemen. Since 2016, he is also the country's vice president.

In 2005, the U.S. embassy in Yemen raised a red flag about Al-Ahmar's trips to Afghanistan and meetings with Bin Laden in the 1980s. In the U.S., Al-Ahmar is believed to have played a key role in the relocation of large groups of al-Qaeda fighters from Afghanistan to Yemen. Al-Ahmar resettled many terrorists that were banned from going back to their countries in Yemen.

That an individual with a long history of friendship with AQAP is leading the country's army, makes it is no surprise that terrorist group is not defeated in the north yet.

Is Al-Islah a Terrorist Group?

Weeks ago, the U.S. Congress held a hearing to examine the possibility of designating the Muslim Brotherhood party as a "Foreign Terrorist Organization." The hearing resulted in the compromise that the Congress will go through case by case and only designate the radical Muslim Brotherhood branches.

Al-Islah, the group's party in Yemen, is one of the most radical Muslim Brotherhood parties and the U.S. should, therefore, designate them as a terrorist organization. Al-Islah is deeply affiliated with AQAP.

Many Yemeni youths who carried out suicide bombings had political affiliations with the Al-Islah party, and leaders like General Al-Ahmar trained part of them.

Letting Al-Islah take over territory in Yemen generates wealth and resources for their ally AQAP to carry out more terror attacks. Daily incidents indicate that bombings and terrorist attacks are executed with professional planning and coordination between Al-Islah and AQAP.

Until this moment, a number of places under the control of the Al-Islah party embrace the leadership of terrorist groups, especially AQAP, particularly in Marib, al-Baida, and Taiz.

It does not look like AQAP will be defeated in north Yemen anytime soon. While IS was defeated in Syria and Iraq, a new chapter of the caliphate is breaking out in north Yemen, where the Al-Islah party lives in harmony with al-Qaeda.

This scary scene in the north makes people in the south even more focused on having the right to determine their destiny. The south fought against AQAP, even in north Yemen, but today it is believed fighting AQAP makes no sense since the group has the backing of a government with international political recognition.

In south Yemen, a high price was paid to build a democratic, egalitarian society with a free market and a significant role for women. We believe that we have our own culture and lifestyle that contradicts the presence of extremism or Islamic political groups. We in the south accept diversity, and we will never consider AQAP as a friend just because of our mutual Sunni background.

Abdrabbuh Mansur Hadi Abdul Majeed al-Zindani Al Qaeda Al-Islah Ali Mohsen al-Ahmar

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