

South Yemen – a summary of a series of articles

by the “Al-Sharq Al-Awsat” newspaper

Between December 19th and 30th 2010, the “Al-Sharq Al-Awsat” newspaper published a series of investigative reports on southern Yemen, including impressions from a tour in the remote region and interviews with the tribal leaders in the area. This series of articles demonstrates that the press has good access to the area, to the tribal leaders there, and to the leaders of the local militias affiliated with Al-Qaeda. The following points arise from this series of reports:

- Most of Al-Qaeda's activity is focused on southern Yemen. This is due to the geographical isolation, the mountainous terrain, the difficulty in reaching the area, and the lack of an official government presence.¹
- Over the course of the previous months, the Yemeni security forces waged a war against Al-Qaeda entities in the Abyan and Shabwah Provinces, and made extensive use of fighter aircraft in the Radfh region in the Shabwah Province. The Awlaqi tribes, which are divided into two - the Upper and the Lower Awlaqi - reside in Radhf. Amongst the members of the Upper Awlaqi tribes are Fahd Al-Quso and Anwar Al-Awlaqi, Al-Qaeda operatives who at the time of publication were wanted by the American authorities (Al-Awlaki has since been killed), but these tribes are large and also include senior members of the government holding key positions.²

¹ Al-Sharq Al-Awsat, December 19th 2010,
<http://www.aawsat.com/details.asp?section=4&issueno=11709&article=600063>

² Al-Sharq Al-Awsat, December 19th 2010,
<http://www.aawsat.com/details.asp?section=4&issueno=11709&article=600063> ; Al-Sharq Al-Awsat, December 20th 2010,
<http://www.aawsat.com/details.asp?section=4&article=600194&issueno=11710>

- The article describes the living conditions in the area as being harsh: the roads are unpaved, there is no electricity, water or education, and many of the region's people live a primitive life. It is further reported that there is one school in the area that was taken over by Al-Qaeda until it was closed down due to a bombing.³
- The local residents vehemently deny that Al-Qaeda has any presence in the region and that the tribes give patronage to the organization's operatives in their territory. They also claim that the government is exaggerating the Al-Qaeda phenomenon.⁴
- The Yemeni authorities have tried to fight Al-Qaeda in the Shabwah region through "Awakening Councils" similar to those in Iraq, trying to enlist the local tribesmen. Up until this point, these councils were not part of any real action against the organization and it is doubtful that they can be effective. This is due to the tribal social structure in the region, and in view of the experience of the Awakening Councils in Iraq - they themselves became a target for Al-Qaeda.⁵
- The Abyan Province in the south of the country suffered from a wave of assassinations against security personnel, a large part of which were carried out in broad daylight by armed men on motorcycles. This pattern is reminiscent of the assassinations carried out by Al-Qaeda in Iraq,⁶ and coincides with the doctrine of personal Jihad carried out by individuals and

³ Al-Sharq Al-Awsat, December 19th 2010,
<http://www.aawsat.com/details.asp?section=4&issueno=11709&article=600063>

⁴ Al-Sharq Al-Awsat, December 20th 2010,
<http://www.aawsat.com/details.asp?section=4&article=600194&issueno=11710>; Al-Sharq Al-Awsat, December 26th 2010,
<http://www.aawsat.com/details.asp?section=4&article=601047&issueno=11716>

⁵ Al-Sharq Al-Awsat, December 20th 2010,
<http://www.aawsat.com/details.asp?section=4&article=600194&issueno=11710>

⁶ See for example:
http://www.ict.org.il/Portals/0/Internet%20Monitoring%20Group/JWVG_Arab_Media_Sources_February_2011_1.pdf, page 3.

small groups which is preached by Abu Musab Al-Suri.⁷ In September 2010, Al-Qaeda issued a manifesto containing a hit list of 54 security force personnel in the province. Following these assassinations and threats the authorities tried to limit motorcycle riding in the province, which they succeeded in enforcing in the provincial capital, Zinjibar. However, in the second largest city in the province, Jaar, the security forces failed to enforce these limitations. In Jaar, armed men move about freely and do as they please. As well as Da'awa activity, military activity and attacking the security forces, the Jihad organizations' members take the law into their own hands undisturbed – they execute homosexuals, and punish prostitutes and individuals who consume alcohol. The article notes that before the conflicts between the security forces and the Jihadi organizations began, the latter controlled Jaar almost completely. Some people likened it to an Islamic Emirate or to “Yemen Kandahar”.⁸

In Abu Musab Al-Suri's book, “Da'awat Al-Muqawamah Al-Islamiyyah Al-'Alamiyyah” (The Call of Global Islamic Resistance), Al-Suri writes about the benefits the Jihad theaters can derive from the activity of individual Jihadi cells: “These cells' activities are a long arm in managing Jihad... Through their activity they provide the required deterrence of the attacking forces, they eliminate the enemy's leaders, operate behind enemy lines and carry out special operations in collaboration with the emirs of these theaters in a clandestine and planned manner”.⁹

⁷ Da'awat Al-Muqawama Al-Islamiya Al-Alamiya, December 2004, pages 1355 – 1500.

⁸ Al-Sharq Al-Awsat, December 21st 2010,

<http://www.aawsat.com/details.asp?section=4&article=600341&issueno=11711>

⁹ Da'awat Al-Muqawama Al-Islamiya Al-Alamiya, December 2004, page 1403.

- There are many disagreements as to the question of whether the acts of violence in the south of Yemen are carried out by Al-Qaeda or by criminal elements, and with regards to the level of sympathy these criminal elements have with Al-Qaeda's ideas. Furthermore, there are many elements that oppose Ali Abdullah Salah's regime, such as the separatist Al-Harak movement that claims the south is discriminated against by the authorities and calls for its independence. However, the locals deny any connection between the Al-Harak movement and Al-Qaeda, despite the government's claims.¹⁰
- The Jihad movements in the south of the country included fighters who had returned from Afghanistan, and some claim that the movements grew in the 1990s with the support of elements from within the government following the resistance to the Socialist Party, however - "the puppet rose against its maker".¹¹
- There is some dispute as to whether Al-Qaeda is carrying out criminal acts in southern Yemen in order to finance its terrorist activity. Over the past two years, a series of robberies were carried out which resulted in the theft of almost US\$2 million. Al-Qaeda did not claim responsibility for these robberies, but there are claims that Al-Qaeda carried them out to finance its

¹⁰ Al-Sharq Al-Awsat, December 21st 2010, <http://www.aawsat.com/details.asp?section=4&article=600341&issueno=11711>; Al-Sharq Al-Awsat, December 22nd 2010, <http://www.aawsat.com/details.asp?section=4&article=600516&issueno=11712>; Al-Sharq Al-Awsat, December 26th 2010, <http://www.aawsat.com/details.asp?section=4&article=601047&issueno=11716>

¹¹ Al-Sharq Al-Awsat, December 23rd 2010, <http://www.aawsat.com/details.asp?section=4&article=600639&issueno=11713>, and Al-Sharq Al-Awsat, December 24th 2010, <http://www.aawsat.com/details.asp?section=4&article=600798&issueno=11714>

activities after its governmental financing sources dried out and fatwas were given which permitted obtaining funds through theft.¹²

From all of the above, one can conclude that the main reasons for Al-Qaeda's success in the south of Yemen are the lack of ability on the part of the security forces in operating in this region, the absence of a strong central government, terrain which makes it difficult to carry out regular military activity, and the strong tribal social structure which places tribal interests before those of the state. The contribution of the tribal structure of Yemen society to Al-Qaeda's development has been discussed in previous JWMG reports.¹³ It seems that the weakened Yemeni state is facing pressure from Al-Qaeda's direction and from the direction of the separatist movement opposing the government - both weaken the state's presence in the region, thus undermining its legitimacy. The recent protests in Yemen calling for the downfall of Ali Abdullah Salah are also an expression of the absence of legitimacy and of the government's weakness and also feed the anarchy which serves as fertile ground for Al-Qaeda's continued growth.

¹² Al-Sharq Al-Awsat, December 30th 2010,
<http://www.aawsat.com/details.asp?section=4&article=601608&issueno=11720>

¹³

<http://www.ict.org.il/ResearchPublications/JihadiWebsitesMonitoring/JWMGInsights/tabid/320/Articlsid/865/currentpage/1/Default.aspx>

A map of the southern Yemen area

