



SPECIAL ADVISORY: YEMEN

January 27, 2015

SUMMARY

As this Advisory is written, Yemen is essentially a country without governance. The following quote from the New York Times on January 25 is informative: “Power in Yemen is largely centered in the hands of individuals rather than institutions, and national identity often competes with tribal and sectarian allegiances. The Houthi-led takeover, which forced the resignation of President Abdu Rabbu Mansour Hadi on Thursday (January 22), is part of a broader structure of shifting alliances and warring interests that are now being negotiated behind closed doors, political analysts and officials say.”¹

In the present environment, dynamic and violent change is likely to be the norm for at least the foreseeable future. With the major competing parties enjoying backing from state allies, and with the fundamental dispute between Shiite radicals (the Houthi network) and Sunni radicals (AQAP) resulting in violent competition; the lack of a functional government (or any peace-keeping force) virtually guarantees a season of increasing violence.

In this environment, CCI assesses the threat to faith-based organizations and their staff, especially western expatriate staff, in Yemen to have increased to critical.²

ASSESSMENT

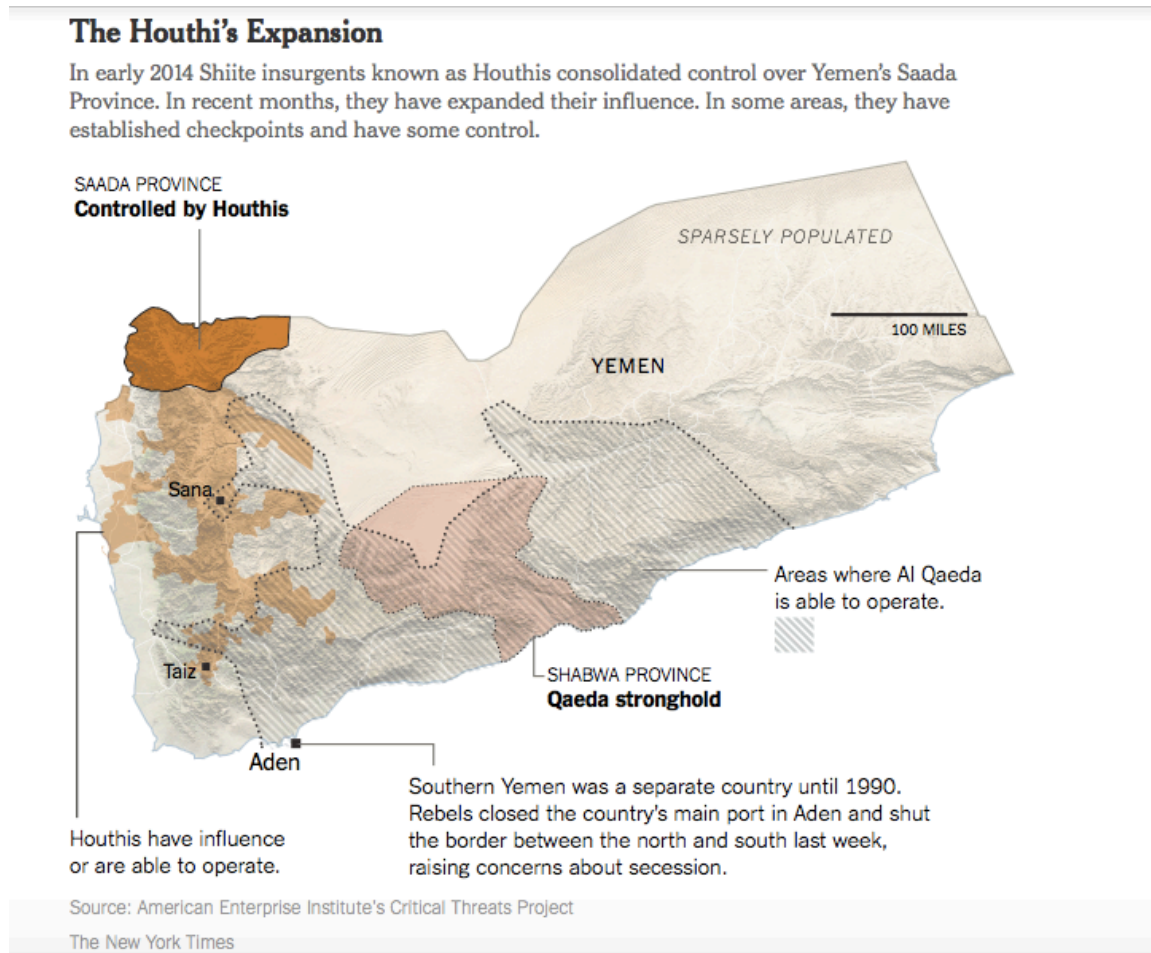
CCI believes that the faith-based organizations with staff presently in Yemen have robust and sophisticated access to sources of information. So rather than devote considerable time in this Advisory to documenting a wide range of data and information that the primary consumers of the Advisory already know, we will

¹ El-Naggar, Mona; “Shifting Alliances Play Out Behind Closed Doors in Yemen”, The New York Times; January 25, 2015

² CCI’s proprietary risk assessment system defines “critical” as “Continued operations risk the sacrifice of staff and/or constituent lives without meaningful benefit; or, the operation cannot continue to produce desired results regardless of the extent and cost of security countermeasures imposed.”

instead concentrate on putting the situation into the larger context of foreseeable occurrences and impacts.

This map, included in the January 25 New York Times article previously cited, illustrates the geography of the multiple conflicts and is indicative of the complexity of the situation.



There are at least four primary power centers: The Houthi network, AQAP, the separatist movement in southern Yemen, and supporters of the government of former President Ali Abdullah Saleh (ousted in 2012). Tenuous alliances may presently exist between the Houthis and Saleh supporters and between AQAP and the separatists, but these are much more of “the enemy of my enemy is my ally” (at least for today) variety.

In such a turbulent and contested environment, it might be easy to presume that faith-based targets would drop to second- or third-tier status. CCI believes just the opposite is true. The following factors contribute to this assessment:

1. The collapse of a government that was at least nominally supporting US counter-terrorism efforts in Yemen creates a vacuum that AQAP especially is likely to exploit.

2. There is an unprecedented global phenomenon impacting terrorist group actions: There are multiple Islamist terrorist groups that are deeply divided along sectarian lines, and these groups are being forced into competition with each other (for headlines, for funding, for recruits, for “legitimacy” in the world of terrorism and terrorists). In this setting, AQAP especially needs to demonstrate that it has the capacity to continue to perpetrate significant acts of terrorism even as its conflict with the Houthi network plays out.
3. AQAP has a recent history of attacks on expatriate faith-based personnel, assassinating one and kidnapping three others since 2012.
4. AQAP suffered multiple casualties in US-led military actions, including attempted hostage rescues, in late 2014. Those casualties alone are a motivation for revenge; however, the incentive for AQAP to react is strengthened by the fact that two US military attempts to rescue an American hostage failed. AQAP’s perceived ability to deny the US military successful hostage rescue operations will almost certainly embolden them.
5. The latest US hostage rescue effort resulted in the deaths of the American hostage and a South African hostage when AQAP guards engaged the US forces and delayed the action sufficiently for a guard to execute the hostages. At the time, there was a crescendo of media reports that the South African hostage’s release had been negotiated and was in fact imminent. Confidentiality issues limit what CCI can say, but we can offer our very strong assessment that it would not be unreasonable for AQAP to suspect (incorrectly³) some sort of double-cross related to the South African hostage’s negotiations and to link that perception (again incorrectly⁴) to the US military actions. CCI is aware that the AQAP kidnapers of the South African hostage believed him to be a faith-based worker.

For these reasons as well as a historical animus, CCI assesses AQAP to represent a critical threat to the safety of faith-based organizations, personnel and operations in Yemen. Security and risk mitigation measures that have been employed in the recent past were dependent at least in part on a functioning government that offered at least pro-forma opposition to this targeting. With the removal of that opposition, the efficacy of security and risk mitigation measures is reduced. With that reduction, **the razor’s edge margin that represented “acceptable risk” is gone.**

CCI also notes the very strong recommendation of the US Embassy: “U.S. citizens still in Yemen should make plans to depart immediately.”⁵

³ “Incorrectly” is a categorical assertion based on CCI’s knowledge of the facts and circumstances

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⁵ Emergency Message for US Citizens, US Citizen Services, Embassy of the United States; January 26, 2015 (http://yemen.usembassy.gov/em_012615.html)

Finally, we note that although international airlines are scheduled to operate from Saana for the remainder of this week, cancellation of commercial airline service to and from Yemen is certainly possible (if not likely) in the near future.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. It is recommended that faith-based organizations give careful consideration to the assessments herein, especially concerning the increasing threat from AQAP.
2. It is recommended that these organizations give careful consideration to the proposition that any international staff remaining in Yemen are at greater risk today than last week, and that risk is likely to continue to increase as the current power vacuum continues or in the event the Houthi network assumes control of the government.
3. It is recommended that these organizations give careful consideration to the proposition that pre-determined and/or traditional benchmarks, tripwires and trigger points may no longer have relevance in the Yemen context. Relying on any such indicators that pre-date the present situation (i.e., that are more than two or three days old) may represent flawed understanding of the present situation.
4. It is recommended that these organizations carefully consider the need to keep expatriate personnel in Yemen. CCI assesses the risk to such personnel as critical. We consider that only a truly compelling, imminent and otherwise-unmet need for an expatriate “worker” would justify accepting such a high level of risk.
5. It is recommended that these organizations evacuate dependents of expatriate staff that remain in Yemen. We note that AQAP has shown no mercy to female members of these organizations. There is no reason to believe that mercy would be shown to children.

CCI stands ready to support Christian agencies in the response to this increased threat, to conduct site-specific assessments, to provide training and to assist agencies in the implementation of recommendations and additional actions; and to discuss specific issues and situations. Contact us:

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