



**POLICY REPORT**  
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# **Local Security Governance in Yemen in Times of War**

## **The Cases of al-Hudayda, Ta'iz and Aden**

*by Mareike Transfeld,  
Mohamed al-Iriani,  
Maged Sultan and  
Marie-Christine Heinze*

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## Acronyms

GPC	General People's Congress
IRG	internationally recognized government
LAL	Local Authority Law
MoD	Ministry of Defense
MoI	Ministry of Interior
NMSC	National Military Security Committee
NRA	National Resistance Army
NSA	National Security Agency
PTM	Peaceful Tihama Movement
PSO	Political Security Organization
SSC	Supreme Security Committee
SSF	Special Security Forces
STC	Southern Transitional Council
TPR	Tihama Popular Resistance
UAE	United Arab Emirates

## Introduction

■ Mareike Transfeld and Marie-Christine Heinze

After six years of war, Yemen and its state institutions have undergone dramatic changes, having fragmented along multiple fault lines. The security sector is no exception. In the northwest, Ansar Allah took over the capital Sana'a by force in September 2014, before seizing large parts of the highlands: from the Saudi border in the north, to the Red Sea in the west, Marib in the east and al-Dhali' in the south. Ansar Allah consolidated its control over the state, systematically weakening tribal structures and using security forces to crush any space for dissent or opposition (Nevola & Carboni 2019). Due to the escalation of hostilities southwest of Sana'a in 2015, security institutions collapsed in heavily embattled areas, particularly in Ta'iz and Aden (Transfeld & al-Sharjabi 2020; Sultan, Transfeld & Muqbil 2019; bin Othman & Transfeld 2020). The re-establishment of security institutions under the internationally recognized government (IRG) in early 2017 brought some stability; but eventually, instead of unifying the troops under the 'National Army', the localized recruitment processes have resulted in more state fragmentation. Exemplary of this is the expulsion of the IRG from Aden in August 2019, after which the Southern Transitional Council (STC) gained full control over police and para-military forces (Saleh & al-Sharjabi 2019). What many seem to neglect is that this is, *de facto*, a building block for what the STC wishes to achieve: an independent South. While the Riyadh Agreement seeks to mend these fractures and re-unite these institutions under the banner of the Yemeni state, the agreement has up to date failed to do so. Regional support to the state security sector, as well as other non-state actors, has created a mosaic of military and para-military formations with conflicting missions and motivations (Nagi, Ardemagni & Transfeld 2020). Rather than coming together, the gravitation forces from the region appear to be pulling the institutions further apart. As a consequence of the deadlock on the national level, mobilizing opportunities for stabilization on the local level are now paramount.

Most literature on the Yemeni security sector, with few exceptions (Jerrett 2017; Al-Qodasi & Al-Jarbani 2021), looks at military structures on a national elite level, with a special focus on patronage networks and tribal loyalties (Seitz 2017; Fattah 2010; Barany 2016). While the Yemen Polling Center has researched popular perceptions of security institutions (Heinze & Albukari 2017; Heinze & Albukari 2018; Soudias & Transfeld 2014), as well as the specific security concerns of girls and women (see below), to date not much research has been done on the security



institutions themselves, particularly at the governorate and district levels. In fact, the literature often neglects institutions in favor of informal politics, highlighting family or tribal relationships, while leaving the extant albeit weak institutions underresearched.<sup>1</sup> This report seeks to fill this gap. Given their role as central nodes of the security governance structure, this report explores governorate-level Security Committees in three governorates that have been particularly affected by violence and institutional fragmentation: Ta'iz, al-Hudayda and Aden. Next to seeking to understand the institutional set-up and functions of the Committees, questions guiding this inquiry are how the Committees have evolved in the context of state fragmentation and what, if any, capacities they have to play a potential role in local-level mediation (for instance, regarding humanitarian access) or transitional security governance arrangements.

## State Institutions in a Context of Informality

Informality is a cross-cutting factor in all three locations. The Yemeni state has never possessed the monopoly over the legitimate use of force, a criterion of statehood as defined by Max Weber. In the past, the lines dividing state and non-state actors had already blurred: tribal structures permeating the military; tribal *shaykhs* distributing the salaries of formal troops; and sectarian or tribal militias fighting in battles next to formal militaries (Brandt 2013). However, with the takeover of state security institutions by Ansar Allah, the boundary between state and non-state virtually collapsed, and this happened not only in territories controlled by Ansar Allah, but throughout the entire country. Security institutions either fell into the hands of non-state actors through violent means as opposed to a politically legitimate process; went rogue and joined Ansar Allah; or simply collapsed. In this context, new local security actors emerged in the form of armed resistance forces. These groups – such as the Southern Popular Resistance, the Resistance in Ta'iz or the Tihama Popular Resistance – represented local identifications and thus local grievances, granting them a kind of legitimacy that security institutions of the central state never possessed. In the course of the war, many of these non-state actors formalized to the degree that they do not differ much from state institutions in terms of organization, habitus and appearance. At the same time, many of these non-state actors either took control of state institutions in a bottom-up manner after they had been recruited into various position within the security sector by the IRG, or they were integrated as groups into state hierarchies. As a result, a complex institutional landscape developed, in which categories such as state or non-state, informal or formal no longer are useful. Today, Yemen is fragmented into areas with various power dynamics: areas where legitimacy does not rest exclusively with state institutions; areas where state institutions are run by non-state actors

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<sup>1</sup> For an assessment of such institutions, see Transfeld, Muqbil, bin Othman and Noman (2020).

considered legitimate by some and illegitimate by others; areas where informal actors were formalized through integration into state hierarchies, but where integration has not created loyalties to the state among non-state actors; and areas where state institutions are considered illegitimate. Given their normativity, this research avoids the use of terms such as ‘state’ and ‘non-state’ or ‘formal’ and ‘informal’ as analytical categories. Unfortunately, however, an analysis of security institutions is hardly possible without considering the state or non-state. Therefore, these terms will be used only descriptively when referring to the structures and hierarchies under the Ministry of Interior (MoI) and the Ministry of Defense (MoD) operating under the IRG, while understanding that some of these state institutions are occupied by non-state actors. Thus, institutions are viewed distinct from who is in control. The Security Committees as institutions exist in this context of informality. And although this report shows that institutions and their legitimacy did and continues to matter in this context, our research also shows that institutions are weak and have only limited capacities to transcend informal political loyalties. The vague legal framework of the Committees is a case in point.

The context of establishment of both the national-level and governorate-level Security Committees, as well as their legal framework, remain unclear. What is striking is that there are neither publicly available documents that help in determining the precise time and circumstances of their establishment, nor an agreement amongst security officials on the exact context. Based on the interviews with security officials, it could be inferred that the Supreme Security Committee on the national level was established per presidential decree by former-President ‘Ali ‘Abdallah Salih in the 1990s. This presidential decree, most likely stored in an archive in the capital Sana‘a, was neither available to security officials interviewed, nor accessible to YPC researchers. Most convincingly, interviewed security officials placed the establishment within the context of the 1994 civil war, most likely in 1997 when the GPC secured the majority in the parliamentary elections. Others – including Assistant Secretary General of the then ruling party General People’s Congress, Yasir al-‘Awadhi, in an interview with Mareb Press (25.09.2010) – situate its formation in the early 2000s (between 2001 and 2003), when Salih felt the need to better deal with emerging security challenges of a broader nature, such as the rise of al-Qa‘ida in Yemen or that of Ansar Allah in Sa‘da. The earliest reference to the Supreme Security Committee YPC’s researchers were able to identify is from the year 2003 (NIC 21.03.2003). The governorate-level Security Committees were most probably established in the context of the implementation of the Local Authority Law (LAL) in the early 2000s. As part of an attempt at decentralizing authority, the LAL (2000) set up governorate and district-level Local Councils and delegated governance portfolios to them.

Because the Security Committees were established by presidential decree, no law exists that further defines their tasks and responsibilities. Indeed, in above-cited

interview (Mareb Press 25.09.2010), Yasir al-'Awadhi referred to the Supreme Security Committee as an unconstitutional and illegal body that acts with full authority and beyond oversight and accountability, while not being based in any law or the constitution. If not seen as an organization but rather as a meeting mechanism, however, the question of the Committee's rootedness in legality becomes more difficult to answer. After all, the Committee's functions end with the distribution of tasks to the member ministries and security agencies at the end of each meeting and these tasks only relate to the issues discussed during the meeting, i.e. the Supreme Security Committee does not define the tasks of the member ministries and agencies in general, and also does not follow up on or evaluate their work except in relation to the issues discussed in the Committee meetings.

Nonetheless, many, if not all, of the security officials interviewed were convinced that the Security Committees are legally regulated. Many officials provided very similar responses when asked about the legal structure and mandates of the Committee. This shows that Security Committees are viewed as legitimate institutions that are enshrined in the consciousness of security officials. What also stood out is that the longer-serving security officials, as well as those associated with institutions that pre-dated the war, generally had more detailed knowledge about the Security Committees than those officials who had joined the forces in the context of the war or had been put in charge of a newly established institution. This highlights the importance of institutional memory for the legitimacy of institutions, while at the same time laying bare the lack of accessibility of physical archives, which are relevant for an institution's memory, due to the destruction of security headquarters and/or their takeover by non-state actors. This gives a limited number of individuals a crucial role in maintaining an institution's memory and upholding its legitimacy. At the same time, it hints at the role of informality in the structures and processes of Security Committees: individuals with little formal training are put in charge of security agencies, while vice versa, informal institutions participate in Security Committee meetings.

## **Security Committees as Part of Local Authority**

Security officials interviewed for this project believe the sub-national Security Committees to be regulated by the Local Authority Law. Because the security officials were unable to provide further details on the legal framework and the LAL does not explicitly mention security committees, the legal basis of the Committees remains unclear. The LAL defines the responsibilities and structure of the Local Councils, which are headed by the governor. Per law, the governor is elected by an electoral college consisting of the members of the elected Local Councils on the governorate and district levels. Once elected, the governor is officially appointed by presidential decree. While the law does not mention Security Committees, it



does include some provisions regarding security: Article 10 (LAL 2000) mandates the Local Council to discuss security matters and to take measures that improve security and stability for citizens and protect private and public property. Further, article 326 of the Executive Bylaw places the security directors on the district and governorate level under the authority of the chief of police, aka the head of the Security Department. The security directors are mandated to discuss security issues with the chief of police on a daily basis, while the governor is tasked with reporting to the MoI after consulting the police chief in regard to security matters.

Although not explicitly mentioned in the law, the Security Committee helps the Local Council fulfil its mandate as per the LAL (2000). Headed by the governor and by the chief of police, the governorate-level Security Committees bring together all heads of security and intelligence agencies that are relevant for a particular governorate. Theoretically, the LAL (2000) makes the governor, followed by the chief of police, responsible for governorate security. The individual agencies, however, are primarily regulated by a different set of laws – for instance, the police or military laws – and thus nominally report to the national-level ministries. As a result, on the legal level, there are overlaps and contradictions with regards to reporting lines. For instance, Republican Decree No. 65 of 2002, article 1 provides that police are a national service not subject to LAL provisions. This contradicts paragraph 326 of the Executive Bylaw of LAL (2000) mentioned above, which places district police chiefs under the local authority (Rogers 2019). The manner in which the Security Committees conduct their oversight functions well exemplifies this division of authority: The Local Council, headed by the governor, has a legal oversight function over institutions in the governorates. Given that the governor oversees the Security Committee, it makes sense for the governor to use this Committee to practice oversight over security institutions. However, the oversight conducted by the Security Committees can only be of a very general nature, in that the Committee reviews reports submitted by the agencies or the Joint Operations Room. The closest measures to actual oversight are conducted by the agencies themselves, such as the Oversight and Inspection Department at the Security Department, which regularly conducts visits to local police stations to review records and then shares and discusses the results in the Security Committee.

## Hierarchies and Functions

The governorate-level Security Committees represent a node connecting different security hierarchies. On the national level, the Supreme Security Committee brings together the heads of the agencies; on the governorate level, the Security Committees bring together the governorate-level heads of the agencies; and on the district level, the respective security representatives are brought together under the district director. The main communication hierarchies between governorate

and national level do not go through the Security Committee, however. Instead, as revealed by YPC interviews with security officials, the governorate-level Security Departments hold a central role connecting the various scales in terms of communication. The district-level security agencies (police and civil institutions related to security) report to the governorate-level Security Department, where nominally a Joint Operations Room is located. This Joint Operations Rooms communicates with the Security Committee chaired by the Governor and implements security plans. The Security Department also directly reports to the MoI and does not go through the governor. Security officials reported no to little contradictions in policies between the national and governorate level; but most, if not all, security officials stated that although the MoI is the higher authority, the Security Committee and the Security Department have more knowledge on security issues on the local level and thus their instructions are to be prioritized. With regards to the security structures under the MoI and local authorities, a decentralized structure is thus in place, which the current absence or weakness of national-level politics has strengthened.

Security Committee meetings are primarily attended by security agencies under the MoI. The heads of the security agencies are all men; although some of the security officials interviewed confirmed that if a security institution had a female head, she too would attend the meeting. Women are, however, not structurally included, i.e. there are no reserved positions for women representatives to address the security concerns of women and children in security provision. While there is not a fixed number of attendees, meetings are always headed by the governor, with the chief of police as his deputy in this capacity. Agencies are represented by their head, or in case of absence, by the deputy. Military agencies only attend meetings when the Committee meets in its expanded form at the time of a security emergency or whenever the security situation makes it necessary. Military commanders, whose headquarters are located in the respective governorate, attend the expanded Security Committee meetings. This typically includes the division and/or Axis commander of the governorate's region, as well as various brigade commanders and intelligence agencies. The Committees then serve as a platform to discuss local security challenges, which due to their nature require a concerted effort to be addressed successfully. Such challenges may include the implementation of measures to stop the spread of COVID-19, returning government buildings into public possession, conflicts over land, or infighting. The Security Committee serves as a platform where concerted measures are decided, and capacities, equipment and troops are made available. Typically, these security plans are then implemented through the Joint Operations Room at the governorate-level Security Department. In principle, Security Committees, whether on the national, the governorate or the district level, are structured very similarly and have similar functions. For example, Security Committees can form sub-committees that concern themselves with specific issues or particular conflicts. While in practice there are differences between the

individual governorates, the structures and mandates are still quite similar, which suggests that Security Committees might in fact be defined by law, at least in terms of function and structure. However, they are not. As laid out above, Security Committees are not explicitly mentioned in a single Yemeni law; neither in the LAL, nor in any of the laws regulating security institutions. The Committees are also not mentioned in open access official documents outlining the hierarchies and structures of the security sector before and after the restructuring of the security sector in 2012/2013. Thus, it seems that the Committees' structures and mandates are not legally defined.

## Performance Legitimacy and Civilian Oversight

As in other contexts, but especially where democratic legitimacy is lacking and legal legitimacy is weak, institutions such as the Security Committee derive their legitimacy from performance. However, the Committees in al-Hudayda and Aden lack local legitimacy and were not able to bolster their position through performance. Even though civic figures associate only a handful of successes with the performance of the Ta'iz Security Committee, it is the best performing Committee of the three under study. In Ta'iz, the Security Committee was viewed to be effective by civic figures, many of whom mentioned the numerous security campaigns that were launched to clear Ta'iz city from militias and persons they referred to as "outlaws". However, smaller political parties, such as the Nasserites, understood the security campaigns by the Ta'iz Security Committee to be driven by political calculations, rather than by security interests. Here, the Ta'iz Security Committee, dominated by the Islah Party, was viewed to be pursuing party interests. In terms of its performance over the last years, the Aden Security Committee appears to be the least legitimate, certainly a result of the deteriorating security situation in the city due to conflict between IRG and STC-affiliated forces. In the period prior to the current conflict, moreover, the Committee was mostly associated with the oppression of the Southern Movement, further explaining its negative reputation among Adeni citizens.

Although police place the security of the communities at the heart of their mission, security agencies in Yemen are generally not well connected with the communities they serve. District-level Security Departments and the *'aqils* (neighborhood representatives) are the entities that are closest to the communities. They relay information on the security situation in the community to the governorate-level Security Department, which in turn forwards the reports to the Security Committees and the MoI. Beyond this, security agencies have little to no direct connections with communities, although they do also communicate with tribal *shaykhs* and important social figures, albeit only on a personal, not necessarily institutional basis. While military agencies report to have media departments that make regular

press releases, police stations often have Facebook pages, which they use to inform the public about security campaigns and other issues. In fact, journalists and civic figures report social media to be an important source of information on matters relating to security institutions. Likewise, media reports and social media have been used time and again to generate pressure on security cases, forcing the police to act. Especially in cases involving women, such as rape, this has yielded – albeit limited – results.

## Women's Security

A cross-cutting issue among security actors is the complete disregard shown towards women and girls and their unique security concerns and requirements. Across the three governorates, security officials interviewed had little knowledge of women's security issues, and no awareness of certain security concerns or requirements as gender-specific. Some security officials named sexualized violence and domestic violence as concerns specific to women (in al-Hudayda, all officials mentioned that the Huthis and the spread of arms caused a special security concern for women). However, many others simply stated that women had specific concerns simply because they were more fearful of security incidents that in reality pose an equal threat to men and women. On the district level in Aden, for example, security officials said that the security situation of women and girls in their districts was excellent, and the issues that do exist are negligible. Most security officials did not see gender differences regarding security concerns. In fact, security officials appear to believe that it is progressive to view women as an equal part of the society, handling their cases just as the cases of men are handled. When asked if security institutions take any special measures to ensure women have access to security services, most security officials appeared to misunderstand the question (misunderstanding 'access' as 'inclusion/integration' of women in the security institutions) or simply underlined that all components of society, including women, are equal, and thus women do not get *different* treatment. This reasoning, however, completely ignores the disadvantaged position women have within the security sector, and the unique assistance women require.

The attitudes of Yemeni security actors towards the security requirements of women and girls are very much shaped by the dominant perception in Yemeni society that women are physically and emotionally weak and need to be protected and controlled for their own safety, as well as to safeguard the family honor (see also Heinze 2016). To keep women and girls safe – and to protect their honor, also by limiting their freedoms – is thus considered an obligation of the men of the family and not of the state. For males outside of the family, such as policemen, to intervene in what is considered a family affair would be perceived as an insult to the men of the family. If security-related issues with women need to be resolved, for

example if a woman is accused of a crime, the police – often via the *shaykh* of a tribe or the *'aqil* [representative] of a neighborhood (Heinze 2018: 30) – will usually raise this with the male head of the family, whose obligation it will be to resolve the problem in coordination with the authorities. In many cases, if a woman has indeed committed a crime and is sentenced to prison, a male family member will go to prison in her stead to protect her and thus the family's honor. Likewise, if a woman wishes to report a crime, she will rarely go to a police station herself, but will (only be allowed to) either go with a male member of the family, a *mahram*, or send him on his own (see also Yemen Polling Center 2019: 126–129).

This direct linkage of the security for women and girls with family honor poses several problems for their safety: Firstly, only women and girls benefit from this protection if they have male family members to keep them safe and whose honor is respected by other male members of the community. Female migrants and refugees, or female members of marginalized groups whose male members are themselves considered “weak” in comparison to the “real” men of Yemeni society, sit outside of this normative framework. The result is that those women who end up in prison are usually members of these social categories. As prison terms are often accompanied with a financial fine, such women at times end up spending additional time in prison beyond their sentence as there is no one to pay their debts to the state. Often, their children are locked up with them. Also, incidents of verbal and physical abuse, including rape, of girls and women from among these social categories is particularly high (Al-Warraq 2019: 9): The perpetrators – often correctly – assume that no one will take responsibility for these women; or that if the men of the family do intervene, they will not be taken seriously due to their low position in society. Secondly, as in all societies worldwide, most cases of mental and physical abuse occur within families. As the safety of women and girls is considered a family affair, females who experience abuse from a male family member often have no outside help to turn to and seek protection if their own family fails to step up. Thirdly, cases of physical abuse, even rape, from men outside the family are preferably kept hidden as it will always be the honor of the girl or woman, and thus by extension that of her entire family, that will suffer; never that of the perpetrator. (These cases often only come to light if a girl or woman is assaulted so badly that she dies.) As perpetrators are seldom held to account, a sense of impunity around such crimes exists. This impunity has been exacerbated by several trends: a breakdown of social norms that Yemen has been undergoing in recent decades (particularly in urban areas where the traditional elders are not present) and further accelerated by the ongoing war; the economic deterioration that prevents many young men from marrying (which is their only pathway to a legitimate sexual relationship) while forcing more women into the public space as they seek to provide an income for their families (as fathers and husbands are dead or away fighting); the trauma and depression among many men resulting from the war; an increase in Islamist discourse directed against the role and presence of women in



the public space; and the legal impunity surrounding Yemenis armed factions. All these factors have contributed to the increase of public and private gender-based violence (GBV) since the conflict began. Gender-based violence includes domestic (verbal and physical) violence; abduction; rape; sexual harassment in public spaces by armed men; early marriage; and physical threats and attacks towards female activists (see, for example, Gressmann 2016: 25–26; Heinze & Stevens 2018: 23–24).

The general police and military do not have awareness of such gender issues, having received little to no respective training. Security issues involving women appear to be either neglected, delegated to institutions that hold specialist knowledge, or addressed in cooperation with such institutions. Especially al-Hudayda stands out as highly militarized, with no women active in the security sector. Ta'iz and Aden both have special women police which are involved in investigations and are employed particularly when interaction with women is required. Aden can boast of several hundred female police officers. District police generally rely on the governorate-level Security Department to dispatch female officers whenever required. Women officers are reported to be involved in investigations and situations when women are involved. At the same time, it has been reported, especially in Aden, that security institutions have increasingly posed a threat to women as they make arrests without charges or based on false accusations, such as espionage. In contrast to security actors, journalists and CSO representatives had more knowledge on security concerns specific to women. CSOs and journalists that focus on women's issues hold the most detailed knowledge, and frequently report via phone information on security risks and incidents involving women to security institutions, namely the governorate-level Security Department or the governor. Overall, CSOs and journalists stated that security institutions do not pay attention to women's and girl's security, only doing so whenever individual cases become a matter of public debate through coverage of media reports or social media. However, many civic figures and journalists believe that security officials only sometimes respond to pressure from media or civil society.

## Methodology

The research design and methodology for this report was developed on the basis of past research conducted by the Yemen Polling Center focused on local security institutions funded by the Konrad Adenauer Foundation (Transfeld, Muqbil, bin Othman & Noman 2020) and the European Union. The findings of these studies have served as a baseline of information on local security governance institutions since 2013. Further, the data collection experience the Yemen Polling Center gathered in these previous studies shaped the approach to collecting data for this project. A three-sponged approach was used, consisting of desk review, key informant interviews (KIIs) and observations. Structured interviews were conducted by YPC,

including: a total of 17 security officials who hold positions that are part of a Security Committee; 31 security officials working on implementation or on the district level; 13 CSO representatives; 45 journalists; and five security experts. The interviews were conducted in Aden, Ta'iz and al-Hudayda in the period between April and November 2020. KIIs are qualitative in-depth interviews with individuals who are selected due to their first-hand knowledge. Interviewee selection is based on position or level of expertise, and in coordination between lead researcher and field researcher. YPC's pre-existing networks in target areas and prior experience in fieldwork, as well as researchers trusted by influential figures within target communities, provide better access and are able to mitigate certain barriers that may otherwise prevent researchers from gaining access. For this report, governorate-level security agency heads who attended Security Committee meetings, their deputies or high-ranking officials from the agency were recruited for the interviews. To understand policy implementation and district-level governance, the Yemen Polling Center recruited lower-level officials including security directors, police station heads or military commanders. The specific goal of the KIIs with security officials was to gauge their perceptions of the institutions they work for and the structures they are embedded in, as well as to gather as much concrete information on the security institutions as possible. KIIs with security officials were challenging: the officials only reluctantly agreed to participate; had little time to spare; had difficulties to provide comprehensive responses; and feared reprisals of unspecified nature. Past research experiences have also shown that interviewed officials do not usually differentiate between the normative (how it should be) and the empirical level (how it actually is). The research tools were designed to yield as many details as possible in spite of these challenges, by using multiple questions targeting a specific dimension of the research and including detailed follow-up questions.

Two rounds of interviews were conducted with each interviewee: in the first round, the interviews focused on questions regarding the structure, mandate and capacities of Security Committees. A second round of interviews inquired into questions regarding political divisions, as well as normative questions regarding the institutional design of a potential security arrangement for a future transitional period. The second round also allowed a deeper dive into questions resulting from the first round of answers. As well, the research tools were designed specific to the individual governorates. KIIs were also conducted with CSO representatives and with journalists with insight into security institutions due to their work. The goal of these interviews was to speak with individuals who may be less concerned with sharing information, who may be easier to access for YPC researchers, and to collect independent data. Observations added a second layer to YPC research results, and served to verify information collected through KIIs. YPC designed an Observation Guide that was used by YPC researchers in the field to collect specific kinds of information without conducting comprehensive interviews. Through observation we collected information on events or the behavior of institutions in specific

situations, such as security incidents and the response of security providers. YPC researchers personally observed events/institution's responses in their everyday life or during field visits and recorded them in the observation guide. Researchers also heard about events/institution's responses and then followed up on the information through further inquiries. The interpretative analysis of the interviews was combined with in-depth desk research. The thorough analysis of Yemeni newspaper sources filled gaps and allowed the authors to make further inferences about local security institutions and practices.

The chapter on Ta'iz focuses on the Security Committee that is run by the security institutions associated with the IRG. This Security Committee resumed its meetings when the security institutions were re-established after the brunt of the fighting between the local resistance and Ansar Allah was over in 2016/2017. The interviews in Ta'iz were implemented fairly swiftly, with the Yemen Polling Center relying on its well-established network in the governorate. Given that the Ta'iz Security Committee meets regularly, it was not difficult to identify relevant actors. The case study of al-Hudayda looks at both the Security Committee under Ansar Allah and the one associated with the IRG. Given that Ansar Allah officials were not available for interviews, it is particularly the case study of the Ansar Allah Security Committee in al-Hudayda that is based on desk research combined with interviews with security experts and journalists. Desk research was helpful to understand the Ansar Allah Security Committee because the Committee continued to meet regularly under Ansar Allah control and released media reports. Identifying interviewees for the IRG committee was much more challenging given that the state institutions under the IRG were still in flux. Many of the officials based in al-Hudaydah remain scattered. Aden proved a particularly difficult context in which to conduct interviews. The political situation was still tense half a year after the STC took control of the city, amid attempts of Saudi Arabia to push the parties to implement the Riyadh Agreement signed in October 2019. On top of this, Aden was experiencing flooding, while COVID-19 and other diseases were spreading quickly through the city. In this context, we were unable to continue data collection in the first half of 2020, and only resumed after a break in late August 2020. Interviews were conducted with officials from the IRG and the STC under the assumption that the Security Committee was not meeting at all. The combination of thorough desk research, context knowledge and a meticulous approach via a research tool designed to inquire both into the normative and empirical dimensions ensured that the standardized research tool would yield comparative results despite the different contexts.

## The Security Committees in al-Hudayda

■ Mohamed al-Iriani and Mareike Transfeld

### Context

In June 2018, the internationally recognized government (IRG) under President ‘Abd Rabbu Mansur Hadi with the support of the Saudi-led Alliance began an offensive on al-Hudayda in a bid to take back control of this strategic governorate from Ansar Allah (the Huthis). The IRG forces consist of three elements: the Giants Brigades or the Giants (al-‘Amaliqa); the Tihama Popular Resistance (TPR); and the National Resistance Forces, Guardians of the Republic (Republican Forces). Together, the Giants, the TPR and the Republican Forces are called the Joint Forces.<sup>1</sup> The three components of the Joint Forces each receive support from the United Arab Emirates (UAE), albeit to different degrees. The Giants are the largest component of the Joint Forces. They are made up of predominantly Salafi soldiers from Lahij, Abyan, and Sa‘da (Dammaj). The TPR emerged out of the peaceful Tihama Movement in 2014, as a defense against the Ansar Allah incursion into al-Hudayda. The Tihama Movement, with roots in the political and economic marginalization of the Tihama region, called for more political and economic participation in the context of the popular uprisings of 2011.<sup>2</sup> The Republican Forces are composed of remnants of state armies, controlled pre-2011 by the Salih family. These forces include the Special Security Forces (SSF; the former Central Security Forces), and the Republican Guards. The Republican Forces fight under the command of Tariq Salih, a veteran military commander and former-president Salih’s nephew. Attempts to formally integrate the Republican Forces, the Giants and the TPR into the Joint Forces under the command of Tariq Salih were not successful. Although the three groups now fight under the umbrella of the IRG and are integrated into the state hierarchy, each has maintained a degree of independence. The tensions between the TPR and Tariq Salih are particularly significant, due to differing positions in the 2011 uprisings. The former was anti-Salih, while the latter defended the regime and participated in the violent oppression of protesters.

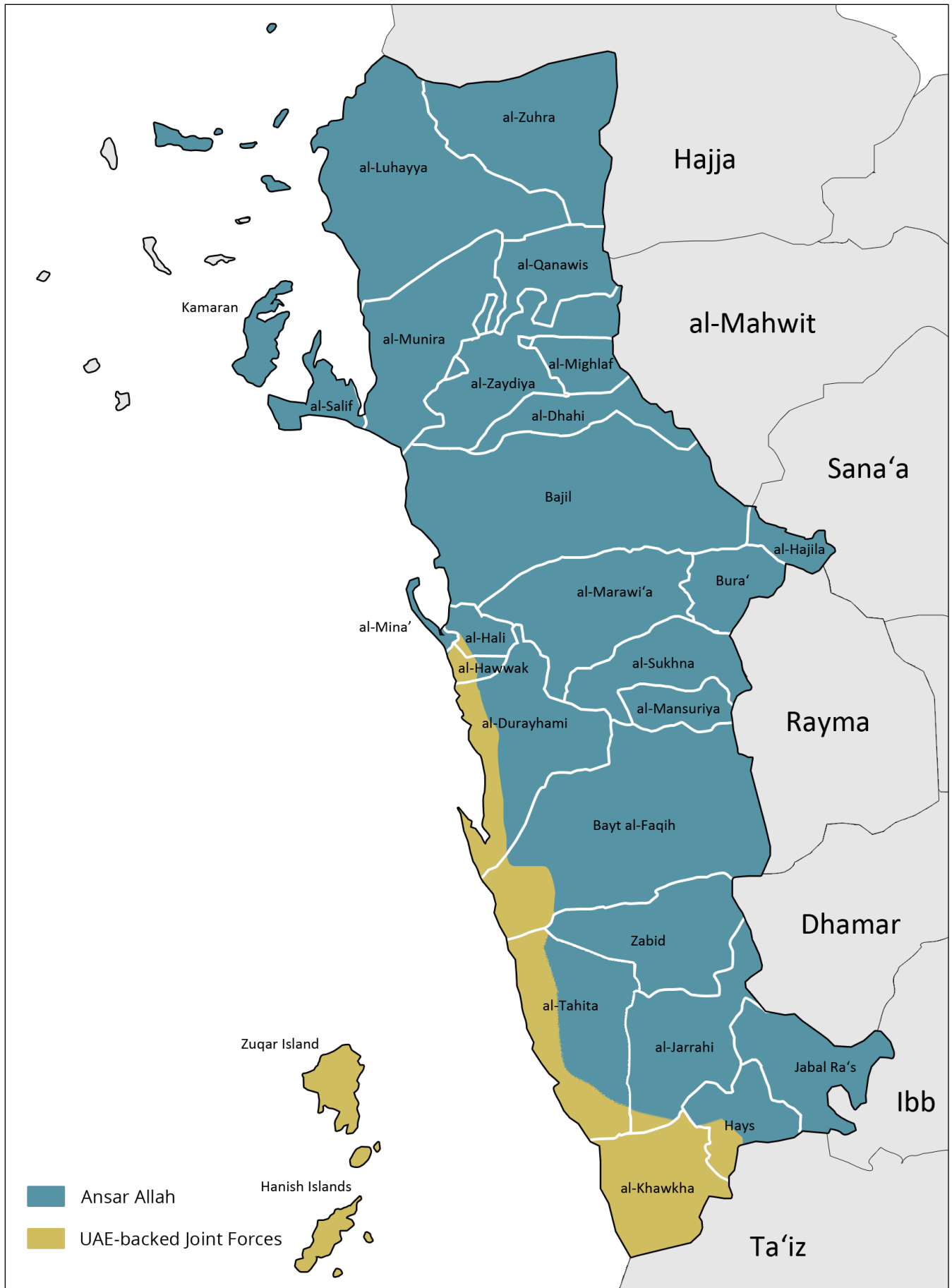
By late 2018, under the so-called Operation Golden Victory campaign, the IRG forces surrounded al-Hudayda city from its southern and eastern sides. But due to the devastating impact the fall of al-Hudayda was believed to have for the entrance

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<sup>1</sup> See more details at ACLED 2018.

<sup>2</sup> For more context on the Tihama and the Tihama Movement, see Horton (2020).

Map of Security Actors' Control in al-Hudayda, December 2020





of humanitarian aid into the country, the UN intervened. This led to a ceasefire between the IRG and Ansar Allah under the so-called Stockholm Agreement.<sup>3</sup> However, the agreement, which included the redeployment of security forces from the port and the city, was never fully implemented.<sup>4</sup> Civilians who could not escape conflict areas were frequently caught in the crossfire. According to a 2019 YPC countrywide survey, 42 percent of locals in al-Hudayda cite the security situation as worsening from mid-2018 to mid-2019 (YPC 2019). Over one million of al-Hudayda's residents were displaced amid the violence (Reliefweb 31.01.2019). Despite the ceasefire, clashes between Ansar Allah and the Joint Forces remain frequent. South of the port, fighting continues between the warring parties; although not as populated an area, civilians are often victims of the fighting. Observational reports by YPC found that stray ammunition in the south and east of the city, theft, and abuse of power by local security institutions are the most troublesome forms of violence in al-Hudayda today.

Operation Golden Victory has led to territorial divisions in the governorate. The IRG forces control the southwest, and are positioned mainly along the Red Sea coast, south of al-Hudayda. Ansar Allah controls the northeast of the governorate. Currently, the only direct access into al-Hudayda city is through Ansar Allah-controlled territory. The port city itself is considered neutral territory per the Stockholm Agreement, but Ansar Allah remains the de facto authority on the ground. As a consequence of these political and territorial divisions, parallel security governance institutions exist in al-Hudayda. In the course of their incursion into the governorate, Ansar Allah took over all government and security institutions. Once the IRG regained some control in the governorate, they began to establish new institutions under their authority, including the Security Committee. In general, political divisions have affected the functionality of local security institutions in both Ansar Allah and IRG territories. While the Ansar Allah Security Committee suffers from centralized control from Sana'a, which reduces its local effectiveness, the IRG institutions suffer from political divides, which impede its functionality. Divisions among the Joint Forces first started to manifest themselves when the UAE announced its withdrawal from Yemen in June 2019 (Al-Ashwal 2020). Although officially the territory is under IRG control, the Republican Forces maintain direct control of police stations. For instance, Tariq Salih is in charge of appointing the chief of police in al-Mukha' district. He also has significant influence over the police departments of al-Tahita,

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3 For more on the battle for al-Hudayda, see Salisbury (2018).

4 The fate of the Stockholm Agreement is uncertain; most of its terms have not been fully implemented, as Ansar Allah still maintains control of the city. Meanwhile, fighting continues south of the city between the warring parties. As of May 2020, the IRG controls the area south of the airport and Sana'a Street in the east of the city. Ansar Allah control begins further east at the Kilo 16 intersection, the connection to the main road to Sana'a. At the moment, the only way into the city is through the northeast, controlled by Ansar Allah. For more details on local security forces in al-Hudayda, see Transfeld (2019).

al-Durayhami, Hays, and al-Khawkhah, via payment of their monthly salaries and financial allocations. Today, the IRG chief of police of al-Hudayda is Najib Waraq, a Salih affiliate, who attained the position despite immense opposition from the TPR. Tariq Salih also supports local security institutions through Najib Waraq, using financial support from the Arab Coalition.

## **Current State of the al-Hudayda Security Committee**

Prior to the 2011 popular countrywide uprisings against President Salih, the figures leading security and military institutions – namely, the members of the Security Committee in al-Hudayda – were all affiliated with ‘Ali ‘Abdallah Salih. Salih ensured the loyalty of local government and security institutions by appointing loyalists to the leadership. During the uprising of 2011, some security institutions supported the protesters while others remained supportive of the Salih regime. The resulting political divisions weakened civil and military institutions throughout the country. After the transitional government under Hadi assumed its role, the number of Security Committee meeting announcements for al-Hudayda on the official Saba News Agency increased. The issues addressed in the meetings ranged from clashes, protests, illegal land seizures, rise in petty crime, and security arrangements to hosting one of the National Dialogue committees. This sudden increase in Security Committee activity may have been due to the Hadi government’s initiative to improve local security. At the same time, due to the weakness of the central government, local security institutions faced various challenges that required coordination on the local level between various security and military institutions. When Hadi assumed power, the Security Committee became more politically divided, as Islah members and Southern military figures were appointed to various military and civil institutions. Today, the original al-Hudayda Security Committee is completely under Ansar Allah’s control.

### ***Ansar Allah-Controlled Areas***

The original Security Committee in al-Hudayda, today entirely under Ansar Allah’s control, was first recorded in official media in 2006. The institution continued to function throughout the Salih-Ansar Allah incursions into al-Hudayda in 2014/2015. Ansar Allah gradually took control of state institutions in the city, building on the pre-existing institutions established and dominated by former President Salih. Soon after the capture of al-Hudayda in late 2014, Ansar Allah appointed Hassan Ahmad al-Hayj as the new governor. A member and supporter of the General People’s Congress (GPC), the former ruling party, al-Hayj is also of Hashemite background, a group believed to be descendants of the Prophet Muhammad. As the leadership of Ansar Allah also claim Hashemite lineage, al-Hayj thus represented

a middle ground for the Salih-Ansar Allah alliance. Soon after his appointment, al-Hayj called a Security Committee meeting that established a sub-committee to integrate thousands of Ansar Allah fighters into the security and military structures of the governorate, thus contributing to an Ansar Allah power grab. Shortly after al-Hayj's appointment, another Hashemite, 'Abd al-Hamid al-Mu'ayyid, was appointed as the new police chief. Al-Mu'ayyid quickly moved to replace the heads of all the security and military institutions in the governorate with Salih-Ansar Allah loyalists. Soon after, there was a change of heads of district-level and implementation-level members of the Security Committee, such as the Fifth Division, the Air Force, the Navy, and the Coast Guard. Eventually, Ansar Allah consolidated its military grip on al-Hudayda. After the fall-out with and subsequent death of former ally 'Ali 'Abdallah Salih in December 2017, Ansar Allah pushed out Salih loyalists from the security structures in favor of their own followers.<sup>5</sup> As a result, control over the Security Committee began shifting away from the local level to the national level.

For five months after former President Salih's death, the Security Committee in al-Hudayda was totally inactive, indicating the role Salih loyalists had played in keeping the institution active. The first meeting after Salih's death was in May 2018, shortly after Yemen National Day. Instead of the governor, as was the norm, the meeting was chaired by the Ansar Allah-appointed Minister of Interior 'Abd al-Hakim al-Mawari. In the meeting, as reported by official media, security officials assessed the capabilities and needs of local security institutions. Around this time, just before the onset of Operation Golden Victory, al-Mawari also made visits to the Coast Guard, where he stressed the need for local authorities to be on high alert, at possible entry points, for an IRG offensive into the city. With the minister heading the Security Committee meeting, Ansar Allah in Sana'a had now taken control of the Security Committee. Two months later, Minister al-Mawari chaired another Security Committee meeting. Governor al-Hayj was not present, with the Head of the Local Council, Muhammad 'Ayish Qahim, now acting as governor.<sup>6</sup> Another Ansar Allah loyalist, Husayn Dahman, was appointed as the new chief of police. Effectively, the heads of local security agencies were now all Ansar Allah loyalists, even as control over security institutions shifted increasingly to Sana'a, cementing Ansar Allah's centralized grip on al-Hudayda's institutions and by extension, the Security Committee. Officials from the Ministry of Defense confirmed that all heads of security institutions in Ansar Allah territory are now pro-Ansar

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<sup>5</sup> This was apparent when the Fifth Division commander was sacked in late April 2017, and Yusuf al-Madani was appointed. Al-Madani was a hardline Ansar Allah commander that spearheaded the group's move south from Sa'da to Sana'a, and eventually took over the Presidential Palace in Sana'a in September 2014, putting Hadi under house arrest. See also Transfeld (2019) for more details.

<sup>6</sup> Al-Hayj was relieved of his role in the Security Committee while maintaining the position of governor in name only. Unconfirmed reports state he is under house arrest in Sana'a, along with other local figures.

Allah. Most of these officials entered the institutions as supervisors (*mushrif*<sup>7</sup>), and have now officially taken up state positions. Others are GPC-affiliated but have pledged loyalty to Ansar Allah.

### ***IRG-Controlled Areas***

Given that the actual Security Committee with al-Hudayda based institutions had fallen into the hands of Ansar Allah, a parallel Security Committee for al-Hudayda was established under the IRG in April 2018, once the IRG had regained control of parts of al-Hudayda governorate. Between 2018 and 2020, IRG Security Committee meetings were held in Aden, due to the security risk of holding meetings in al-Hudayda amid an active war front. Some journalists reported that the IRG Security Committee at times met in civilian buildings and sometimes in the governor's office in al-Hudayda; most likely, this was during the transition period while IRG institutions were being re-established in al-Hudayda. According to interviewed officials, beginning the second half of 2020, the IRG Committee now holds meetings at the government headquarters in al-Khawkha. While the Ansar Allah Security Committee could build on past institutional practices, the IRG Committee was newly established and without an institutional history. Although the IRG has adopted a similar structure to the Security Committee in Ansar Allah areas, it lacks organizational experience and skilled personnel, as well as being riddled by multiple political divides.

The role of the IRG Security Committee is that of a coordinator between the various military and security institutions, to re-establish these institutions in the IRG areas and generally support them to guarantee functional capacity. In December 2017, Dr. al-Hassan 'Ali Tahir was sworn in by President Hadi as the governor of al-Hudayda, marking the first parallel state institution in the governorate. Four months later, a Security Committee meeting was held under the new governor's auspices, and included the al-Hudayda Axis (the highest IRG military command in the governorate), Deputy Director of Security, and Head of Special Forces, to discuss the re-establishment of security and military institutions in IRG areas and establish special headquarters and reception camps.<sup>8</sup> In September 2018, three months before Operation Golden Victory ended, another Security Committee meeting was

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<sup>7</sup> Ansar Allah assigned a *mushrif* to each security institution for supervision. A *mushrif* supersedes the power of formal institutions and positions, and ensures policies align with Ansar Allah interests. Today, most of these *mushrif* roles are no longer held; some have been promoted to official positions in the institutions where they were stationed, and others were transferred to new positions, even as their job descriptions remain that of *mushrif*. Interviews with officials from the MoD, as well as CSOs, confirm that the current al-Hudayda police chief was in fact a *mushrif*, and still functions as one.

<sup>8</sup> Reception camps are temporary locations for formal military and security to use upon return to the governorate when traditional infrastructure has been destroyed in the war.

held, concluding with the decision to integrate 3,000 TPR forces into the Republican Forces under Tariq Salih, already under state hierarchy. The integration of local TPR forces was not only part of the re-establishment of permanent military and security institutions, but also an attempt to gain local legitimacy through the TPR, the only component of the Joint Forces with local roots. Although some units were integrated, the move was largely met with refusal by the TPR, as they understood Tariq Salih and his forces to be part of the Salih regime, and thus the cause of grievances that ultimately led to the emergence of the Tihama Movement. As well, the Republican Forces had previously fought with Ansar Allah against IRG forces.

The political divisions in the IRG Security Committee are a result of two factors: The first divisive factor is the unequal relationship between forces officially making up the IRG army in al-Hudayda and the IRG itself. Specifically, the Republican Forces are considered the formal component of the IRG forces, while the Giants and the TPR are considered merely 'semi-formal'. Within the Security Committee, given its nature to bring together formal security agencies, those actors considered formal by the IRG, namely the Republican Forces, have more power in decision making than those considered informal, namely the TPR and the Giants. The second divisive factor is tension resulting from the historical grievances of the local actors making up the Joint Forces. These grievances came to the forefront during the 2011 uprising, but have remained unaddressed. The TPR emerged as a result of political and economic marginalization of al-Hudayda by the Salih regime, and the subsequent incursion of Ansar Allah into the governorate in 2014. The Republican Forces, in contrast, are mostly pro-Salih and led by the former president's nephew. The Giants own a southern and Salafi identity, which pits them against the northern Zaidi Ansar Allah. Those of the Salafi component of the Giants were expelled from Dammaj (Sa'da), the Ansar Allah stronghold, in 2013 (Bonnefoy 2018). Despite these divergent groups coming together under a common facilitator, the UAE, with a common goal to reclaim al-Hudayda from Ansar Allah, their political histories put them at odds with each other.<sup>9</sup> Each of these actors, the Republican Forces under Tariq Salih, the Giants and the TPR, are wary of each other and to different degrees of the IRG. Although officially under the banner of the IRG, the Republican Forces have been accused as being Tariq Salih's private army and not completely loyal to the government. While interviewed officials of the Republican Forces describe the Security Committee's relationship with the Hadi government as good, intelligence members closer to President Hadi describe the relationship as poor, further highlighting political divides. These divisions affect the dynamics within the IRG Security Committee.

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<sup>9</sup> See, for example, the continued tension between the Republican Forces and the Giants in Almasdar Online (27.05.2020).



## Legal Framework: Institutional History, Laws and Functions

### *Ansar Allah-Controlled Security Committee*

In the areas held by Ansar Allah, the group simply took over pre-existing structures, with Security Committee actors being able to draw on the pre-2011 legitimacy of the institution. Civic figures interviewed by YPC in Ansar Allah territory of al-Hudayda claimed that it was established in 1993, to supervise parliamentary elections. Journalists based in Ansar Allah territory claimed that they first became aware of the Security Committee in 2011, during the countrywide popular uprising and the Committees' coordination of the various security and military institutions to curb illegal seizures of land and construction sites in the governorate. Since the Ansar Allah takeover of security institutions, the Security Committee has continued functioning uninterrupted. Ansar Allah has maintained the Committee's structure and composition, with the governor heading the Committee and membership being determined on an institutional basis. For instance, when Ansar Allah first arrived in al-Hudayda, they attempted to integrate members of their group in security and military institutions, but did so only through the Security Committee. When Ansar Allah found then Governor Sakhr al-Wajih reluctant to address their demands, a new governor, Hassan Ahmad al-Hayj, was appointed in December 2014. The new governor called a Security Council meeting and announced the integration of their forces, demonstrating the importance Ansar Allah placed on retaining institutions (Saba Net 27.12.2014). The Security Committee in the Ansar Allah area retained the same structure as the Salih-era Committee due to the gradual transition of its leadership and Ansar Allah's control of the physical institutions.

Security experts based in al-Hudayda explained that the Security Committee's primary purpose was to coordinate between member agencies and supervise elections. Committee members and local journalists interviewed for this paper, however, claimed it was set up to resolve more significant problems, such as threats to the state or the illegal land seizures in al-Hudayda. Interestingly, one respondent described the Committee mainly as a tool for oversight at the governor's disposal, for the overall security situation (see below).

### *IRG-Controlled Security Committee*

Security officials associated with the IRG in al-Hudayda have only superficial knowledge of the pre-war Security Committee and its institutional history. Unlike the IRG Security Committee in Ta'iz, the IRG Committee in al-Hudayda does not operate within the institutional legacy of the pre-2011 institutions. This is because the officials in charge of the institutions have held these positions for a relatively short time, and do not appear to hold detailed knowledge of the pre-2015 security sector. Some officials cited recent years, such as 2014 or 2017, as dates of

establishment. In an interview, a Giants official provided only limited knowledge of the Security Committee, and did not attempt to legitimize the Committee nor give it any relevance. Members of the Security Committee that are also heads of Tariq Salih's Republican Forces had more awareness of Committee history. Given they are remnants of the old regime and as the Republican Forces are a formal component of the Committee, they are more inclined to voice the legitimacy of the Committee. Some members of the semi-formal TPR located the establishment of the Security Committee in the early 2000s, indicating they viewed the current Committee as a continuation of the pre-war Security Committee.

Interviewed officials were also unaware of the legal framework of the Security Committee, with some believing that it is subject to MoI and MoD laws. Some officials also cited a presidential decree or a decree from the prime minister's office as the legal framework, without providing further details. According to one Security Committee member, no law regulates the Security Committee because it is an emergency committee. Other officials were completely unaware of the Committee's legal structure.

The functions of the Security Committee, per interviewed officials, include dealing with emergencies, such as threats to the state, and coordination between security, military and local authorities. The coordination of security includes the evaluation of performance of the governorate and district-level military and security units. Security Committee members believe that the Committee was established with the role of coordination between security actors and military and emergency response; while member agencies claimed that it was created to coordinate between institutions and manage security specifically in the IRG-claimed areas. Security officials believe the Security Committee was established specifically for the extraordinary situation in areas recently retaken by the IRG, where special measures were necessary to manage security.

There are different reasons why security officials associated with the IRG in al-Hudayda lack knowledge of the Security Committee. First, given that most security institutions in al-Hudayda fell to Ansar Allah, the IRG was forced to establish new institutions. Second, the member agencies are composed of new officials, recently appointed by Hadi. Many of these officials, particularly those from popular resistance groups, lack knowledge on institutional histories, laws and security structures. The forces considered informal by the IRG, particularly the Giants and the TPR, are not institutional members of the Security Committee. Third, as the Security Committee was historically most active in al-Hudayda city (now under Ansar Allah control), there is minimal to no representation of security institutions in the rural areas of southern al-Hudayda governorate, currently under IRG control. Thus, IRG forces have no access to archives or written documents that attest to the security structures' institutional history and grant the institutions legal legitimacy.

## Hierarchy, Composition, and Structure

### *Ansar Allah-Controlled Security Committee*

In Ansar Allah-controlled areas, the Security Committee meets in either a simple or an expanded form, according to need. The simple form includes the governor and a leading representative from local security institutions, such as the chief of police, criminal investigation, and intelligence. The simple form of the Committee meets when the security situation in the governorate is calm. The expanded form, alongside the security and intelligence representatives, also includes the military, such as the al-Hudayda branches of the Air Force, Military Police, Coast Guard, and Coastal Defense. The expanded version of the Committee meets in emergencies, when the local police and intelligence cannot handle the implementation of tasks on their own (Yemeress 09.03.2013; Saba Net 10.04.2013). Depending on the agenda, external figures are invited to participate in meetings, and can include any persons relevant to the topic being discussed. For example, local *shaykhs* were invited to a meeting in March 2012 to consider establishing a Joint Operations Room to collaborate with the Security Committee; and the general manager of the airport was invited in September 2012 to discuss a security strategy to physically close off the airport with checkpoints (Saba Net 04.03.2012, 19.09.2012). Occasionally a delegate from the central government will also attend the meeting, such as from the MoI.

The governor of al-Hudayda chairs the Committee meeting, unless a higher-ranking official is present from the central government. The vice-deputy of the Committee is the police chief. While the governor calls the meetings and has a controlling role in the Committee, the police chief's role is to present the overall security in the governorate, and outline the current security status via a report to the members. This report includes an overview of security in the governorate, alongside implementation outcomes of the last meetings. The rest of the attendees are heads of the various security and military institutions that are tasked with implementing meeting outcomes. In case the head of an agency is unable to attend a meeting, the second in command will attend on his behalf.

At times, sub-committees are formed to implement decisions made by the Security Committee. Sub-committees are formed under two conditions: when the Committee has an internal conflict of interest in implementing outcomes; and when member institutions do not want to be, or should not be, associated with carrying out said meeting outcomes. In these two cases, a sub-committee is formed from selected foot soldiers of the various institutions and external actors, tasked to implement the meeting outcomes in the sub-committee's name. For instance, to resolve the problem of security agencies illegally seizing land at the airport, a sub-committee was formed to resolve the issue while avoiding direct confrontation between member institutions of the Security Committee. Already in 2013, pre-Ansar

Allah, illegal land seizure was a problem and four subcommittees were formed: The first was a parliamentarian sub-committee to transfer the case to parliament in Sana'a; the second was a popular protest committee aimed at gaining local popular support from residents; the third committee was a media committee; and the fourth was a committee aimed at reaching high profile individuals in Sana'a who could help with the issue (Yemeress 10.01.2013).

Presidential committees can be formed through executive orders or via presidential decrees. These delegates intervene with the Security Committee processes mainly when the Committee has proven ineffective. Most examples of such cases are from the time before Ansar Allah's incursion into al-Hudayda, such as when the Security Committee could not control illegal seizure and construction on government-owned land. After Ansar Allah took control of the Security Committee in al-Hudayda, presidential committees became less necessary due to direct involvement of the national level, given that the MoI usually chaired the meetings. We could not interview Ansar Allah members of the Security Committee to determine current communication between the levels; but prior to the Ansar Allah takeover the Security Committee communicated with the central government through memos. Such was the case when the central government decided to combat illegal land seizure around the airport. In this instance, in 2012 the Security Committee had initially sent two memos to the president and the MoD to explain non-compliance by the Air Force and Military Police (Saba Net 07.10.2012).

At the beginning of each year, the Committee meets to outline the overall security strategy, and a plan for each member institution to work in synergy with the others. The most important topics discussed by the Committee are security problems considered emergencies, such as the popular uprisings from 2011; elections; the National Dialogue Conference; redeployment security strategies; and misbehavior of civil security and military institutions. The Committee meets once a month, but in case of an emergency will meet as often as necessary to address the specific situation. An example of such an emergency meeting was after violence occurred in two neighborhoods between the Tihama Movement and the local police over the kidnapping of an Egyptian fishing crew in March 2013. After the kidnapping by the Tihama Movement, the military and security institutions placed a siege on the neighborhoods, resulting in several deaths and tens of injuries. This Committee emergency meeting created a special sub-committee to investigate the incident (Saba Net 09.03.2013). Examples of other specific, non-emergency topics discussed in Committee meetings include an audit of al-Hudayda security in March 2015 by Sana'a ministry officials, such as the MoD; crimes such as illegal construction and seizure of land; and specific issues such as gun control, theft, and motor vehicles that operate without license plates.

### ***IRG-Controlled Security Committee***

In IRG-controlled areas, the governor of al-Hudayda chairs the Committee while the director of security is the deputy. Member agencies are the Directors of the National Security, Political Security, Special Forces, the Traffic Police, the Military Police, the Emergency Police, and the Military. Heads of these institutions are appointed by presidential decree. Unlike the Ansar Allah Committee, the IRG Security Committee does not have both simple and expanded meeting forms. All security and military institutions are on the Committee and tasked with supporting the governorate-level Security Department; however, it is unclear if this is a temporary or permanent situation. The fact that Security Committees in other governorates meet in both a simple and an expanded form, but not in al-Hudayda, may indicate a constant emergency environment in al-Hudayda that requires all members to attend all meetings. Unlike other Security Committees, there are no recorded instances of the IRG Security Committee forming sub-committees or the existence of district-level committees. This may be related to the weakness of the Committee in the IRG-controlled areas of al-Hudayda.

External actors relevant to the agenda may attend a meeting by invitation from the governor. While some members claim the governor chooses the overall priorities and objectives based on security developments, others claim it is a group choice through voting. All non-government implementers, namely the TPR and the Giants, did not answer this question nor name the governor and security director as the sole decision-makers, potentially indicating the lesser involvement of these forces in the decision-making process. As already mentioned above, the designation of institutions as formal or informal shaped the IRG process of re-establishing state institutions, as formal actors were granted a more prominent role in the Security Committee, and thus important components of the IRG forces were alienated. The informal components of the Joint Forces only attend meetings by invitation, highlighting the political divides.

The Security Committee meets at least every month, and may meet more often depending on the security situation in the IRG-controlled areas. Issues addressed are the overall security strategy given the unique situation with Ansar Allah, terrorism, and lesser crimes such as celebratory fire at weddings, proliferation of small arms, and theft within communities. The Security Committee communicates with the national-level Supreme Security Committee through the MoI, using bureaucratic reporting. The governorate-level Security Committee passes directives down to the district-level committees, communicates with its members via meetings, and passes on policies in both directions of this hierarchy.

## Mandates, Capacities, Hierarchies of Implementing Agencies

### *Ansar Allah-Controlled Security Committee*

The Security Committee is designed to act as a forum, in which member agencies decide on strategies and plans. The Committee itself does not implement the plans; rather, they are implemented through the member agencies. The police, represented in the Committee by the police chief, are the core implementation agency of the Security Committee. Other military agencies provide support. Civic figures interviewed did not agree on the capacity of the police in al-Hudayda. Five out of twelve interview partners named the governorate-level security department as the most capable institution to ensure community security, as opposed to three who named Ansar Allah, and three others who stated that no institution is capable of providing security. All noted that Ansar Allah provided security, but lacked fairness and impartiality. Journalists, heads of NGOs and civic actors cited police organizational experience, infrastructure and equipment as strong compared to other institutions, although many expressed that the Security Committee is under control of Ansar Allah, which have been known to use excessive force and oppression. Security experts from the MoD also referenced the governorate-level Security Department as the most capable in providing security, but also spoke of its limited integrity. Observational reports by YPC found that a district-level Security Department, for example, practices extortion, bribery, arbitrary imprisonment, and other general infringements of citizen rights. CSOs also observed that police are more of a day-to-day security provider and do not have the capacities to negotiate opening roads amid war or maintaining ceasefires. They also found that, currently, the aspect of police funding, both on a district and governorate-level, is lacking; and that training, in human rights specifically, would be needed to improve this institution. Also, it was noted that any interest to provide security specifically to women and girls is lacking, with the exception of a few instances, with stories then shared on social media. According to interviews with journalists, the authorities give these cases special media attention for the sake of public relations. The police in al-Hudayda communicate with the community by word of mouth, *'aqils* and mosque *shaykhs*, as well as traditional and social media.

The Security Committee identifies security developments through intelligence member agencies, while community needs are routinely identified through the local council, *'aqils*, and other notable figures. It communicates with the district committees frequently, almost weekly, through bureaucratic means and reporting, and with member institutions through the governorate-level police department. Exchange of information is through the Security Directory, and decisions are brought down the chain to security implementors by their respective representative in the Committee to be implemented on a local level. Each Committee member agency is tasked with different roles in the overall security plan for the



governorate. This system appears seamless, but actual outcomes depend on the capacities of implementing members. These functions are similar in most Security Committees regardless of governorate, but in Ansar Allah-controlled areas, representatives not only represent their local functions as per their role in the security sector, but also represent national interests through their *mushrif* role. Thus, the function of the Security Committee in Ansar Allah-controlled areas is more tied to the government in Sana'a and the war effort. In general, the physical capacity of these implementing agencies is adequate in Ansar Allah-controlled areas; but as the leadership is chosen based on loyalty to Ansar Allah, many lack the experience in the area of specialization of their appointed institutions.

The Security Committee has a simple public relations strategy, with the official media outlets reporting about meetings. Most communication with the community is on the member agency level. The institutions seem to communicate with the population through social media,<sup>10</sup> traditional media, the *'aqil* and, in some instances, international organizations. Interestingly, civil society actors explained that a *mushrif* also exists as a buffer between the media and each security institution, acting as the main point of contact – and most likely controlling the flow of information.

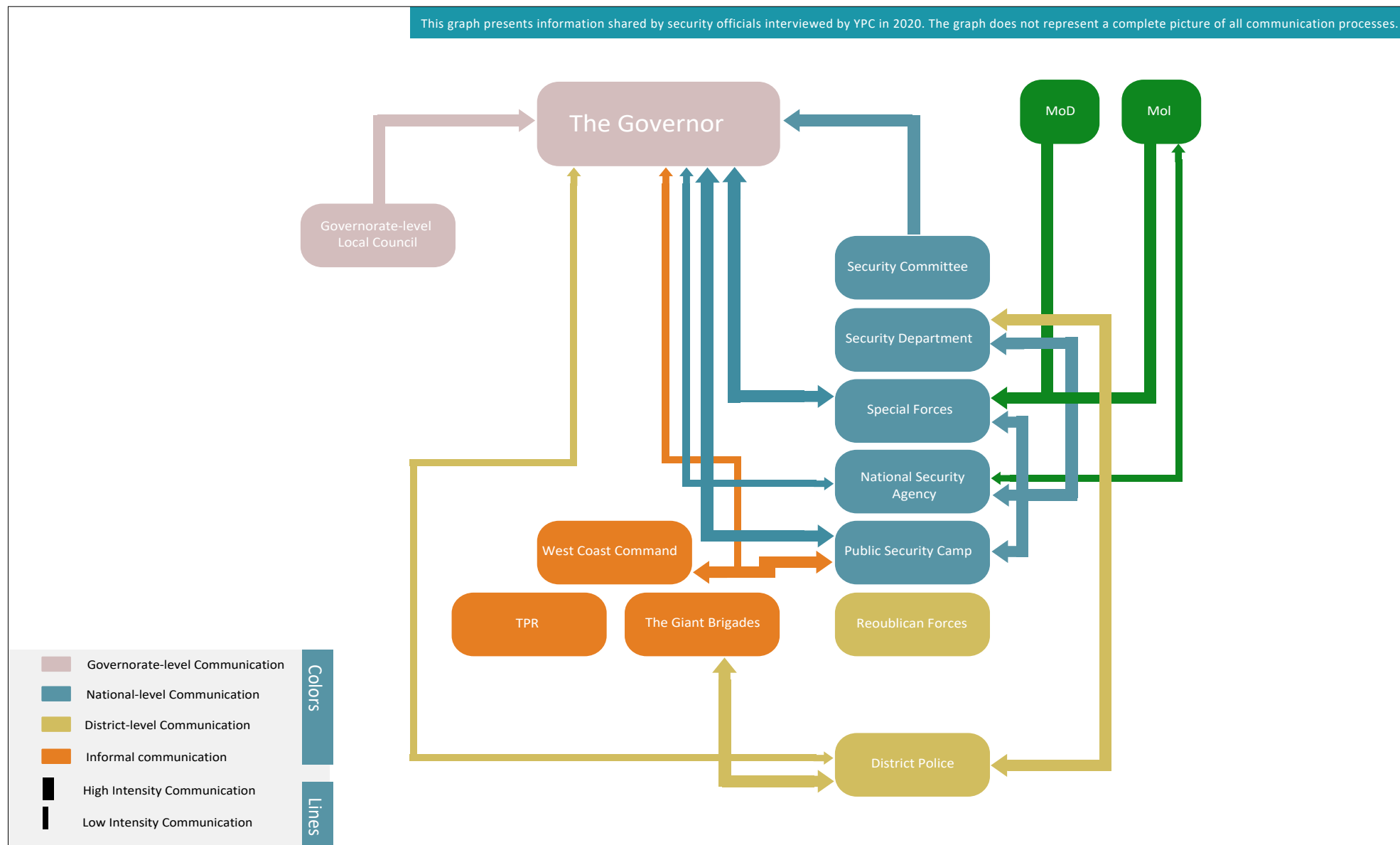
### ***IRG-Controlled Security Committee***

The main security actors in the area are the Joint Forces and the police; intelligence agencies play a coordinating role between different agencies, while the military police deal with military offenses. While the TPR and the Giants implement policies of the Security Committee, they do not regularly participate in meetings due to their semi-formal status.

The main mandate of the police, according to the interviewees, is crime prevention and the arrest of criminals. Police officers interviewed described their job as ensuring public order through regular patrols. They actively investigate incidents and complaints by locals. In the Security Committee, the police chief represents the police. Instructions to the police are communicated directly through the governorate-level police department via reports, mobile phone or face to face. In terms of capacity, the police in IRG-controlled areas of al-Hudayda were restored in 2018, after the IRG regained control over police stations from Ansar Allah. Both police station heads and officers described the level of coherence among police institutions as lacking. Although wanting for resources, police claim to be the most capable to provide security because they are local and close to the communities. Nevertheless, they acknowledge the need for assistance from the governorate Joint Forces to fill the resource and capacity gap. The governorate-level Security Department has

<sup>10</sup> Facebook account of 'Amn muhafaza al-Hudayda [Security of al-Hudayda]. Available at <https://www.facebook.com/158281754316588-امن-محافظة-الحديدة/> (accessed 05.04.2021).

Communication Between Institutions and Forces in al-Hudayda



been implementing general training programs to qualify new personnel, as well as currently rehabilitating buildings destroyed in the war. District police have also received arms and vehicles from the Arab Coalition through the governorate-level Security Department.

Police stations in IRG-controlled areas receive information on the security situation within the community through daily reports; some interviewees also mentioned fieldwork. As most members are local, information about the community's security situation comes from personal sources, by communicating with civilians, and through direct investigation. Police stations often involve other actors, such as the Giants, that describe similar intelligence gathering functions, alongside reports from the Joint Forces Command. When asked explicitly if other informal security groups interfere in their work, the response was no, rather claiming coordination with the Giants or TPR Brigades. This could indicate a lack of capacity within the state military, or possibly reflect the Security Department's direct affiliation with the head of the Joint Forces, Tariq Salih, and part of the UAE network of sponsored informal actors. Others involved by the police in gathering information and addressing security problems include neighborhood *'aqils*, social figures, and *shaykhs*. The police on a district level communicate mainly with the Security Department, the governor's office and, usually face to face, with the local council. They also communicate with informal security actors, such as the Giants, on a weekly basis, and hold monthly meetings with civilians, such as *'aqils*, *shaykhs*, and notable social figures. When asked about communication with the MoI, one officer mentioned the Joint Forces General Command on the West Coast as if it were a ministry, claiming to have frequent communication. This, on one hand, highlights dependence on these forces, but at the same time indicates that the formal hierarchy is not clear.

The Giants or the TPR Brigades, rather than the Republican Forces, are stationed at all exits and entrances to the areas controlled by the IRG in al-Hudayda. These forces protect the IRG on the frontlines from Ansar Allah, conduct patrols and pursue smugglers. Because of the informality of their security structures, the Giants and TPR overlap in terms of functions, authority and geographic area. Both forces took on the role of police from when the ceasefire was implemented in 2018 until the local institutions were re-established. The TPR exclusively receive instructions from the Joint Forces Command, while the Giants additionally get orders from the governorate-level Security Department. (This may be due to TPR's disengagement from entities linked to Tariq Salih, such as the governorate-level Security Department). In contrast to the Republican Forces, the TPR and the Giants implement no training and cite a lack of vehicles, arms, uniforms, and equipment for non-military security activities. They also receive no financial nor other support from the IRG, despite the fact that they complement local security structures. Their intelligence comes from their direct engagement with citizens and reports received from the

governorate-level Security Department. According to some interviews, the Giants and the TPR involve *shaykhs* and *‘aqils*, as well as “trusted armed civilians”. Currently, these two groups have no communication with the MoI/MoD. Instead, they communicate with the Joint Forces Command, the Security Department and the governor’s office, as well as with CSOs and tribal leaders.

## Oversight Mechanisms

### *Ansar Allah-Controlled Security Committee*

Oversight functions for security institutions in al-Hudayda are not optimal, as formal entities and processes exist but lack effectiveness. For example, civic figures and journalists claimed the public prosecutor’s office and other institutions, such as the inspector general of the MoI, have oversight authority, while others stated the security directors have the oversight. In reality, as MoD-affiliated security experts affirmed, local security institutions are not monitored by any entity, including the Security Committee. According to one journalist, local councils theoretically have an oversight function on decisions to be implemented on a district level, and report to the district head. Information moves up the chain in the form of reports to the entity responsible, i.e. the security institution, via the Security Committee. Civil society appears to have only a limited oversight function, for fear that too much civic authority would lead to a backlash from Ansar Allah’s authorities. One civic figure stated:

“At the present time, Ansar Allah’s grip is strong, so no one dares to implement oversight of the security institutions, especially since the charges of treason are ready-made in office drawers. However, social media has provided a limited electronic space for some activists who follow the work of the security authorities and put forward comments in a well-told and decent manner. They delete posts after receiving calls advising them to do so before being harmed.”

The one tool thus used by civic actors is social media, where activists can call out entities that may be involved in questionable activities and behavior. Human rights organizations, such as the Yemeni Coalition for Monitoring Human Rights Violations, independently investigate events.<sup>11</sup> However, their influence is very limited and often politically motivated.

### *IRG-Controlled Security Committee*

Security Committee members associated with the IRG claim that the Committee only uses field visits as a tool for oversight. Field visits are done by the Oversight and Inspection Committee at the Security Department, while the Security Committee communicates with the Inspection Committee to follow-up on implementation

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<sup>11</sup> Facebook account of ‘Yemen Coalition for Monitoring Human Rights Violations’. Available at <https://www.facebook.com/YCMHRV> (accessed 05.04.2021).

of decisions. The Giants and the TPR, although not officially part of the state hierarchy, have their own internal oversight mechanisms, such as the Oversight and Inspection Directorate (the Giants) and the Office of Legal Affairs (the TPR). Although the two forces are part of the Joint Forces and are coordinated through the governorate-level Security Department, the latter has no oversight functions over the former. The local councils do follow up with security actors, but have no recourse if implementation of a directive is not followed.

## **Performance Legitimacy: Achievements and Failures**

### ***Ansar Allah-Controlled Security Committee***

Journalists interviewed in Ansar Allah-controlled areas had different opinions on whether the Committee has had positive achievements. One success highlighted was the investigation of the above-mentioned incident involving an Egyptian fishing boat in 2013, an achievement that happened before Ansar Allah took over. Another success highlighted was the Security Committee's investigation that identified threats to local marine life and made recommendations to the government to ensure its protection and sustainability in the future. It is striking that all examples given occurred prior to the Ansar Allah takeover. This may be due to fewer recent achievements reported in the media, or that civic figures do not consider the performance of the Security Committee as legitimate. The Committee's inability to deter illegal land seizure, combined with the non-compensation of 85 families that were forcibly displaced in 2013, were listed as failures. The latter was due to an inefficient composition of the sub-committee tasked to resolve the issue, as specifically a lawyer was missing amongst the experts.

### ***IRG-Controlled Security Committee***

The main achievement of the IRG Security Committee, according to interviewed members, is the establishment of the Committee itself and the re-establishment of some control under the governorate-level Security Department. Security Committee members cite the curbing of celebratory gunfire, the reduction of firearms in communities, and the decrease of banditry as Committee achievements.

## **Conclusion**

With the original Security Committee under the control of Ansar Allah and a second Committee established by the IRG, there are currently two functioning Security Committees in al-Hudayda. Community members in al-Hudayda have low levels of confidence in all security institutions. The Security Committees in al-Hudayda thus lack legitimacy, as they have not been able to create a positive image amongst the community, due to lack of significant improvements in the security situation.

Members of the Ansar Allah Security Committee are viewed as legitimate by some, but repressive and illegitimate by others. The newly established IRG Security Committee is not viewed as legitimate by the security actors charged with the implementation of its directives; while its Committee member agencies, particularly the non-military members, have little authority.

Given that the IRG side is riddled with internal divisions and weak communication between the governorate and the national level, the Security Committee on the IRG side is currently rather weak. The Committee members and its implementing agencies lack unity, experience and possibly the political will to render the IRG Committee an effective institution. However, a direct confrontation with the Ansar Allah Committee could have a unifying effect.

Regarding the IRG Committee, reform may be necessary to ensure its effectiveness. Particularly, actors considered by the IRG as informal, such as the TPR or the Giants, should be included as equal participants in decision-making. Given the tension between individual forces, each component should be included in the Committee as a separate entity, rather than under the umbrella of the Joint Forces. A sub-committee may be necessary to manage the tensions between the components of the Joint Forces. As well, awareness raising amongst security actors on the legal framework and institutional history of the Security Committee in al-Hudayda could help increase its legitimacy.



## The Security Committee in Ta'iz

■ Maged Sultan and Mareike Transfeld

### Context

After more than five years of armed conflict in Ta'iz governorate, neither the IRG nor Ansar Allah can claim victory over the other. The governorate remains in a stalemate. Since 2017, neither of the two main conflict parties has gained significant ground, with fighting decreasing to sporadic clashes and shelling, including in fall 2020 and spring 2021. To date, the governorate remains divided into two main spheres: Ansar Allah controls the north of the governorate and areas around the capital, and has imposed a siege on all but one entry to Ta'iz city. The IRG controls most of Ta'iz city and the southwest of the governorate. This territorial division is congruent with divisions within the political establishment and security structures. The various (de facto) authorities in each sphere control distinct security institutions that build on security structures that emerged during the presidency of 'Ali 'Abdallah Salih. A closer look at the areas under IRG control reveals further territorial and political divisions: military and security leaders affiliated with the Islah Party, dominant within the state institutions; an alliance between military leaders affiliated with the Nasserite Party and the Salafi militia; and members of the former ruling party, the GPC. Each holds various positions in political, security and military institutions. Depending on the political dynamics, the GPC oscillates between the Islah Party and the Salafi-Nasserite alliance.

Tension between the various groups within the IRG frequently lead to political disputes and violent conflicts over the control of territory, state institutions and resources. Particularly after the eviction of the Salafi Abu al-'Abbas Brigade from Ta'iz city in April 2019, the Islah Party became the dominant political actor in the city, holding sway over most of the security institutions (Sultan & al-Sharjabi 2019; Sultan, Transfeld & Muqbil 2019). With the withdrawal of the Salafi brigade to al-Kadaha front,<sup>1</sup> and the location of its headquarters halfway between Ta'iz and Aden in al-Turba, political tensions in Ta'iz governorate were relegated to the margins. But this delicate power balance in Ta'iz was threatened by the August 2019 takeover of Aden and other southern areas, along with the expulsion of the IRG from Aden as its interim capital, by the Southern Transitional Council (STC), backed by the UAE. The STC power grab in Aden raised concerns that the UAE-backed forces

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<sup>1</sup> Approximately 30 km kilometers southwest of Ta'iz city.

– represented by the Abu al-‘Abbas forces in the southern part of the Ta’iz governorate and the troops in al-Khawkha at the west coast affiliated with Tariq Salih, a military leader of the former ruling party – would enable the GPC to attempt a similar power grab in Ta’iz (Sultan & al-Sharjabi 2019). The Ta’iz governor’s intervention to put an end to the tension was successful, but only in August 2020, a year after the initial conflict began. Following a presidential decree, the 35<sup>th</sup> Brigade Command, which unifies forces loyal to the Nasserites and Abu al-‘Abbas through UAE support, was handed over to Brig. Gen. ‘Abd al-Rahman al-Shamsani, an Islah-affiliate. As a result, Abu al-‘Abbas troops were relocated to the al-Kadaha area at the west coast while many positions in the security and military institutions were replaced with Islah-affiliated leaders. Likewise, to ensure his control over military staff, including commanders and deputies, the Ta’iz governor instructed that all bank withdrawals made by military brigades require the governor’s personal signature. These developments resulted in more unity within the security structures. However, rather than unifying different political groups, only the Islah Party became dominant.<sup>2</sup>

State security institutions in areas nominally under IRG control were re-established in 2017, countering their collapse in the context of the 2015 Ansar Allah incursion (Sultan, Transfeld & Muqbil 2019). These security institutions contributed to the restoration of a degree of security. On 4 November 2018, the governorate-level security department (*idarat al-amn*) moved out of its temporary building at the Authority of Immigration and Passports and back into its original premises. Police stations were reopened and 3,000 policemen and 600 Special Forces members were recruited (*ibid.*). Following President Hadi’s order to integrate various armed groups into the state military and security structures in July 2015, the local authority worked on their integration process. This included the formation of new brigades around Ta’iz, such as the 17<sup>th</sup> Infantry Brigade (2016), the 4<sup>th</sup> Infantry Brigade (2018), and the 5<sup>th</sup> Presidential Guard (2019). The loyalty of the integrated armed men remained, however, with their respective political parties or military leaders. Nonetheless, the improvement of security around 2017 was the result of a broad-based effort, and can be attributed both to the work of the governorate-level Security Department and various security actors belonging to the Ta’iz Security Committee.

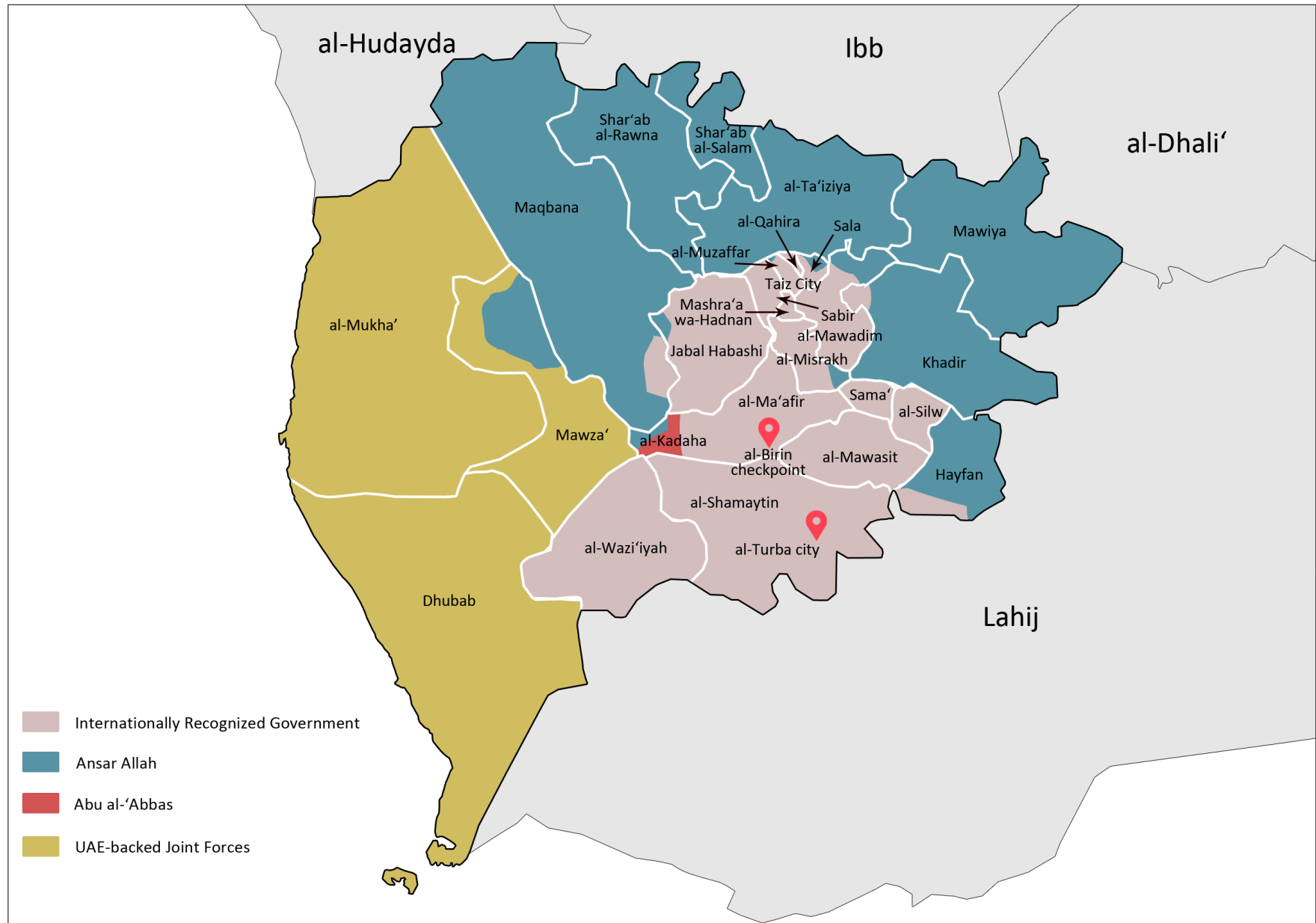
## Current State of the Ta’iz Security Committee

The Security Committee in Ta’iz was first established under the presidency of ‘Ali ‘Abdallah Salih. With the exception of a short period between 2015 and 2016, the leadership of the Security Committee in Ta’iz has been continuously in the hands of the Ta’iz governor (as documented by Yemeni media from 2007 to 2020). In May

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<sup>2</sup> For more analyses on the context of Ta’iz, see Baron & al-Hamdani (2019); Al-Madhaji (2020); and Sana’a Center for Strategic Studies (2018).

Map of Security Actors' Control in Ta'iz, December 2020



2015, during a period of heavy clashes between the Ta'iz IRG forces and Ansar Allah, the Security Committee was replaced by the Military Council, led by Major General Sadiq Sarhan, Commander of the 22<sup>nd</sup> Mechanized Brigade and the Islah-affiliated de facto military leader of Ta'iz. The Military Council brought together military and tribal leaders and had similar functions as the Security Committee: namely, to defend the governorate; maintain security; and coordinate all military units and leaders. With the first governor 'Ali al-Ma'amari after the onset of the war appointed in January 2016, the Security Committee resumed its work. However, the head of the Military Council only gradually passed on the leadership of the Security Committee to Governor al-Ma'amari in September 2016.

Ta'iz security officials at the governorate level view the Security Committee as a success story, as per interviews by YPC. Some of the recent achievements cited were the apprehension of “outlaws,” “capturing suspicious and subversive individuals,” or “criminals who have been assassinating officers,” along with stabilizing the security in the governorate and supporting the ‘National Army,’ which refers to the forces associated with the formal security structure under the IRG. The officials ascribed these accomplishments to various factors, including the successful coordination between the Committee members, to their shared sense of responsibility for the security of Ta'iz, unity and the implementation of decisions. It is particularly the sense of responsibility for the city's security, as well as their unity, which appears unique to Ta'iz (compared with Aden and al-Hudayda). The interviewees also referenced security campaigns implemented by the Security Committee as successes: one aimed at the apprehension of what the interviewees described as “outlaws” in 2015, and another campaign from 2018 restored state institutions that had been recaptured from the Abu al-'Abbas Brigade. External security challenges and the lack of resources were cited as the sources of failures, rather than weaknesses; of the Security Committee itself. Some security officials alluded to a lack of discipline within security institutions as weaknesses; while civic figures listed political division, lack of experience, weak sense of patriotism, and a partisan quota in appointments as shortcomings.

All the various political parties that emerged as armed groups to defend Ta'iz in the context of the Ansar Allah-incursion in 2015 remain present in the governorate today; and their balance of power is reflected in the security institutions, including the Security Committee. A majority of the security and military leaders and personnel in Ta'iz affiliate with the Islah Party, such as Khalid Fadhl, who is Ta'iz Axis Commander, Deputy Head of the Security Committee, and close associate to Vice President 'Ali Muhsin, a longtime Islah ally. Ta'iz Axis unifies all military forces that are under the IRG hierarchy. In July 2020, the 35th Armored Brigade, believed to be composed of a large number of Nasserite Party loyalists and affiliated with the Salafi Abu al-'Abbas Brigade (both held to be supported by the UAE), was moved under the command of an Islah leader. Given that Islah-affiliates

head most security and military agencies, the Islah Party dominates the Security Committee by default. This dominance is exacerbated by the lack of attendance of non-affiliated Islah leaders (per interview of a CSO representative).

Various security officials interviewed assessed the political differences in Ta'iz differently. While most downplayed the differences, describing them as misunderstood pluralism or personal rather than political differences with no impact on security institutions, few referred to existing differences as “deep” and “affecting everything”. Although the interviewees were reluctant to admit any political differences within the Committee, it was clear that political maneuvers between various groups have resulted in tension within the Security Committee. For example, on 5 March 2020, four members of the Security Committee affiliated with the Nasserites withdrew from the Committee due to a conflict between the Secretary General of the Socialist Party in Ta'iz, who had attempted to create a movement to pressure the Islah Party, and the Ta'iz Axis commander, a representative of Islah. These four members have not returned to the Committee (News Yemen 05.03.2020). All interviewed officials agreed that partisanship is negative, adding that it is sometimes incited by media or foreign actors. In their opinion, partisanship could be overcome through coalition-building, such as the Joint Meeting Parties or the National Alliance of Parties, via incentives of nationalism and state-building. Other factors mentioned, which can potentially help to enhance cooperation, were the neutral and strong role of the governor, a unified media discourse and a common enemy (Ansar Allah).

## **The Legal Framework: Institutional History, Laws, Functions**

As there are no official records available and current members of the Security Committee are uncertain about its history, it is difficult to put an exact date on the establishment of the Ta'iz Security Committee. This confusion and lack of information highlights the weak institutional memory of the Committee, due in part to the destruction during the war of the Security Department archives. Security officials on the governorate level appear more informed than those on the district level. Most officials place the Committee's roots within the rule of President Salih, although younger officials recall only its immediate past.

Three timeframes stood out in the narratives of the security officials as regards the establishment of the Ta'iz Security Committee: the late 1990s; the early 2000s; and the period immediately after the heavy clashes in Ta'iz in 2016. Many of the older governorate-level security officials stated that the national Supreme Security Committee was established per a presidential decree after the civil war of 1994 – most likely in 1997 when the GPC secured the majority in the parliamentary

elections.<sup>3</sup> Per that same decree, the governorate-level Security Committees were then formed, either immediately after, or, as many officials stated, in 2003 after the Local Authority Law (LAL) came into effect.<sup>4</sup> Finally, the last date mentioned, 2016, is the period in which the Ta'iz governorate-level Security Committee was re-established, having been inactive during a period of intense fighting in the governorate. Many of the younger officials assumed the Ta'iz Security Committee was first established at this latter date. For instance, a 29-year-old chief of a police station viewed the Security Committee's establishment only in the context of the 2017 re-establishment of state institutions in Ta'iz. Civil society representatives and journalists are similarly uncertain about the institution's historical roots, and date it to 2018, 2006, 2000, or 1998.

The governorate-level Ta'iz Security Committee is not mentioned in any laws or official security hierarchies; thus, its legal framework in terms of establishment, function, and composition is vague, to say the least. Even though not explicitly mentioned in any laws, the members of the current Security Committee, as well as interviewed civic figures in Ta'iz, believe that the Committee is embedded in a legal framework. To them, the LAL, as well as the laws regulating the member agencies of the Security Committee, such as the Police Law or the Military Law, are important points of reference. It is possible that the activities of the Security Committee fall under the authority of the LAL, but the Committee is not actually mentioned in the law. The Security Committee works through implementing agencies, which are regulated by comprehensive laws. The Committee itself, however, is not. Security officials and civic figures interviewed by YPC view the Security Committee under the regulation of the same laws designated for its member agencies. However, none of the interviewed security officials nor CSO representatives including lawyers, were able to mention details of any laws or describe how these laws regulate the Security Committee.

Confusing the functions of the member agencies with the functions of the Security Committee, some Committee officials named "making arrests, enforcing the law or maintaining order" as Committee functions. Most officials interviewed in Ta'iz, however, understand the functions of the Security Committee to transcend the level of implementation, using keywords such as "unifying commands", "coordination or distribution of tasks". Another function of the Security Committee is to tackle the security challenges that a single agency cannot tackle alone, but require the coordinated efforts of various agencies. As described by one security official:

"Primarily, the Security Committee is responsible for security issues and infractions that are above the capacity and ability of security agencies to face by themselves. Therefore, it is an entity that supports the police, but does not take their role. It is also responsible for coordinating between the various security and military units that are within its jurisdiction."

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<sup>3</sup> On the establishment of the Supreme Security Committee, see the introduction to this report.

<sup>4</sup> For more details on local governance in Yemen, see Rogers (2019).



Security officials stated that the Committee's role is not only to coordinate, but also to enhance cooperation among security agencies. Two interviewees believed coordination and cooperation was sometimes enhanced through the Security Committee, while others stated there was neither coordination nor cooperation happening on the ground.

While the Security Committee is a place for discussion, decision-making and assessments, the Joint Operations Room or the Command and Control Room, based in the governorate-level Security Department, is where the actual coordination, cooperation and follow-up takes place. There is a strong relationship between the Operations Room and the Security Committee: The Operations Room receives instructions from the Security Committee, as well as information from implementing agencies, and relays it to relevant institutions.

## Hierarchy, Composition and Structure

On an institutional level, the Security Committee in Ta'iz, as other Security Committees in Yemen, brings together security and military leaders. Interviewed security officials agreed that there was a standard form and an expanded form of the Security Committee, with military leaders included only in the expanded form. The head of each institution present in the governorate is represented in the Committee. Thus, membership in the Committee is per appointment by presidential decree. This was the case in Ta'iz regarding the appointment of the Axis Commander, the police chief, the military police commander, the 5<sup>th</sup> Presidential Guards Brigade commander, the 35<sup>th</sup> Armored Brigade commander, and the 22<sup>nd</sup> Mechanized Brigade commander. The Political Security Organization (PSO) head in Ta'iz, however, was appointed by the governor (Mandab Press 24.05.2016). There is flexibility concerning who can attend Security Committee meetings. Upon the governor's invitation and dependent on agenda topics, external officials or experts are invited. These external figures can be tribal leaders, national-level or district-level officials, or civil society representatives. To be noted, as women usually do not head security agencies and there is no position designated to women, women are not structurally included and only rarely attend meetings. If women-related issues are on the agenda, a woman representative from the Yemeni Women's Union is invited to attend.

The Security Committee is headed by the governor, who convenes meetings and ultimately decides which non-members are also invited. The Security Committee is responsible to formulate strategic plans: However, members interviewed disagree on when the last strategic plan was drawn up, indicating the low significance of such plans. The current security situation determines the meeting priorities, while the governor, in coordination with the members, sets the agenda. Institutionally, the governor represents the Security Committee and speaks on its behalf. In Ta'iz, the current governor is a member of the GPC, and thus has a balancing function between

the various Islah Party-dominated institutions and those headed by non-Islah members. While most of the Ta'iz members believed that the Committee successfully coordinates and enhances cooperation among its members, two interviewees saw potential for improvement. Meetings are held at least monthly, and more frequently if the security situation necessitates. Such security issues might include terrorism, security emergencies, or “movement at the front” with Ansar Allah.

The governorate-level Security Committee can, per the governor's decree, also form sub-committees for local/specific security purposes, such as to remove particular checkpoints, to evacuate buildings or to reduce tension between military units. Often sub-committees are formed after security incidents that require the involvement of non-Committee individuals, such as CSOs, the judiciary or national-level officials. At other times, sub-committees are required to resolve tensions among security agencies who are members of the Security Committee. In these cases, individuals with the capacity to balance political dynamics will be involved. An example is 'Arif Jamil, a GPC member, who chaired a number of sub-committees on sensitive issues, including the conflict between Abu al-'Abbas and Islah.

Certain security challenges in Ta'iz, such as conflicts between security or military actors, have required the formation of presidential committees in the place of the engagement of the Security Committee itself or the formation of sub-committees. Presidential committees are composed of security officials from various levels (district, governorate or national), while their mission and function are defined by decree. For example, the Presidential Committee formed by President Hadi on 10 August 2018 is demonstrative of a situation that necessitated a higher-ranking committee in place of the Security Committee. The Presidential Committee was chaired by Brigadier 'Abduh Farhan Salim, the advisor of the Ta'iz Axis Commander and an Islah Party leader. The mission of the Committee was to resolve the armed conflicts between the Abu al-'Abbas Brigade and the armed fighters associated with the Islah Party. As Islah did not consider then-Governor Amin Mahmud impartial, his engagement in this particular conflict was rejected, thus necessitating the formation of a committee above the Ta'iz Security Committee. While the governor himself did not immediately accept the authority of the Presidential Committee, it was successful in enforcing a ceasefire, evacuating public facilities and private buildings from armed groups, and releasing eleven soldiers.

Security officials, as well as some civic figures, view the governorate-level Security Committee as subjugated to the national-level Supreme Security Committee. Most of the interviewees confirmed that the national-level Supreme Security Committee passes directives to the governorate-level Security Committee. The individual members of the Ta'iz Security Committee stated that they communicate with members of the national-level Committee on a nearly daily basis through bureaucratic channels. The military police do so through the Joint Operations Room. Given that the MoI and the MoD are members of the national-level Committee, the governorate-level

Committee is also in frequent contact with these ministries. Based on this coordination, the interviewees agree, there are no conflicts between directives from the ministries and the Security Committee. Regarding local affairs, however, the governorate-level Security Committee is the higher authority, as its members can better assess the local situation. There are only a few examples of local institutions not following the directives of the national level, such as when the Islah Party rejected the appointment of a district police chief in southern Ta'iz governorate.<sup>5</sup>

Individual member agencies at governorate level receive their directives primarily from the MoI or MoD directly. When communicating with either of the two ministries, the member agencies rely on the bureaucratic process, as well as use mobile phone/WhatsApp communication on a daily basis. Member agencies communicate slightly less with the governor; when they do, it is somewhat through bureaucratic means, and more often face to face (possibly at Security Committee meetings). Beyond the communication with the governor, there is no interaction with local councils on part of the member agencies.

While there is no official documentation or decree pointing to the existence of district-level Security Committees, many of the security officials associated with the governorate-level Security Committee confirmed their existence at the district level, describing them as “branches of the governorate Security Committee”. Those who denied their existence argued that district-level Security Committees do not exist due to a lack of resources. In a meeting of the Ta'iz Security Committee on 5 February 2020, in the aftermath of the tension caused by the Aden crisis in 2019 (Sultan & al-Sharjabi 2019), members agreed to activate the district-level Security Committees. In fact, the formation of such district-level Security Committees appears to depend on the security situation in the respective districts. The only district Committee to have actually been activated in Ta'iz governorate is in the district al-Shamaytin. This committee is chaired by the district director (*mudir al-mudiriya*), with members from the security and military units located in the district, particularly the district security director, the division commander of the 35<sup>th</sup> Armored Brigade, Special Forces and the PSO. Thus, the district-level Security Committee appears politically balanced. Interviewed district officials confirmed that the district director formed the Committee in response to the governor's directive. Although there was no mention in online news reports, information spread via WhatsApp groups in April 2020 referred to measures taken by the al-Shamaytin district Security Committee to prevent the spread of Covid-19.<sup>6</sup> This not only proves the existence of this Committee, but also hints at the wide

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5 The decision was made in the context of the takeover of Aden by the Southern Transitional Council in the summer of 2019. The Islah Party in Ta'iz feared that local groups supported by the UAE would emulate the power grab. For more details, see Sultan & al-Sharjabi (2019).

6 For more on the implementation of measures to prevent the spread of the corona virus in Ta'iz, see Al-Hamdani & Transfeld (April 2021).

variety of its responsibilities. According to descriptions of the governorate-level Security Committee members, the relationship between the governorate-level and the district-level Security Committees is based on a hierarchical order. Thus, the governorate-level Security Committee passes directives to the district-level Security Committee. Communication between the two levels occurs through bureaucratic channels (reporting), phone calls and face to face.

## **Mandates and Hierarchies of Implementing Agencies**

The Security Committee represents a forum for security agency heads to discuss security matters and coordinate efforts; however, the implementation of these decisions lies elsewhere. Given that the Security Committee is merely a forum for discussion, whether and how it is successful in implementing policies and plans depends on the will and capacity of the implementing agencies, such as the Security Department. As presented by security officials interviewed, each agency has its own mandate and contributes to the implementation of Security Committee policies and plans within this mandate. For example, the police are responsible for the prevention of crime; Traffic and Patrol police are responsible for checkpoints, apprehension of individuals, and securing roads; the Military Police are responsible for the discipline within the troops; and the PSO is responsible for gathering intelligence and conducting investigations.<sup>7</sup> As well, the Special Forces currently work in parallel and coordination with the Security Department in ensuring security in some state institutions such as Ta'iz University, the Central Jail, the Immigration and Passport Office, the Taxes Authority and the Finance Administration Office. The Special Forces are also responsible for the security of sea and land entries, foreign visitors, and in countering terrorism. During interviews, security officials denied any overlaps in mandates; in practice, however, clear delineations is not always a given. Officers at police stations in particular complain about the interference of military actors.

A significant implementation tool of the Security Committee are security campaigns such as those mentioned above, during which participating agencies come under a unified command. There was some agreement among interviewees that the Security Department and the Ta'iz Axis play central roles in the command structure, with all participating agencies also represented. In a Security Committee meeting, the individual agencies decide together on the purpose, required equipment, personnel and capacities. Then, the participating agencies and brigades are placed under a unified campaign command.

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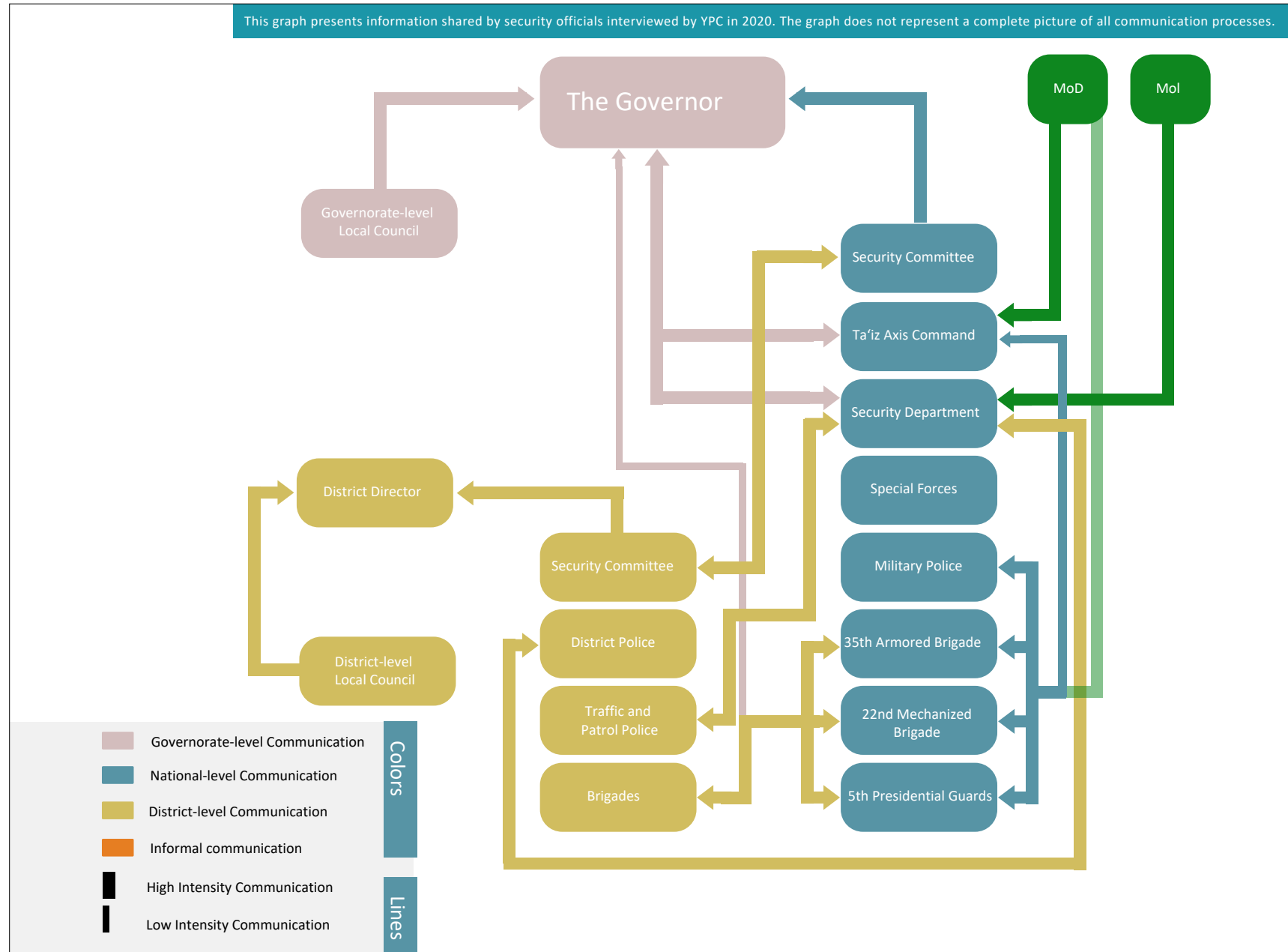
<sup>7</sup> All institutions listed in this sentence are distinct agencies.

The implementing agencies do not receive instructions directly from the Security Committee, nor the MoI or MoD. Rather, instructions from national-level institutions and the Security Committee go through the respective hierarchies: for the police, they go through the governorate-level Security Department; and for lower-level military officers, they go through the Axis. The governorate-level Security Department is the central node between the national and the district level institutions (MoI and police), as well as between the Security Committee and other police agencies. Interviews revealed that instructions are communicated to police stations through the governorate-level Security Department. All upward communication from the district level within the police hierarchy goes through the governorate-level Security Department (not via the governor).

Generally, the police are seen by security officials to be responsible for crime prevention and investigation of cases reported to them by residents. The type of cases most often reported involve petty crimes, and conflicts over land or rent. Within the scope of the Security Committee's plans and policies, district police appear to be responsible for enforcing decisions concerning public order. For instance, such policies include: "Implementing the plan to close *qat* markets and mosques, and disperse crowds due to the Corona virus", or "the decision to prohibit motorcycles to work between 7 pm and 8 am", and "removing improvised buildings and gas stations". The police have never been asked to implement any Security Committee policies regarding the special security interests of women. The military police are responsible for discipline within the troops, and thus ensure the capacity of military actors to implement policies on the local level. Military officials interviewed (military police and brigade commanders) stated that they participate in the implementation of policies and plans of the Security Committee, such as "security campaigns against outlaws".

There are no district-level military structures; although military camps are located in districts. Nominally, the Ta'iz Axis is the highest military authority in the governorate. Even though lower-level officers mentioned the Axis as a source of directives, most military commanders interviewed stated that they receive their missions from the MoD directly, thus demonstrating the independence of the individual units and brigades from the centralized Ta'iz military structure. This makes necessary the presence of all military leaders within the Security Committee, as Ta'iz Axis command might not be able to adequately represent all brigades. Unlike the police, the military does not have a structure on the district level. Instead, individual brigades may be located in districts where they have their "theatre of operations", according to a police station head, who further explained that these brigades are said to be active in coordination with district-level Security Departments. One institution where such coordination was said to take place is the Joint Operations Room situated at the governorate-level Security Department.

Communication Between Institutions and Forces in Tai'z





## Communication and Capacity of Implementing Agencies

Interviewed security officials agreed that the Ta'iz Security Department, out of all security actors in Ta'iz, is the most effective, fair and just in ensuring security and justice for community members and negotiating conflicts. These officials also believed that, given more support and equipment, the Security Department and its police stations would be well poised to take over security provision in the area. There are generally three reasons why the police are viewed this way: First, the police have the necessary know-how and experience; second, although they lack support and equipment, the police are armed; and third, the police are viewed as legitimate actors.

Generally, the capacity of district-level police stations is relatively low. Police chiefs complain of a lack of equipment (everything from office furniture to arms and police vehicles), a lack of training (from simple administration, knowledge of the law and archiving to basic police work) and a lack of an operational budget. Such needs are communicated to the district-level Security Department, but requests stay unanswered (stated district police chiefs), mostly due to the lack of resources on the governorate level.<sup>8</sup> If police require backup or equipment, they must rely on the Security Department or the military. The support the district police receive from the governorate level, which may include “arms or food”, is insufficient; and there is a definite need for more assistance with equipment, training and political support.

Such support is particularly needed to minimize the interference of military actors in police work, as frequently happens. Several police officers stated that they are unable to pursue or arrest soldiers who have committed a crime. In such contested cases, the Security Department becomes involved, via request by either the police or the military. However, as a district police chief highlighted, resolute decisions by the Security Department or the Axis Commander to prevent such behavior are missing.

District police stations are embedded within communities and receive information on the security needs of the communities through frequent communication with social figures, as well as through reports filed by residents. Police most frequently communicate with *'aqils* (neighborhood representatives), tribal leaders and social figures, as well as contact with the local council and CSOs, to a lesser degree. Information from girls and women regarding their security interests is not communicated through face-to-face channels. According to the police chiefs, such information is gathered through intelligence reports, investigations; or, as one district police chief stated, through social media.

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<sup>8</sup> In 2019 research conducted by the Yemen Polling Center, similar was also reported in the governorates of Shabwa, Lahij, Ta'iz and Aden. See Transfeld, Muqbil, bin Othman & Noman (2020).

Members of the community communicate with security providers via mobile phones or face to face. The Security Department is the institution most contacted by the CSO representatives and journalists interviewed, although they gave their most common source of information as social media and *'aqils*. Police institutions, in turn, rely on the neighborhood *'aqil* to communicate back to communities, highlighting the important role of the *'aqil* as a link between state institutions and communities. The police also rely on community meetings and seminars, media and social media to communicate information on their campaigns and policies to the community. Almost all interviewees mentioned the use of social media. The governorate-level Ta'iz Security Department has three Facebook pages, followed by a total 50,000 people. Its media center page on Facebook provides updates on the security situation. Interviewed district police officers in Ta'iz governorate do not have a relationship with media outlets for public relations, although some use Facebook for this purpose. Such users include the Police Department in al-Muzaffar district, the Najd Qusaym Police Department,<sup>9</sup> the Bab Musa Police Station and the al-Hasab Police Station.<sup>10</sup> Facebook pages are used to post news on the security situation, and to raise awareness among the community.

The military agencies have much broader communications than the police insofar that they communicate with a wider range of institutions, although the military is less embedded within the communities. Although military commanders speak with *'aqils*, their security situation assessments are mainly based on reports provided by intelligence agencies.

## Oversight Mechanisms

The Security Committee does not have the authority, mandate nor tools to conduct its own follow-up, monitoring or oversight of implementation of policies, or the conduct of implementing agencies. The implementation of the Committee decisions is regularly assessed in Security Committee meetings through the submission and presentation of reports by member agencies; but the actual follow-up, monitoring or oversight is conducted through mechanisms established within the member agencies themselves. There are no independent oversight or monitoring structures for the security agencies on the governorate or district level, nor are there formal

<sup>9</sup> Najd Qusaym is a rural area in al-Misrakh district in western Ta'iz governorate.

<sup>10</sup> The Facebook pages of various security institutions in Ta'iz can be found here: Ta'iz Police Media Center at <https://www.facebook.com/pmcTa'iz/>  
Media Center of the Police Station in al-Hasab at <https://www.facebook.com/140251443465749-المركز-الإعلامي-لقسم-شرطة-الحص-ب-140251443465749>  
Public Relations of Ta'iz Police at <https://www.facebook.com/Ta'izpolice/>  
Media Center of Ta'iz Axis at <https://www.facebook.com/mcaxTa'iz/>  
Official Page of the Traffic and Patrol Police at <https://www.facebook.com/TA'IZYEMEN222/>  
Security Department Ta'iz at <https://ar-ar.facebook.com/Ta'izamn/> (all accessed 07.03.2021).

civilian oversight mechanisms. Police work is monitored by the Inspection and Oversight Department at the Security Department, which uses regular reports and field inspection visits as tools to follow-up and monitor police performance.<sup>11</sup> All officials interviewed confirmed the current implementation of such follow-up and monitoring activities.

Military officials spoke of internal oversight mechanisms within the military brigades and the Axis command, which are implemented via field visits. An officer of the 22<sup>nd</sup> Mechanized Brigade stated that such inspections are currently practiced at two levels: internal oversight is implemented by the Brigade Operations Room, the Oversight and Inspection Committee or the brigade commander; and external oversight is undertaken by the Military Security Division of the Ta'iz Axis. An officer from the 170th Brigade mentioned that inspections are currently practiced through the military prosecutor's office, the military police, and the Legal Affairs Department at the Brigade. Two of the civic figures interviewed referred to formal oversight mechanisms, such as the Oversight and Inspection Department and the Central Authority for Oversight and Accountability. However, four civic leaders stated that these mechanisms were not working and pointed to the community as the only entity that could perform impartial and effective oversight.

Although the Ta'iz Local Council, per the LAL, is empowered to hold the governorate executive to account, the Local Council conducts no direct oversight nor monitoring of security agencies. In fact, communication between security institutions and the Local Council is limited, with only governorate-level security and military leaders communicating with the governor, as head of the Local Council. The Local Council is an elected civil body and as such could be an effective oversight structure. However, due to the war, the body is inactive and does not perform oversight over the security institutions, as confirmed by civic figures interviewed for this paper.

Despite the lack of formal civilian oversight mechanisms, CSOs and activists play an informal oversight role in Ta'iz. Among these actors are the Wise Men Council for Peace, which engages in local conflict mediation; the Free Media Foundation, which uncovers corruption in the military; as well as journalists reporting on violations of specific security actors and the security situation at large. Activists and CSOs use media campaigns, particularly via social media, to demand better performance in security provision. While no systematic oversight exists, CSOs do influence security actors through their work. In 2020, Youth without Borders Organization for Development, for example, implemented a community evaluation of state institutions, including the police. Female-run CSOs, such as the Yemeni Women's Union, likewise exercise similar influence by appointing lawyers for specific security cases involving women and pushing security services to adhere to laws.

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<sup>11</sup> In 2019 research conducted by the Yemen Polling Center, similar observations were reported in the governorates of Shabwa, Lahij, Ta'iz and Aden. See Transfeld, Muqbil, bin Othman and Noman (2020).

## Performance Legitimacy: Achievements and Failures

In interviews, security officials associated with the Security Committee emphasized not only the legal legitimacy of the Committee, but also its achievements (as opposed to its failures or shortcomings). A high-ranking police official referred to the Security Committee's successes in preventing the manifestation of terrorist groups in the governorate prior to 2011. Others reference the stabilization of security more generally, achieved through criminal arrests, the establishment of checkpoints, unifying orders, coordination among security institutions, logistical support for the army and the expulsion of "armed groups" (reference to the expulsion of the Abu al-'Abbas Brigade from the old city in Ta'iz).

Likewise, local community individuals and groups in Ta'iz praised the role of the Security Committee and its sub-committees in establishing security. A group referred to as Sons of Ta'iz was quoted in a 2019 *al-Hikma* news report, "The existence of the Security Committee is of good contributions, first in terms of addressing the security threats and issues faced by people; and second, it is a good step towards the existence of the state (Al Hikmanet 21.03.2019). CSO representatives and journalists interviewed in Ta'iz also listed achievements of the Security Committee, such as the expulsion of extremists in 2018; putting down some armed gangs in 2017 and 2019; the removal of security checkpoints in 2018, 2019 and 2020; arresting outlaws; and facilitating the hand-over of state-owned buildings occupied by armed groups. The civic figures interviewed attributed these successes to several factors: the character of the governor; that the situation addressed by the Security Committee represented a threat to the security agencies themselves; the cooperation of community members; and the involvement of the president.

Overall, however, civic figures interviewed described the role of the Security Committee as a failure. Concrete examples mentioned include the Committee's inability to arrest "troublemakers" affiliated with armed groups or military units due to political protection, such as the notorious teenage militia leaders Shaykh Ghazwan and Ghadir al-Shar'aby.<sup>12</sup> Others include the failure to return civilian houses occupied by military leaders or armed groups to their legal owners, despite the implementation of specifically designed security campaigns. "The three governors of Ta'iz have spent a great deal of time abroad in Riyadh, Cairo or Aden because of the security threats they face in Ta'iz", said one of the interviewees,

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<sup>12</sup> Ghazwan al-Mikhlafi is the notorious leader of an informal armed group under the 22nd Mechanized Brigade and is affiliated with al-Islah. He rose to fame in his teenage years and is rumored to have family relations with Major General Sadiq Sarhan, an Islah military leader. Ghadir al-Shar'aby is affiliated with the 170th Air Defense Brigade and is said to be connected to Brigadier 'Abdu Farhan Salim, advisor to the Ta'iz Axis Commander.

to highlight the Security Committee's lack of success in establishing security and stability. Interestingly, this same activist had previously praised the role of the Security Committee in media reports.

The political dynamics within the Security Committee and the dominance of the Islah Party in the security institutions also generates criticism amongst political parties who view the Committee as acting in the interests of the Islah Party rather than for the common good. For example, in March 2019, the Nasserite Unionist People's Organization asserted that a security campaign, implemented by the Security Committee in Ta'iz, had drifted from its primary mission of impartially enforcing security in the city, but rather had turned the campaign into "a military and security rebellion against the governor", calling it "a tool for a factious and political wipeout" (Al-Ayyam 24.03.2019). Interviewed civic figures shared similar opinions, stating that each political party seeks to control the state institutions, particularly the military and security institutions, in order to give their party more power. "The state security and military institutions turned from legal institutions into militias affiliated with Commander X or commander Y", said one of the interviewees. The political division between Islah, GPC and Nasserites "led to weaknesses in the performance of the security agencies, a decline in the community trust towards them and an increase in social tension", explained another civic figure. As a result, a lack of professionalism is seen in the performance of such agencies in terms of communications, implementing directives and orders, and coordination. This directly affects the security situation of the communities, for both men and women. Partisanship renders the Security Committee "biased towards some armed groups", so that it either "does not arrest them or it releases them after arrest," said one of the activists.

## Conclusion

The Ta'iz Security Committee, despite its obvious weaknesses, is well poised to play an active role in a transitional security arrangement, due to the relative unity of its members, and its widely affirmed legitimacy. After a short period of inactivity, the Ta'iz Security Committee was re-established in 2016. The IRG, along with its partners in the Islah Party, regained control over security institutions in the city and re-established them, thus allowing the Security Committee to function effectively under the IRG. Security leaders in Ta'iz respect the institution and acknowledge its legitimacy and achievements. In the years since the beginning of the war, the Security Committee has conducted several security campaigns that security officials and many civic figures have rated as successful. These campaigns contributed substantially in regaining control over public buildings, and removing non-state armed groups from Ta'iz city.

Several security officials underlined the unified nature of the Committee. Compared to other governorates, current political divisions amongst security actors are minimal, as Governor Nabil Shamsan has managed to play a unifying role. The divisions are minimal also because Islah dominates the Security Committee. That the Ta'iz Axis Commander and Islah-strongman, Khalid Fadhl, is deputy head of the Committee, rather than the city's chief of police as is typically the case, attests to the strength of Islah within the Committee, as well as within the military in the city. This cohesion allows the Security Committee to make decisions on strategies and policies.

The Islah party's political interests and overall orientation will determine the future behavior of the Committee. Decisions taken by the Security Committee will have the goal to protect the party's dominance in the governorate. To best understand the behaviors of the Security Committee, it is important to assess the interests of the Islah Party and in this context analyze the performance of the Committee.

The Security Committee relies on the capacity of the local forces to implement its directives. District police are in a desolate state and need more support of the Security Department and the MoI. The type of support required includes financial resources, equipment (office furniture, office supplies), training in basic police work and administration, and importantly, training on laws regulating their work.



## The Security Committee in Aden

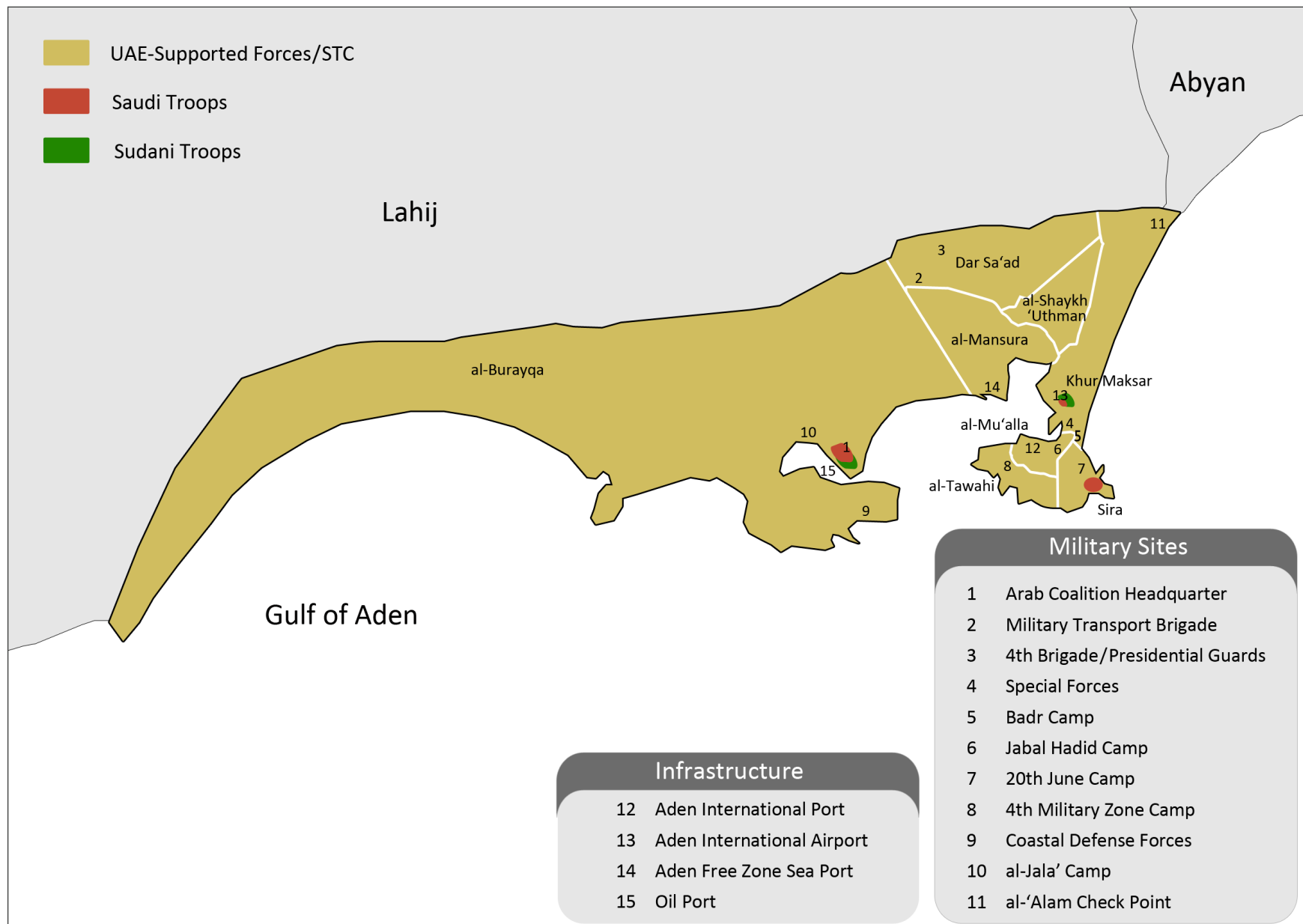
■ Mohamed al-Iriani and Mareike Transfeld

### Context

Ever since the unification of the North and South in 1990, Aden has been the focal point for Southern independence movements in Yemen, fueled by the marginalization of the Southern governorates by the Northern ruling elite. Attempts by the former ruling elite of the People's Democratic Republic of Yemen (PDRY) to re-establish their independence peaked during the 1994 civil war. However, the Southern elite and military were crushed in the aftermath of the war. The movement resurfaced in 2007, as the Southern Movement (*al-Hirak al-Janubi*). This umbrella movement, initiated by officers of the former Southern military demanding to receive their pensions, quickly received support from other professions, including the younger generation. The Southern Movement called for an end to the political, economic and cultural marginalization of Southern governorates by the national regime. Al-Hirak operated through peaceful protests, with only a few violent incidents, mainly in al-Dhali', occurring as a response to government repression. The goals of the movement's members cover a wide spectrum, from merely seeking reassurances for Southern autonomy under the IRG to full independence. The Southern Transitional Council (STC) (*al-Majlis al-Intiqali al-Janubi*), which claims to speak for all Southerners, was established in 2017; its military takeover of Aden in summer 2019 represents another peak in the conflict.

With the Ansar Allah-Salih incursion into the governorate in February 2015, the peaceful Southern Movement became a major component of the armed Southern Popular Resistance (*al-Maqawama al-Sha'abiya*). The Resistance found itself not only defending the city from attacks from the north, but also from local security institutions, built under President Salih to assert control over the city. Most local security institutions remained pro-Salih and joined the invading forces from the north. With the support of UAE troops, the Resistance expelled the Ansar Allah-Salih forces from the city in June 2015. Local pro-Salih institutions, such as the Central Security Forces (now, the Special Security Forces) collapsed. Troops either left Aden along with the Ansar Allah-Salih coalition or abandoned their posts to join the armed Popular Resistance (Saleh & al-Sharjabi 2019; al-Jazeera 29.03.2015). After the defeat of the Ansar Allah-Salih coalition, forces associated with the Southern Popular Resistance filled the local security vacuum created by the collapse of the security institutions (bin Othman & Transfeld 2020). After Aden

Map of Security Actors' Control in Aden, December 2020



and its institutions officially came under the control of the IRG, the IRG recruited members of the Popular Resistance into the newly established institutions. Consequently, the Southern Movement was able to usurp power from within and gradually strip the IRG of its position in the interim capital of Aden and the surrounding governorates (Saleh & al-Sharjabi 2019; Transfeld & al-Sharjabi 2020). Gradually, between 2016 and today, the re-establishment of the security institutions, with the assistance of the UAE, has resulted in a security sector in Aden that is decentralized through local institutions aligned with the STC, rather than the IRG. Today, the most relevant security forces in Aden are the Security Belt (*al-Hizam al-'Amni*) and the Support & Backup Brigades, both loyal to the STC but created by non-STC actors. The Security Belt was created in March 2016 by the UAE to secure Aden after Ansar Allah-Salih troops were expelled from Aden. The Support & Backup Brigades were established per presidential decree in May 2016 (Aden Time 05.10.016). The Support & Backup Brigades are nominally under the MoD, and the Security Belt was nominally integrated by the IRG into the MoI security structure. On their shared internet website, however, both the Security Belt and the Support & Backup Brigades present themselves as one institution.

After declaring self-rule in August 2019, the STC became the de-facto government of Aden. Formed in May 2017, the STC sees itself as a proto-government for a future, independent South. The STC is headed by Aydarus al-Zubaydi, a military leader and former Aden governor (2015–2017). Most members of the STC hail from the more radical spectrum of al-Hirak, demanding complete independence of the South within the pre-1990 borders. In October 2018, the STC attempted to seize Aden from the IRG, but mediation by Saudi Arabia prevented this. In August/September 2019, the STC once again clashed with the IRG over control of Aden. This confrontation was sparked by the assassination of Munir al-Yafi'i, commonly known as Abu Yamama, the head of the STC-affiliated and UAE-sponsored Support & Backup Brigades. Following these clashes, the STC expelled the IRG from Aden city, and took control over surrounding areas. This advance was possible because the STC already had considerable influence within the security and military institutions in Aden, a consequence of the previous IRG recruitment of Southern Movement members into these institutions. The Riyadh Agreement, signed in November 2019 and resulting from the Saudi Arabian mediation between the IRG and the STC, was designed to bring the two sides together and allow the IRG back into their interim capital of Aden. The agreement, however, was only reluctantly implemented by the STC and the IRG. The addition of STC-affiliated troops to the Saudi-financed IRG wage bill was viewed as one of the agreement's better achievements (Aden al-Ghad 18.07.2020), but this was not enough to unify the two sides. It was only after nearly a year of continued hostilities and empty promises that the STC and the IRG, as part of the Riyadh Agreement, formed a new national government, in December 2020. The formation of the government and the agreements made to end hostilities between the STC and IRG occurred only after tremendous

pressure by the Saudis. In contrast to appearances, however, the two sides have not reached a genuine agreement. Divisions persist in Aden. In reality, the STC continues to try to use the agreement to tighten its grip on its security forces and the southern governorates, while the IRG continues to try to place its own loyalists in strategic positions.

## Current State of the Aden Security Committee

The Security Committee in Aden, first recorded by media in 2007, was founded under then-President ‘Ali ‘Abdallah Salih. Between 2015 and July 2020, the Committee did not function, due to the political divisions affecting the city’s security institutions, and it remains questionable if the currently operating Security Committee is acting in the interest of the IRG-headed state. In mid-2017, after the STC had been established, those security institutions loyal to the STC splintered off and met informally as a quasi-Security Committee under the STC. Because this constituted the most important security agencies in Aden, in this period, the IRG was left with an ineffective Security Committee, which had no real influence and met only as a show of legitimacy, to counter an ever-stronger STC. For example, in June 2017, just after the establishment of the STC, a Committee meeting took place. It was headed by Prime Minister Ahmad ‘Ubayd bin Daghr and attended by formal Security Committee members, as well as a surprisingly large number of ministers unrelated to the security sector.<sup>1</sup> Only after the appointment of STC Secretary General Ahmad Hamid Lamlas as governor of Aden in July 2020 did the Security Committee meetings resume in a formal capacity. However, the meetings remain under STC influence.

Already in 2016, before the STC was established, statements made by IRG officers regarding the state of the Security Committee indicate that the Committee was not functioning properly. In 2016, an IRG commander expressed his wish, in an interview published in the Yemeni press, to coordinate with the Security Belt through the Security Committee. He added that this formal mechanism was no longer functioning, however, and that “informal” armies had already taken up positions without government coordination (Huna Adan 23.05.2016). YPC interviews conducted with security officials in 2018 likewise confirmed the absence of any coordination amongst security forces, IRG brigades, and forces associated with the STC (Saleh & al-Sharjabi 2019). Interviewed civil society figures also stated that the original Committee was no longer functional, adding that the governorate-level Security Department deals directly with the Security Belt.

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<sup>1</sup> This meeting was the last attended by the head of the Security Belt (Tahdeeth 20.06.2017) before the Security Belt pledged loyalty to the STC. In October 2017, another meeting took place under the prime minister, but the heads of both the Security Belt and Aden police, now loyal to the STC, were absent.

The shift of loyalty towards the STC among Adeni security institutions was the consequence of the growing weakness of the IRG and because the IRG had to increasingly rely on the Southern Movement for local legitimacy and to ensure continued support from the UAE. Initially, President Hadi had depended on members of the Islah Party that were part of the IRG but recognized in the Aden community for their involvement in the Popular Resistance. Hadi, who had fled to Saudi Arabia and left Aden to battle the Ansar Allah-Salih incursion on its own, needed local legitimacy. At the same time, the IRG was trying to rebuild its institutional capacity on the ground. After UAE troops pushed out Ansar Allah-Salih forces in June 2015, Hadi was increasingly forced to accommodate the interests of the UAE, now a main player in the conflict. The UAE was reluctant to support Islah components in the IRG, as the UAE considers the Islah Party a terrorist organization due to its significant Muslim Brotherhood component. Instead, the UAE selected Southern Movement members as partners on the ground, building on their local legitimacy (Ardemagni 2016). This alliance ultimately led to the strengthening of the Southern Movement's presence within IRG institutions (Saleh & al-Sharjabi 2019). Al-Zubaydi, a military leader of the Southern Popular Resistance, was appointed as governor of Aden by Hadi at the end of 2015. Al-Zubaydi was the first UAE-backed figure appointed as the governor. Shortly after, Hadi appointed Shallal 'Ali Shay', also a Southern Movement figure supported by the UAE, as the chief of police. The influence of the Southern Movement also extended deep into the rank and file of the security institutions. For instance, in its efforts to rebuild the security sector in Aden, the MoI announced the integration of 4,000 Southern Popular Resistance troops into the IRG army. The plan was to integrate all Resistance forces, but due to limited government resources the process was never completed.

The UAE, which was present in Aden with a limited number of its own troops, also engaged in security sector reform, and in February 2016 announced training and equipment aid for the Aden police (Emarat al-Youm 27.02.2016). Soon enough, however, the UAE aid was channeled to the Security Belt, which operated under al-Zubaydi but outside of formal state hierarchies (Abdul-Ahad 21.12.2018; Yemen Press 10.04.2016). According to interviews with heads of district police stations, Popular Resistance troops were integrated into the Security Belt and the local police. In the second half of 2016, in the face of increased influence of the Southern Popular Resistance and Southern Movement on the security institutions, Hadi tried to regain control over the security sector by announcing that the Security Committee would integrate the Security Belt into the hierarchy of the Aden Security Department (al-Mashhad al-Yemeni 24.07.2016; Almasdar Online 24.07.2016). At the same time, Hadi also announced the move of the Central Bank from Sana'a to Aden, in order to both weaken Ansar Allah and to regain control over security institutions with payment of overdue salaries. President Hadi had so little control over security institutions that Governor al-Zubaydi even held a

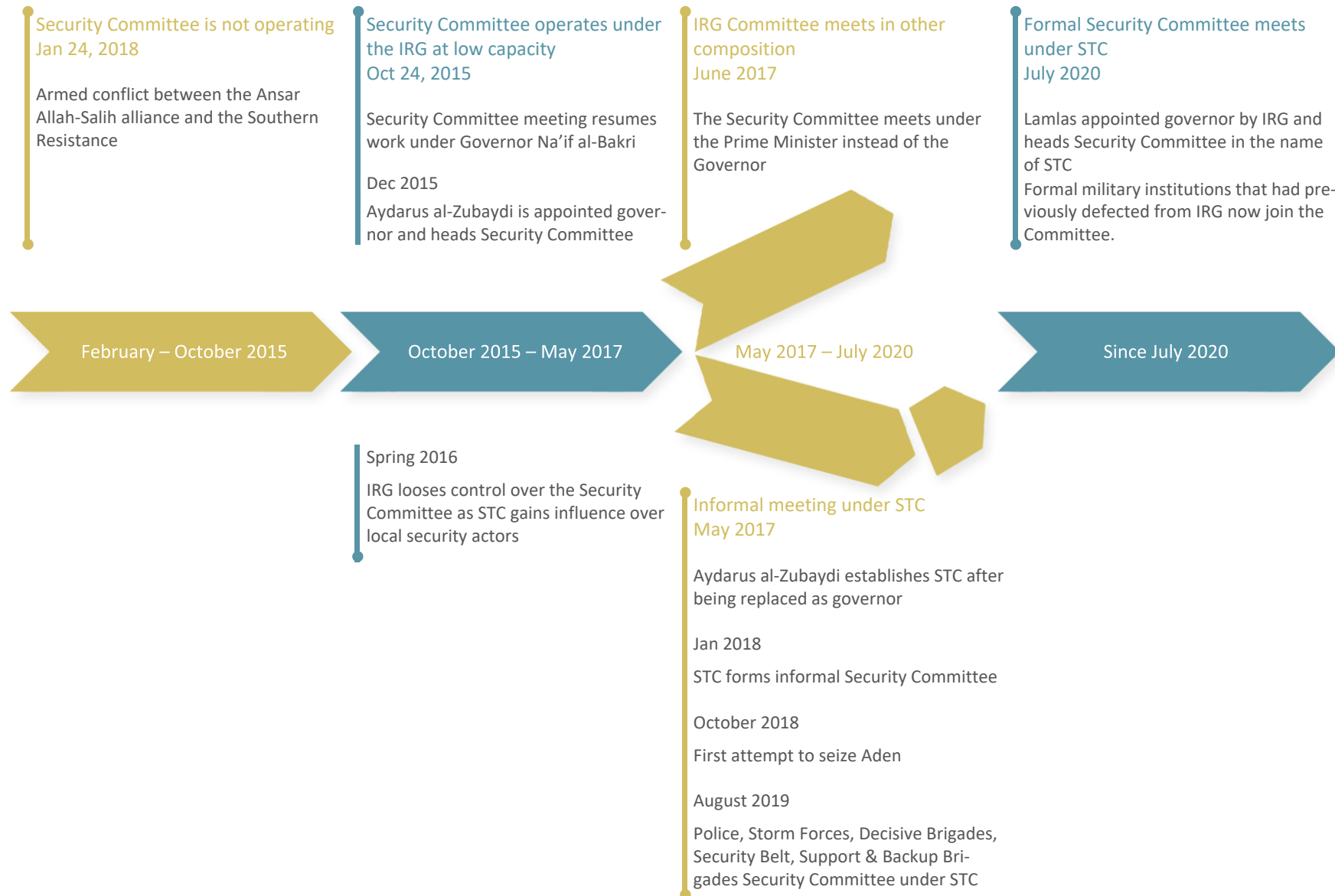
Security Committee meeting at his private house (Akhbar al-Yawm 16.01.2017). In a push for more centralized power, Hadi sacked al-Zubaydi, for what Hadi described as al-Zubaydi's alignment with the UAE occupying forces in the South. After al-Zubaydi lost his formal position, Police Chief Shallal informally assumed the role of governor within the framework of the Security Committee. Essentially, security agencies loyal to the STC boycotted the original Security Committee, while meeting informally under the STC. In May 2017, the STC was formed. It controlled local police forces through Police Chief Shallal, commanded the Security Belt, and developed a popular political platform. The fact that Aden was already divided into eight districts, each with its own district director and security department, facilitated this diversion from central authority to the local level. By 2019, the 4th Division, nominally an IRG military institution, and the Special Security Forces, had also aligned with the STC.

In July 2020, Hadi appointed the STC Secretary General Ahmed Hamed Lamlas governor of Aden. The IRG hoped that by granting political power over Aden to the STC through the appointment of Lamlas, the STC would be more likely to hand control over the police back to the IRG after the appointment of a new police chief. The outcome was quite the opposite. The STC took control of both local security and the Local Authority. While the police chief, Brigadier General Ahmad al-Hamidi, is IRG-affiliated, members of the Aden police prevented him from taking on his role since his appointment on 29 July 2020. However, after Mutahar al-Shu'aybi was named police chief in December 2020, Shallal returned to Yemen and appeared to hand over his post. It is likely that Shallal allowed al-Shu'aybi to assume the position of police chief because al-Shu'aybi originates from the same district of al-Dhali' as Shallal and many other STC leaders. Al-Shu'aybi is reportedly also an associate of Tariq Salih, a nephew of former President Salih and the UAE-supported commander of the Republican Forces positioned in al-Khawkhah by the Red Sea (al-Janub al-Yawm 30.12.2020). The STC will try to retain its control over the Security Department. In the Security Committee meeting of 10 January 2021, al-Shu'aybi assumed his official role as police chief. Because the governor is the one who chairs Security Committee meetings, the informal meetings were now formalized, but remained under the STC. With STC-affiliated Governor Lamlas in charge of the Local Authority, and Aden police loyal to the STC, the STC has further widened its grip on Aden, as compared to the summer of 2020. Under Governor Lamlas, the STC has invited formal security institutions, those that had not supported the IRG during the STC takeover, to join Security Committee meetings. Formal STC-led Security Committee meetings are now held regularly, with heads of the 4th Division, Special Forces and the military police participating.



### Timeline of the Aden Security Committee

This graph presents information shared with YPC in interviews in 2020.



## The Legal Framework: Institutional History, Laws, and Functions

The Security Committee is not well established in the conscience of security officials in the city. Because of the complex institutional landscape of security actors in Aden, it is not surprising that security officials interviewed by YPC had no knowledge of when, or even if, a Security Committee was originally established. Some of the security officials vaguely dated the establishment of the Committee to pre-2011; others had no recollection of its establishment. Given that most security institutions had collapsed in the context of the Ansar Allah-Salih incursion, and later re-established in June 2015, there is no medium-term institutional continuity in the Aden security sector. Although these re-established institutions retain their original purpose, the leadership and the rank-and-file members were all newly recruited by Hadi after 2015. Thus, many security officials simply do not know of the institutional set up of the Security Committee. Additionally, the institutions of the IRG-led state are also not viewed as particularly legitimate in the eyes of STC-affiliates.

Historically, the Security Committee in Aden, just as in the other governorates, has its roots in the Presidency of 'Ali 'Abdallah Salih. The STC, as part of the Southern Movement, emerged in opposition to the Northern-dominated national government and its state institutions; thus, they were not keen to participate in meetings of the IRG-controlled Security Committee. Although the STC had recognized the IRG as the government of Yemen, the STC nevertheless kept pursuing its long-term goal to re-establish an independent state in the South. Members of the Southern Movement, and later the STC, accepted appointments to IRG institutions to gain access to state positions and resources. Gradually, the STC used its access to shift the loyalty of the institutions to their party. Participation in meetings of the formal Security Committee would have forced STC-controlled institutions to coordinate with IRG institutions. This could have brought about a loss of autonomy for the STC and submission to the IRG, contradicting the STC core objective to establish an independent Southern state.

The legal framework of the Aden Security Committee on a normative level, as is the case for the other governorates in this report, is vague. There was no respective agreement amongst interviewees. Yet, almost all interviews conducted in Aden with district police heads and civic figures credited presidential decrees or the LAL as being the Security Committee's legal basis. Civic figures also referenced the "powers of the president of the republic", as well as MoD or MoI laws, as regulating the Security Committee. Given that district security officials were not part of the original Security Committee when it was functioning, it is not surprising that they had no idea of its legal framework. Similar to other governorates, Aden civic figures claimed that the hierarchy and chain of command in the Committee itself is structured in accordance with the LAL, and explained that the Committee's

actions are further regulated according to the laws governing the various security and military institutions that make up the Committee's member agencies.

As confirmed by district police heads and civic figures, the Security Committee has an administrative function and aims to coordinate security institutions. The actual day-to-day coordination takes place through the Joint Operations Room at the governorate-level Security Department. Sponsored by the Arab Coalition, the Operations Room was established in 2019 after the death of Abu Yamama (Crater 08.05.2019). Nominally, the Operations Room operates under the MoI; but given its location at the Security Department, the STC is the de facto authority. The Operations Room deals with coordination and dissemination of instructions. Specifically, the duty officer of the Operations Room is the primary point of contact at the Security Department. As revealed in the interviews, when police stations cannot deal with a challenging security task, they generally contact the Operations Room for assistance. Thus, it is not surprising that heads of police stations are oblivious to the Security Committee's coordination function, given that the police heads communicate with the Operations Room.

## Hierarchy, Composition, and Structure

A few months after the establishment of the STC was announced in April 2017, the meetings of the governorate-level formal Security Committee nearly came to a halt. When the Committee did meet, headed by the prime minister and attended by representatives of the Saudi-led military coalition, it was mainly to demonstrate its legitimacy. Between 2017 and the appointment of Governor Lamlas in mid-2020, an alternative Security Committee, under the STC, emulated the original Security Committee, using a similar structure and composition. The police, the Security Belt, the Support & Backup Brigades, the Storm Forces (*al-Asifa*) and the Decisive Brigades (*al-Hazm*) met under Police Chief Shallal in informal meetings – without the presence of the IRG governor, IRG militaries, or intelligence agencies. Thus, only institutions loyal to the STC met and implemented the functions of the Security Committee (Al-Ayyam 21.08.2019). One significant difference, compared to the original Committee, is that these informal meetings included district police and security zone heads.

Whether an agency can participate in these meetings is determined by the appointment of individuals to head security agencies, just as participation is in the formal Security Committee. With the shift of authority from the IRG to the STC, the STC now determines participation in the Committee through the governor, who is the head of the Security Committee and the Secretary General of the STC. While current military leaders were appointed by the IRG, they remain in place today due to their support of the STC. Unlike the original Security Committee, which is subjugated to the national-level Supreme Security Committee, the informal Security

Committee meetings operate under the STC rather than the IRG Supreme Committee. While the original governorate-level Security Committee traditionally has had a relatively high level of autonomy in relations with its national-level institutions, this is not the case for the informal Committee, in which the STC is in complete control, and the highest authority.

The informal Committee's functions are the same as those of the original Security Committee: to coordinate between security institutions, implement and review governorate-level security plans, and deal with all potential crisis situations. Topics discussed in the informal Committee meetings include general security coordination plans, and review of past implementation of plans and security campaigns. The Committee also meets to deal with emergencies and critical situations, such as Covid-19 measures or flooding. Other frequent meeting topics include arms control, terrorism, war front updates, security of entry points to the city, smuggling, and illegal construction, motorcycle bans, and discipline of members. The informal Committee also discusses how to suppress media campaigns that the Committee considers a threat to peace and security in the city. The STC defines the priorities and goals of the Committee, while the chief of police sets the meeting agenda, usually based on the current security situation in the governorate. According to one attending agency head of the informal Committee, neither a formalized structure nor regular meetings exist, with security actors only invited according to need. Since August 2020, however, the number and regularity of the Committee meetings has increased significantly.

In contrast to the original Security Committee, there is no media record of external individuals that attend the informal meetings. Although sub-committees were frequent under the original Security Committee, they are not common under the informal Committee. The only sub-committee mentioned by an interviewee was one formed to address flooding in Aden. Presidential committees, formed by the president, are common in other governorates where the authority of the IRG is unchallenged, but not in Aden. This lack of presidential committees in Aden is not surprising, given the contentious relationship between the IRG and the STC.

District-level Security Committees, however, are well established, and have been functioning uninterrupted, despite the political tensions in the interim capital. All interviewed district heads explained that they have regular meetings. The district Committees, described as branches of the governorate-level Security Committee, are headed by either the district director or the head of the district council. Members include heads of the district police, the police stations, the police zones, and criminal investigation. Interestingly enough, as described by a member of the district-level Committee, district security directors are "prohibited" from direct contact with the governor, with the head of the district council being the contact point. This may have been due to the previous governor's affiliation to the IRG; however, it is unclear whether this is still the practice under current Governor Lamlas. Unlike

the informal Committee in Aden, within the framework of the district Committees, participation of external representatives from institutions unrelated to the security sector is common, such as representatives from the government health office.

The district Security Committee members described receiving their mission from various sources. Depending on the district, these sources include the governorate-level Security Department, the head of the local district, and other members of the Committee (police station heads). According to the interviewees, priorities are defined exclusively by the heads of district police and local councils, which attests to decentralization on the district level. When interviewed, district security directors explained that authority, oversight, and evaluation within the district are per the district heads. Although district police members described being formally under the MoI, our interviews revealed that there is no actual communication with the MoI. Instructions are also disseminated through bureaucratic reports, phone, the Joint Operations Room, or personally from the police chief or his deputy.

## Implementation and Communication

Although the informal Security Committee meets to discuss security plans, actual implementation of these plans depends on its member agencies. All the security member agencies meet in the informal Committee meetings under the chief of police and coordinate with each other through the governorate-level Security Department, specifically the Joint Operations Room. Each implementing agency has its specific responsibilities in carrying out the Committee's strategic plans. Given the lack of experience, training, and specialization of the member agencies, and even the complete absence of some specialized types of institutions such as intelligence agencies, large gaps exist in the capacities of the STC-run Security Committee. In fact, in the absence of the Political Security Organization (PSO) and National Security Agency (NSA) in Aden, police have also taken on intelligence functions. Similar to other governorates, the police are responsible for crime prevention and investigation. Heads of police stations explained that their areas of jurisdiction are sub-divided into blocks, with teams in each block collecting intelligence in that specific zone. This information is communicated up the chain of command to the district police stations, and then on to the governorate-level Security Department. At the same time, the Security Department shares intelligence downward to the district level. The MoI would traditionally be part of this process, but the political divisions between local and national government have eliminated such coordination.

In absence of the Facilities Protection Brigades from the committee,<sup>2</sup> the Storm Forces under the STC are responsible for securing state institutions (al-Watan al-Adaniya 26.04.2020). Traffic police are responsible for checkpoints and road security, while the military police are responsible for discipline within the troops. The 4<sup>th</sup> Division manages the war fronts. The Special Forces are officially responsible for securing state institutions, but currently they are active at the frontlines outside Aden.

The STC came into command of the Security Belt after the UAE withdrew in summer of 2019. The police chief of Aden has nominal command over these forces through the Joint Operations Room in the headquarters of the governorate-level Security Department. Even though these military formations are coordinated through the Joint Operations Room under the STC, they have often clashed, such as happened between the Security Belt and the Storm Forces (al-Araby al-Jadeed 06.06.2020). Other military formations have joined the STC only recently, after it became apparent that the STC would hold the upper hand. These include the Special Forces and the 4<sup>th</sup> Military Division.

The governorate-level Security Department coordinates with STC forces and tasks them to assist district level police. About half of the police station heads interviewed rated their relationships with STC forces as good and as providing helpful support. Others, however, described instances of direct interference in police affairs and stated that the Joint Operations Room is often required to defuse tensions. The Joint Operations Room, located in the governorate-level Security Department, acts as a hub for information, directives and coordination between the STC, police and informal actors. As in other governorates, implementation tools of the informal Security Committee include security campaigns led by the local police and supported by various Committee members, such as the Security Belt or the Support & Backup Brigades. One example of such a security campaign implemented by the STC Security Committee is the October 2020 campaign to remove unsanctioned roadblocks and unnecessary checkpoints in all districts (Aden Time 11.10.2020).

## Capacity of Implementing Agencies

The Security Department is key to the implementation of security plans drafted by the informal Security Committee. The governorate-level Security Department, which functions as the central police headquarters, is the most influential security institution in Aden and the STC's main tool for security governance. The police

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<sup>2</sup> Although the Facilities Protection Brigades were considered neutral and should have taken over facility protection under the Riyadh agreement, today, they are pro-STC but remain of questionable loyalty. This is because the force was originally established by Hadi's son and was supported by Saudi Arabia at that time.



in Aden are generally viewed as a legitimate security provider by the community, although their capacity is perceived to be low. In regional comparison with Lahij and Shabwa, however, the Aden police may be the more developed institution due to their large number of staff (645); their better equipment (including computers and vehicles); and their recruitment of women (Transfeld, Muqbil, bin Othman & Noman 2020). However, the capacity of Aden police remains limited in many areas, such as facilities, equipment and specialized knowledge in investigation, laws and general police work.

As explained by local CSOs and district police interviewed for this paper, the district police lack capacity. District security officers confirmed that most of the district-level police are new recruits with no previous experience, and so lack a general understanding of police work. There is need for training on a wide scale. Interviewed civic figures named the district police as the most effective security provider in case armed forces were to withdraw. Under the Riyadh Agreement, the police are to eventually take over local security; however, this may not be feasible due to the resource gap. While civic figures stated that the district police lack in overall competence, they are still viewed as effective because of their access to communities. Yet, other civic figures did not find any institution in Aden capable of providing effective security. Interviewees were divided on whether more support should be given to the governorate-level police; some stated significant doubt whether any amount of support would be sufficient to reach the needed capacity. Some interviewees completely rejected the idea of relying on the police alone for security; others explained it was possible, but that police needed more qualified personnel, training, equipment and general strengthening of the rule of law throughout the area.

District police stations are well integrated into communities. They learn about security concerns through reports from the governorate-level Security Department, intelligence gathered by members of the police, investigations, neighborhood *'aqils*, and complaints from the community itself. The police are also well established in social media. Facebook is used to issue press releases, announcements and provide a glimpse of the work that the police carry out. Currently, the Facebook page of the police has roughly 56,000 followers,<sup>3</sup> although communication is often one sided. STC forces, such as the Security Belt, obtain their intelligence in the same fashion. Intelligence gathered by the governorate-level Security Department is shared with STC forces through the informal Security Committee and the Joint Operations Room. Essentially, due to the absence of IRG-affiliated institutions for political and national security, intelligence gathering functions are now embedded within each STC-affiliated institution, with intelligence shared through the Joint Operations Room.

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3 'Aden police' Facebook page: <https://www.facebook.com/Police.Aden/> (accessed 07.03.2021).

## Oversight Mechanisms

Much as Security Committees in other governorates, the STC-run Security Committee has no means for real oversight over its member agencies. Each member agency evaluates its own institution and reports to the Committee. According to interviewees, the Security Department can deal with illegal behavior and noncompliance of police through disciplinary sanctions, including investigations, warnings, transfers, dismissals, arrests, or imprisonment. Although these mechanisms exist, they do not seem to be effective; also, in some instances, they are used as a political tool rather than a means of oversight and accountability.

Whether other STC forces have oversight mechanisms is unclear. However, at least in theory, misconduct of any security force is reported through the district police to the Joint Operations Room, which in turn reports it to the Security Committee. But given the low capacities of the police themselves, this type of oversight is unlikely to be very effective. Independent civilian oversight mechanisms do not currently exist in Aden, but the strong presence of security institutions in social media have opened the door to community criticism. Local media has also scrutinized police behavior, such as a recent article that highlighted police refusal to arrest an individual despite an order issued by the public prosecution (Al-Ayyam 20.09.2020).

## Performance Legitimacy: Achievements and Failures

Both Security Committees in Aden, the one that was under the IRG as well as the Security Committee that operates under the STC, have limited legitimacy. The original Security Committee is widely understood not to have been active since the war began in 2015. Before the popular uprisings of 2011, as well as throughout the events of 2011, the Committee was composed of pro-Salih security institutions and actively enforced bans on protests. Even in the transitional phase in 2012 and 2013, the Security Committee supported the military in its suppression of the protests, which caused civilian deaths, riots, and blockage of major roads in al-Mu'alla and al-Mansura for over a year. Given that, even then, Aden was a focus of the Southern Movement, these repressive policies may well have damaged the local reputations of these pro-Salih institutions for the long term.

Many security leaders and civil society in Aden did not view the meetings of the security agencies under the STC as those of a proper Security Committee. Although the meetings of the Security Committee under the STC are attended by many officials, such as district directors and civic figures, the local population does not recognize the STC-affiliated Committee as a formal Security Committee, both due to its informality and low capacity. An apparent failure of the current Committee is the inconsistency in structure, irregularity of meetings, and its internal political

divisions. Whether the Security Committee meetings under Lamlas will be viewed as legitimate could not be determined as the data collection for this paper was completed before the Security Committee resumed formal meetings.

## Conclusion

The Aden Security Committee, with its current capacity, may be able to play a constructive role in a transitional security arrangement, if it is recognized that the security institutions in the city are dominated by the STC. Even after the formation of the new government in December 2020 and the appointment of a new police chief in January 2021, the power balance in Aden has not shifted significantly enough as to grant IRG sufficient influence over security institutions and with that the Security Committee. Although the Committee now operates within the realm of the formal, it still represents the security interests of the STC. Because of the overwhelming influence of the STC within the security institutions, the Committee could not function as a vehicle to heal divisions between the STC and the IRG.

The fact that the meetings of the Security Committee continued in an informal capacity under the STC demonstrates the importance of the Committee for coordinating between security agencies. But it also demonstrates that the Committee functions according to the political interests of its members. If the two sides were brought together under the Security Committee, it is likely that the Committee would be unable to function and would cease meeting, as was the case in the early years after the war. The failure of both the STC and the IRG to implement the Riyadh Agreement indicates that political divisions are too significant to be overcome within the Security Committee.

Civic figures, highlighting these political divides, stressed the need for representation of all sides. However, the current local government is completely controlled by the STC. While this dominance of a single party undermines the IRG's legitimacy, furthering state fragmentation, it does allow unobstructed decision-making within the Security Committee.

## Security Committees and Political Stabilization

■ Mareike Transfeld and Marie-Christine Heinze

Ten years after the transfer of power from President ‘Ali ‘Abdallah Salih to transitional President ‘Abd Rabbuh Mansur Hadi, the state and its security sector have disintegrated into a complex institutional landscape. Attempts at the reform of an overly personalized security sector in the context of the 2012–2014 transitional period, rather than overcoming a two-way split, have further divided institutions leading to a loss of central control. With the takeover of the capital Sana‘a by Ansar Allah in September 2014, not only did the already porous boundary between state and non-state actors now completely crumble, but national-level politics suddenly became void, with old elites fleeing the country, national institutions falling under the control of Ansar Allah or becoming impaired, and the territory becoming increasingly divided. The study of Security Committees in the governorates of Ta‘iz, al-Hudayda and Aden demonstrates the state of security institutions at the local level, and the way the processes of state disintegration are reflected in governorate and district-level institutions. As the papers in this volume demonstrate, local security governance institutions with functioning procedures exist even in governorates with significant political fragmentation, albeit with varying degrees of functionality, capacity and legitimacy. State fragmentation has shaped three different trajectories in the three governorates. In Ta‘iz, one political group came to dominate the institutions, while political divisions are relatively minor, and the Security Committee functions most effectively. Al-Hudayda provides not only an example of parallel institutions, but with Ansar Allah in control of the original Security Committee, the governorate is also an example of a Security Committee that was newly established by the IRG from the ground up. Aden presents an example of a Security Committee that was captured by a political group within the state, with the IRG having gradually lost control.

Security Committees have a constructive role to play. Despite apparent weaknesses in terms of resources and lack of experience/knowledge, with their current functions, governorate-level Security Committees theoretically have a number of tools available to contribute to community safety at the local level and to effectively engage with mediation or stabilization efforts at the governorate level. Security Committees are the most suitable state addressees for civil and independent oversight and accountability initiatives, and an ideal forum for community interests to

impact on local security policy. Governorate-level Security Committees could also play a constructive role in long-term stabilization within the framework of transitional security arrangements. When considering the potential roles of local security governance institutions in transitional security arrangements or stabilization efforts at the local level – for example during a negotiated nationwide ceasefire – two factors need to be considered. Firstly, the local variances of the Committees need to be taken into account. Rather than following a one-size-fits-all solution, therefore, approaches need to build flexibly on the current local realities, aiming to uphold existing state structures wherever possible while addressing their specific localized challenges or shortcomings through a variety of different measures. Secondly, the precise role and setup of Security Committees in transitional security arrangements depends on the provisions of the agreement preceding the transitional period. Any agreement on the distribution of power and access to the state is difficult because in all areas of Yemen political actors have access to the state, be it because they have taken it over through violence as in the case of Ansar Allah, because they have always had access to it as is the case for certain actors affiliated with the IRG, or because they have been integrated into state institutions in an attempt to build a ‘National Army’.

## Functions and Composition of Security Committees

Governorate-level Security Committees are forums for the local authority (in the form of the Governor) to discuss emergency or complex security issues with the heads of security and military agencies that are present in the governorate. The Governor together with the Committee discuss and agree on policies, planning their implementation through coordinated collaborative responses. The coordinating function of the Security Committees in bringing together the heads of the various security agencies in the governorate is an important feature that ought to be maintained and strengthened where possible. With the Committees’ capacity to meet in both a simple and expanded form, invite external experts to meetings, form sub-committees, coordinate security campaigns, and review implementation, Security Committees are, even without the need for reform, well placed to contribute to local stabilization efforts. These tools have been commonly employed in Ta’iz and Ansar Allah-controlled al-Hudayda, where the current Committees function closest to how we believe the Committees functioned previous to the conflict. Although these functions could be enhanced through additional training, they already allow Security Committees to address a wide variety of security issues in a flexible manner. In its simple form, the Committee can address security issues that are under the mandate of the police institutions, for example the enforcement of COVID-19 combatting measures. An expanded form adds military capabilities to the committees, allowing them to, for example, play a role in mediation or de-escalation at frontlines. The option to invite external experts integrates a consultative function

into the structure of the Security Committees, which allows specialized knowledge to influence the decision-making process. The formation of sub-committees allows the Committee to address specific, localized security issues, which may need sustained attention, and makes it possible to involve all those individuals who have the influence to resolve the matter. Most importantly, sub-committees can also be set up to resolve tensions between security agencies who are members of the Security Committee. Such a sub-committee – if composed of the relevant actors – can play a coordinating and mediating role in the implementation of a ceasefire or for ensuring humanitarian access. Security campaigns on the other hand, are implemented by multiple security agencies in a coordinated manner and are a tool Committees can employ to enforce directives in public spaces or combat widespread security issues. Finally, through its review processes, the Security Committee can determine weaknesses and resource shortages of security agencies.

The selection of sub-committee members is – according to common practice in Ta'iz and al-Hudayda – very much shaped by the details of the issue to be addressed. Depending on the task at hand, sub-committees can be either technical or political. While technical sub-committees may hold valuable experience and technical knowledge, political committees are bound to be more influential, given that high-ranking security and military officers who hold sway over troops and security forces could be included. Functionality can only be achieved if the membership of all relevant security actors in the governorate is on an equal level. This was demonstrated by the differentiation between 'formal' and 'informal' members in the IRG-controlled Security Committee in al-Hudayda.

Beyond the relevant local stakeholders, membership may also comprise the inclusion of advisors / technical experts from outside the region for the purpose of future efforts to stabilize an area. Where the task is the facilitation of humanitarian access, for example, including a liaison from among the humanitarian agencies may be beneficial in order to receive technical input on the operative side of humanitarian interventions. Where the task is to implement a negotiated ceasefire as part of a broader UN-led process, for example, the inclusion of a UN representative to provide technical advice on the broader ceasefire process may be considered. If the inclusion of additional stakeholders is agreed upon, their role, function and powers need to be further defined. Also, parties will have to agree on a person they consider impartial, who can chair the body.

The Security Committee's reporting and assessment role can be used to assess the implementation of a ceasefire, for instance. The Committee collects reports on the behavior of its member agencies and regularly assesses their status. Through the Joint Operations Room, member agencies of the Security Committee can be coordinated and cooperation enhanced. These processes appear to be functioning well in Ta'iz, given the political will and unity of the member agencies. Redeployments of formal and informal groups, as well as measures against member agencies that



have committed violations of the ceasefire agreement, can be taken through the Committee. The Security Committee in Aden could make use of existing oversight mechanisms within some of the security institutions such as the Security Belt or the police. Likewise, the Committee can make use of the Security Department's capacity to discipline illegal behavior and noncompliance through disciplinary sanctions. However, the institutions require training to enhance these mechanisms and ensure they contribute to transparency and accountability and are not used as political tools.

While its form theoretically allows a Security Committee to respond to and handle a wide variety of security incidents, including the implementation of local authority policies, de-escalation at frontlines, re-deployment and withdrawal of troops, mediation, implementation of ceasefires in its territory or negotiating humanitarian access, whether or not it actually engages or meets success actually depends on political considerations. The composition of the Committees necessarily varies from one region to another, depending on the political realities in the respective governorates. The Security Committees are not strictly technical but instead are dominated by the political groups that control the security institutions in the respective areas, and this circumstance influences how effective Committees can be. Members of the Ta'iz Security Committee stressed in interviews that it was their unity and shared interest in the security of Ta'iz that was responsible for their successes. The current political composition of the Committees allows them to act effectively with regards to local level initiatives, given that their membership is rooted in a presence on the ground. An exception to this may be the IRG-affiliated Security Committee in al-Hudayda. In theory, the TPR and the Giants are represented in the Security Committee through their subsumption under the Republican Forces. Given the tension between the groups, this may not be an effective measure for inclusion. Especially the TPR hold local legitimacy, thus the effectiveness of the Security Committee there may be enhanced if these forces were included as equal actors in decision-making processes.

## **Bringing Civil Society In: Improving Agenda-Setting, Responsiveness & Oversight**

Past YPC research has shown that the majority of Yemenis want the police to be responsible for security in their area. However, they at the same time want the participation of civic and social actors (YPC August 2019). All interviewed security officials agreed that a combination of military, political and social actors should be involved in stabilization efforts. With regards to the monitoring of a ceasefire, for example, civic figures stressed the need for non-partisan, qualified and professional security and military staff, next to civil society involvement. Similarly, civic figures stated that negotiation of road opening and of humanitarian access

is best done by civil society, independent political and social figures, academics, parliament members or local mediators, rather than the Security Committee. Civic figures argued that the International Red Cross can mediate road openings, while others named *shaykhs* or the Security Department as having the capacity to mediate conflicts.

Inclusion and coordination can ensure that Security Committees take up tasks they wouldn't have otherwise. Integrating and/or coordinating with further (non-)security actors from the area is certainly also the foundation of performance as well as local legitimacy. While the inclusion of and coordination with security actors is a given, the involvement of civilian stakeholders of different backgrounds needs to be advocated for. As described above, the Security Committees have an integrated consultative mechanism. YPC research has shown that it is common practice to flexibly involve civilian stakeholders in Security Committee (or sub-committee) meetings when their knowledge and networks make this necessary in order to achieve a certain objective. This mechanism, along with the option to form sub-committees, should be used more systematically for agenda-setting and for a more collaborative approach to decision-making and policy design. The influence of civil society, the private sector and experts on policies implemented by the Security Committee is limited. Especially against the backdrop of the extremely limited understanding security officials have of women's security concerns, these actors should not only play a role in shaping the approach to policy implementation but they should also play a role in the decisions on which issues the Security Committee discusses and tackles. A sub-committee composed of civil society actors, the private sector and experts could be tasked with conducting studies and assessments and informing the Security Committees about security issues that might not be in their focus, including those related to women, youth, marginalized groups, or the environment. At the same time, the Security Committee should enhance its communication efforts and develop a communication strategy that speaks directly to the community as its central audience, to ensure the community is informed about the measures the Committee is taking.

A permanent inclusion of such actors as well as further civil society representatives in such bodies might, however, be counterproductive given that membership in Security Committees is determined by institutional mechanisms. At the same time, when it comes to oversight and accountability, civilian stakeholders do require a certain distance from security bodies of any kind in order to continue to be perceived as impartial and retain their own legitimacy. As YPC's research for this report has shown, institutional oversight capacities over the security sector are limited and are not always adequately made use of, even where they exist. There are also no independent oversight or monitoring institutions for the security sector on a national, governorate or district level, nor are there formal civilian oversight mechanisms. This gives particular importance to informal civilian oversight of the

security sector and its performance, but any such attempts have been and continue to be constrained by the impunity surrounding armed groups in Yemen and the crackdown on journalists, civil society and other critical independent voices by various parties to the conflict, particularly Ansar Allah. Moreover, not all civil society actors act independently from politics and their actions are thus automatically considered as politically motivated – even if not always rightly so.

The potential of civil society involvement for contributing to further stabilization efforts at the local and governorate level in Yemen thus needs to be seen in this context of oppression and politicization. Individual civil society actors and/or journalists may choose to monitor human rights violations and/or call out security actors' actions via social or traditional media as is ongoing practice. While it is a safer choice for civil society actors to consult security actors when their input is requested rather than engage in oversight and monitoring work, Hadil al-Mowafak (2021) shows in her research that civil society organizations can learn strategies from each other on how to best conduct oversight and accountability work while minimizing security risks and argues that even small-scale initiatives can contribute to changing the culture of impunity. There is both the demand and the will amongst civic entities to practice oversight over the security sector. However, particularly in Ansar Allah-controlled areas, civil society oversight over security institutions comes with risks of a backlash, given the repressive nature of Ansar Allah.

## **After a Peace Deal: The Role of Security Committees in Contributing to Stabilization**

A central question with regards to stabilization and the emergence of stable state institutions is how power and access to the state is to be distributed among the political groups post-conflict. Civic figures and journalists interviewed by YPC were divided on what is the best way forward for Yemen. Some expressed their support for a unified state, others support federalism. Of those who support federalism, some believe it should be part of the peace deal, others believe federalism should be discussed after a deal. And yet others believe Yemen should no longer be unified. Several scenarios are theoretically possible. One scenario is defined by UN Resolution 2216, which sees a return to the political process as it was interrupted by the 2014 Ansar Allah power grab. Next to Resolution 2216, the main references for this scenario are the National Peace and Partnership Agreement, the GCC-Initiative and the outcomes of the National Dialogue Conference. Accordingly, an agreement would be struck between Ansar Allah and the IRG resulting in a power-sharing arrangement, with the STC subsumed under the IRG. In this scenario, it is likely that unified institutions which represent a variety of political groups would be sought, or that portfolios would be distributed among the political groups to create an overall balance within a unity government. Ideally, and if provided the political

and economic will of conflict parties, a transitional roadmap would have to define steps to unify institutions such as the MoI or MoD once again. In this case, it is not the political composition of the Committees that should be in the foreground. Given that a power-sharing arrangement would see ministries divided between political groups, this distribution of posts would be reflected in the appointment of agency heads at the governorate level and thus in the composition of the Security Committees. Given that political groups are dominant in particular governorates, it is important that a possible agreement includes mechanisms determining how political affiliation is to be considered in the appointment of governorate and district security agency heads. A sub-committee formed between the national and the governorate levels would then ensure appointments are smooth. In fact, such committees could also ensure that the appointment of agency heads is an inclusive process. Ideally, these appointments should go hand in hand with an assessment of the political, security and tribal networks of those individuals involved, to ensure that appointees are accepted and that those being replaced do not retain influence on their post through their personal networks.

In another scenario, the transitional security arrangement could be organized in a decentralized manner, reflecting the military balance on the ground, through the introduction of a federal organization of governance in the peace deal. Federalism was agreed on at the NDC but is not explicitly part of the current negotiations. Prior to the 2011 upheavals, the security sector was highly centralized and personalized at the national level. This centralization of power increased in Ansar Allah territories as exemplified by the Ansar Allah security committee in al-Hudayda, where Ansar Allah supervisors reporting to the Ansar Allah leadership in Sa'da are represented within the institutions. In IRG territories, decentralization of security institutions rather progressed and mostly did so along old state hierarchies, meaning the governorate-level Security Department has become more powerful and plays a key role in governorate security. In this scenario, the political composition of the Committees on the governorate level could principally remain unchanged. For example, the Ansar Allah-controlled Security Committee and the IRG Security Committee in al-Hudayda would both play a role in the transitional period (or the implementation of a ceasefire) as counterparts. The two Committees represent the main political division in the area; thus, only the inclusion of both Committees would guarantee an inclusive process. Joint sub-committees could be formed as liaison committees between parallel committees and ensure effective communication and coordination. The two Security Committees would function as representatives of the political groups and as a coordination mechanism for the respective forces. The sub-committee could be of a technical nature, including security experts and local figures, and remain in close exchange with international organizations such as the International Red Cross, but they could also be formed of representatives from both groups. These sub-committees could be involved in trust-building measures, reciprocal monitoring, oversight and accountability,

de-escalation and mediation. Given the politicization and decentralization of the security sector, the long absence of a strong center, the gravitational pull is towards the local, rather than the national level.

Challenges that exist at the local level with regards to stabilization and the formation of stable state institutions are compounded at the national level. Given that both scenarios assume Yemen would remain a unified state after a peace agreement, both approaches would require a form of centralized governance that brings various political and regional groups together. The main challenge is to unify parallel institutions on the national level, which in turn would determine the composition of Security Committees on all levels. But the obstacles to unifying institutions are enormous, given that so many different groups have gained significant control over state institutions and have greatly benefited from this access. It is unlikely these groups will let go of this control, even if they do agree to a deal. Political interests and affiliations will continue to dominate state institutions and thus also security governance, and political actors will seek to retain influence over the security actors affiliated with them through informal networks, even if they are nominally integrated into state institutions. The evolution of Security Committees in the three governorates demonstrates that none of them provided a mechanism to overcome major political divisions. Instead, through a combination of violent conflict (ousting of IRG by STC from Aden or of Abu al-‘Abbas from Ta‘iz) and the manipulation of institutions (informal meetings of the Committee under the STC, subsumption of TPR and the Giants under the command of Tariq Salih in al-Hudayda), the security Committees have come under the control of one dominant actor. The Governor of Ta‘iz does have a unifying role within the Security Committee in Ta‘iz, which helps to bridge divisions. However, in the course of the last six years, the Islah Party has come to dominate the Security Committee in Ta‘iz. The parties present in the institutions agree on the identity of the Yemeni state; existing divisions are thus not over respective fundamental questions. The examples of Aden, where the STC hijacked the Security Committee from within the IRG (and continues to do so despite the Riyadh Agreement), and al-Hudayda, where the IRG established a parallel set of institutions after the violent takeover of security institutions by Ansar Allah, demonstrate the limits of an institutional approach to bridging divides. Nevertheless, Yemeni politics are dynamic and political alliances will continue to shift. But unless these shifts align with institutions and the distribution of power within them, an institutional approach to unifying political groups may be futile. It is in this context that conflict parties and civil society must reimagine what national-level politics could look like. Rather than merging existing parallel institutions, a body above the national-level institutions – for example a new Supreme Security Committee above the presently existing parallel national-level Supreme Security Committees – could be established, bringing together the various political groups and defining the relationship of these institutions within a new form of state.

## Providing Support to Enhance Implementation Capacities

Security institutions on the local level, especially the district level, require support. International organizations working with security institutions in Yemen must channel their support to the country's security sector through Yemeni civil society organizations. If civil society organizations are not involved, the country will not be able to develop a responsive security sector that adheres to human rights and respects the interests and will of the communities it serves. For Yemeni civil society organizations, being able to support security institutions gives them leverage, which can enhance monitoring and advocacy work. Police officers in all three governorates pointed to a broad range of resource gaps concerning equipment such as uniforms, vehicles, computers, office furniture and supplies; lighting; materials for non-military security activities such as surveillance, discovery and investigation; weapons and ammunition; as well as ongoing financial support for the police stations. A rehabilitation of buildings may also be necessary in quite a number of districts in all three governorates.

Likewise, a need for training on practically all relevant topics was voiced, which is not surprising as many new and untrained staff have been recruited into the police and other security forces in the course of the past few years. Training needs comprise knowledge of the law – particularly also the laws regulating police work – and institutional history of all relevant institutions; basic police work and administration; record keeping and archiving; advanced methods of criminal investigation, surveillance and discovery; as well as human rights. Given the lack of knowledge of practically all interviewees on the special security concerns of women and girls, a strong emphasis ought to be placed on this issue when providing human rights training to police. Moreover, where possible, the inclusion of more women in the police should be pushed for. There is interest from women to become involved with the police and thereby contribute to the security of their communities. Particularly when it comes to providing stability at the local level, the ability of women to access families and speak with them about their specific security concerns is an asset that could be helpful in convincing some of those opposed to the inclusion of more women in the security forces.

A further important point to be made here is the inclusion of training on community policing. Stabilization – as well as legitimacy – on the ground requires access to and trust-building with local communities, particularly those in unstable (political) situations, i.e. with deep political cleavages, large numbers of IDPs or a high number of possible returnees from the war. Close cooperation and coordination with civil society representatives as well as other local stakeholders beyond the *'aqil* and the local *shaykh*, including women and youth, should be part of such a training. Coordination and communication are further training needs, not only within the police, but



also across the levels. Such training, which could include (joint) training and drills, should also be extended to members of the Security Committee and the governor's staff as well as staff of the Joint Operations Room. Where practical and expedient, such training might also include further actors, such as the civil defense forces, but also actors from outside the security forces. Wherever possible, training and capacity building should be done through Yemeni civil society organizations, as this will not only guarantee local ownership but will also allow civil society actors to build trust with local security actors and develop some leverage on security institutions.

Members of the Security Committee, but also the Joint Operations Room, might require further technical training beyond coordination and communication. The Joint Operations Room as the central node for the coordination of all security actors in the governorate may also need to be supported materially and financially through the local authority in order to be able to fulfill its obligations. Depending on the additional tasks to be implemented by the Security Committee (or a sub-committee or an independent body), the members of this Committee might also require further technical training, which could presumably also happen 'on the job,' i.e. when implementation is already ongoing. Communication training should not only focus on internal communication, but also on public relations, to ensure security institutions communicate effectively with the public. A further point to consider is the means of communication for such bodies. In contested areas where distrust among existing security actors is high, the case of the Redeployment Coordination Committee in al-Hudaydah, which had to meet on board a vessel of the United Nations Mission to Support the Hudaydah Agreement (UNMHA) on the high seas off al-Hudaydah because no secure meeting ground between the parties could be found, has shown that finding the right location for such meetings is important. Alternatively, where a secure location for face-to-face meetings cannot be immediately identified and/or agreed upon, virtual meetings can be a temporary alternative. Due to the internet situation in many governorates of Yemen, technical support to securely operationalize such virtual meetings will very likely be necessary. A hybrid format of physical and virtual meetings may also be a possibility in those areas where physical meetings are possible, alternating monthly physical meetings with daily or weekly virtual meetings. Particularly at the beginning of new measures such as the implementation of a negotiated ceasefire, regular meetings even on a daily basis may be necessary, gradually expanding the days between meetings as (and if) the security situation stabilizes.

## Final Remarks

It may take decades to build a professional security sector in Yemen, whose members and institutions act for the security of the country's citizens and in fulfillment of their legal and constitutional obligations, rather than in the interest of certain

political factions. There are avenues to make at least parts of the security sector more accountable to the communities it is serving. The political groups' desire for legitimacy may be the best avenue to achieve this. The research conducted by YPC for this report has shown that the legitimacy of security actors of various nature as well as of the Security Committees themselves can derive from several factors, not all of which may be relevant at the same time for all actors, however: **a)** the power and authority to implement security on the ground based on the ability to transcend, mitigate or mediate divergent political loyalties ('political legitimacy'); **b)** a rootedness in a formal institutionalization process, including being based on a legal framework and a formal ("democratic") establishment procedure as well as the existence and knowledge of an institutional history ('legal legitimacy'); **c)** the actual performance on the ground when it comes to providing security in the governorate in general and the local level specifically ('performance legitimacy'); and **d)** a rootedness of their members in the local communities, which results in an understanding of – and often solidarity with – local identifications and grievances, but also (and very importantly) knowledge of local security issues due to existing networks within the local public ('local legitimacy').

The wellbeing of the community is the goal all security institutions in Yemen should strive for. In the short term, international organizations and donors should enhance their cooperation with civil society organizations that have a focus on security issues or security-related issues and include them in the planning stage of the project cycle, the goal of this cooperation being the establishment of working relationships between security institutions and the community. The focus in the short term needs to be on capacity building within the implementing agencies, especially district police, and this should be done together with or through local civil society organizations. Partners within the security sector should be selected on the basis of good governance criteria. If security institutions demonstrate their interest in providing good services to the communities then they should be supported in doing so, as the wellbeing of the communities should be the priority, particularly at a time when the future trajectory of 'the state' is uncertain.

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## About the Authors

- **Mareike Transfeld** is the Director of the Yemen Policy Center in Berlin. Previously, she was Head of Research at the Yemen Polling Center. Between 2013 and 2015, she was a research fellow at the German Institute for Foreign and Security Affairs in Berlin. She is pursuing a PhD at the Freie Universität Berlin.

Contact: [mareike.transfeld@yemenpolicy.org](mailto:mareike.transfeld@yemenpolicy.org)

- **Mohamed al-Iriani** is a research fellow at the Yemen Policy Center. He holds an MA in Development Economics from the Doha Institute. Also, he is currently a consultant for a project on DDR with UNOPS.

Contact: [mohamed.aliriani@yemenpolicy.org](mailto:mohamed.aliriani@yemenpolicy.org)

- **Maged Sultan** is a consultant for the Yemen Policy Center and Chairman of Youth Without Borders Organisation for Development. He has a background as journalist and works as a research consultant on youth, security and peace-building issues.

Contact: [maged.alkholidy@ywbod.org](mailto:maged.alkholidy@ywbod.org)

- Dr. **Marie-Christine Heinze** is President of CARPO. Since 2008, she has implemented several Yemen-related projects at CARPO and the University of Bonn and has regularly worked as a consultant on security system reform, gender, peacebuilding, development and political change in Yemen.

Contact: [heinze@carpo-bonn.org](mailto:heinze@carpo-bonn.org)

## About the Project

The objective of this research project is to understand the institutional set-up and functions of the Security Committees in three governorates of Yemen that have been particularly affected by violence and institutional fragmentation: al-Hudayda, Ta'iz and Aden. Questions guiding this inquiry are how the Committees have evolved in the context of state fragmentation and what, if any, capacities they have to play a potential role in local-level mediation (for instance for humanitarian access or the implementation of a negotiated ceasefire) or transitional security governance arrangements.

This project has been undertaken with the financial support of the Government of Canada provided through Global Affairs Canada.



The Yemen Policy Center is an independent think tank established in 2020 by a group of Yemeni and German researchers associated with the Yemen Polling Center, a Yemeni NGO headquartered in Ta'iz, Yemen. Yemen Policy aims to impact local and international policymaking with the ultimate goal of improving the living conditions of the Yemeni people. With its research and advocacy activities, Yemen Policy works towards a closer integration of local perspectives into the policy-making process. While upholding the principles of the Human Rights Charter, Yemen Policy's strategy is to advocate for good governance reforms based on sound research and to support the creation of communication channels between citizens and state institutions. By seeking out and sharing positive stories and best-practices, Yemen Policy does not only aspire to put local communities into the position to help themselves but also to put Yemeni civil society activities into the spotlight.

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