

Following close to eleven months of street protests calling for an end to his 33-year presidency, former president Ali Abdullah Saleh signed a U.S.-supported transition plan on November 23, 2011. Former Vice President Abd Rabbuh Mansur Hadi was elected president in February 2012 in a one-man election. While the new government has made progress on parts of the transition plan by beginning to

restructure the security sector and completing a National Dialogue Conference (NDC), it has yet to revise the constitution or hold new elections.<sup>1</sup>

In late September 2014, Shiite rebels gained control over much of Yemen's capital, Sanaa, prompting a new agreement to establish a more inclusive government. At the same time, President Hadi is facing growing protests in the south for independence and continuing attacks by al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP). Security forces and several non-state actors in Yemen have been implicated in various human rights violations.

Given the unstable political and security climate, U.S. support for Yemen's security sector remains a top priority. From Fiscal Year (FY) 2011 to 2014, the U.S. government allocated a total of \$343 million in U.S. security assistance to Yemen aimed primarily at strengthening the security forces' capacity to combat terrorism. As the Obama Administration seeks more funding for U.S. security assistance to Yemen, there are several serious challenges ranging from concern about the use of U.S. drone attacks, Houthi support for the new agreement and high levels of security force corruption and abuse of power.

**QUICK FACTS**



**POPULATION:** 26,052,966  
**UNEMPLOYMENT RATE:** 29%  
**PER CAPITA GDP:** \$2,500  
**CORRUPTION PERCEPTIONS INDEX RANKING:** 156 (out of 176)  
**MEDIAN AGE:** 18.6 years  
**SIZE OF ARMED FORCES:** 67,000  
**DEFENSE EXPENDITURE:** \$1.416 billion



## Main Security Challenges

### **AL-QAEDA IN THE ARABIAN PENINSULA (AQAP):**

AQAP maintains a domestic insurgency while also planning attacks against Western targets. Since President Hadi was elected, the Yemeni military has led several offensives against AQAP, including one in 2012 with assistance from local tribesmen that helped remove AQAP from controlling sections of southern Yemen.<sup>2</sup> U.S. drone attacks have also removed AQAP operatives in Yemen. However, AQAP continues to regularly attack Yemeni government forces and facilities, including a Defense Ministry compound that killed at least 52 people, and has planned attacks against U.S. and other Western interests in Yemen and abroad.<sup>3</sup>

**HOUTHİ REBELLION:** Although the Zaidi Shiite group known as the Houthis or Ansar Allah has been engaged in a low-level insurgency in northern Yemen since 2004, they recently took control over much of Yemen's capital city, Sanaa, after a series of military advances in northern Yemen.<sup>4</sup> Animated by anti-Western sentiment, the Houthis see themselves as defending their community from government repression while Hadi's government has considered them rebels supported by Iran. Since 2011, the Houthis have been battling Yemeni government forces, Sunni Islamists and tribal militias led by Yemeni political party Islah and former general Ali Mohsen. In response to Houthi military advancements and protests, President Hadi signed an agreement on September 21, 2014, which calls for a Houthi presidential advisor to help create a more inclusive Yemeni government within a month.<sup>5</sup>

**SOUTHERN SEPARATIST MOVEMENT (HIRAAK):** Since reunification in 1990, southern Yemenis have continued to feel marginalized by the central government, which in the past led to a civil war in 1994 and more recently the reemergence of a separatist movement in 2007 called Hiraak.<sup>6</sup> The movement maintains strong public support among southern Yemenis whose perceptions of second-class status led many not to participate in the NDC, rejecting it as illegitimate. Others in the movement aligned with President Hadi, himself a southerner, participated in the dialogue and advocated for a federalist state instead of secession. Like the Houthis, Hadi has also agreed to appoint a Hiraak presidential political advisor to help form the new government.<sup>7</sup>

**HUMAN RIGHTS VIOLATIONS:** According to the State Department's human rights report in 2013, Yemen's security forces engaged in several types of human rights violations, including arbitrary killings, kidnapping and politically motivated disappearances of individuals critical of the security forces or those in support of the Houthi or Hiraak movements.<sup>8</sup> In early September 2014, Yemeni soldiers and personnel from special forces, which have received U.S. aid in the past, reportedly fired live ammunition into a crowd of peaceful protestors.<sup>9</sup> There have also been reports of the security forces conscripting child soldiers. Several non-state actors such as AQAP, "progovernment and opposition tribal militias [and] regionally and religiously oriented insurgents" also committed numerous human rights abuses.<sup>10</sup>

## U.S. Security Assistance

In response to Yemen's security challenges, U.S. security assistance aims to build the counterterrorism capacity of Yemeni security forces, support Yemen's military reform and strengthen civilian law enforcement and judicial institutions, among other goals. From FY 2011 to 2014, the U.S. government allocated a total of \$343 million in U.S. security assistance to Yemen through State and Defense Department-funded programs.<sup>11</sup> Compared to other recipients of U.S. security assistance in the Middle East in FY 2013, Yemen was the fifth largest, with Israel, Egypt, Iraq, Jordan and Lebanon receiving more funding. For FY 2015, the State Department requested a total of \$32 million in U.S. security assistance to Yemen. Although the Defense Department has not publicized how much it plans to spend on Yemen in FY 2015 through several of its security assistance programs, it said it may allocate \$200 million to Yemen as part of the new Counterterrorism Partnerships Fund over the next three years.<sup>12</sup>

The primary focus of U.S. security assistance to Yemen is on counterterrorism with what appears to be four broad goals: 1) improve Yemen's military and special forces capabilities to conduct operations against AQAP; 2) support Yemen's manned and unmanned capabilities for gathering intelligence; 3) increase Yemen's airlift capabilities and 4) enhance Yemen's law enforcement ability to detect and deter terrorist activities along and within Yemen's borders.<sup>13</sup> Most counterterrorism assistance to Yemen goes through two Defense Department programs,

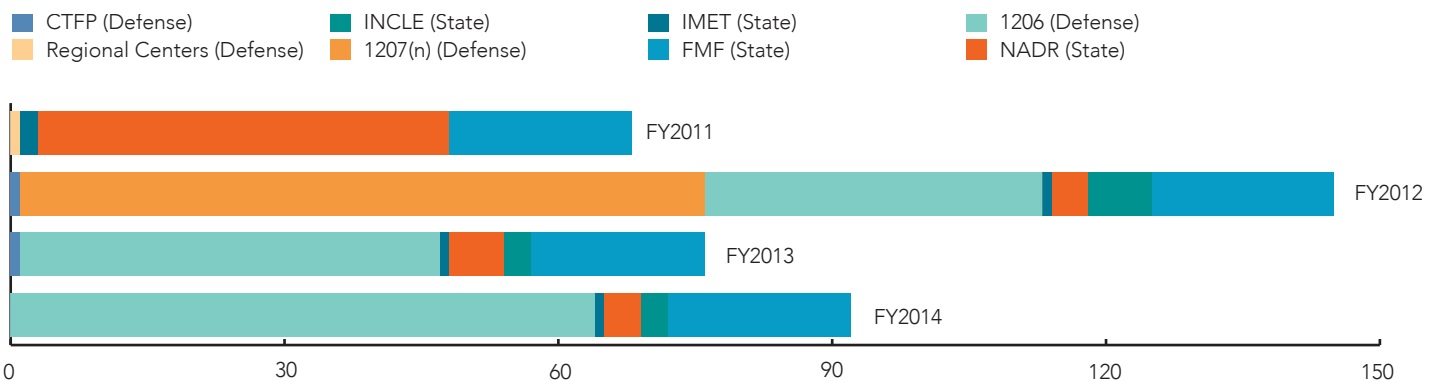
namely Section 1206 and Section 1207(n) (see Figure 1 below), with a heavy emphasis on providing weapons and equipment.<sup>14</sup> Of the \$46 million the Defense Department allocated under Section 1206 for Yemen in FY 2013, for instance, only \$565,000 went to security force training.<sup>15</sup> U.S. security assistance to Yemen through the State Department’s Nonproliferation, Anti-Terrorism, Demining and Related Programs (NADR) program helps security forces detect and detain terrorists at the border, identify explosive devices and protect its national leadership.<sup>16</sup>

## Key Challenges to U.S. Security Assistance

**CONCERN ABOUT U.S. DRONE ATTACKS:** U.S. drone strikes targeting AQAP have killed scores of civilians, some reportedly in clear violation of international law, attracting indignation from Yemen and the international community.<sup>19</sup> In response, in December 2013 Yemen’s parliament passed a non-binding motion calling on President Hadi to ban the United States from using such strikes.<sup>20</sup>

### U.S. Security Assistance to Yemen by Program, FY 2011 TO FY 2014 \$ (IN MILLIONS)

SOURCE: SECURITY ASSISTANCE MONITOR DATABASE



Outside of assistance for counterterrorism, U.S. security assistance to Yemen also aims to sustain critical military equipment, support military reform, strengthen civilian law enforcement and judicial institutions and reduce the availability of arms to unauthorized users. Although it is difficult to determine how much money the U.S. government has given Yemen to improve its military governance and ethics, a critical part of military reform, the United States provided an estimated \$967,000 in various training activities in FY 2013 that included some degree of focus on these issues.<sup>17</sup> The purpose for much of the \$967,000 training was improving Yemen’s counterterrorism efforts. For FY 2014, the State Department estimates it will spend approximately \$3 million to “support increasing access to justice, combating corruption, and strengthening accountability mechanisms within the civil and criminal justice sector” through the International Narcotics Control and Law Enforcement (INCLE) program.<sup>18</sup>

**HOUTHIS SUPPORT FOR NEW AGREEMENT:** Although the Houthis have signed the new agreement to establish a more inclusive government in Yemen, there is concern that the Houthis may not fulfill their part of the accord. As one Yemen security expert indicated, the Houthis did not declare support for the annex on some security and military issues in northern and central Yemen where there has been prolonged fighting.<sup>21</sup> The Houthis also maintain control of several government and military buildings in Sanaa.

**CORRUPTION AND HUMAN RIGHTS VIOLATIONS:** Yemen’s security forces are rife with multiple forms of corruption and have a legacy of human rights violations with impunity. The practice of hiring “ghost soldiers”, or claiming to have more fighters than actually exist so military leaders can keep their salaries, is widespread and makes it harder for the already strapped Yemeni defense budget to sustain its forces.<sup>20</sup> Yemeni military officials have reportedly sold government-provided arms on the black mar-

ket, increasing the likelihood of U.S.-supplied arms reaching unwanted users.<sup>21</sup> If Yemeni security forces that have received U.S. aid commit serious human rights violations with impunity, this could also fuel anti-U.S. sentiment.

<sup>1</sup> International Crisis Group, "The Huthis: From Saada to Sanaa," Middle East Report No. 154, June 10, 2014, Executive Summary, online at <http://www.crisisgroup.org/en/regions/middle-east-north-africa/iraq-ngulf/yemen/154he-huthis-from-saada-to-sanaa.aspx>.

<sup>2</sup> Anthony H. Cordesman, Robert M. Shalala III, Omar Mohamed, "Yemen and U.S. Security," Center for International Strategic Studies (CSIS), August 8, 2013, pages 9-12, online at [http://csis.org/files/publication/130808\\_yemen\\_burkechair\\_updated.pdf](http://csis.org/files/publication/130808_yemen_burkechair_updated.pdf).

<sup>3</sup> Ibid. BBC, "Al-Qaeda claims attack on Yemen defense ministry," December 6, 2013, online <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-25256368>.

<sup>4</sup> International Crisis Group, "The Huthis: From Saada to Sanaa," Executive Summary.

<sup>5</sup> BBC, "How Yemen's capital Sanaa was seized by Houthi rebels," September 27, 2014, online at <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-29380668>. The Economist, "Houthis take over: But are they Ansar?," September 27, 2014, online at <http://www.economist.com/news/middle-east-and-africa/21620284-are-they-ansar-houthis-take-over>.

<sup>6</sup> International Crisis Group, "Yemen's Southern Question: Avoiding a Breakdown," Middle East Report No. 145, September 25, 2013, pages 1-2, online at <http://www.crisisgroup.org/en/regions/middle-east-north-africa/iraq-iran-gulf/yemen/145-yemen-s-southern-question-avoiding-a-breakdown.aspx>.

<sup>7</sup> The Economist, "Houthis take over: But are they Ansar?."

<sup>8</sup> U.S. Department of State, "Yemen," Country Reports on Human Rights for 2013, Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights and Labor, online at <http://www.state.gov/documents/organization/220595.pdf>.

<sup>9</sup> Human Rights Watch, "Lethal Force Against Houthi Protestors," Press Release, September 14, 2014, online at <http://www.hrw.org/news/2014/09/14/yemen-lethal-force-against-houthi-protesters>. For information on the types of U.S. training to Yemeni special forces, see the State Department's FY 2013-2014 foreign military training report at <http://www.state.gov/t/pm/rls/rpt/fmtrpt/2014/index.htm>.

<sup>10</sup> U.S. Department of State, "Yemen," Country Reports on Human Rights.

<sup>11</sup> The total number is likely higher as the Defense Department has not provided estimates on how much money will be spent for three of its security assistance programs such as the Combating Terrorism Fellowship Program for fiscal year 2014. See the Security Assistance Monitor's database online at [www.securityassistance.org](http://www.securityassistance.org).

<sup>12</sup> U.S. Department of State, "FY 2015 Congressional Budget Justification," Appendix 3 Regional Perspectives, Yemen, online at <http://www.state.gov/f/releases/iab/fy2015cbj/pdf/index.htm>.

U.S. Department of Defense, "FY 2015 DoD Overseas Contingency Operations (OCO) Budget Amendment," June 27, 2014, online at [http://comptroller.defense.gov/Portals/45/Documents/defbudget/fy2015/amendment/FY15\\_OCO\\_Congressional\\_Briefing.pdf](http://comptroller.defense.gov/Portals/45/Documents/defbudget/fy2015/amendment/FY15_OCO_Congressional_Briefing.pdf).

<sup>13</sup> See also the State Department's congressional budget justifications for FY 2014 and FY 2015 and Congressional Research Service's "Security Assistance Reform: 'Section 1206' Background and Issues for Congress," April 4, 2014.

<sup>14</sup> Section 1207(n) was a one-year program created for fiscal year 2012 solely to assist the Ministry of Interior in counterterrorism efforts. Acronyms not included in text: FMF refers to Foreign Military Financing, IMET refers to International Military Education and Training.

<sup>15</sup> See Volume I of the State Department's foreign military training report for FY 2013-14.

<sup>16</sup> See the State Department's congressional budget justifications for FY 2013, 2014 and 2015.

<sup>17</sup> Security Assistance Monitor calculation based on a review of the State Department's foreign military training report for FY 2013 (volume I) online at <http://www.state.gov/documents/organization/230215.pdf>.

<sup>18</sup> U.S. Department of State, "FY 2015 Congressional Budget Justification, Foreign Assistance Summary Tables, page 16, online at <http://www.state.gov/f/releases/iab/fy2015cbj/pdf/index.htm>.

<sup>19</sup> Human Rights Watch, "Reassess Targeted Killings in Yemen," Press Release, October 23, 2013, online at <http://www.hrw.org/news/2013/10/21/us-reassess-targeted-killings-yemen>.

<sup>20</sup> Reuters, "Yemeni parliament in non-binding vote against drone attacks," December 15, 2013, online at <http://www.reuters.com/article/2013/12/15/us-yemen-drones-idUSBRE9BE0EN20131215>.

<sup>21</sup> Danya Greenfield, "Yemen: President Hadi's Gamble with the Houthis," Atlantic Council, September 23, 2014, online at <http://www.atlanticcouncil.org/blogs/menasource/yemen-president-hadi-s-gamble-with-the-houthis>.

<sup>22</sup> International Crisis Group, "Yemen's Military-Security Reform: Seeds of New Conflict?," Middle East Report No. 139, April 4, 2013, page 28, online at <http://www.crisisgroup.org/en/regions/middle-east-north-africa/iraq-iran-gulf/yemen/139-yemens-military-security-reform-seeds-of-new-conflict.aspx>.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid. page 31-32.

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