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Yemen's Truce with al Qaeda

Who will be the next victims?

by Jane Novak

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THE AMERICAN ATTEMPTS to rehabilitate the Yemeni regime of Ali Abdullah Saleh have not succeeded. Yemeni authorities recently pardoned Jamal Al-Badawi, convicted mastermind of the 2000 USS Cole bombing. All the terrorists who bombed the American warship and killed 17 American sailors are free, except those dead or in U.S. custody. Jamal Al-Badawi was originally sentenced to death in 2004 as the lead planner bombing. The sentence was reduced to 15 years. He escapedColeof the USS twice, the last time in February 2006. He has been on the loose since. He spent less than three years physically inside a jail, where, by the way, he was very well treated. One of the FBI's top ten most wanted terrorists; he is currently at home receiving well wishers.

Yemeni President Saleh says openly that he has a truce with al Qaeda. However, it's more than a truce; it's a mutual support pact. That pact is long standing, mutually beneficial, and responsible for much of the carnage around the world, including the deaths of U.S. soldiers in Iraq.

The first al Qaeda attack was a 1992 hotel bombing in Aden, Yemen. The bombing targeted US troops heading for Somalia. The Yemeni regime's relationship with al Qaeda was already well established by that point.

Presidential half brother General Ali Mohsen al-Ahmar recruited fighters for bin Laden in the 1980's and set up training camps in Yemen. After the withdrawal of the Soviet Union from Afghanistan, the Yemeni regime Yemeni and non-Yemeni "Afghanwelcomed thousands of both Arabs" back to Yemen.

Yemeni President Saleh uses these al Qaeda operatives as a domestic paramilitary. The Afghan Arabs fought for Saleh in Yemen's 1994 civil war. The war was framed as a jihad against Southern socialist "infidels." Some of these bin Laden loyalists who fought for Saleh in 1994 are now high ranking members of the Yemeni military and security forces, governors, ambassadors and other appointed officials. Consequently, covert administrative support for al Qaeda is substantial in total, varied in nature, and appears on multiple levels.

Through the 1990's, Osama bin Laden and Aiman Zawaheri regularly visited

Yemen, meeting religious leaders and other prominent persons. Bin Laden delivered sermons in Yemeni mosques and purportedly held a six hour meeting with al-Ahmar in Sana'a airport in 1996.

In 1999, bin Laden bargained for the release of al Qaeda operative Tawfiq (Khallad) bin Attash who was arrested in Yemen. The Yemeni regime released Attash and promised not to confront al Qaeda. In exchange, bin Laden pledged not to attack Yemen. These terms mirror the current agreement which led to the release of al-Badawi. American aid, pressure, military training, and other coaxing have done little to alter the fundamental relationship between Saleh and al Qaeda.

In January of 2000, Attash, along with Yemeni Fahd al-Quso, attended a high andColelevel al Qaeda meeting in Malaysia at which the attacks on the USS the World Trade Center were discussed and planned. Both were later found guilty of organizing the Cole attack.

Al Qaeda operatives participated in the Sa'ada wars (2004-2007) when the state fought a Shiite rebel group in northern Yemen. Terrorists trained and indoctrinated Salafi tribesmen using the state's military camps. The military determined the prolonged bombing of Shiite cities was necessary, as was the

withholding of food, medicine and cooking oil to the entire region. Historic Shiite mosques were "accidentally" shelled. General al-Ahmar led the military assault.

What does al Qaeda gain? First of all, releases of operatives. Yemen's revolving door for terrorists is accomplished by biased show trials, repetitive escapes, "rehabilitation," and direct negotiation. The level of duplicity is astounding. For example, convicted Limburg bomber Abu Bakr al-Raibi was never actually in jail despite a ten year sentence. He was transported from his house to court in prison clothes, his father said. And apparently the United States fell for it.

Twenty-three al Qaeda operatives escaped from a high security Yemeni jail in February 2006, using a spoon to break through a concrete floor. Those who later surrendered received a pardon for a pledge. The pardoned include Abdullah al-Raimi, mastermind of the Riyadh bombings in 2003. Other al Qaeda operatives served limited jail time, like al Qaeda number two, bombing.ColeMohammed Hamdi al-Ahdal, who was never charged in the Instead, al-Ahdal was convicted of handling substantial funds for al Qaeda, sentenced to three years time served and released.

The export of Yemeni al Qaeda operatives is another benefit for bin Laden. Yemeni terrorists are found in nearly every jihad: Lebanon, Chechnya,

Somalia, and Iraq. A Yemeni newspaper documented 1,861 individual Yemenis who traveled to Iraq to engage in Jihad. The Islamic Courts Union's jihad against Somalia's Transitional Federal Government drew hundreds of Yemeni jihadists as well.

Jihadists are made, not born. The process that transforms a nice Yemeni boy into a suicide bomber shredded in the street is aided by "influential to training, topeople." State resources are present from indoctrination, documentation, to transport. Yemen's near complete failure to thwart terror financing comes as no surprise. Neither does the release of al-Badawi, who presents a clear danger to the American homeland.

bombing cell isColeThe threat to the United States posed by the reconstituted high. The group has support from the tribal regions, access to state resources, operational experience, international connections, and ideological motivation. The risk is enhanced by the lack of a counter-terrorism environment in Yemen; the state is actively appeasing them. And considering they already blew up an American warship, target selection would tend toward the spectacular if they became operational.

However, the most immediate target of these al Qaeda operatives is likely Southern demonstrators. The regions of the former South Yemen have experienced widespread civil unrest since May. The growing protests threaten

to fracture Yemen, thereby disrupting President Saleh's cash flow from a variety of illegal enterprises. If the quid pro quo holds, these poor souls on the streets of Aden holding signs demanding democracy and justice will be the next victims of Saleh's truce with al Qaeda. A fatwa was issued several weeks ago.

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