

Yemen's Military-Security Reform: Seeds of New Conflict?

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Executive Summary

Ask virtually any Yemeni from across the political spectrum, and he will protest support for a professional military-security apparatus free from family, tribal, party and sectarian influence. Yet, these public assurances do not mean it is easy – far from it. Military-security restructuring is hugely critical to a successful transition, but it also is hugely difficult, because it directly threatens an array of vested interests. Although President Abdo Robo Mansour Hadi has taken important first steps, the harder part lies ahead: undoing a legacy of corruption and politicisation; introducing a coherent administrative and command structure, instilling discipline and unified esprit de corps; and continuing to weaken the old elite's hold without provoking a backlash. All this must be done as the nation faces a redoubtable array of security challenges, including al-Qaeda attacks; sabotage of critical infrastructure; growing armed tribal presence in major cities; Huthi territorial gains in the North; and increasing violence in the South over the issue of separation.

There is a long way to go. Under former President Ali Abdullah Saleh, the military-security services were virtually immune from civilian oversight and operated largely outside the law. Loyalties flowed to individual commanders, who hailed mostly from the president's family or tribe. Then, amid the 2011 uprising, those commanders fractured the military in two, with one group (General Ali Mohsen al-Ahmar's) supporting protesters and the other (Saleh's family) the regime; today, they remain powerful political players who control significant resources and sizeable slices of the economy. However much they claim to support the transition, there is good reason to suspect they will deploy their still formidable resources to sway or even thwart the national dialogue, which began on 18 March 2013 and is scheduled to last six months.

Military-security reform is, in part, about loosening the grip of the now-bifurcated old regime and, in so doing, opening political space for meaningful and effective change through the national dialogue, the cornerstone of the transition process. Hadi has made some inroads. By ordering a personnel and administrative shake-up and then scrapping two controversial military organisations – the Republican Guard, commanded by Saleh's son, Ahmed Ali, and the Firqa, led by Ali Mohsen – he clipped his two rivals' wings and bolstered his own hand. But dangers lurk: implementation is embryonic and will take time; some of Hadi's appointments smack of his own brand of partisanship; Mohsen's and Ahmed Ali's military fates remain unknown; and, by dealing by far the more serious blows to Saleh's camp, Hadi might unwittingly have disproportionately strengthened Mohsen's.

Lasting institutional reform must entail more than reshuffling individual positions. Therein lies a second risk, or shortcoming. To date, Hadi's changes appear to have been driven chiefly – and understandably – by political expediency and the urgent need to remove controversial commanders from their posts without prompting violent resistance. Other festering issues cannot long be ignored, however, such as professionalising the military-security sector; gradually enforcing non-partisan laws governing hiring, firing, retiring and rotating personnel; integrating tribesmen into the security forces without encouraging factionalism; ensuring civilian oversight and decision-making; and, more broadly, elaborating a national security strategy within which the mandate and size of the various military-security branches make sense.

In a larger sense, the key obstacle to meaningful reform remains the absence of an inclusive political pact. It is hard to see major military-security stakeholders relinquishing hard power or fully accepting change that could leave them vulnerable to domestic rivals in any circumstance; it is near impossible to imagine it when distrust runs so high. There are other, related complications: two major constituencies, the primarily northern-based Huthi movement and southern separatists, share profound scepticism toward a restructuring process from which they have been essentially excluded; they are unlikely to support decisions taken without broad agreement on the parameters of a post-Saleh state.

That is where the national dialogue comes in. Only by closely integrating the process of military-security restructuring within the larger effort to produce an inclusive political consensus – a national pact and new constitution – can the two be successful. The challenge is to generate a virtuous cycle in which restructuring and dialogue proceed in tandem and reinforce one another. It is a tricky dance. International actors can and should lend a hand. But Yemenis carry the heavier burden of getting the sequencing and timing right.

Recommendations

To President Hadi:

1. Communicate a clear vision to the public of how the national dialogue will guide the military-security restructuring process.
2. Redouble outreach and confidence-building measures aimed at the South to ensure greater inclusion and acceptance of dialogue decisions.
3. Work with national dialogue participants, technical committees and foreign advisers to ensure full integration between the dialogue and restructuring process.
4. Facilitate implementation of the December 2012 defence ministry reorganisation by appointing new regional commanders in consultation with the defence minister and army chief of staff; and preserve political balance by either excluding or including both Ahmed Ali Saleh and Ali Mohsen al-Ahmar.
5. Avoid the appearance of “rule by decree” by giving the technical committees and army chief of staff more prominent roles in determining and communicating next steps in the reform process.
6. Avoid, to the extent possible, regional-based appointments and explain to relevant stakeholders and the public the rationale behind new appointments and rotations.
7. Demonstrate a commitment to reform, and particularly to limiting presidential authority, by reducing the size of the Presidential Protection Unit and moving responsibility over the Missile Command to the regular command hierarchy as soon as politically feasible.

To the defence and interior ministries' technical committees for restructuring:

8. Take the lead in communicating progress on restructuring, including concerning the role of international advisers, through regular press briefings and public symposia.
9. Consider measures to accelerate professionalisation of military-security services by rotating and retiring current officers, for example by financially encouraging voluntary retirement.
10. Develop and implement plans for administering direct payment to all soldiers and police and for training and integrating post-uprising recruits into the military-security services.

To the interior and defence ministers:

11. Adhere to established rules governing hiring, firing and rotating military-security personnel.
12. Freeze hiring until decisions are made regarding the appropriate size of defence and interior forces, with the exception of the reintegration of southern employees illegally expelled from service following the 1994 civil war.

To Generals Ali Mohsen al-Ahmar and Ahmed Ali Saleh:

13. Implement without delay orders from President Hadi, the defence minister and the army chief of staff.
14. Refrain from using soldiers as political proxies and avoid political activity.

To national dialogue participants and their UN-sponsored advisers:

15. Specify an agenda for discussion in the military-security working group, including, inter alia:
 - a) developing mechanisms to ensure civilian oversight over the military-security apparatus; and
 - b) designing a national vision governing strategic roles and responsibilities of the defence and interior ministries and their relationship with other state institutions.

To international actors supporting the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) initiative and implementation mechanisms (inter alia, the UN special envoy, the U.S. and other permanent members of the Security Council, the EU and its member states, the GCC and Jordan):

16. Continue to communicate clear support for decisions by President Hadi, the technical restructuring committees and the national dialogue, so as to discourage potential spoilers.
17. Provide training and information to members of parliament, civil society groups and political parties on how to forge a comprehensive national security strategy.

Sanaa/Brussels, 4 April 2013

Yemen's Military-Security Reform: Seeds of New Conflict?

I. Introduction

On 21 March 2011, amid popular unrest, Yemen's military fractured along intra-regime battle lines. Some backed Ali Mohsen al-Ahmar, the powerful general who announced his defection and support for the ongoing protests. Others, including the best trained and equipped unit, the Republican Guard, backed the president. A political and military stalemate ensued that ended only with the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) initiative, an agreement under which Saleh transferred power to his deputy, Abdo Robo Mansour Hadi, in return for domestic immunity. A UN-sponsored implementation document added flesh to the bones of the original agreement by outlining a transition roadmap that includes three principal tasks: holding a national dialogue with the goal of producing a new constitution before elections are held in February 2014; addressing issues of transitional justice; and unifying as well as reforming the armed forces.¹

The latter task is particularly sensitive. A year into the transition, some progress has been made in weakening the Saleh family's power within the military and preparing the ground for further reform. Yet the military-security apparatus remains divided, and Hadi's authority is deeply dependent on foreign backing. The restructuring process also lacks an overarching vision that is clearly connected to decisions that are to be made during the national dialogue conference.

Stakeholders from across the political spectrum remain wary of the military, and for good reason. Commanders occasionally have refused, ignored or only partially implemented the president's orders, suggesting lack of trust in the political process and, possibly, their willingness to use the military as leverage over political negotiations or for protection in the event those negotiations fail. A wide range of activists also worry that the military-security apparatus will be further politicised during a fragile period in which the government is split between rival political factions. Extracting the military-security services from the political realm is a critical challenge that, if not met, could threaten Yemen's transition.

¹ Military-security terminology can be confusing, as terms are inconsistent among Arab countries and between Arab countries and the West. In Yemen, "armed forces" generally refer to all forces under the defence ministry, including the army, air force and navy, as well as policing and paramilitary forces under the interior ministry. In this report, the term "military-security apparatus" encompasses all defence and interior ministry forces plus the intelligence services.

II. Military-Security Services under Saleh

A. *Three Sea Changes*

1. The early years: 1978-1990

Saleh became president of North Yemen, the Yemen Arab Republic, in 1978 during a tumultuous time in its history. The two previous presidents, Ibrahim al-Hamdi and Ahmed al-Ghashmi, had been assassinated, and a caretaker president, Qadi Abd-al-Karim al-Arashi, refused to assume the presidency permanently for fear of being murdered.² Saleh stepped into the breach as a young, self-made military officer who had risen through the ranks and was supported by the pre-eminent sheikh of the Hashid tribal confederation, the late Abdullah bin Hussein al-Ahmar.³ The threat of assassination was so acute that Saleh and his tribesmen from the Sanhan (a clan that is part of the Hashid confederation) made an informal pact: if Saleh was killed, his fellow tribesman, Ali Mohsen al-Ahmar, would become president.⁴

Immediately upon assuming office, Saleh placed close relatives and tribal supporters in powerful positions within the military-security apparatus. According to a retired military officer, "Saleh brought his family and his tribe [the Sanhan] to prominent positions in the military regardless of levels of professionalisation or education. He did this so that he could sleep at night without fear".⁵ The pattern continued throughout his presidency. According to the same officer:

The most important factor in the appointment and promotion of officers was loyalty to Saleh. The next factor was hailing from the Sanhan. Look at all of the highest-ranking commanders. They were all Sanhan. The third factor was regional. Saleh chose a sampling of officers from different regions so that all areas of the country would have token representation, but the most important factor was always personal loyalty.⁶

Saleh was far from being the first to tribalise or regionalise the army. Prior to the 1962 Republican revolution which overthrew the religious Imamate in North Yemen,⁷ imams would pay tribesmen to serve as soldiers when needed. Military officers who led the 1962 uprising were deeply influenced by the Egyptian model and, during the 1960s and 1970s, made efforts to create a professional officer corps loyal to the

² Paul Dresch, *A History of Modern Yemen* (Cambridge, 2000), pp. 147-148.

³ There are two main tribal confederations in northern Yemen: Hashid and Bakil. The Ahmars are the pre-eminent sheikhs of Hashid. They are not related to Ali Mohsen al-Ahmar, who, like Saleh, comes from the Bayt al-Ahmar village in the Sanhan tribal area.

⁴ Crisis Group interview, retired military officer, Sanaa, October 2012. The original pact continued to influence political and military developments two decades later, when Saleh began to bolster his son, Ahmed Ali Saleh, at Ali Mohsen's expense. Today, Ali Mohsen is arguably Saleh's most powerful adversary. Prior to Hadi's December 2012 decisions to restructure the military – notably by abolishing the 1st Armoured Division and drawing new lines for regional commands – Ali Mohsen commanded the north-west region and the 1st Armoured Division. His current fate within the military is unclear.

⁵ *Ibid.*

⁶ *Ibid.*

⁷ Since the ninth century, parts of North Yemen were governed by a Zaydi imamate, whose rulers, known as imams, claimed descent from the Prophet Muhammad. Zaydism is a form of Shiite Islam distinct from the more commonly known Twelver Shiism prevalent in contemporary Iran, Iraq, Lebanon and Bahrain. For more on Zaydism, see Crisis Group Middle East Report N°86, *Yemen: Defusing the Saada Time Bomb*, 27 May 2009.

state; this was particularly true under the presidencies of Qadi Abd-al-Rahman Eryani and Hamdi.⁸ Yet, these attempts at best were incomplete. A member of the former opposition bloc, the Joint Meeting Parties (JMP),⁹ said:

Beginning in the 1960s, there was a focus on building a real army. But within the northern army, there were two groups: the ideological left, associated with the Shafei¹⁰ areas of the country, particularly Taiz, Ibb and Rayma governorates; and the conservatives who were mostly from the Zaydi¹¹ northern highlands. Ideological divisions overlapped with sectarian and regional divides. In the late 1960s, the conservatives began to marginalise the ideological left, which eventually formed the National Front in central Yemen and assisted the 1967 socialist revolution in South Yemen. Under Saleh, people felt that the army was biased in favour of the Zaydi, northern tribesmen. This is true, but the divisions predated his presidency.¹²

In addition to stacking the military with loyalists from the Zaydi highlands, and especially from the Sanhan, Saleh facilitated formation of a military-commercial complex in the 1980s.¹³ A prominent civil servant said:

Around 1983, a new phenomenon occurred. Military officers became more involved with society, and they began to use their positions for personal [financial] gain. This development took place under the old generation of Sanhan leaders, including Ali Abdullah Saleh, Abdullah al-Qadi, Ahmed Farag, Mohammed Abdullah Qadi and Ali Mohsen al-Ahmar. These men are responsible for the weakness

⁸ Qadi Abd-al-Rahman al-Eryani (1967-1974) and Ibrahim al-Hamdi (1974-1978) were viewed as presidents of North Yemen who sought to modernise the country. Hamdi was assassinated in 1978.

⁹ Established in 2002 to coordinate opposition efforts against Saleh and the ruling party, the JMP is a coalition of five opposition parties: the Islamist party, Islah; the Yemeni Socialist Party (YSP); the Nasirist Popular Unionist Party; al-Haqq; and the Union of Popular Forces (UPF). Islah is its most powerful member and the only one with strong national appeal. The second most important player is the YSP, the ruling party of South Yemen prior to unification in 1990. The three remaining parties have little to no popular base. Al-Haqq and the UPF are small Zaydi parties. The JMP coalition is under strain and showing signs of fragmentation in the wake of Saleh's resignation and in the context of preparation for the national dialogue. Given diverse policy preferences, the parties chose to enter the dialogue independently, not as a coalition.

¹⁰ Shafei is one of the four main schools of Islamic jurisprudence in Sunni Islam. The majority of Yemenis are Shafei.

¹¹ Zaydis, roughly 30 per cent of the population, are located in the northern highlands; the Shafei are concentrated in the populous central regions and in the former territories of South Yemen.

¹² Crisis Group interview, Sanaa, September 2012.

¹³ The convergence of military and commercial interests in the 1980s was made possible by a shift in the political economy. In the 1970s, the country was awash with lucrative remittances from Yemenis working in Gulf states. At the same time, the central government benefited from aid and loan packages from a variety of sources including the U.S., Soviet Union and Gulf states. In the early 1980s, aid dried up, and remittances levelled off. Following the crash of oil prices in the mid-1980s, the government stabilised foreign reserves by banning private imports. See Dresch, *A History of Modern Yemen*, op. cit., pp. 156-159; Kiren Aziz Chaudhry, *The Price of Wealth: Economies and Institutions in the Middle East* (Ithaca, London, 1997), pp. 193-225, 269-277. A principal beneficiary of the import regime was the Military Economic Corporation (MECO). Originally established to supply soldiers with military goods at subsidised rates, it quickly expanded into other economic areas, notably lucrative grain imports and, later, land acquisition. Dresch, *A History of Modern Yemen*, op. cit., pp. 156-159. Today, MECO is known as the Yemeni Economic Corporation (YECO).

of the current army. They were all involved in smuggling, trafficking and privileged business deals. The Yemeni people could not do anything to stop them.¹⁴

Prior to unification in 1990, the northern military was deeply embedded in the economy, with powerful generals, many from the president's clan, being primary beneficiaries. In addition to privileged access to import licences, land and business deals, the military employment structure also had become a source of patronage for officers and regular soldiers alike. Many individuals listed on the military and police payrolls were, and still are, "ghost soldiers" who never or rarely work. The salaries and benefits of those who do not serve revert directly to commanders; the commanders also receive the bulk of the salaries and benefits given to individuals who remain on stand-by.¹⁵ The ghost soldier phenomenon allows commanders to line their pockets while providing a social safety net of sorts for a wider subset of the population.

The military also was marked by apparent ideological divides. Structurally, before unification, the army comprised various brigades scattered throughout the country and one division, known as the 1st Armoured Division or the *Firqa* (Division). The *Firqa*, established in the early 1980s and now headed by Ali Mohsen, was the first and largest unit; its critics charge that, since its inception, it has been tied to religious movements and particularly the Muslim Brotherhood.¹⁶ The suspected connection to the Brotherhood – and, some claim, to other ideologically-affiliated fighters, including mujahidin who returned to Yemen from Afghanistan in the late 1980s – remains a point of concern, as many suspect that its loyalties lie with their religious leaders more than with the state.¹⁷

2. Unification and civil war: 1990-1994

In 1990, the Yemen Arab Republic merged with its socialist southern neighbour, the People's Democratic Republic of Yemen (PDRY), to form the Republic of Yemen. As part of the unity accords, both sides agreed to share power on a roughly 50-50 basis during a transition period, until parliamentary elections could be held. One of the many challenges of this period was to unify two different, yet equally bloated, military-security services.

¹⁴ Crisis Group interview, prominent civil servant, Sanaa, April 2012.

¹⁵ Crisis Group interview, two high-ranking military officers, Sanaa, October 2013.

¹⁶ Prior to unification, political parties – with the exception of the two ruling parties – were banned in both the North and South. The Muslim Brotherhood was an underground movement in North Yemen. Fighters associated with it played a critical role in the central government's battle against the leftist National Front in central Yemen throughout the 1970s.

¹⁷ Crisis Group interviews, high-ranking military officers, Sanaa, September-October 2012; GPC leader, Sanaa, October 2012; southern officer, Sanaa, November 2012; retired military officer, Sanaa, November 2012; Yemeni journalist, Sanaa, February 2013. According to a non-Islah member of the JMP opposition bloc, "[t]he *Firqa* is governed by ideology, and they are deeply tied with Islah militia. Before unity, the Muslim Brotherhood had many militias. After unity, these groups were given to the *Firqa*. Now if someone who is not associated with the Muslim Brotherhood [or Islah] tries to manage the *Firqa*, he will not be able to do it". Crisis Group interview, Sanaa, December 2011. Ali Mohsen al-Ahmar categorically denied any association between *Firqa* and any ideological movement: "The *Firqa* recruited soldiers from all parts of the country, and now it has recruits from all governorates in Yemen. We never recruited from one specific social group. Those who say this are doing so as part of a domestic political struggle. Saleh has always tried to say that anyone who is against the U.S. or Saudi [Arabia] is with Ali Mohsen". Crisis Group interview, Sanaa, 14 January 2013.

Yemenis uniformly describe the southern army as being more professional and better organised than its northern counterpart. While the North was influenced primarily by Turks and Egyptians, the southern army was first organised by the British and later, during its socialist period, largely trained and equipped by the Soviet Union. A southern officer estimates that the southern army was 64,000-strong; although the northern army officially numbered 200,000 at unification, the actual number was significantly less given the ghost soldiers.¹⁸

Like its northern counterpart, the southern army suffered from regional and tribal divisions. The socialist leadership went to great lengths to eradicate both centrifugal tendencies, but cleavages remained.¹⁹ These fractured the army during the 1986 civil war in the South, which by some estimates killed as many as 10,000 in ten days. The conflict pitted supporters of the president, Ali Nassar Mohammed, against a faction within his socialist party; the president's followers eventually were defeated, and at least 30,000 of them fled north, where they formed an alliance with Saleh. This group, hailing primarily from Abyan and Shebwa governorates, was nicknamed the Zumra while their opponents – chiefly from Dalia and Lajh – were dubbed the Tuqma.²⁰ The split between Zumra and Tuqma remains pertinent to this day.

Reflecting on divisions in both the northern and southern armies, a JMP politician said, “in 1990 there was a decision to unite the armies. But, at that time, there were not just two armies. Regional and ideological divisions influenced both. There was no truly national army in the North and no truly national army in the South”.²¹

In theory, the new unified state should have undertaken a comprehensive threat assessment and a significant reduction in military personnel. After all, the primary external menace each state previously faced had been the other. This process did not occur. In practice, no downsizing plan emerged, and little integration took place. The transition period mainly consisted of moving some southern military units north and vice versa. A southern officer involved with the unification process argued that northern generals resisted genuine integration, “because they feared that it would weaken their position. The northern soldiers realised that the southern army was more professional and its officers were better trained. This resulted in several northern units rebelling against their commanders”.²²

Whatever the specific reasons, it was clear from the outset that the main obstacle to integration was political. The South entered unity assuming that it would be treated equally in all aspects of governing, but the power-sharing settlement proved to be fragile and short-lived. According to Mohammed Ali Ahmed, a prominent southern leader who was aligned with the Zumra in 1986 but fought with the South in 1994:

The agreement at unification was for 50 per cent of the army to be from the South and 50 per cent from the North. There were various options on how this

¹⁸ Crisis Group interview, Sanaa, November 2012.

¹⁹ According to a southern politician, “most of the tanks were controlled by commanders from Radfan [an area in what is now the Lahj governorate], and the navy was largely controlled by individuals from Abyan governorate. Commanders from Yafa [a tribal area that spans parts of Lahj and Abyan] held high positions in the defence ministry. But everyone was trained and well-qualified”. Crisis Group interview, Sanaa, November 2012.

²⁰ Zumra and Tuqma were terms used to describe the Iraqi and Syrian Ba'ath, respectively. The Yemenis lifted these names, using them to describe two competing groups in their own national context. Crisis Group interview, Yemeni academic, Sanaa, January 2013.

²¹ Crisis Group interview, Sanaa, September 2012.

²² Crisis Group interview, Sanaa, November 2012.

could be accomplished. They could have had a shared leadership structure split evenly between northerners and southerners, or they could have established a rotating leadership. However, what happened in practice completely violated the agreement. It became clear that the North did not want 50-50 power sharing.²³

Saleh and the PDRY president, Ali Salim al-Beedh, rushed into unity without a durable settlement. The 50-50 arrangement – which southerners assumed they could maintain or even improve following the vote – quickly was shattered by 1993 parliamentary elections in which Saleh's party, the General People's Congress (GPC), and its Islamist ally, the Yemeni Grouping for Reform (Islah),²⁴ won a clear victory over the former ruling party in the South, the Yemeni Socialist Party (YSP).

By the spring of 1994, the country was at war, and the former northern and southern armies faced each other on the battlefield. During the short conflict, part of the Zumra and, to a much lesser extent, Islamist militias, played a role in ensuring the North's victory.²⁵ Following defeat, remnants of the southern army were disbanded. Many top southern generals fled the country, and most of its officers were forcibly retired.

Unification and the subsequent civil war shaped Yemen's military in ways that are directly relevant to the current reform process. First and foremost, they produced resentment and feelings of marginalisation among southern officers and soldiers. These feelings are especially pronounced among the Tuqma, who bore the brunt of retirements. Mohammed Ali Ahmed estimates that "only 30 per cent of the southern army remained after 1994. The rest became known as the "stay-at-home party". Many still received a basic salary, but they were barred from working and received no other benefits.²⁶ A senior northern military commander confirmed that southern officers at a rank of lieutenant-colonel and above, as well as some majors, were immediately fired, although most were still paid.²⁷

Even those southerners who fought with the North, mostly from the Zumra, soon felt marginalised.²⁸ A southern officer explained:

As soon as fighting ended, a unity council ordered southern commanders [who had sided with the North] to leave the cities, where they controlled heavy weapons, and go to the borders, ostensibly to defend against Saudi Arabia. They were told that they would find heavy weapons at their new positions. Instead, they found nothing.²⁹

²³ Crisis Group interview, Aden, 23 September 2012.

²⁴ Islah was established shortly after unification in 1990. The party encompasses a number of overlapping groups, including tribesmen, businessmen, members of the Muslim Brotherhood and Salafis. Until the 2011 uprising, it was the strongest opposition party; it now forms part of the transition government.

²⁵ For further information on the war and the subsequent plundering of Aden, see Dresch, *A History of Modern Yemen*, op. cit., pp. 196-198; and Sheila Carapico, *Civil Society in Yemen: The political economy of activism in modern Arabia* (Cambridge, 1998), pp. 186-191.

²⁶ Crisis Group interview, Aden, 23 September 2012.

²⁷ Crisis Group interview, Sanaa, October 2012. The commander confirmed that those forcibly removed received salaries but no benefits, a central component of compensation in Yemen that can include petrol subsidies, uniforms, food, housing and even vehicles, depending on rank.

²⁸ Crisis Group interview, southern politician, September 2012.

²⁹ Crisis Group interview, Sanaa, November 2012.

A prominent civil servant summed up the dynamics of the unification and post-war periods: "After the civil war, three people – Ali Abdullah Saleh, Sheikh Abdullah al-Ahmar and Ali Mohsen al-Ahmar divided the country as if it were their farm. Southerners felt completely defeated. The northerners thought that by giving them symbolic representation [in the military and the government] this was enough".³⁰ The assumption proved deeply misguided.

Following the war, a restructuring process effectively solidified dominance of two Sanhani power centres – those of Ali Mohsen and of Ali Abdullah Saleh – within the army. Theoretically, the military was organised around five military regions or zones that covered territories of the new country: north west, central (includes Sanaa), middle, southern and eastern.³¹ Yet, two units, the Firqa and Republican Guard, retained semi-autonomous status.³² By law, when either of these is assigned to missions falling within a regional command, its operational command should shift to the relevant regional commander. In practice, this was not always the case, and, even when it was, the Republican Guard and the Firqa often retained administrative and logistical authority. This remained a cause for frustration among many military professionals and immediately became a controversial issue in the current transitional process.³³

3. The new generation: 2000-2011

In the late 1990s, another change took shape. A new generation of Sanhani officers came of age and began to challenge their older colleagues' supremacy. Beginning around 2000, Saleh assigned his son and nephews to top military, security and intelligence positions. In practice, they built parallel army, security and intelligence services, better equipped and more qualified than pre-existing ones and whose loyalty and purpose were a source of intense debate and suspicion.

In 2000, Saleh's eldest son, Ahmed Ali, took command of the Republican Guard, expanding it by building eight new brigades from scratch. By the time of the 2011 uprising, they comprised eighteen of the nation's best equipped, trained, funded and – arguably – managed brigades.³⁴ As a result, the military balance of power shifted dramatically away from the Firqa and regular army. In this process, Ahmed Ali enjoyed his father's full backing. All in all, the Republican Guard received an overwhelming proportion of new weapons and supplies, as well as superior benefits, including health care, housing and sports facilities.³⁵

³⁰ Crisis Group interview, senior civil servant, Sanaa, October 2012.

³¹ Crisis Group interview, retired military officer, Sanaa, October 2012.

³² Ali Mohsen al-Ahmar maintains that the Firqa was not placed outside the regional command structure because the commands of the north-west region and the Firqa are tied together, insofar as the latter's commander also commands the north-west region. Crisis Group interview, Sanaa, 14 January 2013. At unification, the Republican Guard was a small unit protecting the presidential palace. It expanded to include three artillery brigades, then continued to grow after the war. The Firqa essentially was an expanding, ad hoc combination of units and fighters that, like the Republican Guard, did not fit neatly within the regional command structure. Crisis Group interview, military officer, Sanaa, November 2012.

³³ Crisis Group interview, senior military officer, Sanaa, October 2012.

³⁴ Crisis Group interview, senior military officer, Sanaa, November 2012.

³⁵ Several people confirmed that the Republican Guard enjoyed superior benefits. Crisis Group interviews, high-ranking military officer, Sanaa, November 2012; former soldier, Sanaa, November 2012; Yemeni journalist, Sanaa, October 2012; military officer, Sanaa, October 2012; retired army officer, Sanaa, October 2012; JMP politician, Sanaa, September 2012; group of mid-level GPC politicians, Sanaa, September 2012.

Superior resources aside, the Republican Guard also gained from internal reform. A high-ranking military officer said:

The Republican Guard began to implement a restructuring plan ten years prior to the 2011 crisis. They brought in outside experts [Jordanians] and incorporated the experiences of others into their planning. Eventually, they became an effective strike force or reserve force [for the president] that could be deployed anywhere in the country to assist regular troops. The process was not easy, and there was a great deal of resistance from those whose interests were threatened.³⁶

He added: "Some complain that they are the most qualified and equipped. But all armies need elite forces that are superior in battle. Besides, every riyal that was allocated to the Republican Guard went to the Republican Guard. This was not the case with other army units".³⁷ A former soldier echoed this:

Ask any regular soldier in the Republican Guard, and they will tell you that they support Ahmed Ali. They support him because he gave them their rights [benefits]. In other parts of the army, the soldier's salary and benefits go to commanders. When Ahmed came to the Republican Guard, they were like the rest of the army. The soldiers did not have housing or any facility. They had no mess hall in their bases. They ate outside on the ground and made their own shelters in the base. Now Ahmed has built houses, sports clubs, dining facilities and hospitals. He took care of the soldiers' needs, from medical care to the caps on their heads. They respect him for this.³⁸

As the Republican Guard acquired greater resources and underwent reform, other parts of the army were neglected. A leader in the uprising with ties to the Firqa explained: "Since 2000, no new weapons or real training went to the regular army. Everything went to the Republican Guard, which was built as Saleh's alternative army". In his view, Saleh intentionally sought to weaken Ali Mohsen and the Firqa during the wars against Huthi rebels in Saada governorate: "During the fourth round of the war, Saleh ordered Mohsen and the Firqa to go to Saada. The Republican Guard was supposed to support the Firqa from behind, but instead they prevented the Firqa's retreat. Mohsen's forces were intentionally exhausted".³⁹

A similar dynamic was at play with the interior ministry forces and intelligence services. In 2001, Saleh's nephew, Brigadier General Yahya Saleh, became chief of staff for the Central Security Forces, a paramilitary organisation focused on domestic threats that came to be viewed as his own army. According to an interior ministry officer, "under Saleh, the Central Security Forces were stronger, better-equipped and better paid because they were under Yahya".⁴⁰ Yahya also oversaw the formation of

³⁶ Crisis Group interview, high-ranking military officer, Sanaa, November 2012.

³⁷ Ibid.

³⁸ Crisis Group interview, Sanaa, November 2012. Critics are less charitable, claiming that Ahmed's reforms tended to be politically motivated. Crisis Group interview, prominent tribal sheikh, Sanaa, January 2013.

³⁹ Crisis Group interview, Sanaa, September 2012. Beginning in 2004, the Yemeni government and Huthi rebels engaged in six rounds of conflict. For a history of the crisis and review of the first five, see Crisis Group Report, *Yemen: Defusing the Saada Time Bomb*, op. cit.

⁴⁰ Crisis Group interview, interior ministry officer, Sanaa, October 2012. According to the same officer, "the salaries of interior ministry soldiers are standardised, with the starting base salary being

the Central Security Services' counter-terrorism force, an elite unit that benefited from significant U.S. training and equipment.⁴¹

On the intelligence side, Saleh formed the National Security Bureau in 2002, with Colonel Ammar Saleh, Yahya's brother, as deputy head and de facto director. Previously, the Political Security Organisation had been the primary intelligence entity responsible for both domestic and external collection, as well as analysis. An intelligence officer explained the organisation's origins:

The National Security Bureau was formed after the 9/11 [2001] attack [in the U.S.] and the 2000 attack on the U.S.S. Cole in Yemen. Prior to 1990, the Political Security Organisation had been a professional organisation, but after unification, two intelligence services [North and South] merged, and in 1994, Ali Mohsen had enrolled many from Islah. After this, the plan was to strengthen the National Security Bureau and to gradually phase out the Political Security. In 2006, National Security began to take the most qualified officers. The plan was to keep the best officers and retire those associated with political groups like Islah and the Yemeni Socialist Party. However, Mohsen and others worked against it, and the phasing out of Political Security never was fully implemented.⁴²

The National Security Bureau is significantly smaller but also better trained, equipped and qualified than the Political Security Organisation. Although the total of its officers has been estimated at less than 5 per cent of the Political Security Organisation's, the latter has a chronic ghost workers problem similar to the army's; in contrast, nearly 100 per cent of National Security Bureau employees reportedly are present and working.⁴³

There are other relevant differences: recruitment into Political Security is lenient, whereas the National Security Bureau's vetting process can take six months to a year. More importantly, the regular monthly base salary for an entry-level officer in the former is around \$200, compared with \$600 for the lowest officer in the latter. Finally, like the Central Security Forces, prior to the 2011 uprising, the National Security Bureau received significant funding and support from the U.S. and Jordan.⁴⁴

Two diverging yet overlapping narratives explain the new generation's rise to power and the simultaneous establishment of alternative military, security and intelligence institutions. Both acknowledge competition between Saleh and Ali Mohsen. However, whereas one frames the development essentially as a Saleh power-grab to marginalise Mohsen and secure Ahmed Ali's future, the other emphasises genuine differences between the older generation in the Sanhan, particularly Mohsen, and a

35,000 Yemeni Riyals [approximately \$160] per month. However, the Central Security Force soldiers have better benefits than others".

⁴¹ Crisis Group interviews, high-ranking military commander, Sanaa, September 2012; military expert, Sanaa, March 2013. For an overview of U.S. military aid to Yemen, see Jeremy Sharp, "Yemen: Background and U.S. Relations", Congressional Research Service, 1 November 2012, pp. 14-20.

⁴² Crisis Group interview, Sanaa, 2012.

⁴³ Ibid. The same officer estimated that only 30 to 40 per cent of those on the Political Security Organisation payroll are real employees. During the wars between North and South of the 1970s, the group hired sheikhs to report what was going on in their areas, especially in the middle and southern parts of North Yemen. They were informants but did not actually work in the organisation. That pattern allegedly continues to this day.

⁴⁴ Ibid.

new generation intent not only on consolidating power, but also on professionalising the military-security forces.

A retired army officer presented the first interpretation:

In the late 1990s, the Republican Guard gradually came under Saleh's and Ahmed Ali's control. The idea was to build a large force to protect the regime without Ali Mohsen. When Saleh prepared Ahmed for the presidency, the relationship with Mohsen silently crashed. One part of the Sanhan sided with Saleh and the other with Mohsen. What Saleh did went against the oath taken in the Sanhan in 1978. This split in the Sanhan was the principal reason for the war against the Huthis in 2004. Saleh sent Mohsen into the war to weaken him while he strengthened Ahmed in Sanaa. In the end, the army split between Saleh's and Mohsen's armies. Militarily the Saleh side was stronger.⁴⁵

A civil servant put forward the alternative perspective:

Until 2002, there was no difference among Sanhan commanders. They were involved in smuggling, trafficking, corrupt business deals and more. When the new generation came, they were better educated and fresh with new ideas. They realised that Yemen did not have a professional army. There was a budget for an army, but no real army. They decided they wanted to build a real army, and they had Saleh's support. Saleh supported building the Republican Guard for his own protection and because he wanted to ensure that Ahmed would be his successor. Now, after ten years, Yemen is left with only one real army: the Republican Guard.⁴⁶

Both narratives contain elements of truth. The new institutions unquestionably were more professional and qualified, but they were established in the context of intense intra-regime competition. Ultimately they were accountable to their commanders only and were perceived by many citizens as personal property, rather than forces loyal to the nation.

B. *Snapshot of the Military-security Services on the Brink of the 2011 Uprising*

On the eve of the uprising, the military-security services had become an internally divided set of organisations akin to competing fiefdoms. Increasingly, they were ground zero for an intra-regime struggle for power between Ahmed Ali, Ali Mohsen and their respective supporters. The army, security services and intelligence units were roughly divided between partisans of Ahmed Ali and those associated with the old generation of officers. The Republican Guard was the best trained, equipped, financed and managed, yet was viewed as Ahmed Ali's personal property. The Firqa, perceived as Ali Mohsen's army, was poorly equipped, trained and funded; and the regular army was least privileged of all.

The interior ministry and intelligence services suffered similar patterns of fragmentation. Among the interior ministry's branches, the Central Security Forces, effectively headed by Yahya Saleh, was privileged; the Najdah (rescue police), led by Mohammed Abdullah al-Qawsi, a close supporter of Ahmed Ali and the young generation of Sanhan officers, came second. Other security units, including general security, traffic police,

⁴⁵ Crisis Group interview, retired army officer, Sanaa, October 2012.

⁴⁶ Crisis Group interview, civil servant, Sanaa, October 2012.

tourist police and government building guards, largely were neglected, especially in terms of training.⁴⁷ On the intelligence front, the small and nimble National Security Bureau quickly emerged as the elite unit. Next to it was the Political Security Organisation, a bloated, 120,000-strong branch that, like the regular army and security services, in many ways amounted to an ill-paid, albeit politically useful, jobs program.⁴⁸

Even a cursory examination of the structure and distribution of these forces suggests the purpose of the military-security apparatus had little to do with external and internal threats and much more with politics and regime preservation. The most capable and well-trained units all fell under the control of the president's son and nephews and enjoyed clear superiority over the Firqa and regular army, both viewed by Saleh as potentially dangerous.⁴⁹ Many of these included specialised units trained by the U.S. to combat terrorism, including the Central Security Forces Counter-Terrorism Unit and Ahmed Ali's Special Forces.⁵⁰ Yet, the battle against al-Qaeda and local rebel groups such as the Huthis typically was fought by ill-equipped and poorly trained regular army troops.⁵¹ Additionally, most of the sophisticated and heavy weaponry was dedicated to protecting the capital and particularly the presidential palace, even as precious few resources were devoted to building a navy or effective Coast Guard capacity to police a 1,906km coastline.⁵²

None of the military-security forces were subjected to effective civilian oversight, whether by government officials, parliament or watchdog agencies such as the Central Organisation for Control and Accounting (COCA).⁵³ Instead, these forces, and notably their commanders, operated above the law, inspiring fear and suspicion among the

⁴⁷ Crisis Group interview, interior ministry officer, Sanaa, October 2012.

⁴⁸ Crisis Group interview, military expert, Sanaa, January 2013. That said, its size also clearly reflected the regime's nature and priorities.

⁴⁹ According to a military expert, "the Republican Guard under Ahmed Ali was modelled after the Jordanian military. In Jordan, there is an armoured brigade designed to stop people from poor areas from attacking the rulers. In Yemen, the 3rd Brigade serves a similar role in defending the palace. In Jordan, brigade commanders are deeply loyal to the ruling family and receive many benefits; the same applied to Yemen. In Yemen, Ahmed Ali built an army to resist a coup. This is why the Republican Guard was enlarged. In this process, he took brigades from Ali Mohsen. For example, the 1st Mountain Brigade was with the Firqa before it was added to the Republican Guard". Crisis Group interview, Sanaa, October 2012.

⁵⁰ See Jeremy Sharp, "Yemen: Background and U.S. Relations", *op. cit.*, pp. 14-20.

⁵¹ Crisis Group interview, military expert, Sanaa, April 2012.

⁵² Crisis Group interviews, military expert, Sanaa, October 2012; army officer, Sanaa, October 2012; retired southern officer, Aden, September 2012.

⁵³ Parliament technically exercised oversight over the military-security apparatus (including the intelligence services) through budgetary approval. However, military-security spending is a line-item, in effect neutralising the legislative role. Other watchdog agencies, such as the Central Organisation for Auditing and Accounting, lack the authority to audit the armed forces, security services and intelligence services. The defence and interior ministries each have internal auditing and financial offices, but they could not function due to powerful commanders. An interior ministry official said, "under the old regime, the Central Security Forces and the Najdah did not have to account for their weapons and supplies through our ministry. Instead, deals would be directly struck between their commanders, the finance minister and the president. The situation was even worse with the defence ministry. There, 100 per cent of project financing was done outside the law". Crisis Group interview, Sanaa, October 2012. A retired army officer echoed this: "It was impossible to exercise oversight over commanders. The financial administrative office is responsible for this, but they could do nothing. Also, the Central Organisation for Control and Accounting lacks the authority to audit the military, because of the existence of state secrets". Crisis Group interview, Sanaa, October 2012.

general population. Added to this was the widespread perception of regional bias, especially within the military, favouring the Sanhan and other tribal groupings or areas closely aligned with the president.⁵⁴ Among some southerners, particularly members of the Southern Movement (Hiraak) – a loosely organised group advocating independence or at a minimum two-region federalism⁵⁵ – the military was even perceived as an occupying force.⁵⁶

C. *What Happened to the Military-security Services During the Uprising*

On 18 March 2011, pro-Saleh gunmen killed over 50 unarmed protesters in Sanaa. While significant ambiguity still surrounds the event, at a minimum security forces loyal to the president failed in their duty to protect demonstrators. The event was a tipping point in the uprising that precipitated dozens of high-level military and civilian defections. Most importantly, on 22 March, Ali Mohsen, the commander of the Firqa and north-west military region, switched sides, announcing that his troops heretofore would defend protesters.

Mohsen's announcement in effect split the military. He brought with him the Firqa, some north-west region troops and many other regular army and air force commanders, including the eastern region commander, Mohammed Ali Mohsen.⁵⁷ As the conflict escalated, both sides suffered defections and recruited thousands of new soldiers.⁵⁸ A politically non-aligned soldier claimed that the Republican Guard added around 15,000 new recruits, officially registered, trained and paid by the state. The same soldier estimated that the Firqa added close to 20,000 new soldiers who were not registered but nonetheless paid by Mohsen through his regular military budget, which was never cut.⁵⁹ According to a military officer who defected to support the uprising, recruitment into the Republican Guard was far higher, reaching 46,000, and the number of additional Firqa soldiers was roughly 17,000⁶⁰ – in either case, significant figures.

All in all, and defections notwithstanding, the most important regime forces, notably the Republican Guard and Central Security Forces, remained largely intact. In the words of a member of the former opposition bloc, "those who joined the revolution

⁵⁴ Crisis Group interviews, retired military officer, Sanaa, October 2012; interior ministry officer, Sanaa, September 2012; prominent independent politician, Sanaa, September, 2012; Islah politician, Sanaa, November 2012; JMP politician, Sanaa, October 2012.

⁵⁵ The Hiraak contains a diverse mix of opinions and groups. Its supporters argue that North-South unity failed, and southerners now have a right to choose separation or, at a minimum, to renegotiate the terms of unity. The most vocal trend within the movement is for immediate independence. However, others are discussing two-region federalism for a set period, usually five years, followed by a referendum on unity. Still another alternative is a confederal system. For an overview of the history of the Hiraak and its various components and trends, see Crisis Group Middle East Report N°114, *Breaking Point? Yemen's Southern Question*, 20 October 2011.

⁵⁶ Crisis Group interviews, Hiraak members, Aden, September 2012.

⁵⁷ Mohammed Ali Mohsen is from the same village as General Ali Mohsen and Saleh, Bayt al-Ahmar, in the Sanhan. For a list of brigade defections, see "Yemen Order of Battle", Critical Threats, 4 December 2012.

⁵⁸ A JMP member described the recruitment process: "In the beginning of the revolution, Islah and the Firqa offered money to soldiers to join the revolution, and many came. When too many came, and they could not pay anymore, many left and returned to the Saleh side". Crisis Group interview, Sanaa, September 2012.

⁵⁹ Crisis Group interview, Sanaa, November 2012.

⁶⁰ Crisis Group interview, defected military officer, Sanaa, January 2013.

either did not belong to Saleh's inner circle or had specific reasons to oppose him. Islah and Mohsen did not get to the heart of the Republican Guard".⁶¹

Saleh's backers maintained a clear conventional military advantage throughout the conflict, particularly in Sanaa; the Republican Guard's powerful 3rd Armoured Brigade controlled most of the high ground around the city, the largest weapons storage facilities and the country's only T-80 tanks. Yet, the president was unable to convert this conventional military edge into political victory for several reasons. First, Ali Mohsen benefited from the strength of allies, particularly the Ahmar clan, as well as other tribal fighters, many affiliated with Islah, in areas surrounding the capital like Arhab and Nehim and in the southern city of Taiz.⁶² Tribal fighters pinned down Republican Guard brigades outside of Sanaa, preventing their access to the capital.⁶³

Moreover, despite involvement by Ali Mohsen and various armed groups, the uprising retained a core of peaceful activists. Although the Saleh regime periodically used security forces – and notably the Central Security Forces – to suppress unarmed protesters,⁶⁴ unleashing their full weight almost certainly would have prompted both greater defections and intensified international condemnation, both of which Saleh was keen to avoid. Abd-al-Ghani al-Eryani, president of the Democratic Awakening Movement, said:

The lesson from the conflict is that the number of tanks, artillery, etc., does not always matter as much as the number of people you influence and what types of loyalties you control. This is why Ali Mohsen was able to win with only a few soldiers in Sanaa and with far fewer weapons. He enjoyed the loyalty of Islah and could mobilise revolutionaries on the streets. The conventional balance of power was not decisive. Hard power did not produce a victory for Saleh.⁶⁵

⁶¹ Crisis Group interview, JMP member, Sanaa, September 2012.

⁶² A prominent Islah spokesman denied the movement was involved in the fight in Arhab: "The fighting in Arhab was between tribes and the Republican Guard. It was not Islah fighting the Republican Guard". Crisis Group interview, Sanaa, November 2012. Labelling fighters is an uncertain task, insofar as a large array of parties and movements (whether the GPC, Islah, the Hiraak or the Huthis) to varying degrees can mobilise fighters. As a political party, Islah might not have been involved in the preparations and organisation of armed struggle. However, the tribal fighters in Arhab who fought the Republican Guard were politically affiliated with the opposition and notably with Islah. The same dynamic seemed to be true in Taiz, where Sheikh Mahmoud Miklafi, an Islah member, organised a force to fight Saleh's security services during the uprising. See Laura Kasinof, "Ancient city anchors political standoff in Yemen", *The New York Times*, 2 November 2011.

⁶³ Crisis Group interview, senior military commander, Sanaa, March 2012.

⁶⁴ See Human Rights Watch Reports, "Yemen: Protesters' Killings Show Perils of Immunity Deal", 20 September 2011; "Yemen: Stop Shooting Protesters", 4 April 2012; "U.S.: Suspend Military Aid to Yemen", 18 March 2011; "Yemen: Excessive Force Used Against Demonstrators", 9 March 2011.

⁶⁵ Crisis Group interview, Abd-al-Ghani al-Eryani, president, Democratic Awakening Movement (TOWQ, a non-partisan political movement), Sanaa, 4 September 2012.

III. Restructuring During the Transition

As a result of the popular unrest, Mohsen and his allies achieved important gains in their struggle against Saleh. The ensuing stalemate paved the way for third-party intervention in the form of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) initiative. Although neither side was fully satisfied with the compromise deal, their mutual inability to secure a clear military or political victory gave them little choice but to accept it and shift the battleground to the uncharted territory of transitional politics. There, competition over new rules of the game remains intense, notably with respect to military restructuring.⁶⁶

A. *Restructuring According to the GCC Initiative*

The transition agreement offered only vague guidelines on military restructuring. According to the companion implementation mechanism, a “Committee on Military Affairs for Achieving Security and Stability”, chaired by President Hadi, is to spearhead efforts in this area, with the goal of improving security conditions, addressing army divisions⁶⁷ and “work[ing] to create the necessary conditions and take the necessary steps to integrate the armed forces under unified, national and professional leadership in the context of the rule of law”.⁶⁸

At a very general level, all domestic constituents claim to support a professional military-security apparatus under civilian control and free from regional, party, sectarian or family influence. There also is broad agreement that restructuring should follow a two-step process: first, actions to unify the military under a single chain of command and build confidence in a national dialogue free from military interference, and secondly, reorganisation, standardisation and professionalisation steps that will last beyond the two-year transition.⁶⁹

Beyond these basic parameters and principles, however, in practice ample disagreement remained, fuelled by various parties’ competing interests, as well as by ambiguities and gaps in the agreement. In particular, the agreement failed to address several sensitive political issues: Ahmed Ali’s and Ali Mohsen’s fates; whether groups beyond the Military Committee should take part in decisions affecting restructuring; and what role, if any, civilian decision-makers in the national dialogue should have over that process. Nor did it specifically mention the police, intelligence services or judicial sector, all of which ought to be integral parts of comprehensive

⁶⁶ For an analysis of transitional politics, see Crisis Group Middle East Report N°125, *Yemen: Enduring Conflicts, Threatened Transition*, 3 July 2012.

⁶⁷ It mentioned the following priority items: removing roadblocks, checkpoints and fortifications throughout the country; returning military units to their camps; removing armed militia from cities; and the more ambiguous task of ending divisions in the armed forces and addressing their causes. “Agreement on the implementation mechanism for the transition process in Yemen in accordance with the initiative of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC)”, Part III, section 16.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, Part III, section 17.

⁶⁹ Mohammed Abu Lohom, general secretary of Reform and Build, a new party formed during the 2011 uprising comprising several prominent GPC defectors, reflected a widely-held view when he said, “restructuring should be thought of in two phases: first, the immediate reshuffling of individuals. Then, restructuring based on national needs, which will take three to five years. The immediate reshuffling is necessary because it assures people that the loyalty of the army is not with individuals”. Crisis Group interview, Sanaa, 13 October 2012.

security sector reform. Instead, the agreement focused primarily on the army – the central locus of hard power and of inter-elite competition.

B. *Stakeholders, Interests and Priorities*

Three groups are directly connected to the restructuring process: the Military Committee; the president and his close advisers; and two technical committees (one in the interior and the other in the defence ministry) established by the Military Committee to address the nuts and bolt of restructuring. Of the three, the first is the least influential by far.

A politically-fragmented entity, the Military Committee comprises fourteen senior military officers, some associated with Saleh, some with Ali Mohsen and others with Hadi.⁷⁰ Although theoretically in charge of restructuring efforts, its diverse political make-up inevitably hampers decision-making. To the disappointment of the Saleh camp, which had counted on the committee to retain leverage,⁷¹ Hadi essentially seized the reins, leaving the committee to deal with reducing tension; de-escalating conflict between the Republican Guard and the Firqa; improving security conditions; resolving problems surrounding soldiers who defected to one side or the other during the 2011 conflict;⁷² and, most recently, securing the capital for the national dialogue conference.

In contrast, Hadi and his advisers initiated the overwhelming majority of changes to the military-security apparatus, with increasing input from two technical committees. The president appears to be motivated by two immediate priorities: first, ensuring his own physical survival and personal protection – no mean feat given that he is caught between two well-entrenched power centres and enjoys no ready-made personal support base within the army;⁷³ secondly, demonstrating progress on the restructuring front, so that it does not impede the national dialogue and thus undermine his status as a consensus candidate tasked with facilitating implementation of the transition agreement.

In this latter respect, he faced the dual challenges of responding to the former opposition's demands to immediately remove all Salehs from their posts before dialogue began, while at the same time not tipping the balance of power too far and thereby risking a serious backlash from Saleh supporters or overdependence on Ali Mohsen. Even now that the dialogue has begun, he continues to balance the political imperative of making progress on restructuring with the need to minimise potential pushback from the two power centres and their respective allies.

⁷⁰ For names of committee members, see Mohammed al-Kibsi, "Hadi forms military committee to defuse tensions in Yemen", *Yemen Observer*, 4 December 2011.

⁷¹ Crisis Group interview, Saleh supporter, Sanaa, September 2012.

⁷² Crisis Group interview, Military Committee member, Sanaa, October 2012. The committee has enjoyed some success in these areas, though much remains to be done, especially in regard to removing armed tribesmen from major cities. In 2012, it removed checkpoints of competing army factions and associated militias in cities like Sanaa and Taiz. It has mediated between the Republican Guard and the Firqa when tensions flared and ended hostilities between Republican Guard and tribal militias in areas like Arhab and Nehim. Despite these efforts, problems remain. It has failed to fully rid even Sanaa or Taiz of tribal militias, and tensions intermittently flare among competing parts of the military-security apparatus.

⁷³ According to close supporters, he is keenly aware of his vulnerability vis-à-vis the Saleh and Mohsen camps. Crisis Group interview, Hadi supporters, Sanaa, September, October 2012.

The two technical committees are composed of experienced military technocrats, who seem to be genuinely interested in the army's long-term professionalisation and not primarily driven by party, sectarian or tribal allegiances.⁷⁴ Despite enjoying only limited political clout, their role has grown over time. In March 2012, the Military Committee delegated details of restructuring to them, and ever since they have engaged in an assessment and planning process with the help of international advisers. Originally the U.S. helped the defence ministry and the EU the interior ministry, with the UK assisting both when needed. In each case, as planning stalled, the Yemeni government requested the assistance of Jordan, which played a pivotal role in generating agreement and moving the process forward.⁷⁵

Overshadowing these endeavours has been the persistent tug-of-war between Saleh and his GPC supporters on the one hand, and Mohsen and the former opposition Joint Meeting Parties (JMP) on the other. For the JMP, the priority from the outset was to remove Saleh's family and allies from the military-security services as a pre-requisite to the national dialogue.⁷⁶ Some JMP politicians are prepared to look beyond, supporting Mohsen's eventual removal and the need for broader institutional changes, but on the whole their focus remains on the former president and ending his influence over the military.⁷⁷

Taking a different view, the Salehs and their GPC supporters argue that the GCC initiative was a compromise mandating the president's resignation rather than wholesale exclusion of one side in favour of the other. As a result, they view efforts to remove them as evidence of a de facto coup orchestrated by Ali Mohsen and the Is-

⁷⁴ Crisis Group interview, military expert, Sanaa, November 2012. Brigadier General Nassar Ali al-Harbi heads the defence ministry's technical committee and Dr/Major General Riyadh al-Qirshi chairs the interior ministry's. Both also belong to the Military Committee and report back on the technical committees' progress.

⁷⁵ Crisis Group interviews, military experts, Sanaa, October 2012, January 2013. The U.S. arguably possesses the greatest leverage given the level of technical and, especially, financial resources it offers. Jordan enjoys an historically close relationship with the Yemeni armed forces. It previously was involved in sensitive political negotiations between Yemeni factions. Prior to the 1994 civil war, feuding politicians signed an agreement, the "Document of Pledge and Accord", in Amman that proposed a North-South settlement but quickly was rendered moot by the conflict. Crisis Group interviews, senior military officer, Sanaa, September 2012; military advisers, Sanaa, January 2013.

⁷⁶ Many who supported popular protests against Saleh distinguish his fate from Ali Mohsen's, given the latter's willingness to join the uprising. Crisis Group interviews, Islah politician, Sanaa, March 2012; political independent supportive of the uprising, Sanaa, October 2012. Others go further, asserting that Ali Mohsen has no ambition for power, would be prepared to leave whenever Hadi desires and is staying solely to help counter-balance the Salehs. Crisis Group interview, JMP politician, September 2012. By contrast, Saleh supporters, other GPC members, many political independents, Hiraak and Huthis would vehemently disagree, viewing Mohsen as an equal threat. Crisis Group interviews, Hiraak supporters, Saleh supporters, political independent, GPC member, Sanaa, September 2012; Hiraak supporters, Aden, September 2012; Huthi supporters, political independent, GPC members, Sanaa, October 2012.

⁷⁷ Some JMP politicians argue for Ali Mohsen's removal. For example, according to an Islah politician, "the real problem of reform is with the Republican Guard and the Firqa. The Republican Guard follows Ahmed Ali, and the Firqa follows Ali Mohsen. Without these two powerful individuals, the technical part of restructuring could move forward. The challenge now is removing them and making sure that all units follow the defence ministry". Crisis Group interview, Sanaa, October 2012. Yet, the JMP media and associated street protests clearly indicate that they were focused first on removing the Salehs.

lah party, as well as Hamid al-Ahmar.⁷⁸ They have pushed for a gradual process of institutional change⁷⁹ – no doubt because in their minds it would do more harm to Mohsen given the Republican Guard's higher degree of professionalism relative to the Firqa's and because it would buy time for them to regroup and reassert influence. For the most part, however, they have found themselves on the defensive, waging a rearguard fight to maintain their influence and limit Ali Mohsen's and Islah's relative gains.

C. *What has Happened thus Far*

1. Reshuffling by presidential decree (February-December 2012)

In the absence of consensus and plagued by a divided military-security apparatus, Hadi and his close advisers initially imposed changes with little outside input. They chiefly relied on personnel rotations to weaken Saleh and strengthen the president, moves that (arguably) bolstered Ali Mohsen. But these changes lacked an overarching strategy, drawing criticism from both military-security professionals and Yemenis concerned with longer-term institutional reform.

In the first few months of his presidency, Hadi moved cautiously, restricting himself to several widely-popular decrees removing or rotating controversial commanders.⁸⁰ He also consolidated control over his personal security, replacing Saleh's nephew, Brigadier General Tariq Mohammed Abdullah Saleh, with a commander from his home governorate, Abyan, to head the Special Republican Guard (the 1st Brigade).⁸¹ Tariq Saleh was appointed commander of the Republican Guard's powerful 3rd Armoured Brigade, a shift that proved short-lived.

Hadi gradually extended his moves. On 6 April 2012, he rotated over 20 senior commanders, including Saleh's half-brother, Air Force Commander Mohammed Saleh al-Ahmar, and (again) Tariq Saleh, who was reassigned to the 37th (regular army) Armoured Brigade in Hadramout governorate.⁸² These changes prompted strong resistance on the part of the Salehs. Mohammed al-Ahmar openly defied Hadi's orders for two weeks, and his soldiers briefly shut down Sanaa Airport in protest. Tariq Saleh also balked at leaving his post. Even after he officially transferred authority to his replacement on 3 May, his backers prevented the new commander from entering the base until 11 June, a day before the UN Security Council adopted a resolution threatening sanctions against those opposing Hadi's orders.⁸³ On both occa-

⁷⁸ Crisis Group interviews, Saleh supporters, Sanaa, September-October 2012. Hamid al-Ahmar is one of ten sons of the late Sheikh Abdullah bin Hussein al-Ahmar and a powerful business tycoon and Islah member.

⁷⁹ Crisis Group interviews, close Saleh supporter, Sanaa, September 2012; high-ranking military officer, Sanaa, November 2012.

⁸⁰ For example, he rotated the southern region commander, Mahdi Makwala, and sacked the Taiz security chief, Brigadier General Abdullah Qairan, who was involved in the crackdown against anti-regime protesters in 2011. For a detailed list of initial changes to the military-security apparatus, see Sasha Gordan, "The Parallel Revolution in Yemen", *Critical Threats*, 6 March 2011.

⁸¹ Under Saleh, the 1st Brigade was responsible for protecting the president and the presidential palace in Sanaa.

⁸² Tariq Saleh never accepted this post and currently is not serving in any military position.

⁸³ The resolution "[d]emands the cessation of all actions aimed at undermining the Government of National Unity and the political transition, including continued attacks on oil, gas and electricity infrastructure, and interference with decisions related to the restructuring of the armed and security forces, and obstructing the implementation of Presidential Decrees of 6 April 2012 concerning military and civilian appointments, and expresses its readiness to consider further measures, in-

sions, international pressure was important in eventually persuading both commanders to relinquish their posts.⁸⁴

On the whole, Hadi's measures were perceived as going after Saleh's as opposed to Mohsen's camp. There were exceptions: the 6 April decrees rotated Mohammed Ali Mohsen, the Eastern Region commander and a Mohsen ally. Hadi supporters explain that any perceived short-term, tactical alliance with Mohsen is only aimed at curbing Saleh's power and avoiding opening a two-front struggle. A Hadi supporter said, "the president came to power without any military base. In the context of Saleh's aggressive moves, he found himself temporarily taking sides with Mohsen".⁸⁵ The overall pattern was unmistakable, as evidenced by the Salehs' strong public challenge and the ensuing adversarial relationship between them and the president that endures to this day.

This strongly-held perception that Hadi is favouring Mohsen – whether temporarily or not – has generated considerable fear and resentment within the GPC rank and file;⁸⁶ in turn, this potentially can undermine the president's chances of forging closer ties with his own party. It also raises apprehension among a larger group of political independents and activists who reject continued dominance of former regime power centres, whether loyal to Saleh or to Ali Mohsen.⁸⁷

In his second major round of decrees, issued on 21 May 2012, Hadi removed Ammar Saleh, National Security Bureau deputy, as well as the director of the Central Security Forces and the commander of the rescue police, all Saleh allies.⁸⁸ The announcements came on the heels of a devastating suicide bombing that killed over 100 soldiers as they practised for unity day celebrations in front of the Central Security Forces headquarters. Subsequent announcements would also come in the wake of significant security breaches, providing immediate political justification for Hadi to clean house, while exacerbating the anger of Saleh loyalists who felt singled out as responsible for the incidents.⁸⁹

On 6 August, Hadi announced several structural and administrative changes aimed at further clipping Ahmed Ali's wings. These decisions cut deep into his authority by removing some of the most well-armed and trained brigades from his command. They shifted three brigades to a newly created Presidential Protection Unit, reporting directly to the president, and four to regional commands.⁹⁰ Although Hadi also shifted command of five defected brigades associated with Mohsen, the move largely was

cluding under Article 41 of the UN Charter if such actions continue". Security Council Resolution 2051, 12 June 2012.

⁸⁴ The international role was a double-edged sword. While it helped consolidate Hadi's power, it also exposed his dependence on the international community and highlighted difficulties in reforming an army in which a significant number of troops are prepared to disobey presidential orders.

⁸⁵ Crisis Group interview, Hadi supporter, Sanaa, October 2012.

⁸⁶ Crisis Group interviews, GPC members, Sanaa, September, October, November 2012, January, February 2013.

⁸⁷ Crisis Group interviews, civil society activist, Sanaa, September 2012; independent political activist, Sanaa, September 2012; independent youth activist, Sanaa, January 2013; Yemeni journalist, Sanaa, February 2013.

⁸⁸ See "President assigns military and security leaders", Saba News Agency, 21 May 2012.

⁸⁹ Crisis Group interview, close Saleh supporter, Sanaa, September 2012.

⁹⁰ Abdul-Aziz Oudah and Mohammed Ali Kalfood, "Hadi's restructuring of Republican Guard sparks resentment, official", *Yemen Observer*, 11 August 2012.

symbolic, as none of the brigades was under his operational authority at the time.⁹¹ The decrees immediately sparked tensions in the capital, and, on 14 August, dozens of Republican Guard soldiers stormed the defence ministry in protest.⁹² In the ensuing firefight around the ministry, two civilians were killed and fifteen injured.⁹³ While those responsible for the attack were arrested, convicted and imprisoned – a very rare public display of accountability – Hadi was able to impose change only with great difficulty and against significant resistance from both commanders and soldiers.

A second major security violation – the high-profile assassination attempt on the defence minister – provided Hadi with yet another opportunity to issue a list of rotations. On 12 September, he announced the purge of more Saleh loyalists, including the National Security Bureau chairman, military intelligence director and defence ministry financial department director.⁹⁴

Hadi's decrees disproportionately affected Saleh supporters but ultimately earned him criticism from both sides. Backers of the former president argued his decisions were politically biased in favour of Mohsen, as well as Islah, and inflicted long-term damage on the armed forces by undermining the Republican Guard. They also criticised their haphazard nature and lack of coordination with the Military Committee.⁹⁵ Conversely, Mohsen's allies, notably within Islah, faulted Hadi for not going far enough in purging the military of Saleh supporters.⁹⁶ The dual attacks resulted in part from the president's cautious approach, taking a (bigger) bite out of

⁹¹ This was confirmed by two military commanders and three military advisers. Crisis Group interviews, Sanaa, September-October 2012.

⁹² See Amal al-Yarisi and Ahlam Mohsen, "Separate military forces feud", *Yemen Times*, 16 August 2012.

⁹³ 62 Republican Guard members were arrested for involvement. Hakim al-Masmari, "Official: soldiers loyal to Yemen's ex-president accused in attack", CNN, 17 August 2012. Responsibility is disputed. His opponents immediately blamed Ahmed Ali for instigating the violence (Crisis Group interviews, interior ministry officer, JMP member, Sanaa, October 2012), a charge his supporters deny (Crisis Group interviews, Saleh supporters, Sanaa, October-November 2012). According to the latter, the troops that attacked the ministry were genuinely angered by their transfer to the southern regional command, particularly to Abyan, an area that lacks basic facilities and is far from Sanaa. They had participated in the campaign against al-Qaeda affiliates, known as Ansar al-Sharia, in Abyan in June 2012. During that campaign, they felt that local popular committees, who fought alongside the army, unfairly received credit for expelling Ansar al-Sharia; they also complained that the popular committees received more government money. Once the battle ended, Hadi transferred their pay from the Republican Guard to the southern regional command. In protest, some soldiers refused their salaries. In August, a presidential decree officially transferred the brigade to the southern regional command. In response, some resigned and left their weapons with Abyan tribes. A few hundred others returned to Sanaa to demand their salaries and complain of poor treatment. When they arrived in the capital, Ahmed Ali informed them he could do nothing as he no longer was their commander; instead, they should take up the matter with the defence ministry. The firefight occurred the next morning. Crisis Group interview, close Saleh supporter, Sanaa, November 2012.

⁹⁴ Much public attention has focused on the National Security Bureau position, but replacing the defence ministry's financial department director was equally significant. As a consequence, Hadi is in a position to financially squeeze both Saleh and Mohsen by limiting their access to ministry money and other resources. For a more comprehensive list of changes, see "President Abdrabuh Mansour Hadi issued the following decrees", *Yemen Post*, 12 September 2012.

⁹⁵ Crisis Group interviews, Saleh supporters, Sanaa, September and November 2012.

⁹⁶ Crisis Group interviews, sheikh aligned with Ali Mohsen, Sanaa, April 2012; Islah members, Sanaa, November 2012. Islah and other JMP members often point to the need to reduce the authority of both the Saleh and Mohsen camps in order to facilitate reform. Crisis Group interviews, Islah members, Sanaa, September, October, November 2012. They mostly focus on the Salehs, as evidenced by continued Islah-affiliated protests in Sanaa calling for removing all the ex-president's family members from the security services and lifting their immunity from prosecution.

Saleh's camp but doing so gradually, going after Mohsen's allies but far more gingerly, seeking to avoid a two-front war that risked reuniting the two camps against him.⁹⁷

An arguably more serious charge is that Hadi issued the initial decrees without consultation and allegedly in a manner that favoured regional and political allies, thereby not only angering Saleh supporters but also instilling apprehension among would-be supporters who feared they could be removed next.⁹⁸ Echoing a broader concern, a moderate GPC member said:

There is no national army in Yemen now. But what is happening under Hadi is a restructuring in which one party is winning over another. Abyan [the president's home governorate] and Islah are replacing GPC commanders. It is the same problem we faced in the past. If these changes allow for successful reform during this year of transition, then they are acceptable. But if the pattern [of favouring Abyan and Islah] continues, then it will create a problem in itself.⁹⁹

Hadi indeed has tended to appoint loyalists, particularly from his home governorate of Abyan and the adjoining Shebwa governorate, to strategic military positions.¹⁰⁰ Some bias in favour of trusted allies – notably in his personal protection unit – hardly is surprising, especially given the sensitive political climate; moreover, his appointees from these areas are not yet in a position to challenge established power centres. The issue will be whether this will give rise to a longer, and more perilous, pattern of regional favouritism.

A third critique revolves around the fact that the removals and rotations occurred without transparency and in the absence of a broader strategy for reform. This, together with the pattern of perceived regional favouritism, has opened the president up to criticism that he was duplicating past practices and enabling further politicisation of the military-security services. Tellingly, a number of organisational changes have reflected political expediency more than long-term reform priorities. Formation of the powerful Presidential Protection Unit – which includes, inter alia, the strong Republican Guard 3rd Armoured Brigade, as well as an armoured brigade formerly associated with the Firqa – is a clear example. These are some of the best equipped and trained brigades in the country, which are, on paper at least, now explicitly dedicated to presidential protection. Moreover, the command structure remains unclear, posing potential coordination problems, although it is widely believed that it has been unofficially assumed by the president's son, Nassar Hadi.¹⁰¹

As it stands, the unit seems to reinforce old practices, prioritising regime protection over other national priorities. Hadi's supporters themselves acknowledge that the unit's composition reflects a political decision more than a sound military choice.¹⁰² A military critic argued: "This seems like a repetition of the past behaviour. It is like

⁹⁷ Crisis Group interviews, Hadi supporter, Sanaa, September and October 2012.

⁹⁸ Crisis Group interview, military expert, Sanaa, October 2012.

⁹⁹ Crisis Group interview, Sanaa, September 2012.

¹⁰⁰ Of the approximately twenty military appointments made on 6 April, three were from Abyan, including the navy commander, the Special Guards commander and the 2nd Republican Guard Brigade commander. Since then, the president has appointed a new National Security director from Shebwa. The commander-in-chief's office director and the head of the defence ministry restructuring committee, also hail from Abyan.

¹⁰¹ Crisis Group interview, military commander, Sanaa, September 2012.

¹⁰² Crisis Group interview, Hadi supporter, Sanaa, October 2012.

what happens when parents beat their children, and then the abused children become the abusers. This pattern will be difficult to break".¹⁰³

People familiar with Hadi's decision-making maintain that the new structure is merely a temporary fix that will be revisited as the restructuring moves forward. A presidential ally said:

The Presidential Protection Unit is a temporary solution. Four of the brigades in the unit are not actively protecting the president, and all of them fall under the defence minister, both financially and administratively. As the restructuring moves forward, some of the forces may be moved outside of the city and redistributed to other commands. But for now, it was important that these units be directly under the president and not under the two military power centres [Ali Mohsen and Ahmed Ali].¹⁰⁴

Furthermore, the unit's ambiguous command structure potentially could suggest that in the future the president intends to redistribute some of the forces that compose the unit once Sanaa's security and political situation stabilise.¹⁰⁵ Whether that happens – or whether these powerful brigades remain under the president's direct command – will be a significant test of his commitment to reform.

2. New organisational charts (December 2012-present)

Hadi's decisions went far toward dismantling Saleh's network at the top of the military, but this failed to satisfy JMP supporters who insisted on removing all of Saleh's family. International advisers likewise advocated further restructuring, believing its absence would be used as an excuse to stymie the national dialogue.¹⁰⁶

In this context, Hadi announced on 19 December a major reorganisation of the armed forces based on recommendations from the defence ministry's technical committee. The decisions went to the heart of the political challenge by disbanding both the Republican Guard and the Firqa. With their removal, the military could be organised strictly on the basis of regions, which were increased from five to seven. Ali Mohsen's north-west regional command was split in half.¹⁰⁷ Forces also were streamlined into four services: the army, navy, air force and border guards. Two new commands were added, the Missile Command, which reports directly to the president, and the Special Operations Command.¹⁰⁸

¹⁰³ Crisis Group interview, military expert, Sanaa, October 2012.

¹⁰⁴ Crisis Group interview, Hadi supporter, Sanaa, January 2013.

¹⁰⁵ Crisis Group interview, military expert, Sanaa, January 2013.

¹⁰⁶ Crisis Group interview, foreign advisers, Sanaa, November 2012, January, February 2013.

¹⁰⁷ "The President and Commander of the Armed Forces issued a decree in accordance with the restructuring of the Armed Forces", Saba News Agency, 19 December 2012. Decrees also streamlined the chain of command. Under the new model, the chief of staff is to report directly to the defence minister, who reports to the president as commander-in-chief. Breaking with past practice, the decrees clarified that the defence minister is responsible for policy decisions and the chief of staff for implementing them.

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid.* Those close to the process argue these decrees complete phase one: an agreement on both a new organisational chart and the division of the armed forces into seven regions. Phase two, theoretically lasting around six months, is to focus on implementation. The entire process of restructuring, including professionalisation, is estimated by military technocrats and advisers to take three to five years. Crisis Group interview, foreign adviser, Sanaa, January 2013.

Among political activists, reaction to Hadi's decisions was cautiously positive, despite lingering doubts.¹⁰⁹ Among chief concerns was the remaining ambiguity surrounding Ahmed Ali's and Mohsen's fates given the lack of follow-up announcements regarding the identity of new regional commanders.¹¹⁰ Hadi supporters and GPC members suspect that the president was on the verge of announcing that both were excluded from the military service but that, at the last minute, Islah pressured him not to remove Mohsen.¹¹¹ The lack of follow-up also arguably was related to the 18 March 2013 launch of the dialogue.¹¹² Hadi, as is his wont, appears to be carefully calibrating military announcements, seeking to do enough to facilitate the political process but not so much as to provoke significant backlash.

Other critics are concerned that the focus on the two men has obscured broader structural questions. A GPC member said:

The president's decrees jump to disbanding the Firqa and Republican Guard without taking preliminary steps recommended by the technical committee, such as implementing the civil service law to retire and rotate generals; standardising existing units to ensure they are properly staffed and equipped; addressing the ghost soldiers issue; raising and equalising unit capability; and redistributing troops and equipment based on a strategic vision. His decision to place the Missile Command under his direct authority also was not originally recommended by the technical committee.¹¹³

Both the critique and accompanying scepticism have some basis. Hadi concentrated significant authority in his office, and his decisions at times altered technical committee recommendations. But the broader political context needs to be taken into account, and there remains hope of further amendments in the future. Taking this view, a military expert said:

The president's decision to end the Firqa and Republican Guard was a wise political move, because it was responsive to the former opposition's demands. People were uncomfortable going to the national dialogue at a time when both sides [Mohsen and Islah on one hand; the Salehs and GPC on the other] possessed significant military power. As for the missile unit, it is only temporarily under the president's direct command. This is due to historical reasons. In 1994, the North used SCUDS against the South and, in this tense political climate, Hadi is concerned that if there is a problem, one side may try to use them again.¹¹⁴

In a new batch of decisions in January 2013, Hadi announced a major interior ministry overhaul based on its technical committee recommendations. Among other

¹⁰⁹ Crisis Group interviews, prominent GPC member, political independent, JMP member, independent journalist, Sanaa, January 2013. A prominent analyst said, "it is too early to judge the impact of the decrees or Hadi's real intentions. We should give him the benefit of the doubt. He needed to respond to popular demands and consolidate some power before addressing other difficult issues". Crisis Group interview, Sanaa, January 2013.

¹¹⁰ Crisis Group interviews, political independent, youth activist, JMP supporters, GPC supporters, Sanaa, January 2013.

¹¹¹ Crisis Group interviews, GPC supporters, prominent GPC leader, Hadi supporter, Sanaa, February 2013.

¹¹² Crisis Group interview, Hadi supporters, Sanaa, March 2013.

¹¹³ Crisis Group interview, Sanaa, January 2013.

¹¹⁴ Crisis Group interview, Sanaa, January 2013.

things, he streamlined the number of departments reporting directly to the minister; increased provincial governors' authority over ministry forces in their respective areas; rebranded the controversial Central Security Forces as the new Special Security Forces; and established a General Inspectors office to deal with human rights transgressions, corruption and police violations within the ministry.¹¹⁵ The changes elicited little public reaction, no doubt because the interior ministry's structure appears less pertinent to the power struggle than the defence ministry's. If anything, recruitment into the interior ministry is what matters to political actors, not (for now) its organisational structure or by-laws.¹¹⁶

To the extent the steps were questioned, it was on grounds that civilian participants in the national dialogue ought to have greater say in the future interior ministry organisation. As a retired diplomat put it, "the outcome of the national dialogue should be a vision for the state. This vision in turn should define, among other things, what Yemenis want from law enforcement and who – whether the police, tribes or another actor – ought to provide various services".¹¹⁷ Moreover, a security expert warned:

In a rush to produce a new organisational chart for political purposes, the Yemenis have skipped important steps. In particular, structure should have followed function. To date, there has been no strategic discussion of the appropriate functions of the interior or even defence ministries. Instead, the new structure appears somewhat to be the product of efforts to grab internal assets, as well as Hadi's desire to produce a new structure before the dialogue begins.¹¹⁸

3. Recruitment and mid- to low-level personnel changes (2011-present)

Beginning in 2011, both the Saleh and Mohsen camps added a large albeit unknown number of recruits to combat and policing units under the defence and interior ministries. Ahmed Ali's recruits immediately were included on the Republican Guard payrolls;¹¹⁹ those brought on by Ali Mohsen and the opposition became part of the state's payroll only later, in March 2012, when Hadi issued a decree approving 10,000 new recruits for each ministry.¹²⁰

Although the 20,000 additional personnel ostensibly were replacing soldiers and security officers killed over years of fighting,¹²¹ Saleh supporters claim most are Islah loyalists who participated in the protests, and many are religious extremists associated with the conservative Iman University.¹²² More broadly, there is concern that

¹¹⁵ Crisis Group interview, foreign expert, Sanaa, February 2013. Organisational chart and decree on file with Crisis Group.

¹¹⁶ Crisis Group interview, prominent GPC member, Sanaa, February 2013.

¹¹⁷ Crisis Group interview, Ambassador Marwan Noman (ret.), Sanaa, 31 January 2013. A political independent and youth activist expressed a similar view: "It is not the right time to restructure the interior ministry, because the national dialogue, notably as far as the state's structure is concerned, of necessity will have a profound impact on the ministry's authority and shape". Crisis Group interview, Sanaa, January 2013.

¹¹⁸ Crisis Group interview, security expert, Sanaa, January 2013.

¹¹⁹ Crisis Group interview, former military commander, Sanaa, November 2012.

¹²⁰ Crisis Group interview, military personnel with a copy of the decree, Sanaa, March 2012.

¹²¹ Crisis Group interview, military adviser, Sanaa, October 2012.

¹²² Crisis Group interviews, military commander, Sanaa, March 2012; prominent GPC members, Sanaa, March, September, October 2012; military officer, Sanaa, November 2012. Islah representatives and allies dispute the charges. Crisis Group interviews, Islah members, Sanaa, September, November

recruiting politically and ideologically affiliated soldiers can only complicate the task of building a neutral army and police force. Saleh Wajaman, a Huthi representative, said, "many new soldiers have been added to the army from Islah, more than 30,000 recruits. But, these recruits are really militia and are not soldiers loyal to the nation. New recruits are not coming from other groups like Ansar Allah [the Huthis] or the Hiraak."¹²³

The accusations are mutual. Islah and its allies assert Ahmed Ali has been stacking the Republican Guard with tribal loyalists and even Huthis,¹²⁴ while others claim that during the uprising he and Yahya Saleh recruited and promoted individuals from allied tribes, notably 'Ans, Sanhan and Hadda, bordering Sanaa.¹²⁵

Without hard numbers, it is difficult to substantiate either side's allegations, though there is every reason to suspect both of trying to stack the deck. As it is, the claims have persuaded each competing group that the other is busily working on a military plan B should negotiations fail.¹²⁶ Expanding the army also is problematic at a time when virtually all experts, foreign and domestic, agree on the need to downsize based on a proper threat assessment.¹²⁷

Further muddying the picture, an unknown number of interior and defence ministry mid- and lower-level officers have been fired or rotated. Because these decisions do not require presidential decree, they are hard to track and could well be made without legal basis. In particular, Saleh supporters, GPC members, non-Islah opposition members, the Huthis and Hiraak suspect Islah of implementing far-reaching personnel changes within the interior ministry¹²⁸ – a charge Islah vehemently denies.¹²⁹ A senior interior ministry official said:

2012. An Islah member denied recruits came from Iman University, that it was used as a training camp for Salafi fighters and that there was any official connection between it and Islah. Crisis Group interview, Sanaa, November 2012.

¹²³ Crisis Group interview, Sheikh Saleh Wajaman, Huthi representative and chairman of a non-governmental organisation, the High Council of the Revolutionary Forces, Sanaa, 15 October 2012. In a subsequent telephone conversation, he explained: "Recruitment until now has not been based on national, standardised criteria. Instead, it is benefiting those aligned with the Firqa, Mohsen and the Ahmars. Recruitment should not happen until after the national dialogue, when the country has decided on national recruitment criteria and when all Yemenis have an opportunity to apply. If the government would wait, it would build confidence in an inclusive dialogue process". Crisis Group interview, Sanaa, 22 March 2012.

¹²⁴ Crisis Group interviews, Islah members, Sanaa, October 2012.

¹²⁵ Crisis Group interview, prominent bureaucrat and political independent, Sanaa, September 2012.

¹²⁶ Crisis Group interview, prominent journalist, Sanaa, October 2012.

¹²⁷ Crisis Group interviews, Abd-al-Ghani al-Eryani, Democratic Awakening Movement president, Sanaa, 20 September 2012; retired general, Sanaa, October 2012; foreign experts, Sanaa, October 2012; Ambassador Marwan Noman (ret.), Sanaa, 16 January 2013.

¹²⁸ Crisis Group interviews, Saleh supporters, GPC members, Sanaa, March, November 2012; Hiraak supporters, political independent, Aden, September 2012; Yemeni journalist, Huthi supporters, Sanaa, October 2012; political independent, Sanaa, November 2012.

¹²⁹ Islah asserts it is abiding by the law and being judicious with appointments, rotations and firing decisions, despite considerable pressure from constituents for more radical changes. Moreover, it says that some appointees whom critics claim to be from Islah are not party members. Crisis Group interview, Islah member, Sanaa, November 2012.

We have made changes in the ministry strictly in accordance with the civil service rotations law. Most everyone inside the ministry is a product of the old regime, but they still all are sons of Yemen. Changes are being made but at higher levels so that the people will see that positive transformations are taking place.¹³⁰

There is little doubt that the former opposition is under strong pressure to demonstrate that things no longer are the same and reward its supporters. It is also correct to point out that, after 33 years in power, security services are stacked with Saleh and GPC loyalists. Yet, in today's charged political climate, in which rules of the game remain up for grabs, and there is no inclusive political pact, recruitment, rotations and appointments are deeply sensitive issues that could undermine trust. Optimally, any recruitment should be halted for the time being, save efforts to rehire southerners who illegally lost their jobs post-1994.¹³¹ Public discussion by the defence and interior ministries of how they are going about training and integrating recent recruits could help allay suspicions and reduce tensions. As for rotations and attendant appointments, some are necessary and even desirable in order to demonstrate that changes have occurred after the uprising. But these ought to be done transparently, according to the civil service law and based on qualifications rather than party affiliation.

¹³⁰ Crisis Group interview, Sanaa, December 2012. According to him, as of December 2012, senior-level rotation/changes included one vice minister, one finance and administration deputy minister, eight general managers and twelve general security directors.

¹³¹ See Section IV.A.5 for more detail on the southern issue and military-security employment.

IV. Challenges Ahead

Challenges to reforming the military-security apparatus are numerous and, taken together, even daunting. A legacy of corruption, personalisation of leadership and balkanisation along tribal and regional lines inevitably weighs on the course and pace of change. An observer said:

The core of the problem is that the army [and security services] is not built on a professional basis but rather according to tribal and party affiliation. That is still the case: Islah has sway over the interior ministry, and the GPC enjoys influence within the defence ministry. As for corruption, it exists at all levels of the military, not just among officers. As a result, change will need to be gradual and accompanied by the necessary [financial] means to deal with it.¹³²

Announcing new organisational structures for the interior and, more importantly, defence ministries was a significant step, meeting a core demand of those in the opposition who insisted on diminishing the power of the Salehs as a condition for meaningful dialogue. In theory, it also should significantly loosen Mohsen's hold on the military, paving the way for further reform. But it is an initial step only and still awaits full implementation.¹³³

A. *Fractures and Competing Stakeholders*

1. Elite powerbrokers

As seen, the weightiest short-term obstacle to reform is the persistent influence of – and rivalry between – Ali Mohsen and Ahmed Ali. Both men in effect command important units, recent restructuring announcements notwithstanding. This likely will endure at least until the president announces new regional commanders. Even then, and assuming neither Ali Mohsen nor Ahmed Ali is appointed, their respective networks arguably will remain in place.¹³⁴

Unlike earlier decrees, the December 2012 reorganisation posed a significant threat to both power centres. Although in the past Saleh's camp was most openly defiant, attention has since shifted to Mohsen, who had been steadily gaining strength but now faces a challenge to his authority. Initially, he accepted the announcements, telling Crisis Group that he “welcomes the decrees on behalf of the revolution and in accordance with Hadi's legitimacy. It is the other side that blocks decrees. The revolution is carrying the idea of change and is supportive of restructuring”.¹³⁵

Yet, beneath the surface, tensions between Mohsen and Hadi appear to be brewing, notably over the latter's decision to disband the Firqa and split the north-west region into two. Observers point as evidence to a mutiny led by pro-Mohsen troops

¹³² Crisis Group interview, military expert, Sanaa, January 2013.

¹³³ Next steps in the defence ministry include defining job descriptions for new posts, assigning new regional commanders, identifying the weapons and troop requirements of new military regions and distributing resources accordingly. Crisis Group interview, foreign expert, Sanaa, January 2013. In the interior ministry, too, more is needed, as the technical committee defines the functions of new organisational structures and produces ministry by-laws. Crisis Group interview, foreign expert, Sanaa, February 2013.

¹³⁴ Crisis Group interviews, group of GPC supporters, Sanaa, January 2013.

¹³⁵ Crisis Group interview, Sanaa, 14 January 2013.

against a recent presidentially-appointed commander.¹³⁶ Mohsen augmented these fears in March, when he declared his intention to remain in the military as long as the country is unstable and facing a political crisis.¹³⁷ His controversial statements raised the stakes surrounding Hadi's expected command announcements; the real test will occur when the president declares the list of new regional commanders.¹³⁸

In seeking to curb his potential rivals' power, Hadi undoubtedly is benefiting from external pressure. Although indirect forms of resistance are possible, neither Saleh's nor Mohsen's camp likely will want to openly oppose key outside actors at this stage. An analyst said:

The timing of Hadi's decrees came as a surprise to Yemenis. The fact that he had the confidence to issue them so soon shows that the external balance of power presently is more important than the internal one. Yemenis must adjust to a new reality made possible by the UN and the U.S. This means Hadi might be able to implement what he has announced.¹³⁹

Equally important, Hadi's strategy of gradually chipping away at both power centres without dramatically tipping the balance to one side seems to be yielding dividends. Both camps have lost substantial financial clout and authority, which should further contain their ability and willingness to openly defy the president.¹⁴⁰

2. Defence ministry versus interior ministry

To date, no meaningful discussion has taken place regarding the appropriate division of labour between the two security ministries. Instead, and partly reflecting political expediency, reform in each has occurred independently, producing separate and mostly unrelated organisational charts. As a result, boundaries between the two remain unclear, leading to ambiguity as to the mandate of the military (which in many instances is engaged in domestic activities), and confusion between its role and that of the police and the relative size of each.¹⁴¹ A foreign expert remarked:

¹³⁶ Crisis Group interviews, senior politician, GPC members, independent analyst, prominent youth activist, Sanaa, January 2013. A senior politician said that the January 2013 mutiny in the 310th Brigade (the Amalika Brigade) should be interpreted as a message of dissatisfaction from Mohsen to Hadi and the U.S. regarding recent decisions. Earlier in the restructuring process, the president had replaced the commander of the brigade; subsequently, Hadi was persuaded by Mohsen to reinforce the brigade with a loyal battalion. This battalion led the rebellion against the president's new commander. Crisis Group interview, senior politician, Sanaa, January 2013; "Possible mutiny said contained by Yemeni state", *Asharq al-Awsat*, 13 January 2013.

¹³⁷ "General Ali Mohsen in Sharq al-Awsat", *Akbar al-Youm*, 3 March 2013.

¹³⁸ If Mohsen does not appear on the list, his military power will decline significantly, and his supporters are likely to resist the decision. Even if he is on the list, his power almost certainly will be greatly diluted, as he will command a single region, no longer have the Firqa at his disposal and have to deal with a stronger defence ministry. In this latter scenario, the test of compliance will be whether Mohsen abandons Sanaa for his regional command and supports the reallocation of Firqa troops to other command units.

¹³⁹ Crisis Group interview, Abd-al-Ghani al-Eryani, Democratic Awakening Movement president, Sanaa, 10 January 2013.

¹⁴⁰ Crisis Group interview, Hadi supporter, military expert, Sanaa, March 2013.

¹⁴¹ Many reformers advocate a significantly smaller army and much stronger police. Crisis Group interviews, tribal sheikh, civil society activist, Sanaa, September 2012; academic, civil servant, Sanaa, January 2013.

In Yemen, unlike most Western armies, the defence ministry is working primarily inside the country, where the army is used as the main coercive agent. It is deployed against tribes and insurgents, including al-Qaeda. In this sense, the battle space is shared between the interior and defence ministries. Roles and responsibilities need to be clarified, and their respective missions should be differentiated.¹⁴²

Likewise, a controversy exists over which institution should take the lead on counter-terrorism and border security.¹⁴³

The issue is politically highly sensitive, as any redefinition of mandates – and thus recalibration of sizes – undoubtedly would entail a redistribution of resources. A military expert said, “Yemenis probably realise they do not need an army of its current size, but the military officers also know that they would be out of a job if it were reduced. No one wants to get rid of his assets”.¹⁴⁴ And the issue could be further complicated by the reality that the institutions increasingly are perceived as closely identified with different camps – the interior ministry with Islah¹⁴⁵ and the defence ministry with the GPC, though it also progressively is being associated with Hadi loyalists as well.¹⁴⁶

Protecting both ministries from politicisation or the perception thereof will be difficult considering the nation's charged legacy in this respect. At a minimum, it will require a transparent and consultative process guided by civilian decision-making. The national dialogue could play a role by laying out a broad division of labour between the two ministries. Initiating a discussion among the government, parties and civil society on the need for a comprehensive national security strategy also might help break the defence and interior ministry stovepipes; widen the security lens to include neglected issues such as the economy, the judicial sector and the intelligence apparatus; and generate national political support for any future resource reallocation.

3. Domestic versus external stakeholders

Although foreigners provide valuable advice and can boost confidence in the overall process, there are potential downsides. Notably, and while international advisers so far have displayed sensitivity to the concerns,¹⁴⁷ critics of the restructuring efforts are liable to denounce their contribution as externally-driven, and domestic stakeholders

¹⁴² Crisis Group interview, Sanaa, October 2012. Yemenis also acknowledge the problematic overlap between the two ministries, as evidenced by the fact that defence forces often are engaged in policing. Crisis Group interview, tribal sheikh, Sanaa, September 2012; interior minister officer, Sanaa, October 2013.

¹⁴³ Even after restructuring decisions, the situation is muddled; the interior ministry retains authority over the coast guard and has a counter-terrorism general directorate, whereas the defence ministry has both a Special Operations Command responsible for counter-terrorism and a border guard. Roughly speaking, defence ministry officials and their U.S. advisers generally lean toward granting defence a greater role, whereas interior ministry officials and their European advisers advocate greater interior ministry responsibility. Crisis Group interviews, military advisers and experts, Sanaa, September, November 2012, January 2013.

¹⁴⁴ Crisis Group interview, Sanaa, November 2013.

¹⁴⁵ Crisis Group interviews, prominent GPC members, Sanaa, September, October, November 2012, January, February 2013.

¹⁴⁶ Crisis Group interviews, political independent, civil servant, Sanaa, September 2012; GPC members and supporters, Sanaa, September, November 2012; JMP supporters, Sanaa, November 2012. Of course, both still are full of Saleh supporters given his 33 years in power.

¹⁴⁷ Crisis Group interview, foreign advisers, Sanaa, October 2012 and January 2013.

might feel less ownership of – and therefore less accountability for – any decision it influences.

Fears of overreach appear particularly acute regarding the U.S., perceived by some as partisan and overly focused on counter-terrorism. Sheikh Saleh Wajaman, Huthi representative in Sanaa, said:

Ansar Allah [the Huthis] objects to outside interference in military restructuring. What is happening in the army now is an American and Saudi conspiracy. The U.S., supported by the Wahabbis, is controlling the agenda. This is not restructuring but privatisation in a different direction – the U.S. is getting rid of those who oppose them and bringing in *Islah*.¹⁴⁸

On a different note, a high-ranking GPC member commented: “The U.S. does not want a real army in Yemen. Instead, they want a force that can fight al-Qaeda. This is one of Yemen’s goals, but it is not our only priority”.¹⁴⁹ Expressing another concern, a military expert remarked:

If security reform fails, the Americans will be blamed. It will be labelled a foreign model. If there were more involvement from parliament and relevant political parties, including actors like the Huthis and Hiraak, then it would be more likely to be accepted inside Yemen.¹⁵⁰

Although such suspicions likely are inevitable, particularly given Yemen’s entanglement in the ongoing regional cold war, they can be abated in several ways: emphasising transparency; clearly integrating the restructuring endeavour with the national dialogue; and preserving a prominent role for Jordan as an external adviser, given its overall reputation so far.¹⁵¹ As for transparency, both the defence and interior ministries have taken steps to engage the public via conferences bringing together military-security personnel, civilians, academics and activists.¹⁵² This ought now to be followed up with more routine communication pertaining to the restructuring process and the foreign advisory role.

4. Tribes, officers and restructuring

The country’s tribal structure, especially in the northern highlands, is a significant albeit not insurmountable obstacle to building a national, professional military-security service. In many regions, the state never has enjoyed a monopoly on violence. In the northern highlands governorates such as Marib and Jawf, tribal fighters are heavily armed, forcing the authorities into constant negotiations. Confrontations, when they occur – involving, for example, the protection of critical infrastructure – necessitate involvement of not only regular police units but also paramilitaries, like the Central Security Forces, or even the regular army. This is one reason for the blurred lines between the interior and defence ministries.¹⁵³

¹⁴⁸ Crisis Group interview, Sanaa, 15 October 2012.

¹⁴⁹ Crisis Group interview, Sanaa, February 2012.

¹⁵⁰ Crisis Group interview, Sanaa, October 2012.

¹⁵¹ Crisis Group interviews, military commanders, Sanaa, November 2012; military advisers, Sanaa, January, February 2013.

¹⁵² The defence ministry held a symposium in November 2012 to discuss restructuring with the public; the interior ministry did likewise in December.

¹⁵³ Crisis Group interview, military officer, Sanaa, November 2012.

Potential resistance to reforms by sheikhs and their tribesmen reflects in part their deep entanglement in a political economy of corruption and attendant benefits revolving around the military-security apparatus. Some sheikhs hold significant security positions, even though they work either not at all or seldom. According to an officer with access to payroll information, “under Saleh, sheikhs would become colonels without any training. Indeed, there are approximately 14,000 colonels in the army – more than all other officer ranks combined”.¹⁵⁴ As a result, they receive not only salaries, but also petrol subsidies, uniforms and supplies. Likewise, they routinely are allotted a certain number of soldiers who work in their service as guards, even though their salaries and benefits come from the central government budget. A southern officer explained this relationship:

The North has a long history of paying tribes to fight. Now, many tribesmen are included in the military; salaries and other benefits are paid through the defence ministry directly to the sheikh, who in turn pays the soldiers and provides them with food, uniforms, etc., as needed. They serve as his guards and are loyal to him, not to the nation. Most sheikhs have a few dozen; some have a few hundred.¹⁵⁵

A prominent tribal sheikh added:

Under Saleh's regime, having the state pay the guards was yet another way to gain the sheikhs' support. Over half the sheikhs in the country, including the Ahmars, have a certain number of guards paid with state money flowing through three main centres: the Republican Guard, the Firqa and the interior ministry. Some sheikhs collect from all three. Changing the current system is necessary, but it also is complex and will require time, careful planning and possibly a temporary monetary solution for tribesmen who are not needed in the military but cannot find alternative jobs.¹⁵⁶

In other words, sheikhs but also tribesmen extract important economic benefits – in the latter case, in the form of full or partial state employment in a context where alternative jobs typically are unavailable.¹⁵⁷ Attempts to clear payrolls of ghost soldiers or reduce the regular military's size without providing compensation or alternative employment could be deeply destabilising. The challenge thus will be to allow for the

¹⁵⁴ Crisis Group interview, army officer, Sanaa, October 2012.

¹⁵⁵ Crisis Group interview, Sanaa, September 2012. A prominent tribal sheikh with knowledge of the Zubaryi brigade (affiliated with the Ahmars) claimed it has only 300-400 soldiers. It was established in 1994, but after the war, Saleh reportedly redistributed many of its troops and moved what was left of it to Marib governorate. Many see the brigade as a sign of Ahmar influence in the military, but this sheikh said, “Saleh did not want anyone from the Ahmar family to have power in the army, so he placed them [the Ahmars] in charge of the Zubaryi brigade, which is small and has no armour or heavy weapons”. Crisis Group interview, Sanaa, January 2013.

¹⁵⁶ Crisis Group interview, Sanaa, January 2013.

¹⁵⁷ Sheikhs can extract other types of gains. A military officer said, “when the military establishes a base in a region, they will employ some tribesmen from the area. Maybe 5-10 per cent of the total employees at a base will hail from the local tribe, but the number really depends on the strength of the local tribe. If tribesmen are directly recruited by the army, they will be paid by army commanders; if they are recruited through a sheikh, the sheikh pays salaries with government money. In general, there has been a decline in the number of tribesmen being paid by sheikhs. The Republican Guard is seeking approval of local tribes via other indirect benefits related to military bases, such as the construction of new roads”. Crisis Group interview, Sanaa, September 2012.

incorporation of tribes into the military-security apparatus without encouraging its further balkanisation.

One way to do this would be to explicitly enlist tribes in the task of protecting their local areas through a system of recruitment and training pursuant to which they would be directly remunerated by the state or local government. Sheikh Faisal Abu Ras, a former parliamentarian from Jawf, pointed to his own region, where, he said, border guards were local tribesmen paid by Ali Mohsen and reportedly received only half their allotted 30,000 riyal (approximately \$150) monthly salary. He proposed that border guard money be used instead to fund and train a proper police force. Responding to critics who argue this would strengthen tribalism, he said, "my aim is not to bring Yemen back to tribalism, but to bring tribalism to modernity".¹⁵⁸ Other solutions along this line could entail incorporating tribesmen into defence ministry forces¹⁵⁹ or setting up a federally-structured National Guard.¹⁶⁰ Yemenis should publicly debate these options to ensure buy-in from key stakeholders, sheikhs included.¹⁶¹

If sheikhs and tribes present one obstacle to reform, so too does the wider officer corps. As mentioned, rank rarely reflects qualification, and commanders benefit financially from the practice of ghost soldiers, weapons trade and privileged business deals – including the sale on the open market of subsidised products intended for

¹⁵⁸ Crisis Group interview, Sanaa, 17 September 2012. A southern officer who views the tribes as a significant obstacle to reform said, "how can we strengthen the state when the tribes are so powerful? My personal preference would be for the government to respond with force. In the former South Yemen, the state took weapons away from tribes, and no civilian could carry weapons. Another option would be to pay the tribes to protect their own regions. The tribes weaken the state, but incorporating them may be the best way to deal with the challenge". Crisis Group interview, Sanaa, October 2012.

¹⁵⁹ A southern general who has studied the issue for years suggests that the state first identify ghost soldiers who receive partial salary for reporting to work when needed and then give them the option of working full-time in their areas of origin. "The tribesmen eventually could be moved to the interior ministry, but right now the ministry forces are not strong enough to secure these areas". Crisis Group interview, Sanaa, November 2012.

¹⁶⁰ If the national dialogue produces a federal system, a National Guard could be a useful option for incorporating tribesmen into the security services. National Guard troops would be paid by the central government yet fall under the command of local governors for use inside their respective regions. In a national emergency, troops could be placed under central government command. A military adviser warned this model "would require coming up with a clear organisation, rank system and proper training for national guardsmen. Ultimately, whether to form such a body is an issue that would need to be resolved in the new constitution". Crisis Group interview, Sanaa, October 2012.

¹⁶¹ Unfortunately, the current government in some ways is repeating the mistakes of the past by paying local tribesmen/notables directly, as opposed to developing a plan for integrating them into the military or police. This is the case with the popular committees in the South. In 2011, during the uprising and in the absence of security provided by the state, local communities in the South, particularly in Abyan, formed popular committees to fight al-Qaeda affiliates, known as Ansar al-Sharia. Popular committees are a combination of tribesmen, Hiraak, party affiliates, political independents and, in some cases, former Ansar al-Sharia fighters who have switched sides. (For information on the origins of Ansar al-Sharia, see Crisis Group Report, *Breaking Point?*, op. cit., pp. 26-28). Originally they were not funded by the government, but largely due to their critical role in expelling Ansar al-Sharia from Abyan in June 2012, their fighters now receive defence ministry salaries and assistance. The popular committees largely are managed by the defence minister, himself from Abyan. Crisis Group interviews, high-ranking military officers, Sanaa, October and September 2012. Today, although popular committees are the cornerstone of local security in Abyan, there is no plan to systematically train and incorporate these fighters into the military or police force.

military use.¹⁶² Many officers are past retirement age or have been in their current positions for as many as 25 years.¹⁶³ Removing them and promoting a new generation likely would give rise to a military constituency more supportive of reform, yet also present immense challenges, threatening as it would powerful vested interests.¹⁶⁴

What is required is an incremental process that both rearranges the officer corps and avoids provoking its collective opposition. One option would be to provide financial incentives for voluntary retirement via an upgraded pension package – no mean feat given existing budgetary constraints. At a minimum, it would require a parallel effort to cleanse payroll lists of ghost soldiers.

Regardless of the ultimate approach, there is little doubt that direct – preferably electronic – state payment of soldiers would help fight corruption, curb the ghost soldier phenomenon and promote loyalty to the nation. As a foreign military adviser put it:

Direct payment of soldiers would have widespread, positive consequences. It would go a long way in reducing corruption as well as building a national sense of pride in military service. If tribesmen realised they were being paid less than they could, they might choose to become full-time rather than part-time soldiers indebted to a particular sheikh.¹⁶⁵

Local commanders and tribal sheikhs almost certainly would oppose any such direct payment scheme for precisely those reasons.¹⁶⁶ Progress along this path would require full support from Hadi and the interior and defence ministries, as well as external actors. It also would have to be implemented simultaneously across all units so as to impact all vested stakeholders equally at the same time.

5. Regional considerations: The Hiraak and Huthis

Two significant communities essentially have been frozen out of the debate over restructuring: the southern Hiraak and the Huthis. Their respective views must be taken into account if the process is to be meaningful. Both are influential domestic constituencies with significant popular support; they do not perceive current restructuring efforts as legitimate; and they are unlikely to do so until a political settlement that can guide military-security reform is in place.

The Hiraak's view is profoundly influenced by the strong regional push for independence or, at a minimum, substantial autonomy.¹⁶⁷ Even as discussions in Sanaa

¹⁶² For an overview of military corruption, see "Yemen Corruption Assessment", U.S. Agency for International Development, 25 September 2006, p. 4.

¹⁶³ Crisis Group interview, military expert, Sanaa, January 2013.

¹⁶⁴ A military expert said, "most top-level military officers would lose as a result of restructuring, because they gained from corruption in the old system. The majority among them are northern tribesmen. Some professional officers are interested in change, but they constitute a mere handful at the top; most are ... at the colonel level and below". Crisis Group interview, Sanaa, January 2013.

¹⁶⁵ Crisis Group interview, Sanaa, October 2012.

¹⁶⁶ Efforts previously have been made to pay soldiers directly. Prior to their transfer to the Presidential Protection Unit, for example, 1st Brigade soldiers were paid by mail. Crisis Group interview, high-ranking army officer, Sanaa, September 2012. However, other units continued to receive payments from their commanders. Likewise, plans were afoot before the uprising to move toward a direct payment system in the interior ministry, but powerful officers thwarted them. Crisis Group interview, interior ministry officer, Sanaa, September 2012.

¹⁶⁷ For more on the Hiraak and their demands, see Crisis Group Report, *Breaking Point?*, op. cit.

revolve around how best to unify and restructure the current military-security apparatus, southerners focus on maintaining a distinct body of their own. A southern military general said, "one argument frequently made by southerners is that the southern army must be restored before we can begin any restructuring. The second, prevalent in Sanaa, is that the existing army must first be unified under a single chain of command before restructuring begins".¹⁶⁸

For southerners who support full independence, current restructuring efforts are wholly illegitimate. A Hiraak activist and former southern military officer explained:

What army are we talking about reforming now? The southern army was completely destroyed. Even if southerners return to this army, the number of northerners will be much greater, and they still will control everything. There will never be a unified army. So the solution is to build a southern army in an independent South. Then, at some point in the future, maybe there can be a political alliance between the two states similar to the European Union.¹⁶⁹

Even southerners willing to remain part of unified nation in a federal system insist on first ensuring regional military balance. In the words of a prominent southern political leader, "today, the term restructuring refers only to restructuring Ali Mohsen's and Ahmed Ali's armies. Why should Yemenis talk like this? First the government must bring back the entire southern army to ensure balance".¹⁷⁰

The divergence between the Hiraak and others on this underscores the difficulty of implementing comprehensive reform in the absence of a durable political settlement. Relatedly, it underscores the need to integrate the restructuring process within a broadly inclusive national dialogue – and to ensure the Hiraak participate in it, something that is not yet guaranteed, particularly given escalating tensions between southerners on the one hand and the government, as well as Islah, on the other.¹⁷¹ A minority of Hiraak affiliates open to federal options are participating in the dialogue, but the more hardline faction associated with former southern President Ali Salim al-Beedh refuse and continue to demand immediate separation.

¹⁶⁸ Crisis Group interview, Sanaa, September 2012.

¹⁶⁹ Crisis Group interview, Aden, September 2012. A former southern officer echoed this: "How can we talk about reform of the army when there is no southern army? What is happening now is a fight between northern factions. The issue is between two factions in the north [Ahmed Ali and Ali Mohsen]. The South has no part of it. We need our own army for protection against the North". Crisis Group interview, Aden, September 2012.

¹⁷⁰ Crisis Group interview, Sanaa, October 2012. Whereas from a political vantage point it would make sense to rehire southerners, this would complicate the longer-term reform process which – if based on a realistic threat assessment – presumably would entail military downsizing.

¹⁷¹ In December 2012, President Hadi belatedly announced formation of employment and land committees to address southern grievances. However, these have yet to produce results capable of bolstering southern confidence in the political process. Prospects are clouded by the rising tensions that caused the deaths of at least five unarmed Hiraak demonstrators on 21 February 2013. On that day, Islah organised a rally in Aden to celebrate the anniversary of Hadi's election. Hiraak supporters set up opposing rallies and security forces fired on participants seeking to approach the Islah demonstrations. Violence prompted further demonstrations and a Hiraak-led campaign of civil disobedience in Aden, Lajh, Dalia, Abyan, Shebwa and Hadramout governorates. Hadramout reportedly witnessed instances of northern-owned stores being torched and their owners harassed. In Aden and Hadramout, Hiraak supporters burned Islah headquarters. Crisis Group interviews, Adeni journalist, Hadrami activist, Hadrami politician, Sanaa, February 2013.

Like the Hiraak, Huthi supporters also feel estranged from the current restructuring process. Their scepticism is understandable: not only did they fight six rounds with the central government, but the general who prosecuted these wars, Ali Mohsen, as well as the Huthis' arch rivals, Islah, seemingly have been gaining strength. Sheikh Wajaman, a Huthi spokesman and national dialogue delegate, said, "Ansar Allah [the Huthis] is excluded from the restructuring process. What is happening now amounts to the privatisation of the military to benefit Islah. It is not real reform".¹⁷² Restructuring, he said, "should wait until after the national dialogue and the formation of a sufficiently representative government. The current government only represents signatories to the GCC initiative [the GPC and JMP], not all Yemenis".¹⁷³

Without Huthi acquiescence, meaningful military-security reform will be hard to achieve. They control significant territory in the north, repeatedly have repelled government incursions into their mountainous strongholds and are heavily armed, so much so that critics often describe them as a state within a state.¹⁷⁴ In the present context, demands that they relinquish their weapons and support current restructuring efforts are illusory. Like other armed groups, whether factions within the military, militia associated with parties or armed portions of the Hiraak, the Huthis have little incentive to fully disarm in the absence of a durable political settlement.

B. *Linking Restructuring with the National Dialogue and Civilian Decision-making*

In an ideal situation, the definition of roles, responsibilities and authorities of various security sector institutions – together with their relationship to other branches of government – would be guided by a constitution and overarching consensus on the shape of the state and political system. Because none of that exists, security reform is taking place in a relative political vacuum, beyond the vague and broad (albeit fundamental) principle of civilian control.

This in turn has given rise to two opposing views. Among civil society and political activists, many wish to see the outcome of the national dialogue guide the security reform. Mohammed Abd-al-Malik al-Mutawakil, a prominent intellectual and politician, argues the military – because it is one of the most important components of the state – must be a matter of national consensus and should be the first issue discussed in the dialogue. Political actors collectively should address "what type of military they want; how precisely to separate the military from politics; and how to ensure that the army is a truly national institution?" He goes so far as to characterise decisions that already have been made on the security sector as antithetical to the goal of building a democratic state: "Who is making decisions regarding the military now? It is President Hadi, with influence from the political parties and maybe the U.S. Instead, there must be input from all relevant political actors and consensus on the way forward".¹⁷⁵

¹⁷² Crisis Group interview, Sanaa, 15 October 2012.

¹⁷³ Crisis Group phone interview, Sanaa, 22 March 2013.

¹⁷⁴ Crisis Group interviews, GPC member, Sanaa, February 2012; Islah politician, Sanaa, November 2012; military commander, Sanaa, November 2012.

¹⁷⁵ Crisis Group interview, Sanaa, 12 January 2013. This, he added, was the only way to guard against manipulation of the restructuring process by political actors: "Islah and others wanted restructuring before the dialogue so that they could take some of the military-security services for themselves. They knew that if the issue was integrated into the national dialogue, the army would become a national army".

Others, while not objecting to steps already taken, nonetheless believe the dialogue must guide the reform process. Abd-al-Karim al-Eryani, who chaired the national dialogue preparatory committee, said:

Nobody has articulated a clear vision for the role of the military under a civilian government. The national dialogue should discuss the relationship between the military-security apparatus and politics. What it should not do is discuss the technical aspects of restructuring, for example how the armed services are organised.¹⁷⁶

Others, notably members of the military-security apparatus, advocate a strict firewall between security restructuring and the national dialogue, fearing politicisation of the former. A high-ranking army commander put it as follows:

The political parties must not be involved in the restructuring of the military, or they will destroy the army. They will try to carve up the army between them and create their own separate militaries. Hadi should be in charge of reforming the military, and the national dialogue should be separate.¹⁷⁷

Security personnel are not alone in this view. A GPC member likewise insisted that “restructuring must be kept far from the national dialogue and politics; it should be conducted on the basis of expert, technical advice. Otherwise, the political parties will structure the army as they want”.¹⁷⁸ Nadwa al-Dawsari, a political independent and civil society activist, agreed, voicing concern that if restructuring “is included in the dialogue, then it will be politicised and hijacked because of the 50-50 split between parties who signed the GCC agreement”.¹⁷⁹ The U.S. ambassador also backed a strict separation between the two processes:

Restructuring and the national dialogue are two separate processes, and mixing them is like mixing apples and oranges. The restructuring should be left to military-security experts, and the national dialogue is where politicians should discuss the functions of the new state. The dialogue already has a huge agenda and they need to stay focused.¹⁸⁰

In the end, the national dialogue committee decided that the question of the security services ought to be included, both given its importance and because it inevitably will be shaped by what happens during the dialogue.¹⁸¹ Yet, this only half resolved the debate. Significant ambiguity surrounds how the dialogue will influence restructuring and what specific issues will be on the agenda. The challenge will be to clearly

¹⁷⁶ Crisis Group interview, Sanaa, 13 January 2013.

¹⁷⁷ Crisis Group interview, Sanaa, March 2013.

¹⁷⁸ Crisis Group interview, Sanaa, January 2013.

¹⁷⁹ Crisis Group phone interview, 4 January 2013.

¹⁸⁰ Crisis Group interview, U.S. Ambassador Gerald Feierstein, Sanaa, 13 January 2013. That said, he acknowledged that the results of the dialogue would have an impact on security matters. “A general understanding moving forward is that restructuring might depend on the outcome of the dialogue. This is the case, for example, with decisions regarding the state’s structure, which could impact the relative balance between central and local governments in term of providing peace and security”.

¹⁸¹ Crisis Group interview, national dialogue technical committee member, Sanaa, January 2013. One of the nine national dialogue working groups specifically addresses military-security reform. The agenda of the “foundations for building and the role of the army and security organisations” working group is unclear and currently under negotiation. Crisis Group interview, national dialogue participant, Sanaa, March 2013.

define the relationship between the dialogue and restructuring in a way that ensures civilian guidance and overall acceptance of the outcome, while protecting the technical prerogatives of military-security experts.

Specifically, the national dialogue should shape restructuring in three distinct areas: guaranteeing civilian oversight, notably through financial controls;¹⁸² providing a vision for the purpose and relative size of military-security services;¹⁸³ and ensuring decisions on restructuring are in line with whatever state structure ultimately is adopted (a federal system or some other decentralised model).¹⁸⁴ These issues are strategic in nature and do not necessitate a halt in current restructuring efforts, although they likely will dictate future adjustments and modifications.

¹⁸² Crisis Group interviews, political independent, Sanaa, September 2012; national dialogue technical committee member, Sanaa, January 2013.

¹⁸³ Crisis Group interviews, retired general, civil society activist, Sanaa, September 2012; Yemeni researcher, prominent Yemeni academic, Sanaa, January 2013.

¹⁸⁴ Crisis Group interviews, general, Sanaa, December 2012; prominent Yemeni academic, political independent, prominent tribal sheikh, civil servant, Sanaa, January 2013. This is particularly true with regard to the interior ministry, insofar as a more decentralised model likely would enhance local government authority over policing structures and, potentially, over the division of labour between the police and informal institutions, such as the tribe, on security matters. According to a poll conducted in November-December 2012, 51.48 per cent of respondents felt security ought not to remain exclusively with the central state. Preferences varied greatly by governorate; citizens from Aden governorate almost uniformly wanted security matters decided by the state; in Lahj, Dalia, al-Baydah and Amran governorates, the overwhelming majority wanted non-state actors to play a role. "Public Perceptions of the Security Sector and Police Work in Yemen", Yemen Polling Centre, 30 January 2013. A copy of the report, funded by the European Union, is on file with Crisis Group.

V. Conclusion

Yemen is in the initial stages of a military-security reform process that, even if successful, will be long and fraught with difficulties. What changes have taken place to date have weakened Saleh, strengthened Hadi and thus potentially opened political space for the national dialogue and deeper reforms. But there is a downside as well. Hadi's decisions are insufficiently transparent, inadequately explained to the public and concentrate excessive institutional authority in his hands. Little has been done to alleviate fears that Saleh's opponents within the old regime – namely Ali Mohsen and his supporters – are gaining influence. To build real confidence in the dialogue and persuade Yemenis it is free from undue military interference, it will be important to move gradually and simultaneously to reduce both camps' power. By the same token, the military-security services need to be immunised from further politicisation by halting recruitment, conducting personnel rotations, retirements and appointments in conformity with the law and ensuring all changes take place in a transparent fashion.

In the longer term, successful and sustainable security reform will have to cover broader issues, including the relationship with economic development and job creation (to ensure those who lose their positions do not become a source of disgruntlement); judicial reform (to support and hold accountable police and military forces); and reorganisation of the intelligence services.

For now, the most significant obstacle to effective and enduring restructuring is the absence of an inclusive political agreement regarding the future of the state and its political system. Without that, any small gains on the military side are liable to go to waste, and deeper reforms will be near-impossible to implement.

Sanaa/Brussels, 4 April 2013

Appendix A: Map of Yemen



Map No. 3847 Rev. 3 UNITED NATIONS
January 2004

Department of Peacekeeping Operations
Cartographic Section

Appendix B: About the International Crisis Group

The International Crisis Group (Crisis Group) is an independent, non-profit, non-governmental organisation, with some 150 staff members on five continents, working through field-based analysis and high-level advocacy to prevent and resolve deadly conflict.

Crisis Group's approach is grounded in field research. Teams of political analysts are located within or close by countries at risk of outbreak, escalation or recurrence of violent conflict. Based on information and assessments from the field, it produces analytical reports containing practical recommendations targeted at key international decision-takers. Crisis Group also publishes *CrisisWatch*, a twelve-page monthly bulletin, providing a succinct regular update on the state of play in all the most significant situations of conflict or potential conflict around the world.

Crisis Group's reports and briefing papers are distributed widely by email and made available simultaneously on the website, www.crisisgroup.org. Crisis Group works closely with governments and those who influence them, including the media, to highlight its crisis analyses and to generate support for its policy prescriptions.

The Crisis Group Board – which includes prominent figures from the fields of politics, diplomacy, business and the media – is directly involved in helping to bring the reports and recommendations to the attention of senior policy-makers around the world. Crisis Group is chaired by former U.S. Undersecretary of State and Ambassador Thomas Pickering. Its President and Chief Executive since July 2009 has been Louise Arbour, former UN High Commissioner for Human Rights and Chief Prosecutor for the International Criminal Tribunals for the former Yugoslavia and for Rwanda.

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Appendix C: Reports and Briefings on the Middle East and North Africa since 2010

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Tipping Point? Palestinians and the Search for a New Strategy, Middle East Report N°95, 26 April 2010 (also available in Arabic and Hebrew).

Drums of War: Israel and the "Axis of Resistance", Middle East Report N°97, 2 August 2010 (also available in Hebrew and Arabic).

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Gaza: The Next Israeli-Palestinian War?, Middle East Briefing N°30, 24 March 2011 (also available in Hebrew and Arabic).

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Light at the End of their Tunnels? Hamas & the Arab Uprisings, Middle East Report N°129, 14 August 2012 (also available in Arabic).

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