



# SMALL WARS

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## JOURNAL

## The Adaptive Transformation of Yemen's Republican Guard

By *Lucas Winter*

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### The Adaptive Transformation of Yemen's Republican Guard

Lucas Winter

In the summer of 1978, Colonel Ali Abdullah Saleh became president of the Yemeni Arab Republic (YAR) or North Yemen. Like his short-lived predecessor Ahmad al-Ghashmi, Saleh had been a tank unit commander in the YAR military before ascending the ranks.<sup>[1]</sup> Like al-Ghashmi, Saleh belonged to a tribe with limited national political influence but a strong presence in the country's military.<sup>[2]</sup> Three months into Saleh's presidency, conspirators allied with communists from the Popular Democratic Republic of Yemen (PDRY), or South Yemen, staged a coup and briefly seized key government installations in the capital Sana'a. The 1st Armored Brigade, North Yemen's main tank unit at the time, was deployed to quell the insurrection. The 1st Armored Brigade subsequently expanded to become the 1st Armored Division. Commanded by Saleh's kinsman Ali Muhsin al-Ahmar, it became North Yemen's premiere military unit and took control of vital installations in the capital. The division played a decisive role in securing victory for Saleh and his allies in Yemen's 1994 Civil War.

Although the 1st Armored Division functioned as President Saleh's Praetorian Guard, his personal safety was in the hands of the Yemeni Republican Guard (YRG), a small force created with Egyptian support in the early days of the republic.<sup>[3]</sup> YRG headquarters were in "Base 48," located on the capital's southern outskirts abutting the territories of Saleh's Sanhan tribe. Over the next 15 years, the YRG grew to comprise three brigades: in addition to the unit stationed in Base 48 (Sawwad), there was an air defense unit in Naqm Mountain and a third brigade located in Dhabwa, also near the border between Sanhan and the capital.<sup>[4]</sup> President Saleh established close ties with Saddam Hussein during the 1980s, and the YRG received training from and began modeling itself after the Iraqi Republican Guard.

Saleh's half-brother Ali Saleh al-Ahmar was the YRG's commander throughout the 1980s. During the 1994 Civil War he was said to have suffered from panic attacks.<sup>[5]</sup> This along with rumors he was using the YRG to plot a coup, and reports of a deadly tussle between his son and the president, eventually got him banished to Washington DC as Yemen's military attaché.<sup>[6]</sup> According to most interpretations, Ali Saleh al-Ahmar was marginalized as part of a plan, launched following the 1994 Civil War, which involved installing a new generation of Saleh family members in top military commands.

The new generation's leadership core consisted of Ali Abdullah Saleh's sons and nephews, most of whom had received military training abroad, including in Great Britain, the United States and Jordan. What influence they may have lacked on Yemen's local politics they presumably made up for with expertise in military theory and connections to the levers of global power. The new generation was to build a

professional force free of the venality and incompetence that characterized Yemen's military. It would then be used to shepherd the country into the post-Ali Abdullah Saleh period. At the center of this plan lay the YRG, and the president's son and presumed heir Ahmed Saleh was appointed its commander in 1999. That same year President Saleh announced his intention of pushing for constitutional amendments allowing him to stay in power until 2013, after which his son was expected to take over.

Ali Abdullah Saleh's family was not historically influential in the broader affairs of Sanhan, and his move to consolidate power within his family was viewed with suspicion by more established Sanhani families. Among the most vocal critics was the commander of Yemen's Eastern Military District, a close ally of Ali Muhsin named Mohammed Ismail al-Qadhi. Al-Qadhi allegedly objected to Saleh's request that Ali Muhsin's 1st Armored Division cede an important military base guarding the western entrance of the capital to the YRG. In August 1999, not long after clashing with the president, Al-Qadhi and several other senior officers died in a helicopter crash.<sup>[7]</sup> YRG units took over the 1st Armored Division's base the following day.<sup>[8]</sup>

The YRG bypassed the defense ministry and responded directly to the president. Under Ahmed Saleh's command it grew to become Yemen's elite military unit at the expense of Yemen's conventional forces, which were already riddled with corruption and neglect.<sup>[9]</sup> Most if not all of the new weapons systems acquired after 1994 went to the YRG and associated forces.<sup>[10]</sup> In 2002, U.S. troops were deployed to "train with, assist and advise" YRG troops.<sup>[11]</sup> Significant U.S. military assistance was also disbursed to establish the Counter Terrorism Unit (CTU) within the Central Security Forces (CSF), which were commanded by one of the president's nephews.<sup>[12]</sup>

The YRG also took possession of the Yemeni military's strategic weapons, including Soviet-era SCUD missiles from the PDRY arsenal and SS-21 Scarabs from YAR stocks, as well as newer SCUD-types imported from North Korea in the 2000s. The missiles were housed in fortified depots on a hillside overlooking Sana'a and overseen by the YRG's 5th and 6th Missile Brigades. Yemeni air defense assets guarding the capital were also under YRG control. The YRG received Yemen's newest main battle tanks, the T-72 and M-60A1, as well as the country's most advanced artillery systems.<sup>[13]</sup> The YRG had its own production facilities,<sup>[14]</sup> and by the end of the decade had grown into a self-contained force superior to Yemen's conventional forces. In total, the YRG consisted of nearly two dozen brigades, including mechanized, artillery and mechanized infantry, as well as air defense and missile brigades and specialized infantry units including special forces, presidential guard and mountain infantry.

Despite its extensive resources and training, the YRG was plagued by the corruption and factionalism that permeated Yemen's conventional armed forces and its government more broadly. Many YRG commanders were chosen for political rather than meritocratic reasons.<sup>[15]</sup> According to a Yemeni media report from late 2012, at least 52,000 of the YRG's alleged 128,000 soldiers were "ghost soldiers," making the actual force no greater than 78,000.<sup>[16]</sup> Media reports of clashes between factions within YRG units were common, as were mutinies and accusations that officers were using their positions for self-enrichment. The YRG helped fuel the Huthi insurgency from 2004 to 2010 by providing the rebels with weapons in order to weaken the 1st Armored Division, which had been tasked with suppressing the insurgency. The YRG performed poorly in its few significant engagements, such as in 2008 with Huthi backers in Bani Hushaysh on the outskirts of Sana'a.<sup>[17]</sup> When protests broke out throughout the country in early 2011, lightly armed tribesmen expelled the YRG from a base in al-Jawf, near the border with Saudi Arabia. Protesters encircled other YRG bases, and hundreds if not thousands of YRG members joined the anti-government movement.

The YRG's shortcomings were made plain by their struggles to contain armed supporters from Arhab and Nihm, two important tribes occupying strategic territory near the capital's north and northeast entry

points. Powerful families from both tribes had joined the anti-Saleh movement, and during the protests of 2011 groups from Arhab and Nihm met at a junction near the international airport to the capital's north and marched thence to join anti-government protests in the capital. The YRG's 62d Brigade set up various checkpoints along this route and began detaining and harassing protesters. Tensions boiled over after a man from Arhab was killed at one of these checkpoints.[18] The tribesmen surrounded the 62d Brigade with a "protest camp" consisting of more than 30 tents and over 1,000 people, in essence laying siege to the military base.[19] In July 2011, Arhab anti-government fighters came close to overrunning two other nearby YRG brigades (3d Mountain Infantry Brigade and 83rd YRG Artillery Brigade) but were chased off by the Yemeni Air Force, which at that point was still under Saleh's control.

In 2012 Murad al-Awbali, a member of Saleh's Sanhan tribe, was put in charge of the 62d Brigade in Arhab. A few weeks after his appointment, al-Awbali was kidnapped while traveling through territory of the Khawlan al-Tiyyal tribes, directly north of Sanhan territory and not far from the capital Sana'a. Al-Awbali's captors were YRG personnel who supported Ali Mushin and the opposition Islah Party. They had been dismissed for joining the protest movement in early 2011 and now wanted back pay and reinstatement, as stipulated by the UN-backed transitional roadmap (the "GCC Initiative").[20] The kidnappers immediately downplayed the tribal aspect of their action, noting that their demands were directed toward the state and the YRG rather than toward Sanhan. This did not deter al-Awbali's kinsmen from setting up checkpoints on the road between Khawlan territory and the capital, kidnapping dozens of men and demanding that al-Awbali be freed in exchange.[21] In early June a prominent Sanhani leader close to Ali Abdullah Saleh became involved in the mediation and eventually negotiated al-Awbali's release. A telling video of the negotiations showed how despite being a high-ranking YRG commander, a powerless al-Awbali watched passively as tribal leaders negotiated his fate.

The post-1994 YRG had been conceived as a professional army in which resources, training and advanced weaponry would replace the leveraging of patronage networks and tribal alliances as the basis for military and political supremacy. Rather than being thrust into the nitty-gritty of Yemeni tribal politics, Saleh's sons and nephews were sent abroad to receive military training and establish foreign contacts. Yet as al-Awbali's kidnapping showed, tribal politics often reigned supreme. Ali Muhsin and his decaying 1st Armored Division were well aware of this, and they remained relevant by maintaining a network of tribal, military and political connections. Writing in the daily *al-Masdar Online*, one Yemeni commentator explained how "Ali Muhsin lost his army one brigade at a time, but his home and his office were open daily to sheikhs and community leaders, and he built strong relationships with military leaders not only in the various military sectors but even within the YRG." [22]

Its shortcomings notwithstanding, the YRG remained Yemen's most formidable force when protests broke out in 2011. With rockets and artillery positioned above the main access points to Sana'a, it was well positioned to repel a military incursion.[23] Units from the Central Security Forces, also controlled by the new Saleh generation, were deployed inside the city. The public defection of Ali Muhsin al-Ahmar in March 2011 raised expectations of an armed struggle for control over the capital involving the 1st Armored Division on one side and combined YRG/Central Security Forces on the other, but the looming conflict was averted with Ali Abdullah Saleh's November 2011 resignation.

Saleh's resignation put a formal end to more than 30 years of carefully calibrated tribal-military rule. Replacing Saleh was a simplistic transitional roadmap, sponsored by Saudi Arabia and the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) and with backing from the United Nations (UN). The GCC- and UN-backed transitional period began in earnest with the February 2012 referendum on whether longtime Saleh's vice-president Abd Rabbo Mansour Hadi would remain as the country's president for the two-year transitional period. The referendum passed with a solid if unenthusiastic majority, given that large swathes of the

population boycotted the process.

Among the priorities of the transitional period were reforms to the military and security sectors, most importantly the dismissal of Saleh and his close family from command positions in the YRG and associated forces.<sup>[24]</sup> The 1st Armored Division was also slated for an overhaul in structure and command. In April 2012 Hadi removed the ex-president's nephew Tariq Saleh from command of the YRG 3d Armored Brigade and Special Guard; the first member of the new generation targeted for reassignment, he finally relinquished control after several months of extended negotiations.<sup>[25]</sup> In August Hadi folded three YRG units and one from the 1st Armored Division into the newly created Presidential Guard. Two more units from the YRG and six from the 1st Armored Division were put under regional commands. The following week a group of YRG soldiers unsuccessfully tried to storm the defense ministry in Sana'a. In December 2012 units from the Central Security Forces and the remaining YRG units were incorporated into a new formation called the Strategic Reserves Forces. The YRG's three missile/artillery brigades became part of a new "Missile Brigades Group" under the conventional chain of command. A final round of restructuring took place in April 2013, when new units were added to the Strategic Reserve Forces and the national military command went from five to seven military sectors, now identified by number rather than location. Ahmed Saleh was reassigned from YRG commander to UAE ambassador, theoretically putting the entirety of ex-president Saleh's praetorian forces under the control of President Hadi and his defense minister Mohammed Nasser Ahmed.

On paper the restructuring looked successful, as the YRG and the 1st Armored Division were officially dissolved and Saleh's close family members had all been replaced. In reality, neither Defense Minister Ahmed nor President Hadi was willing or able to fully reform a system that had provided them with a life of material comfort and social prestige. Although the entire new Saleh generation was pushed aside, their replacements were mostly career officers who were reluctant to fully break with the regime from which they had greatly benefited. Commanders whose careers preceded the Saleh presidency, such as Ali al-Jaifi (Ahmed Saleh's replacement as YRG commander), were inclined to tweak rather than overthrow the status quo.

Perhaps the most important consequence of restructuring was that by the end of the process the YRG and other military entities were in disarray. Entire units of the YRG dissolved amidst mutinies, desertions and infighting, with soldiers often taking equipment with them.<sup>[26]</sup> Ali Abdullah Saleh is said to have transferred large quantities of weapons from military stockpiles to his home area of Sanhan.<sup>[27]</sup> The transitional authorities became increasingly unable to provide services and security, including the wages and perks YRG officers had come to expect.

When the transitional negotiations fell apart in January 2014, Yemen was cast into political limbo. The restructured YRG forces were nominally loyal to the transitional authorities, but they were unable or unwilling to prevent supporters of the Huthi Movement from encircling the capital in the summer of 2014. In echoes of the strategy used by Arhab tribesmen a few years earlier, the Huthis surrounded YRG positions near the capital with "protest camps." Despite occasional clashes with Huthi gunmen and supporters, the YRG largely remained on the sidelines.

The Huthis and the Saleh government had been sworn enemies for the second half of the 2000s. Even then, Saleh loyalists in the YRG worked with the Huthis against the 1st Armored Division, which was the main government force fighting the Huthi insurgency.<sup>[28]</sup> In 2014, Saleh allies in the YRG (of which there were presumed to be many) once again saw common cause with Huthi leaders. Huthi influence in the YRG may have also been substantial, albeit hard to quantify. One anonymous source from 2012 claimed, perhaps fancifully, that over half of the YRG were Huthi sympathizers and 80% were Zaydis.<sup>[29]</sup>

In late summer 2014 pro-Huthi protesters cut off access to Sana'a International Airport and surrounded vital ministries downtown, while at the same time reinforcing the encirclement of the capital. On 21 September Huthi fighters entered Sana'a and immediately overran the remaining positions of the former 1st Armored Division. After seizing key installations they pressured the transitional authorities into forming a "national salvation" government under Huthi leadership. Ali al-Jaifi, commander of the former YRG, issued a statement welcoming the new government and reaffirming the neutrality of forces under his control. The Huthis named Zakaria al-Shami, a supporter from a prominent Hashemite family, as deputy chief of staff of the armed forces.<sup>[30]</sup> Other officers sympathetic to the Huthis were appointed to key commands, including in the YRG.<sup>[31]</sup>

According to documents leaked by a high-level defector, a Huthi priority was to co-opt the YRG into its own chain of command, under the leadership of Abd al-Khaliq al-Huthi, brother of the group's leader Abd al-Malik.<sup>[32]</sup> Shortly after entering the capital, the Huthis forcefully stormed several YRG positions, placing loyalists within the forces' command structure. Hundreds of Huthi fighters were incorporated into YRG ranks as soldiers. The YRG may have lost some its independence, but the injection of experienced and loyal foot soldiers revived its capabilities.

Some Yemeni media outlets argued that by the summer of 2015 the Huthis had seized full control of the YRG, though it appears that Saleh loyalists continued to hold sway within its command.<sup>[33]</sup> Quantifying the extent to which one or the other group had power over this complex and newly adaptable entity was virtually impossible. By early 2015, the YRG-Huthi hybrid was transforming into a force composed of ideologically motivated irregular fighters working alongside operators of heavy weaponry and professionally trained commanders. Rather than the Egyptian, Iraqi or Jordanian Republican Guards on which it had been variously modeled, under Huthi pressure the YRG rapidly drifted toward a structure more commonly associated with Hizbullah and the Iranian Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC).

Shortly after seizing the capital the Huthis began transferring heavy weaponry from the YRG and 1st Armored Division to their strongholds near the border with Saudi Arabia. Alleging that SCUD missiles from YRG stockpiles had been transferred north of Sana'a and pointed toward Saudi Arabia, in March 2015 the Saudi Air Force launched a bombing campaign targeting a variety of military targets. Some of the fiercest Saudi bombing runs focused on YRG bases surrounding Sana'a.<sup>[34]</sup> In April 2015 the YRG spokesman stated that YRG units had been scattered and redeployed in light of Saudi strikes.<sup>[35]</sup> Overmatched by Saudi airpower, the YRG became even more intertwined with the Huthis, and in the following months the YRG and the Huthi "Popular Committees" took credit for joint operations along the Saudi border, including ambushing Saudi patrols, launching raids into Saudi territory, blowing up isolated border guard posts, and raining artillery rockets on Saudi areas along the border. In June 2015, they launched the first of dozens of ballistic missiles toward Saudi territory. On the battlefield it became virtually impossible to separate the YRG and the "Popular Committees."

The YRG-Huthi hybrid forces have survived over a year and half of fierce Saudi bombardment. In October 2016, Saudi bombers struck a funeral hall and killed over a hundred Yemeni mourners, including prominent political and military leaders. One of the victims was Ali al-Jaifi, who had until then remained nominally in command of the remaining YRG forces. Some rumors claimed that al-Jaifi would be replaced by Murad al-Awbali, the Saleh loyalist who had been kidnapped in 2012. Others claimed that Abdel Khaleq al-Huthi would take command of the YRG.<sup>[36]</sup> As of early December 2016, the situation remained unclear.

The YRG has proven to be a resilient entity, able to adapt to volatility and adverse conditions. During the transitional period (2012-2014), its command and leadership structure was modified under the auspices of a Saudi-led, UN-backed plan. The modifications turned out to be largely superficial, for when the Huthis

entered Sana'a the purported praetorian forces refused to fight for the transitional government. The era of Huthi influence (2014-present) has in contrast forced the YRG to amalgamate with the Huthis. The internationally recognized government, still led by Abd Rabbo Mansour Hadi, has sought to drive a wedge between these two entities. The most recent such attempt involved moving Yemen's central bank from Sana'a to Aden, making it difficult for the Huthi government to pay the salaries of angry YRG commanders who had gone months without a paycheck.

The YRG-Huthi hybrid force represents the effective amalgamation of young, ideologically motivated foot soldiers on the one hand and trained operators of heavy weaponry and advanced equipment on the other hand. It has proven highly resilient to the Saudi strategy of overmatch via airpower and may no longer be separable into its constituent parts. The YRG-Huthi force is in many ways similar to the successful fighting groups emerging from the battlefields of Syria and Iraq, and as such it provides a template for the type of forces that will define the region's operational environment for years to come.

*The views expressed in this report are those of the author and do not necessarily represent the official policy or position of the Department of the Army, Department of Defense, or the U.S. government.*

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## **End Notes**

[1] From 1918 to 1962, North Yemen was ruled by the Hamid al-Din family, whose leadership claim was based on their status as Hashemites, or descendants of the Prophet Muhammad via his grandsons Hassan and Hussein. Following the death of Imam Ahmed Hamid al-Din in 1962, Egyptian-backed officers seized power and established a republican system of government, including a military modeled on Egypt's. For the rest of the decade, Republicans and Royalists fought a civil war in North Yemen, with the former eventually emerging victorious.

[2] Paul Dresch. *A History of Modern Yemen* (Cambridge University Press, 2000), pp. 148-149.

[3] "Why Did the Huthis Choose Hezayaz as Protest Site?" *al-Masdar Online*. 15 September 2014 (Arabic). Accessed 17 December 2016. <http://almasdaronline.info/article/62039>

[4] "Geography of the Expected War in Yemen." *al-Masdar Online*. 15 October 2011 (Arabic). Accessed 17 December 2016. <http://almasdaronline.com/article/print/24506>

[5] Dresch, *A History of Modern Yemen*. p. 196.

[6] He eventually returned to Yemen as a presidential adviser in 2001, but by then his influence in the YRG had been significantly curbed. "Why did Ali Saleh al-Ahmar Go Back to Commanding the Republican Guard?!" *al-Masdar Online*. 21 April 2011 (Arabic). Accessed 17 December 2016. <http://almasdaronline.com/article/18832>

[7] Lucas Winter. "Restructuring Yemen's Military Leadership." *Foreign Military Studies Office*, 2012. Accessed 17 December 2016. <http://fmso.leavenworth.army.mil/documents/Restructuring-Yemen-Military.pdf>

[8] “Geography of the Expected War in Yemen.” *al-Masdar*.

[9] Farea al-Muslimi. “Yemen Wastes Time.” *al-Monitor*, 23 December 2013. Accessed 17 December 2016. [www.al-monitor.com/pulse/originals/2013/12/yemen-government-time-wasting-favoritism.html](http://www.al-monitor.com/pulse/originals/2013/12/yemen-government-time-wasting-favoritism.html)

[10] “Associated Forces” includes the various other military units led by Saleh’s sons and nephews and the paramilitary Central Security Forces. The term YRG is often used in this paper to refer to all of these forces. To avoid confusion, YRG is also used to refer to these forces during the transitional restructuring era (2012-2014).

[11] “U.S. Will Send Troops to Yemen In Training, Assistance Capacity.” *Wall Street Journal*. 1 March 2002. Accessed 17 December 2016. <http://www.wsj.com/articles/SB1014933100485431160>

[12] Jeremy Shapiro. “Yemen: Background and U.S. Relations.” *Congressional Research Service*, 6 October 2011. Accessed 17 December 2016. <https://fpc.state.gov/documents/organization/175903.pdf>

[13] “The Deposed Saleh’s Army... A Third of a Century to Build, Destroyed by the Coalition in Months.” *al-Yaum*. 21 February 2016 (Arabic). Accessed 17 December 2016. <http://www.alyaum.com/article/4121348>

[14] In December 2010 YRG announced they were producing modern armored vehicles called Jalal-1, Jalal-2 and Jalal-3. YRG Facebook Page (Arabic). Accessed 17 December 2016. <https://www.facebook.com/Rrpublican/photos/a.155121451224595.37152.155119921224748/403530796383658/>

[15] “The Republican Guard... Who Created It?” *Mareb Press*. 20 June 2011. (Arabic). Accessed 17 December 2016. <http://marebpress.net/articles.php?id=10731&lng=arabic>

[16] “President Hadi: Saleh Controls 1,000 Tanks, 13 Artillery and Missile Brigades, and 52,000 ‘Ghost’ Soldiers in the Republican Guard.” *Nashwan News*. 10 December 2012 (Arabic). Accessed 17 December 2016. <http://nashwannews.com/news.php?action=view&id=21663>

[17] “Secrets of the Army Joining the Yemeni Revolution: Part 2.” *Mareb Press*. 4 April 2011 (Arabic). Accessed 17 December 2016. [http://marebpress.net/news\\_details.php?sid=32562](http://marebpress.net/news_details.php?sid=32562)

[18] Mohammed al-Bukhaiti, the YRG 62d Brigade’s former commander, provides an example of the factionalism and politicization permeating the YRG. Al-Bukhaiti hails from a tribal group (al-Hada) whose territories are strategically located south of Sana’a and which has historical links to the Yemeni military. Still struggling to contain Arhab’s tribal militias, in early 2012 he ordered one of his units to storm a nearby Arhab village. Several of his subordinates refused, and in a subsequent tussle one of them shot al-Bukhaiti in the hand. Shortly thereafter he was swapped with the YRG commander in Taiz, but the following year he was also ousted from that command, over charges of corruption and hoarding of resources.

“After al-Bukhaiti’s Insistence to Storm al-Abwa Village, Fariha Camp Defects, He Is Injured, and Two Soldiers Are Killed.” *Mareb Press*. 16 January 2012 (Arabic). Accessed 17 December 2016. <http://marebpress.net/nprint.php?sid=39685>

[19] “Arhab, Nehm and Bani Jarmouz... A Story of Blood, Destruction and Displacement.” *al-Masdar Online*. 23 November 2011 (Arabic). Accessed 17 December 2016.

<http://almasdaronline.com/article/25813>

[20] “Sheikhs from Qarawa Clarify the al-Awbali Kidnapping and Ask Politicians to Steer Clear of Khawlan.” *Saadah Press*. 30 June 2012 (Arabic). <http://www.saadahpress.net/news/news-5097.htm>

[21] “Tribal Mediation Fails to Free the Kidnapped General.” *Mareb Press*. 29 July 2012 (Arabic). Accessed 17 December 2012. [http://marebpress.net/news\\_details.php?sid=45041](http://marebpress.net/news_details.php?sid=45041)

[22] “Geography of the Expected War in Yemen.” *al-Masdar*.

[23] The YRG also held strategic high ground at the entry points to the important city of Taiz. When protests broke out there in 2011, the YRG’s ability to hold that ground prevented the city from falling fully out of government hands.

[24] These included: Ahmed Ali Abdullah Saleh (son) as commander of the Republican Guard and Special Forces, Khalid Ali Abdullah Saleh (son) as commander of the Armored Mountain Forces, Yahya Mohammed Abdullah Saleh (nephew) as head of Central Security, Tariq Mohammed Abdullah Saleh (nephew) as head of the Special Guard, Ammar Mohammed Abdullah Saleh al-Ahmar (nephew) as head of the National Security Agency, and Mohammed Saleh Abdullah al-Ahmar (half-nephew) as head of the Air Force.

[25] Abdul Rahman al-Halaihili, an army veteran who had been commanding the 37th Armored Brigade in Hadhramout, was put in charge of the powerful YRG 3d Brigade. Because al-Halihili came from the regular army and not the YRG, his influence remained limited.

[26] For instance at the time of the first major restructuring (December 2012), the 1st Brigade of the former Special Guard which was incorporated into the new Presidential Guard, was believed to only have 10% of its weapons remaining. “The Task of Recovering Military Loot.” *al-Masdar Online*. 14 July 2013 (Arabic). Accessed 17 December 2016. <http://almasdaronline.com/article/48109>

[27] “Saleh Has Massive Depots of Deadly Weapons in Sanhan.” *al-Arabiya*. 11 May 2015 (Arabic). Accessed 17 December 2016. <https://goo.gl/cLLbbI>

[28] Winter. “Restructuring Yemen’s Military Leadership.”

[29] “Military Expert: Huthis Control 60% of Republican Guard Forces.” *Yemen Press*. 23 August 2012 (Arabic). Accessed 17 December 2016. <https://yemen-press.com/news11872.html>

[30] “The Secret Political Hashemite Organization and Important Details on General Yahya al-Shami.” *Huna Aden*. 7 June 2016 (Arabic). Accessed 17 December 2016. <http://hunaaden.com/news33059.html>

The Zaydi system of government, which dominated parts of Yemen for hundreds of years up until its overthrow by Egypt-backed Yemeni soldiers in 1962, draws its rulers (imams) exclusively from Hashemite families. The Huthis are a Hashemite family, though hardly one of the more important ones in

Yemeni politics. Yahya al-Shami had held several important positions in Saleh's government and political party GPC, while at the same time being a prominent member of the Hashemite community.

[31] "Increasing Huthi Hegemony Over Republican Guard Drives Saleh Crazy." *Yemen Press*. 7 November 2016 (Arabic). Accessed 17 December 2016 .<http://yemen-press.com/news84980.html>

Prominent Huthi supporters in the military included Mohammed Yahya Sharf al-Din (operations commander for the YRG), "Abu Adel" (staff commander of the YRG), Zakaria al-Mutaa (4th Reserve Forces Brigade Commander) and Hassan al-Malsi, who was killed in September commanding forces near Saudi border.

[32] "Huthi Leader Publishes Secret Documents on Huthi Conspiracy to Take Over the Republican Guard." *al-Tagheer*. 12 October 2016 (Arabic). Accessed 17 December 2016. <http://www.al-tagheer.com/news91847.html>

[33] "Saleh Loses Control of the Republican Guard." *Yemen Press*. 25 July 2015 (Arabic). Accessed 17 December 2016. <http://yemen-press.com/news51765.html>

[34] These included the Rima Hamid Base in Sanhan, Base 48 in Huzayz, al-Summa and al-Farija in Arhab, a Special Forces Base in Asr (west of the capital), missile bases in Attan and weapons depots in Naqm Mountain.

[35] "Republican Guard Spokesman Discloses Military Units Redeployment." *Barakish.net*. 7 April 2015 (Arabic). Accessed 17 December 2016. <http://www.barakish.net/news02.aspx?cat=12&sub=23&id=311773>

[36] "Increasing Huthi Hegemony Drives Saleh Crazy." *Yemen Press*. and "Huthi Conspiracy to Take Control of Republican Guard from Saleh." *al-Arabiya*. 13 October 2016 (Arabic). Accessed 17 December 2016. <https://goo.gl/EuJvkQ>

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- {8} <https://fpc.state.gov/documents/organization/175903.pdf>
- {9} <http://www.alyaum.com/article/4121348>
- {10} <https://www.facebook.com/Rrpublican/photos/a.155121451224595.37152.155119921224748/403530796383658/>
- {11} <http://marebpress.net/articles.php?id=10731&lng=arabic>
- {12} <http://nashwannews.com/news.php?action=view&id=21663>
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