

Fault lines

Tracking armed violence in Yemen

A unified state for just 20 years, Yemen has endured decades of social and political turmoil. It is also afflicted by a number of interlocking armed conflicts. These range from separatist political clashes between state security forces and protesters to all-out civil war—drawing in Saudi Arabia—and terrorism, which has seen the United States, the United Kingdom, and others become involved.¹ Meanwhile, under the international radar, simmering social conflicts—primarily over land and water—reportedly account for some 4,000 violent deaths every year.

In Yemen, armed violence is conditioned by the widespread availability and proliferation of small arms and light weapons. It is also exacerbated by structural factors such as weak rule of law, the limited political legitimacy of public institutions, and rapid natural resource depletion. Similarly, it is tolerated due to prevailing socio-cultural norms sanctioning certain forms of violence, and because of competing geopolitical interests. As a result, many observers are concerned about the likelihood of increased instability in Yemen and its implications for the region as a whole.²

A diverse network of diplomatic, development, and defence analysts are preoccupied with the causes and consequences of armed violence in Yemen and for its neighbours. They are keen to identify the drivers and dynamics of armed violence at the societal, group, and individual levels. Initiated in 2008, the Yemen Armed Violence Assessment (YAVA) comprises a multi-year field-based project designed to generate quantitative and qualitative analysis of the drivers and dynamics of armed violence in the country. The YAVA is designed to support efforts to prevent and reduce armed



Man carrying AK-47 north of 'Amran, February 2009. © Gavin Hales

violence in Yemen, not least by the Yemeni government, which has taken significant steps in recent years to address weapons carrying in cities and constrain the arms trade.³

This first Yemen *Issue Brief* reviews reported incidents of armed violence over the 12-month period between September 2008 and August 2009. Drawing on domestic Yemeni and international news accounts, the *Issue Brief* introduces a typology for analysing armed violence in the country. While acknowledging the limitations of media reporting, it finds the following:

- Armed violence in Yemen is shaped by a host of factors, including social change and the progressive erosion of customary norms, weak governance, weapons proliferation, competition for scarce land and water resources, growing rivalries between different schools of Islam, Jihadism, and chronic poverty and under-development. It is likely that these factors will worsen before they improve.
- A non-exhaustive review of Yemeni and international media reports reveals some 199 separate recorded incidents of armed violence between 1 September 2008 and 31 August 2009. These incidents account for 728 intentional deaths, 12 unintentional deaths, and 734 non-fatal violence-related injuries. Incidents can be categorized as resulting from political violence, social conflict, ransom-related violence, criminal violence, domestic violence, and unintended violence.
- Political violence was responsible for roughly two-thirds (64 per cent) of all media-documented deaths from armed violence and almost three-quarters (71 per cent) of all violent injuries during the reporting period. Meanwhile, social violence was responsible for an additional 23 per cent of all recorded deaths from armed violence.
- Overall, trends in the incidence of armed political violence (including those resulting in deaths and injuries) increased dramatically in July and August 2009. This reflects clashes between security forces

and followers of Tariq al-Fadhli in southern Yemen, and escalating hostilities between government forces and Houthi rebels in the lead-up to the outbreak of the 'sixth Sa'dah war' in the north of Yemen on 11 August 2009.

- Publicly available reports probably severely under-capture the scale and distribution of armed violence. Based on crime statistics and other official sources, it is likely that media reporting captures about 10 per cent of all armed violence-related deaths in Yemen.

Drawing on intensive research and analysis, this *Issue Brief* first briefly reviews Yemen's political and economic environment. It considers a range of key risk factors shaping contemporary and future instability, then provides a short assessment of arms availability and use. Finally, the *Issue Brief* provides a typology to conceptualize the manifestations of armed violence and the interaction of key risk factors. While preliminary, the typology facilitates a more structured analysis of armed violence dynamics in Yemen and identifies opportunities for strategic engagement leading to preventive and reduction strategies for both Yemeni actors and their international partners.

Chronicling state fragility

Yemen is a geographically diverse and socially heterogeneous country with a complex and a rapidly evolving society. Between one-quarter and one-half of all Yemenis self-identify as having a tribal affiliation, largely concentrated in the northern highlands where three major tribal confederations—the Hashid, Bakil, and the weaker Madhhaj—predominate.⁴ Since perhaps a majority of Yemenis are not tribal, sweeping social or cultural generalizations are to be avoided. Overall, almost three-quarters (71 per cent) of Yemenis reside in rural areas.⁵

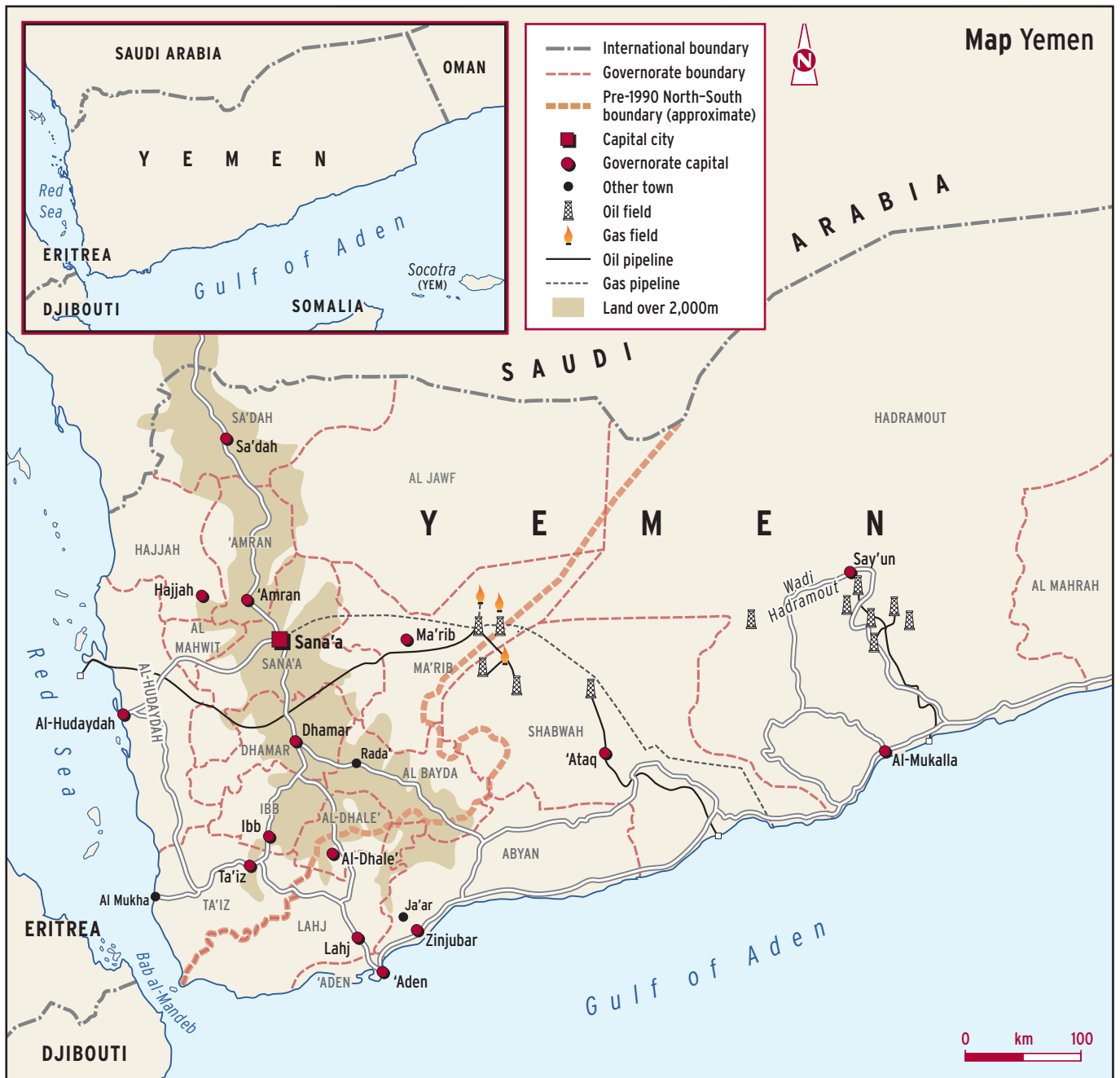
The present-day Republic of Yemen was formed in May 1990 following the merger of the socialist People's Democratic Republic of Yemen (PDRY, or 'South Yemen') and the Yemen Arab

Republic ('North Yemen'). Unification, long discussed and supported on both sides of the border,⁶ was precipitated in part by the collapse of extensive Soviet support for the then Marxist southern state. It is important to put Yemen's contemporary fragility in a historical context, since the country has been engulfed by at least five decades of turmoil.⁷

The civil war in North Yemen (1962–70) ended a millennium of theocratic rule. Yemen had been overseen by a succession of Zaydi Shi'ite imams, each claiming descent from the Prophet Mohammed's family.⁸ A republican model of governance emerged in their wake. In the North Yemen highlands, Egyptian- and Soviet-backed Yemeni republicans battled royalist forces supported by Saudi Arabia, Jordan, and Iran.⁹ Significant inflows of modern weaponry accompanied the conflict, such that 'by the war's end there was an incredible mixture of weaponry on both sides' in North Yemen.¹⁰ Meanwhile, in South Yemen, more than 130 years of British colonial rule centred on Aden, the then capital, was brought to an abrupt end in 1967. This was followed by an internecine battle for control of the South, from which the PDRY emerged in 1970.¹¹

The unification of North and South Yemen occurred in May 1990 and the first parliamentary elections were held in 1993. Relations between the new state and its neighbours were difficult. During this period, more than 800,000 migrant Yemeni workers were expelled from neighbouring Gulf states after Yemen, as a new (and the only Arab) member of the UN Security Council, abstained from voting on a number of resolutions relating to the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait and voted against a resolution authorizing the use of force there. The resulting loss of economic aid from regional governments and remittances from the Yemeni diaspora, compounded by diplomatic isolation and rampant inflation, severely damaged the local economy.¹²

Following months of increasing political tensions and military manoeuvring, in 1994 Yemen lurched back into a brief but bloody civil war.¹³



An attempt by Yemeni Socialist Party leaders Ali Salim al-Bid and Abd al-Rahman al-Jifri to secede from the North failed to gain widespread support.¹⁴ Northern military forces backed by irregular fighters, notably jihadi veterans of the Afghan–Soviet war,¹⁵ put down the secessionists, but not before Scud missiles were fired by the southern military at the unified country's capital, Sana'a.¹⁶ The 1994 civil war reportedly witnessed a significant change in the diffusion of weapons of all sizes to ostensibly 'non-state' hands. It also contributed to the emergence of a sizeable weapons market, facilitated in no small part by the seizure

of Southern forces' weaponry by government forces and allied irregular fighters.¹⁷

Political and military power was further consolidated by northerners, and particularly by tribal leaders, from the mid-1990s onwards, through the entrenchment of a patronage-based political system built around the executive.¹⁸ Both the rule of law and, indeed, the social contract itself are weak in Yemen, and the government and its institutions exert only partial territorial control.¹⁹ Notwithstanding these idiosyncrasies, Yemen remains the only democratic state in the Gulf region, with an elected president, an

elected 301-seat parliament headed by a prime minister, an appointed 111-member Shura Council, and elected local councils.

Structural risks of armed violence

Power disparities and marginalization

The shift from traditional tribal leadership (sheikhs) to a patronage-based republican political system led to the co-opting of many sheikhs, who were drawn away from their homelands and became dramatically wealthier

than their fellow tribesmen. In elite circles, tribal leaders have become businessmen and increasingly motivated by material, rather than social, gain.²⁰ Predictably, customary norms that once played a role in regulating conflict in the tribal areas of Yemen have weakened, even while norms around revenge and blood feuds remained.²¹ Rapid urbanization and modernization have hastened these trends, particularly as people migrated from their traditional homelands to urban areas where formal state agencies are stronger, communities more mixed, and customary law relatively ineffective.²²

The patronage system has generated an increasingly uneven distribution of state resources. It has also effectively marginalized areas that traditionally lacked access to power, were unable to mobilize the collective bargaining of powerful tribal areas, or otherwise found little favour with the executive.²³ Of particular concern, unresolved grievances relating to the political settlement between North and South aggravated simmering political instability. Southerners claim that heavily tribal regions in the north are routinely prioritized for public sector employment (in the army and civil service) and for the dividends of oil wealth generated predominantly from wells in the South. Southern military officers forced into retirement following the 1994 civil war were the first to protest publicly.²⁴ These ongoing protests have taken on an increasingly confrontational tenor since 2007, with outright calls for the secession of South Yemen, under the banner of the Hiraak al-Janubi (the Southern Movement, which in reality is a loose collection of individuals and groups with diverse interests).²⁵

Sectarian tensions

Adding to this growing political and customary instability, cracks are emerging in Yemen's traditional accommodation of different schools of Islam.²⁶ At question is the delicate balance between Zaidi Shi'ism, followed by about 35 per cent of Yemenis, including the president,²⁷ and Sunnism, which

in Yemen is dominated by the moderate Shafi'i school.²⁸ During the last century, the two converged in doctrine and practice and have generally easily coexisted.²⁹

At least two issues are altering sectarian dynamics. Firstly, conservative Sunni movements proselytizing various forms of Salafism³⁰ and Saudi-derived Wahhabism³¹ have emerged over the past four decades. These movements derive support from key figures in the Yemeni government and military, and, in particular, Saudi Arabian patronage. Secondly, the Yemeni government has used religious rivalry for political ends. This includes support between 1995 and 2001 for the al-Houthi family-led Zaidi Shi'ite revivalist movement al-Shabab al-Mu'min (the Believing Youth) in Sa'dah, which has historically been a significant seat of Zaidi Shi'ite leadership and teaching. The aim of the government was to counteract the growing influence of Salafi and Wahhabi institutions.³² In some cases, these actions and rivalries have led to accusations of religious interference, clashes over the control of mosques and religious schools, and the destruction of shrines. A growing sectarian schism has played a key role in the outbreak of civil war in the northern governorate of Sa'dah, in combination with a host of political, historical, tribal, and economic factors.³³

Jihadi movements

Yemen is home to a range of jihadi movements that have successfully recruited fighters for conflicts in Chechnya and Bosnia,³⁴ Iraq,³⁵ and Soviet-era Afghanistan. In the latter case, an estimated 27,000 Yemenis travelled to wage jihad against Soviet forces in the 1980s,³⁶ after which some 29,000 so-called 'Afghan-Arabs' (not just Yemenis) returned to Yemen.³⁷ The perceived legitimacy of at least some of these actions was underlined in 2009 when the Yemeni president, Ali Abdullah Saleh, stated that 'in the past, based on American cooperation, we supported the volunteers who went to Afghanistan'.³⁸ Most recently, a Yemeni Salafi scholar warned in an

interview that '[i]f the US sent troops to Yemen under the pretext of fighting Al-Qaeda, we will call for Jihad'.³⁹

Jihadi groups in Yemen display a degree of diversity and should not therefore be cast as homogeneous in their organization or means, even where they may broadly share core goals.⁴⁰ Of particular concern to many observers, Yemen has assumed a growing significance as a base for al-Qaeda-affiliated groups and acts of terrorism since the early 1990s.⁴¹ This reputation has only grown in the wake of the bombing of the USS *Cole* in Aden in 2000 and the escape of 23 militants from a prison in Sana'a in 2006. More recently, al-Qaeda-affiliated groups have targeted oil installations, tourists, and Western diplomatic targets. These have included: a July 2007 suicide bomb attack that killed eight Spanish tourists and two Yemenis; a January 2008 gun attack that killed two Belgian tourists; mortar attacks targeting Western diplomats in Sana'a in March and April 2008; an assault on the US Embassy in Sana'a in September 2008 that resulted in 18 deaths outside the embassy; and two suicide bomb attacks on South Koreans in March 2009, the first of which killed four tourists.

In early 2009 Yemeni and Saudi branches of al-Qaeda merged to form al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP).⁴² Its membership, estimated to number between 200 and 300,⁴³ has increasingly set its sights on Saudi interests, including the attempted assassination of the Saudi deputy interior minister, Prince Mohammed bin Naif, in Jeddah in August 2009.⁴⁴ In a further escalation, AQAP claimed responsibility for the attempted bombing of a civilian airliner over Detroit in December 2009.⁴⁵ It is reported that between the early 1990s and December 2009, al-Qaeda-affiliated groups carried out at least 61 separate attacks in Yemen.⁴⁶

Resources and the economy

Yemen is acutely exposed to a host of structural resource-related pressures that demand urgent attention and reform. Given current trends, oil resources, which in 2005 accounted

for 90 per cent of export earnings and 70 per cent of government revenues, will likely be depleted by 2018.⁴⁷ Meanwhile, fuel subsidies and the public sector wage bill absorb around 50 per cent of government expenditure.⁴⁸ In the absence of rapid non-oil revenue growth, these factors will weaken the national economy and the capacity of patronage systems to effectively regulate Yemeni society and incorporate disparate interests.⁴⁹ Yemen suffers from very limited economic diversification: sectors such as tourism offer significant growth potential, but are completely undermined by widespread and persistent insecurity.⁵⁰ Yemen is also gripped by chronic poverty:⁵¹ gross national income per capita was just USD 950 in 2008⁵² and unemployment is as high as 35 per cent.⁵³ Moreover, youth unemployment runs to at least 30 per cent, having almost doubled since 1999.⁵⁴

Yemen was badly affected by food and other commodity price shocks in 2007 and 2008: indeed, food prices rose 60 per cent in this period, contributing to an increase in poverty⁵⁵

and rioting that left at least 12 dead.⁵⁶ Perhaps of greatest concern, Yemen is also running headlong towards a severe water crisis, as freshwater reserves, derived to a large extent from underground aquifers, are being exploited at a rate that far exceeds replenishment, most acutely in the case of major urban areas such as Sana'a and Taiz.⁵⁷

Other structural challenges shaping future trajectories of armed violence are predominantly demographic and social in nature. Yemen's population is growing at around 3 per cent per year, which, if sustained, would see the population double by 2035. Moreover, almost half (45 per cent) of the population is under 15 years of age.⁵⁸ Combined with rapid and unregulated urbanization, population pressure on land resources is increasing, while land values are predictably rising rapidly. Owing to a poor land titling system and regulatory infrastructure, tensions over property rights and common property resources (notably water) appear to be escalating in number and severity.⁵⁹ Indeed, land disputes

are viewed by most analysts as the single most common cause of armed violence in the country.⁶⁰

Yemen is at a crossroads. Its leadership can undertake rapid and substantial reform to move the country towards increased stability; barring such action, deepening fragility is inevitable and some form of collapse is possible.⁶¹ Given the simultaneous presence at the start of 2010 of a civil war in the north, a secessionist political movement in the south, and al-Qaeda, there are genuine reasons for concern. Following the attempted bombing of a US commercial airliner in December 2009 by a Nigerian linked to al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula,⁶² Yemen is now firmly on the agenda of the international community, and especially the US administration.⁶³ The multiple structural risks associated with armed violence and state fragility in Yemen imply that the ambitions of any interventions must extend well beyond the security paradigm. If such interventions are deployed in isolation from broader reforms and support, they will almost certainly fail.



Guns stored at a checkpoint on the road from Lahj to Aden. © Gavin Hales

Civilian access to arms

Yemen is widely cited as among the most heavily armed societies—in per capita terms—on earth. Notwithstanding apocryphal (indeed, quite implausible) claims of 50–60 million small arms and light weapons in circulation, more realistic assessments suggest something in the order of 10 million or fewer small arms for a population of 23 million people—or roughly one weapon for every two civilians.⁶⁴ A recent national survey of small arms ownership in Yemen found that 61 per cent of respondents reported weapons in their household.⁶⁵ Rashad al-Alimi, the deputy prime minister for security and defence affairs, and former interior minister, identified arms proliferation as one of four ‘security challenges’ facing Yemen; the others were terrorist threats, border protection, and ‘weak loyalty to the state’.⁶⁶ The availability of weapons is frequently cited as significantly related to the rapid escalation of armed violence in Yemen.⁶⁷

Gun licensing law

The principal legal instrument regulating the ownership, carrying, and trade of firearms, ammunition, and explosives is Law No. 40 of 1992: On Regulating Carrying Firearms and Ammunitions and Their Trade, which was enacted in 1994, and which details the penalties for any legal violations.⁶⁸ Article 9 establishes the right to own firearms (‘rifles, machine guns, revolvers, and hunting rifles’) for the purpose of ‘legitimate defence’.

Carrying—i.e. possessing—arms in cities is regulated by Article 10, which introduces a licensing system for all urban dwellers other than a list of stated exceptions.⁶⁹ Licence holders, who must be at least 18 years old, are only permitted to carry one licensed weapon at any one time (art. 14). Licences, which according to Article 53 cost YER 50 (USD 0.25),⁷⁰ are valid for ‘three renewable years’ (art. 17). Importantly, no controls are described relating to rural areas.⁷¹ Furthermore, no limit is mentioned on the number of weapons that may be owned (as

opposed to carried), although Article 13 states that ‘a licensed weapon may not be handed over to another person before the latter party obtains a licence to this end’. Significantly, as part of the weapons possession enforcement campaign introduced in 2007 (see ‘Enforcement’, below), all existing licences were cancelled and additional conditions were introduced for new licences (which could only be issued by the Interior Ministry), e.g. banning the carrying of rifles—notably AK-47s—in urban areas, except in a very few cases.⁷² The law further states that arms and ammunition retailers and repairers should be regulated through a system of licensing. This includes the requirement to maintain records of stock and sales, including recording the buyer’s name and ID card number, the issue date, and the number of items sold to any buyer. Finally, the legislation also regulates armed escorts (i.e. personal bodyguards) through a licensing system, with a maximum of five, seven, or ten escorts permitted, depending on the seniority of the official or important person being guarded (arts. 21–23 of the associated Republican Decree No. 1 of 1994).⁷³

The application of these laws is uneven. In Aden, for example, firearms licensing by the police has been described as a ‘special plan’.⁷⁴ Special interventions include the prohibition of all weapons carrying in public other than by on-duty police and soldiers; the licensing of all weapons and ammunition ownership; the limiting of arms to certain actors (such as banks, jewellery stores, and government officials); the recording of the licence holder’s fingerprints, firearm details, and a test-fired bullet; and the requirement for a ‘certificate of good behaviour’ from the police or local authority. Licences are only valid for one year and all details are stored electronically, and, according to the chief of police, ‘in Aden the trade in arms is prohibited’.⁷⁵

Gun commerce and social norms

Prior to the start of the latest campaign to control arms, launched in 2007, arms were openly sold in Yemen in at least

18 arms markets, with roughly 300 retailers in total.⁷⁶ Small arms ownership and carrying in Yemen are largely confined to male youths and adults.⁷⁷ Socially, it is strongly associated with a masculine tribal identity and is most prevalent in rural tribal areas in the northern highlands of the country,⁷⁸ in many of which the open carrying of AK-47s is commonplace among males from their mid-teens.⁷⁹ Handguns, rifles, and other varieties of firearms are far less frequently seen. Likewise, the *jambiya*, a curved dagger worn attached to a wide, typically embroidered, belt is routinely carried by men and male youths in tribal areas (including the capital, Sana’a), serving a largely symbolic purpose.⁸⁰

Larger weapons, including larger-calibre automatic weapons (.50 calibre and above), rocket-propelled grenades, mortars, and anti-aircraft guns, are also frequently owned by civilians, although in unknown numbers. Indeed, there are tribes in Yemen with access to sophisticated military-issue munitions, including surface-to-air missiles and even tanks in rare instances.⁸¹ The Houthi rebel group, based in the northern governorate of Sa’dah, has had enough regular access to weaponry to sustain a cyclical conflict with the Yemeni government (and latterly Saudi Arabia) since 2004. The outbreak of fighting in August 2009 saw the beginning of the so-called ‘sixth Sa’dah war’. Unknown numbers have been killed and injured, although most estimates suggest that many thousands were killed in each of the later rounds of fighting.⁸² More than 175,000 people were internally displaced by the ‘sixth war’ as of late 2009.⁸³

Enforcement

The implementation and enforcement of the 1992 law and its associated articles has varied significantly over time. In Sana’a, for example, public campaigns to prevent weapons carrying have been implemented in at least 1998, 1999 (twice), 2002, and from 2007 to the present (early 2010).⁸⁴ The latter campaign in particular is reported to have precipitated rapid changes in patterns of urban weapons carrying:

in 2006 it was normal to see civilians openly carrying firearms in public, but by late 2007 the practice was almost entirely eradicated.⁸⁵

At least anecdotally, the ban on carrying weapons has generated a positive impact on documented levels of armed violence and the population's perceptions of security.⁸⁶ Even so, many civilians continue to retain personal stocks in their private residences and, to a lesser extent, vehicles.⁸⁷ The reasons for continued possession are various, although many respondents report lingering feelings of insecurity and the need for self-defence.⁸⁸

More generally, the government implemented a crackdown on arms sellers (both retail and wholesale) following the August 2009 outbreak of fighting in Sa'dah, including announcing a 'blacklist' of arms dealers and the interception of several reportedly illegal consignments of weapons.⁸⁹ Most of the country's arms markets and retailers were closed, and the few remaining are subject to ongoing enforcement campaigns apparently intended to limit their business to sales of small arms and ammunition to individuals.^{90,91}

Security checkpoints are present on roads throughout Yemen, including on virtually all roads leading into urban areas. These checkpoints are tasked with, among other things, preventing unlicensed weapons (other than *jambiyas*) being carried into cities and towns. In most instances, the checkpoints operate a 'cloakroom' service, whereby weapons can be temporarily checked in on arrival at a city boundary in exchange for a receipt and then collected on departure.⁹² Within cities such as Sana'a, temporary checkpoints are also periodically established on the streets, checking vehicles for unlicensed weapons and wanted individuals.

A media review of armed violence patterns

In order to explore patterns and trends of armed violence in Yemen, an archival media review was undertaken over the 12 months between September

2008 and August 2009. The review included the routine monitoring of (predominantly English language) domestic and international news reports relating to Yemen.⁹³ A total of 199 individual incidents involving armed violence were identified, reported in a total of 264 separate articles.⁹⁴ These reports were coded and analysed for mortality, morbidity, and situational data such as location, date, and type of violence. The 199 separate incidents included 728 reported intentional deaths, 12 unintentional deaths, and a further 734 violence-related injuries.⁹⁵ The police or other security forces were reported to have been involved in some capacity in 93 (47 per cent) of all the reported incidents.

Archival and secondary research of this nature must be undertaken with a clear acknowledgment of its limitations. In Yemen, there are considerable restrictions on media reporting, especially in relation to political developments in the south (especially since early 2009), but also the war in Sa'dah in the north.⁹⁶ Yemen's press was classified as 'not free' in the 2009 Freedom House Freedom of the Press Survey and was ranked 172nd out of 195 countries for press freedom.⁹⁷ Moreover, official statistics reported by the media must be treated with caution: government and rebel forces virtually always manipulate the number of casualties sustained on either side.⁹⁸

There are also serious methodological challenges to interpreting findings from media incident reporting. For example, geographical coverage of news reports often displays an urban bias, owing in large part to readership, but also the political and logistical challenges of reporting from areas outside of state control or subject to ongoing conflict.⁹⁹ Similarly, the language used by reporters to describe armed violence may not neatly fit with formal typologies, requiring reading between the lines. Certain types of armed violence may be over-represented. Comparatively rare and high-profile events such as 'terrorist' attacks, kidnapping of foreigners, and also deaths arising due to political protests in southern

Yemen have typically been well publicized and occurred in areas where facts can be independently verified. This is not the case for many land and property disputes or civil war-related deaths in the north.

In general, armed violence can be placed on a continuum that runs from discrete interpersonal disputes to widespread collective action. In Yemen, as elsewhere, armed violence does not fit readily into neat categories and motives are seldom easily known. Nevertheless, it is possible to develop a typology of specific forms of armed violence and to highlight the way these are interconnected and mutually reinforcing.

It is important to stress that any conceptual framework or typology, including the one presented in this *Issue Brief*, is necessarily a heuristic device and will inevitably gloss over complex social realities. At a minimum, it lacks temporal explanatory power—e.g. interpersonal disputes that escalate into acts of collective violence and ultimately political violence. A typology may also fail to wholly capture the way in which specific incidents transcend many motives associated with armed violence and may be culturally mediated.

Nevertheless, a growing number of attempts have been made to classify various forms of armed violence to better understand associated risk factors and ultimately prospects for intervention. For example, a growing cadre of scholars and practitioners distinguish between armed violence occurring in 'conflict' zones—which tends to be motivated by a combination of grievances and economic imperatives and is collective in scope—and ostensibly 'non-conflict' zones—where armed violence also shares similar types of motives, but is more often interpersonal.¹⁰⁰ In Yemen, such a binary classification only takes the analyst so far, not least given chronic social conflict that in individual cases may extend over decades.¹⁰¹ Notwithstanding these limitations, a typology has been developed and is presented in Table 1. A more detailed examination of the drivers and dynamics of

Table 1 A typology of armed violence in Yemen

Type	Definition	Examples
Political violence	Armed violence relating to the acquisition and conduct of political power, including electoral processes and government policies	The civil war centred on Sa'dah governorate Clashes in the context of political protests in southern Yemen, including calls for secession Protests relating to parliamentary elections that were due to be held in 2009 Al-Qaeda terrorist attacks and clashes with security forces
Social violence	Armed violence between non-state groups, often sustained over a period of time, particularly in the context of norms relating to collective responsibility and blood revenge	Disputes over ownership of, or access to, natural resources such as land and water, including border disputes* Religious clashes, e.g. relating to religious practices or control of religious institutions such as mosques and religious schools
Ransom-related violence	Seizing people, goods, or infrastructure as collateral in support of material demands	Kidnappings, road blocks, and vehicle seizures, typically to demand services, jobs, prisoner releases, justice, and compensation payments
Criminal violence**	All other forms of predatory and economically motivated violence (i.e. all those not included in the other definitions presented here)	Homicides and assaults in the context of interpersonal disputes; would include many revenge killings. Includes cases where violence is related to mental illness, e.g. periodic cases of multiple homicide shootings in locations such as mosques and homes Protection rackets, particularly targeting the extractive industries; generally distinct from the ransom issue identified above, as these involve direct incidents of violence, e.g. shots being fired at facilities Armed robberies (rare) Piracy and counter-piracy operations
Domestic violence	Violence between spouses or other cohabiting individuals, including against children	A taboo subject, but reported cases have included women killing their husbands following abuse; includes child abuse and 'honour' violence
Unintended violence	Unintentional injuries and deaths	Includes mishandling of weapons by owners or others; incidents involving other munitions such as grenades found and played with by children; and accidents relating to landmines and other unexploded ordnance

Notes:

* Land and water conflict will be explored in more detail in the forthcoming YAVA Issue Brief 2.

** Given the weaknesses of the Yemeni justice system and the predominance of armed conflicts arising from civil disputes, 'criminal' violence is particularly difficult to differentiate.

these types of armed violence will be provided in future YAVA publications.

Having applied this typology to reported incidents of violence from September 2008 to August 2009, it is possible to tentatively examine the relative incidence of different types of violence, and the relationships among types, distribution, and outcomes. As noted above, it is important to stress that the incidents included in the timeline drawn up from the media review capture only a fraction—probably about 10 per cent—of the total burden of armed violence in Yemen.¹⁰² Nevertheless, they are instructive to illustrate trends and patterns.

Table 2 suggests that political violence was the predominant type of

armed violence in Yemen in 2009, with 95 incidents, resulting in 475 dead and 518 injured. Social conflict was the second most commonly reported, particularly in terms of the numbers killed (in both absolute terms and per incident), followed by criminal violence. This fits with a general sense that Yemen experiences comparatively low rates of crime, as reflected in the official crime statistics.¹⁰³

Table 3 briefly examines the distribution of all types of violent incidents by geographic location (governorate) and type of armed violence. The clearest patterns relate to political violence, with incidents concentrated in Sa'dah, where the war between government forces and Houthi rebels has raged

periodically since 2004. Political violence is also common in Lahj (and neighbouring areas, including Aden and al-Dhale), where much of the violence relating to the southern secessionist movement has occurred. Finally, political violence flared in Abyan, where a different cluster of insecurity has persisted between government forces and jihadi groups, including the militia of Tariq al-Fadhli, a jihadi veteran of the Afghan–Soviet conflict and high-profile figure in the southern secessionist movement.¹⁰⁴ Despite the diversity of underlying issues, a clear upward trend is seen, culminating in the outbreak of the sixth round of fighting in Sa'dah in August 2009 (see Figure 1).

Table 2 **Armed violence-related deaths and injured by type, September 2008–August 2009**

Type	Number of incidents	Number killed		Number injured	
		Number	Avg.	Number	Avg.
Political violence	95	475	5.0	518	5.5
Social violence	26	169	6.5	154	5.9
Ransom-related violence	17	1	0.1	0	0
Criminal violence	27	55	2.0	33	1.2
Domestic violence	0	0	0	0	0
Unintended violence	7	12	1.7	11	1.6
Ambiguous*	27	28	1.0	18	0.7
Total	199	740	3.7	734	3.7

* Insufficient information was reported to reasonably attribute a type of violence to an incident.

Table 3 **Armed violence incidents by type and location (governorate), September 2008–August 2009***

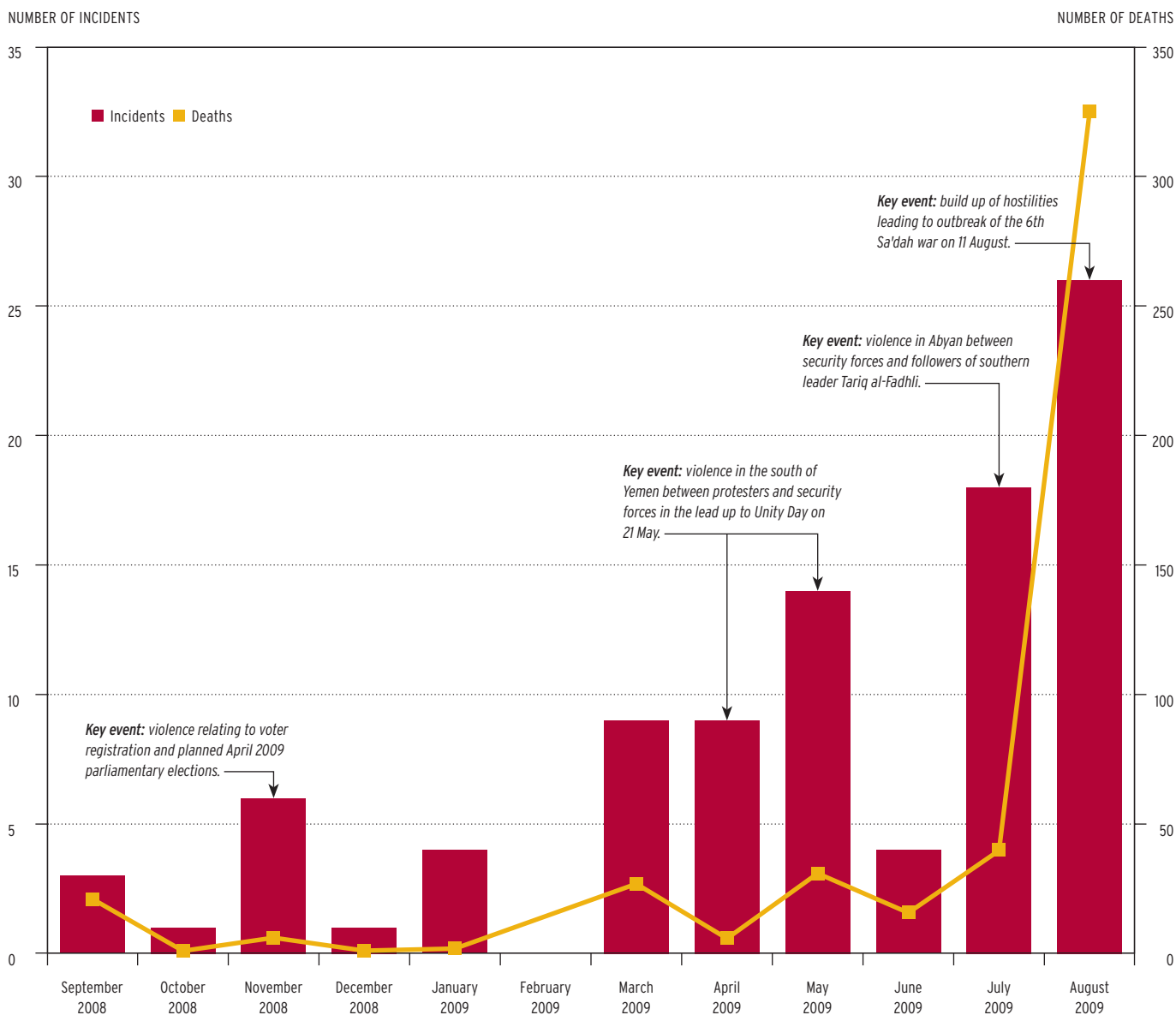
Governorate	Ambiguous	Criminal violence	Political violence	Ransom-related violence	Social violence	Unintended violence	Total
Abyan	3	1	11	1		1	17
Aden	2	1	6		1		10
al-Baidha	1	1			1	1	4
al-Dhale	2	3	5		1		11
al-Hudaydah	1	2			2	2	7
al-Jawf		1	2		3		6
al-Mahra		1					1
al-Mahweet						1	1
Amran	2	2	6	1	7		18
Dhamar	2			1	1		4
Hadramout		1	4	1	1		7
Hajjah		2					2
Ibb					3	1	4
Lahj		1	21				22
Marib	3		2	2	1		8
Raymah					1		1
Sa'dah	4		31	3	1		39
Sana'a**	5	5	6	6	3	1	26
Sea		5					5
Shabwa	2	1		2			5
Taiz			1				1
Total	27	27	95	17	26	7	199

Notes:

* 'Domestic violence' is excluded from this table because no incidents were captured over the period.

** Although they are administratively separate, Sana'a municipality has been combined with Sana'a governorate for the present analysis.

Figure 1 Incidents of political violence in Yemen, September 2008–August 2009



Source: YAVA timeline of media reports

Reflections

Recording the incidence of armed violence is one thing, but interpreting this data is not straightforward. Information about the drivers and triggers of armed violence and larger-scale armed conflict is often partial. The determinants of violence are frequently complex, dynamic, and located in a cultural and historical context that is not readily amenable to quick or easy interpretation. The prevailing political and security situation in Yemen also forces researchers to depend more heavily on secondary sources rather than primary data collection, so verifying claims is challenging.

It is also important to note that in Yemen the words ‘violence’ and ‘conflict’ are politically and culturally sensitive, which makes researching these subjects very difficult at the best of times. This sensitivity is understandable, given that the violence in Yemen is, like everywhere, a challenge to the state’s legitimacy and monopoly over force. The persistence of armed violence betrays more fundamental questions associated with the (uneven) distribution of resources; (the weak) rule of law; and (the limits of) social regulation, representation, and local governance. Without doubt, the risks presented by the heavily armed nature of Yemeni society, itself a consequence of complex

socio-cultural factors, are significant.

Since Yemen is in fact a comparatively new state, it should come as little surprise that there are real tensions concerning the relationships between individuals, communities, and the state. In five decades the territory now known as the Republic of Yemen has seen a theocratic imamate, colonial rule, revolutions, Marxist-Leninist socialism, republicanism, and unification. All of these experiences overlay a patchwork of more ancient social relations in various shades of tribalism and religious identity, cut through by geopolitical rivalries played out either directly or through proxies. It should also be recalled that the acquisitive or preda-

tory forms of armed criminality—robbery and burglary—are relatively conspicuous by their absence. Nevertheless, it is important to acknowledge that very little is known about violence in the domestic realm on account of powerful social taboos.

This *Issue Brief* has disaggregated the many layers of armed violence in Yemen and placed them in a broader context. It is anticipated that the presentation of balanced evidence can inform policy discussions associated with armed violence prevention and reduction, conflict- and armed violence-sensitive development planning, and appropriate capacity support by both Yemeni and international actors. The brief also cautions against overly enforcement-based responses to armed violence undertaken in isolation from reforms addressing wider structural risks. It urges a wider debate on the risks and symptoms of armed violence in Yemen, given the ever-increasing pressure on resources such as land, water, and the national economy, which suggests that the situation may well become worse before it gets better. ■

Notes

This Issue Brief is based on research by Gavin Hales, an independent British researcher. He has a background in criminology, particularly researching armed violence, illegal drugs, and policing in the United Kingdom, and has lived in Sana'a, Yemen, since November 2007. Editorial and substantive support was provided by Emile LeBrun and Robert Muggah.

- 1 Saudi Arabian military forces entered the war in Sa'dah in early November 2009 (Aljazeera.net, 2009), while both the United States (*New York Times*, 2009) and United Kingdom (BBC, 2010) have been involved in supporting the development of Yemen's counterterrorism capacity.
- 2 On state fragility in Yemen, see, for example, Hill (2008), Bernin (2009), and Boucek (2009a).
- 3 The YAVA express thanks for the support and assistance of Dr Ali Hamid al-Awlaqi of the Sana'a Police Academy, under the auspices of the Interior Ministry.
- 4 In reality, the proportion of Yemenis who are members of tribes and actively self-

identify as such ranges from 25 per cent (Schwedler, 2006, p. 136) to 35–40 per cent (author interview, Sana'a, November 2008). In the former South Yemen, first the British and then the Socialists significantly reduced the presence and influence of tribalism, although this trend reversed following unification (May 1990), according to Dresch (2000, p. 197). It is said that 'retribalization' is both encouraged by the state (as a mode of governance) and associated with increases in conflict as re-emerging tribes need to 'announce their appearance in a violent way' (author interview with Yemeni conflict reduction specialist, Sana'a, November 2008).

- 5 CSO (2009a).
- 6 Phillips (2008, p. 46).
- 7 For a comprehensive overview of Yemen's history from 1900, see Dresch (2000). On the period since 1990, see Whitaker (2009). On the significance of the developing relationship between state and tribes in Yemen, see Manea (1996).
- 8 Yemen is dominated by two schools of Islam that have significantly converged in recent decades: Zaydi Shi'ism and Shafi'i Sunnism, with the former followed by about 35 per cent of the population (Bonney, 2009a). Zaydism differs from Jaafarism ('Twelver Shi'ism'), the dominant Shi'ite sect in Iran and Iraq, 'in terms of jurisprudence and institutional organisations' (ICG, 2009, p. 7).
- 9 The motives of the various external parties were diverse. In Egypt's case, they related to the spread of Arab nationalism, while the Soviet Union saw a cold war opportunity to extend its influence and reputation (Wenner, 1992).
- 10 Wenner (1992, pp. 109–10).
- 11 For more on the history of South Yemen, see Dresch (2000). Aden has a natural deep-water port and lies a short distance from the Bab al-Mandeb Straits at the mouth of the Red Sea, a location that affords it great strategic significance for shipping.
- 12 Dresch (2000, pp. 185–86).
- 13 As Dresch (2000, p. 197) makes clear: 'Although the war was not North versus South but rather between [political] parties, the effect was felt by Southerners to be a Northern invasion.' For an account of the military conduct of the 1994 war, see Warburton (1995).
- 14 Dresch (2000, p. 196).
- 15 Johnsen (2006); Cheterian (2008); Hafez (2008); Sharp (2009, p. 2).

- 16 See Whitaker (1994). Dresch (2000, p. 196) reports that the 'highest estimate by either side' of the number of 'Islamist auxiliaries' was 5,000. The question of tribal involvement is somewhat disputed. Writing shortly after the civil war, Manea (1996) asserts that there was no tribal involvement in the war: 'tribes simply ignored the fighting . . . although the feuding parties issued several statements claiming tribal support.' A more recent assessment, however, describes the Northern army 'taking some help from tribal militias . . . and a group of Salafi fighters' (Carter, 2009, p. 17). Prior to the civil war, Salafis were involved in an assassination campaign that killed 'nearly 200 prominent Southerners . . . between 1991 and 1993' (Carter, 2009, p. 17).
- 17 Author interview with Yemeni conflict reduction specialist, November 2008. Elsewhere, Awas (2009, p. 1) describes the leakage of 'medium and heavy' arms to citizens during the 1994 war. The International Crisis Group quotes Ali al-Anissi, head of the Yemeni Bureau of National Security, as stating in relation to the Houthi rebels in Sa'dah: 'The weapons they use are Yemeni. Most actually come from fighters [government soldiers and allied militia members] who fought against the socialists during the 1994 war and then sold them' (ICG, 2009, p. 12). In this regard, it may be significant that Saudi Arabia sent 'large shipments of arms' to the Southern leaders in the period leading up to their declaration of secession in 1994 (Dresch, 2000, p. 196).
- 18 See World Bank (2007) and Phillips (2008). In reality, there is a plurality of patronage relationships, including domestically and originating in Saudi Arabia. In the case of the Yemeni military, the president's family and broader Sanhan tribe are very heavily represented.
- 19 In terms of the social contract, Yemen's tax revenue was only 6.8 per cent of gross domestic product in 2008 (Yemen, 2009, p. 8, Table 2); this is well below the UK Department for International Development's fragile state indicator of 15 per cent (UK, 2005, p. 9, Box 1). In terms of the rule of law, the Yemeni state's formal authority does not extend to all parts of the country and coexists with tribal and other customary laws and norms (al-Asrar, 2006; al-Zwaini, 2006); the implementation of laws is often ineffective, notably in respect of land tenure (World Bank,

- 2005); and judicial processes are slow (UK, 2008). The formal state is said to be particularly weak in the governorates of Marib, al-Jawf, and Shabwa, but they should not be understood as 'ungoverned'; rather, they are predominantly regulated locally through more traditional tribal mechanisms.
- 20 On the emergence of tribal leaders as businessmen, see Dresch (2000, p. 201). The Yemeni head of an NGO working on conflict reduction described how many tribal sheikhs are 'moving from serving people to self-interest' (author interview, Sana'a, January 2009).
- 21 On traditional customs regulating conflict in tribal areas, see, for example, Weir (2007) and Caton (2005). A significant number of interviews have highlighted the way that traditional norms are no longer upheld (e.g. author interview with Yemeni conflict reduction expert, Sana'a, December 2008). Elsewhere, for example, Williams and al-Yemeni (2007, p. 3) argue that the selective application of patronage in tribal areas favouring 'certain tribal elites over others' has 'contributed to intertribal tensions and eroded the ability of tribal institutions to prevent and resolve conflicts'.
- 22 For example, author interview with Yemeni political analyst, October 2009.
- 23 The political establishment has, however, generally proved to be extremely effective at integrating disparate interests; e.g. on the integration of Islamists, see du Bouchet (2007).
- 24 *Yemen Times* (2007).
- 25 Protest has primarily taken the form of public gatherings, including marches through the streets of Aden, Lahj, and al-Dhale. On the Southern Movement, see Dahlgren (2008), Longley and al-Iryani (2008), and HRW (2009).
- 26 Bonnefoy (2009a) presents an overview of Islamist movements in Yemen, their historical accommodation 'through integration and cooption rather than repression', and the emergence of tensions within this equilibrium. See also du Bouchet (2007).
- 27 Bonnefoy (2009a).
- 28 Additionally, the Isma'ili Shi'ite and Sufi schools of Islam are also found in Yemen, with much smaller followings.
- 29 Bonnefoy (2009a).
- 30 Bonnefoy (2009a; 2009b).
- 31 Weir (1997).
- 32 Du Bouchet (2007, pp. 148–49); Hamidi (2009, p. 167). 'In addition to receiving political support for his educational activities, [Husayn] al-Houthi was tacitly allowed to raise the Islamic *zakat* tax and to establish a militia' (du Bouchet, 2007, p. 150).
- 33 Peterson (2008); Hamidi (2009); ICG (2009); Fattah (2009).
- 34 Bonnefoy (2009a).
- 35 Felter and Fishman (2007).
- 36 Cook (2006, p. 26).
- 37 Stracke (2006, p. 5). In fact, two generations of Yemeni jihadi fighters have travelled to Afghanistan: the first and much larger group during the 1980s, and the second around the end of the 1990s and early 2000s (see Barfi, 2010).
- 38 Peraino (2009).
- 39 Saeed (2010).
- 40 For example, there are said to be important differences between jihadi groups in Abyan, centred on an older generation of Afghan–Soviet war veterans, and al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (personal correspondence with Yemen Islamism researcher, November 2009). See also Schanzer (2004), Mudabish (2006), Bonnefoy (2009a; 2009b), and Barfi (2010).
- 41 According to Johnsen (2010, p. 21), al-Qaeda's stated *raison d'être* is 'expelling the infidels from the Arabian Peninsula'.
- 42 For an overview of the development of al-Qaeda in Yemen since 2001, see Johnsen (2010); see also Barfi (2010).
- 43 BBC (2009a).
- 44 For coverage and analysis of al-Qaeda in Yemen, see the US-based blog written by Gregory D. Johnsen and Brian O'Neill: <<http://islamandinsurgencyinyemen.blogspot.com/>>.
- 45 Schmitt (2009).
- 46 Barfi (2010, p. 2), citing al-Mu'tamar Net, 27 December 2009.
- 47 World Bank (2008, pp. 33, 51). Oil production peaked around 2002 at 450,000 barrels per day, but has since fallen to less than 300,000 (World Bank, 2008, p. xv). Export oil revenues are expected to dwindle to zero in 2011, as are domestic oil revenues in 2018; these will be only partially replaced by liquefied natural gas, which started coming on stream in late 2009 (World Bank, 2008, p. 33).
- 48 IMF (2009, p. 13).
- 49 Phillips (2008).
- 50 According to Rashad al-Alimi, Yemen's deputy prime minister for security and defence affairs, '[t]errorism has destroyed the country's infrastructure, [and] hit [the] tourism industry as Yemen was expecting to receive one million tourists and hundreds [of] thousands of people who were working in tourism, lost their jobs because of terrorism' (Assamiee, 2010).
- 51 Yemen ranks 140th out of 182 countries in the United Nations Development Programme's *Human Development Index*. See UNDP (n.d.).
- 52 World Bank (2009a, p. 1).
- 53 'Since 1999, in the absence of labor force surveys, the unemployment situation has not been quantified' (World Bank, 2008, p. 6). Commentators typically quote a 35 per cent unemployment rate (e.g. Boucek, 2009b), although it is not clear on what basis this figure has been calculated.
- 54 World Bank (2008, pp. xvi, 6).
- 55 IRIN (2008); World Bank (2009b, p. 2).
- 56 Brown (2009). Food security has the potential to be a significant armed violence risk factor. The nutritional situation in Yemen is described as 'alarming' in the *Global Hunger Index* (von Grebmer et al., 2009, p. 18). In 2009 the World Food Programme (WFP) in Yemen was expecting to have 1.5 million beneficiaries (author interview with senior WFP official, Sana'a, April 2009).
- 57 Ward, Ueda, and McPhail (2000). For example, in Sana'a, the water basin is being exploited at four times the rate at which it is being recharged (Ward, Ueda, and McPhail, 2000, p. 5); and it is reported that the level of the underground aquifer is falling by 6–10 metres per year (author interview with international water expert, Sana'a, December 2008). In the case of Taiz, see Hackman and Assamiee (2009). Yemen already suffers from severe freshwater poverty, with per capita availability only 2 per cent of the global average (World Bank, 2008, p. xiv).
- 58 WHO (2009).
- 59 On water-related conflict, see, for example, Ward (2005), Hydro-Yemen and CARE (2005), and al-Amry (2008).
- 60 According to a well-placed government official, internal reports record that approximately 4,000 people are killed during land disputes each year in Yemen (author interview, Sana'a, July 2009). This is in addition to, and four times the number of, homicides recorded in official 'security and justice' (crime) statistics for 2008 (CSO, 2009b).
- 61 Not everyone shares this conclusion. There is a strong current of domestic opinion that is reflected in the comments, in January 2010, of the deputy prime minister for defence and security affairs, Rashad

- al-Alimi: 'In the past, the country has been able to overcome greater challenges and now the country is stronger than in the past' (quoted in Assamiee, 2010).
- 62 BBC (2009b).
- 63 See Obama (2010).
- 64 Estimates of the number of small arms in Yemen have varied greatly. The *Small Arms Survey 2007* presents a list of these estimates cited in existing published sources, which range from 6–9 million up to 60–80 million, and arrives at a best estimate of 6–17 million, averaged to 11 million (Small Arms Survey, 2007, pp. 45–46). The most sophisticated approach of the studies cited is almost certainly that of Miller (2003), who arrived at the 6–9 million small arms estimate on the basis of a series of focus groups. A dissenting voice came from a government official, who questioned 'how nine million is possible, given that 40 per cent of Yemenis struggle to buy food' (author interview, Sana'a, August 2009). According to the Yemeni Central Statistical Organization, in 2008 the population of Yemen was 22.2 million; with an annual growth rate of around 3 per cent, it will have now exceeded 23 million (CSO, 2009a).
- 65 Al-Hakimi (2009, p. 6). A 'household' in Yemen is likely to include an extended family and therefore a number of adult males. Average household size in 2008 was 7.1 people (CSO, 2009a).
- 66 AFP (2008).
- 67 For example, the head of an international NGO working on conflict reduction in Yemen described the importance of access to arms in escalating conflict, allowing people to 'react quickly' to provocations (author interview, Sana'a, January 2009).
- 68 Translation from the original Arabic by Malhani Translation Services, Sana'a.
- 69 The exceptions include: (i) people who may not acquire a licence or possess weapons in urban areas; and (ii) people who do not require a licence. In respect of (i), Article 21 states that licences may not be granted to anyone who: is under the age of 18; has been convicted of a serious offence or a crime in which he used a firearm; is proven to use drink, intoxicants, or dangerous drugs; and who has (or has had) a 'mental or psychological disability'. In respect of (ii), Article 22 specifies a long list of exempted individuals, primarily current and former high-ranking officials.
- 70 YER = Yemeni rial.
- 71 In July 2009 the official Saba news agency reported that the deputy interior minister, Saleh al-Zaw'ari, had instructed 'security offices in governorates of Taiz, Lahj, Baidha'a, Mahrah, Mahweet, Abyan, Ibb, Hadramout and Raymah to activate a decision of banning carrying weapons throughout each governorate' (Saba, 2009), which implies in both rural and urban areas. It is not clear on what legal basis he made this instruction.
- 72 Awaz (2009).
- 73 The full title is: Republican Decree No. 1 of 1994 of the Executive Regulation of Law No. 40 of 1992 on Regulating Carrying Firearms and Ammunitions and Their Trade.
- 74 Author interview with chief of police, Aden, November 2009.
- 75 Author interview, Aden, November 2009.
- 76 IRIN (2007). In October 2008 the government announced that it had closed 230 shops and arrested 270 arms dealers (Oudah, 2009a).
- 77 Women may be trained in the use of firearms, and in rare cases may even carry weapons. For example, a female Yemeni acquaintance of the author described being taught to strip, clean, and reload an AK-47 by her family (author interview, Sana'a, November 2009). A news report quoted a resident of Sana'a as saying: 'I train my children and wife in how to use guns to protect our home from thieves in my absence' (IRIN, 2009).
- 78 Al-Hakimi (2009, p. 8).
- 79 The customary significance of arms in tribal society is underlined by Sergeant, writing in 1982, who states: 'Traditional Arabia is dominated politically and socially by the arms-bearing tribal class and its chiefs. . . . The power and honour of a tribe can be gauged by its ability to defend itself and to extend its protection to other groups' (Sergeant, 1982, p. 11).
- 80 The traditional custom of carrying a *jambiya* is said to be at least 1,000 years old, while that relating to carrying a firearm may be as little as 60 years old (author interview with Yemeni anti-violence campaigner, Sana'a, June 2008). Shelagh Weir (2007, p. 42) describes the role of the *jambiya* in Razih, a northern district of Yemen, in the late 1970s as follows: 'Daggers denote status. . . and the *qabili* [tribal]-style dagger worn upright at the front is explicitly equated with masculine virtues, and especially with the imperative to appear invincible. Once they become *shibab* [youths], therefore, men generally wear their daggers whenever they go out in order to protect their masculine strength.'
- 81 For example, a Western security manager commented that a tribe in the area where he works had previously sold a tank to government forces to assist them in securing from security threats (notably from al-Qaeda) an extractive industry facility that brought jobs to the local community (author interview, November 2009, Sana'a). In 2007 the Yemeni government implemented a short-lived heavy weapons buy-back scheme, which included purchasing 'bombs, artillery and even anti-aircraft guns' in addition to 'mortars, surface-to-air missiles, anti-tank shells, rocket propelled grenades as well as large quantities of mines, explosives and ammunition' (Aljazeera.net, 2007).
- 82 For example, in relation to an earlier round of fighting, Hamidi (2009, p. 179) quotes the *Washington Post*, which claimed that 'the war had claimed 4,000 lives in 2007 alone'.
- 83 OCHA (2009).
- 84 References to the campaigns in 1998 (Reuters, 1998), 1999 (Reuters, 1999), and 2002 (AP, 2002) were all found through <<http://www.gunpolicy.org>>; the reference to the 2007 ban is from *Yemen Observer* (2007).
- 85 This assertion was made repeatedly during author interviews and conversations with longer-term Yemeni and foreign residents of Sana'a. Nevertheless, weapon carrying persists in urban areas, especially in the capital, including by police and soldiers (both personal weapons and vehicle-mounted .50 calibre machine guns), and personal bodyguards of high-ranking officials, sheikhs, and other VIPs.
- 86 For example, at a July 2009 symposium on arms control hosted by the Democracy School NGO in Sana'a, tribal participants from an area to the north of Sana'a city—but still in the municipal area—reported a reduction in land disputes following enforcement of the ban on carrying weapons introduced in 2007, a move for which they expressed strong support (author interview, Sana'a, December 2009).
- 87 Many Yemenis report routinely carrying weapons in vehicles when travelling between cities. For example, one participant at a workshop on small arms in Sana'a commented: 'All of us move from one city to another and all of us must carry a small arm in our car' (Sheba

- Centre for Strategic Studies workshop on Proliferation of Light Weapons: Feasible Solutions, Sana'a, 15 June 2009).
- 88 For example, a senior Yemeni development professional described feelings of insecurity as 'the main motive for weapon ownership' as a form of 'security enhancement' (author interview, Sana'a, March 2009). Al-Hakimi's study of small arms ownership found that self-defence was the most important motivation, and higher in rural than in urban areas (respectively 61 and 45 per cent of respondents) (al-Hakimi, 2009, p. 7).
- 89 Oudah (2009b).
- 90 IRIN (2007). In October 2008 the government announced that it had closed 230 shops and arrested 270 arms dealers (Oudah, 2009a).
- 91 According to local sources, as few as three markets are operating as of December 2009, with shops essentially acting as meeting places for buyers and sellers, with stock kept at other locations such as retailers' houses (author interviews, Sana'a, December 2009).
- 92 This process tends to be described by the Yemeni government as 'seizing' weapons (e.g. see Oudah, 2009c) and conflated with weapons genuinely confiscated in urban areas, whose owners could not produce an appropriate licence. The author observed the 'cloakroom' process at the checkpoint on the road between Aden and Lahj in November 2009. The transaction of checking in a firearm by an owner entering Aden was entirely straightforward and took approximately one minute.
- 93 For a list of news services used, see <<http://www.yemen-ava.org>>.
- 94 In some cases, multiple articles were identified relating to specific incidents, notably where additional information was identified in secondary and subsequent reports.
- 95 When a report indicated 'several' deaths, 3 deaths were assigned to the incident; when 'dozens' of deaths were indicated, 24 deaths were assigned. These therefore represent the most conservative assumptions. Where conflicting reports were identified, e.g. about the numbers killed during an incident, the reports were averaged. The full timeline is available online at <<http://www.yemen-ava.org>>.
- 96 More generally, there are many instances when media reports in Yemen do not provide contextual information on the nature or associated factors contributing to armed violence, e.g. reporting that a number of people were killed in a clash between two tribes, but not why, or reporting deaths, but not injuries. This may be considered indicative of the relatively underdeveloped state of journalism in Yemen, in combination with a concern about reporting details that may be considered to be in some regard sensitive.
- 97 Freedom House (2009).
- 98 Small Arms Survey (2005, pp. 235–37).
- 99 Independent reporting of the war in Sa'dah has been significantly limited, as access has been almost non-existent, severely proscribing the potential for independent verification of reports originating from the conflict parties. Moreover, Yemeni media practise self-censorship in relation to politically sensitive events. Relating to the 2008 round of fighting in Sa'dah, see HRW (2008, p. 2).
- 100 See, for example, Geneva Declaration Secretariat (2008).
- 101 For example, see NDI (2007).
- 102 Official crime statistics report around 1,000 homicides and other violent deaths in 2008 (CSO, 2009b). It should be noted that in Yemen crimes are generally only formally recorded once 'detected', i.e. once a suspect has been identified and the relevant file passed to the prosecutor. As a result, it is reasonable to expect that published statistics represent a significant undercount of overall crime levels (author interview with Yemeni government official, Sana'a, July 2009; author interview with Western diplomat, Sana'a, February 2010). To this should be added the estimated 4,000 deaths annually in the context of land disputes, as well as an unknown number due to security operations and the war in Sa'dah, with the latter being likely to run into thousands (not including indirect deaths).
- 103 Only 40,000 crimes were recorded in 2008 for a population of 23 million (CSO, 2009b), although this is almost certainly an undercount.
- 104 For a profile of al-Fadhli, see Worth (2010).
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About the Yemen Armed Violence Assessment

The Yemen Armed Violence Assessment (YAVA) is a multi-year initiative administered by the Small Arms Survey, an independent research project of the Graduate Institute of International and Development Studies in Geneva. Designed with the support of the UK Conflict Prevention Pool, the project seeks to collect and disseminate quantitative and qualitative research to support efforts to prevent and reduce real and perceived armed violence in Yemen. The YAVA will focus on addressing the following broad research themes:

- the demand for small arms and other weapons (motivations and means);
- armed violence typologies and the drivers of armed violence (risk factors);
- the impact of small arms and other weapons (on specific demographic groups and geographical areas);
- the market for small arms and stockpiles throughout the country (supply); and
- measuring the effectiveness of various approaches to armed violence prevention and reduction.

The YAVA will draw information from key informant interviews, field research, and secondary analysis of existing data sources, along with a review of publicly available literature (in Arabic and English). Where appropriate, it will triangulate findings with available statistics (e.g. on crime), public health records (e.g. hospital admissions data), and

media monitoring or 'incident reporting'. Summaries of key findings will be periodically released in the form of short policy-relevant *Issue Briefs*, as well as a final report later in 2010. All publications will be made available in both English and Arabic. For more information, see <<http://www.yemen-ava.org>>.

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