THE HOUTHI SUPERVISORY SYSTEM

The interplay of formal state institutions and informal political structures

Thematic report – 17 June 2020

The complex interplay of formal and informal political, military, and security structures in Yemen poses a challenge for humanitarian agencies trying to operate on the ground while adhering to humanitarian principles in Houthi-controlled territories. This situation is made even more complex by the increasing competition between different wings of the Houthi movement, and between local elites and the central regime, for the control of state institutions.

Understanding political environments is key to ensuring an effective provision of humanitarian assistance. In Yemen, particularly, a thorough understanding of local elite networks is needed in order for humanitarians to engage with state actors in a way that is neutral, impartial, and independent.

This report explores the history of the Houthi movement and the structure of the Houthi regime highlighting the need for nuanced and customised approaches to state authorities in different parts of Houthi-controlled Yemen. The vocabulary and conceptual tools presented in this report are necessary to understand local and national elite dynamics.

In Houthi-controlled territories, formal state authorities are systematically paralleled by the Houthi supervisory system. This 'shadow state' guarantees the control of the central regime over its peripheries, and the grip of the Houthi inner-circle over local elites of Houthi supporters (the *mutahawwithin*). As a result, decision-making does not necessarily lie with those actors who are formally representing the state (e.g. governors, ministers, security directors, etc.). Rather, it often lies with informal Houthi supervisors. Choosing one political interlocutor over another can make the difference and requires a thorough understanding of elite dynamics.

Key Findings

- **The supervisory system operates as a direct link between the inner circle of the Houthi leadership and the local governance system**. Most Houthi general supervisors are Hashemites from the northern governorates, ideologically committed, and tied to the leadership by kinship and territory.

- Since December 2017, **a gradual merging of formal institutions and the informal supervisory system is underway**, with Houthi supervisors and loyalists appointed in state authorities. New state authorities, established outside of the law and placed under Houthi control, are making formal institutions redundant and ineffective.

- **Houthi supervisors from the northern governorates and local elites of Houthi sympathisers (mutahawwithin) often compete for influence** and the control of governorates' institutions.

- **The regime's architecture is ever-evolving and volatile. State institutions and the supervisory system are increasingly merging**, with the result that prominent Houthi leaders are now holding formal state positions.

- **The relationship between the Houthi inner-circle and local elites shapes different configurations of power in each governorate**. Charting these dynamics on the governorate level is fundamental for humanitarian agencies to successfully deal with local authorities.

Methodology

This thematic report presents an analysis of publicly available secondary data and previously unreleased data collected by the VERSUS project. It offers an overview of the history and internal organisation of the Houthi movement in northern Yemen, focusing on the interplay of formal state authorities and informal political structures.

ACAPS welcomes all information that could complement this report. For additional comments or questions please contact the Yemen Analysis Hub at yah@acaps.org

The Houthi Movement

Historical roots and development

In less than two decades, the Houthis have transformed from a handful of individuals chanting anti-imperialist slogans to an organised political and military force, capable of ruling the northern governorates of Yemen while confronting the international coalition supporting President Hadi in air and ground combat. While advancing militarily, the Houthis have also expanded their internal organisation, which remains largely uncharted. Ansar Allah, the political wing of the movement, is the tip of an iceberg: what lies beneath is the 'supervisory system', a sort of shadow state that parallels formal state institutions, guaranteeing the grip of the Houthi inner-circle over territories that are peripheral to their northern strongholds.

1982 – 2000 | The northern governorate of Saada is traditionally a stronghold of the Zaydi school, an offshoot of Shiite Islam. In 1982, religious scholars from Saada established a study group focused on the 1979 Iranian Revolution. It aimed at contrasting what it perceived as the politico-economic marginalisation of the governorate and at reviving the Zaydi doctrine, threatened by the advance of Salafi institutes in the area. In 1986, the group evolved into the **Union of the Believing Youth** (BY), teaching Zaydi thought to high school students. It later operated, throughout the 1990s, by organising summer schools and cultural events (Nevola & Shiban 2020).

1993 – 2002 | **Badruddin al-Houthi**, a renowned religious scholar of Hashemite origin, joined the BY in 1986. His son, **Husayn al-Houthi**, was elected member of parliament in 1993 for Hizb al-Haqq, a political party representing the interests of Zaydi communities. In 2000, Husayn took control over part of the BY network and by 2002 he developed an anti-imperialist narrative opposing the US-led "war on terror" and condemning President Ali Abdullah Saleh's government as an accomplice of what he termed the "forces of evil" (i.e. US, Israel, and Saudi Arabia). This rhetoric was overtly aligned with the political discourse of the so-called **Axis of Resistance** (i.e. Iran, Lebanon's Hezbollah, and Hamas) (Nevola & Shiban 2020).

Hashemites and Tribesmen

Yemen's traditional society is organised in well-defined status groups structured by genealogical descent and hereditary professions. The so-called *sada* (s. *sayyid*) are descendants of the Prophet through Ali and Fatima. The term '**Hashemites**' (s. *hashimi*, pl. *hashimiyyin*) is often used interchangeably. Many *sada* pursued religious knowledge and lived in protected enclaves in tribal territory, the so-called *hujar* (s. *hijra*). The **tribesmen** (s. *qabili*, pl. *qaba'il*) trace their descent to the Southern Arabs, and traditionally they acted as arms-bearing farmers (Dresch 1989).

2004 – 2010 | President Saleh fought Husayn al-Houthi and his supporters — accused of being subversive Iranian proxies — in six rounds of war, often referred to as the Saada wars (2004–2010). During the first war, Husayn was killed, and **in 2005 his brother, Abdulmalik, took the lead of the movement**. Rather than weakening the Houthis and their supporters, the wars increased their military and organisational capacity, and their popularity (Knights 2018).

The Zaydi doctrine

The **Zaydiyya** is a Shiite school of Islam, imported to northern Yemen in the 9th century by the Imam Yahya al-Hadi ila al-Haqq (d. 911). The role of the Imam is not hereditary: claimants must be recognised by Zaydi religious scholars and embody 14 qualities, the most important being a direct descent from the House of the Prophet Muhammad through his nephew Ali and his daughter Fatima. **Zaydi doctrine substantially differs from Iranian Twelver Shiism**, and the Zaydiyya is often described as the "fifth school of Sunni Islam" because of its proximity to Sunni religious tennets (Vom Bruck 2005).

2011 – 2013 | In 2011, the Houthis started referring to themselves as **Ansar Allah (Partisans of God)** and when the so-called Arab Spring erupted, they declared their support for street protests. In 2013, they joined the National Dialogue Conference (NDC) in Sanaa. In this phase, they tried to reconcile the use of military violence in the northern governorates with a 'civic' liberal political façade represented by Ansar Allah's political wing (Brandt 2018a).

2014 – 2017 | In 2014, the Houthis forged an alliance with their former foe, President Saleh. This "marriage of convenience" granted the Houthis a network of tribal and military connections that paved the way for the 21 September 2014 takeover of the capital, Sanaa. On 6 February 2015, the Houthis and Saleh promulgated the Constitutional Declaration, dissolving the parliament and appointing Muhammad Ali al-Houthi President of the **Supreme Revolutionary Committee** (SRC), a transitional 15-member political body that effectively ruled the state in Houthi–Saleh–controlled territories. In August 2016, the Houthi–Saleh alliance announced the establishment of the **Supreme Political Council** (SPC) and the formation of a new cabinet. On 2 December 2017, Saleh declared his intention to "turn the page" and he broke the alliance with the Houthis. Two days later, he was killed. Since then, the Houthis have ruled northern Yemen without an effective political counterpart.

Terminology and structure of the movement: Houthis or Ansar Allah?

Though the labels 'Houthis' and 'Ansar Allah' are often used interchangeably, they refer to organisations that do not completely overlap. In this report, Ansar Allah is considered as a subset of a wider organisation called the Houthi movement.

Ansar Allah is not formally a political party (Diwan 23/09/2019). It is a 'civic' movement and the legitimate wing of the Houthi movement. Its main purpose is the propagation of the so-called Quranic March (al-masira al-qur'aniya). With the latter expression, the Ansar Allah leadership refers to the cultural, political, and religious movement set in motion by Husayn al-Houthi in 2002 with his conferences and teachings. Abdulmalik al-Houthi is often referred to as "Leader of the Quranic March" or "Leader of the Revolution" (meaning the 21st September 2014 Revolution). He holds no official position in the SPC nor in any of the Houthi-controlled state institutions (Ansarollah 1/12/2019).

Ansar Allah's organisation revolves around a General Secretary, Fadhl Abu Talib, and several 'departments', the political office (al-maktab al-siyasi) being the most relevant. Other departments include: the external relations office; health office; education office; social office; intelligence service; and the 'media authority to counter the aggression'. No organisational chart of Ansar Allah is publicly available.

When reference is made to 'Houthis' or the 'Houthi movement', it points to a broader network of actors that do not necessarily hold a position in Ansar Allah or in state institutions. The Houthis are firstly a kinship network. Badruddin al-Houthi was married four times, and each marriage connected him with specific tribes and territories. He fathered at least 14 sons and seven daughters, most of whom married prominent leaders of the Houthi movement, expanding the network (Salmoni, Loidolt, and Wells 2010).

Though Badruddin's sons constitute the nucleus of the movement, the Houthis expand far beyond kinship ties. Many followers of Husayn al-Houthi supported the Quranic March from its early stages and fought alongside the Houthi family during the Saada wars (2004-2010). This group of loyalists makes up the inner circle of the Houthi movement. Most of them hail from the northern Yemeni governorates: Saada, Amran, Hajjah, and al-Jawf.

Houthi political leadership is organised around 'wings' or 'currents' that lobby for different, sometimes conflicting, interests and compete for resources:

- The 'military wing': led by Abdullah 'Abu Ali' al-Hakim, military mastermind of the movement and current head of the military intelligence.

- The 'tribal wing': composed by loyalists of non-Hashemite origin, those commonly known in northern Yemen as qaba'il, or tribesmen. It was led by Salih al-Samad (d. April 2018), the former president of the SPC. Now it is being marginalised.

- The 'ideological wing': led by Abdulkarim al-Houthi, the current Minister of Interior and uncle of Abdulmalik al-Houthi.

- The 'political wing': often described as overlapping with Ansar Allah, and represented by the current President of the SPC, Mahdi al-Mashat.

Territorial advance and expansion of the Houthi network: *the mutahawwithin*

The Houthis adopted multiple strategies to expand their influence and territorial control from their northern strongholds to other governorates. As previously noted, they exploited the alliance with former President Saleh to access the tribal, military, and political networks associated with his family and his political party, the General People's Congress (GPC). At the same time, they autonomously forged new alliances with local partners by exploiting several other networks:

- **Sectarian conflict and tribal mediation**: the Houthis engaged in sectarian clashes with the Islah party, with al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP), and with Salafi groups. Through these conflicts, they expanded their influence in new governorates. In particular, they exploited tribal mediation committees to establish new contacts and co-opt local *shaykhs*.

- **Hashemite families and *hijra* enclaves**: local networks of Hashemites provided a pool of loyalists to co-opt in-state administration. In a number of governorates (e.g. Ibb, Hajjah, Sanaa, etc.), the *hujar* (protected religious enclaves) served as a foothold to access new territories, promote the celebration of Shiite religious festivals, and spread Houthi ideology.

- **Zaydi religious centres**: with the Houthi movement deeply rooted in the Zaydi school, Zaydi networks (and formerly established BY ones) offered a foothold in Sunni territories.

- **Tribal hospitality and the Saada wars**: many *shaykhs* were co-opted when they visited Saada to assess the damage incurred by the conflict. The Houthis are masters of tribal customs, and they made extensive connections through outstanding displays of tribal hospitality.

The local allies of the Houthi movement are often referred to as ***mutahawwithin***. This term can be literally translated as 'Houthised' and has a derogatory connotation, implying that the *mutahawwithin* joined the ranks of the Quranic March at a later stage, for pragmatic reasons rather than ideological commitment. Tribal *shaykhs* and former GPC leaders are often put into this category. As a matter of example, prominent mutahawwithin are the Governors of Ibb and Al Hodeidah, former GPC leaders who disowned Saleh after his death and 'embraced' Houthi ideology.

Many **Hashemites** are 'close' to the Houthi movement, for at least two reasons: Zaydi doctrine reserves a central role for the Prophet's descendants, and most Hashemite families are connected by kinship ties. Since 2014, local Hashemite elites have played a

Mediation committees

Conflicts within and among tribes, and conflicts between major tribes and the state are often handled by 'mediation committees'. Mediators act as guarantors, and they facilitate conflict resolution by brokering "face-saving compromises which leave the dignity of the parties to the conflict intact" (Brandt 2018b: 104). To perform this function, mediators must embody some moral qualities: fairness, neutrality, moderation. Depending on the level of the conflict, they are selected among national elite members or among influential local shaykhs. During the Saada wars and ensuing conflicts, several presidential mediation committees and tribal mediation committees brokered agreements with the Houthis.

prominent role in governing the areas in which they reside. However, the Houthis keep drawing a neat distinction between Hashemites from the northern governorates — the inner circle that fought the Saada wars — and 'peripheral' ones from other governorates, labelled mutahawwithin.

The supervisory system and the Houthi 'shadow state'

In March 2011 the Houthis seized Saada governorate and the local council elected Faris Manna as Governor. The existing administrative and security structures were fully preserved (Brandt 2017: 334). However, next to the 'formal' managers and executive officers of the security, military, and general services, the Houthis appointed their own supervisors (*mushrif*, pl. *mushrifin*). These supervisors did not hold formal state positions, rather **they acted on behalf of the Houthi movement, "relieving existing authorities of their duties or rendering them redundant"** (UNHRC 09/08/2019).

When the Houthi–Saleh alliance took control of formal state institutions, the SRC and the SPC decreed the appointment of military, security, and executive officers, including a whole cabinet of ministers and a wide number of governors and deputy governors. **These appointments were carefully selected to guarantee a balance of power between Ansar Allah and the GPC** in formal state institutions. However, they did not account for the Houthis' informal power: while militarily expanding, the Houthis had also exported the 'supervisory system' to areas under their control (Nevola 2019).

The main function of the supervisory system is to provide a direct connection between Houthi national leadership and the local governance system, to guarantee that central directives are locally executed. The system parallels the structure of state institutions on each formal level and supervisors establish a symbiotic relation with ministers, governors (*muhafiz*), district directors, neighbourhood chairmen ('*aqil al-hara*), school directors, police department officers, military brigade commanders, detention facility directors, security checkpoint commanders and so forth, effectively replacing these officers in their

decisional and executive capacity. Though supervisors are often referred to as 'Ansar Allah supervisors', they are not formally elected or transparently appointed by Ansar Allah's political department. Rather, there is evidence that they are appointed by the Supreme Revolutionary Committee[1] and directly report to Abdulmalik al-Houthi (Diwan 23/09/2019) (UNPoE 2020: 9).

Structure of the supervisory system

The structure of the supervisory system parallels the administrative structure of the state on the governorate level (see figure below). The **general supervisor** (*al-mushrif al-'amm*) is the apex of this hierarchical organisation, and he is the **'shadow counterpart' of the formal state governor**. He is in charge of forming the Popular and Revolutionary Committees and of appointing lower-level supervisors on the district level. Moreover, he is capable of exerting pressure to make the 'formal' governor comply with Houthi directives. The general supervisor also appoints three supervisors in charge of specific domains:

- **Educational supervisor** (*al-mushrif at-tarbawi*). The Educational *mushrif* coordinates the work of school directors. Instruction holds a pivotal role in fostering ideological commitment. Consequently, the Houthis have reworked primary school curricula to expand religious studies and place their motto at the core of the students' daily routine (Sanaa CFSS May 2019). As testified by the UN Human Rights Council, they have also practised child recruitment (UNHCR 2019: 162) and turned schools into sources of potential fighters (Mareb Press 24/07/2018).

- **Social supervisor** (*al-mushrif al-ijtima'i*). The social *mushrif* manages relations with development aid agencies, charitable organisations, and civil society associations that are branched throughout the country. Some of the biggest organisations known to operate for the Houthis are al-Shahid and Bunyan (Al Montasaf 8/01/2019). The Wounded Foundation holds a pivotal role in managing medical supplies and aid and has been chaired by prominent supervisors of the Houthi movement (Nevola 2019).

- **Security supervisor** (*al-mushrif al-amni*). The security supervisor is the 'shadow' counterpart to a governorate's Security Director.
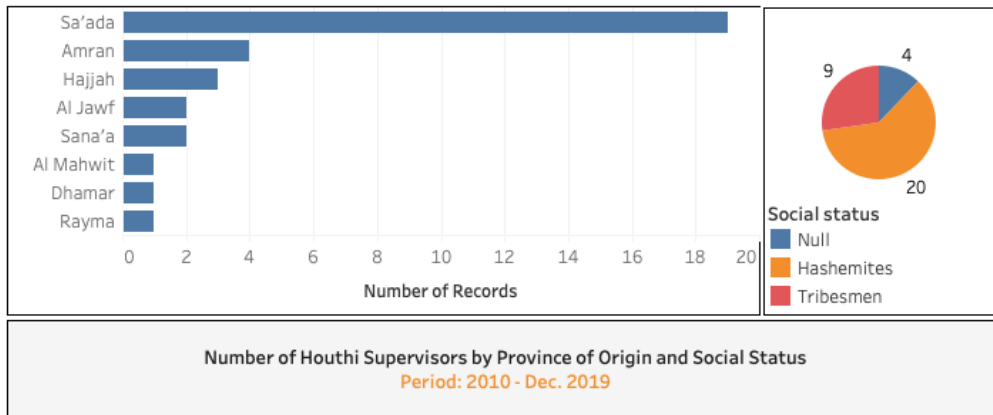
Key point
While lower-level supervisors, on the district and neighbourhood level, are frequently *mutahawwithin*, the general supervisors are carefully selected among loyalists of the Houthi inner-circle. Most of them hail from the northern governorates of Saada, Hajjah, and Amran; the majority of them are Hashemites; and many of them are directly connected with the Houthi leadership by kinship networks (Nevola 2019).
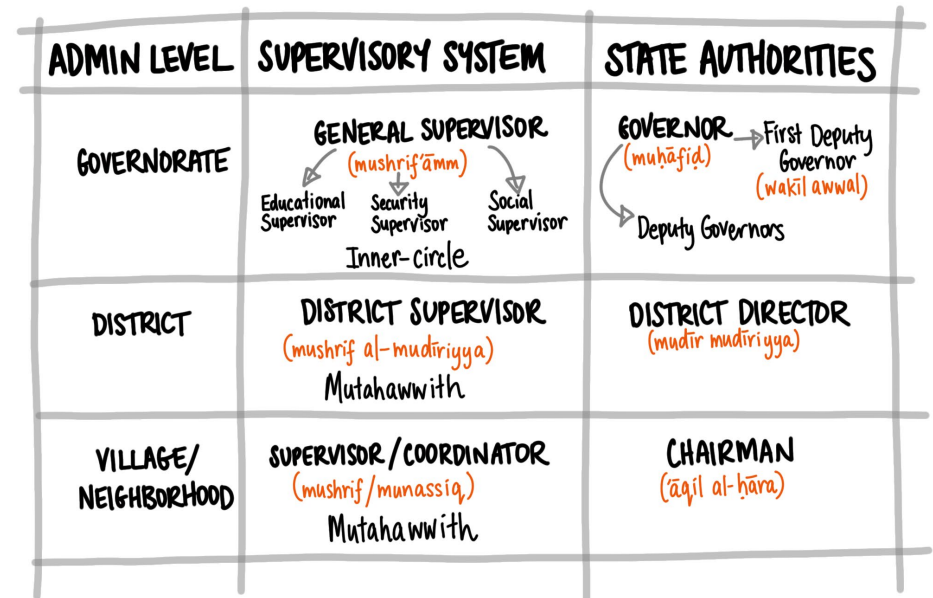

The so-called *'aqil* (pl. *'uqqal*) is the chairman of an urban neighbourhood or of a country village. The 'aqil holds a complete list of the residents of a neighbourhood and his stamp guarantees their reputation for basic social activities (e.g. buying a car, obtaining a job, etc.). He is in charge of distributing cooking gas bottles at controlled prices. This 'soft-power', which includes an intelligence-like capacity of providing information about the residents, accounts for the central role of the *'uqqal* in the administrative structure. In urban settings, the 'aqil is appointed by the Local Council, and thus he is the expression of a political majority. During the Saleh era, most *'uqqal* were GPC-loyalists, but now many are affiliated with Ansar Allah (ACAPS interview 11/05/20). In spite of this increasing overlap between administrative structures and Ansar Allah, the 'aqil remains a civil servant, and is often supervised by a Houthi *mushrif*.

Number of Houthi Supervisors by Province of Origin and Social Status
Period: 2010 - Dec. 2019

The graphics below compare the province of origin of the Houthi supervisors and governors who were in charge in December 2019. Eight out of 14 supervisors hailed from Saada, with the remaining six ones hailing from four northern governorates. On the other hand, governors were selected so that most areas of the country would have token representation. This comparison shows that governors represent the legitimate side of the state and embody a territorial connection with the province they rule; supervisors are, instead, an expression of the Houthi inner-circle.[2]

Province of origin of the governors in charge in December 2019

Province of origin of the supervisors in charge in December 2019

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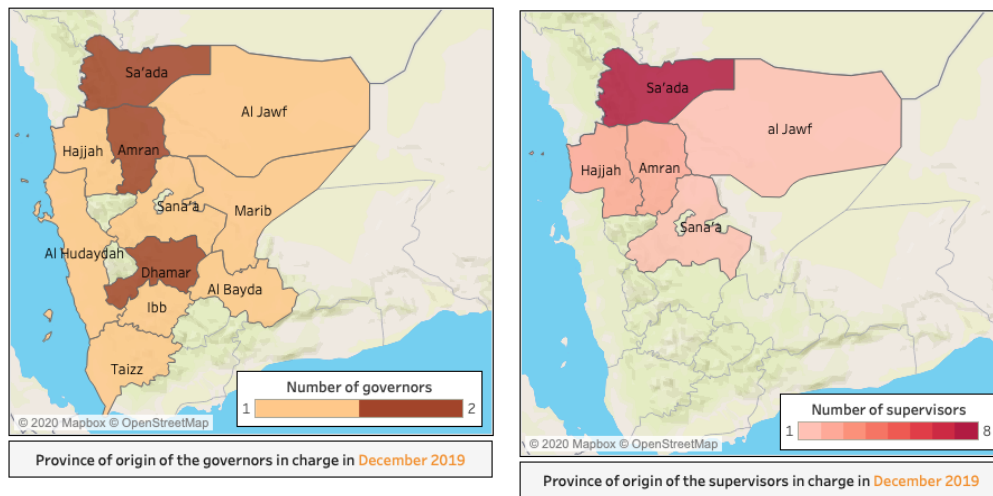
[2] The total sample is constituted by 14 supervisors and 14 governors who were in charge in 14 Houthi-controlled governorates in December 2019.

Merging of state institutions and informal structures

After December 2017, the alliance between the Houthis and the GPC was effectively dismantled. Since then, the Houthis have held a strong grip over state institutions. The new balance of power is vividly reflected by the appointment of Houthi loyalists as ministers and governors, making the supervisory system partially redundant.

Though the structure of the supervisory system has remained unaltered, an increasing merging of formal and informal institutions is underway. In many governorates, the supervisors have been appointed as deputy governors or even as governors, the latter case being exemplified in Raymah and Sanaa governorates. Dozens of *mutahawwithin* have been appointed members of the National Shura Council, and most Houthi leaders of the inner-circle now hold formal state positions.

Another governance strategy developed after December 2017 consists in creating new state authorities to put them under the control of Houthi loyalists. This way, former state authorities are duplicated and effectively deprived of their functions, while the legitimate side of the state is preserved. The Authority for Zakat (established in May 2018 to collect the mandatory charitable contribution) and SCMCHA (see boxed text) are prominent examples of this dynamic (Sharq al Awsat 30/04/2020).

Case study: SCMCHA

The Supreme Council for the Management and Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs and International Cooperation (SCMCHA) is currently the main interlocutor for INGOs and humanitarians in the Houthi-controlled territories of Yemen. The authority was established by presidential decree in 2017 and called NAMCHA (National Authority for the Management and Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs and Disaster Recovery). Its President, al-Qasim Muhammad 'Ali 'Abbas, was appointed Deputy Minister for International Cooperation (MOPIC) in April 2018, thus establishing an informal link between the Ministry and the Authority. In November 2018, NAMCHA was reformed: it was granted a legal personality, financial and administrative independence, and was directly subjected to the President of the SPC, Mahdi al-Mashat. Its Board of Directors was led by al-Mashat's office director, Ahmad Hamid. In November 2019, the authority was transformed into SCMCHA, incorporating the International Cooperation Department of the MOPIC.

In a nutshell, a function that was previously assigned to the MOPIC was transferred to a newly established authority under the direct control of the SPC. Moreover, two prominent Houthi loyalists were appointed at the apex of SCMCHA: Ahmad Hamid, Director of the Presidential Office and media responsible for the Houthis; and Abdulmuhsin al-Tawwus, an in-law of Abdulmalik al-Houthi and of the Commander of the Special Security Forces, and former General Supervisor.

Military sector, police forces, and intelligence services

The structure of the **Yemeni military** was reorganised by President Hadi between 2012 and 2013, as part of the GCC-brokered transition agreement. This process of reform revolved around two pillars. First, Hadi aimed at removing or reshuffling top military commanders whose loyalty lay with former President Saleh, or with Ali Muhsin al-Ahmar, the influential commander of the First Armoured Division (*al-Firqa*). Second, he attempted to reorganise the armed forces under a unified chain of command. To accomplish this second goal, in April 2013 he dismantled the semi-autonomous Republican Guard (led by Saleh's son, Ahmed Ali) and the Firqa and restructured the armed forces around seven geographically defined 'military regions' (ICG 2013).

Houthi authorities have maintained a similar architecture. The armed forces are still organised around seven military regions, and new commanders have been appointed since the Supreme Revolutionary Committee was established in 2015. In 2018, a supplementary 'central military district', including Sanaa and the surrounding tribes (the so-called *muhit* Sanaa), has been created and placed under the command of Abdulkhaliq al-Houthi, Abdulmalik's brother (Mareb Press 3/02/2018). This new district includes military camps formerly associated with the Republican Guard and the Reserve Forces (Al Mashhad Al Yemeni 18/04/2019).

Case study: Infighting between the Houthi inner-circle and local *mutahawwithin* elites

Since December 2017, the Houthis have accelerated the replacement of GPC leaders with Houthi loyalists. This strategy has triggered tensions with local elites of *mutahawwithin,* marginalised in favour of members of the inner-circle hailing from the northern governorates. Ibb and Al Hodeidah are characteristic examples of this dynamic.

In September–October 2018, a vast reshuffle led to the appointment of several Houthi supervisors from Saada in Ibb's security positions, thus expanding the control of the inner circle over the governorate and increasing the overlap between state and non-state institutions. This reshuffle occurred to the detriment of the Ibb elites of *mutahawwithin* and triggered infighting among the Houthi ranks (ACLED October 2019).

Similarly, Al Hodeidah's military and security is now under the control of Houthi loyalists from Hajjah. Houthi leaders from other governorates, including those ruling the local branch of SCMCHA, have consequently entered into an alliance with local elites of *mutahawwithin*. Two blocks of powers are now facing one another, triggering infighting among the Houthi ranks.

Case study: The 3rd Military Region

The area of Marib falls under the jurisdiction of the 3rd Military Region and since 2016 was commanded by Major Mubarak al-Mushin al-Zayadi. Appointed in Houthi quota, al-Zayadi was the architect of the alliance with Marib's tribes (Mandab press 10/12/2014). In March 2020, al-Zayadi was killed in clashes with the frontline supervisor of Sirwah, Abdulwali al-Houthi, who is now in charge of the 3rd Military Region (Al Mashad al Yemeni 26/03/2020) (ACAPS interviews 21/05/2020). This case exemplifies how formal state structures and the informal supervisory system, though both under Houthi control, respond to different logics and chains of command.

Though the formal structure of the army remains apparently unaltered, the commanders of the military regions now report to the Jihad Office which is under direct control of Abdulmalik al-Houthi. Next to this formal system, the informal supervisory system remains in place, reporting to a different chain of command. Houthi loyalists with no formal military training are appointed next to career military officers and they directly report to the Revolutionary Committee. This informal system includes the 'frontline supervisor' (*mushrif al-jabahah*), a Houthi loyalist in charge of the units fighting on the frontlines, and the 'military supervisor' (*mushrif askari*) who is, instead, the Houthi military responsible for the whole governorate.

The **security sector** exhibits the **highest degree of merging between formal state structures and the informal supervisory system**. After the takeover of the capital Sanaa (September 2014) and their subsequent expansion in the central and western governorates, the Houthis delegated the provision of security services to the Revolutionary and Popular Committees. Though marginalised, police forces remained operational, reporting to the security directors of the formal system of governance. Within this context the Houthi security supervisors exerted their informal pressure over 'formal' officers with the aim of influencing their action. In 2017, the Interior Minister, Muhammad al-Qawsi, a GPC loyalist, 'normalised' the situation by re-establishing police control in many areas, including Sanaa itself (Al Arabi, 6/12/2016).

As the police gradually regained control over the provision of security services, the Houthis managed to appoint some of their supervisors as **Deputy Governors in charge of Security Affairs** in Dhamar, Hajjah, and Ibb governorates (Nevola 2019: 11). Under this guise, the supervisors amassed in one role a dual loyalty, to the Houthis and to the state, blurring lines between the formal and the informal. As illustrated above, after December 2017 the Houthis gained almost complete control over state institutions and sped up the process of merging. A new Interior Minister loyal to the Houthi movement, Abdulhakim al-Mawiri, was immediately appointed. Eventually, in May 2019 the position was handed to

Abdulmalik's paternal uncle, Abdulkarim al-Houthi, one of the most influential leaders of the movement (Al Methaq News 21/04/2019) (Yemen Saeed 5/05/2019).

As a consequence of this almost complete monopoly over the security apparatus, the Houthis are now in a position to appoint their loyalists as security directors on the governorate level, which is effectively what happened in Ibb (in July 2018) and Al Hodeidah (by the end of 2018).

During the Saleh era, **intelligence information** was provided by two separate agencies: the Political Security Organization (PSO), focused on internal security, and the National Security Bureau (NSB), focused on external security. The two agencies differed in purpose, their internal organisation, criteria of selection and training of personnel, and sources of funding. The NSB was better trained and funded, while the PSO was burdened by political patronage (IRC 2013).

The Houthis have recently restructured the intelligence service, merging the two agencies in one novel authority called **Security and Intelligence Service (SIS)**. The Director of the SIS is Abdulhakim al-Khaywani, former Deputy Minister of Interior (Ayn al Arab 2019). On the formal side, next to the SIS, is Military Intelligence led by Abdullah 'Abu Ali' al-Hakim, a field commander often described as leader of the Houthi military wing. On the 'informal' side, Preventative Security (*al-Amn al-Waqa'i*) is an extremely influential intelligence apparatus, directly reporting to Abdulmalik al-Houthi, and aimed at monitoring the Houthi movement and protecting it from infiltrations (UNPoE 2020: 9).

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