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Analyzing the formal and informal roles of women in security and justice in Yemen: Reflections for future considerations

Joana Cook

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 For more information, contact the Co-directors of the Centre, Daniel Hiebert, Department of Geography, UBC (daniel.hiebert@ubc.ca) and Lorne Dawson, Department of Sociology and Legal Studies, University of Waterloo (ldawson@uwaterloo.ca).

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Joana Cook

Department of War Studies, King's College London

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Introduction

In both the fields of security studies and terrorism studies, there is a demonstrable lack of academic analysis on the roles and agency of women in security practices, particularly as security actors, including in countering terror and countering violent extremism capacities. Indeed, women are generally viewed in terms of victims of violence, or as deviants who may perpetrate violence (such as female suicide bombers), or as duped "jihadi brides" as seen with Daesh, yet their varied and important roles in the maintenance and provision of security practices is often overlooked. Furthermore, what limited focus there is on women in security forces themselves often does not consider women's roles in informal justice and security provision, which is particularly important in countries like Afghanistan or Yemen where tribes can play key roles in local security provision. This has particular implications for both access to and provision of security for women; understandings of women as security actors; post-conflict provision of security for women; and the provision of robust public security more broadly.

This working paper is part of a larger project which examines the roles and agency of women in counterterrorism practices. The aim in this paper is to highlight women's historic roles in security more generally in Yemen, and how women's informal and formal roles have evolved in justice and security practices. In particular, the growing involvement and support of international actors amidst shifts in Yemen's national security apparatus itself will be expanded upon to inform future security sector reform (SSR) and restructuring efforts. This also highlights theoretical implications for the roles of women in security, extending beyond what may be considered "Western" understandings of security through formal security structures, to additionally consider how informal roles may also inform, compliment and support these.

This paper argues that women have been neglected in analysis of the security sector in Yemen in a number of respects including their historic and varied roles in formal security in the People's Democratic Republic of Yemen (PDRY); informal roles in negotiation and mediation in tribal structures; and security roles in the Ministry of Interior and Yemeni Armed Forces that began to re-emerge, particularly after 2001. Furthermore, while significant gains to their roles in

security were being advanced after 2011, the current conflict has significantly, negatively impacted these. This paper draws off of these precedents and demonstrates that particularly in light of the gendered impacts that women are facing during the current conflict, and the pre-existing gendered challenges women faced in Yemen, it is timely and crucial to consider the engagement and integration of women into any post-conflict security arrangements.

This paper begins by demonstrating the importance of Yemen as a case study in relation to women and security, and is followed by a contextualization of the literature on women in Yemen. It briefly lays out key security concerns in Yemen, and historical roles of women in the security sector, before specifically examining women's informal roles in tribal customary law, and the formal roles they have played in the Ministry of Interior and the Yemeni Armed Forces, before looking forward to post-conflict considerations. The general timeframe examined in this paper is the 1990 unification to 2015, with particular note of the shifts which emerged after the 2011 uprisings, and the commencement of 2015 Operation Decisive Storm. This paper recognizes that the conflict in Yemen is ongoing but aims to encourage considerations of women's roles in any future negotiations and settlement, and highlight what benefit this may bring to the post-conflict environment.

This working paper supports the argument that while women's roles and agency in the political sphere have become more publicly visible in unprecedented levels amidst broader public demonstration and support for such roles (particularly post-2011), such agency becomes more limited to externally implemented and supported roles in formal security roles. That is, while Yemeni women themselves have actively carved out their place in the political field, their roles within the security sector have been seemingly driven by external donors and partners who may not sufficiently recognize or consider their varied roles in informal and formal roles in security, which impacts security in the country more broadly. This working paper is based on desk-based research and 25 interviews that were conducted by the author in 2015 in the United States (US) and UK.[1]

1 The next stage of this project was to be field work in Yemen to interview female security practitioners and visit training facilities as part of a confirmed fellowship based in Sanaa. Fieldwork for this stage has been delayed for an indefinite period due to the ongoing conflict.

Why focus on Yemen?

Examining the roles of women in Yemen's security sector is important for a number of reasons. As a country, Yemen is often labelled "on the brink" and many analysts state that Yemen risks becoming a failed state.[2] It has become a safe-haven and base for international terrorists, particularly al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP),[3] and more recently Daesh.[4] This has led to regional and international actors, in particular the US,[5] taking a more "hands on" approach in Yemen to deal with the issues that threaten their security including training and equipping local security and intelligence forces, and targeting militants with air and drone strikes. These strikes have also been linked to Saudi Arabia and the United Kingdom (UK).[6]

Yemen also possesses a number of traits and threats that are present to varying degrees around the region where security sector reforms and support are being undertaken (for example, in Somalia), which could make it a valuable case study to compare and contrast. These include the presence of informal security and justice structures, a severe level of poverty, corruption, underemployment, high youth population and key problems related to development, particularly education, food security, and health.[7] Yemen also has another common characteristic of the region—low levels of gender equality—with Yemen being ranked as the lowest in the World Economic Forums Gender Gap Index.[8]

On a national level the country has also historically struggled with a southern separatist movement and Houthi rebels, who threaten to further destabilize the country, and with the

Some of the background information at the beginning of this report is drawn from my recent publication Joana Cook, ed. 2015. *"Our Main Concern Is Security": Women's Political Participation, Engagement in the Security Sector, and Public Safety in Yemen*, Rebuilding Yemen: Political, Economic and Social Challenges. Gerlach Publishing.

2 Christopher Boucek and Marina Ottaway, *Yemen on the Brink* (Carnegie Endowment, 2010). Thomas Juneau, "Yemen and the Arab Spring: Elite Struggles, State Collapse and Regional Security," Orbis 57, no. 3 (2013).

3 Gregory D Johnsen, *The Last Refuge: Yemen, Al-Qaeda, and America's War in Arabia* (New York: WW Norton & Company, 2013).

4 Gregory D. Johnsen, "Al--Qa'ida and the Islamic State Benefit as Yemen War Drags On " *CTC Sentinel* 9, no. 1 (January 2016).

5 Jeremy Sharpe, "Yemen Background and US Relations," ed. Congressional Research Service (Washington, DC2014).

6 While the US has been the primary international actor to carry out drone and air strikes in Yemen since 2002, the United Kingdom was linked to these strikes in April 2016. The Royal Saudi Air Force has also reportedly carried out strikes in Yemen. This point also excludes Operation Decisive Storm which commenced in April 2015 where Gulf Coalition forces have additionally been carrying out air strikes in the country at the request of the Hadi government. For United Kingdom's role see: Namir Shabibi and Jack Watling, "Britain's Covert War in Yemen: A VICE News Investigation," *VICE News* 7 April 2016. For full stats on US strikes see: The Bureau for Investigative Journalism, "Bureau Data Sets on Drone Strikes in Pakistan, Yemen and Somalia," http://www.thebureauinvestigates.com/category/projects/drones/drones-graphs/.

7 For good analysis of these various issues see: Helen Lackner, *Why Yemen Matters: A Society in Transition*, vol. 10 (Saqi, 2014); Noel Brehony and Saud Al-Sarhan, eds., Rebuilding Yemen: Political, Economic and Social Challenges (Berlin, London: Gerlach Publishing, 2015).

8 Yemen is ranked 140 of 140 countries. World Economic Forum, "Global Gender Gap," in *Global Gender Gap*, ed. World Economic Forum (2013).

current conflict are only becoming increasingly dire. There is a growing sectarian narrative of a Sunni-Shia divide in the country, which was largely absent in the country previously.[9] The prominent roles of non-state actors, such as tribes and local militias, have historically filled a security void, helping in maintaining order where the struggling transitional government still lacks reach. The critical development situation also constantly threatens the civilian population and is further compounded with gender specific issues such as the prevalence of child marriage. Addressing a variety of these concerns is reliant, either directly or indirectly, on an accountable, effective, representative and functioning security sector.

Having completed its National Dialogue Conference in January 2014, a new parliament was formed in November 2014 and a draft constitution was presented in January 2015, which also highlighted the new roles of military and police in society. However, with the current conflict in Yemen, which was prompted by the Houthi move on Sanaa in September 2014 and the initiation of Operation Decisive Storm in March 2015, the very status of the state is in question. What is clear though is that the country will require a political solution which engages all actors at the table; significant rebuilding, reforming and restructuring; consideration and reintegration of former soldiers and combatants; and a constitution will have to be introduced and approved going forward. Drawing from their previous roles, inherent in these should be considerations of the role of women in relation to security practices.

Why do women in security matter?

While there has been a fair amount of academic analysis on the status of women in the Middle East more broadly,[10] women in Yemen have generally garnered niche academic focus particularly related to political participation, development or health.[11] In the broader sphere of security,

9 Farea al-Muslimi, "How Sunni-Shia Sectariaism Is Poisoning Yemen," ed. Carnegie Endowment for International Peace (29 December 2015).

10 Valentine Moghadam, (2003), *Modernizing Women: Gender and Social Change in the Middle East.*, 2nd ed. (Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner Publishers); Valentine M. Moghadam. *From Patriarchy to Empowerment: women's participation, movements and rights in the Middle East, North Africa and South Asia* (1st Ed. Syracuse, N.Y.: Syracuse University Press, 2007); Mervat F. Hatem, "In the Shadow of the State: Changing Definitions of Arab Women's 'Developmental' Citizenship Rights" in *Middle East Women's Studies*, 1, no. 3 (Fall 2005): 20-45; Mervat F. Hatem, "Toward the Development of Post-Islamist and Post Nationalist Feminist Discourses in the Middle East", In *Arab Women: Old Boundaries, New Frontiers*. Judith E. Tucker, ed. (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1993), 29- 48; Katherine Meyer, Helen Rizzo, and Yousef Ali, "Women's Political Rights: Islam, Status and Networks in Kuwait. " *Sociology* 36 (2002): 639-662; Brian Katulis, . "The Impact of Public Attitudes", in Sameena Nazir and Leigh Tomppert, eds., *Women's Rights in the Middle East and North Africa: Citizenship and Justice* (New York and Lanham, MD: Freedom House and Rowman & Littlefield, 2005).

11 Fahmia Al-Fotih, "Women's Rights in Yemen: Between Rhetoric and Practice," *Middle East Program and Global Women's Leadership Initiative* (2013); Christina Hellmick, "Sovereignty over Their Bodies: Rethinking the Determinants of Wom-

there has been an even greater lack of focus on women. Instead, Yemen is most synonymous with regional and international security concerns revolving around the seemingly ever-present risk of state failure and what this would offer to groups already present in the country such as AQAP and more recently Daesh.[12]

While numerous academics have shown the importance of women's representation in newly formed governments in the post-conflict peace process and peace-building more generally,[13] this has more rarely been linked to the immediate, and in the case of Yemen, tenuous and complex issue of participation in the security sector. Women's political involvement in Yemen gained popular attention in the media, highlighted by 2011 Nobel Peace Prize winner, Yemeni human rights activist, Tawakkol Karman. There has, however, been little academic focus on analysing women's agency and roles in formal and informal sectors of security in Yemen. This is despite the fact that security is seemingly the highest priority for many Yemenis. Focus group participants from one 2014 survey highlighted that "the rapidly deteriorating security situation after the 2011 protests negatively affected women the most."[14] Furthermore, for all focus groups across the country, "Security was the number one concern expressed…. the most important indicator of the overall state of the country."[15]

There is one recent case study which has exemplified how this discrepancy can be demonstrated in practical terms in relation to the roles of women, drawn from the case of Afghanistan.

en's Reproductive Health in Yemen," in *Why Yemen Matters: A Society in Transition*, ed. Helen Lackner (Great Britain: Saqi Books, 2014); Maxine Molyneux, "Women's Rights and Political Contingency: The Case of Yemen, 1990-1994," *The Middle East Journal* (1995); Lody Odeh, "The Beginning or the End of Women's Dreams in Yemen?," *Arab Spring and Arab Women* (2013); Jamila Ali Raja, "Yemeni Women in Transition: Challenges and Oppurtunities," *CDDRL Working Papers* 140 (2013), http://fsi.stanford.edu/publications/yemeni_women_in_transition_challenges_and_opportunities/; Marina de Regt, "'Close Ties': Gender, Labour and Migration between Yemen and the Horn of Africa," in *Why Yemen Matters: A Society in Transition*, ed. Helen Lackner (Great Britain: Saqi Books, 2014); Stacey Philbrick Yadav, "Segmented Publics and Islamist Women in Yemen: Rethinking Space and Activism," *Journal of Middle East Women's Studies* 6, no. 2 (2010); Al-Fotih, "Women's Rights in Yemen: Between Rhetoric and Practice."

12 Sarah Phillips, *Yemen and the Politics of Permanent Crisis*. (Routledge, Oxon, 2011); Alistair Harris, "Exploiting Grievances: Al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula" in *Yemen on the Brink* ed. Christopher Boucek, and Marina Ottoway (2010), 31 – 44; Christina Hellmich, "Fighting Al Qaeda in Yemen? Rethinking the Nature of the Islamist Threat and the Effectiveness of US Counterterrorism Strategy," *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism* 35, no. 9 (2012).; Johnsen, "Al--Qa'ida and the Islamic State Benefit as Yemen War Drags On "; Ely Karmon, "Islamic State and Al-Qaeda Competing for Hearts & Minds," *Perspectives on Terrorism* 9, no. 2 (2015); Johnsen, *The Last Refuge: Yemen, Al-Qaeda, and America's War in Arabia*.

13 Birgitte Refslund Sørensen, *Women and Post-Conflict Reconstruction: Issues and Sources* (Diane Publishing, 1998); Azza Karam, "Women in War and Peace-Building: The Roads Traversed, the Challenges Ahead," *International Feminist Journal of Politics* 3, no. 1 (2000); Sanam Naraghi Anderlini, *Women Building Peace: What They Do, Why It Matters* (Lynne Rienner Pub., 2007). For an excellent annotated bibliography of current literature on gender and security see: Security and Human Rights Consortium on Gender, "Annotated Bibliography Project ".

14 Sarah Ahmed, "Women's Voices in the 'New Yemen'", in *YPC Policy Report*, ed. Yemen Polling Center (Sanaa, Yemen Yemen Polling Center, 2014), 19.

15 Ibid., 26.

Claire Russo, Former Intelligence Officer in the U.S. Marine Corps, summarized this succinctly,

> We haven't gotten to the point where we're looking at national strategies and coordinating the tactical employment of females with national strategies [such as] the Afghan peace and reconciliation process, or recruitment of the Afghan security forces, or the Afghan Local Police program or the Village Stability Operations. We have not, as a military, looked at integrating all of these things…. into the sort of strategy for employing women.[16]

More generally, looking at not only the tactical employment of women, but long term strategies and benefits related to engaging women in security policy and practice are generally overlooked in national strategies. This remains particularly important in countries like Yemen, where certain gender segregation norms may limit women's access to male officers in some areas of the country.

Considering the roles of women in security practices in Yemen is important for a number of reasons. The current security sector in Yemen has not traditionally been responsive to the needs of women. When (and if) laws are in place to protect the rights of women, they are still often not enforced adequately:

> In part due to the lack of representation, women's rights violations were, and still are, common. Existing laws that supposedly protect women and girls are either inconsistently applied or lack enforcement. There are no laws to protect girls from early marriage—a persistent practice in the country—or to protect women from rape and harassment.[17]

Women's absence from the security forces, as well as a lack of gender awareness and training amongst security forces, have also left gaps in access to justice for women. Drawing from, and expanding on a number of recent reports,[18] it can be argued that it is vital for women to become more involved in Yemen's security sector, in particular the police and military. This is based on a number of points.

16 Claire Russo, Council on Foreign Relations International Relations Fellow; Former Intelligence Officer in the U.S. Marine Corps. Speaking at the Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS) conference, "The Roles of Women in Terrorism and Counterterrorism – Expert Panel" April 19, 2012 in Washington, D.C. Full transcript available at:http://csis.org/event/roles-women-terrorism-and-counterterrorism

17 Raja, "Yemeni Women in Transition: Challenges and Oppurtunities". 3.

18 Mary Christine-Heinze and Sarah Ahmed, "Integrating Women's Security Interests into Police Reform in Yemen," in *A YPC Policy Report*, ed. Yemen Polling Center (June 2013); YPC, "Public Perceptions of the Security Sector and Police Work in Yemen. Major Survey Findings," (Sanaa: Yemen Polling Center, 2013). Ahmed, "Women's Voices in the 'New Yemen'." Hannah Wright Rogers Joshua, Saleem Haddad, Marwa Baabad, Basma Gaber, ""It's Dangerous to Be the First." Security Barriers to Women's Public Participation in Egypt, Libya and Yemen ", ed. Saferworld (October 2013); Cook, *"Our Main Concern Is Security": Women's Political Participation, Engagement in the Security Sector, and Public Safety in Yemen*; "Women's Role in Yemen's Police Force," in *Background information prepared for Saferworld Gender, Peace and Security workshop series*, ed. Saferworld (December 2014).

First, unless human rights and the rule of law are upheld and enforced for all members of society, including women, the government of Yemen will not achieve accountability required to the population. Second, including more women in the security sector also helps "open it up" to women who may have been reluctant, or not allowed, to engage male officers when their rights are violated. Third, due to the highly disadvantaged and unequal position of women in Yemeni society, special attention needs to be paid to ensuring not only areas such as development or political participation, but also to how their consultation and inclusion within the security sector itself can complement and support broader public engagement. Fourth, with the numerous security threats present in Yemen, coordination in these areas by Yemeni and international actors are tightly intertwined, and may see competition between national and international priorities. This risks politicizing or excluding the roles of women whose concerns may be overlooked by focus on specific objectives (for example, dealing with AQAP or Daesh). Fifth, if emphasis remains solely on women and traditional areas such political advancement or more general development concerns without consideration of how their involvement can be complementarily reflected in security practices, women risk being overlooked in larger security discussions and priorities. Finally, due to an increasing emphasis on human security and particularly on the security of women (seen in examples like UNSC Resolution 1325[19]), policies and engagement of this sector must reflect this concern.

Such points are only more critical to consider in a post-conflict environment as during conflict women generally face increased exploitation and abuse,[20] and the current conflict in Yemen has already demonstrated increasing incidents of child marriage, rape, and sexual harassment due to displacement and general breakdown in law and order during the conflict.[21] How women's requirements will be addressed, and what support their will be in place for them following the conflict, should reflect these additional concerns.

19 UN Security Council Resolution 1325 was a landmark resolution on women, peace and security. It highlighted and affirmed "the importance of [women's] equal participation and full involvement in all efforts for the maintenance and promotion of peace and security." UN Security Council, "Security Council Resolution 1325 (2000) [on Women and Peace and Security]," in *S/RES/1325 (2000)* (October 31, 2000).

20 UNFPA, "Gender-based violence in humanitarian settings." December 1, 2014. Available at: http://www.unfpa.org/resources/gender-based-violence-humanitarian-settings

21 UNFPA, "As Yemen conflict drags on, women's vulnerability grows." November 2, 2015. Available at: http://www.unfpa.org/news/yemen-conflict-drags-women's-vulnerability-grows

One report offers three observations that attempt to frame the relationship between gender, terrorism and counterterrorism and offers points of reflection on increasing roles for women in the security sector, as well as increased gender awareness in security services more broadly. First, "counter-terrorism measures will inadvertently punish, rather than protect, women and sexual minorities unless careful attention is paid to the underlying gender dynamics in which counter-terrorism measures are developed, implemented and assessed." Second, "the failure to take account of gender in the design, implementation, and assessment of measures to combat terrorism will undermine the extent to which such measures can achieve their stated goal." Third, "gender equality and non-discrimination are integral to a number of tools regarded as essential to countering terrorism" such as human rights, fundamental freedoms and rule of law.[22] That is, it is important to consider not just the roles of women in formal and informal sectors of security, but also increased gender awareness in security policy and practice more broadly, including areas such as counterterrorism which maintains a primary focus for various international actors in Yemen.

Yemen's security concerns and links to female security practitioners

Viewed from an international lens, Yemen's main threats revolve around the vulnerability of ungoverned spaces and how terrorist groups, particularly AQAP and Daesh, can take advantage of such areas thereby increasing their threat abroad. Recent examples from Syria and Iraq only accentuate this threat. Security interests of external actors have tended to focus on preventing this, also suggestively influencing national security priorities by virtue of their significant financial and physical support and training to Yemen.[23] The security risks the everyday Yemeni may face, however, are often much different and highlight the opposing security priorities of different actors, which have left a specific gap in access to formal security institutions for women.

One survey of Yemeni's focused on the present situation in comparison to the Arab Spring. Focus group participants had highlighted that "the rapidly deteriorating security situation after

22 Center for Human Rights and Global Justice, *A Decade Lost: Locating Gender in U.S. Counter-Terrorism* (New York: NYU School of Law, 2011), 22

23 For example, a total of $328.5 million was allocated to Yemen from the US alone in 2012. In 2013 this figure was still a significant $242.8 million, of which Section 1206 funding for training and equipping military forces was the single highest account contributor at $47.3 million.

the 2011 protests negatively affected women the most."[24] Many of these same concerns extended to the wider population with examples given including:

> Shootings, random assassinations, the spread of arms, bandits on roads leading out of the cities, an increase of sexual harassment and robberies during blackouts, the absence of police protection in cities such as Al-Hudaida and Aden, and a general increase in common crime.[25]

Women faced an additional burden however, "because of the conservative nature of Yemeni society" where "male and female relatives discouraged them from going to work, school, or other simple social activities because of security concerns." The same report succinctly pointed out that of the five most urgent priorities to improve women's status, security was chosen as the primary concern. They explain that, "if a woman cannot go to work, school, or a hospital safely, then she would not have a chance to improve her living conditions."[26] These same factors, as noted above, also have negative impacts on ability to engage in political activity and other public roles and have increasingly been linked to the promotion of women in policing in Yemen.[27]

For all focus groups across the country, "Security was the number one concern expressed… the most important indicator of the overall state of the country." All groups described the security situation in Yemen after 2011 as "the worst to date."[28] This insecurity was particularly present amongst the highly discriminated against Akhdam[29] community who were most likely to "suffer the most from rape and sexual abuse", yet "least likely to find protection, compensation, or punishment for perpetrators within the legal system."[30] In fact, some estimates state that up to 90% of Yemeni women are exposed to some form of sexual harassment.[31] Livelihoods, travel and family care were also negatively affected by security concerns. For example, when midwives were unable to get to client's homes this impacts not only their income, but also "the overall state of the family since women become unable to care for their families as they would if the situation was

24 Ahmed, "Women's Voices in the 'New Yemen'," 19.
25 Ibid.
26 Ibid., 26.
27 Cook, *"Our Main Concern Is Security": Women's Political Participation, Engagement in the Security Sector, and Public Safety in Yemen*.
28 Ahmed, "Women's Voices in the 'New Yemen'," 26.
29 Members of the Akhdam community are also referred to as 'the marginalised ones' and are often distinguished by their dark skin and lower economic status. They are said to number approximately 1.5 million in Yemen
30 Ahmed, "Women's Voices in the 'New Yemen'," 26.
31 Ashraf al-Muraqab, "Yemeni women subject to frequent sexual harassment," *Yemen Times*, 3 January 2012. http://www.yementimes.com/en/1639/report/1814/Yemeni-women- subject-to-frequent-sexual-harassment.htm

more stable."[32] Freedom to travel also became impeded by increasing blackouts, further limiting women's ability to engage in work,[33] amid other prevalent concerns of sexual harassment[34]—which carries with it additional burdens related to honour. That is, in environments of insecurity, while the broader population can suffer from the consequences of this, there are particular gendered implications for women, increasing the scope for consideration of their roles in post-conflict environments.

Historical considerations for security roles

There are a number of key events in Yemen's history that have contributed to the current situation on the ground. A brief examination of these help outline the complexities of competing interests at a national level, where examining the role of women in the security sector could be beneficial to reforms, stability, inclusion and addressing issues of cronyism and patronage that has been historically divisive in the military and state structure.

Firstly, unification of North Yemen (Yemen Arab Republic–YAR) and South Yemen (PDRY) has long left unaddressed grievances related to divisions of power and resources. In 1970, the government of South Yemen became Marxist and hundreds of thousands of Yemeni fled to North Yemen. This caused great tension between the two governments that continued until unification in 1990 when the new country became the Republic of Yemen (ROY). The tension that existed did not simply dissipate through the hurried unification which saw increasingly marginalization of southerners, including in the newly united security forces. As women's roles in the security sector prior to 1990 existed largely in the PDRY, marginalization of southern security forces also extended to women. In 1994, the government quickly quashed a secessionist movement in the south and tensions took on a renewed vigour with the Southern Movement in 2008. The issues of national identity, economic development and political governance were critical concerns that the unification did not address and continue to severely affect the political climate today. Such issues were also reflected in the security sector, including deficiencies in a unified, national identity in the military, and a lack of democratic governance and oversight in the security institutions more

32 Ahmed, "Women's Voices in the 'New Yemen'," 27.
33 Ibid., 30.
34 Ibid., 29.

broadly.

Secondly, the patronage politics which were rife under Ali Abdullah Saleh who used military and external funding for things like counterterrorism to consolidate his inner circle by framing himself as the sole individual able to manage the various competing political and tribal relationships, while at the same time marginalizing and radicalizing large sections of the population. This patronage is a key focus of SSR and restructuring, and has been noted as a critical point to address.[35] These patronage politics also sought to include certain groups in key positions of power and influence, while excluding others. Such management of the services also tended to neglect the security needs and requirements of the population at large.

Thirdly, Yemen faces multiple social and environmental challenges including an increasingly dire humanitarian situation, high youth population and unemployment levels, and severe water shortage.[36] Yemen's economy is largely reliant on oil (which is quickly running out), with no clear plan for a post-rentier economy.[37] Forty-three percent of Yemen's population is food insecure and almost half of Yemen's children under age 5 (2 million children) are malnourished and 1 million of these are stunted in their growth.[38] It is also estimated that 75% of Yemeni men chew *qat*, said to be "one of the primary causes of poverty in the country, decreasing productivity, depleting scarce resources, and consuming an increasingly larger portion of household budgets."[39] Birth rates are also extremely high with an average of 6.75 children per family in rural areas and 4.78 in urban areas.[40] Furthermore, only 27.7% of married women in Yemen use any form of contraceptive.[41] There is no minimum age for marriage in the country and half of the girls younger than 18 are married, a quarter of which are married before they are 15.[42] Youth unemployment or underemployment sits at 53%, while the figure for the general population sits at 40% (up from

35 For more detail on the complex history of Yemen's security sector see: International Crisis Group, "Yemen's Military-Security Reform: Seeds of New Conflict?," in *Middle East Report No. 139* (4 April 2013). Adam C. Seitz, "The 'Arab Spring' and Yemeni Civil-Military Relations," in *Why Yemen Matters: A Society in Transition*, ed. Helen Lackner (Great Britain: Saqi Books, 2014).

36 Boucek and Ottaway, *Yemen on the Brink*, 6.

37 Sarah Phillips, *Yemen and the Politics of Permanent Crisis*, vol. 420 (Routledge, 2011), 32.

38 World Food Programme, "Country Overview: Yemen," (United Nations World Food Programme, 2014). These figures are all prior to Operation Decisive Storm and current UN estimates state that 82% of the population needs some humanitarian assistance.

39 Boucek and Ottaway, *Yemen on the Brink*, 8.

40 2009 Statistical Yearbook - MOPIC

41 United Nations Development Program, "Gender Inequality Report," in *Human Development Report*, ed. UNDP (New York2010).ed. UNDP (New York2010

42 USAID, "New Insights on Preventing Child Marriage," *Produced for the International Centre for Research on Women* (April 2007).

15% in 2009).[43]

These are all important elements which help inform the current environment in Yemen, and the opportunities women have to manoeuvre within it in areas such as the security forces. In the past system driven by patronage politics, unless there was some personal benefit to Saleh to encourage change, it was likely to not be advanced. Neglecting the roles of female security practitioners was likely impacted by this. In regards to development challenges, women's roles in the public sphere may be impeded or overtaken by family obligations, access to paid employment, or basic survival concerns. Such pre-existing challenges must also be acknowledged when discussing women's roles in the security sector.

Locating women in security

Women in Yemen have played various informal and formal roles in justice and security. While formal security institutions have generally received the majority of international attention, informal security and justice structures and mechanisms (specifically tribal customary law) have also played important roles in Yemen for centuries. This continues now as a weak central government has meant that there is little government presence in many rural communities in the country.

There are also examples of partnership and cooperation between formal and informal security actors throughout the country. Authors such as Morris and Trammell have noted that in rural settings in Yemen, police officers may defer to local sheikhs to maintain peace. As such, there exists a "hybrid model of rural and state justice in which state agents, such as the police, defer to indigenous, customary law to restore order and justice."[44] While preference by international institutions and foreign governments is to generally engage with formal governance structures,[45] better understanding women's roles in informal structures helps highlight not only how informal and formal security and justice institutions may interact, but how roles of women in one sector may inform or impact those in the other.

43 Madiha AlJunaid, "The Challenge of Youth Unemployment," *The Yemen Times* 17 April 2014.

44 Travis Morris and Rebecca Trammell, "Formal and Informal Justice and Punishment Urban Law and Rural Mediation Rituals in Yemen," *Race and Justice* 1, no. 2 (2011): 131.

45 See for example the UK: FCO Stabilisation Unit, "Tribes and Tribalism in Yemen" (paper presented at the A joint FCO research analysts and Stabilisation Unit workshop, 26 April 2012).

Informal roles in security

Alongside the formal security sector in Yemen which is expanded upon below, tribes and tribal customary law have played an important role in informal security and conflict resolution particularly at the local level in Yemen, and women have played various roles in these.

Tribal mediation has historically been a flexible and adaptable means of addressing justice in Yemen, where decisions are considered more restitutive rather than coercive, and is often engaged in rural settings where state justice systems are not well established.[46] Authors such as Adra note that historically these systems may be seen as discriminatory towards women. However, women can be involved in tribal mediation, often simultaneously meeting to discuss the proceedings of a case alongside the men. After discussing the case in the evening as a family, men in the proceedings may bring the opinions of their wives, mothers and sisters into the proceedings where their opinions may be engaged. As such, women's engagement in tribal mediation may be done largely through their male family members, offering a means of influence, though limiting direct engagement in these processes. Women would also, in some cases of dispute and altercation, physically intervene in situations to deescalate them.[47] Women have also participated in mixed gender mediation, in rural settings where gender segregation may not be as prominent.[48]

Adra also highlights the urban-rural split in women's participation, where rural women generally participate more in the local economy and may have more mobility, and as such may be able to play a more significant role than urban women. However, she concludes, "although [tribal] customary law may not be ideal for women and excluded groups, state courts are not more consistent in protecting their rights."[49] The tribe that one belongs to may also impact protection or influence mechanisms for women from smaller or "weaker" tribes, and such access to tribal protection may be limited or non-existent.[50]

46 Najwa Adra, *Tribal Mediation in Yemen and Its Implications to Development* (ÖAW, 2011).
47 Ibid.
48 Andre Gingrich and S Howell, "Inside an 'Exhausted Community': An Essay on Case-Reconstructive Research About Peripheral and Other Moralities," *The ethnography of moralities* (1997). Unit, "Tribes and Tribalism in Yemen."
49 Adra, *Tribal Mediation in Yemen and Its Implications to Development*, 9.
50 Rogers Joshua, ""It's Dangerous to Be the First." Security Barriers to Women's Public Participation in Egypt, Libya and Yemen " 15.

Nadia al-Dawsari noted additional examples of female tribal leaders (sheiks), generally older women in a number of tribal areas, who often mitigate family and local conflicts and disputes.[51] Respected older women in the community may also intervene in violent disputes and can play roles mitigating (or also exacerbating) these, though they have generally not taken roles as direct mediators or arbitrators. There are some cases though, such as that of Aaliah Ali Khaled Ben Shutaif of the Alfuqman of Arrawdh, who directly mediated an escalating violent conflict between government and tribal forces.[52] Such roles also have precedents in Islam, where women were sometimes seen as outside of war.[53] As such, they may be viewed, at times, as impartial mediators, communicating and interacting with women from other tribes when their male family members were themselves engaged in conflict. Such themes may have particular salience for communities where Islam is practiced widely by the population.

In a country where revenge killings have a long tradition and have resulted in the deaths of over 5,000 people in the last 10 years, Partners for Democratic change have also highlighted cases such as that of Warda who prevented a major feud from erupting after her brother was stabbed, instead accepting mediation to end the conflict. Warda and her sisters also set up a women's commission to resolve local conflicts. One young women named Yasemin also got the men in her community to be more engaged, and got her father to help introduce lower dowry prices for marriage so that young, frustrated men in the community could then afford to get married, where this was becoming increasingly difficult.[54] Such cases help highlight the varied roles that women have traditionally played in mediation, informal justice and security institutions.

Propelled by women's increased roles in the 2011 protests and subsequent National Dialogue Conference, women's and youth roles in conflict dispute resolution mechanisms have also grown. This was noted as a very positive advancement that extended to tribal customary law, particularly due to its flexible and adaptive nature. According to Jonathan Apikian of Partners Yemen, while not necessarily making women more empowered in security processes, tribal customary law has proven "adaptive to other opportunities that in the past have been limited," and

51 Author interview with Nadia al-Dawsari, August 2015.
52 Nadwa Al-Dawsari, "Case Studies on Women and Conflict in Tribal Yemen," (19 April 2014).
53 It should be noted the varied and complex roles that women have played historically in Islamic literature, as warriors and mediators for example.
54 Partners Global, "Women in Yemen, Partners for Change," (7 March 2013).

as such has been more open to evolving roles for women. While the progressiveness of tribal customary law differs by region, he noted that women have proven to be active voices in this sphere:

> We were very surprised that in many of these regions the women were leading and facilitating these discussions [between the community and] the security officials. To be in a room with Yemeni tribal leaders, sheikhs and [state] security officials and you have a woman standing there addressing them, that's a huge accomplishment because the political participation is one thing, but being at that local level, to be empowered to have these conversations with these figures was really significant.[55]

These roles were noted as an extension of training and roles that women had had in civil society organizations and in political empowerment projects, where they were traditionally more active. Apikian noted,

> When you see a civil society organization that is working on transitional justice in Yemen, and it's led by a woman, you see this empowerment and I think it speaks very heavily of building on the momentum that women and youth had in the revolution. We are starting to see them be more active players within civil society, to be active leaders.[56]

While these are not formal roles in the national security sector itself per se, they speak to unique and emerging examples of the diverse and complementary roles that women may play in the country with direct links to security, or as bridges between national security forces and the population. They also inform pathways to bring women further into security resolution and mediation, particularly at a local level.

It has been noted that the tribal system in Yemen is growing weaker, and limiting the ability of tribes to manage conflicts. This has been linked to perceived corruption, and increasingly vulnerable and disengaged youth.[57] However, others such as Charles Schmitz have argued that tribes are instead changing, not weakening. Furthermore, tribes are becoming more involved in NGOs and local parties, and "the role of the tribe as a security unit is something that continues and will continue."[58] However, additional factors such as the influence of Wahhabi and Islamist influences in the country are also impacting women's mobility and reanimating tribal process-

55 Author interview with Jonathan Apikian, June 2015.
56 Author interview with Jonathan Apikian, June 2015.
57 Nadwa Al-Dawsari, Daniela Kolarova, and Jennifer Pedersen, "Conflicts and Tentions in Tribal Areas in Yemen," ed. Partners for Democractic Change International (2011).
58 Unit, "Tribes and Tribalism in Yemen."

es.[59]

As the current conflict drags on, and national security forces remain fractured and in disarray, and other actors like AQAP attempt to take advantage of governance vacuums (also cooperating with or challenging local tribes to achieve their goals), the roles that tribes will play in local security and justice provision is also likely to be impacted. These points suggest that whether weakening or evolving, women's roles in this informal sector of security and justice provision will likely also be impacted.

This section has also aimed to emphasize the importance of women's informal roles and considerations alongside those of the formal security sector, and how these may complement, inform and even reinforce each other. This also encourages wider academic analysis and consideration of how the formal and informal roles of women in justice and security practices should be understood.

Formal roles in security

Historically, women have played significant formal roles in the security sector in Yemen, particularly in the PDRY prior to unification in 1990. Women in the PDRY had varied and senior roles in the justice and security sector, and were active in the judiciary, army (also holding positions as generals) and police force. Since the 1990 unification of Yemen, however, women have largely worked in less active positions, and in far fewer numbers.[60] These roles, however, did begin to re-emerge after 2001 in the Ministry of Interior, which encompasses Yemen's division of Public Security and Police. Specific sub-disciplines include, for example, police departments, criminal investigations, port and airport security, and family protection. The European Union (EU), largely led by the UK, has assisted in reforms of the Ministry of Interior. A second institution is the Yemeni Armed Forces, which encompass the army, navy, air force, border control, reserves and an elite female counterterrorism unit.[61] Reform and assistance of the armed forces

59 Ibid., 11.

60 The PDRY was the only Marxist state in the Arab world. In the PDRY, equality of women was promoted in many areas such as education and politics and identical social roles for men and women were encouraged. After unification, many grievances emerged related to the loss of rights and roles of women, and Southerners more broadly. See for example: Maxine Molyneux, "Chapter 7, Women's Rights and Political Conflict in Yemen 1990-1994," *Women, Ethnicity and Nationalism: The Politics of Transition* (1998).

61 The most recent structures of the MOI and MOD can be found in Appendix I and II

has been largely assisted by the US, with countries such as Jordan and the UK also providing some support.

The Ministry of Interior

Women in policing fall under the Ministry of Interior (MOI), where reforms and training have been led by the Yemeni government with the support of the EU, in particular the UK. Policing itself ideally provides security to its population and access to justice for all members of society. While policing itself can be seen as independent to counterterrorism activities in institutional divisions, with terrorists often being immersed in the population, increasingly it is members of the police who may, unwillingly or not, be exposed to different aspects of terrorist activities (e.g. at check points). This section will analyse the roles of women in the MOI up to 2014.

Women's presence in police forces largely re-emerged after the first class of female officers graduated in 2001 from the Police Academy in Yemen.[62] Women play active roles in various areas of the police forces including in administrative roles; border services; the family protection unit in Aden; UN model police station in Aden; and in corrections as prison guards, though these generally do not include leadership positions.[63] Yemen's police forces currently contain 168,996 men and 2,868 women (or 1.7 per cent). In the police forces in 2010, 16 women had reached the rank of colonel, 17 had reached the rank of lieutenant colonel, three had reached the rank of captain and two were lieutenants.[64] Women working in the security services often face social stigmas,[65] which was noted as particularly prominent issue for women working as prison guards.[66]

Yemenis themselves appear open to the idea of having female police officers: 51.64% of the population support this.[67] However, 75.3% of the population does not support the recruitment of women from their own family into the police, highlighting challenges for increased recruitment and retention of women.[68] This indicates that while there is still a willingness to see female offi-

62 Faisal Darem, "Women Police in Yemen Fight Terrorism and Gain Acceptance," *Al-Shorfa* 7 July 2010.
63 Fiona Mangan and Erica Gaston, "Prisons in Yemen," in *Peaceworks*, ed. United States Institute for Peace (USIP) (2015), 38; Cook, "Women's Role in Yemen's Police Force."
64 Al-Methaq. "Yemen: female police surveillance of terrorists in the security points and at the entrances to major cities." 14 October 2010. http://www.almethaq.net/news/news-17831.htm
65 Abdulrahman Hussein, "Film: Women and Security in Yemen," ed. Saferworld (2014).
66 Mangan and Gaston, "Prisons in Yemen," 38.
67 YPC, "Public Perceptions of the Security Sector and Police Work in Yemen. Major Survey Findings," 70.
68 Ibid., 72.

cers in the country, there is also resistance to engage in these roles or allow female family members to take up such roles. Such resistance is often based in cultural and societal pressures, where such roles can be viewed as against culture, against religion, or against the belief that women should not work outside the home, amongst others.[69] Specific roles such as female prison guards hold particular shame and negative stigmas.[70]

Female officers were not often found at police stations and this has proved challenging for male officers who deal with female suspects, and for female members of the public who may be seeking police assistance. According to Yemen analyst Nadwa al-Dawsari, a lack of female officers was noted to deter women from accessing formal security institutions in the country, as male officers were generally "unfriendly" towards women, and going to the police as a woman came with a social stigma. Al-Dawsari also noted that focusing on more local-level security actors could be one positive area to influence women's impact on security.[71]

There was a notable theme in a number of interviews that suggested a primacy of focus on national-level security initiatives involving the military, neglected local-level initiatives that may have offered increased access to justice for women, or roles for women in the security sector, particularly in policing. In the words of one interviewee, for foreign donors funding training in Yemen's security sector, "police were never a priority."[72] Police were also largely not found outside of major city centres. This was due to the way that Saleh structured the security forces: police were based in the cities, while Saleh gave some autonomy to tribal sheikhs to demonstrate authority through their position of power (which was then linked back to the President, not independent oversight). Sheikhs then had their own military units sourced from members of their own tribe.[73] As such, there was a significant lack of opportunity for women in formal policing structures to extend their roles outside of major city centres, and only limited roles in major city centres.

In 2010, the EU partnered with the MOI on projects focussed on SSR and professionalization,

69 Marie-Christine Heinze and Sarah Ahmed, "Integrating Women's Security Interests into Police Reform in Yemen," (Yemen Polling Center, June 2013), 31.
70 Mangan and Gaston, "Prisons in Yemen," 38; Hussein, "Film: Women and Security in Yemen."
71 Interview with author August 2015.
72 Interview, July 2015
73 Interview, July 2015

and capacity-building, including the training of police. Previous projects were designed to build the capacities of training institutions of the MOI. The project aimed to improve the quality of training provided by the Police Academy through modernising the curriculum, improving linkages with other training providers, and exchanging and developing best practices. The project included other components such as technical assistance, professional development, and empowering female officers to be equally trained and promoted as their male colleagues. Respect for human rights was to be mainstreamed in the entire curriculum as well.[74]

Changes in the MOI can also be linked directly to women's engagement and stake in reform processes. For example, increasing the number of women in the police can help make the police more accountable and accessible to the people it serves, thereby helping rebuild trust amongst the population and its representative government. Noting some of the key challenges Yemen currently faces above, and reflecting on the comparable (though unique) case of Afghanistan, one report highlights the benefits that a greater focus on increasing the number of women in the security forces could provide. Discussing an increase of empowered, well-trained and experienced policewomen, benefits could include properly "react[ing] to violence against women, family violence, children in trouble, and kidnappings…. Provid[ing] support to female victims of crime, and ensur[ing] the security of women in communities."[75] Other important areas of consideration could include prison reforms or community policing initiatives which could help undercut or prevent extremism.

These are all critical components to solidifying a more secure environment in Yemen, rebuilding positive relationships between the government and population, and creating local ownership and response to security. A focus on this by the Yemeni government itself could also indicate a critical step toward, and support for, improving the wellbeing of women in Yemen, fulfilment of obligations to gender equality and reducing discrimination against women such as CEDAW,[76] as well as commitments from the National Dialogue Conference (NDC, which is dis-

74 The European External Action Service. "Newsletter of the delegation of the European Union to Yemen." Issue 2. November 2010. Accessed: 14 November 2014. Available at: http://eeas.europa.eu/delegations/yemen/documents/newsletter/newsletter_issue02_en.pdf

75 Tonita Murray, *Report on the Status of Women in the Afghan National Police* (Kabul: Afghanistan, Ministry of the Interior. Funded by the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA), 2005), 4.

76 The 1979 international treaty Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) was adopted by Democratic Yemen in 1984.

cussed further below). However, if these initiatives seem to be led by external actors, as opposed to internally by the Yemeni population, and excluded from the discussions of SSR, they risk being viewed as "externally imposed, or unworthy of political focus and effort."[77] That is, local ownership and direction of security reforms and provision are imperative to long term stability and security in Yemen.

This involvement could be led by actors such as civil society organisations and female parliamentarians, particularly in the areas of oversight and gender sensitivity respectfully. However, the ability to "speak" security and prioritize issues may restrict this:

> In order to allow women parliamentarians to be engaged in SSR there must of course be enhanced women's participation in parliament itself-an illustration of how SSR requirements go hand in hand with improving women's access to public decision making and policy formulation more generally.[78]

With an increase in women's political participation and representation in Yemen as reflected by the NDC, changing "elites" may articulate security interests differently. While not clearly related to the current roles of female security practitioners in Yemen, being cognizant of changing political actors and their priorities could impact areas such as programming and policy design. It could also reduce discrimination against female security practitioners by contributing to an environment where women's roles in general are increasingly valued in relation to the field of security.

It is important that women are utilized and valued in their positions, providing them opportunities to demonstrate their skills, abilities and contributions. A case from Afghanistan demonstrates the consequences of underutilizing or undervaluing such roles: "It is evident that the return on present investment in recruitment, training and maintenance of policewomen is poor because of the failure to employ policewomen in value-producing work." This resulted in:

> A waste of human capital, failure to protect the human rights of policewomen, and missed opportunities for using policewomen to advance government objectives for security and human rights, including the duty to provide the female half of the Afghan population with security services and

77 Ibid.
78 Megan Bastick, *Integrating Gender in Post-Conflict Security Sector Reform* (DCAF, 2008), 9.

> access to justice.[79]

A number of factors were pointed out in relation to the failures in the ability of the Afghani Ministry of Interior to recruit and advance women in the Afghan National Police (ANP). These included: organizational and leadership inertia, failure to finance the gender priority, the absence of gender policy and program, and a clear lack of recruitment plan. It was noted that,

> While there is usually a good response when a gender inequity comes to light, there do not appear to be any formal gender policies, programs, financial resources or even sufficient staff to integrate gender rights into the organization and operations of the ANP.[80]

As a result, there was no "strategic gender plan to direct desired change, no programs to identify and remove systemic bias against women in policing, no affirmative action programs, and no serious consideration of what the role and responsibilities of policewomen should be."[81] The report pointed out that while there has seemingly been support for gender equity from other agencies and the international community, gender "frequently escapes attention when plans are developed and budgets allocated."[82] A number of similar statements could currently be applied to Yemen and offer valuable insights to consider in post-conflict rebuilding, restructuring and reform efforts.

Following the 2011 Arab Spring, SSR was considered a key component of reform and change. In relation to women, there was a continuation and apparent increase in work to advance their roles in the Yemeni MOI. For example, there have been sporadic programs related to women's leadership advancement in the police. Examples of this include a course on *Women Leadership and Strategic Planning* which involved 28 female police officers and was run by the MOI in cooperation with the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP)/ Emergency Capacity Development Facility (ECDF) project, with funding from the US Department of State: Bureau of International Narcotic & Law Enforcement (INL).[83] The *Women's Leadership Programme* run by

79 Murray, *Report on the Status of Women in the Afghan National Police*, 5.
80 Ibid., 6.
81 Ibid.
82 Ibid.
83 UNDP, "Police Female Leaders Further Develop Their Skills Attending a Leadership & Strategic Planning Course," news release, 08 September 2013, http://www.ye.undp.org/content/yemen/en/home/presscenter/pressreleases/2013/09/08/police-female-leaders-further-develop-their-skills-attending-a-leadership-strategic-planning-course/.

the College of Policing in the UK has also seen Yemeni women attend.[84] In late 2014, the police college under the MOI initiated women-specific programs, also offering some positive signs of progress.[85] While women continue to play a minor role in the MOI, there has been incremental steps to advance their status within these forces, particularly with support of international actors.

The Ministry of Defense

Women have been engaged in various, though limited, roles in the Ministry of Defense. These roles have been diverse, for example, working in the Recruitment and Mobilization Office, also working in archives, where they worked separately from their male colleagues, reflecting local gender norms. One interviewee noted the particularly evident skills of women in this specific department, which they considered an important role for the Ministry.[86]

Perhaps one of the most unique programs was an all-female elite counterterrorism unit, which was established in 2006 and included an initial intake of 20 women.[87] Training and support for this unit was heavily lent from the US, alongside other counterterrorism training and equipping more broadly.[88] Though a relatively small unit, largely limited to interacting with female suspects, it is an unique example of women engaged in a predominantly male force, and set to take on an increasing role in the security sector.[89] The unit's training has included kinetic practices such as how to enter a house by force, drive a Hummer military vehicle, and shoot weapons. The women also studied English and first aid.[90] This unit in particular was referred to by Nabeel Khoury, deputy chief of mission at the US embassy in Sanaa, as "One of our favourite security institutions to work with because it's new and there is no corruption."[91] US Ambassador Stephen Seche recalled that women in these roles would search houses where women were present, as they would want women to take care of the women and keep them isolated from the

84 The College of Policing, "Breaking Down Barriers for Female Officers from Yemen to Bahrain," (April 2014), http://www.college.police.uk/en/21649.htm.
85 Police College announces new specialized course for women" *Yemeress*. 24 August 2014. http://www.yemeress.com/alahale/1778224
86 Interview with author July 2015.
87 Ginny Hill, "Yemeni Women Sign up to Fight Terror," *BBC News* 2007.
88 See footnote 23
89 Ali Ibrahim Al-Moshki, "Women's Unit Prepares for Potentially More Active Role in Counterterrorism," *The Yemen Times*, 15 May 2014.
90 Hill, "Yemeni Women Sign up to Fight Terror."
91 Ibid.

men.[92] US Ambassador Krajeski also recalled that Yahya Saleh had been particularly proud of this unit, and noted that they appeared very professional.[93] This unit trained alongside their male counterparts, but had culturally appropriate uniforms designed and separate facilities at the training barracks.

The establishment of this unit appeared to be largely due to need to facilitate security operations in a culturally appropriate manner. In particular, women were engaged to search other women, and to integrate with troops on counterterrorism raids where they would be responsible for dealing with the women and children. David Des Roches, an associate professor at the National Defense University who formerly worked on defence policy concerning Yemen noted that women being engaged to search other women for culturally sensitive purposes was a common theme considering women's involvement in certain counterterrorism units.[94] There were also many reports in Yemen of terrorists escaping dressed as women so a legitimate concern arose to ensure that women were searched, which may have led to this role for this unit.[95] One interviewee who had worked with the US government in Yemen noted that the establishment of this unit in 2006 was likely to appeal to Western donors, but also served useful purposes in kidnapping scenarios and hostage situations. The concept of including women in both the military and police forces also meant that the US was "encouraging a more democratic approach, and a better approach to the rights of women in general."[96]

While the elite female counterterrorism unit may have been the beginning of wider female engagement in such efforts, two things are clear. First, there does not appear to be an indication that current security priorities will soon be dissolved and increasing focus on counterterrorism training and capacities will likely remain a priority (particularly for international actors and funders), and women will likely be engaged in these. However, there is some concern that only engaging women based on their perceived value in managing female suspects may detract from their diverse abilities to contribute to security practices more broadly. Secondly, if imposed externally, without input from female Yemeni practitioners or consideration of how these efforts

92 Interview with author, July 2015
93 Interview with author, June 2015
94 Interview with author July 2015.
95 Anonymous, July 2015.
96 Interview with author, July 2015

are affecting or engaging women, there is a risk of negative impacts against the population. How women are being engaged or perceived in such efforts is of critical importance to the way the security sector develops in Yemen. Perhaps most importantly, using the complex case of Yemen could offer areas of reflection and consideration for policy makers and practitioners involved in comparable reforms in other corners of the world.

Post-2011 Security Sector Reform

Following the 2011 Arab Spring, Yemen undertook a National Dialogue Conference (NDC) which concluded in January 2013. The NDC brought together diverse actors from across the country to discuss nine key areas which were cited as drivers behind the uprising. Whereas women constituted 0.3% of the previous government, there was a 30% quota in place for these talks due in large part to their participation in the Arab Spring protests and demand for a spot at the table, and indicative of the more prominent roles women were demanding and taking in the emerging government. This was also supported by the UN envoy, bringing to bear the normative position on the inclusion of women and minorities in such processes.

SSR was a significant priority of the NDC, emphasized in the military and security working group. The aim of this group was to discuss military and security issues and work towards refashioning a professional national army, as well as the identity of the army and role it should play in political life.[97] The military and security working group however, was one that was noted as having lower representation of women than other working groups.[98] There was also criticism that the NDC process was rushed and as such, at times, reverted to previous power structures and decision-making processes that had failed in the past.[99]

An American Yemen analyst noted that in terms of a more thoughtful restructuring of the army, and the professionalization of the army that was in line with national strategic objectives and national goals regarding the role of the army in society, these concerns should have been dealt with by the NDC. This was problematic however as the NDC was viewed as not really em-

97 See National Dialogue site: www.ndc.ye
98 Interview with UN official, July 2015.
99 Interview with UN official, July 2015.

powered from the beginning to really make those decisions.

> Ideally, you should have had national level input and directive from a group of Yemeni's that were talking about their future and what they wanted the army to look like. Instead, for these immediate security reasons you had to start with those very institutions that were the problem and had vested interests in keeping things the way they were. It was a bit backwards in the way that it was done, and it was a product of political circumstance, but probably not enough attention given to that contradiction and problem.[100]

With women's significant representation in the NDC, they may have additionally been well-positioned to contribute their concerns and vision for security forces in the country, yet due to the structure of the NDC, this was perhaps a missed opportunity.

While there were inherent challenges related to the status of the security sector from day one of the NDC, SSR was at the forefront of priorities and initial proposals discussed the objective of "Expansion and empowerment of women in the work of the security services and the military and intelligence."[101] This reflected the belief that:

> In rebuilding security institutions, SSR should include a range of measures to increase the recruitment and retention of women and to create a work environment that is supportive of women not only in police and defense forces, but also in intelligence services, penal services, border authorities, the judiciary and the institutions that manage them.[102]

However, with inherent challenges such as addressing immediate security needs and undercutting prior power structures in the forces that impeded further reforms, even minor reforms and restructuring was going to take significant effort. In such circumstances, the roles of women in security are often neglected.

More general shortfalls that face gender integration in SSR could be also reflected in wider integration into the security sector. For example, "an impatience to complete programmes, leading to insufficient local ownership; and assumptions that models that have been used elsewhere can be replicated without due regard to context."[103] Considering the large number of stakeholders that require consultation, commitment by a large number of individuals to engage

100 Interview with the author, July 2015.
101 NDC, "Topic: Final Report of the First Period to Build the Foundations of the Army and Security and Their Role," ed. The NDC working group (Sanaa, Yemen: National Dialgue Conference, 13 April 2013).
102 Bastick, *Integrating Gender in Post-Conflict Security Sector Reform*, 14.
103 Ibid., 21.

these, and often long-term sustained financial resources required, it is no wonder that certain challenges may arise, particularly in more "taboo" subjects like women and security. "Gender issues are often of great cultural sensitivity, so while external actors can encourage and support, initiatives must be led by local stakeholders."[104] With the continuation of increasingly violence in the country, prioritization of immediate needs also risks relegating women's inclusion to a secondary concern. The benefits to supporting focus on gender consideration are certainly worthwhile though. "By drawing on the full participation of both men and women it can become more responsive to local needs, more legitimate and better able to address the range of security and justice priorities that coexist in communities."[105] How SSR may evolve in the unique Yemen context must also consider this.

There are many challenges to SSR that were present in Yemen even prior to the current conflict. In regards to civil-military relations—a cornerstone for effective security services, a seemingly emergent combination of:

> A weak central government, military factionalization, empowerment of local tribal militias and increased external influence has the potential of transforming Yemeni civil-military relations into something akin to warlordism, in which military and/or tribal leaders exercise civil power at a local or regional level – either in support of or in opposition to the central government – through control of the militias.[106]

Such trends have worrisomely emerged even more so in the current climate, and former state security forces are now in shambles.[107]

Moving forward

The current conflict has only exacerbated insecurity and an uncertain future for Yemen. The future status and role of the security sector is particularly precarious, as is the role of women within these.[108] However, it is largely recognized that a political solution is required to move

104 Ibid.
105 Ibid.
106 Seitz, "The 'Arab Spring' and Yemeni Civil-Military Relations," 66.
107 For further information on these post-2011 SSR see: International Crisis Group, "Yemen's Military-Security Reform: Seeds of New Conflict?." For more detail specifically related to post-March 2015 security actors and status of institutions see: International Crisis Group, "Yemen: Is Peace Possible?," in *Middle East Report* (9 February 2016).
108 It was noted by one interviewee that in Sanaa, when the Houthis took over the MOI female officers and employees were some of the first to be sent home and were no longer present in the MOI. However, this could not be independently confirmed by the author.

forward and address the grievances driving the current conflict. Within this, considerations from the results of the NDC and constitutional drafting committee will likely be expanded based upon concerns that have arisen from the current conflict. The restructuring of the security sector will likely consider the future roles and status of former employees in the sector, as well as the status of combatants and irregular militias.

Since February 2015, the Houthis have taken over significant control of state security services and the military power that went with it, including the counterterrorism unit and Republican Guard. The Houthis have also claimed that they are winning the loyalty of the army over time.[109] Houthi and Saleh loyalists are also thought to control upwards of 70% of state-owned medium and heavy weaponry seized from military bases.[110] While the Yemeni government has maintained some units, and has attempted to integrate irregular militias and resistance forces into government structures, this has been slow moving and flawed, given that thousands of Popular Resistance fighters have been excluded from integration into the military and police.[111]

Women have emerged in different security roles in the current conflict as well, and there have been unique instances of women joining resistance forces as snipers, police and intelligence gatherers in cities such as Taiz,[112] as well as unconfirmed reports of similar roles in Aden.[113] These instances encourage further inquiry into, and considerations of, the role of such women following the conflict, alongside other resistance fighters. Ousted President Saleh also maintains strong military networks throughout the country from his decades in power leading to further challenges ahead.

Within future discussions and considerations of security, the roles that women will take in Yemen's security institutions will be up for debate. For example, in the first draft of the Yemeni constitution released in January 2015, Article 314 confirmed the aim to, "Empower and expand employment opportunities for women in the Armed Forces, Police and General Intelligence" as

109 International Crisis Group, "Yemen: Is Peace Possible?," 6.
110 Yemen Post Staff. "Report: Militants seize 70% of Yemen's army equipment," Yemen Post. 5 January 2015. http://yemenpost.net/Detail123456789.aspx?SubID=7835
111 AFP, "Yemen's Aden living in fear as jihadists grow." 8 December 2015. Available at: http://reliefweb.int/report/yemen/yemens-aden-living-fear-jihadists-grow
112 Charlene Rodrigues and Nasser Al Sakkaf, "Women of Taez Take up Arms against Yemen's Rebels," *The National* (18 October 2015).
113 Sarah Kaufman and Vladi Vovcuk, "Women in Yemen Are Armed and Donating Jewelry to Fund Civil War," *Vocativ* (3 May 2015); Vladi Vovcuk, "Yemeni Women Take up Arms in Yemen's Battle for Aden," ibid. (12 April 2015).

a key principle.[114] How the status of this constitution will evolve in the current political situation is presently unknown, but will likely inform how female security practitioners are brought back under state security institutions and what roles they will be empowered to take in the future.

Certain concerns that have arisen during the conflict are also pertinent to these considerations. While the UN estimates that 21 million residents (82% of the population) currently need basic humanitarian aid,[115] women can also face particularly gendered problems in conflict, including increases in sexual assault, rape, forced child marriage, and other forms of violence as increasing pressure is put on internally displaced and fleeing populations in an increasingly insecure environment. As such, in post-conflict environments, access to justice for such individuals takes on a particular degree of importance, and can positively impact post-conflict reconciliation and reforms. The roles of female security practitioners in this will be essential for such initiatives.

One area that has been highlighted as essential in the short-term is the re-establishment of security on a local level, which also leads to such concerns. One American Yemen analyst noted that strengthening local police forces and security units in their areas, with local security actors, could be a useful place to start. However, local police forces face many challenges in armed tribal areas and there is also often a lack of distinction between military and policing functions which is also problematic.[116] This was reiterated by another interviewee who noted the security sector must be built, "from the bottom up, as opposed to from the top down. Not focussing on military leaders, it has to be from the bottom up." They also extended this to practical support required for security actors. "The military has to be adequately compensated—they are starving. You can't expect loyalty from someone who is starving, unequipped, not trained properly, or even has the tools to do what's expected of him."[117] This speaks to wider SSR concerns such as long-term, sustained funding and support. However, by ensuring that those whose primary livelihood is based in the security sector remain employed, could help avoid destabilizing trends seen in places such as Iraq after the removal of Saddam Hussein in 2003, where the Iraqi army was disbanded leav-

114 Constitutional Drafting Committee, "Draft Constitution English," (15 January 2015).
115 UN News Centre, "UN: More Than 21 Million People in Yemen Need Basic Humanitarian Aid," news release, 24 November 2015, http://www.un.org/apps/news/story.asp?NewsID=52638#.VzNekmPHKFk.
116 Interview, July 2015
117 Anonymous, July 2015

ing thousands jobless, frustrated and significantly detracting from security provision.[118]

For women who have worked as police officers and in the counterterrorism unit, such considerations would also extend to their previous roles in the MOI and MOD, and could help ensure that some semblance of access to justice for women is rebuilt alongside local, regional and national initiatives. It should also be considered how their informal roles in security and justice may support to these efforts, particularly at a local level. Such gendered considerations should be inherent in any discussion involving the status and roles of the Yemeni security sector going forward, including the design, support and funding of any assistance.

Conclusion

There has been a seeming neglect in the literature analysing or expanding upon women's roles in two key areas pertinent to security and justice in Yemen. First, in informal security, particularly in tribes, and areas such as conflict mediation or negotiation. As the power and influence of tribes continues to evolve, particularly in light of the current conflict, so may opportunities for women in this informal sector. However, even if tribal power and influence does recede, tribes still represent powerful actors in the social and political sphere in Yemen and it's important to understand women's roles within these. Second, women's roles in formal security roles in areas such as corrections, policing, and armed forces have also been neglected. While there is a historic precedence for such roles in the PDRY, and initiatives to advance these made particularly after 2001 and again in 2011, the current conflict has thrown the status and advancement of these roles into question.

It remains an important consideration to recognize the roles that women may play in both formal and informal security institutions, practices and norms, and to holistically understand what contributions women can and are making to security in Yemen and how this can be engaged and supported by domestic and international actors. In terms of larger implications for research, recognizing and engaging women's roles in both formal and informal security practices in Yemen, particularly in tribal structures, can lead to a more nuanced understanding of wom-

118 James P Pfiffner, "US Blunders in Iraq: De-Baathification and Disbanding the Army," *Intelligence and National Security* 25, no. 1 (2010).

en's diverse agency in country and region-specific contexts. It can also greatly enrich SSR literature, leading to more robust and holistic analysis of security structures, relationships, roles and institutions present in various countries and contexts, as well as informing partnership, policy and practice of domestic and international actors.

In terms of formal roles, while women had active and varied roles in the security services in the PDRY prior to the 1990 unification, it was only after 2001 that they began to really re-emerge first in the police services (MOI), and in 2006, in the counterterrorism unit (MOD), as well as playing various other security-related roles in areas such as corrections, border and port security, and in administrative and research roles. While the driving thrust of these roles appears to be based on fulfilling a requirement for gender-sensitive security functions (searching, interrogating, engaging, and supporting other women), as opposed to recognizing their roles as important in and of themselves, or in necessarily reflecting democratic norms, this still offers an opening to further expand and solidify women's engagement and participation in the field of security. However, policing and counterterrorism roles for women have been largely restricted to major urban centres, such as Sanaa, Aden and Taiz, limiting the benefits of these roles for rural constituents. Women continue to face social stigmas working in this field, in particular in roles in corrections.

As well as mixed domestic support from such roles, there was international training and support from actors such as the US, UK and UN. Steps were also taken to solidify these roles by Yemenis in the draft constitution and supported by their inclusion in the Police Academy. These roles have been noted as key to provide access to justice for Yemeni women in particular, positively leading to democratic norms, and also offering women access to influential and decision-making roles in the field of security in Yemen. However, as reflected on in the case of Afghanistan, such a long-term project requires consistent funding, support and accountability to ensure success. This has not historically been the case in Yemen, and a number of consequences highlighted in Afghanistan may easily extend to Yemen.

The current conflict in Yemen has significantly interrupted the incremental progress that was being made in advancing women's roles in this field and the very future of the state and its

security sector is in question. While the population at large is suffering at unprecedented levels, women have also been uniquely impacted in the conflict environment and will require unique, gender-sensitive considerations in the post-conflict environment—women's roles in security can be considered and positioned to help address this.

The rebuilding, restructuring and reform of the Yemeni security sector is certain to be key in any future settlement and lasting peace in the country. As noted by one UN official, "women have to be included in these conversations about security and things like national army and defense starting at a really local, community level…. After a conflict [women] need to have agency and be involved in decision-making that affects them."[119] It is still to be seen how this will evolve in the case of Yemen.

119 Interview with UN official, July 2015

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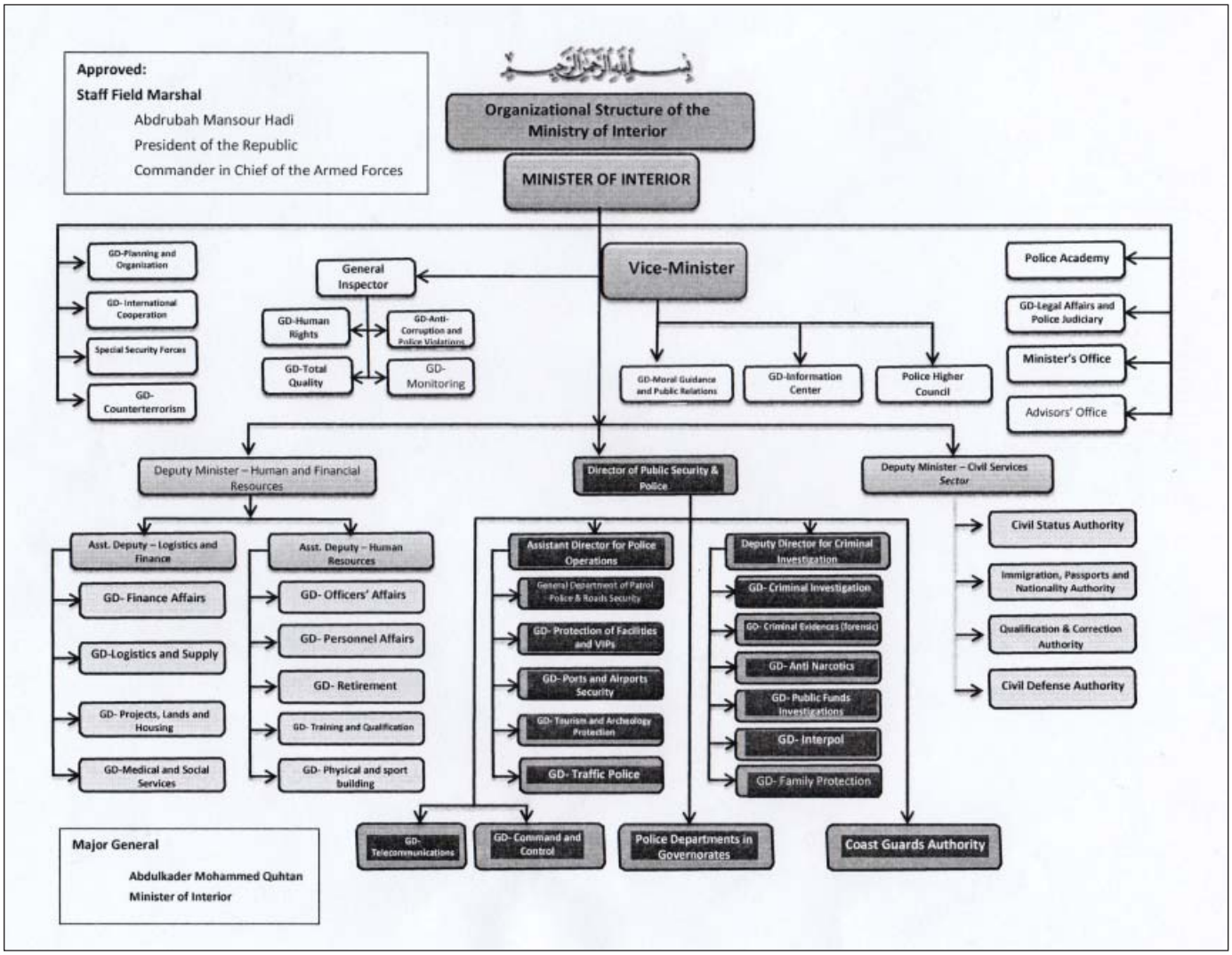
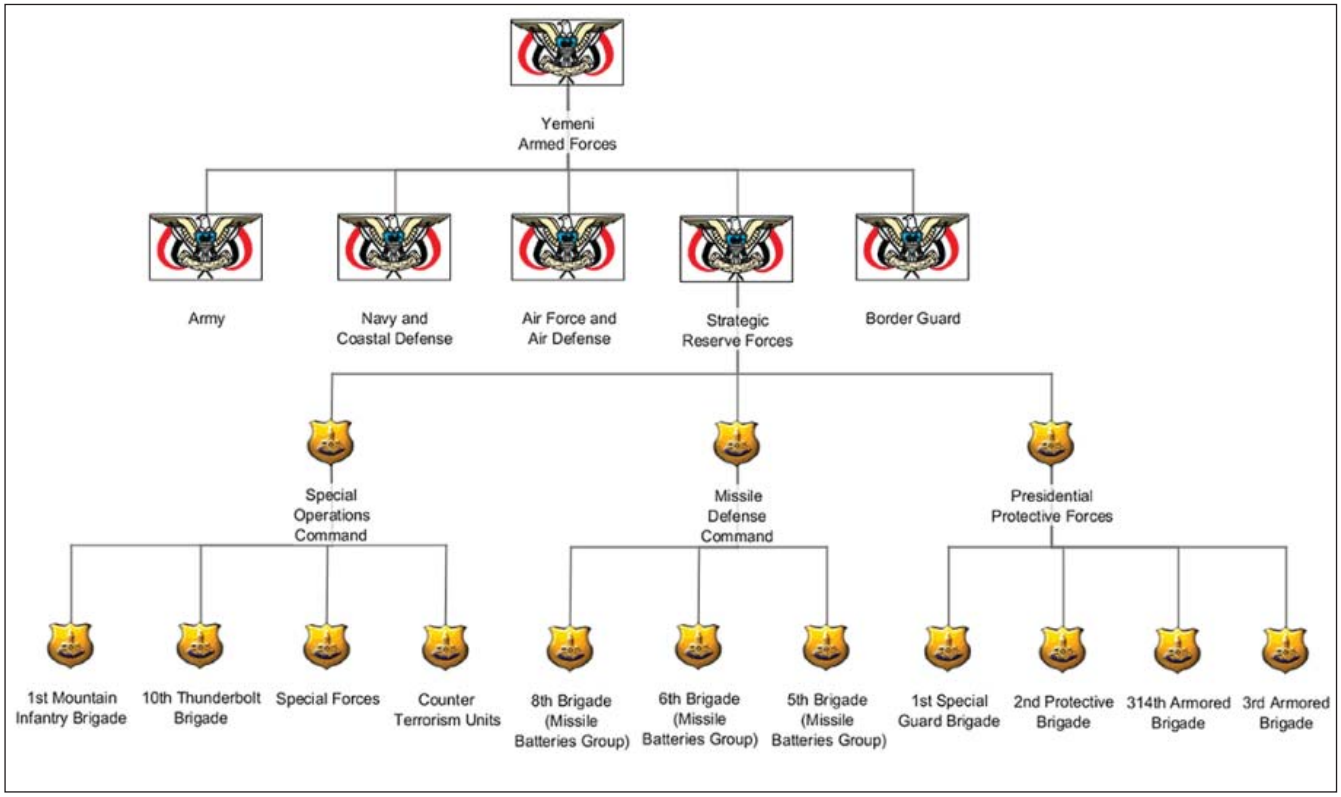
Appendix I – The Organizational Structure of the Ministry of Interior



Appendix 2 – The Organizational Structure of the Yemeni Armed Forces



Source: AEI Critical Threats (December 19, 2012)