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Responses to Information Requests

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Yemen: Southern Movement, including areas of operation, membership, leadership, structure, activities and relations with the government (2016-October 2018)

Research Directorate, Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada, Ottawa

1. Overview

According to sources, the Southern Movement [also known as Southern Separatists Movement, Southern Mobility Movement, Southern Hirak, Al-Hirak Al-Janoubi, Al-Hiraak Al-Janoubi, Al-Herak Al-Janoubi, Al-Hirak, Hirak, Hiraak, al-Harak] has existed since at least 2007 (Southern Movement n.d.a; International Crisis Group 20 Oct. 2011, i; Al Jazeera 29 Jan. 2018). Sources indicate that the Southern Movement seeks "greater autonomy" within the country (Human Rights Watch 13 Mar. 2014; UK 12 Apr. 2016, para. 4.1.1) or the independence of southern Yemen (Human Rights Watch 13 Mar. 2014; TRAC n.d.; Phillips 2017,

911). On its website, the Southern Movement indicates that it seeks the secession of South Yemen from the Republic of Yemen by way of a referendum (Southern Movement n.d.a).

Sources describe the Southern Movement as a "popular" movement (The New Arab 28 Sept. 2018; IPI 3 Nov. 2017; International Crisis Group 20 Oct. 2011, i). The UK Home Office indicates that the Southern Movement is "a movement of southern Yemenis" (UK 12 Apr. 2016, para. 4.1.1). However, in a research paper on Yemen, Chatham House [1] explains that, "[w]hile there is a tendency to describe the 'south' as a largely homogeneous space, there are in fact significant differences in the politics, identities and world view of those who live in the south and those that make up the Southern Movement" (Chatham House Mar. 2018, 15).

Sources refer to the Southern Movement as "an armed separatist movement" (International Crisis Group 2 Feb. 2017, 12) or as affiliated with "armed separatists" (US 20 Apr. 2018, 12) or "armed groups" (UN 4 Aug. 2016, para. 11).

2. Areas of Operation and Membership

According to sources, the Southern Movement is present in the south of Yemen (Phillips 2017, 911; *Political Handbook of the World* 2017, 1698; IPI 3 Nov. 2017). Sources indicate that the Southern Movement is present in Aden (International Crisis Group 9 Feb. 2016, 14; Human Rights Watch 13 Mar. 2014; Chatham House Mar. 2018, 11). A declaration on the Southern Movement website notes that it has a presence in the Hadhramaut [Hadramaut, Hadramawt] governorate (Southern Movement 4 May 2017).

According to International Crisis Group, the Southern Movement is "non-Islamist" (International Crisis Group 14 Mar. 2016, 24). Chatham House indicates that, although the Southern Movement portrays itself as "secular," the "vast majority" of its members are "of Muslim heritage" and "it has had a more complex relationship with Islamist groups up to and including Al-Qaeda than its leaders would like to admit" (Chatham House Mar. 2018, 21).

Information on the number of supporters of the Southern Movement was scarce among the sources consulted by the Research Directorate within the time constraints of this Response. A March 2014 article by Human Rights Watch reports that 5,000 supporters of the Southern Movement gathered for a protest in Aden in February 2014 (Human Rights Watch 13 Mar. 2014).

3. Leadership and Structure

The website of the Southern Movement provides a list of the following leaders:

- Ali Salem Al-Beidh;
- Abd Al-Rahman Ali Al-Jifi;
- Haidar Abu Bakr Al-Attas;
- Ahmed Omar Bin Fareed;
- Saleh Yahya Saeed [Saied], "President of the High Council for the Southern Movement";
- Salah Al-Shinfrah, "Vice President of [the] High Council for [the] Southern Movement";
- Hoda Alattas (Southern Movement n.d.a).

The list also includes the following military leaders:

- General Aidroos Al Zubaidi [Aidarous al-Zubaidi];
- General Shalal Ali Shayih;
- General Faraj Salmeen AlBahassani;
- General Adel Alhalmi (Southern Movement n.d.a).

The list includes the following media representatives:

- Laila Rabeeh;
- Ahmed Alsaleh;
- Hussian Laqwar;
- Sana Mobarak (Southern Movement n.d.a).

Sources describe the Southern Movement as an "umbrella" group (Human Rights Watch 13 Mar. 2014; The New Arab 28 Sept. 2018), "decentrali[z]ed" (International Crisis Group 9 Feb. 2016, 14; Phillips 2017, 911), "amorphous" (Chatham House Mar. 2018, 10), "a loose coalition" composed of a number of "identifiable separatist groups" (*Political Handbook of the World* 2017, 1698) or "a fractious group" (TRAC n.d.). The International Peace Institute (IPI) [2] reports that the Southern Movement has "an extreme faction demanding the secession of the south and a moderate one pledging for regional autonomy" (IPI 3 Nov. 2017). According to a Middle East textbook's chapter on Yemen, written by Sarah Phillips, an Associate Professor at the University of Sydney whose research and publications focus on Yemen (The University of Sydney n.d.), the

Southern Movement refers to "many organizations and activists" in the south that are united around a common goal, namely "full independence ... though they disagree about the best way to achieve it" (Phillips 2017, 911).

The *Political Handbook of the World* identifies the following seven separatist groups as part of the Southern Movement:

- Higher National Forum for the Independence of the South;
- Higher National Council for the Liberation of the South, led by Hasan Baoum and Mohammed Salih Tammah;
- Movement of the Southern Peaceful Struggle, led by Salah al-Sanfara and Nasser al-Khubbaji;
- Union of the Southern Youth, led by Fadi Hasan Baoum;
- National Forum for the Southern Peaceful Struggle, led by Salih Yahya Said;
- Council for Leading the Peaceful Revolution, led by Tariq al-Fadhli;
- Council of the Peaceful Movement to Liberate the South, "established in 2010 as an umbrella organization for all [s]outhern opposition groups," led by Hasan Baoum and Tariq al-Fadhli (*Political Handbook of the World* 2017, 1698).

Without providing further details, the Middle East textbook's chapter on Yemen indicates that "some of [the Southern Movement's] affiliated organizations and activists" are working "primarily to achieve quite local objectives" (Phillips 2017, 911). Based on 2015 interviews with a "Western diplomat" and an "Aden journalist," International Crisis Group indicates that, since March 2015, the Southern Movement is "more decentralised, with a growing cadre of new local leaders. In Aden alone, there may be some 300 neighbourhood leaders, each controlling a small armed group" (International Crisis Group 9 Feb. 2016, 14). Corroborating information could not be found among the sources consulted by the Research Directorate within the time constraints of this Response.

4. Activities and Relations with the Government

According to Al Jazeera, "thousands of Hiraq activists defended Aden against the advance of the Houthi [Huthi]-Saleh [Salih] [former Yemeni president] alliance" weeks before the Saudi-led offensive started in March 2015 (Al Jazeera 29 Jan. 2018). Similarly, the New Arab news website reports that the Southern Movement is "opposed [to] ... Houthi rebels" (The New Arab 28 Sept. 2018).

According to sources, in 2015, elements of the Southern Movement formed the Southern Resistance (SR) to fight the Houthis (Southern Movement n.d.b; Phillips 2017, 911; IRIN 4 Aug. 2016). Similarly, according to International

Crisis Group, "[w]hen anti-Huthi forces pushed south in 2015, local guerrilla forces became known as the 'Southern Resistance' in the fight for Aden and southern governorates" (International Crisis Group 2 Feb. 2017, 12). According to the Southern Movement website, the SR was formed with the "blessing" of Yemeni President Abdrabbuh Mansour Hadi (Southern Movement n.d.b). International Crisis Group indicates that although the SR is fighting on the government's side, it is not "by default pro-Hadi government" (International Crisis Group 2 Feb. 2017, 12). IRIN similarly notes that the Southern Movement is "only loosely aligned to deposed President Hadi against the Houthis" (IRIN 15 July 2015). According to the Middle East textbook chapter on Yemen, the Southern Movement sees President Hadi "as a part of the northern-based system from which they wish to secede" (Phillips 2017, 911).

The website of the Southern Movement indicates that there is a "partnership" between the SR, the Southern Movement, and the Arab Coalition Forces led by the Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates (UAE) against "Iranian expansion," to counter terrorism and provide "security and stability" (Southern Movement 4 May 2017). The US Department of State's *Country Reports on Human Rights Practices for 2017* indicates that terrorist groups carried out "deadly attacks" against members of the Southern Movement in Yemen (US 20 Apr. 2018, 12). According to International Crisis Group, the Southern Movement has been "fight[ing]" Al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP) (International Crisis Group 14 Mar. 2016, 24).

Further information on relations between the government and the Southern Movement since 2016 could not be found among the sources consulted by the Research Directorate within the time constraints of this Response.

Information on the activities of the Southern Movement since 2016 was scarce among the sources consulted by the Research Directorate within the time constraints of this Response.

On its website, the Southern Movement reports that on 14 October 2016, Southern Movement leaders organized a rally in Aden to call for the end of "Yemen Unity" and the establishment of a "South Yemen political entity," and to renew demands for a "[UN] sponsored referendum" (Southern Movement [Oct. 2016]). *Gulf News*, an English-language newspaper based in the United Arab Emirates, similarly reports on a parade on 14 October [2016] in which

"thousands" of "south Yemen separatists" "restate[d] their long-held demand - to break off from the north and create their own state of South Yemen" (*Gulf News* 21 Nov. 2016).

This Response was prepared after researching publicly accessible information currently available to the Research Directorate within time constraints. This Response is not, and does not purport to be, conclusive as to the merit of any particular claim for refugee protection. Please find below the list of sources consulted in researching this Information Request.

Notes

[1] Chatham House, "the Royal Institute of International Affairs, is an independent policy institute based in London" (Chatham House n.d.).

[2] The International Peace Institute (IPI) is an "independent, international, not-for-profit think tank" with offices in New York, Vienna and Manama (IPI n.d.).

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