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SALEH DISCUSSES SECURITY CONCERNS WITH AMBASSADOR

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Classified By: Ambassador Thomas C. Krajeski for reasons 1.5 b and d.

1. (C) Summary. President Saleh convoked Ambassador the morning of April 9 to discuss renewed fighting in Saada. Saleh immediately launched into requests for USG political and military support for ROYG efforts to defeat al-Houthi rebels in the north. Reiterating an argument he used during last summer's fighting, Saleh said, "This is your fight we are fighting." Ambassador turned the focus to the current threat against Americans. They discussed ways the U.S. could help improve the situation in Saada, as well as timing for a potential Saleh visit to Washington to meet President Bush. End Summary.

Saleh in the Dark on Ansar as-Sunna Cell

2. (S) Saleh opened the meeting with a complaint that travel advisories, warden messages, and Embassy closures were not helpful to ROYG efforts to quell renewed fighting between security forces and al-Houthi's "Believing Youth." Ambassador quickly explained that while we were indeed concerned about continued fighting and the potential spread of the insurgency, the Embassy is closed today because of a specific and dangerous threat unrelated to events in Saada.

3. (S) Ambassador remarked that there was very specific information about a Yemeni Ansar as-Sunna member Kanaan, who returned from Iraq with clear intentions to attack U.S. as well as ROYG interests. Shaking his head, Saleh asked for clarification on this individual and the threat he posed. We are working closely with the Ministry of Interior, the Political Security Organization (PSO) and the National Security Board (NSB) on this threat, Ambassador replied, and find them to be extremely cooperative and responsive. Ambassador suggested the President request a brief from his nephew, NSB Chief Ammar. Saleh said he would, and emphasized his commitment to cooperate closely and do whatever necessary to remove the threat. "Be careful, by all means, for a week or so," he said, "but don't worry all is under control."

"We are Fighting Your Fight"

4. (C) Returning to the crisis in Saada, Saleh asked Ambassador for a strong message of political support from the U.S. DCM noted his statement to independent Arabic daily "al-Ayam," condemning violence against the state and calling for calm and dialogue. "Forget about al-Ayam," said Saleh with a wave of his hand, "I want it printed in (state-run) al-Thawra and reported on the wires." Ambassador said we would explore the possibility of issuing a strong statement to a wider audience. Saleh nodded, saying USG moral support was required, "please get your European friends to also express their support and stress the link between al-Houthi and international terrorism." Saleh accused his opposition of exploiting the Sadaa crises to weaken the regime. "They call me an American agent," he exclaimed.

5. (C) Saleh said he had offered to end the fighting if the rebels stopped chanting "death to the U.S and death to Israel." Repeating his theme from last summer's conflict, Saleh said "we are fighting your fight, they are anti-U.S., anti-Israel, and pro-Iranian, whereas we are your friend."

"They Continue to Fight like Donkeys"

6. (C) Describing the situation in Saada, Saleh exclaimed, "They are surrounded but continue to fight like donkeys (hameer)!" Saleh assured Ambassador, that despite stubborn rebel fighting, "everything will be fine" in a matter of weeks. Saleh reported that 49 security forces and 100 rebels had been killed in fighting. He characterized rebel forces as 700 strong. (Note: Interior Minister Alimi agreed the situation was "under control and reported that 150 rebels were "taken care of" (ref A). Reports on the situation in Saada from CSF-CTU soldiers in the field are less are optimistic (ref B). Throughout last summer's June-September fighting, the President and ROYG officials routinely claimed they would win the battle in a matter of days or weeks. The number of 700 may be high, given the attrition of al-Houthi forces due to death or capture from last summers engagement. End Note).

7. (C) Saleh asked the Ambassador to expedite ROYG requests for M113 APCs and HMWWS, saying, "they are needed urgently." Ambassador replied that we are anxious to help; materiel assistance, however, even on an expedited basis would take time. He assured the President that we would make every effort to speed up delivery. The USG can provide other assistance, such as intelligence sharing, on a faster basis, if asked, Ambassador added.

Spread of Saada Related Violence

8. (C) Ambassador shared USG concerns that al-Houthi related violence is spreading, noting the recent string of grenade attacks targeting military leaders in downtown Sanaa. Saleh confirmed these events were connected with Saada, and told Ambassador that seven to eight individuals involved in these terrorist acts learned that the ROYG had been arrested. He also said he had learned that the captured individuals were planning attacks against the children of military commanders and possibly Americans. "The al-Houthi movement has connections across the country -- this is a sectarian fight," he said. (Note: Recent, likely Saada related, grenade attacks against MOD officials in Sanaa reported septel. ROYG efforts to deploy regular forces to Ma'rib and al-Jawf to preempt the unrest from spreading beyond Saada reported ref C. End Note).

Saleh Prefers Fall Visit to Washington

9. (C) Saleh told Ambassador his preference is to visit Washington in the Fall, waving off a short June visit as an option. Preferring a longer visit with opportunities to meet with Secretary Rice, the Pentagon, and other agency heads, Saleh raised the issue of visiting the last week of September vice October, to avoid the beginning of Ramadan. Ambassador said the White House was cognizant of the Ramadan conflict, and would pass on his request.

Krajeski

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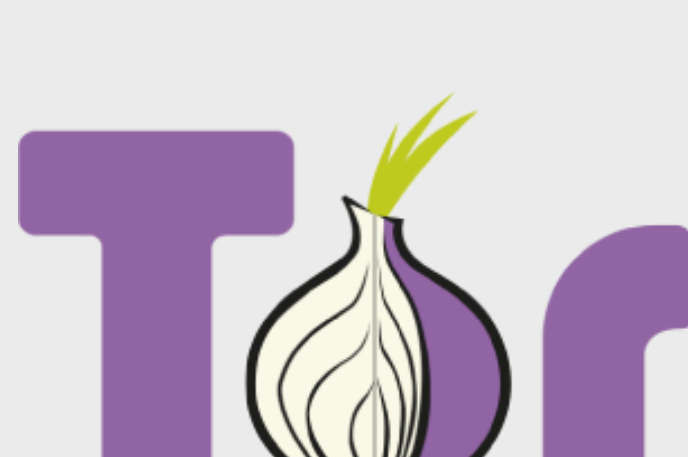
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