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Heritage meets communication

Sporadic clashes could spell end to latest ceasefire with Houthis

■ Ali Saeed

SANA'A, June 29—Fighting between Houthi rebels and the 310th Armored Brigade backed by Sunni tribesmen in Amran subsided at the weekend. However subsequent clashes have led to growing concerns that the latest ceasefire agreement proposed by the Defense Ministry on Monday June 23 could go the way of a previous ceasefire which was shattered on June 14.

The latest halt in fighting took place Saturday, two days before Monday's formal ceasefire agreement. This came after a meeting between Defense Minister Mohamed Nasser Ahmed and the Houthis' military leader known as Abu Ali Al-Hakim in the Sumain area of Eyal Suraih district in Amran. The two sides negotiated a deal to implement the ceasefire agreement, a local source in Amran told the Yemen Times on condition of anonymity for reasons of security.

Defense Ministry teams were set up last Tuesday in anticipation of implementing a ceasefire

agreement, according to the text of the agreement published by the Defense Ministry.

However, as of Sunday afternoon neither of the warring parties had withdrawn from their positions in Amran or other fighting fronts in the Hamdan and Bani Mater districts of Sana'a governorate.

The Defense Ministry said that on Sunday it would "remove all new posts set up by both parties and replace them with military police units," according to Ali Al-Ghashmi, deputy governor of Sana'a.

The Houthis' website, ansaruallah.com, said on Friday that Houthi supporters in Sa'ada city, as well as Razih and Ghamir, two districts in Sa'ada governorate where the group enjoys power independent of the governorate, marched in support of the "presidential ceasefire agreement in Amran."

However on Monday morning there was shelling between Houthi and military forces around the Al-Mehshash Mountain. Gunfire was also exchanged

at the Al-Dhahr checkpoint on the outskirts of Amran city on the road to Sada'a.

A statement by a presidential committee tasked with overseeing the ceasefire, which was published by the state-run Saba News Agency on Sunday, said that the ceasefire would be implemented on Monday.

The ambassadors of the ten countries that backed the power transfer deal known as the GCC Initiative welcomed the ceasefire agreement in Amran in a press statement Sunday, according to the Saba News Agency. The ten countries include the five permanent members of the UNSC, GCC countries and members of the EU mission to Yemen.

"We completely support the effort of President Abdu Rabu Mansour Hadi in ending armed confrontations and encourage all concerned parties to expand their efforts to develop a comprehensive peace plan through direct negotiations," the statement read.

"All parties must protect civilians, respect the ceasefire and

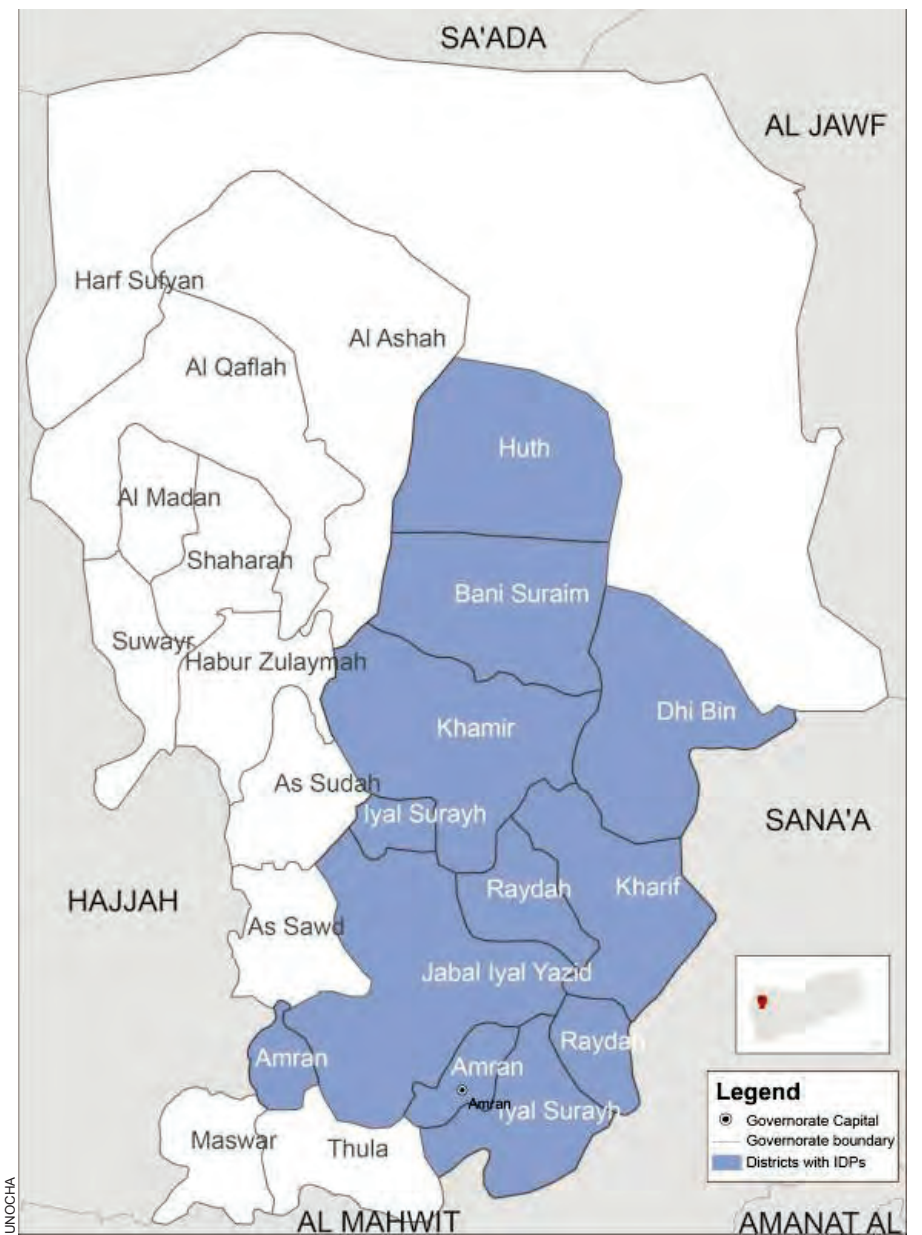
simplify the access of humanitarian aid."

The recent fighting in Amran had displaced up to 40,000 people as of June 20, about half of whom had fled since May, according to the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (UNOCHA).

The population caught in the fighting is in need of food, water and healthcare. Relief organizations suspended their activities outside Amran city due to the prevailing insecurity, according to the UNOCHA.

The organization added that the fighting has also blocked the Sana'a-Amran road, resulting in a suspension of aid to some of those who were displaced during fighting between October 2013 and March this year in Amran between Houthis and tribesmen of the Hashid tribe.

Food aid that was supposed to be distributed by relief organizations to 30,000 internally displaced persons in Amran and Sa'ada on May 26 was delayed due to security concerns, according to the UNOCHA.



Fuel disputes in Dhamar leave four dead, two injured in June



Four separate incidents in June linked to the fuel crisis in Dhamar have resulted in casualties.

■ Abdulkarim Al-Nahari

DHAMAR CITY, June 30—Four people have been killed and two others wounded in Dhamar governorate over the course of June in four separate incidents linked to the fuel crisis the governorate has been experiencing since late April.

Last week, two citizens in Jahran area were shot dead by another citizen at a queue for gas, according to a security source speaking on condition of anonymity because he is not authorized to speak to the press.

Earlier in the month another individual was killed in Abu Khalba area of Al-Hadda district after a dispute over diesel broke out at a black market.

The security source also said that in a separate incident the son of the owner of Al-Azraq gas station in Dhamar city killed a motorcyclist and injured another following a dispute over gas. The perpetrator fled, prompting the security apparatus in Dhamar to shut down the station and detain the father, according to the source.

On June 9, the security authorities in Dhamar stopped protesters from breaking into the headquarters of the Yemen Petroleum

Company in Dhamar. One protester was injured in the ensuing chaos.

Late last week unidentified individuals set a car on fire in Dhamar city. The car was selling diesel and gas at a black market.

Amin Abdulla, an eyewitness, said the car was carrying diesel and gas and it was near the governorate compound.

Dhamar city has been going through a chronic fuel crisis since late April, leading to a 50 percent reduction in public transportation

services, according to Adel Atiq, a member of the Transportation Union in Dhamar. He said the majority of vehicles have stopped operating due to a lack of gas, affecting the livelihood of thousands of families whose breadwinners are taxi drivers.

A source at the Yemen Petroleum Company in Dhamar said the company is not able to fill the fuel gap, and that the fuel problem is exacerbated by roadblocks and the detention of oil tankers by tribesmen with grievances against the government.

Eleven Yemenis and Saudi national released

■ Nasser Al-Sakkaf

SANA'A, June 27—The Saudi Foreign Ministry on Sunday said that its national Ayidh Bin Jubran Al-Meshali arrived the same day in Saudi Arabia after he was abducted with 11 Yemeni nationals on June 10.

"Al-Meshali was released following great efforts by the concerned bodies in Saudi Arabia, in coordination with the Yemeni authorities," said the Saudi Press Agency (SPA).

Marib's Jahm tribe on Friday released the Saudi national along with 11 Yemenis working for oil companies in Marib.

The Saudi national was visiting a friend in

Marib when he was kidnapped.

Khalid Al-Zaidi, director of Serwah district, said that the captives were released after tribal mediation efforts and without any ransom being paid.

Tribal mediation in Serwah district of Marib began on Monday in an attempt to release the captives following orders by President Hadi to the governor of Marib to intervene. Efforts did not get off to a good start because of disagreements between the captors, according to Al-Zaidi. He added that he met with the captives and that they were all in good health.

Abshal Al-Fatimi, a sheikh of the Murad tribe, said that leading figures from the Jahm tribe

participated in the release of the captives.

Tribesmen in Yemen occasionally abduct foreigners as a means of putting pressure on the government to meet certain demands such as the release of prisoners or better public services.

The captives are usually released unharmed through tribal mediation.

The Jahm tribe abducted the Saudi national because the government failed to meet their demand of compensation after the death of their sheikh last year during a security operation, Mohammad Al-Qaedi, director of the Public Relations Department at the Interior Ministry, told the Yemen Times in a previous statement.

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21 killed in separate attacks in Hadramout

■ Amal Al-Yarisi

SANA'A, June 29—At least 21 people were killed in two separate attacks on Thursday and Saturday morning on military institutions in Hadramout governorate, in eastern Yemen.

Among the victims are nine civilians, including a woman and two children, eight soldiers, and four alleged Al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP) affiliates.

Gunmen on Saturday morning attacked Al-Batina Military Hospital in Al-Qatan city of Hadramout.

Ahmed Ali, a source from the 37th Armored Brigade, said that alleged Al-Qaeda affiliates driving a Toyota Hilux pickup attacked the hospital, according to Ali.

A security source from the Al-Qatan Security Department, who requested anonymity for security reasons, said the security forces are on alert in anticipation of any new

attacks.

"Soldiers of the 37th Armored Brigade blocked the attack on the hospital. Clashes lasted for an hour," Brigadier Saeed Mohammed Al-Faqeeh, the military spokesperson, told the state-run Saba News Agency. He said that two soldiers and at least four militants were killed in the attack. The Yemen Times was unable to verify the number of casualties from independent sources.

The attack came shortly after Thursday's attack on the First Military Region by alleged AQAP militants, in which a bomb-laden car was used.

Meanwhile, other gunmen attacked Seyoun Airport and the Telecommunication Office, according to the Defense Ministry's website.

Al-Wadi Dates Plant, located near the First Military Region's headquarters, was damaged in the

attack and six employees, a woman and two children were killed. Eight others were wounded.

"A suicide bomber in a bomb-laden car drove to the entrance of the First Military Region HQ but the guards attempted to stop him," the Defense Ministry's website cited a military official at the First Military Region as saying. "Guards at Seyoun airport thwarted an attack... during the landing of a Yemmenia Airways plane... Several militants were killed and wounded," he added.

None of the passengers on the plane were harmed, according to the military source. The Defense Ministry's website stated that six soldiers were killed and four others wounded in the attacks.

Yemen's military launched an offensive against AQAP in the south of the country in late April, provoking retaliation from AQAP against military targets across the country.

Reports of civilian deaths in Al-Dhale violence

■ Ali Ibrahim Al-Moshki

SANA'A, June 29—Two people were killed and 16 others injured—four of them soldiers—in fierce clashes between the 33rd Brigade and militants who the government alleges belong to the Southern Movement. Security sources said the brigade arrested three alleged militants.

Yafe news website, which has extensively covered the southern governorates, said the forces of the brigade shelled a number of villages including Khawbr, Hisn, Lakma Salah, Sheb Al-Swd and Ribat.

The website quoted eyewitnesses as saying a civilian called Abood Al-Abhr from Sheb Al-Aswd village was injured in the shelling. The eyewitnesses said the brigade's forces prevented an ambulance from entering the village and Al-Abhr died from his injuries.

The brigade denied Al-Abhr's innocence and claimed he died in a firefight with soldiers.

Yafe added that an armored vehicle belonging to the brigade ran over two citizens from Taiz, killing one and critically injuring the other. The names of the casualties were published on the website.

However, Sadeq Al-Hakimi, the spokesperson of the 33rd Brigade, denied the shelling of villages. He told the Yemen Times that the brigade responded to militant attacks. He said gunmen attacked military vehicles as they were transporting food commodities to the brigade headquarters.

"The soldiers accompanying the vehicles clashed with the gunmen, killing the most dangerous individual, Abood Al-Abhr. They injured two others in addition to arresting one. Four other soldiers were injured," said Al-Hakimi. He denied that two civilians were run over by a military vehicle.

The gunmen again attacked a number of locations under the control of the brigade, but the soldiers repelled them, Al-Hakimi said. "The area is calm now," he added.

According to Al-Hakimi, the brigade did not use heavy weapons and rocket-propelled grenades.

Walid Al-Khatib, the head of Al-Dhale Coordinating Committee, a local militia established in January to provide security to the city, said that soldiers in three armored vehicles fired shots to disperse a crowd demonstrating against the lack of government services. He said

that in the ensuing confusion two people were run over, one of whom was killed. Al-Khatib says that this sparked the clashes.

"During the night, a militant group attacked a military location, killing one and injuring another. In response, the 33rd Brigade shelled some parts of Al-Dhale city and villages such as Al-Jalila, Khala, Bajah and Sanah. They used tanks, artillery, machine guns and RPGs," added Al-Khatib.

Sanah, Al-Jalila and Al-Dhale city have been tense since the beginning of June, when the army shelled these areas in response to what it says was an assassination attempt on Brigadier Abdulla Dhaban, the commander of the 33rd Brigade.

"We have been living in panic. The clashes break out from time to time. Power cuts are repeated and fuel is unavailable. The Al-Dhale residents are suffering," said Mohammed Al-Shuaibi, a resident in Al-Dhale.

Al-Dhale governorate has witnessed sporadic clashes since late December, when the 33rd Brigade shelled a funeral tent in Sanah killing 15. The brigade initially denied the incident, later admitting that it was a mistake.

Yemen Today to broadcast from Lebanon

■ Ali Ibrahim Al-Moshki

SANA'A, June 30—Ahmed Al-Kibisi, a Yemen Today TV channel employee, told the Yemen Times the channel will start broadcasting again from Lebanon within the next few days. This move is aimed at ensuring that the channel, owned by former president Ali Abdullah Saleh, does not face further disruption.

Al-Kibisi said that "some of the technicians have already traveled to Lebanon and a number of the crew will follow. A few staff members will stay here and news bulletins and live programs will still be broadcast from Yemen."

He also told the Yemen Times that Saleh met with Yemen Today's staff on June 24. He emphasized that the channel will start operating again with its entire staff.

Yemen Today was shut down by presidential guards on June 11. Many local and foreign media institutions condemned the closure of the channel, saying it goes against media freedom.

It is believed the channel was shut down due to its coverage of the riots over fuel shortages and power cuts in the city, which had broken out shortly before.

A source close to the presidency who is not authorized to comment on the incident, told the Yemen

Times that the channel's coverage was not neutral and that it played a role in intensifying the riots on June 11.

In a speech delivered on June 27, President Hadi said that the protests earlier in the month were the result of an attempted coup.

"You remember what happened on Wednesday June 11 in Sana'a because it's a new episode of the series of thwarting the peaceful transition process," said Hadi.

In an interview with Dubai Channel on June 26, Prime Minister Mohammed Salim Basendwa, said that former president Saleh had planned a coup against the government but had failed.

Staff threaten to shut down Aden International Airport

■ Amal Al-Yarisi

SANA'A, June 30—Manager of the Aden International Airport Tariq Abdo told the Yemen Times on Monday that "the airport is operating normally" after threats the previous day by the Worker's Union to shut the airport down in protest against the arrest of the airport's assistant security chief, Munaif Al-Zaghli.

Abdo denied reports of the clo-

sure by local media outlets, saying "such reports are an attempt to spark sedition at the airport."

The management of the airport reached an agreement on Monday with the Workers' Union to have a meeting with the security administration to discuss the arrest of assistant security chief Al-Zaghli, who was arrested on Wednesday.

Aden Al-Ghad, a local news website, said on Monday that forces of the Counter-Terrorism Unit arrest-

ed Al-Zaghli last Wednesday at his house and he has been in detention since then. A local journalist based in Aden who requested anonymity told the Yemen Times that Al-Zaghli was detained based on accusations made against him for his "cooperation with 'terror militants.'"

The Administration of Aden International Airport declined to provide any details on why Al-Zaghli was arrested.

Camel deaths in Ibb raise MERS concerns



Evidence supports the theory that MERS can be transmitted from camels to humans, leading to fears over the camels' cause of death.

■ Ali Saeed

SANA'A, June 29—The death of twelve camels last week in Al-Mashana district of Ibb, central Yemen, raised fears of the spread of Middle East Respiratory Syndrome (MERS), but reports suggest that the camels probably died from poisoning, according to Dr. Adnan Al-Ariqi, manager of the Animal Health Administration in Taiz.

The death of the camels was alarming because there is evidence to suggest a link between camels and the spread of MERS, a potentially fatal disease first discovered in 2012.

According to a report by the World Health Organization (WHO)

released March 27, recent studies support the idea that camels are the primary source of MERS in humans.

"We examined the dead bodies of the camels and did not notice any respiratory symptoms," said Al-Ariqi. "It is suggested that the diseased camels had poisoning which is caused by clostridium and it is the cause of sudden death," he said.

Al-Ariqi explained that clostridium sometimes attacks other livestock such as cows and sheep. "We followed the herd of camels which remained after some died and found them negative of any MERS symptoms," said Al-Ariqi.

There have been multiple cases

where individuals handling sick camels have caught the virus, with both the camels and human patient carrying the MERS virus.

Yemen has 443,000 camels nationwide and they live mostly in Hadramout, Lahj, Taiz and Hodeida, according to the General Management of Agricultural Statistics at the Ministry of Agriculture Irrigation.

In April, MERS claimed its first victim in Yemen in the capital Sana'a. The victim had caught the disease in Seyoun city of Hadramout governorate, according to a previous statement to the Yemen Times by Dr. Abdunasser Al-Robai, vaccination and observation officer at the WHO.



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How will this year's Ramadan compare?

Ezzaddin Alzain and Mohammed Alqalisi

Ramadan, the ninth month of the Islamic lunar calendar, is marked by over a billion Muslims around the globe. Muslims believe that the Quran was revealed to the Prophet Muhammad during the month of Ramadan. For thirty days the occasion is marked by abstaining from food and drink from sunset to sunrise. Ramadan is concluded by Eid al-Fitr, which is a day of celebrations, feasts and prayers.

But Ramadan is not just a month of fasting, it is also supposed to be a month of worship, charity, reflection, generosity and togetherness. Time is spent strengthening bonds between families and neighbors, and people come together for iftar to break their fasts.

But amid a deteriorating security situation and an economic crisis with no end in sight, how do ordinary Yemenis view this year's Ramadan?

Salwa Al-Fareh, private sector accountant

"The situation is more difficult this Ramadan because we have more problems and clashes in various areas."



Tahani Qasim and Dua'a Yusuf, students in Al-Salam School

"We call on all Yemenis to stop fighting because we can't afford more destruction. We hope the government will assist the poor."

Amal Al-Rawhani, director of an education development project

"The situation is very bad and it seems that this Ramadan will be worse than previous ones because of the current crises. We may die before we finish the month because of clashes everywhere."



Taha Abdulla, taxi driver

"We are used to the difficult situation and nothing will change in Ramadan. I hope people will help the poor."



Abdulghani Al-Wesabi, street vendor

"There is no difference between this Ramadan and the past one. I hope the situation will be more secure and stable and the government will provide for the basic needs of citizens."



Abdulsalam Hadi, retail worker

"Ramadan is a good month but I think it will be a little bit difficult because of the fuel shortages and power cuts. I hope everything will be okay."



Helal Qaed, street vendor

"Ramadan is good but I make less money. I think work during the day will be difficult because of the sun and hot weather. I hope we will live in peace."



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FROM THE ARCHIVES
4 November 2002

Welcome Ramadan

Saleh Abdulbaqi

Ramadan has finally come. This is the special holy month for Muslims—9th on the Hijri calendar—that includes valuable concepts and practices. Its sacredness and delightfulness are bestowed with a virtuous atmosphere of sympathy and solidarity among Mus-

lims. It also makes people feel and see the suffering of the poor. Life changes almost completely. Night turns into day, as most of the people stay awake the whole night doing several things. Whatever they used to do during the day, they do at night during Ramadan. Although Muslims feel hunger and thirst because of fasting during daytime, they cannot but admire the spirit of Ramadan.

Nights turn into a lively, joyful atmosphere with people going out. Some go to work, and some just enjoy their time. This seems to be almost identical in most of the Islamic countries. However, there are still some things that are unique to each country. In Yemen, we find some customs shared in almost all governorates of the republic. Despite hardships which make the population suffer from their

deplorable and hard living conditions, you can only see simple and innocent smiles on the people's faces during this holy month. During Ramadan, spirituality is personified by the fact that people stop eating. This is known as abstinence. It is one of the most favorable months, in which mercy and forgiveness prevails in the entire Islamic nation (Ummah). It is the month in which Muslims

show their self-restraint and forbearance. As it is customary for Yemenis to celebrate this holy month, people, vendors selling toys and local desserts gather next to any ancient mosque. In the mosque, people spend the night chanting psalms and verses. In short, life is completely changed, as houses and mosques become like bee hives where people recite verses of the Holy Koran.

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Iraq crisis: John Kerry's search for moderates is five years late

Patrick Cockburn
independent.co.uk
First published June 29

Defenders of the US Secretary of State, John Kerry, sometimes concede that he is a well-meaning windbag but argue that, if he does little good as he rushes around the world, he has done little real harm.

But going by his latest foray to Iraq, Saudi Arabia and other parts of the Middle East, this estimate may have to be revised. As the situations in Iraq and Syria deteriorate after the fall of northern Iraq to jihadis, Kerry brings to these twin crises a shallowness of understanding that can only make them worse.

Take the Secretary of State's latest idea about what to do in Syria and Iraq, expressed at the start of a meeting with the Saudi-supported Syrian opposition leader, Ahmad Al-Jarba, in Jeddah last week. Kerry said that "obviously, in light of what has happened in Iraq, we have even more to talk about in terms of the moderate opposition in Syria, which has the ability to be a very important player in pushing back against the presence of ISIS and to have them not just in Syria, but also in Iraq." The foginess of the sentence probably reflects Kerry's befuddled thought processes about what is happening.

But for all their wooliness, Kerry's words reveal that he is the victim of two important misconceptions about what is happening in Syria and Iraq. The extent of American policy failure, which led to the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS)

taking over a great swath of territory since the fall of Mosul on 10 June, has been understated. For 18 months, Iraqi leaders having told anybody who would listen that the opposition in Syria was dominated by jihadis such as ISIS, Jabhat Al-Nusra (the official Al-Qaeda representative) and Ahrar Al-Sham. The Iraqis expressed complete conviction that unless the US did something to close down the civil war in Syria then this would inevitably destabilize Iraq.

Over the past week, everybody in Western capitals and many people in Baghdad have been blaming Iraq's Prime Minister, Nouri Al-Maliki, for the present disaster—and with good reason. But what really destroyed the political and military status quo in Iraq was not Maliki's misdeeds but the civil war in Syria and the fact that the predominant military force in the Sunni opposition since the end of 2012 has been Al-Qaeda-type groups just as opposed, for sectarian reasons, to the government in Baghdad as to the one in Damascus.

The moderate Syrian military opposition scarcely exists inside the country any more and the Free Syrian Army is losing rather than gaining ground. There is no substance to Kerry's idea that it, or other, armed moderates are important players in Syria or that they are in a position "to push back" against ISIS's ferocious battle groups, not only in Syria but in Iraq. At the same moment as Kerry was lauding the potential of the moderate opposition in Syria, a much more accurate description of the real situation was being told to a news agency by Abdullah, a 27-

year-old former Free Syrian Army fighter, who said he left the FSA when ISIS overran his hometown of Al-Bab in northern Syria in the spring, killing two of his friends. He said he quit because "I realized that our uprising has been hijacked by others, and that nothing will be settled unless there is an agreement between Iran and Saudi Arabia: that's not worth dying for."

The "moderate" opposition in Syria was crumbling long before the fall of Mosul, but ISIS's victories in Iraq have given it a tremendous boost in prestige, morale, money and equipment. It holds parades in Syria with tanks and Humvees captured in Iraq. In the past two weeks it has besieged Deir ez-Zor, whose capture would leave it in control of the whole Euphrates valley from Fallujah through western Iraq and eastern Syria to Jarabulus on the Turkey border.

In another important development, besieged Jabhat Al-Nusra fighters in the town of Boukamal, on the border with Iraq, defected this week and joined ISIS which already holds the Iraqi side of the border.

The crucial point here, one that Kerry and Washington should try to grasp, is that the opposition in Syria is controlled by jihadis, and within the jihadi constellation it is ISIS that dominates more than ever. Yet it is at this moment that President Obama is asking Congress for \$500m (YR107 billion) to equip and train "appropriately vetted" opposition fighters who are supposedly going to fight both Bashar Al-Assad and ISIS, Jabhat Al-Nusra and the other jihadis. And, of course, these fighters will be seen by all sides as

mercenary pawns of the Americans, Saudis and Qataris.

Again, the idea is so silly that maybe the US administration is only pretending to have a policy in Syria and Iraq. Maliki has openly identified Saudi Arabia and Qatar as funding terrorism in Iraq so one more Saudi-backed Sunni gang playing a role will be wholly unwelcome in Baghdad.

Kerry's faith in the Syrian moderate opposition is reminiscent of Alden Pyle, the undercover CIA agent in Graham Greene's novel *The Quiet American*, who believes in a "Third Force" in Vietnam in the 1950s that is neither colonialist nor


Communist. In fact, the Third Force is wholly an American creation.

Kerry has been searching for a Third Force in Iraq, in this case in the shape of moderate Sunni leaders to be included in a new Iraqi government to be led by somebody other than Nouri Al-Maliki.

That may be easier said than done, since the Sunni leaders on offer are discredited politicians regarded by their own community as agile in feathering their own nests but not much else. Maliki should go, not only because he is a hate figure for the Sunni, but because he is catastrophically incompetent and incapable of directing a war against

ISIS. And war there is bound to be, because ISIS is not in the business of negotiating compromises but of building a sort of religious fascist state in which Shia and Christians will be killed or expelled.

The time for genuinely inclusive governments and power sharing between communities was five years ago. Both the Sunnis and the Kurds have now taken by force what they could not obtain by constitutional means. They are not going to reverse course into a united Iraq from which they have just escaped. If the US seriously wants to combat ISIS it will have to look beyond non-existent moderate forces.



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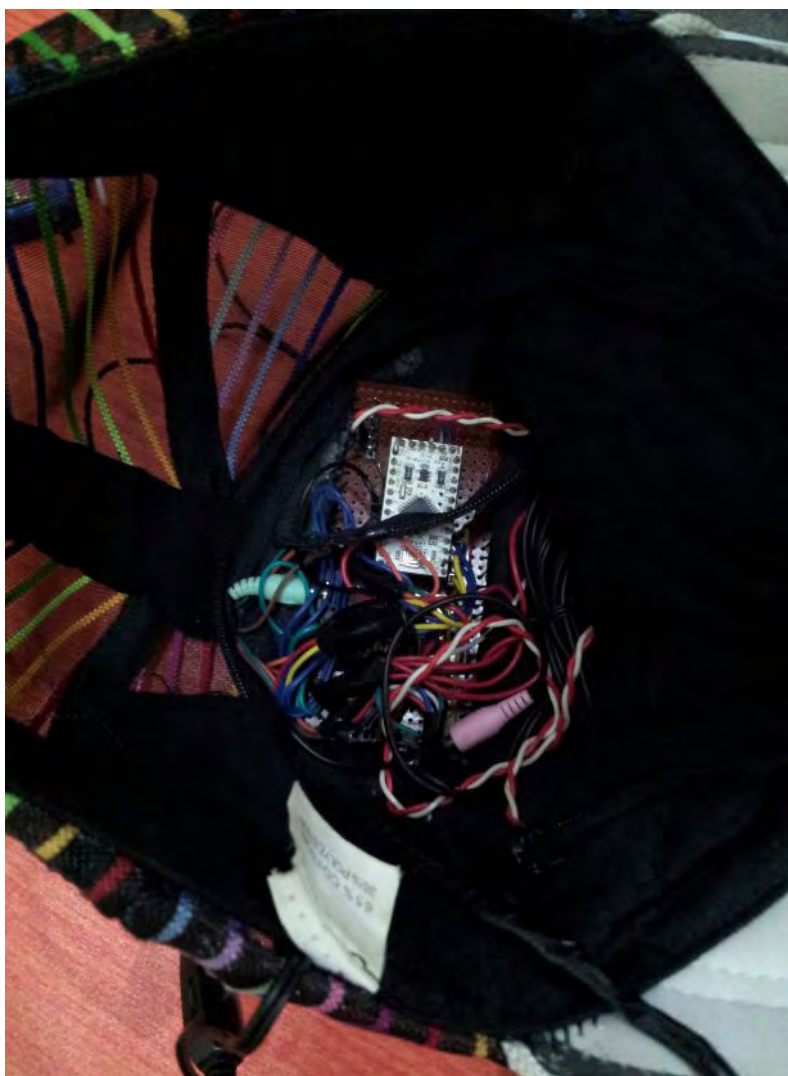
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The smart hat uses ultrasounds to help visually impaired sense what is within four meters from them.

Female graduates apply visual aid technology for “smart hat”

■ Dares Al-Badani

Samar Al-Nuzaili, Taiseer Al-Ghorbani and Fatima Al-Muntasir, graduates from the Engineering College at Sana'a University, have spent the last five months working on a project to help visually impaired people navigate their way around campus.

What made you think of this project exactly?

Al-Nuzaili: Each college student was tasked with coming up with an idea for a graduation project. I have some visually impaired female friends who [rely on] a stick [for guidance]. I feel the difficulties of these women and agreed

with two of my colleagues to come up with something that can enable them to walk without a guide.

What did you do?

Al-Muntasir: We looked at existing smart devices that help visually impaired people and found that most of them, such as the smart stick and phones, rely on sound and vibration. We couldn't find a light and sleek device.

Did you benefit from the existing devices?

Al-Muntasir: These devices were a source of inspiration. However, we mainly focused on creating a portable device with multiple benefits. The smart hat is a hat that helps the visually impaired recognize their surroundings. It's light and stylish.

Give us more details about this smart hat.

Al-Nuzaili: It uses ultrasounds to help the visually impaired sense what is within four meters from them, whether that be to their front, right or left. It's connected to headphones and produces different tones [depending on what objects the sensor picks up].

How can the visually impaired benefit from this hat?

Al-Nuzaili: Whenever the person moves, the sensors recognize what is surrounding him. The hat produces audio tones. The right handset makes a sound when an object is to the right of the person, and the left when the objects are to the left of the person. Both earphones produce tones if the object is in the front.

How can the user determine a dangerous place, the distance and the way to avoid it?

Al-Muntasir: The smart hat has many different tones. When objects are closer, the tone gets stronger. Moreover, the hat has special sounds for stairs, slopes and holes.

Do you think it could be confusing for the user?

Al-Nuzaili: Absolutely not. The person can control the tones and set the ones they want. The smart hat has 6 tones for the user to choose from. The tone can be set to low or high. If they do not want to use the tones, they can use the vibration function. The vibration function is based on a device called Alsirfa motor. The hat is equipped

with a key pad, through which the tone can be controlled.

Is it easily portable?

Al-Ghorbani: The hat is light and easy to carry. It may take a short time to get accustomed to it. Then one can use it smoothly and freely. For a trial, some individuals were blindfolded and were given the hats to use... Those who took part in the experiment were able to tell us what was near them, based entirely on the tones they heard.

What difficulties did you face in making the hat?

Al-Ghorbani: The work was done by hand. It was not done in a factory. We would spend entire days on making one small part or installing a small piece... We hope one day we will have a laboratory

so that we can make lots of smart hats. Now we have only one. Another difficulty is that the items ordered through the Internet were sometimes delivered late. Moreover, the hat does not have financial potential and this is especially difficult for us considering we are students.

How much does the smart hat cost?

Al-Nuzaili: Making it by hand means it is more expensive [than it could be]. Even if these imported items are cheap, the shipping is expensive. We also had to buy spare items so that we could replace any faulty parts. This smart hat costs about one thousand dollars, but of course it would be cheaper if we had a factory where we could make them in Yemen.

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Ramadan: A centuries-old American tradition

Khaled A Beydoun
aljazeera.com
First published June 28

This weekend marks the beginning of Ramadan. Nearly one-fourth of the world will observe the annual fast and eight million Muslims in the United States will abstain from food and drink from sunrise to sunset during the holy month. A grueling task at any time of the year, Ramadan this year will be especially daunting during the long and hot summer days.

Islam in America is rapidly expanding. It is the fastest-growing religion in the nation, and the second most practiced faith in twenty states. These demographic shifts prompted a prominent Los Angeles-based imam to comment, "Ramadan is a new American tradition." The cleric's forward-looking pronouncement marks Islam's recent arrival in the US. However, this statement reveals a pathology afflicting a lot of Muslim Americans today—an inability to look back and embrace the

opening chapters of Muslim American history written by enslaved African Muslims.

Social scientists estimate that 15 to 30 percent, or, "as many as 600,000 to 1.2 million slaves" in antebellum America were Muslims. 46 percent of the slaves in the antebellum South were kidnapped from Africa's western regions, which boasted "significant numbers of Muslims."

These enslaved Muslims strove to meet the demands of their faith, most notably the Ramadan fast, prayers, and community meals, in the face of comprehensive slave codes that linked religious activity to insubordination and rebellion. Marking Ramadan as a "new American tradition" not only overlooks the holy month observed by enslaved Muslims many years ago, but also perpetuates their erasure from Muslim-American history.

Between Sunnah and slave codes

Although the Quran "allows a believer to abstain from fasting if he

Many forget that the first Muslims to celebrate Ramadan in America were African slaves.

or she is far from home or involved in strenuous work," many enslaved Muslims demonstrated transcendent piety by choosing to fast while bonded. In addition to abstaining from food and drink, enslaved Muslims held holy month prayers in slave quarters, and put together iftars—meals at sundown to break the fast—that brought observing Muslims together. These prayers and iftars violated slave codes restricting assembly of any kind.

For instance, the Virginia Slave Code of 1723 considered the assembly of five slaves as an "unlawful and tumultuous meeting," convened to plot rebellion attempts. Every state in the south codified similar laws

barring slave assemblages, which disparately impacted enslaved African Muslims observing the Holy Month.

Therefore, practicing Islam and observing Ramadan and its fundamental rituals, for enslaved Muslims in antebellum America, necessitated the violation of slave codes. This exposed them to barbaric punishment, injury, and oftentimes, even death. However, the courage to observe the holy month while bonded, and in the face of grave risk, highlights the supreme piety of many enslaved Muslims.

Ramadan was widely observed by enslaved Muslims. Yet, this history is largely ignored by Muslim

American leaders and laypeople alike—and erased from the modern Muslim American narrative.

Rewriting the history of Ramadan in the US

Muslim America was almost entirely black during the antebellum Era. Today, it stands as the most diverse Muslim community in the world. Today African Americans comprise a significant part of the community along with Muslims of South Asian and Arab descent. Latin Americans are a rapidly growing demographic in the community, ensuring that Muslims in America are a microcosm of their home nation's overall multiculturalism.

In the US today, Ramadan dinner tables are sure to include staple Arab or Pakistani dishes. Yet, many Muslim Americans will break the fast with tortas and tamales, halal meatloaf and greens. Muslim diversity in the US has reshaped Ramadan into a multicultural American tradition. The breadth of Muslim America's racial and cultural diversity today is unprecedented, mak-

ing this year's Ramadan—and the Ramadans to follow—new in terms of how transcultural and multiracial the tradition has become.

This Muslim American multiculturalism comes with many challenges: namely, intra-racism, Arab supremacy, and anti-black racism prevents cohesion inside and outside of American mosques. These deplorable trends perpetuate the erasure of the Muslim slave narrative. Integrating this history will not only mitigate racism and facilitate Muslim American cohesion, but also reveal the deep-rootedness of the faith, and its holiest month, on US soil.

This Ramadan honoring the memory of the first Muslim Americans and their struggle for freedom and sharing their story with loved ones at the iftar table, seems an ideal step towards rewriting this missing chapter of Muslim American history into our collective consciousness.

Khaled A. Beydoun is the Critical Race Studies Teaching Fellow at the UCLA School of Law.

Egypt: wake up to the serious crime of sexual violence

Adam Walker
middleeasteye.net
First published on June 26

Two weeks ago, Egypt found itself with a new president—Abdel Fattah Al-Sisi. Supporters gathered in Tahrir Square to celebrate Sisi's rise to power, but the mood in one part of the square quickly turned very dark. The jubilation that day was tainted by heinous crimes, that brought to light cultural realities endemic within Egyptian society.

A wild mob of men brutally gang raped a woman, whose clothes were torn from her bloodied body as she was dragged across the square. The attack was filmed and trended globally, as the world stood still, in shock at what had taken place. The tragic scene was made all the more distressing by the helpless sight of a single police officer waving his pistol in the air as he tried to help the woman. She was one of nine women reported as being sexually assaulted that night.

In a positive and unprecedented move, President Sisi visited the woman in hospital, where he told her, "I have come to tell you and every Egyptian woman that I am sorry. I am apologizing to every Egyptian woman." He promised a decisive response.

However, for many, the video and its disturbing undertones came as no surprise. And while welcomed, the words of Egypt's new President will be treated with great distrust by human rights campaigners.

The Egyptian revolution is surely the most reported, documented and captured revolution in the history of humankind. Those in the the thirty something generation—will one day describe to their grandchildren images of a filled laser-lit Tahrir Square, or the sight of an Egyptian Army officer praying with the revolutionaries, as President Mubarak's henchmen sprayed the worshippers with water cannons.

For many, however, the most

piercing and harrowing image of the revolution came during December 2011, when an Egyptian woman, clad in traditional Islamic garb, was dragged down a street by soldiers, who then mercilessly beat her with batons and stripped her down to her blue underwear. The color blue took on greater significance, as it later came to symbolize the struggle of Egyptian women in graffiti and artwork sprawled across Cairo.

"The forced virginity tests were, of course, just one of many tools used by various groups in their attempts to silence the voices of women through humiliation and intimidation."

The soldiers involved were, for sure, an ugly example of humanity. But it was something else that caught the attention of many that day; the sight of men hurriedly walking by, or looking on from a distance, as this helpless woman was dragged, beaten and stripped. And while the young woman targeted was certainly the victim of a humiliating violation of her person, it was undeniably the soldiers and passive onlookers who were criminal and without dignity.

Sadly, this was far from an isolated incident, but rather a symbolic representation of a much wider problem that continues to plague the country today; that is, the oppression and marginalization of women across

Egypt and, indeed, much of the Muslim world. This fact was made manifestly clear in a United Nations report which found that over 99 percent of Egyptian women had experienced sexual harassment and that more than 90 percent suffered unwelcome physical contact.

During protests in March 2011, male soldiers famously detained a number of women who they subsequently tortured, humiliated through degrading strip searches and coerced into having highly invasive virginity tests when threatened with the prospect of prostitution charges. In some cases women were even filmed.

One famous example is found in the case of Samira Ibrahim. After she was beaten, electrocuted and stripped, soldiers forced her to undergo one of these procedures. Following her release, she battled through a case against an army doctor accused of having carried out forced virginity tests on women who had been protesting in Tahrir Square in 2011. Here Egypt stood, poised, with an opportunity to put behind it the misogyny of the Mubarak era and set a precedent of equality and dignity. Quite predictably, however, justice was not served and the case against the doctor was acquitted. The tears of Samira Ibrahim outside the court on that day were indeed the tears of a nation let down.

Despite the travesty of the court's decision, those campaigning for justice persevered and some months later overcame the Supreme Council of the Armed Forces (SCAF) when a civilian court ruled that such tests were henceforth illegal. Ms. Ibrahim went on to declare, "I will not give up my rights as a woman or a human being." Unfortunately, Ms Ibrahim's courageous stance was later somewhat overshadowed by reprehensible anti-semitic remarks she made on twitter.

The then Major General Abdel Fattah al-Sisi, Egypt's newly elected President and former Army chief, later confirmed to Amnesty International that the tests had been carried out on seventeen female detainees.

Defending the army's position, he added in a very bizarre statement that the tests were in place to protect the Army against possible allegations of rape and were also carried out on women seeking to join the military ranks. One hopes that his latest stance indicates a change of view.

The forced virginity tests were, of course, just one of many tools used by various groups in their attempts to silence the voices of women through

"Since the beginning of the Arab Spring, a large number of women protesters have been sexually assaulted or raped in and around Tahrir Square ('Tahrir' ironically means independence')."

humiliation and intimidation. Since the beginning of the Arab Spring, a large number of women protesters have been sexually assaulted or raped in and around Tahrir Square ("Tahrir" ironically means "Independence"). Such heinous tactics are by no means new to Egypt, finding their roots in the Mubarak era. In May 2013, for example, a group of activists took to the streets to mark eight years since the infamous 2005 Black Wednesday, when a group of women were targeted and sexually assaulted by plain-clothes policemen for protesting. Nearly a decade on, and they are still awaiting an opportunity to seek recourse in the criminal courts.

Alongside civilians, a number of

high profile journalists have been the target of such assaults. The rape of the respected CBS journalist Lara Logan is perhaps the most prominent example of this crime, which continued on throughout the rule of the Muslim Brotherhood. While SCAF seemed to ignore the issue completely, the Muslim Brotherhood acknowledged the problem, only to do nothing to combat it.

Last year's infamous June 30 opposition protests by no means marked an end to sexual assaults. On the contrary, Egypt saw a sudden spike in the number of attacks. Sources suggest that there were some ninety-one reported incidents of sexual assault and rape over the four days of the protests in Tahrir Square. Given the stigma attached to reporting sexual assaults, particularly within a society with a history of ignoring sexual crimes, the actual number of assaults is likely to be much higher. Human Rights Watch even published some chilling video accounts of women who survived sexual assaults in Tahrir Square.

Days before the recent Presidential elections, former president Adly Mansour, widened the definition of 'harassment' and increased the range of punishments open to offenders. His changes marked only a small step in the right direction. The recent sexual assaults spurred Sisi to establish a governmental body, inclusive of Egypt's religious leaders, to investigate the root causes of what some have termed Egypt's sexual "rape culture." They have placed 12 proposals to tackle the epidemic, mainly focusing on awareness and educational campaigns.

Some feel that for Egypt to protect the rights of women, awareness campaigns must be backed up by robust legislative reforms that reflect standards rooted in international law. For example, Human Rights Watch published a series of legal reforms suggested by Rothna Begum who wrote, "the Egyptian authorities are required to act—both under the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against

Women, to which Egypt is a state party, and Egypt's new constitution, to protect women against all forms of violence."

President Sisi's public statements since the inauguration day attacks are a positive first step. However, turning the tide on sexual violence requires the implementation of a comprehensive and coordinated approach that tackles all forms of violence against women.

"The recent sexual assaults spurred Sisi to establish a governmental body, inclusive of Egypt's religious leaders, to investigate the root causes of what some have termed Egypt's sexual 'rape culture.'"

The poet Rumi once wrote, "Where there is ruin, there is hope for a treasure." And so, despite the utter failure of successive Egyptian governments and ruling elites to protect the rights of women, the spirit of Egyptian women affords their daughters great optimism of a future of female empowerment, where women are able to command dignity, respect and rights.

Adam Walker has published works on various issues related to the history, law and social affairs of the MENA region. He is also co-editor of the first western encyclopedia on the Prophet Muhammad.

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Expression of Interest to provide Design and Printing Services Ref. No. EOI/YEM/005/2014

UNICEF Yemen is interested in sourcing the services of local companies for Design and Printing services. The requirement covers different types of publication and promotional material.

Purpose of the Assignment

To enter into a long term arrangement with UNICEF to provide design and printing services for one year renewable to a second year. The arrangement will be a form of a framework agreement that is non-binding to UNICEF, and sets the ground for cooperation in this area.

UNICEF Yemen now invite eligible design and printing firms to express their interest in providing such services.

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- Full dossier of the organization. The dossier should also include a brief description of the company structure, including branches in different parts of the country or outside Yemen.
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IMPORTANT: please note that no offer should be submitted at this stage, only the information requested above should be included.

Only the qualified firms will be invited for bidding.

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TERMS OF REFERENCE

Job Title: Project Manager (PM)
Project: SMEPS Rural Value Chains
Location: Based in Sana'a with frequent travel to Hodiedah, Lahaj, Hadramout and Abyan
Starting Date: July, 2014
Duration: 3 Years (Fixed Term Contract)

Deadline to receive applications: 5th, July 2014

1. BACKGROUND:

The Small and Micro Enterprise Promotion Service (SMEPS) is a quasi-government agency established in 2005 as a subsidiary of the Social Fund for Development. SMEPS focuses on planning, directing, coordinating and monitoring several programs that contributes directly to developing SMEs in Yemen. In close coordination with partner organizations, such as the World Bank, UNDP, GIZ and others, SMEPS provides SMEs in Yemen with adequate tools and policies that facilitate their growth and diversification. The agency's programs focus on three main lines of intervention, namely; 1) promoting business development services (BDS), 2) developing value chains; including fisheries, coffee, horticulture and health, 3) sponsoring entrepreneurship.

2. DESCRIPTION OF THE PROJECT:

SMEPS rural value chain projects are supported by multiple donors in a number of sub-sectors including horticulture, coffee, fisheries, honey and crafts. SMEPS rural value chain projects focus on ensuring accelerated growth in the value of production for farmers, beekeepers, fishers and craft producers through access to improved inputs, training, and links to higher value markets. The projects build in sustainability models through identifying and working with lead firms and private sector consultants in addition to establishing mechanisms for spill-over effects encouraging and facilitating the market adoption of the project interventions.

3. SCOPE OF WORK: SMEPS is seeking a Project Manager to lead the implementation of its rural value chain projects. The Project Manager will be reporting directly to the Executive Director of SMEPS and will be responsible for proper implementation and execution of the project objectives. The Project Manager will have the following responsibilities:

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- Ensure the implementation of the project in accordance with the financial management and procurement systems at SMEPS and in compliance with Donor requirements.
- Manage and lead a project team, ensuring in particular strong, practical technical and business management skills among the staff working on the project.
- Ensure the procurement of the services of well qualified consultants with both local and technical knowledge that will act as the first line of support.
- Organize and ensure full pre-start-up training of Project Team members to meet their job responsibilities and periodic post-start-up workshops.
- Lead and ensure sound project promotion and liaison with the Yemeni business community, farmers, and stakeholders through a well-developed Communications Plan.
- Lead and support the Project Team, ensuring good internal communications, exchange of information, and teamwork;
- Lead Management Committee comprised of the Project Manager, Project Officers, Finance Manager, and the Business Development Manager which oversees the project.
- Ensures a business culture that emphasizes business-friendly and supportive, and rapid response, business administrative efficiency and flexibility;
- Provide support as requested by independent evaluation consultants and independent financial accounts auditors.

4. QUALIFICATIONS:

- The incumbent will have to meet the following qualifications:
- Demonstrated leadership, general management, and people management skills.
- Master's or equivalent degree in economics, business or a related field (or BA degree with at least 5 years experience).
- The candidate will demonstrate experience of working within the private sector in Yemen and experience of the market approach to value chain development.
- The candidate will demonstrate relevant working experience in projects programming and management and in developing and managing private sector oriented technical assistance, advisory services, business projects or consultancy programs.
- Must be fluent in English and Arabic with excellent report writing skills and excellent written and verbal communication skills.
- Very good administrative skills and IT skills.
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VACANCY ANNOUNCEMENT

International Business & Technical Consultants, Inc. (IBTCI), a U.S.-based international development consulting company, is seeking a Communications Officer to lead its communications and outreach activities. This is a full time position based in Sana'a, Yemen, under the Yemen Monitoring and Evaluation Program (YMEP) implemented by IBTCI.

YMEP provides M&E services and support to USAID/Yemen and its implementing partners, with a central goal of assessing the effects of Mission programming on stability in Yemen.

DUTIES AND RESPONSIBILITIES:

A. Strategic Communications Management:

1. Works closely with the Mission to maintain and update the Communication Strategy and for assuring its adherence to USAID policy and to the US Mission's Strategic Communication Plan.
2. Facilitates information access and sharing among implementing partners (IP) and USAID/Yemen. Provides advice to USAID staff on the selection, targeting, and placement of potential information consistent with the Strategy.
3. Responsible for proposing, articulating and implementing USAID/Yemen outreach and communication policies and procedures. This may include working with IPs and USG staff to clarify roles and responsibilities and provide templates for various communications tools, standards for creating and finalizing materials, and guidelines for planning and managing events.

B. Media Affairs:

1. Works closely with the US Embassy's Public Diplomacy Office (PD), the USAID mission and its IPs to manage a coordinated media relation effort.
2. Reviews the daily press to keep abreast of coverage that relates to development in Yemen and USAID activities.
3. Advises and works with PD to expand opportunities for coverage of USAID assistance, including all media formats. Works with YMEP communications subcontractor and helps USAID's Technical Office and IPs to define prospective activities for coverage, participates in field inspections and final selection, and accompanies TV/radio crews to site locations.
4. Plans, researches, drafts, and/or edits press releases and fact sheets on behalf of USAID/Yemen. Coordinates these with the USAID, IPs and PD to produce and release timely, accurate, and useful written material for local media and other media.

C. Public Events Management:

1. Works with USAID to plan, schedule, publicize, and carry out activities to present USAID/Yemen programs to the public, including a range of communications tools and distribution to a variety of audiences, with particular field trips to specific events or activities, as well as outreach and media coverage for overall programming.
2. Advises USAID and IPs on events and media activities and confirms cultural sensitive and coherence with the Communications Strategy.
3. Coordinates drafting of press releases for placement in the Yemen press and on the USAID website homepage. Oversees the arrangement of translation or interpretation services by YMEP to the Mission.

D. Production of Public Information and Publicity Material:

1. Oversees the production of high quality, targeted information and briefing materials, ensuring suitability to audience and message coherence.
2. Ensures that all materials produced by YMEP meet USAID branding guidance and advises USAID and IPs on USAID branding policy.
3. Identifies communication products requiring Arabic translation and coordinates with YMEP subcontractor to ensure completeness and accuracy. Makes recommendations for distribution of Arabic language materials and other communication products.
4. Maintains an up-to-date file of information on where USAID programs are working in particular regions of Yemen, including tracking successful site visits and lessons learned for future visits and for reporting purposes. Manages and updates country-specific background information, including economic, political and human development indicator summaries, sub-regional and sectoral information and maps to be relied upon for briefings and other purposes.
5. Responsible for updating (and redesigning as necessary) USAID/Yemen's website to ensure that its content will have optimal impact in providing information about USAID/Yemen and its programs for a wide range of audiences as well as the YMEP Project Website. Responsibilities include coordinating the selection of information displayed on the website, clearing content, and overseeing placement.

E. Editorial Quality Control:

Acts as editor of YMEP documents, reports, and correspondence. Responsible for ensuring that documents meet quality standards.

QUALIFICATIONS:

Minimum Requirements

- A. Education: A bachelor's degree in journalism, communications, international relations or development, public administration, public relations, or a related field is required. A master's degree in one of the above fields is preferred.
- B. Prior Work Experience: Seven years of progressively responsible experience in related fields is required, with at least three years of experience in public relations and/or journalism. Previous work experience with USG or another international development organization is highly desirable. Experience in stressful environments with high workload, especially conflict and post-conflict environments, is highly desirable.
- C. Knowledge, Skills, and Abilities:
 - i. Superior writing and communication skills and a keen editorial eye for detail and quality of communication products.
 - ii. Demonstrated skills and extensive hands-on experience in public and media relations are required.
 - iii. A broad understanding of issues related to international development in general and stabilization programming in particular is required.
 - iv. Demonstrated organizational, workflow management and the ability to work in a diverse team environment is required.
 - v. The qualified person must be a strategic thinker with operational planning experience, analytical ability, excellent communication skills, and the capacity to convert planning concepts into firm plans to meet a variety of contingencies.
 - vi. S/he must be comfortable working independently, managing several activities at once, and working under pressure to meet very short deadlines.
 - vii. S/he must have management ability to plan and execute media campaigns and programs.
- D. Language Proficiency: Native speaker of English; excellent written and oral communication skills are required. Basic Arabic language skills are a very strong asset.
- E. Computer skills: Excellent working use of MS Office, MS Outlook, and MS PowerPoint are required. Familiarity with various new media applications and online sharing tools is required. Basic web design and maintenance is desirable.

TO APPLY

Please send a cover letter and full Curriculum Vitae (CV) by e-mail to recruiting@ibtci.com with subject line: YMEP – Communications Officer. No phone calls please. Only finalists will be contacted.



Desertification a threat to millions of Yemenis

Story and photos by
Ali Abulohoom

The World Day to Combat Desertification took place on June 17 to bring awareness to one of the greatest global challenges to sustainable development and one that has a devastating impact on the world's poorest people whose livelihoods are tied to the land. In Yemen, drought and increasing desertification in rural areas has pushed people to relocate to towns and cities. It is also one of the factors that make Sana'a one of the fastest growing capital cities in the world, with a growth rate of seven percent.

Ten years ago, 50-year-old Hamood Al-Sharai migrated to Ibb city from Al-Sofi village in Ibb governorate. He hoped for a new source of income after his land became too arid to use due to drought and overgrazing.

"I used to earn money by selling the crops produced on my land. I also sold cattle that grazed on the land. However I started to lose my cattle when they were dying of starvation," Al-Sharai said.

Al-Sharai faced multiple difficulties when he decided to leave his small village—the village where he was born and raised.

"I sold my leftover cattle and took my family to Sana'a. I remained jobless for a few months. I tended someone's garden for a few weeks then left that job as I was not paid well. Right now I have a minibus shuttling passengers from one place to another," Al-Sharai said.

He chose Sana'a because he believed it would offer more job opportunities than other cities. Farming, however, used to be much more lucrative for Al-Sharai.

"I used to earn more money in comparison to my current career. I earned about YR1,000,000 (\$4,655) annually, but now I earn almost YR2,000 (\$9.31) a day, making my annual income YR600,000 (\$2,793)."

Abdu Madar, the deputy manager of the Ministry of Agriculture and Irrigation's Desertification Department, estimates that over 90 percent of land in Yemen is at threat of desertification. He stated that too little has been done to alleviate this problem.

Yemen also faces heavy sandstorms, which cause soil erosion and damage crops. Annually, 20 percent of arable land is destroyed by sandstorms, making life difficult for farmers.

According to Madar, desertification has increased the poverty rate in coastal areas of Yemen. "People seem bent on moving to other places to find alternatives, increasing the overall rate of internal migration," he said.

Futaini Saeed, a resident of Tehama district in Hodeida governorate, west of Sana'a, moved 30 miles to Hodeida city to work as a fisherman, leaving behind his job as a farmer.

Saeed had been a farmer for 20 years. He used to plant tomatoes and carrots in his 12 hectare plot of



Unregulated well digging causes the depletion of aquifers and desertification.

land. However, sand storms ruined much of his land, driving him out of Hodeida in search of a new source of income.

"When my land turned into a small desert, I was forced to leave for Hodeida to work at sea as a fisherman, the career my elder brother taught me before," Saeed said. "My land is better than the sea but I have no choice but to stay here."

The unregulated drilling of private wells to tap into underground aquifers has contributed to the problem of desertification in water scarce areas. Mohammed Al-Jabri, the director of the Population Study Center in Sana'a, said that the depletion of underground wells in many rural areas has caused arable land to become unusable. People have found themselves jobless and have gradually lost their only means of sustenance.

"The major cities, according to a study released by the center in 2012, including Sana'a, Taiz, Ibb, Hodeida, Aden and Mukalla, have witnessed high levels of internal migration in the past 20 years as people lose their source of income from cultivation and grazing," he said.

Al-Jabri explained that the migration of people from rural areas to the cities has led to some cities becoming very heavily populated within a short span of time. He says that Sana'a and Taiz have populations of about 2 million and 600,000 respectively, but that "ten years prior... they were half that number. Migration is the main reason for the increase in the population."

And even in the cities the threat of water shortage is being felt. The once lush communal gardens of Old Sana'a are now parched and unable to support many crops, in part due to the paving of large parts of the city, which prevents water being absorbed into the ground, and because of the massively increasing demand for water. Nowadays, wells need to be drilled ever deeper. By some forecasts, the Sana'a Basin could run out of water within a matter of years as the rate of consumption far outstrips the rate of replenishment.

Yemen is part of the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD) formed in 1995, which states that a "global partnership will be forged to reverse and

prevent desertification/land degradation and to mitigate the effects of drought in affected areas in order to support poverty reduction and environmental sustainability." However, Yemen has yet to demonstrate real commitment to these goals.

Ali Al-Thmeri, manager of the Desertification Department at the Ministry of Agriculture and Irrigation, said that Yemen received support from the UN to combat desertification. Trainees were sent abroad to attend workshops and complete courses on how to combat desertification and land degradation.

UN Secretary General Ban Ki-moon said in a speech that "land degradation, caused or exacerbated by climate change, is not only a danger to livelihoods but also a threat to peace and stability."

He went on to say, "while land degradation is acutely felt in the world's arid lands, some 80 percent is actually occurring outside these areas. More than 1.5 billion people subsist on land that is degrading—the majority of whom are small farmers. Climate change directly threatens their productivity. In many regions, freshwater resources are declining, food-growing areas are shifting and crop yields are faltering."

People's dependence on qat, the mildly narcotic leaf that is highly popular in Yemen, is contributing to the problem. By some estimates, qat accounts for as much as 40 percent of the water consumed from the Sana'a Basin, although this figure is disputed.

Mohammed Dubaie, an economic analyst at Sana'a University, said qat cultivation contributes to the depletion of wells in many areas. Qat from one parcel of land can be harvested more than four times a year and requires water all year round.

"Four yields a year means land [for cultivating qat] needs hundreds of cubic meters of water—much more than needed by crops that give one or two yields a year. The water depletion inevitably leads to land degradation."

Although less water intensive cash crops are also suited to Yemen's environment, qat production is highly lucrative and high demand for the leaf is guaranteed.

Another part of the problem has to do with inefficient use of water. Drip irrigation systems—which are designed to conserve water and are easily accessible—have yet to displace outdated and wasteful techniques such as flood irrigation.

Yemen's severe environmental problems will likely only worsen as climate change intensifies. Stories like that of Yahya Al-Okam, a 43-year-old from Ibb governorate, will become increasingly common. He and his family moved from the countryside to Sana'a last year, where they are currently living off his savings while he searches for a job. "I had land on which my income depended entirely for 30 years. But two years ago the source of income vanished as the well beside my house ran out of water. My land became arid."



Arid land on the outskirts of Sana'a.

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Egypt's new law for parliamentary elections sets up a weak legislature

Scott Williamson and Nathan J. Brown
atlanticcouncil.org
First published June 24

In an uncharacteristically immodest burst of activity, Egypt's humble and stolid acting president, Adly Mansour, issued a series of last-minute decree-laws before handing authority over to President Abdel Fattah Al-Sisi. Some dealt with harassment, preaching, and littering. He still showed caution and restraint in some significant areas—for instance, a set of legislative changes designed to combat “terrorism” will have to wait for his successor. But most controversially, he decreed a set of legal changes for upcoming elections for Egypt's new House of Representatives. Those changes are contained in a new law for the parliament and a significant set of amendments for the “Law of Exercising Political Rights” governing elections to the parliament.

Parliamentary elections will mark the end of Egypt's transitional roadmap, adopted by the interim authorities after former president Mohamed Morsi was ousted by the military last July. The new parliamentary law will have a significant impact on the character of the legislature that will be elected in the coming months to work with Sisi. The electoral system it adopts will help to swing the political balance even further toward the president, in a constitutional and political environment that is already heavily tilted toward the executive branch. Questions on the legal context of the new law, as well as what to expect from the legislature it will produce, are addressed below.

“In the two 15-seat districts, each list must include seven women, three Christians, two workers or farmers, two youth, one disabled Egyptian, and one expatriate.”

Why was a new law needed?

Under the 2014 constitution, procedures for parliamentary elections must begin by July 18. It is not quite clear what “procedures” are required, but whatever they are, they clearly require a legal foundation. And there has been none for two years—Egypt's last parliamentary election law (negotiated among leading political actors and then decreed by the then-ruling military council) dates to 2011 but was overturned by the Supreme Constitutional Court (SCC) in June 2012, leading to the dissolution of the lower house of the parliament. The upper house of the parliament (or Shura Council) made three attempts to draft a new law in 2013, but the first two were turned back by the SCC; Mansour

disbanded that upper house as one of his first actions when he was slotted into the interim presidency by the July 3 military coup so the SCC never ruled on the third draft.

What are the key provisions in the new laws?

Originally slated to be 630 seats, the final legislation peoples the parliament with a still sizeable 567 deputies, 59 larger than Egypt's 2011 parliament. A significant majority of those seats—420 of them—will be elected by an individual candidate system, while 120 will be elected via a list system and the remaining 27 will be appointed by Sisi.

This distribution has proven to be the most controversial part of the law. Most of Egypt's political parties, including older institutions such as the Wafd and newer, post-revolutionary parties such as the Social Democrats, had actively campaigned for a greater weight to be given to a list system that would favor party representation. To add insult to injury, even the 120 list seats fail to meet this criteria. They will be distributed across four districts, two with 15 seats and two with 45 seats. Rather than using 2011's proportional representation, only the list that wins an absolute majority in each district will receive any seats. Nor are the lists reserved solely for political parties—independents can form their own lists, too. Such a provision would allow for networks of powerful local figures—the kind who used to be the backbone of the now-dissolved National Democratic Party of Anwar Al-Sadat and Hosni Mubarak—to make a comeback without forming a party or hoisting an ideological banner.

At first glance, there will be some compensation for parties since they will be allowed to run their members for the individual candidacies if they like. But if they do so, the MPs will owe their seats to their own standing and might be difficult for the parties to direct.

The lists are to be the mechanism for providing representation to marginalized groups. The law establishes quotas that the lists are mandated to fill, though only in the upcoming elections. In the two 15-seat districts, each list must include seven women, three Christians, two workers or farmers, two youth, one disabled Egyptian, and one expatriate. In the two 45-seat districts, the lists are required to include triple those numbers for each group. The seats appointed by the president are supposed to play the same role—they are intended for experts, minorities, and women, and the law forbids the president from appointing representatives in a way that alters the partisan balance in the House.

The laws cover all sorts of other areas as well (they regulate campaigning and polling, for instance) but most of the controversy in Egypt has focused on the way that seats are to be allocated.

Is the new law constitutional?

Probably. After all, it was the chief justice of the SCC, temporarily seconded to the country's presidency, who issued it. And according to the law's preamble, he consulted virtually any relevant legal and judicial body in the Egyptian state before acting.

Of course, if there were a constitutional challenge to the law (and it is hard to think of anything in Egypt that is not a potential constitutional dispute) Mansour would likely feel compelled to recuse himself.

But his oversight probably still made a significant difference in ways that make it likely that this

will be Egypt's first parliamentary election law ever to survive SCC scrutiny. Mansour is a famously cautious figure, and he seemed to have hesitated up to the last minute before approving any law, likely reluctant to add his name to any provision that could run afoul of his SCC colleagues.

By striking down so many parliamentary election laws, the SCC has given many clues on what must be done to survive its scrutiny. In fact, the drafters of the 2012 constitution, so fearful that the SCC would dissolve any parliament, required the Court's review of any law before it could be promulgated. By rejecting the law twice in 2013, the justices gave many pages of guidance for the 2014 drafters—and Mansour himself would have been involved in those 2013 deliberations. The provisions allowing non-party members to form electoral lists and permitting party members to run for individual seats, for instance, come in part as a response to past rulings.

There is one matter where SCC guidance has been incomplete: districting. The Court did hold that the 2013 drafts were unconstitutional in the disproportionate nature of their districts. The claim had real merit, since parliamentary election districts have always been unequally distributed throughout Egyptian history. But the SCC did not make clear what precise standard has to be met. So the new laws omit the size of the districts, perhaps hoping that shorn of such a difficult issue, the laws will be inoculated against constitutional challenge on such grounds. The question of details for the districts has been left instead to another, special law that has not yet been issued.

Who will make it into the house?

The 420 seats to be elected via the individual candidate system (and perhaps the 120 reserved for lists) will likely be dominated by wealthy independents and local bosses with ties to Egypt's security forces, tribes, and Mubarak's former National Democratic Party. With the money to finance their campaigns and the networks to turn out voters, these candidates will make up a significant component of the future House. The recent presidential campaign, in fact, gives some idea of what to expect. Prior to the election, private businessmen funded Sisi campaign posters, often displaying themselves prominently in the process. And as turnout failed to materialize during the election, Egyptian officials were reported to have turned to various state bodies, local bigwigs, and tribes—the traditional mobilizers of Egyptian voters—to bring people to the polls.

Dozens of political parties have formed in Egypt since the 2011 revolution, but only a small number have previously shown any electoral abilities, and meaningful party representation in the legislature is likely to be minimal. The Freedom and Justice Party—the electoral arm of the Muslim Brotherhood—clings to formal legal existence, but its leadership and rank and file have been decimated by the wave of post-July 3 repression and the party is likely in no mood to run. Another formerly successful party is the Salafi Nour Party, but its electoral abilities, while impressive in 2011 when it was first founded, are uncertain after it has thrown its lot in so heavily with the new regime. And both parties are legally quite exposed by a constitutional ban on religious parties. The Wafd, the leading party of the pre-



1952 era, retains some skeletal national structure (and a fractious leadership), and it is attempting to build an electoral alliance that has attracted interest from some other parties. But its appeal and ability to reach out to voters seems limited. No other party can boast of a meaningful national structure, though a few organizations—such as Ahmed Shafik's Egyptian National Movement—might be able to cobble together some of the remnants of the old regime and other wealthy independents to perform credibly at the polls. If they do so, however, these parties are likely to operate more as groups to coordinate the efforts of opportunists than as parties standing for an established set of principles or programs.

It remains to be seen how, or if, Sisi will attempt to influence the elections. Amr Moussa, an adviser

force. The large size established by the new law, combined with the likely mix of independents and marginal or weak parties who will make it in, suggests that it will lack internal coherence, a collective popular mandate, or any sort of independent agenda. The Egyptian parliament has rarely been an effective legislative body, so the tools for any positive agenda would have to be forged, something difficult for the likely mix of local power brokers that will take their seats later this year.

The representatives will be generally loyal to Sisi and his regime, though internal divisions are likely to persist if the heated maneuvering currently taking place over electoral coalitions is any guide. Actual policymaking will be reserved for the president and his government—the president has the first shot at appointing the prime minister, and both the president and cabinet ministers have the ability to introduce legislation. The broader political context in which the elections will take place, defined by severe repression and the exclusion of dissenters, also means that opposition forces are unlikely to secure any meaningful representation they can use to challenge Sisi. Though the Nour Party may bring a small dose of ideological diversity to the House, the past year implies it will be superficial and unthreatening.

Egypt's most recent constitution does provide the legislative branch with potentially significant tools to check the power of the executive—for instance, the ability to impeach the president or hold a vote of no-confidence against him or his government. But these powers assume an independence and coherence to the House that is unlikely to materialize, and even then the constitution's balance of power still favors the president by a wide margin. Under Sisi, the legislature will be a secondary player.

Could the house still cause problems for Sisi?

A weak House could still be unpredictable enough to frustrate Sisi at times. As president, he will confront a major economic crisis, severe political and social polarization, and a restive population that ousted two presidents in as many years; furthermore, as the most prominent and powerful public official in Egypt, he will be held most responsible for what takes place during his presidency. If Sisi is to resolve these challenges, he will likely need to implement reforms that could be broadly unpopular, such as reducing fuel subsidies and raising taxes. The

constitution also charges the House of Representatives with passing a series of laws after its election that could prove controversial (transitional justice and church building, for instance), and it requires two-thirds majorities to pass laws related to important issues such as elections, constitutional rights, judicial bodies, and political parties.

Sisi seems to be trying to get a head start on these issues—on June 16, he issued a decree forming a Supreme Council for Legislation Reform that will begin preparing draft laws, some of which the president may issue before the House is elected. Still, he will need a legislature that can pass tough legislation, either by contributing as an active partner or quietly approving whatever laws the body is told to pass. The former seems unlikely to materialize, but the latter, though more likely, could occasionally be problematic as well. A legislature that is too weak to take the initiative could still be difficult to manage smoothly from the top. Pro-Sisi members will owe their election to their own vote-getting abilities, which, particularly in the absence of a well-organized political party, will not be completely dependent on ties to the president. With Egyptian politics still unsettled, controversial issues with the potential to rouse public anger could reward grandstanding and thunderous defenses of the rights of the people, or at the very least elicit sharp, public complaints from the House. Even the House's loyalty to Sisi could conceivably change at some point, given the right circumstances. If Sisi begins to be perceived as a failure and Egyptians start to turn on the president, the legislators could too, gradually distancing themselves from him with perhaps a few even leaping off what they see as a sinking ship. Of course, even if this happens, they are unlikely to be able to build their own alternative, leaving Egyptian politics right back to the period of feckless authoritarianism so many Egyptians thought they had left behind them.

Nathan J. Brown is professor of political science and international affairs at the George Washington University, nonresident senior associate at the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, and author of When Victory is Not an Option: Islamist Movements in Arab Politics (Cornell University Press, 2012).

Scott Williamson is a junior fellow at the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace.

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“As president, he will confront a major economic crisis, severe political and social polarization, and a restive population that ousted two presidents in as many years; furthermore, as the most prominent and powerful public official in Egypt, he will be held most responsible for what takes place during ‘his presidency.’”

to the president, has announced plans to form an electoral alliance; however, it is unclear to what extent the initiative has Sisi's blessing, and in any case, the idea has been criticized in some quarters and has so far failed to acquire any significant support. Several potential coalitions are in the process of forming, including at least two that have explicitly defined their purpose as supporting the president. Whether any of these various coalitions can attain sufficient party and independent support and then maintain enough cohesion to be a real force in the elections is an open question.

How will the house function?

The legislature that will result is unlikely to be much of a political

Looking beyond IGAD in South Sudan

IRIN
First published June 23

The northeast African regional Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD) has been working to get the opposing sides in South Sudan to implement multiple ceasefire and peace process commitments to try to end the crisis in South Sudan, but fighting has continued with little progress towards ending the impasse.

Meanwhile, beyond such international efforts, the South Sudanese are trying to organize their own reconciliation conversations, and independent grassroots efforts have sprung up.

In April, church groups and civil society organizations came together to create the National Platform for Peace and Reconciliation (NPPR), an independent body seeking "to form a united platform to work for peace and reconciliation in South Sudan."

Since its launch, the organization has attempted to reach out to key stakeholders in the mediation process such as the government, opposition and IGAD team in Addis Ababa. They have also worked with local media, and joined forces with other civil society groups.

The platform was formed with the understanding that "the problems confronting the country are urgent, bigger and more complex than any single body can handle," said Reverend Bernard Suwa, secretary-general of the Committee for National Healing, Peace and Reconciliation (CNHPR), one of three organizations that banded together to form the NPPR. "There was also a realization that the problems of South Sudan must be worked out by the South Sudanese themselves."

The other two organizations in NPPR are the South Sudan Peace and Reconciliation Commission (SSPRC) and the National Legislative Assembly (South Sudan's parliament) Specialized Committee on Peace and Reconciliation (SCPR).

"Each [group] brings their own strengths to the platform and their combined mandates, capacities and distinct roles and responsibilities provide the basis for a viable platform through which to promote national peace and reconciliation efforts," said David Okwier Akway, chairperson of the parliament's SCPR.

In South Sudan, the churches play a powerful role, and their involvement in a peace platform is crucial. Throughout the decades-long civil war, they were at times the only stable institutions and as such, have legitimacy with many, especially in more remote areas of the country.

During the signing of the 9 May Peace Agreement, Kiir and Machar "initially refused to shake hands during the peace negotiations and it was a bishop who eventually managed to line them up and make them hold hands during a prayer for peace," said Erik Solheim, chair of the OECD Development Assistance Committee, and former Norwegian minister of environment and international development.

Indeed, at the launch of the NPPR, President Kiir noted that "given the nature and leadership of the institutions we see the potential for them to reach out to a wide range of constituencies, not only in Juba... but also to all counties, bomas and payams of our country."

Understanding the complexities

While national peace efforts generally have a greater understanding of the complexities of the crisis and



Critics argue that what South Sudan needs is smaller, community-based reconciliation rather than more top-down imposed deals like those which have failed in the past.

therefore focus on more long-term solutions, it is clear that the IGAD-brokered talks are so far falling short.

On 10 June, both leaders committed to ending the conflict and creating a transitional government of national unity within 60 days. IGAD warned both sides that member states "will take further collective action to pressure any party who fails to honor its commitments to date" noting that this could happen "through imposition of punitive measures."

But, a fresh round of talks slated to start on 16 June was postponed

after the opposition boycotted the event.

"The problem with the IGAD process for many of us is that it will only lead to an elite solution, unable and unwilling, I fear, to deal with the underlying causes," said Michael Comerford, adviser to the CNHPR.

NPPR was created on the understanding that there is more to the South Sudan crisis than just a conflict between the two principals, and as such, according to their mandate, they will consult with "a wide set of stakeholders and interest groups" over the coming months.

"The main argument for an inclusive peace process is to prevent potential spoilers from destroying the peace outcomes," said Nhial Tiitmamer and Abraham Awolich of the Sudd Institute, in a paper in February. They called for civil society, women and youth groups, and community to community initiatives to be included within the peace process in order to get a wide range of perspectives.

It is also unclear how neutral regional governments are. Uganda, Ethiopia, Sudan and Kenya all appear to have taken positions in the conflict, and have strong interests

in the outcome of the crisis.

"The crisis has added a new dimension to existing tensions in the region—between Uganda and Sudan on one hand, and Ethiopia and Eritrea on the other," said Berouk Mesfin, senior researcher at the Institute for Security Studies (ISS) Africa. "Every day the crisis continues, additional pressure is placed on these states that have, for some time now, been locked in a distrustful and suspicious relationship to support one side or the other."

Continued on the back page

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	7	1	8				6
5				9	2		8
	6	3	8				
	2		5	6			8
7		4			6	9	
2	4	8					7
6		3		5		2	
3		2	8				9

Intermediate

9			2	3			
	5		4				6
	7	1		8			
	8	7					5
			9				
3				1			
	6		8	2			
4			5			9	
1		7					4

Difficult

8							4
	9	5					3
6		2			7		
4			8				5
1		9					2
	7		6				1
3			4				2
2			9				6

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White plays and wins in the 4th move

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CONTINUED FROM PAGE 12

Looking beyond IGAD in South Sudan

Reconciliation still a long way off

International peace talks are also often a quick fix solution. "What is taking place in Addis is a political settlement, but [it is] not building bridges across social divides," Suwa told IRIN. "Unless comprehensive work is done in the area of reconciliation, these problems

are likely to raise their ugly heads later."

Because the peace deal was largely forced upon the leaders, using the threat of sanctions, it is "not a reflection of reconciliation or a political agreement between the president and his former deputy," said an Amnesty International report in May. "The mood between

them is ice cold and both of them still think they can benefit from victories on the battlefield."

These types of deals are unlikely to be perceived as legitimate, or engender any sense of goodwill and forgiveness between the warring parties.

"A peace process which is truly inclusive and listens to the voice of the people on the ground has to trust those people," John Ashworth, an adviser to church groups in South Sudan, told IRIN. "They will tell us how they want justice, accountability and other issues built into the process. These things will arise organically during the process, and should not be imposed from the beginning."

Lack of political goodwill

"Although on paper the government seems to appreciate this process, I am afraid there is very little political goodwill from politicians," Suwa told IRIN. "The government, for example, is prepared to run its own political dialogue and the people in opposition also are gearing up to establish their own process of peace and reconciliation, instead of supporting a body that brings together all CSOs [civil society organizations]."

He also believes that the government views the NPPR as threatening "because it is likely to carry a stronger voice of the people of South Sudan" and will be a body that, once hostilities have ended

"will question the people in authority and seek for justice and accountability."

Comerford notes that the NPPR struggles with a perception of neutrality, and maintaining independence. For many, he believes, especially within the international community, independence mistakenly "seems to mean having no contact with the government, while reaching out to the opposition."

More broadly, instituting successful peace and reconciliation is uncommon in South Sudan. "The precedent has been established with regard to violence as a political tool," Comerford told IRIN. Actors appear to believe in South Sudan that "change and political objectives are achieved through non-peaceful means."

"While I am not party to the calculations made with regard to who should be included in the current talks in Addis, armed actors appear to have secured an automatic right to be there, while non-violent actors have to wait to be invited," he added.

Indeed, when boycotting the continuation of peace talks on 16 June, the opposition said they would not attend because civil society representatives nominated to the negotiations were done through "a faulty process."

Precedents for local peace

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certain specific conditions, local dialogue and small peace talks between groups can be very effective. If the agenda is limited, if the right people are in the room and are empowered, if the process is transparent and agreements and implementation mechanisms are drafted, and if there is a way to monitor results, war-torn states can use local processes to create stability.

There have been previous precedents for local peace initiatives in South Sudan. In May 2012, the Presidential Committee for Peace, Reconciliation and Tolerance in Jonglei State managed to negotiate and sign a peace agreement between the chiefs of all six communities in the area.

They came painfully close to creating a stable Jonglei, but for the actions of David Yau Yau, whose

insurrection against the government of South Sudan led the state back into violence.

At the time, in 2013, the CNHPR said that "although not part of the traditional conflicts in Jonglei State, nevertheless the actions of Yau Yau have further destabilized the State and have begun to draw other actors back into a sadly familiar pattern."

The inability of the government to cement the peace deal with meaningful development assistance and foster genuine reconciliation ultimately led to the collapse of the 2012 agreement. But it provides an illustration that there may be viable alternatives to IGAD processes, which for now are faltering.

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