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Southern Movement labor union to hold partial strike



The General Union of Southern Labor Syndicates announced on Tuesday a two-hour strike. The union is demanding that all military and civil institutions in the south are returned to southerners.

■ **Khalid Al-Karimi**

SANA'A, Nov. 4—Supporters of the Southern Movement working in state-run companies in Aden governorate will hold a partial two-hour-long strike on Thursday, the General Union of Southern Labor Syndicates announced on Tuesday.

The union's secretary general, Arslan Al-Sakkaf, told the Yemen Times the union considers itself part of the southern people, and that they share the same cause. "We have declared our strike in support of the southern people, demanding independence," said Al-Sakkaf.

Abdulla Naji Rashid, one of the leaders of the Southern Movement, confirmed that the decision to hold a partial strike on Thursday

is meant to demonstrate that the southern issue should be of concern to all southerners, whether they're employed or not.

The partial strike comes as part of a series of steps taken by the movement since Oct. 14, including protest marches and sit-ins.

The General Union of Southern Labor Syndicates was established in 2012, according to Al-Sakkaf. It aims to "improve the performance of state institutions [and] includes those working in [state-run] oil refineries, the electricity sector, the water sector, and others."

Mustafa Qasim, an employee at a state-run power plant in Aden, told the Yemen Times that he would be participating in the strike. "We won't achieve progress if we remain

protesting in the squares, and so we've decided to escalate our operations," Qasim said. He said he supports the Southern Movement and its call for secession. He also wants to improve the living situation of southern workers.

According to Al-Sakkaf, the strikers' demands are not limited to the cause of southern secession. "We demand that [state-run] oil and gas companies cease their production in the south. Moreover, we demand that all the southern military and civil institutions are returned to the people in the south," he said.

Similar demands were made by the Southern Movement on Oct. 14 when it called for all oil, gas, and fishing companies to cease their operations immediately, and for the

Yemeni government, military, and security personnel to withdraw its personnel from the south by Nov. 30.

Al-Sakkaf said the two hour-long strike would serve only as an initial warning, saying that further escalations would gradually follow. "We are contacting other unions in other southern governorates in order to coordinate future strikes at the regional level," Al-Sakkaf added.

Zaid Al-Jariri, a Southern Movement activist, described the partial strike to the Yemen Times as a new form of escalation that would help draw attention to the southern cause. "Labor unions are the cornerstone of production, and them striking will help strengthen the Southern Movement," he said.

Economists agree: Yemen's economy risks collapse

■ **Ali Ibrahim Al-Moshki**

SANA'A, Nov. 5—Economic experts agree with the statement made earlier this week by Jamal Benomar, the UN Special Envoy to Yemen, who said that Yemen's economy could collapse if the new government is not formed immediately.

Benomar told the AFP news agency on Nov. 2 that many people who are concerned with the Yemeni economy worry "the government might not be able to pay employees by the end of this year."

According to Mustafa Nasr, an economic expert and the head of the Sana'a-based Studies and Economic Media Center, "the Yemeni economy might collapse during the few coming months, which will cause a complete halt in Yemen's essential services such as health, education, electricity, and water."

"If the country does not avoid this collapse with the help of neighboring countries, the crisis could reach a point where salaries can not be paid," Nasr told the Yemen Times.

Economic analyst Ahmed

Saeed Shammakh, who works for the Yemen Central Bank, agrees that the government could reach the point of not being able to pay public employees' salaries, if it does not reverse the country's deteriorating economy.

Shammakh said that disruptions to the country's oil transportation infrastructure, mainly through pipelines being blown up, has caused a significant drop in government revenue. Other reasons he

mentioned are widespread corruption, conflict throughout the country, and the heavy presence and increasing influence of armed men in the governorates.

Based on statistics released by the Yemen Central Bank at the end of September, "Yemen's foreign debt is over \$7 billion, and the domestic debt is around \$17 billion. It is owed to corporations and individuals," Shammakh said.

The destruction of infrastructure

such as power lines and oil pipelines are amongst the main reasons why foreign debt payments have been postponed, he said. As a result, Shammakh explained, the government had to increase the amount it borrows from other countries, raising its foreign debt considerably.

The press secretary for Mohammed Basindwa, who officially stepped down as prime minister on Sept. 21, told the Yemen Times on Nov. 4 that "these issues are not

under our jurisdiction right now, they are related to the new government which is not yet formed."

Are the Houthis to blame?

The Houthis captured Sana'a on Sept. 21 and since then have spread to several other governorates. When asked whether the group is worsening the economic situation, the press secretary refused to place blame on any specific parties or groups, saying the situation is currently "too delicate" at the moment.

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Envoy Benomar did not place any blame on the Houthis when talking to AFP, only blaming the security vacuum and lack of governance.

In Nasr's view, "the economic problems began in 2011, not since the Houthis entered and controlled Sana'a on Sept. 21. The Houthis only made things worse because some donor countries stopped their support, saying the economic environment in Yemen is bad and the Houthis run the government."

The Executive Authority to Expedite Receiving Foreign Aid, which is overseen by the cabinet, declared in August that the total sum of promised foreign aid amounts to \$8.2 billion, but only a fraction of this has been received.

The Houthis also re-introduced fuel subsidies after the government removed them on July 30, further straining the government budget.

"Lifting the fuel subsidies on July 30 was to support the economy and protect it from collapse," Nasr explained. However, he said the reinstatement of fuel subsidies by the Houthis is not a major reason the economy is deteriorating, but rather the nation-wide lack of security.

Dhaifallah Al-Shami, a member of the Houthis' Political Office, said "we began our revolution in mid-August to save the economy from collapsing. Right now, we are committed to saving it. We will cooperate with all the political parties with which we have signed the Peace and National Partnership agreement on Sept. 21."

"In the agreement there are terms meant to correct the economic situation," Al-Shami said, adding that "on the other hand, fixing the economy is not our exclusive responsibility."



Explosion of oil pipe in Wadi Habab, Marib governorate in June 2014.



AQAP commander Nabil Al-Dhahab killed in air strike

■ **Ali Ibrahim Al-Moshki**

SANA'A, Nov. 5—Eleven people were killed in two separate strikes on Monday and Tuesday near Rada'a district in Al-Baida governorate, including Al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP) field commander Nabil Al-Dhahab.

An airstrike was launched on Monday evening and a second one on Tuesday at dawn, according to Mokhtar Al-Khatib, a Rada'a-based journalist. Eleven AQAP members, including five leaders, were killed in the strikes, according to Al-Khatib.

"Yes, my brother was killed in a US drone attack [while] he was with some Ansar Al-Sharia [AQAP] brothers," said Abdulra'ouf Al-Dhahab, the brother of Nabil Al-

Dhahab.

Jamal Al-Geez, head of the Security Department at the Defense Ministry said he had received news that Nabil Al-Dhahab was killed, but that the ministry has not yet recovered his body.

Ma'moon Hatem, an AQAP member in Ibb announced on his Twitter page Monday morning that "our hero and loved one was killed in a US drone strike during clashes with Houthis in Rada'a."

The first strike targeted a vehicle and killed at least nine AQAP members near Rada'a city, according to Al-Khatib. The second raid targeted Nabil Al-Dhahab along with two other AQAP members in Yakla' village east of Rada'a district.

Among the five dead AQAP mem-

bers were: Taha Al-Tahtah, Abu Usama Al-Sanani, Khaulani Al-San'ani and Shawki Al-Ban'dani, according to a security source in Rada'a.

"The Yemeni airforce and the US will continue to cooperate until they purge the area of all Al-Qaeda fighters," Al-Geez said.

Warplanes have been circling heavily over Rada'a and neighboring Qaifa over the past week. A statement claiming to be written by Qaifa tribes was circulated through social media Tuesday morning.

"Under the pretext of fighting Al-Qaeda, US drones kill our women and children," the statement said. The Yemen Times was unable to reach those who signed the statement, and could not verify its authenticity.



AQAP field commander Nabil Al-Dhahab was killed in an airstrike on Tuesday, local sources told the YemeTimes.

IN BRIEF

AQAP claim attack on Shabwa military camp

SANA'A, Nov. 5—Al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP) claimed responsibility on Tuesday for an attack on a military camp in the Al-Saed area of Shabwa governorate on Tuesday.

AQAP reported on its Twitter handle that the group attacked the camp with seven shells and that heavy fighting broke out with soldiers in the camp. No casualties from either side were reported.

In recent months militants allegedly belonging to AQAP have attacked numerous security and military camps in Shabwa and other governorates in the south.

Riot breaks out inside Sana'a prison

SANA'A, Nov. 5—A riot broke out in Sana'a's Central Prison on Wednesday morning leading to clashes between the prisoners and the guards.

The conflict was reportedly triggered when guards tried to crack down on the use of cell-phones by the prisoners, which had previously been widespread and ignored by the guards, despite violating prison regulations.

Mansoor Al-Hamdani, a guard at the prison, said the clashes took place when the prisoners organized a protest against the administration to try and get their mobiles phones back, saying that the guards succeeded in preventing the prisoners from doing so.

GPC can no longer afford Yemen Today

"The GPC can no longer afford its financial commitment to the channel, and so it has decided to close it," said Ahmed Hussein Mane, a member of the GPC's Media Department.

■ **Ali Aboluhom**

SANA'A, Nov. 4—A source inside the General People's Congress (GPC), which is a co-owner of the Yemen Today TV channel, told the Yemen Times that it could no longer afford to maintain the channel, whose closure was announced on Monday.

Ahmed Hussein Mane, a member of the GPC's Media Department, said that during the past three years the GPC has sustained financial losses due to the economic recession associated with the "Arab Spring." He said "the GPC can no longer afford its financial commit-

ment to the channel, and so it has decided to close it and to compensate its employees as soon as possible."

Ahmed Al-Kebisi, a TV presenter and host of Yemen Today's well-known political program "usual faces," said that he attended the board meeting which decided over the channel's future. He confirmed that the channel was closed for financial reasons.

Al-Kebisi revealed that the GPC owns almost 30 percent of the channel's shares. The remaining 70 percent are divided between GPC member and former governor of Amran Kahaln Abu Shawareb,

a number of businessmen close to the GPC, and the Shibam Company owned by Ahmed Ali, the son of former president and current GPC leader Ali Abdullah Saleh.

On June 11, under the command of President Abdu Rabu Mansour Hadi, Republican Guards stormed the channel's premises. Ever since, Yemen Today has put its operations on hold, broadcasting nothing but videos of the guards raiding the building and taking the channel's equipment. Initially, the channel announced that it would only temporarily stop broadcasting and soon resume operations.

Employees were staying at home



waiting for the channel to recommence its work. According to Dalia Mahdi, a Yemen Today news reporter, employees have not received their salaries for the last three months.

"The partners, including the GPC, Shibam company, and other businessmen have been at odds with

each other over who is supposed to compensate the employees for going without their salaries," reported Al-Kebisi. He explained that the partners vowed, however, to pay the pending salaries.

By closing the channel, he added, "the GPC started to spiral down, as it lost one of its most influential media tools."

Following the 2011 uprising against Ali Abdullah Saleh's regime, the former president decided

to establish two new TV channels representing his party's agenda. In partnership with some Yemeni businessmen, he founded Yemen Today, which has now announced that it will cease operations, and the Azal TV channel, which is still operating.

Houthis allegedly murder one Salafi student, injure another

■ **Bassam Al-Khameri**

SANA'A, Nov. 5—A foreign student was killed and another wounded on Wednesday at noon in Dar Salm area of Sana'a, allegedly by Houthi gunmen.

A high-ranking Salafi source, who spoke to the Yemen Times on condition of anonymity for fear of being targeted by the Houthis, said the two students were living with their families on 24th Street of Dar Salm area and were headed to the nearby Um Al-Qura Salafi Mosque to study.

"Fareed and Murad had their books in their backpacks and were going to the mosque. Fareed was killed and the other was taken to a hospital but we don't know where he is exactly," the source added.

Fareed was from Algeria and Murad was from Morocco, and according to the source they had French citizenship. Although the source did not know their last names, he said they were known as Fareed and Murad "Farancy," meaning "Frenchman"

Mohammed Al-Bukhaiti, a member of the Houthis' Political Office, told the Yemen Times Wednesday afternoon that he was unaware of the incident.

Salafi mosque stormed

Earlier on Wednesday, gunmen stormed the Sunna Mosque, the biggest Salafi mosque in Sana'a, located in the Sawan area, claiming that they were looking for weapons.

Abdulqader Al-Odaini, a Salafi who studies and lives at the mosque, said he witnessed a group of Houthi gunmen, which he said numbered around a dozen, come to the mosque at 2 AM and enter without permission.

"The Houthi gunmen closed all streets surrounding the mosque and started knocking on its doors,

which were closed. We were scared, they told the Salafi students who slept inside the mosque that they were looking for wanted people," he added.

"They stayed in the mosque for two hours and then left when they found nothing inside. They took photos of the students and said the books in the library were provocative," Al-Odaini said.

Al-Rashad Press, a Salafi website, reported on Wednesday that the Houthis were accompanied on the raid by the deputy head of Sawan Police Station and Sawan Security Chief.

Both the police stations in Dar Salm and Sawan areas could not be reached by the Yemen Times. The Operations Department at the Sana'a Security Department told the Yemen Times they had no information about the incident.

Hussein Al-Bukhaiti, a prominent Houthi activist and member, said that Houthis don't storm any building unless they have conclusive information about the existence of weapons or security threats.

Although he said he was unaware of this specific incident, he said "everyone knows that Sawan is one of the main strongholds for Al-Qaeda members. The National Security Bureau arrested Adel Al-Raimi, one of Al-Qaeda's leaders, in Sawan area last month."

Houthi Political Office member Mohammed Al-Bukhaiti also said he was unaware of the incident.

The mosque was stormed hours after a speech by Abdulmalik Al-Houthi, the leader of the Houthi group, saying that the state does not effectively fight Al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula.

A large majority of Salafi students fled Dammaj area of Sa'ada governorate in mid-January of this year and went to the Sawan area of Sana'a, with many taking up residence in the Sunna Mosque.

Popular committees step up presence in Aden

■ **Khalid Al-Karimi**

SANA'A, Nov. 5—Popular committees started to step up their security in Aden governorate on Wednesday, reportedly on orders received the day prior from the 4th Military Command.

Mohammed Herhaj, commander of the popular committees in Salah Al-Deen area, located at the western entrance of Aden governorate, told the Yemen Times that members of popular committees throughout the governorate have started to increase their presence to maintain security.

"We support the security forces," he said, referring to their efforts to prevent an outbreak of chaos in the governorate.

Colonel Mohammed Musaed of the Aden Security Department denied that local security forces need the support of popular committees. "The security situation in Aden is under control, and it is not true that we need the popular committees to protect public institutions," said Musaed.

While local security never asked for the help of the popular committees, Herhaj said he has received instructions from the 4th Military Command. "They called us [popular committees in Aden governorate] on Tuesday to co-ordinate with our increased security presence," he said.

Ali Al-Naqi, a local journalist in Aden city, said many local newspapers and news websites reported that the 4th Military Command is coordinating the spread of armed men inside the governorate.

The Yemen Times could not reach the 4th Military Command to verify this claim.

Al-Sharq Al-Awsat, a regional newspaper, reported on Wednesday that popular committees were armed and sent from Lawdar district in Abyan governorate to Aden governorate in order to maintain its security.

Mansar Khalid, a member of the popular committees in Abyan's Lawdar district, confirmed to the Yemen Times that 150 armed men headed from Lawdar to Aden on Tuesday. According to him, this move came in coordination with the commander of the 4th Military Command.

Abdulla Rashid, a Southern Movement leader, told the Yemen Times that the Southern Movement is supporting the popular committees, describing the maintenance of security in Aden as a "collective effort."

In describing the close cooperation between popular committees and the Southern Movement, Rashid praises the popular committee's protection of sit-ins in Al-Arood Square in Aden's Khor Maksr neighborhood.

Popular committees consist mostly of local residents, many of whom are in support of the Southern Movement.

Journalist Al-Naqi said he witnessed an increased presence of armed men roaming the streets of Aden city on Wednesday.

Another resident of Aden city, Muthana Radfani, said he saw an unprecedented number of armed men in the city, including Aden Port, which he visited on Wednesday.

Analyst: Brussels reconciliation deal "useless"

■ **Ali Ibrahim Al-Moshki**

SANA'A, Nov. 4—A number of Yemen's political factions and representatives from civil society organizations met in Brussels between Nov. 1 and Nov. 3 to sign the Brussels Declaration for National Reconciliation. The agreement is claimed to serve as a guide to help dictate Yemen's transition that began Sept. 21, the day Sana'a fell under Houthi control.

The conference was sponsored by the Global Network for Rights and Development (GNRD), in conjunction with the National Center for Human Rights and Democratic Development in Yemen.

The agreement was signed by representatives from the General People's Congress (GPC), the Islah Party, the Houthis, and the Southern Movement, in addition to representatives from the National Democratic Coalition, the Rashad Party, civil society institutions, human rights organizations, and a number of businessmen.

A joint statement by the representatives was published on Monday night by the state-run Saba News Agency. The statement said that the conference sought to pave the way for the implementation of the National Dialogue Conference (NDC) outcomes and the Peace and National Partnership Agreement, in addition to creating a framework to end all armed conflicts, prepare for a referendum on the constitution, hold parliamentary and presidential elections, and work to improve federal state infrastructure.

It called on the GCC states, the Friends of Yemen, and the international community to support national reconciliation, affirming the importance of preserving the National Solidarity Front to Combat Terrorism and Destruction, a national unity organization made up of prominent

political and social figures established in August of this year.

Loai Deeb, founder of the GNDR, has been the subject of some controversy after being accused of founding a fake university, known as the "Scandinavian University," in 2007. Despite claiming to employ nearly 500 professors and lecturers, according to official Norwegian records, the university employed no staff at all. Its headquarters were registered as being in a single two-story building in which Deeb himself also lived. The GNDR has also been accused of having close links with the United Arab Emirates (UAE), ranking the small Gulf nation 14th in its international league of human rights, in contrast to the US State Department and Human Rights Watch, which have placed the country much lower in similar rankings.

Sheikh Ahmed Saleh Al-Essi, who is the current Chairman of the National Center for Human Rights and Democratic Development, one of the co-sponsors of the event, and the former head of the Yemeni Football Federation, has also been accused domestically of being involved in corruption in Yemen and personally siphoning off some of the country's oil wealth.

"The Brussels agreement is worthless in terms of its substance and content, which is identical to that seen in the NDC agreement," said political analyst Yasin Al-Tamimi, who works for the state-run Saba News Agency.

He stated that "only the government would implement the NDC agreement. That being said, I'm not sure what the point of the Brussels meeting was. It contributed nothing to the Yemeni reconciliation process. We as a country didn't benefit from this meeting, which was in itself a lie, aimed at diverting attention away from achieving justice, removing armed men from the streets, and forming a new government."

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DNA evidence: The missing link

■ **Mohammad Al-Khayat**

Sufian Al-Odaini was 12 years old when he was found hanging from a drainage pipe in the city of Taiz. According to a medical report, he had been raped over a long period of time before committing suicide due to the psychological trauma he endured. However despite the heinousness of the crime, a verdict was never reached.

"In the case of Sufian Al-Odaini, the judge was unable to reach a verdict because no DNA testing was available," said Ahmed Rashad Al-Akhali, a member of the Yemeni Children's Parliament, an NGO that seeks to promote child rights and protection. "The prime suspect was the son of a prominent MP," he added.

A family member and eye-witness to the crime, who asked to remain anonymous, claimed that Al-Odaini did not commit suicide, but was murdered by his rapist, saying that she saw the accused man carry Al-Odaini's dead body away from the crime scene in a duffel bag. Despite this, no one was ever convicted. "Considering who was being accused, combined with the lack of DNA evidence, it was difficult to push the case through the court, and so it has been ignored for a long time," says Al-Akhali.

Yemen suffers from a number of problems and crises plaguing its society, from drone attacks on its population to an often broken legal system. However, according to many activists and those working in the criminal justice system, many of the problems could be addressed if the Yemeni government had better access to DNA testing.

Drone strikes

In addition to aiding in rape and murder investigations, improved availability of DNA testing would enable Yemeni officials to better verify the identity of those that were killed in drone strikes or suicide bombing attacks. In the aftermath of American drone strikes on

alleged members of Al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP), officials are often unsure as to whether or not they targeted the right man.

"The faces and bodies of corpses we receive are usually burned or severely deformed, preventing us from being able to identify them. We need DNA testing in order to verify their identities. Otherwise, families will be prevented from knowing the fate of their deceased relatives for years, if ever at all," says Abd Al-Kareem Al-Khawlani, director of the Al-Thawra General Hospital in Sana'a.

"Several donor countries promised to provide us with DNA testing machines, including Germany, Saudi Arabia, and the United States," according to Mohamed Al-Mawri, spokesman for the Ministry of Interior. "The latter pledged to provide us with these machines in order to help us verify the identity of victims of drone strikes. However until now we haven't received any devices."

Al-Khawlani says that DNA testing machines are very expensive, and that when purchasing technology for state medical centers, the government prefers to purchase dialysis and advanced laser surgery machines.

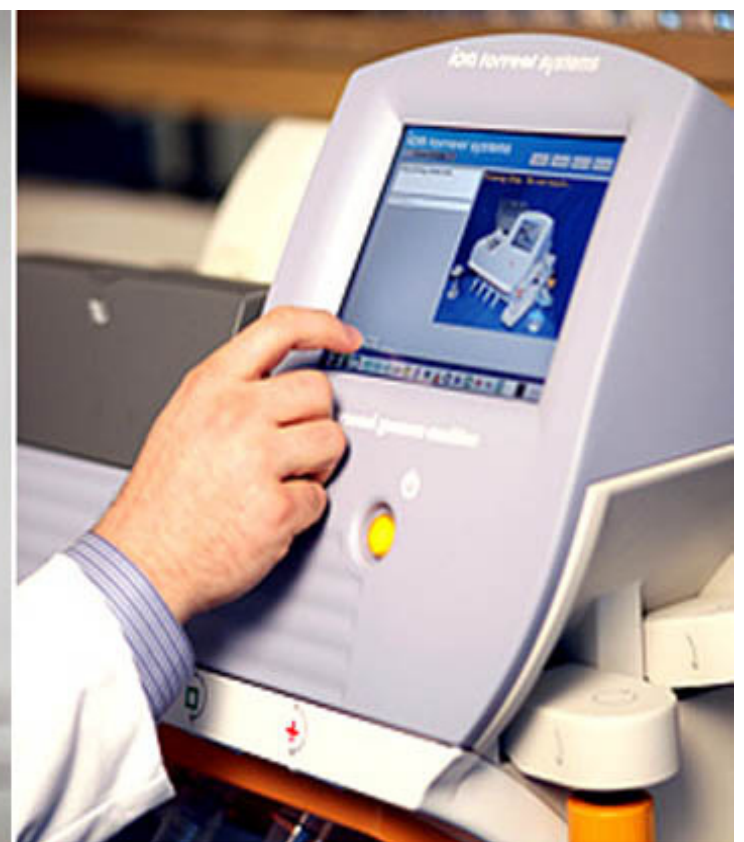
Not being able to verify the identities of victims of drone strikes has proven to be a problem in the past. "The Ministry of Interior thought that it had killed infamous bomb-maker Ibrahim Al-Aseery," Mawri said. "However, after the corpse was transferred to Saudi Arabia and submitted for DNA testing, it was found that we had killed the wrong man."

Similar incidents took place when the body of former Houthi leader, Hussein Badr Al-Deen Al-Houthi, had to be transferred by his family to Lebanon in order to verify his identity.

Dr. Taha Al-Basiry, the director of the Police Hospital in Sana'a, confirmed that his hospital did not possess DNA testing machines to verify the identities of those killed during military and police operations. Many bodies the hospital receives are completely deformed, he



Human rights activists and hospital workers alike argue that a number of crimes committed in Yemen could be solved more efficiently with the use of DNA testing.



says, and as a result there is no way to verify their identity.

Paternity Cases

Colonel Abdulsalam Aburrejal, Director of Yemen's Criminal Investigations Bureau, states that his office also receives a number of "paternity cases" in which his office is asked to help verify and prove the identity of fathers.

Um Kalthoum Al-Shami, an activist and manager within the Democracy School NGO that oversees operations of the Yemeni Children's Parliament, states that "in the case of many pregnancies, husbands often disagree with their spouses over whether they are the father of the child. This often leads to divorce, with the issue then having to be addressed in a court of law."

Adel Al-Hamadi, undersecretary of Yemen's Public Prosecutor, states that in most cases, the courts rule in favor of the mother, saying the real

father of the child is who the mother says it is. "However, these cases can sometimes last several years," says Al-Shami, and "even if it is found that the husband is the father, the process as a whole has an incredibly damaging effect on the child."

Al-Shami states that DNA testing centers should be established and manned by trustworthy staff who are trained abroad. Such centers should be made available to all government departments that need them, including those in the police, the medical field, and court systems.

Abu Bakr Al-Nashari, a Yemeni national who lives in Saudi Arabia, said his former wife filed a paternity case against him several years ago. "I settled the case with my ex-wife out of court and accepted that I was in fact the father. However, I was never truly convinced until I brought the child to Saudi Arabia to undergo DNA testing."

Rape and Murder

Aburrejal states that "Yemen does not possess the technological capability to engage in DNA testing, which forces us to work twice as hard when trying to end an investigation. If we had access to such tests, many cases would be solved much quicker."

"In cases of rape, perpetrators often leave incriminating evidence on the scene of the crime. However without DNA tests, we can't make use of this evidence, instead all we can do is perform blood tests," he said.

"As human rights activists in Yemen, we're ill equipped to identify those who have raped or committed crimes against children," says Al-Shami. "We've called on the government to purchase DNA testing machines to help identify those who have committed crimes. Not having these machines emboldens criminals, who do not fear getting

caught," she says.

Official reports from the Ministry of Interior show that so far 96 instances of rape were recorded in 2014. "However, cultural norms and stigmas attached to rape victims mean that most cases do not get reported, and the figure is probably much higher," according to Al-Mawri.

"We receive many cases in which there is enough physical evidence to solve the case immediately, if only we had DNA testing technology," says Al-Hamadi. In the case that DNA testing is required, however, Yemenis are forced to send samples to foreign countries, in particular Germany.

If the government established DNA testing centers and appointed trustworthy people to operate them, "we could accept the results of such tests as evidence in court," says Mohammed Khalid Al-Husaini, Undersecretary of the West Taiz Court.

Unrest in Sana'a hurts local economy

■ **Bassam Al-Khameri**

The typical Yemeni corner shop is small, packed with a broad and colorful variety of goods, and loved by all those in need of quick and easy access to snacks and basic necessities.

It also constitutes the sole source of income for many Yemeni families.

While shop owners in Sana'a were never rich, they have begun to suffer more over the past two months. Particularly in neighborhoods that have witnessed fighting between Houthis and local opponents, shop owners expressed concern over declining revenues.

The fighting, they explain, has caused many families to flee the city, moving to their home villages or to relatives living elsewhere in the capital.

Anwar Abdu Ali, a 30-year-old owner of a shop in the so-called Television area in the capital's Al-Thawra district, told the Yemen Times that his sales have decreased following clashes that took place on Sept. 18. Fierce fighting has taken place in the area near the headquarters of Yemen's state-run television station, which fell into the hands of Houthis on Sept. 20.

"Many families have left the area after the clashes began. Some of them moved to other areas in the capital while others left to other governorates. So far, none of these people have returned to the area," said Ali.

While Ali used to spend Eid vacation with his wife and three children

in Ibb governorate, this year he says that he can not go.

"I'm not making the same amount of money that I used to before the Houthis gained control of the capital. I spent Eid here in Sana'a and had to work during the holidays to make money to send to my family. It was really hard for me," said Ali.

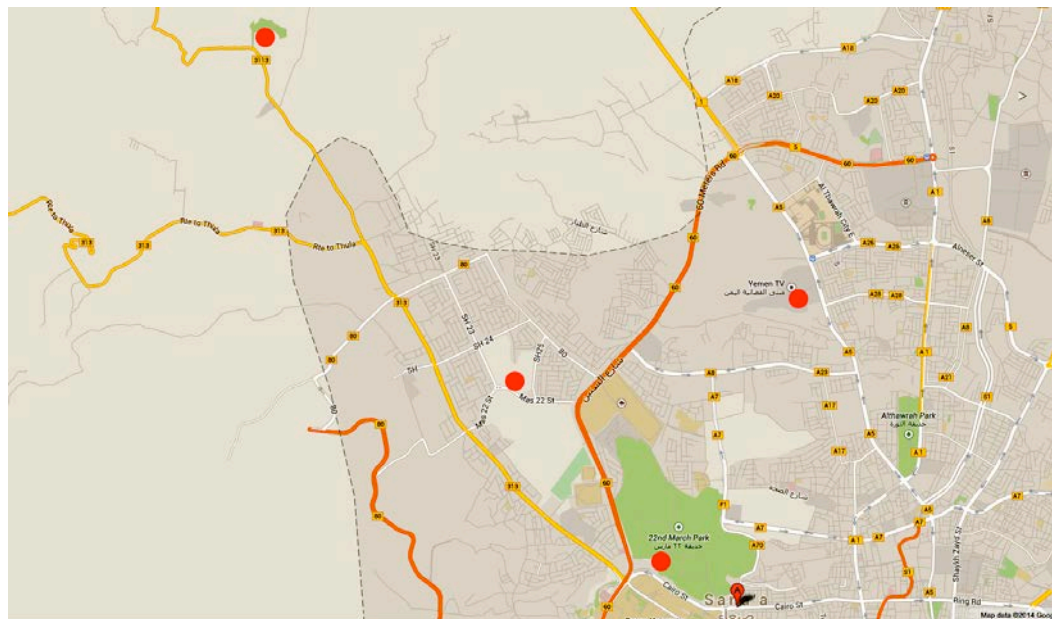
He criticizes the Houthis for having stormed the capital and other governorates, arguing that "residents became the victims."

"Hundreds of families have been displaced in Sana'a because of the Houthis, and the same thing is happening in my governorate [Ibb]. The Houthis are pursuing their opponents and we become displaced. I don't really know what they want," he added.

Prior to Sept. 18, Ali made about YR7,000 (\$33) per day. Now he has to make due with only YR2,000 (\$9).

"I have to pay rent and send money to my family in Ibb. Nowadays, I'm trying to be very thrifty. I eat less and I have quit chewing qat," Ali explained.

The United Nations Food and Agricultural Organization (FAO) warned in late September that rising political conflicts and chaos in



Fighting between the Houthis and their opponents since mid-September has forced many locals to flee and has reduced earnings for shop owners and bus drivers, among others. Some of the locations where fighting occurred are marked in red.

Yemen is further threatening the already weak state of food security in the country.

Officials in the organization stated that more than half of Yemen's population suffers from food insecurity.

In Al-Hasaba neighborhood as well, store owners struggle. Ehab Al-Odaini, the owner of a small grocery store on Amran Street, told the Yemen Times that clashes have affected his income.

"The people who lived in this area are from other governorates and left during the fighting," he said. "Only some of them returned while the rest fear that clashes may reignite," he added.

Al-Odaini pointed out that he used to make about YR6,000 (\$28) a day, but is currently making only half of that amount.

"I'm working in the grocery store with just my son helping me. I prefer not to hire anyone in order to avoid paying salaries during this volatile situation," he explained.

Abdullah Al-Salahi, an owner of a communication and internet center in Al-Hasaba neighborhood, also reports that recently, fewer people are coming to his center to make calls and use the internet.

"I don't like this area [Al-Hasaba] anymore. We suffered during the 2011 clashes and spent two years

waiting for the situation to improve. These recent clashes brought us back to where we were in 2011," he complains.

Al-Salahi blames Ali Mohsen Al-Ahmar, the former commander of the 1st Armored Division, for the clashes that took place in the area and his personal misfortune.

"Mohsen had spread his forces in the area, particularly inside the TV station's headquarters to fight the Houthis. He knew the Houthis would put an end to his corruption," he explained.

In addition to small businesses like grocery stores and internet cafes, the transportation sector has also suffered

since the Houthis' takeover in September. Several bus drivers told the Yemen Times that their income has decreased since the clashes.

Mutahar Al-Sukhaimi, a bus driver who transports people from Al-Hasaba to the Television area and back, explained that he makes less money now than he did in the past, and so now he resorts to other means to make ends meet.

"I signed a contract with a private school to take students from their homes to school and back," he said. This allows him to earn extra money.

Around Tahrir Square as well, store owners suffer from a widely

perceived lack of security. Since the suicide bomb attack in Tahrir square on Oct. 9, Yemenis try to avoid the area, they claim.

Azam Mohammed, who works in a clothing store in the Tahrir area, said that his employer has been laying off workers in order to decrease his expenses.

"My employer recently fired two workers that he had just hired. Now, aside from the boss and his son, there's only two employees including myself," he said.

"Imagine, we're at the store for 14 hours and no customers show up. We're thinking of closing the shop and opening another one in a different governorate," he says when describing the store's financial situation.

Mustafa Nasr, the head of the Studies and Economic Media Center in Sana'a, emphasized the importance of establishing a new government in order to bring back stability and launch a new phase of economic recovery in Sana'a.

"When the new government is established people will feel safe and return to the capital. If that happens, commercial activity, which is directly linked to security and stability, will resume," he added.

Houthi member and activist Hussein Al-Bukhaiti agrees on the importance of the new government and explains that fighting always affects people economically.

"The residents should wait until the new government is formed and everything will be okay again. The most important thing is that we got rid of those who were corrupt," he said.

“Popular committees” feed Yemen polarization

IRIN
First published Nov. 3

Yahya Abu Talib, serious and stoic, is in no doubt about the importance of his role. “We protect homes and mosques,” he says, referring to the so-called popular committees of which he is a member.

In a mixed neighborhood of Yemen’s capital Sana’a, Abu Talib calls himself a “social supervisor” for the Houthi group known as Ansar Al-lah, or “Supporters of God.”

In the same area, off Hayal Street, a young man with an AK-47 slung over his shoulder identifies himself as a ninth grader. He is responsible for guarding a government warehouse, attending school in the day and doing shifts through the night. “[I am here] to defend Yemen,” he says.

The two men are part of a new reality on the ground in Yemen’s capital. After more than a decade of on-and-off conflict with the government and allied tribes, in September the Houthis—a Zaydi Shia Muslim group—advanced from their northern base in Sa’ada, seizing control of many parts of the capital.

Since then, while they have officially agreed to withdraw, in reality they remain the power players in the city: On Oct. 31 they warned President Abdu Rabu Mansour Hadi to form a new government within ten days or a “national salvation council” would take its place.

Their popular committees—a mix of community members, Houthi supporters from outside Sana’a, and in particular youths with guns—have mushroomed at new, improvised checkpoints across the city, acting as a “neighborhood watch” system. They say they are merely unpaid volunteers, inspecting cars

and residents to ensure they do not pose a threat.

Supporters point out that they have brought order to a city where the government has struggled to provide even basic security in recent years. Critics charge that they act as a partisan force in a polarized conflict and their presence is likely to encourage rivals to pick up arms, bringing more violence to the urban setting. They also accuse the Houthis of violently suppressing dissent—several members of Islah, Yemen’s influential Islamist party, declined to be interviewed for this article citing fears of reprisal for speaking out.

The Houthis themselves claim to have national interests at heart, saying they protect everyone—including political opponents. But those in the opposition certainly do not think so.

On Oct. 9 a suicide bomber blew himself up near a checkpoint at a Houthi gathering in central Tahrir square. The bombing, which killed over 50 people and injured more than 100, was claimed by the southern-based Ansar Al-Sharia, a Sunni subsidiary of Al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula. They had previously warned that the Houthi decision to seize Sana’a would be met with force.

The result of the violence is an



Destruction in northern Yemen caused by several rounds of war between the government and the Houthis between 2004 and 2010.

increasingly polarized population. “The streets are politicized,” George Abu Al-Zulof, Yemen representative of the UN Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), told IRIN. “When you talk to people who are with the Houthis, they are happy. The opposition feels threatened and vulnerable.”

Partisan media, Abu Al-Zulof said, has contributed to the problem, often publishing unverified information painting political opponents in a negative light. “This lack of understanding has created this fear,” he said.

Civilian impact

The Houthi advance came after four years of political upheaval fol-

lowing the resignation of former President Ali Abdullah Saleh, who relinquished power following mass anti-government protests in 2011. Yemen’s ambassador to the UK, Abdullah Al-Radhi, recently warned that the country was at risk of descending into civil war.

Yet in the capital, after the violence of late September an uneasy calm has broken out since the Houthis and other political parties signed a UN-backed peace agreement with the government. Despite occasional attacks, Houthi forces appear determined to remain in power.

On Nov. 3, however, one of the signatories of the peace agreement—the head of one of Yemen’s

leading liberal parties—was shot dead. While no group has yet claimed responsibility, Mohammed Abdulmalik Al-Mutawakel’s death sparked fears of attacks on those cooperating with the Houthis.

In their private moments even Houthi supporters fear that their fighters cannot keep the peace forever. The day after the suicide bombing, 23 year-old Ibrahim Al-Mahatawi’s car was targeted by an explosive device. While he survived, Al-Mahatawi, a Houthi, is currently awaiting an operation for injuries sustained in the blast.

Ansar Al-Sharia claimed responsibility. The group alleges that Al-Mahatawi is the nephew of a prominent Zaydi cleric with the same last

name. Ibrahim denied that he has any relation to the cleric, as did several other Houthi sources.

“I knew [Ansar Al-Sharia] were attacking Ansar Allah, but I didn’t think I would be attacked personally,” he said. He denounced the incident as “un-Islamic” and blamed the interference of “foreign intelligence in Yemen.”

Those with no political interests—like Abdulla Ameen Senan—are also seeing their lives disrupted. When asked if he identified with any party, Senan replied “I am just looking for a job. That’s all.”

It is proving harder than he thought. A recent graduate, his brother-in-law was going to lend him money to start a small business with the profits from the sale of his grocery store. Yet the start of the Houthi advance caused the buyer to pull out—leaving Senan’s dreams on hold.

“People are trying to have a normal life, but they keep waiting for what happens next,” Senan, 25, said. “No one knows what will happen.” He dismissed Yemenis’ desire to fight over religion, saying most were just trying to put food on the table.

Jane Novak, an independent analyst focused on Yemen, stressed that the Houthi-AQAP dispute was fuelled by frustrations over security and the cost of living in a country where roughly half the population lives below the poverty line. The Houthi protests were sparked by the government’s decision to lift subsidies on fuel that saw prices increase by 50 percent over night.

“While there is more religious tension than in the past, what the whole country wants is jobs,” she said.

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ANALYSIS

Arab women making slow strides

Sophie Claudet
al-monitor.com
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Arab women are increasingly present in public life, contrary to widespread misconceptions about the region. This is at least what Youssef Courbage, research director at the French National Institute for Demographic Studies (INED), contends. The combined effects of delayed marriages, high enrollment rates in universities, access to contraception and decreased fertility (i.e., the number of children per woman) has led to the emergence of women from the family sphere and entry into the

labor market and politics.

In an interview with Al-Monitor, Courbage dated this evolution to the early 1970s. He cited Morocco as a case in point, where the percentage of single women in the 30-34 age bracket has soared from five percent in the late 1960s to 33 percent today. Likewise, traditional marriages that often involve marrying into a clan or tribe continue to plummet, from 30 percent in 1995 to 15 percent today. Female political participation is best exemplified in Tunisia, where women represent more than 31 percent of members of parliament, up from 28 percent in 2011. By way of comparison, a mere 18 percent of national legislature seats are held by women in

the United States and 27 percent in France.

According to preliminary results of the Oct. 26 parliamentary election, Tunisia’s parliament boasts 68 female members of parliament, of which 35 hail from the liberal, secular party Nidaa Tunis and 27 from the moderate Islamist party Ennahda. Tunisia is reaping the fruits of a progressive electoral code, which was revised in the wake of the Arab Spring.

“We fought to have male-female parity in the 2011 electoral law,” Faiza Skandrani, who heads Tunisia’s organization for equality and parity (Association pour l’Egalité et la Parité), told Al-Monitor.

Continued on the back page



Members of the Tunisian parliament celebrate after approving the country’s new constitution in Tunis, Jan. 26, 2014.





YT vision statement

“To make Yemen a good world citizen.”

*Prof. Abdulaziz Al-Saqqaf,
(1951 - 1999)
Founder of Yemen Times*



OUR OPINION

US and Yemen's atrocious treatment of Sharif Mobley must end

The governments of Yemen and the US have a lot of questions to answer regarding the abduction, detainment, and disappearance of US citizen Sharif Mobley, who lived with his family in Sana'a.

Mobley has been held without trial for nearly five years and has been missing inside Yemen's prison system for over eight months. He has not had any contact with his attorneys, who say they do not know where he is being held, since Feb. 27. The details of his abduction, by eight armed men clad in black who never identified themselves or showed a warrant, are harrowing. Reprieve, the UK-based charity and rights group, says it has evidence of US complicity in his abduction. Mobley went missing shortly before his attorneys were going to present that evidence in court.

In September, his wife received a phone call from Mobley when he was lent a cellphone from a sympathetic guard.

“He said, ‘I’m being tortured.’ He even said, ‘They’re gonna kill me in here,’” according to his wife, Islam. He did not know where he was being held.

He has been accused of attempting to contact a well-known US born preacher once known for his strong condemnations of the Sept. 11 attacks, who later became an outspoken supporter and member of Al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP). Mobley has never been charged with terrorism. If the US and Yemen have evidence that he was involved in terrorism, they have had four years to pursue those charges. Instead, he is charged with murdering a guard during an alleged escape attempt from Jumbori Hospital, where he was being treated for the two bullet wounds he sustained during his abduction.

During his detention, he was beaten, dragged down a flight of stairs, left with heavy bleeding in his genitals following the removal of a catheter, and chained to a bed 24 hours a day for days on end. Two US agents interrogated him at the hospital, where he was threatened with rape, according to Reprieve. The agents also threatened to seize his wife, and told him his children would be placed in an orphanage. His wife and children were held at gun-point in their home and strip-searched.

The Yemen Times attended a court hearing Mobley was due to appear at in September. It was the fifth time the government failed to deliver Mobley to his court trial, despite a direct order to the prosecutor from the judge overseeing the case.

Mobley's rights were trampled on every step of the process, from his abduction, to his detainment, to his disappearance. Taking into account the government's reprehensible treatment of Mobley, who wouldn't try to escape? It's clear that a fair trial is not in the cards for Sharif Mobley and that his case is very much politically motivated.

The new prime minister, Khaled Bahah, should prioritize Mobley's case and secure his immediate release from the Yemeni prison system. At the very least, Mobley, like every detainee, is entitled to a fair and speedy trial.

This case is bigger than Mobley, and is an opportunity for Bahah to demonstrate what kind of leader he is going to be and just how seriously he takes his responsibility of upholding the law and the rights of all people in Yemen.

Ahlam Mohsen
Deputy editor-in-chief

Shia militias as much a threat as Islamic State

The international community has not just turned a blind eye, but has exacerbated the problem by supporting Baghdad without assurances that it would rein in the militias

Sharif Nashashibi
middleeasteye.net
First published Nov. 3

While the international community is focused on the barbarity of the Islamic State, equally heinous acts committed by pro-Baghdad Shia militias in Iraq are receiving scant attention or condemnation.

The “increasingly powerful” militias “have abducted and killed scores of Sunni civilians in recent months and enjoy total impunity for these war crimes,” Amnesty International said in a report published in October. The militias “are ruthlessly targeting Sunni civilians on a sectarian basis,” committing “war crimes and other gross human rights abuses.”

This was not a revelation. Prior to the Amnesty report, Al-Jazeera English highlighted such atrocities with accounts from eyewitnesses, including Kurdish fighters also battling IS, who said the militias were often Iranian-led.

In July, Human Rights Watch (HRW) documented militia “killings and abductions” that “mark a serious escalation in sectarian violence.” In another report that same month, HRW documented “mass extrajudicial killings” that “may be evidence of war crimes or crimes against humanity.” Christians are reportedly also being targeted.

In what seems an implicit acknowledgement of such atrocities, Iraq's leading Shia cleric Ali Al-Sistani on Friday urged those fighting IS to “protect the lives of the innocent citizens and protect their property... whatever confession they may belong to. Beware that if you touch anything that belongs to them or hurt any of them—that is haram (forbidden by Islam).”

Complicity

Calls by Amnesty and HRW for the Iraqi government to rein in the militias—whose members number in the tens of thousands—are perfectly justified. However, given Baghdad's arming of, support for and reliance on these militias—something amply stated by both human rights organizations—it is

highly unlikely to do so. The government does not even acknowledge the problem—the Interior Ministry has denied any pattern of sectarian killings.

As such, “the Iraqi authorities have effectively granted them free reign to go on the rampage against Sunnis,” and are “sanctioning war crimes and fuelling a dangerous cycle of sectarian violence that is tearing the country apart,” said Amnesty. HRW added, “The government seems to think that if people blame militias for killings, it can wash its hands of the matter.”

The international community has not just turned a blind eye, but has exacerbated the problem by supporting Baghdad without assurances that it would rein in the militias. If governments are arming the Iraqi military, which is arming the militias, then it is likely that weapons meant for the army are being transferred to the militias.

The coalition campaign against IS was largely dependent on the Iraqi government being more inclusive than it was under former Prime Minister Nouri Al-Maliki. This stipulation was explicitly stated by US President Barack Obama, whose country is leading the coalition. Using and supporting sectarian militias, which was taking place long before IS's lightning gains in Iraq this summer, are the antithesis of inclusivity.

This may cause serious cracks in the coalition if Sunni-majority Middle Eastern members start questioning their participation in a campaign that is propping up the Iraqi government under these circumstances, strengthening militias' power and Iran's influence, and further jeopardizing the increasingly tenuous position of Iraq's Sunni Arabs.

Cementing militia power

There has been no change under Maliki's successor, Haider Al-Abadi, despite the latter's promises. Just days after the Amnesty report, Mohammed Ghabban was appointed interior minister, despite vehement Sunni opposition. Ghabban, now in charge of security and police, is a member of the Badr Organisation, which fields one of the largest Shia militias (the recently

appointed human rights minister is also a Badr affiliate.)

“There is little doubt that Hadi Al-Amiri, head of the party and its military wing, will wield the real power” in the interior ministry, wrote Washington Post correspondent Loveday Morris. According to a leaked 2009 State Department cable, Amiri may have personally ordered attacks on up to 2,000 Sunnis.

“Ghabban's appointment cements the Shia militia leader's—and Iran's— influence over the country's security forces,” added Morris. Absurdly, the State Department welcomed the appointment, among others, as part of the formation of an “inclusive” cabinet.

The hollowness of Abadi's rhetoric was on display at a meeting he had last week with Sunni tribal leaders. “When they left, they said the government still hadn't understood their grievances,” Reuters reported.

Even if Baghdad mustered the will to rein in Shia militias, it has become so reliant on them that they would be too powerful an enemy to make, particularly in the context of the government's tense relations with the Kurds and Sunni Arabs, and its war against IS.

“Few” militia leaders “say they plan to give up their arms or their political influence” even if IS is defeated, wrote Matt Bradley, the Wall Street Journal's Middle East correspondent. As such, it is not inconceivable that Iraq could end up like Libya, ruled by a myriad of militias with little—if any—central authority.

It seems the government has unleashed a monster, if not created one. This is hardly surprising, given its own terrible human rights record, which has fuelled Sunni anger and swelled IS ranks. The number of documented abuses this year alone are too many to list, yet governments have increased military aid. It seems atrocities committed by militias or the authorities are somehow less objectionable than those by jihadists.

Benefiting IS

The various parties involved in the fight against IS do not seem to see the

obvious: That the actions of Baghdad and the militias, and those supporting them, are playing into jihadist hands.

They are discouraging Iraqi Sunni tribes (who were pivotal in defeating Al-Qaeda years earlier) from fighting IS, and allowing the group to portray itself as a defender of Sunnis and a resistor of Shia aggression. These tribes are already wary of sticking their necks out again, given that promises of integration and opportunities for their community, made to them by Baghdad for rising up against Al-Qaeda, were not fulfilled.

Indeed, the US has acknowledged that the coalition campaign has done nothing to slow the pace of IS recruitment. In addition, Iraqi Sunni tribes that have risen up against the group say they are not receiving the necessary support from the government or the coalition. This has allowed IS to take deadly revenge, including massacres. In the past few days alone, it has executed more than 300 members of a single tribe.

Sunni victims of Shia militias are, in a sense, in a more difficult position than Shia and Kurdish victims of IS. Shia and Kurds have their own heartlands that they can rely on, but these communities are suspicious of Sunni Arabs, who also fear fleeing to territories controlled by IS because it is persecuting Sunnis as well as other communities. As such, Sunnis feel that they have nowhere to go where they will be welcomed.

There must be concerted international pressure on both Baghdad and Tehran to rein in the militias, which pose as much a threat to the viability, territorial integrity, and social fabric of Iraq than IS. The question is whether this realization will come too late.

Sharif Nashashibi is an award-winning journalist and analyst on Arab affairs. He is a regular contributor to Al-Arabiya News, Al-Jazeera English, The National, and The Middle East magazine. In 2008, he received an award from the International Media Council “for both facilitating and producing consistently balanced reporting” on the Middle East.

Al-Zaffa: A show that has made me worry about Arabs

Rawan Abdulla

I know there are plenty of far greater things to worry and write about in the Arab world right now but I feel compelled to write about a recent TV show that has made me seriously worry about the state of the Arab world, albeit in a different way. This program is called “Al-Zaffa,” or “The Wedding Procession,” a slickly produced hidden camera show on during primetime on MBC.

Each episode starts off the same: A wife is sat down for a fake interview with the presenter in the middle of a hotel lobby. The presenter repeatedly asks rude and provocative questions, mocks what she says, and derides the way the woman looks in a fairly unpleasant way. Obviously the point—and it works—is to get the woman riled up. When the woman reaches this state, it is time: One of the producers tells the presenter he has to stop the interview because a wedding procession is coming through the hotel lobby. So they wait, and in comes the wife's husband dancing with a fake bride with the whole wedding fanfare, then we see the fallout as the wife real-

izes the groom is her husband.

Perhaps you can argue that watching an already angry and upset women reacting to her husband humiliating and betraying her is nothing more than a light hearted romp (though I would question your judgment), but what happens next is frankly shameful. As the woman confronts her husband, the presenter actually starts shouting at the woman to come and finish the interview, seeing as she has already been paid to do so. Then, the fake marriage officiator who is also part of the posse gets involved and starts angrily shouting at the women for holding up proceedings. So you have the husband, the fake bride, the presenter, and the officiator all shouting at this poor woman who is already in a state of high distress. There is no hint of humor, it is only horrible.

Not only do they shout, they mock. The band starts playing again, they all start dancing and the presenter even starts dancing in front of the woman to provoke her further. In one episode, a woman said she wanted a divorce and the presenter and officiator started singing and clapping, “all things must come to an end.” In a couple of the episodes,

the women have actually collapsed. This is when I wonder if perhaps instead of looking at political solutions for the Arab world, we should start looking at solutions for our psychological problems. If you lament the absolute horror of the Arab world right now but you enjoy this program then realize there is an issue. Because what you are enjoying is watching the emotional abuse of a fellow human being to the point of trauma.

What is worrying is that this seems to be a trend. There was an equally horrifying program on this past Ramadan. In the program, Arab celebrities are made to think that the boat they are on has capsized. They are literally grabbing at the boat to hold on, think they are surrounded by sharks, see their boat companion fall off and drown, only to see blood and a dismembered leg floating to the surface soon after. The celebrities seem genuinely frightened they are going to die.

Through all this, I just can't help but wonder whatever happened to good old fashioned tricks like talking on a massive mobile phone in the cinema? Or a panda in a zoo that's actually a man dressed in a panda costume? (both done

by the brilliant British comedian Dom Joly). Or if MBC is struggling to come up with original ideas for pranks that don't psychologically harm their victims, then I have genuinely wasted hours of my life watching poor souls trying to pick up some cash on the floor that is being pulled on by a piece of string. I'm not proud of it, but it's happened, and it'll probably happen again.

I understand people come from different cultures and walks of life, but as much as we need to be understanding and non-judgmental, we also need to call out something when it is wrong, particularly when that thing is popular—and even if that makes us unpopular. If we partake in a collective wrong in Arab society, however small, then we owe some personal responsibility to the state we are in today.

Rawan Abdulla grew up in the UK and is currently doing her LL.M in human rights law at the School of Oriental and African Studies in London. She has a blog www.poorlittlemuslimgirl.wordpress.com and tweets at @rawanabdulla.

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Southern Movement Youth Coalition spokesperson: “Our problems will not be solved as long as we remain part of the north.”

The Southern Youth Coalition grew out of the pro-secessionist Southern Movement four years after it was founded in 2007. Since its establishment, the coalition has been mobilizing youth from all southern governorates to participate in Southern Movement activities.

Despite disputes between Southern Movement leaders and resulting divisions, the Youth Coalition says to have remained steadfast in its position on the issue of separation from the north.

Apart from being responsible for mobilization, the coalition has also been organizing awareness campaigns in Aden and several southern gover-

norates on the importance of self-determination and the privileges they claim southerners will enjoy if their demand becomes a reality.

The Yemen Times interviewed Shamsan Bin Monis, the spokesperson for the coalition, who at 26 years of age is one of the youngest leaders within the Southern Movement. Bin Monis has participated in the movement's activities since its inception in 2007, when he was only 19.

Bin Monis discussed the position of the Southern Movement, particularly its youth members, on the latest developments that have been going on since the 2011 uprising.



Southern Youth Coalition Spokesman Shamsan Bin Monis

Interview and photo by
Ali Aboluhom

You have heard the latest statements made by Houthis leaders—that they would relinquish their share in the upcoming government to Southern Movement leaders. What is your stand on such statements?

The southern issue, which came about after the civil war in the south in 1994, can not be solved by simply giving the southerners some positions in government. The independence of our homeland and reparations to the southern people, which will not be achieved as long as we remain unified, are part of our demands which we have been struggling for.

Why are you so certain that those demands would not be met if you remain unified with the north?

Briefly, it's impossible for the thief to bring back what he stole, even if there were urgent requests made by the victim.

I mean, the former and present rulers who invaded the south in 1994 and committed crimes including looting lands and laying off employees within the civil and military sectors, will not admit to their crimes and give us back our rights. This will not be achieved unless we garner complete independence.

You have followed the confrontations which broke out in Sana'a on Sept. 18 and the latest ones in Ibb and Al-Baida governorates between Houthis and tribesmen on one side and Al-Qaeda militants on the other. Do you think it is a suitable time to escalate the situation to gain independence?

The clashes that have taken place in the north are of no concern to the people of the south. They are merely scores amongst corrupt people that need to be settled. We as southerners have nothing to do with the northerners' affairs. We are not meddlers. All that we want is to separate from the north and let the northerners solve their problems on their own. We are a peaceful people and do not have a tendency towards violently.

I called on the Houthis not to interfere in our affairs because we are the only ones who can solve our own problems. Furthermore, President Hadi's statements about the southern issue—that it would be solved through unification—are groundless, as we believe that our problems can not be solved as long as we remain part of the north.

But President Hadi and the newly appointed prime minister are from the south. Don't you think that your demands will now be met, as they are likely to be more keen on your interests than others?

Hadi and other people who come from the south and are in the north represent the conqueror state in the north. If they believe in the southern issue they should go back to the south and call for secession.

Since 2007, the Southern Movement has witnessed disputes which led to divisions. Who rules the Southern Movement today?

Some southern leaders have different points of on certain subjects but there are no divisions within the movement itself. The people in the south are brought together within the movement and disputes between leaders do not necessarily mean that the movement is divided. As long as our main demand [secession] is supported by all southerners, however diverse their thoughts may be, nothing will affect our solidarity.

What major strides has the Southern Movement achieved since 2007 until now?

The biggest accomplishment so far is that the southern issue is now being debated and discussed by the international and regional community. Prior to 2007, the southern issue and southerners' grievances have not been heard. Moreover, the struggle in the south predated the Arab Spring in 2011, as southerners started their struggle and revolution for independence in 2007. We will keep up our struggle until the international community supports our demand for separation.

The Southern Movement set up an encampment for the first time since its establishment on the eve of the commemoration of the 51st anniversary of the 1963 revolution against British occupation. Why set up this encampment at this specific time?

The newest developments that have taken place in the south, including the clashes and confrontations, prompted us to take further actions, as escalations, towards achieving independence. The encampment is one of the activities organized by the movement and the coalition mobilized in support it. Now there are hundreds of youth who have been camping out since Oct. 14 [and will continue doing so] until we get what we came to the camps for—independence. The people in the south have come to realize that those who fight against each other in the north can not provide solutions for the southern issue. We hope to invite a delegation from the international community to observe the situation on the ground and push ahead with our demand.

Are you planning to participate in the upcoming government as it is being reported that as southerners you will have your own share?

The compromises being made among political stakeholders indicate that the upcoming government will be formed to satisfy political parties and not the Yemeni people. We prefer to distance ourselves from taking part in such a trick against the people. We will stick to our to our demand for secession. Then we can decide our own fate.

Is it right that you called for

northerners who live in the south to leave by Nov. 30, the anniversary of the 1967 independence day—the day that the last British troop left Aden?

The press release that was issued on the 51st anniversary of the 1962 revolution stated that regular citizens from the north who live in the south would not be included in the threat. We were referring to military leaders and influential individuals who still live in the south and are accused of looting lands and starting business at the expense of southern people. This includes those influential people who took part in the invasion of the south in 1994, whilst the people who came from the north to work and eke out a living in the south will be entitled to receive fair treatment.

We called on military officers and those with influence to leave the south. We will form popular committees to protect both public and private institutions and maintain the security.

Why do you not exploit the fragile security in the capital these days and officially announce secession from the north? Is it not a suitable time for you to do so?

We do not want to take the opportunity just to take advantage of the current situation. We will keep struggling until the Yemeni people in the north and the international community believe in our demand. We are not so low that we would exploit the security vacuum and announce separation.

When is a suitable time for the Southern Movement to announce secession?

Currently, we are working on arrangements that will enable us to rebuild our state, including the restructuring of both military and civil institutions on national grounds rather than partisan grounds as the northern state has done since 1990. Once we are done with that and have international support we will announce secession. The international community is concerned about its interests in the south. We reassure it that we will preserve its interests should we get our freedom and become independent.

Who is the legitimate president in the eyes of the Southern Movement?

Despite disagreements among the southern leaders over some administrative issues, they all agree that the legitimate president is Ali Salem Al-Beidh [former president of South Yemen, and vice president of unified Yemen until 1993] as he was the first one to announce the secession before the civil war broke out in 1994.

Who supports the Southern Movement and the protesters in the encampment?

We do not receive any kind of financial support, whether locally or internationally. The activities held by the movement have been funded by the protesters themselves. The protesters found in the encampment live on one meal a day. They

are waiting for their freedom, regardless of how agonizing it will be, until we gain our right of self-determination.

Why do you think the southern leaders who fled the country following the 1994 civil war have not returned to continue struggling for secession?

The people in the south continue to struggle in the camps, whilst their leaders abroad fear being assassinated if they return. I think they prefer to stay where they are, encouraging people to continue their struggle until we take back our country. Once that is achieved, they will come back.

One of the nine issues discussed by the political stakeholders during the National Dialogue Conference (NDC) was the southern issue. Do believe in and will you abide by

the outcomes of the NDC?

I do not deny that the southern issue was discussed at the NDC. However, we do not support the NDC agreement as it will not affect change on the ground. Political stakeholders who support the NDC will begin to oppose it once it threatens their interests. Our demands no longer remain as they were—recovering our rights and our lands—our demands have gone beyond that: Reclaiming our state.

Do you expect the ongoing fighting by the Houthis to extend to southern governorates?

I do not think so. The Houthis have no interests in the south. They want to settle their accounts with their rivals in the north.

Do you have competent leaders to rule the south if secession is achieved?

We have youth leaders from the south who are qualified to take responsibility for ruling the southern state in collaboration with the former southern leaders.

On Wednesday, it was reported that one protester was killed and three others injured by random shots fired by soldiers from the Badr Brigade, located in the vicinity of the encampment. Was this an attempt by the government to disperse the protesters and remove the encampment?

The justification for the gunfire was that the army wanted to free a soldier being held by the protesters in the encampment, but this is a complete lie; there were no detained soldiers in the encampment. It was an attempt by the government to put an end to our struggle, but we will remain steadfast regardless of how much we have to suffer.

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Nov. 30 deadline looms over northerners in the south

Story and Photos by
Ali Aboluhom

Nov. 30 is a day constantly on the mind of many northerners, who have settled in the south of Yemen since the country's unification in 1990. The Southern Movement, a popular secessionist group formed in 2007, stated in a press release on Oct. 14 that all government, military, and security personnel hailing from the north should leave the south by this date.

Northerners who "work in the security or military forces and civil institutions [are requested to] leave their positions and return to their institutions in the friendly [north] Yemen."

The Oct. 14 statement was made on the occasion of the 51st anniversary of the beginning of the revolution against the British occupation of the south in 1963. The Nov. 30 deadline is symbolic as it signifies the day the last British troop left and South Yemen gained independence in 1967.

The Southern Movement stepped up calls for secession following the Houthis' takeover of the capital Sana'a on Sept. 21. On Oct. 14, the movement set up encampments in Aden and other southern governorates.

Encampments, protests, and sit-ins—coupled with the Nov. 30 deadline—have led many northerners to question their safety in the south.

Although the Southern Movement did not call on "ordinary" northerners to leave, many are worried about what is to come.

"I need to leave for the north as soon as I can," said Mohammed Hazem Al-Quershi, a 42-year-old shop owner who left his home governorate of Taiz in 1993 to settle in Aden and build a business.

On arrival in Aden, Al-Quershi got a job as a cashier in a supermarket. After working long hours and saving up money, he opened up his own small grocery store that grew several years later into a supermarket.

"I have been toiling for years at the supermarket, and do not want to take the risk of staying here following the threats made by the southerners," he said. "If I stay beyond the deadline I might be attacked or robbed, so I need to leave."

Ahmed Afeef, a lawyer and a leader within the Southern Movement, says Al-Quershi's concerns are unfounded. He explained that "the threats were made against influential politicians and military commanders who committed murders in the wake of the invasion during the 1994 civil war and built up business by looting the lands and wealth of the south."

"For those ordinary people from the north," he continued, "the

southerners will not hurt them or seize their belongings and possessions."

Rising communal tensions

Al-Quershi takes the Southern Movement's Nov. 30 deadline seriously, he said, as he has been subjected to verbal harassment for years. What were once words, he argued, could turn into violence once the end of the month arrives.

According to Al-Quershi, the harassment was particularly bad following the Southern Movement's formation in 2007. While he has noticed a surge in anti-northern sentiment recently, he said such harassment was by no means absent in years prior.

An example he gave of the typical harassment he receives is being told to "leave our country Dehbashi. You looted our lands. Get out Dehbashi."

Dehbashi is a derogatory word some southerners use to describe those from the north. It stems from a character in an old Yemeni TV series, who is called "Dehbashi" and is stupid, lazy, and supposedly from Sana'a.

While doing research in Aden for this article, a Yemen Times journalist was called Dehbashi on multiple occasions by strangers who simply assumed he was from the north based on his appearance.

In contrast to southerners, people in the north tend to have lighter complexions, with northern men in particular being distinguished by the traditional white robes (thawb) and daggers (janbiyya).

Some of the shops and grocery stores located near the main sit-in in Aden city have remained permanently locked and closed for quite some time. Protesters at the camp said some of the shops belong to people from the north, who are afraid of being harmed if they reopen.

"I know people are getting afraid, particularly those from the north, but I want to reassure them that we will not hurt them if they remain peaceful and respect our thoughts and desire for self-determination," said one of the protesters, 22-year-old Yahya Saeed.

It is not only in Aden in which northerners are becoming more and more afraid as the deadline looms, but other governorates in the south as well, including Hadramout, Abyan, and Al-Mahrah.

Near the end of 2013, prominent Southern Movement figure Sa'ad Bin Hibrih was killed at a checkpoint in Mukalla, the capital city of Hadramout, by soldiers who were believed to be from the north.

That incident was followed by a wave of anger among locals, that led to a surge in violence against northerners, including killings and setting fire to their shops.

Since then, many people in Mu-



Southerners share home-made cookies at a sit-in in Al-Arood Square in Aden City.

kalla who come from the north have left the south for fear of being harmed along with their families.

"After that incident [in 2013] many people [northerners] left Mukalla. I preferred to stay as I believed it was just a sudden outburst of anger that would disappear afterwards," said Waleed Al-Hamas, a 29-year-old from Ibb governorate who has worked in Mukalla for ten years now selling qat, a mildly narcotic plant.

"However, I've decided to leave now that the southerners, through their threats, seem more serious this time. They might take harsh actions against us," Al-Hamas said. He is not sure where he will go, but he said any governorate in the north would do.

Hope for unity

Not all northerners are worried about the Nov. 30 deadline. In fact, some people working for the government, and thus targets of the Southern Movement, feel safe and remain confident.

Sami Qasim Murshid, a 32-year-old from Sana'a who works in the Education Ministry's office in Aden, said that he does not

care about the threat because he believes that Yemen will remain unified and that the National Dialogue Conference (NDC) agreement would overpower any secessionist demands.

"What is going on right now is merely a storm in a teacup. The Southern Movement has not gained any international support for their

cause. Instead the international community has praised the outcomes of the NDC, which will address the southern issue and all southern grievances," he said.

Police officer Saleh Saeed Ghaleb, another northerner whose job title makes him a target of the Southern Movement, also says he is staying calm.

"I am not afraid of the threats made by the Southern Movement," said Ghaleb, who is originally from Taiz, adding that the Southern Movement alone cannot decide over secession or the evacuation of northerners.

In his view, all Yemenis would have to agree on such an important political decision, which he thinks is highly unlikely.

"It's not that easy for the Southern Movement to decide whether to remain unified or not. It should be done via a referendum and with international support. I will continue living in the south along with my family, content and unafraid of what is going on today."

Sameeh Yasser, 43, an accountant from Aden, says he is confident that shared grievances between northerners and

southerners can unite them.

"The northerners are innocent like us. The regime which ruled Yemen after 1994 [not the northerners themselves] has been responsible for everything that happened to all Yemenis," he said.

"The people who looted land, killed people, and laid off employees were not all northerners, but powerful figures," he added.

Indeed, many northerners feel they are just as much a victim of the dictatorial regime that ruled Yemen, and that their problems are shared with those from the south.

For Yahya Ali, a construction worker in Aden who is originally from Taiz, the Nov. 30 deadline is too far away to even think about. Ali does not have a fixed job and says all that is on his mind is the daily struggle to survive.

"I depend on a daily wage. Sometimes I find myself unemployed, waiting in the streets with my shovel for anyone to provide me work. I have no family to care about and business to lose, so I am not afraid of these threats, and I will stay here unless they force me out," said the 33-year-old.

Murshid felt the same way, saying "I am not letting those thugs turn my life into a nightmare. I am here along with my family and am not moving because I believe that nothing bad will happen to us."

"The solution to all our problems is to implement the NDC agreement, which will bring justice to all Yemenis, both northerners and southerners," said Yasser.



A protestor wraps himself with the southern flag.



The flag of the former South Yemen draped over Hadid mountain in Aden city.



Posters of southern leaders and martyrs in an encampment in Aden city.



The southern flag waves from atop the November 30th statue in Aden City. Nov. 30, 1967 was the day South Yemen gained independence from the British.

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Arab women making slow strides

She remembered that surprisingly enough Islamists from Ennahda were sometimes more in favor of gender parity than democratic parties. Skandrani said the main chal-

lenge back in 2011 was to convince political parties that there were indeed apt female politicians. "Often times, men in political parties said they wouldn't be able to find suit-

able female candidates. So we traveled the country and collected the resumes of perfectly able women to prove them wrong." Her organization also trained female candidates in political communications and lobbying.

Some 5,000 women ran in the 2011 election and almost as many ran in 2014. Yet, Skandrani said she regretted that gender parity only applied to the lists of candidates—meaning that each party should present 50 percent of women candidates—and not to the heads of the lists. Article 23 of the Tunisian electoral law requires only one-third of women as heads of the lists. "Considering the advanced status of Tunisian women historically and the 2014 constitution, which provides for equal rights, women could have done much better in the last election if integral parity had been ensured in the electoral law." She said it would be her organization's next battle for the coming 2015 municipal elections, when an updated electoral code will be enforced. The existing partial parity rule will apply to the upcoming November presidential election, in which a fe-

male candidate is running.

Tunisia stands as one of the rare exceptions for female political participation in the Arab world. According to a report published annually by the World Economic Forum (WEF), most Arab countries fare poorly on gender parity. WEF's Global Gender Gap Report uses four criteria to assess the parity gap between men and women: Economic participation and opportunity, educational attainment, health and survival, and political empowerment. Not a single Arab country ranked above 113th place, out of 142 surveyed in the 2014 edition. Kuwait had the best ranking at 113th, followed by the United Arab Emirates (115th) and Qatar (116th). Tunisia ranked 123rd, with its lowest score for economic participation (130th) and its best ranking for political empowerment (82nd). In comparison, Kuwait ranked 137th for the latter criteria, Morocco 98th and Egypt 134th.

But Courbage, a French-Lebanese national, had an explanation: Progress takes time. "The poor performance of Arab countries in the WEF report doesn't mean they haven't improved over time. They have, but in parallel with other countries, and that is why Arab countries are still close to the bottom," he said. He cited illiteracy rates in the Arab world: "Illiteracy in the 1960s reached 80 percent of the Arab population compared to 20 percent today, but considering that it was probably 0 percent in Sweden all along, Arab countries still rank poorly."

The WEF report measures the economic participation of women as a factor of gender parity. This criterion does not necessarily make sense in Gulf countries where female university enrollment exceeds male enrollment, but where women "aren't obliged to work as they can easily and happily live on their husband's salary," said Courbage. However, change in the status of women is in the making even in conservative Gulf countries. "Look at Saudi Arabia where the fertility rate has dramatically decreased in the past 40 years, with 3.3 children per woman."

Arab women's economic participation and their share in the overall labor force only partially reflects the reluctance of male-dominated societies, Courbage argued. Many low-income and middle-income Arab countries such as Morocco, Tunisia, and Egypt have been deeply affected by the 2008 downturn of the global economy and consequently hit by higher unemployment rates. Arab women are historically more vulnerable to economic crises as they hold less secure jobs or jobs in the informal sector.

The upsurge in Islamist politics, whether it be in Morocco with the ruling Parti de la Justice et du Développement (PJD), Tunisia with Ennahda, or Egypt with the Muslim Brotherhood, has also set women back a few decades. "But this is all temporary," said Courbage. "Deep transformations are underway such as the demographic transition and one should not forget that it took Europe a century and half from the industrial revolution to truly empower women."

The International Labor Organization (ILO) says that decreasing fertility rates, increasing life ex-

pectancy and therefore an increasing working-age population will require the recruitment of more women into the workforce. ILO forecasts an increase of at least 50 percent in the Arab female participation rate by 2050, down from 26 percent—one of the lowest rates of female economic participation in the world, relative to a global aver-

age of 56 percent.

The status of Arab women is evolving but it will require the commitment of governments, rights organizations, and women alongside men to speed up the pace and make sure that economic participation and higher school enrollment rates also translate into political empowerment.

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