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On Friday, Nov. 7, thousands demonstrated in the capital in support of former President Ali Abdullah Saleh. The protesters shouted slogans against President Hadi and foreign interference, and called for Saleh or his son Ahmed to become president. Photo by Brett Scott

## GPC retaliates for UN Sanctions targeting Saleh

Story by **Ali Ibrahim Al-Moshki**  
Photo by **Brett Scott**

**SANA'A, Nov. 9**—The General People's Congress (GPC) standing committee, led by former President Ali Abdullah Saleh, removed President Abdu Rabu Mansour Hadi from his position as deputy chairman and general-secretary of the GPC in a meeting held on Saturday.

President Hadi's office could not be reached for comment.

Some have said that the decision came as a response to the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) sanctions imposed on Saleh, as well as Houthi leaders Abd Al-Khaliq Al-Houthi and Abdullah Yahya Al-Hakim, last Friday. Lithuanian UN Ambassador Raimonda Murmokaite, chairwoman of the UNSC's Yemen Sanctions Committee, stated on Friday that all 15 members of the committee agreed to blacklist Saleh, along with the two Houthi leaders. The three men are now subject to a global travel ban and asset freeze.

Prime Minister Bahah affirmed his government's readiness to comply with the sanctions in a press conference on Sunday, saying "we respect the decision [to impose sanctions] and will cooperate with the UNSC in doing so."

Following the announcement, Saleh stated on his official Facebook page "I possess nothing for them to take, however, whatever they want, they can have. My wealth is measured through Yemen's culture and preserved through its unity. All my wealth, either in or outside Yemen, is theirs."

Yasin Al-Tamimi, a political analyst working with the state-run Saba News Agency, claimed that the sanctions were in response to recent political developments throughout the country. "Saleh and the Houthis have been working together recently to spread their influence throughout the country, with the former actively seeking to



From his residence in the capital, Ali Abdullah Saleh waved to his supporters on Friday as they protested the threat of sanctions by the UN against him. Later the same day, sanctions were imposed.

take over entire governorates outside of Sana'a." This campaign, he says, "has undermined the political process and helped lead to the collapse of the economy. Sanctions were imposed to target those who are perceived to threaten Yemen's stability in order to prevent the derailing of the political process."

### Conflicting Reports

On Wednesday Nov. 5, GPC members told Al-Jazeera English that representatives of the US State Department had privately threatened to have Saleh expelled from Yemen. State Department Spokeswoman Jen Psaki flatly denied those claims the next day. Despite the denial, thousands of Saleh supporters demonstrated in Tahrir Square in Sana'a last Friday, denouncing the alleged threats. From Tahrir Square the protesters headed to Saleh's residence, where he

came out on his balcony and waved to his supporters.

"The GPC claimed last week that the United States was attempting to expel Saleh from Yemen," said Al-Tamimi. "On Friday, [Saleh] gathered his supporters, claiming that he would never allow foreign powers to meddle in Yemen's affairs or force him to leave the country."

Senan Al-Hajji, a GPC representative in Yemen's parliament, reiterated this sentiment. "Saleh wants to stay in Yemen," he said.

Al-Hajji believes the sanctions are unlikely to have any effect inside the country. "Such decisions are rarely ever implemented in reality and on the ground," he said.

### Future threats

Ha'il Salam, a prominent Yemeni lawyer who follows political developments in the country, claimed that implementing an asset freeze

on Saleh would be difficult. "Imposing an asset freeze would derail Yemen's political transition," he said. "Saleh controls the GPC, which is allied with the Houthi rebels, who are the real power on the ground controlling events in the country," he added. "Any attempt by Hadi to implement this decision could lead to further war."

Regarding the UN's failure to sanction Houthi leader Abdulmalik Al-Houthi, Tamimi said that sanctions on the leader would have increased instability in the country.

Mahmoud Al-Junaid, a member of the Houthis' Political Office, stated "even if the UNSC decision had included Abdulmalik Al-Houthi, it would be of no concern to us." He added, "we're in the midst of a revolution. We can mend our relationship with Yemen's political factions ourselves, we don't need foreign powers to help us."

## Ministers sworn in amid Houthi, GPC objection

■ **Ali Ibrahim Al-Moshki**

**SANA'A, Nov. 10**—Thirty of Yemen's 36 appointed ministers were sworn in on Sunday morning despite objection from the Houthis and the General People's Congress (GPC).

The new technocratic government held its first meeting on Sunday after a swearing in ceremony. The meeting was attended by the president and 30 out of 36 appointed ministers.

"Thirty out of 36 ministers performed the constitutional oath. Three ministers could not attend the meeting because they were outside the country, and we are negotiating with the last three ministers [who rejected their appointment] to convince them to join the new government," Prime Minister Khalid Bahah said after the cabinet's first meeting.

The three appointed ministers who declined to participate in the government are Gabool Al-Mutawakel, appointed minister of social affairs and labor, Ahmed Luqman, minister of civil service and insurance, and Ahmed Al-Kuhlani, the minister of parliament and Shura council affairs.

On Saturday evening, Al-Mutawakel posted an apology on Facebook saying "thank you for the trust I have been given as minister of social affairs and labor within the new formation... I hope you accept my apology for not accepting the position, there are reasons preventing me at this time."

The Yemen Times was unable to reach any of the ministers who declined their posts for comment. Al-Mutawakel is an independent, while the other two ministers who declined their posts on Saturday are GPC members.

Also on Saturday, a statement published by the GPC's Standing Committee read that "due to their [the president's and the prime minister's] failure to consult with the GPC in forming the new government and due to appointing GPC members in the new government without their knowledge and without the GPC knowledge, we have decided not to participate in the new government."

Abdulmalik Al-Fuhaidi, a leading figure within the party and the editor-in-chief of Al-Motamar Net, a GPC mouthpiece, told the Yemen Times on Monday that the party instructed its members who were appointed as ministers to reject their positions.

Of the seven GPC members appointed as ministers, two declined. As for the five who accepted their posts, Al-Fuhaidi said the party will "launch procedures against them," implying they would be punished, but declined to explain further.

Muftah Al-Zoubah, who is a member in the GPC, confirmed that Hadi chose the ministers without discussing it with the candidates or with their political parties. This, he said, is what led the GPC and some of its appointed members to reject their appointments.

The Houthis also objected on Saturday to the formation of the new cabinet.

"President Hadi chose the members of this cabinet without adhering to the standards that were included in the Peace and National Partnership Agreement," said Mahmoud Al-Junaid, a member in the Houthis' Political Office. "Among these standards were honesty, integrity, and the need to consult with other political parties. We were shocked to find names listed as being part of the new cabinet that we had previously opposed."

Al-Junaid continued, "Hadi re-appointed some ministers that we had removed on Sept. 21, including Abdulrazzaq Al-Ashwal, former minister of education, who is now minister of technical affairs, and Abdulrahman Al-Akwa, former and now current minister of electricity, and was appointed again in the same position."

"We will hold the president of the republic and the prime minister responsible in the event that the new government fails," Al-Junaid told the Yemen Times after the swearing in ceremony on Sunday. "And like we did with the previous reconciliation government on Sept. 21, we will overthrow this government if it fails."

The new government is comprised of 36 ministers, 26 of whom are new and ten of whom have previously held ministerial posts. Eighteen of the posts were given to independents, four to Islah Party members, seven to the GPC, three to the Yemeni Socialist Party, one to each the Nasserist and the Al-Rashad party, and two to the Houthis.

Around 40 percent of the ministerial positions were given to southerners, while only 12 percent of ministers appointed are women, one of whom declined the position. This is in contrast to the 30 percent quota for women put forth in the NDC outcomes, which the Peace and National Partnership Agreement, signed Sept. 21, is supposed to abide by.

As for what is to come, the agreement stipulates "the government shall, within thirty (30) days following the appointment of the cabinet, develop a program that is consensual and based primarily on the implementation of the outcomes of the National Dialogue Conference. The program shall be submitted to the parliament for a vote of confidence."

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## Change Square's last remaining tents demolished

Story and photo by  
**Ali Aboluhom**

**SANA'A, Nov. 10**—Nearly four years after they first went up, the last tents of Change Square in the capital were demolished on Monday, with police officers and officials from the mayor's office present at the site.

The structures that were erected during the uprising were not limited to tents, but were often full-blown buildings made out of brick. The squares were set up shortly after people took to the streets to call for the stepping-down of former President Ali Abdullah Saleh. The majority of the tents disappeared following the signing of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) Initiative on Nov. 27, 2011, but a couple dozen remained until they were dismantled early Monday.

According to Amin Jomaaan, the secretary general of the local council in Sana'a, "this step is by order of the president and the prime minister based on the Peace and National Partnership Agreement that was signed by the parties."

Moamar Harsh, head of the security committee tasked with removing the tents, confirmed that the actions were a result of an order from the president and prime minister.

In a statement to Defense Ministry's Sept. 26 website, Jomaaan said the various teams tasked with removing the tents and construction waste are from the works, hygiene, traffic, and security offices.

The security committee informed the protesters two weeks ago that they would have to remove their tents and belongings, Harash said. The Yemen Times visited Change Square on Oct. 24 and was told by multiple protest-



without success. He argued that the structures blocked the streets and prevented families and cars from passing through.

"I can not believe that finally the tents will be removed forever and the streets will be reopened," Al-Bashiri said.

Mohammed Al-Sabri, the head of the Media Committee in Change Square, said the remaining protesters, which he estimated at over 100, intend to sue the Mayor's Office for the "crack down," as he called it.

According to Mohammed Al-Bukhaiti, a member of the Houthis' Political Office, the Houthis approved the removal of encampments at Change Square as part of the Peace and National Partnership Agreement signed Sept. 21.

Al-Bukhaiti said he was not able to give specific details of the terms of the agreement, but in the security annex of the Peace and National Partnership Agreement, article 15 states the following: "With the start of the formation of the new government, the camps established around the capital, Sana'a, as well as camps within the city limits, shall be dismantled and removed."

Al-Bukhaiti believes this applies to the Change Square, and not just the Houthi camps erected before the Houthi takeover of Sana'a.

Saleh Essa, a 25-year-old Houthi protester, said he will leave the square in line with the Peace and National Partnership Agreement.

"As long as the Houthis participated in the signature of the agreement, we should abide by it and let the people see the square as it was before 2011," he said.

When they saw security forces and bulldozers, some protesters fled from their tents for fear of being harmed, but many said that they would come back and continue protesting.

## 2011 protestor dies while in prison

■ **Khalid Al-Karimi**

**SANA'A, Nov. 10**—A prisoner accused of killing two police officers during a protest in 2011 died on Sunday in the Hajja governorate Central Prison. He was allegedly denied treatment by prison staff for chest inflammation.

Waleed Al-Shaibari was accused of killing Colonel Hamoud Al-Atbaei and a second officer named Hamoud Al-Gharbani in Hajja city on April 22, 2011, in an anti-government protest. He has been in prison ever since, according to Sadeq Ali Hussein, Shaibani's cellmate who spoke to the Yemen Times over the phone. Hussein claimed that he and Al-Shaibari were arrested together, along with 17 other protestors.

Al-Shaibari had been suffering from chest inflammation for over a year, and had been taken to a

hospital six months ago. Hussein claimed that Al-Shaibari had never received proper medical treatment while at the hospital, and "he was prescribed medicine without doctors ever having conducted tests or given him a diagnosis. Thus, he continued suffering."

"His pain started getting severe about ten days ago, however shortly after he claimed he felt better. However by Sunday, his symptoms had worsened, and he died," said Hussein. "Other inmates and I shouted at prison guards to try to save Al-Shaibari," Hussein added. "But they ignored us."

Abdullah Tior, warden of the prison, confirmed that Al-Shaibari had been suffering from chest inflammation in the days prior to his death. However, he refuted Hussein's claims saying that he had been denied treatment. "We tried to bring Al-Shaibari to the hospital on

Sunday, however he died before he arrived." He further rejected claims that Al-Shaibari had been denied proper medical treatment during his previous visit to the hospital, and that he had been prescribed medicine based on a doctor's diagnosis.

Adel Al-Shaibari, brother of Waleed Al-Shaibari, confirmed that the family had received Waleed's body, and that he had been buried, but wouldn't comment further on the case.

Abdulaziz Al-Baghdadi, a lawyer for the Yemen Observatory for Human Rights, told the Yemen Times that if Hussein's accounts regarding Al-Shaibari's treatment in prison were true, it would be considered inhumane. "It is unlawful to prevent a sick inmate from receiving treatment. He should have been hospitalized and then brought back to prison," he said.

## Houthis take over military base in Marib

■ **Ali Ibrahim Al-Moshki**

**SANA'A, Nov. 10**—Armed Houthis took over the Al-Mas military base located in the Medghil Al-Jedaan district of Marib governorate on Sunday evening.

Drill instructor Abdul Kareem Ahmed Da'bas, who was on leave at the time of the attack, told the Yemen Times that he was contacted by his colleagues and told that ten cars loaded with Houthis surrounded the camp and fought for thirty minutes with soldiers who were manning the gates and surveillance towers before surrendering to the Houthis.

He added that Houthis then deployed themselves at the gates of the camp and on surveillance towers after seizing a number of tanks and heavy weapons stashed within the armory.

The takeover occurred just hours after President Abdu Rabu Mansour Hadi swore in the ministers for Yemen's new government.

Ali Al-Qahoom, a member of the Houthi's Political Office, described the event, saying "popular committees loyal to Ansar Allah [the Houthis] took control of the Al-Mas camp, after receiving information from soldiers inside and local tribesmen that Al-Qaeda was preparing an attack on the governorate."

"We will continue to deploy our armed forces throughout Marib in order to preserve the safety and security of its residents," he added. "This does not violate the terms of the Peace and National Partnership Agreement. If the government is able to combat Al-Qaeda on its own, we will withdraw our forces," he said.

According to article 1 of the Peace and National Partnership Agreement's security annex, "parties pledge to defuse all elements of political and security tensions, to resolve any conflict through dialogue, and to enable the state to fulfil its functions." The annex explicitly refers to "the military and security situation in and the issues related to Amran, Al-Jawf, Marib, Sana'a, and any other governorates."

The Al-Mas camp is part of the 3rd Military Command and is led by Brigadier General Ahmed Saif. Formerly used by Ali Abdullah Saleh's Republican Guards, the base has, since Saleh's overthrow, primarily been used as a training base for new recruits. The camp is also known for possessing an armory used to hold large numbers of weapons and military hardware, including ten tanks, said Da'bas. Despite the Houthi takeover of the camp, several hundred soldiers remain inside guard-

ing the armory, he added.

According to Da'bas, "some soldiers cooperated with the Houthis and helped them to take the camp, providing them with information about its layout and claiming that Al-Qaeda was preparing an attack on the area."

Nasser Ali Ahmed Ibrahim, a soldier with the 14th Armored Brigade in the Sahan Al-Jinna area located several hundred meters from Al-Mas, confirmed that the Houthis had taken over the camp, which he referred to as an important strategic military location.

"Houthis control the Al-Mas camp which is critical for asserting control over the whole governorate, due to its location and the amount of hardware stashed in its armory," he said.

"We fear that Houthis might try to break into our base next, as they now possess a large amount of heavy weapons. A number of soldiers in many brigades have been loyal to the Houthis, a fact which has helped them take over other camps."

He added that Houthis established a checkpoint on a road leading into the Al-Mas camp in early September.

The Yemen Times contacted the governor's office and the governorate's security office, however neither would comment on the event.

## With Hadi out of GPC leadership, Yemen Today resumes broadcasting

■ **Bassam Al-Khameri**

**SANA'A Nov. 9**—The Yemen Today TV channel, owned by the General People's Congress (GPC) and other shareholders close to the GPC, resumed broadcasting on Saturday, despite announcing its closure last week.

Faisal Al-Shabibi, the manager of the channel's News Department, told the Yemen Times that the channel resumed its work after the GPC's Standing Committee met on Saturday and agreed to restart the work of Yemen Today.

Abdulmalik Al-Fuhaidi, a member of the GPC's Media Committee and head of the GPC mouthpiece Al-Motamar Net, confirmed that the channel resumed its programs after the GPC Standing Committee met on Saturday and reached a consensus on resuming the channel's broadcasting.

The Standing Committee—headed by Yemen's former president and current head of the party, Ali Abdullah Saleh—includes prominent party figures and is in charge of formulating the GPC's political agenda.

Kamal Al-Safani, Yemen Today's production manager, told the Yemen Times that the channel is resuming its programs gradually.

"News bulletins and daily programs will start today and the other weekly programs will begin this week," Al-Safani said on Sunday.

On June 11, under the command of President Abdu Rabu Mansour Hadi, Presidential Guards stormed the channel's premises. Ever since, Yemen Today has put its operations on hold and announced its definite closure last week, on Nov. 3.

The Yemen Times reported on Nov. 5, that the channel shut down

for financial reasons. Ahmed Al-Kebisi, a renowned TV presenter at Yemen Today who attended the board meeting which decided over the channel's future, told the Yemen Times last week that financial disputes led to the channel's closure.

When asked about the channel's renewed broadcasting, Al-Kebisi explained that Hadi, as the GPC's secretary-general, voted against financial support of the channel. The party's payment to the channel and the resumption of Yemen Today's broadcasting are directly linked to Hadi's dismissal as the GPC's secretary-general and its deputy, Al-Kebisi said. Hadi held both positions in the party.

The GPC had reached several agreements with President Hadi to resume the channel's operations, but the deal never reached fruition, Al-Fuhaidi said.

After three months without payment, employees of the channel received their salaries on Sunday. A source in the channel's financial department told the Yemen Times, on the condition of anonymity, that he does not know where the money for salaries came from.

The GPC's decision to restart Yemen Today channel came after the Security Council issued sanctions against Saleh on Friday. Political analyst Yasin Al-Tamimi said that Saleh is challenging these sanctions by removing Hadi as the party's general-secretary and by resuming the channel's broadcast.

In addition to the channel's news bulletins, documentary films, and two daily shows, it provides airtime to Yemenis who express their personal opinions, condemning the United Nations' sanctions and lending their support to Ali Abdullah Saleh.



### Fighting in Al-Khibza village, Rada'a

**SANA'A, Nov. 10**—Clashes broke out on Wednesday morning between Houthis and tribesmen in the Al-Khibza village in Rada'a district, Al-Baida governorate.

The governorate's spokesperson, Nasser Al-Sanei, said the Houthis stormed Al-Khibza village on Wednesday morning, which led to intense fighting that remained ongoing as of Wednesday evening.

Al-Khibza is located in Qaifa area, which is considered to be a stronghold of Al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP).

Last week on Nov. 4, AQAP field commander Nabil Al-Dhahab was reportedly killed in an airstrike in Al-Khibza.

### Coast guard detains over 70 smuggling ships

**SANA'A Nov. 10**—The Yemeni coast guard seized 73 boats in the Aden Gulf between July 2013 and October 2014 that were smuggling people and a number of other illicit goods, according to the general manager of the Coast Guards Authority in the Gulf of Aden, Brigadier General Mohammad Al-Shouqfa.

Al-Shouqfa explained in a statement to the Defense Ministry's September 26 website that the boats were being used to smuggle African refugees into Yemen, as well as to bring in fireworks, motorbikes, gas tanks, wine, and many other items.

Al-Shouqfa added that the ships, along with their cargo, were handed over to the relevant authorities to undergo necessary legal procedures.

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# Innovative ideas, same old barriers

*An acclaimed young Yemeni tries to get his inventions to the masses*

Story and photos by  
**Ali Abulhoohom**

**I**brahim Hamza has been taking things apart and putting them back together since he was seven years old. While other kids his age were out playing, or inside watching TV, the 16-year-old was studying or seeing what he could build out of simple household items.

Hamza was given the title of "inventor" in Nov. 2013 by the Yemeni Association of Inventors, a local NGO established in 2004 that seeks to foster people's ideas and innovations. According to the association's public relations manager, Mohammed Abdulmajeed, the honor is bestowed upon Yemenis who have created a unique machine or device ready for practical use.

While Hamza's innovative mind could have the potential to help many Yemenis, he feels he is being held back due to a lack of financing and support. His father died when he was little and the responsibility for raising him was placed squarely on his mother, who continues to care for him.

"My mom taught me how to be patient and think deeply about people and things around me. Unlike most moms, my mother always encouraged me to press ahead with what I was interested in," Hamza said.

A perfect example of this, he explained, was what happened one day when he was ten. "One day when my mom was out, I snuck the TV into my room and dismantled it into small pieces in order to understand how it works. When my mom got back home and discovered what I did, she was surprised. But she continued to encourage me nonetheless."

While Hamza's mother noticed early on that her son was different from other children, she said it was then, at age ten, that she believed he could go on to be an inventor.

"Hamza was different from other children. He never wanted to waste his time playing. He paid more attention to reading and watching scientific programs on TV," she said. "I encouraged him because I want to



**Hamza's electric desalination device consists of two small plastic pipes with pieces of glass attached to them, connected to electric circuits.**



**Hamza with a model-sized version of his fire extinguishing projectile. If built to the proper size, Hamza claims it will be able to put out major fires in forests, factories, or chemical laboratories.**

see my son become successful and serve his country."

Born and raised in Sana'a, Hamza is currently attending the Al-Salam School. He enjoys scientific subjects like chemistry, physics, and math. After graduation, he hopes to study physics abroad.

Hamza has taken part in a few exhibitions in Sana'a put on by the Yemeni Association of Inventors. Mohammed Al-Hasani, the organization's media director, said Hamza's inventions garnered the praise of the attendees.

"People were impressed by Ham-

za's inventions. His achievements were great, particularly considering his age," Al-Hasani added.

However, the praise did not translate into tangible support. Hamza said he has tried to market his inventions to local companies but has so far received no responses.

Abdulmajeed thinks that Hamza's inventions, like others, have been overlooked due to the economic and political situation facing Yemen.

"There aren't any companies or businessmen taking on my inventions and turn them into something tangible and real," he said.

At the same time, he remains hopeful, adding that "someday Hamza's inventions will be purchased either by the government or businessmen once the country stabilizes."

Hamza shares Abdulmajeed's optimism, saying that, "although my inventions haven't yet been purchased, that does not mean I will stop. I'll continue developing new ideas for inventions until I find someone who can make my dreams a reality in the hands of the people," Hamza said.

"I want the whole world to benefit from my inventions," he added.

**The Chemical Cup**  
One of Hamza's inventions is the so-

called Chemical Cup, a small, light cup that can fit into one's pocket, and can indicate in minutes whether a liquid is acidic or alkaline.

One practical use of the device, according to Hamza, could be if someone is bitten by a snake or other insect. "The Chemical Cup could be used to help identify what type of treatment is most suitable for the victim by indicating the type of poison detected in a blood sample," he said.

"This could be considered a diagnosis for people who don't have access to medical centers," he explained.

At the moment however, the device lacks a small solar plate, needed to power the machine. When developing new inventions he says, some parts are unaffordable, while others are not easily found in Yemen.

## Electric Desalination

This device is made out of two plastic pipes fitted with pieces of glass, and connected to electric circuits. In its current form, the device is used to desalinate sea water in small quantities. However, Hamza hopes that with more resources, he can convert it into a bigger device.

The device can also be powered by batteries and with additional modifications, could generate electricity.

"The device can be taken apart into small pieces, and transported easily," he said.

"If a sailor gets lost at sea," Hamza explained, "he could use the device to desalinate water for his own personal consumption and for the boat generator."

The device also currently lacks a solar plate, as well as an uninterruptible power system (UPS).

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## Extinguishing Projectiles

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Hamza explained that the purpose for creating the device was to facilitate the work of fire-fighters.

The device launches a projectile filled with the fire retardant into the heart of the fire, which he claims speeds up the process.

Hamza said that he is currently developing other inventions, but requires more resources and needs to do more research.

"When my new inventions are ready, I'm going to take part in the upcoming inventions expo. Hopefully I'll find someone interested in investing in them and getting them off the ground," he said.



**Hamza shows off his Chemical Cup invention, which can help treat poisonous insect bites.**



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# Houthi expansion: Gain or loss?

■ **Khalid Al-Karimi**

It has been three months since Yemen's national consensus government decided to cut fuel subsidies—a move that angered many within Yemen, in particular the country's poor and disenfranchised. The government's unpopular decision has provided the Houthis, or "Ansar Allah," an opportunity to enter the national political sphere on the pretext of aiding those who have been underserved.

In August, the group took to the streets of Sana'a, gaining popular support along the way, eventually overpowering government forces, taking control of the city, and extending their influence throughout the country. Since then, and after a string of questionable moves by the Houthis, some have begun to turn against the group.

"I joined the Houthi marches after fuel subsidies were cut on July 30," said Akram Al-Shawafi, a youth activist in Sana'a. "I was not alone," he added. "Many independent activists and others affiliated with political parties took part as well."

Al-Shawafi never imagined that the Houthis would take over the capital, and later expand their control to other governorates in the north. "I never expected that they'd be able to pull off something like that, albeit unopposed by the government, military or security forces. I, like many others, wasn't aware of their real agenda," he said.

Amar Al-Amri, a 25-year old university graduate living in Sana'a, who considers himself politically independent, says that he took part in marches sponsored by the Houthis back in March calling for the reinstating of fuel subsidies. "However, they have since made a

series of power grabs. This I don't support."

## Backlash

In July, the government set the price of gas and diesel at YR4,000 (\$18.62) per 20 liters. Before the decree, 20 liters of diesel and gas would cost around YR2,000 (\$9.30) and YR2,500 (\$11.60), respectively.

"It wasn't just Houthi supporters that took part in the marches, but lots of others who were hurt by the decision to cut subsidies. The Houthis exploited public outrage in order to pursue their own interests," said Al-Amri.

On Sept. 9, government forces killed eight people demonstrating in a Houthi-led march near Yemen's Cabinet building in Sana'a, which sparked condemnation from a number of political parties and earned the Houthis sympathy from a large portion of the population.

"I don't support the use of violence, or government crackdowns on protestors regardless of their political affiliation," Al-Amri said.

Since the signing of the Peace and Partnership Agreement on Sept. 21, the Houthis have stopped their protests. Those who have once again taken to the streets did so to protest measures taken by the Houthis, particularly in Sana'a. In Hodeida, the Tehama Movement has been particularly active in demonstrating against the Houthis.

Many protestors claim the Houthis failed to live up to their commitments as spelled out in the Peace and Partnership Agreement, particularly article 1 of the agreement's security annex, which calls on "all parties committed to ensuring security...[to] cease all forms of violent acts in the capital and its surrounding areas," which has been

interpreted by many as a call for the Houthis to disarm their militias and remove them from the streets. On Oct. 26, President Abdu Rabu Mansour Hadi publically called for the Houthis to withdraw from the capital city of Sana'a and other cities that they currently control, to no avail.

Majed Siraj, a political analyst at the Sheba Strategic Studies Center in Sana'a, told the Yemen Times that, "the Houthis garnered huge popular support both inside and outside the capital when they made their calls to combat corruption and lower the price of fuel. However, they were wrong to assume that they would be the sole beneficiaries of the negotiation process that followed. Everything they've gained for themselves has been achieved through armed force."

Siraj compared the Houthis' current actions to that of the Islah Party, who was accused by some of attempting to hijack the youth revolution that broke out in 2011. "If they choose to ignore the demands of the people, their victory won't last long. The opposite is in fact true," he said.

The Islah Party played a major role in the 2011 uprising that overthrew former President Ali Abdullah Saleh, and includes many prominent political figures, among them Hussein, Sadiq and Hamid Al-Ahmar, members of the powerful Al-Ahmar family.

## Marginalization

On Sept. 21, armed Houthis fought and took over the 6th Armored Division base on 60th Street, the last bastion of resistance to the Houthi's takeover of Sana'a. Many grassroots youth activists who supported the Houthis admit they did not have the foresight to predict such a move



Throughout August, tens of thousands took to the streets in Sana'a to protest the lifting of fuel subsidies.

or what followed. "I was wrong to think that the Houthis would stop their advance after taking over the 1st Armored Division [officially called the 6th Armored Division]. They continued to spread throughout the capital, replacing government forces at checkpoints and roundabouts. They hid their real goals behind populist demands," said Al-Shawafi.

Al-Shawafi stated that the Houthis lack the type of long term planning and vision that could allow them to become a viable and legitimate political alternative, adding instead that the Houthis are now undermining the legitimacy of the state and the rule of law.

Since their control of the city, reports have circulated that Houthi fighters have stormed buildings owned by or affiliated with members of the Islah Party, and other Salafi organizations, seen as the Houthis primary political rivals. Recently on Nov. 5, two Salafi students were attacked and one killed by Houthis while on their way to study at a local

Salafi mosque in Sana'a.

Abdullah Ismail, Editor-in-Chief of the Al-Wahdawi newspaper, affiliated with Yemen's socialist party, describes the attacks on the students and other Salafis as, "uncivilized behavior that demonstrates that the Houthis don't seek to co-exist with their opponents." He added that the Houthis "are an aggressive organization that does not seek to implement real democracy."

Fatima Al-Aghbari, another youth activist in Sana'a, said she also took part in the Houthi-led marches. "I participated in the marches, but stopped when I started seeing people chanting Houthi slogans and holding Houthi symbols."

The Houthis' three demands—removing the government, implementing the NDC agreement, and reinstating fuel subsidies—were the demands of the people, said Al-Aghbari. "The Houthis hid behind these demands in order to conceal their real intentions."

Similar to Al-Ashawafi, Al-Aghbari claims that the Houthis have

lost the trust of people. "Their recent actions, including the recent take over of Hodeida in October, in addition to clashing with tribesmen in Ibb and Ra'ada, have revealed their true colors, that they are in fact violent. Their war with Al-Qaida has taken a heavy toll on them. People respected them more when they were protesting peacefully in the city's squares," she said.

## Now is no time to judge

"It's premature to judge the Houthis now. The General People's Congress (GPC) ruled the country for 33 years. The Joint Meeting Parties (JMP) and the GPC have ruled together since 2011," said Hussein Al-Bukhaiti, a prominent Houthi figure.

Al-Bukhaiti further pointed out that the Houthis are fighting Al-Qaeda in Al-Baida and Ibb, which he sees as evidence of their good will and intent to improve security throughout Yemen. "This is a case in point of our intention to reform the country for the better."

Ibrahim Al-Moayad, a university graduate and Houthi supporter in Sana'a, reaffirms this sentiment, saying that he supports the Houthis because, "they are fighting terrorism and corruption at a time when the government is doing nothing. The Houthis are going after Al-Qaida's foothold in the region; this is a positive development," he said.

Mohammed Al-Hassani, a freelance journalist in Sana'a who is affiliated with the Houthis, said the government would not have reversed the decision to cut fuel subsidies if not for the pressure placed on them by the Houthis. "When a taxi driver fills his tank at the gas station for YR3,000 (\$14) instead of YR4,000 (\$18.60), he has the Houthis to thank for that."

# Houthis spread in eight governorates

■ **Ali Ibrahim Al-Moshki**

Houthi tribesmen, otherwise known as "Ansar Allah," are currently showing an increased presence in eight of Yemen's 22 governorates. While some have been taken by force, others surrendered to the Houthis peacefully, while still others remain locked in a vicious cycle of violence between the Houthis and their rivals, both struggling for power and control.

The Houthis first seized the governorates of Sa'ada, Amran and Sana'a between May 2011 and Sept.

2014, as part of a series of power grabs which capitalized on growing instability in the country following Yemen's tumultuous 2011 uprising. In August of this year, the Houthis skillfully took advantage of people's widespread opposition to the government's fuel subsidy cuts, spearheading a series of protests and marches in the capital. Following the Houthi takeover of Sana'a on Sept. 21, five other governorates quickly fell under their control. This article seeks to shed light on each of these governorates and analyze the factors that enabled the Houthis to spread their influence, either through peaceful means or by force.

## The calm before the Storm

Ibb and Hodeida governorates initially surrendered peacefully to the Houthis on Oct. 14, however, intense clashes erupted the very next day between Houthis and Al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP) forces in Ibb governorate. In Hodeida as well, fighting broke out when AQAP took control over the governorate's Jabal Ras district. Once Houthis sent reinforcements to gain the district back, AQAP members left and no fighting has been reported in the governorate ever since.

In Ibb, on the other hand, clashes remain ongoing. A center for local tourism, the governorate is also a mixed region, home to a number of tribes with strong loyalties to the GPC, as well as the Islah Party and AQAP. While Houthi control Ibb city, the governorate's capital, fighting between the Houthis and AQAP continues in the cities of Yarim, Al-Radhma and Al-Sadda, according to Ibrahim Al-Bad'ani, a resident of Ibb city.

"Residents of Ibb rely on tourism for revenue, and are naturally opposed to the spread of armed men throughout the governorate," he added. Furthermore, "locals know the identities of many of the fighters, most of whom are locals themselves and live side by side with residents. That being said, most of those currently posing as Houthis are really just GPC members in tribal clothing."

In Al-Baida, Houthis along with forces from the Yemeni army supported by drone strikes, have been engaging in heavy clashes with AQAP forces since Oct. 17, leading to a high number of casualties on both sides. As of now, no group has been able to assert total control of the governorate. Particularly fierce fighting has taken place in the city of Rada'a.

"Most Rada'a residents are Sunnis, with only a small number of Houthis. In addition, there's a large number of Al-Qaeda fighters in the area, who have long considered Al-Baida's Rada'a district to be their traditional stronghold in northern Yemen," said Muneer Al-Humaiqani, a resident of Rada'a city.

Faid Al-Harazy, an officer in the 7th Military Command that oversees all military bases and security

apparatuses in Al-Baida, confirmed that the violence taking place throughout the governorate can be attributed to the fact that many Sunni tribesmen are sympathizers or supporters of AQAP.

## No resistance and a silent increase of influence

The Houthis have been able to seize control of the Dhamar, Al-Mahweet and Hajja governorates without encountering any resistance. Tribal leaders were said to have coordinated the handover of the provinces with the Houthis in order to avoid bloodshed.

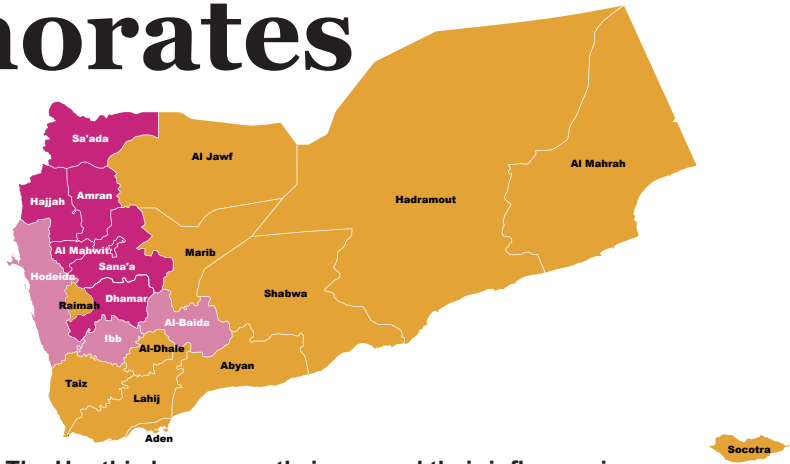
Ali Saeed, a journalist from Al-Mahweet governorate, which fell to the Houthis on Oct. 21, told the Yemen Times that the Houthis are coordinating with the GPC. In contrast to other regions that are home to local political organizations—such as the Southern Movement and the Tehama Movement—the GPC has been the only active political organization in Al-Mahweet since its establishment in the 1980's.

A source within the Logistical Operations Department of the Al-Mahweet governorate, who asked to remain anonymous, said that, "all of the governorate's facilities in Al-Mahweet are under control of the Houthis. Business is running as usual and public employees are performing their duties, however all this is happening under the supervision of Ansar Allah."

The Hajja governorate quietly fell under the control of the Houthis on Oct. 20, two days after the conclusion of a meeting attended by Governor Ali Al-Qaisi, a Houthi delegation led by Abu Malik Al-Faishi, representatives from the governorate's security apparatus, and local administrative councils, according to Hajja-based journalist Rammah Al-Jabri.

"Nearly half the governorate's population are Sada [members of the Hashimi tribe, or descendants of the prophet], who share the same bloodline as the Houthis. The Sada in Hajja... threw their support behind the Houthis."

Houthi control of the governorate grants them control of both the Harad border crossing and Midi seaport, through which large amounts of trade passes into Saudi Arabia.



The Houthis have recently increased their influence in five of Yemen's 22 governorates, now showing a notable presence in a total of eight governorates.

The Houthis are said to conduct searches of all those who enter and exit the port, and collect taxes on all business conducted in the ports, according to Al-Jabri.

Mohammad Ahmed Al-Hareb, a member of Hajja's administrative council, said that local authorities still oversee the governorate's civil administration, but that all issues related to security are controlled by the Houthis. He added that the Houthis have established a number of checkpoints throughout Hajja city, particularly around government buildings.

The Houthis were also able to peacefully take over the Dhamar governorate on Oct. 14, according to Abdullah Al-Seedy, Deputy Director of the Dhamar Security Bureau. He stated that the Houthis spread throughout the governorate after coordinating with local leaders within the bureau, deploying outside the gates of a number of government buildings and facilities. He estimated that roughly 70 percent of Dhamar's population are active Houthi members or supporters, in addition to being registered members of the GPC.

He claims the two groups are currently allies, a fact confirmed by Yahya Mujahid Al-Ansi, a GPC leader and member in the governorate's local administrative council. He stated that the handover of Dhamar to the Houthis was done in coordination with the GPC leadership, and that this could explain why the governorate had not witnessed any violence in recent months. Houthi checkpoints are set up throughout Dhamar city, he claims, with roughly 10 checkpoints set up at the city's

various entrances.

## Houthis' portrayal of events

Ali Al-Qahoom, a member of the Houthis' Political Office, describes the Houthi movement into these governorates as part of a move to support the local popular committees there that had been set up before the Houthis' arrival.

"Most popular committees in most governorates are made up of local residents. Recently, some committees loyal to Ansar Allah have come in as reinforcements from other governorates in order to provide aid and help those that were already there," Al-Qahoom said. He claimed that popular committees loyal to the Houthis have been successful in maintaining peace and security and have not interfered in the administrative affairs of local governments.

He further said that none of governorates currently under the control of the Houthis have witnessed any fighting, as most residents realize the seriousness of the current situation and refuse to be dragged into a new round of violence. "We coordinated with many of the governorates' leaders who formed their own popular committees before the Houthis created their own," Al-Qahoom said.

Regarding the Houthis clashes with AQAP, he stated that, "AQAP hasn't seized any territory in any of the governorates under our control, however some battles have taken place between us and members of Al-Qaeda who are attempting to turn residents and the popular committees against us. However, our fighters have beat them back and

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# Yemen: Learning from past mistakes

■ Wael Zakout

Since the signing of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) Initiative that ended the political crisis in 2011, Yemen embarked on a political transition that was applauded by many regional and international powers. Above all, it saved Yemen from a terrible civil war. The transition included the resignation of former President Ali Abdullah Saleh, the formation of a national reconciliation government, the election of the vice president as the new head of state, and the undertaking of a comprehensive national dialogue to discuss and agree on a political roadmap to resolve Yemen's long term political problems.

The National Dialogue Conference (NDC) was concluded successfully in January 2014. The spirit of the nation was high. Yemenis had chosen the path of dialogue over violence, a model few others in the Arab World have managed to adopt. The NDC included the different colors of the political spectrum: Youth, women, academia, and civil society.

What happened in Sana'a over the last few weeks surprised everyone, even those who keep a close eye on the political landscape. I will not comment on the underlying political reasons or implications of recent events. Rather, I would like to address the economic factors that in part led to them and what the new government should do to increase the likelihood of its success and keep the transition on track.

For more than a year now, I have repeatedly said that the success of the political transition in Yemen will be judged by ordinary people in the streets and not in the Movempick Hotel or the corridors of the presidential palace. People want a government that is responsive to their needs, a cleaner government

that is free of corruption, and a government that delivers improved services, creates jobs, and improves living conditions. I have also said on several occasions that the government should do more to fight corruption. Increasingly, the general public perception in Yemen is that corruption under the outgoing transitional government was not much different than that of the former Saleh regime. The government faced serious fiscal challenges resulting mainly from the frequent attacks on oil and gas pipelines, which undermined the main source of government exports and the hard currency it earned. As a result, the

would be much worse on the economy and the people of Yemen. The government took the big decision to fully liberalize fuel prices, but, failed on several fronts: Firstly, the government should have done this in the context of a broader reform program that includes fighting corruption, eliminating double dippers and ghost workers from the civil service and military, and reforming various sectors in the economy to generate some savings to accompany the subsidy reform. Secondly, senior government officials should have explained the rationale for the fuel subsidy reform to the people, the challenges the government was

have brought Yemen to a significant crossroads: One direction could lead to a corrective revolution to achieve the main goals of the youth revolution of 2011, which the unity government failed to deliver; and the other direction could lead to a serious, protracted and devastating civil war.

While everyone is concerned and unclear about the future of Yemen, I'm one of those few who are still optimistic. I believe and trust in the wisdom of the Yemeni people: "Al-Hikma Al-Yamaniya." On many occasions, the Yemenis have surprised everyone and stepped back from the brink of an all-out civil war.

We see what is happening around us in the region. Wars are raging in many of our beloved Arab World countries, resulting in so many deaths and injuries, millions displaced, and the emergence of radical groups. Although, on a positive note, the monopoly on political power has ended. No one will be able to exercise unchallenged and complete control of society and the institutions of the state. The genie is out of the box, as the old cliché goes, and no one will be able to put it back. Political pluralism that draws on the region's diversity and vast potential is the only way forward for the region. Yemen has an opportunity to show that it is different and once again succeed in the face of enormous challenges. It can draw on the creativity and energy of a young and educated population.

As for the new Yemeni government, they should learn from past mistakes. Here are some suggestions for the next phase that could increase the likelihood of success

**The government should also consider local elections as the first set of elections after the constitution is approved.**

(or reduce the chances of failure).

1. The new government should be given the freedom to distance itself from all political parties and act as one team focusing solely on the interests of the nation.

2. The cabinet should focus on developing and implementing a comprehensive economic reform program to improve government services, improve security, create jobs and fight corruption. The parameters of these reforms are included in the Economic Transition Plan and the Mutual Accountability Framework (MAF) that were developed at the beginning of the transition, but, unfortunately, the bulk of which were never implemented.

3. The new government needs to re-program pledges to accelerate the flow of aid and the implementation of donor-funded projects. This includes the re-programming of funds attached to some of the mega projects that are not expected to start in the coming two years, to fast disbursing programs such as the Social Fund for Development and the Public Works Project. These

programs will deliver thousands of badly needed projects to remote and deprived communities all over the country. This will improve services, generate jobs, and provide new hope for millions of Yemenis.

4. While the NDC and its recommendations should be the main roadmap for completing the political transition, the sequencing of how the recommendations are implemented should be reconsidered. The new government should be quick to implement key aspects of the NDC even before the constitution is drafted or approved.

5. The new government should transfer powers quickly to localities (i.e. to cities, districts, and provinces), including the transfer of local security arrangements to local governments, including traffic police and crime control. The government should also consider local elections as the first set of elections after the constitution is approved. This will ensure that government is brought closer to the people and will anchor decentralization at the local level to ensure services are functioning during the major process of establishing the federal structure of the state.

Clearly, a smooth and stable political process and improved security will be determining factors in the future direction of the country. However, as the last two years have shown, these alone will not be enough. As I said earlier, the people in the streets are the ones who will judge the success of the transition, and without jobs or improved services, they will not be convinced.

*Wael Zakout is the director of the World Bank office Yemen.*

## Radicalism is a political problem, not an Islamic one

■ Mohamed Ghilan

middleeasteye.net  
First published Nov. 7

In the midst of the ongoing discussions about the link between Islam and violence, and all the different "Islamic" considered, one uncomfortable yet fundamental question remains unanswered: Is a Muslim allowed in principle to be violent, should the context justify such behavior? Based on the discourse as it stands, the answer from a Western perspective is an unequivocal "no." Incidentally, groups like Al-Qaeda and the Islamic State (IS) use this as one of their talking points.

Jonathan Lyons pointed out this problem in his book "Islam Through Western Eyes" by stating that the West has "arrogated to itself a monopoly over the legitimate uses of force in conflicts involving the Muslim world." Lyons further says, "the production of Western statements on the subject of violence and war is shaped profoundly by some of the central tenets of the anti-Islam discourse: That Islam is inherently violent and spread exclusively by force; that Muslims

are irrational and are motivated by religious fanaticism. The result is an unchallenged discourse that affords the West the power to determine which tactics, weaponry, and targets are legitimate and which are not."

The very idea that Islam can be categorized into radical, moderate, extremist, etc., gives credence to the Islamophobic assumption that Islam has an inherent quality within it that makes it dangerous—regardless of context. It also removes responsibility from the individual and places blame on the religion itself, as if it is something that can stand on its own without the human element. To assume that Islam is the primary motivation for the presence of extremist violence in the Muslim world is to assume that without Islam, no violent groups would arise in the same political conditions that exist today. It is not mere coincidence that all violent groups in Muslim majority countries in modern times constantly speak of themselves as legitimate forces of resistance against foreign occupation or local despotic governments that serve foreign interests.

Islam is not a religion of peace. It also is not a religion of violence.

It is a religion for human beings, who by nature of their primal instincts sometimes engage in violent conflicts. It is, therefore, not appropriate to view the Quran as a contradictory text, simply because it contains peaceful as well as violent verses. Rather, it is a text that contains passages that relate to behavior during violent conflict, surrounded by passages calling towards peace and co-existence.

Some will insist there is a direct link between the statements violent extremists make and their actions. This is understandable if one views Islam as an entity that can be removed from the culture of a population living with it for the past 14 centuries. What many observers in the West fail to recognize is that for Muslims, Islam can sometimes serve as a language of expression, which may or may not reflect the motivations of an individual or necessarily even the teachings of the religion. This conundrum becomes clearer after reviewing the ample evidence available on violent extremists.

In his article about the wannabe Jihadists who bought "Islam for Dummies" on Amazon, Mehdi

Hasan cites a leaked 2008 classified briefing note on radicalization prepared by MI5's behavioral science unit. It revealed that a large number of radical Muslims "do not practice their faith regularly. Many lack religious literacy and could... be regarded as religious novices." Contrary to their misguided belief that they are fulfilling commands in the Quran, western wannabe jihadists project onto the scripture conclusions they concoct in their minds after reading newspapers. Without the tools of interpretation, this is all they can do with the Quran they recite. However, while this religious ignorance may characterize Western men who join extremist groups, the case for those indigenous to Muslim majority countries is somewhat different.

Contrary to their Western counterparts, radicalism in the Middle East cannot so easily be dismissed as coming from ignorant, economically disadvantaged groups. In the 2007 Gallup publication "Who Speaks for Islam?" John Esposito and Dalia Mogahed dedicated a chapter to address the question what makes a radical. According to Gallup Polls in Muslim countries,

seven percent of the population was identified as having radical political opinions, which view the terrorist attacks of Sept. 11, 2001 in New York as "completely" justified and have an unfavorable opinion of the United States.

Assuming that political radicals were more likely to support or be a source for terrorist group recruitment, their answers were further analyzed and compared with the rest of the population. The politically radicalized were, on average, more educated than moderates: 67 percent of those with radical political opinions have at least a secondary education (versus 52 percent of moderates). This disparity carries over in economic terms where 65 percent of the politically radicalized have an average or above-average income, versus 55 percent of moderates.

When it comes to religious observance, the data showed there were no differences between moderates and radicals in the importance they placed on religion in their daily lives and in their mosque attendance. The striking difference came about in the responses from those who were asked why they

condoned or condemned extremist acts. Many of those who condemned extremist violence did so for religious reasons, citing the Quran as evidence. In opposition, not a single political radical who condoned the attacks of 9/11 cited the Quran as justification. Rather, they gave politically secular reasons.

The available evidence presents a clear case that the presence of violent Muslim extremist groups is a direct consequence of political circumstances imposed by Western foreign policies in the Middle East, and religion merely serves as a vehicle of expression. All attempts to "refute" the theological cases of these groups are distractions from addressing the real causes why these groups exist in the first place. Not only are such attempts unlikely to succeed, they also make it more difficult to tackle the Islamophobic discourse that is becoming increasingly widespread more than it already has been.

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# Iran's headscarf politics

**Fatemeh Aman**  
Middle East Institute  
First published Nov. 3

Iranian women have long been in a cat-and-mouse game with the interpretation and enforcement of many aspects of Islamic law, but most especially the hijab. Since 1983, when the first written law was passed, the Islamic Republic has made it officially mandatory for women to wear the headscarf and loose clothing, with punishment for failing to comply ranging from lashes to imprisonment. Even before the law was passed, just a few strands of hair outside the scarf would not be tolerated. Many women pushed that boundary during the tenure of reformist president Mohammad Khatami in the 1990s and early 2000s, partially showing hair and wearing Western-style clothing with the hijab.

Today, while a large sector of Iranian women voluntarily wear the hijab, women from all parts of Iran and all socioeconomic backgrounds are still defying hijab restrictions, and the struggle between them and the authorities and conservative citizens continues. A string of acid attacks on young women in the city of Isfahan last month raised questions as to whether the attacks were a response to the women wearing "bad hijab"—the term for a woman who does not adhere to the most restricted style of the hijab—and "un-Islamic" clothing.

Despite the threat of such violence or state-enforced punishment, Iranian women have recently been using social media to test boundaries. This past May, six young Iranians, three of them women without headscarves, posted a video of themselves dancing to Pharrell Williams's global hit "Happy." And a Facebook page called "My Stealthy Freedom," featuring "selfies" of bareheaded women who have taken

off the hijab, has attracted hundreds of thousands of followers and "likes."

Can Iran's current political system allow women to choose or reject the hijab freely and voluntarily? To date, the regime has had a harsh reaction to the idea of loosening strict enforcement of the hijab. Many symbols of the early Islamic Republic have gradually disappeared. But can the hijab be one of them? If not, what makes the hijab such a powerful symbol to which the government clings?

The group dancing to "Happy" was arrested for "hurting public chastity," in the words of Police Chief Hossein Sajedinia. Shortly thereafter, the six were shown on Iranian state television confessing. In September, they were sentenced to up to one year in prison and 91 lashes. Their sentences have been suspended for three years, meaning that the punishment won't be imposed if there is no further offense during that time.

The regime has had less success prosecuting the women on Facebook's "My Stealthy Freedom" page, which also appeared in May and has close to 700,000 likes. Facebook CEO Sheryl Sandberg has called it her favorite page on the site.

The images are incredibly varied—students, homemakers, young girls, professional women, and grandmothers—but all depict a bareheaded woman defying the order to wear a hijab.

The page was started by journalist Masih Alinejad, who was forced to leave the country in the aftermath of the popular uprising following the controversial June 2009 re-election of former President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad. She says the idea for the page began by "posting an old picture of myself sitting behind the wheel without [a] headscarf on Facebook and [captioning] it 'stealthy freedom.'"

Masih asked her Facebook friends

to post similar pictures, but she says it wasn't a calculated campaign. In the beginning, friends posted images on her Facebook page, but eventually so many women and girls were sending in their pictures that she decided to start a new page devoted solely to the images, calling it "My Stealthy Freedom."

Facebook lets her do what she cannot as a journalist, she says: Walk freely in the streets of Tehran, taking pictures and reporting on how women feel about wearing the hijab.

Not surprisingly, hard-liners have branded her "anti-Islamic" and "anti-culture," and have labeled the Facebook page "anti-religion."

Little hope for change is on the horizon. On Oct. 8, the Iranian parliament passed a bill that gives the "morality police" a free hand. The new law, which promotes the principle of Amr be Maruf va Nahy az Monkar—"commanding the right and forbidding the wrong"—says no person or institution has the right or authority to prevent the enforcement of "commanding the right." In other words, the law expands the authority of the morality police to dictate to women how to dress. No matter how aggressively the police behave, they will not face prosecution, whereas those being targeted who respond with force will be punished. This law could also potentially be perceived as a green light by "pressure groups"—citizens with radical political and religious views who exert "pressure" on fellow citizens, including beating bad hijab women—to exercise violence without fear of prosecution.

The hijab is such a source of tension and disagreement in Iran that the rhetoric used in debate sometimes veers into the absurd. Gholamhossein Hadad-Adel, a former conservative presidential candidate and member of parliament, called the hijab "a complicated issue like drug addiction." The imam of Mash-

had's Friday prayers then said that a bad hijab is "worse than drug addiction."

In June, 195 members of parliament urged President Hassan Rouhani to take measures to promote the hijab and warned that failing to implement hijab law would have severe consequences.

Conservative political figures are not the only ones pressing for stricter hijab laws. High-ranking religious leaders are as well, such as the Grand Ayatollah Naser Makarem Shirazi, who has called the lack of a "proper hijab" a "threat to the society" and has urged parliament to pass "the right laws" to save society from a "dangerous path."

Even President Rouhani, a moderate, must walk a fine line on the subject even as he speaks against stricter treatment of women. During a trip to Mashhad in September, Rouhani took two very different positions. In a gathering with a more conservative audience, he defended the hijab, promising not to allow the legacy of the Pahlavi regime to reappear; this was a reference to Reza Shah Pahlavi, the father of the late Shah of Iran Mohammad Reza Pahlavi, who unveiled women by force in the 1930s. But among a different audience of elites, Rouhani asked, "is the way to promote chastity through vans? We have no other way?" The reference was to how the morality police round up bad hijabs in vans and take them to local jails.

Fighting against patriarchal demands for stricter enforcement of the hijab is an unofficial but steady women's movement that is expanding its own demands. If in the past



Unveiled Iranian women who videotaped themselves dancing to Pharrell Williams's global hit "Happy" were arrested for "hurting public chastity."

women's rights and freedoms were defined as being able to vote or having access to free media, now, as Tehran-based sociologist and women's rights activist Noushin Ahmadi Khorasani explains, "one of the most important pillars of democracy is the non-interference in the private spheres of the citizens." Ahmadi suggests that a lack of democracy in a society like Iran is due to the fact that the integrity of the private sphere "has not been recognized." The hijab—what one chooses to wear—is firmly in that sphere.

The enforced wearing of the hijab has been one of the most distinguishing characteristics of the Islamic Republic and as such is one of its weightiest issues. In part, the obsession with the headscarf has to do with countering what is seen as the corruption of the former Westernized regime. Powerful figures in both the government and the religious establishment also do not want Iran to currently open up to the West or Iranians to become Westernized, and they see the hijab as a bulwark against such trends. For these leaders, the mandatory hijab is critical

to retain the country's "internal order;" without it, they fear that they would completely lose control of women, who are already the majority of students in Iran's universities; such a situation, in their view, would create "chaos." While there are more moderate members of the regime, like Rouhani, who do not at base approve of the broad and extensive restriction of women, their voices are, as seen with Rouhani, contradictory or muted.

This does not mean that things cannot ease or lessen in severity. Since 1979, many unwritten rules, such as chess playing, singing by women, and the expectation for men to grow a beard, have faded or completely disappeared. Even some laws once considered sacred have changed. In 1998, the law barring women from attending trials or holding positions in the judiciary was rescinded.

So far, though, rules concerning the hijab have remained in place, despite some shifts—both less and more restrictive—over time. Headscarf politics in Iran isn't going anywhere soon.



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	7			3		6	8

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8	P	6	1	S	Z	E	L	9
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# An ambitious plan to end statelessness

IRIN  
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It is now 60 years since stateless people received recognition in international law, and the UN has two conventions (1954 and 1961) dedicated to their protection and the regularization of their situation. Yet an estimated ten million people worldwide still suffer the problems and indignities of having no nationality.

"It may be a bit of an understatement to say that these are the two least loved multilateral human rights treaties," said Mark Manly, head of the UN Refugee Agency's (UNHCR) statelessness unit. "For many years they were pretty much forgotten and that was in large part because they had no UN agency promoting them."

Manly has responsibility for the issue of statelessness, even though most stateless people neither are, nor have ever been, refugees, and this week UNHCR launched an ambitious plan to try to end statelessness over the next ten years.

The plan breaks down the issue into ten action points, addressing the main reasons why people end up stateless. Sometimes it's because children were not registered at birth, or because discriminatory laws prevent their mothers from passing on their own nationality. Some are the victims of ethnic discrimination by countries which refuse to recognize members of their community as citizens; others, especially in Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union, have fallen down the cracks between countries, as it were, after boundaries were redrawn and states divided.

In some of the world's major situations of statelessness UNHCR is already involved. In 1989 tens of thousands of black African Mauritians fled to Senegal to get away from murderous ethnic persecution. A large number of the refugees who came scrambling across the river border had no papers. Their Mauritanian identity cards had been confiscated or torn up by members of the security forces or by their fellow citizens, who told them, "Tu n'est pas Maure; alors tu n'est pas Mauritanien" (You are not a Moor, an Arab, so you are not a Mauritanian).

Senegalese nationality law is gener-



**In the Middle East statelessness is often the result of laws discriminating against women, which only allow nationality to be passed through the father—a problem if the father is not there to register his child or is himself stateless.**

ous, and allows them to apply for citizenship after five years' residence, but many have preferred to go home to Mauritania, assisted by UNHCR which supplied them with travel documents under an agreement governing their return. But large numbers are now finding themselves effectively stateless. Manly told IRIN "what that agreement says, if I remember correctly, is that the nationality of the refugees is 'presumed'—they are presumed to be Mauritanian. However, many people have faced real problems in getting the documentation to prove that they really are Mauritanian, so there is clearly an issue."

"Some 24,000 have returned," adds Bronwen Manby, a consultant who has worked on this issue. "But the Mauritanian organizations are telling us that only about a third have got their documents. It's the standard sort of situation," she told IRIN, "where in principle, of course—but then documents were destroyed, and then they find that the name is Mohamed with one 'm' instead of Mohammed with two 'm's, and then it's in French and not in Arabic—there needs to be more pressure on the Mauritanian government to sort out the situation."

**Laws discriminating against women**  
In the Middle East a lot of statelessness

is the result of laws discriminating against women, which only allow nationality to be passed through the father—a problem if the father is not there to register his child or is himself stateless. Laura van Waas, who runs the Statelessness Programme at Tilburg University, says it can have a devastating effect on all members of a family.

"It's not just the stateless child who is affected by this. It's the mother, who has nationality, who feels guilty for whom she has chosen to marry. Her children are suffering and she sees that as the result of her life choices. And it's the young men who are perhaps the worst affected. This is seen as a women's rights issue, but if you are a young women who couldn't get nationality through your mother, in most of the countries we are looking at you can acquire nationality through your husband, and your children will take his nationality. But if you are a young stateless man, you can't acquire nationality through marriage, and because your children have to acquire their nationality through you, they will also be stateless."

In countries like Lebanon, where ID cards were first introduced in the 1920s, but not everyone bothered to register, this kind of statelessness has persisted through several generations, resulting in whole families which, although Lebanese,

are non-citizens, unable to travel, and with no access to state schooling or health care. It could be sorted out with a bit of goodwill, but as in many countries, political considerations—in this case questions of religious and ethnic balance—mean goodwill may be in short supply.

In situations like that of Myanmar, where the government is so reluctant to accept the Muslim community in Rakhine state as Burmese citizens, goodwill seems totally lacking. But elsewhere a lot can be done to reduce statelessness, with improvements to nationality laws, better coordination when states and boundaries change, simpler bureaucratic procedures, and a greater effort to make sure all children get registered.

## Attitudes changing?

Manly says he is seeing a real change of attitudes, with governments increasingly willing to ratify the conventions, enter into discussions on the issue, and make the necessary changes.

"The taboo has now been broken," he says. "Governments now increasingly accept that this is not purely an issue of their sovereign discretion, but that issues of statelessness are of legitimate concern for the international community... Governments have also perceived that it is not in their interests to have a very large disenfranchised and frequently undocumented population in their territories... Ministries of the interior round the world don't want to have tens or hundreds of thousands of people who are undocumented. They want to know who is in their territory, and to be able to control them."

"In the past four years, more countries have acceded to the 1961 Convention on the Reduction of Statelessness than in the four decades following its adoption," says the new UNHCR report.

So the UNHCR is hopeful that their

campaign can bring down the numbers of stateless people in areas like the Middle East and the former Soviet Union.

But Bronwen Manby warns that in parts of Africa where she has worked, a push to regularize citizenship could actually increase numbers elsewhere. "Nigeria, for instance, has a large number of people who are absolutely undocumented, but everybody somehow gets by, because that's Nigeria. But it's of concern in the context of increasing efforts to reduce the

number of undocumented people for security reasons. Once you really start being strict about ID documents, all the people who have managed to get by with a bit of cash, or a bit of magouille, as they say in French, are going to find it much more difficult to get an ID from somewhere, and I think a problem of statelessness is going to be revealed which is already there but has never been identified."

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