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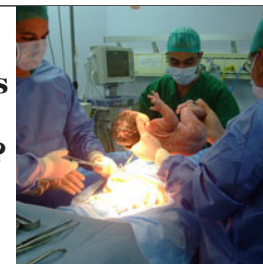


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# Marib tribes form alliance following killing of soldier Tribes fear killing was provocation by Houthis

Story by  
**Ali Ibrahim Al-Moshki**  
Photo by **Amal Al-Yarisi**

**SANA'A, Dec. 1**—Residents of Marib governorate announced the establishment of the "Sons of Marib Alliance" on Monday. The alliance says its aims is to eliminate violence, discrimination, and disputes between tribes in order to fend off any attacks on the governorate.

Abdullah Diman, the alliance's spokesperson, told the Yemen Times that the main goal of the alliance is "to confront the Houthis."

Diman explained that the alliance includes youth and independent politicians, as well as the elders and sheikhs of Marib.

Diman listed some of the alliance's key responsibilities, which include, "The protection of Marib residents from any attack by Houthis and Al-Qaeda, the protection of gas, oil, and electricity facilities, and the combat of bandits." In ensuring the governorate's security, he said, the tribes will cooperate with and support government forces.

Saleh Lanjaf, who is a member of the alliance and a sheikh in the Obaidah tribe, said that major tribes in Marib support the alliance, adding that the interests of the governorate must trump personal interests.

"All tribes need to end their disputes and focus on issues related to the protection of the governorate," Lanjaf said.

Aishal Al-Futaini, a prominent tribal leader with the Murad tribal federation, agreed that Marib's major tribes are in support of the alliance.

The announcement of the alli-

ance followed the death of a soldier on Sunday. He was killed in clashes between the Presidential Protection Forces and unknown assailants in Marib city, which left four civilians and two soldiers, including the commander of the Presidential Protection Forces, injured.

According to Lanjaf and a number of local media outlets, the dead soldier was Anwar Al-Hajji. The injured soldiers were Commander Ali Nasser Hameed and Abdullah Al-Rumaish. Among the four injured civilians is Qasim Al-Muawadi.

Rumors circulated by local media on Monday claimed that the armed assailants were Houthi supporters, wearing Houthi patches on their clothes. Ali Al-Qahoom, a member of the Houthi Political Office, denied these claims.

Hussein Al-Khudairi, an officer in the Third Military Command in Marib's Serwah district confirmed that one soldier was killed and that two soldiers and four civilians were injured. Al-Khudairi said police arrested one suspect and that investigations are ongoing.

Numerous phone calls to representatives of the Presidential Protection Forces were not returned.

The Houthis had first signed an agreement with Marib's tribal sheikhs on Nov. 24. In exchange for the tribesmen's protection of citizens and state facilities, the Houthis agreed not to advance into the governorate.

Opinions among tribal sheikhs on whether to uphold the agreement are divided.

Sheikh Al-Futaini, one of the tribal sheikhs that signed the agreement, expressed his ongoing sup-



Tribal checkpoint at the border of Marib governorate in Wadi Obaidah district.

port of it. "We are all tribal sheikhs and we stick to our word," he said.

Others, like Sheikh Lanjaf, reject the agreement, "because if any problems occur, the agreement will be null and void—which is exactly what the Houthis want." The previous agreement stipulated that the tribal sheikhs would protect all citi-

zens and maintain security. If the

tribes are unable to do so, the agreement would no longer be valid.

Lanjaf worries that recent incidents in Marib city might give Houthis an excuse to enter the governorate, under the pretext of maintaining stability and security.

Lanjaf said that he does not reject Houthis per se, "but for them to storm one governorate after

another, this is unacceptable. We will fight them with everything we have."

He pointed to the importance of armed tribesmen who are positioned at the border of Marib governorate, including the Qadi Nakhla and Wadi Sajeel areas.

Al-Qahoom emphasized that the Houthis' only interest lied in pro-

tecting the governorate from AQAP. He said that Houthis in the governorate have no intention to spread their influence, as tribesmen promised to protect the governorate.

"Because of Al-Qaeda's heavy presence, we call all the tribes of Marib to protect their governorate before the situation escalates," Al-Qahoom added.

# Secessionists in south remain defiant following death of protestor

■ **Khalid Al-Karimi**

**SANA'A, Dec.1**—Thousands continued to wave southern flags and call for secession in the streets of Aden in southern Yemen on Monday after security forces opened fired on protestors the day before, killing one and injuring several others, according to eye witnesses.

"The protestors were marching peacefully from Al-Arood Square, heading to the Al-Muala district," said Arslan Al-Sakkaf, a member of the Al-Arood Square Supervisory Committee, which has served as a focal point for protestors. "Security forces opened fire on the unarmed protestors using live ammo and tear gas."

According to Al-Sakkaf, ten protestors were injured during the shooting.

On Sunday, protestors marked the 47th anniversary of South Yemen's independence from British colonial rule. But this year, they had also set Nov. 30 as the deadline for the central government to recognize the secessionists' calls for independence for the formerly autonomous southern governorates. After unifying in 1990, South Yemen lost a brief civil war for independence with North Yemen in 1994.

Since then, calls for independence have grown louder. But this year secessionists, hoping to capitalize on political unrest in the country's north due to the military advance of the Houthis, have held mass rallies since Oct. 14 to draw attention to



Woman holds the southern flag during a protest demanding secession from the North.

their cause.

Secessionists are loosely aligned under an umbrella organization known as the Southern Movement. Despite leadership within the movement towing a hard-line secessionist agenda, several factions of the movement support Yemen's unity.

Security officials have denied their wrongdoing in Sunday's events.

"No one was killed. If there were injuries, they would have been minor," said Mohammed Musaed, an official in Aden's Security Department.

Witnesses report that the deceased protestor was taken to the Al-Jamhoori Hospital, where he was pronounced dead. The Yemen

Times calls to the hospital were not returned.

Musaed accuses the protestors of attempting to break into a government compound to replace Yemen's national flag with that of former South Yemen.

"Security personnel prevented them from entering the compound using tear gas," Musaed said.

Protestors deny any intention to storm government buildings saying they will continue to escalate their protests in a peaceful manner to apply pressure to government forces.

"[Security forces] will not frighten us or make us leave the square," said Abudulla Rashid, a Southern Movement leader.

Protestors say the focus now

employees appeared to be unfazed by the deadline.

"The Nov. 30 deadline came and passed, and nothing happened," said Zaki Al-Yousifi, a government employee in Aden originally from the country's north. "I still feel safe."

Those working in the South's government oil sector also said it was business as usual on Monday, explaining that the entire country would suffer if the production of oil was impeded.

"Those who work in the oil refineries are not only from the north. There are employees from the south. Everyone cares about the health of this sector," said an oil worker who declined to give his

name given the sensitivity of the topic.

But secessionist leaders say they are not abandoning their calls.

"Unions, organizations and civil

society in the south will increase peaceful escalations of protests," said Khalid Bamdhaf, a Southern Movement leader. "Such civil disobedience will have an impact."

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# Islah agrees to reconciliation deal with Houthis

■ Nasser Al-Sakkaf

SANA'A, Nov. 30—Representatives of the Islah Party met with Houthi leader Abdulmalik Al-Houthi in Sa'ada city on Thursday, according to a news update released on Friday by Al-Sahwa Net, a news website affiliated with the Islah Party.

The names of the Islah Party delegates who attended the meeting were not mentioned.

According to the news release, the two sides agreed to put an end to all forms of fighting and tension between them. The news release read: "The Islah Party delegation met Abdulmalik Al-Houthi on Thursday. The two sides agreed to put their differences aside and turn over a new leaf, rooted in trust and cooperation, and the implementation of the outcomes of the National Dialogue Conference (NDC), and the Peace and National Partnership Agreement."

The agreement followed several months of tension and clashes between Houthis and Islah Party members. Since the Houthi takeover of Sana'a on Sept. 21, Houthis have stormed, taken over, and seized a number of Islah Party headquarters and buildings belonging to its members.

Among the buildings seized were the homes of prominent Islah Party members Hamid Al-Ahmar and



Ali Mohsen. Hamid Al-Ahmar is a prominent business mogul, while Ali Mohsen is the former commander of the First Armored Division, which led a series of wars against the Houthis between 2004 and 2010.

The news release further stated that the two sides have agreed to live in peace and coexist in accordance with the principles of "orthodox Islam." Since the meeting, no clashes have reportedly taken place between the two groups. However, Houthis have not yet relinquished their control of the Islah Party buildings they have seized.

Ali Al-Qahoom, a member of the Houthi Political Office, told the Yemen Times that the agreement was a "good omen" and reflected the desire of both sides to usher in a new era of cooperation and peace. He

added, however, that the issue of Islah Party buildings currently under the control of the Houthis had not been addressed at the meeting.

Islah Party Spokesman Saeed Shamsan said that the current agreement between the Houthis and Islah was the first step towards further reconciliation between the two parties. The issue of Islahi houses controlled by Houthis being returned to the former is a subject that would be addressed at a later date, he said.

Nabil Al-Shargabi, professor of International Relations and Crisis Management at Hodeida University, described the meeting as a positive step, however pointed out that similar agreements had previously been reached between the two parties that were violated shortly after being signed.

"Similar agreements were signed between the Houthis and the Islah Party in July of this year in Amran, and in Al-Jawf on Aug. 11," he said. "In the former, the Houthis violated the agreement and ended up taking over the entire governorate later that month. In the latter case, the Houthis violated the agreement the next day, and eight other peace deals had to be signed and broken before peace was established in the governorate."

Abdu Al-Ganadi, spokesperson of General People Conference (GPC), told the Khabar News Agency on Saturday, that he supported attempts by the two parties to reach an agreement. "The GPC supports national reconciliation between all of Yemen's various political parties. We consider this a step in the right direction."

# AQAP claims attack on Houthi positions in Rada'a

Story by Nasser Al-Sakkaf  
Photo by Ali Ibrahim Al-Moshki

SANA'A, Nov. 30— On Friday night and Saturday morning, clashes took place between Houthis and Al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP) in Al-Manaseh village, located in Rada'a district of Yemen's Al-Baida governorate.

AQAP claimed on its Twitter account on Saturday that dozens of Houthis had been killed in the clashes. "On Friday evening at 11:30 p.m., four AQAP members launched a multi-pronged attack on the Al-Hisn neighborhood in Al-Manaseh using rifles, hand grenades and LAW [light anti-tank weapon] missiles... Dozens of Houthis were killed in the process in a battle that lasted four hours."

In another statement released later that day, AQAP said members, "were able to attack all areas of Al-Hisn and the surrounding region, including the homes of Abdullahillah and Abd Al-Raouf Al-Dhahab." The statement went on to say that two AQAP fighters were killed before all withdrew from the area.

Ali Al-Qahoom, a member of the Houthi Political Office, said that the Houthis had taken over the homes of Abdullahillah Al-

Dhahab and Abd Al-Raouf Al-Dhahab on Oct. 26. As of today, the Houthis still occupy these houses.

Abdullahillah and Abd Al-Raouf Al-Dhahab are the cousins of Nabil Al-Dhahab, an AQAP field commander who was killed in an airstrike in Rada'a on Nov. 4.

Al-Qahoom contradicted AQAP's statement, giving a different account of the events that transpired over the weekend. He claimed that popular committees were able to combat and repel AQAP forces who attacked the area. "No Houthis were killed in the attack. However, we were able to kill two AQAP members... and arrest two others."

Abdulrahman Al-Dharaibi, a citizen of Al-Manaseh village, said that clashes began late Friday night after an explosive device was launched on Houthi positions, followed by several hours of gunfire. Although he could not verify the number of casualties on either side, he questioned the authenticity of Al-Qahoom's claims. "Whenever clashes erupt following an explosion, there's almost always casualties. I don't believe that no Houthi was killed in the fighting."

Clashes between AQAP and Houthi fighters in Rada'a district broke out and escalated in October of this year.

# GPC refuses to participate in the Southern Committee

■ Bassam Al-Khameri

SANA'A, Dec. 1—Yemen's former ruling party, the General People's Congress (GPC) announced on Sunday they will not participate in a recently-created presidential committee to address grievances outlined by southerners during the National Dialogue Conference (NDC).

The announcement, made via a GPC-aligned publication, came the same day that southern secessionists, loosely organized under an umbrella organization known as the Southern Movement, had given as the deadline for government employees to leave the formerly autonomous southern governorates and for state-run oil companies located in the country's south to stop production.

The committee, established on Sunday, is a stipulation of the UN-brokered Peace and National Partnership Agreement signed by Yemen's major political forces at the end of September.

The committee is meant to oversee the implementation of agreements made at the NDC focused on providing compensation to southerners whose land was confiscated and government employees who lost their jobs following Yemen's unity in 1990.

The editor-in-chief of Al-Motamar Net, the website that announced the GPC's position regarding the committee, said the party believes the committee will not adhere to agreements made at the NDC, namely the division of Yemen into six regions under a federal system.



The grievances outlined by southerners during the NDC are going to be addressed by the presidential committee that was established on Sunday.

"The current committee is dominated by parties that, during the NDC, supported a suggestion to divide Yemen into two regions [north and south]," said Abdulmalik Al-Fuhaidi.

He said the GPC continues to back the six-region plan and argues that a majority assigned to the Southern Committee are in support of a two-region federal system.

"Support for the two-region proposal is the first step towards eventual secession of the South," he added.

A Region's Committee formed by President Abdu Rabu Mansour Hadi after the NDC concluded recommended a six region federal system—four regions in the country's north and two in the south.

The Houthis, a group that fought six wars against the central govern-

ment from 2004-2010 and have recently gained more political influence after effectively seizing control of Sana'a on Sept. 21, opposed the regions division, as did the Southern Movement and Yemen's Socialist Party.

The new committee includes seven current ministers and five other representatives, one coming from each of Yemen's major political groupings—the Southern Movement, the Islah Party, the Socialist Party, the GPC and the Houthis, according to the Ministry of Defense's website.

It is unclear who if the GPC's spot will be filled by another party's representative.

The Southern Movement will be represented by Yasin Makkawi, who was recently appointed as a political advisor to the president. Makkawi

is known to have pro-unity sympathies.

The presidential decree establishing the committee states: "The committee will have two months to finalize its duties, after which it will report its findings to the Cabinet. Until then, the chairman of the committee shall report to the Cabinet every two weeks."

The prime minister's press secretary, Rajeh Badi, said the committee was formed in the wake of escalated calls for secession in the country's south.

But not everyone is confident the committee will make a difference.

"Some members of the Southern Movement were included in the committee, but the government isn't serious about addressing southern grievances," said Khaled Bamadhaf, a Southern Movement leader and staunch proponent of southern secession. "The timing of all this is suspicious as well. After failing to live up to their previous obligations, [the government] announces the creation of a new committee to address southern grievances the day before the Nov. 30 deadline."

"They're just trying to show the international community that they're doing something, and temporarily placate the Southern Movement into acquiescence," he said.



The house of Abd Al-Raouf Al-Dhahab in Al-Manaseh village (pictured) has been under Houthi control since Oct. 26.

## Correction:

On Thursday, the Yemen Times' website erroneously posted a photo of the Al-Fayoush Salafi Center in Lahj alongside the article, "Counter-terrorism forces rescue eight." The photo was not intended to illustrate this news piece, but another article, "400 Salafi students leave Yemen." We apologize for any confusion and would like to reiterate that the center is no way related to the counter-terrorism article.



### Editorial Staff

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### Policies:

Construction workers (Part two of a two-part series):

# Facing contractors, greed, and a lack of rights



Photo courtesy of Sara Al-Zawqari

There are no official statistics on the number of workers who are a part of Yemen's informal construction economy.

Having heard stories about construction workers who died in work-related accidents and uncompensated families, Sara Al-Zawqari, the Yemen Times Radio manager, and Sadeq Al-Wesabi, a freelance journalist based in Sana'a, set out to explore the work conditions of unregistered construction workers in Yemen.

In collaboration with the Network of Arab Reporters for Investigative Journalism, the reporters completed a five-month investigation culminating in a written report and a documentary.

The first part of Al-Zawqari's and Al-Wesabi's report was published in last week's Thursday issue. Below is part two.

## Sadeq Al-Wesabi and Sara Al-Zawqari

In Yemen's construction sector, many contractors are employing unregistered workers.

The reason is simple: while a registered worker typically receives a daily salary of up to YR5,000 (\$23), those without contracts are paid significantly less at around YR3,000 (\$13) per day.

If an employee is not registered they have no way to prove their legal rights, leaving them vulnerable to work-related injuries without compensation and the self-regulation of their employers.

In Bait Baws, a neighborhood in southern Sana'a, unregistered construction workers are not hard to find. They sit scattered on the street, awaiting potential employers to approach them with a temporary job opportunity.

At 6 a.m., two men with work tools in hand, shout, "Here, here!" as a car approaches them. They hope the car carries an employer that will offer them work for the day.

This scene unfolds every morning. Contractors will approach the workers to discuss the terms of employment.

One contractor who declined to give his name, candidly admitted that he had no work license so he did not feel obligated to hire employees with a contract, outlining their legal protections.

Asked if the workers he hired would be provided with basic safety equipment, he replied, "There's no such thing as occupational safety standards here in Yemen. Here, God protects the workers."

His indifference towards applying standard safety measures appeared on the surface to be rooted in his confidence in the workers' ability.

"These guys are first class professionals. They have built things in Saudi Arabia and most of the Gulf

countries, and have worked in most governorates throughout Yemen."

Most workers who enter into arrangements with unlicensed employers rely on verbal agreements. They have no legal recourse if they are injured on the job.

Firas Ghanem, 50, hasn't been able to work since injuring his right hand and left foot a year ago in a construction accident.

He was injured when his employer instructed him to use an electric chainsaw. Ghanem had only ever used manual wood saws.

He says he told his employer he didn't feel comfortable operating the equipment, but his employer said he wanted to get the job done as quickly as possible.

Ghanem's inexperience proved dangerous. After dropping the saw, he cut both his hand and foot so severely that he hasn't regained proper use of either.

Firas bitterly remembers his employer's reaction.

"He gave me YR10,000 [about \$50] and then left me to my own. I could barely afford to get my hand and leg stitched."

Like Firas, Mohammad Suleiman, was injured while on the job. He calls himself a victim of "contractors' greed."

Suleiman now has a glass eye because a nail punctured his eye while on the job.

"I spent nearly YR300,000 [about \$1,400] on the operation, but the contractor paid me no mind," he said. "I've become deeply indebted as a result."

Suleiman could file a legal case against his employer, but he says it's not worth it.

"If I file a complaint I would lose more [money] than I did on treatment."

## Unions and NGOs paralyzed by a lack of funds

Both NGOs and government organizations are often unable to help unregistered construction workers.

They say workers are difficult to identify and there are not enough resources available to take on their cases.

The General Federation of Yemeni Workers, an umbrella organization that includes 15 different labor unions, was founded in 1956 to defend workers' rights and interests.

The chairman of the federation, Ali Balkhedr, explains how difficult it is for his organization to represent unregistered construction workers. "They're unorganized, and we cannot reach out to them," he said.

Engaging in outreach with such workers is also often hampered by the low annual budget the federation receives from the government. According to Balkhedr, the annual budget is \$140,000.

In addition to a dearth of government funding, Balkhedr explains members often fail to pay their subscription fees to the federation, compounding the organization's

tight budget.

"Most of the federation's budget is spent on renting out offices and paying staff salaries," he said.

Balkhedr was quick to absolve the federation of its shortcomings. He shifts blame to the state.

"The government is responsible for protecting all Yemeni construction workers, and all other employees for that matter," he said.

This sentiment is echoed by Yahya Al-Tabib, chairman of the General Union of Construction and Timber Workers in Yemen, who also blames the government for failing to act on this issue.

"The labor ministry is completely out of touch with reality. It hasn't even bothered conducting studies regarding the number of unregistered workers," he said.

Although the Ministry of Labor has set up arbitration committees to mediate disputes between workers and contractors, they are

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Men await an employer to offer them a job.

to slow to issue rulings, due to the volume of complaints they receive. It's too many for their small offices, says Al-Tabib.

Tens of thousands of workers wait years to receive verdicts.

"Unregistered construction workers, have the worst luck. They lack the most basic rights," he said.

According to its bylaws, the federation is supposed to educate workers about their legal rights and defend their interests. But Hassen

Al-Yasseri, a training official at the General Union of Construction and Timber Workers, which is member of the federation, there isn't even enough money to do this.

Between the failure of unions, the General Federation of Yemeni Workers, and the Ministry of Labor to address the plight of unregistered workers, this vulnerable group continues to lack legal protection in Yemen—exposed to the arbitrary will of their employers.

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# Chewing Tunbol: A replacement for qat?

Story and photos by  
**Mohammad Al-Samawi**

Twenty years ago Amjad Ahmed opened a shop on Al-Matam Street in Sana'a's Al-Tahrir neighborhood. However unlike other restaurants in the area, Ahmad does not prepare traditional Yemeni dishes. Instead he sells a mixture of green leaves, neatly packaged and filled with a number of curious looking ingredients, known popularly as Tunbol.

Tunbol is the Sanskrit word for betel pepper, a vine that is widely found throughout Asia and valued as a mild stimulant. Similar to qat, it is chewed. Users prepare Tunbol by wrapping small pieces of sliced, dried betel seeds into a fully grown betel pepper leaf, along with pellets of slaked lime, an inorganic compound also known as calcium hydroxide, which releases stimulating alkaloids and causes users to salivate.

References to the betel pepper appear in ancient Greek, Sanskrit, and Chinese literature as early as the first century BC, while chewing betel has long become an important cultural tradition in many parts of southern Asia.

Mohammad Ghulam, a 60-year-old Tunbol trader, believes the practice of chewing Tunbol first made its way to Yemen through Indian merchants passing through Aden. With the British takeover of the city in 1839 and the increased number of Indians working in the colonial administration, the practice became more popular and spread throughout southern Yemen. Even

today, Tunbol traders like Ahmad or Ghulam import most of their ingredients from India.

Ahmad, who is originally from Aden, explains that the practice of chewing Tunbol had long been limited to the south of Yemen. However, after the country's unification in 1990, traders from Aden introduced the practice to the north.

"Most people who buy Tunbol are southerners from Aden or other southern cities living here in Sana'a," he said. "But the number of northerners who have started chewing Tunbol has been increasing."

Currently, Tunbol vendors can be found in many areas throughout Sana'a, including on Zubairy Street, Tahrir Square, Al-Hasaba area, Aser area, and Bab Al-Yemen.

## A colorful variety of Tunbol and dangerous side-effects

Tunbol comes in a variety of flavors. The most popular is "Tunbol Halw", meaning "sweet Tunbol" followed by "Tunbol Zarda'a." In addition to "classical" Tunbol ingredients, Zarda'a includes both artificial tobacco, local tobacco, and saffron. Its effects are known to be particularly strong. Tunbol Helw includes "harisa," a traditional Adeni candy, and tiny colorful sugar cubes, giving it a sweet flavor. Due to its sweetness, Ahmad says, Tunbol Halw is often sold to women and children.

Mohammad Ali has been chewing Tunbol for the past 27 years. Originally from Ibb governorate he prefers Zarda'a Tunbol to the Helaw alternative. "I feel like I'm the king of the world when I chew Tunbol. Not a day goes by without me get-



Two leaves of Tunbol on display at Amjad Ahmed's shop in Sana'a's Al-Tahrir neighborhood. The mild stimulant that some people use to kick qat cravings is a cultural import from India.

ting my fix," he says.

About 0.25 percent of all betel nuts are made up of arecoline, the effects of which are similar to Nicotine, which produces a feeling of euphoria and acts as a stimulant. A distant relative of the cocaine plant, its effects are not as potent but still slightly addictive. Given its stimulating effects, Ahmad says that most of his customers are "unemployed and uneducated youth" who use it to relax and forget about their problems. For some, he says, it has even become an alternative to qat, a narcotic stimulant consumed daily by roughly 85 per cent of Yemeni adults. "Tunbol is spreading as an alternative to qat, because it's much cheaper," he says.

Ahmad sells Tunbol at YR70 (\$0.3) a piece, adding that many addicts spend upwards of YR350 (\$1.6) a day on Tunbol—an amount that he says is less than one would spend on a daily amount of qat. A decent bundle of qat can be purchased at YR1,000 (\$4.65). The cheapest qat available—which has almost no effect—costs YR500 (\$2.33) during the winter and YR250 (\$1.16) during the summer.

Fahd Dughhaish, a man in his 20s who is originally from Ibb governorate, refers to himself as a Tunbol "addict." "I use Tunbol everyday," he says. "If I don't, I start to feel tired and exhausted and become depressed. Tunbol is the only thing that gets me through the day," he says.

Tunbol is not without its social stigmas, and men like Dughhaish are sometimes referred to as "Tunbol people," by others. Ramzy Qasim, 34, from Taiz, says that many in his family don't support his habit. Whenever they want to upset him, they tell him "go get some Tunbol," as a means of putting him down.

Like all drugs, Tunbol has negative side-effects, the least serious one being the increased generation of saliva, causing many Tunbol chewers to spit. Ahmad complains that he has set up a series of barrels in his shop for users to spit into, but that few choose to use them. Instead they spit on the street outside the shop he says, "dirtying up the sidewalks."

Dr. Fathi Mansur a dental and gum health specialist in Sana'a, says that saliva produced while chewing Tunbol is usually brick-red, and may temporarily alter the color of

a user's mouth, lips, and gums, in addition to staining the teeth, causing them to become orange-brown. However the true danger, Mansur says, is the potential for Tunbol to

cause users teeth to rot, to cause blisters in the gums, and, in worst case scenarios, the potential for users to contract oral and esophageal cancer.



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# What Obama doesn't understand about Syria

**Noah Bonsey**  
foreignpolicy.com  
First Published Nov. 26

**T**he current US strategy to destroy the Islamic State is likely doomed to fail. In fact, it risks doing just the opposite of its intended goal: Strengthening the jihadis' appeal in Syria, Iraq, and far beyond, while leaving the door open for the Islamic State to expand into new areas.

This is in large part because the United States so far has addressed the problem of the Islamic State in isolation from other aspects of the trans-border conflict in Syria and Iraq. Unless Barack Obama's administration takes a broader view, it will be unable to respond effectively to the deteriorating situation on the ground.

The good news is that the White House can still change course—and indeed, President Obama has reportedly requested a review of his administration's strategy in Syria. In crafting a new way forward, the White House needs to understand three points about the Islamic State and the military landscape in which it operates.

**1. Growth is essential to the Islamic State's future, and its best opportunities are in Syria.**

Demonstrating momentum is crucial to the jihadi group's ability to win new recruits and supporters. In an atmosphere of sectarian polarization and amid deepening Sunni anger at the use of indiscriminate violence by the Syrian and Iraqi governments and their allied militias, the Islamic State's primary asset has been its ability to rattle off a string of impressive victories. Its

**Momentum on the battlefield also provides the Islamic State an alluring brand with which to cloak what is, ultimately, its familiar and unappealing product: single-party authoritarian rule, imposed by brutal force**

territorial gains project strength, which contrasts starkly with its Sunni rivals, such as the hapless Sunni political figures in Baghdad and the struggling mainstream armed opposition in Syria. Momentum on the battlefield also provides the Islamic State an alluring brand with which to cloak what is, ultimately, its familiar and unappealing product: single-party authoritarian rule, imposed by brutal force and secret police.

"Be assured, O Muslims, for your state is good and in the best condition," Islamic State "caliph" Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi said in his latest audiotape. "Its march will not stop and it will continue to expand, with Allah's permission."

Although its propaganda suggests otherwise, in reality the Islamic State has prioritized expansion and consolidation of power in Sunni Arab areas. Insofar as it attempts

to seize ground and resources from government and Kurdish forces, it does so on the fringes of their territory or in isolated areas—such as the northern Syrian city of Kobani—that are especially vulnerable.

The Islamic State has incentive to pick such low-hanging fruit, but it has more to gain from seizing Sunni Arab areas. Each advance in these areas not only contributes to the group's perceived momentum, but also comes at the expense of local Sunni competitors. This is crucial, because local forces have by far the best track record of beating back the organization in Sunni Arab areas of Iraq and Syria. Local Sunni tribes and insurgents routed the group—then known as the Islamic State of Iraq—with American help in 2007 and 2008, and rebel groups drove it from the city of Aleppo and much of northwestern Syria in early 2014.

If the Islamic State is able to sideline such competitors and establish a monopoly on Sunni resistance to hated government and militia forces, it will secure its existence for the foreseeable future. It has already effectively accomplished this in Iraq and now hopes to do so in Syria.

For the Islamic State, the most valuable target for expansion in Syria and Iraq would appear to be the Syrian countryside north of Aleppo. Mainstream rebel factions control the area but are overstretched as they seek to hold the Islamic State at bay near the town of Marea while simultaneously fighting to prevent the regime from encircling their forces inside Aleppo city, 15 miles to the south. Should the jihadis escalate their attack on Marea in the near future, rebel forces already struggling to slow regime progress in Aleppo will probably be unable to prevent significant Islamic State gains.

**The current US approach of giving precedence to the Iraqi battlefiled while dleaying difficult decisions in Syria is at odds with dynamics on the ground.**

At stake in the northern Aleppo countryside is the strategic border territory in the opposition's heartland. If the Islamic State seizes the area, it would give it control over a key supply line from Turkey and a foothold from which to expand further west. For mainstream rebel forces, the combined human, logistical, and psychological toll of a loss there would be devastating.

In this context, the current US approach of giving precedence to the Iraqi battlefield while delaying difficult decisions on Syria is at odds with dynamics on the ground.

**2. The twin crises of the Islamic State and Syrian regime are inextricably linked.**

US officials publicly acknowledge that the Syrian regime's behavior—indeed its very nature—is a primary factor fueling the jihadis' rise and that Syrian President Bashar Al-

Assad's forces continue to kill far more civilians (and rebels) than the Islamic State does. They also recognize that the role of mainstream rebels will be essential in reversing jihadi gains. Yet in practice, US policy is emboldening Damascus and undermining the very rebels it is ostensibly designed to support.

The US-led coalition's strikes have enabled the regime to reallocate assets to face mainstream rebels, whose defeat remains the regime's top priority. Since strikes against the Islamic State began, regime forces have gained ground against mainstream rebels on key fronts in Hama province and in Aleppo city; in the case of the latter, they have done so against the very same rebel groups that are confronting the Islamic State in the nearby northern countryside.

The targeting in Washington's air campaign has further blurred the lines between US and regime military strategies. Rather than maintain singular focus on hitting Islamic State targets in eastern Syria, the United States has struck Al-Nusra Front, an Al-Qaeda affiliate whose role in combatting the regime and Islamic State has earned it credibility with the opposition's base, west of Aleppo. On one occasion, the United States also appears to have hit Ahrar Al-Sham, a Salafi group that has moderated its political platform substantially in recent months and that is broadly viewed as an authentically Syrian (albeit hard-line) component of the rebellion. Washington's claims that these strikes targeted members of a secretive "Khorasan" cell planning attacks against the United States or Europe are unconvincing in rebel eyes—not least because Washington never publicly mentioned "Khorasan" until the week preceding the

**Yet in practice, US policy is emboldening Damascus and undermining the very rebels it is ostensible designed to support.**

first round of strikes. Such attacks strengthen jihadi claims that the US campaign aims to quietly boost Assad while degrading a range of Islamist forces, and thus they are a significant blow to the credibility of those rebels willing to partner with the United States. For a rebel commander seeking to convince his fighters that cooperation with Washington is in the rebellion's best interest, American strikes that ignore the Assad regime while hitting Ahrar Al-Sham are extremely difficult to explain. Even assuming "Khorasan" poses a threat justifying urgent action, Washington should more carefully weigh the immediate losses jihadis suffer in strikes against the recruiting benefit they derive from rising disgust with the US approach among the rebel rank and file.

*Continued on the back page*

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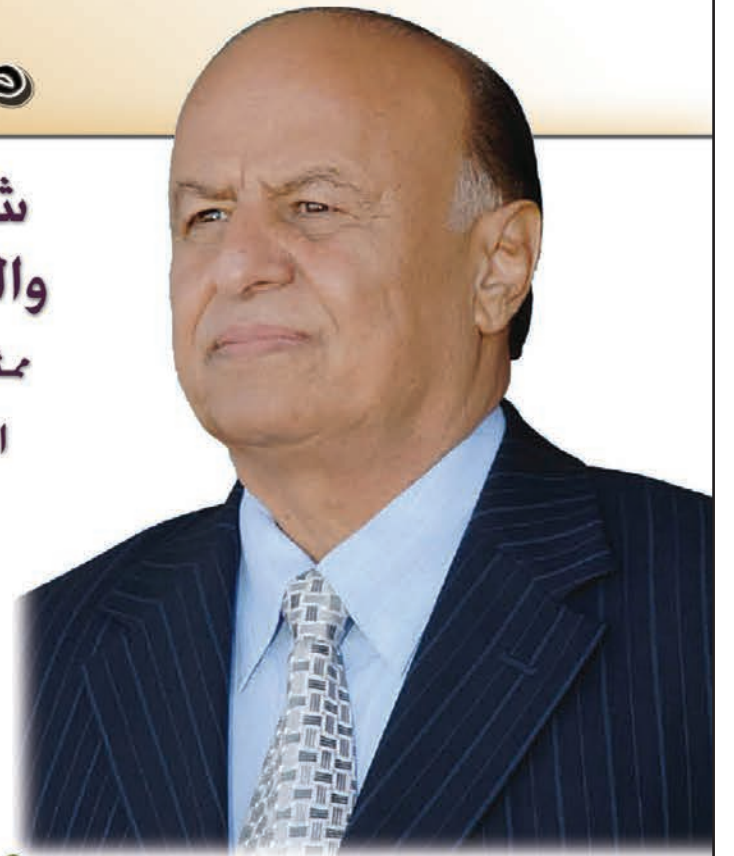
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## How fuel prices led to the government's fall

# Budget deficit spells grim economic forecast

■ Ali Saeed

The decision by the Yemeni government to lift fuel subsidies on July 30 granted the Houthis the populist mandate they needed to ride into town and seize power this summer. After a month of setting up camp in and around the capital, the Shia rebel group based out of Sa'ada took over Sana'a on Sept. 21, prompting the government to sign a Peace and National Partnership Agreement with the movement. The effects of the revolt have since led to significant changes in Yemen's political landscape.

Giving in to Houthi demands, the government partially reversed its fuel subsidy cuts on Sept. 21, with prices thereafter decreasing from YR4,000 (\$18.6) to YR3,000 (\$13.9) per 20 liters of gas. Increases in transportation fares (YR10, about \$0.4) also put in place on July 30, were similarly removed. However this will be readjusted if fuel prices are again changed.

According to the Peace and National Partnership Agreement, an economic committee would be formed to review the issue of fuel subsidies within two months of the formation of the new government. The new government, consisting of 36 ministries, was sworn in on Nov. 9. A final decision regarding fuel subsidies is due Jan. 9, 2015.

According to the agreement, members of the committee must have experience in both economic and financial management in addition to legislative affairs.

"We'll protest again if they decide to raise fuel prices," said Jamal Hadi, 38, a taxi driver who lives in the capital Sana'a and who took part in the Houthi led demonstrations to reinstate fuel subsidies. He

said people were happy with the reversal, but that they would respond again with force if the cuts were reinstated.

The economic committee will be tasked with studying Yemen's economic and financial situation and reviewing the state budget, with special focus paid to the relationship between shifting fuel prices, supply liberation, and energy reforms. The committee will also be tasked with making suggestions for how best to use financial surpluses to aid poor people in underdeveloped areas. All suggestions put forth by the committee will be binding for the new government.

Decisions regarding fuel prices are particularly sensitive in Yemen, as they affect prices for both basic commodities and transportation. The reversal of subsidy cuts was implemented despite repeated attempts by President Abdu Rabu Mansour Hadi to defend his earlier decision to enforce the cuts. According to Hadi, maintaining the fuel subsidies will deplete government foreign currency reserves and devalue Yemen's currency.

The government paid nearly \$1.5 billion for fuel imports between January and July of this year, with oil revenues bringing in just \$1.079 billion, according to the Central Bank of Yemen's monthly report.

According to an International Monetary Fund (IMF) report released in late September, the country's foreign currency reserves rose to \$5.2 billion, despite a sharp decline in oil exports. Yemen will need \$6.5 billion between 2014-2017 to cover its budget.

Consistent attacks on the country's oil pipelines have severely affected exports. In June 2012, President Hadi said the attacks on the country's pipelines cost Yemen \$15

million a day.

The pipelines are usually attacked by tribesmen who hold grievances against the state. Attacks have increased since the 2011 uprising, which created a power and security vacuum in the country.

### How the government decided to implement cuts

"It makes sense that Hadi defended the subsidy cuts because it was him who implemented them in the first place, against the wishes of the leaders of other political parties," said Al-Hamdani, a business editor at the state-run Saba News Agency who was invited by Resonate Yemen, a local NGO, to debate the lifting of fuel subsidies in April of this year.

"Cash shortages in Yemen occurred in late 2012 due to attacks on oil pipelines," said Al-Hamdani. "Hadi knew that a financial breakdown would occur if pipelines in Marib were not protected, however he did nothing to protect them. The attacks led to a crisis that prevented the government from being able to pay its civil servants. It's Hadi who's responsible for the financial crisis that created the need for subsidy cuts in the first place."

By mid 2013, the country's cash shortages increased, forcing the Ministry of Finance to reduce spending and borrow from local banks to make up for the shortfall. Later, in Dec. 2013, the cabinet approved the 2014 state budget, which called for subsidy cuts to be implemented in August of this year.

Hossein Al-Bokhaiti, a Houthi activist, said that Hadi reversed the subsidy cuts after the Houthis forcibly removed a number of tribal and military commanders who had been controlling the state budget.

"Hadi didn't reverse the subsidy

cuts for budgetary reasons or to appease the protestors," Al-Hamdani said. "He did it to save his own skin."

Al-Bokhaiti added that the economic committee's upcoming decision on fuel subsidies would be accompanied by a long-term economic development plan, that included forms of more efficient tax collection, improved collection of water and electricity bills and improved methods of combating corruption. Influential military commanders, tribal leaders and government officials are known to often refuse to pay their water and electricity bills, he claimed.

According to the Peace and National Partnership Agreement, any

action taken by the government regarding fuel prices would be accompanied by a 50 percent increase in support for poor households, to be paid for by the Social Welfare Fund. The fund is the main social assistance program in Yemen and was started with World Bank funds in 1997.

The IMF recommended gradual removal of the subsidies. Yemen initially pledged to cut the subsidies on Oct. 1. It acted sooner and more aggressively then it pledged, implementing the cuts on July 30, a full two months ahead of schedule. Petrol, diesel and kerosene prices were expected to rise by YR50 (\$0.23) per liter, bring the price of petrol to YR150 (\$0.7). Diesel and kerosene

prices would rise to YR175 (\$0.8) after the YR50 (\$0.2) increase.

But the government increased the prices far beyond the expected projections. Petrol and kerosene prices rose by YR200 (\$0.93) per liter and diesel rose by YR195 (\$0.91) per liter.

The cuts were supposed to coincide with a simultaneous expansion of the Social Welfare Fund to mitigate the financial impact on Yemen's poor, which never happened. The IMF agreed to provide Yemen with a \$553 million loan over the next three years based on the reform pledges, which included other stipulations. Yemen agreed to eliminate ghost workers from public payrolls and to increase tax revenues.



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## Cesarean sections in Yemen Pricy but needed?

■ Bassam Al-Khameri

**S**alah Al-Deen Al-Sukini, a 22-year-old resident of Sana'a, stood in front of the emergency room at the state-run Al-Thawra Hospital in Sana'a on Nov. 11, waiting for news of his wife who was giving birth to their first child. She had long suffered from hypertension and high blood pressure, and had been instructed by doctors to undergo a cesarean section to avoid complications during her child birth. Doctors told Al-Sukini that without a cesarean section, child birth might lead to heart and cardiovascular diseases, or in the worst case scenario, death. "When I heard that my wife and unborn child could die, I opted for the surgery, without thinking," he said. "It cost \$100, but it was worth it. The operation went smoothly, and both my wife and child are fine now," he said.

While the decision to have a child is often a time for celebration and rejoice, in some instances, bearing children can pose risks to the health of both the mother and the child. Doctors responsible for delivering children are always on the look out for complications that may point to such risks. In the event that medical difficulties are detected, they often elect to perform cesarean sections, making one or more incisions in a mother's abdomen and uterus to deliver the baby. The procedure has been practiced in one form or another for more than 2,000 years, and has been credited with saving the lives of both mothers and children in many countries. However, some in Yemen believe the prac-

tice is prescribed too often, and is a mere ploy on the part of private hospitals to reap higher profits from patients.

One source within the Al-Thawra Public Hospital in Sana'a, who asked to remain anonymous, stated that, "private hospitals, which on average charge patients more for the same operations, are prescribing cesarean sections to women who don't need them as a way of reaping higher profits." Cesarean sections in public hospitals in Yemen, cost roughly YR22,000 (\$100), he said, compared to nearly YR100,000 (\$500) in private hospitals.

Mushtaq Thabit, 28, who works as a sales associate at a clothing store in Sana'a, took his wife last month to a private hospital where he was told she would need a cesarean section to avoid dying during childbirth. However, Thabit could not afford the exorbitant costs which he said came close to \$500. Instead he took her to a clinic where she gave birth normally without complications. "Private hospitals are doling out cesarean sections to pregnant women as a way to get more money," he said. "But most women don't need them, my wife is living proof."

Dr. Yahya Al-Thawr, chairman of the Private Hospitals Union, told the Yemen Times that for many doctors, cesarean sections were the easiest way to deliver babies. "In many hospitals, including private hospitals, some doctors aren't experienced, and fear the potential negative consequences of delivering a baby normally and there being problems afterwards." He went on to say that, "This may be the reason why so many cesarean sections

are prescribed in private hospitals. Whether or not they're necessary depends on the individual doctors' conscience and honesty."

Salah Mohammad Naji, a 28-year old resident of Taiz, traveled last month with his wife to the Sabaean public hospital in Sana'a, one week before she was expected to give birth to their first child. He was told by doctors that his wife would require a cesarean section. "We agreed initially to the operation because I was afraid that either my wife or unborn child might die," he said. However Naji's father was against the idea of an operation, insisting on his own intuition that it was not necessary, and would not allow for Saleh's wife to undergo the procedure. According to Naji, it is better that they did not pay the money. "A week later, she went back to the same hospital and gave birth naturally," Naji said. "Everything turned out fine."

Dr. Areej Taher, the National Professional Officer of Maternal and Reproductive Health at the World Health Organization (WHO), said that no accurate statistics are available regarding the number of cesarean sections performed each year in Yemen. But based on reports she has reviewed from a number of both public and private hospitals, Taher stated that she could confirm that the number of operations being performed throughout the country was increasing overall. "This is a positive indicator," she said, "it shows that doctors are intervening more often to save the lives of mothers and children." According to worldwide averages as measured by the WHO, roughly 15 per cent of women who give birth do so through cesarean operations,



Woman undergoes cesarean section operation. The number of cesarean sections being performed in Yemen has increased significantly in recent years.

according to Taher.

Dr. Abdulhakeem Al-Eryani, head of the Obstetrics and Gynecology Department at the state-run Al-Thawra Hospital in Sana'a, emphasized that at public hospitals, cesarean sections are only performed in critical situations, however added that, "the number of operations has increased in recent years." He estimated that of the roughly 35 childbirths that take place daily at the hospital, nearly 10 are performed via cesarean operations. "This comes to nearly 300 per month, or 3,600 per year," he said. "When asked why the number of operations had increased, he responded, "if something happens to the mother during childbirth, we are held responsible in the end.

We're more careful now and intervene more to prevent such complications from taking place."

One of the reasons such operations become necessary, according to Al-Taher, is that women don't visit doctors enough during pregnancy, or in turn take enough preventative measures necessary to avoid complications from occurring, a fact confirmed by Al-Eryani. "There are very few maternal health clinics in Yemen, and women rarely consult with professionals during pregnancy to determine if they may be suffering from any preventable conditions or diseases that may complicate the birthing process," he said.

Underage pregnancies are another leading factor that lead to ce-

sarean operations, adds Al-Eryani. "Oftentimes girls are married off in their teens and get pregnant when they're 15 or so," he said. "Their bodies can't handle it." Yusra Murait, a gynecologist based in Sana'a, confirmed that cesarean sections are required more often when delivering children from younger mothers. "The bodies of younger mothers are often not fully matured, in particular their pelvises, which can be permanently damaged as a result of the birthing process," she added. "Oftentimes in such cases, the womb closes itself off during the birthing process, preventing doctors from being able to deliver the baby. Cesarean sections are absolutely necessary during such circumstances," she said.



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

**Intermediate**

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

**Difficult**

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

**Chess**

White plays and wins in the 3rd move

**Solutions**

Chess: Bd2+

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

Sudoku

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CONTINUED FROM PAGE 5

## What Obama doesn't understand about Syria

Washington also faces a more concrete operational problem: How can it hope to empower moderate rebels in northern Syria if the regime continues to drive them toward the brink of defeat? The portion of the White House's policy explicitly designed to strengthen these forces—a

Al-Nusra Front efforts to expand control within rebel areas, and continued regime onslaughts.

**3. For a "freeze" to help, it must be fundamentally different from a "cease-fire."**

UN special envoy Staffan de Mistura is advocating a "fighting freeze" in the pivotal battle between regime and opposition forces in Aleppo. The goal is to relieve the humanitarian disaster in the northern city and allow all groups to focus their resources on combatting the Islamic State.

De Mistura's use of the word "freeze" rather than "cease-fire" is important. Cease-fires have been discredited in Syria: The regime has exploited them as a pillar of its strategy, cutting such agreements with rebels to cement a military victory or to withdraw resources in one area in order to shift them to another front. The regime's significant advantage in firepower has ensured that terms are heavily tilted in its favor—and it has often used egregious violations of international humanitarian law, including sieges and indiscriminate bombardment, to achieve its aims. The cease-fires thus have not led to an overall reduction in the level of violence nationally or in the resolution of legitimate grievances that jihadi groups have proved so adept at exploiting.

A freeze in Aleppo can save lives

and aid efforts to combat the Islamic State, but only if it preserves the mainstream opposition's fighting capacity. If it cements regime victory there or enables Damascus to redeploy resources against mainstream rebels elsewhere, it will work to the Islamic State's advantage.

**Damascus and Tehran appear to believe that achieving regime victory is simply a matter of maintaining the conflict's current trajectory.**

Insofar as the regime is able to gain ground from mainstream rebels, whether by force or truce, it is clearing Sunni competitors from the jihadis' path.

Yet the regime's position around

Aleppo is so strong, given its progress toward severing the final rebel supply line to the city, that it currently has little incentive to reach any deal that would leave the rebels' fighting ability intact. Damascus would much prefer to deliver a decisive blow to the mainstream opposition in Aleppo, which would cripple the West's potential partners and leave only the regime as a supposed bulwark against the jihadis. Rebels recognize this, and given their negative experience with cease-fires elsewhere, even those in favor of a freeze are unlikely to invest political capital in convincing the skeptics in their own ranks unless they see new reason to hope for a fair deal.

The crux of the American dilemma in Syria is thus clear: Degrading jihadi groups requires empowering mainstream Sunni alternatives, but doing so may prove impossible unless Damascus (or its backers in Tehran) can be convinced or compelled to dramatically shift strategy. For now, the regime treats the Western-, Arab-, and Turkish-backed opposition as the main threat to its dominance in Syria and treats the Islamic State as a secondary concern that the United States is already helping to deal with. Iran has done nothing to suggest that it objects to the regime's strategy; in-

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**The portion of the White House's policy explicitly designed to strengthen these forces - a \$500 million program to train and equip 5,000 fighters over the course of one year - will prove to little, to late.**

\$500 million program to train and equip 5,000 fighters over the course of one year—will prove too little, too late to enable them to hold their ground against anticipated escalations by the Islamic State, ongoing

stead, it is enabling it.

Damascus and Tehran appear to believe that achieving regime victory is simply a matter of maintaining the conflict's current trajectory. This view, however, is shortsighted and would yield an unprecedented recruiting bonanza for jihadi

groups. If Washington wishes to prevent this—and the unending cycle of conflict that it would perpetuate—it must better balance its Iraq and Syria strategies, refine its airstrike tactics, and find ways to change calculations in Damascus and Tehran.

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