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# YEMEN TIMES



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## AQAP claims responsibility for attack on Iranian ambassador residence



A car bomb exploded in front of the Iranian ambassador's residence in Hadda Street, Sana'a on Wednesday morning. One person was killed and 17 others were injured in the attack.

Story and photo by **Ali Ibrahim Al-Moshki**

**SANA'A, December 3**—Al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP), also known as Ansar Al-Shariah, claimed responsibility on Wednesday evening for a remote-detonated car bomb which exploded outside the Iranian ambassador's residence in Sana'a at approximately 9:00 a.m. One person was killed and 17 others were injured in the attack.

AQAP claimed responsibility on their Twitter account and posted photos of the scene following the attack.

Iranian Ambassador Hussein Nam arrived in Sana'a on Monday Dec. 1. He was reportedly not present at the time of the attack, and was not hurt.

The son of Ali Abdulwase Al-Idrisi, a private security guard sta-

tioned outside the house, was killed in the attack. Al-Idrisi's son was inside the house at the time of the explosion, along with his mother, who was injured in the blast.

Among the 16 others who were also injured, was a child who had been passing by the building at the time of the attack. A statement released on the Ministry of Interior's website said the injured were transferred to both the General Police Hospital and the Yemen-German Hospital.

Dr. Hussein Hamdy, lead supervisor of the morning shift at the Yemeni-German Hospital, said that ten casualties, all civilians, were admitted to the Yemen-German Hospital Wednesday morning. Nine casualties suffered light injuries, while one remains in intensive care, he said. Three other casualties, he said, were taken from the scene

to the Al-Mutawakal Hospital on Baghdad Street as well.

Colonel Mohammad Hizam, deputy manager of public relations at the Ministry of Interior, said that three casualties were transferred to the General Police Hospital, one of whom remained in the hospital's intensive care unit. Hizam refused to comment on the identity of the attackers, claiming that investigations were still ongoing.

The Yemen Times visited the site of the attack, and found extensive damage to the ambassador's residence, as well as scattered car parts belonging to the exploded vehicle.

Mohammad Yahya Al-Awadhi, an eyewitness to the explosion, told the Yemen Times that the car had been parked in front of the Iranian ambassador's house since 8.30 a.m., exploding 30 minutes later at 9:00 a.m.

Yahya Al-Qariti, an officer with the Political Security Bureau, present at the scene following the attack, said the bomb was detonated remotely, and that there was no suicide attacker. The Political Security Bureau is one of Yemen's two premier intelligence agencies, whose headquarters is located roughly 500 meters away from the Iranian ambassador's house in Sana'a.

Before AQAP had claimed responsibility on Wednesday evening, Ali Al-Qahoom, a member of the Houthi Political Office, put the blame on the group and claimed the attack was a conspiracy.

"Such an attack, that was capable of penetrating a target surrounded by security forces and popular committees, was done in lock step with foreign intelligence networks," he claimed.

Continued on page 2

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## Strike in Hadramout meant to expand secessionist pressure

■ **Khalid Al-Karimi**

**SANA'A, Dec. 3**—The Liberation and Independence Coordinating Committee (LICC) announced on Wednesday a strike and march for government employees and civilians to take place Thursday in Hadramout governorate.

The LICC in Hadramout was created in September as a way to expand the Southern Movement's cause in governorates that were a part of the formerly independent South Yemen.

"This is in line with the Southern Movement's struggle to regain

the control of their state," said Ali Abdullah, the spokesperson for the LICC.

Supporters of the Southern Movement, a group encompassing many loosely-aligned southern secessionist factions, have been camping out in the south's largest city, Aden since Oct. 14, demanding that the central government recognize their calls for independence.

The planned strike in Hadramout piggy backs on demonstrations in Aden on Saturday that called for the halt of state oil production in the south and for central government institutions to vacate their

branches in the southern governorates. Calls were not headed and government bodies and oil production continue to operate.

The LICC is asking government employees in Hadramout to attend work on Thursday but to refrain from fulfilling their duties from the hours of 8:00 a.m. to 2:00 p.m.

A public relations representative for a labor union in the city of Mukalla, Salem Baduqidq, announced the union's support for the employee strike. Employees at public schools, universities, health facilities and emergency units within the water and electricity sec-

tors are not being asked to support the strike he said.

Instead the strike will target revenue-generating institutions like the Central Bank, the post office and state-run petroleum companies.

Abu Bakr Ahmad, a finance ministry employee in Mukalla, says he enthusiastically supports the strike. He believes it will send a strong message to the central government that secessionists are serious about their calls for an autonomous southern nation.

"Participating in the strike is a matter of siding with my people's demand to realize independence,"

he said.

In line with the overall platform of the Southern Movement that espouses non-violent means of protest, the LICC says they also support peaceful civil disobedience.

At protests in Aden on Saturday, one person was fatally shot when security forces opened fire on protesters, according to eye witnesses. Security forces have denied their culpability in the event.

A march for civilians is planned to accompany the brief state-employee strike on Thursday in Hadramout to denounce the violence in Aden.

"Our struggle is peaceful and will remain peaceful," said Ahmad Al-Jawhi, the head of the LICC.

Security forces in Mukalla say they do not plan to intervene with protests as long as the public's interest is not put at risk.

"They are free to protest or hold sit-ins," said Saleh Al-Naqib, Mukalla's security manager. But he said it is "unacceptable" if public facilities are attacked by protesters.

The governor of Hadramout could not be reached for comment on how government facilities would respond to striking employees.



## Local NGO: Number of disabled citizens in Yemen exceeds two million

■ Ali Ibrahim Al-Moshki

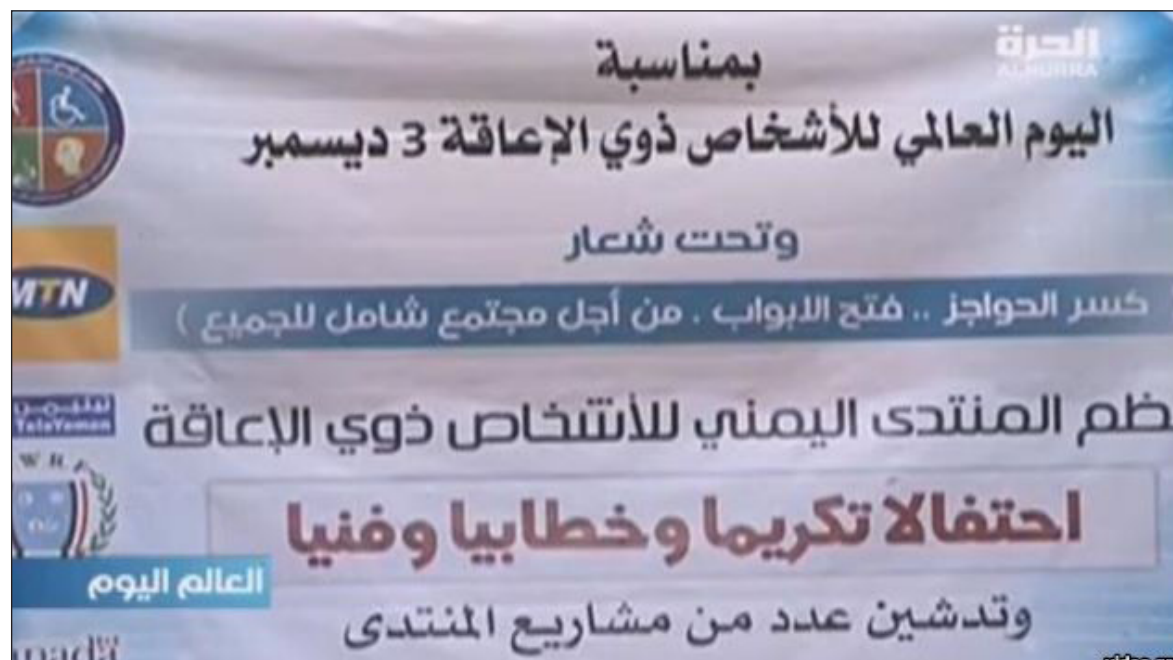
SANA'A, Dec. 2—Yemen commemorated the International Day of People With Disabilities on Wednesday. Yemen's disabled population exceeds roughly two million citizens, most of whom do not receive basic treatment and services from the government, according to statistics released by the Yemeni Handicapped Forum on Monday.

The Yemeni Handicapped Forum is an independent NGO that works to spread awareness and provide services to disabled people in Yemen.

Hassan Ismail, chairman of the forum, told the Yemen Times that this number is an estimate, based on a series of surveys conducted by the forum, the World Health Organization (WHO), and other international agencies in various governorates throughout Yemen. It includes all those who are blind, deaf, mute, or suffer from mental health problems or physical disabilities such as paralysis.

He added that the real number is likely much higher, and that the survey only represents those who are registered with various disabled aid organizations. Most families, especially in rural areas, he said, rarely seek aid from official organizations, whether private or affiliated with the government, for fear of the shame this may bring to the family. He went on to say that only 100 schools tasked with addressing the needs of mentally and physically disabled people existed throughout the country.

Ahmad Ali, the undersecretary of the Disabled Persons Department within the Ministry of Labor and Social Affairs, stated that in addition to special schools for those with disabilities, that there also exist over 145 private and public organizations, the latter being under the authority of the Ministry of Labor and Social



"Dec. 3 marks International Day for Persons with Disabilities," reads a poster put up by the Yemen Handicapped Forum, at the organization's commemoration of the yearly celebration on Wednesday in Sana'a.

Affairs. Throughout Yemen these organizations are dedicated to providing aid and services to disabled individuals. "Each organization's specific mandate is different. Individual organizations exist to address citizens suffering from hearing, speaking, and vision disabilities, in addition to those who are mentally handicapped," he said.

Despite the existence of such organizations, the extent to which their aid makes its way to the disabled is negligible, according to Ismail. "Organizations controlled by the Ministry of Labor and Social Affairs rarely receive their full budget from the government," he said. "That being said, many of the programs they claim to support rarely get funded in practice. Private and independent organizations, meanwhile, don't have much of a budget to begin with. In the end, few disabled people actually benefit from the services pro-

vided by either."

Abdullah Al-Hamdani, chairman of the Fund for Handicapped Care and Treatment, created in 2002 and managed directly by the office of the prime minister, claims that the organization has registered 50,000 individuals who are supposed to receive aid and assistance from the fund. Aid is usually provided in the form of paid medical tests, surgery costs, and school tuition, at both primary and university levels. The fund has six branches he says, which registered members can go to sign up for and receive such assistance, in the cities of Sana'a, Aden, Taiz, Hadramout, Hodeida and Amran.

However, like most other organizations tasked with treating disabled people, Al-Hamdani claims the organization is underfunded, and lacks the proper resources to perform its stated and specified tasks. "The fund's financial committee, which

is tasked with allocating funds from Yemen's budget for specific projects to be sponsored by the fund, such as programs for medicine and school supplies, has failed to provide us with revenues for quite some time," he said. "I can't comment as to why this is," he added.

"On the education side, the Ministry of Education should help shoulder some of the burden of some of these costs," he added. "First by integrating disabled students into regular schools, and second by paying for materials to be sent to schools established especially for disabled individuals."

The Yemen Times contacted Abdullah Al-Hamadi, Yemen's deputy minister of education, who also claimed that his ministry lacked the proper funds to take on such a burden. He refused to comment further on the financial state of the ministry.

## Tehama Movement demands release of leader held by Houthis

■ Bassam Al-Khameri

SANA'A, Dec. 3—Members and supporters of the Tehama Movement in Hodeida city continue to protest for the release of the movement's secretary general, Abdulrahman Mukaram.

Mukaram was arrested by men associated with the Houthis on Nov. 10. He has been held by the group, which has spread out across parts of Yemen, increasing their militias presence, ever since.

Mohammed Al-Bukhaiti, a member of the Houthi Political Office, confirmed that the group had taken Mukaram into custody but could not comment on his current whereabouts. He said Mukaram is accused of orchestrating armed attacks on the Houthis on Oct. 26. One Houthi affiliate was killed that day in clashes with members of the Tehama Movement, Al-Bukhaiti said.

"We have requested that prominent figures and sheikhs in the governorate mediate Mukaram's release, but all attempts have failed," said Ahmed Hibatallah, a spokesperson for the Tehama Movement, a grouping formed in 2012 to advocate for greater autonomy for the Tehama people in Hodeida governorate. "If Mukaram is guilty of anything, they should refer him to state prosecution."

The Houthis, a group formerly concentrated in the country's north with Zaidi Shia roots, have gained an unprecedented amount of power in Yemen since their militias seized many government buildings in the capital Sana'a in September. They have spread to provinces like Hodeida, where

they have asserted themselves as self-styled authorities combating corruption and crime.

Those advocating for Mukaram's release and information about his current condition are at a loss as to what to do. In the absence of support from the state, they have been holding bi-weekly protests outside the Houthi office in Hodeida, calling for their leader's release.

Government security forces said they had not heard of the case.

"We don't know who is investigating this case or where Mukaram is being held," said a source at Hodeida's security department who requested anonymity.

Mukaram's case highlights general confusion about the role the Houthis are playing in Yemen's justice system.

They are operating outside the bounds of Yemeni law and are not shy about admitting that they are not including government security forces in their "justice" proceedings.

Mahmoud Al-Junaid, a member of the Houthi Political Office, said that several suspects in criminal cases are being held captive by the Houthis in Al-Hodeida. He could not confirm if Mukaram was one of them.

He indicated that the group intends to hand their suspects over to central prosecution, but he bluntly admitted that they will carry out their own investigations first. This investigation, Al-Junaid bluntly declares, does not involve Hodeida's local security.

The Houthis took over Hodeida city and its port on Oct. 14, controlling strategic locations and checkpoints in the city.

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

## AQAP claims responsibility for attack on Iranian ambassador residence

Targeting of Iranian ambassador also directed at Houthis?

It has been widely reported in local and foreign press that the Houthis have received material and moral support from the Iranian regime. In March of 2012, the New York Times quoted American, Yemeni and Indian officials, who claimed to have intercepted a series of Iranian ships transporting arms to businessmen in Yemen with links to the Houthis.

In July later that year, President Hadi publicly threatened to recall Yemen's ambassador to Iran, claiming Iran had been operating a spy ring through the Houthis in the country for more than seven years.

In early October of this year, several weeks after the Houthi takeover of Sana'a, two Iranian officials,

including Ali Akbar Velayati, a top foreign policy advisor to Iranian Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, in addition to parliamentarian Ali Zakani, publically exclaimed Iran's support for the Houthis, with the latter going so far as to say that Sana'a was, "the fourth Arab capital to fall to Tehran," after Baghdad, Beirut and Damascus.

Despite such public claims, many Houthis deny having any links to Iran. Mahmoud Al-Junaid, a member of the Houthi Political Office, claimed that the targeting of the ambassador had nothing to do with any perceived connection between Tehran and Ansar Allah.

"The ambassador was targeted not because he is Iranian but rather because he is a foreigner," he



said, adding that this attack posed a threat to all foreign embassies in Yemen, not just Iran. "We draw our support from God and the Yemeni people. Those in Iran, Yemen, or anywhere else, who claim that we have links with Tehran, are lying," he said.

The car bomb exploded one day after AQAP claimed responsibility on its Twitter handle on Tuesday for two attacks allegedly launched in Sana'a on Monday. AQAP claimed it killed an unspecified number of Houthis who were stationed near Sana'a's Ministry of Interior headquarters early Monday morning after setting off a motorcycle laced with explosives. They further claimed responsibility for a second attack in which the home of an unspecified Houthi leader was targeted by an improvised explosive device.

Ali Al-Qahoom, a member of the Houthi Political Office, denied that such attacks occurred, or that any Houthis were killed or injured on Monday. The Yemen Times could not independently verify from any other sources that AQAP launched any attacks in Sana'a on Monday.



### Sketched Opinion



The Houthis and the Islah Party shake hands over a fruitful agreement.

Basement' members to the Yemen Times:

# 'We give space to people who might otherwise express themselves in the worst way'

Interview by **Ahlam Mohsen**  
Photos courtesy of **The Basement**

**Y**oung members of "The Basement," a non-profit cultural foundation, are no strangers to controversy. They have attracted a fair amount of attention the past few years for their mixed-gender activities including lectures, workshops, political debates and art and cultural events.

Many of those involved with the organization are artists, photographers, musicians and left-of-center on Yemen's political spectrum. To put it mildly, for these men and women, Yemen has never had an ideal political climate.

They had front-row seats to Yemen's anti-government uprising in 2011, and now they are once again confronted with tough questions about their country's future following the Houthi military invasion in September.

The Yemen Times sat down with several members of the organization to talk about the shift in political dynamics brought about by the Houthis, a Zaidi Shia group formerly concentrated in the country's north, and what this means to them.

Nabil Kacem, 49, a prominent artist and writer living in Sana'a, has a few decades on most of his Basement peers. On a recent day at the cultural foundation, Kacem was leading a creative writing work-shop.

Young men and women sat in a circle with notebooks and pens in hand. They began furiously writing once Kacem prompted them with a question, giving them just a few minutes to respond.

"What would your life be like if you were a police officer?" asked Kacem. Participants soon went around the circle reading their writing. Responses ranged from the poetic—complete with *terza rima* rhyming verse stanzas—to the more straightforward.

"If I were a police officer, I would

have to slit my wrists," said one participant, drawing laughter from the room.

The Basement has been around since 2009 but only officially registered with the Ministry of Culture in 2012.

"The basement is an open space where you can be whatever you want to be. You can be the artist, you can be the writer, you can be the political activist," said Mohammed Al-Suleihi, a visual artist and a member of the Basement's executive board. "It's a breathing space more than anything else. You can be nobody in particular. You can be an inventor. The basement is living, it is people."

For musicians and those who want to hear some live music, the Basement hosts jam sessions on Wednesdays and an open-mic on Saturdays.

But many regulars fled abroad after the Sept. 21 takeover of the capital by the Houthis so sessions have mostly leveled off. Still, the Basement continues to host movie viewings and discussions on Thursdays and "knowledge exchange forums" on Saturdays.

The general mood at the center feels unchanged from past observations, but the situation in the capital has changed. What impact do the politics of the day have on a cultural foundation like the Basement?

According to Al-Suleihi, a lot. "It's always been a tough climate [for us], but it's gotten worse, way worse," he said. "We've always had to think about the topics we choose. We wouldn't hold off on presenting something because it's too controversial, but we have to anticipate the consequences so we can be prepared."

The Basement has not held a political lecture since the Houthis' ascent power.

"We don't know what sort of response to anticipate from them. The consequences could be serious. You cannot go to the authorities even because they [the Houthis] are the authorities now. Which is very strange and unstable for us," said Abdul-Aziz Morfeq, a writer at the foundation.

But Kacem, along with Shaima Jamal, the director of the Basement, think concerns are overblown.

Next to the building is a water pump, which the Houthis took control of, mistakenly believing it belonged to the Al-Ahmar family. They were there for weeks, and gave the Basement free water as a gesture of support, said Jamal.

"They were friendly and said they supported us," she added.

Kacem says the Houthis' mission is political, not cultural, and draws a clear distinction between the two.

"They're not here to stifle your creativity," he said.

But Morfeq thinks that sort of calculation is dangerous.

"If they gain strength, or it becomes time to act, maybe we're next," Morfeq said. "We're expecting that actually."

"I think they're being tolerant now because they want to normalize their presence. They need to normalize their existence here in Sana'a, because the country has changed since 1962 [when Yemen's imamate was overthrown]," he added. "This isn't the moment for them to provoke people. They just need more time to gain more strength."

Both Al-Suleihi and Morfeq recalled an incident that raised concern.

"Our neighbors told us, 'They're asking about you.' They've come here a few times asking what we do and why women are coming in and out," said Morfeq.

But the young man said they welcome anyone.

"We told them we're a cultural foundation and that our doors are always open, [they] can come anytime. Just leave your guns at the door."

Others say the group is waiting to get stronger, and that people like Kacem shouldn't underestimate their appeal.

When trying to decipher what the



The Basement says all are welcome to come and share ideas, art and projects.



The Basement has been criticized for its mixed-gender events.



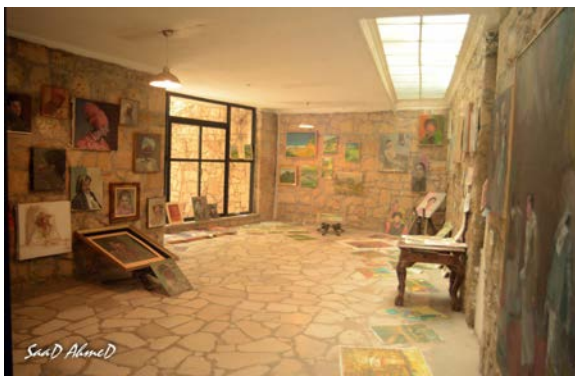
Musicians have found a home at The Basement.



Members were always happy to talk politics until recently.



The foundation is unsure about its future now that political powers are changing.



Houthi takeover means for Yemen, there is much ambiguity.

"Just read the sermons they record and publish," Morfeq said. "They say they are the opposite of Islam, but if you read their books, they clearly are not." Islam is Yemen's major Islamist party and political foe of the Houthis.

Morfeq is referring to a sermon by Hussein Al-Houthi that says that one of the conspiracies of the West to make Yemenis "less religious and more retarded," is to encourage mixed environments.

"At work, you see a woman and this will spread love," Al-Houthi said. "Once love is spread, the man goes to work thinking of love. And he will dress to impress the woman, and he will want to show his female colleague this love." And then Al-Houthi asks, "How can a nation be

built on love?" He literally asks that," Morfeq said.

Morfeq and Al-Suleihi argue the members of the Houthi Political Office are more Lenin than Houthi.

"They're socialists. They even use communist vocabulary when they write about the [Houthi] movement. They talk about the proletariat and the [bourgeoisie]," Morfeq said. "Some of them even call themselves communists, but I don't think they've read Marx. Maybe they love Lenin or Stalin, anti-imperialism and that sort of thing."

Where does that leave left-leaning artists, writers and musicians?

"They might try and control what we present and what we do here. Of course the Basement has not stopped and will not stop. We have been through a lot," Al-Suleihi said. "[During 2011,] we had bomb

threats, and we kept going."

For Al-Suleihi, progress is about more than improving the humanitarian situation or securing security in a country with a vibrant secessionist movement and an Al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP) insurgency. It requires a different sort of change.

"The war against terrorism is not fought with bombs or the military. The war against terrorism is what we do here. It is cultural, it is rejecting those ideologies," said Al-Suleihi. "Maybe people should stop being willing to die for [their causes]."

"When a young person comes and displays their art here, it is comforting and it makes us appreciate this space. We give space to people who might otherwise express themselves in the worst way. It's a slow pace, but it's something," he added.




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# Gas shortage:

## Residents in Socotra are logging trees for wood

■ Ali Ibrahim Al-Moshki

Ranked as the world's fourth most exotic island and a World Heritage Site by UNESCO in 2008, the island of Socotra has for many years been known as the jewel of Yemen's tourism industry. Located south east of the Yemeni mainland in the Indian Ocean, Socotra is known for its beautiful beaches and clear climate.

Recently, the island's pristine nature and rare plant life has come under threat from a domestic fuel crisis that has left locals without gas or electricity, forcing many to begin cutting down the rare trees to collect firewood to warm their homes as winter on the island intensifies.

The island is home to 853 types of rare plants and trees, 362 are found only on the island. Most famous among them is the Dragon Blood tree, known locally as 'Dam Al-Akhwayn,' or 'the blood of two brothers.' Locals say the first dragon tree sprouted on the island shortly after Cain, son of Adam and Eve, killed his brother Able. The legend claims that following his death, Able's blood seeped into the ground, giving birth to the first dragon blood tree.

Socotra is one of Yemen's nature reserves, and is therefore protected under the country's Natural Reserve Protection Law 275, passed in 2000. The law forbids, "All forms of logging, and destruction or targeting of plant and animal life in all five of Yemen's natural reserves," says Ahmed Said Suleiman, director of the General Authority for Environment Protection in Socotra. "The biological diversity that has made Socotra so unique is in real danger of being wiped out in the medium to long term, due to illegal logging by locals," he added.

The fuel crisis that led locals to start logging began in June when the state-run Yemen LNG Gas Corporation, run by Yemen's Ministry of Oil, ceased providing fuel shipments to the Al-Aisi Organization for Investment and Commerce, also known as Raha,

according to Salem Dahaq, director of the Hadibou District, home to Hadibou city, the capital of Socotra. The organization, owned by business mogul and former chairman of the Yemeni Football Federation, Ahmed Al-Aisi, is Socotra's sole fuel provider according to Dahaq. It is responsible for transportation of fuel from mainland Yemen to Socotra, and distribution of fuel supplies to citizens on the island.

Gas shipments ceased, according to Dahaq, because Al-Aisi had accumulated a large amount of debt that was owed to the Yemen LNG Gas Corporation. "The total debt is in the hundreds of millions of riyals," according to Dahaq. The Yemen Times was not able to independently verify this figure. A source within Yemen's Ministry of Oil, who asked to speak on condition of anonymity, confirmed that the Yemen LNG Gas Corporation, which falls under the authority of the ministry, had stopped sending gas shipments to Raha, due to the company's unpaid debts. He would not comment on the total size of the debt.

According to Dahaq, Socotra residents were able to weather the shortage between June and October, as the local government had stockpiled large amounts of gas to be used during crisis situations. This stockpile ran out in late October, according to Dahaq, at which point local residents began illegally cutting down Socotra's trees and plant life.

"Locals are chopping down the island's trees without distinguishing between rare and common trees," he said. "They don't care, they just need firewood for their homes in order to cook and stay warm."

According to Ahmad Said Suleiman, the General Authority for Environment Protection in Socotra has sent several letters to Prime Minister Bahah pleading for assistance to help address this issue, but to no avail. No response has yet been received, according to Suleiman. In a phone interview with the Yemen Times, Dahaq claimed he traveled to Sana'a on Dec. 3 to meet with Prime Minister Bahah and oil minister Mohammad Abdullah bin



Socotra resident Abdulrahman Al-Socotri said some residents have made a business out of cutting down Socotra's trees. "They go out into the center [of the Island], cut down trees, load them in trucks and sell them back in town to residents," he said. Some fear one result could be the decline of tourism on the island, which is known for its trees.

Nabhan to discuss the crisis.

"Last week, a proposal was put forth by Yemen LNG to have the Yemeni Economic Corporation replace Raha as Socotra's gas supplier," said Suleiman. "However, this would require that the company buy a new fleet of gas shipping tankers, gas cylinders, and other equipment needed to transport the fuel, a process that would take a long time, and not provide a solution to Socotra's immediate fuel needs," he added. Dahaq claimed that the possibility of commissioning The Yemeni Economic Corporation to replace Yemen LNG was discussed at the meeting held Wednesday with the Minister of Oil and the prime minister.

The Yemen Times made many calls to both Yemen LNG and the Al-Aisi Organization for Investment and Commerce, but both repeatedly declined to comment. Socotra Island is distinguished for its wild life and trees, whose leaves are included as ingredients in a number of local herbal medicines used to treat diseases ranging from asthma, headaches to skin infections. Among them is the Al-Saber Al-Socotri tree, Mur tree, Boswellia Carteri tree, Euphorbia Mili and Jaraz tree. Palm trees and Al-Amata tree are also spread out heavily throughout the island, particularly along various riverbanks.

Suleiman further bemoaned the effects tree-cutting would have on tourism. "Socotra is the only part of Yemen tourists come to, because it's the only part of the country that's safe," he said. "Tourism has been steadily increasing since the labeling of Socotra as a World Heritage sight. Last year, we received 1,400 foreign tourists, a huge boost to the local economy," he added.

Suleiman said cutting down the trees would eliminate incentive for tourists to visit. Cutting down trees would also cause Socotra's rare bird population, another reason tourists travel to the island, to migrate, he added.

"We've had gas shortages before, they usually occur once a year.

Usually they last ten days. However Socotrans have now been without gas for almost a month and a half and we haven't seen any reaction from the government," he said.

"Locals have cut down hundreds, if not thousands of rare trees already. If steps aren't taken to address this crisis, Socotra will never be the same again."

Abdulrahman Al-Socotri, a resident of Hadibou, told the Yemen Times that gas in all houses in Socotra had run out since late October, and that residents had taken to cutting down trees to use as firewood. "Some have made a business out of it," he said. "They go

out into the center [of the Island], cut down trees, load them in trucks and sell them back in town to residents. It's the only option we have, even if it is destroying the environment."

Ali Yahya, an ecologist based in Socotra, says that among the trees being cut are the Croton Socotranus, locally known as Matrer; the Carphilia Abovata, locally known as Shaihat; and the Ziziphusspina-Christi, known locally as Dha'd. The latter is found only in Socotra, he said.

Ahmad Al-Aisi had been accused in 2011 in a number of Yemeni media outlets of illegally smuggling

large quantities of diesel to Djibouti, allegedly in cooperation the Aden Refining Company. On Aug. 4, 2014, the news outlet "Aden Al-Ghad," published ten photos of various undisclosed documents from the Yemeni Customs Agency, Ministry of Finance, and Aden Refining Company that allegedly link Al-Aisi and a number of other Yemeni businessmen and government officials to the smuggling of fuel outside the country. Neither Al-Aisi nor the Aden Refining Company were ever brought to court or prosecuted in or outside of Yemen on any charges related to these allegations.

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# ‘Death to America’: Would you like some chicken with that?

## Houthis now control Sana’a branches of KFC and Baskin Robbins

Story by **Nasser Al-Sakkaf**  
Photo by **Brett Scott**

**N**ear Hadda Street in Sana’a is one of the city’s most popular Kentucky Fried Chicken (KFC) restaurants. Although the menu is pricey compared to local cuisine, KFC is always bustling with people. Right next to KFC is another popular American chain, Baskin-Robbins.

Apart from their popularity and location, the two stores share one other thing in common: the Houthis.

While both chains are American symbols, anti-Americanism does not appear to be the group’s motive, despite the Houthis’ clear anti-imperialist stance.

Ali Al-Qahoom, a member of the Houthis’ Political Office, told the Yemen Times that their only concern is who owns the restaurant’s branches in Yemen: Hamid Al-Ahmar.

When the Houthis took over the capital on Sept. 21, they stormed institutions run by, and homes owned by, members of the Islah Party—historical opponent of the Houthi movement.

Al-Ahmar is a multimillionaire businessman and politician, and more relevantly, a prominent member of the Islah Party.

The son of the former leader of the powerful Hashid tribal federation, Al-Ahmar fled Yemen when it was clear the Houthis were gaining ground. The exact date of his departure is unclear, but he has not returned since.

Al-Qahoom wryly states that the Houthis consider Al-Ahmar’s wealth state resources to be distributed to Yemeni citizens.

### The takeover

“On Sept. 21, we asked the administration of the restaurant to give us financial reports about the work in the restaurant, but they refused to give us this report,” Houthi mem-

ber Abdullah Mohammad told the Yemen Times. “Then we decided to take over of the restaurant.”

Mohammad is one of the Houthi members who now make up the administrative staff at the KFC located near Kentucky Roundabout. He studied accounting at Sana’a University but hasn’t worked in the field since his graduation in 2011.

On Nov. 12, Houthis took control of the restaurant and closed it. The next day, it reopened with business as usual—or so it seemed.

Although waiters, cooks, cleaners, and cashiers came to work like any other work day, the administration was run by the Houthis and a few armed Houthis were positioned inside.

Fahmi Tawfeeq, a waiter at KFC, said the workers in the restaurant have not noticed any difference between the former and current administration, and that the Houthis are treating the employees with respect.

“I heard that Houthis seized the restaurant so I was afraid to visit the restaurant, but when I visited it, I did not feel like anything was different,” said resident Basem Al-Shargabi, while dining in the restaurant.

Al-Shargabi says the spread of armed Houthis has become normal for people, and their armed presence at the entrance of the KFC is what people are used to seeing outside government buildings and other institutions.

Houthi administrator Mohammad told the Yemen Times there are more than 100 workers in the restaurant and that the Houthis did not change a single one—apart from the manager, who was fired.

The Houthi administrators told the Yemen Times they did not have the contact details of the former manager, and multiple employees declined to speak to the Yemen Times, apparently out of fear of employment repercussions.

“We sell and buy according to the



The infamous Houthi slogan on top of the KFC brand.

needs of the restaurant, and we pay the wages of the workers in the restaurant,” Mohammad said. “[The Houthis] are not going to close the restaurant because of the workers, who depend on their work in the restaurant to live, and Ansar Allah [the Houthis] want to develop the country, not damage it.”

### Stealing or fighting corruption?

Al-Qahoom said the Houthis will hand over the restaurant to the government “at the proper time.” They would not specify the date.

For now, says Mohammad, the Houthi administrators will continue to pay for the operating costs of the restaurant. As for the profit,

Mohammad said they will “keep the rest with us, then we will give it to the government.”

The land on which KFC is built belongs to Sana’a’s capital secretariat. Al-Ahmar paid the city for use of the land.

According to Mohammad, Al-Ahmar paid YR85,000 [almost \$400] per month. But he alleges the city is asking the new administration for YR1 million (\$4,650) per month.

While Mohammad could not provide evidence for these figures, and the Yemen Times was unable to independently verify these claims, Mohammad pointed to this as being an example of corruption.

Mohammad said the Houthis have not yet paid rent to the Cap-

ital Secretariat and that negotiations are underway to settle on a figure.

Mohammad Qaid, the manager of the secretariat’s endowment office, which is responsible for property ownership in Sana’a, confirmed that his office owned the restaurant’s land. However, he denied that his office was responsible for resolving disputes regarding rent. He directed the Yemen Times to the Capital Secretariat’s spokesperson who also provided no comment on the issue.

### Baskin-Robbins and Saba Islamic Bank

It is the same story at the Baskin-Robbins, located next to KFC. It continues to operate normally publicly but under Houthi administration.

Al-Ahmar’s business ventures are not limited to fast-food joints. He also owns the mobile telephone company, Sabafon; Al-Ahmar Group; the Peace Foundation, which manages the Al-Ahmars’ assets and holdings in Yemen; as well as the Al-Afaq Foundation, which manages the Al-Ahmars’ hospitality businesses, and includes hotels and tourist-related businesses.

The Houthis have seized many of these businesses.

In the beginning of November, writer and political analyst Ghamdan Al-Yousafi published photos of several different documents on his personal Facebook account, allegedly written and signed by members of the Houthis, demanding that Al-Ahmar transfer his holdings and assets to accounts owned by Houthi “popular committees.”

The same was allegedly demanded of Ali Mohsen, the former commander of the First Armored Division, who was chased out of Sana’a when the Houthis seized control of his military installation on Sept. 21.

Al-Yousafi told the Yemen Times that he obtained the documents from the Peace Foundation, which is now controlled by Houthis, but continues to be formally owned and

operated by Al-Ahmar.

The Yemen Times obtained a copy of these documents. One of them was addressed to the Saba Islamic Bank, where Al-Ahmar serves as the chairperson, and read as follows:

“We hope that you cooperate immediately with our representative [Houthi member] Mr. Qasim Abdullah Al-Wadei in transferring all the assets and shares of Hamid Al-Ahmar to the popular committees, and also his assets and shares as an administrative partner according to your bylaws and regulations. Please note that our representative has the right to negotiate and make the necessary decisions.”

The Yemen Times made repeated phone calls to Saba Islamic Bank. Employees repeatedly hung up when asked about the documents and the allegations.

Al-Yousafi also claimed that the Houthis are looking to seize assets belonging to the Islamic Insurance Company and Qatari, Emirati, and Syrian Airlines, whose agencies in Yemen are administered by the Al-Ahmar family, according to representatives at those agencies.

“I’ve faced intimidation from the Houthis for publishing these documents,” he said. “I got a message from an anonymous person saying he will harm me if I continue to publish documents related to the Houthis.”

The Yemen Times contacted a number of Houthi leaders but none confirmed the accuracy of these claims or authenticity of the documents. Houthi Political Office member Al-Qahoom stated that he could neither confirm nor deny their authenticity.

Hussein Al-Bukhaiti, a prominent Houthi member and activist, said there was no truth to any of these statements, and that those making them sought to disparage the Houthis’ name.

“If we wanted to freeze or transfer money we wouldn’t document it. We’re not stupid,” he said.

# Houthi poetry and songs: Propaganda, art or both?

■ **Mohammad Al-Khayat**

**T**he power of music and words isn’t news. Throughout history, wars were started, fought, and brought to an end with the uttering of a single word. Likewise, music has been used to move the masses.

In 2011 Yemen saw a reemergence of these techniques during the country’s anti-government uprising. Poetry and music were used to rouse emotions and convey political and social messages. Most recently, these artistic forms of expression have also served the Houthis’ (a religious group from the country’s north that has morphed into a political grouping) ascent to power.

Salah Al-Dakak, a poet who represented the Houthis at the National Dialogue Conference (NDC), says he feels compelled to support the Houthi cause through his craft.

“As artists and writers, our only way to support those struggling against the regime was through our poems, it was our duty.”

He said this was especially true during the Houthis’ six wars against the central government from 2004-2010.

Al-Dakak said that he wrote the following lines when visiting the shrine of Hussein Badr Al-Deen Al-Houthi, the founder of the Houthi movement:

*Oh Master of the weak, you have surrounded them [the enemy],  
Smugness and arrogance reign no more,  
If they attack you, your arms*

*are like lightning bolts,  
Shedding their blood, turning it into rain for the soil,  
You’re grandeur is too complex for them to understand*

The artist is selective about whom he shares his craft with.

“I don’t publish my poems in newspapers because most are owned and operated by political parties that have their own message and target audience,” Al-Dakak said. “I sing them at Houthi events and share them on Facebook, in order to get them out to the widest audience possible, including those who differ with me on politics.”

Many poems are uploaded to YouTube, where artists create music videos to go along with the poems. These videos include images and clips of speeches made by Abdulmalik Al-Houthi, the movement’s current political and spiritual leader.

Malik Al-Shami, a graphic designer and freelance film editor, has produced a number of these videos. His work primarily consists of mixing poems with speeches made by Abdulmalik Al-Houthi, adding sound and pictures taken in areas around Sa’ada and other cities.

Al-Shami’s work is frequently broadcast on Al-Masira, the Houthis’ official television network.

One of the most popular Houthi songs is “Ma Nabali” (We don’t care), produced by Firqa Ansar Allah, the movement’s official musical group, according to Al-Shami.

A video accompanying the song opens up with pictures of various Houthi leaders, including Al-Houthi standing next to his brother and the movement’s founder.



The Houthi movement’s official musical group, Firqa Ansar Allah, sings popular songs like “Ma Nabali,” meaning “we don’t care.”

What follows is an eclectic mix of shots and images taken from various sources, carefully chosen to evoke feelings of pride, anger, and commitment to the movement’s struggle, said Al-Shami.

These include shots of Houthi fighters in full military gear, interspersed with shots of the group’s infamous slogan—“Death to America, Death to Israel, Damn the Jews, Victory to Islam.”

These images are followed by news clips that show U.S. soldiers beating Iraqi prisoners during their occupation of the country. Finally, clips are taken from the film, “Lion of the Desert,” directed by Syrian-American Mustafa Al-Akkad. The film depicts the life and times of Omar Al-Mukhtar, a Libyan jihadist who fought Italian occupation prior to World War II.

To some, the lyrics of the song

suggest that the Houthis are eager to partake in a similar war:

*We don’t care  
We don’t mind launching a new world war  
We ask for rifles  
It’s a shame to continue living like this  
Struggling in the path of God,  
we’ve experienced the taste of bittersweet*

### We welcome death Hello, oh demise

“Armies tend to have ballads and hymns that encourage their soldiers to be brave in battle,” said Dr. Amal Abbas, a professor of psychology at Taiz University. “For the Houthis, these poems and songs are their hymns.”

Continued on the back page



## YT vision statement

**"To make Yemen a good world citizen."**

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



## OUR OPINION

## Workers have rights, government needs to enforce them

A recent report by the Yemen Times on construction workers and the enforcement of labor laws should leave us all feeling ashamed. The people building our homes, workplaces, schools, hospitals and grocery stores often work in extremely dangerous conditions, without basic safety equipment or training.

Yemeni labor laws provide workers with social protection benefits if they are injured or killed doing their jobs. But it is far too easy for construction companies and contractors to skirt these rules by hiring non-contracted laborers.

Profiled in the report was Hajj Ahmad, a laborer who spent 30 years working in construction before falling off a scaffold four years ago and permanently injuring himself. Ahmad never once signed a contract, relying instead on verbal agreements with contractors.

Although recognizable by Yemeni law, verbal agreements keep employer liability low, often exempting them of having to provide social protection to workers, based on the "current practices of the industry."

In three decades, Ahmad was not once provided safety equipment—not even a helmet to protect his head. After his accident he went from being a provider for his family, to a liability.

Instead of social security Ahmad received medical bills, leaving his family without its main breadwinner and—as a result of his accident, heavily in debt.

Construction companies avoid contracts with people like Ahmad by categorizing them as temporary or seasonal workers.

There is currently a bill in discussion before the Cabinet that would extend labor rights and protection to non-contracted workers. The Cabinet should waste little time passing it.

The over-arching problem with labor laws in Yemen, however, is enforcement. Even contracted employees who are protected under the law rarely seek justice, because institutions tasked with monitoring work conditions, investigating violations, and doling-out punishments to those who take advantage of workers to line their pockets, are severely understaffed and underfunded. Contracted workers routinely wait for years to hear from the arbitration committees set up by the Ministry of Social Affairs and Labor.

The Ministry says there are three inspection teams to monitor work environments throughout the entire country. The team based in Sana'a consists of about 30 individuals. But such a group is too small to monitor all work sites in a city of two million people.

Workers are not disposable machinery, and the government needs to fully fund the institutions it has set up to protect them. The bottom line is that we should have safety and job security of our workers as a priority if we are to build a stable and developing country.

**Ahlam Mohsen**  
Deputy editor-in-chief

# The Syrian Conflict and the Ascendancy of the Lebanese Armed Forces

**Basem Shabb**  
Middle East Institute  
First published Nov. 25

In the past, the Lebanese Armed Forces' (LAF) inability to confront or deter Israel was reflected as political weakness for the Lebanese government vis-à-vis Hezbollah. Israel's withdrawal from south Lebanon in 2000 heralded a growing political role for Hezbollah. This role was further enhanced by the 2006 war with Israel, with Hezbollah claiming victory and consolidating its influence within the LAF and the government. Neither Security Council Resolutions 1559 and 1701, which mandated the disarmament of Hezbollah, nor Western support for March 14 forces could reverse the rising tide of the group, which had forged an alliance with General Michel Aoun, thereby securing credible Christian support. Even a sizeable faction of the Sunnis was sympathetic to Hezbollah due to its role as a deterrent force against Israel. The Palestinians, the second best armed faction after Hezbollah, were close allies. As such, the Lebanese government could not do much to confront Hezbollah. In May 2008, the group, in response to a government decision to dismantle its land-based communications network, took over Beirut while the LAF stood by. Hezbollah's military and political dominance was complete.

The Syrian crisis is changing all that. Quietly over the past few years, the LAF has been develop-

ing a credible force, with US assistance. The training and materials geared toward counterterrorism, internal security, and border control were not seen by Hezbollah as a threat to its military arsenal of rockets and long range missiles. As it turns out, the LAF was better prepared for the Syrian crisis and its spillover into Lebanon. The elite units of the LAF, notably the rangers, commandos, and navy seals, were specifically trained in urban warfare and in confronting irregular forces and counterinsurgency. US military equipment, while not relevant in a context of confrontation with Israel, is well suited to countering irregular forces and border control. A modest but credible helicopter force provides mobility. More importantly, the delivery of Cessna aircraft gave the LAF advanced surveillance and reconnaissance abilities as well as pinpoint firepower with Hellfire missiles. More conventional weapons such as M198 Howitzers as well as M-60A3 and M48A5 tanks offer accurate and continuous firepower.

On the other hand, Hezbollah's involvement in Syria exposed its lack of direct firepower as well as its inadequate surveillance for guerilla-style warfare in which it is on the receiving end. The conflict now involved jihadis with light weapons and mobile anti-tank missiles facing Hezbollah fighters with similar weapons. In a sense, Hezbollah had prepared for the wrong war. Long range missiles and short range Katyusha rockets designed for a war

**"LAF monitoring towers are being erected in sensitive areas along the Lebanese-Syrian border, to which Hezbollah would not have acquiesced three years ago."**

against Israel were now of little use. Chinese anti-ship missiles as well as concealed anti-tank and short range missiles in south Lebanon facing Israel seemed of little military value when the real threat to Hezbollah came from across the long and ragged border with Syria. Hezbollah did not anticipate this and was ill prepared for irregular warfare and border control. It has resorted to erecting fixed positions not unlike what the Israelis erected in south Lebanon.

The battles by the Syrian Army and Hezbollah 18 months ago to control the Damascus-Homs highway drove several thousand Jabhat Al-Nusra fighters into the Qalamoun plateau, an area roughly 60 by 20 kilometers straddling Lebanon and Syria. Isolated from Syria, the town of Aarsal in Leba-

non was the logistical base supplying the insurgents. On Aug. 2 in a surprise attack, Jabhat Al-Nusra and the Islamic State struck the LAF in Aarsal. Though 36 military personnel were taken hostage, the LAF quickly repulsed the attack, putting to good use its Hellfire-armed Cessna with a ground counteroffensive. The insurgents suffered an estimated 150 to 200 casualties.

Having given up on Aarsal, the Syrian insurgents most recently attacked ten Hezbollah positions. The attack on one position, Nabi Sbat in Lebanon, was seen in a video that showed the position being stormed and the bodies of several Hezbollah fighters. A booty consisting of TOW missiles (probably of the Iranian type) was also shown. It is rumored that out of 60 or so Hezbollah fighters, many fled. On the Syrian side of Qalamoun in Asal al-Ward, several Hezbollah fighters were reportedly taken prisoner, among them an 18-year-old who was shown on YouTube pleading for his life. Hassan Nasrallah had to appear in military fatigues in east Lebanon to shore up the morale of Shia towns and fighters.

The Syrian conflict has been detrimental to Hezbollah's political standing as well. In addition to antagonizing the Sunni Lebanese and Palestinians, Hezbollah's involvement inflamed sectarian tensions. Despite a few Sunni defections, the LAF shows little signs of fracturing though Sunnis constitute almost half of the forces. In a recent bold move, the LAF took control of Tripoli, the second

largest and predominantly Sunni city in north Lebanon with a sizeable Alawi community. Tripoli had been a hotbed of Sunni radicalism and had seen violent clashes between Sunni radicals and Alawi fighters supported by Hezbollah. The LAF move was endorsed by all Lebanese leaders, including those from the Sunni community.

Thus, despite sectarian tensions the LAF has overwhelming popular support in countering extremism and terrorism. In contrast, Hezbollah has lost ground politically and is overstretched militarily. The political void Hezbollah has left behind is gradually being replaced by a more assertive LAF. LAF monitoring towers are being erected in sensitive areas along the Lebanese-Syrian border, to which Hezbollah would not have acquiesced three years ago. An offer by Iran to supply the LAF with ammunition and light weapons, which would endanger US support, was politely rejected by the Lebanese government. A Saudi gift of \$3 billion will further boost the capabilities of the LAF.

The most immediate danger to Lebanon is not from an ISIS incursion from Syria, but would be from a fracturing of the LAF due to sectarian tensions. By remaining a united, effective force with widespread popular support, the LAF has thus far helped Lebanon weather the sectarian storm. As the dust settles on a politically isolated and militarily weary Hezbollah, only a strong LAF can ensure a smooth transition to sovereignty and normalcy.

## Syrian refugees in Europe:

# The law is not on their side

**Menelaos Tzafalias**  
aljazeera.com  
First published Nov.30

More than 150 Syrian war refugees, old men, women and babies among them, have been protesting peacefully opposite the Greek parliament in the heart of Athens since Nov. 19. Some of them have been on a hunger strike since Monday and several have been hospitalised. They demand nothing more and nothing less than the equivalent of "life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness," as Thomas Jefferson wrote in the US declaration of independence. But to actually put this into practice, they must defy laws currently in place in the European Union, of which Greece is a member.

The refugees, who have even set up a dedicated Facebook page, want to leave Greece with adequate travel documents. They want to pursue happiness in other European nations, where they believe conditions will be better for them compared to the crisis-hit country where they are currently stuck, having escaped war and ruthless traffickers.

"We demand the Greek government to find a solution for Syrians in Greece," reads a sign in English, at the small protest camp which the refugees take care to keep tidy. Packs of food are set out but left untouched. One night, a homeless Greek woman couldn't help herself from taking a tangerine from an open bag and was pleasantly surprised when no one reacted.

**Bound by the Dublin System** Unfortunately, and despite the refugees' best behavior, Greek authorities cannot legally grant the protesters the right to travel freely to other European countries and look for work or apply for asylum there. Greece is bound by the so-called Dublin System (including all EU member countries apart from Croatia, along with Iceland, Lichtenstein, Norway and Switzerland), whereby refugees making their way to Europe must apply for asylum and then remain in the European country they first reach. Greece and Italy bear the brunt of this burden. Interestingly, Syrians enjoy a privileged status, compared to other refugees—if qualifying for war refugee status can be called a privilege. Provided

they have a Syrian passport or identification card, even expired, they can apply for and receive political asylum on the same day. No other alien nationals have this right. If a refugee has a relative already benefiting from asylum in another Dublin System country, they can apply to be reunited with them. This would take two to three months.

If a Syrian refugee does not have any documents, they again can apply for asylum in Greece, but the process would take longer. Applying for asylum would mean the protesters would have access to aid for food, housing, and public healthcare, as a government minister who met them on the square last week tried to explain. As for the right to work, unfortunately they would be in the same precarious situation as most Greeks, who face soaring unemployment.

Indeed, Greece has seen its economy lose a quarter of its output in the last six years. Last Tuesday, if the protesters had looked to the other side of Syntagma Square, they would have seen the offices of Greece's finance minister still lit, deep into the night, as officials were preparing for tough negotiations with international

creditors.

Even so, it is interesting to see other groups of Greek protesters offering support. For example, among the first to help, bringing food, clothes, and blankets, were the almost 600 public sector cleaning ladies who were fired because of the austerity measures and who have staged another sit-in not far from the square. The Syrian protesters are aware of all this and that is why they are refusing to apply for asylum.

### What about Palestinians and Iraqis?

Syrians, of course, are not the only foreigners suffering. Palestinians, who for years were living as refugees in Syria, have seen their lives once again torn inside out. And never mind those seeking to escape the permanent pain of the West Bank and Gaza. This recently was put in the spotlight by the story of a young Palestinian girl who left Syria for Europe with her parents. Her parents drowned at sea when traffickers rammed their boat. Approximately 500 souls were lost. Masa Dasouki survived, to face a different kind of ordeal, as she is now living in an Athens orphanage and for the moment cannot be

reunited with her uncle, who got asylum in Sweden. The situation has grown worse for Iraqis, too.

Moreover, the situation for all migrants in Greece, simply is bad. A new documentary by acclaimed Palestinian film-maker Mahdi Fleifel illustrates one aspect. The other aspect is the plight of those migrants held in detention camps. In the rest of Europe it is not ideal, either. Yet thousands keep coming.

It would seem that the Syrian protesters are demanding the impossible. They do not have the law on their side. But laws can change. Europe should be doing something more than export arms. And countries like Greece and Italy should not become dumping grounds for the world's wretched. Even the pope recently urged European leaders to do more for migrants. So, what is left? Divine intervention?

*Menelaos Tzafalias is a freelance journalist and producer based in Athens, Greece. He has worked as an associate producer on the documentary "Palikari: Louis Tikas and the Ludlow Massacre," a story about migrants and labor relations in early 20th century US.*

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# Yemen faces economic crisis as Saudi mulls pulling plug

**IRIN**  
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**S**audi Arabia is considering stopping financial support to Yemen, a move that could tip the country further towards economic collapse, Yemeni, Saudi and Western officials have said.

Since rebels from the Houthi movement took hold of the capital Sana'a in September, Saudi Arabia, which has provided an estimated \$4 billion to keep the Yemeni economy afloat since early 2012, has been reviewing its economic support for its southern neighbor. Among the key disbursements put on hold is \$700 million in military aid.

The deliberation comes at a time when fears of an impending economic collapse have risen, with UN envoy to Yemen Jamal Benomar warning it was unclear "whether [Yemen] would be able to continue to pay its civil servants after the end of the year."

## The ghost of 2011

Yemen's economy, already fragile before the country's 2011 uprising, was decimated by the unrest and elite infighting of that year. The transitional administration of President Abdu Rabu Mansour Hadi has struggled to restore growth or provide basic services, and the poverty rate has remained stubbornly above 50 percent since early 2012.

The only reason the government has been able to stay afloat since 2012, officials and analysts say, is the largesse of Saudi Arabia, Yemen's northern neighbor. While the donations have never been made official, in 2012 Riyadh is believed to have deposited \$1 billion at the Central Bank of Yemen and given the country a further \$2 billion in oil and fuel products to help shore up its finances. In July 2014, Ri-

yadh again bailed Sana'a out, providing \$1.2 billion in cash to help pay for fuel and another \$435 million to help the government make welfare payments.

Part of the issue has been the failure to trim fuel subsidies. Yemen heavily subsidizes fuel in the local market, costing the government more than \$3.3 billion—about a quarter of all spending—in 2013.

In August, the government cut subsidies, leading to a price increase of up to 95 per cent for fuel at the pump. It partly reversed the decision less than two months later, decreasing fuel prices by 25 per cent after the takeover of Sana'a by rebels from the northern Houthi movement, a Shia group with whom the Saudis have fought in the past.

Since the Houthi takeover no new Saudi funds have been disbursed, including \$700 million in military aid agreed as part of the bailout package in July. A number of diplomatic and government sources told IRIN that although there is unlikely to be a formal announcement that funding is being frozen, Riyadh will at the very least take a "go-slow" approach to transferring further funds to Sana'a until it is clear that the money will not financially benefit the Houthis.

"In conversation with [Yemeni] officials, they have been saying that they are not going to bring money to Yemen just to reinforce the Houthis," said a senior Yemeni official, part of whose responsibilities is to report on government spending and finances. "And whatever Saudi Arabia does, you know the other GCC [Gulf Cooperation Council] countries will do."

Two other Yemeni government and Western diplomatic officials confirmed that the \$700 million had been expected but had not as yet been delivered.

This has exacerbated other trends

towards financial collapse. Attacks on an important oil pipeline and electricity infrastructure in restive Marib province have cut off revenues and forced the government to import expensive fuel from abroad.

Thus the government is running short on dollars. Foreign currency reserves fell from \$4.4 billion to \$3.8 billion between September 2013 and September 2014, pushing the country towards a currency crisis. With the remaining reserves the bank can only afford to cover 4.8 months of imports, a record low.

Estimates of when the government would run out of money vary from the end of 2014 until early March 2015, but government officials and advisers make it clear that fiscal collapse is imminent. "If there is no intervention, it is not a question of if, it is a question of when," said the Yemeni official.

In line with other GCC officials, a senior Saudi diplomat said no formal decision had been made to halt aid or funding to Sana'a, but added that Riyadh is reviewing the situation in Yemen. "We will see how the new government [formed in early November] does," he said. "If they can act independently [of the Houthis], then maybe we can work with them."

Saudi officials are also said to be frustrated that the \$435 million they gave Sana'a in July has not been distributed to the Social Welfare Fund (SWF), the state body tasked with overseeing welfare payments to 1.5 million of Yemen's poorest people. According to people familiar with talks that took place earlier in the year, the funds had been touted as the first in a series of payments to be used to underwrite the Fund's costs.

A source at SWF told IRIN the government did not disburse the funds needed to make the first



A Yemeni man stands in front of a barricade of burning tyres erected on the main Sixty Metre Road during fuel riots in Sana'a, 30 July 2014.

quarterly payment of 2014—which had been due in January—until August. The second tranche followed in September, but SWF is yet to receive payments for the third or fourth quarters, both of which should have been made by this point in the year. "In the past, we paid at fixed times," the source said. "Now we don't know if or when we will be able to pay."

## Humanitarian crisis

The economic crisis is having an impact on the humanitarian suffering and any further collapse could be disastrous. More than 15.9 million people—60 percent of the population—require some form of humanitarian assistance.

"Yemen remains one of the major humanitarian crises in the world and the outlook for 2015 shows that the humanitarian crisis in the

country has gotten worse," said Johannes van der Klaauw, Yemen Humanitarian Coordinator for the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA).

"A large number of poor people in Yemen rely on welfare payments. Late [payments] make it difficult for them to meet their obligations including basic expenditure like buying food for their families... There are expenditures that a human being cannot postpone like buying food or medicine for a sick child."

"Yemen is experiencing new waves of increased conflict, while the risk of an economic meltdown cannot be ruled out," he added.

Hanalia Ferhan, country director at international NGO ACTED, said there would be a significant impact if the government were unable to pay salaries. "The financial and

economic situation has affected the country across the board," she said, highlighting the high prices of food imports and severe fuel shortages as key concerns for poor Yemenis.

"The communities we work with are in the most rural, hard-to-reach parts of the country. They were already in a dire situation a year ago... and the situation has not improved."

Abdulfatteh, a 47-year-old bus driver who would only give his first name, pointed to a mounting queue of trucks and cars at a petrol station on the outskirts of Sana'a's Old City. "It's very bad now," he said. "No electricity, no [petrol], no diesel... There is no work and there is no security. I think it will only get worse."

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# Challenging the Islamist-Secularist Binary of the 2014 Tunisian Elections

**Emily Parker**  
muffah.org  
First published Dec. 1

**T**unisia's October 26, 2014 parliamentary elections sent tremors through the country's ruling Islamist party, Ennahda. The results were a clear victory for the party's main opponent, the secular party Nidaa Tounes. This blow to Ennahda's power was quickly followed by presidential elections held on Nov. 23, with Nidaa Tounes's founder Beji Cassid Essebsi widely expected to win the run-off vote at the end of December.

Back in 2011, Ennahda won 89 out of 217 seats in the National Constituent Assembly, during the country's first free and fair elections. The party has since weathered two political assassinations and numerous large-scale anti-government protests to which it has responded by offering significant concessions. Despite dominating the government since November 2011, in January 2014 Ennahda ceded a majority of its power to a technocratic government.

Against this backdrop, much attention has focused on the implications of the recent elections for Ennahda, specifically, and for Tunisia's political Islamists, more generally. Such a focus is clearly justifiable, as the aftershocks of these events will certainly reverberate long into the future for Ennahda and its followers.

But, in assessing the election's



outcomes, there has been an inclination within Western—and particularly French—media to view Nidaa Tounes's victory exclusively through the lens of a secular-religious binary. But relying on this binary clouds the political reality behind these events and represents a myopic interpretation of voter attitudes. Instead of reflecting the politics of religious ideology, Ennahda's loss to Nidaa

Tounes reveals popular disappointment with the party's failures in delivering accountability and good governance to the country.

## A More Nuanced Story

With approval ratings dipping for many politicians and countrywide support for democracy on the decline, a vast majority of Tunisians chose to abstain from the parliamen-

tary vote. In a country with a population of approximately 10 million, around 7 million Tunisians did not vote either because they could not or did not want to. While the significance of this mass electoral exodus is unclear, it certainly suggests that something other than secular versus religious ideology is at play.

Further undermining the secular-religious binary is the fact that the

Congress for the Republic (CPR) and Ettakatol—the two secular parties that entered into a coalition government with Ennahda to form Tunisia's previous "troika" government—fared even worse than Ennahda in the parliamentary elections. Winning 29 seats in 2011, the CPR dropped down to only four seats after the recent electoral round, while Ettakatol lost all its seats (Ettakatol

initially received one seat, but this was later revoked).

The troika's failures to deliver on its promises to mitigate Tunisia's socioeconomic crisis largely explains this shift. Inflation has skyrocketed, and unemployment has exceeded 30 per cent among youth. Multiple political assassinations and protracted skirmishes along the Algerian border have further contributed to perceptions of instability in Tunisia.

According to a recent Pew Research poll, Ennahda's popularity has plummeted over 30 percentage points during the past two years, from 65 per cent in 2012 to 31 per cent in 2014. In the same research poll, 88 per cent of respondents described the country's economic situation as bad, and roughly half of Tunisians (51 per cent) said the recent years of post-revolutionary instability had left the country worse off than it was under President Zine Al-Abidine Ben Ali. Only 35 per cent said Tunisia was better off because of the Ennahda government and the technocratic administration that followed.

## The Rise of Nidaa Tounes

In lieu of another five years of Ennahda-dominated government, Tunisians chose a new political leadership. Founded in July 2012 by Essebsi—an 87-year-old veteran who served under former Presidents Habib Bourguiba and Ben Ali—Nidaa Tounes includes a number of former regime officials together with liberal political activists.

Continued on the back page



# The Saudi king who fought the wrong wars

**David Hearst**  
middleeasteye.net  
First published Dec. 1

There is one man for whom Hosni Mubarak's acquittal will come as welcome relief, his friend and fellow potentate King Abdullah. Such was the Saudi King's anxiety about Mubarak that he has nudged the Egyptian military to be more active on the former dictator's behalf.

Abdullah hinted several times that aid was contingent on Mubarak's release. In August last year, just after the coup, Abdullah lobbied for Mubarak at a time when Saudi Arabia was dangling \$10bn of economic relief. Mubarak was transferred from his prison cell to hospital. Latterly, there have been hints that Mubarak's release would smooth the way for an international donor's conference that the king was the first to call for.

The two men go back to the time when Abdullah was Crown Prince. Mubarak played a key role in the First Gulf War when the Arab League hesitated about backing an invasion of Kuwait. The Egyptian president not only turned the tide of Arab opinion but contributed 33,500 troops, the 4th largest commitment of coalition manpower.

Like Mubarak, Abdullah fancied himself as a reformer and he indeed came to power with high hopes. The kingdom he inherited was the world's leading oil exporter, the guardian of Islam's most sacred sites, and the center of the Arab world. It had good relations with most of its Arab neighbors. Abdullah also took the opportunity to be his own man. In May 2001 he refused an invitation to Washington over US support for Israel during

the second intifada.

Contrast this to the kingdom the aged king may soon leave behind. What will his legacy be?

Abdullah's record as a reformer is mixed. Over 70,000 students have taken him up on his offer to go to universities in the the US, Europe, and Australia. One in five shura members are women. But women are still forbidden from travelling, or going to the hospital, without permission from their male guardians. A man who has locked up four of his own daughters and prevented them from moving freely for 13 years, is not about to make radical changes here.

**"There is one man for whom Hosni Mubarak's acquittal will come as welcome relief, his friend and fellow potentate King Abdullah."**

On human rights in general, the kingdom remains one of the world's most repressive: political and human rights groups are banned; arbitrary arrest and ill-treatment in custody are commonplace; chil-

dren can be tried for capital crimes if they show signs of puberty. And when they have run out of charges with which to try activists like Mohammed Saleh Al-Bajadi, one of the founders of the Saudi Civil and Political Rights Association (ACPRA), they simply try them again on the same counts.

In Al-Bajadi's case, the criminal conspiracy involves "participating in the founding of an unlicensed organization, harming the image of the state through the media, calling on the families of political detainees to protest and hold sit-ins, contesting the independence of the judiciary and having banned books in his possession."

Domestically, there are unmistakable rumblings of discontent. 70 per cent of the people in one of the world's richest countries do not own their own houses. Salaries are low, and internet campaigns with the slogan "the salary is not enough" have run like wildfire in the last two years. Infrastructure is crumbling, as the inhabitants of Jeddah regularly find out when their city is flooded. The wealth of this kingdom has not trickled down.

But it is in foreign policy, that the kingdom's decline under Abdullah has been so marked. Abdullah inherited a landscape in which the kingdom had influence to the north and the south, and its historical regional rival of Iran was contained. Abdullah even had good relations with Syria, with a personal connection to the Assad clan. One of Abdullah's many wives (the estimates vary between 27 and 70 ex-wives) is the sister-in-law of Rifaat Al-Assad, Bashar's uncle. When the Lebanese civil war ended, it was in the Saudi city of Taif that the agreement between the warring parties was signed. When Hamas and Fatah at-

tempted to reconcile, they tried it first in Mecca. Abdullah's ill-fated Arab Peace Initiative is still technically on the shelf. If you had a problem in the Arab world, you would go to the Saudis to mediate the solution. They had friends everywhere.

Contrast that to today. Under Abdullah's watch at least three Arab capitals have fallen under Iranian influence—Baghdad, Beirut and Damascus.

Abdullah lost Iraq to the benefit of the Iranians, when he supported the 2003 invasion. He lost influence in Lebanon in the 2006 war between Israel and Hizbollah. Both Rafiq Hariri, the prime minister who was assassinated and his son Saad had Saudi passports. And he has now lost influence in his backyard Yemen, when a UAE inspired plot to crush the Islamist Islah group backfired spectacularly, opening the door to an Iranian-backed Houthi militia. Sana'a could become the fourth Arab capital Abdullah has lost.

Quite simply, he has fought the wrong wars, with the wrong allies, and left a vacuum in each one, inviting the kingdom's real enemies to enter.

Abdullah's biggest miscalculation was his reaction to the Arab Spring in 2011, which the House of Saud took personally. They were shaken by those 18 days in Tahrir Square, because they thought that they could be next. Abdullah viewed political Islam as an existential threat and vowed to fight it wherever he could.

The cost of waging this campaign has been enormous. Abdullah has lost Turkey, another vital player in the strategy to contain Iran. He has picked a fight with Qatar, threatening at one point to lay siege to the tiny Gulf enclave and almost de-

stroyed the Gulf Cooperation Council, the core instrument of Saudi power, in the process. In trying to destroy political Islam, Abdullah now sees the resurgence of a real enemy, militant Takfiri Islam or the Islamic State.

**"Abdullah's biggest miscalculation was his reaction to the Arab Spring in 2011, which the House of Saud took personally."**

It is not just a matter of propaganda. Abu Bakr Al-Baghdadi addressed himself to the "leader of the hypocrites" when he personally threatened the king in his latest speech: "There will be no security, no rest for Al-Salul." The ISIS leader said: "Draw your swords." The black flags of the Islamic State are fluttering on the northern border of Saudi Arabia, in Iraq, to the south in Yemen and to the west in the Sinai peninsula. The suppressed Shia in the volatile east of the country are also a force to be reckoned with. There was an outcry when Sheikh Nimr Baqir Al-Nimr, who led pro-

tests in Qatif at the height of the Arab Spring in 2011, was convicted of sedition.

Last, but not least, Abdullah has split his own family, by botching the succession. The crown prince Salman is in bad health and thought to be suffering from alzheimers or some form of dementia. Abdullah attempted to lock down the succession in an "unchangeable" decree which created the post of deputy crown prince for Prince Muqrin bin Abdulaziz, at 69 the youngest surviving son of King Abdulaziz. But Muqrin is also regarded as transient.

This leaves three real pretenders to the throne. There is Prince Miteb, Abdullah's own son, Mohammed Bin Nayef, the interior minister, or Ahmed bin Abdulaziz, the youngest surviving brother of the Sudairi clan. For the first time in many decades there is real uncertainty about who will be the next Saudi leader. Add it all up, and it's some legacy to bequeath.

A Saudi Arabia which has failed to open up its political system, which has failed to improve the lot of its people, which has fought the wrong wars, and which has poured all its energies in trying to crush the only real antidote to Takfiri Islam, and which harbors thousands of willing carriers of the black flags of the IS, is vulnerable indeed.

*David Hearst is editor-in-chief of Middle East Eye. He was chief foreign leader writer of The Guardian, former Associate Foreign Editor, European Editor, Moscow Bureau Chief, European Correspondent, and Ireland Correspondent. He joined The Guardian, from The Scotsman, where he was education correspondent.*



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ف: ٠١/٢٤٠٩٥٨٠  
٠١/٢٧٠٧٥١  
فرع شيرتون ٠١/٥٤٥٩٨٥  
فرع عدن ٠٢/٤٥٦٣٥  
٠١-٤٤٠٣٠٩  
فرع شيرتون ٠١/٥٨٩٥٥٥  
عدن ٠٢-٢٤٥٦٣٥

**شركات طيران**  
طيران اليمنية

٠١/٤٥٤٥٥٥  
٠١/٢٧١١٢٦  
فرع تعز: ٠١/٢٥٢٤٥٦  
فرع عدن: ٠٢/٢٥٢٤٥٦  
فرع الحديدة: ٠٣/٢٠١٤٧٤  
٠١/٥٦٥٦٥٦, ٠١/٢٥٠٨٠٠  
٠١/٤٤٤٤٤٢  
٠١/٤٢٧٩٩٣  
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٠١/٤٤٦٧٥٠

**السعودية**  
الإماراتية  
الاثيوبية  
الألمانية (لوفتهانزا)  
التركية  
السعودية  
القطرية  
طيران الخليج  
طيران الأردنية - صنعاء  
طيران الاتحاد  
طيران دبي

٠١/٤٤٠١٧٠  
عدن ٠٢/٢٥٥٦٦٦  
الدمية ٠٢/٢٦٦٩٧٥  
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سقطري

**مراكز تدريب وتعليم الكمبيوتر**  
NIIT لتعليم الكمبيوتر  
البريد السريع

٠١/٤٤٥٥١٨/٧  
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٠٥/٢٠٢٣٢٦  
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٠٥/٦٦٠٤٩٨  
سقطري

**بنك كاك الاسلامي**  
بنك اليمن والكويت للتجارة والانشاءات

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**مراکز تدريب وتعليم الكمبيوتر**  
NIIT لتعليم الكمبيوتر  
البريد السريع

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سقطري

**مدرسات**  
روضه واحة الأطفال  
مدرسة رينبو  
مدارس صنعاء الدولية  
مدرسة التريكة الدولية  
مدرسة منارات

٠١/٤٤٠٨٤٠  
تلفاكس: ٧٣٤٥٥٦٤٥  
موبايل: ٠١/٤١٤٠٣٦  
٠١/٢٤٤٤٣٣  
٠١/٣٧٠١٩١/٢  
٠١/٣٧٠١٩٣  
٠١/٤٤٨٢٥٨/٩  
٠١/٣٨٢٠٩١

**فنادق**  
فندق ميركوير صنعاء  
فندق شمر  
فندق مومبيك  
فندق لازوردي  
فندق تاج صيد زرينيس  
العالمية للفندق - صنعاء  
فندق شهران - صنعاء  
فندق وأجنحة التاج الملكي

٠١/٢١٣٥٤٤-٦٦  
عدن ٠٢/٢٢٨٦٦٦  
٠١/٥٤٦٦٦٦  
٠١/٥٤٦٦٦٦  
ف: ٠١/٥٤٦٦٦٦  
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٠١/٤٤٠٣٠٥/٧-١٤  
٠١/٤١٨٣٢٠  
٠١/٤٠٦٦٦١, ٤٠٦٦٦١

**مطاعم**  
مطعم ومخازنة الشيباني (باسم محمد عبده الشيباني)  
تلفون: ٠١٠٥٧٣٦٦٦ - ٠١٠٩٢٥٠٥  
فاكس: ٩١٦٦٦٢  
٤١٧٣٩١  
٤٣١٩٩٩

**معاهد**  
معهد مالي

٠١/٤٤٥٤٨٢/٣/٤

**كلمات متقاطعة**

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**الكلمة المفقودة**

ح ل ا س ا ل س ا ل ح

**استراحة العدد**

**النجمة**

عجائب وغرائب  
أصيب أحد المواطنين بحالة من الدوخ والاسهال عندما استيقظ باكراً ليجد أن سيارته قد سرقت من أمام منزله ويجد سيارة أخرى متوقفة مكان سيارته، فأتجه إلى قسم الشرطة وقدم بلاغاً لهم وأخبرهم بوجود سيارة أخرى إلا أنه فتاحاً بأن الشرطة أخبرته بأنه لا يوجد بلاغ في سجلاتهم لتلك السيارة.

**حكمة العدد**  
السعادة كالفرشة إذا طاردتها هربت منك وإذا تجاهلتها رفرت على كنفك

**نكتة العدد**  
واحد في اللحم تناول غداء ولم يرد أن يدفع الحساب فقتل إلى الخارج وعند الباب قرأ كلمة «ادفع» فقال: أخ .. بيدوا أنني سادف على أي حال.

**لغز العدد**  
مال الغرفة المغلقة المليئة بالخز؟

**هل تعلم**  
أن عظام ظهر الجمل مستوية ومستقيمة تماماً وأن سنانه عبارة عن دهون وشحوم

**الحلول بالمطلوب**

١- فيل من بطولة هاني رمزي ونادين - للنداء  
٢- ممثل خليجي  
٣- في باطن الارض (م) - يحدث من وقت لآخر (م)  
٤- سنة - اغبر (م) - من الحيوانات (م)  
٥- شغف - الحديقة (م) - جرد بالانجليزي  
٦- شعوبها - حيوان بري - تلم (م)  
٧- الجواب (م) - للخبرة (م)  
٨- المرتب (م) - من الألوان - جبل صغير  
٩- دق - وجي (م) - خيالنا  
١٠- متشابهة - من السلم الموسيقي - علم مؤنث - قطة بالانجليزي  
١١- زعيم نازي (م) - علم مذكر  
١٢- القوي (م) - للفي - عكس بعيد  
١٣- التكميلية (م) - شعوب قيمة - ضمير المتكلم  
١٤- منعكي - في البحار والمحيطات  
١٥- زعيم سياسي هندي

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 6

## Houthi poetry and songs: Propaganda, art or both?

However their appeal is not limited to Houthis.

"Many poems speak to and inspire people from all sectors of society. They're an effective way to mobilize crowds and inspire people," she said.

Bassam Al-Shariabi, a taxi driver who considers himself politically independent, likes listening to Houthi songs and poetry on 99.1 Sam FM, a local radio station affiliated with the movement.

Most of the time, he lets those he's driving decide what they want to listen to. However, when he's alone, he prefers Houthi affiliated songs. "There are more than 13 radio channels in Sana'a. Islah members listen to Hayati FM, while Saleh supporters like Yemen FM," Al-Shariabi said. "I'm not a big supporter of any side, but I like listening to Houthi songs because of the sound. They're beautiful and have great lyrics."

Like Al-Dakak, Muad Al-Junaid, a well-known Yemeni poet, has recently made it a policy to



only recite poetry at protests and events that are officially organized and sponsored by the Houthis. His most recent poem was written after the Houthis entered and took over Sana'a on Sept. 21. He recited the poem in Tahrir Square the same day:

**They are a few young men, who held a sit-in to support the uprising, They are a few young men who believed in God, and so**

**they united,**

**They're no longer cave men They've awakened from their slumber ... Shocked by what they saw in caves filled with silence ...**

**Oh, how long have they been asleep!!**

**... We have wasted years being silent in the face of injustice...we were lost...our**

**country was lost... But they woke up!! Rejecting submission they flounced, and launched an uprising supported by God...**

Al-Junaid, a member of the Hashimite family and thus an alleged descendant of the prophet Muhammad, first rose to prominence in 2008 after appearing on a popular poetry competition series, "Poem Challenge," broadcast on the Saudi Fawasil TV Channel.

He performed, "Hod Hod Suleiman," a sonnet that speaks of love and infatuation. Al-Junaid won second place in the competition.

Later, during Yemen's 2011 anti-government uprising, Al-Junaid was one of the first poets to protest in Freedom Square in Taiz city. He wrote hymns denouncing former President Ali Abdullah Saleh.

While Al-Junaid was known as the "Revolution's Poet," clearly siding with anti-government protesters, work from some of Al-Junaid's colleagues is not as politically clear.

During the beginning of 2011, both protestors and supporters of Saleh would listen to songs by Ayoub Taresh. His work cen-

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tered on themes of patriotism and duty to one's country.

**Oh my country, my country, oh Yemen, I salute you, until the end of time, I salute all men who have struggled for Yemen**

Three years later, Al-Junaid is

a vocal advocate of the Houthi movement.

"After the 2011 uprising, some political parties imposed their agenda on Yemenis and turned against the revolution, using it as a means to cover up their own corruption. It was necessary that a new uprising be launched in order to correct the old one."

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 7

## Challenging the Islamist-Secularist Binary of the 2014 Tunisian Elections

Media depictions notwithstanding, Nidaa Tounes is not a secular panacea for all the country's ills. The party largely lacks a unifying platform and discourse. As a result, ideological and structural fissures abound within the organization. As Tunisia experts Monica Marks and Omar Belhaj Salah explain in a piece for Sada, "Nidaa Tounes has patched together a motley crew of leftists, liberal progressives, Destourians, and former RCD [Rassemblement Constitutionnel Démocratique, the party of former President Ben Ali] partisans who oppose Ennahda's rule. Even groups with nominally conflicting agendas—such as many members of the country's principal labor union, UGTT, and the national employers' union, UTICA—tend to support Nidaa Tounes."

As noted by Marks and Salah, a number of Nidaa Tounes members are associated with the now defunct RCD party. Such members include Essebsi, as well as prominent businessman Faouzi Loumi and Mohamed Ghariani, RCD's last secretary general. Parallels and links to the former regime have caused many Tunisians to fear Nidaa Tounes may represent a return to the heavy-handedness of the country's former dictators. Rather than being linked to the corrupt practices of the Ben Ali regime, however, Nidaa Tounes has sought to associate itself with the "modernist social project" of former President Bourguiba.

Much of Nidaa Tounes' constit-

ency hails from Tunisia's north, while a majority of Ennahda's supporters come from the south. The fact that voting patterns on election day also reflected this north-south divide is not a new phenomenon. Politicians from the country's former regimes have historically hailed from the "sahel" (Tunisia's northern and coastal region) and received support from their compatriots in the north. That this trend has continued reveals how geographic and historical elements had a more concrete effect in the parliamentary elections than ideological disputes. In fact, if observers were to highlight any "binary" related to the elections, this geographical divide would be the one to choose.

### Ennahda & Ideology

Ennahda is neither the monolithic nor uncompromising Islamist party that many in the West seem to believe. The "religious" end of the media narrative is, in other words, not just concerned with religion. In fact, during the drafting of Tunisia's new constitution, Ennahda made a number of compromises on controversial clauses related to religion. The group backed down on issues such as referencing sharia, criminalizing blasphemy, and pushing gender "complementarity" in this important founding document.

Despite these concessions, Nidaa Tounes officials have so far indicated a reluctance to enter into a coalition with Ennahda.

If Nidaa Tounes is able to secure 109 out of 217 parliamentary seats by collaborating with smaller parties, Ennahda will be marginalized. Ennahda's acceptance of these circumstances reflects its own pragmatism, and the secondary place ideology has in its day to day activities.

"Yes to bread and water, no to Ben Ali"

Many Tunisians would argue that socio-economic issues have remained important since the start of Tunisia's transitional period. A prominent slogan chanted during Tunisia's 2010-2011 revolution, "khubz wa maa", Ben Ali laa" ("Yes to bread and water, no to Ben Ali") reflects these concerns.

According to some Tunisians, elites have used ideology and religion to "hijack" the revolution. The 2014 parliamentary elections have demonstrated, however, that Tunisians continue to be moved by social and economic issues above all else. After Tunisia's decades' long dictatorship, prioritizing the immediate needs of the population and attacking the shortcomings of the current government are clearly positive signs—both for Tunisians and the region.

Whether Nidaa Tounes will be able to patch together a coalition viable and cohesive enough to address these needs remains to be seen.

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