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# Resumption of national dialogue marred by disagreement

■ Ali Ibrahim Al-Moshki

**SANA'A, Feb. 9**—A new round of national talks began at the Mövenpick Hotel Monday after the Houthis' constitutional declaration was roundly rejected by political groups within Yemen and much of the international community. The talks have already been undermined by disagreements.

Representatives from the Nasserist and Islah parties walked out of discussions shortly after they commenced on Monday morning.

Party members had agreed to return to talks if the UN Special Envoy to Yemen, Jamal Benomar, released a public statement clarifying the reasons political parties had agreed to return to the table, according to Mohammed Al-Sabri, a Nasserist member present at the conference.

Al-Sabri said party members walked out when it became clear that Benomar was not going to release a statement on Monday.

Benomar refused to comment on the matter, according to Al-Sabri. Mahdi Al-Mashat, the office manager for Abdulmalik Al-Houthi, then told members they would "be forced to have the dialogue," according to Al-Sabri.

Abdullah Noman and Mohammed Qahtan, Nasserist and Islah party representatives, respectively, responded by leaving the talks with their advisors. The leaderships of both parties had demanded Houthis rescind their constitutional declaration and release all members of government from house arrest before negotiations can continue.

Mohammad Al-Bukhaiti, a member of the Houthi Political Office, dismissed their version of events, claiming Benomar's opening re-

marks were purposefully misinterpreted as an excuse to leave the conference.

The Islah and Nasserist delegations "arrived with the intention of leaving" and misconstrued Benomar's words, according to Al-Bukhaiti, who denies Al-Mashat ever said delegates would be "forced to have the dialogue."

In a statement released on his official Facebook page on Sunday, Benomar said negotiations would involve all political parties, including the Houthis.

"Following consultations with all political sides and direct contact with Abdulmalik Al-Houthi, I am pleased to inform you that the parties have agreed to resume the negotiations aimed at reaching a political solution to the current crisis," the statement read.

Announcing their constitutional declaration on Friday, the Houthis, otherwise known as Ansar Allah, say they acted unilaterally to fill the void created by the resignations of President Abdu Rabu Mansour Hadi and members of his Cabinet last month.

UN Secretary General Ban Ki-Moon has called on President Hadi to be reinstated, but the extent to which he and his Cabinet members wish to be involved in the political process remains unclear.

State-run Saba News Agency, now controlled by the Houthis, released a statement from Hadi on Monday claiming he has no intention of returning to office.

The Houthis' constitutional declaration came following a three-day deadline set by the group for UN-brokered talks between political parties to find a solution to the current deadlock, which expired on

Wednesday, Feb. 4.

The declaration effectively dissolved parliament, calling for the establishment of a 551-member National Transitional Council to be headed by a five-member Presidential Council. The technocratic government is to last two years and will be overseen by the Houthis' Revolutionary Committee, led by Mohammad Al-Houthi.

Parties from across the political spectrum released statements on Saturday condemning the move as a "coup."

The National Coalition of Parties, a 15-member group founded in 2008 and headed by Yemen's most powerful political party, the General People's Congress (GPC), have denounced the Houthis' declaration as a "violation of constitutional legitimacy."

Similar statements were released on the official websites of the Islah, Al-Rashad Union, Socialist and Nasserist parties, all of which have called for a resumption of UN-brokered talks.

Gulf Cooperative Council (GCC) members also condemned the move in a statement released Saturday, calling it a "dangerous escalation" that lacks constitutional legitimacy.

The Houthis' constitutional declaration has effectively undone the GCC Initiative, leaving the outcomes of the National Dialogue Conference in doubt.

While agreeing to return to national talks, Houthi representatives have largely dismissed criticism from within Yemen.

According to Fadhel Abu Talib, a member in the Houthi Political Office, most parties have rejected the way the declaration was announced, rather than the content of it.



Nasserist and Islah party representatives walked out of talks Monday morning, demanding the Houthis rescind their constitutional declaration and release members of government from house arrest.

"We cannot say there are political parties that reject the declaration entirely. Those statements do not necessarily express the parties' final decisions," he said. "Negotiations regarding how the declaration will be implemented are ongoing under the direction of Jamal Benomar."

Abu Talib also said the Houthis took unilateral action as a matter of necessity.

"Without a president or Cabinet, there was a political void in the country, that's why we came for-

ward with the constitutional declaration," he said, adding that all political factions "will be our partners in the coming period."

According to Mohammad Al-Shubairi, a journalist and political analyst working with Al-Masdar news outlet, party opposition to the constitutional declaration is irrelevant at this point. The only way to make their stand count, he said, is to "call upon their supporters to take to the streets and turn the table on Ansar Allah."

"The Houthis' political move is a coup, not a constitutional declaration—the only option left to political parties is to reject it. They gave Ansar Allah the opportunity to take over the country when they signed the Peace and National Partnership Agreement and conceded to all of their demands," he said.

Al-Shubairi was also dismissive of opposition from the GCC, whose Initiative he deems a failure. "The solution must come from within Yemen," he said.

# Talks underway for independent Sheba region

■ Ali Aboluhom

**SANA'A, Feb. 9**—Hundreds of tribesmen from Marib, Al-Baida, and Al-Jawf governorates gathered in Marib city on Sunday to discuss the creation of an autonomous "Sheba" region, one of the six federal regions approved at the National Dialogue Conference (NDC) but never put into effect.

According to Mohammad Buhaibeh, a tribal field commander from Marib who attended the conference, prominent tribal figures from the three governorates began coordinating immediately after the Houthis' constitutional declaration on Feb. 6.

In a statement released on behalf of the attendees, the Houthi declaration was described as a "coup" undermining the legitimacy of the president and agreements signed by political factions since the GCC Initiative was introduced in November of 2011.

"We would not have wanted to make this exceptional meeting for the region's governorates, but the Houthis' declaration, which came as a defiant step, provoked us," said Ameen Al-Okaimit, a sheikh from Al-Jawf who was the general supervisor of Sunday's conference.



Tribal leaders from Marib, Al-Baida and Al-Jawf are discussing pushing ahead with regional autonomy following events in the capital.

A Preparatory Committee was formed during the meeting, whose members are to be appointed Tuesday and will be composed of well-known tribal figures from all three governorates, Buhaibeh said.

According to him, the committee will be tasked with gathering tribesmen, academics, youth and activists from the proposed Sheba region to attend a meeting scheduled for Feb. 11.

Several of those present at Sunday's conference told the Yemen Times that on Feb. 11 the region's

independence from the Sana'a government may be announced.

"The comprehensive meeting might decide to make Sheba region independent from Sana'a if the attendees approve it and the Houthis do not rescind their declaration," said Buhaibeh. "The timing of the declaration may be extended to a further deadline, depending on what the attendees decide and on political developments."

Al-Okaimit, who also heads the Communications Committee that was formed during Monday's meet-

ing, said the Feb. 11 meeting will decide the future of the region.

"If Houthis press ahead with their declaration, we will make our region independent from Sana'a. We will also stop the flow of oil and electricity from the center of our governorate [Marib] to the rest of Yemen," Al-Okaimit said. "We will consume what we need of the oil, while the rest will be exported abroad by the region's authority, to be elected once the tribal figures of the region move ahead with separation."

Houthi Political Office member Mohammad Al-Bukhaiti made it clear the Houthis are adamantly opposed to the creation of the Sheba region, and claims the organizers of the meeting are "elements affiliated with regional countries that have their agenda in Yemen" and do not represent the Yemeni people.

"The threat made by some elements from the so-called Sheba region proved the accuracy of our concerns about the danger of the regions' project approved by some political parties," he said. "We have said from the beginning that this project will divide Yemen into small, weak territories."

Abshal Al-Futaini, a tribal figure from Marib who heads the Sana'a-

based non-governmental General Union of Youth, which runs initiatives for youths nationwide, disagrees. In his view, it is as a result of the Houthis' actions in Sana'a that the three governorates must unite.

"Houthis want to bypass the constitution, the parliament, and agreements signed by all parties," he said. "We should stop their arrogance. We do not have a choice except to separate our region from the others."

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## Houthis appoint Mahmoud Al-Junaid director of the presidential office

■ **Mohammad Al-Samawi**

SANA'A, Feb. 9—Houthis have installed Mahmoud Al-Junaid as director of the still-vacant presidential office, replacing Ahmad Awad Bin Mubarak, who was removed from the position after the group kidnapped him on Jan. 17.

Al-Junaid's appointment is the latest in a series of moves by the Houthis giving them greater control over government. President Hadi and some Cabinet members remain under house arrest since resigning on Jan. 22, while Parliament was effectively dissolved by the Houthis' constitutional declaration on Friday.

The constitutional declaration, arrived at unilaterally by the Houthis, calls for the creation of a 551-member National Transition Council and a five-member Presidential Council, both of which are to be overseen by the group's Revolutionary Committee under the leadership of Mohammed Ali Al-Houthi.

Abdulrahman Al-Rayani, a political analyst and head of the Center for International Media and Public Relations, a non-governmental organization based in Sana'a, is not surprised by the move. It is a logical step for a group intent on taking over the country, he said, "but what is humorous is that they made this appointment without having a president."

Nonetheless, as Al-Rayani points out, Al-Junaid may well have been chosen to work under Mohammed Al-Houthi, "who is considered the current president of Yemen since the constitutional declaration was announced."

Whatever his function, Al-Junaid's appointment may signal concerns for a group that finds itself with levels of responsibility it was not expecting.

Having risen to power so rapidly,



Previously a member of the Houthi Political Office, Al-Junaid's role in the still-vacant presidential office remains unclear.

the Houthis "are sensing a void," says Al-Rayani. "They are trying to put their people in key positions in an attempt to fill the gap between them and the Yemeni people."

Speaking with the Yemen Times on Monday morning, Al-Junaid confirmed he is now the director of the presidential office, but refused to say whether he is working for Al-Houthi or not. He only said his current function as director of the presidential office is to work with the existing employees and that he "hopes to serve the people and not stand over them during these difficult times."

The day prior, the Yemen Times spoke with Mohammad Al-Bukhaiti, a member of the Houthi Political Office in Sana'a, who said he was "not sure about this news." Responding to reports that the Houthis "broke in" to the office and forcibly installed Al-Junaid, Al-Bukhaiti said, "if the whole country is under the Houthis' control why would we break into the presidential office in order to appoint a manager there?"

"I have to question when I see news about Ansar Allah [the Houthis] without any sources being contacted from Ansar Allah's

Political Office," he said.

Repeated calls from the Yemen Times on Tuesday to Houthi Political Office members Ali Al-Emad, Mohammad Al-Bukhaiti, and Ali Al-Qahoom were not answered. Prominent Houthi activist Hussein Al-Bukhaiti told the Yemen Times he had no information to add because he heard about the appointment from the news and not from the Houthi Political Office.

Al-Junaid, who served as a Houthi representative during the NDC, comes from Taiz governorate and is considered a longtime supporter of the Houthis. Before being appointed as director of the presidential office he was a member of the Houthi Political Office in Sana'a.

Bin Mubarak was appointed director of the presidential office on June 11, 2014, and previously served as general secretary of the National Dialogue Conference (NDC).

Houthi sources previously told the Yemen Times his release on Jan. 27 was unconditional, and he is currently abroad in Saudi Arabia on a personal visit, according to a statement on his Facebook page.

## Houthis increase their control over Al-Baida

■ **Ali Ibrahim Al-Moshki**

SANA'A, Feb. 9—Houthis have taken control over the districts of Sharia and Dhi Naem in Al-Baida governorate and are pushing towards Yakla sub-district, considered a stronghold of Al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP).

Fighting between Houthis, backed by the army, and Al-Qaeda-supported tribesmen took place Thursday and Friday in Sharia. On Saturday fighting occurred near to Dhi Naem, before entering the district on Monday. As of Monday afternoon, skirmishes continued in bordering areas of Dhi Naem.

Mohammad Ali Al-Humaiqani, a sheikh in Dhi Naem not involved in the clashes, confirmed the Houthis were supported by the military and said dozens have died from either side. He could not confirm a specific figure, but said news reports indicate around 45 people have been killed since Thursday in Dhi Naem and Sharia, 30 of which were Houthis.

Walid Al-Dailami, a Houthi leader in Rada'a city, agreed that dozens of men were killed from both sides, but said he was unable to disclose Houthi fatalities.

The 139th Infantry Brigade, headed by brigadier Ahmad Abdulwali Al-Dhahab, has been supporting the Houthis. This was confirmed to the Yemen Times by both Al-Humaiqani and Al-Dailami. The brigade is based in Rada'a but was involved in the recent fighting outside that area.

According to Al-Dailami, the brigade is leading the fight with the help of armed Houthi fighters who are coming from Rada'a city to track down AQAP operatives.

He said the Houthis want to "purge the governorate" with help from the army, then control it



The Houthis are backed by the 139th Infantry Brigade in Al-Baida as they push toward the AQAP stronghold of Yakla.

themselves "like the other governorates."

"The popular committees have taken control over Dhi Naem, Al-Haboubah and Sharia [districts], and the next target is Yakla, the true Al-Qaeda stronghold," he said. The Yemen Times was unable to confirm if Al-Haboubah is under Houthi control.

According to Al-Dailami, the goal of controlling Sharia and Dhi Naem districts is to surround Yakla, located in Rada'a district, and prevent supplies from reaching AQAP fighters. He considers Yakla to be the group's biggest stronghold in Al-Baida.

Najm Al-Din Harash, the security chief of Al-Baida, confirmed that the army is backing the Houthis in fighting AQAP and that their next target is the stronghold of Yakla.

Arafat Saad Al-Mawri, a soldier in the 139th Infantry Brigade, said he engaged in fighting under orders from the Defense Ministry. On

Friday, former Minister of Defense Mahmoud Subaihi was appointed as acting minister by the Houthis' Revolutionary Committee. The soldier dismissed suggestions the army was being exploited by the Houthis, saying that combating terrorism has nothing to do with political events in Sana'a and that it is a national duty to fight AQAP.

An AQAP source from Al-Baida governorate told the Yemen Times that the group is allied with tribesmen because the Houthis are a common enemy. AQAP fighters escaped to the mountains surrounding Dhi Naem in order to attack the Houthis at night, the source said, adding that this is a tactic they commonly resort to.

Yakla is a sub-district in Qaifa district and is located near the border of Marib governorate. The presence of AQAP fighters in Yakla swelled in late October of last year after being pushed out of Al-Manaseh area in Qaifa by the Houthis.

## Ministry of Interior bans protests nationwide

■ **Ali Ibrahim Al-Moshki**

SANA'A, Feb. 9—Yemen's Ministry of Interior issued a directive on Sunday banning all public demonstrations in the country, except those approved by the authorities, amidst a surge in protests against Friday's constitutional declaration.

The directive was issued to protect demonstrators from attacks by Al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP), according to a memorandum circulated to law enforcement officials by the minister of interior, Jalal Al-Rowishan.

Al-Rowishan, who resigned with fellow Cabinet members on Jan. 22, was reinstated as acting minister of interior on Friday evening following the Houthis' constitutional declaration.

"No protests or demonstrations will be allowed to take place without the consent of law enforcement bodies, otherwise necessary measures will be taken to put a stop to the demonstration," the memorandum stated.

Mohammad Hezam, deputy director of the Public Relations Department in the Ministry of Interior, said the directive was issued to avoid confrontations between rival protesters as well as protect crowds from potential attacks from AQAP, who "will attack any gathering its members believe Houthis are a part of."

The announcement comes after several mass protests were held over the weekend against the Houthis' constitutional declaration on Friday.

Abdullah Yahya Al-Ansi, a student protester from Sana'a University, believes the ministry's directive is an attempt by Houthis to stifle their opposition.

"Even if we are to be suppressed,



The ban was announced in a memorandum circulated by Interior Minister Jalal Al-Rowishan, who was reinstated by the Houthis on Friday.

we will not give up and we will go on with our peaceful struggle until Houthi militias leave Sana'a and the other governorates," he said.

Taiz governorate is witnessing large demonstrations against what many there are calling a "coup in the capital."

According to one protester in Taiz city, Tariq Al-Sheri, hundreds are joining daily demonstrations that begin on Jamal Street in central Taiz and end at the governorate headquarters. Protesters are demanding that orders from the capital be dismissed, and that the governorate be ruled by its own citizens.

Hodeida governorate has witnessed ongoing anti-Houthi protests since Sept. 21, when Houthi militias took control of the capital. Mass protests were held there over

the weekend as well.

In a statement issued by protesters from Hodeida's Tehama Movement, which opposes the Houthis, the group rejected the constitutional declaration as "a completely illegitimate and illegal announcement, imposed at gun point."

In Sana'a, hundreds of youth protested throughout the weekend at Change Square.

Mohammad Al-Imad, who took part in the protests, said demonstrators were attacked by Houthis and law enforcement personnel with batons and the butts of rifles. At least 24 protesters were arrested over the weekend, two of whom are still being held at the October 14 Police Department on Al-Dairi Street, in central Sana'a. The others were released on Sunday after a sit-in was held in front of the station.

Ali Al-Qahoom, a member of the Houthi Political Office, claims his group is not opposed to demonstrations and that the directive was issued by the Ministry of Interior without the insistence of Houthis.

Nonetheless, he believes the directive was issued in the best interest of Yemenis, regardless of political affiliation. "It is to avoid conflict and casualties, and there are parties who seek to attack protesters under Houthi cover," he said.

Al-Imad told the Yemen Times that those protesting remain defiant. "These are youth demonstrations, they aren't organized by any political parties so they should be unrestricted—they will continue," he said.

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# Will the Houthis help empower the muhamasheen?

■ Sadeq Al-Wesabi

Ansar Allah, as the Houthis prefer to be known, have won over non-Zaidi's since their Sept. 21 takeover of the capital. One of the speakers at the three-day national dialogue that Ansar Allah held last week was a member of the muhamasheen, or the "marginalized."

"We've come to you on behalf of one million marginalized people to [tell you that we are on] your side," said a veteran advocate and member of the community, Mohammed Al-Qairai.

The speech garnered some support from the community, as well as a lot of criticism.

Critics within the muhamasheen community accused the Houthis of appropriating the community's struggles to improve their political image. Al-Qairai says the shared history of marginalization between the two groups should make them natural allies.



Critics within the muhamasheen community say the Houthis are exploiting them for political gain. Others say the two groups' shared history of marginalization should make them natural allies.

## Between a Houthi and a hard place

Al-Qairai, who left the Yemeni Socialist Party to join the General People's Congress (GPC), told the Yemen Times that the muhamasheen have to deal with the facts on the ground.

"All political parties have let the muhamasheen down," he said. "The Houthis are in control now—so why not try them too?" he asked.

Mohammed Marzouqi, the head of the Street Cleaners Union, which mostly consists of muhamasheen, accused Al-Qairai of giving the Houthis an opportunity to "exploit the agony of the muhamasheen to achieve political gains."

If the Houthis are misappropriating the struggles of the muhamasheen for political gain, they

wouldn't be the first.

Bogumila Hall, a Phd candidate at the European University Institute in Florence, is writing her thesis on the politics of marginalized groups and has spent years studying the muhamasheen. According to Hall's research, 90 percent of the muhamasheen community supported or was part of the former ruling party, the GPC.

The head of the National Union for the Poor, Noman Qaed Al-Hudeithi, said muhamasheen joined the party as individuals—not representatives of the muhamasheen—because the muhamasheen "issue" was non-existent for the GPC. Al-Hudeithi, a former member of the GPC, said

that the link to the GPC explained why very few muhamasheen joined the protests in 2011.

The National Union for the Poor—one of the groups that represents muhamasheen—was partly funded by the ruling party, and they simply could not afford to lose their "allies," according to Hall.

In 2011, Sheikh Mojahed, a member of the muhamasheen community and a GPC loyalist, discouraged people from participating in protests. Mojahed and others rationalized the decision post factum, saying that they were for change, but not revolution.

Leaders within the muhamasheen community say that their disenfranchisement, which results in dependency on external funding, limits their independence and the extent to which they can be "revolutionary."

Many ordinary slum dwellers do not accept these justifications, according to Hall's research. They have accused these leaders of accepting external funding not on behalf of the community and its struggles, but for the profit of the National Union of the Poor and its individual members.

## "Marginalization"

The muhamasheen are not one, homogenous community, and their disagreements go beyond the Houthis. The community is not even united around the label "marginalized."

"Marginalization' is a problematic word which doesn't really say a lot. Many muhamasheen themselves are against this label, as they say that anybody can be 'muhamash' in Yemen today, even Ali Abdullah Saleh," according to Bogna.

The National Union for the Poor has embraced the word "akhdam"—

which means servants. Akhdam is rejected by many other community members, who consider the term derogatory.

The National Union says the word better reflects the specific type of exclusion that muhamasheen face, which is unique and not comparable to others.

Marzouqi rejected calls from the community to reclaim the word, and insists that he is "marginalized" and not a "servant."

"[This] shows that 'akhdam' are not monolithic, and that there are competing self-representations and political visions and strategies within the group," Hall said.

The problem is not simple marginalization, but also vulnerability and dehumanization, she added.

"So in a way, their 'misery' is recognized, but it is also inscribed into them by the dominant society because 'that's their culture,' they are 'different.'"

## "Objects" or "subjects?"

The muhamasheen are rarely framed as political actors who are aware of their needs and aspirations and "can speak," but rather—at best—as objects of a humanitarian mission.

"[The Houthis] seek to bring justice and fairness to the oppressed and deprived," said Abdulrahman Al-Ahnooni, a Houthi media activist. "Unfortunately, instead of appreciating the Houthis for this humanitarian step, some opponents have attacked [us]."

The National Dialogue Conference, the ten-month-long peace talks that brought together Yemen's various parties, factions and groups, was seen as a historic moment by the muhamasheen because it was the first time the community was represented in institutional politics.

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The muhamasheen were in charge of speaking for themselves and articulating what the community needed and wanted, as well as directly participating in decision-making.

The Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) initiative, which mapped out the country's transition, called for the peace talks. That transition is no longer viable.

Following the resignation of the Cabinet and the president on Jan. 22, the Houthis issued a "constitu-

tional declaration" on Feb. 6, announcing the dissolution of Parliament and the formation of a 551-member national council.

Abdulmalik Al-Houthi says he wants an inclusive national council, which will in turn decide the five-member presidential council that will rule the country for an interim two years.

Will the Houthis make room for the muhamasheen at the table? Only time will tell.

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## ADVERTORIAL

### Yemen Commercial Bank hands over the Dream House award

Sheikh Naif Bin Muhammad Bin Yahya Al-Roishan, member of the YCB board of directors, handed the Grand Prize Bait Al-Ahlam (Dream House) to Mohammad Mohammad Al-Hamami winner of Attijari Jawaher Program for the Year 2014.

During the celebration Sheikh Al-Roishan expressed his warm congratulations to the winner and said that "the banks will handover today the seventh Bait Al-Ahlam prize to Mohammad Al-Hamami, confirming that the bank will continue to offer various prizes for member in Attijari Jawaher Program for the year 2015," within the framework of the Jawaher program. He also alluded to the bank's activities that aimed at combating poverty in society.

Sheikh Al-Roishan also mentioned some of the bank's achievements including receiving Bank of the Year award for the sixth time which is offered by The Banker, which is a British research institute specialized in evaluating banks worldwide.

The Grand Prize winner Mohammad Al-Hamami expressed his gratitude to the YCB which awarded him the prize. He says that he will celebrate with his family, indicating that the YCB has turned his dream into reality. He also added that the prize he received is evidence of the bank's credibility and honesty when dealing with its customers.

Deputy General director of the YCB Abdulwahab Al-Hakimi congratulated Al-Hamami, and confirmed that the bank still has many prizes to offer, adding that the banks has handed over

many grand prizes including four luxurious Chryslers, one of them was for a female client of the bank. He indicated that Attijari Jawaher Program is built upon the customers' patience and encouraged all customers to increase their savings in order to increase their chances of winning in the Jawaher program, especially the Bait Al-Ahlam program.

# Three lessons drawn from Tunisia's cabinet formation process

**Karim Mezran and Lara Talverdian**  
atlanticcouncil.org  
First published Feb. 4

The political maneuverings in Tunisia over the last few weeks bear the hallmarks of a nascent democracy. Developments have involved negotiations, checks on power, and nuanced political calculations that demonstrate an overall political maturity among Tunisian authorities—the reason why so many international observers and policymakers have time and again heralded the North African country as the so-called Arab Spring's "best hope" for success. Facets of the Cabinet formation process highlight critical lessons about Tunisia's political landscape, but they also underscore areas of vulnerability regarding the country's ongoing transition.

First, winning an election does not mean one can go it alone. Prime Minister Habib Essid's first proposal of a Cabinet included

only one other party, the Free Patriotic Union. The move by Nidaa Tounes—its first major step on the heels of the elections—reflected an inclination by the party to exclude other stakeholders on the political scene. On one level, it was a sign of politics as usual: The winners felt they had secured the upper hand and had little incentive to reach out to the other major parties. Significantly, it was criticized not only by Ennahda but also by the leftist Popular Front and liberal Afek Tounes, which indicated they would not vote in favor of the government, forcing Essid back to the drawing board. Although it won the legislative and executive branches in elections, Nidaa Tounes learned an early lesson on the need to take confidence-building measures—with more than just Ennahda—to earn buy-in and take the necessary steps forward.

Second, the Cabinet appointments suggest that the two major parties operate from positions of both strength and weakness, and they need each other. Ennahda may have lost support after a troubled

period in power, but it remains a political force to be reckoned with, having won 69 seats in parliament. Striking a conciliatory and pragmatic tone, the party leadership signaled their early willingness to join a coalition. When Nidaa Tounes decided instead to forge ahead on its own, it seemed that Ennahda might accept the outcome and assume the role of the formidable opposition, hoping to capitalize on the moment as Nidaa Tounes took on all of the risk of governance. That they have not done so, but rather agreed to exchange the role of opposition for one ministry and a few other junior posts, can be interpreted as a strategic step taken out of fear of being left out of the political process. On the other hand, joining the coalition can be considered a sign of Ennahda's strength; they are demonstrating maturity and responsibility in sharing the governance burden of undertaking the necessary economic and political reforms.

Nidaa Tounes, a coalition party comprising many different stakeholders, galvanized support after

an imperfect and troubled interim governance period led by Ennahda. Riding the wave of anti-Islamism pervading the broader region, Nidaa Tounes secured the needed votes at the ballot box. While the voters ensured its leadership in both the legislative and executive branches, these victories do not translate into enough power to allow them to ignore other stakeholders. Despite their initial misstep, Nidaa Tounes' return to consultations with Ennahda and other smaller parties reflects a capacity for political compromise. It remains to be seen, however, whether Nidaa Tounes' outreach to Ennahda will prompt the former to fragment, given certain vehemently anti-Islamist segments of the base, or to effectively pivot to a pro-reform agenda and platform.

The maneuverings demonstrate how the two major parties need each other. They will navigate a delicate, perhaps sometimes uncomfortable, partnership to share in the outcomes of governance.

Third, a process was upheld and respected. On the heels of a campaign during which Nidaa Tounes emphasized what it was not rather than what it stood for, Essid's initial Cabinet makeup—albeit a unilateral move meant to appease anti-Ennahda elements of its base—raised concerns that the political space for the opposition would shrink. But rather than force through the homogeneous Cabinet, agreeing to backroom deals that would have bypassed Ennahda and brought in a handful more votes needed to approve the government, Nidaa Tounes revisited the Cabinet makeup altogether. Some speculate that the party's initial misstep was intentional, meant to demonstrate to its base how a unilateral move would be unwise. In doing so, Nidaa Tounes gained the political cover needed to invite other parties into a ruling coalition. Whatever the rationale, all stakeholders committed to a process and respected the formal and informal systems of checks and balances exercised to ensure a level political playing field.

These observations bode well for the country's long-term promise of becoming a stable, pluralistic democracy. Factoring in the domestic and regional pressures, however, they also underscore the fragility of the coalition. Tunisia operates in a regional context, characterized by divides between opponents and proponents of political Islam. The country's elected officials and international partners face the challenge to support political inclusiveness and compromise, which are sustainable and long-term solutions to addressing shared security interests.

In the late 1980s, the now deposed Ben Ali regime took nascent steps toward opening up the political sphere, loosening restrictions on the press, and passing constitutional amendments limiting presidential terms. He then used security concerns, purportedly faced in light of the conflict in neighboring Algeria, to justify a subsequent clampdown and regression of such reforms. The international community did little to maintain the momentum, placing higher priority on addressing the security dilemma. Circumstances

# Yemen, the absolute uncertainty

■ **Afrah Nasser**

Yemen has been at a turning point for some time now. It's a continuous turning point that started on Feb. 11, 2011, and still continues till today. Nobody knows when—if ever—it will stop spinning us around. Yemen's 2011 uprising was for many the date when we reclaimed our country, when we took the streets and when we stood, men and women, shoulder to shoulder, demanding the end of the regime. It was when we finally felt validated and had the satisfaction of amazing the world. Little did we know that, right there, in the same streets we took to, the death of our desire to reclaim our country was also in the making. Little did we know that we were facing ruthless super political powers, from General Ali Mohsen's forces, to Islah's forces, to the US administration's agenda for Yemen along with the Gulf Cooperation Council, to where we are today: Al-Houthis' militias. We were dreamy, right? But isn't that what a revolution is all about?

The dream for having a stable and democratic state got a slap in the face when Al-Houthi, Yemen's new pharaoh, decided to be a self-appointed ruler. Al-Houthi, one of the snakes Saleh used to dance upon, is Yemen's latest authoritarian figure, thanks to Saleh himself. Saleh not only orchestrated hijacking all that Yemen's 2011 uprising aimed to achieve with the help of his new puppet, Al-Houthi, but he probably even orchestrated the leaked tape, proving his link with Al-Houthi, so Yemenis would know who was the one running the show for real. He indeed still dances on the heads of snakes.

"What's happening in Yemen?" I've been asked a million times. "Is it a war? a coup?" I swallow my pain and try to come up with something that could sound smart because the truth of the matter is nobody understands what the heck is going on. We have never had such a situation in Yemen since the start of Yemen's repub-

lic regime in 1962. The traditional pattern for changing power used to be the same: Either the president got assassinated or fled the country. Simple and clear. Saleh came and broke the cycle. Today's reality is surreal for many. However, what I know for sure is that Yemen needs a war against all these wars erupting in the country, the political, tribal, religious, communal and even the media wars.

Even though little is certain about Yemen lately, it's clear that we're in a cold war at its height. Rivals vs. allies, at the expense of ordinary citizens' rights for a peaceful country. The road to stability looks like a phantom. My hopes in the 2011 uprising were so high. Today, my wildest dream is to go back to where we were before the uprising. No, I shouldn't say that—we betray the martyrs in regretting what they and we have started. There is not and should not be a point of return. Then, how must one proceed while each step forward means one decade backward? what can be there for us after we already hit rock bottom? Is there salvation for my generation? A generation that is traumatized by the failure of the 2011 Arab Spring, and resentful of all who hijacked the revolutions.

The answers lie in an absolute uncertainty. However, one thing I am certain about is that there is still hope within the civil movement that has never ceased to take to the streets protesting all kinds of injustices. I have complete faith in the power of people. I'm awaiting the moment when my people will amaze the world once again. Until then, I'll hold onto tragic optimism and quote the Italian theoretician, Antonio Gramsci: "I'm a pessimist because of intelligence, but an optimist because of will."

*A journalist since 2008, Afrah Nasser rose to prominence during Yemen's 2011 uprising telling the untold stories on the ground. After receiving death threats for her anti-regime writings she became a political refugee in Sweden in May 2011. Follow her on Twitter @AfrahNasser*



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have certainly changed since then, but given the regional context in which Tunisia is transitioning today, there is a chance of making a similar mistake twenty-five years later. Clashes between the Tunisian military and extremists along the borders have increased; radicalized Tunisians return home after fighting alongside the Islamic State in Syria; and Libya's deteriorating situation has growing economic and security impacts on its neighbor.

Such issues absolutely need to be addressed, but not at the expense of political inclusiveness. Indeed, the two priorities are not mutually exclusive and ought not to be treated as such if Tunisia wishes to over-

come divisive politics and achieve gains in the shared interest of all its citizenry, and if its international partners want a reliable democratic partner in the region.

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Socialist Party foreign relations head to the Yemen Times:

# “Any efforts based on force and violence... will end in failure and will not be accepted by the Yemeni people.”

Following the Houthis' Feb. 6 announcement of a 551 member transitional council and a five member presidential council, the Yemeni Socialist Party (YSP) released a statement the next day calling the move a “risk as it could lead to the violation of national sovereignty.”

“It undermines the current political process which is based on the GCC Initiative. It is also considered to be a coup against the legitimacy of the national conformity based on the NDC outcomes and the Peace and Partnership Agreement,” the statement read.

The party called on the Houthis to release Cabinet ministers and the president from house arrest, stop violent crackdowns on media employees and release those currently detained, remove their militants from public institutions, and to return to negotiations under the patronage of the UN Special Envoy to Yemen, Jamal Benomar.

The Yemen Times spoke to Mohammad Ghalib Ahmed, the head of foreign relations for the Yemeni Socialist Party (YSP), shortly before the Houthis' announcement. He placed emphasis on the party's peaceful nature, saying “The Socialist Party, during the crises Yemen has passed through

since the unification between the north and the south in 1990, has not used force or bribery but instead offered its detailed and justified visions based on peaceful dialogues as the only way to solve all crises.”

“The Socialist Party depends on national reconciliations encouraged by gulf-brokered initiative, the NDC outcomes and the Peace and National Partnership Agreement,” he said. “Therefore if the majority of the political parties opted for the parliament as a constitutional institution to solve the deadlock of the president's resignation, the Socialist Party would not object.”

Ahmed was born on Oct. 14, 1949 in Al-Shuaib district of Al-Dhale governorate. He holds a high secondary school and diploma from Moscow. In 1965 Ahmed joined the national front, participating in the resistance against the British occupation of the south. He has a lengthy history as a politician, serving in embassies in Britain and Saudi Arabia and in many deputy ministerial positions in the former South Yemen. Following unification in 1990 he became a member of parliament and in 1994 he became a member of the YSP. In 2005 he was elected head of the party's foreign relations.



## ■ Ali Aboluhom

The Joint Meeting Parties (JMP), which include the Socialist Party, have been complaining about the stubbornness of the Houthis and described their presence in Sana'a and other governorates as illegal. So why do you negotiate with them whenever they want?

Dialogue is an ideal and civilized way of breaking deadlock—better, less harmful than the use of force. We all know that fruitful outcomes are reached only through dialogue. The martyr Jar Allah Omar [former secretary general of the YSP and founder of the JMP] was assassinated in December 2002 while he was calling for dialogue. Yasin Saeed Noman, the ex-secretary general of the party, also survived an assassination attempt in front of his house in December 2013. Nevertheless, he was not frightened and didn't remain indoors, instead going to the NDC (National Dialogue Conference). Dialogue is an everlasting socialist approach and through difficult times [the party] has called for dialogue, such as in September 1994 when the civil war was at its peak.

The Houthis have their eyes on Marib and are vowing to advance on to defeat Al-Qaeda. Do you think Marib will witness violent clashes?

I am a member of the Socialist Party, not [the Houthis], and I am unaware of their intentions. They

have dozens of spokespersons and nobody is able to distinguish between those that are honest or not. Furthermore, their power is not unilateral but multilateral, which has enabled them to reach where they are now.

In the meantime, while Yemen passes through this political vacuum a US drone strike in Shabwa governorate on Jan. 31 claimed three lives. Do you think the US will continue fighting it's “war on terror” within the current situation?

What the US cares about most are the interests it has in Yemen and other countries. A historical chance loomed on the horizon in 2011 when all countries, including Yemen, shared mutual interests. But it seems that there is someone who wants to miss this chance [referring to the current situation], so no blame on foreign countries for being interested in their interests.

The Yemeni youth have taken to the streets to ignite a revolution against the Houthis, as they did in 2011 against the former regime. Does the Socialist Party side with this approach, and does the JMP support the youth as it did in 2011?

The Socialist Party believes in peaceful struggle and dialogue. We definitely side with the youth and other social factions as long as they organize peaceful demonstrations. The party opposes any kind of crackdown against such peaceful events—the same stance adopted by

the party since the peaceful Southern Movement started in 2007, during the revolution of 2011, and for recent crackdowns against youth and journalists today.

In the event that the former regime is re-instated by the Houthis by forming a presidential council to represent them, as analysts predict could happen, what will the stance of the party be?

There is no point in saying because the former regime still exists until today and the transfer of power has yet to be completed. The so-called former regime is still grabbing public institutions, the army, security, and economy, and even the currency exchange market.

How does the Socialist Party describe what happened on Sept. 21, 2014 and Jan. 19, 2015? Was it a coup or a revolution?

In the second sentence of the vision offered by the party [given Jan. 28, 2015, to the committee tasked with the implementation of the Peace and National Partnership Agreement], it reads, “A political action took place on Sept. 21, 2014.” As for the explanation of what has been done by the Houthis since then—by using force against the government—it's mentioned in the vision, which reads, “Houthis are achieving power by making strong decisions via revolutionary committees within public institutions based on what they called revolutionary legitimacy, which has

caused more problems to exist in addition to what already existed. It then led to the use of violence which caused the president and the government to resign, as thus Yemen has plunged into a political and constitutional vacuum.”

Since the president and the government resigned, the Southern Movement has been working on establishing a preparation council for secession. Do you think the south is really preparing for secession and the establishment of an independent state?

Secession was announced by former President Ali Abdullah Saleh from Sabaen Square in Sana'a on April 27, 1994, and the decision regarding civil war on July 7, 1994, came from Sana'a. Today, secession is being announced and practiced from Sana'a itself. Nothing came from Aden and the entire south except for the dream of unification between north and south, which was one of the most prominent aims since 1967 until unification took place in May 1990. From Aden unification was announced and the preparation agreement for it on Nov. 30, 1989.

How does the Socialist Party see the southern issue with regards to federalism, and the six provinces which were opposed by the Houthis. Do you agree that federalism can solve the southern issue or do you believe it will divide Yemen into small, weak counties?

The answer to this question is in the party's vision [given Jan. 28, 2015]. It reads: “The formation of the Regions Committee was in conflict with the NDC outcomes as it imposes the division of the country into six regions and it moved towards imposing it on the ground away from the national reconciliation and agreements regarding the issue, the last of which was the Peace and Partnership Agreement signed on Sept. 21, 2014.”

For the record, the Socialist Party had legally appealed against this decision, which was in conflict with the bylaw of the NDC and the agreements reached by the participating factions. It released its press release on Jan. 12, 2014, and another release after the republican decree of the Regions Committee and also a third one after issuing the release of the Regions Committee.

How do you find the performance of the newly elected leadership of the Socialist Party? And what is the political role played by former Secretary General Yasin Noman after leaving his position?

The performance of the party and its new leadership are assessed by the party's bodies, especially the Central Committee as the highest ranking body. The party performance is not assessed by ordinary members, even in the political office or secretariat or even the secretary general himself. As for Noman, he is still a political and socialist leader. He is admired and respected by all the party's members and other

parties. He is still a member of the political office of the party, performing his duties perfectly.

Who would you thank and who would you blame?

I would thank the Yemeni people for their patience and I would thank our beloved youth, the future builders who have bravely resisted crackdowns and oppression. I would thank the peaceful Southern Movement revolutionaries who have been clinging to the peaceful principles of their struggle since 2007 despite the violent crackdowns they faced.

But I blame those who have been accusing us of heresy, who killed us in the name of God and in the name of unification from 1990 up until now, who legitimized violence and devastated the state, which is essentially owned by the Yemeni people.

Any efforts based on force and violence and are in conflict with the NDC outcomes and the Peace and Partnership Agreement and will end in failure and will not be accepted by the Yemeni people.

It's important here to mention what the party repeatedly warned about through statements released between August and September 2014. We warned political factions about the possibility of the state collapsing. And its force would not impact only Sana'a and northern governorates but also the south, which would witness divisions, especially amongst politicians in the south who have their own personal agendas.

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# Dhobab: Yemen's bird sanctuary

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

The coastlines and islands of Bab Al-Mandeb ("Gateway of Anguish")—a strait separating southwest Yemen from Djibouti and Eritrea, connecting the Red Sea with the Gulf of Aden—provides refuge for hundreds of thousands of migratory birds each year. As growing levels of pollution and unchecked poaching threaten wildlife sanctuaries in the area, the Yemen Times visited the Taiz coastline in December as part of an awareness-raising campaign sponsored by the Threatened Wild

Life Foundation, a non-governmental organization based in Sana'a.

Seeking out more temperate climates in November and December, flocks of birds pass through Bab Al-Mandeb as they arrive from Europe and Asia on their way to Africa, returning again between the months of March and July.

According to ornithologist Abdul Rahman Raweh, over 500 thousand birds are thought to pass through Bab Al-Mandeb, including 250 rare and endangered species. During their flyover, the shores and hinterlands of Dhobab district in Taiz provide refuge to over 60 thousand birds and a dizzying array of species.

Mohammad Al-Duais, an ornithologist who heads the Threatened Wild Life Foundation, says Bab Al-Mandeb is the second most important area for migratory birds of prey after the Panama Canal in Central America.

Landscape and biodiversity are closely linked, and the variety of landscapes in Yemen make it uniquely hospitable to bird wildlife. Mountains, planes, deserts, wetlands, coastlines and islands can all be found in the area of Bab Al-Mandeb, providing safe refuge for both indigenous and visiting species.

Yemen is uniquely rich in its own birdlife. According to the British-Yemen Society, a charitable group that serves to advance public knowledge of Ye-

men's history, geography, economy and culture, over 360 species have been recorded in the country. These include seventeen species (thirteen on the mainland and four on the island of Socotra) which are found nowhere else. With such a high number of endemic species, Yemen is considered one of the most important countries in the Middle East for bird conservation.

## An ecosystem under threat

In addition to serving as a potential tourist attraction, Raweh says the importance of these birds lies in the fact that they serve as an indicator for environmental well-being and biodiversity.

Biodiversity and landscape variety allow visiting and indigenous birds to flourish in southwest Yemen, but underdevelopment and low levels of human population are important factors as well. Dhobab is both the largest and—with under 12,000 inhabitants—the least populated district in Taiz. Ali Salam, who heads the Environmental Center at Taiz University, says it is critical this equilibrium be conserved if birds are to continue visiting the area in such large numbers.

Poaching constitutes one of the most serious threats to birds in Bab Al-Mandeb. Hunting seasons coincide with the arrival of birds in November and March, when thousands of hunters gather along the Yemeni coastline in search of rare species, selling them in nearby markets or to overseas buyers.

Haj Mohammad Qasim Al-Ghoul, a Dhobab local, says local residents are joined by large numbers of amateur and professional hunters from other governorates during hunting season.

Al-Ghoul told the Yemen Times he caught two Al-Bashiq birds—a rare bird of prey—in December, and sold them to a trader, who he said will sell them on to buyers in the United Arab Emirates.

"Forming teams of about ten, we try to catch the birds while they're



The destruction of mangrove trees found at Khour Al-Guraira, which offer both food for birds and firewood for locals, are of particular concern to environmentalists.

perched on trees. Each bird sells for about YR43,000 (\$200)," he explained, adding there are no restrictions in place to prevent them from doing so.

While industry and urban development remain limited, environmental pollution and deforestation are on the rise. When the Yemen Times visited, plastic bags and other refuse were found strewn along the Dhobab coastline.

Deforestation is not a problem unique to mountainous areas in Yemen, but its effects can be seen along the coastline as well. Of particular concern in Bab Al-Mandeb is the ongoing destruction of mangrove trees, an important source of food for birds in the region, many of which travel to the area specifically for them.

Salam says the unique mangrove trees found growing at Khour Al-Guraira, a naturally formed creek, provide an important source of food for fish, crustaceans, and birds in the area that gather around in large

numbers to feed upon them. As elsewhere in Yemen, they also provide firewood for locals and, as gas prices become ever more volatile, are coming under increasing threat.

Compounding these problems is an apparent lack of drive by government bodies. There are desperately few government-sponsored programs to protect the local environment or educate local communities, nor are there any initiatives to invest in eco-tourism similar to that found on Socotra.

According to Ahmad Haidar, director of the Department for Monitoring and Evaluating Environmental Impact in the Ministry of Tourism, the government is reluctant to intervene in the natural habitat for fear it will "disrupt the natural system just by bringing our hardware into those areas."

Anwar Al-Himiari, general director of the government's Environmental Protection Authority, says his office organizes environmental seminars in various governorates

and carries out independent studies throughout the country, but admits efforts in Bab Al-Mandeb remain in their early stages.

With such limited government input, organizations like the Threatened Wild Life Foundation take on added importance. Al-Duais says his foundation holds awareness-raising campaigns, workshops and field trips throughout the country. A group of 35 wildlife enthusiasts and media professionals accompanied the Yemen Times on one such excursion organized by the foundation.

One of the foundation's current projects involves the construction of watch towers in Dhobab. In cooperation with the government, the watch towers are expected to be completed over a two-year period. Al-Duais says it is a crucial initiative because, while there is as yet no way of monitoring numbers in the area, few doubt that bird populations have declined significantly in recent years.



Rare species such as the Al-Bashiq bird are under threat from poachers.



Large volumes of plastic refuse can be found strewn along the Dhobab coastline.

## ANALYSIS

# Power vacuum in Yemen strains international security cooperation

**Fernando Carvajal**  
muffah.org  
First published Feb. 9

Since President Abdu Rabu Mansour Hadi resigned on Jan. 22, 2015, the future of Yemen's political transition has been increasingly uncertain. Hadi's resignation was a result of tensions in the capital that erupted after members of the Houthi movement seized control of the Presidential Palace and tried to change the country's draft constitution, which calls for a new federal state with six regions.

The coming months will undoubtedly be turbulent for Yemen. Together with various political parties, UN Special Envoy Jamal Benomar, who was responsible for overseeing the UN supported transition in Yemen, had insisted Hadi rescind his resignation and address the power vacuum exacerbating the country's security and humanitarian crises, a stance echoed by Abdulatif Bin Rashid Al-Zayani, secretary-general of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC). President Hadi made it clear this past week, however, that his resignation was final.

Regional and international actors, particularly the United States and Saudi Arabia, have raised alarm bells over growing chaos and the potential for Islamist militants to use the crisis to their own advantage. The territorial integrity of the republic remains under threat as southern secessionists move forward in their bid for an independent state.

As of this writing, political parties, which were part of the transitional process, failed to meet a deadline issued by Houthi rebels on Feb. 1, 2015 to reach a solution to the political crisis. Claiming talks mediated by Benomar were unable

to determine the next steps to resolve the crisis, the Houthis called a meeting on Friday, Feb. 6, and announced a fifteen article constitutional declaration. The declaration effectively dissolved parliament, called for a 551 member Transitional National Council (TNC), and named Mohammed Ali Al-Houthi as head of a five member presidential council. The UN Security Council issued a statement the same evening threatening new sanctions if negotiations do not resume.

With this move, the Houthis have consolidated the soft coup that began on Sept. 21, 2014 as part of a campaign to rid Yemen of corrupt government officials and restore the country's sovereignty by rejecting foreign interference. The Houthis latest brazen move by no means solves the ongoing political crisis, and only adds to growing uncertainty over two vital issues: Relations between political parties under an unprecedented imbalance of power in Sana'a and uncertainty over continued security cooperation between Yemen, Saudi Arabia, and the United States. Even as the Houthis, Saudi Arabia, and the United States share a common enemy in Al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP), prospects for overt co-operation remain marginal.

## Politics as (un)usual in Sana'a

During the course of 2014, as the Houthis began advancing from their northern stronghold in Sa'ada governorate downward to Amran and then Sana'a, power imbalances were created that have led to unusual political relations in Yemen. There is a new governing equation, uniting the Houthis with their once-nemesis, former President Ali Abdullah Saleh. This alliance of convenience, driven by a need to eliminate mutual rivals like the Islamist Islah Party, will be difficult

to sustain in the absence of a single legitimate actor with authority over the entire republic.

Thanks to the new Houthi-Saleh alliance, international support for Yemen's transition, which has mainly come from the Group of Ten Embassies (the UN, EU, the United States, UK, France, China, Russia, Saudi Arabia, Qatar, and the GCC countries) can no longer maintain a balance of power among rival parties. The political order established by the GCC Initiative, which began the transitional process and was signed on Nov. 23, 2011, has been turned on its head. The ill administered agreement failed to produce a transparent process for Yemen's transition toward a more democratic and just political order, and, instead, paved the way for the return of deposed President Saleh.

Benomar has been sidelined, during the current crisis, to the point that a number of political parties often refused to attend meetings in his presence. His vehicle has also been targeted by gunmen in the capital. As for the country's political parties, Islah and its junior partners in the Joint Meeting Parties (JMP) failed to agree on proposals presented by the Socialist and Nasserist parties, as well as those introduced by Benomar and the GCC. The JMP instantly rejected the Houthi declaration of Feb. 6.

Junior members of the JMP, such as the Yemeni Socialist Party (YSP) and the Nasserist Party, continue jousting to find a role for themselves and remain relevant, while Islah remains weakened and unable to exert any meaningful influence during crisis negotiations. The Houthi dealt a fatal blow to Islah's tribal and military wings toward the end of last year. On Sept. 21, 2014, Islah's elite supporters, including General Ali Mohsen Al-Ahmar, were forced to leave Sana'a and the

leaders of the Al-Ahmar tribal federation, who are the Houthis' tribal and ideological rivals, were rendered powerless. The Zaydi-Shia rebels kept Islah's political leaders under house arrest for days following the September siege. Islah has yet to recover from these attacks against its leadership and support base.

With Hadi's resignation, Saleh and his party find themselves in a rather difficult position. Much has been written recently about Saleh's possible return to power. It is clear, however, that no one will consent to the re-emergence of authoritarian rule. Saleh's rise to the top can not come without consent from Yemen's other parties.

But, if Saleh and his supporters mismanage their relationship with the Houthis, they will lose all leverage over the opposition parties. Thanks to past and present realities, the alliance between Saleh and the Houthis is fragile at best. From 2004 to 2009, the Saleh government waged six wars against the Houthis. Currently, the two sides are fighting over military equipment and strategic positions like the Al-Samah Mountain, which overlooks Sana'a International Airport.

Saleh's General People's Congress (GPC) aimed for a peaceful constitutional transfer of power to the Speaker of Parliament, Yahya Al-Rai, a member of the GPC. On the evening of Feb. 7, the GPC released a statement condemning the Houthi declaration. Commentators have suggested that the move is a smoke screen, as the GPC did not reject the new transitional process. Undoubtedly, however, Saleh and his loyalists are concerned about losing their majority in the legislature, which is now being replaced by the National Council.

Mohammed Alabasi, a Sana'a-



President Hadi with Secretary of Defense Hagel

based political analyst, commented "that most of the [declaration] content does not affect GPC interests," but it would be difficult for the party to accept the authority of the Revolutionary Committee charged with overseeing the Transitional Presidential and National Council. Conditional acquiescence may come if the Houthis commit to re-engaging the dialogue process "because they can't proceed alone," according to Alabasi. Undoubtedly, Saleh and his loyalists are concerned over losing majority control of the legislature to be replaced by the National Council.

The Houthis, themselves, are perceived as lacking the capacity to rule directly, as evidenced by their recent inability to effectively administer state institutions. The Houthis seem to have acknowledged this problem. Their leader, Abdulmalik Al-Houthi, inadvertently suggested as much when he referred to Hadi as Yemen's president during recent televised speeches, and called his resignation a mistake damaging the people's will. The Houthi leader re-

iterated this position during his latest televised speech on Feb. 7, when he spoke about the deepening chaos and obstacles posed by "spoilers" in negotiations to solve the political crisis.

The way forward remains unclear. Young activists also remain committed to holding every party accountable and subject to scrutiny. Motivated by fears of the Houthis' increased power and control over the state, a new youth-led protest movement, which includes members of Islah and JMP, surfaced in Sana'a soon after Hadi submitted his resignation. Protesters gathered at the gates of Sana'a University to reject the Houthi-led coup against Hadi and Prime Minister Khaled Bahah. Their persistence in the face of Houthi aggressions show that young Yemenis will do their part to prevent a return to politics as usual before the 2011 uprising. Heavy-handed crackdowns in recent days against protesters by Houthi will undoubtedly continue to challenge the resolve of young activists.

*Continued on the back page*

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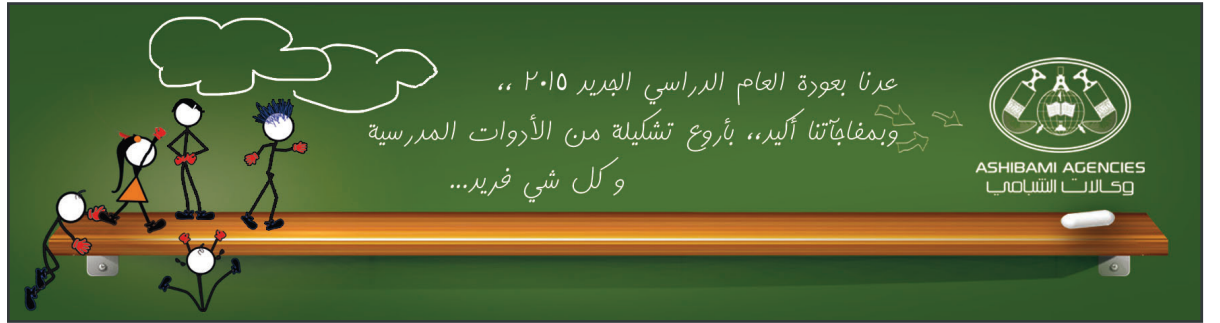
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Continued from page 6

## Power vacuum in Yemen strains international security cooperation

### Power vacuum leads to increased security dilemmas

In addition to upsetting the political order, the Houthi takeover has further fragmented and demoralized the armed forces. Houthi rebel gains in Sana'a have deeply fractured the command and control structures of the state security forces, and undermined their ability to respond to mounting threats around the country.

A former high-ranking security official familiar with events leading to the Houthis' rise confirmed the breakdown of command structures and low morale among security forces. In a brief interview, he indicated that junior commanders and troops had been resentful toward Hadi and former Minister of Defense, Mohammed Nasser, for providing no support when the Houthis over-ran Amran City, less than 50km north of the capital in July 2014. Adhering to their partisan affiliations, military commanders responded, instead, to orders from political or tribal patrons, like Saleh and Islah, rather than following directions from the minister of defense or the President.

The Houthi takeover has also aggravated existing difficulties with deploying military equipment and personnel to deal with conflicts in remote areas of Yemen. Aggravating Yemen's general lack of modern logistical capabilities to deploy troops beyond garrisons, Houthi militias have looted military bases in Amran and Sana'a, taking whatever equipment there was.

The security breakdown has aggravated concerns over new operational spaces for AQAP, and has al-

ready led to increasing threats from AQAP militants. This was evidenced by a coordinated attack on a military convoy on Jan. 2, 2015 by tribes and Ansar Al-Sharia (AQAP) elements in Marib and then in Belhaff, Shabwa on Jan. 14.

The Houthi incursion has created ripple effects beyond Yemen's borders, as well. As a result of Hadi's resignation, the United States, in particular, has lost its closest ally in the country. President Hadi had been a staunch supporter of US counter-terrorism (CT) operations in Yemen since taking office in February 2012. Hadi publicly acknowledged his approval of US drone strikes against AQAP militants during his first visit to the United States in September 2012. Unlike his predecessor, who was often seen as using Al-Qaeda's presence as a tool for political gain, President Hadi viewed AQAP as an existential threat to the state, as well as to his own physical safety.

As Houthis advanced on state institutions, such as the National Security Bureau (NSB) and the Political Security Office (PSO), observers began to sound alarms over the collapse of US-Yemen CT cooperation. When the Houthis besieged the home of NSB director Ali Hassan Al-Ahmadi in September, and later kidnapped PSO General Yahya Al-Marrani in December, concerns increased over the fate of intelligence agencies partnered with the United States and Saudi Arabia for CT purposes.

With Saudi Arabia listing the Houthi rebels as a terrorist group and given the sanctions levied against Houthi military leaders,

Abdullah (Abu Ali) Yahya Al-Hakim and Abdul Khaleq Badr Al-Din Al-Houthi by the UN Security Council, few avenues seem available for direct cooperation between Yemen and its US and Saudi allies.

Recently, media reports claimed US intelligence officials have been maintaining a degree of contact with Houthi elements. The fact remains, however, that Houthi rebels continue to publicly object to interference and operations by foreign military forces in Yemen. This has been true even as US drones target mid-level Ansar Al-Sharia leaders like Nabil Al-Dhahab, killed in Al-Baida in November, and militants in Marib, which the Houthis claimed planned attacks against them.

The United States faces a complicated relationship with the Houthis, who share its interests in eliminating AQAP, but cannot afford to cooperate with the United States or Saudi Arabia even for the sake of defeating a common enemy. Abdulmalik Al-Houthi, who has emphasized the evil of foreign interference, can only quietly take advantage of US drone strikes. In the meantime, public anti-US rhetoric from him and other Houthi leaders will continue to fuel speculation over future US and Saudi operations in Yemen.

The Houthis specifically addressed the issue of foreign interference in their constitutional declaration. Although ambiguous, Article 11 emphasizes Houthi commitment to protecting national sovereignty and "maintain[ing] the state's independence." It is unclear as to how the new transitional government will deal with existing security agree-

ments with international partners, or how much oversight will be delegated to Houthi loyalists.

### Long-term fallout from the current crisis

As Houthis now aim to shoulder the responsibility over the post-Hadi era, it is unlikely the United States and Saudi Arabia will enjoy the same degree of support in Yemen. No matter which party ultimately imposes a degree of order, security cooperation with the two countries will change.

Nevertheless, the most vital issue in Yemen right now is consolidating command and control over the armed forces, in order to contain AQAP. Observers expect this issue to surface as the next point of conflict among political actors, as the Houthis refuse to withdraw their militias from the capital and other major cities in central Yemen. Recent gatherings organized by the Houthi movement in Sana'a, including the meeting announcing the constitutional declaration, witnessed large numbers of police and military officers often joining in chants of "Death to America." Former President Saleh has also started to rally loyalists within the former Republican Guard, currently known as the Reserve Forces, which may impact ongoing clashes in Al-Baida and Marib governorates where Houthis



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face strong resistance from a mix of AQAP and tribal elements. Beyond Sana'a, the Houthis remain highly dependent on elements loyal to Saleh, a reality the former president will use as leverage to safeguard his own interests.

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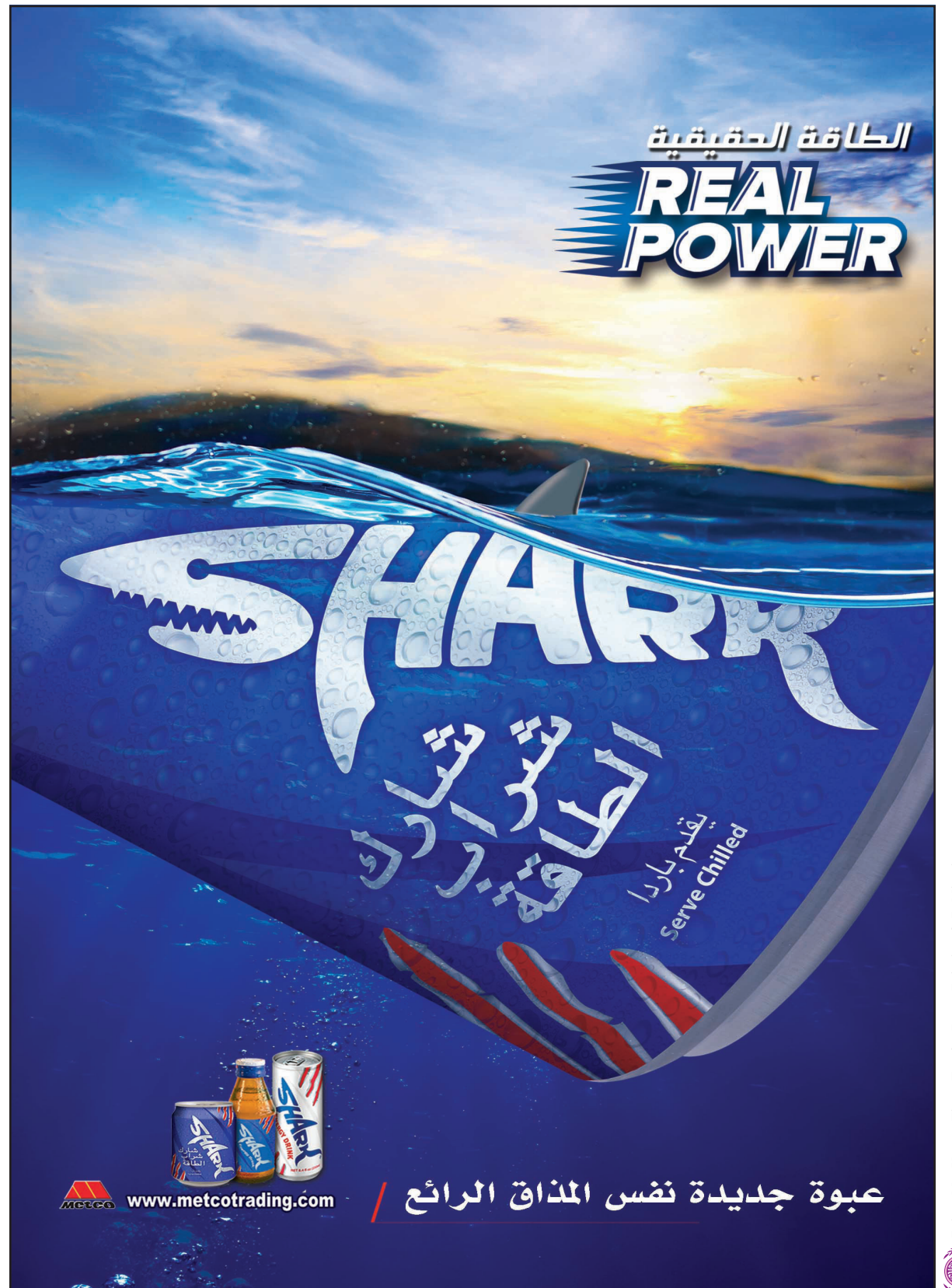
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