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Brief clashes in Aden as popular committees set up checkpoints



Popular committee members from neighboring Abyan have arrived in Aden governorate.

■ Nasser Al-Sakkaf

SANA'A, Feb. 16—Clashes broke out between popular committee members and Special Security Forces (SSF) Wednesday morning in the Al-Boraika district of Aden governorate, following a dispute over checkpoints.

The fighting took place in Al-Hoswa area, leaving one popular committee member injured, according to Nasser Al-Hawshabi, a prominent popular committee member from Abyan who arrived in Aden Tuesday.

With the help of reinforcements from Abyan, popular committees established dozens of checkpoints Tuesday morning in the governorate.

Al-Hawshabi claimed there was a misunderstanding when popular committee members were asked to move their checkpoint farther away from an SSF checkpoint in the same area. According to him, the popular committee members thought they

were being told to evacuate their checkpoint, and brief clashes broke out.

Earlier on Monday, fighting took place between popular committees and SSF, leaving a soldier and three popular committee members dead, and another three injured from both sides.

Popular committees were established at the end of January as an anti-Houthi force under the control of the SSF. Mohammad Mosaed, office manager of the Aden Security Department, told the Yemen Times earlier this week that the committees were being dissolved Monday morning because "there was no longer a need for them."

Following Monday's clashes, popular committee members from neighboring Abyan travelled to Aden in support.

"On Monday evening around eight thousand popular committee members entered Aden governorate to help the popular committees in Aden fighting the

[SSF]," said Al-Hawshabi.

Mosaed confirmed to the Yemen Times on Tuesday that large numbers of armed men from Abyan arrived in Aden Monday evening, though he said he was unsure of how many.

Al-Hawshabi said the popular committees took over most of the areas in the governorate and there are no clashes between the popular committees and the SSF, as there was reconciliation between the popular committees and security personnel in Aden.

"The popular committees are now responsible for protecting Aden from Houthis or any other militants, such as Al-Qaeda [AQAP]. We erected our checkpoints in several areas inside the governorate to control it very well," he said.

Mosaed said the popular committees should work "shoulder to shoulder" with the security forces and described Monday's events as a "dispute between brothers."

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Agreement accelerates Houthi control over Al-Baida

■ Ali Aboluhom

SANA'A, Feb. 18—After days of fighting, Houthis took control of Al-Zaher district in Al-Baida governorate on Tuesday following an agreement with local tribesmen.

Adel Al-Asbahi, the security office manager of Al-Baida governorate, brokered a deal early Tuesday between the Houthis and tribesmen from the districts of Al-Zaher, Al-Sawma, and Maswarah.

The deal allows the Houthis, who are backed by the army, to enter these three districts in order to track down members of Al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP), Al-Asbahi told the Yemen Times.

Only hours after the deal was signed, the Houthis entered Al-Zaher, located in the southwest of Al-Baida governorate, without facing any resistance, Al-Asbahi said.

From Friday until Monday deadly clashes took place between the army-backed Houthis and Al-Zaher tribesmen, who have been accused by the Houthis of supporting AQAP. According to Abdulrab Mohsen Al-Humaikani, head of the Al-Humaikani tribe in Al-Zaher, the clashes left 11 tribesmen from the district dead: Seven from his tribe and four from the Al-Monasar tribe.

Al-Asbahi and Al-Humaikani said they have no information regarding Houthi casualties, as did Abu Hassan, a Houthi popular committee member who was involved in the clashes.

Al-Asbahi said that before the deal was made there was a "misconception" that Houthis break into villages, kill people, and destroy houses. However, he said, when "the Houthis and tribesmen were brought together to have a dialogue, they realized they have nothing to dispute and should unite in their efforts to fight Al-Qaeda."

Houthi fighter Abu Hassan said the deal facilitates the group's "search for Al-Qaeda militants" and that "the districts will witness no bloodshed as long as the tribes abide by [the agreement], because the common enemy we face is Al-Qaeda."

Al-Humaikani adamantly denied any association to AQAP, saying that



A deal with tribesmen from Al-Zaher, Al-Sawma, and Maswarah allows the Houthis to enter the three districts in search of AQAP militants.

the Houthis have always made claims its militants are positioned throughout Al-Baida. "We had to make this deal in order to prove that we have no connection with Al-Qaeda," he said. "[Houthis] are allowed to enter our district to search for them."

The deal gives no specific deadline for Houthis to end their mission in Al-Zaher, but tribesmen have

"agreed with Houthis that they enter the district and search for Al-Qaeda for a few days then pull back to the city," according to Al-Humaikani.

While the agreement stipulates that the Houthis can also enter Al-Sawma and Maswarah districts, it does not permit the group to enter any others.

Continued on page 2

National talks to continue despite deadlock

■ Bassam Al-Khameri

SANA'A, Feb. 18—UN-brokered talks are continuing with the participation of Houthi representatives, despite the demands of opposition parties being ignored.

Supervised by UN Special Envoy to Yemen Jamal Benomar, national talks were resumed on Feb. 9 but have been marred by disagreement.

Islah Party delegates threatened to walk out of the session on Tuesday. Party representative Mohammed Qahtan said his team had been demanding the release of President Abdu Rabu Mansour Hadi from house arrest in order to receive urgent medical treatment.

"The family of President Hadi called on the Islah Party to push for his release, his health condition is

critical," he said, although he could not provide any details.

Former Minister of Information Nadia Al-Sakkaf has also raised concerns about the president's health on her twitter feed. "I visited President Hadi today, he has a heart condition and was quite ill. He must be allowed to travel for treatment," she wrote on Feb. 16.

Sakkaf claims the Houthis will not allow the president to leave until a deal is reached, "even if he dies due to his heart condition."

After walking out of the conference on its opening day, representatives from the Nasserist Party suspended their participation for a second time on Tuesday. In a statement released by the party, its members demanded the release of all government members from house arrest as a pre-condition for further discussions.

"Throughout several sessions of dialogue, we have seen negotiations taking place in a vicious circle that can not lead to positive outcomes and will only exacerbate the

existing crisis," the statement read, adding that Nasserist delegates will only partake in talks based on the Feb. 2 recommendations of the Joint Meeting Parties (JMP).

The JMP recommendations include the immediate lifting of house arrests, a guarantee for freedom of expression, and an end to the abuse of protestors, journalists and activists.

Calling on Nasserist delegates to return to the table, Benomar's office released a statement in response on Tuesday evening, reiterating that "the lone reference for negotiations is the Gulf Initiative and outcomes of the National Dialogue Conference (NDC), and the Peace and National Partnership Agreement, as well as the UN Security Council's resolutions related to Yemen."

Benomar deemed the Houthis' constitutional declaration of Feb. 6 unilateral and therefore illegitimate, and said it will not be included within the framework of negotiations.

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National talks at the Movenpick Hotel in Sana'a, overseen by UN Special Envoy Jamal Benomar (center left), have continued despite opposition party demands being ignored. The Houthis insist any agreements must abide by their constitutional declaration of Feb. 6.

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Bombings return to Arhab district

■ Nasser Al-Sakkaf

SANA'A, Feb. 18—Houthis demolished five houses belonging to Islah Party supporters in Arhab district on Tuesday and Wednesday, following a dispute over a local water well that left three Houthis dead.

A prominent Islah member from the area, who preferred to remain anonymous, said the houses targeted were in Al-Janadra village. "The other residents [of Al-Janadra] are waiting for the Houthis to bomb their houses as well, since they took control of the district no one can stop them," he said.

One of the properties demolished belongs to Mohsen Daba, an Islahi

sheikh who is well-known in the area. Families were evacuated beforehand and no one was killed in the explosions, according to local sources.

Members of the Houthi Political Office claimed to be unaware of the incident, but Mabrook Qusaila, a Houthi sheikh based in Arhab, said the demolitions were in retaliation for the killing of three of the group's popular committee members.

Fighting broke out on Tuesday when work on a well in the village was prevented. When popular committee members intervened, they were attacked, according to Qusaila.

"I don't condone bombing houses or killing people, I tried getting Arhab's sheikhs together for a meeting

to solve the dispute, but it was too late," he said.

Himiar Al-Sohaini, a resident of Al-Janadra, says the situation in the village is unpredictable and that his neighbors are wary of further repercussions from the Houthis. "Most families weren't able to sleep on Tuesday because of the volatile situation," he said.

Al-Sohaini is one of a number of displaced residents, having left the area for his cousin's house in a nearby village.

Demolitions were a common sight in Arhab during clashes between tribal militias and Houthis there last year, before Houthis forces claimed control of the area in mid-December.



A screenshot from a video purporting to show one of the five houses in Arhab demolished by the Houthis. Arhab experienced similar incidents last year, until Houthis claimed control of the district in December.

Hadramout Tribal Federation calls for regional security apparatus

■ Khalid Al-Karimi

SANA'A, Feb. 17—The Hadramout Tribal Federation is working with local security forces, civil society organizations, and counterparts in Shabwa governorate to form a Coordinating Security Committee, members of the federation reported Tuesday.

The Hadramout Tribal Federation—an alliance of leaders from the governorate's 185 tribes that was formed in 2013—convened a meeting in Wadi Nakhb on Monday to discuss the formation of a united security apparatus and closer ties between Shabwa and Hadramout.

Socotra, an administrative division of Hadramout until granted autonomy in 2013, has been included in the discussions, as have a number of local civil society organizations, such as the Hadramout Future Front and the Hadrami League.

Saleh Al-Dwaila, a spokesperson for the federation, said the committee is being formed "to maintain security in Hadramout and Shabwa in cooperation with the security authorities," calling it a "necessary step" in Yemen's current crisis.

A preparatory council, composed of 20 representatives from both Hadramout and Shabwa, is currently being created to oversee the formation of the Coordinating Security Committee, said Saleh Al-Bahsmi, a member of the Hadramout Tribal Federation.

Al-Dwaila said the security committee's primary tasks will include crime prevention, dispute resolu-



Tribesmen gathered in Wadi Nakhb to discuss closer security coordination between Hadramout and Shabwa.

tion, and sharing information between authorities in Hadramout and Shabwa. "We have nothing to do with Sana'a. We have to depend on ourselves and protect our governorates," he said.

Southern Movement members in the governorates have put their support behind the initiative, according to an activist with the group, Hussein Bashuaib. "We do not oppose the [formation of a security committee], we want what is best for the south and its people," he said.

A source from the First Military Command, speaking on condition of anonymity, said the committee would play an important part in "overcoming security problems in

the governorates."

The governor of Hadramout, Adel Bahumaid, has also welcomed the move. Speaking with the Mukalla-Star news website, he said, "We congratulate the Hadramout tribes on the success of the conference... We commend their sincere attempts to instill togetherness, social integration, and to deepen the bonds of our neighboring governorates."

The Hadramout Tribal Federation established a "Wise People Committee" last September in response to Houthi advances on the capital Sana'a. Although less expansive than the current initiative, it was also concerned with maintaining local security in the governorate.

Al-Jawf tribesmen close governor's office

■ Nasser Al-Sakkaf

SANA'A, Feb. 18—Dozens of tribesmen closed the governor's office in Al-Jawf on Tuesday in protest over plans to replace the governorate's highest ranking military official, Brigadier Adel Al-Qumairi.

Al-Jawf's governor, Hussein Al-Awadhi, was appointed by President Hadi on Dec. 25, 2014, and is accused by local tribesmen of being pro-Houthi.

Based in the capital Sana'a, Al-Awadhi has yet to travel to Al-Jawf and was not present at the protests. However, in a show of defiance the tribesmen closed his local office for two hours on Tuesday morning and warned all employees, in addition to the governor himself, not to enter.

"Al-Jawf does not have a governor, and we will not allow him to enter Al-Jawf because we do not have a government [in Sana'a] that can make appointments and changes," said Sheikh Basha Atia, deputy head of Al-Jawf Tribal Federation.

A senior source from the Ministry of Defense, speaking to the Yemen Times on condition of anonymity, said the decision to replace Al-Qumairi was made by the presidency of the army's General Staff, rather than the governor.

"Houthis control government and much of the country—but the decision was legal," the source said. He did not say why Al-Qumairi was being replaced, or who would be taking his position.

Soldiers from the 115th Infantry Brigade, under Al-Qumairi's control, are largely against him being replaced, according to one



Tribesmen blame Governor Al-Awadhi, who they view as pro-Houthi, for the decision to replace Brigadier Al-Qumairi (pictured).

of the brigade's soldiers, Hussein Al-Khadri.

The 115th Infantry Brigade was formed out of the popular committees in Al-Jawf, which were created following the 2011 uprising. Their members were gradually absorbed into the army, and were involved in fighting against the Houthis in 2014.

Soldiers also accuse the governor of blocking their salaries for the last three months. "We stopped getting our salaries in November. The new governor hasn't addressed the issue and we are still not getting paid," said Al-Khadri.

The Ministry of Defense source claims salaries have been delayed because the process of turning

popular committee members into soldiers was never made official, which requires that each is allocated personal ID numbers held by all public sector employees.

Government authority remains weak in Al-Jawf. According to Mabhkoot Mohammed, a journalist based in the governorate, central areas that include the capital city are under the sway of local tribesmen opposed to the Houthis.

Intermittent clashes between Houthis and tribesmen in Al-Jawf, which broke out in April and August of 2014, have not flared up since the group took Sana'a on Sept. 21. Houthi control remains confined to Al-Safra area in the west of Al-Jawf.

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

Brief clashes in Aden as popular committees set up checkpoints

"It is normal that disputes happen, but the most important thing is that the purpose of the popular committees is not to be against security personnel, rather they have the same purpose—to protect Aden from any assault."

Monday evening a meeting was convened by the governors and security officials of Aden, Abyan and Lahj. Two committees were formed: One to investigate the clashes that took place on Monday, and another for reconciliation between the SSF and the popular committees.

The investigation committee consists of Brigadier Mosaed, Brigadier Ahmed Al-Moghni, the chief of staff of the SSF in Aden, Brigadier Ahmed Al-Masabi, deputy of

the Political Security Bureau in Aden, Colonel Mahyoub Mohsen, manager of military intelligence for the Fourth Military Command (stationed in Aden), and Ahmed Al-Maisari, supervisor of the popular committees in Aden.

One of the primary duties of the reconciliation committee is to facilitate the release of those detained on Monday. This includes around 100 soldiers detained by the popular committees and ten popular committee members held by the SSF, according to Mosaed.

"The detainees from both sides have not been freed as the reconciliation committee has not done anything yet," Abdulateef Al-Said, a member of the committee, said Wednesday afternoon. Al-Said is the head of Abyan's popular committees and arrived in Aden on Monday.

Al-Hawshabi confirmed that around 100 SSF soldiers were arrested on Monday by the popular committees: 37 soldiers from Al-

Alam checkpoint, which is on the border between Aden and Abyan, 20 from the headquarters of Aden TV channel, 25 from the Local Council headquarters, and others from various checkpoints throughout the governorate.

According to Al-Hawshabi, the popular committees in Aden have dozens of private houses where they are holding the soldiers.

Agreement accelerates Houthi control over Al-Baida

According to Al-Asbahi, these are the only districts over which the Houthis have no control, and when the Houthis enter them they "will witness no confrontations, in accordance with the deal."

On Feb. 8 the Houthis took con-

trol of the districts of Dhi Naem and Sharia. The takeover came following days of fighting between Houthis, backed by the army, and tribesmen from those districts who were allegedly backed by AQAP. At least 45 died from both sides in the conflict.

Abu Hassan said that while the Houthis control Sharia, "once in a while" skirmishes break out with AQAP militants. "We still face resistance from Al-Qaeda, who fled from Sharia to Yakla," he said, referring to the sub-district of Rada'a district, long considered an AQAP stronghold.

On Feb. 9, Walid Al-Dailami, a Houthi leader in Rada'a city, told the Yemen Times that their next objective was a push towards Yakla.

Although Rada'a district—where Yakla is located—is not included in the agreement, Abu Hassan confirmed the group's goal is still to invade Yakla, "purging" it of AQAP. He said they will do this once they

have entered Al-Sawma and Maswarah.

National talks to continue despite deadlock

Abdulmalik Al-Fuhaidi, editor-in-chief of the General People's Congress' (GPC) mouthpiece Al-Motamar Net, said the GPC is still participating in negotiations "because the country is in a critical situation and all parties must find a way out of the current crisis."

Regarding the continued detention of President Hadi and members of Cabinet, Al-Fuhaidi clarified his party's opposition, saying, "former President Ali Abdullah Saleh, head of the GPC, said in an interview two days ago that the GPC opposes the [illegitimate] detention of any Yemeni national, be it President Hadi or anyone else."

Hussein Al-Bukhaiti, a prominent Houthi activist, told the Yemen Times that any negotiations ought to be based on the group's Feb. 6 declaration.

"The terms of the declaration represent the goals of the 2011 revolution and the Sept. 21 [2014] revolution and shouldn't be objected to by parties that participated in the revolution against the former regime of Saleh," he said, adding that house arrests are a "precautionary measure" taken to protect the revolution, and that President Hadi would not be prevented from travelling if "verified information" regarding his health is provided.

While participating in national talks, the Houthis announced the members of its 15-member Revolutionary Committee on Monday. Headed by Mohammad Ali Al-Houthi, the committee is tasked with overseeing the creation of a 551-member National Transitional Council and a five-member Presidential Council.

“Damn the Jews” proving more than just a slogan

Yemen's dwindling Jewish population reports abuse, fear of the Houthis

■ Ali Ibrahim Al-Moshki

As security continues to deteriorate in Yemen, many of the country's remaining Jews may once again entertain the thought of leaving and resettling in safer countries.

On Jan. 21, Robin and Ishaq, two Yemeni Jews living in Sana'a, were beaten while buying groceries in the Old City, according to Yousef Habib, one of the few remaining Jewish rabbis left in the city. The attackers were allegedly popular committee members of the Houthis, also known as Ansar Allah.

“They were approached near Bab Al-Yemen as they were leaving the city by two men, who noticed them because of their Payot,” said Habib. Payot are long twisted locks of hair worn by observant Jewish men of all backgrounds. “The two men stopped them and ordered that they praise the prophet Muhammad, however the two refused. As a result they were then publically beaten, and had their possessions confiscated.”

It wasn't the first time Jews in Sana'a had experienced such attacks. In 2012, Aaron Zindani, a Yemeni Jew living in Sana'a, was stabbed to death at a local market while with his children.

Although being Jewish in Yemen has long posed problems for the country's small community, Habib says those who remain have become increasingly fearful since the Houthi takeover of Sana'a and other parts of the country in recent months. “Most of Yemen's Jews live in Sana'a and Amran, both areas now firmly under the control of Ansar Allah,” he said. “Many of us are thinking of leaving and going to Israel, like others have done previously.”

“Our problems are with Zionism and the occupation of Palestine, but Jews here have nothing to fear.”

Fadl Abu Taleb, a member of the Houthi Political Office in Sana'a, denied the Houthis had anything to do with the attack, and asserted under Houthi control Jews in Yemen would be able to live and operate freely as any other Yemeni citizen. “Our problems are with Zionism and the occupation of Palestine,” he said. “But Jews here have nothing to fear.”

Despite insistence by Houthi leaders that the movement is not sectarian, Habib says many Jews are terrified by the movement's slogan, which reads: “God is great, death to America, death to Israel,

damn the Jews, victory for Islam.”

“Many of us are originally from Sa'ada [governorate], the traditional homeland of the Houthis, and we know them all too well,” he said. “Many of us came to Sana'a fleeing Ansar Allah, now it's like they've followed us here.”

Forty-six of Yemen's Jews live in Tourist City, a walled compound housing foreign aid workers, diplomats and others working in the oil sectors located near the US embassy in Sana'a's Sawan district. Another 48 live near Raida city in Amran governorate. Most choose to remain isolated, avoiding going out in public for fear of harassment and discrimination by their Muslim neighbors.

Most of those in Tourist City are former residents of Sa'ada, and are recent arrivals in Sana'a, having fled the violence that resulted from the government's various wars and campaign against the Houthis between 2004 and 2010. “My house in Sa'ada was bombed by government forces in 2006, so I came here,” said Habib.

Haboub Salem Mousa, 36, also lives in Tourist City and migrated along with Habib and others from Sa'ada in 2006. According to him, he and other Jews were not just fleeing the fallout of war, but also the active discrimination they faced from the Houthis. “Houthis pursued us everywhere we went,” he said. “Attacks and even forced conversions were common in that time.” Various news reports from 2010 confirm the type of treatment Jews received at the hands of the Houthis. In 2009, the US State Department evacuated 100 Yemeni Jews to the United States where they were granted refugee status.

“It was a very traumatizing experience,” said Mousa, describing his experience fleeing to Sana'a. “Even after arriving here [Sana'a] we didn't feel safe mixing with the local population. The government lets us live in Tourist city, away from prying eyes.”

Beginning in 2009, the Jews of Tourist City were provided monthly stipends by Yemen's government including rations of oil, sugar and other basic goods, a program that was temporarily put on hold for eight months in 2012 because of the economic crisis the country faced following Yemen's 2011 uprising. The aid has now since resumed.

In order to avoid harassment in the instances where he does leave the compound, Mousa has shaved his side-locks, a tradition observed by pious Jewish men of all backgrounds. “When I first arrived in Sana'a, I still had my locks,” he said. “However, people recognized me as a Jew right away, and would shout and harass me in the street,” he added. “So I decided to get rid of them. I'm not happy about it, but it was necessary.”

Despite the hardships he faces, Mousa says he does not intend on leaving Yemen, and will remain here the rest of his life. “Most of us [Yemeni Jews] have left, but I won't. This is my country, I'll die here.”

According to Al-Yahoodi Al-Hali (the Nice Jew), written by Ali Al-Muqri, a popular Yemeni scholar and author from Taiz, Yemen's Jewish population at one point numbered almost 50,000. “Many Yemeni Jews lived in various regions in the country's north and south, including Sana'a, Aden, and Tarim, however many traveled to Israel following the 1948 United Nations partition plan,” the book reads.

Nearly 45,000 of those Jews were airlifted out of the country and moved to Israel a year later in 1949 in an operation known as Operation Magic Carpet, organized by local Yemeni authorities, the British government and the Jewish Agency. The Jewish Agency is an Israeli non-profit organization that sponsors Jewish migration, or “Aliyah” to Israel. Since then, various smaller waves of Yemeni Jews leaving the country have taken place, traveling to Israel, the United States and the United Kingdom, often seeking refugee status.

Approximately 48 other Jews live in the village of Bayt Harash, just outside Raida city, the capital of Raida district in Yemen's Amran governorate. Yahya Yaqoub is a Hebrew teacher and father of four who teaches at a private Jewish school in Bayt Harash. He claims that in his village Jews face similar discrimination as is witnessed by those in Sana'a and Sa'ada. “I haven't cut off my locks, however I hide them underneath my Imamah [Yemeni headscarf] whenever I go outside,” he said. “If I don't, people might identify me as a Jew. If that happens, who knows, anything could happen.”

Several years ago the school had about 20 students, he said. Now that number has dropped to seven, as the number of Jews living and working in the area has dropped due to people fleeing the country. Parents of the students avoid sending them to public schools he says, for fear of the harassment they would face from students and staff.

“Legally, Jews are treated as equals by the state and in state institutions such as schools,” he said. “But in practice, Jewish children who go to public schools are often forced to learn the Quran and face harassment from teachers, especially those teaching religion, Islamic culture, and similar subjects.”

“...We know them all too well. Many of us came to Sana'a fleeing Ansar Allah, now it's like they've followed us here.”

Two of Yaqoub's children left to study in the US and Israel he said, but he currently remains in the village with his wife and ten-year old son, also named Yaqoub. Yaqoub says he would like to immigrate to Israel or the US to meet up with his sons but cannot afford it. Three houses in Bayt Harash belonging to family members who left are currently in his possession he says, and if he could sell them he may be able to gather up enough money to leave.

However he claims he has faced



The remnants of a once thriving community, Yemen's Jews speak of an increase in abuse and persecution under Houthi rule. Those who remain are reconsidering their place in the country.

resistance from Muslim neighbors, who claim the houses belong to them, despite the fact that Yaqoub claims he possesses documentation proving his ownership.

Many Yemeni Jews are unemployed, and, due to security con-

cerns, find it difficult to practice their traditional trade as goldsmiths, jewelers and dagger forgers. As a result, the already small community has continued decreasing. On Aug. 15, 2013, 20 Yemeni Jews were smuggled into Israel

by the Jewish Agency and Yemeni middlemen. Thirty five others reportedly were also evacuated from the country during the same year. The Yemen Times contacted the Jewish Agency, but was refused any comment.

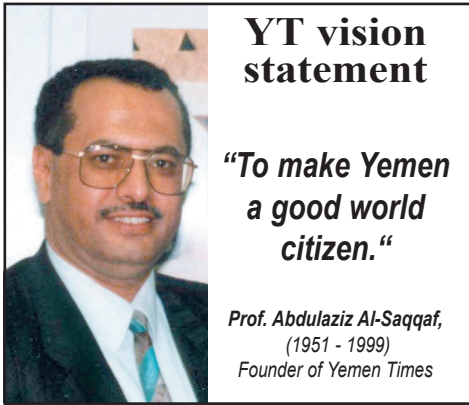
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OUR OPINION

When preparation fails expectations

Every year, the Yemeni job market receives an influx of fresh university graduates. After four years of hard work (six if you have a master's degree!) students enter the market full of excitement and grand expectations, eager to start their careers and find good, stable employment.

But for those unprepared, reality starts to set in very soon, and excitement gives way to desperation. What happens to those eager faces and lofty dreams? The preparation most receive at university is unfortunately far from the reality that the market expects.

After four to six years of study, students walk away without the minimum skills needed in today's market, such as familiarity with MS Office and a basic level of English proficiency.

Producing a professional Curriculum Vitae is one of the most important skills, it's your foot in the door. How can you make that crucial, good first impression if you are not able to put together professional e-mails, cover letters and correspondences?

Unfortunately, our universities are in an isolated bubble. As the market adjusts to modernity and technology, students should be prepared for this new reality.

Youth must take responsibility for these requirements and develop themselves. Computers have become less expensive and access to the internet is greater now than ever before. Yemeni youth are creative and innovative and must count on themselves to bridge the gap between what the market demands, and what their universities prepare them for. These skills aren't luxuries in today's landscape—they're the basics.

Farouq A. Ibrahim
General Manager
of the Yemen Times.

Isis has provoked an Arab alliance to bomb the West's enemies

Robert Fisk

Independent.co.uk
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Just when Washington and NATO feared they were going to be bombing ISIL on their own, the self-styled "Islamic State" has single-handedly created a new Arab military alliance to bomb the West's enemies.

By its seaside slaughter of 21 Egyptian Christians, ISIL has brought ex-Field Marshal President Abdel Fattah Al-Sisi into the war against it. And by burning Jordan's captured pilot alive, it provoked 56 more air strikes from Jordan, a return to action by the UAE and a flight of Bahraini jets to Amman to help in the struggle. In what is almost a sideshow, Libya's air force—supporting one of its country's two rival governments—continues to bomb ISIL fighters, but now in co-operation with Egypt.

So President Obama and the Pentagon can, it seems, take satisfaction in seeing their "moderate" friends in the Middle East flying alongside them in their latest version of the "war on terror." So far, so good. No "boots on the ground," as the now-hackneyed expression goes. No Western lives in danger—save for the pitiful handful of hostages still held in Raqqa. Of course, any Iraqi who opposes the "Islamic State," any Iraqi Shia, and any Christian—Libyan or

otherwise—who falls foul of ISIL's sectarian hatred, will suffer accordingly. But that will be Arab killing Arab. Americans are safe. So are the Israelis.

But crystal balls almost always break in the Middle East—especially when, to expressions of outrage and shouts of "barbarism," fighter jets take to the air. ISIL, in all its various mutations, can now claim that it is fighting its enemies in Iraq, Syria, Arabia (Yemen), Egypt (Sinai), Libya and Algeria. It boasts as much, even warning that France and "French-speakers"—a clear allusion to Algeria's ruling military-bourgeois elite—must expect to be attacked. Italy, too. And remember all those thousands of extra refugees who'll now be washing up on Italian shores.

But let's start with Egypt. Ever since the now-elected President Sisi overthrew the previous democratically elected President, Mohamed Morsi, in 2013, ISIL and its satellites have been fighting a ferocious campaign against Egyptian security forces in the Sinai peninsula. Sisi likes to conflate ISIL with the Muslim Brothers, which is bad news for the thousands of Brotherhood supporters thronging Egypt's jails—but bad news, too, for the Sisi regime. Islamists have shown themselves strong enough in the Sinai and they are already setting off bombs in Cairo—without acquiring new allies among the Brotherhood courtesy of the Egyptian President.

The Egyptian air strikes on "training camps and weapons caches"—by extraordinary circumstances, that's exactly what Jordan's air force claims to be targeting—may have been revenge for the murder of the 21 Christian Copts. And we all knew that women and children would be killed by the Egyptian planes.

But now ISIL will want revenge for the Egyptian air raids. Will there be more bombs in Cairo itself? Definitely. Will there be assassination attempts against Sisi? Almost certainly. When the ex-dictator Hosni Mubarak fought his native Islamist enemies in the 1990s, he miraculously survived 15 murder attempts, one of them in Addis Ababa, at least two of them by soldiers belonging to the same Egyptian army from whose ranks came President Anwar Sadat's killers in 1981. Mubarak was lucky. With ISIL as his enemy, Sisi will now have to be even luckier.

After all, four months ago Islamists massacred 28 Egyptian security men in Sinai. Then just over two weeks ago, the "Islamic State's" Egyptian militiamen butchered at least 30 more in a massive bombing at a military hotel and base in Al-Arish. On that occasion, Sisi flew back from a conference in Ethiopia as his soldiers were being flown in pieces back to Cairo in a fleet of military aircraft. Egypt didn't launch its war with Isis in yesterday's air raids—the two sides had been killing each other for

more than a year.

Shorn of its window-dressing, however, the Arab alliance does not look so impressive. UAE planes may have flown to Amman—but are they to be crewed by Emiratis or Jordanians? Bahrain has also sent some planes to Jordan; but this was a minuscule kingdom that felt so threatened by its own Shia majority in 2011 that it had to call in the Saudi army to occupy part of the island and protect the Sunni royal government.

Isis would no doubt like to provoke Sunni-Coptic armed violence in Egypt, reigniting a miniature war which has been smoldering for decades. An unlikely scenario. But Egypt's support for the Libyan military of General Khalifa Haftar—who in turn supports the internationally-recognized Benghazi government—will only deepen the Libyan civil conflict.

But for Arabs, there is a clear message in all these alliances. Washington has an American-trained general in charge of the Libyan air force, an American-trained former field marshal and president in charge of Egypt, an American-educated and British-trained king in Jordan and two wealthy emirates with huge US investments—one of them headquarters to the US fleet in the Gulf—in the battle. Only that well-known dictator who has been fighting ISIL for longer than any of them—Bashar Al-Assad of Syria—is left out. For now.

From failure to success: How the Houthis saved the Arab Spring

■ **Hussain Al-Bukhaiti**

When a revolution was sparked in Tunisia in late 2010, the Arab world waited to see who would be next. Arabs were ruled by tyrants and kings. The deeply human desire to be free proved too powerful for many of the region's dictators, and one-by-one, many fell.

As they fell, other leaders took note. As far as China, government fear of the people's power was evident. Saudi Arabia increased subsidies, Morocco and Jordan removed some especially unpopular officials, and China reigned in some of its party's excesses.

But then chaos came, spreading over the region like a dark cloud, as terrorists made territorial gains in various Arab Spring countries. The spirit of change gave way to a failed Spring.

Ansar Allah joined the 2011 revolution in Yemen and like the independent youth, refused to back the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) Initiative that laid out a roadmap which handed power back to the former regime and granted immunity to President Saleh. But calls for a new Yemen, separate from the one envisioned by the GCC and international community, continued.

On Sept. 21, 2014, those demands were met when a new revolution led by Ansar Allah opened a third way.

Before the Arab Spring, the government fought six wars against Ansar Allah, starting in 2004 in the north of Yemen. It started when Hussain Al-Houthi denounced Yemen's foreign policy with his anti-American slogan, "Death to America."

Yemeni tribes and the Yemeni army, led

by General Ali Mohsen, sought to crush Ansar Allah with their six wars, which ended in 2010. 2011 saw the start of protests that culminated with the end of Ali Abdullah Saleh's corrupt reign. But the transition that followed, crafted by the international community and rejected by Yemenis, left the regime intact, giving it half the seats in the new coalition government, and giving the Islah-dominated Joint Meetings Party—the allies of Saleh's General People's Congress—the other half.

The farcical "election" of Abdu Rabu Mansour Hadi—who was the only candidate on the ballot—was rejected by Ansar Allah, the youth and Hirak, also known as the Southern Movement.

The National Dialogue Conference (NDC), which was inclusive, resulted in a number of outcomes. Ansar Allah is here to implement them, something the government failed to do.

This past summer, the government removed the country's fuel subsidies—a lifeline for the poor in Yemen's volatile economy. Ansar Allah heard the people's cries and empathized with their pain, and soon a new revolution was to sweep the streets.

Protests against the fuel subsidies, led by Ansar Allah, but joined by thousands of youth, tribesmen and even soldiers, showed the country what Ansar Allah's priorities are: Justice, democracy and the people.

The removal of the subsidies proved to be the straw that broke the camel's back. Or rather, Hadi's back. Anger against the decision spread through the country, with Yemenis from all walks of life renewing their faith in Yemen; hoping it could be a better and more decent place for all Yemenis. Ansar Allah is here to answer their

calls.

The fight against the old for something new continues. The government has spent years trying to tackle the scourge of Al-Qaeda. What Yemen and the US failed to do in four years, Ansar Allah accomplished in four days, successfully removing Al-Qaeda from Rada'a.

After Sept. 21, the movement had the upper hand in Yemen, but still chose to sign the Peace and National Partnership agreement with Hadi and other parties, including Islah, in order to form a more inclusive government and to implement the NDC outcomes.

Tensions escalated in January after Hadi's chief of staff, Ahmed Awad Bin Mubarak decided to move forward with a draft constitution without consensus. Ansar Allah said it had no choice but to stop him.

Ansar Allah officials said they discovered a vehicle full of weapons that were smuggled from the presidential battalion. As a result, popular committees had to take the battalion to protect it from looting. Imagine if those weapons had fallen into the hands of Al-Qaeda.

On Jan. 21, Hadi and Ansar Allah signed an agreement that all sides would return to the positions they held before Jan. 19, but the agreement collapsed when Bahah's government—and President Hadi himself—resigned.

Ansar Allah gave political parties a three day deadline to come to an agreement, or the movement would take the necessary steps to fill the political vacuum. Those three days came and went.

On Jan. 6, the Revolutionary Committee announced a constitutional declaration that addressed many of the goals of the

2011 uprising. The declaration dismissed the Parliament, which was largely GPC. It called for a national council of 551 members that would be tasked with forming a five-member presidential council.

Ansar Allah is here to fulfill the promise of the revolution by removing corrupt officials and bringing them to justice, ending American drone strikes, all foreign interference in the country's affairs and forming a new government.

We've fought Islahi militias, led by Ali Mohsen, who were the largest sponsors of jihadi terror. Their overseer, Saudi Arabia, is determined to lead the country down the path of sectarian war, to hit back at their enemy, Iran—which Ansar Allah has relations with. Ansar Allah won't let Yemen fall like Libya or Syria.

This movement is a youthful one, led by the youthful Abdulmalik Al-Houthi, who is in his 30s. It is serious about tackling the country's most pressing problems. Yemenis can look to Sa'ada for an example of what Ansar Allah is capable of.

The path to freedom in Arab Spring countries has flooded into a river of blood and violence. For Yemen, there is light at the end of the tunnel, but also danger.

As US-ally Saudi Arabia funds extremists in Yemen in hopes of defeating Ansar Allah, it is clear that the international community's aim for the Spring was to destroy Arab armies and infrastructure, so Israel will come out on top without having to go to war. The Arab world would destroy itself from within.

But Ansar Allah has revived the revolution and put it back into the hands of the people. The government abandoned Yemen when it resigned on Jan. 22. Ansar Allah will never abandon the Yemeni people.

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Anti-child marriage campaigner to the Yemen Times:

‘Do not deny them their happiness’

Amal Al-Jaradi heads the National Initiative for Combating Child Marriage, an organization dedicated to spreading awareness and providing support to victims of child marriage. Struggling against a widespread practice that is deeply engrained in much of Yemeni society, Al-Jaradi is under no illusions about the obstacles she faces. In its most recent survey in 2011, Human Rights Watch estimated that 15 percent of Yemeni girls were married before the age of 15 and more than half before 18. Forced into marriage at 15 herself, Al-Jaradi is intimately aware of the suffering that child brides experience. Determined to eradicate the practice she calls “legitimized rape,” Al-Jaradi began her initiative in 2013. She spoke with the Yemen Times about the issue and what her initiative is doing to address it.



■ Interview & Photo by
Khalid Al-Karimi

What is the National Initiative for Combating Child Marriage?

The National Initiative for Combating Child Marriage is an organization that struggles against this particular problem [of child marriage] and supports the rights of women and children. Women are our mothers, our daughters and our sisters—they constitute half of society. Child marriage robs all these girls of their innocence and I am deeply opposed to the practice, I call it “legitimized rape.” So, the initiative is actually about providing justice for a particular social group and offering them hope, but it serves the wider society as well.

How exactly are you addressing this issue?

We hold symposiums, deliver lectures and pay field visits to a number of governorates where child marriage is particularly prevalent. Our activities have been focused on the governorates of Hajja, Amran, Sana’a, Mahweet, Taiz and Ibb.

Have you been able to see any tangible results?

Considering how entrenched these traditional practices are in the places we work, reactions have been divided. Some are supportive of our cause, but the majority are opposed and this obviously undermines our efforts. When our group visited the districts of Hamdan and Wadi Dahr in Sana’a, we carried out a survey and found that about half of the women there had been married, or had been forced into marriage, at an inappropriate age [below 18]. We plan to visit those areas again this year, and I hope the numbers have not increased.

“Have mercy on your daughters. Raise them until they grow up... do not deny them their happiness because of child marriage.”

Some criticize campaigns and organizations like yours for seeking financial gain and

other benefits from their activities. Is that true in your case?

I think it’s true that some organizations are formed with certain benefits, financial or otherwise, in mind. That does not apply to the National Initiative for Combating Child Marriages. I finance the campaign and its activities myself, and whatever aid we receive goes entirely into the initiative. When we visit particular areas, I don’t go alone. I accompany a large team on the mission. As I’ve already said, our sole purpose is fighting the practice of child marriage.

“Fathers, husbands and marriage officials all stand to gain from the practice and are implicated in it.”

What would you say are the primary reasons behind the continuation of child marriage?

Obviously, it comes from a flawed conception held across our society. There is a misguided expression that says: “Marry off your daughter at eight, and I will guarantee [her well-being].” Some will also say that the Prophet Mohammad married Aisha when she was eight. They use this example in an attempt to legitimize child marriage, but for me this is not enough to say the practice is acceptable today. That was how the Prophet lived, and other men should not compare themselves to him. Also, fathers, husbands and marriage officials all stand to gain from the practice and are implicated in it. The father who sells his daughter benefits from the money he acquires, but the daughter is a victim.

Can you provide any examples of the victims of child marriage that your initiative has helped?

Four months ago I came to know about the plight of two girls in the capital city. Their father passed away, and they were left behind with their two brothers. The girls are only eight and ten years old. Their brothers were willing to

marry off their sisters. They said they weren’t able to cover living expenses. I went to the house and resolved the issue. I dissuaded the brothers from marrying off their sisters, and I promised to give the two girls YR25,000 (\$115) monthly to cover living expenses and allow them to continue their schooling. This is a case in point.

How do you present this issue to the public and raise awareness for it?

We use different ways to get our message across. Brochures, lectures and plays are all tools we make use of. We also encourage gynecologists to explain the dangers involved. When we launch campaigns in some governorates, speeches are delivered to educate people about the practice and why it is wrong. Once, when I was in Amran, I was surprised when a man claimed he would not consider marrying a woman over 20. For him, a woman at this age is already old. He said he would only marry a girl at the age of 14. It just shows how unaware our society is.

What do you think should be the government’s role in tackling child marriage?

So far, the government has not played an effective part. The government is supposed to monitor the practice and penalize those who marry off their daughters before they are psychologically and physically prepared. Girls should only be married once they turn 18—and with their consent.

“Women are our mothers, our daughters and our sisters... Child marriage robs all these girls of their innocence.”

Which ministries would you like to see involved in tackling child marriage?

I hope three particular ministries will take action this year and help

raise

awareness throughout the country: The ministries of public health and population, information, and education. The ministry of health can distribute brochures and instructions to hospitals and health centers nationwide to raise awareness about the dangers of child marriage. I also want the information minister to fund education programs and promotions with local media outlets in cooperation with the health ministry, so that these programs can target as large a section of society as possible. The education ministry has an equally important role to play, raising

awareness in schools and including lessons about child marriage in school curriculums. In short, these ministries can play a fundamental role in mitigating or eliminating child marriage altogether.

Amongst the National Dialogue Conference outcomes was an agreement to set the minimum age of marriage at 18. Do you think this will prove effective?

At the moment it can not be effective, but it might have results in the future. What hinders the quick implementation of this outcome are the deeply embedded

social customs and traditions and the misunderstanding of religion. Some think it is against Islam to determine the age of marriage at 18.

What is your message to parents?

Have mercy on your daughters. Raise them until they grow up. Help them go to schools and do not deny them their happiness because of child marriage. I hope parents will help their daughters complete their studies so that they can also contribute to developing our society and making a living for themselves.

1st Extension

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الدولي والمشاريع التابعة لها

In reference to the announcement published in

- Al-Thawra newspaper issue no. 18337 on 02.02.2015
- Yemen Times newspaper issue no. 1858 on 10.02.2015

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Yemen's Ansar Allah:

Causes and effects of its pursuit of power

Charles Schmitz
Middle East Institute
First published Feb. 14

The Yemen Times is republishing this piece, from the Middle East Institute, in two parts. Part two is below, part one ran last issue on Feb. 17.

The myth and fear of sectarian conflict

Opposition to Ansar Allah is not religious, as many commentators seem to think, but instead stems from its violation of the pact of inclusivity—the National Dialogue Conference—that held Yemeni politics together after the fall of Saleh. Ansar Allah's grab for power is what has caused its faltering, and is therefore not due to its Zaydi Shia leadership.

Moreover, the label "Shia rebels" mischaracterizes Ansar Allah. The Al-Houthi family does include a long line of prestigious religious scholars of Zaydi Islam, and the movement did begin as a re-assertion and revival of Zaydi practice among youth in the north. And religion has played some symbolic role in Ansar Allah's rise, such as when Sana'a was decorated by Ansar Allah's forces for the celebration of the Prophet's birthday, which clearly marked the new power of Ansar

Allah in the capital. But celebrating the Prophet's birthday is not a Zaydi tradition, and Ansar Allah does not pretend to represent Yemen's Zaydi elite. The Zaydi Sada (elite) are not united behind Ansar Allah; there are Sada dispersed among all of Yemen's political factions. More significantly, Ansar Allah's fighters are not battling for Zaydism. Ansar Allah recruits fighters from everywhere and from every sect, and its ability to build militias depends upon funding for fighters and credible leadership.

Nonetheless, some Yemenis fear a new sectarian divide. There is a new verb in Yemen, "to Iraqize," and Al-Qaeda hopes to exploit sectarian divisions for its own purposes. Al-Qaeda wants to gain credence for its bloody attacks by claiming the mantle of defense of Sunni against Shia aggression, as in Iraq, in addition to fighting the Western infidel powers. As Ansar Allah moved south toward Taiz, Al-Qaeda attacked Ansar Allah's militias. Fierce battles ensued between Ansar Allah and Al-Qaeda in Rada'a, in Al-Bayda governorate. Ansar Allah was able to overrun Al-Qaeda's stronghold in the Qaifa tribal area, but at great cost, and Al-Qaeda continues to exact a heavy price on Ansar Allah's militias in the region.

The fear is that Al-Qaeda's battles with Ansar Allah will align with southern and eastern resistance to Ansar Allah and give Al-Qaeda credibility and support. However, Al-Qaeda has made plenty of enemies who are not about to allow it to exploit the current crisis. Its attacks on Yemeni security and military personnel, particularly after 2011, won it the animosity of most Yemenis. Yemenis see Al-Qaeda as a root of their country's problems rather than a solution. The Yemeni military in the south, outside of the regions controlled by Ansar Allah, is currently involved in battles against Al-Qaeda rather than allying with it against Ansar Allah. Al-Qaeda does have its supporters, particularly when it is able to provide material aid, but it has far less credibility than Ansar Allah.

Sectarian fears are not restricted to Al-Qaeda. Saudi Arabia and the Gulf states declared a red line for Ansar Allah at the eastern tribal area where the Islah Party leads a tribal coalition along with loyal military units. Gulf support of the eastern tribes and of Islah against the Iranian-backed Ansar Allah aligns with sectarian divisions, giving rise to fear of sectarian civil war. But while it is true that Ansar Allah's expansion halted when it reached the southern and eastern areas, this

is not because Ansar Allah's leadership is Zaydi. The eastern tribes, the leaders of Taiz, and the tribes of Al-Bayda supported Ansar Allah when it fought against the Saleh regime and demanded reform. However, when Ansar Allah transformed from a regional power to a national power and wanted to impose itself on Yemen's southern and eastern regions, these areas rejected Ansar Allah's leadership and resisted the movement's expansion.

US Policy and Ansar Allah

In the United States, many were surprised to discover US officials' complacency with Ansar Allah's newly expanded role in Yemen. Senator John McCain accused the Obama administration of allowing Iran to take over the Middle East and of following a failed counterterrorism policy. Many assumed Ansar Allah's rise meant free reign for Al-Qaeda. In reality, of course, Ansar Allah and Al-Qaeda are mortal enemies. Al-Qaeda attacked Ansar Allah immediately upon its arrival in Sana'a, and Ansar Allah responded by pushing its military campaign into Rada'a. US drones attacked Al-Qaeda in the midst of Ansar Allah's campaign in Rada'a, demonstrating clearly the merging of US interests with Ansar Allah's war on Al-Qaeda.

In spite of Ansar Allah's close relationship to Iran and the fact that its rallying cry includes the phrase "Death to America," the White House said that it would work with the group in discussions to end the political crisis and that counterterrorism operations would continue. However, Washington rejected Ansar Allah's unilateral declaration of a new governing body and closed its embassy in response, along with a host of other European and Gulf countries. The closings are not a result of security concerns—Ansar Allah-controlled Sana'a is safe—but are designed to undermine the legitimacy of Ansar Allah's attempt to rule Yemen alone.

US drone attacks continue without interruption. A drone killed three people in a car in the eastern desert region days after Ansar Allah's overthrow of the government in Sana, killing a key religious leader of Al-Qaeda. Other drone attacks followed. Ansar Allah opposes the US use of drones as a violation of Yemeni sovereignty, which Ansar Allah defends vigorously, but its opposition to drones, by contrast, is not vigorous. US training of counterterrorism forces in Sana'a has been discontinued, but the United States has been operating in the south, where Ansar Allah has no presence; it will continue to operate there.

Washington's pragmatic behavior stems from a realistic assessment that Ansar Allah is an important political force in Yemen that will have a role in shaping the country's future. Washington's hope is that the closing of the foreign embassies will force Ansar Allah to negotiate more realistically with the rest of Yemen's diverse political forces. US behavior also reflects the common animosity it shares with Ansar Allah toward Al-Qaeda.

Looking ahead

The current military buildup in the east is an ominous sign that Ansar Allah has not learned anything from its theatric bungling of Sana'a politics and is preparing to extend its military campaign into the oil-rich eastern desert. Ansar Allah and opposing Yemeni military units and tribal forces from the eastern desert are amassed in opposing camps east of Sana'a in preparation for a major war for the Marib, Jawf, and Shabwa regions. Such a move might prove the end of Ansar Allah's dominance as its political weakness unravels in the areas already under its control, particularly if Saleh's loyalists turn against it. If Ansar Allah falls apart, Saleh would likely have a major say in the next government.

Only five percent of pledged aid reaches Gaza

Annie Slemrod
IRIN
First published Feb. 16

Just over five percent of the money pledged to rebuild Gaza after last summer's devastating 50-day war with Israel has been delivered, IRIN has learned.

More than 2,000 Palestinians—the majority civilians—were killed during the conflict and around 100,000 homes were destroyed. Six months since a ceasefire was agreed, many families are still sleeping in temporary shelters.

Five months ago world leaders promised over \$5 billion for reconstruction, redevelopment, and government assistance. Yet only a fraction has actually materialized.

"Approximately \$300 million" has been received so far, a source at the office of the Palestinian Deputy Prime Minister Mohammad Mustafa—who is heading up the government's reconstruction efforts in Gaza—told IRIN.

"Projects [that are] being held up because of the lack of donations are major reconstruction projects, chief among them housing and road reconstruction," the source said.

The revelation follows comments by Robert Turner, the Gaza head of UNWRA—the UN agency for Palestine refugees—that "virtually none" of the pledged funds had reached the territory.

Broken promises?

The \$5.4 billion that was promised at the Cairo conference exceeded the \$4 billion the Palestinian Authority said it needed. About \$2.8 billion of the pledged money was earmarked for the first three years of reconstruction. Yet only a fraction of that has been made available.

Tracking down who promised what has proved stubbornly difficult.

The website of the conference, which was hosted by Egypt and Norway, contains no specific breakdown of funding pledges.

IRIN asked the Norwegians to provide a full list of promises made,

but Frode Overland Anderson, a spokesperson for Norway's minister of foreign affairs, told IRIN "it is not feasible to make a complete and detailed breakdown of pledges from the Cairo conference." The reasons, Anderson said, were "partly because donors have [yet] to provide a comprehensive breakdown of their contributions and partly due to conditions on the ground that are preventing [disbursement of] further installments."

However, some say there has been too little emphasis placed on chasing up the money. Contrasting it with pledging conferences for Syria, one UN staffer said the Egyptians had not been sufficiently pro-active.

"When Kuwait organized the conference on Syria the secretariat followed strict procedures to ensure that the money got paid, including inviting donors to meetings. Egypt has done nothing."

Egyptian officials did not respond to requests for comment.

In fact it was only in mid-January, ahead of a donors' meeting in March, that Norway formally requested the World Bank to track down how much money had been delivered.

According to Steen Lau Jorgensen, the World Bank's country director for Gaza and the West Bank, the process will "include a report... that will reflect the pledges of Gaza reconstruction disbursed through all channels and the timing for disbursement. It will also assess to what extent the donors have realized their pledges and will break down the list of pledges into budget support and Gaza reconstruction."

Political uncertainty

One European diplomat told IRIN that although the lack of actual disbursement so far is especially low in this case, conferences are notorious for producing big headline figures that don't ultimately materialize. "These kinds of pledging events tend to produce much more in pledges than what is actually delivered," he said. "I doubt that we have ever seen a pledging conference where commitments were ever followed up completely."

But even before Cairo, donors expressed frustration that they were expected to pay to rebuild a territory that would likely descend into repeated violence without a durable solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

Hamas and Fatah, the two leading Palestinian factions, reached a political agreement ending seven years of bitter division just before the latest outbreak of hostilities with Israel. But the new joint government of technocrats has yet to take over in the Gaza strip leaving Hamas—considered a terrorist organization by the United States—still in charge. That is a matter of concern for some donors.

A senior European Union diplomat who is familiar with the situation told IRIN, "Donors are holding back until the Palestinian Authority gets a foothold in Gaza." "We need to see some signs of political certainty and there is none," he said.

The source in the Palestinian deputy prime minister's office agreed that some "donors seem to be hesitant in fulfilling their pledges as the reconciliation agreements seem to be at an impasse." But he added, "the [Palestinian] government believes reconstruction efforts should proceed regardless of the progress in implementing the agreement."

Everyone IRIN spoke to agreed that the United Nations-brokered Reconstruction Monitoring Mechanism, designed to allow construction materials into Gaza while assuaging Israeli concerns about security, is now operating. But the broader Israeli blockade of Gaza remains in place and Norway said there is still "the challenge of providing sufficient volumes of building materials into Gaza."

The European Union diplomat said concerns about Israeli control over the borders added to worries about Gaza's political situation. "The fact of the matter is that a lot of the money pledged in Cairo was premised on the Israelis easing the blockage... so that people would be able to travel more freely keeping in mind security concerns, and that the Palestinian Authority would be able to play more of a role of au-



Palestinian families travel to an UNRWA school to seek shelter after evacuating their homes in the north of the Gaza Strip. Gaza City, July 13, 2014.

thority in Gaza. These two admittedly complicated issues have not materialized in a way that gives anyone a feeling this is worth the money at the moment."

Slow trickle

The Gulf Arab states in particular pledged-high at Cairo: Qatar promised some \$1 billion, the United Arab Emirates \$200 million, and Saudi Arabia \$500 million ahead of the conference.

Yet so far they have made only limited payments due to the lack of political change. Said the European official: "There is some disappointment that Arab countries may have made commitments that are not delivering... it is particularly difficult to get them to commit to actually provide cash which is what is now needed," as opposed to in-kind donations—providing the required goods and services themselves. The cash shortage is particularly acute for projects carried out by UNRWA, which recently had to suspend its financial assistance for rent and home repairs because of a lack of

funding.

UNRWA spokesperson Chris Guinness said "donors have been generous but unfortunately this does not cover all the needs; hence we were forced to suspend the cash program for rent and rebuilding which are among the most urgent needs."

The European Union diplomat said these countries, with their political ties to Gaza, are as keen as the Europeans to see change from the Israelis and the Palestinian Authority. "The ones who have come up with big figures, the Qataris, the Saudis and the Turks, they need to see some progress, truth be told."

A humanitarian crisis

The limited funds that have been made available have allowed some reconstruction work to begin: Some schools and health facilities have been patched up and there have been emergency repairs on electricity, water, and sanitation networks. The huge piles of rubble, left behind after the Israeli bombardment, are now starting to be cleared.

But Hamas spokesperson Sami Abu Zuhri told IRIN he doesn't see much progress. "Gaza residents don't notice any real effort to start reconstruction operations, except very little amounts that are used to rehabilitate, restore, and repair some houses here and there."

Larger projects, including rebuilding roads and economic infrastructure, are nearly ready to begin but will remain on hold until the money arrives. Anderson, spokesperson for Norway's Ministry of Foreign Affairs, told IRIN, "While the UN system has made its best effort to address the short-term needs, further implementation requires swift financial contributions by the donors."

The Palestinian source said donors should "be reminded that the people of Gaza are in dire need, and that failing to move forward with reconstruction could have negative impacts on security and stability in the region."

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Saba TV staff strike in demand of salaries

Story and photo by
Mohammad Al-Samawi

Live programming at state-run Saba TV channel has been off-air since Saturday, when staff at the channel escalated protests and refused to continue work. Their salaries have not been paid since November.

The staff of Saba TV are not alone—all public sector media employees have not been paid for at least two months. Aden TV employees have not received salaries for over three months, while employees from Al-Iman and Yemen TV channels have gone without pay for the months of December and January.

The offices of Saba, Al-Iman, and Yemen TV are housed in a compound in the Al-Jiraf neighborhood

of Sana'a. Saba employees are on full strike and are not showing up to work, but some employees from Yemen TV are operating pre-recorded broadcasts for Saba's channel, which continues to run.

After months without pay, many employees are feeling a heavy financial burden.

"Employees are under extreme pressure because of the financial state they are in," said Tawfiq Abu Zaid, director of the Program Management Department at Saba. "We have never been through something like this before, we do not even have the taxi fair to get to work."

Abdulrahman Al-Yahayri, a news anchor for Yemen TV channel and director of the News Anchors Department, said, "I started my strike a week ago and went back to Ibb, my hometown, due to the difficult financial conditions we have



reached. If this is how things are going to be then the media profession is over."

"This is it," said Mufareh Al-Hasan, program creator and presenter for Al-Iman TV channel. "How are we going to do our creative jobs and represent Yemeni media while our children are starving at home? How are we going to do that while our landlords are asking for the rent?"

How are we going to do our jobs while we are starving? Sadly, this is our life right now."

Ammar Marza, who is not a full-time employee but works as a contractor for Saba TV, said his financial circumstances deteriorated even faster because of his irregular income.

"I was evicted because of not paying my rent, the landlord went and complained to Ansar Allah [the Houthis], and I told them I'm an employee at Saba," he explained. "They seized my furniture and the landlord locked the apartment. I had to borrow money in order to go back with my wife and kids to live with family in Hodeida."

There are plenty of similar cases, said Hamdi Al-Abasi. He is the head of a committee made up of Saba employees, established in November, which began calling for contract employees to be made full-time workers. After payments stopped, in December the committee switched focus and is demanding all employees be paid.

"This financial crisis has shocked the employees," he said. "They do not even have YR50 (\$0.25) to pay for the bus."

A short-term solution

Saba is part of the TV Sector in the General Yemeni Corporation for Radio and TV, a body under the Ministry of Information which includes all state-run media organizations.

According to Al-Abasi, the employees have reached a dead end with the corporation and the banks and are going on strike as a last resort.

A source in the Financial Department of the General Yemeni Corporation for Radio and TV, who preferred to remain anonymous, said the delay in payments is caused by several factors—namely, corruption within the corporation, lack of coordination between its members and the Central Bank of Yemen (CBY), and excessive bureaucracy.

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Following months without pay, public media employees have taken matters into their own hands. Live broadcasts at Saba TV ended Saturday, and desperately needed funds have been sought in new advertisement deals.

The CBY does not have funds available for January and February's salaries, according to the source, who claims money is available to cover December's payments. Staff at CBY could not be reached for comment.

Faced with the deadlock, members of the Visual Media Union, which represents public television employees, have taken matters into their own hands.

While the corporation's commercial department normally handles marketing and advertising, the head of the union, Abdulrahman Al-Bukari, has been signing advertising agreements on their account in a last-ditch effort to raise money for salaries.

"We solved the problem when Bashar Mutahar, the general director for the corporation, and I went to MTN telecommunications company and agreed they would pay us YR50,000,000 (\$232,000) in exchange for advertisements," he explained.

MTN's Marketing and Adver-

tisement Department has confirmed the deal with Saba. Al-Bukari has also approached the Yemen Mobile Company and raised YR40,000,000 (\$186,000) in a similar deal.

In order to raise extra funds, the Cooperative and Agriculture Credit Bank (CAC Bank), which is authorized to pay full-time employees, has also released YR80,000,000 (\$372,000) from the staff's medical insurance reserve.

With this money, Al-Bukari said payments owed for the month of December will be paid for all state television and radio employees on Thursday, February 19.

At the beginning of February TV sector employees began protests at the Central Bank of Yemen to demand their salaries. According to Al-Bukari, the office manager of the bank's director, Mohammad Awad Bin Hummam, promised the funds would be released "within the coming days." However, half way through February employees have yet to receive any payments.

YEMEN TIMES Radio

التأسيس

"راديو يمن تايمز" هو أول إذاعة مجتمعية في صنعاء، حيث بدأ العمل في هذا المشروع في بداية 2012، والذي كان تأسيسه من أهم رؤى مؤسس يمن تايمز الراحل، البروفيسور عبد العزيز السقاف. ولذلك سعت الأستاذة / نادية السقاف / رئيس تحرير صحيفة يمن تايمز إلى تحقيق فكرة المؤسس الراحل، من خلال تأسيس راديو يمن تايمز بمشاركة الكثير من المتطوعين والداعمين ومن أمن بأهمية الإعلام المستقل ودور الإذاعات المجتمعية.

وتعد إذاعة يمن تايمز جزء من مشروع أصواتنا، وهو برنامج دولي يدعم تأسيس الإذاعات المجتمعية في دول الربيع العربي. حيث يتمحور هذا البرنامج حول العرب الذين سعوا لأن تكون أصواتهم المستقلة مسموعة، بعيداً عن الاحتكارات الحكومية، أو التجارية، بحيث تكون نقطة انطلاق جديدة لكل من يريد الخوض في تجربة الإذاعات المجتمعية المستقلة.

أهدافنا

يعمل "راديو يمن تايمز" على طرح وجهات نظر جديدة وموضوعات هامة للجمهور اليمني ويعايش قضايا المواطنين الذين يجيدون اللغة الإنجليزية والعربية والأميين بشكل مباشر. ويسعى أيضاً لإيجاد فضاءات جديدة لحرية الرأي والتعبير في اليمن عامة وفي العاصمة صنعاء خاصة ليكون راديو يمن تايمز "صوت من لا صوت لهم" ويعزز مفاهيم الديمقراطية وحرية الرأي والتعبير من خلال دوراته البرمجية المتنوعة التي تعالج قضايا المرأة والطفل وحقوق الإنسان وتدافع عن الحريات بواسطة إعلامها الهادف وبرامجها المتعددة والتي تخاطب بشفافية وموضوعية كل مستمعها وتسم بروح شبابية وإيجابية واضحة لكل من يتابعها سواء سكان صنعاء أو اليمن.

رؤيتنا

للإعلام دور كبير ومهم في الدعوة للتغيير السلمي فهو ركيزة من ركائز التغيير نحو الأفضل، ولكن الصراعات السياسية اعتادت أن تفرض أجندتها على المؤسسات الإعلامية مما يخلق أثراً سلبياً واضحاً على طابع استقلال الإعلام وأثر بشكل مباشر على معايير أساسية مثل الحيادية والموضوعية. وهنا تسعى "إذاعة يمن تايمز" لتعزز من دور مؤسساتها الإعلامية المستقلة لتصل إلى كل من لا تصل إليه عبر صحيفتها لتكون من الإذاعات الرائدة في اليمن التي جعلت من الحيات والاستقلال سياسة خاصة لها مواصلة بذلك سمعتها الحسنة التي استطاعت أن تفرضها من خلال سياسة الصحيفة على الرغم من عدم وجود قوانين منظمة لعمل الإذاعات الخاصة في اليمن.

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