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Reactions divided as Hadi reclaims presidency

■ Ali Ibrahim Al-Moshki

SANA'A, Feb. 23—Abdu Rabu Mansour Hadi met with southern governors and security personnel Sunday evening, reclaiming his presidency and calling for the capital to be moved to Aden while national talks resume.

Hadi escaped from house arrest in Sana'a on Feb. 21, where he had been confined since his resignation on Jan. 22. Amid conflicting reports, Houthi sources allege he managed to escape on Saturday morning disguised in woman's clothing.

A legitimate president?

Arriving in the south, Hadi met with governors Abdulaziz Bin Habtour of Aden, Ali Qasim Taleb of Al-Dhale, Ahmad Abdullah Al-Majidi of Lahj, Jamal Al-Aqel of Abyan, and Saeed Bahaqiba of Socotra, as well as Brigadier Nasser Al-Taheri, head of the Fourth Military Command.

In a statement released by Muhammad Mosaed, spokesperson for the Aden Security Administration, Hadi is said to have "confirmed during the meeting his continuation of tasks as head of the republic, and emphasized the importance of maintaining constitutional legitimacy."

Hadi also intends on making Aden a temporary capital "until

president of Yemen on Feb. 21, 2012, for a period of two years. His term was extended by one year, ending the day he fled to Aden.

Others within the former Parliament, such as Abdulaziz Jubari, a former GPC member who now runs the Justice and Building Party, believe Hadi has the right to return. "He is the legitimate president according to the constitution and he has the right to rule from any part of the country he wishes," said Jubari, who believes Hadi will reveal a different kind of leadership now that he has left Sana'a.

"Hadi resigned while his house was being shelled, and Parliament didn't hold an emergency session during the security breakdown—what has changed since then?" he added.

Consequences for national dialogue

National talks at the Movenpick Hotel in Sana'a, convened on Feb. 7 under the auspices of UN Special Envoy Jamal Benomar, were called off following Hadi's departure from the capital.

Mansur Al-Jaradi, a political analyst who heads the Wujoh Media Foundation, an organization that works to promote press freedom in Yemen, believes continued negotiations are not nec-



"No to armed militias, yes to the civil state"

Story and photo by Bassam Al-Khameri

SANA'A, Feb. 23—Hundreds demonstrated in Sana'a on Monday afternoon in support of Abdu Rabu Mansour Hadi and against the presence of Houthi militias in the capital.

The protesters gathered in front of the Ministry of Youth and Sport on Al-Zubairi Street and marched

to Al-Siteen Street.

"Hadi is the legitimate president of Yemen and we call on him to announce Aden as the capital instead of Sana'a," said Mahmoud Humaid, 32. He joined the protest in order to show the international community that Yemenis support Hadi, he said.

Omaima Salah, a 26-year-old college student, said that she wants the Houthi gunmen to leave

Sana'a. She also supports the step taken by Hadi in moving to Aden. "President Hadi made the right decision by escaping or moving to Aden because here in Sana'a he was under the control of the Houthi militias," she said.

"Aden must be the capital because a capital must be free of militias."

The protesters also demanded the release of all those abducted

by the Houthis during previous demonstrations. No gunmen were visible at Monday's demonstration and no one was harassed or attacked.

Some of the yellow signs read: "No to armed militias, yes to the civil state," and others read: "We are all Saleh Al-Bishri." Al-Bishri was a peaceful protester who was kidnapped and subsequently tortured to death. There is consider-



A sign in Aden welcoming Hadi and celebrating his arrival.

Sana'a is free of the Houthis," according to Mosaed.

Hadi's statements have received mixed reactions, as opinions are divided as to whether the president's resignation was valid and if it can now be retracted.

Abdu Al-Janadi, a spokesperson for the General People's Congress (GPC), said his party will not recognize Hadi's claim to the presidency unless his resignation is rejected by Parliament.

"He resigned on Jan. 22 and he can't rescind his resignation until it has been accepted or rejected by Parliament. As it stands, Hadi is no longer the president of Yemen," he said.

Fadhil Abu Taleb, a member of the Houthi Political Office, said Hadi is no longer eligible for the presidency following the Houthi's constitutional declaration on Feb. 6, which effectively dissolved Parliament—meaning there is no Parliament to reject Hadi's resignation.

Furthermore, Hadi was elected

because the country now has a legitimate president.

"If there needs to be more negotiations, they should be held outside of Sana'a and should focus on how to remove the Houthis from the capital, not on creating a new government," he said.

Others, such as GPC spokesman Al-Janadi, believe talks offer the only peaceful way forward. "The only way out of this crisis is the dialogue at the Movenpick. The Houthis are a strong force and Hadi is strong in the south, if there is no dialogue there will be war," he said.

Benomar has remained in Sana'a since the crisis unfolded on Saturday, and has been in contact with Hadi since his arrival in Aden. He called on all parties to resume talks, and assured Hadi he would pass on his request for discussions to be held outside of Sana'a to the other delegates, an option the Houthis have already rejected.

Continued on page 2

Cabinet rejects call by Houthis to return

■ Nasser Al-Sakkaf

SANA'A, Feb. 23—The Cabinet has dismissed the decision announced Sunday by the Houthi Revolutionary Committee for it to return as a caretaker government, according to Cabinet Spokesperson Rajeh Badi.

"The government does not care about decisions made by the Revolutionary Committee," he told the Yemen Times on Monday.

The Houthi Revolutionary Committee issued a statement on Sunday evening calling for the Cabinet, which resigned Jan. 22, to return.

"The resigned government is assigned to manage the state of general affairs until the formation of the transitional government according to the constitutional declaration," reads the full statement, which came one day after Abdu Rabu Mansour Hadi, who resigned as president on Jan. 22, fled to Aden governorate.

Spokesperson Badi said a statement released by the Cabinet on Jan. 29 confirms that the resignation is irreversible. In that statement the Cabinet terms the Houthis' takeover of the Presidential Palace on Jan. 19 a "coup." Three days after that incident, on Jan. 22 in a letter addressed to Hadi from then Prime Minister Khaled Bahah, the Cabinet announced its resignation.

Mohammad Al-Sharjabi, the head of the Information Committee within the Revolutionary Committee's Legal Authority, said the

decision is legitimate and binding. He claims the Revolutionary Committee gets its legitimacy from what he terms the Sept. 21 revolution, and is now responsible for the country's affairs.

Rumors began circulating on local news Monday afternoon that the Houthis would impose their decision on Cabinet members and either force them to return or put them on trial.

Al-Sharjabi denied the rumors, telling the Yemen Times Monday afternoon that the Houthis will not put them on trial "even if it is legal" for them to do so. However, earlier the same day, Al-Sharjabi said "those who are in charge of the Cabinet [referring to all members] should be brought to trial because Hadi did not accept their resignation."

According to him the Revolutionary Committee has "yet to decide on what they are going to do with the ministers," but there are several possible solutions to be discussed in the coming days, one of which is to assign the deputy ministers as acting ministers.

According to Al-Sharjabi, the Revolutionary Committee is responsible for making this decision because, immediately following Cabinet's resignation on Jan. 22, Hadi should have ordered the Cabinet to remain in place until a new Cabinet was formed. Because of his failure to do so, and because of his own resignation as president, "the Revolutionary Committee became the group responsible for decisions

like this."

It remains unclear how long it will take to form a new government, and therefore how long the Cabinet is being asked to return for, Al-Sharjabi confirmed.

A lawyer with the National Organization for Defending Rights and Freedoms (HOOD), Mohammad Al-Hunahi said the "so-called Revolutionary Committee does not have legitimacy." In his view they seized power as the result of a coup, and they do not have the right to issue decisions.

"The only one who has the right to issue decisions is President Hadi, and the Cabinet should not honor the decisions of this committee. The government acted legally when it refused to manage the state of general affairs," he added.

He stated that legally the cabinet should continue its work as an "acting cabinet" until the formation of a new government, but current circumstances—namely the house arrests imposed on Cabinet members by the Houthis—warrant their refusal to return to work.

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Protesters await justice for Ibb killing

■ Bassam Al-Khameri

SANA'A, Feb. 22—Anti-Houthi protests continued Sunday in Ibb city the day after one protester was killed and six others injured at a demonstration on Saturday morning.

A senior security source in Ibb governorate, speaking to the Yemen Times on condition of anonymity, said that a committee from Ibb Security Department was formed on Sunday to investigate the killing of the protester. As of Monday afternoon, the source said no information is available to be released to the public as investigations are ongoing.

Saturday's protest took place in Khaleej Al-Huria Square in Ibb city. Those in attendance—mostly youth—were protesting the Houthis' presence in Ibb governorate as well as the group's Feb. 6 constitutional declaration.

The anti-riot unit of the Special Security Forces (SSF) intervened to disperse the protest, according to the source. "The personnel belonging to the unit used water hoses and then live ammunition to disperse the protesters and this is wrong because riot police are supposed to use batons only," he said.

According to the source, it is not yet known if Houthi gunmen were involved in the shooting.

Mohammad Mahroos, a local resident who attended Saturday's protest and has attended many prior, said the Houthis' involvement in attacking the peaceful protesters is evident.

"Houthi gunmen in military and plain clothes gathered in Khaleej Al-Huria Square early Saturday in preparation for the protest, which is held every Saturday in Ibb city," Mahroos told the Yemen Times.

"Youths gathered in the square and began protesting but the gunmen opened fire on us," he said. Addressing the security source's claim that it was the SSF who dispersed the protesters, Mahroos countered that "the security forces are used as a cover for the Houthi gunmen who shoot at protesters."

Other participants of Saturday's protest also refute the claim that



Dozens of mourners lay Fares Al-Shuja to rest on Monday. On Saturday he was shot dead at an anti-Houthi protest in Ibb city.

it was security forces who fired at the protesters. Abdullah Salah Al-Badani, from Badan district of Ibb governorate and currently residing in Ibb city, said the gunmen who shot at the protesters were Houthis.

"There were personnel from the riot police in addition to Houthi gunmen in plain clothes with Houthi slogans on their weapons and cars. The gunmen shot at us when we started protesting, killing one of us and wounding six others," he said.

Mohammad Al-Bukhaiti, a member of the Houthi Political Office in Sana'a, claims there were gunmen from both parties in the square.

"The gunmen from both sides were involved in a disagreement and opened fire that left one protester dead and some others wounded," he told the Yemen Times.

Mahroos and Al-Badani denied this version of events, saying they were peacefully protesting when Houthi gunmen opened fire on them.

The office of the Joint Meeting Parties (JMP) in Ibb governorate late Saturday called on Ibb Security Chief Mohammad Abduljalil Al-Shami to shoulder his responsibility in protecting the protesters.

"The Security Chief is completely responsible for what happened in

the governorate and he must send the perpetrators to court, either security personnel or members of the militias," said a statement released by the JMP's office on Saturday.

Youth protesters in Ibb city organize small protests two or three times a week, with a larger protest every Saturday that draws thousands, according to Mahroos.

This is not the first time violence has been used on protesters in Ibb. Around five protesters were injured last Saturday, Feb. 14, when alleged Houthi gunmen in a pickup truck opened fire on protesters. "The protesters managed to reach the car and set it on fire while the Houthi gunmen on board fled the scene," Al-Badani said.

Al-Badani asserted that they will continue their protests regardless of attempts by the Houthis to instill fear in them.

"Using force to frighten us will result in more protests against the Houthi coup and their presence in the governorate," he added.

The Houthis gained control over much of Ibb governorate in mid-October 2014 and established checkpoints on main streets, often in coordination with security departments in the governorate.

The name of the protester killed on Saturday is Fares Nasr Al-Shuja. He was a first-level student in the English Department at Ibb University.

Hadi's press secretary released, family says

■ Ali Ibrahim Al-Moshki

SANA'A, Feb. 23—After being kidnapped by the Houthis in Sana'a Saturday morning, Yahya Al-Arasi, the president's press secretary, was released Sunday at midnight, a member of his family told the Yemen Times.

Khalid Al-Arasi, the victim's nephew, said his uncle was released when it became clear he was not involved in Abdu Rabu Mansour Hadi's escape to Aden early Saturday morning. According to Khalid, his uncle is at his home in Sana'a and remains in good health.

The Houthis held him in an unknown location on 50-Meter Street in central Sana'a, Khalid said, and was under interrogation since Saturday morning.

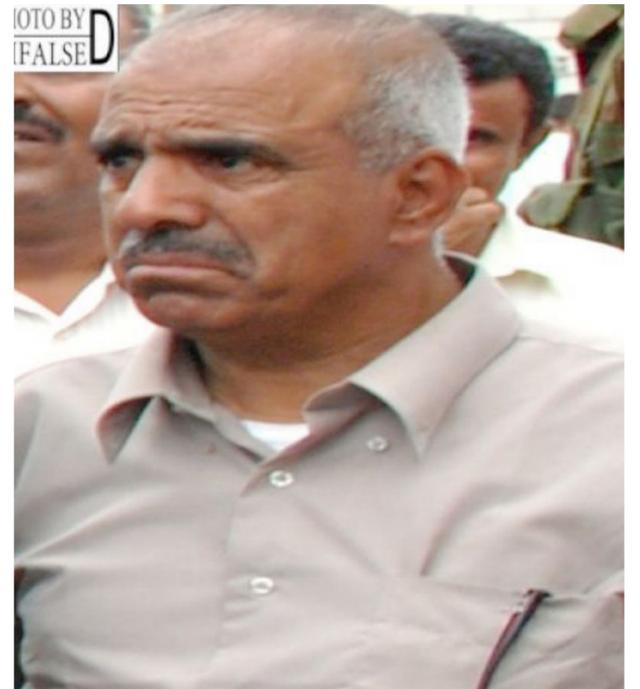
"The Houthis contacted me to collect my uncle, they told me to go to 50-Meter Street on Sunday evening and that I should wait in the middle of the street, which I did, for two hours until midnight. Then a military truck came, and my uncle was in it. They handed him to me and left," Khalid explained.

As of Monday there remained considerable confusion surrounding the incident. Numerous organizations and lawyers following the case told the Yemen Times they were unaware of Al-Arasi's release. The Yemeni Journalists Syndicate (YSJ) also reported earlier that that kidnapping occurred Friday—before Hadi left the capital.

However, Al-Arasi's nephew said the timeline is clear: "My uncle was on his way to Hadi's house on Saturday morning, because he is Hadi's press secretary. When he reached the gate, armed Houthis accused him of being involved in Hadi's escape. However, he only found out about [Hadi's escape] from them," he said.

Ali Al-Qahoom, a member of the Houthi Political Office in Sana'a, admits the Houthis were behind Al-Arasi's disappearance. "The Houthis investigated Al-Arasi because he was suspected of being involved in Hadi's escape, subsequently he was released," he said.

Al-Qahoom refused to give any details regarding the time or loca-



Yahya Al-Arasi was kidnapped by the Houthis and interrogated for over a day at an unknown location. He was accused of helping Hadi escape from house arrest and flee to Aden.

tion of Al-Arasi's arrest, the outcomes of the interrogation, or why he was eventually released.

Khalid Al-Humadi, head of the Sana'a-based Hurriya Foundation for Press Rights, Freedoms and Media Development, described what happened to Al-Arasi as "a criminal act which goes against morals, values and manners."

"He is a journalist first, regardless of his occupation [in government]. We condemn his kidnapping not because he works for the president but because he is a journalist only doing his job and has nothing to do with what's going on," he said.

Abdulkarim Thuail, head of the Council for Detainees, an organization formed in the wake of Yemen's 2011 uprising and which continues to investigate politically-motivated detentions, said Al-Arasi was not arrested. Al-Arasi's family were not informed of his whereabouts or what conditions he was being held

in, so his case is better described as a forced disappearance, according to Thuail.

"The Houthis commit their crimes, trying to gag journalists who expose the Houthis' immoral behavior. Any one who opposes them gets assaulted, such as the official newspapers and TV channels which were turned into Houthi mouthpieces. If people oppose them they will be tortured," he added.

According to the Council for Detainees, as of Monday there are seven activists and media professionals being held illegally by the Houthis. The following men were kidnapped during various protests in February: Fateh Al-Qadasi, Abdu Khalid Al-Houthaifi, Zakaria Al-Sharabi, Abdulsalam Al-Awash, Mu'in Al-Dhubiani, Omar Ahmad Saleh Al-Faqih, and Amer Al-Hakim. Their whereabouts remain unknown.

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

Reactions divided as Hadi reclaims presidency

Southern reactions

Hadi's arrival in Aden was largely welcomed, but his latest statements have received a mixed response and southerners appear anxious about his plans for the immediate future.

Radfan Al-Dubais, the official spokesperson for protesters in Aden's Al-Arood Square, said Hadi was welcome in the governorate as "a southern citizen" and that his presence there "will help turn the table on the Houthi militias that occupy the capital and have turned against the system."

However, he added that "the south does not want Aden to be made a capital for future talks" and invite further conflict into the area as a result. "The south has one clear goal—separation," he said.

Fathi Bin Lazraq, editor-in-chief of Aden Al-Ghad Daily newspaper in Aden, said many are unhappy with Hadi's press release because he did not talk about the southern issue, and that southerners view Hadi as a reason for the south's defeat

in the 1994 civil war.

Many will also recall Hadi's involvement in South Yemen's 1986 civil war, after which he escaped north to Sana'a. In December 1987, Hadi was found guilty in absentia of treason and "committing acts of terror and sabotage" and sentenced to death, charges that were dropped following unification in 1990.

Popular Committees have established control over much of Aden governorate since Feb. 17. Established under Hadi's guidance at the end of 2011, he enjoys widespread support amongst their members.

Pro-Hadi demonstrations were held in a number of governorates following his press release on Sunday, with large showings in Taiz, Dhamar, Hodeidah, and Ibb.

Salim Al-Qadhi, a protester in Taiz governorate, said demonstrations were being held to "overturn the coup" under the slogan: "No coup, no armed militias, yes to reclaiming the country."

Protestors, both in the south and in Sana'a city, are calling for Hadi to resume his tasks as President of a unified Yemen, to temporarily shift the capital to Aden, and to rid Sana'a of Houthi militants.

Shabwa tribes gather in support of Hadi

■ Ali Aboluhom

SANA'A, Feb. 23—Thousands of members of the Bani Helel tribal federation gathered in Ataq, the capital of Shabwa governorate, on Monday in an unprecedented display of support for Hadi and show of force against the Houthis.

Yussef Al-Kulaifi, a prominent sheikh from Bani Helel, said the gathering was organized to send a message to "whoever thinks of invading our governorate, whether it be Houthis from the north or Al-Qaeda in the south."

Arriving fully armed in over 400 vehicles, tribesmen came from several districts including Markha, Baihan and Ein. A total of 12,000 were in attendance, according to Al-Kulaifi.

The show of force in Shabwa comes three days after Abdu Rabu Mansour Hadi escaped house arrest and arrived in Aden. From there, he retracted his resignation and called for national talks to resume outside of Houthi-controlled Sana'a.

Al-Kulaifi says the gathering was planned to coincide with Hadi's arrival in Aden and is intended to show solidarity with him as "the legitimate president" of Yemen.

"We welcome President Hadi with his relatives and supporters in



An estimated 12,000 tribesmen gathered in the capital Ataq Monday. They gathered to show support for Hadi and demonstrate their strength to the Houthis.

the south and we vow to resist any attacks carried out against our governorate," said Al-Kulaifi. "We will not accept any imposed political solution, including the Houthis' [Feb. 6] declaration. We only recognize the legitimacy of President Hadi as an expression of the people's will."

Monday's gathering is the biggest to be organized by tribes in the governorate, according to Saleem Al-Sael, who manages the governorate's media office and was present at the meeting. Another, smaller gathering was organized by Shabwa's Al-Awaleq tribe in Janu-

ary. In a statement released through Al-Sael's office, Bani Helel members confirmed their support for Hadi, called on the Houthis to release all members of government from house arrest, and dismissed the Feb. 6 constitutional declaration as a coup.

In addition to forming a defensive pact against any military intrusions into Shabwa, the tribesmen also agreed to form a committee to visit Hadi in Aden in order to "get briefed on his situation and health condition and show solidarity with

him." Al-Sael said the governorate administration, including its six military brigades, will support a Bani Helel force against any outside interference.

Mohammed Al-Jomaie, who is in charge of the military brigades positioned in Shabwa, also confirmed his support for Hadi and the Bani Helel tribal federation.

"The brigades will react to any directives given by Shabwa's administration if they do not conflict with the interests of Shabwa and its citizens," he said.

Newspaper closed, forced south by the Houthis

■ **Mohammad Al-Samawi**

Former staff and journalists have been protesting the Houthi takeover of Al-Shumo Foundation and its affiliate newspaper, Akhbar Al-Youm, which have since moved their operations to Aden.

The Al-Shumo Foundation is a press and printing house that releases a weekly news publication under its own name, in addition to its daily Albar Al-Youm newspaper.

Protests began on Feb. 8, three days after armed Houthis stormed the offices in Shumaila neighborhood, and have been held since then at both the Sana'a office of the Yemeni Journalists Syndicate (YSJ) and the headquarters of Akhbar Al-Youm in Sana'a.

Iad Al-Buhairir, editor-in-chief of Akhbar Al-Youm, said large numbers of armed Houthis arrived in three military trucks, accompanied by two armored vehicles, and besieged the building from all sides.

Staff were detained in their offices for three hours, before reinforcements arrived to establish full control over the foundation.

Four staff members were arrested for resisting the Houthis, according to Ashraf Al-Rifi, secretary of the syndicate's "Freedoms Committee," but were released two days later.

The foundation's six editors have since relocated to their branch office in Aden and have continued publishing the daily paper from there, which missed just one issue with the sudden closure of their headquarters in Sana'a.

There was little choice but to release all remaining staff from the foundation, according to Al-Buhairir, who said many employees and families risk losing their homes if the Houthis do not end their siege and reimburse the foundation for its losses.

The editorial board join the 80 staff members that were already located at the Aden branch, while close to two-hundred employees at the Al-Shumo Foundation's head-

quarters find themselves out of work.

The foundation uses private printing presses in Aden to continue its circulation in the southern governorates, but sales have dropped significantly as a result of the ordeal, as have advertisement revenues following the withdrawal of clients unwilling to risk association with the publisher.

Al-Buhairir says property was looted following the takeover, and that the Houthis are using the equipment to print brochures and other publications, including those of their own news outlet, Al-Haqiqa ("The Truth").

"Where is the truth in what they have done?" asks Al-Buhairir.

The general secretary of the YSJ, Marwan Dammaj, says restrictions on press freedom under the Houthis are unprecedented in Yemen. "We'd never seen press offices or publishing houses broken into until the Houthis seized power, taking over media and suppressing anyone who speaks out against them," he said.

Members of the YSJ have contacted several international organizations, including the affiliated International Journalists Federation (IJF), to lodge their complaints and ensure the wider international community is aware of the situation. It has found support from the Gulf Association for Journalism and the Arab Association for Journalism and Media Freedoms, both members of the Council of Gulf International Relations.

"We also call upon the Yemeni people and the free men of the revolution to stand by us and reclaim our rights and properties from the Houthi terrorist militias and their criminal campaign," read a Feb. 11 statement from the Al-Shumo



Nearly 200 of Al-Shumo Foundation's staff members have found themselves out of work since Feb. 5, when Houthis seized their offices and started using their printing press to print pro-Houthi materials.



Protests are being held by former staff and journalists at the YSJ and Akhbar Al-Youm headquarters in Sana'a.

Foundation.

The foundation and Akhbar Al-Youm have been targeted by the Houthis because of their association with General Ali Mohsen Al-Ahmar, according to Mohammad Al-Bukhaiti, a member of the Houthi Political Office in Sana'a.

"Ali Mohsen is a fugitive wanted by the justice system and all his properties will be seized, they belong to the people of Yemen," he said, accusing the media outlet of "serving foreign agendas" and "dividing the country."

Ali Mohsen was formerly the commander of the 1st Armored Division, and led the fight against the Houthis in six rounds of war that lasted from 2004 to 2010. He defected from former President

Saleh's government during the 2011 uprising, later serving as a military advisor to Saleh's successor. He fled to Saudi Arabia during the Houthis' capture of Sana'a in mid-September.

Mohsen is also one of the Islah Party's founding members, and has long been accused by the Houthis as fighting on the party's behalf.

Al-Bukhaiti also alleges the southern Al-Ayam newspaper was closed by the former regime in collaboration with Ali Mohsen, allowing him to replace it with Akhbar Al-Youm. "Today they are being given the same treatment they used against our brothers in the Al-Ayam newspaper," he said. It is an allegation members of Al-Shumo deny.

The Al-Shumo Foundation was

established in 1996, and Akhbar Al-Youm newspaper published its first issue in 2003.

The Houthis broke into the house of the foundation's general manager, Saif Mohammad Al-Hadhri, on Dec. 23, 2014, and are accused of kidnapping one of his family members.

The YJS has recorded 60 violations of civil liberties between the beginning of January and mid-February. Assaults on journalists and activists have ranged from threats and kidnappings to physical abuse.

Such wide-ranging abuses have not been seen in the country since unification in 1990, according to Al-Rifi, when the northern and southern precursors to the YSJ were merged.

VOX POP

Hadi in Aden: Supporting unity or encouraging secession?

■ **Bassam Al-Khameri**

When Abdu Rabu Mansour Hadi left the capital Sana'a to the southern port city of Aden on Saturday, Feb. 21, the question immediately arose as to whether the move will help unity or make secession more likely.

In a statement released by Hadi late Saturday, which he signed as the president, he called on the international community to respect the country's constitution—referring to his legitimacy as president—and not the Houthis' Feb. 6 constitutional declaration. He described the steps taken by the Houthis after gaining control over Sana'a on Sept. 21, 2014, as illegitimate. Many Yemenis remain skeptical about the upcoming decisions Hadi will take.

Some believe Hadi will stand by southerners and help them to achieve their goal of gaining independence from the north. They say he is surrounded by pro-secessionist southerners now, and the Houthis' treatment of him—including a month of house arrest—pushed him to take this stance. Meanwhile, others say Hadi is known for his pro-unity stance and point to the fact that he supported former President Ali Abdullah Saleh in waging war on the south in 1994.

The Yemen Times asked residents of Sana'a and Aden if Hadi's arrival in the south signals a move closer to secession or if they think he will be able to help unite the country.



Mohammad Sadeq Al-Bukhaiti, 25, Ibb University student currently in Sana'a

Many southerners don't like President Abdu Rabu Mansour Hadi and accuse him of betrayal since he supported the former President Ali Abdulla Saleh during the war between the south and north of Yemen in 1994. However, he gained great support in the south recently because of the house arrest imposed on him by the Houthis. I don't think Hadi will support secession because he was able to do so a long time ago but he insisted on protecting unity. Hadi's leave for Aden may result in announcing Aden as the capital instead of Sana'a.



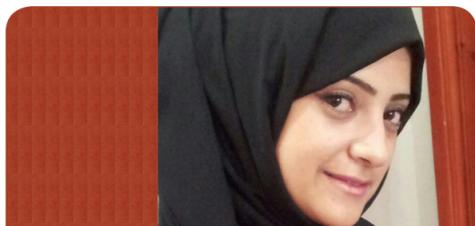
Mahdi Mohammad Al-Zubairi, 45, unemployed Sana'ani resident

President Abdu Rabu Mansour Hadi is pro-unity and will never allow the south to secede from the north of Yemen. By leaving to Aden and announcing the statement late Saturday, President Hadi assured that he is a wise man who knows what to do at the right time. Southerners will give up on the demands of separation because President Hadi is there in Aden now and he may shift the capital to Aden to strengthen unity.



Faten Sinan Al-Shaheri, 24, recent graduate of the Arts College in Sana'a University

President Hadi's leave to Aden wasn't the right step to be taken at this sensitive time because southerners are skeptical about his loyalty to them. Although he left Sana'a due to the violations against him by the Houthis, I think this step supports secession because President Hadi is in the south now and he is required to stand by the southerners to pay for his faults during 1994. Actually, nobody can foresee what will happen in Yemen because the political situation is very complicated.



Maram Jaghman, 23, fourth-year student at the Media College of Sana'a University and a human development coach

I'm certain that President Hadi will work for the unity of Yemen and, by leaving to Aden, he will encourage southerners to support unity because he will be ruling the country from there. Although leaving to Aden is important, the upcoming period will explain what will happen because the decrees made by President Hadi in the future will be more important. Going to Aden is the most appropriate choice as long as he wants to maintain the unity of Yemen.



Mohammad Al-Musalami, Southern Movement leader based in Aden

"Concerning the leave of President Hadi from Sana'a to Aden, it seems through the statement he released that this step doesn't serve the southern issue and our demands for separation. However, if President Hadi came to Aden to help southerners he will be welcomed. Otherwise, he should go back to the north."



Abdulrahman Anees, 26, local journalist in Aden

"By leaving to Aden, President Hadi has confused the entire political process in Yemen. When in Sana'a, the Houthis were controlling everything but now after President Hadi left to Aden he is the one making decisions. It was the most appropriate step to be taken by President Hadi and now he can announce Aden as the capital. The decisions he will take will make things clearer."

Libya is now beyond any easy solutions

Hafed Al-Ghwel
Atlantic Council
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On Feb. 17, Libya marked four years since the uprising that toppled Colonel Muammar Gaddafi, and ignited the country's civil war. The war that began as a fight between two camps—Gaddafi and his supporters against other Libyans who were determined to topple him with the help of NATO forces—is now a war between an endless number of militias and gangs of all stripes. From the ideological and criminal to the regional and tribal, each faction is fighting for different reasons, and in pursuit of different goals.

On Wednesday, the United Nations Security Council met in an emergency session to discuss an Egyptian request for a new international mandate to deal with the growing threat that Libya poses to its neighbors, with the increasing presence of the Islamic State (or ISIL) forces in the country. Splashed on TV screens around the world earlier this week was the barbaric slaughter of 21 Egyptian laborers in Libya. This was immediately followed by Egypt's airstrikes against training camps and

command centers that Cairo said belonged to the Islamic State in the eastern city of Derna.

Egypt, of course, is not alone in its growing unease about what is happening near its borders with Libya. Italy, France and Malta, just a stone's throw away across the Mediterranean, have all expressed their concern about the direct threats emanating from Libya. The concerns are very real and run the gamut of issues, including arms smuggling, drug trafficking and illegal immigration into Europe, in addition to the threat of terrorist groups such as the Islamic State carrying out attacks in Europe.

Now, the problem is being debated in the UN by the western, Arab and African countries, many of which are themselves fragile states with precarious and unstable political economies. The question is what can or should be done to manage, if not to solve, the threats from Libya to their security and stability?

Unpacking that debate, and the policy options available, is of course a very complex process, especially where the UN is concerned. The need to come to an agreement given the multiple and always conflicting interests of the various governments that sit on the Security Council is never easy or straightforward.

There are deals to be made, compromises to be reached, and a lot of give and take involved.

The basic underlining argument for this debate is the realization that if Libyans can not or will not figure out a way to reach a reasonable agreement among themselves and form a semblance of a stable and united government, as evidenced in the past four years, then Libya's neighbors, at least, will need to take action to protect themselves. This action is something that no one can afford at this point to ignore in the face of the very real menacing fallout of the situation in this massive, rich and strategically located country, which is disintegrating and collapsing. It is right in the middle of North Africa and the Mediterranean region, and has long stretches of empty, ungoverned borders with the sub-Saharan African countries of Niger, Chad and Mali.

One aspect being debated in policy circles this week is whether the UN should enact a mandate, under Chapter 7, that would allow a coalition of countries—most likely Egypt and some African states with logistical support from Italy, France and several Arab countries—to carry out air strikes and even send in ground troops to Libya to fight Islamic State forces as a part of the larger US-led

campaign in Iraq and Syria. Other countries, mainly the United States and Britain, are not very comfortable with such a line of thinking, and therefore offer a counter argument that such a move will simply make things worse, drawing in more radical elements into the fight, as has been witnessed in other places in the past, including Iraq and Afghanistan.

Another proposal being debated holds that the international community should simply arm and support the existing, internationally recognized government, weak and ineffective as it is, and help it to build a small army that could start fighting these extremists with the support of neighboring countries. Opponents of this proposal say that the situation in Libya is still not there yet, and it's not urgent enough to take such a decision considering the potential of arms falling into the hands of militias. They take the following line: "Let's wait and see what happens to the UN sponsored talks in Geneva and the city of Ghadames, among various Libyan political factions, to form a unity government."

The final proposal being discussed is one that pushes for imposing sanctions on Libya's financial assets and an embargo on its oil and gas exports to minimize potential

funding for extremist groups and reduce the "ATM effect" that Libya can have when it comes to funding groups from Boko Haram in Nigeria to the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria, among many others across the region.

One thing is clear: Libya is now, and will continue to be in the short term, a growing threat so long as it is a no-man's land, ruled by and divided up among armed gangs of all kinds. The question is whether the international community, whatever its make-up, will decide to approach the Libya quagmire in a united, coherent and comprehensive way and in a holistic military, economic and diplomatic manner—or whether it will just decide to bomb some targets from the air and simply end up breaking big rocks into smaller ones and enrich the already fertile ground for a new terrorist crop.

Libya is now beyond any easy solutions, which were possible two or three years ago, and whatever policy will prevail in the coming weeks will be costly for Libyans themselves and the neighboring countries. As the past 30 years of delayed international engagement, of one sort or another, in Somalia, Afghanistan, Iraq, Syria, Libya, and before them, Lebanon, shows us clearly, it is not so much about what the interna-

tional community does, but rather about how and when it does it. Unfortunately, all these precedents reveal that it is usually done very late, badly and almost always ends up producing far worse results than originally anticipated.

Ultimately, the final outcome in Libya will be messy, mixed, and dependent on whether Libya itself can produce a new political leadership capable of charting a new course; looking to the future not the past; and exhibiting the international and domestic credibility needed to tap into and connect with the international community and the wider silent majority of Libyans. The people are against all groups vying for power today, tired of war and vengeance, and are waiting for someone who can lead them into a future that is beyond Gaddafi's tyranny and the post-Gaddafi chaos and failures.

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ANALYSIS

Do Egypt's upcoming parliamentary elections even matter?

Chloe Bordewich
Muftah.org
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In March and April of this year Egyptians will have the opportunity to vote for parliamentary representatives for the second time since the 2011 revolution that overthrew President Hosni Mubarak. These elections will take place during a period human rights organizations have described as "the most dramatic reversal of human rights in Egypt's modern history." In this environment, it is worth asking: Should we even be paying attention to the vote?

The coming elections can help us understand how seemingly mun-

dane, technocratic decisions have set the stage for a political future without real democracy in Egypt. In the coming years, the shape of Egypt's political landscape will be determined by an electoral system that discourages public debate and political participation. In a world where undemocratic regimes have grown increasingly adept at holding technically sound elections, the design of electoral systems is a vital part of the abrogation of rights and persistence of authoritarianism.

2015 election forecast
Dissent is hardly tolerated in Egypt these days, and, as observers rightly point out, the results of the coming elections are a foregone conclusion.

The country's voting-age popula-

tion is divided three ways, and none has a high stake in the race.

In one corner are fervent supporters of the present regime and, in particular, of President Sisi. Preferring a powerful executive, they are suspicious of competitive, unpredictable elections. At the other extreme are fragments of the decimated Muslim Brotherhood and its allies, who are either in jail or in hiding. The elections are irrelevant for them, as they are banned from participating.

Finally, there are those who identify with neither group but are profoundly disillusioned by the resurgence of authoritarianism and dissipation of revolutionary ideals. In this repressive environment, they believe, they will not be represented. The elections do matter to President Abdel-Fattah Al-Sisi, however.

Major funders, including the United States, have already demonstrated their willingness to suspend the minimum requirements of democracy in the interest of strategic pragmatism. Still, Egypt desperately needs more foreign investment to fulfill government promises, and the scheduled elections are a final signal to the international community that it is firmly committed to some level of democracy, however superficial it may be.

In this regard, the timing of the electoral contest is impeccable. Just one week before the first votes are cast on March 21, investors will convene in Sharm Al-Sheikh for the Egypt Economic Summit. Campaign banners will line the highways leading from Cairo to the Red Sea resort town where officials will ask investors for \$10-12 billion to cover the government's \$47-billion plans to expand infrastructure and industry.

Legislative elections are the last hurdle for President Sisi's political roadmap. Since Sisi ousted Islamist President Mohamed Morsi on July 3, 2013, the country has drafted a

new constitution, passed electoral laws, and elected a president. It has not, however, had an active parliament since June 2012, when the Supreme Constitutional Court dissolved what was then known as the People's Assembly just days before Morsi became president. At the time, the legislature had been meeting for less than five months. The Shura Council, which was dissolved in July 2013, had negligible legislative authority. The new constitution, approved by referendum in January 2014, eliminated the Council altogether.

Egypt's new legislative system

The two laws governing the coming elections were drafted by a six-person committee and signed by Interim President Adly Mansour on June 5, 2014. One law outlines the electoral system and composition of the new legislature, now called the House of Representatives. The other regulates matters like voter eligibility, election administration, and campaign media.

An electoral system defines how votes cast are converted into seats; whether voters select a single candidate or multiple, and whether they can rank their preferences; and the number of representatives assigned to a given district.

Egypt's 2014 constitution establishes a single legislative body and sets a minimum of 450 seats, but does not specify an exact number of members. The House of Representatives Law puts the number of seats at 567, with five percent of these (27 members) appointed by the president. Likewise, the constitution mandates "appropriate" representation of women, Christians, youth, workers, farmers, Egyptians abroad, and persons with disabilities, but leaves it to the law to define these categories and determine what qualifies as "appropriate." Yet

even elaboration provided in the electoral law with regard to candidate qualifications leaves these quotas difficult to implement in practice.

The real object of scrutiny is the method by which representatives will be selected. Article 102 of the Egyptian constitution states only that members of the House of Representatives may be selected "based on the plurality voting system or proportional list, or a combination of both at whatsoever ratio." This encompasses virtually all known systems. The constitution's drafters had reason to leave the details to lawmakers: They wanted to prevent future election results from being nullified on the basis of an unconstitutional electoral process. This was the reason the Supreme Court dissolved the People's Assembly in 2012, leaving the country without a legislature for nearly three years.

The number of electoral systems in use around the world is essentially finite. Experts group the 12 main systems into three general categories: Plurality/majority systems, proportional systems, and mixed systems.

The most common, now used in 82 countries including most of Europe, is called "List Proportional Representation," or List PR. This system requires political parties or coalitions to offer a list of their candidates for a given electoral district. Voters vote for a party and seats are apportioned based on the overall share of votes each party wins. A large, popular party will win more seats than a small, less popular party, but the latter is likely to gain at least some representation.

The second most common electoral system is known as "First Past the Post." This is a plurality/majority system and is how Americans elect members of the US Congress. Electoral districts have only one

representative and the candidate with the most votes wins, even if she has not earned an absolute majority.

Egypt's system is a mixed, or parallel, system that blends three majoritarian methods. Of the 540 elected seats in the House of Representatives, 420 will be selected on an individual basis, i.e., not from party lists. Of these, 237 will be voted into office in single-member constituencies, like members of the US House of Representatives. The rest of the districts will have multiple representatives. Unlike the United States, Egypt will use the "Two-Round System," as it has in the past. This means a candidate must receive an absolute majority to win. If no candidate meets this requirement, there is a runoff between the top vote-earners. This can be a hurdle both for state finances and in terms of public participation.

One hundred twenty members of the House will be elected from party lists rather than as individual candidates. For this vote, the country has been divided into four districts: Two with 45 seats and two with 15 seats. Seats will be allocated by "Party Block Vote" (PBV), a system that is nearly obsolete. Rather than dividing seats proportionally among the parties competing, PBV is winner-take-all. The party with an absolute majority of votes wins all seats—15 or 45—allotted to the district in question. If no party wins a majority, there is a runoff.

It is easy to see why Egyptian voters might get confused. They will be presented with two separate ballots, one for the individual candidates in their district and one for the party list constituency to which they belong.

Yet the larger problem is the real and perceived value the system gives to a person's vote.

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Islah spokesperson to the Yemen Times:

“Hadi remains the legitimate president of the country”

When a new government was formed following the 2011 uprising, the Islah Party was one of the biggest winners. Yet today, the party holds little sway against the Houthis, a militant group which has taken over much of northern Yemen. When the Houthis started their expansion from their home governorate of Sa'ada toward Amran, eventually taking Sana'a in September 2014, the group targeted prominent Islahi businessmen, military leaders, politicians, and organizations affiliated with the party.

On Jan. 22, 2015, the Cabinet and President Hadi resigned. Weeks later, on Feb. 6 the Houthis issued a constitutional declaration, setting the stage for a new government under their control, and essentially formalizing the slow-motion coup they began in September. The president was under house arrest until Feb. 21, when he managed to flee to Aden.

Abdulmalik Shamsan, a member of the Islah Party's Information Committee and an official spokesperson for the party, spoke to the Yemen Times about what recent events mean for his party and for the country. He said the Houthis have no other option but to withdraw their Feb. 6 declaration, and he calls on the Houthis to take part in reconciliatory talks under the auspices of the United Nations. Though optimistic about the future because of the “culture of peace” entrenched in the people of Yemen, Shamsan worries “the Houthis' violent culture” might lead some to use violence.

Originally from Taiz governorate, Shamsan currently lives in Sana'a. Prior to taking on his current position with the Islah Party, Shamsan worked as a journalist.



Interview by
Khalid Al-Karimi

Hadi managed to flee to Aden. Will Aden become the capital?

The departure of president Hadi to Aden, his call on the government to meet there, and his statement that state institutions in Sana'a are under the Houthi militant groups' control add to the latest resolution of the UN Security Council which accuses the Houthis of undermining the political process. This development entails that all the political parties engage in dialogue to denounce the unjust situation in Sana'a. Official political activities taking place in Aden or Taiz could mean one of these locations becoming the capital, but this could also be temporary. However, the Houthis' stubbornness could lead the capital to change [permanently] and be accompanied by state efforts to regain the areas under Houthi control.

The Houthis announced the constitutional declaration on Feb. 6. What do you expect will happen in case they do not retract this declaration?

The Houthis have no other option but to withdraw this declaration. It was a coup statement, not a constitutional declaration. In general, it can be said not everyone recognizes this declaration. The Houthis need to let go of their stubborn stance and accept the reconciliatory talks taking place under the auspices of the United Nations.

The Houthis seem to be unstoppable. Could this help unite political parties, including the Islah Party and the General People's Congress, to collectively oppose the constitutional declaration?

The General People's Congress is a nationally respected political party. However, in my opinion, some of its leaders have been governed by the desire to retaliate. Because of this, they have turned the party into a weapon at the hand of the Houthis just like any other weapon. We still pin hope on the patriotic members of the General People's Congress to play a major national role in a way that corresponds to their convictions and their history. There could be close ties between the General People's Congress and the Islah Party or any other party.

The Islah Party has been continuously emphasizing that dialogue is indispensable among political parties in order to rescue this fragile nation.

In your view, what mistakes has Abdu Rabu Mansour Hadi made over the past three years of his tenure?

Hadi spoiled some groups at the expense of state authority and

“It is true [Al-Houthi] is extending his hand to all. But he is extending it with weapons and explosives.”

government institutions. There was very slow progress toward dealing with major priorities, such as the southern issue and restructuring of the army. He did not restructure the army in a way that would serve national interests. If the [army restructuring] was seriously and correctly dealt with, what is happening today would not be possible.

Regardless, Hadi remains the legitimate president of the country. The coup against him is unacceptable. The Islah Party emphasizes its opposition to this. I call on the United Nations to commit to its pledges and hold those undermining the political process accountable.

Local media have been critical of the role of Jamal Benomar, the UN Special Envoy to Yemen. At a time when he is engaged in peace talks with the political parties, the Houthi group has continued tightening their grip on state institutions. What do you think?

Political reconciliation began in late 2011 under the auspices of the ten sponsor countries and the United Nations.

There was no guarantee for the success of talks. The statement issued by the UN Security Council last week, three years after the opening of talks, spoke openly about the Houthis' role in undermining the political process. This is an admittance by the Security Council that the necessary progress has not been achieved.

The Islah Party has constantly expressed respect for the United Nations and its envoy, Benomar. They are responsible for listening to this surge of criticism against them on social media and local news websites.

I think the United Nations and

Benomar should pay attention to the reasons the public have lost trust in them.

How do you read American policy in Yemen?

The United States needs to revisit its policy in Yemen, I think it is losing its balance. Dealing with the security issue in Yemen is one thing—dealing with political and democratic issues is another. But there seems to be confusion. Another issue is the talk about American coordination with the Houthi group to combat terrorism. Yemen is a state which is engaged in the war on terror. There is official cooperation between Yemen and the United States in this field. So cooperation should remain official, and only official. Seeking the support of militant groups outside the state's control will only complicate the issue and heralds dangerous consequences which will also harm the United States. I do not mean to offer advice to the Americans. It is up to them. However, it must be clear cooperation with militant groups, for counterterrorism purposes directly harm the Yemeni people.

How does the ongoing political vacuum hinder the national dialogue?

“The Houthis are capitalizing on the political vacuum. They continue swallowing the state.”

The Houthis are capitalizing on the political vacuum. They continue swallowing the state. They go on capturing state institutions and state revenues. They persist in their invasion of more governorates in order to directly govern them. They see an advantage in the continuity of this political vacuum. This poses a major hindrance for the dialogue.

Abdulmalik Al-Houthi said he is extending a brotherly hand to all. What is blocking you from reaching an agreement with the Houthi group?

It is true he is extending his hand to all. But he is extending it with weapons and explosives. Though the Islah Party has been facing lots of obstacles, its members entered negotiations with the Houthi leader months ago. Unfortunately, the Houthi wanted only to realize their own goals, not to get Yemen out of its troubles. So the negotiations misfired.

Do you think anti-Houthi Yemenis will one day stop protesting peacefully and opt for violence to counter the Houthis' forceful takeover of power?

Personally, I am optimistic about the future. This feeling is a result of my knowledge that the culture of peace has become entrenched in Yemenis. However, I am pessimistic because of my knowledge of the Houthis' violent culture, which may force people to decide on other [violent] options. It is really confusing and the coming days will clarify matters.

Do you think the Islah Party is a strong political contender after the departure of General

Ali Mohsen and Hamid Al-Ahmar from Yemen?

Ali Mohsen departed the state, not the Islah Party. The Houthis have been targeting those opposing them regardless of their political affiliations. The Houthis ousted the president and the Cabinet. Do the president, the prime minister and the besieged ministers belong to the Islah Party?

How do you evaluate the popularity of the Islah Party?

The issue is not how much popularity the party has lost or gained. The Yemeni state has been robbed and is now collapsing at the hand of those robbing it. It does not matter that the Islah Party has become stronger or weaker than before. Our concern should be: What about the state? Is it weaker or stronger?

Some accuse you of placing partisan interests first, ahead of national interests.

Anyone or any group has the right to criticize the Islah Party and say what they want. It is a matter of freedom of expression.

Finally, how do you describe the events of Feb. 2011, 11, and Sept. 2014, 21?

The former was a revolution, and the latter was a coup.

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Street vendors: Just making a living, or hired hands on the campaign trail?

■ Ali Ibrahim Al-Moshki

Politicians use various methods to promote themselves and their political parties in order to better get their message across to the masses. Appearing on television and radio, releasing books, or distributing brochures, posters and stickers are just a few of the usual methods employed by politicians in countries throughout the world.

In Yemen, many people make a living coordinating with such politicians, working as street vendors and selling posters adorned with the faces and photos of famous figures and politicians on major streets and at busy intersections. Anyone walking the streets of Sana'a will see them; often times such posters can be bought as cheaply as YR50 to YR100 (\$0.25 to \$0.50).

Qasim Jamil Al-Utomi, 20, is a street vendor who spends his days in Sana'a's Taiz roundabout. Much of the money he earns on a daily basis comes from selling posters that bear the faces of politicians and figures that Yemeni citizens identify with. "Yemen is very polarized at the moment and people are very attached to certain figures," he said.

"There's a lot of money to be made by providing people with posters that allow them to publicly identify with people they like," he continued. The most common posters he sells are of former President Ali Abdullah Saleh, his son Ahmed Ali Abdullah Saleh, the former commander of the Republican Guards and current Yemeni ambassador to the UAE, and Abdulmalik Al-Houthi, the leader of the country's Houthi movement.

While Ahmed Ali Saleh has for years been publically involved in Yemen's national political scene, especially as his father groomed him for secession, the resurgence of photos

bearing his face have been more recent—particularly since the resignation of former President Hadi on Jan. 22.

Since then, it is not uncommon to see posters of Ahmed with the words, "Ahmad Ali Abdullah Saleh, GPC presidential candidate" written on them, or simply "Ahmed Ali Abdullah Saleh, the coming president." It is not clear whether such posters represent the official party line of the GPC or are just an attempt for opportunists to capitalize on fairly widespread local support.

Abdul Fattah Jamil Al-Wesabi has been working as a street vendor since 2012. The Yemen Times spoke with him at the Al-Rowishan roundabout in Sana'a's Hadda district, where he has been stationed for the past year.

"The top selling photos are for Al-Houthi, Saleh and his son, but we also sell photos of Ibrahim Al-Hamdi as well," he said. Al-Hamdi was President of North Yemen from 1974 until his assassination in 1977. He was known for being a strong opponent of the Islah Party and the Al-Ahmar family, both of which had strong links to Saudi Arabia and currently are at odds with the Houthis.

"I buy and sell around 100 photos per day of all sizes, small, medium and large. Of those, I'd say 50 of them are usually of Ahmed Saleh." In 2012 and the beginning of 2013 he said, photos of former President Ali Abdullah Saleh were the top sellers. But towards the latter half of 2013 and throughout 2014, more photos of Ahmed Ali began to appear, particularly those showing him alongside other prominent Arab leaders, such as Saddam Hussein and Gamal Abdel Nasser.

During 2014, photos of Abdulmalik Al-Houthi also became more popular, particularly around July after the Houthis took over Amran city. "By the end of 2014, Al-Houthi

posters became the most popular, more so than Ali Abdullah Saleh or his son," said Al-Wesabi. "However, now that's changed once again."

Al-Wesabi told the Yemen Times that he often works directly with GPC members who run printing shops that provided him with the posters. "It's a win-win," he said. "We work together so they can promote figures they support, and it helps us to earn a living."

After concluding the interview, the Yemen Times journalist got in a taxi. Before leaving, the driver purchased a poster of Ahmed Saleh from Al-Wesabi. "He's going to be the next president of Yemen," the driver said. "He's not corrupt and is someone we can trust. My house is full of photos of Ahmed Ali," he added as he plastered the photo on his car window.

Whether or not the GPC has been intentionally promoting photos of Ahmed Saleh in preparation for a potential presidential campaign—and if Ahmed himself is involved—is unclear.

The Yemen Times spoke with Tammim Al-Sayani, a GPC member who works in the party's Youth Department. "In the last few months we've intensified our campaign to spread posters bearing the face of Ali Abdullah Saleh in the major streets and thoroughfares of Sana'a," he said. "Less so for his son."

Al-Sayani denied that the GPC was making an attempt to increase the number of posters in circulation bearing Ahmed Saleh's face, or that the man had any ambitions to run for president. "Most of the posters we produce read, 'Salamu Allah alah Affash, [Saleh's days were better]," he said. "We're not concerned with Ahmed so much, we're just trying to get the message across that life was better when the GPC had more control."

Abdul Rahman Al-Jamili, owner of Al-Raed publications, an inde-



Political parties may use vendors for self-promotion, but the popularity of political posters is also a reflection of public opinion. Demand for posters of Abdulmalik Al-Houthi and Ahmed Saleh (both pictured) has grown in recent months.

pendent printing house in Sana'a, also makes much of his profit selling posters of Ali Abdullah Saleh and Al-Houthi to street vendors. He insists that he has no political party affiliation, but that it's just good business. "We often photoshop their face to make them look more youthful or glamorous," he said. "I do it for the money, nothing else. But a lot of the printing shops around town are operated directly by Saleh and Houthi affiliates. I know this for a fact."

Lutf Al-Ufairi is a vendor in Sana'a's Al-Sabin district who claims that he coordinates directly with GPC members whom he speaks with each morning to both collect posters and make plans about future strategy. "We talk every morning about how my sales are doing, which posters sell the most, and ways we can improve our sales," he said.

"For me it's about making money, but their primary concern is how to increase the number of photos showing the face of Ali Abdullah Saleh and his son." When asked about

Ahmed Ali in particular, he admitted the GPC has been giving him more attention in recent months. "I didn't used to get so many photos of him in the past, however starting this January I got larger stockpiles of his photos, as have many other people."

Zakaria Al-Meqdad, a GPC member in Sana'a referred to the Yemen Times by Al-Ufairi, said that he and those he works with print thousands of photos of the "leader" Ali Abdullah Saleh and his son each year. "We distribute them to our representatives in Sana'a and other districts. We work with adults and children, usually from poor families. We're helping them etch out a living in an otherwise difficult economy."

Regarding posters of Ahmed Ali, he claimed that the increased visibility of his face around town was merely the result of his increasing popularity among the people, and not a reflection of the GPC's political strategy. "Many people see him as a hero. We've taken advantage of this and printed more photos of him, to

make more money." Meqdad did not elaborate as to why Yemenis might view Ahmed Saleh as a hero, however some people attribute it to his long-standing feud with President Hadi, who recently stepped down as President on Jan. 22 after being placed under house arrest by the Houthis.

Dr. Abdu Al-Sufi, a professor in Sana'a University's Faculty of Media, does not think it is a coincidence that Ahmed's face is more visible around the capital than before. "It's an attempt by the GPC to portray Ahmed Ali as some type of savior at a time when Yemen is steeped in instability," he said.

"Ahmed Ali was seen by many as being hostile to President Hadi, particularly in December 2012 when the latter tried to restructure the military. Ali refused to cooperate with Hadi in this regard, and only did so after he was forced to through presidential decree. Now that Hadi is gone, Ali's face is making a resurgence."

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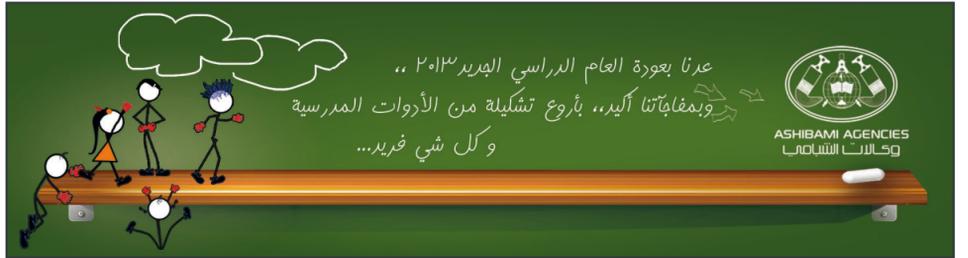
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Continued from page 4

Do Egypt's upcoming parliamentary elections even matter?

Winner take all

In a nascent democracy, the success of elections hinges on two things: Competition and public participation. Political parties in Egypt are weak. The 2011 revolution shredded the credibility of established opposition parties that, according to liberal Dostour Party spokesman Khaled Dawoud, had served mainly as a "fig leaf for elections that were inevitably rigged" in favor of the ruling National Democratic Party (NDP). At the same time, the 92 new parties that materialized in the brief political opening surrounding the 2011-12 elections have been unable to translate enthusiasm into strategic unity. They continue to struggle in gathering consistent public support.

It was no surprise, then, that the Freedom and Justice Party (FJP), which was able to tap into the Muslim Brotherhood's institutional network, dominated the polls in 2011. But the FJP is now in shambles and no longer allowed to compete.

Every electoral system has advantages and disadvantages, so it is important to consider the national context. Is the country emerging from one-party rule and needing structural encouragement for a substantive shift in power? Is it threatened by an extremist fringe? How many political parties does it have? Are there minority groups that could spark conflict if not given adequate legislative representation? What is the geographical distribution of voters with different ideologies?

Generally, the use of party lists to determine representation is a good thing. But this is only the case if these lists are used to guarantee



Campaign banner in Cairo's Abdeen neighborhood during Sisi's 2014 presidential campaign. Parliamentary elections are set for later this year.

proportional representation, and allow for new, less established parties to obtain seats. In Egypt's case, less than a quarter of the House of Representatives will be elected by party list. Those who are elected by this method will represent vast districts that include disparate parts of the country and constituents with wholly dissimilar interests. Yet the party that captures a majority in each of these districts will sweep either 15 or 45 seats. This winner-take-all approach is a serious disincentive to participation for both political parties and voters who will be less inclined to participate if winning seats is nearly impossible.

That the great majority of seats will be awarded to individual candidates is little consolation. Candidates competing for individual seats are not precluded from associating with a political party, and many will do so. But the emphasis on individual candidacy hurts nascent political parties, as there is little incentive for likeminded candidates to band together. As in the 2011-12 elections, candidates with

similar ideologies will likely compete against each other, weakening the party or coalition that best represents them.

While the losers are clear, it is also important to ask who will benefit from this system. As political analyst Ahmed Morsy and others have argued, the emphasis on individual candidate constituencies privileges those who rely on "personality politics" and established patronage networks. In the present context, this means those who were once part of Mubarak's NDP, as well as those close to President Sisi. The result, as Nathan Brown and Scott Williamson have pointed out, will probably be a weak House of Representatives unable and unwilling to advance an agenda independent of the president.

A long way from real political competition

Political figures of different ideologies expressed dissatisfaction with the House of Representatives Law when it was passed, and again when the electoral districts were finalized in December. The criticisms were varied: Younes Makhyoun, chairman of the ultra-conservative Salafi Nour Party, flaunted his party's ability to win seats but claimed that requiring party lists to include female and Christian candidates qualified as religious and gender discrimination. Others worried certain regions would be under-represented. The most



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damning criticisms, however, came from groups focused on systematic weaknesses in the electoral system and the disastrous effects they would have on political life in Egypt.

Civil society groups proposed alternatives to the system. Suggestions including that of a coalition of Egyptian feminist organizations closely resembled the somewhat more progressive system that was briefly in place for the 2011-12 elections. At that time, two-thirds of People's Assembly members were elected by List Proportional Representation and only one-third as individual candidates. But there is little evidence of what alternatives, if any, the committee tasked with designing the electoral system considered.

By choosing the current electoral system, Egypt's leaders have squandered another opportunity for progressive change. This small way of undermining democracy could have far-reaching consequences. Without eliciting horror from human rights groups or foreign governments, it is likely to help suppress citizens' desire to engage in political life.

Contemporary undemocratic regimes that cultivate a veneer of democratic process, as Egypt does, rely on a combination of fear and



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systemic manipulation. Fear is instilled through intimidation tactics deployed against those who speak out or assemble without permission. But amidst persistent international pressure to democratize, a firm and nuanced grasp of the

structural mechanics of elections is more important than ever to maintaining control.

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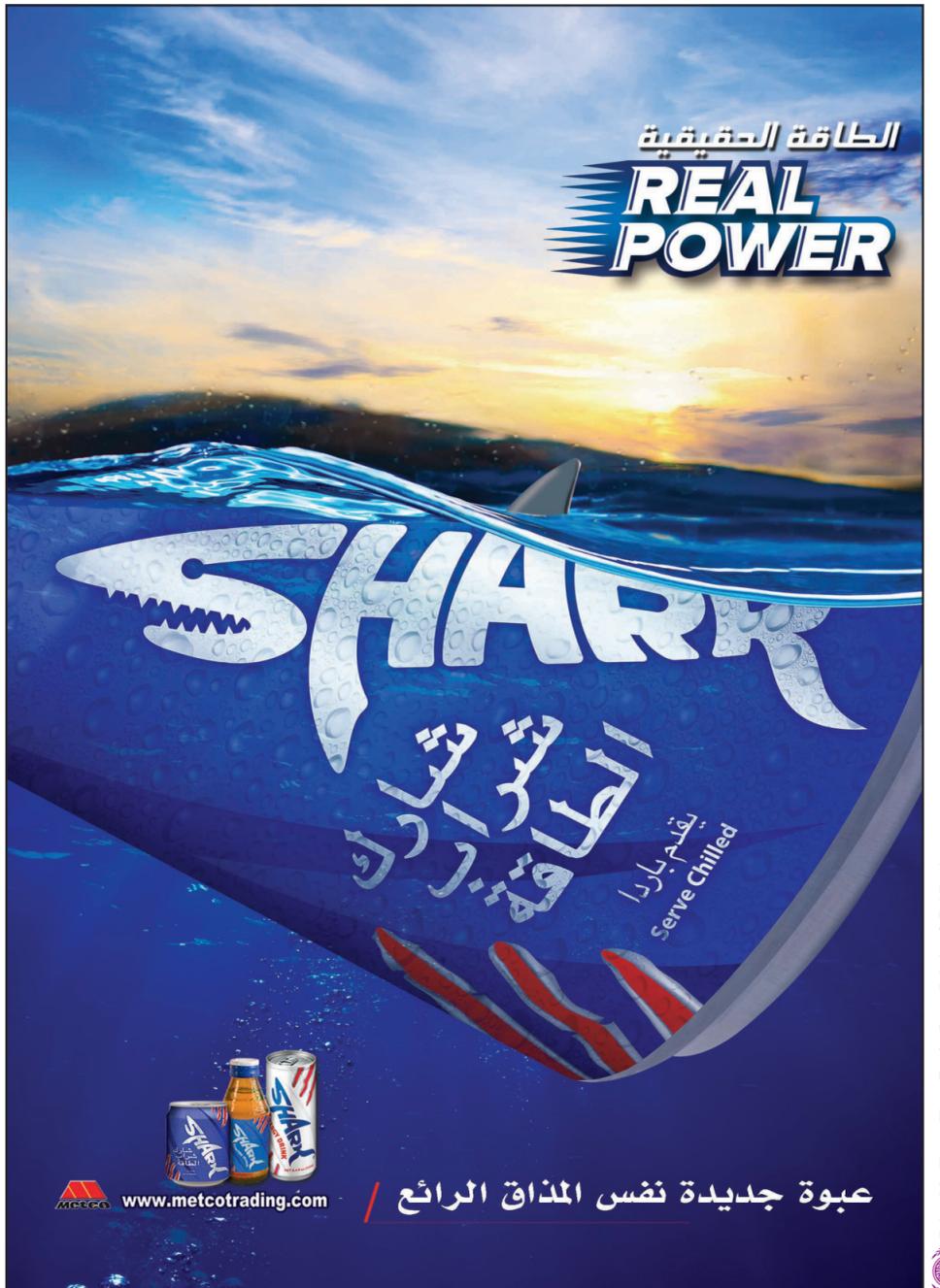
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