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Houthis release Sam Al-Ahmar after three-month detention

■ Ali Ibrahim Al-Moshki

SANA'A, March 11—The Houthis released Sheikh Sam Yahya Bin Hussein Al-Ahmar on Tuesday evening after being held without trial for over three months.

Al-Ahmar was released following

mediation from prominent members of the Hashid tribal federation, of which he is a member. senior Lengthy negotiations were carried out between Houthi represen-

tatives and a group of prominent tribal figures from Amran government, including sheikhs Kahlan Abu Shawareb, Amin Atif, and Saleh Abu Awjaa.

Al-Ahmar was taken from his house in the Al-Hasaba area of the capital on Nov. 26, after fighting outside his house left two Houthis and six of Al-Ahmar's escorts dead.

Sheikh Atif, who helped secure his release, said negotiations only began in January. "The Houthis promised us they would release him and they've kept their word," he said, declining to provide any further details.

Salim Allaw, Al-Ahmar's personal attorney and a member of the National Organization for Defending Rights and Freedoms (HOOD), said he came forward to represent



Sam Al-Ahmar (left) pictured with tribal sheikhs Jubran Abu Shawareb and Nashwan Al-Ahmar directly after his release.

his client following his arrest but that no requests were made of him.

"We faced several obstacles in the beginning, such as finding out where he was being held," explained Allaw. "The security forces denied any knowledge of his whereabouts, and the Houthis claimed the security forces had him. For a month we went back and forth between the two sides."

It eventually emerged that both the Houthis and the security forces were involved in Al-Ahmar's forced disappearance, according to Allaw, who eventually found out his client was being held in the Al-Judairi police station in the capital Sana'a.

Allegations of murder

Following his arrest, the Houthi mouthpiece Al-Masira aired a report in which it accused Al-Ahmar of the Nov. 22, 2013 assassination of Abdulkarim Jadban, who represented the Houthis in the NDC, as well as the Nov. 2, 2014 assassination of Mohammad Abdulmalik Al-Mutawakel, general secretary of the Liberal Union of Popular Forc-

Allaw was prevented from visiting or otherwise consulting with his client throughout Al-Ahmar's detention, and says he was never officially charged with the killings. "Those accusations were purely political, he didn't commit any of the crimes he was accused of," said Allaw.

Mohammad Al-Bukhaiti, a member of the Houthi Political Office in Sana'a, said Al-Ahmar was not tried for the killings because of mistakes made during his arrest in November. "He is guilty, but our men made a mistake when they forced their way into his house and set it on fire, which Al-Ahmar turned to his advantage to secure his release," he said.

Ali Al-Bukhaiti, who resigned as a member of the Political Office in January and has spoken out against the group on multiple occasions, called for the Houthis to issue an apology.

"Apologize to Sam Al-Ahmar and to everyone you have falsely imprisoned with charges announced on Al-Masira TV... apologizing with courage is far better than losing your credibility because of your false pride," he wrote online.

Sam Al-Ahmar is the previous under-secretary of the Ministry of Culture and the cousin of business mogul Hamid Al-Ahmar, who fled Yemen in August of 2014 and is currently living in exile. Al-Ahmar is also cousin to Sheikh Sadeq Bin Hussein Al-Ahmar, who heads the Hashid tribal federation, and a nephew of the deceased Abdullah Bin Hussein Al-Ahmar, who formerly served as head of Hashid and was the general secretary of

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Casualties mount in Lahj's Al-Hawta city

■ Bassam Al-Khameri

SANA'A, March. 11—Investigations remain inconclusive in Lahj governorate, following an attack Tuesday evening on the Al-Hawta Post Office by unknown gunmen that left three guards dead.

"Anonymous gunmen in a Toyota truck attacked the Al-Hawta Post Office in Lahj governorate in an attempt to loot money," a senior security source in the Operations Unit of Lahj's Security Department

Speaking to the Yemen Times on condition of anonymity, the source said at least six gunmen launched the attack at around 6 p.m. on Tuesday. As of Wednesday afternoon none of the perpetrators had been identified.

guarding the office dead but didn't loot any money, although the office was open," the source said. Initial reports from local media claimed rated situation." that YR50 million (\$233,000) was looted. The source said it would have been easy for the culprits to steal the money because the guards were killed, and that it was unclear why they did not.

Al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP) is normally the initial suspect in such cases, as they have been known to loot post offices around the country and have claimed responsibility for numerous assassinations in Al-Hawta city in recent weeks.

Basim Al-Zuraiqi, spokesperson for the Ministry of Information's of-

"They shot the three soldiers that Al-Qaeda is behind this attack a soldier working for the governorbecause no money was looted. I think the attack aimed to create more chaos in the already deterio-

> The gunmen took the personal weapons of the three guards after they shot them dead, Al-Zuraiqi

The security source agreed that AQAP was likely not behind the attack, saying the post office would have been looted if it was.

As of Wednesday afternoon, AQAP had not taken responsibility for the attack, and two sources within the group told the Yemen Times they had no knowledge of AQAP involvement.

Tuesday's attack comes two days after two gunmen on a motorbike fice in Lahj, said, "It doesn't seem assassinated Abduljabar Dawood,

ate's Public Security Department. The attack also took place in Al-

Later that day, on March 8, AQAP claimed responsibility for the assassination. "Two Mujahidin assassinated Abduljabar Abdullah Mohammed Dawood, a soldier of the Public Security Department in Al-Hawta," read a message on the group's Twitter handle.

Lahj governorate, and Al-Hawta city specifically, has witnessed an increasing number of assassinations since the beginning of 2015. The local security apparatus attributes the rise in assassinations to an increased presence of AQAP

No arrests have been announced for any of the dozens of killings carried out in Al-Hawta so far this

"We start the investigations but then stop them when we find no evidence. Most of the assassinations are carried out by professional assassins belonging to Al-Qaeda who use motorbikes to flee the scene easily," said the source from the Operations Unit.

Yemen Post, a state-run company that runs post offices throughout the country, handles all financial issues for the government. These include the monthly payments of civil servants, and receiving bill payments for electricity, landline telephones, internet, and water.

Southern Movement suspends protests amid growing turmoil

■ Ali Ibrahim Al-Moshki

SANA'A, March 10-Members of the Southern Movement announced a suspension to the group's civil disobedience campaigns on Tuesday. The decision comes following the arrival of Abdu Rabu Mansour Hadi in Aden on Feb. 21 and heightened concerns that the conflict in northern Yemen may spill over into the south.

official Radfan Al-Dubais, spokesperson for protesters at Aden's Al-Arood Square, confirmed that strikes and protests normally held every Monday in the governorate would be put on hold.

"We will suspend all our peaceful activities, we want to wait and see what happens with regards to Hadi in the governorate following his

and the international community and try to benefit from that," said Al-Dubais.

"Civil disobedience works when also moved from Sana'a to there is a government, but it doesn't make sense to continue our campaign at the moment," he said. "The situation is turning violent and large numbers of arms are pouring in from surrounding governorates and there are armed men all over the streets."

Protesters set up camp in Al-Arood Square on Oct. 14 of last year. Numerous strikes and protests in Aden and other southern governorates have occurred since then, but the turn of events in recent weeks has forced the movement to reconsider its tactics. With Hadi's arrival

escape from house arrest on Feb. 21, Al-Dubais said, "all disputes and tensions have Aden, which is what brought Aden governorate into violence and removed it from its peaceful course."

The spokesperson sees two options as events unfold: "We either keep silent and see what Hadi does or we go to war. We preferred to wait and see what will happen."

Aware of the influx of foreign delegates, particularly from the Gulf states, Al-Dubais is keen to represent his movement's supporters in a positive light. "We don't want people to think



of southerners as rebels or bandits—maybe [the international community] will change their thoughts on Yemen's unity and support our cause," he said, adding many in his camp are hopeful that Hadi will give up on the national project and declare his support for southern independence.

According to Al-Dubais, a conference will be convened in Abu Dhabi next week to discuss events in the south. The former president of South Yemen, Ali Salem Al-Beidh, and former Prime Minister Haider Abu Baker Al-Attas are due to attend with other leading figures from the south.

Mohammad Ali Bajunaid, head of the Bajunaid Research and Studies Center in Aden, confirmed that the movement has halted its activities in recent days. In his view, the Southern Movement will try to show itself as a peaceful movement to gain the support of Hadi and the international community, in an effort to convince Hadi to follow through with their ultimate goal of secession.

The Southern Movement was founded in 2007 by army officers who were laid off by then President Ali Abdullah Saleh after the 1994 between the south and the north. Initially demanding reinstatement, the movement soon rallied for secession, a common sentiment in the south which increased in 2014 after the Houthis took over the capital Sana'a.

No talks without Hadi present, Islah says

■ Khalid Al-Karimi

SANA'A, March 10-The Islah Party is refusing to take part in national talks in Sana'a without Hadi's involvement, amid proposals to relocate the dialogue to Riyadh.

In an open letter issued on Monday, Islah representative Mohammad Qahtan told Jamal Benomar, the UN Special Envoy to Yemen, that continued talks would be counter-productive until the legitimacy of Abdu Rabu Mansour Hadi's presidency is determined.

In the letter, Qahtan outlined his party's objections to Hadi's absence. He said that continuing talks without Hadi or his representatives would provide a semblance of legitimacy to the Houthis.

Until a solution is found, Qahtan said it remains unclear whether talks are to center on returning Hadi to the presidency or finding an alternative solution to the power

vacuum in Yemen.

Islah Party spokesman Abdulmalik Shamsan said the move was an attempt to put discussions on the right track, not to derail the national dialogue. "Continuing the dialogue without President Hadi's presence or his representatives is a question of giving legitimacy to the Houthi coup," he said.

Talks have continued in the capital since Hadi escaped house arrest and fled to Aden on Feb. 21, but appear to have made no progress since then. Hadi, who claims he remains Yemen's legitimate president, has said the capital is "occupied" and proposed moving the dialogue to Aden. More recently, Hadi has called for the talks to be moved to

Reports emerged on Tuesday that Benomar had flown to Riyadh to discuss moving the talks there, a proposal supported by Islah officials. "Sana'a remains under occu-

pation and is not a safe place to hold the dialogue," said Shamsan.

Mohammad Al-Bukhaiti, a member of the Houthi Political Office, told the Yemen Times on Tuesday that Qahtan's letter to Benomar is an attempt to obstruct the national dialogue at a critical juncture. He suggested Islah Party members are part of a "foreign conspiracy" to destabilize the country. "They are pandering to foreign agendas at the expense of national interests," he

The Houthis claim to remain open to suggestions, but have so far opposed the relocation of talks to Riyadh or Aden, saying any decision requires agreement from all of the concerned parties.

"There should be sufficient preparation [for a move], and Saudi Arabia should provide guarantees it will not side with any particular party," said Al-Bukhaiti.

Mohammad Al-Sibri, a member

of the Nasserist Party, agrees that talks in Sana'a have failed to produce results but says Qahtan's letter does not help matters either. "The letter shows that political parties, including Islah, are unable to provide any solutions. The letter makes no difference to the situation," he

Al-Sibri is pessimistic about the Riyadh option. "We obviously expect opposition from the Houthis and the [General People's Congress], and pointless statements from Islah members will not help matters," he added.

In a statement released Tuesday, the general secretary of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC), Abdulatif Al-Zayani, said the question of Yemen's national dialogue will be discussed Thursday in Riyadh. The meeting will include the six foreign affairs ministers of the GCC, presided over by Qatar's Minister of Foreign Affairs Khalid Bin Mohammad

Islah representative Mohammad Qahtan sent an open letter to UN Special Envoy Benomar outlining his party's position.

Al-Attiyah.

The Riyadh option seems to hinge on endorsement from the Houthis. While most observers and participants accept Hadi's de jure presidency, Houthis remain the de facto power in northern Yemen and it is unclear what progress can be made in Riyadh or elsewhere without their support and participation.

Tensions remain high in Aden over **SSF** position



Armed popular committee members have positioned themselves throughout Aden as fears mount further violence could break out.

■ Ali Ibrahim Al-Moshki

SANA'A, March 10—The standoff between Special Security Forces (SSF) and popular committee members in Aden has continued following orders for SSF Commander in Aden Abdulhafez Mohammad Al-Saggaf to step down.

Abdu Rabu Mansour Hadi called for Al-Saqqaf to be replaced last week. After Hadi's nomination of Thabet Muthanna Yahya Naji Jawas was rejected, a compromise was sought in Adlan Saleh Al-Hattas, who was appointed to the position on Sunday.

Despite mediation from the SSF's national commander, Abdulrazzaq Al-Marwani, Al-Saqqaf has refused to relinquish power and remains in control of his base in central Aden.

A source with the SSF in Sana'a, who spoke on condition of anonymity, said Al-Saqqaf is carrying out his duties as normal and has positioned his soldiers around the camp in preparation for an assault from popular committee members loyal to Hadi.

Explaining Al-Saqqaf's refusal to step down, the source said, "Al-Saggaf refuses to obey orders from Hadi because he is not the legitimate president and has no authority to appoint or remove anyone."

deployment of large numbers of armed popular committee members in the governorate, with SSF soldiers stationed throughout Khour Maksar city. Residents have been fleeing for neighbouring districts since Saturday.

Abdullah Al-Samehi, a security officer in Aden, said governor Saleh Bin Habtour was mediating between the parties in an attempt to avoid bloodshed and damage to property in the governorate.

Habtour and others involved in negotiations were not available for comment.

According to Mohammad Herbaj, a field commander with the popular committees in Aden, hundreds of popular committee members are positioned in areas where SSF soldiers have been deployed.

Herbaj fears clashes could break out at any moment, and said the popular committees are determined to storm the SSF base if Al-Saqqaf refuses to step aside.

According to the SSF source in Sana'a, Hadi wants to remove Al-Saqqaf over fears the commander remains loyal to former President Ali Abdullah Saleh and the Houthis.

An anonymous source from Aden's security administration provided the Yemen Times with a list

Wednesday morning saw the of brigades in the area he believes are loyal to Saleh and the Houthis. He mentioned the 201st Infantry Brigade and the air force from Al-Anad airbase in Lahj, the 31st Armored Brigade in Aden's Bader camp, and the 39th Armored Brigade in Aden's Salah Al-Din camp, also in Aden.

A large portion of the 39th Brigade are currently based in the neighboring governorate of Abvan. where they have been involved in heated battles with tribesmen allegedly backed by Al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula.

The source claims each brigade has at least 2,000 men within its ranks, and have been put on alert in case Al-Saqqaf and his men need support.

The only brigade loyal to Hadi is the 119th Infantry Brigade, under the command of Faisal Raja, according to the source. Based in Abyan governorate, the brigade was closely aligned with General Ali Mohsen.

There are an estimated 20,000 armed popular committee members in Aden governorate. Many of them are from Hadi's home governorate of Abyan, and operate under the leadership of Hadi Mansour Hadi, the brother of former President Hadi.

Fifty-three immigrants detained in Mocha

■ Ali Aboluhom

SANA'A, March, 11—Fifty-three immigrants from Ethiopia were detained in the port city of Mocha on Tuesday for illegally entering the country. The arrests were made in two separate operations carried out by the 35th Armored Brigade stationed in Taiz governorate.

Saeed Awath, a soldier with the brigade, said 30 people were arrested on Mocha's Al-Jadeed coastline coming from Dhobab district, a popular point of arrival in Taiz. A separate group of 23 Ethiopians had crossed the Bab Al-Mandeb strait in the south, he told the Yemen Times.

Awath belongs to a unit tasked with pursuing illegal immigrants in the governorate arriving on its coasts from Ethiopia, Somalia, and elsewhere in the Horn of Africa. He speculated that the 53 men and women who were detained in Mocha city were en route to the governorates of Aden and Hodeida.

According to protocol, all arrivals are processed at the security office in Mocha, before being transferred to Taiz Central Prison pending deportation.

According to Anees Al-Shameri, manager of the security office in Mocha district, his personnel receive immigrants from the 35th

Armored Brigade for processing "every two or three days." He could not provide specific figures, but estimates hundreds of arrivals are processed on a weekly basis.

According to Mogib Hassan Abdullah, Senior Communications and Public Information Assistant at the UN Refugee Agency (UN-HCR) in Sana'a, some 8,755 immigrants arrived via the Gulf of Aden and Red Sea in January of this year alone. From Jan. 1 to Feb. 28, the agency recorded 50 deaths at sea.

According to Abdullah, 1,242 of new arrivals were Somali, the only nationals granted prima facie refugee status upon arrival. The majority-7,507, or 86 percent-were Ethiopian nationals and another six arrived from Eritrea.

The screening of new arrivals by the Danish Refugee Council (DRC) at Mayfa, Ahwar and Bab Al-Mandeb reception centers determines which arrivals are eligible for refugee status in Yemen. Candidates are then referred to UNHCR offices in Aden or Sana'a.

Of the 8,000 illegal immigrants not granted refugee status since the beginning of 2014, 60 percent have been deported, according to a source within the government's Immigration, Passport and Naturalization Authority (IPNA).

An estimated 91,592 immigrants arrived on Yemen's coastlines in 2014. Two hundred and forty-six people died making the journey last year, more than the previous four years combined, according to the UNHCR.



An estimated 8,755 immigrants have arrived on Yemen's shores this year already, with 50 recorded deaths in January and Febru-



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When politics effects sports:

BUSINESS

AWARD

Yemen's football clubs suspended

Story and photo by

Ali Mohsen Aboluhom

t is difficult to imagine the Gulf Cup being hosted by Yemen today, as it was just five years ago. The Yemen Football Association (YFA) has managed to weather trying times since it was founded 15 years ago, but political and economic turmoil in the country is proving too much for the national league today.

The last day of first division football matches in Yemen was Jan. 10, and it has since been decided that games will not resume for at least two months.

On Feb. 1, the Competitions Committee of the Ministry of Youth and Sports suspended all YFA activities. The suspension is planned to last until the end of March, and effects all football clubs playing in Yemen's first division.

The deputy head of the committee, Ali Abu Al-Rejal, said the decision came following a review of national security and the dwindling resources available to clubs. Government funding has not been provided since the beginning of January and most clubs are no longer able to meet their commitments to players and coaching staff, he said.

While some teams will continue training despite the suspension, many have decided to shut down completely. The president of Al-Tilal Sports Club in Aden, Aref Al-Yarimi, said that since the suspension came into effect on Feb. 1 there is no money to keep the stadium and training facilities open.

All activities were thus suspended at the club—founded in 1905 as the first sports club in the Arabian Peninsula—and the closure applies to the club's volleyball, weight-lifting, basketball, boxing, and wrestling departments as well.

With little indication that secu-

rity or the national economy will improve anytime soon, it seems likely the suspension will extend beyond its April deadline. Even if it doesn't, however, the suspension may have long-term consequences for a league that has always struggled on a regional and international level.

International players live and work in a foreign country that offers little in the way of alternatives for a professional athlete, and many players see little reason to wait it out. In the last two weeks alone, Al-Yarimi says he has lost three players from Nigeria because of the club's inability to pay them.

First division clubs, representing different governorates around the country, normally receive annual funding of YR10,000,000 (\$47,000) from the Ministry of Youth and Sports. Al-Yarimi says his club has not received its annual budget and does not have recourse to alternative funding in the form of sponsorships and private donations.

Security concerns have prevented clubs from travelling to play each other in their respective governorates, and many have had to suspend training and matches in their own governorates due to ongoing fighting.

Mohammad Haidan, head of the Football Federation in Aden governorate, says a number of clubs have had to suspend activities in the south because government security and protection around stadiums is not provided for.

In the southern governorates, Haidan says a number of events have been cancelled because Southern Movement protestors have disrupted matches by cutting off roads leading to the stadiums and preventing spectators and teams from arriving.

For Hussein Madhloum, a

40-year-old Southern Movement supporter, any sporting events that involve both northern and southern athletes are at odds with the spirit of the secessionist movement. "We want to suspend all activities with the north until we separate from them," he said.

Sports in Yemen have proven important for fostering consensus and a sense of national belonging, particularly after unification and the bloody civil war between north and south in 1994.

The YFA was originally established in North Yemen in 1962, becoming a member of the International Federation of Association Football (FIFA) in 1980, but only found its modern form in 1990 when South Yemen's league was incorporated following unification.

Thirty-two teams, 16 from northern governorates and 16 from the south, entered the first national championship in the 1990-91 season, and until the outbreak of civil war in 1994 the captaincy at every club would alternate between southerners and northerners for each match.

Mohammad Mukhtar, 22, plays for Hassan Football Club in Abyan governorate. He says he hasn't attended training since mid-January, and while financial difficulties have played a role he highlights the security situation across the country as the main interference.

"Traveling from Abyan to Sana'a or any other governorate is very difficult. We need money and protection and the club simply can't provide it," he said.

As a southerner, Mukhtar says he is especially concerned about travelling to the northern governorates for matches, but says he is usually surprised by the warm reception he and his teammates receive from the crowd.

"When we headed to Ibb gover-



A match during the 2013 season between Al-Ittihad club from lbb and Al-Yarmok from Sana'a.

norate to play a match against their Al-Ittihad football team, we used to expect hostility from the locals because of the current political situation," he said. "We thought we would be attacked, but they still gave us a respectful reception and left politics out of it."

Many in the YFA's general assembly welcomed the decision to suspend the league, only regretting it did not come sooner. Members complained of vagueness and indecisiveness when matches were postponed after Jan. 10, leaving clubs struggling to remain open when no funds were forthcoming, while monthly expenses for the YFA itself run in excess of YR3,000,000 (\$14,000).

Some players also welcomed the decision. Players at Al-Ittihad in Ibb, which has been struggling more than many other clubs in the country, by the end of January had not received their salaries for four months.

Players had nonetheless continued playing in anticipation of the government's annual budget, while their clubs appealed for emergency funding. Mohammad Abdulfattah, who plays for Al-Ittihad, is unhappy to be out of work but is relieved a decision was finally taken. "We love the club, we want to give it all we have, but no one can endure under these circumstances," he said.

The committee's decision was delayed following lengthy negotia-

tions with management at the various clubs, which now number 14 in addition to another 20 playing in the second division. The initial suspension in January was enforced by the committee without consulting the clubs, but a final decision was taken with the participation of all of the YFA's stakeholders.

Discussions of security concerns also included a proposal to hold all matches in designated governorates, according to Al-Rejal. Hodeida, Ibb and Taiz were suggested by committee members given the relative calm in their capital cities, but it was never approved by members of the general assembly and assumes the necessary funding will be acquired.



Prominent Nasserist Party member to the Yemen Times:

"We aim to protect the country from plunging into civil war"

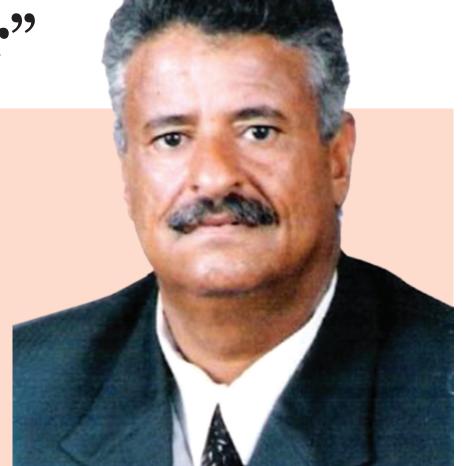
As the country slips into further turmoil, dialogue between political parties and armed groups has failed to provide any results. The Houthis control large swathes of the north of Yemen, and Abdu Rabu Mansour Hadi claims, from the southern port city of Aden, to be the legitimate president.

One of the groups involved in ongoing talks is the Nasserist Party, officially known as the Nasserist Unionist People's Organization. Although part of the Joint Meeting Parties (JMP), which is composed of seven parties including the Islah and Socialist parties, the Nasserist Party participates in the negotiations as its own entity.

In objection to conditions set by the Houthis, the Nasserist Party has twice withdrawn from negotiations and resumed participation. With Hadi's escape to Aden on Feb. 21, the talks saw further setbacks. Recently, Hadi called for negotiations to be held in Riyadh but the Houthis and the GPC refused the call and insisted on holding the talks in Sana'a.

Hatim Abu Hatim, a leading figure in the Nasserist Party and member of its Central Committee, spoke to the Yemen Times about how the talks are progressing and why the party has refused to take part on more than one occasion.

Abu Hatim was born in 1946 in Nehm district of Sana'a governorate. He studied aeronautical engineering in Russia and returned to Yemen in 1970, joining the Yemeni air force in Hodeida and becoming a member of the Nasserist Party at the same time. Now a retired general, Abu Hatim was a member of the Military and Security Working Group of the National Dialogue Conference (NDC).



Interview by **Bassam Al-Khameri**

The Nasserist Party has participated in the negotiations since the beginning but it withdrew several times and then resumed participation. Why? In the beginning, we participated in the negotiations like all other parties following the signature of the Peace and National Partnership Agreement on Sept. 21, 2014, after the Houthis gained control over Sana'a. But then we withdrew because of the Houthis' refusal to sign the security annex. We resumed negotiations after they signed the

The second time was when the Houthis mistreated the representative of the Nasserist Party, Abdullah Noman, during the negotiations because the Houthis insisted that the negotiations are based on the [Feb. 6] constitutional declaration. We didn't resume negotiations this time until President Abdu Rabu Mansour Hadi left Sana'a to Aden, because it was a move forward in the negotiations. Also, Jamal Benomar pledged that negotiations would not be dependent on the constitutional declaration.

The dialogue will be held in a secure place agreed upon by all parties and identified by Benomar and President Hadi.

Now, the foundations of the dialogue have changed completely and negotiations must be held in an appropriate place. [The Parties] should be serious in their efforts to find a way to better share power. The focus may be that the Houthis' withdraw the constitutional declaration and the steps taken after Sept. 21 and return the weapons looted from the state's military

"Holding negotiations in Sana'a is fruitless because talks can't occur in a place dominated by one party."

camps and start a real partnership this option. between all parties.

But will the Houthis agree to these conditions?

It's not known yet, but Benomar said he is in negotiations.

"If all parties don't abide by negotiations, we will continue to struggle peacefully until we achieve the aim of protecting Ye-

The Houthis have accused the Nasserist Party of withdrawing from negotiations to obstruct the dialogue, what is your response?

This is not true because we withdraw due to real reasons and I have mentioned these reasons earlier. Even when we withdrew, we wished that all parties would succeed in reaching an agreement out of the current standoff. The Nasserist Party always supports and calls for dialogue and we were the first to call for dialogue in Sa'ada governorate during the six rounds of war that erupted between the Houthis and the military during the rule of the former president, Ali Abdullah

Even when the negotiations reach a deadlock, we stop participation but continue calling for resolving the obstacles through dialogue and not violence. We aim to protect the country from plunging into civil

Did you support the call to hold talks in another governorate other than Sana'a?

Holding negotiations in Sana'a is fruitless because talks can't occur in a place dominated by a certain party. So we support holding negotiations either in Aden or Taiz but the Houthis and the GPC are rejecting

Hadi has recently called for the negotiations to be held in Riyadh. What is the Nasserist Party's stance on this?

As a last resort, we support holding the negotiations outside Yemen because there will be an appropriate ground for the sessions to be resumed under international supervision and guarantees. However, we prefer that all parties agree on a neutral place where all parties can attend and participate freely without any obstructions.

But do you think Riyadh is an appropriate place?

No, because the Houthis will not accept this because of their stance with Saudi Arabia. If negotiations were to be held outside Yemen, the Nasserist Party believes that the Arab League is the best place to host the talks because it is a neutral place that is accepted by all parties.

Have you suggested this? Yes, and there are many options provided by several parties participating in the negotiations.

You and the Islah Party are part of the Joint Meeting Parties (JMPs). Why do you participate in the dialogue individually?

Unfortunately the JMP is a federation that contains several parties but we participate individually. Even during the National Dialogue Conference we were represented individually and we deem this a failure on the part of the JMP. The parties [within the JMP] should consider this matter seriously in order to come up with a new vision to have a unified representative and say in national matters.

Is it a matter of disagreement between members of the JMP?

No, it's not. There is no disagreement within the JMP but I think the parties in the JMP are participating individually in order to put more pressure on those parties trying to obstruct the talks.

What are the most recent outcomes of the negotiations?

The last session [in which the party participated in] was held on Monday, March 2, but the dialogue is focused on resuming the rule of the state, evacuating the Houthi popular committees from the capital Sana'a and other cities, and enabling the state to perform its duties instead of establishing national or presidential councils.

representative to meet Hadi in Aden?

Yes. Abdullah Noman, the secretary general of the Nasserist Party, went to Aden and met with President Hadi along with several representatives of other parties.

Did they reach an agreement with Hadi?

They discussed a vision to establish a presidential council headed by President Hadi but he refused this proposal and insisted on being the legitimate president of the country and insisted on adherence to the Gulf Initiative. It's due to a lack of

Did the Nasserist Party send a trust [by Hadi for the Houthis] because President Hadi suffered unbearable oppression by the Houthis and has the right to refuse.

> What are the expected scenarios in Yemen, particularly after the departure of General Mahmoud Al-Subaihi, the acting defense minister, to Lahj? The departure of Al-Subaihi was another hit directed to the other concerned parties, including the Houthis and Saleh, because he will play an essential role in the operations room [referring to the military command Hadi established as supreme commander of the military]

that was established recently by President Hadi in Aden, and he will create changes in the military.

If the Houthis refuse negotiations outside Sana'a, will you suspend your participation again?

As I said earlier, the Nasserist Party hopes that the negotiations will succeed and the political parties will find a way out of the current standoff because Yemen can't afford more deterioration. If all parties don't abide by negotiations, we will continue to struggle peacefully until we achieve the aim of protecting Yemen.

ADVERTORIAL

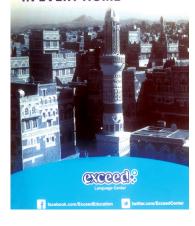
Exceed's Marketplace,

March 9 and 10, 2015

aughter is everywhere; people are having fun and enjoying their time. When you enter a huge institute like Exceed Language Center, the first thing you expect to encounter is serious faces and deep quietness, but this was not the case. You can feel the spirit of motivation consume the place, and that is what encouraged different companies to take part in Exceed's Marketplace.

All the companies that participated in the market clarified that they are looking for young costumers who are more open to new things and always excited to try new products. Mr. Tareq A. Sabeha, the Managing Director, and Mr. Peter J. Willems, the Academic Coordinator, were greeting both students and visitors

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and handing out Exceed's brochures. This point makes Exceed the right place for people who are searching for the best environment and quality for learning.

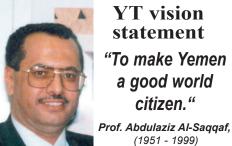
"We care about each person who really wants to learn English and our aim is to have an English speaker in every home. Due to the economic situation, we have reduced the price of our courses from \$130 to \$90 to help students learn. We always focus on quality here at Exceed. Our solid program features an integrated curriculum, ongoing professional teacher training and curriculum development. We also pay attention to the needs of our students. For example, our students have been doing a great job developing their speaking, reading and listening skills, but we noticed that students had difficulties developing their writing. Therefore, a few months ago we created Exceed's Writing Toolkit and it has proven to be successful. What really matters to us is how we can help students receive the best quality of learning," Mr. Willems said.

Participating companies, students and visitors were all satisfied and happy with the event and its outcomes. The companies think that such an event gives them a chance to showcase their products to a wider audience of younger people. In addition, Exceed provided numerous activities such as games, contests, and so forth. Some of Exceed's graduate level students were involved in organizing and carrying out some very exciting activities. Students said they had "a great time." "Thank you Exceed for giving us this opportunity," a student said.

Participants in event: MTN, Brothers, Al-Kaboos Group, NATCO, MAM, Mansour Al-Sofi, Mokka, Green Land, Ghamdhan Group, National Museum for Sciences



BUSINESS





OUR OPINION

Poised for a comeback

espite Hadi's declaration that he is the legitimate president of Yemen, the stickers and posters selling out on the streets of Sana'a are not of him. If the market has anything to say on the matter, our choices are now between Saleh's son Ahmed Ali and Abdulmalik Al-Houthi

The youth had the right idea in 2011, but the international community stepped in and granted Saleh immunity. To do otherwise, foreign officials claimed, would allow Saleh to take the country down with him.

The staunchest Saleh critics are marveling at his brilliance. Aligning himself with the Houthis to bring down Hadi, the country now awaits the inevitable stand-off between the former enemies turned friends-of-convenience. Whether Saleh is a political mastermind, or just taking advantage of opportunities as they present themselves, he's now hosting news conferences and re-writing history.

At a conference on Tuesday, he accused Hadi of destroying the country and told him it was time to leave.

"The people cannot afford to eat or drink, you have gobbled up their money, suspended their salaries, brought their livelihoods to a standstill, investment to a halt and tourism too," said Saleh.

That's rich, coming from the man who stole an estimated \$30 to 60 billion dollars from the country he ran for 33 years. This editorial isn't about Saleh being a hypocrite. No one needs an editor to tell them that.

It is a plea to the hundreds that marched to Ahmed Ali's home on Tuesday to reconsider their encouragement for him to run for election, and the many, many more who would vote yes.

The international community promised us stability if we went along with their transition plan. We didn't get it. Saleh and company are promising us stability if we bring them back to power.

Things are bad here, and it's difficult to talk about change and democracy when it becomes increasingly difficult to feed your family.

But we shouldn't accept the alternative. The alternative is orderly theft, torture at state prisons, instead of secret prisons (though Saleh has his fair share of secret prisons too), closure of papers through decrees and not direct takeovers. It's no alternative at all, really.

Yemen Times

Rocky road ahead for US-Egypt relations

Gregory Aftandilian

aljazeera.com First published March 10

gypt's strong stand against the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL), especially in the wake of the brutal killings of 21 Egyptian Coptic Christians by an ISIL-affiliate in Libya, and President Abdel Fattah Al-Sisi's call on Muslim religious figures to re-examine Islamic texts to bring them into the modern world as a hedge against their exploitation by extremist groups, have contributed to a more positive image of the Egyptian government within the halls of the US Congress.

Such sentiments will make it easier for the Obama administration to resume deliveries of some held-up military items, such as F-16 fighter jets. However, until the Sisi government eases up on human rights abuses, particularly of journalists, bloggers and secular opposition activists, relations will remain problematic despite this recent mending of fences.

When US Secretary of State John Kerry testified before Congress in late February about foreign policy budget issues, most of the questions and comments he received on Egypt had more to do with the hold-up of military items—with members complaining about it—rather than the efficacy of the annual \$1.5 billion aid package to Egypt that has been a source of contention over the past few years.

In response, Kerry said, "I believe it's important to for us to provide some of these items and I believe decisions will be forthcoming that will set out how we proceed forward to do that."

Critical partner

Earlier that month, Kerry held a joint news conference with visiting Egyptian Foreign Minister Sameh Shoukry where he called Egypt an "increasingly critical partner" in counter-terrorism efforts. Kerry also mentioned that Egypt is "working with us in the Sinai against terrorism."

With the US public taking a hostile position towards ISIL because of its brutality against US citizens and other nationals, it is not surprising that countries that have been on the receiving end of ISIL's violence and are in the anti-ISIL coalition (both of which apply to Egypt) have been seen in a more positive light not only by the American people but by Congress.

This, then, has given the Obama administration more room to maneuver to assist Egypt strategically and economically. Though no additional aid package is in the offing, Kerry is expected to attend the big investment conference that the Egyptian government is hosting in Sharm Al-Sheikh in mid-March which is expected to tout Egypt as a place to do business.

Although the conference is geared to the foreign private sector, having the US secretary of state in attendance (along with other foreign officials) gives Egypt's economic reforms, at least, the stamp of approval from Washington.

That said, Egypt's problematic human rights record continues to be a thorn in the side of more positive relations. Even when praising Egypt on Capitol Hill, Kerry expressed concern about the five-year sentence recently meted out to opposition blogger Alaa Abdel Fattah and the trial of some journalists. And in his joint press conference with Shoukry, Kerry referenced "some of the challenges" that Egypt faces as it moves "to the elections and the fulfillment of its promises about democracy." Meanwhile, prominent Republican Senator John McCain stated at the end of February that while Egypt has legitimate security concerns, which necessitate US support for its fight against terrorism and extremism, "there does not have to be a trade-off between democracy and security.'

McCain criticized the arrest of opposition activists and journalists as well as Egypt's new anti-terrorism law that would "institutionalize arbitrary detentions and place undue restrictions on civil society operations."

Political roadmap

Egypt's political roadmap has hit a pothole in that parliamentary elections, initially scheduled for March and April, have been postponed because of a Supreme Constitutional Court ruling that the election law concerning the drawing of voting districts was unconstitutional.

Sisi wanted to tout these elections as a sign of the country's democratic progress. In the face of the court's decision, he has charged a committee to redraft the election law with utmost haste.

Opinion

More importantly in terms of Egypt's image, Sisi, in early March, sacked his controversial interior minister, Mohammad Ibrahim, who has presided over a heavy-handed campaign not only against the Muslim Brotherhood but also against some journalists, bloggers, and secular oppositionists.

Sisi's decision to remove Ibrahim from his post may be firstly because the police have not been able to quell extremist violence in the Sinai and in mainland Egypt itself. But the decision may also have been made to mollify Egypt's secular intelligentsia, a key constituency, who has questioned the police killing of a secular female oppositionist and other police abuses, as well as the US and some EU countries which have continually raised the issue of human rights.

It remains to be seen whether the new interior minister will be any more tolerant of those expressing dissent than his predecessor. If not, relations between Washington and Cairo, while on the upswing in large part because of common security threats, will remain rocky.

Gregory Aftandilian is a former Middle East analyst at the US State Department and a former staff member of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee.

Scenarios For Libya going forward

Mohammed Eljarh

atlanticcouncil.org
First published March 10

s Libya's internationally recognized government in Tobruk and its rival self-declared Islamist government Tripoli resumed a new round of UN sponsored dialogue in Morocco that began on March 5, rival armed groups targeted each other with air strikes. Amid the ongoing turmoil, the Islamic State (ISIL) continues to expand its activities and control over Libyan territory. In the last few days, ISIL-linked militants attacked vital oil infrastructure in the Libyan desert and beheaded two kidnapped officers in the city of Derna. These are some of the immediate and obvious challenges facing the UN brokered dialogue initiative in Libya. In my previous article titled: Libva's Geneva Talks and the Search for Peace, I explored the challenges facing the Libyan dialogue, but also highlighted the positive indicators arising from the dialogue initiative.

The UN-brokered Geneva talks were a reaction to the escalating armed dispute resulting from Islamist and their Misratan allies' rejection of the June 2014 elections after suffering a devastating defeat at the ballot box. UN Special Envoy for Libya Bernardino Leon hopes the talks will lead to the formation of a unity government and agreement on a ceasefire mechanism that would result in armed groups withdrawing from towns and cities. The demobilization would eventually lead to disarmament and the rebuilding of Libya's military and police forces. Some Western countries have made the formation of unity government a precondition to the lifting of the arms embargo imposed on Libya, which Libya's internationally recognized government and its regional allies have fought to lift in order to fight terrorism in the country.

This pressure from the international community and the significant threat posed by ISIL in Libya could galvanize Libyan factions to reach a political settlement and pull Libya back from the brink, but it could also backfire. Libya's international

partners must understand that they will have to face up to some difficult choices in Libya if the dialogue fails. They should not promote the calls for unity and consensus to appease anti-democratic forces, but rather ensure the democratic process in Libya is maintained. The suggestion by some that Libya should embrace the dialogue in lieu of the democratic process would set a dangerous precedent in the future

Despite the positive start to the Geneva talks and the cautious optimism over the new round of dialogue in Morocco, deep distrust between the rival parties and ongoing clashes makes the outcome highly uncertain. Four possible scenarios could sway Libya along vastly different trajectories:

- 1. Instability and chaos prevail, resulting in the complete disintegration of the remaining Libyan institutions (including the Central Bank, National Oil Corporation, and the Investment Authority). The failure of a negotiated political settlement would threaten an unprecedented economic/financial crisis in Libya—where ordinary citizens would not have access to salaries, subsidized goods, or basic services—prompting a huge scale humanitarian crisis in Libya.
- 2. Regional or international intervention become more likely. Leading international actors dismiss any new intervention in Libya, insisting the only solution to Libya's crisis is political, but remarks from Egyptian, French, and Italian officials in recent months indicate that some regional actors may act unilaterally to combat the rising terrorist threat. This action could come in the form of targeted air strikes or ground peacekeeping troops in coordination with some Libyan entities on the ground.
- 3. Another scenario could see one of the warring sides in Libya make significant gains that lead to a decisive victory. This scenario has become more likely in recent months due to the significant improvement in capabilities and advances made by the Libyan National Army, led by General Khalifa Haftar,

and increased regional support. In this case, insurgency would plague Libya as defeated forces seek to undermine the victors through bombings and attacks on vital installations and institutions, posing a particular threat to the country's oil facilities.

4. The most hopeful scenario for Libya's current crisis would entail reaching a power-sharing agreement between the main stakeholders and forming a unity government. Such a scenario would lead to vital state institutions such as the Central Bank and National Oil Corporation becoming fully functional, which could in turn minimize the damage and erosion in Libya's financial and economic sectors, and put the Libyan government in a better position to tackle ISIL more effectively.

It is crucial that the United Nations Support Mission in Libya (UNSMIL) and Libyan powerbrokers capitalize on the positive achievements from the first two rounds of dialogue to ensure sustainability of the peace building process. These actors must:

- Localize security issues. Development of local leadership and ownership of security problems arising from nonstate actors linked to particular cities could prove effective. The locally elected municipal council in the city of Misrata would be the best-suited authority to handle disarmament of militias that originate from the city. Meanwhile, a unity government could oversee the wholesale reform of the security sector while working with local authorities to develop a cooperative relationship with local security structures. Democratically elected local municipal councils are best situated to respond to the needs of local communities throughout Libya. Capacity building, technical expertise, and support from international organizations should focus on local authorities, thus making them more effective, efficient, and capable.
- Take immediate action to avert or appeared on minimize the impending humanitarian MENASource Blog

crisis. UNSMIL and Libyan parties that have engaged in the dialogue would gain more credibility in the eyes of affected cities and populations through a swift response to the issue of internally and externally displaced populations.

- Encourage and maintain trust-building initiatives. Libyans participating in the dialogue could form a committee to facilitate prisoner swaps, manage support for internally displaced people, and coordinate local dialogues to resolve local concerns.
- Take measures to reduce competition over power and resources. In a coauthored report with Libya Senior Fellow for the Atlantic Council Karim Mezran, titled "The Case for New Federalism in Libya," we argue for a federalist system in which the executive branch handles foreign affairs and national security issues, while considerable legislative powers are devolved to the regions. Such a set-up would reinforce the previous recommendations, while supporting a vision for a unified Libya. It would require clear communication between the different levels of government to respond more effectively to the distinctive challenges of different segments of Libyan society and mitigate the risk of partitioning the country.

Libyan actors and their international partners must acknowledge that terrorist groups such as ISIL will waste no time in their efforts to expand control over Libyan territory. All of Libya's stakeholders must show genuine commitment to the fight against ISIL in order to be considered part of the solution to Libya's current crisis.

Mohamed Eljarh is a Nonresident Fellow with the Atlantic Council's Rafik Hariri Center for the Middle East and a regular contributor on Foreign Policy's Transitions blog.

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Supporters of Ahmed Saleh call on him to run for president

■ Ali Aboluhom

hundred protesters gathered in the capital's Al-Sabaeen Square in support of Ahmed Ali Saleh, the son of former President Ali Abdullah Saleh.

The protest was fairly small, protesters headed to Ahmed Saleh's will be our president," they chanted. ures from Taiz governorate.

planned for Friday, March 13. The n Tuesday a few former president and his son still garner considerable support among residents of Sana'a, and a pro-Saleh demonstration in November drew many thousands.

After demonstrating in Al-Sa-

but attendees said a bigger one is house in the nearby Hadda neighborhood. Speaking to the Yemen Times, many protesters outside his house called on Ahmed to return to Yemen and run for president.

The protesters lifted photos of Ahmed and chanted for him to "save Yemen" and lead the country. baeen Square, at noon Tuesday the "Peacefully or violently, Ahmed Ali

Ahmed previously served as head of the now-dissolved Republican Guard, and since early 2013 has been Yemen's ambassador to the UAE.

The protest came a day after Ahmed's father, the former president, gave a speech in Sana'a in the company of prominent tribal fig-

Rabu Mansour Hadi for the ongoing instability. He said that Hadi, who resigned as president on Jan. 22, should not have withdrawn his resignation because he has become unable to take responsibility for bringing the nation's opposing parties together.

Another protest was held Tues- from Taiz to Aden.

In his speech, Saleh blamed Abdu day, in Taiz city. Protesters opposing Ali Abdullah Saleh voiced their disagreement with his speech and called instead for people to support Hadi as the legitimate president of Yemen. To voice this support, a convoy of 20, which included parliamentarians, lawyers, journalists, academics, and activists, headed

Only a few hundred gathered outside Ahmed Ali Saleh's home in the capital's Hadda neighborhood. However, many protesters are convinced an upcoming protest planned for Friday will draw many thousands.



Naji Mohammad, 40, from lbb governorate, said, "We are fed up with poverty and the misconduct by current politicians. We need Ahmed Ali to come back from the UAE and reform what others have spoiled."



"No one deserves to be the president except for Ahmed Ali, he loves Yemen and loves the Yemeni people as his father taught him to love his country and how to be a good person," said Mohammad Motahar (right), 49, a resident of Sana'a.



Jameel Mohammed (left), 22, from Amran governorate, says "once Ahmed Ali left the military in 2012, the Yemeni army and security have been damaged and their loyalty deviated from the homeland to a few influential figures. We need **Ahmed Ali to reform** Yemen as he built the strong Republican Guard in the past."



"We came from Marib governor-Ahmed Ali to be our president. No one else can save Yemen like him," said Yahya Nasser (left), aged 37.



While photos, stickers and both Ali Abdullah Saleh and his son can be seen around Sana'a, vendors have told the Yemen Times previously that those bearing Ahmed's face have grown in popularity since Hadi fled to Aden.



As with previous protests in support of the former president and his son, there was a low turnout from women.



The majority of protesters carried photos and placards bearing the image of Ahmed Ali Saleh, rather than his father, and called on the son of the former president to "save Yemen."



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The true cost of media restrictions in Somalia

First published March 10

he dangers and pressures journalists face in Somalia undermine coverage of not only sensitive political stories but also important humanitarian issues.

Somalia is one of the most dangerous countries in the world to be a journalist, according to the Committee to Protect Journalists. Fifty-six have been killed there since 1992, five of them in 2014.

"Journalists are routinely threatened (whether anonymously via mobile phone or in person) over their reporting by a variety of actorsmainly but not exclusively from the Al-Shabab militants," said CPJ East Africa representative Tom Rhodes in an emailed response to questions.

"Media outlets are predominantly owned by non-journalists with their own political interests and that can jeopardize the safety of their staff. These factors contribute to a lack of genuinely independent media houses in the country, even in Mogadishu where a plethora of private radio stations and at least two newspapers exist."

"This wave of attacks on press freedom and a culture of impunity have forced journalists to impose self-censorship," said Mohamed Ibrahim, the secretary general of the National Union of Somali Journalists. "Unfortunately, there are some regions in Somalia such as Somaliland [a self-declared state] and the disputed regions in the north where there is no press freedom at all."

As well as the five journalists who were killed in Somalia last year, seven were injured, 47 were arrested and five media houses were attacked, according the Union's annual report.

According to Louise Tunbridge, program manager for Radio Ergo, which broadcasts humanitarian news in Somali to Somalia, condi-



Journalists covering an attack by Al-Shabab militants on the Somali Parliament in Mogadishu in May 2014.

tions for the station's contributors are "hugely restricting," even if they avoid the risks faced by political or generalist reporters.

"Travelling is dangerous, often impossible; getting people to talk is hard; communications are cut off or unreliable in many places; maneuvering between the powers-that-be demands resilience; we often find ourselves amazed by the fact that our stringers [freelance contributors] manage to get anything to us at all!" she told IRIN.

Reporting the humanitarian impact of Al-Shabab's draconian rule in areas under its control is especially difficult. The Islamist insurgency uses its own radio station, Andalus, and various websites to spread its propaganda messages. Few other journalists are able safely to operate

Radio Ergo producer Mohammed Hassan gave some examples: "Last week I assigned our reporter in Baidoa, to do a report about the blockaded district of Qansadhere, which faces severe food shortages; health facilities are a problem; the price of food has doubled, women are dying in maternity as they have not got any treatment, and the local

community started last week to cut trees to prepare an air strip which they think is the only way they can get aid to survive in this critical time. However, he said Al-Shabab had closed the phone network totally. He is trying to get information out but he can't.

"Also last week, the same stringer was trying to report on the lack of early childhood vaccinations in Wajid causing five killer diseases to spread. He said people fear to speak to us at all."

Hassan explained that Ergo's reporter in Bardere, which is under Al-Shabab control, "has a certain freedom to report, [but he] restricts his calls and his movements and always has to be wary, and keeps as low a profile as he can.'

Journalists trying to cover the government's military operations, backed by African Union forces, to counter Al-Shabab is equally fraught.

"The Somali security forces are generally very strict with journalists. It is dangerous when they report something about them," said Abdikarim Hussein, a journalist and youth activist based in Mogadishu. "Therefore journalists tend to shy

away from talking about key issues affecting the public for their own

The government and its security apparatus have recently reacted heavy-handedly to critical reports.

On March 1, a Mogadishu court ordered journalists from the privately owned Shabelle news network to pay fines of up to \$13,000 in addition to the eight months they had already spent in jail without charge. They were arrested in August last year when intelligence and security forces raided Shabelle's offices, shut down its two radio stations and arrested 19 people whom they accused of spreading disharmony among Mogadishu's clans.

In February 2013, Abdiaziz Abdi Nur, a freelance journalist, was sentenced to one year in prison by a Mogadishu court for interviewing a woman who claimed to have been raped by a member of the security forces. The woman was also sentenced to one year in prison for making false accusations against a government security agency.

The case came at a time when reports were circulating of sexual violence committed by men in government uniforms against women living in camps for internally displaced people. In the aftermath of the arrest of Abdiaziz and the alleged rape victim such reports dried up. Abdiaziz was released after serving four months following pressure from the international community and human rights groups.

Pressure against journalists is spreading to different administrations. The Media Association of Puntland—a semi-autonomous region in the north-accuse the authorities there of blocking five websites last October. "These websites are still closed. They had been banned following an order from Puntland Presidential Palace's communication office without any court ruling," said association head Faisal Khalif Barre.



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Aid agencies depend on a functioning press, according to Abdulhakim Shuriye, program manager with the Juba Development Organization.

"Our partnership with the local media is very vital during such critical times when the country is facing humanitarian crisis," said Abdulhakim Shuriye, program manager with the Juba Development Organization.

"They have direct relationship with the community and reach out to people we can not reach," he said.

"Journalists have an important role to play as Somalis recover from decades of conflict and tackle an ambitious agenda of state and peace building," Aleem Siddique, spokesperson for the UN mission in Somalia, told IRIN.

"A free press gives people access to the information they need to make critical choices in their lives," he said. "It raises awareness of issues affecting them, their families and their communities, and it helps

people to hold authorities to account for their actions."

Investigative reporting is becoming increasingly rare and that is having an impact on accountability of humanitarian operations, according to journalists in Mogadishu.

"We hear a lot of complaints from people whose aid was mishandled by government officials and security forces but we can not report such stories since it involves people in power," said a local journalist in Mogadishu, who asked to be identified only as Mohamed.

"The harassment starts when you ask for comments from the concerned institution. It is therefore better to keep quiet for our safety,' he said.

"Balanced coverage of these issues by the press represents one of the few means the Somali public can hold the government accountable,' Mohamed said.

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OPINION

The cognitive dissonance at the heart of American diplomacy

Husain Abdulla middleeasteye.net

ecretary of State John Kerry has certainly earned the right to speak before the Human Rights Council (HRC) in Geneva, Switzerland, As a US senator and now secretary of state, he has promoted human rights and the expansion of freedom in authoritarian nations. Therefore, when Secretary Kerry remarks, "When people in every corner of the globe are denied the rights that they deserve, the HRC must live up to the standards upon which it was created," it sends a strong and clear message about the resolve the US intends to exercise in its duties as a member of the HRC. When he touched down in the Saudi capital last Thursday less than three days after delivering this statement—he and the administration he represents sent another message—one that is weak, muddled and conflicting with the first.

After celebrating the "courage

and commitment" of each genera- nitive dissonance. The conflict be- that not only do they have zero re- need to balance our need to speak with Saudi Foreign Minister Saud the US to live up to its founding ideals," he met with a Saudi government that works to prevent its citizens from engaging in a similar process. After recognizing the "moral standard that summons" all participating member nations to the council, he embraced a government which has exempted itself from this standard time and time again. By failing to include needed human rights reforms alongside grave discussions about the Iranian nuclear program and the threat of the Islamic State (IS), Kerry unwittingly contradicted the US message to Geneva.

Of course, the government for which he speaks does not intend to send mixed messages. Rather, Kerry succumbs to the same ailment that has struck so many human rights-conscious diplomats and politicians attempting to maneuver within the US-Saudi alliance. In order to maintain the status quo visà-vis Riyadh, US policymakers at all levels wrestle with diplomatic cog-

in his HRC speech and the reforms that he did not include in his Riyadh itinerary is a clear source of tension within US policy circles.

In Geneva, Secretary Kerry said that "activists, journalists, community organizers, [and] critical thinkers" can combat the spread of violent ideologies by "showing people a way to express hopes and grievances peacefully." In Riyadh, he attended to a government that has sought to quash any trace of a critical civil society. Almost all the founding members of the Saudi Association for Civil and Political Rights, reformers calling for expanded freedoms and a transition to a constitutional monarchy, have been arrested and imprisoned. Human rights lawyer Waleed Abu Al-Khair, who founded the Monitor for Human Rights in Saudi Arabia, is serving a 15-year prison sentence. Political organization is forbidden. Tweets can lead to charges of treason.

In Geneva, Kerry also said, "Violent extremists have made it clear

zero regard for human life, period. In Riyadh, he visited the ranch of a monarch who, for decades, involved himself in overt and covert Saudi efforts to fund the radical groups that served as the forerunners of IS and Al-Qaeda. Standing beside his Saudi counterpart on Thursday, Kerry talked about disrupting extremist militants in Syria and related terror networks. It may have been discomfiting to acknowledge that many of the officials with whom he met in Riyadh were complicit in the spread of the ideology behind these networks.

When feelings of cognitive dissonance arise, people often work to rid the tension by bringing their beliefs more in line with their actions. Attempts to rationalize American diplomacy extend all the way to the office of the presidency. In January, when President Obama received criticism for meeting directly with King Salman after speaking strongly on the state of women's rights in India, he said: "Sometimes, we

tion of American citizens in pushing tween the values espoused by Kerry gard for human rights, they have to them about human rights issues Al-Faisal, Kerry stated that the with immediate concerns we have in terms of counter-terrorism or dealing with regional stability." While the above serves as an easy

explanation for inconsistent behavior, it can not replace the hard work that will secure long-term peace and security for all parties. Reshaping the alliance with the Saudi government is a difficult task, but one that-if undertaken-would fundamentally improve both counterterrorism capabilities as well as regional stability. US officials can press for human rights reforms alongside weapons shipments. They can publicly advocate for the release of political prisoners. They can demand an end to a guardianship system that turns women into second-class citizens. They can soberly address the Saudi government's role in exacerbating regional conflict, instead of treating it as an element of a bygone era. They can, simply, act upon the sincerity evident in Kerry's remarks to the HRC.

During a joint press conference

United States will remain as re solved as ever to pursue what we believe is in the interests of our country and with respect to universal rights and values." Such a declaration does not also have to be a contradiction.

The administration can start righting this dissonance, instead of rationalizing it away. It would do Secretary Kerry well to remember his commendable record in pushing for justice at home and abroad. In 1971, as a young man and a veteran, he sat before the Senate Foreign Relations Committee in the wake of the Vietnam War and pointedly asked: "Where are the leaders of our country?" He should add to the legacy he has built and fight to give Saudi men and women the freedom to publicly ask the same kinds of questions.

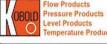
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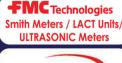


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