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SANA'A, March 25—Tens of thousands gathered in Al-Sabaeen Square in the capital Sana'a on Wednesday to attend a funeral procession for those killed in the March 20 attacks on the Badr and Al-Hashoush mosques. The suicide bombings left at least 137 dead and hundreds wounded. Hashem Sharaf Al-Deen, one of the procession organizers, said there were around 80 coffins in the procession and the rest of the deceased were already buried individually by their families. Inset: Among many notable attendees were Yahya Al-Houthi, the elder brother of leader Abdulmalik Al-Houthi, Mohammad Ali Al-Houthi, the head of the Revolutionary Committee, and Jalal Al-Rowaishan, acting minister of interior. Read more on page 6 Photos by Ali Aboluhom

Al-Subaihi captured and Lahj falls as **Houthis move on Aden**

■ Ali Ibrahim Al-Moshki

SANA'A, March 25-In coordination with armed forces loyal to former President Ali Abdullah Saleh, Houthi militants took control of Lahj governorate and captured a number of key opponents on Wednesday morning.

The group captured Brigadier Mahmoud Al-Subaihi, the former minister of defense who was leading troops loyal to Hadi in the south, and Faisal Rajab, commander of the pro-Hadi 119th Armored Brigade in Lahj's capital Al-Hawta.

The captures happened at 11 a.m. as the Houthis and their allies were combing Al-Hawta city, which they took control of shortly after the fall of Al-Anad Airbase that morning, said Naji Al-Arashi, chief-of-staff of the 201st Armored Brigade stationed in Al-Anad.

"By cooperating with the Houthis we have taken control over Al-Hawta city, Al-Anad base, and remaining districts in the governorate," he said, adding that the Houthis, aided by the army, intend to take over the remaining southern governorates as

Al-Subaihi was leading the counter-offensive against the Houthis in Lahj governorate. Following the Cabinet's resignation on Jan. 22, the Houthis appointed Al-Subaihi as acting minister of defense on Feb. 6. However, he fled Sana'a for Lahj on March 8, and headed towards Aden where he became President Hadi's de facto minister of defense.

A senior source within the brigade, speaking to the Yemen Times on condition of anonymity, said Special Security Forces (SSF) and Department for the two cities, which other units arrived on the outskirts border Al-Dhale governorate to the of Al-Anad base in the middle of the north. According to Houthi Politiabout 30 kilometers away.

night before advancing without resistance later in the morning.

According to Colonel Ali Oasim Muthana, deputy commander of Al-Anad airbase, "We contacted air force leadership in Sana'a and there was mediation between us and the Houthis, we agreed to hand over the entire base on condition that no one gets harmed."

"I allowed them to enter and deploy their men, and indeed that happened without any confrontation. If we had resisted, our soldiers and citizens would have been the victims," he said.

Forces from the 33rd Armored Brigade took control of the cities of Al-Habilain and Al-Malah and were joined by reinforcements, according to a source from the Operations cal Office member Mohammad Al-Bukhaiti, all of Lahj governorate is under the Houthis' control. He confirmed that Al-Subaihi and Rajab are in Houthi custody.

The Houthis announced a YR20 million (\$93,000) award for the capture of Hadi on the official state TV channel Al-Yemen, whose whereabouts remain unknown as of

Wednesday evening. Responding to claims that Hadi had fled the country, the head of national security, Major-General Ali Al-Ahmadi, claimed to Reuters Wednesday afternoon that he was with Hadi in the Presidential Palace. The Yemen Times was unable to

verify the authenticity of this claim. Abdurahman Anis, an Adenbased journalist, said that as of 5 p.m. Wednesday Aden was calm but the Houthis were stationed in Lahj









Protests continue in Taiz, governor resigns

Story by Fareed Al-Homaid Photo by **Ahlam Mohsen**

SANA'A, March 25-Tens of thousands of protesters gathered in Taiz city Wednesday, a day after ten protesters were reported killed in the governorate and another 83 injured.

The Ibn Sina Hospital, located near the SSF camp in Taiz city, made appeals for urgent blood donations as medics struggled to cope with growing numbers of injured protest-

According to local journalist Ahmed Al-Wafi, ten protesters were killed in the governorate on Tuesday. These figures were confirmed by Dr. Mubarak Al-Habashi of Ibn Sina Hospital on Wednesday, who said six of those killed were in Taiz city while the other four were brought to hospitals in Al-Turba city, 60 km south of the capital.

Akram Al-Jubaihi, a local journalist and eyewitness to the protests, said the victims were killed by armed Houthis wearing uniforms belonging to the Special Security Forces (SSF). "We know the real SSF soldiers, those confronting the protesters today are Houthis," he said.

Ali Al-Qahoom, a member of the Houthi Political Office in Sana'a, told the Yemen Times that security



A child protests in Taiz city on Wednesday as soldiers watch on.

forces reacted when protests turned violent, and he questioned reports that protesters were killed on Tues-

day.

"What is happening in Taiz is chaos instigated by the Islah Party.

"Tab supporters attacked the SSF camp and its soldiers fought back in self-defense," he said. "Islah is trying to provoke people in Taiz to go out to the streets and to attack security forces. They are lying about protesters being killed.'

Mass protests have been taking place in Taiz since Sunday, when Houthi militants said to be clothed in SSF uniforms entered the governorate. Protesters are demanding the militants remove their checkpoints and vacate the governorate.

Al-Jubaihi said Houthis remain in control of the SSF camp on Al-Howban Street in the center of the capital, in addition to Taiz International Airport at the northern entrance of the city.

Al-Turba has witnessed largescale protests against new checkpoints in the city, with protesters forcing the closure of a checkpoint and reportedly storming the security building there.

Taiz governor Shawqi Ahmed Hail resigned from his position on Tuesday. His press secretary, Sultan Mughalles, said on Wednesday the governor has no intention of returning. According to Mughalles,

the governor resigned following a meeting with members of the security committee and other political

leaders in Taiz. "As the head of the governorate's security committee [Hail] ordered SSF commander Ali Al-Harithi to remove newly established SSF checkpoints in Al-Turba and Al-Rahida cities," he said. "When the commander refused Hail's orders, the governor submitted his resignation.





Houthis warn against foreign military intervention

■ Khalid Al-Karimi

SANA'A, March 24—Abdu Rabu Mansour Hadi, considered the country's legitimate president by the international community, dispatched a letter on Tuesday to the UN Security Council asking for military intervention against the Houthis.

"A Security Council resolution should invite willing countries to immediately support Yemen's legitimate government by all means and measures, to protect Yemen and deter the Houthis' potential aggression at any time against Aden city," the letter reads.

The day prior, Hadi requested military intervention by the Peninsula Shield Force, the joint military force of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC), according to Riyadh Yasin, the foreign affairs minister.

The Houthis have warned against military intervention in Yemen. Mohammad Al-Bukhaiti, a member of the Houthi Political Office, told the Yemen Times that Hadi's call for foreign military intervention tells of his intention to drive the country into civil war.

"If he was a real president, he would not seek the support of foreign military forces to crush his

people. His call for foreign military intervention is a conspiracy against Yemen and proves Hadi is a traitor," said Al-Bukhaiti.

Mohammad Abdulsalam, the official spokesperson for the Houthi group, said in a phone interview Monday with the Beirut-based, Hezbollah-affiliated Al-Manar TV channel that military intervention by Saudi Arabia in Yemen's affairs would amount to repeating the Libyan scenario through supporting terrorist groups in the south.

"If Saudi Arabia wages a war on Yemen, it will open a door to war that it can not control. Just leave us alone and we will solve our problems ourselves," Abdulsalam said.

On Monday, in response to Hadi's call for military assistance, Prince Saud Al-Faisal, Saudi Arabia's foreign minister, said in a press conference that his country would "take necessary measures if needed" to protect Yemen's sover-

Hadi's call for foreign military intervention came following the Houthis' control over Taiz Sunday, March 22, and subsequent expansion south toward Aden.

According to Al-Bukhaiti, Houthi fighters have been fighting Al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP) in Al-Baida, a northern governorate, and did not previously plan to move south. AQAP's presence and the latest violence made it imperative for them to expand, he claimed, adding that "any Saudi military intervention in Yemen will not be for the good of Saudi Arabia."

Iran has been repeatedly accused of backing the Houthis, but the degree of cooperation between the two parties remains unclear. When asked if military intervention by Saudi Arabia would lead the Houthis to seek Iran's military support, Al-Bukhaiti said, "The Yemeni people are able to confront the challenges and defend themselves without the support of any country."

Abdulmalik Al-Fuhaidi, the editor-in-chief of Al-Motamar Net, the mouthpiece of the General People's Congress (GPC), criticized Hadi's call for foreign military intervention.

"It is shameful that Hadi begs for support from foreign powers. Regardless of their different affiliations, Yemenis will reject any interference because it will bring more problems than solutions," said Al-Fuhaidi. The head of the GPC, former President Ali Abdullah Saleh, is widely viewed as being allied with the Houthis.

Unlike Al-Fuhaidi, Nasser Al-Khubaji, a Southern Movement leader, said military intervention by the Peninsula Shield Force is acceptable as long as it is to defend the south. "Though we may have differences with President Hadi, we think it is not wrong to request military support to protect our land," he said.

The UN Security Council (UNSC) emphasized Hadi's legitimacy on March 22, calling on all parties and member states to "refrain from external interference which seeks to foment conflict and instability and instead to support the political transition." As of Wednesday evening, the UNSC had yet to comment on Hadi's letter.

Abdulsalam Mohammad, head of the Sana'a-based think tank Abad Center for Strategic Studies, said the potential military intervention by the UNSC and the GCC would be limited to imposing nofly zone areas and logistical sup-

"Direct military intervention would be costly and I do not expect it to happen. Stopping the influx of weapons to Yemen and freezing former President Saleh's assets would be better than direct military intervention," said Moham-

Houthis request public donations for war effort

BUSINESS FOR PEACE

AWARD

■ Ali Ibrahim Al-Moshki

SANA'A, March 24-The Houthi Revolutionary Committee announced Monday it was taking donations via an account opened with the Credit Cooperative & Agricultural Bank (CAC) in Yemen.

The call for donations comes as part of the group's general mobilization for war, announced earlier on Saturday.

Revolutionary Committee member Muhammad Al-Maqaleh said it is "a duty of all Yemenis inside and outside the country to stand

by the Revolutionary Committee and the army in their struggle against Al-Qaeda and other enemies.

Mohammad Al-Bukhaiti, a member of the Houthi Political Office in Sana'a, said citizens should be expected to contribute "either in money or manpower" whenever the state is faced with internal and external threats.

He said the account is open to

donations from individual Yemeni citizens, but that "donations from other governments are a private matter and have nothing to do with the CAC bank account.'

Al-Bukhaiti added that personal donations are but one means to raising funds, and that state revenues from taxation, natural resources and the public treasury will all be pooled in the effort. "The

> Revolutionary Committee has the right to use any of these funds in support of the general mobilization," he

Mubarak

Al-Obadi, a member of the Islah Party's Media Department, said the opening of the account indicates that Houthis are expecting a protracted war.

"It will be a disaster," he said. "Citizens won't be able to contribute under our current economic difficulties, so the Houthis will have to support their mobilization campaign through a public treasury that is already half-empty."

Houthis reject Doha peace talks

■ Ali Ibrahim Al-Moshki

SANA'A, March 24—Calls for national peace talks to resume in the Qatari capital Doha were rejected by Houthi representatives on Tuesday, while militias and military units loyal to the group continue their push south towards Aden.

Muhammad Al-Bukhaiti, a spokesperson for the Houthi Political Office, said Qatar represents one of the group's "worst enemies" and that the location for continued dialogue can only be decided by those participating in it.

"[UN Special Envoy] Jamal Benomar and the UN are in no position to decide where talks are held, only those engaged in discussions are entitled to do so," he said, adding that Benomar should have made suggestions to relocate the talks when they were still being held in the capital Sana'a.

The Houthis are adamant that any dialogue will resume in Sana'a and that regional powers should "stay out of Yemen's internal affairs," said Al-Bukhaiti.

"The problem is not primarily where the dialogue takes place, it is a matter of its participants and other foreign powers trying to derail the talks and create conflict in Yemen for as long as possible," he added.

Benomar's office confirmed the special envoy's desire for talks to be held in Doha and that any agreement reached is to be signed in the Saudi capital Riyadh. His proposal has been submitted to UN Security Council members, who have endorsed the plan.

On March 5 the Saudi government accepted an earlier proposal for talks to be held in their capital, a plan that fell through following opposition from Houthis and members of the General People's Congress (GPC).

Peace talks struggled to resume following the Houthis' constitutional declaration on Feb. 6, which dissolved government and effectively formalized the group's takeover. Talks were marred by disagreement and saw Nasserist and Islah delegates withdrawing, until Benomar agreed to relocate the dialogue.

Adnana Al-Audaini, deputy head of the Islah Party's Media Department, said his party would continue the dialogue outside of Yemen. "The situation here is very dangerous and war will break out unless we return to talks and contain the crisis," he

Mohammad Al-Sabri, a Nasserist Party member who participated in previous rounds of talks, told the Yemen Times Tuesday that his party is not interested in where talks are held so long as they resume outside of the capital Sana'a. "Any dialogue in Sana'a [which came under Houthi control on Sept. 21, 2014] will happen under coercion and fear of the Houthis," he said.

"Benomar is not coordinating his efforts, he is merely making phone calls and announcements to waste time," he added. "He is allowing the Houthis to bring Yemen under their control and destroy whatever state authority still remains, at which point there will no longer be a state to have any dialogue for.'



INVITATION TO TENDER FOR SUPPLY AND DELEIVER OF HYGIENE MATERIAL KITS FOR ALMAZRAO CAMP1 IN HARADH DISTRICT HAJAH GOVERNORATE

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Ceasefire in Marib ends clashes between tribesmen and Houthis

■ Bassam Al-Khameri

SANA'A, March 25-Fighting between Marib tribesmen and Houthi militias backed by security forces in the Qania area of Marib governorate came to an end on Tuesday after the parties reached a ceasefire agreement.

Sheikh Mohammed Bohaibeh, a prominent member of the Murad tribe in Marib, said the agreement was reached following discussions between sheikhs Yasser Al-Awadhi and Hussein Hazib and Houthi representatives based in Marib and neighboring Al-Baida governorate.

"The truce took effect early Wednesday and both parties have kept to the agreement, there have been no further clashes," he told the Yemen Times on Wednesday afternoon.

Mohammed Al-Jedasi, a journalist based in Marib, confirmed fighting had stopped and said negotiations would continue between the sides until a formal agreement is reached.

Fighting between the groups began in Qania on March 19 when Houthi militants, backed by forces from the 26th Mechanized Brigade, entered the area ostensibly in pursuit of Al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP). They sought to



Fighting previously broke out between Houthis and Marib tribesmen on March 19 in Marib, near the border of Al-Baida.

da from Marib as a security mea-

Houthis had previously signed an agreement with Marib tribesmen on Nov. 25 following clashes in the northern Marib district of Al-Jidan, and have been fighting AQAP-affiliated militants in the Al-Zahir district of Al-Baida that are said to be entering the governorate intention to enter Marib, we are from Marib.

"There is no deadline for the ceasefire, which will remain in place until an agreement is reached between both sides," said Walid Al-

close off roads leading into Al-Bai- Dailami, a Houthi popular committee leader in the Rada'a district of

> Mohammad Al-Bukhaiti, a member of the Houthi Political Office in Sana'a, said his group are keen to avoid bloodshed and to reach agreement with other parties whenever possible.

> "Ansar Allah [Houthis] have no only in pursuit of Al-Qaeda fighters, we do not attack areas needlessly,' he said, adding that clashes will not resume unless the other party breaches the ceasefire agreement.



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Fatima Al-Selwi to the Yemen Times:

"Yemeni women have great abilities"

Yemen has for long ranked poorly in gender equality. The Global Gender Gap Report, released annually by the World Economic Forum, has repeatedly ranked Yemen dead last. Despite this, Fatima Al-Selwi, the businesswomen office director at the Chamber of Commerce and Industry in Sana'a's Capital Secretariat, is optimistic things are chang-

The chamber, which serves as "the union of the private sector," as she puts it, "gives women a chance to be under the umbrella of an organized sector." The chamber's mission is to strengthen the role of the private sector in improving economic development and bettering the national economy.

Speaking about women in the economy, Al-Selwi says she is confident that Yemeni businesswomen are playing an important role and their contribution is not inferior to men's. As the businesswomen office director for the chamber, Al-Selwi coordinates training, certification, and the participation of Yemeni businesswomen in conferences inside the country and abroad. She also offers consultation to businesswomen.

Al-Selwi was born in Taiz governorate and received her bachelors in business management in Sana'a. She has worked in the Chamber of Commerce and Industry for five years and was promoted to her current position in

The Yemen Times spoke to Al-Selwi about the role she believes Yemeni businesswomen are playing in the economy, how the current instability impacts their role, and why-despite the current situation and Yemen's poor gender equality-she remains steadfast in her optimism.



It is often said that Yemeni women are marginalized. How do you evaluate women's economic role in Yemen?

Yemeni women are playing a pioneering role in the economic situation of the country. Women, either employed in rural or urban areas, are shouldering a big responsibility, not less than men. The Yemeni woman is running the domestic affairs of the house in the absence or presence of her partner. Moreover, the Yemeni woman has grown stronger and become part of the labor market. Today, Yemeni businesswomen are working in various fields, including service-related sectors such as education, health, trade, among others. women's current role is greater than it used to be. Women's jobs used to be confined only to household affairs, but nowadays they have made major strides in different walks of

How does the volatile situation affect the economy in general and Yemeni businesswomen in particular?

The current political situation has negatively affected the status of the national economy. There are worries, and financial capitals are receiving blows because of the insecurity. Some businesses have stopped and others have been relocated. Yemeni businesswomen are not separated from this, and thus they have felt the consequences. Their businesses are small and their capitals are not that large. So, all of them can not resist such hard times. The bottom line is that stability and prosperity are inseparable.

As the businesswomen office director in the Chamber of Commerce and Industry, what assistance are you offering Yemeni businesswomen?

The Chamber of Commerce and Industry is considered the union of the private sector. The chamber gives Yemeni businesswomen a chance to be under the umbrella of an organized sector. If a businesswoman encounters a problem with some concerned authorities like customs and taxation, we take action and step in, considering that the busi-

businesswomen with legal advice. In order for businessmen or businesswomen to embark on export and import businesses, the foreign parties make sure that the businesswoman or businessman is registered with the chamber. Therefore, having membership in the chamber is one's identity for business. We are offering Yemeni businesswomen rehabilitation, training, workshops and symposiums. Also, we select Yemeni businesswomen to take part in foreign conferences.

Which businesses are Yemeni businesswomen more likely to initiate, or prefer to launch?

The Yemeni businesswoman has come to the forefront particularly in Thus, Yemeni women have great service businesses such as schools. universities, pharmacies, hospitals and contracting. Yemeni businesswomen have become present in all aspects. Yemeni businesswomen have also been running industrial businesses such as making incense, perfume and accessories.

How many Yemeni businesswomen are registered in the Chamber of Commerce and Industry?

I would like to clarify that no authority gives businesswomen or businessmen their title [of businessperson] except the chamber. Some mistakenly think that only those with handsome capitals can register in the chamber. We do care about nascent entrepreneurs more than more established ones. The former needs care and support in order to be able to compete and flourish. So, I want to say that the presence of businesswomen in the chamber gives strength to her business. Until the end of last year, the number of registered Yemeni businesswomen reached 352. Also, other businesswomen have been registered since the beginning of this year.

Do you think Yemeni businesswomen have been able to compete against Yemeni businessmen, or even outdo them in some ways?

The Yemeni businesswoman is a What do you hope to see change competitor, but she is not stronger in Yemen? than the Yemeni businessman. I I hope that Yemen becomes a stable

nesswoman is registered with the than the men's. Also, cultural valchamber. We also provide Yemeni ues and a patriarchal society have been among the major obstacles facing the Yemen businesswoman. The chamber is trying to make businesswomen connected to businessmen through different activities like conferences and workshops. There are some Yemeni businesswomen who have proven a shining example of woman's positive role. It is not necessary that businesswomen compete with businessmen. The process should be interdependent.

In your view, how are women different than men when it comes to work responsibilities?

I think women are more diligent than men. I am not alone in saying this. Actual studies have proven that. abilities and can reach decisionmaking positions. Yemeni women have been taking on a big position in society, and have been able to overcome difficulties.

Do you think Yemen's national economy can keep afloat without foreign aid and grants?

Generally speaking, Yemen has lots of natural resources such as tourism, oil, fishery and human resources. If these resources are appropriately exploited, the country's economy will improve. For the time being, the country is still in need of foreign aid, and this will continue unless we see financial and administrative re-

What do you want to say to Yemeni businesswomen?

My advice to Yemeni women, whether a businesswoman, a housewife, or employee, is to start up their own businesses. Business begins with an idea. If she has a business idea, she can turn it into a project. There are many places that can help Yemeni women and the youth turn their ideas into real businesses. I also urge Yemeni businesswomen who work in their relatives' shadow to go ahead and make a name for themselves. Being part of the Chamber of Commerce and Industry helps businesswomen get their voices heard.

think women's capitals are smaller and secure country, and I hope that

to defuse and resolve the crisis the country is undergoing. I hope that Yemeni people really cherish their

is happening today results from peoples' unreal love for the nation. Everyone should work diligently

Yemenis can work hand-in-hand homeland. In my opinion, what regardless of her or his position in order to establish development. If this materializes, our situation will change for the better.









More than 15,000 Beneficiaries from Family Planning **Education Sessions in Seven Governorates**

unded by Yamaan Foundation for Health & Social Development (the German Government Support through the German Development Bank -KfW). National Foundation for Development and Human Rights (NFDHR) concluded the first phase of the health education session program. The program aims to educate people about reproductive health and family planning issues as well as STDs. During the first phase, a total of 790 sessions were conducted in seven governorates (Sana)a district, Sana>a, Taiz, Aden, Hajah, and Mahaweet)

Mr. Tariq Abdulmoula, NFDHR Project Coordinator, reported that during the first phase, the program reached more than 15,000 beneficiaries, most of whom men and women on reproductive age. He also indicated that a group of specialists in reproductive health reached people in universities, organizations, associations and mosques as well as in

He also stated that they already started the second phase in March and will last until May 2015 targeting seven governorates including Hadramout, Aden, Lahij, Abyan, Dhamar, Hodeidah, and Amran. A total of 1400 session will be conducted by the end of the project reaching a total of 28,000 beneficiaries.

Dr. Jamal Badr, BCC Manager at Yamaan Foundation, stressed on the urgent need to raise people awareness of family planning indicating that BCC activities are great technique to reach people and change misconception of family planning. «At Yamaan, we put a lot of effort and invest a lot of resources on BCC activities because it important to



convenes people of the benefit and the importance of family planning» he said.

Dr. Naseam Alhaobani, one of the specialists on reproductive health in Taiz, was thrilled to see women enthusiasm during the sessions and their eager to learn more about family planning. Additionally, she noticed a significant change on respondents concepts of reproductive health issues including family planning and STDs.

One female beneficiary, Abeer Alkhohali from Hajah, expressed her support to family planning and birth spacing pointing out to the benefit it adds to individuals families and communities. Abeer is a mother of two and has been using birth control pills for two years, «My husband and I chose to use the pill after consulting a doctor, my life is better as I can concentrate on my kids and my health» she said.







YT vision statement "To make Yemen a good world citizen."

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



OUR OPINION

A nightmare worse than Libya

oday there is an estimated 320,000 combatants spread across 11 factions in Yemen and all are preparing for war. The majority of these combatants are young people between the ages of 15 and 24. They are under-fed, underequipped, and under-trained youngsters who have little knowledge of where this is heading, but what they do know is that there is violence coming down the road. In such a situation, their AK-47 is going to be their best friend and potential life saver, which they can not afford to let go silent in the near future.

These 11 factions are spread across the country and most have their geographic strongholds. The expected meeting point is the Taiz-Aden-Al-Baida triangle, with spillovers in every city across the country. The conflict is likely to be protracted given the incapacity of any party to declare a quick victory, and the human cost may be unprecedented. This is indeed a serious and frightening scenario for Yemen, considering that these factions are still actively recruiting and the war propaganda machine is in full swing. Today's situation was rather difficult to imagine just a year ago.

Another worrying development is the alliances forming among these factions in preparation for war. The first camp includes the Houthis, Saleh, and Iran, as well as a wide following in tribal regions and within the military. The second camp is Hadi, supported by some followers of the Southern Movement (Hirak), southern tribes, and to a limited extent among military personnel. The third camp is a consortium of extremist radical organizations such as AQAP and Islamic State, with the latter claiming responsibility for the murderous bombings in Sana'a last week. The protracted conflict is likely to benefit these radical organizations the most, as they thrive in situations of lawlessness and exploit emerging sectarian tensions among Yemenis.

Unfortunately, Hadi, although backed by the GCC and receiving vague verbal support from the international community, can not effectively deter the Houthi-Saleh camp from advancing their military campaign. His survival and legitimacy is highly dependent on his capacity to exert his influence and show confidence in his civil and military institutions, institutions which themselves are being taken over by southern popular committees and extremist groups.

As head of state, Hadi needs to reinforce his institutions, not undermine them. His popular committees should not be seen as a faction like the other ten. They need to show a degree of organizational sophistication which even a new uniform can bring as an identity of legitimacy, which is a basic tactic any crisis administration should consider. This stands to show that Hadi's crisis administration is on the borderline between nonexistent and archaic, particularly considering the size of the challenge the country is facing. It is not all hopeless yet, but it may be in a matter of days.

Yemen Times

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Yemen over the edge

Martin Reardon

aljazeera.com First published March 24

p until a week ago, there was a slim margin of hope that Yemen might somehow avoid civil war, and that there was a political solution to the ongoing power struggle between President Abdu Rabu Mansour Hadi, its democratically elected leader, and the Houthi rebels. It certainly wasn't from a lack of trying, with Hadi himself, the United Nations and the Gulf States all pushing hard to get the Houthis to the negotiating

The Houthis, members of the Zaydi branch of Shia Islam, shocked the world last September when they seized the capital city of Sana'a and brought the Hadi government to its knees. They forced the prime minister to resign, and then refused to accept Hadi's first choice to replace him. Things didn't get much better after that.

Following months of stalemate and government gridlock, the Houthis placed Hadi, along with other key members of his cabinet, under house arrest in January. Hadi offered his resignation in protest, which Parliament was wise to reject. Last month, Hadi made his escape and fled to Aden, where he has since reclaimed his presidency in what is now his de facto capital.

Behind the scenes

Working behind the scenes during the Hadi-Houthi standoff was Ali Abdullah Saleh, Yemen's former president, who was forced

to step down in 2012 following months of violent protests that swept the country in the wake of the Arab Spring. Saleh, himself a Zaydi Shia Muslim, fought a series of wars against the Houthis when he was president, but is now squarely on their side—or at least determined to use them as he makes his political comeback.

Earlier this month, in fact, he called for Hadi to resign and go into exile. That would conveniently open the door for either Saleh's return, or more likely the rise to power of his son, Ahmad Ali Abdullah, former head of the elite Republican Guard, which Hadi disbanded when he became president.

By late last week, events took a turn for the worse, and as happens all too often during tense standoffs where neither side is willing to talk to the other, the unintended consequences of seemingly isolated actions led to a violent escalation of events that have put Yemen over the edge. Or maybe they weren't unintended after all. Last Thursday, military forces loyal to Saleh attempted to take over Aden's international airport, only to be repulsed by forces loyal to Hadi. More than a dozen soldiers from both sides were killed in the fighting. That was quickly followed up by airstrikes targeting Hadi's palace in Aden, presumably in fighter aircraft flown by Saleh loyalists. Hadi was not at the palace at the time, and the airstrikes did little if any damage. But the initial shots by both sides had been fired, battle lines drawn and the chances for a political solution greatly diminished. But last Friday's horrific twin suicide bombings during noon prayers at the Al-Hashoush and Badr Mosques in Sana'a, used mainly by the Houthis, may have ended whatever chance there was for a peaceful resolution. Of note, just as quickly as the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) claimed responsibility for the bombings through a Yemen affiliate, which if true, marks their first such attacks in the country, Al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula, also known as AQAP, distanced themselves from it with a vehement denial through social media.

AQAP tactics

However, the way in which the attacks were carried out-four suicide bombers hitting the two mosques in near simultaneous fashion-suggests a significant degree of target selection, pre-attack planning and detailed coordination that are associated more with the tactics of AQAP than ISIL. And that brings up the very real and sobering prospect that some hardline factions within AQAP may have switched allegiance to ISIL, a trend that is becomingly increasingly more common with longtime Al-Qaeda affiliates. If that's the case, and given ISIL's absolute hatred of the Shia, the mosque attacks may very well have ignited a sectarian conflict the likes of which have not previously been seen in Yemen. Think Syria and Iraq.

The Houthis have since called for a general mobilization of forces to fight the Hadi government. Backed by armored forces loyal to Saleh, they took control of Taiz, Yemen's third largest city, on Sunday, and are now less than 140 kilometers from Aden as they close in on Hadi. With neither side willing to talk, civil war is inevitable. The big questions now are: How and when does

it end? And who stands to benefit most?

AQAP appears to be in position to gain the most from the turmoil in Yemen, and has wasted no time in exploiting it. While the Houthis and Saleh loyalists battle it out with Hadi's forces in the south, AQAP has gone on the offensive against both. Better to fight an enemy divided than an enemy united. Last week, AQAP also attacked and took brief control of the town of Al-Hawta, only 30 kilometers from Al-Anad airbase, where US special operations forces were training Yemeni counterterrorism units to fight them. The attack on Al-Hawta, along with the rapidly deteriorating security situation in Yemen, led the United States to pull those forces out of the country on Sunday.

For now, AQAP, considered by many counterterrorism experts to be the most dangerous terrorist organization in the world in terms of capability and intent to carry out transnational attacks, appears to have much freer reign to operate in Yemen. That doesn't bode well for Yemen, the Gulf region or the West, because no matter who wins in the end-Hadi, Saleh or the Houthis-AQAP will still be there. But they'll be bigger, stronger and better. And in all likelihood, so will ISIL. Not much of

Martin Reardon is a senior vice president with The Soufan Group, a New Yorkbased strategic security and intelligence consultancy, and senior director of Qatar International Academy for Security Studies. He is a 21-year veteran of the FBI, and specialized in counterterrorism opera-

Analysis

Kuwaiti activists targeted under GCC security pact

Madawi Al-Rasheed

al-monitor.com First published March 20

Saudi-backed Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) Internal Security Pact signed by Saudi Arabia, Qatar, Oman, Bahrain, the United Arab Emirates and Kuwait is now in full swing. It has truly ushered a new era of Pax Saudiana across the Gulf. The agreement was proposed in 1982 but remained under discussion until all GCC countries accepted its terms. The last country to ratify the pact was Kuwait. Ironically, the first casualties of this controversial agreement that took almost three decades to be ratified are Kuwaiti activists. Since January, at least three Kuwaiti opposition figures, social media activists and heads of political movements have been detained at the request of the Saudi authorities. Meant to enhance security for economic development and stability of GCC countries, the pact has now tuned into creating cross-border controls, evacuating the Arab Gulf of dissent and eliminating safe havens for dissidents of one country in another one.

The first casualty was Hakim Al-Mutairi, an Islamist graduate in religious studies at Birmingham University and founder of the Umma Party in 2008, a Salafist transnational movement seeking political change by elections. His party aspires to create a Muslim society, implement Sharia and free the Gulf from the presence of foreign troops. Although the party remained unlicensed in Kuwait, it was tolerated up to a certain extent. In several books, Mutairi-who belongs to a large tribe in both Saudi Arabia and Kuwaitcritically scrutinized the texts of Saudi Salafists, reprimanding them for rejecting elections and pluralism. He warned in "Liberty or Deluge," one of his most popular books, of the perils of the subjugation of religion by kings and princes, restrictions on freedoms and criminalization of opposition. In another book, he offered a reinterpretation of Gulf history, depicting the kingdom and emirates as foreign creations serving the interests of an ongoing colonialism. He described Gulf citizens as "slaves without chains."

Mutairi's ideas and activism echoed

across the Gulf. In 2011, and under the euphoria of the Arab uprisings, a group of professors, activists and lawyers announced the formation of a Saudi Umma party. Needless to say all founders were immediately imprisoned. The spokesman of the party, Muhammad Al-Mufrih, was outside Saudi Arabia at the time and continued to issue statements from Istanbul where he took refuge and passed away in 2014. In December 2014, in an interview with TV station Al-Shorouk, Mutairi accused Saudi Arabia of poisoning Al-Mufrih. When he returned to Kuwait, he found that the Saudi authorities had filed a case against him, and thanks to the GCC Internal Security Pact the Kuwaiti authorities detained him. He was released on bail after paying a large sum.

On March 15, Tariq Al-Mutairi, a Kuwaiti opposition activist and head of the Civil Democratic Movement, was detained also at the request of the Saudi foreign ministry, according to the Kuwaiti Ministry of Interior.

According to his lawyer, the charges include "acts of aggression against a foreign ·i.e., Saudi Arabia the reputation of Kuwait, openly calling for overthrowing the regime and misusing his phone." Tariq's and Hakim's recent activism in participating in a demonstration in support of famous Kuwaiti opposition figure Musallam Al-Barrak, currently serving a two-year prison sentence, must have angered the Kuwaiti government. Tariq created a Twitter hashtag to free Barrak and more than 2,000 Kuwaitis ioined the demonstration.

In addition to honoring the emir's persona as someone beyond criticism, Kuwaitis must also respect the Saudi king, and refrain from any critical tweets that undermine him and many other sacrosanct personas across the Gulf. Mohammed Al-Ajmi, a famous Twitter activist known as Abu Asm was also detained simply because he tweeted a statement interpreted as disrespectful of Saudi King Abdullah Bin Abdul-Aziz when the latter passed away on Jan. 23. Abo Asm declared on Twitter: "I can not mourn any Gulf leader, this is my sentiment, but at the moment of death, I do not rejoice, I keep quiet." His detention angered his followers who launched more hashtags calling for his release.

Kuwaiti civil society is one of the most vibrant in the Gulf, hence its early rejection of the GCC Internal Security Pact, which was interpreted as yet another attempt to silence dissent in their own country. Many Kuwaiti activists resented Saudi hegemony, which the pact is meant to strengthen not only in the small emirate but the other ones, too. It is evident now that criticizing Saudi Arabia is taboo, the violation of which definitely leads to perhaps several years in prison. Kuwaiti apprehensions were not unfounded but they couldn't do much about the treaty that was ratified by their Parliament. Several opposition groups boycotted the elections that eventually produced a docile body.

On the other side of the border, there was no debate or controversy related to the pact as Saudis are completely disenfranchised. The only consultative council they have is appointed by the king and has no power to discuss security pacts with the GCC or other countries.

Pax Saudiana is definitely being felt across the Arabian Peninsula with the exing the grip of its wealthy neighbor to the north. This Saudi hegemony comes with a heavy burden, mainly silencing opposition and interfering in the freedoms in countries such as Kuwait, which is politically more vigorous and developed than "Big Brother, known in Arabic as "Big Sister.

However, there is more to the recent detentions at the request of Saudi Arabia than simply freedom of speech. Regardless of their ideological affiliations, all the detainees belong to tribes that have historically lived between Saudi Arabia and Kuwait. Also all the detainees have gone beyond their Bedouin way of life to acquire education, political visions and determination to be part of states established when they were lacking skills. The governments of most GCC countries prefer the tribal Bedouin population to remain as part of folklore. Their ancient tents, camels and coffee pots are a reminder of a pure Arabian heritage, lost under the pressure of globalization, foreign labor populations and the ethnic diversity of the coastal states. So Gulf leaders, including the Kuwaitis and Saudis, prefer the Bed-

ouin to be in the museum and the folklore heritage festivals rather than in public squares, demonstrating against corruption and calling for true citizenship.

The Saudi regimes disenfranchised the tribes, whose solidarities are now fragmented and less likely to stage rebellions along the ones that the Saudi leadership had to deal with in the 1920s and 1930s. But Saudi Arabia more than Kuwait knows well that the tribe remains a potential space for mobilization and solidarities as the regime itself played this game under the guise of Islamizing the tribes of Arabia. The tribes themselves contributed to the creation of the realm that later on disenfranchised them. So, Saudi Arabia fears the simple names of those Kuwaiti detainees who have cousins across the border inside Saudi Arabia itself. The kingdom the tribes had created could not tolerate them later on, simply because they are depicted as independent, disloyal and even blasphemous. With the exception of their military spirit that was used by the founder of the kingdom to expand his realm, the tribes lagged behind in edukingdom in 1932.

Today, not only Saudi Arabia but also Kuwait have to manage a different citizen, namely the "tribal moderns" who speak the language of human rights, freedom of speech, civil society, accountability, anti-corruption, elections and democracy. Such slogans are written on placards, chanted in demonstrations in Kuwait and virtually circulated in Saudi Arabia, as demonstrations are banned.

The tribal moderns may endorse Islamism, or liberal democracy, but the fact of the matter remains constant. From the perspective of regimes, they are a dangerous bunch, simply because if they invoke tribal solidarities, they may be heeded by their fellow cousins, both imaginary and

No doubt, activists in Kuwait and other GCC countries will fall under the heavy weight of a pact designed above all to control, monitor and punish dissidents. The GCC itself may not move from cooperation to unification in the near future but it has certainly become yet another mechanism to silence peaceful and legitimate opposition across borders.

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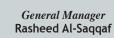
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6 Report 26 March, 2015

The spectre of sectarianism in Yemen



A funeral procession was held Wednesday morning for the victims of the March 20 mosque bombings.

Story and photos by **Ali Aboluhom**

shraq Mohammed says she would be grateful if her 11-year-old son had been among the hundreds killed and wounded last Friday, on March 20, when suicide bombers attacked the Badr and Al-Hashoush mosques in the capital Sana'a.

Killing at least 137 and injuring scores more, it was the worst terrorist attack Sana'a has ever seen. Targeting mosques frequented by Shia Houthis, including a failed attack on a mosque in the group's heartland of Sa'ada, the bombings were also marked by their apparent sectarian motivations.

Mohammed claims her son is upset, too, for not being martyred with those who died that day. It is all part of a mindset that has become increasingly common in Yemeni society but is not homegrown, says Mohammad Saleh Othman, a Sunni imam who preaches at Al-Hasaba mosque in the capital.

Othman points to the influence of Saudi Wahhabism, a movement

started by Mohammad Abdalwahab in the nineteenth century but only began taking root in Yemen in the 1980s, finding formal representation in Yemen's Islah Party.

"One of the pillars of this doctrine is Jihad against disbelievers and those siding with them," says Othman, who argues the notion may be inherent to Islam but "is not a binding principle" for the moderate Zaydi and Shafi muslims who make up the majority of Yemenis.

This began to change with growing immigration to Saudi Arabia, he thinks, where Yemeni children were exposed to Islamic teaching that put a new emphasis on particular interpretations of Jihad. "When they came home they brought those hardline beliefs with them, and introduced them into Yemeni society," he said. "Wahhabis even think Muslims with different readings of their shared religion need to be fought against."

These differences have nonetheless had little impact on Yemeni society until very recently, the imam believes. With growing conflict and the violence that accompanies it,

however, differences become crystallised and take on new importance. Ishraq Mohammed and her son's wish for martyrdom is a product of

this process, he says.

Long a symbol of coexistence within Yemeni society, with little thought given to who is attending or preaching at a given mosque, many feel Friday prayers in Sana'a have become a means to differentiate who belongs to what sect.

This change was set in motion as soon as Houthis took over the capital in September 2014, says Mohammed Abdal Moghni Al-Hadi, a graduate of Al-Eman University, an Islamic institution established by the well-known Sheikh Abdulmajeed Al-Zandani, who was formerly a spiritual advisor to Osama Bin Laden.

"Yemenis have lived with different beliefs for centuries, but sectarian conflict is emerging as a reaction to Houthi attempts to impose their beliefs on Sunnis by force. Others react in the same way, and it leads to a cycle of violence," he said, adding that the deadly mosque bombings are a result of this sectarianism.

For Al-Hadi, a sign of things to come was first evident when Houthis displaced Sunnis from Dammaj district in Sana'a months before entering the capital. "Where one chose to pray used to be a matter of convenience, they used to attend whatever mosque was closest to them, but after Dammaj people began to be more selective and it has only gotten worse since Houthis took control of the capital."

It is still unknown who was behind the deadly mosque bombings. A Yemeni branch of Islamic State, which considers Shia Muslims heretics, claimed responsibility for the attacks on Friday, although the claim has not been verified and precisely who Islamic State in Yemen consists of remains unclear. Al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP) have denied involvement, citing directions from its leadership to avoid attacks on mosques and other public gatherings.

In a statement released by his office in Aden, Abdu Rabu Mansour Hadi said, "[Shia] extremism, represented by the armed Houthi militia, and Sunni extremism, represented by Al-Qaeda, are two sides of the same coin, who do not wish good and stability for Yemen and its people."

However amicable relations between different religious sects have been in Yemen over the long-term, it is not the first time fears of sectarian conflict have surfaced. Sunni-Shia tensions were thought to have reached new levels in 2010 following suicide attacks by AQAP on Houthis marking Ghadir Dar, a Shia event, in northern Al-Jawf governorate. Twenty-five died in those attacks, for which AQAP later claimed responsibility in a statement titled "Operations to defend Sunnis."

In July 2013, clashes broke out between attendees at Al-Taiseer Mosque in the capital Sana'a following allegations the traditionally Sunni mosque was being overrun by Shia Houthis. Fighting erupted after the latter mounted opposition

For Al-Hadi, a sign of things come was first evident when ammaj district in Sana'a months efore entering the capital. "Where to Taraweeh prayers—extended nighttime prayers held by Sunnis during Ramadan—being held at the mosque, which they consider herefore entering the capital."

It would appear that Houthis have escalated these minor disputes since establishing control of the capital, but it is not always clear who sparks such confrontations and which actions should be treated as reactionary or sectarian in nature. It remains the case that most if not all mosques are open to Muslims of any persuasion. Prominent Houthi imam Al-Mortada Al-Mahatwari died in Friday's mosque attacks, and video footage shows attendees chanting the Houthi slogan at the time the attacker detonated his explosives, but it remains unknown if Sunnis were among the dead and how many were present during the explosion.

Hassan Al-Haifi, an independent political analyst, believes sectarian tensions are not a driving force for conflict in the country, but are being stoked by external actors. "The attacks on the mosques were meant to create the impression of sectarian conflict, which is something that works in the Saudis' interests," he said. "The planning, financing, and equipment came from outside."

Mohammed Al-Qis, 22, Sunni who lives in Moseek neighborhood of Shoub district in Sana'a. said attacks on sociated with Houthis are a bid to frighten those associated not only with the political movement of the Houthis but all Zaydi Shias in the country. He says he is deterthe attackers, whoever may be behind them, to drive a wedge in his society.

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"I will continue praying at Shiadominated mosques to send a message to the terrorists that we are not afraid. We believe in our doctrine and want to perform our ritual in our own local mosques" Al-Qis said.

While there are many citizens like Al-Qis determined to resist sectarian divisions, it has become more difficult as a result of overt distinctions being made at various mosques, largely as a result of Houthi campaigns to redecorate once-neutral mosques with colors and slogans associated with the movement.

However opposed to sectarian distinctions citizens like Al-Qis may be, attending one mosque or another often sends a public message of one's allegiance, especially if it is painted green and adorned with Houthi slogans and banners. Many, like 34-year-old Senan Masowd, now choose to avoid public displays altogether.

"I personally do not go to mosques associated with any sect, I'd rather pray at home these days. I don't want to become involved in these trivial disputes. We are all Muslims, what is the point?"





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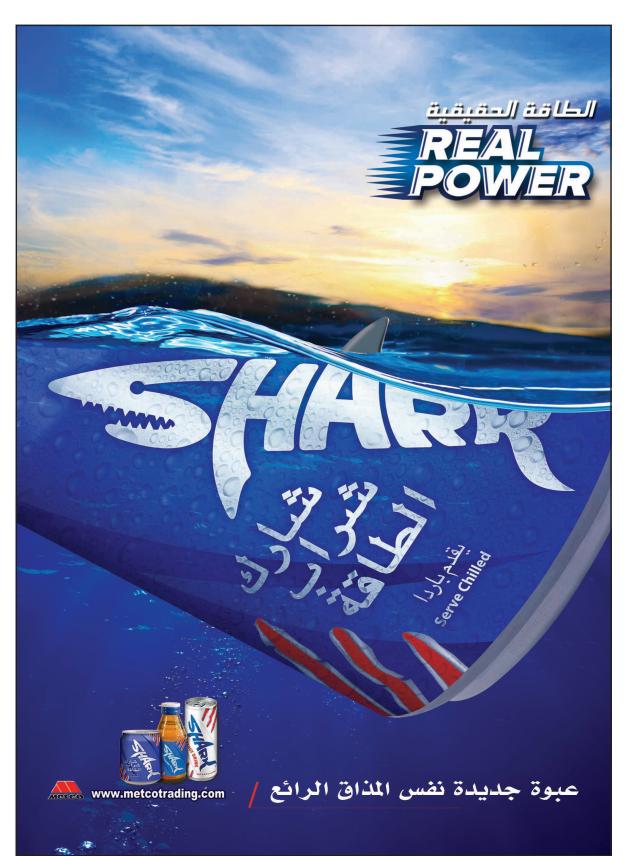
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As Yemen crumbles, civilians brace for the worst



Protests against the Houthi takeover of the city of Taiz in Yemen on March 23, 2015.



Almigdad Mojalli

First published March 24

bdu Hasan Dabwan is not willing to let it happen again. Twice before, the 54-yearold says, he waited too long, refusing to flee in the hope that the tensions in his home country would not tip over into chaos. Twice he was wrong.

The first time was 1994. Four short years after North and South Yemen had unified, the initial oprimism had faded and a civil war broke out in which president Ali Abdullah Saleh brutally crushed the southern leadership. Trapped in their houses, the Dabwans were forced to watch the three-months of carnage play out around them.

The second time was in 2011 when a wave of popular protests against Saleh began. While he eventually stepped down to be replaced by his deputy Abdu Rabu Mansour Hadi, it was not before months of intermittent clashes.

"We had terrible experiences [before] when we waited until the war broke out [and] were besieged for many days. Some of our neighbors were killed, and we [had to abandon] much of our furniture and property."

So, like many Yemenis, as the country looms ever closer to civil war again, Dabwan is packing his bags and leaving the capital, in his case for his birthplace in Taiz gov-

Others feel obliged to stay. Sami Ali, 27, has ordered his family to leave Sana'a as he expects a fullblown civil war, but can't afford to leave his government job. "I sent them today in the morning because I do not want to wait till I hear the gunshot [that kills them]," he said. "I stayed here because of my job."

A recurring theme

Once again, Saleh is not far from the chaos. The former leader never quite accepted his loss of status and has allied with his erstwhile

the country-to try to reclaim control of Yemen. Houthi forces have seized Sana'a and other northern cities and look set to try to take to the south. Hadi escaped to the Red

foes the Houthis—a Zaydi Shia

Muslim group from the north of

Sea port city of Aden, where his Presidential Palace has been bombed-allegedly by forces loyal to the Houthis. The United Nations envoy to the country has warned that the country is on the

"edge of a civil war." Calls for calm are falling on deaf ears. In an aggressive speech on Sunday night seen by many as a declaration of war, Houthi leader Abdulmalik Al-Houthi lambasted Saudi Arabia and other Gulf countries, accusing them of undermining Yemen's security in league with the United States and Israel. He rejected all calls for political

Gulf States to intervene militarily. "This is the closest Yemen has been to a full on civil war in some time. Fighting is currently taking place on multiple fronts, while tensions between rival governments in Aden and Sana'a has never been higher," said Adam Baron, a Yemen expert and visiting fellow at the European Council on Foreign Relations (ECFR)

dialogue. Hadi has since called on

"There is still some possibility of some deal to prevent war-the fact is, some sort of consensus agreement remains in all parties' interests as no one faction is likely to be able to able to decisively establish hegemony over the country. That being said, the distrust between factions runs deep and it would likely be difficult for anyone to take a step back at this point while still saving face."

Protest and preparation

There was an eerie silence in Sana'a on Tuesday as residents staved in their houses. Some streets, normally bustling, were almost deserted. In some areas, men piled into shops-grabbing as much food and water as they could, packing them into cars and heading home.

"When the Houthis entered and dominated Sana'a [in September] I came and bought YR220,000 (\$1,000) of food, and now I am coming to buy more because no one knows what will happen tomorrow," Hussein Nasser Ahmed, 45, said.

Ahmed Al-Werafi, 38, said he is responsible for 28 relatives, but doesn't have enough money to get food for them all in the event of a lockdown. "We trust in Allah, yes we fear the potential war but we have no money to buy food, so we can do nothing but to wait and see what will happen," he said.



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Despite some frantic shoppers, business is generally slow. Ameen

Al-Ma'amari, a food wholesal-

er, explained that his sales had

dropped 50 percent this year since

the Houthis took over-partly be-

cause many companies and diplo-

matic missions have fled the city.

Protests in Taiz

The latest front for the conflict is the southern city of Taiz, where Houthi forces have seized the airport. In response, thousands of people have taken to the streets to protest, leading to violent repression. On Tuesday four people were allegedly killed when Houthi forces opened fire on protesters.

Saeed Dabwan, 56, from Taiz, was one of thousands on the streets and he said he would never accept domination by the northern Houthis. "Taiz is [a] city of flowers, civilization and education and we can not accept the reactionary forces at all," he said.

An official security source in Taiz told IRIN that the city's police and army had rejected the arrival of the Houthi forces. The source said a meeting had been held to discuss how to expel the Houthis. "The meeting stressed the necessity of not taking any instructions from [Sana'a] unless they are confirmed by directions from Taiz governor," he said.

Adding to humanitarian toll

The violence is likely to increase suffering in the Yemen, the Arab world's poorest country. Over half of the country's 24 million population lack access to safe water and sanitation, while ten million do not have regular, reliable access to

Nasser Al-Jamali, 48, a day laborer, said he had only worked for 13 days in the past six months and has been forced to move his family from Sana'a to save money. "I do not know what to do or where to go. Even the merchants and businessmen complain [of] the miserable situation. People stopped building and companies dismissed many of their staff, so who will hire us?"

Jameel Al-Yafe'e, 34, said he had cut his daily laboring rates in half but still could not find work. "No one to hire us because companies have left the country and no roads [are being] paved, no buildings 3 built. Even the farmers cannot find 🕱 diesel to irrigate lands and, therefore to hire us."

"The humanitarian situation in Yemen is still dire—a civil war will only make things worse, deepening an already acute crisis," Baron

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