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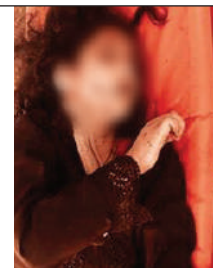
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President and Cabinet members remain under house arrest for sake of "security"

■ Ali Ibrahim Al-Moshki

SANA'A, Jan. 26—President Abdu Rabu Mansour Hadi and members of his technocratic Cabinet, all of whom resigned last Thursday, remain under house arrest by Houthi popular committees.

A source with the Houthi Political Office talked to the Yemen Times on condition of anonymity, saying that members of the group and its popular committees have not been authorized to comment on the current situation.

"Rumors that only some Cabinet members are under surveillance are not accurate—in fact, all of them are being kept under house arrest, for several reasons," he said, referring to reports that only seven ministers were being restricted by the group.

Those identified by news outlets include the minister of defense, General Mahmoud Ahmad Al-Subahi, the minister of oil and minerals, Mohammad Abdullah Bin Nabhan, the minister of transportation, Bader Mohammad Baselmah, the minister of justice, Khalid Omar Bajunaid, the minister of legal affairs, Mohammad Ahmad Al-Mekhlafi, and the minister of general health and population, Riyadh Yasin.

Cabinet members are letting the country "collapse" and want to "avoid doing their job," the source alleged. "They may even leave the country, which will prevent us from finding a solution," he said, adding that others were under secret surveillance in addition to those being publicly watched.

He also claimed Cabinet members are under surveillance for their own protection, citing concerns that anti-Houthi groups may wish to assassinate members of government and lay blame with the Houthis.

The source added that, as far as the Houthis and its popular committees are concerned, President Hadi and all Cabinet members remain in government until their resignations have been accepted by parliament.

The Yemen Times visited the homes of Minister Al-Subahi, on October 14 Street in Al-Sabaen district, Minister Yasin, in the neighborhood of Faj Attan, and Minister



A Houthi source said that all ministers are under surveillance for their own safety and to keep them from travelling abroad.

Al-Mekhlafi, in Al-Sunainah area. At least ten armed Houthis and three vehicles with mounted machine guns were found at each residence, in addition to others stationed along roads leading to the ministers' compounds.

Asked why ministers were being kept under surveillance, a Houthi guard at Al-Mekhlafi's house, who refused to give his name, said he was acting on orders from the group's leader, Abdulmalik Al-Houthi.

"The ministers are not to be harmed, we are supposed to watch over them and prevent them from travelling," he said. "They know everything about their respective ministries, they could steal anything and simply run off to another country."

The head of the security department in the Ministry of Defense, Jamal Al-Geiz, said officials from the ministry visited Minister Subahi on Sunday morning and reported he was in good health.

President Hadi has been under house arrest since Jan. 19. Abdulkhaleq Al-Ubadi, a personal guard for the president, confirmed on Jan. 25 that his house on Al-Siteen Street remained surrounded by armed Houthis.

"The President's house came under Houthi control on Wednesday, and since then the popular committees have been in charge of protecting the house and keeping an eye on any visitors," he said.

"Prominent figures including tribal leaders, businessmen, and staff from international embassies had mediated for the release of President Hadi, but he refused to leave his house after his own security had gone and his protection was in the hands of popular committee members," according to Al-Ubadi.

The resignation of President Hadi and his Cabinet members on Thursday has created a constitutional void, leaving government and public institutions in limbo.

While civil service employees report that work is continuing as normal, Al-Geiz told the Yemen Times that many within the Ministry of Defense are not reporting to their offices, while those present are too pre-occupied with the current situation to perform their tasks normally.

Shafi Al-Mamari, an employee in the Ministry of Higher Education, said many employees are taking advantage of the minister's absence by not showing up or otherwise neglecting their work.

The current crisis began when armed Houthis took control of President Hadi's house and the Presidential Palace on Tuesday last week. The president, along with Prime Minister Bahah and all members of Cabinet have since offered to resign. A response from parliament is still being awaited after a parliamentary session on Sunday was postponed.

Anti-Houthi protestors assaulted and arrested

■ Ali Ibrahim Al-Moshki

SANA'A, Jan. 26—Student protests on Monday morning took a violent turn in Sana'a, with protesters reporting arrests and violent attacks that involved daggers and batons.

"There is a laceration in my hand because of the violence I was subjected to near Al-Qadisiyya roundabout. I was assaulted with batons and daggers, along with dozens of other protesters," said Walid Al-Ammari, a well-known youth activist in his mid-twenties, who joined Monday's demonstrations.

Protests took place near Sana'a University, Al-Qadisiyya roundabout, the Old University in Sana'a, and Change Square. They were organized by students through social media and can not be affiliated with a single organization or political party, according to Al-Ammari.

During the protests anti-Houthi slogans were shouted and banners demanding freedom were held. "The Houthis are a Nazi group that does not believe in people's right to live," read one of the banners.

Several protesters told the Yemen Times on Monday that the armed men responsible for the assaults wore civilian and military clothing. "They fired bullets in the air and attacked the protesters with daggers and batons," said Saqid Al-Radai, another protester who studies at Sana'a University's Department of Trade.

"Armed men wearing civilian clothes joined us in the morning," remembers Al-Ammari. "Initially we thought they were also protesters, but half an hour later they started beating us."

Al-Radai accuses the Houthis of carrying out the attacks, and claims to have seen Houthi stickers plastered on the weapons carried by the armed men.

Salah Al-Azi, a high-ranking Houthi who is based in Sa'ada and works within the movements' media sector, told the Yemen Times that a group of people affiliated with the Houthis attacked the protesters on Monday, emphasizing that none of them had received orders from the group's leadership to do so.



A Houthi rebel brandishes a blade toward Yemeni protesters at an anti-Houthi demonstration in Sana'a.

"Young people affiliated with the Houthis went to Sana'a University to stage a protest there, demanding the implementation of the Peace and National Partnership Agreement. They were surprised by the presence of other protesters, voicing their opposition against the Houthis. The two groups quarreled with each other, using their fists and daggers," he said.

Protesters on Monday did not only report physical assaults, but also a number of arrests.

Abdullah Bin Abdullah Yahya Al-Hasmani, who studies engineering at Sana'a University and joined Monday's demonstrations, estimates that around 12 protesters, including students, professors, and activists, were arrested in and around Al-Dairi Street. The exact number of arrested protesters remained unknown as of Monday evening. However, a number of protesters echoed Al-Hasmani's estimate.

Al-Ammari said that the whereabouts of protesters that were arrested on Monday remain unknown.

Monday's demonstrations were preceded by similar protests on Sunday, which also expressed anti-Houthi sentiments. Many incidents of peaceful protesters being assaulted and arrested were also reported on Sunday.

"On Sunday afternoon we held a sit-in in front of the Jedairi police station on Al-Dairi Street until 15 protesters were released, including two females," said Al-Ammari,

who assumes that the protesters who were arrested on Monday are being held at the same police station.

Al-Azi asserted that he has no information about the arrest of any youth on Monday. On Sunday, he claimed, soldiers from the Sana'a Security Department arrested 15 young protesters and took them to the Al-Jedairi Police Station because their protests annoyed people. "I made some phone calls to the police station and had the youth released," he added.

Abdulrahman Barman, a lawyer who works with the Organization for Defending Human Rights and Freedoms (HOOD), condemned Houthi attacks on protesters. "This is a crime against the freedom of expression and against freedoms in general, we strongly condemn those brutal acts."

Barman also blames local security forces for the arrest of protesters, especially the Capital Secretariat's security department, which supervises the Al-Jedairi police station where protesters were being held.

The Capital Secretariat's security chief could be reached but only called journalists "troublemakers" and declined any further comment.

Al-Ammari told the Yemen Times on Monday that anti-Houthi protests will continue in the following days. Barman also expects that "this will become a major popular uprising against the Houthis—one which will be successful."

Tensions mount in Aden as three killed in clashes

■ Bassam Al-Khameri

SANA'A, Jan. 25—Tensions remain high in Aden governorate following the resignation of President Abdu Rabu Mansour Hadi and the Cabinet on Thursday.

Clashes broke out early on Sunday between Southern Movement popular committees and the government's Special Security Forces, leaving three soldiers killed and four wounded on both sides, according to local sources.

Mohammed Herhaj, commander of popular committees in the Salah Al-Deen area of western Aden, told the Yemen Times the clashes took place Sunday morning between the popular committees and the Special Security Forces in the Crater district of Aden.

"Three soldiers were killed and three others wounded. A popular committee member was injured as well," he said. "Clashes broke out when the popular committees established a checkpoint in the district and the soldiers demanded it be removed."

Colonel Mohammed Mosaed of the Aden Security Department told the Yemen Times that security forces intervened and resolved the matter. "There is nothing now and the situation is stable in Aden, but some parties try to exaggerate the matter in order to cause disorder in



At Aden International Airport on Friday activists raised the flag of the former South Yemen.

Aden governorate," he claimed.

Mosaed did not provide any information on the numbers killed or injured, but Khaled Mansour, a resident in Crater district and an eyewitness to the clashes, confirmed the number of casualties given by Herhaj.

"Security officials usually deny the existence of clashes and casualties because they want to portray the situation in Aden as being stable, but it's not," said Mansour.

The Special Security Forces are run directly by the Interior Ministry in the capital Sana'a. However,

following the resignation of Cabinet members last week, orders are being received from the forces' national commander, General Abdul Razak Al-Marwani.

Activists raised the flag of Southern Yemen at Aden International Airport in a show of defiance on Friday. The move followed an announcement on Thursday evening by Brigadier Nasser Al-Nuba, a founder and prominent member of the Southern Movement, declaring the secession of South Yemen and its division into two autonomous regions, Aden and Hadramout.

Armed men from the governorates of Abyan and Lahj arrived in Aden later on Thursday to back the popular committees there, offering security in the governorate following the violence in Sana'a.

"The popular committees, in coordination with the governor, are protecting public institutions in the governorate," according to Herhaj.

The Supreme Security Committee in Aden, which is headed by Governor Abdulaziz Bin Habtoor and responsible for issuing decrees related to security issues in the governorate, also released a statement on Thursday. The committee called on all military and security units in Aden, Lahj and Abyan to recognize orders only from the governors of those three governorates and the commander of the 4th Military Region, which includes Aden, Abyan, Lahj, Al-Dhale and Taiz governorates, and is headed by General Nasser Abdu Rabu Al-Taheri.

"The committee calls on local residents, political powers and civil society organizations to assist in ensuring public security and safety," the statement read.

In response to the violence in Sana'a on Jan. 20, which the committee deemed a "coup," the committee closed all entrances to Aden governorate, including Aden International Airport and Aden Harbor.

The airport and harbor were reopened Thursday, and remained open as of Monday afternoon, according to the reception department at the airport.

Radfan Al-Dubais, a spokesperson for Southern Movement protesters at Al-Arood Square in Aden

city, said the popular committees represent all southerners and are working for the good of the south.

"These committees are composed of southerners only and the Southern Movement is part of these committees. We all support these committees," he said.

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Dozens killed in two days of clashes in Rada'a

Story and photo by
Ali Ibrahim Al-Moshki

SANA'A, JAN. 25—At least 14 people were killed on Sunday night in the Rada'a district of Al-Baida governorate in clashes between Houthis and tribesmen backed by Al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP).

On Sunday night, eight armed Houthis were killed and one was injured in an ambush on a Houthi patrol vehicle set up by tribesmen in Hummat Sarar village of Qaifa area, Rada'a district.

Ahmad Al-Leqahi, a resident in Hummat Sarar, told the Yemen Times that the attack on Houthis Sunday night triggered an hour-long fight during which at least six more men were killed: Four tribesmen from the area and two Houthis.

Walid Al-Dailami, a Houthi commander in Rada'a city, agreed with Al-Leqahi's version of events and said that "more than ten" Houthis

were killed on Sunday.

On Saturday, the fighting broke out between AQAP-backed tribesmen and Houthis in the Dar Al-Najd area of Rada'a city.

Mohammad Saleh Al-Qaifi, a resident in Dar Al-Najd who identifies as politically neutral, said the clashes started at noon on Saturday and lasted until midnight. According to him, over 200 residents fled the area and at least five houses were destroyed.

According to Al-Qaifi, at noon on Saturday Mohammad Al-Hattam, from the Hattam tribe in Dar Al-Najd village, killed a prominent Houthi sheikh in the village named Mohammad Al-Ashi along with five other Houthis. Subsequently, the Houthis killed Al-Hattam.

The Houthis then raided dozens of homes causing further clashes to break out. They killed three tribesmen in Dar Al-Najd.

Al-Qaifi said the situation is tense because of the armed Houthis deployed around the village. Dar Al-

Najd is located in the northeastern entrance of Rada'a city, which fell under the Houthis' control on Oct. 17.

Houthis are breaking into peoples' homes daily, Al-Qaifi said, and are pursuing young men under the allegation they belong to AQAP.

Mohammad Ali Al-Masudi, a tribal fighter in Dar Al-Najd village, said the Houthis are blackmailing the residents and harassing them with constant inspections. "We hold the Special Security Forces command fully responsible regarding everything that happened because of their participation with the Houthis' raids in their campaigns," he told the Yemen Times. "We have caused the Houthis major losses, currently we are stationed on the mountains that overlook the area."

Al-Masudi claimed that armored vehicles and patrol cars belonging to the Special Security Forces were used to support the Houthis during the clashes.

Majid Alawi, a member in the

Special Security Forces positioned nearby the Dar Al-Najd area, said, "We did not participate in the clashes, however the equipment the Houthis were using is ours. Right now the popular committees are controlling everything. As for pursuing the armed tribesmen, we have reports saying that they are pro Al-Qaeda, and yes we are pursuing them."

Houthi commander Al-Dailami said the Special Security Forces were not directly involved in the fighting, but admitted the Houthis are "cooperating with the security forces to preserve security in Rada'a."

Al-Dailami said the tribesmen exploited the popular committees' absence because many members travelled to Sana'a on Jan. 19, when fighting broke out between Houthis and government security forces.

Abu Muqbel Al-Qaifi, a member of AQAP currently located in Rada'a city, told the Yemen



Clashes are occurring almost daily in Rada'a district, and AQAP-backed tribesmen have taken advantage of the Houthis' preoccupation in Sana'a.

Times that "the opportunity is still open for the tribesmen to kill the Houthis, because they are busy in Sana'a. We will help them to kill all the popular committee members in all of Rada'a's streets."

Armed Houthis enter Ministry of Electricity

■ **Khalid Al-Karimi**

SANA'A, Jan. 26—On Sunday armed Houthi members entered the Ministry of Electricity and Energy and took the minister's official stamp. No Houthis were subsequently stationed inside the ministry and work resumed as usual on Monday.

"At 10 a.m. on Sunday eight armed Houthis entered the minister's office. I was surprised when I saw them and asked what they were up to. They responded they wanted the minister's stamp," said Abdullah Hajar, a high-ranking manager at the ministry.

"I asked who sent them and they said they did not receive directions from anyone. They were only insisting on having the stamp. They took my cell phone and later returned it. They also took the stamp under the threat of using violence," Hajar



The Houthis stole the minister's official stamp, which he requires for official correspondence, memos, and paying salaries.

told the Yemen Times on Monday. "I was unable to oppose them. They have taken control over the entire state, not only the ministry's stamp," said Hajar.

Fuad Al-Khazan, a lawyer working with the Ministry of Electricity and Energy, said that in spite of Sunday's incident the employees showed up to work on Monday and

that no Houthis remained stationed inside the ministry. Emphasizing the importance of the minister's stamp, Al-Khazan said, "The minister can do nothing without the stamp. Any form of official correspondence, memos, the payment of salaries—all these things require the ministry's official stamp."

Hasn Al-Dailami, one of the eight popular committee members who entered the ministry on Sunday, told the Yemen Times that the Houthi Revolutionary Committee, which falls under the Houthi Political Office, ordered the eight men to get the minister's stamp.

"We did not threaten anyone and we behaved peacefully when we entered the ministry's headquarters," Al-Dailami said. "We took

the stamp and even gave Hajar a receipt, proving that we took it." Hajar confirmed that he received a receipt.

According to Al-Dailami, the stamp serves as a tool of leverage for the Houthis. All of the ministry's documents will have to go through the Houthis, as they require the minister's stamp before gaining official status. "We want to end corruption and mismanagement at the electricity ministry," he said.

Hussein Al-Bukhaiti, a prominent Houthi figure, also claimed the popular committees took the stamp in order to end corruption. "The use of the stamp should be monitored. The purpose of taking the stamp is not to control the ministry. It is to fight corruption," he said.

The Houthis often claim their actions are justified under the pretext that they are fighting corruption, as they claimed when they previously stormed other ministries and state institutions.

On Jan. 8, unarmed Houthi popular committee members entered the offices of Minister of Information Nadia Al-Sakkaf, and went through her documents in search of indicators of corruption, they claimed. On Jan. 14, Houthis shut down the state-run Educational Satellite Channel, which they also accused of corruption. Earlier, on Oct. 20, armed Houthis broke into the Sana'a office of the state-run Safer Exploration & Production Operations Company "to monitor their performance."

Attack on military brigade in Abyan

■ **Ali Aboluhom**

SANA'A, Jan. 26—One soldier was killed and four others injured on Monday in an attack on Saeed Fort's 131st Infantry Brigade, in the Shuqra district of Abyan governorate.

Shaker Hussein, a soldier from the 11th Brigade in the Ahwar area of Shuqra, said militants from Al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP) were behind the attack. Having advanced along the coastline under the cover of night, the group launched their attack in the early hours of Monday morning, according to Hussein.

Saeed Al-Bareq, an officer from Shuqra's security office, said four of the militants were tracked

down and captured by members of a local popular committee. Such committees are composed of local recruits and salaried by the Ministry of Defense, and were formed in 2011 to aid government forces in their campaign against AQAP.

"The captured militants will be transferred to the 4th Military Command in Aden today or tomorrow for interrogation," Al-Bareq added.

Brigades have taken additional security measures following the attack, according to Hussein, with soldiers deployed to create a barricade 200 meters from their barracks.

Hussein confirmed the attack was the second suffered by the

131st Infantry Brigade. An assault three months earlier resulted in five injuries, with no deaths reported.

AQAP claimed responsibility for Monday's attack on their official twitter account, but made no mention of any of its members being captured.

Soldiers and military installations in Abyan and other governorates, primarily located in the south of the country, have been the target of many AQAP attacks since 2011. Such attacks largely occur in response to intensified assaults by government forces in cooperation with the American government, which for years has conducted covert operations against alleged AQAP targets.



Military brigades in Abyan governorate have taken additional security measures following the attack on Monday.

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Houthis refuse to return seized weapons

Story by **Nasser Al-Sakkaf**
Photo by **Ali Aboluhom**

The Houthis' ascent to power was accompanied and often propelled by the movement's continuous stockpiling of heavy weaponry. In spite of signing an agreement with the government on Sept. 21 stipulating the group's disarmament, Houthi leaders have so far shown no intention of returning seized weapons. On the contrary, their armory keeps on growing.

While the power of Yemen's Zaydi Shia Houthi movement has long been restricted to the northern governorate of Sa'ada, its members further expanded their sphere of influence in a series of battles in 2014. By September of last year, the group had taken control over Amran, Al-Jawf, Hajja, and Sana'a governorates.

These military advancements were accompanied and partially made possible through the Houthis' rapidly expanding weapons arsenal. In early July, Houthi fighters seized the headquarters of the 310th Armored Brigade and the Special Security Forces camp in Amran city, acquiring large amounts of heavy and medium weapons. Many observers claim that they later stole more weapons from the military in Al-Jawf and Sana'a governorate.

On Sept. 21, 2014, Houthis crowned their series of military successes by taking over the Yemeni capital and bringing the headquarters of the 6th Military Command under their control.

Formerly known as the 1st Armored Division and headed by Ali Mohsen Al-Ahmar—a key adversary of the Houthis—the 6th Military Command constitutes the operating and logistical center for all military operations in Amran, Al-Jawf, and Sa'ada governorates. By gaining its headquarters, the Houthis added considerably to their power and weapons stockpile.

"They seized all the equipment at the base, even our personal weapons," claimed one former soldier who served at the 6th Military Command and spoke to the Yemen Times on condition of anonymity. "We surrendered on Sept. 21 when they entered the headquarters and kicked us all out. They made me give up my AK-47 before I could leave."

According to the source, the headquarters contained large numbers of weapons and advanced military equipment, including tanks, humvees with mounted 50 caliber machine guns, missile launch pads, PKCs (a type of machine gun), AK-47s and large stockpiles of ammunition. The loss of such weapons and the refusal to return them into the hands of state actors exemplifies how the power of Yemen's military forces is continuously being undermined.

On Sept. 21, Houthis also gained control over a number of battalions belonging to the 4th Armored Brigade, which guarded a range of state-run (media) institutions—including the state TV headquarters, a compound containing the TV channels Al-Yemen, Saba, and Al-Iman.

Since then, Houthis have taken control over the entire 4th Armored Brigade, according to Jamal Al-Geez, head of the Morale Guidance Department at the Ministry of Defense. "Like any other brigade, the 4th Armored Brigade possesses many weapons, including tanks, military vehicles, and machine guns," he said. All these weapons, Al-Geez said, are now under Houthi control—a claim that was confirmed by Hussein Al-Bukhaiti, a prominent Houthi activist.

None of the weaponry seized by



Often ignored in discussions of the Houthis' spectacular rise to power are the vast weapon arsenals they have collected in the process. It has enabled the group to continue advancing southward, while making any prospect of an amicable peace based on previous agreements increasingly unlikely.

the Houthis has been returned to state institutions so far—a gross violation of the National Peace and Partnership Agreement signed by Houthi representatives, the Yemeni government, and a broad range of other political actors on Sept. 21.

Article 3 of the agreement's security annex stipulates the "disarmament and recovery of state-owned heavy and medium weapons from all parties, groups and individuals that were plundered or seized nationwide."

Although the Houthis have been keen to draw legitimacy from the agreement, it is unlikely they are going to hand back weapons anytime soon.

"There are several articles in the Peace and National Partnership Agreement that are more important than disarmament. We can not talk about this article at the moment. We will do so when the time is right," Ali Al-Qahoom, a member of the Houthi Political Office, told the Yemen Times.

Mohammad Hizam, deputy chairman of the Public Relations Department at the Ministry of Interior, questions the feasibility of disarming the Houthis. So far, Hizam told the Yemen Times in early January, the ministry has not been tasked with the responsibility of tracking down or ensuring the return of missing weapons. "It's an issue of organizing our priorities," he said. "The Houthis are in control of nearly half the country, we can't realistically force them to return any seized weaponry. A political arrangement needs to be reached first."

Speaking on condition of anonymity, a source from the Ministry of Defense told the Yemen Times around the same time that the ministry is too weak to disarm Houthis. "The defense ministry does not care about weapons in the current situation," the source said, "Houthis took control of the whole country and not just weapons."

Not only have Houthis blatantly ignored their Sept. 21 promise to disarm, they have continued seizing considerable amounts of weaponry. In November of last year its members took control of the Al-Mas military base in Marib governorate and reportedly stole a number of tanks and heavy weapons stashed within its armory.

After extensive fighting with government troops in Sana'a on Jan. 19, Houthis seized control of the 1st and 3rd Armored Brigade headquarters that are located inside the extensive territory surrounding the Presidential Palace on Jan. 20. A high-ranking source inside the

Ministry of Defense, speaking to the Yemen Times on Jan. 26 on condition of anonymity, said the weapon depots of both brigades were plundered by the Houthis. Talal Ali, a soldier from the 3rd Armored Brigade agreed that Houthis seized "a large number of weapons."

While the exact number of weapons taken by the Houthis remains a matter of debate, Officer Mohammad Hamoud Ibrahim—who used to work with the 3rd Armored Brigade and is still attending weekly meetings with the brigade's officers inside the premises of the Presidential Palace—told the Yemen Times on Jan. 21 that the following weapons were stored on the palace premises: 300 tanks, 122 rocket launchers, almost 500 vehicles equipped with 12.7 caliber machine guns, 400 automatic assault rifles, 23 anti-aircraft artillery, 125 armored vehicles, 5,000 handguns, and almost 10,000 sniper rifles. The Yemen Times was unable to independently verify these numbers.

Fighting on Jan. 19 also surrounded the 5th and 6th Armored Brigades in Sana'a's Faj Attan neighborhood. Yet, the defense ministry source denied that Houthis took control of these two brigades and their respective armories.

If there was any chance at all, the resignation of Yemen's cabinet on Jan. 23 further decreased the likelihood the Houthis would return their stolen weapons. Mohsen Khosroo, a retired colonel who used to work with the defense ministry, echoes the pessimism expressed by defense and interior ministry sources regarding Houthi disarmament. He critically remarked that the government has so far failed to show any serious initiative to disarm the Houthi movement. "It never really pushed for a return of the weapons that were seized in Amran in early 2014."

With Houthis enjoying a moment of unprecedented, and unexpected, power, it is not only their disarmament that seems far-fetched; it is equally uncertain whether or not earlier talks of handing back the brigades they seized—a step that some hoped would be coupled with a return of the weaponry—will be implemented.

On Dec. 22, the Houthi Political Office in Sana'a publicly called on the government to form a committee to oversee the conversion of the headquarters of the 6th Military Command into a park. At the time, Abd Al-Qadri, head of Sana'a's Capital Secretariat, told the Yemen Times that he had requested the Prime Minister's Office to establish the committee and include the min-

isters of defense and interior.

"Once the Capital Secretariat is prepared logistically to convert the headquarters into a park, we'll hand it over," announced Mohammad Al-Bukhaiti, a member of the Houthi Political Office in Sana'a, in early January. "However, the Capital Secretariat is a civil authority that is not tasked with administering and managing advanced military equipment. We won't be returning any weapons to them,

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their responsibility is overseeing the conversion of the grounds into a park."

A month later, Al-Qahoom announced that "the committee will not be formed these days, and the task of the committee is to oversee the conversion of the headquarters into a park, and it is not tasked with regaining the weapons." Likewise, Hussein Al-Bukhaiti relayed promises to hand over the brigades under Houthi control "in line with the NDC outcomes," but failed to

specify when, and under what conditions, such handovers can be expected.

The whereabouts and number of weapons currently in Houthi hands constitutes a sensitive subject that Houthi leaders refuse to comment on. Even without details it remains clear, however, that the group has managed to significantly bolster its position of power with a stockpile of heavy, medium, and light weaponry that they are unlikely to let go of.



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Another blow to freedom of speech in Tunisia

Asma Ghribi
foreignpolicy.com
First published Jan. 23

Earlier this week, a military tribunal in Tunis sentenced a blogger to a year in jail for a Facebook post it deemed “defamatory” of the armed forces. Needless to say, the case casts an ominous light on the prospects for freedom of expression in post-revolutionary Tunisia.

Last November the military court initially sentenced Yassine Ayari, in absentia, to three years in prison, so Tuesday’s verdict actually represented a reduction of the penalty. Ayari’s lawyers immediately filed for an appeal, and human rights groups are calling for his immediate release. Amnesty International denounced his conviction as a “gross violation of the right to freedom of expression.”

Over the past few months, Ayari had posted a series of messages on his Facebook page criticizing decisions made by current Minister of Defense Ghazi Jeribi. His posts referenced several recent military appointments and the resignation of a high-ranking military official. In one of his texts, Ayari claimed that Jeribi intends to sell land owned by the military. He then noted that the minister is serving under a limited mandate in the interim technocratic government of Mehdi Jomaa, which is valid only until a new government based on the recent election takes office, and argued that Jeribi does not have the right to make such decisions. He also challenged the minister to respond to his allegations and to deny them if they’re wrong.

Ayari’s claims provoked a backlash from the Tunis military court, which resorted to a 1957 law (Article 91 of the code of military justice) to indict Ayari and charge him with “harming the dignity of the army” and “defaming the army high command with the effect of undermining military discipline.”

“The idea behind this law is to intimidate anyone who tries to speak up,” said lawyer Malek Ben Amor, one of several representing Ayari. Ben Amor is also the head of a “defense committee” of 54 lawyers who have joined together to help the blogger.

Article 91 is one of many laws inherited from long decades of dictatorship in Tunisia. Vague and full of loopholes, the law enables the military tribunal to prosecute anyone, including civilians, for the simple act of talking about the army. “A civilian will be punished when he opens his mouth and says anything about the army: Anything, good or bad,” Ben Amor added.

He said that the use of such laws is arbitrary and selective. He pointed out that some of the claims made by Ayari were first raised by a police union leader named Sahbi Jouini, who was also pursued by the military court. Unlike Ayari, however, Jouini remained free and was never arrested. “He [Ayari] is being prosecuted because he is Yassine Ayari, not because he wrote about the military,” said Ben Amor.

While Ayari frequently blogs and analyzes Tunisian political affairs, his special interest in the military can be traced back to the fact that his own father, Colonel Taher Ayari, was killed in an armed confrontation between the Tunisian army and



Laws inherited from decades of dictatorship in Tunisia allow the military to prosecute anyone for talking about the army, writes Ghribi.

suspected Islamist militants in May 2011.

Ayari started his cyber-activism before the January 2011 uprising that toppled the country’s longtime autocratic leader Zine Abidine Ben Ali. He is also known for his hostile views to figures of the former regime and for his support of ex-President Moncef Marzouki and his Congress for the Republic (CPR). During the most recent electoral campaign in 2014, Ayari stood out as one of the harshest critics of current president Beji Caid Essebsi and his Nida Tounes party. Ayari made many enemies when he popularized the hashtag “#vote_for_the_diapers,”

aimed at mocking the age and physical infirmity of the 88-year-old presidential candidate Essebsi.

Ayari’s supporters and lawyers suspect political motives behind his conviction. Military justice in Tunisia makes little pretense of independence. In fact, the head of the Supreme Council of Military Justice is none other than Minister of Defense Jeribi, the target of Ayari’s allegations.

“Rather than opening an investigation into the allegations against the minister, they sent Yassine to jail,” said Moutia Ayari, Yassine’s 27-year-old younger brother. “We’re returning to the practices of the

past. Now we have military tribunals. People can no longer express their opinions or criticize.” He added that civil society groups are supporting Yassine in his case precisely because they see it as a “barometer for rights and liberties in Tunisia.”

Perhaps even more disturbing than the case itself is the relative lack of reaction to the verdict from the public. Moutia Ayari said that, despite the support his brother has received from international human rights groups and media outlets, local groups have failed to show the same level of interest and concern. “I was interviewed by Le Figaro, Le Monde, Yahoo News,” he told me,

“but in Tunisia the only media outlet that interviewed us was [private channel] Zeitouna TV.”

Ayari’s views were echoed by his brother’s lawyer, Ben Amor. He said that local organizations seemed more reluctant to criticize the case against his client, while international groups have been far more zealous in defending Yassine.

It would seem that the past four years of political wrangling and polarization have left Tunisian civil society divided and unable to reunite against a common enemy: The specter of a reviving dictatorship. Today Yassine is the victim. Who knows who will be next?

A Saudi palace coup

David Hearst
huffingtonpost.com
First published Jan. 23

King Abdullah’s writ lasted all of 12 hours. Within that period the Sudairis, a rich and politically powerful clan within the House of Saud, which had been weakened by the late king, burst back into prominence. They produced a palace coup in all but name.

Salman moved swiftly to undo the work of his half-brother. He decided not to change his crown prince Megren, who was picked by King Abdullah for him, but he may choose to deal with him later. However, he swiftly appointed another leading figure from the Sudairi clan. Mohammed Bin Nayef, the interior minister is to be his deputy crown prince. It is no secret that Abdullah wanted his son Meteb for that position, but now he is out.

More significantly, Salman, himself a Sudairi, attempted to secure the second generation by giving his 35-year-old son Mohammad the powerful fiefdom of the defense ministry. The second post Mohammad got was arguably more important. He is now general secretary of the Royal Court. All these changes were announced before Abdullah was even buried.

The general secretaryship was the position held by the Cardinal Riche-lieu of Abdullah’s royal court, Khalid Al-Tuwaijri. It was a lucrative business handed down from father to son and started by Abdul Aziz

Al-Tuwaijri. The Tuwaijris became the king’s gatekeepers and no royal audience could be held without their permission, involvement, or knowledge. Tuwaijri was the key player in foreign intrigues—to subvert the Egyptian revolution, to send in the troops to crush the uprising in Bahrain, to finance ISIL in Syria in the early stages of the civil war along with his previous ally Prince Bandar Bin Sultan.

The link between Tuwaijri and the Gulf region’s fellow neo-con Mohammed Bin Zayed, the crown prince of Abu Dhabi, was close. Tuwaijri is now out, and his long list of foreign clients, starting with the Egyptian President Abdel Fattah Al-Sisi may well feel a cooler wind blowing from Riyadh. Sisi failed to attend the funeral on Friday. Just a question of bad weather?

Salman’s state of health is cause for concern, which is why the power he has given his son is more significant than other appointments announced. Aged 79, Salman is known to have Alzheimers, but the exact state of his dementia is a source of speculation. He is known to have held cogent conversations as recently as last October. But he can also forget what he said minutes ago, or faces he has known all his life, according to other witnesses. This is typical of the disease. I understand the number of hospital visits in the last few months has increased, and that he did not walk around, as he did before.

So his ability to steer the ship of state, in a centralized country where no institutions, political parties or

even national politics exist, is open to question. But one indication of a change of direction may lie in two attempts recently to establish links with Egyptian opposition figures.

I am told that senior advisers to Salman approached an Egyptian liberal opposition politician and had a separate meeting with a lawyer. Neither of them are members of the Muslim Brotherhood but have working contacts with it. Talks were held in Saudi Arabia in the last two months about how reconciliation could be managed. No initiative was agreed, but the talks themselves were an indication of a more pragmatic, or less belligerent, approach by Salman and his advisers. It was understood that these meetings were preparatory to a possible initiative Salman may announce once he was in power.

The policy of the late King was to declare the Brotherhood terrorist organization on a par with the Islamic State and Al-Qaeda.

Even before the Sudairis made their move, a power struggle within the House of Saud was apparent. Early on Thursday evening, rumors on Twitter that the king was dead flooded the Internet, which is the primary source of political information in the kingdom. There were official denials, when a Saudi journalist on Al-Watan newspaper tweeted the information.

The palace’s hand was forced when two emirs tweeted that the king was dead. MBC TV network cut broadcasting and put the Quran on screen, a sign of mourning, while national television kept on with normal

programming. This was a sign that one clan in the royal family wanted the news out quickly and the other clan was stalling for more negotiations.

The need for a change of course is all too apparent. On the very night in which the royal drama was taking place, a political earthquake was underway in Saudi Arabia’s backyard, Yemen. President Abdu Rabu Mansour Hadi, his prime minister and government resigned after days of virtual house arrest by Houthi militia. Hadi’s resignation leaves two forces in control of the country both of them armed to the teeth: An Iranian backed militia which gets its training from Hezbollah, and Al-Qaeda, posing as the defender of Sunni Muslims.

It is a disaster for Saudi Arabia and what is left of the ability of the Gulf Cooperation Council to make any deal stick. Their foreign ministers met only the day before. Yemen’s former strongman Ali Abdullah Saleh, who was levered out of power three years ago and who according to leaked telephone calls, advised the Houthis on how to grab power, is now calling for fresh elections, and there were already calls on Thursday night for the south to split away from the North. Yemen, in other words, has officially become the Middle East’s fourth failed state.

The meteoric rise of the Houthis in Yemen was not the result of spontaneous combustion. It was planned and plotted months ago by Saleh and the United Arab Emirates. Saleh’s son, the Yemeni ambassador to the UAE, was a key figure in this

foreign intrigue, and as I reported before, he met an Iranian delegation in Rome. This was picked by US intelligence and communicated to Hadi. The year before, the then Saudi intelligence chief Prince Bandar flew a leading member of the Houthi delegation via London for a meeting. Incredible as it seemed, the Saudis were re-opening contact with an Iranian backed Zaydi or Shia sect with whom they had once fought bitter wars.

The Saudi/Emirati plan was to use the Houthis to engage and destroy their real target, which was Islah, the Islamist party and chief representative of the Sunni tribes in Yemen. As elsewhere in the Arab world, the entire focus of Abdullah’s foreign policy after 2011, was to stop the Arab Spring in its tracks in Tunisia and Egypt and crush all forces capable of mounting an effective opposition in the Gulf States. Everything else, including the rise of Saudi’s foremost regional rival Iran, became subservient to that paramount aim to crush democratic political Islam.

The Yemen plan backfired when Islah refused to take up arms to resist the Houthi advance. As a result, the Houthis took more control than they were expected to, and the result is that Yemen stands on the brink of civil war. Al-Qaeda’s claim to be the only fighters prepared to defend Sunni tribesmen, has just been given a major boost.

It is too early to tell whether King Salman is capable of, or even is aware of the need for changing course. All one can say with any confidence is that some of the key fig-

ures who stage-managed the Kingdom’s disastrous foreign intrigues are now out. Meteb’s influence is limited, while Tuwaijri is out.

It is in no-one’s interests for chaos to spread into the Kingdom itself. Maybe it is just coincidence that Abdullah died almost on the eve of the anniversary of the Jan. 25 revolution in Egypt. But the timing of his death is a symbol. The royal family should learn that the mood of change that started on Jan. 25 is unstoppable. The best defense against revolution is to lead genuine tangible political reform within the Kingdom. Allow it to modernize, to build national politics, political parties, real competitive elections, to let Saudis take a greater share of power, to free political prisoners.

There are two theories about the slow train crash which the Middle East has become. One is that dictatorship, autocracy, and occupation are the bulwarks against the swirling chaos of civil war and population displacement. The other is that dictators are the cause of instability and extremism.

Abdullah was evidence in chief for the second theory. His reign left Saudi Arabia weaker internally and surrounded by enemies as never before. Can Salman make a difference? It’s a big task, but there may be people around him who see the need for a fundamental change in course. It will be the only way a Saudi King will get the backing of his people. He may in the process turn himself into a figurehead, a constitutional monarch, but he will generate stability in the kingdom and the region.

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Yemen crisis disrupts US counterterrorism operations, officials say

Greg Miller and Craig Whitlock
washingtonpost.com
First published Jan. 23

The Obama administration has been forced to suspend certain counterterrorism operations with Yemen in the aftermath of the collapse of its government, according to US officials, a move that eases pressure on Al-Qaeda's most dangerous franchise.

Armed drones operated by the CIA and the US Joint Special Operations Command remain deployed for now over southern Yemen, where Al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP) is based. But some US officials said that the Yemeni security services that provided much of the intelligence that sustained that US air campaign are now controlled by Shia rebels, known as Houthis, who have seized control of much of the capital.

Even before the disintegration of the government, officials say, the growing chaos in Yemen had resulted in a steady erosion in intelligence-gathering efforts against AQAP and a defacto suspension in raids by Yemeni units trained, equipped and often flown to targeted Al-Qaeda compounds by US forces.

"The agencies we worked with ... are really under the thumb of the Houthis. Our ability to work with them is not there," said a senior US official closely involved in monitoring the situation. In a measure of US concern over the crisis, officials

also signaled for the first time a willingness to open talks with Houthi leaders, despite their suspected ties to Iran and antipathy toward the United States.

The developments have unraveled a campaign that President Obama described last year as a model for how the United States should fight terrorist groups, and avoid being drawn more directly into overseas conflicts. The turmoil in Yemen has exposed the risks of that strategy, with US officials now voicing concern that the suspension in operations in Yemen could enable AQAP—which has launched a series of plots against the United States and claimed credit for the attacks in Paris this month—to regroup.

"The chaos has aided Al-Qaeda," said the senior US official, who like others spoke on the condition of anonymity because of the sensitivity of the matter. "There's no question in our mind that Al-Qaeda has gotten a breather."

The White House disputed that joint efforts against Al-Qaeda had halted. White House spokesman Alistair Baskey said that "the political instability in Yemen has not forced us to suspend counterterrorism operations" and that "we also continue to partner with Yemeni security forces in this effort."

Asked if those forces were still intact and functional, a senior administration official said, "It is difficult for me to assess what is a very fluid situation on the ground."

Other US officials said that joint operations had been deteriorating since last fall, when Houthi militias



The Houthis overran the Presidential Palace and shelled the president's residence in an offensive against the Western-allied government.

began a series of advances toward the capital of Sana'a, but that cooperation had broken down in recent days amid a Houthi assault that culminated with the resignation of Yemeni President Abdu Rabu Mansour Hadi, a staunch US ally.

Before that development, US military trainers and advisers had continued working closely with Yemeni counterterrorism forces, primarily from Al-Anad air base, a Yemeni military installation in the southern part of the country.

A senior military official said that counterterrorism training with Yemeni units has been put "on hold," but that partnered operations between US and Yemeni forces are still ongoing in areas outside the capital.

The Pentagon has been tight-lipped about how many US troops it has deployed to Yemen, but the senior US official said the total number of trainers and advisers numbered in the "dozens" and that the presence had gradually increased

over the past two years. The US advisers could accompany Yemeni units on missions around the country, and even provided helicopter transport during operations, but were precluded from directly engaging in combat.

US officials and analysts have said the most reliable Yemeni units were assigned to the Interior Ministry. Their training and equipment, officials said, were designed exclusively for counterterrorism missions, meaning that they were not capable

of fending off the Houthi advances and were never summoned to Sana'a to protect Hadi.

US advisers also spent years training units from the Defense Ministry that until 2012 had served under the command of one of the sons of then-President Ali Abdullah Saleh, the long-standing leader of Yemen who was forced from office three years ago but is suspected of having colluded with Houthi elements in recent months to oust Hadi.

Continued on the back page

Aid at risk as Afghanistan's war splinters

Joe Dyke
IRIN
First published Jan. 19

Delivering aid to millions of Afghans in need is becoming more complex and dangerous as government forces and militant groups splinter and security deteriorates, analysts say.

Foreign forces formally withdrew from combat roles at the end of 2014, leaving behind an Afghan army that has taken heavy losses in recent years while the opposition Taliban has become increasingly fragmented. On both sides, new splinter groups have emerged—making it far more dangerous for humanitarians to deliver aid to those in need.

Antonio Giustozzi, visiting professor in the Department of War Studies at King's College, London and an expert on Afghanistan, said the conflict was fragmenting on all sides, with dozens of armed groups contesting certain areas. "It is making for a much more complex environment for NGOs," he said. "[In 2015] they may have to negotiate with more organizations than ever before."

Both sides fracturing

While the perception of the Afghan conflict as simply the government and allied forces against a unified Taliban has long been an over-simplification, in recent years the number of fighting groups has grown exponentially.

According to Giustozzi, the Taliban first splintered in 2009, with later years seeing an acceleration of the process. He said there are now believed to be three shuras, or consultative councils, that have declared varying degrees of autonomy from the original Quetta Shura. Another seven or eight independent

"fronts" have also declared greater levels of independence.

These fronts, he said, were often receiving funding directly from outside Afghanistan—with groups from Pakistan, Iran and Gulf countries alleged to be supporting them—and are therefore not always accountable to central Taliban command. "Some of the [outside] donors are unhappy with the different shuras and decided they wanted more control over how the money is spent," he said. "So they are funding individual fronts."

For those seeking to provide aid, it means access agreements with the central Taliban control may not be enough. In particular, Giustozzi said, the Zakir Front in parts of Helmand Province has been refusing to recognize agreements made by the Taliban's central NGO commission for several months.

In May 2013, the compound of the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), one of the aid agencies with the best access in Taliban-controlled areas, was attacked in Jalalabad, capital of Nangahar province, with one staff member killed. While it has never been confirmed, it was widely reported to be the work of a Taliban splinter organization. ICRC declined to comment.

Numerous NGOs raised concerns over the ICRC killing to IRIN, pointing out that a deal with the Taliban no longer guarantees security. "We can reduce risk by 20-40 percent by agreeing to an access deal with the Taliban but we can never be sure," said a senior NGO worker.

While the Taliban itself has fractured, further concerns have been raised in the past two years as major new Islamist groupings have broken off into entirely new militant groups.

Giustozzi said small Al-Qaeda affiliates had established them-



An Afghan National Army (ANA) soldier looks on from a hill near the Spozhmai Hotel following an attack by Taliban militants at Qargha lake on the outskirts of Kabul on June 22, 2012.

selves, while the past year has also seen at least two groups pledge allegiance to the so-called Islamic State: A splinter from the Haqqani Network, an Islamist insurgency formed in the mid 1970s, and a group in Helmand, led by former Guantanamo detainee Muslim Dost.

"These are hardline groups that say the Taliban are too soft now that they want to talk—they [the Taliban] are too concerned about collateral damage of the jihad."

Cathy Howard, acting head of the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), said the UN is wary of these grow-

ing threats.

"We are prepared that along with the Taliban and other groups interested primarily in criminal activities, that there are other ideological groups now developing that don't hold their allegiance to [Taliban leader] Mullah Omar, that may be looking elsewhere for support," she said. "Afghanistan is not isolated from what is happening elsewhere in the world—the Middle East."

Not just the opposition

From the government side, too, Giustozzi said that numerous militias and criminal gangs that had been previously affiliated with the

government have become increasingly rogue as foreign funding from the Americans and other allies has dried up.

"The money was the connection and they were linked into government networks. With less money around, they need other ways to make revenue," he said.

Bo Schack, the outgoing head of the UN Refugee Agency, UNHCR, told IRIN in the capital Kabul last autumn that criminal gangs were stealing the organization's goods. "The big problem is criminality. With criminality you have nobody to negotiate with," he said.

Government forces have been

stretched but so far have managed to maintain their discipline, Graeme Smith, Kabul-based senior analyst at the International Crisis Group, told IRIN.

He said the number of deaths and injuries among Afghan security forces roughly doubled in 2014 compared to 2013, adding that the numbers were in the thousands but that the official data often underestimated them.

"Yet even though they have been taking a beating the Afghan forces seem to be able to maintain the same level of operations. Quite how long that can continue is not clear."

Humanitarian challenges

For those trying to deliver aid to Afghanistan's needy—estimated at 7.4 million people, just over a quarter of the population—the fracturing war makes for many complications. It means that despite the UN improving its relations with the Taliban in recent months, the environment is still increasingly unpredictable.

Previously stable areas of the country are no longer. For example, after years of relative calm, the disputed eastern province of Nangahar has become among the most violent. More worryingly still, Smith said, the somewhat random nature of the violence has made it harder for NGOs to work around it.

"[The southern provinces of] Kandahar or Helmand are clear-cut and easier to predict. In the east, it is a confusing alphabet soup of new insurgent groups which is difficult," Smith said.

"If you are the UN, maybe you feel more confident operating in areas solidly controlled by the government or the Taliban, but more concerned by those that are more disputed," he said.

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Trial ongoing for man who killed his daughter

Public outrage could lead this to be the first time a father is executed for killing his daughter in Yemen

■ Ali Ibrahim Al-Moshki

After torturing his ten-year-old daughter Maab for several days, Nouh Ali Saleh Al-Yemeni, a 30-year-old onyx salesman and resident of Dhamar governorate, drove to Ibb's Naqil Sumara Mountain on Dec. 26 where he held his pistol to his daughter's back and pulled the trigger.

The reason: He believed his daughter was no longer a virgin.

Daughters being killed for so-called "dishonorable" behavior—whether it actually happened or not—is not unheard of in Yemen. According to the deputy director of the Public Relations Department at the Ministry of Interior, Mohammad Hizam, "Girls being killed by their families comes as a result of rape, online messaging, befriending boys, being sexually harassed by their own fathers, or as a result of grudges between the parents after they are divorced."

While the Interior Ministry does not have statistics regarding such incidents, Hizam said he knows of "dozens of similar cases." Furthermore, the head of the Family Protection Department in the Ministry of Interior, Brigadier Suad Al-Qa'tabi, told the Yemen Times that no father has been sentenced to death for killing his daughter so far. The reason, she said, is fathers' alleged defense of honor which usually results in the lesser penalty of imprisonment.

Public pressure for a swift trial

The murder of Maab by her father is unique, according to Hezam, in that it was unusually cruel and grabbed the attention—and captured the anger—of the public.

Similar cases of children being killed by their families usually proceed slowly, if at all. And if they do not get lost somewhere along the way in the country's disorganized, if not dysfunctional, legal system, the verdict tends to be lenient.

Colonel Muhammad Ali Al-Haddi, the director of the Dhamar Criminal Investigations Bureau, told the Yemen Times that court proceedings would have taken "a very long time" had protests by local residents not expedited the case.

Demonstrations were triggered in Dhamar by photos of Maab's mutilated corpse, which surfaced online and indicated that the girl had been severely tortured before her death. With considerable evidence implicating the girl's father in the killing, protesters called for Nouh himself to be killed. Since the first protest on Dec. 29, thousands have been gathering every Thursday and Friday to date, demanding capital punishment for the so-called "killer of innocence."

Nouh was arrested on the morn-

ing of Dec. 27, only hours after killing his daughter.

"During the investigation Al-Yemeni willingly confessed to having murdered his daughter," Al-Haddi said. "We made him think that we had him under surveillance a few days before he killed his daughter and that denying it would do him no good."

According to Al-Haddi, the perpetrator was transferred to Ibb governorate's Criminal Investigation Bureau following his confession. The investigation moved slowly as a result of the country's political crisis, but, in compliance with protesters' demands, the case was soon transferred from Ibb to the Criminal Investigation Bureau branch in Dhamar.

The undersecretary of the West Dhamar prosecution office, Ahmad Al-Qeiz, told the Yemen Times that the prosecution finished interrogating the victim's father and referred the suspect to West Dhamar Preliminary Court on Jan. 12. Only two days later, on Jan. 14 the trial began.

According to Al-Qeiz, "In the first trial session, headed by Abdu Al-Hajuri, the prosecution accused the suspect of willfully killing his daughter Maab." The allegations are haunting, he said. "The indictment read that the accused tortured and beat his daughter for days. He stabbed her and burned her skin using a clothes hanger and an iron. At night he took her to a vacant area in Naqil Sumara, Ibb governorate, and shot her several times with a pistol, killing her instantly. Leaving her body behind, he left."

Al-Haddi said the court has definitive evidence proving the suspect is guilty: A video of the father conducting various methods of torture on the ten-year-old girl, which left scars all over her body. Al-Haddi also said there is evidence of careful planning by the father to carry out the killing, as demonstrated by his purchasing of a pistol and his travel plans.

Al-Haddi said the culprit is not considered criminally insane.

According to Al-Qeiz, the prosecution has submitted as evidence the murder weapon and projectiles taken from the girls body, as well as the suspect's cellphone, which contains video clips of the victim while she was being tortured.

The prosecution is demanding the accused be executed in accordance with article 234 of the Penal Code.

Fuad Al-Khazan, who has a law firm in Sana'a, told the Yemen Times that the normal punishment for a father killing his son or daughter is ten years imprisonment. Where torture is involved, as in Maab's case, the punishment can be life in prison. According to Al-Khazan, the penal code does not permit for a father to be executed for killing his offspring, and with this specific



The murder of Maab on Dec. 26 caused public outrage, leading to an ongoing campaign to expedite the case against her father and introduce a legal precedent by sentencing the father to death.



"The coordinating authority for NGOs working in the field of child rights held, in cooperation with the civil society organizations of Dhamar, a seminar entitled: 'Advocating Maab Al-Yemeni's Case.'"

case there is considerable pressure from the public for the father to be punished by death.

Al-Qeiz expects a verdict will be announced within the coming few days because all evidence indicates the suspect is guilty of a "crime against humanity." The suspect has thus far not hired a lawyer.

What drove Nouh to kill his daughter?

According to Al-Haddi, Nouh suspected that his daughter was practicing prostitution and had her undergo virginity tests at three different hospitals, the last one being the Specialized Motherhood Hospital in Sana'a.

At all three hospitals it was determined that the ten-year-old was still a virgin. Despite these expert opinions, Nough remained unconvinced.

An interview Nough gave to Marib Press after his arrest is telling of his unstable condition and relationship with his daughter. "I asked my daughter Maab to read the Holy Quran with her two sisters but she refused. She was sitting in the kitchen chatting with her mother on her cellphone, and then she ran into the bathroom. I told her to come out but she refused, then I threatened to kill her myself if she didn't not come out," he said. "When she came out I asked her to tell me the truth about whom she was speaking with otherwise I would kill her."

Nouh is divorced and has three daughters from the marriage, including Maab. His ex-wife, who is from Ibb governorate, remarried and all three children were left in his custody.

When Maab told him she was chatting with her mother, Nough said he became upset and hit her. "She told me her mother had forced her to stay on the phone by threatening to tell me, her father, that she was having sexual relationships with boys." Maab went on to say, according to Nough's statement, that her mother made her perform sexual acts with other men with the intent of upsetting him. None of Nough's claims could be verified by the Yemen Times.

Brigadier Abdulkarim Al-Odaini, the general director of Dhamar governorate's police, told the Yemen Times that the perpetrator's accusations do not justify the murder. He said that preliminary examinations indicate the girl was not raped and did not have sexual relations before. In Al-Odaini's view, Nough killed his daughter to get back at his wife who divorced him and re-married someone else.

Nabil Al-Khadher, head of the Sana'a-based human rights organization Dhamanat ("Guarantees"), said the judiciary must punish the perpetrator to the full extent of the law, and agrees that capital punishment is suitable for the nature of Nough's crime.



Nouh Al-Yemeni admitted to the torture and murder of his daughter Maab and claimed he did so because she was no longer a virgin.

Yemeni's voice their opinion on the Charlie Hebdo attack

■ Bassam Al-Khameri

“We strongly condemn the repeated offenses directed against the Prophet Mohammad, the latest of which was a caricature in a French newspaper,” announced Houthi leader Abdulmalik Al-Houthi in his televised speech on Jan. 20. “These repeated offenses prove negligence of the symbols that are sacred to the Islamic Ummah [community]. These repeated offenses reflect Western countries’ hostile perception of Muslims and the Islamic Ummah.”

Following Al-Houthi’s speech, the Houthi Political Office in Sana’a and the Houthi-run Al-Masira channel publicly called for protests to take place on Friday. Cars with loudspeakers drove through Sana’a’s neighborhoods on Friday morning, Jan. 23, encouraging people to participate in protests that opposed Charlie Hebdo’s cartoons. Thousands of demonstrators, mostly Houthis, rallied and marched through Sana’a’s Airport Road later that day, demanding, among other things, respect for the Prophet.

On Jan. 7, 2015, two masked gunmen stormed the offices of the weekly satirical magazine Charlie Hebdo in Paris. They shot and killed eleven people, shortly afterwards shooting a French police officer dead. The gunmen identified themselves as belonging to Al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP), which later claimed responsibility for the attack.

Nasser Bin Ali Al-Ansi, a leading AQAP member, announced in a video released on Jan. 14 that “the operation” in Paris came “as vengeance for the Messenger of Allah, peace be upon him.”

“Those ignorant infidels, who have spoken ill about our chosen prophets, took it too far by bad-mouthing God’s last Prophet Mohammad, which enraged the Islamic Ummah.”

Though AQAP and the Houthis appear to agree in their condemnation of Charlie Hebdo’s cartoons, Yemenis are divided over the issue and the recent Paris attack. Given the highly politicized nature of the debate, the Yemen Times took to the streets of Sana’a, asking citizens for their opinions on the Charlie Hebdo attack.



Antar Fuad Ali, 37 years old, general manager of the Islamic teaching institute Hidayah, Sana’a

“Insulting the Prophet of Muslims is not new. It has been going on for centuries. The only difference is the media that makes bad news travel fast. All intellectuals think about how to respond positively to such acts that lack any sensitivity and logic. They struggle to show the demarcation between free speech and insulting others. However, there is a bright side to these defamations of our beloved Prophet. The more copies Charlie Hebdo publishes, the more people know about Islam. Hopefully, people will use their senses and explore Islam from a different angle, trying to understand the reality of Islam and what Islam really stands for. The same thing took place in the aftermath of 9/11 in the USA.”



Hana Mohammad, 22 years old, sociology student, Sana’a University

“The attack was the best response to the offenses against Prophet Mohammad. Those people have insulted the Prophet several times and the protests we stage were of no use because they didn’t stop.”



Adnan Al-Awdi, 22 years old, mechanic

“I’m opposed to the attack against the newspaper because it offends Islam and Muslims. We should engage in dialogue with those people to convince them that Prophet Mohammad doesn’t order Muslims to kill others, neither does Islam.”



Khaled Al-Maswari, 45 years old, qat vendor

“We love Prophet Mohammad and the French people who make fun of him know that. I’m against the attack but insulting prophets and religious offenses must be criminalized worldwide. Prophet Mohammad didn’t kill the people who offended him during his life time but dealt with them in a good way.”



Bassam Al-Sharafi, 24 years old, graduate in telecommunication engineering, Sana’a University

“Attacking the newspaper was unethical and resulted in the killing of people. We have to follow the morals and teachings of Prophet Mohammad in responding to such offenses. We can organize protests to condemn these attacks. The most important thing is to follow the Sunnah of Prophet Mohammad.”



Ibtisam Sediq, 27 years old, private sector employee

“I was with the attack in the beginning but then I changed my mind when I came to know that Charlie Hebdo has increased the number of its publications following the attack. By attacking those French people, we caused people to think of Islam in a bad way and to believe that Muslims are killers. We have to prove that Muslims are the best.”

REPORT

City farming in Sana’a: A hobby with potential

Story by **Nasser Al-Sakkaf**
Photo by **Mohammed Al-Samawi**

Haji Mahdi Muhammad lives in the Al-Sabaen area of Sana’a city. He moved to the capital in the early 1980s to work with the military, and is originally from Utma, a green and mountainous region in western Dhamar.

Within a few years of settling in the capital, Muhammad says he became nostalgic for the rustic life he led in Utma. Eager to recreate what he could of its rural environment, he began rearing sheep in his front yard.

He has been city farming ever since, and says the company of his sheep help him feel closer to home. “We are used to raising sheep, I don’t think I would be able to live without doing so. Every day I clean after them, I give them feed and even our leftovers.”

As a matter of necessity, Muhammad’s relationship with his sheep has grown increasingly intimate. Following several cases of theft amongst urban sheep herders, in 2012 he decided to move his flock of ten sheep into the third floor of his house, where they remain today.

Rearing animals in the city is relatively uncommon, but there are others doing it in Muhammad’s neighborhood. Alawi Thabet, who also lives in Al-Sabaen, has been keeping sheep on the roof of his house since 2003.

Thabet, 75, is originally from the Badan district of Ibb governorate. Like Muhammad, he does not consider it his primary source of

income, but merely a useful way for a retired man to spend his time.

“It is necessary for a man to have things to do in his free time, so that he does not feel a burden to society,” said Thabet. “For me raising sheep is the best way to do that, I have been doing this since I was a child.”

The pros and cons of urban livestock

Muhammad says he and his family are not bothered by having sheep in the house and, since livestock are common enough in his area, he claims the neighbors do not mind either.

Ali Saleh, a tenant in Mohammad’s house, says he is not disturbed by the noise or smell because he considers it “a natural thing.” However, Saleh and Mohammad are rural migrants,

and not all city dwellers consider it acceptable practice. As Mohammad admits, animal waste including feces is thrown out with the trash on a daily basis.

Manaf Hasan, 25, who lives in Al-Hasaba neighborhood and is originally from the rural district of Gabal Habashi in Taiz, concedes it is difficult keeping animals in the city. Bringing fodder into the house is messy, he says, and not everyone is used to the smell of the animals. Embarrassed by what his neighbors thought of the practice, he and his family stopped rearing sheep at their home ten years ago.

Beyond the nuisance of smell, keeping livestock in unsanitary con-



Introducing rural practices to an urban environment carries risks, but it may help solve Yemen’s chronic food insecurity.

ditions poses more serious risks of disease and can pollute waterways. As Sami Nassar, the director of Epidemiology at the Ministry of Agriculture, points out, keeping livestock in close proximity to humans increases the chance that microorganisms—such as screw worm—will infect human populations.

There are no laws preventing or regulating urban livestock in Yemen, but according to Nasser Al-Ansi, the director of Veterinary Medicine at the Ministry of Agriculture, any risk is minimal so long as livestock owners keep the animals and their living quarters clean.

According to records at the Ministry of Agriculture, there were

only two registered cases of human screw worm infections in 2014 resulting from domestic sheep, which were found in Hodeida governorate.

There are no accurate statistics regarding the numbers of livestock being kept in Sana’a city, but Al-Ansi believes the majority are to be found in suburban and underdeveloped neighborhoods such as Al-Safia, and that the majority of livestock owners are of lower socioeconomic backgrounds.

The risks involved will increase with population growth and urbanization, but urban livestock can also be a source of income during difficult times, and they offer protection from volatile food prices.

Although it is showing signs of improvement, levels of food insecurity have reached unprecedented levels throughout the country. According to research by the UN World Food Programme (WFP), Yemen now ranks as the world’s eighth most food-insecure country.

Civil unrest and political crisis in 2011 led to the country’s worst food insecurity in decades. A 40 percent increase on 2009 levels meant that some 45 percent of the population became food insecure in 2011, a figure that has only dropped to an estimated 41.1 percent in 2014, according to the group’s latest report.

With nearly half the population suffering from food insecurity, rural areas are far more vulnerable than urban areas, where on average one-quarter of the population are food-insecure, according to the report. This is nonetheless a significant proportion—in Sana’a city, with a population of approximately 2.8 million, the WFP estimates 11 percent suffer from “severe” and another 12.7 percent from “moderate” food insecurity.

Nearly a quarter of the capital’s population thus struggled to feed themselves in 2014. Although Muhammad and Thabet explained animal rearing as a lifestyle choice or a past time, urban livestock may offer solutions to Yemen’s unpredictable food security.

Muhammad currently tends to 12 sheep in his house, which cost him about YR2,500 (\$12) per month

to keep fed. While he considers it a small price to pay for something that brings him so much joy, he says the sheep also provide him with a source of emergency income, especially during Eid and other special occasions.

Thabet says he sells on average four of his sheep a year at around YR20,000 (\$93) each, a considerable markdown from average market prices. According to WFP statistics, the average price for a sheep in Sana’a was at least YR39,000 (\$181) at the end of 2014, which represented a 30 percent increase on the previous year. It is nonetheless a significant amount of money for many Yemenis, and the annual fluctuation reveals how volatile food prices can be in the country.

Purchase remains the principal way that both rural and urban households access food, according to the WFP. Nationally, over 95 percent of food consumed at household level is purchased, a figure that nears 100 percent in urban areas.

With such high levels of food insecurity and food price volatility, urban livestock may offer families in the city much needed self-sufficiency in difficult times.

Nassar says the numbers of urban livestock are too small, and the evidence for risks of infection insignificant, for the government to take a more active role—which, he reminds us, has far more pressing concerns. Yet food insecurity is surely one of the most pressing concerns for many Yemenis. Moreover, as population growth, rural-urban migration, and urbanization continue unabated, government authorities may be forced to take a closer look at the practice soon enough.

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Yemen crisis disrupts US counterterrorism operations, officials say



Yemenis protesting against Houthi militias clash with Houthis in Sana'a.

and loyalists. April Longley Alley, a senior analyst and Yemen expert with International Crisis Group, described the outcome of that effort as "an absolute disaster."

"Some of the moves were good, but collectively they were very damaging," Alley said. "In the transition, some of the elite troops lost privileges. This created angst towards Hadi and the transition. Some even joined the Houthis."

As a result, Alley said, "Al-Qaeda is gaining strength and the Houthis are at the forefront of fighting them, which creates its own problems and fuels recruiting for Al-Qaeda."

US officials said they are weighing whether to begin withdrawing military trainers and liaison officers. There is no plan to close the US embassy, but the senior US official indicated employees from the State Department, CIA and other agencies will probably be withdrawn.

"We will be bringing our numbers down," the official said.

US officials expressed hope that counterterrorism operations could resume if the political conflict in Yemen is resolved. "It's unclear where that is going to fall out," said a senior administration official. "It is very hard to say until we see what emerges from the current vacuum."

Although AQAP claimed credit for

the attacks in Paris this month, US officials have said they have not uncovered evidence of direct involvement by the group after one of the gunmen, Chérif Kouachi, returned to France from Yemen after getting training and as much as \$20,000 from the organization.

AQAP's plots targeting the United States include an attempt to bomb a Detroit-bound airliner on Christmas Day 2009, a plan that failed only when the bomb sewn into the operative's underwear failed to ignite. The group has not been linked to any major attacks outside Yemen in recent years but continues to be regarded as the most immediate terrorism threat to the United States.

Michael Vickers, undersecretary of defense for intelligence, described AQAP as "the most dangerous of Al-Qaeda's organizations" in a speech in Washington this week.

The United States has sought to counter the AQAP threat through a campaign of airstrikes that began in late 2009, involving drones flown from separate bases outside Yemen operated by the US military's elite Joint Special Operations Command and the CIA.

The pace of US airstrikes has tapered off, with no known attack since Dec. 6. With Hadi's departure,

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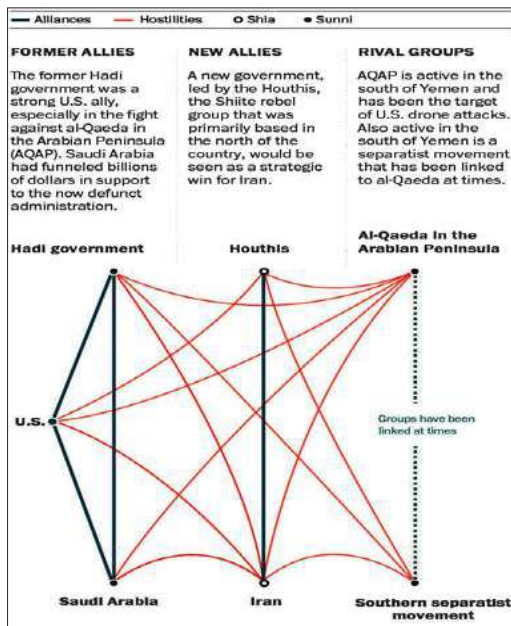
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Some of the US-trained Yemeni troops resisted the Houthis' advance into Sana'a, but others stepped aside or may even have cooperated with the rebels, the senior US official said. The senior US official said that the United States "wouldn't be averse" to talks with the Houthis on subjects including permission to continue operations against AQAP. "We're not against the Houthi movement."

Yemeni military leadership ranks were overhauled in 2012 largely to remove Saleh relatives

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