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Clashes between Special Security Forces and popular committees in Aden

Clashes came after SSF tried to dissolve the committees

■ Nasser Al-Sakkaf

SANA'A, Feb. 16 — Clashes between Special Security Forces (SSF) and popular committees in Aden governorate in the early hours of Monday morning left one committee member dead and at least three others injured.

The popular committees were established at the end of January as an anti-Houthi force and were under the control of the SSF. The committees consist of Adeni residents, said Mohammed Mosaed, the office manager of the Aden Security Department.

The SSF decided to dissolve the popular committees, "because there was no longer a need for them," Mosaed said. The Yemen Times was unable to reach members of the popular committee.

The clashes took place at a number of buildings that Special Security Forces are tasked with protecting, including the headquarters of a public TV station in Aden, the Political Security Bureau in Al-Tawahi district, and other government buildings. Clashes started at



Clashes between the committees and Special Security Forces took place at Aden TV, the Political Security Bureau in Aden and other government institutions.

around 1 a.m.

Mosaed said that following the clashes, the Special Security Forces in Aden successfully expelled the popular committees from Al-Nasr military camp in the Koor Maksar district, where they had been stationed.

"After expelling the committees from the camp, they spread to other parts of the governorate," Mosaed said. "They are now

targeting Special Security Forces everywhere in Aden. The security situation in Aden city is rough, but security forces are trying to control the situation."

He denied that the committees have taken control of any buildings or institutions.

"Just like what happened at Aden TV, the committees are trying to take over institutions but failing. At the TV station, they tried

to enter and failed."

Shamsan Bin Monis, the Southern Movement Youth Coalition spokesperson, told the Yemen Times on Monday that the popular committees were still clashing with the SSF at the Political Security Bureau in Aden.

Mosaed said that the committees consist of Southern Movement members. Bin Monis denied the allegation.



Ahmed Al-Qubati is one of several men who have accused the Houthis of torture in the past week alone. Photos circulating on social media show that the men were all beaten on their buttocks. Critics of the Houthis say that the group chose this spot on the body because survivors would be less likely to pass around photos of their private areas. "Even lions in the jungle only kill to eat. They tortured me for the fun of it," Al-Qubati said. He describes the torture he endured in an interview on page three.

Photo by Ahlam Mohsen

Houthis defiant in face of international condemnation

■ Khalid Al-Karimi

SANA'A, Feb. 15 — The Houthis, also known as Ansar Allah, reacted with defiance on Monday to calls by the international community for the group to relinquish power in Sana'a.

The United Nations Security Council adopted resolution 2201 on Sunday with unanimous support, demanding that Houthis "immediately and unconditionally" withdraw from government institutions and return "in good faith" to UN-brokered negotiations.

The resolution also calls for the immediate release of President

Abdu Rabu Mansour Hadi and members of Cabinet, who have been under house arrest since Jan. 19.

Members of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) — composed of Saudi Arabia, Oman, Kuwait, Qatar, Bahrain, and the United Arab Emirates — had called for more direct intervention at a meeting in Riyadh on Saturday, something Resolution 2201 falls short of.

While GCC members wanted the resolution to be adopted under Chapter VII of the UN Charter, which would allow it to be enforced through military engagement or economic sanctions, members of the Security Council have warned

against any "external influence" — although the resolution includes a "readiness to take further steps" if it is not complied with, without indicating what those steps might involve.

"The Yemeni people will not bow to any threat or warning. This will only make them stronger, more aware and more adherent to their principles," read a statement released Saturday evening by the Houthis on their official Facebook page.

Houthi Political Office member Mohammad Al-Bukhaiti told the Yemen Times on Sunday the GCC's statement was released "to please

American interests" and said it would not undermine "the Yemeni people's revolution."

"The Yemeni people will not stop fighting corruption, terrorism and building their future state. We rely on God and the Yemeni people alone — we move in line with our faith in God, not any loyalty to America," said Al-Bukhaiti.

While less stringent than the GCC statement, the resolution passed by the Security Council on Sunday "will only facilitate efforts by Al-Qaeda to gain power and take over our institutions," he added.

According to Majed Siraj, a political researcher at the Sheba Strategic

Center, a non-governmental institute based in Sana'a, statements by the GCC and UN Security Council will have little if any immediate impact on Yemen's political arena.

"Calling for Yemen to be placed under Chapter VII will only exacerbate the situation," he added.

The GCC statement and Resolution 2201 are the latest in a series of moves by foreign governments in opposition to the Houthis, who dissolved parliament and called for a new government to be formed in their Constitutional Declaration of Feb. 6.

Citing security concerns, which appear to be unfounded, foreign embassies have suspended operations and evacuated staff from the capital. Following closures of the American, British, and European embassies, Saudi Arabia became the first Arab state to evacuate its

consular staff on Friday.

Al-Bukhaiti has called the evacuations "unjustified."

"There are no security reasons for their departure. Everyone can see that after Sept. 21 [when Houthis seized control of Sana'a] no foreign national has been targeted in the capital. The reason behind their evacuation is to harm Yemen's economic interests," he said.

GCC and United Nations members have demanded respect for political "legitimacy," but Al-Bukhaiti said the return of President Hadi to power is now "impossible."

Addressing the UN Security Council on Feb. 12, Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon spoke of dire consequences if immediate action is not taken. "Let me be clear: Yemen is collapsing before our eyes. We cannot stand by and watch," he said.

Two soldiers assassinated in Lahj

■ Bassam Al-Khameri

SANA'A, Feb. 16 — Increasing tensions in Lahj culminated in the killing of two soldiers Monday by unknown gunmen in Al-Hawta city.

A senior security officer in the Lahj Security Department told the Yemen Times on condition of anonymity, because he was fearful for his safety, that the two soldiers were part of Armored Brigade 39 stationed near Al-Hawta city of Lahj governorate. They were attacked near their brigade, the source said.

"The two soldiers went to buy items from a grocery store near the brigade and unknown gunmen, perhaps linked to Al-Qaeda, attacked them. The soldiers were found dead," he added.

This came after gunmen affiliated with the Youth of the Southern Popular Resistance — popular committees established recently in light of the unstable security situation in northern governorates

— kidnapped 12 military officers in Lahj governorate Sunday afternoon.

The security source said that the kidnapping took place in Al-Habelin city in Radfan district of Lahj, adding that, "The 12 kidnapped military officers include: Colonel Redhwan Bin Mohammed Al-Dhamari, commander of a military battalion positioned in the west of Al-Habelin City in Lahj and Colonel Ahmed Al-Sherari, the newly-appointed commander of the battalion."

The kidnapped officers are part of Brigade 201 positioned in Al-Anad area of Lahj.

Basim Al-Zuraiqi, the spokesperson for Lahj governorate, said that the military officers were kidnapped while they on the way to the site of the battalion to attend a ceremony for the transfer of leadership from Al-Dhamari and Al-Sherari.

Al-Zuraiqi said that the popular committees in Lahj demand all military commanders in the gover-

norate to be replaced by southern leaders.

Al-Zuraiqi told the Yemen Times that the situation in Lahj is unstable because southerners are anticipating a Houthi attempt to take over the south.

"Popular committees have been established in the southern governorates, including Lahj and Aden, in preparation for any attacks by the Houthis. The popular committees in Aden have attempted to take over public institutions and this may happen in other southern governorates as well," Al-Zuraiqi said.

In a statement released on Monday, the popular committees of Lahj claimed credit for the kidnapping of the officers.

"The members of the Southern Popular Resistance were able to kidnap 12 officers of the 201 brigade in Lahj. The operation came as a response to the shelling by the military on Radfan district where civilians were killed and injured," the statement said.

Tension increased in southern governorates following the Houthis' seizure of Al-Baida city in Al-Baida governorate on Feb. 10. Al-Baida borders Abyan, Shabwa, Al-Dhale and Lahj governorates.

Mohammed Al-Bukhaiti, a member of the Houthi Political Office said that the fears of southerners are unjustified.

"Ansar Allah has no intentions to spread militarily to the south. We are fighting Al-Qaeda and combating corruption in the north and the southerners should cooperate with the military and security personnel there to get rid of the terrorist groups that create instability in the south," he said.

The military shelled Radfan district on Jan. 30 after local gunmen launched an attack against a military site in the district. At least four people, including three Southern Movement members, died in those clashes. Radfan is known for its role in the October 14 Revolution in 1963. Efforts to end the British occupation began in the district.

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Popular committee ousts Special Security Forces in Zunjubar



One special committee member told the Yemen Times that the attack is part of a wider campaign to reinstate an independent South Yemen.

■ Ali Aboluhom

SANA'A, Feb 16— Popular committee members raided the Special Security Forces in Zunjubar city, Abyan governorate, on Monday, expelling the soldiers and taking control of their compound. Nasser Al-Hawshabi, a popular committee member in the city, said armed members broke into the compound on Monday after giving the soldiers a warning beforehand. No resistance was offered and the soldiers have since departed, giving the popular committee full control of the barracks. One of the departing soldiers, Mohammed Antar, said his men would have been unable to defend themselves and had little choice but to hand over their compound. "It was the right decision to surrender, otherwise there would be deaths on both sides and they would have defeated us anyway," he said, adding that his side were

undermanned and under-armed. Al-Hawshabi said the attack is part of a wider campaign to reinstate Southern Yemen as an independent state. "When the legitimate president [Abdu Rabu Mansour Hadi] resigned under pressure from the Houthis, the popular committee realized it was time to remove any bastion of Houthi authority in the south, which includes the special forces," he said, adding that Monday's attack was a first step towards extending control throughout Abyan governorate. "We are determined to free government institutions in the south from the grip of Houthis who took over the government in Sana'a," he said. The resignation of President Hadi, who is originally from Abyan's Al-Wade'a district, has provoked a backlash from many popular committee members in the governorate, according to local journalist Jamal Mansour.

Mansour says the Special Security Forces' barracks in Zunjubar had remained almost empty since 2011, leaving Abyan vulnerable to infiltration by Al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP). "No more than 50 soldiers were remained in the barracks after 2011, following the war with Al-Qaeda at the end of that year. Those remaining all left on Monday morning," he said. Members of Abyan's Security Office will be meeting with popular committee members to resolve any issues arising from the stand-off, according to a source at the governorate's Security Office who wished to remain anonymous. Popular committees were formed in Abyan by the Ministry of Defense in early 2012 to provide support in operations against AQAP, whose members had taken advantage of the upheaval in 2011 to expand their influence in the governorate.

Houthis continue policy of abducting protesters

■ Nasser Al-Sakkaf

SANA'A, Feb.15— At a protest in Ibb Sunday morning demanding the release of an anti-houthi organizer, Houthis abducted two more people, a photographer and another activist. Armed Houthis kidnapped photographer Mohammed Al-Moalimi and activist Mohammed Al-Doais at a protest demanding the release of Ahmed Haza'a, the secretary general of the Rafdh (Rejection) Movement in Ibb. The Rejection Movement is an anti-Houthi Movement established on Dec. 22 in Ibb governorate. They have organized anti-Houthi protests in Ibb, Taiz and the capital city, Sana'a. The Houthis fired live rounds at the protest, according to eyewitnesses. Walid Al-Amari, a founder of the Rejection Movement, told the Yemen Times that the two people were taken once the protesters had reached the security department in Ibb city. "Suddenly, two Houthi military vehicles arrived and tried to arrest a large number of us. They were unsuccessful at kidnapping anyone until after the protest had concluded," Al-Amari said. Haza'a, for whom the protest was called, was taken a day earlier after a large demonstration against the Houthis in Ibb.



The Rejection Movement, an anti-Houthi coalition, was formed on Dec. 22 in Ibb. It has organized protests in Ibb, Taiz and Sana'a.

"After the Houthis attacked protesters, the youth burned a Houthi military vehicle," Al-Amari said. Haza'a was driving home when he was stopped and detained, according to Al-Amari. On Feb.2 broke into the home of retired military officer Mohsen Khasrof in the Sana'a. Khasrof said the Houthis were looking for his son, who is the head of the Rejection Movement in the capital. He was not home. Mohammed Al-Bukhaiti, a member of the Houthi Political Office, said he did not have any details of Haza'a's abduction. A Houthi in Ibb city, who calls himself Abu Basser, told the Ye-

men Times that Haza'a was arrested "after the youth attacked an Ansar Allah [Houthi] vehicle. They burned it, and this was our response." He declined to comment on the other abductions. "Houthis are not popular in Ibb city," said Ahmed Al-Guhaifi, an activist in Ibb. "But [they] use force to impose their presence [here], and I think there will be escalating confrontations between residents and the Houthis if they keep kidnapping their opponents." The Houthis took Ibb city in mid-October. Their checkpoints have since expanded throughout the governorate.

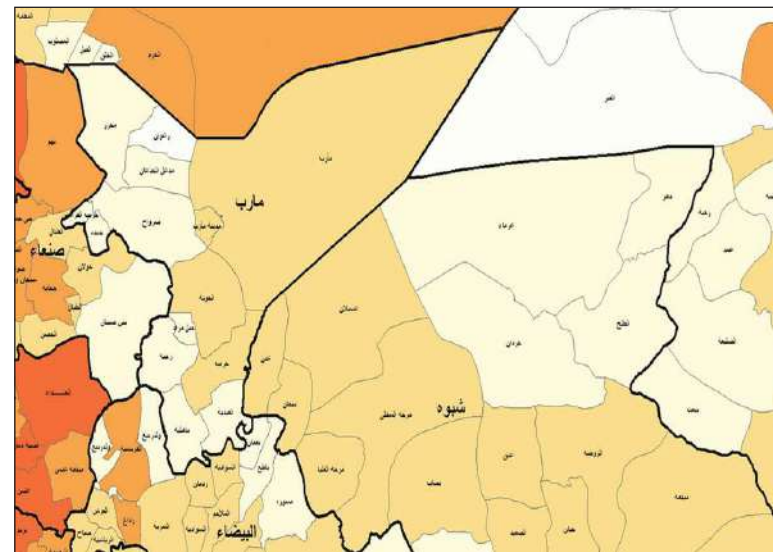
Marib tribesmen protect military camp from AQAP assault

■ Nasser Al-Sakkaf

SANA'A, Feb. 15— Tribesmen from Marib governorate crossed into Hadramout Saturday night to protect Al-Abr Military Camp from an assault by suspected members of Al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP). Militants attacked the camp on Saturday, which lies in Al-Abr district on the border with Marib. It belongs to the 23rd Mechanized Brigade, part of the First Military Command. Gunmen laid siege to the camp from midnight until noon, before armed men from the Abida and Murad tribes in Marib responded to a request for backup, according to Abshal Al-Futaini, a prominent member of the Murad tribe.

Al-Futaini, who also heads the non-governmental General Union of Youth in Sana'a, said tribesmen joined the fight after the brigade threatened to capitulate if reinforcements did not arrive. Fourteen vehicles carrying armed men were sent into Hadramout to protect the camp, said Al-Futaini, causing the attackers to flee. "Marib's tribes are willing to support the army and they will not let Al-Qaeda or any other armed group enter our governorate," he added. "Al-Abr camp is not inside Marib but it is nearby, and if AQAP take it over, they will enter Marib."

Responding to a request from Abida tribe members, men from the Al-Se'er tribe in Hadramout agreed on Sunday to help coordinate protection for the camp. "Al-Se'er promised they will protect the entrance [to the camp] from their side," said Al-Futaini.



Tribes from Marib crossed into Hadramout to protect Al-Abr Military Camp from suspected AQAP members.

Mohammad Bohaibeh, a tribal field commander in Marib, confirmed that tribes in Marib are collaborating closely with the military in his governorate. "This is a positive attitude for Marib tribes and I wish all tribes in the country would do the same," said Abdullah Yaradan, director of Wadi Abida district in Marib. The attack on Al-Abr camp comes following an assault on the 19th Infantry Brigade in Baihan district, Shabwa governorate, on Thursday, when the brigade was overpowered and looted. According to Salem Al-Sail, a locally based journalist, men from Shabwa's Al-Masabain tribe led that attack and only half a dozen AQAP militants were involved. "Some tribes in Shabwa think they should imitate Houthis and take over camps in the south," he said. Nasser Al-Mulaish, under-

secretary of Shabwa governorate, conceded that some AQAP militants may have been involved, but says Al-Masabain carry AQAP banners in an attempt to disguise their identity, making it difficult for authorities to pursue them. Al-Abr Camp is located in the desert frontier between Hadramout and Marib, and is considered strategically important as a buffer between north and south, where AQAP has a stronger presence. "Marib's tribes will not allow [AQAP] to move northward through Marib," says Al-Futaini. "There are dozens of vehicles protecting the camp, and men from our main tribes [Obeida and Murad] are still gathering to join those already in Al-Abr." As of Monday evening, tribal militias remain in the area to fend off any further attacks, according to Mohammed Al-Sharafi, a local journalist.

الأوسرا

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Tortured by the Houthis

Yemen Times exclusive interview with Ahmed Al-Qubati

Ahmed Al-Qubati, 54, is a high-ranking member of the Nasserite party. He was abducted by the Houthis during a demonstration commemorating the four year anniversary of Yemen's 2011 uprising on Feb. 11. Below is Al-Qubati's account of the torture he endured during his two days of detention, as well as his thoughts on Yemen four years on.

■ Interview and photo by **Ahlam Mohsen**

How did your day start?

I was kidnapped on Feb. 11, during the morning demonstration. I met with a group gathered at Mesbahi roundabout. We headed towards the UN building. The other group coming from Baghdad [street] didn't make it, because the Houthis cut off the route.

Before leaving some young people were taking photos. The Houthis were taking things from young men and women such as notebooks, cameras and university textbooks. They even took my little notebook.

After that, someone returned some of the things that were taken, but after reading what was written in my notebook they refused to return it.

"I've been a Nasserite since university. I've never hidden it. People can think what they want. The problem with the Arab world is that the people in power are always right, and we must always defer to them."

I went to the man who had returned some of the belongings and asked him to return my notebook. He went to [the Houthis] in a pick-up truck and told them that I have slogans written in my notebook, and the man in the car asked me to get in the car. I told the man in the car to read the slogans—there was nothing wrong with them, but the man kept asking me to get in the car. I started to back away slowly.

Then, two soldiers came and pushed me towards the car while a third man pulled me inside it.

They covered my head with a hood, and I told them I am [a] sick man and I might suffocate. They said, 'shut up and nothing will happen to you.'

As we were driving, they asked if I was trying to turn Yemen into another Iraq or Syria. I told them I wanted to see Yemen happy and prosperous—a decent place for all Yemenis.

They said they wanted partnership and invited me to join them in power. I said, 'We do not want positions of power, we want to serve Yemen.'

I was taken to the basement of some building. I don't know where, my head was covered until we arrived, and they blindfolded me once we were there.

What were the conditions like during your detention?

For the first day, it was only me. I was allowed to go to the bathroom twice a day. Even though I have diabetes, I tried not to drink too much water in order to minimize bathroom breaks. After a while, I started urinating in an empty bottle.

They fed me, but I tried not to eat too much, to avoid defecating outside the two visits to the bathroom I was allowed.

On the first day, two men came in to the room. They brought with them a table and a bright light. I thought it was nice of them to give me lighting, perhaps they were going to give me reading materials.

Actually, they brought the light in for interrogation. They did the same thing the following day.

What did they ask you during your interrogations?

At first, it started out simply enough. They wanted to know my name, occupation, where I lived. But then they asked me to 'confess'. 'Confess to what?' I asked them.

And then the accusations got strange. They wanted me to confess that I take young women to hair salons before bringing them to the protests. They said I ordered the women to wear make-up to these protests. A lot of nonsensical things.

'That's not true,' I said. 'I don't even know those women.'

They then tied my feet and hands to the table and started beating me.

I've been a Nasserite since university. I've never hidden it. People can think what they want. The problem with the Arab world is that the people in power are always right, and we must always defer to them.

Our righteousness is a reflection of our actions, not our words. People should prove they're good by doing good.

What were the beatings like?

I was blindfolded, so I couldn't see what they were beating me with. They started with wood, I think, because I saw them torture another man. They broke a dozen pieces of wood on his buttocks.

There were three of them, I saw them before they blindfolded me. They were in their 20s.

They beat me with a number of different materials: plastic, metal, rubber.

During the torture, they asked me about Tawwakol Karman. They ac-

"Yemen is like a school, you bring in a bad teacher, you'll have bad students... So many Yemenis are armed, anything could happen."

cused me of cooperating with her to 'create chaos'.

I told them that I met her once during the first public commemoration for Ibrahim Al-Hamdi. It was not a personal meeting, she was there as an activist.

I've been a Nasserite for 42 years, I know most of the politicians in Yemen. Knowing Karman is nothing special. I have nothing to hide.

Did you think you would survive the torture?

It lasted for an hour and a half, maybe two hours. I was most worried for my family. My mother is an old woman, and very sensitive.

As for myself, I surrendered to it. I love this country. If my time to die has come, so be it.

Did you sense any hesitation from the men?

No, they enjoyed it. They accused me of everything as it was happening. I was an ally of the US, Saudi Arabia, the Islamic State (ISIL), everyone.

You're 54. You've lived through the Sept. 26 Revolution, the ascent of [Ali Abdullah] Saleh, unification, the 1994 civil war, the 2011 uprising and the Houthi takeover. The UN says we are on the brink of civil war. Do you have hope for Yemen?

During a [Nasserite] party meeting in February 2011, I said that this will be the most difficult phase Yemen has ever been through.

The civil war in 1994, the Sept. 26 Revolution, nothing was as dangerous as this current situation is.

Yemen is like a school, you bring in a bad teacher, you'll have bad students.

So many Yemenis are armed, anything could happen.

Instead of education, we have indoctrination. Indoctrination by the sheikhs, by religious and tribal leaders. People do what leaders tell them to do.

If ignorance is the disease, education is our vaccine.

What do you think of the Houthis' stated goal of completing the revolution?

We do not reject the Houthis outright, we never reject any side outright. [The Nasserites] are the middle men, the center of all sides always trying to bring people together.

We will oppose any one who tries to send us over the abyss. We will not make all the compromises while they do whatever they want.

During Saleh's days, there were injustices, but a government is always better than armed militias.

There's talk of a possible Ahmed Ali Saleh presidency. Would a government with Ahmed Ali at the head be better than a country ruled by the Houthis?

We do not want [Ali Abdullah] Saleh back. However, if his son wants to become president, and he's elected through fair and transparent elections, fine.

Some have said that we're back where we started four years ago. Is it worse than that? Is living under the rule of the Houthis worse than what Yemenis endured under Saleh?

What happened to me in that room never happened to me under Saleh.

In 2011, I was obsessed with Saleh, with the idea that we must remove him from power, but things were never this bad. I was harassed, more than once bullets were fired in the air to scare me, but I [was never tortured].

What was the pain like?

I was tortured on my second [and



Ahmed Al-Qubati has been involved in politics for over thirty years, but says nothing Yemen has been through is as dangerous as the current situation.

last] day of captivity, as a farewell gift.

The pain was so bad that I felt my back side being cut open and salted, every time they hit me. Even lions in a jungle only kill to eat. They tortured me for the fun of it. It felt like they would never stop.

I pop painkillers all day, and

sleeping pills to try to sleep.

Their cruelty has left me feeling empty.

The last question they asked me was if I would continue going to the protests.

Will you continue going to the protests?

They're illegal now. I swore that I would not protest anymore. I want the international community to demand that protests be allowed. It's the only way to make it safer for people.

I will not be attending. They clearly indicated that attending them would be the end for me.

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Government failure extends private healthcare crisis in Sana'a

■ Nasser Al-Sakkaf

Over a year and a half has passed since several hospitals were ordered to close due to malpractice, but a follow-up investigation by the Yemen Times reveals they are continuing to operate in sub-standard conditions.

Following an inquiry in 2013, the Ministry of Public Health and Population found the majority of private hospitals in violation of minimum health and technical standards. In a statement released on Aug. 12 that year, the ministry stated that only eight of the capital's 62 private hospitals were up to standard.

Hospitals found operating below standard were classified into two categories and given corresponding penalties: those meeting at least 80 percent of requirements were given three months to address any shortcomings, while those faring worst were issued fines and ordered to close down immediately.

Seven private hospitals fell into the latter category and thus had their licenses revoked: Al-Salam, Al-Madina, Sharha, Women and Children's Hospital, Al-Sahab, Khalifa Bin Zaid and the Shahr Al-Shiba-

ni Surgery Center.

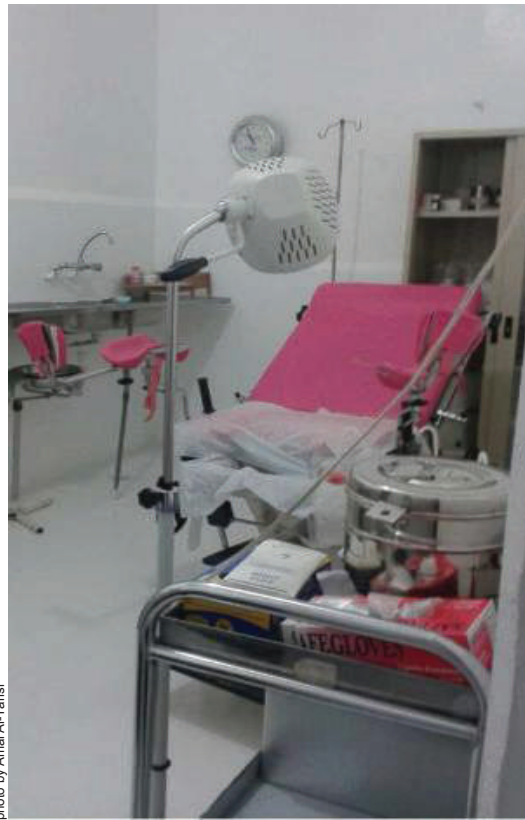
Since then, all but the Shahr Al-Shibani Surgical Center remain open, and there is little indication that conditions have improved.

At the beginning of February, the Yemen Times visited Al-Salam hospital on Taiz street. The clinic was found open for service against government orders, but while nurses were seen waiting at reception there were no patients or doctors to be found.

Fatima Mohamed, a nurse working in the hospital's reception hall, explained that doctors only come in the mornings or if called in for emergencies.

Dr. Shais Al-Silwi, the general manager of Al-Salam, confirmed that he and other doctors continue working at the hospital. "We didn't close because the ministry has not identified specific issues for us to address," he said.

"We haven't fixed anything because we don't know what needs fixing," claims Al-Silwi, who said his hospital hasn't been inspected by any monitoring committees since a visit



“The problem isn't just the hospitals, it's the ministry and the [health] office — we don't have a minister,” said the manager of private medicine at the Ministry of Public Health and Population.

by the Sana'a Health Office in late 2013.

According to Yahya Al-Ghasali, general manager of private medicine at the ministry, hospital standards are measured according to a range of medical and technical issues. Inadequate emergency rooms, surgical equipment and a lack of staff were the most common violations, he said.

Any hospital working without a license is doing so illegally, admits Al-Ghasali, “but the ministry can't do anything — even if improvements are made, there is no government these days to monitor the situation or enforce decisions, everything is chaotic.” Nonetheless, he adds, the Ministry of Public Health and Population is not actually responsible for closing hospitals. While the ministry issues decisions, responsibility lies with the local Health Office to implement them, which can call on the Ministry of Interior for support in the matter.

According to the manager of the Sana'a Health Of-

fice, Ali Al-Hammadi, a committee formed in 2013 to enforce hospital closures “disappeared” and was never replaced. He said hospitals had appealed against the inquiry's findings and sought time to address their shortcomings, but that “conditions in Yemen went from bad to worse, and then a new government was formed in 2014.”

Whether or not hospitals have improved their standards is largely irrelevant in the current situation, according to Al-Ghasali. He cites the example of Al-Sahab Hospital in Al-Hasaba neighborhood, which has worked to bring its operations into line with government expectations.

“Al-Sahab Hospital has improved, but it is still not legally entitled to operate because it requested a license when the previous government was formed and it hasn't been possible to follow up on the paper work,” he said.

Requests for licenses are made through the capital's Health Office, which need confirmation from the health ministry, according to Al-Ghasali.

“The health ministry is supposed to send committees on annual visits to evaluate standards at private hospitals, but there is no budget for it,” he added. “Since these commit-

tees are not formed from within the ministry, it is costly to fund a group of several experts and engineers for the task.”

Until a new government is formed that is capable of enforcing the law, Al-Ghasali admits that any hospital will continue operating regardless of the conditions found there.

“The problem isn't just the hospitals, it's the ministry and the [health] office — we don't have a minister,” he points out.

In the meantime, it seems market forces that provide the very reason d'être for privatized healthcare offer the only means for regulating standards, even if they have proved inadequate in the past.

According to Mazen Adel, who lives near Al-Madina hospital on Amman Street, those hospitals blacklisted are avoided by most of the public. “Patients are reluctant to visit these hospitals since the government's decision was issued [in 2013],” he said, adding that members of his family used to visit Al-Madina until its low standards were made public.

Though information and public awareness are key in this scenario, so long as the current political crisis continues, much of the responsibility will lie with the public.

OPINION

Tunisia between subsidies and security

Chris Chapman
atlanticcouncil.org
First published Feb. 17

With a democratically elected parliament and president, now come Tunisia's difficult growing pains of balancing newly earned freedoms with security reform and economic transformation. Tunisia's leadership must guide the country through a difficult path that addresses the primary needs of Tunisians—from curbing violent terrorism to increasing economic opportunity. Yet, the policy solutions to these major concerns may yield conflicting results. How Tunisia addresses each priority will affect the other. Efforts to secure Tunisia's border and prevent smuggling can increase domestic threats and violence. Similarly, enacting the tough spending cuts and reductions to subsidies may produce an equally dangerous outcome in the form of civil unrest. The decision is not as simple as choosing guns or butter.

Economic concerns in part drove Tunisian revolutionaries to the streets. Rebalancing the economy to address their concerns remains a challenge for the incoming government. Since former President Zine Al-Abidine Ben Ali fled and a transitional government took over, the Tunisian economy has faltered. Unemployment remains high at more than 15 percent—above the pre-revolution level of 13 percent. The trade deficit increased to 13.6 billion Tunisian dinars or \$7.2 billion in 2014 (versus 11.8 billion dinars or \$6.2 billion in 2013), which roughly amounts to 8.9 percent of GDP. Due to continued instability and violence, foreign direct investment (FDI) fell to around \$1 billion dollars. Despite the decreases in revenues, the government increased

spending on subsidies to \$4 billion in 2014.

Setting aside the unsettling macroeconomic indicators, the Tunisian government must also cope with the large illicit economy that boomed during the transitional period. While the black market and criminal trade had long existed under Ben Ali, smuggling has greatly increased since the revolution. Food and resource prices have grown so high that bananas cost roughly 30 percent more than in Western states like the United Kingdom. For many Tunisians living near the borders, smuggling goods and fuel provides the only source of income. The World Bank reported in 2013 that illicit trade costs the Tunisian government about \$1.2 billion per year and encompasses nearly half of the bilateral trade with Libya. The influx of refugees from Libya adds additional strain on its already subsidy-reliant economy. The UN estimates that Tunisia has taken in over one million Libyan refugees (the Tunisian government reports that nearly 2 million Libyans have fled to Tunisia), making adequate care and accommodations difficult.

The second, but equally important issue for Tunisians, includes protection from extremist groups such as Ansar Al-Sharia and Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM). Since the revolution, internal security has proven difficult for the Tunisian security apparatus. Tunisia's porous borders with Libya and Algeria allow the free movement of people, drugs, and weapons. The criminal activity poses a danger not just to Tunisia, but also to the wider region and Europe. The Mount Chaambi region along the Algerian border has seen deadly fighting between extremist Islamists and Tunisian security forces. Tunisia produces the highest number of foreign fighters for the Islamic State (ISIS or ISIL)

and Al-Qaeda's Syrian branch, the Al-Nusra Front. More than 3,000 people have left to fight in Syria.

How can Tunisia balance its security and economic priorities?

Tunisia's President Beji Caid Essebsi emphasized the need for a secure and stable Tunisia in his inaugural address. He envisions a society free from the devastating harm of terrorism. Tunisians can expect the new government to aggressively increase military patrols along the border, beef up intelligence activity to disrupt terror networks, and crack-down on Salafist ideology. However, an overemphasis on security would redirect resources from supporting economic institutions and programs. Assuming secure borders and a halt to illicit activity, many Tunisians dependent on smuggling for their livelihood would lose their only source of income. Without a comparable rise in meaningful employment, disaffected Tunisians may blame the government, making them prime candidates for violence or extremism. Rather than achieving a secure Tunisia, the unintended consequence may create a new wave of domestic threats.

Alternatively, should Tunisian authorities emphasize economic growth—focusing on macroeconomic reforms that include reducing and eventually eliminating government subsidies—may feed into the same criminal activity it tries to curb. To re-orient its balances, Tunisia needs to slash government spending. This means an end to highly subsidized goods such as fuel and food. However, an International Monetary Fund study shows that these subsidies help mostly higher income citizens rather than the targeted low-income families. Not only are subsidies costly, but they also provide an ineffective social safety net.

Yet, removing subsidies may force Tunisians living in the outer regions to resort to smuggling. Similarly, the government would face the decision of cutting salaries for public employees, whose unions already strike over pay. The removal of subsidies and potential wage cuts puts pressure on vulnerable Tunisian pocketbooks, leading to a reliance on illicit markets for their survival. Unfortunately, smart economic choices will hurt many in the short-term. Tunisians having to adjust to new expectations of government aid could lead to the same frustrations that ousted Ben Ali. If security is not addressed aggressively and the full brunt of economic reforms is not mitigated, Tunisia may experience a spike in violence from disaffected citizens.

The proper use of international assistance would help Tunisia realize the delicate policy balance that gives equal weight to both security and economic issues. Several states already provide aid to bolster the country's agenda. The United States, which strongly desires a secure and democratic Tunisia, has already committed more than \$570 million in assistance since 2011. Tunisia receives security sector help from Spain, Turkey, Qatar, Japan, Belgium, Norway Germany, the United Kingdom, Finland, and France. Yet, few countries coordinate their assistance, muddling its impact. Tunisia's partners must consolidate international efforts to improve border security and counterterrorism effectiveness with the necessary equipment and technical assistance. The effort must also include reforming the criminal justice system and policing procedures to meet international human and civil rights standards.

Large loans or aid packages from Gulf states—like Saudi Arabia or the United Arab Emirates—could allevi-

ate the initial economic pressures resulting from cutting subsidies. President Essebsi's positive relationship with the UAE could particularly help exact the needed support. The influx of cash would allow the government to ease subsidies out while counter-balancing them with cash handouts to minimize the pain to citizens. It would also allow the uninterrupted payment of employee salaries, thereby avoiding strikes, and afford increased security measures. New employment and job creation programs for border areas would prevent the temptation to resort to the informal economy.

Provided with the proper international support, the Tunisian government would no longer have to decide between security and the economy. Both would be addressed in a man-

ner that is most beneficial to all Tunisians. Security is enhanced, the border is controlled, but rather than eliminating sources of income and removing safety nets, the government can reform its subsidies to best serve those in need and avoid the pitfalls that can come when implementing these policies. With help from the international community, Tunisia could tackle the issues in the best way possible, simultaneously.

Chris Chapman is a research intern at the Atlantic Council's Rafik Hariri Center for the Middle East focusing on North Africa.

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The lure of traditional orthopedics in a volatile economy

Story and photo by **Bassam Al-Khameri**

With its low ceilings and narrow, winding steps, Akram Mohammed Sulaiman's apartment looks like most others in Sana'a. Approaching the building on Al-Dairi Street, however, an inconspicuous sign hanging on the door tells visitors they are in fact entering an orthopedic clinic. Of sorts, anyway.

Known as a "mujaber" or bone-setter, Sulaiman is one of many traditional doctors in Yemen offering alternative, and cheaper, orthopedic treatment.

Sulaiman's makeshift clinic is composed of four small compartments. Two are used as waiting rooms — one for men, another for women — and a third is for x-rays. With little more than chairs, a desk and a sink in the corner, there is not much to distinguish the operating room, but between 9 and 4 p.m. large numbers of patients are received and treated here.

Judging by the number of patients he sees, Sulaiman is a popular and trusted physician. But he did not study orthopedics and does not have any recognized medical qualifications. His skills were passed on to him from his father, and from his grandfather before him. Training begins with sprained wrists and ankles, according to Sulaiman, before apprentices are taught more complicated skills like splinting broken and fractured bones.

Established by his father almost

30 years ago, Sulaiman has been practicing at his clinic on Al-Dairi Street for more than nine years. Working without assistance, he says he receives between 40 and 50 patients each day for all kinds of fractures, broken bones and sprains.

"I treat everything related to bones, including displaced vertebrae and herniated discs. I only don't intervene in cases that need surgery, such as serious injuries in car accidents," said Sulaiman.

A popular alternative

Many Yemenis both in urban and rural areas believe traditional bone-setters are better than qualified orthopedic doctors.

Ahsan Ali Al-Ahlasi, a 56-year-old street vendor in Sana'a, was being seen in the treatment room while the Yemen Times was visiting. He has been to Sulaiman several times for treatment on a fracture he sustained on his shoulder. A patient of Sulaiman's father before him, Al-Ahlasi said he is familiar with the practice and is confident in its efficacy.

Victims of road accidents, children and the elderly are Sulaiman's most common patients.

"Motorcyclists and kids are some of my most regular customers because there are so many traffic accidents and kids get hurt while playing. The number of women visiting me increases during Eid preparations, because they fall of ladders when cleaning the ceilings," he said.

Following initial treatments, Sulaiman asks his patients to come back for checkups on a weekly basis. In his experience, broken bones



With little more than wooden rulers, plasters and cotton, traditional bonesetters treat a wide range of injuries. Although cheaper and traditionally acceptable, if not done properly it can lead to permanent damage.

and fractures in children can heal in about two weeks, but older patients

need a month or more, depending on the injury.

He uses simple material to treat his patients, avoiding plates and other intrusive materials normally used in hospitals. "All I use are small rulers, plasters, cotton and gauze," he says, adding that, so long as patients come to him soon enough, his techniques work.

Regardless of how severe the injury, Sulaiman also forgoes the use of anaesthetics. "They can only be used by doctors and may have negatives effects if used inappropriately," he acknowledges, adding that most of his patients prefer to tolerate the pain on his advice rather than visit

a hospital.

Although traditional bonesetters can usually diagnose using experience and touch alone, an exception is sometimes made for x-ray machines. "Only some unclear cases need x-rays, and at only YR500 (\$2) each it is very cheap at my center," explains Sulaiman. At hospitals, x-rays normally cost at least YR1500 (\$7).

Affordable healthcare

Yemen is the poorest country in the Arab world, and with ongoing turmoil since 2011 most families have seen their situation deteriorate further. Finding affordable al-

ternatives, whether it be dinner or healthcare, is necessary for a growing number of people.

"What is the benefit of going to a doctor and spending much more money while I can be treated for less? Here at Sulaiman's clinic I only pay YR500 (\$2)," said the street vendor Al-Ahlasi.

There are no set prices at Sulaiman's clinic, where patients pay according to their means. "People usually pay between YR500 and 700 (\$2-3) for x-rays, but some poor people who don't have money are treated for free," according to Sulaiman.

Ibrahim Salah, a motorcyclist in Sana'a who is originally from Ibb governorate, came to Sulaiman after he had a road accident and fractured his arm.

"I prefer not to go to doctors because they charge a lot for treatment, and then they subscribe expensive medicines. I'm not rich, I work hard to make enough money for my family," he said.

The prices are low, but Sulaiman is confident his patients come to him because he is good at what he does. Not everyone agrees, however.

Ateeq Mohammed, a private school teacher in Sana'a, has vowed never to take his four children to traditional doctors following an incident with his son.

"My eight year old, Ahmad, broke his arm about five months ago while I was in Taiz doing some business. My neighbor took him to a practitioner who splinted the arm."

According to Mohammed, the practitioner used a small ruler and simply wrapped Ahmad's arm in cotton and gauze without taking an x-ray. His son was kept awake with the pain, and when Mohammed took him to see a qualified doctor he was told Ahmed was suffering from Volkman Syndrome—a deformity caused by mistreated injuries.

Unsurprisingly, medically qualified doctors are opposed to the practice and warn the public against it. Tradition and practical survival techniques are central to the lives of many Yemenis, however, and it is safe to assume the mujaber will not be going out of business any time soon.

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ADVERTORIAL

Yemen Airways has launched its first direct flight from Dubai City in the UAE to Hadibou Airport in the Socotra Archipelago.

Yemen Airways has launched its first direct flight from Dubai City in the UAE to Hadibou Airport in the Socotra Archipelago.

The flight was warmly received after its departures from Dubai and Socotra airports. The initiative reflects interest in both countries for expanding the route, which connects Socotra — an island listed by UNESCO as a world natural heritage site — with Dubai, one of the world's most important cities.

The first international flight to the island has also received a warm welcome from authorities and locals on Socotra.

Mohammad Abdulhameed Al-Mekhlafi, Deputy General Director for Commercial Affairs, told Saba news agency the new flight is part of a wider initiative to expand Yemen Airways, under a five-year program aimed at improving services that was approved in 2014.

"Launching this program corresponds with our company's plans to connect every part of Yemen with other countries.

Our carefully planned expansion will develop with our commercial visions for the future and developments within the aviation industry," he said.

The regional manager in Yemen Airways' UAE branch expects the new route to be in high demand.

"The company has received many bookings from all over the world for trips to Socotra, it is an island filled with natural treasures and untold secrets."

Local authorities in the Socotra Archipelago have welcomed the initiative, which enhances Socotra's connection with the wider world and facilitates direct access to the island.

Socotra's police chief, Brigadier-General Abdulla Essa, told Saba news agency that "activating this flight will increase tourism to and from Socotra Island, but it will also facilitate air transport for other passengers, especially locals from the Island who live and work in the UAE."

Essa praised Yemen Airways and the positive role it plays in reviving the tour-



ism sector on Socotra, and for being the first airline to organize flights to the island.

He reaffirmed the airport staff's desire to provide for all the needs tourists and travelers seeking out the enchanting nature for which Socotra is known the world over.

General Director of Hadibou district, Salem Daheq, has also praised the new international direct flight into Socotra, considered one of the world's most important areas for biodiversity.

The archipelago has been ranked the world's most beautiful area, after coming in tenth and fourth on previous occasions — a status that all Yemenis can be proud of.

"Eco-tourism, which Socotra island stands for, is thriving day after day, and people who adore it increase everyday, which make us care even more about its unique bio-diversity and the need to facilitate access to the archipelago, and to overcome all the difficulties and hardships the country is currently undergoing," added Daheq, who expects the new international flight to make Socotra a top destination for lovers of eco-tourism.



Does Iran really control Yemen?

Shahir ShahidSaless
al-monitor.com
First published Feb. 12

On Jan. 22, the embattled Western- and Saudi-backed president of Yemen, Abdu Rabu Mansour Hadi, and his Cabinet resigned. Immediately afterward, the Houthi Shia rebels, who have controlled the capital Sana'a since September and are officially organized under the banner of Ansar Allah (Partisans of God), announced that they seek "a peaceful transfer of power."

Despite some differences in their religious beliefs, when it comes to foreign policy, very little separates the Iranian Twelver Shias from Houthis, who are Zaydi Shias. The political narrative that Houthis have propagated is "Death to America, Death to Israel," which is modeled on revolutionary Iran's motto.

Houthis adhere to a branch of Shia Islam known as Zaydism. Their name is derived from Badr Al-Deen Al-Houthi, the group's leader during the uprising in 2004 that sought autonomy for

their heartland, Sa'ada governorate, and protection for their tradition against Sunni domination. Sa'ada governorate is in Yemen's northwest and sits adjacent to the southwest border of Saudi Arabia. According to some estimates, Zaidis make up one-third of Yemen's 25 million population.

A series of statements by Iranian officials shed light on Iran's point of view: Yemen is now within Iran's sphere of influence and is viewed as a new member of the "axis of resistance," which encompasses Syria, Lebanese Hezbollah and Iraqi Shia militants. This axis is an Iran-led alliance of state and non-state actors in the Middle East that seeks to primarily confront Western interests and Israel.

Aside from shared regional objectives, another pillar of the axis is Iran's extensive material, financial, training and logistical assistance to the members of the grouping.

On Jan. 25, Hojatoleslam (a Shia clerical rank just below that of ayatollah) Ali Shirazi, representative of Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei to the Iranian Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC)

Quds Force, said, "Hezbollah was formed in Lebanon as a popular force like Basij (Iran's militia). Similarly popular forces were also formed in Syria and Iraq, and today we are watching the formation of Ansar Allah in Yemen."

A few days earlier, IRGC Brigadier General Hossein Salami said, "Ansar Allah is a similar copy of [Lebanese] Hezbollah in a strategic area."

In both statements, the likening of Ansar Allah to Hezbollah could be interpreted as Iran's involvement in financing and weaponizing Ansar Allah as it does for Hezbollah.

The former speaker of Iran's Majles, Ali Akbar Nategh-Nuri, who heads the Office of Inspection of the House of the Supreme Leader, has also added Yemen to Iran's new sphere of influence, maintaining on Jan. 31, "We witness today that our revolution is exported to Yemen, Syria, Lebanon and Iraq."

On Dec. 16, Ali Akbar Velayati, the foreign affairs adviser to Khamenei, asserted that Iran's influence stretches now "from Yemen to Lebanon."

In October, Hojjat Al-Eslam Ali



Houthi fighters stand on a truck as they secure a street where pro-Houthi protesters demonstrated to commemorate the fourth anniversary of the uprising that toppled former President Ali Abdullah Saleh in Sanaa, Feb. 11, 2015.

Said, the supreme leader's representative in the IRGC, touted Iran's growing influence by saying, "The Islamic Republic's borders...

are now transferred to the farthest points in the Middle East. Today, the strategic depth of Iran stretches to Mediterranean coasts and the

Bab Al-Mandab Strait [southwest of Yemen]."

Counted on the back page

Yemen's Ansar Allah:

Causes and effects of its pursuit of power

Charles Schmitz
Middle East Institute
First published Feb. 14

The Yemen Times is republishing this piece, from the Middle East Institute, in two parts. Part one is below, part two will run on Thursday, Feb. 19.

Observers can be excused for confusion over events in Yemen. In late January, Ansar Allah—the group often referred to as the Houthis—kidnapped President Abdu Rabu Mansour Hadi's chief of staff, sacked the presidential palace, and effectively placed the president and government ministers under house arrest. Ansar Allah's demands, strangely, were that the president and government stay in power rather than leave.

When President Hadi finally called Ansar Allah's bluff and resigned, Ansar Allah called all parties to negotiate a solution. On Friday, Feb. 6, Ansar Allah, lacking an agreement, declared the dissolution of parliament, the formation of a new parliamentary body, and the election of a five-member presidential council, whose appointments were subject to review by Ansar Allah's Revolutionary Committee. Ansar Allah's leader Abdulmalik Al-Houthi said he was generously extending a brotherly hand to all political forces in Yemen. The declaration met with near universal rejection. Even Ali Abdullah Saleh, allied with Ansar Allah, suggested that toying with the Yemeni constitution was a bad idea. By the following Monday, the UN's special rapporteur, Jamal Benomar, restarted the negotiations and Ansar Allah's declaration fizzled.

Ansar Allah's erratic behavior reflects the dominance of its military strategy over its political strategy. After its long wars against the Saleh state in the 2000s, Ansar Allah appears determined to prevent any future Yemeni government from threatening it again. Pushing into the Al-Qaeda stronghold in Bayda this week, Ansar Allah controls much of the western highlands of Yemen as well as the Red Sea coast. Taiz in the southernmost part of the highlands still resists Ansar Allah, as do the eastern desert areas of Jawf and Marib. The south of Yemen remains far outside Ansar Allah's reach, though the move into Bayda positions the group's forces

for a possible push into the south for the first time.

Yet Ansar Allah appears to lack the political sophistication to build a stable coalition to rule Yemen. The Yemeni state is not simply a pulpit for the party with the most guns, as Ansar Allah seems to think. Even when the state is so incapable that it hardly functions, Ansar Allah's toying with the institutions of state—the accepted rules of politics in Yemen as flawed as they are—was categorically rejected across the country as well as in the region. People supported Ansar Allah as an opposition group, but when it attempted to monopolize power, they rejected it. This is not because of sectarianism, but because of Ansar Allah's failure to build a political coalition accepted by sufficient numbers of Yemen's diverse political groups.

Ansar Allah's rise complicated U.S. counterterrorism strategy in Yemen, but Yemen's political difficulties are not necessarily an opening for Al-Qaeda. Though U.S. training of Yemeni counterterrorism units in Sana'a ended, U.S. special forces remain in the southern region outside of Ansar Allah's control, and U.S. drone strikes killed the "mufti" of Al-Qaeda this week. Tribal groups in the south preparing to battle a possible Ansar Allah push to the area say that they will fight both Ansar Allah and Al-Qaeda, undermining attempts of Al-Qaeda to play the sectarian card and lead Sunni resistance to Ansar Allah. Furthermore, Ansar Allah is a mortal enemy of Al-Qaeda from long ago. While Al-Qaeda will try to build common cooperation among those resisting Ansar Allah's advance, Al-Qaeda has made plenty of Sunni enemies.

Ansar Allah's Precarious Position

Kidnapping the chief of state, sacking the presidential guard, and surrounding the house of the president and key ministers may appear to be an overreaction, particularly when the demands are to amend the draft constitution and to keep the government in power, not replace it. Ansar Allah's actions are a result of tension in its strategy to consolidate its position.

On the one hand, Ansar Allah is using every means to extend its military control. Beginning in January 2014, it used its networks of family and tribe to overturn the Al-Ahmar leadership of the Hashid tribal con-

federation and defeat military units allied with the Islah Party. Then, aided by material support from the Iranians and political support from its former enemy, Saleh, it built a coalition of militias, tribal leaders, military leaders, and political leaders that culminated in its control of Sana'a in September.

On the other hand, Ansar Allah lacks control in the eastern regions where Yemen's oil and gas and electrical generation is located, and it lacks control of the south. Demonstrations in Sana'a and Hodeida show that its legitimacy even in the areas it controls is challenged. Ansar Allah knows that it cannot rule Yemen alone and that it needs the participation of the rest of Yemen's diverse political groups. Power in Yemen is not assured by force alone but is fractured among many competing centers. As a result, no one group can rule single-handedly. Leaders organize coalitions composed of tribal leaders, military

heads, political parties, and foreign powers under a single umbrella. Material resources are important in cementing such coalitions.

Thus, while Ansar Allah is busy exerting its military muscle, it is also striving to ensure enough of a consensus to maintain the central state. While it is now threatening to rule alone, Ansar Allah knows that it is in a precarious position. In particular, its use of force to shape the government undermined its political credibility. While Ansar Allah's demand to reform government was well received in all of Yemen, its subsequent attempt to dominate the government demonstrated that its demands for reform were a pretext for power.

Saleh's help

Saleh had an important role in Ansar Allah's rise. The former president retains substantial influence in the General People's Congress, among the military, and among trib-

al leaders. The fact that Ansar Allah fighters entered Sana'a and Amran with little resistance was attributed to Saleh's influence with military leaders and the tribes, respectively. Saleh has an interest in attacking those that split from his network and brought down his regime. Ansar Allah forced Ali Mohsen and Hamid Al-Ahmar to flee the country, and it has destroyed much of the property of the Islah Party in Sana'a and elsewhere. Saleh's opponents of 2011 are now gone, while he remains in the country. Furthermore, Ansar Allah's alliance with Iran gives Saleh some breathing room. For the Gulf countries in particular, Saleh may now appear a far lesser evil than Ansar Allah. Though Saleh was refused a place at the funeral of Saudi Arabia's King Abdullah, the speaker of Parliament and a key member of Saleh's General People's Congress, Yahya Al-Rai, attended.

The relative balance of power between Saleh and Ansar Allah is

unclear. It is not apparent whether Saleh has achieved his goals and is now preparing to push Ansar Allah aside in his quest to return his son to power, or whether Ansar Allah used Saleh to consolidate its military dominance. In negotiations following the resignation of Hadi and the failure of Ansar Allah's new parliamentary body, Saleh is insisting on following the current constitution, according to which Parliament must accept or reject Hadi's resignation and, in the case of acceptance, declare new elections within 60 days. Saleh's General People's Congress controls Parliament, and today he can play the electoral game better than anyone. Ansar Allah does not feel confident in elections, particularly after the upwelling of hostility toward the group following its attack on the president and failed political initiative. If Ansar Allah begins a war in the east, it will encounter even greater opposition in the areas it already controls.



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Continued from page 6

Does Iran really control Yemen?

In addition, there are claims that Iran is directly involved in sponsoring the Ansar Allah (Houthi) movement.

In September, according to Reuters, the Yemeni government freed "at least three suspected Iranian Revolutionary Guard members... who had been held for months over alleged ties to" Ansar Allah.

Hussein Al-Bukhaiti, a Houthi activist who is familiar with the inner workings of the group, has denied the story as "false claims about the involvement of Iran" in Yemen's developments.

Despite some reports about Iran's material support and training to Ansar Allah, Houthis have continually denied allegations that they are proxies for Iranian foreign policy objectives but have admitted Iranian backing due to a shared vision in confronting "the American project."

Former Yemeni officials continually complained about Iran's intervention. As a glaring example, they stressed the "Jihan 1" affair as evidence. Allegedly the ship Jihan 1 was seized by Yemen in 2013 and was smuggling weapons from Iran to Yemeni insurgents. Iran denied any connection to the incident.

Meanwhile, Ali Al-Bukhaiti, a prominent member of the group's political arm [who resigned Jan. 23], said, "Iran is not so stupid so as to send this big quantity of weapons to easily provide evidence about itself. Iran could have sent money to Houthis, who would

then buy any weapons they want from local markets or from African smugglers."

Given these circumstances, why do several Iranian officials depict Yemen as a new Islamic Republic stronghold and part of the "resistance?"

There is a near consensus among Yemen experts that no single tribe or political current can individually govern the country.

There could be two explanations.

The first is that Iran has not materially assisted and supported the Houthis, and that Iranian statements of the opposite are simply

targeting several audiences domestically and regionally. Iranian officials who do insist on Yemen's place in the "resistance" depict the rise of revolutionary Shia Houthis in Yemen as yet another victory for Iran and against the West, and particularly their Sunni rival, Saudi Arabia.

Iran, then, is exaggerating its regional power and military reach to create a mystical stature aimed at solidifying the confidence of its grassroots supporters within and outside its borders—in Iraq, Syria, and Lebanon—while muscle-flexing, and discouraging and pushing its domestic and international opponents onto the defensive.

Many observers maintain that the developments in Yemen are likely to set off alarms in the West and Israel, but most seriously in neighboring Sunni Saudi Arabia, which backed Hadi's government with billions of dollars and is locked in a proxy cold war with Shia Iran over regional hegemony.

The presence of an Iran ally at the borders of Saudi Arabia is not only a serious threat militarily but could also destabilize the country from within. The victory of Houthis may inspire the Shias in Eastern Province, an estimated 10 to 15 percent of the Saudi population who are already in a tense relationship with the establishment, to rise.

The weakness of this explanation is that while Saudis have poured billions of dollars into supporting the Yemeni establishment, it is



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hard to believe that Houthis succeeded in organizing such a massive movement and fought a victorious war, as one analyst maintained, just by selling "pomegranates and grapes," Sa'ada's major source of income.

The second explanation is that there is truth in the former Yemeni president's claims and accusations that Iran meddles in Yemen's affairs as well as Iranians' statements implying that Ansar Allah is a new member of the "axis of resistance." But if so, why do Zaydi Houthis reject such a connection?

There is a near consensus among Yemen experts that no single tribe or political current can individually govern the country. Although pictures of ayatollahs Khomeini and Khamenei and Hezbollah leader Hassan Nasrallah have been carried by Houthi supporters during demonstrations, in the last year or so, no member of the Houthi political bureau has made any statement praising Iran.

The Houthis' position might be explained by pointing to their lack of desire to stir up unnecessary resistance from inside and outside of the country against them, and that they do not seek to become the sole



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holder of power in Yemen. Hussein Al-Bukhaiti explains the Houthis' realistic view of Yemen as follows:

"We cannot apply this [Iranian system] in Yemen because the followers of the Shafi [Sunni] doctrine

are bigger in number than [us], the Zaydis [Shia]."

Houthis may want to avoid political and sectarian polarization that seriously threatens the Yemeni nation with fragmentation.



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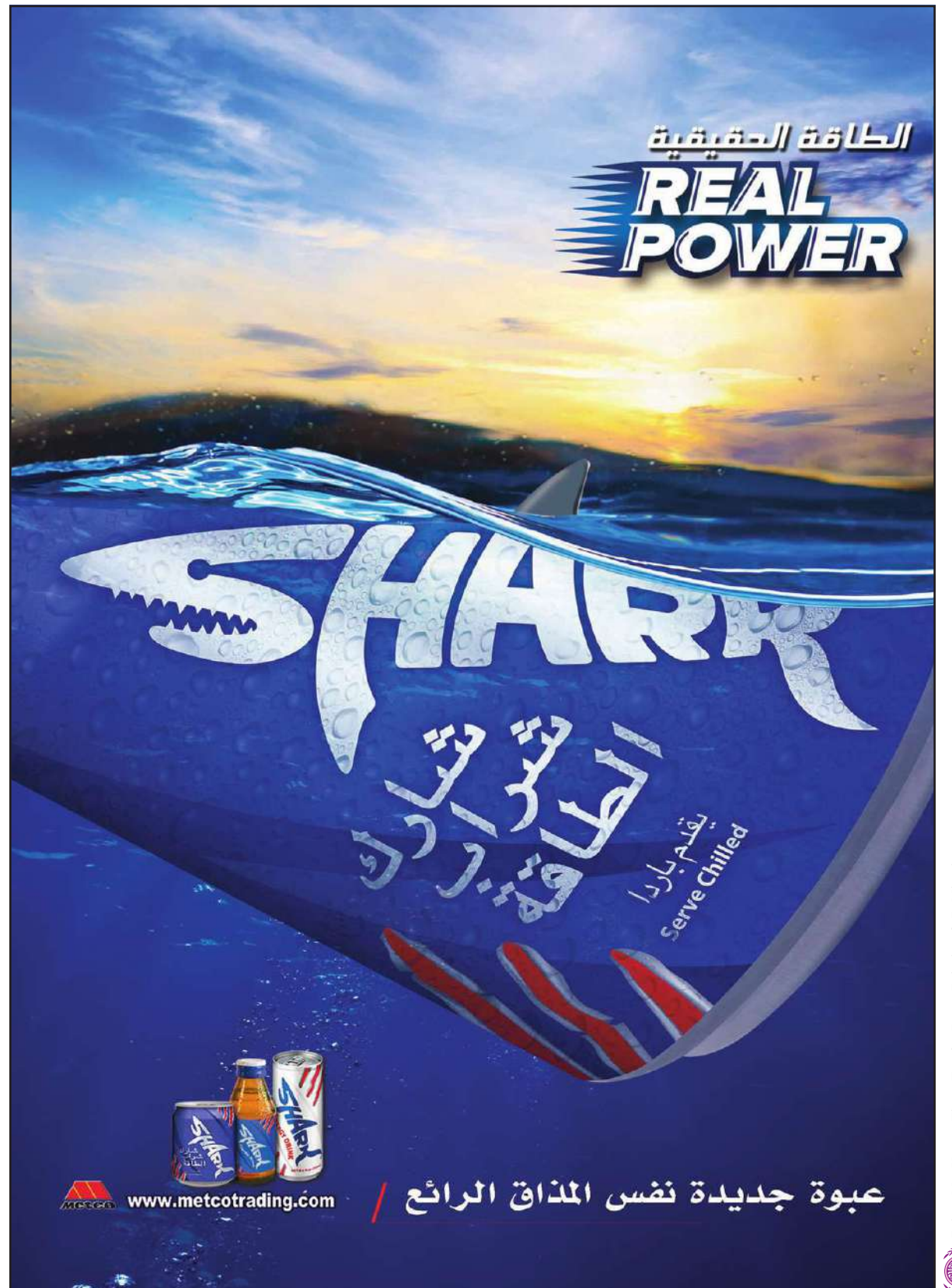
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