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Five Yemenis Steadfast

"When the people fear their government, there isThursday 14 February 2008Jane Novak tyranny; when the government fears the people, there is liberty." Thomas Jefferson

As Yemenis struggle toward freedom from tyranny, the Yemeni government uses all means at its disposal to thwart the growing democracy movement. The regime simultaneously creates a facade of reform for the benefit of the western donors, often with depressingly good results.

Any real public accountability, however, would displace the corrupt oligarchy that pillaged Yemen 's economy, environment and natural resources for decades. Over the years, the state has become adroit at creative persecution, deploying a variety of duplicitous tactics to punish those who demand or exercise their constitutional rights.

To follow is a short list of activists that the Yemeni state has in its cross hairs and the blatantly illogical logic that the regime uses to target them; however the actual number is in the thousands.

Ayman M. Nasser (Blaming the Victim)

As Yemeni security forces began shooting into a crowd protesting in Aden on January 13, 2008, several people recorded the ensuing chaos and later uploaded the videos to Youtube. Yemen 's Internet Provider (IP), the Yemeni government, blocked the bloody scenes from being viewed on the internet in Yemen , bouncing them as "pornography". The protesters were demanding the equal rights denied to Southern Yemenis since the civil war in 1994.

Three southern demonstrators were killed at that protest, bringing to 17 the number of demonstrators shot dead since August 2007, indicating either a premeditated pattern of intimidation or severe lack of discipline by police. The security officers who killed the demonstrators were not held accountable for the deaths; the protest organizers were. On January 29, Aden 's prosecutor charged Ayman M. Nasser, the Editor in Chief of Attariq Newspaper, with "transgressing the Republic's independence, undermining security and social stability, exposing transportation to jeopardy, and damaging private properties." These charges stem solely from Mr. Nasser's role as the media coordinator for the protests. The charges carry the death penalty.

Walid al-Saqaf (Information Black-out)

After the January protest, Yemen's IP blocked Yemeni citizens from viewing seven popular Yemen based news and information websites, including the news aggregator YemenPortal.net and the human rights site, YemenHurr.net The Yemen Portal is

Yemen's first dedicated news crawler. It was blocked after including in its aggregation the Youtube videos of security forces shooting protesters. However, Yemen 's government controlled IP allows access to jihaddist websites.

The Yemen Portal was designed as a Master's Thesis by Walid al-Saqaf who was warned not to include articles critical of the regime on the portal. After the Yemen Portal was blocked, Al-Saqaf vowed a campaign of electronic resistance, opening new domain names for the portal as fast the government could block the last. "We expect the authorities to go on blocking the third domain, after which we will simply launch a fourth. This will go on for as long as it takes." Al-Saqaf noted.

Yemen Portal has taken the lead in a national campaign against internet censorship. In one initiative, Yemen Portal now publishes the full content of all the news and opinion websites blocked by authorities. It is the only site that allows Internet users in Yemen unfettered access to all Yemen news as well as a true diversity of opinion. This week, "unknown assailants" trashed an automobile belonging to Yemen Portal's management.

Nayef Hassan (The Terrorism Card)

In November, Editor Nayef Hassan and two journalists at al-Share Weekly were indicted in Yemen 's State Security Penal Court , which is reserved for terrorism cases. (Media cases are required by the constitution to be heard by

the Press and Publications Court .) Al-Share published articles documenting the regime's use of tribal fighters in its northern war against Shiite Zaidi rebels.

The Ministry of Defense which brought the indictment demanded the execution of the three journalists for "threatening national security, demoralizing the military and divulging state secrets." However, the Defense Ministry itself had announced the induction of five thousand tribal fighters into a pro-regime militia. The Ministry also publicized a fatwa legitimizing rebel deaths and that of their "supporters", a designation left to the interpretation of the tribal paramilitary.

The al-Share article also noted the military used Islamic extremists from the Aden Abyan Islamic Army as fighters and to train the tribal paramilitary. A purported spokesman for al-Qaeda admitted in the an interview that the Yemeni government asked the group to fight in the war against the rebels. The terrorists are not facing terror charges; the journalists are.

Abdulkarim al-Khaiwani (False Charges)

A similar case was described to the US Senate's Foreign Relation's Committee by Joel Campagna, the Committee to Protect Journalists Middle East Program Director, as "one of the year's most troubling press freedom incidents."

Journalist Abdelkarim al-Khaiwani is also on trial in the Specialized Penal Court . "The government made a slew of unsubstantiated accusations, reinforcing the belief among Yemeni journalists and political observers that the editor's arrest was an attempt to punish him for his unrelenting criticism of the government's fight against anti-government rebels in northwestern Yemen , as well as his writing about government nepotism," Campagna testified.

Campagne also noted al-Khaiwani's prior imprisonment in 2004 for insulting the president, the cloning of his newspaper and his abduction in 2007, when "the assailants threatened him, beat him, and tried to break his fingers. The gunmen also threatened to kill the journalist and his family if he wrote another word against the president or the country's national unity." An article about the President's family triggered the death threat to al-Khaiwani's family, and al-Khaiwani's

young daughter, Eeba, was slapped so hard during his arrest that she fell unconscious.

Ahmed Saif Hashid (Religious Incitement)

Ahmed Said Hasid is an editor, activist and Member of Yemeni Parliament. In a special televised session, eleven extremist members of Parliament labeled Mr. Hasid an apostate. He fears he may be killed by militants as a result.

In a telephone interview, Hashid told the Yemen Times, "I was considered a disbeliever due to some articles recently published in my newspaper, one of which reported a meeting with an insane person who said, 'Allah was not fair to me.' Another issue related to one of the ladies who inquired about a fatwa related to prayer and adultery."

Mr. Hashid previously went public with testimony he collected from Yemeni prisoners who described torture by acid and electricity, arbitrary arrest, near starvation conditions, children jailed as hostages, political prisoners and tribal and private prisons. Hashid was named the Yemen Times "Person of the Year" in recognition of his humanitarian work.

The Yemeni Parliament however is in the process of revoking Hasid's parliamentary immunity so he can be prosecuted. Parliament has taken no steps to rescue the children in jail, the victims of torture or persons illegally detained in tribal prisons. Instead, the man seeking to rescue the children and his fellow citizens from inhumane conditions has been called a disbeliever on national TV.

Conclusion

The three branches of Yemeni government are highly criminalized, corrupt, dysfunctional and non-accountable. Elements of the fourth branch, the non-governmental media, the

part which maintains its independence, has been blinded, cursed, muzzled and jailed.

On December 14, 2006, the US State Department advanced an initiative, "Defending the Defenders of Democracy." Yet, despite all its rhetoric, the US State Department continues to defend the dictators. The US willful blindness to atrocities, and its applause for puppet shows, is itself a form of appeasing terrorism and will have the predictable result.

Yemenis are denied the right to read and speak about events in Yemen . Protests against social injustice are discouraged by bullets. Individual activists are swatted like flies. The 2006 elections were unfair, and the 2008 elections will likely be little better. The courts are politicized. Political parties are neither representative nor inclusive.

There is no outlet for the popular voice, no safe and effective way for the average Yemeni citizen to hold the government accountable. However that circumstance did not stop these five

from claiming their rights. And there are thousands more Yemenis with the same determination. Calling them killers, terrorists and traitors does not change the reality that they are in fact heroes.

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http://www.middleeasttransparent.com/article.php3?id_article=3341&lang=en