

Yemen security forces kill dozens more protesters

David Walsh
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Yemeni security forces killed dozens more anti-government demonstrators Wednesday and Thursday in numerous cities around the impoverished Middle Eastern country, in the worst violence in months.

The hated regime of President Ali Abdullah Saleh, with the connivance of the Obama administration, Saudi Arabia and the official opposition, has clung to power for the last three months despite the mobilization of wide layers of Yemen's population. Hundreds have been killed in the frenzy of state repression.

According to media and medical sources, 16 people were killed Wednesday in the southern industrial city of Taiz, "where soldiers are attempting to disrupt a near total general strike" (*Financial Times*).

Some 240 people were also wounded in Taiz, the scene of massive protests in recent months, by gunfire and bat-wielding plainclothes security men. Demonstrators reportedly stormed the police station where the shooting originated, resulting in a further death of a protester. Angry crowds in the city set tires ablaze and took over numerous streets and government buildings.

Another 18 anti-government demonstrators were reportedly shot dead Wednesday by army units in the streets of the capital, Sana'a, as crowds marched toward the cabinet building and a radio station. The *Guardian* reported, "Soldiers positioned on the balconies and roofs of nearby houses rained bullets down on the angry mob of protesters, who responded by hurling chunks of broken-off paving slabs."

Army units associated with the defector general, Maj. Gen. Ali Mohsin al-Ahmar, eventually arrived in pickup trucks and returned fire at the troops loyal to Saleh.

Dozens were also injured in the gunfire in Sana'a. A protester, Talal al-Hamadi, told Al Jazeera, "The

snipers were shooting at the people ... People rushed and some fell over each other. There was a stampede."

Deaths were also reported Wednesday in the western port city of Hudaida and in Dhamar, 100 kilometers south of Sana'a. In Ibb (also in southern Yemen), business activity has come to a halt as well, according to reports. "No one is going to work in this city," resident Ali Noaman commented to Al Jazeera. Aden, Abyan, Amran and Hadramawt were also hit by protests.

Al Jazeera's web site carried a video showing an outraged man in a hospital denouncing Saleh and his government. "So many people hit by bullets, so many people are killed everywhere," he angrily exclaims. "This regime doesn't know mercy! I call on the revolution to destroy this regime. I call on an awakening of the people to destroy this regime and this killer who killed our martyrs!"

On Thursday, further killings carried out by the police and paramilitary took place in Al Bayda, in south-central Yemen. Gunmen on the roof of Saleh's ruling party headquarters allegedly opened fire on demonstrators who had been tearing up posters of the president, killing three and wounding seven.

More violence erupted in Taiz Thursday, where, according to Reuters, "Security forces, using machine guns mounted on military vehicles, wounded dozens of protesters setting up roadblocks along a main street in the city. ... Leaders shouting on megaphones urged protesters to head to the main road to reinforce demonstrators as clashes continued."

Demonstrators in Taiz seized control of the oil ministry headquarters and hung a banner over the entrance that read, "Closed until further notice by order of the youth revolution."

According to the Chinese news agency, Xinhua,

Yemeni military planes have bombed rural areas north of Sana'a, where local tribespeople have demanded the resignation of Saleh. At least four people were wounded in the aerial attacks.

Tribesmen hostile to Saleh have blockaded Yemen's main oil- and gas-producing Ma'rib province in the central part of the country. In fact, the country's economy is grinding to a halt.

As the protests in Yemen grow ever wider and angrier, the venal opposition continues to attempt to arrange a deal with Saleh that will produce a seamless transfer of power.

The Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC), dominated by Yemen's oil-rich neighbor, Saudi Arabia, will make another attempt this weekend to broker such an agreement between Saleh and the Joint Meeting Parties (JMP). GCC Secretary General Abdullatif al-Zayani is returning to Sana'a this Saturday in an attempt to resume talks between the rival factions.

The JMP continues to bluster and issue meaningless ultimatums to Saleh. On Sunday the opposition gave Saleh two days to sign the GCC deal—which guarantees him immunity, but allows the opposition to nominate a prime minister—or face “the people's choice.” The GCC plan also includes the “temporary” transfer of power to Vice President Abd al-Rab Mansur al-Hadi, a Saleh appointee and favorite of Washington.

This official opposition is widely discredited, made up as it is of disaffected Saleh cronies, Islamists, prominent tribal sheikhs, businessmen and army commanders. As *Foreign Affairs* magazine noted in April, some of the JMP members “enjoy deep personal, financial, and political connections with the current regime.”

The magazine went on, “Although the rhetoric between Saleh and the opposition is increasingly inflammatory, the lines of communication remain open. The United States, the United Kingdom, the European Union, and a number of Yemeni mediators, including respected leaders inside Saleh's tribe, continue to facilitate discussions. Those with knowledge of the negotiations suggest that there is agreement on the broad contours of a transition plan.”

Wide layers of protesters are suspicious of the opposition. Al-Ahram Weekly On-line noted recently that youthful Yemeni protesters chanted, “Saleh must leave, and opposition leaders must leave,” at a recent

demonstration in Sana'a.

Student leader Najeeb Al-Sadi told Al-Ahram, that “the opposition leaders turned ‘our revolution’ into a crisis, and they prevented the silent majority of the people from joining the revolution. ‘Some leaders of the opposition are even worse than Saleh, so people ask what's the difference,’ Al-Sadi said.”

Moreover, the students explain that the “dissident” army units under Maj. Gen. Ali Mohsin al-Ahmar are blocking the Yemeni population from dealing once and for all with the regime. The youthful protesters have been trying to organize a mass march on the presidential palace, using Facebook and word-of-mouth, “But the rebel military leaders are preventing this.”

US officials are feverishly working behind the scenes to make sure a new Yemeni government would defend Washington's interests. In response to the latest deaths in Yemen, State Department spokesman Mark Toner issued the usual hypocritical statement, which indicated that the US was “deeply concerned by recent violence throughout Yemen. ... We call on the Yemeni security forces to exercise maximum restraint, refrain from violence, and respect the rights of the Yemeni people to freely and peacefully assemble and express their views.”

Those security forces have in many cases been trained and armed by the US.



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