

Yemen power struggle proves deadly as tensions explode

By Catherine Schurz
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Blood was shed and lives were lost in Yemen protests on Sept. 18.

The anti-government protestors typically refrain from leaving their encampment in the city's capital, Sanaa, but last week, their bold step out of bounds proved dire.

"The whole place shook with the explosion and clouds of dust shot up in the air when the second mortar hit," protestor Badr Ali told Reuters.

Revolution sparked by the "Arab Spring" movement sweeping the Middle East has fostered a culture of civilian empowerment. But that empowerment can only stand so tall when matched against Yemeni President, Ali Abdullah Saleh.

The elite members of the Yemeni government are fighting to maintain power with the use of military tactics and lethal force.

"It's as if he was unleashed from a cage and came out to retaliate," Mohammed al Sabri, a protester, told NPR. "This man deals with Yemen as if he's a gang leader, not a leader of a nation."

necessarily due to the audacity of Yemeni protesters, according to the BBC. It is important to acknowledge the long standing rivalry between two powerful families: the Salehs and the al Ahmars. The clash between the two has divided the State.

The al Ahmar family was formally headed by Abdullah bin Hussein al Ahmar, Yemeni speaker of parliament, a strong supporter of uniting North and South Yemen with the ultimate intention to form a new party that is tribal but holds Islamic interests, the BBC reports.

The potent combination of revolution and family contention only further drains the Arab world's poorest country. Yemen currently suffers the third highest rate of malnutrition and is projected to be one of the first world capitals to run out of water. Additionally, because oil sales finance 90 percent of Yemen's food imports, oil's depletion suggests a rapid increase in hunger, according to the BBC.

International concern was expressed toward Yemen's decline and government corruption at the London conference in January 2010. Despite their sympathy, the promised billions in aid have yet to reach those Yemenis in need.

"I'd like to see even more support from the



Large crowds gather to express their collective discontent with their leaders following the alleged overuse of lethal force by the Yemeni government against protestors on Sept. 18.

were seriously wounded in a mortar attack at a mosque, caused by a botched bomb while the two elite families were disputing. Saleh retreated to Saudi Arabia to seek treatment and, while many were hoping or suspecting he may not return to fulfill his duties as President, he reappeared Friday of last week with a message for his people.

"I return to the nation carrying the dove of peace and the olive branch," Saleh said on Yemen television.

But the integrity of that statement has come into question as the aftermath of Saleh's arrival proved to be deadly.

According to a report in Al Jazeera, armed Saleh supporters attacked unarmed anti-Saleh demonstrators in Sanaa at what is appropriately titled, "Change Square." Yemeni government forces, under orders of Saleh's nephews and sons, released fire on the main anti-Saleh protest camp. Mortar fire and sniper attack killed at least 16 and injured approximately 54.

According to the BBC, tents and buildings were set on fire.

"It was an intense fight. My house was shaking like crazy. There are no protesters there now — it's just armed people," a witness

told the BBC.

While Change Square was under attack, Saleh supporters shelled machine guns at the Arab Spring headquarters. The headquarters, known as the "First Armored Division", is the home to defected soldiers who support the revolution. 11 of those soldiers are now dead, and 120 were left injured.

"I have no doubt that loyalists still exist in Yemen, made worse by the return of the president," said Gilmore. "The next 24 hours will be key. Why did this asshole return to Yemen? What does he want in exchange for formally relinquishing power?"

The cause of Sunday's attacks could be attributed to the underlying conflicts between the Saleh and al Ahmar families and their stances on who should be in power. But it was the revolutionists of all ages who crossed boundary lines in opposition to power that exacerbated the violence.

Friday's horrific events left at least 47 dead and raised the week's death toll to a devastating 142, as reported in Al Jazeera.

Blame for the attacks on Friday can be assigned to the return of Saleh. While he may have called for peace, only time will tell as the escalation of violence continues in Yemen.

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Badr Ali, protestor

Saleh gave his nephews and sons positions of military control and it appears that the majority of their discretion is rooted in undying loyalty to their uncle, father, and President.

But the recent violence in Yemen is not

West," said Ken Gilmore, professor and chair of the political science department. "These countries need more than symbolic gestures like diplomatic visits and photo opportunities. They need money, trade, and so on."

On June 3, Saleh and several Yemeni officials

BUFFETT TAX

New tax proposal pushes to increase rates for wealthy

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percentage than those in income brackets below them.

"(This happens) mainly through tax deductions," said Bob Williams, professor of economics. "For example, some people are getting tax deductions for multiple homes. There is a variety of things that wealthy people can get tax deductions for, some perfectly socially meritorious and others less so."

Though the system Williams refers to has been criticized by many, controversy still resonates in congress over this invocation of tax rate adjustment.

Republicans largely argue that funds for deficit reduction should not be created through a millionaire minimum tax rate, but instead pulled from programs like Medicare, Medicaid, and Social Security, the New York Times reports.

"Tax increases, however, are not a viable option for the joint committee," said Speaker John A. Boehner (R) from Ohio in a speech after the announcement of the policy proposal.

Boehner, who has reportedly insisted he will not vote for any new policies involving tax increases, is among those who believe that a solution to this economic recession lies chiefly in cuts on social programs. This position, however, has served as a political bargaining tool for Obama, as he urges Republicans to agree to tax increases, while promising support of cuts on Medicare

and Medicaid.

This tactic challenges the Republican aversion to tax increases, one of the issues which has prohibited Congress from making much progress on economic policy.

"So much of the discussion is that this or that does a bad thing and that's the end of the discussion," said Williams, on the Congressional debate over tax increases.

"One of the underlying causes of the Great Depression was concentration of income among the wealthy."

Bob Williams, professor of economics

"That's only half of the discussion. What are the good things that it does and how do you balance the two out?"

Still, some are accusing Obama of sparking a fiery "class warfare" with this millionaire minimum tax, according to Fox News.

"Class warfare may make for really good politics, but it makes for rotten economics," said Rep. Paul D. Ryan (R) to Fox News.

Many have latched onto this sentiment, questioning whether this tax will truly level the playing field or only contribute to U.S. social stratification.

"I think we use the term 'war' way too freely," said Maria Rosales, professor of political science. "We have social stratification in the U.S. and it's getting worse ... but there is actually research that shows people in general, including wealthy people, are happier in a society with more economic equality."

Presumably, the Buffett Tax is aimed at creating more of just that.

Evidently, this tax rate adjustment is only fueling the fire of the congressional debate on economic policy, as well as generating numerous doubts and questions. Is Obama targeting a large enough group? Should he be targeting a group in the first place? Why must social program funds suffer? Is this the invocation of class warfare? And just how much will this affect the U.S. economy long-term?

All of these queries have been brought to the surface with Obama's new economic proposal. Though perhaps it is these questions, along with emerging discussion over U.S. wealth distribution, that deserve the most attention.

"One of the important things about this tax is that it begins to look at the concentration of income in this country," says Williams. "Not many people are talking about that. One of the underlying causes of the Great Depression was concentration of income among the wealthy. We're above that."