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In Thailand, campaign to purge Net of royal insults

BANGKOK

Technicians at 'war room' censor anything deemed offensive to monarchy

BY THOMAS FULLER

Down a maze of neon-lit corridors in a massive government complex here is a windowless room where computer technicians scour the Internet for photos, articles, Facebook postings — anything that might be deemed offensive to King Bhumibol Adulyadej and his family.

The technicians work in what is called the Office of Prevention and Suppression of Information Technology Crimes. The government that came to power in July prefers to call it the "war room," the headquarters of a vigorous and expanding campaign to purify the Internet of royal insults.

The crackdown, which officials have vowed to intensify, is being carried out by a team of 10 computer specialists led by Surachai Nilsang, whose title is cyber inspector.

"The thing that drives us to do our duty is that we love and worship the monarchy," Mr. Surachai said in a two-hour interview here. He and his colleagues showed a reporter around the war room and an adjacent space that contained computers seized as evidence from suspects charged with insulting the monarchy. It was the first visit by a journalist to the facilities.

Photography was not allowed. The visit offered insights into the scale of the government's battle against online skeptics of the monarchy. But it also highlighted the difficulties of determining what exactly constitutes an insult, a point emphasized by those in Thailand who say the campaign against lèse-majesté is impinging on civil liberties.

Many governments, notably those of China and Singapore, have over the years tried to control the flow of information on the Internet. But perhaps nowhere else is the mission so explicit and single-minded as in Thailand.

Technicians in the war room have blocked 70,000 Internet pages over the past four years, and the vast majority — about 60,000 — were banned for insults to the monarchy, according to Mr. Surachai. (Most of the other pages were blocked for pornography.) Each blocked page requires a court order, a request that judges have never turned down, Mr. Surachai said.

Because the monarchy remains a taboo subject in Thailand and is often discussed elliptically, the motives of those who attack the royal family remain largely a matter of speculation. After his six decades on the throne, public protests against the king are unheard of in Thailand. And not even the most strident anti-establishment protesters would openly call themselves republicans.

But the Internet is where ancient mores of deference for the royal family collide with the irreverence and informality of the Facebook generation.

While Thais may be afraid to rebel against accepted orthodoxies in public, they unleash caustic criticisms with THAILAND, PAGE 4



In a cellphone-camera image taken on Friday in Homs, Syria, an anti-government demonstrator displayed a red heart with the Arabic word for freedom.

Fears of a civil war brewing in Syrian city

HOMS, SYRIA

Residents in Homs sense a new phase as tensions and violence rise apace

THE NEW YORK TIMES

The semblance of a civil war has erupted in Homs, Syria's third-largest city, where armed protesters now call themselves revolutionaries, gun battles erupt as often as every few hours, the security forces and their opponents carry out assassinations and expensive rifles flood the city from abroad, residents say.

Since the start of the uprising in March, Homs has stood as one of Syria's most contested cities, its youths among the best organized and most tenacious. But across the political spectrum, residents speak of a decisive shift in past weeks, as a largely peaceful uprising gives way to a grinding struggle that has made Homs violent, fearful and determined.

Analysts caution that the strife here is still specific to the city itself, and many in the opposition reject violence because they fear it will serve as a pretext for the government's brutal crackdown.

But in the assassinations, the rival security checkpoints and the hardening of sectarian sentiments, the city offers a dark vision that could foretell the future

of Syria's uprising as both the government and the opposition ready themselves for a protracted struggle over the endurance of a four-decade dictatorship.

"We are done with the protesting phase," said an engineering student in the city who spoke on the condition of anonymity for fear of reprisal. "We've now entered a more important phase."

Homs is a microcosm of Syria, with a Sunni Muslim majority and minorities of Christians and Alawites, a Muslim sect from which President Bashar al-Assad draws much of his leadership.

Six months of protests and crackdowns have frayed ties among those communities, forging the conditions for urban strife. The opposition is battling

the security forces in the most restive neighborhoods. Rebels have tried to protect the same peaceful protesters the government has relentlessly sought to arrest. The tensions have grown so dire that members of one sect are reluctant to travel to neighborhoods populated by other sects. Men in some parts of the city openly carry weapons.

Perhaps the most dramatic facet of the struggle is a series of assassinations last week that left nearly a dozen professors, doctors and informers dead in a paroxysm of violence that echoes the sectarian vendettas still besetting Iraq.

Unlike the uprising's early days, when the government exercised a near SYRIA, PAGE 5

Drone strike reflects shift in U.S. war on terror

WASHINGTON

Yemen killing signals move away from fighting enemies on the ground

BY SCOTT SHANE AND THOM SHANKER

The C.I.A. drone strike that killed Anwar al-Awlaki, the American-born propagandist for Al Qaeda's rising franchise in Yemen, was one more demonstration of what U.S. officials describe as a cheap, safe and precise tool to eliminate enemies. It was also a sign that the decade-old U.S. campaign against terrorism has reached a turning point.

Disillusioned by huge costs and uncertain outcomes in Iraq and Afghanistan, the Obama administration has decisively embraced the drone, along with small-scale lightning raids like the one that killed Osama bin Laden in May, as the future of the fight against terrorist networks.

"The lessons of the big wars are obvious," said Micah Zenko, a fellow at the Council on Foreign Relations, who has studied the trade-offs. "The cost in blood and treasure is immense, and the outcome is unforeseeable. Public support at home is declining toward rock bottom. And the people you've come to liberate come to resent your presence."

The shift is also a result of shrinking budgets, which will no longer accommodate the deployment of large forces overseas at a rough annual cost of \$1 million per soldier. And there have been improvements in the technical capabilities of remotely piloted aircraft. One of them tracked Mr. Awlaki with live video on Yemeni tribal turf, where it is too dangerous for U.S. troops to go.

Even military officials who advocate for the drone campaign acknowledge that these technologies are not applicable to every security threat.

Still, the move to drones and precise strikes is a remarkable change in DRONES, PAGE 6

REGION HARDLY NOTICES CLERIC'S DEATH In the Middle East, the voice of the American-born Anwar al-Awlaki has had almost no resonance. PAGE 6



A scientist checking pine beetle damage in a Montana forest. The tree was as good as dead.

Deadly perils for earth's fragile canopy

WISE RIVER, MONTANA

Rising temperatures put deep stress on forests and threaten carbon cycle

BY JUSTIN GILLIS

The trees spanning many of the mountainsides of western Montana glow an earthy red, like a broadleaf forest at the beginning of autumn.

But these trees are not supposed to turn red. They are evergreens, falling victim to beetles that used to be con-

trolled in part by bitterly cold winters. As the climate warms, scientists say, that control is no longer happening.

Across millions of hectares, the pines of the northern and central Rocky Mountains are dying, just one among many types of forests that are showing signs of distress these days.

The great euphorbia trees of southern Africa are succumbing to heat and water stress. So are the Atlas cedars of northern Algeria. Fires fed by hot, dry weather are killing enormous stretches of Siberian forest. Trees are under stress across the rim of Southern Europe, and the Amazon recently suffered two "once a century" droughts just five years

apart, killing many large trees. Experts are scrambling to understand the situation, and to predict how serious it may become.

Scientists say the future habitability of the earth could depend on the answer. The reason is that, while a majority of the world's people now live in cities, they depend more than ever on forests, in a way that few of them understand.

Scientists have figured out — with the precise numbers deduced only recently — that forests have been absorbing more than a quarter of the carbon dioxide that people are putting into the air by burning fossil fuels and other activi- FORESTS, PAGE 5

BUSINESS ASIA

Manufacturing up in China

The purchasing managers' index and the new export orders index both increased in September, suggesting that fears of a more pronounced slowdown might be somewhat overblown. PAGE 19



EIRINI VOURLLOUMIS FOR THE NYT

Greece's money substitutes

Alternative currencies and barter systems are cropping up as people look for creative ways to cope with a radically changing economy. PAGE 22

Discontent at Merrill Lynch

Bank of America cannot seem to find its way, and the situation has set teeth on edge in front offices. But perhaps nowhere is the grumbling louder than in its main office in New York, the base of the Wall Street bank formerly known as just Merrill Lynch. PAGE 22

WORLD NEWS

NATO captures Haqqani figure

Western forces said that the capture last week of Haji Mali Khan, the Haqqani clan's top figure inside Afghanistan, was a "significant milestone." His arrest was expected to degrade the network's relationships with local tribal elders in the eastern provinces. PAGE 3

Peace prize discord in China

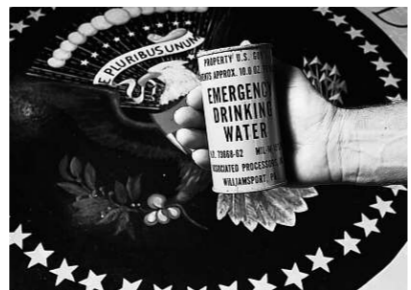
When a Chinese dissident was awarded the 2010 Nobel Peace Prize, a patriotic group came up with its own honor. Now, a second group has set up another award, and fighting between the rivals has put the future of the first prize in jeopardy. PAGE 4

2nd Somali attack rattles Kenya

Somali gunmen staged a new attack inside Kenya, kidnapping an elderly Frenchwoman from her seaside bungalow on an island 95 kilometers south of the Somali border. It was the second assault in three weeks. PAGE 6

Inside Kennedy's bomb shelter

John F. Kennedy's Florida bunker, which fell into disrepair in the 1990s, was cleaned up and has been open for tours since 1999. But the museum that cares for it now faces a shortfall in visitors and funds. PAGE 7



PETER W. CROSS FOR THE NYT

VIEWES

Thomas L. Friedman

Today's hyperconnected world requires white-collar workers to compete with a bigger pool of cheap geniuses, some of whom are robots, microchips and software-guided machines. PAGE 9

A just act, or an illegal killing?

Washington's decision to assassinate an American citizen in Yemen was legal and justified, writes Jack L. Goldsmith. Yasir Qadhi argues that it undermined America's moral authority. PAGE 8

ONLINE

Battle for the right to 'doctor'

Doctors are popping up all over the health professions in the United States, and the result is a quiet battle over not only the title "doctor," but also the money, power and prestige that often come with it. As more nurses, pharmacists and physical therapists claim the honorific, physicians are fighting back. global.nytimes.com/us

The limits of compassion

Are people today — are societies — really becoming somehow more callous? The answer is no, of course not — at least not in any fundamental sense. But compassion is a limited resource, a system rooted in cognitive networks that tire and need refueling. And it's not always rational. nytimes.com/sundayreview

EDUCATION

New scrutiny in Malaysia

The Malaysian government has imposed a record number of fines on private higher-education institutions in the country this year. PAGE 10

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Deep stress for earth's forests

FORESTS, FROM PAGE 1

ties. It is an amount so large that trees are effectively absorbing the emissions from all the world's cars and trucks.

Without that disposal service, the level of carbon dioxide in the atmosphere would be rising much faster. The gas traps heat from the sun, and human emissions are causing the planet to warm.

Yet the forests have only been able to restrain the increase, not halt it. And some scientists are worried that as the warming accelerates, the trees themselves could become climate-change victims on a massive scale. If enough died, they would not only stop absorbing carbon dioxide, they might also start to burn up or decay at such a rate that they would spew huge amounts of the gas back into the air. That, in turn, could speed the warming of the planet.

It is clear that the point of no return has not been reached yet — and it may never be. Despite the troubles of recent years, forests continue to take up a large amount of carbon, with some regions, including the Eastern United States and parts of Europe, being especially important as global carbon absorbers.

"I think we have a situation where both the 'forces of growth' and the 'forces of death' are strengthening, and have been for some time," said Oliver L. Phillips, a prominent tropical forest researcher with the University of Leeds in Britain. "The latter are more eye-catching, but the former have in fact been more important so far."

Many researchers say the best way to ensure the health of the world's forests is to slow emissions of greenhouse gases. Most nations committed to doing so in a global environmental treaty in 1992, yet two decades of negotiations have yielded scant progress.

In the near term, experts say, more modest steps could be taken to protect forests. One promising plan calls for wealthy countries simply to pay those in the tropics to halt the destruction of their immense forests for agriculture and logging. But even that limited plan is at risk for lack of money.

Many scientists had hoped serious forest damage would not set in before the middle of the 21st century, and that people would have time to get emissions of heat-trapping gases under control before then. Some of them have been shocked in recent years by what they are seeing. "The amount of area burning now in Siberia is just startling — individual years with 10 million hectares burned," the equivalent of nearly 25 million acres, or larger than Portugal, said Thomas W. Swetnam, a researcher at the University of Arizona. "The big fires that are occurring in the American Southwest are extraordinary in terms of their severity, on time scales of thousands of years."

CARBON CYCLES

In the 1950s, when a scientist named Charles David Keeling first obtained accurate measurements of carbon dioxide in the atmosphere, a mystery presented itself. Only about half the carbon that people were releasing into the sky seemed to be staying there. It took scientists decades to figure out where the rest was going.

As best researchers can tell, the oceans are taking up about a quarter of the carbon emissions arising from human activities. That is causing the sea to become more acidic and is expected to damage marine life. But scientists are confident the oceans will keep absorbing carbon.

Trees are taking up a similar amount of carbon, but whether that will continue is far less certain. Carbon dioxide is an essential part of the cycle of life on earth, but geologic history suggests that too much can cause the climate to warm sharply. With enough time, the chemical cycles operating on the planet have a tendency to bury excess carbon.

In the 19th century, humans discovered the usefulness of some forms of buried carbon — coal, oil and natural gas — as a source of energy. The concentration of the gas in the atmosphere has jumped 40 percent since the Industrial Revolution, and scientists fear it could double or even triple this century, with profound consequences.

While all types of plants absorb carbon dioxide, known as CO₂, most of them return it to the atmosphere quickly because their vegetation decays, burns or is eaten. It is mainly trees that have the ability to lock carbon into long-term storage, and they do so by making wood or transferring carbon into the soil. The wood may stand for centuries inside a living tree, and it is slow to decay even when the tree dies. But the carbon in wood is vulnerable to rapid release. If a forest burns up, much of the carbon stored in it will re-enter the atmosphere.

Destruction by fires and insects is a part of the natural history of forests, and in isolation, such events would be no cause for alarm. Indeed, despite the recent problems, the new estimate, published Aug. 19 in the journal *Science*, suggests that when emissions from the world's forests are subtracted from the carbon they absorb, they are, on balance, packing more than a billion tons of carbon into long-term storage every year.

One major reason is that forests, like other types of plants, appear to be responding to the rise of carbon dioxide in the atmosphere by growing more vigorously. The gas is, after all, the main food supply for plants. Scientists have been surprised in recent years to learn that this factor is causing a growth spurt even in mature forests, a finding that overturned decades of ecological dogma.

Climate-change contrarians tend to focus on this "fertilization effect," hailing it



A Montana forest hit by pine beetles, which drill into a tree, cut off its nutrients and break down the chlorophyll that makes it green. The attacks are fed by warming temperatures.



Mountain pine beetles have ravaged the forests of the Western United States.

as a boon for forests and the food supply. "The ongoing rise of the air's CO₂ content is causing a great greening of the earth," an advocate of this position, Craig D. Idso, said in Washington in July.

Dr. Idso and others assert that this effect is likely to continue for the foreseeable future, ameliorating any negative effects on plant growth from rising temperatures. More mainstream scientists, while stating that CO₂ fertilization is real, are much less certain about the long-term effects, saying that the heat and water stress associated with global warming seem to be making forests vulnerable to insect attack, fires and many other problems. "Forests take a century to grow to maturity," said Werner A. Kurz, a Canadian scientist who is a leading expert on forest carbon. "It takes only a single extreme climate event, a single attack by insects, to interrupt that hundred-year uptake of carbon."

MEASURING TWIGS

So far, humanity has been lucky. While some forests are starting to release more carbon than they take up, that effect continues to be outweighed by forests that pack carbon away. Whether those healthy forests will predominate over coming decades, or will become sick themselves, is simply unclear.

The other day, deep in a healthy New England thicket of oaks, maples and hemlocks, two young men scrambled around on their hands and knees measuring twigs and sticks that had fallen from the trees. "What was the diameter on that?" asked Jakob Lindaas, a Harvard student holding a clipboard.

Leland K. Werden, a researcher at the university, called out a measurement, and they moved to the next twig. It was one of thousands they would eventually have to measure as part of an effort to tell how fast the wood, knocked off the trees in an ice storm in 2008, was decaying. The work the men were doing, in a forest owned by Harvard University, will become a small contribution toward solving one of the biggest accounting problems of modern science.

Measurements over the decades have established that the Harvard Forest is gaining weight, four tons per hectare per year on average. It is characteristic

"It takes only a single extreme climate event, a single attack by insects, to interrupt" the hundred-year carbon uptake.

of a type of forest that is playing a big role in limiting the damage from human carbon emissions: a recovering forest.

Not so long ago, the land was not a forest at all. Close to where the men were working stood an old stone fence, a telltale sign of the land's history.

"When the European colonists came to America, they saw trees, and they wanted fields and pastures," explained J. William Munger, a Harvard research fellow who was supervising the measurements. The colonists chopped down the forest and built farmhouses, barns, paddocks and sturdy stone fences.

By the mid-19th century, the Erie Canal and the railroads had opened the interior of the country, and farmers plowing the stony soils of New England could not compete with produce from the rich fields of the Midwest. So the fields were abandoned, and trees have returned.

Today, the regrowing forests of the Eastern United States are among the most important carbon sponges in the world. As in much of the world, the temperature is warming there — by an average of 1.3 degrees Celsius, or 2.34 degrees Fahrenheit, in the last 40 years — and that has led to longer growing seasons, benefiting this particular forest more than hurting it, at least so far.

Scientists say that something similar may be happening in other forests, particularly in cold northern regions that

are warming rapidly. In some places, the higher temperatures could aid tree growth or cause forests to expand into zones previously occupied by grasslands or tundra, storing more carbon.

Forests are regrowing on abandoned agricultural land across vast reaches of Europe and Russia. China, trying to slow the advance of a desert, has planted many trees on nearly 40 million hectares — and those forests, too, are absorbing carbon. But, as a strategy for managing carbon pollution, these recovering forests have one big limitation: The planet simply does not have room for many more of them. "We're basically running out of land," Dr. Kurz said.

BEEBLE INVASIONS

Stripping the bark off a tree with a hatchet, Diana L. Six, a University of Montana insect scientist, pointed out the telltale signs of infestation by pine beetles: channels drilled by the creatures as they chewed their way through the juicy part of the tree.

The tree was already dead. Its needles, which should have been deep green, displayed the sickly red that has become so commonplace in the mountainous Western United States. Because the beetles had cut off the tree's nutrients, the chlorophyll that made the needles green was breaking down. Pine beetles are a natural part of the life cycle in Western forests, but this outbreak, fed by warming temperatures and under way for more than a decade in some areas, is by far the most extensive ever recorded. Fears are rising that they could spread across the continent.

Flying in a small plane over the Montana wilderness, Steven W. Running, a climate scientist at the University of Montana, said beetles were not the only problem confronting the forests of the Western United States. Warmer temperatures are causing mountain snow to melt earlier in most years, he said. That is causing more severe water deficits in the summer, just as the higher temperatures cause trees to need extra water. The whole landscape dries out, creating the conditions for intense fires and making the trees easy prey for beetles.

Because of the changing climate, experts say some areas in the southwestern United States, which are burning this year at record rates, may never return as forest. They are more likely to grow back as heat-tolerant grasslands or shrub lands, storing far less carbon than the forests they replace.

FOOTPRINTS AMONG THE TREES

Scientists are gradually coming to a sobering realization: There may be no such thing left as a natural forest.

However wild some of them may look, experts say, forests from the deepest Amazon to the remotest reaches of Siberia are now responding to human influences, including the rising level of carbon dioxide in the air, increasing heat and changing rainfall patterns. That raises the issue of what people can do to protect forests. Some steps have already been taken in recent years. But other ideas are essentially stymied for lack of money.

Widespread areas of pine forest in the Western United States are a prime example. Human mismanagement has allowed underbrush to grow so thick it creates a likelihood of severe fires, but little money is available to thin the forests.

On an even larger scale, experts cite a lack of money as endangering a program meant to slow or halt the elimination of tropical forests.

Destruction of such forests, usually to make way for agriculture, has been under way for decades, with Brazil and Indonesia being hotspots. Rich countries agreed in principle in recent years to pay poorer countries large amounts of money if they would protect their forests.

The wealthy countries have pledged nearly \$5 billion, but far more money was eventually supposed to become available. The idea was that the rich countries would create programs to charge their companies for emissions of carbon dioxide, and some of that money would flow abroad for forest preservation.

Climate legislation stalled in the United States amid opposition from lawmakers worried about the economic effects, and some European countries have also balked at sending money abroad.

"Like any other scheme to improve the human condition," said William Boyd, a University of Colorado law professor working to salvage the plan, "it's quite precarious, because it is so grand in its ambitions."

Tensions and violence rise in Homs

SYRIA, FROM PAGE 1

last week that left nearly a dozen professors, doctors and informers dead in a paroxysm of violence that echoes the sectarian vendettas still besetting Iraq.

Unlike the uprising's early days, when the government exercised a near monopoly on violence, the fear is beginning to spread in the other direction, as insurgents kill government supporters and informers, residents say.

One of those killed was Dr. Hassan Eid, the chief of thoracic surgery at the Homs National Hospital and an Alawite from Al Zuhra, one of a handful of neighborhoods where the sect makes up a majority and where buildings and streets are still plastered with the portraits of Mr. Assad.

Dr. Eid was shot to death in front of his house as he headed off to work Sept. 25, residents said.

Al Ouruba, a government-aligned newspaper, called Dr. Eid a "symbol of dedication" and said he had treated victims of the violence "without discriminating between any of them."

But in Sunni Muslim locales, residents called him a government informer who had helped the security forces detain the wounded who were treated at his facility.

Within hours of his shooting, a hint of triumphalism echoed in parts of the city, as some people celebrated his death.

"He was responsible for the death of many young men," said a 65-year-old resident of Homs, who gave his name as Rajab. "He was killed because he deserved it."

Soon after dawn the next day, gunfire erupted as children went to school.

"They shot Abu Ali," an old man who collects garbage and cleans the streets in the neighborhood said a short time later.

Abu Ali, the name most knew him by, was another informant, the residents said.

"The guys were aware of him a long time ago," said an activist in his late 40s who gave his name as Abu Ghali. "But now it's different. He kept reporting, so they had to kill him. I don't think he died right away, though."

Abu Ghali added that it was not difficult to get information on informers. "You can do anything with money," he said. "You just bribe an officer, and be generous with him, and you can get all you want."

The killings took place during two bloody days in Homs, a city along the Orontes River and not too far from the medieval castle Krak des Chevaliers.



The tensions have grown so dire that members of one sect are reluctant to travel to neighborhoods populated by other sects.

Residents said that after Abu Ali died, three Alawite teachers were killed at a school in the neighborhood of Baba Amr. (Government newspapers did not confirm those deaths.)

In the afternoon, Mohammed Ali Akil, an assistant dean at Al Baath University in Homs, was found dead in his car on a highway. Students said he had shown support for the uprising and had criticized Mr. Assad's leadership in his lectures.

"It is true that we were scared during your lectures, but you were a wonderful professor," a student posted on Facebook. "May you rest in peace. We won't forget you."

Near the Lebanese border — where residents say weapons flow across a porous border from Turkey, Saudi Arabia and even Qatar — Homs strikes an odd posture. Many of its Sunni residents are at once fearful and proud, empowered by their opposition to Mr. Assad's dictatorship. Many Alawites are terrified; they are often the victims of the most vulgar stereotypes and, in popular conversation, uniformly associated with the leadership.

In Alawite villages, only government television is watched. To do so in Sunni neighborhoods amounts to treason. In those, Al Jazeera and Al Arabiya are the stations of choice. Suspicions give currency to the wildest of rumors; in one, a female butcher in Homs named Um Khaled asks the armed gangs to bring her the bodies of Alawites they capture so that she can cut them up and market the meat to her customers.

Centuries-old connections between

sects still knit together the city, even as the suggestion of civil war threatens to sever them forever. The countryside, residents say, is roiled by far more sectarian hatred. Government checkpoints separate Sunni from Alawite.

"One side kills an Alawite, the other kills a Sunni," a 46-year-old activist said.

The uprising's overall toll has been grim: By the United Nations' count, more than 2,700 people have died. The revolt still draws much of its strength from the countryside, and the two largest cities, Aleppo and Damascus, remain relatively quiescent. Though protests have flagged lately, Homs has stayed defiant.

Armed men often protect the perimeter of protests in places like Bab al-Sbaa, Khaldiya and Baba Amr, where some stores are shut and buildings are scarred by broken windows and bullet holes. Some of these men have carried out the assassinations of informers, or "awayniyeh," as they call them. Others scout government checkpoints and occasionally set up their own, temporary versions.

"They have rocket-propelled grenades and Kalashnikovs," said a driver in his late 50s who lives in the neighborhood of Khaldiya.

"They should be armed," he added. "They protect us."

A woman who gave her name as Suleima lives on Al Joura Street in Baba Amr. She earns a living by preparing kibbe, a dish of minced meat with cracked wheat, for wealthier clients in other neighborhoods of Homs. She said that for three days, gunfire had kept her inside her house and that telephones were down.

"You never know when they will start shooting again," she said.

Angry and exhausted, she professed neutrality in a conflict that makes such a notion ever more difficult.

"Neighbors accuse me of being with the regime, so I laugh," she said at her house, which she shares with her daughter.

"What on earth did this regime give me?" Suleima asked. "Absolutely nothing. But neither did the revolutionaries. I work, I eat. If I don't work, I starve. At least I worked before. Now I'm at home, hardly leaving it, and hardly making a living."

This article was reported by a correspondent for The New York Times in Homs, Syria, and written by Anthony Shadid in Beirut.

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