

Destroying Yemen

WHAT CHAOS IN ARABIA TELLS US
ABOUT THE WORLD

Isa Blumi



UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA PRESS



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Për Jemenin më të dashur . . .

يا يمن ... أنا في رهبة منك

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This was a difficult book. Its composition spanned a period of my life that taught me the limits of the human heart and that one's spiritual radar is often the only way to navigate troubled waters. I cannot even imagine what it is like to be living in Yemen at the moment, and feel a sincere sense of guilt that I cannot do more. What I have done is pull together emotional and material resources and write a book that is but a minuscule approximation of the complex world Yemenis face. The fact that a genocidal war is still being waged on Yemenis expected to submit to others' whims means this tradition of writing a brief few words of thanks feels odd. I cannot in good conscience thank any of my Yemeni, Kosovare, Emirati, Saudi, and Somali interlocutors by name as retribution is likely a tool to be used for years in beautiful Yemen. It is a war still incomplete, and I need not share thanks to those who will know, upon, inshaAllah, reading this book, that I have them always in my heart.

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NOTE ON DATES, ABBREVIATIONS,
AND TRANSLITERATION

All dates are Common Era unless otherwise noted.

ABBREVIATIONS

Al-Qa'ida in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP)
Brazil, Russia, India, (Iran), China, South Africa
(BRI(I)CS)
Dubai Ports World (DPW)
European Union (EU)
Free Yemeni Movement (FYM)
Front for the Liberation of Occupied South Yemen
(FLOSY)
General People's Congress (GPC)
Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC)
International Monetary Fund (IMF)
Joint Meeting Parties (JMP)
Kingdom of Saudi Arabia (KSA)
Local Development Associations (LDA)
Mainstream Media (MSM)
Muslim Brotherhood (MB)
National Dialogue Conference (NDC)
National Liberation Front (NLF)
Non-Aligned Movement (NAM)

Non-Government Organizations (NGO)
North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO)
Trade Union Congress (TUC)
United Arab Emirates (UAE)
United Nations (UN)
United Nations Security Council Resolution (UNSCR)
United States Agency for International Development
(USAID)
United States of America (USA)
World Trade Organization (WTO)
Yemen Arab Republic (YAR)
Yemen Bank for Reconstruction and Development
(YBRD)

TRANSLITERATIONS

Because this study utilizes several foreign language sources, including Arabic, transliteration is necessary. I wish to represent as best as possible the standardized transliteration of Arabic words and names, but rendering absolute transliterations of Arabic words in Latin script can be tedious and distracting for most readers. As there are special nouns that have renditions in Latin script now commonplace in the media, especially the case with names of public figures, I only choose to represent the ‘ain and hamza. This means I forego depicting long vowels and the numerous consonants whose Latin renditions require complicated graphic renderings. I trust scholars of the region will reserve criticism to the content of this book and not my leaning to convenience in this matter.

Introduction

“So for you this is a moral issue?” “Because you know, there’s a lot of jobs at stake. Certainly if a lot of these defense contractors stop selling war planes, other sophisticated equipment to Saudi Arabia, there’s going to be a significant loss of jobs, of revenue here in the United States. That’s secondary from your standpoint?”

CNN’S WOLF BLITZER INTERVIEWING
SEN. RAND PAUL, September 8, 2016
(Jilani and Emmons 2016)

IT WAS OCTOBER 8, 2016, 6:30 P.M. in Sweden. I had just settled in to begin writing after dinner when a friend in Yemen e-mailed me the news. Earlier that day Saudi warplanes—armed, fueled, and maintained by British and American loaned military personnel—once again committed mass murder. The target was the capital city’s al-Qa’a al-Kubra funeral hall. Inside, hundreds upon hundreds of mourners were attending the funeral of Shaykh ‘Ali Jalal al-Rawishan, former interior minister of the Republic of Yemen.

Under the guise of an “international coalition” first operating under code name “Operation Decisive Storm” and soon after rebranded “Operation Restoring Hope,” Western-built warplanes unleashed four waves of airstrikes targeting the building in which much of North Yemen’s political and economic elite were paying their respects. Ten minutes later, when rescue workers and pedestrians rushed to assist the victims, another round of airstrikes, the notorious “double tap” the Americans perfected in Yemen years earlier, followed. This time they struck with incendiary bombs.¹

For the last three years the same American- and British-made planes drop bombs on the poorest country in the Middle East while well-paid public

relations firms justify what in Syria is called a war crime.² This (Saudi/Anglo-American) coalition targets everything from transport infrastructure (bridges, roads, ports) to food processing plants, farmlands, food stores, markets, and water wells. The resulting famine has almost without exception been kept out of the media. Among the few journalists who have reported on the famine, some persuasively argue the starvation is strategic rather than collateral.³

Tellingly, the UN demonstrates reluctance to acknowledge the catastrophe. Indeed, the UN in the summer of 2016 revealed embarrassing moments of confusion, where lower-level officials condemned Saudi crimes only to be officially retracted by former UN secretary Ban Ki-Moon's offices.⁴ The same held later with the refusal to even initiate an investigation after massacres in Hudaydah and Sana'a' actually made some headlines. Contrast this attitude to that in Syria and it is clear the UN services only certain parties' interests.⁵

In sharp contrast, less politically and economically compromised NGOs have called a spade a spade: Norway's Refugee Council (NRC) did not mince words already in November 2016 when it reported hunger claims untold thousands of Yemenis every week. Impervious to Saudi and American pressure to keep silent, the NRC's outraged secretary-general Jan Egeland affirmed that millions were in a state of famine by late 2016 and "millions more will go hungry in 2017," adding that "this man-made disaster . . . shames us all."⁶ With but such rare outbursts, the incriminating images of the skeletal fragments of once beautiful children only circulate on obscure, almost entirely ignored Facebook and Twitter accounts.⁷ To add to the misery, since April 2017 Northern Yemen is experiencing the "biggest outbreak of cholera in recorded history," with hundreds of thousands infected. And still, Yemeni men, women, and children continue to die behind a kind of journalistic omerta.⁸

. . .

Operation Decisive Storm/Restoring Hope was marketed as a war of "last resort." While unfortunate, it is justifiable because, first, Yemen is dangerous. As the political fortunes of the country impact more important neighbors and possibly the flow of global commerce, what happens in Yemen concerns the rest of the world. Those who wage this war, we are assured, do so only reluctantly. They have rained terror on the population only when the internationally recognized "government" was "illegally" overthrown in a coup

d'état. War was chosen over diplomacy because the primary organizers of the coup were "Shi'is" with close affiliation to Iran.

This narrative, circulating with slight modification since March 2015, reflects the often repeated methods of framing tragic events in the Third World/Global South (Prashad 2016). Necessarily they neatly designate those whom the "world" must protect, and an easily identifiable villain. Following such recognizable patterns, under the cover of a UN Resolution (in our case, UNSCR 2216), the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia (KSA) and USA authorized themselves to use violence in Yemen. Under the pretext of reinstating the "legitimate," "recognized" government, they openly support with considerable deadly force a regime associated with one 'Abd Rabbuh Mansur Hadi (henceforth Hadi). This once vice-president of twenty years serves as a figurehead of a coalition of US/KSA-approved parties, including vetted Islamist groups like Muslim Brotherhood (MB).

Those targeted by this UN-sanctioned alliance are loosely associated groups representing a broad sweep of Yemeni society—almost 80 percent of the country's population currently lives under these groups' authority. Forming its own precarious coalition government at the height of a political breakdown in early 2015, it consists of loyalists to the former president of Yemen, 'Ali Abdullah Saleh; a major swath of the Yemeni military; and an amorphous political alliance (tribal militias, some of the more partisan would say) calling itself AnsarAllah (Partisans of God), manipulatively characterized in most media as "Shi'a tribesmen with links to Iran."

The glaring problem in this war justified by "the international community" is the existence of a possible alternative reading of recent events in Yemen. The removal in late 2014 of Hadi's ineffective interim administration was deemed by most Yemenis as entirely justified. Indeed, some observers acknowledge that AnsarAllah, the group responsible for removing the Hadi administration, had secured by late August 2014 broad-based support for its "patriotic" actions. This support appears to have extended to large numbers of Sunni Yemenis and most elements of the Yemeni Armed Forces (Brehony 2015).⁹

When asked, many recall how it was thanks to AnsarAllah's takeover of the capital city that Yemenis could finally come to an agreed timeframe for elections promised by the Obama administration and Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) in 2012. Informants point to September 21, 2014, when, with the assistance of Jamal Benomar, the appointed UN envoy to Yemen, interim "president" Hadi was forced to sign the Peace and National Partnership Agreement with AnsarAllah and leaders from all the major political parties.

This agreement once again put elections on the front burner. With this, AnsarAllah earned the trust of large swathes of Yemen's population. Unfortunately, an agreement that would lead to power sharing was exactly what Yemen's influential neighbor KSA did not want. From that day of apparent reconciliation onward, KSA began to plot how it could reverse this turn of events.¹⁰

Rarely discussed anymore were the truly unacceptable conditions Yemenis found themselves living under during Hadi's interim government. At the time of AnsarAllah's takeover of the capital city, those living in Yemen largely acknowledged Hadi's administration as excessively corrupt and incompetent. Indeed, since handed the keys of government in 2012 by the USA/KSA, the interim government of Hadi/Israh had made Yemeni lives demonstrably worse.¹¹

By 2013, for example, the number of assassinations, bombings of mosques frequented by Zaydi Muslims, paired with growing poverty, rising unemployment, and property confiscations, grew to epidemic proportions. Perhaps the biggest shared concern for Yemenis of all political, cultural, and economic stripes was a realization that this supposedly "interim government" took it upon itself, with no parliamentary oversight, to push forward economic liberalization "reforms" that illegally put much of Yemen's public assets up for sale. More problematic still, the main beneficiaries were foreign.

With Yemenis living the horror of austerity familiar to Argentinians and Greeks, by August 2014, KSA and Qatar were given the green light, in the name of IMF-approved "free trade," to buy Yemen's most valuable assets, something no democratically elected, or even the previous Saleh, government could allow (Hill 2017; Carapico 2016). In this context, AnsarAllah not only threw out a corrupt foreign imposed government filled with crooks and Islamist bigots, but they also reversed the selling of Yemen's economic future. As a result, the unstable coalition between Saleh's loyalists and AnsarAllah continues today in a modified anti-American, anti-Israeli, and anti-Saudi form. This unflagging support for a struggle against Saudi/American violence is strategically ignored by most outside accounts of this war to destroy Yemen. Rather than seeing it, as at least twenty million Yemenis do, as a war of aggression, "coalition" bombing is still marketed as necessary to reinsert the "legitimate" Hadi government, protect global commerce, and assure that the austerity measures demanded by the IMF are fully implemented.

Put in these terms it is clear the reporting on what is and is not at stake in Yemen—ignoring the underlying ambition to keep the country servile to the



FIGURE 1. Protest. Loyalists to former President Saleh remained entrenched in Sana'a' for the duration of the transitional regime headed by Hadi. These protestors were motivated by different causes, including demands for justice in respect to several heinous crimes committed during the tumultuous events of 2011 and after. Tahrir Square, Sana'a', January 2013. Photo by author.

needs of certain regional and global interests—fails to provide the tools readers will need to anticipate what happens next. One of the more egregious examples of manipulative reporting that confuses readers is the constant reference to events in Yemen as a “civil war.” Framing events in this manner attempts to place the blame for these catastrophes on Yemenis themselves, a way of reading events that is not politically neutral.¹² Claiming Yemen’s ills are self-inflicted strategically elides the role outside interests played in igniting and sustaining such violence. In fact, this war (at the time of publishing in its third year) is much more usefully read as a continued foreign effort to subordinate Yemenis, long defiantly independent from the globalization trends infesting the larger world. The aim of this book is to explain chaos in Arabia in these terms.

If events in Yemen were ever presented in this frame, it would be more problematic to rationalize the robust deployment of modern warplanes, cluster and phosphorous bombs,¹³ and potentially something more sinister still

dropped on Faj Attan Mountain in Sana'a' on April 20, 2015.¹⁴ For this the media and corrupted international organizations work overtime to confuse and cover up with clichés about Yemeni tribalism and Iranian-backed rebels.¹⁵ In this particularly narrow, but almost universally promoted line of thinking, even the thought of Iran's proximity to strategic chokepoints like the Bab al-Mandab, which overlooks the southern entrance into the Red Sea, constitutes a threat to the "free flow" of global commerce. While Iran cannot be trusted, the Americans and Saudis (who are the primary benefactors of much of the violent *takfiri* groups in the world today) are assumed to be responsible guardians of the world's commercial trade routes.¹⁶

As a challenge to this perspective, the conclusions drawn at the end of this book will highlight that those parties waging this war of aggression have at times conflicted agendas, raising questions about the actual durability of this so-called coalition. For instance, among the principals—KSA, Qatar, UAE, USA, and UK—there have been since the beginning indications that their ambitions for a final solution to the Yemen crisis conflict with one another. Indeed, there are hints that Yemen's unity is not a part of any long-term goal among the coalition partners. Furthermore, there are clearly differing opinions on the viability of the "legitimate" leader of Yemen and if Hadi is still the solution. There are also stark differences of opinion in respect to which of the many mercenary groups hired by different coalition partners are "terrorist." In fact, all indications suggest the UAE and KSA are fighting each other for ascendancy in southern and eastern Yemen through these mercenary armies. For its part, Qatar by April 2017 fell into open conflict with both the UAE and KSA. Usefully, ever since, Qatar has used its main media outlets, Al-Jazeera and a swathe of compensated journalists and academics around the world, to shed light on unsavory aspects of Operation Restoring Hope.

The ultimate point here is that as much as this war is marketed in simple terms, often evoking the binaries popular in the media, there are far more complex (and long-standing) issues at play in Yemen that need analysis. The latter chapters of this book will offer more background to these recent events in Yemen. However, in order to fully appreciate the seemingly confused terms in which the main actors are operating, it is necessary to first highlight that the war's deeper roots derive from the policy of destroying Yemen long ago adopted by heretofore obscured foreign parties, a testament to the consequences of South Arabia's historic entanglements with the larger world.



MAP 1. Yemen, 1990–2015.

YEMEN AND THE WORLD

For millennia, the inhabitants of South Arabia have maintained a complex relationship with the larger world. Already a major cultural and commercial hub for Arabia's Jews by the seventh century, Yemen would be forever remembered as the home of the first converts to God's last message to humanity.¹⁷ Centuries later, Dutch traders climbed the terraced hills covered in addictive coffee beans, while Ottoman Janissaries hailing from Albania, Georgia, or Crimea laid yet one more claim to the same terraced hills for Istanbul's sultan. Setting this stage for global convergence was a ruling class that had for at least five hundred years prior to the arrival of Europeans turned the region into a thriving hub of intellectual and commercial activity. This is the Yemen that became the destination for waves of Muhammad's descendants (recognized as *sayyid*/pl. *sada*), who, by the eleventh century CE formed a binding, enduring spiritual and intellectual link with the larger world.¹⁸ By the end of the nineteenth century, the remarkable infrastructure that harnessed seasonal rains to produce a seemingly endless amount of wealth attracted no



FIGURE 2. Farmland. In Northern Yemen, centuries-old terraced hills produced considerable surplus wealth long coveted by outsiders. Until recently, these regions of Yemen were self-sufficient in food production, enabling the inhabitants to remain defiant to empire. Since March 2015 fields like these have been targeted by Saudi-led airstrikes, often with cluster bombs to render them unusable to farmers. Hajjah, August 1993. Photo by author.

longer just disciples and descendants of prophets, but aggressive agents of capital seeking profits.

Until recently, Yemen could accommodate all comers, whether prophet or profiteer. After all, Yemen was a land that for millennia served as the bosom of new faiths in God's power over the ways of the universe. What drew both the pious and the materialistic were some of the wealthiest, vibrant centers of cultural and philosophical exchange the world has known (Laffan 2003; Ho 2006). There was enough for all to revel and profit. Unfortunately, this rich history that left an imprint on corners of the world as distinct as Java and Detroit has been largely overshadowed by Yemen's recent past.

Destroying Yemen suggests that as much as various local (re)actions account for specific moments, to appreciate the extent to which Yemen's story is "complicated" requires moving beyond the geographies, historiographies, and epistemologies used to make Yemen conveniently legible to specialists. This book thus aims to identify multiple links that conjoin the place and peoples with those global forces constantly drawn to Yemen but rarely associated with it. These are complex, contingent, and constantly (d)evolving exchanges, often

themselves byproducts of watershed moments originating from abroad or locally. Studying these turning points, especially over the last century, will prove crucial to understanding the past, present, and future of not only a country, or even an “area” or region, but the world.

At the heart of this book’s claims is a recognition that Yemen’s stories retold here are experienced within the lifetimes of the period of emerging financial power between the two World Wars, the Cold War, Pan-Arabism, anti-imperialism, globalization, and the rise of political Islam. To appreciate fully the significance of this observation requires demonstrating just how interconnected Yemen’s modern history has been to the transformations of the modern, and postmodern, world. In this regard, Yemen’s diverse peoples are not merely the victim of global processes, but often the causal force behind dramatic global changes. Indeed, it will be the conclusion of this book that the current war in Yemen may yet lead to the collapse of a system of economic, political, and cultural domination that has reigned supreme since the conclusion of World War II. Throughout we will refer to this system, or regime, as *empire*.¹⁹

The contours of this empire need to remain abstract, nebulous, and global in scope if Yemen’s role in its development and possible demise is appreciable. The empire to which I refer serves for much of the last three hundred years as an umbrella for what, initially at least, constituted an amorphous, sometimes disorganized cluster of competing interests (Cooper 2005, Kramer 2011). For much of the time since the seventeenth-century rise of private banking in the North Atlantic world (ostensibly what we refer to as “the West”) these interests competed. Over time, however, the pool of these interests shrank, with expansive successes increasingly seeking ways to work together.

By World War I, after further consolidation of power to a small cluster of financiers and their political partners, these interests collaborated to secure a mutually beneficial monopoly on global trade via its primary vehicle, the modern state and its central bank. The resulting empire’s core operations based in the North Atlantic became by the end of World War I all the more ubiquitous in the affairs of peoples around the world. Using “multilateral” organizations like the League of Nations in the interwar era to the UN, IMF, WTO, and World Bank since World War II, empire has sought to push an agenda of financial domination that used the state to streamline the extraction of surplus wealth produced by human labor. Through international organizations, in particular, but also by way of surrogate imperialist industrializing states of the prewar era—Britain, France, the Netherlands,

Spain, Germany, Belgium, Italy, and Portugal—and today’s USA, empire has gained considerable leverage over once noncompliant polities, including those found throughout Yemen. Crucially, in as much as empire secures leverage by way of financially overwhelming targeted polities and when needed military coercion, it also harvested technology and the social sciences (Vitalis 2015).

It was through its cultivation of higher education, in particular, that this modern empire produced the analytical frameworks to complement its violent methods of financial domination. With the establishment of the disciplines of economics, sociology, social anthropology, and political science, empire had the tools to indoctrinate generations of ambitious agents with theories of modernization, globalization, and neoliberalism. These theories of human development have all at some point become orthodoxies, which by 1945 multilateral organizations and academia could enforce as science and truth to their respective, captured audiences. In this way, empire expanded its influence intellectually, training would-be technocrats who embraced these ideologies of progress crucial to establishing uniformity in the way the world’s peoples conducted their economic (and moral) lives.²⁰

By the 1940s, the world would even find itself coaxed into not only abandoning traditions of spirituality for “scientific” accountings of the way the universe worked, but also surrendering gold and silver (for five thousand years the means of valuation and exchange) for an abstraction known as a central bank-issued currency (Rickards 2011). In time, the world would even be compelled to accept one bank-issued currency, used almost exclusively by 1971 for the purchase of everything a modern society needed. The US dollar became ubiquitous, in large part because suppliers of commodities like oil agreed to only accept US dollars as payment. This collusion between the major oil producers (OPEC) and empire assured the Federal Reserve Bank, a coalition of private banks, monopolized the means of exchange in the world (Hudson 2005). This constituted a power almost unique in human history, one Yemenis still resist well into the new millennium.

Empire in the last two centuries is thus a product of a coalition of finance capitalists who have forged a global regime that until recently has been able to build, with virtually unlimited amounts of debt financing, the most powerful military machine ever known. These apparatuses marking a “new imperialism” unique to this era now exceed the once more nuanced means of persuasion, be it financial, or scholarly/cultural (Grandin 2006). Indeed, empire as understood here has increasingly resorted to brute force by way of

international organizations such as NATO and, if stealth is needed, well-trained insurgencies.

This has been most recently evident in the 1980s with the CIA-funded Contras in Central America and Usama Bin Laden's directed Mujahidin (Coll 2004). Today this ability to sabotage a resistant people like some of those found in Yemen extends to terrorizing them by way of quasi-mercenary auxiliary forces, the so-called al-Qa'ida and Da'ish (ISIS/ISIL) militants ruining what is left of the postwar Middle East (Blumi 2016; Davidson 2016; Skoll 2016: 107–20).²¹

To reach this revisionist conclusion about just what role more generally the “West” played in the world over the last two centuries, we must dramatically change our perspective. Yemen's history and current war does this by offering an account of this multifarious empire's rise in microcosm. As we will learn, there were some deeply imbedded Yemenis in the inner circles of empire. Indeed, crucial to empire's campaigns to seek and expand financial power was the central role of local intermediaries and the enabling partnership expat Yemenis offered to these projects.

More interesting still, as explained throughout, lowly herders, farmers, or the urban poor often initiated the battles between states, the global economic forces they represented, and local communities that informed the ways the larger world did business in Arabia. Proof of this extends to the current war in Yemen, which has clearly drawn the larger world into a conflict that had, in some remarkable ways, originated as a mere land use dispute between local farmers and the Yemeni/Saudi states seeking to forcibly integrate the region's assets into the global economy (Blumi 2010; Lichtenthäler 2017).

The wisdom of taking a microscopic view of events during a longer period is reinforced once we push the analysis of local politics back to the period when Yemen was ruled by two distinctive regimes with surprisingly similar global orientations. Covered in chapters 1 and 2, we look at how both the Ottoman and British imperial projects covering a vast track of South Arabia was distinctively impacted by the demands its representatives faced while administering a range of local polities with varying connections to the larger world. In most cases, British operations in South Yemen were compelled to deal with polities whose experience in global affairs extend back to the time before England asserted authority over the isles. More still, the region's other major imperial players, be they the Ottomans, or the Italians and French based across the Red Sea in the nineteenth century, all complicated the relationship that large tracts of Yemen sustained with the larger world.

In this vein, Yemen must always be viewed in an international context and through a lens that acknowledges as much the local impact on the global as vice versa.²² The most useful approach to reflect this codependent intimacy, and the one with the most documented evidence, is to study how Yemen fit into the many economic and administrative development schemes that empire promoted over the last century. As we learn throughout the first three chapters, it was the ascendant Zaydi Imamate in North and Middle Yemen that resisted such encroachments of finance capitalism most. Their principled resistance resulted in one of the unique cases of indigenous, independent political order to survive World War II.

This order ended with a brutal war between rival would-be masters and the occupation of North and Middle Yemen by Nasserist Egypt after 1962 (chapters 3 and 4). As a result, the country became over the next decade subject to a litany of invasive economic development programs designed to redirect its economy to service global capital's demands. That Yemenis continued to struggle against their incorporation into this web of dependency proves heartening. At the same time, however, one observes the extent to which foreign interests would connive, even to the point of staging military coups, to finally capture an economy that had for years been the target of the oil/gas, mining, and agricultural industries. It is thus during the Cold War, by way of direct foreign aid or international (multilateral) organizations like the UN, World Bank, and IMF (Bretton Woods institutions), that self-appointed global leaders encouraged (and often insisted) pliable locals in both North and South Yemen to institute "economic development programs" designed by proponents of modernization theory.

THE IMPERIALIST PROJECTILE OF DEVELOPMENT

Whether by the Egyptians in the 1960s or the present USA- and Saudi-led coalition, Yemenis have faced bombardment and embargoes that put millions into conditions of starvation in the name of altruistic, even humanistic "progressive" agendas. In response, Yemenis have a long history of resistance to empire's invasive "humanitarianism." This pushback, as witnessed since the 1900s and reaching its apex during the neoliberal period in the 1990s, has spurred on new contingencies, themselves leading to shifts in the concentration of power in the larger world. Appreciating these shifts is crucial to understanding Yemen's deep implication in the global transformations since

World War II and that its inhabitants' resistance may have contributed to the evolution of modernization as practice.

At first resisting by refusing to operate in the dollar-based global economy imposed since Bretton Woods (1944), Yemenis led by Imam Yahya and his sons eventually had to fight one of the many wars shaped by the Cold War. Yemen ultimately also succumbed to the economic paradigms of the era, but only after a bloody war from 1962 to 1970 that claimed at least 200,000 lives. Discussed in detail in chapters 3 and 4, the saddest irony is the fact it was "revolutionary" Egypt that, through its occupation regime, established structures tailored to force Yemen's incorporation into the global economy. Informing the bureaucratic imprints of this attempt were the hegemonic doctrines of modernization.

Through its ubiquitous presence in universities and deep infiltration into the new multilateral institutions charged with bringing change to the Global South, theories of modernization and the prescriptions for how to realize it became unquestioned (social) science. Accompanying the tins of dried milk, sacks of American wheat, and an occasional Ford tractor were the development how-to guides often composed, printed, and distributed by corporations being handsomely compensated for their donated surplus products and services. Reflecting the postwar power structure that produced these theories, within a few years modernization's ideals and the various blueprints to realize them were applied by most international donor agencies and governments. Presented through various multilateral organizations and directly implemented by way of aid agencies, it can be observed that throughout the 1960s and into the 1970s, the actual discourse of modernization imposed a narrowed idea of what was both correct economic practice and necessary for the implementation of a global economic order envisioned by the Bretton Woods agreements.²³

The main agents promoting modernization were social scientists who understood the project to be invasive and (counter-) revolutionary. They shared a belief with corporate America (and intelligence agencies) that a state administered "scientifically" (read: in a disciplined, or more specifically militaristic manner) was the best means to transform human behavior. The social and cultural by-product of these interventions (transforming peasants and villagers into modern city dwellers) was expected to service global corporate interests as modernized subjects eagerly working for wages that were then recycled to buy the products they made.

The image of a young woman in Egypt, Brazil, or Turkey leaving work, drinking a bottle of Pepsi, chewing gum, and listening to rock and roll was

the idealized expression of societies attaining a certain developmental status in the world (Escobar 1995: 154–211; Momsen 2008: 34–45). In exchange for the blue jeans, soda, fast cars, and microwaves, citizens of the world were expected to be more amenable to the global hegemonic ambitions of those promoting the campaign. One thing expected of those benefiting from the American president Truman’s “Fair Deal,” was that, while modernizing, they had to shun the spurious incitements of communism, the one ideology that could take all those good things away.²⁴

For the true believers, by going through various stages defined by the likes of Walter Rostow and Daniel Lerner, it was held that even Yemen would transform. What was not very clear when Yemeni technocrats read so diligently such development models was whether their country was expected to transform into a pliable satellite funneling its wealth toward the North Atlantic capital markets or to develop to become truly independent. Considering the politics of the era, if supplying raw materials to the “free world” was the price for “growth,” the question was just how much did Yemen have to pay.

It was quite clear that the revenues produced from their sale of resources—cheap oil, minerals, coffee, workers’ lives—were not meant for savings but rather consumption. The ideal modern Arab, in other words, was one who became a consumer. This constituted a development cycle that assured any national economy adopting this formula could expect to reach what Rostow wrote was a “modest developmental stage.” The fact that this meant once-penniless peasants were “empowered” to purchase US goods that they had previously no use for was an irony on which only later generations of critics commented.²⁵

What “modest development” did not mean was the right to speak up and become a partner in shaping global affairs. Here the return to the Cold War context is essential to reading Yemen’s complex relationship with the larger world. There was a paradox burning through the reports of those advocating the application of modernization theory. With development—to most in New York/DC power circles, measured only by GDP and import/export data, not the actual rise in the masses’ quality of life—some observers began to see a dangerous trend in those societies allowed to “progress.” The warning from a top theorist of the period encapsulated the entire modernization ethos for those on the right side of the East–West, North–South divide: “in the Congo, in Vietnam, in the Dominican Republic, it is clear that order depends on somehow compelling newly mobilized strata to return to a

measure of passivity and defeatism from which they have been aroused by the process of modernization. At least temporarily, the maintenance of order requires a lowering of newly acquired expectations and levels of political activity” (Sola Pool 1967: 26).

In sum, too much development became a dangerous thing for those who envisioned the distribution of aid as a tool whose significance can only be measured “when it is related to the benefits which the United States receives from that activity.”²⁶ And here began the critical link between mediating development with possible risks that come with it.²⁷ It was well known among those debating policies at the height of the Cold War that in the case of aid distribution, the principal beneficiary in the US case is the US balance of payments, US industry and commerce, and long-range US strategic goals (Hudson 2003: 219, Henry 2003).

But while there is a growing appreciation that development aid’s actual function is to more efficiently serve the interests of what we call empire, it is still understudied just how insidious were the parameters of the debate over what can be the extent of that aid. In the Cold War, and repackaged today in the “war on terror,” certain fixtures in the language of direct assistance make the process of justifying aid permanently interlinked with the larger, more lucrative military side of the empire project. While it is said US\$5 trillion has been spent on security and “war on terror” related projects since 9/11, the relatively miniscule amounts of aid for development seem to narrow even more to focus on several targeted, functional areas. While the direct links between aid focused on public health issues—AIDS, malaria, tuberculosis, now Zika—clearly point to beneficiaries in various industries, as we explore further in this book, aid to Yemen had its own ideologically charged function that aimed to stop the spread of grass-roots resistance to capitalist exploitation of its agrarian, human, and carbon wealth. That modernization theory, practiced with different levels of fanaticism, also required a generic image of the recipient as decidedly unmodern also plays itself out in dangerous ways in this story.

While the language of modernization changed periodically since the 1950s to reflect greater sensitivities and perhaps new industries that directly benefited from new kinds of projects, the project’s ultimate function—to uproot “traditional” societies and infuse the productivity of Yemen into the global economy—did not change much. In this respect, these same histories of development in Yemen throughout the 1970s require that we appreciate just how much generations of Yemenis from a wide range of backgrounds intuitively mistrusted these foreign gestures of charity.

Technically trained but entirely social in their scientific work, development advocates of the 1960s (theoretically still Keynesians and not the free market proponents of the 1970s Chicago School) provided the sought-after constructs, modeling a progress-orientated theory of social and economic change that specifically saw the traditions of nonindustrialized societies diametrically opposed to advancement. The resulting theory of modernization promised an accompanying program for action, a scheme to undermine in a humane way those entrenched impediments to progress and, in the end, to create a new world by way of changing the manner in which human communities conducted their economic life.

At its rawest form, the objectives clashed with those—Vietnamese, Native Americans, Moros, and Yemenis—who refused to accept what advocates assured them would result from development: progress and freedom. As such, American social scientists were charged with finding ways to change these resistant “traditional people,” acknowledging that the way “old societies are changing . . . is truly revolutionary. It touches every aspect of the traditional life . . . [but] . . . the revolution of modernization is disturbing. . . . Men and women in the villages . . . feeling that the old ways of life are shaken . . . express old resentments and new hopes” (Rostow 1968: 127–28).

Two schools of paternalistic thought emerged on how to address this resistance from people (transparently coded in the scholarship as children) who just did not know what was best for them. For those certain that this was merely a matter of empowering allies within the technocratic class of each Third World society, the solution was technology. The insertion of modern gadgets and tools could break down frustratingly coherent social systems that still command the loyalty of those who choose to resist “progress” American empire style.

The apparent empathy that Rostow and others expressed when trying to disentangle American imperialist violence in Vietnam from its convoluted myths about bringing a better life to those who were resisting ultimately rendered the literature on modernization as much messianic as technical. This in many ways allowed the imperialism promoted in their manuals to circulate beyond the classroom and into pedestrian settings.

The discourse would also prove easily translatable for those from, for example, Egypt working in Yemen to sugar-coat their claims that those napalm and chemical bombs dropped during their country’s quasi-imperialist adventure in the 1960s were also drawing from the same altruistic, self-sacrificing, and ultimately moral agenda of bringing to Yemenis modernity, progress, and

freedom. The following is from a training manual distributed to Egyptian cadets sent off to Yemen between 1962 and 1968:

The war in Yemen did not bear the character of an invasion but was meant to help a sister-Arab country. The government of Yemen at the time of the revolution as well as the Arab forces that came to defend this revolution from reactionary-imperialist infiltration stood before a dysfunctional, backward society in which fantastic tales, division and dissent proliferated. For this reason, the armed battles were carried out in tandem with an attempt to instill in the Yemeni an awareness of the backwardness and dysfunction in which he lives.²⁸

Western educated technocrats writing such prose were charged with the presentation of a modernization package that was most suitable for a *potentially* modern Yemen, not the Yemen at hand. The present Yemen was filled with tradition and backward peasants unwilling to so easily become part of a modernizing economy that expected them to work for Egypt's revolution, in Saudi oil fields, or wash cars in Kuwait.

Their location, "out beyond the city," in often rich farmlands peppered by the most extraordinary villages, were outliers of modernity that needed uprooting entirely. The language juxtaposing the "dysfunctional" and the "backward" with the educated, progressive republican living in Sana'a' is indicative of the violence just beneath the surface that could always be used as a last resort when development needed it.

Modernization and what was expected from developed Yemen was an ideological construct in the end. It also, given that "traditional Yemen" did not cooperate, proved development could be quite violent. Scholar Nick Cullather has discovered something quite remarkable about this whole development enterprise since the beginning of the Cold War. The persistent reference to "the village" in anti-Soviet Cold War rhetoric almost entirely framed the social organization of the clear majority of poor people in the world as the quintessential den of communist recruitment.²⁹

Recall that to destroy the Viet Cong was to destroy the villages that gave them shelter.³⁰ This brutal campaign to "save" the region from communism extended to Laos and Cambodia but from the air. Kissinger's endless bombardment of rural Southeast Asia aimed to transform the way villagers functioned in a crucible of naked American (and French) aggression. This cruel logic had its Middle Eastern as well as African and Latin American variations. What we do with this fact must extend beyond the still too meek



FIGURE 3. Old City. Yemen was until recently still impervious to blind development. Sana'a, 1993. Photo by author.

denunciation of these genocides and consider its role in rationalizing the war on, for instance, Yemen today.

The methods of fighting communists became a “science” that would be taught in military academies, and a veritable counterinsurgency industry emerged out of it. And as these same tactics were used in counterinsurgency programs in Southeast Asia, Southern Africa, and Central America, they produced indigenous assets. Many who were once violent victims of empire’s anticommunist campaigns became themselves something to tap into and recycle in the form of Afrikaner, Colombian, and Salvadorian mercenaries. Today many of these human byproducts of the dastardly work of the mysterious James Steele have found their way into the war in Yemen, fighting and killing for pay.³¹ If that is what modernization is all about, no wonder Yemen itself,

after decades of war, has become a net exporter of some of the most notorious *takfiris*. That they, like their Colombian, white South African, Salvadorian, Libyan, and ex-Yugoslav counterparts, thrive in the kind of social and economic disruption caused by “development” once preached in the form of modernization theory is not ironic. It is criminal (Hagmann and Reyntjens 2016).

As made in a larger argument throughout, various and often rival constituencies end up servicing the same larger globalist project. Often these agents of what I call empire are not even aware of it. For instance, Nasser’s project of expanding Egyptian interests with Pan-Arab nationalism as cover was performed by many who truly believed in the project. Indeed, while it may have had anti-imperial threads, empire adapted during the Cold War and ultimately calculated that Nasser’s anticommunism and confrontation with progressive Islamists whose agenda was a unification of a transregional struggle to defend the poor from capitalism may be more useful intact.

In some important ways, therefore, the rise of Arab nationalism, which manifested in a productive, revolutionary way in the 1950s, was mediated as much as nurtured by Nasserism. Nasserism’s rise effectively defanged the communist proclivities of the indigenous anti-imperialist groups emerging throughout the Middle East. Moreover, in their own, perhaps paradoxical way, the power grabbing that became synonymous with Egypt’s ten-year flirtation as a regional hegemon suggests Nasserism as much served landowning interests as the masses. In some ways, Nasser’s rise laid the foundations for the subsequent collapse of progressive resistance to global capitalism.

In the end, like other progressive icons of the Cold War, Egypt’s Nasser was more fairytale than reality. Unfortunately, the retrospectives written on why Nasserism failed are meant to exonerate the authors rather than give us insights into why the war in Yemen helped bring Egypt to its knees.³² Basically, more than 200,000 Yemenis would die over grudges between Egyptians and various Arabian princes.³³

As Rostow and others saw it in the 1960s, modernization was a less direct version of the war on the village advocated by military men fighting guerillas. Theirs was a means of realizing peaceful victory over the villager prone to embracing communism that could also release coveted assets somewhat less damaged than with war. As such, there were practical economic results to expect from targeting the village for development, again, with the same ultimate goal of securing it from communism. That said, the added benefit of “developing” Yemen’s villages, for example, would result in uprooting most of those living in them.

Critically, migration from the countryside to the cities created pools of cheap labor. Throughout postwar Europe (as today) it is not improbable to suggest key industries, keen on accessing cheap labor, pushed certain kinds of policies that induced large-scale migration from the “dangerous, communist-infested village” to urban areas. From there, it is not difficult to imagine a ready-made infrastructure, often legalized in trade agreements, that helped transport now uprooted farmers to the high-labor-demand areas of the Gulf after the oil boom of 1973 and to Europe (Halliday 1977, 1992).

As with North Africans, Portuguese, Southern Italians, and Balkan natives flowing into Northern and Western Europe, Yemenis by the hundreds of thousands, if not millions, flooded the construction and service labor markets of the Gulf and KSA. Yemenis started to migrate just at the time when major shifts in land use were advocated by multilateral development aid organizations and the US government. In Yemen, the economic reforms meant farmers should “rationalize” the use of their land: stop growing perishable food for local consumption and focus on cash crops. Chapter 4 introduces some small hints at this linking set of projects, rationales, and agendas, the same kind of “frictions” observed by Tsing (2005) in Borneo.

Interrogating how Yemeni farmers mediated the globalist project should also, however, help us appreciate just how important were the resulting influx of individually meager but cumulatively explosive amounts of remittances that came to North Yemen in the 1970s “boom years.” Here, the often-mentioned phenomenon of Yemeni migration becomes a crucial, extended prism to understand Yemen’s global entanglements and the possible rereading of who has been pushing war on Yemen since 2015. As throughout the world, Yemeni refugees of modernization ended up forming rings of ghettos internally and diasporas in host societies. While there were inevitable issues that arose with their potential to cause problems, they nevertheless were believed to be much more easily policed under these congested conditions.³⁴ For example, within a generation, many of the able-bodied men of North Yemen turned from being a threat to an asset in British industrial cities and the Gulf (Halliday 1992). But not always.

Upon settling in their exploitative state, many uprooted Yemeni men became active members of socialist and even communist parties flourishing in the 1960s throughout the region. Here Nasser’s paradoxical importance extends beyond the Egyptians’ stealth implementation of modernization practices in otherwise socioeconomic situations ideal for revolutionary, anticapitalist movements. Ultimately, the way to fight the larger threat of anticapitalist

Arab nationalism was not through Egypt's quasi-imperialist project. Nasser's anticommunism, in this regard, was one side of a Cold War story tied to controlling politics on the edge of revolution. The other side was the imbrication of Islam, at the time still understood by many progressive Muslims as the best moral and socioeconomic framework to fight global capitalism. With heavy investment into finding ways to subdue anticolonial resistance spreading like wildfire throughout the world, there is a long thread considered throughout this book that positions Yemen in the middle of a struggle for the underlying global role of Islam and Muslims. As it is argued, the partnership between empire and "conservative" Middle Eastern monarchies ultimately served the exploitative capitalist interests rather than protecting the global poor. This was done by collaborating to ostensibly use Islam against Muslims.

In time, the incremental uprooting of a radical, progressive, and perhaps even Islamic anti-imperialism (represented by Yemen's Imam Ahmad, ruling from 1948 to 1962, and then Muammar Qadhafi in Libya) resulted in instrumentalizing the faith of a billion people (Hussin 2016). Within a generation, with considerable logistical, financial, and military support from Britain and the USA, an essentialist, ahistorical Islam synonymous with Wahhabism became a reactionary social engineering force led by an antisocialist front based in Arabia. The transformation that suddenly made "Islam" antithetical to "universal" values (and thus antiprogressive) took place at the frontline of the struggle over Yemen.³⁵

If properly harnessed, Islam could help in places like Yemen (and Pakistan, the Balkans, and refugee camps everywhere) to fully utilize the revolutionary spirit found there against revolution. In areas of the so-called Muslim world where advanced finance capitalism created millions of "excess" young males, the question was how they could be recruited to serve empire. While their recruitment until 1990 may have been simply to work in two-year stints in the oil-rich GCC countries, a political economy of war had emerged where the well-trained mercenary can either become an employee for companies like Blackwater/Xe and BAE Systems or more useful still for operatives/recruiters whose links to CIA and other intelligence agencies need not be shared (Amar 2012: 189–94; Vallons 2009). Indeed, KSA, and more recently Qatar, were crucial in this *takfiri* politics, offering the logistical support for the effective creation and cultivation of radical Islamic groups today known as Al-Qa'ida in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP), Ansar al-Shari'a, the Islah Party (the Muslim Brotherhood), and more recently Da'ish/ISIS. In this manner, many Yemenis became *takfiri* fighters, helping in the violent campaigns against the

Soviet Union's allies in Afghanistan and those last few regimes resistant to empire today.

By the end of this study, we will see that these mobilized men (and some women) will prove expendable, more valuable as human bombs who could blow themselves up at Syrian Army or Yemeni checkpoints. Such a sad calculation prevails throughout a century-long process covered in this book. At the same time, most of this connection between empire and the rise of *takfiri* violence is lost in the scholarship as Yemen's many crises are too often explained by the persistence of traditional behaviors, beliefs, and practices. In most interpretations available to readers, Yemenis' "tribal," "sectarian," and "regional" differences are the sources of its current disaster. Under such an analytical umbrella, the same sources that justify mobilizing war to fight empire's enemies in Yemen also attempted to market the same violence as the country's cure. In fact, for any "backward" society to change required that the residuals of a bygone era be quite literally wiped out. Gone with the old, in with the new, unfortunately, meant modernization was not only a personal choice but a societal fate (Massad 2015).

As a country periodically facing threats of famine and what seemed a clear case of structural and socioeconomic "backwardness," Yemen was seen by the technocrats reading the prescriptions for modernity as the quintessential case modernization hoped to cure. The often-violent methods of administering the medicine and how various targeted constituencies responded thus serves as the basis of this book's continued look into how Yemen's global interactions both changed Yemenis and the larger world.

PERMISSION EUTHANASIA

In both North Yemen and South Yemen, the late 1960s bore witness to a kind of violent imposition of change via the rise of central state power (and the related rise of a class of technocrats) that dramatically transformed the "Third World" more generally. Important for Yemen's political developments, the heavy investment in state building necessarily required a well-staffed cadre of technocrats. These men in suits were ideologically devoted to rationalizing state power at the expense of traditional (read "backward") forms of political and economic exchanges. As experienced throughout the world, Yemeni technocrats would prove themselves willing to push a universal model of administrative "science" regardless of whether it upset their fellow citizens.

With eager foreign agencies empowering these would-be missionaries of modernity with the kind of violent power that led to endless wars in the period, nonstate actors in South Arabia faced a ferocious campaign of state expansion throughout the Cold War.

Crucial to this story is the evolution of these “schemes to improve the human condition” and their specific implementation in South Arabia. It is no small irony that later in the 1980s, as the doctrines changed, a new generation of advocates on behalf of the IMF, World Bank, and other multilateral organizations pushed both the governments of North and South Yemen to implement policies that often contradicted their heavy investment in state centralization advocated earlier. With the fall of the Soviet Union, the agenda was to encourage “decentralization” and push for privatizing state services and national resources that had only a generation earlier been violently nationalized at the behest of those same North Atlantic powers.³⁶

Throughout *Destroying Yemen*, I argue that the efforts to push these kind of contradictory economic development schemes had dramatic consequences, not only for civilians in Yemen, but also for the government, for its growing army of technocrats that once eagerly implemented these policies, and for the international community that previously imposed these generic development programs. This proves crucial in Yemen’s case because by the time we read into events starting with unification in 1990 (chapter 5) and ending with the present catastrophe (chapter 6), there is much to say about how global financial interests expected the country’s anointed leaders to adopt an entirely exploitative system of economic liberalization that included a renewed rush to privatize the country’s resources after 2012. Ostensibly, the kind of neoliberal project that would assure South Arabia’s full integration into a “globalized” regime required a new set of coercive tools that induced Yemen’s destruction.

While the agenda of forcing Yemen to expose its natural and human wealth to the “free trade” regime benefited Western-based economic interests, the means by which these reforms were introduced, negotiated, and then ultimately rejected has much to say about the nature of global political economy and Yemenis’ historic place in it. After providing in chapters 1 and 2 some historical context to the ways Yemenis successfully maintained their independence from empire by pitting rival foreign interests against each other, chapter 3 initiates the longer discussion on the campaigns to subordinate the country and its people. By way of a complex political economy emerging in face of outright occupation by Egypt in the 1960s, chapters 3 and

4 signal the beginning of a new set of invasive tools used by empire, in the form of modernization, the use of “development aid,” and knowledge.

In chapter 4 it becomes clear that even with the imamate destroyed, Yemeni resilience not only upsets a program of full integration global organizations planned for the region but also initiates the kind of indigenous development programs, the Local Development Agency, that threatened to provide a countermodel for agrarian societies the world over. It is in chapter 5 where it is argued that from these precarious 1970s many Yemenis were dragged into a strategy that invested in the destruction of their society. It means the rise of Islamic terrorism to cover for the failures of these previous tactics of integrating North Yemen by way of modernization.

For those parties throwing money behind the indoctrination of, and then granting diplomatic, academic, and legal cover for, violent *takfiri* agents, the belief was that a radically transformed Muslim polity could become a useful coercive tool against noncompliant regimes like those found in both North Yemen and the recently independent South (1967). From the recruitment of large numbers of Yemeni “mujahidin” who first violently opposed a Soviet-backed regime in Afghanistan, (referred to as Afghan Arabs in subsequent decades) to later allowing this same pool of fighters to metastasize into our current panoply of terrorist boogeymen, one may be forgiven for thinking Yemen is the epicenter of global reactionary political Islam (Johnsen 2014).

Those who claim this to be the case rarely consider what always needs to be the caveat to all references to Yemen as a hub to terrorism. Granted, Yemen has proven an attractive haven for like-minded *takfiris*, many who found their calling while visiting the many well-funded (and not-so-well-funded) institutions, more than 1,200 at one point, specifically designed to radicalize would-be men and women of faith (Bonnefoy 2011). But Yemen did not just export terror. Those well-armed units unleashing death and destruction, almost entirely on fellow Muslims in Libya, Syria, Iraq, and Yemen itself, need scrutiny beyond serviceable phrases that instill fear in all the politically right places. One must highlight that the consequences of various countries harvesting this breed of terrorism has been most fully felt in Yemen itself.

The current war in Yemen is in part a result of the manipulation of a faith that US, KSA, French, Israeli, British, and Qatari intelligence agencies knew could lead to a violent disaster for Yemen itself. But, as claimed throughout this book, much of the world that has any influence over the future of South Arabia would like nothing more than to simply turn Yemen into a mere satellite. A proud, dynamic epicenter of human ingenuity is programed to be

reduced to nothing more than a combination of tourist destination, development opportunity, and endless resource of cheap labor, including sex. For many proud Yemenis, by the late 2000s Yemen had been reduced to a bordello for the Middle East by its corrupted political elites.³⁷ No doubt historians to some, the only way to recognize this is by moving our focus away from generic references to sectarianism, tribalism, and anti-Western Islamic terrorism (Dingli 2013: 91–94).

“AL-SHA‘B YURID ISQAT AL-NIZAM!” (THE PEOPLE
WANT THE FALL OF THE REGIME!)

Instructively, those writing on Yemen since 2011 have ignored the role of the very foreign powers now trying to starve Yemenis into submission. Finding this exoneration of empire morally and ethically unacceptable, *Destroying Yemen* resists placing the blame on most Yemenis for what is an unprecedented global campaign to destroy their country. If the present war on Yemen ever ends, the critical role of external interests will increasingly become apparent. No longer able to hide behind the media blackout that has left the world unaware that millions of Yemenis are starving as I write this, the concern may turn to a reconsideration of how globalist interests aimed in the long term to subordinate Yemen. This will only be possible, however, if this war on Yemen since March 2015 is not treated as a “civil war” but a by-product of finance capitalists’ mobilization of human and financial assets to assist in plundering Yemen’s wealth. To better read into this angle of analysis, it is necessary to return to political economy and seeing Yemen as a part of the larger world.

At the heart of the conflict between Yemenis and capital was a regime that since the ascendancy of ‘Ali Abdullah Saleh in 1978, the transfer of power to his former vice president Hadi in 2011, until the war initiated by empire in early 2015, constituted waves of different kinds of economic deprivation, exploitation, and violence. As the last two chapters specifically cover the confused grassroots resistance to empire’s regime of choice the transitional phase represented by the “interim government” of Hadi, today marketed as the legitimate constellation of yes men demanded by the Saudi-led coalition to return to power, the means by which this process reached a point of no return should serve as a warning to any pedestrian attempt to analyze the destruction of Yemen.

The people (al-Sha‘b) had spoken often in Yemen, its most coherent and potentially revolutionary moment came in early 2011 when the once innovative and necessarily ruthless partner, Saleh, became a liability to a coterie of neoconservatives, neoliberals, and the globalist oligarchy who will surface throughout this book in different forms. The suppression of the 2011 uprisings in stealth cover of vetted “popular” leaders and a false internationally backed transitional government led by the pathetic Hadi, will prove only temporary. As laid out in detail in chapter 6, the failure to entirely subdue the people throughout the 2012–2014 period led to a resurfacing of these same masses of disgruntled, impoverished, and now fully mistrustful of the outside world. The frustrations of these Yemeni masses with the failures of the Hadi interim government induced the well-armed, politically savvy, morally secure partisans of AnsarAllah, who also believed that they had no recourse but to take direct action on behalf of an unrepresented people.

It is hard to appreciate the frustrations mediating and ultimately informing this resort to violence when authors writing from the Washington Institute, Council for Foreign Relations, Carnegie, State Department, Atlantic Council, Pentagon, or UN insist on criminalizing this resistance. Worse, the tendency has again been to reduce the passions of millions of Yemenis to their “tribal nature.” As we see explicitly in the context of reporting on events in Yemen, al-Sha‘ab also fall into the equally dangerous category of “militias” or “terrorist” when resisting forces supporting empire’s agenda. Being labeled as such is of no small consequence. If one is tribal, one operates outside modern frameworks of civilized behavior, and unless such individuals can be coaxed into “settling into a more modern way of living,” they are likely to face a violent state response. As demonstrated earlier with the Cold War thesis that the village was the “den of communism,” Yemeni communities are simply those groups, polities, and communities who operate outside the modern state’s direct authority. This has, since the nineteenth century in North America and since the 1950s in much of the Third World, become a crime against the state and thus civilization.³⁸

Because tribal people operate outside formal state boundaries, by default they no longer operate within the rules of a rational, law-and-order regime as defined by a state-centric world system. Identifying people as such opens the door to justify using violence to assure their compliance. Indeed, we would be hard pressed to find a historical example when violence was not part of the policy dealing with peoples identified as such in media and academia. As primitive and irrational people, it is impossible to negotiate with them: they know only the language of the gun, cluster bomb, and torture.

We see this violent intolerance at play everywhere when Yemeni resistance to empire becomes the focus of attention. In more recent parlance, the search for a decent return on an investment means any amount of political alliance making is possible for those representing capital. “By all means necessary” hums the engine in Wall Street as yet another indigenous community in some far-off jungle or mountain top gets wiped out for the cobalt that lies underneath. Yemen’s history with this business-driven morality is charted throughout this work as a caveat that proves especially tragic considering the depth of individual Yemeni involvement in this plunder. Yemenis have constituted an almost inexhaustible adversary to a profit-seeking machine that has stopped and will stop at nothing to rob them of what they have. Sadly, those whom these Yemenis battle often prove to be other Yemenis. On account of their transnational ties over the years, Yemenis have become entrenched in the structures of global finance capitalism and often partnered with empire to steal from other Yemenis.

Destroying Yemen engages this political economy of the confrontations registered disingenuously by think tank experts and British or American ambassadors as a Yemeni way of life. While at any given moment there are individual and often conflicted group ambitions contributing to the aggressive attempts to incorporate Yemen into the global economy, the larger transformation of the world and the forces behind it must include what happens in Yemen specifically. As with those in the Congo, Amazon, Borneo, and Persian/Arab Gulf, Yemenis who engaged a global force shielded under the guise of the “market” or “capital” often end up on the edge of physical destruction. Yemen’s wealth is an object of desire for an amorphous regime of capital that repeatedly proves its capability of unleashing enormous financial resources to destroy those who resist.³⁹

Sadly, with a few exceptions, rarely do these brutal economics play into the way we study Yemen’s violent past, present, and future. This constitutes a massive misrepresentation of what Yemen means to the rest of the world, including the pharmaceutical industry, big and medium-sized finance banks, the oil/gas oligarchy, the military-industrial complex, commodities brokers, real estate developers, and big agriculture. Critically, the corporate conglomerates that represent much of the surface power in the world almost never enter the equation when discussing Yemen’s myriad of issues. This silence reveals the ideological need for ignorance, a state of experiencing Yemen that implicates today, as Yemen is destroyed, the mainstream media and academia. This book endeavors to end this neglect.

The Quest for Global Hegemony Starts There

اليمن فتاكة (*Yemen Fataakah*)

Yemen is deadly.

REGIONAL PROVERB

INTRODUCTION

Over the last century there have been numerous cases of foreign intervention in South Arabia. Be they “humanitarian” or “development” campaigns sanctioned by multilateral organizations like the United Nations (UN) or unauthorized drone strikes commanded by US military forces, such interactions with Yemen have left as much a global as a local imprint. Studying more closely such interventions not only helps us understand the modern world but also reminds us how global affairs are the domain of peoples beyond the white males of the Euro-American world. For this reason, there is value added to providing a more granular historical analysis of these forces’ engagement with Yemen.

In most Euro-American histories of the contemporary world, Yemen occupies barely a footnote. It was Portuguese, Dutch, and Genovese traders who “discovered” Yemen in the sixteenth century and, like the inhabitants of Australia or the Americas, Yemenis and their productivity became an object of strategic value to outsiders only after these rational Western men started to exploit and thus profit from an otherwise economically “underutilized” region. Well into the twentieth century Euro-American capitalist interests explored ways to better integrate Yemen into their evolving globalist regime, a process that necessarily stripped Yemenis of their historic role as the economic, cultural, spiritual, and political engine for much of the Indian Ocean world.

Put in this global context, the analysis below challenges several assumptions about Yemen, a corrective that provides a foundation to better understanding the links to the country’s devolution into war today. From the start, we aim to upset an enduring image of Yemen incognito, an ancillary space of premodern

cultural and socioeconomic activity whose purportedly marginal place in the developments of a world modeled after the West justifies the Saudi-American intervention today. Challenging in this way the thought of South Arabia's historical marginality helps usher in new perspectives on how Yemen arrived at this horrible state of affairs today. In the process of reinserting, in particular, Yemen's relationship with global finance capitalism, it becomes possible to appreciate the extent to which Yemenis adopted contemporary progressive, anti-imperialist agendas in their inevitable resistance to European encroachments.

The most recent form of this resistance—AnsarAllah temporarily partnering with Saleh's loyalists—started from the late nineteenth century. Its continuity, expressed as “traditional” values and practices, consistently leveled challenges to the rise of Western capitalist power. In fact, this resistance may have even left a mark on how the modern Euro-American state itself evolved (Blumi 2012). Such assertions may help us appreciate better globalization via neoliberal economic and social policies as influenced by the fact that Europe could not entirely subordinate Yemen. This fact may even explain why powerful interests continue to commit vast resources to dominate the country today.

I defend this argument by casting light on a particularly animated period of imperial competition in the larger Red Sea region from the 1880s until the eve of World War II. The dynamic exchanges, when seen from a multiplicity of local perspectives, prove to have influenced the manners in which various indigenous Yemeni actors interfaced with an expansive, yet still developing, Euro-American capitalist enterprise. The subsequent rise in the Red Sea area of the Saudi state and the British, French, and Italian colonial administrations account for the ensuing kinds of interstate relations shaping the larger region's history. Parallel to these developments, various Yemeni polities evolved in kind, adapting in the face of new kinds of complex exchanges involving foreign interests, a dynamic that helps account for the arrival of heretofore alien interests. This applies, in particular, to the multilateral organizations like the UN, World Bank, and even the United States, which after World War II became synonymous with the globalist project.

THE GLOBAL PULL OF YEMEN: FROM THE NINETEENTH CENTURY TO WORLD WAR I

Southern Arabia has long been the focal point of transregional commercial and thus political ambitions. Since antiquity, the resource-rich areas along the

hinterland of the Indian Ocean/Arabian Sea produced wealth for regional traders. For just as long, these merchants sent out their sons to establish commercial ties, often by way of marriage into local elite families or religious proselytization. At times, such networks that produced enormous wealth also translated into transregional polities. The highly mobile constituencies emerging out of such polities were precursors to Euro-Atlantic colonialism of much of the same territories. In this respect, the expansionist Hadhrami emirates established in Sumatra, Java, the Malay Peninsula, and the islands throughout the South China Sea pre-date the arrival of empire's investment in Southeast Asia. As such, diasporas of Yemeni heritage became the principal rivals and, at some point, crucial allies for future Dutch, Spanish, Portuguese, British, Japanese, and American traders-cum-colonial administrators (Laffan 2003; Tagliacozzo 2014).

Crucially, these Yemeni diasporas, which were getting wealthy as either rivals or allies to European financial interests, invested their wealth both locally and back in their Arabian homeland to strengthen resistance to global capitalism as much as to service it. Among the more important investments were globally recognized centers of learning in towns like Tarim, Sa'adah, Ibb, and Zabid (Messick 1993). As long as these centers attracted Muslim intellectuals with transnational links for centuries, the cultural products of the subsequent exchanges were trend-setting iterations of Shafi'i, Zaydi, and Sufi spirituality (Ho 2006). To the frustration of the globalists hoping to channel this wealth, the productivity of such Yemeni communities inspired generations of Muslims to disseminate the distinctive tenets of their faith to all corners of the world facing Euro-American violence.¹ In sum, Yemen's Muslims were at the forefront of resistance to European capitalists.

As scholars in the past have highlighted, this conduit of spiritual exchange, debate, resistance, development, and expression helped maintain deep into the twentieth century a social force that, when needed, mobilized tens of thousands of faithful. From the nuanced principles of the jurist Muhammad Shawkani (Haykel 2003), the scholars informing judicial practice within various Zaydi imamates (Messick 1993), and finally the diverse groups of Sufi activists rallying transregional anti-European resistance for decades (Blumi 2013: 115–42), the periodic expression of principled faith in Islam helped Yemenis thwart, or at least mediate, the expansion of modern capitalism.

The resulting struggles with foreign powers cannot be fully studied without appreciating the extent to which Yemenis were implicated in the events. Be they subsumed in regimes of exploitation that further harnessed their

labor or active members of the beneficiaries of such regimes, Yemenis' global entanglements, when associated with the arrival of the British East India Company (BEIC) to South Arabia, prove more complicated than traditionally assumed.²

Establishing in 1839 a working political alliance with a local intermediary in Aden, the Bombay-based BEIC hoped to secure a foothold in a region still entirely out of reach to European capitalists. Unfortunately, there has been in the scholarship an unnecessary linkage made between this early stage of capitalist investment in Yemen and the subsequent century and a half, where it is British-occupied Aden and its administration that animates the region's history (Dresch 2000: 8–10). But this accounting occludes indigenous factors (Stoler 2016: 14–21). To avoid the Eurocentric assumption that modern history only begins with the arrival of Europeans, this important watershed exposes the multiple push-pull factors involved in Yemeni affairs.

The first point to highlight when writing an alternative history is that the Bombay-based company BEIC arrived in Aden as an invited ally of a local ruler. The fateful decision to invite BEIC into the fray ultimately agitated the numerous semi-independent emirates guarding supply routes along the Red Sea, Horn of Africa, and larger Western Indian Ocean. More still, one of the forgotten elements contributing to locals' aligning with this foreign trading company was the ascendancy of allies of the Ottoman Empire in the region just north of Aden. While neglected in the historiography, the geographic scope of the Ottomans' rapidly realized, some would say colonialist, state appears to have instigated the first "scramble" for influence in Eastern Africa and its Southern Arabian neighbors (Kuehn 2011; Minawi 2016; Makdisi 2002).

In this regard, British interests—at least those of landed elites heavily invested in BEIC shares—were directly challenged by the expansive Ottoman-Egyptian state that established a foothold in the coastal Tihama region of Yemen in the early 1830s. It is by no coincidence, then, that the first efforts by the British corporation to steer the Ottoman Empire into its financial orbit correlated with similar overtures being made to Southern Yemeni political leaders to ignore the opportunities offered by Egypt's governor Muhammad 'Ali's expansion into the Red Sea (Wick 2016: 42–45). Indeed, as it is always wise to account for the diversity of interested parties in Yemen affected by regional and global events, some of those embracing a partnership with the BEIC felt equally threatened by a newly expansive Ottoman-Egyptian state.³ As agents of the BEIC took measures to thwart these encroachments into the

lucrative trade of the region, they successfully entered into treaties with various local ruling families. As is often the case with new political alliances, BEIC partnerships animated much of the subsequent actions taken by other foreign interests.

By the 1860s, French, Belgian, Italian, German, Swiss, and British companies established similar treaties with local coastal communities in the Red Sea, hoping to secure access to the expanding trade of coveted commodities to and from Yemen and the Horn of Africa (Miran 2014). The resulting scramble for Africa in the 1870s and 1880s is, therefore, a byproduct of those earlier campaigns to secure political/commercial alliances with indigenous actors willing to diversify their own revenue streams (Alloul and Markey 2016: 267–72).

Crucially, private capitalist interests pushed for the creation of a new kind of administration to take on the expenses of violently subduing the kind of contingencies created by local and global rivalries in the Indian Ocean/Red Sea. In fact, the BEIC “outsourced” the expensive task of militarily subordinating locals to a British imperial state whose primary policy makers also became shareholders in the company (Dirks 2009). In short, the heavy lifting of capital accumulation was transferred to an amorphous British state whose officials (tax collectors, generals, engineers, school teachers) often unknowingly, served the demands of “the market” by reaping the surplus wealth produced by largely autonomous peasants around the world (Davis 2002: 23–116).

These transformations, the first of many occasions when capitalists based in the North Atlantic harnessed the resources of a modern state to defer operational costs of harvesting a region’s human and natural wealth, offer a useful starting point to our historical survey. If nothing else, observing the complexity of these relations in their pre–World War II iterations helps us appreciate the multitude of constituencies struggling to fight off the exploitative whims of empire ever since. Central to this investment in reading a more complex exchange between many Yemenis and the larger world is reminding ourselves just what the European traders flooding the Red Sea region in the 1860s onwards so coveted.

Despite assertions that the region was economically backward, we can see from archives that global commercial interests hoped to tap into heretofore inaccessible surplus wealth produced locally. Indeed, Europeans had a trade deficit with Yemen, meaning more gold and silver flowed into Arabia than out (Blumi 2012: 144–68). As in China and India before, this hemorrhaging

of wealth needed to be reversed, a calculus that extends to our present-day catastrophe in Yemen (Fichter 2010).

Reading the sources of many of the first generation of commercial-cum-colonial administrations highlights how Yemen was not “underdeveloped,” simply awaiting the arrival of Europe to usher in modernity. Far from being “poor” and “backward,” these areas had already-refined wealth extraction regimes in place, whose primary beneficiaries were not willing to hand them over to Europeans (Blumi 2012: 40–44). The subsequent century of interactions between Europeans and Yemenis was based on changing this (im)balance of commercial and political power. As is still the case, a small group of interested parties rationalized that, if properly steered away from indigenous hands, the wealth generated from these productive Yemeni regions would go a long way in satiating the increasingly monopolistic North Atlantic bankers’ need for gold and silver.⁴

In the face of such competing commercial ambitions, some Yemenis were granted new leverage over local and regional rivals after signing agreements with globalist interests. At a practical level, partnerships with English merchants meant that powerful companies (and later the British Empire itself) recognized the “sovereignty” of the Amirs in Lahj, ‘Asir, throughout the Horn of Africa, and eventually across what today is South Yemen. Some of the inducements for cooperation of this kind were domination over local rivals or the opportunity to expand commercial operations beyond traditional limits. Indeed, with advanced European weapons helping tip the balance in favor of local allies, many of the ascendant trading communities in the nineteenth century gained their first taste of success after securing their own treaties, either directly with a British representative or a rival like the Ottomans or Italians.

This process of increasing direct influence over the affairs of the region’s political classes gave some local intermediaries the possibility to think big and act boldly. While on paper the Arabian Peninsula appears to be marked by claims in Istanbul or Bombay (from where the British imperial government east of Suez managed its Indian Ocean assets), by the beginning of World War I Arabia was a puzzle of intrigue beyond any European power’s ability to lay exclusive claim. The resulting quest to secure partnerships with aspiring leaders from even obscure arenas of imperial competition—Najd, ‘Asir, Kuwait, Assab, Zeila, Yafi’—created the kind of contingencies necessary for locals to survive in the twentieth century.

In respect to North and Middle Yemen, the political rivalries between various claimants to local authority offered Ottoman, Italian, French, and even

other local polities short-term spiritual and/or political legitimacy. Revealingly, these short-lived polities' ability to secure the eager patronage of larger external actors (this includes the long-forgotten Zaranaq, Qu'aytis, and more importantly, the Idrisi) forced the hands of the Great Powers. For British-linked agents in particular, this meant adapting to the reality that the Red Sea and Hadhramawt were far from secure a dangerous situation considering the role a recently completed Suez Canal played in sustaining the empire.

In response, some British made the fateful choice of directly supporting the rise or expansion of several Arabian dynasties. The most notorious was Abdul Aziz Ibn Sa'ud (who came to power in 1902 with British assistance at the expense of his brother, whom the Ottomans supported). The corresponding embrace of Wahhabism as a likely wedge to upset Ottoman authority throughout Arabia signaled an opportunistic willingness of a political and financial class in London to support destructive extremists in their quest for long-term hegemony over the region's strategic assets (Massad 2015: 70–71). In so doing, the British financial elite now holding the Wahhabi card opened the gates of hell for which the world continues to pay the price today (Davidson 2016: 85–90; Blumi 2016).

The strategy of partnering with fanatics to use Islam against Muslims was only one of several deleterious tactics adopted by British (and French) agents operating in the region over the early twentieth century. The other was co-opting older states, as when Egypt became by the 1880s the hub of British investment in the Ottoman Middle East. In this instance, a British administration staffed with men owning a stake in major projects—Suez, railroad, port, and agriculture—brought a once powerful Egyptian state to its knees.

Destroying Egypt to pillage it marked the commencement of a long-lasting, invasive imperialist strategy to be imposed again and again on the region. In short, Egypt's new and subordinated reintegration into the global economy, long applauded by European banks raining money down on infrastructure development, opened the floodgates of debt financing. As a consequence, the Egyptian state abandoned basic Islamic economic principles and embarked on a path ultimately resulting in bankruptcy and direct occupation by an administration working on behalf of the once proud state's creditors.⁵

Bankrupt and under bank receivership, Egypt became the magnet for trans-regional intrigues targeting a still independent Yemen. In hindsight, the most important was the investment in extremist religious ideologies preaching intolerance like Wahhabism and Zionism. The same cadre of Oxbridge-educated imperialists willing to co-opt fundamentalist *takfir*is to subdue rivals in the

Hijaz and Palestine quite possibly invested in controlling a new generation of Salafist reformers who emerged in Egypt—in an era when any number of anti-imperialist movements were arising among British Muslim subjects throughout the world—to serve a similar purpose in Yemen.⁶

In Yemen, the British were in open competition with not only local rulers but the Italians, Germans, French, and Ottomans. Since the 1870s these rival interests invested in securing the support of local constituencies in the highlands of North Yemen and all along the Red Sea coastline (Blumi 2010: 62–64). In the new era when no ideology was too odious or oppressive for global capital's power brokers, many locals proved more than happy to accept the stipends, trade opportunities, passports, and weapons offered to them. In this shifting web of alliances, many local and regional actors adapted in ways that demonstrated how thoroughly they were intertwined in the modern world's affairs. The goal of many of these local entrepreneurs was to assert some leverage over a rapidly changing economy that only with the benefit of hindsight can we identify as part of a globalist conspiracy to wrest the region's wealth from its inhabitants' hands. Workaday documents housed in the Italian archives, in particular, illuminate how otherwise obscure examples of backdoor diplomacy at play in the larger Red Sea region had a direct bearing on how entrepreneurial Yemenis played a role in global history. To the Italians, the project was protecting and even expanding their interests. It was not predetermined that their intrigues would service a globalist agenda.

ENTREPRENEURIAL YEMENI

One Yemeni working towards securing his influence in the larger region was Imam Yahya. By 1904, after a contentious struggle between competing Zaydi families, Yahya Muhammad Hamid al-Din finally succeeded his father as imam. His first task was to consolidate authority over the disparate traditional spheres of Zaydi power. As Imam Yahya suffered from rival claims for the important role of imam, the intrigues linked to volatile politics in the era of hostage taking and rapidly evolving commercial alliances spilled out from the highlands of Yemen and into Eritrea and Egypt. It is in these corners that we find diaspora Yemenis hoping to secure interest in their leaders from possible European benefactors.⁷

Building on support from a wide range of political allies scattered throughout the Sa'adah, 'Asir highlands, and throughout the Red Sea where

Yemen's diaspora settled, Imam Yahya grew strong with the departure of the Ottomans after World War I. This political success, however, required keeping an eye on the British and their local allies. The British demonstrated hostility to Yahya's early regime as he searched for allies to fight off the Ottomans, the Idrisi, and other local rivals. Eventually this hostility led to the British putting coastal Tihama under a naval blockade during World War I. From then the British occupied the valuable Yemeni Red Sea port of Hudaydah by early 1918, allowing a veritable pogrom by forces linked to Ibn Sa'ud to take place.⁸ To such unprincipled foreigners, starving Yemenis into submission has been a weapon since World War I, a fact informing Imam Yahya's mistrust of the British ever since (Dresch 2000: 28–57).

Such harsh treatment during and after World War I tarnished Britain's reputation throughout North and Middle Yemen. Subsequent Yemeni hostility, especially within Yahya's camp, left little room to negotiate Britain's precarious, and equally controversial, hold over Aden. This issue continued to animate Yemen's relations with the enclave well into the Cold War. Crucially, while the British had no intention of recognizing any authority in the neighboring Middle Yemen that did not sign away its claims to Aden and the rest of South Yemen (something Imam Yahya would never do), neither could London afford a direct confrontation. Already by early 1919, Imam Yahya had created a fragile alliance of disparate local leaders throughout North and Middle Yemen. Lacking the means to coerce rivals militarily, the British responded by adopting a tried and true strategy of securing the loyalties of Yahya's biggest competitors. Once again, we appreciate the importance of local agency in the evolution of Yemen's place in the larger world through the willingness of some Yemenis to collaborate with an emerging empire.

Rather than negotiating a share of the spoils with Yahya, British agents arranged the transfer of the Tihama coastline to Idrisi's loyalists in early 1920 in return for keeping Yahya's highland economy isolated from the rest of the world.⁹ This gesture immediately informed Imam Yahya that his own process of securing alliances across the North/South, Shafi'i/Zaydi, tribal/urban binaries (popular in the scholarship on Yemen), was crucial for political survival. In this respect, while faced with a new wave of British-induced "divide-and-rule" strategies adopted throughout Arabia, the compelling need to reach well beyond traditional spheres of influence may have been crucial for the geopolitical reconstitution of Yemen.

No matter how he and his representatives did it (this history has been rewritten too often since the 1960s to allow a fair assessment), it is clear Imam

Yahya was no longer just a Zaydi imam. Many a community leader deep in so-called Shafi'i Sunni territories in Middle Yemen identified Yahya's expansive state as the best solution to what was promising to become an ugly power vacuum with the Ottoman departure. In time, with Yahya's unanticipated success in rallying the support of powerful local leaders in Ibb and al-'Udayn, the imam proved his value as a leader of all of Yemen.

In a strategy mobilized by all successful leaders in Yemen since, by using his human resources to support entrenched landowning families like the Nu'man and al-Wazir early in the 1920s, Yahya's political investment into building mutually beneficial alliances proved essential to securing North Yemen's future as a coherent, unified entity. Clearly not to the liking of British observers based in Aden, Bombay, or Cairo, Middle Yemen, including the vital city of Ta'iz, became part of a free North Yemen by the early 1920s and henceforth a counter to British claims to authority in South Arabia, the so-called Aden Protectorate. This indeed may be the beginning of Yemen conceptually in a modern world context that extended its loyalties to states as much to clan, faith, and family. By coercing them to submit to the imamate, Yahya's integration of the inhabitants of Middle Yemen helped lay the claim to a future unified Yemen (Willis 2012: 45–72).

Key to keeping at bay the wolves of capital dictating British policy was the availability of alternatives. Unlike the post-Cold War period, as we see next with the Italians, rulers like Imam Yahya and Idrisi could still balance one suitor against another. The expansionist Italians were not only keen on protecting the fragile Yemeni state, but by tapping into their old Yemeni connections in Cairo, they got what no one among their European superiors could: the loyalty of Imam Yahya.

COURTING THE ITALIANS

As noted earlier, in the 1920s the British treated the entire Yemeni coast as a sphere of strategic influence, marshalling all of its available assets to thwart potential adversaries as diverse as the Soviets (the Bolshevik state was already in the region by the mid-1920s), the still developing Yahya state, the French in Zeila/Zayla and 'Issa (later Djibouti), and most importantly, Mussolini in Assab/Masawa (Eritrea).¹⁰ The heart of this strategy consisted of controlling with whom North Yemen, theoretically a sovereign state, could interact commercially and politically. In many ways, an alliance between a local "client"

and the imam's young state could threaten to tip the balance of power in South Yemen against the British.

Large amounts of harassment from British-paid agents thus made the state-building process fraught with dangers for the imam and those allies in whom he invested considerable social and political capital. From Imam Yahya's perspective, the most dangerous of such efforts was the alliance forged between the British and the son of the legendary Sayyid Muhammad 'Ali al-Idrisi (1876–1920) who had set up a powerful state in 1906 along the 'Asir/Jizan coast (Baldry 2015; Bang 1996). Hoping to leave the impression to all the powers in the Red Sea that one of Yemen's local leaders at the time, Muhammad ibn Ahmad al-Idrisi al-Hasani, was under their thumb, the British surrendered to him the Tihama coast they had occupied because of the 1918 armistice signed with the defeated Ottomans. There was, however, more than one problem to this calculated gesture.

To start, it caused more than minor grief to British authorities that Ahmad al-Idrisi proved adept at working the options available to those with his kind of spiritual credentials and economic assets. As they surrendered to him all the Tihama coast, events in the north of Arabia reminded Idrisi and his allies of British duplicity. In face of the expanding Najdi state into the Hijaz and the 'Asir, a region Idrisi's father had secured for his movement already in the 1880s, the spiritual leader needed new allies to help fend off the Wahhabi juggernaut that was at this time laying waste to Mecca and Medina (Al-Rasheed 2010: 42–46). By 1925, Idrisi established what seemed like a significant military and commercial alliance with the Italians based out of Eritrea.¹¹

The Italians were the first European power to partner with the Idrisi family in 1911 and by the 1920s provided weapons and bags of silver coin in return for oil concessions that may have been the first of their kind in the region. These links with Idrisi were but part of a larger strategy for the Kingdom of Italy, administering colonies on the East African coast since at least the 1880s (Blumi 2012). Maintaining strong links to the coastal communities that made trade with Yemen very lucrative for Eritrea-based merchants, by the end of World War I the Italians renewed their efforts to become *the* major European power in the area.¹²

Despite efforts by the British to break from tradition and negotiate (impose) a settlement with the imam throughout 1925 and 1926, it was Italy that won the honor of becoming the first European state to recognize Imam Yahya's state. Ever since 1922, with the rise of the National Fascist

Party, concern grew that the Italians were willing to challenge any British claim to exclusive rights based on the prewar diplomatic principle of “spheres of influence.”¹³

The treaty with Imam Yahya’s government seemed to have surprised officials back in London. Guaranteed trade between the two states gave North Yemen new leverage vis-à-vis Britain in respect to Aden. This was evident when, the next time a British delegation traveled to Sana’a’ in the hope of forcing the imam to cooperate, he had already laid down new rules of engagement. The imam was playing a sophisticated diplomatic game with the many different political and economic assets available to his government. By fortifying a treaty with the Italians, after perhaps years of cultivating a sense of mutual trust, the imam had secured North Yemen’s independence.

This treaty with Italy was a coup for the imam. Recall that the leader of North Yemen was under considerable pressure from the British and their allies to surrender to any bid for influence in South Arabia. Considering this impressive maneuvering, one may conclude that, far from being isolated, Yahya and his close associates had opened channels of commerce that secured both lucrative trade deals with the Italians and the kind of protection that comes with a major European power formally recognizing their state (and, importantly, its territorial self-definition as drawn on a map).

Incidentally, it was not exclusively the Italians in Eritrea who proved beneficiaries of Yahya’s careful diplomacy. By 1930 the Yemeni foreign ministry formally reached out as Paris recognized the imam’s government, along with his territorial claims extending from just beyond Aden to the ‘Asir. Formalizing the specifics took a while, however, and by the time authorities in Djibouti were prepared for a formal trip to Sana’a’ to sign the documents, the British intervened in a way only they know how.¹⁴

Crucially, the treaty with Italy (and then in theory with France) included a renewed alliance with the Idrisi. Unfortunately for both these Yemeni rulers, they were dealing with the truly devious British. As already noted, it is at this point that Britain’s other client, Abdulaziz al-Sa’ud, was just in the throes of unleashing his *takfiri* vandals on the holy cities of Mecca and Medina. As one important local asset of the British had violently put Hijaz into his (and thus their) political sphere of influence, Sa’ud’s Wahhabis would soon bring the ‘Asir and Tihama region to heel.¹⁵

Amid this rapidly changing dynamic to Yemen’s north, Imam Yahya’s quest to consolidate power over his growing domain in the south continued unabated. Imam Yahya invested heavily in securing the loyalties of a broad

range of community leaders scattered throughout North and Middle Yemen. This process extended deep into the Adeni hinterland, especially around Ta'iz.

In all cases where the imam posed a direct threat to British “spheres of influence” in the Adeni hinterland, the public “signing” of the *bay'ah* (oath of allegiance) between Yahya's emissaries and local communities became ubiquitous. As most community leaders agreeing to forge an alliance with Imam Yahya could assume their loyalty meant something to the state, we begin to see an entrenchment of powerful families whose influence extended over generations. At the same time, not all the major stakeholders in North Yemen in the 1920s succumbed to the state-building campaign. Those who were either reluctant to offer their full loyalty or hoped to secure enough support from external interests to challenge outright the imam's legitimacy ended up bearing a grudge for losing out to Imam Yahya. The resulting bitterness extended for generations. Indeed, these long-term rivals, including the extended family of Shaykh Nasir al-Ahmar and to a lesser extent Sayyid 'Ali al-Wazir, would long offer outside interests associated with Britain the opportunity to influence Yemen's future (Al-Jirafi 1987: 225; Zabarah 1956: III, 27–28).

On a broader level, even as many small Zaydi communities and larger clusters of Middle Yemen's intelligentsia, big land owners, and merchants resisted the imam's push for power, a much larger number embraced his state. As a result, Yemen became conceptually possible in this time of rapid alliance making. Many of those inhabiting Middle Yemen, with seemingly conflicted geographic, sectarian, and even class affiliations, strategically embraced Imam Yahya and joined in the struggle to consolidate his state's (and thus Yemen's) authority over at least the highlands (Willis 2012: 137–67). To the outside world, this entity became known as the Yemeni Kingdom; most of the regional powers, be they European-backed or local, sought to find some form of accommodation with it. All except the British would-be global hegemon.

Critical to the way Imam Yahya used his relative capacity for violence over others is the fact that it was not arbitrary. For every hostage left to fester in the imam's palace, others were often expected to serve as judges or administrators in distant counties recently incorporated into the Yemeni state. In this, Imam Yahya's state respected the status of his potential enemies by making them offers that in the short term (and ideally over the longer one) they could not refuse.¹⁶

Linked to the subsequent scramble for influence in areas in Yemen beyond Aden is the heavy investment Imam Yahya made in securing working alliances with peripheral interests rarely seen as important in Yemen's historiography. Thanks to archival sources produced by some of those marginal actors, it is possible to note that Imam Yahya was perfectly aware of the ambitions of many actors in the larger world and hoped to use them to secure leverage against his state's greatest enemy, Britain. It is in this context that the imam reached out not only to other powers in the region but even those still marginal to the Red Sea, such as the United States. As early as 1919, the American consul in Aden accepted the invitation to visit Imam Yahya as he sought formal recognition of his state's authority. Unfortunately, Anglo-American agreements over British spheres of influence would mean the United States could do nothing more than establish commercial relations with North Yemen out of respect to British demands that Yahya, their greatest regional adversary, remain diplomatically isolated.¹⁷

The result was a series of American commercial expeditions to North Yemen, visits to the imam's government facilitated to break the embargo Aden's authorities tried to impose on their belligerent neighbor. First labeled as "goodwill" visits, soon several business delegations traveled the long roads to the Yemeni highlands. The conclusions these expeditions starting in 1920 drew acknowledged that Yemen was enormously wealthy. Agriculturally rich and loaded with minerals, including petroleum, North Yemen deserved the immediate attention of the US government. Considering the flood of lobbying that followed, the imam and his allies knew what they were doing and with whom they were dealing.

Impressively, the distribution of information about Yemen's potential oil wealth stimulated a kind of entrepreneurialism from any number of small-time actors with whom we have become familiar. The short-lived scramble for access to the imam promised decades of intrigue as the political economy of oil, tearing apart parts of Africa, the Americas, and elsewhere in the Middle East, also infested Yemen. For instance, the mighty Standard Oil of Rockefeller fame commissioned expeditions, led by a French geologist, Victor L. Cherruau, who already had years of experience with the country. A Syrian-American named Amin al-Rayhani followed up with a visit in 1921–22. Both expeditions, coming from different angles, had the apparent intention of facilitating less formal agreements that fell short of political recognition and

diplomatic support, but were advanced enough to explore the possibility of financing road and bridge building projects. The impetus was always Yemen's geological wealth.

For his part, the Arab-American Amin al-Rayhani wanted to claim that he had a special relationship with the imam and served as courier, bearing personal letters to the US president, the consul in Aden, and any oil executive willing to listen.¹⁸ So too would the French geologist Cherruau claim friendly personal relations with Imam Yahya. In fact, it is Cherruau's enthusiastic reports that catch the eye today.

Cherruau's travels throughout Yemen in early 1922 led all the right people reading his reports to conclude that there were resources to plunder, from manganese to gold. The geographic range in Northern Yemen in which the geologist found evidence of oil extended from Dhammar to Ta'iz and Ibb. US consuls throughout Europe, upon reading the reports circulating diplomatic mail runs, eagerly alerted Washington of the "considerable quantity of industrial riches" (Sinclair 1976: 42). Key at this point was the hope that the first company able to secure access to Imam Yahya would be able to tap into the prize.

It requires further investigation as to what ultimately happened with this information and why more was not done to meet the imam's regime halfway on the issue of recognition. Interest only grew as first freelance and then officially appointed delegations continued to pay the imam visits. The ones led by Charles Crane, who traveled several times to Sana'a in 1926 and 1927, are especially interesting considering the context in which his offers of a treaty with the imam were made.

For the Americans, hope in securing exclusive access to the imam's mineral wealth was dashed when, as explained in the next section, the Italians out-maneuvered them. Missing out then did not necessarily mean, however, that there was no hope for American capitalists. As long as the Yahya regime wanted American diplomatic recognition, there was room to negotiate.

Charles Crane, representing big American oil, hoped to secure from the imam oil and mineral concessions. Without full diplomatic support from Washington, however, American business through Crane's overtures needed to resort to new tactics as Yahya was not giving away what these American visitors clearly wanted. Here may be the point when the American diplomatic corps make their first offer of corporate "development" assistance. On offer was the engineer Karl S. Twitchell.

Twitchell seems to have been the first American to mobilize aid to service the blurry interests of American capitalists in Arabia. While offering "tech-

nical assistance” that included drawing up designs for a new Hudaydah to Sana‘a’ road (and all the bridges and reinforcing walls that entailed) he busily conducted surveys of Northern Yemen, inspecting the geology of the country and writing reports on what kind of investments in infrastructure were needed for a full-scale mining operation to begin.¹⁹ Such activities unnerved the imam.

The imam remained skeptical about the Americans’ sincerity while Yankee investors, experiencing a domestic boom of the mid-1920s, had lots of loose money to offer. The problem was that the implicit goal was not to mutually benefit from any collaboration, apparently evident to the very perceptive and principled ruling elite in Yemen. North Yemen’s elites saw from their frequent interactions with the Americans and British that they were two sides of the same coin minted by empire.

While not the place to go into the details of these early alliance-building days, the subsequent references to often violent conflicts between various families must be put in the context of American overtures directly clashing with British attempts at securing regional domination either directly or through proxy. As we witness in the campaign to destroy Yemen since 2015, the most important tool of empire cultivated by British representatives of global capital since 1902 was the alliance forged with Saudi Arabia, an alliance at play then as today. The consequences of this alliance for many regional polities, including the Hashemites who lost everything in the 1920s, were reason enough for Yemenis to adopt seemingly contradictory strategies. As discussed next, the continuous resistance to British/Saudi violence progressively weakened Yemenis as empire began for the first time to harness *takfiri* Islam to destroy Yemeni independence.

CONTAINING YEMEN: THE ANGLO’S WAHHABI SOLUTION

Eager not to face the same fate as the Hashemites in neighboring Hijaz, Idrisi signed a formal treaty with Abdulaziz al-Sa‘ud in 1926, marking the formal entry of the Najdi state into the affairs of the ‘Asir, previously administered as part of the Yemen governorate under Ottoman rule. As in earlier agreements with their Italian partners, the Mecca Treaty (October 21, 1926) meant to put the Idrisi emirate on good terms with Ibn Sa‘ud’s governors still relishing their pillage of the holy cities. In theory, the treaty gave Idrisi Saudi

protection.²⁰ Unfortunately, the agreement, facilitated by British officials who had maintained relations with both sovereigns since World War I, constituted not a promise to end Saudi expansion, but an invitation to begin making the kind of political and economic alliances necessary for further encroachment into Imam Yahya's sphere of influence. Not surprisingly, by November 1930 the 'Asir and the upper reaches of Tihama were simply annexed by Ibn Sa'ud (Schofield 1992: 20:529).

Imam Yahya did not recognize the agreement of 1926 and subsequent annexation in 1930. At a time when the Saudi state, with public British support, threatened to push further south, not signing onto the arrangement concocted by London seemed unwise and invited further conflict. But the Yemeni state was not alone in its fight with Saudi Wahhabism and the British. Imam Yahya reached out to locals suddenly under Saudi occupation, a move that openly challenged British encroachments and reminded the globalists that local resistance would persist. Indeed, there was a suggestion that Imam Yahya found new legitimacy beyond his assumed Zaydi-based center of gravity on account of this new phase of Saudi/British expansion.

Building alliances, both internally and beyond, many merchants directly affected by the rise of the Saudi coalition with religious fanatics saw in Imam Yahya's Yemen a ray of hope (Schofield 1992: 20:505; Ingrams and Ingrams 1993: 8:170). Recall that it was but a few years earlier that the British-armed Wahhabis briefly laid havoc to the Tihama coast. Ostensibly, the fear many in larger Yemen had of the never-ending harassment and abusive taxes that the Saudi occupation state imposed elsewhere offered the imam an opportunity. As the founder of a post-Ottoman state now recognized by the Italians and others in the region, Imam Yahya proved himself to be a thoughtful, careful ruler in full grasp of the situation.

By not recognizing the land grab facilitated by the British, the Imamate of Yemen fell into an outright territorial dispute with those claiming exclusive power in Arabia. No doubt his regime had little choice in the matter but to take this stand. Armed with an arrogant self-worth reflected in the way Britain issued itself authority—by way of a League of Nations-sanctioned mandate—to rule over much of the Arab world, Southern Arabia promised to be a mere extension of such hegemonic ambitions. In response, a veritable flood of new allies arrived in Imam Yahya's domain. Seeking protection from British-backed Saudis, former allies of Idrisi pledged to join Imam Yahya in an eventual struggle against the invading Wahhabis. These alliances with

locals in the 'Asir uneasy about the religious fanatics armed with British guns gave Yahya the confidence to persist in his counterterritorial claims.

His open threats of resistance produced results. Yahya signed the so-called 'Aru Agreement of 1931, which the Saudis and their British guardians hoped would settle a potential boundary dispute with a well-armed local rival. One of the results was a formal ceding of much of the Tihama to Imam Yahya's Yemen. Remarkable in retrospect, emboldened by the increasing successes throughout Middle Yemen, Imam Yahya demonstrated dissatisfaction with the treaty. He and his allies continued to pressure the Sa'ud state, at the time experiencing internal political challenges. In 1933, the KSA attempted one more time to formally agree with Yahya on a mutually profitable distribution of the old Idrisi state. The response from Yahya was further expansion of influence in the 'Asir, including the occupation of Najran at the expense of local Isma'ili elites who at the time remained loyal to the old Idrisi state.

There were consequences to all this bravado, however. In challenging his overtly hostile rival, Imam Yahya opened a second front from which his state could be attacked directly by the British. In this respect, Imam Yahya likely miscalculated the power of British and Saudi leverage over 'Asiri merchants. They, after all, were eager to secure access to the larger world whose waters the British navy often policed. As Yahya remained adamant that he would never concede, among other regions, the Najran oasis, at the time occupied by his loyalists, secret negotiations with many of these same allies granted Britain new leverage over the fate of much of Southwest Arabia (Schofield 1992: 20:496).

The lessons Yahya learned from these rapidly changing events would impact North Yemen for generations. Overt threats from the British proved critical to inspiring a new state-building initiative beyond simply consolidating revenues and policing relations between allies (al-Akwa' 1987: 2:817-54). In face of these challenges, the imam's skilled and principled alliance building made the difference between historic obscurity and extending power deep into the Cold War. Indeed, Imam Yahya's careful analysis of the regional and perhaps even global dynamics after World War I informed his methods of state building to enable Yemen's authority to extend into areas once believed exclusively British spheres of influence. When, as with the case of al-Ahmar from Khamir in Hashid, more forceful measures were needed, the imam's closest allies, including his son Ahmad, understood what needed to be done.

Ahmad and his entourage of warriors earned a reputation for violence in this period as his father's regime required a firm hand in order to secure the fringes of his authority. Ahmad's famous carrot and stick techniques proved vital to putting the numerous disparate threats facing the fledgling North Yemeni state to rest.²¹

As Yemen expanded both in a practical sense and an increasingly rhetorical one, Britain certainly worried that even the Sultan of Qu'ayti (Shihr and Mukalla) in Hadhramawt, supposed to be under their sphere of influence, had diplomatic interactions with Imam Yahya's government. Worse, Yahya's representatives by that time were in Lahj itself, an area just north of Aden. The encroachments on areas that British representatives in Aden would have preferred left alone forced a strategic reinvestment in South Yemen, one that led to arming "treaty chiefs" and using aircraft to bomb the imam's representatives by the 1930s (Dresch 2000: 35–41). This proved a fateful turn of events. Realizing that his fledgling state and growing human resources could not advance against such air power, the imam invested exclusively in securing authority over Yemen's northernmost reaches.²²

The struggle to subdue the regions in the east, especially around what is today Jawf and then up into the highlands around Sa'adah and Wa'ilah (bordering Najran), the home of the so-called Huthi rebellions in the 2000s, upset a local balance of power in a way that served to invite Sa'ud and British intervention (Brandt 2017). For instance, Prince Ahmad's pursuit of misbehaving subordinates led to direct confrontations with the Isma'ili communities inhabiting the areas around Najran.²³ This was a moment that allowed Imam Yahya to expand his state's authority north. At the same time, however, his aggressive actions stimulated a new wave of countermeasures by the KSA. By this time, British investment in Ibn Sa'ud produced the anticipated results as Saudi aggression diverted the attention of indigenous rivals from Mesopotamia, Palestine, and in our case, the 'Asir.²⁴

Such a capacity to balance brute force with skilled diplomacy proved the right combination, and the 'Asir, once in the hands of the short-lived Idrisi state, now a point of expansionist interest for the Wahhabis of Najd, became the new arena for struggle. Here the British played their Saudi card well. By embracing a shrewd alliance that Ibn Sa'ud forged with Wahhabi fanatics, Mecca and Medina's ruling families had no chance of reversing their loss. Weakened already by the betrayal that segregated prominent Hashemite families into rival political projects as dispersed as British controlled Iraq and Trans-Jordan, the growing interplay of Central Arabian riff-raff, well-placed



MAP 2. Evolution of Yemen's borders, 1918–1934.

British advisors, modern weapons, and fear mongering exposed the Muslims' most cherished shrines and the legacy of the *ahl al-bayt* to indirect British rule for the next century. What remained open for expansion to sate the appetites of those "Ikhwan" fresh from the plunder of Hijaz was the equally wealthy 'Asir, a region once seemingly off-limits due to the political alliance British authorities forged with the Idrisi clan.

Considering the evolution of these events, we can suggest a basic principle in local Yemeni affairs is established: no single alliance is invulnerable to the opportunism of others. While the British supposedly maintained a mutual defense treaty with Idrisi, their needs to subdue their immediate rivals in North Yemen meant using the Saudi Wahhabis to open a new front against autonomous, independent, and threatening regional polities linked to Imam Yahya. For his part, Imam Yahya had been claiming the 'Asir as part of Yemen since 1927. The confrontation that followed offers important insights into the nature of Yemen's global entanglements and their consequences on the region for the next century (Dresch 2000: 32n13).

THE 'ASIR CRISIS

It is not clear how Yahya's Yemen ultimately lost control of 'Asir. As we saw above, by 1931 the once-dominant Idrisi family and its allies were openly inviting the imam to secure the 'Asir against the expansion of Saudi (and British) forces. Unhelpfully, the historiography is scant. Most scholars, out of "respect" to the region's current Saudi rulers wishing not to open a can of worms, leave the annexation of Jizan, 'Asir, and Najran as a *fait accompli*. Far from an inevitability, there were negotiations because of Imam Yahya's extensive alliances, compelling Saudi-British forces to threaten the reoccupation of the crucial coastal areas of Tihama and even Hudaydah in order to force the imam to finally surrender what, until today, most Yemenis believe is occupied North Yemen.

Perhaps reflective of the sensibilities on the ground, the response to the occupation was a request from Ibn Sa'ud either to keep Najran neutral or at least divided along community lines—the north, linked to the Isma'ili Yam who had recently signed a treaty with Riyadh, would go to the KSA directly, while portions of the Wa'ilah territories would remain Yemeni (Schofield 1992: 20:554). War finally broke out in 1934 when Yahya ignored this last overture. Surprisingly, the fighting did not last long because Imam Yahya failed to secure the loyalties of local groups long associated with Idrisi; he signed a truce in February 1934 having lost on the battlefield. A formal Treaty of Muslim Friendship and Fraternity was signed in Ta'if on May 20, 1934 (Ingrams and Ingrams 1993: 8:191–228).

The Ta'if Treaty included a clause crucial to understanding the evolving dynamics of the conflicts festering along this borderland until today. The clause was written in large part because neither the Saudis (and their British handlers) nor Imam Yahya could afford a long, drawn-out war that could push locals like the Yam and Wa'ilah to reconstitute politically, as happened with the rise of Idrisi in the late nineteenth century. With opportunistic regional actors like the Italians and French always eager to capitalize on turmoil, a truce was necessary. Reflective of this dynamic, the clause in question provided for the possibility of future amendments to the agreement (and the delineation of territory); this agreement lasted for twenty lunar years. In other words, the truce would have to be renewed or modified during the six months preceding its expiration. Nothing, it turns out, was final with the 1934 truces; the act of signing the treaty under these temporary terms demonstrated a balance of power not entirely reflected in the way the relations

between the KSA and North Yemen are described in the literature since then. If nothing else, the treaty, negotiated to end open conflict, demonstrated an understanding that local power ebbs and flows, that any shift in the local dynamics could change the tide of local, regional, and thus global affairs.²⁵

In recognition of the logistical limitations of both states, the Ta'if Treaty of 1934 simply ignored the sticky question of sovereignty; the treaty allowed for the inhabitants of the region to pass back and forth freely across a “boundary” that would be marked by stones but never enforced.²⁶ The Saudi-imposed terms of the treaty were comprehensive, covering cultural, social, military, economic, and political areas.²⁷ Article Four of the treaty fixed the boundary and sovereignty claims to ‘Asir, Jizan, and Najran, with emphasis on “tribes” as markers of boundaries, clearly a British contribution. Here the confusion over which resident community belonged to which confederation and thus allied with which state shaped the subsequent seventy years. While Ibn Sa‘ud signed a treaty with both the Idrisi and the Isma‘ilis (Yam) based in and around Najran, the region’s mountainous terrain made it impossible to enforce any formal treaty among the groups of locals who did not recognize the sovereignty of either state at the time. As a result, one particular concession made to reflect this reality would have long-term consequences in the decades to come: Both the Yam and Wa’ilah were allowed to retain the freedom of movement across the borders.

The border was impossible to formalize in the 1930s because of a dispute between the Isma‘ili Yam who had signed a treaty with King Abd al-‘Aziz bin Sa‘ud in 1934 in exchange for local protection, and the Wa’ilah who shared with the Yam the Sa‘adah/Najran water sources and agricultural/pasture land. Thus, neither the Saudi nor the Yemeni states could secure absolute authority over the area in the subsequent decades. Without precisely drawn borders, years of dispute followed. In this context, these already distinctive communities developed over time new associations as their local and regional orientations shifted with the rise of a lucrative business in trading locally produced goods as well as smuggling more illicit materials to and from the KSA.

These privileges are important because these are the same rights that the Saudi-Yemeni agreement of 2000, discussed later, revoked (Ingrams and Ingrams 1993: 8:226–27). With Yemen formally surrendering any future claims to this contested region, efforts to impose the US-brokered deal between President ‘Ali Abdallah Saleh and the Saudis would start a chain reaction leading to war throughout the 2000s, a bloody conflict that helped

create what today is known as the AnsarAllah movement. Appreciating the origins of this conflict in the misappropriation of peoples' livelihoods along the frontier is crucial to understanding Yemen today.

RETHINKING INTERWAR YEMEN

The important lesson drawn from this brief history of Imam Yahya's exchanges in the interwar period was that Yemenis were impervious to overtures from powerful interests like the Ford Company or Rockefeller-funded geologists. When engaging with the outside world, Imam Yahya and his allies stuck to demands that fit their perceived interests. As they saw it, the British were the problem. The use of the Saudis as an ally, if not as an outright blunt instrument of the British, would remain a point of reference for Yemenis' calculations. This was especially the case with lands in the north whose cultural, commercial, and strategic orientation still today marks them as "Yemeni" territories occupied by the Saudi state. Despite violent British efforts to subordinate, if not outright dominate him, North Yemen Imam Yahya still had leverage as the Red Sea was politically and economically still up for grabs.

Recall that many outsiders considered Imam Yahya's Yemen a lucrative economic prize. In return for their treaty in 1925 Italy secured a market both for their weapons and their road engineers' expertise. The roads they were building, often extensions of those already laid by the Ottomans, ultimately gave the imam the wherewithal to halt the parallel projects that the American Twitchell had been pursuing, including the construction of a harbor at Mukha, and in stealth, the survey of a land the Rockefellers' men believed produced oil.²⁸ As we have seen, and will continue to observe in the next two chapters, the Americans operated in such ways that gave Imam Yahya and his sons pause. They perhaps appeared too anxious to secure a foothold that would have made them personally wealthy. The imam identified a more reliable partner in the Italians, whom he rewarded for their principled engagement with a gasoline concession and with the exclusive right to search for the Yemeni oil that the Americans so desperately wanted.

Fatefully, the Americans' failed efforts to seduce the imam led to their moving to the KSA, which then enabled them to gradually push the British out of Eastern Arabia and, by World War II, establish a surrogate "kingdom" that serviced the shift in global power and continues to animate the nature

of finance capitalism today (Vitalis 2009 and Hertzog 2011). It was not forgotten, however, that Yemen's mineral wealth likely exceeds that of the Gulf. In time, its treasures would again become the center of monopolistic strategies. The strategic calculations of King 'Abdul-Aziz, who embraced the team of Crane-Twitchell of Standard Oil of California, provided the beginning of a recognition that the USA did not want all-out war over what they increasingly believed would all be under its sphere of influence. This attempt to conjoin good relations with North Yemen with America's continued expansion into the rest of Arabia determined the nature of violence in the region for the next half century.

It was the Saudi-British juggernaut that the imamate compromised at a time when its state continued to grow eastward into the sparsely (or seasonally) populated Ma'rib regions. The imam's capacity to bridge the differences separating these highly autonomous polities on which his regime relied ultimately meant the KSA-British alliance could not dominate North Yemen. The result was that the British and Americans were compelled to resort to new tactics. Because Saudi-Wahhabism could not fully subordinate Yemen's cultural elite, they tried to exploit the truces eventually signed with the British in the 1930s. By signing these treaties, Yahya may have signaled a vulnerability that translated into future political complications. Doubts about the imam translated into conflicted loyalties at crucial moments when alliances were of strategic importance. I suggest this perception of vulnerability translated into perpetual internal conflict.

Such local tensions provided the British another window of opportunity in face of growing American and Italian influence. At the time when North Yemenis experienced the turmoil instigated by a constant barrage of British and Saudi harassment, any number of opportunistic interlocutors whispered doubts about Yahya's qualifications as imam. Such a subterfuge within once loyalist camps often became a point of access for the ever-present British agent provocateur to exploit.

And yet, the imam's regime survived. What such challenges ultimately inspired were the unique forms of political and economic alliance-making that would serve as the foundation to the dynamic, cross-regional, ecumenical alliances permitting North Yemen to remain a resilient and independent cluster of polities until today.

In the end, the British lacked what Imam Yahya and his close associates enjoyed in Yemen: legitimacy. As a consequence, throughout the 1920s and early 1930s, the small cadre of British agents stuck in Aden resorted to

juggling different communities and their immediate interests in the hope they could economically manage their colony. The core of the strategy, it seemed, was to marshal the influence of useful partners who had thrived by way of their transnational links to Hadhramawt. The idea of allowing (or not) wealthy natives to continue earning money within the British Empire was deemed the best way to sedate volatile regions beyond the port city of Aden. This example of “indirect rule” notwithstanding, one gets the sense that the few officers charged with keeping things calm in South Yemen needed the globally-linked Yemenis’ cooperation more than the other way around (Lackner 1985: 14–17).

This was certainly the case of the powerful merchant families with whom British authorities long worked hand-in-glove in Southeast Asia. One Singapore-based family, in particular, operated in their Eastern Hadhramawt homeland with the attitude that British resources were available to service their strategic needs. They, in other words, were sovereigns over their independent state and temporarily partnered with the British. In return for cooperating with the British, the al-Kaff trading dynasty’s stranglehold on the textile and property markets in Singapore expanded. In return, the family’s patriarch, Sayyid Abu Bakr al-Kaff, was expected to provide the funds to maintain the Kathiri state over which he ruled (Shipman 1984; Mattar 2004). In this respect, the process of consolidating some semblance of authority in the Hadhramawt seemed to frustrate any British centralization measure (especially manpower levies and tax collection) as they had to deal with influential, autonomous Hadhramis who were equally powerful in Singapore and Arabia (Dresch 2000: 35–41; Brehony 2011: 8). Because the revenues produced by the al-Kaff in Singapore far exceeded any relative value Aden-based administrators produced, the decision to rely on the Hadhrami diaspora returning home to help maintain order in the eastern districts of South Arabia ultimately created tension across the bureaucracy of the empire.²⁹

The fact that so many indigenous partners of the British Empire had transnational ties meant locally based administrators had to surrender much authority to Yemenis. As good relations with partners like al-Kaff took precedent over any issue in the glorified coaling station of Aden, many local politics played on this priority to ostensibly go over the head of any official in Aden if a conflict of interests arose. In the end, the threat to cause trouble held weight and exposed the limited capacities of a British Empire entirely built at this stage to produce revenue. Such realizations played into the hands

of the imam north of Aden too. Imam Yahya and his sons would spend the next half century partnering with locals seeking leverage over the globalist regime.

The invaluable scholarship tying Yemenis living abroad to homeland politics has focused largely on those originating from South Yemen (Ho 2006). While crucial to appreciating a continuum of Yemeni links to the larger world that extends back for hundreds of years, the equally dynamic and historically significant North Yemeni migrants—particularly from the Ibb/Ta'iz—proved just as vulnerable to global intrigues. In the case of the British frustrated by their inability to draw many communities inhabiting North Yemen into their orbit, the large contingent of Yemenis living in Egypt proved an attractive point of entry. While already a hub of Yemeni domestic intrigues in World War I, British-occupied (and soon-to-be formally independent) Egypt constituted an especially attractive arena to cultivate resistance to the imam. The primary targets were those small numbers of North Yemenis who would eventually form the Free Yemeni Movement (FYM).

With British activities both in Arabia and abroad becoming increasingly evident to the imam's government, the regime resorted to the long-established tactic of mobilizing external alliances to serve as a counterbalance. While the Bolsheviks and Italians were the most useful in countering British efforts of sabotage in the interwar period, reading the ambitions of the Americans lurking about in this still uncharted part of the world offers some invaluable nuance to Yemen's complicated place in the era's global intrigues. Indeed, as we would learn with the conflicted interests of those promoting "A New American Century" among neoconservatives entrenched in Washington since the mid-1990s (Pieterse 2004; Parmar 2009), many of the Americans staking their place in the scramble for influence in interwar Arabia proved a crucial diplomatic tool for Yemenis. As explained later, the ability to read and mediate individual American ambitions in securing those lucrative contracts that made some men enormously wealthy helped Yemenis to deflect Britain's wish for regime change. This leverage constituted a remarkable moment in the region's recent history.

Reading the modern history of Yemen and the larger Middle East in these terms may produce important new avenues of inquiry. Recall that by the late 1940s American interests had successfully sequestered themselves in the soon-booming oil economy, resulting in their overtly hostile position toward the British. Indeed, Washington's Arabists pitched a policy that increasingly

disregarded London's hopes to preserve a role "East of Suez" after World War II. To date, scholars have exclusively seen this rivalry manifested in British and American clashes over the appropriate response to the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM) and Jamal Abdul Nasser or who controlled East Arabia's vast oil resources.³⁰ We discover in subsequent chapters, however, that the tension finds its earliest expression in Yemen.

CONCLUSION

The two truces North Yemen signed with the British and their Saudi proxies in 1934 reveal considerable vulnerability and suggest that the Yemeni state lacked authority in many regions it continued to claim. The truce with the KSA also left the borderlands of Jizan, Najran, and 'Asir under ambiguous sovereignty. It became increasingly difficult to extract tax revenue from these areas. Additionally, a considerable amount of local trade, itself a source of tax revenue, was redirected northwards, away from Yemen's markets. More important for the short term, however, was the fact that losing 'Asir to the Saudis undermined the imam's credibility among many of the most dangerous allied constituencies.

Many would-be rivals saw a window of opportunity and demanded new terms for their continued support of Imam Yahya's government. Others coming from many different walks of life believed Yahya had failed in his sanctioned role as defender of the land, warranting a debate about finding a new paramount leader of Yemen. This debate, and the circles of men within which they would take place, proved diverse.

To many groups located in Middle Yemen, the loss of so much northern territory marked a loss of influence among the most important elements of the regime. Perhaps the most damning concession given to the Saudis under duress was the handing over the right to determine who would be granted "rights" to live in the unmarked borderlands. This loophole opened the gates to social engineering policies that included Riyadh encouraging the migration of Najdi (read: Wahhabi) settlers into the border areas.

According to local sources, within months of the formal transfer of sovereignty over Najran and 'Asir to the Saudis, Najdi colonialists began to push out natives, first by way of stealing prime land and then undermining local businesses by favoring to trade exclusively with those from the Saudi heartland. The resulting reorientation of capital flows in the 'Asir immediately

impacted North Yemeni communities and marginalized non-Najdi merchants based in Najran and throughout now Saudi-occupied 'Asir. The immediate response to this Saudi colonization requires more research, but, in Yemen, the decline of local power led to a reordering of loyalties in much of the Sa'adah and Ḥajjah region. In turn such issues led many to consider removing the imam outright, placing his younger brother 'Abdullah or even his son Ahmad in Yahya's place.

One refraction of this broad-based opposition can partially be traced to the rise of the "Shabab movement," which found considerable support from the economic elite of the northern highlands directly affected by the Ta'if Treaty. As merchants relying heavily on the trade linking coastal areas to the hinterland, they were most directly (and adversely) affected by the 1934 events. In large part because the imam proved unable to help this powerful cluster of merchants and landowners, they made up an important part of the *al-Ahrrar al-Yamaniyyun* or Free Yemeni Movement (FYM) from 1935 onward (Douglas 1987: 23–68).³¹ As we learn in the next two chapters, this movement would prove crucial to the transformation of Yemen from a resilient, autonomous state to one actively seeking integration into a global economy for its own survival.

The way Yemen's rulers would seek to accomplish this proves a valuable opportunity to reconsider the early history of the Cold War. For one, Yemen's eventual insertion into the Cold War highlights some of the larger points made in this study. When Yemen ultimately did succumb to the kind of ugly politics enveloping the larger world by the 1950s, and thus also integrated into a postwar global economy, it was not due to the imam's inability to engage the "modern" world. This integration would be done on Yemeni terms. In other words, the regime fully appreciated the dangers lurking beyond the horizon and resisted being entirely subordinated to empire by using the relatively limited tools available to an agrarian society that shared borders with irredentist enemies.

At the time, orientalist characterizations and academic slurs framing Yemen's ruling elite proved conceptual barriers for most outsiders to understand what Imam Yahya and then his son Ahmad attempted. This confusion proved an advantage for astute Yemenis. We will see in the next chapter that an otherwise "premodern" monarchy, whose legitimacy stemmed in part from the imam's religious training, played on the misconceptions of arrogant Americans and their European allies. Imam Yahya and his successor basically played the Cold War powers off each other to assure for yet another

generation that their homeland would be both at the center of strategic concerns and too important to risk entirely falling into the hands of rivals. Thus, for the Americans the goal was to simply ensure that North Yemen did not gravitate too far into the Soviet orbit. The result was that these “traditional rulers” both stymied Western aggression and compelled would-be globalists to adopt new tactics.

*The Region That Pumps the Heart
of the Cold War, 1941–1960*

I pray God I do not die before I colour my sword here with the
blood of these modernists.

IMAM AHMAD, One Day in 1944

INTRODUCTION

During the first half of the postwar period, known as the Cold War, the fate of the world's inhabitants changed. Most associate the historic force of this change to be the world's often involuntary bifurcation into two loosely defined camps. On one side stood the so-called West and the mechanisms of global governance established at Bretton Woods. Moving forward, the USA and an emerging "military-industrial complex" (MIC, a coalition of corporations directly profiting from the perpetuation of war and conflict in the post-war era) would provide, via the CIA, the violence necessary to maintain such a globalist agenda. At the opposite end of this militarized liberalism was the Soviet or Communist East Bloc and its own convoluted globalist project. As argued below, events taking place in Yemen directly shaped the contours of this divided world. It was the deft playing of these rival powers against each other that enabled both Imam Yahya and then his son Ahmad to maintain North Yemen's independence. Throughout the first half of the Cold War the manners in which diverse Yemeni constituencies pursued confrontations secured them a place in the strategic calculations of still-competing globalist interests. More, their stubborn autonomy likely transformed the way the modern state system synonymous to the post-World War II world itself evolved.

In this sense, as for many around the world, the Cold War constituted both a threat and opportunity. Indeed, because Yemenis' resistance frustrated the ambitions of global powers—British administrators, American oil conglomerates, Soviet strategists, French colonialists in Djibouti, and Egyptian

would-be heroes of the Third World—these foreign interests had to adopt new policies towards first Yemen and then with the larger Middle East.

The modest historical scan of the contours of the early Cold War below introduces a good many different Yemenis whose roles as potential surrogates for global interests both ignited new political opportunities in the country and redefined what constitutes the modern state. Forming a generation of reformists known as the *‘asriyyun*, “modernist” urban intellectuals cultivated an alliance between the Free Yemeni Movement (FYM, *al-Ahrar al-Yamaniyyun*) and the Muslim Brotherhood (MB) based in Egypt (Douglas 1987). The resulting coalition against the imamate reflected the currents of the larger world and eventually overpowered peoples still resisting global finance capitalism.¹

Such dynamics are still at play in present-day Yemen. The seemingly endless supply of local surrogates both serves as a tool for external interests wishing to destabilize the country and as a major headache once occupying Yemeni lands becomes part of the agenda. As presented throughout the book, while the KSA tries to use “Operation Restoring Hope” as cover to annex large tracts of territory (and the UAE maneuvering to thwart them), the necessary alliances with locals prove consistently unstable. Because Yemeni fighters are rarely unquestioning loyalists, Saudi Arabia and their globalist masters’ war has dragged on much longer than anticipated, basically bankrupting the KSA in the process.²

A REGIME AT THE EDGE OF WAR

To better appreciate how the current violence in Yemen has unleashed opportunities for Yemenis to exploit the growing desperation of would-be paymasters, we return to the late Imam Yahya period. By the end of World War II, with fewer recognizable opportunities to balance rival European powers, the political and commercial elite around the imam looked nervously at their revitalized neighbors, now free from fighting the Axis powers.³ Soon enough, Yemen’s domestic politics excited new fantasies among those external interests hoping to destabilize the imamate. This shift in regional power due to the defeat of the Italians resulted in political entrepreneurs making fresh overtures to potential new allies. During the late 1940s, in other words, this diversity at times turned the domestic political scene in North Yemen into a cesspool of intrigue.

As explained earlier, Imam Yahya’s regime had put up a remarkable show of endurance, mobilizing varied group and individual ambitions to secure

North Yemen's independence. By continuously maintaining, and even expanding, law and order to new areas, the agriculturally rich highlands produced considerable revenue for the state and also those locals profiting from their alliance with the regime. With these resources the imamate and loyalists could consolidate administrative control over even more zones east and south of their traditional areas of influence. Crucial in this process remained the imam's ability to accommodate potential enemies. To politically survive in Arabia, the imamate directed resources to protect—by cunning diplomacy or from the barrel of a rifle—its internal allies while also placating potential rivals with concessions, including surrendering large chunks of revenue in return for either loyalty or simply neutrality. This campaign to reinforce domestic alliances needed, however, a complimentary effort to reach out beyond traditional circles of power. In this respect, Yemen's ruling elite operated while in the crosshairs of numerous domestic and regional rivals who could always expect the eager support of outsiders.

In part because of the growing concerns with the imam's health, a new round of investment went into cultivating strategic relations with those capable (or at least marketing themselves as capable) of uprooting the regime.⁴ The resulting flood of opportunism inundating North Yemen forced the imam's regime to devise strategies that both addressed these threats and made sure such efforts did not simply create more enemies. In other words, oppression and political violence, if used, needed the kind of nuanced approach the present-day would-be foreign rulers of Yemen fail to appreciate.

British efforts to mobilize an internal opposition during the time entailed establishing a working relationship with various religious Yemenis. As elsewhere in the Middle East, British-assisted nonstate organizations and groups like FYM, the MB, and Saudi-origin groups enter into Yemeni domestic politics (Hamada 2008: 2–31). While it is known that the FYM, through the work of one of its founding members, Muhammad Nu'man (1965: 48–50), and others, secured support from Britain for its openly "modernist" positions, it was clear the MB was the primary force behind British-sponsored opposition to the imam during and after World War II. Initially organized by North Yemen's future president 'Abd al-Rahman al-Iryani (see chapter 3), the MB established by the mid-1940s a foothold in North Yemeni opposition politics.⁵

Much like their British-protected counterparts in Egypt, the ever-present Saudis also funneled resources toward disgruntled highland leaders. Those most benefiting from such patronage came from the Hashid Confederation, long a coalition of ever-shifting polities in the highlands around Sana'a whose

leading family, al-Ahmar, would become the wild card in Yemeni stability for decades to come. But like the British and MB, the Saudi-backed Wahhabi zealots ultimately failed to secure political hegemony over Yemen for their clients. Unable to break down the regime and access Yemenis on their own terms, this coterie of competing interests began to try to gain influence by way of recruiting outside the country altogether. Beyond the need to keep a still aggressive imamate with irredentist claims at bay, the emerging discourse of resistance to British (and capitalist) influence took shape around Pan-Arabism. As argued below, by the time he became imam, Ahmad's role to sustain North Yemeni independence from empire posed a threat to Britain and the USA. Reflective of this perception of North Yemen as a source of anti-imperialist resistance were the countless attempts at orchestrating regime change using assets recruited from the diaspora or locally. As witnessed throughout the Middle East after World War II, we see the hands of MI6 and the CIA behind the rise of an active opposition to the imamate (Chalcraft 2016; Tripp 2013).

Decades of subsequent violence was North Yemen's punishment for not serving a larger imperialist agenda. As was the case throughout the Third World, empire's intrigues only sharpened the political lines of distinction in North Yemen. The resulting mistrust assured instability for much of the period leading up to a 1962 coup that ushered in eight years of war. Crucial to this campaign of destabilization, if not outright political engineering, was the availability of local allies.

Fortunately for empire, there were able-bodied Yemenis willing to destabilize the imam's regime for the right price. Rival families, often losers in local political struggles for patronage from the state or merchants who lost out to competitors with a more reliable relationship with the imam, welcomed overtures from the outside world. Either by way of stipends and arms from their surrogates in the KSA, or directly from the British administration in Aden, domestic opposition to the imam's regime proved easy to find. Defeating the state was an entirely different matter.

NOT MUCH CHANGE: BRITISH INTRIGUES AND THE ROOTS OF THE 1948 COUP

The most conspicuous opponents of the regime were self-identified "modern men," remembered today as the "famous forty." Largely from urban areas in middle Yemen (Ibb, Ta'iz, Lahj), these men benefitted from the support

offered secretly by the British and their regional allies in the KSA, Iraq, and Egypt (all monarchies at the time). The hostility from these “modernists,” as then Prince Ahmad saw them, stemmed from the realization that the blind embrace of materialist values they learned while studying in Cairo, Baghdad, and Europe threatened to sell Yemen down a path of financial subordination. With the benefit of hindsight, this is precisely the tragic path many “educated” Yemenis took and in so doing, dragged their homeland into a spiral of violence from which it has not yet been able to escape.

This path was not inevitable, however. As evidenced by the spirited push-back that still exists in the country today, attempts to integrate Yemen into a global economy require a great deal of coercion and even brutality. The internecine violence that often emerged with the coaxing of external parties, traditionally read as a struggle for political change or even “modernization,” certainly helped globalist interests in this quest. Indeed, as we chart throughout, the subsequent rise of rival polities would lay down the generational groundwork for self-identified modernists to grab the threatening saber from Imam Ahmad’s hands, raised in patriotic defiance to a world in a deep spiral of change.⁶ Crucially, those inspired by “the West” ultimately failed in winning over the masses.

By 1950 tens of thousands of Yemenis lived abroad. A small minority, including the famous forty, were well-placed members of society and traveled to either conduct the family’s business or to secure an education in the British-controlled universities scattered in the region. There was also, however, a much larger number of less fortunate North Yemenis who migrated to find work. As the post-World War II economy boomed, labor shortages in Europe and in the shipping and mining industries offered landless Yemenis a new opportunity (Halliday 1992). Excess manpower, especially in Middle Yemen around Ibb and Ta‘iz, meant that many landless peasants could fill the labor demands of capitalist economies by moving abroad. The largest magnet for Yemeni labor after the 1940s and 1950s was the trading and administrative hub in Aden. Beyond serving the economic interests of the British, there was also the possibility that such workers could provide London greater influence in North Yemen.

In theory, this pool of Yemenis migrating to work in Aden would serve as an access point for British intelligence agents to influence events in North Yemen. Alas, many migrating to work for British shipping companies suffered from the class and racialized hierarchies that imperial administrators emphatically maintained.⁷ Thus, Yemeni migrants to Aden proved unreliable

in the quest to influence events inside Yemen. The British wanted to recruit “men of substance,” not migrant landless proletarians of peasant stock.

With not much chance of developing a future political elite from the dock workers and mariners inhabiting every seedy portside neighborhood of the British Empire, another pool of possible agents was needed. The primary underground movement the British would approach was the previously mentioned FYM, some of whose members were among the famous forty.⁸ Sources reveal that in their midst were agents who worked to recruit some of the more impressionable members of an emergent educated, technocratic class of Yemenis.⁹ The problem was that these men were not so easily turned.

While it was assumed in London that educated Yemenis would be swayed by science and the liberalism they supposedly learned to love while studying abroad, reaching these men proved challenging because of what they were expected to do for Britain. The only thing these well-educated “modernists” could offer their British handlers was their duplicity. They were not soldiers and did not own vast tracts of land. In the end, therefore, the British were mobilizing men to sabotage the imam’s authority and thus abuse the trust that their spiritual and political leader had vested in them.

Such a formula of action did not bode well for a would-be revolution. In fact, most of these possible proxies of British destabilization remained for years conflicted by their associations with enemies of Yemen. These anti-imam activists were, after all, as nationalistic as those they hoped to remove from power. Among themselves debates arose over just what kind of regime could replace the imamate. To the chagrin of the British authorities handling the Yemeni opposition file, one criteria for the leading voices of the FYM was that Imam Yahya’s replacement must be someone who expanded Yemen’s interests. Such interests did not include delivering Yemen to the British. Moreover, many within the FYM advocated long-term goals that included securing occupied South Yemen from the British. Whether they were fully aware of it or not, the extent to which British intelligence was willing to tolerate a longer-term problem of empowering Yemeni (and possibly Pan-Arab) nationalists for the short-term gain of ridding the world of the Hamid al-Din clan presents a thought-provoking set of angles of analysis.¹⁰ One especially useful example is the question of just who was “playing” whom and for what ultimate purpose, which remains the object of gossip and speculation in Yemeni circles to the present day.

Despite what clearly promised to be a future conflict of interests, the British continued to channel resources to the anti-imam groups in their

midst. Apparently, rumors streamed in from Cairo and Aden of small bands of young men publicly voicing their wish for Yemen to pivot away from its current “isolationist” position. British officials proudly pointed to the fact that newspapers and other forms of mass communication began to circulate among Yemenis abroad, repeating this demand.¹¹ The agenda perpetuated in this British-funded media campaign was itself ambiguous, however, and at times either mirrored or clashed with the USA’s own CIA-led infiltration programs in literature, social sciences, and arts (Rubin 2012: 8–12, 45–47).

Full of vague, “foreign” references to reform and modernity and mentioning virtually nothing that truly mattered to Yemenis ready for a fight, the mere availability of propaganda does not account for why some joined forces with Britain. Instead, we benefit from considering that those embracing the opportunity to change the regime sometimes took their own initiative and demonstrated a more nuanced, local-orientated, agenda. These local agents of change repeatedly expressed that they were willing to tolerate British assistance only to realize their own agenda (al-Abdin 1979: 36–48). The problem was that the mere act of collaborating with the British compromised the credibility of so-called modernists. This domestic political fact required that the FYM leadership adapt less blatantly pro-British tactics if their organization had any chance of gaining a popular foothold inside North Yemen. With the benefit of hindsight, the fact that would-be revolutionaries recruited other leading families to replace the Hamid al-Din clan did not bode well for Yemen’s future stability.

Failing to recruit the “modern” Prince Abdullah to lead “backward” Yemen into the postwar universe, the turn toward ‘Abdullah Ahmad al-Wazir seemed to many the best alternative. Recognizing him as one of the discontented members of the political elite with the credentials needed to keep Yemen firmly within tradition (and thus relatively stable), members of the FYM made overtures to this major landowner through various channels both in and out of Yemen. At some point—when, we may never know—this descendent of Muhammad embraced the invitations to rule Yemen when the time came (Khudduri 1952: 59–68).

What is striking about the conspiracy is that ‘Abdullah Ahmad al-Wazir was serving at the time as a trusted member of the imam’s inner circle of advisors. In part no doubt a reason for his recruitment, his importance to both the imam and would-be putschists derived from a long and distinguished career in Yemeni politics. First an administrator for the Ottomans, then a loyal servant to the imam for years as the state’s chief negotiator

during the Ta'if accords signed between the KSA, Britain, and the imamate in 1934, al-Wazir nevertheless availed himself to outside intrigue (Dresch 2000: 31, 56–57).

Identified as a potential asset, the British arranged for al-Wazir to meet an agent during some of his foreign travels on behalf of the imam's government. It is critical to again stress that al-Wazir still served his government. Only recently he had helped lead state forces to subdue communities in the eastern Ma'rib provinces, and even chased out the remaining elements of Saudi- and British-backed Wahhabis who occupied the Tihama in 1934. At this point, therefore, al-Wazir would seem to have no interest in serving the British, who represented the worst form of aggressive foreign threat to his homeland. Later appointed governor of Hudaydah, the imam clearly entrusted al-Wazir with the revenues the port produced. At some point during this tenure as Hudaydah's governor, he became increasingly suspect, however. This suspicion led to his transfer in 1940 to join the imam's advisory board in Sana'a'. In theory, from across the room al-Wazir would not pose a threat.

Key to the opposition's recruitment of al-Wazir was the role of his cousin, 'Ali al-Wazir, who had been based in Cairo since 1938. Before landing in British-dominated Egypt, 'Ali al-Wazir too had played an important role in the governing of North Yemen. Reflective of the family's importance in the imam's Yemen, 'Ali served as governor of Ta'iz until 1938. For reasons unknown, Imam Yahya then sent 'Ali al-Wazir into "exile," suggesting the regime was aware of British efforts to destabilize it. Whether or not 'Ali al-Wazir was guilty of betraying his ruler, his exile to Cairo immediately led to his joining forces with Qadi Abdullah Muhammad Nu'man in 1940, perhaps the most important figure in this complicated story moving forward (Peterson 1978: 46–47).

As British agents were not entirely confident that Yemeni nationalists like Nu'man would serve the goal of protecting Aden, Cairo's British governors may have used the MB to conjoin the otherwise disparate Yemeni diaspora in the city. The idea of hemming in anti-imam sentiments to suit first a sectarian agenda rather than a narrower Yemeni nationalist one was consistent with the British/MB's *modus operandi* in many other cases around the Middle East. That it would remain a primary function of the MB to create internal tensions (a role many accuse the MB and its local affiliates in Yemen, the Islah Party, of continuing to play today) certainly helped the British cause.

Already able to recruit several Yemeni students during the early years of the war, greater coordination between branches of this now integrated

MB/FYM campaign ended up dominating the areas where North Yemeni migrants circulated, in Egypt, Ethiopia, and especially Aden.¹² The respected Zaydi intellectual Muhammad al-Zubayri soon joined this group of well-intentioned men and formed “The First Battalion” in 1941, likely a MB operation from the start.¹³

In the tumultuous times of World War II, the part played by ‘Ali Muhammad Luqman and his newspaper *Fatat al-Jazirah* (The Youth of the Peninsula) suggests a set of possible additional intermediary roles for Yemenis willing to push for modern ideals to complement (but not yet to usurp) Imam Yahya’s ambiguous commitment to change. The subsequent decade of activism by those embracing the content of Luqman’s Aden-based newspaper allowed for political organization that tied the Party of Free Yemenis and Arab Reform club to the British goal of getting rid of the ruling family and if possible, subduing the nationalism within activist groups.¹⁴

It is at this point where we must move deeper into the intrigues of other sets of actors who were seeking very different results. As today, the attempt by British or American intelligence services to contain and then channel the otherwise dangerously anti-imperialist/anti-Western sentiments of Yemeni (and Arab) youth demanding reform (*islah*) informs much of the surface iterations of anti-imam activism in the 1940s. Fatefully, most Yemenis were on to British intentions and may have played the British as much to service their own domestic interests as the other way around. To be sure, there were many different currents flowing through this anti-imam story, with as many freelance political entrepreneurs willing to “milk” those eager to shower money on Yemenis who promised results as there were dedicated reformers working toward a better future for Yemen (or empire).¹⁵

As the men British agents were hoping to turn were Muslims and Yemeni nationalists as much as pawns amenable to servicing empire’s needs, we can appreciate that the unpredictable whims of human agents must always temper any sweeping accounting of events, in the 1940s or today. Clearly the inner circles of Imam Yahya’s state had no interest in seeing dramatic change. The fact that Yahya himself was getting on in age (and showing it) left the inner circle (including members of the al-Wazir clan) to consolidate support behind a successor. Crucially, in Zaydi concepts of legitimacy, successors must go through a process of election that includes demonstrating they fit twelve requirements expected of a just leader (Dresch 2000: 43–44). Crown Prince Ahmad, by force of Imam Yahya’s heavy investment in him, had both his supporters and his enemies within the religious leadership or ulama

expecting to elect an eventual successor. With an active opposition in Cairo, Aden, and in North Yemen itself, those eager to avoid what was becoming an overt campaign to champion al-Wazir pushed for dealing harshly with these “modernists” represented by the FYM.

Importantly, a readily available list of the most active members of this clandestine group was known to the regime. Recall that while in Cairo, members of the FYM tried to recruit Prince Abdullah. Unfortunately for them, the prince continued to remain loyal not only to his country’s struggle but also to Yahya’s wishes for his older son Ahmed, to inherit the position of imam upon Yahya’s passing. This meant that those who spent time cultivating a relationship with Abdullah ended up on the regime’s hit lists.

Already by the middle of 1943, the imam’s loyalists arrested many opponents. As the revenge spree seemingly ended, the remaining opposition secretly returned from Cairo or Aden, only to be met with warrants for their arrest too. Incarcerated, their fate appeared sealed. As none of the organizers came from major families, no amount of lobbying could set them free. Worse, being linked to the British meant they were also ideologically compromised. Indeed, dialogue seemed impossible with these traitors.

An unlikely sympathizer emerged to keep the dream for reform alive: Sayf al-Islam Ahmad himself. Ahmad developed an interest in these young men and actually “rescued” many from prison. In the hope of engaging them as he sought answers to Yemen’s biggest questions, Ahmad debated his guests in the Ta’iz palace. According to reports, the debates were over the pros and cons of change as envisioned by the FYM (Dresch 2000: 53–54). Ahmad also appeared hopeful to redirect their legitimate desire for reform to work in the regime’s favor as they faced the British and their Saudi allies.

At some point, however, the “liberalism” of many of the “modernists” translated into a visceral animosity that simply intensified the internal war among Yemenis. As we see in the epigraph that opens this chapter, over time, Ahmad lost whatever good feelings he had for his “modernist” subjects. The campaign for a peaceful transition increasingly turned into a conviction that change would have to be brought by the barrel of the gun.

Those not wishing to face persecution learned to enjoy British hospitality in Aden. Ahmad Nu‘man, among others, adopted Aden as a safe haven, allowing one faction of the FYM to cultivate their ideals as well as, with the encouragement of British intelligence, to establish contacts with Middle Yemen just across the colony’s border. This proved useful not only for the

purposes of cultivating an anti-imam movement, but also for keeping a close eye on Yemeni nationalists more generally.

For the British holding onto Aden and its hinterland, the end of World War II meant that a new audience for Arab anticolonialist demands had emerged. In Yemen's case, when Ahmad Nu'man, now well known to British intelligence, returned to Aden in 1944, his agenda to initiate reform in his homeland became confused by his interactions with a mix of rebellious firebrands from Ibb and Ta'iz. They too wanted the imam gone but were willing to say that Arab nationalist causes took priority. Because the British were so implicated in the disaster that Arabs in general and in particular Yemenis from Ibb and Ta'iz faced, officials in Aden had a very difficult time balancing their campaign to uproot the imam while simultaneously subduing a possible source of violent resistance to their administration. In fact, evidence suggests these laborers in Aden embraced the range of ideological offerings circulating the larger Arab world, including, ironically, Imam Yahya's message of unifying Yemen (Dresch 2000: 53–57). What members of the FYM like Nu'man discovered in Aden therefore, was a contradictory mixture of nationalism, labor activism, anti-British fervor, and moral righteousness. This cocktail of projects ultimately undermined Britain's South Arabia policy. As violence increasingly threatened a total collapse of British rule east of Suez, American intervention proved necessary to secure empire's agenda.

WORLD WAR II AND BEYOND: AMERICA COURTS PRINCES

The shifting centers of power in the larger world compelled Yemen's political elite to deal on a regular basis with the most aggressive of those external powers seeking access to their country's wealth: the Americans. Having already crossed paths in the 1930s, the imam and his cohort demonstrated a healthy distrust for the eagerness entrepreneurs like Karl Twitchell displayed during their visits. The impression left by such people was reason enough to keep a distance from whatever these odd globalist WASPs were out to accomplish.¹⁶

The problem was ultimately that what would-be imperialists like Twitchell hoped to accomplish personally became part of a confused overall "policy" of a country that, to the Yemenis, seemed a useful trade partner.¹⁷ Indeed, until the Kennedy administration, when the State Department took (or at least tried to take) control of its human "assets" operating in the Middle East

(most being self-aggrandizing adventurers who became legends decades later in oil industry and intelligence circles), what constituted American policy toward Yemen was liable to take any number of directions.¹⁸

To the imam and his sons, the Italians of the 1920s and 1930s were the much-preferred interlocutors. Americans like Twitchell, with all his sneaking about taking water samples, drilling wells without permission, and offering to build secondary roads into valleys where few people lived, left the Yemenis with the impression that the Americans lacked the integrity to be a useful partner. The regime's paranoia at some point translated into the imam concentrating more authority into the hands of his sons, some who felt differently about the Americans. Conveniently, with the Italians entirely absorbed into the Anglo-Saxon orbit after World War II, the imam needed to find new external allies to counterbalance Britain's tireless quest to undermine the regime.

Over the course of the next twenty years this search drove Yemen into the early Cold War's major global currents. The politics of assassination, the political economy of oil, American exceptionalism, Arab Nationalism, the anti-imperialist struggle that unified the Third World, and ultimately the Cold War itself all had a perceptible impact on Yemen. But, as is the main point of this book, Yemen's imprint on all these currents is of equally significant consequence.

As much as they were frustrated by Yemenis and their insistence that relations be maintained on terms of mutual respect, the Americans were still eager to do business with them. The fact the Americans saw strategic value in North Yemen remaining a partner rather than an enemy indicated the relative balance of power that still existed right after World War II. This would, of course, have to change, but the risks were too high to alienate entirely Yemen's stubborn rulers at that time. The task was to gradually break down the internal Yemeni structures that allowed the Hamid al-Din family to operate with such insolence.

Keeping this in mind helps us put the relations that North Yemen's ruling elite forged with the core of the Atlantic world in the context of the early Cold War era. Importantly, many of those oil men who still were in control of US policy in the Middle East during the 1940s and early 1950s were willing to upset some conventions prominent before World War II. If, for instance, American recognition of North Yemen (March 1946) meant upsetting British policies in the region, all the better. The motivation was to secure for themselves the country's enormous mineral wealth likely lying in the

ground. At the same time, however, it seemed clear that Imam Yahya and his sons held the key to maintaining regional stability, something especially important for a KSA that some Americans were not entirely sure could survive intact.

Beyond the strategic calculations, however, archival sources leave the impression that many Americans who were used to conducting their affairs with entirely corruptible (or intimidated) people admired Imam Yahya and his closest advisors. What impressed more than a few American officials was the fact that Yahya and his sons were unmoved by offers of fancy cars, women, booze, interstate highways, airplanes, and more direct forms of persuasion. In sum, these “premodern” men remained unimpressed by all the tools of American expansion so regularly in use in other parts of the world, especially the KSA.

Of course, Yemen’s resistance to Yankee overtures was not unique. By the early 1950s, many Latin Americans, Iranians, Central and North Africans, Koreans, and Southeast Asians all demonstrated a contempt for the bullying of the Europeans and Americans. That all these regions fell into decades of war and destruction is no small consequence of this resistance. The same fate, albeit by way of different channels, awaited Yemen. That it would take different turns in South Arabia is in part because many Americans believed Yemenis were a different kind of indigenous actor. This detail must remain a central point of focus as we continue to explore what impact Yemen’s global entanglements had on the rest of the world.

What the give and take ultimately looked like in both diplomatic communiqués and on the ground is of interest to us. It was the imam’s state that initiated the first real attempts to form something substantive between Yemen and the Americans. Through third-party communications and Prince Abdullah’s connections in Cairo, the Near Eastern Affairs office in the US State Department received an invitation from Sana’a’ to assist North Yemen in its cumbersome dealings with the British.¹⁹ By March 1945, Harlan B. Clark, a newly appointed consul in Aden, made the trip to the highlands in order to forge a much-delayed treaty of mutual recognition. Details of the watershed trip is itself worthy of a screenplay, but it is more useful for our purposes to further build up the context for what ultimately prove to be years of frustrated diplomacy and the failure to successfully integrate North Yemen into the “Free World’s” orbit.

The process begins with the British being rudely pushed out of Saudi Arabia during the war. This was especially crucial for Yemen as this meant

the Saudi portfolio, so to speak, was taken over by the likes of Karl Twitchell who, well into the 1950s, served as the personal intermediary between the US State Department, presidents Truman and Eisenhower, the big oil companies, development firms, and Ibn Sa'ud (Lippman 2004: 13–15). A rivalry between British and American stakeholders emerged with much of the Middle East over the next twenty years their field of competition (Fain 2001). Perhaps of most relevance to present-day readers is that the Americans even supported Saudi territorial expansion at the expense of British clients in the Trucial States and Oman in the 1950s (Smith 2007).²⁰

But as becomes evident here, this shift in power began when the Americans finally secured the trust of Imam Yahya and signed the ever-important treaty of mutual recognition in 1946.²¹ As such, the more the US MIC took on the role of laying exclusive claim to the region's strategic resources, the more it operated independently of Great Britain. The entire 1950s, therefore, proved to be a window of opportunity for the Yemeni regime.

The previously mentioned March 1945 US delegation visiting Sana'a' was charged with the task of securing the Hamid al-Din family's allegiance, compliance, and perhaps their embrace as a *fait accompli* of the KSA's authority over 'Asir. Inside the "Deuce-and-a-half" trucks²² that brought the delegation up to the imam and his advisors were the kind of trinkets misinformed Americans thought would impress "backward Yemeni tribesmen."²³ Unable to shed their racism toward Arabs, the US delegation learned the hard way that Yemen's frustratingly independent leaders wanted substance, not platitudes and condescending offers of assistance. The imam simply did not trust, nor apparently like, the Americans. So while Washington got its treaty by March 1946, the Americans were not allowed to formally set up diplomatic residence inside Yemen until 1959. For the next ten years, the Americans failed to figure out what was the problem. In the meantime, the imam and his allies moved elsewhere to secure the resources they needed.

OUTMANEUVERING BRITAIN: YEMEN USES AMERICA

The next few pages take us through the reverberations of how the Americans failed to seduce Yemen's leaders. We peek into documented con games and "wine-and-dine" trips for Saif al-Islam "Prince" Abdullah, who had been charged with engaging the world rapidly changing by the end of 1944 and early 1945. And while this charm offensive won over materialistic Saudis,

even the wine-drinking Abdullah proved an astute diplomat and a loyal subject of reigning Imam Yahya.

Critical to this story is the fact that personal contacts with the Americans since the 1930s had residual effects on Abdullah as political agent. Abdullah developed a personal relationship with several men representing American oil, civil engineering firms, agricultural, and financial interests in the 1930s and 1940s. Based on these interactions taking place in and around Abdullah's residences in Yemen and Cairo, American intelligence reports seemed to champion the younger Abdullah for possible support.²⁴

Recruiting a younger member of the ruling family of a country to which American company men wanted access had become a normal tactic by the end of World War II. For the Dulles brothers (CIA head Allen Dulles and John Foster Dulles, secretary of state for Eisenhower) North Yemen was a logical continuation of their quest to build influence in the region. As was to happen in Syria and Egypt, these engineers of the American branch of empire either instrumentalized war (or the threat of it) or attempted to corrupt young men like Abdullah for the simple reason that the American elite needed North Yemen in ways that paralleled the early recruitment of the KSA (Nye 2014; Little 2004). The issue was to secure contracts and assure that the government paid (ideally via loans from US sources) to help the oil and military industries build capacity in the Middle East and larger Third World.

Prince Abdullah seemed an ideal candidate to facilitate this expansive agenda in Yemen. His open-minded embrace of new ideas and a reported curiosity for things American titillated US policy makers in Washington and Jeddah (at the time the epicenter of American operations in the Middle East). Having read the profiles produced on the various members of the ruling Yemeni elite, more than one prominent affiliate of the political and diplomatic elite in Washington hoped to use Abdullah to secure that ever-elusive trade agreement.²⁵

But even if Abdullah was the likely candidate for Americans because they believed they could steer him to their side, his first trip to meet with US government representatives proved them wrong. Reports from the 1947 New York trip suggest the prince was coy during his meetings, flirting constantly with, yes, the American development companies, oil and military brass, but also with the Soviet Bloc, especially the Polish delegation with whom he apparently visited frequently. The trip that also took him on a tour of Washington, DC, where his hosts tried to impress him with the newly built

highways, proved also a revelation in that he was far from naïve, backward, and isolated.²⁶

The first impression one takes from the reports on Saif al-Islam Abdullah is his concern for detail, proper protocol, and even Arabic grammar. He regularly corrected the Arabic translations of official documentation he requested from his American hosts, and always had handwritten questions that followed anything he read. The kinds of questions he asked suggested that he was up-to-date with global affairs and was especially astute regarding the range of issues that could arise if Yemen were to join any of the multilateral organizations just being set up at the time. He was formally in New York to officially request Yemen's induction into the UN and sister agencies. That he handled this task so obviously well—North Yemen gained a seat in the UN despite the British objections—could only bode well for the other projects he and his country explored over the course of his trip.²⁷

Another telling example helps demonstrate further that Prince Abdullah (and thus Yemen) was no pushover in postwar global affairs. Officials in the State Department reported that, upon learning he would soon receive an invitation to attend the World Trade Conference, scheduled to take place in Havana, Cuba, in November of that year, Abdullah prepared a set of questions that he promptly presented to his handler, a Mr. Armstrong. For over an hour Abdullah grilled Mr. Armstrong about the proposed charter, concerned in particular about the intent of the "Proposals for the Expansion of World Trade and Employment." He articulated an apprehension that signing such agreements seemed to favor big industrial powers like the USA while punishing small countries like Yemen who would have to lower tariffs and undermine their workers' ability to negotiate salaries abroad. Specifically wanting to know about tariffs, their structures, and the actual objectives of the charter and its principal supporters, he impressed the men writing the reports.

Ultimately, the diplomat in him did not want to disappoint his hosts, who were keen on having him simply sign on the dotted line without reading the details. Abdullah suggested he approved of the objectives as presented to him and wished those seeking its approval from the UN success. At the same time, however, he would have to bring details back to Yemen for consultation, after all, Yemen was a country of committees in which approval for such things must be voiced by its members.

Americans reporting back to their superiors marveled at both the coherence and confidence with which this educated Yemeni engaged "white men"

on the world stage. More, Abdullah shrewdly recognized that these newly emerging international bodies and specific programs promoting “development” had strings attached to them that would benefit a small group of actors and not necessarily Yemen overall. While he assured his hosts he would consider joining them in Havana in November, Abdullah also left them with the impression that, when consulting with Imam Yahya back in Yemen, he would voice a skepticism that the tariff regime being carted around in the preliminary discussions would be helpful to Yemen’s own trade relations with the world.²⁸

But this is, after all, a story of Yemen’s global entanglements, and we have reached the era in which big oil is inseparable from any discussion on the Middle East. Until now scholars have missed the Yemeni part of the early oil bonanza story; Abdullah’s New York mission helps put Yemen back into it. On August 7, 1947, Abdullah met with one Lt. Col. Jack Nahas, based in Fort Lawrence, Kansas. Nahas, of Syrian heritage, specifically came to New York to meet Abdullah again. They had crossed paths in the spring of 1946 when Nahas traveled with the second American delegation that visited the imam since 1945.²⁹ A year later, Nahas, a US Army officer, and in uniform, came to New York to lobby the good prince.

Representing Stanolind Oil Company of Tulsa, Oklahoma, Nahas attracted the attention of State Department officials who were wondering what the hell an Army officer was jabbering on about in Arabic with the prince. Asked later about his agenda, Nahas reported that he sought on the company’s behalf a commitment from the Yemeni government to permit a group of specialists to visit Yemen. The objective was to produce a geological survey of targeted areas.³⁰ What Nahas did not say to his State Department interrogator was that he also represented the Phillips Petroleum Company and was arranging for the prince to meet them during a visit to Washington, DC. The story gets even more convoluted when deeper into the report we note that Nahas is overheard saying he believes the company wanted to “eliminate him from any part in the discussions.” He claimed that the company men who wanted to push Nahas out of the picture invited the prince to visit company headquarters in Oklahoma without him. To Nahas’s chagrin, the prince apparently accepted the invitation.

No proof exists that the imam’s representative traveled to Oklahoma, but the story is nevertheless useful as it depicts a US Army officer offering his services to various oil companies seeking access to a visiting member of Yemen’s ruling family.³¹ Such was the nature of the oil rush that completely

transformed the US economy and confused the roles of various segments of the government and armed forces (Mitchell 2013). While there were many other stories of similar entrepreneurs trying to weasel their way into the business—after all “finders’ fees” are incredibly generous—we can only return to this aspect of the story in chapter 5 when Yemen’s oil again becomes the center of powerful men’s attention.

The events in New York in 1947 also tell us that Yemen’s regime, far from being isolated and hostile to the modern world, eagerly sought to engage a rapidly changing matrix of power that moved the center of global affairs to North America.³² Crucial for us, this mission would just be a precursor to what Yemenis were going to do in the next decade, if they could only survive the intrigues of the British. Sure enough, Abdullah returned from Washington bringing with him a draft of a supplementary agreement with the USA, a treaty proposing that the imam accept the offer to help finance the construction of some infrastructural projects for roads and water management. For their part, the offer gestured to the US’s hope to incorporate North Yemen into their growing Middle East portfolio of allies. For Yemenis, the agreements promised to strengthen the regime whose ideological soul aimed to reunite all of Yemen at British expense. The British would not let this stand.

News of the agreement Abdullah brought back spread like wildfire. For their part, the British and the Yemeni opposition panicked. Rather pathetically, the British protested that the agreement violated the February 1934 Anglo-Yemen treaty that obliged Yemen to give preference to Britain in all international dealings.³³ Such protestations likely brought a fit of laughter among the Americans. Yemen’s active engagement with the newly established global institutions, its integration into the UN in 1947, its recognition by the US in March 1946, and the list of trade agreements they established with a new range of global partners signaled to the British (and their Yemeni allies) that the window of opportunity was quickly closing and it was their American Atlantic Charter partners pushing.

To reverse this trend, British agents needed to act. As noted earlier, not much could be done directly, so the British would need to resort to clandestine means. The problem was the opposition really did not have sufficient strength to start a shooting war to secure power. Most of those at one time or another voicing likely support for a change of leadership were hoping that the frail Imam Yahya would simply die. As Zaydi legal principles required, after his death, a formal election was required to anoint the next imam. Change could happen by way of a period of significant lobbying as different

factions pushed for their own representative to lay claim to a theoretically open seat. The dynamics of power, however, meant the next imam would likely have to remain friendly to the larger coalition of interests long served by Imam Yahya. What upset much of this was simply the fact that the imam continued living. Still, instead of taking matters into their own hands, the opposition preferred to wait, to British agents' frustration.

As the months passed, a sense of urgency crept in. There was a growing conviction that the public displays of friendly relations between the US and the imam's government were empowering the ruling elite. At the same time, the thought was that the Americans were aiming to manipulate the family as they became increasingly codependent. For those claiming their nationalism, the fear was that accepting the kind of American largess rumored to have been offered to Abdullah always came with a price. Apparently, the price for those most entrenched elites was change, and as the governor of Hudaydah, Qadi Abdul Rahman bin Ahmad al-Sayyaghi reportedly told the visiting American consul, William Eddy, "Yemen was doing all right the way it was and that any changes brought about by Westerners would be for the worse" (Sanger 1954: 249).

This hostility toward American encroachments is demonstrated in other ways by the Iraqi military advisor to the imam, Captain Jamal Jamil. He complained in his secret reports to Baghdad (which were promptly relayed to British intelligence) that any chance of reforming the state seemed over with this agreement signed between the government and Americans.³⁴ Such protests are especially important because from within this opposition the killer of Imam Yahya and several of his sons would later come.

How we get to the point of actually pulling the trigger needs a bit more discussion. Leading members of the FYM in Sana'a' and Aden at this point recognized (or were told in no uncertain terms) that this was their last chance to get the regime change they desired. The discussions over the situation led to a decision to oust Imam Yahya by way of a coup ignited by soldiers charged with protecting the imam. In Aden, the Arab Islam Reform Group led by Ahmad al-Asnaj, who in partnership with al-Wazir family (and even one of Imam Yahya's estranged sons, Ibrahim, in exile since 1946), set up the parameters to the coup in 1948 (al-Shamahi 1972: 210–22).

Among other measures, they mobilized the clandestine contacts inside the inner circles of the imam's government, killing the old ruler, several of his sons scattered throughout the country, and his most loyal guards.³⁵ Indicative of the deep British networks at work in the larger Middle East, the main

internal agent organizing the coup was Jamal Jamil, the same Iraqi military advisor commissioned by the imam to train his ever-growing military.

Here the complex reactions to the US-imam alliance were only matched by the intrigues that followed. Crucial to Yemeni politics for the next decade, the Americans' potential embrace of the imam pushed the FYM permanently into the British corner. The Iraqi link proved crucial in convincing the FYM to temporarily ignore their mistrust of the British to work together in putting a stop to the expanding Yemeni state before it was too late.

Taking place on February 17, 1948, the coup led to the installation of Abdallah al-Wazir as imam.³⁶ The coup was somewhat botched, however. The father of modern Yemen along with several of his sons were murdered while the short-lived al-Wazir regime (24 days), installed immediately after Yahya's demise, let the charismatic, feisty son Ahmad get away.³⁷ The Wazir family lost their chance, not due to Ahmad's often claimed brutality, but because they could not garner support from many of those communities who gave previously their *ba'yah* (pledge of loyalty) to Imam Yahya. Able to rally the most powerful of North Yemen's leaders, in large part thanks to the political gamesmanship of his brother Hasan Hamid al-Din, the imam's son Ahmad destroyed the would-be modernists.³⁸

IMAM AHMAD AND THE COLD WAR

Done with the postcoup cleansing, Imam Ahmad took over a North Yemen clearly on the threshold of political chaos. This chaos resulted because North and Middle Yemen continued to induce fantasies among those external actors (and local facilitators) whom Imam Yahya had long kept at bay. As in the interwar period, the larger powers to the north and south of Yemen continued to act as unreliable neighbors. Despite this, Ahmad did not diverge from the spirit of his father's tempered integration into the larger world. That the world remained divided among rival globalist camps, all seeking access to Yemen's resources and/or alliance, meant the imam's regime had some options.

More than those Arab heroes lauded later in the Cold War, Imam Ahmed would prove capable of forging, out of necessity, an independent path for North Yemen. He proved especially adroit and revealingly astute, even worldly in this quest. Always distrustful not only of the British but also of the Americans and those home-grown reformers evoking modernization, his government's policies in the 1950s took its enemies' ideological fire and

positioned the regime at the forefront of the pan-Arabist wave. Not only would Ahmad continue a tradition started by his father of pestering the outside world about the injustices in Palestine, but he was among the first supporters of the regime change in Egypt in 1952 (remarkable considering he too was a “monarch” presumably threatened by revolution), an active member of the Arab League, and eventually a member of short-lived federation linking Iraq, Syria, Egypt, and Yemen.

In retrospect, Ahmad initiated a remarkable strategy that may have even anticipated the rise of the famous Non-Aligned Movement’s main strategic calculation. His state would take the agreements Abdullah brought back from New York and give the Americans the chance to prove their worthiness. At the same time, however, relations with the Eastern Bloc, Sweden, China, and Yugoslavia moved full speed ahead. Learning from experience, it was the so-called Communist Bloc that generously offered development assistance and modern military equipment with far fewer strings attached than those exacted by their American rivals. Crucially, by 1952 Yemen availed itself to trade with all—even with the Saudis.

With this in mind, we briefly scan the range of intersecting ties the imamate forged at a time when it was supposed to be an isolated medieval enclave. We do this in order to emphasize for the rest of the book that Yemen posed a serious challenge to any globalist paradigm imposed on the postwar world. Throughout the 1950s, Imam Ahmad enacted a model of global engagement that aimed to balance domestic demands with the different offerings available in a nasty Cold—bidding—War to build and sustain a viable, independent state.

For their part, the Americans got exactly what they wanted to avoid: the Soviets increasingly entrenched themselves in South Arabia. With open arms, Imam Ahmed welcomed the Soviet Union and its allies, who all participated in an impressive period of “development” for North Yemen. The Soviets constructed massive ports, trained and armed North Yemen’s military, and put together a civilian transport infrastructure. The Swedes, East Germans, Czechoslovaks, and Yugoslavs all got into the picture too. Even the Communist Chinese helped by way of major road construction works that employed tens of thousands of Yemenis. Peking even received hundreds of Yemeni students by 1960. Perhaps of greatest consequence, however, by 1955 Egypt and Yemen became tied at the hip.

Domestically, the imam paid close attention to the opportunities for stronger local alliances, especially along the areas bordering British-held

South Yemen. One possible indication of a new effort to openly challenge the British in Aden was the gesture to move the capital to Ta'iz, both the presumed heart of the Shafi'i (Sunni) Yemen and hub of the South Yemeni resistance. Moving the capital to Ta'iz certainly reoriented geographically the power of the Yemeni state. It also reiterated the country's outward focus. Again, far from isolationist or resistant to change, like his father, and in many ways unlike those who followed, Imam Ahmad's regime remained committed to Yemen maintaining a progressive, anticolonialist foreign policy.

The renewed overtures to progressive states signaled that Yemenis would not surrender independence to the British and/or the Americans. Of course, as the more astute observers of Yemen rightly pointed out, there would be consequences for this defiance. Poverty (in material goods) for the majority of its peoples continued to be a challenge, especially in respect to Yemen's historic vulnerability to famines. The image of starving peasants in some of the lean years in the 1950s does challenge the idea that the imamate had some redeeming features. That Ahmad's regime proved incapable of caring for its subjects is certainly a preferred impression of British and American media, and has long been an image promoted in subsequent republican-era propaganda about the period (Clark 1947: 631–72).

North Yemen, especially the most fertile (but potentially most volatile) middle highland regions, was not poor, however. This posed one of the fundamental long-term problems for would-be hegemon. Yemen was self-sufficient. As we have seen with the use of a UN-sanctioned embargo manufactured by Yemen's enemies since 2015, starving Yemenis into submission is likely the only way the country would ever be turned into a satellite of empire.

The fact that food production and consumption was still local meant any long-term hope for pressuring its people required changing fundamentally how society was structured. Prior to its surrender to IMF-imposed "structural adjustments" initiated in the 1980s, the country as a whole did not import superfluous factory-made products in the amounts big industrialists lobbying the US government wanted.³⁹ Indeed, Yemen in the 1950s did not boast streets filled with gas-guzzling cars or chain restaurants. Nevertheless, those who had a chance to see Ta'iz or Ibb considered the kingdom "blessed by nature."⁴⁰

More than the endless fruits of their terraced fields and seasonal rains, Yemenis were independent, in large part because of the way Imam Ahmad continued his father's principled foreign relations. For a critically located, potentially mineral rich country, this "neutrality" constituted a major defeat

for empire. Perhaps the most humiliating aspect for the engineers of the US branch of this globalist empire, however, was the fact they had to ingratiate themselves to Ahmed's regime, which continuously demonstrated its mistrust of anything agents of empire proposed to his government.⁴¹ One gets the sense, while reading their reports, that white men in crew cuts and a history of bossing around Third World leaders did not take kindly to being told in no uncertain terms NO. Yemenis' resilience until today invariably upsets this lingering colonialist sensibility, now framed in neoliberal, humanitarian discourse.

In the 1950s, a heavy dosage of browbeating, accompanied by various seemingly irresistible inducements in the form of loans, bribes, and/or threats failed to tip the scales to American/British favor. This globalist approach to subordinating independent societies like North Yemen was mediated through a new language of "modernization" where the tools were as much promises of "development" as outright threats. This was certainly the case in respect to Egypt (Burns 1985). And yet, no amount of UN reporting about Yemen's grinding poverty could convince Imam Ahmad that the Americans were sincere in their declarations of friendship (and "generous" offers of technical assistance). As is the case today, the problem for Ahmad's regime was that the expressed willingness to help "develop" Yemen did not come with the required assurances that such aid would not compromise the authority of the state and the independence of the larger society.

When antiglobalist rulers like Imam Ahmad resisted, the threats of UN sanction were accompanied with the old tools of regime change, be it in the form of mercenary "jackals," in the words of self-declared "economic hitman" (Perkins 2005), a campaign to induce chaos in society, again a likely policy at one point used on a resistant Yemen (see chapter 6), or outright military intervention as that since March 2015. Continuing with this line of analysis, a return to the 1950s becomes even more important to our ultimate hope of understanding how destroying Yemen today is an obvious part of globalist strategy.

In contrast to the Americans, who insisted that the imam's state accept US "aid" in the form of long-term loans, and that the monies paying for "development" projects be paid to US companies, the Soviets, Swedes, Chinese, Yugoslavs, and others were more astute interlocutors. They proved equally happy to assist in the improvement of the country's infrastructure and military capacity but in terms that respected Yemen's independence. Add to this the fact that Soviet or Chinese assistance was not a roundabout way to enrich

well-connected companies left the Americans looking both unprincipled and greedy in comparison.

Moreover, Americans became notorious for their insulting racism. The Americans in the 1950s insisted on building separate living quarters, mini-cities basically, when their engineers and paid labor (often imported from Africa or Italy) arrived to start a project. This policy of not mixing with locals stood in sharp contrast to those Soviet, Chinese, and Eastern European engineers who lived with the Yemeni workers they hired, trained, and ultimately to whom they transferred know-how. Again, the contrasts are remarkable. Whereas the Americans imported their Jim Crow esprit to an incredulous Third World, demanding absolute loyalty in a bipolar world (Vitalis 2009), patriotic, and maybe even principled leaders like Ahmad used the availability of progressive alternatives to keep the country independent throughout the 1950s.

One dangerous consequence of remaining emphatically “neutral” was the possibility that the Americans, as the British before them, would unleash their now fully subordinate Saudi partners to explore further territorial expansion at the expense of Yemen. If the mineral- and agriculture-rich lands under a noncompliant leader were out of reach to US capitalists, giving an entirely subordinate Saudi state the green light to acquire these lands would in the long term mean Yemen’s wealth would be funneled to the West whether its peoples liked it or not.

Such an option was not beyond the pale. By the mid-1950s, under cover of US protection, Ibn Sa‘ud was acquiring swathes of oil- and water-rich territory from British-protected rulers in Eastern Arabia. At one point a similar push southward pitted British-backed sultans in Qu‘aiti-Kathiri (Eastern Yemen bordering Oman) against the Saudi state and the oil conglomerate ARAMCO.⁴²

North Yemen, however, was a different story. The KSA (and thus their US masters) had to handle Yemen delicately. The credible threat that Yemen still posed to these American proxies was in full view when, in March 1953, both Yemen and the KSA renewed the treaty of 1934, in part because it was Yemen that held sway over their neighbor’s stability. Unlike the claims to large swathes of Hadhramawt at the expense of British allies, the Americans could not risk a direct confrontation with Yemenis who still made up the majority of people living in this resource-rich corner of Arabia.⁴³

Unable to directly attack North Yemen (and annex its resources), the Americans attempted for the first time the tried-and-true methods of supporting internal opposition. Through their Saudi intermediaries, the Americans

signaled a willingness to support a violent regime change. In this period, they opened links with the FYM. This was a problem for the Saudis and their American masters, as the FYM gained popularity precisely because they secured a partnership with the state in the promotion of both Arab and Yemeni nationalists' causes. The regular declaration of Pan-Arabism in North Yemen meant unifying the Arab world was indeed a goal, one that at the same time would not be at the expense of Yemenis' desire to unify the country, a spirit that had implications for both Saudi Arabia and British-occupied Aden.

Here, the FYM's demands for the reincorporation of all of the 'Asir region previously ceded to the Saudi state in 1934 marked the renewed nationalism mobilized within Yemen. Such nationalism posed a clear barrier to any hope of mobilizing the FYM to undermine the imamate. Indeed, renewed demands led by the FYM to integrate "lost" territories sparked a period of tensions with the KSA that eventually took on the contours of what Malcolm Kerr (1971) characterized as the Arab Cold War.

Neither a loose cannon nor a demagogue overwhelmed by a populist cry for immediate justice, Imam Ahmad balanced the pressures of simultaneously managing territorial disputes with two hostile neighbors by signaling occasionally to the rest of the world that Yemen embraced the cause of Pan-Arabism first and foremost. Instead of promoting Yemeni irredentism, the regime allowed the FYM to do the heavy lifting of applying pressure on Yemen's two enemies.

The combined pressure coming from a population in the KSA that was still very poor (and equally supportive of the pushback Arab nationalism promised) and North Yemen's potential to upset the southwest of the KSA led the rising crown prince Faysal to explore further cooperation. At its most important level, such cooperation was economic. Yemen would supply the unskilled labor the expanding Saudi economy required while pushing for a military pact that joined the KSA with Egypt and Syria, ostensibly challenging the so-called Baghdad Pact devised at the time by the Dulles-led Eisenhower presidency.⁴⁴

Unhappy with this situation, elements within the USA and their Saudi allies quietly explored alternatives. At once trying to cultivate relations with members of the imam's extended family who often had a very different set of allies within Yemen and beyond, the US and the ever-present British sought to capitalize on an internal 1955 conflict between members of competing families long struggling for power in North Yemen. In the historiography, these events are treated as the 1955 attempted coup (Douglas 1987: 183–201).

Behind the events was the more pliable half-brother of the reigning imam, Hassan, to whom conservative Saudis and American oil interests promised power if he could get rid of Ahmad. While ultimately a failure, these events in 1955 have retained a special place in the lore of those who opposed the Hamid al-Din family. What most stands out was the brutal sweep the regime made of almost anyone known to have associated with the plotters. This was not, however, a sweep of all known opposition. As noted above, key members of the FYM actually supported the imam's government in this battle, feeling the supporters of regime change were led by forces who did not have Yemen's long-term interests in mind (Dresch 2000: 78).

In this respect, the "coup" in 1955 failed to materialize because the regime was not entirely unpopular as claimed by later generations of historians. Rather than the result of an entire society up-in-arms, the violence originated almost exclusively from the animosity that existed between the political elite surrounding the imam and the al-Ahmar family. What makes the violent events of the failed 1955 "coup" historically significant is the new wave of calculations made by the major external actors in the region after the dust settled.⁴⁵

While likely a consideration as early as 1956, the intrigues seemingly at work in this period cannot obscure the fact that North Yemen and Egypt remained joined at the hip in strategic moments well until 1961. None of this mapped neatly onto the way the big powers expected to fight the Cold War. In the end, perhaps with considerable blame to lay at the imam's family's feet, the treacherous dynamics of Great Power strategic thinking swept any alliance North Yemen could forge under the rug of history.

It is at this stage of the Cold War that Yemen's deeper insinuation into global affairs took a set of unanticipated turns. First, despite all its efforts at coaxing a member of the Hamid al-Din clan to betray the wishes of Imam Ahmad, from his more "liberal" son, Muhammad al-Badr, to the New York-based Hassan, Washington could not secure a useful puppet.⁴⁶ In the meantime, the Americans were clearly trying to coax the regime away from its heavy investment in Chinese and Eastern European ties. Although in hindsight Imam Ahmad was perhaps a bit too self-assured, his ability to remain "neutral" was a masterful use of the limited resources available to a regime with an official annual budget of \$10 million.

Considering how long it survived the Cold War, Yemen's significance in the larger postwar story may be better understood if we focus on the proactive approach Imam Ahmad's regime made toward its old enemy, the UK and

its occupation regime in South Yemen. It was there that heavy investment in rival opposition groups pitted the British against the imamate, a struggle in which Britain armed willing proxies while the government in Ta'iz explored ways to protect itself from these attacks. As we explore in greater detail in the next chapter, the difference from earlier attempts at uprooting the regime in North Yemen was a change in Nasser's Egypt. By January 1958, the increasingly bold Egyptian regime forged the United Arab Republic (UAR) with Syria. In March of the same year, Yemen joined in a loose federation with the UAR to create the United Arab States (UAS), meant to maintain a strong shared defense and build cultural and economic ties. Unfortunately, Egypt was moving beyond seeing itself as a partner; its political and economic elite began to act as a condescending hegemon willing to lord over Syrians, Iraqis, and Yemenis, brotherhood and shared Arab dignity be damned.

CONCLUSION

This contradictory reading of Nasser requires seeing Egypt as a still dynamic and multilayered political arena after 1952. For important elements of the regime in Cairo, to see Imam Ahmad secure such strong ties with the Soviet Union, China, and others at a time when they were just gaining a seat at the big table constituted the same kind of threat to Egyptian would-be hegemony as it did to Britain, the KSA, and the USA. There would be consequences for Yemen's global ties as a still powerful, if reallocated, Egyptian oligarchy embraced Nasser's far less threatening populism. More still, Nasser's popularity and ardent anticommunism seemed a perfect opportunity for a new Kennedy administration in Washington to shift away from the Cold War hawks infiltrating the State Department and intelligence agencies. In this regard, the beginning of the 1960s would see a dramatic shift in fortunes for the larger world with events in Yemen itself laying the parameters for this transformation to take shape within a context not entirely in the hands of the Cold War powers.

Keen observers of the larger world, the Yemeni ruling elite throughout the 1950s balanced not only the Americans off the British, but also pitted the Egyptians and Soviet Bloc against the West and vice-versa. This guaranteed the kind of bidding war over lowly North Yemen that helped the ruling elite survive numerous coup attempts. Until the 1960s, then, the Hamid al-Din faction proved capable of resisting the uncompromising demands of empire.

As such, the scale of intervention that distinguished the Cold War era from its predecessors also provides the first important insights into how current events in Yemen are interconnected with global affairs. As the next chapter reveals, however, the same globalist project adapted when faced with Yemeni resistance. Whether knowingly or not, progressive forces emerging in the late 1950s converged on Yemen to bring the kind of “reforms” deemed necessary for a modern society. Their ascendancy was matched by the British and the KSA. The two polar ends of the Cold War’s ideological divide ended up serving empire’s project leading to the destruction of Yemen.

T H R E E

Birthing Revolution

A GENEALOGY OF THE 1962 COUP

The land of Arabs is my homeland
From Damascus to Baghdad
And from Najd to Yemen
To Egypt and Tatwan
For no border separates us
And no religion divides us.

FAKHRI AL-BARUDI

Bilad Al'Arab Awatani

(The Land of Arabs Is My Homeland)

INTRODUCTION

On the surface, it started like any of the many Third World coups of the 1960s. On September 26, 1962, the palace of the newly elected Imam Muhammad al-Badr, at the time convalescing over the recent passing of his father, came under tank and small arms fire. With still unknown ties to either Iraq or Egypt, less than 500 men took it upon themselves to change Yemen's political fortunes and declared themselves North Yemen's progressive vanguard.

As much as the coup and subsequent measures to harness its "revolutionary" potential appear extensions of larger Cold War events, there remains something distinctive to what happened in Yemen. The nasty war that followed the coup (1962–1970), today considered a mere sideshow to the historically more significant rivalry between Egypt and Saudi Arabia, echoed both domestic factors and complex exchanges between Yemen and the larger world in ways that appear to be a watershed. Appreciating the importance of these events, however, warrants a deeper look into the ten-year period prior to the 1962 coup.

From what we have learned of the events leading up to the 1962 coup, the most active foreign player was Iraq. Many of them were Ba'athists who entered into Yemeni politics as military advisors, the Iraqis had a penchant

to mistrust the Egyptians. In this regard, they strived as much to keep Nasser sympathizers out of power in North Yemen as their rivals working for conservative Saudis or British. As such, Yemen's domestic scene on the eve of the coup simply did not conform to any of the ideological frames evoked in the scholarship (i.e., an affinity to socialism, sectarianism, and/or royalist leanings). There proved to be too much doctrinal and strategic nuance to the way factions within the potential opposition understood domestic, regional, and global politics.

The result was armed factions aiming their resources at each other as much as focusing on the regime itself.¹ With all the suspicion and second-guessing, fear and mistrust ruined the possibility of would-be opposition groups pooling their resources (Wenner 1967: 85–89; 'Umar 1970: 162–63). It also left many potential allies to question the value of joining a struggle that had no guarantee for success, let alone speak clearly to a set of objectives that could appeal to outsiders (Peterson 1978: 77–100). For this reason, most Yemenis remained “neutral” during and immediately after the coup of late 1962, and remained so for most of the subsequent war.² This made for a complicated puzzle of contradictions that describes perfectly the fluid boundaries that separate factions in Yemen's current war as well.

As will become clearer below, the neutrality of many possible rivals served an important function in the politics of opposition mobilization and the imam's response. For one, neutrality created circuits of influence and power rarely noticed in the scholarship. Most of those coveted neutral Yemeni actors understood perfectly well the value of their decision to remain on the sidelines of the violence before, during and after the 1962 coup. There was, in the end, considerable reward for those waiting for the right moment to pick and choose a patron. Witnesses to the events in the 1960s certainly appreciated this fact. The question is, did the British, the Americans, Saudis, or Egyptians harnessing Pan-Arabism to justify their soon to be neocolonial adventure appreciate Yemen in these terms?³

As in Egypt, Syria, and indeed Iraq, Yemeni military officers in their newly pressed uniforms, barely a decade earlier but mere poor urban dreamers, understood that Imam Ahmad's passing on September 21, 1962 offered them their best chance to take power. The coup itself was an inevitability, as it is presented today in the partisan historiography. From a three-year-long drought to endless bouts of terrorist attacks on markets, sporadic gunshots at princely entourages, rival sons taking opposite sides of the Egyptian versus Saudi conflict, and shortages of silver to pay the bills (and troops), simultaneously several

conspiracies emerged to overthrow the regime. Such variety, however, had implications for Yemen throughout the 1960s, a period of war, yes, but one that has its role in entirely undermining an easy projection of power by would-be global hegemony. By excavating this period, now almost entirely submerged in a historiography influenced by violence, we can appreciate more fully that war in Yemen, then and now, is in large part a by-product of lingering frustrations with the country's continued independence from empire.

INTEGRATING YEMEN INTO THE COLD WAR

As noted earlier, interests deep within European and American circles of power, often through their Saudi surrogates, invested in human assets who could steer Yemenis toward the West. That such change came in the form of an outright Egyptian occupation by the end of October 1962, with thousands of troops flown in courtesy of Soviet planes, certainly warrants scholarly focus (Ferris 2013: 70–101). The problem is centering major Cold War powers' interests reduces Yemenis and the conflicts in which they engaged to mere sideshows—and sideshows they were not.

For one, it was a largely autonomous and locally orientated conspiracy that initiated the September 1962 coup d'état, a political operation whose fragility and lack of popular support ultimately led to a frustrated effort by conspirators to recruit prominent Yemenis to sanction it retrospectively. Once failing to win over men long hoping for change, like the socially conservative judge 'Abdul Rahman al-Iryani, the conspirators next made overtures to external would-be patrons. From the USA to Egypt, Iraq, the KSA, and even Britain, what seemed to be a string of opportunistic outreaches to find a viable patron blurred even further the political horizons of everyone involved.⁴

Considering this chaos in the first forty-eight hours of the attempted coup, it seems reasonable to move deeper into the past to establish just why the coup did not receive immediate, comprehensive support. Below we study the 1962–1970 war and the opportunities it spurned to discover that part of the problem for the initial conspirators was an ambiguity over what ultimately was the goal of the coup and who most benefited from it.

At the center of this quest is recalling that the regime of Imam Ahmad and revolutionary Egypt had until 1961 enjoyed years of collaboration. This alliance offered support to underground groups opposed to Euro-American imperialism. So influential was this coalition among the antiimperialist

groups that empire's two most invested tools—the USA and Britain—held an open hostility to both the Hamid al-Din dynasty and the Egyptian state. In other words, empire had a vested interest in seeing this relationship broken.

In this respect, the Americans and their KSA allies, and even the Soviets, welcomed the 1962 coup, even if perpetuated by men who thought they were serving a progressive cause. Even the British, long excluded from the study of “Nasser’s Vietnam,” feared a strong North Yemen, thereby eventually celebrating a coup while fearing Egypt’s occupation regime. Studying, therefore, how the KSA, Egypt, the Soviet Bloc, America, and Britain maneuvered immediately before and after the coup offers fresh insights into both the scramble for power in North Yemen and the ways in which Yemenis’ actions impacted the larger world.⁵

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There have been repeated retrospective claims that Egypt planned already in late 1953 regime change in Yemen (al-Mahrizi 1998: 13–105; al-Baydani 1993: 48–66; Gause 1990: 59). Such claims, however, deny the very complex relationship that North Yemenis developed with Egypt since the 1952 rise of the Free Officers. As noted in the previous chapter, since at least 1954, Imam Ahmad had strategically given the junta in Cairo regional legitimacy by signing onto several bilateral agreements. The implication for Egypt’s relations in the broader region should not be understated. It was Imam Ahmad who helped wean Egypt out of the political crisis arising from the power struggle between Nasser and Muhammad Najib (the two principal officers in the 1952 coup that overthrew the Faruk regime). Imam Ahmad’s regime also supported Egypt’s struggle in securing financing for the Aswan Dam. In short, from 1953 to at least 1961, the Egyptian revolution and the imamate in North Yemen were on the same side.

Yemen’s embrace of the Free Officers’ coup of 1952 also gave the stumbling Saudis an opportunity. In 1955, a faction within the Saudi ruling family grew hostile with American aggressive expansion into the Middle East. Manifested in the Baghdad Pact, this campaign threatened the still fragile alliances Riyadh needed to expand its own influence into Iraq and the Levant, both regions undergoing radical change. As hard-liners in Washington pushed their agenda through the region, ostensibly to shore up the Hashemites in Iraq and Jordan and the newly implanted shah in Iran, many in Saudi Arabia saw the writing on the wall. Feeling suddenly abandoned by the Americans promoting both

rival Arabian families and Western progress over tradition, factions within the KSA advocated joining Syria, Egypt, and North Yemen in a mutual defense accord. This defiance of the Americans did not last long (Safran 1985: 72–82).

The US government and the CIA quickly concocted plans to demonize Nasser, deemed the popular front man for this slide toward Pan-Arab independence. At one point, with the MI6, the CIA mobilized the MB to assassinate Egypt's rising star.⁶ When they could not find the golden bullet, pressure was levied to block multilateral funding of the Aswan Dam project, a confrontation with global institutions that has since become part of every Middle East history textbook (Nasser 1955; Hahn 1991). At the same time, enough pressure was put on the KSA's Prince Faysal and his emissaries to begin a new phase of Washington's recruitment of Wahhabism. In the years that followed, the KSA's regional disputes with Britain in Oman and the Trucial States received direct US diplomatic and, if necessary, material support. In return, the Eisenhower administration expected Riyadh to step away from its flirtations with an alliance with North Yemen and Egypt.

That the USA demonstrated its ability to stop in its tracks a potentially dangerous alliance across the Arab world should be appreciated from the perspective of North Yemen's continued principled confrontation with Euro-American imperialism. Be it in respect to Palestine or British occupation of South Arabia, Imam Ahmad, like his father, never shied from openly condemning Zionism and its Euro-American enablers. Crucially, these voiced oppositions to empire mirrored the imam's condemnations of the immoral materialism that infected what seemed more and more of the region's ruling elites.

While relations with the KSA reverted to open hostility, as to be expected, increasingly socialist, anticolonial Egypt deepened its relationship with Imam Ahmad's regime. In time, this led to a regular shipment of military and police advisors, whose mission it was to train the imam's troops while shoring up his state's hold on power. Considering all the other contingent factors contributing to the region's development, it must not be ignored that Imam Ahmad had already proven himself adept at balancing Cold War actors by allowing in Soviet, Chinese, American, Yugoslav, French, Italian, and Swedish aid. In the end, North Yemen became a crowded arena, one in which Egyptian military advisors and middle-school teachers were but one of many foreign investments into Yemen's future.

With this in mind, it is hard to believe that Egypt's leaders at these earlier stages were considering upsetting relations with an ally by staging a coup.

Throughout the 1950s, the Egyptians were especially leery of Iraqi (both under the Hashemites and then Baathists) and British attempts at upsetting the ongoing negotiations Cairo had with their Syrian and North Yemeni interlocutors. They responded with a planned military union.

Indeed, far from trying to sabotage Imam Ahmad's regime, Cairo by 1958 established a loose federation in the form of the United Arab States (UAS), one that followed the Syrian pact in March of that year which created the United Arab Republic.⁷ North Yemen and Egypt, in other words, were firmly on track for greater collaboration on several fronts, including confronting British imperialism.

Throughout this period many a Yemeni delegation traveled to Cairo and the Egyptian state reciprocated by sending advisors, teachers, and technicians to Yemen. Imam Ahmad also provided Egypt some cover at the Arab League as the CIA's "holy war" against "neutralism" (aka the NAM) successfully drew distinctive boundaries between socialist and "Western" camps in what became known as the Eisenhower doctrine (Burns 1985). In face of open hostility, Imam Ahmad, his sons, and many more influential Yemenis linked to the regime defended the cause with which Nasser would become associated.⁸ Until 1958, at least, this partnership between Egypt and North Yemen seemed to operate without ideological contradictions.

What ultimately kept the Egyptians close to Yemen until the last minute was a mutual enemy in Britain. In respect to the United States, on the other hand, until the end of the Eisenhower administration, efforts to steer Yemen into the "free world's" orbit meant cultivating a viable successor to Ahmad, who was often bedridden and likely addicted to morphine. This did not necessarily entail inciting a coup, America's policy of choice during the Cold War. Indeed, all the powers were compelled to conduct the subtle business of building links, not breaking them, in a North Yemen apparently not so ripe for the kind of exploitation associated with the era. One reason was North Yemen's investment in its relationship with the Soviet Union and China, a development that by 1953 induced competing "anticommunist" powers to adopt nuanced approaches to North Yemen. For its part, a faction within Britain hoped to improve relations with its hostile Yemeni neighbors. Hickinbotham, the previous governor of Aden, for example, came humbly to Imam Ahmad's palace in late 1954 hoping to persuade him to limit his anti-British rhetoric and reconsider his ties with the Soviet Union and its allies.⁹

This competition to win over Yemen's often ridiculed (at least in retrospect) political ruling class brought some relief to the state over a particularly

toxic period of Cold War politics. A good example of this was during the three years of drought starting in late 1958. While the threat of famine could have been exploited to destabilize North Yemen, both the Soviets and the Americans competed over who sent more food aid to help shore up the state's stability.¹⁰ This was the reward for nonalignment Imam Ahmad expected.

THE YEMENI HAND THAT TURNED THE WHEEL OF HISTORY

At some crucial moment, what directly threatened Imam Ahmad's regime also posed a strategic threat to the maturing state around Nasser. The two regimes would hence work in unison, at least in respect to undermining British authority in South Yemen. The primary weapon against the British arsenal was the increasing tensions caused by the exploitative economy in Aden to which so many Yemenis from Middle Yemen, especially the highland region of Ibb, migrated since World War II. For decades, the region's inhabitants were integrated into the global economy by way of the ships passing through Aden. By the 1950s, with postwar economies booming, driven by cheap oil and reindustrialization in Europe and East Asia, Aden was the critical trading entrepôt. As some British companies profited, their infrastructure expansion created the heavy demand for cheap labor that rural Yemenis in and around Ta'iz and Ibb were anticipated to fill (Halliday 2001: 156–69).

Paradoxically, this migration would lay the foundations for years of anti-colonial activism. The struggle in South Yemen, in fact, would, except for Algeria, be the focus for antiglobalist militants. Arab nationalists and radical elements from around the world anointed South Yemen the cause célèbre of Third World resistance (Halliday 2002: 23). For a good portion of the 1950s, the heart and soul of this resistance resided in neighboring North Yemen, with Imam Ahmad the primary backer.

The imam's investment into forging political alliances with those North Yemenis settling in British-administered Aden corresponded with the rise of a trade union movement in the early 1950s. As Aden's economy increasingly grew toward shipping and other labor-intensive logistics industries, North Yemenis continued to gravitate to the poor-paying jobs that proved breeding grounds for leftist activism. In the face of atrocious conditions, by 1956 these North Yemenis formed the core of twenty-five unions. Revealingly, this

grassroots labor activism spurred the emergence of political rivalries that drew on, but ultimately neglected, the workers' cause.

Larger-than-life personalities soon appropriated the frustrations of Yemeni dock workers, seamen, and others attached to maritime trades. As these new players gained political capital, the imam, the Egyptians, and/or other progressive patrons allied with them for their own political needs. One such group was the South Arabian League (SAL), which operated in stealth along the boundaries of the two rival administrations. More radical elements in the organized labor movement challenged SAL and their positions on unification with North Yemen (which the imam and most intelligentsia in the opposition sought) increasingly differed.

Such divergent policies toward unifying Yemen led to confusion as to what were the primary objectives, beyond securing workers' better conditions, of these competing groups. The SAL in many ways, as deftly extracted from a variety of sources by Fred Halliday, amalgamated popular themes with the stated goal of avoiding union with North Yemen (2001: 180–95). If and when independence for Southerners was secured, in other words, the quest was not to form a single state spreading across South Arabia.¹¹ This was a position supported by Aden's merchants, most of whom were foreign-born South Asians.

The first leaders of SAL to rise above the small factions were Qahtan al-Sha'bi and Muhammad 'Ali al-Jifri, who regularly received funds from both the KSA and Egypt. To some, perhaps unintentionally, these seemingly contradictory liaisons helped service the larger objectives of the Aden government to divide the growing labor movement. Indeed, at one point shunning connections with the imam, SAL extended its utility to the KSA by serving as a relatively cheap way of disciplining the disparate parties based in North Yemen, many just beginning to receive the weapons flowing from the Soviet Bloc.¹² It was with this role in facilitating the transport of game-changing weapons that the imam's government secured for Egypt a place for the entire decade that followed. This link has been conveniently forgotten in the historiography.

By 1957, Aden teetered on the edge of the kind of uprisings seen throughout the Third World. Yemenis' demand for full independence was always a matter of time but tensions seemed to have reached an apex, allowing Imam Ahmad to step forward and engage the larger world as the primary adversary of what was clearly a globally despised British Empire (Halliday 2001: 184). One of the cleverer tactics was to mobilize trips to the frontline for Western journalists. The objective of highlighting just how uncooperative the British

were as neighbors constituted a new weapon in the regime's arsenal. As noted even in Aden, the British were not dealing with a backward, entrenched medieval tyrant.¹³

Throughout 1957, more weapons passed back and forth across the poorly marked line of separation. Locals in unsettled areas like Fadhli eagerly embraced the role of serving as a surrogate for the imam. This came at the expense of the Sultan of 'Awadi, whom the British aggressively goaded to attack North Yemen in response.¹⁴ Treated as a sovereign only when 'Awadi served the interests of a cash-strapped British Empire, the local leader was expected to do the heavy lifting of fighting off encroachments from the north that threatened Aden. But Ahmad's allies were popular among 'Awadi's constituencies, and it was asking a lot for a local leader to undermine his base political ambitions just to placate Aden's governor. Miscalculation and short-term interests ultimately forced local allies into impossible situations, a flaw in strategy that ultimately hurt British interests over the long term (Trevaskis 1968: 212–14; Gause 1990: 37–41).

We learn from subsequent reports that the program to install a Federation of South Arabia was again put on a fast track in response (Brehony 2011). The conclusion was that just too many local factors contributed to undermining the will of allies to continue facing off popular resistance. These rapid policy shifts of empire should be read as evidence that Yemenis were pushing outside powers to modify their global strategies. In short, Imam Ahmad and Yemeni nationalists, and thus a significant member of the "Global South," were getting the upper hand.

In attempt to reverse the trend, Yemen witnessed a period of heightened violence as the British resorted to using mercenaries to suppress cross-border movements. The problem for empire's main beneficiaries was that this move to violence simply further animated revolutionary possibilities. What had already become an expense that political factions in Britain no longer wished to shoulder only accumulated once the smaller constituencies became involved. British rivalries with indigenous actors east of Suez became the last exhaustive drain on resources. In response, London sought policies that assured influence while deferring the costs of empire to others, a strategy that influenced the federation project of 1950 and its reinstatement in 1962. In other words, these events constituted a watershed for a larger Yemen and thus the global events that followed (Halliday 2001: 169–75).¹⁵

Again, local context is essential. Imam Ahmed's convictions were at odds with those of many regional power brokers who did not fall within his

shrinking group of allies. Arab nationalism for many in North Yemen appeared as contradictory as it did promising. The heavy dosages of spirited anti-imperialism certainly resonated beyond a small pool of educated men, but the promises made in this spirited campaign, and the mobilization of certain principles rallying for undermining the old for the new, often clashed with the conservative, very powerful landowners in South Yemen. This was especially the case around those major landowning interests attacking Imam Ahmad from Bayhan, 'Awadi, and Fadhli, all areas sitting within the borderlands dividing North and South Yemen. In the end, the idea of the imam joining forces with the larger, almost socialist world, provoked both European imperial and wealthy South Yemeni hostility.

How this manifested requires some attention here. Because of the imam's open struggle against Britain, North Yemenis were truly operating on a different plane from its postwar Arab neighbors. By 1955 Egypt had destroyed all the goodwill its young military officers won in Washington by flirting with the kind of balanced relations between "East and West" perfected by Imam Ahmad. Violent confrontations with Britain throughout the larger Middle East instilled among many a rising conviction that cooperation between Arabs could both leverage the Cold War and win back authority over Palestine, Eastern Arabia, and North Africa. Indeed, the crucial recognition that South Yemen was part of this larger, global struggle helps underscore how deeply the region became entangled with the larger world (Halliday 2002).

Combined with a sudden intensification of clashes with British-backed forces in South Yemen that Imam Ahmad supported, these moves proved too radical for empire.¹⁶ In the previously discussed attempted coup of March 24, 1955, the conspirators relied on the participation of Prince Abdullah, the same Yemeni who in 1947 loyally kept the Americans off guard.¹⁷ The coup failed and trust in Abdullah's ability to raise a popular uprising on behalf of the still regionally isolated al-Ahmar clan (and their British and conservative Saudi allies) proved misplaced.

For their part, both the loyalists to the imam in Yemen and Egypt's new leaders shrugged off these imperialist intrigues and signed a mutual defense pact in April 1956. The alliance aimed to unify military command, which in theory resulted in a formidable adversary for any regional—read: Israel, the KSA, or British Aden—power. This potentiality was informed by the ongoing crisis over Suez and the friendly relations North Yemen enjoyed with the Soviet Union. In this respect, the imam was not shying away from potential conflicts with empire after surviving yet another coup attempt. Indeed, as

previously noted, Imam Ahmad's state played Soviet willingness to give military support and to build the country's infrastructure to balance the untrustworthy behavior of its KSA neighbors and America's failed Baghdad Pact (Ashton 1993).

In respect to the Americans, Yemen's friendly relationship with the Soviet Bloc throughout the 1950s alarmed to the point of panic the notoriously anti-Russian Secretary Dulles. In a communiqué written to the US embassy in the KSA, March 26, 1956, Dulles noted that "increasingly frequent contact between high-level Yemeni representatives in Cairo and Soviet agents there, coupled with known proliferating arms sales by USSR to Near Eastern countries" constituted a source of concern in Washington. This concern resulted in a call for action after the signing of the Yemeni-Soviet trade agreement on March 8 (Almadhagi and Noman 1996: 23n65).

For one, Dulles advised the US ambassador in the KSA to bring the monarch "in the interests of brotherly relations that exist between him and the imam to advise against mortgaging his country's resources to Communists and exposing his country to manifold dangers of Communist influence."¹⁸ This proved the Americans knew little of the dynamics between the two neighbors. The message ultimately conveyed to Imam Ahmad was that if Yemen rescinded its agreements with the Soviet Bloc, the Americans would offer a generous combination of loans and direct technical assistance via their Four Points program. Here again the Americans seemed tone deaf.¹⁹

The idea was to use the offer of a "long term development loan for a specific project" as the carrot. The generic reference to using loans to entice otherwise uninterested political leaders speaks a great deal to American tactics that seem not to have dramatically changed since. In the late 1950s, the assumption was that poor, uncivilized countries would bend over backward for such offers. That these maneuvers paled in comparison to what the Soviet Union and China were offering, and that they were delivered with such luggage of arrogance, would translate into years of failure. Ineptly, Dulles wanted to mobilize the KSA and their bag of tricks to secure Yemeni compliance. The attempted coups of 1955 and 1959 may have been two manifestations of this wish to outsource empire's dirty politics.

As Yemen remained inaccessible to the Americans, the violent anti-British resistance in South Yemen promised to make this even more the case. More still, the rise of the Arab Nationalist Movement, taking a somewhat distorted form in the Egyptian-dominated United Arab Republic (with North Yemen, Syria, and for a moment Iraq) coincided with a South Yemen Liberation

Movement that both had global socialist links and attracted volunteers from throughout the world. Such activism clearly posed a long-term threat to those hoping to incorporate South Arabia, and all its oil and massive territorial waters, into the globalist orbit. Exasperating an already hostile relationship with North Yemen, another coup attempt in 1959 (discussed below) unleashed a series of countermeasures by Imam Ahmad, in hindsight miscalculations, that expanded into a proxy war with Egypt, at the time a country also trying to straddle the precarious chasm between Cold War rivals.

REVISITING YEMEN'S OPTIONS

What Imam Ahmad needed most from foreigners was political support to secure military leverage over his two primary strategic concerns, the Saudis and Britain. As the British were reorganizing their affairs in South Yemen with the creation of the Federation of South Arabia, a tactic aiming to leave but a shell of their current colonial state while laying claim to the territory's wealth, the imam's concerns heightened with the opportunities and/or dangers that lay ahead. In the meantime, Americans were not helping. Although they finally secured diplomatic representation in Ta'iz in 1959, their approach was to disregard the internal concerns of their Yemeni interlocutors and continue to pitch economic assistance in the form of loans.

In this respect, the USA clearly did not learn from the successes of their rivals—China, the Soviet Union, Eastern Europe—in North Yemen. American advisors stationed in Ta'iz continued to annoy their hosts, ultimately leading to many Yemenis raising questions about their moral character. To take one example, a fire that destroyed large parts of Hudaydah in 1959 could have served as an entry point for the Americans. Instead of a sincere offer of aid, however, Yemenis received an intrusive mission organized by the International Cooperation Administration (ICA), a USAID precursor. Those high up in the Eisenhower administration, via the ICA, proposed a Mukha-Ta'iz-Sana'a' road, the first of what was hoped to be a string of projects drawing North Yemen into the American orbit. To be built entirely with US government funds, in theory, this was the opportunity Dulles had been seeking. Indeed, it came at a time when the imam had reportedly become wary of Soviet influence over socialist (antireligious) elements in South Yemen. By signing an agreement to allow the ICA to start this new road, the imam's government clearly wanted to communicate its willingness

to give the Americans a chance to prove they were in fact a partner in Yemen's continued quest for advancement and independence.²⁰

Unfortunately, this was not what the Americans had in mind. The Dulles-dominated government mistook Yemenis' overtures as subordination and pursued the road-building project as a challenge to both what the Soviets were doing in Hudaydah, which included the expansion of the port and the Maoist Chinese road construction projects taking place farther north (Burrowes 1987: 20-21). The failure extended to a lack of moral reliability; ICA projects in Yemen were mired in corruption. Aid projects such as the proposed road served as nothing more than concessions to powerful interests within the USA. So, while the Chinese could build roads in months, not years, the American capitalists seeking leverage in Yemen continued to confuse their personal profits with Yemenis' needs.

As already seen with the Soviet and Chinese road and port building ventures, such large-scale projects should have created thousands of salaried jobs for Yemenis. They also should have served as hands-on training for local engineers. Yemeni employees received an education in Moscow or Beijing and could expect to take over "ownership" of the infrastructure once it was built. The American construction company involved in the ICA project, on the other hand, secured the contract by some unsavory means back in Washington. What was crucial for its managers was making a profit, not training Yemenis to take over the operations of these projects once completed. Worse, the American project had little immediate impact locally. Rather than hiring locals, the main contractor imported labor from Ethiopia, a tactic used throughout Arabia.²¹ This blatant misappropriation of resources did not sit well with the imam.

Eventually the Americans were convinced to hire Yemenis. Rather than helping the immediate need for Yemenis to find wage-paying jobs, however, the Americans simply hired those Yemeni laborers being expelled from the KSA at the time. The move served as a way to assist the KSA and its ARAMCO partners, who at the time claimed the tens of thousands of Yemenis found in the kingdom crowded the labor market, one which the ruler at the time hoped to see more of his own subjects fill (Vitalis 2009).

In response to this shoddy shell game at the expense of real economic assistance, Imam Ahmad pushed back. In a quick sequence of demands levied against the construction company managing the road project, the imam secured both the respect of a new constituency of landless Yemenis once deemed beyond the state's reach (such peasants were largely living under the

authority of local landowning elites) and the ire of Americans. By forcing the Americans already used to limitless profits in the larger world to surrender more of their budget to Yemeni workers, the imamate's sovereignty was both reaffirmed and expanded.²²

In April 28, 1959, Ahmad complained to US ambassador Frederick Reinhardt, threatening that unless the company managing the road project abandoned all its corrupt schemes, the imam's government would revoke all agreements. Sure enough, by July it was "authoritatively learnt" in Aden that Imam Ahmad was true to his word. He informed the Americans of his decision to cancel the US-Yemeni agreement for the construction of the Sana'a-Ta'iz-Mukha road.²³

Details must await another study, but reports by mid-July out of Aden suggested the imam handed the project over to the Soviets who had undertaken to build the road without payment. On top of that, they intended to train 500 Yemeni technicians and employ local labor.²⁴ To the British, basically on their way out of South Yemen because of the violent resistance and lack of money, this episode confirmed their fears that the Yankees knew not how to deal with the task at hand. To them, the development of close ties between Yemen and the West was being hindered by "American administrative shilly-shallying." The cost for Britain was that it took the blame for US "tardiness."²⁵ The strident internal disputes between agents of globalism seem to have led to finger pointing well beyond the Arabian theatre (Rubin 2012: 49–50).

To many incredulous imperialists in London, the Americans had successfully ruined a perfectly good opportunity to win over Yemenis just to funnel "aid" to well-connected companies. More still, the Americans botched the opportunity to secure the trust of one of the leading voices of Pan-Arabism. Instead, they reaffirmed and consolidated the mistrust the imam had long felt toward them, thus exacerbating British headaches as they sought to maintain control over South Yemen even if formally leaving the region to some "locally" administered federation.

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This was all taking place while, in spring 1959, Imam Ahmad fell ill. Eventually traveling to Rome for medical treatment, his departure passed on authority to his son Badr and loyal foreign minister Qadi Muhammad

al-Amri. This was the window of opportunity for which various plotters had been waiting. Two of the most conspicuous were Husayn al-Ahmar and Sinan Abu Luhum, powerful community leaders who had long demanded close attention from the Yemeni state. Interestingly, instead of taking power directly, they sought a partnership and reached out to still young Badr, encouraging him to declare a new, "free government."²⁶

News of such intrigues reached Ahmad in Rome. Not wishing a life in exile, Ahmad returned and swiftly meted out retribution. His successful return affirmed that Imam Ahmad had a critical mass of loyal supporters across a broad spectrum of Yemenis. Within weeks, any semblance of a coup had vanished and loyalists to Ahmad secured, with some violence, the regime's hold on power.

The biggest losers in the resulting house cleaning were Hamid and Husayn of the al-Ahmar clan. They literally lost their heads to a Hamid-al-Din executioner's sword. At the same time, however, the imam, aiming to secure long-term political reconciliation, ordered on November 25, 1960, the return of all the confiscated property of Abdullah Ibn Ahmad al-Wazir, the once dangerous rival claimant to the imamate. This gesture followed earlier amnesty to imprisoned family members.

What was happening here was a dramatic gesture toward reconciliation, a renewal of old alliances and a clear attempt to start once more afresh. Indeed, rumor had it that the imam was planning to move the capital from Ta'iz, somewhat more vulnerable to the bomb attacks happening more frequently of late, to Hudaydah. The Soviets had just completed an impressive, expanded harbor, the city's infrastructure had been remodeled, and new, modern roads now linked the coast with the highlands.²⁷ This reconciliation was not what outside interests like the British, Saudis, or Americans wanted.

As in 1948, likely 1955, and again in 1959, if something was not done, and quickly, to stop this progression toward consolidation of the imam's alliances with the now intimidated potential opposition, North Yemen threatened to fall permanently beyond the reach of empire. Clearly, inducing internal strife proved counterproductive. The imam got stronger with each exposed, half-baked conspiracy. Other measures in the future would require a shift in tactics, including mobilizing populist leaders whose liberal education and allergy to communists promised empire new ways to subordinate Yemen.

UNIFICATION

The problem was that the popular embrace of liberalism marketed by empire remained lacking in North Yemen. Even among the most eager members of FYM, liberalism was synonymous with British imperialism, which remained the nationalists' larger concern. To his credit, Imam Ahmad was regionally oriented and his goals were that of most local intellectuals—the liberation of Aden and ultimately unification of all South Arabia. In this respect, the ability of an outside power to mobilize something akin to a “popular revolution” was next to impossible as long as the main beneficiary would be Yemen's enemies currently obstructing its unification.

Imam Ahmad's firm advocacy of the unification cause remains a crucial element to the period. His ally in South Yemen was Sultan 'Ali bin 'Abd al-'Abdali of Lahj, who was exiled by the British for being overtly hostile to both the government in Aden and the resurrected 1950 federation plan. These Yemeni leaders shared a goal of unification, one that other political actors in both the North and South needed to affirm (or reject at the risk of alienating their followers). This proved especially difficult given that it was Imam Ahmad's regime that owned the cause, with the Nasser loyalists clearly appreciating the need to veer away from what was a contradiction between a Pan-Arab, unified state and this “Yemen first” sentiment.

The nuance here is crucial and highlights how strategists based in Cairo could not countenance any ideological confusion. This all constituted a dramatic but gradual shift in the way Cairo handled Yemen ideologically and politically. As seen earlier, the cultivation of the South Yemeni cause by the imam's regime and Egypt, at least in the beginning, complemented each other and likely lay the foundation to any hope of a long-term alliance. As long as both Egypt and Imam Ahmad's regime agreed on staving off both the Saudis and dislodging the British from South Yemen, their ties seemed unbreakable. Unfortunately for the region, the alliance did not last because of differing long-term goals.

By 1960, the UAR was in full swing and Cairo was no longer in the mood to partner with anyone to whom the articulate elite suddenly felt superior.²⁸ With missionary zeal and a touch of chauvinism beginning to creep in, the tensions that ultimately led to Egypt's invasion in 1962 surfaced in numerous, often violent ways. As such, the period from 1958 to the summer of 1962 is best read as a transition that permits the expansion of an analysis of Yemen's

deepening ties with global forces. Imam Ahmad's tensions with Nasser's Egypt arose with a changing dynamic in the south.²⁹

In Aden at the time, a simmering labor dispute exploded.³⁰ Earlier in 1956, the Aden Trade Union Congress (TUC) was founded with direct support from North Yemen. Abdullah Asnaj, an Arab nationalist but, importantly, one advocating independence from Britain and then union with North Yemen, was elected secretary-general. For the next few years the TUC was the only real political party in Aden. By 1959 it formally turned itself (and its members) into the People's Union in 1959 and eventually, the armed Front for the Liberation of Occupied South Yemen (FLOSY).³¹

The choice by many progressives, and those who supported Egypt, to politically boycott the British governing apparatus helped the TUC. Responding to the growing tensions Egypt (UAR) had with North Yemen over who would sponsor whom as more workers' unions emerged in South Yemen, the TUC pushed for greater reflection on the fractionalization of South Yemen's polity. The connection with North Yemen remained strong amid this tumult because most members of the TUC were natives of Middle Yemen. For them, Egypt's increasingly public objectives did not correspond with their platform of union with North Yemen first.

The resulting tension between factions, and the reception of training, arms, money and, when necessary, diplomatic cover from both Egypt and North Yemen, left South Yemen's liberation struggle a downright mess. At times, the battles over how to defeat the British in Aden spilled over in Egypt and North Yemen. For example, a cluster of competing "modernists," who by 1960 were joined by the leadership of the SAL to voice their celebration of Egypt's leadership led to conflict inside North Yemen among South Yemeni rebels based there.

Always the rival with a rhetorical bite, the TUC newspaper *Al-Amal* was particularly harsh toward the SAL for this shift in strategy. With its leadership based in Cairo, the TUC called the SAL mere tools of Egypt. This challenge not only to a Yemeni group, but Egypt itself, at a time when the rest of the progressive world seemed enthralled by Nasser, is especially telling. On May 11, the TUC lashed out at Egypt for harboring the SAL's exiled president Muhammad 'Ali al-Jifri, along with ex-sultan of Lahj 'Ali 'Abd al-Karim. The TUC, and presumably Imam Ahmad's government, accused the former allies of the British Aden government of having embezzled contributions donated to the Algerian cause by the workers in Aden. Instead of buying medicines or

boots for anticolonial rebels, the SAL's leadership were seen squandering donated funds in Cairo on amusement.³²

Here we gain some insight into the maneuverings within Yemeni opposition politics, a likely imprint of the tensions that arise from living under constant threat of persecution for sure, but also of two entirely contradictory agendas. The loose money circulating the region through various intelligence agencies linked to Iraq, Israel, the USA, Egypt, France, Britain, China, or the USSR meant plenty of opportunities for the likes of al-Jifri who, despite being the guest of Egypt at the time, had no qualms about pursuing independent overtures. In one case, he initiated a campaign organized with KSA money (Dresch 2000: 76–77).

These were serious issues. As noted throughout, for some old rivals to the imam, the goal of Yemeni union took occasional precedence over the mantra of greater Arab unity, to which of course the UAR, and Cairo, would lay exclusive claim. This caused tension within the North Yemeni opposition. Some of the luminaries of the FYM, including Abdullah Nu'man, Naji bin 'Ali al-Ghadir of Khawlan, and others, were ambiguous about Egypt's role in changing Yemen.³³

Himself a proponent for an acceleration of Yemen's modernization, the future imam, Prince Muhammad al-Badr actually helped men like al-Ghadir ascend to power within their own political niches. While at the time al-Badr was generally seen in a positive light in the inner circles of Egyptian power and had made successful diplomatic missions to Moscow and the Warsaw Pact countries in the 1950s, Badr's father had left too many enemies behind. They included the previously mentioned Shaykh Sinan Abu Luhum, an important member of the Bakil confederation. Once Imam Ahmad sent Abu Luhum into exile, he turned the popular leader of many constituencies in the northern highlands into an asset for first the British and then Cairo from 1959 onward.

In fact, there existed in the highlands a considerable range of factions that make it impossible to label men like Abu Luhum along the simplistic radical and conservative spectrum of the period. Ibrahim b. Ali al-Wazir, for instance, pushed to make himself relevant by linking his Zaydi "tribes" with Shafi'i (Sunni) merchants in Middle Yemen.³⁴ In retrospect, it is damning that, while hundreds of thousands of Yemenis would pay the ultimate price, their aspirations leading up to the eight-year war remained of little consequence to the objectives of competing outsiders who tried to make kings out of pliable local leaders like Luhum, al-Wazir, and al-Ahmar.

RETHINKING NASSER'S REVOLUTION

To avoid repeating an already well-told story of “Nasser’s War” requires focusing on the varied Yemenis who had stakes in the planning, persecution, and termination of the long struggle for power in their homeland. Since details of the battles are available elsewhere, the task here is to consider the intersections of strategic thinking by which Yemenis engaged each other and their external interlocutors. As such, we put Yemen and Yemenis like those mentioned above in the middle of this quintessential Cold War conflict.³⁵

The place to begin is the disillusion many had with the Nasser project leading up to the coup. Egypt’s charismatic ruler’s luck had seemed to run out over the previous year. In the short-lived union with Syria, Egypt’s leadership proved every bit the kind of amalgamation of arrogance, petty rivalry, jealousy, and greed that repeatedly has spelled doom for the region. In the face of globalist forces keen on exploiting such personality flaws, there was no room for corruption, selfishness, and condensation toward “lesser” Arabs. But that is ultimately what lurked behind the promising United Arab Republic (UAR—*al-Jumhuriyya al’Arabiyya al-Mutahida*) forged in 1958.

In time, Nasser’s best men laid a heavy (and no longer welcome) hand on those once willing to fight for the Pan-Arab cause, especially justice in Palestine. With the gory details often gleefully distributed in rival media, events in Syria throughout the short-lived union with Egypt should have warned those championing Egypt’s regime that killing off North Yemen’s imam was no guarantee for justice (Sorby 2009: 145–68). Indeed, with the chance to reflect more, there have been some who claim Yemeni progressives already suspected Egypt was not the ally they needed in the fight against first the imam, but also Britain and Saudi Arabia (Afif 1985; al-Shami 1984: 1–35).

Clearly the process leading to war in Yemen was not as simple as retrospectives portray. The actual moment when officers mobilized Egyptian power to invade North Yemen was a time of considerable ideological confusion. The Pan-Arab revolution (so much like the 2011 uprisings) was rapidly turning into a corrupted justification to extend an Egyptian oligarchy’s power by way of the military and intelligence agencies they harnessed. As suggested throughout, Nasser in some ways offered a charismatic ruse while the leadership of “revolutionary” Egypt remained far from united (Ferris 2013: 23–25). The problem for the real power in Cairo was that the contradictions in the message and the practice were too glaring even for hardened Nasserists in Yemen.

What proved debilitating as Egypt's rulers aspired to reign supreme over the region was an entirely unprincipled cadre of would-be imperialists who bantered on about Arabism while indulging in vulgar domination over those same Arabs they presumed to champion. As we will see in chapter 4, these were confused ideologues drunk on their unrestrained zealotry for often contradictory approximations of the grander modernization project Nasser's regime encapsulated. The fact that their interventions in Syria and Yemen ultimately led to the killing of Arab nationalism itself warrants greater attention.

Indeed, to many Yemenis, Nasser's revolution had grown dangerously counterproductive. This was evident by 1961 for Imam Ahmad and his closest allies. They understood Egyptian-led pan-Arabism as a form of colonialism that aimed to steal from Arab siblings their wealth rather than sustaining a unified state to fight off Western materialism and its Zionist project. The result was public condemnation by Imam Ahmad of a regime unable to stick to the guiding principles that fused Islam with modern statecraft. Broadcast to anyone who was listening, Imam Ahmad wrote:

Taking property by forbidden means
On a pretext of nationalization, or of justice
Between those who have wealth and those with none,
Is a crime against Islamic law.³⁶

Thus, Imam Ahmad openly criticized Egypt and its "socialist" ideology, declaring it hostile to Islamic principles and Arabs' interests. A verbal tit-for-tat followed, with Egypt unilaterally declaring over its current project of unifying with Yemen (Attar 1964: 83–84). To one faction in Cairo, such open challenges to a fragile UAR project needed immediate attention.

This growing anti-Egyptian fervor in North Yemen must serve as a crucial part of our analysis of why the coup had to take place when it did. Indeed, time was running out and any subsequent change needed to be directed toward the right faction (Naji 1979: 206–7).³⁷ Things were getting bad, quickly, for Egypt.

Most worrisome to Cairo's elites was the rise of Ba'athism in rebellious Syria, in Iraq, and by extension within the intelligentsia throughout the Arab-speaking world, especially in Yemen. It was this movement's most convinced partisans who believed Arab union superseded Egyptian pride, thus making Ba'athists, once the greatest admirers of Nasser's potential, his most

dangerous rivals moving forward. Infused with the conviction that Egypt had no right to dictate to Iraq as they had tried in Syria, a rising cadre of intelligence operatives who infiltrated the Yemeni military since the 1940s made it clear they would not subordinate their new power to Egypt. Iraq's new military ruler, 'Abd al-Karim Qasim, made this clear by dramatically pulling out of the negotiations for union in 1958, a move that left Syria on its own. In time, Iraq would aspire to challenge the UAR's claim to be the exclusive representative of Arab progressivism.³⁸

Alas, the final collapse of Egypt's union with Syria still did not faze those clandestine members of the conspiracy to overthrow the imam, perhaps suffering from their isolation as they planned their coup through their man Muhammad 'Abd al-Wahid in the Egyptian embassy, or even in Cairo itself. Here the connections are familial, a crucial factor to consider always in Yemen, especially in the context of the current war. A wealthy merchant from Middle Yemen, 'Abd al-Rahman al-Baydani, secured influence inside the halls of power in Egypt by marrying Anwar Sadat's sister. Throughout the 1950s, Baydani spent much of his social capital proving his worth to would-be masters over Yemen. He took over designated propaganda roles and was notorious for inciting via Radio Cairo sectarianism in the form of Zaydi and Shafi'i conflict. He even stoked resentment for the "foreign" occupation by *sada* (*sayyid* sing.) like the imam at the expense of the "indigenous" Yemeni masses.³⁹

The effort to assuage the now growing number of sceptics was the assurance distributed publicly via Radio Cairo and quietly in Egypt's embassy in Ta'iz that there is only one objective possible, (*wahdat al-hadaf*)—unity of purpose. The mantra targeted the few remaining starry-eyed supporters hiding in Yemen's political shadows to reassure them that Egypt still offered deliverance despite its separation with Syria.⁴⁰ Indeed, we are told, and many speculated at the time, that the contradictions of Syria's escape from the UAR project pushed the Egyptian regime, and perhaps more crucially, Nasser personally, towards a greater focus on being proactively revolutionary abroad. The adventures in Yemen may have been, in this regard, a way to recenter an Egypt that was on the edge of marginalization in early 1962 due to what seemed a reactionary renaissance, first manifested in the 1961 Arab League summit now dominated by hostile, British-protected monarchies (Kerr 1971: 39; Ferris 2013: 28–29).

This all would suggest Egypt had a direct role in the violence of September 26. It certainly fits a larger narrative of Nasser engaging in a regional power

grab at a time when North Yemen was vulnerable and the KSA and Britain were caught in their own political tumult. While the speculation continues over who supported the actual coup, this all suggests a parallel political arena that would not include the Hamid al-Din family. Such a space for partisans to operate beyond the shadow of the imamate was key throughout the subsequent war, that is certain. Here the Egyptians and Saudis saw eye to eye: never to allow the return of al-Badr and his family to power.⁴¹ Recognizing this dynamic with such a historically deep, potentially broad base of support required more thought into which legitimate leaders (whom the Egyptians failed to properly vet) would take their place. When the Egyptians, who arrived with a supportive unit of soldiers before any of the other external interests, opted for a pliable military man, Imam Ahmad's chief of staff Col. 'Abdallah 'Ali Sallal (ca. 1915–1994), they mistook a quiet cluster of partners for a passive one.⁴²

Even before the smoke rose from the cannons firing on the palace of the imam on September 26, there were multiple claimants to a new order. One faction pressed Egypt for recognition and thus political engagement. Others sought direct British engagement, with even hints of a new state created out of Middle Yemen.⁴³ Indeed, for much of the war, Egypt (and the KSA, Iraq, UK, USA, and USSR) was vulnerable to the entrepreneurial spirit of numerous would-be Yemen powerbrokers finding new windows of opportunity with each napalm or mustard gas attack. The British, for one, did not sit still. The fading imperialists took measures to counter Egypt's surprising intervention. Egypt's move to establish a National Liberation Army immediately after buttressing the newly minted Yemen Arab Republic (YAR) was especially a sign that London's worst strategic nightmare was unfolding in Aden's neighborhood.⁴⁴

Upsetting any pretention of managing events from the metropole were the proactive Yemenis, many living in neighboring countries, identifying an opportunity. As much as the Egyptians were hoping to instill the new order that by empowering those like Sallal, who came from more humble origins, the objective soon moved from revolution, modernity, and a defeat of tradition, to mere survival. Here, in their desperation, even the Egyptians had to resort to old-style Yemeni politics. The only recourse at this point was to initiate a proxy war in which Egyptian assets would fight those mobilized by the KSA and Britain, long the tools of empire. Crucially, this escalation is not what the Egyptians (or empire) had envisioned for South Arabia prior to 1962 but would be fertile ground for the Yemeni political entrepreneur.

Perhaps the most interesting example of such a Yemeni opportunism is a man who made his fortune while in Ethiopia, ‘Abdul al-Ghani Mutahhar. Mutahhar, long hoping to parlay his wealth in Ethiopia into influence in his homeland, had his ambitions previously thwarted by the imamate. With the collapse of the Hamid al-Din dynasty, such men as Mutahhar recognized that offering outside patrons armed men under their control was the key to their access to any resulting spoils that invariably come with regime change.⁴⁵

In this vein, perhaps the most important beneficiary of the chaos the Egyptian intervention brought was ‘Abdullah al-Ahmar, at the time struggling to keep a hold on the Hashid confederation. Eventually, out of frustration due to a lack of both manpower and finances, Cairo would simply defer fighting the war to conservative al-Ahmar (paying him to remain cooperative). The idea was this family, long associated with the KSA, could help maintain security in large parts of the narrow triangle of territory the Egyptian-dominated YAR controlled throughout the 1962–1970 period. This constituted the worst kind of betrayal to those progressives inside Yemen actually fighting Saudi-backed forces. Progressive Egypt’s alliance with al-Ahmar would prove disastrous to Yemen’s long-term stability; as with the Saudi-led war on Yemen today, including the son of ‘Abdullah al-Ahmar, otherwise politically isolated Yemeni “warlords” could always harvest conflict for their own immediate benefit.

HARVESTING CIVIL WAR

The fact that competing anti-imam factions secured funding from an equally diverse array of domestic and foreign interests left the successful conspirators and their (in theory) like-minded sympathizers in the opposition at each other’s throats. In rapid succession, all those would-be king makers caught by surprise by rapidly changing events mobilized whatever assets they could on the ground. The resulting exploitation of local political entrepreneurialism led to an internecine war that, as it expanded, evolved into something adaptive agents of global power could live with. This taking advantage of a catastrophe has become the modus operandi of globalist forces ever since (Klein 2007).

It is important to remind ourselves that as insidious as the opportunism of various outside parties was (and is), the internecine hostility in the immediate aftermath of the coup did leave a door open for both sides. Later to become known as “royalists,” Imam Badr’s short-term survival tactics and subsequent

rallying of allies in the impenetrable northern regions around Sa'adah forced the still flatfooted globalist partisans, including those in a politically fragile KSA, to adjust. The subsequent, almost eight-year war of succession opened even more channels of influence for foreign powers to cultivate relations with would-be warlords and diplomatic middlemen.

The resulting political economy of war, where the steady flow of generous stipends and aid incentivized many to take sides, proved entirely detrimental to the long-term interests of almost all Yemenis, regardless of ideological orientation. This mirrors the current drawn-out war that started in 2015. In this respect, more than simply seeing a synergy of interests collude to destroy Yemen for different reasons, there are more nuanced ways to understand war. For one, there is the obvious problem of a strong loyal cadre of fighters who would remain impervious to seemingly blatant indicators of criminality on the part of their patrons. Yes, the money was often too good to turn down, but so were principles.

Perhaps more important for our purposes here are the structural reasons for a persistence of "loyalty" to those factions in Yemeni politics deemed indefensible in the MSM and academia. In the 1950s, what proved crucial to the long-term survival of the imam's government was its ability to penetrate domestic opposition groups. As an anonymous source explained once, the imam's regime had sympathizers quietly spying on dedicated enemies and identifying those with leanings. In so identifying the core and fringes of secret opposition groups, the imam's agents could upset efforts to forge broader coalitions. In critical ways, however, the interactions also led to opportunistic partnerships, with moles serving the state (and often outside intelligence services) in return for rewards.

These internal security "assets" represented many constituencies in Yemeni society. In this way, in the process of constantly seeking out opponents, Yemen's political elite were deeply linked to larger society. In other words, as much as there were factions within the ruling Hamid al-Din family, so too were there divisions that cut across all lines of distinction foreign observers love so much to emphasize when writing about Yemen. The result was during the war many Yemenis seeking influence and power had no problem with accepting foreign funds to assist their agendas. At the same time, however, their Yemeni constituencies were equally liable to support the local authorities whom would-be plotters hoped to remove from power. Critical nuance, therefore, is necessary when exploring further just what instigated a war that lasted on and off in different parts of North Yemen until 1970.⁴⁶

We know in retrospect that many previously obscure actors read the changing winds correctly and, by the end of the subsequent war in 1970, secured themselves a viable corner of a demonstrably larger political arena. More prominent rebels-for-hire, especially the ever-present al-Ahmar clan, proved especially adept at parlaying their utility to the changes of the era. And yet, there they were, in early 1962, observing how the powers were forging new alliances with conservative “tribal confederations” and the imam countering by suddenly agreeing to work with the British to fight against those using bombs in Ta‘iz’s markets in the quest to incite a revolution.

It was as if Britain calculated it should abandon their MB allies, who had seemingly forged a coalition that remains to this day the centerpiece to the “moderate” Islamic party of Western choice, Islah. Sure enough, at odds with Nasser since 1961, Imam Ahmad sent a delegation to Aden to explore a possible temporary peace with Britain.⁴⁷ Faced with terrorism, the ruler of a target enemy of empire seemed to have capitulated. Desperate to stop the bombs and threats of violence on his society, the imam folded, a British victory that led to a wave of deportations of assets close to Cairo by both Aden and Ta‘iz.

For a moment at least, it seemed there was a shift. That did not last long and Britain’s turn of face upon Imam Ahmad’s death basically undermined all future discussion. This attempt by Britain to exploit a transitional moment in North Yemen, even if it was not behind it, meant all negotiations over a reconfiguration of the boundaries of Yemen were frozen. The result was several previously idle constituencies suddenly acting. It was their fear of losing out to a Saudi or American faction that then pushed both British-backed agents and Iraqi operatives to follow the way of Yemenis’ intricate relations with the larger world.

The consequences of this state of affairs in late 1962 did not register until much of the damage caused by the war had already been done. As discussed in detail in the next chapter, implicated in the unequivocal disaster caused by Egypt’s overt attempt at colonizing YAR was the economic model used to implement these goals. As within Egypt, the extension of adapting modernization theory to a context of outright occupation will shed light on a pervasive, ever-present consequence of Yemen’s global interactions.

Initially, newly minted graduates from university hired to implement progress were blocked by Egyptian occupation politics to implement social transforming policies they were trained to advocate. By 1968 this changed with the departure of the Egyptians. With the full weight of the responsibilities of

building the war-torn YAR from scratch, a large proportion of Yemen's technocrats took it upon themselves to invest in expanding state capacities. In many ways, the very doctrines that had poisoned so much of Egypt's long-term sustainability were again adapted and even expanded in Yemen with a new vigor that could only be characterized, in retrospect, as tragically naïve.

What to make of this process of Yemen also falling into the state-led modernization trap requires the entirety of chapter 4. It is enough here to observe that Yemen's occupation by technocrats pursuing modernization meant that the ever-adaptive empire ultimately translated Yemenis' resistance into a framework that strategically induced chaos in certain parts of the country. This ultimately led to the development of an entirely new, Yemen-inspired wealth-extraction mechanism for the larger world that we can only appreciate today by looking at how conflicts in Yemen have been "resolved" ever since. But as suggested earlier with respect to other forms of social organization, what has long been treated as quintessentially "non-Western" about the patronage networks that aspiring leaders are required to maintain has a lot more in common with self-declared modern states than initially thought (Mitchell 1991: 77–87).

In the end, events initiated in 1962 simply led to an occupation in which Egyptians were expecting nothing less than Yemen's surrender to Egyptian bureaucrats and soldiers. Unable to conduct a "civil war" on their own terms, most of the youthful spirit of revolution brought by those Yemenis initially attracted to Nasserism felt discarded and used. Many left to go underground. For those, like the presumed leader Col. Sallal who was deemed no longer useful, exile in Cairo was the only possible arena for once-heralded "leaders" of Yemen. The parallels to today's Hadi are remarkable, also a Yemeni "leader" who cannot even secure enough political capital to reside in the very country, it is claimed by some, to be his legal right to administer.

To understand the importance of the bloody 1960s period for the greater concern here of what violence in Yemen tells us about the larger world, we are advised to keep in mind the need to avoid overdetermining the political calculations of such principal actors involved based on labels given to them. Individual and group loyalties were as negotiable and contingent on numerous factors during the Cold War as they are today. In fact, the primary reason why attempts to influence the affairs of Yemen from the outside so frequently failed (or even backfired, as the case since March 2015) is the blind reliance on inaccurate categories to characterize individuals. The notion that labeling someone a Nasserist, Shafi'i, Salafist, Hashid tribesmen, Sunni/

Shi'i, and/or Zaydi (Huthi today) gives us any insight into their future actions is begging for trouble.

And yet, this is precisely how Egyptian occupation administrators and subsequent "reconciliation" governments led by 'Abd al-Karim Iryani (and occasionally Nu'man or 'Amri) operated. The result of trying to placate "the tribes" as well as the "modernists" was a government entirely subordinate to the whims of political entrepreneurs who, as today, protect their categorical spheres of influence at the expense of operating in distinctively abstruse Yemeni terms. Yemen therefore is permanently subdivided categorically and any, often imposed, foreign intervention, be it for "development" or diplomatic arbitration, requires that the interlocutors are put into distinctive constituencies. Yemen as a sovereign and legal entity is therefore analytically subservient to the divisions that are assumed to always already exist inside the country.

The influence of empire is thus assured. A fragmented and mutually hostile ruling class relies on its ability to upset all efforts to unify Yemen. In the rest of this study I will read this dynamic as the "rot remains," as Ann L. Stoler (2016: 336–79) called the legacy of fallen colonial states, a gift from the Egyptian occupation and the war it spurred. The Egyptian legacy, in other words, has influenced Yemen's subsequent decades of chaos. It has especially influenced the valiant, if ultimately frustrated, resistance against empire.

CONCLUSION

The conspiracy against the imamate by progressive agents of change was doomed in part because of the failure to appreciate the fluidity of political possibilities in Yemen. The fragility of all coalitions temporarily forged meant the investment in overthrowing the Hamid al-Din regime, hostile to both the KSA/Britain and by 1961 Egypt, was not too difficult to stage but nearly impossible to sustain. The coup of September 26, 1962, just ignited greater instability in North Yemen.

If charitable, we can catalogue the intervention as a miscalculation on the part of those who planned it. For those soon to enter a spiraling conflict, Cairo's move (pushed by Anwar Sadat, whose sister married into Yemeni politics) proved an opportunity to forever subordinate Yemen. It was a gift, in other words, for those frustrated by a history of Yemeni resistance to empire. To those doing the planning, the war was not supposed to happen. But it did, in large part because those who sought to instigate regime change,

or at least capitalize on it, failed to appreciate just how deeply intertwined the imamate was in society and how short-term calculations would lead many to stand up and fight on its behalf. The planners also misread the contingencies emerging from any endured resistance, especially if this offered other interested parties, like the British and their on again, off again Saudi allies, a chance to secure influence over a previously inaccessible political theatre. In this context, those otherwise marginal foreign interests seeking to undermine the regime of antiglobalism par excellence proceeded to capitalize on a window of opportunity, eventually creating a menagerie of political opportunists whom subsequent generations of Yemenis would fail to manage.

The story is thus that of opportunistic alliances that amount to successfully selling oneself as the solution to problems those hoping to secure influence over Yemen had created. Egypt in 1962 stepped into Yemen's trap, in part at least thanks to the coaxing of local allies like Baydani, who most likely fraudulently sold their influence over Yemenis fatigued with "the Zaydis" too well. Nasser's gamble (or better still, Sadat's bluff, with American foreknowledge) was but another case of some Yemenis marketing their own relative significance, a con job that remains a career choice in the Middle East, from Syria's "moderate opposition," Yemen's own *Islah* crowd populated by MB apparatchiks, to those riding the Hadi coattail in exile since 2015. In the 1960s, this form of political entrepreneurialism led to well-intentioned idealists hearing what they wanted to believe could be a true revolutionary wave just waiting for the Egyptians, Iraqis, or surrogates of empire. Tragically, the result was an unwelcomed invasion and a war that lasted until at least 1970. The parallels to what happened in 2015 (and, as we will see in chapter 5, 1994 and 2009 as well) must enter future analyses of Yemen.

The perpetual quest for local, regional, and transregional power in contemporary Yemen gravitates around constituencies that are constantly adjusting to local possibilities. Nothing is certain in Yemeni politics, with few exceptions, and one's ideology is amendable to the tidal swings of global politics. The result is that local power is both precarious and constantly in need of reinforcement through means other than the threat of violence. In the next chapter, we discover how frustrated globalist interests began to understand this and adopted new methods to economically integrate both North and South Yemen into the larger world. A new era of invasive "humanitarianism" was just beginning, with Egypt's occupation regime providing the unexpected roots to a reanimated campaign to destroy Yemen, this time by way of modernization and development.⁴⁸

FOUR

Wrong from the Start

MODERNIZATION AND DEVELOPMENT AND THE VIOLENCE THEY SPUN

Yemen's Fight is My Fight. Yemen's Revolution is our Revolution.

JAMAL ABD AL-NASSER, Port Said, December 23, 1962

INTRODUCTION

Striving to break free from the stranglehold of capitalist colonialism, peoples of the Third World increasingly sought to unite to resist the traps of the Cold War. Along with others from the newly emerging postcolonial states, Jamal 'Abd-al-Nasser of Egypt joined a new generation of leaders aiming to liberate the non-Western world from the shackles of diplomatic marginality, economic servitude, and racial violence. It was the 1955 Bandung Conference that brought together those most charismatic Afro-Asian leaders of recently decolonized peoples, instilling a sense of possibility in the middle of the Cold War. The photogenic meetings in Indonesia, riding a wave of stunning confidence derived from their momentary independence from the confines of partisanship demanded by the Cold War, signaled hope to the world (Prashad 2008).

Sadly, the very sense of promise emanating from diverse intellectual circles also blinded would-be revolutionaries to the fact that their programs often served as pillars of the very colonial edifice they were attempting to topple. In what became a quick chain of setbacks, contradictions, and outright betrayals of the spirit of the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM), some of the proponents of what was supposed to liberate Third World peoples projected the very same economic authoritarianism against which they fought.

Central to the betrayal was a missionary-like zeal for "development." Implicit in Marxist-inspired campaigns to change the world was the idea that "traditional" peoples like those found in Yemen blunted historical

inevitably. Egypt's war in Yemen was in this respect, in the name of progress and justice, an attempt at forcefully integrating a previously independent agrarian people into the global economy. For would-be modernizers, be they self-declared capitalists or revolutionaries, the 1962 coup and the resulting war proffered possibilities for larger global gain. The task below is to make sense of these blurry lines of causality that caught Yemenis inhabiting this different web of politics.¹

Framed in the euphemisms of a new era, Egypt's "brotherly" intervention in Yemen opened channels of globalist penetration earlier denied by men ardently distrustful of "modernity." The resulting eight years of war structurally reoriented North Yemen toward the global economy. Most importantly over the long term was the introduction of policies the IMF, World Bank, and other UN agencies advocated throughout the 1960s. Piggybacking on Egypt's occupation, these "multilateral" organizations established, through invasive "aid packages," the kinds of institutions that would over the next thirty years facilitate the economic subordination of heretofore "isolated" North Yemen (Latham 2011). These efforts, however, were constantly sabotaged as Yemenis openly defied the interests of global finance capital by pitting rival foreign agents of this forced "modernization" campaign against each other. As a result, both Egypt and the KSA failed to insinuate "progress" into North Yemen, a resiliency that should illuminate why the parallels to the current intervention by globalist henchmen should not be ignored.

This chapter charts the unbending Yemeni resistance to "progress" well into the 1970s, a stubborn embrace of local values that exposes the problem for those Bretton Woods institutions seeking to implement modern development programs in still-independent rural societies. To successfully integrate Yemen into the global economy required the blind trust and credulity on the part of Yemeni "clients." Yemenis were expected to ignore the political consequences of installing the most basic of requirements in the modernization manifesto: a strong central state and economy exposed to the larger world. Ostensibly global capital required a compliant state willing to enforce progress on an uprooted, and thus economically vulnerable, politically fragmented society. Impossible under the imams, such a subordination and ultimate incorporation into the global regime of plunder could not have happened without the Egyptian occupation starting in late 1962 and the cooperation of a tank commander by the name of 'Ali Abdullah Saleh.

THE EGYPTIAN LEGACY

Regarding those who ultimately sided with (or were coopted by) Egypt in its battle between “conservative forces” and “progressives,” one gets the sense their ambitions conflicted with the war’s objectives. With rare exception, Yemenis did not wish for occupation, and it is clear Egyptian strategists understood this. Already by the early months of 1962, perhaps sensing change would come soon, prominent Yemenis drew up something they called the National Charter (NC). The NC appropriated the language of the period, wishing to reduce the class distinctions that persisted in Yemen, while advancing the struggle to liberate South Yemen from British rule. At the same time, drafters demanded a strong national army, modeled after Egypt’s but mediated by the “true spirit of Islam,” testament to the fact that many in Yemen believed more developed Arab societies abandoned their moral principles in return for the delights of modernization (Halliday 2001: 193–95).

This skepticism about Egypt’s values certainly reflected in the reaction to the arrival of Egyptian forces later that year. Even those with an ideological affinity for the larger revolutionary cause were not convinced that Nasser’s military occupation constituted a positive development. The warning bells rang almost immediately as both the Soviets and the Kennedy administration eagerly supported Nasser’s Yemen adventure (Gerges 1995). As Cold War rivals lauded the stated goals of the occupation to promote a strong centralized state that could impose “reforms” specifically targeting “tradition,” the imprints of the Nasser regime’s global reach would soon be everywhere in North Yemen’s cities. In the end, it was a globalist regime through planeloads of UN staff that mobilized popular Nasserism to provide cover for the project to subordinate Yemen.

Wasting no time, the newly minted Yemen Arab Republic (YAR) secured membership to various international bodies while the Soviet Union and soon after the US offered diplomatic recognition.² This initial support gave Nasser’s men the mandate to build a new, fully integrated North Yemen despite the initial panic from KSA and Britain.

Ultimately the YAR under Egyptian tutelage and the UN failed because it constituted but a shell of a government, the instruments of a real, transformative and, what many had hoped, modernizing state were all but forgotten with the war. Worse, instead of benefiting from an alliance with a fellow revolutionary state, the “progressive” Egyptians acted like old-school imperialist

occupiers. Again instructive for our reading events in Yemen today, a side effect of the occupation and the political economy around it was the emergence of competing factions whose rival embrace of Arab nationalism mirrored that which pitted Syrian/Iraqi Ba'athist against the Egyptians. In this respect, all the factions participating in this war proved ideologically malleable.

One important faction, called Nasserists in the literature, initially proved eager to ingratiate their homeland's new globally minded guardians. Unfortunately, these "naïve" Yemenis ended up being abused in Egyptian technocratic talk as peasants and tribesmen (Schmidt 1968: 85–87).³ Realizing only too late that Western values (corporate colonialism draped in progress) reached even the Nasserist idealists, many erstwhile Yemeni republicans eventually conceded that they should have listened to their imams.⁴

EGYPT'S COLONIALIST TURN

Much blame awaited those who idealized the personality behind Egypt's power grab in the Middle East. Of course, most progressives imagined Egypt through a prism filtered by Radio Cairo broadcasts and the laudatory stories appearing in local print media about the charismatic Nasser as the natural champion of Arab Nationalism. Egypt was also seen, thanks to slick marketing via a thriving film industry, as the closest thing to a modern, developed state in the region (Schochat 1983). When Syrians eventually revolted against Egypt's "revolutionary project," the rest of the world should have been watching more critically.⁵

The biggest problem was an Egyptian arrogance permeating all levels of the country's interactions with the rest of the Arab world. In particular, the Egyptian technocratic zealots eager to implement modernization strategies they learned about from college textbooks proved incapable of working with partner Arab societies. By embracing the discourse around Egypt's special role, most of the well-intentioned agents of Nasserism proved blissfully ignorant that their efforts often replicated those of the old powerful families ruling Egypt before the "revolution" of 1952 or worse still, European imperialists (Mayfield 1971: 156–63).

Indeed, Egypt's "revolutionary" state became the infrastructure for an entrenched elite that was wise enough to read into the Free Officer's Movement an opportunity in face of the inevitable land reform and nationalizations. In many ways, the enhanced state power garnered by the populism of Nasser

became an extension of a modified oligarch's power.⁶ The war in Yemen was thus as much an extension of domestic Egyptian politics at the height of a crisis within the UAR as a charitable gesture to help initiate progress for a "brother-Arab" state.

In the end, Nasser's populist dictatorship was framed ideologically to serve as succor to a dangerously downtrodden population while proving equally hostile to those socialists aiming to redistribute the oligarchy's wealth. That is to say, Arab nationalists actually worked to further redistribute wealth into the hands of a select group of already powerful Egyptians. In the early days of the new regime in Cairo, it was the forced nationalization of formally privately owned lands, especially those properties owned by non-compliant foreigners, that opened the window for some Egyptian elites (Aoude 1994: 3–14; Kerr 1962). As with most other programs of development before and since, be it in the form of a xenophobic outburst ripping apart the fabric of Egyptian commercial life or the blind embrace of abstract Arab nationalism as applied in occupied Yemen, the real revolution was in the expanded power of oligarchs, the foreign corporations they represented, and political entrepreneurs in and out of the region.⁷

No matter how much sympathetic scholars tried to suggest otherwise, the Egyptian regime of the late 1950s was following a route that several of the most notorious ideologues of modernization set out for Egypt at the expense of its Arab comrades. Eager to promote US ascendancy, Daniel Lerner, Walt Rostow, and their Cold War colleagues (Manfred Halpern) were enthralled by what they saw in postcoup Egypt. Indeed, as evident from their several visits to the region, many of the superficial accoutrements of modernity were beginning to inundate Egypt (Latham 2011: 75–77). As Egyptians bought TVs, wore Western clothing, and drank Pepsi, the link that many US advocates of modernization made with the principled investment in schools and enhancement in state power suggested that better times were coming.⁸

For Egyptian partisans of modernization, it was edifying to hear praise from W. W. Rostow who advocated the fostering of national markets to defeat communism at its own game (Mehmet 2002: 70–72). Nasser himself was enthralled by Rostow's ideas articulated in *Stages of Economic Growth* (1960). As Egypt's largest newspaper, *al-Abram*, published key points of the thesis in a serial, Egyptians could see with their own eyes that the new forms of governance that specifically aimed to change "backward," "traditional societies" found in rural Egypt were working. Here the psychological handicap of constantly seeking "Western" affirmation led to adopting especially

brutal policies in North Yemen by 1962. As such, Egyptians were prepared to perform their progressive and modern duty: export Egypt's own successful integration into the world economy to places such as Yemen. In this context, like missionaries of another era, educated Egyptians harnessed the powers afforded by the modern state to bring an improved life to those who still did not know any better (Mitchell 2002).

Of course, modernization and most development schemes of the era qualified "growth" by the extent to which formerly inaccessible sources of wealth production became part of the larger global mechanisms serving the Atlantic powers (Hah and Schneider 1968). The imamate in Yemen, in this frame of analysis, was almost criminally "traditional" because, in part, it regulated the kind of economic interactions Yemenis maintained with the outside world. Perhaps ironically, both the Zaydi conservatives backing the imams and progressive members of the FYM most likely to embrace Nasserism and "modernity" initially agreed that those outsiders clamoring to gain access to North Yemen were poisoned by un-Islamic materialism and thus entirely unwelcome. Yemen, in other words, would not surrender easily.

Enter the modern Egyptian proxy. As with rural Egypt in the late 1950s, transforming places like "undeveloped" Yemen was the modern Egyptians' manifest destiny.⁹ Americans appreciated Egypt's potential. Indeed, already in the late Eisenhower period, but especially with the rise of Kennedy's new generation of Cold War strategists, Americans viewed Egypt's revolutionary potential in this modernist context as firstly an important buffer to the expansion of the Soviet Bloc, both in the Suez region and the larger Red Sea and Middle East, but then also as a huge new market for US corporations. As we will explore more below, as much as US development aid agencies (and multilateral agencies dominated by them) were eager to push US standards of living on the rest of the world because it was good for the charitable soul, it was also very good for business.¹⁰

With the subsequent push to make Egypt the region's hegemon and enforcer of the kind of modernization benefitting US corporations as much as local political oligarchies, we can interpret the overtures of pan-Arabism as cynical populism played in tunes to sedate the likely renewed backlash to this new era of exploitation. This betrayal played out earlier with the creation of the UAR in 1958. The same exploitative forces pillaging much of Egypt's newly expanded agricultural capacity, investment in factories, cheap electricity, and a pliable military leadership was greedily directed first at Syria and then Yemen (Jankowski 2002: 161–73; Kerr 1971: 11–25). In short, Egypt

exported its exploiting class in the form of “aid,” laying the groundwork for subsequent assaults on Yemen’s economic sovereignty as demanded by the USA, UN, and IMF.

RETHINKING NASSERISM AND GLOBALISM

Nasser’s project in the 1960s, far from being hostile to the liberal economic agenda imposed on the larger Third World in the form of modernization, promoted an Egyptian version of the globalist program that impoverished targeted, once functioning agrarian societies (Amin 1992: 92–93). Egyptians hoped to extend such programs inducing “downward mobility” in North Yemen, ostensibly turning a once independent agrarian society into a guinea pig for “development” projects expected to assure long-term Egyptian political and economic hegemony (Rahmy 1983: 34).

In partnership with the UN, authorities freshly arrived from Cairo immediately established something called the Revolutionary Command Council (RCC). The role of the RCC was to impose a state with a formal infrastructure modeled after Egypt’s. This entailed a full portfolio of ministries that could not have possibly been manned by Yemenis. With personnel shortages and patronizing Egyptian assumptions that even those few who came to work were not capable, within months Yemen became but a mere province of larger Egypt.¹¹ Wishing to maintain some semblance of propriety, the Egyptian-appointed governors of Yemen set up a legal framework, taking the form of preliminary and then transitional constitutions that lasted for the rest of the 1960s (Rahmy 1983: 249). Unfortunately for North Yemen, this legal apparatus allowed corrupt officials to pillage the funds beginning to flow from now eager donor nations.¹²

In such an environment, the RCC had practically free reign. What it did with that power is revealing in that it supports the characterization of development aid being strategically used to build the capacity of the recipient state to collect as much surplus from the population’s productivity as possible (Hudson 1971; Hayter 1971). Indeed, the first year of reforms installed by the Egyptians and the army of technocrats and advisors sent by UN agencies was to develop this wealth transfer function of state. Through direct and indirect taxation, through a functioning centralized banking system, North Yemen’s surplus wealth was targeted. As we can safely identify in “capacity-building” schemes promoted by USAID, UN, and IMF programs since Egypt’s global

friendly occupation of the YAR, such schemes helped maximize the amount of Yemeni savings ending up in off-shore capital markets.

This task fell to the hastily established state bank and its partner Bank Misr (which handled all finances of the military operations). These institutions, with branches set up in most cities, immediately tried to supplant the old ways of local merchants. Both criminalizing traditional commercial practices by way of new tax laws and forcing newly regulated markets to funnel productivity into Bank Misr-backed institutions, the regime aimed to maintain a firm control of prices and ostensibly monopolize trade (Burrowes 1987: 24–27).¹³

The strategy to break apart the economically powerful, and thus politically dangerous, local “oligarchs” formally controlling the markets was to force them to interact with the occupation regime directly. To realize more comprehensively this reorientation of the Yemeni economy the administration imposed a currency that included a significantly revalued minted silver riyal and for the first time, paper.¹⁴ As all transactions would be steered through public corporations under Egyptian management that then offered exclusively commercial concessions to Egyptian companies, those traditional merchant elites would have to politically demonstrate their subordination or lose out entirely. The result would be a redirecting of funds through Egypt that intended to abolish trading monopolies once belonging to families linked to the imam.¹⁵

The Yemen Bank for Reconstruction and Development (YBRD) grew in this period and in theory worked with the Yemeni currency board to serve as a central bank (Attar 1964: 266–69).¹⁶ The idea here was to help steer the distribution of funds while also stabilizing exchange rates.¹⁷ In fact, until the early 1970s, the YBRD was the only commercial and investment bank in YAR. Other “state-owned” corporations created to serve empire during the Egyptian period included the National Tobacco and Match Company, a guaranteed revenue source; the Yemen Foreign Trade Company, which during the war assured that all imports and exports went through Egyptian ports and were processed through their own customs services in order to collect fees; the Yemen Salt Industry Company; the Yemen Fuels Company; and the Yemen Pharmaceutical Products Company (Burrowes 1987: 24–25).¹⁸ In what was previously a decentralized and largely state free society, these monopolies served the purpose of redirecting power toward a “modern” state at the expense of Yemenis ability to manage their commercial affairs independent of empire.

In the end, the YAR government, which had difficulty collecting revenues from a war-torn, territorially truncated country, was but a conduit for redis-

tributing Yemen's wealth to Egypt. The system ultimately bred a class of bureaucrats who had a vested interest in perpetuating the plunder. A precursor to much of what constitutes development aid today, the Yemenis discovered Egyptian and UN assistance meant gutting the country of whatever it had to offer. When the Egyptians finally left, Yemen inherited banks with no gold reserves, a heavily damaged infrastructure, enormous debts to global "lending" agencies, and an impending famine.

A STATE OF CHANGE: THE IRYANI ERA, 1967–1974

Moving out of the shadow of its Egyptian overlords, by 1967 a technocratic workforce slowly inserted itself in the economically ruined YAR. As its constituents sifted through the rubble and started to fill in the shell of a government that Egypt had left behind, they still evoked modernization, faithfully repeating the claims and promises it offered. The young, educated Yemenis who found themselves working within a new Iryani-led government, often still under the advisory supervision of the UN that stayed behind, not only proved to be quick students but also soon demonstrated a strong nationalism deemed obstructive by their foreign guardians.

With the mess of Egypt's occupation always in the back of their minds, some prominent Yemenis tried to clean the country up by mediating between the zealotry around modernization still circulating among them and the political needs of the new reconciliation government. This effort began with President Abd al-Rahman al-Iryani's establishment of a Republic Council in 1970, a well-meaning effort to equitably distribute the spoils of any reformed, functioning state the Yemeni political elite—both Republicans and "traditional" shaykhs—could create after Egypt's occupation (Deffarge and Troeller 1969: 221–53; O'Ballance 1971: 189–202). Members of the Council included Qadi 'Abd al-Rahman al-Iryani, Ahmad Muhammad Nu'man, Muhamad 'Ali 'Uthman, and, lurking in the shadows, Shaykh Abdullah Husayn al-Ahmar. Unfortunately, the concessions given to the al-Ahmar clan in particular undermined the Council's ultimate objectives to bring political and thus economic stability. This failure induced the breakup of the government in 1974 (Burrowes 1987: 28–56).¹⁹

Revealingly while power was distributed to members of the Republic Council, the Iryani government facilitated the drawing up of a constitution that, among other things, reinitiated YAR's stealthy integration into a global

financial regime. It was the creation of certain governing agencies, among them an improved Ministry of Finance that facilitated the creation of the Central Bank of Yemen (Burrowes 1987: 40–42, 46–49). Officially the Central Bank would enable commercial banking and thus better manage the promised influx of funds from donor countries. This development proved important over the next few years as already there were a few donors, especially the USA, eager to “help” steer this defiantly independent country into the global economy.²⁰ To manage the newfound aid streaming in, upon the insistence of donors the Yemeni government established a Central Planning Organization (CPO) in 1972 (Burrowes 1987: 46–49).

It did not take long before the CPO became home to planeloads of expensive advisors whose primary task was to write a national development plan. One problem with drawing up such a development scheme was the particularities of the Yemeni economy. Long understood as “most underdeveloped” because Yemen was composed of communities living in small rural settlements, Yemen’s cities were to be the core areas receiving most of the development money. The central reason for the initial neglect of rural Yemen was that economic development models equated urbanization (and thus encouraged the depopulation of “underproductive” villages) with modernization. The Cold War context also helps account for this seemingly odd decision to neglect Yemen’s countryside.

As noted in academic papers written by disciples of Rostow and Lerner, rural populations were deemed more difficult to police. North Yemen, highlighted in the growing number of US-government-funded ethnographies of the country, was predominately an agrarian society. Its economic “backwardness” and penchant to remain impervious to central state rule meant “developing” the country by inducing migration to the cities, just as in Egypt and in Southeast Asia. Be it through the increasing shift to a cash-based economy (where rural people could only buy goods and services, and pay taxes, using money issued by the central state) or systematic flooding of Yemen’s markets with cheap “donated” food such as US wheat, almost all foreign aid to North Yemen was directed to inducing such urbanization.

By the early 1970s, it seemed this classic “development” trajectory had been implemented successfully in North Yemen. Indeed, Yemeni villagers by the hundreds of thousands flocked to the oil-related jobs emerging in the 1970s boom economies of the Gulf and KSA. Yemenis desperate for cash to feed families back home were availing themselves to be the cheap workforce for Arabia (Swanson 1979; Halliday 1977). And yet, contingencies arose and

the consequences of this dramatic structural change created new synergies of local power that continued to upset empire's long-term agenda. Unexpectedly, the resulting inflow of savings from workers created a boom in rural North Yemen. The net inflow of money, almost entirely in Saudi riyals or precious metals, constituted a significant, but unanticipated, shift in society (Carapico and Myntti 1991).

For one, the influx of savings enabled rural communities to remain detached from any development program advocated by the IMF, World Bank, and the CPO technocrats. Instead of their surplus cash going to the larger economy, rural Yemenis not only continued to save their earnings in traditional ways (for dowries, rainy days) but when they did spend it, it was reinvested in local projects. Such economic behavior frustrated the underlying agenda of globalist agencies that had envisioned both a massive migration to cities and a net export of Yemen's wealth as city dwellers adopted more "rational" practices. Instead, Yemenis remained locked to their land (even those who worked overseas sent their earnings directly to their villages) and spent these remittances locally. This stubborn "traditional" economy assured North Yemen's peasants their economic independence, something empire could not countenance (Fergany 1982).

Because Yemenis were, consciously or not, defying "rational economic practices" advocated by modernization experts, the primary agenda for the CPO and allied government agencies necessarily shifted. Their new task was to figure out how to redirect Yemenis' savings into state coffers. The idea was, once in state-run institutions or state bank accounts, the wealth could eventually be reinvested in institutions controlled by globalist forces. Since Yemenis refused to become middle-class consumers, embrace "universal values," and stop having children, institutions representing empire pressured the Yemeni government to introduce a new generation of "reforms" in the mid-1970s. Once again, but under a different set of goals, "development" experts attempted to assert some "order" into Yemen's economy. As in the past, there would be Yemeni pushback.

Government employees with strong anti-imperialist convictions appreciated that the only possibility of realizing sustainable development was to let rural communities figure out themselves how to invest their savings. Many looked to socialist South Yemen, which had taken a hard line in respect to imposing self-investment schemes after securing independence in 1967 (Lackner 1985: 176–79; Brehony 2011). Alas, despite pleas from within the Ministry of Agriculture, those holding power in the North Yemeni

transitional government adopted the UN programs.²¹ The attempt to impose these development “road maps” would have dire consequences in Yemen.

Meanwhile, Iryani’s policy of reinforcing the power of those “traditional” actors who enjoyed the unequivocal support of the KSA added fuel to a fire among a growing rebellious cadre of progressive technocrats (Malone 1971: 541–48). For those around the conservative Iryani, caving to the KSA was politically expedient considering just how much power Egypt had given these rural leaders in return for their neutrality during the long war (Witty 2001; Ferris 2013: 181–90). Ironically, in time it became clear that these same actors Egypt helped empower demanded a central role in any state-building (and thus development) program. The rent they expected to draw from any cooperation quickly made it impossible for the otherwise cooperative technocrats to accomplish anything through the modernization campaign promoted by the international community.²²

Here lies the paradox of globalist imperialism’s contradictory policy. Some of Yemen’s most entrenched conservative forces were the same rural leaders now expected to cooperate with the reconciliation government led by Iryani who had also signaled a desire to develop his country per globalist guidelines. The Americans initially encouraged this seemingly contradictory policy, claiming the “innovative recruitment of tribal shaykhs into positions of authority, and reasserted Islamic principles as the proper foundation of government” helped restore legitimacy to the central government (Stookey 1974: 410). And yet, if this is what the Americans sought—the restoration of the “collective voice of the ulama”—the question arises: what exactly differed from this government and that under the imam?

This is a nuance to globalist imperialism missing in most analysis of the region. Stability is not the ultimate target; it is the reversal of Yemen’s independence which the imams cultivated. Thanks to Egypt’s brutal intervention, Yemenis’ ability to negotiate with the larger world weakened considerably. Iryani’s government was given the mandate to bring peace to Yemen, but only if that entailed tying the short-term fate of the country to powerful interests backed by the KSA and the Americans.

ENTER HAMDI AND THE LDA

But this was Yemen and such infringements imposed by the KSA did not sit well. In June 1974, a bloodless coup led by Lt. Col. Ibrahim Muhammad al-

Hamdi (1943–1977) initiated a new track that at once reinvigorated the drive to develop rural Yemen advocated by socialist-leaning technocrats. The pretext for this coup was an overtly assertive KSA, echoed in Riyadh’s chief apologists, ‘Abdullah Hajri and members of the al-Ahmar clan.²³ Hamdi’s sudden rise echoed the ongoing political fight inside North Yemen between those supporting the Saudis, a coterie of foreign progressive activists linked to Baghdad, and the rival Bakil confederation.

To the extent this was true, at the time of Hamdi’s intervention, rumors circulated that loyalists to the Iraqi Ba’athists were plotting to kill conservative members in the Iryani coalition. Catching wind of these moves, rivals scrambled.²⁴ In a replay of 1962 perhaps, two very different sets of Yemeni agents with different visions for the future raced to secure the tattered shell of the Yemeni state. Hamdi and his men got there first.

After securing the government, the men around Hamdi set up on June 13, 1974, a Command Council (CC) and installed the “Corrective Movement” to stymie the al-Ahmar (and Saudi) countercoup elements (Burrowes 1987: 57–88). While these maneuvers were crucial, the long-term success of the Hamdi coup is not possible to explain unless also appreciating how his “Corrective Movement” catered to those previously mentioned technocrats who envisioned a different path for North Yemen.

The CC set up by Col. Hamdi immediately froze the al-Ahmar-controlled assembly, sending anyone with the ability to challenge authority into exile.²⁵ Importantly, three members of the ascendant CC, the *de facto* rulers of the YAR for the next three years, were members or allies of Sinan Abu Luhum who was accused in some circles of being closely linked to Iraq. An important personality in the Bakil confederation, originally Sinan Abu Luhum had been appointed governor of the port region of Hudaydah by Iryani. Thanks to the posting, Luhum eventually dominated trade from the coast to the highlands. Now in a short-lived partnership with Luhum, the new Hamdi government coalesced around a secular orientation that was also “fundamentally Zaydi” (Stookey 1974: 416). Stookey’s fixation on the Zaydi aspects of the new powers is internally contradicted, however, when it is taken into account that actually it was “Shafi’i” merchants from Ibb and Ta’iz who thrived under Luhum’s governorship. That this Shafi’i merchant bourgeoisie also enjoyed old Adeni ties allowed for their transnational trade links to translate into power in the YAR by the 1973 global oil boom.

The coup of 1974, in other words, may have not been coincidental to the fact Luhum and his merchant allies were now anticipating entirely new

economic perspectives. Sometimes that included doing business with the KSA or other newly independent oil monarchies. The need to frame Yemen's politics constantly in sectarian terms, therefore, seems in retrospect counterproductive and indeed a distraction. The ultimate irony is that Yemenis (both Zaydi and Shafi'i) had far more direct influence in the Gulf and Saudi political economy of boom and bust cycles for the next forty years than any crude attempt by the US/Saudi axis at securing influence inside Yemen by way of funding Islamic parties or the al-Ahmar clan. Evidence of this is in the short-lived Hamdi government.²⁶

The measures taken by the CC immediately defanged Saudi abilities to counter. In the meantime, reports suggest Hamdi was quite the charismatic and effective orator, catching many by surprise and immediately grabbing the support of a larger public, desperate for a new champion after so many years of dysfunctional government and overt Saudi influence peddling and cronyism.²⁷ Diplomatically Hamdi's government directly reached out to the USA, and thus put pressure on the Saudis to give this push for stability and order a chance. Such moves reveal both an astute reader of global affairs and appreciation that Riyadh could be coerced despite the oil boom.²⁸ Amid this mix was a new regional boom economy that had direct consequences for Yemenis, both those profiting from the massive uptick in oil prices that resulted in new construction and service contracts, and the poorer Yemenis who migrated to work for these ex-pat Yemeni companies.²⁹

In North Yemen's domestic politics, the key was a balanced cabinet, with enough "conservatives" getting their hands on marginal portfolios, and the open embrace of the socialist-leaning technocrats, who had finally found their man. The subsequent infiltration of the Central Planning Organization (CPO) with like-minded technocrats highlighted the intended direction of this new "Corrective" regime. Here we begin to see an essential partnership that linked domestic politics with a global political economy of resistance. Newly trained nationalistic bureaucrats started their slow takeover and denied for another generation empire access to Yemen.³⁰

With all the discipline the task required, Hamdi embraced *au courant* modernization strategies, but with a distinctly Yemeni twist. Crucially, Hamdi's consolidation of state power in respect to the military and some core government agencies took its form at the expense of those "traditional" actors demanding rent in return for their compliance. At the same time, however, and to the chagrin of the most rigid modernization advocates, Hamdi also embraced a novel idea that lent support to unleashing Yemen's economic

productive capacity via a truly unique Yemeni form of “self-help” organization, the Local Development Associations (LDA).³¹ With these locally managed development cooperatives located almost exclusively in the countryside, the YAR under Hamdi would unleash an early form of grassroots soft power that had the potential of revolutionizing rural development schemes throughout the world.

Perhaps the most important factor was just how independent the LDAs were from the central state. Able to exclusively access the potential tax revenue under their jurisdictions, the committees created from members of the community could also solicit external funds and loans (almost exclusively drawn from local, nonbanking sources) independently of the central state and bank now formally connected to the outside world. What really set these committees apart, however, was the fact that the biggest source of funds to help build water wells, roads, other infrastructure, or collectively invest in new revenue-producing agricultural projects was the remittances of the community’s men working abroad.³²

Clearly, Hamdi and his close allies understood that the LDAs promised to politically uproot what had been a dangerous entrenchment of so-called tribal shaykhs just recently given a lease on life. Hamdi realized that efforts to pry YAR free of the grip of the KSA necessitated a vibrant rural economy that made rational use of the country’s greatest economic assets, its hard-working people. If Yemen’s rural population could sustain an autonomous commercial relationship with larger Yemen, and remain financially the heart of the rural economy, there would no longer be a need for once-powerful intermediaries who worked for empire.

The numbers registered of the period’s economic performance are staggering: More than a million hard-working Yemeni migrants funneled savings from their salaries to their communities, often ending up assisting to fund an LDA project. More than remittance funds, the unprecedented use of the LDAs’ legal right to draw from local *zakat* (the annual tax Muslims surrender to pay for communal needs) collections helped villages finance the development of their communities with minimal state (and more importantly foreign) help. Crucially, by the mid-1970s these locally run projects constituted a significant portion of the national economy, and local communities owned them.

Such success induced a sudden influx in interest among international development aid organizations. And it is with this crucial episode in postwar North Yemen’s history that we may also begin to appreciate just how negatively a role external actors, especially those with a so-called humanitarian

mandate, play in sabotaging rural people's political and economic independence. As the few early observers noted, these LDAs spurred on an unprecedented period of the kind of development long advocated in the West. Indeed, they were producing results that would make any program manager blush in the larger world. The problem is, the function of development is to integrate rural societies into the larger global economy. In Yemen, success in 1974 meant the very same "traditional" communities long condemned to aggressive social engineering proposals from the modernization advocates remained independent (al-'Awdi 1977).

Contradicting every formulaic program "experts" brought with them to Yemen from the late 1960s onwards, this self-help revolution invariably attracted the negative attention of the international community (World Bank 1981; Green 1975; Samuels 1979). Impudently dismissive, the slew of reports coming out of the much better funded developmental aid programs almost all tried to diminish the enduring value of these programs, complaining they were administratively weak and unprofessional (World Bank 1981; Swanson and Hebert 1981: 25–76). The way USAID consultants, in particular, tried to make sense of this Yemeni "anomaly" in terms of its "lack of oversight and cooperation with the government" revealed how much global powers invested in using development aid to structurally transform the world to service their needs—Yemenis' well-being be damned!

The problem was Yemenis with Hamdi in charge were again impervious to coercion. Opting for local funds to build roads, water wells, and schools, North Yemenis were not borrowing from the IMF to build the infrastructure needed to help investors pillage the country's mineral wealth. The areas of concern for scholars and officials of the various developmental aid organizations facing this reality are especially revealing. According to the reports drawn up by the international community, Yemenis' considerable savings drawn from remittances remained almost entirely within an indigenous financial system. With only 8 percent of the Yemeni population using banks in the late 1970s and most savings stored outside banks entirely, Yemen's informal economy remained invulnerable to a global system of monetary policy (Ross 1980).³³ Even at the heart of an oil-induced boom in the mid-1970s, with the Yemeni economy restructured to importing almost everything consumed by a growing population, less than 25 percent of all import business was financed by formal commercial banks. In other words, Yemen's vibrant economy was largely managed and lubricated outside any formal system that had strings attached to the Bretton Woods mechanisms.³⁴

To outsiders, this meant the productivity of rural cooperatives “failed” to reach the necessary channels of incorporation into the global economy, a defiance of development economics orthodoxy of the time. The necessary lie in the negative press that followed was that rural communities did not have the capacity to effectively and efficiently manage their land, and, in the case of Yemen, cash and gold savings assets. With upwards of 90 percent of all remitted money circulated through local, informal financial businesses, Yemenis’ wealth remained in Yemen and used in ways that almost entirely excluded a role for the major global mechanisms. The implication was if such a cooperative model were ever instituted in Africa, the Soviet/Chinese and Western development programs, and thus empire, would go out of business.

While under Hamdi’s watch, money was certainly to be made from the massive growth in construction and consumption but the likely winners of these supply contracts were trading families with historic links to Yemen. Not much room for the Bechtels, General Electrics, and Teers in that environment. Worse, unlike the Saudis, far from developing with a growing dependency on the IMF, World Bank, or other agencies, Yemenis were heading to a thriving future without surrendering their hard-earned savings to the global economy.

Many in the cooperative movement and around Col. Hamdi recognized the patriotic significance of allowing the LDAs to continue to do the heavy lifting of developing Yemen. These same advocates for rural development that remained autonomous of the programs being pitched by global interests were doing so to satisfy the long-held wish of avoiding precisely the kind of economic subordination demanded by the outside world. In this regard, Hamdi’s government refused to move forward with those prescriptions drawn up by the World Bank, IMF, and scholars paid for by USAID (El Mallakh 2014: 46).

Although the cooperatives movement is treated in the literature as an economic phenomenon, it also carries political and social implications. LDAs provided a nucleus for an alternative system of administration that directed socioeconomic development to service constituencies in ways that assured their functional independence from any larger governing body. The LDA committees, for instance, played several political roles, including arbitrating group disputes. Elections to select representatives to the LDA administrative mechanisms that covered communities throughout the highlands in North and Middle Yemen suggest they also supported nascent democratic trends in local politics free of Western interference. In theory, a community could elect representatives from the village to the general assembly of the LDA, a body

that consisted of forty to fifty members. In turn, this body elected a president, secretary-general, and treasurer for three-year terms (Cohen, Hebert, Lewis, and Swanson 1981).

Despite the democratic potential, in some places a dominant patriarch's claim to authority infringed on the deliberative possibilities of the LDA. To address this decentralization of power Hamdi's presidency instituted a national body to link all LDAs known as the Confederation of Yemen Development Associations. This helped supervise LDA management and further unlock the power of communities while liberating them from the often-debilitating claims of authority from what some would call feudal residues. Clearly, this open-minded president who drove around town in a Volkswagen Beetle without an entourage wanted these LDAs to realize their full potential. In many ways, this was Hamdi's passion. It should be noted that before becoming president, Col. Hamdi was head of the LDAs' national organization in 1973. Slowly implemented in a few places before 1974, they boomed under his presidency.

Again, the rapid development of the LDA caught the international development community by surprise, and increasingly concerned them. Hamdi created a favorable environment for development, crucial at a time when much of the Third World simply did not trust the Americans and their invasive programs. The LDA movement held out the promise of grassroots organization nationwide. Even one of the few examples of direct state intervention in the functioning of the LDAs—the 1975 linking of the organizations to a revived Correction Movement, which offered a means to train and place political cadres at all levels of the state—proved to complement, not contradict, the bottom-up nature of the development apparatus (Carapico 1985). Yemen here gave clear space to those citizens otherwise shut out of the global development game. With the central state's money flowing to specifically develop the military and not the locally funded LDAs, the intention was to allow communities to assert more direct control over the country while keeping the state involved as partners, not rivals.

Hamdi's Yemen remained too independent of global influence to last. As noted above, the international community started to complain that those operating the LDAs were not "modern" enough and could not absorb properly all the surplus savings flooding the country via remittances. Rural Yemenis were basically "wasting" money. Worse, the money was handled by money changers who operated outside institutions linked to the global economy. Like Somali "pirates" or Huthi "militias" of the 2000s, the money

changers became criminal in the language of foreign development agencies. In the end, however, the root of all foreign hostility was Yemenis spending their own savings locally.

Even when families receiving the earnings of their loved ones toiling in Kuwait, the KSA, Qatar, or UAE did use their money to buy things, foreigners complained that Yemeni consumption put heavy inflationary pressures on property, food, services, and even labor. Ironically, rural Yemenis could adjust. It was the government employees living on fixed salaries, be they American or Yemeni, who saw their living standards drop. Reports complaining about such inflation thus must be read in this light.³⁵

WITH FRIENDS LIKE THESE: THE GOOD OLE US OF AID

One would think development agencies around the world, operating on the advertised principles of charity and rural prosperity, would be happy for Yemenis developing such an innovative and path-breaking rural development program. Instead, the wealth produced in areas enjoying the greatest concentration of LDAs became the target for structural “capture.” International development agencies with a rapidly changing mandate began to devise new schemes to induce Yemen’s incorporation into the global economy.

The problem was that Yemen was in the middle of a boom, and its political, one could say patriotic, leader wanted his country to remain independent of foreign influence. The question then for those charged with “reforming” Yemen was how to tap into this largely “informal” economic activity and make it work for the global economy. One means of achieving this goal was the co-option of the farming development programs many of the LDAs embraced at the time. Conditions were not, however, ripe for unidirectional exchanges. When, for instance, the UN’s Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) sent a mission to North Yemen in 1955, its members noted a remarkably rich country with a well-developed agricultural base. The tone of their report was both laudatory and deferential. Yemenis did not need the UN’s dictates, but instead needed its willingness to work with them (FAO 1960).

By the 1970s boom, this attitude changed. What were once seen as ancient methods of water management and farming worthy of study fell out of official favor. The same regions once praised became the focus of ridicule and condemnation. Yemenis were now using “backward” techniques and inefficiently

exploited the resource-rich land. In other words, Yemen's peasants, trapped in an ancient world rife with tradition, needed scientific, modern techniques, chemicals and heavy machinery (Tutwiler 1990).³⁶

Again, what changed to account for this shift was not so much Yemen, but the politics around the "experts" charged with engaging the country. If a once productive regime of land usage with the accompanying wealth flowing through the hands of locals was to change, reforms needed the steady hand of a government insisting on involving itself in the daily affairs of citizens. Realizing that YAR had the reputation of being a "weak state" full of fiery, independent-minded "tribesmen," the international community put a new spin on the flood of advice it provided. A new generation of social anthropologists was sent to Yemen to figure out how to steer rural Yemenis in the right direction, softly.

Funded by the Ford and Rockefeller foundations and a still steady flow of government research grants, social scientists and economists influenced by the "Chicago Boys" (Klein 2007: 59–132) were flown into YAR to study what they now called hierarchical societies. In the process of discovering new regions, writing detailed reports on who lived there and how, many of these scholars/informants were charged with figuring out ways to convince these rural communities to cooperate (Parmar 2014: 169–72). Modernization was still the solution to a life under the thumb of regressive, backward, and patriarchal community leaders. One possible weapon to realize this was transforming the relationship these rural Yemenis had with their land. Appreciating this led to an explosion of reports related to land management, communal leadership hierarchies, and farming techniques in North Yemen (Tutwiler 1990).

As argued throughout, intrusive outsiders were in the business of figuring out cost-effective ways of prying Yemen's wealth out of its peoples' hands. The resilience of Yemeni resistance meant empire needed a pretext. Fortunately for them, a drought between 1967 and 1973 increased the already high demand for grain imports and added to the domestic cost-of-living crisis. In no time, the "failure" of Yemeni farmers coincided with new waves of wheat imports (and accompanying researchers) from the USA, subsidized by USAID or other agencies (Almadhagi and Noman 1996: 41, 77).

By 1976, scholars considering YAR's food issues insisted that their Yemeni interlocutors at the Ministry of Agriculture read more IMF and World Bank annual reports on proper land management and pay less attention to admiring their homegrown LDAs. As remembered by an anonymous source

working at the time in the ministry, “rationalization” of land use became a buzzword, meaning the production of “input-intensive” crops should replace traditional ones. The structural transformations of the countryside encouraged by aid agencies added pressure on local authorities, leading to hasty concessions. Within a few years, North Yemenis significantly changed the ways local food went to market, how seeds were distributed, and how the entire rural economy operated financially.

The plan was to create large central markets, denying smaller clusters of villages their autonomy by forcing them to sell their products in concentrated, more regulated centers. While Hamdi was in power, this was not possible. The coup that led to his murder came just in time. Upon Hamdi’s departure in 1977, state and foreign aid agencies began to partner again to build infrastructure for these larger markets (stalls, public toilets, parking space).³⁷ The immediate effect was the undermining of the farmers’ ability to adapt seasonally as local markets suddenly disappeared. Solidifying its gains, USAID then proposed programs to geographically link this now more concentrated regional trade to external forces (Tutwiler 1984).

Now exposed to cheaper imports, advisors pressured farmers to introduce to “underutilized” farm lands more “productive per unit” crops. As the USAID programs sought to develop a marketable yucca tree (a program run by the University of Arizona) or tropical and semitropical fruits perfect for export (their European and Chinese counterparts doing the same), an entirely new calculus was introduced into how locals, and their LDAs, operated.³⁸ Most glaring was the egregious amount of pressure put on LDA committees to convert lands that at the time produced more expensive food products consumed locally to cash crops strictly meant for export. When adopted, again after Hamdi’s assassination, this program did effectively transform parts of Yemen’s rural economy (World Bank 1979: 72–75).³⁹

The early stages of this invasive development took place in targeted zones that seemed ideal for commercial expansion. One of the areas most heavily “researched” was Wadi Zabid (Tesco 1971; Tutwiler 1984). From the 1960s onwards, this vast area extending from the Red Sea coastal plains in Tihama well up into the highlands of Hajjah received an unprecedented amount of attention from foreign researchers. The agencies that claimed ownership to the different projects involving land management, water collection, sorghum production, and even exploring which foreign species would have commercial use in Yemen, all funneled relatively large amounts of money into the area.

One example was the Tihama Development Authority (TDA), sponsored by the Americans and linked to the long-standing Wadi Zabid project (Burrowes 1987: 46). On paper, the TDA's initial aim was to conduct large-scale agricultural experiments, in partnership with the US Department of Agriculture and various agribusiness experts on loan from Kansas or Nebraska. These schemes ultimately aimed to instill an ethos that equated "rural development" with the importation of certain technologies and expertise that only US corporations could provide (Tutwiler 1990). Crucially, some of that money also went to train a small group of Yemenis. At first trained to help tabulate the results of the research, these beneficiaries of scholarships would become the local advocates for the liberalization of Yemeni agriculture, being especially conspicuous after unification in 1990 when they ran many NGOs benefiting from direct foreign support.⁴⁰

Throughout this time Yemenis remained resistant, however. With the Hamdi administration not entirely cooperating, other options slowly took precedence. These were the 1970s, when the CIA and MI6 frequently used local surrogates—"jackals"—to ensure regime compliance throughout Africa, the Middle East and Latin America. Amid this orgy of violence, Hamdi, the charismatic hero of North Yemen's LDA revolution, was assassinated. By the next year empire found their man.

. . .

The arrival of 'Ali Abdallah Saleh in 1978 almost immediately led to the YAR reversing its locally focused development agenda. Saleh's new government sought to insinuate the central state into larger society, ostensibly turning back the push to develop North Yemen from the countryside. Critically, the resulting full-scale exposure of North Yemen to the global economy would take place at an odd transitional moment in the larger world.⁴¹

With the approval of the Saleh regime, for the next thirty years scholars and USAID technicians encouraged neoliberalism to take root in previously resistant North Yemen. The answer prior to 2011 was to exploit the apparent tension between traditions and rational economic behavior afflicting North Yemen. In somewhat of a reversal, social anthropologists from Britain and the USA increasingly suggested to the aid agencies supporting their research that the political organization of so-called tribal communities could be used to the advantage of development programs (Gerholm 1977). The key would be to create a cadre of "facilitator[s] of change" who would

help assure rural North Yemen finally fit within a larger global structure (Swagman 1988: 168–72).

Sure enough, the big aid agencies and governments funded a generation of ethnographic work to explore how “tribes” could, with some oversight, assure that the agricultural production of communities in, for instance, the strategically important Sa‘adah region, found its way into the larger global economy. The number of British and American anthropologists invading the area signals this new strategic turn. Perhaps the most blatant fusion of scholarly work and empire was a 1982 joint USAID and US Department of Agriculture study into how best “the market” could mobilize rural Yemen to ostensibly challenge the successful model of the Hamdi-era LDAs (USAID 1982).

Through the participation of a social anthropologist and other “experts” in their respective fields, an Agricultural Sector Assessment framed the LDA as a “traditional” form of social organization with “Islamic” roots. As such, the communities seemingly doing so well in the confines of the LDA were beholden to an ever-present “tribal” shaykh who controlled the flow of funds in and out of the community. Upon recognizing this supposed hierarchy in rural North Yemen, the question turned to how to use it to realize the structural changes deemed optimal by Washington. A question yet unanswered by those studying this period in Yemeni history, or more generally the ethics of social science work of this sort, is what were the consequences of the US government and its aid agencies remaining fixated on the “Islamic” associations to an LDA system they assumed was backward and inefficient?

It is likely that framing the relationship between the inhabitants at the time thriving within LDA programs in an “Islamic” coloration had consequences to how US agencies planned to pursue future development projects. In time, it becomes clear that subsuming the local under the banner of “Islam” was a discursive trick connected to a similar juxtaposition of tradition versus innovation (USAID 1982: 21).

The resilient decentralized nature of agricultural production in Yemen emerged as one of the most crucial issues earmarked by the authors of the USAID’s 1982 Agricultural Sector Assessment for change. Their research mandate had been to identify factors that were “constraining agricultural development in Yemen.” Asserting that the LDA system, under the hegemony of tribal Zaydi Muslim shaykhs, kept Yemeni farmers autonomous from the global market, the Americans advocated for more formal, secular, and rational state interaction. With a vetted cadre of ministry of agriculture “experts,” educated in American universities, the Americans encouraged the

Saleh government to push for complete centralization of agricultural policy using as partners selected “communal leaders.” In their model, the YAR government would determine which crops farmers should grow and how they spent any surplus revenue. Again, the presumption was USAID “experts,” among whom included an anthropologist and sociologist, and their trained “locals” were more attuned to what North Yemen needed than those farmers producing the wealth empire coveted. In the process, they may have created a new hierarchy that rewarded pliable locals with positions of “leadership” otherwise reserved for other, traditionally autonomous community leaders.

The problem was “tradition.” According to drafts of these USAID reports translated into Arabic for local government consumption, Yemeni peasants were reluctant to move beyond “self-sufficiency.” As American experts saw it, farmers were predisposed to continue producing just for their local markets, thereby, it was charged, stymying economic growth. By just selling locally, there was never the need to expand production and thus develop new techniques (requiring chemicals and fertilizers or new American-made machines). The hope was that these communities might consider “modern technological” and American “know-how” to improve their productivity.⁴²

According to a former official in the ministry of agriculture, perhaps the most glaring aspect of these reports was the suggestion that farmers change from producing for local markets altogether. By substituting crops they normally produced for “inefficient” local markets with cash crops that could be exported, local farmers would become rational, business-minded agents instead of uneducated peasants avoiding risk. Here the modernization discourse of the 1950s remains relevant, as North Yemen was still impervious to the world in which Nelson Rockefeller’s servants Kissinger and Brzezinski reigned supreme.

To the brainwashed USAID agents, the tradition of self-sufficiency was posited as an impediment to development. Farmers could buy much cheaper imported (processed) food in the market, so why would the consumer bother buying “expensive” fresh local products if given the chance? The “free trade” demands being imposed on North Yemen with the change of regime in 1977–1978 gave Yemenis a way out. But for the USAID and other foreign aid programs to get these communities out of their “stagnant” “traditional ways,” they needed to move beyond a clumsy central state with its complicated politics. To the Americans, they also needed a “facilitator [s] of change,” and invariably a religious leader or “tribal shaykh” would be a better intermediary

in the quests to convince Yemeni peasants to take that leap of faith and change (USAID 1982: 21–25).

Tellingly, the underlying model for the Americans to understand how rural Yemeni communities functioned borrowed heavily on the crude, dismissive attitudes educated experts had about faithful people more generally. The community leader, a male figure of some status, was the necessary interlocuter if these peasants were going to ever change. Unfortunately, in many parts of North Yemen, it was the old Zaydi shaykh in that position. They proved stuck in their privileged ways and resisted change. This image of Zaydi leaders not only resembled what social anthropologists working in the region observed, but reflected a popular trope among urban Yemenis likely shaping the attitudes of impressionable Americans writing reports back to Washington (vom Bruck 2005).

The unit of analysis in such reports, repeated under the aegis of the World Bank, IMF, or various UN agencies, was the traditional force of Zaydi Islam, the source of interference for communities' needing development. Zaydi interpretations of Islamic law blocked the proper use of land, infringing on its redistribution through market forces and the commercialization of its accumulation outside family inheritance traditions.⁴³ At this early stage, therefore, that crucial local intermediary was not yet available in the village. In the end, the USAID pushed for yet a new generation of secular land laws that required a strong state to enforce them (USAID 1982: 21–25).

As the targets for reform were always the LDAs that had brought so much actual physical development to rural North Yemen, the 1982 USAID report specifically explored ways this legacy of the Hamdi era could be circumvented. It is here that the inability to find suitable partners within local "tribal" structures proved frustrating. The conclusion was the village unit itself needed breaking up. One idea was to create an expanded pool of labor recruiters who could facilitate a more rational system of distributing the male (and female) workforce, at the time understood to be seasonal and based on an old system of networks. The idea behind setting up with US funds a program that sent "excess" capacity throughout the country and even abroad was to deny local communities the ability to provide their own labor (USAID 1982: 37). In time, the aid literature produced in New York, London, and Geneva devised ways of building bridges between the Yemeni state (representing the collective financial interests of the larger world) and local communities, assuring that "tribes" worked with the state in a rapidly changing economy that rationalized a mobile laboring population (Manea 1998).

This revealingly invasive, meddling, and arrogant 1982 report was eventually given preference by authorities in Sana'a who likely shared the same prejudices toward "tribal" (and religious) rural people. Development required bold, aggressive, and life-changing acts, often beyond the wish of local communities that were far more conservative than was deemed healthy. As a result, Yemen's "peasant" rural communities, entrapped by the village "chief" and perhaps the restrictive role of Zaydi Islam as well, needed bold, state-induced projects that actually spirited men out of the village.⁴⁴ After all, with the right kind of cash crop and the use of American labor-saving technology, pesticides and fertilizers included, Yemen's villagers were no longer needed in the fields. Alternatively, they could work in cities in sweatshops producing clothes for a global market (long advocated by modernization theorists) or the soon booming oil and gas projects as discussed in the next chapter.

Complementing USAID's projects were the major international financial programs' own plans for Yemen's integration into the global market. In the World Bank's five-year plan covering 1975–1980, for instance, it envisioned helping expand physical infrastructure, integrating regions long self-sufficient but isolated; developing the agriculture industry (including domestic food production); encouraging agricultural exports; and expanding the construction sector to absorb rising investment volume. Of course, investment required finance, which means debt. These capital-intensive projects would all be funded by foreign-sourced loans. To pay for them, YAR would set up mechanisms covering the expenditure in the public sector through raising the level of national savings deposited into banks, not buried gold or LDAs, and mobilizing "dormant" financial resources through taxation and other means (World Bank 1981: 72–75 for land use; for five-year plan, 4).

In this time of proffering expensive, budget-changing development programs, Yemen became a major recipient of funds from various invasive aid groups: UNDP, WHO, FAO, UNESCO, UNICEF, World Bank, and US, British, Swiss, Swedish, USSR, Italian, Chinese, and other bilateral agencies. The net effect of such assistance corresponded to those monitored more recently in the developing world: distortions in pricing, and funding pools that privileged insiders and produced greater poverty for the majority of people (Ferguson 2006). Worse, this was a period when oil prices plummeted, resulting in a massive return of Yemeni men no longer employable in the oil rich economies elsewhere in Arabia. By the mid-1980s, in other words, Yemen would go from boom to bust on the watch of Saleh and his newfound allies in the international aid industry (Carapico 1985).

CONCLUSION

As the veritable industry of aid helped globalist forces insinuate into Yemeni societies at their most precarious moments—drought in the late 1960s and the oil bust economies of the mid-1980s—the first target was to absorb the surplus wealth they had produced earlier through farming or working overseas. In increments, power was taken away first from the notorious “informal” bankers, those money changers who kept a tight lid on currency devaluation and interest charged for loans to merchants. With Saleh’s stealth campaign to uproot these “informal” economic actors at a time of economic crisis, his government, under the watchful eye of foreign advisors, steered Yemen’s microeconomies toward centralization.

As attempted already during the Egyptian occupation and Iryani government, developing Yemen’s banking industry aimed to give the IMF, World Bank, and others an efficient means to rob Yemen of its human and natural wealth.⁴⁵ In this sense, Saleh’s regime, unlike predecessors deposed by coups, successfully played a crucial role in an expansive phase of empire. Forgotten today as he has become the target for Saudi destruction, Saleh throughout his career as leader of North Yemen performed his various roles well. During early stages of his tenure, he assured that Yemenis’ productivity could be monetized. That often entailed facilitating the exportation of Yemenis to work in the neighboring oil economies. Saleh’s regime also assured that Yemen remained open to both capital investment and development. In this sense, in spite of his demonization since 2011, Saleh was ostensibly an agent whose “contractual obligations to investors” made him a partner in the (negative) development of Yemen. As a reward, he and his allies became fabulously rich, payment for agreeing to ruthlessly play the role of the “local guarantors of the regime of private property” (Ho 2004: 227).

Saleh facilitated the erection of the necessary “modern” financial infrastructure all the major donor parties hoped to put in place. The idea was that once implemented, workers’ remittances, in particular, could foster the kind of consumption Lerner and Rostow argued a developing nation needed to prosper.⁴⁶ More realistically, these measures simply assured Yemen’s considerable savings would no longer be used to secure the country’s autonomy from the larger world. Instead, Yemen’s integration would both saddle its future generations with debt while providing the liquidity needed by empire.

Clearly the unleashing of development schemes both in agriculture and other capital-intensive segments of the Yemeni economy had multiple

functions, but all were steered to disrupt and then transform a society. Ben Ramalingam, a major voice in the aid industry, has warned after years of observation that the disjointed cookie-cutter approach first used in Yemen has had chaotic consequences for recipients throughout the world. His biggest concern is the fact that interventions are not properly studied in themselves to help future campaigns draw from an available pool of “lessons learned.” It is often the case that “interventions begin with the lack of adequate indicators, clear objectives, baseline data and monitoring” (Ramalingam 2015: 112). The inevitable pushback comes from locals whose reasons for resistance are never allowed into summary reports of projects, as the biggest goal of agency staff and project directors is keeping out clear assessments of their policies. As Ramalingam (2015: 112) suggests, the ones who make careers out of aid will likely argue that multilateral development agencies, banks, and UN agencies already invest much manpower hours into assessing their projects and do not need oversight.

This factor alone suggests a political complacency and subordination to which Yemenis would come to adjust. But the emergence of an invasive development aid apparatus hostile to oversight also hints at a change in the political ambitions of some elite. With the rise of the likes of Saleh and Hadi, his vice-president of more than twenty years, interactions with the larger world have led to a course of structural disequilibrium, which we observe in the next chapter is part of an actual attempt at “controlled demolition.”

This takes us back to the spring of 1977. While the country was economically booming, external interests considered that North Yemen’s further development could pose a long-term security threat to the KSA. As has often happened, the use of violence via local proxy would help upset Yemen’s trajectory. The primary target would be the political leadership responsible for such prescient economic policies.

Known to travel freely throughout Sana’a’ in his small Volkswagen, eating regularly at his favorite restaurant where he held meetings, Hamdi was an easy target. But his assassination was not just a transfer of power; it also was an attempt to erase something. News of his death, along with his brother, came with a twist. The large number of incriminating photos of his body lying next to bottles, crates some say, of whisky extended to innuendo as he was attached to the death of two beautiful French models whose bodies were found at his home. The dirty politics of the 1970s were in full swing in Sana’a’, with the Cold War of a different nature showing its ugly head again.⁴⁷

To some still-important opponents of Yemen's global entanglements, a foreign-imposed ideology of modernization thankfully failed even to begin to realize its promised results. Its failed insertion into Yemen created a space for a different kind of political economy of development to emerge. It is by drawing from this much less programmatic, albeit equally doctrinally driven, quest that the Saleh regime remained empowered for decades. To external interests hoping to finally break the Yemeni knot of resistance, Saleh would be the necessary intermediary. With one foot in "traditional" Yemeni politics and the other desperately reaching out to cultivate relations with powerful globalist interests, the way the Saleh regime mediated the enhanced, and even aggressively expansive form of modernization doctrine known today as neoliberalism and globalization assured that for much of the 1990s and 2000s, a much more insidious "penetration" of globalist power would take place. This would require that Saleh eventually abandon the local for the global. The results were destructive.

Making Yemen Dance

THE REGIME AND THE POLITICS OF CHAOS

INTRODUCTION

'Ali Abdullah Saleh once confided to a journalist that governing Yemen was akin to dancing on the heads of snakes (Clarke 2010). To many, North Yemen's ruler since 1978 and president of a unified country from 1990 until 2011 was himself a poisonous viper. Corrupt and brutal, libel to strike friend and foe alike, Saleh was a conflicted leader whose reign has evoked both anger and admiration.

Blessed with the skills to survive Yemen's truly unique political habitat, the man from Bayt al-Ahmar learned from a tender age that any leader must share the spoils of power with patrons and possible enemies. Essential to this formula is the sharing of power with those entrenched landowning families found scattered throughout the highlands from which Saleh came. Historically, the main beneficiary of this patronage system has been the extended al-Ahmar family, whose actions on behalf of the Hashid Confederation have left an imprint on modern Yemen.

And yet, as argued earlier, Yemenis' arena is not Arabia alone. With the end of the imamate in 1962, any successful ruler has to transfer this tradition of sharing the spoils of power into a global arena. Clearly learning this lesson early on, for three decades Saleh ingratiated himself to the most villainous of the world's oligarchic families. As a reward for proffering Yemen's natural wealth and human resources to the Hunts, Bushes, Rockefellers, and numerous other mineral and financial dynasties, Saleh received formal sanction to serve as their Yemeni interlocutor. At least until 2011.

This chapter highlights the amorphous parameters that constitute the regime Saleh ultimately corralled to service his and empire's needs. Such a

survey entails appreciating the evolution of the Yemeni state itself, once the prized arena for imams to arbitrate global affairs and, for a short time under al-Hamdi, a mechanism to protect rural Yemen from global capitalism. Since what constituted “the state” in Yemen became by the 1980s a mere façade for the real power that lay in larger society, this chapter necessarily expands its focus to studying how competing nonstate actors pushed the region into the recent period of turmoil. Perhaps surprisingly, as discussed below in the context of formal unification in 1990, the arena of conflict between nonstate actors would remain within formal political institutions, at least until 2015.

HARNESSING THE LAND

The key intermediary asset in realizing the long-term pauperization of Yemen’s rural communities was the Saleh regime. By the end of the 1990s, its incremental, selective war on once vibrant agrarian societies was deemed a “success” in that state authority expanded over historically autonomous rural communities. As an observer of this process of integration concluded: “Yemeni success in implementing a regime of taxation and regulation bespeaks the political capacity of an impoverished state to force compliance from a powerful and affluent private sector” (Chaudhry 1997: 292–93). In fact, by the time Saleh in the early 1980s signed a treaty with US oil interests, potentially alienating his country from its considerable carbon wealth, it was clear that the global interests long frustrated with Yemen’s persistent independence had found their man.

As much as modernization and development functioned as an ideological component to a larger expansive state apparatus that itself served the interests of finance capitalists, concrete observations of the efforts by Saleh’s agents to integrate Yemen into the larger global (“free world”) economy suggest a change in process, not ambition. Over the course of the 1980s and 1990s covered below, patriotic Yemenis around Saleh who believed in solidifying the power of the state to command their country’s economy, gravitated to the neoliberal model offered by influential globalists. With more thoughtful use of Yemen’s human and material resources, more investment in education, greater diversity in revenue sources, a modern, well-disciplined military (and perhaps even mothers, sisters, daughters, and wives who could drive their own cars), there was no reason, these patriots thought, for Yemen not to be great. Such was the evolving Yemeni ideology of development as expressed over the first half of the 1980s,



MAP 3. Evolution of Yemen's borders, 1967–1990.

even as Saleh's entourage assuage foreigners fearful of such a strong, independent Yemen.

This patriotic optimism was bantered about by different segments of the state bureaucracies who believed in their mission. Increasingly used as dumping grounds for loyalists of diverse patrons who were collecting on favors, promises, and more obtuse forms of political blackmail, the fundamentalist modernizer, stuck in offices filled with this motley mix of political servants eyeing the next influx of foreign aid nevertheless, learned to navigate Yemen's now infamous style of politics (Wedeen 2008). In the process, Yemen's plethora of power bases managed by Saleh demanded a "national" politics to take place in something rather unique to the Middle East, multiparty elections.

The 1990–2011 period covered below constitutes a time of political struggle between parties and partisans that often mirrored the larger condition of Yemen and its place in the world. Of course, Saleh's regime made the greatest contribution to what is thirty years of upheaval. The chaotic state of daily life in Yemen under Saleh's (mis)rule should not obscure, however, the fact that the country's politics were contested by organized entities with articulated

goals. This is true especially in the context of the end of the Cold War in 1989–1990 and the global financial crisis of 2007. For Saleh and his temporary allies, the instabilities produced by state violence often took precedence over the search by Yemeni patriots for equitable solutions to the many issues facing this unique and potentially wealthy country (Blumi 2010). With this periodic slippage away from using the state to deal with domestic concerns first, it is possible to chart anew what some parties envisioned as Yemen's trajectory, including calculations that a unified Yemen during the transition from the Cold War was a good idea.

WHAT DOES UNION HAVE TO DO WITH IT?

In power since 1978, Saleh's evolving role in South Arabia narrows in the mid-1980s, a time when the Soviet Union experienced financial strain in part because of a destructive war of attrition in Afghanistan.¹ Once a generous provider for both Yemens' sustainability, it was the People's Democratic Republic of Yemen (PDRY) that experienced the greatest upheaval after the Soviet Union's retreat. A forgotten Soviet ally by 1986, the political elite of the PDRY faced an existential threat during a short-lived civil war in January of that year (Brehony 2011: 151–67). The warring factions ultimately broke the once-proud bastion of anticapitalism, leaving the victor, 'Ali Salim al-Bidh (a Hadhrami, not Adeni native), and his loyalists stuck with the task of finding alternatives to Soviet globalism.

As had happened intermittently throughout the 1970s, the newly minted government in Aden entered negotiations with Saleh's regime in North Yemen. Facilitated by the particularities of the global situation in the mid-1980s, once hostile neighbors took the dangerous gamble of unifying in order to share the economic potential of South Arabia (Halliday 1986).² The product of still highly confidential consultations, the intersecting fates of Saleh, Bidh, and empire would take its final form when Yemen formally got into bed with then US vice-president George H. W. Bush; the results were not pretty.

The pretext for such a romance was Yemen's natural resources. Oil companies surveying South Yemen's territories discovered large oil reserves in the early 1980s, sparking a new era of foreign intervention in Arabia's affairs.³ In response to news of South Yemen's extraordinary wealth, powerful but rival globalist interests, one faction represented by Vice-President Bush, began to

strategize how to remove the regime in Aden and steer the inevitable rush for concessions toward allied companies associated with empire.

Crucial at the time was that oil prices were at their lowest since the 1973 OPEC price hike (from \$56 to less than \$10 per barrel in 1986). Desperate for cash, Aden offered access to Algerian and Soviet engineering companies. Later even Brazilian, Japanese, and Chinese projects were considered. Aden's government, in other words, was still exploring options that would have secured its continuous autonomy from empire. The problem was these operations lacked financing at a time when no immediate profits with low oil prices were possible. The staunchly anticapitalist regime's inability to get South Yemen's massive reserves properly developed left Bush and company a limited window of time for action.

America's Cold War warriors understood well that such potential wealth was not safe in the hands of a small cadre of socialist-leaning South Yemen leaders with a history of supporting anticapitalist movements (Burrowes 1989). Barring direct occupation, the next best thing was to assure Yemen ended up in a more reliable, pliable set of hands. Under a cooperative regime, be it under the guise of a unified Yemen or even in fragments, Yemen's massive oil potential could then be kept deep underground, at once off the world markets suffering from a glut but always ready to exploit on a rainy day.⁴

YEMENI PETROL PARADOXES

George H. W. Bush, then US vice-president, a former head of the CIA, and oil man to the core, visited North Yemen in 1986 on official business. Tasked with inaugurating Oklahoma-based Hunt Oil's Alif field, a modest concession secured in 1981 and entirely unprofitable due to low oil prices, the obvious question then was why invest in a small asset that would never produce more than 300,000 BPD (Burrowes 1987: 137–39). Today we know the answer lies in appreciating that the target was not just an oil well or a pipeline project, but also the complete subordination of Yemen.⁵

To accomplish full-spectrum domination over South Arabia required drawing the two most promising Yemeni strongmen into the CIA criminal complex. Here we may speculate that empire hoped unification could efficiently accomplish this. By tying South Yemen's larger mineral resources to a cooperative regime in Sana'a, it was possible to envision a useful coalescing of interests that ultimately serviced empire in this period of transition

away from the Cold War. As often the case, oil and gas was but a platform for bigger things (Vitalis 2009; Mitchell 2013).

Again, on paper Hunt Oil's investment in the mid-1980s made no economic sense. The project, however, proved essential to the geostrategic machinations involving the Bush family and the "deep state" that services empire. With the investment in Yemen's oil financed largely by aid agencies and loans provided by various regional "development banks," the Mar'ib/Jawf fields permitted Hunt Oil, owned by a close friend of Bush, to gain exclusive access to other fields in the area south of Mar'ib, areas with considerably more proven reserves previously closed off by an anti-capitalist South Yemen (Maycock 1986).

Geologically the actual "source" Hunt and the Bush clan would now tap into was part of a massive Jurassic oil rift—the Ma'rib-Shabwah graben basin with at least 6 billion barrels of oil—extending into the Red Sea via the Aden Gulf and into what was then unified Somalia (Reitano and Shaw 2013). These areas were proven to be so rich that war would be the only reality these regions would know ever since.

Indeed, beginning in the early 1990s external interests have torn this very part of the Horn of Africa into entirely hapless ungoverned units. In Puntland, where the greatest potential for finding massive offshore oil reserves exists, oil is being exploited today for fractions of the cost.⁶ The reason is a lack of government. Over the years, oil companies have discovered that not having to pay state taxes or a percentage for each barrel of oil to a sovereign state like Somalia, but rather a flat lump sum to those who provide "security" to infrastructure, is a far more profitable way of exploiting oil. What happened in Somalia, in fact, may be the fate for a future Yemen disaggregated by war, an economic model that seems to have already been applied to Syria and Libya.⁷ The curse destroying most "oil-rich" societies infected Yemen as well by the mid-1980s.

In the short term, even with oil prices at historic lows, the oil deal between Saleh and Bush still promised to create plenty of "upstream" business opportunities. While not earning money from pumping the oil, Hunt Oil's full-spectrum ties to the industry meant its profits would come from pipeline construction, maintenance, and facilities like refineries and ports. Laying pipelines and building infrastructure in Yemen would prove for decades very good business indeed. Moreover, the fact that much of the actual financing for the construction would come from Iraqi "aid" seemed almost too good to be true for everyone involved.⁸ Considering Iraq's subsequent conflict with Bush over Kuwait, these relations seem in retrospect even more scandalous.⁹

But these were the wild years of liberalization personified by the Thatcher and Reagan administrations. A period of deregulated banking, finance, and commodities trade also allowed for profits from “off-the-books” oil, arms, and cocaine sales. Billions often passed through money-laundering hubs like Panama, Hong Kong, Kuwait, and Miami. Banks like HSBC, BCCI, and others became notorious for redirecting these billions of illicit dollars to help finance CIA operations in Latin America and Central Asia while keeping otherwise anemic Western economies moving. Entirely ignored today, Yemen’s political elite, both in the diaspora (the Bin Laden family comes to mind) and in the soon-to-be-unified country, played a central role in this grey economy of global dimensions (Davidson 2016).

As all the major players at the end of the Cold War understood, many of the potentially lucrative investments in Yemen’s economy required a compliant government and a passive population. Critically, much of Yemen’s assets targeted for plunder were publicly owned properties, businesses owned by politically active families, or still belonged to LDA cooperatives that had long served local economic activity. In some cases, the redirecting of Yemen’s wealth trapped in these assets would not be too difficult. In other cases, however, Yemenis directly impacted by globalization would resist with violence. This is where Saleh’s political entourage, already proving its worth in the Hunt Oil deal of 1986, rose to the occasion yet again.

Within a year of unification in 1990, the Saleh clique would initiate a series of privatization schemes per IMF and World Bank advice (World Bank 1999). As expected, the privatization campaign faced considerable resistance from those South Yemeni areas first targeted. To defeat this resistance, Saleh’s faction needed to gain politically the upper hand in a newly unified country. Conveniently, the political allies of socialist leader Bidh, who practically sold South Yemen’s independence to begin the unification process, cooperated. As happened in the Soviet Bloc after 1990 when George Soros and Jeffrey Sachs gutted Eurasia with the help of a few local oligarchs (Wilson 2014), Aden’s “radical” leadership, in power after the 1986 coup, took the opportunity to share in the spoils of selling off the best of South Yemen’s assets. With little delay, the actual legal infrastructure to do this was put in place.¹⁰

The subsequent episodes of unified Yemen’s “development” and resistance to it highlight how “friction” between different interests created new synergies that allowed some Yemenis to gain access to the larger world. At the same time, the clash between globalist interests and local ones, especially over the

use of land, created at least one binary that has endured until today. This division puts different Yemeni constituencies at the juncture of new laws and regulations, often resulting in conflicts that festered beyond the state's capacity to resolve.¹¹ An early example in the Northern Ma'rib province may offer some intriguing insights into how the evolving globalist project, out of necessity, adapted to this resistance, a reworking of neoimperialism prior to and immediately after the fall of the Berlin Wall.

SEQUESTERING MA'RIB

In the early 1980s Korean and American engineers discovered "wealth" buried in Ma'rib's earth. Within months, the land was forcefully included into a global economic order policed by empire and local state forces (Burrowes 1987: 140–51). This transformative process took the form of investments into "rationalizing" the use of oil-rich territory, invariably leading to clashing sovereign claims over the land. Without much consultation with locals living there, international development agencies aiding Sana'a' advised Saleh's government to properly realize this land's full economic potential by reaffirming the state's legal right to "develop" it (Albrecht 2002). Of possible interest to students of globalization, it appears Yemen was the first major arena where such a legalistic charade, repeated ad infinitum in Eastern Europe and the former USSR throughout the early 1990s, played out. Although unaware of its future significance to the larger world, locals facing this "innovative governance" in the Ma'rib nevertheless understood the subsequent policies as a major breach of trust between the state and its presumed subjects.

Scholars studying this process elsewhere appreciate that the ideological cover used to justify implementing neoliberal "development" strategically blurs the lines separating the laws of states (written invariably to protect the interests of some at the expense of others) and individual or collective claims over the land in question (Escobar 1995; Ferguson 2006). As in the former Soviet Bloc, South Yemen had large land cooperatives and many state companies that in theory controlled the country's mineral wealth (Lackner 1985). To access the potential wealth of these assets, the neoliberal mantra of rationalizing the management of "underutilized" state assets needed to take precedence. In this context, as much as state-owned factories and infrastructure were deemed worthy of globalist attention, lands like those in Ma'rib deemed

“underused” or inefficiently “fragmented” were especially targeted for liberalization.¹² Throughout Central and Southern Yemen, the prize in the early years was oil. As locals were not naive, efforts to secure these lands from those living on them would assure tensions for years to come.¹³ As with North Yemen’s LDAs in the 1970s, the primary agents helping enforce this rationalization of Mar’ib’s land were associates of the Saleh regime.¹⁴

As discussed earlier, the development aid literature stemming back from the 1960s often promises lucrative partnerships to those communities willing to expose their lands to empire. In reality, such partnerships often ended up producing—especially when the development entails harvesting natural resources—a pauperized native population. In the case of the Ma’rib lands, it was clear well-armed natives were not going to allow this to happen. The tactics used by the state to transfer these valued lands, therefore, needed to be subtle or risk civil war. In this case involving well-armed locals, the power of the state to arbitrarily rewrite laws and selectively choose to enforce them proved critical.

In time well-placed globalist interests justified the eventual plundering of communal lands in Mar’ib by claiming their methods of exploitation were first sanctioned by laws recently written by the Saleh state and then justified because their activities were more economically rational. For this set of justifications to win over the locals over the long term, however, state lawyers needed to work within the auspices of a discourse of “reform” long used as cover for imperialist plunder elsewhere. In Mar’ib in the late 1980s, in the name of “reform” and “rational economics,” the Yemeni state tried something new, it territorially disaggregated the areas where oil was known to exist.

Trumpeting national development as a “right” that exceeds those of individuals and communities, the efforts by Hunt Oil and their Yemeni partners based in Sana’a’ to assure a profitable return pushed to divide the formerly massive Ma’rib province into two. The result was the creation of a smaller but oil rich Mar’ib province and a new underpopulated Jawf that dwarfed the former (Burrowes 1991). As the jurisdiction of local governments shifted in the aftermath, the move allowed for significantly reducing the chance of a political battle over the distribution of future revenues. This was only possible, however, because most of the cumbersome “natives” were now effectively alienated from mineral-rich Mar’ib and declared inhabitants of the newly created resource poor Jawf. How this trick was turned entailed exploiting the fact most of those using the lands were seminomadic and thus “resided” in several locations. Strategically, those seasonal homes found outside the newly

drawn frontiers of an oil-rich Ma'rib—ostensibly Jawf—simply became the new official residence for most of the regional inhabitants.¹⁵

To fully appreciate Yemen's postunification trajectory we must link such land grabs to the violence that followed. As anticipated, people affected by this gerrymandering resisted. To address this opposition to globalization, the new "war on terrorism" evolved, ostensibly justifying a violent clampdown of peoples resisting the alienation of their homelands. Here lies the important intersection of empire's plunder and the emergent police state experienced since. The labeling of resistance as "violent" led to its characterization as "terrorism." This precarious slide over the past thirty years enabled different systemic responses (Amar 2012).¹⁶

Besides the logistical problem of legally justifying stealing oil-rich lands (and suppressing dissent), "modernizers" and oil companies were faced with locals who appreciated that investments made to "develop" these targeted areas, roads for instance, were costs largely shouldered by locals themselves. There was thus a need to assure relations with locals remained functional on at least an economic basis if the extraction of wealth from these lands were to remain profitable. An armed, angry local population could easily disrupt the flow of oil. It is in this respect particularly instructive to observe the role of American "development agencies," such as the USAID offices, that suddenly found new projects to fund in the area. What experts sent to the field were expected to do was "broker" the implementation of collaborative projects that often required lying to locals about the long-term benefits and advising government interlocutors how to deal with the inevitable local resistance (Burrowes 1987).¹⁷

Since the 1970s much of the USAID's office's budget in North Yemen was reserved for expensive consultants flown down to study the country's development needs. The reports they produced invariably advocated for security and a compliant population, just the kind of things military attachés and their bosses wanted. For those based in Washington, among the important criteria for initiating public works projects in the "developing world" was assuring US firms landed the lucrative construction contracts that followed.¹⁸ Such activities required, however, the compliance of government and the use of state violence when necessary. As such, the USAID office in Yemen reallocated resources—human, financial, material—in a concerted effort to peddle US influence in certain Yemeni government offices that would provide these services (Cassam and Miller 1985: 3, 12–14). The subsequent influence gained with this investment would pay dividends as North and South Yemen moved towards unity, often with the coaxing of a loaded gun.

In the late 1980s, leaders from the two Yemens incrementally agreed to demilitarize a 1,400-square-kilometer neutral zone between Ma'rib and Shabwah provinces. The mending element was Hunt Oil, whose now almost billion-dollar commitment to a still-divided Yemen demanded a full-spectrum presence, something that required development of neighboring oil and gas fields found inside South Yemen (Burrowes 1987: 145–46). Likely with the personal touch of Bush, both Aden and Sana'a' agreed to establish a jointly run oil and mineral exploration and development company (Yemen Company for Investment in Oil and Mineral Resources). The purpose of this company was to develop equitably the shared borderland region to which Hunt Oil hoped to lay exclusive claim.

The unification of the two Yemens thus promised greater oil revenues to all those included in the inner circles of the Saleh and Bidh networks. This sudden opening of new resources also offered major interests in the development sector of the global economy the chance to negotiate the financing of related major infrastructure projects. Indeed, even before unification plans went public, men flying in from Zurich and Beirut sought both new concessions to scan additional areas for its oil and gas potential, and road construction projects.¹⁹

The main winners in this transition to unification were French, Kuwaiti, Russian, Korean, and US companies (Burrowes 1987: 130–54). But unification also benefited some local enterprises linked to Saleh. Spurred on by the promise of a bright economic future for unified Yemen, in 1989 a national pact (*al-Mithaq*) was drawn up and approved by referendums held in both North and South Yemen (Gause 1989). During the next three years leading up to the first elections in 1993, intended to allow Yemenis democratically to choose a unified government, Saleh's gamble produced great dividends both politically and economically. The losers, 'Ali Salim al-Bidh and his partners, failed to offer the citizens of a unified Yemen a much-needed second national party. In retrospect, this was postunification Yemen's downfall; it needed a political alternative to stand up to Saleh the snake-charmer and profiteer.

In theory, the old Yemeni Socialist Party (Hizb al-Ishtiraki al-Yaman [henceforth YSP]) should have been the ideal patron of the hundreds of thousands who took to the streets periodically since 1990 to protest privatization. The YSP also favored the active participation of women in society, a constituency with a new lease on political life with unification. Since the

promised public role for women rubbed some northern leaders the wrong way, especially the powerful MB partisans, the YSP should have represented women's interests throughout North Yemen (Carapico 1998b: 162; Clark 2003: 197). Additionally, the YSP offered at the time a strong emphasis on public investment in education and promised to protect secular institutions that had emerged in South Yemen since the 1970s. Such issues, in other words, promised considerable interest from progressive citizens inhabiting North Yemen (Dresch 2000: 172–75).

Instead of the masses mobilizing to embrace the YSP, in the first elections in 1993 most Northern Yemenis simply choose to remain loyal to traditional patronage networks. Such loyalty, likely reaffirmed because of the economic rent that comes with affiliation, allowed Saleh's General People's Congress (al Mu'tammar al-Sha'abi al-'Amm) [henceforth GPC] to abandon earlier promises to cooperate with their co-nationals from the YSP. The resulting polarity marked what some interpreted as an entrenched "regionalism" synonymous with Yemen's postunification history (Day 2012: 107–26). It is a mistake, however, to study this solidifying regional divide in political terms alone.

The political maneuvering during unification took place during a rapidly changing global "carbon economy." Under conditions driven by unobstructed neoliberalism, the political ambitions of previously (strategically) marginal figures in Yemen mutated. The continued struggle between the Hashid (always under the leadership of Shaykh 'Abdullah bin Husayn al-Ahmar) and Bakil (still under the leadership of Lulum) confederations animated Yemen's unification politics because of the economic spoils at stake during the process.

All the major constituencies strived to secure rent from Saleh's government by threatening to upset earlier revenue-sharing agreements made between state agencies and those globalist interests arriving to plunder Yemen. Fittingly, such complications to doing business in Yemen simply put greater trust in the ability of Saleh to assure Yemen's integration into a world shaped by unrestrained neoliberalism. As in the late 1970s with uprooting the LDAs and the mid-1980s sequestering of Mar'ib's oil well, foreign "development" companies demanded a powerful central state and rewarded the man capable of containing even the most ruthless power-grabbing shaykh. To the global oligarchy just getting its first taste of postsocialist plunder, the idea of sharing the spoils with unruly "tribesmen" still did not register.

The containment of the shaykhs was an important demand made of the state at this early phase of unification. The service expected of Saleh's

government promised considerable risk, however. These were not simple herders as in Jawf. By 1990 Shaykh Ahmar (along with ‘Ali Muhsin al-Ahmar, Abdul Majid al-Zindani, and Muhammad al-Yadumi) established the Tajammu’ al-Yamani lil-Islah (Yemeni Congregation for Reform, or simply Islah) ostensibly to participate in elections, this religiously orientated party constituted a political coalition whose power would force the Saleh-controlled state, regardless of how much New York and London investors wanted it differently, to keep part of the spoils flowing to rural constituencies (Schwedler 2006: 89–96; Alviso-Marino 2010).

Islah’s emergence further complicated the state’s function in the globalist agenda for Yemen because of a set of dramatic shifts in the larger regional economy. First, the large numbers of migrant laborers from mostly rural communities constituted a force in domestic politics. Increasingly influenced by missionaries proselytizing among those large groups of Yemenis living in Saudi Arabia, this once spiritually amorphous army of migrants soon became associated with the rise of political Islam in domestic Yemeni politics.²⁰

It is at this level of domestic politics, especially in the Abyan and Shabwah districts located along the former borders between North and South Yemen, that a Saudi form of Islam served as a political glue, creating for the first time a constituency that cut across the regionalisms at the time plaguing the country. This rise of Islamic politics not only lent new power to the al-Ahmar clan, however. The entry of a *takfiri* ethos compelled Saleh to rethink ways to profit from unification.

Saleh quickly learned to seek from al-Ahmar an ally who would both bridge the legitimacy gap between the state and at least one “tribal confederacy”—the Hashid—and secure links to a political force of puritanical groups cultivated by the KSA (Carapico 1998b: 143; Phillips 2008: 138; Day 2012: 133). Once it became clear al-Ahmar, the KSA, and the state could do business, unification politics changed. Saleh’s GPC now calculated that conflict in unified Yemen strategically suited better its interests than power (and profit) sharing with the YSP. The globalist forces eagerly awaiting the privatization of South Yemen’s assets seemed to agree (Gause 1990: 75–149).

UNION NEVER TO BE

The unification process evolved quickly in the 1989–1990 period.²¹ Declared on May 22, 1990, the first phase included adopting some common policies in

customs and taxation but leaving the crucial process of integrating the army commands, for example, totally up in the air (Detalle 1998: 272). More importantly perhaps for the long-term political development of a unified Yemen was the fact that trade unions serving as the power base for the YSP and “tribal” militias loyal to Saleh and al-Ahmar remained basically separate. Worse, with only a modicum of integration at the top allowed, two different “national” polities remained intact with two completely different sets of patronage networks in operation. Such a divide would not be crossed prior to elections in 1993.

A series of strategic steps taken by various interests, each with their own internal logic, marked the crucial interim period before the 1993 elections. From the perspective of GPC’s leadership, the process ensured its domination over rewriting laws, critical to protecting the interests of their larger constituent base. Such advantages may in fact explain why Saleh conceded to lesser southern demands that, for example, Yemen allow for a free press (meaning some southern-controlled papers would circulate in the north). Saleh also agreed to permit “multiple parties” to participate throughout the unified country leading up to the first elections (Schwedler 2006: 59–61; Burrowes 1998). Such concessions enabled the GPC to secure potential rivals’ confidence in the early phase of unification, thus enabling the passing of new laws designed to assist the plunder of, in particular, South Yemen’s state-owned properties.

At the crucial moment of unification in 1990, the biggest source of dissonance in the country was the worsening economic crisis caused by Iraq’s invasion of Kuwait. As punishment for Yemen’s less-than-emphatic condemnation of Saddam Hussain’s actions (recall Yemen was in an economic alliance with Iraq by way of the Arab Cooperation Council [ACC], and Saleh personally decried the conservative monarchies as a menace to progressive Arab republics) the GCC not only cut off more than \$500 million in aid to the country but proceeded to expel upwards of 800,000 Yemeni workers from their countries (Colton 1991).

The return of so many people, plus the loss of more than \$2 billion in remittances, transformed the political horizons for all parties (Stevenson 1993). While clearly negative, some identified opportunities from this humanitarian disaster. The single biggest contingency created by this crisis was the greater pressure put on land, especially in and around Sana’a, Hudaydah, and Aden. Largely unable to return to their villages due to a lack of local resources, a by-product of those policies introduced to escalate crop substitution in

Yemen's farms as demanded by the IMF and USAID, it became increasingly impossible to peacefully settle hundreds of thousands of evicted workers in their regions of origin. Instead, state agencies monopolized by the GPC saw this pool of internally displaced people (IDPs) an invaluable political asset into which, over time, numerous domestic and foreign actors invested.

The best example of this over the next decade was the use of these exploitable human assets to colonize (settle) targeted areas. Already experiencing a demographic boom accompanying the economic one of the 1970s, North Yemen was suddenly overpopulated. In response, Saleh's government encouraged the largely landless poor expellees returning from the GCC to settle, like colonizers, Southern Yemeni lands long deemed underpopulated. This pool of *de facto* colonizers flooded Abyan, Mukalla, Tarim, and other areas along the former borderlands between North and South. In effect these settlers helped build the ranks of increasingly useful armed militias whose utility became apparent during the 1994 civil war.

While Saleh's state manipulated large numbers of IDPs to change demographically South Yemen at a time when native southerners started to reconsider the merits of union, new forms of violence plagued the country's cities. As the capital, Aden, Hudaydah, and Sa'adah swelled with unemployable IDPs, a subclass of Yemeni living in makeshift "temporary" accommodations quickly became targets for political manipulation.²² Anthropologist Paul Dresch (1993) reported that the mass demonstrations organized by the expellees and their host communities foretold a larger political shift by the time of the 1993 elections.²³

True to form, Haydar al-'Attas, YSP leader and prime minister during this interim period, attempted to use the apparatus of his branch of the government to provide additional funds to address some of the demands made by Yemen's IDPs. Such political maneuvers were regularly blocked by the GPC, however. Exploiting the power to veto any major spending initiative, Saleh's partisans successfully made the YSP the scapegoat for the plight of the new urban poor underclass made worse by their political maneuvers.²⁴

With the benefit of hindsight, this demographic surge and the politics around it undermined the YSP's ability to secure long-term influence in much of the country. At the same time, a steady stream of talented people more and more representing Yemen's uprooted masses began filling the ranks of charitable organizations with transnational links. And while Saudi charities and USAID had an impact, it would be a mistake to see this new *lumpen-proletariat* as entirely subordinate to foreign machinations. In many ways,

the laborers who were now without work, angry, and vulnerable to mobilization, were to become the new kingmakers of unified Yemen.

As already noted, the YSP made a concerted effort to mobilize these uprooted masses. The party's links with trade unions would seem a logical avenue for cooperation. Indeed, strikes broke out throughout South Yemen during the spring and summer of 1991 as a pretext to igniting a broader outcry of the direction Yemen was going. Saleh reacted by permitting the Ministry of Interior forces to target the organizers of these strikes as "instigators of violence," indicating that the GPC saw the IDPs and their YSP sympathizers as a political liability. The subsequent violence resulted in the death of several key members of the YSP and their labor activist partners.²⁵ While intimidation worked at a visceral level, the southern elite who initially backed an alliance with Saleh now faced a financial crisis. A 100 percent inflation rate and the rapid devaluation of the South Yemeni riyal forced many in the YSP to simply focus on surviving a crisis for which they were held partially responsible. In the process, the party did not have the organizational wherewithal to exploit what seemed from afar a perfect opportunity to gain the loyalty of many urban and rural poor in need of a truly representative opposition.

The YSP ultimately lost out to the Islamic parties who, with the considerable funds flowing from the Gulf, often distributed via Yemenis living there, began to imagine they could monopolize the future loyalties of these people.²⁶ While charity projects did produce grateful "clients," it was the old patronage networks in rural North Yemen, the mobilizing and resource-rich Salafi groups and the MB (whose GCC-Yemeni money did not stop flowing) that ultimately catered to the needs of hundreds of thousands of families (Clark 2003: 3–15). Proving incapable of addressing the nuanced needs of these potential assets, the YSP demonstrated a strategic ineptness when contrasted to the client-building abilities of Islah (Schwedler 2006). In face of such starkly different capacities, the ability of key personalities associated with Islah, especially al-Ahmar (2007), to straddle the line between rebel and peacemaker allowed the party to become Yemen's first to transcend north-south prejudices. The consequences would manifest in the 1993 elections.

To address the persistent challenges to the GPC's drive for power in the transitional period leading up to 1993, Saleh adopted a (r)evolving partnership with "snakes" from his home districts. Many Yemenis falling victim to poor government and abusive cronyism prior to 1993 gravitated toward the Shabab al-Mu'min, the Islah Party, or "quietist" Salafis linked to Muqbil

al-Wadi'i based in Dammaj deep in the Zaydi heartland (Dresch 2000: 186–95). Not entirely dependent on Saleh, these *takfiri* parties served as well-leveraged opponents capable of securing concessions by threatening violence. Suggestively, by the time of the elections, Yemenis of different backgrounds seemed to believe they found their champion against global capitalism.²⁷

Despite some instances of disorder and violence, the peaceful elections held on April 27, 1993, resulted in the GPC taking most of the votes (Carapico 1998: 3). For its part, YSP not only found itself a very junior partner but also faced another rival in Islah, which practically took over the position of unified Yemen's second party.²⁸ In statements after the elections, the victorious Saleh, while regretting the clear North/South outcome, noted the “people had spoken” and that the “march towards democracy” could not be stopped to accommodate those who were not supported by the people. Saleh, the winner, was in no mood for sharing power (Carapico 1998: 4).

Considering these interactions, it needs to be emphasized that the political violence in Yemen and the corresponding emergence of political Islam is not a coincidence. Despite the possibility of Islah becoming too powerful, Saleh's interests seemed to be better served with al-Ahmar's growing influence, especially as a growing problem with a rebellious south led by the YSP became apparent. This relationship of convenience still plagues domestic politics today.

Tragically, the logic of the situation after the elections, from the perspectives of both the GPC and the YSP, led to a zero-sum game, one that calculated any gain for the YSP as a loss for the GPC and vice versa (Hudson 1995: 16). This ultimately prevented the realization of a truly “democratic transition,” a failure that stimulated further unrest, which in turn only complicated the task of nonpartisan government officials who had hoped to broaden the reach of the state. Perhaps most important for the future of the Yemeni state was that this systemic impediment, along with the fact that each group had firm control over quite separate units in the military and paramilitary groups, left a vacuum in coercive power. In other words, with no single entity monopolizing power, and violence having long been used as a tool of coercion, intimidation, and political leveraging, the civil war of 1994 was waiting to happen.

While the details of the bloody war of 1994 that allowed for this process to finally take off do not need revisiting here (Bakr 1995) it is important to note that a new ambience supplanted the old rhetoric of unity. This discourse of discord and regionalism served the interests of not only Saleh but a small

number of outside countries as well.²⁹ It is here that recognizing the colonialist tendencies of the Saleh-led state (the exploitation of South Yemen for the benefit of a growing number of northern allies) is especially important to appreciating the postwar period.³⁰ Robert Burrowes (1998) perhaps best captured the spirit by characterizing postwar Yemen a “kleptocracy” in which a “government by and for thieves” orchestrated an ongoing policy of placating allies by allowing them to plunder the resource rich south.

Sure enough, in the immediate period after the war—1995–1999—40 percent of all South Yemen’s small and medium-sized public enterprises were privatized. The pretext for such a controversial policy was securing World Bank and IMF loans, unavailable unless “restructuring” took place. Selling off the Aden Textile Factory, the National Bank of Yemen, and other important (southern) state properties was the sacrifice for these loans (IMF 1999). As during the 1960s, an extragovernmental body was set up to help sell off these assets. The so-called Social Development Fund, set up by the World Bank, facilitated the fire sale while the Saleh state (and its Salafist allies) guaranteed its completion (Hamed 1996).

With the implementation of what the World Bank calls “private sector development,” considerable long-term damage was done to southern Yemen’s capacity to maintain local industries. Once these assets were sold for cheap, large-scale unemployment followed. Instructively, the euphemisms applied when these devastating “adjustments” took place consciously obscured the political ramifications of such sales. With justifications like “reducing the fiscal and monetary burden of the public sector,” and hoping to “raise private enterprise efficiency” (World Bank 1999), many in Yemen quickly turned hostile. The primary target for this ire was Saleh’s regime, which seemingly surrendered all sovereignty to a cadre of “advisors” from globalist institutions.³¹

The accelerated privatization of public properties after 1994 did not translate well in the south. This was made clear by a persistent resistance pushing for greater southern autonomy if not outright independence. As the separatist al-Hirak al-Janubi (the Southern Movement), emerging in 2007 noted, since 1994 South Yemen had been literally in a state of intermittent revolt.³² Therefore, we may conclude that the unrest in South Yemen that is currently (2018) labeled as a war against the Huthis based in the northwest of Yemen had its actual roots in the Saleh- (and his vice president Hadi-) led hegemonic push following unification. Ironically, what helped Saleh’s quest to consolidate power after 1994 was the return of old southern families living for years in exile.

Having fled the Marxist capture of newly independent South Yemen in 1967, many prominent families, already with ties in the still British administered Trucial States—Qatar, Bahrain, all the Emirates—installed themselves into the ruling hierarches of these soon-to-be independent, oil-rich states. As with those who joined earlier generations of Yemenis in Jeddah and Mecca/Medina (especially the Bin Laden family), Yemenis were the first in line to profit from the oil-boom-induced construction explosion in larger Arabia. Eager to win the favor of those who became important global players in various industries, Saleh invited old Hadhrami families to return home to “develop” the south, offering to rewrite the legal infrastructure to facilitate.³³

For the immediate post-civil war period, successive constitutional amendments solidified centralized power in the executive, leading to a *de facto* merger between the ruling party and the state, both headed by Saleh. In the meantime, the GPC severed its ties with its previous partners, Islah, inviting years of conflict (Browsers 2007). While a rivalry with Saleh’s GPC did follow, parallel developments in civil society over the next fifteen years also contributed to the actual failure of the Islah to play the role as leader in opposition. Such moves by Saleh to secure more power spurred on a dramatic rise in civil society activity, with self-help groups and local communities fending for themselves as the spoils of power increasingly translated into a dysfunctional government (Dingli 2013). As a result, Yemen became the destination for political scientists who wanted to study the explosion of grassroots organizations in the face of Saleh’s drive to secure greater power (al-Eriani 2016; Schwedler 2006: 103–21).

WISDOM IN NUMBERS

Sheila Carapico (1998: 220) demonstrated that several groups not linked to Islah enjoyed virtual political (and by default economic) autonomy at the expense of Saleh’s state. In such a position, they were thus able to thwart efforts to build state power. More importantly, they could leverage their relative ability to upset local stability to assure greater rent from either the Yemeni state, the “oppositional” Islah, or, more lucrative still, outside powers hoping to manipulate local politics.

This amorphous source of local power was not always reserved for constituencies inhabiting the northern highlands. For instance, the resurrected political elite of the Hadhramawt and even the Adeni hinterlands became

the backbone of two often conflicting interests. Consequently, Saleh himself began to solicit the political alliance of these Hadhramis and natives of Lahj, a forgotten factor in Saleh's strategy both to undermine his southern rivals as well as to counterbalance opponents within the former boundaries of North Yemen. Crucial to Saleh, both the Lahj and Hadhrami migrant communities, which formed an important substratum of the regional economy in Ta'iz, as well as throughout the Gulf, actually invested heavily in his initial unification strategy of the early 1990s.³⁴ Not only would these temporary loyalists prove crucial to sustaining commercial links in South Yemen during the unification process, but many of these Hadhrami allies would also become key actors in Saleh's own version of "neotribalism," a strategy that aimed to undermine the ability of the YSP to ever rival Saleh again (Wedeen 2008; Phillips 2008).

While politically useful, the biggest contributions these Yemenis offered Saleh was financial influence. Their access to global capital helped unload billions on future (mostly still unrealized) property development and infrastructure projects in South Yemen. Taking the form of IMF-induced "structural adjustments" that required a compliant political elite willing to sell off state assets immediately after unification, we can identify the subsequent instability in South Yemen throughout the 1990s and 2000s as a by-product of the global economy being entirely built around cheap foreign credit.³⁵

The resulting speculative boom most famously made places like Dubai possible while revitalizing New York and London property markets. The cost of this massive inflation of money supply, however, was that the global economy became intimately connected, thus exposing the saver, be they in Peoria, Adelaide, or Aden, to the frequent market corrections that commodity traders on Wall Street and City of London brokers were incentivized to exploit (Das 2011: 65–69). Less known during this period than the more spectacular locales where global finance parked their speculative capital was Yemen. This segmented integration of the country into a dysfunctional global economic order was eventually halted by an uprising germinating in Sa'adah province.

FINANCIALIZING ISLAM

Before turning to this remarkable story of "subaltern" resistance to what I suggest is a direct correlation to expansive finance capitalism (and its investments

in South Arabia) it is necessary to explore further what was taking place in Yemen after unification that led to such a violent response from those who eventually would become known as the “Huthis.”

As much as the Hadhrami diasporic elites coveted business alliances with empire, they also keenly rebuilt spiritual links upon returning home in the early 1990s. While many became hardened Salafists or even Wahhabis thanks to their growing up in Qatari or Saudi societies, they also often sought to revitalize their spiritual heritage. Basically, the Hadhrami diaspora started a global revitalization of spiritual (and trade) networks linking the old Sufi hubs of Tarim to the outside world (Knysh 2001). The most prominent patrons of the old Sufi *tariqats* were finding new life with the activities of the Junayid and al-Kaff families from Singapore and the Jifri family’s transnational educational empire known as the Dar al-Mustafa center (Bonney 2011: 229–34; Talib 1997; Walker 2008; Ho 2006: 195–243). The depth of these Hadhrami networks’ investment in South Yemen ultimately transformed their (ancestral) homeland into a veritable extension of, on the one hand, Malaysia and Indonesia, and on the other, the United Arab Emirates, Kuwait, and Qatar, where many settled by the 1970s.

At the same time as the revitalization of an old global pilgrimage route made Tarim a spiritual epicenter once again, emerging within the larger region, often setting up shop side-by-side, were an assortment of Salafist and sometimes overtly Saudi or Qatari Wahhabi groups.³⁶ Thus, as much as the biggest contributors to Tarim’s Sufi renaissance came from the extended Hadhrami diaspora based in Southeast Asia, those drawn to the self-declared Sunni compounds were foreign Arabs and South Asians, many already with a history of violence in Afghanistan. The resulting tension left an imprint of Yemen’s religious and regional politics for years to come.

Securing a stranglehold over southern groups by using the most violent Afghan Arabs (those Yemenis and non-Yemeni migrants who fought the Soviets in Central Asia) and then the management of their role in subsequent years was a task left to men like Zindani and ‘Ali Muhsin. Their mobilization of radical *takfiri* groups, ostensibly to help with domestic political struggles, constitutes one of the most significant developments in Yemen since 1994.³⁷ In some ways, it could be argued that Saleh’s regime and its clients had solved the problem of power sharing with their discovery of *takfiri* violence. Today the results are evident in the strong links between Hadi and what remains of the old Islah elite that distanced itself from Doha, sharing exile in Riyadh.

There is an important caveat that should be drawn from this otherwise rough sectarian canvas. While numerically superior, the openly hostile Salafist groups, many with deep links to the KSA and recruited from all corners of the world, did have to face considerable local—that is, Yemeni—pushback on theological and political grounds. Their Pan-Islamic, transnational *takfiri* discourse clashed with local “quietist” Salafists who adopted a decidedly “nativist” orientation toward their missionary work. In this regard, the Sufis and the “Wadi‘i” Salafists shared a common, foreign enemy.³⁸

This diversification of the spiritual environment in Yemen meant efforts to politicize Islam required mobilizing Muslims to act consciously against other Muslims. This required a discourse of sectarianism that would require the importation of an almost certainly alien element to Yemen’s political and cultural life. The arrival of men and women who would then serve as *takfiri* agents for larger agendas near and far hints at the incremental growth of entrepreneurial indigenous movements aiming to secure lucrative global ties. This process, encouraged by Saleh who periodically conceded large areas of his country to Saudi and Qatari interests in return for support, produced the conditions necessary for Yemen’s current war. Indeed, violence at the micro level, cultivated by the Yemeni state, often evolved into larger regional conflicts that involved the KSA, Qatar, China, Pakistan, India, and the USA (but *not* Iran). Reason enough to take a closer look at those who may have made these Yemenis so angry.

Crucial for the expansion of powerful nonstate interests was the promise of making money from Yemen’s “decentralization,” a problem we will see becoming acute only after 2011.³⁹ One key sector of state authority diminished after the 1994 civil war was education. While it would take a war and the divvying up of the spoils to Afghan Arabs who helped destroy the Southern Yemeni resistance, much of Yemen’s political landscape changed by then (Burgat 2006). Marking that transformation was the rise of the Salafist-orientated school.⁴⁰ In 1995, the Saleh regime opened the floodgates by allowing foreigners to fund these private schools, long a demand by empire. As intended, the *de facto* privatization of rural schools was especially dangerous as the long-term loyalties of Yemeni peasants were at stake.

The pretext for the schools that emerged throughout rural Yemen was the convenient tie-in to the campaign to privatize government functions. Encouraged by the USA, World Bank, and regional partners, the decision to

surrender the education of the masses flooding Yemen from the Horn of Africa and the GCC to Salafist groups constituted a victory for both the GPC and their Islamists allies (Beh and Alameer 2012; Coffman 1996).

That said, there is a danger of observing this clear power shift in Yemeni politics as uniformly beneficial to KSA or Qatari interests, at least in the beginning. Again, the Salafist groups monopolizing rural education in Yemen came from quite diverse theological traditions, a source of actual conflict between groups rather than blind collaboration. Indeed, as French scholar Laurent Bonnefoy (2009) crucially demonstrates, there was tension between different Salafist projects that the Saleh regime encouraged to assure it never completely subordinated itself to the whims of empire's crudest weapon.

Instructively, the most prominent Salafist program emerging at the time was not even funded by the KSA. Arising within the web of loyal followers of Muqbil al-Wadi'i, himself inspired by Shaykh Nasir al-Din al-Albani's "quietist" Salafism, this formidable movement stimulated by a set of theological principles hostile to the KSA, was also profoundly Yemeni in orientation. Once associated with the anti-Saudi Jama'a al-salafiyya al-muhtasiha, al-Wadi'i from the early 1990s onward clashed with not only the Zaydi establishment, but the MB represented by al-Ahmar and Zindani, and various protégées of foreign supported *takfiri* groups. In other words, the case of the school Dar al-Hadith that al-Wadi'i founded demonstrates the need to disaggregate the Salafist label when observing political Islam in Yemen at least prior to 2005 but likely also today.⁴¹ More often than not, tensions between very different kinds of religious organizations, mobilizing very different kinds of partisans, led to violence today utterly glazed over by the simplified narrative presented in the mainstream and alternative media alike in respect to political Islam.⁴²

OPENING UP FITNA'S BOX: A GIFT THAT KEEPS ON GIVING

Among other tools available to ensure that outside allies properly interpreted the character of local resistance to the Saleh regime was to evoke the Iranian-backed, Hizbullah-trained Shi'i boogeyman. In the case of the far northwest of the country, which became the epicenter of much of Yemen's war against the world since 1990, the specific issues facing the people of Sa'adah and their enduring dispute with the Saudi government necessitated stigmatizing them

as “Shi‘a.”⁴³ The Saleh regime’s resorting to sectarianism against large segments of North Yemenis, today lumped together as “Huthis,” promised at once new roles for these foreign *takfiris* making their way to Yemen since the 1990s and narrowing the interpretive field for scholars, journalists, and policy makers to sectarianism.

Such moves reflected a new pattern of describing conflicts throughout the region that usefully exploited the anti-Iranian rhetoric circulating within empire more generally. Such micromanagement by Saleh’s regime of local (and isolated) pockets of opposition constitutes a masterful case of post-Cold War survival.⁴⁴ That said, there is a political context to Saleh’s slide toward choosing violence over negotiation with the peoples of Sa‘adah we should not forget. At the formal level, Saleh’s government increased the number of seats won by the GPC in the 1997 parliamentary elections.⁴⁵ Added to this sense of legitimacy was Saleh’s reelection as president. Armed with this new “mandate” in 2001, Saleh succeeded in forcing amendments to the constitution guaranteeing his executive power despite opposition from Zaydi rural leaders, Islah, and what was left of the socialists based in Aden.⁴⁶ This apparent success at the polls, largely given the seal of approval by foreign observers, signaled an important asset in the hands of the regime: legitimacy by the ballot meant it had free reign to subjugate any insubordination.

Meanwhile, great attention was paid to the purchase of increasingly sophisticated military hardware and to the modernizing of Yemen’s military forces, particularly the elite Republican Guards.⁴⁷ In a short time, Saleh’s state expanded its activities all over the country, penetrating different political organizations, military units, government bodies, and even NGOs. Active NGOs were particularly targeted once they themselves successfully established alliances with local clients.⁴⁸

The wars in Sa‘adah thus began as a quasi-police operation to arrest an opponent of the regime no longer willing to tolerate resistance. A former member of parliament, Husayn al-Huthi had taken up a regional cause regarding the right of local communities to use sources of water and grazing lands increasingly rendered inaccessible by expanded Saudi border patrols and the privatization of some key tracks of lands as per IMF “structural adjustment” demands. As he and his closest allies resisted persecution, al-Huthi won over the hearts and minds of thousands.

Over five rounds of negotiations, endless ceasefires, and international hand-wringing reflected a needlessly complex struggle between numerous interests that in time accumulated grievances with the state and its allies (al-San‘ani

2005: 23–43). Indeed, with each new confrontation with locals, the state created a larger group of antagonists who gravitated around the charismatic leadership of al-Huthi. The nature of the struggle soon expanded beyond Sa‘adah itself, reviving old Yemeni irredentist claims to Najran, ‘Asir, and Jizan lent out in 1934 to Saudi Arabia.

Once Riyadh, with increasing support from Saleh’s government, formalized the boundary by a 2000 treaty signed in Jeddah, the program to separate the countries with walls, fences, and security posts began. Those who moved back and forth across these lands for all their lives were now required to obtain visas to pass through newly fenced areas. As these natives saw it, they were being targeted for outright alienation from their lands, just as those in Mar’ib in the late 1980s discussed above. Considering it was some of the best farming and grazing land in Yemen, with considerable water resources available as well, Saleh’s concessions to the KSA amounted to both an “unpatriotic” and criminal betrayal.

Such was the context for the region’s indigenous population’s persistent hostility to the KSA and the Saleh regime. The fact that the Yemeni state (and NATO powers) helped enforce this sizable land grab with little to no compensation overrides any covenant between a state’s authority and the local population’s property.⁴⁹ And yet, with war comes winners and losers. As argued throughout, conflict with locals and the subsequent chaos served the strategic interests of various actors. Indeed, at the outset of these Sa‘adah wars, eventually lasting nine years (2000–2009), the Saudis believed they had secured a pretext to expand even further into Yemeni territory. In fact, in 2009 the Saudi state openly admitted to creating a buffer zone 10 kilometers within Yemeni territory.⁵⁰ More, there was a well-documented period during the early phase of the conflict when Riyadh conducted a campaign of forced resettlement of the indigenous Isma‘ili (Yam) population once living along the entire border area.⁵¹ In this respect, the long-sought-after colonization of areas under dispute with Yemen since 1934 could finally take place under the cover of “security operations.”

There are of course other external factors contributing to the violence along the Yemeni-Saudi border. The popular assertion that Iran was somehow involved because the principals were “Shi‘a” is far less useful to understanding the violence than considering the commercial windfall from such events. As in other “hot zones” around the world, the conflicted interests of the military industry influenced the direction events took in South Arabia. Not only were various parties influenced by the profits gleaned from

the war lasting from 2000 to 2009, but even UN-led diplomatic efforts to stop the conflict were shaped by the political economy of violence.⁵² In the end, having failed to stop local resistance invariably led to a new quest to provide security for the Saudi state facing an irredeemable “Iranian-backed” enemy.⁵³

The rise of the Huthi movement itself, instrumental to the creation of AnsarAllah and the sustained war from 2015 onward, is only possible to understand considering events along a borderland that threatened to transform entirely the way of life of the area’s inhabitants.⁵⁴ Recognizing the threat posed by Saudi expansionism by stealth, upwards of 3,000 heavily armed local men, enjoying support from their Yam neighbors long assumed loyal to the Saudis, initiated resistance to the Saleh–Saudi boundary agreement of 2000. By February 2004, the Wa’ilah communal leadership behind the resistance to the European defense contractor EADS’s barrier being erected on their lands gained global prominence. This was a fight against what we may call the securitization of their land. Crucially, belated attempts at offering compensation were rejected as leading members of the affected communities reiterated that nothing would change the fact that the Wa’ilah and Yam agreements of mutual help superseded those imposed by Saudi-paid lawyers. By 2009 these events were serious enough to finally attract the attention of the overseas media.⁵⁵

As seen with the eventual demonization of the partisans behind this resistance and later the Huthi clan that supported them, the Saleh regime adopted a predictable response: characterizing the opposition as agents of foreign forces (most often in reference to Iran) and thus terrorists. On the grounds of a reticent local group failing to bow to state pressure, the regime often “justifiably” increased violence at strategic moments, a form of selective repression sanctioned by the outside world because almost everyone accepted Iranian-backed agitators were responsible for upsetting regional stability. The use of the “Iran card” corresponded with key members of the international community, such as the USA, members of the EU, and UN officials, demanding that Yemen’s state play a more direct part in the “war on terror.” This role as “frontline” state proved perfectly suitable for a regime also playing along with privatizing the Yemeni economy and supporting its integration into the global capitalist system.

By 2004 the regime successfully positioned itself as Washington’s key ally against manifestations of “radical Islam.” Because of its increased cooperation with the USA in the quest to ostensibly project KSA influence over

resistant Hadhramis and North Yemeni self-identified Islamic groups, the regime could expect greater support from its temperamental local allies like 'Ali Muhsin and other members of the al-Ahmar clan. Unfortunately, such support was accompanied by an even greater willingness to resort to violence. As the Saleh regime's overseas allies continuously looked the other way, many regions of the country witnessed a dramatic rise in attacks on "Islamic terrorist" safe havens code for either "traitorous" separatists or Huthi inspired rebels in Sa'adah.⁵⁶

CONCLUSION

Perhaps most troubling is that these "internationally approved" state actions often took the form of extrajudicial assassinations carried out by elite "counterterrorism" units, professional hit men or, more notoriously, unmanned drones. Not only did the attacks come with considerable civilian casualties, they were often targeting political rivals or leaders of local efforts to protect communal lands from capitalist pillage, not the *takfiri* radicals openly training in camps throughout Abyan, Shabwah, and Jawf provinces. In other words, the "war on terror" was used as cover to eliminate legitimate resistance to the Saleh regime, at the time working with empire.

These measures represented a shift in the entire nature of Yemen's political environment. Among other things, the rather dubious shoot-to-kill policy, often based on easily corrupted "intelligence," predictably became a source of tension in the country. Many locals warned that the worsening chaos in Yemen because of Saleh's vicious tactics would have long-term consequences. In time, the regime's strategic shift to exploit the USA's highly dubious, but lucrative, war became a problem from within the killing apparatus itself. Pilots of drones started to confess publicly just how egregiously criminal these CIA and MI6 operations against Yemenis (and Pakistanis, Somalis, and God knows whom else) really were.⁵⁷

This slide towards greater state (and increasingly corporate) violence at the expense of pursuing traditional strategies of conflict resolution resulted in a dramatic increase in regional instability. As I have argued elsewhere, this move toward chaos was strategic (Blumi 2010). The parties most invested in Yemen's literal collapse were nonstate entities and often foreign-linked financial interests whose stealthy exploitation relied on the Yemeni government's sovereignty to write the country's future off for pennies on the dollar. In

return for its cooperation, well-placed henchmen of the Saleh regime—General ‘Ali Muhsin al-Ahmar and other members of the al-Ahmar clan, and Saleh’s extended family, snakes to millions of Yemenis—were generously compensated. It is the consequences of this pillage of unprecedented proportions and the fight over who controls the rewards to which we shall turn in the next chapter.

*Plundering Yemen and Its
Post-Spring Hiatus*

The bestiality of imperialism knows no limits, has no national frontiers.

CHE GUEVARA, 1965

INTRODUCTION

Until today Yemenis' issue has been the lack of a unified opposition that could "legally" contest the oligarchs of global finance and their local surrogates. In response to each Yemeni challenge, empire has mobilized "legitimate" counterforces—from US drone strikes, *takfiri* thugs, interim governments, to even unleashing a UN-backed coalition to bombard (and starve) Yemenis into submission. Under these programs of suppression, a long list of foreign actors—national armies, mercenaries, "humanitarian aid" workers, academics—have been recruited to discipline Yemenis. Until now, these measures to suppress Yemenis have failed. That millions in Yemen still resist globalization has led some within the deepest hovels of empire to conclude that the only way to pillage Yemen now is to destroy it.

Before coming to this conclusion, empire relied on the unhealthy coalition forged between the Saleh clan and the extended network behind Shaykh Abdullah bin-Husayn bin-Nasir al-Ahmar. Under this shaky alliance's watch, foreign and local interests have attempted persistently to introduce the kind of neoliberal policies needed to realize empire's long-awaited subordination of South Arabia. From massive construction projects requiring billions in debt financing, oil/gas infrastructure, property development, microfinance enterprises, the privatization of state assets in agriculture, water management, mining, and banking, Yemen fell into a web of dependency linking it to the exploitative forces blowing up the larger world.

So thorough had the integration become that it was no longer possible to detach Yemen from global shifts that, by the 2007 financial meltdown, induced death and destruction everywhere. As a desperate financial oligarchy scrambled to find new sources of wealth, the increasingly vulnerable hanging fruit that was Saleh's Yemen followed the fate of Zaire/Congo, Libya, Syria, Iraq, and perhaps soon Venezuela.

The subsequent efforts to harvest Yemen's wealth during this global turmoil were played out in open fields in Abyan province in the form of drone strikes and in high-rise offices in New York, Zurich, and London. Masterminded by cocaine-snorting bankers, hedge fund managers, and commodities brokers, neoliberal financial bombs perfected in Latin America ripped through Yemenis' resistance. And yet, peasant militias in Sa'adah province and southern separatist groups continuously frustrated the Saleh/al-Ahmar regime's attempts at political subjugation. Out of frustration, as of 2009 empire unleashed a new set of financial weapons.

Although they are paying the ultimate price in 2018, most Yemenis did not know that their country became the frontline of a larger battle for global financial hegemony. This war has pitted empire against the likes of Qadhdhafi and his gold-backed African dinar and the BRI(I)CS coalition (Hoff 2016). The latter especially became a veritable threat to the stranglehold a few private banks in the North Atlantic had over the world. Its plans to offer the undeveloped world financing by way of alternative, gold-backed currencies and a bank—New Development Bank—designed to rival the IMF, World Bank, and Euro-American Central Banks unleashed our current era of global chaos.¹

This contextualization should help remind us of the shifting causal factors behind the ongoing violence in Yemen, itself a contingency resulting from a brief outburst of indigenous (if fatefully ununified) resistance erroneously associated with the so-called Arab Spring of 2011. Yemenis' violently pushed back against the globalization that, in its most incipient forms, literally infested Yemen by 2011. As outlined below, this infestation entailed the blatant surrender of much of the country's economic assets to those well-heeled global financial interests whose plunder of the world has by now become unquestioned (Amin 1997; Das 2011; Hudson 2005). In the process of perfecting this pillage, Yemen once again became the laboratory for many of the financial weapons of mass destruction that only later surfaced elsewhere. In this regard, what happened over the 2007–2015 period covered below was a critical microcosm of the larger state of the world.

Oil is not only lucrative when traded between state ministries, companies, and brokers. Ever since oil was harvested for commercial purposes in the late nineteenth century, there were those skimming off large amounts for personal use. Throughout the 2000s a few well-connected Yemenis stole and sold millions to oil brokers who, for a commission, linked Chinese or Israeli buyers with the “illegal” oil. None of the revenues collected ever passed through formal Yemeni accounts.

The main perpetrator was none other than Shaykh al-Ahmar who, through the Hashid confederation and its political party affiliates, made a career out of pillaging Yemen. It takes a special skill set to plunder a nation and only the likes of the al-Ahmar clan had the means to run such a massive program of selling Yemeni crude via a London-based, Norwegian firm called Arcadia. By the late 2000s the program had become so big that rivals in the petroleum sector lobbied the US government to shut it down.

The key was the profits earned from what originally was likely a concession to al-Ahmar for the clan’s political compliance. The family’s operations partnered with Arcadia to sell the oil siphoned off the country’s grid for as much as \$1.50 a barrel under daily market prices. Arcadia, by being able to undercut its competitors in the short term, threatened to corner Yemen’s oil market. As payments to those facilitating this scheme bought political cover, Arcadia’s operation produced millions in extra revenue for al-Ahmar, who for over at least a decade, translated this cash flow into domestic power.²

In 2009, under pressure from those in the industry wanting a piece of this lucrative Yemeni trade, US regulatory bodies took Arcadia to court.³ At the same time, Saleh’s government responded to public outcry reacting to news reports, finally breaking up an operation that perhaps cost Yemen billions. While upsetting a very profitable segment of the global grey market in oil, this intervention resulted almost immediately in additional revenue flows to the state coffers of well over a billion US dollars in the first year alone.⁴

It is hard to believe Saleh’s intelligence agencies did not know what was going on (certainly the US embassy did). The fact pressure was put on the government to shut down this operation signals that there were political and economic factors that suddenly changed in 2009. For Saleh to take the fateful decision to go after Sadiq al-Ahmar (who took over leadership with his father’s passing in 2007) and General ‘Ali Muhsin al-Ahmar, perhaps the two most powerful men in the country at the time, means something big was

happening within the fringes of empire.⁵ Whatever the conditions were, the move constituted war with a very dangerous underworld that had deep connections to the larger global economy.

Saleh's moves, with the encouragement of the Obama/Clinton administration, took place at a time when Yemen could least afford an internecine war. As this was 2009, the war in the northern province in Sa'adah still raged. One of the men targeted by the Arcadia "revelations" was General 'Ali Muhsin al-Ahmar, at the time leading the military campaign in Sa'adah. The inability of 'Ali Muhsin's forces to suppress the local "Huthi" militias constituted a small disaster for the KSA, whose direct intervention in support led to Yemeni militias actually occupying large swathes of Jizan province. The two scandals around 'Ali Muhsin were likely politically linked.

'Ali Muhsin's corruption threatened to rip the al-Ahmar/Saleh alliance apart. Over the subsequent three-year period, a fight to halt the plundering of Yemen's wealth eventually mobilized millions. Initially implicated in the plunder of Yemen's oil and publicly blamed for the subsequent violence, a key element of this internecine war among Yemen's political snakes, the patriarch of the al-Ahmar clan since 2007, Shaykh Sadiq, nevertheless identified a window of opportunity.

During the 2011 uprisings the al-Ahmar clan exploited the synchronized abandonment by the Obama administration of empire's old relations in Egypt and Tunisia. As elsewhere in the region, Yemen's MB affiliates, with the protection of al-Ahmar, successfully wrapped themselves around the confusion of the "jasmine spring" while also taking revenge on Saleh. At one point the al-Ahmar clan got so bold as to attack Saleh as he prayed, leaving him burnt over much of his body and hospitalized for months (Phillips 2011).

Clearly, the politics over the control of a revenue stream worth billions had dire consequences for the stability of an entire country. As much as empire had tolerated these arrangements in the past, the reasons for the about-face in 2011 warrants a deeper analysis of the political economy of Yemen's relations with empire. It also requires appreciating how Yemenis eventually declared they had had enough. To properly capture these intersecting forces requires we move the analysis away from the political economy around oil. Like a perfect storm, by 2011 other potentially huge shifts in wealth were playing their own part in turning the levers of political transformation in Yemen. These shifts, in critical ways engulfing the entire Middle East, ultimately account for why destroying Yemen was the only option for at least a significant faction within a potentially fragmenting empire.

As presented in the last two chapters, since the 1950s the KSA has had a critical role in shaping the direction in which Yemen's economy moves. While a more detailed analysis of Saudi direct investment into that economy would require an entire book, it is sufficient here to appreciate the role of Yemenis who resettled in the KSA from the 1960s onward as South Arabia's economy transformed. Even a sample look at the investment in massive infrastructure projects by the Bin Laden group reveals the impact KSA-based Yemenis had on the political economy of (ad)venture capitalism in larger Arabia. What the Bin Laden group envisioned to do with its ability to raise billions in investment capital and mobilize the human and material resources of entire states is especially useful at this stage of our analysis of destroying Yemen.

Before the recent war, Shaykh Tariq bin Laden (CEO of Middle East Development, LLC) was more powerful than most princes in the KSA.⁶ He had the ear of the faction of the family in power and proved to be bold at the right time. His Bridge of the Horn project proved to be one such time. He envisioned linking Djibouti with Yemen (Bin Laden's homeland), a project that could result in hundreds of billions in investments and countless spin-off development projects by 2025.⁷ With a corresponding campaign to address the "issues of the twenty-first century," this project invariably tied in with Ethiopia's rediscovered strategic importance to key KSA allies, the USA, and Israel (Mundy 2015). Crucially, considering its geostrategic significance, this project would have no problem attracting the capital, with only one condition, that the people of the countries involved behaved.

From the damming of the Blue Nile to supply power for Ethiopia's massive expansion of labor-intensive manufacturing and industrial agriculture, the future market for Africa's grains and fresh foods was the consumption economies of Qatar, Kuwait, UAE, and the rest of the GCC (Pearce 2012). Many well-placed Saudis of Yemeni origin promised to produce the kind of synergies needed to finance and then to realize such projects.⁸ But all those promises of "new markets" and "free-trade zones" that could reorient the global economy (and help the KSA, by way of its "vision 2030" project, move out of oil dependency) required a compliant, in fact, entirely subordinate, Yemen.⁹

For the bridge project, as an example, the peoples inhabiting the likely path of the rail and road networks feeding the proposed bridge had to be dispossessed and moved. A look at the map suggests Tihama, a dry, flat swathe

of land along the Red Sea coast was the most cost-efficient route. These areas are also part of the heartland of resistance to Saudi expansionism, however. Trying to possess these lands necessary for any development project would result in years of war.

While far too early to come to any definitive conclusion, there is ample evidence suggesting the initial prosecution of the 2015 war had these very areas of the Tihama in mind. Despite enormous investment into securing the coastal areas, the KSA's mostly Sudanese mercenary force has not done well against Yemeni resistance. Time will tell if Bin Laden's bridge to Africa will ever again be feasible, but it most certainly will not take place under conditions of such resistance. The lesson to draw here, then, is such bold projects require so much violent disruption of people's lives that unless the right conditions are created, no amount of influence peddling and greedy applause from Wall Street will bring it to realization.

From this far too invasive kind of development project we next explore the more realizable investments regional players made in Yemen. And while property development schemes like those embraced by Qatar and UAE have been the most glamorous of Yemen's neoliberal contributions to the global economy, they too have resulted in setting the conditions for violent resistance. Indeed, gated communities overlooking the capital was just the beginning as far as those directly impacted were concerned.

PROPERLY DEVELOPED

In North Yemen, perhaps the biggest player outside of the KSA has been Qatar. Riding a wave of global influence that extended from the Al-Jazeera news network to the funding of radical *takfiri* groups needed to destabilize empire's enemies, Doha's gas-rich enterprise has become a major neocolonial player. Considering recent WikiLeaks revelations about Hilary Clinton's reign as US secretary of state, Qatar's ruling family—al-Thani—has been especially successful in tying its interests with US foreign policy. With considerable amounts of money funneled to the Clinton Foundation, the al-Thani family has been able to link an ambitious agenda to parallel, if not rival, Saudi Arabia's function as both chief patron of radical *takfiri* groups and main financial supporter of Washington's biggest political clans.¹⁰ Crucial for such a small polity, this influence had until the Trump administration (sometimes an ardent rival of the Clintons and neocons whom Doha lavished with money)

bought protection as Qatar took on rivals as diverse as the KSA, UAE, and many in Yemen with seeming abandon (MacEoin 2014).

Among the numerous ways Qatar insinuated itself into Yemen beyond supporting the Islah Party was in property development. Being such an important component of the global economy since the late 1990s, the massive—almost obscenely inappropriate considering Yemen’s general poverty—“Al-Rayyan Hills” project stands out as Qatar’s most aggressive investment into Yemen’s conflicted economy. This project had since 2009 enervated Yemen’s political and social elite. Presented as a “mixed-use” property, it planned to stud one of the rugged cliffs surrounding the southern edge of Sana’a’ with high-end residential units, a series of retail and commercial buildings, community center, mosque, and of course a five-star hotel. Sitting atop Faj Attan Hill, 2,350 meters above sea level, the idealistic renditions of the projected complex promised everything that Yemen was not.¹¹

At approximately US\$600 million, the 440,000-square-meter project was planned to take place over four phases. Its various partner companies were all expected to reap profitable returns for years, especially QPM out of Doha, a company expected to provide the project management, which included design, construction, and cost services. By November 2009 the first phase was initiated, with Qatar’s DIYAR and Shibam Holding the leaders. Water and energy supply, however, were issues already before the breaking of ground. The key here then was that costs were ultimately to be deferred to larger society, while the profits would be repatriated to Qatar or pension funds in the West. More difficult to justify to Yemenis otherwise keen on supporting such a project was the demands from investors that the properties being designed assured their exclusivity and that no locals were allowed.

Such exclusive enclaves for rich Khalijis (Arab Gulf natives) are not unique to Yemen, of course. Greater Cairo has been ringed by gated communities like any self-respecting US city (Sims 2015). Drive through Bosnia today and one realizes it has become a major destination for Qataris who are seeking both investment opportunities and a chance to escape the Gulf’s summer heat. As part of the packaging promising exclusivity and privacy, these enclaves of Qatari colonization come with plenty of rumors to suggest that inside their highly secured, almost militarized compounds rather illegal activities take place.¹²

And yet, projects like these were the twinkle of the Saleh regime’s eye. The chairman of the General Investment Authority, Salah al-Attar, frequently presented the perks of these projects for Yemeni society at large, boasting that

foreign investment in 2009 had reached \$1.6 billion with Qatar leading the pack. Considering these numbers there was plenty of reason to push through further legal reforms quickly to ensure that Gulf money flowed freely. By 2009, in other words, Yemen had become an open conduit for Gulf excess cash.

Schemes to build, as in Dubai, something out of nothing promised quick returns for the savvy investor and considerable long-term profits for the underworld of Yemeni politics. Considering Saleh's own insinuation into all sectors of the Yemeni economy by 2009, at the al-Ahmar's expense it turns out, it would not have been surprising to learn that a member of his entourage tapped into the businesses meant to service this exclusive market niche. This was certainly the case with the otherwise pious Khalijis expected to throw big parties upon the project's completion.¹³ The subsequent impact on the cityscape and the lives of the poor of these neighborhoods targeted by such Qatari projects inevitably translated into open hostility, an energy just waiting for the right combination of leadership and a catalyzing moment.

The other major investor in Yemen prior to 2011—the UAE—had a different kind of experience when it joined in the feeding frenzy. Emiratis and their dynamic, if financially overleveraged enclave economy, have been latecomers in Yemeni politics and overseas development more generally. As mentioned earlier, initiating the UAE's interest in Yemen was the large diaspora. A growing commuting Yemeni-Emirati economic elite envisioned great things for the country after the civil war of 1994. These efforts to enter the country's politicized economy were hampered, however, by KSA and Qatari rivals who often mobilized their *takfiri* assets to thwart physically UAE investment. And yet, while late to the party, by the end of 2010 major Emirati consortiums (in partnership with local construction firms) entered into many potentially lucrative sectors of the Yemeni economy—education, tourism, construction, high-end property development—especially in South Yemen.

The Yemeni Group, partnering with the Sahara Group in Abu Dhabi, was one of the major new players in Yemen overseeing and financing construction projects covering corporate, private, and government clients.¹⁴ Their synergy with local and UAE partners along with their track record impressed many; a marked improvement to that of Rayyah Hills fraught with scandal and close attachment to Islah. A broad range of Emirati interests also extended to mining, which competed with already established mining companies from South Africa, Romania, the UK, the Netherlands, Germany, and France, all harvesting the country's vast gold resources. Once again late to the game, one of Dubai's most important families, with likely Yemeni roots, nevertheless

secured a concession that proved politically significant. In 2010 Thani Dubai Mining claimed to have tapped into a thread of gold near the port of Mukalla worth more than US\$3 billion.¹⁵ They subsequently made hundreds of millions on the claim.¹⁶

Probably the most infamous and visible single investment by UAE-based companies was the development of South Yemen's Aden Port area. In the early Cold War Aden was one of the world's busiest ports; many a South Yemeni exile, either in Abu Dhabi, Kuwait, or somewhere in the KSA dreamed of using the opportunity of South Yemen's liberation from Britain to exploit the port's centrality to global commerce. Aden had it all, it seemed, and with unification, the plan was to tap into diaspora Yemeni desire to invest in their homeland. In response, the unified Yemeni state declared 32,500 hectares part of an Aden Free Zone in the hope that Yemeni-foreign joint ventures would result in the kind of rapid development seen in Dubai (Unruh 2016). Who in Yemen would not want to see Aden turn into Dubai, after all?

As anticipated, this overture to global Yemeni interests did produce results. One of Yemen's largest companies, Hayel Sayyid Anam Group (HSAG), a major food supply and processing conglomerate spread around the world, actively invested in the port area, eventually negotiating a US\$1 billion finance package to develop capacity in the hope of attracting additional investment in an even larger number of joint-ventures.¹⁷ As a Free Zone the idea was to attract traders to Aden's port, its storage facilities and perhaps manufacturing base. The problem was that South Yemen after the war of 1994 became a main asset for Saleh and the Al-Ahmar clan. This meant any business in Aden also had considerable political strings attached. The concern for outside investors was any move forward on developing South Arabia, especially if it entailed large amounts of capital, had to be mediated through empire's Saleh and Al-Ahmar interlocutors, themselves quasi-occupiers of Aden.

Perhaps the most successful example of an outside set of interests working in tandem with Yemenis (Yemen Gulf of Aden Ports Corporation) was the contract signed between the Saleh regime and Dubai Ports World (DPW). In 2008 the International Dubai Seaport Company reached an agreement with Saleh's government over the development and operation of the container terminal in Aden. The deal granted a thirty- or fifty-year concession to run the entire Aden Port operations in return for DPW's promise to double capacity of the port's container facilities and build more berth space for the port. The commitment in further investment was promised to amount to at least US\$220 million in a five-year handover period.¹⁸

The granting of this massive swathe of land (one-third of the total land in Aden) to one group of investors just recently securing the support of a faction within the Saleh regime changed dramatically the politics of development in South Yemen. Tied to these contracts to build up an asset that had slowly been marginalized by the shifts in global trade were efforts to navigate around how this company and other local conglomerates, like HSAG, operated assets that extended from collecting rent from the properties to building light industry, warehousing, and residential buildings. What many in Aden feared were the politics around such massive contracts guaranteed long-term conflicts of interest. HSAG, after all, was not the only stakeholder in South Yemen.

In response to these local concerns, a number of private holding companies that recently emerged actively lobbied well into late 2010 to rewrite Yemeni laws. Despite protests from numerous domestic interest groups, these mixed holding companies hoped to secure the kind of tax-free incentives comparable investments enjoyed around the world. Surprisingly, at this stage many within the government resisted; the resultant pitting of “global free traders” versus “antiquated nationalists” produced a lot of partisan banter in the media (Dingli 2013). The clear divide between nationalists fearing Yemen’s wealth was too easily sold off to hostile neighbors, and those hoping to profit from this burst of investment in the country became an even deeper rift once these same globalist forces targeted Yemen’s poor with debt.

MICROFINANCE

By the 2011 uprising, finance was one of the only profitable games in the global economy. Pre-dating the massive “quantitative easing” phase of this last gasp of a dying global economic order, the larger Middle East had been identified as a last frontier for both retail and finance banking in the West. Huge amounts of savings remained locked away in local structures. As had been with the drug and petrol dollars that had been successfully diverted to “off-shore” accounts and ultimately into the capital flows controlled by North Atlantic banking interests, Arabia’s wealth stored locally was desperately needed if empire would remain liquid after 2007. Sure enough, by late 2007 we see new initiatives taken by the major European and American banks like Goldman Sachs to pitch new financial products to a banking sector that was crucial to “capture,” in order to manipulate local and regional economies (Johnson 2009).

While by the numbers, the aggressive colonization of the Gulf's banking sector is far more significant for empire, Yemen's experience during this period of expansion was consequential to how events in the larger world developed since 2011.¹⁹ Among the many aggressive entries into what had perhaps until recently been agreed as Saudi spheres of influence, Dubai's remarkable ability to pool finance from around the world translated into a strategic buying spree in the southern Red Sea. As we saw with Aden, this included investments in coastal properties in the south (Sana'a's potential for a boom in high-end property development seemed a Qatar forte). But these glitzy projects covered a profitable niche economy with perhaps minimal social engineering consequences.²⁰ With many outlying elements generating large amounts of autonomous savings still beyond the reach of global interests, Yemen remained a work-in-progress. As since the days of the imams, large swathes of Yemeni society continued to live separately from the larger global economy.

With efforts to get Yemenis to park their surplus savings in national banking institutions, a new generation of penetrative strategies was developed both to tap deeper into the Yemeni economic productivity and to better maintain some form of institutional authority over the economic activities of the majority of Yemenis. The story is microfinance, one heralded in Davos as the next great development tool to help the global poor.²¹

As elsewhere, the loans issued out by an increasingly North Atlantic-dominated financial infrastructure are designed to tie people to the global economy by way of debt. While the individual amounts of the loans are relatively small, the function is the same as when entire nations are saddled with "financial obligations." Recognizing the penetrative value of debt in securing both individual compliance (those who must pay off debts usually politically behave) and access to previously inaccessible lands (individuals and communities put up real assets as collateral for access to fiat currency), major European banks like Deutsche Bank (DB) and a consortium created around the German development bank established the Sanad Fund for micro, small, and medium-sized enterprises (MSME). Focusing on exposing rural Yemen to finance the private-public partnership offering loans and equity to local financial institutions—with thousands in Yemen popping up since 2010—effectively indebted Yemenis, poor or rich.²²

Yemen was deemed the darling of the growing microfinance industry, with the primary tool of DB in their aggressive push into Islamic finance being the "award-winning" Amal Bank.²³ It has been the biggest, by far, agent of promoting debt in a "Sharia-compliant" manner.²⁴ Many of Amal

Bank's "products" were tailored for the specifics of different regions in Yemen, hinting at a close collaboration between academia (scholars hired as consultants) and the industry to tap into this long-term pool of human resources. With products like *murabaha* and *ijara*, which won the 2010 CGAP Islamic Microfinance Challenge, Amal and DB targeted Yemenis for "pilot" testing of such programs. Yemen thus served for much of the 2000s as the incubator for a much grander Middle East strategy.²⁵

In no time Yemen was developing, through the eager assistance of development NGOs with Atlantic World connections and sponsored by the industry, training sessions where small-time investors were encouraged to create and integrate in a network (now destroyed by the war) of microfinance banks. Informatively, even after the 2011 uprisings that chased Saleh from power and globalists put Yemen under the "interim" administration of Hadi, this network of banks had found several channels to market the outcomes of the industry and effectively lobby political interests. What they advocated was Yemenis to appreciate microfinance as the bridge over IMF-imposed austerity that left much of Yemen destitute and robbed it of future effective social planning.²⁶ In reality, the campaign aimed to push impoverished peasants to borrow their way to debt slavery.

Until being forced out by AnsarAllah in late 2014, Hadi served his masters well. He successfully expanded a process already started under the late Saleh/al-Ahmar regime, which forced Yemen's poor to increasingly go into debt through such programs in order to survive the inflationary conditions induced by IMF-inspired austerity.²⁷ In no uncertain terms, Yemenis were being asked to put up whatever real assets they had for collateral to borrow money to pay for services Hadi's government was no longer willing to provide.

FISHING WITH DYNAMITE

Drawing on testimonials gathered over the last few years of field work, it is clear another major prize for empire is Yemen's fisheries. Yemen's huge territorial waters mark a last frontier for many of the major fishing conglomerates, and the war could not have come at a better time to literally plunder Yemen's seas. In the larger universe of food politics long registered in studies in Africa, who owns the food clearly plays a role in Arabia's affairs, as we briefly saw with GCC states' investments in the Horn of Africa. We may add to this still untapped story the fisheries off the coast of Yemen, which, along with the oil,

is a major prize in this current war. In one of the many sick ironies, this war that starves people is waged for others to secure food assets.²⁸

Related to this stealth campaign to control Yemen's territorial waters are coastal development schemes, including food processing facilities (all interestingly destroyed by coalition bombing after 2015) and tourism.²⁹ As with the entire Tihama needing to be tamed if Bin Laden's bridge project is feasible, so too does much of South Yemen's coastal areas become strategic points for foreign paid forces to secure for paymasters. Indeed, much of Yemen's coastal zones with both military and commercial value likely face quasi-annexation. The USA in partnership with the UAE, for instance, now have fully occupied the island of Socotra and is rumored to be building an airbase there. As of April 2017, the UAE signed a pliable local "leader" to develop the area. Aside from the oil and likely tourist opportunities, are the billions to be made in fishing from securing the waters off Socotra (and Yemen more generally).³⁰

Thanks to a World Bank report written in 2003, we know that a quiet hysteria over Yemen's potential as a fishing goldmine was developing. Experts gushed that the ratio of processed marine resources to total fish exports for Yemen was only 0.004 percent. The corresponding figures of other fish exporters such as Thailand, China, and Morocco were 44 percent, 34 percent, and 26 percent respectively. The world average was 17.3 percent. "There are huge prospects for Yemen to bolster fish exports," and what no one says about Yemen's fishery industry, as with the oil, is that there are billions of dollars of annual income at stake (World Bank 2003: 72-73). Sure enough, the moment war broke out in 2015, foreign ships started to rob Yemen. Today off the coast, where only coalition war ships guard the shores "against piracy," Spanish, South Korean, and Chinese crews are plundering Yemen's territorial waters without even having to hand out pay-offs to government officials, as was reportedly the case prior to 2015 (IFAD 2010: 3-4).

In the past, the key to long-term returns on investments in Yemen was stability. Stability of the regime, that is. Assets like fisheries, oil, human labor, and mining, however, do not need necessarily a stable society. In fact, blowing up Yemen has served some interests very well indeed. By 2011 Yemenis responded in a surprisingly unified way. Locals are beginning to respond.

The rapid privatization of many of Yemen's assets due to the orderly breakdown of the once formidable South Yemen state may have signaled to some that it is time to return some stability to places like Aden now that it is out of the hands of North Yemeni governance. This certainly appears to be the objective of competing (UAE vs. Hadi/Saudi) administrators now fighting

over control of Aden since late 2015. The intriguing fact that UAE-backed forces are facing the *takfiri* menace that has long benefited the conjoined interests of Qatar and the KSA and war profiteers means that, from now on, any long-term development of South Yemen will be mediated by violence.

As can be observed in Aden since April 2015 (still under threat of violence as two rival camps within the coalition fight for control of the city) any medium-term postconflict development will require force to secure the city.³¹ Already evident as well are the more sordid forms of economic activity—prostitution, slave labor, inflation, sharpened class divides—described elsewhere in disaster zones similar to Aden today (Klein 2007; Burgis 2015).

IMF(ED)

The problem for those since 2009 hoping to realize such potentially lucrative returns from plundering Yemen was that the partisans of neoliberalism charged with assuring the country's pacification could not produce results. For Yemen to reach the operational stage where oil and capital flowed out into the global "market" there needed to be little functional resistance from those invariably impacted by the changes. Saleh's government had evolved to provide such a service when it joined forces with al-Ahmar and, selectively, *takfiri* militias. As Salah progressed, however, his regime proved incapable of subduing the people of northwest Yemen. By 2009, to implement the necessary "structural adjustments" needed to pauperize large swaths of still independent Yemeni communities, a new approach was needed. This was especially evident as Yemenis again collectively mobilized to protest the unemployment, homelessness, and hunger they experienced because of Saleh's dutifully implementing IMF and World Bank readjustment programs. The resulting violence, first in the Sa'adah district, various locales in Abyan province, and then, by 2011, throughout the country was a game changer.

As elsewhere in the world, the impact of structural changes, the selective use of regulation and taxation (or reduced state subsidies), and sudden economic shocks onto the larger Yemeni population intensified a sense of despair. Already expressed in all-out war against revolting villagers in the Sa'adah province since at least 1993, there was an equally dangerous separatist movement arising in South Yemen. Old partisans of the YSP nostalgic for South Yemen as an independent state increasingly grew frustrated with the direction of their homeland since 1994. As a response, Hirak emerged in 2007

to rearticulate the suspicion that unification was but a ruse to plunder South Yemen's enormous mineral potential and its serviceable infrastructure and physical assets (Dahlgren 2014). Unable to mollify these diverse constituencies politically, the old tactics of winking, letting money and weapons flow to certain quarters, and allowing the American drones to complete the hit left many South Yemenis in an entirely unsatisfactory position (Scahill 2016).

Strangely, the violent integration of Yemen into the global economy remained largely immune of any political economic analysis. It was not civil war that befell Yemen in 2011, it was another phase of a war of survival against the nastiest forms of finance capitalism. One of the most important factors putting Yemen on the frontline of the ongoing global war for ascendancy was the growing presence of China. Both Chinese state and private investors had begun to give the Saleh regime some leverage over surrogates of what is now an empire in transition. As China starting in the 2000s invested billions in Yemeni oil (now increasingly available with the end of al-Ahmar's operations), infrastructure, and fishing, South Arabia was suddenly caught in the middle of a struggle between empire and a new global rival.³²

As suggested earlier, the rise of a global coalition in resistance—BRI(I) CS—constituted a major challenge to empire's exploitative apparatus. Chinese offers for business with no strings attached meant Yemen's oligarchs had a new resource to sustain power over their increasingly impoverished subjects. In conditions reminiscent of the Cold War, empire responded with obfuscation, intimidation, blackmail, and violent coercion. In the process of trying to halt Chinese ascendancy, empire left once useful surrogates like Saleh, Egypt's Mubarak, Bahrain's Khalifa, and Tunisia's Ben Ali vulnerable to contingencies emerging within and beyond the Middle East.

But when the people revolted, their dangerous calls for an economic reorientation demanded some emergency engineering. What we saw in the so-called Arab Spring, in other words, was the controlled demolition of an outdated structure of imperial rule. The subsequent reactionary campaign to stem Yemen's "revolution" meant that a new figurehead "in power" was needed. As in Egypt, Tunisia, and eventually Libya, a Saudi/Qatari/US-backed MB candidate rose to the top. One Tawakkul Abedl-Salam Karman—heavily pushed as an Islah Party's and "woman's" candidate—promised to be a more viable intermediary for empire than Saleh. Critically, a wide breadth of Yemen's diverse population responded in an impressive moment of resistance, so much so that by early 2011 their struggle made the Yemen subsidiary unsustainable, even with a charismatic Islamist like Karman promising Yemenis change.



FIGURE 4. Shelled Military Base on Airport Road. Portrait of ousted President Saleh demonstrates the enduring loyalty of many in Yemen's military to the old regime. Note English graffiti on wall to the left exclaiming Get Out!, or Irhal!, and on the right in Arabic: Libya Congratulations, May Yemen Be Next. Sana'a, January 2013. Photo by author.

IRHAL!

The events of early 2011 brought forth a confused moment of possibility. A series of protests against corruption, violence, and the larger economic crisis threatened to spiral out of control. In rapid succession, detractors of a regime that continued to betray the trust of the poor and empower the powerful few mobilized across seemingly distinctive regional and sectarian lines to reconstitute in the streets of Yemen's cities. In no time the "Huthi" cause and those of the urban poor, and even fringes of the religiously conservative groups drawing rent from factions within Islah Party, conjoined into a truly national popular uprising (Hill 2017; Thiel 2015). The subsequent scramble among the major powers to devise a response would prove illuminating in retrospect for those still idealistic among the protestors.³³

Amid flying bullets that only inflated the opposition's numbers, outsiders promised the world to the protestors. Foreign media and globally connected bloggers went to work and established what one may characterize as a

rhetorical firewall. Separating Yemenis' very distinctive plights from their indigenous ways of solving them by cynically labelling it, in preemption, part of an "Arab Spring," in search for "freedom," and "democracy," foreign agents, activists, and their local partners steered the meaning of such violent uprisings away from the structural—economic, moral—causes.

Unfortunately, a growing, amorphous potential agent of history, "the youth," got sucked up into the new atmospherics of the mediated "revolution" as well. The tell-tale signs of a much more aggressive co-option by stealth was the American human assets who began to appear everywhere once bullets started to fly and order was quickly dissipating.³⁴ From the clever phrases printed on the finest placards, easily marketed to a global audience, activists with strong institutional backing, Hashim al-Abara of the Media and Information Center or Tawakkul Karman for example, took over the narrative. Through well-oiled "youth organizations;" posters throughout Yemen's cities with the clenched fists and portraits of Che Guevara pasted on them popped up in literally copy-paste versions of other activities in Egypt, Tunisia, and Syria. Photogenic scenes made their way in well-funded websites and what was supposed to be a domestic Yemeni struggle became part of a global (empire) apparatus of social engineering.

Once "authentic" symbols of revolt against capitalist crimes, "revolution" worked now entirely for the George Soros–funded Open Society, Movements. org, US government–funded National Endowment for Democracy (who funded the Project on Middle East Democracy), CANVAS, and their pupils like Otpor in Serbia.³⁵ Many of these local-based groups, through training seminars (summer camps) in Virginia or Jordan, learned how to create and sustain youth organizations in their homelands. Young Egyptians, Syrians, and a few Yemeni members of the MB like Karman, became itinerant operatives helping globalists co-opt their countries' color revolutions.³⁶

The result was that most "activists" quickly confused the global attention their causes received for empathy. Many of the most dynamic leaders surrendered their operational committees (filling the thousands of tents that remained erected well into April 2011) to new emerging media stars and those American and European "advocates" swooping in (El-Eriani 2015). In a process of undermining the raw revolutionary potential of events in Egypt, Tunisia, and Wall Street, Yemen's uprisings were systematically tied to personalities, like Karman, at the expense of a diverse and far more vigorous opposition (Yadav 2011; cooke 2016). In other words, when big media came swooping in to interview Karman everyone should have heard alarm bells ringing.

Churning social unrest always spurs entrepreneurial spirits. The protests that lit up the streets long before 2011 took on new, immediate value as they suddenly found a linking narrative. Days of rage and demands for the system to fold excited the same idealistic opportunism as found elsewhere in the Middle East. There was certainly the element of shared agendas that was intraregional at first sight. The ubiquitous presence of social media and Al-Jazeera spurring on Yemen's impressionistic, eager, and entirely fed-up youth took it to the (wo)man while filling the conversations with useful phrases like "leave/get out" "the people united," and "Iran Out," revealing a kind of preemptive political engineering (Yadav 2016).

For a few intense and equally invigorating weeks, the alliances, dying, and iterations of outrage taking place on Yemen's city streets promised the kind of moments revolutions make. At the time, there was indeed a great deal of hope. Alas, with the rapid repositioning of the same political elite—the posturing of General 'Ali Muhsin al-Ahmar abandoning Saleh in March 2011 to "join the people" was laughable then, sickening in retrospect—we saw within the revolution several counterrevolutionary tracks. Soon it became apparent that even sterner fates awaited those who persisted too much longer. Yemen would not go down the route of popular democracy.

It took a while, though, for the larger world to mastermind an exit strategy; it has hardly proven a convincing fix six years later. Worse, it will take still more time for us to fully appreciate just how much more plundering took place in the interim. There is, after all, a war still raging. But we do know that back in 2011, the principals to usher in a post-Saleh era were vetted and finally carted out, after some six months of delay, with many of the same old faces standing in the background. Empire tried its best by parading a fresh, promising, and female face to the world. Marketed as the incarnation of civil mobilization and Middle Eastern women's power, the shining star of both the neoliberal project and the key public relations asset of the MB, Tawakkul Karman even got to share the Nobel Peace Prize in 2011.³⁷

However, as I wrote in the *New York Times* in 2011, this was not a revolution.³⁸ What we can say about these events that have easily folded into a new narrative, just as 9/11 serviced a new era of power and plunder (granting extralegal coercive and surveillance powers to the state, which in turn issued out US\$5 trillion in counterterrorism contracts), is that far from being the quiet advocate of "nonviolent struggle" that mobilized for "the safety of women and for women's rights to full participation in peace-building work," anointed champions of the "revolution" like Karman had a far more cynical

role to play. For one, the Islah Party she represented ended up politically co-opting change in Yemen. With Karman's corrupted peace prize and a heavy push for Islah to lead the way to a transitional government, it was only the last-minute intervention of AnsarAllah from the Sa'adah region that forced the hand of external forces to pull back on this blatant attempt to co-opt the "revolution."

In the face of Yemenis not buying the tactical use of the "popular" support Islah purportedly enjoyed (along with 'Ali Muhsin's loyal forces said to consist of at least 10,000 men and thousands of foreign and local *takfiri* auxiliaries), new efforts to steady Yemen necessarily expanded the arena of politics to international organizations. Here the UN proved the most useful pliable asset, granting any Saudi-Qatari initiative in Yemen institutional cover.

Alas, despite the euphoric, tragic, exciting but always uneasy protests that seemingly changed something, within months the encroachments of those same forces that had empowered earlier the Saleh regime reclaimed it in a silent counterrevolution. Cosmetic "defections" among the most opportunistic of the lot, from Hadi to Zindani, Sadiq al-Ahmar, and Gen. 'Ali Muhsin al-Ahmar, all secured a foot in the transitional phase.³⁹ Long profiteers from a regime that linked global demands to "liberalize" the national economy and sell off its best assets to "market" forces, these free agents of empire picked the right time to abandon the personally sinking ship of Saleh and his closest confidants.

With still some doubt as to its ultimate role and which external interests these changes would serve, the ultimate power broker—the Americans on behalf of empire, of course—intervened to assure Yemen did not upset a larger GCC order. At least not in 2011 (Thiel 2012). What was not registered in most analyses of Yemen's next few years that led to the present war were the socioeconomic conditions between 2012 and 2015 under which this violence germinated.

ECONOMIZING YEMEN'S DESTRUCTION

By the time Saleh took the offer to leave in return for immunity, he perhaps saved the country from a war many were edging to fight. What drove the regime to ultimately fold was an enduring fear of *al-nas* [the people]. Behind this fear is an historically complex relationship empire had with a Cold War-era ontological enemy, the villager.⁴⁰ Since these villagers, waving their

slogans—Death to America, Death to Israel, etc.—and impervious to threats of violence from outsiders were clearly standing behind AnsarAllah and the Huthi clan that rode its popularity to power, empire needed to take another route. In this way, Saleh’s gesture to leave enabled a managed change of figurehead, with his party the GPC agreeing to share power with an opposition that was also carefully manicured to service the larger foreign interest, al-Ahmar’s Islah Party. And thus, with the GCC providing “local cover” and the UN its global embrace, Yemen was steered away from real change.

The investment in this story of managed regime change does not pass many smell tests. The most obvious, already frustrating to some observers before its actual formal realization in February 2012, was the appointment of a new president to succeed Saleh. Probably already since his days as Yemen’s vice-president, ‘Abd Rabbu Mansur Hadi was empire’s man. In retrospect, the two-plus years of Hadi rule from 2012 to late 2014 constituted an unprecedented period of economic and political engineering. Instead of quieting down the country and preparing it for elections, publicly Hadi’s official mandate, the real agenda was to service empire by way of a prepared list of “reforms.” True to form, from day one almost, Hadi steamrolled the country into membership of the World Trade Organization (WTO) that required an egregious amount of economic austerity and liberalization. These “reforms” immediately hurt the poorest and most vulnerable in Yemen, the very same people who had sacrificed their lives for the change Hadi formally ended.

The way the US/GCC-backed transitional government proceeded to literally sell Yemen off to Saudi and Qatari interests shocked all parties hoping for a reprieve when they signed onto a program to grant temporary legitimacy to Hadi’s coalition government. The “legitimization” of Hadi by way of a February 21, 2012, referendum in which his was the only name on the ballot, accelerated plunder of Yemen. The first to react were the public sector employees who initiated a wave of strikes to upset the work of government for much of the 2012–2014 period.⁴¹

As much as budgetary cuts of Hadi’s government threatened tens of thousands of employees’ livelihoods, it was the proposal to push Yemen toward membership in the WTO that unleashed the greatest outcry. One concession given to the WTO was to privatize eleven service sectors within a maximum of five years.⁴² Such a move would have been entirely impossible if the Yemeni (armed) masses were ever consulted. Long resisted by various powerful interests in the country, it became clear Hadi’s role was to push through “reforms”

the global capitalist institutions long sought, no matter what the political consequences. Indeed, under no legal or electoral pressure, Hadi's interim government was the ideal vehicle to plunder Yemen. As the pillaging of the country had to be done in stealth, the now "legitimate" government under formal UN sanction, formally signed off Yemen's economic future by way of treaties and protocols.

Again, the most spiteful example was Hadi's government signing the protocol for Yemen's accession to the WTO at the beginning of December 2012. The damage to Yemen's economic stability, let alone independence would be immediate. For instance, with Hadi's open embrace of World Bank degrees, the interim government exposed Yemeni companies to competition in the "free market," a move that promised tens of thousands of layoffs. As much as a new wave of unemployment was rationalized in the language of neoliberalism—progress comes with sometimes painful change—what upset even those apologists of liberalization was these crucial assets slated for sale were "priced" far too low. Worse, nationalists argued that some initial investment in these assets could result in significantly higher revenue from future sales. Why was Hadi rushing?

According to well-placed leaders of the various government unions (independent of any political party and during this period were frequently on strike), the greatest fear of all during this hysterical campaign to sell off Yemen's assets was that there would literally be nothing left of a unified Yemeni state. Even if in the future patriots would secure an elected government, the Yemeni state would be incapable of building a future independent of what outsiders envisioned. All subsequent pleas for this liberalization process to halt, at least until an election took place with Yemen's people given a chance to debate their country's economic future, not surprisingly fell on deaf ears. Ostensibly, the interim government, was given a mandate by empire to structurally destroy Yemen.

The biggest prizes awaiting liberalization were the Yemeni banking, electricity, agricultural, and oil sectors. When the tenders were first rumored, unions in the many targeted ministries, especially the Ministry of Telecommunications and Information, protested vigorously. Leaders argued that exemptions were necessary to assure that the larger social good was served. As so often around the world, such arguments failed to persuade the planeloads of visiting dignitaries. Playing its role, Hadi's first wave of privatizations included 11 of the 12 main sectors of the Yemeni economy with 78 of the 160 subsectors included for immediate "liberalization."⁴³

STEALING DUBAI'S WORLD

The intervention in 2011 by Yemen's neighbors and the USA was not only about countering a potential revolution or returning power to an old regime. Post-2011 Yemen under Hadi's firm hand (aided by *takfiri* militias) also teaches us a lot about the nasty politics taking place behind closed doors in the GCC. As rival families sought to protect their investments in Yemen from the rapacious needs of empire, they turned on each other. For his part, as the KSA and Qatar's man, Hadi knew his government's role included uprooting the UAE from Yemen's economy.

Almost immediately after taking over the seat of power, Hadi's "reforms" applauded by the international community included systematically declaring null and void many of the long-term lease agreements UAE companies signed during the Saleh period. As noted earlier, perhaps the largest investment made during Saleh's era was the concession in Aden acquired by Dubai Ports World (DPW). Paying to manage Aden's potentially vast port facilities and neighboring properties (perfect for either the establishment of industrial zones or a high-end tourist infrastructure), Dubai apparently upset powerful Saudi-backed interests. This hostility did not manifest publicly until after the Hadi interim government took power in early 2012.

Almost immediately, the Hadi government initiated a "review" of all deals made by the previous regime. The pretext was the claim that most concessions were granted under dubious, extralegal settings, a general complaint about the way the Saleh regime ran Yemen's affairs. The specific case involving DPW and its Aden investments gravitated around unkept promises to invest in the facilities and the failure to demonstrate sufficient revenue flows to justify the lease. Basically, the concession would be taken away from Dubai's flagship overseas company and go under a rebidding process.⁴⁴ There was little doubt the new bid would go to a Saudi or Qatari interest.

The real reason for ripping up the original concession, according to many familiar with the interim Hadi government, was to reverse the UAE's ascendancy in the region. The idea would be to take over the many property assets accumulated by UAE investors over the previous decade and transfer them to Saudi or Qatari interests, which could then reap the benefits from an infrastructure already built up by the earlier concession holders. Largely ignored in the mainstream press, professional traders of commodities and insurance confessed at the time that the precedents being set by Hadi's government

could lead to intra-GCC violence (Dorsey 2014; Cuadro 2016). Billions upon billions of UAE properties were at stake.

As the *Financial Times* reported, it was a time of rapid change with “heightened competition for business in a region central to world oil and non-oil trade.” What Hadi’s people were doing was restarting the bidding on such high-stakes contracts to ostensibly secure their claim to “finders” fees and commissions, a lucrative reward for doing the bidding of the KSA and/or Qatar. Publicly, the issue with the DPW was its conflict of interest; the company also operated the much more modern Djibouti port across the Red Sea. As mouthpieces for either Qatar or the KSA in the business media repeated often, Yemeni officials saw only a continued decline, thus lower revenues, coming out of Aden, thanks to the UAE’s dishonest business practices.

Forgotten were the other political calculations behind securing the UAE’s economic investment in a stable Yemen. At the time of the contracts being signed in 2008, South Yemen was just being rocked by the rise of the separatist HIRAK movement. By granting a very attractive long-term deal whereby the DPW was expected to develop capacity to 900,000 containers while maintaining a competitive strategy, it is possible there was also the appreciation that the UAE would assure HIRAK would cooperate.⁴⁵ Additionally, closer ties with the UAE, whose ruling families are again closely linked to the region, would give Hadhramis support to thwart KSA ambitions to turn South Yemen into a mere satellite. More still, the UAE had strong links with China, at the time investing in Yemeni oil and food processing industries. This triangulation of autonomous, even anti-KSA parties could have been a major strategic threat to Saudi, Qatari, and American long-term interests.

Returning to 2012, since old Hadhrami and Adeni links to Abu Dhabi and the larger UAE commercial elite refused to validate the accession of Hadi’s government by boycotting, along with AnsarAllah’s allies, the farcical “election” in which Hadi was the only candidate, it was clear a rival remained embedded in the south. For the interim Hadi government denied any legitimacy by such behind-the-scenes tactics, there was added motivation for stripping the DPW of its contract, rendered formulaic after an “anticorruption commission” report conveniently pointed out numerous irregularities (O’Neil 2012).

There were also the UAE’s moves in the larger region for the KSA and Qatar to consider. As much as the UAE incrementally drew once-assumed Saudi clients away with offers of better finance terms, often in partnership

with China, there were also aggressive moves on strategic assets in the Horn of Africa. As the DPW had also secured in 2006 a lucrative concession to manage the port in Djibouti, the UAE was primed to become the major power in the Horn of Africa. They could, as they now have secured similar deals with Eritrea and Somaliland, be seen as threatening to monopolize storage and transport capacity in the southern Red Sea. Djibouti, recall, is Ethiopia's port, and with China and Ethiopia recently restarting the railroad linking Ethiopia's fertile highlands with the Red Sea, the previously mentioned investments the KSA and Qatar put into Ethiopia's booming agriculture industry seemed now entirely hostage to UAE- and Chinese-owned infrastructure. Under these conditions, Bin Laden's bridge project noted above may prove nothing but a spectacular dream.⁴⁶

Whatever the promises Hadi had to fulfill once in power, his campaign ostensibly repossessed the DPW's assets, drawing Yemen into an enduring rivalry between UAE families and the KSA and Qatar. The results of this rivalry are manifested clearly in Yemen today. UAE efforts to protect the billions of dollars of potential investments in South Yemen from Saudi and Qatari plunder will have long-term consequences for Yemen as this ongoing war moves forward.

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The moves to squeeze potential rivals out of Yemen after securing a transition regime willing to protect their interests meant there was a powerful faction within empire who wanted to push further into undermining Yemen's future. Perhaps most transparent of all moves by Hadi's administration was the interim government's imposition of a new legal and political structure in which power was decentralized. Early in Hadi's mandate, this interim government arbitrarily rewrote many of Yemen's laws, including setting in motion a process of federalization designed to benefit specific constituencies and forever weaken those regions long known to resist Yemen's economic subordination to empire. Faced with these unprecedented abuses of executive powers, millions of Yemenis said once again enough and embraced the AnsarAllah movement that promised to bring justice and order back to Yemen (Thiel 2015).

The right question to ask is why the aggressive moves to liberalize Yemen's economy and more importantly, why the rush to impose six federal districts that basically undermined the power of the central state? The answer to both lies in Sa'adah. Recall that for the peoples of northwest Yemen their



FIGURE 5. Huthis. Partisans of Huthis never left Sana'a after providing support to protesters in 2011. Even at the height of Hadi's government, with Islah and *takfiri* hitmen killing members, Huthi dominated the Old City. Their emblem, with the motto "God Is Great, Death to America, Death to Israel, Curse the Jews," was painted throughout this part of the city. Note faded portrait of interim President Hadi; by early 2013 this GCC-imposed administration had lost its legitimacy in many parts of Yemen. Sana'a, January 2013. Photo by author.

homeland had been ravaged by war for almost ten years. The hardened men who gave an invading Saudi military in 2008–2009 more than a bloody nose invested considerable political capital to ensure that the protests of 2011 remained focused on Yemen's larger needs, especially the Sa'adah homeland. While the Islah partisans, foreign powers, and GPC apparatchiks maneuvered via NGOs and youth groups to manage the expanding protests in early 2011, AnsarAllah and its allies remained the armed wing of the movement

for change. Soon protestors recognized that the larger principles of the movement did not clash with their own and appreciated how AnsarAllah's presence ensured that violence did not extend to a complete overturn of the occupation of key locations in the major cities in Yemen. As such, a broadening coalition around AnsarAllah grew as an answer to the efforts by empire to steal the revolution.

In true antidemocratic fashion, the US government and international monitoring groups sent down to "assist" in the transition openly condemned the popular AnsarAllah, referring to it as an "armed group" in the attempt to delegitimize it. There were even more formal efforts to side-line AnsarAllah in the subsequent National Dialogue Conference (NDC) held between March 18, 2013, and January 24, 2014. This trajectory of outright persecution of those long resisting empire even at moments of reconciliation offers the careful reader a hint at what were the actual motivating factors behind such a swift, multilateral intervention in March 2015.⁴⁷

This contentious process was not to allow AnsarAllah's main constituencies to secure the political and economic restitution many said they deserved. Aside from a faint apology for all the death and destruction caused by the Saleh regime and the sponsors of the NDC process, the response to "Zaydi" political and economic demands was continued attempts at marginalizing them and, when needed, murder.⁴⁸ Beside the citizens of Sana'a' being harrowed by drive-by shootings and suicide bomb attacks throughout the 2013 and 2014 periods, it was the larger, spirited disapproval of the very process of undermining the revolution that warrants reconsideration.

By late 2014, the so-called Youth Movement, many who sacrificed so much for so little in return, once again led an uprising of sorts with the aim of upsetting the legitimacy of the NDC (El-Eriani 2015). As many began to see it, the entire "transition" was a scam to reassert power over Sa'adah province through Islah, the main instrument to apply both legal and extralegal pressure on noncompliant actors after 2012. In this regard, the targeting of the so-called Huthis and their AnsarAllah coalition led to devising programs that aimed to completely shut out both them and, interestingly, the Hirak Southern Separatist movement (Perkins 2017). Both opponents to a regime even Western media had begun to characterize as criminal and brutal ended up being entirely excluded from the interim government run by Hadi during the whole lifespan of the NDC.

As the transition accord imposed by the USA and its GCC interlocutors forced a ban on "nonpolitical" parties from inclusion in the new government

led by Hadi, both the Huthis and Hirak were excluded from translating the public debates around their distinctive demands for administering their needs. Despite their huge support base in their respective corners of the country, neither group received government positions or were invited to take on governing roles during this transition period. To be expected, without a stake in this government, they increasingly became associated with the unaddressed needs of most Yemenis who were also disappointed. Violently so.

In retrospect, the parameters of the US-backed GCC initiative put forth way back in April 2011 are as much interesting as revealing. Framed as a “transition road map,” the role of the various external actors assured that locals could not adopt a settlement without first addressing the demands of outsiders. The demand from the KSA was the surrender of all arms. From the IMF, to begin paying the large debts accumulated over the last decade of liberalization. Such demands have spilled over since 2015 as the coalition periodically offers to halt bombardments only when those resisting accept complete defeat, both in the form of disarmament and, among other things, the creation of Hadi’s six-region federal division of Yemen, the core demand of empire now.⁴⁹ Again, this push for federation should be read in the larger context of the last few years, which saw efforts to tear apart Iraq, Libya, and Syria along similar lines.

Any fair assessment of this interim period would see huge problems with the Hadi administration. When forces allied with AnsarAllah finally entered Sana’a they did not formally remove Hadi as interim President. Rather, partisans hoping for real changed established committees that then demanded the immediate establishment of a timeframe for elections, an immediate halt of the frantic selling off of Yemen’s assets, and review of all new laws added to the code during the Hadi period. This entailed holding back on federation until after an elected parliament can have their constitutional right to debate this crucial matter.

And yet, these were some of the most vigorously defended legacies of the Hadi time in office by the KSA and USA during the brief negotiations with AnsarAllah.⁵⁰ To any rational observer, the idea of devolving Yemen into six disproportionate regions with enormous autonomy was a blatant effort to benefit foreign interests and subdue the rebellious populations through poverty and administrative obscurity. Looking at the map of the GCC-imposed plan (See map 4) the areas that produced the Huthi and AnsarAllah rebellions would be entirely sequestered off into a much larger, oddly shaped Azal province.

In the meantime, Yemen's oil wealth would be concentrated in a vast territory named Hadhramawt and Saba'. It so happens that, configured in this way, both areas that contain much of Yemen's oil would be also the two least populated provinces. This would make bribing the few tens of thousands of eligible "residents" with a tiny portion of the oil revenues (no longer flowing to the central state) both easy but an enormous windfall for those hoping to steal South Arabia's wealth.

AnsarAllah representatives rightfully rejected this agenda to rob Yemenis blind. But to the minions supporting empire, these objections are impossible to accommodate even after three years of war. Consider the wording of an article depicting the objections Yemenis in early 2015 had with Hadi's unconstitutional schemes: "The leader of Yemen's Shiite rebel Houthi movement on Saturday rejected an agreement reached last year to divide the country into six federally organized regions, a major blow to efforts to unite the divided country."⁵¹

The presentation of this story in these terms could not have been more manipulative and disingenuous. Opponents to Hadi's crude stunt are identified by the *Washington Post* (owned by Amazon founder Jeff Bezos) exclusively as "Shi'a."⁵² This egregiously inaccurate but calculating description of Yemenis objecting to the pillaging of their country offers a perfect example of just how empire is geared to destroy Yemen. In the article, no effort was made to account for the illogical, and legally unsupportable, scheme to break Yemen into fragments by way of an ill-conceived federation. Not only is the *Washington Post* here obviously incapable of logically making the case for this illegal move to undermine Yemen's central state sovereignty, but it fails to provide insight into why Yemenis across the board could possibly object. Hadi, now an illegitimate governor with no popular mandate, is trying to cut Yemen into six federal units. It is an act on behalf of external interests that do not intend to "unite the divided country" but divide it even more.

To the now-hardened, entirely cognizant opposition, the process led by Hadi's so-called government by consensus was nothing more than a front for regional powers, the IMF, and the USA to secure Yemen. While the evidence of such efforts is itself worthy of a book, the most crucial conclusion to draw was the fact that the Hadi government appointed large numbers of Islah loyalists to positions explicitly targeting the Huthi/Zaydi heartland. The very territories that had just ended a ten-year-war with a regime supposedly on the mend, faced, in theory at least, an outright occupation by its greatest



MAP 4. GCC and Hadi-imposed federal regions, 2014.

political enemy. Worse, as northerners objected, Hadi’s government seemed perfectly unwilling to rein in the mobilization of Ansar al-Sharia (or AQAP) and Islah auxiliaries who started to wage war against anyone still resisting after 2012 (Swift 2012).

Engaged in intermittent battles with clusters of militias set up by close allies of the KSA and Qatar from the far north, Amran province, to Sana’a, enough was enough. Riding a wave of public outrage AnsarAllah occupied the capital in August 2014 (Coombs and Scahill 2015). The rhetoric was of liberation, nationalistic, and ecumenical. To many hearing it, AnsarAllah’s move was not a power grab, but a necessary corrective measure to ensure that Hadi and his external mentors did not permanently transform Yemen into a mere shell of a sovereign state.

The pretext for finally entering Sana’a’ was to reverse an apparent breach of the Hadi government’s mandate by unilaterally declaring an extension of power.⁵³ While promising never to allow Hadi to extend his mandate beyond the two-year intermediary period actually first set by the GCC/USA, all the assurances that the postponement was only temporary lost credibility. The

intervention sanctioned by the UN in 2012 proved a major bait-and-switch move to undermine the main objectives of the 2011 protests.⁵⁴

Immediately unleashing committees to investigate corruption, injustice, and the monopolizing of state resources to service the interests of the Islah elite, what AnsarAllah and its allies exposed in a short period in late 2014 was itself enough to cause a new wave of outrage. Holding sit-ins in the kind of civic action most Western NGOs should have embraced, AnsarAllah and its diverse allies highlighted how dangerous the transition government under Hadi had become.⁵⁵ Since none of the criminal activity over the last twenty-plus years had been addressed—Saleh and his family were promised immunity in return for cooperating—millions felt they had not been served justice with the 2011 “revolution.” Rather, Yemenis saw the state become once again a private vehicle to acquire wealth; pillaging Yemen had in fact increased under Hadi, a fact that left Yemen’s opposition no option.

CONCLUSION

After offering sample genealogies of Yemen’s many, even parallel, trajectories into the twenty-first century, this book ultimately concludes that an epochal shift is in the making. It will not be the bombs that bring about this change, but the resilience of those so targeted by them. After more than three years of war on Yemen, it is not only the stench of burnt flesh; rotting carcasses of dogs, cats, and goats; or the pulverized brick that one smells in Yemen’s city streets. One can also smell that change is in the air.

While it will take time before we can reach this conclusion, we need to recognize here that Yemen’s peoples have effectively resisted a brutal campaign to reassert empire’s authority over the country, its people, and most importantly, the use of its considerable wealth. It was a war meant to be quick and relatively painless. “Operation Decisive Storm” has been indecisive at best. Today, their “legitimate” government remains under protection in some distant Riyadh building, watching from afar its country burn but not fall.

Revealingly, the current war in Yemen, resulting in tens of thousands of deaths and untold structural damage to an already “poor” country, has been fought with little fanfare. The silence about this violence is particularly instructive in as much it brings home the selectivity of Western empathy and the strategic necessity of the war to remain obscure. Instead of horrific, gut-wrenching images of skeletal children panting their last breaths before the

intrusive Western media's camera, the machines of public (dis)information have been mobilized to shut down debate, articulations of outrage, and collective imaginings of solidarity. Unless, that is, they are used against rivals within the GCC.

There are no mass rallies in the world's major cities today protesting the destruction of Yemen in part because of the normalization of news gathered via very controlled sites. "Alternative" media too have been compromised, following "news cycles" impervious to the silenced screams of areas of the world that strategically demand no attention. Why Yemen must remain off the headlines is only possible to explain over the course of a larger book, but it is clear that Yemen and its continued subordination to service global financial interests suffices to account for the silencing of any discussion on it.

No need to wait ten years to report that this war has produced more than its share of revolting firsts. The public cowardice and thus corruption of the UN, for one, marks a watershed. The rewriting of previous committee statements that condemned the use of illegal cluster bombs and white phosphorous on civilians is the work of none other than former UN chairman Ban Ki-moon. He personally saw to the wording identifying the KSA as skirting its obligations being removed from the record—this despite the now confirmed fact that more nonmilitary than military sites were hit by airstrikes in Yemen.⁵⁶

The daily bombings mark yet again what Yemenis around the world have known now for decades: factions within the Saudi family and the empire it serves are incapable of human empathy. They resort to violence to obtain their objectives of economic, cultural, and political hegemony over Yemen and the larger Islamic world. The problem for empire is there are consequences to such acts. Wisely avoiding Yemen for much of the modern history of the region, the overreach we are witnessing today will prove to be a historic miscalculation. As the coalition of more than ten nations fighting this war on behalf of empire already discovered, Yemenis will bend but not break, and more still, Yemenis will prove to be the deadliest, unflagging enemy empire has ever known. And because Yemenis just will not succumb, this war will one day be the point to which empire forever changes and Saudi Arabia itself will disappear. For this, we owe it to Yemenis to honor the sacrifice of tens of thousands, perhaps hundreds of thousands who will die to save us from what is, in the end, our empire.

Coda

YEMEN'S RELEVANCE TO THE LARGER WORLD

Rule number one in Arabia's Fight Club: Don't Fuck with Yemen. Rule number two in Arabia's Fight Club: DO NOT Fuck with Yemen.

HAYKAL BAFANA

THIS BOOK SUGGESTS THAT we can only offer answers to the question of why destroy Yemen by taking a broader perspective, one that, perhaps surprising to many, puts Yemen at the heart of many global processes over the last century. The attempt to explain the recent horrors transpiring in South Arabia seems to also reveal Yemen's contributions to the modern world and thus shed light on the very amorphous nature of global affairs. In this way, global events share common origins with local Yemeni ones, thereby revealing that the trajectories of socioeconomic, political, and intellectual trends often originate, pass through, or end in South Arabia, rather than pass it by.

What accounts for this heavy Yemeni presence in the larger world is a resilient, some would argue archaic, even futile, loyalty to kin or self-interest. Recent outsider adventures in Yemen expose only too frequently just how most miss this point, especially Yemen's northern neighbor the KSA. In its constant effort to secure leverage over Yemenis impervious to their dictates, factions within the ruling elite have attempted until March 2015 to control Yemen by way of local proxies. But the most recent, now almost entirely discarded puppet, Hadi, and the one he replaced, Saleh, both failed in large part because they were tainted by their associations with empire. At the most practical level, skeptical would-be allies to whatever coalition of local and

foreign forces the USA, the KSA, and empire more generally put together, simply did not see the rewards come fast enough to justify the eternal betrayal of their kin.

Largely driven by corrupted ideals now entirely justified in neoliberal jargon, the surrogates of empire delivering so much death and destruction on Yemen today have no other means to rationalize their actions than by simplistic references to Iran or evoking international law; the protection of minorities, women, and children; and most cynically, the need for “democracy” to flourish. So shallow have their offerings to the country been that in defiance millions of Yemenis demand with weapons either to be treated fairly or simply left alone.

By the simple fact they resisted so energetically throughout the last hundred-plus years has meant Yemenis played a key role in the evolution of this modern world increasingly dominated by empire and its vacuous, increasingly inept American and Saudi surrogates. This history of open defiance (and often useful collaboration, for no two Yemenis think alike, all the time) constitutes a forgotten global story only partially revealed here. What accounts for so much obfuscation of Yemen’s place in the larger world is in itself a topic worthy of discussion.

For much of modern history, the rhetoric Yemenis mobilized, often developed and articulated locally, sometimes inherited from elsewhere, has offered a serviceable retort to (neo)liberalism, a message of insolence that, if marketed beyond its borders, could spread to other contested arenas of ongoing finance capitalist conquest. Indeed, the charismatic men and women’s valiant struggle against the brutality of this war to destroy their homeland could easily be marketed as the hipster generation’s Che Guevara. Who would not want to look and act like those potentially iconic armed men broadcasted in reports of the news channel Almasirah (almasirah.net and [@MasirahTV](https://www.instagram.com/MasirahTV))? These are the men, cheeks bulging with the mild natural amphetamine qat, often in sarongs, who take on empire with Kalashnikovs and outdated anti-tank weapons. With weapons of the poor, these “backward tribal” warriors are fighting for the kinds of cause any millennial sometimes wants to embrace. As such, this energetic, continued resistance to global capitalism and the fears that such impetuous patriotism, love of family, and faith in God could threaten the larger, still not entirely realized, globalist agenda will never receive the proper media and academic coverage it deserves.

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Throughout this work, I claim that intersecting processes of both imposing development programs and the remarkable extent to which many Yemenis pushed back have contributed to the tensions in larger Arabia today. Why war was inevitable in this setting, I argued, has much more to do with the larger world than usually realized. The context is systemic decay.

Today the global economic order has been torn from within. The very institutions erected to maximize the plunder and concentration of the world's wealth into the hands of a concentrated few are corrupt to the core (Das 2011; Hudson 2015). The mechanics of this project have now resulted in systemic break-down, with global contraction the result of years of aggressive financialization that has successfully entangled individual and national economies to take unacceptably risky bets. The larger world, no longer united by anticolonial, socialist solidarity movements (or even what in the 2010s promised a new rival in the form of BRI(I)CSs that seeks to challenge North Atlantic financial hegemony), is increasingly forced to face open war or accept brutal austerity as global economic elites scramble for one last pillage.¹

The war on Yemen fits into this context. It is a rush to address some of the consequences of a rapidly accelerated process of financial meltdown that results from the parasitic banking elites now eating their host (Hudson 2015). Brutalizing Yemen, as done in South Asia and China last century (Davis 2002) is one facet of empire's efforts to sustain for a bit longer the funneling of "Third World" wealth to this empire about to collapse.²

The principal agent seeking rewards for bringing Yemen to heel is the family ruling KSA, itself, in desperate financial trouble. For years saddled by the enormous costs of buying the compliance of rival families, subsidizing the US economy by way of huge contracts, the purchase of US debt, and long periods of low oil prices has meant the ruling class in Riyadh is experiencing the ongoing global crisis in liquidity most acutely.³ For this, the war in Yemen is premeditated and constitutes an aggression by an enterprise set up by the British empire in the 1920s to efficiently extract the wealth of the region. It is no small irony that KSA itself will not survive unless it secures hegemony over Yemen by way of this war.

The hope for a quick, lucrative victory in Yemen disappeared before the spirited resistance from not only the "Huthis" but a wide swath of Yemeni society. This resistance has only exasperated KSA's desperate situation by the fact the new regime in Riyadh (after the passing of King Abdullah in 2014 and the "coup" that instilled in June 2017 Muhammad bin Salman as "crown prince") has nowhere else to go now. Its existence is leveraged on winning this

war, with its future capacity to pay for the weapons (and technical assistance) it has ordered and already used—upwards of US\$200 billion just in 2015, with reported additional commitments of more than US\$300 billion in 2017—increasingly trapped in a quagmire they can no longer exit.⁴

Even more problematic is the fact that the global economy is very much linked to the current rentier system that relies on Arabia's cooperation. Recent efforts to reassure global investors in the continued survival of the ruling family in the form of an economic reform program called Vision 2030, hardly reassures those in the know. No matter how much austerity, new taxation, and cost-cutting the regime in Riyadh can pretend to introduce to its oil-dependent economy, the politics of sustaining the regime will prove impossible. In short, the consequences of KSA defaulting (it has not paid salaries for months on end since the war began in 2015) could have dramatic consequences on the Middle East's maps as well as global finance.⁵

As was the case when the British had to surrender its globalist role to the Americans after it could not subdue resistance in South Yemen in the 1960s, the source of our current period of change is Yemeni intransigence. Many different Yemenis will not surrender their homeland's wealth to subsidize empire's need for liquidity, collateral for new infusions of cash, or the commodities that lie under the country's surface. Failing to learn from previous disasters, the current war of attrition will result in Yemen bringing down yet another would-be occupier as it is itself destroyed.

Acknowledging this is crucial because most policy-orientated and journalistic accounts of events in Yemen today obscure this resistance by claiming that the origins of the conflict are stubborn "traditions" hostile to change. Strategically left out of a discussion heavily influenced by the numerous spin masters powerful interests have hired in Washington, New York, and London, are those outsider facilitators of empire whose war has created new opportunities to plunder Yemen's resources. Rather than seeing the heavy hand of empire, the outsider is expected to believe the media and think tank experts that it is Yemenis' own pathologies, their social and economic backwardness that leave them susceptible to violence and thus "civil war."

The "they are at war with themselves" trope continuously repeated in various media and academic circles ultimately obfuscates who are guilty, laying blame on eighty percent of a country's population currently being starved to death. Conveniently released from responsibility, the only possible role for global actors is a false claim of altruistic intervention to "help" resolve the conflicted country's many ills. What is rarely explored is the possibility that

attempts by foreign actors to aid Yemen's quests for development or resolve its conflicts over the last century may have had a deleterious effect on the country's well-being. As proven with cases drawn from Latin America and throughout Africa, foreign assistance such as that provided by the US government, UN, World Bank, or IMF has far more to do with controlling a recipient country's assets than to resolving the root causes to poverty and the conflicts that it produces (Robinson 2004). In the cases studied throughout, the consequence of the relatively successful efforts to install formal control over Yemen's vibrant "private sector" economy since the end of the Cold War has been, perhaps paradoxically to some, also the cause of Yemen's descent into violence.

While understanding this evolution of empire's efforts at instilling a dependency-inducing restructuring of "poor" Yemen, it is necessary to recognize also Yemenis' spirited embrace of any number of anti-imperialist tactics arising in the last century. We learned throughout that various Yemeni leaders flirted with anti-Western ideologies like Nasserism, Pan-Arabism, Non-Alignment, Ba'athism, Maoism, Communism, and various forms of Islamism. Significantly, these "alternative" universalist frameworks also promoted changing Yemeni societies to better fit what various people believed constituted the modern era. As such, be it the modernization that North Atlantic globalists promoted since the late 1940s or their "revolutionary" alternatives marketed by progressives or Islamic fundamentalists, the necessary institution demanding promotion was the state.

Reaching its apex in the 1970s when the first overt fusion between academic research, international humanitarianism, and neo-colonial expansionism directly interfaced with Yemeni resistance, globalist institutions—be they governmental, corporate, or the UN, IMF, and WHO—took on their present-day violent interventionist forms. To sustain such an enterprise, want-to-be totalitarian regimes found in KSA or Qatar were invited to buy seats at the table of global power in exchange for facilitating the plunder of Muslim societies like Yemen. Offered symbolic cover as the UN's Human Rights' Committee chair or World Cup host, KSA and Qatar respectively provided the liquidity for a finance capitalist regime having now reached its apex of power. More importantly for Yemen, these same "Islamic" states also paid for tens of thousands of Contra-like mercenaries—in the past neo-fascist anti-communists, Al-Qaeda or ISIS these days—expected since World War II to enforce order in zones of resistance like Yemen.

With the preceding observations, I conclude that the current war, far from being a response to growing "Iranian" influence, a theme marketed heavily in

both Arabic and Western media, was in fact a direct response to a changing political economic dynamic in Yemen. What was happening threatened the viability of development/investment projects, most initiated since the 2011 overthrow of the Saleh regime, that promised Yemen's complete economic and thus social and political subordination. A project long in waiting as far as some globalists are concerned became increasingly dirty as some facilitators of empire stole from others.

In this respect, we witnessed with this war how willing Qatari, Emirati, and Saudi investors threw money and influence behind competing political actors willing to contribute to Yemen's destruction. At stake were property development schemes, competing in audacity and scale with anything currently in construction in Dubai, Doha, Cairo, or Jeddah. With billions at stake, the nature of these deals complemented (as well as complicated) the already rich scholarship on other parts of the Arabian Peninsula that focus on speculative property development. Unfortunately, to date studies on "development" and the promotion of "Dubai Inc." fail to detail the political alliances needed to realize such seemingly lucrative programs. As learned throughout this book, it is precisely the way domestic politics informs the extent to which such investments are possible that ultimately shapes the contours of the violent struggle for ascendancy in the larger world. Today this campaign is mediated by Islamic "terrorism" and mercenary armies who have converged on Yemen. What is impossible to ignore and why Yemen will survive is that these regional players mobilizing such destructive forces are at war with each other.

In this regard, Yemen's contentious domestic politics, and the consequences of the relative failure of both regional and global interests to dominate the country, also have much deeper roots that attest to the virulence of the war today. There are sociological factors animating Yemenis' responses to the economic relationship their country has with their largely despised northern neighbors and US partners. The extent to which many of the development projects mentioned throughout also had links to a boom in sex tourism, the desecration of Yemeni heritage, and even extensive environmental destruction explains a great deal of the kind of violence we are observing in Yemen. While this nefarious side of the globalization of Yemen has remained under the radar of scholars, until the war at least, many young men from the GCC had come to know Yemen as the Tijuana of Arabia. This, perhaps, is ultimately why Yemen's neighbors are so willing to subject millions of Yemenis to an endless war: they have no empathy for them for they have exploited them, especially their children, for so long.

But this recent, pathological history of the unbridled rape of Yemen has not gone unanswered. Indeed, the political consequences of such exploitation of Yemen by external actors (and their identified domestic enablers) account for the nature of the war today that no simple reference to “sectarianism” or “ancient tribal rivalries” can in themselves disguise. For one, as the might of an international order has unleashed for more than three years now a full range of weapons that kill human beings, destroy their habitat, and means to feed themselves, a simple rule long ago understood in the pre-European world has been forgotten. A now well-known Yemeni patriot has tweeted a reminder to the Saud family serving as the primary face and financier of this war: “Rule number one in Arabia’s Fight Club: Don’t Fuck with Yemen. Rule Number Two in Arabia’s Fight Club: Do Not Fuck with Yemen.” It may seem bombastic, and considering the extent of the destruction levied by American, British, French, Swedish, and Canadian weapons, not much has been avoided in the KSA’s campaign to assure direct influence over the affairs of its long-feared southern neighbors. But Haykal Bafana knows something most of the KSA’s ruling family refuse to admit (or do not understand for lack of honest advice from their expensive American and British consultants).⁶ The greatest source of misery for Yemenis has been, and will likely continue to be, the efforts by outside powers to address the unanticipated contingencies created by decades of instability in the country. Yemenis are under no illusion who is responsible for this catastrophe.

It is a matter of time before Yemenis across a broad coalition put together the kind of organized resistance that will ultimately address their security problems. This capacity to organize does not bode well for the coalition and is especially dangerous for the KSA, which may never recover from the misplaced confidence to rule over Yemenis. Among the many ironies this current war has brought to the surface is the fact that the KSA hemorrhages money while its efforts produce limited results in Syria and Yemen, the two conflicts that seem animated by the combatants as much as the paymasters.

The expensive enterprise of integrating Yemenis into a global regime of plunder has brought those administering it into a state of financial chaos. As already evidenced in the meltdowns starting the 1970s, the sustainability of the American branch of this empire was temporarily addressed by way of Nixon/Kissinger’s violent imposition on the global economy a “petrol dollar” (Hudson 2003). This project had run its course by the end of the Obama administration, the last generation of beneficiaries of the ability to print dollars to sustain an inefficient regime. While it was possible to continue to

divert the savings of the West's working classes or inflate the global bond market for a short period longer, the real redeemer of empire, the wealth of the Third World, is increasingly no longer so cheaply plundered.

As noted throughout, key assets used to enforce this global financial enterprise—in particular the increasingly inept *takfiri* Islamic alliance linking the CIA with the KSA/Qatar—is seeing its last bloody gasp in Yemen, InshaAllah. Indeed, at the time of completing this book, the principle agents subjecting Yemenis to waves of famine affecting now 80 percent of Yemen's population, the largest cholera outbreak in recorded history, and tens of thousands of civilian deaths, make up a coalition of regional monarchs that is tearing at the seams with the arrival of the new Trump administration.

While ridiculing Trump's first months in office as an incompetent display of showmanship, what the partisan media has missed are the subtle switches taking place under this new regime of a dying empire. Within weeks of his ridiculously theatrical May 2017 visit to Saudi Arabia, what had already appeared to take place in Yemen itself (American drones were for once attacking *takfiri* assets long used by the KSA and Qatar to subordinate otherwise resistant communities in the vast Hadhramawt and Jawf provinces) was now taking place in plain sight for those analysts willing to step out of the echo chambers that inform their politics. The most evident change was the way assets of the KSA, UAE, and Qatar started to take turns vilifying each other. The resulting schism pitting Qatar against its GCC neighbors suggests the main funders of those operations, long needed by empire to maintain order in places like Yemen, have been told to fight it out among themselves. Trump, in a manner more akin to a New York real estate developer, has applied the ultimate threat to the heavily leveraged oil monarchies. Knowing how finance works, the gangster inside Trump has called out the scam the KSA and Qatar has run over the last thirty years.

As was the case with the collapsing Soviet Union, some people in empire are going to exploit the fact the KSA and/or Qatar with their enormous cache of privately held wealth is teetering. The issue now is who among the henchmen of empire are going to be able to secure the assets needed to buy protection for one more generation. Since day one, Yemen, as is now Qatar's wealth fund, the KSA's airports, ARAMCO even (is Kuwait next?), are up for grabs. What is lost in all this already too complicated political economy of systemic collapse is the way this war on Yemen will determine the fate of those scrambling to survive.

All the major players in this race to destroy Yemen have miscalculated the relative ease in securing this region's vast natural resources. All the big players are now in the throes of a violent war within a war. With Trump's arrival, the oil assets and strategic location of Yemen are now in the hands of the UAE, the US president's primary long-term business partner in the Gulf. This most likely means the KSA's gamble to subdue Yemen quickly as far back as the 1930s has ultimately caught up to it.

What really marked the tensions around the entire war that started in 2015 were questions of just what were the targets and the end results once victory was obtained (losing to Yemeni resistance never seemed a possibility). Considering what had happened since late 2011 with the aggressive reversal of all those concessions granted to UAE-based business interests during Saleh's era, this operation conjoining rivals in a temporary coalition only continued to work if the primary task was fighting a war. With the opportunity to watch how "allies" conducted their respective, rarely coordinated tasks, the UAE and its forces, which have endured some considerable losses since March 2015, is charged with assuring that South Yemen does not entirely fall under the orbit of the Saudi project. In between are the Yemeni proxies of these two, now maybe three competing factions within the GCC, with freelance Da'ish and AQAP units proving yet again the weapon of choice for factions of empire. The targets, by way of drive-by shootings, car bombs, and outright clashes in Aden, Ta'iz, or now in the heart of Hadhramawt, have been not only Yemenis, but soldiers representing the UAE as well (Saudi Arabia actually has very few soldiers in the mix, relying almost entirely on hired guns).

Making a comeback now that the UAE seemed to have again secured access to much of South Yemen's coastline are questions about the underlying strategic concerns of Abu Dhabi. Reports suggest that the Jebel Ali Free Zone and DPW operators once thrown out by the Hadi regime returned to start up operations in October 2015.⁷ The problem is that "liberated" Aden is a disaster since the coalition expelled the "Huthi rebels." Transport in and out of Aden is still significantly low, with charter flights, often with Yemenia planes to Amman and Cairo, and the occasional UNDP or UNHCR flight to Djibouti the only means for people of these areas to travel beyond Yemen. Otherwise, the once-regular contact to Oman and occasionally the chance to get out of Yemen via Dubai has been closed.⁸ Worse, *takfiri* forces roam in small units, assassinating UAE officials and those linked to them, especially Hirak loyalists. More troubling for the long-term durability of the coalition caught fighting an endless war in Yemen is Saudi and Qatari proxies, especially the

thousands of Sudanese troops sent to the fight. In March 2017, for example, Sudanese and UAE forces engaged in firefights over control of Aden airport.⁹ The conflict exploded in late April 2017 with Hadi, the KSA, and AQAP maneuvering to expel UAE and Hiraq loyalists from Aden—the latest example of the competing agendas over what South Arabia’s future will look like.¹⁰

Much like the diamonds, cobalt, and timber that have long serviced the global economy with “war bling,” Yemen’s oil provides opportunities for those prepared to capitalize on conflict. As seen with the case of al-Ahmar in the previous chapter, Yemeni strongmen have made millions smuggling their country’s oil wealth. More recently exposed in Syria (where even the country’s food, let alone its expensive factory equipment, was carted off to Turkey), a market for unrefined oil from conflict zones has thrived in recent years. While Arcadia is no longer a facilitator, there are tankers currently waiting to dock in the port of Mukalla to pick up the next shipment of stolen crude.

What the captains await is news from brokers in Europe who have closed a deal with buyers and those with access to Yemen’s oil. Since Mukalla is where Yemen’s most valuable oil/gas conduits are located, this Hadrhami port is likely to remain a zone of violent confrontation among empire’s factions for years to come. Much is at stake in this port area, both a hub to redistribute Mar’ib natural gas and a storage facility for Yemen’s oil production. Indeed, until early 2016, Hadhramawt’s key port town was under the control of a mysterious military outfit that sat on top of 2,000,000 barrels of oil stored in local containers.¹¹ Eventually, a lucrative deal for the warlords and a brief, seemingly made-for-TV “fight” over the access to the oil stored away nearby led to the UAE and its hired guns taking over the port.¹²

The recent shift in Arabia’s politics has led to the demonization of Qatar, marking an unspoken demand by Trump that these vulnerable regimes prove their loyalty to empire. These proxies of empire are hemorrhaging money in an effort to satisfy those demands. The UAE in particular is capitalizing on America’s sudden shift in policy regarding the war in Yemen. This is their battle to win now and they are thus engaged in a real war in South Yemen, both against *takfiri* assets directly and those who support them by way of KSA.

In the meantime, the KSA finds itself vulnerable to constant attacks from its increasingly bold adversaries in Yemen. The joint Yemeni armed forces who are defending their country from this coalition’s war have developed ballistic missiles and periodically demonstrated a delivery capacity of over 1000 kilometers. Yemeni forces have reportedly hit a military base in Riyadh

and targeted successfully ARAMCO's Yanbu oil refinery some 800 km to the north. On top of relying on a military force almost entirely composed of foreigners, the bills to fund this war are piling for KSA and its partners. In particular for Riyadh, this situation promises years of austerity if oil prices do not get above operating costs quickly. In sum, having failed to destroy Yemen swiftly enough, South Arabia will prove very difficult to excise from the future of those GCC countries participating in this war.

This is a lesson—covered extensively in this book—all the parties involved in this last-ditch effort to destroy Yemen should have learned over the twentieth century. And while power in the global economy shifts over the next few years, what happens in the meantime in Yemen is the utter destruction of this magnificent country. The desecration of its historically unique cultural and socio-intellectual contribution to the larger, not only Islamic, but world in general, and rendering its 24 million people into victims, will in a sick irony simply push Yemenis to extend the violence for generations to come. This new cycle of violence will gravitate well beyond the boundaries of the fractured country today and likely ruin once seemingly peaceful safe havens in other parts of Arabia.

Perhaps, in the end, it is the KSA that will see itself broken apart into inelegantly defined polities, with the still retrievable oil wealth concentrated into more reliable hands. One possible outcome is that Abu Dhabi, in an intimate relationship with those surrounding the Trump administration, may secure a place in the larger world suddenly transformed by the demise of the House of Saud.¹³ In this regard, the war in Yemen is but a small part of a larger process of global transformation over the last two hundred years. It reflects a growing power of a small clan of monopolistic financiers whose machinations have transformed how human communities self-govern, trade culture and commodities with each other, and even spiritually position themselves in the universe. What they destroyed in Yemen was a short-lived but very popular union. So popular was the union, in fact, that any and all efforts at steering the country toward “structural reform” required considerable coercion; most citizens simply did not want to see their Yemen financially bled to death. When the tools of coercion that the Yemeni state could muster failed, a combination of *takfiri* guerrillas, the US/globalist Middle East equivalent of the Nicaraguan Contras in the 1980s, were unleashed on the country's resiliently independent people. And when, over time, the MB, AQAP, or Da'ish did not service the needs of this imperial alliance, it was US drones and occasionally Marines that stepped into the fray (Davidson 2016;

Blumi 2016). Finally, when even these drones and special forces failed to silence Yemeni defiance, the fateful war of 2015 was unleashed. We wait to see the unanticipated consequences such a foolhardy gamble unleashes.

One thing is clear from all that is covered in this book: there has been little to admire from the world's entanglements with beautiful Yemen. Sadly, in the end, we must conclude that the imprint of empire on Yemen takes its most enduring form in graves, bombed medieval cities, and a whimper from starving children no one wants to hear. And with this stark reality, I have nothing left to do. This in the end is just a book.

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NOTES

INTRODUCTION

1. Shuaib Almosawa and Ben Hubbard, "Saudi-Led Airstrikes Blamed for Massacre at Funeral in Yemen," *New York Times*, October 8, 2016.

2. It certainly helps when Saudi Arabia (KSA) can pay for the services of public relations firms with intimate links in Washington, DC, and plenty of influence on what is written by academics and disseminated in the press. Wikileaks has documented such efforts to either "contain" or "neutralize" anything negative published about the region. Beyond the work of paid lobbyists, these documents expose the extent to which KSA has bought the loyalties of academics, politicians, and journalists from "Australia to Canada and everywhere in between." <https://wikileaks.org/saudi-cables/buying-silence>. This power to influence content extends to rewriting Wikipedia sites related to KSA interests. Kevin Morris, "PR Firm Accused of Editing Wikipedia for Government Clients," *The Daily Dot*, March 8, 2013. This has a special bearing on Yemen, as these same PR firms help "whitewash" KSA's human rights record, Chris Green, "PR Firm Accused of Helping Saudi Arabia 'Whitewash' Its Human Rights Record," *Independent*, March 17, 2016. In July of 2017, Sultan Muhammad Abuljadayel, a Saudi investor, bought a significant piece of the same *Independent* newspaper that has produced some of the most critical reporting on KSA activities in the region. Graham Ruddick and Mark Sweney, "Saudi Investor Buys Significant Stake in the Independent," *The Guardian*, July 29, 2017.

3. Robert Fisk, "Saudi Arabia 'Deliberately Targeting Impoverished Yemen's Farms and Agricultural Industry,'" *Independent*, October 23, 2016. Three weeks later the *New York Times* finally joined in: Ben Hubbard, "U.S. Fingerprints on Attacks Obliteration Yemen's Economy," November 13, 2016.

4. An obvious truth the UN, due to pressure from KSA and the USA, refuses to acknowledge. Miraculously, the number of deaths caused by this war has remained near or below 10,000 since the first year. Clearly organizations collude to keep this war acceptable. Contrast a January 2016 report in which the UN stated that more than 8,100 civilians had died due to the war: <http://www.un.org/apps>

/news/story.asp?NewsID=52938#.WP1jW_nyvIU. In itself a ridiculously low number considering the number of airstrikes and heavy fighting in all of North Yemen over the previous ten months, by August 2016, the UN admits that another 2,000, now at least 10,000 in total, were killed in Yemen by 2017: <http://www.reuters.com/article/us-yemen-security-toll-idUSKCN11516W>. That number has remained the same ever since. Kareem Shaheen, “Yemen Death Toll Has Reached 10,000, UN says,” *The Guardian*, January 16, 2017.

5. Stephanie Nebehay, “Activists Cry Foul as U.N. Decides Against Yemen Rights Probe,” *Reuters*, September 29, 2016.

6. Of course, his outrage is nowhere to be found in major media sites. The embargo on news from Yemen is a deadly reality. <http://reliefweb.int/report/yemen/yemen-millions-more-will-go-hungry-2017>. Belatedly, likely after much political wrangling behind closed doors, the World Food Programme reported in March 2017 that the “current level of hunger in Yemen is unprecedented,” adding that 17 million Yemenis were “on the brink of famine.” Considering how sensitive UN agencies are to Saudi concerns, the message could not have been more urgent. <http://www.wfp.org/yemen-emergency>. Alas, “news” providers working for corporate overlords have done all they can to play down the story that the UN finally circulated; Reuters offered the following headline: “No Famine in Yemen But Over Half on the Brink,” March 15, 2017. The war on Yemen is yet one more example of how corporate-owned mainstream media (MSM) colludes with the powerful to provide cover for their war crimes.

7. Media outlets never fail to preface any of the few reports on atrocities in Yemen with the claim that the victims are “Iranian-backed” Houthis (spelled here throughout as Huthis), a connection no one has yet been able to prove beyond innuendo. <http://www.reuters.com/article/us-yemen-security-britain-usa-idUSKBN12G0MX>.

8. On the cholera outbreak, see reports from Oxfam. <https://www.oxfam.org/en/pressroom/pressreleases/2017-07-20/yemen-cholera-worst-record-numbers-still-rising>.

9. All too often linked to the “Huthi” movement emerging in the 1990s, AnsarAllah draws its early successes from providing support for the antigovernment protesters in 2011’s uprisings that led to the downfall of the previous USA/KSA-supported regime of ‘Ali Abdullah Saleh (Brandt 2017). By late 2014 the broad coalition around AnsarAllah once again brought the people of the northwestern governorates of Sa‘adah and ‘Amran together with those in the capital. Together they initiated a popular uprising that hoped to expunge Yemen’s government from corruption and sectarianism. For a detailed background, see Ali Ibrahim al-Moshki, “The Houthis: From a Local Group to a National Power,” *Yemen Times*, September 4, 2014.

10. Joe Lauria and Margaret Coker, “Former U.N. Envoy Says Yemen Political Deal Was Close Before Saudi Airstrikes Began,” *Wall Street Journal*, April 26, 2015.

11. With the previous government under ‘Ali Abdallah Saleh losing control of the country in early 2011, the “international community” intervened to subdue a

situation teetering on war. The solution, covered in detail in chapter 6, entailed setting up a temporary administration (led by Hadi, Saleh's vice-president for more than twenty years). This interim government would work in coalition with some political parties to stabilize Yemen and then organize an election in two years. The problem turned out to be that the interim regime put in place by the GCC and the USA did not fulfill its mandate and even refused to allow for the organization of the promised elections. It is at this point that the AnsarAllah-led uprising resulted in the arrest of key members of this US-imposed government for corruption and abuse of power (Mundy 2015).

12. American power seems at war with itself, with very different forces pulling at a besieged, and thus vulnerable, Trump administration to keep the focus on empire's interests. The factions associated with the neocons and Clinton loyalists now at war with Trump's outsiders have spoken up against what seems a direct attempt by the administration to put an end to the war in Yemen. Clinton/neocon loyalist Tueller, US ambassador in Yemen when Hadi reigned, pleaded on August 4, 2017, that America was powerless before such ugly intra-Yemeni violence: "We simply don't have leverage over the groups that are actually fighting on the ground . . . This is a civil war. This is Yemenis fighting against Yemenis. And until we have some mechanism to get the Yemenis to step back and make political compromises the conflict is going to go on." <https://www.pri.org/stories/2017-08-04/we-dont-have-leverage-why-us-cant-stop-yemen-war>. The characterization of the violence in Yemen since the early 1990s as a "civil war" is itself an inaccurate description. What induced the violence since 2015 was an invasion led by Western-backed mercenaries and a native people's resistance to it. As discussed throughout this book, the violence in Yemen prior to the present war was also the product of considerable foreign intervention. The outside world, in other words, cannot get away with just concluding Yemen's problems are entirely self-induced, as Peter Salisbury (2017) also insinuated for the Chatham House think tank.

13. The white phosphorus munitions being dropped on civilians in North Yemen had attracted mild attention in late 2016. Ben Norton, "America's Deadly Gift: U.S. Gave Saudi Arabia Skin-Burning White Phosphorus," *Salon*, September 30, 2016.

14. An undisclosed, likely experimental, perhaps atomic thermobaric "bunker buster" bomb destroyed an entire neighborhood during the first weeks of the Saudi-led military campaign. Since such ordinances are not in the Saudi arsenal, it was likely provided by either the USA or Israel. Consult #2YearsSinceAttanBomb on Twitter for the horrifying details.

15. The easy link, it seems, is the inaccurate reference to the principal adversaries—members of the AnsarAllah party, often lumped as being "Shi'a" "Huthis"—against KSA and its local "Sunni" proxies. The misleading reference to sectarian divides usefully evades all context, and for most writing on Yemen today, the association needs no further elaboration, obscuring the real distinctions between Yemeni Muslims (Sufis of various orders, Zaydis, Isma'ili, and Shafi'i Sunnis) from the rest of the Islamic world (Knysh 2001; vom Bruck 2005).

16. Throughout this book the term *takfiri* is used to characterize radicals who act on a hatred of all those who stray from what are narrow criteria for being a good Muslim (standards as laid out by Saudi state ideology, known as Wahhabism). Adopting a particularly rude practice of accusing others of apostasy—*takfir*—an accusation directed at other Muslims most prominently used among Da'ish/ISIS affiliated groups. These *takfiri* groups have played a critical role in the application of pressure on Yemeni politics since the 1990s. Who ultimately benefits from this violent interlocutor in Muslim societies may best be asked of the primary financiers of such radical groups: KSA, Qatar, and elements within the CIA/Mossad/MI6 coalition. Crucially, with the arrival of the Trump administration, these *takfiri* assets have been targeted by US drones, for the first time, it appears. Politicians like Senator John McCain in Washington (along with a branch of the Democratic Party linked to the Clintons), long known to provide cover for the use of *takfiri* groups, initiated a war of words with the new president complaining about a policy shift that overtly attacked KSA/Qatari assets in Yemen. Eliza Collins, “Trump Attacks McCain over Criticism of Outcome of Yemen Raid,” *USA TODAY* (February 9, 2017). Dan De Luce, “Bombing in Yemen Signals More Aggressive Use of Military,” *Foreign Policy* (March 9, 2017). Who benefits from this shift in US policy away from supporting *takfiri* groups is a question addressed in the latter chapters of this book.

17. In a more general sense the early history of Islam is especially reflective of the symbolic and strategic importance of Yemen to the outside world. When, for instance, the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) sent Mu'adh ibn Jabal to Yemen as his minister, he had no doubts that these “kind and gentle” people would play a role in shaping the kind of world Islam would fill. Even the *kiswa*, the ornately designed black silk cloth that covers the Ka'ba in Mecca, is called the *Yamani Kiswa* on account that it is believed a Yemeni king centuries prior to Islam was the first to cover the sacred stone.

18. See Dresch (2000) for especially helpful background for the reader unfamiliar with the country.

19. The nature of modern empire became clear by the 1960s with Kissinger's genocidal wars on Southeast Asia (Baran and Sweezy 1966; Foster 2006: 31–38). The problem became global by the mid-2000s, as evidenced in a UN report noting that the “net transfer of capital from poorer countries to rich ones was \$784 billion . . . even the poorest countries . . . are now money exporters.” Tina Rosenberg, “Reverse Foreign Aid,” *New York Times Magazine*, March 25, 2007, 16–19. French economist Piketty (2015: 294–97) charts the historic trend of a greater concentration of wealth (and power) to fewer and fewer hands. In the period 2009 and 2012, the top 1 percent received more than 90 percent of the increase in US national income. As Piketty commented, “It is hard to imagine an economy and society that can continue functioning indefinitely with such extreme divergence between social groups” (2015: 297). Alas, the expedited redistribution of wealth to a few families is a global phenomenon. Apologists for the concentration of more than two-thirds of the world's wealth in the hands of a few thousand argue that humanity is better off with this egregious, historically unprecedented, concentration of power (Mankiw 2013). This

process of “killing the host” will invariably lead to a point of no return and violence will be the likely outcome, not only in Yemen but in the imperial metropole as well (Hudson 2015; Rickards 2016).

20. Marxists once used political economy to capture the crucial dynamics at play, an interpretive angle all but abandoned in contemporary economics, labeled by some as now a “junk discipline” that helps obscure the real nature of empire (Hudson 2017; Keen 2011).

21. Staff, “Pentagon Spends \$500 Million on Fake Al-Qaeda Videos,” *The Clarion Project*, October 5, 2016.

22. This also implies taking the perspective of dynamic horizontal exchanges between members of the “Global South” in the context of not a Cold War pitting West and East but the “Third World” pushing back at these forces offers valuable insights (Connelly 2000: 739–69).

23. For both an invaluable detailed analysis of the implications of the global structures and their institutional stewards (what Hudson calls the institutions of American empire: the IMF, World Bank, WTO, UN) see Hudson (2005: 137–216). And for an exposé of the role of financial and technical aid in this imperialist project see Hudson (2005: 217–47).

24. “More than half the people of the world are living in conditions approaching misery. Their food is inadequate; they are victims of disease. Their economic life is primitive and stagnant. Their poverty is . . . a threat both to them and to more prosperous areas. For the first time in history humanity possesses the knowledge and the skill to relieve the suffering of these people. . . . we should make available to peace-loving peoples the benefits of our store of technical knowledge in order to help them realize their aspirations for a better life. . . . Greater production is the key to prosperity and peace. And the key to greater production is a wider and more vigorous application of modern scientific and technical knowledge” (Truman’s inaugural address, 1949, <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=13282>).

25. What was not so self-evident was the program also assured that an economic hierarchy created by the nineteenth century remained, and even expanded. The key was that any would-be modern society must aim to become a “high mass-consumption” economy before breaching the formidable developmental barriers dividing the traditional, backward society from the modern one. For a useful, contemporary survey of the whole movement that even took over the US State Department and hijacked the programs of the UN throughout the 1960s see Tipps (1973: 199–226).

26. 1957 US Senate report on the objectives of developmental aid, or “technical assistance” as it was often labeled by the modernization advocates. US Senate, *Technical Assistance* (1957).

27. Development has ever since been paired with measures that assured natives would remain serviceable to a neoimperialist world order established since World War II (Grandin 2006: 181–222).

28. Quoted from Ferris (2013: 174).

29. Subsequent waves of research grants, funded primarily with Rockefeller, Carnegie, and Ford money, were given to projects considering the sociology of the

village. What they found was a “temper” in the village that needed study, and research explored how to help “effectively release the energies so long pent up in the villages in Asia,” Arthur Schlesinger quoted in Cullather (2006: 29–48). Moreover, as Cullather observes, “The village was thus prefigured as the site of future conflicts that would finalize the ascendancy of the nation within a global system dominated by superpowers” (2006: 32).

30. There is the terrifying thought stemming from a conviction that villages in the Third World were a dangerous “breeding ground for violent revolution,” per Isidor Lubin, Henry Truman’s foreign aid advisor in 1952. This initiated a vicious logical calculation where forced urbanization would protect American interests while making this huge population dependent on US agriculture and aid for the next fifty years.

31. Steele’s career as mastermind behind the death squads in Central America and later in Iraq invariably uses prisons as ideal recruitment zones. It is not a surprise that most of the leadership from Da’ish/ISIS, now murdering in Iraq and Syria, perhaps also in Yemen, come from either US-run prisons in Iraq or Saudi equivalents. It is a claim made throughout that the USA is directly implicated in creating these *takfiri* groups; they, like the Contra forces unleashed on Nicaragua’s Sandinista regime in the 1980s or the death squads who hunted down social activists and sympathizers with guerilla movements, serve the purpose of extrajudicial violence, applied to assure both the local population is terrified and the long-held strategy of controlling the village. Joshua Boswell et al., “From El Salvador to Iraq: Washington’s Man Behind Brutal Police Squads,” *The Guardian*, March 6, 2013.

32. In his memoirs, the chief of staff of the same Egyptian army that failed in 1967 against Israel claimed that the forces sent to Yemen were poorly trained and suffered from a leadership both incompetent and corrupt (Fawzi 1986: 10–65). This is significant in the context of some scholars’ claiming the intervention in Yemen actually led to the 1967 war (Ferris 2013). For his part, the head of Egyptian intelligence running the war in Yemen even speculated that the war was largely personal, with Saudi Arabia being the real target. Crucially, the emphasis was not on one man but an entire political class who contributed to the destruction of what could have been of the Egyptian army (al-Hadidi 1984: 53–65). For a survey of the revisionist literature see Binder (2004), Orkaby (2017), and Ferris (2013: 18–20).

33. While it is not the purpose of this book to chart the 1960s war, reports of the extent of Egypt’s crimes authored by Dana Schmidt (1968: 260–85) and US embassy staff speak of, for instance, gas attacks on opposition forces and their supportive communities, none of which, as today, were condemned by the Americans. USNA RG 59, CF, 1964–66, Box 3023, Dinsmore to State, no. A-7, “Situation Report,” Sana’a, December 20, 1966.

34. For an important approach to seeing the complex social and political interactions taking place among uprooted farmers settling in Third World cities, see Way (2012).

35. Massad (2015) definitively made the case that discursively Islam had a primary function in the framing of what would constitute the liberal West from the

nineteenth century onward. And while it has taken decades to properly establish an apparatus that today conveniently proffers the quintessential “other” to an equally narrow and ahistorical “West,” there was a much larger issue facing those invested in harnessing Islam to help project global capitalist power (Davidson 2016). A recent study showed how collaboration between the USA, British-based interests, and the Saud family helped lay down the actual infrastructure to realize a “Sunni” state in the form of Saudi Arabia. This enterprise could, through educating migrant Muslims, impose a doctrinal uniformity on a billion Muslims whose complex history and dynamic, progressive ideas of what their faith teaches them had previously resisted Western-style materialism (Farquhar 2016). Crucially, migration to Saudi-funded indoctrination facilities, both in KSA and increasingly after the 1970s abroad, directly impacted how Yemenis in large numbers engaged the world through their faith (Bonnefoy 2011). This is discussed more closely in chapter 5.

36. In this postliberal era of “governance” but not government, a paradigmatic shift has occurred. It has meant moving away from internationally backed aid programs promoting central states to expand to help implement reforms that facilitated wealth redistribution (from Yemen’s poor to the global economy). States are now more valuable broken apart and their functions privatized. Outsourcing tax collection or management of roads is marketed as a “more efficient” means of governing the flow of human and material assets than governments, which in Yemen’s case perfectly reflects the sentiment about the Saleh clan and its political utility to empire. Far too corrupt and ultimately unable to keep a lid on the social unrest caused by IMF-imposed structural adjustments, by 2011 Saleh had to go. For an excellent analysis of this process, see Chandler (2010: 71–79).

37. Until the war, Yemen’s sex dens were popular destinations for weekend Johns from the UAE, KSA, and Qatar. One could fly cheaply from Sharjah, Dubai, and Qatar several times a day during the height of this sex trade. Increasing demand from middle-income professionals to have access to the illicit trade in women coming mostly from East Africa, initiated an elaborate underworld in Yemen’s two main entry cities—Sana’a’ and Aden—that has yet to fully die out, apparently, despite the war.

38. Chasing down such threats to order is neatly folded into America’s dubious “war on terror.” American “hunting” narratives resonate in dangerous ways with earlier campaigns justifying mass murder, a slippery slope that is evident today in the war on Yemen. For clarification see Chamayou (2012).

39. Since the 1990s, the Yemen government has accused a diverse coalition of farmers and villagers in North Yemen fighting for regional rights (calling themselves Believing Youth and then AnsarAllah but not Huthis, the name of one of their chief inspirational leaders) as working within a transnational “Shi’a” constituency that takes its orders from Hezbollah (Wedeen 2008: 152–55). As much as Saudi- and Qatari-funded media have preached this narrative to the converted in Western think tanks and policy makers, the concern voiced here is that the larger academic community and media have unquestioningly regurgitated this propaganda about the wars in the Sa’adah province as part of a larger “Iranian” plot for regional hegemony.

CHAPTER ONE

1. Yazid b. Maq̄sam al-Sadafi noted that students of Malay-Hadhrami heritage are drawn to their ancestors' homeland to benefit from the status those educated there carry in the larger world. As the saying goes: "Greeting Hadhramaut! The followers of tradition, research and study know thee [Hadhramis are] distinguished by judgement amid Barbarian and Arab, in days of Ignorance and Islam." See Stark (1936: 203).

2. In many cases, Yemen does not even play into the history of BEIC (Lawson 2014; Robins 2012).

3. While the larger argument about the significance of this reorientation of our understanding of the period is made in Blumi (2012, 2013), we can simplify things here by emphasizing how desperately certain capitalist interests needed a new order of governance to adapt to the challenges presented by actors indigenous to the region.

4. In the subsequent attempt to expropriate most of the surplus wealth of the region, the instruments of an increasingly invasive finance capitalist regime—empire—resorted to the use of orientalist tropes about "backward" natives, a mobilization of the social sciences just beginning to emerge in the academy to rationalize the absolute, and violent, quest to dominate indigenous actors (Stoler 2006). As Vitalis (2015) has recently demonstrated, there was a long line of academics eager to cash in on the likely plunder.

5. By 1875, the Ottoman Empire itself defaulted on their massive debt to Western financiers, resulting in a series of coups and ultimately a devastating period of austerity not entirely different from that experienced in Greece today (Blumi 2013: 31–45).

6. Rashid Rida is perhaps the most obvious example. He was increasingly identified as a precursor to the Muslim Brotherhood, equally nurtured by a British administration in Egypt (Davidson 2016: 90–98; Curtis 2012: 21–59).

7. The Italians often used intermediaries based in the diaspora, such as Cairo, to help develop relations with crucial actors inside Yemen (Blumi 2012: 131–38). In one case the Italian legation in Cairo debated about the merits of paying the debt of a long-used intermediary, Sayyid Ahmad Yahya al-Kibsi. Well established by 1908, Kibsi wrote to the consul that his personal debt of 48 livres (pounds) made it impossible for him to provide the Italians the services they expected of him. ASMAE 91/9 f. 125, no. 77590, Kibsi al-Yamani to Italian Legation, Cairo, November 2, 1908.

8. The resulting depopulation of the once dynamic imperial port city evokes the similar targeting since March 2015 of Hudaydah in the attempt to starve Yemenis into submission. The port is the only one big enough to download supplies needed by the more than 20 million people living under siege.

9. The way the British handled their brief intrigues into Tihama politics did not entirely go their way. While promoting themselves as "liberators," any number of would-be leaders emerged in the vacuum created by the expulsion of Ottoman troops in 1918. At one point Aden's own emissaries in the area were kidnapped and were only freed after British forces used their one airplane to fly over the

communities in question. For information on this revealing moment where the British almost overstepped their place in local politics, see NAUK, FO 371/5145, Report from Major Meek, "Report on operations for the release of the Jacob Mission," Hudayda, January 31, 1920; NAUK, FO 371/5144, FO to Field-Marshal Viscount Allen, London, February 16, 1920.

10. The first attempt to establish relations between the French and Imam Yahya was in 1922: AMAE, Affaires politiques, Afrique 1918–1940, CFS no. 2, rapport du capitaine de frigate Esteva, August 8, 1922. The imam in 1930 renewed overtures, ANOM, 2E9, "Relations franco-yemenites (1930–1957)," May 9, 1930, suggesting an appreciation for balancing off various regional European powers.

11. On news that the Italians were supplying Idrisi with ammunition in exchange for oil concessions, see NAUK, FO, 371/10818, report no. 16858/25, Colonial Office to FO, response to telegram, Aden, April 15, 1925. Other files demonstrate how the various polities beyond British influence produced considerable revenue through trade between Italian-run Massawa and Yemen's ports. Once Imam Yahya could control both Hudaydah and the trade moving between the coffee-producing regions, profits from trade dropped for those linked to British Aden. IOR L/P &S, R/20/A/2919, Major Reilly, to Sec. of State for the Colonies, London, August 11, 1926.

12. We know from the French that during World War I Italy was secretly expecting, as compensation for entering the war, Yemen's coastal region, that very same Tihama and 'Asir (both part of the Ottoman vilayet of Yemen at the time). But as this was between allies, the imam was not to know of Italy's imperial designs. As noted in AMAE, Guerre 1914–1918, Affaires généraux Afrique, vol. 1505, "Ambitions coloniales italiennes (30/6/1916–30/4/1917)," lettre du chargé d'affaire à Rome, September 10, 1916.

13. NAUK, FO, 371/20202, Telegram from Mr. Robert, Addis Abba, to Resident at Aden, "Italian Policy Regarding Arabs in Ethiopia: Movements of Individuals between Ethiopia and Arabia." Yemenis had long established commercial footholds in Ethiopia and during the interwar period aided in the diplomatic overtures between the two Red Sea states hostile to the British (Bezabeh 2015: 101–3).

14. It would take until 1936 for these earlier diplomatic efforts to bear fruit. ANOM, 2E9, "Relations franco-yemenites (1930–1957)," letter, May 9, 1930.

15. Al-Sa'ud's violent human assets needed fine tuning and considerable effort by the likes of Gertrude Bell and Cunliffe-Owen in the period immediately after the war produced results later on when the final betrayal of the Hashemites took the form of British-armed al-Sa'ud sacking Mecca. On these early efforts see NAUK, FO 882/9, Report by Colonel Cunliffe-Owen on his mission to Ibn Sa'ud, April 1918.

16. Any number of visitors in those early days noted the considerable wealth Yahya was able to acquire by way of his smooth absorption of the rich agricultural lands in Ta'iz and Ibb, areas in Middle Yemen that, in theory, by way of the majority Shafi'i Sunni population would resist the expansion of a Zaydi imamate. Instead, the transregional layout of power sharing made Yahya's early 1920s state considerably wealthy. For details of this consolidation process see al-Wazir (1987: 127, 175–86); al-Akwa' (1987: 2:291, 324–48, 407–12); Zabarah (1956: III: 8–16).

17. The Americans made it clear that their hands were tied if Britain and the imam could not agree on rival territorial claims all along the Lahj, Radwan areas. Imam Yahya had far too many suitors in these areas the Aden-based authorities claimed remained under the sway of the protectorate and earlier “treaties.” The constant reminder British authorities sent to their American interlocutors did not sit well with businessmen seeing opportunities in North Yemen falling into the hands of Italians just because of a now bankrupt British imperial claim.

18. Rayhani faded quickly, leaving behind a forgotten travelogue, *Arabian Peak and Desert* (1930). Another Syrian was more successful. As we will see in the next chapter, “Jack” Nahas, an officer with the US Army, at some point became a major player in the postwar American efforts to open relations with Yemen.

19. Later, Twitchell became synonymous with America’s presence in Saudi Arabia, characterized in one correspondence as such: “Karl S. Twitchell, American mining and hydraulic engineer, long associated with roadbuilding, well-drilling, and development of mining interests in Saudi Arabia as a representative of American and British capital, and for some time the informal agent of King Ibn Sa’ud in the United States in respect to projects for economic development.” US Government, USAID, *FRUS: Diplomatic Papers, 1945, The Near East and Africa*, v. IV, 890F.61A/2: telegram, Sec. of State Hull to Kirk, Washington, DC, February 6, 1942. In other words, Twitchell was the agent of empire par excellence. Imam Yahya was right to mistrust him; Sa’ud, on the other hand, seemed to have no other recourse but allow this agent of American and British capital infect Arabia with empire’s disease of greed.

20. For a copy of the treaty see Schofield (1992: 20:48–49).

21. Yemeni historians offer the best details of Sayf al-Islam Ahmad’s campaign to subdue al-Ahmar (Zabarah 1956: III:76–119 and al-Jirafi 1987: 237–41).

22. After several displays of British airpower, the rival powers in South Arabia signed the Sana’a Treaty in February 1934, which agreed to an administrative division of the region.

23. Known as Yam, this community proved crucial to opening the doors for Sa’ud/Wahhabi expansion into the region in 1933 as Prince Ahmad chased members of the Dhu Muhammad into the area (Zabarah 1956: III:313–14).

24. The details of this relationship/partnership are still poorly studied, but after even a cursory look at the published documents, it is clear that a much more active British team played a role in the territorial expansion of their Sa’udi partner in the 1920s and 1930s. This expansion was all at the expense of the Hashemites in the Hijaz, Rashidi in North Arabia, and Idrisi and Hamid al-Din in Yemen. Among others involved in these British machinations were Philby, a close confidant of Ibn Sa’ud (Philby 1939: 251–59, 431–32). See also “Summary of Statements made by Mr. Philby about his Expedition to Shabwa and beyond,” enclosed in Message to British Minister in Jeddah, no. 16, Jeddah, February 18, 1937 (Schofield 1992: 20:675–78).

25. As we will see in chapter 5, subsequent efforts to finalize a division of territory in Sa’udi (and thus empire’s) favor, the Jeddah Treaty of 2000, was a final attempt to erase the fact that Yemenis could always upset regional stability.

26. The actual border that had been “temporarily” approved by the victorious Ibn Sa‘ūd and the defeated Imam Yahya delineated a frontier only up to Jabal al-Thar; all points east, including the lands in Najran belonged to communities known in the literature as the Wa’ilah and Wada’a who are extensions of the Bakil confederation (Gingrich and Heiss 1986).

27. Details of the negotiations are found in *Oriente Moderno* 14 (May 1934): 231–47.

28. In fact, the imam expelled Twitchell. We do not have the details but considering what Twitchell was up to once he moved his operations to Sa‘udi territories, it is clear that Yemeni authorities did not trust the engineer. There is evidence suggesting Twitchell was a grade A spy who also profited handsomely from his activities. By the time he became Abdul Aziz’s informal representative in discussions with the US government, Twitchell carried several other titles. From being representative of the American Eastern Corporation, chief engineer from Standard Oil, and the head of the American Agricultural Mission to the KSA in 1942, he pitched lucrative development projects and at some point, even helped the US government to convince Ibn Sa‘ūd to open his domains to US military airbases. US Government, USAID, *FRUS, 1945, The Near East and Africa*, v. VIII, 890F.51/2–1945; telegram, Washington, DC, February 19, 1945. By the 1950s he became an intermediary for the newly created CIA as they attempted to blackmail prominent members of the Sa‘udi family by using evidence they held of corruption between the Onassis ship-building empire and private representatives of the Sa‘udi government, US Government, USAID, *FRUS, 1952–1954, The Near and Middle East*, v. IX, part 1, 886A.2553/8-2454, no. 367, Memorandum of Conversation, “Utilization of Papers Showing Bribery in Connection with Onassis Contract,” September 24, 1954.

29. The family maintained a massive philanthropic network that transferred funds to Hadhramawt to build schools, roads, and textile mills. NAS Alkaf transcript, 1–4.

30. By that measure, the starting date is somewhere in 1955 when Britain, France, and Israel agreed to attack Egypt (Hahn 1991: 211–39).

31. At the same time, there were many allies dispersed throughout the Red Sea region. Many Yemenis living in Djibouti, the most prominent being Ali Coubeché (Kubashi), were politically very close to Imam Yahya. ANOM 4E6/2, “Rapports 1932–1951,” rapport sur la politique indigène, December 15, 1943. For French citizens working in the Red Sea as free agents, Imam Yahya’s state proved an important source of business. Alphonse Lippmann was one of the more colorful colonial agents operating in this period. In 1953, he wrote a book on his adventures, *Guerriers et sorciers en Somalie*. His claim to fame was the way in which he actively engaged the governor of Djibouti, pushing for more support from the colonial government to help French merchants. He was seemingly always seeking business opportunities, and when it became known that Imam Yahya was looking for a way to secure modern weapons, the chief of the Onno Battalion suggested a joint business deal via Monsieur Lippmann. Contacting Marcel de Coppet, governor at the time, for permission to visit and inquire about weapons sales to the imam, in February 1935 we have a

recorded second attempt to get this permission. Having just been expelled from Ethiopia in January 1936, Lippmann upped his request by adding 10,000 rifles and ammunition to pass through Djibouti port to Yemen. At some point we see Lippmann in Aden, but he is then expelled from there as well. He ends up in April 1937 in Yemen. ANOM, Affaires politiques 4F2, letter from Lippmann to Djibouti governor, November 21, 1934; ANOM, Affaires politiques 4F2, letter from Gov. to Lippmann, June 26, 1935; ANOM, Affaires politiques 4F2, “note de renseignement” 2nd office, April 25, 1946. In time, we learn that Yemeni authorities arrest Lippmann and his French business partners pay his ransom. His crime: the imam had ordered oil products in late 1947 and paid Lippmann upfront. Lippmann did not produce the requested products but kept the money. Somehow in July 1948 the imam’s representatives captured Lippmann and brought him to Sana’a, as appears from a statement made by the main business interlocutor for all foreigners to Yemen, Ibrahim Mubin (spelled Moubine in French documents), see ANOM 12A2-1, “Représentations consulaires des pays voisins,” note de la legation de France a Djeddah au gouverneur, January 20, 1948. Finally, a representative of the Société des Batignolles, named Martin, was tasked with securing Mr. Lippmann’s freedom; the price was 27,000 rupees. ANOM, 4F2 Martin’s Report, August 25, 1948.

CHAPTER TWO

1. What the major powers hoped to achieve in the larger Middle East required strong local allies. Yemeni men who settled in areas under British administration—Cairo, Baghdad, or Aden—seemed perfect candidates. Throughout this period British recruiters searched for ambitious students and idealistic officers who were sent by the imam’s government to British-controlled academies in Iraq. While there were successful cases of turning Yemenis against the imam’s government, problems always arose because of Britain’s own sordid imperialism. Many viewed the British as occupiers, and Yemenis in Cairo, Baghdad, or Aden could just as easily have seen Britain’s enemies as allies capable of helping them liberate their homeland. As seen throughout, this at times meant the Americans too maintained a rivalry with “old world” powers over global assets. The CIA and its coterie of “aid” agencies operated in the early Cold War in a manner that required partnership with local polities (Petersen 1992; Smith 2007). These needs clashed with British plans for Arabia.

2. Indeed, the KSA’s reputation for being miserly has manifested in their failure to pay the salaries of their (at least dark-skinned) guns-for-hire in the present war in Yemen. See Robert Fisk, “Saudi Arabia Cannot Pay Its Workers or Bills Yet Continues to Fund a War in Yemen,” *Independent*, September 8, 2016. The result on the battlefield has been widespread desertions. These desertions mean once well-armed soldiers can sell their weapons supplied by the coalition. A common practice in Yemen today, many of the sophisticated weapons handed out to fight “the rebels” end up in their hands via the black market. Another issue is infighting, as witnessed around Aden. After capturing Aden in late 2015, the occupying “Hadi government”

has failed to provide security, sewage, jobs, and electricity to its swelling population. In sum, as rivals fight in the streets of most major towns in South Yemen, the Saudi-led coalition is a mess. See “Sudan and the UAE Battle for Control of Yemen Airport,” *MEMO*, March 7, 2017.

3. The role German and Italian spies played in mobilizing resistance to British forces in the Middle East is largely unknown. It is certain, however, that the British alliance with al-Sa‘ud animated the political calculations of Yemenis. Some found the combination of hatred for the British in Yemen and support from the Axis powers useful. One Hussain al-Dabbagh, for instance, spent time in Italy and Italian-administered Ethiopia and then with their money set up “religious” schools throughout the fringes of British South Yemen. By 1942 al-Dabbagh’s efforts compelled British administrators to invest considerable resources to shut his operations down. As Paul Dresch (2000: 54–55) rightly speculates, Al-Dabbagh’s activities were most likely only the tip of the iceberg.

4. Consult Douglas (1987) for a comprehensive list of all the small parties that emerged in the period—such as Muhammad al-Akwa‘ and Qadi ‘Abd al-Rahman al-Iryani’s Jam‘iyyat al-Islah (Reform Party) based in Ibb.

5. Starting already in British-occupied Cairo, prominent young intellectuals like Zubayri and Nu‘man framed reform through their association, al-Katibah al-awla lil-Shabab al-Yamani (Shamahi 1972: 219–22). The movement expanded into Aden. Already a hub for anti-imam activists, through a British-funded opposition newspaper, *Fatat al-Jazirah*, that targeted the large North Yemeni immigrant population in South Yemen, the conditions were ripe for the FYM. Upon their arrival in Aden, Nu‘man and Zubayri created al-Jam‘iyyah al-Yamaniyyah al-Kubra (the Greater Yemen Association), which managed to secure British approval to establish a weekly—*Sawt al-Yaman* (Voice of Yemen)—that served as the official organ of the FYM. In time the movement was joined by like-minded members of the ruling family, with even one son of Imam Ahmad, Ibrahim, joining the group in Aden. Growing in credibility, at some point Crown Prince Ahmad invited these respected men for consultations (*Sawt al-Yaman*, December 19, 1946).

6. Ahmad once said: I pray God I do not die before I colour my sword here with the blood of these modernists (Stookey 1978: 218; Dresch 2000: 86), originally quoted in al-Shamahi (1972: 191, 209).

7. The workers became important parts of their host society’s labor movements (Halliday 1992: 23–41).

8. It is somewhat an irony that this potential pool of Yemenis whom the British agents could recruit was supplied by the imam himself. It was with stipends provided by the Yemeni state that these men could travel to Iraq, Egypt, and Europe to conduct their studies in the first place (Peterson 1978: 26).

9. For Soviet attempts at developing a reliable local resource of influence, see Bissell (1978).

10. In Yemen today, contradictions about the overt support of *takfiri* units by the Saudi-backed, “legitimate” Hadi forces correspond with British military assistance. Once again, the use of Yemenis (and foreign mercenaries) to attack a local regime,

even if they themselves become hostile to their current patrons later, seems a risk many in the elite are willing to take. Unlikely to receive much journalistic exposure, the fragments that have reached the mainstream media of *takfiri* units fighting alongside those affiliated with the “legitimate” Hadi government against the AnsarAllah/Saleh coalition quickly fade away. See “Yemen Conflict: Al-Qaeda Seen at Coalition Battle for Taiz,” *BBC News Online*, February 22, 2016, <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-35630194>.

11. As reported by British intelligence, set up in Aden by the Free Yemenis or Greater Yemeni Association (Jam’iyyat al-yamaniya al-kubra) the Voice of Yemen, *Sawt al-Yaman*, started publication in late 1946 and immediately laid out a program for reform that included the removal of the imam and the establishment of a Consultative Council, which was to play a role in the late 1960s when these same activists finally came to power. NAUK, FO 371/68334, January 10, 1948.

12. Revealingly, this geographically dispersed group of dissatisfied young men was carefully managed by Shakib Arslan, the prominent Syrian-Druze cum Arab Nationalist who had earlier chaired a commission to help in the negotiations between Imam Yahya and Ibn Sa’ud in 1934 (Cleveland 2014: 81–82). On Arslan’s work during the Ta’if negotiations and his correspondence with Rashid Rida, a strong supporter of the Saudi ruler, many files can be found in NAUK, FO 371/17831, E3847 and E4384.

13. If this link is correct, it is not a surprise then that Zubayri emphasized the importance of bringing to Yemen “Islamic justice” seemingly defined as being distinct from that then offered in his homeland by the Zaydi Imam (Douglas 1987: 51–68).

14. The British were clearly behind the newspaper, happily facilitating the publication of the colony’s first Arabic-language daily that, it was hoped, would promote British interests as the Cairo-based *Zabrat al-Sharq* (Douglas 1987: 72–73). It certainly promoted the globalist-orientated liberalism that British colonialists so very much loved to see their Arab, “underdeveloped” subjects adopt. To Luqman, the only hope to rescue Yemen was to “to industrialise and introduce reforms,” which for a 1943 editorial offers us a precursor to the kind of activism we find unleashed by the successful coup of 1962.

15. Some gained access to the imam, pitching their reform measures, and then later seeking support from those eager to see the regime fall. The Algerian, Fudhayl al-Wartalani, a member of the MB, had gained the trust of the imam by way of his prowess as a trader. In their meetings, he both produced profits and preached the benefits of having an advisory council with some legislative teeth. It is likely that the imam mistrusted his eagerness, however. He was preaching a reform package similar to what the tandem of Zubayri and Nu’man, the founders of the Free Yemeni group, earlier proposed to Yahya. Eventually these three collaborated to draw up the documents that would form the basis of a constitution for future generations, the so-called Sacred National Pact (*al-muthaq al-watani al-muqaddas*). Crucially, ‘Abdallah al-Wazir would sign onto the program laid out in the document in November 1947, solidifying his place as the imam’s preferred successor. See below. On al-Warilani and a full text of the pact, see al-Ahnaf (1999).

16. Detailed reports on Yemen from this early group of American intermediaries for the aspiring oil and mining companies hoping to establish commercial links with the imamate are largely stored in files linked to the Jeddah consulate. See for example extensive reports of American “grants” to the imam’s military in its “Mutual Defense Assistance Program” (MDAP) that donated surplus military equipment used in the European theatre during World War II, USNA, RG 59, Box 27, A1 1434, Jidda Embassy to Arabia, Yemen file: 1920–54.

17. USNA, RG 59, Box 25, A1 1434, Jidda Embassy to Arabia, Yemen, 1920–54, “Recommendations of K.S. Twitchell to Government of Yemen Regarding Purchases of US Surplus Army Property,” Yemen Series No. 40, Jidda, June 30, 1947.

18. We find out later that Twitchell, for instance, while officially an engineer specializing in water irrigation, also represented both US oil and British capital (Twitchell 1958). Indeed, it was Twitchell and his college of underlings, as servants of both British/US imperialism and finance capitalism, who formed the first generation of “Arabists” in the US intelligence services. This confusion of interests often meant that big oil concerns took precedence over official US foreign policy initiatives (Vitalis 2009: 2, 36; Wilford 2013: 16–31).

19. While communications had already taken place prior, President Franklin D. Roosevelt felt compelled to respond to Imam Yahya’s personal telegram, assuring him that the US government was “familiar with the views of the Arab States respecting the question of Palestine, and . . . those views will continue to receive the most careful consideration.” Yemen was no tiny dot on the map; FDR had to respond to concerns Imam Yahya felt compelled to voice regarding Palestine in early 1945. On April 2, 1945, the imam thanks FDR on behalf “of all Arabs—nay, of Islam and of all Moslems.” US Government, *FRUS: Diplomatic Papers, 1945, The Near East and Africa*, 1945v08/d690. No.867N.01/3–2945, telegram, Franklin D. Roosevelt to the King of Yemen, Washington, March 29, 1945.

20. Perhaps the most famous dispute arising from this land grab in the eastern regions of the Arabian Peninsula is the oasis of Buraimi (Morton 2013: 64–73).

21. USNA, RG 59, Box 25, A1 1432, Jidda Embassy to Arabia, Yemen, 1920–54, P. 8143, “Memorandum of Conversation,” WR Crawford to Ambassador, October 1, 1947.

22. These GMC CCKW350 2.5-ton trucks were the workhorse of the US Army in the European theatre. They made a positive impression on the Yemenis when they finally rolled into Sana’a’ after several days of rough travel from the Red Sea coast. USNA, RG 59, Box 25, A1 1434, Jidda Embassy to Arabia, Yemen, 1920–54, Yemen Series, No. 40, “Recommendations of K.S. Twitchell to Government of Yemen Regarding Purchases of US Surplus Army Property,” Jidda, June 30, 1947.

23. USNA, RG 59, Box 25, A1 1434, Jidda Embassy to Arabia, Yemen, 1920–54, “FLC Credit for Surplus Sales to Yemen-American Easter Corporation,” Sanger to Deimel, July 11, 1947.

24. USNA, RG 59, Box 25, A1 1434, Jidda Embassy to Arabia, Yemen, 1920–54, “Further Discussions re Yemeni Desire for Admission to the United Nations and a Loan from the US,” Sanger to Deimel, August 4, 1947.

25. Indicative of the dearth of information on the country (and just how pervasive tropes about the “tribal Arabs” were in American and British policy-making circles), the content produced for a broad American audience to learn about “Mysterious Yemen” also served as accessible intelligence for policy makers. Of course, “reporters” working for the news services owned by major corporations or oil conglomerates had a dual role. Yemen has been targeted by so-called journalists (and social scientists doing “field work”) to dishonestly collect intelligence for years. USNA, RG 59, Box 25, P1432, Clarke Beach (AP “reporter”) to Richard Sanger, Middle East Division, Washington, DC, January 17, 1947. Enclosed is an advanced print copy of article “Mysterious Yemen Lifts Its Veil for U.S.” and accompanying letter, which reads: “Dear Mr. Sanger, here is an office copy of the Yemen story for your information in case you don’t happen to see it in the papers. You never know how much of a play such stories will get.” Reporters like Clarke Beach, formally attached to the Associated Press when he accompanied a US delegation to visit the imam’s “little kingdom” in 1946, were in fact working for US intelligence. That said, it is amazing that lower-ranking staff, who end up writing case reports for the State Department or Congressional Reports to inform lawmakers on events in Yemen, regularly use news stories produced by corporations like the *New York Times* or material from think-tanks rather than consult intelligence generated by government hired “experts.”

26. Full reports as published by the US government may be accessed at US Government, “Visit of Prince Saif Al-Islam Abdullah to the United States,” *FRUS: Diplomatic Papers, 1947, The Near East and Africa*, Volume V.

27. Any number of interest groups courted Abdullah while in New York, and it was clear he was aware of it. To the Americans, this demonstrated the kind of hard-to-get attitude that boded ill for their efforts to turn him against both his father and his ideals. USNA, RG 59, Box 10, NND 917337, doc. 1101, “Yemen’s Application for Membership in the UN,” August 6, 1947.

28. USNA, RG 59, Box 10, NND 917337, USSD (US State Department) Memorandum of Conversation, “Yemen and ITO,” August 6, 1947.

29. This was clearly an intelligence gathering mission, as the report attests. As a technical officer, Nahas took several photographs and wrote reports on the findings. Details of the report is available at the Combined Arms Research Library, N15770B, Special United States Diplomatic Mission, the Kingdom of Yemen, April–June 1946.

30. USNA, RG 59, Box 10, NND 917337, USSD (US State Department) Memorandum of Conversation, “Conversations of Col. Nahas re-interest in Possible Yemeni Oil Resources,” August 7, 1947.

31. *Ibid.*

32. Abdullah was also working, through his Egyptian advisor in New York, with Hasan Baghdadi Bey to start loan negotiations for \$2 million with the Export-Import Bank by way of a facilitating bank American Eastern. USNA, RG 59, Box 10, NND 917337, USSD (US State Department) Memorandum of Telephone Conversation, “Eximbank Loan for Yemen,” August 11, 1947.

33. NAUK, FO 371/68322, Middle East Office, Cairo, enclosed copy of report by Capt. Jamal Jamil, military advisor to Yemeni government, to FO of Iraq, Sana'a, October 12, 1947.

34. Capt. Jamal Jamil noted that Yemen's minister of defense, Prince 'Ali, and Qadi Muhammad Raghیب Bey, at the time the foreign minister, were outraged about the agreement Saif al-Islam Abdullah brought back from New York. Among other things, they complained that the agreement signed with the US constituted "a Jewish plot directed against the Arabs." This language is revealing and ironic, when taking into account Imam Yahya's protests that dated back to 1944 of British policies allowing European colonialists to settle in Palestine. NAUK, FO 371/68322, Middle East Office, Cairo, enclosed copy of report by Capt. Jamal Jamil, military advisor to Yemeni government, to FO of Iraq, Sana'a, October 12, 1947.

35. Events dramatic enough (perhaps they were deemed positive by the British) for the Associated Press to pick up the story, without, of course, a reporter on the ground. "Yemen Ruler, Three Sons Die in Plot: Religious Leader Heads New Government as Nation's Unrest Ends," *Associate Press*, February 20, 1948.

36. NAUK, FO, 371/68336, A. L. Mayall to FO, Cairo, March 8, 1948.

37. Unique details of the conspiracy and the violence around the short-lived regime of Abdullah bin Ahmad al-Wazir is available at al-Akwa' (1995: I: 196-209). In English consult (Dresch 2000: 56-57).

38. al-Mujahid (1997: 241-42) offers a colorful description of the scene in Ta'iz when its inhabitants lined the streets to welcome the victorious, and vengeful, new imam.

39. The Americans complained endlessly about this fact. More than the lack of any evident "consumption economy" was the bigger, structural problem that Yemen did not have a fiat currency. Without a central bank tied to the global network of banks issuing paper, Yemenis still insisted on using gold and silver as their only means of exchange. Throughout the 1950s American companies wanted to sell tractors and wheat to Yemen, which had at this stage proved to be a potentially lucrative market for many industrial and agricultural goods. The problem was Yemen did not maintain a dollar account in foreign banks. Any transactions taking place would have to take place in physical coin/bullion, creating the kind of accounting headache most American companies could no longer handle. USNA, RG 59, Box 27, Department of State to CDF, 786H.11/6-2755. See also chapters 4-6.

40. William Lakeland, US consul in Aden, offers a revealing accounting of the wealth he observed while making his way from impoverished Aden to Ta'iz, Imam Ahmad's capital. USNA, RG 59, Box 27, 786H.11/6-2755, "The Sad State of Affairs in Arabia Felix," Lakeland to Washington, Aden June 27, 1955.

41. As relations chilled because of the 1948 coup, the Americans could, only after regime permission, conduct a 1952 expedition led by Wendell Phillips to the Ma'rib area. On the pretext of conducting palaeographic investigations for the American Foundation of the Study of Man, the Americans could not restrain themselves from acting suspiciously. They were soon expelled on the belief the mission was simply a front for both spying and oil exploration. And yet, Yemen continued

to keep the Americans hopeful. Appreciating the American desire to win the imam's favor, North Yemen sent its minister of state, Sayyid Hasan Ibrahim, to Washington to request funds from the Export-Import Bank. While the US played hardball in trying to pry open their still independent economy, the back-and-forth proves useful to support the larger argument that Yemenis knew how to play the Cold War powers. USNA, RG 469, Box 2, P 146 File 1323, CA-3220, "Request of Government of Yemen for Export-Import Bank Loan," Hoover of the Foreign Assistance Agencies Mission to Jidda, October 12, 1956.

42. Until today Saudi Arabia occupies land claimed by Abu Dhabi, acquired during a period of aggressive expansion in the 1940s and 1950s with direct US support. While no longer mentioned in public, British writers at the time did their best to tell the world of US-Saudi indiscretions (Kelly 1958: 16–23). By the time the UAE became a recognized federated state of seven emirates, the Saudis were still at it, pushing all the countries in the region to recognize their occupation of land separating Abu Dhabi and Qatar. See USNA RG 59, Washington Central Foreign Policy Files, 1973–1975, General Records of the Department of State, 1975ABUDH02059, Sterner to Sec. of State, October 15, 1975.

43. Here the role of Twitchell is intriguing and invites further research. Southwest Saudi Arabia/Asir is rich in water. Twitchell, once an administrator in the Southwest US, identified Yemenis in the area as the same kind of "savage tribesmen" as in New Mexico. His approach to ridiculing as "backward" their protection of water resources would follow the way the US Department of Interior dealt with their own tribal peoples in New Mexico, something Twitchell's chief patron Ibn Sa'ud and the US oil companies hired him to do. See chapter 1 note 29 and Black (2016).

44. The mainstream media failed to appreciate the significance of the pact, which ignored North Yemen's place in the story. "Egypt-Syria Pact Signed," *New York Times*, March 4, 1955. Within a few days, the story clearly took on greater importance and the *New York Times* sent its own reporter whose reports ended up on the front page: Robert C. Doty, "Three Arab States Join in Military-Economic Plan: New Arab Set-Up Slated in Cairo," March 6, 1955. The role of Doty reporting on events was to assure *New York Times* readers that this pact was a failure. Robert C. Doty, "Egyptian Pact Bid Said to be Failing," March 24, 1955.

45. As is normally the claim, it is these outsiders who end up making the decisions that bring change to Yemen. The 1956 Jiddah conference between Egypt and the KSA reportedly led to a decision to impose a new leader in North Yemen. Egypt did become a haven for activists from both Aden and North Yemen by 1955. This did not, however, mean Cairo was hostile to Imam Ahmad's regime. As discussed in the next chapter, until 1961 at least, Egypt's concerns in South Arabia reacted to the British investment in regime change, which threatened Egypt's long-term interests in the larger Red Sea. Such efforts by empire demanded that Egyptian intelligence keep close tabs on domestic political events in the imamate, not overthrow it (Nasr 1999: 2:332–34).

46. NAUK, CO 1015/1266, Kemp to FO, February 1958. By 1959, some Americans visiting Ta'iz perceived a break between Imam Ahmad and Egypt, offering the

USA a chance to exploit “the internal turmoil” rumored in the imam’s palace and pry North Yemen away. USNA, RG 469, Box 2, Dispatch 119, “Evidence of a Major Policy Decision by the GOY,” Ferguson, American Legation in Taiz (via Cairo) to State Department, November 12, 1959.

CHAPTER THREE

1. It was reported that someone distributed leaflets calling the people and the army to join forces under the leadership of someone whose name would be disclosed later (*Fatat al-Jazirah*, December 11, 1960). The consequences of such overt circumvention of the older opposition, such as the FYM, left many from the old guard to rethink their long-term objectives. Ahmad al-Shami, for one, as a founding member of the FYM, ended up serving as the imam’s foreign minister during the 1962–1970 war (al-Shami 1984: 33–35).

2. Based on the reporting of Dana Schmidt (1968) for the *New York Times*, four separate conspiracies were operating simultaneously throughout 1962. They eventually clashed themselves, resulting in the fragmentation of the opposition leading to violence. In this environment of clashing interests, the declared agenda of all to support the revolutionary spirit of the times—brotherhood, progress, unity, rationalism, modernity—were hardly persuasive to ordinary Yemenis.

3. Immediately after the Egyptians sent thousands of troops to shore up their claim to the new order in North Yemen, once allies in a struggle against the imam split. Such fissures reflected the immediate tension that arises in such moments. For example, Ahmad Muhammad Nu‘man, from a prominent family in Middle Yemen, openly sparred with a former FYM ally Muhammad al-Zubayri, a member of a family of Zaydi judges whose insubordination to Imam Ahmad, despite being Zaydi, won him credibility for years as a viable option to the sectarianism promoted by the Saudis (al-Shahari 1972: 176–78). For his side of the story, see Nu‘man (1965: 57–58).

4. By the time of the coup, and under a new Kennedy administration, the careerists inside the US Department of State apparatus sent the new Secretary of State Rusk a note clearly stating that the US government should not interfere: “foregoing more profitable line of action than attempt [to] manipulate Yemen internal situation which possibly would fail or at least would entail being drawn too deeply into unpredictable Yemeni affairs. In our view, [the] heart of problem is not in Sana’a [*sic*] but in Cairo and we are [the] only Western power possessing possible capability of influencing situation there.” US government, *FRUS, 1961–1963*, Vol. XVIII, no. 59, Telegram from the Department of State to Sec. of State Rusk, Washington, DC, September 27, 1962. In response to this information, an intelligence report from one Hilsman to the acting secretary warned on September 27 that everyone in the intelligence community, especially in the region, knew of the UAR’s involvement in Yemen. This would cause problems down the road if not addressed. The prediction from the CIA officer to the Kennedy team reveals a prevailing mindset: “If the UAR is clearly seen to be directing affairs in Yemen, conservative internal resistance to the

new regime [in Yemen] will increase. The UK, Saudi Arabia, and the [Soviet] Bloc will be disposed to oppose UAR control over the Yemen." While this old guard was busy trying to kill Castro in Cuba and set up presidents in various other Cold War "hot spots" like Indochina and Central Africa, and clearly trying to undermine the Kennedy administration (which it eventually did), in the meantime, the CIA's analysis, in hindsight, could not have been more spot on about Egypt's move into Yemen. Kennedy Library, National Security Files, Countries Series, Yemen, 8/61–9/62, Intelligence Note, Hilsman to Acting Sec. of State, "Turmoil in Prospect in the Yemen" Washington, DC, September 27, 1962.

5. Here we see the Kennedy administration's clear, distinctive turn toward engaging Nasser and ostensibly giving him a free hand in a country for which the new crew in the State Department no doubt had little regard on account of Yemenis being, as quoted in another document written later, "extremely primitive . . . tribal peoples." USNA RG 84, Box 1, P. 836, United Arab Republic US Embassy, Cairo, 1963–1964, Jidda No. 143, Istanbul for Talbot, October 13, 1963.

6. Nasser's populism had the Dulles brothers (who ran the CIA and US State Department) so upset that they began to explore with British interlocutors (behind the back of the US Congress and Eisenhower himself) about doing "a Mossadegh" on him. US Government, *FRUS, 1955–1957*, Vol. XIV, no. 543, Telegram from Allen Dulles, Washington, DC, October 29, 1956. On such "intelligence," passed on by the ever-gossipy Muhammad Haykal, an eager journalist for the Egyptian daily *al-Ahram* who shared many a story with staff at the US embassy in Cairo (and then in books written for English-speaking audiences), see Heikal (1973).

7. By February 1958, Syria and Egypt forged the Arab United Republic (UAR), with Yemen's Sayf al-Islam Badr reportedly involved in the Cairo meetings. In the end, North Yemen elected to keep its sovereignty and entered a weak federation with the UAR (Egypt and Syria). This was no sudden turn of events, we must remember. These things take time and clearly al-Badr, representing his father's government, had been moving between Cairo, Damascus, and Ta'iz throughout the process. The Americans observed as much and spent considerable time explaining the consequence of the imam's decision to retain Yemen's sovereignty (which, falling short of a federal "union" assures Yemen's international status and creates a military "joint command" that meant if troops from UAR were to go to Yemen, they would have to come under Yemeni command, a stark difference from what would happen once the imamate was removed by a coup some four years later). For the author of the report on the "Significance of Impending Yemeni Association with UAR," the ongoing UAR-Yemeni relations did not threaten the goal of providing economic assistance (which the imam remained coy about accepting) and eventually establishing a legation in Ta'iz. Clearly North Yemen, at the heart of the Cold War, was an independent state that regional and global powers alike had to respect. USG, *FRUS, 1958–1960, Near East Region*, Vol. XII, no. 361 (from DoS, OCB File, Lot 62 D 430, Near East—Secret), Background Paper from the Assistant Sec. of State for Near Eastern, South Asian, and African Affairs Roundtree, to the Under Sec. of State Herter, Washington, DC, March 4, 1958.

8. The close ties between an instrumentalist use of “fundamentalist” Islam to defeat empire’s enemies has increasingly surfaced in the literature. From the CIA’s Frank Wisner’s first known pitch to the US president to support the MB and Saudi-led zealots to Britain’s own nefarious mobilization of the Society of the Muslim Brothers and Saudi Wahhabis, the cat is out of the proverbial bag. As we today see in Yemen, Syria, earlier Iraq, and Libya, it is not certain that we are fully aware of the dynamics at play about this old Cold War (and even earlier) imperialist tool. On efforts to mobilize extremist Islam to defeat the Soviet Union see Johnson (2010); various uses by the British of these same “assets” (Dreyfus 2005; Dorill 2002: 632–36) and for more historic background returning us to the nineteenth century, consult the indefatigable Massad (2015: 60–84).

9. NAUK, CO 1015/830, Hickinbotham to Lennox-Boyd, Aden, October 28, 1954. By 1960, it was apparent Britain had eyed American overtures to Ta’iz regarding what was an open secret: Yemen was loaded with oil. NAUK, FO, 371/149223, “Oil Concessions in Yemen,” BM 1531/1, R.W. Baily to Wyatt, November 24, 1960.

10. USNA, RG 469, P 146, Box 1, “Yemen Agriculture-Preliminary Observations,” International Cooperation Administration Report A-40, Ta’iz, January 20, 1960.

11. This would include Dhofar, a province bordering Eastern Yemen whose capital of Salalah had been claimed by the Sultanate of Oman and would be witness to a bloody insurgency by its native peoples throughout the 1960s and early 1970s (Takriti 2016).

12. For British authorities in Aden, the eventual tensions between North Yemen and Egypt could not come soon enough. Aden’s governor Luce, reporting on Imam Ahmad’s allies funneling weapons into South Yemen via smuggling routes dating back to Ottoman times, warned that “Yemen is becoming involved in the Nasirist-Soviet bloc.” NAUK, CO 1015/809, Luce to Morgan, Aden, December 23, 1956. By 1956, Imam Ahmad extended the threatening gestures toward South Yemen by opening a much broader set of bilateral agreements with Warsaw Pact countries. Indeed, the Americans based in the region complained that “crown prince” Badr bragged to regional actors that only the Soviet was “prepared [to] give selflessly in support of its Arab friends.” USNA, RG 469, P 146, Box 1, Confidential Telegram No. 253, Crawford to Secretary of State, Aden, December 23, 1958.

13. NAUK, CO 1015/1298, Luce to Secretary of State, Aden, January 28, 1957.

14. We learn a great deal about the nuances behind such relations between the imam and the many smaller communities who would happily take on a bigger role, if not on behalf of an imam and “Yemen” as some historians today would argue, at least to secure a place in the security calculations of the British administration. On British encouragements for their allies to attack North Yemen, see NAUK, CO 1015/1304, Luce to Secretary of State, Aden, December 2, 1957.

15. Not only used in South Arabia, federalism (a form of decentralization also demanded of large postcolonial states by empire) would be dusted off a decade later with the Trucial States and again in the recent imposition of Western solutions on Libya, Syria, Iraq, and since 2013 Yemen (see chapter 6).

16. Invited to tell his superiors what he thought about Imam Ahmad, minor player Derek Riches based in Ta'iz advised his audience in London to approach Yemen with the understanding that "The Imam is an ignorant, suspicious, tyrannical, bigoted savage," who was nevertheless bestowed with the kind of "native shrewdness" that allowed him to survive all that the British intelligence services could throw at him. One can find such a gem of British imperialist racism in NAUK, FO 371/114795, Derek Riches to Foreign Office, telegram no. 47, Ta'iz, November 16, 1955.

17. Details about the coup and speculation as to who encouraged whom is beyond the interest of this chapter. It is curious, however, how adamant the FYM was in condemning the coup attempt as an "American plot." Accusing Abdullah of being an agent of American imperialism perhaps offers us enough to speculate that even the opposition behind the murder of Ahmad's father in 1948 recognized the folly of siding with the Americans and British at this point. Clearly Imam Ahmad was hitting all the right Arab and Yemeni nationalist buttons in 1955 (Douglas 1987: 187–91).

18. US Government, *FRUS, 1955–1957*, No. 423, 750. A policy continued for the rest of the decade, often in tandem with Aden Governor Luce: USNA, RG 469, P 146, Box 2, No. 119, "Evidence of a Major Policy Decision by the GOY," Ferguson to Secretary of State, Taiz, November 12, 1959.

19. The precursor to USAID—the Point Four program—was put into the US budget with the International Technical Cooperation Act of 1949, President Truman's playbook for global hegemony. Aid was the fourth point in the list of objectives. The idea was to provide technical assistance and economic aid to underdeveloped countries to win the "hearts and minds" of the likes of Yemenis. Sharing know-how in agriculture, industry, and other big ticket items could mean big profits for well-connected companies. This was the first US foreign aid program. Nelson Rockefeller was both the inspiration and the front man to promote the program. By the time of the Eisenhower administration, the program was simply referred to as the "technical assistance program" (Peterson 1972). Crucially, the program required targeted countries to conclude bilateral agreements with the USA. The first government to sign such an agreement was Iran in 1950; three years later the USA and Britain overthrew the country's democratically elected government. For attempts to tie North Yemen in such an agreement (one was the "Wheat Transportation Contract" to "aid" in easing food shortages) and Imam Ahmad's cunning refusal, see USNA, RG 469, P 146, Box 2, No. 90, "Problem of Obtaining Visas for USG Employees," Ferguson to Secretary of State, Taiz, October 27, 1959.

20. Details of these cases are outlined throughout USNA, RG 469, P 146, Office of Near East and South Asia Operations Administrative Office Yemen Subject Files, 1953–1960, Boxes 1 and 2.

21. USNA, RG 84, Box 1, Entry UD 2437 and 832491 US Consulate Asmara, Classified General Records, 1950–55. Elsewhere, even when delivering food "aid" the USA insisted on bringing their own teams of labor and providers of transport. USNA, RG 469, P 146, Box 1, "Aid for Yemen-Transmittal Transfer Authorizations," Workinger, ICA Rep. to Secretary of State, Taiz, June 1, 1960.

22. Ultimately, the compromise proved also acceptable to key elements of the American project in the larger region because many of those Yemenis eventually hired had worked for American construction companies in the KSA prior to their deportation (*Aden Chronicle*, March 10, 1959).

23. Details of a last minute scramble by operatives of the ICA to reassure the Ahmad government of their altruistic intentions reveal they fell into turmoil as the ICA was forced to account for the significant overcharge of wheat and shipping services. These overcharges undercut the actual aid Yemenis would receive while bringing suppliers considerable profit. USNA, RG 469, P 146, Box 1, "Appropriation No. 72-1191079: Final Accounting on Contract ICA 1186," William Awad to US Consulate, Ta'iz, November 9, 1959.

24. *Aden Chronicle*, July 14, 1959.

25. *Scotsman*, November 25, 1959.

26. Badr had been approached at some point during the previous few years and likely expressed sympathy (al-Shamahi 1972: 307–12).

27. By April 1960, Soviet ships were already entering the new harbor, offering for the first time an alternative port for North Yemen's use, until then dependent on Aden. *Hayat*, May 1, 1960. More importantly still, reports from Aden's most important "opposition" newspaper claimed that eight engineers from China had been studying the construction of a port at Midi further north, laying the foundation for a possible expansion of Yemen's naval capacities ultimately to challenge the KSA and others for the Farsan Islands in the Red Sea (*Fatat al-Jazirah*, November 7, 1960).

28. Political groups such as the Movement of Arab Nationalists, led by George Habash, interlinked with impressionable laborers who mistook Yemen's support for activists in Aden for an opportunity to put similar pressure on the regime in Ta'iz. They were key assets for Cairo to use to upset life in North Yemen (Halliday 2001: 120–23, 190).

29. As I argue more closely in the next chapter, most scholars of the era have missed the possibility that Egyptians' quasi-colonialist zealotry with administering Yemen was tied to its embrace of modernization theory circulating in universities at the time. Such a correlation manifested with the overt intervention on behalf of "progress" in late 1962, and even years earlier. Indeed, Amir 'Abd al-Rahman discussed with UAR authorities the strengthening of the ties between the two countries, especially the sending of UAR technical and economic aid for development projects in Yemen as early as 1959 (*Jumhurriyah*, January 7, 1960). In no time, it was reported that thirty Yemeni workers arrived in Cairo for a three-month training course in textile manufacture (*Akhbar al-Yawm*, January 16, 1960).

30. British authorities and the companies working out of Aden's ports started to import cheaper and more pliable Somalis and Indians to replace the mobilized Yemenis. Within no time these newcomers were given civic rights while the tens of thousands of North Yemenis living in Aden for years remained "foreign" (Halliday 2001: 183).

31. In 1960 Asnaj was the spearhead of an attempt to organize the various nationalist groupings that were suddenly popping up, confusing the political discourse

with variations of Pan-Arabism circulating in the press and radio—discourse that was at odds with the goal of unity with North Yemen. Brehony (2011: 10–30) and Halliday (2001) have from different ideological angles studied the evolution of the party from labor union to armed group, eventually challenging the Egypt-supported NLF itself.

32. *Aden Chronicle*, May 12, 1960.

33. For claims that Egyptian officials secretly met with the imam's political enemies and offered weapons and promises of diplomatic support once a new republic would be declared on the radio, see Mutahhar (1990: 110–22). Among those supposedly attending these meetings, Al-Ghadir proved much more a political haggler, collecting funds from all sides during the subsequent civil war and ultimately, with the proper display of loyalty to Imam Muhammad al-Badr, leveraging himself into the leadership of the powerful Bakil confederation. The one who lost out as a result, Shaykh Sinan Abu Luhum, would in 1959 become a key resource for the British when he fled to Aden. In his case, knowing how to keep himself relevant in even a global setting, al-Ghadir happily fed journalists and Western embassy staff alike insider information about such calculations. He became most famous for being Eric Rouleau's primary source (*Le Monde*, May 12, 1967).

34. Further confusing to those fixated on simple Sunni/Shi'i or regional references (Day 2012), al-Wazir's move resulted in his falling into the Saudi orbit, a relationship extending until 1980 when, from his office in Jiddah, he could return to Yemen's political scene (Dresch 1989: 272–73).

35. The most useful literature on the events during and after the coup are provided by the journalists reporting from the area since 1960. See Schmidt (1968); O'Ballance (1971); Deffarge and Troeller (1979); and Rida (1974).

36. The poem that condemned Egypt for its abuses of power signaled the end of Egyptian relations with Imam Ahmad (Dresch 2000: 86; al-Akwa' 1995: II:849). For the full text see 'Izz al-Din (1990: 227–30).

37. Equally crucial, however, is the apparent urgency shared in Washington to give diplomatic cover for what was clearly an Egyptian move to secure North Yemen, both for itself and presumably for the greater task of modernizing the region and keeping the Soviets out.

38. USNA, RG 59, CDF 1960–1963, Box 2072, 786b.00/11–261, Research Memo, State Department RNA-8, “The Outlook for Nasser,” October 30, 1961, 3–6. In taking a rival position to Egypt, many Iraqi agents would leave their mark on Yemen. The first was their heavy influence on North Yemen's military. While they were pushed aside after the 1962 coup by Egyptian sympathizers, Iraqis proved the most important, unspoken foreign actor in Yemen since. Perhaps the biggest role Iraqis played would be putting 'Ali Abdullah Saleh in power in 1978, a story told in chapter 4.

39. In a series of rallies in Yemen starting in October 1962, al-Baydani added fuel to the sectarian fire while offering no formula for the new republic's success. For his own account of the events leading up to the intervention and eventual occupation of his homeland by Egypt see al-Baydani (1993: 79–111).

40. Elaborated in a speech recorded and disseminated on February 22, 1962, mentioned in Kerr (1971: 25–29).

41. Americans based in London reported that all the major actors seeking an acceptable end to Egypt's occupation in the YAR wanted to assure a pull-back from Saudi support of the pro-Badr "Royalists." Crucially, both sides—Saudis and Egyptians—agreed that the Hamid al-Din family would not be allowed to return to the country. This is very interesting as on one side, Riyadh would eventually fund the war against the Egyptians, an effort led by the heavily respected Imam al-Badr. And yet, this quiet diplomacy to rid the region forever of this old dynasty constitutes the kind of stab-in-the-back politics the KSA practices in respect to Yemen even today. Since the 1930s, for the Saud family, no matter what it looks like politically, Yemen had to remain subordinate and weak. USNA, RG 84, Box 1, P 836, London Embassy No. 56, London to Washington, DC, October 28, 1963.

42. Per what the Americans have learned about Sallal, "because of his humble origin . . . [h]e was not even in [the] conspiracy to overthrow Imam but taken in last moment because he had possession of keys to ammunition supply." It should be noted that the Americans believed that it was in fact conservative Qadi Iryani who was offered the position of president, not Sallal, but refused it. By late 1963, they were hoping that Iryani would reconsider as neither the Saudis had a candidate nor was the other option, al-Amri, of any use as he "has failed to achieve national stature largely because of his limited intelligence." USNA RG 84, Box 1, P. 836, United Arab Republic US Embassy, Cairo, 1963–1964, Jidda No. 143, Istanbul for Talbot, October 13, 1963.

43. There were reports of an offer being circulated by Britain to recognize an independent Shafi'i state in Ta'iz, thus territorially breaking North Yemen apart, a project clearly still under consideration in today's war on Yemen (al-Shahari 1972: 176–82).

44. By November 1962, Egyptian *de facto* governors in Yemen created a National Liberation Army whose stated aim was to liberate Aden. Throughout the first half of 1963, the new North Yemen government began to sponsor conferences that hosted various activists associated with the Movement of Arab Nationalists led by George Habash, who professed their embrace of this cause. It is from these meetings in Sana'a that the National Liberation Front (NLF) under the supervision of Qahtan al-Sha'bi was ultimately formed as well (Brehony 2011: 10–30). The NLF would start an insurgency against the Aden administration and eventually establish an independent South Yemen in late 1967. All this proved the suspicions that Egypt was, already by 1960, planning major operations throughout the Red Sea. NAUK, CO 1015/2150, C. Johnston to FO, Aden, January 6, 1961.

45. While he failed to secure a patron in 1962, his decision to enter permanently in Yemeni politics after the coup sheds light on the multiplicity of political mercenaries emerging at moments of opportunity. The US consul in Ta'iz at the time, Cortada, seemed to have considerable faith in Muttahar, as "top Shafei [*sic*] in Taiz" and "go-between revolutionaries and Egyptians" to provide insights into an otherwise nebulous domestic political scene. Mutahhar apparently told Cortada that

Yemenis wanted full control of their government and wanted “Egyptians to sharply reduce forces and while leaving military training unit, technicians, teachers and doctors . . . [but] to get UAR out.” USNA, RG 84, Box 1, P 286, Taiz no. 84, Cortada to Washington, DC, October 29, 1963.

46. To be sure, some possibly interested foreign parties were certain any lasting solution needed to be found locally. Kuwait, itself a “monarchy” with Yemeni links via marriage, was not entirely clear as to its role in finding a lasting peace. “Kuwait would not, even if invited, attempt to propose lines of action on which a political solution in Yemen could be reached. Self-determination in accepted sense of term is fantastic concept for today’s Yemen; only sound rule is that Yemenis themselves through whatever leadership and institutions that now exist, must have prime role in determining their own future.” USNA, RG 59, Box 13, P 836, NYUN no. 81, UN Ambassador Cottam to State, “Notes of Discussion with Kuwaiti Permanent Representative, Rashid,” New York, October 9, 1963.

47. As reported by Aden media at the time, an eight-man delegation from Ta‘iz came to Aden on August 6, 1960, carrying a pardon from the imam. The delegation met Naqib Sufyan Abu Luhum and ‘Ali Ruwayshan in the presence of Sharif Husayn, ruler of Bayhan and the minister of interior of the federation. Such interactions would produce dividends after Ahmad’s death when former rivals, Prince Hassan and now Imam Badr, rallied support against the Egyptians.

48. War and poverty, and more recently human rights, constitute the “fig leaf” globalist agents need to provide popular cover for otherwise invasive agendas, a claim now well accepted in some quarters of the literature (Ferguson 2006; Duffield 2001; Barnett and Finnemore 1999).

CHAPTER FOUR

1. For example, sectarianism was both exploited by locals and fomented by outsiders. Often, leftist-orientated scholars of the period, caught in their own doctrinal vortex, laid blame for Yemen’s violence on this sectarianism. At one point, opponents to the Hamid al-Din family even claimed that Imam Ahmad was alone responsible for divisions between Shafi‘i Yemenis and the Zaydi from which the imams came (Nu‘man 1965: 11–28).

2. The republic was not recognized by Saudi Arabia and the British, a story that became a diplomatic carrot used to assure YARs cooperation in respect to South Yemen later on. For the Kennedy administration to embrace Egypt’s move concerned the British prime minister at the time, Harold Macmillan. In his memoirs Macmillan observed that during his meeting with Kennedy to discuss the crisis, JFK confided that he did not know where to locate the country on a map. The implication was JFK was not in control of a policy that threatened British interests “east of Suez” (Bidwell 1983: 201). Those pushing US support for Nasser’s occupation of Yemen were William Polk and W. W. Rostow, who advocated Egypt’s role in spreading American values to the rest of the region. USNA, RG 59, Box 12, Folder Egypt,

Policy Planning Council (1961–1969), “United States–United Arab Republic Relations,” paper by Polk, January 16, 1963.

3. Let us not forget that while Egypt was aiming to “develop” Yemen, Nasser’s army of technocrats and engineers, often in partnership with major Western construction companies, also eviscerated indigenous communities throughout Egypt (Mayfield 1971). The massive land reform projects in Upper Egypt included targeting certain “uncivilized groups,” especially Nubians, in the kind of racialized exploitative politics one finds in more famous cases in North America and Southern Africa. A program of “development” seen as positive at the time (Beddis 1963: 77–80) was actually forced removal of a population. The larger point to keep in mind is the era of positivist social engineering projects transcended the apparent ideological divide the Cold War inflated. Marxist-Leninists, hardcore Maoists, Arab Republicans/Nationalists, Kennedy do-gooders, and World Bank–funded technocrats all aspired to mobilize science, technology, and the modernization spirit to change the world (Mitchell 2002). The guardians of Yemen’s integrity before 1962 did not trust this zeal.

4. Within a year of Egyptian occupation, Yemenis of all political colorations were already on their own negotiating a resolution that included the departure of foreign forces. The so-called Amran resolutions are a dramatic example of how domestic politics often operated beyond the reach of foreign influence. Indeed, the efforts of outsiders to intervene in what locals insisted were Yemeni affairs actually dragged the war on for years (Afif 1982: 339–44). For an analysis of how the Americans and their Saudi allies interpreted the Amran meetings and how Egypt was seeking to assure their interests would still be served if these resolutions were adopted, see USNA RG 84, Box 1, P 836, Taiz no. 82, Cortada to Washington, October 27, 1963. A very similar dynamic is at play today in Yemen with old hands meeting in Europe and Oman to negotiate a resolution outside the UN framework that has served as cover for the KSA’s genocidal war.

5. Serious critiques of the “bitter experience” only surfaced later; perhaps the most illuminating analysis of the time was offered by Munif al-Razzaz (1967). And yet, already in 1961, with Egypt’s abusive rule over Syria sending shock waves among leftist factions throughout the region, Nasser’s charisma partially lost its attraction. Ironically, it was the policy differences over Yemen that most highlighted how far leftists and Nasser loyalist drifted prior to Egypt’s invasion of Yemen. At the height of its own crisis, the UAR (Egypt, in other words) formally withdrew its support for the Southern Yemen Liberation Movement, which had a strong presence within its leadership of Arab Nationalists (MAN) led by the Palestinian George Habash. Instead, Cairo extended open support for the conservative rival under the leadership of Abdallah al-Asnaj and Abdul Qawi Makkawi, first known as the People’s Socialist Party and then FLOSY (Brehony 2011: 11). This constituted a crisis for many among the Southern Yemeni diaspora, including intellectuals who would not treat Egypt and Nasser kindly in their subsequent publications (al-Hawatmah 1968: 37–42).

6. Far from being socialist in the classic sense, Egypt’s heavy state-directed development program in the period prior to the *infstab*, or massive privatization “opening

up” imposed by Anwar Sadat in the 1970s, created virtual monopolies that benefited the most well-connected oligarchs turned bureaucrats (Sonbol 2000).

7. Such criticism within Egypt, suppressed throughout the Nasser period, became commonplace in first Cairo literary circles and then openly after the 1967 defeat to Israel among university students. The protests culminated in an explosion of violence ultimately resulting in the movement’s destruction by Nasser’s successor, and long-term US ally, Anwar Sadat (Anonymous 1972).

8. Throughout his seminal book, Lerner refers to Egypt’s ongoing transformations as moving toward the ideal goal of eliminating traditional impediments to modernizing the country, and in the process securing the region for the “free world” (Lerner 1958: 214–63; Shah 2011: 129–32).

9. As understood by some Americans, to many in the nonalignment crowd led by Nasser and the bigger-than-life personalities of Tito, Nehru, Nkrumah, and Sukarno, development was key to liberation (Mehmet 2002: 59). That the same principles pitting modernization and “tradition” required an aggressive social engineering campaign targeting “backward” indigenous, rural, and “tribal” peoples resulted in state-led violence entirely within the confines of imperialist scale genocide seen in the Soviet Union or USA. USNA, RG 59, Box 222, Folder: Near and Middle East, “Shaking the Kaleidoscope in the Middle East,” Polk to Rostov, October 29, 1962.

10. One of the important ways the USA aided Egypt’s development agenda was to feed the country’s massive appetite for wheat. With more than half of Egypt’s grain imports subsidized by the USA dumping its own huge surplus supplies, the limited cash and gold reserves of the country could go into more capital-intensive—and for US companies like Bechtel and General Electric, more profitable—infrastructure projects. As much as there would be a material transformation, so too would the USA assist in the social engineering component of the Nasser revolution, another intersection of imperialist agendas that remains understudied (Burns 1985: 54–76; Weinbaum 1986).

11. There were exceptions. Perhaps the more outstanding Yemeni working for this early republican government was a Cairo University graduate named ‘Abdallah al-Kurshumi. An engineer, he eventually became minister of public works under Egyptian tutelage and subsequently very wealthy, it is said. Private Correspondence, Europe, 2016.

12. An early display of such corruption around the still-powerful head of Egypt’s armed forces ‘Abd al-Hakim ‘Amir, was recorded in the bemused Canadian Ambassador Ford’s correspondence to the British. See NAUK, FO 371/172862, Ford to FO, “UAR Internal Affairs,” Cairo, November 16, 1963; see also the extensive intelligence report gathered on ‘Amir’s patronage networks in USNA, RG 59, Box 2554, POL 15-1 1967–69, UAR, Battle to DOS, A-636, “The Rise of Abdul Hakim AMER,” Cairo, January 27, 1967.

13. There was money to be made. In 1961 Yemen was importing almost \$17 million worth of goods, leaving it with a balance of trade deficit of more than \$8.5 million, until then covered by grants from all the major powers competing for the govern-

ment's favor (Attar 1964: 201, 282). This would change after occupation, with the deficits covered by new loans guaranteed by Bank Misr and the UN.

14. USNA RG 84, Box 2, p 836, P4641, Taiz no. 194, Cortada to State, December 22, 1963. The US consul in Ta'iz reports that he heard from banking personnel of plans to issue new riyal within the next thirty days of the new year (1964). The riyal was to be pegged to the Egyptian pound and given a face value of twenty East African shillings or approximately \$1.40. Reports said the introduction of paper currency was causing Ta'iz merchants to begin digging holes in cellars to hide their silver coins. Some YAR merchants predicted a complete collapse of Yemen's economy after the introduction of this new currency.

15. Such tactics would be used by the Hadi/Islah interim government after 2012 and repeated by different administrations in Southern Yemen occupied by rival factions after May 2015. The consequences have not been pretty, with about as dysfunctional an economy as one could find anywhere in the world. Throughout Hadhramawt and Aden are competing warlords siphoning off oil and maintaining smuggling routes that bring fresh supplies of weapons and Baskin Robbins ice cream to the supposed enemies in North Yemen, hardly an endorsement for Operation Restoring Hope.

16. An old Imam Ahmad hand and one of the "Famous Forty" who studied in Italy, Muhammad al-Attar, born in Djibouti, was the first director of YBRD and minister of the economy. He proved to be a diligent adherent of technical Marxist development strategies, hoping to realize a "socialist transformation" of the Yemeni economy that did not veer too far from Nasser or the Americans (Burrowes 1987: 24).

17. By the time the Iryani government-led YBRD and its fragmented offices joined the IMF in 1970, everyone realized that simply letting the "market" determine the rate of exchange (in order words, returning day-to-day control of currency markets to money-changers in the main towns of YAR) was the best plan of action. Ultimately, the Yemeni Central Bank, in order to secure some of the cash circulating in the informal (normal Yemeni) economy, offered particularly attractive exchange rates (Chaudhry 1997: 253-54, 282).

18. The last corporation is especially intriguing as Yemen has long been the place of curiosity among pharmacologists and botanists. With the region only visited by Western-trained experts in these fields in the 1930s, over the next half century, the amount of, often very secretive, research on Yemen's plant life is astonishing. For a brief peek at the kind of work done by scientists picking at Yemen's untold treasures, see Hadden (2012).

19. The reconciliation government's collapse was in part the work of Nixon's hawks in the State Department and CIA who had hoped that an even more compliant government would follow. Fearing a political vacuum, the plan was to use development ("international free-world") aid, strategically placed into certain sectors to assure a pliable North Yemen. The groundwork for this strategy was already laid by agents based in Jeddah observing the ongoing war. The idea then would be for the Saudis and Kuwaitis to serve as the surrogates for America's post-Egyptian aid politics in South Arabia. USNA RG 84 P. 836, Box 1, No. 139, Hart to State,

Jeddah, October 9, 1963. As we learn below, by the 1970s, the Americans hoped to cultivate a local to serve this role.

20. The problem is donors no longer made direct payments to recipients, especially in the gold and silver still preferred by most rural Yemenis. Instead, governments offered credits denominated in units of exchange whose value was only measured by its ability to purchase supplies provided by specific sources, often from the same countries that granted the “aid.” More problematic was that these transfers (aid delivery) needed to go through financial institutions entirely under the control of powerful corporations who charged fees for such services. This has become a form of corporate subsidy regularly condemned when applied to non-Western institutions (Dietrich 2012).

21. A source who will remain anonymous spent his first years of government service in the Ministry of Agriculture at the time. His account of the bureaucratic schism between those blindly following dictates from experts sent by the World Bank and those who trusted farmers knew what best to do with their savings constituted an important source of support for the Hamdi government that took power in 1974.

22. As much as power brokers helped secure so-called tribal compliance, and thus shore up the Egyptian-backed “Republican” government during the war, these same agents understood the leverage they held over both the government in Sana’a and the “royalists” supported by Britain and the KSA. Examples of political gamesmanship at crucial moments highlight the precarious nature of intra-Yemeni politics and the foolish dependency external powers develop toward such brokers. A particularly bold example was the defection of Shaykh ‘Abdullah al-Ahmar from the Egyptians to the KSA. With the help of the British, al-Ahmar and his men abandoned their positions and traveled to the KSA to secure a better deal. Using the possibility of leaving entirely the fight, a loss of manpower and credibility that threatened to ruin the Republic, this Yemeni political entrepreneur par excellence secured untold concessions. The details remain murky but he eventually, at the behest of the Saudis, actually returned to fight for the Republic against Badr’s loyalists. NAUK, FO 371/179855, Fyjis-Walker to FO, BM 1015/53, Cairo, July 16, 1965.

23. If there was an ideological current that would tie them together, it was the MB. The biggest agent behind the takeover of much of the government offices at the middle tier was Qadi ‘Abdallah al-Hajri, who also once presided over court in Imam Ahmad’s time. By 1974, it was clear he worked first and foremost for the KSA (Burrowes 1987: 43–45). He was also sure to be on the negotiation team when discussions over the renewal of the 1934 treaty with the KSA took place. At the meetings he pushed Yemen to give up its long-held territorial claims on Jizan, ‘Asir, and Najran; an outrage that likely led to his assassination in 1977.

24. It is commonly forgotten that Ba’athist Iraq was particularly influential in Yemen. A long list of Yemeni officers trained in Iraq, including Sinan Abu Luhum, allowed Baghdad to secure their services by stealth (Burrowes 1987: 48–50). I have been told that the leader until recently of the National Arab Socialist Ba’ath party, Qasim Salam, is notorious in Yemeni gossip circles for distributing “bags of money”

to awaiting pawns based inside and around Yemen's government on behalf of Baghdad. This Ba'athist operative is linked to coups and political murders throughout the Middle East and London and has also acquired an air of scandal around him for his close ties to the Americans—he married a mysterious American woman with connections in Beirut and they split time between a heavily protected home in Grand Rapids, Michigan, and Lausanne, Switzerland. According to my sources well entrenched in Yemeni affairs during this period, Salam made untold millions skimming off Iraq's bribe money. *Personal Correspondence, Europe, 2016.*

25. The next few months were so contentious that they led the new government publishing an official narrative of these events (YAR Ministry of Information 1974).

26. Developed further in chapter 6, it bears remembering that Yemenis, especially Hadhramis, emigrated en masse after the 1967 independence of South Yemen. They flooded the Hijaz in the KSA and Kuwait, Qatar, and what became the UAE (Alajmi 2014; Alsudairi and Abusharaf 2015). Many of the wealthier members quickly infiltrated into the now booming oil economies by way of marriage and/or business partnerships. More, some of the ruling elites in these receiving communities, especially in Abu Dhabi, already had deep family roots tying them to Yemen. While the bin Ladens are the most famous, they are not the only Yemeni families who would end up dominating Saudi and Gulf domestic, regional, and global political orientation. It bears remembering that many of the "Adenis" who would settle abroad were from Ta'iz and Ibb, having migrated to Aden to work in the then boom economy of the port. It is largely this pool of now well-established Yemenis in the larger Arabian Peninsula who would give the Hamdi regime the breathing space to do some fairly incredible, if short-lived, things. It was also these Ta'iz, Ibb, and Aden natives who are likely driving events in Southern Yemen today in the context of the war.

27. For Hamdi's efforts at state building see Burrowes (1987: 57–85).

28. The alliance between Kissinger, Nixon, and the Saudis that strived to transform the global economy did not mean Riyadh became a political equal. As always, the KSA depended on the USA, which had just now made the family fabulously wealthy by permanently tying the two together with the so-called petrol dollar (Chaudhry 1997: 185–92).

29. Chaudhry (1997: 193–207) writes on the remarkable impact of this boom period had on Yemeni workers and the YAR economy.

30. Perhaps ironically, it would be American-trained technocrats at the forefront of this institutional building marathon. 'Abd al-Ghani, once with the Yemeni Bank for Reconstruction and Development and head of the CPO's earlier version Technical Office, became the first governor of the newly minted Central Bank. A nephew of the now deposed Iryani, al-Ghani obtained a PhD from the USA, and once ran a Wadi Zabid agricultural project for a US research group discussed later (Burrowes 1987: 46–48, 67).

31. Sheila Carapico (1998b: 107–34) did truly ground-breaking work in the late 1970s on these remarkable rural associations. In addition to Dr. Carapico's exploration into how Yemen's private sector remained essential to the day-to-day

functioning of the country's economy, readers are advised to consult Chaudhry (1997: 207–11) for an equally essential study written a decade later. Chaudhry's rich political economy of Yemen's dramatic change of fortunes between the boom years that were administered during the Hamdi government and bust period in the decade that followed is especially relevant.

32. The Americans were funding several studies to capture the dynamics around the migration and remittance patterns that were transforming Yemen and proved so promising a resource for external interests to plunder. Often noted was money literally transferred hand to hand, frequently along commercial routes that saw daily traffic crossing the borders between Yemen and the KSA (Carapico and Tutwiler 1981: 45–50).

33. The lack of branch banking was in part put to blame for this anomaly in global finance, one that needed immediate attention (World Bank 1979: 103–5).

34. Money changers and individual communities pooling savings were more than capable of keeping Yemen's dynamic growth in-house, and the big corporate banks knew it (Chaudhry 1997: 241–50).

35. Staff at the American embassy complained that property prices in Sana'a were going up at a 200 percent per annum rate. Their fixed budgets, they complained, could not keep Americans in the country. Indeed, Yemen had become by 1979 a hardship destination for American officials as any daily allowance compensation immediately shrunk in face of North Yemen's carbon-fueled economy. USNA RG 286, Box 1, P 688, Central Subject Files 1973–77, USAID Mission to the Yemen Arab Republic, RY 79, Ruiz to Glaseser, May 24, 1977.

36. As was often the case, some of the most egregious, dangerous, and most disruptive projects uprooting people's lives entailed industrial-scale agriculture and the forced resettlement of farmers in towns and cities (Way 2012).

37. Early work in the coffee-producing areas of Ibb highlighted how distribution networks were upended by such changes in the regional economy. When new markets emerged, shipping coffee via new paths became more expensive and paradoxically pushed many producers to get out of the business (Gerholm 1977: 53–56).

38. In the meantime, in a “know thy enemy” spirit, American social scientists and researchers paid by USAID dissected the LDA structure and laid out an analytical scheme that charted the personalities leading them (Tutwiler 1977).

39. Today notorious crop substitution policies have ruined local economies by inducing both massive flight to the cities of now landless peasants and the production of monocrops. Such crops, like palm oil or soy, lead to massive deforestation, the overuse of scarce water resources, and the concentration of wealth into largely foreign hands. The YAR and South Yemen were facing similar pressures from advisors and newly minted economic planners returning from university abroad. Tobacco, coffee, sugar, and cotton were the commodities international markets demanded and these were to become the chosen crops; food could simply be imported for less. Those Yemenis remaining in their villages producing food were likely to be vigilant about securing their “traditional” means of cohabitation. With the periodic imposition from a more “rationalist” view of the world, disruptions in

local life would eventually transform these parts of Yemen into zones of conflict. We see this dynamic at play over disputed lands in Northern Sa'adah, discussed in chapter 5.

40. See project plan for FY 1979 as proposed to Joseph Wheller, head of Agency for International Development, by USAID Yemen office, via Ambassador Thomas Scotese, USNA RG 286, Box 1, P 695, Central Subject Files 1973–77, USAID Mission to the Yemen Arab Republic, Scotese to Wheeler, May 25, 1977.

41. First applied by the “Chicago School” led by Milton Friedman in Chile, the imposition of the “shock doctrine” on independent and progressive states required the kind of dirty politics and CIA-funded saboteurs we see in Yemen since the 1960s, an association important to making the larger arguments in this book (Klein 2007).

42. The director of the Yemen USAID office, Aldelmo Ruiz, wrote that one of two major roles of his office was to serve as “broker” between US business interests and possible sources of profits in Yemen. USNA RG 286, Box 1, P 695 Central Subject Files 1973–77, USAID Mission to the Yemen Arab Republic, Ruiz to Wheeler, May 25, 1977.

43. A study in agriculturally rich Ibb in the late 1970s offers insight into the transitions in learning, interpreting, practicing, and enforcing the law in Upper Yemen, albeit in a traditionally non-Zaydi area (Messick 1993).

44. There are intriguing correlations between notions of Zaydi or Sufi Islamic practices being “traditional” barriers to development and a new generation of Sunni-orientated programs that try to link Hanbali Islamic practices with Western capitalism. Efforts in Yemen to tap into a large idle population took the form of joint Islamic training and “business schools” found scattered throughout South Yemen after unification. At the same time, large numbers of Yemenis in the 1970s and 1980s attended such schools in the KSA while migrant laborers. Many brought back their alien intolerance for old school Zaydi and Sufi practices in places like Dammaj, Tarim, and Yafi’ in ways that would by the 1990s incite violent conflicts (Bonney 2011: 111–222; Farquhar 2016; Hajj 2002). The Gülen movement originating in Turkey offered similar services producing “liberal” Muslims (Yavuz 1999). Similarly, in Indonesia, a cadre of pious Muslims helped pitch science and especially business practices as a natural extension of Islamic values. Often through Saudi-funded NGOs and a very successful private training company—ESQ—an intensive period of indoctrination initiated a generational shift toward a productive fusion between being rational economic beings and good Muslims (Rudnyckij 2010: 6–8; Van Bruinessen 2002).

45. In the early 1980s the focus was on steering all the money accumulated in the LDAs away from traditional forms of wealth transfer. The biggest potential was to see LDAs as individual borrowers who could assure big business for branches of major investment banks making inroads in Saleh’s Yemen. To fully tap into this “market,” major consulting firms were hired to produce reports (Verdery 1982). Chemonics International is a Washington, DC, consulting firm that is often working through the USAID and specifically agribusiness issues. By the 2000s it was

involved in helping pitch the promise of microfinance in Yemen, pharmaceuticals, and even ventured into environmental protection, ironic considering their other clients (Chemonics International BIFOR Consortium 2000).

46. The literature is substantial on remittances; major donors were especially keen on monitoring the phenomenon and funded ethnographic and sociological work on the Yemeni expat worker population. Entirely innocent on their own, these reports, when viewed cumulatively, expose the insidious intersecting roles of IMF advisors, consultancy firms, NGOs, think tanks, government agencies, and academia. One can see how this “intelligence” is mobilized in more formal policy reports and learn a great deal from sitting down and talking to commodities traders or “corporate research” department employees about how they pick and choose from this well-intentioned academic production. Of course, there are the more overt Cold War uses of anthropologists “working in the field” that has expanded to “aid workers” and employees of other multilateral agencies. This dastardly misuse of local people’s trust to spy and then report on their lives for better strategic planning to either steal from them or destroy their lives outright deserves more attention in academic circles. Some revealing critical reflections of this phenomenon include Price (2008) and Lutz (2006).

47. Again, the French interest in Yemen was deep, providing the best coverage of these events (Rondot 1978). That said, many are convinced this was a Ba’athist hit, orchestrated by Iraq for reasons not entirely clear.

CHAPTER FIVE

1. The struggle to support a socialist state in Kabul pitted Soviet troops against US-backed “mujahidin” recruited and trained by Usama Bin Laden, of Yemeni origin. Many of those who fought the Soviets on behalf of the CIA were in fact from Yemen as well, the so-called Afghan Arabs. One Hussayn al-Hussami, also known as Ghazwan al-Yemeni, an important propagandist (recruiter?) who at one point had a tremendous online presence, represented the Jalaluddin Haqqani Organization operating under the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan. He perished in North Waziristan in 2010 but had effectively passed on his knowledge throughout South Asia, providing empire plenty of talent for the wars in Syria and Yemen. See “Yemeni Bombmaker Martyred in Waziristan,” *Flashpoint Partners*, May 9, 2010; Evan Kohlmann, “Al-Qa’ida’s Yemeni Expatriate Faction in Pakistan,” *CTC Sentinel* 4, no. 1 (2011).

2. For details of how the young Qadhdhafi in 1972 tried to sit down the two sides and help forge a unification treaty more than a decade earlier, see Viennon (1976: 52–59). Apparently Qadhdhafi tried once more in 1987 (Brehony 2011: 167).

3. Interview, Zurich, October 2014.

4. Only twelve of Yemen’s eighty-seven oil blocks were ever put in production due to high production costs. With the steady rise of oil prices, however, there was always the possible “right moment” to mobilize financial resources to expand

Yemen's oil production. Once natural gas became a viable asset in the 1990s, investment into Yemen's liquefied natural gas (LNG) resources was even more impressive. LNG exports were expected to bring in at least \$11 billion over a twenty-year period, revenues constituting the spoils of power in Yemen since unification (World Bank 2007, 2008). Sure enough, these are the primary areas targeted by those rival powers waging war in Yemen since 2015. As of August 2017, Emirati and American Special Forces evicted Saudi assets (al-Qa'ida) from the highly valued Shabwah fields. <https://www.thenational.ae/world/mena/yemeni-uae-and-us-forces-drive-al-qaeda-from-shabwa-stronghold-1.616747>.

5. While very profitable in some parts of the world, especially in eastern Arabia, oil extraction in most asset-rich environments is an expensive, capital-intensive operation. These operations may include building entire towns, laying hundreds of kilometers of pipeline, and constructing facilities to load the product onto receiving tankers off-shore. In the case of southern Arabia, beyond the pitfalls of a harsh environment is the presence of a problematic local population able to disrupt operations at any time. And still, even with oil prices in a long-term depression in the mid-1980s and an inhospitable, politically oblique Yemeni setting, oil politics came crashing in. The question this chapter hopes to answer is why.

6. Range Resources, a small Australian company, competes with the Italians in an area officials connected with the operations said might yield 5 to 10 billion barrels of oil. In this case there is a direct causal link between Somalia's destruction and these potential trillions of dollars. Interview, Berbera, Somaliland, April 2013.

7. As with Somalia, the Syrian and Libyan war zones still export hundreds of thousands of barrels of crude a day, all controlled by *takfiri* gangs, many who originated from or were trained in Yemen during the Saleh era.

8. Reporting by the *Los Angeles Times* revealed that Vice-President Bush applied pressure on the US Export-Import Bank to provide a US-taxpayer-subsidized \$1-billion loan to Iraq in the late 1980s. This loan lubricated several profit-making schemes that eventually included Yemen. Undersecretary of State for the Middle East Richard Murphy, whose Murphy Associates made tens of millions in business with Kuwait later, came to an agreement with Baghdad to loosen the country's export controls. This then set the stage for a pipeline project linking Iraqi crude to Aqaba in Jordan. Such infrastructure construction contracts would be rewarded to Bush-linked companies, again, paid with money initially provided by US taxpayers via the "loan" to Iraq. The company securing this massive contract was Bechtel, whose director, George P. Schultz, served as Ronald Reagan's secretary of state and the head of the Rockefeller-established Council of Foreign Relations. Considering the \$300 million Iraq passed onto Yemen just beginning to unify, the synergies are impossible to ignore. See three-part series on "Bush and Aid to Iraq" reported by Douglas Frantz and Murray Waas, especially part 2, "Bush Secret Effort Helped Iraq Build Its War Machine," *Los Angeles Times*, February 23, 1992.

9. Fatefully, prior to unification, Yemen's interim government composed of leaders from both North and South agreed to forge an alliance with Iraq and Jordan called the Majlis al-Ta'awun al-'Arabi, the Arab Cooperation Council (ACC). The

stated ACC agenda of “development and modernization” entailed pooling the resources Baghdad could provide financially (for Yemen that included \$300 million in 1990), to promote an agenda not entirely approved by the USA (Brookes 1989: 36; Wahby 1989: 60–67). This latest iteration of Pan-Arabism was meant to serve as a counterweight to the GCC. All four countries feared the rise of Islamic radicalism, especially in the form of the MB that served as a First World asset long cultivated by the British, Americans, and their Saudi partners. Since at least the late 1960s this asset served to destroy progressive Muslim regimes throughout the world. Recall that Syria had already faced two major MB-led insurgencies by the 1980s, and while most of the human assets being sent to fight the Soviets in Central Asia, the Afghan Arabs, were coming from Yemen under the leadership of the “Wahhabi Guide” ‘Abd al-Majid Zindani, he openly threatened to redirect his efforts toward the still progressive states in Sana’a and Aden (Dresch 2000: 53–56).

10. By 1992 the Yemeni constitution was rewritten to initiate a first wave of privatization (IMF 1999).

11. Michel Foucault’s (2007) description of the emergence of a juridical combination of laws and regulations in Western societies may help the reader appreciate the evolution of events in Yemen.

12. There is a vast literature promoting radical land reform that pits local use against the “market,” which in our world today takes precedence (Deininger, Savastano, and Carletto 2012; El-Ghonomy 2006).

13. Although rarely explained in these terms, it appears a new Clinton administration in 1993, brought to power thanks to patrons mostly out of the oil business, accounts for the USA’s temporary loss of interest in Yemen (Almadhagi and Noman 1996: 149–50).

14. In this Ma’rib region, the local populations had long resisted state centralization and found over the decades KSA money and access to its markets an optimal resource to leverage for their continued autonomy. While the presumed loyalty of these local herders gave the KSA some leverage in these largely unmarked borderlands (helpful during the negotiations to secure permanent boundaries in 2000), it is always unwise to assume absolute loyalty. Conditions change, and the current war in Yemen is a perfect example. From March 2015, drawing on its history of paying off locals, the KSA and its US/UK allies assumed these “tribal peoples” would remain loyal. It has not turned out that way. Due to the fragmentation of the Yemeni National Army, the majority defecting from the Hadi government, the one remaining core unit that stuck with the KSA was the First Armoured Brigade, considered a military wing of the Islah and under the command of MB loyalist ‘Ali Muhsin. This powerful asset of the KSA coalition resettled in Ma’rib. The problem is these units are foreign to the region, thus creating tensions with locals. More still, the arrival of Emirati-paid mercenaries along with untold thousands of *takfiris* long working elsewhere upset any possible working relationship between this foreign coalition and local Yemenis (Patrick 2016). The result has been an uprising led by members of the ‘Abidah and al-Jalal communities against what are now seen as foreign occupation forces led by the coalition. <https://www.almasdarnews.com>

/article/saudi-backed-forces-panic-tribal-fighters-kick-mareb/. The consequences of this local hostility have been grave; these same foreign occupiers based in Safar were hit on December 14, 2015, by one of the Yemeni military's ballistic missiles, resulting in the worst single day of casualties for the UAE. <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-35091675>. The area is in early 2018 still a major frontline of the war.

15. Personal Correspondence, Sana'a, January, 2013.

16. Such was the tactic used by Saleh's regime (and by 2012, Hadi's) to justify the suppression of disenfranchised victims of globalization throughout Yemen. As noted below, the primary targets were those now called the "Huthis" found in the Northwest Sa'adah province and resilient communities found throughout Hadhramawt, Abyan, and Shabwah (Blumi 2010). More insidiously, the frame to justify this brutal suppression—Zaydis as Shi'a as Iranian proxies who threaten Sunnis or resistant Sunnis as al-Qa'ida terrorists—has become the only way the outside world understands events in the region.

17. There are examples found throughout the archives of the US embassy, often through Peace Corps or USAID intermediaries, intervening to help lubricate the transfer of wealth from rural Yemen to the global markets. USNA RG 286, Box 1, P 688, Central Subject Files 1973–77, USAID Mission to the Yemen Arab Republic, Peace Corps file, USAID Dir. Ruiz to AID HQ, March 23, 1975.

18. A North Carolina-based construction company, Nello Teer, which built the Washington, DC, underground metro, was lobbying the US government through connections in Abu Dhabi to gain access to projects like dams, highways, and bridges in Yemen. See letter written to Shaykh Muhammad al-Nahyan, ruler of UAE, seeking help on the Sana'a to Ma'rib road contract, USNA RG 286, Box 1, P 688, Central Subject Files 1973–77, USAID Mission to the Yemen Arab Republic, Nello Teer file, March 13, 1976.

19. Importantly, even at this moment of apparent greed, the vested interests made sure much of Yemen's on-shore and off-shore blocks remained off-limits to exploration.

20. For a useful discussion on how political Islam, in the form of "Wahhabism," infiltrated North Yemen and its consequences, consult Weir (1997).

21. For details of the build-up to the initial agreement and a general outline of the official narrative that has changed since 9/11, see al-'Abdali (1997: 123–50).

22. For a study into how these waves of displaced migrants impacted Yemen society see Van Hear (1994). Peasants in Central America faced similar "development" pressures resulting in complex adjusted lives in cities (Way 2012).

23. The central concerns among the tens of thousands who showed up to these rallies were the scarcity of housing, especially in the South, as well as increased petty crime.

24. Haydar al-'Attas interview in *al-Sharq al-Awsat*, May 30, 1992.

25. The media suggested that the main source of opposition to the labor activism came from Islah loyalists, whose staunch antisocialist platform seemed to encourage violent opposition to the YSP. *al-Majalla*, June 24, 1992.

26. *al-Wasat*, March 6, 1992.

27. The problem was political Islam played the role of placating Muslims in the service of globalism. The most prominent of the groups attracting most attention in the 1990s proved able, with considerable Qatari and Saudi money, to form the so-called Joint Meeting Parties in 2002. This coalition brought together scattered members of the Islah Party in opposition to the Saleh regime. These alliances produced surprising results: this joint platform won 22 percent of the votes in 2006. These “successes” in the polls did nothing, however, to compel the regime to change its course until 2011. Until the uprisings, the regime used violence against its opponents with little public outcry. The disturbing fact was this constituted silent support for outright war against fellow Yemenis. At its advance stages, it drew on regional chauvinism and sectarianism circulated by pro-government and Islah media alike (Browsers 2007). This seems essential if for no other reason than to understand better the violence in Yemen since 2015. To date, “the roots” of war in Yemen remain almost entirely trapped by a neat “watershed” construct built around 2011. The result has been a complete avoidance of studying deeper structural roots to the current violence in the larger world. This strategic silence, in my estimation, aims to exonerate those most profiting from Yemen’s destruction today.

28. The vote was for 301 seats in Parliament. Voters had to choose from more than 3,500 candidates. The results published on May 1 gave the GPC 123 seats, Islah 62, the YSP 56, while the Ba’athists obtained 7, Nassirists 3, and an assortment of religious and special interests groups made up the rest. *al-Majalla*, May 26, 1993 (Glosemeyer 1993).

29. KSA authorities played a duopolistic role in the civil war, at once offering moral support to the efforts to find a diplomatic solution while supplying weapons and cash to northern Salafi militias that raided the south. At the same time, as published in a Saudi newspaper, Riyadh often communicated to South Yemen’s former leader Haydar Abu Bakr al-‘Attas that the KSA was willing to recognize the south’s call for separation if he, exiled from Aden since the 1986 civil war in the PDRY, could find a way to victory against the north. *al-Sharq al-Awsat*, June 28, 1994.

30. See an important collection of articles that originally appeared in the southern journal *al-Ayyam*. The articles speak of the sentiment that the south is being colonized by the north (al-Saqqaf 1996: 43–45).

31. As seen throughout this study, the idea that Yemenis needed any advice from Western-trained “experts” on how to earn money was especially absurd. Yemeni merchants and businessmen are some of the most successful in the world. And yet, the arrogance of power allowed the IMF and World Bank to send advisors to promote the gutting of Yemen on behalf of the multilateral organizations set up at Bretton Woods. Alas, thanks to Saleh and the reforms he would impose, by the early 2000s, Yemen was considered the most “liberal” of national economies in the region and was destined to becoming the shining star of the Islamic world (World Bank 2003: 68–69).

32. The pressures on southerners became too great, and the old political elite proved entirely incapable of addressing the needs of the dwindling southern popula-

tion who saw themselves as such. The creation of Hirak led to campaigns of civil disobedience and often violent protests, with invariably the use of deadly force that itself galvanized more to join. If it was of any use then, there were demands made on the state and the political elite. They included equality of access to government positions, with attention paid to the benefits and services their predecessors enjoyed. More, there was a demand for self-governance, taking power away from the inter-linked central state and its provincial and state representatives. Considering South Yemen's oil wealth, another demand was for a greater share of its natural resources. By the simple act of deduction, reading this list points to a Saleh regime that was getting more and more obnoxious to many of the country's marginal citizens. While Islah and the JMP had their routine down pat by the late 2000s, the rise of Hirak also suggests that this Islamist umbrella alliance was not doing any favors for South Yemenis. Southerners were very much on their own, with even external sympathetic actors in the diaspora proving keener on securing lucrative access to South Yemen's assets, notably Aden port. Dubai Ports World, as we will see later, secured one such deal at the expense of southern aspirations for greater economic benefits (Longley and al-Iryani 2008).

33. We explore this issue further in chapter 6.

34. With Hadhramis long known for casting their spiritual net far and wide, the wave of exile induced by the collapse of the sultanates linked to the Southern Arabia Federation after 1967 seemed to be only temporary. With whispers of unification in the air, their bid to return was inevitable. Many wealthy and influential members of the Hadhrami merchant elites used the political capital they secured for Saleh, in his quest to becoming a GCC player, to translate into both lucrative and politically essential alliances for themselves. As we see below, the biggest arena in which they could secure influence was religious. On the economic leverage these communities enjoyed in North Yemen throughout the 1970s and 1980s, see Chaudhry (1997: 139–92).

35. The era of cheap credit as an instrument of globalist power only took shape with the ascendancy of the Clinton administration. With the fateful lifting of the Glass-Steagall Act in 1999, the financial industry finally secured the deregulation it sought to appropriate the structural barriers to hegemony. By the end of the 1990s, in other words, the globalist empire was also targeting the savings of the middle and working classes in the so-called developed world. As the IMF, USAID, and World Bank tried to do in Yemen in the 1970s, so too was empire plundering its own. With dwindling interest rates and nowhere else to “park” one's savings, the new game in town was equity markets and property development (Hudson 2003, 2005). South Yemen and Sana'a' became two areas for such speculation in property by the 2000s.

36. As Bonnefoy (2007: 39–78) has demonstrated, their Pan-Islamic, transnational *salafyya* discourse conflicted with those efforts by local “quietist” Salafists who adopted a decidedly “nativist” orientation toward their missionary work. In this regard, the Sufis and the “Wadi'i” Salafists actually shared a common enemy. These often violent clashes, as witnessed throughout the region, were largely lost in the crude sweeping reference to all these groups in the same terms.

37. The activities of the increasingly powerful Zindani and his KSA-funded MB apparatus represented a clear and present danger to YSP operatives throughout South Yemen in the 1990s (Johnsen 2006: 3–5). Ironically, such concerns of an aggressive *takfiri* campaign opened opportunities for new alliances, with many southerners soliciting direct protection from Saleh, a role his regime was not expected to play (al-Saqqaf 1996: 25–30; Schwedler 2006: 205–13; Glosemeyer 2004: 44–46).

38. That many of the violent groups would become the backbone of first the Islah Party's armed militias and since March 2015, the ground troops for the campaign "Operation Restoring Hope" has not gone down well with Southern Separatists (Hirak) and UAE officials, an important member of the coalition. In fact, the UAE's units in South Yemen have been fighting those paid and armed by the KSA and Qatari governments, presumably allies in a common cause against "Iranian" influence. In an almost mocking undertone, Qatar's press reported to the world that the UAE was leaving the battle as of the summer of 2016, wishful thinking apparently as Abu Dhabi has beefed up security in Aden, where its troops and auxiliaries maintain the largest presence by October 2016. Al-Jazeera, "UAE: 'War is Over' for Emirati Troops in Yemen," *Al-Jazeera News*, June 17, 2016. Of course, as of April 2017, the KSA has been encouraged by the Trump administration, to sever ties with Qatar, leaving stranded Islah members once crucial to giving support to the GCC-anointed "legitimate" leader Hadi.

39. Rashid al-Hadad, "Critics Raise Alarm Over Privatization Policies," *Yemen Times*, March 25, 2014; Aref Abdullah al-Selmi, "Privatization of Higher Education," *Yemen Times*, April 30, 2012.

40. This logic fit perfectly with the new push by the USA for "outsourcing" education, promoting corporate products to be adopted by UN agencies in the developing world by the 2000s (Petró, Leroux, and Watanabe 2015). Bonnefoy's impressive work explores the depth of the educational empire created by the opening of Yemen's educational "market." Muqbil al-Wadi'i, whose main Dar al-Hadith based in Dammaj, just outside Sa'adah (deep in so-called Zaydi territory), competed with a variety of other private religious institutions, all celebrated in the early aid literature as exemplary private schools (Sanyal 1998). From Muhammad al-Imam's school in Ma'bar to 'Abd al-'Aziz al-Bura'i in Ibb, to Abd al-Majid al-Zindani's al-Iman University in Sana'a (built on land stolen from a Huthi charitable institution established as a *waqf* years earlier), the educational politics was matched by the entrepreneurial and at times sincerely scholarly rivalries taking place throughout Yemen (Bonnefoy 2009: 54–57, 144–47).

41. As Bonnefoy (2009) carefully explains, efforts by former students who wished to capitalize on the reputation of their teacher led to new forms of entrepreneurialism with many students simply becoming extensions of these transnational Islamist forces. But it would be wrong to lose track of those indigenously orientated activists whose primary concern was insular, not global. If there would be the need to address political issues at all, it would, as al-Wadi'i and other like-minded "quietist" Salafists argued, have to remain local.

42. Since at least 2001, the analysis of political Islam is almost entirely shaped by an ideological apparatus tailored to justify a perpetual war on terrorism. Periodically labeled “radical Islamic groups” in the larger context of a US campaign that claims to fight “Islamic terrorism,” the occasional targets of this war are, in the Yemeni domestic political context, rival constituencies who emerge and disappear after unification. As such, both their amorphous organization and the ambiguous limits of their political legitimacy suggest a new space for the proactive, often autonomous groups mobilizing Islam to transform domestic and regional politics. Seen as autonomous agents by some, by others as mere tools of powerful foreign interests, what remains critical to our larger story is that activists also provided the requisite violence. None of those operating in Yemen were entirely independent from the states claiming to fight them. Unmasking the correspondent “war on terror” thus needs returning to theorists of ideology who have shaped our (post) modern political imaginations to mistrust empire (Blumi 2016).

43. Irresponsibly, think-tanks and media have justified the violence directed at Yemenis on the grounds of their supposed links to Iran. This logic has regularly been used, suggesting both a callousness and precursor to the lack of media coverage of the Saudi-American war on Yemen since 2015 (Juneau 2016).

44. These tactics clearly antagonized old allies like al-Ahmar, who at various points in the late 1990s openly sided with not only his own constituents in Islah or within the Hashid confederacy, but even urban poor who protested the state. See his angry response to attacks levied by state officials against protesters in *al-Hayat*, June 24, 1998.

45. See *Yemen Times* (May 5, 1997) for election results. In 1993, the GPC won 123 seats; this share of parliament grew to 187 seats in 1997 and 238 (out of 301) in 2003.

46. By September 11, 2001, those same resources Saleh used earlier—the so-called tribes and Islamic groups—to bully southern and Zaydi rivals were now marginalized by an “electoral” process. After 9/11, former partners were forced to act entirely outside the “rules” of the state as determined by the Saleh regime, thus further intensifying the tendency to use force instead of politics to resolve Yemen’s disputes (Bonney and Cheikh 2002: 169–71).

47. For a revealing article listing the large proportion of Saleh’s family members in the upper levels of the military, see *al-Shura* (Yemeni weekly), March 6, 1994.

48. For insight into how these groups had been identified as effective counterweights to the regime, see Carapico (1996: 282–316).

49. By 2009, despite years of open war with people from the region, the amount of smuggling of drugs, weapons, and migrants had clearly not abated. According to officials, Saudi forces arrested over the second half of 2009 127,875 “infiltrators” and 2,206 smugglers along with confiscating 30 kg of gunpowder, narcotic substances found in 2,140 vehicles, and large amounts of handguns. Muhammad al-Majid, “Normalcy Restored at Border,” *Arab News*, December 16, 2009. This kind of business had clearly not abated, despite the fact the border had been increasingly fortified since 2004. “Saudi Foils Bid to Smuggling Arms on Yemen Border,” *Khaleej*

Times, September 3, 2005; “Security Tightened across Yemeni-Saudi Borders,” *Yemen Observer*, February 28, 2006.

50. The Saudis eventually admitted that it has created a 10-km “kill zone” within Yemeni territory, something that enraged Yemeni opposition figures and may have even led to greater sympathy for the Huthi-led coalition that emerged in this period of regional outcry. As mentioned by Hasan Zayid, the leader of the JMP, Yemen’s largest opposition coalition party since 2001, Yemenis once hostile to Zayidis were beginning to read the violence in the northwest as Saudi expansionism at Yemen’s expense (*Yemen Post*, 2009). Such sentiments in late 2009 must be read as a forewarning of the 2011 anti-Saleh explosion and the broad support behind AnsarAllah’s retaking the government from Hadi in late 2014.

51. Officially, the forced relocation of upwards of 250 villages along the border was for the safety of inhabitants. Informants, however, feared their relocation to north of Abha marks a policy of permanently changing the demography of the region.

52. As evidenced since 2014, the then UN secretary-general Ban Ki-moon fired Algerian diplomat Jamal Benomer as his chief negotiator in Yemen. The move at Saudi insistence took place despite the fact Benomer literally had all parties in Yemen agreeing to a power-sharing scheme that would have avoided war. Alas, since the KSA and the Obama administration likely had war (and the outright occupation of Yemen) as the preferred outcome, efforts to stop the expansion of violence ended with Benomer’s dismissal.

53. In response, huge contracts were awarded the European conglomerate EADS (\$2.3 billion) to effectively design, implement, and finally help police the Saudi frontier with Yemen. “Fencing the Kingdom: EADS Lands Huge Saudi Border Deal,” *Defense Industry Daily*, July 19, 2009.

54. *Yemen Times*, March 17, 2002.

55. *al-Quds al-Arabi*, February 9, 2004.

56. On December 18, 2009, two days before the Saudis launched an invasion of Yemeni territory around Sa’adah, the *New York Times* confirmed that the US “provided firepower, intelligence and other support . . . to strike at suspected hide-outs of al-Qaeda.” While secretive about the extent of its support to the Saleh regime, it was widely known that US special forces were operating within Yemen and that the weapons used in this attack were cruise missiles fired from off-shore ships. Mark Landler and Thom Shanker, “U.S. Aids Yemeni Raids on Al Qaeda, Officials Say,” *New York Times*, December 18, 2009.

57. Leading the way has been Scahill (2016: 56–66, 80–86, 110–20). As revealing are the overtly apologetic productions by well-established newspaper journalists reaffirming the narrative that the American-Yemenis murdered by the US state deserved death without formal trial. Asserting that one Yemeni-American named Awlaki and his teenage son were indeed terrorists (even though the father only wrote hostile messages against the USA and never picked up a weapon himself) the full-spectrum propaganda machine clearly works at the expense of law and order in the world (Shane 2016).

CHAPTER SIX

1. Robert Marquand, "Amid BRICS' Rise and 'Arab Spring,' a New Global Order Forms," *Christian Science Monitor*, October 18, 2011; Parag Khanna, "New BRICS Bank a Building Block of Alternative World Order," *Huffington Post*, http://www.huffingtonpost.com/parag-khanna/new-brics-bank_b_5600027.html.

2. On top of his \$50,000 monthly salary, he used the skimmed money for political leverage and assured Arcadia a near monopoly on the resale of Yemen's over 3-million-barrel monthly production. The US Commodity Futures Trading Commission (CFTC) eventually filed a case against Arcadia and al-Ahmar for the collusion between the two to receive uncompetitive oil bids. Brian Grow and Joshua Schnever, "Exclusive: Arcadia May Have Rigged Yemen Exports: Cable," *Reuters*, June 1, 2011.

3. Once Arcadia's largest "book" after Nigeria, with as much as 3 million barrels of Yemeni crude bought legally every month, this mutually beneficial business ended when Saleh granted export tenders to Chinese Sinopec.

4. Interview, Foreign Ministry, Sana'a, 2013. Subsequent reports were released over the years, exposing further how deeply entrenched the al-Ahmar clan was in the stealing of Yemen's natural wealth. Mark Rice-Oxley, "WikiLeaks Cable Links Defecting Yemeni General to Smuggling Rackets," *The Guardian*, March 21, 2011.

5. In a process beginning to transform, via "reform priorities," how oil was sold, the primary goal was to undermine the National Investment Committee's oil branch. Taking over was Saleh's son Ahmed Ali Saleh, head of the Yemeni Special Operations Force. Ahmad Ali would chair the National Investment Committee, drawing power away from the al-Ahmar enterprise, a process beginning in March 2009, in order to "increase transparency in the oil sales tendering process, attract new and more qualified bidders, and generate millions of dollars, by cutting out Ministry of Oil officials from the oil sales decision-making process." It would also allow previously shut out companies, including BP and Unipecc, subsidiary of Sinopec of China, to secure bids. In addition, production sharing agreements were introduced to "end the era in which Arcadia Petroleum and Hamid al-Ahmar bought Yemeni crude at below-market value and scared away potentially more competitive bids by threatening to kidnap representatives." "Tribal figure" Ibrahim Abdulahoum, local agent of the Swiss-registered company Trafigura, was entirely on board with this move that would push al-Ahmar aside. Today these same factions are fighting each other in Yemen's current war. The intrigues do not stop here but draw us too far from the point; nevertheless, it is worth noting that numerous personalities have positioned themselves to represent French (Yahya Saleh) and Korean (Naji al-Shaif) companies during this renewed scramble for Yemen's oil. In sum, the move by the Saleh government would mark the beginning of a new era in Yemeni politics, ultimately resulting in the opportunism of 2011 onwards. <http://wikileaks.org/cable/2009/09/09SANAA1782.html>

6. Because of the war on Yemen, things are entirely different. Unable to pay salaries, a massive culling of workers has left many in the region speculating that the Bin

Laden era, which earlier controlled 70 percent of the KSA's government construction projects, is over. Since early in 2016 Riyadh stopped paying contractors, creating a cascade effect throughout the economy. Max Bearak, "Bin Laden Family's Huge Company Faces Its Worst Crisis Since 9/11," *Washington Post*, May 3, 2016.

7. Designed to be the world's longest suspension bridge, it would provide space for a six-lane causeway and four light rail lines, and gas and water pipelines. The idea also envisioned the creation of three "Al-Noor Cities" that would become the kind of serviceable concentrations of cheap labor needed for sustained infrastructure development, and it is almost never paired with this recognition that one day Yemen's oil and gas would finally enter full-scale exploitation. Clearly the hopes for initiating the infrastructure to realize this project clashed with the fact the war in Yemen makes any future planning impossible. It is also important to remember that Dubai Ports World (DPW), which was denied its contract in Aden, holds a similar concession in Djibouti, which would also become obsolete with the construction of such a bridge. Horand Knaup, "The Bin Laden Bridge: A Vision to Connect Africa and Asia," *Spiegel Online*, August 22, 2008. <http://www.spiegel.de/international/world/the-bin-laden-bridge-a-vision-to-connect-africa-and-asia-a-573588.html>.

8. The most notorious among the GCC investors in Ethiopian land was a company named Saudi Star. The Jeddah-based company has plans to grow over 140,000 tons of rice annually for export, causing considerable scandal in a country where landless peasants represent an expanding crisis that as of October 2016 has translated into widespread violence throughout Ethiopia. See the excellent investigative report <https://ig.ft.com/sites/land-rush-investment/ethiopia/>.

9. These plans may just be an attempt to trick currently skeptical foreign investors that the "kingdom" has much to offer. There are plenty of rumors filtering through the Zurich and London commodity brokerage firms that the KSA may be running out of oil. If this is indeed the case, the upcoming IPO for Aramco, the massive "state-owned" oil conglomerate, may produce nowhere near the trillion dollars the ruling elite hoped to get out of the sale. That is not stopping the finance sector from helping to drum up the hype. Anjali Raval et al., "Banks Secure Key Adviser Roles on Saudi Aramco IPO," *Financial Times*, March 30, 2017. In the end, this may indeed be one reason why the KSA cannot stop this war with Yemen: it is basing its future on annexing Yemen's massive oil reserves because it no longer can count on its own. Robert Fisk, "Saudi Efforts to 'Modernise' Its Economy Away from Oil Are Just PR Tactics—and the West Is Lapping Them Up," *Independent*, April 28, 2016.

10. See emails released by *Wikileaks* showing how Hillary Clinton and her chief campaign advisor Podesta knew money given to the Clinton Foundation as part of a way to fund her bid for the US presidency in 2016 came from the same Qatari and KSA sources that funded ISIS/Da'ish forces. <https://wikileaks.org/podesta-emails/emailid/3774>. See also Patrick Cockburn, "We Finally Know What Hillary Clinton Knew All Along—US Allies Saudi Arabia and Qatar Are Funding Isis," *The Independent*, October 14, 2016.

11. <http://www.constructionweekonline.com/article-6848-yemen-mixed-use-project-launched/>

12. The growing popularity of temporary marriages in Yemen and the court infrastructure to provide it during the heyday of sex tourism from the Gulf in the post-2011 period and earlier from the KSA has received virtually no open condemnation from international organizations. <http://www.irinnews.org/news/2005/07/07/social-impact-temporary-marriages>.

13. <http://www.qpm.com.qa/english/Projects/Pages/Project-Details.aspx?Proid=7&Digest=171A24EAAB2WTGF203D7C6C81FCB991B9D42>

14. Yemen's ties to the UAE go back centuries. So much settlement of the area today known as the UAE came from Yemen, especially Hadhramawt. Indeed, the British, still overlords in the then Trucial States when South Yemen fought its way to independence, contemplated making a Bani Yas state to join the larger UAE in 1967. There were so many newly arrived, prominent Hadhramis they promised a bright future for the territory now in Abu Dhabi. Subsections of those families who settled in these areas are the Al-Sawaydi, who trace their lineage to Yemeni Shaykh Suwad al-Kindi and have long enjoyed a close relationship with the al-Nahyan (a region in Yemen) ruling family. Shaykh Zayid bin Khalifa al-Nahyan's mother was from this group. The close family relations led to considerable close relations between Yemeni and Emirati families. Ahmad bin Khalifa al-Suwaidi is one example. Al-Suwaidi advised on foreign relations and acted high up in the Abu Dhabi Investment authority and as minister for presidential affairs.

15. Tamsin Carlisle, "Dubai Family Strikes \$3bn Gold Deposit in Yemen," *The National*, October 26, 2010.

16. With so much at stake for some important Emirati families, there is reason to believe that it is the billions of possible claimed assets by members of the ruling families in the UAE that is driving much of Abu Dhabi's current investment in occupying (more like keeping the Saudis out of) areas around Shabwah and Mukalla. Aziz El Yaakoubi, "UAE Builds Up Yemen Regional Army but Country Fragments," *Reuters*, May 3, 2017. This issue about over what GCC allies are fighting in Yemen is a topic to which we return below.

17. <http://www.hsagroup.com/>.

18. <http://web.dpworld.com/wp-content/uploads/2014/01/DPWORLDINYEMEN.pdf>.

19. By 2017 the top consultancy firms have the narrative down. See for instance, <http://www.huxley.com/insights-news/the-gulf-banking-sector>. It was not always the case, however, that global financial players understood the significance of, for instance, the UAE's banking sector, which is currently worth US\$770 billion in assets, and its links to the larger region. https://www.zawya.com/mena/en/story/UAE_banking_sector_tops_Gulf_states-WAM20170308175107244/.

20. United States Senate Committee on Foreign Relations, 2010.

21. <http://blogs.worldbank.org/arabvoices/boost-microfinance-arab-world>.

22. <https://www.cgap.org/blog/islamic-microfinance-yemen-challenges-and-opportunities>

23. <http://www.cgap.org/blog/microfinance-sector-yemen>. For DB's narrative see <https://www.db.com/cr/en/concrete-funds.htm>.

24. By their own account, Amal bank was "dominating" the market share in Yemen and claimed in 2010 to have more than 19,000 savers (tie-in with schemes in the 1970s to get Yemeni cash out of pockets and into coffers) and funded 24,000 small and micro projects in 2010. 62% of the clients were women. http://www.alamalbank.com/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=279:news-3&catid=59:bottom-newsflash&Itemid=282&lang=en.

25. A competition sponsored by CGAP, Deutsche Bank, Grameen-Jameel Pan Arab Microfinance, and the Islamic Development Bank. <http://www.cgap.org/news/al-amal-microfinance-bank-named-winner-islamic-microfinance-challenge>.

26. <http://yemennetwork.org/en/>. See also https://www.microfinancegateway.org/sites/default/files/publication_files/microfinance_in_yemen_-_impact_of_war_ymn_july_2015.pdf.

27. The region of Abyan that has long been infested with *takfiri* groups was one of the primary target areas for microfinance. In 2011 it had over 69,000 outstanding loans in the books. <https://www.cgap.org/blog/microfinance-yemen-abyan-program>. Incidentally, AnsarAllah would make this fact a major point of justification for war, ostensibly to reverse Yemen's flight to economic ruin. Again, the war ended this engineering effort, one that the interim government under Hadi had a clear mandate from empire to integrate the country's rural populations finally into the banking system.

28. Ben Norton, "Famine Looms in Yemen, as US-backed Saudi Bombing Intentionally Targets Food Production," *Salon*, October 27, 2016.

29. <http://www.yementimes.com/en/1816/report/4342/Foreigners-line-up-to-buy-land-in-Socotra.htm>.

30. To begin the process, the Hadi "interim" government pushed through a rewriting of Yemen's internal boundaries, creating by decree (Law No. 31 of 2013) a province of the Socotra Archipelago with a capital in Hadibow. The province would be administered by two districts—Hadibow and Abd al-Kuri. With this new dispersal of power, the former sovereign of the incredibly rich region—the Sultan of Mahra—and larger Yemen was no longer able to negotiate terms with outside suitors. Sure enough, Hadi-appointed governors, and today those installed by an occupying force of Emirati and American soldiers, sign off the region's wealth to friends and allies. <https://presidenthadi-gov-ye.info/en/archives/law-establishing-province-of-socotra-archipelago-issued/>.

31. Media assets for competing GCC interests have very different perspectives about who is to blame for the violence and disarray in "liberated" South Yemen. From the Qatari side: David Hearst, "EXCLUSIVE: Yemen President Says UAE Acting Like Occupiers," *Middle East Eye*, May 3, 2017. From Abu Dhabi, Mohammed Al Qalisi, "Massive Protests in Aden To Support Separate Rule for South Yemen," *The National*, July 14, 2017.

32. Samuel Ramani, "China's Role in the Yemen Crisis," *The Diplomat*, August 11, 2017. Adam Taylor, "What Yemen's Crisis Reveals About China's Growing Global Power," *The Washington Post*, March 31, 2015.

33. For a local perspective consider report by Khalid al-Karimi, “Houthis’ Recent Expansion Stems from 2011 Uprising,” *Yemen Times Online*, July 3, 2014.

34. <http://landdestroyer.blogspot.ch/2011/02/cia-coup-college.html>.

35. In turn, Otpor’s expertise in overthrowing Serbia’s regime in 2000 led to its leadership becoming the consultants US aid agencies sought to train youth activists for later revolutions. Tina Rosenberg, “Revolution U,” *Foreign Policy*, February 17, 2011. <http://foreignpolicy.com/2011/02/17/revolution-u-2/>.

36. The interlinking networks of cooptation and sabotage are classic US government tactics to prepare for contingency. Events in Egypt have been much better documented, with Syria also now increasingly understood in these terms. Central has been the heavy investment Google put into facilitating the communication of these US-backed operations. In respect to Yemen, more research, virtually impossible with the war in Yemen today, would likely demonstrate considerable overlap between the various NGOs receiving funds indirectly from the US government. Many of these organizations, having been outed, have repackaged and evacuated the infrastructure created around them during key moments of the 2011 events in the Middle East. Having been exposed for their close collaboration and open embrace by corporate sponsors, Movements.org has been rebranded. <https://www.movements.org/en/movements/our-partners/>. Most recently it took the form of CANVAS. See <http://canvasopedia.org/>.

37. The darling of the infrequent visitor from empire, Karman made the ideal symbol of the “new Middle East,” a “jasmine spring” that had already been mobilized in 2005 by neoconservative think-tanks in the USA. She was the co-founder of the NGO activist group cleverly rendered for English translation as “Women Journalists without Chains.” With money flowing from undisclosed sources, the NGO staged weekly protests from 2007 until 2011 offering photogenic acts of civil disobedience. Since it was well known she had close links to the Islah Party and the Joint Meeting Party (al-liqa al-mushtarak) coalition, Karman’s agenda was transparent to locals. For an excellent analysis of the larger woman’s activist project see Yadav (2010) and Massad (2015: 110–212).

38. Isa Blumi, “In Yemen, Hardly a Revolution,” *New York Times*, April 8, 2011.

39. Samia Nakhoul, “Sanaa Is Now a Capital Divided between Entrenched Enemies,” *Reuters*, May 27, 2011.

40. The authors of the National Commission on Terrorist Attacks Upon the United States, writing in response to a call to arms made in the entirely fraudulent 9/11 Commission Report, reads like the worst kind of caricature of the American imperialist. Identifying the next generation of enemy to America’s way of life, as if experiencing flashbacks of fighting the Viet Cong, the authors of the report speculated that it was the lack of development and social isolation in rural areas that was the source of danger in the new world shaped by Islamic terrorism.

“the uneducated, fanatical, single, and predominantly rural ‘muscle hijackers,’ the report claimed that this latter group personified the social condition that allowed Al Qaeda to thrive. All came from villages along the Saudi-Yemen border, an ‘isolated’ and ‘weakly policed area . . . sometimes called ‘the wild frontier.’ These remote areas,

untouched by oil wealth, harbored ‘a large, steadily increasing population of young men without any reasonable expectation of suitable or steady employment—a sure prescription for social turbulence’ (Cullather 2006: 43–44).

The sweeping imagery of the wild native tribesmen interwove the think tank reports of the period, suggesting as Brian DeLay (2015) has convincingly that for many in the US MIC apparatus, the fight is still against those damn Indian savages.

41. Interviews, Sana‘a, January 2013.

42. Rammah al-Jubari, “Yemen: New Member of WTO, Experts Debate Long-Term Effects,” *Yemen Times*, December 5, 2013. On Yemen’s ascension to the WTO, an international body established in 1995, see https://www.wto.org/english/thewto_e/acc_e/a1_yemen_e.htm.

43. One of the main watchdogs of this process in Yemen were the editors of the *Yemen Times*, who offered years of critical analysis of the process. See for instance, Rashid al-Hadad, “Critics Raise Alarm over Privatization Policies,” *Yemen Times Online*, March 25, 2014.

44. Simeon Kerr and Michael Peel, “DP World Faces Loss of Yemen Port Deal: Contract Agreed under Pre-Revolutionary Regime under Threat,” *Financial Times*, September 17, 2012.

45. Considering Saleh’s son was Yemen’s ambassador in Abu Dhabi, the relations between the regime and the UAE had been amicable. Simeon Kerr and Michael Peel, “DP World Faces Loss of Yemen Port Deal,” *Financial Times*, September 17, 2012.

46. Indeed, since the middle of 2016 Eritrea has sold off rights to use its Assab port to UAE forces, recently followed by Berbera in Somaliland. Asa Fitch, “DP World to Manage Somaliland Port of Berbera,” *Wall Street Journal*, September 5, 2015; “The Gulf’s ‘Little Sparta,’” *Economist*, April 6, 2017.

47. The NDC put together 565 delegates with the intention of managing a negotiated reordering of the old regime that could cut the corners of imposing violently empire’s continued hegemony over Yemen. The composition of the delegations explicitly functioned to sharpen lines of tensions, especially the “southern issue,” by insisting that 50 percent of the delegates come from the south even though southerners make up, at best, 20 percent of Yemen’s population. 30% were women and 20% of the seats were designated for the so-called youth. The use of quotas effectively reinforced issues that were not necessarily crucial to real reconciliation. Cynical use of these sideshows marked a recognition that AnsarAllah represented a large segment of the Yemeni population tired of the regime that was being set up for rejuvenation under the guise of this NDC. The heavy lifting of finding consensus over often obstructive, “minor issues,” was transferred to subcommittees, some of which were populated by responsible politicians all around. But a closer look leads one to recognize the banality of those agreements and public declarations—Yemeni rights to clean water, education, freedom of expression—while ignoring the pressing needs to address the concerns of the poor, especially those targeted since 2000 for economic plunder, meant that no real stability was possible. This was a poor performance in conflict resolution management to be sure. Of course, the US government,

with its dominant position in capturing the interpretive parameters on such things celebrated the NDC's conclusions (Gaston 2014). For a more clear-eyed reading of these events, see Alley (2013).

48. For example, the main representative of the AnsarAllah in the NDC, dean of the Faculty of Law at Sana'a University, Dr. Ahmad Sharaf al-Din was assassinated. He had been vocally offering counterproposals for a federal civic state that assured North Yemen could have some hope of economic and political survival. He also, perhaps surprising to those assuming Huthis were religious zealots, wanted to make sure the state's affairs remained separated from religion.

49. <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-26125721>.

50. Yara Bayoumy, "Yemen's Federal Plan a Bold Idea, but Many Hurdles Remain," *Reuters*, February 23, 2014.

51. Ahmed al-Haj, "Yemen's Shiite Rebels Reject Plan for Federal System," *Washington Post*, January 3, 2015.

52. Wikileaks, in one of its massive document drops during the US presidential election of 2016, exposed a working relationship between the CIA and *Washington Post* owner Jeff Bezos, perhaps undermining the last bit of credibility corporate media in the USA can claim. See the story from the eyes of a paper with an equally tarnished history, Cheryl K. Chumley, "Wikileaks At It Again—This Time, the CIA," *Washington Times*, March 7, 2017.

53. Already by spring 2013 rumors were spreading that the Hadi "presidency" was about to become a permanent fixture by dictate, a breach of the 2012 agreement. Even the then US ambassador Gerald M. Feierstein assured his anxious audiences that there was no question that Hadi and his administration would step aside when the mandate ended. When this promise proved hollow, the response from those most directly threatened by the larger agenda must be registered with sympathy. The Americans simply tried to pull a fast one. Ironically, members within the Islah Party were most vocal about the fears, realizing that backroom politics may mean they would be pushed aside, as happened to the Qatari-backed parties in Egypt and Tunisia. Abdul-Aziz Oudah, "No Extension for Hadi, US Ambassador and GPC," *Yemen Observer*, June 20, 2013.

54. <http://www.securitycouncilreport.org/un-documents/yemen/>.

55. Ahmed al-Zarqa, "Yemen: Saudi Arabia Recognizes New Balance of Power in Sanaa as Houthis Topple Muslim Brothers," *Alakhbar*, September 22, 2014. For their part, Qatar, long patron of the now expelled MB affiliate, used their considerable media assets to try to shape the narrative about this temporary change of power. In 2014 Doha's propagandists tried to insinuate the UAE, through its close contacts with Ahmed Saleh (son of dethroned 'Ali Saleh) was behind the 2014 take over by AnsarAllah. Now in 2018 with the coalition fragmented, the Qataris have again mobilized its considerable influence in seemingly independent media to again divert attention to the UAE as uniquely corrupting in Washington, remarkable considering how Qatar has infiltrated the "swamp" over the last decade. <https://theintercept.com/2017/06/30/uae-otaiba-emails-rob-malley-human-rights-watch-saudi-arabia/>. See also the far more eagerly circulated piece now that the previously backdoor

animosity has been made public: <https://theintercept.com/2017/08/09/gulf-government-gave-secret-20-million-gift-to-d-c-think-tank/>.

56. <https://www.theguardian.com/world/ng-interactive/2016/sep/16/how-saudi-arabias-airstrikes-have-hit-civilian-life-in-yemen>. Add this to the fact that it is the USA whose auxiliary forces perform the task of this targeting, it becomes clear that the US MIC now openly taunts us with their profiteering and does so with the collusion of an entirely sadistic political and economic elite. No need to wait another ten years to conclude this imperviousness to Yemeni suffering; this marks a new era of human relations, one that promises decades of such criminality.

CODA

1. Crucial studies to consult for putting Yemen and the larger world in a financial context include: Le Billon (2012); Klare (2012); Mirowski (2013); and Rickards (2011).

2. Some reports on the process, offering invaluable insights but little scholarly glue, force audiences to draw causal links to events in their own lives and those in faraway, “savage” Arabia or Africa (Eichstaedt 2011). Some scholars usefully frame the despicable story in terms of China’s role, almost leading to the conclusion that something is different today with East Asian economic imperialism more insidious than the one it is on the throes of supplanting (Burgis 2015), while others have made the link in regard to the Middle East, albeit with barely space to consider Yemen (Hanieh 2013).

3. For details of this little-known relationship Nixon’s government established with the KSA that guaranteed mutual dependency, see Andrea Wong, “The Untold Story Behind Saudi Arabia’s 41-Year U.S. Debt Secret,” *Bloomberg News*, May 31, 2016.

4. In *Middle East Eye*, a Qatari-funded online “news” outlet, reports of leaked emails suggest the KSA is desperate for a way out of its war on Yemen. The article itself functions to exonerate Qatar by highlighting that the KSA “allowed” Trump’s diplomatic team to start secret meetings with Iran a month before Qatar was formally outed for maintaining commercial ties with its Persian neighbor. Even more confusing in this piece supposedly about Yemen is the overt criticism of the “Little Sparta” UAE for its own “imperialistic” ambitions unnecessarily complicating Arabia’s politics. When the authors stick to the actual theme of the article, the suggestion is that Riyadh currently attempts to separate Saleh from the much more threatening “Huthi” rival, a clear indication that this war will not be so easy to end for the KSA and the larger GCC community. David Hearst and Clayton Swisher, “Saudi Crown Prince Wants Out of Yemen War, Leaked Emails Reveal,” *Middle East Eye*, August 14, 2017.

5. Raising money has been increasingly expensive for KSA, leaving it to cut even further its expenses by going to the extent of not paying salaries or honoring contracts. Fiscal deficits are massive again (14% of GDP). Money is leaving the region in

droves as people with any wealth try to hide it from the clutches of a desperate ruling family trapped in a war with Yemen. The KSA is issuing bonds at higher rates, even now offering all of its oil and gas industry, ARAMCO, for privatization. Of the more than US\$1 trillion believed to be the family's assets abroad, most is likely beyond reach anymore as the KSA overleverages its future on an unwinnable war that now also pits it against the UAE and Qatar. Ahmed A. Namatalla, "Soaring Saudi Interbank Rates Prompt \$4 Billion Injection," *Bloomberg News*, August 2, 2016.

6. Until the Trump administration at least. Reports circulated that Trump's secretary of defense Jim Mattis told his Saudi hosts that the time was now (April 17, 2017) for the war on Yemen to end. Ed Adamczyk, "Mattis Calls on U.N.-Brokered End to Yemen Civil War," *UPI*, April 18, 2017. These attempts at shutting down the destroy Yemen project, at least as envisioned by the KSA and its Washington/Tel Aviv allies, seemingly ended by the summer. Generals approved by the "deep state" consisting of the CIA and powerful neocon/New Left Clinton loyalists have tried to reverse the process. Glen Greenwald, "What's Worse: Trump's Campaign Agenda or Empowering Generals and CIA Operatives to Subvert It?" *The Intercept*, August 5, 2017. A week later, however, "leaked" emails circulating among Qatar supported journalists, perhaps in an attempt to sow disharmony in the destroy Yemen camp, now gossip that the KSA's crown prince wants out. Ryan Grim, "Leaked Emails: Saudi Power Behind The Throne 'Wants Out of Yemen,'" *The Intercept*, August 14, 2017.

7. <http://www.ship-technology.com/news/newsdubai-to-help-yemen-rebuild-aden-port-4694562>.

8. The cynical shutting down of all flights in and out of Sana'a leaves the most desperate of travelers to seek travel via ten-hour bus rides through apparently harrowing check points manned by non-Yemeni jihadists. Eventually making it to Aden, they then must wait for security clearance to board the regular flight to Cairo or Amman. The same bus company takes passengers overnight and for much of the next day from Sana'a through a practical war zone, braving check points to Say'un, where there are intermittent flights with long waiting lists to Amman. Interviews, Geneva, September 2016.

9. <https://www.alaraby.co.uk/english/news/2017/2/13/boiling-tensions-yemens-pro-coalition-forces-fight-for-aden-airport>.

10. In a bid to halt attacks on their forces by US drones, Qasim al-Rimi, leader of AQAP, confessed that his troops fight alongside KSA-backed forces against the AnsarAllah/Saleh coalition: Maggie Michael, "Al-Qaeda Leader Says Group Fought Alongside US-Backed Forces," *Times of Israel*, May 1, 2017; The decision by Hadi/the KSA to sack the Aden governor led by Hiraq and UAE-supported Hani bin Brayak had by April 26 unleashed the final break between former allies, "al-Lajnah al-sha'abiyah lil difa'a an qadiyya sha'ab al janub tadawa al-zahif ila Aden al-khamis al-qadim," *Adengad.net*, May 1, 2017.

11. <https://warontherocks.com/2016/05/the-u-a-e-approach-to-counterinsurgency-in-yemen/>.

12. Noah Browning, Jonathan Saul, and Mohammed Ghobari, "Al Qaeda Still Reaping Oil Profits in Yemen Despite Battlefield Reverses," *Reuters*, March 27, 2016;

Phil Stewart and Matt Spetalnick, "Exclusive: US Considers Supporting New UAE Push Against Al Qaeda in Yemen," *Reuters*, April 15, 2016.

13. Far more astute and politically correct, the UAE has masterfully insinuated itself into the affairs of Yemen, from which its own ruling elite hail. Likewise, the utility of political Islam has almost run its course. Unable to finance perpetually destructive wars that even small-scale adversaries like AnsarAllah and their allies could bring to a standstill, it may be that empire has a special role to play for Abu Dhabi soon. It has certainly mobilized anti-Wahhabi, anti-takfiri forces, most recently at a conference in Grozny, Chechnya. During a remarkable three days in August 2016, senior Sunni scholars from around the world sought to reassert their authority over a community taken over by Wahhabis, the focus of their collective polemic. Their closing statement itself warrants consideration for the future. Emphasizing the legitimacy of the four schools of Islamic jurisprudence—Hanafi, Maliki, Shafi'i, and Hanbali—along with "pure" Sufism, "other sects are not included in the Sunni community." Wahhabism, in other words, is an innovation, a by-product of the twentieth century. Considering how this prestigious body of scholars increasingly shut out in Europe and the USA where Qatar and the KSA dictate the frame within which Islam is understood, to speak on behalf of Sunnis in the closing statement reaffirmed the authority of major institutions not in the KSA or Qatar to train Islam's future scholars. These institutions included al-Azhar in Cairo, al-Zaytunah in Tunisia, and a number of Hadhrami schools in Yemen. Again, KSA institutions were not recognized. Crucially, scholars based in the UAE, but not Qatar or the KSA, were invited to this important conference. Bernardo Cervellera, "Conference in Grozny: Wahhabism Exclusion from the Sunni Community Provokes Riyadh's Wrath," *AsiaNews.it*, September 6, 2016.

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