

THE DRONE AND THE DOVE: FIGHTING AL-QA'IDA WHILE
NEGOTIATING PEACE IN YEMEN

by

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THESIS ABSTRACT

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International conflicts are becoming more complex. Many involve multiple intra-state parties with multiple and at times opposing interests. With increasing globalization and the resulting growth in connectivity, the United States and other Western nations will likely find themselves increasingly involved in these conflicts.¹ Recent history has shown that the 'military option' is not as effective as previously thought in dealing with inter-state conflicts. Thus, studies that explore other options in the management and resolution of these conflicts are critical. This thesis will explore and analyze the option of a systems theory based model as a model for conflict resolution by specifically analyzing the use of such a model in the present conflict in Yemen.

¹ United States of America. National Intelligence Council. Office of the Director of National Intelligence. *Global Trends 2030: Alternative Worlds*. Washington, D.C.: National Intelligence Council, 2012. Print.

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CHAPTER I

PROLOGUE

The morning of September 17, 2008 began like any other for the staff at the U.S. Embassy in Sana'a, the capital city of Yemen. Early in the morning, at 4:40 AM the morning call to prayer went off at what Islamic scholars call "true dawn", when the first faint glimmer of the sun's light starts to spread horizontally across the sky.² From the post outside the embassy, the local guards couldn't see much because of the light pollution in the city, but they heard the chants of "*Allahu Akbar, Allahu Akbar*"³ signaling the beginning of the day.⁴ Since it was Ramadan, the holy month of fasting for all Muslims, there would be no more food or water until sunset. A few blocks away, two Suzuki jeeps with darkly tinted windows were driving towards the embassy, these jeeps held a total of seven men all dressed in military uniforms.⁵

These men were quite knowledgeable about early Islamic history and had picked the date for their mission on purpose. In 624 A.D., in the very early days of Islam, on September 17th, the Prophet Muhammad had led a small band of believers to victory against a much larger pagan force, a victory that Muhammad and the Qur'an attributed to divine intervention.⁶ The seven men driving towards the U.S. Embassy saw themselves as true believers of Islam, going to crush the infidels just like the faithful had done centuries

² Johnsen, Gregory D. "The Benghazi That Wasn't: How One Man Saved The American Embassy In Yemen." *BuzzFeed News*. BuzzFeed, Inc., 23 May 2014. Web. 5 July 2015. <<http://www.buzzfeed.com/gregoryjohnsen/the-benghazi-that-wasnt-how-one-man-saved-the-american-embas#.xaOPoNBg1>>.

³ Arabic for an Islamic phrase that translates into "God is the Greatest", also known as Takbir in Arabic. Used in various contexts by Muslims, here it is in the call for prayer. It can also be used as an informal expression of faith, in times of distress, to express celebration or victory, or to express defiance or determination.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Ibid. p. 2

⁶ Ibid.

ago. On this day, the infidel was the United States, and these men had decided that the Americans had to go.

The men had been recruited by their leader, Lutf Bahr, from a mosque where he taught in Hudayah, a Red Sea port city located ninety-three miles southwest of Sana'a.⁷ These men had dreamed of fighting and killing American soldiers in the battles happening in Baghdad or Fallujah in Iraq, Yemen had never been their first choice, however, travel restrictions forced them to consider carrying out operations against U.S. targets at home.⁸ The U.S. Embassy made for the perfect target; it was the symbol of U.S. presence in the nation, and to these men, a constant reminder of the infidel sitting in a Muslim land.

As they got closer to the embassy, the men kept their speed down and tried to stay calm, for today was going to be their day, “we’re all a sacrifice for the messenger of God,” they repeated, breaking their sentences with cries of “*Allahu Akbar*”.⁹ The same words that had called the faithful to prayer and reflection only hours ago on this holy day during Ramadan were now driving seven radical men to war and certain death. The plan was simple enough; the first vehicle would crash into the main gate, exploding a hole in the embassy’s perimeter and allowing the second vehicle to enter the main compound and allow the men in it to kill as many Americans as possible.¹⁰ At 9:11 AM, Sana’a time, the two jeeps pulled up to the second checkpoint, having passed through the first thanks to the military license plates, and stopped.¹¹ One of the men in the jeeps shouted to the two guards, Mukhtar al-Faqih and Taha Shumayla, “we have a general here to see the

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Ibid. p. 3

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Ibid. p. 4

¹¹ Ibid.

ambassador.”¹² Neither of the guards had heard anything about a meeting, furthermore this was not protocol, since Ambassador Stephen Seche hardly ever met people at the embassy, preferring to go out to meetings.¹³ However, the ambassador didn’t consult with the guards on every one of his decisions, so the guards went continued with the process. Shumayla went first towards the jeeps to check IDs, while Mukhtar manned the gate.¹⁴ The windows of the jeeps were tinted so darkly that Shumayla could not see inside them, this wasn’t right, Mukhtar was already pulling on the rope to raise the drop bar, which would allow the jeeps to go through, when Shumayla saw it: a man in the first jeep coming up through a hole in the roof of the first jeep holding an AK-47.¹⁵ “Ya, Mukhtar!” Shumayla shouted, “Run!”¹⁶

It was at this time, approximately 9:12 AM, that the shooting started, three men jumped out of the second jeep and started firing as they ran, Shumayla was gone, fleeing to the protection of several concrete barriers.¹⁷ But Mukhtar waited, he had to get the bar down, as he let the rope slide from his hands, he hit the duck-and-cover alarm, the embassy’s early warning system, as the bar crashed back down.¹⁸ A few seconds was all it took, one bullet hit Mukhtar below the left shoulder; another hit him in the stomach, he managed to turn and run a few feet toward some rocks before a third bullet hit him in the back and exploded out of his chest, killing him.¹⁹ The terrorists knew at this point that key seconds had been lost, thanks to Mukhtar’s delaying tactics, and that the element of

¹² Ibid.

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ Ibid.

surprise was gone, but they had to go forward, they had crossed the point of no return. Each one of them knew that they would die today.

Thus began one of the most harrowing days at Embassy Sana'a, although no one knew at this point, the brave actions of Mukhtar al-Faqih²⁰, actions that cost him his life, had saved the U.S. Embassy. Nonetheless, nineteen people, including a Yemeni-American Susan el-Baneh would die that day in what became the deadliest attack²¹ on a U.S. Embassy in a decade.²²

²⁰ For his actions on that day, Mukhtar al-Faqih was posthumously awarded the Department of State's Thomas Jefferson Star for Foreign Service for sacrificing his life and giving "the last full measure of devotion to his colleagues and friends." The U.S. Embassy in Sana'a reportedly hired his younger brother Muhammad to replace him as a security guard.

²¹ At the time of writing, questions have been raised about the level of complicity that the government of Yemen had in this attack. An al-Qa'ida informant interviewed on the *Al Jazeera* news network has made allegations that Colonel Ammar Abdullah Saleh, nephew of then President Ali Abdullah Saleh, had provided al-Qa'ida with money to buy the explosives used in this attack and the Saleh regime was using al-Qa'ida as a way to receive U.S. funding. However, these allegations have not been substantiated by any other sources.

²² Knickmeyer, Ellen. "Toll in Yemen Rises, Includes American." *The Washington Post*. Washington Post Foreign Service, 19 Sept. 2008. Web. 6 July 2015. <<http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2008/09/18/AR2008091800557.html?hpid=sec-world>>.

CHAPTER II

INTRODUCTION

The Republic of Yemen is located in the southwestern part of the Arabian Peninsula, bordering Saudi Arabia to the north and Oman to the east. Yemen's history stretches back thousands of years; the nation was home to the Sabeen kingdom, which is mentioned in the Old Testament as Sheba. This kingdom presided over a fertile territory that was a center of trade in the region. In fact, the name 'Yemen' is derived from the Arabic root *ymn*, meaning either "prosperity", to medieval Arab scholars, Yemen was always associated with a flourishing economy and wealth, or "right hand," describing the country's position to the Ka'bah in Mecca, Islam's most sacred sanctuary.²³

Currently, however, the nation finds itself in the midst of turmoil. A major civil war continues unabated, with foreign players like Saudi Arabia being involved, a war that has worsened an already bad humanitarian crisis as resources dwindle because of hostilities. Additionally, Yemen faces an impending food and water crisis as more and more of its citizens go hungry and as resources diminish because of conflict and mismanagement. Furthermore, the nation finds itself becoming a sanctuary for some of the most radical and violent Islamic fundamentalist groups like al-Qa'ida and the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) with the current instability providing fertile ground for these organizations to plant the seeds of their violent creed. All of these crises along with the multiple secessionist movements, such as the Houthis in the north and the Southern Movement based in Aden, threaten to turn Yemen into a failed and fractured state.

²³ "Yemen (San'a')." *Encyclopaedia Britannica*. 15th ed. Vol. 19. Chicago: Encyclopaedia Britannica, 1980. 1084-1089. Print.

Along with the threat of a failed Yemen being used as a base for groups like al-Qa'ida and ISIL to launch attacks globally, the failure of this country would also threaten the global economy, as Yemen borders the Bab-al-Mandeb strait. The strait is a key passageway for global shipping routes carrying goods from Europe and oil from the Middle East to nations in Asia and across the world. In 2014, the U.S. Energy Information Administration (EIA) estimated that up to 3.8 million barrels of oil passed through the Bab-al-Mandeb strait per day.²⁴ Although this number is not that large when seen in context with the total amount of oil shipped daily through various routes, it is large enough to cause economic instability if the shipping route were to be disturbed.



Source: <https://oilandgaslogistics.wordpress.com/2012/09/17/chokepoints-bab-el-mandab/>

All of this chaos in Yemen comes at a time when the wider Middle East is going through a great period of instability with nations such as Syria, Iraq, and Libya dealing with a large amount of internal unrest and rising Islamic fundamentalism. Seen in this

²⁴ United States of America. Department of Energy. Energy Information Administration. *World Oil Transit Chokepoints Critical to Global Energy Security*. By Alexander Metelitsa and Megan Mercer. Energy Information Administration, 1 Dec. 2014. Web. 4 July 2015. <<http://www.eia.gov/todayinenergy/detail.cfm?id=18991>>.

context, it can be argued that the instability in Yemen is another problem on a large list of problems Western policymakers have to deal with in the region. However, the problems that Yemen faces can very quickly become global problems. This is not to say that the other issues in the Middle East can be ignored, but to say that Yemen should not be put on the backburner. Furthermore, the global reach of violent Islamic fundamentalism makes it so no nation on the verge of collapse like Yemen in the Middle East can be ignored.

The involvement that the United States has had within Yemen is founded upon good reasons. The nation of Yemen is clearly important geopolitically not only to the United States, but also to the rest of the world. However, as the conflict in Yemen becomes more complex, the ‘military option’ becomes less effective for the U.S. as previously thought in dealing with the intra-state conflicts.²⁵ Thus, a more detail-oriented approach is needed, and policymakers need to be eased out of the ‘bomb our way to victory’ mindset. For this to happen, studies that explore other options to be used alongside the military option in the management and resolution of conflicts like the one in Yemen are critical. This thesis will explore and analyze the option of multi-track negotiation through application of systems theory as a way to deal with the conflict in Yemen.

The rise of Islamic fundamentalist groups like al-Qa’ida in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP) and, more recently, the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) in Yemen is something that clearly has to be addressed. However, the problems in Yemen are deeper than the spreading of militant fundamentalism. AQAP and ISIL are dangerous, and their

²⁵ Nye, Joseph S., Jr. "Soft Power and American Foreign Policy." *Political Science Quarterly* 119.2 (Summer, 2004): 255-70. *JSTOR*. Web. 3 May 2014. <<http://www.jstor.org/stable/20202345>>.

spread in Yemen should worry policymakers in the West, however these groups are a symptom of a deeper disease. Thus, like any good doctor, the United States cannot simply treat the symptoms and think that the disease will disappear.

This thesis will attempt to address the deeper disease that has taken root in Yemen, a disease that has made it so that basic needs of the people are not being met. In the first part, there will be a brief exploration of the country's history along with the history of militancy in Yemen and the tribal politics of the society. Through this exploration, the reader will get an understanding of the 'system' that exists in Yemen. This is the 'system' that the SAT (Structural, Attitudinal, and Transactional) model²⁶ of systems theory will be applied to in the final part of the thesis. In this part there will be an exploration of the art and process of systems theory. Taken together, the parts will form a cohesive guide to understanding and potentially resolving the deeper systemic issues that underlie the current crisis in Yemen.

By no means should this thesis be taken as a 'silver bullet' to the current issues that Yemen faces. However, the facts are that the Yemen is a nation that holds a high level of strategic importance to the United States, and the U.S. *is* involved in the nation. What this thesis is attempting to do is channel that involvement towards a constructive direction rather than the 'business as usual' approach that has been taken in Middle East policymaking. Implementation of the systems theory based approach advocated in this work will push the U.S. deeper into the situation in Yemen. And given the multitude of issues that the foreign policy machinery of the U.S. has to deal with, this is going to be no easy task. It will require long-term strategic thinking that will not follow preset timelines

²⁶ Ricigliano, Robert. *Making Peace Last: A Toolbox for Sustainable Peacebuilding*. Boulder, Colorado: Paradigm Publishers, 2012. Print. p. 21-22.

based on the political winds in Washington, however this is a task that needs to happen. The U.S. has, unfortunately already seen what can happen if nations are left to fail, and issues are not dealt with. Nevertheless, the issues that Yemen faces all have multiple layers of complexity; therefore the implementation of some single approach is something policymakers should avoid. What this thesis humbly attempts to do is introduce another tool in the policymaking toolkit, with the hope that it will be used at the right moment and through its use the resilient nation of Yemen can move on to a brighter future.

Yemen: Political Map



Source: <http://www.nationsonline.org/oneworld/map/yemen-map.htm>

Yemen: Physical Map



Source: <https://www.google.com/maps/@15.5539046,48.1748476,7z>

Yemen: Governorates



Source: Wikimedia Commons

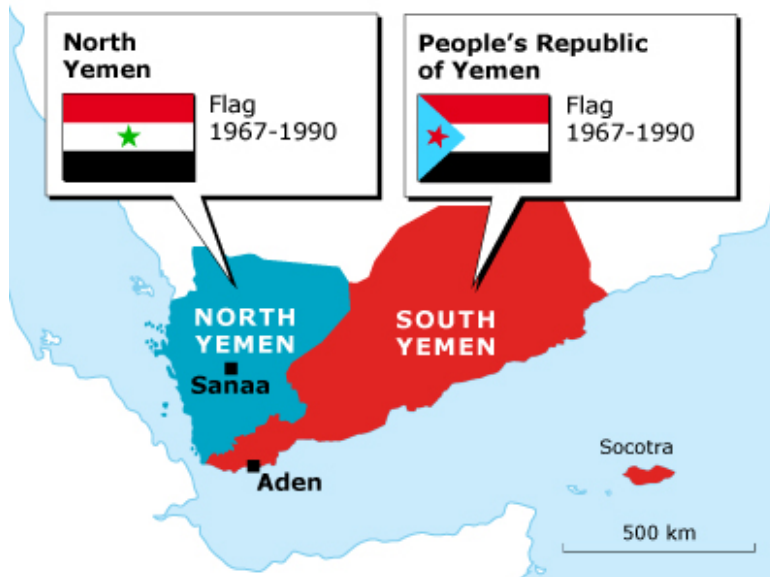
https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/Atlas_of_Yemen#/media/File:Yemen_governorates_english.png

CHAPTER III

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND OF YEMEN

The Division of North and South Yemen

The division of Yemen between North and South Yemen officially occurred in the waning days of the Ottoman Empire in south Arabia. However, the regions that would become North and South Yemen, respectively, had been rarely governed as a single entity.²⁷ In his work titled, *Yemen Unity: Past and Future*, Prof. F. Gregory Gause, III explored some of the reasons underlying these divisions. Many experts have looked at Yemeni history and have simply seen political divisions that encumbered the formation of a united nation. However, as Prof. Gause states there are many other, non-political reasons for this division.



Source: <http://wildstarlife.com/?p=598>

²⁷ Gause, F. Gregory III. *Yemeni Unity: Past and Future*. *Middle East Journal*, Vol. 42. No. 1 (Winter 1988), p. 34.

The first major issue was a very small resource base, resources that could have been used to create instruments of coercion and administration by potential state-builders was simply not present.²⁸ Along with meager resources, strong tribal solidarity encouraged local revolts, this combined with the religious split between the Zaydi Shia²⁹ in the northern highlands and the Sunni Shafi'i³⁰ everywhere else, made uniting the region into one nation a distant dream.³¹ The religious divisions existed alongside strong ethnic divisions, the Adnanis, who were 'Arabized Arabs'³² having migrated into the region from Arabian Peninsula, and the Qahtanis, who dominated the south, and were considered 'pure' Arabs.³³ British imperialists saw these divisions as an opportunity to expand into the region, and further solidified the split between North and South Yemen, leading to a deep fissure being created within the region.³⁴

This fissure is one that is still causing issues, the deep societal divisions that plague Yemen today can be traced to the historical points outlined above. These divisions have created essentially two Yemens, which at one point were a reality, but exist even today. The history presented here cannot and should not be ignored, Yemen as a nation,

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ Zaydism is a school of thought within Shia Islam. It is named after Imam Zaydi bin Ali, who was killed in an uprising against the Umayyads. Although, Zaydism was at one point spread throughout the Middle East and North Africa, Zaydis are now only found in significant numbers in Yemen. Traditionally, there is not a huge difference doctrinally between Zaydis and Sunnis.

³⁰ Shafi'ism is a school of thought within Sunni Islam. It is named after Imam al-Shafi'i, and is one of four main schools of thought in Sunni Islam. Shafi'is are found across the Muslim world, and in Yemen they predominate in all the areas not mentioned as being 'traditionally' Zaydi, and are the majority in the country.

³¹ Gause, F. Gregory III. Yemeni Unity: Past and Future. *Middle East Journal*, Vol. 42. No. 1 (Winter 1988), p. 34.

³² Arabized Arabs are people who came into contact with Arabs through conquest or migration. Arabization refers to the dynamic that occurs when a non-Arab area comes under the influence of Arab culture and slowly incorporates that culture and the Arab identity. In the case of the Adnanis, they became arabized when they moved into the Arabian Peninsula.

³³ Gandy, Christopher. A Mission to Yemen: August 1962-January 1963. *British Journal of Middle Eastern Studies*, Vol. 25, No. 2 (Nov., 1988), p. 247.

³⁴ Gause, F. Gregory III. Yemeni Unity: Past and Future. *Middle East Journal*, Vol. 42. No. 1 (Winter 1988), p. 34.

exists as a political idea, underneath this idea exists a universe of divisions, political and religious. These divisions make Yemen an area full of complexities that will need to be understood before any intervention takes place. Many of these complexities have their roots in the long history of the nation.

As was stated above, the true division of Yemen occurred at the end of the Ottoman Empire in Yemen. The establishment of Kingdom of Yemen, or the Mutawakkilite Kingdom of Yemen shows how the divisions, both ethnic and religious, crept into the creation of the first states in the region. The area that would become the modern day nation of Yemen had just been taken over by Imam Yahya Hamiduddin al-Mutawakil, and this takeover had ushered in the Mutawakilite Kingdom of Yemen. King Yahya belonged to the al-Qasimi dynasty, a dynasty whose members were Zaydi Shia. The control of this area by King Yahya set up the rule of Zaydi Shia in the northern corner of Yemen for centuries to come. The Shia domination of northern Yemen continued to fuel the divisions within the region. These divisions along religious lines would become sharper as southern Yemen developed with a Sunni majority. In fact, this past of Shia domination in the north affects Yemen to this day. The Houthi rebels, who have come out of their northern strongholds to takeover the government in Sana'a, are also followers of Zaydi Shi'ism. One can trace a direct line from the establishment of the Kingdom of Yemen under Shia control to the rise of the Houthis. The Houthi movement itself began as a theological movement, to promote a Zaydi revival.³⁵ Therefore, one can see how the shadow of the past still affects the day-to-day politics and society in Yemen.

³⁵ Al Batati, Saeed. 'Who are the Houthis in Yemen?'. *Al Jazeera*.
<http://www.aljazeera.com/news/middleeast/2014/08/yemen-houthis-hadi-protests-201482132719818986.html>. 29 March 2015.

After King Yahya's takeover, the Mutawakkilite monarchy started modernization efforts, however some elite circles opposed these reforms and were influenced by the Arab nationalism, which had grown since its start in the 1930s and spread to many parts of the Middle East. This influence of the ideology became apparent in 1962 when Imam Ahmad bin Yahya died. His son succeeded him, but army officers attempted to seize power, sparking the North Yemen Civil War. This war pitted the royalist partisans of the Mutawakkilite Kingdom and the supporters of the Yemen Arab Republic (YAR).

The YAR was established on September 27, 1962 when revolutionaries inspired by the Arab nationalist ideology of Gamal Abdel Nasser, who had consolidated power in Egypt, which was called the United Arab Republic at this time, deposed the newly crowned King Muhammad al-Badr.³⁶ These revolutionaries took control of Sana'a and established the Yemen Arab Republic.³⁷ In this conflict, Saudi Arabia and Jordan supported Badr's royalist forces Britain provided covert support. While the YAR troops were supported by the United Arab Republic (Egypt) and allegedly received warplanes from the Soviet Union³⁸. The conflict involved both foreign irregular and conventional forces. Nasser supported the republicans with as many as 70,000 Egyptian troops and chemical weapons. Despite several military moves and peace conferences, the war sank into stalemate. Conflict continued periodically until 1967 when Egyptian troops were withdrawn. In 1968, the royalists mounted a final siege on Sana'a; following this siege most of the opposing leaders reached reconciliation. In 1970, Saudi Arabia recognized the Yemen Arab Republic, which was known as North Yemen.

³⁶ Burrowes, Robert D. The Yemen Arab Republic's Legacy and Yemeni Unification. *Arab Studies Quarterly*, Vol. 14, No. 4 (Fall 1992), p. 43.

³⁷ Ibid.

³⁸ Sandler, Stanley. *Ground Warfare: The International Encyclopedia*. Vol.1 (2002): p. 977.

One of the important aspects of this war was the amount of foreign intervention. Starting with Egypt, Nasser had looked to a regime change in Yemen since 1957, and finally put his desires into practice in January 1962 by giving the Free Yemen Movement support in Egypt. As mentioned above, Saudi Arabia, Jordan, and Britain provided support for the royalist side. This involvement by foreign powers started a dynamic in Yemen that has continued until today.

The result of this civil war was the official creation of two nations in what is known today as the nation of Yemen, South Yemen or the People's Democratic Republic of Yemen (PDRY) and North Yemen or the Yemen Arab Republic (YAR). Unlike other nations, which have been divided or are divided, like East and West Germany or North and South Korea, the YAR and the PDRY remained relatively friendly, however relations were often strained. The PDRY was a communist state, which had one major political party, the Yemeni Socialist Party. As far as foreign support was concerned the PDRY established close ties with the Soviet Union, the People's Republic of China, Cuba, East Germany, and the Palestinian Liberation Organization.

While the PDRY was able to get the support of the Eastern Bloc of nations, the YAR was not able to get the same connections. In 1972, the two states fought a war; the war was a short lived and small proxy conflict, which was resolved with a ceasefire and negotiations brokered by the Arab League, where it was declared that reunification would occur.³⁹ However, these plans were put on hold in 1979, as the PDRY was finding communist rebels in the YAR, it was only through the intervention of the Arab League

³⁹ Halliday, Fred. *Revolution and Foreign Policy: The Case of South Yemen, 1967-1987*, Cambridge University Press, 2002, p. 30.

that fresh conflict was not started.⁴⁰ The goal of unity between the two nations was reaffirmed by the heads of state of the YAR and the PDRY at a summit meeting in Kuwait in 1979. In 1980, PDRY president Abdul Fattah Ismail resigned and went to exile in Moscow, having lost the confidence of his supporters in the Kremlin.⁴¹ His successor, Ali Nasir Muhammad, took a less interventionist stance towards the YAR.

War and Movement towards Unification

In 1986, a violent civil war started in the city of Aden within the PDRY. The conflict started after a failed coup and was rooted in ideological and tribal tensions between two factions within the ruling Yemeni Socialist Party (YSP). At this point the assistance from the Soviet Union was propping up a weak economy, however this was all about to change. With the political situation in the PDRY worsening, President Ali Nasir Muhammad invited hardliners in his Politburo to a meeting and had them executed by his personal guards. This along with the tribal tensions, contributed greatly to the start of the civil war, the war resulted in the flight of President Muhammad to the north and the death of 10,000 South Yemenis.⁴² In the aftermath of this war, the PDRY found itself having lost more than half of its aid from the Soviet Union, because of the break up of the USSR, and with the possibility of oil reserves found on the border of the YAR and the PDRY, Ali Salim al-Beidh, one of the few high ranking official who survived the civil war, moved the two nations towards unification.⁴³ In 1988, these moves towards unification started to pick up steam. They were driven by the worsening economic conditions in the

⁴⁰ Ibid. see p. 32.

⁴¹ Halliday, Fred. *Revolution and Foreign Policy: The Case of South Yemen, 1967-1987*, Cambridge University Press, 2002, p. 35.

⁴² Hurd, Robert and Noakes, Greg. North and South Yemen: Lead-up to the Break-up. *Washington Report on Middle Eastern Affairs*, July/August 1994. p. 48.

⁴³ Coswell, Alan. *2 Yemens Let Animosity Fizzle into Coziness*, *New York Times*, October 20, 1989.

PDRY, which were worsened by the domestic collapse of the nation's main benefactor, the USSR.⁴⁴ In December of 1989, North Yemeni President Ali Abdullah Saleh, an army officer who had come into power in 1978, and South Yemeni President al-Beidh, signed a draft constitution and agreed to a one-year timetable for unification.⁴⁵ This move unification of the YAR and the PDRY caused much doubt across the region and the world. Charles Dunbar, the U.S. ambassador to the YAR during this period, wrote,

“The reasons for these doubts were understandable. The period between South Yemeni independence on November 30, 1967, and the start of the final phase of unity negotiations—exactly 22 years later—was marked by dramatic unity initiatives, by two border wars between the YAR and the PDRY, by unending rhetoric about the “inevitably” of unification, and by growing cynicism among Yemeni officials predicted that, while there could be détente between north and south, real unity was at least 50 years away.”⁴⁶

There were multiple reasons as to why the leaders of the YAR and the PDRY were able to overcome the obstacles of mutual animosity and suspicion to unify Yemen. One of the major reasons was the global change that occurred with the collapse of the Soviet Union, this change resulted in Moscow dramatically changing its aid policies towards the allies it had in Aden, the capital of the PDRY.⁴⁷ This shift in the policy of the Kremlin resulted in the leadership of the PDRY feeling the need to strike the best deal with the YAR.

The other reasons for the unification were interrelated. In the 1980s, within the YAR, Saleh was left with a large amount of flexibility within the negotiations to unify Yemen. Saleh had a high personal stake in the unity initiative; also, the YAR had

⁴⁴ Hurd, Robert and Noakes, Greg. North and South Yemen: Lead-up to the Break-up. *Washington Report on Middle Eastern Affairs*, July/August 1994. p. 48.

⁴⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁶ Dunbar, Charles. The Unification of Yemen: Process, Politics, and Prospects. *The Middle East Journal*, Vol. 46, No. 3 (Summer, 1992), pp. 456-476.

⁴⁷ Ibid. see p. 463.

experienced a consolidation of power by the national government in the tribal areas. As Dunbar states, “Saleh’s greater maneuverability vis-à-vis the tribes grew out of the evolution of the complex Yemeni-Saudi relationship, which was an important element influencing the success of the initiative.”⁴⁸ To better understand how this unification came about, it would be helpful to take a brief look into the political and economic situations that existed in Sana’a and Aden in 1989.

By the fall of 1989, the government in Aden was facing a very limited set of options. The political situation was stagnant and divided, with multiple factions opposed to one another along regional and ideological lines.⁴⁹ As Dunbar continues, “These splits sharply limited the regime’s ability to develop a clear policy direction. The only success the new PDRY leadership could claim was the rapprochement with the YAR that produced the joint investment zone...”⁵⁰ The economy of the YAR was also suffering. Land and fisheries reforms had produced declines in agricultural production, and the port of Aden, which was one of the busiest global ports under British rule, played almost no role in global commerce. Industrial production had also declined, and despite the long time rule of a socialist government, more than half of the GNP still came from the private sector.⁵¹ The worst part of the PDRY’s economy could be seen in the petroleum sector. The discovery of oil in the YAR by the U.S. corporation Hunt Oil in 1984 had led to exports of 200,000 barrels of oil a day. The Soviets had also discovered oil in the north, right across the border in the PDRY, however all this resulted in was the YAR falling in debt for \$500 million with “sixty or so mostly non-functioning wells, a pipeline suspected

⁴⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁹ Ibid. see p. 464

⁵⁰ Ibid.

⁵¹ Ibid.

of leaking, an outmoded oil processing complex, and a few barrels of crude oil trucked sporadically to Aden's decrepit refinery."⁵²

All of this came with the global backdrop of one of the YAR's biggest international supporters breaking apart and cutting the aid that Aden received from Moscow. This military and economic aid that the Soviets had provided was vital to survival of the government in Aden.⁵³ The government in Aden pushed for limited economic liberalization in the hopes of revitalizing the national economy, however this move came to be seen as too little, too late and proved to be a failure. All of these factors greatly contributed to the leaders in Aden to take seriously the offer that the PDRY gave as far as unification was concerned. To understand this push for unification further, it would be helpful to look at the political dynamics, which were dominating Sana'a at this time. This brief overview will also allow for an understanding of struggle between the central government and tribal leaders, a struggle, which dominates Yemeni politics to this day.

Since the creation of the YAR in 1962, the feature that dominated North Yemeni politics "had been the struggle between the central government and tribal leaders, whose base of support lay primarily in the northern and eastern parts of the country."⁵⁴ The government in Sana'a had little control in the hinterlands after the creation of the YAR. The tribes controlled the roads via checkpoints; justice in these areas was tribal rather than governmental, and governmental social services were quite limited.⁵⁵ The tribes'

⁵² Ibid. see pp. 464-465

⁵³ Ibid.

⁵⁴ Ibid. see p. 467

⁵⁵ Ibid.

main opposition to the unification plan was that they considered the south to be an atheistic and alien entity.

In the 1980s the relationship between the government in Sana'a and the tribes began to slowly change. Through a conscientious effort the government extended its control over the tribal areas, extending its reach into the tribal strongholds in the northern and eastern areas.⁵⁶ The keys to the successful exertion of control in these areas were construction of schools and hospitals in the tribal areas; all of this was helped by the discovery of oil in the Marib province in central Yemen, which was in the heart of tribal territory.⁵⁷ These developments allowed the government to provide the jobs in the tribal regions that it could not provide before. This development, in turn, allowed Sana'a to get the loyalty of the tribal leaders and members. However, this is not to say that the tribes have been completely pacified, the tensions between them and the national government continue to this day, as will be explored in a later chapter.

The expansion of government authority in the tribal areas created a new dynamic in the relationship of the tribes and the government. This new relationship resulted in a change in the position of the tribal leaders. People, who were previously the major sources of power and patronage in their regions, were now vying for favors that the government was in a position to give.⁵⁸ This new relationship between the tribal leaders and the national government made it so the leaders of the tribes were much more willing to go along with the national government's major foreign policy maneuvers.⁵⁹ With the tribes willing to go along, the government in Sana'a led by President Saleh was able to

⁵⁶ Ibid.

⁵⁷ Ibid.

⁵⁸ Ibid. see p. 468

⁵⁹ Ibid.

have a freer hand than before to pursue the goal of unification. Thus, President Saleh was able to conduct the negotiations with the confidence that the push for unification would not provoke the tribes to create a crisis like they had in the past, a crisis that had led to changes of government in Sana'a.⁶⁰ As Dunbar points out, "The neutralization of tribal opposition to unity was probably the most important North Yemeni contribution to the success of the unification effort."⁶¹

Aside from having gained the loyalty of the tribes that was needed for the unification effort to go forward, Saleh had at least three major political interests in seeking unification in 1989. These interests show how unification essentially became a necessity for the government in Sana'a and thus ensured the marriage of two separate entities. The first reason that Saleh had was a personal one, he felt strongly, that if unification were to succeed, he would be the one to reap the political rewards for being the architect of the unification process. Second, Saleh was in desperate need for economic and political success. Both at home and abroad many of the economic success that Saleh was touting were failing.⁶² The elite of the YAR were realizing that no matter what Saleh was saying as far as the oil bonanza was concerned or any other economic progress that was being talked about, the nation remained one of the poorest in the world.⁶³ The government in Sana'a was anxious to change this perception and the unification with the PDRY would allow for the YAR to tap into the oil wealth that existed just south of its border.⁶⁴

⁶⁰ Ibid.

⁶¹ Ibid.

⁶² Ibid. p. 469

⁶³ Ibid.

⁶⁴ Ibid.

Finally, Saleh needed unity to strengthen the position of the national government vis-à-vis the tribes. In the YAR, tribal members made up about half of the population, which allowed them a significant voice in politics. To consolidate the government's power and to essentially 'dilute' the voice of the tribes, Saleh needed the introduction of 2 million South Yemenis to the polity.⁶⁵ This would, in turn, allow for the creation of a new country in which the tribes would not have that much power, since they would no longer command a majority. Saleh would, therefore, be able to have a country in which the tribes' ability to oppose the central government would be greatly limited.⁶⁶ The other benefit Saleh would accrue from the unification was the access to the much more disciplined southern army whose officers had no ties of loyalty to the tribes, unlike the ones in the YAR. This lack of loyalty would allow for the government to move against the tribes in case the need arose.⁶⁷ The roots of the divide between the national government and the tribes can be seen with these early policies.

Another point that should be explored in this early history of Yemen is the nation's relation with its northern neighbor, Saudi Arabia, a relationship that is also relevant to the present situation in Yemen. As pointed out in the introduction, Yemen has recently fallen into a crisis, which has put the country on the brink of a civil war. This conflict involves multiple parties, one of which is Saudi Arabia. However, the involvement of Saudi Arabia in the internal politics of its southern neighbor is nothing new. In fact, the Saudis have been involved with Yemen since its unification and even before that. In the days of the YAR and the PDRY, the involvement of Saudi Arabia made of a complex trilateral relationship. As Dunbar points out, there were multiple

⁶⁵ Ibid.

⁶⁶ Ibid.

⁶⁷ Ibid. p. 470

incidents and issues that caused the tension and the complexity in the relationship of the three nations. He states, the “Yemeni resentment caused by the military defeat and loss of territory to Saudi Arabia in the 1930s, Saudi backing for the royalists in the 1962-1970 North Yemeni revolution and civil war, and Riyadh’s suspicion of the Marxist regime in the PDRY and its pressure on Sana’a and Aden to reach a boundary agreement...”⁶⁸ had strained the relationship between the nations.

Even though the relationships were at best strained, Sana’a needed to maintain a good relationship with Riyadh. There were many reasons for this necessity, top of which lay the fact that until the Gulf crisis peaked in the latter end of 1990, Saudi Arabia was YAR’s leading donor.⁶⁹ Saudi Arabia also provided a welcome employment destination for about 1.5 million Yemenis; these Yemenis formed a much-needed source of foreign currency exchange for both the YAR and the PDRY.⁷⁰ By the end of the 1980s, the Yemeni-Saudi relationship had evolved to the point that there was very little Saudi opposition left to the move towards unification.⁷¹ As this opposition was fading, a concern grew amongst Yemenis about alleged Saudi opposition to the unification, this concern allowed for the negotiations to be sped up.⁷² As 1989 drew to a close, the main constraints to the unification of Yemen, Soviet support for the southern leadership and the ability of the northern tribes to block unification, had disappeared and a new nation was ready to be formed.

The Republic of Yemen was declared on May 22, 1990. Ali Abdullah Saleh of the north became the Head of State, and Ali Salim al-Beidh became the Head of

⁶⁸ Ibid.

⁶⁹ Ibid.

⁷⁰ Ibid.

⁷¹ Ibid.

⁷² Ibid.

Government. This new state and government agreed to a constitution in May 1990, and the populace ratified the constitution in May 1991.⁷³ This new constitution affirmed Yemen's commitment to free elections, a multiparty political system, the right to own private property, equality under the law, and the respect of basic human rights.⁷⁴ In April of 1993, the first Parliamentary elections were held, which were monitored by multiple international organizations.⁷⁵ With this unification, greater Yemen was under the control of one government for the first time in centuries, and the new constitution also held the promise of a government founded on stable principles, which the populace hoped would last.

However, the lasting tensions of the division continued to boil under the surface, until they came back. As the government consolidated its power, a new oil field was brought online in the Hadramaut Governorate in the south, many southerners started feeling that their land, under which existed most of the oil reserves, was illegally being appropriated as part of a conspiracy by the rulers in the north.⁷⁶ This issue along with other grievances, led to conflicts within the coalition government, which resulted in the self-imposed exile of Vice President Al-Beidh beginning in August 1993.⁷⁷ The resulting instability led to deterioration in general security that allowed for political rivals to settle scores and tribal elements to take advantage of the unstable situation. All of this paved the way for the coming civil war.

⁷³ Enders, Klaus-Stefan. *Yemen in the 1990s: From Unification to Economic Reform*. International Monetary Fund, 2001.

⁷⁴ Ibid.

⁷⁵ Ibid. p. 10.

⁷⁶ Ibid.

⁷⁷ al-Suwaidi, Jamal S. *The Yemeni War of 1994: Causes and Consequences*. Emirates Center for Strategic Studies and Research, 1995.

In this opening chapter, the historical division between North and South Yemen has been explained. However, through this analysis we have also seen the multiple strains of other divisions that continue to plague Yemen even though the official boundaries between the YAR and the PDRY have broken down. Overall, there exist three major divisions within Yemeni society, and this chapter has shown the various strains of those divisions. The first is the religious division, between the Zaydi Shia and the Sunnis in Yemen. This division manifested itself at the founding of the Kingdom of Yemen (North Yemen) under King Yahya and has undergirded the development of Yemen ever since. This religious division is seen even today within the societal and political makeup of the Yemeni state, the Zaydi Shia Houthis are pitted against Sunni tribes and AQAP, which also espouses radical Sunni beliefs.

However, this division isn't that clean either, traditionally speaking, Zaydi Shia and Shafi'i Sunnis have gotten along just fine.⁷⁸ Therefore, it would be wrong to paint the situation in Yemen with a broad brush simply along religious lines. For example, it would be erroneous to "say that Houthis = Zaydis, and, say, Al-Ahmar [another major tribe in Yemen] = Shafi'is. Or even worse, Houthis = Shias, and Al-Ahmar = Sunnis."⁷⁹ One issue with the clean divisions that one would want is that many in the Al-Ahmar tribe are, like the Houthis, followers of Zaydi Shi'ism.⁸⁰ One could, from reading what has just been stated, come to the conclusion that what is happening within Yemen is really a conflict within the Zaydi Shia, however, that would also be incorrect. If one were to put a religious element on the Houthis it would be that they espouse a more 'hardcore' or

⁷⁸ Al-Shamahi, Abubakr. 'Yemen is More Nuanced than 'Sunni' and 'Shia'. *Yemen Times*. 27 February 2014, <http://www.yementimes.com/en/1759/opinion/3540/Yemen-is-more-nuanced-than-'Sunni'-amp;%C2%A0'Shia'.htm>.

⁷⁹ Ibid.

⁸⁰ Ibid.

fundamentalist version of Zaydism.⁸¹ As was pointed out before, the Houthis were borne out of a desire of Zaydi revivalism, and they tend to see the other tribes as people who are Zaydi in name only. The story gets even more complicated as the Al-Ahmars have, in the past, accused the Houthis of secretly not being Zaydi anymore, and instead being Twelver Shia, the Shia who predominate Iran.⁸² This pulls in the political divisions that run through the Middle East, since by accusing the Houthis of being Twelver Shia, the Al-Ahmars stoke the regional fears of Iranian dominance and can paint themselves as the true defenders of Yemen and Zaydism.

This division bleeds into the second major division within Yemen, that of ethnicity. The ethnic division in Yemen was mentioned above through the Adnanis and the Qahtanis, two powerful families in Yemen who trace their lineage to two different ethnic roots. This ethnic division amongst the various tribes is one to keep in mind, and a division that will continue to manifest itself in the historical narrative. The tribes and their ethno-religious lineages form a very important part of Yemeni society, a part that has to be considered when looking into potential intervention in Yemen. The third major division within Yemen is the political one, this division is one that overlays the other two. Earlier, when discussing the division of North and South Yemen, it was shown how differing political ideologies led to the different nations being formed, and how the waning of some of those ideologies led to unification.

However, unification by no means erased the political divisions within Yemen, at best, unification simply put a cover on the divisions. The main political actor to come into power after unification, Ali Abdullah Saleh, brought an autocratic system of

⁸¹ Ibid.

⁸² Ibid.

governance that quieted the political divisions within Yemen through oppressive government control and force. Along with this system of governance, Saleh found himself in power when the western backers of his regime wanted a quiet Yemen and therefore backed him financially and politically. All of that ended with the revolution in 2011, and now we see the political divisions in Yemen laid bare. With a multitude of political actors vying for power, the situation on the ground is quite complex. The Houthis, and the weak national government, two parties that have differing political interests, are both up against the fundamentalist governance model that AQAP espouses. All of this is in the mix with the major international players, the U.S., Saudi Arabia, and Iran, who have their own political interests. There is also present a secessionist movement in southern Yemen based in Aden, which, because of unaddressed grievances arising from unification, want separation from the nation, all of these political actors and their interests make up a very complex political situation.

The three major divisions, religious, ethnic, and political, all combine and act separately to make the current situation in Yemen one that should cause great concern internationally. As we continue onto the next chapters and explore the historical development of Yemen, it would be wise to keep in mind these divisions. The importance of these divisions is not simply so one can appreciate the history of this troubled nation, but also because understanding these divisions and the complexities they create on the ground is key in formulating whatever response will be given to the current crisis.

CHAPTER IV

MODERN YEMEN

Civil War

As was stated in the last chapter, in 1990, the two separate nations of North Yemen and South Yemen were united under the flag of the Republic of Yemen. However tensions, stemming from the deep-seated political divisions, remained between the two regions. These tensions increased as the new national government based in Sana'a started consolidating its control by incorporating newly found oil fields in the south. This in turn, made many southerners feel that the national government, dominated by people who were in the government in North Yemen, was illegally taking their land in a bid to retain power over the south. This issue, led to a political crisis that saw the self imposed exile of Vice President al-Beidh.⁸³ This exile began a series of events that resulted in Yemen falling into a civil war. This is what will be explored in this section, along with the effects this civil war had on the development of Yemen and how lingering animosities between the north and south still affect Yemeni society today.

However, before the actual war is explored, it would be helpful to look into the political situation, as it existed right after unification occurred. Unification brought about an integrated government in Yemen, nevertheless this was an uneasy integration at best. While the presidency went to Ali Abdullah Saleh and the Vice Presidency to al-Beidh, the post of prime minister was given to a veteran southern politician, Haider Abu Bakr al-

⁸³ Hurd, Robert, and Greg Noakes. "North and South Yemen: Lead-up to the Break-up." *Washington Report on Middle Eastern Affairs* (1994): 48. Web. 23 May 2015. <<http://www.wrmea.org/1994-july-august/north-and-south-yemen-lead-up-to-the-break-up.html>>.

Attas.⁸⁴ The cabinet seats were halved between the members of Saleh's General People's Congress (GPC) and Beidh's Yemeni Socialist Party (YSP).⁸⁵ During this integration period, a decision was made, which would come back to haunt the young nation. It was decided by the national government, that the integration of the northern and southern armed forces would be delayed, thus, while 15,000 southern troops were moved to the north and 8,000 northern soldiers posted to the south, the armies remained under separate commands.⁸⁶ At this point, the tensions within the new government were becoming apparent, with increased conflicts amongst the governing elite. Although the former PDRY was larger geographically, the ex-YAR held 80% of the estimated 13 million Yemenis; this caused the southern leadership to push for a speedy integration so that it could consolidate its political power.⁸⁷

Additionally, the introduction of ex-Marxist southern leaders into an already fragile network of party and tribal leaders in the north caused considerable political disruption.⁸⁸ The first multiparty elections were held in April of 1993, and they resulted in a lopsided victory for the northern GPC with the southern YSP coming in a disappointing third place.⁸⁹ These elections also brought in a third political player, the Al-Islah party, led by the influential Sheikh Abdullah al-Ahmar of the Hashid tribal

⁸⁴ Ibid.

⁸⁵ Ibid.

⁸⁶ Ibid.

⁸⁷ Ibid.

⁸⁸ Ibid.

⁸⁹ "Yemen: The 1994 Civil War, Houthi Insurgency, and Political Transition." Berkley Center for Religion, Peace, and World Affairs, n.d. Web. 23 May 2015.
<<http://berkleycenter.georgetown.edu/essays/yemen-the-1994-civil-war-houthi-insurgency-and-political-transition>>.

confederation, who became speaker of the parliament.⁹⁰ Therefore, the 50-50 split that existed between the GPC and the YSP became an uneven three-way partnership.

These elections left the southern political leaders fearful of northern dominance in the new political makeup of Yemen; this fear resulted in the unsworn Vice President leaving Sana'a in August of 1993.⁹¹ Vice President al-Beidh set up his base in Aden, the southern port city in Yemen, and issued a series of conditions for his return to Sana'a; the conditions centered on the security of the YSP. However, Beidh's prolonged absence paralyzed the newly formed national government in Sana'a, within the political turmoil, a campaign of assassination claimed about 150 YSP leaders and heightened tension throughout Yemen.⁹² Initially, moves were made towards reconciliation, early on, Beidh suggest that both him and Saleh resign to break the impasse, the Jordanians also stepped in to broker a deal which was signed in February, however that deal collapsed as forces from the north and south exchanged sporadic gunfire.⁹³ The outbreak of open fighting between the two armies started on May 4th, with the southern forces in the north being attacked, with this fighting, President Saleh declared a 30-day state of emergency and dismissed all southerners from the government.⁹⁴

The seeds of this war had been laid much before the actual start of the conflict. Many experts at the time of the unification were skeptical about the nation actually being viable as a united country. There were many reasons for doubt; but the major issue was

⁹⁰ Hurd, Robert, and Greg Noakes. "North and South Yemen: Lead-up to the Break-up." *Washington Report on Middle Eastern Affairs* (1994): 48. Web. 23 May 2015. <<http://www.wrmea.org/1994-july-august/north-and-south-yemen-lead-up-to-the-break-up.html>>.

⁹¹ Ibid.

⁹² Ibid.

⁹³ Ibid.

⁹⁴ Ibid.

the increasingly poisonous conflicts between the northern and southern elites.⁹⁵ At this point, it would be valid to point out that a conflict that has divided Yemen to this day was borne not out of a division amongst the people, but a division amongst the elites in society. Both Saleh and Beidh were strong personalities who saw deficiencies in the way the newly unified Yemen was setup. Beidh saw Saleh as unresponsive to the concerns of the south, particularly to the concerns of the YSP, and was determined to amass as much power as possible.⁹⁶ Saleh contributed to this anger by failing to arrest and punish the people who killed YSP leaders, among whom were some of Beidh's extended family, he also made the move of sacking the YSP leadership, which angered Beidh further.⁹⁷ Saleh, on the other hand, believed that Beidh and the YSP held unrealistic aspirations for the south in a unified Yemen, with only a fifth of the population, the south wanted to maintain a 50 percent stake in the government.⁹⁸

Alongside the conflicts amongst the elites, there also existed the problem of the unmet expectations the south had for unification. One of the major reasons for the push for unification in the south was the access to the stronger northern economy that would occur, however, because of Saleh's support of Saddam Hussein on the 1990 Persian Gulf War, Saudi Arabia and the other Gulf countries expelled more than half the Yemeni workers working in those states.⁹⁹ This expulsion of workers made it so that the expatriate remittances that the northern economy relied on plummeted.¹⁰⁰ The other economic factor that had formed a major reason for the push for unification was Yemeni

⁹⁵ Ibid.

⁹⁶ Ibid.

⁹⁷ Ibid.

⁹⁸ Ibid.

⁹⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid.

oil production. There were two issues within this larger issue of oil production, one problem was the lack of production increases that occurred because of Saudi Arabia's warnings for foreign companies against doing business in Yemen because above mentioned support of Saddam by Saleh.¹⁰¹ The other was the recognition by the south that although the north held multiple natural gas reserves, the largest oil deposits actually existed in the former PDRY.¹⁰² This made it so Beidh realized that the north, instead of becoming the economic boon that he thought it would be after unification, had become a drag on the economy of the south.

If the divisions had stayed at the elite levels, the civil war would have been the end of the issue. However, the divisions spread into the populace, which, combined with the violence of the civil war made the conflicts seeped into the very social fabric of Yemeni society. This dynamic made it so the divisions that could have been relegated to history made it all the way to present and affect Yemeni society and politics today. The reason for the divisions were felt at the societal level was fairly simple; the fact was that the former YAR and the former PDRY were, in reality, different societies. These societies shared some aspects, but differed in some key ones also. The differences between the two societies were not going to simply be resolved through unification, especially a unification that had deep conflicts amongst the political elite.

There were many differing societal norms between the YAR and the PDRY, which, upon unification, the people came face to face with. For example, the north was and is a socially conservative, and largely tribal society with numerous centers of power, whereas the south retains much of the socialist and secularist outlook of its Marxist past,

¹⁰¹ Ibid.

¹⁰² Ibid.

along with its experience of a heavily centralized economy.¹⁰³ One example of the differing social norms that existed between north and south Yemen is the amount of women in leadership positions. The Washington, D.C. based National Democratic Institute for International Affairs stated in a report it published during the 1993 elections that, “There are several female judges in southern Yemen but none in northern Yemen, and there is apparently only one practicing female lawyer in northern Yemen.”¹⁰⁴ The report goes on to mention how this under-representation, according to most Yemenis, of women in positions of leadership is because of the conservative, tribal social structure and the most women, especially in the north, are not encouraged to complete their education.¹⁰⁵ In the south, the situation was different where promoting education for women was a government priority, unfortunately at the time of the unification, this trend was not seen in the unified government.¹⁰⁶

This issue of the lack of women in leadership positions is not one to be simply brushed aside, instead the issue points to deeper social differences in the norms of the north and the south. All of these differences in social norms coalesced during unification and forced two societies with similar cultures to realize the differences between social norms amongst them. As unification occurred, many in the north, especially, the Islamists and the rural population, feared the impact of the secularist south, southerners were afraid that the new north dominated government in Sana’a would roll back the PDRY’s liberal

¹⁰³ Ibid.

¹⁰⁴ Wollack, Kenneth D. *Promoting Popular Participation in Yemen's 1993 Elections*. Rep. Washington, D.C.: National Democratic Institute for International Affairs, 1994. Print. p. 49

¹⁰⁵ Ibid.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid.

social legislation.¹⁰⁷ These fears were realized when; in May of 1992 the Saleh's Presidential Council passed a personal status law that revoked a woman's right to sue for divorce unless she could prove abuse.¹⁰⁸ These differences in social norms combined with the contentious political battles amongst the elites made it clear that the unified nation of Yemen was not one that could stay together.

The actual fighting in the war was characterized by the resistance in the south entrenching itself for a drawn out fight.¹⁰⁹ Although the northern forces outnumbered the forces of the south, the south used its greater air power to good effect.¹¹⁰ In the battle for Aden, which many observers thought would fall quickly, the air power of the south bogged down the offensive of the northern forces for days, which allowed the south to regroup and strengthen defenses around Aden.¹¹¹

The leadership in Sana'a dismissed Aden's pleas for a cease-fire as a delaying tactic, and as a result Beidh declared the independence of the southern Democratic Republic of Yemen (DRY) on May 21, 1994.¹¹² There was no international recognition of the DRY, and in mid-May, northern forces began a push toward Aden, with the key city of Ataq, which allowed access to Yemen's oil fields, falling to the northern forces on May 24.¹¹³ The United Nations Security Council adopted Resolution 924 on June 1, 1994 calling for an end to the fighting and a cease-fire, which was established on June 6, but

¹⁰⁷ Hurd, Robert, and Greg Noakes. "North and South Yemen: Lead-up to the Break-up." *Washington Report on Middle Eastern Affairs* (1994): 48. Web. 23 May 2015. <<http://www.wrmea.org/1994-july-august/north-and-south-yemen-lead-up-to-the-break-up.html>>.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid.

¹¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹¹ Ibid.

¹¹² Ibid.

¹¹³ Boustany, Nora. "North Yemeni Troops Seize Oil Field Center; Region Controls Country's Chief Resource." *The Washington Post* 25 May 1994: n. pag. Web. 28 May 2015. <<http://www.highbeam.com/doc/1P2-892404.html>>.

only lasted six hours; at this time the peace talks that were going on in Cairo also fell apart.¹¹⁴ The northern forces entered Aden on July 4, and fully captured the city in about three days, most of the resistance quickly collapsed and the top southern military and political leaders fled into exile.¹¹⁵ Official figures estimated between 7,000 and 10,000 casualties from the fighting.¹¹⁶

One of the other elements in this war had been the foreign involvement. Yemenis not new to foreign powers being involved, and this situation was no different. The regional powers quickly chose sides in the conflict, with Saudi Arabia and the other Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) states, minus Qatar, tilted towards Beidh and the south.¹¹⁷ Most analysts and experts at that time agreed that this official stance by Saudi Arabia and the Gulf nations was borne out of the distaste they felt towards Saleh's support for Saddam in the Persian Gulf War, this made it so that very few Saudis were comfortable with the idea of Saleh ruling a single, strong state at their southern border.¹¹⁸ Alongside this official support, many wealthy Saudi families have family ties to the southern Hadramaut region in Yemen, and may also have offered clandestine support to Beidh's forces.¹¹⁹

This support for the south originating from Saudi Arabia and other Gulf nations is not something that only happened during this first civil war in Yemen, it is a support base that has continued to this day. In fact, looking at the current conflict within Yemen, the

¹¹⁴ Lawless, Richard I. "Yemen: History." *The Middle East and North Africa 2004*. 50th ed. London: Europa Publications, 2003. 1207-238. Print.

¹¹⁵ Ibid. p. 1222

¹¹⁶ "Saleh down Plays Yemeni War Death Toll." Online posting. *Agence France-Presse*. N.p., n.d. Web. 28 May 2015. <<http://www.writeopinions.com/1994-civil-war-in-yemen>>.

¹¹⁷ Hurd, Robert, and Greg Noakes. "North and South Yemen: Lead-up to the Break-up." *Washington Report on Middle Eastern Affairs* (1994): 48. Web. 23 May 2015. <<http://www.wrmea.org/1994-july-august/north-and-south-yemen-lead-up-to-the-break-up.html>>.

¹¹⁸ Ibid.

¹¹⁹ Ibid.

key support that the non-Houthi forces are receiving is coming from Saudi Arabia going as far as the Saudis getting directly involved in military activities. The familial connections of the Saudi elite with the people in the southern Yemen is something that has to be kept in mind when looking at the dynamics of the current conflict, and potential ways to resolve it. With Saleh, his support base was limited to the small support that Saddam's regime in Iraq could provide in return for Saleh's support during the Persian Gulf War. However, this support was limited to Iraqi newspapers starting a print campaign against King Fahd of Saudi Arabia and some expertise provided by the Iraqi military.¹²⁰

Overall, this civil war at the outset of unification sowed the seeds of division and strife deep within the Yemeni social fabric. These seeds of division would continue to plague Yemen as it entered the modern period of the late 1990s. Saleh had won the war, but had inherited a Yemen that was held together by force. It was a broken nation, a nation which had suffered greatly because of the conflict, this new Yemen was one that lacked the conditions for a strong centralized government, and Saleh had very few options as far as coaxing the south to come along with economic incentives, because this would have angered the northern tribes.¹²¹ The southern half of Yemen was one in which infrastructure worth millions of dollars had been destroyed because of the fighting, with a populace that had suffered great personal costs because of the war.¹²² Other costs of the fleeing of foreign investment capital, and the leaving of foreign resident community, most of which worked in crucial areas such as health, education, construction, and

¹²⁰ Ibid.

¹²¹ Ibid.

¹²² Ibid.

petroleum services.¹²³ On top of all of this, Saleh had gotten himself a Yemen that was alienated from both the regional and global community, because of his support of Saddam. The work of the four years that had been put in to building a united Yemen had been destroyed in a matter of weeks and whatever goodwill had been fostered between the north and south had also been lost.¹²⁴

The results of the civil war had been bad, however, it should not be a surprise that the civil war broke out in the first place. The Yemen that was created at unification was never truly unified in the first place since the divisions were present at two levels. The first division existed at the political level, amongst the elites, specifically Saleh and Beidh. Alongside the personal political divisions between Saleh and Beidh there existed the economic and political divisions between the north and the south, especially amongst the YSP and the GPC.

The secondary set of divisions existed at the societal level. With the north and south having differing sets of political, economic, and social norms amongst themselves. This set of divisions was highlighted by the difference that existed between a predominantly conservative and Islamist north versus a secularist south. In the north the population was generally rural, and therefore had a much different economic lifestyle than the south, which existed under a centralized economic system. This dual division made it so the nation of Yemen was never really unified, and the civil war only exacerbated this issue. By defeating the south, Saleh did force a unified Yemen to exist, but he did not meet the deeply held southern interests. These interests would be covered up under the authoritarian rule of the Saleh regime, only to fester and continue to create

¹²³ Ibid.

¹²⁴ Ibid.

tension that would erupt in 2011 in the midst of the Arab Spring and bring about the current crisis in Yemen.

Continuing Instability and Conflict

The years after the civil war were marked with Saleh and his GPC consolidating power and control over Yemen. In the first parliamentary elections held post-civil war in 1997, the GPC won a landslide victory against the Islamic Al-Islah party; the GPC took 187 of the 301 seats contested.¹²⁵ The YSP boycotted this election alleging that the government had harassed and arrested their party workers.¹²⁶ These allegations against Saleh's government were not ones to be taken lightly, the issues that the YSP faced further deepened the divisions that existed between the north and south. With this, the nation that had been unified through a civil war found itself mired in political instability.

In 1999, Yemen held its first presidential elections; the main contenders for the seat were Ali Abdullah Saleh of the GPC and an Independent candidate Najeeb Qahtan Al-Sha'abi.¹²⁷ Saleh won the election with 96 percent of the vote; the YSP again boycotted the election.¹²⁸ With both the parliamentary and the presidential elections behind him Saleh had consolidated his control over the nation, however, given that the YSP had boycotted both of the major elections, the serious divisions in Yemen remained. During the 1990s, Yemen had essentially become a pariah state, with very little support or connections of even the Gulf nations in its neighborhood. The reason for this status

¹²⁵ "Yemen Leader's Party Dominates Elections." *The New York Times* 8 May 1997: n. pag. *Nytimes.com*. Web. 30 May 2015. <<http://www.nytimes.com/1997/05/08/world/yemen-leader-s-party-dominates-elections.html>>.

¹²⁶ "Yemen's Ruling Party Proclaims Victory amid Claims of Fraud." *The Indian Express* [New Delhi] 02 May 1997: n. pag. *Indianexpress.com*. Web. 30 May 2015.

¹²⁷ *Elections in Asia: A Data Handbook*. Ed. Dieter Nohlen, Florian Grotz, and Christof Hartmann. Vol. 1. Oxford: Oxford UP, 2011. 301-10. Print.

¹²⁸ *Ibid.*

was the ill-fated decision by Saleh to support Saddam Hussein in the Persian Gulf War. Because of this support, Yemen had not only lost the backing of Saudi Arabia, but also the support of the United States, which had put its relations with Yemen in a diplomatic freeze.

This situation that Yemen found itself in did not bode well for its economy. With the support of Saudi Arabia and Kuwait gone, the weak Yemeni economy became weaker. Added to this was the lack of support coming in from the West, and for a nation which had depended mostly on aid from other nations in the region and the world to support its economy, Yemen found itself in dire economic straits. In 1996, the International Monetary Fund (IMF) granted Yemen a \$190 million stand-by credit facility, and the following year it approved two funding facilities that increased the country's credit by approximately US\$500 million.¹²⁹ The funding was contingent on Yemen's adoption of stringent economic reforms, a requirement that the country had limited success in fulfilling. As a result, the IMF suspended lending to Yemen from late 1999 until February 2001.¹³⁰ These economic conditions meant that Yemen would face a bleak future, and with the internal divisions that existed within the nation, the situation was rife for conflict to begin. The conditions on the ground in Yemen were made much more difficult with the poor economy also.

By the end of the 1990s Yemen had gained a reputation for being one of the poorest, if not the poorest, nations in the Middle East. However, as the new millennium dawned, a new force would make its mark in the troubled history of this nation and pull it into the global conflict that would become known as the “War on Terror”. This force was

¹²⁹ United States of America. Library of Congress. Federal Research Division. *Country Profile: Yemen*. N.p., Aug. 2008. Web. 2 June 2015. <<http://lcweb2.loc.gov/frd/cs/profiles/Yemen.pdf>>.

¹³⁰ Ibid.

not one that appeared suddenly. The seeds for the rise of al-Qa'ida in Yemen, which would later become known as al-Qa'ida in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP), had been laid much earlier, in the 1980s when the PDRY and the YAR were still two separate nations. Saleh had established and supported an Islamist insurgency in South Yemen, and Osama bin Laden himself was asked to establish the “volunteer” mujahideen¹³¹ units to bolster the ranks of the anti-Communist insurgency in Aden.¹³²

The history of the rise of AQAP is tied with the history of the rise of Islamic terrorism coming out of the Soviet war in Afghanistan in the 1980s. However, it is also tied up to the history of South Yemen and the history of one of the most powerful tribes in the south. This history will show not only the rise of an increasingly dangerous branch of al-Qa'ida but also how societally Yemen had the ingredients necessary for such a potent insurgency to grow. With this analysis we will see reach of AQAP and the complexity that this group adds to the current crisis in Yemen.

CHAPTER V

TERROR COMES TO YEMEN

The Rise of AQAP

Before diving into the history of al-Qa'ida in Yemen, it would be useful to take a moment to understand why it is important to explore this history. Yemen is a nation in which history plays a great role in the present and inevitably affects decisions that pertain to the future. The end goal of this work is for it to assist in the formulation of the

¹³¹ Mujahideen is an Arabic term and is the plural form of Mujahid, the term for one engaged in Jihad. In this context the term is used to refer to the guerrilla type military outfits that were made famous by the Muslim Afghan warriors in the Soviet war in Afghanistan in the 1980s.

¹³² Bodansky, Yossef. *Bin Laden: The Man Who Declared War on America*. Roseville, CA: Prima, 2001. Print.

resolution to the current crisis that has engulfed the nation of Yemen. The present crisis is one that is rooted very much in the past and therefore, any attempt to resolve it via negotiation and diplomacy will *have* to be informed by this past. The current divisions, both political and social, the tribal animosities, and even the current presence of al-Qa'ida all have their roots in the past within this nation. If this past history is not explored in detail and analyzed, no amount of involvement in the present or the future will completely resolve the crisis. Along with this exploration of history, this chapter will also analyze AQAP and how the group continues to be so resilient in the country.

Many people in the west think that al-Qa'ida first showed its face in 2000 when the group carried out the attack on the USS *Cole* that killed 17 U.S. Navy personnel in Aden. This is incorrect, jihad in Yemen, as it was pointed out above, had its beginning in the 1980s when Saleh used returning mujahideen from Afghanistan to fuel an insurgency in the South Yemen. However, even this story goes back further than that. One of the major players in the insurgency against the PDRY was Tariq al-Fadhli, a member of the powerful al-Fadhli tribe and the son of the last sultan of Aden, Nasir bin Abdullah al-Fadhli.¹³³ The elder al-Fadhli was the leader of the al-Fadhli tribe and the last sultan of Aden, who ruled vast areas of the southern Yemeni province of Abyan.¹³⁴ After the British pulled out of South Yemen in 1967, however, the elder al-Fadhli lost his lands and power to the new rulers of South Yemen, the Marxists of the YSP.¹³⁵ The al-Fadhli family moved to Saudi Arabia, where Tariq grew up, but abandoned his education and

¹³³ Ali, Rafid Fadhil. "The Jihadis and the Cause of South Yemen: A Profile of Tariq Al-Fadhli." *Terrorism Monitor* 7.35 (2009): n. pag. 19 Nov. 2009. Web. 3 June 2015.

<http://www.jamestown.org/single/?tx_ttnews%5Btt_news%5D=35757&no_cache=1#.VW6dx1tH02w>.

¹³⁴ Ibid.

¹³⁵ Ibid.

joined the mujahideen movement in Afghanistan fighting against the Soviet forces.¹³⁶

Yemen currently faces a secessionist movement in the south called the Southern Movement; this movement will be discussed in detail in a later section. However, it is worth mentioning that the roots of the Southern Movement lie in the taking of the al-Fadhli tribe's land by the YSP, therefore any resolution to the current conflict in Yemen will have to involve the Southern Movement and their needs will have to be met.

The Islamic Jihad in Yemen (IJY)

The story of jihad being established in Yemen continued during the civil war that was fought between the North and the South after unification. At this point Saleh turned to Tariq al-Fadhli and instructed him to join the fight against the South immediately.¹³⁷ The assistance that the jihadis led by al-Fadhli provided was vital for the north being successful in the war, and al-Fadhli was awarded a senior position in Saleh's new government.¹³⁸ However, during this same time period, many mujahideen were returning from Afghanistan and were joining the fight against South Yemen, these returning Yemenis were joined by Arab veterans of the Afghan war, foremost among them Osama bin Laden, who advocated a central role for Yemen in global jihad.¹³⁹ A corps of jihadis who had trained under Bin Laden in Afghanistan formed the militant group Islamic Jihad in Yemen (IJY), which existed from 1990-1994, one of several AQAP predecessors.¹⁴⁰ The IJY was comprised of Yemenis and other Arabs who were returning from the Afghan war, the majority of returning Yemenis integrated into society without much of an issue,

¹³⁶ Ibid.

¹³⁷ Ibid.

¹³⁸ Ibid.

¹³⁹ CFR.org Staff. "CFR Backgrounders: Al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP)." Council on Foreign Relations, 19 Mar. 2015. Web. 3 June 2015. <<http://www.cfr.org/yemen/al-qaeda-arabian-peninsula-aqap/p9369>>.

¹⁴⁰ Ibid.

however, a small minority returned from Afghanistan committed to violent regime change throughout the Arab world.¹⁴¹ For many of these returning warriors, the conditions of jihad seemed strongest at home, the Yemeni veterans of the Afghan war quickly joined a disparate mix of royalist, Wahhabi, tribal and disaffected southern elements, all of whom were unified by their dislike of the PDRY's socialist regime.¹⁴²

This group formed what would become the core of the IJY, however, a more important and dangerous individual was also present amongst these veterans and he was becoming one the main financial backers of the IJY. The involvement of bin Laden in Yemen during this period allowed for two things to occur. First, he became the main source of funding for the IJY, as was noted by Noman Benotman, one of bin Laden's colleagues and a later head of the Libyan Islamic Fighting Group, bin Laden began spending, "a lot of money [on the jihad in Yemen] in '88, '89, '90," diverting resources, arms and recruits from Afghanistan to southern Yemen.¹⁴³ Second, it gave the mujahideen across the Arab world returning from Afghanistan a cause to gather around and join. Bin Laden financed this fight in southern Yemen from his apartment in Jeddah, and on the ground Tariq al-Fadhli emerged as the leader of this group of Afghan veterans.¹⁴⁴

However, this jihad to remove the socialist regime in southern Yemen would be short-lived, as was explained in an earlier section, eventually both the PDRY and the YAR unified. Although this unification physically brought two nations together, the unity was far from perfect. Many of the YSP leaders retained important seats in the new

¹⁴¹ Koehler-Derrick, Gabriel, ed. *A False Foundation? AQAP, Tribes and Ungoverned Spaces in Yemen*. Rep. West Point, NY: Combating Terrorism Center, 2011. Print. p. 22.

¹⁴² Ibid.

¹⁴³ Ibid.

¹⁴⁴ Ibid. p. 23

government and the fight that the IJY had launched was deemed unfinished. In late 1992, the IJY was accused of organizing bombing in Aden, which had occurred in December.¹⁴⁵ The IJY continued its violent strategy against Marxist officials in the government, and by the elections in 1993, more than 150 Politburo officials were dead.¹⁴⁶

At this point, Yemen descended into a civil war, which was covered in an earlier section. Members of the IJY joined the fight on the side of the northern forces, and took over Aden on July 4th, sending southern leaders fleeing into neighboring countries, three days after this takeover, the civil war officially ended.¹⁴⁷ With this involvement in the conflict, the IJY had shown that they were a force to be reckoned with, and had effectively, established a jihadi movement in Yemen. However, the defeat of the socialists in the civil war did not achieve enough to meet the expectations the jihadis in Yemen had. Bin Laden and the other jihadis had the expectation that the fall of the socialist regime in Yemen would be a harbinger of the fall of other secular regimes in the Middle East. Bin Laden himself captured this sentiment when he wrote; “The defeat of the communists is a rejection of atheist regimes across the region.”¹⁴⁸ Nonetheless, the wish that bin Laden and the other jihadis had did not come true, in fact, in the aftermath of the civil war, the Socialist Party returned to the Yemeni parliament and continues to remain a major fixture in the country’s politics at present.¹⁴⁹

¹⁴⁵ Ibid.

¹⁴⁶ Ibid.

¹⁴⁷ Ibid. p. 24

¹⁴⁸ Laden, Osama Bin. "The Banishment of Communism from the Arabian Peninsula: The Episode and the Proof." *CTC Harmony Database*. Combating Terrorism Center at West Point, n.d. Web. 18 June 2015. <<https://www.ctc.usma.edu/v2/wp-content/uploads/2013/10/Letter-from-Bin-Laden-Translation.pdf>>.

¹⁴⁹ Koehler-Derrick, Gabriel, ed. *A False Foundation? AQAP, Tribes and Ungoverned Spaces in Yemen*. Rep. West Point, NY: Combating Terrorism Center, 2011. Print. p. 24.

The end of the civil war brought an end to the IJY as a semi-organized jihadi movement, two of the major leaders of the group, al-Fadli and Jamal al-Nahdi, were appointed to government positions in exchange for disbanding the IJY.¹⁵⁰ This move was not well received by many in the group, both local and foreign Islamists, unhappy southerners and northern tribesmen set about administering Islamic government in parts of southern Yemen.¹⁵¹ At this point, the Yemeni government was negotiating with IJY members as to what would happen after the group's disbanding, however negotiations broke down over demands for military employment and the imposing of shari'a law in Aden.¹⁵² In response to the breakdown in negotiations, the IJY seized a security outpost in Aden's Crater City in July of 1994, however this uprising was put down quickly.¹⁵³ This uprising and the response of the Yemeni government was the beginning of the end of the IJY, by the end of July twelve members of the IJY were reportedly dead, the rest were either arrested or hiding in Abyan and other governorates east of Sana'a.¹⁵⁴ Many of the former IJY members who were hiding in Abyan would coalesce around a new group of jihad that was formed by another veteran of the Afghan war, the Army of Aden Abyan (AAA).¹⁵⁵

Army of Aden Abyan (AAA)

After putting down the uprising at Crater City, the national government deported thousands of foreign Arab Afghans in 1995 and 1996, and offered many of the former

¹⁵⁰ Ibid.

¹⁵¹ Ibid. p. 25

¹⁵² Ibid.

¹⁵³ Ibid.

¹⁵⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵⁵ Ibid.

IJY members civilian posts in the government, however many resisted.¹⁵⁶ Among them was Zain al-Abidin Abubakr al-Midhar, who was a veteran of the Afghan war, and quickly emerged as a spokesman for what remained of the IJY. Although it is unclear when al-Midhar created the AAA, it is believed that at sometime in 1994 he relocated to the Abyan governorate to rebuild the IJY.¹⁵⁷ In 1995, with the help of Abu Hamza al-Masri, al-Midhar established a training camp in Abyan, filling the camp with disenfranchised southerners, former IJY members and unaffiliated Arab Afghans.¹⁵⁸ At the same time Abu Hamza reportedly set up funding for the newly formed AAA from London through his Finsbury Park Mosque.¹⁵⁹

In March of 1998, the AAA established a training camp near the capital of the Abyan governorate, Zinjibar, in a move that angered irritated local farmers who notified the authorities.¹⁶⁰ A month later the government in Sana'a launched an assault on the base, the raid failed, and resulted in the release of the first public statement by the AAA, soon after this statement a second statement was released, sent directly to the Agence France-Presse, calling for 'total war' against U.S. interests in Yemen and pledging the AAA's support for Osama bin Laden.¹⁶¹ Before continuing with the explorations of the evolution of jihadi groups in Yemen, it would be helpful to take a step back and see what was occurring at this time. With the statement cited above, the AAA had given Islamic extremism in Yemen a global dimension. Whereas the IJY had kept its jihad local, and firmly rooted in the desire to change the government within Yemen into an Islamic one,

¹⁵⁶ Ibid. p. 26

¹⁵⁷ Ibid.

¹⁵⁸ Ibid. p. 27

¹⁵⁹ Ibid.

¹⁶⁰ Ibid.

¹⁶¹ Ibid.

the AAA had turned its attention to the United States. With the ever-growing clout and support of bin Laden, this dynamic would only grow.

During this period there was a weak stalemate between the Yemeni government and the AAA. During this stalemate, there were ongoing negotiations between al-Midhar and the national government, however by December 1998, those talks had broken down.¹⁶² Even a ceasefire that was brokered by a representative of bin Laden himself could not hold up because of the continued clashes between government troops and AAA fighters.¹⁶³ The AAA, had, by this time tapped into the growing resentment of the populace against the national government, which was failing to provide them with basic services. This issue was brought to the forefront when the government rejected the demands put forth by al-Midhar to increase basic social services. This inability of the national government to provide basic services to parts of the population is something that is present even today; one of the major reasons for the continuing conflict in Yemen is that there exists a large part of the population that remains disenfranchised.

The Yemeni government continued battling with the AAA into January of 1999, by this time many of fighters of the AAA had been arrested and charged with plotting to attack Western hotels in Yemen. Among those arrested were six male Britons linked to Abu Hamza and his Finsbury Park Mosque, these arrests showed the international reach of the AAA.¹⁶⁴ These arrests and other raids spelled the end of the AAA as an organized group; eventually al-Midhar was arrested, tried and executed by a firing squad in Sana'a.¹⁶⁵ However, the end of the AAA did not mean the end of violent jihad within

¹⁶² Ibid.

¹⁶³ Ibid. p. 28.

¹⁶⁴ Ibid.

¹⁶⁵ Ibid.

Yemen, in fact the work that the AAA had done was a boon to the future of jihad in Yemen. It should be remembered that at this point, globally, Islamic terrorism was on the rise, in 1998, U.S. embassies in both Kenya and Tanzania had been bombed. Both bombings were linked to Osama bin Laden and his newly formed al-Qa'ida organization. Bin Laden had established himself as a major financier of violent jihad to the point that by the spring of 1998, the Clinton administration had approved a plan to capture him.¹⁶⁶

As mentioned above, the AAA had done what neither the IJY nor any other jihadi group in Yemen had done before. The Army of Aden Abyan had connected local grievances to a broader discourse of Western expansion into Muslim lands, and the resulting humiliation of Muslims, with this the AAA had provided the clearest of templates for future al-Qa'ida affiliated groups in Yemen, including AQAP.¹⁶⁷ This idea of an international jihad is one that formed a core part of the overall operational plans of al-Qa'ida and its branches. Furthermore, both the AAA and al-Qa'ida strengthened this narrative through the citing of several hadiths¹⁶⁸ demanding the expulsion of polytheism from the Arabian Peninsula.¹⁶⁹ All of this combined to prove a foundation on which al-Qa'ida could come into and start operations. This foundation that al-Qa'ida would step in and take advantage of was laid on the basis of government inaction and inability to provide for the diverse set of interests within the nation. This set of diverse interests, ranging from the interests of the southern and northern tribal leaders, to those of the various political parties vying for power, the interests of average citizens of Yemen and

¹⁶⁶ Coll, Steve. *Ghost Wars: The Secret History of the CIA, Afghanistan and Bin Laden, From the Soviet Invasion to September 10, 2001*. New York City: Penguin, 2004. Print. p. 376.

¹⁶⁷ Koehler-Derrick, Gabriel, ed. *A False Foundation? AQAP, Tribes and Ungoverned Spaces in Yemen*. Rep. West Point, NY: Combating Terrorism Center, 2011. Print. p. 29.

¹⁶⁸ The Hadith are collections of the reports purporting to quote the Prophet Muhammad verbatim on any matter. The term *hadith* is Arabic for "report", "account" or "narrative".

¹⁶⁹ Koehler-Derrick, Gabriel, ed. *A False Foundation? AQAP, Tribes and Ungoverned Spaces in Yemen*. Rep. West Point, NY: Combating Terrorism Center, 2011. Print. p. 29.

the various interests of the international parties involved, will all have to be taken into account for Yemen to move forward. If these interests are not taken into account moving forward and the needs of the various groups not met, then groups like AQAP will be able to feed off the anger and the disenfranchisement of groups to gain support for their activities.

Even though the Army of Aden Abyan had furthered the mission of the IJY and had successfully connected local grievances to a global jihad against the West, it had failed as successful movement.¹⁷⁰ The AAA had failed to launch a single attack against major Yemeni or western targets and the legacy of its leader, Zain al-Abidin al Midhar was one of ambition and charisma rather than any tangible accomplishment. However, because of what the AAA had done, al-Qa'ida could now establish itself in the troubled nation. With the fervent ideology of the AAA and the operational ability that the leaders of al-Qa'ida brought to the table, al-Qa'ida in Yemen (AQY) would be able to accomplish what no other jihadi group in Yemen had been able to do. The age of Islamic terror was spreading into Yemen and very soon it would put the country on the radar of a global superpower.

Al-Qa'ida in Yemen (AQY)

For much of the mid-1990s, Yemen seemed a secondary priority for al-Qa'ida, as bin Laden was focusing his energy on consolidating control in Afghanistan through the Taliban and establishing a media presence abroad.¹⁷¹ The focus shifted to Yemen when another veteran of jihad in central Asia, Abd al-Rahim Hussein Muhammad Abdhah al-

¹⁷⁰ Ibid. p. 30.

¹⁷¹ Ibid.

Nashiri, reportedly approached Bin Laden with a proposal for an attack on U.S. forces.¹⁷²

At this point it would be useful to explore the background of al-Nashiri a little bit, to show the widespread nature of Islamic fundamentalism and to also show how Yemen became a place that was attracting jihadis from the world over.

From 1992 to 1993, al-Nashiri fought in Tajikistan as part of the jihad that was happening during the civil war in the country, this is where he first made contact with an al-Qa'ida operative, Walid Muhammad Salih bin Attash, and moved to train at an al-Qa'ida camp in Afghanistan.¹⁷³ Al-Nashiri first met Bin Laden in 1994 in Jalalabad, Afghanistan, and it was during this meeting that al-Nashiri heard Bin Laden talk about the coming battle with the U.S. after this meeting, al-Nashiri eventually returned to Saudi Arabia, and then traveled to Yemen.¹⁷⁴ In 1995, al-Nashiri attempted and failed to get into Tajikistan to continue fighting the jihad there, he then traveled to southern Afghanistan and stayed there involving himself with various Islamic fundamentalists.¹⁷⁵ In 1996, al-Nashiri again met bin Laden and heard his message to wage jihad against the United States, it was at this time al-Nashiri was urged to pledge loyalty to bin Laden and his cause, however, al-Nashiri refused finding swearing a loyalty oath to bin Laden distasteful.¹⁷⁶

After leaving Afghanistan, al-Nashiri visited Saudi Arabia and Yemen later in 1996; this is where the idea for his first terrorist operation began to take shape as he saw

¹⁷² Ibid.

¹⁷³ United States of America. Department of Defense. Joint Task Force-Guantanamo. *JTF-GTMO Detainee Assessment for Abd Al-Rahim Hussein Muhammad Abdah Al-Nashiri*. N.p.: n.p., n.d. *New York Times: The Guantanamo Docket*. New York Times. Web. 24 June 2015. <<http://projects.nytimes.com/guantanamo/detainees/10015-abd-al-rahim-al-nashiri>>. p. 2.

¹⁷⁴ Ibid.

¹⁷⁵ Ibid.

¹⁷⁶ United States of America. The National Commission on Terrorist Attacks Upon the United States. *The 9/11 Commission Report*. By Thomas H. Kean and Lee H. Hamilton. New York City: St. Martin's, 2004. Print. p. 221.

many U.S. and foreign vessels sailing off the coast of Yemen.¹⁷⁷ After this, al-Nashiri decided to return to Afghanistan in 1997 and joined the Taliban in their fight against the Ahmed Shah Massoud led Northern Alliance, he also found that bin Laden was still in Afghanistan recruiting for his global jihad against the U.S. and in 1998, after learning that his cousin was the bomber in the U.S. Embassy attacks in Kenya, al-Nashiri formally joined al-Qa'ida.¹⁷⁸

By this time, al-Nashiri was fully committed to the jihad that bin Laden was espousing, and upon joining al-Qa'ida, he went to train in a variety of weapons, sometime in 1998, al-Nashiri met with bin Laden to discuss the idea of attacking a western vessel off the coast of Yemen.¹⁷⁹ In late spring of 1999, bin Laden provided al-Nashiri with \$2,000 to return to Yemen, purchase a boat and observe the travel of U.S. Navy ships and oil tankers, however al-Nashiri did not see any U.S. naval vessels during his observation.¹⁸⁰ At this point, bin Laden instructed al-Nashiri to case activity in the Port of Aden, located off the coast of Aden, after a few months of casing, and a failed attack on USS *The Sullivans*, al-Qa'ida struck the USS *Cole* in October of 2000.

This attack on an important U.S. target was a major feat for al-Qa'ida. The attack also showed the religious fervor that bin Laden put on the fight against the United States, after the attack he reportedly remarked, “The destroyer represented the capital of the West, and the small boat represented Mohammed.”¹⁸¹ The attack also showed the importance that bin Laden had placed on Yemen. In late 1996, bin Laden had given an

¹⁷⁷ Ibid. p. 220

¹⁷⁸ United States of America. Department of Defense. Joint Task Force-Guantanamo. *JTF-GTMO Detainee Assessment for Abd Al-Rahim Hussein Muhammad Abdah Al-Nashiri*. N.p.: n.p., n.d. *New York Times: The Guantanamo Docket*. New York Times. Web. 24 June 2015.

¹⁷⁹ Ibid.

¹⁸⁰ Ibid.

¹⁸¹ Wright, Lawrence. *The Looming Tower: Al-Qaeda and the Road to 9/11*. New York City: Vintage, 2007. Print.

interview to the London newspaper, *al-Quds al-Arabi*, in which he stated that the second base of al-Qa'ida, if established would only be done in Yemen.¹⁸² He stated, “The choice is between Afghanistan and Yemen. Yemen’s topography is mountainous, and its people are tribal, armed, and allow one to breathe clear air unblemished with humiliation.”¹⁸³ In this interview, bin Laden hit on some key points that make Yemen a fertile ground for groups like al-Qa'ida to grow and hold territory. Both the geography and the tribal makeup of Yemeni society was something that a group like al-Qa'ida could take advantage of very easily, combined with the mountainous geography built for hiding and easily escaping government forces made the environment quite hospitable for al-Qa'ida.

The USS *Cole* bombing allowed al-Qa'ida to establish itself in Yemen, mostly because of one man, Qa'id Salim Talib Sinyan al-Harithi who came from the upper Shabwah region in Yemen. Qa'id Salim al-Harithi, had, just like al-Nashiri, participated in jihad in Afghanistan; it was during his participation in the Soviet-Afghan War that he first met bin Laden.¹⁸⁴ With bin Laden’s assistance, al-Harithi helped establish training camps in multiple provinces in Yemen in the early 1990s to fight against the Yemen Socialist Party.¹⁸⁵ After a few years of travelling to various jihadi hotspots and getting arrested in the UAE, al-Harithi returned to Afghanistan in 1997 and received instructions from bin Laden to start preparing for attacks in Yemen.¹⁸⁶ In 2000, al-Harithi returned to Yemen and by the fall of 2001, Washington identified al-Harithi as the most senior al-

¹⁸² Koehler-Derrick, Gabriel, ed. *A False Foundation? AQAP, Tribes and Ungoverned Spaces in Yemen*. Rep. West Point, NY: Combating Terrorism Center, 2011. Print. p. 19.

¹⁸³ Ibid.

¹⁸⁴ Ibid. p. 32.

¹⁸⁵ Ibid.

¹⁸⁶ Ibid.

Qa'ida commander in Yemen.¹⁸⁷ The involvement of both al-Nashiri and al-Harithi in the USS *Cole* bombing showed the global and local reach of al-Qa'ida. Both men had participated in the Afghan jihad, one came from Saudi Arabia and the other was a Yemeni, yet the network that bin Laden had laid through the establishment of al-Qa'ida allowed both men to connect and launch a major attack within Yemen. This ability that al-Qa'ida possessed would go a long way in laying the foundation on which a group like AQAP could be established.

However, despite the concerns of the United States, especially after the attacks on 9/11, al-Qa'ida in Yemen did not mount any serious efforts to exploit the *Cole* bombing, no follow-up attacks or propaganda efforts were mounted by the group.¹⁸⁸ The only major operation that occurred was in October of 2002, when members of AQY bombed the French tanker *M/V Limburg*, but this attack was by no means a tactical success like the attack on the *Cole* two years earlier. By this point, Yemen had fallen off the radar of counter-terrorism experts and policymakers, with the U.S. and most of the world busy with the ongoing 'War on Terror' that centered in Afghanistan and Pakistan. The national government of Yemen, led by Saleh, had pledged support for the U.S. led war against Islamic extremism and the U.S. was content in letting Yemeni authorities lead the way in Yemen, with light U.S. support. This support was seen in 2002 when a U.S. drone strike killed al-Harithi in the southern Marib region.¹⁸⁹

¹⁸⁷ Tyler, Patrick E. "Yemen, an Uneasy Ally, Proves Adept at Playing Off Old Rivals." *New York Times* 19 Dec. 2002: A18. *Nytimes.com*. Web. 30 June 2015.

<<http://www.nytimes.com/2002/12/19/world/threats-responses-mideast-yemen-uneasy-ally-proves-adept-playing-off-old-rivals.html?pagewanted=1>>.

¹⁸⁸ Koehler-Derrick, Gabriel, ed. *A False Foundation? AQAP, Tribes and Ungoverned Spaces in Yemen*. Rep. West Point, NY: Combating Terrorism Center, 2011. Print. p. 33.

¹⁸⁹ *Ibid.* p. 35.

Killings like al-Harithi's and arrests of members by government forces led to the demise of AQY. This group, although, it had officially unfurled the banner of al-Qa'ida in Yemen had not done anything to establish a lasting organization committed to global jihad in Yemen. By no means was the establishment of al-Qa'ida in Yemen anything like the group enjoyed in pre-9/11 Afghanistan or even as to what the group was establishing in Pakistan after the 9/11 attacks. Although AQY had carried out two attacks against Western targets, the group had failed to establish durable ties within the country and failed to create a common vision or ideology.¹⁹⁰ It would take nearly three years for another like-minded group to rise up in Yemen, however the new group was very dissimilar with AQY. The al-Qa'ida of al-Nashiri and al-Harithi was at best a network of foreign leaders abroad and local operatives at home who were loosely organized around secretive plots.¹⁹¹ This was a far cry from the permanent or institutionalized terrorist organization that al-Qa'ida had become in other parts of the world.

Nonetheless all of this would change in a few years. As the U.S. and the rest of the world focused on al-Qa'ida in Afghanistan and Pakistan, and later the U.S. led War in Iraq, al-Qa'ida would re-emerge in Yemen, taking advantage of weak government control combined with a populace filled with resentments towards the government, and the lack of attention from Western powers. The al-Qa'ida branch that would emerge in Yemen in 2006 would establish the first durable al-Qa'ida presence in the country and would force the world to turn its attention once more to the Arabian Peninsula.

¹⁹⁰ Ibid.

¹⁹¹ Ibid.

Al-Qa'ida in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP)

AQAP's first pivotal moment in Yemen would come on the morning of February 3, 2006 when nearly twenty-four men would escape through a tunnel running from the basement of Sana'a's Political Security Organization's prison to a mosque in the capital.¹⁹² Seven months later, a group calling itself al-Qa'ida in the Land of the Yemen¹⁹³ carried out synchronized suicide attacks against Western oil facilities in the Marib and Hadramawt governorates.¹⁹⁴ The leaders of these attacks were mostly comprised of prisoners who had escaped on February third. Two of the nine attackers, Nasir al-Wahayshi¹⁹⁵ and Qasim al-Raymi¹⁹⁶, would climb to become part of the upper echelon within AQAP.¹⁹⁷ The complexity of the attack showed how AQAP was moving away from the earlier tactics of the IJY and the AAA. This attack was followed by the assassination of a local police chief in April; three months later the group mounted a second suicide operation, which killed eight Spanish tourists in the Marib governorate.¹⁹⁸ These attacks quickly proved that AQAP was not another group that was simply going appear and vanish quickly; instead, the group would soon show itself to be the most resilient and ambitious jihadi organization in Yemen.

The root of the resiliency of AQAP lies in the group's ability to have local capabilities while attacking global targets, through the successful execution of this

¹⁹² Ibid. p. 36

¹⁹³ Al-Qa'ida in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP) was formally created in January of 2009, when al-Qa'ida in the Land of the Yemen joined forces with the al-Qa'ida branch in Saudi Arabia.

¹⁹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁹⁵ Nasir al-Wahayshi was killed in a drone strike by the United States on June 12, 2015 in the Hadramawt Governorate.

¹⁹⁶ Upon the death of al-Wahayshi, al-Raymi was promoted to leader of AQAP. He released a video on July 8, 2015 through AQAP's media wing renewing the call for jihad against the U.S.

¹⁹⁷ Johnsen, Gregory D. "A Profile of AQAP's Upper Echelon." *CTC Sentinel* 5.7 (2012): 6-9. *CTC Sentinel*. Combating Terrorism Center at West Point, 24 July 2012. Web. 8 July 2015.

¹⁹⁸ Koehler-Derrick, Gabriel, ed. *A False Foundation? AQAP, Tribes and Ungoverned Spaces in Yemen*. Rep. West Point, NY: Combating Terrorism Center, 2011. Print. p. 37.

strategy AQAP is able to hit both U.S. interests, therefore weaken counter-terrorism efforts, and isolate the national government in Sana'a. This, in turn, pushes the already autonomous local population to further recede and disconnect from the national government and international actors. Furthermore, even though the attacks on tourists, oil infrastructure, and other Western interests go to AQAP's interest to bloody the United States and the West, the main purpose of the attacks remains local.¹⁹⁹ One of those goals was mentioned above, the attacks isolate the government in Sana'a, the other goal served is that the attacks communicate the group's relevance to jihadis elsewhere.²⁰⁰ Further study of the advantages AQAP accrued from these attacks yields answers to important questions such as how AQAP is able to enmesh itself so deeply within the rural areas in Yemen, to the point the group actually controls territory. This study and understanding is important in the long run because it gives policymakers the ability to understand the core of AQAP resiliency and formulate an adequate response. Furthermore, this analysis will be revisited in a later section, when the crisis in Yemen is analyzed through systems theory. Unfortunately, AQAP has become part of the 'system' that is Yemen and to resolve or manage the crisis within the system, important parts of the system must be understood.

The attacks that AQAP carried out against oil facilities and westerners made it so economic pressure was being imposed on an already besieged national government, this in turn, starved the government of much needed foreign investment.²⁰¹ The attacks offered more advantages to AQAP, they clearly damaged western interests physically, exacting a toll of lives and material, but they also forced western nations to impose travel

¹⁹⁹ Ibid. p. 40

²⁰⁰ Ibid.

²⁰¹ Ibid.

restrictions on their citizens and embassy staff.²⁰² These restrictions made it so the U.S. was severely constrained in its visibility to developments outside Sana'a, and the people outside Sana'a were also constrained in the interaction with U.S. diplomats.²⁰³ Because of these constraints the communications battle was effectively ceded to AQAP, allowing the group to spread its message without any competing messages from the West coming in.²⁰⁴ Without the ability to present a competing message, U.S. counter-terrorism efforts were handicapped, and AQAP was able to not only spread its message but also paint the U.S. as the intruding 'infidel' in a Muslim land. Essentially, AQAP was given freedom to expand its influence within Yemen, expand its targets to the Saudi government, and have the ability to carry out operations abroad as well.²⁰⁵

Initially, AQAP was somewhat conciliatory towards the Saleh government, asking President Saleh to renounce secularism in the group's first official release on 13 October 2006, it was only after President Saleh failed to do either of things requested did AQAP's tone become more violent.²⁰⁶ This further allowed AQAP to legitimize itself in the eyes of the local population, Saleh not heeding to call to break ties with the West allowed AQAP to project and take advantage of the 'we asked, but he didn't listen' dynamic and then proceed to call for violence. During this time period, AQAP also consolidated its media outreach, creating and strengthening its media wing al-Malahim.

By 2007, AQAP had worked to position itself as the foremost *legitimate* means for expressing discontent with the political status quo.²⁰⁷ This positioning was a key part

²⁰² Ibid.

²⁰³ Ibid.

²⁰⁴ Ibid.

²⁰⁵ Ibid.

²⁰⁶ Ibid. p. 41

²⁰⁷ Ibid.

of the AQAP strategy, this positioning allowed AQAP to strengthen itself amongst the local populace, and it also increased the group's global appeal. This phenomenon of integrating itself within a population is not unique to AQAP in Yemen. The Taliban have used this strategy in areas that they control in Afghanistan. The scholar, David Kilcullen, in his book, *Out of the Mountains: The Coming Age of the Urban Guerrilla*, labels this strategy the theory of competitive control. Formally expressed, the theory is that: in irregular conflicts (conflicts where at least one combatant is a non-state armed group), the local armed actor that a given population perceives as best able to establish a predictable, consistent, wide-spectrum normative system of control is most likely to dominate that population and its residential area.²⁰⁸ This theory is not only informative in seeing how AQAP is able to retain control in vast swaths of Yemen, but can also be used to explain the control that the Houthis exercise in Yemen. Furthermore, as will be detailed later, the systems theory based approach of the SAT model can be applied in a system where a non-state armed group exercises competitive control in a way that cuts away that control.

Globally, at this point the main branch of al-Qa'ida, known as al-Qa'ida central, was losing power and appeal. Bin Laden and his second in command, Ayman al-Zawahiri had all but vanished from the global scene, the joint efforts of the United States and NATO forces were yielding results in Afghanistan and had al-Qa'ida on the run. The group found itself dispersed and overstretched; the Global War on Terror had truly become global with more and more countries becoming vigilant to the militant threat. However, in Yemen al-Qa'ida had found a fertile place for development and was, by 2007, well on its way to establishing what would, in two years time, become AQAP.

²⁰⁸ Kilcullen, David. *Out of the Mountains: The Coming Age of the Urban Guerrilla*. New York: Oxford UP, 2013. Print.

AQAP not only worked to be the main method of voicing political discontent, but also vigorously defended this role. To date, AQAP continues to display an impressive talent for assimilating broadly popular grievances into a single narrative in which jihad remains the only solution to the country's multiple crises.²⁰⁹ AQAP worked to exploit popular sentiment against the national government. By 2010, AQAP's al-Malahim wing had developed a magazine to spread the group's message further. The assimilation of the Yemeni population's grievances can be seen in the very first issue of the magazine, known as *Inspire*. In a letter apparently written by Ayman al-Zawahiri, he calls his readers to jihad by asking,

“How, O noble and defiant tribes of Yemen, can you agree to let Yemen be a supply center for the Crusade against the Muslim countries? How can you agree to let the ruling authority in Yemen to be the CIA? How can you accept this treasonous traitor as your president and ruler, when he begs the pleasure of the Americans and their dollars by spilling the blood of the free, noble and honest men of Yemen?”²¹⁰

In this early issue of the magazine, AQAP also showed the ability to understand Western interests and formulate its strategy around those interests. Another quote offers an example of such understanding, “Because of the greed of the Americans, they have vital interests in the Arabian Peninsula. The passage-ways of commerce pass through its waters and oil is stolen from it. So this place is a vein of life for the Americans.”²¹¹ This

²⁰⁹ Koehler-Derrick, Gabriel, ed. *A False Foundation? AQAP, Tribes and Ungoverned Spaces in Yemen*. Rep. West Point, NY: Combating Terrorism Center, 2011. Print.

²¹⁰ Al-Zawahiri, Ayman. "Message to the People of Yemen." *Inspire*. Al-Qa'ida in the Arabian Peninsula, Sept. 2010. Web. 8 July 2015. <<https://azelin.files.wordpress.com/2010/06/aqap-inspire-magazine-volume-1-uncorrupted.pdf>>. p. 11

²¹¹ Al-Malahim staff. "Interview with Shaykh Abu Basir: The head of al-Qa'idah in the Arabian Peninsula." *Inspire*. Al-Qa'ida in the Arabian Peninsula, Sept. 2010. Web. 8 July 2015. <<https://azelin.files.wordpress.com/2010/06/aqap-inspire-magazine-volume-1-uncorrupted.pdf>>. p. 14

quote shows how AQAP fully understands that attacking vital U.S. interests in the region could cause major damage.

By arguing against both the West and the national government in Yemen, and showing how the West's influence has corrupted the government, AQAP shows how the government has forfeited its ability to rule effectively. By incorporating local grievances against the government, AQAP paints it as a regime that neither represents the interests of the people nor adheres to Islam.²¹² Through this line of argument, AQAP taps into the understanding of *al wala wa al-bara* (association and dissociation)²¹³, where *al-wala* mandates that Muslims support those that resist secular governments, al-Qa'ida argues that *al-bara* demands that Yemenis withdraw their support from the 'apostate' government in Sana'a.²¹⁴ AQAP goes further to argue that the formation of a legitimate government cannot lie in the bankrupt ideologies of the West, and media releases by AQAP often support that argument by pointing to Yemen's failed experiments with secularism and democracy.²¹⁵ This leaves AQAP to argue that the only possible route left for governance in Yemen is to follow Islamic law, or shari'a. Through the effective use of this communication strategy, AQAP has positioned itself as an organization that is a reflection of the local population and the global community of subjugated Muslims.²¹⁶

Furthermore, since its founding in 2009, alongside the communications strategy outlined above, AQAP has executed a 'hearts and minds' campaign, through which it has

²¹² Koehler-Derrick, Gabriel, ed. *A False Foundation? AQAP, Tribes and Ungoverned Spaces in Yemen*. Rep. West Point, NY: Combating Terrorism Center, 2011. Print. p. 42.

²¹³ Al-Malahim staff. "Interview with Shaykh Abu Basir: The head of al-Qa'ida in the Arabian Peninsula." *Inspire*. Al-Qa'ida in the Arabian Peninsula, Sept. 2010. Web. 8 July 2015. <<https://azelin.files.wordpress.com/2010/06/aqap-inspire-magazine-volume-1-uncorrupted.pdf>>. p. 15

²¹⁴ Koehler-Derrick, Gabriel, ed. *A False Foundation? AQAP, Tribes and Ungoverned Spaces in Yemen*. Rep. West Point, NY: Combating Terrorism Center, 2011. Print. p. 42.

²¹⁵ Ibid.

²¹⁶ Ibid. p. 44

won the loyalty of many of the local tribes in Yemen.²¹⁷ As was mentioned above, AQAP has a deep understanding of local grievances, however alongside this, AQAP also has the ability to address those grievances for the local population. This move from understanding to action is key for the resiliency of a group like AQAP, since the group was, initially, mainly a collection of Arabs coming in from outside of Yemen. Given the autonomous nature of the local tribes in the country, the coming of AQAP would be seen as an outsider interfering and would thus be treated with hostility. However, by addressing many of the grievances local tribes face, AQAP not only earns loyalty but also ingratiates itself within the tribes. A report by the Washington Institute for Near East Policy, the author explains how AQAP accomplishes this. By capitalizing on longstanding local grievances relating to inadequate education, healthcare, security, rule of law, political representation, and economic development, AQAP replicates the national government's functions throughout the region.²¹⁸ The group sends out political agents to establish a form of stability based on shari'a law, by convening regular meetings with community leaders, solving local problems, and resolving tribal feuds through a religiously inspired justice system.²¹⁹

Alongside the mitigation of conflicts, AQAP also lends protection to the weaker tribes from stronger rivals, and creates social opportunity for members of weaker tribes to rise beyond their social positions, effectively doing exactly what government social programs are set up to do. The result of these efforts has been a boon for al-Qa'ida in the Arabian Peninsula, the efforts appeal to the local population, not only because they are

²¹⁷ Green, Daniel. *Al-Qaeda's Soft-Power Strategy in Yemen*. Rep. no. 2021. Washington Institute for Near East Policy, 23 Jan. 2013. Web. 10 July 2015. <<http://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/view/al-qaedas-soft-power-strategy-in-yemen>>.

²¹⁸ Ibid.

²¹⁹ Ibid.

better than what the government provides but also because many of the tribal sheikhs have been discredited for not living up to their responsibilities.²²⁰ In these situations, AQAP nets two victories, one against the national government, because it further alienates the population from Sana'a and the other against the tribal sheikhs, this victory cements the loyalty of the local populace to AQAP.

This strategy of gathering loyalty works in supplement with another strategy AQAP often applies, and that is to seek out areas where government control is absent and local tribal leaders are apathetic or weak.²²¹ This remains AQAP's greatest strength, the local tribes are too weak to face the group on their own and unless given a reason, they do not attempt to.²²² This strategy combines with the ability of AQAP to address local grievances effectively, and makes it so the local population becomes loyal to the group. By doing all of this, AQAP has lost its initial foreign character, and has blended into the population, to the point that it is next to impossible for Western counter-terrorism forces to differentiate AQAP members from the local population.²²³ The end result of all of these efforts by AQAP is the protection the group earns from military strikes by the national government and Western forces. This has made counter-terrorism operations quite difficult; in fact, this ability of AQAP to blend into the population has made it so that the use of drone strikes has become a strategic liability. Some analysts argue that

²²⁰ Ibid.

²²¹ Michaels, Andrew, and Sakhr Ayyash. "AQAP's Resilience in Yemen." *CTC Sentinel*. Combating Terrorism Center at West Point, 24 Sept. 2014. Web. 25 Apr. 2014. <<https://www.ctc.usma.edu/posts/aqaps-resilience-in-yemen>>.

²²² Ibid.

²²³ Green, Daniel. *Al-Qaeda's Soft-Power Strategy in Yemen*. Rep. no. 2021. Washington Institute for Near East Policy, 23 Jan. 2013. Web. 10 July 2015. <<http://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/view/al-qaedas-soft-power-strategy-in-yemen>>.

these strikes engender anti-Americanism, increase alienation from the national government, and increase sympathy towards AQAP.²²⁴

Overall, AQAP and its ability to become part of the ‘system’ presents a very complex obstacle on the path to resolving the current crisis engulfing Yemen. In the next chapter and sections, there will be a detailed analysis of how the United States has responded to the threat posed by AQAP. There will also be an analysis of the current conflict in Yemen, how it came to be and where it stands. Thus far, most of the U.S. efforts against AQAP have been limited to counterterrorism operations, and as effective as those operations are in taking away individual leaders within AQAP, they have failed to address the fundamental issues that create the support Yemenis give to AQAP.²²⁵ What this chapter has sought to do is give an understanding of how Islamic militancy operates in Yemen. Through this analysis, one can see an important, however unfortunate, part of the system that is Yemen function. The understanding of this functioning is important in formulating potential methods of resolution to the crisis in Yemen and in protecting U.S. interests in the region. As we move forward and the various entities operating in Yemen become clearer, AQAP and its workings should be kept in mind.

²²⁴ CFR.org Staff. *Al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula*. Issue brief. Council on Foreign Relations, 19 June 2015. Web. 11 July 2015. <<http://www.cfr.org/yemen/al-qaeda-arabian-peninsula-aqap/p9369>>.

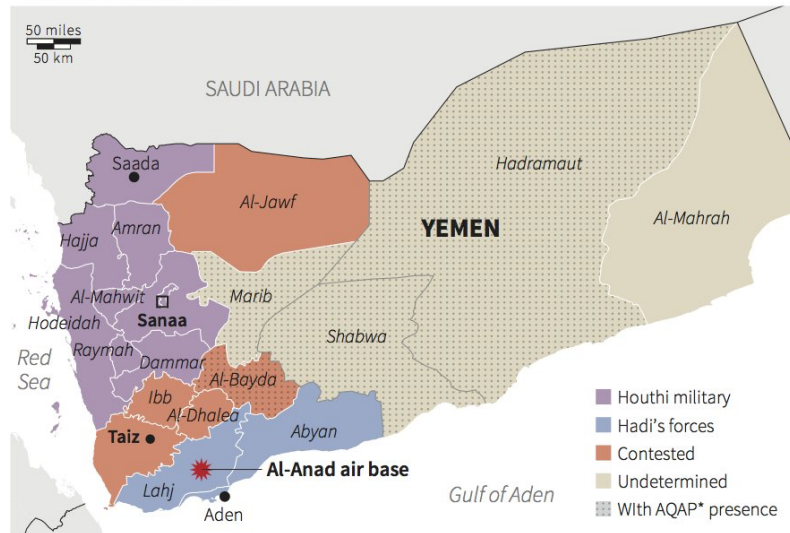
²²⁵ Green, Daniel. *Al-Qaeda's Soft-Power Strategy in Yemen*. Rep. no. 2021. Washington Institute for Near East Policy, 23 Jan. 2013. Web. 10 July 2015. <<http://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/view/al-qaedas-soft-power-strategy-in-yemen>>.

AQAP Territorial Control

Yemen control

Houthi forces backed by allied army units seized al-Anad air base on Wednesday from defenders loyal to President Abd-Rabbu Mansour Hadi, local residents said.

TERRITORIAL CONTROL



Sources: Reuters; M. Izady, Gulf/2000 Project, Columbia University. *Al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula

Staff, C. Inton, 25/03/2015

REUTERS

CHAPTER VI

U.S. INVOLVEMENT AND POLITICAL UNREST

The “Global War on Terror”

As pointed out earlier, the involvement of the United States in Yemen stretches back to the late nineties and into the early millennium. The attack on the USS *Cole* and the growing influence of al-Qa’ida made Yemen somewhat of a priority. However, the attacks on 9/11 and the events following it made it so Yemen became just another front in the global war that was being waged mainly in Afghanistan, Pakistan, and later Iraq.

Shortly after the 9/11 attacks, President Saleh visited the United States; in a meeting with

President Bush he pledged assistance in the emerging war against al-Qa'ida.²²⁶ In return, Saleh received U.S. assurances that there would be continued economic and military support for Yemen.²²⁷

Along with these assurances, Saleh also received the reduced pressure on matters of democratization from the U.S. Until the attacks on 9/11 Yemen had been lackluster in its counter-terrorism policies, more willing to appease extremists instead of directly confronting them. After 9/11, however, all of this changed for several reasons. First, U.S. officials were aware that a number of the hijackers had been born in Yemen, showing the dramatic effects of laissez-faire counter-terrorism policies, second, Saleh remembered the terrible consequences to Yemen when it failed to side with the U.S. in the Persian Gulf War in 1991, and finally, Saleh realized the advantages he would gain for his authoritarian rule by supporting the U.S.²²⁸ All three of these reasons converged to make the Yemeni government publicly back Washington in its global war against al-Qa'ida.

However, this backing essentially gave the United States a carte blanche to take on al-Qa'ida targets within Yemen. The U.S. therefore entered the Yemeni battlefield with the understanding that al-Qa'ida in Yemen was quite similar to al-Qa'ida in other locations; however, this would soon be proven false. In 2002, the U.S. began to use Unmanned Aerial Vehicles (UAVs) or drones as part of combat operations in the global war against al-Qa'ida. One of the countries where clandestine drone operations started taking place was Yemen. Unfortunately, the strategy that the U.S. was using to fight AQAP was based on what had worked in areas such as Afghanistan and Pakistan, two

²²⁶ Salmoni, Barak A., Bryce Loidolt, and Madeleine Wells. *Regime and Periphery in Northern Yemen: The Huthi Phenomenon*. Santa Monica, CA: RAND Corporation, 2010. Print. p. 124.

²²⁷ Ibid.

²²⁸ Ibid.

other countries in which UAVs had become part of combat operations. In both Afghanistan and Pakistan, drone strikes were destroying what is often termed al-Qa'ida's core.²²⁹ However, unlike in Afghanistan and Pakistan, where al-Qa'ida was largely a group of Arabs in non-Arab nations, in Yemen, al-Qa'ida membership consists of Yemenis.²³⁰ This fact in Yemen creates multiple policy implications for the U.S. One of which is because al-Qa'ida in Yemen is localized, members do not have to go outside of the country to gather the expertise to carry out operations.²³¹ This means that because these individuals are not crossing international borders, they are harder to detect and apprehend.

Another implication is that the current U.S. strategy of drone strikes means the machines are targeting the local population.²³² Something that was not true in either Afghanistan or Pakistan, where al-Qa'ida members were apart from the local populations. As was pointed out in an earlier chapter, al-Qa'ida in Yemen has become part of the local population to the point that it is quite difficult to separate an al-Qa'ida member from a local. It is even harder when viewing a target from thousands of feet in the air, as drone pilots routinely do, and most of the time both the local tribesman and the al-Qa'ida member are one in the same. This makes it so the U.S. strategy runs up against an embedded Yemeni concept²³³ called *thar*.²³⁴ The concept of *thar* means that for every individual that the United States identifies as a terrorist and kills, the family members and/or relatives of that individual rise up to fight against the United States and defend

²²⁹ Johnsen, Gregory D. "How We Lost Yemen." *Foreign Policy* 6 Aug. 2013: n. pag. Web. 14 Apr. 2014. <<http://foreignpolicy.com/2013/08/06/how-we-lost-yemen/>>.

²³⁰ Ibid.

²³¹ Ibid.

²³² Ibid.

²³³ Ibid.

²³⁴ The word 'thar' in the Arabic language has been employed for different meanings, but it mainly means avenging for blood.

that person as a tribesman. Therefore, the U.S. in pursuing a ‘drone-heavy’ strategy in Yemen is creating more enemies than it is destroying. In fact, many of these men are drawn to al-Qa’ida not because they agree with the group’s ideology per se, but because they see the group as a means to get revenge on the killers of their kin.

Some of the drone strikes on al-Qa’ida in Yemen have been successful, such as the one in September 2011 that killed Anwar al-Awlaki, a U.S. citizen who, the U.S. government believed to be the head of AQAP’s external operations unit, or the strike in 2014 that killed Said al-Shihri, a former Guantanamo Bay detainee and the deputy commander of AQAP.²³⁵ As mentioned before, this year a U.S. drone also took out Nasir al-Wahayshi, the founder of AQAP and former head of the group. Although these strikes have damaged the group, they prove ineffectual in completely dismantling the al-Qa’ida threat in Yemen. In fact, soon after the U.S. drone strike took out al-Wahayshi, Qasim al-Raymi was promoted to be the head of AQAP and he proceeded to release a video calling for renewed attacks against the United States.²³⁶ This is the result of the ‘whack-a-mole’ strategy that the United States is applying in Yemen; the broader AQAP network does not get dismantled effectively, while new leaders keep popping up. Furthermore, as pointed out above this strategy further alienates a population already fed up by foreign intervention; this alienation can only result in further enmity towards the West.

One of the main reasons as to why the United States continues to use drones in Yemen is because policymakers understand that sending troops into the country would be

²³⁵ Johnsen, Gregory D. "How We Lost Yemen." *Foreign Policy* 6 Aug. 2013: n. pag. Web. 14 Apr. 2014. <<http://foreignpolicy.com/2013/08/06/how-we-lost-yemen/>>.

²³⁶ CNN Staff. "New AQAP Chief Calls for Attacks on U.S." *CNN.com*. CNN, 10 July 2015. Web. 29 July 2015.

a catastrophic mistake.²³⁷ However, this does not take away the fact that the drone strikes are greatly damaging long term U.S. policy in the nation, and creating a whole population who only associates the United States with missiles launched from these drones. An article in *Foreign Policy* magazine pointed this out, citing the December 12, 2013 drone strike in Yemen that killed civilians going to a wedding party, “It’s going to take more than drone strikes to eliminate al Qaeda from its strongholds in this Yemeni province. The militants killed, locals say, are replaceable, while the tens of civilians killed over the past two years has only heightened distrust of the central government among noncombatants, pushing some young men into al Qaeda’s arms.”²³⁸ In this section we will explore the adverse affects that the drone strategy has had on the long-term strategic goals of the U.S. in Yemen. Through this exploration we will see the problem that exists within the current U.S. policy, and a potential to rethink this policy.

Rise of Drone Warfare

Following the 9/11 attacks the U.S. established a targeted killing program, which has expanded into battlefields beyond Iraq and Afghanistan. Since 2002, as was noted above, the U.S. has conducted secret targeted killings in Yemen through drone strikes as well as conventional strikes.²³⁹ The U.S. claims authority under domestic and international law to conduct targeted killings against al-Qa’ida, the Taliban, and their “associated forces.”²⁴⁰ Within domestic law, the U.S. claims authority under the Authorization for Use of Military Force, which authorizes the president “to use all

²³⁷ Johnsen, Gregory D. "How We Lost Yemen." *Foreign Policy* 6 Aug. 2013: n. pag. Web. 14 Apr. 2014. <<http://foreignpolicy.com/2013/08/06/how-we-lost-yemen/>>.

²³⁸ Baron, Adam. "The Red Wedding." *Foreign Policy* 18 Dec. 2013: n. pag. Web. 26 June 2015. <<http://foreignpolicy.com/2013/12/18/the-red-wedding/>>.

²³⁹ Singh, Amrit. *Death by Drone: Civilian Harm Caused by U.S. Targeted Killings in Yemen*. Rep. New York: Open Society Foundations, 2015. Print. p. 31

²⁴⁰ *Ibid.* p. 27

necessary and appropriate force against those nations, organizations, or persons he determines planned, authorized, committed, or aided the terrorist attacks that occurred on September 11, 2001, or harbored such organizations or persons, in order to prevent any future acts of international terrorism against the United States...”²⁴¹ The United States claims authority to conduct targeted killings under international law on two grounds. First it claims it is engaged in an armed conflict with al-Qa’ida, the Taliban, and “associated forces”, second, the U.S. claims this authority through the right to national self-defense.²⁴²

President Obama, at a recent speech he gave at National Defense University (NDU) outlined the use of targeted killings, in a Presidential Policy Guidance that the president signed a day before his NDU speech, there were details given on the preconditions of the targeted killings program.²⁴³ The fact sheet states, that lethal force will be used outside areas of active hostilities only when the following preconditions are met: First, a legal basis must exist for using lethal force, second, the U.S. will only use lethal force against a target that poses a continuing, imminent threat to U.S. persons.²⁴⁴ Finally, the following criteria must be met before lethal action may be taken: 1) near certainty that the terrorist target is present; 2) near certainty that non-combatants will not be injured or killed; 3) an assessment that capture is not feasible at the time of the operation; 4) an assessment that the relevant governmental authorities in the country where action is contemplated cannot or will not effectively address the threat to U.S.

²⁴¹ Ibid.

²⁴² Ibid.

²⁴³ Ibid. p. 29

²⁴⁴ Ibid.

persons; and 5) an assessment that no other reasonable alternatives exist to effectively address the threat to U.S. persons.²⁴⁵

However comprehensive this policy guidance might look, commentators have criticized it on many occasions. They have noted that the rules leave critical questions unanswered, such as the definition of “areas of active hostilities” because of this lack of clarity, it is unclear where the fact sheet’s policies apply, there is also a lack of clarity as to what actual patterns of behavior or ‘signatures’ are used to determine who is and is not considered a combatant.²⁴⁶ Just these criticisms show how problematic the U.S. drone strategy is, with both criticisms pointing to how the undefined nature of the strategy could lead to it expanding endlessly. Without the patterns of behavior clearly defined the use of drone strikes could also result in more civilian deaths. The key issue here is what actually defines an enemy combatant in this conflict. In Yemen, as it was pointed out above, al-Qa’ida has the ability to blend into society to the point that it is nearly impossible to separate locals from al-Qa’ida members, with this distinction not even existing many times. The policy directive of the U.S. states that the U.S. has the authority to wage war against people who are of imminent threat to the safety of U.S. persons or people who are members of al-Qa’ida. In Yemen, al-Qa’ida operates in a way that makes it so this sort of war becomes unending.

The ability of AQAP to assimilate within the societal structures within Yemen makes it so the membership of the group, as defined by the U.S., creates an ever-expanding amount of targets. What makes it so a person in Yemen is a member of al-Qa’ida? Does accepting money from the group or the group’s protection make one a

²⁴⁵ Ibid.

²⁴⁶ Ibid. p. 30

supporter of al-Qa'ida and therefore someone who is a threat to U.S. persons?

Furthermore, does the support to al-Qa'ida by tribal elders or members of various tribes for various reasons make all of those people enemies of the United States and thus fit for drone strikes? The big concern that these questions point to is what the result of such targeted killings is on the overall U.S. policy in the region. The official statement is that the United States is engaged in a covert battle with one of the most active branches of al-Qa'ida, and seeks to dismantle this branch and prevent it from using Yemen as a base to launch attacks globally. The question is whether the strategy being pursued accomplishes this policy or not? Recent news, however points in the opposite direction. Recently, Nasser bin Ali al-Ansi, a high ranking member with AQAP has urged Muslims to carry out lone-wolf strikes in Western countries.²⁴⁷ The issue this news raises is that the military operations that the United States is involved in within Yemen are not bearing the results that policy makers have hoped for.

Furthermore, there is a large amount of evidence that this strategy of drone strikes is alienating the Yemeni population towards the United States. Many of these strikes end up killing civilians. These civilians are family members, who have lives and people who deeply care about them. An article written in the *Washington Post*, reported that the continued U.S. airstrikes are stirring increasing sympathy for al-Qa'ida linked militants and are driving tribesmen to join a network linked to terrorist plots against the United States.²⁴⁸ The article goes on to point out how the airstrikes are angering powerful tribes

²⁴⁷ McDowall, Angus. "Yemen's Al Qaeda Renews Calls for Lone-wolf Attacks in West." *Reuters*. Ed. Jeremy Laurence. Thomson Reuters, 21 Jan. 2015. Web. 17 Aug. 2015.

<<http://www.reuters.com/article/2015/01/21/us-yemen-qaeda-idUSKBN0KU0CG20150121>>.
²⁴⁸ Raghavan, Sudarsan. "In Yemen, U.S. Airstrikes Breed Anger, and Sympathy for Al-Qaeda." *The Washington Post*. N.p., 29 May 2012. Web. 9 July 2015.

within Yemen, tribes that will be key is any resolution to the current crisis, and could prevent al-Qa'ida from gaining strength in the country.²⁴⁹ Even one of the more successful strikes on a known AQAP target has resulted in unwanted consequences for the United States in Yemen. One of the most influential tribes in southern Yemen, a hotbed of al-Qa'ida activity, is the Awlak tribe²⁵⁰; this is the tribe that Anwar al-Awlaki, whose death from a U.S. drone strike has been mentioned above. His son, the sixteen-year old Abdulrahman al-Awlaki, an American citizen, was killed in a drone strike a month following his father's death, the Awlak tribesmen are known to be businessmen, lawmakers, and politicians, however, the strikes have pushed many of them to join the militants or to provide AQAP with safe haven in their areas.²⁵¹ This shift of tribal loyalties shows, in a very stark manner, the failure of U.S. policy in the region. The United States maintains that the strategic interests in Yemen include the stability of the country, the protection of U.S. and/or western assets, and the eradication of the al-Qa'ida presence in the nation. However, with the actions that the United States policymakers have pursued on the ground have resulted in the increase of al-Qa'ida's presence and the decrease in the amount of stability within the nation. Reports have indicated how the recent Saudi led intervention in Yemen, which had the quite backing of the United States, has strengthened al-Qa'ida.²⁵² It has been a few months since the U.S. supported Saudi intervention in Yemen began, and fighters linked to AQAP are closing in on the key port

<https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/middle_east/in-yemen-us-air...-sympathy-for-al-qaeda/2012/05/29/gJQAUmKI0U_story.html?hpid=z2>.

²⁴⁹ Ibid.

²⁵⁰ Ibid.

²⁵¹ Ibid.

²⁵² Youssef, Nancy A. "The U.S.-Backed War in Yemen Is Strengthening Al Qaeda." *The Daily Beast*. The Daily Beast Company, 25 Aug. 2015. Web. 25 Aug. 2015.

<<http://www.thedailybeast.com/articles/2015/08/25/the-u-s-backed-war-in-yemen-is-strengthening-al-qaeda.html>>.

city of Aden, according to U.S. officials and local reports.²⁵³ Not only is the group gaining strength, it is also reported to be safer than before, by mixing in with the local populations, AQAP has become harder to target through the drone program.²⁵⁴ According to Daveed Gartenstein-Ross, a senior fellow at the Foundation for Defense of Democracies, a Washington, D.C. based think tank, “AQAP has insinuated itself among multiple faction on the ground, making itself more difficult to attack.”²⁵⁵

Along with the rise of al-Qa’ida, recent reports have indicated another problematic dynamic arising in Yemen is the spread of the ISIL; this point was alluded to earlier. A recent article published by the Jamestown Foundation pointed out how the current conflict going on in Yemen has allowed for ISIL to enter the fray.²⁵⁶ ISIL officially entered the battlefield in Yemen in November as Wilayat al-Yemen, or “Province of Yemen”, and are seeking to drive the current conflict in the country in a more sectarian direction.²⁵⁷ Although, the next section will explore more this rise of ISIL within Yemen, one point deserves attention in this section, that point is how ISIL’s presence and the strategies that the group will likely pursue in Yemen will further divide the country along sectarian lines and may pull the United States further into the Yemeni morass. The likely scenario, if ISIL expands in Yemen, is that the United States continues following the strategy it has adopted against AQAP, since it is highly unlikely that Washington would want to use any sort of sustained ground assault within Yemen to dislodge ISIL and/or AQAP from their strongholds. However, the continuation of the

²⁵³ Ibid.

²⁵⁴ Ibid.

²⁵⁵ Ibid.

²⁵⁶ Perkins, Brian M. "Wilayat Al-Yemen: The Islamic State's New Front." *Terrorism Monitor* 13.16 (2015): 7-9. Web. 21 Aug. 2015.

<http://www.jamestown.org/uploads/media/TerrorismMonitorVol13Issue16_03.pdf>.

²⁵⁷ Ibid.

current strategy will also increase the radicalization on the ground. This increased radicalization will allow for increased membership and support of groups like ISIL and AQAP. With what has been seen regarding the rapid rise of ISIL in both Syria and Iraq, the future of Yemen, if ISIL does establish itself will not look good.

The U.S. continues to maintain that the current strategy of using signature strikes is resulting in the advancement of national security interests, however, what this justification fails to recognize are the long-term results of pursuing this strategy. As the strikes increase, the amount of collateral damage increases, parallel to this increase is the increase in the radicalization of the population. This radicalization increases anti-American sentiment within the Yemeni population and results in further detriment to U.S. policy goals in the region. The current state of affairs in Yemen shows how strong the anti-American sentiment is. A recent article by Stratfor pointed to the benefits that al-Qa'ida has accrued from the recent crisis. The article states, "The group has actively fought Houthi rebels—mostly with vehicle-borne IED²⁵⁸ attacks and armed assaults on Houthi positions—in conjunction with its tribal allies...the group's successes have not been without costs, though—in particular, drone strikes have targeted al-Qa'ida in the Arabian Peninsula leaders..."²⁵⁹ The article goes on to state that even with the strikes, the group finds itself "comfortably nested" in Yemen and will become yet another serious problem for a central government.²⁶⁰ One way to understand the unintended and detrimental consequences of U.S. foreign policy in the region is to look at the state of

²⁵⁸ IED: Improvised Explosive Device is a bomb constructed and deployed in ways other than in conventional military action. IEDs are commonly used as roadside bombs. The bombs may be constructed of conventional military explosives, such as an artillery round, attached to a detonating mechanism.

²⁵⁹ "Yemen's Historical Bases of Power." *Stratfor.com*. Stratfor, 19 Aug. 2015. Web. 20 Aug. 2015. <<https://www.stratfor.com/user/destination=image/yemens-historical-bases-power>>.

²⁶⁰ Ibid.

current affairs in Yemen. To do this the next section will analyze the current political instability and conflict that the nation of Yemen is facing. This will give an understanding of the current status of the ‘system’ within Yemen, this understanding, in turn, will yield in a better ability to apply the systems theory to be discussed in a later chapter.

Revolution in Yemen and Aftermath

Before the discussion of what occurred in Yemen after the revolution in 2011, it would be good to give some context. Before 2011, the population of Yemen faced a dual set of problems, one group of problems was socio-political and the other group of problems was socio-economic.²⁶¹ The socio-economic issues ranged from high levels of unemployment and poverty combined with the misallocation and problematic distribution of resources, such as water, all of which contributed to social suffering and a great amount of frustration and anger amongst the population.²⁶² The socio-political issues were, and are complex, mostly because of the nation’s social makeup.²⁶³ The overlapping and conflicting loyalties (to the tribe, the clan, or the state) of the population combined with the lack of transparency and accountability in the government, and the large amount of corruption, created a volatile mix.²⁶⁴ On top of these socio-political issues lay the lack of modernization in the country, modernization that is necessary for the creation of a modern and democratic society, this lack of modernization created an increased military and tribal presence in the nation.²⁶⁵

²⁶¹ Al-Qarawi, Hisham. *The Yemeni Revolution: Replacing Ali Abdullah Saleh, or Replacing Obsolete Institutions? Case Analysis*. Doha: Arab Center for Research and Policy Studies, 2011. Print.

²⁶² Ibid.

²⁶³ Ibid.

²⁶⁴ Ibid.

²⁶⁵ Ibid.

Both the socio-economic and the socio-political problems present in Yemen in 2011 created a mix of anger and frustration towards the national government within the national population. This anger boiled over when Yemenis saw what was happening in the rest of the region in this time period. The question of ‘why not us?’ came to the forefront and the population decided to take on the regime directly and call for change within the nation.

The Arab Spring in Yemen

In 2011, the Middle East went through a period of dramatic change, from nations in northern Africa to Bahrain, the region saw organic, grassroots uprisings that caused a major shift in how these nations were governed. These revolutions were collectively labeled the ‘Arab Spring’ and were unprecedented in the region; the age-old autocracies that had kept a tight lid on the aspirations of their citizens in the name of stability were removed. Although there were quite a few commonalities in the various uprisings that occurred in the Middle East at this time, there were key differences present also.

A case analysis of the Yemeni revolution by the Arab Center for Research and Policy Studies at the Doha Institute discussed a key difference. Unlike in Tunisia and Egypt, where the events that led to the revolution and the fall of the rule were spontaneous, and where the protesters’ demands were social at the beginning, the revolution in Yemen was motivated by political factors.²⁶⁶ The report goes on to note that Yemeni opposition parties, even before the revolts in Egypt and Tunisia had started, had already expressed strong disapproval over President Saleh’s planned political reforms.²⁶⁷ The protests began

²⁶⁶ Al-Qarawi, Hisham. *The Yemeni Revolution: Replacing Ali Abdullah Saleh, or Replacing Obsolete Institutions?* Rep. Doha, Qatar: Arab Center for Research and Policy Studies, 2011. Print.

²⁶⁷ Ibid. p. 4.

on these lines gaining more weight and popularity as time went on, especially after important elements of the political and military elite joined in.

As the protests gained steam, with multiple large protests occurring, the specter of violence arose. On March 11, 2011 there was a protest calling for the ouster of President Saleh in which three people were killed, these protests were followed up by other mass demonstrations in which violence continued.²⁶⁸ On March 18th, about fifty-two protesters were shot dead and more than two hundred and fifty were injured in Sana'a when pro-government snipers fired at them from rooftops.²⁶⁹ At this point, the Saleh government saw many defections including many of main military leaders, who declared their support for the protesters.²⁷⁰ As the Revolution progressed, Saleh proposed an early presidential election before the end of 2011, he added the promise that neither he nor his son would run for office in this election.²⁷¹ The back and forth between Saleh and the opposition continued as Saleh refused to step down and stated he considered the protests to be an attempted coup, he also warned of the growing threat of al-Qa'ida stating that Yemen could descend into a civil war if the protests continued.²⁷² As the protests, and the resulting violence continued, President Saleh, coming under the mounting pressure, agreed to step down as part of a "constitutional transfer of power", however, opposition leaders rejected the offer.²⁷³ As the protests continued and Saleh

²⁶⁸ IRIN Staff. "Yemen: Timeline of Protests since March 11." *IRIN News*. N.p., 4 Apr. 2011. Web. 2 Sept. 2015. <<http://www.irinnews.org/report/92359/yemen-timeline-of-protests-since-11-march>>.

²⁶⁹ Ibid.

²⁷⁰ Ibid.

²⁷¹ Ibid.

²⁷² Kasinof, Laura. "President of Yemen Vows to Stay." *The New York Times* 26 Mar. 2011: A13. *New York Times*. The New York Times Company, 26 Mar. 2011. Web. 2 Sept. 2015. <<http://www.nytimes.com/2011/03/27/world/middleeast/27yemen.html>>.

²⁷³ The Associated Press. "Power Crumbling, Yemen's Leader Warns of Civil War." *CTV News*. Bell Media, 22 Mar. 2011. Web. 2 Sept. 2015. <<http://www.ctvnews.ca/power-crumbling-yemen-s-leader-warns-of-civil-war-1.621714>>.

refused to step down, the United States stepped in, publicly calling for Saleh to give up rule, stating that continued unrest could create a power vacuum that would be an advantage for al-Qa'ida in the region.²⁷⁴

As the unrest continued, and Saleh continued to resist giving up power, the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) stepped in to attempt a resolution for impasse, however those efforts did not bear fruit either, on April 30, 2011, officials close to Saleh stated that he had "reservations" about the GCC-brokered deal and would not sign it.²⁷⁵ As protests continued to spread the opposition held to their stance that the GCC brokered deal was the only deal they would accept from Saleh, as pressure and violence continued to mount, Saleh again promised elections and his willingness to sign the GCC deal.²⁷⁶ However, on May 22, 2011 Saleh backed out of signing the GCC deal and several thousand gunmen hired by Saleh's government besieged the United Arab Emirates' embassy in Sana'a, where diplomats from the U.S., U.K., E.U., and the GCC were staying to monitor the start of a peaceful transition.²⁷⁷

A day after Saleh refused to sign the GCC transition agreement, Sheikh Sadiq al-Ahmar, the head of the Hashid tribal federation, one of the most powerful tribes in Yemen, declared support for the opposition and his armed supporters started fighting Saleh's security forces in Sana'a, heavy fighting ensued leaving 120 people dead,

²⁷⁴ Barker, Anne. "US Ratchets up Pressure on Yemen's President." *ABC News*. Australian Broadcasting Corporation, 4 Apr. 2011. Web. 4 Sept. 2015. <<http://www.abc.net.au/news/2011-04-05/us-ratchets-up-pressure-on-yemens-president/2629086>>.

²⁷⁵ Al Jazeera Staff. "Reports: Saleh Refuses to Sign Exit Deal." *Al Jazeera*. Al Jazeera Media Network, 30 Apr. 2011. Web. 4 Sept. 2015. <<http://www.aljazeera.com/news/middleeast/2011/04/201143094747158908.html>>.

²⁷⁶ Xinhua Staff. "Yemeni Opposition Signs the Gulf-brokered Deal." *Xinhua*. Xinhua News Agency, 22 May 2011. Web. 4 Sept. 2015. <http://news.xinhuanet.com/english2010/world/2011-05/22/c_13887312.htm>.

²⁷⁷ Aziz, Ammar Ben, and Mustapha Ajbaili. "Saleh Gunmen Hold Many Envoys Hostage at UAE Embassy in Sana'a." *Al Arabiya*. Al Arabiya Network, 22 May 2011. Web. 4 Sept. 2015. <<http://english.alarabiya.net/articles/2011/05/22/150031.html>>.

including civilians.²⁷⁸ As this situation in Sana'a was developing, about 300 Islamic militants attacked and captured the city of Zinjibar, a southwestern city on the coast; the militants belonged to the group known as Ansar al-Sharia, the umbrella militant organization that includes units from several Islamic groups, including AQAP.²⁷⁹ This battle, which became known as the Battle of Zinjibar, underscored the concern of al-Qa'ida militants finding opportunity during the political instability of Yemen's Revolution and taking territory. While the forces loyal to the Hashid tribal federation and the government entered into a ceasefire, militants in Zinjibar consolidated their control by capturing several armored vehicles, and larger parts of the city.²⁸⁰

As the fighting continued in both Zinjibar and Sana'a, more fighters joined the opposition. On June 3, 2011 the presidential palace in Sana'a was attacked, and a blast tore through the mosque that was used by high-ranking members of the Saleh government, including Saleh himself, the blast killed several soldiers but the fate of Saleh was not clear.²⁸¹ The next day, Saleh left for Saudi Arabia to seek medical treatment, and power was handed over to Vice President Abd Rabbuh Mansur Hadi.²⁸² As the revolution in Yemen wore on, there were constant rumors of Saleh returning; however eventually

²⁷⁸ AFP Staff. "Fighting Grips Yemeni Capital as Saleh Orders Arrests." *Alternet*. Agence France Presse, n.d. Web. 4 Sept. 2015.

<http://www.alternet.org/rss/breaking_news/598992/fighting_grips_yemeni_capital_as_saleh_orders_arrests>.

²⁷⁹ AFP Staff. "Suspected Al Qaeda Militants Seize Yemeni Town." *France 24*. Agence France Presse, 29 May 2011. Web. 4 Sept. 2015. <<http://www.france24.com/en/20110529-suspected-al-qaeda-militants-seize-yemeni-town-zinjibar%20>>.

²⁸⁰ Al Jazeera Staff. "'Al-Qaeda Fighters Seize Yemeni City'" *Al Jazeera*. Al Jazeera Media Network, 29 May 2011. Web. 4 Sept. 2015.

<<http://www.aljazeera.com/news/middleeast/2011/05/201152815531552947.html>>.

²⁸¹ The Telegraph Staff. "Yemen's President Saleh 'wounded in Palace Attack'" *The Telegraph*. The Telegraph Media Group Ltd., 03 June 2011. Web. 4 Sept. 2015.

<<http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/middleeast/yemen/8554795/Yemens-President-Saleh-wounded-in-palace-attack.html>>.

²⁸² MSNBC Staff. "Yemen President Arrives in Saudi Arabia." *NBC News*. NBC News Services, 4 June 2011. Web. 4 Sept. 2015. <http://www.nbcnews.com/id/43277769/ns/world_news-mideast_n_africa/#.VepOcs5H02w>.

top officials in Saudi Arabia started reporting that the return of President Saleh was not going to be a likely scenario.²⁸³ As the violence and the transition of power to Hadi continued, the spread of AQAP continued into the areas of Yemen in which there was no effective military presence.

As 2011 wore on the violence in Yemen continued, alongside the violence, the protests continued calling on Saleh to give up all power, while there were counter-protests by supporters of Saleh and his regime. Both sides continued to stand firm on their demands that the other give up all desires to hold power in Yemen. This was all happening while there were repeated attempts by the GCC, Saudi Arabia leading and the United Nations to broker a peaceful transition. On September 23, 2011 Saleh returned to Yemen despite the reports that Saudi Arabia would prevent him from leaving their soil, the return caught both the support and opposition to Saleh by surprise.²⁸⁴ Before this return, both Saudi and American diplomats had urged Saleh to stay in Saudi Arabia, fearing that his return would set off further violence.²⁸⁵ Unsurprisingly, the increase in violence is what occurred, as soon as Saleh came back to Yemen he was greeted with almost a million Yemenis rallying against him in Sana'a.²⁸⁶ Less than a day after the

²⁸³ AFP Staff. "Saleh Will Not Return to Yemen: Official." *The Sydney Morning Herald*. Fairfax Media, 17 June 2011. Web. 10 Sept. 2015. <<http://www.smh.com.au//breaking-news-world/saleh-will-not-return-to-yemen-official-20110617-1g84b.html>>.

²⁸⁴ Kasinof, Laura, and Robert F. Worth. "After Four Months, Saleh Is Back in Yemen." *The New York Times*. The New York Times Company, 23 Sept. 2011. Web. 10 Sept. 2015. <<http://www.nytimes.com/2011/09/24/world/middleeast/yemens-president-ali-abdullah-saleh-abruptly-returns-from-saudi-arabia.html>>.

²⁸⁵ Ibid.

²⁸⁶ Yemen Post Staff. "Sana'a, Million Men March." *Yemen Post*. N.p., 23 Sept. 2011. Web. 10 Sept. 2015. <<http://yemenpost.net/Detail123456789.aspx?ID=3&SubID=4108&MainCat=3>>.

arrival of Saleh in Yemen, government forces attacked an opposition camp, killing at least 17 people.²⁸⁷

As the violence continued, the U.N. Security Council met in October and passed Resolution 2014, condemning the violence and calling for Saleh to accept the GCC brokered peace plan.²⁸⁸ The violence and Saleh's intransigence continued into the end of October, and on the 30th of October 2011, the General People's Congress announced that it would nominate Vice President Abd al-Rab Mansur al-Hadi to stand in the proposed presidential elections once the GCC deal was signed.²⁸⁹

At this point, it would be wise to take a step back and realize that all of the violence and instability that was happening at this time in Yemen was setting the country up for a troubled future. Not only was the instability bringing Yemen closer to the edge of becoming a failed state, it was also weakening state institutions to the point that they were ineffective. This ineffectiveness led to the populace losing faith in the national government, allowed for the entrance of rebellions and militant Islamists, and also kept the divisions of the past open.

As the uprising continued into November, the violence and protests continued. The Houthi rebels in northern Yemen took advantage of the instability and scored victories against pro-government tribes, seizing control of northern districts and moving

²⁸⁷ Solomon, Erika. "Attack on Yemen Opposition Camp Kills 17." *Reuters*. Thomson Reuters, 25 Sept. 2011. Web. 10 Sept. 2015. <<http://uk.reuters.com/article/2011/09/24/uk-yemen-idUKTRE78L79020110924>>.

²⁸⁸ Lynch, Colum. "U.N. Council Condemns Violence in Yemen, Urges Saleh to Cede Power." *The Washington Post*. N.p., 21 Oct. 2011. Web. 10 Sept. 2015. <https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/national-security/un-council-condemns-violence-in-yemen-urges-saleh-to-cede-power/2011/10/21/gIQAnQub4L_story.html>.

²⁸⁹ "[Yemen to reach power-transfer deal soon: FM](#)". Xinhua. 2 November 2011. Retrieved 29 October 2015.

towards Sana'a.²⁹⁰ However, by mid-November, the Gulf nations, especially Saudi Arabia has pushed Saleh to sign the agreement brokered by the GCC and on November 23, Saleh arrived in Saudi Arabia to sign the GCC deal.²⁹¹ The political instability and protests continued into December, as protestors continued to call for Saleh to stand trial. Then, on December 12, 2011, fifteen al-Qa'ida militants broke out of a prison in the coastal city of Aden.²⁹² This escape brought to the forefront the capability that al-Qa'ida possessed in Yemen, and the weakened state institutions that had failed to prohibit the escape of dangerous militants. The bigger problem that the escape showed, however, was that even after the Arab Spring had hit Yemen, and the government changed, the ineffectiveness had continued. This did not and would not bode well for the young administration of President Hadi.

The transition of power in Yemen also pointed to a pernicious problem within foreign policymaking, where western nations support leaders without adequate consideration of the long-term issues pervasive in nations like Yemen. This backing of one leader over another generally ends up presenting problems, in the case of Yemen, these problems were more numerous because while the United States was supporting the Hadi government, it was also allowing Saleh to come into the United States for medical treatment.²⁹³ This was justified by officials in the Obama Administration as a necessary

²⁹⁰ Yemen Post Staff. "Al-Houthi Expansion Plan in Yemen Revealed." *The Yemen Post*. Yemen Post, 09 Nov. 2011. Web. 29 Oct. 2015.

<<http://yemenpost.net/Detail123456789.aspx?ID=3&SubID=4288&MainCat=3>>.

²⁹¹ Al Jazeera Staff. "Yemen's Saleh Agrees to Transfer Power." *Al Jazeera*. Al Jazeera Media Network, 24 Nov. 2011. Web. 30 Oct. 2015.

<<http://www.aljazeera.com/news/middleeast/2011/11/2011112355040101606.html>>.

²⁹² The Telegraph Staff. "Al-Qaeda Militants Escape from Yemen Prison." *The Telegraph*. Telegraph Media Group, 12 Dec. 2011. Web. 1 Nov. 2015. <<http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/al-qaeda/8950720/Al-Qaeda-militants-escape-from-Yemen-prison.html>>. Newspaper Article

²⁹³ Landler, Mark, and Eric Schmitt. "Path Is Cleared for Yemeni Leader to Get Care in U.S." *The New York Times*. The New York Times Company, 26 Dec. 2011. Web. 1 Nov. 2015.

step to keep Saleh distanced from the political transition happening in Yemen, even though it was known that the Yemeni people would see it as U.S. support for a leader that Yemenis rose up against.²⁹⁴ The decision to go ahead with allowing Saleh to enter the U.S. was problematic, not only because it tarnished U.S. reputation in Yemen, but also because it showed the inability of the United States government to formulate a coherent policy towards what was happening in Yemen. This lack of coherence translated into regional allies realizing that the U.S. had no viable options for the instability, apart from fighting AQAP. The group, although a formidable threat to U.S. national interests, is just part of the host of issues that Yemen finds itself in. In fact, it can be argued that the overall instability in the country allows for AQAP to expand its control, so any policy or set of policies not addressing the deeper issues in Yemen do nothing to address AQAP. As 2011 turned into 2012, the militant group showed its resiliency in the face of U.S. efforts against it by capturing more territory in southeastern Yemen.²⁹⁵

The next month, Yemen held presidential elections, however as the election were happening there was violence reported at the polls.²⁹⁶ Another issue that was coming to the forefront in Yemen at this time was the growing strength of the Southern Movement, a group struggling for the secession of southern Yemen from the government in Sana'a. However, even with these issues, elections were held on February 21, 2012 and on the 27th of the same month, President Hadi was formally inaugurated. Nevertheless, the

<<http://www.nytimes.com/2011/12/27/world/middleeast/saleh-yemen-leader-to-be-admitted-into-us-for-medical-care.html?pagewanted=1&r=1>>.

²⁹⁴ Ibid.

²⁹⁵ Associated Press Staff. "Yemen Town Captured by Al Qaeda Militants." *CBS News*. CBS Interactive Inc., 12 Jan. 2012. Web. 1 Nov. 2015. <<http://www.cbsnews.com/news/yemen-town-captured-by-al-qaeda-militants/>>.

²⁹⁶ Al Jazeera Staff. "Aden - Feb 14, 2012 - 11:04." Web log post. *Al Jazeera Live Blog*. Al Jazeera Media Network, 14 Feb. 2012. Web. 1 Nov. 2015. <<http://blogs.aljazeera.com/topic/aden-feb-14-2012-1104>>.

fissures within the Yemeni polity were not easily to be overcome as the Joint Meeting Parties, an alliance comprised of both Islamist and secular opposition parties, quickly boycotted the elections.²⁹⁷

Rise of the Houthis and Saudi Intervention

The newly elected Hadi government was by no means on solid footing at the end of the elections in February 2012. Yemen as a nation lay in a deplorable state, with a failing economy, multiple groups of militants that it could not effectively deal with, and a population that was increasingly realizing how ineffective the government was at providing for basic needs. All of this combined with the regional turmoil that was engulfing the Middle East at this time and taking the attention of not only the regional powers, but also the western powers, like the U.S. and E.U. nations.

Since 2012 and until the Houthi takeover in 2014, the national government of Yemen had survived, however, the internal divisions within Yemen had persisted. The Houthis had supported the anti-Saleh protests and as an article in *Foreign Policy* magazine pointed out, the Houthis “played a role in the transitions process that included the national dialogue process and redefining the constitutions.”²⁹⁸ However, the final constitution was not to the liking of the Houthis, who greatly disagreed with the Hadi government’s plan to reconstitute Yemen as a six region federal state.²⁹⁹ With this emboldening them, the Houthis took matters into their own hands and started a military campaign against the Hadi administration.

²⁹⁷ Ezzi, Yasser. "JMP to Boycott Hadi's Inauguration Ceremony." *Yemen Times*. Yemen Times, 27 Feb. 2012. Web. 1 Nov. 2015. <<http://www.yementimes.com/en/1550/news/470/JMP-to-boycott-Hadi's-inauguration-ceremony.htm>>.

²⁹⁸ Kasinof, Laura. "How the Houthis Did It." *Foreign Policy*. Foreign Policy Magazine, 23 Jan. 2015. Web. 8 Nov. 2015. <<http://foreignpolicy.com/2015/01/23/how-the-houthis-did-it-yemen-hadi-arab-spring/>>.

²⁹⁹ Ibid.

Another reason for the Houthi rebellion in 2014 was the economy, in July of that year; the national government announced an increase in fuel prices as part of reforms to subsidy programs that were being required by the International Monetary Fund as conditions for continued financial assistance.³⁰⁰ Yemen has among the highest level of energy subsidies in the region, however given its low per capita income; the country could not afford to continue to subsidize energy. Another major reason the government decided to reform the subsidy program was because of the lopsided benefits that it resulted in, with the elite of Yemeni society benefitting the most from the subsidies, by smuggling the cheap oil to neighboring nations and accruing large profits.³⁰¹ However, these subsidies also allowed the nation of Yemen to function by keeping the prices of transport, food, and water low. As soon as these subsidies were removed, the prices of these staple functions spiked, hitting the poor the hardest. The Houthis grabbed on to this populist issue and exploited it to the detriment of the Hadi government.

Officially, the uprising began in August 2014. Over the rest of 2014, the Houthi militia made its way towards Sana'a, fighting some tribes, making alliances with others, and defeating the national military along the way.³⁰² As the Houthis made advances, the national government in Sana'a weakened and on September 21, 2014 as the Houthis captured the capital city, Prime Minister Mohammed Salim Basindwah was forced to resign.³⁰³ Eventually, the Houthi rebellion and its increasing control over government

³⁰⁰ Ibid.

³⁰¹ Ibid.

³⁰² Ibid.

³⁰³ BBC Staff. "Yemen: Deal to End Political Crisis Signed." *BBC.com*. BBC, 21 Sept. 2014. Web. 8 Nov. 2015. <<http://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-29302898>>.

held territory also forced President Hadi to resign.³⁰⁴ As the Houthis pushed southwards, they ignited fears of the sectarian divisions flaring back up in Yemen, with accusations flying back and forth of the Houthis trying to install a Zaydi Imamate in Sana'a and the Houthis alleging that the national government was threatening their Zaydi culture in the north.³⁰⁵ Apart from causing political instability, the Houthi rebellion also allowed for AQAP to launch reprisal attacks against the Houthis and made it so many Yemenis who would not have usually sided with AQAP to side with the group because they are opposed to Houthi rule.³⁰⁶ This has caused a resurgence of AQAP activity in Yemen, making the group more dangerous while also allowing it to gain followers. Alongside the threat of a growing militancy by AQAP, many people have also worried about how the chaos in Sana'a has opened the door for the Southern Movement to increase its activities.³⁰⁷

A major issue with this rebellion is the international involvement in it. Saleh has accused the United States of working with the Houthis to undermine the Hadi government.³⁰⁸ However, this could not be farther from the truth, as a recent report on the current crisis in Yemen from the Congressional Research Service stated, the Obama administration's position on Yemen has been support for the Saudi-led coalition's military action against the Houthis.³⁰⁹ Along with providing materiel support to the

³⁰⁴ Kasinof, Laura. "How the Houthis Did It." *Foreign Policy*. Foreign Policy Magazine, 23 Jan. 2015. Web. 8 Nov. 2015. <<http://foreignpolicy.com/2015/01/23/how-the-houthis-did-it-yemen-hadi-arab-spring/>>.

³⁰⁵ Ibid.

³⁰⁶ Ibid.

³⁰⁷ Ibid.

³⁰⁸ Ibid.

³⁰⁹ United States. Cong. *Yemen: Civil War and Regional Intervention*. By Jeremy M. Sharp. Cong. Rept. R43960. Congressional Research Service, 2 Oct. 2015. Web. 4 Dec. 2015. <<https://www.fas.org/sgp/crs/mideast/R43960.pdf>>.

coalition, the Obama administration has also staunchly behind the Hadi government.³¹⁰ In the aftermath of the Houthi takeover, several Western and Asian countries closed their embassies in Sana'a, and the U.N. Security Council adopted a resolution standing against the group's seizure of power. As the Houthis consolidated control in Yemen, the sectarian divisions continued to flare and with them the violence continued unabated. As this instability continued, AQAP and other like-minded militant groups continued to spread. As the civil war between the Hadi government and the Houthi rebels became more entrenched, Saudi Arabia alongside multiple Gulf nations decided to intervene in the conflict.

This Saudi-led intervention began in 2015 to influence the outcome of the civil war that was engulfing Yemen. The Saudis, spearheading a coalition of nine Arab states, began carrying out airstrikes and imposed an aerial and naval blockade in March of 2015. The intervention began as a response to requests for assistance by the Hadi government. Eventually the coalition of multiple Arab countries joined the Saudis to start taking part in operations. The military campaign by the Arab coalition, spearheaded by Saudi Arabia, began in March of 2015. The coalition first declared Yemeni airspace to be a restricted area. After that declaration, Saudi Arabia began airstrikes, and quickly moved into setting up a naval blockade. Other nations in the coalition also assisted in the blockade including the United States. Naval ships were also used to evacuate diplomats and other civilians. As March turned into April, Saudi Arabian and Egyptian ground forces started exchanging artillery fire with Houthi rebels in Yemen. On April 21st, the Saudi Defence Ministry declared that it was ending the campaign of airstrikes because it had

³¹⁰ Ibid.

“successfully eliminated the threat” to its security posed by Houthi ballistic and heavy weaponry.³¹¹

At this point the coalition entered into a new operational phase, which saw an increase in aid to Yemen in the hopes of rebuilding the nation after the military strikes. However, after the announcement of a ceasefire and movements towards rebuilding, airstrikes by the coalition resumed as the Saudis attempted to restore the Hadi government and push back against Houthi advances.³¹² As the airstrikes continued the toll they took on the ground increased, and various human rights agencies grew concerned about the damage that was happening to the infrastructure of the nation as the conflict continued.³¹³ Alongside the damage to the national infrastructure, the suffering of the civilian population also increased as humanitarian aid became more and more limited.

Although the conflict itself has become and continues to be a major issue for the Yemeni nation and the overall region, the bigger problem was the involvement of multiple nations within the conflict. For the United States, the conflict and its proxy nature has resulted in a complex operating environment. The U.S. as has been pointed out was already involved in Yemen, through its counter-terrorism operations and economic aid delivery, as this conflict started the U.S. voiced support for the Hadi government and also supported Saudi Arabia and its coalition in the military campaign against the

³¹¹ Hamid, Nadeem “Saudi Arabia Says Airstrikes in Yemen Succeeded in Ending Threat”. *Bloomberg*. 21 April 2015. <http://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2015-04-21/saudi-arabia-says-airstrikes-in-yemen-succeeded-in-ending-threat>.

³¹² BBC Staff. “Yemen Conflict: Saudis launch new air strikes on rebels”. *BBC*. 23 April 2015. Web. 14 May 2015. <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-32430003>.

³¹³ Miles, Tom. “UN urges Saudi-led coalition to stop targeting Yemen airport”. *Reuters*. 4 May 2015. Retrieved 13 July 2015. <http://mobile.reuters.com/article/idUSKBN0NP1VJ20150504>.

Houthis, through providing intelligence and logistics.³¹⁴ This involvement however, has made it so that on the ground in Yemen, there are very strong anti-U.S. sentiments, as the Houthis see the support the United States has given Saudi Arabia as the U.S. standing against Houthi interests. However, the U.S. support of the Houthis is mixed at best. Parts of U.S. policy-making circles understand the use of the Houthis and favor them in their fight against AQAP and now, ISIL. This support is countered by other policy-makers continuing their support of Saudi Arabia in countering the Houthis, whom they see as a group of militants backed by Iran. This confusion amongst policy makers in the United States is leading to the U.S. having very little say in what is happening on the ground in Yemen.

Not that the United States should be controlling the future of the Yemeni nation in any direct way, but the fact that there are real U.S. interests that need to be protected in Yemen is a something that needs to be kept in mind. The stated interests of the U.S. range from making sure that militant groups like AQAP and ISIL do not spread to the protection of the strategic Bab-el-Mandeb strait in Red Sea, from which a significant portion of the world's oil supply is shipped through. The current policy stature of the United States, does not, significantly protect either of these interests, since both of the interests are connected to stability on the ground in Yemen. As we will see in the next section, the spread on militants in Yemen is completely unchecked because of the increasing instability. Not only al-Qa'ida but now, increasingly, ISIL is spreading its network in the Yemeni hinterlands. This trend should be deeply concerning to U.S.

³¹⁴Keane, Angela G. "U.S. Backs Saudi-Led Yemeni Bombing with Logistics, Spying". *Bloomberg*. 26 March 2015. <http://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2015-03-26/yemeni-bombing-led-by-saudis-is-backed-by-u-s-logistics-spying>.

policymakers, in the rush to support our Saudi allies in their ill-conceived foray into Yemen the U.S. may have compromised on some of its key interests in the region.

Rise of ISIL in Yemen

The rise of ISIL in Syria and Iraq in the summer of 2014 was something that caused great concern across the world, and as the group has grown in its brutality and deadliness, the concern and readiness to counter its threat has grown. However, the group itself is not one that is easily contained. Its message is spread far and wide, and alongside the message the group's menace grows. With attacks happening in France, the United States, Indonesia, and other nations, ISIL has shown itself to be a formidable force. ISIL has also shown itself to be a group that has learned from the mistakes of al-Qa'ida and is highly organized. This organizational ability has allowed it to grow branches across the Middle East. One of the countries in which ISIL now boasts a branch is Yemen, adding to the nation's history with militancy, ISIL now is openly challenging al-Qa'ida in Yemen.³¹⁵ A recent *New York Times* article covered the rise of ISIL in Yemen, stating, the Saudi-led intervention and the resulting instability "has produced another bitter legacy: a new branch of the Islamic State that has quietly grown in strength and appears determined to distinguish itself as Yemen's most disruptive and brutal force."³¹⁶

The ISIL branch has stoked sectarian divisions in Yemen by attacking Shia mosques in Sana'a, which killed 130 people and started the civil war in Yemen in March

³¹⁵ Almosawa, Shuaib, Kareem Fahim, and Eric Schmitt. "Islamic State Gains Strength in Yemen, Challenging Al Qaeda." *The New York Times* 15 Dec. 2015: A14. *The New York Times*. The New York Times Company, 14 Dec. 2015. Web. 12 Feb. 2015.
<http://www.nytimes.com/2015/12/15/world/middleeast/islamic-state-gains-strength-in-yemen-rivaling-al-qaeda.html?_r=1>.

³¹⁶ Ibid.

2015.³¹⁷ Recently, the group has also carried out powerful car bombings in southern Yemen and released videos of executions and sectarian denunciations of Yemen's Shia minority.³¹⁸ These attacks and the spread of militancy in Yemen is adding greatly to the instability within the nation and is threatening the various U.S. interests in the country and the region. Analysts state that just like al-Qa'ida, ISIL has profited from the security vacuum that was created in Yemen after the Houthi takeover and the Saudi-led intervention, this vacuum has allowed ISIL to rally Sunnis in Yemen against the Shia Houthis.³¹⁹ More crucially, however, the militant groups have faced no resistance from the Saudi-led coalition and its allies, this lack of resistance has made it so ISIL has been able to consolidate its hold in Yemen.³²⁰ The group, taking advantage of the instability in the country, officially entered the scene in Yemen as Wilayat al-Yemen or "Province of Yemen", ISIL's existence was made public on November 13, 2014 when ISIL's leader Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi announced via an audio message titled "Despite the Disbelievers' Hate" that he had accepted coordinated oaths of allegiance from fighters based in Yemen, Libya, Egypt, and Saudi Arabia.³²¹

ISIL has organized itself in Yemen following the organizational pattern of its other branches. The ISIL branch in Yemen, flows out of the Wilayat al-Yemen, which is the head office for the nation, underneath the Wilayat, are sub-wilayats, which control various provinces and cities in Yemen.³²² Although these sub-wilayats are taking orders from the head office, they tend to operate as autonomous units, which give them much

³¹⁷ Ibid.

³¹⁸ Ibid.

³¹⁹ Ibid.

³²⁰ Ibid.

³²¹ Perkins, Brian M. "Wilayat Al-Yemen: The Islamic State's New Front." *Terrorism Monitor* 13.16 (2015): 7-9. Web. 21 Aug. 2015.

<http://www.jamestown.org/uploads/media/TerrorismMonitorVol13Issue16_03.pdf>.

³²² Ibid.

more flexibility and allow them to conduct operations without having bureaucratic hindrances.³²³ There is also some evidence that the ISIL branch in Yemen has coordinated with ISIL branches in other nations, specifically the main branch in Syria.³²⁴ As far as the strategy of ISIL in Yemen is concerned, the group has replicated its strategy from other nations of attempting sectarian tensions, which is a strategy that reflects ISIL's overarching global strategy. The targets, tactics and propaganda of each of the sub-wilayats reflect the group's global strategy and its overarching narrative of Sunni-Shi'a conflict.³²⁵ ISIL's branch in Yemen has focused its propaganda efforts in this direction also, recruiting followers in Yemen and abroad, on denouncing the Zaydi Houthis and in claiming to be the protector of the country's Sunnis.³²⁶

This presents a deeply concerning point for U.S. policymakers, given the complicated situation that has developed in Syria regarding ISIL. The United States, along with a global coalition of European and Arab nations, including Saudi Arabia has aligned itself against ISIL, given this; the Houthis in Yemen would presumably be allies of the U.S. led coalition. However, this is far from true, although there is support amongst Pentagon officials for the Houthis against ISIL, it is not widespread, as most of the foreign-policy machinery of the U.S. is still aligned with the Saudis, one of the longest standing allies of the U.S. in region. The Saudis and other Gulf nations have no desire to see the Houthis emerge triumphant from the chaos in Yemen. Yet, neither the U.S. nor the Gulf nations want to see ISIL takeover Yemen in any significant way.

³²³ Ibid.

³²⁴ Ibid.

³²⁵ Ibid.

³²⁶ Ibid.

This presents a major problem; the oft-repeated saying of the enemy of my enemy is my friend breaks down in this situation, since ISIL is not at all the friend of the U.S. Furthermore, the Houthis are also not considered friends of the United States in any sense. However, to the most effective force fighting ISIL in Yemen at this point are the Houthis. The Houthis have also formed the only able fighting force against the increasing influence of AQAP in Yemen. By doing both of these things, the Houthis have inadvertently assisted U.S. efforts in Yemen. However, because of the continued assistance the U.S. has provided the Saudis in their fight against the Houthis, support for the United States is virtually non-existent within the Houthi ranks. This places policymakers in the United States in a quandary; no one wants to see Yemen become a failed state, ruled by a government that is against U.S. interests. However, even with the recent military successes of Yemeni government forces against the Houthis, the situation looks bleak for a nation of great strategic interest. What may be needed is a policy approach that prioritizes the interests of the United States in Yemen and then implements the policies in a way that assists the various actors through the priorities. An example of such a method can be understood through the threat of ISIL in Yemen is one of high priority and aligning the parties involved in the conflict to join forces against ISIL branches in Yemen. This process would require deep level diplomacy with multiple parties who would have to be convinced as to the validity of the prioritization policy. Given the rising policy-paralysis regarding Yemen, policymakers in the U.S. will have to chart a new course regarding the policy in Yemen. This may mean cooling relations with some long-standing allies in the Gulf region; however, the temporary cooling of relations

will give the U.S. opportunities to work for long-term security in a very destabilized region.

CHAPTER VII

TRIBAL POLITICS

Major Tribes in Yemen

Yemen is dominated by several tribal confederations, and each of these confederations includes tribes, clans, and extended families.³²⁷ The determination of which tribe or group is the most powerful is quite difficult because of the constant intermarriages and shifting alliances.³²⁸ For the most part the tribal confederations are located in the north, because before uniting with the North in 1990, South Yemen's socialist leaders had reduced the power and influence of the tribes.³²⁹ The most powerful tribal confederation in Yemen is the Hashid, the Hashid are the second largest in population with hundreds and thousands of followers.³³⁰ The leader of the Hashid confederation is Sadeq Abdullah al Ahmar and influential members include his brother, Hamid al Ahmar, and their other brother, Himyar al Ahmar.³³¹ The confederation is concentrated around the northeast governorate of Amran and associated tribes and clans include Al Osaimat, Othar, Kharef, Bani Suraim, Hamdan and Sanhan, which is the clan of Ali Abdullah Saleh.³³²

The second most powerful confederation is the Bakil confederation; they have the largest population, and are concentrated north of Sana'a.³³³ The leaders of the Bakil come

³²⁷ Naylor, Hugh. "Yemen's Tribal Confederations." *The National*. Abu Dhabi Media, 27 Feb. 2012. Web. 13 Mar. 2013. <<http://www.thenational.ae/news/world/middle-east/yemens-tribal-confederations>>.

³²⁸ Ibid.

³²⁹ Ibid.

³³⁰ Ibid.

³³¹ Ibid.

³³² Ibid.

³³³ Ibid.

from the Abu Lahoum and Nihm tribes; the associated tribes and clans include the Khawlan, Arhab, Al Hada, Al Jidaan, Anis, Dihm, Bani Mata, and Haimatyeen.³³⁴ The third most powerful tribal confederation in Yemen is the Madhaj, this confederation is geographically dispersed but concentrated in the central part of the country, and the confederation is known for its business and educated elites.³³⁵ The clans and tribes associated with the Madhaj include: the Murad, Abidah, Ans, Al Zaraniq, Al Awaliq, Kaifah, Al Bakzm, Al Sabyha, Al Abadil, Al Alhasani, and Al Fadhli.³³⁶

The prevalence of tribes in Yemen and the political power that they exercise should give policymakers looking at the conflict in Yemen a pause. Any policy changes or changes in the status quo that the United States or any other outside party is wanting in Yemen will have to go through the tribal confederations. Meaning the powerful tribes are the ones who will have to be brought into the fold and convinced that the status quo needs to be changed. The tribal framework of Yemen makes it that the ‘ground-level’ work that needs to be done in the nation will be done with the help of the tribes. Policymakers in the United States have already had experience with tribal politics and dynamics in places like Afghanistan and Iraq. This is not to say that the same policies can be applied in Yemen, however many of lessons learned in both of these nations can and should be applied in Yemen. One major aspect of tribal society in Yemen that U.S. policymakers should pay close attention to is the built in conflict resolution processes within the tribal communities. These conflict resolution processes have been part of the tribal communities in Yemen for generations and have been successfully used to resolve conflicts throughout Yemeni history. With the national security issues that the United

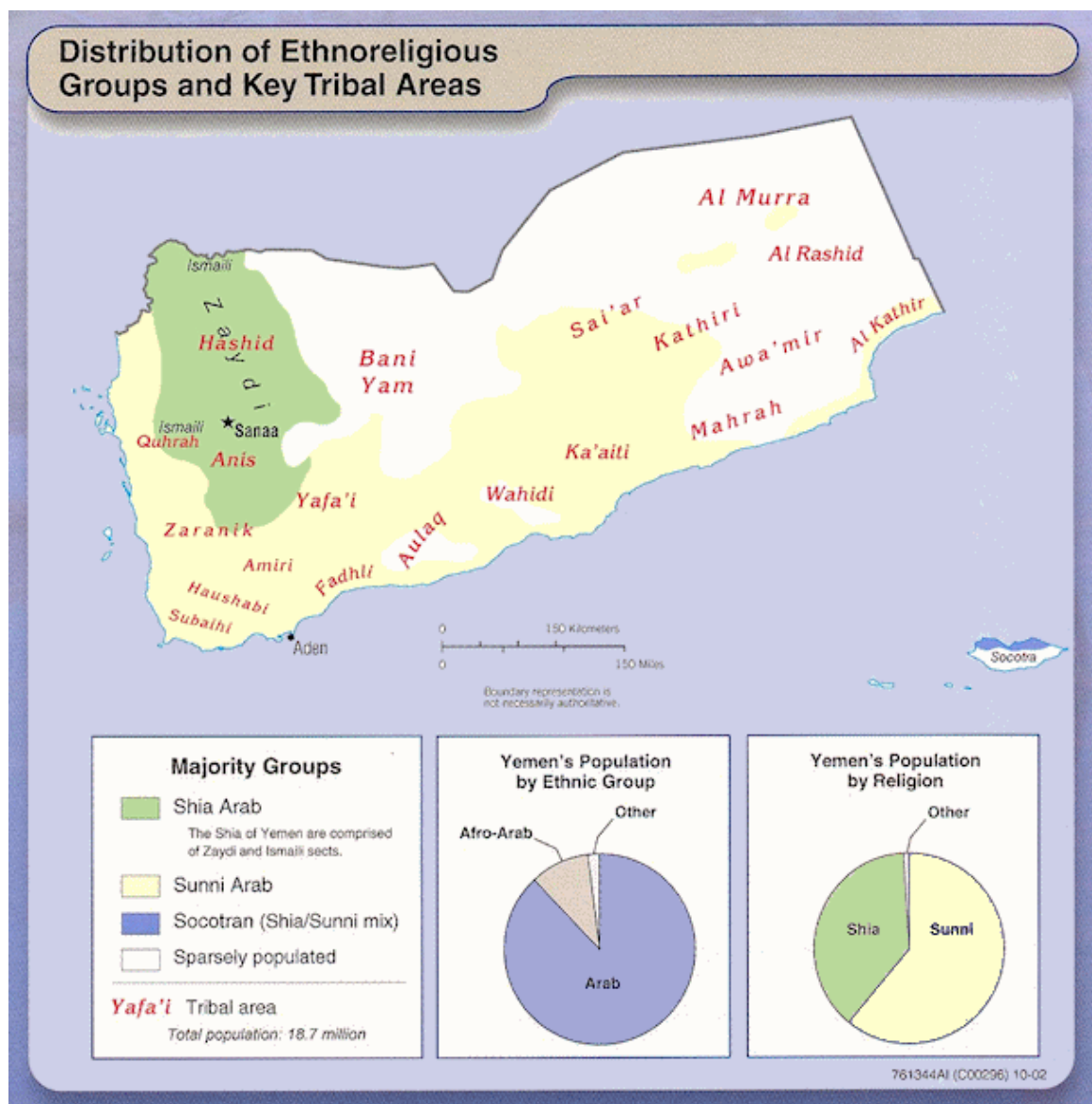
³³⁴ Ibid.

³³⁵ Ibid.

³³⁶ Ibid.

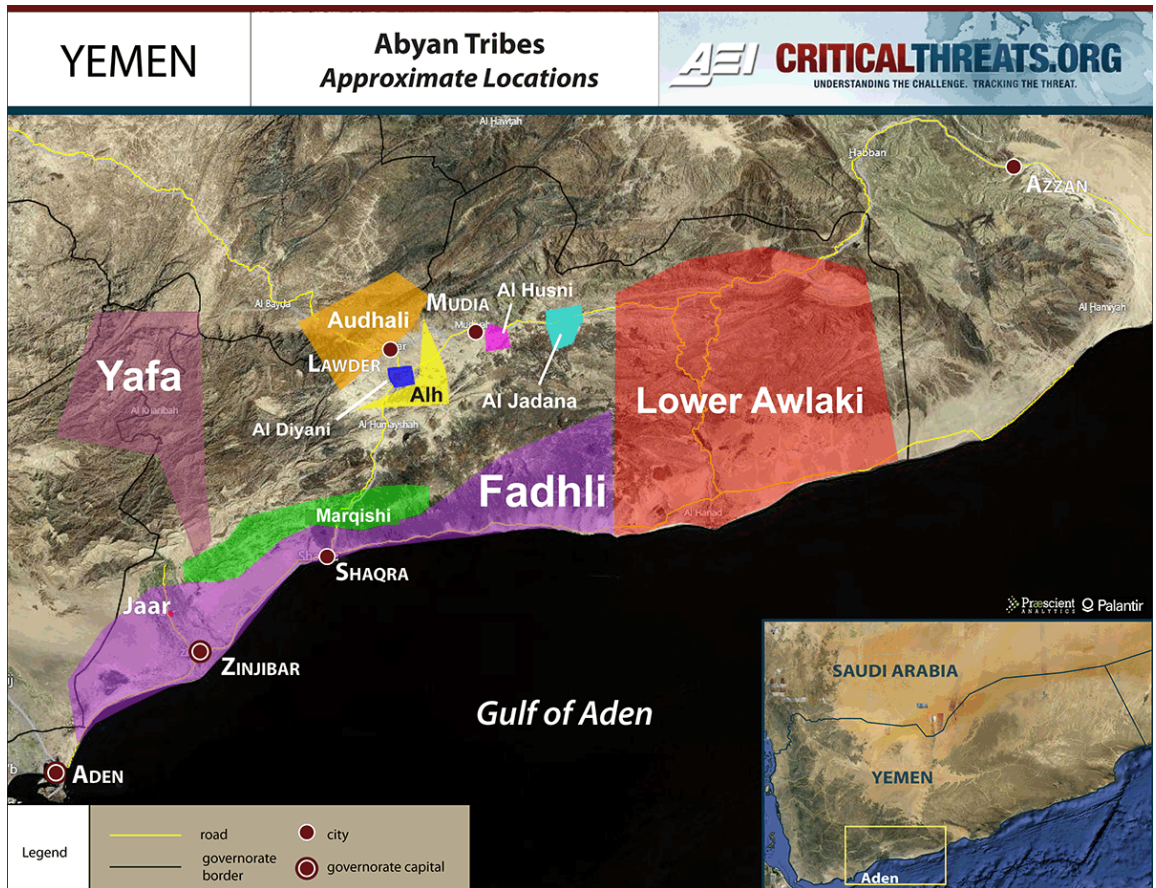
States faces in the nation, these indigenous conflict resolution strategies could prove to be an important resource in moving the troubled Gulf nation towards peace. In the following section, we will further explore these conflict resolution methods and the interaction of the tribes with governance. Before we take a detailed look into the tribal governance in Yemen it would be wise to see a pictorial representation of where many of these tribes have influence, the following maps will show this influence:

Map of Tribes in Yemen (Hashid Confederation in green)

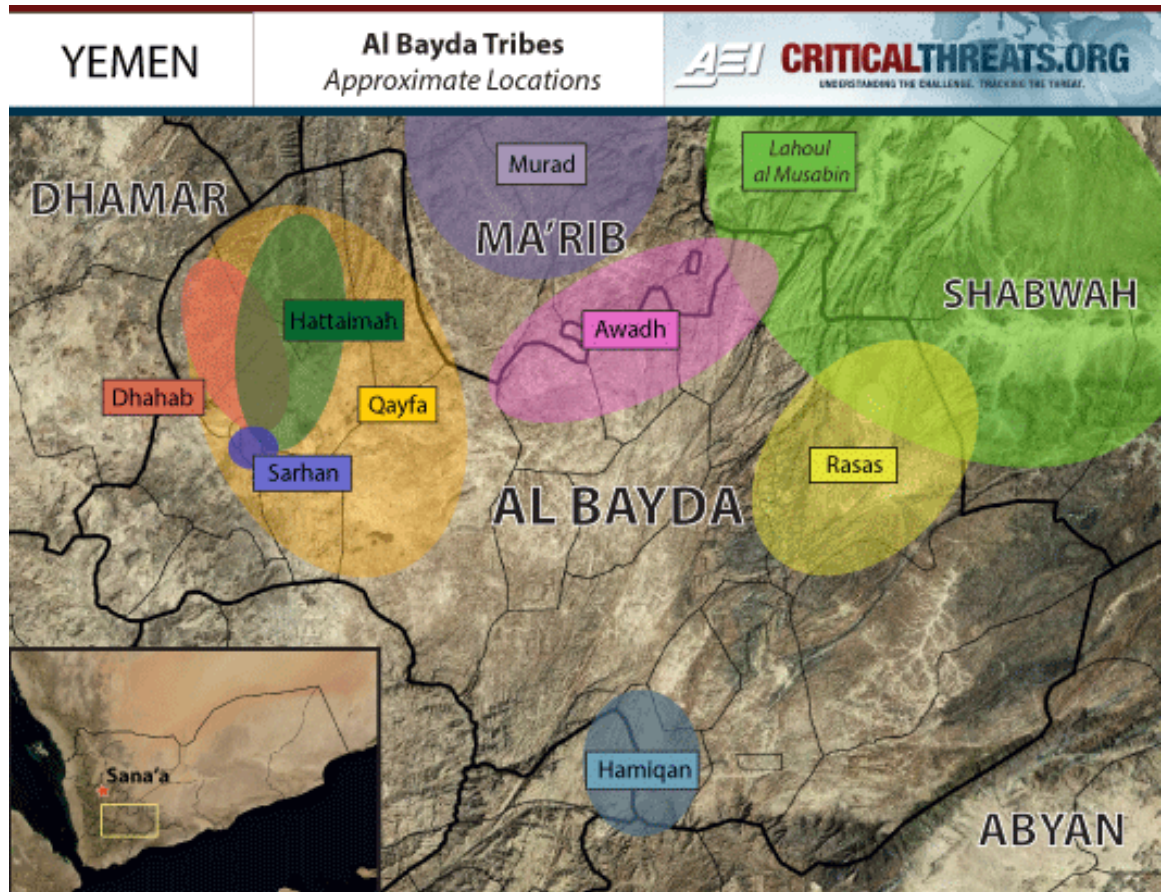


Source: <http://www.globalsecurity.org/military/world/yemen/images/tribes-map1.gif>

Map of Abyan Tribes



Map of Al Bayda Tribes



Tribal Governance

Yemen is a nation that has tribal society woven into its societal fabric; therefore, any political change in the nation must, and usually does involve the major tribes. The depth of the tribal structures can be seen within the national character of Yemen, especially in the lack of national identity, for example, people in southern Yemen call themselves southerners or Shafi'i instead of Yemeni.³³⁷ This lack of national identity makes it so any sort of nationhood becomes a very complicated issue in Yemen. With the tribes being a major historical force in society and societal organization, large swaths of Yemen essentially exist as a multitude of 'nations', each with its own methods of governance and conflict resolution processes. However, before we analyze how the tribes interact with politics and their conflict resolution strategies, we should dispel a myth about the tribes that hinders policymakers' ability to engage with the tribes. The myth is that tribes and the tribal dominance of society in Yemen is a hindrance to the growth and development of the nation. Through this lens the tribes are, unfortunately, viewed as obstacles to peace in Yemen. However, in a country in a country like Yemen, where the state is weak, the tribal system—especially tribal conflict resolution mechanisms—can help promote national reconciliation, stability, and even state building.³³⁸

Tribal interaction with Politics

The tribes and the tribal society become part of Yemen's politics and governance, with many tribal leaders ending up in powerful political positions. When tribal leaders

³³⁷ Zafaranloo, Saeed. *MWC News*. "Tribal socio-structure is he axis of fragility and instability in Yemen". 28 May 2014. Web. 01 June 2014. <http://mwcnews.net/focus/analysis/41229-instability-in-yemen.html>. 28 May 2014.

³³⁸ Al-Dawsari, Nadwa. *Tribal Governance and Stability in Yemen*. Carnegie Papers. Carnegie Endowment for International Peace. April 2012.

move into political positions within the nation, they lay claim to power on behalf of their tribe.³³⁹ This makes it so the loyalty of the political leaders is linked to the tribes in a very key way to the tribes. In the minds of the leaders, their tribes concerns are what are given importance. In turn, this makes it so the national polity of Yemen suffers. The issue in Yemen regarding tribal leaders getting into politics is akin to early political leaders in the U.S. being more loyal to the colonies or states they came from rather than the nation. One can imagine problems that would rise in governance if this were the case in the United States. The interference of tribal leaders in internal affairs is to the extent that every time a person has political power, he is somehow affiliated to a tribe, and naturally, every tribe competes for more of a share of the national power structure.³⁴⁰ This competition for power creates a constantly fragility in Yemen³⁴¹, and in turn makes the nation a state in which the national government has very little control.

Tribal Structure

However, as indicated above, Yemenis have relied on indigenous tribal traditions to regulate conflict and establish justice for centuries, if not millennia.³⁴² Tribal law has effectively handled conflicts between various tribes, between tribes and extractive companies, and between tribes and the government.³⁴³ It has successfully prevented and resolved conflicts over resources, development services, and land, and has sometimes managed to contain complex revenge-killing cases. Nationally, tribal mediators have played an important role in promoting political dialogue and building consensus among

³³⁹ Zafaranloo, Saeed. *MWC News*. "Tribal socio-structure is he axis of fragility and instability in Yemen". 28 May 2014. Web. 01 June 2014. <http://mwcnews.net/focus/analysis/41229-instability-in-yemen.html>. 28 May 2014.

³⁴⁰ Ibid.

³⁴¹ Ibid.

³⁴² Al-Dawsari, Nadwa. *Tribal Governance and Stability in Yemen*. Carnegie Papers. Carnegie Endowment for International Peace. April 2012.

³⁴³ Ibid. p. 1

political groups.³⁴⁴ The tribes in Yemen have gotten to this point of pre-eminence because of the corruption and the weaknesses of the state institutions there.³⁴⁵ These tribes provide social order outside the formal system of governance.³⁴⁶ Tribes and tribal law act, in the words of political scientist Daniel Corstange, as “second-best substitutes for an absent or weak state.”³⁴⁷ People approve of the tribes because they provide basic rule of law in the form of conflict resolution and regulation.³⁴⁸ The key to the system of tribal social structure in Yemen is based on the collective responsibility and accountability of the tribal leaders (sheikhs) to their respective communities.³⁴⁹ The leadership dynamic within the tribes is not one of a sheikh being the ‘chief’ who has authority over his ‘followers’, instead the legitimacy that a sheikh has is gathered through the acknowledgment of tribesmen, which is given if the individual has consistently shown the ability to resolve tribal problems, resolve conflicts, and safeguard the tribe’s interests without resorting to coercion.³⁵⁰ Another point to be raised is that the title of sheikh does not pass automatically from father to son; it is a title that *must* be earned though earning the respect of tribesmen.³⁵¹

Furthermore, the tribal structure is not hierarchical, as was pointed out above, there is no paramount sheikh sitting atop the tribe. Rather, there are ‘prominent’ sheikhs who earn their status by attending to tribal needs and interests, and also providing conflict resolution services within the tribe and amongst tribes.³⁵² These ‘layers of authority’ are

³⁴⁴ Ibid.

³⁴⁵ Ibid. p. 4

³⁴⁶ Ibid.

³⁴⁷ Ibid.

³⁴⁸ Ibid.

³⁴⁹ Ibid.

³⁵⁰ Ibid. p. 5

³⁵¹ Ibid. p. 4

³⁵² Ibid. p. 5

relevant within the conflict resolution system when the parties are exercising their right to appeal when they disagree with the verdict of an arbitrator.³⁵³ When a conflict does arise, a sheikh or some respected social figure first mediates between parties and helps them choose an arbitrator, then after the arbitrator has heard the case, the parties may appeal twice at higher tribal arbitration levels before the decision becomes binding.³⁵⁴ The tribe in Yemen, thus, is a social organization that gains its legitimacy from a set of traditional rules that constitutes a social contract among the tribe's members as well as between them and their sheikhs and other tribes.³⁵⁵

This social contract, or Customary Law, governs public affairs within the tribes, protects common interests, and extends protection and economic support to tribal members.³⁵⁶ This Customary Law system that the tribes in Yemen follow is one that is resilient and has continued to evolve as the country has evolved.³⁵⁷ This system is mostly dominant in the tribal areas; however even Yemenis in the urban areas often prefer it to the formal court system.³⁵⁸ The tribal law system is more accessible, effective, and much faster than the formal legal system in the country, furthermore the formal court systems are mistrusted since they are often linked with corrupt government officials.³⁵⁹ Even the national government, has at times, called upon the tribes to solve complex conflicts, especially between the government and tribes.³⁶⁰ However, one issue that the tribes are

³⁵³ Ibid.

³⁵⁴ Ibid.

³⁵⁵ Ibid.

³⁵⁶ Ibid.

³⁵⁷ Ibid.

³⁵⁸ Ibid. p. 8.

³⁵⁹ Ibid.

³⁶⁰ Ibid.

feeling is the increased pressure being placed on these Customary Law systems with the increasing levels of violence, and institutional failure of the courts.³⁶¹

This is a troubling sign for the future of the nation of Yemen; the national, formal systems of conflict resolution through the courts have stopped functioning because of the violence. If the more informal systems within the tribal communities also get hampered and cease to function, if this happens a key part of Yemeni society will have been altered, this alteration could have large detrimental effects on the pursuit of U.S. foreign policy goals in the region. What needs to happen is for U.S. policymakers to tap into the tribal conflict resolution networks to assist in moving the nation towards resolving some of the major issues facing it. This would not mean interrupting the systems already in place but allowing U.S. foreign policy goals to work with those systems.

Tribal Conflict Resolution

A key aspect of connecting with the indigenous methodologies of conflict resolution that the tribes practice is to first understand what the process is. Unlike the formal court system, the tribal system is based on consensus building and maintaining relationships.³⁶² The keys to tribal traditions are transparency, accountability, solidarity, collective responsibility, the protection of public interests and the weak, prioritizing community interests over those of the individual, empathy, and forgiveness.³⁶³ The culture of dialogue and apology are embedded in the practice and rituals of tribal Customary Law.³⁶⁴ The processes of tribal conflict management also emphasize tolerance and forgiveness throughout, while also involving a great deal of deliberate

³⁶¹ Ibid.

³⁶² Ibid. p. 9.

³⁶³ Ibid.

³⁶⁴ Ibid.

negotiation and dialogue to ensure that the conflicting parties are content with the resolution.³⁶⁵ Within the conflict management process, the confession or apology play an important role in easing the tension and releasing negative emotions, this allows for a way of constructive conflict resolution to be opened.³⁶⁶

The process itself generally opens with a tribesman or a representing sheikh giving *banadeq assawah*, or “guns of reason” to the person that was wronged, this ceremonious offering signals to the party that was wronged that the other side is open for arbitration and/or negotiation.³⁶⁷ According to tribal traditions, this ritual signifies a confession of the mistake/crime, and in return, the other side shows its honorable tribal generosity by accepting mediation and sometimes granting forgiveness or a reduction of demanded amends.³⁶⁸ This conflict management system generally deals with conflicts at an early stage, when they are not violent, but it also has mechanisms in place to resolve conflicts when they become violent.³⁶⁹ When the tribes sense a conflict brewing between families or individuals, sheikhs from the two tribes rush in to contain it before it escalates, they bring parties to the conflict together to negotiate and settle differences.³⁷⁰

The negotiation itself is usually facilitated by sheikhs or social figures that each party authorizes to his representative, if this process does not work, then a sheikh from a third tribe can initiate a mediation process, through which, if a conflict becomes violent, he gets the parties to agree to short cease-fire.³⁷¹ He helps prepare for arbitration by getting each party to choose an arbitrator or arbitrators, once that happens, the mediator’s

³⁶⁵ Ibid.

³⁶⁶ Ibid.

³⁶⁷ Ibid.

³⁶⁸ Ibid.

³⁶⁹ Ibid.

³⁷⁰ Ibid.

³⁷¹ Ibid.

role ends unless a party or parties choose him to arbitrate.³⁷² The arbitrator or arbitrators issue a verdict after a long process that involves examining evidence, dialogue, and caucuses with the parties to the conflict, at the end of the process each party has the right to appeal twice in front of other tribal sheikhs before the verdict becomes final and binding.³⁷³

The tribal conflict management system has a strong enforcement mechanism mainly based on collective responsibility and action.³⁷⁴ In each phase of the process, the parties bring guarantees to the mediators and arbitrators; these guarantees can take the form of daggers, guns, or money that is presented as a symbol of the parties' commitment to implement the arbitrator's verdict.³⁷⁵ Additionally, the parties are required to obtain the support of respected tribal sheikhs who serve as guarantors; therefore any offense committed by any of the parties is an insult to their guarantors.³⁷⁶ Through this two pronged accountability approach, the parties are held accountable not only through the monetary resources they expend on the process, but also through the leadership of their respected tribes. This also gives us a look into the core strength of the tribal system in Yemen, these individuals who go to their respective sheikhs to get these guarantees have a very strong incentive to work towards a peaceful resolution of the conflict, and also make sure that they do not break any of rules set forth by the mediators. If they run into trouble, or break any of the rules the individuals risk angering their sheikhs and becoming an outcast in a society that is held together by these tribes. The shame that the individual would bring not only to themselves, but their families and relatives if they were to be

³⁷² Ibid.

³⁷³ Ibid.

³⁷⁴ Ibid.

³⁷⁵ Ibid. p. 10.

³⁷⁶ Ibid.

kicked out of the tribal network is so high that they will work very hard to continue the conflict resolution process.

Therefore, what exists in Yemen is an indigenous system that has existed for a long time and has become stronger as time has gone on. A key part of any policy that is pursued by the United States in Yemen *must* include the indigenous conflict resolution processes that have developed within the tribal structures. There are multiple benefits to approaching the stabilization of conflicts in Yemen through this strategy. The first, and the main, benefit is that whatever conflict resolution processes are created through this process will be inherently indigenous, and therefore will have a higher ‘buy in’ than a process that is imposed externally. The recent history of U.S. involvement in the Middle East is rife with failed strategies of imposing governance models that ended up failing and resulting in the political situations deteriorating. The legacy of western involvement in Yemen is already littered with failed policies; this time around the United States cannot afford to have history repeat itself.

However, the engagement with the tribal structure and the traditional system in Yemen is fraught with risks. Part of the ‘smart strategy’ U.S. and other western policymakers will have to adopt will be the understanding of these risks. A major risk is borne simply out of the fact that there is a lack of understanding of local power dynamics and the political landscape, which could result in the worsening of already existing conflicts or the creation of new ones.³⁷⁷ If the engagement process is not done carefully, the tribal leaders that are engaged might end up losing the political authority and the trust that they have built up in their communities, and therefore, the local people would end up

³⁷⁷ Ibid. p. 14.

losing the access to justice that they have enjoyed through the tribal system.³⁷⁸ This risk could potentially be alleviated through the integration of the informal tribal system into the formal system that exists in Yemen.³⁷⁹ Another method of avoiding this risk would be through the adoption of methods that allow the informal system to function smoothly, yet deal with some of the major political and social issues the nation is currently dealing with. Either way, the process of engagement and integration will have to be shaped through an in-depth assessment of local needs, the opportunities the process might offer, and the risks that it entails and ways to mitigate them.³⁸⁰

One of the first steps that can be taken in the formulation of such a strategy of engagement is to attempt to understand the local needs, opportunities, and risks. A method of getting to this understanding is through analyzing the situation in Yemen through a systems theory approach. This is what the remainder of this thesis will attempt. The hope is that by the end of this final portion, the reader will understand the ‘system’ that the policies formulated on Yemen will operate in. This understanding should yield in better policy formulation and execution, and through this an overall better level of engagement with the nation of Yemen.

³⁷⁸ Ibid.

³⁷⁹ Ibid.

³⁸⁰ Ibid.

CHAPTER VIII

SYSTEMS THEORY AND YEMEN

Systems Theory

The systems theory approach to peacebuilding has had a long and rich developmental history; it is not necessary here to analyze the historical development of this approach. What this section will aim to do is to explore the core concepts of the approach and help the reader understand what these core concepts are. The overall goal of this chapter is to finally attempt to apply those concepts to the crisis in Yemen. The hope here is to show the reader a potential path to constructive conflict resolution in the country as well as show the policymaker a method of U.S. involvement that may result in long-term development for Yemen.

One of the major thinkers of the systems theory approach to peacebuilding is the scholar Robert Ricigliano, in his book *Making Peace Last: A Toolbox for Sustainable Peacebuilding*; he outlines some of the core basic tools of systems thinking. They are: Interaction or relationships among parts; Interconnectedness of parts; Feedback and dynamic (as opposed to linear) causality; and Patterns or holism.³⁸¹ One of the first steps in moving from seeing individual parts to seeing whole systems is to focus on the interactions among the parts.³⁸² This may seem as an obvious point, however, this is a fundamental and very common mistake that is made in the realm of peacebuilding or conflict resolution. A lot of time and many resources are spent on working to figure out how to fix the various parts rather than seeing the whole system, or even how the parts

³⁸¹ Ricigliano, Robert. *Making Peace Last: A Toolbox for Sustainable Peacebuilding*. Boulder, Colorado: Paradigm Publishers, 2012. Print. p. 21-22.

³⁸² Ibid. p. 22.

interact. There is a major issue that occurs if this is being done in a complex environment like the one that is faced in Yemen. A good example is that of fixing a car, one can see the car as a collection of separate parts, and it would be accurate to see a car as such. However, all of those separate parts *interact* in specific ways to make the car run smoothly. If one or multiple parts break, then it is appropriate to go in and attempt to fix those parts, but the interactions to other parts *must* be kept in mind, otherwise we would have an endless problem on our hands.

After one can see the interactions that the parts of a system have to each other, then we can move to understanding the interconnectedness, how each piece of a system is connected, directly or indirectly, to other parts in the system.³⁸³ This interconnectedness is like a spider-web: Pulling on any one strand in the web will affect, directly or indirectly, every other strand in the web.³⁸⁴ If we look at the example of Yemen, the various parties involved in the conflict are the pieces of the system, forming a ‘spider-web’ of connections that are dependent on each other. In the last chapter, there was an exploration of the tribal structure in Yemen, all of the various tribes are pieces of the ‘system’ that is Yemen. The political parties, the people, the various civil society organizations, the various foreign interests, and unfortunately the militant groups that have found a home in the hinterlands of the nation join these tribes to complete this system. All of the various parts are fluid, and constantly interacting with each other. Sometimes these interactions are positive and sometimes they are negative.

³⁸³ Ibid.

³⁸⁴ Ibid.

This interconnectedness gives rise to the ideas of *feedback* and *dynamic causality*.³⁸⁵ The feedback can be thought in terms of the spider-web mentioned above, if one strand of the web is plucked, the vibration travels around the spider-web, the *system*, until it comes back to affect the strand that was initially plucked.³⁸⁶ It is the same for systems, if one part of the system affects another part that original action will reverberate throughout the system and eventually act on the part that initiated the action.³⁸⁷ This interconnectedness leads to dynamic causality, which is a defining feature of wholeness.³⁸⁸ Within an interconnected system, it is this dynamic causality that is at work, instead of linear causality. Linear causality is a fairly simple concept to grasp, it looks at discrete causal chains and assumes that causality happens in a line that travels in one direction: If you do A, then B will happen; if B happens, then C will result.³⁸⁹ This is different from the dynamic causality that exists in complex systems like the one seen in nations like Yemen. Dynamic causality assumes that no initial condition exists in isolation; instead all conditions are part of an interconnected system.³⁹⁰

For example, if a military strike occurs on an al-Qa'ida camp in Yemen, it can be seen as an isolated incident, and many times it is seen in that manner. But in reality, on the ground, it is far from an isolated incident; the effects of the strike reverberate throughout the system on multiple levels. Initially, the effects are very localized, only stretching to the community and the tribe level. However, the effects slowly spread beyond the local levels and start affecting the national levels, questions as to who was

³⁸⁵ Ibid. p. 23.

³⁸⁶ Ibid.

³⁸⁷ Ibid.

³⁸⁸ Ibid.

³⁸⁹ Ibid.

³⁹⁰ Ibid.

involved may be raised, where intelligence for the strike came from? Who was providing the intelligence? Followed by questions of loyalty in a constantly shifting battle-space and a very fluid political system. On the international level, questions of the legitimacy of the strike may be raised, also questions about the efficacy of the strategy. All of these questions result in complexities for policy-makers, complexities that exist and need to be dealt with.

This example of a strike is a simple one, however, there have been major system changing incidents that have occurred in Yemen's recent history, the coup and the revolution are just two of the examples. These incidents have not just affected the complex system that exists in Yemen but have altered it in ways that were unimaginable to policy-makers just a few years ago. The effects of these changes are too many in number and too complex for this work to analyze, but the fact remains that they are changes that will have deep, and long-term effects to the system and policy-makers will have to be cognizant of these effects as the U.S. and other western nations get further involved in the situation.

One potential methodology that can be used to analyze, understand, and potentially move towards a more long-term peacebuilding process in Yemen is the SAT model, as outlined by Ricigliano in his work. The 'SAT' in this model stands for 'Structural'; 'Attitudinal'; and 'Transactional', together these three components form a framework for systemic change in the peacebuilding context.³⁹¹ The Structural component refers to the "systems and institutions designed to meet people's basic needs", the peacebuilding tools in this component include governance assistance, economic

³⁹¹ Ibid. p. 35.

reconstruction programs, rule-of-law program, security sector reform, etc.³⁹² The Structural component is working at the government level and working on the processes and issues that are dealt in the public sector level. The peacebuilding tools show that most of the work in this component in the framework is involved in improving governance mechanisms, meaning the tools operate at the upper-levels of society and work with a ‘top-down’ philosophy. As important as this component of the framework is, it is not one that can be relied on exclusively, especially in a complex environment like Yemen, unfortunately, up until now, the intervention of the United States has been almost exclusively at this level.

The second component of the SAT model is Attitudinal, this component refers to the shared norms, beliefs, social capital, and intergroup relationships that affect the level of cooperation between or people.³⁹³ The peacebuilding tools within this component include, truth and reconciliation commissions, trauma-healing initiatives, community dialogue programs, multi-ethnic media programs, etc.³⁹⁴ This is a component of the SAT model that may result in some constructive progress being made in the conflict in Yemen, however before I outline how that may be achieved it would help to go through the final component of the SAT model, and that is Transactional. This component refers to processes and skills used by key people to peacefully manage conflict, build interpersonal relationships, solve problems collaboratively, and turn ideas into action.³⁹⁵ The tools within this component include formal mediation initiatives, cease-fires, negotiation

³⁹² Ibid.

³⁹³ Ibid.

³⁹⁴ Ibid.

³⁹⁵ Ibid.

training for representatives of combatants, local development councils, back-channel dialogues among leaders, confidence-building measures, and so forth.³⁹⁶

Both the Attitudinal and the Transactional components of the SAT model are ones that can yield some success in the conflict that has engulfed Yemen. The idea here is that policymakers should analyze and approach the conflict in Yemen as one that requires a deeper level of commitment than has been seen so far. The advantage of the SAT model and its implementation in a complex conflict like Yemen is that it allows for a both the Attitudinal and Transactional pieces of the SAT model offer an opportunity to do this. Combining the indigenous conflict resolution processes that were discussed in the previous section with the tools that are available through the Attitudinal and Transactional components is something that is key to allow for the ‘buy in’ necessary for any of these processes to work in a nation like Yemen. The full implementation of the SAT model also allows the policymakers to go *beyond* the processes that have been implemented so far, and we can clearly see that there is a need to take this step. The intervention of the U.S. has so far, as we have seen, has been an approach that has put the military aspect of the conflict first.

The plain reality is that the United States and other nations involved in the conflict in Yemen have military and national security interests that override the developmental aspects in this situation. The long-term development of the country is not the focus of the policymakers, however, given what has been discussed in this work, the conflict in Yemen has now become so intertwined with the development of the nation that it is something that has to be paid attention to. In fact, it would be of great benefit to the overall U.S. policy in the Middle East if the conflict in Yemen comes to a resolution

³⁹⁶ Ibid.

that promises long-term peace in that region of the world. With other Gulf nations already staunch U.S. allies in the Middle East, adding another friend in an increasingly unstable neighborhood would clearly be something that would assist U.S. interests in the region.

The SAT model would allow for this to occur, by implementing all three components of the model would allow the U.S. to intervene constructively in a nation that the U.S. is already involved in. This intervention can take the form of increased aid to programs that can tie into indigenous conflict resolution practices. The aid would have to be complimented by continued military support to effectively counter the militant threat. Added to this prong of intervention should be programs that work to counter extremist ideology. The militant groups operating in Yemen have fed off the local tribes and as was pointed out in an earlier section the militants have integrated themselves within the tribal structures. The SAT model's implementation would target the connections the militants have made in the communities by supporting the traditional peaceful conflict resolution methods. The Structural and Attitudinal components of the model would also help in the counter-terrorism efforts by allowing for the governance challenges that fuel militancy to be addressed while also addressing the attitude shifts that need to occur for militancy to be dealt with, through its focus on healing the communities that have been affected by the violence of militant groups.

This is where both the Attitudinal and Transactional components of the SAT model can be addressed. The counter-ideology component is of high importance to any successful counter-terrorism strategy, and the work will have to be done at the local level. The work that is needed in Yemen to counter the militant ideology will have to involve

work at the community level, meaning investment will have to be made in aspects of both the Attitudinal and Transactional components of the SAT model. For the Structural component, the rule of law (ROL) and governance programs that have been applied in other post-conflict regions will have to be applied. However, in applying these programs the role of the tribes will have to be kept in mind. As indicated above, the tribal system already has an indigenous conflict resolution system in place, and without a functioning judicial system, the preference for most Yemenis is the tribal system that has successfully worked for so long. The application of the Structural component of the SAT model through ROL promotion in this system *cannot* mean pulling people away from the tribal systems they are accustomed to.

As Yemen enters into a period of recognizing that peace is necessary and the conflict must end, the time is ripe for a nation like the U.S. to implement a long-term development strategy. The SAT model's implementation would require work on multiple levels with multiple U.S. government agencies operating simultaneously. A major benefit of applying a comprehensive system wide model like the SAT model would be its ability to take away from the control of groups like AQAP and ISIL. As was pointed out above, these groups have successfully applied the theory of competitive control to the point that they dominate the population in parts of Yemen. They are the groups that have been able to “establish a predictable, consistent, wide-spectrum normative system of control”³⁹⁷ and this dominance has occurred within the larger system of Yemen.

Since both these groups exercise this dominance, and are effectively the governance in the parts of Yemen they control, it means that they have found ways to

³⁹⁷ Kilcullen, David. *Out of the Mountains: The Coming Age of the Urban Guerrilla*. New York: Oxford UP, 2013. Print.

dominate the structural, attitudinal, and transactional portions of the system they occupy. The best way to counter such dominance is to apply the SAT model in a way that targets the segments of society that these groups have infiltrated. This approach inherently calls for moving beyond the application of a ‘military first’ approach to the crisis in Yemen, although the military aspect is important to wrest physical control of territory initially from groups like ISIL and AQAP, the *keeping* of the territory depends on the successful application of the SAT model. The application of the SAT model is what is needed to effectively address the “winning of hearts and minds” in territory that has been dominated by AQAP or ISIL. Therefore, by successfully applying the SAT model to recover the areas where AQAP or ISIL exercise competitive control in Yemen, we can look forward to dealing with a major issue that has dogged counter-insurgency operations in the past.

One of the main points that have to be kept in mind is that whatever the solutions are to the conflict, they *have* to be owned by the Yemeni people. However, even through the analysis that has been done above, one can see how aspects of the SAT model can be applied in the Yemeni situation. The clear aspects include trauma-healing programs, mediation services that work with and incorporate the indigenous conflict resolution processes that the tribes have been performing. The intervention would require assistance and support provided to these conflict resolution processes, this support could take the form of monetary support and/or logistical support. Alongside this there would need to be continued assistance on the governance end, the Structural component of the SAT model. Through the successful implementation of the SAT model, there could also be some ground made on the counter-terrorism front in Yemen.

Attempting to implement the SAT model in Yemen, of course has major implications, not only for the nation of Yemen, but also for the nations like the United States, which will be involved in the effort. Regarding the U.S. this policy of implementation will deepen the involvement of Washington policymakers in the region. Given the fact that the Middle East is a region that the United States is increasingly viewing as a place of limited involvement, the political will required for long-term involvement in Yemen will be quite high. However, given the security interests present in the region, long-term involvement will be something that pays dividends into the future for the United States. A high level of involvement *does not* however mean imposing policy onto Yemen. Among the many lessons learned from the U.S. led invasion of Iraq and its aftermath is that democracy cannot be simply be ‘planted’ in nations. The process of stabilization post-conflict *requires* patience and allowance of organic, indigenous processes to happen. If these processes are short-circuited, it is highly likely that a high amount of alienation will occur and the government that the Yemeni state has will not be friendly towards U.S. interests in the region.

Conclusion

Taken together, the SAT model gives policymakers who are working on the issues in Yemen a powerful tool to deal with not only the issues that Yemen faces right now because of the conflict, but also pave a path for long-term development and growth. The key concept to understand here is that the idea of long term growth and development for a nation like Yemen is predicated on the complete ending of the political violence that has existed for so long. Until this violence and instability is not dealt with the growth cannot occur. Unfortunately the longer the problems continue, the more difficult finding

solutions will become. Yemen already has become a tragedy, seemingly trapped in an endless cycle of violence and deprivation of human rights and needs. All of these problems are not only complicating the present, but are also making the future bleaker. This should not be seen as a simple humanitarian cry motivated by a need to assist humanity in their time of need, it is that, but for U.S. policymakers it is much more. A strategically important nation like Yemen cannot be left alone, and it cannot be left to the geopolitical storms of the future. The United States needs to work harder and better to ensure that Yemen develops in a peaceful manner, and that Yemenis see the U.S. as a partner in peace and not in war.

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