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A CLOSER LOOK AT YEMEN

A review essay by James P. Farwell

The Last Refuge: Yemen, Al-Qaeda, and America's War in Arabia by Gregory D. Johnsen.
Publisher: W. W. Norton & Company

Yemen: Revolution, Civil War, and Unification by Uzi Rabi.
Publisher: I.B. Tauris

Unfinished Revolutions: Yemen, Libya, and Tunisia after the Arab Spring by Ibrahim Fraihat.
Publisher: Yale University Press

Tribes and States in a Changing Middle East Edited by Uzi Rabi.
Publisher: Oxford University Press

About the author

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'I would never a trust a man who didn't steal', former Yemen President Ali Abdullah Saleh famously declared. No wonder people call Yemen a kleptocracy. The ex-President of South Yemen, Ali Salim al-Beidh, was less quotable but claimed bragging rights as an Omar Sharif look-alike. Sharif and al-Beidh shared a passion for gambling, a quality that epitomizes the risks that Yemeni political parties have taken in pushing their agendas. History shows such risks can be costly. Sharif lost a $6 million mansion in a single hand of cards. Al-Beidh lost his country after cutting a deal with Saleh to unite north and south Yemen.

Uzi Rabi is the director of the Moshe Dayan Center for Middle Eastern Studies at Tel Aviv University. He has produced two exceptional books that all or partly deal with Yemen. As author of *Yemen: Revolution, Civil War and Unification*, he insightfully describes the unpredictable dynamics that enliven Yemen's modern political history. As editor of *Tribes and States in a Changing Middle East*, he provides an exceptional set of essays that describe and evaluate the dynamics and political impact of tribes on Middle East states.

This review essay focuses on Yemen. Analyses produced by Yoav Alon on Qatar, Andrea Rug on the United Arab Emirates, Rabi himself on Oman, Sarah Yizraeli on Saudi Arabia, Dawn Chatty on Bedouin tribes in Syria, Ronen Zeidel on Iraq, Anthony Toth on Bahrain, and essays by P.C. Salzman and Joseph Kostiner offer keen understanding into how tribal dynamics are unfolding. J.E. Peterson has authored a dozen books on the region. His concise, superbly stated analysis of Yemen here is an indispensable addition to discourse on its situation.

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Why do we care about this impoverished, heavily-armed nation that has become a failing state? Geography drives the importance of a stable Yemen for the United States and its allies. The Suez Canal-Red Sea-Bab al-Mandab passage is critically important to America's ability to shift military resources rapidly between the Mediterranean and the Indian Ocean. Economically, approximately eight per cent of global trade, mostly between Europe and Asia, passes along Yemen's shores. Likewise, Yemen's long land borders with Saudi Arabia and Oman have been a source of regional instability. In the 1970s, Yemen was a refuge for rebels fighting to overthrow the Sultan of Oman, while smuggling across the Saudi border has long been an economic mainstay for many Yemenis.

Yemen has experienced upheavals since 1962, when military officers ousted the thousand-year old Imamate. In 1969, infighting caused the nation to divide between north and south. The National Liberation Front established the People's Republic of South Yemen. In 1969, radical Marxists seized control and transformed it into the People's Democratic Republic of Yemen. In 1978, northern Yemen's Parliament elected Saleh as President after unknown parties assassinated his predecessor, Ahmed bin Hussein al-Gashmi.

A turning point came in 1990, when Saleh persuaded Al-Beidh to join him in uniting north and south. Saleh felt unification would strengthen his regime's legitimacy. Al-Beidh [sometimes spelled al-Bayd or Al-Bid] felt it might strengthen the southern economy. As the Soviet Union collapsed, Russian aid had ended. The South needed new options. A common language, wide geographical expanse, oil exploration, and a common written tradition appealed to aspirations for unity on all sides. Unfortunately, northern and southern cultures did not easily mesh. Political elites found common ground mainly in their hostility to pluralist, multi-party systems.

Parliamentary elections took place in 1993. The outcome surprised al-Beidh. The majority of votes lay in the north. Yet the eccentric southerner had convinced himself that he could win. Rabi's excellent narrative details the slapdash union and

the instability it engendered. Loosely organised, the north was rooted in tribal society, dominated by the Hashid and Bakil tribal confederations. A structured, secular Marxist regime had governed the south. The south had its own divide. Aden was more cosmopolitan and secular. Its eastern governorates were more conservative and tribal.

The union fractured. Southerners fumed over exclusion from power, high unemployment, and price increases. In 1994, Al-Beidh declared independence and established the Democratic Yemeni Republic. Civil war erupted. Saleh crushed the south in a ruthless, two-month conflict that inflicted 10,000 casualties. Saleh's victory, spearheaded by Afghanistan war veterans, was pyrrhic.

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Peterson's robust, richly detailed assessment adds other insights. The war 'broke the back of the existing leadership in South Yemen—both the Yemeni Socialist Party and the broader coalition of exiles that were recruited to participate'. But what did Saleh achieve? His rule reinforced division in the south, which lacked new leadership to challenge his then rule. Yet the war and its aftermath intensified southern desires for secession, while strengthening the appeal of the Islamists. The persistent criticism that followed helped delegitimise Saleh's regime.

Rabi sees in Yemen the story of a decline in revolutionary ideas. Saleh tried to create state cohesion by cutting himself off from socialist ideology and emphasising the centrality of tribes. But while tribal ties matter more than national ones, in Yemen family matters most and provides the fabric that binds the key players. Peterson recognizes the centrality of tribes, but argues that tribe members have increasingly become individual political actors, while the role of shaykhs as tribal leaders has diminished.

Saleh was a master of playing off the tribes. Peterson reports that his authority depended on a 'small clique, not tribal alliance'. Tribesmen are well represented in Yemen's military. They comprise 70-80 per cent of it. But they joined for employment, not to express support for Saleh. Saleh partnered with key players to sustain his power. Unless needed, he tossed them aside.

Still, he conducted aggressive outreach to tribal notables, apparently putting 4,500 shaykhs on a monthly payroll. For decades, he maintained power by balancing competing interests. It was, he famously said, 'like dancing on the heads of snakes'. Saleh bought off anyone who caused trouble, rewarded important families, installed his own family members in key positions. 'In this sense', Rabi argues, 'the story of Yemen could serve as an example of the resilience and importance of tribal identities.' Saleh turned 'familial divisions into a legitimate characteristic of the regime'.

Inevitably, Saleh's iron-fist rule weakened. The key political parties, the General Peoples Congress, the Yemen Socialist Party, and Islah all drew financial aid from Saudi Arabia, affording a measure of independence. The tribes and radical Islamists presented challenges. The Islamists strengthened their hand by providing government services. In the meantime, instability deepened as Al Qaeda established a presence.

Saleh felt he had quelled challenges from the left. Increasingly, he feared Islah, Yemen's chapter of the Muslim Brotherhood. Its leader was the flamboyant Abdullah bin Hussain al-Ahmar. As Speaker of the National Assembly and paramount Shaykh of the al-Hashid tribal confederation, al-Ahmar was Yemen's second most powerful individual. Until his death in 2007, his considerable influence checked Saleh's power.

Yemen's political system was surprisingly stable despite its many, often violent problems. After al-Ahmar's death, it spiraled into today's current disaster. How has the death of this man affected Yemen? Al-Ahmar was a Zaydi and Saleh's tribal superior. Yet he founded a Muslim Brotherhood affiliated political party, led Parliament, and emerged as the fulcrum between relative stability and a disastrous multi-party civil war in which numerous foreign powers are intervening. Would understanding the inherent contradictions in al-Ahmar's roles provide useful clues into the reality of Yemen's political system? Greg Johnsen and Uzi Rabi recognise his importance, but one wants more analysis. Given the stakes, al-Ahmar merits serious study.

The rise of Islah pressured Saleh. It posed one of many crises. In June 2004, the first Houthi rebellion broke out in the northern governorate of Sa'dah, triggering successive conflicts. Saleh bungled matters when his henchman—from whom he distanced himself in 2015—General Ali Mohsen al-Ahmar (no relation to the Speaker) captured and murdered Houthi leader Hussein Badreddin al-Houthi.

The Houthi rebellion stemmed from the Houthi refusal to accept the legitimacy of Saleh's regime. The Houthi are members of the Zaydi sect (of which Saleh is a member), a branch of the Shi'i community. Many believe that its moderation qualifies it as the fifth school of Sunni Islam. Known as 'fivers', the key difference in Yemen is that Zaydis have an extra line in their call to prayer and hold their hands differently. Sunnis and Zaydis have intermarried and pray in each other's mosques.

The Houthis felt repressed by Saleh and hemmed in by the growing strength of Salafi Islamists. Peterson's view aligns with Rabi's on this point. Peterson emphasises that, since 1962, the Saudis have maintained a policy of keeping Yemen weak while funding tribes, who welcomed the largesse. The Saudis also created instability through their support of Salafi proselytisation in tribal areas, especially in the north. 'The perception in Yemen,' he reports, 'is that the Saudis are deliberately spreading Wahhabism across the country.'

One might have expected Saleh to discourage that. Instead he poured oil onto the Houthi fire by mobilising the support of Sunni-Salafi actors. His poor judgment dragged Yemen into Sunni-Shi'i divisions that were unsettling the region. Yemen found itself between a rock and a hard-place. The US depicted Yemen as backward and corrupt. Saleh's domestic opponents blasted him as appealing too heavily to 'the West and Global Zionism'.

The Arab Spring, Rabi argues, was a game-changer. It shifted alliances and exacerbated tensions beyond Saleh's ability to control events. Yemen, he concludes, 'is a state at risk—high risk'. His book ends before the outbreak of the current civil war, but his prognosis proved prescient.

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In *The Last Refuge,* Princeton professor Gregory D. Johnsen focuses on the US efforts against Al Qaeda through 2014. Johnsen conducted extensive on-the-ground research. Yemen sent scores of its best and brightest to Afghanistan. 'For an entire generation of young Yemenis', he notes, 'a trip to the front lines in Afghanistan became a rite of passage.'

The Soviets defeated, jihadists flooded back home. Saleh turned a blind eye until bombings in Aden raised questions as to what the Afghan Arabs were up to. During the first Gulf War, Saleh ignored warnings by US Secretary of State James Baker and stood by his friend Saddam Hussein. That proved expensive. Saudi Arabia ejected a million Yemeni migrant workers, whose remittances had provided a safety net at home, and terminated aid, inflicting a severe economic blow.

Towards Al Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP), Saleh maintained an ambivalent attitude. He provided the US with qualified cooperation in exchange for aid dollars. But he stiff-armed FBI efforts to investigate the USS *Cole* bombing and his top intelligence agency, the Political Security Organisation, enjoyed a long history with the jihadis. Johnsen offers a sharply observed, skeptical assessment of US strategy. Ambassador Edmund Hull and other diplomats prudently championed the use of non-lethal aid to improve health care, build hospitals, and help impoverished Yemenis looking for alternatives. Like Hull and Peterson, Johnsen believes a more positive narrative could slowly weaken Al Qaeda's appeal. Unfortunately, US leaders have resorted mostly to kinetic operations.

In 2002, the US caught a break. Johnsen writes that Americans intercepted a cell phone call to AQAP leader Abu Ali al-Harithi. Four hours later, a Predator drone armed with two Hellfire missiles locked on his car in the dunes east of Sana'a. The strike killed six people. The attack crushed Al Qaeda's ability to operate in Yemen.

Al Qaeda's strategy has been to appeal to tribal honour and a code of honour that supports providing assistance to an Islamist tribal member. Peterson stresses a key lesson that goes to the heart of countering terrorism by creating opportunity and fostering reform. Says Peterson: 'If the tribes can be co-opted then AQAP's future security is compromised—if they cannot then the West faces a longer-term threat from Al Qaeda.'

Johnsen finds US strategy misguided. He has even less respect for its execution. Saleh had authorised the al-Harithi strike on the condition that it remained secret. Instead Deputy Secretary of Defense Paul Wolfowitz went on CNN and crowed about it. Saleh was furious. 'That is why we are reluctant to work closely with them,' fumed Yahya al-Mutawakkil, the deputy secretary general of Saleh's ruling party. 'They don't consider the internal circumstances in Yemen.'

All this raises a crucial point. The disconnect between how the US and the West perceive Yemeni dynamics and the way Yemenis perceive them has chilled Yemen's eagerness to cooperate. Yemenis accuse the US of ignoring civilian sensitivities.

Matters grew more complicated in April 2003 when ten prisoners drilled a hole in a bathroom wall and escaped from prison in Aden. The escapees included Jamal al-Badawi and Fahd al-Qusa, two Al Qaeda members involved in the USS *Cole* attack. Instead of cracking down, Saleh opted to work with clerics in creating a program for their re-entry into society. His idea appalled the US, but Saleh was determined.

Whether Saleh's instincts were correct was mooted as the US invaded Iraq. The war radicalised many Yemenis against the US. Released prisoners headed straight for Iraq. They invoked the **Quaranic** principle of defensive jihad. Johnsen states: 'It was a simple case of non-Muslim troops attacking Muslims in a Muslim country. Fighting the US wasn't simply permitted; it was required.' The only condition Saleh demanded was that Yemenis avoid targeting Yemen. The gambit worked—for a while.

Saleh viewed AQAP as a nuisance. He treated the Houthis as an existential threat. He quashed the first rebellion, but in March 2005 it re-ignited. Successive wars followed. Saleh broadened his attacks from Houthis to the powerful Zaydi families who formed the backbone of his state. That mushroomed into a contest between the Zaydis and the more numerous Sunnis. The strategy backfired, weakening Saleh and encouraging AQAP.

The US stepped up its counter-terrorism efforts by working with Central Security Forces under the command of Yahya Saleh, the President's nephew. Yet Saleh mostly ignored pleas to use aid for development. Continuing corruption and growing instability dampened American enthusiasm for Saleh. The Saudis, Yemen's biggest donors, cautioned the Americans that cash transferred into Yemen usually wound up in Swiss banks.

Rejoinders from the US angered and puzzled Saleh. He felt the US ought to be grateful. 'I respond to you immediately when you need something', he told the Americans. Shouldn't he be rewarded? Instead, frustrated by lack of reform and foolishly concluding that the AQAP threat had receded, the Bush administration cut its aid.

Johnsen argues that the US misjudged Yemeni political realities, costing it a unique opportunity for reform that might have helped stabilise Yemen. The window closed in 2006, when three new AQAP leaders emerged: Qasim al-Raymi, Hamza al-Quayti, and Nasir al-Wihayshi. Escaping from prison in January, they rebooted the terrorist organisation. Remarkably, the US let four years elapse—until 2009—before even designating AQAP a terrorist organisation.

Civilian deaths worsened relations. A US Navy ship fired cruise missiles into a Bedouin camp mistakenly identified as an AQAP base. The mishap illuminated an important disconnect in classifying casualties. 'Unless there was explicit intelligence exonerating specific individuals', Johnsen writes, 'the US counted all males of military age at a strike site as combatants.' Yemenis counted many of those as civilian tribesmen. The casualties enraged friends and relatives and provided a pool of new recruits for AQAP.

President Barack Obama wanted to dial down American efforts. 'We are not going to war with Yemen', he declared. Obama insisted on signing off individually on each missile or drone strike. Still, the US-Yemen disconnect persisted. After 2009, AQAP membership tripled from 300 to an estimated 1,000 or more. One tribal

leader echoed a familiar refrain: 'The US sees al-Qaeda as terrorism and we consider the drones terrorism.'

In May 2011, AQAP demonstrated its growing power by seizing Abyan's coastal capital, Zanjubar. It captured US-supplied tanks, heavy artillery, armoured transports and chemicals for bomb-making. Their success fueled an internal debate among the jihadis about identity. Should AQAP be a guerilla organisation that carries out attacks and de-stabilises the existing order, or should it evolve into an insurgent group that uses terrorism to take over and control territory and implement sharia law?

In Zanjubar, AQAP dug water wells and strung electrical lines. Its leaders talked about fixing day-to-day problems, such as sewerage. Recognising that the AQAP brand was unpopular, they toyed with adopting the name Ansar al Sharia to clean up their image. Unlike ISIS, which appeared on the scene in 2014, AQAP has tried to avoid killing civilians and has shown target discipline.[1]

Here emerges an important distinction with strategic implications. The US sees AQAP as a terrorist organisation. AQAP sees itself as a governing organisation that employs terrorism to achieve its goals. Their propaganda is rooted in that perception. Actions and strategic communication must address that issue. So far they haven't.

New US Secretary of Defense and former US Central Command commander General James Mattis watched AQAP's growth with alarm. He worried that Yemen might become the next Afghanistan. Hoping to stop it in its tracks, he proposed major strikes inside Zanjubar. President Obama rejected that counsel. He authorised only the resupply of Yemeni troops. Saudi Arabia was marshalled to stage bombing raids. It took the Yemeni army four months to force AQAP to evacuate the city. While Yemeni political players battled among themselves for power, AQAP set about taking root.

In spring 2011, the Arab Spring stirred street protests. In June, Saleh was badly wounded and barely escaped with his life after his palace was shelled.[2] As fireworks filled the sky, he fled to Saudi Arabia for treatment. People celebrated by sacrificing cows and goats in 'Change Square', an encampment that had been pressuring the President.[3] A year later, Houthis entered Sana'a. Evidently angling to increase his own stature, General Ali Moshen al-Ahmar announced he would protect anti-Saleh protestors and defected to them. His action forced Saleh to step down.[4]

Hardly feeling defeated, Saleh took the long view that big players will always find a way to fight another day. He quit the presidency as part of a heavily criticised deal brokered by the Gulf Cooperation Council that gave him immunity from prosecution.

[1] Johnsen's book ends before ISIS makes its appearance, but does not share AQAP's perspective, and for that reason seems not to be gaining ground in Yemen. See: Joscelyn, Thomas, 'Islamic State defector in Yemen apologizes to Al Qaeda', *Long War Journal*, 23 January 2016. Joscelyn blasts ISIS for acting like Kharijites and that it 'has no respect for Muslim blood'. ISIS later denounced him as a fake but his statements comport with ISIS actions.

[2] 'Yemen's Saleh survives palace shelling', *CBS News*, 3 June 2011.

[3] Dunkel, G. 'Saleh forced to leave: What Next?', *International Action Center*, 11 June 2011.

[4] Naylor, Hugh 'A key player in Yemen's political chaos? A strongman ousted in 2012', *Washington Post*, 11 February 2015.

Saleh transferred power to his weak vice president, Abu Rabu Mansur Hadi, whom Yemenis then voted to give a two-year transition term. The machinations went for naught. Mansur Hadi achieved little. But lacking viable alternatives, the government and the international community extended Mansur Hadi's term for two more years.

Johnsen's book concludes prior to the current Saudi/United Arab Emirates-led intervention. Complementing Rabi's book, it is a well-researched, well argued study of how US policy fails. The book is highly recommended.

Johnsen's argument that the US should have pushed harder for reform and missed opportunities seems reasonable. The issue is whether the US could ever have substantially influenced Saleh or the key political players. Each had its own agenda and other regional support. None harbored love for the US, a nation whose successive leaders seem eternally in quest of friendships as much as the pursuit of national interests. The US would seem well advised to better heed Viscount Palmerston's distinction between the two notions.

By 2014, Yemen had descended into bloody conflict. An alliance of Houthis and militias loyal to Saleh launched an offensive that drove south to Aden. Forging what most view as a transactional alliance, Saleh resurfaced on the playing field as a Houthi fellow traveler. He had maintained strong ties with the Air Force and the Defense Reserve Forces, an elite unit that his son had commanded. In January 2015, these forces stood down as Houthis marched on Sana'a, seized the Presidential palace, and placed President Mansour Hadi under house arrest. Hadi managed to escape, first to Aden and on 25 March 2015, to Saudi Arabia.

Under the cover of UN Security Council Resolution 2216, the Saudis intervened at the head of a coalition of ten regional states, co-led by the United Arab Emirates. Framing the war as an effort to block Iranian influence, their stated goal has been to support Hadi and roll back the Houthis.[5]

The US supports the Saudis' Houthi-Iran narrative.[6] How well judged is that view? Experts like Peterson, Mohsen Milani,[7] Thomas Juneau, retired State Department diplomat Greg Hicks—who served in Yemen—and the late Yemen expert for Carnegie, Christopher Boucek, believe or believed that view is over-stated.[8] Who is correct? The media has cited US officials who claim that Iranian Islamic Revolutionary

[5] Juneau, Thomas, 'No, Yemen's Houthis actually aren't Iranian puppets', *Washington Post*, 16 May 2016.

[6] The UAE, the Saudi's principal coalition partner, has put money into reconstruction but echoes the Saudi line. See Dr Abdulkhaleq Abdulla, Chairman, Arab Council for Social Sciences, *Gulf News*, 12 October 2015. ('The security and the stability of Saudi Arabia was at stake. Hence, the UAE had no choice but to stand by Saudi Arabia in its time of need. There was a collective Gulf need to stand up to expansionist Iran. Yemen was the place to draw the line.') Still, the UAE assesses the threat differently than Saudi Arabia and understands the need to address southern pro-separatist sensibilities and grievances. The Saudi emphasis is on defeating the Houtis and creating a unitary state under its control.

[7] Milani, Mohsen, 'Why Tehran Isn't to Blame for the Civil War', *Foreign Affairs*, April 2015. He argues that Iran's interest in the Houthis is opportunistic to create a political sphere of influence but that it has no vital economic or strategic interests in Yemen. He states bluntly: 'The nature and extent of Iranian involvement has been exaggerated and sometimes deliberately distorted.' See also: Juneau, 'No, Yemen's Houthis actually aren't Iranian puppets'.

[8] Boucek and the author were friends and had discussed this topic on numerous occasions.

Guard Corps personnel were training and equipping Houthi units.[9] The Houthis acknowledge Iran has furnished limited arms aid,[10] but stoutly reject any suggestion that they are anyone's proxy.

The view that Tehran is meddling in Yemen rests on the argument that Iran exploits instability to increase its influence in weak states, and to gain launching pads to pressure Saudi Arabia, Israel, and the U.S. No one doubts it opposes the status quo that Mansur Hadi represents, especially given his Saudi and Western backing. Even so, insists the University of Ottawa's Thomas Juneau, 'Iran's investment in Yemen has been limited…. It has therefore bought only limited influence' and lacks the ability to shape events in Yemen.[11]

What do the Houthis want? They posture themselves as populist reformers. Any rational reading of their actions translates into an effort to gain greater power. But what does that mean? As noted earlier, for over a thousand years, until the Egyptians invaded in 1962, a Zaydi Imam ruled the country. The Houthis see themselves as heirs to this tradition. Does that mean Houthis feel they should legitimately be leading the country and earning the economic rents from such status? Do they want to restore the imamate? Is the goal more autonomy?

Their agenda remains oblique. Uzi Rabi points out that conflicting alliances in Yemen make it hard to identify where the alliance lines are drawn or to ascertain their logic and motivation. That description fits the Houthis. One thing seems likely: Saleh wants his old job back.

The anti-Houthi Yemen coalition is united mainly in its hostility to a Houthi-dominated Yemen. Its stability is dubious. Its factions hold different visions for Yemen's future. Islah favors a united Yemen. In theory the nation had that in 1993. It failed. Southern separatists want to break away from the north. The challenge is whether the south is economically viable, and how well it could bridge internal cultural differences. Others argue for federation. That requires a reconciliation that's not in sight anytime soon.

Peterson is skeptical. He envisions two probable scenarios for Yemen's future. One posits Saleh reasserting his influence in a chaotic atmosphere, perhaps by pushing forward his son Ahmad. That Saleh maintains strong influence with the military and security apparatus makes this scenario plausible. Those elements may well most affect who becomes the next President and will not necessarily act according to tribal norms and solidarity. In this scenario, tribalism will remain an important identifier and component of many tribal members' lives. The other envisions neutralising Saleh and his family. But that scenario would likely produce political deadlock that produces weak government.

[9] Strobel, Warren and Mark Hosenball, 'Elite Iranian guards training Yemen's Houthis: U.S. officials', *Reuters*, 27 March 2015. The story acknowledges that Houthis deny this and leans heavily upon Saudi sources like Saudi Ambassador to the US Abel al-Jubeir, who touts the official Saudi line.

[10] Landry, Carole, 'Iran arming Yemen's Houthi rebels since 2009: UN Report', *Middle East Eye*, 1 May 2015.

[11] Thomas, 'No, Yemen's Houthis actually'.

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Here Irbrahim Fraihat's *Unfinished Revolutions* offers interesting ideas. A Senior Fellow at the Brookings Institution's Doha Center, he follows the story of Yemen, Libya, and Tunisia from the perspective of stabilisation and reconstruction. Fraihat champions achieving national reconciliation through a formal process.

Fraihat recommends 1) national dialogue, 2) truth seeking about the past, 3) holding past regime members accountable, 4) forging a consensus about what role past regime members may enjoy in the new government, 5) institutional reform, and (6) integrating the role of civil society organisations, women, and tribes into the new consensus.

The book is impressively organised. His analysis of Yemeni instability is concise. He sharply criticises the international community, especially the Gulf Cooperation Council, in giving Saleh immunity from prosecution in exchange for resigning. The flaw in this view is that the deal reflected ground realities. Saleh is savvy. He had retained substantial influence with security forces in Yemen. He had powerful leverage and used it adroitly. Conceivably a different compromise might have accorded immunity in exchange for exile. Whether Saleh would have accepted that is not clear.

Fraihat recognises the power that lies hidden in the 'deep state'—the power structure embedded in the security establishments of these nations and their ability to wage counter-revolution. He's less persuasive on how to address that problem in a state embroiled in civil war. A more peaceful Tunisia was a different story. It might have fallen apart. Instead prudent leaders have worked for stability. Their success well illustrates why Fraihat's approach is more workable in a peaceful political environment.

Yemen illustrates why war makes it less workable. He cites the ten-month, UN-sponsored National Dialogue Conference held in 2013-2014. It produced about 1,400 recommendations for reconciliation. The challenge lies in reconciling these with the political capacity to implement them. The 2014 war and the intervention of the coalition reflect deeply felt resentments.

The Saudi intervention has brutally worsened the situation. Its Air Force has indiscriminately bombed civilians, hospitals, schools, and factories and killed numerous civilians. The US bears a grave responsibility for what has transpired. It has sold the Saudis weapons and provided other support. It did so to mollify them after the Iran nuclear deal.[12] Keeping alliances together may seem pragmatic. But doing so at the expense of avoidable civilian carnage and endangering many Yemenis with famine is inexcusable. The strategy brings into focus a familiar challenge that has beset US security policy for decades: the inability to look over the horizon and think through the future consequences of today's actions.

The US would seem well advised to rethink its strategy for drone strikes and how and why it communicates the rationale for them. Alienating the civilian population, especially through its support for the Saudi-UAE intervention, is causing

[12] See the Editorial, 'America Is Complicit in the Carnage in Yemen', *New York Times*, 17 August 2016.

near- and longer-term challenges. On a mil-to-mil basis, perhaps it could restrain Saudi violence against civilians and, if the US is providing targeting information, work to limit strikes to well-defined AQAP/ISIS targets.

There needs to be greater emphasis on persuading Gulf allies to provide economic aid. Diplomat Greg Hicks makes a prudent suggestion in arguing that the US move its Ambassador to Yemen out of Riyadh. '[Being in Saudi5465gfg is] the wrong symbol', he explains, 'and sends the wrong message to Yemenis, who already are unhappy over the extent of US alignment with Saudi Arabia.' Above all, we need to do whatever it takes to end this civil war. It is hampering US interests and undermining regional stability.

Until the key players in a fragmented strategic situation resolve their competing agendas, conflict not reconciliation will ensue, unless one of the parties emerges triumphant. So far, war has produced stalemate. The big loser has been Yemen and its population. The winner, so far? AQAP and, lately, ISIS, which has made its entrance into this troubled land.

Until the war ends, AQAP and ISIS will strengthen. Can it be resolved? Despite the Saudi skepticism about the Houthis, the two parties have a history that suggests one is plausible. The Saudis financed the Zaydi imam's resistance against the Egyptians until the 6-Day War in 1967, when they sold out the Zaydis to free up Nasser to pull his soldiers out of Yemen for use against Israel. Despite the double-cross, both sides have shown a transactional quality. They'll need a strong one to settle the current conflict.

Fraihat's analysis of Libya and Tunisia merit brief comment. His framework for national reconciliation is rational. But it's hard to see how his approach offers a realistic path to end the chaos in Libya anytime soon. The section makes its point, but he oversimplifies a complex situation. His analysis leaves the impression that two principal factors are competing for power. Actually, multiple factions are doing so, each pushing a distinct agenda.

In Tunisia, various parties have followed a framework consistent with Fraihat's views. One lesson perhaps is that once violence stops, Fraihat's framework can achieve positive political outcomes. A key difference between Tunisia, Yemen, and Libya is that education levels are vastly higher in the former. Tunisia is also more connected to the global community.

Fraihat is an idealist. His book is highly worth reading merely for that strength and the ideas that support why nations should work to adopt his or a similar framework.

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The four books offer different perspectives on Yemen. Each distinguishes itself through excellent scholarship, understanding, knowledge, and insight. Yemen has a storied history. The shifting alliances among tribes, parties, and leaders have given rise to competing, changing narratives. None of the parties has proven especially deft in communicating agendas, or framing them in ways that establish the common

ground required for national reconciliation and unity. For its part, US policy has ebbed and flowed, focusing transactionally on the only thing that Yemenis perceive matter to it: fighting AQAP, not enhancing their lives.

That is unfortunate, because the two goals complement one another. The achievement of the former is essential to fulfilling the latter. This will be a challenge President Donald Trump and his allies need to address prudently and decisively, keeping a firm eye on the horizon. Donald Trump brings to the White House a different perspective than President Barack Obama's. Obama was reticent about the Middle East. Obama summarised his approach in four words, which in the name of civility this review paraphrases: Don't do stupid stuff.[13] Journalist Jeffrey Goldberg has reported that Middle East leaders including Abu Dhabi crown prince Mohammed bin Zayed al-Nahyan, Jordan king Abdullah II, and the Saudis were 'already dismayed by what [Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak] saw as Obama's illogical desire to distance the US from its traditional Sunni Arab allies and create a new alliance with Iran….'[14]

At this writing, President Donald Trump's approach is unfolding. He has declared: 'I like to be unpredictable.'[15] He has indicated that the US should stay out of conflicts that pose no immediate threat to the nation's security. He advised Fox News host Bill O'Reilly in January 2016 that the US should avoid direct intervention in the Yemen conflict unless the US stood to benefit financially from Saudi Arabia's support.[16] The final configuration of his national security team seems likely to matter. Trump views himself as a pragmatist and despite criticism that he speaks off the cuff more than is prudent for national security, he's shown a willingness to listen to different points of view. That and unfolding developments seem most likely to determine US policy in the evolving Yemen debacle, in which Yemeni are increasingly faulting the US for facilitating Saudi attacks that are killing their countrymen.

Trump has confounded political observers. He punches back hard when he is attacked. He's not the type to accept fault for the military strategies or tactics carried out by others. The Saudis should be cautious about presuming that US policy in Yemen will remain unchanged or that US support for its operations will persist. Trump feels no obligation to follow Obama's policies or approaches. He will decide anew where US interests lie and he's made clear that these are paramount in his strategic thinking.

[13] Goldberg, Jeffrey, 'The Obama Doctrine', *Atlantic,* April 2016

[14] Ibid.

[15] Statement of Donald Trump in the October 2015 Republican debate

[16] Baron, Adam and Peter Salisbury, 'Trump and the Yemen War', Sana Center for Strategic Studies, 2016; and Hanchett, Ian, 'Trump: I'm not going to tell what I'd do with the 'disaster' Iran deal, people don't have right to know how far I'd go', *Breibart*, 4 January 2016