



**The British-Yemeni Society  
Journal**

2018

# THE BRITISH-YEMENI SOCIETY

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## BRITISH-YEMENI SOCIETY JOURNAL

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## CHAIRMAN'S REPORT

(Twenty-fifth Annual General meeting, Friday 29 June 2018)

### The situation in Yemen

Once again, I have to start my report with a gloomy picture of the situation in Yemen. However, there are some new elements which may offer some hope that the situation will develop – though whether any development will prove favourable remains to be seen. A key event, of course, was the killing of ex-President Ali Abdullah Saleh by Huthi rebels last December. Many of those in the north who had been opposed to Hadi's weak and subsequently absent government had expected that, sooner or later, Saleh would prevail and bring the Huthis to heel, if not to account. Their hopes were now dashed, and this gave the emboldened Huthis virtually unchallenged control of a large area of Yemen.

Both of the key UN personalities involved with Yemen were replaced in the course of the year – Jamie McGoldrick, the forthright head of the humanitarian mission in Yemen was replaced in March by Lise Grande; in February Martin Griffiths took over as the UN Special Envoy for Yemen, succeeding Ismail Ould Cheikh Ahmed.

By the time of last year's AGM, in May, we were concerned that a coalition assault on Hodeidah might be about to begin. It has taken a year for this to materialise, and as I write this, has only begun earlier this month. Aid organisations warn of the danger that an assault on the city may cause many civilian deaths, and that the import of food and medical aid through the port may be severely disrupted. Griffiths has been in Yemen to discuss with the Huthi administration in Sana'a whether the port could be brought under UN control to assure aid supplies and avert large scale civilian casualties in the port city.

Although the campaign to take control of the port of Hodeidah has begun, progress has been slow, and costly to both sides. The UN Special Envoy Martin Griffiths continues to work at trying to find some readiness on both sides to work towards peace, but there are few signs as yet of success. A humanitarian conference has taken place in Paris, co-hosted by France and Saudi Arabia but it excluded many of the parties involved in the conflict in Yemen, and may not have achieved much progress towards either an improvement in the humanitarian situation or towards peace.

For a detailed consideration of the longer-term prospects for peace and recovery in Yemen, I would refer you to the closing chapters of Helen

Lackner's very detailed analysis of the background to the present civil war and the international policies that have contributed to it, *Yemen in Crisis*. Recently I was speaking to a UN official who highlighted the need for the political and humanitarian aspects to be treated together, rather than as separate issues. It is an unfortunate fact that the division between the two areas may harden positions by both the Huthis and the coalition confronting them – the Huthis will be greatly heartened by the calls of the international humanitarian community (and most recently by the European Commission) for the coalition to hold back from its attempt to gain control of Hodeidah, and feel secure that they have won the battle for international hearts and minds. Why at this point should they make concessions? The coalition, on the other hand will surely feel that abandoning its effort to defeat the Huthis (who continue to launch missile attacks on neighbouring Saudi Arabia) would be seen as both a political and a military defeat. In the midst of all this, the ordinary people of Yemen continue to suffer. We must hope that the sides will be persuaded to get together soon.

On the political front the picture is one of increasing fragmentation, both internally and externally. The two key partners in the coalition supporting Hadi's government – Saudi Arabia and the UAE – seem to have increasingly divergent objectives: in the south, where Hadi's government headed by Prime Minister Bin Daghr has some presence (I hesitate to say authority) it seems to face challenges from both the UAE and the Southern Transitional Council which was emerging a year ago.

On the humanitarian side, we are reminded frequently of the desperate situation of food insecurity and starvation. Last year's epidemic of cholera and similar conditions may have eased somewhat – though humanitarian co-ordinator Lise Grande has recently warned that new outbreaks could occur. A recent attack on an MSF cholera treatment centre in the northern town of Abs, apparently by a coalition air strike, is a reminder of the difficulties and dangers faced by Yemeni and international aid workers. On this occasion, it seems that the centre was not yet occupied, and that there were no human casualties.

The British-Yemeni Society has helped in a small way – I can report that our Yemen appeal has so far raised some £22,000, no mean achievement for a small society such as ours. These funds have been shared between MSF and the Red Cross. I mentioned last year that we were considering using funds donated in memory of John Shipman towards buying new

equipment for the Ras Morbat eye clinic in Aden, which B-YS has given support to in the past. Earlier this year we were asked whether we might be able to help fund some new air conditioners for the facility, and although we had not raised funds specifically for this purpose, the Committee agreed to provide the \$4,500 needed to get the units installed before the worst of the summer heat. We would welcome donations towards this as it has come out of our existing savings.

## **The Committee**

I am standing down as Chair at this AGM, having served 3 years in the position. I hope, if elected, to continue to support the Society as a committee member for some time to come. More importantly, we are looking for a replacement for our invaluable secretary, Audrey Allfree, who wishes to hand over to a successor in the course of the year. We have thoughts on how to reduce the demands placed on the secretary so that Audrey's successor will have lighter responsibilities than at present. I have been well supported by the committee and, in the course of the year, we were delighted that Mohammed Bin Dohry and Noel Brehony agreed to be co-opted back on to the committee. I should also thank our Treasurer, John Huggins, for his continued work in keeping the books in order, Journal editor Helen Lackner, and Thanos Petouris who has continued to provide valuable support (notably on the web site and Facebook page) and advice though not, for the moment at least, on the committee!

## **B-YS Activities**

- 7 September 2017: Leonie Northedge and Marwa Baabbad of Saferworld talk on “Women Nowadays Do Anything: Women’s Role in Conflict – Peace and Security in Yemen”
- 2 November 2017: HE Simon Shercliff OBE spoke to the Society
- December 2017: Chairman’s newsletter re President Ali Abdullah Saleh assassination
- 9 February 2018: Newsletter/Update
- 28 February 2018: Arab British Chamber of Commerce. Yemeni Minister of Information, Muammar al-Iryani, spoke to the Society
- 4 April 2018: Screening of Prof Vitaly Naumkin’s documentary of the

1929 Russian Schneiderov film expedition to Yemen

- March 2018: Chairman's message
- 29 May 2018: Dr Adel Aulaqi spoke on his recently published book *From Barefoot Doctors to Professors of Medicine in 75 years*

## New Books on Yemen

*Aden: The Curtain Falls: 1965–1967*, Dick Eberlie, 2016

*Yemen in Crisis: Autocracy, Neo-Liberalism and the Disintegration of a State*, Helen Lackner, Saqi, October 2017

*From Barefoot Doctors to Professors of Medicine in 75 years*, Adel Aulaqi, 2018

*Beyond the Arab Cold War: The International History of the Yemen Civil War, 1962–68*, Asher Orkaby (Oxford Studies in International History), June 2017

*Tribes and Politics in Yemen: A History of the Huthi Conflict*, Marieke Brandt, 2017

*Yemen and the Search for Stability: Power, Politics and Society after the Arab Spring*, Ed Marie-Christine Heinze IB Tauris, May 2018

*Hot Skies Over Yemen: Aerial Warfare over the Southern Arabian Peninsula*, 2 vols, 1962–1994 and 1994–2017, Tom Cooper, September 2017

*Destroying Yemen: What Chaos in Arabia Tells Us About the World*, Isa Blumi, Jan 2018

*Shari'a scripts: a historical anthropology*, Brinkley Messick, February 2018

## B-YS Grant

The 2017 B-YS grant for research was awarded to Joseph Higgins, researching the final days of British rule in southern Yemen and in particular what he terms “the federal panacea”. This year’s grant goes to David Harrison who is researching the Yemeni community in Liverpool, and what it means to be a Liverpool-Yemeni in a global age, and the relationship of the community to Yemen in this time of conflict. We shall look forward to hearing presentations from them in coming months.

## Website and Facebook Page

We continue to attract followers to the Facebook page which receives a

good number of informative communications and links from its almost 1500 members. Statistics for the B-YS web site, intended mainly for members of the Society, are more modest, and, irritatingly, a spate of spam e-mails earlier this year led to the site having to be cleansed and updated, with a loss of some of the recent material on it.

## **Membership**

We are delighted to welcome 11 new members to the Society since last year: Patricia Tomlinson, David Tomlinson, Philip Chambers, Ibrahim Zanta, Peter Becker, Matilda Sherwood, Niamh McBurney, Peter Astbury, Andrew Ovens, John Mawson and Joseph Higgins

Members deceased since last AGM

Douglas Gordon: 28 June 2017

Ivor Lucas: 7 April 2018

## **Yemen Related Events**

15 September 2017: Monuments of Faith and Power: Yemen's Religious Architecture – talk by architectural historian Noha Sadek

7 October 2017: Adalah, in Association with SOAS Yemen Society, workshop with Keith Vaz MP, HE Dr Yassin Noman, Taher Qassim, James Firebrace, and Tarek Yafei

19 October 2017: Dr Sami de Giosa speaking on Arabian Art, MBI Al Jaber Foundation

27 October 2017: Historian Jonathan Walker (B-YS member) spoke on the Aden Emergency, National Army Museum, London

16 November 2017: Shane Stevenson, Aid Delivery in the Context of Conflict: the situation on the ground in Yemen

4 December 2017: RUSI Conference around the British withdrawal from southern Yemen in 1967



## THE POLITICAL SITUATION IN YEMEN (AUGUST 2018)

NOEL BREHONY

Yemen's humanitarian crisis is becoming a disaster as other contributions to this year's journal clearly show. It continues to deteriorate despite ongoing delivery of assistance. Not enough gets through to the people who need it and even where food is plentiful it is too expensive for many people to buy. The widely quoted UN estimate that 10,000 people have died in the war has not been updated for two years. More people die from the impact of the war on the physical and medical infrastructure than from direct military action. The prospects for an early end to the war do not look good even though peace talks might resume later this year.

### **The war**

The military situation may have tipped slightly in favour of the coalition in 2018 but it remains in stalemate. Coalition strategy since the killing of ex-President Ali Abdullah Saleh by the Huthis in December, 2017 has been to put pressure on the Huthis on all battle fronts whilst maintaining its bombing campaign and its stringent control of the flow of imports to the Red Sea ports of Hodeidah and Saleef. The split with Saleh-aligned forces and the loss of Saleh al-Sammad, the head of the Supreme Political Council and some militia leaders have not substantially affected Huthi military capacity to retain control of Sana'a and much of northern Yemen. They will not be defeated unless the coalition deploys much larger ground force – which it will not do.

### **Hodeidah**

The move on Hodeidah is spearheaded by a significant force made up from the Tihama Resistance, the southern forces of the Amaliqa, and the Guards of the Republic (led by Saleh's nephew Tariq). The main force made a rapid advance along the Tihama plain but a second has been held up in fighting to secure routes into the Tihama from the mountains to the east to prevent Huthi attacks to cut supply lines. The UAE is planning and supporting the Yemeni forces and might deploy other Yemeni forces by sea. Though the coalition took part of Hodeidah airport in June, it then announced a pause to allow time for Martin Griffiths, the UN Envoy, to negotiate a peaceful solution that would lead to the Huthis handing over

the port to UN management and withdrawing from the city. Fighting continues close to Hodeidah but the coalition seems to have been surprised by the determination of the Huthis to defend the city. Hodeidah is vital to the Huthi war economy through their control of the distribution of diesel and food from Hodeidah and they may calculate that if they can draw the coalition into urban street fighting then they can prolong the campaign, undermine the morale of their enemies and cause the international community to demand the coalition abandon the operation to prevent a humanitarian disaster. Even if the coalition decides to besiege rather than attack Hodeidah that too could have a devastating impact on the humanitarian situation since the rest of Yemen's ports lack the capacity to bring in the required level of assistance. Coalition promises of increased deliveries by developing alternative routes, including one from Jizan in Saudi Arabia, have made only limited progress so far and may not be practicable.

Many analysts assume that the capture of Hodeidah (or the threat to be able to do so) would provide the coalition with a victory and make it more willing to enter peace negotiations. The loss of Hodeidah would weaken Huthi support but the leaders have the option of trying to hold on to their current heartland and Sana'a. They could still make money to finance the war by taxing imports arriving in their area of control (80 per cent of the imports via Aden go to Huthi-controlled areas). Wisdom and expediency might suggest that they should negotiate but there is little sign that the core Huthi leadership is ready to give up and the Huthis have the will and capacity to suppress any popular resistance to their control.

The Huthis have usually responded to coalition pressure by increasing their activity along the Saudi border and by the firing of missiles at Saudi urban and economic targets. They have more recently warned the UAE that it is not safe from missile attack. Their missiles have proved ineffective, either falling short or being destroyed by Saudi defences. However, in July 2018 Saudi Arabia said it was suspending for a few days oil shipments through the Red Sea after two of its tankers were damaged by the Huthis. The Huthis denied they were involved but the incident is a reminder of the impact of the war on a vital international sea route.

### **President Hadi's government**

President Hadi, who was absent from Aden for most of the year, has struggled to impose his authority. He has more resilience than many critics think. He embodies the legitimacy through which the coalition is acting;

some resources are channelled through him, the cabinet reports to him and he has the personal loyalty of most of the governors. On the other hand, his government has only a limited capacity to deliver essential services. The security situation remains very difficult in parts of the south, including in Aden. One effect of the war has been fragmentation leading to the erosion of central power and the expense of local actors of various sorts. This is apparent even in Aden where one experienced analyst spoke of the “Balkanisation” of the city with groups loyal to Hadi, the Southern Transition Council and neighbourhood security units confronting each other as they compete to control resources.<sup>1</sup> There is little effective government and the population feels its needs are ignored. In July and August people were taking to the streets to protest. The situation is better in places outside Aden (especially Hadhramaut) in part because there is de facto decentralisation to local power centres.

With coalition support, President Hadi has been trying to forge a broader coalition of political forces that could bolster his authority. This has been boosted by the defection of some important GPC leaders since the death of Saleh. This is of potential significance not just in helping Hadi’s authority but also in providing some balance to the position of Islah, which now appears to be the strongest political grouping on the internationally recognised government side. In Marib effective power is wielded by personalities and tribes allied to Islah and Ali Mohsen, the Vice President. Marib is prospering (relatively) because all the significant trade routes meet there and it is virtually an inland port supplied via Wadi’a. In Ta’izz, Islah is stronger than other pro-Legitimacy militias and it also has pockets of support in the south.

The rise of Islah has generated tensions within the coalition. Saudi Arabia needs Islah in the north for the fighting against the Huthis: pro-Islah units are among the most coherent of the Yemeni armed forces and are well embedded in some of the leading tribes. Saudi Arabia may distrust the links between Islah and the Muslim Brotherhood but it takes a more pragmatic approach than does the UAE whose antipathy to the Muslim Brotherhood is so great that it will not work with Islah – even in Ta’izz for example. Islah is not part of the Muslim Brotherhood but the Muslim Brotherhood is a part of Islah – but that is too much for the UAE. Though

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1 International Crisis Group: Eight Days in Aden, 23 May 2018. Available at <https://www.crisis-group.org/middle-east-north-africa/gulf-and-arabian-peninsula/yemen/eight-days-aden-for-gotten-city-yemens-forgotten-war>

contacts have taken place between Islah and UAE leaders, there is little prospect of any warming of relations – unlike, for example the reconciliation between Hadi and the UAE.

### **President Hadi and the UAE**

Relations between Hadi and the UAE have been difficult for many months. The UAE is not anti-Hadi but has been forced by the power vacuum to find pragmatic ways of stabilising the situation. It has recruited its Security Belt and Elite Forces from local people and armed and trained them to provide security and stability, again at a local level (and in the process inadvertently increasing fragmentation). It seems to be behind the Southern Transition Council, which aspires to speak for the south and makes little secret of its aim to restore a southern state. The poor relations between Hadi and the UAE forces in the south have caused serious problems – notably in the last year in Aden, Al Mahra and Socotra and added to tensions between Saudi Arabia and the UAE. However, in June, just as the offensive against Hodeidah was developing, the UAE leaders received President Hadi in Abu Dhabi and he returned to Aden at the end of Ramadan. This has helped calm the situation in the south and bolster Hadi's position ahead of any peace negotiations. Saudi Arabia and the UAE will not allow any differences of approach in Yemen to impair their broader alliance which has been strengthened in the last year.

### **The economy**

The economic situation is dire. Yemen's GDP declined by about 47 percent from 2015 to 2017, and 40 percent of households have lost their primary income source. Most public services have been suspended, leaving 16 million people without access to safe water and 16.4 million with limited or no access to healthcare. For most Yemenis the problem is a lack of cash or access to it. Whilst this might be expected in the Huthi areas it should not be happening in the governorates loyal to President Hadi and the blame for that lies mostly on the Hadi administration, the divisions discussed above and a lack of capacity except at local level to deliver effective aid. It is exacerbated by corruption.

Both sides operate war economies that involve taxing all imports, paying for licences, granting concessions to cronies (e.g. for trucking) and ensuring even legitimate revenues are paid into bank accounts controlled by members of the regime and not by ministries of finance. At a local level,

armed groups can extract rent from their ability to block key trade and trucking routes. According to police sources, smuggling is operated by people close to both regimes using local networks and exploiting the urgent need for income and the absence of much employment.

There have been attempts to enhance the capacity of the Yemen Central Bank in Aden to absorb and use the \$2 billion provided by Saudi Arabia to pay public sector workers (and generate more cash in the economy) and to support the price of staple products. It seems that money that was previously held in private bank account from income from oil exports from Masila has now been transferred to the Central Bank. Separately, oil company executives report that, because of poor maintenance, the capacity of the pipeline from Masila to Al-Shihr has fallen by about 50 per cent thus reducing exports and cash earnings. However, some oil is now being exported by trucked in from oilfields in Shabwah to Bir Ali on the coast.

### **Al Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP)**

AQAP may have used the post-2011 crisis and the first two years of the war to increase its membership, acquire weapons and steal resources but it has since come under intensifying pressure from UAE-trained and supported forces which seem to have used a combination of force, mediation and inducements to get them out of the main cities. Security Belt and Elite forces harass AQAP gangs in more remote areas thus preventing them from coalescing to launch attacks on main population centres and routes. A high level of drone attacks (27 in the first five months of 2018) has hit local leaders of AQAP. The number and frequency of AQAP attacks has decreased markedly in 2018.<sup>2</sup> AQAP does have militias that are part of it or linked to it in Ta'izz and possibly even in Aden but the main centre remains in al-Bayda and Middle Yemen where AQAP has worked with anti-Huthi tribes, posing as defenders of Sunni Islam. Despite its setbacks there is no evidence that AQAP has abandoned its long term aim of re-launching attacks outside Yemen.

### **Peace prospects.**

Martin Griffiths has made a good start as the new UN Peace Envoy and is building a strong support team. He has managed to persuade the

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2 For an excellent analysis of the current state of AQAP and ISIS in Yemen see Elisabeth Kendall: Contemporary Militancy Jihad in Yemen, July 2018, The Middle East Policy Institute, Washington DC file:///C:/Users/John/Desktop/MEI%20Policy%20Paper\_Kendall\_7.pdf

combatant parties to agree to talk about peace talks in Geneva on 6 September. This is promising, but the prospects for success at this stage are not good. The coalition will not enter serious peace negotiations until it has achieved a victory that justifies the cost of its intervention (and future reconstruction) and insists that UNSC Resolution 2216 must be implemented before any talks can start – but that requires the Huthis to give up almost everything they have gained since 2014 and ignores the reality of Huthi power. Yemeni actors will have to negotiate the end of the war – as they have in previous civil wars – but there is little sign they yet ready.

The ideas for a peace settlement being discussed by Martin Griffiths build on earlier plans that essentially lead to de-escalation and a step-by-step process that, whilst being linked to the implementation of 2216, sees the surrender of weapons and territory by the Huthis balanced by moves to build a new consensus government. Even if there is agreement between the main parties, implementation will be extremely difficult given the fragmentation that has been taking place throughout Yemen. Establishing peace and a new consensus government will be a prolonged process that will have to be backed by an economic reconstruction plan that can deliver better lives to Yemenis if they are patient.

### **Iranian involvement**

Iran acts in Yemen within the context of its regional rivalry with Saudi Arabia and the UAE. Yemen is of strategic importance to Saudi Arabia but not to Iran, and Teheran can therefore engage in low level support of the Huthis without increasing the risk to itself. From late 2017 Iran may have enhanced the quality of its support to the Huthis through smuggling of crucial parts for missiles, including guidance systems, and weapons that could be used against ships and tanks. Following President Trump's decision not to renew the JCPOA and the imposition of sanctions Iran will need to think more carefully about the level of any future support for the Huthis. Whilst there may be a temptation to do more for the Huthis, the cost and risk of doing so will increase significantly – on what is a country of marginal concern to Iran and might bring US retribution. Iran is likely to be quite cautious.

### **Western interests and support**

The US, UK and France (among others) give strong support to Saudi Arabia and the coalition, recognising that it is a way of protecting /



Newly appointed Special Envoy for Yemen Martin Griffiths seated at the UN and on the large screen (photo from Anna Samulski on Twitter)

furthering their defence, security and economic interests. Their primary interest in Yemen is to prevent AQAP posing a threat to the security of the Western countries and their regional allies. They accept that the only effective means of countering AQAP is to address the drivers of terrorism within Yemen but that can only happen after the war ends and should be financed, in their view, mainly by the regional powers. They recognise that the stability of Yemen is a vital interest to its neighbours and understand the coalition's concerns about Iranian activity.

Western governments take note of growing public awareness of Yemen's plight and criticism, particularly over the supply of arms to the coalition, and the judgements made by leading international humanitarian relief agencies about the situation and the impact of coalition bombing. Western countries will need to be seen to do all in their power to stop a coalition attack on Hodeidah and support Martin Griffiths' efforts to find a peaceful solution to Hodeidah that might lead to a wider peace deal. If these fail and the coalition attacks or besieges Hodeidah, the humanitarian cost will be severe and Western governments will come under increasing public pressure to review their defence and wider relations with the leading coalition members.

## ALI ABDULLAH SALEH, PRESIDENT OF YEMEN (1934–2017)

*This section marks the death of former president Ali Abdullah Saleh. The importance of his role in Yemeni politics and history for an entire generation require attention beyond an obituary. It starts with some comments from Robert Wilson, setting the political context of Saleh's life and ends with an eloquent and balanced piece by his long-lasting foreign minister and senior member of the General People's Congress, Dr Abubaker al-Qirbi.*

### **An Assessment**

Ali Abdullah Saleh united the two Yemeni states and brought development to the country at an unprecedented rate. On more than one occasion, he could have stood down from his positions and would thus have gone down in history as the builder of modern Yemen. Sadly, addicted to power, he gambled for too long and met his fate at the hands of Huthi militiamen.

As Dr al-Qirbi makes clear in his obituary, Saleh was not without faults: his main one may have been his failure to build true administrative institutions, loyal to the state rather than to its political leaders when Yemen's short-lived oil wealth came on stream. Instead, he used the income to buy loyalty, using traditional systems of patronage – until Yemen's oil wealth began to decline. Arguably, an even greater failing was his inability to inspire and create a state out of the parts joined by agreement in 1990 and by force in 1994: while the mantra of unification had been a constant theme in both states since their creation, respectively in 1962 and 1967, their very different histories, social structures and traditions had left them ill-suited to marriage. Saleh was not the man to make it work though one would struggle to imagine who might have done better.

The “Arab Spring” reached Yemen in early 2011. Growing unrest led to the GCC initiative that would see Saleh leave power and be immune from prosecution. He prevaricated and, in June 2011, survived an explosive attack on the Presidential compound mosque. He was wounded; other senior political figures suffered serious injury or died as a result of the attack. Finally, in November 2011, Saleh formally stepped down from the Presidency and his former Vice President Abdo Rabbo Mansour Hadi was elected as interim president to replace him in February 2012.

However, Saleh never ceded real power, and Hadi was unable to secure the loyalty – or at minimum the obedience – of either the armed forces or



large portions of the political establishment. Throughout the two years of the official transition, Saleh was widely seen as a manipulator and spoiler, embittered and disruptive, waiting for the tide to turn and bring him back to power. During this period, he could have shown true statesmanship, recognising past mistakes, addressing past injustices, and acknowledging the grievances of important communities, particularly in the South and above all, those of the Huthis in the north. Instead, it seems that he relished being perceived



President Ali Abdullah Saleh (photo [www.kremlin.ru](http://www.kremlin.ru))

as the man manipulating everything from behind the scenes – and he was careful never to deny it. He may have believed in his own invincibility – especially after the mosque attack, and his fortunate absence from the murderous airstrike on the Rowaishan funeral ceremony in 2016.

From the moment that Huthi militias gained control of Sana‘a in 2015 many, inside and outside Yemen, expected the time would come when Saleh abandoned his opportunistic alliance and turn against them to reassert his power, having demonstrated that he was still better able to rule Yemen than Zaydi zealots, Hadi’s absentee government, or immature and disunited democratic alternatives.

When the military campaign led by Saudi Arabia began in 2015, the dreadful toll in civilian lives, destruction of towns, important cultural sites,

and attacks on weddings, funerals, and medical centres reinforced support for the Huthis and their ally, Saleh. As the Huthi grip tightened, it became clear to many that they were neither less corrupt or brutal, nor more competent and accountable than Saleh's regime had been. By 2017 many were ready for Saleh to reassert himself, and demonstrate that he alone was the person who could rein in the Huthis, and govern Yemen more effectively than Hadi's largely ineffective government and, above all, bring an end to the crippling airstrikes imposed by the international coalition.

Clashes broke out between Saleh's supporters and the Huthis at the beginning of December 2017. As Huthi unpopularity increased, Saleh made his bravest and most statesmanlike move, declaring that it was now time to build a new relationship with Saudi Arabia if they were prepared to end the air strikes on his country. Within two days he had been killed by Huthi militiamen.

How will history judge Saleh? He was never able to become the Mandela of Yemen. His closest allies recognised his flaws. His chief critics recognised his strengths, whilst fretting at his choice of advisers. Did he really have a vision for Yemen like his predecessor Ibrahim al-Hamdi (whom he may have played a part in assassinating) whose reputation is increasingly being rehabilitated nowadays? Or was he simply a manipulative opportunist who aimed at enriching himself and his cronies? It will largely depend on who gets to write the definitive history. My own take is that he continued playing long after he should have retired, and finally lost, murdered by his supposed allies.

ROBERT WILSON

### **His Life And Achievements**

Former President Saleh or al-Zaeem (chief, leader), as he was called after the transfer of power to his Vice President in 2012, was an exceptional Arab leader in terms of both his achievements and failures. When he was elected in 1978, by the then People's Assembly, he was an unexpected choice, and at the time most observers, including Time magazine did not expect him to last for more than six months. It turned out that their predictions were wrong and he ruled Yemen for more than 33 years.

When Saleh became president, Yemen was in a state of political turmoil, as two northern presidents had been killed in the previous year, reflecting both internal political conflicts and the role of regional powers. His first challenge as president was to face a rebellion in the governorate of Ibb,

supported by the socialist government of the then People's Democratic Republic of Yemen. After two wars between North and South Yemen in 1972 and 1979, Saleh took an innovative approach to end the rebellion and the North-South conflict by calling for a national dialogue in which the whole political spectrum of parties participated and which culminated in the drafting the National Charter which was approved by a national referendum and became the political charter for General People's Congress (GPC) in 1982.

The GPC was in fact a national coalition and an umbrella for all political parties rather than a party in itself and its establishment assisted in bringing about the end of the rebellion. His success strengthened his image as a leader both inside Yemen and beyond, with regional and international powers. It marked the beginning of a period of economic growth, oil exploration, and active diplomatic activity.

In the 1980s, based on the peace accords which followed the intra-Yemeni wars (one signed in Kuwait and the other in Libya) several committees were formed to prepare the ground for the unification of the two Yemeni states. However, unification was not the result of the committees' preparation but was brought about by the internecine fighting in 1986 within the Yemeni Socialist Party in the PDRY which, combined with the collapse of the Soviet Union, allowed Saleh to exploit the situation to unite the two states. Thus he achieved a long awaited national aspiration. Saleh considered the Unification of Yemen as his greatest achievement and therefore, for him, the call for separation was tantamount to treason. This was enhanced by unanimous public support, and one of the reasons for the precipitous collapse of the Southern separatist movement in the 1994 conflict. However that victory, instead of being used to consolidate the unity and build a modern state, was squandered in petty ideological conflict due to Saleh's alliance with the Islah party.

Saleh's tactical alliances, whether with the Islah party, the Huthis, other political parties or with tribal leaders, were all factors in undermining the power and authority of the state. The conflicts between these groups led eventually to political unrest and challenge to Saleh leadership as was demonstrated in the 2006 presidential elections. Although he won the election, opposition to his rule grew and intensified, to eventually emerge in the youth Arab Spring movement in 2011 which the official opposition used for their political advantage.

Saleh was a master of tactics but a weak strategist. This was due to his

personal insecurity, and he described his rule of Yemen like dancing on the heads of snakes. This meant he was living under the constant threat of a snake bite, and thus his priority was to ensure that this never happened. Because of this perception, he created many centres of power whose allegiance he had to ensure to protect Yemen's stability and his rule. This in turn weakened the authority of the state and opened the door to gratuitous and corrupt practices. As a result of such tactics he created enemies for himself due to political and financial reasons. However he always kept in contact with his enemies and tried to accommodate them in his plans for political manoeuvring.

In spite of his exceptional abilities to outmanoeuvre his enemies and to buy allegiances from tribal and political leaders, Saleh fell victim to his policy of surrounding himself with a small inner circle who followed his choices without debate, rather than selecting advisers who would challenge him. Nonetheless Saleh had a formidable ego, courage, and stamina and the ability to listen to others and reconsider his positions, thus averting many disasters. This was demonstrated by his visit to Washington after the 9/11 terrorist attacks in the US, when he met with President Bush and defended Yemen from accusations of being a terrorist haven. He came out victorious from that visit and became a partner with the US in the fight against terrorism, while at the same time he refused to give the US a free hand in fighting terrorism in Yemen. Another remarkable decision taken by Saleh was his successful fight to prevent separation to return to the two pre-unification states in the conflict of 1994 in the face of the GCC states relentless efforts to break up the country.

Saleh must be remembered for his statesmanship in agreeing to a peaceful transfer of power in 2012, thus preventing the start of a civil war after the attempted assassination he survived in the mosque explosion in June 2011. Although there is some truth to the undocumented accusations about Saleh's involvement with the Huthis, the real reason for his alliance with them after they took over Sana'a was his rejection of the Saudi-led coalition war against the people of Yemen, and his strongly felt moral responsibility to stand with his people. Saleh warned President Hadi that if the armed forces did not stop the Huthis before they took over Amran, they would certainly enter Sana'a. Unfortunately Hadi, for his own reasons, ignored the warning.

Regardless of Saleh's politics he was a very charismatic person, humble and with a strong sense of humour. This charisma was an asset he used to



Aden, 30th November 1989: signature of Yemeni Unity Agreement

win hearts and establish personal relationships and build confidence. He took deep personal interest in every one's personal situation and problems, especially with his foes, and never missed an opportunity to call them and offer assistance.

Saleh's final stand against the Huthis is a clear demonstration of his courage and commitment to his beliefs. The position he took entitles him to being described as a martyr and a symbol of Yemeni pride and dignity. His departure from Yemen's political scene leaves the country without a pragmatic and moderate leader. This is a loss not only to Yemen, but also to the region and to the search for a political solution for the present conflict.

DR ABUBAKER AL QIRBI<sup>1</sup>

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# THE ROLE OF MUSIC AND POETRY IN THE REVOLUTIONARY TRANSFORMATIONS AND POLITICAL MOBILIZATION IN YEMEN (2011–2015)<sup>1</sup>

JEAN LAMBERT<sup>2</sup>

Since the beginning of this century, traditional Yemeni music has undergone significant upheavals as a result of the country's integration in the world economic market and communications network. This was the time when rap first appeared in the country. The political developments which took place between February 2011 and late 2012 considerably speeded up these transformations. During this period, Yemeni youth were involved in an intense process of political awakening and also, to some extent, participated in the emergence of new cultural norms. Long meetings in Change Square (Sāhat al-Taghyeer), near the university, lasting late into the night, created the possibility of exchanges of views between groups representing different genders, ages and socio-religious affiliations, groups which had previously hardly ever communicated with each other. Thanks to their great vitality, Yemeni music and poetry followed these movements, and the exchanges influenced each other: traditional music was used by the movement for democratic rights; the most commercial forms of world music reached the country but these external forms were also re-appropriated through local interpretations. Music was also used to mobilise people in political and sectarian armed conflict. These painful, but very human, realities must be taken into consideration in any attempt to imagine the reconstruction of Yemen's future, once peace has returned as they will, from now on, be part of Yemen's cultural history. As it is impossible in this article to examine all these phenomena, I will here describe a few which I have been able to access, some of them thanks to the internet.

## **Sahat al Taghyeer: Change Square and aesthetic transformations**

Between 2011 and 2012, the struggle for democratic rights and, ultimately,

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- 1 A first version of this article was presented at the conference: Conflict and Living Heritage in the Middle East: Researching the Politics of Cultural Heritage and Identities in Times of War and Displacement, American University of Sulaimani (Iraq), IFPO (Beirut), 11-12 May 2016.
  - 2 Jean Lambert is an anthropologist and an ethnomusicologist specialized on Yemen and the Arabian Peninsula. He was also the director of the French Centre of Archeology and Social Sciences (CEFAS, Sana'a), and the director of the Research Centre for Ethnomusicology (CREM, LESC, Paris-Nanterre University).



for regime change, was concentrated on the protest movements in Change Square Sahat al Taghyeer. Originally simply a road crossing at the entrance of Sana'a University, it was also situated near popular residential areas. This square came to symbolise the link between educated youth and popular social classes. Like Tahrir Square in Cairo, but for a much longer period, this area was occupied for almost two years by youth who camped there in a permanent sit-in, engaging in numerous activities, including music and dance. These activities can be described as agit-prop but they took many, often very original, forms. As can be seen from the following example, an evening of mobilisation on 26 September 2012.

*Commemoration of 26 September 2012:*

*<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UkupDsO3ofc>*



This date commemorates the 50th anniversary of the Republican Revolution of September 1962, a symbol which the Ali Abdullah Saleh regime had also appropriated. Nonetheless it was repossessed by youth, as it has remained alive among Yemenis, in the same way that the 1789 revolution remains a major date for French people. This event started with a

number of conventional interventions following each other (the figures indicate the time markers in the video document, in minutes and seconds).

(00:00) Speeches in classical Arabic

(02:40) a series of slogans launched by Nasir al Sa'eedi

*O Revolutionaries, O September  
O September and O October  
September is our celebration  
The age of Revolution, 50 years have now passed  
Since the day it freed us from the Imam  
It opened the door to February  
The Hashtag revolution...  
No to the rule of dictatorship,  
Rejected in the Presidential Palace,  
The wheel has turned very fast!  
The deposed has been deposed<sup>3</sup> and can't come back<sup>4</sup>*

This series of carefully drafted slogans sounds almost like a complete poem. The speaker establishes a clear continuity between the independence of the South (October 1967) and the 1962 September revolution which 'opened the road to the hashtag revolution,' that of February 2011.

(09:30) This is followed by a succession of patriotic songs, accompanied by dagger dances, both on stage and in the crowd, as well as songs of the *lahji* style<sup>5</sup>, also accompanied by dancing. The music is that of a military march,

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3 The deposed (*al-Makhlū'*) is the insulting word systematically used to refer to former-President Saleh by his opponents from the moment when, although having officially left the Presidency, he still unofficially continued to control many instruments of power

4 *Yā thuwār ayubā Sebtember  
Sebtember 'īd al-a'yād  
Biyfiah thawrat Febrayer  
Thawra fajjar al-hashtāg  
Umr al-thawra khamsin 'ām  
Min yōm tahrat al-imām  
Lā li-hukm al-diktāri  
Marfūd fī l-gasr al-jumbūrī  
Al-'ajala dārat wa-bi-sur'a  
Tār al-makhlū' wa-balā raj'a*

5 Characteristic of Aden and the South



simple, joyful and catchy (Jamil al Qadi, poet and singer):

*'We will build you, O homeland of the sincere  
We will attend to you, loyalty of all loyalties,  
We are assembled around you  
We are proud of authenticity and belonging'<sup>6</sup>*

If the music is simple, not to say simplistic, the texts are very formal and obviously lack imagination. This part lasts very long and is followed with the following video:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=d5-rijyPeRQ&t=16s>



But these are only warm ups for the next part of the same event, which is spoken, a poetical monologue crooned with a choir as musical background (Mohammed al-Adru'i)<sup>7</sup>:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=u6-5LEm97Ys>

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6 *Sa-nabnik yā mawtin al-awfiyā  
Nubādiru minka al-wafā bi-l-wafā  
Ilayka altamaynā wa-hobba lanā  
Nubākhir bi-l-asl wa-l-intimā*

7 Mohammed al-Adru'i was already well known as a monologist before the events.

(00:45) Chorus: *'The people demand the fall of the regime'*<sup>8</sup>

*'Please, O people,  
Killings will come back  
The government is a deadly poison  
Whoever upsets it (ends up in a) tomb  
They will come with all the army  
/ to lock you up, to massacre you  
We have no one to get us out of here.'*<sup>9</sup>

The voice part is spoken/sung or crooned following a very simple three-note melody. The text uses a very popular dialect and Al-Adru'ī illustrates his argument with much gesturing. After each verse, the crowd responds enthusiastically with the chorus, itself the movement's main slogan: 'the people demand the fall of the regime.' Using an alarmist tone of voice, the performer dramatically sets the scene: a dialogue between verse and chorus which implicitly gives the audience (namely the thousands of demonstrators who sing the chorus) the simultaneous status of chorus and 'people'.

To encourage the audience, Adru'ī increases his sarcastic verbal provocations:

*'How about waiting a bit longer?  
Will the President treat this issue kindly?  
There will be elections  
And we will share power'*

He lists the imaginary details of the negotiations, mentioning all Yemen's social and economic problems. At one point he is interrupted by a voice off, quoting or imitating the President's well-known nasal intonation: 'These proposals are unacceptable!'

The audience then responds with an even more enthusiastic performance of the chorus. Mohammed al-Adru'ī adds amusing spoken commentaries, in complete synchrony with the crowd. The performance ends with a patriotic hymn taken up by all, singing in unison. Here the performance is

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8 *Al-sha'b yūrīd isqāt al-nizām*

9 *Rajaan yā nās / al-'adāma bā-tegum*

*Wa-l-hukuma summ gātil / Man yizā'elhā gubur*

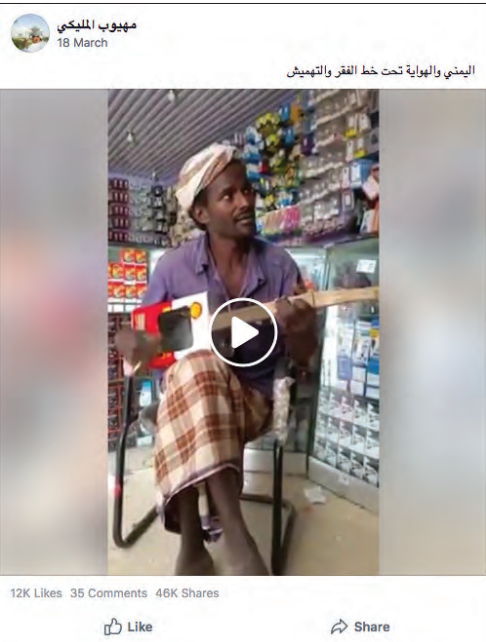
*Bā yijū bil-jayshi kulleh ...*

*Yibbasūkum, yiqtulūkum*

*Mā lanā minhum kbālis*

simultaneously individual and collective, and is far less conventional than the earlier ones. It represents the high point of agit-prop.

Many such monologues and performances were created during these two exceptional years. The Adu'ī monologue is particularly interesting because it holistically brings together in a single event a political rally and a theatrical performance, recalling Greek tragedy or Antonin Artaud's "théâtre de la cruauté (theatre of cruelty)." Indeed, many similar events were published directly on the internet, in some cases without even having been performed in public, but despite this, they responded to people's concerns. In general, we note the appearance of many new forms of social and political expressions in social media, especially YouTube and Facebook. This demonstrates a drastic change in the cultural consumption habits of the Yemeni people. For example, many singers from the very poor outcast *akhdām* class, are playing and singing on internet with home-made lutes made out of a tin can (because they cannot afford to buy a ready-made instrument), often offering political or social messages, as shown in the following example:



<https://www.facebook.com/mahyoub.almulike/videos/1010931452390925/>

This poem is composed to honour a certain 'Abbās al-Miraysī, who may be a political or militia leader. Social media have clearly become the modern equivalent of the street performances of the past, but they are opportunities for these popular musicians to reach a much wider audience as well as enjoy more freedom of expression.

### Rap in Yemen

Although rap was first promoted by certain western embassies in the 2000s, it has now become integral to Yemeni culture, even during the conflict,

offering a form of expression particularly well suited to the country's

dramatic circumstances. There is no doubt that the mass emergence of hip hop is linked to the influence of Hajaj ‘AJ’ Masaed, an American rapper of Yemeni origin, who has been active since 1997 and has often performed in Yemen.

He mainly sings in English but his language is peppered with many Arabic words and phrases. His texts attack jihadism and al-Qaeda, while addressing local and social issues such as unemployment, poverty and ignorance which feed terrorism. His music integrates traditional musical language by linking up with various Yemeni artists, like Husayn Muhibb, Fuad al Kibsi, Ibrahim al Ta‘ifi, Abd al Rahman al Akhfish.

AJ reached a wide Yemeni audience closely associated with the youth mobilisation in 2011 and 2012, by using the ‘clip’ as a format, but he does it in a very different way from the usual commercial process: for example he uses a static shot of poor elderly Yemeni men sitting in the street, giving a very personal interpretation to the national anthem sung very slowly, accompanied by ‘ud and guitar, a discourse promoting a very individual identity.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Q7VsRzaVbDs>



Others such as the rapper named Da7bash<sup>10</sup>, have completely ‘Yemen-ised’ hip hop, particularly by using of poetical texts entirely in Arabic, as in the following video:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uldmB4bnngo>



The clip is a love song to Yemen, with video extracts showing a wide range of carefully filmed and edited desert and urban landscapes, alongside a very romantic and patriotic refrain:

*O Yemen, land of my nation,  
O Yemen, I sacrifice my soul to you'*

The end of this document has a passage in English concluding with the words ‘Peace! Peace!’ Thus this Yemen-ised hip-hop has played a major role not only as bearer of the theme of change in 201–12 but also in building a new understanding of Yemeni identity, based not on imported ideologies or a consumption culture, but on a recognition of the real state of the country. This is another case in point, demonstrating how the spread of this kind of combined poetical-musical expression benefits from the increasing role of social media, since it could hardly be spread in another way.

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10 Da7bash (SMS transcription), dahbash in Arabic transcription, is the symbolic insulting nickname southerners use to describe inhabitants of the Yemeni northern highlands (Sana’a, tribal and rural areas), implying ‘backward, un-civilised, country bumpkin’. Here, the use of this nickname is a way to reverse its negative semiology with irony.

## Huthis and Salafis: tribal songs and militia mobilisation

As is well known, the military conflict between the Huthis and the central state started to wreak havoc on the region of Sa'ada, the main city of the far north of Yemen, during six wars between 2004 and 2010. This conflict was a confrontation between radicalised Zaydis and many Sunni Salafis (who acted as proxies for the state). Following the revolution of 2011–12 the influence of the Huthi movement increased throughout the north, eventually enabling them to take control of the capital Sana'a from September 2014 onwards. Since then, through the war, the two camps, the Huthis on the one hand and the government on the other have continuously fought each other, not only with weapons, but also through poetry. Both camps use sung tribal poetry to send mobilisation messages, thanks to the persuasive power of poetry in Yemeni culture. Different elements of poetry in Yemen are used to influence the audience: rhetoric of honour, use of proverbs, strong poetical images, loud spoken voices, valorisation of the word are some of the main tools of the prosody which are used to influence the audience to act in certain ways ("This is real talk" is a common expression in Yemen to praise rhetoric). Most often found on You Tube, the *zamil* form is a traditional tribal chant much used for symbolic communication between tribes. It had already been very considerably used during the Northern civil war (1962–67) as was demonstrated by the American social anthropologist Steve Caton.<sup>11</sup>

<https://vimeo.com/288501029>

*'Greetings to whoever crackles the gunpowder  
/ and who launched a deluge of fire on his enemies  
The one who threw himself on Jizan and terrified Ibn Saud  
/ and behaved like a hero in the capital Sana'a  
While God is present above our shoulders  
/ We don't fear either America or its proxies'*<sup>12</sup>

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11 See Steven Caton, *Peaks of Yemen I Summon, Poetry as Cultural Practice in a North Yemen Tribe*, Berkeley, University of California Press, 1990

12 *Salāmi 'alā man tetrashshaq al-barūd*  
*/ Wa dhā fattabat bi-l-layl tūfān manāwihā*  
*Wa-masra' 'alā Jizān fī damt Iben Es'ūd*  
*/ Bi-l-'āsima San'a qadamt barā'ihā*  
*Mā damat al-Khāliq 'alā aktāfunā mawjūd*  
*/ Mā hammanā Amrikā wa-man bāywālihā*

What young and impressive talent! This type of sung poetry, tribal song *zamil* or warrior marching song *razfa*, are usually performed by adult poets. But it is not unusual to find children who have considerable talent for poetry, for songs (including religious tunes) and for dance. In a war-oriented collective imagination, such a situation has the drawback of involving children, encouraging them to praise violence in an atmosphere which also facilitates their recruitment as soldiers.

But although such practices are clearly reprehensible, these very youthful poetic and musical talents demonstrate that we must also be careful about the moral judgements we may wish to make about such manipulations: in traditional tribal Yemeni society, a youth used to become a man as soon as he was physically able to bear weapons, and adolescence did not exist as it does in modern societies.

Prior to 2011, in addition to the Saleh regime, the Huthis' main enemy in Yemen were the Sunni Salafis of the Dammaj Koranic school, located in their heartland. Because of the conflict, these Salafis, who have become jihadis and are now armed, are the spearheads of the anti-Huthi struggle. With respect to mobilisation songs, they are also leading, with the use of outstanding electronic sound effects and the eclecticism of their imagery as the Salafi video shows: 'We are not afraid' (*Lā nubālī lā nubālī*).

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cp2ETmMzrwU>

*We are not afraid, we are not afraid*<sup>13</sup>  
*/ O you who call for division and racism*<sup>14</sup>  
*In the path of God, we have readied our blades*  
*/ We will destroy the entire enemy army*  
*By God, my soul will not rest*  
*/ Until Sa'ada smiles, whether willingly or by force*  
*We will purify it of the misled unclean*  
*/ The Shi'i and Persian infidels*

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13 *Mā nubālī mā nubālī* ; this poetic introduction was initially used by the Huthis in their songs, this poem is therefore a response addressed to them according to the rules of oral literature. The poet is Mohammed al Qādīri from Kitaf village (north-east of Sa'dā)

14 One of the main accusations against the Huthis is their sectarianism, as it divides Muslims



*The throne of Badr Ed-din has almost fallen  
/ The page of corruption and impudence has ended*<sup>15</sup>

As can be seen by watching the video, these jihadi songs are far more technically sophisticated and have benefited from studio editing, by contrast with the raw, live documents of the Huthis. The jihadi ones do not show the singer and only retain the sound track from the original source. By contrast, they show many propaganda images, which follow each other as in a clip, in particular they include various caricatures of the enemy removed from their context, while the song's words are also presented in subtitles. Formally, it is clearly a *razfa*, a traditional marching song, but echoing sounds have been added. The text responds to a similar Huthi song which also starts with '*Lā nubālī lā nubālī.*' The video starts with brief opening credits as well as a spoken preface opening with a religious prayer followed by the name of the poet and an explanation of the document's political objective. It is thus an efficient propaganda instrument.

By contrast with the Huthis, who rely mainly on the support of a traditional tribal population, government and Salafi propaganda use sophisticated technology including studio recording, orchestration, sound skillfully superimposed on a battle background, as well as a propaganda commentary. This demonstrates the two movements' different access to means of production, at least in the early stages of the conflict and consequently illustrates their very different nature: the Huthis, representing a local regional and religious revolt fighting against a politico-religious movement supported by an international financial network.

### Concluding remarks

We have examined a series of mobilisation songs: those of the Yemeni civil society movement, those of the marginal groups, rap and its Yemenisation process, the mobilisation songs used in the war between the Huthis and the Sunni jihadis. These examples illustrate three different ways in which poetry and music have adapted/adjusted to the new political situation

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15 *Mā nubālī mā nubālī / Yā du'āt al-tafuqa wa-l-'ansuriyya*  
*Bi-sabilil-lah jahbiznā n-nisālī / Bā nedammir kull al-jaysh al-mu'tadiyya*  
*Qasaman billah mā yirtabi bālī / Lian Sa'da tabtasem hurra ābiyya*  
*Bā nitabhirhā min adnās al-dalālī / Min 'ulūj al-Rāfida wa-l-Fārisiyya*  
*'Arsh Badr al-Dīn auwashak 'a-z-zawālī / Wa-ntawat safhat fasād wa-'anjahiyya*



which started to emerge in 2011 and worsened as a result of the civil war.

In addition to the Saudi coalition bombing and the material destruction and shortages it is causing, one of the main disastrous outcomes of this civil war, is the way it has fractured Yemeni social fabric and divided communities along politico-religious lines. This form of communalism can be understood as an epidemic comparable to the biological medical epidemics which have all-too often affected Yemenis. But all wars eventually end, and we must think about the future of the country and, above all, of Yemeni society. Will reconstruction simply attempt to ignore and forget these conflicts? Or will it remember them so that they can be better avoided in the future? Indeed, the only way to vaccinate future generations against such conflicts, will be by ensuring that all their catastrophic consequences are remembered. It is essential to build a shared cultural memory and re-establish elements of continuity and social solidarity which must emerge from the current divisions and traumas. Thanks to its extreme flexibility, intangible heritage has a formidable power to bring about social recognition and reconciliation based on its socio-political communication potential. In Yemen, for example, can we forget that before the conflict, Sunnis and Shi'i prayed side by side in the same mosques, even though they used different gestures? We are reminded of this by a Yemeni poet, Ali al-Khafanji, who as early as the end of the 19th century said:

*'I have been thinking all night until  
/ I understood the different forms of logic  
Each must pray as he wishes  
/ And God alone knows how prayer is received  
So do not say: This one raises his arms  
/ And that one leaves them dangling  
Leave the Creatures to God's grace  
/ The gate of His Forgiveness is wide open*

If culture is 'the only thing that remains when everything else has been forgotten,' sadly, must we wonder that the intangible heritage may be the only thing left alive when everything else has been destroyed?! Music and poetry would then remain a major means to transmit to future generations the resilience which, despite everything, we all hope the Yemeni people will manage to achieve.

TRANSLATED BY HELEN LACKNER

## HUMILIATING WITHDRAWAL OR A NECESSARY RETREAT?

Reflections on Britain and South Arabia 50 years on

PROFESSOR CLIVE JONES<sup>1</sup>

On 29 November 1967 and to the strains of the band of the Royal Marines playing ‘Fings ain’t what they used to be,’ the Labour Government under Prime Minister Harold Wilson effected a total withdrawal from the Federation of South Arabia. Unable, it has been argued, to withstand a range of social and political forces that subsequently sapped its power and willingness to defend its interests across the Middle East, the indecent haste with which Britain evacuated its Aden base in November 1967 marked, according to Wm Roger Louis, ‘the end of the Great Game in Western Asia’.<sup>2</sup>

The British decision to abandon the Federation has been regarded as the inevitable outcome of the contradictions inherent in London’s policy towards South Arabia from the outset. With their loyalty to London so often a transitory commodity, attempts to cohere the disparate tribal groupings of the Protectorates into a collective whole with the foundation of the Federation of Arab Emirates of the South in February 1959 and four years later, the Federation of South Arabia (FSA) that now encompassed what had been Aden Colony were, it was argued, doomed. After all, local politicians in Aden resisted the idea that their monopoly of power, prestige and influence should be diluted by tribal Shaykhs, Emirs, or Sharifs considered to be the very antithesis of progress and modernity.

When allied to the growing influence of Arab nationalism throughout the Middle East in the late 1950s and early 1960s, the scene was set for a sustained programme of subversion and revolt against British rule,

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2 Wm Roger Louis, ‘Britain and the Middle East after 1945’, in L. Carl Brown (ed), *Diplomacy in the Middle East: The International Relations of Regional and Outside Powers* (London: I.B Tauris, 2004), p.44.



A Hadhrami Beduin Legion (HBL) detachment on the island of Socotra, 1964  
(photo © John Shipman Collection courtesy of Thanos Petouris)

supported both materially and ideologically by President Nasser of Egypt. Thus, within a decade of the 1957 Defence White Paper which identified Aden as the lynchpin of British power projection East of Suez, Britain abandoned the Aden base, bringing to a close a presence in the region that had lasted for 134 years. Comparing the British experience in South Arabia with some notional colonial template that would have dictated French policy in similar circumstances, the former British diplomat, Christopher Gandy, remarked:

[T]he city state of Aden would doubtless have become a heavily guarded showcase of *le rayonnement culturel français*, with French money lavishly poured out and the hinterland remaining the romantic, undisturbed domain of quarrelsome and unregenerate tribesman. British policy was nobler, demanded greater physical courage, persistence, local knowledge, devotion – all the best qualities of the British colonial tradition – and failed, where France might well have succeeded.<sup>3</sup>

Others proved more scathing in their assessments. John Barrett Kelly most famously remarked of this period, ‘Britain betrayed her trust and ran away

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3 Christopher Gandy, ‘A Mission to Yemen: August 1962 – January 1963,’ *British Journal of Middle East Studies*, Vol.25, No.2 (1998), p. 249.

from her responsibilities in South Arabia. Faced with a terrorist movement which was determined, ruthless and implacable, the British government displayed none of these qualities in return. In the contests of wills it proved spineless.<sup>4</sup> The question remains, however, is this a fair analysis?

### **Aden and the Federation: betrayal, bad judgement or just bad luck?**

I believe that five main factors need to be considered in any analysis of why Britain decided to abandon the Federation of South Arabia although the weight that should be attached to any one or all will undoubtedly inform the presentations and discussions here today: (1) the failure of the colonial authorities in Aden to create a new collaborative local elite upon which to consolidate the Federation; (2) the intervention of outside powers that fuelled indigenous unrest; (3) the impact of new technological developments on British defence policy; (4) emergent financial exigencies that cast doubt on the continued sagacity of maintaining British bases east of Suez; and finally (5) 'The change in Britain's perception of her own image as a great power'.<sup>5</sup>

Of these, the first two *occasioned* Britain's departure, while the other three certainly caused it. Technological development and the sterling crisis of 1966 camouflaged the loss of political will on the part of the Labour Government of Harold Wilson, despite assurances given to the Federal rulers that Britain would honour its commitments to safeguard a transition period to independence and beyond. For those rulers and their followers who had thrown in their lot with the British, their sense of betrayal was profound. As that pithy old Arab adage had it, 'it is better to be the enemy of the British than their friend: if you are their friend, they will sell you whereas if at least you are their enemy they'll attempt to buy you.'<sup>6</sup>

Several scholars have explored some or all of these factors from various standpoints: Karl Pieragotini, R.J Gavin, Robert McNamara, Glen Balfour-Paul and Spencer Mawby, have examined the malaise in policy making in Whitehall amid competing tribal and religious affinities across South Arabia and Yemen in explaining the demise of the Federation and of

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4 J.B.Kelly, *Arabia, the Gulf and the West* (New York: Harper Collins, 1980), p.46.

5 Jacob Abadi, 'Britain's Abandonment of South Arabia – A Reassessment', *Journal of Third World Studies*, Vol.XII, No.1 (1995), p.155.

6 Abadi, p.152.

British influence. Professor Tore Petersen has argued that ideological antipathies across the Parliamentary Labour Party towards what they regarded as an avowedly colonial construct, rather than the pressures of the financial crisis, forced the British withdrawal from Aden.<sup>7</sup> Robert McNamara has explored in scrupulous detail the evolution of Anglo-Egyptian relations in this period and the animus generated by shared suspicions of malevolence over events in South Arabia.<sup>8</sup>

Other studies have been more damning towards the very idea that Britain could ever hope to shape the politics of South Arabia to suit its own interests. The former BBC Middle East correspondent, Roger Hardy, is critical of the opportunities wasted by Britain to engage constructively with a range of local actors. In his recent book exploring the legacy of the British and French empires across the Middle East, Hardy pushes the argument that the failure by the authorities in London and Aden to engage with nationalist leaders in the late 1950s such as the Sultan of Lahej, the mercurial Sultan Ali Abdul-Karim and Muhammed Ali Jifri, leader of the South Arabia League proved costly. Officials in Aden, including Sir William Luce and later Sir Kennedy Trevaskis – ‘Uncle’ Ken to those who know him well – preferred to ostracise such individuals whose steer towards independence threatened British economic and strategic interests in South Arabia.<sup>9</sup>

Finally, in *Arabia without Sultans* the late Professor Fred Halliday emphasised the broader social and political eddies that marked the British decline in South Arabia that sapped its power and willingness to defend its economic and strategic interests. With a certitude born from an intrinsic belief in the logic of Marxist dialectic, his book – which Halliday himself later conceded was very much a product of its time – saw the revolutionary forces that eventually triumphed across South Arabia as the harbinger of a new political order across Arabia devoid of anachronistic potentates.<sup>10</sup>

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7 Tore T. Petersen, *The Decline of the Anglo-American Middle East 1961-1969: A Willing Retreat* (Brighton: Sussex Academic Press, 2006), pp.66-67.

8 See Pieragostini, *Britain, Aden and South Arabia: Abandoning Empire*; Joseph Kostiner, *The Struggle for South Yemen* (London: Croom Helm, 1986); Robert McNamara, *Britain, Nasser and the Balance of Power in the Middle East 1952-1967* (London: Frank Cass, 2003); Glen Balfour-Paul, *The End of Empire in the Middle East* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991).

9 Roger Hardy, *The Poisoned Well: Empire and its Legacy in the Middle East* (London: Hurst, 2016), pp.188-89

10 Fred Halliday, *Arabia Without Sultans* (2nd ed) (London: Saqi Books, 2002).

Even if one disagrees with the determinism of much of Halliday's book, his analysis captured much of what has become the accepted narrative of Britain's denouement in South Arabia, a narrative that, to paraphrase the old Marxist dictum, sees British policy makers engage in reactive choices and never amid the most propitious of circumstances. The dirty laundry of acrimony this produced, most notably between the mandarins of the Foreign Office and their counterparts in the Colonial Office and indeed, between the occupants of Great Smith Street and their subordinates in Government House in Aden has been well aired, not least among some of the participants themselves.<sup>11</sup> These bureaucratic battles, important as they are, remain only part of the story.

### Britain and South Arabia: Containing Contradictions

Britain, for so long faced with the irritant of Yemeni irredentism in pursuit of their claims to South Arabia faced a threat of an altogether different magnitude post-Suez. Aden was seen as the strategic jewel in the East of Suez crown but, for all the investment in, and build-up of, its military potential post 1957, the legacy of Suez placed political limits on the extent to which strategic muscle could be flexed openly in defence of British interests. Faced with a regional *zeitgeist* that denied the legitimacy of counterfeit boundaries and regarded the FSA as little more than a fraudulent edifice for British imperialism, London, it seemed, lacked the political will, let alone the military ability to defend its interests.

The actual area of Aden Colony was small, but beyond its boundaries, the Protectorates – named precisely because of the veneer of protection offered by the British in Aden – extended over 112,000 square miles. Until the Second World War, the strategic threat to Aden was deemed insufficient to warrant anything more the perfunctory visit of the occasional Colonial Officer from Aden; the Protectorate rulers were left, by and large, to their own devices, exacting tribute from caravans that passed through their fiefdoms, while investing little in return by way of infrastructure for the betterment of their subjects.

Indeed, British involvement in the hinterland was, for the most part, confined to the suppression of tribal revolts that threatened the hegemony

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11 For example, see Kennedy Trevaskis, *Shades of Amber: A South Arabian Episode* (London: Hutchinson, 1968).

of particular rulers. This was achieved for the most part by the expedient use of air power. The construction of an airfield at Khormaksar, within the boundaries of Aden Colony, afforded the British an effective method of maintaining, and occasionally enforcing tribal obedience – air policing – without the costs incurred by maintaining expensive garrisons and their attendant infrastructure. As Thomas Mockaitis points out in his treatment of insurgency in South Arabia, ‘A century of British occupation had not produced a single yard of tarmac road in the Protectorates’ by the time Britain once more found itself at war with Nazi Germany and Fascist Italy.<sup>12</sup>

It was only in the post-war period that economic developments, notably the construction of the BP oil refinery in Little Aden in the aftermath of the Abadan crisis, coupled with the impact of migrant labour patterns on the political and social cohesion of Aden Colony, that finally spurred officials in London to tackle the chronic state of economic underdevelopment beyond the boundaries of Aden Colony. It now assumed a geo-political significance as great as anything experienced during the heady days of Empire as the need to realise Britain’s energy assets in Iraq, Kuwait and the Trucial States of the Gulf, linked the Colony directly to the health of the British economy. Thus the 1957 Defence White Paper declared that ‘Britain must at all times be ready to defend Aden Colony and the Protectorates and the territories on the Persian Gulf for whose defence she is responsible.’<sup>13</sup>

Britain had no avowed desire to exercise direct control over the Protectorates but the economic expansion of Aden port with its concomitant demands for an increased labour force meant that however reluctantly, the development of Aden would now directly be linked to the fate of the hinterland.<sup>14</sup> Herein lay the kernel of dissent that was to sap the British will to retain its military presence in South Arabia. By the mid-1950s, the Colonial Office began to propose the idea of a Federal structure that would unite the Protectorates with Aden Colony. While conceived ostensibly to protect British interests, it was pitched to the Protectorate rulers, not noted for their progressive political ideals, as a means to safeguard their suzerainty from Yemeni irredentism. Even so, many of these potentates proved reluctant participants, concerned that closer association

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12 Thomas R. Mockaitis, *British counterinsurgency in the post-imperial era* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1995), p.45.

13 Quoted in Mockaitis, p.46.

with the British would fan flames of rebellion already being stoked by a combination of the Imam's intrigues and a vibrant Arab nationalism centred on the persona of Egyptian President Gamal Abdul Nasser.

But countering the territorial avarice of the Imam proved, in retrospect, far easier than diluting the impact of Arab nationalism upon a fast developing political consciousness among Adenis themselves.<sup>15</sup> As R.J Gavin noted, colonial officials 'were limited by their inability to make any mass ideological appeal which could compete with that of their nationalist opponents.'<sup>16</sup> Up until the construction of the oil refinery, the British had co-opted a local elite, comprising a mixed group of Arab, Asian and European businessmen and merchants to run the affairs of Aden Colony. Broad based suffrage was unknown and members of the Legislative Council – in effect the government of the colony – were appointed by the British. These positions of privilege were undermined by the decision by the Colonial Office to forge ahead with the creation of the Federation of the Arab Emirates of the South in 1959 which came to encompass all but one of the states of the Western Protectorates (Beihan, Upper Aulaqi, Lower Aulaqi, Fadhli, Lahej, Dhala, Audhali, Dathinah, Akrabi, Haushabi and Upper and Lower Yafa<sup>4</sup>) as part of its fiat.

Yet anxious to legitimise the British presence and consolidate its position in South Arabia, London ignored the concerns of the Governor of Aden, Sir William Luce, who argued that establishment of a Federal structure was going too far too fast.<sup>17</sup> He concluded that only when Britain was seen to abide by the treaties of Protection with the hinterland and engage in a determined effort to extend development beyond the confines of Aden, could the hybrid that was the Federation have any chance of sustaining itself beyond the imaginations of officials in Great Smith Street.

For the time being, Aden remained a Crown Colony and outside the immediate purview of the new structure but it was clear that the next step planned in London would be for Aden to divest itself of its Crown Colony status to become a state like any other as part of an expanded Federation that would also include the Eastern Protectorates. In this process of controlled liberalisation however, London alienated the old elite that had

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14 DEFE 13/570 77705 Top Secret: Chiefs of Staff Committee, Aden and the South Arabian Federation, 30 June 1964.

15 See Kostiner, pp.38-52.

16 R.J Gavin, *Aden under British Rule 1839-1967* (London: Hurst, 1975), p.340.

17 Balfour Paul, p.69.



hitherto supported British hegemony in Aden but without ever overseeing the emergence of a new coterie of likeminded individuals willing to play the part of political entrepreneurs in this state building process. It was of course hoped that extension of the franchise would foster acceptance of this new political order and, in more propitious circumstances, it might well have succeeded. Officials in Aden certainly believed that the net result of this process of constitutional de-colonisation – one that drew on the experience of Cyprus for inspiration – would have been an independent state of South Arabia, willing to confer sovereign base rights upon the British. The triumvirate of time, timing and location however proved effective conspirators in undermining such beliefs and when combined with the shifting political eddies in London, as well as a burgeoning nationalism among Adenis themselves, the scene was set for the final act of the British presence in South Arabia.

The success of the oil refinery had led to a vast increase in the population of Aden by the beginning of the 1960s as migration followed prosperity. While helping the port to prosper, this flow of indentured labour lived and worked for the most part in appalling conditions. Not surprisingly, a number of labour organisations began to emerge. By 1956, these had coalesced into the Aden Trades Union Confederation (ATUC) led by its charismatic Secretary General, Abdullah al-Asnaj. The ambitions of al-Asnaj went beyond mere labour reform however. Sir Kennedy Trevaskis, the Political Agent for the Western Protectorate who later inherited the mantle of High Commissioner for the FSA, recalled the outspoken comments of al-Asnaj in favour of unification with Yemen. At a public meeting in Aden on 10 February 1960, the Secretary General of the ATUC was reported to have declared that a ‘nationalist programme will be carried out to strengthen your belief in a United Yemen. One nation, one Yemen and one struggle only. No north, no south, but one Yemen. No Legislative Council, no Federation....There is only one Yemen, the occupied part of which must be liberated.’<sup>18</sup> In terms of territorial sovereignty, the demands of the fiery trade unionist were of a piece with the age old irredentism espoused by the dynastic order in Sana‘a. But the ATUC was no cover for the claims of the Yemen Royal Family, the Hamid ‘Ud’Din. Indeed, its ideals were based on Nasser’s view of a new social order in the Middle East which increasingly came to regard monarchical regimes of the

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18 Trevaskis, p.157.



British troops search men in Mansourah in 1966 (photo Danmission Photo Archive)

Middle East as degenerate, counterfeit creations designed to serve imperial interests.

By the summer of 1962, the ATUC had spawned a political wing, the People's Socialist Party (PSP) designed to impede moves towards integration with the Protectorates as much as anything else. Indeed, it was quick to show its true nationalist colours. Within days of the military putsch that brought Colonel Abdullah as-Sallal to power in Sana'a, several leaders of the PSP made their way to the Yemeni capital to proclaim their fidelity to the new Republic and their concomitant gratitude to Nasser. In a matter of weeks, four of them had been made ministers in the first Republican government.

For Britain, so much that was now to unfold in the Aden and the Yemen relates directly to the persona of Nasser and the legacy that the Suez crisis cast over London's ability to safeguard its remaining interests. Undoubtedly, the symbols of British power, if not the actual ability to project that power, were badly tarnished in the aftermath of the Suez debacle, marking as it did the eclipse of Britain hegemony in the region. More than anything else, Suez disabused policy-makers in Whitehall of Britain's ability to act both unilaterally and overtly to secure its interests in the region without support from the United States. In the aftermath of Suez

the Foreign Office, according to the British diplomatic historian Ritchie Ovendale, took it upon itself to manage Britain's decline in the Middle East in such a way that Washington, while clearly the dominant partner and shouldering the greater defence burden, would remain for the foreseeable future reliant on Britain's greater experience to guide regional policy – Washington's Rome to London's Athens.<sup>19</sup>

Still, the view that Britain no longer had the political will to deploy military force to protect its regional interests remains conditional. Within two years of Suez, British and American forces acting in concert intervened to secure the Hashemite dynasty in Jordan from elements inspired by, if not beholden to, Nasser. The same year saw the United Kingdom establish the Middle East Command (MIDCOM) in Aden and with it, the exponential growth in its military facilities. Between 1957-59 in the neighbouring Sultanate of Muscat and Oman British troops were instrumental in suppressing a succession of tribal revolts led by the Imam Ghalib bin Ali and backed by Saudi Arabia against the reigning Sultan. The success of this campaign was for the most part, and much to Whitehall's relief, conducted well away from the glare of publicity. Finally, the importance of the Aden base was demonstrated in June 1961 following its extensive use by British forces during 'Operation Vantage', the British intervention in Kuwait.<sup>20</sup> Such actions demonstrated that while its imprint was less visible, Britain continued to value solid footholds in the mountains and deserts of the Arabian Peninsula.

But the belief remained strong among many in Whitehall and especially among the more vociferous elements of the Conservative Party that Nasser, ever the populist, remained the root cause of anti-British sentiment across the Middle East and actively supportive of a range of surrogate movements determined to drive Britain from Arabia. This antipathy towards the Egyptian President had found collective expression both before and during the crisis of October 1956 in the activities of the 'Suez Group.' Anthony Nutting, the former Minister of State at the Foreign Office who resigned over the Suez affair referred to them as '[A] hotch-potch collection of embittered ex-ministers and young newly elected back-

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19 Ritchie Ovendale, *Britain, the United States, and the Transfer of Power in the Middle East, 1945-62* (Leicester: Leicester University Press, 1996), pp.192-94.

20 L.J.Butler, *Britain and Empire: Adjusting to the Post Imperial World* (London: I.B Tauris, 2002), p.144; Ovendale, pp.216-241.

bench MPs anxious to cut a figure in Parliament by attacking the Government for selling out imperial British interests.<sup>21</sup>

Nutting had in mind, among others, Julian Amery and Lieutenant Colonel Neil ‘Billy’ McLean. It has often been claimed that the Suez Group, smarting under what they saw as Britain’s humiliation over Suez, regarded the issue of Aden as a means to exact revenge. Certainly, statements made by Amery and McLean in Parliament leave little doubt as to the personal animus with which they regarded Nasser.<sup>22</sup> Equally however, they believed that the future prosperity of Britain as a trading nation – notably its reliance on Middle East oil – was threatened by Nasser’s hegemonic ambitions throughout the region, ambitions that they believed served only to strengthen Moscow’s hand.<sup>23</sup>

When, in the aftermath of the overthrow of the Imamate in September 1962, events in Yemen threatened to spill over into Federation territory, the moribund Suez Group transformed itself into the Aden Group, acting as powerful quasi-parliamentary body not only to undermine moves towards recognition of the new order in Sana‘a, a recognition advocated forcefully by the Foreign Office, but as events unfolded, becoming exponents of what might be termed para-diplomacy that at times, placed the Foreign Office on the back foot. It was this para-diplomacy and the emergence as a result of a British led mercenary organisation, funded largely by Saudi Arabia, that contributed so much to Nasser’s undoing in the Yemen; but it could do little to shore up Britain’s position across the Federation.<sup>24</sup> Once the 1966 Defence White Paper was announced without, much to Washington’s annoyance, prior consultation with the United States, the dye was cast for the Federation to collapse through its own internal contradictions and from an insurgent opposition – notably the NLF – buoyed by the

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21 Anthony Nutting, *No End of a Lesson: The Story of Suez* (London: Constable, 1996), p.22.

22 McLean’s maiden speech to the House of Commons made much of the fact that he believed Nasser was little more than the unwitting tool of Soviet expansion throughout the region. For the full text see, Xan Fielding, *One Man in his time: The Life of Lieutenant-Colonel NLD (‘Billy’) McLean, DSO* (London: Macmillan, 1990), pp.101-03.

23 Amery’s comments, made at the time of the Yemen revolution were screened as part of the documentary, ‘The Mayfair Set: David Stirling’, BBC2 (UK), 18 July 1999. In the aftermath of the overthrow of the Hashemite dynasty in Iraq, and attempts to subvert its counterpart in Jordan, Amery argued that ‘Britain should retain sufficient forces in the Middle East to fight a limited war with Egypt’. See McNamara, p.141.

24 Clive Jones, *Britain and the Yemen Civil War: Ministers, Mercenaries and Mandarins, Foreign Policy and the Limits of Covert Action* (Brighton: Sussex Academic Press, 2010).

momentum and popular support it now enjoyed across the Federation.

Could it have been different? The debates no doubt will continue for many years to come. The policy of trying to force the square peg of Aden to fit with the round hole of the Federation can be derided as the great act of colonial self-delusion. Perhaps. But it should not be forgotten that whatever the political animus between the Federal rulers and nationalist leaders, this experiment in state creation may well have succeeded but for the September 1962 revolution in neighbouring Yemen. Moreover, the 1966 Defence White Paper saw Britain snatch defeat from the jaws of victory given the parlous state the Egyptian army in neighbouring Yemen. This is not to suggest Britain should have remained in Aden, but the circumstances under which it did eventually cede power and withdraw could have been more propitious for all concerned. In the end, only Saudi Arabia (which was not unduly unhappy to see the removal of the Imam, replaced as he was by a pliant Republican/Royalist coalition) and Israel (facing a largely demoralised Egyptian army in 1967) got anything like satisfaction from this conflict. In what became the People's Democratic Republic of Yemen (PDRY), conflict between the NLF and its main rival FLOSY had already started before the last British troops had left and proved far more bloody and costly to southern Yemenis. It is widely recognised that more Yemenis died in this internecine violence than were killed forcing the British from Aden.

At this juncture, Halliday's analysis of an 'Arabia without Sultans' appeared to have a compelling determinism, the march of history being on the side of 'Progressive Forces.' In October 1967, attempts by the Wilson Government to assuage the concerns of the various Trucial rulers that the withdrawal from Aden did not presage a wider British withdrawal from the Gulf soon sounded hollow. On 16 January 1968, PM Wilson announced exactly that in a statement to the Commons on what became known as Black Tuesday. Sir Paul Gore-Booth, Private Under Secretary at the FCO regarded this as *the* moment when Britain finally abandoned its claim to really be considered a world power. For some, it would be events four decades later in Iraq and Afghanistan that finally confirmed it.

Of course the economic crisis facing the UK has largely been cited as the cause of British retrenchment although the actual military cost of the British presence in the Gulf (£12m) was relatively minor compared to the envisaged cuts of £606m in welfare spending. Even so, the announcement was met with despair in Washington, the United States Secretary of State

Dean Rusk reportedly opining in frustration to the British Foreign Secretary, George Brown, 'For God's sake, act like Britain'. Even the proposal by some of the Gulf rulers to subsidize the continued British military presence in the Gulf was dismissed by Defence Secretary Denis Healey on the grounds that 'we don't very much like the idea of being a sort of White Slaver for Arab Shaykhs'.

But Britain did eventually act: that seemingly irresistible tide of progressive forces that appeared set to overwhelm the dynastic rulers of the Middle East in the late 1960s had, by the mid-1970s, been checked, if not repulsed. While Fred Halliday's class based analysis of revolutionary forces across Arabia anticipated a political order 'without Sultans' direct British support for and direct involvement with monarchical regimes remained crucial to the creation of the United Arab Emirates (UAE) as it emerged out of the paternalistic embrace of the Trucial States.<sup>25</sup> Nowhere however was such British involvement more critical than in the Sultanate of Oman. Faced with an ongoing rebellion in its Dhofar region aided and abetted by the newly independent PDRY and with Omani dissidents, supported by Ba'athist Iraq, threatening to destabilise the Trucial States, British involvement was crucial in securing dynastic order whose ultimate security came to rest upon that social contract peculiar to the Middle East – the rentier state- to ensure its broad based acceptance among Omanis and Emiratis alike. Only now, with the regional order in flux, is that contract facing challenges that might not so easily be satiated by using material largesse alone to underpin social change, let alone regime legitimacy. The last High Commissioner to the Federation, Sir Humphrey Trevelyan, argued that Britain left Aden and the FSA 'without glory, but without disaster.' Many would beg to differ, although from often conflicting perspectives. That Britain had to eventually leave Aden, there can be little doubt. After all, the anti-colonial *zeitgeist* propelled a political momentum that even die-hard imperialists such as Julian Amery could do little to resist. It is the conditions under which it chose to do so however that remains contested and, as this article suggests, consensus over this issue will likely remain conspicuous by its absence for many years to come.

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25 Fred Halliday, *Arabia without Sultans* (2nd ed) (London: Saqi Books, 2002).

## THE NATURE OF BRITAIN'S IMPERIAL MISSION IN SOUTH ARABIA

JOSEPH HIGGINS<sup>1</sup>

In February 1957, the mood amongst a group of officials at the Colonial Office was bleak. With unusual forthrightness, they contemplated Britain's position in South Arabia. The Protectorate treaties were 'unsatisfactory' for if they were 'ever submitted to the scrutiny of the United Nations or the International Court [they would] be considered, in some sense, invalid.' The historical and recent 'fact' was that 'some of these treaties were imposed on the Rulers by either force or trickery', indeed, the 'whole conception of such Protectorate treaties is entirely out-dated and "colonialist". [...] The only possible answers to criticisms of this kind are either, as we do at present, to brave out the situation on the basis of our juridical rights, and the alleged wishes and loyalty of the Rulers themselves (which must be admitted in many cases to be very weak), or to give up the whole business.'<sup>2</sup> It was a rare outburst, reflective of the tensions British officials felt when trying to interrogate the fundamental questions of Britain's imperial mission in South Arabia. Despite these reflections the British imperial mission never settled on a definitive, universally recognised standard around which British policy would revolve. As one official recalled, 'We weren't [...] lumbered with 'mission statements.'<sup>3</sup> This poses a difficulty for historians of British policy. Spencer Mawby notes that:

'It is difficult to uncover the implicit assumptions of British policy-makers; because they were shared there was little reason to state them in policy debates. [...] Explicit statements of the values which policy-makers aim to uphold are rarer.'<sup>4</sup>

As implicit and rare as such statements may be, the intellectual underpinnings of British policy are not inaccessible. This article seeks to frame some

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  - 2 The National Archives, Kew (hereafter TNA), CO 1015/1213, Minute: Morgan to Vile, Marnham, Gorell Barnes, 11 February 1957
  - 3 John Harding, written response to author's questions, 27 November 2016
  - 4 Spencer Mawby, *British Policy in Aden and the Protectorates 1955-67: Last outpost of a Middle East Empire*, (Abingdon: Routledge, 2005), p. 31



of them, and outline some of the tensions that arose, largely but not exclusively in the 1950s, as a result of competing conceptions of the British imperial mission in South Arabia.

The British colonial administration had long advanced the notion that Britain's benevolent obligations towards South Arabia should be the foundation upon which policy should rest. Through development Britain could 'assure a more successful, prosperous and efficient way of life and government in the area,'<sup>5</sup> thus achieving 'a longer term objective of bringing the area to the point where it [...] is capable of taking its place in the modern world.'<sup>6</sup> How such an aspiration was to be achieved occupied the not inconsiderable energies of the colonial administration in London and Aden. Plans presented for a federation of the Western Aden Protectorate (WAP) states in the early 1950s, however, soon hit the stumbling block of requiring additional funding that the Treasury was reluctant to provide,<sup>7</sup> whilst efforts by Sir William Luce (Governor, 1956–60) in 1956 to advance a comprehensive development plan soon ground to halt under the strain of institutional inertia over the technicalities of implementing such a plan.

But the difficulties Britain faced when advancing more benevolent plans ran deeper than mere issues of technical application. As Aden's increasingly important strategic facilities of port, refinery and potential as a military base developed through the 1950s, London's conception of the British imperial mission solidified around their strategic interests in the Colony. To accelerate the pace of political development in South Arabia would, regardless of its benevolent auspices, embolden the Protectorate Rulers and Colony politicians to call 'to advance the date on which they will be fit for self-government and self-determination.' According to Harold Macmillan (then Foreign Secretary) in October 1955, this would undermine Britain's position in Aden, which was a 'vital' component of Britain's imperial power.<sup>8</sup> British officials recognised that taking steps to fulfil Britain's benevolent obligations would directly undermine its ability to maintain control over the Colony, thus threatening its ability to operate as a global

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5 TNA, CO 1015/166, Reilly to W. Russell Edmunds, 19 March 1953

6 TNA, CO 1015/166, Minute by Gorell Barnes to Marnham, 9 February 1953

7 One Treasury official commented that 'the Colonial Office was clearly at sea' on the issue of the structure and pattern of financing the federation. TNA, T 220/256, Minute by Russell Edmunds: Aden Protectorate: Federation Proposals for the Western Aden Protectorate, 12 May 1953

8 TNA, CO 1015/166, Reilly to W. Russell Edmunds, 19 March 1953



and regional power. As the threat of Arab nationalism developed in the mid-1950s, British policy priorities cemented the importance of Britain's strategic interests over benevolent development.

On the one hand, the British mission sought to bring peace, development and modernity to South Arabia and facilitate taking its 'rightful place in the community of nations.'<sup>9</sup> Yet, on the other hand, Britain recognised the problems of imposing conditions considered foreign to the region or dangerous to British interests. The Federation of Arab Emirates of the South (later the Federation of South Arabia) straddled these two conceptions of the British mission. The 'British predilection for democratic institutions' could not be entertained in South Arabia, the Foreign Office noted, as they would be 'exploited to destroy the British position and elements supporting it.'<sup>10</sup> Instead, constitutional development would be structured 'to develop along more traditional Arab lines into an autocracy or tribal oligarchy' amenable to British interests.<sup>11</sup> The Federation thus formalised the role of the Rulers, as 'heads' or prominent members of each state's *dawla*,<sup>12</sup> within a constitutional framework that cemented the British connection, a connection that Kennedy Trevaskis (British Agent WAP from 1954 and High Commissioner 1963–64) and Luce understood as 'a condition [of] willing dependence.'<sup>13</sup> Because of the perceived 'highly developed individualism' and 'local eccentricities'<sup>14</sup> of the Rulers, the Federation's executive, the Supreme Council, would have no single figure of authority.<sup>15</sup> The chair of the Council would be served for one month,

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9 TNA, CO 1015/1911, Luce to Gorell-Barnes, 28 March 1958

10 TNA, CO 1015/1910, Foreign Office note by Riches: Aden, 21 December 1958

11 TNA, CO 1015/1910, Amery to Gorell Barnes, 8 December 1958

12 For British conceptions of the Rulers, see: Christian Tripodi, 'A Bed of Procrustes': The Aden Protectorate and the Forward Policy 1934–44', *The Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History*, 44:1 (2016), pp. 95-120; J. B. Kelly, *Arabia, the Gulf and the West* (London: George Weidenfeld and Nicholson, 1980), p. 11; Glen Balfour-Paul, *The End of Empire in the Middle East: Britain's Relinquishment of Power in Her Last Three Arab Dependencies* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), p. 55; Simon C. Smith, 'Rulers and residents: British relations with the Aden protectorate, 1937–59', *Middle Eastern Studies*, (31:3, 1995), pp. 509-523; Mawby, Spencer, 'Britain's last imperial frontier: The Aden protectorates, 1952–59', *The Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History*, 29:2 (2001), pp. 75-100

13 The British Library (hereafter BL), India Office Records (hereafter IOR)/R/20/B/2612, Memorandum: Future policy in Western Aden Protectorate by Trevaskis, 14 November 1956

14 BL, IOR/R/20/B/3259, Memorandum by Trevaskis: A proposal for the Federation of certain states with the Western Aden Protectorate, [undated]

15 BL, IOR/R/20/B/3260, 'The Case for a Federation in Southern Arabia' by the Protectorate Secretary, [undated]

thus ‘overcom[ing] the awkward problem implied in elevating any one of the Rulers to a position of paramountcy.’<sup>16</sup> The chairmanship would be decided by ‘gentleman’s agreement’ as a ‘polite cover for the exclusion of the rulers of the petty Sheikhdoms’ whilst ensuring a term ‘too short to allow any [Chair] time in which to acquire sufficient experience to serve the Government usefully.’<sup>17</sup> The Federation elevated the Rulers, ostensibly as a show of constitutional development, without risking continued British influence and control over its interests in the Colony. In this sense, the Federation was an attempt to solve a difficulty at the heart of the imperial mission. But it was an attempt handicapped by the conflicting bases upon which the Federation was rationalised; namely the conflict between the ideals of unity through federation and the practice of *divide et impera* that protected British interests in Aden. It was a fragile foundation for the Federation entering the turbulence of the 1960s.

From their ‘worm’s eye view’, isolated and confronted by the immediacy of local affairs, British officials stationed in South Arabia framed their part in a wider mission independently. One official recalled how events beyond their immediate vicinity ‘sometimes seemed to be happening on another planet and of little relevance to me as near as 50 miles away.’<sup>18</sup> This isolation helped foster the British administration’s own sense of understanding of the problems Britain faced in the region. This became especially apparent when disagreements with London arose over policy. Officials often lamented London as distant and aloof. One Governor, Sir Tom Hickinbotham, commented that the problems facing South Arabia ‘seemed most complex to us in close touch with the situation but possibly not so difficult of solution to those far removed from the realities in the peace and quiet of their studies.’<sup>19</sup> Luce forcibly rebuked a Colonial Office suggestion that South Arabia’s future was ‘rather less certain than anyone attempting to prophesy is bound to appear to think it is’, by hoping that ‘we shall not just go on being uncertain about the “likely trend of developments” when there seem to me to be certain basic facts in the situation which can be

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16 BL, IOR/R/20/B/3260, Draft intel: Aden Protectorate Federation, [undated]

17 BL, IOR/R/20/B/3259, Memorandum by Trevaskis: A proposal for the Federation of certain states with the Western Aden Protectorate, [undated]. Trevaskis had initially proposed a year for the Chairmanship.

18 Peter Hinchcliffe, John T. Ducker, and Maria Holt, *Without Glory in Arabia: The British Retreat from Aden*, (London: I.B. Tauris, 2006), p. 75

19 TNA, CO 1015/1131, Hickinbotham to Lennox-Boyd, 19 June 1956

clearly distinguished.<sup>20</sup> British officials in South Arabia were united in their resentment towards unnecessary interference, and confident in their understanding of the region and its people.

This feeling of ‘closeness’ to local affairs contributed to British officials’ sense of purpose within the British imperial mission, and it became an essential criterion for its implementation. Jim Ellis, (East Aden Protectorate [EAP] Resident Adviser, 1966–67), ordered one new recruit to tour the Empty Quarter as he was ‘no use to me until you’ve worked with the tribes for a bit. So here’s a Land Rover and off you go.’<sup>21</sup> Through direct engagement in local affairs, officials saw themselves as a vehicle for the wider benevolent imperial project. For instance, Robin Young’s (WAP British Agent, 1963–67) ‘affinity for the Arabs, his enthusiasm for development and his belief in the British mission’ were admired qualities amongst his peers.<sup>22</sup> Another official recalled how he ‘sincerely believed (and still does) that our imperial mission was a force for good and that those I knew who served in Her Majesty’s Overseas Civil Service (HMOCS) did so for the highest motives.’<sup>23</sup> But good intentions alone were insufficient to fulfil the British mission. Progressively more proactive, interventionist thinking became an ever-apparent feature of British policy through the course of the 1950s. Plans for a federation of the Protectorates states, initiated by Trevaskis in 1952, were based on the principle that Britain should abandon the *laissez faire* status quo.<sup>24</sup> To be doing something became especially important as the dynamism of Arab nationalism grew. Faced with this challenge, Hickinbotham warned in 1954 that ‘it simply will not do to sit back with folded hands, relying on the purity of our intentions and the rectitude of our policy of allowing the States to continue in their own backward and unenlightened ways.’<sup>25</sup> Similarly, Luce warned in 1958 that ‘there is a great danger of our drifting along in the hope that something better will turn up tomorrow or the next day.’<sup>26</sup> Other lower-ranking officials drew

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20 TNA, CO 1015/1911, Gorell Barnes to Luce, 14 April 1958; Luce to Gorell Barnes, 28 April 1958

21 Oliver Miles, interviewed by Joseph Higgins, 3 August 2017

22 Hinchcliffe, Ducker, Holt, *op. cit.*, p. 90

23 John Harding, written response to author’s questions, 27 November 2016

24 BL, IOR, R/20/B/2122, A note on administrative policy in the Western Aden Protectorate, [February 1952]; Draft Memorandum: A proposal to establish a Federation of the states of the Western Aden Protectorate, [October 1952]

25 TNA, CO 1015/1211, Hickinbotham to Marnham, 7 August 1954

26 TNA, CO 1015/1911, Luce to Gorell Barnes, 28 April 1958



Maalla port (photo Danmission Photo Archive)

the same conclusions, less because of the external threat of Arab nationalism, and more because of what they saw as the very nature of colonial service, in line with the benevolent aspirations of the imperial mission. One recalled how ‘in the Colonial Service, if you had a problem, you took your coat off and you dived in to see what you could do about it.’<sup>27</sup>

Yet the disposition towards action and the operational independence of British officials created divergences in the implementation of the general ideals of the imperial mission. It was often the case that, when entering a new area, contingency plans amounted to putting ‘a political officer there and see[ing] if we can get them to make any sense out of it with the local Ruler.’<sup>28</sup> Orders as to how to achieve this, another recalled, were ‘done in an incredibly casual way. When he [the British Agent] said sort out your Sultanate [...] you relied on a political officer by and large.’ Nor was there cross-guidance over ‘best practice’ between political officers within the Protectorate.<sup>29</sup> The *raison d’être* of the ‘forward policy’ of the 1940s, 1950s

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27 James Nash, interviewed by Joseph Higgins, 18 October 2016

28 Ibid.

29 Stephen Day, interviewed by Joseph Higgins, 29 March 2017

and 1960s varied considerably. Harold Ingrams (EAP Resident Adviser, 1937–44), for instance, saw the advisory system as a way of ‘helping our proteges to order their affairs and improve conditions.’ In contrast, Basil Seager (WAP British Agent, 1940–51) saw it ‘mainly as a device [...] to keep the Imam [of Yemen] out.’<sup>30</sup> Trevaskis, on the other hand, was motivated by a ‘desire for tidiness’<sup>31</sup> (facilitated by plans to ‘penetrate’ and ‘pacify’ states not yet under British control),<sup>32</sup> whereas Luce’s ‘inclinations as an administrator’ framed his conception of the forward policy.<sup>33</sup> Some, like Ingrams, felt that preserving the independence of the states and nature of tribal society was paramount,<sup>34</sup> whereas others such as Hugh Boustead (EAP Resident Adviser 1949–58) ‘strongly discouraged’ this approach, seeing it as ‘going native’<sup>35</sup> or ‘going bush.’<sup>36</sup> Similarly, others resented ‘the way of running things with tribal ideas and tribal customs.’<sup>37</sup> Others, by contrast, relished the ‘constant adventure’<sup>38</sup> of South Arabian society, and the chance to play ‘Cowboys and Indians’<sup>39</sup> in the Protectorate. The autonomy of the British colonial administration in South Arabia led to inevitable and radical variations in the rationalisation and application of British policy.

Though methods of implementing the British mission varied, one prominent feature of the British presence is illustrative of the tensions within the British imperial mission, namely the recognition of the utility of force and arms distribution. The Federation, Luce and Trevaskis

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30 Sir Kennedy Trevaskis, *The Deluge: A Personal View of the End of Empire*, unpublished memoir, p. 135. (I am grateful to Rupert Wise for kindly providing a copy of his uncle’s unedited manuscript.)

31 Stephen Day, ‘Aden and the Gulf: the reflections of a political officer’, *Middle Eastern Studies*, 53:1, (2017), p. 139; Sir Kennedy Trevaskis, interviewed by Karl Pieragostini, 29 November 1979. (Thanks to Karl Pieragostini for taking the time to make a copy of his interview.)

32 BL, IOR/R/20/B/2661, 2675-2677, 3556; BL, IOR/R/20/C/2132-2134

33 BL, IOR/R/20/B/2612, Note on policy in Aden Colony and Protectorate by Luce, 5 October 1956, p. 3

34 BL, IOR, R/20/B/2603, ‘A policy for South-West Arabia’ by Harold Ingrams; Hickinbotham to Lennox-Boyd, 28 September 1954, Harold Ingrams, ‘A policy for South-West Arabia’, *New Commonwealth*, 2 September 1954

35 John Harding, *Roads to Nowhere: A South Arabian Odyssey, 1960–1965*, (London: Arabian Publishing, 2009), pp. 55-56

36 Nathan Tamblin, *A Year in Yemen*, (Self-published, 2016), p. 7

37 Mohamed Farid, interviewed by Joseph Higgins, 11 August 2017

38 James Lunt, *The Barren Rocks of Aden*, (London: Herbert Jenkins, 1966), p. 179

39 Harding, *op cite.*, pp. 9, 27, 238-239; Hinchcliffe, Ducker, Holt, *op cite.*, p. 98; James Nash, interviewed by Joseph Higgins, 18 October 2016

noted, ‘would be politically placed in a better position to deal with rebels in the Protectorate than the Aden Government’,<sup>40</sup> whilst Trevaskis wrote in his diary in 1964: ‘Who is to do the repression? We are no good at repression so will lose out. Therefore what we want is that the Fed SLC [Supreme Legislative Council]... take repressive action without interference.’<sup>41</sup> The distribution of arms or selling a chit to the highest bidder, as a political gift, bribe or quick way of raising money for development, became a staple of the British presence in South Arabia. Though some felt unease over the practice, believing that it ‘sowed the dragon’s teeth’, officials sought to rationalise it as an essential feature of South Arabian realpolitik, especially in the context of the conflict with Yemen and the violent nature of tribal politics. Luce noted that, as ‘distasteful [it is] to me as an administrator [...] I see no alternative at short term.’<sup>42</sup> He had been ‘forced to hand out large numbers of rifles’ to the Rulers to keep them on side, and was ‘sorry that on the eve of [the Federation’s founding] they should ask for arms and ammo.’<sup>43</sup> Even the Colonial Office was ‘convinced’ that supplying arms to the tribes, ‘distasteful as it is, is the most practical and indeed essential immediate step which can be taken to counteract Yemeni subversion activities.’<sup>44</sup> The distribution of arms was utilised, within the context of a chronic lack of resources available to fulfil the British imperial mission, as a way of negotiating and maintaining influence in what was seen as a society riven by, but also based on, violence. Its utilisation is demonstrative of the conflict between the ideals of the British imperial mission and the apparent necessity of this particular way of actualising these ideals, successfully or otherwise.

To conclude, a notable and recurring theme within the British colonial administration’s policy discourse of the 1950s is the institutional, sectional and individual divergences as to the nature and rationalisation of the very most fundamental aspects of the British presence in South Arabia. This

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40 BL, IOR/R/20/B/3259, Trevaskis to Chief Secretary, 4 March 1958; TNA, CO 1015/1911, Luce to Gorell-Barnes, 28 March 1958 [II]

41 Spencer Mawby, ‘Orientalism and the Failure of British Policy in the Middle East: The Case of Aden’, *History: the Journal of the Historical Association*, (95:3, 2010), p. 351

42 TNA, CO 1015/1930, Luce to Lennox-Boyd, 16 March 1957

43 TNA, CO 1015/1911, Luce to Gorell Barnes, 27 March 1958, [emphasis added]; Oxford Bodleian Libraries, MSS Brit. Emp. s. 546, 1/6, 30 January 1959

44 TNA, CO 1015/1930, Morgan to Russell Edmunds, 21 March 1957





Keith Falconer hospital in Shaykh Othman, 1963 (photo Danmission Photo Archive)

period of post-war imperial ‘soul-searching’ prompted questions as to the purpose of late-imperial rule that undoubtedly occupied the minds of colonial officials in South Arabia, and indeed across the Empire. But because the course of decolonisation was ‘riddled with extraordinary and baffling inconsistencies’, it remains difficult to discern an Empire-wide ‘master plan.’ So too in South Arabia was there little by way of a ‘master plan.’<sup>45</sup> The British imperial mission, the justification for policy as well as presence, was multi-faceted, multi-dimensional and conflicted. The direction of policy, at the macro-level and as understood by London, leant towards maintaining Britain’s strategic interests. Such a position was clearly at odds with wider trends across the decolonising Empire and Britain’s regional struggle with Arab nationalism. But it was also at odds with other tenets of the British imperial mission, namely its financial, developmental and benevolent concerns. Within South Arabia itself the isolated and ‘indirect’ nature of the British presence in the Protectorate, as well as the lack of a precise mission statement, emboldened officials at every level to envisage, develop and enact their own understanding of the British imperial mission. This amounted to an entanglement of intents and ‘direct’ and ‘indirect’ methods that produced predictably mixed results. The culmination of these discourses amounted to a fragile foundation that, as the pace and turbulence of events accelerated, curtailed the region’s chances of stability as it entered the 1960s.

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45 John Darwin, ‘British decolonization since 1945: A pattern or a puzzle?’, *The Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History*, (12:2, 1984), p. 190, 187

# THE YEMEN SAFE PASSAGE GROUP

JAMES FIREBRACE<sup>1</sup>

*Among the many organisations involved in seeking to address the suffering of Yemenis during the war, the YSPG is a UK based lobby group seeking to confront the root causes of the conflict. This article, by its coordinator, will inform readers of its history and activities; a longer version will be available on [www.yemensafepassage.org](http://www.yemensafepassage.org).*

## Who we are and how we operate

The Yemen Safe Passage Group (YSPG) began with a letter to *The Times* in May 2015, highlighting the impact of fuel shortages on Yemen's economy, and the health and general welfare of its people. YSPG now includes over 50 individuals, including former diplomats, academics and development professionals, all acting in their personal capacity and without external funding. The group's activities are coordinated by a contact group of three members.

YSPG argues the case for the unimpeded flow of food, fuel and medicines into Yemen, by drawing the attention of senior government officials, MPs and journalists to serious abuses and to potential solutions. The group's strength lies in bringing together a wide range of expertise on Yemeni society, international politics and diplomacy, defence/military, reconciliation and peacebuilding, trade and the economy, humanitarian operations, port operations and infrastructure, along with long experience of the complex politics and unique culture and history of Yemen.

YSPG is not partisan: we take independent positions and are not beholden to any government, business or aid agency. Our motives are to spare Yemenis the suffering of war and starvation, and to 'raise the game' by demanding external interventions to secure a sustainable and inclusive peace. As a British group, our primary aim is to influence British government positions. This leads us to focus on where the British Government has most clout – that is with key allies in Europe and the US, and in the region, Saudi Arabia and UAE. We stress the importance of addressing the

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1 James Firebrace acts as YSPG's coordinator. He has worked on a wide range of Yemen's development and economic challenges since the late 1970s.



roots of the conflict, and of highlighting solutions that address the concerns of the principal actors. YSPG exposes violations of safe passage and human rights on both sides. Our main campaigning efforts have targeted the following areas:

### **The belated success and undermining of UNVIM**

By June 2015, only 15% of pre-crisis imports were entering Yemen, fuel was becoming unavailable, and the UN had begun issuing famine warnings. YSPG argued for the creation of a credible and well-resourced body to independently inspect vessels entering Huthi-controlled ports and certify that they were not carrying arms. After eleven months of shameful obstruction (both the ‘internationally recognised’ government and the Coalition had to formally agree), this led to the establishment of the UN Verification and Inspection Mechanism (UNVIM) based in Djibouti.

UNVIM was initially highly successful in reducing the delays on vessels entering Hodeidah and Saleef. Throughout the war, UN arms inspectors have found no evidence of weapons from any source getting through at these ports. Additional inspections must be justified in writing to the UN, but this has not prevented Saudi Arabia from unilaterally instituting secondary vessel inspections without such justification, increasing the average 36-hour turnaround under UNVIM to around three weeks. To justify its proposed attack on Hodeidah – the Coalition is now claiming that UNVIM is ineffective at stopping ‘the smuggling of Iranian arms’ without providing any evidence for this claim.

### **An Exchange Fund to address Yemen’s liquidity crisis and salary payments**

In September 2016, President Hadi announced the move of the Central Bank of Yemen (CBY) from Sana’a to Aden. With national revenues massively reduced, CBY Sana’a was already suffering severe liquidity problems. But CBY Aden lacked competent staff and chaos ensued. YSPG explored how an ‘Exchange Fund’ might work to reintroduce funds, stabilise prices and the exchange rate, and facilitate trader payments. Later this developed into a wider initiative to develop an ‘International Finance Facility’ though salary payments remain an unsolved issue.

### **Hodeidah as a Safe Passage Port**

In 2017, the Coalition was threatening a military assault on Hodeidah. With expertise within the group, YSPG investigated the legal, political and

technical aspects of operating ‘a safe port’ under UN management. The British government position focused on a similar plan, and the UN Special Envoy adopted this as a central plank of negotiations. In the face of international condemnation, the military threat receded, but now 15 months later, the same issue has returned with increased severity, threatening Yemen’s main supply line at a time of great vulnerability.

### **Controlling arms smuggling into Yemen**

Based on expertise within the group, YSPG investigated how technology employed in curtailing illegal fishing could be employed to control arms smuggling into Yemen’s sparsely populated Arabian Sea coast. Satellite technology exists that could detect vessels switching off identification beacons (AIS) in order to smuggle. YSPG’s proposal was to include this technology as part of a package of measures to provide crucial reassurance to the Coalition, while in addition providing a tool for controlling the most damaging smuggling which has for decades been undermining Yemen’s economy and encouraging massive corruption. This idea remains on the back burner because of concerns about the cost and politics of implementation.

### **Using scenarios to highlight threats and opportunities**

In early 2018, internal consultation within the YSPG led to the development of three possible scenarios which highlighted the desperate seriousness of Yemen’s future should war continue or escalate. These were used for productive discussions with British officials.

### **Averting the Battle for Hodeidah, a more decisive role for Europe**

YSPG supports efforts by the UN Special Envoy to break the current deadlock, and to persuade both sides to make necessary concessions. We urge a direct intervention by the UN Secretary General. We believe that Europe could play a decisive role in solving the crisis and argue for a stronger and bolder intervention from the countries involved, including the UK, which has the necessary leverage with the warring parties. This needs to be applied with the determination and urgency needed to shift mind sets.

## BOOK REVIEWS



*Shari'a scripts* by Brinkley Messick. New York: Columbia University Press, 2018. ISBN 978-0-23117-874-7 pp536 hb £54/\$70

In his new, intensive analysis of the Zaydi and Shafi'i legal contexts in early twentieth-century Yemen, anthropologist Brinkley Messick builds on his earlier award-winning work, *The Calligraphic State* (Berkeley, 1993). Approaching texts as a “historical anthropologist” (p. 9), Messick examines four genres of shari'a texts: *fiqh* or literary jurisprudence, free-standing formal legal opinions (*fatwa* and *ikhtiyar*), case records issued by shari'a courts in and near the southern highland town of Ibb, and private notarial documents such as marriage and land contracts. This is an incredibly rich study, perhaps the most complete analysis of the ways in which a traditional Islamic legal system operated before the influx of reform, in this case the setting of Ibb during the late Zaydi imamate up until its end in 1962. The analysis is historical due to its critical reading of the dominant texts and reconstruction of legal cases; it is anthropological due to Messick's ethnographic fieldwork in Ibb in the mid-1970s with return trips and continued interaction with individuals he had first met. He argues convincingly that the anthropologist as reader must adopt “an active methodological posture of a willingness (and a trained ability) to learn from” his informants (p. 343). This work does so admirably.

Messick divides his book into two major parts, entitled library and archive. The library includes the legal texts and the process of academic learning in the madrasa. The archive links to the judge's court (*mahkama*) and private notarial writers. In a compelling floral metaphor, “if authoritative doctrinal works such as the *Flowers* [a major late fourteenth-century Zayd work of *fiqh*] were the textual perennials of particular shari'a traditions, the court judgments and notarial documents were their equally significant annuals” (p. 21). Although the Zaydi and Shafi'i legal schools in Yemen each had their own intellectual traditions, there was both factionalism and agreement between them (see p. 176). The majority of home-grown legal texts were Zaydi, while the Shafi'i relied primarily on texts written outside of Yemen. Messick assesses the major Zaydi treatises, their

commentaries, legal opinions and the context of their use. The value of his work is that he goes far beyond a reading of the texts to an elaboration of the discursive context of legal reasoning.

For scholars of Islamic law, Messick offers a fresh critique of Joseph Schacht's emphasis on the "discordance" between Islamic legal theory and practice. "Such views about the early closure and the theoretical rigidity of shari'a jurisprudence impeded understandings of its later vigor, including how this corpus of formal thought related to institutions of mundane implementation," he argues (p. 31). Building on theoretical insights of Michel Foucault, Talal Asad, Mikhail Bakhtin and Wael Hallaq, this analysis grounds texts in their context of use, including case studies that highlight the impact on recipients of judgments. The interrelation of orality and memorization, the traditional basis of learning, with writing as the fundamental legal practice emerges throughout the text. The focus throughout is on what Messick defines as "scripts." The transition from library to archive is "to shift from authors to writers, from the productions of literary jurists, muftis, and ruling imams to the work of others in the local interpretive community, those who served as court judges and secretaries, independent shari'a advocates, and private notarial writers" (p. 217). Messick's focus is micro-historical, "a closely focused snapshot of a particular local dialectic" rather than limited to a textual analysis across centuries (p. 331).

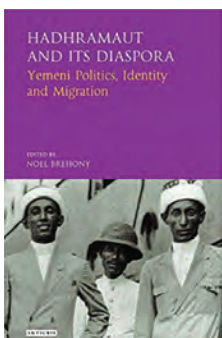
For scholars with a specific interest in Yemen, Messick provides a detailed interpretation of Zaydi legal texts, especially the quintessential Hadawi *Book of Flowers* (*Kitab al-Azhar*) of Imam al-Mahdi al-Murtada (d. 1437) and its commentaries. Unique to Yemen is the imam's legal opinion, called *ikhthiyar* (i.e., choice), a limited sphere of personally issued rules or doctrinal act that permitted the Zaydi imam "to regulate problems either endemic or emergent in his realm" (p. 177). Details are given of these choices by both imams Yahya (d. 1948) and Ahmad (d. 1962) and how they influenced court rulings. The ethnographic attention to how texts were interpreted, how rulings were made and actual case records makes Messick's work an extraordinary window into the traditional legal system of Ibb. Through the data collected the reader learns about marriage contracts, inheritance, sharecropping, land tenure issues, dispute resolution, relation to customary law (*'urf*) and other aspects of the local culture.

The density of the interpretation will no doubt keep some readers from reading through the entire text, but there is literally something for anyone

interested in the traditional application of Islamic law in a specific context. As might be expected in a work of this size, there is duplication of material at times, as the author acknowledges. The lengthy introduction provides an overview of the book's approach and methods. My only regret is that there is no conclusion summing up the important points made in the text.

One of the unique aspects of the book is Messick's reflexive writing style, giving details about who gave him information, his interaction with legal authorities and his own reactions. A particularly poignant example is an anecdote about a return visit he made to an Ibb judge who was no longer active. "As I used to," notes Messick, "I wrote out a question on a piece of notebook paper and gave it to him for a response. He took my pen and, as he used to, immediately commenced to write. But this time the paper did not move in his hands as he wrote. Instead, the letters piled up futilely in a blot of ink that, for me, marked the end of the old writing" (p. 161).

DANIEL VARISCO<sup>1</sup>



**Hadhramaut and Its Diaspora: Yemeni Politics, Identity and Migration**, edited by Noel Brehony, London, I.B. Tauris, 2017, pp 250, ISBN: 978-1-78453-868-2 hb £62.00 / \$99.00

When I visited Hadhramaut in the early 1990s, my purpose was to research the new petroleum finds being developed by the Canadian Occidental oil company. It was an impressive development, including the wellheads and the complex gathering system at Wadi Masila, the 165km pipeline and the export terminal at the historic site of Shihr. My research resulted in a book commissioned by Canadian Occidental to commemorate the coming on-stream of their project. The title of the book was *Gateways of Development* and over the next 20 years or so, until the expiry of its contract in 2011, Canadian Occidental produced 1.1 billion barrels of crude oil.

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One can only begin to imagine the types of development that could have been accomplished with the revenues derived from 1.1 billion barrels of oil. Yet, as Saadaldeen Talib and Noel Brehony observe in their opening chapter, the optimism expressed in the title of my book came to naught as the oil revenues that would have underpinned much development were instead used “to feed the patronage systems of the Saleh regime.” Underlining the widespread corruption involved, Talib and Brehony note that “the companies exploiting and servicing Hadhramaut’s oilfields were run by associates of Saleh and Islah, and Hadhrami oil revenues were used to finance regime patronage.”

Southern Yemenis, and Hadhramis in particular, will doubtlessly always rue the fact that this oil was discovered just months after unification in 1990 and not before. Had that earlier discovery happened, their world might have been much different today. Unification might never have happened, and their smaller nation might well have seen a new prosperity resulting from its petroleum windfall – a prosperity that could have opened a new chapter in their long history.

Hadhramis have long suffered a decided element of adversity in their homeland. Indeed, as one author after another in this fine book attests, Hadhrami migration – also known as the Hadhrami diaspora – has historically been occasioned by a variety of causes, ranging from population growth, pressure on the limited agricultural and fishing resources, and long periods of political turmoil. But whatever the cause, the immediate solution for many Hadhramis was to emigrate. As Helen Lackner puts it “Migration was an activity anyone could carry out provided they could raise the initial funds to finance their trips.” And out they went in a variety of directions: eastward to India, Singapore, Malaysia and Indonesia; westward to Kenya, Tanzania, and Ethiopia; northward to Saudi Arabia, Kuwait and the United Arab Emirates. Regardless of the destination, according to Leif Manger, “the Hadhrami diaspora has no centre except for its point of origin, and is characterised by being highly adaptive.”

Even as they have been adaptive, however, Hadhrami emigrants have been transformative in their new locations, often boosting their own well-being and that of their hosts beyond measure. Consider the cluster of Hadhrami families that have been a mainstay of the economy of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, virtually from its founding in 1932. Indeed, it is hard to imagine the fortunes of the Kingdom without that group of

Hadhrami families, a group that includes the Bin Zagr, Bin Mahfouz, Bin Laden, Kaaki, Bajrai, Bamaoudeh, Balahwal, Baqshan, Baeshen, Baroum, al-Amoudi, and Noaman Said. Long before the discovery of oil ensured Saudi Arabia's wealth in the 1950s, King Abdulaziz was borrowing money from the National Commercial Bank founded by Sheikh Salem Bin Mahfouz. Even today, bin Mahfouz's protégé, Sheikh Mohammed al-Amoudi – himself born of a Hadhrami father and an Ethiopian mother – is the second richest man in Saudi Arabia after Prince al-Waleed bin Talal bin Abdul Aziz al-Saud.

Even as the Hadhrami diaspora found ways to adapt and prosper in far-flung destinations, however, the homeland itself has undergone many changes through the years, particularly in the last century. Helen Lackner draws attention to this, paying attention to issues of land tenure. As she notes, traditional owners lost their lands and went into exile when the region came under socialist rule in 1967, but regained them on returning from exile after the two Yemeni states unified in 1990. "Upon their return to Hadhramaut," Lackner observes, "many of these newly empowered elements saw the new political situation as an opportunity to take revenge over the 'upstart' low-status people who had, in their view, 'stolen' their lands during the intervening period."

Thus, unification reversed the changes wrought under socialist control, and reasserted the traditional order. That, in turn, opened the way for the Islamist Islah party to increase its popularity in the south. "One of the main attractions of Islah was its explicit assertion of equality and rejection of the traditional categories of social status," Lackner notes. She adds that recently there has been a further shift away from Islah toward even more fundamentalist and aggressive Islamist forces such as al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula and ISIS. This is a trend that, arguably, has been in the making for decades since, as James Spencer asserts, Osama bin Laden is the most famous Hadhrami ever. But the Islamist trend remains worrisome in the midst of the current conflict overtaking Yemen, a point Abdullah Bujrah underscores: "How has Hadhramaut been affected by the war – and by AQAP taking control of parts of Hadhramaut?"

The region we know as Hadhramaut has produced some truly remarkable characters over the millennia, and this book serves as a highly sophisticated introduction to that place and its ingenious people. The book makes an excellent point of departure for any scholar wishing to further an area of research that has incomparable rewards, opening up remarkable

stories of a community that has, to say the least, been under-reported for much of its history. This book does much to redress that balance.

ERIC WATKINS<sup>2</sup>



**Beyond the Arab Cold War: The International History of the Yemen Civil War, 1962–1968** by Asher Orkaby, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2017, pp 312, ISBN 978-0-19061-844-5 hb £22.99

Yemen’s civil war of the 1960s has long been neglected in English and more broadly European-language historiography. A small number of publications have begun to change this, the latest being Asher Orkaby’s *Beyond the Arab Cold War: The International History of the Yemen Civil War*. His contribution focuses, as the subtitle suggests, on the international dimensions of the civil war and seeks to do so without losing sight of the dynamics on the ground. It draws on a wealth of archival sources and its main contribution lies in integrating new information and perspectives from Soviet material and from a number of more marginal archives relating to the war, including those of the Red Cross, the UN mission in Yemen, and Baptist missionaries. Following pioneering work with British and Israeli archives by Clive Jones and Jesse Ferris<sup>3</sup>, it also uses these sources effectively and unearths some new US material.

There is much in the study that is new and will be of interest to those seeking to understand international policies towards the war and the role of the Yemen civil war in the region. An initial overview on the eve of the civil war in Chapter 1 provides new information about Soviet perspectives on the Imamate and the way the US used oil companies as fronts to infiltrate the Mutawakkilite Kingdom. Chapter 2 provides interesting insights

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- 2 Eric Watkins served as the Financial Times Yemen correspondent from 1990–1994 and as media advisor to the Yemeni National Opposition Front (MOWJ) from 1994–2000. The publisher of *Gateways of Development* in 1993 and *Yemen Today* in 1997, Watkins continues to write on oil, shipping and security.
  - 3 Jesse Ferris, *Nasser’s Gamble: How Intervention in Yemen Caused the Six-Day War and the Decline of Egyptian Power*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2012; Clive Jones, *Britain and the Yemen Civil War, 1962-1965: Ministers, Mercenaries and Mandarins*, Eastbourne: Sussex Academic Press, 2010.



into debates in Cairo, Moscow, Washington, and Riyadh as governments decided how they should react to the overthrow of the Imam and whether to recognise the Yemen Arab Republic (YAR). Once again, the discussion of Soviet perspectives adds new material. Chapter 3 presents a military history of the war from the Egyptian point of view, complete with breakdowns of the types and calibre of weapons used in different battles. Chapter 4 discusses the UN Observer Mission, challenging some of the received wisdom about a mission generally written off as a failure. Chapter 5 discusses the various cease-fires and peace initiatives of the war, providing a diplomatic history perspective that initially follows well-trodden paths. Like previous chapters, it breaks new ground in providing primary evidence for Soviet relations with the YAR and convincingly argues that by 1965 both the USA and USSR had little interest in ending the war: they both, in different ways, saw it as a way to contain Nasser and to avoid a war between Egypt and Israel.

Chapter 6 discusses chemical warfare in Yemen. Though the Egyptian use of chemical weapons is now an established fact, the chapter does much to illuminate the extent to which they were used, their impact, and the tactics and strategic rationale that animated Egyptian decision-making. It also provides an effective discussion of evolving international responses and particularly of how the US downplayed evidence of Egyptian chemical weapons-use, due to its own reliance on chemical agents in Vietnam. Chapter 7 discusses Anglo-Egyptian rivalry in Yemen, starting in 1835, over Suez, to the “Aden Group” – an informal grouping of influential officials and MPs who sought to maintain Aden as a colony and supported the royalists during the civil war. Though based on archival sources, it closely follows existing accounts.<sup>4</sup> Chapter 8 discusses Israel’s support to the royalists, revealing details of an airlift operation that was long kept secret. It also considers the role of Yemen in Egypt’s defeat in 1967. Chapter 9 discusses “the impact of individuals,” focused on the colourful American Bruce Condé and his dedication to royalist postal stamps, André Rochat of the ICRC, and Southern Baptist medical missionaries, who established a hospital in Jibla. Chapter 10 wraps up the study with a brief discussion of the siege of Sana‘a and royalist-republican reconciliation.

If this summary does not add up to an argument, it is perhaps because

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4 Noel Brehony, *Yemen Divided: The Story of a Failed State in South Arabia*, London: I.B. Tauris, 2011 (not in bibliography); Jones, Britain and the Yemen Civil War.

the book does little to impose an overarching narrative on its disparate parts, preferring to let the sources and the information they provide structure the book and speak for themselves. There is much new material here, the study is alive with details, anecdotes and stories, and systematically considers Soviet perspectives, which have been under-illuminated and, even where they have been considered, have not been backed up by primary archival research. All of these qualities make this an indispensable source for students of the Cold War and the region in the 1960s, placing the Yemen civil war in international context.

Students of Yemen are likely to find the study less illuminating – and those with a broader focus should take note – because the absence of Yemeni, and to a lesser extent Saudi Arabian and Egyptian, perspectives is a weakness. It would have been helpful if the book acknowledged this relative blind spot. There are only a handful of Arabic sources in the bibliography, no interviews with Yemeni (or Egyptian or Saudi Arabian) actors involved in the war, few references to the Yemeni historiography of the war, and none to the recent slew of memoirs (of Abd Allah al-Ahmar, Sinan Abu Luhum, Ahmad Nu‘man, Abd al-Rahman al-Iryani, and others). It is not clear that papers from the Republic of Yemen Presidential Archive or the Republic of Yemen Military Museum, both of which are included in the list of archives consulted for the study, inform its conclusions. Basic geographical and other information about Yemen is occasionally misrepresented<sup>5</sup> and Arabic transliteration is inconsistent and sometimes inaccurate.

The study also makes a number of dubious assertions about dimensions of the civil war that were not purely international. Claiming that the civil war overthrew “the northern tribal order” (p.1) is to get things backwards: the civil war saw a resurgence of tribal influence. Claiming that Nasser sought to fund his war through “taxation, printing paper currency, issuing stamps, and exploiting local resources” (p. 3) is unhelpful because taxation in Yemen collapsed during the war, the Egyptians sought to exploit local markets, not local resources (of which there were few, in any

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5 E.g. the book suggests that *quḍāa* in Yemen are judges (p. 108), that the *Ḥamīd al-Dīn* were a “thousand year old dynasty” (p. 2), and that rural and village areas tended to be royalist (p. 60), without discussing differences between lower and upper Yemen or interrogating the meaning of such a statement at a time when only some 10% of the population lived in towns and cities. It locates *al-Jawf* northwest of *Sana‘a* (p. 72), places *Sa‘ada* and *Ma‘rib* “in the northern region of *al-Jawf*” (p. 61), and describes *Jabal Rāziḥ* as being in the northeast (p. 107).

case), and issuing stamps was a minor footnote to a campaign of printing Yemeni currency, which was indeed one way for Egypt to pay for the conflict.<sup>6</sup>

International intervention during the civil war was not responsible in a straightforward way for “establishing a modern political bureaucracy, roads, transportation hubs, a national army, and [...] the expansion of existing taxation and postal networks” (p.2) as Orkaby claims. Road-building, the construction of an airport, and the expansion of Hodeidah port all pre-dated the war, taxation collapsed and radically changed shape during the war, and government bureaucracies and the military grew very unevenly. Recent revisionist literature on the Imamate<sup>7</sup> might also have troubled a perspective that insists on the radical backwardness of Yemen before 1962. Orkaby also ends up caricaturing the role of tribes in the war and a British mercenary who describes ‘the tribesman’ as a “shifty idle character, brutal to weaker beings and inferiors” is given the last word (p. 66). A closer reading of Dresch (in the bibliography), or a look at work by Shelagh Weir and Marieke Brandt (neither in the bibliography) might have been helpful.

These inaccuracies do not invalidate the rich archival work of this book or its verdicts on the international dimensions of the civil war. Yet the author might have let the more careful and calibrated register that mark his conclusions about the international dimensions of the war inform his sweeping claims about the impact of the war in the place where it was, after all, fought and which it affected above all else. Greater clarity in what the study covers and does not cover would have been helpful. Precisely because this is a study whose many positive qualities will ensure it lasting relevance, it is unfortunate that it will contribute to reproducing some questionable assertions about the impact of the civil war in Yemen itself.

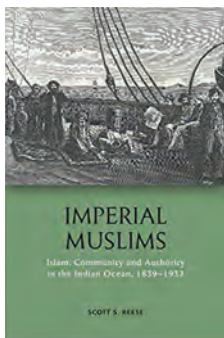
JOSHUA ROGERS<sup>8</sup>

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6 See: Joshua Rogers, “Importing the Revolution: Institutional change and the Egyptian presence in Yemen 1962-1967”, in: Marc Owen Jones, Ross Porter and Marc Valeri (eds.), *Gulfization of the Arab World*, London: Gerlach, 2018, pp. 113-133.

7 E.g. John Willis, *Unmaking North and South: Cartographies of the Yemeni Past*, New York: Columbia University Press, 2012; Fritz Kuehn, *Empire, Islam, and Politics of Difference: Ottoman Rule in Yemen 1849-1919*, Leiden: Brill, 2011. Both not in the bibliography.

8 Joshua Rogers recently completed his PhD on the 1960s civil war in Yemen at SOAS, University of London. He previously worked on Yemen for the EU and Saferworld and is about to join the Yemen team at the Berghof Foundation.



**Imperial Muslims: Islam, Community and Authority in the Indian Ocean, 1839–1937**, by Scott Steven Reese, Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2018, pp. 212, Hb. ISBN: 978 0 7486 9765 6, £ 70.00.

The historiography of colonial Aden is almost entirely focused on the traumatic events of the last years of British decolonisation. In spite of the wealth of archival material available at the India Office Records in the British Library, few researchers have ventured to explore the making of Aden into a colonial port and the early development of its society, a mixture of races, religions, and social classes. The particularity of Aden lies in the fact that when the East India Company occupied it in 1839 it had been reduced to a small village of some 800 residents. Modern Aden is therefore a colonial construct; its political, social, and religious institutions were fashioned within the context of the British Empire and the Raj. Thus, the aim of *Imperial Muslims* is to explore the emergence of a Muslim community within the British imperial context, its characteristics, internal dynamics, and ways in which its members negotiated their position with the colonial authority itself.

Scott S. Reese, a historian of Islam on both shores of the Bab al-Mandab, has compiled an eloquent, well-researched book on the origins of Aden's modern Muslim community. In the first part of the book he places Aden within the geographical and historical topography of the Indian Ocean, analysing the port city's cultural connections with the Subcontinent and explaining the process by which it was integrated into the British colonial sphere. Then, he uses a number of religious institutions from mosques and cemeteries to courts and spirit possession to show the processes by which the local Muslim community was constituted. Given the cosmopolitan character of the port and the variety of adherents of different Muslim sects that were drawn to it, faith played a pivotal role in shaping a single and at the same time distinctive community. Lastly, he looks at the increasingly transnational outlook of Aden's intelligentsia during the inter-war years, its ability to participate in pan-Islamic religious debates — particularly the ones on Salafism — and adapt its message according to local exigencies.

In *Imperial Muslims*, the author's ingenious use of British archival sources and Arabic contemporary publications make 19th and early 20th century Aden come alive in front of the readers' eyes. His assertion that at

the turn of the century Britain ruled over forty percent of the global Muslim population is enough to explain why Aden is an important case study in providing a window into the social and spiritual life of a Muslim community within the British Empire.

The first step towards the development of the local community of the faithful was the delimitation of sacred space. Most of the historical mosques of Aden and the *ziyara* festivals attached to the various *wali* tombs as we know them today were established in the first few decades after British occupation. This was not a straightforward process, as they were an important element of the Muslim public sphere and competing claims over their organisation and significance were directly related to individuals' influence within the community. An even more complex set of relations grew around the administration of law in the Aden Settlement. Reese shows how the British authorities established a state of legal pluralism whereby colonial law co-existed with the application of the shari'a. This meant an uneasy co-existence between the institutions of the civil registrars and the local qadhis, whose overlapping jurisdictions led to tensions and competition for authority over the Muslim community. Lastly, perhaps the most vociferously contested area of intra-communal authority was that over morality and public spirituality. Here the author compares the attitudes of "respectable" members of the Muslim community towards the practice of *zar* and *tambura* ceremonies by women and the *akhdam* social group respectively. Whilst the former was eventually banished as immoral and un-Islamic, the latter managed to survive thanks to its adherents' marginal position within local society and the fact that it did not challenge the acceptable spiritual parameters of the community.

All these episodes in the life of Aden's *umma* are bound together through the employment of a particular religious discourse that involved the entirety of the community and was conducted within the overlapping frameworks of both the local and transnational Islamic society. However, perhaps an area of potential further exploration in Aden's history that is not addressed in this book is that of inter-communal relations in the Settlement and the ways in which local Muslims interacted with the other religious groups. Reese's contribution to Yemeni studies is significant for another, albeit unintended, reason. It comes at a time when Adenis are trying to mitigate the devastating effects of the current civil war on both the social and historical fabric of their city. It is characteristic that a number of landmarks (and even whole communities such as the *khojas*) mentioned by

the author still existed in Aden until the beginning of this catastrophic conflict. At the same time, for more than a decade southern Yemeni society has been experiencing a resurgent nationalist movement demanding independence and a return to an imagined prosperous past. In this sense, *Imperial Muslims* serves both as an authoritative record of that past, and a timely reminder to those advocating a narrow reading of Aden's history and the destruction of anything that does not conform with it, that the port city's success as an emporium has always been proportionate to its ability to accommodate a plurality of different races and religions.

THANOS PETOURIS<sup>9</sup>

**Arabian Routes in the Asian Context**, edited by Pogorelsky, Pavel & Vasilenko, Maxim, Saint Petersburg: Mae Ras, 2016, pp. 616, ISBN: 978-5-88431-323-1. Available as a free download online: <http://www.kunstkamera.ru/files/lib/978-5-88431-323-1/978-5-88431-323-1.pdf>

Prof Dr Mikhail Rodionov's contribution to Yemeni studies is well-known among researchers of the country. He was a member of the Soviet–Yemeni Mission to South Arabia between 1983 and 1991. The mission also included Pavel Pogorelsky, one of the editors of the present festschrift, which was published to mark Rodionov's 70th birthday and was thus purposely antedated to coincide with it. In this remarkable volume, twenty-five scholars have contributed twenty-two chapters covering a significant range of topics on Yemen, the Middle East and Asia. Although most chapters are written in Russian, there are six in English and one each in French and Arabic. The addition of abstracts in English at the start of each chapter aids further in navigating the hefty volume.

Of the chapters this reviewer was able to read, four stand out because of their contributions to the scholarship of Yemen and the distinctiveness of the topics they deal with. Werner Daum's chapter challenges existing assumptions on the origins and continuity of Yemeni silver jewelry. The author persuasively puts forward the argument that what is today accepted as classical Yemeni jewelry acquired its form in the mostly Jewish work-

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<sup>9</sup> Thanos Petouris is a researcher on contemporary Yemeni politics at the School of Global Studies, University of Sussex. He also studies the history and development of the anti-colonial movement in Aden and the Protectorate of South Arabia during 1937–67.

shops of Sana‘a in the late 19th century. He argues that its typical filigree and granulation motifs found their way to Yemen from Jewish communities in central Europe within the context of the Ottoman Empire. This is the first attempt at placing Yemeni silver jewelry within its historical and geopolitical context. Daum’s employment to this end of a 13th century Rasulid tax-register, the Nur al-Ma‘arif, further supports his conclusion that, in spite of continuity in terminology and form, what is today accepted as ‘classical’ Yemeni jewelry formed a distinct break with the past concerning style and production techniques.

This chapter is suitably complemented by Abd al-Rahman Ja‘far bin ‘Aqil’s chapter on the Hadhrami *janbiyya* (“*al-Janabi al-Hadhramiyya*”). Contrary to the title, bin ‘Aqil does not limit his study to the Hadhramaut, but looks at the general history and development of the *janbiyya*, perhaps the most emblematic item of Yemen’s material culture. His discussion of its origins, which he traces back to Bronze Age South Arabia and the detailed description of its parts is a commendable contribution to the field.

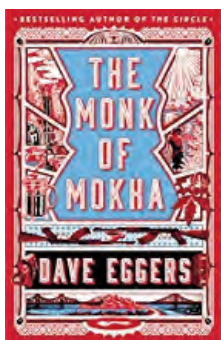
Then, Ester Muchawsky-Schnapper of the Israel Museum in Jerusalem, analyses the architecture and accoutrements of the Jewish synagogues of Yemen. Her research is delimited by the number of objects that were brought to Israel by the Yemenites after their removal there and the photographic record of early 20th century Jewish life in Yemen. Nevertheless, her scrupulous analysis of the existing material leads to two important conclusions considering the Yemenites’ liturgical material culture. One is that despite their artisanal prowess as silversmiths, their religious objects were made of humbler elements such as wood and stone. And second, which can partially explain the latter, that although Yemeni Jews incorporated into their material culture local Muslim influences, their ceremonial objects are characterised by an archaic typology which points to the continuity of ancient Jewish traditions among them.

Lastly, Anne Regourd sheds light on the ancient but very much alive practice of using a particular kind of circular astrological table, the *da’ira falakiyya*, in order to determine the therapeutic qualities of semi-precious stones. This is not a mystical exercise, but rather resembles a valuation service to determine the commercial value of different stones. It is thus in the Sana‘ani suq that the author locates both the physical existence of a number of *da’irat*, as well as the learned person who is responsible for the authentication of stones.

*Arabian Routes* is an important contribution to the study of Yemen insofar as the relevant chapters in this volume venture into hitherto unexplored territory. In this sense it is hoped that Souvorov's chapter on Islamic fundamentalism in Yemeni prose, and Vinogradov's memoirs of conflict in the PDRY and subsequently united Yemen will also be translated one day into English for the benefit of a wider audience. Still, an unfortunate but noteworthy omission by the editors is the lack of a biographical and bibliographical note on Rodionov himself, in whose honour the festschrift was published. Anyone interested in his academic work can find a list of his writings, up to the time of its publication, in his monograph *The Western Hadramawt: Ethnographic Field Research, 1983–91* (Halle: OWZ, 2007).

THANOS PETOURIS

### BOOK NOTES

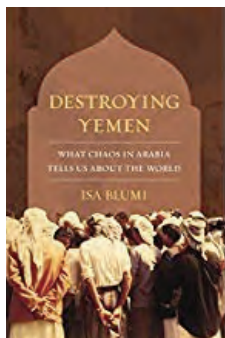


**The Monk of Mokha**, by Dave Eggers, London, 2018, Hamish Hamilton, pp 327, Hb £18.99, ISBN 978-0-241-27850-5

A welcome rare 'good news' story with a strong Yemeni connection: this book is a biography of a Yemeni American from the West Coast. It focuses on his many adventures leading to his successful attempt to import expensive 'specialty' coffee to the US during the current decade, despite first instability and now the war. The description of his early life in poor urban communities gives the reader a good insight into the difficulties faced by the Yemeni migrant community in the US. The year al-Khanshali spent in Ibb developed his personal commitment and connection with his homeland, and led to the early stages of his interest in coffee. The book also includes detailed information on coffee growing and processing as well as the hurdles of setting up a business in the contemporary world, which will be of interest to coffee fans. The considerable space given to alKhanshali's difficulties in leaving Yemen once the war starts, make this a more dramatic and gripping read, a personal touch on the way the political/military situation affects daily life for people attempting to live a normal life. Whether this will encourage people to pay USD 16 per cup of



coffee remains to be seen, but this is certainly a book which helps bring Yemen and its problems to audiences who would otherwise have no interest in the country and it provides some optimism for the future.

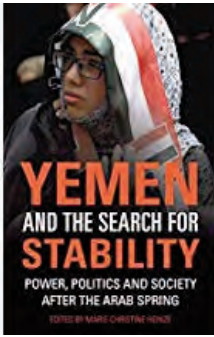


**Destroying Yemen, What Chaos in Arabia tells us about the World**, by Isa Blumi, pp 294, University of California Press, 2018 Pb £24.95, ISBN 978-0-520-29614-5

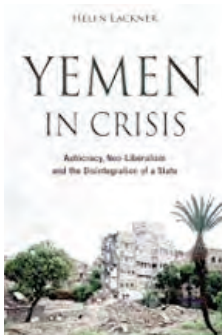
A highly unorthodox analysis of the current Yemeni crisis determined to demonstrate that US/UK/UN/Israeli and other imperialisms are fully responsible for the country's descent into war. The language is more akin to that found in ultra-leftist pamphleteering than in a book published by a recognised university press. Going back a century into the history of the Imamate and the country's 'subordination' to empire, it exonerates Yemenis of any responsibility for their own fate, describing the country's leadership as 'puppets' and 'pawns', an approach which is as arrogant and insulting as that of the colonialist states it blames. Its thesis that 'empire' has been determined to plunder Yemen's wealth might mislead readers unaware of the country's limited natural resources to believe it has wealth comparable to that of its peninsula neighbours. The importance the author gives to the role of external interventions further leads him to depict the Huthi movement as the expression of nationalist popular resistance, something which most Yemenis living under their rule are likely to find shocking, not to mention those who consider the Huthi movement nothing more than an Iranian proxy. Despite its numerous errors of fact, let alone its partisan analysis, the book is partly redeemed by its analysis of the Imamic period and information on the more recent oil economy.

**Yemen and the Search for Stability, power, politics and society after the Arab Spring**, edited by Marie-Christine Heinze, London, IB Tauris, 2018, pp 348 £ 75, ISBN 978-1-78453-465-3

This book presents updated versions of papers discussed at a conference held in Germany in mid-2014. Its 14 chapters [including the introduction] cover a number of important aspects of Yemeni society, culture and

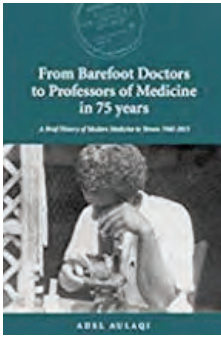


politics in the period from the 2011 uprisings to the official end of the transition period in 2014. It does not address either economic or international developments. Written by a combination of well-known analysts on Yemen and doctoral candidates, its chapters are mostly of high quality and well written. The book is likely to become a reference on this short but dramatic period in Yemeni history and politics. While some authors limited their analysis to the transition period, others have tried to include discussion of the war, thus unfortunately detracting from the value of the book as an account of this historical moment. Although currently appearing largely out dated, some of its chapters may provide inspiration and hope to new generations, as well as possibly re-emerge as relevant discussion points in a post-conflict period. The book's price will probably put it beyond access to many who might be interested.



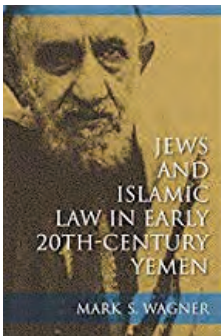
**Yemen in Crisis, Autocracy, Neo-liberalism and the Disintegration of a State** by Helen Lackner, Saqi Books, pp 330, Hb £25 ISBN 978-0-86356-193-1

To avoid accusations of ‘conflict of interest,’ the Journal is not reviewing this book by its editor. Eugene Rogan’s endorsement calls it ‘an outstanding book that provides answers to all of the questions raised by Yemen’s many crises since 2011. Written with compassion and insight, Lackner confirms her standing as the foremost authority on Yemeni politics at work today.’ Current and past chairman of the B-YS, Noel Brehony’s endorsement states that ‘Helen Lackner combines elegant writing with incisive and lucid analysis to reveal the political, economic and social causes of Yemen’s instability. Both specialists and those new to the country will find this book an indispensable guide to understanding Yemen’s profound and tragic problems and what its future holds for its people and the region.’ The editor hopes that members who haven’t yet read the book will do so and find it useful.



**From Barefoot Doctors to Professors of Medicine in 75 years, a Brief History of Modern Medicine in Yemen, 1940–2015**, by Adel Aulaqi, Chesham, Eidat Shams, 2017 pb £10, ISBN 978-0-9956610-0-5

Written by a member of the B-YS Committee, this book briefly outlines the story of the health care systems and modern medical education in South-Western Arabia. It covers events and developments at the cusp of modernity and national and state-building in a period spanning colonial conquests of late nineteenth century and nationalist administrations of the mid-twentieth and very early twenty first centuries. In medical care, East and West, tradition and modernity do not appear to clash but co-exist almost harmoniously. In two case studies the author briefly sketches out the role of a traditional midwife and documents the substantive role of the Hadhramis, famed for their almost legendary stories of migration, in the processes of medical education in the region. It ends by telling of the modern day story of migration and diaspora creation by the more adventurous of the newly-created medical elites who migrated to forge successful careers in many parts of the world.



**Jews and Islamic Law in early 20th Century Yemen**, by Mark Wagner, Indiana University Press, 2015, pp 206, pb USD 29, hb USD 75, ISBN 978-0-2530-1492-4

This book examines how Yemeni Jews ensured they were well informed of Islamic law and were thus able to manipulate it in the interests of their clients during the Imamic period in Sana'a. The Imamate had a Jewish population of up to 60 000 prior to their emigration to Israel, 80% of whom lived in rural areas: as a result in daily life they had a choice of legal systems to use in case of disputes. The main ones were between shari'a and customary law, which turned out to be the most appropriate and favourable mechanisms to deal with their grievances.



**Shipped but not Sold: Material Culture and the Social Protocols of Trade during Yemen's Age of Coffee**, by Nancy Um, Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2017, pp 216, Hb USD 64.00, ISBN-13: 9780824866402

In the early decades of the eighteenth century, Yemen hosted a bustling community of merchants who sailed to the southern Arabian Peninsula from east and the west, seeking and offering a range of commodities, both luxury and mundane. “Arabian stallions, bottles of fragrant rosewater, slivers of aromatic agarwood from southeast Asia, gilded porcelain coffee cups from China and Japan, tufted Persian velvet in red, green and blue, translucent turbans wrapper of Bengali muslin, simmering pieces of heavy satin from Gujarat, bales of coffee beans grown in the mountains of Yemen, sacks of cloves, cinnamon, mace and nutmeg, vials of spiced oils, yardage of English broadcloth, chests filled with pieces of eight.” With these words Nancy Um, an anthropologist, introduces this beguiling book to illustrate how such items circulating in the international networks of the Indian Ocean were exchanged and used in the coffee market of Bayt al-Faqih and the port of Mocha in Yemen.

She adds to recent scholarship that focuses on material objects and the non-commercial rituals of trade to illustrate, illuminate and expand on what might otherwise be banal transactions between merchants and suppliers at the brief zenith (1700–30) of Yemen's Age of Coffee before it lost its monopoly to the new coffee growing regions in South East Asia and South America. The book discusses the key role of these socially significant material objects (many of which were dispatched across oceans but not intended only for sale on the open market) as important signs, tools, and attributes in the vibrant world of a rapidly transforming Indian Ocean trading society.

## OBITUARIES

### SALEH ALI AL-SAMMAD

1979–2018



On Thursday 19 April 2018, President of the Huthi Supreme Political Council Saleh Ali al-Sammad was killed when a coalition drone targeted his convoy as it was travelling in eastern Hodeidah. The most senior member of Ansar Allah to be killed in the conflict, as of August 2018, he was 39 years old.

News of al-Sammad's death broke on 23 April, when the leader of the Huthi movement, Abd al-Malik al-Huthi, confirmed his assassination. In order to not suggest any weakness in the movement, it is likely that Ansar Allah's leadership was waiting until they had appointed a successor to make the announcement. In the four day period between his death and al-Huthi's announcement, Ansar Allah's outlet al-Masirah was still publishing stories about al-Sammad's visit to Hodeidah. The articles have since been removed.

During his brief speech on 23 April, Abd al-Malik al-Huthi offered condolences to al-Sammad's family, saying that Yemen has lost "an outstanding model of accountability for his people and his comrades... Since accepting the position, [al-Sammad] took initiative and worked day and night to serve, as much as he possibly could, the priorities of confronting [coalition] aggression and serving the people." He added that the killing of al-Sammad "will not go unpunished." Al-Sammad's prominence and seniority in the Huthi movement had secured him second place on the Saudi-led coalition's Most Wanted list, with a reward of \$20 million offered for information leading to his capture.

Born on 1 January 1979 in Bani Mu'adh in the Sahar District of Sa'ada governorate, al-Sammad graduated from Sana'a University and went on to become a teacher at Abdullah bin Mas'ud school in Sa'ada. Though not a *sayyid* himself, al-Sammad studied under the distinguished Zaydi scholar and *sayyid*, Badreddin al-Huthi. He was involved with the Huthi movement since its early days under Badreddin's son, the late Husayn al-Huthi. Al-Sammad gained recognition for his leadership in the third and fourth rounds of Sa'ada's six wars (2004–2010), when he fought government

forces from the frontlines of his hometown. According to some reports, his family home was destroyed and two of his brothers killed during the fourth war in 2007.

Al-Sammad often worked as a mediator between the Huthis and President Ali Abdullah Saleh – from 2009, when Saleh was embroiled in the Sa‘ada wars, until 2017, when cooperation between them collapsed. In addition to his ties with Saleh and other prominent GPC members, al-Sammad enjoyed close relations with Yemen’s tribal elites, adding to his versatility as a negotiator.

On 24 September 2014, three days after the Huthi movement overtook Sana‘a, al-Sammad was appointed as an advisor to President Abdo Rabbo Mansour Hadi as part of the Peace and National Partnership Agreement (PNPA), which attempted to de-escalate the conflict by forming a representative government that included advisors from Ansar Allah and the Southern separatist al-Hirak. Despite his respected status in the Huthi movement, al-Sammad issued statements that were opposed by the rest of Ansar Allah’s leadership. In November 2014, for example, he voiced his support for Hadi’s newly-formed cabinet, which prominent Huthi members deemed unacceptable. The following month, al-Sammad resigned from his post as advisor.

On 6 August 2016, power in the part of Yemen controlled by the Huthi-Saleh alliance was formally transferred from the Huthi Supreme Revolutionary Committee to the joint Huthi-GPC Supreme Political Council. Al-Sammad, who had close connections with both parties and was a well-respected political and military figure, was named president of the council. Deep divisions in the alliance became very apparent in mid-2017, when Ali Abdullah Saleh and GPC supporters agreed, without Huthi approval, to hand over Yemen’s seaports and airports to a third party as part of a truce that would end coalition bombardment. The agreement was retracted, but damage had already been done to the partnership. The Huthis lost faith in their ally and in UN initiatives. Al-Sammad himself stated that UN Special Envoy Ismail Ould Cheikh Ahmed “could no longer be trusted” and was “not welcome” in Sana‘a.

The alliance between the Huthis and Saleh’s GPC suffered a deadly blow in December 2017, when Saleh was killed by his former Huthi allies. In the tense aftermath of Saleh’s death, al-Sammad met with leading GPC members in an attempt to salvage the tattered alliance and insisted that Ansar Allah was still pursuing a peaceful solution to the conflict. On 15

January 2018, prominent Yemeni journalist and activist Hisham al-Omeisy was released from Huthi detention after five months of imprisonment without charge. On 24 May, al-Omeisy expressed his gratitude on Twitter to the deceased president for his pardon.

Although by no means a dove, Saleh al-Sammad was a moderate by Huthi standards and spent his career straddling opposing factions in attempts to build partnerships and resolve disputes. This approach did not always benefit him, as members of the Huthi family – especially Muhammad Ali al-Huthi, the head of the Revolutionary Committee – distrusted al-Sammad and felt that he was using his political connections to encroach on their influence. Possibly in an effort to dismantle his diplomatic persona, al-Sammad announced on 9 April of this year that the Huthis were preparing to launch daily attacks on Saudi Arabia, saying that this would be “a year marked by ballistic missiles.” Earlier on the day of his death, al-Sammad was speaking to local officials at Hodeidah University, where he emphasised the importance of resisting the Saudi-led coalition and its attempts to control the port city in the coming months.

Shortly after al-Sammad’s death, Abd al-Malik al-Huthi named his brother-in-law and former office manager Mahdi al-Mashat as president. This appointment marks a shift towards the more extremist strain of Ansar Allah, while also narrowing the gap between the al-Huthi family and the council’s leadership. The decision raises many questions about the killing of Sammad, particularly at a time when there were rumours about possible plans for meetings with the recently-appointed new UN Special Envoy, indicating possible progress towards negotiations.

A number of articles published in Gulf-owned outlets before and after al-Sammad’s killing speculate that the Huthis themselves played a part in his death. Asharq Al-Awsat on 20 April reports that al-Sammad had “disappeared” eight days earlier, with rumours that he was being held under house arrest by the Huthis. Al Jazeera article on 23 April cites Islah-affiliated political analyst Khaled al-Ansi, who claims that al-Sammad was killed as a result of Huthi infighting and because of his ties to Saleh.

Culpability aside, the implications of al-Sammad’s death will reach well beyond Ansar Allah’s leadership. A cycle of retaliation between Huthi forces and the Saudi-led coalition can be expected, which will inevitably result in the deaths of more Yemeni civilians. It has long been clear to observers that there is no military solution to this war, and al-Sammad’s killing has also reduced hope for a diplomatic one.



Al-Sammad's funeral procession was held in Sana'a's al-Sabeen Square on 28 April, the day he was scheduled to have met with UN special envoy Martin Griffiths. Al-Sammad leaves behind two wives and five sons.

HANNAH PORTER<sup>1</sup>

## JULIAN FORTAY WALKER, CMG MBE

1929–2018



Julian Walker, who died on 7th July 2018 aged 89, was British ambassador to the Yemen Arab Republic from 1979 to 1984. After graduating from Cambridge and SOAS, he joined the FCO and was posted to the Trucial States. He was best known for his role in helping to establish the formal boundaries between what became the emirates of the UAE and the UAE's border with Oman. He said that "there were large areas of dispute and no maps, just naval charts and a map of Abu Dhabi made by Wilfred Thesiger during his travels." He spent weeks wandering around the region talking to tribes to draw up the borders. He wrote of his experiences in his book *Tyro on the Trucial Coast* and he edited *The UAE Internal Boundaries and Boundaries with Oman* in eight volumes in 1994. Julian established a close relationship with Sheikh Zayed al Nahyan, and was present at the formation of the UAE in December 1971.

He arrived in Sana'a during the period in which Ali Abdullah Saleh, who had become President in 1978 after the assassination of his two predecessors, was in the early stages of building his regime. Few had thought that Saleh would survive for long. In 1979 the YAR and the PDRY fought a brief border war followed by a unity agreement that neither took very seriously. Relations with the South stabilised after Ali Nasser Muhammad took over in Aden in 1980. In the early 1980s, President Saleh set up the GPC and developed the power and patronage networks that enabled him survive for so long.

Julian was a long serving ambassador with a deep love for Yemen and a profound interest in the intricacies of its politics. His former colleagues

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<sup>1</sup> Hannah Porter is a recent graduate from the University of Chicago's Center for Middle Eastern Studies, where she wrote her Master's thesis on Huthi rhetoric and propaganda.



recall his extraordinarily detailed “fortnightly round-ups” of events. He wrote these with meticulous attention. At the time, busy FCO officials had time only to scan them but they are now in the National Archives in Kew and are rich sources for anyone researching the history of Yemen in the early 1980s. They are written in the tradition of an earlier generation of diplomats who had the time, patience and commitment to gain a deep understanding of the countries to which they were sent. He arranged the first visit by a Yemeni Prime Minister, Abdul Aziz Abdul Ghani, to the UK where his host was Mrs Thatcher. They got on very well but Mrs Thatcher was forced to apologise when her guest’s Yemenia aircraft was impounded at Heathrow over an alleged unpaid debt. Julian was instrumental in rebuilding the Yemeni-British relationship.

After Yemen, Julian was ambassador to Qatar 1984 to 1987 and formally retired from the FCO in 1993 but stayed on as an adviser on Syria and then Iraq at the FCO Research Department. He used his previous experience to advise on the Kuwait-Iraq border in the aftermath of the Gulf War of 1990/91. He later managed the Kurdish Cultural Centre in London and was a strong advocate for the rights of the Marsh Arabs of southern Iraq.

NOEL BREHONY

LIEUTENANT-COLONEL  
ROBERT IAN HYWEL JONES MBE, MC.

1933–2018



Ian Hywel-Jones was born in 1933 and was educated at Birkenhead School from 1944–1950. He was commissioned into the South Wales Borderers, and served with them and their successor regiment – the Royal Regiment of Wales – for 33 years.

He made a name for himself as the 1SWB Battalion Intelligence Officer during the Malayan Emergency, serving there from 1955–1958. As a lieutenant, not only did he – with the help of the local police Special Branch – run an effective network of agents against the Communist Terrorists, but he also personally led the operations derived from that intelligence collection. He was awarded the Military Cross in May 1957 “For personal courage and tireless devotion to

duty and the display of initiative and leadership during operations conducted by his Regiment in Malaya.” Presciently, given his later interest in Yemen, while he accepted that air attack could sometimes be effective with accurate intelligence, he concluded that “bombing on a random basis [...] could well perhaps do more harm than good.”

Subsequently, he was posted to Berlin as Aide De Camp to the General Officer Commanding the British Sector of Berlin. There he met Marilyn Booker (whom many members will know as the long-term Honorary Secretary of the RSAA.) He was posted to Aden, where he served with the Federal Army from 1964–1966. The couple were married in 1965, and remained in Aden until the end of 1966, Marilyn also being fascinated by Aden’s history. Other tours followed: in 1977 the couple were stationed in Iran and had to be evacuated from Tehran when the Revolution broke out in 1979. Later, in the early 1980s, they were posted to the Embassy at Jeddah. He visited the PDRY in 1982.

Retiring from the Army on 30th September 1983, Colonel Ian joined the Foreign and Commonwealth Office as a Senior Executive Officer, co-ordinating British Military Attachés abroad, a role for which – with his intelligence background – he was particularly well suited. With his lengthy experience of both Military and Civil Service, he contrasted the attitudes of the two services: the Civil Servants look upwards; while the military, as well as looking upwards, know that: “the most important people in our lives would be the people ‘beneath’ us – the people we were privileged to lead.” He was appointed MBE in the 1997 New Year’s Honours.

In retirement, Colonel Ian was a much loved Chairman of the London Branch of the (Welsh) Regimental Comrades Association for over 20 years, playing a very active part in military support activities. He was also an active member of the VC & GC Research Project, and made extensive and perceptive contributions to campaign histories of Malaya and Aden as part of the Oral History project at the Imperial War Museums. In August 2015, Colonel Ian and Marilyn celebrated their 50th Wedding Anniversary; sadly, she died in October 2016.

Lt Col Ian Hywel-Jones MBE MC, late of the South Wales Borderers and Royal Regiment of Wales, and the Foreign and Commonwealth Office died on 12th January 2018, aged 85.

JAMES SPENCER<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> James Spencer is a retired infantry commander who specialised in low intensity conflict. He is a committee member of the B-YS



Say'un, 1964; the house of poet and historian Sayyid Salih b. 'Ali al-Hamid (photo © John Shipman Collection courtesy of Thanos Petouris)

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## B-YS APPEAL

In view of the worsening suffering of Yemenis, it would make no sense to close our appeal. Despite its modest results by comparison with the desperation of millions of Yemenis, it has raised more than £22 000. As pointed out in this year's Chairman's report, 'this is no mean achievement for a small society such as ours.' Our partners Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF) and the Yemeni Red Crescent continue their essential work throughout the country, despite the many constraints and risks their staff and volunteers face from military activities from all warring groups.

Needs have increased, with an overall humanitarian situation still described by the UN as the 'worst in the world.' Three quarters of the population or 22 million people are in urgent need of humanitarian assistance. Lack of clean water and sanitation harm the health of more than 16 million people while more than 8 million are officially described as on the verge of starvation. In remote areas thousands have certainly already died, although we don't have official figures to prove it. Malnutrition and polluted water lead to increased vulnerability to diseases, including many which can be easily treated. Diarrhoea is prevalent throughout the country, affecting mostly young children, and killing many. Both MSF and the Yemeni Crescent work to provide clean water and to treat those affected by all kinds of diseases; helping them is one way to contribute to alleviating the pain suffered by Yemenis, young and old.

Yet again, the B-YS committee appeals to all our members and any other readers. Please donate to our appeal, remember that UK tax payers can increase their donation by 25% through the Gift Aid scheme: all you need to do is sign up to it [if not already done] and inform the Treasurer or Secretary when you send your donation. Gift Aid forms are available on our website or from our Secretary at 210 Stephendale Road, London SW6 2PP. Please send what you can to the Secretary or to John Huggins, our Treasurer, at 44 Constitution Hill, Norwich NR3 4BT



The Yemen Red Crescent Society intensifies its relief efforts during a pause in the fighting and mobilised its staff and volunteers to deliver relief and aid services to people across the country. (Photo: YRCS)