



Yemen in Perspective

August 2015

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*Yemen flag
Courtesy of flagpedia.net*

Chapter 1: Geography

Introduction

Yemen, in the Middle East (or Near East), occupies the southwestern corner of the Arabian Peninsula, across from the Horn of Africa. Slightly smaller than the state of Texas, Yemen has a varied geography of mountains, plains, deserts, and more than 100 islands in the Gulf of Aden and the Red Sea.¹ Western Yemen is marked by rugged highlands and mountains, including several peaks that reach more than 3,000 m (10,000 ft)—the highest points on the peninsula. For this reason, Yemen has been called the “Roof of Arabia.”² The land slopes down to the east toward the Arabian Desert, second in size only to the Sahara.³ The temperate climate and relatively abundant rainfall of the Yemeni highlands led the ancient Romans to call it “Arabia Felix,” meaning “happy” or “fortunate” Arabia.⁴ Yemen’s coastal lowlands, eastern plateau, and deserts display the hot and dry conditions that characterize greater Arabia.⁵ Today, water is a precious

and limited resource that is increasingly strained by the needs of Yemen's fast-growing population.⁶

The Republic of Yemen has existed only since 1990, when the Yemen Arab Republic (North Yemen) and the People's Democratic Republic of Yemen (South Yemen) were unified.⁷ The Yemen Arab Republic (1962–1990) made up most of the western region of the current country. Its territory bordered the Red Sea and encompassed most of the adjacent mountain highlands, but was blocked from the southern coast by the People's Democratic Republic of Yemen (1970–1990). South Yemen comprised what are now the central and eastern portions of the unified country, extending west to the Bab el Mandeb strait. Yemen's current borders reflect the unification of the two republics, including boundary agreements with Oman and Saudi Arabia.⁸



*Haraz mountains around Manaka
Franco Pecchio*

Area

Yemen occupies a strategically important position on the southern Arabian Peninsula, near vital shipping lanes. It shares land borders with Saudi Arabia to the north and Oman to the northeast. To the east and south, Yemen borders the Arabian Sea and the Gulf of Aden, which separates the Arabian Peninsula from the Horn of Africa.^{9, 10} Across the Gulf of Aden lies the African country of Somalia and its autonomous region Somaliland. Off the southwestern tip of Yemen lies the Bab el Mandeb, a strait that connects the Gulf of Aden to the Red Sea. The small African country of Djibouti lies directly across the strait from Yemen. Yemen's western border runs along the Red Sea; across the sea lies the African country of Eritrea. Yemen's

total coastline measures 1,906 km (1,184 mi).¹¹

Yemen also possesses more than 100 islands scattered throughout nearby waters.¹² These include the Kamaran and Hanish Islands (two island groups in the Red Sea), and the island of Perim (Barim) in the Bab el Mandeb strait. Socotra (Suqutra), Yemen's largest island, lies in the Arabian Sea off the tip of the Horn of Africa.¹³

Geographic Regions and Topographic Features

Yemen's topography exhibits considerable variation. A rugged and fertile highland region occupies the west. The east is dominated by a high, arid plateau dissected by *wadis*, or valleys that seasonally flow with water. Desert covers areas of the north.¹⁴ Narrow coastal plains lie along the borders of the south and west.¹⁵

Coastal Plains

The extensive coastline is lined with plains that range from 8 to 65 km (5 to 40 mi) in width.¹⁶ The western coastal plain on the Red Sea is known as the Tihamah (or Tihama). Hot and humid, this sparsely populated plain extends from Saudi Arabia south to the Bab el Mandeb strait and ranges from 24–64 km (15–40 mi) in width. Along the water, the Tihamah features beaches and mudflats, while inland are sand or stone plains and occasional salt flats (*sabkhas*). Although the plain receives only 50 mm (2 in) of rainfall yearly, *wadis* carry seasonal runoff to the plain from the adjacent mountains. These *wadis* support limited agriculture on irrigated plots that are interspersed throughout the large network of sand dunes.^{17, 18} On the plain's eastern edge, the terrain rises sharply into cliffs and foothills that form the western escarpment of the mountainous interior.¹⁹

The plains lining the southern and eastern coasts (on the Gulf of Aden and the Arabian Sea) are narrower than those on the west coast. Like the Tihamah, they are bounded by rugged escarpments, some of which reach to the sea. Unlike the Tihamah, the southern and eastern coasts can be blanketed by dense fog as a result of the southwest monsoon. This climate encourages thick woodland vegetation on the nearby foothills.²⁰ Aquaculture (primarily shrimp farming) and fishing-related industries are based on Yemen's coasts. The major ports are Aden (on the southwestern coast), Al Hudaydah (on the Tihamah), and Al Mukalla (on the southeastern coast).^{21, 22}

The Yemen Highlands

Inland from the Tihamah, the terrain rises sharply to highlands that extend north-south (parallel to the Red Sea coast) and eastward (parallel to the southern coast). This L-shaped range is known as the Sarat Mountains.^{23, 24} This region is the southern part of an upland rift along the western coast of the Arabian Peninsula. The rift, which is part of the Great Rift Valley system, is the product of the separation of the Arabian Peninsula from the African continent that occurred millions of years ago.²⁵ The highland region consists of a large, dissected plateau marked with rugged mountains and volcanoes. The western escarpment, which forms a transitional zone between the Tihamah and the upland plateau, is steep and rugged. Thousands of small villages are situated on rocky outcroppings of this slope, which supports crop cultivation via an elaborate terracing system.²⁶ For example, such features mark the Haraz Mountains, which have the city of Manakhah on their western slope.²⁷

The highlands culminate in intermittent mountain chains that contain the country's highest points. The tallest peak, west of the Yemeni capital Sanaa, is known as Jabal an-Nabi Shu'ayb and reaches 3,666 m (12,008 ft).^{28, 29} East of the western escarpment, the upland plateau contains rolling plains and basins among hills and mountains.³⁰ Settlements and agriculture here benefit from fertile soils, a temperate climate, and moderate rainfall.³¹ *Wadis* cut through the region, carrying seasonal runoff to lower

elevations. The advantageous geographic and climatic conditions make the highlands home to the majority of the Yemeni population and several of the country's major cities.³² These include Ta'izz, which is in the southern highlands, and Sanaa, which is in the central highlands. The highlands gradually descend into the arid plateau of the east, where the climate changes markedly.^{33, 34, 35}

Eastern Plateau and Desert

From the highlands, the terrain slopes down to an arid, upland plateau and desert. The Ramlat as Sab'atayn, which is a large desert of undulating sand dunes, occupies west-central Yemen just east of the highlands. The Jawl (Jol), an expansive limestone plateau, covers much of central and eastern Yemen.^{36, 37} It is crossed by numerous *wadis*; the largest is Wadi Hadramawt.^{38, 39} This extensive valley runs through the Jawl from central Yemen, east of the Ramlat as Sab'atayn, to the Gulf of Aden on the southeastern coast. The greater region is also known as Hadramawt (Hadhramaut). The seasonal runoff and the fertile soils of the upper valley (which is intersected by additional *wadis*) have long supported settlement and agriculture, including fruit plantations. The valley's lower reaches, toward the sea, are sterile and mostly desolate.^{40, 41} This lower course is known as Wadi Masilah.⁴²

South of Wadi Hadramawt, the Jawl reaches 1,289 m (4,229 ft) in a series of low mountains and hills that run parallel to the coast.⁴³ North of Wadi Hadramawt, the plateau descends gradually to the southern reaches of the Rub al-Khali, or Empty Quarter, a massive sand desert that covers some 650,000 sq km (250,000 sq mi) of the Arabian Peninsula. Hot, dry, and extremely inhospitable, the Rub al-Khali is the largest sand desert in the world.⁴⁴ Except for Wadi Hadramawt and its related branches, the eastern region is sparsely populated, with large expanses of unforgiving, uninhabited terrain.⁴⁵

Islands

Yemen possesses more than 100 islands in the Red Sea, the Gulf of Aden, and the Arabian Sea.⁴⁶ Although estimates have varied, recent figures place the number at 183.⁴⁷ Topography and climate vary from island to island.⁴⁸ Among the most important islands in the Red Sea are the Kamaran Islands, an archipelago just off the coast of the northern Tihamah. The main island has a small population, primarily composed of pearl fishers.⁴⁹ Farther south in the Red Sea, the uninhabited Hanish Islands were the subject of a territorial dispute between Yemen and Eritrea. After armed conflict and international mediation, most of the



*Socotra Island, Yemen
Martin Sojka*

islands were officially awarded to Yemen in 1998. Jabal Zuqar, the largest of the Hanish Islands, has the highest elevation of any island in the Red Sea: 624 m (2,047 ft).⁵⁰ Perim (Barim) Island is in the strategic Bab el Mandeb strait. In 2009, Yemeni and French officials announced plans to construct an artificial harbor on the island for combating regional piracy.⁵¹ A proposal to build a bridge across the Bab el Mandeb strait would use the island as a stopover point.⁵²

Yemen's largest island, Socotra, is in the Arabian Sea, 340 km (210 mi) southeast of the Yemeni coast. Measuring approximately 3,600 sq km (1,400 sq mi), Socotra has a mountainous interior surrounded by coastal plains. It is known for its unique biodiversity, including many species that are found nowhere else on earth. Local economic activity includes fishing, animal husbandry, and small-scale agriculture.^{53, 54}



*Dust storm
David Chantoiseau*

Climate

Yemen has a subtropical, dry, hot, desert climate.⁵⁵ The climate is determined by two major forces: dry northerly winds that dominate in winter, and moist monsoons that prevail in spring and summer.⁵⁶ Although the alternating strength of these forces makes for relatively distinct seasons, climate varies by region and elevation. In general, the highlands experience a temperate climate with dry, mild winters and warm summers, which see moderate to abundant rainfall. Sanaa, in the central highlands, has an average temperature of 14°C (57°F) in January and 22°C (71°F) in July.⁵⁷ Occasional frosts and light snowfall may

occur at upper elevations during the winter. The spring and summer monsoons bring rain to the highlands in two major cycles: March to May and July to September. The western escarpment and mountains receive the most rainfall. Precipitation levels are lower overall on the upland plateau; the rainfall there is heavier in the south than in the north.⁵⁸ For example, average annual rainfall in Sanaa is about 51 cm (20 in), while the highlands to the south around Ibb and Ta'izz receive more than 75 cm (30 in) each year.⁵⁹ Precipitation comes in localized storms, so it varies considerably, even across short distances.^{60, 61}

The coastal plains feature a tropical climate, with low rainfall and high heat and humidity. Temperatures in this region range between 28°C (82°F) and 42°C (108°F).^{62, 63} But along the southern coast, temperatures can soar to 54°C (129°F).⁶⁴ Average yearly rainfall is less than 130 mm (5 in).^{65, 66} The eastern plateau and deserts are similarly hot and dry year-round. Average temperature highs in Wadi Hadramawt range from 30°C (86°F) in the winter to 40°C (104°F) in the summer. This region receives around 50 mm

(2 in) of rainfall each year—typically in short, periodic downpours that occasionally cause floods.⁶⁷ In the deserts, rain may fall only once every several years. Daytime temperatures in these regions can reach 50°C (122°F), although nights are cooler.⁶⁸ Nationwide, rainfall is erratic and droughts often result.⁶⁹ Precipitation has reportedly decreased in many regions over the last several years. Sandstorms and dust storms, which are fueled by strong northwesterly winds known as *shamal*, can sweep through the region in winter and early summer.⁷⁰



*Dry riverbed
kebnekaise / flickr.com*

Bodies of Water

Rivers and Lakes

Yemen has no permanent rivers; instead, it has *wadis*, which are valleys and dry riverbeds that provide seasonal drainage for rainfall runoff.

Wadis run from the highlands and upper elevations of the eastern plateau to the coastal plains and to the interior deserts and lowlands.⁷¹ The most well-known *wadi* is Wadi Hadramawt, which is the longest *wadi* in Arabia and the lifeblood of the eastern plateau.^{72, 73, 74} Other major *wadis* include Wadi Zabid and Wadi Mawr, which run from the highlands down to the Tihamah, and Wadi al Jawf, which flows from the northern highlands down the eastern escarpment. From the southern highlands, Wadi Bana flows to the

southern coastal plain and into the Gulf of Aden.^{75, 76, 77} On the eastern plateau, Wadi Doan (Dawan) runs northward through the southern Jawl, where it connects to the Wadi Hadramawt system. The lower course of the Wadi Hadramawt is known as Wadi Masilah and flows into the Gulf of Aden.⁷⁸

Although Yemen has no lakes, a dam at Marib on the eastern escarpment has a capacity of 400 million cubic meters. (Marib was the site of a large dam that allowed for the development of the Sabaean culture in the 1st millennium B.C.E.). Hundreds of smaller dams in the highlands store water for local use or channel it into depleted aquifers.⁷⁹

Sea Lanes

Yemen's strategic importance stems largely from its location along vital shipping lanes. These bodies of water include the Arabian Sea, the Gulf of Aden, the Bab el Mandeb strait, and the Red Sea. They form a network from the Indian Ocean to the Mediterranean Sea that is vital for global trade. It is a major route for shipping goods between Asia and Europe, as well as for transporting oil from the Persian Gulf to Europe

and the United States.^{80, 81} This region has been increasingly affected by piracy in recent years. Many of these pirates are based in nearby Somalia.^{82, 83, 84}

Off the southeastern coast of Yemen, the Arabian Sea forms the northwestern portion of the Indian Ocean. The sea's inlet, the Gulf of Aden, begins near the point of the Horn of Africa. The Bab el Mandab strait links the Gulf of Aden to the Red Sea and narrows to 29 km (18 mi). To reach the Suez Canal, ships from the Gulf and Asia must pass through the Bab el Mandab.^{85, 86} This makes it a chokepoint for traffic in and out of the Red Sea.^{87, 88}



Sanaa
Thomas Vogler

Major Cities

<i>City</i>	<i>Population</i> ⁸⁹
Sanaa	1,707,531
Aden	588,938
Ta'izz	466,968
Al Hudaydah	409,994
Ibb	212,992
Al-Mukalla	182,478

Sanaa

Sanaa, the capital and largest city of Yemen, is situated in the central highlands at an altitude of more than 2,200 m (7,200 ft).⁹⁰ The city sprawls across a fertile upland basin near the foot of a mountain known as Jabal Nuqum.⁹¹ Yemeni legend attributes the founding of the city to Shem, one of Noah's three sons. The city's name is thought to mean "fortified place."^{92, 93} Only in the early 1960s did an all-weather road make the historically isolated city relatively accessible from the Tihamah, via the rugged western escarpment. The city became the capital of the Yemen Arab Republic, also known as North Yemen, which existed from 1962 to 1990. The city has expanded rapidly from approximately 35,000 in the early

1960s to more than 2 million today.^{94, 95} The influx of people has led to urban sprawl and

a strain on infrastructure and resources, especially water. Amid a national water crisis, the city could run out of water by 2025 if the depletion of local aquifers continues at the current rate.^{96, 97}

The old quarter of the city, now a UNESCO World Heritage site, is enclosed by a wall measuring 6–9 m high (20–30 ft). This district retains multistoried tower houses that are over 1,000 years old. Historic mosques, bath houses (*hammam*), and traditional marketplaces (*souks*) are also located in this sector. The city's most important mosque is the Great Mosque, or Al-Jami' al-Kabir.^{98, 99} As the nation's capital, the city is home to government offices and civil servants. Its airport is a major hub for travel in and out of the country.¹⁰⁰



*Photo of Aden
Raphaël Fauveau*

Aden

The former capital of South Yemen, Aden is a large port city on a small, volcanic peninsula on the southern coast.¹⁰¹ Its natural deep-water harbor has long made it an important shipping and trade center.¹⁰² According to legend, Noah's ark set sail from this area. The port had become a vital transit point between the Red Sea and the Indian Ocean by the 14th century. Its importance for Yemen grew in the 18th century after the decline of Al Mukha (Mocha), an ancient port located on the Tihamah.¹⁰³ The Suez Canal, which opened in 1869, increased Red Sea traffic and greatly enhanced the port's significance.^{104, 105} Today, Aden remains the commercial capital of Yemen and one

of its strategic centers.¹⁰⁶

The city comprises several districts: Al-Tawahi is a business district on the northwestern end of the peninsula, while to the east, Ma'alla adjoins the natural harbor. Crater, the old quarter, is on the eastern side of the peninsula just below Aden's inactive volcano, Jabal Shamsan. To the north, Khormaksar lies on the isthmus connecting the peninsula to the mainland and is the site of an international airport (a former Royal Air Force base).¹⁰⁷ Sheikh Othman, an industrial district, is located to the northwest and across the Bay of Aden from the harbor district.¹⁰⁸

Ta'izz

Ta'izz is located in the fertile and rain-fed southern highlands at an altitude of 1,400 m (4,500 ft). The city served as Yemen's administrative seat from 1948 until 1962, when Imam Ahmed bin Yahya Hamid, the second-to-last Zaydi *imam*, moved the imamate's capital south.¹⁰⁹ Benefiting from a temperate climate, Ta'izz lies within a productive



*Ta'izz, Yemen
eesti / flickr.com*

agricultural region where coffee and *qat* (a mild stimulant) are the main crops.^{110, 111} It also features light industry as well as a *madrassah*, or Muslim theological school. The city is a regional transportation hub. It is linked via highway to Aden (to the southeast) and the port of Al Hudaydah (to the northwest on the Tihamah). Another highway runs northward from Ta'izz through the highlands to Sanaa.¹¹²

In 2010–2011, the city was the site of violent anti-government demonstrations. Presidential forces killed and wounded hundreds of protesters, and even raided hospitals. One of the largest attacks took place at Freedom Square in the city on 29–30

May, when security forces fired indiscriminately into the populated areas of the city and shelled the largest medical center. Security forces subsequently occupied the medical center from June to December and blocked the citizenry from receiving medical care.¹¹³ In 2012, loyalist forces again attacked demonstrators in the city, killing at least two people.¹¹⁴

Al Hudaydah (Hodeida)

Al Hudaydah is a major port city on the central Tihamah coast and one of the nation's most beautiful cities.^{115, 116} It grew to prominence during the Ottoman Empire, when it was a point of entry for Ottoman troops. Over time it became known for its export of coffee and pearls.¹¹⁷ During World War I, the Germans established a wireless station there to transmit communications from Istanbul to the Germans during the Arab Revolt and to broadcast propaganda to the Sudan, Somaliland, and Abyssinia.¹¹⁸ In the 1960s, Al Hudaydah and the surrounding region underwent extensive reconstruction and development with the aid of the Soviet Union, which built a new deep-water port just north of the city. Around the same time, Chinese engineers built an all-weather road linking the city with Sanaa in the highlands. Today, the port remains vital for Yemeni trade and exports of coffee, cotton, and *qat*. Fishing is an important local industry; the city has a bustling fish market. Although much of the city was built over the last several decades, a small (Ottoman) Turkish quarter remains.¹¹⁹

Ibb

Founded around the 10th century C.E., Ibb is in the southern highlands, north of Ta'izz, in the Jabal Ba'adan Range at an elevation of 2,050 m (6,725 ft).^{120, 121, 122} The city and the surrounding territory benefit from abundant rainfall and rich volcanic soils, making the region green and agriculturally productive. Crops such as grains, coffee, *qat*, and various fruits and vegetables are grown in terraces on the hillsides. Animal husbandry is also



Ibb
Raphaël Fauveau

important to the local economy.¹²³ The region's rich agricultural produce and animal products are sold in the local *souk*, or marketplace. The old walled city is filled with tower houses and mosques, and much of it cannot be navigated by vehicles. Just outside the city is Husn al-Habb, one of the strongest fortresses in the nation.¹²⁴

Al Mukalla

Al Mukalla is located on the Gulf of Aden, on the southern coast of the Hadramawt region. Although it was made the capital of a sultanate (kingdom) in 1915, it did not become a regional center of commerce until the late 1950s, when

it grew in response to rumors of oil in the Hadramawt region. The modern city has expanded along the coast for 20 km (12 mi). A series of low hills surrounds and splits the city into three sections: an old city, and eastern and western suburbs.¹²⁵ Al Mukalla is known for its high quality stone and marble, which support a mining and quarrying industry. It is the primary port for southeastern Yemen and is a center for the country's fishing and fish processing industries. It is the region's administrative seat and largest city as well as its major commercial hub.^{126, 127}



Water fountain
Charles Roffey

Environmental Issues

Water Scarcity

Water scarcity is a pressing environmental concern in Yemen. The country lacks permanent rivers and lakes, so it depends completely on groundwater (aquifers) and rainfall for its water supply. Yet water consumption has rapidly outpaced the replenishment of Yemen's limited renewable aquifers. Each year, Yemen's water table falls by around 2 m (6.6 ft).¹²⁸ The country's water deficit—the difference between consumption and replenishment levels—was around 900 million cubic meters in 2000. It was estimated at 1.28 billion cubic meters in 2005 and is expected to

grow. This trend will be difficult to avert because of rapid population growth, which has already strained the country's limited resources. Estimates of Yemen's annual renewable water resources per capita are around 120 cubic m (4,238 cubic ft). This is much lower than the international definition of water scarcity, which stands at 1,700 cubic m (60,035

cubic ft).^{129, 130, 131}

Agriculture is the primary beneficiary of Yemen's water; it accounts for roughly 90% of the country's annual water withdrawal, leaving only 10% for domestic and industrial use. Notably, approximately 40% of annual water use goes to the cultivation of *qat*, which is widely consumed in Yemen.^{132, 133} Cultivation of this irrigation-dependent crop has been discouraged by the Yemeni government but remains widespread because of its high profit margin. The proliferation of illegally drilled wells to procure irrigation water for *qat* has contributed to the rapid decline of groundwater levels. Recent reports indicate that these levels are dropping by 6 to 20 m (20 to 65 ft) per year—an extraordinary rate. Erratic rainfall, drought, and higher temperatures have hindered the replenishment of aquifers.¹³⁴

As a result of water shortages, rationing is in place in urban areas. In some cities, such as Ta'izz, water may be provided as infrequently as once every 45 days.¹³⁵ At the

current rates of use and growth in population, Sanaa is expected to run out of water by 2025 or even earlier.^{136, 137} Half of Yemenis lack access to safe water, which forces them to buy water from private sellers or hike long distances to tap it.^{138, 139, 140} As the price of water has rapidly increased, more wells have been illegally drilled to meet demand.¹⁴¹ Water scarcity caused by population growth and unsustainable usage has increasingly resulted in social unrest and conflict.^{142, 143} Some estimates suggest that 70% to 80% of rural conflicts are water-related; these cause about 4,000 deaths annually.¹⁴⁴ The Yemeni government's authority is weak outside of Sanaa, and it lacks the financial resources to develop desalination plants—facilities that are used by its richer neighbors, such as Saudi Arabia.^{145, 146} Moreover, it is hard to make water a top priority in a country with so many problems.^{147, 148, 149}

Other Issues

Yemen also confronts the related environmental issues of overgrazing, deforestation, soil erosion, and desertification.¹⁵⁰ The unsustainable exploitation of woodlands and forests has contributed to deforestation in the highlands. It is difficult to curtail tree loss and to rejuvenate



*Women farming
Franco Pecchio*

forests because many rural Yemeni households still rely on firewood as cooking fuel.^{151, 152, 153} Soil erosion is also pronounced in the highlands because disused crop terraces have fallen into disrepair, creating high rates of erosion and water runoff.¹⁵⁴ In turn, erosion and water scarcity have contributed to desertification. Government officials stated in 2008 that 97% of the country's land suffered from varying degrees of desertification. Although the government has developed strategies to combat the problem, it has been unable to widely or effectively implement them.¹⁵⁵ Lack of funding has been identified as the major obstacle to implementation. The ongoing degradation of agricultural land is a serious threat to Yemeni farmers, who are more than half the country's population.¹⁵⁶ In addition, desert locust infestation has threatened crops.^{157, 158,}

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*Hot springs
Sogotra (Yemen) / flickr.com*

Natural Hazards

Yemen is susceptible to a variety of natural hazards. In recent years, drought has become common as rainfall has decreased and temperatures have risen. Droughts not only affect the livelihoods of farmers, but also contribute to a lack of food security for the greater population.^{160, 161} In 2008, drought was so severe in the northwestern highlands that thousands of residents abandoned their villages and migrated to urban areas.¹⁶² Floods periodically occur as a result of torrential downpours.¹⁶³ In 2008, more than 100 people were killed after heavy rains caused severe flooding.¹⁶⁴ Wadi Hadramawt was among the most affected regions, with thousands of residents displaced by the disaster.¹⁶⁵ Flooding in 2013 killed at least 40 and affected more than 50,000.^{166, 167}

Sandstorms and dust storms are occasionally produced by *shamal*, or northwesterly winds that sweep into the region in winter and early summer. These potentially dangerous storms can block out the sun, and cause property damage and the destruction of crops. They also contribute to erosion.¹⁶⁸ Sandstorms have caused havoc in the country. In 2012, a sandstorm swept across the terrain, forcing the closure of

schools and suspension of all flights from the capital.^{169, 170}

Yemen's location in a geologically active zone—the Great Rift Valley between the Arabian and African tectonic plates—makes it susceptible to earthquakes and volcanic activity. Yemen and its nearby waters have experienced several major earthquakes.¹⁷¹ One of the most well-known was a 6.0-magnitude earthquake that struck the Dhamar region of the southern highlands in 2008, causing landslides and extensive ground ruptures.^{172, 173} The quake killed approximately 3,000 people and devastated many villages.¹⁷⁴

Evidence of volcanic activity is widespread in Yemen, including active hot springs and volcanic vents.¹⁷⁵ In 2007, a volcano erupted on the Red Sea island of Jabal al-Tair, destroying a small Yemeni naval base and killing at least eight.¹⁷⁶ The eruption, which was sparked by several earthquakes, reportedly caused the western half of the island to collapse into the sea and the eastern half to be covered in lava.¹⁷⁷ In 2011, a volcanic eruption lasting nearly one month created a new volcanic island off Yemen's Red Sea coast.^{178, 179} In 2013, 352 tremors hit Yemen. The largest was a 5.7-magnitude quake in May in the Arabian Sea.^{180, 181}

Endnotes

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Chapter 1 Assessment

1. Yemen is slightly smaller than the state of Texas.

TRUE

With a total area of 527,968 sq km (203,850 sq mi), Yemen is slightly smaller than the state of Texas.

2. Yemen's topography is homogenous and consists largely of desert.

FALSE

Yemen's topography exhibits considerable variation. A rugged and fertile highland region occupies the west. The east is dominated by a high, arid plateau dissected by wadis. Desert covers areas of the north. Narrow coastal plains lie along the borders of the south and west.

3. Yemen's territory includes more than 100 islands.

TRUE

Yemen possesses more than 100 islands in the Red Sea, the Gulf of Aden, and the Arabian Sea. Although estimates have varied, recent figures place the number at 183.

4. There are no cities in Yemen with more than 1 million residents.

FALSE

Sanaa, the capital and largest city, has approximately 1.7 million residents. The next largest city, Aden, has about 589,000 inhabitants.

5. One of the largest problems facing the nation is a lack of water.

TRUE

Water scarcity is a pressing environmental concern in Yemen. At the current rate of use and growth in population, Sanaa is expected to run out of water by 2025 or even earlier.



Five poems (quintet)
William, Noel

Chapter 2: History

Introduction

Ancient Yemen was the site of several prosperous and well-developed cultures that benefited from the region's wealth of frankincense and myrrh.¹ The advent of Islam in the seventh century C.E. profoundly shaped social and political development in the region. In the late ninth century C.E., the Zaydi *imamate* was founded, and it ruled portions of the highlands for more than 1,000 years.² Although Yemeni tribes in the interior have long been relatively autonomous, Yemen was periodically occupied by foreign powers, notably the Ottoman Turks and the British.³ In the 20th century, two competing states within the region emerged. North Yemen was ruled under the Zaydi *imam* from 1918–1962, and governed as the Yemen Arab Republic from 1962–1990. South Yemen, a former British protectorate, was administered under the socialist government of the People's Democratic Republic of Yemen from 1970–1990. After intermittent conflict, the two states merged into the Republic of Yemen in 1990.^{4, 5}

Today, Yemen is the only republic on the Arabian Peninsula; otherwise, monarchies

dominate governments there.⁶ The nation was ruled by President Ali Abdallah Saleh (formerly the president of South Yemen) from 1990 until 2011, when he handed power to Abdrabbuh Mansour Hadi after months of violent protests that demanded reform. Mansour formed a unity government and became president in 2012 in uncontested elections.⁷ The central government's authority is actually limited because many parts of the country are under tribal rule.^{8, 9} The central government's limitations are reflected in increased al-Qaeda attacks, an insurgency in the north, and a resurgent secessionist movement in the south. These factors have led some experts to conclude that Yemen may be a state on the verge of collapse.^{10, 11, 12, 13}



Frankincense tree
Alexandre Baron

Ancient Kingdoms

The Sabaean

Ancient Yemen was home to several kingdoms and city-states, including those of the Sabaean (Saba), Qatabans, Hadramis (Hadramawt), Minaeans (Ma'in), and Himyarites (Himyar).^{14, 15} These cultures, which coexisted and often competed for power, depended on trade to generate wealth. Among the most important commodities were the aromatic resins of myrrh and frankincense, for which there was a nearly insatiable demand in the ancient world. The trees that produced these two resins grew almost exclusively in the highlands of southern Arabia. The resins were greatly prized for

their curative powers and widely used in religious and funerary rites, most notably as incense.¹⁶

The largest and most well-known of the early Yemeni kingdoms was that of the Sabaean. Archaeologists have approximated the emergence of Sabaean civilization to the 10th–12th centuries B.C.E.; its power peaked several centuries later. Their most famous ruler was Bilqis, the Queen of Sheba, who is mentioned in the Bible and in the Quran, the holy book of Islam. Sabaean culture was distinguished by its architectural achievements, including large temples and monuments.¹⁷ It is best known for the massive Marib Dam, which sources believe was constructed around 750 B.C.E. and expanded around 500 B.C.E.¹⁸ The dam was designed not only to store water but to divert it into a network of irrigation canals. According to some estimates, the impressively engineered dam helped to irrigate some 10,000 ha (25,000 acres) of cropland, enough to support tens of thousands of people.¹⁹

Although irrigated agriculture enabled the population to expand, trade was the primary source of Sabaean wealth. Marib, the Sabaean capital, lay on the trail that connected

ports on the Arabian Sea with the desert caravan routes that reached Mediterranean markets.²⁰ Chinese silk, African gold and ivory, Persian pearls, and Indian spices and fabrics were carried via these camel caravans. At the height of the Sabaeans' power near the end of the fifth century B.C.E., they ruled a federation of regional entities that constituted much of southern Arabia.²¹



Zabid Mosque
kurvenalbn / flickr.com

The Himyarites

The Himyarites, a tribe within the Sabaean kingdom, gradually overtook the Sabaeans and became independent about 115 B.C.E. and consolidated control over much of southern Arabia in the third century C.E.²² They perpetuated Sabaean culture, and improved and maintained the Marib Dam. The Himyarites originated from the coast and were sea traders; their rise reflected the declining importance of overland trade. Sometime around the late fourth or early fifth century C.E., the Himyarites converted to Judaism. The Jewish kings continued to rule until the sixth century.^{23, 24, 25}

In the first century C.E., the Romans, who had conquered Egypt, disrupted the south Arabian economy by encroaching on Red Sea trade routes. By using maritime routes, they effectively undercut Yemen's role as a transit point between Asia and the Mediterranean. The Romans called south Arabia "*Arabia Felix*," or "happy" or "fortunate" Arabia, because of its prosperity and fertile terrain in the highlands.²⁶ The prosperity of the south Arabian kingdoms was further threatened after the Roman Emperor Constantine made Christianity the new state religion in 323 C.E. The limited use of frankincense in Christian churches and a corresponding ban on traditional funerary rights throughout the empire dealt a major blow to the region's economy. Meanwhile, maritime commerce on the Red Sea sailed past Yemen. Economic insecurity contributed to the decline of the south Arabian kingdoms, which were then vulnerable to foreign invasion and occupation. The Christian Aksum kingdom (Ethiopia) invaded in the fourth and early sixth centuries C.E. The latter invasion (around 525 C.E.) was prompted by the massacre of local Christians by the last Jewish king of the Himyarite dynasty.²⁷ The Sassanids of Persia took control of the region in the late sixth century after the declining Himyarite kingdom requested their assistance to expel the Aksumites.²⁸

The Advent of Islam (7th to 15th Centuries)

The Islamic era began in the seventh century. The spread of the Muslim faith from

Mecca and Medina in neighboring Al Hijaz (the Hejaz), now part of Saudi Arabia, resulted in a rapid assimilation of Yemenis.^{29, 30} As Yemen was absorbed into the Islamic world, it fell under the control of various Muslim caliphs in the Arabian Peninsula. The Damascus-based Umayyad dynasty, which ruled from the latter part of the seventh century, was followed by the Baghdad-based Abbasid caliphs in the early eighth century. Indigenous dynasties then emerged. In the late ninth century, the Zaydi *imamate* was established in the far north of Yemen and became deeply rooted in towns and villages in the northern highlands. The *imamate* was a theocracy that followed a branch of Shi'a Islam.^{31, 32}

A Sunni Muslim dynasty founded by the Rasulids repeatedly skirmished with the Zaydis in order to counter their spreading influence. The Rasulids are thought by some to have been professional soldiers who broke from the Egyptian Ayyubid dynasty in 1229 to establish their own sultanate.³³ They took control of the coastal regions and the southern uplands, where they reinforced the influence of the Shafi'i school of Islam. Initially based in Aden, the Rasulids controlled international trade through the Red Sea. This gave them prestige in the Muslim world and in all states that traded in the region.^{34, 35}

Because of the mix of dynasties, three legal traditions coexisted in Yemen, and each developed an administrative bureaucracy. The northern Shari'a courts dispensed justice based on Zaydi jurisprudence while, in the south, a class of Sunni *sayyids* (descendants of the Prophet Muhammad) adhered to the Shafi'i school of Shari'a law. In the hinterland, customary law (*urf*) provided the framework that tribal *sheikhs* governed by.³⁶ As a result, there was no agreement on a uniform code of justice or use of force.



*Painting of Mocha in 1692
Courtesy of Wikipedia*

The Ottomans and the British (16th to 19th Centuries)

By the 15th century, the Rasulid dynasty was in decline. In the early 16th century, Portuguese naval ships attempted to blockade the Red Sea trade routes but failed to take the city of Aden. The Ottomans, who controlled Egypt at the northern end of the Red Sea, found it necessary to defend Yemen at the southern end against the Portuguese. The Ottomans established their Yemeni base in the coastal town of Mocha (Al Mukha),

where coffee trading thrived. Mocha replaced Aden as the area's chief port. Ottoman authority was limited to cities, so the Zaydi *imamate's* authority over tribal areas was undisturbed.^{37, 38}

The British wrested control of Aden from a local sultan in 1842.^{39, 40} In the mid-19th century, the Ottomans regained control of parts of northern Yemen. The Ottomans had relied primarily on land to accumulate wealth, whereas British imperial wealth depended on the control of shipping lanes.⁴¹ To this end, the British rebuilt the entire seafront around Aden. They successfully warded off the Ottomans. Beginning in 1886, Treaties of Protection were negotiated, including an agreement that placed nine tribes under British protection in return for a local leader's pledge not to transfer any territory to a rival foreign power without the British Crown's permission. The two imperial powers subsequently agreed to recognize each other's territorial claims.^{42, 43}



Imam al-Badr outside his cave on Jabal Sheda
Courtesy of Wikipedia

Competing States

North Yemen

After the Ottoman Empire fell in 1918, Imam Yahya took power in the north and established a Zaydi government. The prominent northern tribal confederations—the Hashid and the Bakil—supported the new government.^{44, 45} But the imams were unable to break the power of the tribal sheikhs, and resorted to playing the tribes against each other to maintain their power. Opposition to the *imamate* was centered in the Shafi'i community, where merchants chafed against the tax burden imposed upon them and collected by Zaydi soldiers.⁴⁶

By the mid 1940s, opposition to Yahya's rule had widened to other major elements of the population. Among them were Zaydis who objected to the remote nature of the imperial government. In 1948, Yahya was assassinated in a palace coup, and opposition



*PDRY Independence Day
Joseph Morris*

South Yemen

Aden was governed as part of British India until 1937, when it became a Crown colony; the surrounding territory was designated a protectorate. By 1965, Aden and most of the tribal states within the protectorate had merged to form the British-sponsored Federation of South Arabia. Anti-colonial resistance, which had been active since the 1940s, resulted in several failed coups.⁵⁷ Each failure further radicalized those opposed to colonial rule. After the establishment of the federation, two rival communist groups—the Marxist National Liberation Front (NLF) and the Front for the Liberation of Occupied South Yemen (FLOSY)—fought for power.⁵⁸ By August 1967, the NLF

forces immediately seized power. His son, Ahmad, eventually succeeded him and remained in power until he died in 1962. Imam Ahmad's reign was marked by growing repression and renewed friction with the British. During this time, the imamate also faced increasing pressure to support the Arab nationalist objectives of Egyptian President Gamal Abdul Nasser.^{47, 48, 49}

From 1958 to 1961, North Yemen joined with Egypt and Syria to form the United Arab States.⁵⁰ Imam Ahmad's son, Badr, assumed power. After one week he was removed by a military coup and he fled to Saudi Arabia.⁵¹ Colonel Abdullah al-Sallal was selected to lead the newly named Yemen Arab Republic (YAR); he became both the president and prime minister.^{52, 53}

Civil war ensued between remnant supporters of the *imamate*, who received material support from Saudi Arabia and Jordan, and republicans, who were bolstered by as many as 85,000 Egyptian troops.⁵⁴ Neither side exercised effective control over the country. Both attempted to court the support of tribes by providing guns and money. Egyptian troops withdrew in 1967 and, by 1968, after a siege of Sanaa by *imamate* supporters, Sallal was deposed and most of the opposing forces had been reconciled.⁵⁵ A negotiated settlement followed in 1970. The prolonged war left the tribal sheikhs firmly in control of their domains and it enhanced their role in national politics.⁵⁶

controlled most areas; the federation had formally collapsed by summer's end. The last British troops were withdrawn on 29 November.⁵⁹ The next day, 30 November 1967, the People's Republic of Yemen was established, comprising Aden and South Arabia.⁶⁰ In June 1969, a radical wing of the NLF gained power. The Yemeni Socialist Party (YSP) became the only legal party, and the country's name changed to the People's Democratic Republic of Yemen (PDRY) on 1 December 1970.^{61, 62}

Road to Reconciliation

By 1972, the governments of North and South Yemen were in open conflict, and each side had outside backers. The YAR received aid from Saudi Arabia, while the PDRY, which was the lone Marxist state in the region, received arms from the Soviet Union. The Arab League brokered a cease-fire and both sides agreed to forge a united Yemen within 18 months, yet the union did not materialize. In both countries, large contingents of the national armies occasionally dissolved when soldiers went on leave with their weapons.^{63, 64}



*Healthcare clinic
IRIN photos*

In both countries, tribal loyalties to the leadership often proved fleeting, and the ensuing years were plagued by continued unrest and conflict, which culminated in the assassination of the YAR president in June 1978.⁶⁵ One month later, Lieutenant Colonel Ali Abdallah Saleh, head of the General People's Congress (GPC), was elected by the Constituent People's Assembly.⁶⁶ Fighting renewed in early 1979, but in March the two heads of state signed an agreement in Kuwait reiterating their commitment to unification. In May 1988, the governments of the YAR and PDRY agreed to withdraw troops from their mutual border and establish a demilitarized zone to ease border

crossings.⁶⁷ In May 1990, they settled on a draft unity constitution, which was approved by referendum the next year.⁶⁸

Unified Yemen

The Republic of Yemen (RY) was officially established on 22 May 1990.⁶⁹ From late 1991 through early 1992, the newly unified country experienced unrest because of deteriorating economic conditions. The situation was exacerbated by the return of hundreds of thousands of Yemenis who had been working in Saudi Arabia and the Gulf States but were deported after the new Yemeni government supported Saddam Hussein's invasion of Kuwait.⁷⁰ Nevertheless, the planned legislative elections were held

in early 1993. In August, Vice President al Baydh embarked on a self-imposed exile to Aden, alleging that the south had been marginalized by the elections.⁷¹ Southerners were unable to secure their share of government jobs because of the relocation of government departments to the north. Power-sharing broke down and, by May 1994, the country had fallen into civil war.^{72, 73}

On 21 May 1994, al Baydh and other leaders of the former South Yemen seceded and established the new Democratic Republic of Yemen, with its capital at Aden. But the new republic was not recognized internationally. The ensuing combat took place mostly in the south, despite air and missile attacks against northern targets.⁷⁴ The civil war ended on 7 July 1994, when President Saleh's troops captured Aden.⁷⁵ Saleh was reelected to another presidential term in October.^{76, 77}

After the war, the government turned to urgent economic reforms that had been postponed since unification. A large debt that the south owed to the former Soviet Union, along with high deficits, required the government to cut spending. The price of fuel doubled and the government withdrew food subsidies. Access to water and electricity diminished. This prompted public demonstrations that the government failed to address with a coordinated response.⁷⁸ Saleh was reelected to another 5-year term by an overwhelming margin.⁷⁹

In 2004, the Houthis, a Zaydi-led rebel group in the Sa'ada governorate of northwest Yemen, launched an insurgency against the Yemeni National Army. The sustained conflict has involved several periods of fighting and occasional cease-fires.^{80, 81} Some tribal leaders who are disinterested parties to the conflict have thrown their support behind the Houthis, as a means of reducing central government influence in their areas.^{82, 83}

Recent Developments

On the Brink of Civil War

Saleh was reelected in September 2006, in an election considered fair by outside observers.⁸⁴ Saleh filled important positions with family members.⁸⁵ He positioned his son Ahmed to succeed him as president.⁸⁶ His style of governance relied on a system of informal bargaining to balance competing interests. In essence, the provision of services and patronage jobs was used to exact compliance and loyalty from local actors.⁸⁷

By April 2009, there were signs that the system was breaking. Parliamentary elections scheduled for April 2009 were postponed after the Joint Meeting Party (JMP), an alliance of opposition parties and the only competitor to the GPC, threatened to boycott them—casting doubt on their legitimacy.⁸⁸ The JMP perceived the rollback of elections until 2011 as a victory that provided time to implement electoral reforms for leveling the playing field.⁸⁹ Discontent escalated, and in the former South Yemen, a secessionist

group known as the “southern mobility movement” (*al-harakat al-janubiyya*) that had formed in 2007 supported the complaints of southern military officers about discriminatory pension differentials.⁹⁰

By 2011, the Middle East movement known as the Arab Spring began to affect the political situation in Yemen. Although President Saleh made several major concessions in order to squelch protests, they proved unsuccessful. Several senior members of his administration defected.⁹¹ In March 2011, Saleh tried to form a unity government but the opposition groups opposed the move. The opposition made increasingly strong calls for Saleh to step down but he remained firm in his declaration that he would remain in power until 2013. Protests within the country mounted while other regional governments fell.⁹²

In April, the violence continued and dozens died in confrontations between Yemeni government forces and tribal fighters in Sanaa. In June, a rocket attack injured the president, who was forced to flee to Saudi Arabia. The situation had deteriorated to the point that French and British forces prepared to evacuate foreign nationals from the region as the country threatened to fall into civil war.⁹³



*Soldiers in Yemen
DoD image*

Saleh Steps Down

In September, President Saleh returned to Yemen and, in October, he agreed to a transition plan sponsored by the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) and backed by the United States. But he did not remain in the country long. In January 2012, after being granted full immunity, Saleh again left the country.⁹⁴ In February 2012, elections were held with a single presidential candidate—former Vice President Abdrabbuh Mansour al Hadi. Predictably, Hadi won the elections and assumed the office of president on 25 February.^{95, 96}

Saleh’s departure averted civil war. Hadi’s peaceful transition to power sparked optimism and prompted more than USD 4 billion in aid to improve national infrastructure and security. In June, Yemeni security forces recaptured three al-Qaeda strongholds in the south but tensions remained. In September, the defense minister survived a car bombing in Sanaa and, in November, a Saudi diplomat was shot and killed in the capital.⁹⁷

Current Events

In 2013, former president Saleh’s son, Ahmed, was relieved of his position as head of the Republican Guard.^{98, 99} By July, the United States had intensified its drone attacks against

al-Qaeda in Yemen.^{100, 101} Threats of reprisals caused several embassies to close. Mass protests erupted in Hadramawt province in December when a tribal leader was shot and killed at a military checkpoint.^{102, 103}

Progress had been made on the creation of a new draft constitution and, in January 2014, the National Dialogue Conference announced it had reached agreement on a document that the new constitution would be based on.¹⁰⁴ Although Yemen's political transition is firmly underway, national security is still threatened by internal power struggles and al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP). Fighting continued in May in the south, where al-Qaeda maintains a strong presence. Forty-three militants were killed in the U.S.-backed campaign.^{105, 106, 107} Severe economic problems and water insecurity continue to roil the nation.¹⁰⁸

Signs of discontent with the transition government became clear in April when union members marched on Parliament and called for an end to the government. Demonstrators allege that the government is incapable of handling their demands and is rife with corruption.¹⁰⁹ Southern Yemenis continue to demonstrate in favor of secession.^{110, 111} Tensions between the Shiites and the Sunni are escalating.^{112, 113} If the violence between the Salafist Sunnis and the Shiite Houthi is not resolved, it threatens to destroy the national peace and could plunge the nation into civil war.^{114, 115, 116} In the wake of increased anti-government violence, including attacks against Yemeni leaders, Hadi's term was extended for one year.¹¹⁷ It remains to be seen whether the Hadi government can maintain control and whether Yemen can fulfill its peaceful transition.

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Chapter 2 Assessment

1. Yemen's ancient kingdoms depended on trade, especially in frankincense and myrrh, to make their fortunes.

TRUE

Ancient Yemen was the site of several prosperous and well-developed cultures that benefited from the region's wealth of frankincense and myrrh.

2. The Persians were never able to gain control of Yemen.

FALSE

The Sassanids of Persia took control of the region in the late sixth century after the declining Himyarite kingdom requested their assistance to expel the Aksumites.

3. The Zaydi imamate controlled the area of North Yemen after the fall of the Ottomans.

TRUE

After the Ottoman Empire fell in 1918, Imam Yahya took power in the north and established a Zaydi government. The prominent northern tribal confederations—the Hashid and the Bakil—supported the new government.

4. Marxists seized control of North Yemen in 1970.

FALSE

In June 1969, a radical wing of the NLF gained power in South Yemen. The Yemeni Socialist Party (YSP) became the only legal party and the country's name changed to the People's Democratic Republic of Yemen (PDRY) on 1 December 1970.

5. The Peoples' Democratic Republic of Yemen and the Yemen Arab Republic merged to form the Republic of Yemen in 1990.

TRUE

The Republic of Yemen (RY) was officially established on 22 May 1990.



*Homeless man
Osama, Al-Eryani*

Chapter 3: Economy

Introduction

Yemen is the poorest nation in the Arab world, with unemployment estimated at 40%.^{1,2} Approximately 54% of the population lives below the poverty line.³ At 2.7%, the country's population growth rate is one of the highest in the world.^{4,5} Job creation is an urgent priority because the population of 26.1 million is expected to double by 2050.⁶ Yemen was historically a source of labor for surrounding countries, as well as for Eastern Europe before the Soviet Union was disbanded. The fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989 eliminated the need for migrant laborers in Eastern Europe (where socialism had created an artificial labor shortage).⁷ South Yemeni nationals were forced to return

to a country that had become dependent on their remitted wages. In the south, this contributed to economic insecurity, which played a role in the reunification of North and South Yemen in 1990. Soon, the newly unified government backed Iraq's invasion of Kuwait; this move was unpopular with Saudi Arabia and the Gulf States, which retaliated by expelling Yemeni workers.⁸ It is estimated that within a few months some 880,000 people were repatriated to Yemen.⁹ In most cases they had no land to return to or much chance of replicating the standard of living that they had achieved abroad. Official channels have never been re-opened that would allow Yemenis to again seek work in those neighboring countries.¹⁰ Nor is there any prospect for Yemenis to work legally in Europe.

Yemen is the first country on the Arabian Peninsula with a democratically elected government and the first to give women the right to vote.^{11, 12} The long-standing Yemeni social contract, in which citizens legitimize the government in exchange for a modest social safety net, has eroded under the weight of population growth and a decline in oil revenues.¹³ Oil revenues account for as much as 90% of the nation's exports and 60% of revenue, but the sector is in trouble.^{14, 15} Although the oil industry is capital-intensive, it has not created jobs to match the growth of per capita Gross Domestic Product (GDP).¹⁶ Oil production brings wealth to the country, but the revenues are not equitably distributed as either government services or income from industry-related jobs. Moreover, Yemen's oil is predicted to run out by 2017, and the government has few

sustainable post-oil options to create growth.^{17, 18} ¹⁹ Having operated as a rentier state, in which the revenues that fill state coffers overwhelmingly originate abroad, the government is now hard-pressed to create a domestic economy that will generate tax revenues.^{20, 21}

Agriculture

Crop Production

Yemen was historically self-sufficient in food production. Terrace cultivation has been employed for 3,000 years, enabling farmers to catch rainwater on slopes and to control soil fertility.^{22, 23, 24} During the 1960s, cheap grain began

to flood the country, making food crop cultivation unprofitable while jobs in oil-rich neighboring countries attracted labor migrants.²⁵ Many terraced slopes fell into disrepair and suffered soil erosion. Still, today over half the population engages in agriculture and animal husbandry.²⁶ The low profits and wages generated through farming, coupled with population growth, contribute to underemployment and poverty. Much of the country's



Qat eesti / flickr.com

limited fertile land has been planted with cash crops that are more lucrative than subsistence food crops.^{27, 28}

Agriculture accounts for approximately 8% of GDP and employs 25% to 33% of the population.^{29, 30, 31} The major food crops include sorghum, maize, millet, and pulses. Although the nation once raised enough cereal crops to meet its domestic requirement, Yemen now imports more than 75% of its food needs.³² Coffee has been replaced by *qat* as the top cash crop. It requires much less labor than coffee but it is water-intensive and thus relies heavily on irrigation.^{33, 34, 35} *Qat* accounts for approximately 40% of the country's annual water use while water supplies are rapidly diminishing.^{36, 37} Cultivation and distribution of *qat* employ approximately 14% of the population.^{38, 39} Banning the use of *qat* would have serious economic implications in a country where jobs are already scarce.⁴⁰

Fishing

Fishing is a growing sector and fishing revenues were the third-highest earning sector in Yemen in 2012. Export revenues are second only to oil and account for about 2% of GDP.^{41, 42, 43} In many poor coastal communities, the fishing sector is an important job source.^{44, 45} The most popular species of fish include tuna, sardines, mackerel, and snapper. Shrimp, lobster, and cuttlefish are also significant.⁴⁶ Fishing activities between

June and September are greatest off the Red Sea coast; then the focus shifts to the Gulf of Aden during October through May.⁴⁷ Fishing revenues have dropped in recent years because of piracy and the seizure of fishermen and their crafts off the Yemeni coast.^{48, 49}

Livestock

Livestock is a significant portion of the agricultural sector and contributes about 20% to agricultural GDP.⁵⁰ Livestock mostly comprise cattle, sheep, goats, and camels. Most of the cattle, sheep, and goats are raised in the highlands and mountainous areas. Camels are raised primarily in the coastal and eastern desert regions. Traditional grazing lands are insufficient to meet the cattle's

nutritional demands, which must be supplemented by grazing in the croplands after harvest. Most livestock owners engage in local pastoral practices, although some desert nomads herd their cattle through the deserts in search of forage. Most of the meat produced is consumed domestically as are the dairy products.⁵¹



Livestock marketplace
Charles Roffey

Manufacturing

The industrial sector in Yemen accounts for approximately 31% of GDP and employs a small fraction of the labor force.⁵² Except for oil refining, almost all manufacturing businesses in Yemen are small-scale operations with one to four employees.⁵³ They mostly produce goods for the domestic market.^{54, 55} Construction materials, daily use consumer goods, and processed food and beverages are among their primary products.⁵⁶ Though Yemen has a tradition of entrepreneurship dating back millennia, there are currently significant obstacles to expanding private business. Transportation infrastructure is poor and many economic inputs are under monopoly control by politically connected groups. These conditions make it difficult to turn a profit. Moreover, banks typically do not extend loans to the politically unconnected.⁵⁷ Yemen lacks an informal money lending market, such as those in other Muslim countries (despite the Islamic prohibition on charging interest). In an effort to promote manufacturing, in 2004 the government announced the establishment of three industrial zones in Aden, Al Hudaydah (Hodeida), and Al Mukalla. Since that time, little development has transpired and many Yemeni businessmen remain wary of the perceived heavy hand of the government. The zones still lack significant investment in the basic services required, including power, to become functional sites for business.⁵⁸

Nevertheless, the picture is not all bad. In 2012, the manufacturing sector rebounded slightly with growth of approximately 7%. The particularly hard-hit construction sub-sector also rebounded by a modest 3% after a 25% contraction the previous year.^{59, 60}



*DNO drilling for oil in Yemen using a land rig
Heidu / wikimedia.com*

Energy

Oil

Oil was discovered in commercial quantities in Yemen in 1984.⁶¹ The oil is situated in what was formerly South Yemen, while the government that collects the revenues has its capital in Sanaa, in what was North Yemen.⁶² Unlike much of the oil-producing Middle East, Yemen's petroleum extraction relies largely on foreign firms.⁶³ Oil reserves have been divided into 97 onshore and offshore exploration and production blocks, but only 12 actually produce oil.⁶⁴ After security issues compelled several major international oil companies to withdraw in the mid- to late 1990s, the government identified smaller, independent oil companies as potential partners for Production Sharing Agreements (PSA). A number of state-owned companies are also involved, but all companies report to

the Ministry of Oil and Mineral Resources (MOMR). It is responsible for initiating contracts with foreign oil companies, although parliamentary approval is still required.⁶⁵ Oil production in Yemen dropped significantly after reaching its peak output in 2001.⁶⁶ Analysts predict that the nation's oil supplies could dry up by 2017, leaving the country in serious financial trouble.^{67, 68}



*Gas station
eesti / flickr.com*

Natural Gas

Yemen has approximately 479 billion cubic m (16.9 trillion cubic ft) of proven natural gas reserves.⁶⁹ In 2009, the nation shifted from using most of its liquefied natural gas (LNG) in its oil industry to becoming an exporter of LNG. For the first time in its history, Yemen began to consume LNG. The domestic market remains small but is expected to grow, especially because the government plans to use the gas in place of oil to generate power. The gas pipelines are vulnerable to attack, and in recent years several shipments have been lost. In 2013, there were several attacks on the pipelines, but none resulted in diminished production or exports.⁷⁰

Natural Resources

Beyond its oil and gas reserves, Yemen has other natural resources. Recent explorations have found deposits of several minerals including gypsum, dolomite, feldspar, and marble, along with rock salt. Current projects to exploit the nation's sandstone and limestone are underway.⁷¹ It also has significant reserves of copper, nickel, lead, gold, zinc, and coal.⁷² Several international companies are already operating gold mines in the nation but investor interest was further sparked when 30 additional sites with large quantities of gold were found in 2013.⁷³ Yemen plans to expand its mineral and mining sector to help make up the shortfall from declining oil revenues and diminishing reserves.⁷⁴

Trade

In 2013, Yemen carried a negative trade balance.⁷⁵ Part of the drop in trade exports resulted from a decline in oil and gas revenues.⁷⁶ Three-quarters of Yemen's exports are bound for only four countries: China (41%), Thailand (19%), India (11%), and South Korea (4%). In addition to oil, the main exports include coffee, dried and salted fish, and liquefied natural gas. Approximately 80% of the imported goods come from five sources: the EU (49%), UAE (10%); Switzerland (9%), China (7%), and India (6%). The main

imports are food, live animals, machinery and equipment, and chemicals.⁷⁷

In December 2013, Yemen joined the World Trade Organization (WTO). Membership is expected to help the nation develop its trade ties and expand its international trade, grant it access to reduced tariffs in some countries, and create broader opportunities for expanded trade.⁷⁸



*Hotel
Raphaël Fauveau*

Tourism

The Yemeni government has promoted tourism as an industry that could reduce its reliance on oil revenues. Yemen possesses numerous sites of historic, religious, and cultural interest. Aden, a centuries-old port city, could attract visitors.⁷⁹ The country also has four UNESCO world heritage sites, including the old city in Sanaa.⁸⁰ Yet the development of a thriving tourism industry is unlikely in light of security issues, including recent, high-profile kidnappings and murders of foreign nationals, especially in the capital.^{81, 82, 83, 84} The victims have typically been released unharmed after the government has addressed the tribe's concerns, but this is not

always the case. Safety concerns stemming from the separatist activity in the south deter the use of the scenic Sanaa-Aden road via the mountainous city of Ta'izz. The northern city of Sa'ada, also famous for its old city, has been affected by sustained conflict between government forces and Houthi rebels over the last several years.⁸⁵ Hadramawt, in the southeast, is home to the 16th-century towers of Shibam, the oldest high-rise structures in the world. (The town is sometimes referred to as the "Manhattan of the desert.") Yet Hadramawt is also plagued by security issues.⁸⁶ Overall, the lack of security has hurt private businesses looking to provide goods and services to foreign visitors.⁸⁷

Banking

With the unification of the two Yemens in 1990, the new country also had to reconcile two different economic systems—the capitalist system of the north and the socialist system of the south. This integration created a number of major challenges and reforms for the banking sector. Between 1990 and 1994, the banking system comprised the Central Bank of Yemen, three private domestic banks, four private foreign banks, three state-owned banks, and two specialized state-owned development banks.⁸⁸ In 2012, there were 19 banks and 358 branches.⁸⁹ The government's control had been reduced from 48% to 23% while the private sector control rose to 44%. In addition to an increase

in the number of banks, the types of banks have increased to include Islamic banks and microfinance institutions.^{90, 91}

The deposits held within the banking system are relatively small and form only 24% of GDP. Credit loaned to the private sector is an even smaller 16% of GDP. Most loans are short-term or related to trade rather than to investment.⁹² Privately owned banks overwhelmingly make loans on the basis credit.⁹³ In addition to banks, licensed exchange houses handle remittances from abroad as well as domestic money transfers. Their services, which are well established throughout the Muslim world, are cheaper and preferred by Yemenis needing to transfer money.⁹⁴



*100 Yemen rial
Courtesy of www.banknotes.it*

Foreign Investment

Until 1995, foreign investment in Yemen was minimal. It was even negative in some years when more funds left the country than entered it. The hydrocarbon sector accounts for the majority of foreign investment, in the form of PSA. Efforts have been made to expand investment into other sectors (such as tourism), which have elicited interest mainly from Gulf State investors. In 2002, Yemen's investment law was revised to accord equal treatment to foreign and Yemeni firms.

But the revision means less in practice because connections are more important than legal rights for those seeking to do business. Corruption has been identified as a major impediment to profitability.^{95, 96}

The main investors in Yemen in 2014 were the United States and France.⁹⁷ Many prospective investors remain cautious about doing business in the country. Yemen continues to rank low on economic freedom, placing 12th out of 15 countries in the Middle East/North Africa region and 123rd in the world.⁹⁸ Pressing issues include poor security, erratic energy supplies, tolerated non-compliance of law enforcement, and an impoverished, low-skilled citizenry whose literacy rates remain low (65%). The problem is particularly acute among females who have only a 49% literacy rate.^{99, 100} Because of the population's lack of skills, foreign investors are not likely to view Yemen as an attractive place to assemble goods bound for markets in North America and Western Europe.¹⁰¹

Standard of Living

The standard of living in Yemen is dire. Yemen is one of the poorest nations in the world and ranks in the low human development category.^{102, 103, 104} Unemployment stands at around 40% for the general population but soars to 60% among the youth. Residents

often confront chronic food shortages, lack of water, and insecurity from social conflict that continues to displace hundreds of thousands. It is estimated that more than half Yemen's people live below the poverty line.¹⁰⁵ By recent estimates, 58% of Yemenis were affected by some sort of humanitarian crisis in the first four months of 2014, up from the previous year.^{106, 107}

Yemen is the world's seventh-most food insecure country with approximately 58% of the population unable to meet their nutritional needs. Although food is available in local markets, many Yemenis are too poor to buy it.¹⁰⁸ Half of Yemenis lack access

to improved water and 46% have no access to improved sanitation. This increases the risk of waterborne diseases and diarrhea.¹⁰⁹

Security remains a critical concern for people while fighting continues throughout the nation. More than 350,000 people have been displaced because of the violence.¹¹⁰ Civilians remain vulnerable to conflict between government forces and terrorist groups.^{111, 112, 113}

Outlook

Yemen is working on economic diversification as it transitions from its dependence on oil. The country has seen some progress at the macroeconomic level but has been less successful at creating jobs and reducing the high rates of poverty. Political instability and an unfavorable business climate continue to limit foreign investor involvement, and Yemen has only limited domestic investment capital.¹¹⁴ The forecast for GDP growth is gloomy and expected to stay under 2% for 2015.¹¹⁵ According to the World Bank, Yemen will require an infusion of more than USD 50 billion in external funding in 2015 to avoid a complete economic collapse. The study also found that stronger financial institutions are required if the nation is to reduce poverty levels and diminish popular support for rebel forces.¹¹⁶



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Richard Messenger*

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Chapter 3 Assessment

1. Yemen is the poorest country in the Arab world.

TRUE

Yemen is the poorest nation in the Arab world, with unemployment estimated at 40%.

2. Approximately half the Yemeni work force is employed in agriculture.

FALSE

Agriculture remains an important part of the Yemeni economy, accounting for approximately 8% of GDP and employing 25% to 33% of the population.

3. Most manufacturing operations in Yemen employ fewer than 10 people.

TRUE

Almost all manufacturing businesses in Yemen are small-scale operations with one to four employees. They mostly produce goods for the domestic market.

4. Beyond its natural gas and oil reserves, Yemen has no other natural resources.

FALSE

The nation has significant reserves of copper, nickel, lead, gold, zinc, and coal. It also has deposits of several minerals including gypsum, dolomite, feldspar, and marble, along with rock salt.

5. The Soviet Union is Yemen's largest export partner.

FALSE

Three-quarters of Yemen's exports are bound for four countries: China (41%), Thailand (19%), India (11%), and South Korea (4%).



*Sana'a man
Raphaël Fauveau*

Chapter 4: Society

Introduction

Yemeni tribes have long regarded territory and lineage as distinct markers of identity and solidarity. Today, tribal affiliation continues to be strong in the northern highlands and adjacent eastern mountain slopes. Tribal identity is weaker in the south, where the British—and later, the socialist government of the People's Democratic Republic of Yemen—undermined tribal structures.^{1,2} Since unification in 1990, the administrative apparatus of the central Yemeni government has remained limited in coverage and capacity. In many areas of Yemen, tribes operate independently of the central government, whose effectiveness is mostly confined to the Sanaa region.^{3,4}

But tribal areas of Yemen are not ungoverned or lawless places, because tribal governance and customary law (*urf*) organize the society—often rigidly.^{5,6} For example, tribes have traditional approaches to managing resources, and to preventing, mediating, and resolving conflict.^{7,8} Some tribes acknowledge the central government, while others oppose its authority. Many tribal leaders are recognized and supported by the government through formal and informal channels. Their cooperation with the government was secured through a patronage network, in which the government distributed resources (e.g., oil revenues, jobs, political appointments).^{9,10} Tribal sheikhs continue to play a major role in Yemeni politics and to be courted by the current president. Some sheikhs have joined influential political parties but they often operated outside of those parties. Tribal control over many of the state institutions remains firm including control over the legislature.¹¹

Ethnic Groups and Languages

The Yemeni population is predominantly Arab.¹² Many residents of coastal communities, especially along the Tihamah (Red Sea coast), are Afro-Arab, a heritage that reflects the region's proximity to Africa. Yemen's legacy of foreign trade and foreign occupation is evident in the presence of small communities of Europeans and Indians.¹³ They are concentrated in urban areas, especially Aden, where the British colonial presence was strong. Yemen is also home to a large population of Somali refugees, who commonly undertake the dangerous journey across the Gulf of Aden to escape the conflict in their country.¹⁴ Yemen's residents of African ancestry, called Akhdam (poor, low-class "servants" and sanitary workers) or *abid* (the descendants of slaves), face discrimination and persecution.^{15, 16, 17}

Arabic is the official language of Yemen and the first language of most Yemeni citizens.¹⁸ There are several regional dialects, including Sanaani (northern and central highlands), Hadrami (Hadramawt), and Ta'izzi-Adeni (southern highlands and southeastern coast).¹⁹ Two small ethnic groups speak other languages. The Mahrah live in the eastern governorate of Al Mahrah,



*Yemeni girl
Richard Messenger*

which borders Oman. They speak Mahri (Mehri), an ancient South Arabian language.²⁰ Socotrans, the residents of the island of Socotra, speak Socotri (Soqotri), another South Arabian tongue. Members of both these ethnic groups are said to also speak

Arabic, although some reports indicate that many Socotrans speak only Socotri.²¹

Religion

Virtually all Yemenis are Muslims (99%) belonging to either the Zaydi order of Shi'a Islam or the Shafi'i school of Sunni Islam.^{22, 23} Approximately 65% of Yemenis are Sunnis while 35% are Shi'a. There are several thousand other Muslims centered mostly in the Haraz district near the capital of Sanaa, or in the north.²⁴ There is a Sufi population but their numbers have not been accurately determined.²⁵ The Zaydis are concentrated in the northern and central highlands.^{26, 27} The Zaydi *imamate*, or theocratic state led by an *imam*, ruled portions of the highlands from the late ninth century until 1962. Because of its rationalist and orthodox nature (compared to other Shi'a sects), the Zaydi order has been called the "fifth school" of Sunni Islam.^{28, 29, 30} The Sunni population predominate in the Tihamah, the southern highlands (from Ta'izz to the southern coast), and central and eastern Yemen.³¹ Unlike the Zaydis, who reject any mystical or folk interpretation of Islam, Shafi'is tolerate Sufism, a mystical practice of Islam. The differences between Zaydi and Shafi'i doctrines are minor, particularly in comparison to the broader Shi'a-Sunni relationship.³²

Islam shapes not only the daily lives of Yemenis but also the country's social organization, politics, and government. It is the state religion of Yemen, and *shari'a* (Islamic law) is the basis of the country's legal system.³³ Although these references to religion are decreed by Yemen's constitution, it neither restricts nor protects religious freedom. Citizens and foreign nationals are free to practice a religion other than Islam, but it is illegal for Muslims to convert to another religion and illegal for others to attempt to convert them. Regardless of sect, Yemeni law requires the president to be Muslim but other elected officials can be of any religion.³⁴



Sana'a Mosque
Raphaël Fauveau

Violence between the Shi'a Houthi and the Sunni government has escalated since 2004.³⁵ Although the religious differences between the two groups are smaller those of Iraq and Iran, the extremist Houthi have evolved into a religious military ideology and a breeding ground for hardline religious zealots.³⁶



Food
~w~/ flickr.com

Cuisine

Meat, vegetables, rice, and bread are the core components of the Yemeni diet. Yemenis use distinctive spices that reflect both Middle Eastern and Indian cuisine. Cardamom, caraway, saffron, and turmeric are used in Yemeni cooking, as they are throughout the Middle East.³⁷ Culinary experts have also noted the similarities between Yemeni and African cuisine.³⁸ *Hilbah*, or fenugreek, is a particularly popular spice.³⁹ *Saltah*, the country's signature dish, is a hot and spicy stew of meat, potatoes, and vegetables such as tomato, eggplant, and onion.⁴⁰ Flavored with *hilbah*, *saltah* is a characteristic Yemeni lunchtime meal, and is regarded as the best dish to eat before the afternoon *qat* chew.⁴¹ Other common stews are

fahsa (a stew covered in green foam) and *odgat* (made by tying all the ingredients together).^{42, 43} Commonly consumed meats are chicken, goat, sheep, and lamb.⁴⁴ Pork is strictly avoided in accordance with Islamic custom. Flavorful broths and soups (*shoubra*) are made by boiling meat or bones with vegetables and spices.^{45, 46}

Soups and stews are often accompanied with Yemeni flatbreads. *Malooga* is a yeasted flatbread usually eaten with eggs and some stews.⁴⁷ Another common flatbread is *khubz* (*khobz*), which is an unleavened flatbread that resembles the characteristic flatbread of India.⁴⁸ *Jachnun* is made from rolled dough topped with hunks of margarine, rolled into a cylindrical shape, and brushed with shortening before being placed in an oven on low heat to bake overnight.⁴⁹

Dinner dishes, which are typically small, include *fasouliya* (beans) and *ful*, a bean paste made with spices and vegetables.⁵⁰ *Asid* (*asit*) is a sorghum porridge commonly eaten by rural Yemenis.⁵¹ *Fatta* is a bread soup made with meat broth and cooked vegetables.⁵² Yogurt and honey are popular condiments. Honey also drenches desserts such as *bint al-sahn*, which is a layered pastry.⁵³ Tea (*shay*) is usually served sweetened.⁵⁴ Yemenis today drink a beverage called *qishr*, which is made by steeping ground coffee husks with ginger.^{55, 56}



Veiled woman
Charles Roffey

Traditional Dress

Women

The “curtain dress” (*sitara*) for women is a traditional costume that is still popular in many parts of Yemen. A bright piece of colored cloth (*al-masoon*) is wrapped around the body. The cloth contains unique decorations that are often found in the curtains used in Yemeni homes.^{57, 58} The dress is often accompanied by the *al-momq*, a face covering of silk or cotton that is primarily black with inscriptions in white or red. Most women wear the head covering, but married women and older women wear an additional

head piece, the *amomq*, which is a cloth decorated with silver or coral embroidery.⁵⁹

Styles of traditional garb vary by region. In the mountains, clothes are generally woven from cotton and are often red, blue, green, or yellow. In the front, the dresses are often decorated with coral beads, sequins, coins, or semiprecious stones. In the highlands, dresses are often embroidered all over with cotton and silk yarn. Dresses usually have buttons on the upper half and long sleeves with cuffs. The clothing of desert women is notable for its lack of embroidery and their black color. But the headgear of desert women is much more elaborate and often decorated with cowry shells.⁶⁰

Men

For men, especially in the north, the traditional garment is a long robe called a *zenneh* (*thobe*) that is worn over pants. Traditionally it is white, but it can be light blue, black, or natural colors.^{61, 62} It is usually worn with a dagger (*jambiya*) and a Western-style coat. The *jambiya* is worn in a scabbard on a wide belt. The type of handle and the position of the knife indicate the social status of the bearer. A *jambiya* carried in the center front of the belt is the mark of a tribesman.^{63, 64} Government workers are prohibited from wearing a *jambiya* to work and at official functions, although sheikhs, members of parliament, and judges are exempt.⁶⁵

Some men, especially in the coastal regions and in the east, wear a *ma'awaz*, which is a long woven piece of cloth wrapped around the waist and worn with a shirt.^{66, 67} In the south, people wear a *futa*, which is similar to the Indonesian sarong and stitched together at the ends. The head may be covered with a *smadeh*, which is similar to a shawl and wrapped around the head or sometimes worn over the shoulders.^{68, 69}



*Young couple
Francesco Veronesi*

Gender Issues

Yemen ranks at or near the bottom of countries surveyed on gender equity and has been declared by some to be the worst place to live as a woman.^{70, 71, 72} Effectively, women belong to men in Yemen and are the victims of discrimination in virtually all aspects of their lives.^{73, 74} The practice of *pardah*, or female seclusion, limits female participation in most spheres of life, especially in the public domain, which is largely reserved for males.^{75, 76} Discrimination based on gender is deeply embedded in Yemeni culture and supported by the nation's legal system. Women have limited access to healthcare, employment, and education.^{77, 78} The

education of girls is given little value by many Yemenis.⁷⁹ As a result, the literacy rate for females (49%) is significantly lower than that of males (82%) and less than half receive even basic education.^{80, 81} Women's participation in the workforce is limited because strict adherence to *pardah* prevents women from working outside the home. In 2012, Yemeni women made up only 12% of the workforce.⁸²

To marry, a woman must have the consent of her father or other male relative. If a woman has no male relative, she must secure the permission of a judge to marry.⁸³ Many young women are married off by their families at an early age. As many as 52% of Yemeni women ages 15 to 19 are married, and 14% of girls under 14 are married.⁸⁴ Yemen does not yet have a minimum legal age for females to marry, but there are pressures to set the limit at 17.⁸⁵ Yemeni family code discriminates against women in terms of property rights, inheritance rights, custodial rights, and divorce. To travel, a woman must get permission from her father or her husband.^{86, 87} Women are required by law to obey their husbands.⁸⁸

Honor crimes occur in Yemen. Women who shame the family with behavior that is considered un-Islamic can be killed. No detailed records are kept so it is impossible to know the extent of such killings, but they are estimated in the hundreds each year.^{89, 90, 91}

Qat Chews

Yemeni social life includes communal *qat* chews. The use of *qat*, a mild stimulant, was introduced in the 14th or 15th century by Sufi Muslims, who chewed the leaves during prayer and meditation.^{92, 93, 94} Today the use is widespread and habitual.⁹⁵ Daily afternoon *qat* chews provide an opportunity for friends, acquaintances, or even strangers to socialize and discuss a range of issues, including business and politics.⁹⁶ Participants may settle disputes or exchange lore and poetry. Like most social events, *qat* chews are



*Qat merchant
Francesco Veronesi*

segregated by gender. For men, these gatherings are known as *maqil*.^{97, 98} For women, who consume the drug less often, *qat* chewing may be part of afternoon female social gatherings known as *tafrita*.^{99, 100} Participants bring their own *qat* and congregate in private homes, which usually have a *mafraj*: a special room for such gatherings.¹⁰¹ Seating is not random; it corresponds to social status among the attendees. The stimulant reportedly has the effect of relaxing social inhibitions. The *qat* equalizes the participants, who are then freer to express opinions.¹⁰² The drug suppresses the appetite but provokes thirst, so drinking water or soda is common. Smoking also frequently accompanies *qat* chewing. These gatherings begin in the early afternoon after lunch

and typically last until early evening.¹⁰³

Although *qat* use has a long history in Yemen, the widespread and heavy daily consumption of the plant has been identified as a serious medical and social problem. Short-term side effects include sleeplessness and loss of appetite; heavy long-term use has been tied to kidney and liver disease.^{104, 105} The chewing of *qat* can be an everyday habit that absorbs much of a Yemeni's time and income. In a country with high poverty and unemployment levels, some observers have viewed *qat* chewing as a significant waste of potential productivity and precious income.^{106, 107, 108} Some poorer Yemenis may be spending as much as half their income on the plant. Nationally, about 10% of income is spent on the drug.^{109, 110, 111}

Arts

Poetry

Poetry (*qasida*) is a significant component of Arab culture.¹¹² Cassette recordings of popular poets circulate throughout Yemen.¹¹³ Poetry is more than an art form because it also serves as a conflict resolution mechanism.¹¹⁴ For example, a sheikh mediating a dispute will call the parties together and invite representatives of other tribes who have no stake in the dispute. The delegations will express their positions through poetry. The sheikh will assess the disagreements and determine if a consensus can be reached. "At various points in the dispute mediation, people can weigh in with the moral force of a poem very effectively," explains a scholar who has studied Yemeni poetry in relation to political power.¹¹⁵ During the civil war (1962–1970), republicans and supporters of the Zaydi *imamate* alike were given voice through poetic exchanges.¹¹⁶ More recently,

the government has utilized poets to urge the citizenry to combat terrorism.¹¹⁷ In these circumstances, Yemeni poems serve as tailored rhetorical appeals to secure the support of their audience.



Dagger dance
toyofumi / flickr.com

Dance

Yemeni dances are performed at rite-of-passage ceremonies such as weddings. Dancers are segregated by gender. Women use the word *raks* for dances that originated outside the country, but refer to their own dances as play (*laeb*). Men use the word *laeb* for recreational dance and *bara* for the special, martial dagger dance.¹¹⁸ The *bara* has become a symbol of Yemeni culture and national identity. It is performed in cities as well as in rural communities, where it originated. Tribes have each developed distinctive movement and costume variations.¹¹⁹ In the northern highlands, the leader dances in the center rather than at the head of a procession, reflecting his equality

among the others. All segments of society dance the *bara*, but it is essential to reinforce the honor of a tribesman.¹²⁰ The *bara* entails the coordination of as many as 20 dancers, who must dance in horseshoe formation and carry *jambiyas*. Four different rhythms are played on a large drum (*tasa*), and the tempo becomes progressively faster.¹²¹

Architecture

Yemeni cities lack a “hyper-modern skyline...with mismatched skyscrapers”—an urban architectural style that is seen in Dubai, the United Arab Emirates, and elsewhere in the Middle East.¹²² The country’s centuries of isolation have influenced its approach to contemporary architectural development.¹²³ Distinctive Yemeni architecture is characterized by the use of stone and sun-dried brick. Where stone is scarce, *zubur* houses, which resemble a layer cake, are made entirely from clay laid in horizontal segments.¹²⁴ These buildings are now celebrated for their environmental sustainability. Solid clay walls keep the interior temperature constant through the seasons. The capital city of Sanaa, whose historic quarter has been named a UNESCO World Heritage site, contains ancient tower houses. These buildings, some of which rise 30 m (100 ft) above street level, were constructed from “locally quarried stone, hand-mixed plaster and a naturally waterproof insulating material, *qudad*, made of volcanic cinders and lime.”¹²⁵ In the words of one architect, “This dense, walled city projects the urban character typical of traditional Arab cities and contains many building types unique to Southern Arabia.”¹²⁶



Camel racing
raw_cip_yem_CamelRacing.jpg

Sports and Games

Camel racing, or *al-hagen* (literally, “breeds of fine quality”), is an ancient Arabian sport that originated with nomadic Bedouin tribes.¹²⁷

Though camel racing was once popular, it has become more of a ceremonial event throughout the country.¹²⁸ The Yemeni government began promoting camel racing in 1987 by sponsoring a festival in the town of Al-Husineah, in Al-Hudaydah governorate, where camel racing was a tradition. Competitions consist of races and other events, such as a contest in which participants

jump over rows of camels.^{129, 130} The Zaraniq tribesmen from Yemen’s west coast are the only professional camel jumpers in the world.^{131, 132}

Soccer is also a favorite Yemeni pastime. Where soccer balls are not available, boys will often use a plastic bottle or a rag ball. The Yemeni national soccer team has competed in international events including the Olympics, but has won no medals.¹³³

Boys often play a traditional game called “the honest person and the thief.” Players sit in a circle and take turns tossing a matchbox until it lands in a standing position. Depending on where the box lands, the boy who throws it becomes a “king,” a “minister,” or a “soldier.” If the box lands on its broad side, according to agreements made beforehand, the person is declared to be honest or to be a thief. Thieves are given sentences by the minister that may include doing sit-ups or providing tea for the others.¹³⁴

Girls play “O Hillcock, O Hillcock,” another traditional game in which two lines of girls stand facing each other and stamping their feet to the rhythm of a song. Each team then selects a girl who must come up with a poetry verse around an agreed-upon theme. Her team chants the words. The second girl retorts with her own verse, and the game continues until one team is unable to respond.¹³⁵

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Chapter 4 Assessment

1. Tribes are often responsible for carrying out governance and legal matters.

TRUE

Tribal areas of Yemen are not ungoverned or lawless places because tribal governance and customary law (urf) organize the society—often rigidly. Tribes have traditional approaches to managing resources, and to preventing, mediating, and resolving conflict.

2. The majority of Yemeni Muslims are Shi'ites.

FALSE

Approximately 65% of Yemenis are Sunnis while 35% are Shi'a.

3. Men from the northern regions of Yemen wear a futa, similar to an Indonesian sarong.

FALSE

In the south, people wear a futa, which is similar to the Indonesian sarong and stitched together at the ends. Some men, especially in the coastal regions and in the east, wear a ma'awaz, which is a long woven piece of cloth wrapped around the waist and worn with a shirt.

4. Qat is a common stimulant used daily by many Yemenis.

TRUE

The use of qat, a mild stimulant, was introduced in the 14th or 15th century by Sufi Muslims, who chewed the leaves during prayer and meditation. Today the use is widespread and habitual. Daily qat chews provide an important opportunity to socialize.

5. Camel racing is a common popular sport in Yemen.

FALSE

Camel racing, or al-hagen (literally, “breeds of fine quality”), is an ancient Arabian sport that originated with nomadic Bedouin tribes. Though camel racing was once widely popular, it has become more of a ceremonial event throughout the country.



*Yemen's Counter Terrorism Unit
Ammar Abd Rabbo*

Chapter 5: Security

Introduction

Yemen is the focus of international security concerns because of its connection to acts of terrorism against high-profile targets. In October 2000, while the USS *Cole* was refueling in the southern Yemeni port of Aden, it was rammed by a small boat laden with explosives. The explosion ripped a hole in the naval destroyer and killed 17 sailors.^{1,2} On Christmas Day 2009, the attempted bombing of a U.S.-bound jetliner was attributed to a Nigerian who reportedly had trained for his mission in Yemen.^{3,4} This incident renewed attention on the impoverished country as a breeding ground for Islamist extremists. Of the approximately 154 remaining detainees at Guantanamo Bay in January 2014, 91 were Yemeni nationals.⁵

Yemen faces a number of pressing concerns, including demographic pressures, a

weakening economy, a weak government, human rights, corruption, and water scarcity.⁶

⁷ Analysts have noted that, in order to prevent a total breakdown in state authority, not only must the central government be strengthened, but the lives of the Yemeni people must be improved.^{8, 9, 10} The deep-seated grievances of many Yemenis toward their

government, which provides neither security (*aman*) nor stability (*istiqrar*), make Yemen a fertile recruiting ground for insurgent groups.^{11, 12}

U.S.-Yemen Relations

The United States first established diplomatic relations with North Yemen in 1946 and with South Yemen in 1967. North Yemen severed all diplomatic ties with the United States in 1967 because of U.S. backing of the Israelis during the Arab-Israeli conflict, but relations were restored in 1972.¹³ The United States shuttered its embassy in South Yemen in 1969 when that nation severed diplomatic relations. Relations resumed in 1990 when the country changed its name to The People's Democratic Republic of Yemen. When North and South Yemen unified to form the Republic of Yemen in 1990, the United States recognized the new nation.¹⁴

After the terrorist attacks on 9/11, U.S.-Yemeni relations improved dramatically. Yemen has become a key partner in the war on terrorism by providing intelligence and allowing U.S. Special Forces to operate in remote tribal regions. In return, the United States has increased military aid to the Yemeni government and increased its antiterrorism activities there, including drone attacks.^{15, 16} The attacks have killed a number of high-profile terrorist targets including Anwar al-Awlaki, a radical Muslim cleric who was born in

the U.S. He is believed to have mentored Maj. Nidal Malik Hassan, the accused shooter at Fort Hood in November 2009, and Umar Farouk Abdulmutallab, who allegedly attempted the Christmas Day 2009 bombing of a U.S.-bound jetliner.¹⁷ In recent stepped-up drone attacks, several al-Qaeda commanders and fighters have been killed.^{18, 19, 20} President Hadi has endorsed the drone attacks.^{21, 22} But the drones have caused some tensions because civilians have also died in the attacks.^{23, 24}



*Donald H. Rumsfeld and President Ali Abdallah Salih
DoD photo by Helene C. Stikkel*

The United States supports Yemen's transition to a more democratic government and President Obama has promised to work with the government of President Hadi to complete the transition. The two countries have promised to cooperate to expand trade relations and to encourage United States investment in Yemen.²⁵



*Abdullah of Saudi Arabia
Courtesy of Wikipedia*

Relations with Regional Countries

Saudi Arabia

Yemen's longest land border is with Saudi Arabia.²⁶ The boundary was long a source of dispute until a final border agreement was signed in 2000.^{27, 28, 29} Although the agreement signaled a warming in Yemeni-Saudi relations, Saudi Arabia remains concerned about the instability in Yemen, and in particular fears that the Houthi rebellion could spread to the kingdom.^{30, 31, 32} In 2009, the Saudi air force conducted sorties along its border with Yemen, and stated that it needed to control illegal border crossings and Houthi attacks on Saudi border positions. The Saudi navy patrols the Yemeni coast to slow the trafficking of arms bound for the rebel group.³³

The Saudi government's involvement in the Houthi conflict follows a precedent of influencing Yemeni affairs. Saudi Arabia supported the remnants of the Zaydi *imamate* in their battle against republicans in the civil war in North Yemen (1962–1970). Its support was a source of tension with the government of the Yemen Arab Republic (1962–1990).³⁴ More recently, Saudis have invested

heavily to promote their conservative Islam, known as Wahhabism, in Yemen through the funding of mosques, religious schools, and charities.^{35, 36} This promotion has been associated with the spread of religious extremism in Yemen and elsewhere.³⁷

Saudi Arabia has a history of providing aid to Yemeni tribal leaders. In June 2008, the Saudi government allegedly began funding pro-government tribal militias inside Yemen.³⁸ In 2013, the Saudis announced that they would withhold aid to Yemen and planned to implement stricter visa regulations, which will adversely affect migrant workers from Yemen.³⁹

Since 2011, border security has weakened and the flow of illegal migrants, drugs,

militants, and guns into Saudi Arabia has increased.⁴⁰ To address the problem, the Saudis are building a 1,800 km (1,100 mi) fence from the Red Sea coast to Oman.⁴¹ Work halted when Yemeni tribesmen protested that it impeded their ability to herd livestock. Periodic skirmishes between the Yemenis and Saudis are uncommon, but in April 2014, two Saudi border guards were killed.⁴²



*Al Alam Palace
strizale / flickr.com*

Oman

Yemen's neighbor to the east, Oman, is a monarchy that has been ruled by Sultan Qaboos bin Said al-Said since 1970.⁴³ From 1962–1975, Oman was plagued by an insurgency in the southwest region of Dhofar, bordering Yemen. At the time, the government of the People's Democratic Republic of Yemen (PDRY) provided aid to the Dhofar rebels' attempt to topple the sultanate.⁴⁴ In 1983, South Yemen and Oman established diplomatic relations. In 1992, the unified Republic of Yemen and Oman agreed to their border, which passes through desolate, sparsely inhabited terrain.⁴⁵ In 1994, after Yemen's Vice President al Baydh had declared secession, Oman hosted President Saleh and al Baydh to mediate the conflict. The Omani government supported a unified Yemeni state but

still offered asylum to fleeing southern leaders at the end of the civil war.⁴⁶ Oman has sponsored Yemen's bid to join the Gulf Cooperation Council, an economic and security alliance comprising Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Bahrain, Qatar, the United Arab Emirates, and Oman.^{47, 48}

Oman continues to worry about terrorists from Yemen crossing into the country. In 2012, Oman announced that al-Qaeda terrorists had infiltrated Oman from Yemen.⁴⁹ In 2013, Oman announced its intention to build a fence along its border with Yemen to stop arms smuggling and the illegal flow of militants. The move immediately aroused tensions between the two governments.⁵⁰ Oman began surveying the area, and expects to complete construction in 2018.⁵¹

In 2013, both countries agreed to streamline trade across their borders, including the operation of a maritime link.⁵² Business leaders from both nations are also working to increase trade. Although trade between the two countries increased between 2001 and 2007, it has declined in each successive year.⁵³

Somalia

In 2012, Somalia completed the transition to its first permanent government since

a military coup in 1969.⁵⁴ The establishment of the new government provides opportunities for greater diplomatic ties between Yemen and Somalia. Yemen was the first country to open an embassy in the Somali capital in 2007. Yemen played a central role in the talks between the Somali factions that ultimately led to the formation of the current government.⁵⁵

The two nations have been working to forge new partnerships. In 2009, they agreed to cooperate on an electrical connection project. Yemen is also interested in developing other energy projects.⁵⁶ In 2013, they signed a security cooperation agreement to combat terrorism, piracy, organized crime and smuggling.⁵⁷

One thorn in relations is the operations of Somali pirates that have attacked passing tankers and Yemeni fishing boats.⁵⁸ Such activity has hurt the Yemeni economy because some of the nearly 20,000 ships that annually pass through the Gulf of Aden have been rerouted, thus bypassing Yemen's refueling facilities and other services at Aden.⁵⁹

Yemen also is a main destination and transit point for refugees from Somalia's ongoing civil conflict. Most undertake a dangerous journey across the Gulf of Aden and often are aided by smugglers, who require payment but do not guarantee safe and successful passage.^{60, 61} Once in Yemen, some Somali refugees who fail to cross into Saudi Arabia have reportedly been pressed into military service by the Houthis.⁶² Many refugees who are unable to pay ransom remain in detention imposed by their smugglers. Reports suggest that rape, beatings, and torture are common.⁶³ Refugees from Somalia continue to pour into Yemen. By 2012, the UN estimated their number at over 200,000. The number could be even higher because the UN count included only those that were registered.⁶⁴

Djibouti

Djibouti and Yemen have had meetings to discuss enhanced coordination on regional security matters. Both countries are affected by regional piracy and terrorism.⁶⁵ In 2013, their navies participated in the six-nation Combined Task Force 150 operations to improve maritime security.⁶⁶

Refugees from Somalia and Ethiopia who land in Djibouti are sometimes smuggled into Yemen as part of a human trafficking operation to Saudi Arabia. In 2013, Yemen and Djibouti signed an accord to deal with that issue and illegal arms smuggling.^{67, 68}

Eritrea

Although relations with Eritrea are still tense, they have improved greatly in the last 20 years.⁶⁹ Eritrea still routinely seizes Yemeni fishing boats and charges large sums of money for their release.^{70, 71} Yemen has alleged that the Houthi rebellion is financed partly by the Eritrean government, which has repeatedly denied that it provides any aid.⁷² Another issue revolves around an Eritrean ethnic group, the Afar. Both countries have reportedly reached a security agreement in which Yemen will deport

Afar fishermen who have sought asylum in Yemen. The move sparked international condemnation and was labeled a violation of human rights and the rights of refugees to seek asylum. It is widely believed that repatriated Afar would be at risk of persecution and even death.⁷³ In 2010, the two countries met to discuss joint security operations and an expansion of trade.⁷⁴



Suspected pirates in the Gulf of Aden
U.S. Navy photo by Mass Communications Specialist 2nd Class
Jason R. Zalasky/Released

Police and Security Forces

Civilian law enforcement is provided by the General Security force, also known as the Yemeni national police force, which is under the Ministry of the Interior.⁷⁵ The force comprises over 100,000 officers. Women are allowed to serve in the police force and there are approximately 5,000 female police officers.⁷⁶ The Criminal Investigation Department (CID) is responsible for investigating all criminal activity except terrorism.⁷⁷ The Political Security Organization (PSO) is the national secret police responsible for intelligence gathering. This agency is headed by military officers, reports to the president, and operates without any specific court supervision.^{78, 79} It is the nation's most feared security organization and has

about 150,000 officers. The agency has committed a number of human rights violations including physical abuse and long detentions without charges.^{80, 81} PSO officials have recently become targets of al-Qaeda and several have been assassinated.⁸²

Bribery among the police forces is rampant, and even prompted President Hadi to address the issue in a police academy graduation speech.⁸³ According to a national poll, 59% of respondents identified the security forces as the most corrupt public institution in Yemen.⁸⁴

Military

Army

Yemen's military expenditures are believed to consume between 30% and 40% of the national budget.⁸⁵ There are an unknown number of fictitious soldiers on the payroll so their salaries can be spent in other ways.^{86, 87} In 2014, the army had 60,000 active duty troops. Although the troop levels are high, a draft was implemented in 2007 to reduce unemployment and ensure a ready supply of recruits.⁸⁸

After assuming office in 2012, President Hadi reorganized the nation's land forces. He

changed virtually the entire leadership structure, and abolished the Republican Guard and the First Armored Division.^{89, 90} He also established the Presidential Protective Forces (PPF), whose operations will be under the president's jurisdiction. The Special Forces and counterterrorism units now operate under the Special Operations Command.⁹¹

Morale within the corps is low. Soldiers staged protests over a lack of promotions and being left off the military payroll. The drive toward a centralized command structure has also caused protests by troops who are satisfied with the old patronage system.⁹²

Yemen's armed forces are experienced fighters, largely because of the anti-Houthi campaigns. The army has engaged in successful battles against al-Qaeda forces, particularly in southern Yemen.⁹³ Under the army's control are 1,260 tanks, nearly 3,000 armored fighting vehicles, and about 400 multiple-launch rocket systems, along with some towed artillery and self-propelled guns.⁹⁴ Much of the army's equipment is old, especially its armored vehicles, and questions exist about how the equipment would perform in sustained action. To help remedy the problem, the army has created a corps of qualified technicians that is being trained to repair and maintain the vehicles.⁹⁵

The army's main responsibility is to fight the insurgents. It is also charged with securing the nation from external threats, especially along its border with Saudi Arabia. Most brigades are significantly smaller than U.S. counterparts, often reaching only battalion strength.⁹⁶

Navy

Yemen has a small navy estimated at 2,200 sailors, including 500 marines. The navy is tasked with coastal security, especially combating regional piracy.^{97, 98} In 2013, navy ships fired on a vessel approaching a liquid natural gas export terminal. The boat was rigged with explosives but blew up before it could damage the port facility.⁹⁹ The navy is also involved in anti-insurgency campaigns. For example, in 2012, the navy shelled al-Qaeda positions in the south. Missiles fired from naval warships killed several terrorists after hitting their compounds in the city of Jaar.¹⁰⁰

The navy possesses a small number of vessels. Most of the fleet consists of patrol craft but there are two corvettes and several mine warfare vessels.^{101, 102} Many vehicles are old and in disrepair, and some are essentially inoperable. The navy is incapable of a major offensive against other regional naval forces; however, it has mounted some effective campaigns against Somali pirates.¹⁰³

Air Force

Yemen's air force, including air defense forces, numbers 5,000. In recent years, Yemen has purchased Russian MiG-29 fighters to bring their total aircraft to approximately 181, including 21 training aircraft. Most of the aircraft are fighters or interceptors but

there are approximately 77 helicopters, including 14 attack copters.^{104, 105} The air force has experienced pilots and carries out routine sorties against the Houthi insurgents and al-Qaeda targets. The United States is working with the Yemeni air force to provide training on the maintenance of helicopters often used against Houthi forces. The air

force is not capable of defending Yemeni air space against regional forces, including Saudi Arabia. Most air combat units are located at Sanaa and al Hudaydah, although there are some fixed-wing aircraft at the bases at al Anad and Taiz Ganed. Like the other military forces, air force morale and discipline are problematic.¹⁰⁶

The United States intends to provide the Yemenis with USD 38 million that will be used to purchase a military transport vehicle. Additional U.S. funds could be available to help procure additional weapons. The United States also intends to provide Yemen with 25 light observation aircraft for intelligence-gathering operations. It may also supply some helicopters.¹⁰⁷



*Yemen guard
Martin Sojka*

Tribal Militias

Yemen also has tribal militias, sometimes referred to as “popular resistance committees.” In the Ansar al Sharia region, the tribal militias are the main defense forces. Although they have shown themselves to be an effective military force, these militias may not have long-term reliability.¹⁰⁸ Frequent tribal violence in the area indicates that anti-government feelings continue to simmer. Many tribes have expressed dissatisfaction with the central government over the lack of services, and they feel neglected by the government. The presence of government security forces in the region is another source of tension. Nevertheless, the Yemeni government depends greatly on these militias to provide police services and to hold the territory.^{109, 110} Finally, the country is awash in arms. Only the United States is more heavily armed than Yemen. According to a 2007 survey, there is more than one weapon for every two Yemenis. Gun ownership is a deeply embedded cultural value. Guns are everywhere and are even commonly used at weddings to fire celebratory volleys. Hundreds of people are killed each year by such gunfire and approximately 4,000 are killed each year by guns.¹¹¹ Guns are carried everywhere by most men and have become an essential part of daily dress for many.¹¹²

Threats to Internal Security

The major threats to Yemen’s internal stability are not terrorist activities or secessionist movements, but issues related to food and water insecurity and the collapsing

economy.^{113, 114} The failing economy has left millions of Yemenis in poverty. Yemen is one of the poorest countries in the world and 54% of Yemenis live below the poverty line.¹¹⁵ Food is available but out of reach of many.¹¹⁶ The water shortage is severe and Yemen could be the first nation to completely run out of water.^{117, 118} The lack of basic services, food, and water could lead to populist uprisings and destabilize the government.¹¹⁹



A boy waits in food line
Paul Stephens / IRIN / 201003230957150509

One of the biggest predictors of social conflict is a society's proportion of young men ages 15 to 24. The median age for males in Yemen is 18.5 years.¹²⁰ Most face bleak job prospects in a country where 60% of the youth are already unemployed and general unemployment is expected to rise to nearly 67% in 2015.^{121, 122} Yemen's economy depends too much on oil revenues. The World Bank predicts that the nation's oil reserves will run dry and stop providing funds by 2017. If that happens, the entire economy could collapse.^{123, 124, 125}

Corruption compounds the economic issues for Yemen, which was the world's fifth-largest source of illicit capital between 1990 and 2008.¹²⁶

Corruption contributes to Yemen's low ratings on the Economic Freedom Scale, compromises its business climate, and reduces the enthusiasm of foreign investors, who see corruption as an impediment to profitability.^{127,}

^{128, 129, 130}

Terrorism and insurgency do threaten the political stability of the government in Yemen. The secessionist movement in the southern provinces remains strong, so the Saudis have withdrawn all aid from Yemen until the issue is resolved.¹³¹ Shiite Houthi are also fighting the government. There is no sign of an end to the long-standing rebellion and, according to some, the Houthi are growing even stronger.^{132, 133}

Al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP) has become increasingly active in Yemen despite the recent uptick in military action by the government and drone attacks by the United States.¹³⁴ In addition to al-Qaeda terrorist groups, extremists from Saudi Arabia, Syria, and Iraq are entering Yemen.¹³⁵

Terrorist and Insurgent Groups Operating in Yemen

Al-Qaeda

Yemen has a complicated relationship with al-Qaeda. Osama bin Laden's father was born in Yemen, and bin Laden remains a popular figure in his ancestral homeland. The so-called Afghan Arabs who fought alongside him in Afghanistan against the Soviets

were often not welcome back to their home countries, so they took up residence in Yemen.¹³⁶ Al-Qaeda operatives were responsible for the attack on the USS *Cole* in 2000. Yet an affiliated and fully operational group was formed in Yemen only after 2005.¹³⁷ In January 2009, al-Qaeda affiliates in Yemen and Saudi Arabia merged to create a new organization called Al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP).¹³⁸ AQAP represents what some analysts refer to as Yemen's second generation of al-Qaeda. The group has some ties to the parent organization but acts with considerable autonomy.¹³⁹ AQAP is said to have approximately 100 core operatives, most of whom are in their 20s and 30s, but it reportedly has an untold number of sympathizers and strong tribal support in the southern and eastern governorates.^{140, 141}

Houthi Rebellion

The Yemeni government has been battling an insurgency since 2004 in its mountainous north, along the border with Saudi Arabia. The conflict began as a law enforcement operation to arrest Hussein Al Houthi, a former parliament member. Several rounds of fighting ensued and the conflict expanded to local tribes and other regional and foreign actors.¹⁴² The Houthi have the advantages of knowing the geography, the ability to conduct guerrilla warfare, and tribal connections.¹⁴³

Much about the group remains contested. Although they have espoused anti-America and anti-Israel rhetoric, the Houthis (unlike al-Qaeda) have not targeted Westerners within Yemen. The Saleh government had claimed that the Houthis want to re-establish the Zaydi imamate, which ruled portions of northern Yemen until 1962. It has also accused them of receiving assistance from Iran and other Shi'a sympathizers.¹⁴⁴ The Houthis accused the government of trying to marginalize their religion by "installing Sunni fundamentalists in mosques and official positions in some Zaydi areas." They also decried Saudi Arabia's support of the government of Saleh, whom they regarded as a pro-Washington tyrant.¹⁴⁵ Local observers have stressed that although the Houthis consider themselves descendants of the Prophet Muhammad and the rightful rulers of Yemen, the insurgency is driven by frustration over their economic and social marginalization.¹⁴⁶ The Houthis have garnered tribal support in the north by working to resolve local conflicts. Such efforts contrast with those of the government, which has often pitted groups against each other to keep them from uniting against it.^{147, 148} At the same time, the Houthis have dealt ruthlessly with tribes that have sided with the government.¹⁴⁹

Southern Mobility Movement (SMM)

The Southern Mobility Movement (*al-harakat al-janubiyya*) is an umbrella movement of opposition groups who feel that the south has been marginalized since unification.¹⁵⁰ This assertion is partly rooted in the country's Cold War history, when the south was a socialist state. After unification, the 1993 parliamentary elections swung power decisively to northerners. Southern leadership retreated to Aden and declared secession,

sparking the civil war of 1994. At that time, the conflict was primarily between government elites on both sides; few southerners wished to secede only to be ruled by a reconstituted Marxist leadership. Since that time, discontent has spread.¹⁵¹

The SMM's organizational structure is diffuse, with few clearly defined and identifiable leaders. Their political agenda has been difficult to clarify. A recent analysis suggests there are three strains within the organization: one is separatist, one calls for federation, and one for continued unity with the north.¹⁵² Since 2011, the agenda has become somewhat clearer. The emphasis now seems less on actual secession and more on supporting a unity government.¹⁵³

After the “uncontested” election of President Hadi in 2012, violence erupted in southern Yemen. The SMM had issued a call for civil disobedience, and clashes broke out between armed groups attacking voting centers and police and military forces.¹⁵⁴ Among the motivating factors is the lack of an equitable allocation of national resources.¹⁵⁵ The SMM took part in the National Dialogue Conference, which recently agreed upon a document to base the country's new constitution on.^{156, 157} The SMM has little support outside of Yemen other than among some Yemenis abroad.¹⁵⁸

Water Security

The water situation in Yemen is dire. Because the country lacks permanent rivers and lakes, it depends completely on groundwater (aquifers) and rainfall for its water supply. Water consumption has rapidly outpaced the replenishment of Yemen's limited renewable water resources.^{159, 160, 161} Because of the absence of regulatory oversight of water extraction, the natural aquifers are being depleted at rapid rates for unsustainable irrigation and large-scale private exploitation.

For the government to prevent a national water crisis, it would need to enforce laws



*Thilla village well
Ahron de Leeuw*

governing extraction. Since 99% of water extraction is currently unauthorized, regulation is a formidable administrative challenge that the government is unlikely to meet.¹⁶² The primary cash crop, *qat*, requires more water than food crops, making it difficult to reduce usage.¹⁶³ Water scarcity is worsened by the rapid growth of the population, which is expected to double over the next two decades.^{164, 165} The capital city, Sanaa, could run out of water as early as 2017.^{166, 167} The water crisis may lead to “water refugees,” in which Yemenis would seek refuge in other countries as life in Yemen became intolerable. Competition over water rights has already been identified as the

source of many of Yemen's internal conflicts. According to Yemeni researchers, in rural areas 70% to 80% of conflicts are water-related.¹⁶⁸ There is also evidence that al-Qaeda groups control some water sources and are using them to gain support from villagers.¹⁶⁹

Outlook

Yemen has embarked on a path toward greater democratic reforms; nevertheless, it is confronting several risks to its political stability. The economic situation is likely to worsen, particularly in the short term, while Yemen continues to deplete its oil reserves. The government depends too much on oil for money, and as the supply of oil diminishes and prices decrease, it is unlikely that Yemen's economy will successfully meet the challenge.^{170, 171}



*President Ali Abdallah Salih
DoD photo by Helene C. Stikkel*

Nearly half the population is food insecure, raising the risk of starvation for many.^{172, 173} Declining export revenues, weakened infrastructure, and increased unemployment will likely make it nearly impossible for the government to provide adequately for the people.¹⁷⁴ The main risks include rampant corruption, a weak economy that is too dependent on revenues from rapidly depleting oil reserves, food and water insecurity, and a weak central government.¹⁷⁵ The situation will likely be worsened by increasing water shortages, which threaten agriculture.^{176, 177}

Violence and civil unrest are likely to continue. The Houthi rebellion in the south and the southern separatist movement pose serious threats to stability.^{178, 179} The central government remains

weak and is unable to control certain parts of the country that remain largely under tribal authority.^{180, 181} The president has declared that six of Yemen's governorates remain outside of state control.¹⁸² Sectarian fighting between the Shi'a Houthi and Sunni Salafists in the north could also erupt into major violence, especially if it reaches the capital.^{183, 184}

Southern militants remain active and the insurgency is likely to grow through at least 2014. The fight against al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP) is likely to increase and raise the risk of terrorist attacks throughout the nation. Increased drone strikes by the United States and more military campaigns by the government could increase cooperation between tribal groups and regional militants, thus raising the risk of political destabilization.¹⁸⁵

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Chapter 5 Assessment

1. The United States and Yemen have a tense diplomatic relationship.

FALSE

After the terrorist attacks on 9/11, U.S.-Yemeni relations improved dramatically. Yemen has become a key partner in the war on terrorism by providing intelligence and allowing U.S. Special Forces to operate in remote tribal regions.

2. Oman plans to build a fence along its border with Yemen to increase security.

TRUE

Oman continues to worry about terrorists from Yemen crossing into the country. The border fence is scheduled to be completed in 2018.

3. Women are not allowed to serve in the Yemeni police force.

FALSE

Women are allowed to serve in the police force, and approximately 5,000 are now active.

4. President Hadi disbanded Yemen's Republican Guard shortly after assuming office in 2012.

TRUE

After assuming office in 2012, President Hadi reorganized the nation's land forces. He changed virtually the entire leadership structure, and abolished the Republican Guard and the First Armored Division.

5. The Yemeni government no longer relies on tribal militias to conduct security operations and maintain order in some parts of the country.

FALSE

The Yemeni government remains depends greatly on tribal militias to provide police services and to hold territory. For example, in the Ansar al Sharia region, the tribal militias are the main defense forces.

Final Assessment

1. Yemen shares a land border with Somalia.
TRUE or False?
2. Some peaks in the Yemeni highlands reach elevations of over 3,600 m (11,811 ft).
TRUE or False?
3. Moist monsoons predominate in the winter.
TRUE or False?
4. Yemen has no permanent rivers.
TRUE or False?
5. There has been no recent volcanic or earthquake activity in Yemen.
TRUE or False?
6. Ancient Yemen was once ruled by followers of Judaism.
TRUE or False?
7. The British surrendered control of the area known as South Yemen at end of World War II.
TRUE or False?
8. The Houthis are a Zaydi-led rebel group.
TRUE or False?
9. President Saleh was assassinated in a rocket attack in Sanaa in 2011.
TRUE or False?

10. Since the formation of the transition government and the election of President Hadi, rebel activity has diminished.
TRUE or False?
11. Yemen has the first democratically elected government on the Arabian Peninsula.
TRUE or False?
12. Yemen can continue to count on oil reserves as its main source of export revenues until about 2030.
TRUE or False?
13. The fishing sector is threatened by piracy off the Yemeni coast.
TRUE or False?
14. Foreign banks are not permitted to operate in Yemen.
TRUE or False?
15. More than half the Yemeni population lives below the poverty line.
TRUE or False?
16. Tribal identity and affiliation are weaker in the south of Yemen than in the north.
TRUE or False?
17. The Yemeni population is predominantly of Arab descent.
TRUE or False?
18. The Zaydi order has been called the “fifth school” of Sunni Islam.
TRUE or False?
19. Yemeni women’s participation in the public workforce is governed by secular laws against gender-based discrimination.
TRUE or False?

20. Islamic law prohibits the marriage of Muslim girls until the age of 15.

TRUE or False?

21. Saudi Arabia has promoted its brand of Islam in Yemen.

TRUE or False?

22. The Saudis are withholding all aid to Yemen pending the resolution of rebel activities near its border with southern Yemen.

TRUE or False?

23. The Southern Mobility Movement is a unified political force seeking to secede from the nation.

TRUE or False?

24. The Political Security Organization (PSO) is the national secret police intelligence-gathering agency.

TRUE or False?

25. The most serious threats to Yemeni stability are terrorism and rebel activities.

TRUE or False?

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