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# Historical Roots of Yemen War and Foreign Interferences in It (with an Emphasize on US – Trump Interference)

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## **Abstract**

**Objective:** Yemen is a country from antiquity with a civilization belonging to the pre-Islamic era. During the Islamic history they became Muslim but they kept their tribal life traditions, tribal rivalry and fight, for instance, in this country are not a new phenomena. Since early nineteenth century certain foreign forces too found themselves somehow interested in the Yemenis life, notwithstanding their colonial dominance intention which they were planning to establish in this territory.

Today Yemenis are confronted with so many internecine wars between the domestic rebels and factions in one hand and the foreign troops on the other.

In this article we study the historical roots of this sectarian war, while the other main purpose of this study is to assert the harmful impact of foreign States interferences on independence and territorial integrity of Yemen.

**Method:** In dealing with issues comprising different components which in turn involve more parameters with different variability, as it is the case in this study concerning the intrinsic cultural elements affecting the courses of events in Yemen beside the foreign interferences, the discussions on the methodology usually outreach the mere formalism, debating the virtues of extensive approach against the restrictive approach, taking into account the particular features of the research subject, this article is prepared using "data analyzing system" based on the "contextual approach".

**Result:** The scope of our research shows that, today Yemen is on total disarray on the verge of territorial disintegration and foreign interferences, particularly foreign military interventions are being considered as the major cause of this calamity.

**Conclusion:** Actually the majority of Yemenis are in a dire situation regarding the necessary means of life. UN Security Council expresses its alarm over innocent civilian people's fate and, more importantly, all parties involved in Yemen war continue to commit gross violation of international law.

**Keywords:** Tribes, Zaydis, Houthis, Sheikhs, Civil War, Terrorist Attacks.

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## 1. Introduction

Yemen is a deprived country at an arid and mountainous region of Arabian Peninsula (Southernmost of the Peninsula). It borders Oman, Saudi Arabia, Gulf of Aden and the Red Sea. It is mostly mountainous but geographically Yemen can be divided to five regions: coastal plain of the north-south, western highlands, the central mountains, eastern highlands and north-eastern deserts. The people speak different dialects of Arabic. The majority of Yemenis are Muslims but the tribal alignments have deep roots in the Yemenis life. Two-thirds of Yemenis are living in the rural areas with a poor level of hygiene and public health, where rates of poverty, illiteracy and unemployment remain high. Today Yemen is a strifetorn and war-torn country on the verge of total collapse and territorial disintegration. Actually this country is being considered as a battlefield for variety of internal hostile factions and many opportunist foreign forces. According to some European and American States, it is believed that certain terrorist gangs such as Da'esh and Al-Qaida are actively engaged in terrorist operations in this territory and should be considered as imminent threat to peace and security of Yemen. UN Security Council is strongly concerned and through so many resolutions expresses its alarm over large-scale famine and ongoing attacks on civilians and individuals, kidnappings, abuse of women and conflict related sexual violence, illicit transfer of weaponry and misuses of weapons.

# 2. Research Question and Hypothesis

Concerning the historical roots of Yemen war, the essential question of the research is as follows: "do we find any intrinsic cultural element in the mentality of Yemenis as being one of the major causes of this sectarian war?" Regarding the foreign interferences, the basic question of the research is as follows: "which States or countries have had an interference in the Yemen war, so that actually they could be subjected to the international responsibility"? The first hypothesis under consideration in this article is that, in Yemen tribal affiliation is an essential component of social identity and it continues to be as an important element of political alignment. The second hypothesis being analyzed in this article is that, foreign interferences, particularly the US government military intervention in Yemen during Trump's presidency, have had a catastrophic consequence in the fate of this poor country.

# 3. Research Findings and Analysis

## 3.1. The Origin and Historical Roots of Yemen War

By the early 1800s, Britain was desperate to find a refueling port at the far end of the Arabian Peninsula where the steam ships could replenish their coal containers in their way from Britain to the India.

Therefore in 1837, the British Companies tried to strike a deal with the Aden's Sultan, to purchase Aden's harbors. They succeeded but for decades their crews and guards were targets of Yemenis tribal rebels. Resisting these attacks, they

continued to expand the sphere of Britain's influence at the southern parts of Yemen. The following decades foreigners were vying with each other to gain more footholds in the southern parts of Yemen (Dresch, 2000: 6).

While in 1849, the tribal attackers of the northern parts of Yemen were fighting against the Ottoman's influence, backup forces of Ottoman army from Egypt paved the way for the victory of Ottoman Sultan in 1872 to govern Sanaa and northern parts of Yemen. However, the tribal fighters of the northern and north-eastern parts of Yemen continued to fight the Ottoman colonization. Of all the Yemenis tribes, Yemen's northern highland Zaydi tribes were the most fervent rebels against outsiders influence. Their leader Imam Yahya was of the view that Zaydis should rule Yemen and establish the shari'a (Clark, 2010: 44)

Some historians argue that Zaydism (the faith of Zaydi tribes living at the northern parts of Yemen) is a denomination of Shi'a (madhab), whilst Shi'a (madhab) is based on the intellectual ruling of twelve Imams in its entirety (descendants of the Prophet). Therefore any sect who doesn't believe in this entirety, cannot be called Shi'a.

Zaydis believe that after fourth Shi'a Imam (Imam Zain Al-abidin) his younger son Zayd should be considered as the fifth and final Imam.

Albeit the fact that certain historical documents show that the Zaydi sect has been created in reverence of Zayd's aborted revolt against the Caliph's tyranny in 720s AD, they differ fundamentally from Shi'a (madhab) in that Zaydis don't believe in the supernatural power of Shi'a twelve Imams and they don't believe but in four Imams of twelve Imams, notwithstanding the fact that they consider them as ordinary rulers. Moreover it is argued that practically Zaydi fiqh is similar to the Hannafi school of Sunni Islamic jurisprudence.

Tribal affiliation has been the most distinctive characteristic of socio-political life in the Arabian Peninsula. While Yemen's history in particular has been plagued by rival tribal fights for the last two millennia, historical roots of these nomadic leagues go back well into the first millennium B.C. These tribal rivalries and disputes continue to serve as a pretext to the foreign interferences (Dresch, 1989: 229).

Imam Yahya toiled hardly to subdue the tribe's rivalry and their internecine struggles. He began a series of negotiations with Yemeni sheikhs about the conduct of the tribesmen concerning the security of innocent civilians and the lootings which were happening incessantly. He also tried to put an end to the mayhem reigning the northern parts of Yemen, but the pressure from the Ottoman troop's side was unbearable.

The northern Yemen's tribe's warriors continued to fight against the Ottoman troops. In 1905 fresh Ottoman backup forces were sent to Sana'a, there are reports of besieges, atrocities and protracted famines of innocent civilians (Zabara'h, 1929).

#### 3.2. Yemen after the End of WW I

#### 3.2.1. North Yemen

The defeat of Central Powers ended WWI in 1918 brought with itself the collapse of the Ottoman Empire.

The Ottoman Empire abandoned its colonial territories in the Middle East and withdrew its troops from the northern parts of Yemen. This in turn gave an especially strengthening momentum to the Zaydi movement (Kuhn, 2005). Zaydi Imamate became the sole governing power of the northern parts of Yemen and declared northern Yemen an independent sovereign State.

Imam Yahya apart being a ruler (a one-man government), considered himself as a father of the north Yemen tribes, although certain tribes were politically reluctant to subject themselves to his government (e.g. al-Idrisi clans of Asir region). His opponents tried hard to ruin his political prestige and to smear his fame but with no success.

Obviously many of his opponents were supported by foreigners, notably by Judaist groups and clandestine Hebrew sects who were ardently opposed to any development and progress of Arabian Peninsula. Imam Yahya proclaimed the Mutawakkilit Kingdom of Yemen in 1926, also known as Kingdom of Yemen, and gained certain international recognitions.

Whilst in the northern parts of Peninsula, with the withdrawal of Ottoman troops at the end of WWI, Ibn Saud (Abdulaziz bin Abdul Rahman Al Saud) took control of certain parts of Arabian Peninsula including Nejd and Hejaz and established the Saudi Arabian Kingdom in 1932.

As the first Saudi King, he ordered the Crown Prince to take control of some disputed areas, located at the southern parts of Peninsula, to put an end to Imam Yahya's influence in these parts. With the material helps of Britain, the Saudi Arabia declared war on Yemen in 1934. The Saudi forces advanced quickly and by April 18, 1934 the press reported Saudi advances on all fronts, including Hodeida. But Imam Yahya's forces were advancing toward Riyadh with 200,000 men.

Consequently the peace negotiations began on May 12, 1934, soon a treaty of peace (Treaty of Taif) was signed between the King of Saudi and Imam Yahya, by which a twenty years ceasefire between two countries was guaranteed and the Asir region was annexed to the Saudi Arabia's territory (Kostiner, 1993: 172).

#### 3.2.2. South Yemen

Concerning southern territories, according to some historians South Yemen for ages has been a territory of strife between different religious factions, especially during the Abbasid Caliphate (Stooky, 1982: 22), but in reality given the advantageous situation of South Yemen's ports, historically South Yemen had been a berth of civilization in the Arabian Peninsula and a centre of trade for ancient merchants. It is from these ports that the livelihood of the whole Arabian Peninsula was supplied.

During 1830s, Muhammad Ali Pasha, famed Ottoman Governor for Egypt tried to advance his troops toward Southern Yemen( Al-Seyyid et al., 1984: 196-203). While Britain's east Indian Companies couldn't afford to lose Eden's harbors as coaling stations for their steamers. They transferred more Indian-Britain troops from India to fight against the Ottoman-Egypt invasion of South Yemen.

The following decades Britain's Companies and merchants succeeded in their efforts to conclude certain protectorate treaties with the South Yemen tribe's leaders and local governors to protect them from the North Yemen fighters and outsider's invasions and to assure their own vital commercial interests in their mercantile ventures from Britain to India.

Following the collapse of Ottoman Empire after the defeat of Central powers in WWI, the situation in the Middle East territories changed to the benefit of France and Britain. Albeit the extension of Franco-Britain power in the region till the Second World War, with a closer look at the status of South Yemen, we notice that only the Aden's harbors localities were kept under the Britain Protectorate status. Although this protectorate status of Aden's harbors were rather of a mercantile nature, therefore the leaders and rulers (sultans, sheikhs and imams) of different provinces of South Yemen enjoyed certain independence and international legal personality.

This was partly due to the harsh and arid climate of the South Yemen with an oppressive hot wind during eight months of the year. On the other hand, the fact that the European forces could not find any remedy to the commandos like raids of the tribesmen fighters who morally could not tolerate the foreigner's interference in their country. Furthermore, sectarian fights and attacks against foreigners who were meddling with Yemenis lives and territories were in the Yemenis tribesmen blood since the first millennium.

For ages, Yemenis southern tribes with various Islamic denominations have fought with each other and sometimes with foreign invaders. Also historically we find the traces of many internecine wars between different sheikhs and rulers, and their followers in this part of Yemen.

All these factors worked together to create a situation where the Britain overseas companies (e.g. East India Co.) found themselves in very difficult circumstances which led to the purchase of Aden's harbors concession from the local sheikhs and Imams after the WWI (Stookey, 1982: 35).

During 1930s and 40s Britain Colonial Office took certain elaborated initiatives, by instituting for instance executive councils and legislative councils, to establish a unified front against the north Yemen rebels and to appease the south Yemen provinces Sultans' influences in the Aden's executive administration, but with only a meager result.

Whilst at the end of WWII, the political atmosphere changed in South Yemen drastically to the detriment of Britain Colonial Office, where the Yemen's tribesmen looked upon them as thieves and oppressors.

#### 3.3. Yemen after the End of WW II

In 1958 Egypt and Syria merged to create the United Arab Republic, which with North Yemen adhesion to the federation it was called United Arab States. The following years the South Yemen tribesmen and rebels were receiving arms and ammunitions from this federation. On July 26, 1956 when the Egypt President Gamal Abdul Nasser nationalized the Suez Canal, his victorious influence spread in the whole Arab World and the activities of the anti-colonialist movements in the South Yemen provinces escalated swiftly (Kostiner, 1984: 1-10).

The following years, social unrest was predominant in the whole region. Many political groups, parties and factions with many conflicting ideological background were formed. These rivals were trying ardently to attract more followers and more members from the younger generation and tribesmen warriors. More importantly the members of these parties and factions were armed, therefore to defend themselves the innocent civilian people too were obliged to take arms. Consequently, social order and peace lost its sense in South Yemen during the 1960s.

Via a' vis this situation, the UN Committee on Colonialism held hearing on South Yemen in 1963. The Committee voted in favor of South Yemen independence. On December 11, 1963, the General Assembly adopted a resolution calling for immediate withdrawal of Britain from South Yemen and a free and fair election (similar to a referendum) for the institution of an independent government (G.A. Res., 1963).

This was a time when the North Yemen too was in turmoil similar to that of South Yemen. When Imam Yahya was assassinated by his opponents (e.g. Al-Waziri's clan, Bani Murad clan) in 1948 one of the Waziri's men was proclaimed as new Imam, but soon Imam Yahya's son Ahmed bin Yahya besieged the Capital and successfully succeeded his father and reigned the North Yemen for fourteen years.

# 3.4. Egypt and Britain interferences in Yemen civil war

In 1962 Yahya's ruling clan (so-called Hamidaddin Dynasty or Mutawakkilite Kingdom) was deposed by a coup d'etat by the revolutionary republican officers led by Abdullah al-Sallal. While the revolutionary republicans were supported by Nasserist Egypt who sought to establish a Yemen Arab Republic were struggling with the royalists supported by Jordan and Saudi Arabia, this conundrum escalated into a civil war in the North Yemen.

Absurdly this may seem, in one hand we notice the Israel's support for the royalists and on the other the former Soviet Union's support for the republicans in this parched part of the world. Whereas to strengthen the revolutionary republican officers position, the Egyptian President Gamal Abdul Nasser supported the republicans with as many as 70,000 Egyptian troops and weapons (Orkaby, 2017: 56). In this chaotic situation different tribes with different leaders (sheikhs, imams, sultans) some pro-royalist some others pro-republican stood up

to fight with each other. This was a plain civil war spreading out over the whole area

Against this background, Britain refused to execute the UN General Assembly Resolution of 1963 adopted for the South Yemen situation.

The complete mayhem caused by the civil war led to a dire economic situation. Subtly the devotional and pious impulse of the uprising – against tyranny and foreign interferences – drifted toward more mundane necessities of the Yemenis life.

Whereas the youngsters both from the northern highlands and the southern parts of Yemen were attracted to more intellectual way of life than to mere traditional tribalism, traveled to Beirut and Cairo where they could find peace and moral resilience beside their daily job. They were joined by some other young Yemenis who had traveled to Beirut or Cairo for higher education.

This was a time when some so-called intellectual movements (such as National Liberation Front, NLF or Arab Nationalist Movement, ANM for instance) were trying to assert certain wayward and bogus interpretations of Islamic principles to push these youngsters toward Marxism.

In the beginning the revolutionary parties were behaving gently toward the innocent civilian people, then the revolutionary violence escalated. By way of confiscating people's lands and other properties at gunpoint the NLF members imposed themselves upon Yemeni people.

The atmosphere in South Yemen was very tense and hostile, members of political parties and other groups were armed, confronting Britain's refusal to execute the UN General Assembly's resolution, they began to fight with the foreigners and with each other as well. The shootings, explosions, targeted assassinations (particularly against British subjects) and other military activities intensified and so did the casualties. At the local level, discretionary execution of tribesmen and activists, and land confiscations with other properties by NLF members escalated dramatically.

By 1966 the NLF members were exercising total control over South Yemen (Stookey, 1982: 63).

In 1967 facing such a hostile atmosphere, the British Government concluded to withdraw its forces and to put an end to Britain presence in Aden, the same year the British subjects evacuated Aden under fire and the independent People's Democratic Republic of South Yemen was established. Composed mainly of the NLF members, the new government was heir to a tumultuous society tending toward havoc. It began to wield a socialist kind of ruling with certain derisory plans of reforms, pretended to improve the living conditions of the nation, whilst they worsened the situation and the lower parts of Yemenis societies became more vulnerable and the insecurity spread over the whole area.

In 1969 they turned toward the former Soviet Union, becoming the only communist Arab state in the Islamic world.

The North Yemenis (Yemen Arab Republic - YAR) were much more comfortable compared to the South Yemenis, the northern tribes leaders (mostly

sheikhs) were brought into the National Assembly and the Consultative Council (Dresch, 1989: 261). But conspiracy, political intrigues and foreign interventions continued to play a harmful role in the region and marred the friendly relations between the two governments (governments of Yemen Arab Republic and People's Democratic Republic of South Yemen).

Two destructive Yemenite Wars (the first one in 1972 and the second in 1979) confronted these two nations, while the Cairo Agreement of October 28, 1972 and the Kuwait Agreement of March 30, 1979 between two governments were crafted to bring a permanent unification between two parts of Yemen. Official unification took place in 1990 but four years later another civil war (between northern pro-union forces and southern socialist separatist forces) postponed the unification process.

## 3.5. Saudi Arabia's and Iran's Stances on Yemen War

When the opponents of pro-unionists, radical factions of South Yemen noticed the landslide victory of north highlanders in the Parliamentary election for the united Republic of Yemen's Parliament, they became frustrated and began to welsh on their commitments. They seceded and proclaimed the institution of the Democratic Republic of Yemen for the southern part of the country in 1994. This time, to smear Iran's and Saudi Arabia's public image and prestige, fascism began to concoct another scenario, by putting forward a phony character pretending falsely to be educated in Iran and backed by Iranian government (Hussein Badreddin al-Houthi of Zaydi sect ). The so-called Houthi movement fraudulently pretending to be a Shi'a Islamist, attacks Saudi Arabia's territory with sophisticated arms (mainly supplied by clandestine Hebrew sects), putting Iran and Saudi Arabia against each other. They dragged the government of Saudi Arabia into an undefined war, not knowing who's fighting who. Meanwhile the partisan media's one-sided reports set off an immense brouhaha against Iranian government, alleging the latter's involvement in the Houthi's operations in the region, ruining Iranian government's standing in the international sphere, concurrently the same media lambaste Saudi Arabia's government on account of violation of international law. The UN Panel of Experts on Yemen after months of backbreaking toil in the region in search of the reality of this undefined war submitted its final report to the Security Council on January 25, 2021. In this report there is no sign of allegation about the Iranian government's involvement in the Houthis operations in Yemen, instead it affirms assistances and the interferences of certain individuals and entities of a private nature from Iran (Final Report of UN Panel, 2021). The relevant part of the report reads as follows:

"An increasing body of evidences suggest that individuals or entities in the Islamic Republic of Iran, supply significant volumes of weapons and components to the Houthis."

Notwithstanding the falsity/veracity of this finding, the UN Security Council having examined the Panel's final report, in its Resolution 2564(2021), urges all Member States to ensure full cooperation with the Panel of Experts and expresses

great concern over famine and devastating situation (including sexual related violence and kidnapping) of the innocent civilian people of Yemen.

## 3.6. US Interference in Yemen

The military intervention of Trump's lawless administration in Yemen was another blow to the international law and the flickering democracy of American society. Under the pretext of combating global terrorism, Trump designated Houthis as a "foreign terrorist organization" and a "specially designated global terrorist" entity (US Congress, 2019) paving the way to his military operations in Yemen, hitting with weapons of mass destruction not the phantomlike Houthi members but the innocent civilian people. While in fact the Houthi movement is not a terrorist entity of a global stature, rather a local fighter at a wrong side. Contrary to the fundamental principles of international law, Trump's lawless administration by deploying American troops in Yemen and killing thousands of civilian Yemenis, has created one of the world's worst humanitarian crises. They also tried in vain to accuse Islamic Republic of Iran of meddling in Yemen's internal affairs – certain partisan media too followed suit – but they didn't find a single concrete evidence to support their false allegation.

# 3.6.1. A façade called "Saudi-Led Coalition"

Houthis after having ousted the Yemen's president Mansour Hadi in 2015, began to attack Saudi Arabia's territory. The Saudi government reaction against these attacks at first was a mild counter-offensive, but the fascist elements in the region forced this government to take more hostile stance against Houthis. The outcome of this change was the formation of a coalition so-called "Saudi led coalition" in which the US government played a proxy military role striking Houthis strong holds in North Yemen and South Yemen as well, causing widespread global criticism (Guidero et al., 2019: 88). As Trump administration was aligned with the fascist elements in the region, therefore the coalition (i.e. Saudi led coalition) became a mere façade serving the war mongering gangs.

# 3.6.2. Trump's demagogical craft in Yemen: "Riyadh Agreement"

To consolidate its foothold in Yemen, Trump lawless administration concocted another ridiculous theme, "Riyadh Agreement", a mere imposition on Saudi Arabia in which the cursed fascist intention is salient: "disintegration of Yemen's territory". The paragraph eight of this agreement reads as follows:

"Joining the Southern Transitional Council in a government delegation to discuss the final political solution to end the coup staged by the Iranian government-backed terrorist Houthi militia."

Ironically contrary to what is expressed in this agreement, the ousting of president Hadi was not due to a coup d'Etat but rather in harmony with Arab Spring and in response to corruption, in the midst of Yemenis mass protest against

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his economic policies he was forced to resign. Power struggle between different rival factions too could be asserted as a decisive cause. Iranian government had nothing to do with Yemenis internal affairs. With a closer look at this deed called "Riyadh Agreement" we notice that it is crafted not to establish a durable peace between Saudi Arabia and Yemen, but rather to disintegrate Yemen and open all possible avenues for foreign interferences for an undetermined period of time (particularly for Trump's military interventions), disregarding the two nations earnest desire for a durable peace in the region. Indeed this agreement should be qualified as a demagogical imposition of Trump administration on Saudi Arabia

## 4. Discussion and Conclusion

Professor Guidero and Professor Carter Hallwart in their common work argue that the legal basis for intervening in a sovereign state's affairs for humanitarian purposes is both murky and contested (Guidero et al., 2019: 16). While Professor Goodman in his article asserts that the main obstacle to an internationally recognized right of humanitarian intervention is the concern that aggressive states would use the pretext of humanitarianism to launch wars for ulterior motives (Goodman, 2004: 32). Still less, in a situation where there is no humanitarian pretext but only subjective notion of fighting against terrorism, as it is the case of Yemen where foreign opportunist governments disguise their real intentions while they pretend to fight global terrorism or they put forward the need for humanitarian interference, it could not be easy to camouflage the real objectives of the aggressive or lawless states. It is crucial to remind that in the history of Yemen we don't find any terrorist movement against neutral states, what we find is either tribal fighting out of nomadic rivalry or fighting against colonial forces. Seen from this perspective the military intervention of US government during Trump's presidency loses its legal foundation even from the international authorities' point of view. For instance, regarding the NATO intervention in former Yugoslavia in 1999, Kofi Annan, former UN Secretary General, declared that the use of force could be considered as a legitimate method to ensure international peace and security when diplomacy fails and the considered military intervention is approved by the Security Council (Annan, 1999). This esteemed statement of Dr. Kofi Annan read on par with Article 33 of the UN Charter and Articles 11 and 12 of the League of Nations Covenant uphold the legal concept that diplomacy as a prerequisite for any military intervention in international sphere has become not only a treaty law principle but also a "jus cogen" norm of international law and international relations. If we accept this axiom as posited, then it is plausible to conclude that the US government during Trump presidency has acted aggressively and contrary to the fundamental principles of international law. Obviously the sectarian war in Yemen has its deep roots in the history of this disadvantaged country. For ages the internecine conflicts between different Islamic denominations and their sheikh leaders and also foreign interventions have taken their toll on the Yemeni nation, a nation deprived of all necessary means of life and a durable peace. Today this nation is confronted with so many

plights with no immediate remedy on the horizon. Although racketeering and economic profiteering of Yemen's own bandits and pirates have had a decisive role in the escalation of fighting and its impact on the innocent civilian people of Yemen, actually all parties (including the United Arab Emirates, by training the Southern Transitional Council's military members and supplying sophisticated weaponry to them) continue to commit gross violation of international law and its fundamental principles, international humanitarian law, human rights law and international environmental law.

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