

# NATIONAL COUNCIL ON U.S.-ARAB RELATIONS

## CONGRESSIONAL BRIEFING SERIES

### ***YEMEN HEADLINED: CONTEMPORARY MYTHS AND EMPIRICAL REALITIES***

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***Moderator:***

**Dr. John Duke Anthony**- Founding President and CEO, National Council on U.S.-Arab Relations; former Fulbright Fellow in the People's Democratic Republic of Yemen; and, one of two Americans to have served as an official observer for all four of Yemen's presidential and parliamentary elections

***Speakers:***

**Ambassador Barbara Bodine**- Lecturer of Public Affairs and Diplomat in Residence, Princeton University and former U.S. Ambassador to Yemen

**Dr. Christopher Boucek**- Associate in the Middle East Program, Carnegie Endowment for International Peace.

**Mr. Gregory Johnsen**- Ph.D. Candidate, Princeton University; Co-Founder, Waq al-Waq: Islam and Insurgency in Yemen Blog; and former Fulbright and American Institute for Yemen Studies Fellow in Yemen

**Ambassador James A. Larocco**- Near East and South Asia Center for Strategic Studies, National Defense University, U.S. Department of Defense and former Principal Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for the Near East

***Commentator:***

**Dr. Mustafa Alani** – Senior Advisor and Research Program Director in Security and Terrorism Studies at the Gulf Research Center in Dubai, United Arab Emirates.

## **Anthony**

We're focusing on this particular topic today for all the obvious reasons. It continues to be in the news, but so many people who are writing about what they are reading or describing what they see on television have never been to Yemen. Also, many of them, perhaps as recently as twenty years ago, did not know whether Yemen was animal, vegetable, or mineral. We're playing catch up ball here, and this afternoon is an effort to increase the level of knowledge and understanding with appropriate information and insight. We have a team of five extraordinary people; we have two that have been career diplomats for the United States serving in the region. They also continue to serve regarding these issues. And, we have two upcoming scholars. They have already proven their scholarly worth, but they are a couple of decades younger than the seasoned ones here. My job here is to put this [subject] in terms of the context and background and perspective as to why Yemen is so unique among the Arab countries, those in the Middle East and those in the Islamic world.

Next month will be my fortieth year going to Yemen, living there and doing research there and trying to be a better more knowledgeable person about it here. The country, let's be frank, is massively poor in many of its components but it is massively and pervasively rich in terms of culture, in terms of history, in terms of architecture. It's a nation of builders and it's rich poetically. Though it may not seem so given the focus of today's emphasis, it is also rich in terms of the history of its systems of government and it's political dynamics.

Ponder the following, and I think you will be able to infer why there are so few books in the English language written by Westerners on the dynamics and systems of governance of the country. Less than half a century ago, it was Great Britain's only crown colony in the Arab world. So when people talk about British colonialism in the Arab world there was only one colony, it was Aden, eight square miles. Great Britain divested itself of that [territory] in November of 1967. All of the other imperial relationships were something quite different in format, in structure, and in name as well.

In addition to that small little outpost in Arabia, there was a vast hinterland broken in to two administrative areas, one called the western Aden protectorate and another called the eastern Aden protectorate. In those two there were a least four sultanates, and there was one sharifdom. As well, in terms of Aden, there was the Aden Trade Union Congress (ATUC). Now this was the most non-violent, well-organized, effective and well-led trade union movement to come out of the Arab East. It was rivaled only by the ones in Tunisia and Morocco in the West. It also served as an outpost of empire, for the British,

for the Soviets, and for a small chapter you can say, not empire, in terms of Egypt. Egypt had some seventy to eighty thousand soldiers in Yemen during the 1960s when the Imamate was overthrown and the Republic of Yemen began. It has also been an actor in terms of international commerce and maritime trade because of Aden's port. Up until the 1950s Aden's port was in the top five every single year in terms of ships calling and tonnage handled. If Herodotus' much quoted statement about Egypt had some truth, that Egypt is the gift of the Nile, then after 1869 certainly Aden was the gift of the Suez Canal.

It's been rich too in terms of its political parties. This is the only country in the Arab world and in history that once had a portion of its territory controlled by a Marxist-Leninist oriented regime: The People's Democratic Republic of Yemen. Next year will be the fortieth year since I was the first and only American Fulbright Fellow in the People's Democratic Republic of Yemen. My wife and I were the only two Americans that they allowed in the country in order to conduct field research. We've been going back ever since, and I am always happy to return there. But it's not just this aspect of Yemen that is rich; it is rich in terms of its human resources . . . its people. You can find Yemenis throughout all of Arab North Africa, throughout Egypt, throughout the Levant, throughout the fertile crescent, throughout Gulf Cooperation Council countries, in large numbers in places like Jeddah, for example, but equally so in Southeast Asia. In Indonesia, up until about fifteen years ago, the Prime Minister, the Minister of Education, the Minister of Interior, the Foreign Minister and the Governor of Jakarta all counted their roots as coming from Yemen. And, that was true in Malaysia as well.

So to begin with we have Ambassador Barbara Bodine putting us into a more recent context. We are looking for analysis and assessments and to leave this session more knowledgeable and informed than when we began. Barbara Bodine.

### **Bodine**

I want to thank you all for coming today. Yemen is a unique and interesting little country, not so little really, whose profile in this town [Washington, D.C.] has a tendency to wax and wane. It is either almost the center of the universe in terms of our security concerns, or, as John put it, people aren't sure whether it's animal, vegetable, or mineral. My history with Yemen goes back to the part when at least there were two Yemens, not three, and I congratulate John and staff for trying to see if we can get what we need to know about Yemen into an hour and a half.

Much of the history John provided was certainly accurate, but it tended to be a little Aden-centric. Yes Aden was the only crown colony. It is one of the most beautiful, natural harbors in the world. But the center of gravity, if you like, in Yemen, is what used to be North Yemen. It's where the bulk of the population lives, and it is to an extent where the bulk of the problems and issues reside. What was once North Yemen, while the South was either a British colony or British protectorate, was one of the last medieval theocracies - a system of government the North Yemenis were only able to get rid of in the 1960s. But I think it is important to remember these three different histories to what we now think of as Yemen. One part, the northern portion, was a medieval theocracy until the 1960s, only about fifty years ago. Aden was a British crown colony and then in some ways a Soviet crown colony. Then there were the protectorates off to the East, which operated in a very traditional manner. What Yemen has been trying to do since 1990 is to craft these three very different histories into one functioning state.

I don't think anybody, including any Yemeni I know, would say this has been an overwhelming success at this point. Yemen is often described as the always "almost failing state." It has been the always almost failing state for at least the thirty years that I have been working with it. So the two questions are: "Why is Yemen always an almost failing state?" and the second one would be "Why hasn't it [failed]?" It is always almost failing because of landslides, because of the poverty that John mentioned. It is a country devoid of natural resources in any meaningful way except for her people. It is rugged in a way such that the only country that would be analogous in American experience right now would be Afghanistan. It has almost every physical and economic strike against it. What it has going for it, and I think what has held it together, and this is a point we need to remember, is that Yemen is markedly different from the simple templates that people bring up in the media and in policy discussions, certainly in the press as I've been reading it: trying to make a comparison to Iraq; trying to make a comparison to Afghanistan; trying to make a comparison to Somalia. In contrast, let's look at what actually distinguishes Yemen from these other states and what may keep it from failing. One is that there is a very strong sense of national identity. One of the things that struck me during the four years I was Ambassador was that if I went up to Sana'a, and I did, off to Socotra, off to Mah'rah, into Marib or any place else that I visited was that, although you could certainly see the different and long history of Yemen in the face of the Yemenis, there was very strong acceptance of themselves, a self-identification as Yemenis and a very strong acceptance of the other guy as a Yemeni.

So the people in Sana'a accepted the people in Socotra, who accepted the people in Aden and on and on. There's a very strong national identity, which you don't normally have in a failed state. They do not have the sectarian divisions that we identify with Iraq. Yes

there are Zaydis, and yes there are Shafa'is, but there is not that kind of sectarian divide. When there were two Yemens, a goodly portion of the members of the South Yemen (PDRY) cabinet, even under Soviet influence, were northerners. A goodly portion in the North were southerners. It is a country where there has been great mobility and fluidity of population. [Sound of a cell phone ringing in the audience.] (And they did get cell phones while I was there, unfortunately.) So Yemen has centripetal forces as well as centrifugal forces, and I think we need to focus on those.

A couple of conventional lessons get thrown out when talking about Yemen: one is that Yemen in general and President Ali Abdallah [Saleh] muddle through. Another one I heard recently is that Ali Abdallah is only the Mayor of Sana'a, and a third, of course, is that Yemen is a tribal society and cannot possibly function as a centralized state and again, therefore, is doomed to fail.

Now I'll comment briefly on a couple of these as a set up to the rest of the panel. Does the President and does Yemen muddle through? Yes, I think that would probably be the best description of how they handle things. I would say also that most politicians muddle through. Unless we are getting back to tsarist policies, most politicians, to the extent that they understand that they are dealing with multiple power centers in a broad geographic area, are going to muddle through. If I was going to use an analogy, I would probably describe a juggler with plates, and while every plate is up there spinning not every plate is spinning at its optimum speed at all times, and the juggler is not able to give every plate their preferred level of attention. The question is: Are there too many plates, and can he keep them all going so that they don't crash? So far, yes; the question will always be will there be one more plate or will there be outside forces or outside interference that trips up the juggler or starts knocking the plates down. But the muddling through is probably how Yemen will continue to survive politically. It is a country made up of a number of power centers, economic centers, and social centers and they are going to have to be juggled constantly.

Is the government only a mayoralty and not a central government? I'm not sure I fully agree with that. I think there is what my Embassy once described as "primordial federalism." I suppose a social scientist would call it a kind of primordial decentralization. But there is an understanding that the central government has a certain role, providing basic services, providing legitimacy, but that the day to day operation at the local level is left to local political parties. If I was going to make an analogy I would probably mention something like Montana. There isn't really a question of the sovereignty of the state; there isn't a fundamental challenge to the government. There is a very strong sense that we can take care of our own business; that we will take care of our

own services. The idea that these outer edges have deeply held secessionist views I don't think is accurate.

One example I would give is that while I was there we did go through the period of tribal kidnappings. In trying to explain the kidnappings to Washington, it was always very interesting to have to say that this is not an attempt to extort money; this is not the same kind of kidnapping that we have seen in Colombia. It wasn't even an effort to push the government out; it was actually an effort to try to bring the government in. What they were demanding was more government service, more government attention . . . not less. That's counter-intuitive to what everyone in Washington was thinking. Is it a tribal society? It is, but I'd probably prefer to call it clan or familial. It is relationships that everyone in the government has. Far from being unusual, these relationships are expected, and we need to understand this mindset. Again, I have heard and read recently that you have the tribes versus Sana'a; you have the tribes versus the central government. I think this shows a lack of appreciation for how the social dynamic there operates. Everybody is tribal, and everybody in some ways a part of the government. To get into a simplistic tribal definition of Yemeni society could lead us very wrongly into an idea that we could set up something like the Sons of Iraq. And I think that would be disastrous for both Yemen and for us.

What should we be doing broadly? I am going to leave it to my colleague Ambassador Larocco to get into specifics. But, I would say on balance the best role that we could play, and the one that from my most recent trip to Yemen is certainly what I heard, is to find ways to assist the young government and to work with the central government. Particularly, we need to work with them on how you extend the legitimacy of the state and the legitimacy of a government. I don't mean this solely in terms of extending the legitimacy of Ali Abdullah or any other particular person or party, but of the government and of the state more broadly. There is a difference between extending the authority of the state versus extending primarily military presence and security. What I'm talking about is legitimacy, your basic social services, the sense that the state is somehow involved. I listened to a gentleman on the radio today talking about what we are trying to do in Afghanistan. I think we all know what we did and did not do in Iraq, and I think what we need to do is take many of the lessons on post-conflict reconstruction in Iraq and Afghanistan and try to apply them before we get to a crisis, before we get to a failed state in Yemen, using all the various tools. I am going to stop there, in order to leave time for my colleagues.

**Anthony**

Thank you Barbara, next is Dr. Christopher Boucek.

**Boucek**

Thank you very much, I would like to thank the National Council for the opportunity to come out and talk to you all. Thanks especially to all of you for showing up to talk about Yemen, which is increasingly a more and more important subject for us to discuss. I'd like to start out by relating a conversation I had last week with someone who made the point that what's going on Yemen right now, we've seen this movie before and we know how it ends and we're actually watching it right now. I think this is probably a very scary thing to think about, and I guess I should say I am sorry because every conversation I have about Yemen I end up getting depressed. So, I'd like to apologize to all of you as I am sure this is going to be a little bit more of a downer than I'd like it to be.

I think people understand why Yemen is a priority. The more discussions I have with national security and foreign policy people they talk about Yemen as being second only to Afghanistan and Pakistan in terms of national priority for terrorism and security. While I think terrorism and security is a very important topic, one that Greg is going to get into in much greater detail, I don't think that terrorism and security should be the primary focus for our thinking on Yemen. If there are no easy or no good options right now, there are fewer, fewer and worse options as we look forward. I think that most people understand what we want to avoid in Yemen: we want to avoid a state failure, a state collapse. However, I don't know anybody who can tell you what state failure in Yemen looks like or what the events or event will be that will trigger that. So this kind of leaves an important dilemma where coming up with descriptive policy measures to address what we don't know is even more complicated. As part of this failed state narrative I think it is important to point out that while obviously Yemen is a very weak state there is a strong society. I think Ambassador Bodine did a good a job of laying that out.

I think that we don't understand the power of tribal governments or how tribal systems operate. One of the things that is especially concerning to me, looking forward, is the collapse of tribal government systems because they are not working the way they used to. When we look at how the government in Sana'a has ruled through these politics of personal relationships, through corruption, through patronage, it's further destroying the systems.

I think what I would like to do in the time I have is to talk about basically three intersecting crises that I see in Yemen: economic and demographic, human security, and then hard traditional security. The scary thing is that, as all of us said before, these three major problem areas are going to intersect, and they're going to intersect in the near future. All of these challenges are getting worse, and they are all heading for a trajectory where they intersect.

In the next couple of years Yemen will have to go through a leadership transition, through a process that has yet to be delineated, and there is no clear successor for the current president. Before I get into all these problems I guess I would like to say the challenges that Yemen faces are not unique in the region. Every country in the Middle East is going through these in one way or another. The crisis in Yemen is that they are all coming together at the same time. There is a fear that this will overwhelm the state's capacity to deal. Yemen has a very limited state capacity to deal with more than one problem at a time. What we have seen in the past is that when the government gets preoccupied with one issue it's at the expense of every other issue going on in the country. We see this especially with the civil war in Sa'dah right now. On economic points I would like to start out by saying that Yemen is an economically unviable state at its very base. It has been relying on foreign assistance, and it will always be relying on foreign assistance.

This is probably something that not many people want to hear, but if you think that the government relies on the sale of hydro-carbons, oil, for 75-80% of its income and that it's quickly running out of oil, the situation does not look good. In the past Yemen has produced say, about 450,000 barrels a day, about five years ago. Today they produce about 180,000 [barrels a day], if that much. As global oil prices have fallen Yemen has gotten hit on both sides, selling fewer units per day at fewer dollars per unit. The especially concerning part about all this is that no one has given serious thought to a post-oil economy yet. Yemeni officials talk about liquefying natural gas (LNG), but there is a fear that by the time oil runs out the liquefied natural gas resources will not come on line in time. Moreover the volume of sales will not replace oil sales.

I think when we are talking about economic issues it's important to keep in mind that Yemen is the poorest country in the region. It has about 35% admitted unemployment, which is probably actually much, much higher. For comparison's sake, 35% unemployment is about on par with the Great Depression in the United States. When Yemeni officials discuss this, economic issues are still closely linked to security problems, to demographic development problems, and to a whole host of other issues.

For employment, Yemen will need to become a net labor exporter and there needs to be a way to think in the future about how Yemenis will go abroad to earn money. Yemenis who go abroad and send home money can support on average six or seven Yemenis at home. So there needs to be some process to think about this.

If running out of oil is a sort of cataclysmic thought, then running out of water is even worse. Yemen will be the first country in modern history to run out of water. The water table falls on average several meters in many places, many more in others. About 19 of 21 aquifers in Yemen are not being replenished; some water basins have already collapsed. Yemen is also increasingly extracting fossil water which will never be replenished. If you factor in that the population is set to double in the next twenty years to 40 million Yemenis, triple in three decades to sixty million Yemenis, there are just no more resources to take care of all of this population. There was a study done by Sana'a University, I think, a couple of years ago. Maybe someone on the panel will know more about this than I do. But it was found that 80% of violent conflict in Yemen comes down to water access threats. There is a lot of concern when people talk about conflicts in the future about water access conflicts. We will see this in Yemen. This will be apparent in Yemen before many other places.

I think I would like to shift to talk about the hard security issues, and it's kind of especially sad to me because these are the issue why anyone cares about Yemen in Washington. People care about Yemen because of Al-Qaeda and terrorism. I'm going to let Greg speak to the Al-Qaeda and the Islamist threat, but I'd like to focus on two others: the situation in the south and the war in Sa'dah. Earlier this summer it seemed that the government was especially preoccupied with what was going on in the south. The southern secessionist movement has its roots in the way in which the north has in part governed and the feeling that the south has not gotten its fair share. There is a presumption that the south is not getting fair access to revenues from hydro-carbons, there is this perception that southerners have not had the same access to jobs, to military positions, to pension payments. I think we will see this flare up as soon as the current war in Sa'dah calms down. We will probably get more into the south in the question and answer because I think the war in Sa'dah is a particularly important thing to focus on.

This is now the fifth year of this conflict. The war in Sa'dah started out because of feelings of lack of access, lack of development, feelings that are evident all over the country during the last several years, and it's gone through a period of successive bouts of fighting. At the end of the summer this year in August (2009), the government launched a campaign in Sa'dah, "Operation Scorched Earth", which if ever there was a bad name for what's going on in Sa'dah this is it. The fighting has been especially

indiscriminant. Most often we will see the Yemeni army run out of ammunition, and this is when lulls in the fighting come to bear. When you think about the humanitarian impact there are 175,000 internally displaced people, probably much higher than that.

The war took on an especially sinister turn in the last couple of weeks when Saudi Arabia became an active belligerent in the conflict. There is some lack of clarity about how this exactly happened. There have been reports that Saudis were active on the border for some time; however, on November 4 (2009) the Saudi military became actively involved in the fighting. This is concerning because now the Saudis, as a participant in the conflict, can no longer serve as a mediator as probably some had hoped. It is unclear whether this was a strategic decision to involve the Saudis. It is known that the Yemen military was allowed to transit through Saudi territory before this fighting started. There were some Saudis who were killed, and it is unclear whether this was a decision made to engage Saudi units or whether this was more an example of armed Houthis running into armed Saudis and things happening from there.

I think probably a good place to draw to a close is by talking about this issue of whether or not this is a proxy conflict. There's a lot of discussion in the media about this being a Sunni/Shi'a conflict, about this being an Iran/Saudi proxy conflict. I have never seen anything that convincingly says that the Iranians are officially as a government supporting what is going on in Sa'dah. I'm sure that there is money that comes from Iran; I am sure that there are charitable organizations that raise money that goes to Sa'dah. The Iranian media, I think, as Moustapha [Dr. Mustapha Alani] pointed out yesterday, has obviously been involved in supporting this, especially the Arabic language media. But I have yet to see any evidence as proof of Iranian involvement. There are more than enough guns in Yemen to keep this conflict going. It seems that the Yemeni government has tried a number of ways to legitimize this conflict, and Iran [alleged Iranian involvement] has been the most recent source of that.

The last point I would like to make is: "What this has done to the economy?" I think that this is really the untold story here. This war is destroying the Yemeni economy, and it is accelerating all the other issues I talked about. Foreign currency is being spent [by the Yemeni government] at an alarming rate; there is a budget deficit forecast for next year. Things that cannot be cut like salaries, subsidies, pensions are being cut. All the money that has been pumped in to support this war and the toll that it has had on the enemy military is cataclysmic. All of this money needs to go towards supporting Yemen's development. Instead, it's going to support a war that the Yemen military cannot win and that the Houthis cannot win. What needs to happen is an immediate cessation of violence and an immediate move for mediation. I think on that point I'll stop for Greg.

## Johnsen

Thanks and thanks for coming out. It's a great honor for me to follow Ambassador Bodine and Christopher Boucek who I have been big fans of for quite a while. What I've been tasked with talking about here is Al-Qaeda. But before I get to that, what I wanted to do is essentially just give you my own overview - - I know that Ambassador Bodine has given hers and Chris has given his - - of how I tend to view Yemen right now.

I tend to see Yemen... and I think that the most helpful way to think of it is as three layers of crisis if you will. At the top you have an elite rivalry regarding who's going to succeed President Saleh, the different patronage networks, and so on. This conflict -- or at least how I view this conflict -- is that it's largely going to take place behind closed doors and out of sight. Then below that we have the security challenges that Chris talked about: the Al-Houthi Rebellion, the threat of secession from the south, as well as a resurgent Al-Qaeda threat in the country. These are the threats that I think most of the media tend to focus on. These grab the majority of the headlines, and they will continue to grab the headlines, just given the nature of the threat.

But underlying both of these, and Chris spoke to this a little bit as well, is what I like to think of as a bedrock layer of what might be called structural challenges. This encompasses things like Yemen's rapidly dwindling oil reserves, its nearly depleted water table, chronic unemployment, explosive birthrate, and rampant corruption; you have a laundry list of things. You have an antiquated infrastructure--- you can go on and on. These problems, and I think Chris is spot on in talking about how dangerous they are, have been apparent and they've been dangerous for quite some time. But they have never been an immediate cause of concern for the Yemeni government, which has always been overburdened by more pressing political challenges. So, in Yemen, there is a tendency particularly for the government to kick these problems down the road.

I think that distant problems in Yemen are easily ignored and just pushed off to a vague and fuzzy future. The problem for us now is that we are drawing near to that future, and it's not so vague anymore. I am going to get to Al-Qaeda, but I wanted to say just a couple of words about the elite rivalry because I don't think that's been touched on yet.

In a country where his two immediate predecessors were assassinated within a year of each other, President Ali Abdullah Saleh has survived more than thirty years in power by maintaining a great deal of political dexterity and by surrounding himself with relatives, close confidants, and childhood friends. Ambassador Bodine spoke of this as juggling plates and I think when you read President Saleh's interviews in the Yemeni press, one of

the things that he likes to talk about is “dancing on the heads of snakes.” This is how he claims that he rules Yemen.

But I think that what we are seeing is that both the style and the structure of his rule are now beginning to fracture. Yemen’s waning economic strength means that the President has less money to maintain his own patronage network, as well as to play off different factions against each other as a way of keeping these opposition groups perpetually dependent upon him. Within his own Sanhan tribe, the once strong bonds of loyalty are now starting to show signs of strain. His eldest son and a quartet of nephews appear to be preparing for a post-Saleh scramble for power. While another close relative, General Ali Mohsen al Ahmar, who I think remains the most powerful military commander in the country in charge of the First Armored Division, also is in the mix. I think one of the downsides of the way that President Saleh has tended to govern over the past several years has been by doling out military and intelligence commands to relatives. This tends then to allow these relatives to use these positions almost as an instrument of personal power. Also President Saleh’s efforts, particularly I think in the summer of 2008, to sort of tilt this behind “closed doors” game in favor of his son Ahmed by forcibly retiring some of the well-placed allies of al Ahmar have created a great deal of animosity and anger within the ranks.

Now -- if you expand out a little bit farther this struggle -- this sort of elite rivalry that I talked about isn’t just taking place within the family. There is another traditionally powerful family of ten brothers [the Al-Ahmer family, led by Hameed bin Abdullah bin Hussein Al-Ahmer] that’s looking to turn its political, tribal, and business muscle into power. In the midst of all this sort of familial bickering that we have at the top, and the sort of positioning for power, the country continues to dissolve into the semi-autonomous regions and various rebellions. Over the past several weeks we’ve had different movements starting up in the central plateau area of Ta’izz and Ibb, there’s a movement out in Ma’rib and in the desert, there’s a movement to go along, these are kind of copy cat movements of the southern movements. So you have all these different regional groups that are sort of sensing, whether it’s true or not, they at least perceive it to be true, the weakening of President Saleh. They are essentially trying to poke him and see what it is they can gain from that.

I think that Chris did a very good job talking about the Houthis and the south and so I’ll kind of skip over these and just focus on Al-Qaeda. Let me begin here with a word of caution, I believe we are well past the point of sort of magic missile solutions to the Al-Qaeda problem in Yemen. Al-Qaeda is now much too strong and much too entrenched to be destroyed like it was in 2002 when, I’m sure as you all remember, the U.S.

assassinated Abu Ali al Harithi, in that first phase of the war in 2001-2002 between Al-Qaeda, the Yemeni government and the U.S. government in which I think the latter two cooperated quite well mostly. Al-Qaeda was fighting a largely reactionary war at that point, and I think that that has changed a great deal. I will get into that in just a second.

What I believe to be the cause of this [resurgence of Al-Qaeda] is essentially lapsed vigilance by both the Yemeni and U.S. Governments, which allowed Al-Qaeda to reorganize and rebuild itself up from the ashes. So essentially you have 2001-2002. Then in 2003 there's fighting going on back and forth between the Yemeni Government, the U.S. Government, and Al-Qaeda. The Yemeni and U.S. Government really essentially defeated Al-Qaeda by the end of 2003 with the arrest of Muhammad Hamdi al-Ahdal. From 2003 all the way up through February 2006 we saw very little, almost no Al-Qaeda violence within the country. Part of this is a result of the war in Iraq, of course, where Yemenis who wanted to fight were drawn off to the fighting there. But even more than that there was just a lack of organizational infrastructure within the country for Al-Qaeda to sort of join. That changed in February 2006, what I tend to pick as the starting point for the second phase of the war against Al-Qaeda, when twenty-three Al-Qaeda suspects tunneled out of a political security prison and then walked out the front door of a neighboring mosque to freedom. Among those individuals was a man named Nasir al-Wahayshi, who spent time as an assistant to Bin Laden and fought in the battle of Tora Bora. He eventually was sent across the border into Iran and then was extradited back to Yemen in November of 2003. Along with him was another man, Qasim Yahya al-Raymi who also spent time in Afghanistan and in some of the training camps there. Both of these individuals along with a few others did a very good job of reorganizing and rebuilding Al-Qaeda.

Since that point I tend to think of Al-Qaeda as going through three phases. First, you have this rebuilding phase which took place in 2006 and 2007. You had a dual suicide attack on some oil and gas facilities in Mukalla and Ma'rib in September of 2006. You had a couple of statements put on by Qasim al-Raymi really announcing the reemergence of the organization in June of 2007 and announcing that this individual Nasir al-Wahayshi was the Amir of Al-Qaeda. Right after those statements you have the suicide attack on a group of Spanish tourists out in Ma'rib. Then, at the beginning of 2008, you see the organization move to the next phase which is essentially making itself relevant within Yemen. This is when they start their own bi-monthly journal "*Sada al-Malahim*" which translates roughly to the "*Echo of Battles.*" When they released this journal in January of 2008, they followed this up immediately with a sort of attack on a convoy of Belgian tourists out in Hadramawt, and this campaign of 2008 I tend to analyze as really culminating in the September 2008 assault on the U.S.-Embassy in Sana'a.

Then we move to the next phase, and this is essentially the phase that we are in now: where Al-Qaeda is looking to turn itself from, say, a local chapter of Al-Qaeda into a regional franchise. In doing so it is attempting to demonstrate that it has regional reach, that it can attack from Yemen into Saudi Arabia and into other countries within the Arabian Peninsula. It set this goal for itself in January 2009. This is when two of the former Guantanamo Bay detainees appeared in a video soon after President Obama signed the executive order signifying his desire to close Guantanamo. They announced a sort of merging of the Saudi branches and the Yemeni branches into this group that they now called Al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP). Since then the group has been working to make their rhetoric a reality, and so we see earlier in the summer in August an attempted assassination on Saudi's counter-terrorism chief, Prince Mohammed bin Nayef al Sa'ud. There was another more recent attack that would have involved another Guantanamo Bay detainee, Yusuf al-Shihri that was thwarted by the Saudis. The attacker's will, as well as the will of another Saudi were just posted online in the past couple of days.

In each of these three phases Al-Qaeda has followed a predictable pattern. It's articulated its goals and then it has worked very hard to square its actions to its rhetoric. At the moment Al-Qaeda in Yemen is stronger now than it has ever been in the past. Whether the U.S. realizes it or not, it is in a propaganda war in Yemen with Al-Qaeda, and it's losing, and losing fairly badly. Al-Qaeda's narrative, with the notable exception of carrying out suicide attacks within the country, I think, is broadly popular. Al-Qaeda's managed to put itself on the right side of nearly every issue, whether it's Palestine, whether it's the return of Sheik Mohammed Ali Hassan Al-Moayad, whether it's corruption, whether it's flooding in Hadramawt, whether it's flooding in Jiddah, it has a narrative that I think is quite good.

At the same time U.S. policy towards Yemen has, I think, been characterized by a very dangerous mixture of ignorance and arrogance. The U.S. has continued to insist on seeing Yemen only through the prism of counter-terrorism and this I think has induced exactly the type of results it is hoping to avoid. By focusing on Al-Qaeda to the exclusion of nearly every other threat and by linking most of its aid to this single issue, the United States has almost ensured that Al-Qaeda will always exist. Instead of imploding as some Yemeni analyst would have it, I see the country, if it is going to fail, or even if it doesn't fail, that it's rather going to explode. What I mean by this is that Yemen's problems of today will quickly become Saudi Arabia's problems of tomorrow. I think this is already being foreshadowed by Saudi's involvement in the conflict in the north as well as by the attempted assassination of Mohammed bin Nayef and the other more recent attack.

In the absence of easy or obvious solutions, Yemeni advisors and a surprising number of foreign experts are putting their faith in the country's blind ability to muddle through the multitude of challenges it's going to face over the next several years. This belief, I think, is supported by a very intimate knowledge of the past. Yemenis claim that they have seen much worse and survived. But I believe that such an argument confuses history with analysis. In Yemen, hope, even desperate hope, I don't believe is really a strategy. So on that, depressing note, I'll close.

## **Larocco**

Well I'm going to bring this home. I have to start out, being a professor at NDU (National Defense University), by saying I do not speak on behalf of the Department of Defense, the United States Government, or even my former agency the Department of State, and I find that very liberating. John and I were talking before I came up here, and I have to echo something that he said to me. I made my first visit to Yemen in 1976 when I was a young officer in the Embassy in Jeddah, Saudi Arabia along with Chuck Cecil and I hitched a ride with a wild and crazy ambassador by the name of Tom Pickering. [Editor's Note: The U.S. Embassy in Saudi Arabia opened in Jeddah in 1944. It moved to Riyadh in 1984, at which point Jeddah became a Consulate General.] He was the Ambassador in Jordan, and he said I'm going to drive to Ta'izz and back down the center, and then come back up the coast. I went with him and I lived to tell about it. The one thing I want to echo that John said is that, once you go to Yemen, the people and the country always stay in your heart. It's just absolutely true. When I went back there recently I got that same feeling over and over again.

I made my career in the Foreign Service as a policy manager: give me a policy and I'll make it work. So today I'm going to be very descriptive, and prescriptive, and detailed. Unlike what I do as professor when I am talking to people where English is their second language I am going to speak very fast because I have a lot to say. And I apologize if I do not look at you because I have to look at the notes. Yesterday Iraq . . . today Afghanistan . . . tomorrow Yemen. That's what I hear from the analysts all the time. Unfortunately, yesterday's Iraq is still going to be with us today and tomorrow. Today's Afghanistan will also be with us tomorrow. So, if tomorrow is Yemen, we've got some serious policy choices to make.

In my view this cannot be our struggle. This requires nothing short of major engagement. And, we should start now because the old adage is true on this as it has been for much of my own personal life--- it's pay me now, or pay me later. The costs, as you have heard

from Greg in particular, I think are going to be extremely high in the future. We need to start now. So, I am going to get right into the details. I think the key event we need to look for is that the President of the United States no doubt will be welcoming President Ali Abdullah Saleh to Washington in the not too distant future. I believe that we should have all elements of engagement in place by the time of that visit. There is a lot of work to do, but that is the target. The *suq*, the marketplace, should not open then; it should be closed by then. We must be in a position where we can announce that we are full partners with Yemen.

We must recognize, of course, that Ali Abdullah Saleh's ideas are not in "sync" with ours, but he does see our support as essential. We need, before this visit, a solid set of mutual commitments that serve his and our interests. That is not easy. Again, I'm doing a fly-by here, so I'm not getting into a lot of details. Let's be clear, counter-terrorism (CT) is our overriding concern. But "draining the swamp" is not enough; I was there, I got the t-shirt from 2001-2004 as PDAS (Principal Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for the Near East). The task now is not to drain the swamp of terrorism; the task now is to drain the swamp. That is what needs to be done. And, we have to address all elements to keep that swamped drained and ensure that it never fills up again.

I believe that we need a clear statement by the President when Ali Abdullah Saleh is here [in the United States] about our partnership, and actually there is one! It exists! I came across this remarkable statement by Paul Jones, who is the Deputy Special Representative for Afghanistan and Pakistan, who just this past Monday spoke at the American Enterprise Institute. Get a copy of his speech, and then get to the paragraph that says "Building a New Partnership with Pakistan." It is absolutely freaky. Substitute Yemen and you've got your statement. I am not going to go through it but it is beautiful, read it. [See [http://www.state.gov/s/special\\_rep\\_afghanistan\\_pakistan/133262.htm](http://www.state.gov/s/special_rep_afghanistan_pakistan/133262.htm) for the full text of this speech: "Remarks at the American Enterprise Institute" (December 7, 2009), Paul Jones, Deputy Special Representative for Afghanistan and Pakistan, United States Department of State. The full text of these remarks is also available in the "Yemen Headlined" portion of the National Council on U.S.-Arab Relations website [www.ncusar.org](http://www.ncusar.org).]

Now, CT is our overriding concern, but engagement with the Yemeni people is vital. It was Edward R. Murrow, who many of you here are actually old enough to remember, like me, who said that getting a story out over ten thousand miles is easy; it's the last three feet that count. [Edward R. Murrow was a long-time CBS news broadcaster who served as Director of the United States Information Agency (USIA) under Presidents Kennedy and Johnson from 1961 to 1964.] Getting face to face; it's a very difficult thing

to do. Let me read to you a recent statement by Ambassador [James B.] Smith, the current U.S. Ambassador in Saudi Arabia, which was very bold on his part.

There are unique challenges that we, in our diplomatic presence, face in Saudi Arabia. It is the by-product of what happens when you build walls, because we have been building walls since 9/11 - physical walls. Saudi Arabia has been an unaccompanied post now for five years. So you come on one year rotations: it takes you four months to learn your job, and then you do it for six months, and then you get the hell out. You continue to build walls and fences. You're there to represent the American people to the people of Saudi Arabia, yet you find yourself migrating to only three cities . . . and to single buildings. And that's it!

He's right, and I thought it was bold of him to say that. It's worse in Sana'a . . . been there, seen it.

Now, for those of you from the Hill (Capitol Hill), here is your challenge, here is what I am asking you to do as a bi-partisan effort. We need to have a fast track for Yemenis, and I want you to call this a bi-partisan bill McConnell-Feinstein. That would be wonderful if you could do it. I was part of a McConnell-Feinstein bill once. [In 2004, Senators Mitch McConnell (R-KY) and Diane Feinstein (D-CA) co-sponsored a Concurrent Resolution on Burma.] I would call it "The Last Three Feet." What we need to do is speed up the process of entry and exit visas and Leahy amendments. I could tell you from our NESAC [Near East and South Asia Center at the National Defense University] programs and from so many other people that I talk to, Yemenis can't come because they can't get the visas in time. Some programs end and the visas come in a month later. This is a back log problem, that's all. I am not asking any corners to be cut, but you need to throw in a few more people. Ten million dollars is what we need and the whole backlog of visas, not just for Yemen, but for key countries like Afghanistan and Pakistan will be over. We could bring these people here to do that last three feet. If we can't do it, or if it is difficult to do over there, bring them here.

Secondly, I call for the State Department to announce the Yemen 2000 Initiative, and I will get into more details. When I say Yemen 2000, I think we ought to bring 2000 Yemenis here every year. This is going to require a lot of English language training here, but at the same time we need to bring middle management people who can work on the very issues that Chris and Greg talked about. We need to do that, it's vital.

Engagement with the Saudis. We can't win this without their support and their cooperation in my view, but they won't lead, and they won't be our partner. What we need to have is a notable conversation with them, that is continuous and frank about

keeping the swamp drained and all that that entails. Because they are going to be the victims, there's no question about that. And we need a partner.

Engagement with the international community. It's a knee jerk reaction to go to the World Bank. We've done this over and over again, and it's the wrong way to approach it in my view. We've had pledging conferences in the past that have pledged billions of dollars for Yemen, and it's never been delivered, only a small percentage. What I call for is the creation of a fund of funds; I have seen this work before. A fund of funds is where you have a lead agency, and then you have others come together and they work together. Not under the World Bank lead. In this case, a very good friend of mine by the name of Abdulatif Al-Hamad who is the leader of the Arab Fund [Arab Fund for Economic and Social Development] which is an extraordinary organization in terms of efficiency. If there is a way to do it in Yemen, he will do it. And the other irony, when you think about it, is having a Kuwaiti to do this, but I will not get into that. The fund of funds is the way to go.

So how do we all mobilize our agencies to do this? We have a wonderful team already in place working on counter terrorism, no surprise there - John Brennan and people who work with him and for him at the embassy, General Petraeus, good guys. [John Brennan, Assistant to the President and Deputy National Security Advisor, visited Yemen on March 16, 2009 as part of a visit to the region to discuss continued cooperation between the United States and Yemen in combating terrorism.] Military issues? . . . A lot of tension. I would like to add just one small point on military issues, and again I can speak freely thank God. I do believe that this is a Horn of Africa problem, and I know there are horrendous issues and bloodletting within the administration between the militaries and on the Hill in terms of creating this baby called AFRICOM [United States Africa Command was established in October 2007. Additional information can be found on the Command's website: [www.africom.mil](http://www.africom.mil).] But the Joint Task Force Headquarters, their offices, leadership in the Horn of Africa, in my opinion, for strategic as well as for tactical reasons should be tied to CENTCOM. This is a Horn of Africa problem and it needs to be addressed in that context, with all the resources and all the experience developing best practices that CENTCOM can deliver.

Next, Secretary Clinton is not needed. Please, no new special envoys. We don't need that. Clinton has a very, very strong team at the State Department, with Under Secretaries that she should call on to lead on all of these issues that have been described here today. You are not going to drain the swamp until these issues are addressed. I am only going to mention a few of them or I will go on for far too long. Let me say that Yemen 2000 that I spoke about, that is a perfect project for the Under Secretary for Public Affairs: to be the

lead on this, to work with some of our local universities even right here in Washington [DC], with Georgetown, GW [George Washington University] and others to put these programs together working with excellent agencies and think-tanks like USIP [United States Institute of Peace] and CSIS [Center for Strategic and International Studies]. This is the way to go, and we should launch this now. This is a long term part of our partnership.

Yemen's economic development. If you go back to the opening statement of the policy Secretary Clinton made when she first became Secretary of State she said, "We are going to retake the lead as we have traditionally on economic affairs." This is a perfect task for the Under Secretary of Economic Affairs to be working on the fund of funds. I know he can draw in serious people to help him with this leadership and working particularly with the GCC (Gulf Cooperation Council) States. People like former President Clinton, guess what, he knows the pain of living with the failed state of Somalia. George H.W. Bush knows and is highly respected by those in the Gulf. And, bring back people like Brian Atwood. [J. Brian Atwood is Dean of the Humphrey Institute of Public Affairs at the University of Minnesota. He served for six years as Administrator of the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) during the Administration of President William Clinton. In the Clinton Administration, Atwood led the transition team at the State Department and was Under Secretary of State for Management prior to his appointment as head of USAID.] I think this fund to funds is absolutely vital to bringing together all the resources to address all these economic problems.

Let me end by reminding you again, "Pay me now or pay me later." I think this is going to be a small price to pay, and with the task force and State to support all this, that's about all we need. We don't need boots and pinstripes on the ground, no. This is not a high price to pay, but we need to get to work now. Thank you very much.

## **Alani**

Just as my colleague said, I just came from Yemen two days ago and the news is not that bad. As Mark Twain said, "The report of my death is premature." So Yemen is not a failing state, and it's not a failed state, Yemen's status is like any other state with problems. So the exaggeration is not going to serve any purpose here, and is not in our interest. The mother of all problems in Yemen is the economy, the problem of a lack of resources and mismanagement of resources. This problem basically feeds all the other problems, so the question here is like Egypt. Egypt always faces a major economic problem like Yemen and Iran. Yemen is not a unique state here, so facing the problem,

yes. We talk about twenty-four million people living in Yemen with very limited resources, and if you put all the GCC (Gulf Cooperation Council) together minus the foreigners, Yemen has more population than the whole GCC. So we have to understand the problems facing the government in Yemen.

Yemen is facing three major challenges in terms of security. The pressing question is the al-Houthi; I will remind you that in the region we have different priorities from your priorities. You might see Al-Qaeda as a nightmare sitting outside the door; in Yemen we don't see Al-Qaeda as a major threat, neither to the regime nor to the state security.

Al-Qaeda in Yemen is a manageable threat; the whole organization now has less than fifty people active within it. We have sympathizers, we have supporters, but I challenge anyone who tells me that Al-Qaeda had done a good job in Yemen recently. If we are talking about the attack on the oil facility, it wasn't a successful attack. If we are talking about the attack on the U.S. Embassy, it wasn't a successful attack, If we are talking about the attack on the tourists, well tourists can be killed anywhere, tourists in a show, in the market, tourists walking outside a hotel--- this is not an operation. So the statement that Al-Qaeda is very attractive, very active in Yemen is a myth.

I can tell you about the twenty-three people who escaped in February 2006. Now the other part of the story is that twenty of them were either killed or captured out of the twenty-three. There are only three left out of the group. I am not saying that Al-Qaeda is not a problem; Al-Qaeda in Yemen is a regional organization. Since a new Al-Qaeda [AQAP] has now emerged between Al-Qaeda in Saudi Arabia and Al-Qaeda in Yemen, it's a regional organization, responsible for operations in Yemen, Saudi Arabia, and the whole GCC; at least theoretically. We can see many operations organized by Al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula are directed against Saudi Arabia. So the responsibility of fighting Al-Qaeda is not only a Yemeni responsibility, it's a regional and an international responsibility. So, there's the question of the priority of Al-Qaeda in Sana'a in comparison to two other major challenges which are the al-Houthi people and the situation in the south.

The al-Houthi problem is the major problem that is again a regional issue. The involvement of Saudi Arabia in the fighting basically expanded the whole situation to be a regional problem. We assume the Iranians support the al-Houthi, again making this problem a regional problem. I was in Doha in 2007 when the negotiation between the Yemeni government and the al-Houthi representative took place. Basically, we could not see what al-Houthi wants; there was no demand, there was no specific demand. If you look at 2004, the whole problem started when al-Houthi spoke, "Death to America, death

to Israel,” which he borrowed from the Iranian revolution and Hezbollah. When security tried to arrest him and the rest of the people who shouted this in the mosque that is when the whole problem began. So concerning the question of al-Houthi and what al-Houthi wants, I can't tell you that what al-Houthi wants can be discovered from negotiation. Al-Houthi wants the government to stop interfering in his affairs. Basically what he wants is a safe haven where there's no authority, there's no government and he and his supporters can do what they want. He wants a situation similar to Hezbollah in the south of Lebanon where there is no official government, and nobody to interfere. You can understand, if you know all of this, how it would end up: we would end up with a mini-state in the north of Yemen on the border with Saudi Arabia. My department and I monitor al-Houthi statements and publications every day, and we can see what al-Houthi and his followers want. What al-Houthi wants is not acceptable to the United States, I'll be very surprised if the United States accepts that a group of a militia, a group we assume to have a link with Iran, would be permitted to create a mini-state in the north of Yemen in which the Yemeni government will have no authority and where they can do what they want.

Turning to the question of the south, again this is a huge exaggeration. I was in the south and in the south we have two different kinds of problem people. We have those that participate in criminal activities, stealing cars, robbing banks, and taking advantage of the government focus on the Houthis. You have to understand that the Yemeni government has limited resources, intelligence-wise, security-wise, and military-wise and can not fight on all fronts equally; it is a major problem. So the question of the south: we have five groups inside the south and these groups have different leaders operating in different parts of Yemen, and each has a different demand. The only thing uniting between them is their mutual desire to pressure the Yemeni Government, and to put pressure on the problem of regional stability to ask for separation. So these groups are not really [politically] active. The original demand of these groups was not political, but rather a question of development, a question of jobs, a question of getting more money to the retired people. So in Sana'a, al-Houthi is definitely first priority, for several reasons. Bani Hushaish [near Sana'a International airport and controlling approaches to Sana'a] is only twenty kilometers from Sana'a, and the Houthis have tried to conduct operations in Bani Hushaish, so for the Yemeni as a regime, for the Yemeni as a state, the followers of al-Houthi are their priority. Whether the United States agrees with this or not, this is a problem for the United States. The reality is that this is what's threatening the regime and the stability of the whole region. The second priority is definitely the question of the south and the developments there, and so far there is a fragmented movement with no outside support. And, I am not sure if this movement will survive in the future without more outside support. And, only third comes Al Qaeda.

So I will stop here Dr. Anthony, and I will be happy to answer any questions. Thank you very much.

## **Questions and Answers**

**[NOTE: Serving as moderator, Dr. Anthony received questions submitted by the audience in written form. He collected and collated these questions posing as many of them as possible to the panelists in the time available.]**

### **Anthony**

What is the real danger that conflict could break out between Yemen and Saudi Arabia based on the limited border skirmishes thus far? How can Yemen and Saudi Arabia develop a working relationship that is more mutually beneficial to both countries than is the situation now? Focus your answers if you could, on key issues like labor mobility, religious extremism's threat to Saudi stability, arm sales, displaced persons, and threats regarding piracy. Any takers? Dr. Alani.

### **Alani**

The Saudis have a policy not to interfere, especially regarding the question of Yemen, this is nothing new. The Saudis discovered that a no intervention policy in Iraq was very successful from their assessment. Whether we agree with it or not doesn't matter. Again they believe that the same policy could apply to the problem of al-Houthi. I visited the Saudi border with Yemen in 2006 and I noticed Houthis crossing the border. The Yemeni-Saudi security service and the Saudi military and border guards were not challenging them. These people were crossing the border without their arms and were buying things, food, and coming back to Yemen.

So the Saudis have done every thing possible to avoid involvement in this conflict, because they understand, drawing on their experience in 1962 when they had a good lesson: "Don't put your hands in Yemen because Yemen is too complicated and you can possibly get in but you can't get out." That was true until last November when the Houthis fired on the Saudi border guard, killing one and injuring three. After this the Saudis reached a point where they could not really maintain their policy of no intervention, and they could not leave this sort of provocation without answer. So this is the whole issue, when the Saudis opened fire on the Houthis. They believe that al-Houthi has planned this on purpose because the Houthis' leaders believe that Saudi intervention

would open the door for other intervention. Because once the issue becomes a regional problem, the Iranians may participate easily without a problem.

So this is one of the reasons why the Houthis went that far, they believe that the Saudis involvement is useful. What are the Saudis doing? The Saudis are paying almost two billion rials every year to Yemen, but Yemen is a big country. They need more. And, the question is not what the Saudis can do but also what the GCC can do, not only the Saudis.

### **Ambassador Bodine**

Thank you. In regards to the first question, do I see prospect for a major conflict between Yemen and Saudi Arabia in the future? No, I don't. Border skirmishes, border problems, the Saudis involving themselves with the Houthis, well we have evidence of that already. But a major war? No. I do take a little exception to my colleague's statement that the Saudis have a policy of no interference in Yemen since 1962. There may be others present that may also have a slightly different reading concerning that statement as well. Saudis have been very much involved in Yemen and a part of my words I didn't get to is that Yemen was very much buffeted from--

### **Alani**

I was referring to al-Houthi and his followers.

### **Ambassador Bodine**

The al-Houthi? Well then I misunderstood you, because certainly the Saudis have been very much involved in trying to shape the policy and the situation first in North Yemen and then united Yemen all the way up to at least the 1994 civil war, where the United States did make it very clear to the Saudis that this support for the secessionist movement was not in Yemen's interest, or in Saudi Arabia's interest, or in our interest, and we would highly recommend that they cease the support. There was a major change in the relationship with the demarcation of the border in the summer of 2000, and I think the relationship has become more normal since then. But Saudi tendencies to try to manipulate Yemen I think have been a chronic problem. If there is two billion dollars in assistance, that's good. The problem is the unofficial money that comes to tribes and things. The view was always that the Saudis wanted Yemen to be stable enough not to be a direct threat, and not so stable that it could somehow pose a different kind of military threat. That's a very delicate line to try to find, and I think they've misplayed it a couple

of times. To deal on a more normal diplomatic level, I think, would benefit both of those states greatly.

### **Johnsen**

I just wanted to follow up because I had a slightly different reading as well. I think first, when we're talking about the Houthis, I think to claim that the problem started in June 2004 when the government attempted to arrest Hussein Badr al-Din al-Houthi might be a bit of a mistake. I think this goes back much further than that, back into the '60s and then back after post-unification and dealing with Hizb al-Haqq [the Zaydi political party], and it is a very complicated issue. I think it would be also a bit of a mistake to claim that Saudi only got involved in November. Even before the conflict there were books back and forth between Sheikh Ahmed bin Baaz in Saudi Arabia and Badr al-Din al-Houthi in the north. In 2008 Saudis pressured Hussein al-Ahmar to try to raise a tribal militia to fight the Houthis, so certainly at least from my take, which differs from Dr Alani's, Saudi Arabia has been quite involved even if it wasn't in the way of the active military conflict that we're seeing now.

### **Anthony**

Thank you, Dr. Alani was correct though that the longevity of the involvement has been extensive and Ambassador Bodine as well. One person made the analogy that what Saudi Arabia for a period was picking up in terms of the development cost, schools, hospitals, clinics, roads, mosques in Yemen, was more than most of the rest of the international community combined. There were a number of other countries involved; the U.S., the Dutch, the Germans, and British etc.

This question goes to the development side of it, and perhaps you, Chris, or Ambassador Larocco would like to respond. It has to do with the wars. Many of the speakers identified the depletion of water as a major threat, what can and should the U.S. and the international community do to help the Yemeni government with this problem? Then there's a related one, is there any potential boost the Yemeni economy by starting an industry of desalination plants to create jobs and alleviate the water crisis?

### **Boucek**

That's a great question. I think water is a critical, critical issue. Two things that can be done straight away: one is addressing the issue of subsidies. The fact that the economy of

Yemen subsidizes diesel to the extent that it does goes to the furtherance of uncontrolled extraction of underground water. First and foremost there needs to be a very painful discussion with the Yemeni government about the use of subsidies. That's kind of one issue. The second issue I think would be to address the issue of Qat. The fact that so much water goes to the cultivation of Qat in the long run, is incredibly destructive of the environment for Yemen and for its scarce resources. So, doing things like allowing Yemen to import Qat from other places, stopping the government from purchasing Qat for official functions, all these things would go toward a better use of Yemen's scarce water resources. In regards to desalination, it would be great if this would work in Yemen but the costs of fuel free stock are prohibitive in Yemen; for other places in the Gulf it works very well. Moreover, you would have to pipe water over 7000 feet to get to the highland urban areas where it matters, and that's just not possible.

### **Larocco**

Let me add from my own studies which are nothing like what they have done, the answers are already there, quite frankly, the problem is actually carrying them out. Many Yemeni scientists themselves have come up with the solutions; the political will to do it and the economic resources to do it is a completely separate matter. This is where I would argue that this fund of funds and particularly some of the local regional organizations like the Arab Fund or the Islamic Development Bank and others may play a very decisive role.

Now I would like to give offer a very provocative view on the issue of desalinated water, which I believe very strongly is the way to go. The way to do that, in my view, is to start from the extensive expertise available in the region. I believe the funding could be obtained from the Gulf countries to do this, but you're not going to take it up 9000 feet. If you're not going to take it up to 9000 feet, then you bring people down. That's what I would argue is the way to go; develop new cities along the coastal areas. I think as a matter of security this is good, I think as a matter of decentralization it's good. You bring the people down; you bring them jobs; you have industrialized zones, free ports, however you want to do it. This is what China is doing and if you can do it in a place with a billion and a half people you can do it in Yemen. This is the way to go, move the people, don't move the earth. Yemenis have a history of migrations for thousands of years, I am probably descended from a Yemeni, so this can be done, Yemenis move---do it.

**Anthony**

This next question comes back to the U.S.S. Cole and Guantanamo Bay and the fact that half of the detainees there are Yemeni. How does Guantanamo fit into the U.S.-Yemeni discussions on aid, and how likely is that the U.S. and Yemen will repatriate the Guantanamo detainees? Stated a bit differently, what is the political importance in Yemen of its prisoners being held in Guantanamo, and what reaction should one expect if many or any of them were to be indefinitely detained by the United States? And, do any of you wish to comment on reports of recent Yemeni suicides at Guantanamo?

**Bodine**

First of all I think we have to make a distinction between most of the Yemenis who are in Guantanamo and the attack on the U.S.S. Cole. They are not the same people. Now Mr. Nashiri [Abd al-Rahim al-Nashiri], who was the master mind of the attack, is in custody and has been the subject of the decision by the Attorney General to be tried under a military tribunal. We're not going to get into that issue here, but on the key players in U.S. custody directly related to the attack on the ship I think that that decision has been made and I think it is probably the right one. I will say that I am a little concerned, there are reports that Mr. al-Nashiri benefited from our experiments in water boarding, and I hope this doesn't in any way jeopardize our case. Anyway, I will defer to Attorney General on this; else they would not be bringing the case.

The other major group of Yemenis in Guantanamo has nothing to do with that attack. And, there is a lot of debate about the degree of their involvement either as combatants or as terrorists. The feeling is that we do not have the evidence to support it. The debate that we, the United States, are having with Yemen is exactly how to manage the repatriation process. I do think that some of the ideas of having them go through a Saudi repatriation process do not make great sense to me. To the extent that the Saudi repatriation program works, it works because of the Saudis in the Saudi context. It includes things such as a job, or the funding to get married, neither one of which are the Saudis about to offer to the Yemenis. When I was in Yemen in January, this issue of non-repatriation of Yemeni against whom we do not have sufficient evidence to take them to court, and who would fall into the categories such those who have been repatriated to other countries, is a political problem and is a source of tension. This is true, I think, not only between us and Yemen but also between elements in the Yemeni public who are concerned that their government has not been able to affect the return of those lower level Yemenis against whom we do not have evidence.

## **Johnsen**

I'll just say a couple of things. If you look at the Saudis who were in Guantanamo and who then went through the Saudi rehabilitation program versus the Yemenis who are in there, there is not a lot of difference on what's known. I agree very strongly with Ambassador Bodine that there are a whole lot of these people that were just sort of caught up in this dragnet after September 11<sup>th</sup>. Now, eight years down the road, when we're looking at solving the problem and trying to differentiate who is innocent and who is guilty this is an incredibly difficult task that seems to overmatch the U.S. But the real difference, it seems to me, is that the U.S. has a degree of trust in the Saudi Arabian government that it just doesn't have in the Yemeni government. And so, in many cases these Yemenis who are being held there seem almost to be prisoners of their own citizenship.

Now certainly there are some detainees about whom the United States would have strong suspicions. That would involve Qasim al-Raymi, who has a younger brother [Ali al-Raymi] at Guantanamo: Fawaz al-Rabay'I, who was involved in planning the dual suicide attack in Marib and Hadramawt in 2006, and has a brother there [Salman al-Rabay'i]; and, Mansur al-Bayhani, who was killed by the U.S in Somali, has a couple of brothers there [Tawfiq and Ghalib al-Bayhani]; and so on and so forth. But in the case of the majority of Yemenis being held at Guantanamo, the United States just doesn't have any evidence against them. They continue to be held because the U.S. has little confidence in Yemen's ability to rehabilitate them or to keep them in custody.

Just one final note on Yemenis that have been repatriated to Yemen, none of them have returned to terrorism, unlike say Saudi Arabia where a number of them have gone on to rejoin Al Qaeda.

## **Anthony**

This next one comes back to the economic and adds to it the educational aspects. Perhaps Ambassador Larocco would wish to comment on this for the 2000 that come here: What would you have them do in these institutions that you to make reference to? Not much was said about the failed education system in Yemen. Please elaborate on this issue and how the United States might assist in its reform. And, related to that, are Yemeni Americans participating or being involved in negotiations or communicating with Yemeni officials?

I know that there are at least a dozen people in this room who have been involved in one way or the other.

### **Larocco**

I will take the first part; that's actually three questions. What I perceive for the Yemen 2000 program is that there may be some younger people who could be involved, but I would leave that up to universities. This would be an overall coordinated goal of bringing 2000 Yemenis a year, and I think the prime target audience we're looking at are those who are in a position in their career of being a bit younger but middle manager types, people that we want to be able to help address the economic issues that have been described so well here. We at the NESAC Center [Near East and South Asia Center of the National Defense University], for example, have quite a few alumni now. In fact, if you want to know about our alumni, go to the Yemeni embassy, six of the Yemeni embassy staff here [in Washington, DC] are alumni of our NESAC programs.

We work very closely, particularly in this case, with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Ministry of Defense people, and we get into a whole variety of strategic issues. But what I see is other think tanks and universities designing these programs. Now, if we can, in fact, bring some younger people that would be better. I don't know exactly how that's done, but I am sure universities can work on it. The idea is to build a cadre of people who can in a longer term work with us, work with friends in the region, and have a technical competence, particularly an English language ability to do this. When I was younger officer, we saw this all the time. USIA did this brilliantly and was highly successful at coordinating these types of programs. We lost this capability when we "won" the Cold War and declared the "end of history." So, I think it's time we bring this sort of programming back again, and Yemen is a great place to start.

### **Bodine**

I would like to comment on this. We have had a very long educational exchange program with Yemen going back to the "Famous Forty" when forty young men from the imamate period came to the United States for higher education. Following their education, they went back to Yemen and actually are the core of the modern state. To the extent that there has been success in Yemen politically and economically, a lot of it can be traced back to those first forty.

When I first got to Yemen as Ambassador, we had no educational exchange program at all, and I turned an intern loose to interview everybody in the government, in education,

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in the media, in the non-governmental organizations [NGOs] who had a U.S. education. All of them were based on scholarships. And when we finished looking the results over, it was everybody moving the country forward. Dr. Abd al-Karim al-Iryani is probably the most famous, but he certainly wasn't the only one.

One of our goals was to get the Fulbright exchange program started again, and by 2001 we had it up to thirty-five Yemenis. There were two things that were very notable about the Yemenis that came back from the United States for undergraduate and graduate work. First of all, they did very well and they got into very good schools. Second, the return rate was extraordinarily high. I think in one year out of a 120 Yemeni coming here I think 108 returned to Yemen, and they were all in the government or in the media. They were moving Yemen forward. At one point, I had the Undersecretary for Global Affairs come to Yemen, and I said, "I am going to take you out and show you all of USAID's most important projects." And, I took him to the backyard in a big reception and introduced him to Yemenis we had educated.

This is a program that we have been doing in the past. The school system in Yemen is very bad, yet we have been able to recruit and educate excellent Yemeni students, and they have returned some of the most remarkable people I have ever met.

### **Johnsen**

Just one quick note onto what Ambassador Bodine said. For those interested in that question, I would strongly recommend reading a plan that Jalal Yacoub, Deputy Minister of Finance has put forward. A key part of that plan is bringing back the very talented Yemeni ex-patriot population to the country. I think it's a fascinating document and a very forward and very optimistic one.

### **Anthony**

Dr. Alani, could you re-visit the aspect about the GCC countries and others of means and their potential and probable role in addressing this in an influential way? It was the London donors conference several years ago that pledged around \$4.5 billion to Yemen [Fourth Consultative Group meeting of donors for Yemen – November 15-16, 2006], but you are right to say that very little of it has gotten in. When some of us have asked the donors what has held it up, the answers are never the same from one to the next. Many would say, "You Americans have educated us about transparency and anti-corruption drives, etc., so we're trying to do that ourselves. We need to see a feasibility study for

proposed projects, and we need to send our people from our Ministry of Finance to check it out and make sure the funds are going for institution building or projects and not to leaders or government officials.” So could you come back to that? I know it’s not just Saudi Arabia that has contributed significantly and longer than any one else, but Kuwait did it too. The whole University of Sana’a was paid for by Kuwait, its construction and much of its staff as well. Japan contributed too, and the UAE was quite generous, and the others have not been ungenerous. Could you please comment?

### **Alani**

There was a major shift in the GCC policy starting in 1991. After that, very little money went to Yemen because of the accusation against Yemen that the Yemenis supported the Iraqi invasion against Kuwait. At that time, 90% of the Yemenis working in the GCC were kicked out and sent back to Yemen. Those people [by their remittances] were a major source of income to the Yemeni economy. So, I think that the complication started in 1991 and unfairly because Yemen at that time was not supporting the invasion. Instead, Yemen was basically talking about an Arab solution for the problem. This is what happened at that time.

Since 1991 I don’t see any major attempt to correct the situation. Possibly the broader regional security question might have an impact. If the GCC members feel that the economy is the source of instability in Yemen, and instability in Yemen is going to have a negative impact on stability in other GCC states, then I think this is the only thing that might cause the GCC to invest directly.

On the question of corruption: my understanding is that the Yemeni government is going to say, “OK, don’t give the money to the government. You monitor the project directly, you publish the tender, you supervise the projects, and we will be happy to accept this reality. But so far there is no movement, even on this.

### **Anthony**

This one has to do with Somalia. How does the breakdown of civil society in Somalia affect Yemen? Most Americans are not aware that there are a large number of Somali refugees in Yemen. But, many of Somalia’s refugees do end up in Yemen. How does the Yemeni government deal with them, and how does the U.S help Yemen deal with them? There was an op-ed in the *Washington Post* this morning by Robin Wright, who talked about the image of the United States having suffered after being seen to withdraw from

Lebanon because of the success tactically and otherwise of Hezbollah and from Somalia because of the graphic images on the media of the bodies of American soldiers being dragged through the streets. She suggests that there are echoes of these experiences in Afghanistan and Pakistan. Perhaps Yemen invites an echo in terms of perceptions as well? [See Robin Wright, "The Real Stakes in Afghanistan," *The Washington Post* (December 10, 2009).]

### **Boucek**

Thank you, and just to follow on Mustafa's [Dr. Alani's] point, I think Yemen's problems will very quickly become Saudi Arabia's problems and the rest of the Gulf. And, the Gulf, the GCC, will need to have a relationship with Yemen, one way or another. Whether it's about movement of labor, whether it's about investment in Yemen, or whether it's about the ability of Yemen to have an on-going relationship with the GCC, this relationship is going to be based on security. It's going to be the task of the United States and its allies to keep the pressure on the GCC to view Yemen in terms of security. That's the way the GCC is going to look at Yemen because keeping these problems at home in Yemen instead of becoming the Gulf's broader problems is going to be key. Many Gulf states are already working in Yemen. There are programs to build vocational schools: the Saudis, the Qataris, and others are doing this.

On the issue of Somalia, I think this is a very poorly understood relationship - about the guns that go back and forth, the Somalis that come to Yemen, the diesel trade, the smuggling and corruption networks that go back and forth. The Somalis that get to Yemen have automatic asylum status. It's the only country in the world where Somalis are instantly given status. I think something that we need to do in the research community is to understand this relationship much better because, as pointed out, there's this tendency to look at Yemen as part of the Arabian Peninsula, and not to look at it as part of the Horn of Africa. From the policy point of view, we need to make sure we look at Yemen as part of the greater Horn of Africa-East African complex as well as the Arabian Peninsula.

### **Bodine**

I just would like to add to that, to the extent that Yemen's problems today become Saudi Arabia's problem tomorrow, I think you could also turn it around and, if you are looking even at Al Qaeda, observe that Saudi Arabia's problem of yesterday became Yemen's problem today. There is a constant movement back and forth to these problems. They

don't all simply start in Yemen and work outward. There are a lot of problems in the region that have worked their way into Yemen. Al Qaeda coming into Yemen is one of them; the Somali refugee issue is another of them. It was quite remarkable to me when I was there to think that in a country as poor as Yemen we had economic refugees, on their way in. The Somalis do get automatic asylum status, but they do not really get very well integrated into the society. There are some familial relationships, and that makes the refugees somewhat hard to track. But, I would agree that Yemen is far more of a Horn of Africa state than it is certainly an Arabian-Persian Gulf state. It acts as a very important bridge going back and forth. I would certainly support the idea of the Horn of Africa being brought back into CENTCOM.

### **Anthony**

Dr. Alani, this question comes back to you, having to do with the south [of Yemen]. What percentage of the south would you estimate would be in favor of secession if it could be accomplished? How would you react to the question if someone suggested that more people in the south are in favor of reverting to a two-country solution than you seem to imply by your remarks?

### **Alani**

You have to remember why we have the union between the north and the south. It is because the south of Yemen was a failed state. That's the reason: the south had a collapsed economy, a collapsed government. There was fighting, fighting everywhere. That was the memory of the socialist Yemen. For Yemenis, what's the memory of the previous state? It's everything negative. So as far as I know, and I do not have a comprehensive view, for the great majority of the people their concerns are the economy, employment, money, and development. The question of separation is not an issue. But, they are using separation to pressure the government to divert more resources to the south and to deal with the economic problems.

Possibly we have very few people who are interested in separation. The political leaders have their own reasons. Let's take the example of Tariq al-Fadhli: Tariq al-Fadhli emerged as a leader of the movement for a very simple reason, he reclaimed his family lands, which were basically nationalized by the previous socialist government. And here we are talking about one-third of the south of Yemen, which he considers as family property. So, the point here is that they have no serious intent to separate, nor really any ideology to support the idea of separation. It's basically an economic or personal

problem. So, to answer the question, I don't see any real support for separation. Only a very few support for the idea of separation.

### **Anthony**

We come back now to the Houthis. If the implications have been that Iran is not really supporting it [rebellion], and it doesn't require Iran's support, who, if anyone, is supporting the Houthis other than themselves? And, who might the panel recommend to enter as a third party to resolve, or ameliorate, or better manage this conflict?

### **Johnsen**

Well, I'll talk about the first point. I mentioned earlier that this conflict goes well back. I mean the Houthis are a Hashemi family. Yes it's true that President Saleh himself is a Zaydi. The Houthis are Zaydis, but the Zaydis are Hashemis who have always provided the rulers, almost Zaydi purists, if you will. Under the Zaydi's theology, under the Fourteen Points [guiding succession to authority], President Saleh would not be eligible to rule the country, if it were run along the lines of the Imamate.

That being said, since the open conflict began in June 2004, the war has really taken on a logic all its own. The government has prosecuted the war very poorly. It has destroyed a lot of crops. There have been significant numbers of people who have been killed unintentionally. You have all of these different groups, some different tribes, that become involved on both sides not out of any sort of ideological loyalty to what the Houthis are espousing nor because they necessarily side with the government. As the conflict has expanded, more and more people have been drawn into the dispute, often for their own quite particular agendas. That makes it I think a very complex and complicated set issues even to just begin peeling the layers of interests away in order to get at the original issue.

One of the reasons that we have had so many failures before with the Doha Agreement [signed February 1, 2008 but widely regarded as ineffective], or the accords there, is that Ali Mousa al Ahmar wasn't involved at the beginning. You also have both sides, both the military as well as the Houthis, that are benefitting a great deal by the continuation of what might be called a war economy. I think it's incredibly complex to get into these questions, but you need to do it. What I recommend is that any country that tries to step in is going to have to be one that Saudi Arabia would listen to and agree with and at least

be willing to follow the directions that they are given. Without this basic starting point I don't see any mediation working.

### **Anthony**

This next to the last question is about tribes, and I guess this is for the Congressional staff and some others. Given in American lore the largely pejorative or negative stereotypes of tribes, tribal leaders, and tribalism would you help us place tribes in Yemen's government at the local and national levels in a more understandable context? And, apart from the negativity that many people perceive in the notion of tribes, specifically what are the positive aspects of how they [tribes] contribute to what stability there is [in Yemen] and might contribute to solutions to Yemen's conflicts and economic challenges?

### **Bodine**

First of all, I agree that unfortunately tribe and tribalism have negative connotations in both our own [American] history, which I am not going to get into. But, if you think about how we went about rebuilding Iraqi authority and the decision to involve the tribes, the Sons of Iraq, in many ways we have almost gone back to more of a tribal structure in Iraq than we had. We have Iraq and now we also have Afghanistan. We have now developed a perception of the role of tribes in these societies, which I think could be very distorting, at least when we apply it to Yemen.

As I said earlier, I much prefer the words clans, or familial connections, or something like that because that's what they are. The relationships were there. The relationships are very strong, and they certainly determine your identity. But, the tribal leaders in Yemen do not have the political power or the commander-in-chief power that we often associate with governing authority. One of the things that we discovered when we were working in Yemen is that you might have a tribal sheikh, and he might even have a certain status, but there would also be a tribal council that would be extremely important. Chris [Boucek] made the point earlier, we don't even know enough yet about these societies. Because we don't know exactly how the tribes operate, because we don't know what exactly their relationship is with the formal government, we have to be extraordinarily careful that we do not come up with simplistic ideas based on our stereotypes. What we think we learned in Iraq and Afghanistan, I am not sure that we did. We must be careful that we don't misapply the wrong lessons [in Yemen and elsewhere] before we develop a much more nuanced understanding of how this society is structured and how it works.

**Anthony**

Bringing this to a close, I wanted to mention an educational aspect of this program. Here we have people of various backgrounds with diverse experiences in this field, but one of the things that the National Council on U.S. - Arab Relations is dedicated to is developing leadership skills among America's leaders of tomorrow. We do this through the Model Arab League. It's just like the Model United Nations except that it's 22 delegations instead of 193. We will start next month [January 2010] putting an additional 2000 students through this program between January and the end of April. We've already had two of these models this fall. We have thirteen models in the United States and three abroad - one in Cairo, one in Birmingham, United Kingdom, and one in Saudi Arabia - the eastern province next month.

We have some students here who came today as a result of their professor [Professor Linda Funsch], who the National Council took to the region some time ago and who has been one of the most active in the follow up work. She's brought her students here from Hood College in Frederick, Maryland. They are going to represent, believe it or not, Yemen this year. Would they stand and be recognized please?

Finally, I would like to thank Dr. James Winship, Patrick Mancino, Megan Geissler, Josh Hilbrand, Chelsey Boggs, and Laura Lombard for their assistance in producing this program. In addition, let me express my thanks to our speakers, who set aside time in their busy schedules to come and enlighten us today. Thank you all.