

West & its Arab Stooges Are Terrified of a Genuinely Independent Yemen

Description

By Dan Glazebrook

In his superb new book, *Destroying Yemen: What Chaos in Arabia Tells Us About the World*, Professor Isa Blumi shows how the war on Ansar Allah (the Houthis) now underway is but the latest in 100 years



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The latest chapter of this resistance began in the year 2000, when Yemenis of the northwest region in and around Sa'adah province found their ancestral homelands under threat from two sources: the Saudis, and the IMF.

In 1934, a treaty was forced on Yemen in which the historic Yemen province of Asir was annexed by Saudi Arabia. But whilst it was agreed the new border would be marked out (with stones), it was also agreed that the peoples of the region would be able to freely move across this border. This arrangement ended when a new treaty was signed in 2000, which replaced the stone border with walls, fences and checkpoints, and prevented the free passage of locals.

Just like the illegal Israeli wall, whose construction began at the same time, the Saudis were using 'border enforcement' as a means of separating indigenous people from their agricultural (and other) resources – and, also like Israel, they decided to create a "buffer zone" 10km deep into Yemeni territory in the process. Blumi notes that the zone conceded to the Saudis (not to mention the extra land that was then stolen) contained "some of the best farming and grazing land in Yemen, with considerable water resources available".

At the same time, President Saleh was busily privatizing what land was left, in line with the demands of the IMF's "structural adjustment" program. Hussein Badreddin al-Houthi emerged as the spokesman of

the budding resistance movement that this theft provoked, and which soon claimed 3000 armed men for its cause. Its popularity was assured – after all, this was literally a life-and-death struggle over the right to subsist. The struggle led to the so-called ‘Sa’adah wars’ of 2000-2009, although, as Blumi points out, “The nature of the struggle soon expanded beyond Sa’adah itself, reviving old Yemeni irredentist claims to Najran, Asir and Jizan lent out in 1934 to Saudi Arabia.” Five rounds of armed struggle, ceasefire, and (failed) negotiations followed, but “with each confrontation with locals, the state created a larger group of antagonists who gravitated around the charismatic leadership of al-Huthi.”

Despite his ruthless crackdowns, President Saleh was utterly unable to repress the movement, which merely grew from strength to strength. With the protests of 2011, the resistance – now known as Ansar Allah – became even more of a significant voice for those Yemenis angry at decades of their country being looted by imperial interests under the guise of ‘neoliberalism,’ and facilitated by Saleh. Saleh, in power since 1978, had, says Blumi, overseen the transformation of the Yemeni state from a “mechanism for protecting rural Yemen from global capitalism” to a conduit for channeling Yemen’s wealth into the coffers of Western financial institutions.

Yet ultimately, even Saleh was not considered efficient enough at turning over his country’s resources to the West. Not only had he failed to subdue the spirited resistance in Sa’adah, but he had started to push back on some of the more obscene Western demands – such as a call by corporate lobby groups in 2010 for foreign investors to be exempt from tax altogether – correctly fearing that his rule might not survive such an orgy of obsequiousness.

But what really frightened the West was the growing levels of investment in Yemen by China, who had, since the early 2000s, pumped billions into developing Yemeni oil, infrastructure and fishing. The danger here, as everywhere, was that the existence of alternative sources of investment would give Yemen some leverage – and even independence – in its relations with Western corporate interests.

Yet the leading role of Ansar Allah, with their consistent focus on resisting Yemen’s political and economic subordination, derailed any attempts to turn the protest movement into a liberal charade. If Yemen’s immense resources were to be turned into liquidity for global capital at the rate required – and in the wake of the financial crisis, this had become all but an existential requirement – some deft maneuvering would be needed.

Enter Hadi – “the empire’s man,” as Blumi puts it. Vice President under Saleh for almost two decades, Hadi was a reliable regime stooge, but without Saleh’s growing impertinence. Ordained by the priesthood of global capital, his official mandate was to embark on a process of reconciliation and prepare the country for elections. Instead, he made a deal with the Muslim Brotherhood which allowed him to sideline the country’s two main popular movements – Ansar Allah in the north, and Hirak, the separatist movement in the South, and proceeded to steamroller the country into membership in the WTO.

This process required the usual – and long discredited – “shock therapy” of unrestrained privatization. Hadi immediately privatized 11 of the 12 main sectors of the economy, with 78 of 160 “subsectors” listed for immediate “liberalization.” At the same time, he exposed Yemen’s private sector to instant “free market” competition from global multinationals, costing thousands of jobs. In other words, says Blumi, Hadi “proceeded to literally sell off Yemen to Saudi and Qatari interests... Under no legal or electoral pressure, Hadi’s interim government was the ideal vehicle to plunder Yemen.”

By 2014, when his so-called ‘mandate’ ended, the country had had enough, and Ansar Allah’s entry

into Sanaa was met with little resistance. Since then, the movement has controlled territory comprising 80 percent of the population. The fact that it has been able to withstand over three years of devastating war, waged by a ten-country coalition directed and armed by the world's most formidable military powers, should alone demonstrate that it is this extraordinary movement, not the so-called 'President,' who cannot even set foot in his own country, who have the real claim to legitimacy.