



Gulf Research Centre Cambridge
Knowledge for All

Workshop 4

The Future of Yemen

Workshop Directors:

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Abstract

Yemen is building new political structures following the upheavals of 2011 and the election of an interim president in 2012. A transition process aims to create a system that will include previously disadvantaged groups and find ways of meeting the aspirations of all Yemenis. There is a special focus on Saada in the north and in the lands of the formerly independent South Yemen. The international community, with the GCC in the lead, is playing a critical role in helping Yemen to manage the transition. Yemenis will need to work together and with their international friends to deal with the many profound economic and social problems and to find better ways of countering terrorism. The workshop will examine these issues in depth, analyse their causes, and suggest ideas that will help Yemenis to find solutions.

Description and Rationale

The year 2014 is likely to be a momentous one for the future of Yemen. An agreement between Yemen and the GCC, in association with the United Nations Security Council,

in November 2012 for a process of political transition should have led to the adoption of a new constitution and elections for a new president and parliament. A parallel restructuring of the military and security forces is being designed to bring these institutions under the supervision of an elected government. The international community, led by the GCC, has promised to provide massive economic support. While these developments offer the prospect of a much better future for Yemen and its peoples, the process could still fail or only partially succeed because of a number of very difficult problems: the question of the future of the south, the problem in Saada, the presence of Al-Qaeda and the profound economic and social problems that contribute to, and reflect, Yemen's impoverishment. Even if the political transition process does succeed, the new authorities will have to deal with these issues. It is important that they are fully understood. The workshop seeks to attract papers that will analyse the most important problems in order to understand the causes and identify obstacles to implementing solutions.

Scholarly Contribution

There have been few such conferences or workshops on Yemen in recent years. There are excellent scholarly studies on the politics, religion and social structures but almost none on the economy. As Yemenis seek to build new structures, this is the time for scholarly analysis of its evolution. The Yemeni experience is relevant to the wider region which is itself undergoing upheaval. The workshop will provide an opportunity for scholars to look at all these issues in depth and the outcomes will be published to ensure they reach a wider audience both in Yemen and internationally.

Anticipated Papers

The workshop invites analytical and policy-oriented paper proposals in the following areas:

Political: Yemen is currently making decisions on the future structure of the state. Will the southern region (the former PDRY) become independent or remain within a centralised unified Yemen. Will Yemen become a federal state? How will such regions be selected? What would be the implications of such a federal structure for the future of Yemen? What powers would be held by the central government and what would be delegated to regions? How would the particular problems in the Saada region and adjoining governorates be solved and then accommodated in a new government structure? Have political parties changed and developed after the 2011 uprising and if so, how?

Islamic political movements: There are unique features to the Islamic political movements in Yemen – Sunni (and Salafis), Zaydis (such as al-Huthi) and mixed Sunni-Zaydi parties such as Islah. The workshop would encourage papers on these movements, especially on how they have changed since 2011.

Involving women and youth: The GCC deal was partly designed to enhance the role of women and young people in the national dialogue on Yemen's future. How are they responding and can their roles be institutionalised? Can Yemen's civil society organisations help shape the future?

Political economy and society: Informal networks linking tribal, military, and political figures have operated in Yemen for many years but will be challenged by the changes being made through the political transition process. How can traditional social structures adapt to the needs of the 21st century? How important will these traditional figures and networks be in the future and what will be their impact on political and economic reforms?

Economy: Papers analysing Yemen's natural resources and their development, with a special focus on oil and gas, minerals, agriculture, and fisheries. The government will need to find new sources of income if, as expected, oil revenues from hydrocarbons continue to decline. What policies and structures are required to attract the levels of investment, Yemeni and international, to ensure these new sources are developed?

Humanitarian: Over 42 per cent of Yemenis do not get enough to eat. Poverty levels are at 40 per cent. What can be done to bring short term relief? In the medium term, donors want the Yemeni government to create special entities or vehicles that bypass the normal government system because of its lack of capacity and inefficiencies while others insist that the best way to develop capacity and overcome inefficiency is to make use of the existing structure. What is the best means for delivering real improvement in people's lives in the shortest possible time?

Education and government services: Though participation in education has rapidly improved, much more needs to be done to raise standards and create the skills that Yemenis need to find work at home and abroad. Government services are inadequate especially in the more remote rural areas. What can be done to enhance these?

Land and water (and Qat): Water is of critical importance given predictions that part of the country could run out of groundwater sources within the next 20 years. Papers might look at how water is controlled; how declining resources lead to social conflict; desalination and its implications; possible population transfer from the highlands to the coast; the interaction between land ownership and water resources.

Terrorism and counter-terrorism: Al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula is considered by the US and others as the most dangerous "franchise" of Al-Qaeda. From Yemen, it pursues a global agenda but also a local one directly and via the Ansar al-Shariah, a quasi-insurgency group. International support for Yemen is in part driven by the need to counter AQAP. Are present policies based on sound analysis of the problem and solutions?

Yemen and the GCC: Papers could examine the history of the relationship and suggest where it might be going. The GCC is now deeply involved in Yemen and research and discussion on aspects of this should be encouraged.

Other issues: The directors would like to encourage papers on other topics that might include migration to and from Yemen and the role of Yemenis abroad in the future of Yemen.

Workshop Director Profiles

Dr. Noel Brehony, after completing a Ph.D. on Libya, spent two years on post-doctoral research on the West Bank before joining the Foreign and Commonwealth Office where he worked mainly on the Middle East with postings to Kuwait, Yemen, Jordan and Egypt. He was then Director of Middle East Affairs at Rolls-Royce plc and is now Chairman of Menas Associates (www.menas.co.uk). In addition he has held the following positions: Chairman, Middle East Association 1996-97; President, British Society of Middle East Studies 2000-2006; Chairman, Council for British Research in the Levant 2002-2008; Chairman, British Yemeni Society (2010 to present). He is on the committee of the British Foundation for the Study of Arabia, a trustee of the Altajir Trust, and a member of the Advisory Board of the London Middle East Institute at SOAS. His book “Yemen Divided” was published by I.B. Tauris London in 2013. He was the co-convenor of the conference “Yemen: Challenges for the Future” held on January 11-12, 2013 at SOAS. He also contributed to the book “Why Yemen Matters: a Society in Transition” to be published by Saqi in 2014.

Dr Saud Saleh AlSarhan has been Head of Research and Head of Contemporary Political Thought Unit at the King Faisal Center for Research and Islamic Studies since 2013. He is Visiting Research Fellow of Legitimate and Illegitimate Violence in Islamic Thought Project, at Exeter University, and Honorary Research Fellow, the College of Social Science and International Studies, Exeter University. He holds a Ph.D. in Arab and Islamic Studies from Exeter. He has contributed books and articles in English and Arabic to scholarly journals including: “The Huthis and al-Qaida in Yemen: A Comparative Analysis on Justification for Violence against the State”; “The Struggle for Authority: The Jihadi-Salafism’s Shaykhs in Saudi Arabia” and “The Neo-Reformists: A New Democratic Islamic Discourse.”

Selected Readings

Most recent works have dealt with political and social issues and there has been little academic study of the economy though Nora Colton will publish her book soon.

Blumi, Issa. *Chaos in Yemen: Societal Collapse and the New Authoritarianism* (London: Routledge, 2010).

- Bonnefoy, Laurent. *Salafism in Yemen: Transnationalism and Religious Identity* (London/New York: Hurst/Columbia University Press, 2011).
- Brehony, Noel. *Yemen Divided* (London: I.B.Tauris, 2011).
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- Dahlgren, Susanne. *Contesting Realities: The Public Sphere and Morality in Southern Yemen* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 2010).
- Day, S.W. *Regionalism and Rebellion in Yemen: a Troubled National Union* (Cambridge University Press, 2012)
- Dresch, Paul. *Tribes, Government, and History in Yemen* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1993).
- Dresch, Paul. *A History of Modern Yemen* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000).
- Gatter, Peer. *Politics of Qat: The Role of a Drug in Ruling Yemen* (Weisbaden: Ludwig Reichert Verlag, 2012).
- Lackner, Helen. *Why Yemen Matters: a Society in Transition* (Saqi: London 2014).
- Mahdi, K. A., A. Würth and H. Lackner, eds. *Yemen into the Twenty-First Century, Continuity and Change* (London: Ithaca, 2007).
- Philbrick-Yadav, Stacey. *Islamists and the State: Legitimacy and Institutions in Yemen and Lebanon* (London: IB Tauris, 2013).
- Phillips, Sarah. *Yemen's Democracy Experiment in Regional Perspective* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008).
- Phillips, Sarah. *Yemen and the Politics of Permanent Crisis* (New York: Routledge, 2011).
- Wedeen, Lisa. *Peripheral Visions, Publics, Power and Performance in Yemen* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2008).
- Weir, Shelagh. *A Tribal Order: Politics and Law in the Mountains of Yemen* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2007).