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# Middle East Brief

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## A Passing Generation of Yemeni Politics

Asher Orkaby

In September 2014, an increasingly popular tribal movement led by the extended Houthi family took control of Yemen's capital city of Sana'a after months of expanding territorial conquests emanating from their base in the northern Yemeni city of Sa'dah.<sup>1</sup> In the months following their arrival in Sana'a, Houthi tribesmen gradually extended their control over the city to media outlets and institutions of higher learning as well as government offices. On January 22, 2015, a Houthi assault on the presidential palace forced the abdication of President 'Abd Rabuh Mansur Hadi and shortly afterwards the liquidation of Parliament in favor of a Houthi-led government. Members of the Houthi movement who have spoken of returning to the religious and tribal hierarchy of pre-republican Yemen<sup>2</sup> seemed poised to achieve their goals.

The challenges posed by the Houthi revolt in the North and the reemergence of tribal domination in Yemeni politics are not merely the high point of an anti-government movement that began in 2004, but extend back to the founding of the modern Yemeni republic and the subsequent civil war (1962–68). In the ongoing struggle to define the character of Yemen, the current crisis marks a major point of transition between a declining national identity and the revival of tribal politics.

All too often, the current crisis unfolding in Yemen has been described as a conflict involving extremist religious rebels or foreign intervention. This Brief, however, understands the recent rise and successes of the Houthi movement as the outgrowth of a domestic conflict, rooted in Yemen's modern history and the gradual decline of its republic. It argues that the current challenges to the Yemeni government are occurring during a period of political transition

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following on the passing of the revolutionary generation that came of age during the 1960s. The foreign-educated founding members of the modern Yemeni republic, and the core group known as the Famous Forty, dominated the country's political landscape in the four decades following the founding of the Yemeni republic in September 1962. This Brief will trace the origins of the Famous Forty and of the revolutionary generation, highlighting both the influential role they assumed in Yemeni politics and the ways in which this generation's death, and the absence of legitimate successors to them, has been accompanied by a mass demonstration of grief concurrent with both the government's loss of legitimacy and the loss of a public national identity. The ensuing vacuum in national politics has hampered the central government and allowed for the expansion of multiple opposition movements, such as the Houthis and al-Hirak, which target the very foundations of the modern Yemeni state. Nonetheless, this Brief concludes, although the Houthi assault on Sana'a is a reflection of a conflict between the government and the northern Zaydi tribes that began with the republic's founding in 1962, it is also an indication of possible tribal and religious alternatives to the previous republican state model, and carries with it the potential for the formation of a strengthened central government.

## The Emergence of the Famous Forty and the First Republican Generation

In the decades prior to the formation of the Yemen Arab Republic (YAR) in September 1962, the country was impoverished and forcibly isolated from foreign influence by the theocratic ruler Imam Yahya and his son, Ahmad. During the 1940s and 1950s, Imam Yahya selected a group of forty mostly orphaned teenagers to study abroad and return to Yemen to serve in his administration. This group, overseen by Yemeni foreign affairs representative 'Abd al-Rahman Baydani, who was living in Cairo at the time,<sup>3</sup> studied at universities in Cairo, Lebanon, Western Europe, and the United States.<sup>4</sup> Rather than return home to loyally serve the Imam's government, however, most of these students, who had subsequently been joined by hundreds of others traveling at their own expense, formed the core of the "Free Yemen" network of expatriates.<sup>5</sup> Beginning in the 1950s, the Free Yemen movement was instrumental in organizing the opposition to the autocratic Yemeni Imamate and eventually overthrowing the newly installed Imam Muhammad al-Badr on September 26, 1962.

The declaration of a Yemeni republic in 1962 marked the beginning of six years of civil war between the royalist tribal armies, led by the deposed Yemeni religious leader Imam al-Badr, and the Egyptian-supported YAR. The seventy days between November 1967 and February 1968 marked one of the most important periods in the formation of the modern Yemeni state. An estimated 50,000 royalist tribesmen from the Yemeni northern highlands descended on the capital city of Sana'a with the intention of crushing the republic and reinstating the Imamate. Most of the republican political elite fled Sana'a, leaving behind only a few thousand soldiers to defend the capital. In the ensuing seventy days, however, reported Soviet airlifts, poor royalist leadership, and a solid defense of the city ended the siege.

The lifting of the siege in February 1968 was considered by most Yemenis at the time as a final victory for the young Yemeni republic, ending six years of civil

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war. The defense of the republic's capital carried with it additional historical meaning for the Yemeni people. When Imam al-Badr's army descended on the capital city, many of its residents feared a tribal pillage characteristic of previous regime changes in Yemen.<sup>6</sup> The YAR's defeat of the siege was seen by Yemenis as a historic victory over the tribal traditions of the Imamate era, garnering new respect and legitimacy for the new republican form of government, at least for those living in Sana'a.

Hassan al-'Amri, who had been studying at an Iraqi military college around the time of the Famous Forty, developed his own revolutionary legend of having defended the capital city of Sana'a during the famous 1968 siege. 'Amri's heroic performance maintaining the city's morale and civil order during the siege and eventually breaking through enemy lines earned him the historic title of "The General of Yemen."<sup>7</sup> 'Amri would later serve five terms as the prime minister of the YAR, and would forever be known in the popular media by his battle-earned nickname. During the decades following the civil war, nearly every member of north Yemen's republican elite claimed to have fought to defend the capital city in 1967-1968, bestowing on themselves the title of national heroes. This was despite the fact that only a few of them had in fact played a significant role in the battle or were even actually in the city at the time. The political scientist Stephen W. Day explains that "since national memories of this battle came to define patriotism in the infant republic, it was important for a politician's reputation to be known as someone who helped rescue the city."<sup>8</sup> Even former president Ali Abdullah Saleh's official government biography claims that he was twenty-one when he fought in the "Seventy Days" battle defending the city of Sana'a during the siege, placing him, too, amongst an important generation of Yemeni revolutionaries.<sup>9</sup>

The Famous Forty, as they are known in Yemeni national history, returned home either before or during the years following the September 1962 revolution, representing the core of the country's first modernist and foreign-educated civil service.<sup>10</sup> Mohsin al-'Ayni, for example—the country's first foreign minister—was one of the most prominent Yemeni politicians of the twentieth century, tracing his political beginnings to the original Famous Forty group. Al-'Ayni would later serve four terms as prime minister from 1962 to 1975, after which he became a career diplomat for twenty years.<sup>11</sup>

In the decades following the revolution, nine other members of the Famous Forty became ministers of health, education, economics, state, foreign affairs, finance, and public works. The training they had received abroad translated directly into their designing and staffing the modern state infrastructure of Yemen. For example,

Muhammad 'Abd al-Aziz Sallam, although only a novice in his medical studies abroad, was called upon to found the Yemeni Ministry of Health during the 1960s. Five other members of the original Famous Forty became army officers, helped plot the 1962 revolution, and then assumed high military and civilian authority in the first modern Yemeni government, serving under President Abdullah al-Sallal.

In addition to the principal Famous Forty group, there were an additional estimated five hundred Yemenis studying in a post-secondary school abroad of their own accord. This larger group of university-educated Yemenis born during the 1930s and 1940s considered themselves an elite group within society and came to dominate the post-1962 Yemeni government, economy, and educational system. Their foreign training and experience enabled them to construct the foundations of a modern state and, along with the Famous Forty, make up the first cohort of government officials.<sup>12</sup>

From 1967 to the 1980s, between one-third and one-half of all cabinet appointments originated from the Famous Forty. Eleven of the twenty members of Prime Minister Hassan Makki's cabinet in 1974, for example, were original members of the Famous Forty. Makki himself was a member of the Famous Forty and would serve as prime minister again in 1994, until he was forced to resign after being wounded during a coup.<sup>13</sup> In subsequent governments under Prime Minister 'Abd al-Aziz 'Abd al-Ghani from 1975 to 1980, twelve of twenty-four cabinet members were original members of the Famous Forty. 'Abd al-Karim al-Iryani retained eight of twenty-six original members during his tenure as prime minister from 1980 to 1983.<sup>14</sup>

While the great majority of the members of the Famous Forty ended up in the foreign service, in government ministries, in the military, or at the Yemen Bank for Reconstruction and Development, they were not limited to the Yemeni public sector. Several served senior roles in mixed public-private industries, including Yemenia Airlines and the Sana'a Broadcasting Company; a few remained in academia or became national poets.<sup>15</sup> The Famous Forty and their extended cohort became the face of the new republic in every regard, bringing tribal Yemen into the modern era.

## The Passing of a Generation

On June 3, 2011, six months after the beginning of massive anti-government protests in Sana'a, Yemeni president Ali Abdullah Saleh's palace mosque was targeted by a

rocket attack. Although the publicly reviled president was seriously injured in the attack and was forced to travel to Saudi Arabia for medical care, popular jubilation was somewhat tempered, for there was a second, unintended victim. ‘Abd al-Aziz ‘Abd al-Ghani, one of the original founders of the modern Yemeni republic in 1962, was praying next to Saleh and was mortally wounded in the attack. There was a massive outpouring of grief when the Yemeni public received the news on August 21 that ‘Abd al-Ghani, who had served as prime minister again from 1994 to 1997 and had continued to preside as the president of the government’s Consultative (“Shura”) Council since 2003, had died from his injuries.<sup>16</sup> Al-Ghani’s death was seen as marking the symbolic fall of Saleh’s regime as well as the passing of a great figure in the history of the Yemen Arab Republic. His funeral marked a unique moment in the months of street protest, when both Saleh’s regime and its opposition mourned a casualty of national hostilities. Government employees were given the day off to attend the funeral, and a public day of bereavement was declared. Even during the height of opposition to Saleh’s regime, the protesters took a one-day hiatus to recognize the tragic loss of one of Yemen’s greatest political leaders of the revolutionary era. For many Yemenis, al-Ghani embodied an entire generation of revolutionaries who ran the modern state and continued to represent its legitimacy in the decades after the 1962 revolution.

The death on January 1, 2012, of ‘Abd al-Rahman Baydani, the former mentor to the Famous Forty students who served as vice-president of the Yemen Arab Republic during the 1960s and continued to play a prominent role in Yemeni political society, marked another significant moment in the passing of Yemen’s generation of the revolution. Although Baydani was exiled from the country for political conspiracy during the civil war, he was invited back to Yemen during the 1980s to serve in both official governmental and unofficial advisory roles, and even considered a run for president in 2006. Baydani also became a prolific academic writer, garnering a large readership as well as a local following.

An elaborate website dedicated to Baydani’s life work is a testament to the public’s perception of him as an embodiment of Yemen’s revolution.<sup>17</sup> Up until a few months before his death at the age of 85, Baydani appeared regularly on television shows, radio broadcasts, and in newspaper columns, developing a cult of personality rivaled perhaps only by the president himself. Baydani’s death was particularly significant as he had outlived nearly all of the other Famous Forty and was thus one of the last remaining members of Yemen’s generation of the revolution, who came to political and national prominence during the civil war in the 1960s.

## Unmaking “the Sons of Qahtan”

In a country divided by religious and tribal loyalties, the generation of revolutionaries served as a unifying element following the overthrow of the Zaydi Imamate in 1962. In constructing a modern state, the revolutionary founders employed an elaborate historical myth to function as the basis for a common national identity. According to the myth, the Arabs of South Arabia were all descended from Qahtan (the biblical Yoqtan), a descendant of Sam (the biblical Shem), who was the son of Noah. The poets of North Yemen have perpetuated this national myth through their prose. For example, a famous revolutionary poem begins: “Qahtan is your ancestor and mine, the people of Yemen are your possession and mine.”<sup>18</sup> The Yemeni public was annually reminded of the Qahtan myth, on September 26, the day the republic was founded in 1962, which was celebrated as a day of independence.

Following independence from Britain in 1967, the southern People’s Democratic Republic of Yemen (PDRY) employed a similar nationalist ideology, albeit one mixed with Marxist rhetoric, in an attempt to eliminate tribal and religious divisions in South Yemen society. The PDRY celebrated its independence day on October 14, 1963, commemorating the start of the anti-colonial war against Britain, with its own annual rituals perpetuating the ideology of nationalist union while also reiterating the Qahtan myth of South Arabia. By the time North and South Yemen were united in 1990, forming the Republic of Yemen, northern and southern Yemeni politicians agreed to erase a dividing line drawn by British and Ottoman colonial authorities in the nineteenth century, and to unite behind the Qahtan myth forged by their respective revolutions. Former president Ali Abdullah Saleh often described his position in united Yemen as the “main representative of the ‘sons of Qahtan.’”<sup>19</sup>

With the passing of the Yemeni republic’s founding generation and no new generation of foreign-educated modernists emerging to replace them, government ministry positions have been filled primarily by tribal representatives who openly reject the nationalist Qahtan rhetoric and prefer their own tribal loyalties. Yemeni presidential cabinets from 2010 to 2015 reflected this change in the country’s national politics. With the exception of Hisham Sharaf Abdullah, the minister of higher education and scientific research, who received an M.A. from the Catholic University of America in Washington, D.C., the most recent Yemeni cabinets have not featured a cadre of modern, Western-educated nationalists. (The most educated minister, Dr. Abu Bakr Abdullah al-Qirbi, a British-trained physician who

served most recently as minister of foreign affairs, was fired by Ali Abdullah Saleh in 2011 for his critique of the regime.) In contrast to the cabinets of the 1960s through the 1990s, the great majority of ministers now come from prominent tribal families and exhibit few qualifications for their positions, and little to no training. The cabinet they compose functions more as a patronage network than as a legitimate national government.

Though of the original group of the Famous Forty and the approximately five hundred students who studied abroad during the 1950s and 1960s, only a small minority remained abroad. Since the 1970s the trend has been reversed, as Yemenis studying abroad have increasingly declined to return. According to a February 2014 study by the Yemen Ministry of Higher Education and Scientific Research, upwards of thirty thousand Yemenis holding undergraduate, graduate, and post-graduate degrees are working in other countries.<sup>20</sup> At a time when local hospitals, universities, and government ministries are struggling to find trained professionals, educated Yemenis continue to leave the country.<sup>21</sup> Yemeni institutions like the universities of Sana'a and Ta'iz are forced to appoint their own recent B.A. graduates to give lecture courses in place of faculty who have left the country.

The new generation of Yemenis is faced with the difficulty of prolonging a republic that enjoys declining support and validity in the face of tribal and religious alternatives. The recently deposed Yemeni president 'Abd Rabbuh Mansur Hadi, for example, is a southerner who was studying abroad during the 1968 siege of Sana'a and did not return to South Arabia until the end of the 1970s. Hadi was able to claim neither the status of a national hero nor an association with the founding fathers of the revolution.

The Yemeni republican model and its manufactured national identity have indeed shown signs of serious weakness and decline as the new post-revolutionary generation demonstrates a preference for Yemen's historic clan- and tribal-based affiliations.<sup>22</sup> Tribal, religious, and regional divisions have begun to overshadow the nationalism of prior decades. Sheikhs from Hashid and Bakil, the two largest tribal confederations, have increasingly backed away from the nationalist union, preferring instead to exercise influence as representatives of the country's strongest tribal alliances. The northern Houthi movement claims its own legitimacy based on the historic right of the minority Zaydi population to South Arabian leadership, in place of a nationalist government united behind the Qahtan myth,<sup>23</sup> while the southern separatist movement al-Hirak regards the nationalist union as a farce—because, it argues, southern Yemenis are treated as second-class citizens. Al-Hirak instead advocates for the return of the South Yemen state, which

its supporters argue was the genuine Qahtani state, rather than the northern republic, which was formed with the aid of the Egyptians.<sup>24</sup>

It has become clear over recent years that the nationalist Qahtan myth that served as the ideological basis for the unified Yemeni republic in 1990 was contingent upon the continued presence of the remnants of the original revolutionary leadership. It seems that the myth of the sons of Qahtan has died along with the architects of the nationalist myth that underpinned the republic's legitimacy.

## The Houthi Coup—Echoes of an Old Civil War

The passing of the Yemeni republic's founding generation, and of the revolutionary heroes who had defended the capital city against the northern tribal assault in 1967, has presented an opening for the Houthi movement to regain the initiative in Yemeni politics. The Houthi movement is not a modern phenomenon related to a radical Islamist movement or an expansionist Iranian foreign policy; rather, its history can be traced back to the foundations of the current Yemeni republic during the 1960s. The Houthi family supported the deposed Imam Muhammad al-Badr, the last in a centuries-long dynasty of religious rulers in Yemen, in his armed resistance to the republican state during the 1960s.<sup>25</sup> Following the end of the civil war, the northern Zaydi tribes who had supported the deposed Imam reconciled with the republican political elite and together formed a united government.

The Famous Forty and the founders of the republic replaced the country's former religious hierarchy, which had considered families descended from the prophet Mohammed, known as Sayyids, to constitute the country's social elite. The Houthi family was among the prominent Sayyid families that were marginalized under the Yemeni republic.<sup>26</sup> For decades, the central government in Sana'a neglected the northern Yemeni tribes, both in terms of government financing and with respect to their level of political participation. These policies were exacerbated under the thirty-three-year rule of President Ali Abdullah Saleh, generating additional anti-government sentiment among the northern tribes. Saleh, often described as “dancing on the head of snakes,” with the snakes being the Yemeni tribes, was intent on centralizing state power and exerting control over remote tribal areas that resisted state intervention—and tensions increased during a series of battles between Saleh's army and the tribal supporters of the Houthi family, beginning in 2004.<sup>27</sup> The passing of the modernist generation has presented an opportunity for the

Houthi-led Zaydi tribal opposition to again challenge the previously victorious republic and compete against a new political generation for the national mantle of leadership.

As the generation of revered revolutionaries passed on, the Houthi leadership continued to gain in popularity. Encouraged to pursue bolder actions, the movement's young leader, Abdul Malek al-Houthi, led his tribesmen in conquest southwest toward Sana'a.<sup>28</sup> Although the assault on the capital city in November 2014 involved a relatively small number of tribesmen, the historical significance of the attack was immense—for whereas the republic had defended the capital city in 1968, the new generation of Yemeni leaders could not defend Sana'a in a similarly heroic fashion. The arrival of Houthis in Sana'a symbolized for many in Yemen a return to the tribal dominance of the Imamic period.

The Houthi attack on Sana'a in 2014, however, differed from previous sacks of the capital city, which involved large-scale bloodshed and often featured the decapitated heads of political opponents on pikes adorning the main gates to the city. By contrast, until the siege of the president's palace in the end of January 2015, the Houthi attack on Sana'a had been limited to the bloodless occupation of buildings and minimal looting, with the exception of sporadic clashes with government forces or al-Qaeda operatives. Abdul Malek and the Houthi family have been keenly conscious of their domestic image and have been operating a successful public relations campaign featuring their own television channel, al-Maseera. Houthi leaders seem to be less concerned with the movement's international image, however, and have readily adopted the extremist and anti-Western rhetoric employed by previous isolationist Imams.

The shelling of the presidential palace as well as the resignation of the Yemeni president 'Abd Rabbuh Mansur Hadi are outgrowths both of the government's proposing to exercise influence over the country's periphery by subdividing the country's regions and of the Houthi vision for righting a historic wrong. The Houthi leadership, who have been diligently emphasizing their titles as Sayyids over recent months, seem poised to supplant a secular government that has lost its revolutionary generation.

The Houthi movement is not the only opposition group attempting to take advantage of the passing of Yemen's revolutionary generation, however. Though the Yemeni republic has gradually lost its founding leadership, the southern movement al-Hirak retains two of South Yemen's most prominent former leaders, Ali Salem al-Beidh and Ali Nasser Muhammad. Recent negotiations between al-Beidh and the Houthi leadership have led to speculation about a compromise that might result in a federated state, with

a northern region headed by the Houthis and a southern region led by al-Beidh.<sup>29</sup> Despite Abdul Malek al-Houthi's stated intention to maintain the Yemeni union and the equal representation of all Yemeni groups, separating the Sunni Shafi'i southern half of the country from the Shi'i Zaydi northern region may prove mutually beneficial.

This potential reconciliation between the Houthi movement and al-Hirak is of particular importance as both face a common threat from al-Qaeda of the Arabian Peninsula, a splinter group of the global Jihadi organization that has been gaining popular support since 2009.<sup>30</sup> And a fourth source of uncertainty in the Yemeni political scene is the former members of the popular protests that contributed to Ali Abdullah Saleh's resignation in November 2011. Although this group of malcontents and university students protested Saleh's government alongside tribal members of the Houthi movement through 2011, it remains unclear what role, if any, they will play in forming or contesting a Houthi-led Yemeni government.

## Conclusion

The September 2014 assault on the city of Sana'a and the deposition of the republican president and the parliament have in essence closed a circle of tribal discontent that began with the overthrowing of the last Yemeni Imam and the declaration of the Yemen Arab Republic in 1962. The nationalist union founded by members of the Famous Forty and defended by the first generation of foreign-educated Yemeni modernists has suffered greatly with the passage of time and is unlikely to recover the promise of its past. When Houthi representatives failed to reach a compromise with the existing cabinet by the first week of February 2015, they declared their intention to form an interim Houthi government for a period of two years before considering national elections. The Houthi movement may thus emerge as the beginning of a new era in the modern Yemeni state that holds the promise of stability and legitimacy.

The lost generation of the Famous Forty has left local Yemenis with no legitimate leader or group of individuals to inherit the legacies of the 1962 revolution and the 1990 unification of North and South Yemen. For the past five years, Yemen has been plagued by a decline in economic activity and foreign investment, an increase in violence across the country (particularly due to the activities of al-Qaeda of the Arabian Peninsula), the absence of a functioning central government, al-Hirak's southern independence movement, and massive, drawn-out urban protests across the country. With their situation growing increasingly desperate, locals may be even more amenable to accepting the political certainty offered by the Houthi

leadership, which is proffered in a religiously inspired language historically familiar to the general population. Although competing groups still remain, the public perceives the Houthi leadership as a legitimate alternative to the corrupt political elite of the post-revolutionary republic, and the Houthis may be able to leverage that credibility and the movement's popularity to form a strengthened central government.

Houthi tribesmen and Sayyid leaders have arrived in Sana'a during this moment of political transition, offering a religious and tribal alternative to the republican state model of the 1960s. The movement's preference for the name Ansar Allah, "Supporters of God," underscores the Houthi family's attempt to create a religious cult following extending beyond a popular adherence to their family's leadership. In the coming months, one possible outcome of the current complex political situation would be the designation by a tribal council of a religious leader or perhaps even an Imam. The title of Imam, the most revered and widely recognized position in Yemen's ancient and modern history, may yet constitute a potential component of stability and prosperity in a region that has lacked both for over a decade.

Although the international community has distanced itself from the extremist and anti-Western rhetoric of the Houthi movement, it is important to acknowledge the collapse of the Yemeni republican model and the concurrent domestic popularity and historical legitimacy of the Houthis. The Houthis and their supporters are not a new or imported element in Yemeni society; and the Zaydi tribes of the northern highlands have been among the dominant forces in Yemen for centuries. They have been sidelined from national politics only since the founding of the republic during the 1960s.

The Houthi conquest of the capital city and the government cannot be dismissed as an aberration, or as another obstacle in the path of the Yemeni republic that will eventually be overcome. With the passing of the revolutionary generation, the Yemeni republic has lost its ability to counter the challenge posed by northern tribal insurrections or by other anti-government movements and protests. The Houthi movement and the accompanying re-emergence of northern Zaydi tribes onto the national stage will likely become a permanent fixture of any Yemeni government, leaving the Houthis—inheriting the role previously held by the Famous Forty—as the country's future face and global representatives.

## Endnotes

- 1 The author would like to thank Dr. J. E. Peterson for his invaluable comments on an earlier draft. Sa'dah is considered the capital of Yemen's northern region, which is dominated by Zaydi tribes and families. The Houthi family is originally from the area around the village of Houth, which is located between Sa'dah and the capital city of Sana'a.
- 2 Christopher Boucek, "War in Saada: From Local Insurrection to National Challenge," in *Yemen on the Brink*, ed. Christopher Boucek and Marina Ottaway (Washington, DC: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 2010), p. 49.
- 3 'Abd al-Rahman Baydani, *Azmat al-ummah al-Arabiyyah wa-thawat al-Yaman* (Cairo: Jumhuriyat Misr al-'Arabiyyah, 1984). Baydani, who held dual citizenship from Egypt and Yemen, became a prominent figure in the conduct of Yemen's foreign policy and acted as the Imam's foreign affairs representative during the 1940s and 1950s. His marriage to future Egyptian president Anwar Sadat's sister solidified his connections with the Egyptian political elite, making him a valuable asset to the Yemeni government.
- 4 Robert D. Burrowes, *Historical Dictionary of Yemen* (Lanham, MD: Scarecrow Press, 1995), p. 125.
- 5 Robert D. Burrowes, "The Famous Forty and Their Companions: North Yemen's First-Generation Modernists and Educational Emigrants," *Middle East Journal*, vol. 59, 2005.
- 6 The tribes aiding the Imam were promised a free hand in plundering the capital city as payment for their military service in aiding the Imam's return to power. This had been the case in Yemen for hundreds of years, and it continued through the revolts of 1948 and 1955.
- 7 Asher Orkaby, *The International History of the Yemen Civil War, 1962-1968* (PhD diss., Harvard University, 2014), p. 297.
- 8 Stephen W. Day, *Regionalism and Rebellion in Yemen: A Troubled National Union* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), p. 90.
- 9 "Biography of Marshal Ali Abdullah Saleh President of the Republic of Yemen," [www.presidentsaleh.gov.ye](http://www.presidentsaleh.gov.ye).\*
- 10 J. Leigh Douglas, *The Free Yemeni Movement, 1935-1962* (Beirut: American University of Beirut, 1987), p. 162.
- 11 See Mohsin al-'Ayni, *Fifty Years in Shifting Sands: Personal Experience in the Building of a Modern State in Yemen*, ed. Ghassan E. Ghosn, transl. Hassan al-Haifi (Beirut: Editions Dar An-Nahar, 2004).
- 12 Burrowes, "The Famous Forty and Their Companions," p. 87.
- 13 Kevin Rosser, "Education, Revolt, and Reform in Yemen: The 'Famous Forty' Mission of 1947" (master's thesis, St Antony's College, Oxford, 1998), p. 79.
- 14 Burrowes, "The Famous Forty and Their Companions," p. 94. 'Abd al-Ghani was also a leading Yemeni businessman and the founder of Yemen's Bank for Reconstruction and Development. He would become prime minister again in 1994 after the attempted assassination of Makki.
- 15 Rosser, "Education, Revolt, and Reform in Yemen," pp. 77-78. Al-Sayyid 'Ali al-Saqqaf never returned to Yemen and worked as a medical librarian at New York Medical College and then at Johns Hopkins University (Burrowes, "The Famous Forty and Their Companions," p. 89).

- 16 “The Death of the President of Yemen’s Shurah Council,” *Al Jazeera*, August 22, 2011.
- 17 <http://www.elbaydany.com/>.\*
- 18 Steven C. Caton, “*Peaks of Yemen I Summon*”: *Poetry as Cultural Practice in a North Yemeni Tribe* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990), p. 34. The capital city of Sana’a is often referred to as madinat sam (the city of Sam), implying that Sana’a is an ancient city, with origins dating back to the time of Noah’s grandson, Qahtan. As they regard themselves as descendants of Qahtan, Yemenis often claim to be the most authentic and original Arabs—a source of pride for the people of South Arabia.
- 19 Day, *Regionalism and Rebellion in Yemen*, pp. 40–41, 177.
- 20 The complete study is available through [the Ministry of Higher Education and Scientific Research](#).\*
- 21 Murad Alazzany and Robert Sharp, “Yemen’s Brain Drain,” *Yemen Times*, August 28, 2014. They report that Yemeni university professors are applying for a sabbatical year abroad and not returning to their positions the following year.
- 22 Roby Barrett, *Yemen: A Different Political Paradigm in Context* (Tampa, FL: Joint Special Operations University, 2011). According to Barrett, Yemen never existed as a nation-state in the Weberian sense, as it was always forced to share central authority and territorial control with tribes and competing political groups, and had to reckon with foreign influence as well.
- 23 In actuality, the Yemeni republic formed in 1970 was a compromise between the Qahtan myth of the republicans and the tribal interests as represented by Abdullah al-Ahmar, the sheikh of the powerful Hashid tribal federation.
- 24 Stephen Day, “The Political Challenge of Yemen’s Southern Movement,” in *Yemen on the Brink*, ed. Boucek and Ottaway, p. 69. Since 2009, the Southern Movement has been advocating for secession from the northern republic, with demonstrators in Aden waving the flag of the former South Yemen republic, which had not been seen since the civil war in 1994.
- 25 The Imperial War Museum Archives—London, Neil McLean Papers, Box A (Yemen 1960s).
- 26 Gabriele vom Bruck, *Islam, Memory, and Morality in Yemen: Ruling Families in Transition* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005).
- 27 J. E. Peterson, “The al-Huthi Conflict in Yemen” (*Arabian Peninsula Background Note*, no. APBN-006, published on [www.JEPeterson.net](http://www.JEPeterson.net), August 2008).\* Although Saleh advocated a centralized state, true power and authority in his regime rested with tribal elements and particularly his own Sanhan tribe and the Hamdan San’ani tribes, all of which were small and poorly regarded—thereby engendering resentment from other Zaydi tribes.
- 28 Abdul Malek had taken over the leadership of the movement from his father, Badr al-Din, in 2006. The original leader of the Houthi movement was Abdul Malek’s brother, Husayn, who was killed in September 2004 in the midst of the armed conflict with Saleh’s government and later became a martyr for the movement.
- 29 “Houthis and Al-Hirak Leader Seek Two-Region Federal Yemen,” *Asharq al-Awsat*, December 9, 2014.
- 30 Gregory D. Johnsen, *The Last Refuge: Yemen, Al-Qaeda, and America’s War in Arabia* (New York: Norton, 2013).

\*Weblinks are available in the online version at  
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# Middle East Brief

## A Passing Generation of Yemeni Politics

Asher Orkaby

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