

YEMEN AT THE BEGINNING OF 21ST CENTURY: A VERY POOR AND STILL AN “ATTRACTIVE” COUNTRY FOR THE INTERESTS OF RELEVANT POWERS IN THE REGION

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ABSTRACT:

RECENTLY, IN AN ABSTRACT OF A PAPER ON YEMEN, THE AUTHOR SAID THAT THIS COUNTRY, ONCE CALLED "ARABIA FELIX" ("HAPPY ARABIA"), DESERVES TODAY ITS OPPOSITE NAME, RESPECTIVELY, "ARABIA INFELIX" ("UNHAPPY ARABIA"). IN THIS PAPER, BY ANALYZING THE HISTORY OF THIS STATE SITUATED IN A STRATEGIC LOCATION AT THE SOUTH OF THE ARABIAN PENINSULA, WE WILL TRY TO IDENTIFY THE MAIN ASPECTS THAT LED TO THE "DEGRADATION" OF "ARABIA FELIX", TILL IT WAS LABELED AS THE "UNHAPPY ARABIA" IN THE SECOND DECADE OF THE 21ST CENTURY.

KEYWORDS: YEMEN, FOREIGN INTERFERENCE; POVERTY; WATER SCARCITY; SOCIETAL DIVISION; HOUTHIS; SAUDI-AMERICAN INTERESTS

I. INTRODUCTION -YEMEN IN THE PRE-ISLAMIC TIMES³: SINCE WHEN, AND WHY *THE ARABIA FELIX*?

Yemen's known history dates back over 3000 years, while its unique culture is still visible in the architecture of its present-day cities⁴; also, it should be noticed that it is considered as the cradle of one of the oldest civilization known to man in the Arabian Peninsula, or the Western Asia in the southern part of the ancient Arabian Peninsula.⁵

This civilization was based on trade, mining, agriculture and urbanization, which allowed it to create a stable society that has recorded this development and transferred the

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³ Pre-Islamic times within this paper refers to the period starting with known historical data about Yemen, until the moment of Hegira.

⁴ Yemen Country Study Guide Volume 1 Strategic Information And Developments. 2012. Lulu.com, 2012. 36

⁵ Sayyed, Ayman. *Sources of the History of Yemen in the Islamic Period*, French Institute for Oriental Archaeology, 1974, vol. 7, 3, cited in “The Degradation of History. Violations Committed by the Warring Parties against Yemen’s Cultural Property”. *Mwatana for Human Rights*. November 2018. Yemen. Pdf Format, 7.

experience accumulated in history to different parts of the world at different intervals of time through the migration waves, especially to the North.⁶

However, the development of the region, began long before the present-day Yemen region to be called Felix Arabia, during the Romans; historical sources are speaking about the existence of a giant dam that was built at Ma'rib in the ancient times, about 500 BCE. It was about 610 m wide and 50 m high. Its function was to capture the floods and to feed it into the irrigation channels. This dam irrigated about four thousand hectares, which probably supported a population of three hundred thousand; during its existence, the dam collapsed several times and was rebuilt.⁷ However, following the collapse of 575 BC, it has not been rebuilt, which has caused the people from the area to migrate, while the Ma'rib Dam remained in Yemen's history by its role of maintaining a thriving culture in a challenging geographical location for more than a thousand years.⁸

Since 1000 BCE, this region of the Southern Arabian Peninsula has been led by three successive civilizations – known also, under the name of the kingdoms of *Minaean*, *Sabaeen* and *Himyarite*, the wellbeing of each one of them depended on trade with spices and with aromatics such as myrrh and frankincense that were greatly prized during ancient times, especially by and during the Egyptian, Greek and Roman civilizations. This type of trade had known a great expansion once with the use of camel caravans to carry the frankincense from the production center at Qanī' (nowadays known as Bi'r 'Ali) to different part of the region, mainly to Gaza in Egypt.⁹

Except frankincense, the caravans were also carrying gold and other precious goods that were coming from India by sea, and due to the rise and expansion of the great civilizations such as the Mesopotamian, and the Egyptian, the ancient Yemen became an important trade node between the most important commercial centers, therefore, important pre-islamic trading kingdoms appeared and developed.

The first trade kingdom, was that of the Minaeans, known also as the kingdom of Ma'in, lasted from 1200 to 650 BCE¹⁰, having the capital at Karna, present-day Sa'dah, and its center in northwestern Yemen¹¹. The Minaeans were the ones who controlled for much of their history the stone-walled oases lived by sedentary ancient Arabs, such as Yathrib (present day Medina/Madina al-munawarah), and Qarnaw, and who later connected¹² and lived in two different worlds through trade: the ones of sedentary and the nomadic ancient tribes.¹³ Step by step, the Minaneans, took control over the early spice trade and became the most well-known South Arabians in the Roman world, and were the main providers of incense to Syria, Egypt and Assyria.¹⁴

The second trade kingdom, the one of Sabaeen It was a kingdom from southern Arabia - the present-day Yemen - that flourished between the 8th century BCE and 275 CE when it was conquered by the Himyarites. Although these are the most commonly accepted data, the

⁶ Sayyed, Ayman. *Sources of the History of Yemen in the Islamic Period...*, 3

⁷ Sayyed, Ayman. *Sources of the History of Yemen in the Islamic Period...*, 3

⁸ Sayyed, Ayman. *Sources of the History of Yemen in the Islamic Period...*, 3

⁹ Yemen Country Study Guide Volume 1 Strategic Information and Developments. World Business Information Catalog. IBP, Inc. Lulu.com, 2012, 37.

¹⁰ "Ancient Yemen". 2019. *Cs.Nmsu.Edu*. <https://www.cs.nmsu.edu/~fmohamed/ancient-ye.html>. Accessed 09.07.2019.

¹¹ *Multiple Contributors. Pre-Islamic Arabia. Resources.Saylor.Org. Pdf*. 2019. Ebook. Pdf, 2.

¹² This being the reason why the Minaeans were called also "the intermediaries" by specialists.

¹³ Nabhan, Gary P. *Cumin, Camels, and Caravans: A Spice Odyssey*. (Univ. of California Press, 2014). 51.

¹⁴ Pliny the Elder cited in Nabhan, Gary P. *Cumin, Camels, and Caravans: A Spice Odyssey*. (Univ. of California Press, 2014), 51.

various researchers have supported a longer or shorter chronology with the earliest date of 1200 BCE; however, the majority agree on the Kingdom's end date, that of 275 C.E.¹⁵

The Sabaean kingdom is probably the best known today from the Bible narrative in the Book of the Kings, which mentions the visit of Queen of Sheba to King Solomon; the same story being said, albeit with significant differences, by other religious sources and in different languages and with small differences (New Testament in Matthew and Luke, and in other books of the Old Testament and the Qur'an).¹⁶

The Sabaean Kingdom was located in the Asir region of south-west, present-day Yemen, while its capital, Ma'rib, was located in the vicinity of the modern Yemen capital, Sana'a. According to the South-Arab tradition, Noe's greatest son, Sem, founded the city of Ma'rib. During the reign of Saba, Yemen was named "Felix Arabia" by the Romans, who were impressed by their wealth and prosperity, which, beyond admiration, was the cause for the Romans' desire to conquer it. Consequently, the Roman Emperor Augustus sent a military expedition to conquer "Arabia Felix" under the command of Aelius Gallus.¹⁷

What remains relevant is that in all sources, Saba kingdom was known as the richest in the region that was enriched by trade along incense routes between southern Arabia and Gaza harbor on the Mediterranean Sea, during the ancient times. Prior to the 8th century BC, trade in the area seemed to have been controlled by Minaneans, but the Sababhs dominated the region and imposed the goods directed northward to their neighbors in southern Hadramawt, Qataban and Qani port. The Sabaean kingdom suffered during the Ptolemaic Dynasty in Egypt when the Ptolemy encouraged the sea routes along the terrestrial journeys, and the prestige of Saba fell until they were conquered by the Himyarites.¹⁸

The last of the great pre-Islamic Yemeni kingdoms was that of Himyar, which lasted roughly from the first century BC until the year 500 AD¹⁹. In their glorious moments, the kingdoms of Saba and Himyarite covered most of present-day Yemen; initially, the Himyarites were an important tribe in the old Sabaean kingdom of Southwest Arabia; later, they turned into powerful rulers of much of South Arabia around 115 CE, until 525 CE. The Emperors concentrated in the area known as Dhū Raydān, on the coast of Yemen; they were probably helped to overthrow Saba's kingdom by the discovery of a sea route from Egypt to India that deprived the Sabaean kingdom of its previous importance as a landmark trade center.²⁰ The Himyarites inherited Sabean language and culture, and from their capital to Zafār, their power sometimes extended eastwards to the Persian Gulf and to the north in the Arabian desert. At the beginning of the 4th century, their capital was moved north to Sana'a, and later in the same century both Christianity and Judaism gained firm positions in the area. Internal disturbances and changing trade routes have led the kingdom to suffer a political and economic decline, and in 525, after some unsuccessful attempts, the Abyssinian Christian invaders eventually crushed the third pre-Islamic Yemeni kingdom. All these difficult times for today's

¹⁵ Mark, Joshua, and Joshua Mark. 2019. "Kingdom Of Saba". *Ancient History Encyclopedia*. https://www.ancient.eu/Kingdom_of_Saba/. Accessed 9 July 2019.

¹⁶ Mark, Joshua, and Joshua Mark. 2019. "Kingdom Of Saba"...

¹⁷ "Ancient Yemen". 2019. Cs.Nmsu.Edu. <https://www.cs.nmsu.edu/~fmohamed/ancient-ye.html>., Accessed 9 July, 2019

¹⁸ Mark, Joshua J., 2018.

¹⁹ "Himyar | People". 2019. *Encyclopedia Britannica*. <https://www.britannica.com/topic/Himyar>. Accessed 9 July 2019.

²⁰ "Himyar | People". 2019

Yemeni ancestors determined them to ask for help to the Persian help, which led to Persian control over the region in 575.²¹

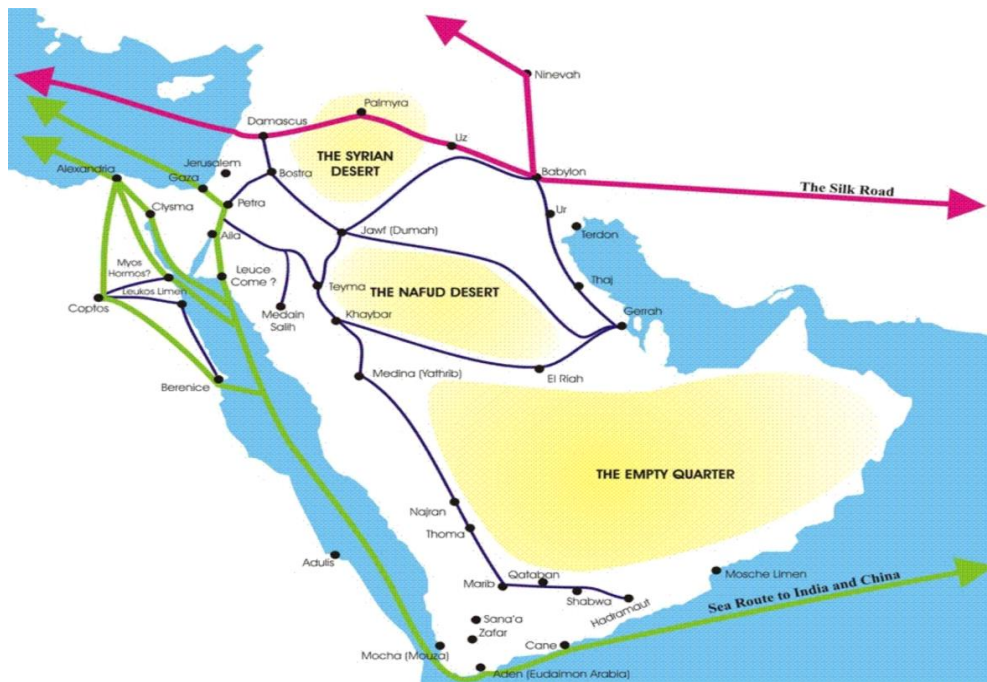


Figure 1.1. The Incense Road. Source: Ancient Cultures.²²

Except the ancient kingdoms described above, a few others deserve to be mentioned; one of them is the Kingdom of Hadhramawt, that existed between 8th century BCE and the 3rd century CE. It existed during the same time with the Minaeans when the later ones took control over the camel caravans' trade routes; historical sources mention that the Hadramawts helped the the Minaean kingdom in this endeavor. Eventually, the Hadramawt kingdom after annexed Qataban in the second part of the second century CE, and reached its greatest size, had been conquered by Himyarites around 300 CE.²³ Other kingdoms that deserves to be noticed during ancient times of Arabian Peninsula are the kingdom of Awsan and the Kingdom of Qataban; the latter one, was located on the trade route that connected the kingdoms of Saba, Ma'in and the Hadramawt. The main deity of the Qataban kingdom was "Amm" meaning the "Uncle" in Arabic language, fact that determined the Qatabanians to call themselves as the "children of Amm".²⁴

II. YEMEN – FROM THE EARLY ISLAM TO THE 1962 REVOLUTION

The Aksumite invasion of the Himyarite Kingdom took place after Dhu Nuwas, a Himyarite king, changed the state religion in Judaism and started to persecute the Christians within the kingdom.²⁵ As a result, the Aksumites, encouraged by the Byzantine Emperor Justin

²¹ "Himyar | People". 2019

²² "The Incense Road". 2019. *Ancientcultures.Net*. <http://www.ancientcultures.net/IncenseRoad.htm>. Accessed 10 July 2019.

²³ Multiple Contributors. *Pre-Islamic Arabia. Resources.Saylor.Org. Pdf*. 2019. Ebook. Pdf, 3

²⁴ Pre-islamic Arabia..., 3.

²⁵ Pre-islamic Arabia..., 4

I, invaded and annexed the whole region of the ancient Yemen, and were looking to invade also Mecca, when the help of the Persian army was requested by the local tribesmen; the former came in, put an end to the Aksumite period,²⁶ and added “the satrapy of Yemen to their domains” as a reward for their intervention. Few decades later, the last Persian governor of Yemen converted to Islam in 628 CE”, thus, accepting in the name of Yemen region the political authority of the Muslim community.²⁷

It was not difficult for Islam to spread in Yemen; the horrifying behavior of both Jews and Christians during those times, alongside the economic problems from the region, helped the Muslims to spread their faith also within the Southern part of Arabia²⁸. As for the bringing and spreading of Islamic religion in Yemen, it is attributed to Ali²⁹, who was sent by Prophet Muhammad as a governor.³⁰

During the reign of al-Mu'awiyah, the Umayyad khalifah, Yemen was divided into two regions: the north, centered around San'a and the south, around the city of al-Janad, and starting with the Abbasids, Yemen turned out to be difficult to be controlled due to its distance and its tribal nature. In the mid-nineteenth century, the Yu'firids a local Sunni dynasty controlled the mountainous area, while at the beginning of the 10th century, a Shi'a leader, Yahya ibn al-Husayn set up the Zaydi imam in the northern mountains Yemen which lasted until the 1962 Republican Revolution. In the southern mountainous areas along the Red Sea coast and along the Gulf of Aden, local dynasties have evolved, which have often been subject to foreign invasion.³¹

Once with the spreading of Islam throughout the Arabian Peninsula and beyond, Yemen became “an inseparable part of the Muslim world”³², though, starting with 10th century the region detached from the main body of the Arab-Muslim Empire and was ruled by different dynasties. The Ayyubids invaded Yemen from Egypt in 1173, when they transformed the latter in a “self-governing state within the Ayyubid Empire”, under the control of a local official Nur al-Din Umar ibn al-Rasul, who proclaimed it an independent nation with its center in Ta'izz, from where the Rasulid dynasty ruled from 1228 to 1455³³, when it fell under “foreign occupiers and domination”, starting with the Dutch and Portuguese.

At the beginning of the 16th century, the Europeans, were already using the sea route between Egypt to India for different purposes, starting from commerce to conquest. Among those Europeans, were also the Portuguese who took over the Socotra island in 1507, and subsequently tried to conquer Yemen, but failed. Ten years later, the Ottoman armies conquered Egypt, and by 1548 brought most of the Yemeni territory under their control.³⁴

²⁶ Pre-islamic Arabia..., 4.

²⁷ Wenner, Manfred W, and Robert Burrowes. “Yemen - History.” *Encyclopædia Britannica*, 16 May 2019, www.britannica.com/place/Yemen/History. Accessed 10 July 2019.

²⁸ “Islam in Yemen - Islamic Studies - Oxford Bibliographies - Obo.” *Oxfordbibliographies.Com*, 19 June 2019, www.oxfordbibliographies.com/view/document/. Accessed 09.07.2019.

²⁹ “Ali (ca. 600-661), the fourth caliph of the Arab and Islamic Empire, was the cousin and son-in-law of Muhammad. The Shiite branch of Islam regards him and certain of his descendants as inspired rulers and the only true heirs of Mohammed.”, according to “Ali | Encyclopedia.Com.” *Encyclopedia.Com*, 2019, www.encyclopedia.com/people/history/middle-eastern-history-biographies/ali. Accessed 10 July 2019.

³⁰ Wenner, Manfred W, and Robert Burrowes. “Yemen - History.” *Encyclopædia Britannica*, 16 May 2019, www.britannica.com/place/Yemen/History. Accessed 10 July 2019.

³¹ “Islam in Yemen - Islamic Studies - Oxford Bibliographies - Obo. 19 June 2019.

³² Rabi, Uzi. *YEMEN. Revolution, Civil War and Unification*. I.B. Tauris. London. New York. 2015. p. XIII.

³³ Davis DiPiazza. *Yemen in Pictures...*, 26.

³⁴ Davis DiPiazza. *Yemen in Pictures...*, 26.

The Ottomans ruled Yemen in two different periods; the first one started from 1539 until 1636, while the second one, began in 1849 until 1911— only in the northern part of Yemen, due to British presence in the south of the country, who were already controlling the port of Aden – in fact a British colony – since 1839.³⁵

During the first Ottoman ruling period, Yemenis began to harvest the coffee beans and to develop an extensive trade coffee, transforming Makha – a port at the Red Sea – into “the most important coffee port in the world”, but in a few decades, this first rule period ended due to a young Zaydi, later known as Qasim the Great, who was able to rise up for the first time in Yemen history the Sunnis and Shiites against the Ottomans by 1608. His son, Muayyad Muhammad, was the one who in 1636 forced the Ottomans to leave Yemen, thus, bringing to an end the first Ottoman rule period.³⁶

The history of relationship between Ottomans and Yemenis during both periods of Ottoman occupation, was one marked by a series of uprisings, especially due to the malpractices of the Ottomans officials, fact that had been used by the Zaydi imams to gain support from the tribesmen and notables for their rising up against unjust Ottoman rulers, in the name of religious duty.³⁷

Another historical relevant European power for the Arabian Peninsula's region – the British Empire - that had controlled part of Yemen for a long period of time, came in for the first time in 1700s, when it started threatening the Zaydi rule, in order to protect British interests in its Indian colony. Therefore, in 1799 the British sized the island of Perim near the Bab al-Mandab Strait, and forty years later, in 1839 they occupied also the port of Aden.³⁸

The Ottomans returned to Yemen during the first part of the 19th century, more precisely in 1849; shortly afterwards, the Suez Canal opened, thus being shortened the distance between the Great Britain and one of the important British colony – India – by 5,000 miles/8,047 km, this event transformed Yemen even in a more important location to the British, because their ships that were using the Suez Canal were stopping in Aden harbor for supplies in their ways to South Asia.³⁹

Around 1882, the Zaydi capital, Sada was taken by the Ottomans, whose the new expansion in the region, alarmed the British who were controlling the southern part of Yemen who perceived the advance of Turks as a threat to their commercial routes. As a result, British Empire officials had to offer military protection to those Yemeni sheikhs who promised not to sell any land without British approval, and also to announce them of any foreign, political interferences attempts. This approach led to the decision of drawing borders between the two spheres of influence: the Turkish, and the British one, at the very beginning of the 20th century. The Turkish territory became the North Yemen, while the British one, the South Yemen; both territories were recognized regionally, as well as internationally and were kept as such almost the entire century.⁴⁰

Starting with the moment when the Ottoman Empire was labeled as “the Sick man of Europe”, the Zaydi Imamate from the northern highlands of Yemen began to extend its control beyond their genuine borders, and under the Hamid al-Din dynasty, reiterated its claim over the entire Yemen. Under the leadership of Imam Yahia bin Husayn bin Muhammad it

³⁵ Rabi, 2015, XIII.

³⁶ Davis DiPiazza. *Yemen in Pictures...*, 26.

³⁷ Yacob, Abdol Rauh. "Yemeni Opposition to Ottoman Rule: An Overview." *Proceedings of the Seminar for Arabian Studies* 42 (2012): 411-19.

³⁸ Davis DiPiazza. *Yemen in Pictures...*, 27.

³⁹ Davis DiPiazza. *Yemen in Pictures...*, 27.

⁴⁰ Davis DiPiazza. *Yemen in Pictures...*, 27.

succeeded partially, only – due to British presence in the south.⁴¹ The Imamate that resulted following the fall of the Ottoman Empire and the sign of Treaty of Da'an in 1911, it was administrated by Yahia and his son Ahmad until 1962 in a “personal manner”, meaning, they maintained divisive policies, and ran the Imamate according to tribal patterns. Therefore, when the revolutionary winds that were “awash in the middle of the twentieth century in the Middle East did not spare Yemen; as a result, the Imamate collapsed in 1962⁴², with the “help” of Gamal Abdul Nasser of Egypt, despite the support for royalists of Saudi Arabia.

If the Ottomans had to give up to their claims over the Yemeni territory partially in 1911, and totally in 1918, the British were in South Yemen, to stay; they knew since the Napoleon Bonaparte's invasion of Egypt in 1798, about the relevance of the Bab al-Mandab strait's strategic relevance for their imperial waterways. Even though, they never aspired to a full control in Arabian Peninsula, the control of Aden “was seen as a tool to build up British dominance in region and therefore they established a military base under direct control of the government of British India”⁴³, and in order to spread their influence, the British looked to sign agreements with emirs from the hinterland, therefore, the name of the zone control started to be called “Protectorate of Aden”, which was divided into the *Western Protectorate* (formed by small emirates and sultanates), and the *Eastern Protectorate* (Qu'aiti state of Shihr and Mukalla, Kathiri state of Sai'un, Mahri state of Qishn and Socotra)⁴⁴. Important to notice is that Aden itself, was a separate entity from the above-mentioned protectorate, and it was named the “Colony of Aden”.⁴⁵

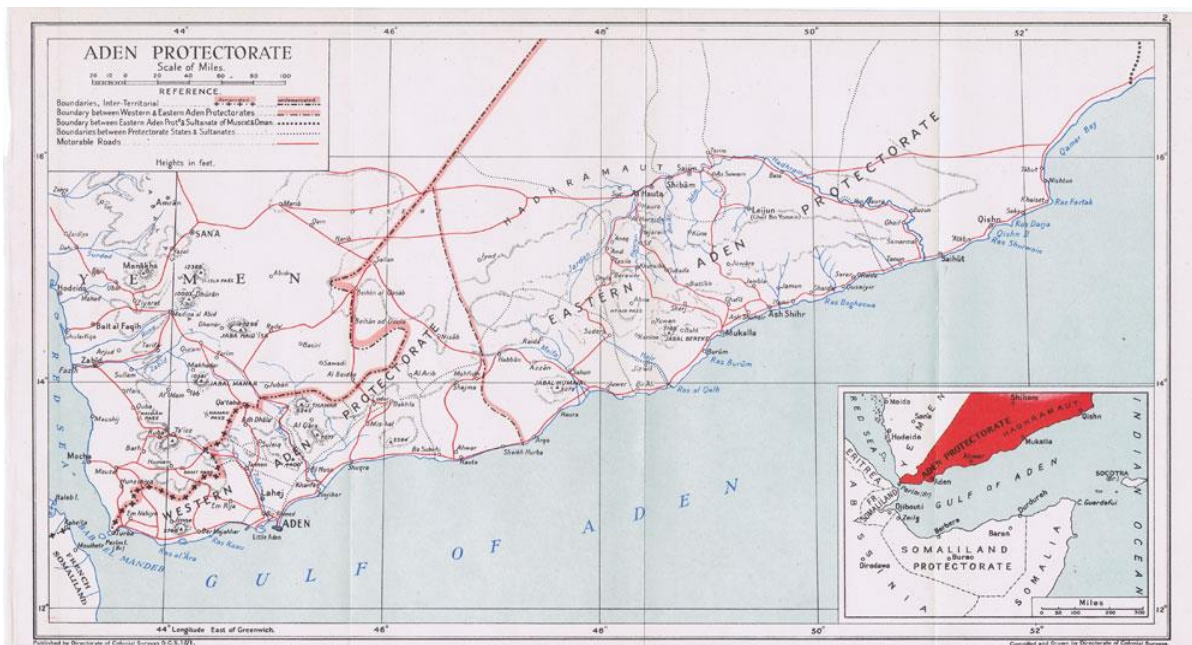


Figure 2. Map of the Aden Protectorate showing the Western and the Eastern Protectorates. Directorate of colonial surveys, 1948. Source: Directorate of colonial surveys. Printed by the War Office, UK, 1948.⁴⁶

⁴¹ Rabi, 2015, XII.

⁴² Rabi, 2015, XIV.

⁴³ Rabi, 2015, 11.

⁴⁴ Zoltán Horváth. South Yemen under British Rule. Accessed July 15, 2019. https://www.crwflags.com/fotw/flags/ye_brit.html#1959.

⁴⁵ Rabi, 2015, 12.

⁴⁶ "Aden - Maps, Prints, Photographs Ephemera - Pennymead.Com". 2019. Pennymead.Com. <http://www.pennymead.com/results.php?ct=4&sub=9&m=s>. Accessed 15 July 2019.

III. YEMEN AND THE SPHERES OF INFLUENCE IN ITS MODERN AND CONTEMPORARY HISTORY

“The 1962 Revolution was ours, and the Egyptians stole it from us”.⁴⁷

In international politics, the sphere of influence is defined as a “claim by a state to exclusive or predominant control over a foreign area or territory..(..)..the term it may refer to a political claim to exclusive control, which other nations may or may not recognize as a matter of fact, or it may refer to a legal agreement by which another state or states pledge themselves to refrain from interference within the sphere of influence”.⁴⁸

Throughout history, according to Uzi Rabi, Yemen was exposed to the designs of foreign forces and world powers, due to its strategic location. In its modern history, two imperial powers left their mark on Yemen: the Ottoman and the British Empire, that also, divided Yemen into two spheres of influences”.⁴⁹

If the Ottoman Empire had been disbanded by the Great Powers at the beginning of the 20th century, the British one, was at its peak when the Sykes-Picot Agreement was signed in secrecy. Therefore, the disappearance of the Turks from the Middle East region, and especially from Yemen, was a good omen for the British Empire, given the position of Aden in regard to other British possessions in the extended region.

Therefore, in 1950s, the nowadays Yemen was divided into four entities: the Imamate, the British Colony of Aden, the Western Aden Protectorate and the Eastern Aden Protectorate; except the first one, all the other were under the British control; however, after the North Yemen – that was an independent state – joined the Arab League, the imam started lobbying among the members of the organization, for international support against the British presence in the South Yemen, and shortly received support from the Soviet Union⁵⁰ – that started to equip the imam's army with tanks and missiles “although it was unclear if the army was even capable of using them”.⁵¹

After World War II (WWII) the British presence in the region started to be seriously challenged: they had to evacuate India in 1947, and the Suez Canal in 1956, while the independence of Sudan in the same year (1956), and the wind of the Arab nationalism and the Jamal Abdul Nasser's charisma proved to be almost impossible to cope with by the British. Nasser's popularity increased after the nationalization of the Suez Canal, fact which prepared the Arabian Peninsula for unification of Egypt with Syria in 1958, to which the Yemeni Imamate joined one month later⁵²; all of these were tough challenges for the British. When Imam Ahmad left the Imamate for a medical treatment in Europe, British started to increase their support for different groups that were questioning the imam Ahmad's rule.⁵³ Despite the British efforts in replacing Ahmad from the imam's rule, he died of natural causes in 1962, while those who abolished the imam, and established the Yemen Arab Republic (YAR),

⁴⁷ Eric Rouleau – a journalist who visited Yemen in the beginning of 1967, cited in Rabi, Uzi. *YEMEN. Revolution, Civil War and Unification*. I.B. Tauris. London. New York. 2015. p. 57.

⁴⁸ Deudney, Daniel H. "Sphere of Influence." Encyclopædia Britannica. April 24, 2019. Accessed July 15, 2019. <https://www.britannica.com/topic/sphere-of-influence>.

⁴⁹ Rabi, 2015, XIII.

⁵⁰ Rabi, 2015, 30.

⁵¹ Rabi, 2015, 33.

⁵² Rabi, 2015, 34.

⁵³ Rabi, 2015, 36.

were a group of army officers that carried out a coup, with the vital support of the Nasserist Egypt, actually a *trendy movement* across the Middle East and North African region in the second part of the 20th century.⁵⁴ Thus, it took place the event known in the history of the North Yemen, as the Revolution, and subsequently to a heavy Egyptian presence on its territory: in 1963 there were 30,000 Egyptian soldiers, also numerous political advisors, military instructors, school teachers, as well as doctors. All of them, Egyptians.⁵⁵

But a secondary outcome of the 1962 Revolution was also the emergence of two distinct camps in Yemen: that of the Royalists (*malkiyyun*) and that of the Republicans (*jumhuriyyun*). Both of them, were supported by important state actors; thus, the Royalists were supported by the British and Saudi Arabia, while the Republicans were backed by Egypt, and the former USSR.⁵⁶ The emergence of these two camps led to a bloody civil war for the first five years, after the YAR had been established, during which the Egypt forces proved that they were not properly equipped for Yemen's climate. North Yemen's cliffs and mountains favored the royalists/guerrilla forces, who attacked mercilessly the Egyptian forces.⁵⁷ Thus, Egyptians “submerged into Yemeni swamp and suffered hard material and human losses to the extent that Yemen became Egypt's Vietnam”.⁵⁸ Among the negative effects of the civil war from the YAR, was a significant immigration of Yemenis from the North to Saudi Arabia in the 1960s: around 100,000⁵⁹, and 200,000 Yemenis, killed.⁶⁰

As for the evolution of events already in what was called since 1962 as the Federation of South Arabia, it was determined by the involvement of Egypt and the former USSR in supporting various groups against the British. The most well-known example is the “the Red Wolves of Radfan” revolt which took place in 1963, when National Liberation Front (NLF) forces attacked the Federation's, as well the British troops, that eventually, let to the withdrawal of British from the region. This revolt is considered by Uzi Rabi as the equivalent of the 1962 Revolution, a “critical juncture in Yemen's history”.⁶¹

Starting with the very moment of walking on the Yemeni soil in 1839, British troops have been continuously under attacked. However, in 1962, the British forces were involved in an escalated conflict in the protectorate; by using different type of weapons provided by regional and world powers (Egypt, former USSR), radical groups, such as the National Liberation Front (NLF) and the South Yemen Liberation Front (FLOSY), targeted British troops and their families. The Yemeni delegations of both Royalists and Republicans met in 1965 in al-Harad, near the Saudi border to discuss a truce; despite the Egyptian pressure, the Republicans refused to introduce the adjective “Islamic” into the title of the YAR/North Yemen, as suggested by Saudi Arabia, and as a result, the negotiations failed.⁶²

The heavy casualties on all sides involved in the conflict throughout Yemen, the interference of relevant regional and global powers, brought the conflict into a stalemate, and due to international pressure “Permanent East Garrison of Suez” had to be abandoned by the

⁵⁴ Rabi, 2015, 38.

⁵⁵ Rabi, 2015, 42.

⁵⁶ Rabi, 2015, 44.

⁵⁷ Rabi, 2015, 53.

⁵⁸ Rabi, 2015, 54.

⁵⁹ Rabi, 2015, 56.

⁶⁰ Davis DiPiazza, 2007, 31.

⁶¹ Rabi, 2015, 59.

⁶² Rabi, 2015, 54-55.

British in November 1967.⁶³ The defeat of the British in Aden, prepared the path for the establishment of an entirely new entity for the region: a “Marxist regime in the Arab World”, that existed as such for a quarter of a century.⁶⁴

Therefore, the evacuation of Egyptians – approximately 70,000 troops at the end of 1967⁶⁵, and the British from Yemen, left beyond two different states, with different political orientation: the Republican North - YAR - and the Socialist South – the People’s Democratic Republic of Yemen – PDRY – that emerged after the retreat of British, with Aden as capital.

The final unification of the two Yemens which took place in May 1990, was preceded by two important events in the Greater Middle East region in 1979; the Islamic Revolution in Iran, and the former USSR invasion of Afghanistan. Both of them brought into the international political scene the revival of the Islamist movement; meanwhile in Yemen, oil deposits were discovered, and because they were shared by both Yemeni countries, according to Francesca Davis DiPiazza, their leadership decided to merge the two states, fact agreed in November 1989, and in May 1990, the Republic of Yemen was established.⁶⁶

After the unification, the newly formed state, struggled to strengthen its economy, which depended by the trade and aid from Kuwait, Iraq and Saudi Arabia; therefore, the invasion of Kuwait by Iraq in August 1990, and the subsequent Persian Gulf War from 1990, were perceived as serious risks for the Yemeni economy by its officials.⁶⁷ This was the main reason why the Yemeni representative opposed to military intervention in Iraq, at the United Nations⁶⁸; still, Yemen had seemed to miss the dependency of Yemeni work force by the Saudi Arabia market, and by As a result of Yemen's vote at the UN, against the draft, which became Resolution 678⁶⁹ of the UNSC, Saudi Arabia sent home more than 700,000 Yemeni workers, whose return “caused severe unemployment and economic hardship”, which was worsened by the Somali refugees who were fleeing the war from their country,⁷⁰ and by the fact that the US, World Bank and the International Monetary Fund halted aid programs to Yemen. In the end it was “the most expensive vote, ever.”⁷¹

Following the unification of the two Yemens in 1990 under Ali Abdullah Saleh, at that moment the President of North Yemen, many South Yemenis felt heavily disappointed by the decision taken, and another civil war erupted in 1994. Eventually, pro-union forces have triumphed, but a movement of southern autonomy continues to this day. Until he was removed in 2012 after the Arab Spring, President Saleh ruled for 33 years, crossing Yemen through many of Yemen’s tribal, political, religious and military competing centers. He described at a time, in an expression that remained famous, regarding the sensation when governing Yemen, that was compared with “dancing on the heads of snakes”, even though he himself strengthened his ruling position by destroying opposition and installing family members and those loyal him

⁶³ Proctor, Ian. "Why Did British Troops Leave Aden?" Imperial War Museums. January 18, 2018. Accessed July 15, 2019. <https://www.iwm.org.uk/history/why-did-british-troops-leave-aden>.

⁶⁴ Rabi, 2015, 66.

⁶⁵ Rabi, 2015, 59.

⁶⁶ Davis DiPiazza. *Yemen in Pictures*, 2007, 32-33.

⁶⁷ Davis DiPiazza. *Yemen in Pictures*, 2007, 34.

⁶⁸ Williams, Ian. "United Nations Report: A Costly Vote? Yemen Paid a High Price For 1990 Security Council Veto." WRMEA. Accessed July 15, 2019. <https://www.wrmea.org/010-march/united-nations-report-a-costly-vote-yemen-paid-a-high-price-for-1990-security-council-veto.html>.

⁶⁹ Resolution 678 authorized Member States to use all necessary means to implement Security Council resolution 660 (1990) and all relevant resolutions. <https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/102245>

⁷⁰ Francesca Davis DiPiazza. *Yemen in Pictures*. (Twenty-First Century Books, 2007), 34

⁷¹ Colburn, Marta. *The Republic of Yemen: Development Challenges in the 21st Century*. Country Report Series. Catholic Institute for International Relations, 2002, 30.

in the government and the army. However, the central government has never exercised full control over rural areas in Yemen, either in the north or in the south.⁷²

IV. YEMEN AT PRESENT: A HUNTED AND DESIRED TERRITORY

” So, for you this is a moral issue? Because you know, there is a lot of jobs at stake. Certainly, if lot of these defense contractors stop selling war planes, other sophisticated equipment to Saudi Arabia, there is going to be a significant loss of jobs, of revenue here in the United States. That's secondary from your standpoint?”⁷³

According to the CIA's World Factbook, the Republic of Yemen is situated in the Middle East – having a “strategic location on Bab al-Mandab Strait which is linking the Red Sea and the Gulf of Aden, one of the world's most active shipping lane”⁷⁴ - bordered by the Arabian Sea, the Gulf of Aden, and the Red Sea, Oman and Saudi Arabia, with a total area of 527,968 sq. km land, and 0 sq. km, water; its total land boundaries is 1,602 km, from which with Oman 294 km, and with Saudi Arabia – 1307 Km, while the coastal line measures 1,906 km. Yemeni population estimated in July 2018, was 28,667,230, composed – ethnically speaking – mostly from Arab, but also, Afro-Arab, South Asians, European. Arabic is the official language, and it comes about religions composition, Yemeni are 99,1% Muslim – 65% Sunni, and 35% Shia; other 0,9% - Jewish, Baha'i, Hindu and Christian. Its natural resources consist of: petroleum, fish, rock salt, marble, small deposits of coal, gold, and fertile soil in the west. Yemen's current issues *related to environment* are actually related to the scarcity of natural freshwater, soil erosion, desertification. The main cities are Sanaa (capital) – 2,779 million people, and Aden – 922,000 people ⁷⁵.

In order to understand what is happening in Yemen, at present, beyond its torn and complex history until 2011, the starting point for the ongoing events must be the so-called “Arab Spring” phenomenon of 2011, which – for more than one reason – respectively, replacing Saleh – ⁷⁶, reached also, Yemen. The overused narrative⁷⁷ was that the pro-democracy protesters went out on the streets in an attempt to force President Ali Abed Allah Saleh to end his 33-year reign, who responded with economic concessions but refused to resign, fact which resulted in increased tensions on the streets of the capital, Sanaa, and in clashes between the population and the army. Eventually, due to an internationally negotiated agreement, Yemen finally saw a power transfer in November 2011 from the former president Saleh to vice president Abed Rabbo Mansour Hadi, thus paving the way for the February elections - where he was the only candidate.⁷⁸

However, despite attempts to reform the Constitution and the budget, he failed to satisfy all parties involved in protests, especially the Houthi rebels from the northern Yemen, who

⁷² Lopour, Jacqueline. “Spotlight On Yemen's Forgotten War And Humanitarian Disaster: Preventing The Next Syrian Refugee Crisis.” *Centre for International Governance Innovation*. CIGI PAPERS. No. 97 – March 2016, 2.

⁷³ CNN's Wolf Blitzer Interviewing Sen. Rand Paul, September 8, 2016 (Jilani and Emmons 2016), cited by Issa Blumi in his book *Destroying Yemen. What chaos in Arabia tells us about the world*. (University of California Press, 2018), 1.

⁷⁴ „The World Factbook: Yemen.” Central Intelligence Agency. February 01, 2018. Accessed July 15, 2019. <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/ym.html>.

⁷⁵ The World Factbook: Yemen.”...

⁷⁶ Researchers' note: the nature of the so-called phenomena *Arab Spring* might be questionable.

⁷⁷ Meaning not only in Yemen; the same reason was mentioned in most countries from MENA, which were touched by the so-called the Arab Spring phenomenon.

⁷⁸ Deutsche Welle. ”Yemen's War Explained in 4 Key Points: DW: 10.08.2018.” DW.COM. Accessed July 16, 2019. <https://www.dw.com/en/yemens-war-explained-in-4-key-points/a-40056866-0>.

were battled with government forces – on and off – since 2004, mostly in the Northern Yemen, according to an Al-Jazeera report. But starting with 2014, the situation worsened: the Houthis⁷⁹ took Sanaa the capital of Yemen under their control, while pushing their forces to the next important city of Yemen: Aden. As a response to Houthis' action, a coalition of Arab states launched a military campaign in 2015 in order to restore the Yemeni government.⁸⁰ At least, this was the official narrative of those countries that joined the coalition.

To legitimize the coalition, Yemen's President Hadi was asked to formally call for the intervention of Saudi Arabia, which responded on March 26th, 2015, initially launching Operation Decisive Storm, followed by Operation Restoring Hope. The Saudi initiative is backed by American, British and French armaments and by significant US logistics; and in order to protect itself from various allegations and disapproval from different regional or international state or non-state actors, Saudi Arabia urged other regional countries to join these operations, thus obtaining participation of Qatar (until 2017), Morocco (until 2019), United Arab Emirates (until 2019), Jordan, Kuwait, Sudan, Bahrain, Egypt and Senegal. There are also sources that mention Coalition's use of mercenaries, provided by Academi (former Black Water), as well as the al-Qaeda (al-Qā'idah) – fact denied by Pentagon.⁸¹

At present, Yemen is in its fifth year⁸² of the so-called⁸³ "civil war" and reports of human rights violations are frequent. Reports are mentioning that millions of people are on the brink of hunger, the country's health system is no longer working, thousands of civilians have been killed or injured by direct fights, or as collateral victims, in bombings. Only from 2016 until the Spring of 2019, 60,000 Yemenis have been killed according to a United States Congress Report.⁸⁴ "The humanitarian situation of Yemen is undoubtedly the most serious humanitarian crisis in the world, while the world seems to be concerned with less relevant issues", said Jacqueline Lopour, in 2016, one year after the Coalition became active. The United Nations reports from 2016 were mentioning that Yemen had at that moment 21.2 million people who were in need of humanitarian aid, more than any other country, including Syria.⁸⁵

⁷⁹ Officially known as Ansar Allah (Partisans of God), the Houthi rebels began as a theological movement that preached tolerance and peace in the early 1990s, according to Ahmed Addaghashi, a professor at Sana'a University and author of two books on the movement, *Houthi Phenomenon* and *Houthis and Their Political and Military Future*. Addaghashi told Al Jazeera that the Houthi movement originally held a considerably broad-minded educational and cultural vision. A religious group affiliated with the Zaydi sect of Shia Islam, the Houthis maintain a stronghold in the northern province of Saada. Source:

<https://www.aljazeera.com/news/middleeast/2014/08/yemen-houthis-hadi-protests-201482132719818986.html>

⁸⁰ Al Jazeera. "Key Facts about the War in Yemen." Yemen News | Al Jazeera. March 25, 2018. Accessed July 16, 2019. <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2016/06/key-facts-war-yemen-160607112342462.html>.

⁸¹ Michael, Maggie, Trish Wilson, and Lee Keath. "Allies Cut Deals with Al Qaeda in Yemen to Serve Larger Fight with Iran." SFGate. August 06, 2018. Accessed July 16, 2019. <https://www.sfgate.com/world/article/Allies-cut-deals-with-al-Qaeda-in-Yemen-to-serve-13135822.php>.

⁸² Sharp, Jeremy M. *Yemen: Civil War and Regional Intervention*. Pdf. Congressional Research Service, March 21, 2019. Congressional Research Service <https://crsreports.congress.gov/R43960>, 1

⁸³ Authors' note: A new trendy term in International Relations, which actually can be an umbrella for the war fought through proxies by great powers.

⁸⁴ According to Armed Conflict Location & Event Data Project (ACLED), cited in Sharp, Jeremy M. *Yemen: Civil War and Regional Intervention*. Pdf. Congressional Research Service, March 21, 2019. Congressional Research Service <https://crsreports.congress.gov/R43960>, 1 of pdf

⁸⁵ Lopour, Jacqueline. "Spotlight On Yemen's Forgotten War And Humanitarian Disaster: Preventing The Next Syrian Refugee Crisis." *Centre for International Governance Innovation*. CIGI PAPERS. No. 97 – March 2016, 1

The attention of international public opinion and financial aid were and still are extremely necessary and are essential to prevent a crisis of Yemeni refugees before starting, it was forecasted in 2016. However, the crisis in Yemen was largely under-exposed and overshadowed by other conflicts, such as Syria and even Libya. In comparison with Syrian crisis for which the global community has spent billions, the international donors provided only half of the approximately \$ 1.6 billion that the UN had requested for Yemen, according to data from 2016.⁸⁶

On May 3rd, 2019, Foreign Policy by citing its “Document of the Week: U.N. Study on the Yemeni War’s Impact” is forecasting that by the end of 2019 around 233,000 people “will have died in Yemen as a result of the Saudi-led war there, including 140,000 children under the age of 5”. Further, Foreign Policy is mentioning that the cited report underscores “the disintegration of a country that was one the world’s poorest before the war began in March 2015”.⁸⁷

Just in two years after the Coalition bombing began, in Yemen approximately 42,000 civilians were injured, over 8,000 civilians, including children, were killed; ten million civilians were at risk of losing access to water; seven million civilians did not have access to food, while three million civilians were displaced from their homes. A cholera outbreak was sweeping the country and was affected about 330,000 people. Approximately 14.8 million people did not have access to basic medical assistance, while twenty-five percent of Yemen’s medical centers were closed due to lack of energy, supplies and insecurity. Of the 3500 health care institutions surveyed by Posey Madyson Hutchinson, only 45% were functioning.⁸⁸

But all these are statistics from 2017, and now at the time of writing this paper we are two years later, and the available data is confusing, difficult to verify, while distorted tendencies of facts are more and more common in open sources, regardless if they are reports, studies, and even doctoral theses.

With all the risks associated with a country like Yemen, and despite the “Unfelix Arabia” label, it looks like this country, still seems to be of particular interest to countries like the United States of America (USA.), the United Arab Emirates (UAE), or the Islamic Republic of Iran (Iran), just to mention a few. If Iran’s interest can be justified to a certain extent thinking about historical relationship with Shiites from the North, or the protection of national interest, given the rivalry with its regional neighbor – Saudi Arabia – and in the case of the US - the overused “justification” for protecting the national interest overseas and above all in the Indian Ocean, the case of the UAE and its – military or not – activities in Socotra island especially, might require a more in-depth research, considering that it recently withdrew from the Saudi-led Coalition against Houthis, and there are indications that are talking about an agreement signed between Hadi and Abu Dhabi regarding the Socotra island; according to sources close

⁸⁶ Lopour, Jacqueline. “Spotlight On Yemen’s Forgotten War And Humanitarian Disaster: Preventing The Next Syrian Refugee Crisis.”

⁸⁷ Lynch, Colum. "Document of the Week: U.N. Study on the Yemen War's Impact." Foreign Policy. May 03, 2019. Accessed July 16, 2019. <https://foreignpolicy.com/2019/05/03/document-of-the-week-united-nations-yemen-war-impact-study/>.

⁸⁸ Posey, Madyson Hutchinson. "Why the Crisis in Yemen Matters to the United States." The Heritage Foundation. Accessed July 16, 2019. <https://www.heritage.org/homeland-security/commentary/why-the-crisis-yemen-matters-the-united-states>.

to the Yemeni President, through this deal, Abu Dhabi received full sovereignty on the island for 99 years.⁸⁹

Socotra island is considered among the four most important islands in the world; all great powers were and are interested in it – former USSR had a military base on it, while in 2010 the Russian Federation tried to negotiate with at that moment – President Saleh the potential of Socotra. The importance of this island springs from the fact that it is characterized by an unique and special dynamic natural diversity, and it is strategically located “on the international maritime corridor linking the Indian Ocean and the East Asia to the rest of the continents”. Besides, Socotra is from a military point of view a “high level of gravity”.⁹⁰

CONCLUSION

In order to understand why Yemen is perceived and labeled today as the opposite of the Yemen during the well-known trade Kingdoms from the ancient times, especially the Sabaean one, a short glance in its history and its topography, as well as demography, will help but not answer to what happens today. For a researcher to come closer to the reality of today’s Yemen, first of all he/she must take into account that this state has always been a place where interests of different types of actors met; the next aspect that should not be missed is that the separation *de facto* and *de jure* of the two main regions/states, each of them with specific characteristics. Also, from a religious perspective, it must be remembered that Yemen remained divided between the Shi’a Zaydi school in the north and Shafi’i, most common Sunni school in the south and along the coast.

Last but not less important, the interference and interests of the great powers with regard to at least the geo-strategic position of this country shouldn’t be forgotten, and that due to its history, where the legitimacy of a single government throughout the territory has proven itself over time an utopia, Yemen seems to be a good place for some state and non-state actors to experience scenarios, but not only.

⁸⁹ „Socotra Once Again: Why Do Emiratis Buy Their Most Beautiful Lands?” Yemen Press. August 08, 2017. Accessed July 16, 2019. <https://www.yemenpress.org/slider/socotra-once-again-why-do-emiratis-buy-their-most-beautiful-lands/>.

⁹⁰ „Socotra Once Again: Why Do Emiratis Buy Their Most Beautiful Lands?” Yemen Press. August 08, 2017. Accessed July 16, 2019. <https://www.yemenpress.org/slider/socotra-once-again-why-do-emiratis-buy-their-most-beautiful-lands/>.

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