

Introduction

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

CNN’S WOLF BLITZER INTERVIEWING
SEN. RAND PAUL, September 8, 2016
(Jilani and Emmons 2016)

IT WAS OCTOBER 8, 2016, 6:30 P.M. in Sweden. I had just settled in to begin writing after dinner when a friend in Yemen e-mailed me the news. Earlier that day Saudi warplanes—armed, fueled, and maintained by British and American loaned military personnel—once again committed mass murder. The target was the capital city’s al-Qa’a al-Kubra funeral hall. Inside, hundreds upon hundreds of mourners were attending the funeral of Shaykh ‘Ali Jalal al-Rawishan, former interior minister of the Republic of Yemen.

Under the guise of an “international coalition” first operating under code name “Operation Decisive Storm” and soon after rebranded “Operation Restoring Hope,” Western-built warplanes unleashed four waves of airstrikes targeting the building in which much of North Yemen’s political and economic elite were paying their respects. Ten minutes later, when rescue workers and pedestrians rushed to assist the victims, another round of airstrikes, the notorious “double tap” the Americans perfected in Yemen years earlier, followed. This time they struck with incendiary bombs.¹

For the last three years the same American- and British-made planes drop bombs on the poorest country in the Middle East while well-paid public

relations firms justify what in Syria is called a war crime.² This (Saudi/Anglo-American) coalition targets everything from transport infrastructure (bridges, roads, ports) to food processing plants, farmlands, food stores, markets, and water wells. The resulting famine has almost without exception been kept out of the media. Among the few journalists who have reported on the famine, some persuasively argue the starvation is strategic rather than collateral.³

Tellingly, the UN demonstrates reluctance to acknowledge the catastrophe. Indeed, the UN in the summer of 2016 revealed embarrassing moments of confusion, where lower-level officials condemned Saudi crimes only to be officially retracted by former UN secretary Ban Ki-Moon's offices.⁴ The same held later with the refusal to even initiate an investigation after massacres in Hudaydah and Sana'a' actually made some headlines. Contrast this attitude to that in Syria and it is clear the UN services only certain parties' interests.⁵

In sharp contrast, less politically and economically compromised NGOs have called a spade a spade: Norway's Refugee Council (NRC) did not mince words already in November 2016 when it reported hunger claims untold thousands of Yemenis every week. Impervious to Saudi and American pressure to keep silent, the NRC's outraged secretary-general Jan Egeland affirmed that millions were in a state of famine by late 2016 and "millions more will go hungry in 2017," adding that "this man-made disaster . . . shames us all."⁶ With but such rare outbursts, the incriminating images of the skeletal fragments of once beautiful children only circulate on obscure, almost entirely ignored Facebook and Twitter accounts.⁷ To add to the misery, since April 2017 Northern Yemen is experiencing the "biggest outbreak of cholera in recorded history," with hundreds of thousands infected. And still, Yemeni men, women, and children continue to die behind a kind of journalistic omerta.⁸

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Operation Decisive Storm/Restoring Hope was marketed as a war of "last resort." While unfortunate, it is justifiable because, first, Yemen is dangerous. As the political fortunes of the country impact more important neighbors and possibly the flow of global commerce, what happens in Yemen concerns the rest of the world. Those who wage this war, we are assured, do so only reluctantly. They have rained terror on the population only when the internationally recognized "government" was "illegally" overthrown in a coup

d'état. War was chosen over diplomacy because the primary organizers of the coup were "Shi'is" with close affiliation to Iran.

This narrative, circulating with slight modification since March 2015, reflects the often repeated methods of framing tragic events in the Third World/Global South (Prashad 2016). Necessarily they neatly designate those whom the "world" must protect, and an easily identifiable villain. Following such recognizable patterns, under the cover of a UN Resolution (in our case, UNSCR 2216), the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia (KSA) and USA authorized themselves to use violence in Yemen. Under the pretext of reinstating the "legitimate," "recognized" government, they openly support with considerable deadly force a regime associated with one 'Abd Rabbuh Mansur Hadi (henceforth Hadi). This once vice-president of twenty years serves as a figure-head of a coalition of US/KSA-approved parties, including vetted Islamist groups like Muslim Brotherhood (MB).

Those targeted by this UN-sanctioned alliance are loosely associated groups representing a broad sweep of Yemeni society—almost 80 percent of the country's population currently lives under these groups' authority. Forming its own precarious coalition government at the height of a political breakdown in early 2015, it consists of loyalists to the former president of Yemen, 'Ali Abdullah Saleh; a major swath of the Yemeni military; and an amorphous political alliance (tribal militias, some of the more partisan would say) calling itself AnsarAllah (Partisans of God), manipulatively characterized in most media as "Shi'a tribesmen with links to Iran."

The glaring problem in this war justified by "the international community" is the existence of a possible alternative reading of recent events in Yemen. The removal in late 2014 of Hadi's ineffective interim administration was deemed by most Yemenis as entirely justified. Indeed, some observers acknowledge that AnsarAllah, the group responsible for removing the Hadi administration, had secured by late August 2014 broad-based support for its "patriotic" actions. This support appears to have extended to large numbers of Sunni Yemenis and most elements of the Yemeni Armed Forces (Brehony 2015).⁹

When asked, many recall how it was thanks to AnsarAllah's takeover of the capital city that Yemenis could finally come to an agreed timeframe for elections promised by the Obama administration and Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) in 2012. Informants point to September 21, 2014, when, with the assistance of Jamal Benomar, the appointed UN envoy to Yemen, interim "president" Hadi was forced to sign the Peace and National Partnership Agreement with AnsarAllah and leaders from all the major political parties.

This agreement once again put elections on the front burner. With this, AnsarAllah earned the trust of large swathes of Yemen's population. Unfortunately, an agreement that would lead to power sharing was exactly what Yemen's influential neighbor KSA did not want. From that day of apparent reconciliation onward, KSA began to plot how it could reverse this turn of events.¹⁰

Rarely discussed anymore were the truly unacceptable conditions Yemenis found themselves living under during Hadi's interim government. At the time of AnsarAllah's takeover of the capital city, those living in Yemen largely acknowledged Hadi's administration as excessively corrupt and incompetent. Indeed, since handed the keys of government in 2012 by the USA/KSA, the interim government of Hadi/Islah had made Yemeni lives demonstrably worse.¹¹

By 2013, for example, the number of assassinations, bombings of mosques frequented by Zaydi Muslims, paired with growing poverty, rising unemployment, and property confiscations, grew to epidemic proportions. Perhaps the biggest shared concern for Yemenis of all political, cultural, and economic stripes was a realization that this supposedly "interim government" took it upon itself, with no parliamentary oversight, to push forward economic liberalization "reforms" that illegally put much of Yemen's public assets up for sale. More problematic still, the main beneficiaries were foreign.

With Yemenis living the horror of austerity familiar to Argentinians and Greeks, by August 2014, KSA and Qatar were given the green light, in the name of IMF-approved "free trade," to buy Yemen's most valuable assets, something no democratically elected, or even the previous Saleh, government could allow (Hill 2017; Carapico 2016). In this context, AnsarAllah not only threw out a corrupt foreign imposed government filled with crooks and Islamist bigots, but they also reversed the selling of Yemen's economic future. As a result, the unstable coalition between Saleh's loyalists and AnsarAllah continues today in a modified anti-American, anti-Israeli, and anti-Saudi form. This unflagging support for a struggle against Saudi/American violence is strategically ignored by most outside accounts of this war to destroy Yemen. Rather than seeing it, as at least twenty million Yemenis do, as a war of aggression, "coalition" bombing is still marketed as necessary to reinsert the "legitimate" Hadi government, protect global commerce, and assure that the austerity measures demanded by the IMF are fully implemented.

Put in these terms it is clear the reporting on what is and is not at stake in Yemen—ignoring the underlying ambition to keep the country servile to the



FIGURE 1. Protest. Loyalists to former President Saleh remained entrenched in Sana'a for the duration of the transitional regime headed by Hadi. These protestors were motivated by different causes, including demands for justice in respect to several heinous crimes committed during the tumultuous events of 2011 and after. Tahrir Square, Sana'a, January 2013. Photo by author.

needs of certain regional and global interests—fails to provide the tools readers will need to anticipate what happens next. One of the more egregious examples of manipulative reporting that confuses readers is the constant reference to events in Yemen as a “civil war.” Framing events in this manner attempts to place the blame for these catastrophes on Yemenis themselves, a way of reading events that is not politically neutral.¹² Claiming Yemen’s ills are self-inflicted strategically elides the role outside interests played in igniting and sustaining such violence. In fact, this war (at the time of publishing in its third year) is much more usefully read as a continued foreign effort to subordinate Yemenis, long defiantly independent from the globalization trends infesting the larger world. The aim of this book is to explain chaos in Arabia in these terms.

If events in Yemen were ever presented in this frame, it would be more problematic to rationalize the robust deployment of modern warplanes, cluster and phosphorous bombs,¹³ and potentially something more sinister still

dropped on Faj Attan Mountain in Sana'a' on April 20, 2015.¹⁴ For this the media and corrupted international organizations work overtime to confuse and cover up with clichés about Yemeni tribalism and Iranian-backed rebels.¹⁵ In this particularly narrow, but almost universally promoted line of thinking, even the thought of Iran's proximity to strategic chokepoints like the Bab al-Mandab, which overlooks the southern entrance into the Red Sea, constitutes a threat to the "free flow" of global commerce. While Iran cannot be trusted, the Americans and Saudis (who are the primary benefactors of much of the violent *takfiri* groups in the world today) are assumed to be responsible guardians of the world's commercial trade routes.¹⁶

As a challenge to this perspective, the conclusions drawn at the end of this book will highlight that those parties waging this war of aggression have at times conflicted agendas, raising questions about the actual durability of this so-called coalition. For instance, among the principals—KSA, Qatar, UAE, USA, and UK—there have been since the beginning indications that their ambitions for a final solution to the Yemen crisis conflict with one another. Indeed, there are hints that Yemen's unity is not a part of any long-term goal among the coalition partners. Furthermore, there are clearly differing opinions on the viability of the "legitimate" leader of Yemen and if Hadi is still the solution. There are also stark differences of opinion in respect to which of the many mercenary groups hired by different coalition partners are "terrorist." In fact, all indications suggest the UAE and KSA are fighting each other for ascendancy in southern and eastern Yemen through these mercenary armies. For its part, Qatar by April 2017 fell into open conflict with both the UAE and KSA. Usefully, ever since, Qatar has used its main media outlets, Al-Jazeera and a swathe of compensated journalists and academics around the world, to shed light on unsavory aspects of Operation Restoring Hope.

The ultimate point here is that as much as this war is marketed in simple terms, often evoking the binaries popular in the media, there are far more complex (and long-standing) issues at play in Yemen that need analysis. The latter chapters of this book will offer more background to these recent events in Yemen. However, in order to fully appreciate the seemingly confused terms in which the main actors are operating, it is necessary to first highlight that the war's deeper roots derive from the policy of destroying Yemen long ago adopted by heretofore obscured foreign parties, a testament to the consequences of South Arabia's historic entanglements with the larger world.



MAP 1. Yemen, 1990–2015.

YEMEN AND THE WORLD

For millennia, the inhabitants of South Arabia have maintained a complex relationship with the larger world. Already a major cultural and commercial hub for Arabia's Jews by the seventh century, Yemen would be forever remembered as the home of the first converts to God's last message to humanity.¹⁷ Centuries later, Dutch traders climbed the terraced hills covered in addictive coffee beans, while Ottoman Janissaries hailing from Albania, Georgia, or Crimea laid yet one more claim to the same terraced hills for Istanbul's sultan. Setting this stage for global convergence was a ruling class that had for at least five hundred years prior to the arrival of Europeans turned the region into a thriving hub of intellectual and commercial activity. This is the Yemen that became the destination for waves of Muhammad's descendants (recognized as *sayyid*/pl. *sada*), who, by the eleventh century CE formed a binding, enduring spiritual and intellectual link with the larger world.¹⁸ By the end of the nineteenth century, the remarkable infrastructure that harnessed seasonal rains to produce a seemingly endless amount of wealth attracted no



FIGURE 2. Farmland. In Northern Yemen, centuries-old terraced hills produced considerable surplus wealth long coveted by outsiders. Until recently, these regions of Yemen were self-sufficient in food production, enabling the inhabitants to remain defiant to empire. Since March 2015 fields like these have been targeted by Saudi-led airstrikes, often with cluster bombs to render them unusable to farmers. Hajjah, August 1993. Photo by author.

longer just disciples and descendants of prophets, but aggressive agents of capital seeking profits.

Until recently, Yemen could accommodate all comers, whether prophet or profiteer. After all, Yemen was a land that for millennia served as the bosom of new faiths in God's power over the ways of the universe. What drew both the pious and the materialistic were some of the wealthiest, vibrant centers of cultural and philosophical exchange the world has known (Laffan 2003; Ho 2006). There was enough for all to revel and profit. Unfortunately, this rich history that left an imprint on corners of the world as distinct as Java and Detroit has been largely overshadowed by Yemen's recent past.

Destroying Yemen suggests that as much as various local (re)actions account for specific moments, to appreciate the extent to which Yemen's story is "complicated" requires moving beyond the geographies, historiographies, and epistemologies used to make Yemen conveniently legible to specialists. This book thus aims to identify multiple links that conjoin the place and peoples with those global forces constantly drawn to Yemen but rarely associated with it. These are complex, contingent, and constantly (d)evolving exchanges, often

themselves byproducts of watershed moments originating from abroad or locally. Studying these turning points, especially over the last century, will prove crucial to understanding the past, present, and future of not only a country, or even an “area” or region, but the world.

At the heart of this book’s claims is a recognition that Yemen’s stories retold here are experienced within the lifetimes of the period of emerging financial power between the two World Wars, the Cold War, Pan-Arabism, anti-imperialism, globalization, and the rise of political Islam. To appreciate fully the significance of this observation requires demonstrating just how interconnected Yemen’s modern history has been to the transformations of the modern, and postmodern, world. In this regard, Yemen’s diverse peoples are not merely the victim of global processes, but often the causal force behind dramatic global changes. Indeed, it will be the conclusion of this book that the current war in Yemen may yet lead to the collapse of a system of economic, political, and cultural domination that has reigned supreme since the conclusion of World War II. Throughout we will refer to this system, or regime, as *empire*.¹⁹

The contours of this empire need to remain abstract, nebulous, and global in scope if Yemen’s role in its development and possible demise is appreciable. The empire to which I refer serves for much of the last three hundred years as an umbrella for what, initially at least, constituted an amorphous, sometimes disorganized cluster of competing interests (Cooper 2005, Kramer 2011). For much of the time since the seventeenth-century rise of private banking in the North Atlantic world (ostensibly what we refer to as “the West”) these interests competed. Over time, however, the pool of these interests shrunk, with expansive successes increasingly seeking ways to work together.

By World War I, after further consolidation of power to a small cluster of financiers and their political partners, these interests collaborated to secure a mutually beneficial monopoly on global trade via its primary vehicle, the modern state and its central bank. The resulting empire’s core operations based in the North Atlantic became by the end of World War I all the more ubiquitous in the affairs of peoples around the world. Using “multilateral” organizations like the League of Nations in the interwar era to the UN, IMF, WTO, and World Bank since World War II, empire has sought to push an agenda of financial domination that used the state to streamline the extraction of surplus wealth produced by human labor. Through international organizations, in particular, but also by way of surrogate imperialist industrializing states of the prewar era—Britain, France, the Netherlands,

Spain, Germany, Belgium, Italy, and Portugal—and today’s USA, empire has gained considerable leverage over once noncompliant polities, including those found throughout Yemen. Crucially, in as much as empire secures leverage by way of financially overwhelming targeted polities and when needed military coercion, it also harvested technology and the social sciences (Vitalis 2015).

It was through its cultivation of higher education, in particular, that this modern empire produced the analytical frameworks to complement its violent methods of financial domination. With the establishment of the disciplines of economics, sociology, social anthropology, and political science, empire had the tools to indoctrinate generations of ambitious agents with theories of modernization, globalization, and neoliberalism. These theories of human development have all at some point become orthodoxies, which by 1945 multilateral organizations and academia could enforce as science and truth to their respective, captured audiences. In this way, empire expanded its influence intellectually, training would-be technocrats who embraced these ideologies of progress crucial to establishing uniformity in the way the world’s peoples conducted their economic (and moral) lives.²⁰

By the 1940s, the world would even find itself coaxed into not only abandoning traditions of spirituality for “scientific” accountings of the way the universe worked, but also surrendering gold and silver (for five thousand years the means of valuation and exchange) for an abstraction known as a central bank-issued currency (Rickards 2011). In time, the world would even be compelled to accept one bank-issued currency, used almost exclusively by 1971 for the purchase of everything a modern society needed. The US dollar became ubiquitous, in large part because suppliers of commodities like oil agreed to only accept US dollars as payment. This collusion between the major oil producers (OPEC) and empire assured the Federal Reserve Bank, a coalition of private banks, monopolized the means of exchange in the world (Hudson 2005). This constituted a power almost unique in human history, one Yemenis still resist well into the new millennium.

Empire in the last two centuries is thus a product of a coalition of finance capitalists who have forged a global regime that until recently has been able to build, with virtually unlimited amounts of debt financing, the most powerful military machine ever known. These apparatuses marking a “new imperialism” unique to this era now exceed the once more nuanced means of persuasion, be it financial, or scholarly/cultural (Grandin 2006). Indeed, empire as understood here has increasingly resorted to brute force by way of

international organizations such as NATO and, if stealth is needed, well-trained insurgencies.

This has been most recently evident in the 1980s with the CIA-funded Contras in Central America and Usama Bin Laden's directed Mujahidin (Coll 2004). Today this ability to sabotage a resistant people like some of those found in Yemen extends to terrorizing them by way of quasi-mercenary auxiliary forces, the so-called al-Qa'ida and Da'ish (ISIS/ISIL) militants ruining what is left of the postwar Middle East (Blumi 2016; Davidson 2016; Skoll 2016: 107–20).²¹

To reach this revisionist conclusion about just what role more generally the “West” played in the world over the last two centuries, we must dramatically change our perspective. Yemen's history and current war does this by offering an account of this multifarious empire's rise in microcosm. As we will learn, there were some deeply imbedded Yemenis in the inner circles of empire. Indeed, crucial to empire's campaigns to seek and expand financial power was the central role of local intermediaries and the enabling partnership expat Yemenis offered to these projects.

More interesting still, as explained throughout, lowly herders, farmers, or the urban poor often initiated the battles between states, the global economic forces they represented, and local communities that informed the ways the larger world did business in Arabia. Proof of this extends to the current war in Yemen, which has clearly drawn the larger world into a conflict that had, in some remarkable ways, originated as a mere land use dispute between local farmers and the Yemeni/Saudi states seeking to forcibly integrate the region's assets into the global economy (Blumi 2010; Lichtenthäler 2017).

The wisdom of taking a microscopic view of events during a longer period is reinforced once we push the analysis of local politics back to the period when Yemen was ruled by two distinctive regimes with surprisingly similar global orientations. Covered in chapters 1 and 2, we look at how both the Ottoman and British imperial projects covering a vast track of South Arabia was distinctively impacted by the demands its representatives faced while administering a range of local polities with varying connections to the larger world. In most cases, British operations in South Yemen were compelled to deal with polities whose experience in global affairs extend back to the time before England asserted authority over the isles. More still, the region's other major imperial players, be they the Ottomans, or the Italians and French based across the Red Sea in the nineteenth century, all complicated the relationship that large tracts of Yemen sustained with the larger world.

In this vein, Yemen must always be viewed in an international context and through a lens that acknowledges as much the local impact on the global as vice versa.²² The most useful approach to reflect this codependent intimacy, and the one with the most documented evidence, is to study how Yemen fit into the many economic and administrative development schemes that empire promoted over the last century. As we learn throughout the first three chapters, it was the ascendant Zaydi Imamate in North and Middle Yemen that resisted such encroachments of finance capitalism most. Their principled resistance resulted in one of the unique cases of indigenous, independent political order to survive World War II.

This order ended with a brutal war between rival would-be masters and the occupation of North and Middle Yemen by Nasserist Egypt after 1962 (chapters 3 and 4). As a result, the country became over the next decade subject to a litany of invasive economic development programs designed to redirect its economy to service global capital's demands. That Yemenis continued to struggle against their incorporation into this web of dependency proves heartening. At the same time, however, one observes the extent to which foreign interests would connive, even to the point of staging military coups, to finally capture an economy that had for years been the target of the oil/gas, mining, and agricultural industries. It is thus during the Cold War, by way of direct foreign aid or international (multilateral) organizations like the UN, World Bank, and IMF (Bretton Woods institutions), that self-appointed global leaders encouraged (and often insisted) pliable locals in both North and South Yemen to institute "economic development programs" designed by proponents of modernization theory.

THE IMPERIALIST PROJECTILE OF DEVELOPMENT

Whether by the Egyptians in the 1960s or the present USA- and Saudi-led coalition, Yemenis have faced bombardment and embargoes that put millions into conditions of starvation in the name of altruistic, even humanistic "progressive" agendas. In response, Yemenis have a long history of resistance to empire's invasive "humanitarianism." This pushback, as witnessed since the 1900s and reaching its apex during the neoliberal period in the 1990s, has spurred on new contingencies, themselves leading to shifts in the concentration of power in the larger world. Appreciating these shifts is crucial to understanding Yemen's deep implication in the global transformations since

World War II and that its inhabitants' resistance may have contributed to the evolution of modernization as practice.

At first resisting by refusing to operate in the dollar-based global economy imposed since Bretton Woods (1944), Yemenis led by Imam Yahya and his sons eventually had to fight one of the many wars shaped by the Cold War. Yemen ultimately also succumbed to the economic paradigms of the era, but only after a bloody war from 1962 to 1970 that claimed at least 200,000 lives. Discussed in detail in chapters 3 and 4, the saddest irony is the fact it was "revolutionary" Egypt that, through its occupation regime, established structures tailored to force Yemen's incorporation into the global economy. Informing the bureaucratic imprints of this attempt were the hegemonic doctrines of modernization.

Through its ubiquitous presence in universities and deep infiltration into the new multilateral institutions charged with bringing change to the Global South, theories of modernization and the prescriptions for how to realize it became unquestioned (social) science. Accompanying the tins of dried milk, sacks of American wheat, and an occasional Ford tractor were the development how-to guides often composed, printed, and distributed by corporations being handsomely compensated for their donated surplus products and services. Reflecting the postwar power structure that produced these theories, within a few years modernization's ideals and the various blueprints to realize them were applied by most international donor agencies and governments. Presented through various multilateral organizations and directly implemented by way of aid agencies, it can be observed that throughout the 1960s and into the 1970s, the actual discourse of modernization imposed a narrowed idea of what was both correct economic practice and necessary for the implementation of a global economic order envisioned by the Bretton Woods agreements.²³

The main agents promoting modernization were social scientists who understood the project to be invasive and (counter-) revolutionary. They shared a belief with corporate America (and intelligence agencies) that a state administered "scientifically" (read: in a disciplined, or more specifically militaristic manner) was the best means to transform human behavior. The social and cultural by-product of these interventions (transforming peasants and villagers into modern city dwellers) was expected to service global corporate interests as modernized subjects eagerly working for wages that were then recycled to buy the products they made.

The image of a young woman in Egypt, Brazil, or Turkey leaving work, drinking a bottle of Pepsi, chewing gum, and listening to rock and roll was

the idealized expression of societies attaining a certain developmental status in the world (Escobar 1995: 154–211; Momsen 2008: 34–45). In exchange for the blue jeans, soda, fast cars, and microwaves, citizens of the world were expected to be more amenable to the global hegemonic ambitions of those promoting the campaign. One thing expected of those benefiting from the American president Truman’s “Fair Deal,” was that, while modernizing, they had to shun the spurious incitements of communism, the one ideology that could take all those good things away.²⁴

For the true believers, by going through various stages defined by the likes of Walter Rostow and Daniel Lerner, it was held that even Yemen would transform. What was not very clear when Yemeni technocrats read so diligently such development models was whether their country was expected to transform into a pliable satellite funneling its wealth toward the North Atlantic capital markets or to develop to become truly independent. Considering the politics of the era, if supplying raw materials to the “free world” was the price for “growth,” the question was just how much did Yemen have to pay.

It was quite clear that the revenues produced from their sale of resources—cheap oil, minerals, coffee, workers’ lives—were not meant for savings but rather consumption. The ideal modern Arab, in other words, was one who became a consumer. This constituted a development cycle that assured any national economy adopting this formula could expect to reach what Rostow wrote was a “modest developmental stage.” The fact that this meant once-penniless peasants were “empowered” to purchase US goods that they had previously no use for was an irony on which only later generations of critics commented.²⁵

What “modest development” did not mean was the right to speak up and become a partner in shaping global affairs. Here the return to the Cold War context is essential to reading Yemen’s complex relationship with the larger world. There was a paradox burning through the reports of those advocating the application of modernization theory. With development—to most in New York/DC power circles, measured only by GDP and import/export data, not the actual rise in the masses’ quality of life—some observers began to see a dangerous trend in those societies allowed to “progress.” The warning from a top theorist of the period encapsulated the entire modernization ethos for those on the right side of the East–West, North–South divide: “in the Congo, in Vietnam, in the Dominican Republic, it is clear that order depends on somehow compelling newly mobilized strata to return to a

measure of passivity and defeatism from which they have been aroused by the process of modernization. At least temporarily, the maintenance of order requires a lowering of newly acquired expectations and levels of political activity” (Sola Pool 1967: 26).

In sum, too much development became a dangerous thing for those who envisioned the distribution of aid as a tool whose significance can only be measured “when it is related to the benefits which the United States receives from that activity.”²⁶ And here began the critical link between mediating development with possible risks that come with it.²⁷ It was well known among those debating policies at the height of the Cold War that in the case of aid distribution, the principal beneficiary in the US case is the US balance of payments, US industry and commerce, and long-range US strategic goals (Hudson 2003: 219, Henry 2003).

But while there is a growing appreciation that development aid’s actual function is to more efficiently serve the interests of what we call empire, it is still understudied just how insidious were the parameters of the debate over what can be the extent of that aid. In the Cold War, and repackaged today in the “war on terror,” certain fixtures in the language of direct assistance make the process of justifying aid permanently interlinked with the larger, more lucrative military side of the empire project. While it is said US\$5 trillion has been spent on security and “war on terror” related projects since 9/11, the relatively miniscule amounts of aid for development seem to narrow even more to focus on several targeted, functional areas. While the direct links between aid focused on public health issues—AIDS, malaria, tuberculosis, now Zika—clearly point to beneficiaries in various industries, as we explore further in this book, aid to Yemen had its own ideologically charged function that aimed to stop the spread of grass-roots resistance to capitalist exploitation of its agrarian, human, and carbon wealth. That modernization theory, practiced with different levels of fanaticism, also required a generic image of the recipient as decidedly unmodern also plays itself out in dangerous ways in this story.

While the language of modernization changed periodically since the 1950s to reflect greater sensitivities and perhaps new industries that directly benefited from new kinds of projects, the project’s ultimate function—to uproot “traditional” societies and infuse the productivity of Yemen into the global economy—did not change much. In this respect, these same histories of development in Yemen throughout the 1970s require that we appreciate just how much generations of Yemenis from a wide range of backgrounds intuitively mistrusted these foreign gestures of charity.