

2018

H-Diplo

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Roundtable Review
Volume XIX, No. 39 (2018)
11 June 2018

Roundtable Editors: Thomas Maddux and Diane Labrosse
Roundtable and Web Production Editor: George Fujii

Introduction by J.E. Peterson

Asher Orkaby. *Beyond the Arab Cold War: The International History of the Yemen Civil War, 1962-68*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2017. ISBN: 9780190618445 (hardcover, \$34.95).

URL: <http://www.tiny.cc/Roundtable-XIX-39>

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Introduction by J.E. Peterson, Tucson, Arizona

The civil war in Yemen during 1962-1970 has been all but forgotten in the succession of Middle East conflicts over the last half century. But, as the three reviewers in this roundtable assess, Asher Orkaby's book not only examines the war but also provides fresh perspective on its impact on three levels. The first is that of the local actors in Yemen and their complex interactions of political actions, intentions, and ideologies. The second is the regional actors, particularly the proxies of Egypt and Saudi Arabia that seemed to employ Yemen as a battleground in the Arab Cold War. The final level is the international actors—the United States, Britain, the Soviet Union, and others—that found themselves drawn into a complicated and confusing conflict in a distant and largely unknown mountainous corner of Arabia.

The interlacing and cross-purposes between the three levels not only created the struggle but prolonged it far longer than it would have fared otherwise. In the end, a wobbly resolution extracted most of the regional and extra-regional complications but produced a weak state and conflicted society in Yemen that persists until today. Indeed, the nature of that resolution in many ways sowed the seeds that allowed the present conflagration to erupt—the result of outside interference on local actors (regionally, Saudi Arabia/United Arab Emirates and Iran as proxies; internationally, U.S., British, and European support for one side and Russian opposition on the other). The superimposition of these broader levels has distorted local politics almost beyond recognition.

Despite Yemen's marginal role in modern Middle East history and politics, the country has received a generous amount of scholarly attention, although less so on the 1960s war. In his review, Gregory Gause indicates a number of significant academic treatments of Yemen and the civil war.¹ In addition, there exist a number of first-person accounts, not only by outside observers, but even more importantly by Yemeni participants whose narratives provide essential details.²

Gause suggests that Orkaby does not pay enough attention to strong evidence that Egyptian leader Gamal Nasser played an instrumental role in fomenting, if not directing, the *coup* in September 1962 that overthrew the old order. The title *Beyond the Arab Cold War* references Malcolm Kerr's seminal book³ even as Orkaby argues that the circumstances were more complex than the prism of the Arab Cold War indicates. Perhaps the Arab Cold War has been over-emphasized in retrospect but it is also irrefutable that the concept clearly

¹ To which probably should be added Manfred Wenner's *Modern Yemen, 1918-1966* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1968) and Muhammad Zabarah's *Yemen: Traditionalism vs. Modernity* (New York: Praeger, 1982).

² Illustrative of this literature in Arabic are the contending accounts by participants in the coup and the establishment of the republic. 'Abdullah Juzaylan, one of the senior officers involved in the coup, gave his interpretation in *al-tarikh al-sirri lil-thawrah al-Yamaniyah* (Beirut: dar al-'awdah, 1977). In response, the viewpoint of younger officers was presented in Ahmad al-Ruhumi et al., *asrar wa-watha'iq al-thawrah al-Yamaniyah* (Beirut: dar al-'awdah; Sanaa: dar al-kalima, 1978). Even 'Abd al-Rahman al-Baydani, the largely figurehead vice-president who had lived in Egypt and maintained close ties to the Nasser régime, felt compelled to write *azmat al-ummat al-'Arabiyah wa-thawrat al-Yaman* (Cairo: privately published, 1984). These books then inspired the various parties to publish their rejoinders.

³ Malcolm Kerr, *The Arab Cold War: Gamal 'Abd al-Nasir and his Rivals, 1958-1970* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1971).

represented two opposing blocs in Arab politics. While ideologies and circumstances have shifted over the decades, it is nevertheless true that relations between the two largely enduring blocs continue to be frequently characterized by antagonism. For example, upon the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait in 1990, opinions in the Arab world divided along lines not dissimilar to the split in the 1960s.

On the international level, great power policy regarding Yemen and the war was built on broader interests and inherent contradictions. In her review, Louise Woodroffe points out that President John F. Kennedy's recognition of the just-declared Yemen Arab Republic was not really predicated on what was happening in Yemen and who was there. Rather, the decision was made principally on the basis of superpower rivalry and U.S. efforts to maintain functioning relations with Nasser. As the war in Yemen continued, the American position became more conflicted. Saudi Arabia perceived the Egyptian presence as an existential threat and the U.S. government seemed to share the perception of the possibility of a domino effect, toppling all the monarchies of the Gulf one by one, just as Washington was preoccupied with the perceived identical consequences of a North Vietnam victory. The Soviets remained in the background until the Egyptian withdrawal saw the royalists poised to seize Sanaa in 1967-1968. Britain had the most reason for direct involvement, given its presence in Aden and the Protectorate, but even London's role was peripheral, particularly as it gradually lost the south while the conflict in the north wore on and, more broadly, retreated from East of Suez.

Such is an inherent characteristic of great power intervention in regional conflicts: policy is usually made on considerations other than a close reading of the situation. KC Johnson in his review makes the apt comparison between the muddle of international reaction to Yemen then and to the indecision and disarray regarding Syria's use of chemical weapons now. There is a lesson to be found: this is how major powers become mired in local conflicts and how their inept involvement distorts and extends the struggle. The Middle East certainly has had its share of 'Vietnams': Nasser himself referred to Yemen as his Vietnam, to which can be added the Soviet experience in Afghanistan and Muhammad bin Salman's present imbroglio in, where else, Yemen.

A real strength of Orkaby's book is in illuminating the complex interweaving of local, regional, and global interests in Yemen's prolonged war. His emphasis on Egypt's role in Yemen and the impact of its Yemen adventure on its participation in the 1967 Arab-Israeli War most closely resembles Jesse Ferris's *Nasser's Gamble: How Intervention in Yemen Caused the Six-Day War and the Decline of Egyptian Power*.⁴ Orkaby argues that Yemen was not a major factor in the June 1967 War while attributing Israeli involvement in Yemen as a way both to sap Egyptian strength and to gain intelligence on Egyptian capabilities. Ferris, on the other hand, contends that Nasser's experience in Yemen significantly weakened Egyptian capability and thus contributed to a decline in Egyptian power that *inter alia* negatively impacted its performance against Israel. As the three reviewers note, Orkaby's analysis inspires discussion and adds significantly to our knowledge and understanding of a war that took place a half-century ago but continues to reverberate today.

⁴ Jesse Ferris, *Nasser's Gamble: How Intervention in Yemen Caused the Six-Day War and the Decline of Egyptian Power* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2013). Other studies that focus on the Saudi and Egyptian roles in the war include Saeed M. Badeeb, *The Saudi-Egyptian Conflict over North Yemen, 1962-1970* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1986) and Gregory Gause, *Saudi-Yemeni Relations: Domestic Structures and Foreign Influence* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1990).

Participants:

Asher Orkaby, Ph.D., is a research fellow at the Harvard Davis Center and a lecturer at Tufts University. He earned his PhD from Harvard University in International History and Middle Eastern Studies and is the author of *Beyond the Arab Cold War: The International History of the Yemen Civil War, 1962-68* (Oxford University Press, 2017). His current research focuses on the history of chemical warfare in the Middle East.

J.E. Peterson, Ph.D., is a historian and political analyst specializing in the Arabian Peninsula and Gulf. He has taught at various universities in the United States and France, has been associated with a number of leading research institutes in the U.S. and Britain, and served as historian in the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister for Security and Defence in Muscat, Sultanate of Oman. He is the author or editor of a dozen books, including *Yemen: The Search for a Modern State* (Croom Helm, Johns Hopkins University Press, 1982; reprinted 2016) and recently *The Emergence of the Gulf States: Studies in Modern History* (ed.; Bloomsbury, 2016) and *Saudi Arabia Under Ibn Saud: Financial and Economic Foundations of the State* (I.B. Tauris, forthcoming).

F. Gregory Gause, III is professor and John H. Lindsey '44 Chair in the Department of International Affairs in the Bush School of Government and Public Service at Texas A&M University, and also serves as Head of the Department. His research focuses on the international politics of the Middle East, particularly the Arabian Peninsula and the Persian Gulf. His most recent book is *The International Relations of the Persian Gulf* (Cambridge University Press, 2010).

KC Johnson is a professor of history at Brooklyn College and the CUNY Graduate Center. His scholarship focuses on Congress and foreign policy, the presidency, and contemporary legal matters.

Louise Woodroffe is a historian in the Office of the Historian at the U.S. Department of State, where she compiles *Foreign Relations of the United States* volumes on Africa. She received her PhD from the London School of Economics and Political Science and is the author of *"Buried in the Sands of the Ogaden": the United States, the Horn of Africa, and the Demise of Détente* (Kent State University Press, 2013).

Review by F. Gregory Gause, III, Bush School of Government, Texas A&M University

Asher Orkaby's main goal in *Beyond the Arab Cold War: The International History of the Yemen Civil War, 1962-68*, is to locate this conflict in contexts beyond that of the struggle for Arab world dominance that characterized Middle East regional politics in the 1950s and 1960s. Egyptian leader Gamal Abdul Nasser was the main protagonist in that struggle. His choice to send an Egyptian army to North Yemen to support the weak and fledgling republican regime that overthrew the Imamate government in September 1962 turned a civil war into a regional struggle that drew in local states like Saudi Arabia and the global powers. The Yemen conflict has always been seen as a part of what Malcolm Kerr famously termed "the Arab cold war," which in his view was something of a minor part.¹ Orkaby urges his readers to see the conflict not simply as a proxy war between republican Egypt and its monarchical regional rival, Saudi Arabia, but as a manifestation of Yemeni domestic political trends, a part of a broader British-Egyptian rivalry, a failed episode in U.N. efforts at peace-making, and an element of the wider Soviet-American Cold War.

He largely succeeds in making his case for multiple lenses. No one would deny that civil wars are profoundly driven by domestic factors. Orkaby situates the 1962 military coup that brought down Imam al-Badr in the broader course of modern Yemeni history, including the failed coups of 1948 and 1955. He highlights the profound effect of even the limited openings to the outside world undertaken by al-Badr's grandfather and father, Imam Yahya and Imam Ahmad, on encouraging revolutionary thinking among the Yemeni political elite (7-29). He emphasizes the strength of the royalist counter-attack on the new republican government, based on the ability of Yemen's tribes to mobilize more manpower into the fight than the young republic, which inherited the rudimentary state apparatus of the Imamate. Once Nasser joined the fight, the strength of the tribes meant that an Egyptian withdrawal would have risked ignominious defeat and the restoration of the royalist government. Orkaby also calls our attention to the important 'third force' in Yemeni politics that emerged in the mid-1960's, calling for a negotiated settlement among the local parties in defiance of their outside patrons. Nasser had to arrange for the assassination of a leader of this 'third force' to prevent such a settlement, and then to arrest a number of leading republican politicians who were supporting this trend, to sustain his position (107-111). The Yemenis were not simply puppets and proxies; their agency in this war was real.

Orkaby also highlights the importance of the British-Egyptian rivalry in understanding the dynamics of the Yemeni civil war (Chapter 7). The British colony in Aden and its protectorate hinterlands, organized into the Federation of South Arabia, was the new Yemen Arab Republic's southern and eastern neighbor. The republican regime immediately committed itself to unity with the southern part of geographic Yemen. Nasser used the North as a base to support anti-British elements in South Arabia. The British in turn supplied the royalist forces and did everything they could to make Nasser's venture into Yemen as miserable as possible.

¹ Orkaby's title calls direct attention to Kerr's classic work, *The Arab Cold War: Gamal 'Abd al-Nasir and his Rivals, 1958-1970* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1971). The Yemeni civil war occupies a very small part of Kerr's work, which concentrates on the failed Arab unity experiments of the period. Orkaby questions the usefulness of Kerr's framework, calling it "an assumed paradigm for the 1960's" (3), and says that the term "Arab cold war" has become "so cliché as to render it nearly meaningless" (4).

The emphasis Orkaby places on the domestic and British-Egyptian contexts of the civil war is merited, but certainly not new. Because of the scope of the book, he is unable to delve into the level of detail necessary to provide the full story on either of these fronts. Those who know the previous literature on Yemen in this period will pick up some interesting new details, but nothing that alters the conventional wisdom.²

Where Orkaby does challenge the conventional wisdom, and very successfully, is on superpower involvement in the war. He shows an early Soviet commitment to the new regime, as part of Moscow's overall regional strategy, and skillfully deploys the American documentary record to prove that, as early as 1963, Washington was worried that an Egyptian withdrawal from Yemen might leave a void that the Soviets would fill. Better Nasser than Soviet leader Nikita Khrushchev (50-57). By the time President Lyndon Johnson entered the White House, the U.S. saw the Yemen war as a way to keep the Egyptian military bogged down, lessening the threat to American military facilities in Libya and the chances of an Arab-Israeli War. When Nasser was engaged in negotiations with the Saudis about withdrawal from Yemen in 1965, the Johnson Administration actually increased economic and food aid to the Egyptian government in order to lessen the burden of the war (125-128). This logic was half-right. His involvement in Yemen did not prevent Nasser from initiating and escalating the crisis with Israel in May 1967, but it contributed to his humiliating defeat in the Six-Day War. Orkaby's work in the Soviet and American archives sheds important new light on this element of the war and changes the established story.

While Orkaby makes a good case for the importance of these other lenses, his account does not alter the conventional wisdom, dating back to Kerr and even before, that the real driver of both war and diplomacy in Yemen in the 1960's was the Arab Cold War. In Orkaby's telling, Nasser remains the main protagonist of the story. Without his intervention, the republic would have fallen to the royalist counter-attack. He drove the diplomacy of 1965 on withdrawal, and his decision in 1966 to abandon the idea of withdrawal and hunker down militarily prolonged the war. Without the support of Saudi Arabia, the royalist forces could not have sustained themselves in the face of the Egyptian military, Soviet support for the new republic, and American indifference to their cause. Without the Arab Cold War, there really is no Yemen civil war, or at least a Yemen civil war that lasts until 1970, and probably no republican regime in North Yemen at the end of it.

Given this, one would have hoped for a more detailed discussion of what drove Egyptian and Saudi policy during the war. Orkaby's account of Egyptian intervention depicts Nasser as cautious and reactive, not sending troops to San'a until 5 October 1962. Other accounts by Egyptian and Yemeni authors have Nasser involved directly in the plotting of the coup and deciding to intervene on 27 September, the day after the coup, though it took until 5 October for the troops to arrive in Yemen.³ More discussion about just why Nasser chose this battle, with reference to any newly available documents, would have been very welcome.

² Paul Dresch, *A History of Modern Yemen* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000); J. E. Peterson, *Yemen: The Search for the Modern State* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1982); Manfred W. Wenner, *Modern Yemen: 1918-1966*, (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1967); Robert D. Burrowes, *The Yemen Arab Republic: The Politics of Development, 1962-1986* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1987); Robert W. Stookey, *Yemen: The Politics of the Yemen Arab Republic*, (Boulder: Westview Press, 1978).

³ In my own research on the conflict, which takes up a chapter of my book *Saudi-Yemeni Relations: Domestic Structures and Foreign Influence* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1990), I cite a number of Arabic language sources available in the 1980's indicating Nasser's more direct involvement in the planning and execution of the coup and an immediate Egyptian decision to provide military support to the new regime, 59.

Similarly, a more extensive discussion of the twists and turns of Nasser's strategy, particularly his decision to abandon negotiations on withdrawal in 1966 and recommit to the Egyptian military presence, would have been very useful.

At times Orkaby's causal arguments exceed themselves. He says that one of the reasons Nasser sent the Egyptian military to Yemen was to keep Field Marshal Abd al-Hakim "Amr busy and lessen the chances of the a military coup against him" (69). That kind of charge needs documentation. Orkaby's book is particularly weak on the Saudi side of the conflict. Orkaby depicts King Faisal, much like the Americans, as very happy to have Nasser bogged down in Yemen (127). This runs counter to the entire thrust of Saudi policy during the war, which was to get the Egyptians out, even if it meant abandoning their support for the Imam and the restoration of the monarchical regime. In the chapter on Yemen and the lead-up to the Six-Day War, Orkaby contends that the Egyptian use of chemical weapons in Yemen "had a profound impact on Israel" and that Egypt's involvement there "provided Israeli politicians with the alarming military intelligence that drove them to war with Egypt" (177). Neither of these contentions is adequately supported. With a conflict as well-documented on the Israeli side as 1967, it was incumbent upon the author to provide greater support for these revisionist conclusions.

In a brief epilogue Orkaby compares the 1960s civil war to the current civil conflict in Yemen. He draws a number of interesting parallels and historical ironies, most notably that the grandsons and great-grandsons of the royalists, supported by Saudi Arabia in the 1960's, are now the backbone of the Houthi movement that is fighting the Saudi-Emirati intervention in the country. However, one can differ with the conclusion that he draws from his comparison that only when foreign interests are withdrawn will the Yemenis be able to settle their differences (214). The ultimate settlement of the civil war in 1970 happened in some respects because of decisions taken by foreigners. The Soviets and their regional allies (the Syrian Ba'thist regime and the new People's Democratic Republic of Yemen in the south) continued to support the republican regime after the Egyptian withdrawal, helping to foil the final royalist offensive in 1968. Without that aid, it is possible that the republic would have fallen. The Saudis then in 1970 made a deal with the republican elite at the expense of Imam al-Badr, accepting the Yemen Arab Republic, encouraging the integration of their tribal allies into its institutions, and providing it with economic aid. It is not so much that the foreigners have to get out. They have to do deals with Yemenis that encourage domestic reconciliation.

With these important limitations in mind, Orkaby's book remains a very welcome addition to the limited literature on the Yemen civil war. It provides the most comprehensive account of the Egyptian use of chemical weapons in the conflict, and establishes both the fact and the rather limited extent of Israeli support for the royalists. He provides fascinating new details on American and Soviet strategies. But, in the end, the book does not convince this reader that the essential lens for understanding what went on in Yemen in the 1960's is other than the Arab Cold War.

Review by KC Johnson, Brooklyn College

Yemen and the Domestic/International Interplay

Asher Orkaby's *Beyond the Arab Cold War* mines a dizzying array of sources (from the United States, the United Kingdom, Russia, Israel, and Switzerland, as well as published documents and interviews) to illustrate a complex interaction of local, regional, and international forces shaping 1960s Yemeni history. The book is, obviously, important in its own right. But it also makes a forceful case for how international history, with a set of properly framed questions, enriches our understanding of the past.

As the title suggests, Orkaby challenges a traditional approach of viewing the 1960s Yemeni political crisis through the lens of an 'Arab Cold War' (the rivalry between Egypt and anti-Nasser forces in the region) or through the global Cold War between the United States and the Soviet Union. In particular, he contends that these approaches shortchange the significance of domestic factors within Yemen, and the way in which decisions by foreign actors distorted Yemeni politics.

Orkaby does not minimize Yemen's significance in other regional and even international developments. Rather, he maintains that historians need to focus on the interplay between all aspects (local, regional, and international) of the country's civil war. He also downplays the role of ideology in explaining the eventual outcome of the conflict. This was, after all, an event in which the United States and the USSR ultimately supported the same side, if for rather different reasons.

"The Yemen Civil War," Orkaby observes, "was an international conflict at a moment when the definition of 'international' was radically changing" (2). The end of colonialism; the growth in international power of African, Middle Eastern, and East Asian nations; the relative decline in U.S. power internationally; and the changing nature of the Middle East all combined to create a new environment for what developed into a highly unpredictable war.

In September 1962, a military coup toppled the regime of Imam Muhammad al-Badr—a figure described by the *Guardian's* Middle East correspondent as "a woolly-minded liberal, sincerely anxious to reform his country without much idea how to set about or what passions reform might unleash. He was full of good intentions which ultimately, and appropriately, paved the way to his downfall" (18). Al-Badr had hoped to use Egyptian support to outmaneuver allies within the royal family. Instead, Nasser's regime supported the newly-established republic, whose leadership was scarcely more capable than the royalist regime it replaced. The coup plotters' inability to capture all of the royal family paved the way for a royalist counter-rebellion that blossomed into a civil war in which the British, Saudis, Egyptians, Soviets, Americans, and Israelis all played some role.

Orkaby contends that "no single foreign power or political entity in Yemen exercised decisive control over local events; each party peddled its own agenda" (57). As a result, an already unstable situation became even more destabilized, with international involvement in Yemeni political squabbles frustrating diplomatic efforts to achieve peace. The United States played a particularly perplexing role. The Irish journalist Peter Somerville-Large detected a widespread belief that U.S. policy was based on "devious diplomatic motives," (47) and that despite rhetorical support for the republicans, Washington actually sympathized with the royalists.

Yemen certainly was an example of a Cold War conflict in which U.S. policymakers involved themselves absent sufficient knowledge of the region. During my work with the Lyndon Johnson presidential recordings, I was struck by how President Johnson's Yemen-related conversations tended to deal with either high levels of generalities or reactions to very specific developments, ignoring detailed discussions of Yemen-related strategy.¹ Johnson was not alone in his lack of detailed knowledge about the region. According to British Prime Minister Harold MacMillan, President John Kennedy once confessed that he did not know where Yemen was. Orkaby also relays an amusing anecdote in which John Foster Dulles, after an aide relayed urgent developments in the region, responded, "Yemen? Who's he?" Eisenhower's Secretary of State later admitted that he did not even know Yemen was a country (24).

On the international side, Orkaby's book portrays a conflict that unintentionally exposed the *limits* of outside intervention. Because the conflict so bogged down Egyptian forces, "Nasser's commitment in Yemen carried with it an inherent inability to pursue military expeditions elsewhere." As former National Security Council staffer Robert Komer (who coordinated policy toward the country under Kennedy, despite a lack of expertise in the region) argued, Nasser's actions in Yemen were "so futile and fierce that the imminent Vietnam War could have easily been dubbed America's Yemen" (126).

As the situation deteriorated in 1967, Nasser authorized the use of chemical weapons against royalist forces. But despite some Western efforts, the United Nations declined to sanction Egypt for violating international law. Indeed, even those countries that professed a deep commitment to internationalism looked the other way. Norway's foreign minister privately remarked that "the Scandinavians considered that their economic and political interests outweighed the moral issues"; the Danes passed on sponsoring any anti-Egyptian initiatives, lest it harm Danish "shipping and economic interests in the Middle East" (148). The failure of the international body to protest Egypt's actions prompted the British UN mission to contend that "the UAR [United Arab Republic] was, in terms of ability to influence Assembly votes, probably the most powerful country of the United Nations, not excluding the Soviet Union and the United States" (149). It is difficult to read this section of the book without thinking of the international community's comparable, failed response to Syria's use of chemical weapons in recent years.

As the 1960s drew to a close, each of the foreign actors concluded that withdrawal from Yemen would serve its interests, even at the expense of abandoning local allies. The weakening of the British economy during the Cold War prompted Prime Minister Harold Wilson to withdraw UK forces from east of the Suez; the move ended hopes of British conservatives (and royalist supporters) that the British would retain a strategic presence in Aden. Developments well outside of Yemen also helped bring the war to a close. The outcome of the Six-Day War in June 1967 between Egypt, Syria, Jordan, and Israel, meanwhile, undermined Nasser's power, and paved the way for Egypt's ultimate decision to withdraw its forces. Egypt did so as part of a deal with the Saudis, who then recognized the republican government. And while the Soviets provided the Yemeni government with significant aid in 1967 and 1968, they eventually turned their attention to South Yemen, which became the Middle East's only Communist state after the collapse of a British protectorate over Aden.

To Orkaby, these developments provided a fitting conclusion to a period of foreign intervention that prolonged and "deepened" the suffering of Yemenis as "a result largely of players and forces much larger than

¹ For a sampling of Johnson and Kennedy recordings on Yemen, please listen to the audio file at <https://kc-johnson.com/yemen-tapes/>.

themselves” (206). They also provided a reminder of how historians need to examine the Yemeni civil war through a variety of levels, and why an exclusive or even primary focus on the Arab Cold War distorts an examination of the conflict.

Historians never can be certain of the policy timeliness of a project—we write, after all, primarily to answer questions about the past. Yet it would be hard to imagine a more relevant time for Orkaby’s book to have appeared. As in the 1960s, Yemen is a major question in international relations, involving the competing interests of the United States, Russia, and Saudi Arabia—with Iran, perhaps, assuming the role of 1960s Egypt. International terrorist organizations such as al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula add to the complexity of the current crisis. Orkaby’s book provides a useful reminder that in Yemen, there are few permanent friends or permanent enemies; and the decisions of foreign actors often can have unexpected, and unproductive, outcomes. Beyond its high quality as a work of scholarship, then, *Beyond the Arab Cold War* provides some cautionary insights for policymakers today in Washington, Moscow, Riyadh, and Teheran.

Review by Louise P. Woodroffe, Office of the Historian, U.S. Department of State¹

In September 1962, revolutionary republicans in the Yemen Army carried out a *coup d'état* against the newly installed Imam Muhammad al-Badr, the last of a thousand-year-old dynasty. The United States chose to recognize the subsequently named Yemen Arab Republic (YAR) and the rule of Abdullah Sallal in December 1962, two months after the Soviet Union had done so.

Our immediate concern is less with what transpires inside Yemen than the prospect that our failure to recognize the new regime will lead to escalation of the conflict endangering the stability of the whole Arabian Peninsula. Likewise, failure to recognize will result in termination of an American presence in Yemen and is likely to lead to a considerable increase in Soviet influence. Following recognition we shall be confronted with the difficult task of working out the modalities of disengagement by all external parties. The United States may have to play the leading role in this operation. After foreign intervention has terminated, the Yemenis should be in a position to work out their own future and we believe the natural frictions between Egyptians and Yemenis will serve to limit United Arab Republic influence in Yemen.²

This assessment by the U.S. Department of State turned out to be a rather woeful misunderstanding of the interwoven complications endemic to the region. Recognition by the Kennedy Administration did not prevent the conflict from escalating. In fact, the civil war that erupted had immediate and lasting regional and international ramifications.

With the current conflict and humanitarian crisis in Yemen raging, the release of Asher Orkaby's *Beyond the Arab Cold War* is both timely and relevant. Yet even without this prescience, Orkaby has provided us with an engaging and truly international retelling of the Yemen Civil War of 1962-1968 through an incredible array of sources, including documents from Britain, Canada, Israel, Russia, Switzerland, the United Nations, the United States and Yemen.

Because he is able to tell this history from a variety of perspectives, Orkaby deftly parses the potentially confusing narrative of the Yemen Civil War. That he does this with such clarity is commendable. Egypt, with support from the Soviet Union, intervened on behalf of the republican side, which ultimately 'won' the war. Yet, the conflict is generally considered a great failure for Egyptian President Gamal Abdel Nasser. Meanwhile, Saudi Arabia supported the royalists, who lost the war. However, the moderates who came out of the YAR were subsequently friendly to Saudi interests. The Soviets ended up with a new ally, not in the YAR, but in the People's Democratic Republic of Yemen (PDRY) that was created out of British-controlled South Arabia after London's early withdrawal. A tentative rapprochement between Nasser and U.S. President John Kennedy was undermined by Egyptian intervention in Yemen, as the United States was reticent to show

¹ The views presented here are my own and do not necessarily reflect those of the U.S. Department of State or the United States Government.

² "Memorandum From the Department of State Executive Secretary (Brubeck) to the President's Special Assistant for National Security Affairs (Bundy), December 6, 1962," Document 112, *Foreign Relations of the United States 1961-1963, Volume XVIII, Near East*, ed. Nina J. Noring (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1995).

approval for the internationally unpopular Egyptian intervention, while U.S. involvement in Vietnam negated the ability of Lyndon Johnson's administration to criticize Egypt's use of chemical weapons.

Through his multi-archival approach, Orkaby is able to challenge some conventional wisdoms about the Cold War in the Third World, the Arab-Israeli conflict, and internal Arab conflict.

First, he sets the Yemen Civil War apart from other Cold War conflicts in the Third World. He contends that "the two parties of the Yemen Civil War came to be dominated by ineffectual and unpopular leaders, who in turn were dominated and overshadowed by the interests of regional and international powers" (44). This is somewhat at odds with other Cold War civil wars such as those in Vietnam, Angola, Ethiopia, or Afghanistan, during which the local players manipulated the superpowers by playing them off of each other, and thus wielding outsized influence relative to their actual power. Of course, in this case, the superpowers were relatively on the same side.

This leads to another of Orkaby's claims that goes against aspects of recent Cold War scholarship on the importance of ideology.

The unfolding scene in Yemen was not one that could have been predicted by the ideological proclivities of either the United States and the USSR or Egypt and Saudi Arabia. Nasser and the Soviets offered support to an untested nationalist regime after forsaking their Nasserist and pro-communist ally al-Badr. After careful consideration, Kennedy declared support for a nationalist government, joining ranks with the USSR and the Eastern Bloc, while at the same time London and Riyadh withheld their recognition (57).

This lack of intractable ideological stances makes the length of the conflict and the inability of all of the external powers to find a compromise for so long all the more tragic. After initial attempts by the United States to broker a peace, the efforts fizzled as Washington became increasingly skeptical of Nasser and more ambivalent about the YAR at the same time that the United States lost international capital while bogged down in Vietnam.

Second, Orkaby argues that the 1967 Arab-Israeli War affected the conflict in Yemen, but not the other way around. He calls the accepted wisdom that Egyptian intervention in Yemen had weakened it militarily and left it unprepared to counter an Israeli attack "self-serving accounts" (175). Quite the opposite, he argues that "the intervention in Yemen and the cycles of troops being deployed acted as training ground for battle experience—much more so than sitting idly in military barracks in Sinai" (175). Orkaby contends that Israel's understanding of Egypt's military capabilities and Nasser's demonstrated willingness to use chemical weapons gave Israeli leaders further incentive to launch a preemptive attack (196). In any case, the decisive loss in the Six-day War affected Egypt's willingness to stay engaged in Yemen, and Nasser withdrew all Egyptian troops by the end of 1967.

Third, Orkaby contends that the civil war's impact on internal Arab rivalries is more complex than the standard conclusion of a Saudi victory and Egyptian loss. While Saudi Arabia benefited immensely from a divided Yemen with a friendly YAR at its border and its regional hegemony intact, Egypt's intervention was not a complete failure. While others have referred to "Egypt's Vietnam" to describe the intervention, the author points to favorable terms in the Saudi-Egyptian Khartoum agreement, in which Egypt gained access to

Saudi oil wealth and jobs.³ Additionally, early British withdrawal from Aden secured the Red Sea approach to the Suez Canal (205).

Orkaby includes a chapter on the Anglo-Egyptian rivalry in Yemen, where he ably explores some of the intersections between the Civil War in the North and the end of British colonialism in the South. This is an area that could have been further explored, though perhaps the subject deserves a book of its own.

As it seems was always the case when larger powers intervened in local conflicts during the Cold War, Orkaby concludes that “the civil war was prolonged and the sufferings of Yemenis deepened as a result largely of players and forces much larger than themselves” (206). The antecedents to Yemen’s current struggles can in part be found in this era, and the pitfalls of foreign intervention are readily apparent. Coming around full circle, on 13 November 1967, shortly after the coup that overthrew Sallal, U.S. National Security Council staffers John Foster and Harold Saunders sent a memorandum to Walt Rostow, President Johnson’s National Security Advisor, expressing caution in not repeating earlier mistakes: “this time, we want to hold our blessings until we’re sure how completely the government represents all Yemen and how acceptable it is to the Saudis and Iranians.”⁴

³ See, for example, Isham Tharoor, “How Yemen was Once Egypt’s Vietnam,” *The Washington Post*, 28 March 2015.

⁴ “Memorandum From John W. Foster and Harold H. Saunders of the National Security Council Staff to the President’s Special Assistant (Rostow), 13 November 1967, Document 461, *Foreign Relations of the United States 1964-1968, Volume XXI, Near East Region; Arabian Peninsula*, ed. Nina Davis Howland (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 2000).

Author's Response by Asher Orkaby, Harvard University

Academic writing is about an ongoing 'conversation' with others in the field as new theories, interpretations, and archival sources are introduced and debated. Few actual conversations ever occur and feedback and responses to the publication of a book are minimal. The tunnel vision of archival research over three different continents, and in multiple different languages, can often obscure the project's broader contributions even from the book's author. This roundtable is a valuable opportunity to engage in an actual written conversation with three leaders in the field of Middle East and International History who have graciously dedicated their time to helping the reading public and myself understand how *Beyond the Arab Cold War* contributes to this conceptual conversation.

In his review, Gregory Gause draws the book into a larger discussion of bipolar histories of the modern Middle East, and specifically Malcolm Kerr's *Arab Cold War*¹ which portrayed regional conflicts, including the Yemen Civil War, as manifestations of a rivalry between monarchies led by Saudi Arabia and nationalist republican states led by Egypt and President Gamal Abdel Nasser, rather than reflections of local events or internal politics. Gause is correct in his hypothetical depiction of Yemeni history without Egyptian intervention. It is indeed impossible to ignore the presence of 70,000 Egyptian troops and their impact upon Saudi foreign policy decisions. However, looking "Beyond" does not mean altering history. Rather, it involves shifting one's eyes back towards Yemen and focusing on the aspects of the country's civil war that may have been obscured by the dominant historical narrative of the Arab Cold War.

In his pivotal article introducing the field of New International History, Matthew Connelly² recommends removing the Cold War lens entirely and focusing on the Global South and other local perspectives that previously have not been the subject of historical analysis and had focused solely on the global conflict. As Erez Manela suggests, it is impossible to ignore a Cold War rivalry that dominated post-War history and memory. Rather than taking off the Cold War lens entirely, it is necessary to retrofit a pair of bifocal lenses that allow both the broader vision of the Cold War and the local vision of the developing world.³ Using these new bifocal glasses, *Beyond the Arab Cold War* attempts to provide similar optics to the Arab Cold War, albeit with a new prescription. On the local level, Yemeni tribalism and political development were at the core of the civil war and were the culmination of a gradual challenge to the traditional religious imamate that began during the 1940s and even preceded the Egyptian Free Officers Revolution in 1952. On the global level, the civil war was about much more than an Egyptian-Saudi rivalry. Using a higher prescription for distance, the blurred vision of the Arab Cold War is corrected to transform Yemen into an arena for international conflict. This new analysis changes the way United Nations (UN) peacekeeping is viewed, reintroduces aspects of the Anglo-Egyptian rivalry, and adds a new layer of understanding to the interrelationship between Yemen and the 1967 Egypt-Israeli war. New aspects are also added to Egypt's outside role in the conflict including an in-

¹ Malcolm Kerr, *The Arab Cold War: Gamal 'Abd al-Nasir and his Rivals, 1958-1970* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1971).

² Matthew Connelly, "Taking Off the Cold War Lens: Visions of North-South Conflict during the Algerian War for Independence," *American Historical Review* 105 (2000): 739-769.

³ Erez Manela, "A Pox on Your Narrative: Writing Disease Control into Cold War History," *Diplomatic History* 34 (2010): 299-323.

depth analysis of Egyptian counterinsurgency in Yemen and Nasser's model for non-European imperialism. Most importantly, new archival evidence is brought to light on Egypt's use of chemical weapons in Yemen, a little known episode that had a profound impact of the international chemical weapons taboo and the general place of morality in foreign policy.

The goal of the book was not to rewrite history or even to write an alternative history without Egypt and Nasser. Nor was this book merely an attempt at offering a new authoritative history of the civil war. As Louise Woodroffe's review indicates, there are limitless areas where each chapter could have been developed into a stand-alone monograph. Rather, it was an attempt to draw attention away from Egypt and Saudi Arabia and introduce new themes, characters, and historical importance to a relatively remote civil war.

In continuing this conversation about looking beyond the Arab Cold War, KC Johnson's review addresses the importance of understanding Yemeni history when making contemporary political decisions. Egyptian and Saudi regimes may have come and gone, changing the calculus of regional policy towards Yemen over the five decades since the Yemen Civil War. The tribal politics of Yemen, however, remain a constant in South Arabia and dominate the current conflict. In the book's introduction and conclusion, a historic parallel is drawn between the contemporary Houthi movement and the anti-republican tribal militias that supported the deposed Imam Muhammad al-Badr during the 1960s. Many of the political grievances that endured after the official end of the civil war in 1970 remain an intractable part of the crisis in 2018. The Houthi wars are not a modern reincarnation or an Iranian creation, but a continuation of a struggle for Yemeni national identity that began in 1962.

As Johnson points out, the same can be said for the historical lessons that can be drawn from the international response to Egypt's use of chemical weapons in Yemen. The gradual normalization of chemical weapons use can be traced back to the Yemen Civil War. The world's failure to uphold this moral and legal taboo set the precedent for continued regional use of chemical weapons, first by Iraq during the 1980s, and most recently by Syria.

Bringing this conversation full circle is Woodroffe's review, which introduces a prophetic and a reflective quotation from the U.S. archives, highlighting the importance of looking at Yemen through the proper lens and not through the eyes of Egypt, Saudi Arabia, or any overarching bipolar conflict. The first quotation, from a December 1962 memo, issued several months after the outbreak of the civil war, showcases the important U.S. diplomatic role, particularly in the aftermath of the conflict, in facilitating a Yemeni-solution to a Yemeni conflict without foreign intervention.⁴ The second is from a statement made by John W. Foster, a member of the National Security Council staff in November 1967 after the first Yemen republican president, Abdullah Sallal was forced out of office. Foster stressed the importance of patiently observing events in Yemen and withholding recognition until the U.S. could be sure that "the government represents all

⁴ "Memorandum From the Department of State Executive Secretary (Brubeck) to the President's Special Assistant for National Security Affairs (Bundy), December 6, 1962," Document 112, *Foreign Relations of the United States 1961-1963, Volume XVIII, Near East*, ed. Nina J. Noring (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1995).

Yemen and how acceptable it is to the Saudis and Iranians.”⁵ These quotations are as true of history as they are of the current conflict. All that is required is a new prescription that allows for a peripheral perception beyond the dominant bipolar vision of Yemen.

⁵ “Memorandum From the Department of State Executive Secretary (Brubeck) to the President’s Special Assistant for National Security Affairs (Bundy), December 6, 1962,” Document 112, *Foreign Relations of the United States 1961-1963, Volume XVIII, Near East*, ed. Nina J. Noring (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1995).