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**Between Cautious and Assertive Policies: Comparing Obama's
Strategy and Trump's First-Term Policy in Yemen**

**A Dissertation Submitted to the Department of Letters and English Language in Partial
Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of Master in Language and Culture**

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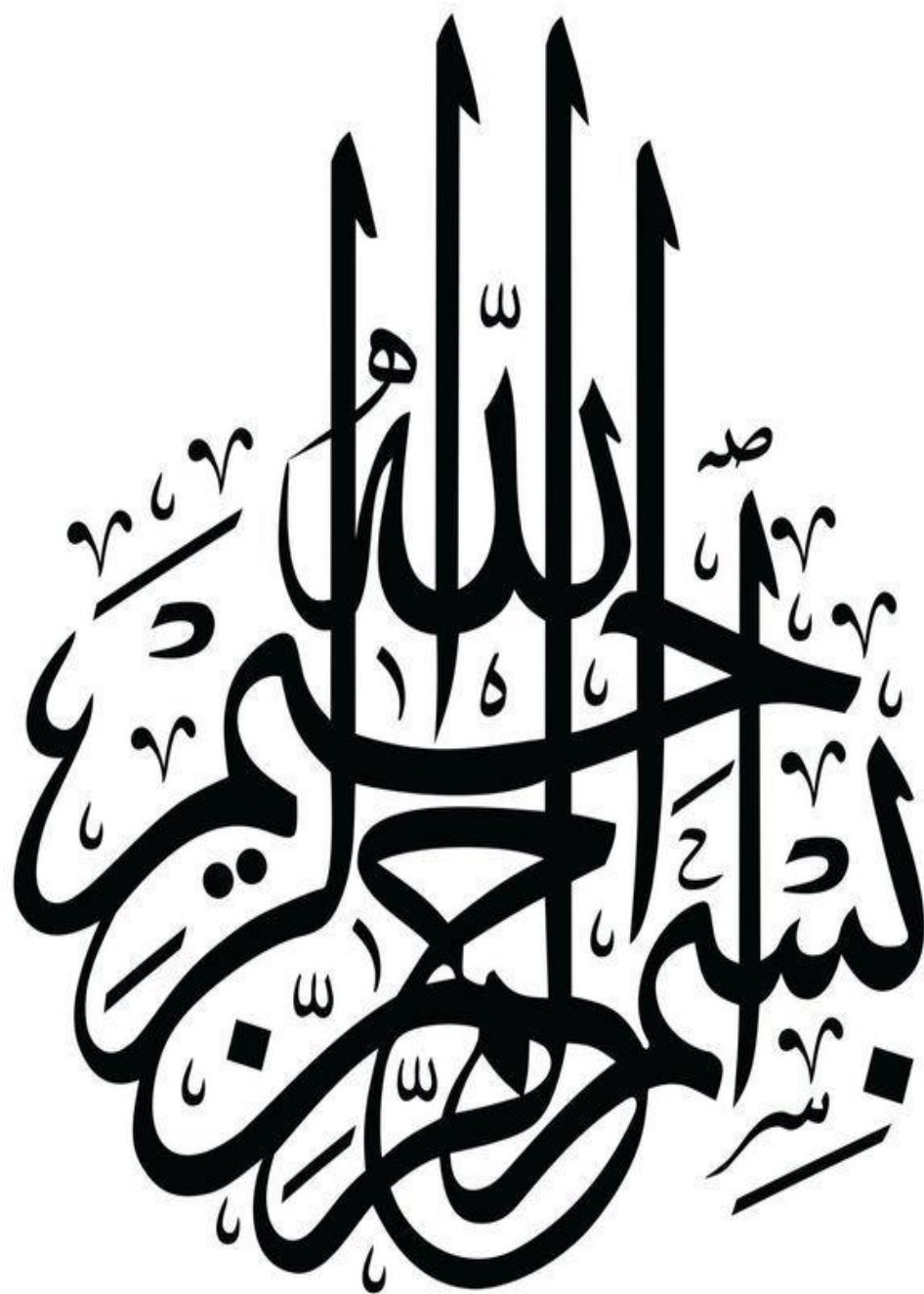
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Dedication

In the name of Allah, the Gracious, the Merciful.

I dedicate this dissertation to my beloved parents.

To my star who guided me through darkness, my Mother. You are the heart of my world.

Your quiet sacrifices and gentle wisdom have shaped every step I take. From you I
inherited wisdom and patience.

To my dear Father, who always believed in me, even when I did not believe in myself.

To my sisters Amina and Noor. Although we sometime disagree, I cannot imagine my life
without you too.

To the lovely, pure, most beautiful Grandmother in the world. May God bless her with
long life .

To my dearest friends, Amani , Youssra and Meryem. Without them, I would not like
going to University

For those who are no longer with us but remain alive in our hearts:

My Grandfather, the greatest man I have ever known, and my Grandmother, who shaped
the sweetest memories of my childhood. Peace be upon them.

To the greatest, bravest, strongest person I know, the girl who puts kindness and love into
everything she does

Me.

Yassamine HABILES

Dedication

I dedicate this work to my dear parents, who noticed my stress even in my silence, who never hesitated to offer help, and who provided me with everything I needed. Without you, I would not be where I am today.

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Abstract

This dissertation investigates and delves into the development of the US-Yemeni relationship throughout history. It also focuses on the foreign policies of Presidents Barack Obama and Donald Trump in Yemen taking in consideration the geopolitical and economic aspects that have shaped this relationship. The latter is affected by nearby countries, natural resources, strategic objectives, counterterrorism, and alliances that have shaped the diplomatic relations. An important part of this work highlights Yemen's political instability and the ongoing civil conflict, and discusses the reasons and consequences of this struggle. The existence of extremist groups such as Al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP) has made Yemen a central concern and the main interest of the United States' counterterrorism policy as it was seen as the hot spot of terrorist groups. These factors influenced how presidents dealt with the issue following different policies. Under Obama's presidency, the United States focused on launching drone strikes and little diplomatic involvement, but also on providing assistance for the Saudi-led coalition as the Houthis' movement captured the attention in the region. Years later, the Trump Administration emphasized its strategy in Yemen on increasing weapons sales to Gulf partners while limiting the diplomatic concerns and ignoring the casualties. By comparing these two administrations and the strategies they maintained, the study concludes a shift from cautious international cooperation to a powerful and aggressive militarism method, concentrating on the consequences on Yemen's national stability.

الملخص

تبحث هذه الأطروحة في تطور العلاقات الأمريكية اليمنية عبر التاريخ، وتعمق فيه. كما تركز على السياسات الخارجية للرئيسين باراك أوباما ودونالد ترامب في اليمن، مع مراعاة الجوانب الجيوسياسية والاقتصادية التي شكلت هذه العلاقة. وتتأثر هذه العلاقة بالدول المجاورة، والموارد الطبيعية، والأهداف الاستراتيجية، ومكافحة الإرهاب، والتحالفات التي شكلت العلاقات الدبلوماسية. ويسلط جزء مهم من هذا العمل الضوء على عدم الاستقرار السياسي في اليمن والصراع الأهلي المستمر، ويناقش أسباب هذا الصراع وعواقبه. وقد جعل وجود جماعات متطرفة مثل تنظيم القاعدة في شبه الجزيرة العربية اليمن مصدر قلق رئيسي ومحور اهتمام سياسة الولايات المتحدة لمكافحة الإرهاب، إذ كان يُنظر إليه على أنه بؤرة للجماعات الإرهابية. وقد أثرت هذه العوامل على كيفية تعامل الرؤساء مع هذه القضية باتباع سياسات مختلفة. ففي عهد أوباما، ركزت الولايات المتحدة على شن غارات بطائرات بدون طيار، وقللت من التدخل الدبلوماسي، كما ركزت على تقديم الدعم للتحالف الذي تقوده السعودية، في ظل لفت حركة الحوثيين انتباه المنطقة. بعد سنوات، شددت إدارة ترامب على استراتيجيتها في اليمن، المتمثلة في زيادة مبيعات الأسلحة لشركائها الخليجيين، مع الحد من المخاوف الدبلوماسية وتجاهل الخسائر. بمقارنة هاتين الإدارتين والاستراتيجيتين اللتين اتبعتهما، تستنتج الدراسة تحولاً من التعاون الدولي الحذر إلى نهج عسكري قوي وحازم، مع التركيز على عواقب ذلك على الاستقرار الوطني في اليمن.

List of Abbreviations and Acronyms

A.D.	Anno Domini (Latin for "In the Year of Our Lord")
AQAP	Al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula
AUMF	Authorization for the Use of Military Force
CIA	Central Intelligence Agency
CTU	Counter-Terrorism Unit
DFA	De Facto Authorities
FY	Fiscal Year
GCC	Gulf Cooperation Council
NDC	National Dialogue Conference
NLF	National Liberation Front
PDRY	People's Democratic Republic of Yemen (South Yemen)
STC	Southern Transitional Council
U.S.	United States
UAE	United Arab Emirates
UAV	Unmanned Aerial Vehicle
UN	United Nations

UNICEF	United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund
UNSC	United Nations Security Council
USAID	for United States Agency for International Development
VOA	Voice of America
WHO	World Health Organization
YAR	Yemen Arab Republic (North Yemen)

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Introduction

Yemen is one of the most strategically important countries in the Middle East situated at the southernmost point of the Arabian Peninsula. It has a crucial location in regard to international trade and worldwide oil transportation with a proximity to the Bab el-Mandeb Strait, an important maritime chokepoint that links the Red Sea to the Gulf of Aden and the Arabian Sea. As a result, Yemen was always under successive colonial exploitations that has affected its political, economic, and social sectors of the country.

Yemen's history is characterized by complex internal variations, specially between the North and South, tribal organizations and the central government, religious groups and forces that tend between modernism and traditionalism. Even with the 1990 unification of North and South Yemen, these conflicts were not resolved. National unity has continuously been damaged by weak governmental structures, widespread corruption, and a lack of economic prospects, which has allowed local players, foreign interests, and extremist organizations to compete for power.

Yemen has historically provided the US with both opportunities and challenges. Because North and South Yemen served as platforms for proxy war between Western and Soviet Union, early relations were influenced by the circumstances of the Cold War and the economic interests. However, in the years following 9/11, when Yemen became an important member of the international War on Terror, U.S. involvement increased significantly by giving humanitarian support. The United States put its military, intelligence, and diplomatic engagement when it determined that Al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP) was one of the most active and dangerous factions of the worldwide jihadist organization.

After 9/11 Attacks, the United States' foreign policy toward Yemen developed from helping at fighting terrorism to promoting political stability and transition in order to keep their dominance in the area. Yemen's internal divisions, the power of tribal systems, and changing regional alliances have often made the implementation of these strategies on the ground more difficult. In addition to the previous mentioned challenges that distressed the tranquility of country, the unstable political environment has also been drastically altered by the start of the Arab Spring in 2011. The latter resulted in the fall of a long time Ali Abdullah Saleh, and the Houthi conflict that followed.

Iran was suspected of supporting the Houthi movement, and by 2015 Yemen had descended into a major conflict that engaged a coalition led by Saudi Arabia and supported by the United States. Yemen is now experiencing one of the greatest humanitarian crises in the world as a result of this proxy war, which increased the situation in Yemen. The Obama administration conducted targeted drone attacks against AQAP members while providing the Saudi army with information and logistical support. This strategy was mostly maintained and reinforced by the Trump administration, which framed Yemen policy within an overall pro-Saudi and anti-Iranian alliance.

The importance of this research lies in understanding the US-Yemen relations during critical times such as Yemen's civil conflict, the growth of terrorist networks like al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP), and the terrible humanitarian crisis that has emerged since 2015. It is also important to know the motivations, tools, and effects of the American involvement in Yemen in order to evaluate the success of the US policies in supporting security, stability, and democratic government in the country.

Considering the complexity of the issue, this dissertation aims to examine the development of U.S. involvement in Yemen from a variety of perspectives, including administrative, and geopolitical one. It also tries to provide an understanding of the larger

challenges that faced the Obama and Trump administrations on their way to develop logical and moral foreign policy in the region. For the same purpose, a comparison between the above mentioned Administrations is conducted to analyze how they handled the Yemeni issue and how they interacted with regional and local players.

This research attempts to answer some questions related to the topic investigating the U.S. foreign policy toward Yemen. Among the questions to be examined are: How do Yemen's geopolitical position and socioeconomic variations influence its strategic importance in the region? How did U.S.-Yemen relations evolve from initial encounters to strategic alliances? What were the major differences in U.S. policy toward Yemen between the Obama and Trump administrations? What were the consequences of these policies on Yemen's political stability, humanitarian situation, and U.S strategic interests? How did the changes in U.S. leadership affect Yemen's conflict and regional alliances?

Many studies have constantly dealt with topics related to the Yemeni ongoing issue. Understanding the country itself can help form an idea about the nature of the conflicts that are still taking place. Among the works that gives a clear description of Yemeni society is Paul Dresch's book entitled *Tribes, "Government, and History in Yemen"* (2000). In this book, Dresch explains how the tribes in Yemen have played an important part in the country's history and politics,. He demonstrates that tribal traditions are more than simply obsolete conventions; they still influence how individuals solve issues, follow regulations, and even interact with the government. This book explains why tribes are still important in Yemen today and how they influence the way the country is administered.

In his article "Imperial Rivalry in South West Arabia before the First World War." Yaccob, Abdol Rauh offers a critical historical perspective on Yemen's geopolitical importance before US participation, concentrating on the struggle between European powers particularly the British and Ottomans in Southwest Arabia. The article is critical for

understanding the strategic significance of Yemen's position prior to the contemporary period of US foreign policy.

Related to the dissertation's aim, a considerable number of studies investigate how American strategic interests, counterterrorism goals, and humanitarian considerations intersect in the Middle East. Moath Alrefaei's book entitled "Yemen-US Relations: The External and Dynamic" provides an in-depth look of the historical trajectory of Yemen-US relationships, looking into the political, strategic, and cultural forces that have affected their interactions. Alrefaei's work is important for contextualizing Yemen within wider US foreign policy attempts in the Middle East, especially throughout critical periods such as the Cold War, post-9/11 counterterrorism efforts, and US engagement in the Yemeni civil war.

The New York Times' (2017) article "Raid in Yemen: Risky From the Start and Costly in the End" is an essential document that shows the consequences of foreign military intervention in Yemen. The article discusses a U.S. military attack that resulted in civilian casualties and raises concerns about intelligence shortcomings. It demonstrates how American counterterrorism efforts may have significant effects for both Yemenis and US foreign policy.

This research is conducted through the historical and the qualitative methods. On the one hand, the historical method aims to explore past- to present's events through the use of a detailed chronological research about the development of diplomatic commercial ties between the two nations. The qualitative method, on the other hand, is used to explain the impact of the U.S. involvement in the region in general and analyze the Obama and Trump policies in Yemen in particular.

This dissertation includes three chapters. The first chapter entitled "Yemen: A Nation of Rich Diversity and Persistent Struggles" that explores the social aspects of the Yemeni

people. It also deals with the ethnic variation, the tribes' cultural aspects, and the local conflict in addition to the country's economic power. Under the title "The Development of U.S. –Relations: From Early Encounters to Strategic Alliance", the second chapter investigates the first encounter between the U.S. and Yemen and how the relation developed from economic to diplomatic ones considering Yemen as an important member in the war on terror specially after the 11 September attacks. The final chapter entitled "The effects and differences between Obama administration and trump administration in shaping Yemen development "presents the Obama and Trump administrations' foreign policy towards Yemen and reflects the connection of strategic interests, counterterrorism goals, and humanitarian challenges in the Middle East. The third chapter shows the differences between Obama's and Trump's policies in Yemen. Both administrations' decisions had significantly affected the events in the country and the region in general.

Chapter One

Yemen: A Nation of Rich Diversity and Persistent Struggles

As an Arab country with a rich and complex history, Yemen is situated between very important countries and seas, effecting the trade and culture for decades. Yemen represents a rich landscape shaped by different tribes, races, traditions, beliefs, and religions. These elements played a crucial role in shaping the society. However, life with its difficulties and challenges made it very hard for the people to live peacefully especially under wars and political struggles. The latters have caused ongoing political, economic, and social instability that made the county incapable of exploiting its own natural resources. This chapter provides a comprehensive view about the country in general and the social life of Yemenis in particular focusing on the struggles they face every day.

1. Foreign Influence and the Rise of the Yemen Arab Republic and Southern Movements

Located at a key crossroads of the Middle East, Yemen is located in the South Western part of the Arabian Peninsula in the Middle East, Asia. It shares borders with the Saudi Arabia to the north and Oman from the East, while the Arabian Sea and the Gulf of Aden are located in the South of the country; in addition to the Red Sea in the West separating the country and Africa. Yemen's area covers 527,970 square kilometers in 2022 ("Yemen-Land Area").

Yemen's history goes back to 897 A.D when a leader named Yahya al-Hadi ila'l Haqq started a ruling family in Yemen that lasted for centuries. He was a Zaidi Imam who believed in strong leadership and religious guidance. In fact, ruling Yemen was never easy due to its diversity in regard to religious and cultural formation. The country had many mountains, different tribes, and religious groups that often fought over who should lead. The Zaidi Imams, who followed a type of Shia Islam, often clashed with Sunni rulers and local tribes who did not want to be controlled. Some foreign powers, like the Abbasid and Fatimid Caliphates, also got involved, trying to take control or support their allies. Because of all these struggles, no one could rule Yemen for long without facing challenges (“Constitutional History of Yemen”). The country’s history showed how hard to rule the land with different powers that wanted to take over and fought to lead.

The constant fighting in Yemen made it easier for the Ottoman Empire to invade the country in 1517. The Ottomans built a powerful empire that controlled large parts of the Middle East and North Africa. They ruled Yemen for a long time, but by 1918, they had grown weaker, and the Zaidi forced them out. As a result, the Zaidis created their own kingdom in the north, called the Mutawakkilite Kingdom of Yemen (Dresch). This shows the way foreign powers took advantage of Yemen’s catastrophic situation to take control. But the Yemenis fought back.

According to Ahmed Al-Maqtari, other foreigners from Europe were interested in the country such as the British. They wanted to protect their ships going to India so they took over and controlled the port city of Aden in the south. Aden was a very important place for ships to anchor. While the British have built roads and ports that facilitated trade, the locals were not offered much help. They also interfered in the locals’ lives by exposing them to new European ideas and different way of life. Overtime, the local people rose up and fought to overthrow the British (Al-Maqtari).

In 1962, a military group took over the north and created the Yemen Arab Republic. This movement was led by officers who wanted a modern government instead of a monarchy. The coup was organized by nationalist army officers, led by Abdullah al-Sallal, who overthrew the Zaidi Imam Muhammad al-Badr and ended centuries of Zaidi rule in North Yemen. But not everyone agreed with this new government. Supporters of the old rulers, helped by Saudi Arabia and Jordan, started a civil war to bring back the royal family (“Constitutional History of Yemen”).

By 1967, after a long struggle, the Zaidi took back control, and the war ended. At the same time, the fighting spread to the south where the British were still in charge. Then, as the British left in 1967, a group called the National Liberation Front (NLF), which had been fighting against them, took over Aden and established a new, creating the People’s Republic of South Yemen. The NLF was made up of rebels who wanted an independent and socialist state. By 1968, they had full control, but the next year, a more extreme communist group took power and changed the country’s name to the People’s Democratic Republic of South Yemen. This marked the start of another period of political struggles (“Constitutional History of Yemen”). The north and the south witnessed big changes because of the new authorities; each side wants to make its own ruling system which led to the division of the country.

2. Understanding the Ethnic Variations of Yemen

2.1. The Dominance of the Tribal System

Yemen is a country with a rich cultural and ethnic diversity shaped significantly by its tribal heritage. To talk about and dive into the ethnic variations in Yemen, it is essential to understand the role of tribe; which is known as “qabilah”. The Yemeni tribes are more than just groups of people; they embody a way of life filled with shared traditions, customs

and a strong sense of belonging that has been developed over many years (“Tribes in Yemen”).

With a population of nearly 29 million people and more than 10 different ethnic groups, one of the most prominent features of Yemeni society is the strong influence of tribal affiliations. Yemeni tribes are organized around family ties and loyalty to a specific clan or family. Hence, the tribal structure plays a significant role in shaping social, political and economic dynamics. In fact, tribal identity can often hold more weight than national identity in Yemen as tribes provide a sense of belonging, support and protection to its members. According to a study by the Middle East Institute, tribal affiliation and customs have a strong impact on decision making processes and social relationships in Yemen. Those tribes are groups who live in the same area and come together to fight to defend each other or attack if needed. Women and children in these tribes are considered dependents and are protected by the men. A person belongs to a tribe mainly based on where they live and some shared family history. Many tribesmen are farmers and own land, they are allowed to carry weapons and they represent a large part of the population, they have a lot of control over political, economic, and cultural life in the country (Al-Dawsari).

Figure .1. 1 bellow shows the location of different tribes and religious groups in Yemen. For instance; the yellow area presents Sunni Muslims, and the green one is mostly Shia Muslims. Most of the population in the country is Arab Muslims; however, it is still divided between Sunnis and Shia.

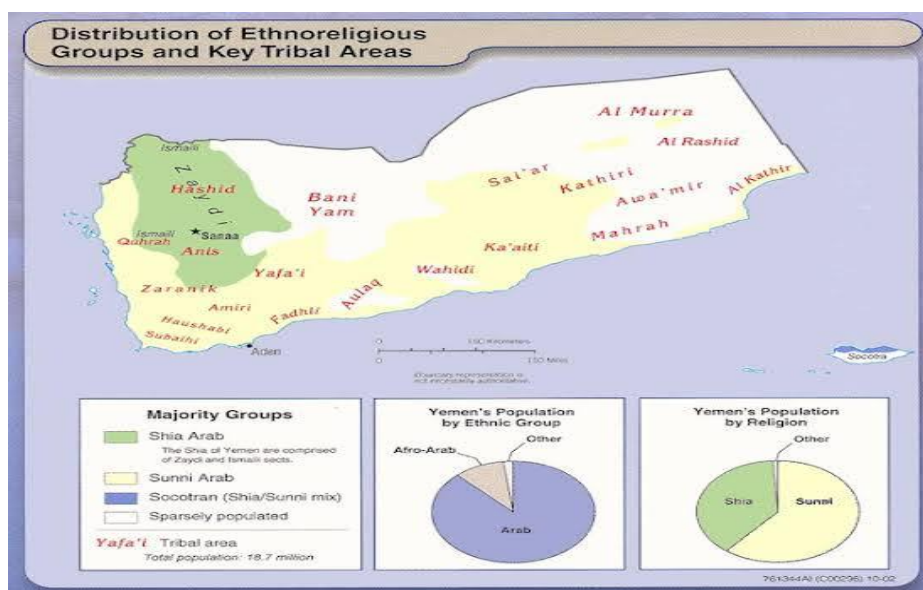


Fig.1.1. Yemen Tribes Map

Source: “Tribes.” GlobalSecurity.org. Web.

www.globalsecurity.org/military/world/yemen/tribes.htm . Accessed 16 May 2025 .

Tribal values in Yemen are important and their role depends on the region. Even though modern life has changed some traditional tribal rules, these values still matter, especially in the countryside. Tribal identity is stronger in the north and southeastern desert areas than in other parts of the country. Tribes are made up of different levels. Big tribes include smaller ones, and in the smaller tribes, family relationships are given priority. In larger tribes, agreements and alliances are more important. Each level of a tribe has a leader called a sheikh, who has their respect. However, the tribal system in Yemen is always changing because of politics and local relationships. This makes it difficult to know how many tribes there are or who they support (“Tribes in Yemen”). In many cases, some tribes support certain sides in conflicts and others stay neutral.

In the past, Yemen had four main tribal groups, also called tribal confederations. They were large groups made up of many smaller tribes. The two most important and powerful ones were Hashid led by the Al-Ahmar family and Baqil led by the Abu Lahoum family. These two groups are still playing a big role in Yemeni society today. Both Hashid

and Baqil came from the same ancient tribe known as Hamdan, which has a long and respected history in Yemen. The third tribal confederation, called Madh-Hajj, became less important during the 1900s. One reason for this was that many of its members joined the Baqil tribe, which caused Madh-Hajj to lose some of its identity and strength. The fourth confederation is not named, but it completely broke apart and no longer exists (Dresch). Thus, the shift of power among tribes led to either the rise or the decline of tribes' domination due to internal changes.

Hashid is recognized for its influential tribal leaders and has played a crucial role in Yemen's political scene, particularly during the Yemeni Civil War. Members of this tribe often align themselves with or support various military and political factions based on their tribal affiliations. Whereas the Bakil tribe is mainly located in the northern areas, it is known for its strong social governance structures. Members of the Bakil tribes frequently participate in local decision-making and are distinguished for their agricultural practices. Together the Hashid and Bakil confederations include over 500,000 people, making them a major part of Yemen's population (Dresch). Yemen's system is so different compared to other countries since it includes various tribes, such as the Hashid and Bakil which played an important in shaping the system.

The Muhamasheen, a term that means "the marginalized," is another tribe in Yemen. They are a dark-skinned minority group. They live in extreme poverty, struggle to access food and health services, and many children are out of school, all because they have been seen as the descendants of the African immigrants centuries before. They are often seen as outsiders and treated as non-Yemenis, this is why they are called with insulting names like "servants" or "slaves" and are mostly pushed to live in the edges of cities or in poor rural areas. Muhamasheen's population is estimated to be around millions. For generations, they have been deprived the basic services like education, healthcare, and employment, and are

treated as a lower class (Al-Mahfali and Homaid 8–12). In fact, discrimination spread all over the world, yet, black skinned people are the most effected.

Aisha Al-Warraq, a Yemeni writer and humanitarian claims that the first major efforts for their good were led by Muhammad Al-Qairaei, who started a group to fight for the rights of the Muhamasheen and raise awareness about their suffering. However, these efforts faced pushback from the government, which often tried to control or weaken their movement through threats, arrests, and creating rival organizations. Later, many small groups formed and were eventually united under the National Union of Muhamasheen, though this umbrella group became inactive and failed to bring real change. Aid organizations often leave them out of support programs. Despite the many challenges, some local activists and groups continue to work on the ground to improve conditions (Al-Warraq). These include efforts to fight racism in schools, provide education, and support displaced families.

Figure 1.2 below is a representation of the geographic placements of the different tribes in Yemen, highlighting the areas in blue and outlining the boundaries.

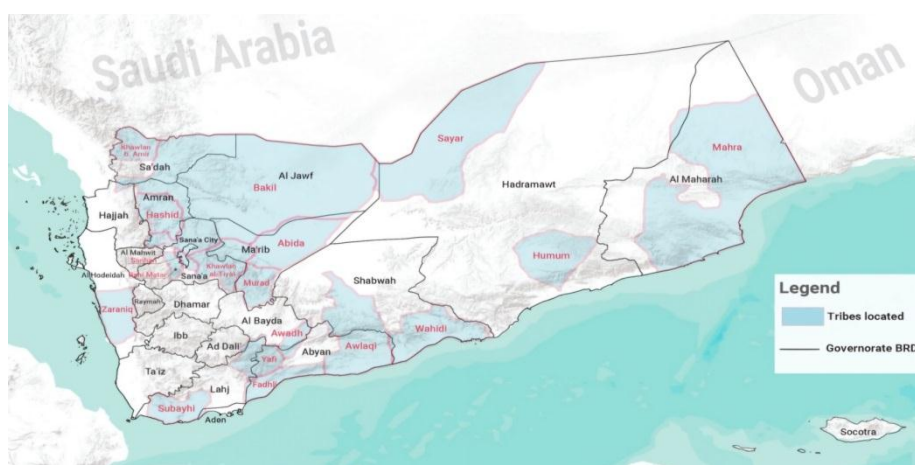


Fig.1.2. Tribal Areas in Yemen

Source: *Tribes in Yemen: An Introduction to the Tribal System*. ACAPS, Aug. 2020.

<https://www.acaps.org/en/countries/archives/detail/yemen-an-introduction-to-the-tribal-system>. Accessed 18 May 2025.

It is clear that Yemen tribes are highly strong and solidly associated with the society. The members of each tribe are not only loyal to family and region but also have historically held significant power, influencing politics, security, and even the balance of the central government ("Tribes in Yemen"). While discussing Yemen's complex tribal structure, one cannot overlook the role of the Houthis, which emerged from the Zaydi Shia minority in the northern Sa'dah province.

2.2. Who are the Houthis?

The Houthis are a political and religious group of people originally from Yemen. They have their own traditions, beliefs and they live in a world of their own creation, special government of theirs, their own schools systems and courts in the areas where they have total control, specifically the northern area of the country mainly from Sa'adah. They are also called Ansar Allah. They follow a division of Shi'a Islam known as Zaydism. The country has about 35% of its people following Zaydism while the rest are mostly considered as Sunni Muslims. While they are inspired by Iran's religious ideas, the Houthis have built their own ruling system which has been criticized. People think of them as a violent and aggressive authority who does not allow others to speak freely ("Who Are Yemen's Houthis?").

Their connection with Iran is not just about politics, weapons, and war, but also because of shared religion and culture. They share similar religious views since they are both Shi'a Muslims. The Houthis look up to Iran's resistance against western powers, especially the US and Saudi Arabia. This influence shows in their slogans, school lessons, and religious speeches. However, they remain to keep their pledge to their own Yemeni roots and tradition. So, they do not exactly follow Iran's way of neither living nor handling situations ("Who Are Yemen's Houthis?"). In fact, the Houthis paved their way for ruling in the north, still, influenced by Iran's shared traditions.

Even though the Houthis are related to certain tribes, they are not considered as a tribe. Their movement began in the 1990s because of their feeling to be ignored by the Yemeni government in addition to being worried about the rise of Salafism, a strict Sunni belief. Over time, they fought with the government and eventually took over the capital Sanaa, in 2014. By 2016, they had taken control of much of northern Yemen (“Who Are Yemen’s Houthis?”). The group’s willingness to get powerful after being ignored by the government increased.

2.3. Exploring Yemen's Social Aspects

Daily life in Yemen is deeply rooted and shaped by the cooperation of the families and their traditions. Families are known for being large and very close to each other, living together- grandparents, uncles, aunts, and cousins united and well-knit. This means that they represent strong family ties through which they help and support each other. Most of the Yemenis worked as farmers and raised animals. As known, women took care of the house and the children while men made the important decisions, brought food and managed the life. They used to live mostly on the mountains and the country side so their style was more likely traditional, however; life changes slowly and takes away the traditional lifestyle. People started to move more to the cities. The cities are the modern side of the country, life got easier with electricity, office jobs, schools and new lifestyle and yet they still follow their old traditions and values (“Yemen: Daily Life and Social Customs”).

3. Peace or Conflict?

Yemen is currently not living in peace. When the Arab Spring spread across the Arab world in 2011, Yemen has been stuck in a long and violent war. It started by protesting against the government and eventually turned into a full civil war. The war now includes; the Yemeni government, the Houthis who are considered as rebels, Al-Qaeda in the

Arabian Peninsula, the Islamic State, and the Southern Transitional Council, a group that wants southern Yemen to be under its rule as it used to be before, in addition to countries like Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates. The latter take side with certain political players in the country against others ("Yemen's Civil War"). This makes the conflict very complicated which resulted in an endless fighting leading to the suffering of innocent people.

Most of Yemeni people have lost their homes and live in camps or shelters because of wars. Many families cannot afford food, medicine, or clean drinking water. Hospitals and clinics have been bombed or shut down, and health care workers often do not have the tools or medicine they need. Diseases like cholera have spread quickly because clean water is hard to be found. Malnutrition is very common in Yemen lately, especially among children because they grew up in very poor conditions, and that led to thousands of children dying because of hunger, and many more are severely underweight and sick ("Yemen Crisis"). People in Yemen live in real misery, no food available or any basic needs with the crisis deepening.

The educational conditions are deeply destabilized and disrupted in Yemen. schools have been either damaged or taken over by armed groups as basics. Teachers have not been paid for years. In addition, the war led to a collapsed economy. Yemen was already one of the poorest countries in the Arab world before the war, but now it is in a severe crisis. Most people live in deep poverty, and millions have lost their jobs. Oil and gas production, which used to be Yemen's biggest source of income, has almost completely stopped. Businesses have shut down, trade has fallen, and the central bank barely works. This shows the misery and sufferance that war has brought to the citizens. In rural areas, farming has also been damaged. Farmers have abandoned their land either because of fighting or because they cannot afford the business. The price of food keeps

rising, while people's incomes are falling ("Endless Violence Shatters Schools"). This has made the hunger crisis even worse and the situation is still going to the unknown.

Culturally, Yemen is also changing. Tribal structures that used to provide protection are now busy with nothing but war, and weapons are a normal part of their daily life. Al-Muhamasheen group is now facing even more discrimination and have little access to safety, shelter, or jobs ("Yemen: Daily Life"). The country is facing one of the world's worst humanitarian crises despite much effort to solve it.

4. Religious Identity in Yemen

Yemen has a rich and varied background when it comes to the history of religion. The country was a home to three major religions which are: Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. The first and earliest religion that was practiced in Yemen was Judaism; Jewish people lived there for hundreds of years. Their community was well known for contributing in trade, crafts, and leaving their trace in the local culture. However, it was not meant to last till nowadays. Over times, Jews faced discrimination and forcibly left the country and were made to live separately; even those who remained, they do not declare themselves as jews (Al-Mahfali and Homaid 25). Yemen had a mixture of beliefs throughout history. However, the society pushed the the oldest away and I believe that it was the best thing that could happened to the country.

Additionally, Christianity existed in Yemen before Islam arrived and did not last for a long time with a slight spread in some areas. Nowadays, Yemen is still witnessing a very few number of Christians but they keep it private because of the fear of discrimination; not to mention that they are mostly foreigners. With the disappearance of Christianity and Judaism, Islam became the official and the only allowed religion in the country during the 7th century till today representing the majority. Smaller Muslim groups such as the Ismailis also have a presence in the country even though their numbers have decreased and mostly

found in specific regions (Al Mahfali and Homaïd 66). Despite the variation of religions and ethnicities, Islam spread as a dominant one.

Most of the Muslims in Yemen are Sunnis, while a large number belongs to the Shiaa, particularly the Zaydi group; also called the Zaydis. It spread and became known in the 8th century and it was named after Zayd Ibn Ali, a great grandson of Ali who is the cousin of the Prophet Muhammad. They believe that any knowledgeable descendant of Ali can be a leader if he is willing to fight against unfairness and get to be called an imam. Although they represent a branch of Shiaa but their beliefs do not really differ from Sunnis (“Zaydiyyah”). The Zaydis have a huge history in ruling and shaping the country’s religion and politics.

5. Yemen’s Economic Resources: Wealth and Challenges

5.1. Yemeni Coffee: An Economic Staple

Yemen was also known for its history of growing coffee. Firstly, Coffee originated in the highlands of Ethiopia, was highly cultivated and by 15th century it was introduced to Yemen where it was grown on a large scale. This coffee was known for its spicy flavors and chocolate taste (“Yemen: The Ancient Origins”). Yemen became the center for coffee cultivation and trade, especially through the port of Mocha, it sent coffee to other countries and helped in making coffee shops in Europe. This kind of coffee was famous along a lot of people who really loved it. Mocha name is still famous nowadays and refers to chocolate coffee drinks. Coffee was very important in Yemen’s economy because it was the source of living for a lot of people. Those people are poor farmers who owned a very small land and used it to grow coffee beans. They would pick them from the ground by hand because they lacked. The war conditions made it really harder to produce and sell coffee (Fathallah et al.). Yemen has a very important role in producing the coffee

worldwide thanks to the hard working farmers who successfully helped in flourishing it throughout the country.

5.2. Energy and Mineral Resources

Yemen's economic state is known as being one of the weakest and the poorest in the world. However, Yemen has strong points that keep the country standing thanks to its natural resources which play a crucial role in the development of its economy. Yemen has a significant amount of valuable oil and gas, especially in: Marib, Shabwa, and Hadramawt. By exporting the natural oil, the money goes directly to pay the salaries of the people and essential services making up around 75–80% of its total revenue. However, in October 2022, Houthi-led forces launched drone attacks on key oil export ports. These attacks forced Yemen to stop all oil exports, cutting off the government's main financial resource leaving it to face serious budget problems. The loss of oil revenue also led to a shortage of foreign currency which made imports more expensive especially for food and fuel. The government had to depend more on external support such as having a \$1 billion deposit from Saudi Arabia (Salisbury). The country kept the economy developing depending heavily on the natural resources despite the endless violence.

Yemen stores underground about 17 to 20 trillion cubic feet of natural gas which used to be sold in the past to other countries in the form of the liquid. In 2013, it exported 9.9 billion cubic meters which brought a good amount of money to the government ("Yemeni Government"). Similar to the oil economy, the country cannot produce gas safely because of the dangerous conditions.

The continuity of the war in Yemen is due to the willingness of each side to take control over its resources in addition to the involvement of external powers that want to influence the production and exportation of those resources. Additionally, Yemen's long coastline and having Bab al-Mandab Strait gives it the importance of having control of

global shipping (“Behind the U.S. Strike”). While the agricultural sector and fishing are important for the Yemeni people, the war made these two life gains difficult and kind of impossible to succeed. Those industries are damaged nowadays. The country has also an enormous number of unexploited minerals such as copper and gold because of the instability but the development of mining has been minimal and limited (“Gulf Allies”).

The last two decades have witnessed a huge decline in the country’s oil production. Back in 2001, the oil production was at its peak producing around 450,000 barrels per day. That was a very important year for the country’s economy because it helped a lot in making the economy active and greatly contributing in the national income. But sooner, it changed due to the continuous conflict. The production has fallen reaching out in 2023 extracting 49,490 barrels per day (“Yemen Oil Production”). The war did not only contribute to change politics but also to break Yemen’s economy and damage it leaving the country the poorest in the region.

5.3. Yemen’s Agriculture and Fishing Sector

Worth mentioning, Agriculture is very common and important to the citizens and the country itself; it is considered as the most important part of the country’s economic resources. As mentioned before, Yemeni people rely a lot on farming either to provide food or to sell it and gain money, that leads agriculture to help around 73,5% of the population. However, with the current state of the country being at a continuous war and the economy weakened, the farming sector is also falling down leading to serious problems because of the high prices of fuel and fertilizers. Another problem is droughts and damaged lands because of the wars. While the system is damaged, the farmers are not able to focus on agriculture because of the lack of modern tools, abundance of water, and good quality of seeds to plant (“Yemen Natural Resources”). The country also prioritizes raising animals since it has a kit of animals- over 11 million sheep and goats and about 1.5 million

cows. These animals also get to be turned into food which makes nutrition and food available (*Plan to Strengthen the Role of the Agriculture*).

At some degree, fishing is also very important to the country's economy, especially for individuals who live near the coast. Yemen has a long coastline of over 2500 kilometers and more than 180 islands with lots of sea life. Statistically speaking, fishing provides livelihood to over 500,000 people. The country gets yearly about 150,000 tons of fish and sells about 60% of it to other countries; which makes it gain around \$300 million. This made fishing one of the two major and dominant economic resources besides oil. Nevertheless, it faces many challenges such as using traditional tools and equipment; otherwise the gain would be much bigger and luxurious (*Plan to Strengthen the Role of the Agriculture*). These numbers explain the importance of the fishing sector in providing better income even though it lacks modernity.

6. Geopolitical Significance of Yemen

Yemen is currently broken into parts and unstable because of the different and the divided groups that are fighting for control. For instance, the Southern Transitional Council (STC) that wants to create and have a separate country in the south apart from the other side of the country, and there are also the Houthis who want to rule Yemen based on their own beliefs (Dashela). This made the government suffer from hunger, poverty and violence and in a state of weakness.

Yemen is considered as a very important country in global politics because it controls the Bab al-Mandeb Strait, a narrow sea that connects the red sea to the Gulf of Aden and the Arabian Sea; it is a passage where a large amount of the world's oil and trade ships pass through (Cordesman). It is vital because it links Asia and Europe. This means that any instability in Yemen can effect and disrupt international shipping, raise global fuel prices and touch the economic security worldwide. It is like a gate between the continents

and many countries depend on it for moving oil and needs that's why it is important to keep it safe and at a peace state since it could seriously affect the global trading, and that is a strong point that Yemen took advantage of (Cordesman). This location made Yemen a focus of attention for powerful countries like the United States, Saudi Arabia, and Iran, who all want to protect their own interests in the region.

Both of the United States and Saudi Arabia have a good relationship, but both share hostility toward Iran. Since Iran supports the Houthis in Yemen, the U.S. and Saudi Arabia see the Houthis as a serious threat for them because the latter could cause problems for shipping routes and use their power to help Iran gain more influence over it (Cordesman). Moreover, what complicates the situation and makes the fighting even worse is that Saudi Arabia, the UAE, and Iran are helping the different local groups in the region (Dashela). All of this shows that Yemen's problems are both about powerful countries fighting over a key location and about serious divisions and chaos inside the country itself.

Despite the poverty and severe famine, Yemeni people are seen as a strong nation. They represent resilience in the hard times, light in the dark, and hope. They kept holding to their faith, traditions, and cultural identity despite many invasions. Families have struggled and are still trying to survive. The life inside the country is almost impossible because of the continuous displacement, lack of basic services, and the limited food and water. Yet, they keep fighting seeking freedom. Every day, they continue to rebuild the country with whatever they can to help each other with whatever they have.

The people in Yemen are suffering from a long and painful conflict, which started as a civil war and developed into a proxy war bringing up new crises appearing on the international arena. Yemen is close to very important shipping borders and it has control over Bab Al Mandeb strait. This strategic location makes it an area of international interest for powerful countries such as USA, Saudi Arabia, and Iran. Those three countries

involved in Yemen's internal affairs leading to the creation of instability in the region.

Over the years, the relationship between Yemen and the U.S. has witnessed many changes and shifts. It has gone through different phases and circumstances under different presidencies that shaped the American policy in the region in general and in Yemen in particular. The next chapter explores and dives into the details on how the U.S. has been involved in Yemen.

Chapter Two

The Development of U.S.- Yemen Relations: From Early Encounters to Strategic Alliance

The historical relationship between the United States and Yemen has transformed dramatically throughout the years, due to changing geopolitical interests, regional instability, and common strategic concerns. This chapter explores each element of this relationship, starting with the first encounters that set the foundation for diplomatic and commercial connections. As circumstances changed and the world witnessed the Cold War era that affected global alliances, Yemen became an area of concern of U.S. foreign policy. It eventually turned into an important partner in counterterrorism efforts following the events of September 11, 2001. The chapter also examines the nature and extent of U.S. military and security support to Yemen, mentioning both cooperation and conflict. The development and influence of Al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP) has complicated the security environment, and raised Yemen's importance concerning the U.S. efforts to defeat terrorist organizations.

The American presence in Yemen dates back to the 19th century and has taken many forms, developing into economic, diplomatic, and security relations. This relationship has transformed over time in response to regional changing geopolitical interests, regional instability, and common strategic concerns. This chapter explores each element of this relationship, starting with the first encounters that set the foundation for commercial and diplomatic connections. As the Cold War affected global alliances, Yemen became a region of concern in U.S. foreign policy, eventually turning into an important partner in counterterrorism operations following the events of September 11, 2001. The development and influence of Al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP) has complicated the environment and made the U.S. intensify its efforts to set up security in the region.

1- Early U.S. - Yemen Encounter

The history of Yemen's relations with the United States was deeply influenced by the colonial actions of European and Ottoman empires. These colonial powers sought to control strategic locations and worthy resources in the region, which had a lasting impact on Yemen's political and economic landscape. For examining the roots of Yemen-U.S. relations, it is important to understand how these colonial actions formed the historical context. The British and Ottoman Empires, the two key colonial powers, have considerably shaped Yemen through their foreign policies. These early interventions laid the groundwork for future interactions between Yemen and the United States, especially following their respective independence movements.

By controlling the state's strategic location and resources, the early colonial powers in Yemen aimed to preserve their wealth on a worldwide scale. For instance, The Portuguese takeover of the Straits of Hormuz and the Yemeni Island of Socotra in 1506, the Island of Bahrain in 1515, and the Straits of Malacca from 1511 to 1641 were all excellent examples of such acts. Additionally, Great Britain and the Ottoman Empire articulated their colonial interests in the formulation and implementation of their foreign policies after the colonial era, which had a significant impact on Yemen and the United States upon its own independence (Alrefaei 25).

1-1 U.S. -Yemen Relations under the British and Ottoman Colonial Rule

In 1839, the British Empire took control of South Yemen's Aden harbor in 1839 before growing to create the so-called "Aden Protectorate." As a result, the Ottoman Empire was compelled to relocate to Yemen's northern era in 1872. Yemen was therefore split between the North and the South as a result of British and Ottoman colonialism. After a long period of colonialism under the Ottoman Empire, North Yemen gained its independence in 1918

under the name; the Kingdom of Yemen and remained autonomous until 1962. Southern Yemen however, was still under the British colonialism until 1967 (Yaccob 1).

While Yemen was still a colony and before the formal establishment of diplomatic and political relations, the commercial ties between the United States and Yemen began to take shape in 1798, preparing the foundation for future engagement through early trade interactions and marine trade in the 19th century. The discussion that follows aims to highlight the nature and structure of early Yemen-U.S. relations until 1918, when North Yemen gained its independence. It also makes an effort to investigate the ways in which the colonial powers tried to stop this relationship from developing.

1.2-Early Diplomatic Relations

Rives Childs was the first American ambassador to establish diplomatic ties with Yemen on August 22, 1946 during the presidency of Harry S, Truman. The U.S .ambassador to Saudi Arabia at the time was living in Jeddah, Saudi Arabia, and was also commissioned to Yemen. The capital of Yemen at the time, Ta'izz, was a home for a diplomatic mission. North Yemen was called the Yemen Arab Republic after a coup d'état occurred there in 1962. Although the United States and the Kingdom maintained diplomatic relations, it was not until 1972 that William R. Crawford Jr. was named as the first ambassador to the country ("List of Ambassadors of the United States to North Yemen").

In 1946, the United States recognized the absolute and complete independence of Yemen and expressed its intent to promote solid relations between the two countries. President Harry S. Truman informed King Imam Yehya bin Mohamed Hamid-ud-din of this recognition and appointed William A. Eddy, then U.S. Minister to Saudi Arabia, as his personal representative to engage in conversations with the Yemeni government regarding

a commerce and friendship agreement. Eddy was empowered to finish such an agreement on behalf of the United States (“Memorandum by the Chief”).

1.3- Commercial Relations

The strategic location of Yemen made the U.S. interested in trading and exploring the area, especially at the Bab el-Mandeb Strait close to the ancient port city of Mocha. In addition to financial and oil exploration prospects, the significance of protecting maritime routes vital to international trade has fueled U.S. business interests in Yemen. Mocha continues to be a representation of Yemen’s economic and cultural contributions to the history of international commerce.

Commercial interests form the oldest identifiable motive that attracted the attention of American merchants towards Yemen. Trade between Yemen and the U.S. can be traced back to as early as the eighteenth century. The Yemeni coffee internationally known as ‘Mocha Coffee’ and leather were the most important Yemeni products exported to the U.S. The American ship Recovery was the first to arrive at the port of Mocha in 1798, marking the beginning of U.S. trade with Yemen. Additionally, kerosene and cotton textiles were among the first American exports to Yemen, which were mostly sent by American commercial ships. Recovery was also the first American ship to reach an Arab port in the Red Sea. Mocha coffee became well known and was in high demand in the U.S. Recovery brought back 326,000 tons of coffee from the port of Mocha on its second trip in 1801. Increased bilateral trade was made possible by the success of these American trips. As a result, marine trade significantly increased. Two million pounds of Yemeni coffee were brought back to the United States by the ship Ulysses in 1809. When famine swept over Yemen in 1826, tons of food was transported to Mocha by an American ship called Ann (“How Yemen Once Introduced the World to Mocha Coffee”).

Due to the increasing commercial relations between US-Yemeni in regard to coffee, the English merchants felt threatened and started to maximize their competition with the Americans. They attempted to hinder the Yemen-U.S. coffee trade by offering to buy Yemeni coffee at higher prices. This led American merchants to offer prices higher than those offered by the British which eventually led them to monopolize the Yemeni coffee trade. Such commercial competition motivated the Americans to extend their official presence in the port of Mocha by establishing the United States Commercial Centre (AL-Hakomi).

Despite America's growing economic presence in Yemen, commercial relations between Yemen and the United States did not result in the establishment of political ties between the two nations as it should have been anticipated. The primary cause of the delay in the formation of Yemen-U.S. political connections in the 18th century was the Ottoman and British colonial powers. Yemen and the United States have had commercial ties for a short time, but it was important to emphasize that this was enough to strengthen British objectives to rule Eastern and Southern Arabia. The American merchants' interference in the coffee trade between Britain and Yemen increased British foreign policy goals in the region (Prados and Macro).

The Ottoman Empire also played a significant role in the region and competed with British goals in Yemen, thus Great Britain was not the only obstacle preventing the development of Yemen-U.S. relations. Muhammad Ali Pasha, the most important Ottoman military leader who controlled Egypt from 1818 to 1841 and ruled over Yemen's western shores launched an uprising against the Ottomans. He sent his army to the Arabian Peninsula in an effort to increase his power. In order to drain power over Yemen's western shores, Britain immediately responded to the threat to its military and commercial interests by assaulting the port of Mocha in 1820. It further solidified its authority and regional

significance in 1839 by colonizing Aden. The strategic significance of Yemen's western and southern coasts increased with the opening of the Suez Canal in 1869 (Jabour). This shows that not only Britain was interested in the area, but many powers also were involved in shaping Yemen's borders for the sake of their benefit.

In fact, The Ottoman Empire sought greater strategic interest in Yemen, depending on its port on the Red Sea being the only one of a few known Red Sea ports, and attempted to assume more control in the region, particularly in western Yemen along the Red Sea. Yemen was divided in the 19th century between the Ottomans in the north and the British in the south, which had seized Aden in the port city in 1839. Yemen, was the scene of the imperial competition between the two countries from the middle of the 19th century to World War I. Due to this competition, Yemeni commodities had to go via ports like Aden and Jeddah to reach American ships, while American exports had to transit through Aden and Muscat in Oman to reach Yemen ("Yemen – The Age of Imperialism"). The Red sea was one of the most important ports in the world that time. So, the Ottoman Empire tried so hard to keep the relation with Yemen stable to improve its domination in the region. Yemen was a land of competition between Britain and the Ottomans in the commercial relations.

In order to protect its limited commercial interests, the United States knew that the situation was not stable between Britain and the Ottomans, so, it remained neutral and worked to foster friendly ties with both empires. Although the colony of Aden was not established until 1895, the United States had already recognized its commercial in 1879 the State's Department appointed an American trader as its Honorary consul there. In addition to promoting American interests throughout the southern Red Sea and the Arabian Peninsula, the consulate's duties included monitoring regional affairs, assisting with American trade, and providing consular services (Gavin 45).

After the Ottoman Empire collapsed during World War I, North Yemen declared independence in 1918 and was ruled by Imam Yahya as the Mutawakkilite Kingdom of Yemen. In contrast, South Yemen was still ruled by the British until 1967, when it gained independence and became the People's Democratic Republic of Yemen, a country with a Marxist ideology. In 1946, the United States signed the Treaty of Friendship and Commerce with North Yemen, establishing official diplomatic ties. In 1959, the United States opened a legation in Taiz. However, because of South Yemen's Cold War allegiance to the Soviet Union, ties with that country were tense, and until Yemen's unification in 1990, there was little diplomatic interaction between them (Alrefaei 27–30). The cold war influenced the U.S. relations in both Yemen's sides. The south Yemen kept its royalty to the Soviet Union and Marxist ideology even after the North signed a treaty of friendship and commercial ties with the United States.

During the Cold War years of the 1970s and 1980s, the United States provided military and economic support to the then-Yemen Arab Republic (YAR), also known as North Yemen, in order to prevent any potential expansion of the Marxist and Soviet-allied with People's Democratic Republic of Yemen (PDYR), also known as South Yemen. As a result, the US military assistance persisted after Yemen was unified in 1990 under President Ali Abdullah Saleh, especially when US companies ventured into Yemen to conduct oil and gas research in the 1990s. During the Cold War, the U.S. Yemen relations represented a clear American objective in refusing Soviet dominance in the area. U.S. engagement prepared the way for a sustained military and economic presence that would influence Yemen's internal dynamics and future international interactions (Baron, Al-Madhaji, and Alhariri). The U.S. strategy was to limit the domination of the Soviet influence on the south part of Yemen. So, the U.S. kept trying to reduce any kind of external powers until the unification.

2 -The Formation of the Republic of Yemen: Unification and Political Transition

The People's Democratic Republic of Yemen (South Yemen) and the Yemen Arab Republic (North Yemen) formally united to become called the Republic of Yemen on May 22, 1990. After years of discussions, including agreements on cooperative oil exploration and border demilitarization in the late 1980s, this unity was an important geopolitical event. After the unification, South Yemen's Ali Salim al-Beidh was appointed vice president and North Yemen's Ali Abdullah Saleh was elected president. In order to integrate the two different political and economic systems together, a 30-month transitional phase was established. In May 1990, a unified constitution was adopted and then accepted by the public in May 1991, emphasizing Yemen's commitment to democratic values such as free elections, a multiparty system, private property rights, legal equality, and human rights (Carapico). The steps of unification were a bit difficult especially when they wanted to establish one system throughout combining the two systems.

3-Yemen's U.N Vote and Diplomatic Fallout

Right after North and South Yemen were unified, the Republic of Yemen received a temporary seat on the United Nations Security Council in 1990. During this period, the Gulf War broke out in response to Iraq's invasion of Kuwait. As a response, Yemen voted "no" on UN Resolution 678 that allowed military action against Iraq. This action seriously harmed Yemen-US relationships. Consequently, the US stopped almost all types of military and economic support to Yemen, expressing its opposition to Yemen's alliance with Saddam Hussein. The action attracted severe condemnation from US Gulf allies, hence isolating Yemen diplomatically. The US ambassador Thomas Pickering supposedly told the Yemeni delegation that it was "the most expensive 'no' vote" they had ever cast (Carapico). The decision to vote "NO" on UN Resolution 678 had a serious diplomatic and economic consequences. This decision was a turning point in US-Yemen relations. Yemen

was diplomatically isolated in the region, and the United States removed almost all of its economic and military assistance. However, the relationship slowly improved when both nations realized they had common interests, particularly in struggling with terrorism. (“Mideast Tensions: How U.S. Won Support”).

Following the Civil War in 1994, US-Yemen relations became more complicated, turning toward a security-focused strategy. The United States became increasingly involved in counterterrorism cooperation and supported Saudi Arabia’s regional efforts. It has supplied economic and intelligence support to the Saudi-led force throughout Yemen’s long conflict after 2015. Despite its engagement, the United States has constantly stated that it was not a direct participant in the conflict (Cordesman).

4-From the Cold War to Counterterrorism

September 11th, 2001 attacks significantly changed the U.S.-Yemen relations, transforming Yemen from a viewed state sponsor of terrorism to a key counterterrorism partner. Following that, Yemen became a strategic ally in the U.S. “War on Terror.” The Yemeni government, led by President Ali Abdullah Saleh, cooperated with U.S. Terrorism preventing programs, allowing U.S. Special Forces and CIA personnel to operate within the country (Hallinan). Relationships between the United States and Yemen were radically changed by the 9/11 attacks, which turned Yemen from a possible terrorist supporter into an essential ally in the struggle against terrorism. Yemen participated with U.S. security protocols under President Saleh, allowing American military there.

The 9/11 attacks were a turning point in the world’s security systems. The attacks made a State of alert and great fear in the American society that deeply trusted its government. In November 2002, a U.S. drone strike in Yemen targeted and killed Qa’id Salim al-Harithi, a key figure involved in the USS Cole bombing. The U.S. presented military aid and training to Yemeni forces, for the reason to bolster their capacity to

combat al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP). This collaboration led to the disruption of several terrorist attacks and the arrest of numerous AQAP operatives. However, the partnership faced challenges due to Yemen's internal instability, corruption, and human rights concerns. The 2006 jailbreak of 23 AQAP members from a maximum-security prison in Sana'a highlighted the limitations of Yemen's commitment to counterterrorism (U.S. House of Representatives). A significant event like 9/11 has the ability to change world politics and even have an impact on events in Yemen and other countries. It also highlighted how difficult it was to combat terrorism in reality when local systems were unstable.

The U.S. reliance on drone strikes and other military interventions in Yemen has been criticized for exacerbating anti-American sentiment and contributing to civilian casualties, which accidentally strengthen radical propaganda. The past few years, Yemen's ongoing civil war has created a fragmented security environment, allowing AQAP to exploit the chaos (Baron, Al-Madhaji, and Alhariri). The military assistance and drone attacks that interfered with AQAP's activities, the military assistance and drone attacks also raised anti-American sentiment and sparked human rights issues. But, the success of these strategies depended on Yemen's internal instability. A weak central government, competing armed groups, and humanitarian crises were some of Yemen's complex political and military features that cast doubt on the efficacy of U.S. counterterrorism efforts and could make the local problems worse.

5-The US Military and Security Support to Yemen

The United States' military and security support to Yemen has been a critical component of its broader counterterrorism strategy in the Middle East, especially after 9/11 attacks. Positioned on the southern tip of the Arabian Peninsula and bordering key maritime routes, Yemen holds strategic geopolitical significance. The emergence of al-

Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP) and later, Islamic State affiliates, prompted the U.S. to deepen its military engagement with Yemeni forces, providing counterterrorism training, intelligence sharing, and conducting drone strikes against high-profile targets.

In November 2002, Saleh participated in a covert U.S. operation involving a Predator; it is the shorthand name for the MQ-1 Predatory an American unmanned aerial vehicle (UAV) a military drone equipped with cameras, which destroyed a Land Cruiser carrying al-Qaeda operative Ali Qaed Senyan al-Harthi. The U.S. provided security assistance to Yemeni ports, with an estimated \$400 million, described as “fiction.” Military assistance increased from \$1.9 million in fiscal year 2003 to \$15 million in fiscal year 2004, with a similar request pending for FY 2005 (Baron et al.). The support was quite impressive; millions of dollars were invested in Yemen to prevent the terror attacks just because the US wanted to keep its dominance and power in Yemen and the surrounding areas.

Following a suicide attack on the French supertanker Limburgh near the Yemeni port of Mukalla, which was allegedly carried out by an al-Qaeda cell, shipping drastically decreased, and maritime insurance costs sharply increased. Spain's capture of a freighter transporting SCUD weapons from North Korea to Yemen in December 2002 were a diplomatic embarrassment. Yemen objected, saying it had previously ordered these missiles and pledged not to order any more. The United States requested that Spain released the ship because it could not establish an acceptable legal precedent for capturing the cargo, relied on Yemen as a partner in the war on terror, and was preoccupied with fostering local support for action as the United States' engagement in Yemen has extended beyond only providing military and security support (Beaumont). The international relations got really complicated, especially when national security, diplomacy, and legal issues all overlapped. It was clear that the United States had to make

some difficult decisions in order to maintain Yemen as an ally, even overlooking questionable issues.

The United States Agency for International Development (USAID) reopened its office in Yemen in June 2003 after it had been closed since 1996. In charge of overseeing an annual budget of \$10–20 million, USAID Yemen focused primarily on healthcare also, focus on services for mothers and children; food and health security, with the goal of preventing malnutrition and improving the area's ability to grow food sustainably; and basic education, with the goal of making it easier for people to go to school and raising the number of people who can read and write in rural areas. In 2002, U.S. Secretary of State Colin Powell established the Middle East Peace Partnership Initiative (MEPI) to strengthen Arab and Islamic moderates' positions in the Arab world (U.S. Department of State).

MEPI focuses on four pillars: economic, educational, political, and women's. Initially funded at \$29 million, MEPI has seen additional infusions and requests for \$150 million. MEPI money has been utilized in Yemen to support a variety of activities, including training programs, democratic reforms, and literacy projects. MEPI funds have been allocated for a pilot project to establish e-learning classrooms in 24 Yemeni schools under the educational pillar's rubric. This \$1.5 million initiative aims to establish a communication network between Yemen's Internet-connected schools and, eventually, sister institutions in the United States. Another initiative, a \$2 million experimental effort to increase Yemeni women's literacy, falls under both the educational and women's pillars ("U.S. MEPI E-Learning Program"; "Yemen Women's Literacy Program"). MEPI's programs in Yemen show an intentional focus on women's empowerment and education. The women's literacy program and the e-learning project serve as examples of efforts to increase educational access and reduce gender inequality. These efforts develop democracy bases and encourage inclusive learning, which supports stability over time.

Since 2001, U.S. engagement with Yemen has grown significantly, with government assistance exceeding \$290 million between 2001 and 2004, making the U.S. the largest national development provider in Yemen. However, the U.S. invasion of Iraq diminished potential goodwill, as the majority of the world's population, including Yemenis, strongly opposed the invasion. Despite winning over the Saleh regime, Yemeni citizens' perceptions of the US in Yemen have hardened, necessitating a sustained effort to redirect perceptions (Prados 22–23). While significant financial assistance placed the U.S. as an important regional partner, the Iraq invasion severely harmed its credibility among Yemenis. What made the situation worse was the attack on the United States Ship Cole in Aden in 2000, which killed many American sailors and increased the threat of al-Qaeda's operations in the region.

5.1-United States Ship Cole Bombing

An important turning point in the escalating threat of asymmetric maritime terrorism occurred in 2000 when a suicide bomber struck the USS Cole, a US Navy warship, in Yemen. This incident demonstrated the complexity of terrorist strategies and the need of U.S. military readiness abroad. On October 12, 2000, the U.S. Navy destroyer Cole¹ was attacked by a small boat laden with explosives during a brief refueling stop in the harbor of Aden, Yemen. The suicide terrorist attack killed 17 members of the ship's crew, wounded 39 others seriously damaged the ship ("USS Cole Attack"). The event served as an indicator of danger, affecting future US military policy in the Middle East and emphasizing the significance of protecting foreign military bases.

The attack has been generally described as a "boat bomb" adaption of the truck-bomb strategy that was employed to attack the U.S. military house in Saudi Arabia in 1996 and the U.S. Marine Corps barracks in Beirut in 1983 ("USS Cole Bombing"). The FBI was leading an investigation to find the perpetrator of the event in coordination with Yemeni

law enforcement officials. Yemen had at least six people arrested. According to the information acquired so far, the attack might have been carried out by Islamic militants with connections to Osama bin Laden's terrorist group. In addition to the FBI-led investigation, Secretary of Defense William Cohen has formed a special panel chaired by retired General William W. Crouch, a former Army Vice Chief of Staff, and retired Admiral Harold W. Gehman, Jr., a former commander-in-chief of the United States Joint Forces Command (Chance).

In a study issued on January 9, 2001, the panel identified major security deficiencies throughout the region and suggested improving research and training to avoid terrorist attacks, but it failed to assign responsibility. On January 19, 2001, the Commander of the Atlantic Fleet shared the results of a Navy investigation into the USS Cole attack. The report said that although some safety procedures weren't followed, the attack likely couldn't have been prevented even if they had been. Instead of blaming one person, the report suggested that responsibility should be shared across different levels of leadership. Officials also held private talks with staff and crew about the incident (Perl and O'Rourke). The USS Cole inquiry revealed that even if security protocols had been followed, the attack might not have been prevented. However, the Navy found that several levels of leadership shared responsibility, causing enhancements in how future threats were handled.

6- The Role of Al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP)

AQAP is a militant Islamist organization and a designated terrorist group by the United States, United Nations, and several other countries. It is widely considered one of the most dangerous branches of al-Qaeda due to its operational capacity, regional influence, and focus on targeting both local governments and Western interests. Because it consistently targets Western objectives, al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP) has remained one of the most dangerous smaller categories of al-Qaeda. Particularly, the

criminal organization was responsible for a number of well-known incidents, including the 2015 Charlie Hebdo murder in Paris and the 2009 attempt by the so-called “Underwear Bomber” to bomb a U.S. airliner. These attacks demonstrate AQAP’s worldwide reach and strategic focus on Western foes, demonstrating its capacity to influence and incite terrorism outside of Yemen’s borders (“Yemen al-Qaeda”).

In the territories it controlled, AQAP attempted to establish legitimacy by imposing strict interpretations of Islamic law, providing essential services, and managing social campaigns to gain local support. These efforts are supported by an advanced media wing; including English-language propaganda that recruits internationally soldiers and incites lone-wolf impacts abroad (United Nations Security Council). By setting up strict Islamic rule, providing basic amenities, and using social efforts to make itself more respectable, AQAP has tried to win over local support. They also advocate lone-wolf strikes outside and attract terrorists from other nations with a strong media operation that includes English-language propaganda.

Although continuous military pressure and internal conflict from Islamic State branches in Yemen, AQAP has managed to adapt, especially through using its strong roots in agricultural and tribal areas. Its competition with ISIS contributed to Yemen’s jihadist surroundings, and the group’s determination in calling for strikes across the West indicates its continuous threat (U.S. Department of State). AQAP’s influence has been raised by people such as Anwar al-Awlaki, a US-born imam who played an essential part in online radicalization via platforms like YouTube and publications such as Inspire (AQAP: A Persistent Threat to the West). While counterterrorism efforts have limited AQAP’s operations, its ongoing existence emphasizes the importance for a comprehensive response. Addressing the group’s persistence needs more than just military action; it also requires

long-term security in Yemen, a rebuilding of institutions, and the establishment of constitutional power capable of denying space to extremist organizations.

7- Humanitarian Assistance to Yemen

Since the 2015 civil conflict, the United States has played a crucial part in providing support for Yemen, treating the devastating humanitarian catastrophe. Realizing the importance of the crisis, the United States has given billions of dollars in help through bilateral and international channels. However, US humanitarian policy toward Yemen has changed due to larger foreign policy shifts and domestic political factors. Significant efforts and recent debates have influenced the delivery of vital assistance in Yemen.

According to Hernandez, Michael A, a journalist and reporter for Anadolu Agency, an international news agency based in Turkey, where he covers various global and humanitarian topics, including U.S. foreign aid and international relations .the United States has been a pivotal provider of humanitarian assistance to Yemen, particularly as the nation endures one of the world's most severe humanitarian crises. In February 2023, the U.S. announced an additional \$444 million in aid, bringing the total assistance since the conflict began to over \$5.4 billion. This funding aims to support emergency food aid, health services, and other critical relief efforts (2023).

Recent policy shifts have raised concerns. In early April 2025, the Trump administration terminated funding to the U.N. World Food Program (WFP) and other humanitarian efforts, affecting emergency food aid in Yemen. The WFP described these cuts as a “death sentence” for millions suffering from extreme hunger .The important role the U.S. has played in helping Yemen by sending over \$5.4 billion in support, mostly for food and medical care. However, it also highlights the catastrophic consequences of the Trump administration's decision to slash support for the United Nations World Food Programme (“US Ends Lifesaving”). This shows how much how much of an impact U.S.

support has had in Yemen, especially a lot of money going toward food, health, and emergency relief. It's clear that this support has been critical during such a serious humanitarian crisis. However, it is also very worrying that funding will be limited in 2025. This shows how political decision can affect human lives in Yemen.

According to Kamal Al-Wazizah, a contributor to UNICEF Yemen, who reports on humanitarian initiatives and development programs, with a focus on child welfare, nutrition, and public health in crisis-affected regions like Yemen. The U.S. has continued to support specific programs. In April 2023, the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) Bureau for Humanitarian Assistance (BHA) granted UNICEF \$11 million to provide lifesaving nutrition services to over 159,000 children under five and over 89,000 pregnant or lactating women in ten governorates ("USAID Bureau Grants"). It was difficult to distribute assistance in Yemen with military actions taking place in the country and this had negatively affected the assistance that people desperately needed.

Throughout history, the American foreign policy objectives have changed over time and faced many challenges. The relationship between the United States and Yemen has been marked by periods of both cooperation and tension, from early diplomatic and commercial exchanges to Cold War-era strategic computations. In the post-9/11 era, defined by counterterrorism imperatives, Yemen was brought to the center of U.S. security strategy, especially as a response to threats created by AQAP and incidents like the USS Cole bombing. The United States has made significant humanitarian and development efforts in Yemen in addition to its security objective. Through agencies like USAID and collaboration with organizations like UNICEF and the World Food Program, the United States has spent billions of dollars to enhance access to water, food security, health care, and education. The U.S. strategy in Yemen highlighted the complex nature of its

involvement, blending efforts to promote stability and development with goals related to counterterrorism.

Chapter Three

Strategic Shifts: U.S. Policy toward Yemen during the Obama and Trump

Administrations

The United States' involvement in Yemen, a country with constant civil wars and humanitarian crises, has reflected the shifting goals established by administrations of many US presidencies. Obama and Trump were one of the main presidents who were engaged in Yemen. Obama's policy toward Yemen focused mainly on counterterrorism, especially targeting Al-Qaeda through drone strikes, while supporting the Yemeni government. He also backed the Saudi-led coalition against the Houthis' rebels by the start of 2015, but with some restrictions to avoid causing civilian casualties. In contrast, Trump took a more

aggressive and unconditional approach, giving stronger support to Saudi Arabia, increasing arms sales, and continuing drone strikes without much concern for human rights.

1. Obama's Policy towards Yemen: Combating Terrorism While Avoiding Full-Scale War (2009-2017)

When Barack Obama took office in January 2009, Yemen was developing as a significant issue for the U.S. foreign policy due to the rising of the instability in the country and the presence of terrorist organizations such as Al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP). The situation worsened after the attempted bombing of a U.S. plane on Christmas Day in 2009 by a Nigerian man apparently trained in Yemen, putting the country at the center of America's counterterrorism agenda (Chulov et al). Consequently, Yemen became a crucial battleground in the globally fight against terrorism. The United States under Obama escalated its counterterrorism operations and faced tough diplomatic challenges after the civil war in Yemen began in 2014 (“FP’s Situation Report”; “Drone Warfare in Yemen”; Bentley and Holland). The Obama administration also allowed “signature strikes” which meant they killed anyone who looked suspicious depending on their behavior or physical appearance (“White House Approves”).

1.1. Obama’s ‘Yemen Model’ Approach

President Barack Obama highlighted the U.S. counterterrorism efforts in Yemen as an example to be followed. He outlined a strategy that emphasized on a limited U.S. military involvement; an approach that was referred to as the “Yemen Model.” The term was used to describe a counterterrorism strategy that relies on targeted drone strikes, special operations, and support for local forces rather than large-scale military invasions (Taub). He said in his speech on May 23, 2013, at the National Defense University in Washington, D.C: “This strategy of taking out terrorists, who threaten us, while supporting partners on the front lines, is one that we have successfully pursued in Yemen and Somalia for years”

(qtd. in headshot). In other words, the U.S. would fight terrorism with no much direct military involvement which proved its effectiveness in some regions.

The “Yemen Model” aimed to defeat terrorism while preserving peace in the area. As it worked to reach a nuclear agreement with Iran, the Obama administration supported Saudi Arabia's military efforts in Yemen. The United States continued its assistance despite of accusations of causing casualties among civilians and worsening humanitarian situations. Robert Malley, a former Obama advisor, admitted that the administration had overcommitted to the Saudi-led conflict, accidentally enabling widespread destruction and poverty (Malley). Obama tried to fight terrorism and also keep peace in the area. But, he supported Saudi Arabia in its war against Yemen even when the war became severe for the people.

1.1.1. Security Assistance

The Obama administration started to apply the approach on the ground by arming and training of Yemeni security forces and allied tribes, with more than \$600 million in support to the government of President Abdrabbuh Mansur Hadi. Additionally, the Saudi-led coalition that militarily intervened in Yemen in 2015 to bring down the Houthi rebellion and establish the Hadi government received logistical, intelligence, and mid-air refueling support from the Obama administration (“How U.S. Aid Helped “). The Obama administration provided a huge amount of money aid and training to the Yemeni military forces. This Support aimed at stopping the spread of Houthis rebellion.

In the period between 2010 and 2011, Obama’s Administration provided a training and support to Yemen's main counterterrorism and associated law enforcement organizations totaling around \$179.8 million. By providing weapons and training to Special Operations Forces, the Coast Guard, Border Security Forces, and the Yemeni Air Force, this would increase Yemen's military forces' ability to carry out counterterrorism

operations (United States, Congress, and Senate). The help of Obama administration gave the confidence to Yemen's military forces to fight against any source of terror.

With a stress on reinforcing the capabilities of Yemen's Counter-Terrorism Unit (CTU), the Obama administration has given Yemeni troops substantial military assistance and training their forces to fight against Al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP). This assistance has been the key element of the counterterrorism policy in the area (Martin, Yuhas, and Ackerman). By preparing the Yemen's military, the latter would be stronger and better equipped with weapons, equipment, and training to fight AQAP.

1.1.2. Drone Strikes and Targeted Killings

Obama administration expended the use of drone strikes in Yemen especially as a part of the counter terrorism strategies. It applied what it was called as 'light footprint' method which prioritized precision and reducing American losses and included a specific focus on al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP). As a good example of that was the 2011 drone attacks that have successfully killed AQAP commander Anwar al-Awlaki. Government agencies claimed that such steps were required to keep the country secure, but they generated severe ethical concerns, particularly when Americans were targeted for no clear explanation (Greenwald). A harsh criticism was launched against the method of 'light footprint' especially after the AQAP commander was killed because there was not a clear explanation for the bombarding.

The U.S. use of drones in Yemen especially after 2013 to fight terrorism has been criticized by human rights groups like Human Rights Watch. The latter claimed that the strikes broke international law and did not follow the government's rules for using deadly force. Many civilians were killed by the drones, which fueled anti-American sentiment and could have aided AQAP's recruitment efforts. The administration's reliance on the 2001 Authorization for the Use of Military Force (AUMF) has been criticized for using it for

other purposes. The legal justification for these acts is still being discussed. The policy's future influence continues to drive perceptions concerning the use of drones in modern conflict (“Between a Drone and Al-Qaeda”). In addition, “signature strikes” that targeted individuals based on behavioral patterns rather than confirmed identities have been authorized by the Obama administration (“White House Approves “). Using drone strikes in Yemen created harm to Yemen in general and individuals in particular. However, the U.S. depicted facing terror attacks as a necessity to accomplish its hidden objectives in the region.

Figure 3.1 below illustrates the number of drone strikes in Yemen from 2002 to present. The highest represents that 37 U.S. drone strikes hit the country in 2012, targeting operatives belonging to terrorist group al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP). The U.S. Drone strikes starts to decrease between 2013 and 2015 with 17 and 22 drone attacks. But, in 2016 the number of attacks increased to 32 due to the will of defeating the terrorism in the region.

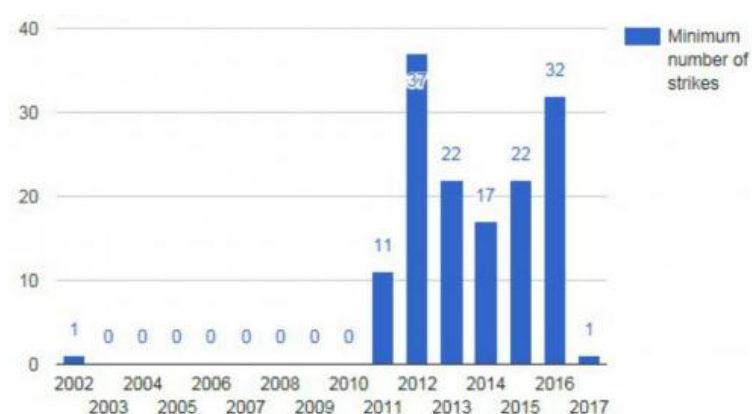


Fig 3.1. Yemen: Confirmed U.S. Drone Strikes, 2002to Present

Source: Purkiss, Jessica, and Jack Serle. “Obama's Drone War: Ten Times More Strikes than

Bush.” *The Bureau of Investigative Journalism*, 17 Jan. 2017,

<https://www.newarab.com/analysis/obamas-drone-war-ten-times-more-strikes-bus>.

Accessed 5 May 2025 .

In fact, even with assistance from the United States, it has been difficult to ensure that the financial support was used appropriately to combat AQAP. According to a U.S. embassy cable from December 2009, a U.S.-funded counterterrorism force was sent to the northern governorate of Saada to combat local Houthi militants, instead of concentrating on AQAP. Significant casualties resulted from this resource transformation, which also stopped the unit's main objective (Kasinof). Additionally, U.S. counterterrorism efforts have been hindered by Yemen's political instability, which included the fall of President Hadi's administration and the emergence of Houthi rebels (Chulov et al.). The emergence of Houthis made the U.S. authorities confused between helping to stop AQAP or thwarting the Houthis militant.

1.1.3. Intelligence Sharing

Intelligence-sharing partnership between U.S. and Yemen is a key component of counterterrorism efforts against AQAP. The United States worked closely with Yemeni authorities under Ali Abdullah Saleh's presidency to gather useful intelligence and launch drone attacks against AQAP targets. However, there were frequently political complexities associated with this collaboration. Despite openly endorsing American counterterrorism objectives, investigations suggested that Saleh's government may have exploited its ties with terrorist organizations for political ends. Saleh was reportedly involved in leading or encouraging AQAP movements, causing doubts about the accuracy of the intelligence his government supplied. Recognizing the strategic importance of intelligence obtained through Yemeni channels, the United States continued its cooperation despite many challenges (“Informant Says Yemen's Saleh”). In order to combat AQAP, especially under

President Saleh's governance, the United States and Yemen exchanged intelligence. While supporting American counterterrorism operations, Saleh have secretly used his connections to AQAP for political goals. However, the United States continued to collaborate with Yemen, because of the strategic importance of that intelligence.

After the election of President Abdrabbuh Mansur Hadi, U.S.-Yemen intelligence collaboration significantly improved. Hadi placed a high priority on help connections with the United States in an effort to help his legitimacy and combat the AQAP's rising danger. As a result, intelligence sharing became more efficient, greatly improving the accuracy of U.S. drone strikes and prevention many AQAP objectives. According to Voice of America (2012), a U.S. government-funded international news and broadcast organization, after Saleh left, the U.S. authorities observed a obvious increase in intelligence collaboration, which helped to facilitate better-coordinated counterterrorism efforts (“Yemeni Intelligence Cooperation”). However, the start of the civil war and the Houthi uprising put these advances in danger. The fall of Hadi's administration has damaged intelligence-sharing infrastructure, which decreased U.S. access to reliable on-the-ground information and put the present one counterterrorism efforts in risk., as The Guardian reported in 2015 (Chulov et al.).

Many people believed that the Yemen Model was harmful to the long-term regional stability. It might have accelerated up Yemen's fall into civil war and state breakdown by ignoring the primary causes of the crisis, which included ineffective leadership, tribal conflicts, and political marginalization. The model has contributed to keep Yemen as a terrorist safe haven and a place of humanitarian disaster rather than contributing to stabilize it (Martorell Junyent).

1.2. Obama's Support for Political Transition (2011–2012)

The Obama administration supported the movement launched by the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) in reaction to the Arab Spring upheavals, which helped President Ali Abdullah Saleh retire in 2011. The aim behind this transition strategy was to stabilize Yemen and prevent civil war. Vice President Abdrabbuh Mansur Hadi became president in February 2012 in a single-candidate election supported by the United States and the United Nations. With an emphasis on governance, economic reforms, and security sector reorganization, the United States committed more than \$346 million in humanitarian, development, and security aid to aid Yemen's democratic transition (Shah).

The Obama administration's humanitarian aid to Yemen includes a large increase in assistance aimed to meet the urgent requirements of homeless and conflict-affected individuals. President Obama increased U.S. aid to Yemen by \$29.6 million in 2013, bringing the total for the fiscal year to \$42.5 million. This assistance concentrated on giving more than 280,000 displaced people in northern Yemen and refugees in the south food, toilets and water access, housing, and medical treatment ("U.S. Humanitarian Assistance").

After the Arab Spring, the United States intervened to support Yemen's National Dialogue Conference (NDC) from 2013 to 2014. The NDC tried to tackle difficult topics such as constitutional amendments, southern concerns, and the proper operation of the government. In order to ensure that the opinions of women and young people were heard and that the results represented the variety of Yemeni society, the United States donated \$40 million. Despite of obstacles and conflicts, the NDC concluded with a proposal for a new federal structure, which was a significant step in the direction of a more democratic Yemen (United Nations Office). The United States' support of Yemen's NDC played a significant role in advancing democracy. Despite obstacles, the meeting advanced a national plan and helped incorporate opinions such as those of women and young people.

1.3. Response to the Civil War (2014–2017)

As part of its reaction to Yemen's civil war (2014–2017), the Saudi led a coalition, which intervened in March 2015 to reinstate the overthrown government of President Abdrabbuh Mansur Hadi, received significant backing from the Obama administration. The United States permitted intelligence and logistical support, including weapons shipments, mid-air refueling, and targeting support (Malley and Pomper). Concerns over the humanitarian effects of the coalition's operations were raised by the conflict's high civilian deaths.

The Obama administration sometimes stopped the transfer of weaponry while looking for a diplomatic resolution, Because of worries about the war. The United States has sometimes stopped arms supplies to these nations trying to convince nations like Saudi Arabia to apply extra caution and put more emphasis on diplomacy rather than fighting. The United States also supported negotiations led by the UN, in the hope to facilitate an agreement between the two parties. However, people have questioned whether the U.S. involvement was really effective or ethical, especially since the U.S. kept supporting the coalition even as civilian casualties increased (“United States Strikes Houthi”). Despite efforts to avoid these consequences, the reality on the ground revealed severe harm to innocent civilians.

1.4. Criticism and Legacy

Human rights groups like Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch criticized the Obama Administration's Yemen policy because it caused civilian deaths and did not end the war. U.S. drone strikes killed thousands of innocent people, which fueled anger among people and helped terrorist groups grew in membership. The U.S. also supported Saudi Arabia with weapons and military help, which was linked to more civilian deaths. Politicians like Senator Bernie Sanders and Representative Ro Khanna said the U.S.

focused too much on military actions and ignored important problems like poverty, tribal conflicts, and political struggles (“Between a Drone and Al-Qaeda”; Ware and Asmar). This approach failed to provide the rights of the majority in Yemen.

Even though the U.S. helped Yemen’s counterterrorism strategy by training soldiers and sharing intelligence, these efforts did not work well because the Yemeni government was weak and the resources were misused. Gregory Johnsen, a former U.S. advisor during the Obama presidency, said that the military help alone was not enough. He believed that the U.S. needed a bigger plan that included political and economic changes to bring real peace and stop groups like AQAP for good (Calabresi). Despite U.S. support, Yemen stayed unstable, especially with the Houthis fighting back. Obama’s presidency ended leaving the issue in Yemen unsolved and giving the path to Donald Trump to implement his policy in the region in general and in Yemen in particular.

2. Trump’s First Term Policy in Yemen: A Combination of Counterterrorism, Coalition Support, and Humanitarian Considerations.

Donald Trump’s first presidency lasted from 2017 to 2021. During that time, the United States government’s policy in Yemen focused mainly on military actions and alliances. The aim of the U.S. was to stop the Houthis rebels from spreading in the region and hinder their dominance. Thus, it launched airstrikes which did not only bomb the fighters’ locations, but also killed many innocent civilians; receiving harsh criticism from human rights’ groups. Yet, Trump’s administration continues its policy claiming that it should stop Al-Qaeda group in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP) with the backing of allies like Saudi Arabia. The U.S. supported the Saudi-led coalition in Yemen by providing the ally with strong and modern weapons sold through big deals, and information sharing.

2.1. Trump's Counterterrorism Strategy

Donald Trump determined to solve the issue in Yemen because of the threat of the prevailing terrorist groups in the region on the one hand, and because of the support of these groups to Iran on the other hand. He believed that Iran; his first enemy, was supplying the terrorist groups in the region mainly the Houthis in Yemen. In 2018, the U.S. president adapted a strategy for counterterrorism in which he labeled Iran as the biggest supporter of terrorist groups, and revealed his intentions to break and eliminate its influence. Trump insisted on warning that these terrorist groups like al-Qaida were promoting for violence since it used unstable countries to launch the attacks such as the case of Yemen (*National Strategy for Counterterrorism*). The Houthis has been supported and empowered by Iran because they share the same purpose that is to stand as an obstacle in the face of the U.S. interests in the Middle East.

Trump claimed that his strategy's main priority was to protect the U.S. and make sure its allies were safe and well protected as well. His team used information gathering to play behind the enemy, propaganda, and publicly spreading messages. The strategy worked on limiting terrorists' financial resources and prohibiting them from spreading inside and outside the borders (*National Strategy for Counterterrorism*). This was Trump's strategy to fight terrorism from all sides using all means including raids and Drone strikes.

2.2. Freedom of Military Maneuver in Yemen

2.2.1. The Yakla Raid

Trump came up with a new strategy calling some parts of Yemen as active war zones, making it easier for the U.S. military to take control and launch airstrikes. Trump's rule allowed the military to act freely and faster without constant permission and carefulness. It has witnessed a lot of military actions and operations, such as the attack in the village of Yakla in Al Bayda governorate. On January 29, 2017, the United States Navy Sea, Air, and

Land Teams (SEALs) and Emirati forces were ordered to raid a village in Yemen named Yakla. This operation aimed to attack al-Qaeda and force the fighters to expose the information and their plans just nine days after Donald Trump took the office in the White House. The result was the death of 14 al-Qaeda fighters and one American soldier named William Owens. Sadly, an uncertain number of civilians died including 10 and 30 women and children, as well as an 8-year-old American girl named Nawar al-Awlaki ; the daughter of a U.S. born religious leader who had been killed in a U.S. drone strike years earlier ("Raid in Yemen"). Those civilians died because of the American gunfire that happened on the ground. The US led the raid under Trump's name which resulted in huge damages and death from both sides.

The raid in Yemen was criticized and was called risky and unplanned because it was targeting Al-Qaeda but ended killing so many innocent people. Although the United States officials publicly mentioned that the mission had achieved its goal, the reality was more like a lie. The raid in fact did not gather as much information as needed about Al-Qaeda. The civilian deaths which stood out most, especially Nawar's, caused concern about the raid's impact. Locals were terrified and lived in horror since helicopters bombed their homes, schools, mosques and left them with no shelters (Schmitt and Sanger). They were left with nothing but pain and grieve. This mission showed how hard to fight terrorists in Yemen without hurting innocent people

2.2.2. Drone Strikes

After Donald Trump took office in 2017, the number of airstrikes had increased six times higher than the previous administration reaching 131 drone strikes; they were such as MQ-1 Predator and MQ-9 Reaper and also missiles. Those missiles targeted the locations where the fighters hid their weapons and vehicles. This aimed to limit their power and put them in a weak situation where they can no longer defend themselves (*America's*

Counterterrorism Wars). The casualties and damages continued to increase day after day because of the government's nonchalance.

As figure 3.2 shows below, there were heavy attacks on Yemen reaching out 131 air strikes in total for the first time during Trump's first term in the White House especially in 2017. It also indicates that the number has highly increased in comparison to Drone and Ground Operations during Obama's presidency

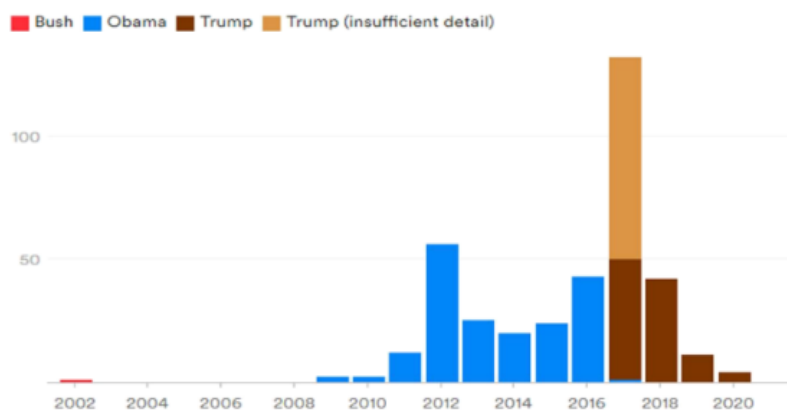


Fig3.2. U.S. Air, Drone, and Ground Operations in Yemen, by Administration and Year.

Source: “U.S. Air, Drone, and Ground Operations in Yemen, by Administration and Year.”

America's Counterterrorism Wars, New America , Web.

<http://newamerica.org/future-security/reports/americas-counterterrorism-wars/>

Accessed 27 May 2025.

2.3. America in Yemen's Proxy Conflict

Powerful countries like the United States and Iran stand on opposite sides supporting different fighting groups in Yemen. The Houthis was supported by Iran, while the Saudi Arabia was backed by the United States. This conflict became a clear example of a proxy war between the US and Iran without fighting each other directly. The US claimed that standing aside with Saudi Arabia and providing it with arms would make Iran weaker. But Iran considers it an opportunity to dominate in the Middle East (“Conflict in Yemen and

the Red Sea “). As a result, those two powers were heavily involved in the conflict leaving severe losses.

Iran claimed that its support for the Houthis was political and moral, and denied supporting it with weapons. Yet, Saudi Arabia and its allies stated the opposite. The U.S. Defense Secretary, Mark Esper said: “It is clear based on detailed exploitation by Saudi, United States and other international investigative teams that the weapons used in the attack were Iranian-produced and not launched from Yemen” (Garamone). It is obvious that the Houthis would be in a weak situation without a military support as they would lack any kind of weapon sources.

The U.S. military had a strategy that focused heavily on launching airstrikes and providing weapons to allies instead of trying to argue and solve the problems through talking. The military actions spread the violence and deepened the crisis, leaving millions hungry, unhealed, and at danger. Thus, the military forces failed to weaken Iran’s dominance as it continued to support the Houthis and influence the region. The U.S. administration neither explained clearly what it wanted to accomplish nor checked if its plans were working. Instead, it kept attacking the civilians (Ware and Asmar).

2.4. U.S.–Saudi Coalition

President Donald Trump strongly supported Saudi Arabia in its war in Yemen. His first visit to Riyadh was in 2017 where he promised to stand with the Saudi Arabian forces against Iran and its groups in Yemen. The US government provided help with over than \$500 million of various weapons and bombs. In addition, it signed a weapons deal that was worth \$110 billion for the benefit of the Saudi military. This deal was considered one of the biggest deals in the American history which included tanks, ships, and missiles. The main reason of this support was to protect the port city of Hodeida; a key spot in Yemen where ships deliver food and medicine. However, that port was controlled by the Houthis

supported by Iran. This Alliance raises the concerns of Saudi Arabia and its allies, pushing them to take over Hodeida in order to weaken the Houthis and stop Iran from taking benefit of that location. The port's strategic location in the Red Sea vastly facilitates international shipping (Sharp). Any obstacle in the port would block help from reaching millions of people who were starving and sick and in need of aids.

In December 2018, the US Senate decided to drop off helping Saudi Arabia in Yemen militarily because of the massive casualties and intentioned killing. Trump had other plans, he vetoed the Congress's resolution and said that it was the president's power to decide such a decision concerning the military and the foreign policies, and that supporting the Saudi Arabia was important for the national security and for other business interests, so the congress failed to override the veto and the support continued until Trump's last days ("US Senate Votes"). The American military's decisions did not only affect their enemies but also innocent people and prioritized politics over human lives.

The U.S. is still maintaining strong relations with Saudi Arabia under Trump's presidency in 2025. They have made a huge \$142 billion weapons deal and it is considered the biggest in U.S. history. Saudi Arabia also discussed about an investment of \$600 billion in the U.S. but the detailed are still not announced yet. In addition to that, the two famous American tech companies Nvidia and Cisco made important business deals with Saudi during Trump's visit to the country (Roth and Christou). This means that Trump's administration is not just supporting Saudi Arabia, but also strengthening their ties.

2.5. Humanitarian Assistance

During Trump's presidency, the United States announced that since October 2017 almost \$24 million in addition to emergency aid were sent to Yemen reaching out \$721 million. This act provided shelters, medicines, relief items, pain killers, and everything that can help the Yemenis who were displaced and left homeless. Not to mention the essentials

such as food and clean water for nearly 8 million people monthly. Yemen faces the world's biggest and hardest humanitarian crisis, with a population that exceeds over 24 million people. Since 2017 around 80% of people were asking for aid and 20 million were not exposed to the basic healthcare, and more than five million suffered from famine. In order to assure a better future for the country, conflicts should be resolved through political agreements (“United States Announces Additional Humanitarian Assistance”). Despite the negative consequences of the American operations, the U.S. has largely contributed with the humanitarian assistances to help the people in need, also to keep its power in the region and compete with other powers like Russia.

In January 2018, Trump’s administration launched a project to deliver four cranes to the Hudaydah port in Yemen. These cranes were funded and sent by USAID stands for United States Agency for International Development, which is a non-separable part of the U.S. government and its aim is to help the other countries. They were sent to replace the tools and everything that had been damaged during the war in addition to providing more food, fuel, and medicaments. The cranes were purposely sent when Yemen was going through the darkest times in order to fasten the aids operations and ensure they were reaching the Yemenis (“US-Purchased Cranes”).

President Trump’s policy in Yemen was driven by military actions, counterterrorism, heavy airstrikes, and raids to stop the terrorist groups. Frequently, the result was the deaths and injuries of many civilians. Iran was seen as a threat because of its influence over the Houthis, so the U.S. armed the Saudi-led coalition with advanced weapons to limit Iran’s presence in the region. However, Trump’s administration sent massive aids to Yemen and funded them with millions of dollars to cover up its failure. Trump’s policy in Yemen failed and did not reach its goals. It aimed to fight the Houthis and stop Iran. However,

with the end of his first term, the Houthis remained, Iran's influence grew in the region, and the civilian deaths increased which made the crisis even worse.

The policies of Obama and Trump in Yemen demonstrate how differently the two presidents approached the issue politically and militarily. They pursued distinct strategies, particularly in their support for the Saudi-led conflict. On the one hand, Obama provided early support with intelligence but soon decreased its participation because of the civilian deaths. However, human rights critics claimed that his policy did not damage the country because of small acts and his early awareness. On the other hand, Trump took a rough path, boosting ties with Saudi Arabia, and removing Obama's restrictions such as the case of controlling the army's actions. Furthermore, he vetoed a resolution that the Congress suggested to end the U.S. involvement in that proxy war, emphasizing more on fighting terrorists, keeping allies close, and ignoring the rising number of civilian deaths.

Conclusion

Yemen as a rich country with different cultures, valuable resources, and a strategic location, has witnessed continuous colonizations for many years. The main reason for the presence of colonial powers in Yemen was to exploit the country's wealth and to extend their interests in the region. The United States has constantly attempted to deepen its involvement and follow different policies in the Middle East in general and Yemen in particular. Yemen's location captured the attention globally until becoming a battleground for influence where many countries acted to accomplish their agendas.

The United States has always been dominating in the Middle East to serve its benefit and to have access to the natural resources like oil and influence the trade routes. Yemen, mainly, drew significant U.S. attention due to its strategic location near Bab el-Mandeb Strait; very important maritime crossing in the international arena. The U.S presence in Yemen was for many reasons including economic, diplomatic, and lately military to fight terrorists who threatened the stability of the region. Consecutive U.S administrations have perused different policies in dealing with the Yemeni issue. Every president affected the countries with his priorities and principles. Barack Obama and Donald Trump were good examples.

During Barack Obama's presidency, the U.S. administration focused on limiting the army's involvement even though he emphasized on counterterrorism. His policy prioritized diplomacy over violence. On the contrary, the Trump administration preferred to deal with the situation harshly. The president went with direct military operations, and supported the Saudi Arabia with weapons and pushed it to a war with the Houthis. Trump's military

approach draws a shift from awareness such as Obama's directly to a war. On the other hand, Obama believed that less military engagement would prevent complications.

Obama's policy fought against terrorism, mainly targeting Al-Qaeda group. He used the "Yemen Model," which launched drone strikes, done special operations, and supported the Yemeni government. The aim was to keep the United States' influence but limit its involvement. In 2009, after a failed Yemeni terrorist attack, the U.S. increased its counterterrorism efforts in the country and turning it into a real battleground. In contrast, Trump put a label on Iran as the major sponsor of terrorist groups and considering it as the top threat. His policy relied on military power to respond to the Iranian-backed Houthis. Trump's administration expanded the military operations beyond Al-Qaeda claiming that Yemen was the center of terrorism.

Obama's presidency maintained a strategy that provided \$600 million of support to train and arm the Yemeni forces and allied tribes, in order to strengthen them against both AQAP and the Houthis. By 2015, the U.S. supported the Saudi-led coalition but tried to limit arms transfers and emphasized on diplomacy because of the casualties that arose. While Trump focused on strengthening the U.S. and Saudi relations. The support for Saudi Arabia was extensive and unconditional covering all political, financial, and military domains. The president signed a \$110 billion arms deal and vetoed the congress's attempts to restrict the arms sales. While Obama showed caution in providing arms for allies, Trump prioritized strong and immediate military support. This reflected their contrasting views.

As a result, Trump's policy caused an increase in the number of drone strikes launched in Yemen because of the army's movements. These strikes aimed to destroy terrorists hiding spots, troops, and weapons. But they did more harm than expected causing many civilian casualties and damaging the homes and villages. The Yakla raid was one of the famous operations in the country. His policy caused a proxy war, with Iran and the

Saudi Arabia in the other sides. Obama's drone strikes number was more controlled and limited. It was like furious reaction to the failed attack that happened in 2009 but still led to criticism. However, Trump's aggressive policy captured global attention. And Obama's measured involvement did not protect him from blame over drone strikes either.

Yemen remains today one of the world's worst humanitarian crises, with most of the population starving, homeless, and with healthcare. The attacks and bombings killed many civilians and deepened the country's crisis. Both Obama and Trump's administrations provided help by funding food programs and sending medical aids. Despite the aids, the country is still damaged and screams for help and the U.S. claim to bring peace fails. Both Obama and Trump policies contributed to this ongoing tragedy.

Although both of Barack Obama and Donald Trump shared similar goals such as fighting terrorism and preserving the U.S. interests and its allies, the methods they chose to opt for were different. Their differences did not lead to better results nor prevent the tragic end. As mentioned above, these shifts showed how the U.S. policy in the Middle East and in Yemen in particular, was influenced by the different leaderships and political views of each president. Their contrasting strategies shaped Yemen's war and humanitarian crisis differently.

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