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Asher Orkaby. *Beyond the Arab Cold War: The International History of the Yemen Civil War, 1962-68*. Oxford Studies in International History Series. New York: Oxford University Press, 2017. Maps. 312 pp. \$34.95 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-19-061844-5.

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Those who read Asher Orkaby's *Beyond the Arab Cold War: The International History of the Yemen Civil War, 1962-68* will immediately see similarities between Yemen in 1962-68 and events in the Middle East today. The two current civil wars in Yemen (2014-) and Syria (2011-) have engulfed both urban and rural populations, seen thousands of innocent civilians killed—many victims of chemical weapons attacks—and drawn in regional and international players further and further into the conflicts. The complicated political pictures in both of these countries have only hindered any progress toward peace, let alone a cessation of hostilities. These recent events make Orkaby's book both timely and important.

Orkaby has four goals for this work. First, he shows that the Yemeni Civil War, 1962-68, was not a simple two-sided conflict between royalists and republican factions and their allies. According to Orkaby, "Yemen became an open field for individuals, organizations, and countries to peddle their agendas in the remote region of South Arabia, laying the ground for subsequent decades of Yemeni and Arabian history" (p. 1). Second, he seeks to dispel the notion that the Yemeni Civil War was solely a product of Egyptian meddling; Egypt indeed played a vital role, but not the only role. Third, he wishes to break beyond the paradigm of the "Arab Cold War," as first described by political scientist Malcom H. Kerr in 1965. In his seminal work, *The Arab Cold War: Gamal 'Abd al-Nasir and His Rivals, 1958-1970*, Kerr argued that the Cold War in the Middle East was between the Arab nationalists, led by Egyptian President Gamal Abdel Nasser (al-Nasir), and conservative and traditional monarchies like Saudi Arabia. Subsequent literature has maintained this

binary, and much to Orkaby's chagrin, the "Arab Cold War" terminology continues to be used today, but now it only refers to Saudi Arabia and Iran. As Orkaby argues, the Yemeni Civil War was a "struggle for Yemeni nationalism, nation building, and pan-Arab unity and rhetoric, rather than just a civil war or merely a proxy war between two regional rivals.... [Egyptian and Saudi policies were] formulated by a combination of historical conflicts, geostrategic interest, religious grievances, local agency and pure happenstance" (p. 4).

Fourth, and finally, along with breaking this binary, Orkaby seeks to recontextualize the Yemeni Civil War, in that it "was an international conflict in a moment when the definition of 'international' was radically changing" (p. 2). Orkaby uses the war as a lens through which to examine the dramatic changes in the 1960s: the fall of European colonialism, death of the British Empire, decline of Arab nationalism, and change in mission and composition within the United Nations. He also demonstrates the limits of the ideological argument of the Cold War, in that instead of squaring off against each other because of conflicting ideological goals and principles, the United States and Soviet Union actually found themselves on the same side of the Yemeni Civil War. This was a result of regional concerns and geopolitical ambitions. Ideology in the Cold War, as evident by war in the Arabian Peninsula, was therefore flexible.

In September 1962, Yemeni military officers, under the leadership of Colonel Abdullah al-Sallal, overthrew Imam Muhammad al-Badr, the last leader of a thousand-year dynasty under the Hamid al-Din family. Narrowly

escaping with his life, al-Badr and his cohort fled north to gather with loyal tribal forces to prepare for a counter assault on the capital of Sana'a. Orkaby persuasively dispels the previously ascribed notion that the Yemeni Civil War was a sole product of Egyptian meddling; it "was, in actuality, the culmination of two decades of anti-imam sentiments from a new generation of Yemeni intelligentsia that preceded the rise of Nasser and the Egyptian Free Officers in 1952" (p. 11). For one, this was not the first and only coup attempt; there had been two failed attempts in 1948 and 1955. An intelligentsia movement developed as military officers were sent abroad for education as part of Imam Yahya's (r. 1904-48) initiative to modernize the national army as a means to rely less on tribal militias. These officers would later serve at the core of the Free Yemeni Movement (FYM), the very group that would lead the 1962 coup. Ironically, al-Badr would later rely on tribal militias for support after his overthrow. Along with the FYM, Yemeni society underwent its own enlightenment, with powerful dissident, expatriate, literature, religious, and media groups seeking to alter, reform, and modernize Yemen. Combine these groups, and it is evident that the groundwork for the 1962 coup was well founded even before Nasser's ascent in Egypt in 1952.

Discontent in Yemen served Nasser well and he allowed FYM allied groups to operate in Egypt, granting them considerable access to Egyptian media to voice anti-imam rhetoric. While Egypt did not plan the coup, Nasser certainly sought to take advantage of the regime change. By 1962, Nasser's dream of Arab nationalism in the Middle East had died out; his beloved United Arab Republic (UAR) collapsed when Syria withdrew, and the monarchies in Jordan and Saudi Arabia signed new treaties and alliances together. By backing Sallal, Nasser sought to reinvigorate Arab nationalism and to secure Egyptian geopolitical interests by curtailing British, Saudi, and Soviet influence in the Arabian Peninsula. Yemen, for Nasser, therefore, offered a new opportunity for Egypt to reassert itself on the regional and global stage.

Even though al-Badr escaped, the FYM officers immediately announced on state radio that the imam had been killed in the coup. This decision to announce the imam's "death" resulted in a massive shift in alliances. By concealing the truth of the imam's supposed death for months, Sallal would "secure international recognition and support prior to the organization of an opposition to the republic" (p. 30). Believing al-Badr dead, the Egyptians, Soviets, and Americans announced their

recognition of the new republican government while the Saudis, who wanted to protect monarchial institutions in both Yemen and at home, recognized a loose coalition of royalist-backed tribes in the North. The Soviets, who had supported al-Badr's modernization campaign, switched sides, not for ideological purposes but because "it appears their objectives in Yemen were opportunistic and pragmatic" (p. 45). The Americans were late to recognize the new republican government, largely because the American government had little to no familiarity with Yemen, including its location on the map. Even after news of al-Badr's survival emerged, they still recognized Sallal's government, despite Soviet recognition, as a means to "contain" Soviet influence in the region; the State Department argued that if Nasser was preoccupied in Yemen, it would not only keep him busy from disrupting other American interests in the region but also curtail Yemeni reliance on the Soviet Union. Containment, in this instance, meant trapping both the Soviet Union and Nasser, even if it meant supporting a Soviet-backed government.

In October 1962, Egyptian forces entered Yemen to back the republican forces from al-Badr allied tribal and royalist forces. Nasser's foray into Yemen created opportunities to "further his personal security, economic, and ideological agendas in the region in a relatively low-stakes conflict two thousand miles away from Egypt" (p. 205). And yet these opportunities were difficult to achieve; for a man who so openly condemned imperialism, Nasser certainly acted like an imperialist in Yemen. After each victory on the battlefield, Nasser attempted to gain the upper hand in diplomatic talks for a ceasefire and disengagement. However, victories were often pyrrhic or short-lived—the Egyptians learned that territory did not necessarily guarantee victory—leaving Nasser calling off talks numerous times and reassuming hostilities on the battlefield. This waffling created a perception that he was stalling or manipulating "international parties with false promises of withdrawal" (p. 59). Yemen's lack of infrastructure, including roads, made maneuvering troops and supplies difficult, let alone waging a steady campaign against royalist forces. The royalist forces had shifted to conducting hit-and-run guerilla tactics all while using the mountainous terrain of northern Yemen as hide-aways. Woefully unprepared for this mountain warfare, the Egyptians turned to a massive aerial campaign and deployment of chemical weapons—discussed below—to root out the royalists. Both the US and USSR discreetly encouraged Nasser to continue his campaign in hopes to draw him further into the conflict, trapping him in an expensive and costly quagmire. As Orkaby illustrates,

both the US and USSR “not only [supported] the same Yemeni republic, but [also pursued] parallel policies in the region” (p. 128).

Continuing to break past Kerr’s “Arab Cold War” paradigm, Orkaby brings in the United Nations Yemen Observer Mission (UNYOM) to illustrate institutional and diplomatic changes within the UN. Whereas previous scholarship has characterized the UNYOM as a failure, Orkaby argues that this characterization is incorrect, in that the mission was not to end the war but to observe the withdrawal of Egyptian forces. According to his archival research, UNYOM’s mission was an important “symbolic presence in the region” (p. 80). Again, whereas previous scholarship has criticized the perceived bias the UNYOM forces had for republican forces, Orkaby demonstrates that the mission interacted and communicated with both republicans and royalist forces. This mission, therefore, acted as a “safety valve for Saudi Arabia and the UAR to let off steam without engaging each other” (p. 97). Criticism of the UNYOM can be more appropriately contextualized in the changing makeup and nature of the UN. In an era of decolonization, the 1960s saw the emergence of a powerful African-Asian bloc of newly independent nations within the UN. Strongly influenced by the Non-Aligned Movement, and backed by the Soviets, this bloc sought to decentralize the UN, and to move attention away from the US-USSR conflict toward their own respective areas of interest. The new secretary general of the UN, U Thant, also wanted to change the nature of UN peacekeeping missions by reducing “lavish expenditures” and only participating in uncontroversial missions (p. 80). In essence, the UN saw a major shift from aggressive to limited peacekeeping in the 1960s, and criticisms against the UNYOM were largely based on “broader disenchantment with the peacekeeping model and the evolving face of the UN rather than the reality of the mission in Yemen” (p. 102).

The Yemeni Civil War also saw the use of chemical gas against Yemeni civilians. First used in 1963, chemical weapons were deployed by Egypt as “a calculated part of the Egyptian effort to depopulate the countryside through a scorched earth policy designed to eliminate support for the royalist guerillas” (p. 129). There was no formal censure of Egypt in the UN, nor was any policy-changing action taken against Nasser by the international community; in fact, the lack of censure gave Nasser confidence to continue gassing Yemenis. A sentiment that easily harkens to today, the lack of censure and international action was because “respective national interests trumped all else” (p. 140). The Kennedy administra-

tion had just authorized large-scale herbicidal warfare in Vietnam, Laos, and Cambodia, while the African-Asian bloc within the UN hindered all efforts to formally censure Egypt. By 1967, more concern was placed in Egypt’s actions against Israel, creating a “let-someone-else-do-it” mentality within the international community. Arguably, the only country that was horrified by the use of chemical weapons was Israel, as the Jewish state feared it could potentially be the next victim of such attacks. However, by the time Egypt withdrew from Yemen in November 1967, little reason or impetus remained for any action against Egypt—what was the point now?

Egyptian and Saudi Arabian forces agreed to withdraw from Yemen in August 1967. With Egyptian withdrawal, and Sallal sent into exile after losing Nasser’s support, royalist forces resumed their siege of Sana’a. Egyptian withdrawal also created a power vacuum, which the Soviets were all too happy to fill; they conducted emergency airlifts and provided air cover for republican forces in the capital. Republican forces broke the siege in February 1968, and al-Badr surrendered in March 1969. Despite this assistance, and subsequent friendship treaties, the Soviets abandoned the Yemeni Republic, believing it was still too friendly with the West, too close with Saudi Arabia, and too weak to justify the amount of time and effort the relationship would require. Instead, the Soviets shifted attention to the newly formed People’s Democratic Republic of Yemen (PDRY), the successor to the Aden Protectorate; this was evacuated at the end of November 1967, marking the final nail in the coffin for the British Empire.

But the British Empire did not go quietly into the night. After the 1956 Suez Canal crisis, a group of influential anti-Egyptian and anti-Nasser British politicians, policymakers, and military officials turned their attention to protecting and advocating for the Aden Protectorate (Aden is part of Yemen today). Taking over the torch from the “post-Suez malaise” in London, this so-called Aden Group, “the last generation of British imperialists,” clandestinely provided mercenaries, weapons, intelligence, and money to royalist forces, all to spite Nasser and Egypt (pp. 164, 168). Toward the end of the civil war, the Aden Group shifted their attention to helping Israel; during the civil war, the group had even helped coordinate secret Israeli airlifts to royalist forces. The Israelis had watched Egyptian military conduct in Yemen with great enthusiasm and concern, eventually developing “an understanding of Nasser’s military capabilities.... Egypt’s conduct of war in Yemen had a profound impact on Israel” (pp. 176-177). Arguably con-

sumed by their own hubris, some Aden Group members even boldly claimed that the Israeli victory in the Six-Day War in 1967 could not have been possible without them.

Who could be considered “victors” in the Yemeni Civil War besides the republican forces? For one, Nasser was not at a total loss; part of the withdrawal agreement with Saudi Arabia saw Egypt receiving shares in Saudi oil production. In another regard, Nasser’s moves into Yemen put further pressure on the British to evacuate their protectorate in Aden, which only secured Nasser’s interests in the Red Sea. Saudi Arabia and the USSR also expanded their influence into the Arabian Peninsula. The PDRY would become a strategic Soviet naval and military asset, serving as a base for “missions to postcolonial Africa: Angola, Ethiopia, Mozambique, and Somalia, in particular” (p. 205).

The book is well written and researched. Along with personally conducting interviews, the author consulted archives in the United States, Yemen, Switzerland, Russia, Canada, and Israel. While Orkaby does well in providing the big picture, the arena in which global and regional powers jockeyed for position for power and influence in the Yemeni Civil War, his multi-archival approach is instrumental in providing the reader with the ground picture of the war as well. Tales of ambitious Southern Baptist missionaries, frustrated Red Cross personnel, and men like Bruce Condé, a former US Army officer who fashioned himself both as Yemen’s first postmaster general and as the next Lawrence of Arabia, illustrate the equally important “impact of individuals” in conflicts such as these. Arguably, Orkaby’s greatest insight is that because there was not a single dominant ac-

tor in the Yemeni Civil War, it “opened the country to a new cast of international characters that previously had no access to South Arabia. The conflict was not dictated by US-Soviet machinations alone, nor did Egyptian or Saudi interests solely determine the course of events in Yemen” (p. 196).

Since the book is largely limited to 1962-68, perhaps an introduction chapter of events prior to 1962 would have been helpful, especially for non-Middle East experts. The author makes numerous mentions of the British-administrated Aden Protectorate but does not provide the appropriate context until page 153. On top of that, while the author’s maps are informative, these maps often use current borders, not those between 1962 and 1968, which again potentially leaves the reader perplexed in terms of context. The book also loses track of the intelligentsia movement in Yemen, which was a crucial factor in formation and success of the 1962 coup; the group also played a role in ousting Sallal in November 1967.

These minor quibbles, however, do not weaken the importance of this work. This is a must read for Cold War, Middle East, and diplomatic historians, scholars, and students. As the overly used cliché goes, those who fail to learn from history are doomed to repeat it. Given the events in Yemen and Syria today, it does appear that the international community is repeating itself. As Orkaby ominously warns, “For the sake of innocent Yemenis one can only hope that this date arrives with great expediency lest fifty years from now another historian sits down to write a sequel” (p. 214).

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