

## Yemen after Saleh's return and Awlaki's exit

Yemen is seemingly slipping deeper into turmoil after months of antigovernment protests and mounting tensions. The risk of a protracted conflict erupting into an uncontrollable civil war looms large. With Yemen teetering ever closer to the brink, fears are high that the threat of terrorism emanating from the country could grow even more pronounced.

In a Q&A, Christopher Boucek analyzes Yemen's internal situation, the strength of al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP), and U.S. counterterrorism efforts. He argues that while recent U.S. drone strikes have been successful, the United States cannot rely on a remote control to defeat terrorism. Improving governance and quality of life for Yemenis will do more to reduce violence in Yemen than drones ever will.

By: Christopher Boucek  
carnegieendowment.org

### Is AQAP benefiting from the government's increasing weakness?

As the Yemeni government's authority and presence recedes, the undergoverned spaces where al-Qaeda thrives are growing. When protests kicked off early in the year, the government pulled counterterrorism resources away from going after AQAP and used the assets to prop up its own rule instead.

The situation devolved quicker than anyone expected and the Yemeni government is now trying to put the terrorism threat back in the box. While it is not any easy task, the Yemeni government has gone to great lengths in recent months to be proactive. The government is being even more active than it was in the past, both for its own sake and due to international pressure. According to American officials, Yemeni cooperation on counterterrorism issues has greatly improved.

The talk about AQAP taking over towns and leading the opposition was overblown, as the protests have not been led by AQAP. There were likely AQAP elements active in some of the violence seen in the south of the country, but there is

still much that is unclear. The last year has been one of the longest periods between successful regional or international terrorist attacks since before 2007. AQAP is under intense pressure. The Yemeni government has been more hands-on in combating the threat and the United States is relentless in its pursuit of well-known leaders.

Yemen is sometimes portrayed as an option between two extremes: either there is an authoritarian central government that will support counterterrorism or tribes that will shelter al-Qaeda. But this thinking doesn't withstand scrutiny. While the Yemeni government has often times sought to portray any opposition as terrorists, this isn't actually the case. And there is so much we don't know or understand about what goes on across Yemen.



**The government's ability to combat AQAP is ominously low.**

With all of this being said, AQAP is still an incredibly dangerous organization. Even though Anwar al-Awlaki was killed in September and some of AQAP's ability to communicate with Western audiences and recruit like-minded individuals was compromised, it remains an innovative, fast-learning, and opportunistic group. It's important to note that Ibrahim Hassan Asiri, the Saudi bomb maker linked to almost every AQAP plot, continues to evade capture. He is perhaps the most dangerous operational figure at large today.

And the government's ability to combat AQAP is ominously low. To fight terrorism, a country must have two things—capacity and political will. Yemen has typically come up short on both accounts. There are many things that still need to improve urgently.



**Saleh's watching what is happening to Hosni Mubarak in Egypt and wants to avoid the same fate.**

Will President Ali Abdullah Saleh step down soon? Would Saleh's exit calm the political crisis?

President Saleh is the single dominating force in Yemen and this is how he has governed for more than thirty years. The weeks of spiraling violence before he returned last month after receiving medical treatment in Saudi Arabia threatened to get much worse and there was no one else in the country who could pull the country back from the brink of wider fighting.

This reinforces the point that there needs to be a transitional process. No matter what one's opinion is of President Saleh, he is the legitimately elected president of Yemen. Saleh has agreed to step down, but he will probably stretch out the turnover as long as he can.

The most viable solution for how to move forward now is through early elections. The regime and parts of the opposition have indicated that they are prepared to move in this direction, but everyone needs to compromise. At the moment there is no incentive for all the parties to make the necessary concessions. Until that happens, there is little likelihood of progress.

Saleh's watching what is happening to Hosni Mubarak in Egypt and wants to avoid the same fate. While he won't be president for another term, turning the situation over to chaos is worse. With a country filled with weapons and many competing factions, there needs to be a clear sense of what comes next. Moreover, Yemen's problems will not magically disappear once Saleh steps down. The situation is far more complicated than that.

What is the greatest danger Yemen faces today?

It's the economy. The untold story of Yemen's internal insecurity and the threat of terrorism is that the economy has collapsed. Yemen is running out of money, food prices are skyrocketing, oil prices are climbing sharply, water is harder and harder to find, unemployment is growing, and the government doesn't have the capacity to solve any of the problems. The Yemeni people are already among the most vulnerable communities in the region, and conditions are getting worse as the crisis drags on.

This is the real concern with Yemen. These problems are what lead to under-governed spaces and



Anwar Al-Awlaki

breeding grounds for terrorism. The international community needs to help reduce corruption and increase the number of jobs available—this will do more to reduce the terrorist threat.

What is the significance of Anwar al-Awlaki's death?

The commentary on Awlaki falls into opposite extremes—he was either insignificant or a terrorist mastermind. The truth is somewhere in between. At first, I was a real skeptic of Awlaki's influence and role in global terrorism. But now I have no doubt that Awlaki was not only a propagandist and recruiter, he was

and powerful orator and it was his unique capacity to communicate with vulnerable communities in the West that was the really scary thing. People who weren't on intelligence radars because they hadn't been to training camps, but were out there looking for answers, could find direction in Awlaki's words. He sounded credible, legitimate, and authentic.

While AQAP is not a monolithic organization, there is an internationally oriented segment that targets the West and Awlaki was key within that group. The fact that Samir Khan, a web-savvy young American who was the brains behind the Qaeda magazine Inspire, was also killed in the drone strike means that AQAP no longer has the capability to produce slick, high-quality media outreach to build a wider audience in the West. AQAP's English language propaganda suffered a debilitating blow with the deaths of Awlaki and Khan.

AQAP's audience was much much bigger because of them. A person didn't have to travel to Yemen or know Arabic. All someone needed was Google and YouTube. Their deaths were significant.

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**Washington should be aware of how U.S. counterterrorism assistance and cooperation affects domestic Yemeni politics.**

also closely involved in the foreign operations of AQAP.

AQAP is still an extremely dangerous organization—the jihadi group that the United States should be most concerned about—but Awlaki's death has degraded the outfit's ability to mount attacks in the West.

Awlaki was a brilliant speaker



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# The third gender

By: Nadia Al-Sakkaf

In Yemen, there are three genders: men, women and foreign women. This is what Sarah, a woman from North America said as she looked back at her three week journey in Yemen in the late seventies.

"Although I am a woman, I was invited with my husband to join the men when we were invited into a private home. I was invited to eat with men, chew qat and smoke with them and was allowed into their «mufraj», which was off limits for the women of the house, at least while foreigners were present," she said.

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**Western women are able to transcend somewhat the social barriers imposed on men and women in Yemeni society.**

When she asked why she was invited to attend men's sessions while other women in the household were not, a Yemeni man told her: "There are three sexes: men, women and foreign women."

This man meant it. The «third gender» referred to women who were treated like a man because they were foreign women. They were given the privilege of being a part of the men's discussions and the men's "superior" environment where intellectual talk happens and decisions are made.

Sarah said that it appeared that since she had an education and global exposure, it was ok for her to be present with the men. But she felt that for her too there was a condition - she had to be with her husband.

"I don't think I would have been treated in this inclusive way had I been on my own. I don't know what the situation in Yemen is like today or whether the Yemeni male community would invite a foreign woman to enter their spaces if she were by herself," Sarah said.

She fondly remembers a time when she was following her husband and their host up the long twisted stairs of a private home when, at the second floor, she felt a hand from between curtains pull her into another space meant for the ladies. That was the only time she got to spend with Yemeni women.

"Although we could not really communicate in either Arabic or

English, I enjoyed spending time with the women and girls. We used sign language around subjects like beauty, hair styles, clothing, and they decorated my hands with henna. When I rejoined my husband he complained: 'Why am I not allowed to meet the women of the household?' I told him jokingly: 'In Yemen there are three genders, not four!'

## Foreign women in Yemen

Western governments' travel advice to Yemen warns women visiting Yemen to dress modestly and respect local gender norms which largely separates men from women. On a travel advice site, Amy from the USA said that when she travelled to Yemen, sometimes she wore the black sharshaf or overall cover and wore a veil to go with it. "It feels a bit mysterious and it is a good way to blend in," she said. She advised women that in order not to offend and to get more respect, it is enough to cover their hair with a scarf and wear loose long dresses with leggings underneath.

In her blog, Louise Hallman who was in Yemen in 2006, says that western women are able to transcend somewhat the social barriers imposed on men and women in Yemeni society.

"This is indeed the general feeling amongst many foreign women in Yemen, but there are of course exceptions," she wrote.

Louise posted an article on her blog in 2009 on western women in Yemen, giving an example of how western a woman who - unlike a western man - are not confined to the male realm of the cultural divide. Emily Allardyce, who has been living in Yemen for the last nine years is able to move between these divides. She considers this to be a "privilege".

"Yemeni men seem to like working with foreign women. We can drive and go anywhere alone without trouble," says Emily.

Another example from Emily's blog was from Louisa Glenn, who during her time as an American student in Yemen, didn't experience as great a feeling of 'privilege' as Emily.

"Being Western on top of being female added to the feeling that I was an object of curiosity," said Louisa. Whilst she was able to chew qat - a locally grown plant that acts as a mild amphetamine - in male company and even attend male wedding parties, Louisa felt this was possible, not only because she was Western, but because she had a male Yemeni escort accompanying her.

Many of her activities when in Yemen - travelling alone, eating in the 'public' (usually male-only) sections of restaurants and even laughing in the street - were frowned



upon by her male chaperone.

Ultimately, even if she has to restrict her behavior somewhat, the Western woman is in a position of privilege in Yemeni society. Only she, and not her male counter-part, can move between the social groups, even if it is with a chaperone on occasion.

## The power relation

Yemeni men control the women of their society and impose their standards upon them. Because Yemen is a male dominated society, men define what is and what is not acceptable behavior. Foreign women, however, are outside the men's control zone simply by being foreign. This is why they get some of the privileges they do. Yemeni men have to accept them as they are, and invite them into their own culture, especially if the foreign women has a husband or a male companion.

In contrast, Yemeni women - because of the gender power relations - remain under the control of men and their version of what is culturally or socially acceptable and what is not. However, with the progress of the women's movement in Yemen, some women have been able to break the power model and turn the balance in their favor through economic, political or even social means.

For example, women who

hold a significant position in the government such as minister are treated very differently and are inevitably invited to be part of the traditionally male domain. Successful businesswomen have also been able to break the gender barrier, and there are some rare instances of Yemeni women who were able to turn the power balance in the social sphere and

become more at par or even above men. Examples of this are female community leaders in some rural areas such as Shabwa governorate, which is known for its strong women. Some women who were able to win elections and become members of local councils have been challenging men from their areas.

British Journalist Rachel Cooke has written about Yemeni female-male power relations, and her personal experiences when she visited Yemen in 2008. She commented on this in her article for The Guardian: Is this the worst place on earth to be a woman?

"In Yemen... an absence of citizenship rights for women horribly combines with crushing poverty to create a society in which women are not only the property of men, unable to leave the house without the permission of a male relative and vulnerable to arbitrary arrest on the street even once they have it, but are also likely to be illiterate, to be married before they reach puberty, and to die in childbirth."

The problem of Yemeni men-women relations as described by Cooke is with the power balance: "Male power is total, and not only in politics (one woman MP out of 301 members, 35 women represented in local councils out of 6,000). A

woman cannot, for instance, marry without the permission of a male relative; if she has no father, she must ask her brother, or a cousin and so on until, if she has no male relatives at all, she must turn to a judge. Women are regularly the victims of arbitrary arrests, picked up for 'immoral acts' such as adultery, smoking or eating in a restaurant with a 'boyfriend'. It is not only the police who can make such arrests; power is invested in all kinds of men from the minister of the interior to local neighborhood chiefs, even coastguards."

Therefore, women have to work much harder than men to prove themselves and to force men to take them seriously. This is because they are not starting from the same level, they are coming from below ground zero.

Many female activists in Yemen are currently demanding a 15 percent quota system for women in decision making positions in order to create some women's presence in power. However, they agree that the way to women's empowerment in Yemen is through education and economic independence. We can work on some urgent remedies such as a quota system in decision making positions but without working on long term education and economic empowerment nothing else will make the required change.

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## Yemen after Saleh's return and Awlaki's exit

### Was Yemen's support critical for the successful American airstrike on Awlaki and subsequent attacks?

Despite the coincidence in timing, with President Saleh returning to Yemen days before Awlaki's death, the drone attack was not a quid pro quo. Saleh was not allowed back into the country by the United States and Saudi Arabia because he gave intelligence on where Awlaki was hiding. The American operation was months in the making, so the timeline doesn't match.

Yemen, however, clearly plays a role in U.S. counterterrorism efforts in the country. Yemenis have resisted going after several persons of interest to the United States for domestic political reasons, but this is now changing.

Yemen is eager to be seen as a good partner to the United States. Many U.S. senior officials feel that the Yemeni government is now more cooperative than it ever was in the past. There is an elite power rivalry that is playing out in Yemen and different factions are vying for U.S. money and support.

Washington should be aware of how U.S. counterterrorism assistance and cooperation affects

domestic Yemeni politics. The current political crisis and potential transition will be impacted by how the United States gives its support and who it gives it to. The United States used to need Yemen more than Yemen needed the United States. But ever since the protests threatened the regime's survival, that's no longer true.

Success breeds success. The killing of Awlaki helps Washington encourage Yemen to go after the other wanted terrorists. The American administration's thinking on Yemen is much more mature than many people give it credit for, with Washington looking to find ways to make this situation work to America's advantage.

### Are U.S.-Yemen relations under greater strain?

There are diverging interests between Washington's reliance on the Yemeni government for counterterrorism support and an international push for Saleh to leave amid calls for greater democracy across the region. But the fear of terrorism is not going away. The United States doesn't know who is going to come to power next in Yemen and is trying to encourage the

government currently in control to do as much as it can today.

Washington is working with the reality that exists now. This doesn't mean that Washington is not pushing for Saleh's exit, but the United States wants it to be as peaceful of a process as possible. Washington would like to see a managed process, with as little fallout as possible. If things go bad, they're going to go really bad. The United States can't push through a final deal, the Yemenis need to make compromises and find a process that keeps tensions calm.

The Yemeni government argues that a transition process needs to be lawful and legitimate—otherwise they say it would be a coup. No matter what you think about the Yemeni government, President Saleh is the legitimately elected leader. Simply throwing him out right now without any sort of plan for what would come next could make matters worse.

There needs to be a way to move toward early elections. American policy has to be realistic and not always idealistic. Washington needs to find a way to help manage Yemen's problem and contain the threat of terrorism.

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**With the progress of the women's movement in Yemen, some women have been able to break the power model and turn the balance in their favor through economic, political or even social means.**

U.S. policy has been inconsistent throughout the Arab Spring. When it comes to issues of terrorism, security, and AQAP in Yemen, Washington has tempered the immediate desire to see change and reform. Balancing these two objectives is not easy and because the stakes are so high in Yemen, it seems U.S. policymakers are not pushing for too much change too soon.

### How effective are U.S. counterterrorism policies in Yemen? Does America's reliance on drone attacks reduce the threat of terrorism?

Drone strikes aren't the ultimate answer. When they work, they work really well and that creates greater pressure to use drones even more. The United States, however, can't kill its way out of the problem and rely on a remote control to defeat terrorism. U.S. policies shouldn't be all about counterterrorism.

There's also an important legal question in the United States about how military assistance can be used against protestors or to prop up illegitimate leaders that needs to be debated and answered. There is a growing narrative with-

in Yemen that its military units that have received U.S. counterterrorism training are the same ones involved in violence against the protesters. In essence, some people think the United States is complicit in the violence against the protest movement. The United States should be concerned about this and make sure that this is not the case.

And there are other ways to improve security in Yemen. The United States can support the rule of law, improve court systems, and enhance police work. Americans don't want to pay for these activities as much, but they will do more to reduce violence in Yemen than drone strikes.

The three biggest things that the United States can do to help Yemen and reduce the threat of terrorism are increasing access to water for all Yemenis, helping fight corruption, and supporting land reform. None of these are sexy counterterrorism raids that grab headlines, but all of them will improve America's relationship with Yemen—not just the government, but the people.

The United States needs to shift from having a relationship

with the government of Yemen to having a relationship with all Yemenis. This is even more evident as no one knows what or who will come next in Yemen. Right now, there is an impression among Yemenis that the government uses the AQAP bogeyman to get American support and the United States is subsequently seen as helping to prolong repressive rule. This is not in Washington's interest.

The United States treats Yemen as a failed state, but it's not yet a failed state. Without a doubt, there is a pressing terrorism concern coming out of Yemen and force must be used to stop present threats. No one would argue with this. But terrorism is not going to ruin Yemen—unemployment, corruption, preventable childhood illnesses, and a lack of water are the problems that will push Yemen over the brink.

There needs to be a better balance in U.S. support and more attention paid to prevent terrorism before it gets worse. It's short-sighted to only rely on counterterrorism efforts and more work needs to be done to ensure that the ungoverned spaces in Yemen don't get any bigger.

# Romance diffuses work tension between couples

By: **Esra Al-Radaydah**

**A**ny couple sharing their lives, the positive, and cheerful aspects and the negative, monotonous and tiresome angles. Things get even worse when the are both working.

With work pressures that leave couples spent and even peevish at the end of the day and the only thing they crave is having some rest with minimum room for conversation or discussion. By this, couples start sliding away from each other although both are smart and seek success with every step they take, which is neither a bad or a weird thing, because Freud, the legend of psychology, says that success elements are love and work.

Usually it is the woman who would take upon herself to rectify the situation. Thus she becomes desperate to accomplish success on both fronts. She makes vain attempts to strike balance between the two. However, all she gets is a widening gap between her and her husband and then she could do nothing but quarreling and working.

At this phase, chaos erupts between the two and bitter feeling surface leaving each long for a moment of romance, rest, closeness and love. Still such wishes in such circumstances and both sides' engrossment are unlikely to occur and thus focusing on achieving anything personal away from business becomes impossible according to Dave Singleton, relationships expert. Singleton won www.match.com's award for journalism and writing in 2003. He has published two books on relationships and their programing and bal-

ancing romance and work.

He explains on the above website that when you feel emotionally besieged, and love is fading as a result of stress and tension, you both have the right reach out for help.

The following advice have helped many a couple who recognized their situation and their need to attain equilibrium between work and feelings. They can give you an incentive and motivation for work while reinforcing your bonds and evaluating your connections further:

### 1. Explore what's really causing the stress

Is your issue simply work-related stress? Or is it something else, camouflaged in business casual? Sometimes people get addicted to their careers as a way to avoid looking at the problems in their relationship. Look under the carpet and make sure you're not missing any other issues that might be disguised as "work stress." If you've simply fallen into the habit of stressing and obsessing over work, then focus on changing your behavior first.

### 2. Develop an "us vs. it" mentality

"Nourish the overworked relationship by developing an 'us versus it' mentality," suggests Bryan E. Robinson, psychotherapist and author of *Chained to the Desk: A Guidebook for Workaholics, Their Partners and Children*, and the *Clinicians Who Treat Them*. "That way, work stress doesn't slither its way between two people that have become a couple — which, believe me, it will, if folks are not alert." In more clinical terms, "it's easier for couples to deal with high levels of work stress if they ac-



knowledge that this is a 'couple-external stressor' and can learn to separate 'couple-external' stress from 'couple-internal' stress," says Beate Ditzen, Ph.D., a psychologist at the University of Zurich in Switzerland who has studied the effects of stress on relationships. "Of course, in times of high demand at work, this is difficult to achieve." But it's clear that one can impact the other, and being prepared certainly helps.

### 3. Create anti-work-stress plans for two

"If couples can help each other with their stress levels, everything becomes easier, so why not build a date around stress relief?" asks relationship and wellness coach Elizabeth Scott, About.com's stress management expert. "Have a romantic evening in and create a haven from stress," says Scott. "Play soothing music, trade massages, and feel the stress melt away. Or, blow off steam while metabolizing those stress hormones. It's also a great date activity! Go hiking, ride your bikes out in nature, or take exercise classes

together — martial arts, yoga etc. These can create endorphin highs to replace your normally stressed thoughts, and are usually relatively cheap date ideas."

### 4. Hug it out

"Hugging it out" is more than just the infamous catch phrase from the HBO series *Entourage* — it might also be the best way to reduce feelings of strain while resting in the arms of your honey. It's no surprise that hugs make most of us feel good; now, science has shown that they're good for stressed-out relationships, too. "Our research suggests that hugs and intimacy between partners seems to buffer the negative effects of work stress on physiology, as measured through the stress hormone cortisol," says Dr. Ditzen. "This effect was shown in the laboratory as well as in a study by Hoppmann & Klumb in couples' everyday lives."

### 5. Put all your tech toys back into the toy box at night

Experts also suggest turning off your technology in order to dial down

your stressful feelings. "Watch out for how technology is separating us from each other," says Dr. Robinson. "There was a time when 'BlackBerries' were something we consumed, not the other way around. And when you had a 'Bluetooth' you went to the dentist, not a conference call. Our wireless devices have blurred our boundaries. Many of us think we have to answer a cell phone or text message immediately when it pops up, no matter if we're in the middle of an intimate conversation. I advise that all working couples have a verbal agreement that during certain times, thinking and talking about work and using electronic devices are off-limits on vacations and during fun date nights. Work tools need to be put away after hours, just like the saw and hammer after you've built those cabinets in the den." If you must engage in work on occasion during traditionally sacred "together times," be judicious. Allow a set amount of time to complete the task and then stick to it. Answer calls for emergencies only, make them short, and keep all ringers on

"vibrate" mode. Check your emails once a night — not every three minutes.

### 6. Develop some individual anti-stress rituals

"Each party in a relationship needs to have at least one activity or practice (a self-care plan) to pursue in order to combat work stress," says Dr. Robinson. "Good examples include vigorous exercise, mindfulness meditation, a hobby, or other pastime." Maybe your ritual is as simple as just taking an hour or two to unwind by doing your own thing before you meet up with your partner. Or use your commute home to focus on decompressing and setting realistic boundaries. Play your favorite music, listen to motivational CDs, or talk to friends to help you shift your gears from racing to cruising speed before meeting with your date. After all, date night is meant to be relaxing... don't you and your date both deserve to enjoy it?

*Special service to The Yemen Times from alghad.jo*

# Military toys: Imaginary warfare led by aggressive children

By: **Maryam Nasr**

**H**ala refuses to buy her eight-year-old son toy weapons because she believes that this could make him a violent person.

Child psychologist Simon James says that hostility is a negative in-born instinct and that families play a role in encouraging or subduing it. "When a child lives in a healthy family where he receives his parents' unconditional love no matter what he has done, he will be less hostile," explains James.

According to James, child desensitization to violence can be caused by media imagery and normalizing comments or behavior in the family environment. "Families should

avoid discussing subjects of war and killing in front of their children and prevent them from watching such gross images on television," he says.

James believes that a child should have one or two toys of this type to allow the expression of aggression. He uses toy guns in his work because they can help children vent suppressed feelings.

James advises mothers to choose realistic but harmless toys and to keep an eye on their children's language while playing. "Families might worry if their child shows a tendency to play only with these types of toys," warns James, "because this could indicate that the child has a problem. He's tense, oppressed and upset. However, as long as playing remains symbolic,

there should be no problem."

James also believes boys have no greater need than girls for play that simulates violence as both genders have an equal impulse to express frustration. Nevertheless, families rarely allow girls to play with toys of this type because convention generally dictates that females be docile.

James suggests that it is ok for fathers to play with sons using toy weapons when their children are young. However, fathers should also engage their children in other activities such as artistic pursuits and sports in order to avoid over-emphasizing the importance of recreational violence.

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*‘All human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights. They are endowed with reason and conscience and should act towards one another in a spirit of brotherhood’.*

The Universal Declaration of Human Rights,  
article 1

يولد جميع الناس أحراراً  
متساوين في الكرامة  
والحقوق، وقد وهبوا عقلاً  
وضميراً وعليهم أن يعامل  
بعضهم بعضاً بروح الإخاء.

'All human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights. They are endowed with reason and conscience and should act towards one another in a spirit of brotherhood.'

The Universal Declaration of Human Rights, article 1

# Marriage in Marib

By: Abdul Salam al-Sami'ee

**M**arriage services differ from one society to another and traditions, customs and values vary to help establish each society's individual identity.

However, the act of ceremony has same goal no matter where you go and this human heritage should be respected and preserved.

As it is the case with all nations, weddings and other occasions have their diverse rites as well as the values that govern them. Even within the same country, different provinces can have their own customs.

In Marib – and particularly in Murad province – wedding traditions are fascinating and unique.

## Consent

In Yemen, it is customary for the father to take care of his son's marriage. Often a father will become concerned when his son reaches marriage age – usually 15-20 years old – so he grids himself into action and starts phase one: finding the proper family.

Once he has found some suitable in-laws, the father, or someone representing him, will visit them unofficially to probe and see if there is a possible match between the two families.

## The coffee

As soon as there is a green light from the would-be bride's family, the second phase begins. It is called



the "coffee" – even though it has nothing to do with hot drinks – and involves the suitor calling at his prospective bride's home to pay around YR15,000 to 20,000 to his future mother-in-law.

Here he will become more familiar with his prospective in-laws and receive their final answer.

## Engagement

If the "coffee" phase succeeds, the next step is the dowry, which is evaluated according to established practices and is usually between YR200,000 and YR250,000 or about \$1,000 in Murad.

Part of this is paid immediately and the remainder when the marriage contract is concluded. This begins the engagement phase, which can last anything from six months to three years.

## Wedding date

As soon as the bride's family announce they are ready for the wedding, the groom's father or his representative visits them to agree on the date.

## The contract

In Murad there isn't usually a party to celebrate the conclusion of a marriage contract – and if there is, it is kept to a minimum.

The contract precedes the wedding by one week. Once the contract is entered into, the couple are legally married and so the groom buys clothes for his new wife; she receives dresses and accessories along with the rest of the dowry.

## Congregation

This is the groom's party, held for both families and attended by all their relatives and all people of the tribe including the entourage – those people who will later accompany the bride to her husband's home.

The bride has her party that is locally called "Yawm al-Nessah" where bulls and sheep are slain for the banquet and the bride puts on her wedding dress.

Folk songs, chants and dances are performed. The splendor of the bride's party shows her status among her family and friends so by the time she leaves home she will either be pleased or disgruntled.

## Invitations the entourage

On the eve of the wedding, the congregation day, the bride's entourage gathers at the groom's house and his father picks the participants carefully. The father should have already invited 20-50 of his friends such as dignitaries, good marksmen, poets, chanters or elders, either from the same or neighboring tribes to inform them that they had been chosen



the outskirts of the bride's tribe, they are officially received officially and begin their arrival song.

The chorale is usually prepared en route, metered and rehearsed professionally by the chanters. After singing it, the poems are submitted in writing to the bride's tribe, so the poets choose their words carefully. The arrival chant usually starts with a salute, introduction of the visitors and praise for both tribes.

After the folk chanting, the marksmanship starts. For safety purposes, this is usually carried out away from homes. The bride's tribe should have prepared targets in advance to test their guests' skills at shooting.

In this case, the visitors will have no option but to take out all the marks before they get in, no matter how much ammo they waste.

When all marks are hit, the visitors progress towards their hosts and greet them. There are "etiquettes" for such greetings where the visitors line up in order of age (the foremost places are given to the elders followed by each younger generation), or to social standing (starting with the tribe's highest ranking person, followed by the "second-in-command").

Only the oldest or highest ranking person is allowed to say the greeting: "May peace be upon you!" The answer comes from a person of the same status: "May peace be upon you too! How are you, guest?" To which the reply is given: "May you all be in good health!" The two sides then start chatting informally.



## Sleep-over and play time

If the bride's entourage comes from a nearby village, they have coffee outside their hosts' houses and near that of the father of the bride until the bride's luggage, including kitchenware and bedroom furniture, is packed.

But if they come from far, they are invited by the bride's father to have lunch and spend the night. At night they play games, challenge each other and improvise poems where each party endeavors to defeat the other. Here, the wedding turns into a magnificent intellectual event where views and artistic visions are exchanged – yet another reason the entourage is so carefully chosen by the groom's tribe.

## The final departure chant

The bride leaves her father's home in a formal festival that befits her and her family. She stops before reaching the threshold and steps out only when the departure mantra is sung. When she comes, out the chanting crowd walks in front of her and keeps singing for a distance of about 300 meters. Only then is she officially handed to her husband who, along with his companions, escort here to her new home.

## Couple's arrival

In appreciation for the efforts they have made, the tribe receives the brides' companions in the lavish and formal ceremony they deserve. The companions walk in front of the newly wed couple, singing folk chants at the tribe's fringe. The

celebration continues until the bride reaches her bedroom.

While the company are singing they are welcomed by the groom's family while the groom takes his bride to her new home where she is received by women from her new family and their relatives. When she enters the house, guns are fired until she reaches her bedroom. The companions move on to marksmanship.

## Marksmanship

This is held as soon as the convoy enters the village and when this rite is completed, they go to their hosts whose eldest or highest in rank ask them: "How are you, escorts?" and the answers comes from an equal person who replies: "We are fine".

## The banquet

The lunch is usually after the formal greetings when the village people who are also called gharamah or "contributors", share in inviting the entourage members to their homes. The number depends on the host's financial capacity, while the rest stay at the groom's house. Each contributor usually offers his guests lamb and beef.

After lunch people gather at the bridegroom's house to perform another custom of offering money.

## Money offering

When the comeback celebration and the feast are over, it is now time for rfid or money offering. All suite members, guests and those invited to the wedding pay money to the groom. The amounts given vary widely and those with the most money will even sell properties to show their wealth in offering money.

## Money paid by relatives

This is called orwah or ma'arriah. This is different from the money offerings; Orwah is paid only by relatives and in-laws and it has its own ceremony. It is also done on other occasions such as circumcision and death. This offering is paid either in kind or in cash.

The bride's family also sends their own offering of one or two sheep or an equal amount of money to their new son-in-law. The bridegroom, in turn, uses this gift to entertain the people who come to visit.

From this point on, the two families keep exchanging such gifts at various occasions. The advantage of this custom is to solidify the bonds between families and make them share both joy and grief. The gift given by one side is paid in the same or equal kind by the other. If the bride's family is from a far area, the two sides agree on when her father should take the gift to the house of his son-in-law. This can be either on the second day after the wedding or one week later. As it is the custom, the visiting group is received with songs before they are divided among the tribe's houses to have food and socialize together.

## Playing and entertainment

This a celebration held by the entourage and the bridegroom's family and it takes place at the groom's house. The games are played at night and include intervals of songs, poems and other arts that show the participants ingenuity and creativity.

## Entourage's banquet

The members of the entourage are not allowed to leave until they have lunch and stay overnight. They eat at the bridegroom's house together with the rest of the village and guests from outside.

## Family party

On the third day of the wedding the bridegroom's father-in-law holds a small party for his family and relatives to relax after the efforts made during the wedding.

## Conclusion day

The fourth day of the wedding is held in honor of the bride. On this day, the bride appears before all the women of the tribe. All kinds of meat are offered this day to celebrate the bride and welcome her to her new family.

This is the way weddings are conducted in Marib with slight differences from one area to another according to the customs and traditions of each. During such occasions, the man expresses his pride in his family and friends and makes a feast in their honor. The custom is that the guest or group of guests sing a poem composed by them then submit it in writing to their hosts to reply to.

## Funny situations

During marriages, amusing events occur that are dealt with either positively or negatively according to the nature of the event and its timing. One of these happened between the father of the bride and the bridegroom before the wedding day. The bridegroom's father warned his future son-in-law: "You'd better be ready because I'm sending you an entourage of too many men".

On the wedding day, the entourage arrived and there really were too many men. The bride's father, wishing to show

his readiness to receive any number of people, stood welcoming the visitors. And although the number was not small, he wanted to indicate that he was prepared for even a larger entourage.

When the entourage heard that, they thought the man was making light of them, not their number as he intended, though they had been chosen carefully from the noblest families. So when he realized that he was misunderstood, he improvised a poem to praise them and explain what he meant.

With this poem, the man could diplomatically get himself out of the dilemma by saying that no matter how many guests were there, his tribe's contributors were more than ready to host them all.

In another situation, the would-be bride's companions went to collect her from the Wadi Harib district were rather fewer than was deemed as normal, so the group's lead poet managed to get out of the embarrassing situation by composing a poem saying that the area they were

visiting was rather too small to contain all his tribe's men who wished to come.

There are some snags that might occur during weddings such as a death in the family or the neighbors'. Events like this can and kill people's joy and even postpone the marriage. And if it happens on the wedding day, it becomes even more difficult because marriage is not likely to be deferred, nor is it possible for guests to express joy while others are grieving. As a compromise, some events like songs, shooting, games or dancing are canceled to show respect to the

deceased's family.

Atone wedding under such circumstances, the poet could not make himself come to terms with the fact that no poem chanting was allowed. Believing in the importance of such a rite, he went to the dead person's house and recited a poem he had composed in which he apologized to the family, telling them that in other circumstances he would not dare to show joy and sing but that day was a special one. The bereft family and the rest of the village accepted his move and the wedding went well.



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# YEMEN TIMES

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## Reading the body gestures of Yemenis

By: Nadia Al-Sakkaf

Every nation has its own body language comprising of a number of gestures people use to convey specific messages. Here are some gestures used in Yemen, together with their description and meanings:

### Welcoming gestures



Even if it means **sacrificing my neck**: s is an expression made by slapping the hand gently on the neck indicating that the person will do the job/request even if it cost his/her life. It is used when there is a task containing risk or when there is an urgent need to do something and by not doing it, would sadden or harm the asker. Another expression for this is "raqabti sadada" which is the same hand-neck gesture but it means the person will take the full responsibility for the issue or promise.



**The best of the best**: "min hinna" is a gesture Yemenis use to describe an object or a place as top class. The person quickly hits the tip of the nose. It is said that this expression comes from the fact that holding the nose high signals top level and so this praised object is relative to holding the nose high.



**Welcome on the head**: "Ala alras" is often said while placing the palm of the hand on the head, to signal that that you are most welcome and will be placed on the heads of people in priority. It is sometimes said that if there is no space for you, the host or welcoming person will place you on the top of their heads.



**From my eye**: "Min aini" is said when you request something and the person promises to attend to your request with great pleasure and attention. From my eye refers to an old concept that if there is no way to fulfil this request, the person asked will give up his or her eyes to answer the need of the person doing the asking. The gesture requires placing the index on one eye and sometimes on both eyes one eye after the other.

### Warning gestures



**I will show you**: "lawareek" is said by holding the tip of the ear as if signalling that the person spoken to will have his ear pinched, either because of something he/she has done, or if they dare to do something.



**Shame on you**: "Allah almusta'an" is a gesture made by holding the chin and often declining the head to one side signalling that "I did not expect this from you" or "shame on you". Allah almusta'an literally translates to 'God is the one we seek to bear the consequence of your wrong doing'.



**Not a penny**: "wala fils" is a gesture that includes a slight sound created by quickly moving the thumb across the upper teeth from inside the mouth to the outside. It means 'you will not get a single penny from me'. It also is used to signal that someone is completely broke.



**Dare you**: "A'ar" It is a gesture made by slightly tapping outwards the back of one ear with the index finger. It is used to dare someone and warn them that if they go ahead and do it, the consequences won't be good.



**I will show you**: "lawareek". In this sign, one person warns another by using the thumb and index finger to make a circle and leaves the other three fingers extended as if indicting the number three while shaking the hand in this position with the palm towards the recipient.



**You dare**: "athadak" is another warning sign, by which the person hold his/her throat with the index finger and thumb at the location of the adam's apple and slightly pulls the skin to the outside. The sign indicates an extreme threat, as if saying I will cut your throat if you dare do this or that.



**In your dreams**: "Wala fi ahlamak" is similar to the one above, but here the upper side of the fingers is used as if removing something from the lower side of the chin. It can be used when someone is delusional and that what they are talking about is not likely to happen, as in 'dream on'.

### Grieving gestures



**What do I do with myself**: This gesture includes slapping one's cheek and sometimes both cheeks, indicating that a disaster has befallen him/her, and the person grieving does not know what to do about it. It is also known as "latm" which means 'slapping'.

### Other gestures



**Ignore it**: "tanish tanish" It is a gesture made by moving the hand outwards to the right side as if waving something away, whilst looking towards the other direction.

**Despite your protest**: "wa ala ainak" is used to tease someone that something will go ahead, despite their protest. The teaser rubs the fist of one hand in a circular motion across the palm of the other.



**Quick**: "fisa" this is a move made by snapping the index and thumb together and making a sound. It is usually done twice or more indicting that something must be done very quickly.



**Shush**: "ooh" this is almost a universal gesture, only in Yemen, instead of biting the fingers, the person bites the knuckle of the index finger from the thumb side, warning the other person not to say a word about a certain topic, or not to 'spill the beans', i.e. let out a secret in front of anyone around. Sometimes it is done by biting the space between the thumb and the index finger, and this shows great regret, such as when someone forgets something very important.



**Arrogance**: "zant" is a gesture made by tapping the tip of the nose upwards, using the index finger's knuckle. It expresses a sense of pride and arrogance, or "nose in the air."



**Give me your word**: "etba' wajhak" is made by gesturing a line vertically across the cheek, similar to the "terribly awful" gesture, only with this, the signaller is hopeful and encourages the other person to make a promise or give his/her word to do something.



**Terribly awful**: "shamat" when describing something as horrible, a Yemeni uses one finger to draw a line vertically across the cheek. It could also describe feelings of great despair.



**What a catastrophe**: "Ya musibatah" is very similar to the welcoming gesture on the head by placing a hand over the head but this has a totally different connotation. Also, when doing this move, it is often in a form of a slap on the head rather than gentle placing and is repeated more than once signalling what a disaster has befallen.



**Oh my God**: "ya wali" this gesture is common with many other cultures and is often used by women rather than men. The woman slaps her hand on her chest often while bending forward and back.