

SALAFIS IN YEMEN: CAUGHT IN THE REVOLUTION?

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Salafism in Yemen: Transnationalism and Religious Identity

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MARINA OTTAWAY: Good afternoon, and thank – welcome to the Carnegie Endowment. Thank you for coming. I am Marina Ottaway, a senior associate in the Middle East program here at the Endowment. Before we start the meeting and I introduce the speakers, I just want to say a few words to remember Christopher Boucek, our colleague who died a few months ago. The idea for this meeting, in fact, was first discussed between Laurent and Chris many months ago.

And we are very happy to be able to have the meeting and the same way we are trying to continue with and bring to fruition some of the work that Chris was doing. We are particularly happy to have with us another one of Chris' colleagues and good friends, Ginny Hill, who happened to be in town. And in fact, she will act as a discussant on this panel.

Laurent Bonnefoy holds a Ph.D. in international relations from Sciences Po in Paris. He is a long-time student of the peninsula, and particularly of Yemen. He has spent four years there, which is probably more than most people can claim to have done. And he has just finished a book on Salafis in Yemen, which is going to be the topic of today's talk. We don't have any copies of the book. This is my copy. But there are some flyers out there if you want – if you want more information.

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Ginny Hill is an associate fellow at Chatham House and runs the Yemen Forum. And in fact, she and Chris ran many activities together, including, for example, in Saudi Arabia and in Yemen itself. She is formerly an award-winning filmmaker and correspondent. And she has reported for the BBC and Al-Jazeera English. She has worked in Bosnia, Djibouti, Egypt, Gaza, Iraq, Saudi Arabia, Somalia, Somaliland and Yemen. So she clearly has a very broad experience.

Without further ado, I'll turn over the floor to Laurent, who is going to speak for about 25 minutes, half-an-hour and then we'll turn it over to Hill – to Ginny, and open it up for questions.

LAURENT BONNEFOY: Well, thank you very much, Marina. I'd like to first of all say that it's a real pleasure to be here and to be given the opportunity to present my work in such a prestigious institution. Well, the book that I'm going to – the book and research that I'm going to present today goes back a long way.

It actually goes back to September 12th, 2001 when I first traveled to Yemen right after completing my undergraduate studies in Paris. Well, most of you probably think it wasn't the right time to travel there and you are probably right and my parents would have agreed with you at the time. But still, I traveled there with the intention of spending a year there to enhance my Arabic skills and to sort of discover a region that was undergoing profound change.

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During the spring of 2002, I decided that staying in Sanaa was probably not the best of ideas and I went to the countryside so that I would be in a 100 percent Arabic-speaking environment. And so I stayed in a place called Yafi, which is situated in the northeast of Aden in former South Yemen. I stayed in a small town called Labos (ph), which is here on the picture, and specifically in a small faculty of students.

There were around 200, 250 students that were studying there to become professors in – or teachers in small schools – rural schools. What I was expecting to find there was a place that would be sort of preserved from foreign influence. But instead of this kind of place of pristine purity, what I discovered was a lost world of Yemeni authenticity and everywhere I could trace connections or links with the foreign world and strong influences and especially links to Saudi Arabia and the Gulf.

Also, what I discovered there living with the students proved very interesting. At the time, there were some elections – some student elections that were being organized. And over a third of the students rejected any type of participation to the elections. And they claimed that this was – this was hizbiyyah. This was partisanship and this partisanship fostered division among the student community and the wider Muslim community also.

And these students formed – these one-third of the students formed a kind of group that labeled itself Salafi and the others stigmatized them and called them ‘abu lahiyah’ – the bearded ones. And these – they mocked them and highlighted their alleged connections to Saudi Arabia.

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So rather than summarizing the whole book that I’ve just published, I have chosen here to focus on a specific issue that appears to me as particularly relevant to understand what’s happening currently in Yemen and where the Salafis stand in this revolutionary process. So my presentation will give you a few guidelines of the Salafi reactions to the Yemeni revolutionary process.

So Salafism emerged in Yemen in the early 1980s around a charismatic figure whose name is Muqbil al-Wadi’i. Muqbil al-Wadi’i passed away in July 2001 and Sheikh Muqbil, as he is frequently called, left hundreds of audio recordings, dozens of books, which you see – you have a cover there. There is another one – tens of thousands of followers and a set of competing heirs, amongst which the most prominent are Yahya al-Hajuri, Mohammed al-Imam and Abu al-Hassan al-Mar’rabi.

So these are three leading figures of the Salafi movement. Muqbil al-Wadi’i also established in the early 1980s an institute which is called Dar al-Hadith and which is situated in Dammaj, in the north of the country close to Sa’da. His former students and students also managed to establish their own institutes all over the Yemeni territory. You have the different spots there. Don’t mind about the different categories because this is something that’s a bit specific.

Muqbil al-Wadi’i turned out to be a rather complex character. Although he had spent a lot of time and had been educated in Saudi Arabia, during most of his career in Yemen he was very critical of the monarchy and although he passed away more than 10 years ago, he still remains a central figure in the Salafi field inside of Yemen but also outside of it, including in Europe and North America.

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So in less than three decades, Salafism has managed to emerge as a significant political and religious identity which manages to compete with other identities or traditional identities, particularly the Sufis, the Zaidis and also to some extent the Muslim Brothers.

Salafism, as it emerged in Yemen, is characterized beyond the way the people dress, beyond the way the people speak, the Salafis speak themselves, what I label as minor behaviors. But beyond these minor behaviors, Salafism in Yemen is characterized by its principled rejection of party politics, what they label hizbiyya – that is, party spirit.

So Salafism bans any kind of institutionalization of the movement and they also ban elections. Democracy in the framework of their own doctrine is perceived as wholly negative. As according to Muqbil al-Wadi'i, it means that people rule themselves and God rules nothing. Interestingly, also they consider that any kind of formalization of their own movement, that is through charity organizations, as something that is not positive.

And so they ban any kind of formalization of their own movement. And this issue of the formalization of the movement became an important point of contention inside the movement during the 1990s. So they consider that any type of man-created institution actually diverts the believer from worship and it implies a kind of loyalty to something other than God.

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The Salafi trend of Islamism considers that the priority for action should be proselytism. So what they call da'wa. It shouldn't be the search for social justice. It shouldn't be a way of improving society. We should only focus on God.

And we should try to apply the text in a very literal manner. And so the ambitions of the Salafis are clearly universal and apolitical. They consider that no matter the time and place, no matter the context, the teachings and prescriptions that are found in the Koran and in the Hadith and the Sunnah are to be implemented.

And so the scholars, when they give advice, don't need to know the context. They can be sort of free-floating scholars, providing they have the sufficient knowledge. They can give enough of a – enough of advice.

They can issue fatwas that are to be implemented everywhere. So the issues of universalism and contextualization are, in my view, central if one wants to define Salafism in a proper way; that is, to go beyond any kind of a stigmatizing label that Salafism has become over the last few years.

So in a political environment like Yemen, which is shaped by party politics which is shaped to some extent, although imperfectly, but by competition between the parties and elections, so the critique of hizbiyya – that is of party politics – became the hallmark of Salafism. Also, the critique of hizbiyya implied on the side of the Salafis a direct loyalty to the ruler, what they call the ulama (ph).

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So in order not to foster chaos and disorder among Muslims, the Salafis consider that in the face of dictatorship or oppression, the Muslims should be patient. They should only give secret advice to the ruler but no revolt and no opposition. So they advocate loyalty.

They also consider that violence targeting the state is negative. They consider, on the other side, that violence targeting so-called Western interests is also counterproductive because in their opinion the fact that there are a number of mistakes in the practice – in the religious practice makes the Muslims not powerful enough and not ready to confront the West.

So gradually, however, you find out that the Salafis got caught into politics. And this is what is interesting, that you have a kind of doctrine that appears to be very coherent. And then you find out that politics, everyday lives, everyday politics constrain the doctrine and that actors – the Salafi actors need to adapt themselves.

And so the apolitical Salafis, the ones that claim descent from Muqbil al-Wadi'i, were very active throughout contemporary history in stigmatizing other groups, and particularly Socialists but also the Sufis and the Zaidi Revivalists, which most of you might know under the label of the Houthi movement.

Interestingly also, while they are often depicted as affiliated to Saudi Arabia, they were for a long period of time very critical of the Saudi regime. And throughout – sorry – throughout the 1990s and 2000s, they emerged as allies of the government in the context of the global war on terror and against the Houthi revolution in the north.

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The limits of apoliticism are also manifest at the grassroots level. And this is something that's very important. You find out that the doctrine that is forged by the ulama is never fully implemented and that people adapt the doctrine in their practice to their own experience and to their own context. And so they make concessions and in the end at the grassroots level you find out that Salafism can be no more than a kind of subculture and a flexible subculture.

Beyond this core of quietist Salafis, you find out that another branch emerged and this branch emerged in the 1990s and has engaged in a more explicit politicization process. And so you have two organizations which are important in Yemen. One is called al-Hikma and the other is al-Ihsan. And these have developed a kind of ambiguous position towards party politics.

In 1997 and in 2003 during the last legislative elections, some candidates which were close to these organizations ran as candidates. This drew (sic) a lot of controversy inside the movement and led to the emergence of a sort of offshoot, which is labeled activist Salafis – the harakiya – salafiya harakiya.

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So although interestingly their doctrine – the fact that they endorse party politics should have drawn them closer to the Muslim Brotherhood, you find out that they remained very ambiguous towards the regime. They didn't clearly state whether they would side with the opposition or with the regime itself. And this debate on their siding occurred until 2009, 2010.

And this is where we stood in early 2011 when the revolutionary process started in Yemen. So building on this unease towards party politics, I will try in this last segment of my talk to look into the way the Salafis reacted to the Yemeni uprising.

So this Yemeni uprising of 2011 appears to have emphasized a movement towards greater politicization, either direct or reluctant. So Salafis are increasingly being caught in the political process. And the revolutionary process that started in a way forced the Salafis to take sides. They could no longer be in a kind of middle position saying, oh, we don't know if we're going to support the government or if we're going to support the opposition.

On the other hand, the quietist Salafis which were claiming descent from Muqbil al-Wadi'i very clearly reasserted their position of loyalty towards the regime. And so they remained very critical of the political process that was ongoing. You have Yahya al-Hajuri – so the main heir of Muqbil al-Wadi'i – who in a recorded conference stated that the historic event of the Arab Spring is a plague due to Masonic doctrine orchestrated by Jews who have exploited the Muslims.

And so in a very direct manner they consider that these processes are not internal. They are alien to Yemeni society. They are manipulated by foreign powers. And so this position of loyalty to the regime was consistent with past positions, with the doctrine itself.

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This position of loyalty yet triggered a number of violent events, especially in Dammaj – so close to the center of Dar al-Hadith. And this occurred a few months ago. The focus of the armed forces – of the Yemeni armed forces on Sanaa has sort of opened the field also for the Houthis rebellion in the north, in Sa'da. And so you have the armed forces which have sort of let the Houthis – they were forced to leave because they needed to focus on the capital.

They left Sa'da for the Houthis and this triggered a kind of reaction by the Salafis which were anxious and they decided – or they asked for government support. And so the leader – Yahya al-Hajuri – wrote a letter to the leading figures of the regime – not President Saleh exactly but some other figures, particularly his nephew – and asked for protection.

In retaliation to this, asking him for his protection, asking that the government come back to Sa'da to fight the Houthis. And so the Houthis in October 2011 started imposing a blockage around Dammaj. And this triggered a lot of violence, a humanitarian crisis inside the institute where you have hundreds of students, many of them being foreigners – Americans, French and from other countries.

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And so fighting occurred and left more than a hundred people dead. And this is something that is worrying because it can really trigger a kind of sectarian tensions and have the population focus on these sectarian differences. Also, beyond this quietist branch and the fact that it is getting more and more involved into direct politics or playing a more direct political role, other branches of the Salafi movement have emphasized their will to actually get engaged into direct politics.

And this is a process that started in the 1990s but which has really accelerated over the last few months. Obviously, the example of the al-Nour Party in Egypt is probably an incentive. I mean, this party really popped up. No one knows a lot about it and it managed to gain over 20

percent of the ballots. And so you might expect that this is an example for the different Salafis of the harakiya – so the activist branch.

Although the movement appears to be – the harakiya movement appears now to be rather fragmented. And so you have a different – a number of initiatives, a number of figures which are mainly structured around regional lines. There are some initiatives and one of them by – (in Arabic). So he's here, in the city of Ta'izz, which is one of the hot – hotbeds of the revolution – created his own party – the league for renaissance and change.

And this is an initiative that you probably need to follow because it is quite likely to become an important political actor in the months and years to come. Also you had fatwas which were published by the leading figures which supported the principle of the revolution, which was something that was new. But they rejected any kind of direct violence.

So one of the things that were triggered by the revolutionary process was a kind of maturing of the Salafi movement. And this is something that the Salafis themselves acknowledge. One of them from the al-a association stated that the recent events – the revolution in Yemen has let the Salafis mature. And so they are sort of bound to take positions. They need to clarify what their actual program is.

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Just a few words to conclude, again, this whole politicization process, the way that the Salafis are caught into politics, the way they start from a kind of apolitical or quietist doctrine and move gradually towards a more overt political role is something that is understudied and which is probably central and which will play a very prominent role, I think, in the years and months to come.

And so we probably need to start focusing on that and not repeat the mistakes that have been made when it comes to Egypt where, as I've said, I mean, the al-Nour Party was something that no one knew about.

And we need experts, diplomats, researchers I think need to prepare for this, for the emergence of these movements and prepare for the emergence of these movements also means not stigmatizing them as directly violent movements but understanding also the way they articulate their own doctrine and their own project with local constraints and with a doctrine that is not per se violent, although radical in a way. I thank you very much for your attention. (Applause.)

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MS. OTTAWAY: Thank you, Laurent. And before I open it up for questions, we are going to take Ginny's comments.

GINNY HILL: So most of my work at Chatham House is focusing on political inclusion, mainly around the youth movement, but also political economy analysis. So my comments on Laurent's presentation and his book will relate to the issues, my limited exposure to the Salafism movement in Yemen, but my understanding of the way it's connecting to the transition process.

And I'm going to look at the political intersection with the Saudi support for the Salafi movement in Yemen. I just – I mean, to start by saying that Laurent's book is an extremely valuable study on a very complex issue.

And it's a very – I mean, it's an extremely good articulation of the internal contradictions which enable you to avoid the kind of stigmatization which is really not helpful in terms of trying to understand the interplay between these different trends in an environment where relationships, institutions, patronage are much more reliable guides to the way that politics actually are carried out and doctrine and institutions.

Laurent used the expression flexible subculture to describe the Salafi movement and I mean, it really rings true with me in terms of my exposure to the movement in Sanaa. And this kind of culture around clothing and facial hair and rejecting culturing and watching TV, which are kind of major forms of socialization in Yemen and rejecting tribalism, partly because it's a class issue and the equality issue.

So within the tribal structure the system of authority and kind of aristocracy inside the tribal movement. The Salafi movement is appealing to people who don't come out at the top in that system. But it's also connected to the conflict between tribal law and sharia.

So this is a notion really of quietist Salafis practicing a form of self-exclusion and setting themselves apart. And even in the idea that the study centers are all located – often located outside of town and become contained environments where everybody's socializing together. They're all trying to practice this interpretation together.

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And Laurent used this brilliant expression in his book. He describes them as deviants and moral entrepreneurs at the same time. And there is this struggle against moral corruption but also an element of rebellion against parents and families.

And what's interesting about that is just how similar it is to a completely opposite trend, which has been the youth movement – kind of liberal, progressive, pro-democracy movement that's obviously been so prominent over the course of the last year but ultimately connected and a sense of disillusionment with the state ultimately, what the state is capable of delivering and how it's really not that relevant in terms of providing services or enabling people to have their aspirations met.

And also I think that the other aspect is the kind of emphasis on study of the Koran and Hadith is almost irrelevant in the job market. So you go into these institutes, you practice your kind of form of social behavior. You study hard. You're devout. You're diligent. And then you really can't make much progress in the job market and you've set yourself apart from your peers to an extent. And that creates these kind of adaptations and pressures and internal contradictions.

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The whole area around kind of Salafi participation during the revolution is not my kind of specialist area. But I think that Laurent is right that this is going to be a really important area to focus on going forwards, understanding how activist Salafism is adapting itself to the new

environment. And really, the precedent has been established, as you say, in previous round of elections when al-Hikma endorsed a number of candidates to stand in parliamentary elections.

It's a very limited precedent but it is there. And I really wonder, given how tough the kind of prescription – the moral code, this kind of social behavior – is for people to follow, what's the appeal ultimately for Salafism – activist Salafism and Salafism within the political process. How are they going to set out their mandate and draw numbers towards them?

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You know, al-Hikma has this charitable activity, the provision of social services, the building of mosques and schools. How much is that going to be appealing to people and in what ground are they going to establish themselves to increase their numbers? I mean, Laurent establishes a way that Salafism flourished in the early stages of unification and democracy in Yemen, which in a way was a form of innovation – a period of innovation and turbulence.

And in the same way, we've seen a great deal of turbulence during 2011. And really a process of restricting going on inside the political sphere. And we've just seen the beginning, I think, of what's going to be much more extensive restructuring of the political parties.

So we've already seen two new parties created since the revolution began. One of them is called justice and building and it's under the leadership of Mohammed Abu Luhoum, who is from one of the big Bakil families. But he sees himself as kind of progressive and a democrat, actually, within the Yemeni context.

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And the other one is al-Omah which is a new party affiliated with the Houthis. Saleh's ruling party still has a majority in parliament but he's lost a lot of supporters and a lot of MPs have defected during the revolution. So his majority is much smaller than it was. And even when he – if the elections, the referendum goes ahead on February the 21st, Saleh will still be president of the ruling – will still be leader of the ruling party.

So after the February referendum, how are these – how is this kind of turmoil inside the political sphere going to express itself in the restructuring of political parties? Laurent said that the Salafi sheikhs, many of the Salafi leaders have stayed loyal to Saleh during the revolution, consistent with this principle of loyalty to the leader. So presumably, in theory, after the February referendum, they will shift their support to the new president, which will be Hadi who is currently the vice president.

But theory is not always a useful guide to behavior. And I'm wondering about the overlap between doctrine and patronage and the extent to which Saleh's family and other players inside the elite, including Ali Mohsen, who has strong connections with the Salafi movement, will maintain their patronage network and their personal links with some of these players and what the balance is going to be between doctrine and patronage.

And that ties into a much bigger question about the extent to which Saleh's family and rival factions within the elite will try to maintain their power base over the coming years through the

retention of hard power – i.e. military units – but also their friends and proxies inside the transitional government as well as their informal patronage networks and the ability that they will have to do this, particularly Saleh’s family, when they no longer have direct control over the allocation of the state budget.

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And it’s really important to bear in mind this relationship between formal power structures and informal networks. To my mind, formal power structures in Yemen are nowhere near as powerful as the kind of nexus of business, military and patronage which kind of sits underneath the surface of the political institutions and the government.

And both formal structures and the informal networks are changing in relationship to this transition process. But the gap between them remains and it’s going to be paying attention to what’s happening in that gap that’s going to help understand what’s really going on.

We can talk a bit more about the details of the transition process in the Q&A. But I just want to comment on the role of the Saudis and their role in maintaining and supporting the Salafi networks in Yemen.

I mean, Laurent’s quite careful in the book to challenge some of the assumptions and the oversimplifications about that relationship and sets the religious dimension alongside lots and lots of other channels of influence and contact between Yemenis and Saudis, including trade, media consumption, pilgrimage, migration.

But the other strong element of this is the tribal links and the transnational patronage networks. So senior Saudi princes have been paying Yemeni tribal sheikhs for decades in an extensive network of transnational patronage. And that has been shifting over the course of the last few years, primarily because the chief recipient in Yemen – Sheikh Abdullah al-Ahmar– who is the patriarch of one of the elite factions that has come onto the streets and challenged the president’s family during the revolution.

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He died at the end of 2007. And he was the chief interlocutor between the Yemeni tribes and the Saudi princes who are managing the patronage network in Yemen. So his departure has really – it’s begun to change some of the patterns of Saudi patronage. And at the same time, Crown Prince Sultan in Riyadh, who is really like the key distributor of Saudi money to Sheikh Abdullah al-Ahmar, also died last year after a period of incapacitation.

And now, we have the interior minister, Prince Nayef, replacing him as the crown prince. So the principle remains. The Saudi transnational patronage will continue to flow into Yemen. But there have been some interesting shift during the course of the last few years. And in 2011 in Yemen, we saw conflict between three elite factions: Saleh’s family, Ali Mohsen, who’s is one of the military generals, and the al-Ahmar family.

The Saudis have been supporting – financially supporting all three of those factions all through the conflict. And the competition between those factions remains unresolved. So just to

add to this is the way that the Saudi intelligence network operates in Yemen. Senior Saudi princes in Riyadh obviously are very concerned about the presence of al-Qaida in Yemen. And Saudi intelligence networks have at times succeeded where Yemeni intelligence has failed.⁴

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So in 2009, there was quite a brutal kidnapping close to Dammaj in Sa'da and a German family was involved. And Yemeni intelligence networks were not able to or were unwilling to provide information about what had happened. But it was actually Saudi intervention that was able to negotiate the release of two small girls, young children, who were released from their hostage takers.

The rest of the family's fate is unknown. But Saudi intelligence was important in that incident. And also in 2010, you remember the ink cartridges plot. Allegedly it was Saudi intelligence which provided a tip-off that enabled those bombs to be found.

And Laurent in his book describes that when he began his research, he was – you were warned against arousing the suspicions and interest of Saudi intelligence networks inside the Yemeni Salafi institutes.

And in my meetings with members of the Houthi movement and their supporters in recent years, I've heard a very clear perception in their eyes of the link between the Salafi movement in Yemen, Saudi intelligence and the collusion of Saleh and Ali Mohsen and the Yemeni intelligence services.

Now, that is their narrative. That's the Houthi view. But it links to a wider perception that Salafism is a Saudi import and it's a kind of internal enemy which is an expression Iran uses. And that again is linked to the view that Saudi Arabia is meddling in Yemeni politics and has a controlling stake now in the transition process.

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And the assumption underpins that narrative and that perception, is that Saudi Arabia can get what it wants in Yemen. But what I see and what I've heard from my engagement with Saudi diplomats and others involved in the transition process and prior to the transition process is the degree of frustration in Riyadh with Saleh and the refusal beyond their sponsorship of the GCC deal to get directly involved in the elite violence which ran in parallel to the revolution last year.

Instead, the Saudis ultimately sustained the status quo and sent the message that these rival elite factions had to sort it out for themselves. So despite their cash resources, which are immense and much greater than Yemen's cash resources, they have limited ability and capacity to enforce their will.

And I think this chimes with the research that Laurent has done which shows that although private and public funding from Saudi Arabia has played a really important role in developing and sustaining Yemeni Salafism, it hasn't been able to control the trajectory. And it hasn't been able to prevent countercurrents emerging and critics emerging within that movement.

So it's just worth bearing that in mind, given the terrible state of Yemen's economy because Saudis have already shown during the course of the last year that when it comes to the crunch, they will be the ones that provide the diesel to keep the commodity supply chains running and that they will probably just keep topping up the economic – topping up the budget to keep things just roughly where they are.

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So ultimately they will be underwriting the new political settlement economically. And how will they spend the political capital that comes with that?

What preferences are the Saudis going to demonstrate during the post-referendum phase when Yemen goes through all the big discussions around constitutional reform, political inclusion, restructuring of the military and even federalism? And to what extent will the Saudis be able to shape the parameters of the transition and enforce their wishes?

And as Laurent's study suggests, it will be a component element but it will only be a component element. Thank you. (Applause.)

MS. OTTAWAY: Thank you very much to both of you. There is clearly a lot of material here to be discussed. I'll refrain from asking a question right now and reserve the right to get into discussion and let me open it up. Please identify yourself and wait for a microphone to come your way. Yes?

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Q: Laith Kubba, NED. Thank you both very much for excellent presentations and insights. I just wonder in terms of from a distance what seems to be among the Salafis other than their clear point of reference to the Salafi, the old books that they refer to – the Hadith basically, I wouldn't say the Koran.

It seems there are three trends have evolved. One is the one that you've highlighted which is evolving to the second one which is lending itself to political engagement while the first one is more reserved.

But we also know that the – (in Arabic), which is more the violent one. And we know that Yemen is a fertile ground for their recruits. So where does that fit in? And if you see them as competing within that market of young people, for whatever psychological, social reasons, going back to this comfort zone of the salaf, where do you see the trends heading? Who is likely to emerge and dominate that scene?

MR. LAURENT: OK, well thank you for this question, which you appear to be very well-informed about the Salafi movement itself. Of course, the purpose of my work has been to sort of look at other trends.

I mean, it's purposely that I didn't look into the Salafi movement because I know that – into the jihadi movement – because I know that there is a lot that's written. But I tend to feel that it's

very difficult to go beyond what one could label jihadology, which would be to go and retrieve, you know, texts on the Internet.

But then what do you make of these texts? You have no way of actually understanding the way that these texts articulate themselves with the context itself. And so I found a limit. And as a social researcher, I thought that it was a challenge and it was difficult. So I didn't look at this. But of course I'm not saying that it doesn't exist.

Yet, I tend to consider that jihadi Salafism is part of a different tradition, that they don't focus so much on issues of creed and of religious practice per se. They are in terms of their own reference a kind of separate branch.

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And they manage to emerge not necessarily as a kind of ideological movement, although there is a strong ideology, but they feed much more on the context itself. The fact that there is what I describe as a continuum of violence in Yemen, a continuum of violence in the different – in different places, say Afghanistan or in Pakistan, et cetera.

And this is how they manage to recruit people. Obviously there are some people who write the doctrine. But then they won't be able to find recruits or find people who will support them unless there is this kind of context, there is this kind of continuum of violence. There are a number of grievances, a number of frustrations.

And what we need to do is understand as social scientists, diplomats or whatever is to understand what do these grievances – where do these grievances come from. And obviously if you have a state of violence like the one that you find in Yemen currently, I think that this movement is able to feed on this violence continuum.

Other than that, I mean, if you look – when I was saying that they are a different separate traditions, Muqbil al-Wadi'i has been one of the first in the 1990s to be very critical of Osama bin Laden. He suggested, and I think this is very symptomatic of his own position and the position of Salafism or apolitical Salafism, if you want – he suggested that Osama bin Laden accepted to buy guns – to give 1,000 to buy guns but refused to give 100 to buy a mosque.

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And so there you can see that you have very different kinds of – I forgot how you say this in English – priorities, sorry – that you have very different priorities. You have on the one side a priority which is to enhance and purify the religious practice and on the other which is to find – to improve social justice, be it through weapons or through ballot boxes.

And so if you have these different categories, you will find that the jihadi Salafis in a way, although they have their own set of references, but are closer to the Muslim Brotherhood in terms of to the way they position themselves to issues of politics. Thank you.

MS. OTTAWAY: OK, there is a question back there.

Q: Thank you. It's Hamid Waa (ph) from the Middle East Broadcast Network. I will go back to the last question but I wish I can get a very clear answer to some of the questions. I wonder if some of the Salafists were engaged or involved in any of the clashes that happened in the past few month in Northern Yemen. I also wonder if the ideology or the philosophy or whatsoever of the al-Qaida Peninsula is popular among some of the Salafists, especially the jihadi Salafists.

[00:44:56]

And also, is there a possibility that we might see some Salafists engaged in the future in a military thing or any of the fights that we might see? Thank you.

MR. LAURENT: You want to answer, or –

MS. HILL: No, you go first.

MR. LAURENT: OK. The purpose of building ideotypes and categories doesn't mean that you don't find bridges between different groups. Obviously between the different traditions – the ones that the gentleman there traced – the three categories – the three Salafi ideotypes.

There are some bridges that exist. And you find out that a number of people – and this is something that worries the intelligence community, the international intelligence community – is that a number of figures who have studied in Dammaj, who have studied in the Dar ul-Hadith institute or the ones that was established by Muqbil al-Wadi'i were later – were sent to Guantanamo.

They were in Afghanistan, in Pakistan fighting. But obviously, I mean, if you have these single cases, you can't draw a rule from this. As I've said, they are a minority, obviously. A very small minority of the students who studied there end up being violent or turning towards violence. So there are some bridges. And yet, they are different traditions. I forgot. Maybe you can follow up on this.

[00:46:34]

MS. HILL: I can comment on this in relationship to – from a very different angle. But there is an integral connection to the politics, I think. You know, when you go back to 2009, I don't know how many people here know how Tariq al-Fadhli is. He was a former mujahedeen in Afghanistan. He came back to Yemen. He helped Saleh basically during the civil war with the socialists in the south in '94. He was one of these who was supporting the northern conquest essentially as the southerners see it – reconquest.

And he remained on the payroll of the state security services. He's married to – connected by marriage to Ali Mohsen. So he's a figure who illustrates some of the connections that make up the regime. And in 2009, he defected. And he ostensibly joined the southern movement. Now, in that period, the Yemen state budget fell by 75 percent on the previous year – its revenues – because of the price of oil.

But there was also the sense that there was an impending conflict inside the elite and that they were going to end up fighting one another at some point. No one saw the Arab Spring coming but they saw a succession conflict coming further down the line. Tariq al-Fadhli jumping ship was

seen as a – certainly for me it was a weathervane moment that this impending confrontation was on the way. And he has been involved in the conflict in Abyan. He's been involved in the conflict between security forces and the southern movement. So here's somebody with a heritage that is connected to jihadi violence in Yemen fighting in the contemporary political environment.

I don't think doctrine is really an important issue for him. But it's part of his identity, this connection to the wider religious violence. And it's being played out in terms of connections to the competition between elite factions, control over local power and competition between other Islamist militias in the same region. And I think if you take that map of competing elements, you see that happening in other areas of the country as well.

[00:48:41]

And even Dammaj, the conflict and the violence in Dammaj and Sa'da over recent years has also been connected to competition between elite factions. So although there is clearly work to be done and a way of approaching this through the ideology, there is also a connection to elite competition and patronage networks and the fact that that's just all breaking down at the moment. And then if you use the notion of the political marketplace, people are bidding essentially for loyalty and allegiance at the moment by raising the stakes.

MS. OTTAWAY: Yes?

Q: Dan Liebman (ph). Yeah, I just want to pin this down concerning al-Qaida. Al-Qaida is a revolutionary jihadist movement which fights outside of its country. It has to spring from somewhere. Are there any direct or indirect roots for al-Qaida from the Salafist movement?

MR. LAURENT: Well, as I've said, I mean, if you trace the main figures of Salafism, either inside of Yemen or outside, the way I describe Salafism, I mean, you have a very little overlap in terms of references – I mean, references which are favored by the jihadis and by al-Qaida are not the same as the ones which are favored by the Salafis – the apolitical Salafis.

One example is that you had in 2002 a book that was published by some of the – by the quietist Salafi trend in which they criticized all of the references that were used by the Salafis which was in a way surprising because you would have thought that they would, as, you know, an Islamist movement, focused on the role of American foreign policy, for instance, of Western domination on the country as a source – a way of explaining what happened and the emergence of al-Qaida.

[00:50:48]

But they didn't. As Salafis, they said, no, no the problem is not with Western domination. It's with these references that al-Qaida uses, right? And so you have very, very different trends. And, sorry, so –

MS. OTTAWAY: OK. Let me –

MR. LAURENT: You know, I'm losing track of what I'm saying.

MS. OTTAWAY: (Chuckles.) OK. Let me get into the conversation. And I'd like to do so first with an observation and then by asking a question. And the observation is it seems to me that we are going – that the writing is on the wall, that it is inevitable that all the organizations, whether it's Salafis or otherwise, that have been sitting on the sideline all political activity are going to get into the fray now.

I mean, it seems to me that the degree of mobilization that we have seen around the Arab world is going to affect everybody. I'm thinking – I mean, we talked about the Salafis in Egypt, certainly the situation that Laurent has seen developing in Yemen. I think there is – this is not technically a Salafi organization but I think – I would really, really be surprised if we don't see an increasing participation in Morocco by al-Adl wal-Ihsan.

That's not a Salafi organization. In fact, its origin is more a Sufi organization. But it's bound to get into the fray sooner rather than later, I say, because of this.

[00:52:29]

The question concerning Yemen and concerning other countries too is what difference is this likely to make in terms of the politics. In other words, how big a movement, how large a movement is this likely to be. And I know this is – it's very difficult to answer. But we were all, you know, surprised when the Salafis in Egypt won 20 percent of the – over 20 percent – close to 24 percent of the vote in the elections.

I think we know that if al-Adl wal-Ihsan gets into the fray in elections in Morocco it's going to make a huge difference probably. What about Yemen? I mean, is there a way of, you know, evaluating what is – you know, how significant is this – is the group, if you want, of Salafi adherents or Salafi-inclined people in that country? And what does that mean in terms of the politics of the country?

MR. LAURENT: First of all, I mean, we tried to think of how legitimate it is or how legitimate is it likely to become if elections are engaged. How many votes will it gather? You have to keep in mind that al-Isla Party – so the Muslim Brotherhood – in a way is associated by the people to the regime itself. It is an alternative but at the same time people know that it participated in government and it is part of the regime, even though it would remain critical.

[00:54:12]

And so, it doesn't necessarily appear as a new actor. While the Salafis themselves have this kind of purity. They have not participated directly in the government and that's for the harakiya branch. The quietist one is likely – I don't think it will develop. I mean, it will become more marginal than before because it has sort of lost legitimacy unless a certain segment of the population considers that the revolution only brought negative elements, that it only fostered violence.

And so they'll say, oh, the Salafis – the quietist Salafis were right because they were warning us against the revolution, they were telling us that it would only create chaos. And so it did and so they were right. We will continue supporting them. But if you have a real legitimate political process that is launched, then I think this branch will certainly not die out but it will retain its kind of a marginal status.

And so the other branch, the harakiya ones, will, because of their purity, emerge as important actors. They will also emerge as important actors because over the last 15 years or almost 20 years now they have managed to develop important charity work which Ginny mentioned.

They have organizations which are very active in taking care of orphans, for instance, and delivering services at the local level which in a way al-Isla has not forgotten but which has tended maybe to focus more on cities, more on the institutional level. And so this is a different – this is, sorry – a difference.

MS. HILL: It's just worth bearing in mind that the last elections – parliamentary elections in Yemen were now in 2003. They were meant to happen in 2009. Then they were delayed until 2011. So like the previous precedent, the previous share of the votes now is over a decade old. So it will be uncharted territory when we actually get around to the next batch of parliamentary elections.

[00:56:22]

And presuming that they will happen in 2014. So February elections – the referendum that's going to see President Saleh replaced by the vice president, then we'll have two years of constitutional reforms, restructuring of the military followed by parliamentary elections. It will be, you know, well over a decade previous to the last parliamentary elections.

And although there is this kind of maturation process of the Salafis and turbulence is kind of creating a new response and that we will probably see more organized activist Salafi representation in the political sphere over the coming years, bear in mind that the diametrically opposed trend with the Houthis as well. The Houthis now control their own territory.

They control several, you know, areas in several governorates and they show absolutely no signs of wanting to surrender that control. And during this transition process when everyone's talking about constitutional reform, my guess is that they're going to be pushing quite hard to retain that autonomy and for a federalist structure essentially.

And so these competing interests will have to be balanced inside the kind of – the final outcome which in a sense can only be a pluralist – a more pluralist environment. But I think at the moment there's still so many tiers have yet to be resolved even before anyone can get to that stage of parliamentary elections.

[00:57:44]

And the first one is going to be resolving elite competition and managing the restructuring of the military in a way that doesn't lead to excessive violence because there has already been continuous violence all the way through 2011 and there is violence now.

And even before the revolution, we saw the elite fighting one another. So that remains the number one threat. And I see it as a political pyramid, everything else kind of lies underneath that and party representation is several phases down in that political pyramid.

MR. LAURENT: Another part of the question was the effect that these movements might have on the political system. One of the things you always need to keep in mind when talking about Yemen is that it is a very conservative society. And so for a lot of people – for the vast majority of the population, particularly in rural areas, the social conservatism of the Salafis or the social – the extreme conservatism that the Salafis express in terms of morals is not a reach.

I mean, it's not something that is new. It's not something that the people are bound to reject. They might refuse it but it wouldn't make a huge difference for many of them. I mean, in terms of access of women to the public sphere or the political sphere. That is not something that would be considered as new.

Most of the people might consider that the Salafis can make a difference in terms of the quality of services and in terms of fighting corruption, in terms of bringing peace. And this is something where they might consider that they actually deliver. And so they don't really – the issue of social conservatism I think comes in second. Obviously you have a proportion of the population which is – which has studied abroad, which has a strong connection with a more liberal way of life.

[00:59:50]

Obviously this will have an impact on them. And this is probably the people that we usually listen to because they are the intellectuals. They are the people who are in the cities. But they are not always representative of the whole of the population. And for segments of the population, as I've said, this issue of social conservatism might only come in second. And you have the same kinds of trends.

I'm not a specialist in Afghanistan but I guess that's also where the Taliban are able to deliver. We used to look in 2001 on the issues of social conservatism and saying that they are much too extreme. They prevent women or girls to go to school. But in the first place, maybe girls didn't even go to school then. So for the families what was important was that they were able to deliver – you know, improve the situation on the ground. And that's what's significant.

MS. OTTAWAY: Thank you. Yes, back there?

Q: Thank you. Excuse me, Danya Greenfield with the Hariri Center at the Atlantic Council. Thank you for your comments. I'd like to return to what you were discussing a little bit, Ginny, in regards to the opportunities to open up political space to non-elites. There's been this elite competition, as you've referenced, for the past – well, for as long as anyone can remember.

[01:01:10]

And I'm wondering in moving forward the national dialogue is meant to take into consideration the issue of the south, the Houthis, the youth, a lot of factions and parties that have been left out of the GCC deal and the formal opposition parties that agreed to it that are now part of the system are still part of that elite. What sort of prospects do you see moving forward that that space might open up specifically to the youth, to other nonaligned groups that have really been left out of the process?

And if I can also add on a second question unrelated, going back to the role of Saudi Arabia, I'm curious what you see as or where you see U.S. and Saudi interests aligned and not aligned in terms of the next two years in Yemen.

MS. HILL: Good questions. (Chuckles.) I think initially it's going to depend on the cohesion of the unity government. The extent to which – I mean, obviously they're very contentious discussions and they've already been – and they're already in play.

You know, these discussions have been in play for several years. The extent to which they can be contained within a peaceful process I think is the question because my feeling is that the fragmentation dynamic in Yemen has really escalated this year.

[01:02:39]

And the potential remains, I think, for that to continue. So there will probably be violence going on in the margins or around the country ultimately. But I think people have a different attitude of that happening front and center in Sanaa. There's peace talks going on. There's kind of U.N. stewardship over the process and Sanaa is basically peaceful. That's one scenario.

The other one is a much more kind of extensive kind of conflict. I think the degree of conflict over the next two years and the extent to which the unity government is perceived to be cohesive and that those dialogues can be contained within a relatively peaceful process is the first question because I think the scale of violence is potentially going to shut down political space and change the kind of discussion.

I think the role of the U.N. is an important issue. I think Jamal Benomar, the U.N. envoy, has demonstrated twice now in getting Saleh to Riyadh to sign a transition deal and in getting the immunity law, whatever you think about those two things, the international community put their support behind it and Jamal Benomar's played an important role in making it happen.

[01:03:43]

And I've been speaking to Yemenis over the last few days while Jamal's been in Sanaa saying, you know, he needs to be here because we can't reach an agreement if he's not in the meeting, which is not necessarily very good for a kind of sustainable process but there's a sense of hope and trust that he can help manage some of this discussion. So I think the extent to which there is a kind of external witness to these discussions is worth bearing in mind.

I can't predict how it's going to unfold. But I do think that the issue of federalism needs to be addressed as a way of managing the kind of regional differences. And in terms of the alignment between Saudi and Yemen – Saudi and U.S. policy – I mean, certainly the priority issue is security for both countries.

But Riyadh and Washington have different comfort zones and different preferences in terms of who they deal with and how they go about doing those things. And I think during the restructuring of the military, American and Saudi preferences are definitely going to be influential. And I can't tell you how much alignment I see at the moment. But I think this question of different comfort zones and approaches has been apparent during the course of the last year.

MS. OTTAWAY: You want to answer that? OK, any more questions? Yes?

Q: Hi. Lucas Winter from GW. My question was about – for Laurent – what you think the – if we're talking about federalism and kind of a Houthi state or autonomous zone – what might be the future for Dar al-Hadith within this area and to what extent will the kind of Sunni-Shia discourse affect the development of the Salafi movement.

MR. LAURENT: I think that the future of Dar al-Hadith and Dammaj is rather bleak, I mean, due to the continued stalemate there. The Houthi leadership appeared to be keen for some time up until the last few months to sort of meddle down the differences that existed.

[01:06:05]

Possibly there was a kind of power shift or local power shift that explains why the Houthis actually decided that they should go against Dar al-Hadith and impose this blockade. But I have no specific, I mean, information or data on this.

What's interesting, however, is that when you had the Saudi intervention in 2009, the Houthis were – sorry – when there was the Saudi intervention and fighting occurred in Dammaj between not necessarily students – we don't really know if they were really students – but people from Dammaj and the Houthis, Abdul-Malik al-Houthi issued a statement in which he sort of downplayed the role of the confrontation. And he said, oh no, we're not fighting against students but we're fighting against tribesmen from this region.

And so he was eager to not portray this as a sectarian tension and to portray himself also as the representative of all the people from Dammaj and all the people from Sa'da. And so that was important also in the way that he portrayed himself, not only as a Zaidi Revivalist but also someone originating from this region.

But things appear to have shifted again. And this position was interesting because also the Salafis Sa'da and Yahya al-Hajuri was very offensive against the Houthis at the time. Because of Saudi intervention and because a number of leading scholars in Saudi Arabia – particularly – (in Arabic) – issued statements saying that fighting the Houthis was jihad, fighting the Houthis for the Saudi army in Yemeni territory.

[01:08:07]

This was the first foreign intervention of the Saudi army in many, many years. And so this was something that was really significant inside – for the debate inside Saudi Arabia. And so Yahya al-Hajuri was also issuing statements that the Houthis had to be fought and that it was in the framework of a jihad. And at the same time, the Houthis were trying to sort of meddle this kind of position and to find not common ground but to emerge as the representatives of Sa'da.

So yeah, if the situation continues as it is, if the people, I think, in Sa'da consider that there is no future for political process, for a centralized political process, I think they will continue to turn towards the Houthis. And the Houthis have sort of a boulevard in front of them. I mean, they can

continue to have this kind of position saying that we need to defend our own identity – regional and religious. And the situation will be difficult for the Houthis.

But if the process opens up, if the people in Sa'da like everywhere, feel that there is a kind of future, that the state is including our grievances and is taking into account our grievances, then the possibility to have, you know, a kind of movement that focus on local identities, on, you know, exclusive identities I think will be more and more difficult. I mean, the people will turn towards the state if the state is in the capacity to delivery something to them.

MS. OTTAWAY: Do you want to add something? OK, yes, sir?

[01:09:47]

Q: David Newton, Middle East Institute. Partly historical question, but we haven't mentioned Ali Abdullah Saleh at all and how would you characterize his efforts at divide-and-rule, manipulative efforts. What effect did this have on the movement? It's also pretty hard to be quietist when you have Ali Mohsen on one side and Ali Abdullah Saleh on the other. Was any of this fracturing – you think could this be attributed partly to Ali Abdullah's efforts?

MR. LAURENT: I don't think so, not directly. I mean, it obviously has created a newer kind of context where you have competing movements. But basically Ali Abdullah Saleh has tried either with the quietest branch or the harakiya branch to maintain good relations with them.

As I've said during the presentation, even in 2009 when the people and the parties were preparing for legislative elections, which ended up being postponed, but no one was actually sure as to where the harakiya Salafis would stand and with them and they would sort of lead the more religious face of its own movement.

And that's also you can put this in the framework of the whole debate with the kind of religious police with – (in Arabic) – sorry – where you had the state – the Yemeni government and people from the – (in Arabic) – who in coordination with a number of figures from the Islamist field and particularly Zindani, to sort of portray the state as religious and to portray the state as the main actor of enforcement of religious norms.

And so they claimed to have established a religious police, never really came into effect but I think that was an important step in actually sort of retaining religious legitimacy also in the face of the Muslim Brothers which hare moving closer to a kind of – to a kind of very overt opposition with JMP – with the joint meeting parties.

[01:12:24]

MS. OTTAWAY: Nothing to add? (Chuckles.) OK. Yes? This seems to be the end. You still have one? (Chuckles.) OK.

Q: OK. To what extent some of the philosophy or some of the cult of the – of Salafis is popular among Yemenis?

MR. LAURENT: It's very difficult to say. I mean, you have no kinds of ways of measuring this in a precise manner. I think that at the very local level, it can be very popular. As Ginny was pointing out, the movement has the habit, in a way, to sort of develop in places where they can find no sort of competition around them.

So it is easier when you're a Salafi cleric to go open a mosque in a place where there is no mosque, obviously. And so you end up creating sort of Salafi spaces, you know, where you have – or a Salafi cluster where you will have Salafi bookshops or you will have Salafi honey shops. Also they're very active in the honey business. And all these things where they end up being sort of creating an independent space.

And in these spaces, obviously, they're very popular because they manage to draw a lot of people, outsiders also. But when the people inside the village, for instance, see that people are coming to their village, then they will be – you know, this will be an incentive for them to also start being affiliated to the Salafi movement.

[01:14:20]

Then there is also – so you have certain spaces like this. You have other spaces where obviously they are not present at all. And then you have the issue of generations also. And I think this is really central. As Ginny was pointing out, there are certain incentives to become a Salafi when you are young, when you are a young Yemeni because that's a way of rebelling against your own society in a way.

That's the way you're going to be heard. That's also the way you're going to sort of emerge as a charismatic figure. And so when I was mentioning that around a third of the students in Yafi – so in the faculty where I was staying – out of around 250 but then when I stayed there other times, the number of students really rose. But it was still around a third of them.

But this could basically be explained by a kind of, you know, fashion. It was fashionable to be a Salafi at the time in this specific context. It didn't mean that if you looked, you know, five years ahead – and I've met people who I had met in 2002 and I met them again in 2006 and they had really evolved their own position because just because they were no longer in this kind of environment where you had incentives to be a Salafi, to be the toughest guy.

[01:15:42]

But I think this is the same kind of process that you get, you know, with some kinds of subcultures or fashions that you have in the U.S. and France and all over the world, you know, where people are hippies in some generation, where they are straight-edge at some point or punks or whatever. And it doesn't mean that the whole movement – the whole Salafi movement can be defined through this subculture thing. But it's an important aspect of it. And this is what explains that in certain instances it is very popular and very significant. But then again, the fact of this popularity doesn't mean that it will actually deliver in terms of ballots and all because you have other trends that add up to this.

You know, it can just be because, for instance, if you're going to vote, you might want to vote for someone from your village even though he's not a Salafi himself rather than someone from

the Isla Party which is from the village or another tribe with which your tribe is in competition. So you have a lot of different dynamics that really overlap and that create a very complex picture.

MS. HILL: Yeah, I just want to add by using one of the stories in Laurent's book actually, which I really loved. There's a lot in the book about migration from Yemen to the Gulf and Saudi and how that's had an impact on Salafism and the economy and culture. And there's this great story from Yafi where you were studying where it's the ones who didn't go to Saudi who were the Salafis.

So although there's this connection in people's minds between Saudi – it's a Saudi phenomenon in Yemen. It's the ones that have actually been to Saudi and come back or the ones that stayed in Saudi that haven't been a convert to Salafism. It's the ones that got left behind.

And in the context of youth unemployment, poverty, I don't – I mean, I just wonder how that all plays together in terms of why people are attracted to that subculture.

[01:17:41]

MS. OTTAWAY: I think we have come to the end of the questions. We have not come to the end of the topic. I think you can expect us to – we'll hear about the Salafis again in a number of countries. You can expect more events dealing with this issue. I'd like to call your attention before I close to a paper on Salafis in Egypt that we published recently, which is very interesting in the sense that it shows how the larger political participation ends up by changing this movements a lot.

Just in the brief period – Salafis in Egypt have been overtly in politics just for a matter of months at this point. And just in that period of a few months, the change in the thinking and the style of what they were saying changed dramatically according to the work that we have just published. So that essentially there is, you know, on the one side you have these – the doctrine, essentially – the ideas that Laurent has explained so well.

But then you also have the changes that are imposed by the larger political participation. So I think we are going to see an enormous amount of evolution on the part of all these movements. And why I take seriously – we all should take seriously Laurent's warning that we really need to start taking these movements more seriously and pay more attention to them.

I think it's difficult to do so. (Chuckles.) We really don't have very much to base our conclusions on at this time. But certainly there is work in progress here. Please help me thank the two speakers, Laurent to begin with but also Ginny. (Applause.)

(END)