

Jizān ○ ○ Abū 'Arish

ZONE OF
IMĀMS INFLUENCE

○ Şa'da

○ Qaflat al-Udhar

○ Shahāra

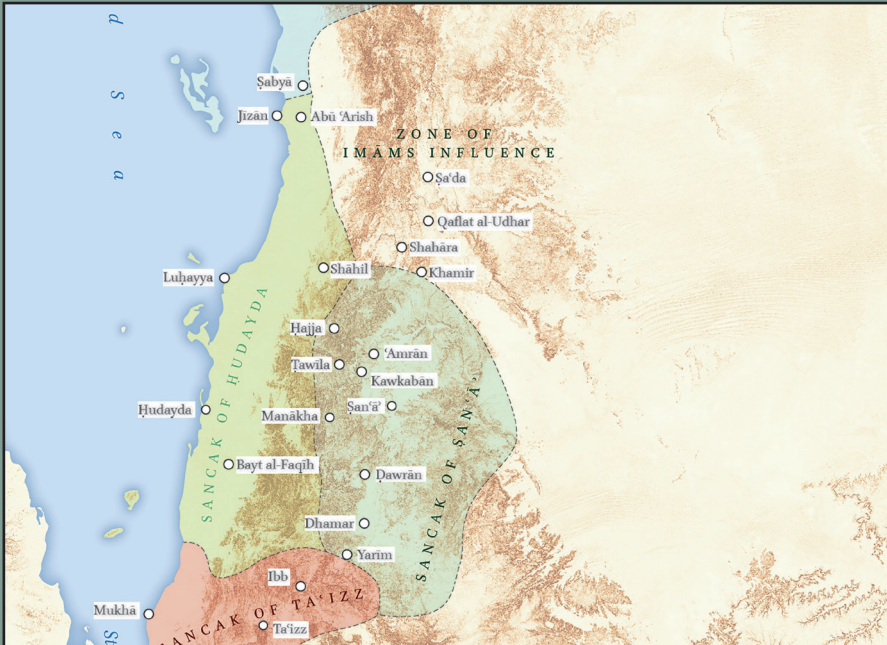
○ Shāhil

○ Khamir

Luhayya ○

Vincent Wilhite

Guerrilla War, Counterinsurgency, and State Formation in Ottoman Yemen, 1872–1911



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Yemen, 1872–1911**

By

Vincent Wilhite



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To my parents



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Introduction

This book examines the nexus between guerrilla war, counterinsurgency, and state formation in Ottoman Yemen from 1872 to 1911. To construct its analysis, it draws on military theories of guerrilla war and counterinsurgency, anthropological theories of tribal state formation, and political science theories of modernizing absolutisms.

Chapter one sets out the theoretical framework of the study. On the one hand, it discusses its specifically military aspects, using theories of total war, guerrilla war and counterinsurgency. On the other, it addresses its political aspects: that is, the political culture of the Zaydi tribes of Yemen, and the structure and ideology respectively of the Zaydi imamate and the Ottoman caliphate.

Chapter two discusses the military and political history of the Zaydi imamate of Yemen in the years prior to the Ottoman occupation. It traces the evolution of the imamate from an institution based on “charismatic” authority, as exemplified in the character of the imams as charismatic military and spiritual leaders, to one modeled on “patrimonial” authority, of state institutions centered around the person of a powerful monarch. From thence it discusses the collapse of the imamate as a result of the loss of revenue and the corrosive influence of tribalism. It analyzes the character of warfare in this period as essentially “limited,” based on the values of tribal culture rather than those of Islam.

Chapter three recounts the Ottoman campaigns to occupy Yemen. It takes as its starting point the strategic theory of the British officer Colonel C.E. Callwell, who analyzed wars between the disciplined regular troops of the modern state and “irregular warriors.” Callwell focuses on rapid campaigning and bringing the irregular warriors to battle as early and often as possible, in order to use the superior discipline and armament of the regular troops to inflict a decisive defeat on them. This chapter shows how these concepts played out in the Ottoman conquest of Yemen.

Chapter four discusses the nature of war between the Zaydi tribesmen and the Ottoman forces in the early years of Ottoman rule in Yemen. It shows how these wars were essentially “limited” in nature: short-term tribal uprisings on the Zaydi side, and short-term punitive expeditions to punish the tribesmen on the Ottoman side. It argues that despite the weakness of the Ottoman forces in Yemen Ottoman rule was fairly stable in this period because the Zaydi tribesmen could not mount a sustained resistance to it.

Chapter five discusses the first major Zaydi rebellion in Yemen, the uprising of 1891 led by Imam al-Manṣūr. It shows how the imam was able to construct an alliance of the major Zaydi tribes of Yemen and lead them in a united uprising against the Ottoman government, seriously threatening their continued presence in the highlands of Yemen. Because of the weaknesses in organization and armament of the Zaydi rebels, however, the Ottomans were able to crush the rebellion fairly swiftly. Nonetheless, Imam al-Manṣūr had constructed a state that could organize the Zaydi tribes for war; and from this time the Ottomans would face Zaydi military resistance that was increasingly long-term and sophisticated.

Chapter six analyzes the guerrilla resistance organized by Imam al-Manṣūr against the Ottoman government after the 1891 rebellion. It shows how he recruited the tribesmen into guerrilla bands called *ʿiṣābāt*, which engaged in hit and run attacks against the Ottoman garrisons, collected taxes in the name of the imam, and mobilized the population for war. It argues that these *ʿiṣābāt* constituted the core of a counter state that was able to organize long-term military resistance against the Ottomans.

Chapter seven analyzes the counterinsurgency strategy of Ahmed Feyzi Paşa, the Ottoman officer who put down the 1891 rebellion. It argues that his policy was based on “punitive repression;” that is, the insurgency was treated as a military problem which could be dealt with by pure force. I show that this policy failed to suppress the rebellion because Feyzi Paşa did not have the military or financial resources to crush the insurgency in a decisive manner. Likewise, Feyzi Paşa did not make meaningful efforts to win the support of the population, which was necessary in the event of a failure of a policy based on pure force. Understanding this, Feyzi Paşa’s successor Hüseyin Hilmi Paşa would try to implement a policy of “soft” counterinsurgency, in which efforts to gain the voluntary support of the population would play a major role.

Chapter eight analyzes the “soft” counterinsurgency policies of Hüseyin Hilmi Paşa. These involved efforts to root out corruption among the Ottoman officials, rationalize the tax system and make it more humane, and expand the educational system. It shows, however, that the Ottoman government lacked the resources to implement a thoroughgoing program of “soft” counterinsurgency in the same way that it lacked the resources to make a policy based on pure force to succeed. In consequence, Hüseyin Hilmi Paşa was unable to bring lasting peace to Yemen, and the 1904–5 rebellion broke out shortly after his departure.

Chapter nine recounts the major military campaign against the imam undertaken in 1898–9 by the commander of the Ottoman forces in Yemen Abdullah Paşa. It discusses the tactics respectively of the Ottoman troops and

the Zaydi tribesmen. It shows how this campaign could not suppress the rebellion because essentially it was nothing more than a punitive expedition on a grand scale, rather than a permanent attempt to suppress the imamate. Again, this was due to the limited military resources available to the Ottomans. In consequence, the campaign did not succeed even temporarily in putting an end to the violence in Yemen; and it was followed a few years later by the outbreak of the 1904–5 rebellion.

Chapter ten discusses the 1904–5 rebellion, organized by Imam Yaḥyā, the son of Imam al-Manṣūr. It shows how steady improvements in the armament and military sophistication of the Zaydi rebels enabled them to drive the Ottoman forces out of the highlands of Yemen, and later to destroy an Ottoman expeditionary force in a major battle at the fortress of Shahāra. It argues that this rebellion marked the high point of the “totalization” of the wars in Yemen, involving increasingly deadly weaponry, tactics and strategies of attrition and, on the Ottoman side, an attempt to suppress the imamate once and for all. After this rebellion the Ottomans began to understand that they could not suppress the imamate militarily, and their policy would gradually shift toward negotiation.

The conclusion discusses the shift in Ottoman policy toward negotiation with the imam. The deposition of Abdülhamid who could not tolerate the imamate because he saw it as rivaling his caliphate, paved the way for the Ottoman government to reconsider its policy of non-negotiation with the imam. This effectively marked the end of the “totalization” of war in Yemen. After a final major rebellion in 1911, İzzet Paşa, the general responsible for suppressing the rebellion, opened negotiations with the imam and was able to conclude a peace with him based on a power-sharing arrangement between the Ottomans and the imam in the Yemeni highlands. In this case, then, war was used as an instrument of policy to achieve a favorable peace, rather than as a total struggle to achieve the complete destruction of the enemy. From this historical example, I argue for the importance of leaving room for negotiation in irregular warfare in conjunction with standard counterinsurgency measures when a state is faced with guerrilla warfare. I close my book with some brief remarks on the Houthi movement in Yemen, both tracing its roots in Zaydi history and showing how in some respects it represents a new and modern phenomenon.

Approaches to Total War, Guerrilla War and Counterinsurgency

Our study will analyze the development of guerrilla war and counterinsurgency in Ottoman Yemen from 1872 to 1911. We will focus on the gradual escalation of the conflict, from limited toward what we may loosely term total forms of warfare. The term “total war” may seem to be an imposition of concepts from European military history. We will show, however, that this was not the case. The conflict in Yemen was a war between the expanding Ottoman state and the Zaydis, the Shiite sect of the northern highlands. We will see that this conflict was profoundly affected by the currents which gradually drew Europe into World War I, such as the burgeoning trade in weapons and the growing power of the bureaucratic state.

Such developments would impact the political self-definition of both Zaydis and Ottomans, in such a way as to bring them into deep ideological opposition. This opposition, combined with the steadily increasing war-fighting capability of both sides, led them into a protracted conflict. As a military struggle, this conflict had important elements in common with the guerrilla wars of the twentieth century, whose strategy has evolved in such a way that they can be considered as wars with a total aim.

In this particular context, a closer definition of what we mean by limited and total war will serve to clarify our analysis. Limited war is usually focused on achieving a specific political objective, conducted on a short-term basis between parties having a shared political and military ethos. Such an ethos defines the limits within which violence can take place; and this tends to restrict warfare to armed combat between warriors or professional soldiers, rather than involving the population at large. The aim is the achievement of the objective within the parameters of the political and military “game,” rather than the destruction of the enemy forces.

Total war, by contrast, is aimed at the complete military and political destruction of the enemy. Such war is frequently grounded in opposing ideologies on both sides, which make the political and military existence of the enemy unacceptable. Accordingly, total wars may discard the “rules” of warfare implicit in limited war in favor of military expediency. Total war may involve the mobilization of the noncombatant population on a large scale, to provide political and logistical support to noncombatants. The civilian

population is also more likely to be subject to attack, as a means of undermining the social and economic base which supports the enemy army. While limited wars are conservative by nature, total wars have the potential for both massive social destruction and large-scale social transformation.

The contrast between limited and total war has been developed largely within the context of European military history.¹ How well do these criteria apply to the transformation of war in Yemen? We will argue that they do, provided that the appropriate qualifications are made, and events situated within their cultural context. We will approach the transformation from limited toward total war from three perspectives: the principles of total war, the strategic principles of unconventional war, and the political traditions of the Zaydis and Ottomans respectively. We will show that the experience of fighting one another gave rise on both sides to a process of state-building and organization for war which in turn tended to intensify the conflict. If the wars in Yemen never could or did become total wars on the model of World War I or World War II, they at least were based on some of the same principles; and thus, we will begin with a discussion of these principles.

1 The Principles of Total War

The origins of the concept of total war, and of the distinction between total wars and limited wars, lie with the Prussian officer Carl von Clausewitz. In his book *On War* Clausewitz postulates that war is an act of violence to force the enemy to do our will, and that there are no logical limits to the application of that violence. "If one side uses force without compunction ... while the other side refrains, the first will gain the upper hand. That side will force the other to follow suit; each will drive its opponent toward extremes, and the only limiting factors are the counterpoises inherent in war ..."² Thus war tended inexorably toward what Clausewitz termed the "pure concept of war" or the "absolute character of war."³ We may call this the principle of escalation in war, and we will see that this played an important role in the Ottoman wars in Yemen.

This concept of the inexorable progression of war to extremes dovetailed with Clausewitz's concept of the ideal objective in war, the destruction of the

1 A contrast is often made between the limited wars of the eighteenth century and the mass mobilizing, nationalist military conflict that began with the French Revolution. For one discussion of this transformation, see Howard, *War* 75–93.

2 Clausewitz, *On war* 75–6.

3 Clausewitz, *On war* 579–80.

enemy forces. "The fighting forces must be destroyed: that is, they must be put in such a condition that they can no longer carry on the fight. Whenever we use the phrase "destruction of the enemy forces" this alone is what we mean."⁴ In the escalation of the conflict in Yemen the Yemeni tribesmen did indeed put the Ottoman forces in Yemen in a condition where they could no longer carry on the fight.

Yet Clausewitz cautioned his readers that the pure concept of war was a theoretical construct rather than a material reality. This is because, first, war is an act of policy designed to achieve a political objective; and second, because multiple real-world factors impinge on the conduct of war and prevent it from achieving its ideal form. Among these factors is the political object of war, the aim for which a given war is fought.

The political object would determine the military objective to be reached and the level of violence necessary to achieve it. A military objective that matches the political object in scale will grow or diminish in tandem with the growth or diminishing of the political objective. "Thus it follows that ... wars can have all degrees of importance and intensity, ranging from a war of extermination down to simple armed observation."⁵

What we will see in our study is that, on the Ottoman side, the political objective gradually changed in accordance with the increasing military sophistication of the Yemeni tribesmen under the leadership of the imams, the traditional leaders of the Zaydi Shiite community. As the rebellions in Yemen increased in scale and intensity the Ottoman political objective changed from short-term punishment of individual tribes to the suppression of the imamate; and this pushed the conflict in Yemen further up the scale toward "absolute war."

The political object of war is the most important factor influencing its conduct; but there are many others which impact war and prevent it from achieving its ideal form. The most important of these is friction, the interplay of danger, human frailty and chance which makes countless things go wrong in war. For example, "fog can prevent the enemy from being seen in time, a gun from firing when it should, a report from reaching the commanding officer."⁶ Other factors include the prevailing ideologies of the time and the personalities of the statesmen and officers responsible for prosecuting the war. War is thus not a collision between two destructive elements which exert unrelenting pressure on one another until one or the other succumbs, but a buildup

4 Clausewitz, *On war* 90.

5 Clausewitz, *On war* 81.

6 Clausewitz, *On war* 120.

“of tension between two elements which discharge energy in discontinuous, minor shocks.” This is what Clausewitz termed “real war” in contrast to “absolute war.”⁷

From these considerations we can see that what Clausewitz had in mind was that “real war” would always exist at some point on a continuum of violence in which, on one end, there might be no fighting at all, and on the other “absolute war,” which could never be fully achieved in practice but toward which war tended by its very nature.

The empirical basis of this idea of a continuum of violence, with limited war at one end and absolute war at the other, was Clausewitz’s reading of the revolution in war that had taken place in his own time. In the absolute monarchies of the eighteenth century the people were kept out of power and had no influence on war or diplomacy, which were solely the business of the government and the monarchs who headed it. There was no universal conscription; armies were recruited from “such idle vagabonds as [the governments] could lay their hands on.”⁸ Armies did not devastate the countryside as in times past, and wars were fought for limited objectives, such as the seizure of an individual province through the siege of individual fortresses. This Clausewitz termed a “limited, constricted form of war.”⁹

The character of war, however, was fundamentally transformed by the advent of the French Revolution and the Napoleonic wars. The wars of the French Revolution involved the mobilization of the people at large, who considered themselves to be “citizens” (that is, entitled to political participation), so that “war again became the business of the people.”¹⁰ Under Napoleon “this juggernaut of war, based on the strength of the entire people, began its pulverizing course through Europe.”¹¹ Only by mobilizing their own populations in turn were Napoleon’s enemies able to defeat him.

With the mobilization of the people, the objective of war changed from the seizure of limited stretches of territory to the complete overthrow and prostration of the opponent. As a result, “war ... more closely approached its true character, its absolute perfection.”¹² There was, in short, a far-reaching and revolutionary movement up the scale of Clausewitz’s continuum of violence. Modern scholars have seen in Clausewitz’s concept of absolute war the

7 Clausewitz, *On war* 579.

8 Clausewitz, *On war* 589.

9 Clausewitz, *On war* 590.

10 Clausewitz, *On war* 592.

11 Ibid.

12 Clausewitz, *On war* 592–93.

beginnings of the concept of total war; and accordingly, they trace the genealogy of total war back to the wars of the French Revolution,¹³ as Clausewitz did for his concept of absolute war.

The military, political, social and cultural background of the wars in Europe in Clausewitz's time was very different from that of the Ottoman wars in Yemen. If we make the necessary allowances for these differences, however, we will see that Clausewitz's conception of a continuum of violence between limited war and absolute war holds good for these wars as well. There was a gradual intensification of the Ottoman wars in Yemen which drew in more and more of the fighting population of both sides. The tribal rebellions in Yemen became a kind of "people's war," and the Ottoman government was forced to detail more and more men to suppress them. We will analyze the distinction between limited war and more "absolute" or "total" conflict in the Ottoman wars in Yemen in the following pages, when we discuss the politics and culture of war in the Ottoman Empire and Yemen respectively.

The term "total war," however, did not come into use until the European experience of World War I. Among the first to use it in a theory of war was the German general Erich Ludendorff, in his book *Der totale Krieg* (The Total War). Writing in the period between the two world wars, Ludendorff postulated that total war is a struggle between entire nations and not just their armed forces, and therefore it was a struggle for the existence of a nation itself.¹⁴ In consequence, war must be waged based on the principles which I have outlined below.

First, there must be a sound ideological and nationalist basis for the war. The total war requires from the nation a deep knowledge of its "racial inheritance," which is to foster its complete psychic and spiritual unity in the contest for victory and survival which total war entails.¹⁵ Ludendorff did not use or elaborate on the term ideology, but it is clear that what he meant by the psychic and spiritual unity of the people was a strong sense of German nationalism. Second, the society and economy as a whole must be mobilized to wage this war. The nation's psychic and spiritual unity is the basis for the tremendous material effort which total war requires. All the military, economic and financial strength of the nation must be mobilized for the war effort. The economy must be formally organized to supply and arm the troops and to provision the civil population.¹⁶ The army of the state must be as large as possible, and

13 Chickering, Total war 14–16.

14 Ludendorff, *Nation* 16.

15 Ludendorff, *Nation* 25 ff.

16 Ludendorff, *Nation* 55 ff.

this requires universal conscription.¹⁷ The troops must be indoctrinated with a nationalist consciousness, an awareness of their “racial inheritance,” in order to overcome their instinct for self-preservation and fight for the survival of the nation.¹⁸

Third, the war must be waged with the deadliest weaponry that the twentieth century had produced with the aim of completely destroying the enemy in battle. Because of the increasing deadliness of weaponry all available types of firearms must be brought to bear against the enemy to obtain a superiority of fire.¹⁹ Total war must be fought on land, sea and air with machine guns, heavy cannon, tanks, heavy aircraft for dropping bombs, armored cruisers and torpedo boats.²⁰ All this is for the purpose of winning in battle; total war requires the decision of battle,²¹ and the purpose of battle is to annihilate the enemy forces.²²

Fourth, the civilian population of the enemy nation must become the target of military operations as well. The annihilation of the enemy forces in battle takes place in conjunction with measures to break the spiritual will to resist of the civilian population.²³ These include blockades to starve the enemy population; unrestricted naval warfare against merchantmen; and aerial bombing of roads, railroads, industrial plant, and of the civilian population itself.²⁴

Fifth, and finally, all military and political power must be concentrated in the hands of the general responsible for conducting the war, who controls the political, economic and spiritual life of the nation and directs it toward the aim of total victory.²⁵

Ludendorff's prescriptions served effectively as a prophecy of World War II and were meant for war between states rather than unconventional war. Ludendorff thus envisioned violence on a scale which most unconventional wars have never reached, representing the far end of the spectrum of violence in war that Clausewitz envisioned. If, however, in accordance with Clausewitz's conception of the continuum of violence we understand unconventional war as progressing toward total war rather than constituting total war in its pure form, we see that Ludendorff's ideas do have some applicability.

17 Ludendorff, *Nation* 87.

18 Ludendorff, *Nation* 100–1.

19 Ludendorff, *Nation* 121.

20 Ludendorff, *Nation* 109 ff.

21 Ludendorff, *Nation* 126.

22 Ludendorff, *Nation* 132.

23 Ludendorff, *Nation* 189.

24 Ludendorff, *Nation* 136 ff.

25 Ludendorff, *Nation* 169 ff.

Ludendorff and Clausewitz are the most prominent military officers to have devised theories of total, or, in Clausewitz's case, "absolute" war. Modern military historians, often taking Clausewitz in particular as their starting point, have constructed a history or timeline of the progression of war toward totality beginning in the nineteenth century and culminating in World War II. Roger Chickering has constructed an outline of this history, or the "master narrative," of total war,²⁶ which he criticizes as being overly schematic. This narrative begins with Clausewitz and the French revolutionary and Napoleonic wars which form the empirical backbone of his work.

In 1792 the population of France was mobilized en masse to defend the revolution, as soldiers or as civilians supporting them. The whole population was thus involved in the war and committed to an uncompromising ideology. This laid the moral foundation for the "nation-in arms," which we have seen was so important to Ludendorff, and the increase in the expanse and intensity of war which accompanied it.²⁷

The material bases of total war subsequently emerged in the nineteenth century with the Industrial Revolution. Railways and telegraphy facilitated the control and movement of mass armies, now armed with factory-produced weapons.²⁸ The American Civil War was the first war in which the mass mobilization of the population was undertaken in conjunction with the use of the new military and communications technologies and the productive forces of industrial society. The use of these new technological and social forces resulted in a protracted war in which civilians came to be seen as legitimate military targets in consequence of their mobilization for the war effort.²⁹

All these factors were intensified in the total wars of the twentieth century. The geographic extent of war became global. Advances in military technology, especially in artillery and rapid-fire infantry weapons, resulted in a strategic stalemate in World War I. This required the mobilization of civilians and all available human and material resources to sustain the war effort.

In consequence, civilians became targets through strategic bombing and naval blockades. The distinction between military and civilian targets vanished completely in World War II, which featured the systematic annihilation of civilians through strategic bombing and the death camps; and Hiroshima brought this totalization of war to its logical conclusion.³⁰

26 Chickering, *Total war* 13.

27 Chickering, *Total war* 14.

28 *Ibid.*

29 *Ibid.*

30 Chickering, *Total war* 14–15.

Chickering, as we have said, criticizes this narrative as simplistic and reductive to a degree. He calls attention to the continuities in Napoleonic warfare with the limited wars of the eighteenth century, and to the restraints on violence that survived even in twentieth century warfare.³¹ Yet in the end, he concedes that this narrative contains much that is essentially valid.³² Rather than rejecting the narrative outright, he calls for a more discriminating use of it which takes account of the multiple exceptions to its generalizations, and situates the history of total war more broadly in the context of the myriad changes in human society of the past two centuries.³³

We do not propose to write a history of the wars in Yemen in all their social, political, cultural and economic context. We intend instead to draw some broad principles from Chickering's outline, as well as the works of other scholars writing on total war, and to see if and how they apply to the wars in Yemen. We will see that these principles in many respects parallel those we have outlined for Ludendorff.

The first principle is the importance of ideology in total war. Total war is based on ideologies that dehumanize the enemy or make compromise with him impossible. Chickering states that World War II became a total war because the Germans embraced an ideology that portrayed other peoples of the world as subhuman.³⁴ Scholars such as Robert M. Utley³⁵ and Glenn Anthony May³⁶ have seen the foreshadowing or actual practice of total war in the American wars against the Native Americans and counterinsurgency operations in the Philippine-American War, which were based on ideologies of white supremacy and the civilizing mission of the Western nations. Ideologies of race that began in the era of high imperialism and found expression in colonial wars against subject peoples would eventually play an important role in the outbreak of the world wars in Europe.

The second principle is that of the mobilization of the civil population and the economy to support the war effort. Richard Bessel has shown how World War I caused major shifts in employment and residency patterns in Germany, with a steep rise in the number of women working in industry, the shift of labor to the armaments industry, and the resultant growth of cities where these industries were concentrated.³⁷

31 Chickering, *Total war* 16.

32 Chickering, *Total war* 26.

33 Chickering, *Total war* 26–7.

34 Chickering, *Total war* 28.

35 Utley, *Total war* 399–414.

36 May, *Was the Philippine-American War* 437–57.

37 Bessel, *Mobilizing* 441–3.

This leads us to the third principle, the industrialization of war. In World War I, as a result of the strategic stalemate, the mass armies in the field required unprecedented quantities of weapons, munitions and the necessaries of life in general to keep the war going. This led, albeit initially in an ad hoc and piecemeal fashion, to increasing government intervention in the industries of the belligerent countries, which were reorganized to produce for the war effort.

Concomitant to the industrialization of war was the fourth principle, the increasing deadliness of weaponry. As Rolf Dieter Müller notes, industrial war was waged with a plethora of new weapons, including poison gas, submarines, fighter aircraft, and tanks, exponentially increasing the destructiveness of war and fundamentally changing its character.³⁸

The fifth principle of total war stems partly from this increase in the destructive capability of modern weaponry, that is, the deliberate targeting of civilians in military operations. The goal of the belligerents in World War I was “to continually increase the destructive capacity of weapons until the destruction of entire societies is made possible.”³⁹ Insofar as civilians were mobilized for the war effort, they came to be seen as legitimate military targets. The British imposed a blockade on Germany in World War I to starve the population into submission, a “project for total war,” which repudiated the distinction between combatants and non-combatants which is a fundamental principle of the laws of war.⁴⁰ The Germans retaliated with unrestricted U-boat war against British shipping.⁴¹

The attempt to wear down the enemy by targeting civilians was part of a strategy of attrition, the sixth principle of total war. Carter Malkasian defines attrition as “a gradual and piecemeal process of destroying an enemy’s military capability.”⁴² Attrition can be used in a variety of military contexts and is not total war as such. It is often, however, a central element in the strategy and tactics of total war, and the concept itself was born in World War I.⁴³

World War I witnessed massed attacks by soldiers who were mown down by the fire of the deadly artillery and small arms used in the war, and whose purpose was not primarily to capture territory but to steadily weaken the enemy by inflicting greater casualties on him than one suffered oneself. The classic example of this was the Battle of Verdun on the Western Front in 1916.⁴⁴ The

38 Dieter-Müller, *Total war* 95.

39 Ibid.

40 Offer, *The blockade* 169.

41 Herwig, *Total rhetoric* 189–206.

42 Malkasian, *History* 213.

43 Strachan, *From cabinet* 19.

44 Afflerbach, *Planning* 13–31.

tactics of attrition were paralleled by a grand strategy of attrition, whose aim was to exhaust the economic and human resources of the enemy and thus cripple his ability to make war. As we have seen, this strategy was realized in the British blockade and the German U-Boat war.⁴⁵

Having thus established some of the main principles of total war as it has come to be defined in modern scholarship and military thought, we can now turn to a preliminary discussion of how these principles apply, or do not apply, to the wars in Yemen. First, it must be noted that the Ottoman Empire was part of Europe and participated fully in European political and military affairs. It was thus as much affected as other European states by the developments in Europe that served as a catalyst to World War I, in which the Ottoman Empire was a key participant.

The guerrilla wars in Yemen and elsewhere in the Empire, like the colonial wars of the European great powers, thus served in many respects as a precursor to World War I.

In terms of the principle of ideology, we will see that the ideology of the war in Yemen was based on rival Sunni and Zaydi Shiite conceptions of authority in Islam. On the Ottoman side, this made the existence of a rival Zaydi authority in Yemen intolerable, and this played a major role in pushing the wars in Yemen upward on the continuum of violence toward total war.

As for the principle of social and economic mobilization, neither the Ottoman Empire nor Yemen were industrial societies, and thus could not mobilize their human and material resources in the manner of the industrial societies of Europe. Nonetheless, popular mobilization was not entirely absent from the wars in Yemen. In response to Ottoman pressure the Zaydi tribesmen were effectively mobilized to fight for their dignity, lives, and political institutions. While the Ottoman population was not mobilized to the same degree, so many of their men died in Yemen that Yemen became known as the "Cemetery of the Turks."⁴⁶

With regard to the industrialization of war and the use of the deadly weapons that this industrialization produced, we have already stated that the economies of the Ottoman Empire and Yemen were not industrial. Yet the wars in Yemen were strongly affected by advances in weaponry in the later 19th century, the industrialization of weapons production in Europe that accompanied it, and the burgeoning arms trade that it produced.

The course of the Ottoman wars in Yemen was defined in many ways by the spread of these weapons. The Ottoman possession of the breech-loading

45 Strachan, *From cabinet* 29.

46 Jacob, *Kings* 75.

artillery and rifles produced by European industry made their conquest of Yemen initially comparatively easy, as their weaponry could not be matched by the Yemeni tribesmen armed with antiquated smooth-bore muskets. Yet the rapid growth of the arms trade in the Red Sea region resulted in the acquisition by these tribesmen of modern rifles, and eventually of modern artillery as well. This increased the duration and casualties of battle, eventually resulting in a major battlefield catastrophe for the Ottomans that played a significant role in changing the course of their policy.

As for the targeting of civilians in the wars in Yemen, a caveat must be made because the Zaydi tribal societies of Yemen were warrior societies in which men carried guns and participated in intertribal wars in addition to cultivating the land. A Zaydi tribesman of Yemen was thus often both a fighter and an economic producer. For the male population, a strict distinction between soldier and civilian did not exist. The civilian population as such constituted women, children, and the elderly, in addition to special classes of people such as the Jews who did not carry weapons but were under tribal protection.

Ottoman sources are comparatively silent about atrocities against the Yemeni population. Arabic sources, however, record an ongoing war of the Ottoman troops and officials against the population marked by looting, confiscations, arrests, and torture. In punishment for open rebellion the Ottomans destroyed houses and sometimes mosques. This resulted in a vicious cycle in which punitive measures fueled rebellion, which in turn fueled further punitive measures.

In consequence of this cycle the war in Yemen became in practice a war of attrition. Under the direction of the imams the Zaydi tribesmen conducted a guerrilla war which wore down the strength of the Ottomans by forcing them to devote ever-increasing human and material resources to maintaining their precarious hold on Yemen. The increasing sophistication and destructiveness of the weaponry on both sides meant that battle progressed toward attrition as well, although never to anything like the extent of the battles of World War I. As a result of the exhaustion of their resources in Yemen the Ottomans would eventually renounce the "total" aim of suppressing the Zaydi imamate and open negotiations to make peace.

The development of sophisticated methods of guerrilla warfare by the Zaydi imams and their tribesmen was thus a key element driving the conflict in Yemen toward totality. This type of warfare, however, did not happen overnight. The Zaydi imamate was in a state of complete disorganization at the time of the Ottoman conquest and was initially unable to mount organized and sustained resistance. When rebellion did happen, it was often undertaken by individual tribes and did not last long. As resentment against the Ottomans grew,

however, resistance evolved from short-term rebellion by individual tribes to long-term and state-forming guerrilla war organized at the supra-tribal level by the Zaydi imams. To understand this process requires a closer familiarity with the basic dynamics of both guerrilla warfare and the “tribal quasi-state” of the Middle East, the type of state exemplified in the Zaydi imamate.

2 Guerrilla War and State Formation in Yemen

2.1 *The Land and People of Yemen*

An understanding of the dynamics of tribe and state in Yemen requires some background information on Yemeni society. The part of Yemen that was under Ottoman rule is divided into three distinct geographical regions: a low, hot coastal plain called the Tihama, a highland plateau to the east, and a portion of the interior desert of Arabia.

The Tihama is extremely hot and humid. Most of it consists of sandy plain covered with thorn scrub, although it has some fertile land.⁴⁷ The highlands of Yemen are more fertile overall, with a much milder climate. The highlands may be divided into three distinct regions: Upper Yemen, Lower Yemen, and the west. Upper Yemen is the arid plateau of the north and east, inhabited by the Ḥāshid and Bakīl tribes. In the Ottoman period, these tribes were engaged in dry farming as subsistence cultivators, producing primarily millet, wheat, and barley.⁴⁸ The region is not very fertile, however; and so these tribes historically resorted to raiding the richer areas to the south, serving as retainers for powerful shaykhs, or relying on subsidies paid them by various governments to keep them quiet.⁴⁹

Lower Yemen and the west, by contrast, are much more fertile and well-watered. Lower Yemen is the southeastern region of the plateau, centered around the cities of Ta‘izz, Ibb, and Ḥujariyya. The west may be defined as the escarpment of the central plateau descending to the Tihama from the northern plateau, centered roughly around Jabal Rayma to the south and Ḥajja to the north. Both regions have comparatively heavy rainfall, with a system of farming characterized by terraced fields and catchment irrigation.⁵⁰ The social structure of these regions can be considered as “semi-feudal,” with a powerful class of landholding families and a class of “peasants,” (*ra‘āyā*) who serve as

47 Bury, *Arabia* 100.

48 Dresch, *Tribes* 291.

49 Dresch, *Tribes* 13, 206–27, 213.

50 Bury, *Arabia* 103–5.

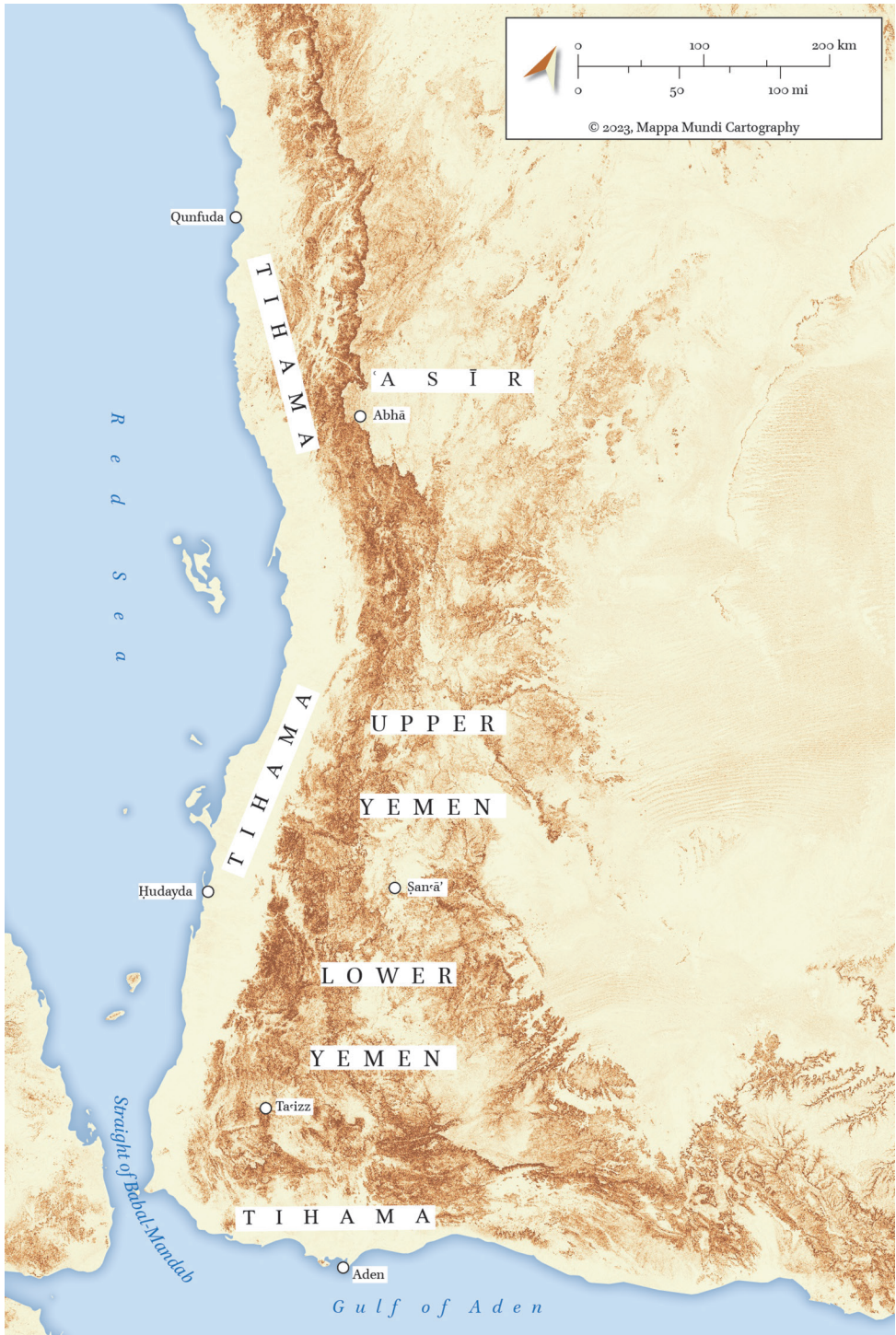


FIGURE 1 Color topographical map of Yemen showing its chief geographical features
 © MAPPA MUNDI CARTOGRAPHY



FIGURE 2 Color topographical map of Yemen showing the chief tribal regions of the country
 © MAPPA MUNDI CARTOGRAPHY

tenant farmers for the former.⁵¹ These regions produced the bulk of Yemen's agricultural wealth, including coffee, and thus their control was strategically vital for any power that wished to rule in Yemen.

The geographical divisions we have outlined determined the most important social cleavages in Yemen's population. The most important distinction is between adherents of Zaydi Shiism and members of the Shafii school of Sunni Islam. The Zaydis are the primary group in the northern highlands, dominating the region as far south as the Yarīm area. In the southern highlands and the Tihama the Shafiis predominate, and they also inhabit certain areas to the northwest of Ṣan'ā'. In addition to these two groups, the Ismailis, a heterodox Shiite sect, live in the Manākha area to the west of Ṣan'ā'. In the Ottoman period, organized political opposition was spearheaded by the Zaydis.

The sociology of Yemen is still incompletely understood. Apart from the Zaydi-Shafii split, the chief distinction relevant for our study is that between tribal and non-tribal populations. Historically it was primarily employed in the highland regions, to distinguish between members of the powerful Ḥāshid and Bakīl confederation and the "peasants" (*ra'āyā*) of the west and Lower Yemen.⁵²

Ḥāshid and Bakīl had been the dominant tribes of the highland region since the seventeenth century, and they spearheaded the revolt against the Ottomans. The tribes of Ḥāshid and Bakīl live in Upper Yemen and the area around Ṣan'ā'. Within their own territories, the tribesmen are sedentary cultivators, owning their own land independently of powerful landlords. They possess, moreover, a distinctive martial culture which distinguishes them from the supposedly compliant *ra'āyā*.

The social elite proper in the highlands consists of the prominent sayyid and qadi families, the major tribal shaykhs, and the powerful landholding shaykhs of Lower Yemen. The sayyids are putative descendants of the Prophet Muḥammad through Ali and Fatima. All sayyids enjoy a certain social status, although not all are wealthy or influential, and a few of the most prominent sayyid families have played a major role in the history of the country.⁵³ The sayyids characteristically serve as mediators in tribal disputes and are often trained as ulama in Islamic law and theology. The imams, the spiritual and political leaders of the Zaydi community, were always chosen from among the sayyid ulama.

51 See Dresch, *Tribes* 12–16, for a discussion of the conceptual opposition between the "feudal" south and west, and the "tribal" north and east.

52 Ibid.

53 Dresch, *Tribes* 140–1.

The term *qadi* in Yemen has a somewhat different meaning from its usage in the rest of the Islamic Middle East, where it denotes a judge trained in Islamic law. The *qadis* of Yemen belong to important notable families whose members have historically tended to become judges and administrators. Only some members of the *qadi* families are judges in the technical sense, but the title is used as an honorific even for those who are not.⁵⁴

The third major element in the Yemeni elite is the *shaykhs*. As with *qadis* and *sayyids*, *shaykhly* status is hereditary in certain families.⁵⁵ The term “*shaykh*” is used with reference to two types of elites. In Upper Yemen, the tribal *shaykhs* of Ḥāshid and Bakīl act as war-leaders and mediators in tribal disputes. They have the power to attract followers by means of conspicuous *sharaf*, (honor), displayed through courageous deeds in battle or skill in mediation.⁵⁶ They do not, however, have the power to coerce their tribesmen.

The *shaykh* of Lower Yemen, by contrast, is a member of a prominent family with large landholdings, who “exercises more autocratic power over a smaller but more tightly knit tribe.” The members of the tribe serve as his tenants.⁵⁷ The *shaykhly* families of Ḥāshid and Bakīl, however, often had extensive landholdings in Lower Yemen or the northwest.⁵⁸ Thus the two categories of “*shaykh*” are not really mutually exclusive, as the prominent *shaykhs* of Ḥāshid and Bakīl can play both roles according to the population to which they are relating.

The imposition of Ottoman control caused bitter resentment among the Zaydi elites, whose power and privileges were considerably curtailed by the Ottoman bureaucratic state. The institution of the imamate provided the rallying point for their discontent; therefore, some discussion of the imamate is essential here.

2.2 *The Zaydi Imamate*

The imamate was the political institution which enabled the various Zaydi social groups to unite against the Ottomans. In Zaydi thought, the imam was defined as the rightful leader of the Muslim community (*umma*), although in practice his authority was confined to Yemen. He had to be of *sayyid* lineage, but there were no formal qualifications of descent apart from this. In theory,

54 J.E. Peterson, *Yemen* 22–3.

55 Among the *shaykhs* of Ḥāshid and Bakīl, the families of al-Aḥmar, al-Shāyif, al-Juzaylān, and Ḥubaysh have risen to prominence in recent centuries. See Dresch, *Tribes* 206.

56 Dresch, *Tribes* 99–100.

57 Peterson, *Yemen* 21–2.

58 Dresch, *Tribes* 206–7.

the primary criteria for accession to the imamate were personal. The imam had to fulfill fourteen conditions, including learning as an *‘ālim* or Islamic scholar, soundness of mind and body, and courage as a warrior. He was supposed to be chosen through the consensus (*ijmā’*) of the leaders of the Muslim community, which in Yemen meant the leading Zaydi shaykhs, sayyids, and ulama.⁵⁹

The election (*ikhtiyār*) of an imam was said to be a “claim” (*da‘wa*) to the imamate by the candidate. The term *da‘wa* was in turn closely tied to the concept of legitimate rebellion in Zaydi political theory, which was conceived as jihad. The Zaydi imam was supposed to enforce Islamic law and morality, and ensure that justice (*‘adāla*) prevailed in social relations. If he did not do these things, it was legitimate for another qualified person to claim the imamate and rally the Muslim community to rebellion against him. The Arabic term *da‘wa* resonated with a number of meanings which reflected this idea of legitimate rebellion. It was a “claim” to the imamate, against the claims of others; it was a “summons” to the Muslim community to rebel; and it was a “challenge” to the holders of power.

Characteristically rebellion was justified by the claim that the current ruler was practicing “tyranny” (*ẓulm*) rather than “justice” (*‘adāla*). *‘Adāla* and *ẓulm* could be conceived of as obverse states of society. In a just society, Islamic law was observed. This in turn produced general conditions of peace and prosperity. The subjects obeyed the ruler, the ruling class behaved properly toward the subjects, and all had their fair share in the general economic prosperity.⁶⁰ In a society where tyranny prevailed, the opposite was true. Islamic law was not observed; the ruler oppressed his subjects, and the subjects rebelled against the ruler; and the different classes of society stepped out of the proper bounds of social behavior in excesses of violence and immorality (*taḡhan wa-baḡhy*).⁶¹ The ruler had the primary responsibility for *ẓulm*, as he was seen as having created these conditions of social disintegration through his oppressive actions.

Such ideas would provide a potent ideological justification for rebellion against the Ottomans. While the Zaydi imams and their followers accepted the

59 Sālim, *Fatḥ* 6–7.

60 In the Ottoman and Safavid empires, the ultimate source of these ideas was Nizam al-Mulk’s *Siyāsatnāmah*; see Nizam al-Mulk, *Book*. Zaydi thinkers developed a similar set of ideas concerning the imamate and society, though the extent to which they were influenced by Perso-Islamic theories of government is uncertain. For a text in which this particular Zaydi view appears see al-Manṣūr’s letter to the Ottoman envoy Sayyid Muḥammad al-Rifā’ī in al-Washalī, *Dhayl* 42–5.

61 Al-Washalī, *Dhayl* 42–5.

legitimacy of the Ottoman sultan as the caliph of the Muslim community,⁶² they could not countenance the non-implementation of Islamic law by the Ottomans and what they saw as the tyrannical and corrupt behavior of Ottoman officials, and this was what drove them to rebellion against the Ottoman government. The political dynamics of Zaydi opposition to Ottoman rule will become clearer in our discussion of Ernest Gellner's theory of the tribal quasi-state.

2.3 *The Principles of Guerrilla War and the Zaydi Imamate*

For this part of our study our theoretical analysis will proceed at two levels: one informed by the strategic literature on guerrilla war as it has emerged in the past century, and the other focused on the dynamics of war and politics in the segmentary lineage societies of the Middle East. For the former, our theoretical framework will be derived from the works of Charles Callwell, Mao Tse-Tung, and Che Guevara.

In the analyses of Charles Callwell on the one hand, and Mao Tse-Tung and Che Guevara on the other, we can see a distinction between two types of resistance to colonial military forces. Callwell focuses on the military methods of what he terms "irregular warriors." The "irregular warriors," whose social organization is often tribally based, have the military advantages associated with the guerrilla in modern times: superior mobility, knowledge of the terrain, and the ability to swiftly concentrate and disperse.⁶³ At the same time, their armament is inferior, and their organization rudimentary. The armies of irregular warriors have little cohesion, and therefore limited ability to carry out resistance over the long term.⁶⁴ A series of major defeats would therefore break the morale of these warriors and make it difficult for them to organize a sustained resistance, as they would be incapable of the organization such resistance would require.

For Callwell, then, resistance to the colonial forces had a tendency to be short-term and poorly organized. In other words, it was limited war. With Mao Tse-Tung and Che Guevara, however, we see the development of a fundamentally different type of resistance. In contrast to Callwell's "irregular" warfare,

62 See al-Shāmī, *Alāqāt* 41, where he notes that Imam al-Manṣūr recognized the legitimacy of the Ottoman sultan; and 91, where he notes that Imam Yaḥyā sought the replacement of corrupt officials and the implementation of Islamic law in his conditions for peace [rather than complete independence].

63 Callwell, *Small wars* 85–91.

64 Callwell, *Small wars* 88.

however, guerrilla war of this type is necessarily long-term and well-organized; and therefore, it can be seen as a progression up the scale toward total war.

Modern guerrilla strategies are characterized, first, by the existence of a defined strategic objective. This objective is total in nature, the overthrow of the enemy state by the destruction of its military forces.⁶⁵ We have seen the centrality of this idea in Clausewitz. In Mao's strategy in particular, this is done by establishing control of the peasantry through a counter state, so that the entire population is mobilized against the government. This constitutes, albeit on a lesser scale, the equivalent of the mobilization of industrial societies in the world wars in Europe.

The struggle proceeds in several phases. In the first stages, a base is set up in a remote region, the guerrillas fan out into the areas under government control, and the peasantry is regimented into a set of military and mass organizations.⁶⁶

Mao and Guevara differ on whether the military struggle precedes or follows the establishment of the counter state,⁶⁷ but the overall strategy for both is broadly similar: initial harassment of the government forces using guerrilla tactics, expansion of the guerrillas' formal military organization, and eventual escalation of the conflict into conventional warfare and the destruction of the government forces on the battlefield.⁶⁸

In very broad outline, the contrast between Callwell's "irregular" warriors and the modern guerrilla indicates a military transition in the colonized world from spasmodic to long-term resistance of the Maoist type.⁶⁹ The growing sophistication of guerrilla war in the colonies would play an essential role in the process of decolonization.

Now, we shall argue that war in Yemen underwent a similar transformation during the period under discussion. What we will see is a transition between short-term uprisings based on the tribal model of warfare, in which the rebels displayed many of the features of Callwell's irregular warriors, to a long-term and state-forming military resistance organized by the imams.

The cultural gulf between the jihad of the imams and Maoist guerrilla warfare is so wide, however, that any use of the Maoist paradigm requires serious qualification; the transformation of war in Yemen must be analyzed on

65 Mao, *On guerrilla warfare* 70–1; Che Guevara, *Guerrilla war* 20–3.

66 Mao, *On guerrilla warfare* (Griffith's introduction) 47–8; Che Guevara, *Guerrilla war* 74–5.

67 Che Guevara, *Guerrilla war* 73–4.

68 Mao, *On guerrilla warfare* (Griffith's introduction) 47–9, 70–1; Che Guevara, *Guerrilla war* 73–5.

69 Such a model does involve a certain amount of oversimplification; Callwell recognized that guerrilla wars could be protracted and well-organized, citing Shamil and 'Abd al-Qādir as guerrilla commanders of genius. Callwell, *Small wars* 126.

its own social and cultural terms. Here, we will argue that this transformation needs to be understood in terms of the tensions of the Zaydi imamate as a tribal quasi-state. The tribal quasi-state incorporated opposing systems of political ethics, based respectively in tribalism and Islam. Such systems were in turn associated with different kinds of war making: intertribal war, which was limited in character, and jihad, which had the potential to be long-term and totalizing.

The ascendancy of tribalism in the nineteenth century caused the collapse of the Zaydi imamate, initially making it impossible to organize sustained resistance to the Ottomans. The pressures of the Ottoman occupation, however, created the conditions wherein the Zaydi imamate could reform for the purpose of waging jihad. The revitalized imamate had the institutional features of the tribal quasi-state and operated according to its principles. To analyze the evolution from tribal resistance to jihad, then, we must first outline the basic structural dynamics of the tribal quasi-state.

2.4 *The Zaydi Imamate as a Tribal Quasi-state*

The concept of the tribal quasi-state was developed by Ernest Gellner, employing Ibn Khaldūn's theory of the state and the segmentary lineage model of tribal social structures developed by modern anthropologists. The tribal quasi-state was historically based on the complementarity of a tribal confederation and a small supra-tribal state. The tribes provided essential military support to the state, while the authority of the state itself was based on social groups or institutions outside the tribal structure, such as Sufi lodges or the ulama. Often, holy lineages claiming descent from the Prophet played a key role in this type of government.⁷⁰

Now, the Zaydi imamate in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries essentially represented a variant of this type of state. The imamate was based on a power-sharing compact between the powerful tribal confederation of Ḥāshid and Bakil and the religious classes of Zaydi society; that is, the sayyids, qadis, and ulama. As an institutional structure, the imamate consisted of a small body of officials drawn largely from the religious classes and Ethiopian slaves; that is, persons outside the tribal structure.⁷¹ While the Zaydi sayyids and ulama resided among the tribesmen, their representation of the pacific and humane values of Islam placed them outside the tribal culture of honor and its perpetual armed clashes. It was this position which allowed them to serve as

⁷⁰ Gellner cites the Saudi, Sanūsī, and Berber Ahansal polities as key examples of this kind of state. See Gellner, *Tribalism and the state* 117–20.

⁷¹ Al-'Amrī, *The Yemen* 23 ff.; al-Ḥaymī, *Rawḍ* 56 n. 1.

mediators in settling intertribal disputes, and to exercise authority on behalf of the state at the supra-tribal level. As in the tribal quasi-state model, however, the major military support of the imamate came from the Ḥāshid and Bakil confederation.

The development of the tribal quasi-state as an institution, in the Middle East and elsewhere, has often proceeded historically in two phases. The first is organization of the tribes around the person of a charismatic military or religious leader and subsequent conquests; the second, routinization of the authority of the state into a patrimonial form of authority, still centered around the persons of the leader and his successors, but now buttressed by a permanent bureaucracy and military force.

The first phase, however, contains an incipient centralization in itself; first, because it is centered around the person of the charismatic leader; and second, because the leader usually requires some kind of military force, wholly or partially separated from the tribal forces, which can organize the tribal confederation for war and enforce the leader's commands. This is the beginning stage of the process called "retinue formation" by Carter Findley; that is, the efforts by dynastic states "to escape dependency on tribal forces that could not be disciplined and to create a retinue that would obey the ruler instead."⁷² Such retinue formations can be seen in the empire-building of Turkic and Mongol leaders in the Middle Ages, the creation of the Zulu polity in South Africa in the nineteenth century by Shaka Zulu, and the formation of the modern state of Saudi Arabia in the twentieth century by Ibn Sa'ūd. It was also at the heart of the formative phase of the modern imamate of Yemen during the period of Ottoman rule.

The core of Genghis Khan's military forces, for example, consisted of thirteen "wagon circles" (*küriyen*) made up of retainers (*nökör*) from Mongol and Turkic tribes, and also from the Muslim merchants of Central Asia.⁷³ The Mongol conqueror Tamerlane's forces were centered around his family and retinue; men from his family and retinue commanded his military forces and thus exercised authority over loyal tribes such as the Barlas and Jalayir, who supplied Tamerlane with warriors for his campaigns.⁷⁴

In South Africa, Shaka Zulu founded a kingdom by conquest using the institution of "regiments" (*amabutho*). These were institutions which young Zulu men entered in adolescence in order to serve their chiefs as warriors or

72 See the discussion of retinue formation in Turkic and Mongol history in Findley, *Turks* 229.

73 Findley, *Turks* 80–1.

74 Findley, *Turks* 101.

farmers.⁷⁵ Shaka, starting out with four regiments on his accession, turned these institutions into a ruthless military machine for waging total war.⁷⁶ The *assegai*, a type of spear previously used as a thrown weapon in intertribal wars, was to be used as a stabbing weapon in close-quarter combat, and the warriors were to maintain orderly movement in close formation.⁷⁷ Women and children, spared in previous wars, were now killed.⁷⁸ Recruits from newly subdued tribes were incorporated into the regiments,⁷⁹ thus swelling the manpower available to Shaka.

In present-day Saudi Arabia, one of the ways Ibn Sa'ūd created his kingdom was by using both a non-tribal military force composed of the townsmen of southern Najd and a military force with tribal origins called the *Ikhwan* for the purpose of conquest. The *Ikhwan* retained their tribal organization at least in part, but recruitment into the *Ikhwan* meant in some regards an important separation from tribal ways of life. Though they were of Bedouin origin, they were settled in towns (*hujjar*) and expected to practice agriculture, for "sedentarisation was obviously more suited to religious indoctrination, military enlistment and control."⁸⁰

In these towns they were educated in the tenets of Wahhabi Islam by the *mutawwa'a*.⁸¹ The *mutawwa'a* were a type of religious specialist unique to Najds, not quite having the rank of ulama, who were versed in Islamic law and the formularies of Islamic worship.⁸² Their function was to enforce obedience and discipline on the sometimes refractory tribesmen, make them instruments of Ibn Sa'ūd's will, and turn them into foot soldiers for the cause of Wahhabi Islam. The *Ikhwan* were thus "taught to obey the legitimate imam [Ibn Sa'ūd] and respond to his call for jihad."⁸³

What we can see from these examples is that the "retinue" represents an intermediate stage in the process of state formation, a nucleus of an inchoate state. The primary loyalty and obedience of the men of the retinue are to the person of the charismatic leader rather than their tribes or societies of origin, and they may be kept on a permanent military footing for the leader to use as he sees fit. In this the retinue as a military formation differs from a tribal levy,

75 Taylor, *Shaka's children* 46.

76 Ibid.

77 Taylor, *Shaka's children* 51.

78 Taylor, *Shaka's children* 48.

79 Taylor, *Shaka's children* 59.

80 Al-Rasheed, *History* 60.

81 Ibid.

82 Al-Rasheed, *History* 49.

83 Al-Rasheed, *History* 60.

which often mobilizes for particular campaigns and disbands when they are over. At the same time, it usually does not have the degree of organization and bureaucratization of a standing army.

As the example of Ibn Sa'ūd's *Ikhwan* shows, the men's separation from the tribal social structure is not always total. The *Ikhwan* partially retained their character as a tribal force, albeit one permanently at the beck and call of Ibn Sa'ūd; and it was a rebellion of the *Ikhwan* led by tribal leaders that ultimately caused Ibn Sa'ūd to disband it.⁸⁴

Now, the context of the Zaydi rebellions in nineteenth and early twentieth century Yemen differs in some regards from the examples we have cited. The impetus to state formation among the Zaydi tribes in Yemen came not from an ambitious tribal or religious leader hungry for conquest but as a defensive response to the pressure of a fully bureaucratized Ottoman state which threatened to deprive the tribes of their traditional privileges and autonomy.

The Zaydi imamate, the ruling institution historically supported by the powerful tribal confederations of Ḥāshid and Bakīl, underwent an economic and political crisis in the nineteenth century as a result of the losses respectively of revenues from the coffee trade and the fertile provinces of Lower Yemen. The imamate could thus no longer distribute its surplus to these tribal confederations at the level they had come to expect. In consequence, the tribes ceased to support the imamate and began to pursue their own particularistic interests, seizing land on their own initiative rather than in obedience to the imams' commands. A political culture of tribal warlordism thus came to dominate in the highlands of Yemen.

The Ottoman conquest of Yemen in 1872 imposed considerable curbs on this culture, if it did not displace it entirely. The Ottoman state imposed taxation and other bureaucratic controls on the tribes in its territory. Ottoman rule could be brutal and high-handed, with rebellious tribes subjected to punitive expeditions in which heads were taken and property destroyed. Ottoman officials were often corrupt, probably as a result of their low salaries.

The upshot of this was that the Zaydi tribes began to rally around the imamate again as an institution which could organize and give meaningful ideological content to their resistance to the Ottoman state. This in turn required military forces under the direct command of the imams to organize resistance at the supra-tribal level. The forces organized by the imams for this purpose came to be known as the *ʿiṣābāt*. These were guerrilla bands recruited from among the tribes by the imams, paid salaries directly from the public treasury,

84 Al-Rasheed, *History* 69–70.

and charged with collecting taxes and otherwise extending the authority of the imamate in the regions of Yemen under Ottoman control.

As with the *Ikhwan*, the boundary between tribal military force and imamic military institution was blurred. The military backbone of the imamate continued to be the tribal confederation of Ḥāshid, and it was men from Ḥāshid who were often recruited to be used by the imams for tax collection and other purposes.⁸⁵ What was clear, however, was that these men were fighting primarily to extend the authority of the imamate, and only secondarily that of their individual tribes.

The *Ikhwan*, as we have seen, were under the disciplinary regimen of the religious class known as the *mutawwa'a*. Similarly, the men of the *ʿiṣābāt* were typically commanded by the sayyids. As stated previously, in Yemen the sayyid families stand outside the tribal structure, play a key role in the mediation of tribal disputes, and have traditionally supplied Yemen with many of its ulama. The control of military operations by the sayyids accentuated the supra-tribal character of the *ʿiṣābāt*'s activities and their subordination to the state-building project of the imams, who, as we have seen, were always sayyids and ulama themselves.

The state-building project of the imams was ultimately successful, due in large part to the *ʿiṣābāt*. The *ʿiṣābāt* were able to extend the authority of the imamate over the tribes in Ottoman territory, effectively forming a counter state to raise them in rebellion against the Ottoman government. The Ottomans ultimately recognized the effectiveness of this state and their inability to subdue the tribes by force, and so made a peace with Imam Yaḥyā which gave official status to his authority over the Zaydi population in return for his recognition of the suzerainty of the Ottoman government. This was a power sharing compact between two states in the same territory, once rivals but now partners.

After the departure of the Ottomans from Yemen Imam Yaḥyā would organize a modern army with the help of Ottoman officers who remained behind.⁸⁶ His authority thus became fully routinized, as it were; the *ʿiṣābāt* were replaced by a modern military force and ultimately by the bureaucratic institutions needed to administer it. Yet it is difficult to imagine that Imam Yaḥyā could have imposed a comparatively stable rule on Yemen after the Ottoman departure without the years of informal state-building through guerilla warfare spearheaded by the *ʿiṣābāt*. In sum, they played the same role in

85 Rūṣṭū, *Yemen* 158.

86 Nājī, *Al-Tārikh al-ʿaskarī* 107–9.

the establishment of their charismatic leader's authority as retinues have in other historic polities with tribal origins.

We have seen from the examples of Ibn Sa'ūd's *Ikhwan* and the imams' *iṣābāt* that the creation of states in tribal societies may be based on a symbiosis between the religious classes and the tribesmen. To understand the nature of the compact between the tribes and the religious classes requires a discussion of the ethical systems which historically underpinned the tribal quasi-state, the opposing values of Islam and tribalism. Tribalism is rooted in the particularistic interests of the tribe and its members, defined as "honor." Honor is an ethic of competitive manhood within the conflict-ridden social structure of the tribe. It lays the ground rules by which men may compete for prestige and defend their families and possessions within a predatory social environment.

Among the majority of Middle Eastern tribes, the particularistic and competitive ethos of honor forms a contrast to the universal ethos of Islam. The latter stresses the brotherhood and unity of the believers. It has historically focused on the establishment of universal justice, social harmony, and the moral order embodied in Sharia law. This is usually accomplished by means of the legal and coercive apparatus of the state. Ideologically, then, it is often opposed to the tribal ethos of competitive self-aggrandizement, the maintenance of tribal autonomy, and customary tribal law.⁸⁷

Islam and the social groups who act as its custodians, however, have historically fulfilled important functions among the tribes. In theory, members of the holy lineages are above the competitive strife of the honor system. Therefore, they frequently act as mediators in feuds between tribes and individuals. Representing Islam in its pacific and unifying aspect, they serve as a brake on the competitive tensions of the tribal system and prevent conflicts from escalating to the point that they threaten the social order. The ulama, as guardians of the laws and scripture of Islam, provide the legal and ideological basis for a state which can exercise authority at the supra-tribal level.⁸⁸ The culture of honor in many Middle Eastern tribal societies tends to preclude outright submission to other tribesmen, to persons who are themselves engaged in the competitive game of honor.⁸⁹ To submit to the ulama, as persons representing a higher moral and spiritual authority, is not so dishonorable.

87 For a discussion of this Islam/honor opposition in the case of the Pashtun tribes of Afghanistan, see Edwards, *Heroes* 191–2.

88 Gellner, *Tribalism* 112, 117–20.

89 R.B. Serjeant notes, for example, that tribal shaykhs in Yemen refuse to defer to one another. See Serjeant, *South Arabia* 228.

Islam, therefore, may provide a unifying spiritual and moral principle to offset the relentless competition of the tribal system. We have noted that these two ethical systems are associated with different types of warfare: intertribal war, which we define as limited in character, and jihad, which has the potential to be long-term and totalizing. How, specifically, did these opposed ethical systems serve to shape the character of war in the tribal quasi-state?

3 Intertribal War and Segmentary Lineage Theory

Intertribal war is rooted in what anthropologists describe as the segmentary lineage structure of the tribe. In this social structure, the tribe consists of an aggregate of lineages which is infinitely divisible into its component parts.⁹⁰ In Yemen, the Ḥāshid and Bakīl confederation divides into the major constituent tribes such as Khawlān and Dhū Ḥusayn, and these in turn subdivide into smaller sections.⁹¹ The different segments of the confederation are conceived as kin, with the supposed blood relationships becoming progressively closer as one goes down the segmentary ladder.

The lineage organization is a source of both social conflict and social solidarity. Suppose that there is a tribal confederation AB, consisting of tribes A and B respectively. Each tribe has four sections: A₁, A₂, A₃, and A₄ for tribe A, and B₁, B₂, B₃ and B₄ for tribe B. In tribe A, A₁ and A₂ consider themselves to have a closer blood relationship than their counterparts in A₃ and A₄; and an analogous situation obtains in tribe B.

Now, A₁ and A₂ are pursuing an intermittent feud with one another. They consider themselves a kin unit as against A₃ and A₄, however. Therefore, if the latter sections should attack A₁, A₂ will come to its aid, and vice versa. Going a step further up the segmentary ladder, suppose that a conflict breaks out between sections of different tribes, let us say A₁ and B₁. If this happens, then in the theoretical model all the sections of A should unite to support A₁, while all of B should unite to support B₁; again this is because A and B define themselves as kin units opposed to one another. Finally, let us say that a powerful enemy from outside the confederation entirely threatens tribe B. In this case tribe A will come to B's aid, both presenting a united front to the enemy as

90 Gellner, *Tribalism* 109–10.

91 Dresch, *Tribes* 84, 339–41.

tribal confederation AB, because AB defines itself as a kin unit opposed to the outside world generally.⁹²

In segmentary lineage theory, this is conceived as a means of maintaining social cohesion without an overarching state authority.⁹³ The segmentary structure is both a source of conflict and a means of managing it in such a manner that the social order will be preserved. As each segment gains an ally, the opposing segment will gain a corresponding ally, with the dispute drawing in segments at progressively higher levels if it becomes very serious.⁹⁴ While this has the potential of leading to disastrous war, it also has the effect of maintaining the equilibrium among the segments, so that none gains a decisive advantage.

This model obtains, broadly speaking, for Ḥāshid and Bakīl. The tribes are “defined against their equals, as are sections against sections, villages against villages, and even men against men.”⁹⁵ While political alliances among the tribal sections do not always divide along neat kin-based lines,⁹⁶ the general concept of “balanced opposition” is largely valid. To maintain one’s own autonomy and prevent coercive practices generally (at least among fellow tribesmen) is an essential part of the cultural value system of Ḥāshid and Bakīl.

The “balancing” aspect of conflict within the segmentary lineage social structure is one factor that serves to limit intertribal war. Another is the concept of honor that we have described above.⁹⁷ A central aspect of honor in many of these societies is the inviolability of land, family, and tribal territory. If any of these are attacked, retaliatory violence is not merely permissible, but obligatory.⁹⁸ The concept of honor, however, usually contains explicit limitations on the use of violence. Men of honor “channel passions into controlled or stylized violence.”⁹⁹ In battle, for example, the opponents may exchange gunfire deliberately aimed over one another’s heads.

92 The segmentary lineage model is derived from Evans-Pritchard’s study of the Nuer ethnic group of the Sudan. See Evans-Pritchard, *Nuer* 192 ff.

93 Gellner, *Saints* 41–2.

94 Gellner, *Tribalism* 109–10.

95 Dresch, *Tribes* 354.

96 Dresch, *Tribes* 346.

97 Caton, *Anthropological theories* 91–2.

98 In a story recounted to David Edwards by a Pashtun man, a boy whose father has just been treacherously shot is made to say to him “If I do not have the force and power within me to take revenge on one person for every bullet that has struck your body, then I would not be your son” (i.e., I would not be a man of honor). See Edwards, *Heroes* 34–5.

99 Caton, *Peaks* 122.

Other limitations on violence result from the presence of the holy lineages, whose role is to resolve conflicts through mediation before they become too destructive.¹⁰⁰ In Yemen, this role is played by the sayyids. From the moment a tribal conflict breaks out in Yemen, there will be heavy pressure on both sides to accept mediation by tribal notables and sayyids. To accept mediation is honorable, while to gain one's ends by pure coercion is not.¹⁰¹ The stress on ritualistic confrontation, avoidance of outright coercion, and mediation has tended historically to limit intertribal warfare among the Zaydi tribes in time and intensity.

The objectives for which intertribal wars are fought are also limited in character. War breaks out over access to land, definition of tribal boundaries, or old feuds. Such objectives tend to revolve around the honor-concept of maintaining the inviolability of the lands, houses, and families of the tribe. Fighting begins when a perceived violation of these boundaries takes place. The pattern of war in this case focuses on intermittent fighting involving exchanges of gunfire and demonstration of heroic prowess. Each side demonstrates that they are men of courage and honor who cannot be coerced.¹⁰² When this has been achieved, they are expected to accept mediation.

The culture of war in segmentary lineage systems thus tends to militate against long-term, state-forming, and totalizing warfare. Almost by definition, the state claims a prerogative over the exercise of violence and power. The segmentary lineage system, however, seems designed to maintain an equality of force, making a powerful state authority undesirable and unnecessary. The goals of intertribal warfare are particularistic and non-ideological. Each tribe, segment, or individual seeks to protect those things which constitute their honor from others. The honor code itself and the presence of sanctified mediators limits the extent to which they can practice violence as pure coercion.

What we will show is that at the time of the Ottoman conquest war in Yemen had come to be dominated by the competitive and particularistic aims of the individual tribes. That is, it was partially rooted in the tribal system and its ethos of honor, even if the behavior of the tribesmen was not always "honorable" in the ethical sense of the term. This in turn served to limit the conduct of war in this period, making it impossible to organize violence as a long-term enterprise.

100 See Ernest Gellner's discussion of the mediatory functions of the Moroccan *shurfa* in *Saints* 70 ff., 169–71.

101 Caton, *Peaks* 165–6, 175–6.

102 Caton, *Peaks* 160 ff.

4 Jihad, the Tribal Quasi-state and the Zaydi Imamate

In conceptual terms, jihad was the ideological opposite of war based in the competitive tribal system. In contrast to the particularistic goals of tribal conflict, jihad was based on universalist political goals. The specific content of jihad has varied over time and place.¹⁰³ Generally speaking, however, it has focused on establishing the just and humane social order represented in Islam. Historically, this was often interpreted as the imposition of the authority of an Islamic government, specifically espousing the spiritual ideals of Islam and enforcing the Sharia.¹⁰⁴ The goals of jihad were therefore usually total, focusing on the sweeping away of the corrupt social order and its replacement by an Islamic one. These goals transcended the narrow limits of the tribal segmentary system and the reasons for which tribesmen ordinarily fought.

Jihad in Zaydi thought in particular was often associated with rebellion against unjust and un-Islamic rule, although it was not confined to that meaning. The Zaydi movement had its genesis in the early revolts of the partisans of Ali against Umayyad and Abbasid authority. The founder of the Zaydi movement was Zayd ibn 'Alī, a grandson of Ḥusayn, the famous martyr of Karbalā'. Zayd, proclaimed imam by his partisans among the Shiites of Kufa, led an abortive revolt against the Abbasids. Although he was killed in the subsequent fighting and his movement temporarily crushed,¹⁰⁵ the example he set of rebellion against an authority defined as unjust and un-Islamic lived on in subsequent Zaydi thought. Zaydi theologians were unanimous in their support for "the sword and revolt" against tyrannical imams;¹⁰⁶ and we find al-Hādī, the first Zaydi imam of Yemen, urging one his relatives to jihad against the corrupt and tyrannical rule of the Abbasids.¹⁰⁷

Because of its universal and Islamic character jihad among the tribal societies of the Middle East has played a central role in facilitating one function crucial for segmentary lineage societies: the ability of all the feuding segments to unite against an external foe.¹⁰⁸ In the nineteenth century, the tribal societies

103 In cases such as that of the Wahhabis, it was based on a call for the purification of Islam from quasi-pagan practices and a return to the faith in its pristine form. In Yemen, jihad among the Zaydis focused on the correct implementation of Islamic law and the establishment of a just social order. See Gellner, *Tribalism* 117; and Dresch, *Tribes* 145, 161, 183.

104 Peters, *Jihad* 1 ff.; Zawati, *Is jihad* 10 ff.

105 van Arendonk, *Debuts* 30–3.

106 van Arendonk, *Debuts* 94.

107 van Arendonk, *Debuts* 302–3.

108 The Pashtun jihads against the British or the Soviets, for example, had in part the character of segmentary unification against an intruder. See Lindholm, *Generosity* 56.

of the Middle East fought a number of jihads of this character, focused on repelling the intrusion of the European or Europeanized colonial states. Such jihads took place in Algeria, the Sudan, and Yemen. In this context, men of the holy lineages frequently played a central role. Representing the universal principles of Islam and standing outside intertribal rivalries, the ordinarily pacific holy men would assume the role of war leaders.¹⁰⁹

Jihad thus provided the ideological basis for supra-tribal mobilization, and the holy lineages provided a supra-tribal social group which could provide leadership for the jihad. As a result, jihad transcended tribal war, although historically it had been influenced by certain aspects of that kind of war. Where military leaders were successful in constructing a supra-tribal state authority, the nineteenth century jihads could take a long-term and total form. 'Abd al-Qādir's war of resistance against the French, for example, lasted for eight years, from 1839 to 1847. As the people became involved in the jihad, the colonial powers often undertook increasingly brutal measures to subdue them. In North Africa, the French and Italians engaged in the large-scale destruction of crops and massacres as a means of crushing rebellion.¹¹⁰ This was essentially total war, at least in its effects on the colonized peoples, an attempt to destroy the enemy's economy and society in order to gain a military victory.

Jihad could thus transform short-term intertribal war into long-term, state-forming, and total war. In the period immediately preceding the Ottoman occupation, the Zaydi imamate had collapsed as a viable state, and tribalism had become the dominant principle of war and politics in Yemen. This made it impossible to organize an effective defense against the Ottoman expeditionary force in 1872 and served to limit resistance for some time thereafter.

Such modes of resistance, however, were gradually shaped into a long-term and state forming jihad in which the Zaydi-Ottoman conflict tended to escalate toward total war, although it was not total in the sense that the Zaydi imams wanted to destroy the Ottoman government or expel it from Yemen.¹¹¹ This involved the gradual reformation of the Zaydi imamate as a tribal quasi-state on the Gellner model, as an instrument designed to wage war against the Ottomans. The specific justification employed by the Zaydi imams for jihad against the Ottomans focused on the perceived injustice of the Ottoman state. The centralizing and often brutal actions undertaken by the state were seen

109 In Libya and Algeria, for example, anti-colonial resistance was spearheaded by the prominent men of the Sufi brotherhoods, who often claimed descent from the Prophet. Danziger, *Abd al-Qadir* 51–4; and Ahmida, *Making* 97–100, 103 ff.

110 Ruedy, *Modern Algeria* 64; Ahmida, *Making* 138–9.

111 Al-Shāmī, *Alāqāt* 41.

as a trespassing of the boundaries, physical and moral, of Zaydi tribal society. Such trespass was deeply offensive both in the tribal moral universe of honor and the Zaydi concept of proper Islamic governance.

The imams were therefore able to unite the fractured tribal sections of Ḥāshid and Bakīl around the Zaydi-Islamic concept of resisting tyranny through jihad. The key role in organizing the jihad was played by the Zaydi qadis and sayyids, who brought the tribes into alliance with one another by means of their mediatory authority. By overcoming intertribal divisions in this manner, the imams were able to effect the “last principle” of a segmentary lineage society: the unification of all the competing segments when an enemy outside the lineage structure threatens it.

On the Zaydi side, then, we will focus on the transformation of military resistance from limited war based in tribal particularism to long-term and state-forming jihad. Likewise, we will show that a similar transformation took place on the Ottoman side. Here, we will discuss Ottoman methods of containing rebellion in Yemen as part of the modernization of the Ottoman state. Limited means of dealing with rebellion based on the Perso-Islamic tradition of statecraft and the Ottomans’ firepower superiority were gradually replaced by the more comprehensive measures employed by the modern bureaucratic state. This transformation took place in tandem with the growing sophistication of the Zaydi rebels, which forced the Ottomans to devote increasing resources to the conflict and plan their strategy more systematically.

5 Counterinsurgency and State Formation in the Nineteenth Century Ottoman Empire

5.1 *The Principles of Counterinsurgency and the Evolution of Ottoman Policy in Yemen*

Our discussion of Ottoman counterinsurgency will proceed on two levels: one attempting to draw general lessons from the analyses of Western counterinsurgency strategists, and the other showing how these lessons were applicable within the nineteenth century Ottoman context. Our discussion of Western counterinsurgency will draw on the following works: Charles Callwell’s *Small Wars*, Roger Trinquier’s *Modern Warfare*, and *Who Will Win?* by Douglas Blaufarb and George Tanham. In these works, we can see an evolution from a short-term reliance on pure firepower to subdue “irregular warriors” to a definition of unconventional war as a long-term struggle for the control of the population. We will show in this context that Western counterinsurgency from an early date focused on achieving the supremacy of the bureaucratic state,

underpinned ideologically by an often violent nationalism. This would later lead to the development of total war in the twentieth century. Total war, in fact, had antecedents in the nineteenth century colonial conquests.

Callwell's *Small Wars*, written in the era of high imperialism, reflected the relative ease of the colonial conquests of the period. *Small Wars* is, in the main, a prescription for limited war. Callwell's strategy was designed specifically to counter the military methods of the "irregular warriors," which we have outlined above. Callwell focused on the necessity of bringing irregular warriors to battle as early and often as possible, so that the regular troops could destroy their military capability by bringing their superior firepower to bear. In order to do this, the commander had to display initiative and boldness. He had to have a definite objective in mind and pursue the campaign decisively until the objective was achieved.¹¹²

The irregular warriors were to be thrown off balance by a succession of hammer blows, which were to convince them of their powerlessness in the face of the regular troops. The irregular warriors generally lacked the organizational cohesion to mount a determined resistance in the face of a series of setbacks. Thus, a campaign conducted in this fashion could destroy their will to fight within a very short period of time. Conversely, a prolonged campaign conducted without decisive engagements tended to increase their boldness, favoring the emergence of guerrilla resistance which regular troops were ill equipped to counter.¹¹³ To Callwell, guerrilla war was merely one type of "small war," and one which could be avoided by a skilled commander. Overwhelming firepower on the battlefield, applied at the proper time and place, could obviate the need for a long-term struggle which would exhaust the population and the regular forces.

At the same time, Callwell understood that guerrilla war itself would require grinding and protracted operations. He recommended dividing the theater of war into sections, clearing these sections of crops that could sustain a guerrilla army, establishing military posts in each section, and telling off mobile columns to hunt down the guerrilla bands.¹¹⁴

Such operations were necessarily long-term and involved significant hardship for civilian populations; and Callwell also approved of visiting massive violence on these populations when to do so would achieve the goal of pacification. Brutal punitive measures (such as those employed by the French in Algeria) were necessary and justified against "savages," for "uncivilized races

112 Callwell, *Small wars* 37, 71–100.

113 Callwell, *Small wars* 97–107.

114 Callwell, *Small wars* 125–49.

attribute leniency to timidity.”¹¹⁵ Measures such as those implemented by the French in Algeria were already a form of total war (albeit a one-sided one), based on destruction of the economic bases of village or tribal life, and often on genocidal measures against the population itself.

The concept of counterinsurgency as a political struggle, however, was alien to Callwell’s thinking. To Callwell, “counterinsurgency” was simply a means of making rebel populations submit by pure military force, of teaching them their place at the bottom of the racial totem pole.

As political opposition in the colonies grew more sophisticated, however, such attitudes began to change. After the Second World War, Western governments were faced with guerrilla war on a scale which they had never confronted before, based on the Maoist model of achieving complete political control of the population to mobilize them for rebellion. The concept that the government fighting the insurgency would have to achieve a similar control to defeat the guerrillas therefore became the basis for modern counterinsurgency.

Such strategies tended to crystallize around two opposing approaches: “punitive repression,” or controlling the people through main force, and “hearts and minds” counterinsurgency, based on gaining their voluntary support. Such strategies did not, of course, require the complete mobilization of the military, economic and human resources of the colonizing powers that the world wars had required. Their political objective, however, was total, aiming at the complete destruction of the guerrillas as a military and political force. Thus, they constituted a movement upward on Clausewitz’s continuum of violence toward total war.

A comprehensive strategy of punitive repression was developed by Roger Trinquier, a French general in the Algerian war. Trinquier was an early proponent of the concept that unconventional war revolves around the struggle for control of the population. To Trinquier, this control was based solely on force. In his view, the capacity of the guerrillas to wage long-term war depends on the construction of a political and military apparatus to control the population, which exercises control by means of simple terror.¹¹⁶ Now, to neutralize the rebels the government would have to destroy this organization.

In essence, this was to be accomplished by means of police repression. Trinquier advised counter-regimentation of the population into “self-defense” units, which would mirror the administrative structure of the guerrillas; the arrest of suspected terrorists through information provided by this organization; and the interrogation, with torture if necessary, of these terrorists so

¹¹⁵ Callwell, *Small wars* 148.

¹¹⁶ Trinquier, *Modern warfare* 10–15.

that they would give the names of their compatriots in turn.¹¹⁷ This would be accompanied by military measures designed to isolate and encircle the guerrillas in their base area, away from the population, until the guerrilla bands could eventually be hunted down in their base area by mobile military units.¹¹⁸

Trinquier makes it clear that “modern warfare” is a total struggle to the death between the government and the guerrilla forces. “*Modern warfare*, like classical wars of the past, will definitely end only with the crushing of one of the two armies on the battlefield, or by the capitulation of one side to the war aims of the opponent.”¹¹⁹ Trinquier’s military thought was brutally amoral and extremely reductive in its concepts of human motivation; and its practical results were demonstrated when the French government, faced with overwhelming political opposition in Algeria even after the military destruction of the FLN, finally granted Algeria independence.

“Hearts and minds” strategy was more humane in conception, although not always in implementation. Among the more eloquent advocates of this strategy were Douglas Blaufarb and George Tanham, whose book *Who Will Win?* represents a kind of *summa* of Cold War thinking about counterinsurgency.

To Blaufarb and Tanham control of the people could only be achieved if the government gained legitimacy in their eyes, and a policy of force would only serve to alienate them. Counterinsurgency, then, was to be divided into its “persuasive” and “coercive” aspects. The latter were, as far as possible, to be aimed solely at the guerrillas in the military struggle. Effective control of the peasants could ultimately only be achieved by persuasion, by convincing them to extend their voluntary support to the government.¹²⁰

The coercive aspect of counterinsurgency focuses on reforming the military to improve its professional conduct and war-fighting capability, establishing an effective intelligence network, and conducting aggressive small unit “search and destroy” operations against the guerrillas.¹²¹ The tactics of persuasion are based on comprehensive programs of reform and development designed to gain legitimacy for the government: democratization,¹²² increasing the professionalism of government personnel,¹²³ and meeting the needs of the peasantry through health, education, and land reform programs.¹²⁴

117 Trinquier, *Modern warfare* 21–3, 29–40.

118 Trinquier, *Modern warfare* 67–93.

119 Trinquier, *Modern warfare* 53.

120 Blaufarb and Tanham, *Who* 17–19.

121 Blaufarb and Tanham, *Who* 23–8.

122 Blaufarb and Tanham, *Who* 35–6.

123 Blaufarb and Tanham, *Who* 25–6, 31–2, 41–2.

124 Blaufarb and Tanham, *Who* 41–2.

For all its apparent humanity, however, the strategy recommended by Blaufarb and Tanham has a total political objective. The aim is fundamentally the same as Trinquier's heavy-handed police tactics: to mobilize the population on the side of the government, so that the guerrillas can be isolated and crushed. Implemented in the prescribed fashion, both strategies would vastly increase the power of the government and result in a basic transformation of state-society relations.

For our purposes, the essential point is that Ottoman methods of dealing with rebellion in Yemen underwent a transformation which foreshadowed the evolution in Western counterinsurgency policy. The Ottomans were initially able to achieve a swift conquest of Yemen employing a strategy similar to that recommended by Callwell, that is aggressive campaigning based on the judicious exploitation of their superior firepower in battle. Superior firepower also played a key role in allowing the Ottomans to maintain control in the early years of the occupation, allowing them to crush overt rebellion fairly swiftly.

As the Zaydi resistance grew more sophisticated, however, the Ottomans were forced to change their policy. Here, a basic tension emerged between repressive measures and strategies designed to win the voluntary support of the population. In the 1890s, the Ottomans employed punitive action against suspected supporters of the imam, including the destruction of crops and villages, police repression and arrests. Such measures were rooted partially in the more brutal aspects of nineteenth century counterinsurgency, as represented by authors such as Callwell. They also foreshadowed the reliance on massive repression which military thinkers such as Trinquier would later advocate.

At the same time, throughout the period of Ottoman rule there was a consistent thread of thought based on the same principles as "hearts and minds" counterinsurgency. Proponents of this view believed that the imams' forces could only be defeated by comprehensive programs of government reform designed to gain the voluntary support of the population. These reformers advocated extending the administration to remote areas of the country, reforming the behavior of government personnel, and infrastructural development to foster the economic prosperity of the region. Just and efficient administration of this type would strengthen the loyalty of the Yemenis to the Ottoman government and reduce the appeal of the imam.

The adoption of these kinds of counterinsurgency policies naturally increased the intensity of the conflict in Yemen and pushed it toward total war. And unlike the Zaydi imams, who wanted to bring the Ottoman government to negotiate with them, the Ottoman sultan Abdülhamid did want to destroy the imamate as an institution and make the population of Yemen submit

unconditionally to his rule.¹²⁵ We will show, however, that the actual implementation of these policies was consistently undermined by the financial and military limitations of the Ottoman administration. The government did not have enough soldiers to implement military counterinsurgency in a thorough manner, and large parts of the country remained beyond the reach of the Ottoman army. Repressive police action was brutal but inadequate, tending to center around Ṣan‘ā’ where the government had the greatest control.

Counterinsurgency based on reform, centralization, and development necessarily faced even greater obstacles. The desirability of constructing road and rail networks to integrate the country was recognized early on by Ottoman officials, but such projects were never implemented in a sustained fashion. Periodic efforts were made to root out corruption in the bureaucracy and improve the behavior of the military. These efforts, however, were often blocked by powerful vested interests within the administration.

In short, the Ottoman administration in Yemen lacked the financial and institutional resources to implement a sustained counterinsurgency program, of either a repressive or benevolent character. In the last analysis, this meant that it could not shatter the enemy decisively, as a counterinsurgency program on a truly total scale might have done. Ultimately, the Ottomans had to make peace with the Zaydi rebels on a basis not dissimilar to that defining the relationship between local elites and the Empire in the period before the Tanzimat, the major reforms of the mid-nineteenth century. The Zaydi tribes and the imam were given practical autonomy in return for formal loyalty.

This particular point, relating as it does to the political and cultural context of Ottoman counterinsurgency, brings up a larger question in regard to our theoretical framework.

We have discussed Ottoman policy in the light of European thinking about counterinsurgency because these strategic theories are useful in highlighting some of the military aspects of the conflict in Yemen. It is clear, however, that there is some cultural and temporal distance between the historical context of these theories and the actual formation of Ottoman policy in Yemen. How, then, is the shift from limited toward total war to be understood in the political and cultural context of the Ottoman Empire in the nineteenth century?

125 See al-Shāmī, *Alāqāt* 44–5, where he notes that the Ottoman government in its negotiations with Imam al-Manṣūr simply urged him to submit, making no consideration of the imam's point of view; and Atif Paşa, *Yemen* II, 261, where he states that the commander Feysi Paşa in one of the campaigns against Imam Yahyā was ordered by the Ottoman government to capture the imam in 20 days or face the consequences.

Here, it is necessary to understand the tensions in Ottoman political ideology during this period. The Ottoman Empire was heir to a system of political thought based in Perso-Islamic and Central Asian concepts of governance, which remained very much alive in this period. At the same time, this thought was being transformed by the incorporation of reformist and bureaucratic concepts of government derived from contemporary European thought. The evolution from limited toward total forms of counterinsurgency in Yemen represented in part a shift from classical methods of dealing with rebellion toward those which were rooted in the modernizing Ottoman thought of the nineteenth century. To understand this shift, then, requires some discussion of both the Perso-Islamic background of Ottoman political thought and its transformation during the Tanzimat and Hamidian periods.

5.2 *Classical Ottoman Methods of Dealing with Rebellion*

The roots of Abdülhamid's political ideology lay in classical Ottoman political thought, which was in turn derived from Perso-Islamic and Turkic concepts of the just ruler. This ideology combined strong paternalist and Islamic ethical concepts with an acceptance of ruthless violence and deception as the prerogative of the ruler. The sultan was justified in using amoral measures to maintain his rule, for the stability and order of the Muslim community depended on it.

The paternal concept of the ruler combined authoritarian and Islamic ethical concepts. The sultan was referred to as the "Shadow of God," and the sixteenth century Ottoman *siyaset-name Hurz'ül-Mülûk* likens the bonds of the ruler with his subjects with those of a father to his sons.¹²⁶ The ruler was to watch over his subjects with the benevolence of a father. He protected the Muslim community from its enemies, upheld Islamic law, maintained social peace and justice, and ensured the public observance of Islamic rituals. The ruler was supposed to exemplify the moral virtues of Islam, such as patience, kindness, and forgiveness, and to act in accordance with them in dealing with his subjects.¹²⁷

The protective function of the ruler, however, was dependent on his control of armed force and his power to punish. The 17th century Ottoman political writer Koçî Bey states "the might and power of the Majestic Sultanate [is secured by] soldiers" in his restatement of the "circle of equity," the classical formulation of the principles of rulership in Perso-Islamic political thought.¹²⁸

¹²⁶ Akgündüz (ed.), *Osmanlı kanunnâmeleri* VIII, 43.

¹²⁷ Al-Shayzarî, *Nahj* 95 ff.

¹²⁸ Koçî Bey, *Nizam* 18.

Elsewhere, he states that “the sons of men are restrained by force and not by kindness.”¹²⁹ The ruler was supposed to possess *hayba*, an awe-inspiring majesty which made his subjects quake with fear. This *hayba*, in turn, stemmed in part from his power to punish evildoers, often in a savage and public fashion, for it was thought that fear was a central component in maintaining social peace and order.¹³⁰ The medieval political thinker Nizam al-Mulk lists fearful punishments in his *Siyāsatnāmah* for officials who transgressed the moral boundaries of Islam, including flaying, trampling by elephants, and beating to death with clubs.¹³¹

Yet while the use of brutal force was an indispensable prerogative of the ruler, it was not necessarily condoned as the best or only way of maintaining social control. The Perso-Islamic tradition encouraged the use of deception and divide and rule tactics to gain political ends, particularly when these tactics would obviate the need for excessive force. Muḥammad al-Iskāfi, author of the medieval *siyāsatnāmah Lutf al-tadbīr fī siyāsat al-mulūk*, tells the story of Aristotle’s advice to Alexander on governing the conquered kingdom of Persia. Rather than killing the men of Persia, which was objectionable on moral and practical grounds, he advised him to appoint different kings over the various peoples of Persia. These kings would not “render one another obedience but have recourse to you.”¹³² The practices of ruling through a local elite and using divide and rule tactics to maintain control of this elite were common in the historic Islamic empires.

The use of force in the Perso-Islamic political tradition therefore tended to be savage but intermittent, restrained by the practical constraints on the ruler’s power, the moral imperatives of Islam with their emphasis on clemency and justice, and the practical preference for manipulation over overt violence. In other words, the tradition was more conducive to the waging of limited wars than total ones.

When we turn to the methods actually used by the Ottoman Empire to suppress rebellion from the sixteenth through the eighteenth centuries, it is in fact the limited and intermittent character of violence which stands out. The elements of force, clemency, and manipulation were all present. We may list the main features of pre-modern Ottoman methods of dealing with rebellion

129 Koçi Bey, *Nizam* 18.

130 See the use of the term *hayba* in the story of Nushirvan the Just in Nizam al-Mulk, *Siyāsatnāmah* 44.

131 Nizam al-Mulk, *Book*, 39, 46, 58.

132 al-Iskāfi, *Tahdhīb* 44–5.

as follows: attempting to gain the support of local elites, divide and rule tactics, and punitive expeditions.

These tactics were necessitated by fundamental limitations on the actual coercive power of the state. The Ottoman Empire had a delicate relationship with the armed tribes and notables in its territory, who retained considerable autonomy. For most of its history, the Ottoman state was unable to disarm these groups. Therefore, it could not exercise sustained coercion in a manner which would make overt violence unnecessary, or fully bureaucratize its system of social controls. Divisive and harshly punitive tactics were a means of maintaining overall state supremacy, in a situation where the state could not exert a great deal of effective control.

In the Arab and Kurdish regions of the empire the role of indirect rule through local elites was particularly pronounced. In Palestine and Lebanon, local princes such as Fakhr al-Dīn Maʿn and Zāhir al-ʿUmar were given tax collecting privileges and effective control over the areas they ruled. In the Kurdish regions of the Ottoman Empire, Selim I gave the Kurdish princes formal autonomy in return for their support against the Safavids.¹³³

The autonomy of local elites tended to encourage the use of divide and rule tactics by the Ottoman sultanate to control them. The Ottoman state used divide and rule tactics extensively to control the local warlords who emerged into prominence in the eighteenth century.¹³⁴ The Syrian governor Cezzar Ahmed Paşa exploited lineage rivalries in the Shihāb family, the ruling dynasty of Mount Lebanon, in order to maintain his overall control.¹³⁵

When divide and rule tactics failed, the Ottomans would resort to the punitive expedition, the final sanction of force which was rooted in the ruler's power to punish. The chronicles of Syria and Lebanon tell of expeditions against the desert Bedouin and the clans of the mountains in which soldiers burnt crops, took heads from fallen rebels, and plundered livestock.¹³⁶ Yet despite the brutality of these measures, the punitive expedition was a limited means of using force; it was not designed to completely destroy. In keeping with Nizam al-Mulk's dictum that after punishing the recalcitrant the ruler would "cover their sins with the skirt of pardon,"¹³⁷ the rebels might be granted

133 Epözdemir, *1514* 27–9.

134 Shaw, *Between* 232.

135 Holt, *Egypt* 130–2; Qaṭṭān (ed.), *Hawādith* 63 ff.

136 See the descriptions of punitive expeditions in Syria in al-Ḥallāq, *Hawādith* 71; or Qaṭṭān (ed.), *Hawādith* 144–5.

137 Nizam al-Mulk, *Book* 10.

safety from further violence (*aman*) in return for formal submission and the payment of an indemnity.

The paternal-Islamic limitations on violence in the classical Ottoman tradition, however, would gradually be loosened in the nineteenth century. While traditional concepts of rule were still important under Abdülhamid, they were gradually being transformed by quasi-nationalist ideas, the centralization of the Ottoman government, and the subsequent increase in the state's capacity for violence. Policies similar to those of modern counterinsurgency came into being, and internal and external pressures on Abdülhamid's hybrid state tended increasingly to push it toward total war.

The heritage of ideas from the Tanzimat about government reform and gaining the loyalty of subject populations was of prime importance in the emergence of modern counterinsurgency strategies under Abdülhamid. The foundation of modern counterinsurgency of the "soft" variety, as we have seen, is the legitimacy of the government. The building of trust between the state and its subject populations through programs of government reform and social and economic development is directed to this aim.

Now, M. Safa Saraçoğlu argues correctly that the Ottoman Empire underwent an extended crisis of legitimacy beginning in the late sixteenth century. The social formation that legitimated exploitation of the Empire's resources by the Ottoman ruling class, a formation which Saraçoğlu defines as "traditional" began to break down under the pressure of the wars, natural disasters, economic crises and social and political unrest that characterized the seventeenth century.

As a result of these crises, the forms of landholding that had defined the old order were gradually replaced by export-oriented agriculture. Saraçoğlu sees in this a transition to the "liberal-capitalist" social formation defined by the relationship between wage labor and capital, and "anchored in the system of bourgeois civil law."¹³⁸ The political, economic and social reforms of the nineteenth century must be understood as an attempt by the Ottoman state to reassert its legitimacy in the context of these social and economic changes, once the old order had lost its legitimacy as a result of the cataclysmic changes the Empire underwent in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.

We do not take issue with this analysis, but we would like to add to it that in the nineteenth century there was a much more direct and immediate political cause for the Ottoman Empire's crisis of legitimacy; that is, the rise of ethno-religious nationalism and independence movements among the Empire's

138 Saraçoğlu, *Nineteenth* 15–16.

Christian peoples. Whether or not the Empire had ever had legitimacy among these peoples is an open question; but in the nineteenth century rebellion against the Empire by these peoples became organized, politicized and supported by the Christian powers of Europe in a way that it had not been before, posing a continual threat to the Empire's territorial integrity.

This development forced Ottoman statesmen to give serious consideration to the problem of winning the loyalty of the subject Christian populations. As the foundation of the state's quest for legitimacy, then, Ottoman statesmen strove to create a legal system by means of which all subjects of the Empire would support the state because they felt it was just and benevolent.

Carter Findley has shown that the issuing and codification of this new legislation was a central feature of the Tanzimat. The Gülhane decree of 1839, usually regarded as marking the beginning of the Tanzimat, guaranteed life, honor and property to all subjects of the Empire regardless of religion.¹³⁹ The Reform Decree of 1856 gave explicit equality to Muslims and non-Muslims, making all eligible for official appointments based on ability, opening civil and military schools to all, and requiring that legal disputes between members of different religions be heard in mixed courts.¹⁴⁰

The law of the state is based on its underlying ideology, which must be accepted by a majority of its citizens if the state is to remain stable. The ideology of the Ottoman state in the Tanzimat came to be that of *Osmanlıluk*, "Ottomanism," which would bind Ottoman subjects of all ethnicities and religions together in loyalty to the *vatan* or "fatherland."¹⁴¹ This did not replace the traditional Islamic ideological foundation of the state but came to exist alongside it, ameliorating those aspects of the Islamic state which had historically made non-Muslims legally inferior.

Apart from law and ideology, a third element in the Ottoman state's quest for legitimacy came to be that of projects designed to improve the social and economic welfare of the population, an essential feature of the modern state. Programs were envisioned, and sometimes implemented, to professionalize the bureaucracy, build schools, develop the resources of the Empire, and construct communications networks.¹⁴²

In theory, all this was supposed to create a sense of Ottoman identity in place of religious and ethnic loyalties, and to foster loyalty to the state as representing the unitary Ottoman nation. Again, these policies foreshadowed modern

139 Findley, *Turkey* 92.

140 Ibid.

141 Findley, *Turkey* 101–2.

142 Davison, *Reform* 87–92, 362–3.

ideas of counterinsurgency because they were implemented in conjunction with efforts to militarily suppress the nationalist guerrillas of the Balkans.

The most salient example of this was Midhat Paşa's policies in the restive Danube Province, today comprising modern Bulgaria and parts of Serbia and Romania, during the 1860s. Midhat's policies combined civil development with strong security measures. They involved consultation with local notables, the construction of schools, hospitals, and roads, and the dispatch of military patrols to clear the countryside of brigands.¹⁴³ Midhat also proposed that a system of schools and universities be set up in Bulgaria which would inculcate Bulgarian youth with a sense of Ottoman nationality and reduce the appeal of Slavic nationalism.¹⁴⁴ Midhat Paşa's policies were successful enough that the administrative organization he established for the government of the Danube Province was codified in the Provincial Regulation of 1864 as a law for all the Ottoman provinces.¹⁴⁵

Many elements of the Tanzimat heritage as exemplified in the policies of Midhat Paşa, including the emphasis on government reform, education, and economic development, passed intact into the period of Abdülhamid's rule. Abdülhamid's reign, however, represented a partial return to the paternal-Islamic conception of sultanic rule. In analyzing the dynamics of his rule, then, we will make use of Carter Findley's definition of Abdülhamid's regime as a state which pursued "split-up" modernization, a concept developed by S.N. Eisenstadt.¹⁴⁶

In this type of modernizing polity "advocates of change who are in positions of power, their roles still defined and legitimated in basically traditional terms, tend to advocate change in spheres where they think they can control it and use it to buttress the order of which they are a part." At the same time, such autocratic modernizers "try to restrict change in the fundamental, constitutive principles of the polity."¹⁴⁷

If the rulers have enough resources to buy off opposition, as in the case of Saudi Arabia, they may be able to maintain their legitimacy and authority. But most polities of this kind have historically been poor and have not had the resources to meet their citizens' rising expectations in the modern era. This kind of policy has therefore historically been highly conducive to the destabilization of the regimes in question, resulting in an increase in violent repression

143 Midhat, *Life* 35–7.

144 Midhat, *Life* 37–45.

145 Saraçoğlu, *Nineteenth* 47.

146 See Findley's discussion of S. N. Eisenstadt's *Modernization* in Findley, *Reform* 149–50.

147 Findley, *Reform* 149.

by the state. This is because, in the first instance, the autocrat's attempt to control the pace and direction of "modernization" proves impossible; "as new ideas begin to spread throughout the society ... there emerge rival reformist groups that oppose the established leadership and expound alternative concepts of change." In consequence, "the rulers of such societies characteristically use whatever resources are at their disposal to maintain their position."¹⁴⁸

Nearly always, such resources include a substantial police and military apparatus. Usually, the autocrats in question have increasingly resorted to this apparatus as the new intelligentsia step up their political activities and steadily undermine the autocrat's bases of "traditional" legitimacy.¹⁴⁹

Such violence may actually be worsened if autocratic rulers try to impose a mass identity from the top down on a diverse population, in an attempt to copy the mass mobilizing techniques of modern politics to foster loyalty to the state. The employment of such ideologies tends to intensify the conflict between the autocratic state and genuinely mass mobilizing movements from below, giving the conflict the Manichaean character of nationalist or other ideological war.¹⁵⁰

Under Abdülhamid, the ideology for this mass identity was provided by the policy of the "unity of Islam, *"ittihad-i İslam,"*¹⁵¹ which Europeans translated as Pan-Islamism.¹⁵² Abdülhamid sought to outflank the appeal of ethnic nationalism among Ottoman Muslims by attempting to "modernize" Islamic identity.¹⁵³ In Abdülhamid's empire, however, proto-nationalist ideas of loyalty to the state and the nation were focused on the person of the sultan-caliph in an attempt to revive the traditional centrality of the ruler in Ottoman thought.

In the "unity of Islam" policy, all Muslims were part of one community (*ümmet*) headed by the caliph, that is the Ottoman sultan. It was essential that Ottoman Muslims and Muslims at large be united, for disunity had made the *ümmet* vulnerable to the predatory European powers.¹⁵⁴ The Ottoman caliph

148 Findley, *Reform* 149–50.

149 We are thinking in this context of the growing opposition to the regimes of Haile Selassie and Muhammad Reza Pahlavi in the 1960s, led in large part by the students whom their educational policies had helped to create, and which caused both regimes to resort to increasingly repressive tactics. See Keddie, *Roots* 235–9; and Lata, *Ethiopian state* 177–82.

150 Such attempts have historically included Haile Selassie's attempt to create an "Ethiopian" identity by forcing Christian Amharic culture on the Muslim and animist peoples of the Ethiopian plateau. See Lata, *Ethiopian state* 171 ff.

151 Georgeon, *Abdulhamid* 193.

152 Georgeon, *Abdulhamid* 208.

153 Karpát, *Politicization* 150–4, 225, 241–4.

154 Karpát, *Politicization* 188, 320–6.

represented the unity of the Muslim community and acted as its defender against European aggression.¹⁵⁵ Therefore, Muslims were considered to have a natural loyalty to the caliph; and in education and propaganda undertaken by the regime, the necessity of Muslim loyalty and obedience to the caliph was continually emphasized.¹⁵⁶

To reinforce this loyalty, Abdülhamid had the state engage in visibly “Islamic” endeavors: repairing mosques, building schools whose curriculum emphasized loyalty to the caliph and the Islamic faith, and constructing the Hejaz Railway.¹⁵⁷ These were the specifically integrative measures designed to mold Ottoman Muslims into a single community, whose identity would be bound up in the state and the sultan. And just as the relatively liberal ideas of the Tanzimat formed the basis for “counterinsurgency” in the Balkans, so did Abdülhamid’s “unity of Islam” policy serve as the foundation for the “state-building” measures undertaken to pacify Yemen.

The “split-up” character of Abdülhamid’s “unity of Islam” policy lay in the fact that proto-nationalist ideas of the state and nation were bound up with the traditional Ottoman focus on loyalty and obedience to the sultan. The sultan’s state-building measures were therefore not designed to create autonomous institutions whose aim was to serve the public, as in a modern democracy. The growing centralization of the state in Abdülhamid’s reign and the expansion of the army, bureaucracy, and police was designed to reinforce the sultan’s traditional power and extend it beyond its traditional boundaries.

The internal contradictions in the process of “split-up” modernization tend, as we have seen, to push the state toward increasing violence against its subjects; and this was the case in Abdülhamid’s empire. Typically, opposition in polities of this kind arises from two sources: the new educated classes who are impatient with customary methods of rule, and more traditional groups whose power and privileges are curtailed as a result of modernizing policies.

Under Abdülhamid, the new class of military officers, bureaucrats and teachers provided a potent source of opposition. The Young Turk movement flourished among the officers of the Ottoman army and educated men from among the Christian subjects of the empire organized guerrilla movements in Macedonia and Armenia. In Yemen, opposition came from traditional groups—the Ḥāshid and Bakil tribes and the Zaydi sayyids—who had lost their historic dominance under the monolithic Ottoman state.

155 Karpát, *Politicization* 241 ff.

156 Karpát, *Politicization* 232.

157 Karpát, *Politicization* 253–7, 229–33.

The politically rigid character of modernizing absolutisms such as that of Abdülhamid typically does not allow for the peaceful expression of political dissent. Consequently, opposition often takes a violent form, as it did in Macedonia, Eastern Turkey, and Yemen. This in turn causes the ruler to respond with force, often transgressing the customary boundaries which govern the use of violence in a traditional polity and breaking down his legitimacy further. This results in more violent opposition, which in turn causes the ruler to clamp down harder, and so on, until a progressive destabilization of the regime takes place.

This essentially was what happened in Yemen. The “unity of Islam” policy was closely tied to the sultan’s policy of suppressing dissent at any cost. Abdülhamid believed that the Zaydi imams, by virtue of their assuming the title of Imam which implied leadership of the Muslim community, were his rivals for the caliphate and wanted to rule independently in Yemen. This was not true, but his belief in this regard seems to have been encouraged by the men of his inner circle.¹⁵⁸ The rhetoric of the “unity of Islam” policy and caliphal authority therefore left no place for a rival Muslim authority such as an imam. In consequence, the sultan plunged into long-term conflict with the Zaydi imams; and the unhappy paradox inherent in “split-up” modernization (at least in the poorer countries, which have historically constituted the majority of modernizing autocracies), in which the military-repressive capability of the state expands as the ruler’s legitimacy deteriorates, meant that this conflict would steadily escalate in intensity.

In sum, the empire under Abdülhamid was evolving toward the nation state political model which dominated Europe at the time; yet its fundamental inconsistencies gave it the character of a fortress state, rather than an inchoate “national” one. The panoply of a modern state served primarily as a machinery to ensure the dominance of the Yıldız Palace over and against the peoples of the Empire, rather than to bind them together in a sense of Ottoman-Muslim identity. Intolerant of conflicting loyalties and seeking to bring the population under direct bureaucratic control, the Ottoman state under Abdülhamid was too inflexible to bring about a genuine integration of the peoples of the Empire.

In Yemen, its centralizing logic brought it into conflict with a tribal and religious culture which historically was intensely suspicious of state power. The availability of modern weapons and astute political organizing by the imams intensified this opposition and made it increasingly effective in military terms.

¹⁵⁸ Al-Shāmī, *Alāqāt* 84 ff.

Before they could make peace on the basis of the values they shared, the Zaydis and the Ottomans would have to fight one another to exhaustion.

6 Conclusion

This study will examine the shift from limited toward more total forms of war in Yemen within the specific cultural context of Zaydi and Ottoman history. The conflict was deeply rooted in the political culture of both the Zaydis and the Ottomans. Perhaps its most salient feature in this regard was its specifically Islamic character, distinguishing it sharply from the nationalist conflicts of the same period. The question of state legitimacy, which is often the key issue where an entrenched bureaucratic state faces organized guerrilla resistance, here revolved around conflicting views of proper Islamic governance.

The Zaydis, in accordance with Shiite tradition, held that the rightful imam had to be a descendant of Ali through his sons Ḥasan and Ḥusayn. Paradoxically, this doctrine did not prevent the imams from recognizing the ultimate authority of the Ottoman sultans as leaders of the Muslim community. The flawed understanding of the position of the imams by Abdülhamid, however, led him to believe that the imams did not recognize his caliphate and were seeking to rule independently in Yemen. The Zaydi tradition emphasized strict adherence to Islamic law, implying in practice legal limitations on the ruler's authority, and sanctioned military resistance to an unjust ruler as a duty of the Muslim community.

The observance of Islamic law was also important in the Ottoman tradition. The Ottomans, however, recognized an additional body of law, the *kanun*, or decrees of the sultan which had the force of law; the Ottoman sultans thus had greater legal authority than the Zaydi imams. The Sunni tradition of political thought did not explicitly sanction authoritarianism but held that submission to a tyrannical ruler was preferable to anarchy and civil war; and Ottoman traditions of government were explicitly authoritarian.

Classical Ottoman thinkers emphasized the Islamic duty of submission to the ruler, rather than resistance to tyranny. The sultan was entrusted with the survival and prosperity of the Muslim community. Since the state protected the Muslim community, the sultan's first priority was to ensure the security of the state; and to do this, he could take any measure he deemed proper.

Such ideas were modified in the Tanzimat period, with its emphasis on the rule of law. They returned, however, under Abdülhamid. Abdülhamid's Pan-Islamic and absolutist ideas represented in part an adaptation of classical Ottoman concepts to the new realities of the bureaucratic state in the

nineteenth century. The educated bureaucratic classes could and did pose a threat to the sultan's authority. Outside the state apparatus itself, however, the modernized army and bureaucracy became a tool of Abdülhamid's absolutism, enabling him to exercise a closer degree of control over the population of the Empire than any of his predecessors.

The extension of this authoritarian state to Yemen created immediate conflicts with the Zaydi tribes, whose own traditions emphasized resistance to government authority. One of the essential functions of a tribal quasi-state such as the Zaydi imamate, to unify its supporting tribes to resist an outside invader, became immediately relevant in this context. The Zaydi ulama were thus able to reconstruct the imamate as a jihad state, organized specifically for the purpose of waging war against the "tyrannical" Ottoman government.

The conflicting rhetoric of Islam was a major factor in the escalation of the conflict toward total war. The Zaydis believed that it was their Islamic duty to fight a regime which was tyrannical and did not enforce the Sharia, although they always held the door open for negotiation if the government would mend its ways. In the Pan-Islamic ideology of Abdülhamid's government, however, the Zaydis were refusing to perform their Islamic duty of submission to the caliph and threatening the unity of the Muslim community. Therefore, "Islam" sanctioned their suppression.

At the same time, Islam provided a shared set of cultural assumptions which would ultimately facilitate dialogue and reconciliation between the two sides after the Hamidian regime ended. The sense that Muslims needed to be united in the face of external threats was an important factor in enabling Zaydis and Ottomans to effect a reconciliation (particularly on the side of the former). The Young Turk government and its negotiator in Yemen Ahmed İzzet Paşa, however, were motivated primarily by the simple recognition of the limits of Ottoman power in Yemen. Although the Zaydis perceived the Ottoman state as immensely powerful, the Ottomans never had the ability to implement a counterinsurgency program in a truly comprehensive fashion. The basis on which peace was finally concluded, then, in some ways reflected the practices of the Empire before the Tanzimat. The imam was allowed to retain his position in return for formal submission to the Ottoman state.

In a sense, then, war in Yemen never quite became "total," even when compared with the nationalist rebellions in the Balkan provinces of the Ottoman Empire. The position of Yemen on the periphery of the empire, the archaic character of its society, and the absence of a tradition of Ottoman rule made it impossible for the Ottomans to impose a strong central authority there. Similarly, while conflicting interpretations of Islam served to intensify the war until 1908, shared assumptions deriving from Islam also made it possible to

bring about a reconciliation after 1908. No such shared assumptions limited the nationalist rebellions in the Empire. Yemen was close enough to the world at large to be profoundly affected by the general progression toward total war during the period in question. It was distant enough that the developments associated with the rise of total war would receive their own particular cultural stamp in Yemen and play themselves out in ways which were unique.

The Collapse of the Qāsimī Imamate

In the introduction, we discussed the specific institutional features of the tribal quasi-state as defined by Ernest Gellner and noted that this type of polity in the Middle East has historically been characterized by a tension between tribal and “Islamic” values. In this chapter, we will show that the Zaydi imamate in the early nineteenth century conformed in its essential features to the Gellner model. Likewise, we will show that the tension between tribal and Islamic values contributed to the collapse of the imamate as a viable state. Specifically, cleavages among the Zaydi scholarly elite resulted in civil wars which permitted this tension to emerge as open conflict, resulting in the destruction of the imamate.

By the eighteenth century, a group of ulama had emerged from among the Zaydi ulama who had for all practical purposes had become Sunni, despite their Zaydi background. Bernard Haykel calls these men Sunni Traditionists. This is because they advocated a return to the Quran and the Sunna, that is, the canonical hadith collections of Sunni Islam, as the authoritative sources of Islamic law, without the intermediation of the Zaydi manuals of Islamic law historically used by the Zaydi ulama.¹ This brought them into conflict with the Zaydi ulama who followed the historic teachings of the Zaydi school, with its Shiite emphases, and who were called Hādāwīs after al-Hādī the founder of the Zaydi imamate in Yemen. The imamate in the early nineteenth century was dominated by the Sunni Traditionists, who supported the central state authority. The Hādāwī ulama tended to oppose the central authority of the imamate and its Sunni tendencies. These men appear to have been supported by those who had grievances against the established order, such as the Zaydi tribesmen of the north and the poorer classes of Ṣan‘ā’.

The subsequent rebellions against the imamate were therefore undertaken as jihad to uproot tyranny and establish Islamic law. These jihads, however, degenerated into bloody civil wars in which the imamate was effectively destroyed as a state institution. It soon became clear that that jihad had simply become a means for the tribesmen to plunder and seize territory. We might say in this context that the particularistic and self-aggrandizing aspects of tribal

1 Haykel, *Revival* 10 ff.

culture, associated with concepts of “honor,” had practically overwhelmed the Zaydi-Islamic orientation of tribal rebellion in this period.

In military terms, this meant that war in this period lost the long-term, state-forming, and ideological character inherent in the concept of jihad. As the authority of the imamate disintegrated, military power passed into the hands of the Zaydi tribes and their shaykhs. The character of war in this period was thus largely determined by a kind of tribal warlordism, with all the military limitations this implies: unstable organization, short-term mobilization for limited and self-interested goals, shifting alliances, and inferior military technology. These, in essence, were the basic weaknesses of “irregular warriors” outlined by Callwell in *Small Wars*; and as often happened with irregular warriors in the 19th century, the Zaydi tribes would succumb to the better armed and organized Ottoman troops in 1872.

1 The Imamate as a Tribal Quasi-state

As described by Ernest Gellner, the tribal quasi-state as an institution has the following features: an undifferentiated administrative apparatus dominated by the religious classes, a small army recruited on a non-tribal basis, and reliance on a tribal confederation to provide its major military support.² The imamate, as we shall see, displayed these essential characteristics. As a state institution, the imamate was dominated by the Zaydi scholarly elite of sayyids and qadis. These men controlled two key institutions of the imamate in the eighteenth century, the vizierate and the judiciary.

Under al-Mahdī ‘Abbās (1748–75) and al-Manṣūr ‘Alī (1775–1809), the most powerful officials in the government were the viziers, of which there were usually about three or four; virtually all came from the major sayyid and qadi families.³ The viziers were given vast and often ill-defined powers. One of al-Manṣūr’s viziers, for example, was responsible successively for administering the key regions of Ḥudayda, al-Ḥayma and Ḥarāz, and finally Lower Yemen.⁴

The judiciary was dominated by the qadi families.⁵ The head of the judiciary was the chief judge, or *qāḍī al-quḍā*, who had oversight of the judges appointed to the provincial capital. The emphasis in Zaydi thought on the supremacy of

2 Ernest Gellner, *Tribalism* 111–21.

3 See al-‘Amrī, *Mī‘at ‘ām* 68–71.

4 Al-‘Amrī, *Mī‘at ‘ām* 75.

5 The Shawkānī family, for example, had served the imams in a legal and administrative capacity at least since the first Ottoman occupation. See al-‘Amrī, *The Yemen* 103–4.

the Sharia gave the judiciary considerable power. According to Niebuhr, the imam could not put anyone to death without the approval of the “supreme tribunal” of Ṣan‘ā’, which would determine the verdict in accordance with the procedures of Islamic law.⁶

Below the viziers were the *‘ummāl* (pl. of *‘āmil*), or the provincial governors, stationed in the main cities of the imam’s territories. The provincial governors were often, although not exclusively, manumitted Ethiopian slaves.⁷ The governors appear to have been appointed directly by the imam, although they reported to the viziers under whose jurisdiction they came. The imams also had a supra-tribal army, known as the “followers,” or *tawābi‘*. The commanders of the former were often Ethiopian slaves.⁸ The men themselves were variously recruited from Ethiopian slaves, the urban lower classes, and Zaydi tribesmen.

The primary base of the imamate’s military manpower, however, was the powerful Ḥāshid and Bakīl confederation. What made the imamate a “tribal quasi-state” was the balance of authority between elements of the ruler’s household, the sayyid and qadi religious elites, and the autonomous Zaydi tribes. All these groups had an interest in controlling and exploiting the richer Shafii areas, Lower Yemen and the Tihama ports, for their own benefit.

The tribes had served as the military arm of the imamate during the conquest of these areas in the seventeenth century. At that time the imamate had espoused an aggressively Shiite form of Zaydism based in the teachings of the imamate’s founder, al-Hādī, and had engaged in proselytization in the conquered areas.⁹ Expansion by means of jihad helped to stabilize this tribal quasi-state by reducing some of its inherent tensions. The Shafiis of Lower Yemen and the Hadhramaut served as a common external enemy to unite the tribes, the Zaydi ulama and the imams. The availability of lands through conquest gave the tribesmen a material incentive to support the wars of the imams. The imamate provided the ideological justification and organization for military expansion, while the tribesmen provided the military muscle. The unity of purpose between tribes and state in this fashion may have helped to reduce the threat inherent in most segmentary lineage societies, that of being torn apart in internecine conflict. The goals of an aggressive tribal society and an Islamic scholar-elite were fused in the Qāsimī tribal quasi-state.

Bernard Haykel, however, views the establishment of the authority of the imamate over the Shafii areas of Yemen as having changed the fundamental

6 Niebuhr, *Travels* II, 83.

7 Al-‘Amrī, *The Yemen* 30.

8 Al-‘Amrī, *The Yemen* 23.

9 Haykel, *Revival* 38.

character of the imamate. Employing theories of authority derived from Max Weber, Haykel argues that the “charismatic” imamate of the seventeenth century became a “patrimonial” state in the eighteenth. This took place as the expansionist drive of the imamate waned and the principle of heredity replaced the strict requirements for election to the imamate. These institutional changes were accompanied by a shift in the ideological orientation of the state toward Sunni doctrines of state authority, with their emphasis on obedience to the ruler.¹⁰ Such changes led to serious strains within the ruling elite and Zaydi society at large; and our concern is to show how the changes described by Haykel increased the stress on the inherent tensions in the imamate as a tribal quasi-state.

2 The Transformation of the Imamate in the Eighteenth Century

Weber defines charismatic authority as authority derived specifically from the personal qualities of the charismatic leader; that is, on his unique access to the divine or sacred, the magnetism of his personality, and his capacity to perform heroic or miraculous deeds. In this it differs from “routinized” methods of establishing authority, such as tradition embodied in the principle of heredity. While the latter are institutionalized means of transmitting authority conducive to the maintenance of stable social relations over time, charismatic authority is unique to the individual leader and potentially revolutionary. The divine revelation supersedes established custom; the charismatic leader’s success in overturning the established social order and putting in a new social dispensation is seen as proof of divine favor.¹¹

In Haykel’s view, the Hādāwī-Zaydi ideal of the imam has the main characteristics of Weber’s “charismatic” leader. In Hādāwī Zaydism, the key element in holding together the Muslim community and ensuring its obedience to God is the personal qualities of the imam, his learning, piety, courage, and so forth. The oppositional character of Hādāwī Zaydism is embodied in the requirement of *khurūj*, literally, “coming out”; the imam must establish his authority by rising against tyranny and unbelief. As a result, Haykel argues, “the political structures they [the imams] established are not to be understood in terms of a state (*dawla*); rather, theirs was a *da’wa* [a summons to follow the rightful imam] whose fortunes followed that of the imam.”¹² Authority was embodied

10 Haykel, *Revival* 25.

11 Max Weber, *Economy* III, 1111 ff.

12 Haykel, *Revival* 29.

not in the institutional structures of a state, but in the personal qualities of the imams and their capability to command in the jihad.

Haykel argues that the imams in the seventeenth century period of conquests attempted to follow this model in their actions; and that the state at this time was held together by the force of their personalities and their leadership in the jihad. Expansion reached its height under al-Mutawakkil Ismā'īl (r. 1644–76). Supported by the powerful Dhū Ghaylān tribes of Baraṭ, al-Mutawakkil sent expeditions to Lahj, Aden, and the Hadhramaut, compelling the rulers of those regions to pay tribute.

The conquests themselves were waged specifically as jihad against the Shafiis, declared to be “infidels of interpretation” (*kuffār ta'wīl*).¹³ Their lands were taken by the imam and given to his Zaydi tribal supporters, who obtained extensive landholdings in Lower Yemen and the west as a result. Al-Mutawakkil Ismā'īl also sent Hādāwī scholars to the Shafii regions to spread Zaydi teachings.¹⁴

According to Weber, however, the new social dispensation established by the charismatic leader must become “routinized” if it is to survive. The following attracted by the personal and supernatural magnetism of the leader must become a body of soldiers and officials maintained by pay or benefices; regular means of transmitting authority, through “customary” or bureaucratic procedures, must be found; and the divine revelation must be codified as established doctrine.¹⁵ Now, Haykel argues that the Imams ultimately had to “routinize” their authority through the establishment of the state institutions characteristic of Near Eastern monarchy, to maintain control of the territories seized through jihad.

As the authority of the imams was “routinized,” the imamate was transformed into a patrimonial state. The patrimonial state is an extension of patriarchal organization, that is, the domination by the patriarch of his household dependents based on the authority accorded by custom to the father or father-figure. In a patrimonial state, the dominion of the patriarch has grown to encompass an empire or kingdom, which is governed according to the principles of the patriarchal household.¹⁶

The empire is defined as the private domain or patrimony of the ruler, and its officials as his dependents. The process of extending patrimonial rule thus involves the establishment of a central body of officials and soldiers dependent

13 Haykel, *Revival* 38.

14 Haykel, *Revival* 39.

15 Weber, *Economy* III, 1121–3.

16 Weber, *Economy* III, 1006 ff.

on the ruler, who can if necessary be used against autonomous status-honor groups that threaten his power. The slave armies of the Islamic world constituted the quintessential type of patrimonial military force.¹⁷ The officials of the patrimonial state thus increasingly derive their power and prestige from connection to the ruler, rather than inherited status. With its focus on consolidating the institutions of the state and stabilizing the social hierarchy established by custom, a “traditional” authority of this kind constitutes the very antithesis of charismatic authority.¹⁸

Haykel argues that the Zaydi imamate increasingly assumed the characteristics of a patrimonial state legitimated by “tradition” in the eighteenth century. The criteria of personal piety and learning in Islamic law were abandoned in favor of hereditary succession.¹⁹ Slaves from Ethiopia were increasingly used to staff the army and administrative apparatus.²⁰ The power of the state came increasingly to reside in the semi-bureaucratic institutions of the vizierate and the judiciary; and the imams began to adopt the bearing of absolute monarchs.

The imamate’s assumption of the trappings of monarchy was paralleled by a shift in its religious orientation. The conquest of the Shafii areas of Yemen was followed by intense interaction between Zaydi and Shafii scholars, resulting in the opening of the Zaydi establishment to Sunni currents of thought.²¹ Those ulama of Zaydi background who for practical purposes became Sunnis elaborated doctrines which reflected the transformation of the imamate as a state institution, overturning Shiite doctrines of “charismatic opposition” to corrupt authority in favor of a stable bureaucratic order.

Muḥammad al-Shawkānī, the most prominent of these scholars, rejected the doctrine that imams needed to be descended from Ali. Likewise, he abandoned the idea of rising against tyranny in favor of a Sunni-influenced focus on the subject’s duty of obedience to authority. He forbade Muslims to rise (*khurūj*) against a tyrannical imam so long as the latter conformed publicly to the major rituals and doctrines of Islam. He dismissed the idea that the imam had to be trained in the religious sciences as a *mujtahid*, focusing rather on the ruler’s function of maintaining the safety and order of the Muslim community.²²

The imams were thereby deprived of the charisma inherent in their descent, spiritual authority, and opposition to the established order. The Alid or Shiite

17 Weber, *Economy* III, 1015–17.

18 Weber, *Economy* III, 1117–18.

19 Haykel, *Revival* 47.

20 The first imam to use slave soldiers extensively was al-Mahdī Ṣāḥīb al-Mawāhib, in the early eighteenth century. See Haykel, *Revival* 48.

21 Haykel, *Revival* 41.

22 Haykel, *Revival* 84–5.

doctrinal core of the Zaydi imamate had been replaced by a political dispensation whose major ideas derived from Sunnism. In Shawkānī's thought, the locus of spiritual and religious authority was to shift from the imams to a body of religious scholars trained in the methods of the Traditionist school as *mujtahids*. These men were to staff the state apparatus and the judiciary, ensuring that the Sharia was enforced, and advising the imams on religious matters.²³ In short, the spiritual authority residing in the individual imams was to be transferred to the bureaucratic and judicial institutions of the central state.

Now, in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries the influence of the Sunni Traditionists became paramount at the court of the imams,²⁴ reaching its zenith in the years when Muḥammad al-Shawkānī served as chief judge (1795–1834). The “Sunnification” of the imamate and its consolidation as a patrimonial state, however, was accompanied by a steady contraction of its territories and revenues. The coffee trade, on whose revenues the imamate depended heavily, began to decline owing to a fall in coffee prices as a result of the development of new sources of coffee outside Yemen.²⁵ Shortly after the death of al-Mutawakkil Ismā'īl, the imamate lost control of the Hadhramaut and its ports; further territorial losses followed in the nineteenth century. As a result of the decline in the income from trade, the imamate became increasingly dependent on agricultural revenues from the fertile areas of Lower Yemen. This brought the state into increasing conflict with the tribes who had settled there in the earlier period of conquest, who controlled the revenues of the region through the system of *iqṭā'*, the “fiefs” granted by the imams in the age of conquest.²⁶

What we see here, in Haykel's phrase, is a *conjunction* of forces which altered the basic nature of the Zaydi imamate as a religious and political institution.²⁷ Such changes brought to the fore certain tensions which were inherent in the Zaydi imamate as a tribal quasi-state. The increasing assumption by the imamate of the attributes of Near Eastern monarchy served to accentuate the distance between the values of tribe and state respectively. Many of the Zaydi tribes remained fiercely Hādāwī in sympathies; and the centralizing trend of the imamate would certainly have aroused resentment among them.

If the stability of a patrimonial state was partially dependent on its control of the sources of patronage, enabling it to buy off opposition by the judicious

23 Haykel, Order 88, 99–100, 156.

24 Haykel, *Revival* 109.

25 Haykel, *Revival* 44.

26 Haykel, *Revival* 44–5.

27 Haykel, *Revival* 47.

distribution of lands and salaries, then the contraction of the imam's sources of revenue would inevitably produce instability. The imams had increasing difficulty in buying off the opposition of the tribes by the distribution of fiefs.²⁸ The widening social and ideological gap between state and tribe was therefore accentuated by competition over increasingly scarce resources.

To present the situation in this fashion is to oversimplify to a degree, to construct tribe and state as monolithic entities inherently opposed to one another. In fact, the actual situation was much more complex. The cleavage between the Shiites and the "people of the Sunna" in Yemeni society at this time has barely begun to be studied as a social phenomenon. It divided what had historically been Zaydi society on both vertical and horizontal lines, creating bitterly antagonistic factions among the ulama, and opposing the artisans of the eastern section of Ṣan'ā' to the wealthy individuals connected with the government in the west.

3 Social Aspects of the Hādāwī-Sunni Conflict

The political ascendance of the Traditionist school at this time meant that the Sunni ulama were preferred at the court and in the judiciary. This was especially true in the years that al-Shawkānī served as chief judge. Al-Shawkānī's vast number of students, and the powers of patronage that he enjoyed, seem to have effectively crowded out Hādāwī scholars from the most desirable posts in the judiciary. In Ṣan'ā', the wealthier ulama and those who had received government preferment resided in the western section of the city, Bi'r al-'Azab.²⁹

This group contrasted sharply with the poorer elements among the Zaydi scholarly class. Among the people who appear as fervent Hādāwīs in our sources are individuals referred to as "doctors of law" (*fuqahā'*) and "students" (*ṭalaba*). Such individuals played a key role in the accession of the last Hādāwī imam with real power, 'Abdallāh ibn Ḥasan [al-Nāṣir] in 1837. The "students" and "doctors of law" often appear to have been people in reduced circumstances, products of the relatively extensive system of religious education in Yemen for whom no posts could be found.³⁰

28 Haykel, *Revival* 45.

29 Al-Ḥibshī (ed.), *Ḥawlīyyāt* 21.

30 The author of the *Ḥawlīyyāt* said of the *fuqahā'* and *ṭalaba* who supported this imam that "the hearts of those [people] had been 'nourished' by hunger, and they [harbored bitterness] in their souls against those who held a position (*miḥna*)."
See al-Ḥibshī (ed.), *Ḥawlīyyāt* 67.

The power base of these people seems to have been in the less wealthy section of Ṣan‘ā’, among the artisans and tradesmen of the market in the eastern part of the city. In the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, periodic outbreaks of unrest took place among these people to protest the Sunni-oriented policies of the government, as when it was rumored that the names of the Companions were to be included in the Friday *khuṭba*.³¹ Within Ṣan‘ā’, then, the Sunni-Shiite divide appears as partially coterminous with the gap between the richer and poorer classes of the city.

Likewise, strong opposition to the “people of the Sunna” emerged among elements of the Ḥāshid and Bakīl confederation. Specifically, the powerful Bakīl tribes of Dhū Muḥammad and Dhū Ḥusayn in the Baraṭ region of the northeast emerged as strong opponents of the Sunni regime in Ṣan‘ā’. These tribes, referred to collectively as Dhū Ghaylān, had been among the major beneficiaries of the Qāsimī expansion in the seventeenth century.³² Drought and economic hardship forced them to continue migrating to Lower Yemen in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.³³ The seizure of land and fortresses by the Bakīl tribesmen made it difficult for the imams to collect taxes in this region. The imams therefore led repeated expeditions to Lower Yemen to expel the tribesmen, none of which had any long-term success. For their part, the Dhū Ghaylān tribes engaged in repeated rebellion under members of the al-‘Ansī qadi family, who were staunch partisans of Hādāwī Zaydism.³⁴

The contraction of the territories and economy of the imamate in the nineteenth century served to intensify these social and doctrinal tensions among the Zaydis. In 1833 the Egyptians occupied the Tihama with its ports;³⁵ and the Zaydi imams would not regain the Tihama until the departure of the Ottomans after World War I. As a result, the underlying tensions between Hādāwī and Sunni came to the fore, leading ultimately to full-blown civil war.

31 Al-‘Amrī, *The Yemen* 117–18; al-Ḥibshī (ed.), *Ḥawliyyāt* 132.

32 Dresch, *Tribes* 199–200.

33 In 1823, for example, there was a mass migration of the tribesmen and their families to the Sumāra region of Lower Yemen as a result of the severe drought in that year. See al-Ḥibshī (ed.), *Ḥawliyyāt* 34–5.

34 Al-‘Amrī, *The Yemen* 41–5. The climax of these rebellions came in 1818, when the Bakīl tribes sacked the Bi‘r al-‘Azab quarter of Ṣan‘ā’, killing many high ranking ulama associated with the government. See al-Ḥibshī (ed.), *Ḥawliyyāt* 20–3.

35 Al-‘Amrī, *Mi‘at ‘ām* 228–9, 258.

4 The Outbreak of Civil War

In the 1830s, the Hādāwī ‘ālim Sayyid Ḥusayn ibn ‘Alī al-Mu‘ayyidī went to Ṣa‘da to “enjoin the good and forbid the evil” among the tribes of Khawlān al-Shām. He remained in the region for about a year until his death.³⁶ He had been accompanied by a number of the prominent Hādāwī ulama and a younger scholar named Aḥmad ibn Hāshim; and in the Hijri year 1264 [1847–8], Aḥmad ibn Hāshim led some of the same ulama from Ṣan‘ā’ to Ṣa‘da again in performance of the Zaydī duty of *hijra*, or emigration from the region where tyrannical rule prevails.³⁷

The civil wars over the imamate began in earnest when Aḥmad ibn Hāshim decided to march on Ṣan‘ā’, after first asserting his claim to the imamate in Ṣa‘da. The last of the Qāsimī imams with any semblance of power, Muḥammad ibn Yaḥyā [al-Mutawakkil], had just been deposed in disgrace, after having invited an Ottoman expeditionary force from Ḥudayda to assist him in subduing the tribes.

The imam who had been elected to succeed him, ‘Alī ibn al-Mahdī [al-Hādī] was a man without significant force of character. Taking the throne-name of al-Manṣūr, then, Aḥmad ibn Hāshim marched on Ṣan‘ā’ with a large following from the Zaydī tribes of the northeast and Ḥāshid. On his arrival near Ṣan‘ā’, he summoned the Zaydī regions of the central plateau to obedience; and delegations from the Anīs and Dhamār regions came to offer the *bay‘a*, or official recognition of the ruler’s assumption of office, to him.³⁸ Apparently realizing the unsuitability of ‘Alī ibn al-Mahdī for the imamate, the ulama of Ṣan‘ā’ decided on the election of ‘Abbās ibn ‘Abd al-Raḥmān [al-Mu‘ayyad] to resist Aḥmad ibn Hāshim.

The rising of Aḥmad ibn Hāshim brought the social and doctrinal cleavages among the Zaydis into stark relief. It appears that Aḥmad ibn Hāshim drew much of his initial support from those social elements that had opposed the Sunni-oriented administration in Ṣan‘ā’. He had been accompanied on his *hijra* to Ṣa‘da by several of the prominent Hādāwī ulama of Ṣan‘ā’; such men included Qadi ‘Abdallāh ibn ‘Alī al-Ghālibī and Aḥmad ibn Ismā‘īl al-‘Ulūfī.³⁹

The tribes of the northeast, historically strong supporters of Hādāwī Zaydism, also threw in their lot with Aḥmad ibn Hāshim. The tribes of Khawlān

36 Zabāra, *Nayl* 1, 394.

37 Zabāra, *Nayl* 1, 236; al-Wāsi‘ī, *Tārīkh* 242.

38 Al-Wāsi‘ī, *Tārīkh* 242.

39 Ibid.

al-Shām and Saḥḥār were the first to answer Aḥmad ibn Hāshim's summons.⁴⁰ Qadi Aḥmad ibn Ḥusayn al-ʿAnsī al-Baraṭī, a scion of the family which had led the Dhū Ghaylān tribes of the northeast in rebellion against the imamate in the eighteenth century, was one of his partisans.⁴¹ Aḥmad ibn Hāshim therefore apparently received strong backing from elements of Dhū Muḥammad and Dhū Ḥusayn, in both the northeast and Lower Yemen. The sources also suggest that he had strong support among the Shiites of the market district in Ṣanʿāʾ, referred to as the "rabble" (*ghawghā*) by the author of the *Ḥawliyyāt*.⁴²

The party of ʿAlī ibn al-Mahdī and ʿAbbās ibn ʿAbd al-Raḥmān, by contrast, appears to have been dominated by the Traditionists. ʿAbbās ibn ʿAbd al-Raḥmān himself was one of al-Shawkānī's students, and his chief qadi was the latter's son, Aḥmad ibn Muḥammad al-Shawkānī.⁴³ Among the tribes who supported these imams against Aḥmad ibn Hāshim were Arḥab, ʿIyāl Surayḥ, Hamdān, and Khawlān.⁴⁴

As the two sides joined battle to determine who would control the city of Ṣanʿāʾ, open civil war broke out among the Zaydis of the central plateau. The population of Ṣanʿāʾ itself split into factions supporting al-Muʿayyad and al-Manṣūr, respectively,⁴⁵ as did the people of Dhamār and Yarīm. The social tensions among the Zaydis had finally exploded into full-scale ideological warfare, involving vast numbers of people who probably felt marginalized or oppressed by the governing elite.⁴⁶ Aḥmad ibn Hāshim's supporters gained control of Ṣanʿāʾ, and ʿAbbās ibn ʿAbd al-Raḥmān capitulated after he and his supporters were driven into the citadel.⁴⁷

Nonetheless, Aḥmad ibn Hāshim's "revolution" was ultimately unsuccessful. Rather than the establishment of a stable Hādāwī polity, Aḥmad ibn Hāshim's accession heralded the destruction of the Qāsimī imamate, the complete fracturing of Zaydi society on regional and tribal lines, and the seizure of political power by the tribes of Ḥāshid and Bakīl as autonomous entities. Aḥmad ibn Hāshim's tribal supporters abandoned him shortly after his accession; and without money to pay them or the unruly *tawābīʿ* of Ṣanʿāʾ, he was unable

40 Ibid.

41 Al-Ḥibshī (ed.), *Ḥawliyyāt* 197.

42 See al-Ḥibshī (ed.), *Ḥawliyyāt* 200.

43 Zabāra, *Nayl* II, 18; al-Ḥibshī (ed.), *Ḥawliyyāt* 199.

44 Al-Ḥibshī, (ed.), *Ḥawliyyāt* 190–2, 211.

45 Al-Wāsiʿī, *Tārīkh* 246.

46 Aḥmad ibn Hāshim had been able to assemble a massive following from the Zaydis of the northeast, Ṣanʿāʾ, and the central plateau, indicating that discontent with the Sunni imamate in Ṣanʿāʾ was fairly widespread. See al-Wāsiʿī, *Tārīkh* 242–6.

47 Al-Ḥibshī (ed.), *Ḥawliyyāt* 205–6.

to assemble a field army to restore the control of the government over the country.⁴⁸

‘Alī ibn al-Mahdī, together with his supporters among the Traditionist ulama, renewed his *da‘wa* with the throne name al-Mutawakkil. Constructing an alliance with the Ḥāshid and Bakīl tribes around Ṣan‘ā, he managed to retake the city and restore his own imamate.⁴⁹ While he was on an expedition to the central plateau, however, a new claimant arose, Ghālīb ibn Muḥammad [al-Hādī] and took Ṣan‘ā from him.⁵⁰

At this point, the struggle over the imamate began to lose any semblance of coherence. Ṣan‘ā became the scene of constant fighting, as one claimant after another sought to wrest it from his rivals. The city was besieged and sacked repeatedly, by the armies of tribesmen whom the various claimants summoned to their aid, while the townsfolk continued their factional fighting in conjunction with this process. While the incumbent imams usually sought to extend their control beyond the city for such time as they remained in power, they were never successful in doing so. The armies which they led out would abandon them, or they would be forced to return to Ṣan‘ā prematurely to fight some new rival.⁵¹

The tone of the Zaydi chroniclers becomes increasingly cynical in describing these events, implying that greed, self-interest, or revenge were the main motivations for the tribesmen who joined the armies of the various claimants. The endless shifting of allegiances effectively discredited the idea of the jihad and the imamate.

The tribes at this time became the most powerful element in the highlands, dominating the Shafīi *ra‘āyā* in their own right, rather than as enforcers for the Zaydi imamate. The Baraṭ tribes of Dhū Muḥammad and Dhū Ḥusayn seized important areas in Lower Yemen and the west, while the Arḥab tribe became powerful in the Ta‘izz region. Innumerable fortresses in these areas were occupied by bands of tribesmen, who used them as bases to plunder travelers and the peasantry.⁵²

The conflict between Hādāwī and Sunni thus served as the vehicle that brought the tensions between tribe and state in the Zaydi imamate to the fore. Edwards’ study of narrative among the Pathan of Afghanistan has shown that

48 Al-Wāsi‘ī, *Tārīkh* 246.

49 Al-Ḥibshī (ed.), *Ḥawliyyāt* 207–12.

50 Al-Ḥibshī (ed.) *Ḥawliyyāt* 215–26.

51 See any of the important Yemeni chronicles dealing with this period, e.g. Muḥammad ibn Luṭf al-Bārī Qāḍī al-Ḥaymī al-Yamanī’s *al-Rawḍ al-bassām* or the *Ḥawliyyāt*.

52 Al-‘Arshī, *Bulūgh* 75.

“honor,” as an ethic of competitive aggrandizement of the self and the tribe, exists in tension with the universalist ethos of Islam which the tribesmen profess. The self-destruction of Afghan society in the 1990s stemmed in part from the fact that the nation-state of Afghanistan was superimposed on the “moral fault lines of honor, Islam, and rule.”⁵³ Edwards’ analysis suggests that the Soviet invasion intensified the inherent pressures of these fault lines, ultimately blowing apart the fragile structures of Afghan society.

A similar process took place in nineteenth century Yemen. The Hādāwī jihad, itself the result of deep social and economic frustrations which had reached the point of crisis, laid bare the underlying tension between the particularistic tribal ethos of honor and the Zaydi-Islamic emphasis on order and right conduct. As the tribesmen were drawn into the conflict, it became increasingly clear that they were less interested in its doctrinal aspects than in advancing the interests of their own tribes, in looting and seizing by force the emoluments traditionally granted by the state.

The pressures along the “moral fault line” of loyalty to tribe and imamate respectively thus resolved themselves in favor of the former. In this context, we wish to show that the forms of social authority and warfare defined by Zaydi-Islamic political thought disintegrated in favor of those shaped by the self-interested and aggressive ethos of tribalism; and this in turn would have important effects on the conduct of war, and the ability of the Zaydis to organize sustained resistance to Ottoman rule. To understand this process, we will first discuss how this transition was reflected in the language employed by the Zaydi chroniclers to describe the “period of anarchy” (*fatrat al-fawḍā*).

5 Islam and Anarchy: the Moral Language of the Zaydi Chroniclers

In the moral language of the Zaydi chroniclers, the rise to dominance of the tribes in the highlands was viewed as a kind of collapse of Muslim society. The just or justified war of jihad became what the Zaydi chroniclers described as *fitna* and *fasād*; force exercised as a moral sanction became meaningless violence aimed at satisfying the basest desires of human beings. The authority of the “rightful” (*muḥiqq*) imam was replaced by that of the *mutaḡhallibūn*, the tribesmen who took power unlawfully by main force.

To highlight the opposition between legitimate war and illegitimate violence, let us first analyze the concept of jihad as it was defined by Aḡmad ibn

53 Edwards, *Heroes* 233.

Hāshim. Replying to a letter urging him to give up his claim from the Qadi Aḥmad ibn ‘Abd al-Raḥmān al-Mujāhid, one of the partisans of ‘Abbās ibn ‘Abd al-Raḥmān, Aḥmad ibn Hāshim sought to justify his actions within the framework of Hādāwī and Islamic teachings about jihad. Four themes are prominent in Aḥmad ibn Hāshim’s letter: jihad as an act of “striving” requiring self-denial, jihad as a means of bringing about the unity of the Muslim community, jihad as the moral purification of society, and jihad as the construction of a social order based on the principles of the Sharia.

The concept of self-control, of the ability to deny one’s own desires to achieve a higher moral end, is central to Aḥmad ibn Hāshim’s conception of jihad. “If a man is subject to his own passions, then there is no cure for his sickness; but if a man [puts his] passions behind him, he is a whole [man] (*saḥīḥ*) who sleeps in the resting place of Paradise.”⁵⁴ Aḥmad ibn Hāshim implies that he is the latter, a man who is capable of denying his own desires to achieve a higher moral good.

Therefore, it is his duty and right to wage jihad. This requires him to summon all his reserves of energy and will to endure the hardships of war. Aḥmad ibn Hāshim is a man who “draws the sword of God and fights the enemies of God, leading the ranks in battle and routing thousands ... enduring the heat of the sun and sleeplessness at night.”⁵⁵ The self-denial of Aḥmad ibn Hāshim enables him to undertake the “striving” of jihad, as a difficult physical and moral struggle to bring about the purification of the Muslim community.

Jihad here is likewise strongly associated with the unifying of the Muslim community. What makes the *da‘wa* of Aḥmad ibn Hāshim legitimate is that the community of the Muslims has reached a “consensus” (*jam‘at al-kalima*) to support him.⁵⁶ Aḥmad ibn Hāshim had a large number of supporters drawn from all the major Zaydi regions of Yemen, as he makes clear in his letter. “Praise be to God, the tribes of the north and the south answered [our summons], and this great multitude followed us and gave us allegiance both openly and in secret.”⁵⁷ The consensus of the Muslim community (*ijmā‘*), is an important principle in the Sharia in determining the correct resolutions to legal problems. Aḥmad ibn Hāshim here argues, in effect, that the vast number of his supporters constitutes a consensus in favor of the legality of his imamate.

The political support of the imam is inseparable from waging jihad on his behalf. Jihad in this context is a collective endeavor of the Muslim community,

54 Al-Ḥaymī, *Rawḍ* 64.

55 Al-Ḥaymī, *Rawḍ* 65.

56 Al-Ḥaymī, *Rawḍ* 67.

57 Al-Ḥaymī, *Rawḍ* 64–5.

led by the imam. As a collective enterprise, it is aimed at restoring the unity of the Muslim community. Aḥmad ibn Hāshim has been elected imam by the consensus (*jam'at al-kalima*) of the Muslim community. For 'Abbās ibn 'Abd al-Raḥmān [al-Mu'ayyad] to refuse to accept his imamate is therefore to go against the injunctions of the Sharia and secede or dissent from the Muslim community (*shaqqa 'aṣā*).⁵⁸ To secede in this fashion is also to deviate from the "straight path" of righteousness on which the imam leads the Muslim community in his role as its rightful ruler. Aḥmad ibn Hāshim asserts that "our path is straight." That is, the legitimacy of his imamate allows him to lead the Muslim community along the path toward the moral ideals enjoined by God. By refusing to accept Aḥmad ibn Hāshim's imamate, al-Mu'ayyad and his partisans are in effect deviating from this "path of righteousness;" they have "been recalcitrant ... in answering [the summons of the rightful imam] (*tamarrada ... 'an al-ijāba*) and therefore have "deviated from the proper path" (*tanakaba 'an ṭarīq al-iṣāba*).⁵⁹

It is partly in this context that Aḥmad ibn Hāshim is undertaking to besiege the city of Ṣan'ā'. Against the sinners who "deviate" from the straight path, violence is both permissible and obligatory. The imam has "drawn the sword of God against rebels and tyrants" (*al-bughā wa-l-ḡalama*). By engaging in jihad, he is "destroying the adulterers," (*mubīdan lil-fujjār*), and "binding the evildoers" (*muqayyidan lil-ashrār*).⁶⁰

Jihad, therefore, is an act of destruction, involving the physical annihilation of evil individuals and the corrupt practices they represent. At the same time, it is also an act of building, of laying the foundations of a moral social order and the state which will enforce it. The imam is "acting in accordance with the noble and reviving that which the Book and the Sunna have brought into being."⁶¹ The destructive acts of jihad, aimed at cleansing society of its corruption, are designed to pave the way for the constructive act of ordering social life according to the principles of Islamic law.

As defined by Aḥmad ibn Hāshim in this letter, then, jihad is a collective act by the Muslim community, an act of self-denial and moral purification. The violence and destruction which war entails are ultimately constructive in purpose. The authority of the rightful imam is to be established, and the laws of God enforced among the Muslims. Jihad in this sense is a state-building form

58 Al-Ḥaymī, *Rawḍ* 65.

59 Ibid.

60 Ibid.

61 Ibid.

of war aimed at universal moral ideals, requiring its participants to put aside their private interests and desires for the larger good of the community.

We have seen, however, the practical results of Aḥmad ibn Hāshim's jihad: the destruction of the imamate and the descent of the highlands into anarchy. For the Zaydi chroniclers of this period, then, the jihad to establish the authority of the rightful imam simply became a vehicle for "strife" (*fitna*) or "evil" (*fasād*). *Fitna* and *fasād* in this context can best be understood as illegitimate violence, the conceptual reverse of jihad. They are associated with the concept of people being overcome by their desires and indulging in sinful excess, rather than the disciplined self-denial associated with jihad. This results in "deviation" from the straight path and the disintegration of the Muslim community, rather than its unification.

Thus, as the jihad undertaken by Aḥmad ibn Hāshim [al-Manṣūr] lapsed into full scale civil war across the central plateau of Yemen, the chronicler Muḥammad ibn Luṭf al-Bārī al-Ḥaymī describes the situation as one in which "discord was raging" (*al-fitna thā'ira*).⁶² The term *fitna*, having the general meaning of "discord" or "anarchy," is also associated with concepts of "temptation." The passive verbs *futina* and *iftatana* can have the meaning "to be tempted, to stray from the right path." The connotation, then, is that when the Muslim community is in a situation of *fitna* it has been overcome by temptation. The Muslims have failed to follow the straight path of "striving" and self-denial embodied in the term jihad, the struggle against personal and social evil.

Fitna is frequently used in conjunction with the term *fasād*, "evil" or "moral corruption." The use of these terms together implies that a surrender to temptation results in social and moral decay; that is, a situation of generalized violence, without meaning or purpose except the immediate satisfaction of man's evil desires. Thus the Qadi Ḥusayn ibn Aḥmad al-'Arshī describes the second half of the nineteenth century as a time when "the people raided one another, and plundered one another" as "the signs of corruption (*fasād*) appeared among the tribes"; when [the tribesmen] "plundered property and killed men; they had no desire for royal authority (*tamalluk*) or any beneficial thing."⁶³

These ideas are likewise associated with concepts of social atomization, the reverse of the unification of the Muslim community through jihad. The chronicler Muḥammad ibn Luṭf al-Bārī al-Ḥaymī states that the reason for the *fitna* in the region of al-Ḥayma was that the shaykhs were at odds with one another. The term used here is *tafarraqat kalimatuhum*, "their 'word' was divided,"⁶⁴

62 Al-Ḥaymī, *Rawḍ* 70.

63 Al-'Arshī, *Bulugh* 75.

64 Al-Ḥaymī 103.

this is the reverse of *jam'at al-kalima*, the “unity of the ‘word’” or “consensus” on which Aḥmad ibn Hāshim based the legitimacy of his jihad. In a situation of *fitna*, every man’s hand is against that of his neighbor, as each one seeks to satisfy his lusts at the expense of the others. The unity and moral “striving” of the Muslim community disintegrate into selfish strife.

The rhetorical opposition of moral imamic authority to immoral tribal anarchy does, of course, partially reflect the social disintegration that accompanies prolonged warfare in any society. Within this opposition, however, we can also distinguish the clash of different ethical systems which, if not mutually exclusive, were not always entirely compatible. To the Zaydi ulama, the tribal culture was sinful almost by definition. The tribes’ apparent rapacity and aggressiveness constituted the very antithesis of the focus on the common good and social peace which Islam encouraged. Such seeming violence and anarchy, however, had their own moral codes, even if they were honored in the breach rather than the observance. Within the picture of complete social breakdown painted by the chroniclers, we can discern the outlines of systems of war and authority peculiar to tribal culture.

6 Anarchy and Honor

With regard to the question of authority, the Zaydi chroniclers employ the term *taghallub* to describe the tribesmen’s seizure of lands in Lower Yemen on their own initiative. The verb *taghallaba* means to dominate or overcome by violence. The related idea of *ghalaba* seems to have been employed in Zaydi thought to denote the forcible “usurpation” of the leadership of the Muslim community by the Umayyads.⁶⁵ In the absence of the rightful authority of the imam and Islamic law, power is exercised simply through the violence of the tribesmen. Therefore, the Bakīl tribes who seized lands and castles in Lower Yemen are described as *mutaghallibūn* “possessing [these regions] by force.”⁶⁶

Passages in some of the Zaydi chronicles, however, indicate that the process of occupying these lands was somewhat more complex. In describing the migration of the Bakīl to Lower Yemen, the author of the *Ḥawliyyāt* notes that the tribesmen “made [Lower Yemen] their homeland (*istawṭanūh*) and took the peasants under their protection.”⁶⁷ The noun *waṭan*, from the same root as the verb *istawṭana*, is used elsewhere in its plural form (*awṭān*) by the

65 See Ghulays, *Tajdīd* 47.

66 Al-Ḥaymī, *Rawḍ* 23.

67 Al-Ḥibshī (ed.), *Ḥawliyyāt*, 35.

chronicler to denote the original “homeland,” or tribal territory, of the Bakīl tribes in the northeast.⁶⁸

The verb used for “taking the peasants under their protection” is *yuraffiqū* [*bi*].⁶⁹ The word means literally “to accompany someone, treat them as a friend, treat them courteously.” Among Ḥāshid and Bakīl, it is associated with the protection extended by a tribal “escort” to a traveler in the territory of his tribe. The “escort,” or *muraffiq*, undertakes to guarantee the safety of the traveler on his own honor. To allow harm to come to the traveler is an *‘ayb*, or “shame,” for which he must exact revenge or compensation.⁷⁰

This kind of “honor” protection is extended by the tribe to non-tribal people in its territory generally, such as the *mazāyina*, the hereditary caste of “weak” people who act as butchers, barbers, and servants among the tribesmen;⁷¹ and the term *rafaq* may also be used to denote this more general kind of protection. What the term *yuraffiqū* means in our context, then, is that the Bakīl tribes extended this protection to the “weak” Shafīi *ra‘āyā* of Lower Yemen.

What we see here is the assertion of a kind of authority which is fundamentally different from, and independent of, the authority of the imamate. In making Lower Yemen their “homeland,” the Bakīl tribes made a specifically tribal claim to ownership of that territory and its revenues. In extending their “protection” to the peasants of that region, they asserted an authority over them which was rooted in the tribal ethos of honor, rather than the universalistic claim to leadership of the Muslim community.

It was the existence of this separate kind of authority which infuriated the Zaydi chroniclers. Only the rightful imam could ensure the *maṣlaḥa*, or general good, of the Muslim community; and in Zaydi thought, this was associated with the ruler’s sacrifice of his individual interests.⁷² The tribesmen’s seizure of the lands and revenues of Lower Yemen independently of the imams therefore represented an infringement of the general good of the Muslims for their own particular interests.

It was this pursuit of self-interest by the tribesmen in war which was offensive to the Zaydi chroniclers. In Yemen during this period, military leaders had to assemble field armies through the medium of the tribal alliance. In order

68 Al-Ḥibshī (ed.), *Ḥawliyyāt* 136.

69 Al-Ḥibshī (ed.), *Ḥawliyyāt* 34.

70 Dresch, *Tribes* 59–60.

71 Dresch, *Tribes* 119–20.

72 In the *Ḥawliyyāt* Imam ‘Abbās ibn ‘Abd al-Raḥmān [al-Mu‘ayyad] was said to have voluntarily surrendered the imamate to Aḥmad ibn Hāshim because “he saw the *maṣlaḥa* in ... relinquishing the throne of the caliphate, and requesting peace for the people of Ṣan‘ā’, quieting their fears, and preserving lives.” See Al-Ḥibshī (ed.), *Ḥawliyyāt* 205–6.

to bring tribes into alliance with them, they had to offer immediate rewards in the form of cash payments or opportunities for plunder. Even then, such armies were not usually reliable. Frequently, they were bought off by their ostensible enemies and abandoned their leader.

This kind of behavior reached major proportions in the civil wars over the imamate in the second half of the nineteenth century. Imam Aḥmad ibn Hāshim [al-Manṣūr] was eventually driven out of Ṣan‘ā’ by ‘Alī ibn al-Mahdī [al-Mutawakkil], a claimant who seems to have had Sunni sympathies. The Khawlān, Sanḥān, and Hamdān tribes who had supported him against Aḥmad ibn Hāshim, however, began to make excessive “demands” (*ṭalābāt*) [sic] on him. Shortly thereafter, the Khawlān tribe abandoned ‘Alī ibn al-Mahdī for another claimant, Ghālīb ibn Muḥammad, who promised them a large sum of money (*amwāl kathīr*).⁷³

What is important to note is that such behavior is not considered dishonorable in the tribal context. In discussing the means by which tribal shaykhs advance their own power, Dresch notes that the shaykhs should be generous or “open-handed” (*mabsūṭ al-yad*). The term “generous” (*karīm*) “is virtually a synonym at times for *sharīf* or ‘honorable’, and there is nothing dishonorable in demanding largesse from a powerful shaykh in the form of rifles or cash or perhaps a new truck.”⁷⁴

The shaykhs use such gift-giving to gain tribal allies to support them in their enterprises. Such support, however, is vulnerable to the sudden shifts of allegiance characteristic of politics in the segmentary lineage system; and such shifts are normal and expected. “Constancy is not really hoped for. A man may take payment from a powerful shaykh, then fail to support him, or may even oppose him, and then come back for more without either he or the shaykh finding this uncomfortable.”⁷⁵

Such politics, however, were obviously better suited to gaining influence within the decentralized polity of Ḥāshid and Bakīl than establishing a central state under imamic rule. For this reason, the Zaydi chroniclers were apt to define this kind of behavior as immoral selfishness. According to the author of the Ḥawliyyāt, the “people [tribesmen] are the sons of *dīnārs* and *dirhams*, who have neither religion (*dīn*) nor good faith (*dhimma*). They are not led to the right (*al-ḥaqq*) except by arousing their greed. The rightful [imam] (*al-muḥiqq*) among them is he who possesses much money, whose two hands are open (*yadāhu mabsūṭān*); the false one ... is he who is bankrupt

73 Al-Ḥibshī (ed.), *Ḥawliyyāt* 213–18.

74 Dresch, *Tribes* 101.

75 Dresch, *Tribes* 102.

or gives them nothing.”⁷⁶ The honor game of trading allegiance in return for “open-handed” gift-giving is simply not compatible with the idea of “rightful” authority as determined by piety and personal moral qualities.

This prevalence of the tribal ethos of war in the “period of anarchy” had profound effects on its actual conduct. Jihad had lost whatever long-term and state-forming potential it had possessed in previous times. There was no central state with an organized army, or the capacity to conduct long-term military operations with a defined objective. As a result, war in this period came to be deeply infused with the tribal culture of war as a game of honor, with its concomitant limitations; and this in turn would render the highlands vulnerable to the Ottoman expeditionary force of 1872.

7 The Culture and Conduct of War in the Period of Disintegration: “Irregular Warriors” and Heroic Culture

In our analysis of war in late nineteenth century Yemen, we will rely for our theoretical framework on Charles Callwell’s *Small Wars*, the classic treatise on colonial warfare in the nineteenth century. Here, we will focus on Callwell’s analysis of the fighting methods of “irregular” warriors, as a means of understanding the character of tribal war in Yemen. As we noted in the introduction, Callwell lists the particular strengths of irregular warriors as mobility, elusiveness, possession of the element of surprise, and skill in guerrilla war. Poor armament, lack of organization, and difficulty in sustaining long-term resistance are their corresponding military weaknesses.⁷⁷

Expanding somewhat on ideas which are implicit in Callwell’s analysis, we may say that this is because the “irregulars” tend to have a “heroic” culture of war. That is, war is not primarily a means of achieving long-term military and political goals. It serves, rather, to demonstrate one’s personal courage and fitness for membership in a “warrior” society. Among many tribal societies of the Middle East, intertribal wars historically often had the character of an elaborate “game” of honor. Political and material objectives did exist, generally in the form of plunder, rights to pasture or water, or defense of the boundaries of tribal territory. The military achievement of these objectives, however, was in practice inseparable from the tribesmen’s self-demonstration as men of

76 Al-Ḥibshī (ed.), *Ḥawliyyāt* 54.

77 Callwell, *Small wars* 85 ff.

“honor” through acts of courage in battle.⁷⁸ War was waged as a spasmodic contest, a means to achieve limited objectives in conjunction with the demonstration of heroic courage, and not as a lengthy project to achieve political domination.

To say that war was never used as an instrument for political domination by the tribes would be a grotesque oversimplification, insofar as it would ignore the pivotal role of tribes in the historic formation of the empires of the Middle East; and “tribal warfare” cannot, of course, be reduced to petty intertribal clashes below the level of the state. “Tribal warfare” existed at varying levels, tending to increase in violence and state-forming potential as it became less localized.⁷⁹ The cult of chivalry among many of these tribes often went by the board when they dealt with non-tribal or ethnically different populations, as may be seen in the brutality of the Afghan occupation of Iran in the eighteenth century.⁸⁰

Nonetheless, in peripheral regions where the tribes were historically very powerful, the culture of intertribal warfare tended to exert a powerful influence against war as a long-term strategy of disciplined coercion. As we have noted, in the period of disintegration we see a process wherein war based in the tribal ethos of honor slowly overwhelmed Zaydi-Islamic concepts of war as a means to maintain or restore a moral social order. Callwell’s remarks on the fighting qualities of “irregular warriors” were largely apposite during the “period of anarchy” (*fatrat al-fawḍā*) in highland Yemen. Permanent military institutions were rudimentary or nonexistent, weaponry was outdated, war was fought for short-term objectives, and armies did not remain in the field for long.

78 For discussions of intertribal or intervillage war as a contest of honor among equals, see Caton, *Peaks* 155–79, on the Khawlān tribesmen of Yemen; Lindholm, *Generosity* 5, on the Pukhtun of the Swat Valley of Pakistan; Glubb, *Story* 117–32, on the Bedouin of the Syrian and Arabian deserts.

79 In discussing war among the Pukhtun of Swat, Charles Lindholm distinguishes between intervillage and interregional wars among the Pukhtun themselves, and wars of conquest against non-Pukhtun populations. The scale of violence tended to increase at each level, and even intervillage wars were more or less violent depending on the genealogical distance between the villages. See Lindholm, *Generosity* 83–7.

80 See Floor, *Afghan* 50–1, 123.

8 The Objectives of War

The key element of Yemeni military “organization” at this time was the tribal alliance. A shaykh or would-be imam who wanted to put an army into the field had to rely on the temporary mobilization of loyal tribes, whom he was expected to reward in some way. As a result, war was fought for what might be termed “layered” objectives. Armies in Yemen were held together by shifting bonds of loyalty and self-interest, rather than an obedience-compelling bureaucratic apparatus. In consequence, the objectives of all participants – nominal war-leaders, ordinary tribesmen, and shaykhs – were of significance in determining the course of conflicts.

In the anarchy of the mid-nineteenth century the struggles over the imamate were justified ideologically in terms of delivering the Muslim community from “discord” (*fitna*) and “rebellion” (*baghy*), restoring order and security through upholding the Sharia. We have seen what had happened to these ideas in practical terms; and here, we will focus more on the immediate material objectives of war in this period. We may list these objectives as follows: plunder, the seizure of lands and fortresses, and the demonstration of heroic prowess.

8.1 *Plunder*

For the ordinary tribesman, the greatest inducements to fight were the prospects of plunder and gifts of money. Once these were obtained, there was little reason to fight further, the rhetoric of jihad notwithstanding. As a result, the tribal armies of Yemen had a tendency to suddenly disintegrate, particularly in the anarchy of the post-1850 period. Such eventually proved to be the case with the partisans of Aḥmad ibn Hāshim [al-Manṣūr], who by 1851 was struggling with a new rival, ‘Alī al-Mahdī [al-Mutawakkil]. The armies of the two claimants had been fighting in Ṣan‘ā’, whose people had also split into Manṣūriyya and Mutawakkiliyya factions. When it became clear that Aḥmad ibn Hāshim was losing, his tribal partisans began to melt away, after plundering the western section of the city. Meanwhile more and more tribesmen joined al-Mutawakkil’s army in the hope of profiting from his victory. “Thus the Mutawakkiliyya soldiers continued to grow in strength and numbers, while the army of al-Manṣūr became weaker ... and fear came upon Ṣan‘ā’, because of all the tribesmen who were inside and outside the city, as they had no other objective besides plunder.”⁸¹ The chronic instability of this period was thus

81 Al-Ḥibshī (ed.), *Ḥawliyyāt*, 211.

partially the result of the unstable nature of tribal levies, whose participants were mainly interested in exploiting conflict for personal gain.

8.2 *The Acquisition of Land*

Historically the acquisition of land was formalized through the institution of *iqṭāʿ*, while in the period of disintegration, lands were simply appropriated by force. The process is described by Ahmed Muhtar Paşa, in his account of the Ottoman conquest of Yemen. “A ‘usurper’ (*müteğallibe*) would come from the waterless regions [that is, the tribal areas to the north and east] and seize a place in the watered regions with his men. Here he would build a castle, or occupy a castle which had been built previously. Employing people of his tribe as soldiers, he would govern the people of that region.”⁸²

One usurper of this type was ‘Abdallāh al-Dafaʿī. He and his Arḥab tribesmen terrorized the population of Ṣanʿāʾ from a small mud fort outside the northern wall of the city, robbing and killing with impunity.⁸³ The Ṣanʿānīs hated him so much that when Ahmed Muhtar Paşa brought him into the city as a captive, he had to put an extra guard around him and his men to prevent an angry mob from beating them to death.⁸⁴

8.3 *The Acquisition of “Honor” through the Demonstration of Courage*

While warlordism tended to turn the tribesmen into Mafia-like gangsters, the code of heroism survived and played itself out in the constant conflicts of this period. In the introduction, we have discussed the central role of “honor” (*sharaf*) in the tribal ethic of manliness. A related standard of heroism, that of *furūsiyya*, survived in Yemen up to the time of the Ottoman occupation. This term means literally “horsemanship” or “mastery in horsemanship,” implying also the qualities of courage, chivalry, and honor associated with the ideal “cavalier.” The employment of cavalry in a quasi-medieval fashion, involving charges of horsemen equipped with lances and coats of mail, was still practiced in Yemen in the nineteenth century; and young men of the elite shaykh and sayyid families, at least, were expected to master horsemanship as part of their education.⁸⁵

82 Ahmed Muhtar Paşa, *Anılar* 1, 83.

83 Al-Wāsiʿī, *Tārīkh* 260.

84 Ahmed Muhtar Paşa, *Anılar* 1, 80.

85 The chronicler al-Shawkānī writes of the sons of Imam al-Mahdī ‘Abbās that “They are the sayyids of the sayyids. Mastery in horsemanship ... high moral standards, and a predilection for knowledge are common to them all.” See al-Shawkānī, *Badr* 1, 312. Translated and quoted in al-Amrī, *The Yemen* 14–16.

What *furūsiyya* meant in terms of the display of heroic prowess is demonstrated in the actions of Sharīf Ḥusayn, ruler of the Tihama, in a battle in 1848 with the reigning imam al-Mutawakkil Muḥammad ibn Yaḥyā. The former had several horses killed from under him, and was himself wounded by a musket ball, but continued to fight on. The horsemen of the imam surrounded him but did not dare to approach “because they knew of his bravery (*shajāʿa*) and *furūsiyya*.”⁸⁶

The armies of our period thus conducted their operations on the basis of a shifting set of goals determined primarily by the heroic culture and material interests of the tribesmen, and to a diminishing extent by the ideological preoccupations of the Zaydi scholar-elite. I am not arguing that Yemeni military commanders were incapable of strategic planning, or of setting prosaic military and political objectives for war. The fissiparous character of Yemeni military organization, however, made the precise planning and execution of campaigns difficult. As in many cultures of “honor,” war had a tendency to become an end in itself, perpetuated by a warrior class to whom it was both a means of personal enrichment and a source of positive identity formation. The consequent deepening cycle of violence resulted in the degeneration of politics into warlordism, and the distortion of ethical codes of honor by increasing atrocities.

9 Weapons and Tactics

The disorganization of war and the isolation of Yemen tended to negatively affect the sophistication of military technology and tactics. Weaponry in the “period of anarchy” was archaic by nineteenth century standards. The cavalry of Yemen were armed with long lances, swords, and sometimes mail shirts.⁸⁷ The infantry possessed smoothbore matchlock muskets, spears, and curved daggers (*janbiyya*).⁸⁸ Cannon of the smoothbore muzzle-loading variety were

86 Al-Ḥibshī (ed.), *Ḥawlīyyāt* 152.

87 In the battle between Sharīf Ḥusayn and al-Mutawakkil which is described above, *Ḥawlīyyāt* states that the former had on “two mail corselets” (*dirʿayn*) and “two swords” (*sayfayn*). Elsewhere, one of the imams is described as going into battle mounted on a white horse with a “large lance (*rumḥ kabīr*) in his hand of the [kind known as] *mazāriq*, which are carried by the people of courage (*al-najda*), honor (*al-nakhwa*), valor (*al-shajāʿa*) and strength (*al-quwwa*.” See al-Ḥibshī (ed.), *Ḥawlīyyāt* 152, 200.

88 The officer and historian Atif Paşa states that the tribesmen of ʿAsīr were armed with smoothbore (*kaval*) muskets at the time of the Ottoman conquest; the term used in *Ḥawlīyyāt* is *banādiq*. The British captain Walter Harris says that in the 1891 rebellion, the

usually mounted in the fortifications of major cities; and sometimes they were employed in battles and sieges, though not in a particularly expert fashion.⁸⁹

Anachronistic weapons meant anachronistic tactics. While the preponderant numerical element in field armies tended to consist of infantry, the cavalry often played an important tactical role. The headlong charge and the cavalry melee remained important in pitched battles. Such was the case in the above-mentioned battle between Sharīf Ḥusayn and Muḥammad ibn Yaḥyā [al-Mutawakkil].

Muḥammad ibn Yaḥyā drew up his battle lines according to the tribal divisions of his men, and then ordered his 400 cavalry to charge Sharīf Ḥusayn's forces. The latter had split his army into two sections, one directly opposite the army of the imam, and one on the left, where he had positioned a large cannon.

As the imam's horsemen charged into the Sharifian ranks, they were met by fire from both the cannon and the musketeers. The artillery shots, however, landed well away from their intended targets. Nor did the musket fire succeed in repelling the imam's men, as apparently the infantry ran out of ammunition too soon. The imam's soldiers were able to capture the cannon and kill most of the artillerymen. Thereupon the Sharīf apparently led a cavalry charge against the imam's troops, but this was halted by the musket fire of the latter. The Sharīf himself was wounded, and his army fled in disarray.⁹⁰

Siege warfare had a similar medieval flavor. Many of the fortresses from which the tribesmen terrorized the countryside were simply single high towers built of stone or mud brick, hardly capable of withstanding a determined artillery bombardment.⁹¹ Since Yemeni armies rarely employed artillery effectively, fortresses remained comparatively impregnable places of refuge. In the event of defeat or invasion by an army which he did not feel himself capable of resisting, a given potentate would often retire into one of his fortresses with his retainers. The enemy army would surround the fortress and a siege of varying duration would ensue, marked by exchanges of gunfire, bargaining, and attempts by both sides to subvert one another's troops. The stalemate could be ended in one of several ways: an agreement could be reached through

Yemeni tribesmen were mainly armed with matchlock and fuse guns, and many only with spears; in all likelihood this reflects the technology of the previous half century as well. See Atif Paşa, *Yemen* 11, 19, and Harris, *Journey* 110.

89 In the conquest of 'Asir over twenty "short bronze 9-pounder cannon of the old muzzle-loading type" were found in the citadel of Rayda, where the amir Muḥammad ibn 'Ā'id had made a last stand. Ahmed Muhtar Paşa, *Anılar* 1, 59.

90 Al-Ḥibshī (ed.), *Ḥawliyyāt* 151–3.

91 See Ahmed Muhtar Paşa, *Anılar* 1, 68, for a detailed description of these small castles.

negotiation, the besieged might be induced by money payments to open the gates of the fortress, or the besiegers might be convinced in a similar fashion to withdraw.

This pattern can be seen in the aftermath of Sharīf Ḥusayn's defeat. After the collapse of his army, the Sharīf retreated into the citadel of al-Quṭay', which was thereupon surrounded by the forces of al-Mutawakkil. A one-month siege ensued, in which the Sharīf's followers began to gradually slip away as it became clear that the immediate advantage lay with the imam. The sayyids of al-Quṭay' wrote to al-Mutawakkil and obtained his pardon for supporting the Sharīf; and the tribesmen remaining with him finally agreed to give him up in return for a money payment.⁹²

This particular pattern of fortress warfare was to prove disadvantageous to the Yemeni tribesmen during the Ottoman invasion, for the Ottomans had modern artillery and used it effectively. Yemeni traditions of guerrilla war, on the other hand, would ultimately work to their advantage in the ongoing conflict with the Ottomans which began with the conquest. Such traditions were prominent in the period under discussion; and they included proficiency in ambush, surprise attacks, the disruption of military communications, and the rapid organization of subversive activity through the medium of the tribal alliance.

The speed with which rebellion could be raised, and the tribesmen's skill in hampering the operations of a field army, may be seen in the aftermath of Sharīf Ḥusayn's capture by al-Mutawakkil (although in this case the guerrillas were Shafii tribesmen of the Tihama, rather than Zaydi highlanders). After the imam had installed his governors in the three key cities of Zabīd, Mocha, and Bayt al-Faqīh, the partisans of the Sharīf turned to guerrilla resistance. The Sharīf's treasurer Ibn Ḥamid, who had been taken captive at al-Quṭay', was released on the payment of an inconsiderable sum of money; and upon this he undertook to raise a rebellion in the Tihama.

Ibn Ḥamid took money from the treasuries (*khazā'in*) of the Sharīf and had it sent to the tribal leaders of that region. Although he himself was killed shortly thereafter by the imam's soldiers, the rebellion which he had instigated gathered momentum, aided by conflicts between the imam's governors and the tribesmen of the Tihama. The people of the Bayt al-Faqīh region blocked the road to that city at a place called al-Maṭāḥin, attacking parties of the imam's troops and robbing a caravan of supplies destined for their use.⁹³

92 Al-Ḥibshī (ed.), *Ḥawliyyāt* 154–5.

93 Al-Ḥibshī (ed.), *Ḥawliyyāt* 157.

Meanwhile, the Sharīf's daughter was raising a field army from among the tribesmen of Yām, which was then dispatched under the command of her father's governor in Ḥudayda. This army succeeded in capturing Zabīd and expelling the garrison which the imam had installed there. The Sharīf was released without al-Mutawakkil's knowledge, after his guards were bribed, and likewise payments were made to the imam's tribal troops to induce them to abandon him. The imam's authority in the Tihama collapsed, and he was forced to return to Ṣan'ā'.⁹⁴

In this campaign, then, guerrilla tactics were employed effectively in conjunction with field campaigns and subversion to destroy the shaky authority which al-Mutawakkil had established in the Tihama. Such tactics were to be refined considerably in the course of the Ottoman occupation, eventually allowing the Yemeni tribesmen to mount serious challenges to Ottoman authority. At the time of the conquest, however, the Yemenis' skill in this regard was not sufficient to compensate for the weaknesses in weaponry and organization which we have outlined above.

10 Conclusion

As a tribal quasi-state, the Zaydi imamate was characterized by an inherent tension between state and tribe, between the tribal culture of honor and the strictly Islamic morality professed by the scholar-elite. Such tensions were reduced when the tribes and the Zaydi ulama needed to cooperate against an external enemy. Thus, the imamate reached the zenith of its power in the seventeenth century, in its battle to expel the Ottomans and bring the Shafiiis of southern Yemen under control.

The changes of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, however, brought this tension to the fore once again. As the imams adopted the trappings of patrimonial Near Eastern monarchy, they became increasingly distant monarchs, surrounded by officials who were often hated by the population. As a result, they could no longer play the role of charismatic military and spiritual leaders among the tribes. The shift in the ideological orientation of the court toward Sunni-influenced legal and political doctrines created conflict within the scholarly class and served to alienate the imamate from substantial elements of the Zaydi population. The steady shrinking of the territory of the imamate undermined the imams' ability to buy off opposition through patronage and

94 Al-Ḥaymī, *Rawḍ* 39–41.

brought them into conflict with the Ḥāshid and Bakīl tribes over land and revenue. The resulting economic crises likewise intensified the social conflicts that underlay the division between Hādāwī and Sunni.

Such tensions finally came to a head in the mid-nineteenth century, when civil war broke out, pitting elements of the Sunni governing elite against the Hādāwīs. The civil war allowed the deeper conflict between the universal “Islamic” political morality of the scholar elite and the particularistic tribal culture of honor to come to the surface. What resulted was the destruction of the central authority of the imamate, and the seizure of land and political power by the tribes. The Hādāwī jihad became “strife and evildoing;” that is, war whose character was shaped by the shifting allegiances and self-interested objectives of conflict in the segmentary lineage system.

In this politically fragmented situation, the tribal armies had all the weaknesses of “irregular warriors” outlined by Callwell: limited firepower, highly unstable “organization,” and difficulty in achieving long-term military objectives. In the Ottoman assault of 1872, these limitations would cause the downfall of the Zaydi tribal opposition. The tribesmen would try to employ their customary methods of fighting and negotiation with the Ottomans; and these simply did not work, either at the military or political level. The defeats the Yemeni tribesmen suffered in consequence would demoralize them badly, leading to a swift collapse of resistance throughout most of the country. We will analyze the events of the conquest in detail in the next chapter.

The Conquest of Yemen and ‘Asīr

In this chapter, we will discuss the Ottoman conquest of highland Yemen as a “small war” according to the strategy outlined by C.E. Callwell in *Small Wars*. First, we will situate the development of the Ottoman military under Sultan Abdūlaziz in the context of European developments at that time. The 1860s were a period of sweeping military changes, in which new technology revolutionized the firepower capability of European armies, and Prussian military organization emerged as the most efficient in Europe. The Ottoman Empire participated fully in these developments. Abdūlaziz’s military reforms modernized the army in terms of equipment and organization, and this would play an important role in facilitating the Ottoman conquest of Yemen.

Second, we will show that the Ottoman campaigns in Yemen had important parallels with European colonial military practice. Our key reference point here will be Colonel Callwell’s *Small Wars*. Callwell’s work is based on the experience of European military powers in their conquests of their colonies. Strictly speaking, the Ottoman conquest of Yemen was not a colonial conquest *per se*. European imperialism was essentially aggressive, based materially on the acquisition of new markets and resources, and ideologically on the “civilizing mission” and the affirmation of European racial superiority. The Ottoman conquest of Yemen, by contrast, was basically defensive. The Ottomans were seeking to prevent the European powers from occupying Yemen and threatening Ottoman power in the Arabian Peninsula in general and the two holy cities of Mecca and Medina in particular. In other words, the conquest was closely tied to maintaining the Islamic legitimacy and prestige of the Empire as guardian of the two holy cities, an essentially conservative goal.

Despite this, the strategy adopted by the Ottomans in Yemen had substantial similarities to that recommended by Callwell, a strategy based on seizure of the initiative, rapid campaigning, and crushing the enemy through superior firepower.

We will argue that this was because the Ottoman commanders were doing what Callwell and other European officers were doing in this period; that is, trying to adjust the precepts of an essentially Napoleonic strategic training to the realities of unconventional warfare. The reliance on force and firepower that was a necessary concomitant of this strategy could not, of course, solve the complex political problems of insurgency with which the Ottomans

were faced after the occupation. But it would prove effective in subduing the poorly armed tribesmen who initially confronted the Ottomans.

1 The Technological and Military-Organizational Changes of the Mid-nineteenth Century

The military watershed of the 1860s has been analyzed by a number of authors.¹ Innovations in small arms and artillery played a central role in these changes. Weapons that had made their first appearance in the 1850s became more sophisticated and widespread, vastly increasing the firepower of European armies. The muzzle-loading percussion lock rifle was rendered obsolete by the breech loading rifle. Rifles such as the British Martini-Henry could be reloaded much more quickly than the rifled musket.² Likewise, smoothbore cannon were replaced by various forms of rifled artillery, in particular Krupp's steel breech loading guns.³ The combination of breech loading and rifling greatly increased the effectiveness of artillery and small arms, weighting the scales enormously in favor of the Europeans in their colonial adventures.

The Ottoman Empire provided particularly lucrative markets for arms manufacturers in the 1860s. Ottoman armament was obsolete at the beginning of Abdülaziz's reign. The soldiers were armed with flintlock smoothbore muskets at a time when most European armies were using the percussion lock rifled musket. Abdülaziz, however, spent frantically to update the equipment of the Ottoman army, converting its arms repeatedly as each new invention rendered the previous one obsolete, and greatly increasing the capability of the Ottoman state to produce its own weapons.⁴ The period from 1861 to 1868 was especially taken up with the purchase and production of up-to-date weaponry.⁵ Needle guns and rifled artillery were purchased from companies in England, Prussia and the United States. In the first half of 1863 162 breech-loading and muzzle-loading steel rifled cannon were produced in the Tophâne-i Âmire, the government-owned factory for producing artillery in Istanbul. 2.5 caliber

1 See for example McNeill, *Pursuit* 223–61. McNeill focuses on the period 1840–84 as the watershed for the initial industrialization of war.

2 See Black, *Western warfare* 121–4, for the importance of the percussion lock rifle in the 1850s, and Bennet, *Story* 30–3, for the introduction of the breech loader. The Martini-Henry was a single-shot rifle with a range of 7–800 meters, according to Atif Paşa, who witnessed its employment in the conquest of Yemen. See Atif Paşa, *Yemen* II, 19.

3 McNeill, *Pursuit* 237–9.

4 Şakir, *Tanzimat* 64–5.

5 Ünal, *Sultan* 302.

rifled cannon were purchased from the Krupp factory in Prussia. The small British Whitworth cannon were tested in Istanbul in 1870 and approved, and a hundred of these cannon purchased for the regular infantry.⁶ By the 1870s the army's equipment was fully modernized, with Snider and Martini-Henry breech loading rifles, and steel Krupp guns.⁷

The modernization of Ottoman military equipment was accompanied by modernization of the army's organization. The model the Ottomans followed was that of the Prussians. The chief strengths of this system were the general staff and the *Landwehr*, or system of reserves. The Ottoman General Staff (*Erkân-ı Harbiye*) was first established in 1845, when 27 officers were sent to Europe for military education, and then appointed as staff officers with the rank of first lieutenant and colonel. Under Abdülaziz the general staff organization was expanded and systematized. A law on the organization of the general staff (*Erkân-ı Harbiye Nizamnamesi*) was promulgated in 1864, in which it was decided that each of the then-six armies of the Empire would have an Office of the General Staff (*Erkân-ı Harbiye Kalemi*) consisting of one major-general, one colonel, one lieutenant-colonel, one major, seven adjutant majors, and one captain. A central office of the general staff (*Erkân-ı Harbiye Merkez-i Umûmisi*) was established at the Ministry of War (*Seraskerlik*).⁸

Some of the duties of general staff officers outlined in the law were as follows: to write reports concerning military operations and logistics, to prepare the registers pertaining to military organization in time of war, to examine the exam papers of the students of the military schools, to undertake duties pertaining to topography, fortification, construction and intelligence, to compile military laws and to print military newspapers. Staff officers were drawn from the brightest pupils of the Military Academy in Istanbul, for whom a fifth year of study was added beyond the usual four.⁹ The general staff system fostered greater speed, better control of troop deployment, and better coordination of operations.¹⁰ Ahmed Muhtar Paşa (1839–1919), the conqueror of Yemen, was one of the graduates of the general staff section of the Military Academy; and the effects of his training would show in the relatively efficient conduct of the Yemen campaign.

The Ottomans also adopted the Prussian system of reserves, or *Landwehr*. The Ottoman reorganization of the reserve system was part of the general movement in the 1860s among the European nations to reorganize their

6 Ünal, *Sultan* 111.

7 Davison, *Reform* 265.

8 Ünal, *Sultan* 73–4.

9 Şakir, *Tanzimat* 53; Ahmed Muhtar Paşa, *Anular* 1, 8.

10 Black, *Western warfare* 141–3.

reserve forces on Prussian lines following Prussian victories over Austria and Denmark.¹¹ This reorganization was ordered in the military law of 1869 and put into effect by the Ottoman Minister of War at the time, Hüseyin Avni Paşa. Prior to this, Ottoman conscripts served for five years in the standing army, and then seven years in the *redif*, or reserve battalions of their home districts. In the new military law the land forces were divided into three classes, the regular forces proper (*nizâmiye*), and two classes of reserve troops, the *redif* and the *müstahfiz*. The *nizâmiye* forces in turn were divided into two classes. The first class, the regular troops proper, were kept under arms for a period of four years instead of the previous five. After this the soldiers were moved to an intermediate category between the regular force proper and the reserves proper, the *ihtiyat*, in which they served for a period of two years.¹² The *ihtiyat* troops were subject to recall, and were not permitted to leave their military districts without written permission from the authorities.¹³ After this they were moved to the *redif* for a period of six years, and then to the *müstahfiz* for eight years.¹⁴

Shortening the service in the regular army meant an increased rate of turnover for the conscripts, and thus a faster expansion in the pool of trained manpower. Expanding the reserve categories and lengthening the period of service in the reserves had the same effect. In addition, keeping the *ihtiyat* troops in their home districts allowed swifter mobilization than the *redif* in the case of emergency. By 1870, then, the Ottoman army had begun a process of manpower expansion which would significantly increase its ability to deal with both internal and external foes.

In sum, the reforms of Abdülaziz had gone a long way toward transforming the Ottoman army into an efficient, powerful, and modern force; and all this would have its effect in the conquest of highland Yemen. The *ihtiyat* troops would be mobilized for the campaign with some rapidity; Ahmed Muhtar Paşa, with his training as a staff officer, would show considerable skill in strategic planning; and finally, the Ottomans' superior firepower would enable them to crush the Yemeni tribesmen in battle.

2 Callwell, Napoleonic Strategy, and the Ottoman Command

Possession of the new firepower technology likewise had its effect on Ottoman military strategy. The conduct of the Yemen campaign bore close similarities

11 Ünal, *Sultan* 25.

12 Ibid.

13 Zboinski, *Armée* 13–21, 33–40.

14 Ünal, *Sultan* 25.

to the strategy recommended by Callwell, a primary exponent of the virtues of firepower in small wars. According to Callwell, the regular armies would usually have a decisive tactical advantage by virtue of vastly superior weaponry and organization. In battle, they could inflict crushing defeats on the “irregular warriors” by concentrated firepower. To bring the irregular warriors to battle would nullify the strategic advantage the latter enjoyed in terms of mobility, knowledge of the terrain, and intelligence about the enemy’s movements.

These advantages, however, meant that it was usually easier for the irregular warriors to choose the time and place of battle than their opponents, and to avoid it completely if they chose to. To bring the irregular warriors to battle, then, the commander had to act with boldness, speed, and initiative. He had to have a specific objective in mind and pursue the enemy aggressively until it was achieved, destroying the enemy armies in a decisive battle or series of battles.¹⁵ Armies of “irregular warriors,” with their loose organization, generally lacked the cohesion to reorganize after a series of crushing defeats. An aggressive campaign of this kind could thus destroy their morale and capacity to resist within a very short period of time.¹⁶

The course of the Yemen campaign was similar to Callwell’s version of the ideal small war. Obviously, the Ottoman officers had not read him, for the publication of *Small Wars* was still some years in the future. Yet Callwell and the Ottoman officers were both involved in the same process; the attempt to apply their training in Napoleonic strategy to irregular warfare. Napoleonic ideas of war were based on seizure of the initiative and hitting the enemy as hard and fast as possible in a series of decisive battles.¹⁷ We have seen that, as interpreted by Clausewitz, the ultimate goal of such a strategy is the destruction of the enemy forces.¹⁸ These ideas are central to Callwell’s strategy; and by all accounts, the Ottoman officers were trained in this strategy as well.¹⁹

15 Callwell, *Small wars* 37, 71–83.

16 Callwell, *Small wars* 97–107. While Callwell did recommend in general terms the strategy we have outlined above, it is also important to stress that he was not a formulaic military thinker. He recognized the immense variety of military situations encompassed in the term “small wars,” and therefore stressed the need for flexibility, good intelligence, and knowledge of the local military culture. See Callwell, *Small wars* 29–33, 143–5.

17 Rothenberg, *Art* 146–9; Black, *Western warfare* 39.

18 Clausewitz, *On war* 90.

19 In the 1840s, French and Prussian military officers had been brought in to modernize the Military Academy’s curriculum; and the academy began to publish military manuals which were either directly translated from the French or heavily influenced by French military thought. See Mehmed Esat, *Mirat* 43–5; *Fenn-i Harp*; and Halil Halid, *Huda’*.

As with Callwell, the Ottomans would learn to adjust Napoleonic ways of thinking about war to the un-Napoleonic guerrilla wars in which they were repeatedly involved. The Ottoman command sought to overwhelm the resistance of the Yemeni tribesmen through a strategy of rapid marches, effective use of the Ottomans' superior firepower, and quick follow-up of successes.

In this campaign, the Zaydi and 'Asīrī tribes also tended to conform to Callwell's generalizations about the military behavior of irregular warriors. The tribal armies of Yemen and 'Asīr, with their military culture of shifting alliances based on immediate self-interest, tended to quickly disband after the serious defeats inflicted on them by the Ottoman expeditionary force. The pattern of retreating into fortresses after a defeat or in the face of a superior foe proved to be a trap in dealing with a well-armed and determined foe such as the Ottomans. The fortresses were either actually destroyed by the Ottoman artillery or surrendered by military leaders who had become convinced that Ottoman firepower made resistance useless.

3 The Conquest of 'Asīr

The conquest of 'Asīr was precipitated not by events in the Yemeni highlands *per se*, but in 'Asīr and the Yemen Tihama, which the Ottomans had taken possession of in 1849. While the internal turmoil of the Yemeni highlands prevented any significant challenges from that quarter, the amirs of 'Asīr gave considerable trouble to the Ottomans, invading the Tihama several times after the Ottoman occupation. In 1870, Muḥammad ibn 'Āiḍ besieged Ḥudayda with a major force of highland tribesmen. Subsequently, the Ottomans dispatched a force of about 14,000 men to relieve that city.²⁰ The garrison of Ḥudayda would, in fact, inflict a severe defeat on the 'Asīrīs before the arrival of this force. The army would not, however, return to Istanbul, but would go on to conquer the highlands of both Yemen and 'Asīr.

By and large, the conquest of 'Asīr tended to demonstrate the efficacy of Abdūlaziz's military reforms. The *ih̄tiyat* reserve permitted a fairly swift mobilization for the campaign. When the news of the siege of Ḥudayda reached Istanbul, the Minister of War ordered the mobilization of a single division of *ih̄tiyat* troops from the nearby imperial armies. The telegram reporting the siege had been received on 2 December 1870, and the first five battalions of the division were dispatched to Ḥudayda ten days later,²¹ with a single battery

20 Atif Paşa, *Yemen* II, 6–7; Ahmed Raşid, *Tarih* II, 5–6.

21 Ahmed Muhtar Paşa, *Anılar* I, 4.

of 2.5 caliber steel breech-loading artillery.²² The *ihtiyat* thus demonstrated its value as a reserve force in the event of an emergency, permitting the Ottoman army to send troops to troubled regions without denuding its permanent garrisons.

The expeditionary force was placed under the command of Divisional General Redif Paşa, with Major General Ahmed Muhtar Paşa as his second-in-command. Ahmed Muhtar Paşa, with whom we are primarily concerned, was well suited for the Yemen campaign both by training and experience. He had been one of the first staff officers to graduate from the Military Academy and had had extensive experience of mountain warfare in Montenegro and southeastern Anatolia.²³

The base of operations, the place where troops and supplies were initially to be concentrated, was Qunfuda. The initial objective of operations (*hedef ül-hareket*) was Sūghā, one of the amir's three major citadels along with Rayda and Abhā.²⁴ The problem, as the Ottoman commanders saw it, was how to take these objectives with the maximum speed and the minimum bloodshed on the Ottoman side.

In order to reach the amir's citadels, the expeditionary force had to climb the escarpment from the Tihama to the plateau of 'Asīr. The only way up was by 'aqabas, steep, winding footpaths which Ahmed Muhtar Paşa likened to the stairways of a minaret. It was impossible to ascend an 'aqaba if the enemy held its head,²⁵ and there were only three 'aqabas suitable for the passage of a military detachment to the above-mentioned citadels: the passes of Tayyah, Qaḍḍā', and Şammā'.²⁶

The solution to this problem was found with Shaykh 'Umar, a Tihama tribal chief who was forced to act as a guide and advisor to the Ottoman expeditionary force. Shaykh 'Umar, the *shaykh al-mashāyikh* of the Ḥallī tribe, had come to offer his submission while the Ottoman force was still in the port of Qunfuda.²⁷ The Ottoman force had proceeded from Qunfuda to the Tihama town of Makhā'il at the beginning of February, where they formulated a plan to

22 Ahmed Raşid, *Tarih* II, 6.

23 Ahmed Muhtar Paşa, *Anular* I, 8 ff.

24 Atif Paşa, *Yemen* II, 7–9. His exact reference states that "it was decided to take Qunfuda as the base for the military operations to be conducted in 'Asīr" (*Asir üzerine icra edilecek hareket-i askeriye Kunfuda'nun mebde ittihaz olunması karargir oldu*). Later (23), he uses the shortened term *mebde-yi hareket* when referring to Shuqayq, the base of operations for the siege of Rayda.

25 Ahmed Muhtar Paşa, *Anular* I, 48.

26 Atif Paşa, *Yemen* II, 13.

27 Ahmed Raşid, *Tarih* II, 8.

attack the initial objective of Sūghā. The pass of Tayyah, which led directly to Sūghā, was the closest to Makhā'il and the easiest to ascend. Muḥammad ibn 'Ā'id assumed that the Ottomans were planning to launch an attack on Sūghā by way of the Tayyah *'aqaba* and had accordingly stationed his main force at its head.²⁸ Shaykh 'Umar, however, advised the Ottomans that there was another way of getting to Sūghā. The Wādī Aḥābish was primarily used as the main route to Rayda. It was possible, however, to make a sudden turning movement to the left into the pass of Ṣammā' after going some distance down the Wādī Aḥābish; and Sūghā could also be reached by way of this *'aqaba*.

In consequence, the Ottoman command adopted the following plan. A single battalion of infantry should make a demonstration of moving up the pass of Tayyah, while the remaining six battalions should go up the Wādī Aḥābish. The amir would thus be deceived into thinking that the Ottomans were going to Rayda or to Sūghā by the Tayyah route. At the proper time, however, the force going up the wadi should make the turning movement into the pass of Ṣammā'; and since the head of the *'aqaba* was unoccupied, the Ottomans could secure a passage to Sūghā by this route.²⁹

The strategy worked as planned; after 48 hours of continuous marching the entire force had been brought up to the head of the pass of Ṣammā'.³⁰ Muḥammad ibn 'Ā'id had been duly deceived by the ruse of the Ottomans, and had sent his brother Sa'd to Rayda to reinforce the garrison there. Belatedly, he then realized that he should reconnoiter the pass of Ṣammā' as well; but by the time the scouts he had sent arrived the Ottomans were already in possession of its head.

Through Shaykh 'Umar's advice, the Ottomans were able to climb the escarpment by means of speed and deception, skillfully avoiding confrontation with the amir's forces until they were at the top. In this manner, they were able to seize the initiative from the amir at the outset, and deal a blow to his morale before fighting had even begun.

The momentum of success and failure was to snowball in the next phase of the campaign, when the effects of Ottoman firepower became apparent. The seizure of the pass of Ṣammā' was followed by a series of battles in which Muḥammad ibn 'Ā'id's tribesmen were either actually defeated by Ottoman rifles and artillery, or fled because of the fear of it.

An important battle took place after the Ottomans had established their camp near the head of the pass of Ṣammā', at a place called Bāḥa. Here, some

28 Atif Paşa, *Yemen* II, 14; Ahmed Ziya, Mufassal; Ahmed Raşid, *Tarih* II, 16.

29 Ahmed Muhtar Paşa, *Anular* I, 48; Atif Paşa, *Yemen* II, 14–15; Ahmed Raşid, *Tarih* II, 6–17.

30 Ahmed Muhtar Paşa, *Anular* I, 48–9; Atif Paşa, *Yemen* II 15–18.

of the shaykhs of the Rabī'a and Rufayda tribes, no doubt seeing which way the wind was blowing, came to offer their submission.³¹ The amir came with a force numbering about 500–600 men to a nearby mountain, where his men began firing on the Ottoman outposts.³² The Ottomans then sent several companies of soldiers against them, who demonstrated the superiority of Ottoman small arms in the ensuing battle.

The Ottoman troops had Martini breech-loading rifles with an effective range of 700–800 meters, while the Arabs were using smoothbore muskets with a far shorter range. The longer range and speedier rate of fire of the rifles decided the battle in the Ottomans' favor. According to Atif Paşa the amir's force retreated after a battle lasting two hours, leaving behind thirty dead men; the Ottomans, by contrast, had lost only two.³³ Military officers almost universally underreport their own casualties and exaggerate those of the enemy, but there seems little reason to doubt that the 'Asīrī casualties were indeed heavier.

The second battle took place when the Ottoman force went to take Sūghā itself. The Ottomans had commenced an artillery bombardment from a ridge commanding Sūghā's fortifications, while simultaneously launching an infantry assault against the village. The infantry succeeded in entering Sūghā without too much difficulty,³⁴ owing to a deliberate lack of resistance by the defenders. The amir's men had set an ambush and came out from behind a nearby wooded mountain once the soldiers were inside the village. Luck, however, intervened on the side of the Ottomans. The Ottoman assault party had set up two small Whitworth³⁵ guns inside the village and were bombarding its inner citadel. One of the projectiles landed in an ammunition depot in one of the citadel towers, blowing it up with all the men therein. The sight was apparently too much for the amir's men, who broke off the assault and withdrew.³⁶

The Ottomans were then able to follow up the capture of Sūghā with two quick victories in succession. A force was sent against Muḥammad ibn 'Ā'īḍ's encampment to the south, where his army was defeated and forced to abandon its military *matériel*. After this a body of troops was dispatched to the

31 Ahmed Raşid, *Tarih* II, 21.

32 Ahmed Raşid, *Tarih* II, 22.

33 Atif Paşa, *Yemen* II, 18–19.

34 Atif Paşa, *Yemen* II, 19–20.

35 The Whitworth gun was an early type of rifled artillery piece invented by Joseph Whitworth, an English manufacturer, in the mid-nineteenth century. In the Whitworth gun, spin was imparted to the projectile by a polygonal bore, which the projectile was shaped to fit.

36 Ahmed Muhtar Paşa, *Anular* I, 50; Atif Paşa, *Yemen* I, 21; Ahmed Raşid, *Tarih* II, 24–5.

north to take Abhā, the second of the amir's major fortresses; and the garrison there fled without offering any resistance whatsoever.³⁷

In these battles, then, we can trace an almost palpable collapse in the 'Asīrīs' will to fight. Their high casualties in the battle at Bāḥa indicate that they had put up some resistance there. At Sūghā, however, they had fled after a single explosion, and at Abhā they fled before the Ottoman troops had even arrived. The resulting differential in morale between the Ottomans and the 'Asīrīs was crucial in the final phase of the campaign, the conquest of Rayda. Rayda was the amir's last citadel, where he had retreated with a body of his supporters.

The conquest of Rayda was mainly the work of Ahmed Muhtar Paşa, who adopted an arrogant and bullying posture toward the 'Asīrīs and won the campaign as much by aggressive bluff as superior firepower. The 'Asīrīs, for their part, displayed little will to resist, and did not attack the Ottomans even when circumstances were favorable.

The Ottoman column which took Rayda was, in fact, much more vulnerable than the column of the Sūghā campaign and could not maintain the same rapidity of movement. This was because the assault on Rayda required heavy 4-pound [German weight] Krupp artillery pieces, all of which had been left behind in the Tihama. In consequence, Ahmed Muhtar Paşa had to return to the coast and bring them up with a second body of troops, bringing with them two Whitworth artillery pieces and 4 pieces of 4.5 caliber rifled artillery.³⁸ Redif Paşa, meanwhile, remained in the highlands and bombarded the fortifications of Rayda with small Whitworth guns.

Of necessity, the transport of the heavy guns was difficult and time consuming. The march from the coast to Rayda took nearly a week, during which time the soldiers suffered intensely from the heat, the lack of water, and the difficulty of manhandling the artillery over natural obstacles. On several occasions the column was marching in the dark over difficult terrain; and an ambush, if executed with the proper skill and determination, might have done great damage in these circumstances.³⁹

The will of the Asīrīs to fight, however, was gone. The column encountered only negligible resistance on the march up the steep wadi to Rayda, despite the fact that Muḥammad ibn 'Ā'id's partisans had in fact placed ambushes there. As for Muḥammad ibn 'Ā'id himself, he simply shut himself up in the citadel of Rayda and waited for the expeditionary force to arrive.

37 Ahmed Muhtar Paşa, *Anular* I, 50; Atif Paşa, *Yemen* I, 22; Ahmed Raşid, *Tarih* II, 26–7.

38 Ahmed Raşid, *Tarih* II, 26 ff.

39 Ahmed Muhtar Paşa, *Anular* I, 53–5; Atif Paşa, *Yemen* II, 25–9.

In the siege of Rayda, the 'Asīrīs' fear of the artillery, together with Ahmed Muhtar Paşa's shrewd exploitation of this fear, were more important than the artillery's actual firepower. The citadel of Rayda, positioned in the bed of the wadi through which the Ottomans were advancing, was very strongly built. It consisted of a curtain wall reinforced by towers in which cannon were mounted, enclosing three castles of four stories each. Four or five separate castles of similar height were positioned at strategic points on the outskirts of the main citadel.⁴⁰ The most important of these was the castle of Qaḥṭān. This fortification occupied a commanding position on the heights to the right of the citadel, viewed from the position of the Ottoman force coming up the wadi; and since fire could be directed from the castle against any point around Rayda, it would obviously constitute a serious danger to any besieging force.⁴¹

An investment of the citadel would thus be hazardous and difficult, even for a force with vastly superior weaponry. So indeed, it was. First, the citadel and its surrounding fortifications proved very difficult to breach. On the day of Ahmed Muhtar Paşa's arrival, the artillery was set up with some difficulty on the broken ground facing the castle (that is, facing it from the direction of the Ottoman advance), where the majority of the soldiers took up their positions.⁴² The Ottomans then directed a howitzer bombardment against the central citadel; and while some breaches in the wall were opened up thereby, the guns were too far away to do damage sufficient for an assault.

Accordingly, that night the artillery was moved to a position on the right slope of the wadi, about 50–60 meters above its bed and 300–400 meters from the citadel.⁴³ The bombardment continued for three days after this before Muḥammad ibn 'Ā'īḍ finally surrendered; and while significant damage was done, at no time did the artillery open a breach wide enough for an assault.⁴⁴

It is not by any means certain, then, that the Krupp guns made the fall of Rayda inevitable. What was important was that the 'Asīrīs believed that they did, and this sapped their will to fight. On the last day of the siege, Ahmed Muhtar Paşa had again been approached by envoys from Muḥammad ibn 'Ā'īḍ. In describing this encounter Ahmed Muhtar Paşa made clear his preference

40 Ahmed Muhtar Paşa, *Anıtlar* I, 56.

41 Ibid.

42 Ahmed Muhtar Paşa, *Anıtlar* I, 56; Atif Paşa, *Yemen* II, 29–30.

43 Ibid. Actually, both authors state that the artillery emplacement was 1200 paces (*adm*) from the citadel; I have estimated this as 3–400 meters.

44 On the last day of the siege the howitzer shells did blast a gap of several meters' width in the curtain wall. Since the ground level within was higher than the breach, however, this did not do any good. By this time, moreover, ammunition for the guns was running low. See Ahmed Muhtar Paşa, *Anıtlar* I, 57–8.

for force over negotiation, especially when dealing with “Bedouins.” “I knew the temperament of the Bedouins, however, and if the matter was again left to negotiation ... the talks would only be brought to end with difficulty after several days; and as for [the Arabs], they would attribute the gentle treatment they experienced during this time to weakness rather than mercy.”

Accordingly, Ahmed Muhtar Paşa sent them off with a rough demand for unconditional surrender, in which he played on their evident fear of his artillery to the full. “Get the hell back [to the citadel] ... and say this to Muḥammad ibn ‘Ā’id: I am going to my artillery. If he comes in person before I arrive there and gives himself up, he will be given a safe conduct (*aman*). If not, tomorrow morning his head will be rolling around underfoot (*kellesi ayaklar altında yuvarlanır*).”⁴⁵ The guns, he added, would not be fired until the Paşa came to them in person,⁴⁶ after which the “cease-fire” would end.

Ahmed Muhtar Paşa’s threats were effective. When dawn broke the next morning, white flags were flying from the fortress; Muḥammad ibn ‘Ā’id had surrendered. The date was 20 April 1871, 130 days after Ahmed Muhtar Paşa’s departure from Istanbul, and 78 days from his departure from Qunfuda.⁴⁷

The Ottomans’ preference for ruthless action in this campaign led to a sad end for the ‘Asīrī amir and his chieftains. Shortly after Muḥammad ibn ‘Ā’id’s surrender, he was surreptitiously murdered with his principal commanders.⁴⁸ The crushing defeat that the amir suffered leads us to question the role of his own mistakes. It is difficult to see how the ‘Asīrīs could have actually won a victory against the Ottoman expeditionary force. Nonetheless, the conquest of ‘Asir did not need to be the relatively bloodless walkover that it was. The amir’s main mistake appears to have been unimaginative adherence to the traditions of war with which he was familiar in an age of new technology.

First, the heroic tradition of battle, in which martial display and reckless valor played an important role, initially caused the ‘Asīrīs to expose themselves to needless risks. In the first skirmish of the ‘Asīr campaign proper, the Ottomans broke up a force of Rijal Alma’ tribesmen within minutes by several bursts of fire from one of their mountain guns. The tribesmen’s mistake had been to assemble in the open where the Ottomans could see them, shooting

45 Ahmed Muhtar Paşa, *Anılar* I, 57–8; see also Ahmed Raşid, *Tarih* II, 42–3.

46 The guns were located some distance up the hill from where this interview took place.

47 Ahmed Muhtar Paşa, *Anılar* I, 58, 60.

48 Ahmed Muhtar Paşa, *Anılar* I, 59. Ahmed Muhtar Paşa actually says that Muḥammad ibn ‘Ā’id and the 31 captive chieftains with him were shot and bayoneted while trying to escape. Coincidentally, all 18 leaders in the castle of Qaḥṭān were also bayoneted while trying to escape, and this almost immediately after they had surrendered. Ahmed Muhtar Paşa, *Anılar* I, 57.

their muskets in the air, waving their spears and *janbiyyas*,⁴⁹ and reciting verses to encourage one another.⁵⁰ The practice of conspicuous martial display was suicidal in the face of modern artillery.

Second, the tradition of “ephemeral” war in the Arabian Peninsula compounded the natural effect of these defeats, thus shattering the ‘Asīrīs’ morale and will to resist. The amir’s armies were loose confederations of tribesmen, and tribal confederations of this kind were inherently unstable, based as they were on the tribes’ calculation of their short-term interests. Thus, when the amir began to lose, his partisans abandoned him. As Muḥammad ibn ‘Āiḍ’s defeats piled up, the shaykhs of the major ‘Asīrī tribes streamed into the Ottoman camp to offer their submission.⁵¹ In this case, then, the behavior of the ‘Asīrī tribesmen substantially reflected Callwell’s dictum that the lack of cohesion among “irregular warriors” made it difficult for them to sustain resistance in the face of a series of defeats.⁵²

Finally, the difficulty of sustaining resistance with tribal troops was compounded by the flaws of a purely stationary and defensive strategy. In the highlands of southern Arabia, the weaker party would retreat into fortresses in the event of a defeat or the advance of a powerful opponent. If besieged, they might initiate a period of bargaining with the opponent, or simply bribe his forces to leave. So it was with Muḥammad ibn ‘Āiḍ; as we have seen, his only plan was to attempt to hold vital strong points against the advance of the Ottomans. This strategy proved to be suicidal as a means of resistance to the Ottoman forces. The amir did have other choices; he could have taken to the hills with a small body of supporters after his initial defeats, instead of shutting himself up in the citadel of Rayda. This was done by Imam Muḥsin al-Shahārī after his defeat by the Ottomans in Yemen proper; and he was in consequence able to survive and build a resistance movement.

Instead, the amir’s tortoise-like “strategy” gave the Ottoman commanders the leisure to plan and organize the capture of Rayda. Thus, he surrendered the initiative to the Ottomans once again; the factor of time, which in a guerrilla style conflict would have tended to favor the local people over the invaders, now worked to the advantage of the latter. The broken morale of the ‘Asīrīs

49 A type of curved dagger used in Yemen and ‘Asīr.

50 Atif Paşa, *Yemen* II, 15–16.

51 Even before the seizure of the pass of Şammā’, the amir lost a good third of his fighting men when the Banī Shahr tribes had withdrawn their support; and afterward, important elements of the Rabī’a, Rufayda, and Banī Alqam tribes submitted to the Ottomans. See Atif Paşa, *Yemen* II, 13–14, 18–19.

52 Callwell, *Small wars* 88.

caused the degeneration of Muḥammad ibn 'Ā'id's defensive strategy into one of virtual paralysis.

This was evident not only in the tribesmen's failure to take active measures of resistance, but in the ease with which they gave up their fortresses. A well-built Arabian fortress could, in fact, withstand a bombardment by heavy breech-loading artillery. Furthermore, the use of this artillery was attended by serious problems; it was difficult to transport in steep terrain, and difficult to carry an adequate supply of ammunition.

In fact, none of the fortresses captured by the Ottomans were taken by breach and assault; all were abandoned or surrendered by their defenders. The 'Asīrīs, in other words, were not in a position to realistically assess the limitations of the Ottoman artillery. Its noise and evident destructive force were new and frightening to them; and its effectiveness in open battle convinced them that their fortifications were equally vulnerable, and that therefore resistance was useless. The skillful use of intelligence, speed, and the judicious employment of firepower won the day for the Ottomans; and the conquest of 'Asīr set the stage for the conquest of Yemen, in which the Ottomans would attempt to employ a similar strategy.

4 The Conquest of Yemen

In the conquest of Yemen, we may speak confidently for the first time of Ahmed Muhtar Paşa's "personal" strategic style, for Redif Paşa had to return to Istanbul due to illness. Ahmed Muhtar Paşa was formally appointed as the commanding general (*müşir*) of the 'Asīr expeditionary force, now reorganized as the Seventh Army, and as governor of Yemen. He was given the responsibility of conquering the areas of Yemen still outside Ottoman control;⁵³ and he set out to do so after organizing the administration of 'Asīr.

During this campaign, Ahmed Muhtar Paşa sought to repeat the "paradigm" of successful conquest that had been formulated in 'Asīr. This paradigm was based on three major components. First, the campaign was preceded by a period of careful planning, with extensive acquisition of intelligence from local sources. This would involve an attempt to gain local allies in the area of operations, both for the intelligence they could provide and as a means of subversion.

53 Ahmed Muhtar Paşa, *Anılar* 1, 64–5.

Second, when the campaign was actually launched, the paşa would try to employ a combination of speed, deception, surprise, and intimidation to achieve his objectives. As in the 'Asīr campaign, the primary objectives were usually citadels or fortified towns which served as regional power centers. The danger always existed that a campaign to seize a fortress could degenerate into a lengthy siege with significant casualties, even if the besiegers were better armed than the defenders. In the 'Asīr campaign, this had been avoided by stratagems which, in effect, won battles before they were actually fought; and Ahmed Muhtar Paşa essentially sought to repeat this pattern in Yemen.

Thirdly, if stratagems and intimidation did not work Ahmed Muhtar Paşa would resort to pure force, to sieges and battles in which he would try to use his firepower to maximum advantage. He would never negotiate, even when doing so might have saved the Ottomans bloodshed, for he believed that negotiation would always be interpreted as a sign of weakness. Superior firepower usually enabled him ultimately to win, although not always as quickly or easily as in 'Asīr.

Here, we shall focus on the three most crucial phases of the Yemen campaign: the conquest of Ḥarāz, the occupation of the Şan'ā' region, and the conquest of Kawkabān. These campaigns involved, successively, the taking of the major strategic areas in the west, northwest, and center of the highlands. We will analyze each phase in light of the strategic paradigm we have outlined above: what features of this paradigm were present in each stage, and how well did the actual strategy adopted succeed?

4.1 *The Conquest of Ḥarāz*

The Paşa had come by ship to Ḥudayda in the middle of February 1872, bringing with him nine battalions of infantry and two gun batteries.⁵⁴ The initial objective of the campaign was Şan'ā', and the ground for the Ottoman occupation of that city was being prepared through contact with the city's ruling political faction.

Between Şan'ā' and the Tihama, however, lay the independent Ismaili principality of Ḥarāz, ruled by the *dā'ī* Ḥasan ibn Ismā'īl. The *dā'ī* would not permit the Ottoman army to cross his dominions, and so the Ottomans had to subjugate Ḥarāz before they could proceed to Şan'ā'. The Ismaili leader possessed seven major fortresses, of which the most important were Manākha and 'Attāra; and the capture of these fortresses accordingly became the primary military objective of the Ḥarāz expedition.⁵⁵

54 Ahmed Muhtar Paşa, *Anılar* 1, 69.

55 Ibid.

Ahmed Muhtar Paşa again was careful to gather substantial intelligence from reliable local sources before beginning the campaign. First he had a map of the route to Şan'ā' drawn up with the aid of people who knew the country well. Then a spy by the name of Nāşir 'Asīrī was sent to Ḥarāz in the guise of a messenger to the Ismaili leader, to get information concerning the roads, fortresses, and garrisons in the country.⁵⁶

When he realized the inevitability of a confrontation, Ḥasan ibn Ismā'īl adopted a purely defensive strategy, much as Muḥammad ibn 'Ā'īḍ had done. He increased the garrisons in his fortresses, and had the Ismaili peasants keep watch over the roads. Likewise, he shut himself up with his relatives in the citadel of 'Attāra, which he believed to be impregnable.⁵⁷

Ahmed Muhtar Paşa would again attempt to employ the combination of speed, surprise, and deception which had been so successful in the march on Sūghā. The objective for the Ḥarāz campaign was 'Attāra; Ahmed Muhtar Paşa, however, intended the expeditionary force to proceed initially as though they were marching directly on Şan'ā'. There were three routes which could be used to reach Şan'ā': the Wādī Şanqūr, Wādī Ḥār, and the 'Attāra roads. The Paşa's plan called for the force to proceed up the Wādī Ḥār until they came to the point where the 'Attāra road branched off. There, they were to turn and make a rapid night march to the above-mentioned citadel. 'Attāra was built at the head of an *'aqaba*; and thus it was important for the expeditionary force to complete the march before the Ismaili leader had time to prepare the defenses of the pass.⁵⁸

In the actual execution of this plan, however, Ahmed Muhtar Paşa failed to achieve the strategic surprise at which he was aiming. He did not initially go to 'Attāra himself, but instead sent Major-General Veli Paşa on 16 March 1872, with five battalions and four Whitworth mountain guns. The march was supposed to be completed in approximately 24 hours. Because of the heat in the Tihama, however, Veli Paşa's force took five days to reach Ḥuwayṭa at the foot of the 'Attāra *'aqaba*. By that time the Ismaili leader understood the intentions of the Ottomans and had stationed men in the pass to block the soldiers' advance.⁵⁹

Apart from the Ottoman failure to achieve strategic surprise, moreover, the Ismailis refused to submit as easily as the 'Asīrīs had done. The expeditionary

56 Ahmed Muhtar Paşa, *Anılar* 1, 69–70; Atif Paşa, *Yemen* 11, 61; Ahmed Raşid, *Tarih* 11, 82, 86. Nāşir 'Asīrī was an 'Asīrī Arab who had been a long-time member of the irregular cavalry stationed in Ḥudayda.

57 Al-Ḥarāzī, *Fatrat* 172.

58 Ahmed Muhtar Paşa, *Anılar* 1, 69–70.

59 Ibid.

force had to fight its way up from Ḥuwayṭa to ‘Attāra; and in these battles, the Ottoman troops encountered greater resistance and suffered more casualties than in the ‘Asīr campaign. In the battles at Ḥuwayṭa, the Ismailis do not seem to have recklessly exposed themselves as the ‘Asīrīs had initially done. Instead, small parties of Ismailis entrenched themselves among the high rocks of the pass, and in its towers and fortified buildings. From there, they rolled stones down on the Ottoman forces and directed musket fire against them. Control of the terrain and effective use of cover thus partially compensated for their inferiority in firepower. It would take four days for the Ottomans to expel the Ismaili leader’s men from the *‘aqaba*. The Ottomans had to send several companies of soldiers at a time to dislodge the Ismaili bands, covering their advance with fire from the mountain guns.⁶⁰

Despite the Ismailis’ stiffer resistance, however, the end result was not fundamentally different. The defenders were driven out of their positions with heavy losses, although the expeditionary force also took significant casualties in the process.⁶¹ As in ‘Asīr, Ḥasan ibn Ismā‘īl’s partisans were defeated in consequence of the Ottomans’ superior weaponry. The will to resist of the Ismailis apparently was destroyed by the defeat at Ḥuwayṭa, for they began to flee or submit shortly thereafter.

When the expeditionary force reached ‘Attāra and began setting up its siege lines, a number of delegations from the tribes and towns in the area came to offer their submission. The day after ‘Attāra was invested, small detachments were sent to several of Ḥasan ibn Ismā‘īl’s other major fortresses, Shibām, Masār, Mitwaḥ, Kāhil and Manākha. The defenders of Shibām, Masār and Mitwaḥ fled without offering any resistance whatsoever. At Kāhil, the shaykh of the local tribe came out in person to the commander of the Ottoman force and gave the keys of the fortress to him. Manākha likewise was occupied without resistance.⁶²

Similarly, the resistance of Ḥasan ibn Ismā‘īl and his remaining partisans in ‘Attāra did not continue for long. As in ‘Asīr, the swift surrender of the fortress was due more to fear and demoralization, adroitly exploited by Ahmed Muhtar Paşa, than ‘Attāra’s actual vulnerability. The citadel was, in fact, impregnable. ‘Attāra was constructed atop a single isolated rock 60–80 meters high, whose sides consisted solely of sheer precipices. The only way to enter was by means of two winding stairways cut directly out of the rock, which joined together at

60 Atif Paşa, *Yemen* II, 63–5. For a detailed description of the battle see also Ahmed Raşid, *Tarih* II, 91 ff.

61 Atif Paşa, *Yemen* II, 63–5; al-Ḥarāzī, *Fatrat* 172.

62 Atif Paşa, *Yemen* II, 65–6; Ahmed Raşid, *Tarih* II, 97–8.

the fortress gates.⁶³ It was clearly impossible to capture the citadel by assault, and probably impossible even to breach it with the small mountain guns the Ottomans had with them. Accordingly it was decided simply to blockade the fortress and bombard it, in the hope that Ḥasan ibn Ismā'īl would thereby be intimidated into surrendering.⁶⁴

The bombardment of 'Attāra continued for several days. While it is doubtful that it did any real damage to the citadel's fortifications, it did cause casualties to the defenders within, and the effect on their morale seems to have been very great. As before, Ahmed Muhtar Paşa was well aware of this effect and knew how to exploit it to the full.⁶⁵

In a pompous and intimidating letter to Ḥasan ibn Ismā'īl, the Paşa wrote the following: "Up to now the artillery bombardment has not been particularly severe, and the reason for this has been to spare the unfortunate wretches within the citadel ... but if you remain stubborn and persist in your rebellion God will hold you accountable for the blood of these helpless ones. We give you until tomorrow [to surrender], and if you do not surrender by then no plea for quarter will be accepted, and your fortress will be brought down over your head."⁶⁶

The letter had its desired effect, and on 2 April 1872 white flags were raised over 'Attāra.⁶⁷ Ḥasan ibn Ismā'īl was taken captive and sent to Ḥudayda, where he would die shortly thereafter. 'Attāra was destroyed by order of Ahmed Muhtar Paşa, who had arrived in Ḥarāz shortly after the surrender of 'Attāra. The Paşa then proceeded to concentrate his forces in Manākha for the march on Şan'ā'.⁶⁸

4.2 *The Conquest of the Şan'ā' Region*

The conquest of the central and southern highlands was the easiest part of the Yemen campaign. The complete degeneration of war and politics in that region meant that the Ottomans did not have to confront even the semblance of a unified resistance. The tribal warlords of the region had no organization,

63 Ahmed Muhtar Paşa, *Anılar* I, 70.

64 Atif Paşa, *Yemen* II, 65–7.

65 Atif Paşa, *Yemen* II, 67; Ahmed Raşid, *Tarih* II, 99.

66 Atif Paşa, *Yemen* II, 67–8; see also Ahmed Raşid, *Tarih* II, 100.

67 Ahmed Muhtar Paşa, *Anılar* I, 71.

68 Ahmed Muhtar Paşa *Anılar* I, 73. It was rumored in Yemen that Ḥasan ibn Ismā'īl had been poisoned; Ahmed Muhtar Paşa, however, makes some effort to exonerate himself from these charges. Since elsewhere he uses the disingenuous explanation that captive Yemeni leaders were "shot while trying to escape," his protestations of innocence cannot be discounted.

no popular support, and no ideological vision around which to rally resistance. Furthermore, Ahmed Muhtar Paşa conducted the Şan‘ā’ campaign with the same precision and decisiveness which he had shown previously.

The disturbed condition of the region initially gave the campaign the character of an intervention in a civil conflict, rather than an outright invasion. The advantage of this was that Ahmed Muhtar Paşa had a significant base of local allies on which he could rely at the outset of the campaign. The immediate political context of the intervention was the tension between the actual ruler of Şan‘ā’, the *shaykh al-balad* Muḥsin Mu‘īd , and the nominal imam, al-Mutawakkil Muḥsin al-Shahārī. These two had had a serious falling out prior to the Ottoman invasion. As a result, Muḥsin al-Shahārī had been banished to the district of al-Ḥadda outside the city walls and forbidden to enter Şan‘ā’, although it had been agreed that the *khutba*⁶⁹ in the city would be read in his name.⁷⁰

Muḥsin Mu‘īd and his partisans represented the interests of the merchant class of Şan‘ā’. As a result of the prevailing anarchy trade was at a standstill; and the *shaykh al-balad* seems to have felt the Ottomans could help him in restoring some semblance of order in the country, so that the caravans could move freely once again.⁷¹ His partisans among the sayyid elite accordingly had written to the sultan through the medium of the Sharīf of Mecca, requesting that the sultan send troops to aid them in restoring order around Şan‘ā’.⁷² The understanding of Muḥsin Mu‘īd’s party was that this aid was to be of a temporary nature, but the Ottoman government chose to interpret this message as a request for direct Ottoman control.⁷³

The movement of the Ottomans into the interior deepened the rift between the *shaykh al-balad* and the nominal imam. Muḥsin al-Shahārī wanted the Şan‘ānīs to resist the Ottomans, while Muḥsin Mu‘īd was preparing to welcome them. The shaykhs around Şan‘ā’ generally sided with the latter, despite Muḥsin al-Shahārī’s efforts to form a tribal alliance to oppose the Ottoman invaders. The major exception was ‘Āmir al-‘Idharī, paramount shaykh of the Arḥab tribe.⁷⁴ With the Arḥab tribesmen preparing to march on Şan‘ā’ and the prospect of another civil war looming, Muḥsin Mu‘īd’s partisans sent a

69 The *khutba* is the sermon read after the Friday prayer in Muslim societies and contains an invocation for God’s blessings on the current ruler.

70 Ahmed Muhtar Paşa, *Anılar* 1, 74; al-Wāsi‘ī, *Tārīkh* 258.

71 Harris, *Journey* 99.

72 Al-Wāsi‘ī, *Tārīkh* 122.

73 Al-Wāsi‘ī, *Tārīkh* 259.

74 Al-Ḥarāzī, *Fatrat* 175.

delegation to Ahmed Muhtar Paşa in Manākha, where they urged him to hurry on to Şan'ā'.

The presence of local allies thus allowed Ahmed Muhtar Paşa to achieve his major objective in the way he preferred, that is, without fighting. Ahmed Muhtar Paşa came to Şan'ā' in late April, accompanied by five battalions and four companies of infantry and four mountain guns, and occupied the city without resistance.⁷⁵ In military terms, his only remaining task was to suppress the Arḥabī resistance. Initially, he was asked by Muḥsin Mu'īd to take care of the bandit chief 'Abdallāh al-Dafa'ī, who possessed a castle just outside the northern wall of the city.⁷⁶ As a member of the Arḥab tribe, al-Dafa'ī had allied with Muḥsin al-Shahārī against Muḥsin Mu'īd and the Ottoman forces.⁷⁷

Minor as this operation was in the military sense, politically it was very important. Muḥsin Mu'īd's party had realized that the Ottomans had come to stay shortly after Ahmed Muhtar Paşa's arrival in Şan'ā', and were having second thoughts. They refused to turn over the administrative records of the country (*dafātir*) to Ahmed Muhtar Paşa unless he destroyed al-Dafa'ī first. It was evident that the chief men of Şan'ā' were testing the will and capability of the Ottoman commander, and might well abandon him if he failed.

Accordingly, Ahmed Muhtar Paşa executed the operation against al-Dafa'ī in the same rigorous fashion as his previous campaigns. The operation was preceded by careful planning and full utilization of local intelligence sources. First, Ahmed Muhtar Paşa enlisted the aid of a local shaykh, ensuring his cooperation through characteristic brutal intimidation. 'Abdallāh al-Dafa'ī's castle was located in the territory of the Banī Ḥārith tribe, and surrounded by their fortresses. Accordingly, Ahmed Muhtar Paşa summoned Şāliḥ Dughaysh, the shaykh of the Banī Ḥārith, and asked his advice: in the operation against al-Dafa'ī should he have his troops march through the city and out the northern gate, or should he send them around the wall, among the fortresses of the Banī Ḥārith?

"I don't know, you know" [the shaykh] said.

"You will act as a guide and proceed in front of the troops, and if perchance a musket should be fired from some place on my soldiers you will be bayoneted at once. Think about it that way!"

The shaykh saw that he had no choice except to help the Ottomans. He thus advised Ahmed Muhtar Paşa that the troops should go out the northern gate, Bāb al-Shu'ūb. The shaykh's own fortress was located just opposite that

75 Ahmed Muhtar Paşa, *Anılar* 1, 76; Ahmed Raşid, *Tarih* II, 110-13.

76 Al-Wāsi'ī, *Tārīkh* 260.

77 Ahmed Muhtar Paşa, *Anılar* 1, 77.

gate, and could accordingly cover the soldiers' advance to al-Dafaī's castle.⁷⁸ Al-Dafaī had followed the "strategy" of his more important predecessors and shut himself up there.

Having thus planned the operation in such a manner as to minimize his own casualties, Ahmed Muhtar Paşa proceeded to its execution. The operation was conducted with a ruthless aggressiveness designed to have the maximum psychological impact on the local population. Ahmed Muhtar Paşa was certainly aware of the fate that had befallen an Ottoman force under the command of Tevfik Paşa which had occupied Şan'ā' in 1849, and subsequently been massacred by the inhabitants of the city.⁷⁹ He may well have believed that only speedy and crushing victory would create the necessary fear that would induce the highlanders to submit.

Previously Ahmed Muhtar Paşa had sent al-Dafaī several written summons to surrender, to which he had replied with a letter "full of empty words."⁸⁰ Şāliḥ Dughaysh told Ahmed Muhtar Paşa that al-Dafaī was relying on the supposed impregnability of his small mud castle. Solid cannon balls, apparently the only kind with which al-Dafaī was familiar, could not break down a fortification of this kind; the ball would simply sink into the earthen wall. Al-Dafaī's stubbornness meant that Ahmed Muhtar Paşa would deal with him by force, in keeping with his general policy of refusing to negotiate. The day after his conversation with Şāliḥ Dughaysh, he dispatched a battalion of troops with three mountain guns to al-Dafaī's castle. When he arrived there later, he found the colonel commanding the battalion attempting to negotiate with al-Dafaī. Ahmed Muhtar Paşa put a stop to this immediately, and informed al-Dafaī's messenger that unless a white flag was raised on the castle within five minutes he would level it to the ground. No white flag appeared, and in consequence the artillery bombardment was begun.

In previous sieges the defenders had usually been intimidated into flight or surrender. Ottoman firepower, however formidable, was not always sufficient to breach a well-built Arabian fortress. In this case, however, Ottoman firepower really was the key to victory. The howitzer shells employed by the Ottomans sank about a foot into the mud wall of the castle and exploded, making large holes. Within the space of an hour the castle had been half destroyed, at which point Ahmed Muhtar Paşa launched a final infantry assault. The soldiers entered the fortification without difficulty, and al-Dafaī surrendered with his men. The occupants of the surrounding castles, seeing al-Dafaī's defeat, raised

78 Ahmed Muhtar Paşa, *Anular* 1, 77–8.

79 Al-Wāsi'i, *Tārīkh* 241.

80 Ibid.

white flags over their castles in token of surrender. The operation, which had been conducted with an eye to impressing the Ṣan'ānīs with the power of the Ottoman army, had been a success.⁸¹

The defeat of al-Dafa'ī thus consolidated Ahmed Muhtar Paşa's control over the city of Ṣan'ā in both the physical and psychological sense. In order to firmly secure the surrounding region, however, it was necessary to deal with Muḥsin al-Shahārī and 'Āmir al-'Idharī. 'Āmir al-'Idharī had gathered a number of warriors from Arḥab and Dhū Muḥammad at the fortified village of Sha'b. Al-'Idharī's son had been killed in the bombardment of al-Dafa'ī's castle and he was anxious for revenge. For understandable reasons, however, the tribesmen were reluctant to march on Ṣan'ā.⁸²

The Ottoman victory had inevitably affected the tribesmen's will to fight, causing them to hesitate. In doing so, they again left the initiative to Ahmed Muhtar Paşa. Ahmed Muhtar Paşa, however, did not attack al-'Idharī's force right away, but delayed for ten days while he sent a summons to al-'Idharī to surrender, gathered information on the disposition of his forces, and made the necessary preparations for battle.⁸³ When the summons to surrender availed nothing, Ahmed Muhtar Paşa had Major-General Veli Paşa make a night march to Sha'b with two infantry battalions, two large mountain guns, and two Whitworth guns, with Ṣāliḥ Dughaysh acting as a guide. This force arrived at Sha'b as dawn was breaking. The tribesmen had fortified themselves in the towers and stone houses near the village.⁸⁴ Al-'Idharī was sent a summons to surrender which was refused, and after a short break to allow the troops some sleep the Ottoman force prepared for battle.

The confrontation at Sha'b, like the suppression of al-Dafa'ī, was essentially won by superior Ottoman firepower. Al-'Idharī's house and a neighboring tower were bombarded with the two mountain guns. A group of tribesmen then apparently tried to surround the Ottoman forces but were driven off by heavy rifle and artillery fire; and the soldiers pursued them for some distance, killing many with bullets, shells, and bayonets.⁸⁵ A large number of the Arḥab tribesmen were killed and wounded, while Ottoman casualties were far fewer. After this defeat resistance among the Arḥab tribesmen collapsed, and their shaykhs and constituent tribes submitted to the government.⁸⁶

81 Ahmed Muhtar Paşa, *Anular* 1, 79–80; al-Wāsi'ī, *Tārīkh* 260; Ahmed Raşid, *Tarih* 11, 122.

82 Atif Paşa, *Yemen* 11, 80–1; Ahmed Raşid, *Tarih* 11, 125–6.

83 Ahmed Raşid, *Tarih* 11, 126.

84 Atif Paşa, *Yemen* 11, 81; Ahmed Raşid, *Tarih* 11, 127–9.

85 Atif Paşa, *Yemen* 11, 81; al-Ḥarāzī, *Fatrat* 180; Ahmed Raşid, *Tarih* 11, 128–9.

86 Ahmed Raşid, *Tarih* 11, 129–30.

With the conquest of Ṣan‘ā’ and Ḥarāz, the most important areas of the highlands were secured: the route to the coast and the capital. Minor military operations to take control of the south would soon follow. Upper Yemen was left alone, for the region was considered too poor and infertile to justify the expense of occupying it.⁸⁷ While this would have momentous consequences for the future, the tribes of that region could not pose a significant threat to Ottoman power at that time.

4.3 *The Siege of Kawkabān*

There remained, however, the lush principality of Kawkabān to the northwest of Ṣan‘ā’, which was dominated by the Sharaf al-Dīn sayyids. The campaign to take Kawkabān was the final episode of major military importance in the conquest of Yemen, and this campaign was the major exception to the pattern of swift and easy victories in the Ottoman takeover. In essence, the Kawkabān campaign would reveal the limitations of Callwell’s paradigm as a means of making war. Initially, the operation proceeded in much the same manner as the previous ones. Local alliances were formed, intelligence carefully gathered, and positions seized by speed and deception rather than fighting.

After this, things went awry. Like their predecessors, the Sharaf al-Dīn sayyids would adopt a strategy of static defense and shut themselves up in the citadel of Kawkabān. Unlike them they would put up a determined resistance; in consequence, the Ottoman siege would last six months before the defenders finally gave in.

By virtue of its position alone, Kawkabān was the most formidable military objective of the campaign. The citadel of Kawkabān was built on an isolated “mesa” about 300 meters high, two kilometers long, and one kilometer wide. The sides of this mesa were all sheer precipices, and on its top there were several hundred houses and a spring of water. The route to Kawkabān went up an *‘aqaba*, which ascended a mountain standing opposite the mesa. The head of this *‘aqaba* was held by a castle known as Bayt ‘Izz.

For an assaulting force the only means of entrance to Kawkabān was by way of a bridge, which stretched from the above-mentioned mountain to the citadel. Below this bridge there was a natural trench which was about 200 meters long, 12–20 meters wide, and 15–20 meters deep. This trench separated the mountain from the mesa on which Kawkabān was built, and its sides consisted of sheer rock. Walls with upper and lower embrasures were built along the

87 Ahmed Muhtar Paşa, *Anılar* 1, 86.

length of this trench on the Kawkabān side, exposing the bridge to gunfire from the citadel.⁸⁸

For the Ottomans, then, it was eminently preferable that Kawkabān be surrendered peacefully. Taking the citadel by assault would be difficult, if not impossible. Accordingly, Ahmed Muhtar Paşa prepared for the campaign with his customary carefulness and skill. At the beginning, he built up a base of local allies who could provide him with good intelligence. The capture of Bayt 'Izz was the necessary preliminary to the conquest of Kawkabān; and Bayt 'Izz was held by the men of Sayyid 'Abd al-Karīm Sharaf al-Dīn, a nephew of the ruler of Kawkabān Sayyid Aḥmad, who nursed a secret enmity toward him. Accordingly Sayyid 'Abd al-Karīm was summoned to Şan'ā' by Ahmed Muhtar Paşa; and the two men formulated a plan in conjunction with Shaykh Şāliḥ, shaykh of the Hamdān tribe, who was also an enemy of Sayyid Aḥmad.

This plan relied on Ahmed Muhtar Paşa's typical combination of deception, surprise and intimidation, calculated to deal a blow to the opposing forces' morale before fighting had even begun and convince them of the futility of resistance. In order not to alert Sayyid Aḥmad to the planned attack on Kawkabān, the expeditionary force would initially set off in a different direction; otherwise, Sayyid Aḥmad would almost certainly send men to hold Bayt 'Izz. Meanwhile Shaykh Şāliḥ's men were to seize Bayt 'Izz, in collusion with the men of Sayyid 'Abd al-Karīm who were already in the castle and hold it until the arrival of the Ottoman troops.⁸⁹

This part of the plan succeeded. An Ottoman force of one and a half battalions with three Whitworth guns, two mountain guns, and a 9-pound mortar under Colonel Musa Bey was dispatched to Kawkabān in the middle of May 1872. Bayt 'Izz was seized by the men of Shaykh Şāliḥ in accordance with the plan; and the expeditionary force arrived shortly thereafter, emplacing their guns opposite the citadel.⁹⁰

Evidently, Ahmed Muhtar Paşa hoped that the exposure of Kawkabān to the feared Ottoman artillery would persuade the Sharaf al-Dīn sayyids to submit without fighting. At Kawkabān, however, he would have to deal with a much stronger personality than any of his previous opponents. The titular ruler of Kawkabān was Sayyid Aḥmad ibn Sharaf al-Dīn. It appears, however, that the leading spirit of resistance at Kawkabān was actually Sayyid 'Alī, Sayyid Aḥmad's brother and the commander of his troops (*ra'īs al-juyūsh*). Sayyid 'Alī was described by Ahmed Muhtar Paşa as an "extremely harsh, hard and evil

88 Ahmed Muhtar Paşa, *Anular* I, 87–8.

89 Ahmed Muhtar Paşa, *Anular* I, 88; Atif Paşa, *Yemen* II, 89; Ahmed Raşid, *Tarih* II, 134–5.

90 Ahmed Muhtar Paşa, *Anular* I, 88; Ahmed Raşid, *Tarih* II, 135–6.

man" (*gayet haşin ve sert ve şerir*), who was very dangerous.⁹¹ This may have meant that Sayyid 'Alī had the same driving and forceful personality as Ahmed Muhtar Paşa himself and did not like to lose any more than he did.

Initially, however, the capture of Bayt 'Izz seemed to have destroyed the confidence of the two brothers in the expected manner. After the arrival of the expeditionary force, they had come out to the camp and met with the Ottoman commanders, agreeing to surrender themselves and turn over the citadel. It was at this point that Ahmed Muhtar Paşa's plans went awry. His instructions to Musa Bey had stated explicitly that if Sayyid Aḥmad and Sayyid 'Alī surrendered voluntarily they were to be detained in the camp, and troops sent to occupy Kawkabān.

Musa Bey, however, agreed simply to hold a third brother, Sayyid 'Abdallāh, as a hostage; and Sayyid 'Abdallāh was a negligible person in terms of intelligence and political power. Sayyid Aḥmad and Sayyid 'Alī were then allowed to return to Kawkabān, accompanied by two companies of troops assigned to occupy the citadel. As soon as these two companies had crossed the bridge and entered Kawkabān, the gates were shut, and the soldiers taken captive.⁹² Sayyid Aḥmad and Sayyid 'Alī prepared to defend the citadel. Ahmed Muhtar Paşa relieved Musa Bey of his command, replacing him with Major-General Veli Paşa, and the siege of Kawkabān was begun.⁹³

In this siege, while the Ottomans had the advantage in weaponry, the Kawkabānīs had an overwhelming advantage of position. While the total resources on which the Ottomans could draw were much greater than those of the Kawkabānīs, the latter were amply supplied with food and water, and did not have to transport their supplies over great distances as the Ottomans did. The commanders on both sides were capable and determined, and the individual men skilled and disciplined. With a rough equality of force on both sides, the siege turned into a war of attrition, something which was relatively rare in the early stages of the Ottoman occupation of Yemen.

The siege seems to have turned into a contest of wills between two men who were dynamic and authoritarian, who had the ability to motivate or terrorize their subordinates into performing. In the particular circumstances of the siege, this seems to have worked best for Sayyid 'Alī, who was commanding his troops in person, and fighting for his life and independence.

Ahmed Muhtar Paşa, by contrast, was unable to direct the siege in person, as he had to stay in Şan'ā' to organize the administration of the province. Despite

91 Ahmed Muhtar Paşa, *Anular* I, 89.

92 Ibid.; Ahmed Raşid, *Tarih* II, 136.

93 Atif Paşa, *Yemen* II, 91.

his absence, he insisted on controlling the smallest details of the operation. In his own words, "Every morning I would write ... a long letter in my own hand to the commander in charge of conducting the siege, containing the necessary explanations with regard to the details of how our positions were to be set up every day, and how the level of the moat was to be raised ... and how the bridge was to be raised and lowered; and every day I received an answer detailing that day's events."⁹⁴

A brief account of the siege will serve to illustrate the ingenuity and determination of both sides. The Ottomans would try all kinds of methods to carry the citadel by breach and assault, all of which ultimately failed. First the Ottomans tried to launch a surprise attack by night over the bridge, which was unsuccessful because they could not break down the gate and were exposed to heavy fire from the defenders of the citadel. The defenders of Kawkabān then destroyed the bridge, so that when the soldiers returned the next day with pickaxes and crowbars, there was no way to cross the trench.⁹⁵

After this siege lines were set up all around the mesa on which Kawkabān was built; and two 6-pound [German weight] Krupp guns brought up from Ḥudayda.⁹⁶ These two guns, together with the artillery pieces that had previously been brought to Kawkabān, were placed under the command of the adjutant major Mehmet Efendi.⁹⁷ The citadel was then subjected to a heavy bombardment, which did a great deal of damage to its fortifications, and opened up gaps in the wall wide enough for an assault. Meanwhile the Ottomans sought to move their positions down from the mountain to the level of the trench, from which point some means of assault against Kawkabān could be devised.⁹⁸ This was not easy, however, for the defenders of Kawkabān were excellent marksmen, and directed constant musket fire on the besieging force below. Accordingly, the Ottomans built "mobile shields" (*siper-i seyyare*), a sort of covered iron cart.⁹⁹ To advance their positions the Ottoman soldiers would go into the mobile shield and wheel it forward to the desired point, where they would build stone and sandbag entrenchments under its shelter.¹⁰⁰

In this manner the siege lines of the Ottomans inched forward at the rate of 4–5 meters a day, so that it was near the beginning of August by the time they reached the trench. Here it was necessary to find a means of crossing

94 Ahmed Muhtar Paşa, *Anılar* I, 90.

95 Ahmed Muhtar Paşa, *Anılar* I, 89; Ahmed Raşid, *Tarih* II, 137.

96 Ahmed Muhtar Paşa, *Anılar* I, 89–90.

97 Ahmed Raşid, *Tarih* II, 143.

98 Ahmed Muhtar Paşa, *Anılar* I, 90; Atuf Paşa, *Yemen* II, 94–5.

99 Ahmed Muhtar Paşa, *Anılar* I, 89; Atuf Paşa, *Yemen* II, 95.

100 Ibid.

over to the citadel. Two options presented themselves. The trench could be filled in at a suitable place or a bridge could be lowered over the place of the destroyed bridge to cross the trench. At first the former option was chosen.¹⁰¹ The Ottomans tried to fill up the trench with sacks of dry straw; but the defenders of Kawkabān threw down lances with flaming rags tied to them, and the straw was all burnt up.¹⁰² The besiegers then tried a new strategy. The positions were advanced to the place where the destroyed bridge was, since this was the narrowest and shallowest part of the trench. This was done using the same slow and painful method outlined above, again under constant fire from the enemy; men who happened to stick their fingers outside the mobile shields while working often lost them.¹⁰³

The plan now was to set up a portable bridge at this point, from which an assault could be launched into the citadel. A wooden bridge about 15 meters long was accordingly constructed, raised into an upright position by means of pulleys and ropes, and then lowered across the trench. The Kawkabān end of the bridge, however, came to rest on the rubble piled up from months of artillery bombardment. In consequence the bridge leaned to one side and could not be securely positioned.¹⁰⁴

Despite this, the Ottomans went ahead and launched an assault over the bridge. This operation, however, went awry when one company commander lost his nerve and refused to leave the Ottoman entrenchments. In consequence he held up all the men behind him, and the few men who did get across were driven back by the fire of the defenders.¹⁰⁵ That night, the defenders of Kawkabān threw down oily rags on the bridge, which had been knocked even further askew during the day's fighting. A second attack was clearly impossible under the circumstances. The bridge was taken away for repairs, and the Ottoman commanders pondered their next move.¹⁰⁶

By this time, however, there was a growing sentiment among the notables of Kawkabān that it would be foolhardy to continue to resist; accordingly they made overtures for surrender to the Ottomans, and Sayyid Aḥmad was forced to follow suit.¹⁰⁷ The citadel was turned over to the Ottomans on 15 November 1872; and Sayyid Aḥmad and Sayyid 'Alī were brought to Ṣan'ā', together with

101 Ahmed Raṣīd, *Tarih* II, 173.

102 Atif Paşa, *Yemen* II, 95–6.

103 Ahmed Muhtar Paşa, *Anular* I, 89.

104 Ahmed Muhtar Paşa, *Anular* I, 89–90; Ahmed Raṣīd, *Tarih* II, 190.

105 Ahmed Raṣīd, *Tarih* II, 190–2.

106 Ahmed Muhtar Paşa, *Anular* I, 90.

107 Al-Ḥarāzī, *Fatrat* 183.

some of the other notables of Kawkabān.¹⁰⁸ Sayyid Aḥmad was given a salary and allowed to settle in Ṣan'ā' with his family; Sayyid 'Alī was exiled to Ḥudayda and murdered on the road.¹⁰⁹

With the conclusion of the siege of Kawkabān the conquest of Yemen was essentially complete. Hemmed in by the desert to the north and east, and the English-protected emirates to the south, the Ottomans had reached the practical limits of expansion in the region. They would not attempt to seize any more territory, and hence the war of conventional battles and sieges had ended. Guerrilla resistance, however, was just beginning; and we shall analyze the initial character of this resistance in the next chapter.

5 Conclusion

In this chapter, we have attempted to analyze the conquest of Yemen in the context of the technological, organizational, and strategic features of war in the nineteenth century. First, we have shown that the conquest was made possible in large part due to a sweeping program of military reform instituted by Sultan Abdūlaziz and the modern weaponry with which the Ottoman army was equipped as a result. Second, we have attempted a critical analysis of Ottoman generalship and the defense strategies of the Yemeni tribesmen, using Colonel Callwell's analysis of small wars in this period.

Both European and Ottoman officers were attempting to apply their training in Napoleonic strategies to the "small wars" in their imperial possessions. As a result, Ottoman strategy in Yemen was broadly similar to that recommended by Callwell. The role of fortified citadels as centers of political power in Yemen and 'Asir supplied the Ottomans with well-defined military objectives. These objectives were seized in a series of bold, sweeping moves whose net effect was to destroy the confidence of the tribesmen, making them amenable to surrender.

On the Yemeni side, in the confrontation with the Ottomans the tribesmen generally followed the customary military patterns we have outlined in Chapter One: emphasis on the display of conspicuous bravery in battle, withdrawal into fortresses in the event of defeat or attack by a superior force, and the resolution of sieges by negotiation or subversion of the enemy's partisans. These patterns played into the hands of their adversaries. The fissiparous character

¹⁰⁸ Ahmed Muhtar Paşa, *Anılar* I, 90.

¹⁰⁹ Ahmed Muhtar Paşa, *Anılar* I, 91. Sayyid 'Alī was also supposedly shot while trying to escape.

of Yemeni military organization; the making and breaking of alliances on the basis of short-term advantage; the corresponding tendency to abandon military leaders who were clearly losing; all these things tended initially to prevent the mounting of sustained resistance to the Ottoman invasion.

For the time being, then, the Zaydi and 'Asīrī tribes were cowed by the Ottomans' superior force. In Yemen, the political fragmentation of the pre-conquest era would initially exercise a determining influence on the post-conquest culture of rebellion. Military resistance to the Ottomans would remain fragmented in the first twenty years of the Ottoman occupation, carried out by individual tribes, shaykhs, and claimants to the imamate without significant attempts at coordination. Ottoman control of Yemen was thus never seriously threatened in this period, despite a multitude of problems in the arenas of logistics and manpower. We will analyze this guerrilla resistance and the Ottoman response to it in the next chapter.

Limited Rebellion and Counterinsurgency, 1872–91

The period 1872–91 in Yemen was characterized by an uneasy stalemate between the Ottoman administration and the emerging movements of resistance to Ottoman authority. First, the Ottoman infrastructure of control in Yemen was comparatively weak. This was a period of great financial difficulty for the Empire in general, and the provincial administration of Yemen in particular. As a result, the Ottoman administration could neither maintain adequate military forces in Yemen, nor undertake the infrastructural improvements necessary to ensure its grip on it.

Second, it may be stated that despite these problems Ottoman control of Yemen was never seriously threatened in this period. This was because from 1872 to 1891 war and rebellion in Yemen remained generally limited in character. In this chapter, we will analyze the reasons for the limitations on warfare in this period. At the same time, we will lay the conceptual foundation for showing how this limited war would ultimately assume a more total character, on both the Zaydi and Ottoman sides. The seeds of the more total conflict of the 1890s were sown in this period, even though their effect was not immediately apparent.

We will show how the military resistance of the Zaydi tribes was initially limited by the constraints of intertribal war and the tribal system, as well as the survival of the military methods of the period before the occupation. At the same time, we will discuss the reformulation of the imamate as a “tribal quasi-state” on the Gellner model. This was the beginning of the transformation of war in Yemen, from fragmented tribal resistance to long-term jihad organized at the supra-tribal level.

On the Ottoman side, we will see that during this period methods of curbing rebellion derived from Perso-Islamic political thought tended to prevail in Yemen, based on limited coercion and manipulation of intra-elite rivalries. Such methods included encouraging intertribal warfare, coopting powerful shaykhs, and conducting intermittent punitive expeditions. They were employed in consequence of the Ottomans’ lack of resources and the limited character of rebellion in Yemen in this period. Despite this, centralizing, progressive, and reformist methods of dealing with unrest were not entirely

absent. In this period, however, such policies did not remotely approach any kind of totalizing conflict.

1 The Infrastructure of Control in Yemen

1.1 *The Military Forces*

The prevalence of “limited” methods of dealing with rebellion was rooted partially in the weakness of the Ottoman military forces in Yemen. Shortly after the conquest, the expeditionary force to Yemen was reorganized as the Seventh Army. The infantry arm of this army consisted of eight regiments with four battalions apiece.¹ The Seventh Army also had a permanent artillery arm, consisting of mobile gunners (*seyyar topçu*), and artillerymen stationed in the major fortresses (*kale topçu*).²

Sharpshooters (*nişancı*) and cavalry units appear to have been attached to the Seventh Army in the 1880s.³ There was a single regiment of locally recruited gendarmerie (*zaptiye*) in Yemen, which collected taxes and performed police duties in the rural areas. The regiment was divided into four battalions of mixed cavalry and infantry, which were stationed in the four sub-provinces (*sancak*) of Yemen.⁴

These units were generally badly understrength. Technically, a battalion in the Ottoman military was supposed to number 800 men. Because of the high death rate among the soldiers in Yemen, however, it soon proved impossible to keep the battalions of the Seventh Army at this strength. In the early 1880s, infantry battalion strength in the Seventh Army was officially fixed at 300 men. There were repeated proposals to increase this strength, but nothing seems to have come of them.⁵ A rough calculation on this basis for the land forces of Yemen, as they appear in the yearbook for the Rumi year 1303 (1887–88), yields a figure of approximately 12,000 men.⁶

Such figures as exist indicate, however, that due to the death rate from disease military units in Yemen were often anywhere from 20–60% understrength;⁷

1 *Yemen salnamesi* I, 108.

2 *Yemen salnamesi* IV, 58–9.

3 *Yemen salnamesi* IV, 59.

4 *Yemen salnamesi* IV, 45–8.

5 BBA, Y.Mtv 8/52 1 Rebiyülevvel 1299/20 February 1882. Minutes of the General Committee of the General Staff; BBA, Y.Mtv 16/86 31 Kanun-ı Evvel 1300/12 January 1885. Minutes of the Bureau of Artillery, presented to the Minister of War.

6 *Yemen salnamesi* IV, 45–59.

7 See Ahmed Muhtar Paşa, *Anılar* I, 97; Harris, *Journey* 266.

taking the death rate into account gives us an actual strength of 5,000–10,000 men for the Seventh Army. Based on other official figures and contemporary estimates, we can reasonably put the total number of troops in Yemen at between 8,000 and 10,000 men at any given time.⁸

The strength of such a force must be considered in relative terms. In earlier centuries, the Ottoman troops permanently stationed in each of the principal Arab provinces often numbered only around 2,000 men.⁹ By comparison with these armies, then, the Seventh Army appears as a fairly considerable force. By twentieth century standards, at a time when in some countries tens of thousands of troops have been stationed in insurgent regions on a permanent basis,¹⁰ the Seventh Army does not seem particularly impressive. From 1872 to 1891 the forces in Yemen seem to have been adequate to garrison the major cities, provide a modicum of security in the adjacent rural areas, and furnish troops for periodic punitive and tax collecting expeditions. Events were to show, however, that they were incapable of holding on to the country in the event of a major insurrection.

1.2 *Communications and Transport Infrastructure*

The communications and transport infrastructure in Yemen presents a picture similar to that of the military forces; it was barely adequate to maintain a semblance of control in time of peace, or what passed for peace in Yemen, but vulnerable in the event of a major insurrection. There was a reasonably good network of telegraph lines in Yemen proper, connecting Ṣan‘ā’ to Ta‘izz and Ḥudayda, and Ḥudayda to Luḥayya, Bayt al-Faqīh, Zabīd, and Ta‘izz. ‘Asīr had a line from Qunfuda to Abhā, but was isolated from the telegraph networks in both Yemen and the Hejaz.¹¹ As a result, the *mutasarrıfs* (sub-governors) of

8 The minutes of the provincial administration of Yemen sent to the Ministry of War in 1882 put the total strength of the regular troops in the sancak of ‘Asīr at 2,132. Multiplied by four, this would give about 8,500 for the province as a whole. See BBA, Y.Mtv 8/52 1 Rebiyülevvel 1299/20 February 1882. Minutes of the Provincial Administration, sent to the Minister of War. Atıf Paşa puts the total troop strength of the Seventh Army in the late 1890s at 8,000 men, a figure which he says represents a low due to the soldiers’ decimation by cholera. For the Seventh Army, however, this would not have been an unusual situation. See Atıf Paşa, *Yemen* 1, 172.

9 Marsigli, *Stato* 135.

10 At the height of the Algerian war the French had over 400,000 troops stationed in the country. See O’Ballance, *Algerian insurrection* 215.

11 Ahmed Ziya, Mufassal.

‘Asīr had to resort to camel courier and post to maintain communication with these places, a slow and outdated method by nineteenth century standards.¹²

The telegraph network, then, was not entirely satisfactory. The road network was barely adequate. There were three routes of major military significance: Şan‘ā’-Ḥudayda, Qunfuda-Abhā, and ‘Amrān-Şan‘ā’-Ta‘izz. Of these, the most important was the Şan‘ā’-Ḥudayda route, by which troops and supplies were sent from the coast into the interior. Major improvements on this road, however, were not made until the governorship of Osman Nuri Paşa (1888–9), although work was begun somewhat earlier.¹³ Even then, the condition of the road was very uneven. Walter Harris, who traveled from Şan‘ā’ to Ḥudayda in 1891, noted that in some places the road showed “signs of the repairs of the Turkish engineers, [and] in others [it was] merely a foothold in the mountainside.”¹⁴

The key strategic points on these roads were sometimes fortified. At Manākha, the “key to Şan‘ā’,” there was a fortress with three guns commanding the road from the left side.¹⁵ It does not appear, however, that the Şan‘ā’-Ḥudayda road had the number of permanent military posts which were constructed after major insurrections had begun to break out. The infrastructure of control in Yemen was thus not particularly impressive in the context of a troubled region, and its deficiencies become even more evident when we examine the logistical difficulties of the Seventh Army.

1.3 *Problems in Supply and Manpower*

The first major problem with which the Seventh Army had to contend was disease. The primary problem was cholera epidemics. Cholera first broke out in the Yemen expeditionary force. According to Ahmed Muhtar Paşa, of the 4,000 deaths among the soldiers in Yemen between 1870 and 1873, 1,800 were caused by cholera.¹⁶ Cholera also broke out in the Seventh Army at the end of the 1880s, decimating the troops just before the major rebellion of 1891.¹⁷ The overall death rate for the forces in Yemen given by Ahmed Muhtar Paşa for this period is about 18%,¹⁸ and in individual units it could be much higher. On

12 BBA, Y.Mtv 8/16 1 Safer 1299/23 December 1881. Letter from the Governor of the Hejaz and the Amir of Mecca to the *mutasarrif* of ‘Asīr.

13 *Yemen salnamesi* VII, 86.

14 Harris, *Journey* 329.

15 Ahmed Ziya, Mufassal.

16 Ahmed Muhtar Paşa, *Anular* I, 97.

17 Harris, *Journey* 102.

18 4,000 out of 22,000.

his visit to the town of Dhamār in 1891, Walter Harris noted that as a result of deaths from illness, the garrison had dropped from 400 to 150.¹⁹

The soldiers were vulnerable in part because they were malnourished, for the transport of supplies in the province of Yemen was slow and unreliable. The needs of the soldiers could not be met from the revenues of the province alone; and therefore, supplies had to be sent by steamship from other parts of the Empire, through the Suez Canal and south through the Red Sea to the port of Ḥudayda. Once in Ḥudayda, where foodstuffs rotted quickly in the extreme heat and humidity, there were formidable problems of distribution. Yemen had no railroads or roads suitable for carts, and therefore military supplies were transported by means of mule or camel caravan. Pack animals were always scarce. In the conquest, the initial departure of the expeditionary force into the interior of ‘Asir had to be delayed for almost a month owing to the shortage of transport animals. Camels had to be brought from Mecca, and mules from Kavalla in Albania, before the force was able to proceed.²⁰

Even apart from the scarcity of animals, caravan transport was always fraught with difficulties. The poor condition of the roads in Yemen was one problem. The Ṣan‘ā-Ḥudayda route, for example, actually consisted of two roads for a long stretch in the highland region. The shorter route, the Manākha road, passed through more difficult terrain. As a result, caravans generally took the longer Sanqūr road, which went by way of a wadi. Unfortunately, during rainy periods the wadi was subject to flash floods, which frequently swept men and pack animals away.²¹ This would have made the efficient transport of supplies a particular problem during the summer monsoon season.

The Ottoman logistical system, then, was very vulnerable. The flow of supplies was always subject to hindrance by inclement weather, difficult terrain, a lack of animals, or tribal unrest. Problems such as these stemmed in large part from the difficulties of the natural environment and were not necessarily insurmountable. The role of human and organizational factors was undoubtedly as significant in the supply problems of the Seventh Army as natural ones, although these are more difficult to document.

One gets the general sense that Abdülhamid’s military bureaucracy was pervaded by corruption, negligence, and inefficiency, which trickled down to the bureaucracy of the Seventh Army. The bureaucratic process involved in the dispatch of men and supplies from Anatolia to Yemen was clumsy and overcentralized. Requests for supplies from the governor of Yemen to the Minister of

19 Harris, *Journey* 266.

20 Ahmed Muhtar Paşa, *Anılar* 1, 46.

21 Ahmed Ziya, *Mufasssal*.

War would have to circulate among the bureaucracies concerned: the Bureau of Artillery, the Bureau of Supplies, or the Porte. When a course of action was finally agreed on, a request for permission to act (*istizan*) had to be submitted to the Yıldız Palace before anything could be undertaken. Even when permission was granted by the Palace, the supplies were not always sent. A letter from the governor of Yemen to the Minister of War in 1881 complains that the grain which was to be dispatched from Iraq to supply the Seventh Army had never arrived, and as a result the soldiers were in dire straits.²²

Peculation by officers with access to military funds was a problem as well. The 1870s was a period of acute financial crisis in the Ottoman Empire, when the salaries of all state employees were reduced or delayed.²³ We know from al-Wāsiī that corruption among Ottoman officials was widespread in this period.²⁴ As a result of all these factors, the military units in Yemen were always short of virtually everything. A telegram from the governor of Yemen to the Grand Vizier in 1884 indicated that the Seventh Army had no money, the military units were badly understrength, and the soldiers were poorly clothed.²⁵

The conditions of service in the Seventh Army inevitably had a negative effect on the morale of the men. They had to watch their higher officers enrich themselves from corruption while they themselves were deprived of every necessity. One can only imagine the feelings of anger which must have arisen in this situation, and this in turn affected the way they dealt with the people of Yemen.

2 Conflict between the Administration and the Population

Blaufarb and Tanham emphasize that a lack of professional and correct behavior by the officer corps has a considerable effect on the behavior of the enlisted men. Where officers use their positions to make money, military discipline and effectiveness break down. The enlisted men are likely to vent their anger on the population, and following the example of the officers, misuse what little power they have to profit at their expense. They may extort money or commit atrocities to compensate for overall feelings of powerlessness.²⁶ Such behavior,

22 BBA, Y.Mtv 8/52 10 Kanun-ı Evvel 1297/22 December 1881. Minutes of the Provincial Administration of Yemen, presented to the Ministry of War.

23 Ochsenswald, *Religion* 167.

24 Al-Wāsiī, *Tārīkh* 265.

25 BBA, Y.A. Res. 24/32 24 Haziran 1300/6 July 1884. Telegram from the Governor of Yemen to the Grand Vizier.

26 Blaufarb and Tanham, *Who* 21–2.

of course, has a tremendous impact on the attitude of the population toward the government.

The chronicler al-Wāsi'ī indicates that corruption and violence were widespread among Ottoman personnel, and he describes the process of tax collection as follows:²⁷

When a *kaymakam* or some other official would go out to a *kaza* or *nahiye*²⁸ to collect the tithe, he would take the sum assessed for himself, without helping [the villagers] to write a receipt (*sanad*) for what he had taken. Then he would go to the government and say that they had paid nothing; and the government would order that they be plundered, and their houses destroyed and burned. And when the regular troops arrived, they would violate the honor [of the people].

Anthropological analyses of Zaydi tribal culture, moreover, indicate that the extension of Ottoman state authority would probably have been viewed as unjust whether it was accompanied by gross atrocities or not. Steven Caton has noted that among the Bakīl tribesmen of Khawlān, “injustice” has the connotation of imposition of a decision by coercion.²⁹ Similarly, Paul Dresch stresses the centrality of autonomy in the preservation of tribal honor. The word honor (*'ard*) is coterminous with one's house, land, women, or tribal border. The preservation of one's honor depends on keeping these things inviolate from outsiders, including the forces of the state.³⁰

In this context, the Ottoman government would not have had to commit significant atrocities for its actions to be viewed as tyrannical and dishonoring. The entry of troops into tribal territory to collect taxes would have been enough. If atrocities did take place, the event could be conceptualized in Islamic as well as tribal moral terms, as the action of an immoral and un-Islamic government.

That there was growing hostility between significant elements of the Yemeni population and the Ottoman administration is indicated by al-Wāsi'ī. One governor arrived in Ṣan'ā' at a time when there was “estrangement” (*al-qulūb mutanāfira*) between the “Arabs and the Turks”. Likewise, he notes that “the common people” (*al-‘amma*) “believed that it was lawful to fight [the

²⁷ Al-Wāsi'ī, *Tārīkh* 274.

²⁸ Administrative districts in the Ottoman Empire.

²⁹ Caton, *Peaks* 75–6.

³⁰ Dresch, *Tribes* 54–6.

Ottomans]” (*istaḥallū qitālahum*), because of what was seen as their tyranny and un-Islamic behavior.³¹

In sum, we may say that the position of the Ottomans in Yemen became increasingly dangerous over the twenty years from 1870 to 1891. Their military forces were not particularly strong, and the population was growing more and more hostile. Yet despite the regular occurrence of localized rebellions, Ottoman control of Yemen was never seriously threatened until 1891. In the main, this was because the patterns of war in Yemen remained substantially similar to those that had prevailed before the Ottoman occupation. That is, they were limited, short-term, and outmoded in weaponry and tactics. Understanding the relative stability of Ottoman rule in this period, then, requires an analysis of the limitations on warfare in Yemen at the same time.

3 War and Rebellion among the Zaydi Tribes, 1872–91

In the introduction, we showed that the tensions between tribal and Islamic values were associated with conceptually opposed “types” of conflict: jihad, which could be long-term and total, and intertribal war, which tended to be short-term and limited. Here, we shall argue that the political fragmentation associated with the ascendance of tribalism in the “time of chaos” tended to keep rebellion limited in the period under discussion. At the same time, the reformulation of the imamate as a tribal quasi-state would lay the foundation for the long and bitter jihad of later decades.

Accounts of war in the highlands by Ottoman officers serve to illustrate the persistence of pre-occupation military techniques. The tribes of the highlands were armed with matchlock muskets, *janbiyyas*, and spears about 3½ feet long called *ḥarbas*. Fortresses continued to play a prominent part in highland warfare. In the event of a tribal conflict, the weaker party would shut itself up in its castles, while the stronger devastated its country. The tribesmen followed the same course when Ottoman punitive expeditions were sent out. They might cause considerable trouble to the expeditionary force by sniper fire, but in the end, they nearly always sought refuge in their fortresses. If the Ottoman commander was skilled, he could usually breach the fortress by artillery fire, and in that case the rebels would surrender.³²

The type of warfare characteristic of tribal society continued in this period. In battles in the highlands, a force would advance after sending out skirmishers

31 Al-Wāsi‘ī, *Tārikh* 264–5.

32 Esat Cabir ibn Osman, Yemen 142, 144.

and fire a single musket volley in unison. If the opposing side seemed strong, the force would scatter, and continue firing from behind high rocks for about an hour. After this, they would signal their readiness to “give what is demanded.” If they sensed weakness, small parties of the bravest men would advance and make sudden attacks on the enemy with their spears and *janbiyyas*. Hand to hand combat of this kind was what was principally desired, because it provided the best arena for the display of individual prowess.³³ Here, we see the general patterns of war characteristic of a tribal society: battle as ritual, the battlefield as an arena for the demonstration of heroic prowess, and the importance of negotiation as the means of finally resolving the dispute in question.

Intertribal war of this kind continues to the present; and the fact that it continued under the Ottoman occupation was not, of itself, particularly significant for the development of resistance to Ottoman rule. The Zaydi tribes, however, were initially unable to get beyond the limitations of this type of war in their first confrontations with the Ottomans. Rebellion against the government tended to be undertaken by individual tribes in their own territories, and was usually not sustained for very long.

Many minor rebellions occurred during the first decades of Ottoman rule. In the 1870s and 1880s, there were a series of rebellions by the tribes of al-Ḥadā', the Khawlān tribe, the tribe of Arḥab, and so on.³⁴ The tribe of Arḥab rose up because Ahmed Feyzi Paşa had had their grain stocks confiscated for the army's use.³⁵ In 'Asīr, we hear of quarrels between tribesmen and soldiers which led to violence,³⁶ and armed clashes during the tax-collecting expeditions undertaken by the Ottoman troops.³⁷ Likewise, disagreements between shaykhs and Ottoman personnel over the assessment of taxes could result in fighting.³⁸

These causes seem to indicate that the rebellions were reactions against the encroachments of the Ottoman state, reflecting the particularly tribal ethos of maintaining political autonomy and territorial inviolability. They were usually brought to an end by the dispatch of a punitive column to the troubled region. At the same time, it cannot be stated with certainty that these rebellions were undertaken on the basis of tribal values alone.

The groundswell of resistance took place in tandem with the reestablishment of the imamate in Upper Yemen and the launching of the first jihads.

33 Ahmed Ziya, Mufassal.

34 Al-Wāsi'i, *Tārīkh* 261–5; *Yemen salnamesi* VII, 84.

35 Al-Wāsi'i, *Tārīkh* 265.

36 Ahmed Muhtar Paşa *Anılar* I, 85.

37 BBA, Y.Mtv 21/61 18 Şaban 1303/22 May 1886. Memorial from the Commandant of the Seventh Army to the Minister of War.

38 Harris, *Journey* 96–7.

While initially the imams could not overcome the limitations of tribal rebellion in this period, the state organization that they established would eventually do so. What we see here is the emergence of Ernest Gellner's type of tribal quasi-state, with a base of tribal military manpower, a charismatic/religious leader, a rudimentary central state staffed by ulama, and a militant ideology of jihad.

The establishment of a base of tribal manpower for this state first took place when Imam Muḥsin al-Shahārī took refuge in the territory of Ḥāshid after his defeat by the Ottomans. Muḥsin al-Shahārī's principal accomplishment was to establish an alliance between the imamate, the Bakīl tribe of Arḥab, and Ḥāshid.³⁹ The alliance remained firm throughout this period, and the above-mentioned tribes served as the essential base of military support for the imamate.

Muḥsin al-Shahārī died in 1878 and was succeeded by Sharaf al-Dīn Muḥammad [al-Hādī]. Under Sharaf al-Dīn Muḥammad, the tribal quasi-state of the imamate began to take shape in earnest. First, there was a rebuilding of the traditional close links between the imam and the religious classes. Sharaf al-Dīn had made his *da'wa* in Jabal Ahnūm, where he was later buried. A telegram from the governor of Yemen to the Minister of the Interior dated 18 July 1884 indicates that Jabal Ahnūm was an important center for the Zaydi sayyids and religious scholars involved in Sharaf al-Dīn's resistance movement.⁴⁰

The Qadi al-'Arshī indicates that an earlier governor, Mustafa Asim Paşa, had treated the Zaydi ulama particularly badly.⁴¹ It is possible that as a result, many members of the Zaydi religious elite had put aside the doctrinal quarrels of the pre-occupation period to concentrate on the struggle against the Ottoman government. Sharaf al-Dīn had at least one rival for the imamate. Nonetheless, the supporters of the respective imams seem to have largely confined themselves to verbal argument (or at least refrained from large scale war); and the rival did not compete seriously with Sharaf al-Dīn for leadership of the jihad.⁴² Similarly, Sharaf al-Dīn's supporters among the ulama acted as kingmakers in the election of his successor, Imam al-Manşūr;⁴³ and al-Manşūr would lead a jihad in which the Zaydi ulama as a whole displayed a real unity of purpose.

39 Al-'Arshī, *Bulūgh* 77, 79; al-Wāsi'i, *Tārīkh* 262.

40 BBA, Y.A. Res. 24/39 6 Temmuz 1300/18 July 1884. Telegram from the Governor of Yemen to the Minister of the Interior.

41 Al-'Arshī, *Bulūgh* 77.

42 Al-'Arshī, *Bulūgh* 79.

43 Al-Jirāfi, *Muqata'af* 276.

The re-establishment of the traditional close relationship between the elected imam and the Zaydi religious elites permitted the imamate-state to take form once again. The Zaydi religious elites played their traditional role in this state, serving as a link between the tribes and the imam, and urging them to jihad on his behalf. The above-mentioned telegram states that the men of religion in the mountains of Ahnūmzalima [sic] and Shahāra “harass the government” (*hükümeti işgal*) by means of the tribe of Ḥāshid and others.⁴⁴

The ulama also served in the imam’s judiciary. Shortly after his election, Sharaf al-Dīn moved to the city of Ṣa‘da. There, he “put the affairs of the region [of Ṣa‘da] in order” (*aşlaḥa aḥwāl bilādihā*)⁴⁵ and “revived ... the laws of the religion of [God], the Lord of mankind.”⁴⁶ This seems to have involved the appointment of qadis to act as judges and administrators in the tribal regions of Ṣa‘da.⁴⁷ Furthermore, he also seems to have organized some type of taxation system for the purpose of waging war. It is recorded that he left a substantial sum in the public treasury (*bayt al-māl*) to his successor al-Manşūr, who used it to finance a major rebellion against the Ottomans.⁴⁸ Finally, he built a fortress near Ṣa‘da, which served as his residence and the center of his government.⁴⁹

In other words, a loosely organized but fairly stable state emerged at this time in Upper Yemen, whose leaders were ultimately able to implement a long-term program of military resistance to Ottoman rule. The rebellions led by the imams in this period, however, were sporadic and limited. An examination of these early jihads shows that, while the military sophistication of the imam’s partisans was increasing, they were unable to overcome the general limitations of warfare in this period.

The first major rebellion was instigated by Muḥsin al-Shahārī among the tribes of Arḥab and Ḥāshid during the governorate of Mustafa Asım Paşa. At Muḥsin al-Shahārī’s instigation, the tribe of Ḥāshid embarked on a guerrilla war against the Ottomans; they cut telegraph lines and roads and burned Ottoman officials’ houses.⁵⁰ This necessitated a major campaign by Mustafa Asım in the territory of Ḥāshid. The Qadi Ḥusayn ibn Aḥmad al-‘Arshī notes

44 BBA, Y.A. Res. 24/39 6 Temmuz 1300/18 July 1884. Telegram from the Governor of Yemen to the Minister of the Interior.

45 Al-Jirāfi, *Muqataḥ* 275.

46 Al-‘Arshī, *Bulūgh* 79; al-Wāsī‘ī, *Tarikh* 264.

47 Al-Iryānī, *Sīrat* 1, 258 n. 2.

48 Al-Jirāfi, *Muqataḥ* 276.

49 Al-‘Arshī, *Bulūgh* 79.

50 Al-Ḥibshī, (ed.), *Ḥawliyyāt* 335.

that “most of [these wars] went against [the imam’s] followers.”⁵¹ After these campaigns the tribes “entered into obedience,” according to al-Wāsi‘ī, and their shaykhs and elders (*‘uqqāl*) came to Ṣan‘ā’ to receive gifts.⁵²

This rebellion was virtually abortive, although the Qadi also notes that Mustafa Asım and his successor were unable to permanently settle the affairs of Ḥāshid (*lam yanḍabiṭ lahum fi akthar al-diyār al-Ḥāshidiyya amr*).⁵³ The fighting took place mainly in the territory of Ḥāshid. The rebels were defeated on the battlefield, no doubt due to their inferior weapons. As a result, the rebel tribes were compelled to make a show of submission, at least outwardly.

This submission, however, was merely temporary. The next major rebellion was organized by Sharaf al-Dīn in the summer of 1884. The tribes of Arḥab and Ḥāshid were again the major participants, and this time the uprising was not limited to their home regions. Rather, it seems to have been a grab for territory by the imam in the well-watered region northwest of Ṣan‘ā’.

This area was located on the frontier of Ottoman territory, and most of it was encompassed by the *kaza* (district) of Ḥajja. The course of events suggests that the rebels had a defined strategic objective and a plan of operations. Sharaf al-Dīn’s aim was apparently to seize the *kaza* of Ḥajja and its surroundings, and he may have hoped to spark a larger insurrection by dealing a blow to the Ottomans in this fashion. The invasion of Ḥajja began when fighters from Ḥāshid and Arḥab seized the fortress of Zafīr⁵⁴ on the northwest frontier. After this, the rebel forces spread out throughout the *kaza* and the surrounding regions, cutting the roads and taking the garrisons of Ḥajja, ‘Affār, Miswār, and Zafīr under siege. All this took place around the middle of June 1884.⁵⁵

The rebellion, however, was contained before it had a chance to spread. Several battalions were sent to the region of the fighting toward the end of June. This force, proceeding north through the *kaza*, was able to scatter the rebel armies without difficulty. By 18 July 1884 the governor was able to report that the expeditionary force had delivered the four garrisons under siege; reopened the Sūda, Miswār, and Ḥajja roads; and cleaned the rebels out of all the *kaza*

51 Al-‘Arshī, *Bulūgh* 79. Al-‘Arshī mistakenly gives İsmail Hafız Paşa as Mustafa Asım’s successor.

52 ⁵Al-Wāsi‘ī, *Tārīkh* 262.

53 Al-‘Arshī, *Bulūgh* 79.

54 Apparently Ottoman troops continued to occupy a portion of the fortifications of Zafīr, however, as it is also recorded that a battalion of troops was besieged there while the rebellion was at its height.

55 BBA, Y.A. Res. 24/32 24 Haziran 1300/6 July 1884. Telegram from the Governor of Yemen to the Grand Vizier.

of Ḥajja except for Ṣafīr, whose recapture was expected within five days.⁵⁶ This estimate proved to be overly optimistic. In fact, the siege of Ṣafīr would last for seven months before the rebels finally decided to abandon the fortress. Nonetheless, the rebellion had been contained, at least for the time being.

Several aspects of this rebellion stand out. First, it was evident that the military sophistication of the rebels was increasing. They had launched an attack which seems to have caught the Ottomans off guard, seizing the initiative and putting the Ottomans on the defensive. The Ḥāshid and Arḥab fighters had, with considerable swiftness, deprived the Ottomans of whatever control they had in the rural areas and cut the internal communications of the Ḥajja region. In the process, the major garrisons of the area were isolated and surrounded by the rebel armies. This could not have taken place without advance planning, although we cannot know what the precise plan of operations was. Furthermore, at least some of the imam's soldiers were armed with modern rifles. The bitter and prolonged character of the siege of Ṣafīr was due partially to the fact that the imam's partisans in the fortress had rifles and were better marksmen than the Ottoman soldiers.⁵⁷

At the same time, the imam and his partisans had obvious limitations. The rebellion was localized in scope and undertaken by a limited number of tribal sections. The Ottomans were able to quickly contain the uprising and isolate the rebels in Ṣafīr. The bitter and bloody siege which ensued could hardly be called a "short-term" form of warfare. Nonetheless, the rebellion did not ignite the major insurrection the Ottomans feared. If Sharaf al-Dīn made efforts to ally with tribes and shaykhs beyond his own immediate sphere of influence, they were not sufficient to ensure that a coordinated uprising would take place.

In other words, while we can see the beginnings of a more purely "jihadic" form of warfare in this uprising, it was not sufficient to overcome the military limitations of rebellion in this period. It seems to have had a degree of planning and focus, but it was still essentially localized. Sharaf al-Dīn and his partisans could not overcome the fragmentation of the Zaydi tribes.

On the continuum between full-fledged jihad and tribal war in this period, which we may say corresponded roughly to Clausewitz's concept of the continuum between limited and absolute war, tribal war tended to predominate. A similar dichotomy characterized war on the Ottoman side in this period. The division here was between the limited methods of containing rebellion employed by the Ottoman state between the classical age and the eighteenth

56 BBA, Y.A. Res. 24/39 6 Temmuz 1300/18 July 1884. Telegram from the Governor of Yemen to the Minister of the Interior.

57 Al-Ḥibshī (ed.), *Ḥawliyyāt* 343.

century, and the more totalizing methods of modern counterinsurgency. The beginnings of the latter were emerging in this period. Nonetheless, limited methods tended to prevail in Yemen, in large part because the resistance faced by the Ottomans was fragmented and limited itself.

4 Ottoman Methods of Dealing with Rebellion in Yemen, 1872–91

Government policy in Yemen in this period was weighted toward indirect rule, and therefore toward methods of dealing with rebellion similar to those historically used in the Arab provinces. Thomas Kuehn has shown that early on in this period the governor Mustafa Asım Paşa recommended a set of measures that were partially based on the principles of indirect rule, such as recruiting tribal leaders to serve in local government and neutralizing the imam's influence by paying stipends to his rivals; and he cites British India as the model for some of these measures.⁵⁸ Yet they also had antecedents in Ottoman practice before the Tanzimat, and we find that the methods of dealing with rebellion used in this period had a markedly traditional character.

These included coopting powerful shaykhs and clan leaders through gifts of money, titles, and tax collecting privileges; manipulating clan and tribal rivalries to isolate rebellious groups; and periodic military expeditions to punish rebels and display the power of the state. The tribes and their shaykhs were not necessarily to be permanently humbled and destroyed. Rather, the government would act as a participant in the endless game of alliances and counter alliances among the tribal sections, in such a manner as to maintain its own overall control.

That is not to say that Ottoman policy in Yemen was entirely "traditional." Officials who served in Yemen were well aware of the necessity of bringing the Zaydi and Tihama tribes under more direct military control.⁵⁹ Governors motivated by a belief in Tanzimat or Islamist progressive thought struggled to reform the administration, implement development policies, and gain the willing support of the population. These efforts toward centralization and reform, limited as they were, nonetheless represented the beginnings of the more totalizing conflict that would eventually engulf Yemen.

An early attempt to bring the powerful tribes and shaykhs of Upper Yemen under government control resulted in failure. Led by Mustafa Asım Paşa and his chief of staff İsmail Hakkı Paşa, the expedition defeated the Ḥāshid tribes

⁵⁸ Kuehn, *Empire*, 100–1.

⁵⁹ See Mehmed Emin Paşa, *Yemen* 1–2 (my pagination).

in battle, but was unable to bring the region under the direct authority of the government. Thus, after the conclusion of this expedition Mustafa Asım invited the shaykhs and elders (*'uqqāl*) of that tribal confederation to Şan'ā', where he "bestowed gifts and favors on them."⁶⁰

After this, it appears that de facto recognition of the shaykhs' autonomy became a cornerstone of Ottoman policy. When Mehmet İzzet became governor several years later, he attempted to solve the problems between Yemenis and Ottoman personnel by "winning over the chiefs of the tribes and the notables" (*ashrāf*).⁶¹ Despite proposals to bring Upper Yemen under government control, this was never done. The state, in other words, was never able to impose central control in Yemen in the preferred manner of Tanzimat or Hamidian policy. Instead, it reverted to the practice of incorporation of local potentates into the government structure.

When rebellion broke out despite efforts to win over the shaykhs, the preferred course of action was to incite the rivals of the rebel tribe to attack it or play off the rebel leaders against one another so that the rebellion would come to nothing. As we have noted, this type of strategy had historically been used by the Empire in a wide variety of contexts; and sometimes, in the texts relating to its employment in Yemen, we can hear echoes of the Perso-Islamic political thought which justified it.

This is evident in Major Esat Cabir ibn Osman's discussion of "divide and rule" tactics in his description of war in Yemen. The tribesmen, he says, assemble for war at the behest of their shaykhs, without knowing why they are fighting. Therefore, it is necessary to consider that "these innocent wretches (*biçaregan*) will become the target [of military operations] simply because of the evil actions of one person" (i.e., the shaykh or rebel leader).

Thus, in order to avoid shedding the blood of Muslims and taxpayers, the commander should try to sow discord (*nifak*) among the "bandit" leaders by various means. The Arabs, he notes, make an alliance one day and break it the next; and this would aid the commander in playing off the rebel leaders against one another.⁶² In order to achieve the moral end of protecting these Muslims and taxpayers, then, the government must employ the amoral means of deception and intrigue; these were justified in Perso-Islamic political thought to the

60 Al-Wāsi'i, *Tārīkh* 262.

61 Al-Wāsi'i, *Tārīkh* 265.

62 Esat Cabir ibn Osman, Yemen 152-3.

extent that they succeeded in maintaining the security of the state and the population.⁶³

A strategy of this type was employed successfully by Ahmed Feyzi Paşa in 1886, to avert a second rebellion by the partisans of Sharaf al-Dīn; and a brief review of this episode is instructive for our purposes. In June and July of 1886, Sharaf al-Dīn was constructing an alliance of Hāshid, Yām, and the Tihama tribe of the Banī Marwān to attack the coastal town of Abū ‘Arīsh. Accordingly, Feyzi Paşa concentrated troops on the borders of the *kaza* of Abū ‘Arīsh, the Banī Marwān territory, and the Hāshid territory.

Troops were sent in support of the Masāraḥa tribe, which had been attacked by the Banī Marwān, and ordered to make preparations for a joint operation with the Masāraḥa against the aggressors.⁶⁴ At the same time, intrigues were set afoot to stir up the tribes near Şa‘da against the imam. Finally, on 8 September 1886, Feyzi Paşa was able to report that the danger of an attack on Ottoman territory by Sharaf al-Dīn had passed. The incitement (*teşvikat*) of the tribes had been successful, and the tribes of Saḥḥār and the Şa‘da region were warring fiercely with the supporters of the imam.⁶⁵

What we see in this episode, then, is a classic case of manipulation of the tribal system to contain rebellion. Sharaf al-Dīn was forming a tribal alliance to attack the government, so Ahmed Feyzi Paşa formed a counter-alliance and threw his own military forces behind it. The coalition of forces thus assembled was too much for Sharaf al-Dīn. With soldiers guarding the Ottoman border and a tribal uprising close to his capital, he was unable to launch the military assault he had planned.

When “divide and rule” strategies were not sufficient, the government would often send a punitive expedition to the region of the uprising. The manner in

63 See Nizam al-Mulk’s story of Kuch Baluch, where Sultan Mahmūd is said to have dealt with a party of bandits from that region by tricking them into eating poisoned apples. This was after he had been reproached by a woman who had been robbed by these bandits for not being able to “protect the sheep from the wolves”; that is, not being able to protect the subjects entrusted to him from the “evildoers” of Kuch Baluch. Nizam al-Mulk, *Book* 64–70.

64 BBA, Y.Mtv 21/46 5 Haziran 1302/17 June 1886. Memorial from the Commandant of the Seventh Army to the Minister of War; BBA, Y.Mtv 22/81 20 Şevval 1303/22 July 1886. Memorial from the Commandant of the Seventh Army to the Minister of War; BBA, Y.Mtv 22/86 19 Temmuz 1302/31 July 1886. Telegram from the Commandant of the Seventh Army to the Minister of War.

65 BBA, Y.Mtv 23/67 27 Ağustos 1302/8 September 1886. Telegram from the Commandant of the Seventh Army to the Minister of War.

which these expeditions were conceived and conducted was generally reminiscent of Ottoman methods of dealing with rebellion before the Tanzimat. The rebels had engaged in “banditry” (*şekavet*) or “sedition and evildoing” (*fitne ve fesat*). Therefore, they were in need of “punishing and disciplining” (*tedib ve terbiye*) so that they would obey the government and keep within their proper bounds. The rebels were punished by the destruction and looting of their property, together with the suppression of any armed resistance they might offer. This punishing could be carried out with great brutality.

Ahmed Muhtar Paşa notes that when the people of a given locality took up arms against the government, he would have no choice but to send a military force against them; and by the time the expedition was concluded “much blood would have been shed, and property destroyed.”⁶⁶ The column sent against Jabal al-Bukhārī drove the people out of their homes, destroyed their khat trees, and plundered their possessions.⁶⁷ After a rebellion undertaken by the Arḥab and Ḥāshid tribes during the governorate of Mustafa Asım Paşa the heads of the rebels were brought to Şan‘ā’.⁶⁸

On an expedition against the Arḥab tribe, Ahmed Feyzi Paşa is said to have “punished and disciplined [the tribesmen] in such a manner that they would be prevented from repeating their rebellious actions” (*bir daha ahval-i şekavetkaranelerini mani bir surette tedib ve terbiye ederek*).⁶⁹ Here again, we see the recurrent theme of Perso-Islamic political thought, that exemplary brutality is necessary to protect the security of state and society from “bandits.” In this, and in the violence and corruption that were characteristic of at least some periods of Ottoman rule, we can see the beginnings of the war against the civil population which would intensify as rebellion became more long-lasting and widespread among the Zaydi population.

Such punitive expeditions, however, could not impose anything other than intermittent control. While the fear inspired by these expeditions might deter rebellion for a time, the government could not permanently garrison every troubled region; and when the punitive column withdrew, the administration would have no more control of the situation than before.

In the main, then, the means used by the Ottoman state to control the tribes of Yemen were those of the pre-modern Islamic state. The combination of unpredictable violence, deception and *de facto* weakness inherent in this type of policy did nothing to endear the government to the Zaydi tribes. Yet the centralizing, progressive, and reformist elements of the Tanzimat and Islamist

66 Ahmed Muhtar Paşa, *Anılar* I, 95.

67 Al-Wāsi‘ī, *Tārīkh* 262.

68 Ibid.

69 *Yemen salnamesi* VI, 50.

political thought had become an inherent part of Ottoman political culture; and these ideas did have some effect in Yemen.

5 Early Counterinsurgency Policies in Yemen

First, it was recognized by some Ottoman officials that the government would have to gain the active support of the population of Yemen, which could be lost by ill-considered policies. In the Hamidian period, this was conceived as reinforcing a “natural” loyalty which the Yemenis as Muslims felt toward the Ottoman caliphate. One text concerning Yemen speaks of the Yemenis’ “love for and obedience to the Abode of the Majestic Caliphate, as is obligatory in Islam” (*İslamiyet icabı*),⁷⁰ despite their rebelliousness against the provincial administration.

In Hamidian thought, the goal was to make this latent loyalty manifest itself in active support for the government. Various measures were proposed to accomplish this. There were efforts to educate a select group of the Yemeni youth as Ottoman Muslims on the Hamidian model, to incorporate them into what we may very loosely term the “national” life of the Ottoman Empire. The author of the above-mentioned text proposed that primary and secondary schools should be founded where Yemeni pupils should be taught that obedience to and love for the caliph was a duty of each individual Muslim under Islamic law (*farz-ı ayn*). Likewise, they should be subjected to a barrage of propaganda concerning the greatness of Abdülhamid and the Ottoman Empire.⁷¹ A number of schools were founded in Yemen during this period, and there is no reason to believe that they did not teach this curriculum. The hope was, apparently, that a Yemeni elite educated in the Ottoman fashion would influence the population at large to support the Empire.

Within the various policies and proposals of this period, we can also see the general counterinsurgency theme that we have outlined for the Tanzimat period. This was the idea that the support of the population could be ensured by government reform, which would facilitate the establishment of security and justice, which would in turn permit development and progress.

The concept of *islah* was used early on in the writings on Yemen, in its various senses relating to military pacification, government reform, and development. Ahmed Muhtar Paşa is said to have completed “the necessary pacification” (*islahat-ı lazime*) in the region by the military subjugation of ‘Asir. Mustafa Asım Paşa’s construction of roads and schools was described as *islahat-ı nafia*,

70 Mehmed Emin Paşa, Yemen 4 (my pagination).

71 Mehmed Emin Paşa, Yemen 6–7 (my pagination).

improvements relating to public works. Osman Nuri Paşa engaged in *ıslah-ı ahval-i memurin*, “reforming the condition of the public officials,” meaning that he forbade bribery.⁷²

The most salient example of a governor who implemented this type of policy was İsmail Hakkı Paşa, whose policies focused on reform in both the bureaucracy and the military. First, he sought to prevent corruption. This measure won him some support among the people, as he came to be seen as a “just” ruler in the Islamic sense. After his arrival al-Wāsi‘ī states that he “unfurled the banner of justice ... (*līwā’ -l-‘adl wa-l-inṣāf*) and broke the back of bribery and oppression.”⁷³ Second, İsmail Hakkı founded a number of schools.⁷⁴

Third, İsmail Hakkı Paşa attempted to organize a locally recruited force to undertake security duties in Yemen. This force, referred to as the *Hamidiye*, reflected the progressive and reformist focus of Abdülhamid’s regime. It was founded specifically to “strengthen ... the natural bonds of the people with the Exalted Sultanate and Glorious Caliphate,” and because “the people of Yemen are both capable and prepared to strive to increase their level of civilization and discipline.”⁷⁵

There is no doubt that İsmail Paşa was aware of the corruption and miserable conditions of service in the Seventh Army, and the role of these factors in causing conflict with the local population. He thus established the *Hamidiye* as the nucleus for a reformed military force.⁷⁶ The *Hamidiye* would have better training, pay, and discipline than the regular troops; and as locals, they would not have to make a difficult physical and social adjustment to an alien place.

The *Hamidiye* consisted of several infantry battalions stationed in Ṣan‘ā’, whose members wore the traditional dress of the Yemeni highlanders, but were given the training of Ottoman regular infantry. The members of the *Hamidiye* were well trained. The Paşa “took such care of their training and education (*ta’līm wa-tarbiya*) that they became known as the sons of İsmail.”⁷⁷

As a reformed military force, the purpose of the *Hamidiye* was to put down rebellion and establish security. It appears that İsmail Paşa did enjoy some success in this regard. The soldiers of this corps were loyal, had high morale, and performed well in battle. After their training was complete, the *Hamidiye* were sent on several punitive expeditions on a trial basis; and on these expeditions

72 *Yemen salnamesi* VI, 46, 48, 51.

73 Al-Wāsi‘ī, *Tārīkh* 264.

74 Ibid.

75 BBA, Y.Mtv 3/58 20 Mart 1296/1 April 1880. From İsmail Hakkı Paşa the Governor of Yemen, type of document unspecified, recipient unspecified.

76 BBA, Y.Mtv 8/101 16 Cemaziyülevvel 1299/5 April 1882. Note (*tezkiye*) from the Ministry of War to the Yıldız Palace.

77 Al-Wāsi‘ī, *Tārīkh* 264.

they “showed extraordinary courage in putting down disorders, so that one battalion of these men was worth many battalions of Turks.”⁷⁸

The local origin of the *Hamidiye* troops seems to have made them more acceptable to the Yemenis. Often rebellious tribes would submit merely on the appearance of these troops, because “they were of the people of Yemen,” and “the rebels feared to kill their brother Muslims.”⁷⁹ The Ottoman troops were not viewed in the same way. By employing the *Hamidiye* in this fashion, İsmail Paşa thus seems to have gained a degree of popular support, as reform and security policy in the nineteenth century Ottoman Empire was supposed to do.

The effect of the *Hamidiye* corps, however, was relatively limited. As with many well-intentioned reforms of the Ottoman Empire, İsmail Hakkı Paşa’s aspirations were frustrated by the hard political and financial realities of the time. First, the administration ran out of money to fund the *Hamidiye*. Second, the experiment foundered on the pathological suspicions of Abdülhamid. İsmail Paşa wanted to expand the corps and have it take over some of the duties of the regular army, at least partially. Abdülhamid, however, apparently feared that the corps might serve as a vehicle for sedition and loosen the Empire’s grip on Yemen; accordingly, he ordered it to be disbanded.⁸⁰

It is clear, then, that İsmail Hakkı Paşa’s policies contained the seeds of a counterinsurgency program. Reforms in the bureaucracy and the military were combined with some efforts at development through the building of schools to further Hamidian reformist policies and win the loyalty of the population. It is equally clear that İsmail Hakkı Paşa’s efforts were relatively limited in scope and did not ultimately impact the profound structural problems of Ottoman rule in Yemen. Lack of money and manpower prevented the full implementation of Hamidian centralization in Yemen in this early period. Yet the full effects of such failure lay still in the future. Zaydi resistance was not yet organized enough to pose a serious challenge to Ottoman rule, serving to limit the intensity of conflict at that time.

6 Conclusion

In the first years of the Ottoman occupation of Yemen, then, war between the government and the Zaydi tribes remained limited and intermittent. At the same time, those elements which would create a more totalizing conflict were

78 Ibid.

79 Ibid.

80 Al-Wāsi‘ī, *Tārīkh* 264–5; BBA, Y.Mtv 8/101 16 Cemaziyyülevvel 1299/5 April 1882. Note (*tezkiire*) from the Ministry of War to the Yıldız Palace.

taking shape and gathering strength. On the surface, the conflict between the Ottoman state and the tribes seemed to follow the archaic patterns characteristic of the Zaydi imamate or the Ottoman Arab provinces before the *Tanzimat*. The Ottoman government was plagued with problems of money and manpower. It could not extend its authority in the aggressive manner of the European imperialist powers, such as the French in Algeria. The Zaydi tribes and the imams, for their part, could not initially overcome the political fragmentation of the pre-occupation period.

The wars which took place in consequence had the appearance of clashes over the boundary between Ottoman state power and tribal autonomy, conducted according to the familiar pattern in the Middle East: a constant merry-go-round of alliances and counter alliances, uprisings and punitive expeditions, and reconciliation followed by renegotiation of the tribe-state relationship. All this served to maintain an uneasy equilibrium of force between tribe and state.

Nonetheless, deeper trouble was brewing beneath the surface. Apart from the administrations of those governors who were seen as good Muslims and made an attempt to curb the worst abuses of the provincial government, Ottoman rule tended toward violence and corruption, amounting in some regards to a war on the population. The Zaydi tribes had an alternate system of Islamic government to which they would resort if the Ottoman administration was seen as un-Islamic. The Ottomans had replaced a state with an ideology just as Islamic as their own, but incompatible with the exclusive claim of Abdülhamid to the caliphate; and this created the potential for deep ideological conflict with the Zaydi imamate.

Under the pressure of Ottoman expansionism, the Zaydi imamate was reforming itself as a tribal quasi-state organized for the purpose of waging war, as had happened among Muslim tribal societies elsewhere. In Yemen as in Libya or Algeria, the concept of *jihad* provided a means to unify tribal societies against outside powers and overcome the inherent limitations of intertribal war. Coupled with the exigencies of waging war against the well-armed forces of the modern state, this would eventually result in a long-term and totalizing rebellion in Yemen organized along guerrilla lines.

The 1891 Rebellion

The 1891 rebellion represented the maturing of the resistance movement led by the imams. After the death of Sharaf al-Dīn, Muḥammad ibn Yaḥyā Hamīd al-Dīn was elected as Imam al-Manṣūr. Al-Manṣūr proceeded to raise a major rebellion against the Ottomans, and enough of the population went over to him to ensure that the rebel forces had overwhelming numerical superiority over the Seventh Army garrisons. This led to the temporary loss of most of the highland region to the imam. How was the imam able to achieve this?

We will show that this was accomplished through the extension of the tribal quasi-state formed by Sharaf al-Dīn into the region under Ottoman control, and its transformation into an effective instrument for raising rebellion. The tribal quasi-state was underpinned by an ideology of jihad and staffed by the Zaydi sayyids, who used their moral authority to persuade the Zaydi tribes to support the imams. Jihad and sayyids thus provided the unifying forces that enabled a segmentary lineage society such as that of Ḥāshid and Bakil to unite against an outside intruder.

The 1891 rebellion marked an escalation up Clausewitz's continuum of violence, chiefly through the united action for the first time of a large part of the Zaydi population.

We will see, however, that the rebellion still had some of the essential features of short-term intertribal war. The rebellion was highly spontaneous, as the tribes rose up one after another after the imam's forces won an important victory against the Ottomans in the Ḥajja region. The alliance system which thereby came into being had formed quickly with the imam's success and would dissolve equally quickly when it became apparent that he was failing.

Finally, we will show that in tactics and weaponry the tribes were still hampered by the limitations of the previous period. In the rebellion, the imam's forces had superior manpower and better control of the terrain, and this enabled them to win important victories in the field.

Because of their outdated weaponry, however, the imam's partisans had greater difficulties in the capture of fortified cities. Moreover, they were still unable to defeat a well-equipped Ottoman expeditionary force in the field, provided that the generals were reasonably competent. This led to the relatively swift dissolution of the tribal armies after the arrival of reinforcements from Istanbul. These forces were able to reconquer the Yemeni highlands with what seemed a reprise of the Callwellian strategy of the first conquest: swift

and decisive action accompanied by superior firepower. To all appearances Ottoman rule had been effectively restored in Yemen. Yet this was not really the end of the rebellion, but the beginning of a bloody and protracted guerrilla struggle in which the imam's forces would slowly gain the upper hand.

1 Al-Manṣūr and Sharaf al-Dīn's Tribal Quasi-state

The leader of the 1891 rebellion was Imam Muḥammad ibn Yaḥyā Hamīd al-Dīn [al-Manṣūr]. Al-Manṣūr was elected to the imamate shortly after the death of Sharaf al-Dīn [al-Hādī] in the late spring of 1890.¹ Once in power, al-Manṣūr proceeded to establish a set of formal alliances with the Ḥāshid and Bakīl tribes. The Ḥāshid tribes in the region outside Ottoman control, the supporters of Muḥsin al-Shahārī and Sharaf al-Dīn, made an alliance with al-Manṣūr early on. In a letter to the al-Gharbī shaykhs in the summer of 1890, al-Manṣūr states that he has received a letter from the men of Ḥāshid communicating their submission and alliance, and he plans to set out for the region of Ḥāshid and Bakīl in the near future.² Al-Manṣūr, then, was apparently able to take over Sharaf al-Dīn's base of tribal manpower with comparative ease.

At the same time, al-Manṣūr was strongly supported by Sharaf al-Dīn's partisans among the ulama in the north. It was they, in fact, who had engineered his election. In a letter to Shaykh 'Alī Murshid al-Gharbī, al-Manṣūr notes that the men of religion and notables of both Ḥāshid and Bakīl are with him, "praise be to [God], I have brought the ulama and sayyids into the circle of alliance, removing the discord ... which causes the appearance of strife and the abandonment of the holy war."³ Al-Manṣūr's imamate thus had the support of the two powerful groups which historically had formed the social core of the "tribal quasi-state" in Yemen and elsewhere: the tribes, who provided it with military manpower, and the ulama, who provided it with literate officials and religious legitimacy.

The imam's state in Upper Yemen provided what we may very loosely term a "base of operations" for the 1891 uprising. It was a remote region outside the

1 Al-Wāsi'i, *Tārīkh* 269.

2 BBA, Y.Mtv 45/107 22 Ağustos 1306/3 September 1890. Letter from the imam to Shaykh 'Alī ibn Murshid al-Gharbī, Shaykh Nāshir [err. for Nāşir?] ibn Murshid ibn Ḥusayn al-Gharbī, Shaykh 'Alī ibn Jābir al-Sindī, and Qāsim ibn Sa'd Abū Hādī, translated into Ottoman Turkish and enclosed with a memorial from the Governor of Yemen to the Minister of War.

3 BBA, Y.Mtv 45/107 22 Ağustos 1306/3 September 1890. Letter from the imam to Shaykh 'Alī Murshid al-Gharbī, translated into Ottoman Turkish and enclosed with a memorial from the Governor of Yemen to the Minister of War.

effective control of the Ottoman government, from which operations could be planned and agitators dispatched into Ottoman territory. It would provide the political nucleus from which the tribal quasi-state of the Imams could be expanded into Ottoman territory as a counter state; that is, an instrument for depriving the government of control of the Zaydi tribes and raising them in rebellion.

The first steps of this process involved an intense period of agitation and propaganda in support of the jihad. As we explained in Chapter One, jihad was the basic principle on which military action at the supra-tribal level could be carried out, and the authority of a tribal quasi-state such as the imamate established. Therefore, before we discuss the imam's counter state in more detail we must first understand the character of jihad as an idea.

2 The Ideology of Jihad

Jihad in Zaydi thought has a strong association with legitimate resistance to an oppressive state authority,⁴ and this idea was what allowed the imams to organize actual military resistance of a long-term and state-forming character. The ideology of jihad underpinning al-Manṣūr's rebellion was set forth explicitly in what the Ottomans called his *davet-name*, the letter sent out to Ḥāshid and Bakīl announcing his accession.

The summons begins with the traditional Zaydi theme that the present governing authority is tyrannical and un-Islamic. The Ottoman officials "oppress the worshipers of God ... the property of the Muslims has been unlawfully seized, those possessing rank and nobility have been humiliated, and the divine laws have been changed."⁵

This denunciation of the Ottomans was paralleled by an assertion of the imam's legitimacy, defined by the moral and Islamic quality of his actions as a ruler. "I guide you in the straight path and the upright ways of the Prophet ... I do not take the property of the subjects, nor let justice and equity escape from my hand."⁶ The probity of the imam's rule is thus contrasted directly with the wickedness of the Ottoman government.

4 For example, see van Arendonk, *Debuts* 68, in which he cites a letter from the early Zaydi rebel Yaḥyā ibn 'Abdallāh, wherein Yaḥyā declares his readiness to wage jihad against the Abbasids for their unjust usurpation of authority.

5 BBA, Y.Mtv 45/107 22 Aḡustos 1306/3 September 1890. Announcement of al-Manṣūr's accession to the imamate and summons to the jihad, translated into Ottoman Turkish and enclosed with a memorial from the Governor of Yemen to the Minister of War.

6 Ibid.

Jihad in Zaydi Islam was defined as a struggle to achieve the moral purification of society through military means. The conduct of jihad in the military sense thus demands the same qualities required for individual moral purification: perseverance, self-denial,⁷ faith in a transcendent ideal which gives meaning to the suffering of the present. Such ideas were well suited to the waging of a hard and protracted guerrilla struggle, although not every jihad undertaken in the Islamic world had this character.

In our document, the example of personal self-denial is set first by the imam. The imam has renounced a life of worldly ease to deliver the Muslims from oppression. "When I saw this great calamity I tore the halter of ease (*rahat*) from my neck and hastened to deliver the religion of my Creator." The imam expects a similar sacrifice from his followers. The imam exhorts the Muslims to struggle against the enemies of the faith with "diligence and fortitude;" and they are advised to persevere in the face of immediate suffering. "Compel yourselves to steadfastness and perseverance, for the reward of perseverance is pleasant."⁸

The concept of jihad, then, provided the essential framework for a quasi-total form of war: a hard and protracted struggle as a means of achieving a universal moral goal, requiring complete commitment from the participants. The Muslims would have to pour their energies into the jihad until the forces of evil were destroyed, and the social order embodying the transcendent ideals of Islam established; and the first step toward achieving this vision of jihad would be the dissemination of these ideas through propaganda.

3 Propaganda in the 1891 Uprising

Propaganda was an essential first step in gaining the support of the Zaydi tribes for rebellion, and in laying the foundation of the Zaydi counter state as a viable institution for waging war. Propaganda was mainly spread by the Zaydi ulama, both sayyids and qadis, whose role in instructing the tribesmen in Islam was extended to exhorting the tribesmen to jihad. In doing this, they were able to reinforce their authority and their role as a kind of social "cement," serving as

7 See for example the ideas associated with jihad in the letter of Aḥmad ibn Hāshim to a prominent partisan of his rival for the imamate in 1850. Aḥmad ibn Hāshim contrasts the man who is subject to his own passions with the man of self-discipline, implying that he is the latter. Such discipline enables him to bear the burdens of jihad including the "heat of the sun", "sleeplessness," and leaving his home and country. See al-Wāsi'ī, *Tārīkh* 244–5.

8 Ibid.

the mediatory social group which could unite the tribal segments against a common enemy.

The chief propagandist of the Zaydi counter state was, of course, the imam himself. In the first year of his reign, al-Manṣūr sent out a stream of letters to the various Zaydi tribes and shaykhs, urging them to answer his *daʿwa* and support the jihad. To create his system of alliances, the imam would appeal both to Islamic moral precepts and the tribal code of honor. In his analysis of the rhetoric of jihad in the Tirah Uprising of 1897 on the Northwest Frontier of British India, David Edwards notes that Islam provided the only ideology which could overcome the fiercely competitive Pashtun culture of honor and enable the tribes to unite. At the same time, Islam “could do so most effectively when those in charge were able to implicate honor and tribe to the cause of Islam, rather than drawing attention to the differences between them.”⁹ The Mulla of Hadda, the leader of the jihad, would thus appeal to the tribesmen’s honor as well as their Islamic piety in his letters summoning them to the holy war; and al-Manṣūr employed the same tactics.

First, the imam appeals to the presumed piety of the shaykhs. In the letter to Shaykh ‘Alī Murshid al-Gharbī, he makes the following quotation from the Quran: “For if you give aid to God he will render you victorious and make your feet firm.” The shaykh must therefore support the imam in his war against the tyrannical and ungodly Ottoman government.¹⁰

Second, the imam appeals to the shaykhs’ sense of honor. Edwards has shown in his analysis of a similar summons to the jihad written by the Mulla of Hadda that reference to the deeds of other tribes is a means of goading the tribe to whom the summons is addressed to similar deeds of honor; it is a “challenge” requiring a response.¹¹ To arouse the shaykhs’ sense of honor, he refers to the zeal that the men of Ḥāshid have shown in their support of him.

“I am gratified that the people are showing the desire for action which will make them honored in this world and the next. Since you are among the great men of the people, it is hoped that you will surpass all others in this regard.”¹²

9 Edwards, *Heroes* 191–3.

10 BBA, Y.Mtv 45/107 22 Aḡustos 1306/3 September 1890. Letter from the imam to Shaykh ‘Alī Murshid al-Gharbī, translated into Ottoman Turkish and enclosed with a memorial from the Governor of Yemen to the Minister of War.

11 Edwards, *Heroes* 192.

12 BBA, Y.Mtv 45/107 22 Aḡustos 1306/3 September 1890. Letter from the imam to Shaykh ‘Alī ibn Murshid al-Gharbī, Shaykh Nāshir [err. for Nāṣir?] ibn Murshid ibn Ḥusayn al-Gharbī, Shaykh ‘Alī ibn Jābir al-Sindī, and Qāsim ibn Sa’d Abū Hādī, translated into Ottoman Turkish and enclosed with a memorial from the Governor of Yemen to the Minister of War.

The *da'wa* is thus both a “summons” to righteous action in accordance with the principles of Islam and a “challenge” to deeds of honor in the competitive spirit of the tribal system.

If the imam was the keystone of the tribal alliance structure, other sayyids and qadis served as the links holding it in place. The Zaydi qadis and sayyids constituted a vast network of families located throughout the interstices of the tribal structure of Yemen. The imam drew on the resources of this network to make propaganda for his *da'wa*. The Zaydi ulama did this as an extension of their role as instructors in Islam, preaching the Friday sermon in his name, and probably arguing for the Islamic obligation to support the imam and the jihad.

A list of persons arrested for seditious activities, drawn up after the suppression of the 1891 rebellion, provides some clues to the workings of this process.¹³ The largest number of persons arrested come from Ṣan'ā' and its environs, the “epicenter” of the rebellion and the place where Ottoman authority was strongest. Among the most prominent of the persons arrested were members of the al-Zubayrī, al-Ḥarāzī, and Zāhir qadi families. These families were connected to the imam and each other by marriage ties and property interests.

Qadi Yaḥyā Zāhir, shaykh of the village of Qābil in the *nahiye* of Hamdān, read the Friday sermon in the name of the imam in his village and stirred up sedition in the environs of Ṣan'ā'. Qadi Muḥammad al-Ḥarāzī of Ṣan'ā' had likewise engaged in reading the *khuṭba* in the name of the imam (*hutbe kira'at*), “secret incitements” (*teşvikat-ı hafıye*), and “assembling people” (*cemi-yet*) before the outbreak of the rebellion.¹⁴ This kind of religious propaganda established an essential link between the moral authority of the imam and that of the ulama among the tribes of their own localities. The mediation of the sayyids and qadis between the tribes and the imam smoothed the way for the acceptance of the imam's representatives into the local tribal structure.

There are some clues to the way this process worked in the sources concerning the raising of rebellion in the Ṣan'ā' region. According to the list of arrested persons, Qadi Yaḥyā Zāhir, the headman (*shaykh*) of the village of Qābil in the tribal territory of Hamdān, was a friend of al-Manşūr and had personally accompanied him on his journey to Şa'da. Upon his return, he had read the *khuṭba* in the name of the imam in his village and worked actively to stir up sedition in the region of Ṣan'ā'.¹⁵

13 BBA, Y.Mtv 74/99, 24 Kanun-ı Evvel 1308/5 January 1893. List (*defter*) of persons arrested for sedition in the 1891 rebellion and after, drawn up by the Administrative Council of Yemen, and sent to the Minister of War.

14 Ibid.

15 Ibid.

In this context, it does not seem coincidental that the tribal shaykh of Hamdān should have also played a pivotal role in inciting rebellion in the Ṣan‘ā’ region; for both the qadi families and the imam had property in the Hamdān region. Just before the outbreak of rebellion the imam sent a military commander (*maqdamī*) to get the formal agreement of the Ṣan‘ā’ tribes to participate in the rebellion. This commander was a prominent sayyid who had grown up in Ṣan‘ā’, Sayyid Aḥmad ibn Muḥammad al-Shar‘ī. His principal local ally in this enterprise was the shaykh of Hamdān Yaḥyā ibn Yaḥyā Dūda, who was “the chief person among them [the tribes] in urging them to those admirable aims.” In consequence of this “urging,” these tribes made a collective decision (*ijmā*) to support the imam.¹⁶

Sayyid Aḥmad was thus able to establish the imam’s authority in large part due to the persuasive powers of the local ulama and tribal shaykhs. The moral support of his local allies made him acceptable to the tribes as a representative of an “outside” state authority. At the same time, as a sayyid representing a higher authority “outside” the local structure of intertribal rivalries, he was able to get the tribes to act in concert without arousing their mutual hostilities. Propaganda on behalf of the imam, then, permitted the establishment of the tribal quasi-state as a counter state in Ottoman territory: a network of tribal alliances held together by a militant ideology of jihad, the mediatory role of the sayyids, and the moral authority of the ulama who represented the supra-tribal principles of Islam.

To establish a counter state in this fashion meant to compete with the established authorities for the support of the population. What we mean in this context is the “game” characteristic of many of the tribal societies of the Middle East, of making often short-lived alliances to gain an immediate political objective. The 1891 rebellion took place only because the imam won this game, which previous imams had tended to lose.

4 Competition for the Support of the Zaydi Tribes

In the context of the game of alliances, we have noted that a first step toward jihad in many of the tribal societies of the Middle East has been the unification of the competing tribal segments in response to extraordinary social and economic pressures. Often, these pressures have been related to the intrusion of a powerful outside force into a tribal society. Alternatively, they may be related to economic distress resulting from overpopulation or a shortage of land or

¹⁶ Al-Iryānī, *Sīrat* I, 271 ff.

pasture in the tribal homeland, coupled with opportunities to prey on social groups outside the tribal structure.

In Yemen, this particular combination of pressures did obtain at the beginning of the 1890s. The unification of the tribal segments of Ḥāshid and Bakīl, however, did not take place automatically. The Ottoman authorities had superior resources and were skilled in using them to exploit the rivalries inherent in the tribal social structure. To create this united alliance, the imam would have to find ways to outmaneuver the Ottomans politically in this regard. He did this in part by exploiting the mistakes the Ottomans made through their authoritarian and often arbitrary dealings with the tribal shaykhs.

The specific policy that the Ottomans adopted in Yemen was that of gaining the support of the shaykhs for the government. The inducements the government offered for this support were heavily material and were described in purely cynical terms even by the idealistic İsmail Hakkı Paşa; “arousing their greed by presenting them with money as ‘gifts of honor’” (*ikramiye tertibinden akçe itasyyla itma*).¹⁷ The Ottomans distributed stipends, titles, tax-collecting privileges, and positions in the administration. One shaykh, ‘Abdallāh al-Dul‘ī, held the rank of Paşa and served on the Administrative Council of Yemen.¹⁸ More commonly, shaykhs held administrative positions at the *nahiye* level in the rural areas, which offered lucrative opportunities to profit from the tax collection process.¹⁹

When it became clear that the imam was trying to raise a general rebellion, the government intensified its efforts to gain the support of the shaykhs. In September 1890 İsmail Hakkı Paşa wrote to the Minister of War that he had summoned the shaykhs of Ḥāshid to Şan‘ā; and after having “honored” (*taltif*) them in the appropriate fashion, he sent them back after obtaining the necessary promises (*mevaid, teminat*) [to the effect that they would not join the rebellion].²⁰ This “honoring” consisted in the distribution of gifts of money and stipends to the shaykhs.²¹

17 BBA, Y.Mtv 45/107 22 Ağustos 1306/3 September 1890. Memorial from the Governor of Yemen to the Minister of War.

18 Al-Wāsi‘ī, *Tārīkh* 266.

19 Naqīb Nājī ‘Abdallāh Juzaylān of Dhū Muḥammad, for example, served as the deputy (*vekil*) for the *müdür* of a *nahiye* in the *kaza* of Ḥajja. See BBA, Y.Mtv 74/99, 24 Kanun-ı Evvel 1308/5 January 1893. List (*defter*) of persons arrested for sedition in the 1891 rebellion and after, drawn up by the Administrative Council of Yemen, and sent to the Minister of War.

20 BBA, Y.Mtv 45/107 22 Ağustos 1306/3 September 1890. Memorial from the Governor of Yemen to the Minister of War.

21 Dresch, *Tribes* 220.

To distribute stipends and positions in this fashion had been an accepted practice of the Zaydi imams, and the Ottomans were in part simply following their example. At the same time, the Ottomans brought an authoritarian conception of this practice which was ill suited to the actual realities of the shaykhly position among the Ḥāshid and Bakīl tribes. It appears that the Ottoman conception of the shaykhs' role was ideally that of obedient functionaries of the government, accepting orders and taking abuse from superiors in the manner of the Ottoman bureaucracy under Abdülhamid. Yemeni tribal culture was considerably less authoritarian than that of the Ottomans, and this could create clashes. In the Yemen yearbook of 1298 (1880–1) it was noted that the Yemenis were “very free in their speech,” so much so that “when they come into the presence of the governor ... they even address him by name, saying, ‘O İsmail!’”²² If ordinary individuals would not adopt the deferential posture expected by the Ottoman authorities, the tribal shaykhs could not be expected to do so.

The behavior of many Ottoman officials toward the shaykhs, moreover, was not merely authoritarian, but viciously abusive. ‘Alī Miqdād, a supporter of the Ottoman government and shaykh of the *kaza* of Anis, was tied to the wheel of a cannon by an Ottoman officer and left in the sun until he fainted.²³ Abuse of this type was also accompanied by sudden reversals of fortune at the will of the sultan, which remained a feature of Ottoman political life in this period. ‘Abdallāh al-Dul‘ī, for example, was exiled by imperial order to Acre after public humiliation at the governor's hands and the plunder of his property.²⁴

Actions such as this were partially due to the relatively authoritarian traditions of government among the Ottomans. Under Abdülhamid and earlier, Ottoman officials themselves were subject to exile and imprisonment at the hands of the sultan.²⁵ To the Zaydi tribal shaykhs, accustomed to a political culture of mediation, compromise, and respect for individual autonomy, such practices were particularly offensive; and the quasi-colonial attitudes of many Ottoman officials worsened the situation in this regard. Concerns about affronts to personal dignity were combined with self-interested fears for their own

22 *Yemen salnamesi* 1, 81.

23 Al-Wāsi‘ī, *Tārīkh* 280–1.

24 Al-Wāsi‘ī, *Tārīkh* 267–8.

25 The most famous example was that of Midhat Paşa, the champion of constitutional government in the Ottoman Empire, whom Abdülhamid had imprisoned and murdered shortly after his accession. See Georgeon, *Abdülhamid* 119.

position and influence under the centralizing state of the Ottomans.²⁶ Nāṣir Mabkhūt al-Aḥmar of the ‘Uṣaymāt tribe, whose family would later become the paramount shaykhs of the Ḥāshid confederation, joined the imam’s rebellion in part because his property had been attacked by the Ottoman governor of Ḥajja.²⁷

As we have seen, the boundary between honor and self-interest was not really firm in the tribal culture of Yemen. Honor constituted one’s personal dignity and autonomy, one’s moral qualities, and one’s possessions which had to be defended.²⁸ To allow trespass against any of these things was to invite social, moral, and economic ruin. In its position as a powerful but capricious patron, the Ottoman state constituted a threat to the shaykhs at all these levels of honor. The implications of the code of honor thus tended to bring the shaykhs of Ḥāshid and Bakīl into opposition to the Ottomans.

The imam was more skilled at appealing to motivations of honor than the Ottomans, and at respecting the boundaries which the concept of honor entailed. The imam did not fail to point out in his letters the dangers to the shaykhs’ honor in siding with the Ottomans. The imam warned the shaykhs against accepting Ottoman gifts of money in terms emphasizing the moral themes of both Islam and honor. The al-Ghashmī shaykhs were warned not to give in to temptation; the al-Gharbī shaykhs were admonished to abandon greed.²⁹ In this context they were reminded of the fate of ‘Abdallāh ad-Dul‘ī. The purpose of the “foreigners” was to take them captive and boast (*iftihar*) about it.³⁰ The Ottoman government would destroy their honor in order to aggrandize its own. The al-Ghashmī shaykhs were advised that since they possessed “a noble zeal” they would not accept “humiliation.”³¹

At some level, appeals of this kind must have been effective. The most powerful shaykhs of Ḥāshid and Bakīl joined the imam, as well as a number of the shaykhs of the lesser Zaydi tribes to the south. Prominent members of this

26 In recent decades, the shaykhs of Yemen have tended to consistently oppose the extension of the central government’s power, even though they have benefited from the occupation of government offices. See Peterson, *Yemen* 110–111.

27 Dresch, *Tribes* 220–1.

28 Dresch, *Tribes* 54–5, 81–2; Caton, *Peaks* 27–8.

29 BBA, Y.Mtv 45/107 22 Ağustos 1306/3 September 1890. Letter from the imam to Shaykh Jibrān ibn ‘Alī al-Ghashmī, Shaykh ‘Alī [ibn ‘Alī al-Ghashmī], Shaykh Aḥsan [Ḥasan?] ibn ‘Alī al-Ghashmī, Shaykh Qā‘id Riyāḍ al-Munqidī, and Shaykh Aḥmad ibn Mukhtāra, translated into Ottoman Turkish and enclosed with a memorial from the Governor of Yemen to the Minister of War.

30 Ibid.

31 Ibid.

alliance included shaykhs from the traditionally powerful families of the northwest, among them Nāṣir Mabkhūt al-Aḥmar (al-‘Uṣaymāt), Aḥmad Ḥubaysh (Sufyān), Naqīb Nāji ‘Abdallāh Juzaylān (Dhū Muḥammad), and Naqīb Ṣāliḥ ibn Yaḥyā Shāyif (Dhū Ḥusayn).³² Among the Bakīl tribes of the northeast, the imam was able to obtain the support of Nāji Abū Ra’s, of a powerful shaykhly family of Dhū Muḥammad.³³ The major tribal shaykhs of the Ṣan‘ā’ region also participated in the rebellion. These included Jibrān al-Ghashmī and Yaḥyā ibn Yaḥyā Dūda of Hamdān, Ṣāliḥ Musā‘id and Qā‘id al-Aḥjarī of the Banī Ḥushaysh, Muhsin Ṣāliḥ Ninī of Khawlān, and Aḥmad al-Rammāḥ of Bilād Bustān.³⁴ In short, the most powerful shaykhs in the major regions of Ḥāshid and Bakīl went over to the imam.

In this manner, al-Manṣūr won the intense competition for the loyalty of the Zaydi tribal shaykhs which began shortly after his accession to the imamate. The shaykhs, in turn, played an indispensable role in persuading their tribesmen to support the imam. Or perhaps, pressures from their tribesmen led the shaykhs to conclude that it was in their best interest to support the imam; we cannot be sure exactly how the process worked. The impression we get from our sources, however, is that the Ottomans had already lost the game of gaining the tribesmen’s allegiance by the time of the 1891 rebellion.

Our sources suggest that Ottoman practice was to win over the shaykhs while treating the Ḥāshid and Bakīl tribesmen as “*ra‘āyā*,” in Yemeni terms, persons subject to the authority and violence of the state.³⁵ Harris, speaking of the Yemeni tribes in general, notes that under the Ottomans the tribes lost the relative independence they had enjoyed under the imams; instead they were “oppressed,” “heavily taxed,” and found themselves “little better than slaves.”³⁶ For the tribes around Ṣan‘ā’, who would have felt the weight of the government most heavily, the loss of their status must have been bitterly resented.

What were seen as repeated and gross violations of tribal honor went far toward creating the united opposition of which segmentary lineage societies

32 BBA, Y.Mtv 74/99, 24 Kanun-1 Evvel 1308/5 January 1893. List (*defter*) of persons arrested for sedition in the 1891 rebellion and after, drawn up by the Administrative Council of Yemen, and sent to the Minister of War; Dresch, *Tribes* 221.

33 Dresch, *Tribes* 221. Nāji Abū Ra’s was one of the shaykhs with whom Ahmed Feyzi Paşa conducted extensive negotiations on his reconquest of the highlands.

34 BBA, Y.Mtv 74/99, 24 Kanun-1 Evvel 1308/5 January 1893. List (*defter*) of persons arrested for sedition in the 1891 rebellion and after, drawn up by the Administrative Council of Yemen, and sent to the Minister of War; al-Wāsi‘ī, *Tārīkh* 273; al-Iryānī, *Sīrat* 1, 271–4.

35 The chronicler al-Ḥarāzī states that after the conquest, the tribe of Arḥab “became *ra‘āyā*,” paying taxes to the Ottoman government. See al-Ḥarāzī, *Fatrat* 180.

36 Harris, *Journey* 99–100.

are capable when threatened by powerful outsiders. Cultural and psychological pressures to unite against the outside authority represented by the Ottomans were exacerbated by severe economic pressures, which affected the tribes inside and outside Ottoman territory alike. In 1890 the rains failed, and the sorghum crop was ruined by locusts in the summer.³⁷ The Zaydi tribes must have been “ready” at the beginning of the 1890s for a major insurrection; that is, to employ the cultural resources at their disposal to unite against the foreign intruders (*‘ajam*).

What we have described as a process that was (very) roughly analogous to the competition for the support of the population between the government and the rebels in modern guerrilla warfare was therefore won by the imam, owing in part to his more astute understanding of the culture of honor. At least half the constituent tribes of Ḥāshid and Bakīl are listed as having participated in the rebellion: al-‘Uṣaymāt, Khārīf, Hamdān, Sanḥān (Ḥāshid), Dhū Muḥammad, Dhū Ḥusayn, Sufyān, Arḥab, Nihm, ‘Iyāl Surayḥ, Banī Ḥushaysh, and Khawlān (Bakīl).³⁸ These were the most powerful tribes of Upper Yemen, the region of the northeast; and this list does not even include the lesser Zaydi tribes of the northwest and the central plateau, which also gave enthusiastic support to the imam. The divide and rule tactics of the Ottomans failed completely for the first time, and they found themselves confronted with a major insurrection.

To lead this rebellion, the imam had to have a state at his disposal which would function in some regards as a counter state; that is, as an instrument to oppose the authority of the established state and wage war against it. Such a state, however, could not regiment the population in a bureaucratic fashion. To lead a supra-tribal alliance effectively, it would have to employ its authority in the same fashion as it had established itself: by processes of collaboration and mediation, which could be performed most effectively by the sayyids.

5 The Imam’s Tribal Quasi-state as a Counter State

In the 1891 rebellion, then, the imam’s state extended its authority largely by means of the processes of persuasion, consent, and alliance which characterized political endeavor among the Zaydi tribes. Correspondence would first be exchanged with local leaders, and an alliance agreed on. After the conclusion

37 Dresch, *Tribes* 220.

38 Dresch, *Tribes* 220–1; BBA, Y.Mtv 53/67 1 Aḡustos 1307/13 August 1891. Telegram from the Governor of Yemen to the Minister of War.

of an agreement, the local tribes would send hostages (*rahā'in*) to the imam and perform a *tanṣīra*. In the *tanṣīra*, fires would be lighted on rooftops or other elevated places, and the people would shout their wishes for the victory of the ruler to whom they had submitted. After this ceremony was performed, a delegation of the imam's officials would arrive.³⁹

Typically, the delegation would consist of three elements: a governor (*'āmil*, pl. *'ummāl*), a military commander (*maqdamī*, pl. *maqādima*), and a body of soldiers (*jund*, *'askar*).⁴⁰ The *'ummāl* and *maqādima* tended to be sayyids. Sayyid Ibrāhīm ibn Qāsim al-Sharafī acted as a *maqdamī* in the Sharaf region, and Sayyid Aḥmad ibn Muḥammad al-Shar'ī was the *maqdamī* of the Ṣan'ā' region in the initial stages of the rebellion.⁴¹

The key supra-tribal element of the imam's state was thus provided by the sayyids, who provided a mediatory and sacral authority which the tribes of the alliance could accept. The men at their disposal, called "soldiers of the imam" (*'askar al-imam*)⁴² were recruited from among the tribes, and may have retained their tribal organization at least in part. Little is known about their recruitment, pay, or conditions of service in the 1891 rebellion. To the extent that they may be considered as part of a supra-tribal state, it was because they were acting in an official capacity for the imam under his appointed leaders and engaging in jihad rather than going on an ordinary plundering expedition.

6 The Imam's State and the Progress of the Fighting

A good deal of careful preparation, as we have seen, thus went into the rebellion. The manner in which the tribal alliance finally came together, however, was highly spontaneous. It began when the imam's forces allied with some of the powerful shaykhs of the northwest and won an important victory against the Ottoman forces there. With this victory, one tribe after another decided to throw in their lot with the imam, in a kind of chain reaction, until the entire highland region was aflame with rebellion.

The alliance of 1891, then, should be understood at least partially in terms of the culture of war in the segmentary lineage system. That is, it was formed to conduct a single campaign for a military objective which seemed achievable

39 See for example BBA, Y.Mtv 57/3 10 Tişrin-i Evvel 1307/22 October 1891. Report (*ariza*) from the *kaymakam* of Radā' to the Governor (*Makam-i Vilayet*) in Ṣan'ā'.

40 Al-Iryānī, *Sīrat* I, 326; al-Wāsi'ī, *Tārīkh* 271.

41 Al-Iryānī, *Sīrat* I, 261, 271–3, 322.

42 Al-Iryānī, *Sīrat* I, 261.

in immediate terms, the expulsion of the Ottomans from Yemen; and it came together only when its initiators were seen to be successful. In the northwest and the Ṣan‘ā’ region, where the imam’s propaganda efforts had been initially concentrated, the course of events followed the military logic outlined below.

1. Establishment of alliances with the influential shaykhs, sayyids, or tribes in a given region.
2. Arrival of representatives of the imam’s government.
3. Seizure of control of the rural areas; capture or expulsion of the local officials and gendarmes, and occupation of outlying military posts.
4. Cutting of roads and telegraph lines, isolating the main Ottoman garrisons.
5. Siege of the main towns and fortresses.

To define the course of events in these terms suggests a distinct military strategy, which was probably present to a degree. The imam and his advisors were obviously aware of the importance of, say, cutting the enemy lines of communication, even if they did not use the formalized terminology of modern strategic thought. The manner in which these events unfolded, however, was partially fortuitous; the imam had to seize opportunities as they presented themselves and turn them to his advantage.

An analysis of the initial outbreak of the rebellion will clarify this point. The rebellion began in earnest when a formal alliance was concluded between the imam and the tribal shaykhs of the Shāhil and Sharaf regions in the northwest, together with their tribesmen and the sayyids of the area. The imam supplied them with weapons and provisions and sent them a *maqdamī* with a body of “soldiers” armed with breech-loading rifles. At the end of May 1891, the imam’s men and the local tribes fought a major battle with Colonel Mehmet Arif, commandant of the forces in Ḥajja. The Ottoman forces suffered a serious defeat. Mehmet Bey was killed with a number of his officers and men, and the remainder of the troops withdrew to Ḥajja.⁴³ This operation, then, was planned fairly carefully, had a specific strategic purpose, and probably succeeded in part due to the fact that the imam had taken care to supply his warriors with modern rifles.

Subsequently, the sources give the impression of a sudden outburst of enthusiasm among the tribes of Upper Yemen and the northwest for the rebellion, together with a plummeting of morale among the Ottoman forces. The defeat of the latter “caused the boldness of the bandits to grow, and their attacks

43 BBA, Y.Mtv 50/97 23 Mayıs 1307/4 June 1891. Note from the Minister of War to the Yıldız Palace; al-Iryānī, *Sīrat* 1, 261; al-Jirāfi, *Muqataṭaf* 276.

hither and thither increased well beyond their customary level."⁴⁴ What we see in consequence is that certain principles of war in the segmentary lineage system seemed to go into operation almost of themselves.

We have noted that tribal armies in Yemen tended to form and dissolve rapidly in accordance with the immediate prospects for victory and defeat. The victory at Shāhil created this kind of immediate political justification to rally around the imam. The more tribesmen flocked to the imam's standard, the worse the situation for the Ottomans became. The more defeats the Ottomans suffered the more tribesmen joined the imam's armies. Thus, a united alliance of the Zaydi tribes emerged almost spontaneously.

The effect was felt first in the northwest. In the month of June, the imam steadily intensified his operations in that area, while more and more people in the region joined the rebellion. On 10 July 1891, it was reported from Şan'ā' that the people of the *kaza* of Ḥajja, "great and small" had submitted to the imam, and that the garrison of the town of Ḥajja itself was under siege.⁴⁵ By the time Ottoman relief columns were sent from Ḥudayda and Şan'ā' to pacify the region in July, the region was swarming with local rebels and Ḥāshid warriors fighting for the imam under their shaykhs.

This made it impossible for the columns even to converge in Ḥajja in accordance with the plan, much less to pacify the region. The column from Ḥudayda under Hasan Edip Paşa managed to reach Ḥajja after three weeks of intense fighting. The force from Şan'ā' under Mustafa Nafiz Bey got as far as Kawkabān and Miswār, but found its way blocked there by the enormous numbers of rebels in the region. As a result, Mustafa Nafiz Bey had to fight his way back to Şan'ā'.⁴⁶ Meanwhile, the countryside around Şan'ā' exploded in rebellion. Hasan Edip Paşa remained for some days in Ḥajja until, recognizing the futility of the situation, he finally returned to Ḥudayda.

The successes in the northwest created a mood of excitement among the tribes in the Şan'ā' region, which the imam moved quickly to exploit. Because of its obvious strategic importance, the imam had directed a constant stream of letters there and had worked to build up an extensive network of supporters in the area.⁴⁷ The victories in the northwest had created a political situation in which these months of patient effort could finally bear fruit. While the fighting

44 *Yemen salnamesi* IX, 326.

45 BBA, Y.Mtv 52/14 10 July 1891. Telegram from the Head Director of the Şan'ā' Telegraph Office (*Sanaa Telgraf Başmüdiriye*) to the Minister of Telegraphs.

46 Ibid.

47 BBA, Y.Mtv 74/99, 24 Kanun-ı Evvel 1308/5 January 1893. List (*deFTER*) of persons arrested for sedition in the 1891 rebellion and after, drawn up by the Administrative Council of Yemen, and sent to the Minister of War.

was going on in the Ḥajja region, the imam sent Sayyid Aḥmad ibn Muḥammad al-Sharʿī to Arḥab to raise the Ṣanʿāʾ tribes in rebellion. Sayyid Aḥmad came first to Arḥab, the tribe which was the most enthusiastic about besieging Ṣanʿāʾ. With the aid of the shaykh of Hamdān, he was able to get the agreement of Hamdān, Arḥab, Banī Ḥārith, ʿIyāl Surayḥ, Banī Ḥushaysh, and others to besiege Ṣanʿāʾ; and a *tanṣīra* was subsequently made in the name of the imam. In his capacity as a *maḥdamī* Aḥmad al-Sharʿī then led a force of these tribesmen against the relief column which had been sent from Ṣanʿāʾ to Ḥajja. His men pursued this column all the way to Kawkabān and Miswār, inflicting heavy losses on it, and eventually forcing it to return to the capital.⁴⁸

Toward the end of July the imam's partisans in Bilād Bustān rose up in rebellion, and in the first days of August they cut the Ṣanʿāʾ-Ḥudayda road and telegraph line.⁴⁹ On 8 August they assembled and went to fight the Ottoman forces; the latter were badly defeated at a place called ʿAṣur, and withdrew into Ṣanʿāʾ. The same night, tribesmen assembled around Ṣanʿāʾ "from every side," and took the city under siege.⁵⁰

What we see here, again, is a combination of planning and spontaneity, characterized by shrewd political exploitation of success to bring about more success. To build up a network of partisans in the Ṣanʿāʾ region had not, of itself been sufficient to bring the tribes into alliance with the imam. Once victory for the imam's forces seemed imminent, however, the tribes around Ṣanʿāʾ were eager to join the rebellion; and the existence of a network of partisans allowed the imam to bring them into his alliance structure with the requisite speed. As these tribes in turn began to win their own victories against the Ottomans, tribesmen from other regions began to flood into the Ṣanʿāʾ area. The army besieging Ṣanʿāʾ eventually contained many tribesmen from the far northeast, from the Bakīl tribes of Dhū Muḥammad, Dhū Ḥusayn, and others.⁵¹ By the time of the siege of Ṣanʿāʾ, the imam was for practical purposes leading a united alliance of the Ḥāshid and Bakīl tribes.

The siege of Ṣanʿāʾ sparked widespread disorders throughout the rest of the highland region; al-Wāsiʿī says dramatically that "all Yemen rose up as one in rebellion on one night."⁵² This was not quite accurate. Nonetheless, the siege of Ṣanʿāʾ may be taken as the point at which the Ottomans lost control of the

48 Al-Iryānī, *Sīrat* 1, 271–9.

49 Al-Wāsiʿī, *Tārīkh* 273; BBA, Y.Mtv 53/67 1 Aḡustos 1307/13 August 1891. Telegram from the Governor of Yemen to the Minister of War.

50 Al-Wāsiʿī, *Tārīkh* 273–4.

51 Al-Wāsiʿī, *Tārīkh* 276.

52 Al-Wāsiʿī, *Tārīkh* 274.

highlands; the primary roads were blocked, Ottoman officials driven out of the countryside, and the major cities besieged. Some of these held out, and some fell to the rebels; but all were effectively isolated in a sea of rebellion.

Within a short period of time, then, the imam's tribal quasi-state was extended over virtually the entire highland region. The institutional basis al-Manṣūr had established for the rebellion permitted him to assert a degree of control over a confused chain of events, however imperfect. In war, the ability to take advantage of fortuitous successes, and turn the general course of events in one's favor, is as important as careful planning; and it does appear that the imam and his advisors possessed this ability to a high degree.

The scale of the uprisings gave the imam a decisive military advantage in the area where the Ottomans were weakest, that is, in manpower. A decisive advantage in manpower, together with an increasing refinement in the guerilla tactics of the highland tribes, permitted the imam's partisans to narrow the gap in the battlefield capability between themselves and the Ottoman forces. This was another important ingredient in the imam's initial successes; and to highlight this process, we will now turn to a brief tactical study of the rebellion.

7 Manpower and Tactics in the Rebellion

In the previous chapter, we noted that for a variety of reasons the Ottomans had serious difficulties in supplying the scattered garrisons in Yemen. In 1889 and 1890, the ranks of the Seventh Army had been decimated by cholera. At the outbreak of the rebellion, the Ottoman troops in Yemen were doubtless as "ill-fed," "ill-clothed," and "diseased," as those which Harris saw several months later.⁵³ Although precise data are lacking, it does appear that the inadequacy of men and supplies permitted the rebels to overrun the smaller military posts in the country fairly rapidly. According to al-Wāsi'ī, "the imam took all the fortresses (*al-ma'āqil*), except for a few," on the outbreak of the rebellion.⁵⁴

The picture became somewhat more complex when the rebels had to deal with larger Ottoman forces in the field or besiege major cities. In the open field, the rebels' overwhelming superiority in numbers often compensated for their inferior weaponry. This was primarily because this superiority was combined with the skilled use of guerrilla methods of fighting: exploitation of the rugged terrain for cover, ambushes, surprise attacks, night fighting, and surrounding

53 Harris, *Journey* 102.

54 Al-Wāsi'ī, *Tārīkh* 274.

tactics. Moreover, while our sources seem to indicate that the majority of tribesmen continued to be armed with matchlock muskets, a number of them had acquired rifles by this time; and no doubt this increased the effectiveness of these tactics.

All these factors came into play in the imam's campaign against the relief column of Mustafa Nafiz Bey. As stated previously, Mustafa Nafiz Bey had been given orders to proceed from Şan'ā' to relieve Ḥajja, where he was to join up with Hasan Edip Paşa's force. His force consisted of about 900 men with three artillery pieces.⁵⁵ It set out from Şan'ā' on 22 July; and on the next day, it encountered a force of the imam's partisans in the region west of Şan'ā'. The force was commanded by Sayyid Aḥmad ibn Muḥammad al-Shar'ī, and consisted of men from Arḥab, Hamdān, 'Iyāl Surayḥ, and others.⁵⁶

Initially, the Ottomans had the best of it. They drove the *mujāhidīn* who had attacked them into the village of Dharḥāna and surrounded them there; and the fighting in Dharḥāna lasted until sundown. The men in Dharḥāna were not the whole of the imam's forces, however, for at sundown the *mujāhidīn* outside the village launched a two-pronged attack against the Ottomans. One column of the *mujāhidīn* advanced from the east, and the other came from the north under al-Shar'ī.⁵⁷

The Ottomans thus found themselves caught in a crossfire from three directions and were quite likely in danger of being surrounded by overwhelming numbers. By this time, moreover, night had fallen; and the advantage would have been with the *mujāhidīn* who knew the terrain better. Accordingly, the Ottomans retreated to the south of Dharḥāna, where a part of the force took refuge in a village. Some of the *mujāhidīn* engaged the troops in the village, while al-Shar'ī launched an assault to take one of the guns the Ottomans had with them. The fighting continued until midnight, and a number of the Ottomans were killed.⁵⁸

The account of this battle, taken from al-Iryānī, is a little vague and leaves many unanswered questions. Nonetheless, it does indicate clearly a situation where the imam's partisans were able to compensate for firepower inferiority by numerical superiority and good generalship. In the battle's initial stages, it appeared that Ottoman firepower would carry the day as it had before. The

55 BBA, Y.Mtv 53/66 4 Ağustos 1307/16 August 1891. Telegram from Hasan Edip Paşa to the Minister of War.

56 Al-Iryānī, *Sīrat* I, 273–4.

57 Al-Iryānī, *Sīrat* I, 274–5.

58 Ibid.

mujāhidīn who had initially engaged them were forced back on the defensive, and the others apparently feared to come to their aid, at least in the daytime.

As night was falling, however, the *mujāhidīn* launched an attack against the Ottomans from multiple directions. The dispersion of the enemy forces on several fronts would thus have diluted the effect of Ottoman firepower. The capability of the *mujāhidīn* to surround the Ottomans in this fashion was, of course, a function of their greater numbers.

In consequence, Mustafa Nafiz's men were forced to retreat and take the defensive, suffering heavy casualties in the process. While his force was able to survive and continue the march for a time, it was pursued, harassed, and blocked at every turn by the imam's partisans. Finally, the relief column had to return to Ṣan'ā' without reaching Ḥajja, because "of the numbers of the bandits who attacked them on the road, contrary to what was expected."⁵⁹

In the open field, then, the rebels could achieve a tenuous battlefield superiority over the Ottomans through the employment of guerrilla tactics and numerical superiority. In general, this allowed them to restrict the movement of the Ottoman forces and confine them to the major fortified cities. In the siege warfare which characterized the rebellion, however, the inferior firepower of the rebels continued to impose limitations. While virtually all the important highland cities were taken under siege, it appears that only a few fell into the hands of the rebels. The cities that fell included Zafīr, Qa'ṭaba, Yarīm, and Dhamār (which was unwallled). The cities which were besieged but not captured included 'Amrān, Ṣan'ā', Kawkabān, Miswār, Ḥajja, and Ibb.⁶⁰

The siege of Ṣan'ā' is the best documented of these episodes; and the accounts of this siege reveal the limitations which, in general, must have prevented the imam's partisans from taking more cities than they did. The numbers of the besieging army were estimated by al-Wāsi'ī at 70,000 men.⁶¹ This is vastly exaggerated, but the tribesmen certainly outnumbered the Ottoman garrison of about 1500 men or so. The tribesmen besieging Ṣan'ā', however, had no artillery. In the main, they were armed with curved daggers (*janbiyya*) and "old style muskets" (*al-banādiq al-qadīma*).⁶²

The defenders of Ṣan'ā', by contrast, were heavily armed, and the city was well fortified. Ṣan'ā' was surrounded by a continuous wall of mud brick, with stone towers at regular intervals, in which small guns were mounted. Outside

59 BBA, Y.Mtv 53/67 1 Aḡustos 1307/13 August 1891. Telegram from the Governor of Yemen to the Minister of War.

60 *Yemen salnamesi* IX, 334; Yemen hatratı.

61 Al-Wāsi'ī, *Tārīkh* 276.

62 Al-Wāsi'ī, *Tārīkh* 274; Atif Paşa, *Yemen* II, 19.

the wall the Ottomans had also built a chain of small individual towers, each furnished with an artillery piece and a dozen men armed with rifles.⁶³

For the imam, then, starving the defenders out was a more viable option than assault. This was done successfully in the 1905 rebellion, and because of the deficiencies in the Ottoman logistical system, the Ṣanʿānīs suffered greatly from food shortages in the 1891 rebellion as well. In the siege, “great distress came upon the people as a result of the lack of food.” The wealthy were forced to sell their possessions to have enough to eat. The poor had to leave the city, and were attacked in consequence by tribesmen who viewed them as “those who had helped the Turks” (*al-musāʿidūn lil-Atrāk*).⁶⁴ The situation, however, did not become desperate enough for the defenders to capitulate before the arrival of the relief force.

Because the besiegers had no artillery, they could not hope to breach the fortifications. Their main military option was thus to storm the wall with ladders and take the city by assault. Such a strategy was extremely risky, given the heavy armament of the Ottoman defenders, but it was attempted nonetheless. The fighting which developed during the siege of Ṣanʿāʾ thus coalesced into three major elements: continual exchanges of gunfire, continual attempts by the besiegers to approach the wall, and continual sorties by the Ottoman troops to drive them back.⁶⁵

Overall, the imam’s partisans seem to have focused on maintaining a harassing fire by day, and approaching the wall with ladders by night.⁶⁶ When they did get close to the wall, however, they were usually caught in a rifle and artillery crossfire from the towers, with deadly effect.⁶⁷ As a result, the *muǰāhidīn* were never able to mount a direct assault on the fortifications of Ṣanʿāʾ. In defending fixed positions during the siege, the Ottoman forces had a decisive advantage.

In tactical terms, then, the picture for the 1891 rebellion becomes increasingly mixed. The Ottoman army would always retain a degree of firepower superiority, owing to the Zaydi tribesmen’s lack of artillery. This would often give them a decisive advantage in siege warfare, whether in the defense or attack of fortifications. In field warfare, however, the imam’s partisans were learning to exploit their own particular advantages – mobility, numbers, knowledge of the terrain, skill in ambush and surprise – to narrow the gap between themselves and the Ottoman forces.

63 Harris, *Journey* 300–1.

64 Al-Wāsiʿī, *Tārīkh* 276–7.

65 Harris, *Journey* 106–8; al-Wāsiʿī, *Tārīkh* 274–6.

66 Al-Wāsiʿī, *Tārīkh* 276.

67 Harris, *Journey* 301–2.

Within the next few years, the gap would close further as a result of the acquisition by the Yemeni tribes of breech-loading rifles on a larger scale. The Ottomans could no longer take their own battlefield superiority for granted; and good generalship, knowing how to exploit one's own strengths and the enemy's weaknesses, would increasingly become the determinant of victory on the battlefield.

8 The Ottoman Reaction; Feyzi Paşa's Campaign to Retake the Highlands

This narrowing of the gap in military capabilities was evident also in the Ottoman "reconquest" of the highlands. On the face of it, Feyzi Paşa's campaign was a walkover executed in good Callwellian fashion: a series of rapid and decisive blows against the imam's partisans, which smashed their resistance, and enabled Feyzi Paşa to achieve his objectives at a minimum cost in time and bloodshed.

Decisive generalship of this sort was indeed a major feature of the campaign and contributed in great measure to Feyzi Paşa's initial success. In the battles Feyzi Paşa fought, however, victory was never inevitable. In the opening phases of the campaign, he led the forces under his command into several very dangerous situations, from which he was only able to extricate them by good battlefield generalship.

The victories he won did indeed result in a general withdrawal of the imam's forces and a brief cessation of resistance, permitting him to retake the highland cities comparatively unopposed. The imam's forces, however, were not "smashed" in the manner that those of Muḥammad ibn ʿĀṣid or the Ismaili *dāʿī* had been. The web of partisans the imam had established remained essentially intact; it would give way when pressed at any one point, but spring back whenever the pressure was taken off. This would become increasingly apparent in the years of guerrilla war which followed the 1891 rebellion.

Feyzi Paşa was appointed as the Commandant of Yemen (*Yemen Umum Kumandanı*) after Hasan Edip Paşa had communicated the futility of his own position, and the military administration in Istanbul had become disgusted with his performance. The *ferman* of appointment was issued on 7 September 1891;⁶⁸ and Feyzi Paşa, who was then commander of the Hejaz Military Division, set sail from Jidda and arrived in Ḥudayda on 27 September 1891.⁶⁹

68 BBA, Y.Mtv 54/10 26 Ağustos 1307/7 September 1891. Note from the Minister of War to the Yıldız Palace.

69 *Yemen salnamesi* IX, 328.

On his arrival he had approximately 8 battalions at his disposal, or 6,200 men; the Karaman and Antalya Regiments had been dispatched from the Mediterranean coast of Anatolia at about the time of his appointment.⁷⁰ The force was armed with Martini-Henry rifles, together with at least 1 battery of 6-pound (German weight) field guns, and one battery of mountain (3-pound) guns.⁷¹ They may have possessed other artillery pieces as well.

The forces at Feyzi Paşa's disposal, then, were well-armed but not particularly impressive in terms of numbers; and the strategy that Feyzi Paşa adopted tended to make them vulnerable, insofar as it required their division. Feyzi Paşa's initial objective was to relieve Şan'ā' as soon as possible. After this, his forces were to retake or relieve the other major cities of the highlands and reopen communications between them.

To do this, he would divide his forces into relatively small mobile columns. These columns would move down the main routes as quickly as possible, reestablish security by planting garrisons in key areas, and break up the rebel concentrations by swift and aggressive action, often through the use of converging columns. The emphasis was on speed and decisiveness, rather than on maintaining the security of the force.

In general, this strategy was successful. Feyzi Paşa set out for Şan'ā' on 28 September, the day after his arrival, and arrived there at the beginning of October.⁷² In the month of October, a series of rapid campaigns restored Ottoman control in the northwest, the central plateau, and Lower Yemen. 'Amrān, Kawkabān, Miswār, and Ibb were relieved, and the towns of Yarīm and Dhamār retaken. These campaigns were usually undertaken by small columns of 400–800 men each, under several different commanders.⁷³

The role of battle in his campaign seemed, at first glance, to reflect the Callwellian ideal. The decisive turning point of the campaign was a series of battles between Manākha and Şan'ā', which the Ottomans won partially through superior firepower. Thereafter the rebels generally refused to hold fixed positions against the Ottoman columns in large numbers, choosing to retreat instead.

70 BBA, Y.Mtv 54/10 26 Ağustos 1307/7 September 1891. Note from the Minister of War to the Yıldız Palace.

71 BBA, Y.Mtv 54/11 26 Ağustos 1307/7 September 1891. Note from the Minister of War to the Yıldız Palace; BBA, Y.Mtv 54/87 18 Eylül 1307/30 September 1891. Table of supplies to be sent to the Seventh Army; *Yemen salnamesi* IX, 328.

72 *Yemen salnamesi* IX, 328, 335.

73 *Yemen salnamesi* IX, 334–6. The northwest region was reconquered by two mobile columns, consisting of one-and-a-half and two battalions respectively. One column marched to Kawkabān, and the other to 'Amrān, to relieve the garrisons there. After this, they joined up in Miswār.

Actual analysis of these battles and their aftermath, however, shows that we need to qualify these observations to a certain extent. Because of the relatively small size of the force as a whole and the mobile columns, Ottoman battlefield superiority could not be taken for granted. In essence, Feyzi Paşa's force was in the same situation as the garrisons of the Seventh Army. That is, they possessed superior firepower, but the imam's partisans had command of the terrain and overwhelming numerical superiority. At the outset of these battles, in fact, the small body of troops under Feyzi Paşa's command was in grave danger of being overwhelmed by a much larger force of the Zaydi tribesmen.

Feyzi Paşa was able to turn this situation into victory for the Ottomans through good generalship and knowledge of the conditions of battle in Yemen. By and large, in these battles the rebels employed the characteristic tactics of the highland tribes. That is, they sought to occupy strategic passages and the surrounding elevated points, taking cover in the rough terrain, for the purpose of blocking the advance of the enemy force and harassing it with sniper fire. When battle was joined, the tribesmen would attempt to surround the advancing force. The men in fixed positions would maintain a steady fire, while others would launch probing attacks against the enemy flanks.

Feyzi Paşa countered these tactics by a combination of artillery barrages and aggressive small unit actions. If possible, advance bodies of troops would secure the high points along a passage before the rebels could occupy them, to provide a screen for the advance of the troops. Otherwise, the rebels could be shelled out of their positions, or driven out by small unit assaults. Once this was done, the pursuit would be pressed as far as possible, and the high ground seized along the way. The emphasis in his tactical combinations was on speed, aggressiveness, and maintaining the initiative. Firepower and assault were employed to deny the rebels the advantage of the terrain and maintain the momentum of the campaign in favor of the Ottomans.

On the march to Şan'ā', Feyzi Paşa had split his force into two columns. This was a compromise between the need for speed and the need to bring up sufficient troops to confront the rebels in force. Şan'ā' had to be relieved as soon as possible, and speed could best be achieved by a small column. This column, however, would have to have reinforcements readily available, if it was not to be overwhelmed by the rebels.

Initially, Feyzi Paşa had gone with about two battalions to seize Manākha by way of the Manākha road. The remaining six battalions were to go by way of the Şanqūr Pass⁷⁴ and the two columns were to unite below Mafḥaq, a fortress

74 This road was longer but less rugged, and therefore more suitable for a large body of troops with heavy equipment.

located a few kilometers from Şan‘ā’.⁷⁵ Feyzi Paşa’s column took Manākha without a struggle, and then proceeded to Mafḥaq.

The larger column, however, failed to materialize in time. This was probably to be expected, given the length of the road and the greater size of the force; but as it happened, the delay put Feyzi Paşa in an exceedingly dangerous position. Mafḥaq was not far from Şan‘ā’, where thousands of rebel tribesmen were concentrated, and these now began to drift into the surrounding area. As a result, Feyzi Paşa’s column found itself in real danger of being surrounded and cut to pieces.⁷⁶

Quick and decisive action by Feyzi Paşa, however, retrieved the situation for the Ottomans. First, troops were sent to occupy the strategic points (*nikat-ı lazime*) surrounding the camp. Apart from denying advantageous sniping positions to the rebels, this was also “so as not to allow the bandits to perceive the meagerness of the force.”⁷⁷ Presumably the troops on picket would prevent the enemy from getting close enough to carefully observe the strength of the column, although our author does not elaborate on his statement; it would also prevent the rebels from launching an attack by night. At dawn the next day, Feyzi Paşa launched a surprise attack against the rebel positions. The tribesmen were caught unawares and fled. The Ottoman forces pressed the pursuit to the environs of Sūq al-Khamīs, seizing control of the mountains which commanded the pass in that area.⁷⁸

In this case, then, Feyzi Paşa had averted disaster by a series of decisive measures, which were taken with an eye to the tactics usually employed by the highland tribes. The most important points around his camp were occupied before the rebels could get to them, thus preventing the latter from carrying out an immediate assault; and after this, Feyzi Paşa turned the tables on them by launching a surprise attack first. The initiative was thus recovered for the Ottomans, and the pursuit pressed, so that the rebels would not have a chance to regroup.

The fighting continued around Sūq al-Khamīs into the next day, when the second column under Ahmed Rüşdi Paşa arrived. The day after, the combined force marched on Şan‘ā’, arriving at the pass of ‘Aşur in the evening. The pass of ‘Aşur led directly into the plain of Şan‘ā’, and in consequence, the imam’s partisans attempted a final stand here against the Ottoman forces. In this battle, Feyzi Paşa’s peculiar tactical combination of artillery, assault, and seizure of strategic terrain came into full play.

75 *Yemen salnamesi* IX, 328–9.

76 *Yemen salnamesi* IX, 329.

77 *Ibid.*

78 *Yemen salnamesi* IX, 329–30.

On the arrival of the force at the entrance to the pass, Feyzi Paşa saw that the peaks on the left side of the road (*şose*) were occupied by the imam's partisans. In consequence, he sent a body of troops to occupy these mountains. The night passed without significant fighting; and in the morning, it was observed that the rebels had left the mountains and taken up position in a fortified village.⁷⁹

A battalion of troops was then brought up from Şan'ā' to blockade the rebels from that side; meanwhile, the rebels opened fire on the Ottomans, and reinforcements began to come up from the rebel camps at Ḥadda and Rawḍa. In consequence, Feyzi Paşa's soldiers occupied the mountains surrounding the village, while artillery was brought up from Şan'ā'. The village was then subject to an intensive bombardment, while simultaneously the Ottomans launched counterattacks against the tribesmen coming from the direction of Şan'ā'. The latter were driven off, and the village almost completely destroyed. That night the rebels abandoned the village, and the army besieging Şan'ā' melted away.

Seemingly, then, victory had been sealed for the Ottomans. With few exceptions, Feyzi Paşa's men were able after this to reestablish Ottoman control of the major cities, without encountering significant resistance on the battlefield. The guerrilla phase of the conflict, however, was just beginning. After the relief of Şan'ā', the "bandits ... no longer dared to move about in large numbers" but "remained scattered hither and thither" (*ötede beride kalmıŝ*).⁸⁰

With the incitement of these "bandits," however, rebel bands soon began to appear in various fortresses throughout the country, necessitating the constant dispatch of punitive expeditions to expel them.⁸¹ The activities of these bands, directed by the imam, and conducted by his commanders (*maqādima*), would steadily increase over the next fifteen years. Guerrilla rebellion, which had been politically fragmented and sporadic, would become continuous and organized from 1891 on. It would soon become clear that Feyzi Paşa's success had been limited and temporary, and that traditional formulas for maintaining control would no longer work.

9 Conclusion

The 1891 rebellion marked a watershed in the history of rebellion and counterinsurgency in Yemen. Imam al-Manşūr, by means of assiduous propaganda and building up his network of partisans, was able for the first time to extend the tribal quasi-state constructed by his predecessors into Ottoman

79 *Yemen salnamesi* IX, 331–2.

80 *Yemen salnamesi* IX, 338.

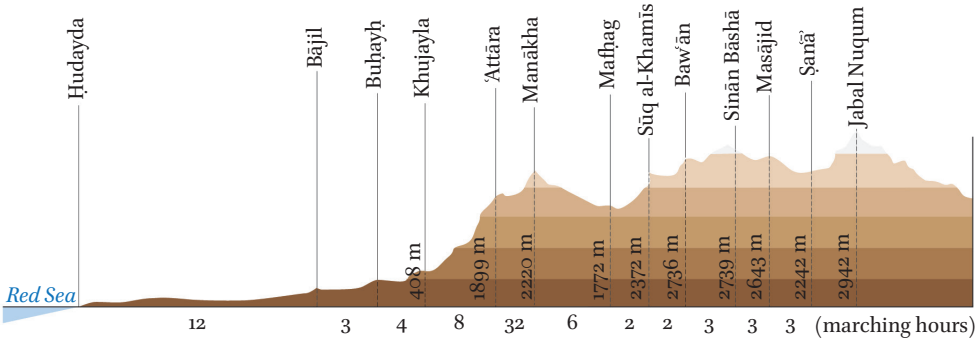
81 *Yemen salnamesi* IX, 335–6, 338.

territory. There, it would serve as an effective counter state for raising rebellion, employing the means historically used by these kinds of states to assert their authority.

Through the shrewd use of these kinds of measures, the imam was able to effect the kind of political unification which can take place in Middle Eastern segmentary lineage societies such as that of Ḥāshid and Bakīl: an alliance of all the rival tribes for the purpose of expelling a foreign invader. In doing so, he successfully neutralized the Ottoman divide and rule tactics which had been effective in maintaining control in Yemen up to that point.

In consequence, the imam was able to raise an insurrection on a scale which overwhelmed the Ottoman force stationed in Yemen. The small Ottoman garrisons, faced with armies that had a tremendous advantage in numbers and familiarity with the terrain, could no longer take their own battlefield superiority for granted. Consequently, they had to retreat into the fortified cities and wait for the arrival of the relief force.

At the same time, the imam’s forces continued to labor under obvious military limitations. The majority of his partisans were still armed with matchlock muskets, and this made it difficult for them to capture fortified cities or to face a well-armed expeditionary force on the battlefield. Because of the high level of spontaneity with which the alliance had come together, the imam had difficulty in controlling his men and keeping them in the field in the event of setbacks. The 1891 rebellion was, to some extent, simply a tribal uprising on a grand scale. The imam had raised this rebellion by careful work and planning but had difficulty in controlling the course of events once it had been set in motion. As a result of all these factors, the 1891 rebellion was



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FIGURE 4 Graphic showing cross-section of the mountain range on the route from Ḥudayda to Ṣan'ā', with elevations, halting places and marching times

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put down relatively swiftly and easily by the Ottomans. When they saw that defeat was imminent, the tribes abandoned the imam as quickly as they had joined him.

Despite its partially ephemeral and tribal character, however, in this rebellion the foundations were laid for the long-term guerrilla war which would

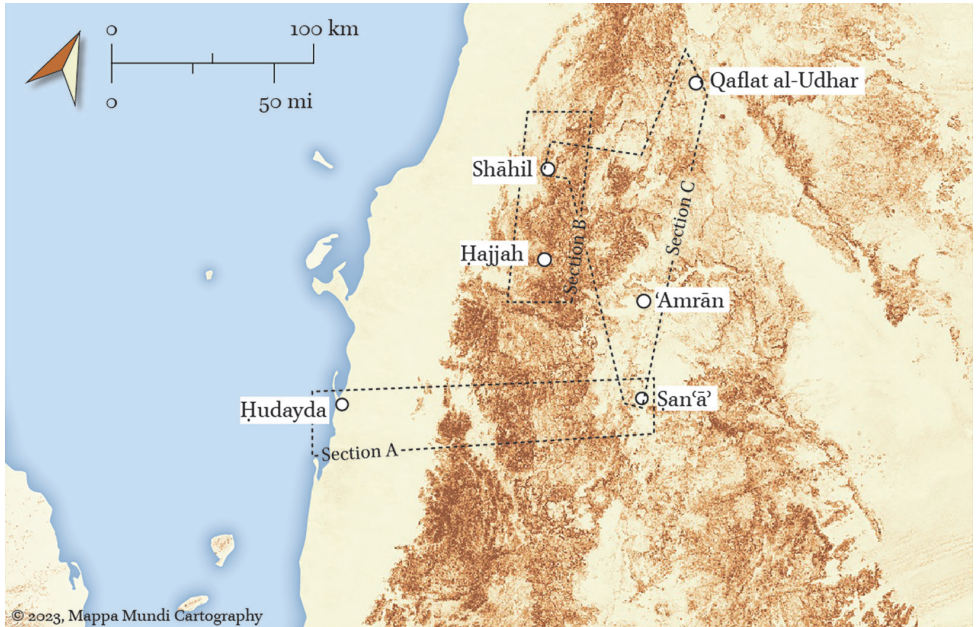
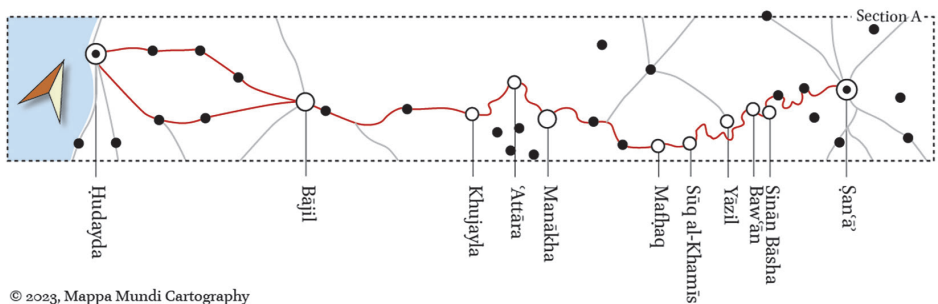


FIGURE 5 Color topographical map showing regions of the Şan'a'-Ḥudayda road and the 1898-9 Ottoman military campaign
© MAPPA MUNDI CARTOGRAPHY



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FIGURE 6 Map of the route from Ḥudayda to Şan'a' showing the course of the road in red and indicating chief halting points
© MAPPA MUNDI CARTOGRAPHY

begin shortly thereafter. A network of committed partisans had been built up, and a counter state structure put in place which could mobilize men for war across tribal boundaries. Al-Manşūr would therefore use the successes of this rebellion to organize the kind of long-term, state-forming and total war which was implicit in the idea of jihad. In turn, this would force the Ottomans to change their own methods of dealing with rebellion.

Guerrilla War as Long-Term War in Yemen

The 1891 rebellion was a major watershed in the development of Zaydi modes of resistance. After the 1891 rebellion, the conflict in Yemen began increasingly to assume the characteristics associated with “modern” irregular war. We will show that this period witnessed a continuing refinement of the imam’s state as an instrument for waging guerrilla war. This involved what the Zaydi chroniclers called *iṣlāḥ*, the ordering of the state on the principles of the Sharia, and the extension of its authority among the Zaydi tribes.

The refinement of the administration of the imamate was paralleled by the adoption of modes of resistance based on guerrilla tactics of attrition and conducted by bands of partisans (*ʿiṣābāt*). We will show that the employment of the *ʿiṣābāt* enabled the imamate to achieve a degree of autonomy from the tribal political system. In turn, this autonomy was a major factor in allowing the imam to wage a jihad that was long-term in orientation, rather than short-term and limited. The escalation of the war in Yemen was likewise facilitated by the tribes’ acquisition of breech-loading rifles, which were pouring into Yemen from Djibouti and elsewhere.

By the 1890s, then, the imam’s war in Yemen had lost much of its archaic and intermittent character. His struggle became focused on an ideologically driven effort to extend the power of his state over the Zaydi population and mobilize them for war; his soldiers fought with modern weapons according to the principles of mobile warfare; the fighting was bitter and protracted, rather than spasmodic and limited; and whether intentionally or not, the imam waged what was in practice a war of attrition against the Ottomans, which wore down the Ottoman forces and forced the Ottoman state to devote ever-increasing resources to suppressing the rebels. And as the Zaydi rebellion became increasingly sophisticated, the Ottomans would in turn be forced to modernize their methods of counterinsurgency, leading to a further escalation of the conflict toward total war.

What we should be clear about here, however, is that the ideological impetus toward total war came more from the Ottoman side than the Zaydi. Fuʿād al-Shāmī has shown that Imam al-Maṣṣūr was not trying to expel the Ottomans from Yemen in the manner of modern anti-colonial guerrilla wars, nor was he posing as a rival for the caliphate to the Ottoman sultan, whom he recognized as legitimate sultan of the Muslims. Rather, he viewed himself as waging jihad against the oppression (*ẓulm*) of the Ottoman officials, rather than the sultan

himself. He used the jihad as a means to pressure the Ottoman government to negotiate with him for the reformation of the administration in Yemen.¹

This, however, was not what Abdülhamid believed. Individuals close to the sultan, especially his Arab advisors, encouraged him in the belief that the imam was his rival for the caliphate, and that the Zaydis would not recognize any imam who was not of the family of the Prophet (*ahl al-bayt*). Accordingly, Abdülhamid simply refused to negotiate with the imam. The Ottoman delegations to Yemen confined themselves to urging the imam to submit to the government.² The position of the Ottoman government toward the imam under Abdülhamid thus left the imam with no choice but to refine and expand the war-making capacity of his counter state if he wished to survive and bring the Ottoman government to a point where it would negotiate with him; and this was what drove the conflict in Yemen toward total war.

1 *Iṣlāḥ*

The concept of *iṣlāḥ* formed the ideological foundation for an essential process in the mobilization of the Zaydis against the Ottomans: the development of a certain level of autonomy by the imamate as a state from the tribal structure, so as to facilitate the cross-tribal mobilization of the Zaydis.

The Arabic root *ṣ-l-ḥ*, from which the term *iṣlāḥ* derives, is rich in meaning. It is associated with peace (*ṣulḥ*), piety or moral soundness in the Islamic sense (*ṣalāḥ*), and the capability or legitimate capacity to perform an action (*ṣalāḥiyya*). The verb *aṣlahā*, from which the verbal noun *iṣlāḥ* is directly derived, means broadly “to make peace,” “to make sound,” and hence “to reform.” It may also mean “to pacify,” to suppress rebellion by military force.

Time and space does not permit us to give a full explication of the historical use of *iṣlāḥ* in Zaydi political thought, which awaits further study. In al-Iryānī’s text, which is our main source, it is connected to the extension or strengthening of the imam’s authority in a given region. The use of the term *iṣlāḥ* for al-Manṣūr’s state-building activities appears to reflect the close connection in Zaydi thought between the authority of the imam and the moral health (*ṣalāḥ*) of the Muslim community.³ *Ṣalāḥ* is the quality possessed by one who is *ṣāliḥ*;

1 Al-Shāmī, *Alāqāt* 41–2.

2 Al-Shāmī, *Alāqāt* 44–7.

3 See, for example, the description of Imam Qāsim al-Rassi’s thought in Ghulays, *Tajdid* 64–6; and the use of the terms *ṣalāḥ* and *ṣāliḥ* in al-Shawkānī, *Rafʿ* 87, 89–91.

that is, who is pious, abstemious, and self-controlled in the Islamic sense.⁴ Historically, Zaydi thinkers viewed it as the duty of the Muslim community to submit to the imam so that he could lead them in the struggle to achieve moral purity at the social level.⁵

The idea of *ṣalāh* is likewise related to that of the *maṣlaḥa*, or the “general good” of the Muslim community, which it is the imam’s duty to look after.⁶ The imam does this by “enjoining the good and forbidding the evil;” that is, by ensuring the observance of the five pillars of Islam, and enforcing the Sharia law.⁷ *Iṣlāh*, therefore, is the moral ordering associated with the imposition of the authority of the imam’s state and the Sharia.⁸

In this context, al-Manṣūr and his supporters may have been influenced by Muḥammad ibn ‘Alī al-Shawkānī (although in contrast to the latter, the imam was a strict Hādāwī). Al-Shawkānī advocated a purification of the faith from elements associated with “polytheism” (*shirk*), and the extension of the authority of the central government, in conjunction with efforts to enforce Islamic law and instruct the common people in the principles of Islam.⁹ These principles were substantially implemented by al-Manṣūr in his program of *iṣlāh*.

This concept of *iṣlāh* is reinforced by the use of its morally opposite terms in the Zaydi context, those of *fitna*, *fasād*, and *‘iṣyān*. These words, having various connotations of strife, evil, and rebellion, effectively denote the converse of *iṣlāh* (that is, reconciliation, moral reform, and pacification). In the Zaydi thought of Yemen, they denote specifically the anarchic and immoral character of tribal life when undisciplined by the guiding hand of the imam and the Sharia.¹⁰ Before the Ottoman conquest, the term *iṣlāh* was used to describe the imams’ futile attempts to pacify the tribes of Ḥāshid and Bakīl.¹¹

Iṣlāh as undertaken by al-Manṣūr, then, included the idea of the moral disciplining of the tribes by imposing on them the authority of the imam and the Sharia. Al-Manṣūr’s imamate, however, was still strongly constrained by the

4 Ibid.

5 See for example Ghulays, *Tajdīd* 81–2, 107–8, 113–14.

6 Ghulays, *Tajdīd* 116. See also al-Shawkānī, *Rafʿ* 91 for the use of *maṣlaḥa* in the sense of “general good.”

7 Ghulays, *Tajdīd* 107–8, 113–14.

8 For the use of *iṣlāh* as “enjoining the good and forbidding the evil” see al-Shawkānī, *Rafʿ*, 90–1.

9 Al-Sharjī, *Imām* 128–9, 179.

10 For the Zaydi Islamic conception of tribal culture see Dresch, *Tribes* 185 ff., 218, 224–5. According to al-Iryānī, *ifsād* (a making perverted or corrupt, a sowing of sedition) “continues to flourish abundantly in the minds of Ḥāshid and Bakīl, leaving them only on very rare occasions.” See al-Iryānī, *Sīrat* II, 26.

11 See for example al-Ḥaymī, *Rawḍ* 27.

characteristic limitations of the tribal quasi-state. Therefore, *iṣlāḥ* as moral disciplining was usually preceded by *iṣlāḥ* as “reconciliation” of tribal factions in conflict, a key role of the sayyids in a tribal society such as that of Ḥāshid and Bakīl. The verb *aṣlahā* in the Quran is often used in the sense of peace-making or reconciliation;¹² and the mediatory role of the imam’s sayyid officials in this sense gave an opening for the imam’s state to expand its authority and implement *iṣlāḥ* in its sense of moral and religious disciplining.

In the Hijri year 1317 (1899–1900), for example, the imam sent the sayyid Muḥammad ibn al-Hādī to “make peace [in] the country of Khawlān al-Shām” (*iṣlāḥ Khawlān al-Shām*). This meant specifically to reconcile the feuding Khalḥi and Jawharī sections of that tribe, which Muḥammad ibn al-Hādī did by making a judgment in accordance with the laws of the Sharia. After this, “the commandments of God were made effective in those regions, and whoever raised his head to commit evil (*fasād*) was suppressed.”¹³

In this passage, then, *iṣlāḥ* as the reconciliation of warring parties led to the imposition of the authority of the imam’s state, so that those who commit “evil” (i.e., rebellion) could be “suppressed” (*inqama’a*); and that the legal code of the imam’s state, the Sharia was therefore enforced in the region (rather than tribal customary law). The point is made more explicit in passages dealing with the extension of the imam’s authority in the northwest.

The year 1899 witnessed a major expansion of the imam’s authority in that region, after the tribes there had been impressed with the defeats inflicted by the imam on a major expeditionary force sent against him by the Ottomans. Not everyone accepted the imam’s authority voluntarily, however, and among the recalcitrant was Shaykh Muḥammad al-Hindī of the Ḥajūr region. The imam therefore proposed to the elders (*’uqqāl*)¹⁴ of the Ḥajūr region that they “reconcile al-Hindī [to accepting the authority of the imam’s government]” (*iṣlāḥ al-Hindī*), and “put them under obligation to wage the jihad against him if he refused gifts.”¹⁵

Here again, we see the subtle transition of *iṣlāḥ* from negotiation to the forceful assertion of the authority of the imam’s state. Al-Hindī refused to come to

12 Merad, *Iṣlāḥ* 141.

13 Al-Iryānī, *Sīrat* II, 141–2.

14 The social role of the *’uqqāl* (sing. *’āqil*), a term which I have translated here as “elders,” is in need of further study. In al-Iryānī’s work, they appear as mediators between local villagers or tribesmen and the state, whether that of the imam or the Ottomans.

15 Al-Iryānī, *Sīrat* II, 132. The *’uqqāl* were evidently given these “gifts,” which were always offered to powerful shaykhs, as material inducements to join one faction or another in a conflict. Al-Hindī’s refusal to accept them would have meant refusal to submit to the imam’s authority, which in turn would justify suppressing his rebellion by force.

terms; and as a result, the imam sent a band of partisans (*ʿiṣāba*) against him, burning his territories and garrisoning its fortresses after al-Hindī had fled.¹⁶

Likewise, the *iṣlāḥ* of al-Hindī in this context is clearly connected to the imposition of Islamic law in his territories. Muḥammad al-Hindī is described literally as one of the “pillars of idolatry” (*arkān al-ṭāghūt*). “Idolatry,” or *ṭāghūt*, in the context of Zaydi-Islamic thought in Yemen, means tribal or local custom as opposed to Sharia law.¹⁷ Al-Hindī was said to have allowed women to leave their husbands without the formal divorce procedure.¹⁸ Other blameworthy customs of the Ḥajūr region included permitting interest, and allowing women to go about unveiled and mix socially with men. When the imam had established full control of the Ḥajūr area, he forbade these customs.¹⁹

What we see in the process of *iṣlāḥ*, then, is the employment by the imam and the sayyids of their mediatory function in the tribal system to build up the authority of their state on a supra-tribal basis, and thereby gradually gain a degree of autonomy for it. *Iṣlāḥ* was a spiritual conception of the process by which the imam’s state made its own legal and moral values paramount over those of tribalism. To organize the diverse Zaydi tribes under a larger state authority required the imam to overcome the particularism of individual tribal interests and local custom; and the idea of *iṣlāḥ*, with its focus on settling the selfish quarrels of the tribes and imposing the uniform legal code of the Sharia, gave the imam the ideological means to do so. How, then, did the imam’s state increase its autonomy from the tribal system in practice?

2 The *ʿiṣābāt*

A key institution in the development of the imamate as an autonomous state were the “bands” (*ʿiṣābāt*) of partisans, which became prominent after 1891. The *ʿiṣābāt* were salaried bodies of tribesmen, recruited by al-Manṣūr specifically for the purpose of waging jihad against the Ottomans under the name of “soldiers of the imam.”²⁰ The *ʿiṣābāt* could not by any stretch of the imagination be considered a standing army. The recruitment for the *ʿiṣābāt*, however, involved a separation (albeit partial) of the tribal warriors from their tribes,

16 Ibid.

17 Dresch, *Tribes* 184.

18 Al-Iryānī, *Sīrat* II, 129.

19 Al-Iryānī, *Sīrat* II, 150.

20 BBA, Y.Mtv 99/37 21 Haziran 1310/3 July 1894. Telegram from the Commandant of Yemen to the Minister of War.

and an incorporation into the state apparatus of the imam. The manner of recruitment of the *ʿiṣābāt* frequently involved a specific agreement between a given tribe and the imam for the former to supply him with a certain number of warriors, who could then be used wherever and however he saw fit.

After an agreement was negotiated between the Dhū Ghaylān tribe and the imam for the former to wage the jihad, for example, the imam required them to supply an *ʿiṣāba* of four hundred men to fight the jihad “wherever it might be [waged].” Subsequently, this *ʿiṣāba* was used to suppress Muḥammad al-Hindī.²¹ That is, they were employed outside the territory of their tribe as an instrument to enforce the authority of the imam’s state, and for purposes outside their particular tribal interests. Not all the *ʿiṣābāt*, moreover, were tribally homogeneous; one *iṣāba* consisted of men from Niḥm, Arḥab, and Khawlān.²²

The structure of command in the *ʿiṣābāt* also tended partially to separate the men from the tribal system. The commanders of the *ʿiṣābāt* were called *maqdamī* (pl. *maqādima*). Usually, they were prominent persons from within the sayyid elite. The sons of the former imam Muḥsin al-Shahārī, for example, served as *maqādima* for the imam,²³ as did the sayyid ‘Alī Ṣalāḥ.²⁴ An *ʿiṣāba* recruited from the Ḥāshid and Bakīl tribes might also be placed under a powerful shaykh in the territories under Ottoman control, if that shaykh was a partisan of the imam. An *ʿiṣāba* of Arḥab fighters, for example, was put under the command of Shaykh ‘Alī Miqdād of Anis in the central plateau.²⁵

In the context of the separation of the tribesmen from their own territory, then, the ordinary structure of military leadership in the tribe was disrupted or replaced. The chief men in command were not the tribal shaykhs, although such men might act as subordinate commanders.²⁶ Rather, they were persons directly chosen by the imam for their sayyid descent, loyalty, or outstanding service.

The dependence of the *ʿiṣābāt* warriors on the authorities of the imam’s state, rather than their tribes, was accentuated by the system by which they were maintained. The *ʿiṣābāt* received their maintenance directly from the imam, as a monthly salary of six riyals. Three were paid directly from the public

21 Al-Iryānī, *Sīrat* II, 131–2.

22 BBA, Y.Mtv 99/37, 13 Haziran 1310/25 June 1894. Telegram from the Commandant of Yemen to the Minister of War.

23 BBA, Y.Mtv 146/77, 19 Eylül 1312/1 October 1896. Note from the Minister of War to the Palace.

24 Al-Iryānī, *Sīrat* I, 298.

25 Al-Iryānī, *Sīrat* II, 174.

26 Ibid.

treasury of the Muslims, the *bayt al-māl*, and three taken from the zakat tax, which they collected on his behalf.²⁷

The *ʿiṣābāt* thus helped to strengthen the second “pillar” of the imam’s autonomous state, the public treasury of the Muslims. The imam had abundant revenues from the canonical taxes of Islamic law,²⁸ the plunder taken by the *ʿiṣābāt*, and the lands specifically attached to the public treasury.²⁹ These were placed in storehouses of grain and money (*buyūt al-amwāl*) in the protected market towns (*hijrāt*) of his territory.³⁰ Apparently as a result of the imam’s careful management, these storehouses had a constant surplus, which the imam used to fund the *ʿiṣābāt* and provide aid to the tribes for the jihad.³¹ The *ʿiṣābāt* and the *bayt al-māl* thus acted as mutually reinforcing institutions which, by virtue of al-Manṣūr’s tireless administrative work, gradually lifted his state above the vagaries of the tribal system of mobilization.

3 The *ʿiṣābāt* and the Zaydis’ Mobilization for War

The *ʿiṣābāt* assumed an increasing role alongside local potentates in the key areas of mobilization: extending the authority of the imam’s state, disseminating propaganda on his behalf, collecting taxes, and arousing the people to rebellion.

The initial steps in extending the authority of the imam’s state were no different than they had been in 1891. There was first an exchange of correspondence or envoys between the imam and the tribes of a given region. Thus in the Hijri year 1317 (1899–1900), the Banī Jumā’a section of the Khawlān tribe sent a delegation to the imam “requesting a governor (*ʿāmil*) to uphold the Shari’a and collect the [taxes] obligatory [in Islamic law]” (*al-wājibāt*).³² If there was mutual agreement in this regard, the imam would receive written undertakings (*ʿuhūd*) from the tribe in question, presumably to the effect that they would obey his orders. The tribe would then give hostages as assurance of their good conduct, and the imam’s officials would arrive in the region.³³ The imam

27 BBA, Y.Mtv 99/37, 13 Haziran 1310/25 June 1894. Telegram from the Commandant of Yemen to the Minister of War.

28 Al-Iryānī (Ṣālihiyya’s introduction), *Sīrat* I, 86–93.

29 Al-Jirāfi, *Muqataṭaf* 285.

30 Al-Iryānī (Ṣālihiyya’s introduction), *Sīrat* I, 96.

31 Al-Iryānī, *Sīrat* II, 54, 57.

32 Al-Iryānī, *Sīrat* II, 161.

33 Al-Iryānī, *Sīrat* II, 128 ff., 161, 163.

was still to a considerable extent reliant on the goodwill of the tribes, and he might be reluctant to send his officials unless he received the hostages first.³⁴

The insertion of the imam's officials or soldiers into a given region gave him a wedge with which to expand his authority. This was particularly true in the northwest and the central plateau, where the imam and the Ottomans vied bitterly for authority. This was where the *'iṣābāt* began to play an increasing role as the imamate's instrument of direct coercion.

Here, the imam would send his *'iṣābāt* and *maqādima* in direct support of the shaykhs or tribes who were his allies, who would then compel the recalcitrant to submit to the authority of the imam. In connection with his victories over the Ottomans in 1899, the imam was invited by the *'uqqāl* of the Sharaf region in the northwest to send his officials there. In the process, the people in the neighboring region of Ḥajūr also submitted to the imam. Here, however, the local shaykhs repeatedly rebelled against the imam's governors; and the imam's *maqdamī* suppressed these rebellions ruthlessly, by means of both the *'iṣābāt* and the neighboring tribes allied with the imam.³⁵

The process of extending the imam's authority in this fashion was closely tied to that of mobilizing the population for the jihad against the Ottomans. As noted, the *'iṣābāt* would often perform these duties in the company of a local shaykh. Inevitably, however, this entailed the assumption by the *'iṣābāt* of an increasingly direct role in obtaining taxes and volunteers for the war.

The *'iṣābāt* would be dispatched into the territory under Ottoman control, accompanied by scholar-propagandists for the imam (sing. *faqīh* or *mujtahid*). The *'iṣābāt* would circulate through the villages, collecting the zakat for the imam, while the scholar-propagandists accompanying them would urge the people to take part in the jihad.³⁶ Thus on 17 July 1895, the Commandant of Yemen informed the Minister of War that a *maqdamī* sent by the imam had come to the territory of Khawlān for the purpose of spreading sedition there; and the rebels had spread out for the purpose of collecting the zakat.³⁷

The rebels could employ coercion against the local people as well as persuasion. Abdullah Paşa, Feyzi Paşa's successor as the Commandant of Yemen, noted in a report to the Minister of War that the rebels threatened those who refused to pay their expenses (*iaşe ve infak*) with the plunder of their property

34 Al-Iryānī, *Sīrat* II, 161.

35 Al-Iryānī, *Sīrat* II, 132, 149.

36 BBA, Y.Mtv 182/39 6 Ağustos 1314/18 August 1898. Report (*tahrirat*) from the Commandant of Yemen to the Minister of War.

37 BBA, Y.Mtv 124/92 5 Temmuz 1311/17 July 1895. Telegram from the Commandant of Yemen to the Minister of War.

and the destruction of their villages. Thus, the villagers were forced to pay whether they wished to or not, and sometimes to join the *‘iṣābāt* in armed rebellion.³⁸

The purpose of the *‘iṣābāt* was in large part to recruit men directly in this manner, to join them in their operations against the Ottoman army; and their numbers were expected to swell as they moved about the countryside. On 1 November 1896, the Minister of War informed the sultan that two *maqādima* had come with 200 bandits into Ottoman territory, where they were increasing their numbers and summoning the tribes of Khawlān and Arḥab to rebellion.³⁹

In sum, the *‘iṣābāt* played an essential role in establishing the authority of the imam’s state in Ottoman territory, thus giving him greater overall control over the war effort. By cooperating with the imam’s troops and permitting them to collect taxes and recruits directly, the tribal shaykhs were acceding to a subtle shift in authority, away from themselves and toward the central figure of the imam. This process would ultimately result in an intangible increase in the mobilizational capability of the imam. That is, it appears that the persistent efforts of the *‘iṣābāt* to involve the local population in the jihad eventually helped to create a symbiotic cooperation between the two groups.

The experience of fighting for the imam under the direction of the *‘iṣābāt*, and making monetary sacrifices for the war effort, may have caused the Zaydis in at least some areas to identify more strongly with the imam’s cause; this may have increased their obedience to the *‘iṣābāt*, and their skill in cooperating with them. The clearest case of this was in the Anis region, where the people had a long-standing loyalty to the imam, from which they would not be swayed even by “continued suffering and the destruction of lives and property.”⁴⁰ Thus, the peasants of many locales in Anis tended to join the *‘iṣābāt* in rebellion when they arrived in the area. When an *‘iṣāba* of 70–80 men came to the *nahiye* of Jabal Shirq in Anis, “the local people united with the men of banditry” (*erbab-ı şekavet*).⁴¹ The effectiveness of guerrilla war in Anis was founded on the close cooperation of the *‘iṣābāt*, the local people, and the shaykh ‘Ali Miqdād.

The system of mobilization we have described was continuous and long-term, and it served as the foundation for a military strategy which was likewise long-term in its orientation. As such, this strategy marked a distinctive break

38 BBA, Y.Mtv 182/39 6 Ağustos 1314/18 August 1898. Report (*tahrirat*) from the Commandant of Yemen to the Minister of War.

39 BBA, Y.Mtv 147/77 19 Eylül 1312/1 October 1896. Note from the Minister of War to the Palace.

40 Al-Iryānī, *Sīrat* II, 181.

41 Y.Mtv 166/119 23 Ağustos 1313/4 September 1897. Note from the Minister of War to the Palace.

with the patterns of war which had prevailed up to the 1890s. Šāliḥiyya, in fact, describes the strategy and tactics of al-Manṣūr's forces as typical of "wars of liberation," with guerrilla attacks, bombings, and occasional assassinations of "collaborators."⁴² We do not go so far as to use the term "war of liberation," a nationalist term which undergirds Šāliḥiyya's nationalist thesis, which is not an appropriate category of analysis for the Zaydi rebellions.

Nonetheless, we do wish to amplify his point in certain regards. The strategy developed by al-Manṣūr was closer in many respects to twentieth century guerrilla war than to the patterns of war and rebellion which had prevailed in Yemen until the 1890s. In the 1890s al-Manṣūr developed a system of guerrilla war by attrition, which aimed to wear down the forces of the Ottoman state.⁴³ The characteristic guerrilla tactics of the highland tribes, historically employed in short-term wars pursued for limited aims, were subsumed into this new mode of war and transformed by it. To employ the term "total war" for this strategy may be something of an anachronism. Nonetheless it must be noted that it was much closer in aims and conception to "total war," than to the limited and "heroic" war of earlier decades; and as such, it represented a virtual revolution in the patterns of war in Yemen.

4 The Military Methods of the *ʿIsābāt*

The *ʿisābāt* employed classic guerrilla modes of warfare on their forays into Ottoman territory, making surprise attacks on Ottoman outposts, capturing their weapons and supplies, and disappearing when a larger Ottoman force appeared on the scene. The effect was to wear the Ottoman troops down in numbers, morale, and resources. ʿAlī Miqdād of Anis was particularly skilled in this type of warfare. "He had with him a band of men who were famous for their valor and fearlessness, and he ... continually raided the government centers in all the *makhālīf* ⁴⁴ of Anis ... The government would prepare a large force against him, having received the news that he was spending the night in Banī Qushayb, and morning would scarcely have come when the news would arrive that he had raided them in Ḍawrān ... this went on for many years, and the government and the country were greatly tired out."⁴⁵

42 Al-Iryānī (Šāliḥiyya's introduction), *Sīrat* 1, 102–11.

43 Šāliḥiyya has commented on the attritional character of this war, indicating that the goal of the imam's forces was to wear down the Ottoman troops by making them engage in continual movement. See al-Iryānī (Šāliḥiyya's introduction), *Sīrat* 1, 102.

44 A *mikhālīf* (pl. *makhālīf*) is a pre-Ottoman term for an administrative district in Yemen.

45 Al-Wāsiʿī, *Tārīkh* 280.

This mobile strategy of attrition required significant changes in the traditional tactics of the Zaydi highland tribes. We have noted that historically the highlanders, to defend tribal territory, would take up position in inaccessible passes or fortresses. This was a form of stationary defense, adopted when confronted by an enemy who was superior in numbers.⁴⁶ Intertribal war in Yemen could be accompanied by a show of resistance, with subsequent bargaining,⁴⁷ or the party on the defensive could simply wait in their strongholds until the invader withdrew. It was tactics of this kind which had led to the downfall of the Yemeni resistance in 1871–72.

The *‘iṣābāt*, however, were able to incorporate this system of fortress warfare into their own methods of mobile and attritional warfare. These methods were described in detail in a memorial from Abdullah Paşa, the Commandant of the Seventh Army, to the Minister of War in August 1898. According to Abdullah Paşa, whenever the government received a report that the rebel bands were in a given region, troops would be dispatched there to punish them and restore public security. Thereupon the rebels would take refuge in a fortified village, and the Ottoman troops would surround the village and bombard it with artillery. Perhaps because they were usually insufficient in number and feared open battle with the *‘iṣābāt*, they would always leave an escape route open.

The bombardment would usually do much more damage to the village than the rebels themselves, who would eventually make their escape by night. Thereupon they would occupy another fortified village, and the process would be repeated. “In this manner the bandits tire out the imperial troops ... for no good purpose; and apart from this they cause the destruction of many towns and villages, with some destroyed by themselves, and others by the Ottoman troops.”⁴⁸

The territorially based, stationary, and defensive system of fortress warfare in highland Yemen was thus replaced by a system of fortress war which was offensive and mobile. The *‘iṣābāt* were not tied to the areas in which they were fighting at any given time. The activity of the bands was particularly intense in Anis and al-Ḥayma, but they also conducted operations in Ḥajja, Khawlān, al-Ḥadā’, and Jabal Rayma.⁴⁹

46 Esat Cabir ibn Osman, Yemen 142.

47 Ahmed Ziya, Mufassal.

48 BBA, Y.Mtv 182/39 6 Ağustos 1314/18 August 1898. Memorial (*tahrirat*) from Abdullah Paşa to the Minister of War.

49 BBA, Y.Mtv 86/21 16 Tişrin-i Evvel 1309/28 October 1893. Telegram from the Commandant of Yemen to the Minister of War; Y.Mtv 124/92 5 Temmuz 1311/17 July 1895. Telegram from the Commandant of Yemen to the Minister of War; Y.Mtv 99/37 4 Muharrem 1312/8 July

In occupying fortresses, they were not seeking to defend territorial boundaries or induce the Ottomans to bargain. Rather, it appears that they were attempting to draw the Ottoman troops into pursuit and combat. This was not necessarily to obtain a clear battlefield victory, but to steadily drain them of men, supplies, and morale in a series of inconclusive campaigns.

In warfare in the field, the rebels often employed classic guerrilla tactics based on harassment, ambush, and withdrawal. Such tactics essentially reflected the strategy of mobile attrition we have outlined. That is, their greatest success was in wearing down the Ottoman expeditionary forces through repeated attack and withdrawal, rather than inflicting decisive defeat.

The effect of such guerrilla tactics was heightened by the flood of rifles which came into Yemen during the decade of the 1890s. The tribes of Yemen acquired their rifles through the arms trade which mushroomed in the European Red Sea colonies in the 1890s.⁵⁰ The center of this trade was the French port of Djibouti, where private traders congregated to sell arms to the emperor of Ethiopia and other local buyers. This trade quickly spread across the Red Sea into Yemen. The coastal tribes of Yemen became involved, ferrying cargoes of rifles to Yemen in their dhows. The Banī Marwān and Zarānīq tribes of the Tihama in particular played a major role in this trade, acting as the middlemen who sold the rifles to the tribes in the interior.⁵¹ Arms were also sold in the free port of Aden, and the sultan of Lahj was rumored to be involved in this trade.⁵² As a result, by the turn of the century virtually all the tribes of Yemen were armed with breech-loading rifles.⁵³ The French Gras rifle and the Remington rifle, were particularly common among the tribesmen.⁵⁴ These weapons had, in fact, a longer range than the Martini-Henry rifle with which the Ottoman troops were armed, putting the latter in an increasingly dangerous position.⁵⁵

The evidence suggests that the possession of rifles emboldened the rebels to stand their ground more often in the face of the Ottoman troops, taking advantage of their skill in occupying difficult terrain to engage them in lengthy positional battles. In the late spring of 1897, for example, ‘Alī Miqdād and his forces occupied 24 fortified villages in the Jabal Shirq region of Anis. Here, he

1894. Note from the Minister of War to the Yıldız Palace; Y.Mtv 173/105 17 Şubat 1313/1 March 1898. Note from the Minister of War to the Palace.

50 Atif Paşa, *Yemen* II, 148.

51 Ibid.

52 Al-Iryānī (Şāliḥiyya's introduction), *Sīrat* 1,102.

53 Yemen hatratu.

54 Atif Paşa, *Yemen* II, 149; BBA, Y.Mtv 204/44 23 Haziran 1316/6 July 1900. Report (*layiha*) from the General Staff Colonel Hüseyin Remzi Bey to the Palace.

55 Ibid.

confronted an Ottoman force of three-and-a-half battalions, with one 8 and one 9 cm. cannon.

The subsequent battles lasted for days. On Sunday, the 22nd of May, two villages were seized in the opening battle of this campaign. After this, the Ottoman force advanced against the pass (*‘aqaba*) occupied by the rebels, where the latter “opened fire on them from the precipices and numerous strong points they had occupied at the head of the pass.” The Ottomans returned fire, and the resulting battle lasted for ten hours before the pass was finally taken. After the capture of the pass, four more of the villages were taken in a series of battles lasting for three days – the first, second, and third of June.⁵⁶ Here, then, the Ottomans encountered fairly stubborn resistance by the *mujāhidīn*; it took them four days to drive the rebels out of five positions, almost a single day of fighting per position.

It appears that the possession of rifles enabled the *‘iṣābāt* to combine bouts of stubborn resistance with their characteristic mobile withdrawals, in such a way as to cause the maximum harassment and exhaustion of the Ottoman troops. Extended fighting of the type we have described would drain the Ottoman troops physically and morally, as much as a fruitless pursuit of an evanescent enemy. Nothing permanent would be gained from these battles, either in terms of securing territory or destroying the rebels. The *‘iṣābāt* would simply reappear in another place and force the Ottoman troops to repeat the process.

Tactics, then, were the final element in pushing the imam’s struggle toward total war. The *‘iṣābāt* had taken tactics which were short-term and defensive and turned them into methods of fighting which were long-term, offensive, and mobile. And as the fighting in Yemen grew increasingly to resemble that of the hard guerrilla wars of the twentieth century, the Ottomans were in turn forced to change their tactics of dealing with rebellion.

5 Conclusion

In the 1890s, then, the situation in Yemen was increasingly dangerous for the Ottomans. Al-Manṣūr had reconstructed the imamate as a viable tribal quasi-state and turned it into a formidable machine for waging guerrilla war. Rebellion in Yemen was no longer short-term, spontaneous, and fragmented by tribe and region; it was now directed by the imam as a long-term war, aimed at the destruction of Ottoman authority.

56 BBA, Y.Mtv 163/72 1 Haziran 1313/13 June 1897. Memorial from Feyzi Paşa to the Minister of War.

This in turn required the Ottomans to make fundamental changes in their own strategies of dealing with rebellion. It became clear that the manipulation of intertribal rivalries and the dispatch of intermittent punitive expeditions would no longer work. What emerged instead in the 1890s were methods of dealing with rebellion which were increasingly modern in character. These strategies employed the Pan-Islamic and absolutist ideologies of Abdülhamid's regime to justify uncompromising war against the imam, using the modern technologies of power available to Abdülhamid's state: ruthless counter-guerrilla strategies, police repression, and the extension of the control of bureaucratic institutions over the population. We will analyze these methods in the next chapters.

Feyzi Paşa and Punitive Repression

In the last chapter, we discussed the increasing effectiveness of the imam's strategy in the 1890s. His guerrillas had spread out throughout the region under Ottoman control, collecting taxes and summoning the Zaydi population to revolt. His soldiers engaged in highly effective hit-and-run tactics which were increasingly exhausting to the Ottoman troops.

Sophisticated modes of rebellion such as this required the Ottomans to modernize their methods of dealing with them. The first reaction of the Ottomans was to employ a strategy of "punitive repression." The military governor Ahmed Feyzi Paşa used ruthless military and police methods designed to break the back of the resistance through armed force.

In terms of escalation toward total war, we can see that Feyzi Paşa's policies increasingly targeted the population at large, rather than just the imam's soldiers. Atrocities against noncombatants are almost inevitable in unconventional warfare. Soldiers who cannot bring the elusive guerrillas to battle often take out their frustrations on the guerrillas' relatives who live in the villages; and this war against civilians is an important factor in pushing "small wars" upward on the continuum of violence toward total wars.

Likewise, Feyzi Paşa's repressive measures were firmly rooted in Sultan Abdülhamid's policy of Pan-Islamism, an uncompromising ideology which affirmed the absolute power of the Ottoman sultan and his sole right to the leadership of the Muslim community. As we have noted in the last chapter, it was this ideology which made it impossible to compromise with the imam, thus pushing the conflict in Yemen toward total war.

Yet the Ottomans lacked the resources to make a policy of massive repression succeed, and the violence of Feyzi Paşa's regime intensified armed resistance by the Zaydis rather than subduing it. In consequence, the Ottomans would be forced to change their strategy once again; and Feyzi Paşa's successor would try to win the active support of the Yemenis, rather than simply suppressing their resistance.

1 The "Unity of Islam" Policy, Repression, and Total War

In analyzing the dynamics of Ottoman repression, we will first discuss how Abdülhamid used Pan-Islamist thought to serve the ends of what we have

described as “split-up modernization.” In the introduction, we discussed the peculiarly brittle character of ideology in autocratic states engaged in this type of modernization. To strengthen the state, the autocrat has to modernize its institutions; yet the educated governing and professional classes he must create to do so are those who will ultimately challenge the legitimacy of his rule.

To ward off these challenges, modernizing autocrats have historically contrived ideologies of rule in which the prerogatives of absolutism and divine right coexist with some of the mass-mobilizing elements of modern nationalism. The autocrat may adopt a quasi-messianic role, in which his traditional role as absolute ruler endowed with the divine mandate and educated modernizer complement each other. It is he who has been chosen to lead the masses under his rule on the path toward civilization and national unity, so that they may take their rightful place among the great nations of the world. To accomplish his mission, his subjects owe him unquestioning obedience.

Such ideas implicitly justify the ruler’s use of his expanded military and police capability to crush dissent, both within the newly educated classes created by his regime and the “traditional” groups hurt by his policies of monolithic centralization.¹ Within this process, a loosening of customary restraints on the ruler’s exercise of force may take place. Aware of the insecurity of his position, the ruler increasingly resorts to violence to bolster his position. This, of course, results in the further erosion of his legitimacy, and further resort to violence. In places such as Iran, Ethiopia, and the Ottoman Empire, such rulers created a “tradition” of bureaucratized violence which was carried very much further by those who eventually overthrew them.²

Here, we intend to show how Abdülhamid’s “unity of Islam” policy played this role in Yemen, serving to justify the suppression of the traditionally dominant groups of Zaydi society who had been hurt by his centralizing policies. First, we will briefly recapitulate the main tenets of this philosophy. Abdülhamid sought to outflank the appeal of ethnic nationalism (*kavmiyet*) by attempting to “modernize” Islamic identity and give it some of the mass mobilizing appeal of modern nationalism.³ In this he was inspired by the Pan-Islamic ideas developed by the Young Ottomans, who in turn were influenced by Pan-Germanism

1 For academic analyses of modernizing autocracies in Iran and Ethiopia, see Said Amir Arjomand, *Turban* 59 ff.; Lata, *Ethiopian state* 155 ff.; and Tibebe, *Making* 106 ff. For literary works exploring the social consequences of repression and alienation under these regimes, see Baraheni, *Crowned cannibals* 99–130; and Kapuściński, *Emperor* 47, 99.

2 Ervand Abrahamian’s *Tortured Confessions*, for example, documents the steady increase in the violence and sophistication of the Iranian prison and torture system from the time of Reza Shah to the Islamic Republic.

3 Karpat, *Politicization* 321 ff.

and the threat posed by Pan-Slavism.⁴ Cemil Aydın has shown that the “unity of Islam” policy was in part a reaction by elements of the Ottoman intelligentsia to the racist-imperialist nationalism of the late nineteenth century.⁵ Similarly, Kemal Karpat links the definitive emergence of the “unity of Islam” policy as a state ideology to the discrediting of Tanzimat liberalism by the military defeats of 1877–8.⁶

Under Abdülhamid, the religious identity of Islam became the religio-national one of *İslamiyet*, stressing communal unity and loyalty to the state, and aimed at mobilizing the Muslim community to defend itself against the predatory nations of Europe.⁷ The Sunni Muslim duty (*farz*) of obedience (*itaat*) to legitimate authority thus became that of unquestioned loyalty to the Ottoman caliphate and the person of Abdülhamid. Such loyalty was referred to as “love” (*mahabbet*), and tied to a personality cult of Abdülhamid.⁸

These increasing demands on Muslims’ loyalty, however, were not paralleled by an opening up of the political system. Muslim populations were, in fact, increasingly repressed and held at arms’ length. The dictatorial and pro-nationalist violence inherent in Abdülhamid’s concept of *İslamiyet* likewise was not consistent with the moral underpinnings of Sunni political philosophy, even in its qualified support of absolutism. As a result, its actual role came to be that of legitimating the violence of the autocrat’s policies for the ruling elite, which was charged with suppressing the rising opposition to the state on his behalf. Nowhere was this more apparent than among the Zaydis of Yemen, among whom loyalty to the Ottoman caliphate was qualified by the ideology of resistance to an unjust governing authority, and who did not have the tradition of Ottoman rule that most of the Sunni Arab regions had.

This is evident in a document of Feyzi Paşa’s regime which contains the main justifications for the Ottomans’ war against the imam, a letter to al-Manşūr written by the Ottoman envoy Sayyid Muḥammad al-Ḥarīrī al-Rifāʿī al-Hamāwī. First, the letter is a summons to the imam to submit, rather than an attempt to negotiate with him. Sayyid Muḥammad first takes issue with al-Manşūr’s imamate, which constituted an implicit challenge to Abdülhamid’s claim to the leadership of the Muslim community. The descendants of the Prophet no longer have a legitimate claim on the leadership of the Muslim community, because it was not ordained in “the will of God” (*al-qadar*) that the caliphate

4 Mardin, *Genesis* 60–1.

5 Aydın, *Politics* 59–69.

6 Karpat, *Politicization* 153–4.

7 Karpat, *Politicization* 321 ff.; Mehmed Emin Paşa, Yemen 6–8 (my pagination).

8 Mehmed Emin Paşa, Yemen 7 (my pagination).

should remain with them.⁹ The lawful caliphate has instead been transferred to the Ottoman line.

Sayyid Muḥammad now goes on to enjoin obedience to the sultan in language reflecting the traditional Sunni political philosophy of submission to authority. Abdülhamid II is “the guardian of the lands of the Muslims and the keeper of the *ḥarām*, the house of God ... he fills his council with the ulama, who carry out the decrees of the Creator, and applies himself with diligence to the duties (*farāʿid*) of religion and the customs (*sunan*) [of the Prophet].”¹⁰ The sultan thus fulfills the essential requirements of legitimacy in the Sunni political tradition, public maintenance of major Islamic ritual practices and moral principles,¹¹ together with the actual power to protect the Muslim community. Therefore, “obedience to [the sultan] is a duty of religion (*mafrūḍa*) and service to him is lawful (*mashrūʿa*).” Conversely, “to rise up against him is dissent [from the consensus of the community] and aggression” (*al-khurūj alayhi baghy wa-ʿudwān*).¹²

Several points are worthy of note here. First, there is an explicit recognition of the ideological character of the war in this letter, conceived within the traditional Sunni legal language of political authority. The war is described as a conflict between two claimants to the leadership of the Muslim community. The imam is described as being guilty of *baghy*, which in Islamic legal language means rebellion against the rightful imam with a religious or political basis.¹³

Second, it is clear from the language of the letter that there cannot be a power-sharing compromise between the rival claimants. The letter has the character of a call to the *bughā*, the rebels, to submit. Historically, such a call to submit was a legal requirement in Sunni Islam, before the state could proceed against rebels with military force.¹⁴ The rationale for obedience to the caliph given here, however, is defined in terms which derive partially from nineteenth century nationalism and partly from traditional beliefs about the necessity for the unity of the Muslims. Unity of the Muslims under the state that represents them is necessary to survive the murderous nationalist competition of the time. The times require the imam “to desist from such action” because the imperialist powers of Europe are constantly watching to exploit sedition within the Empire for their own ends. As a result, “the hearts of the unbelievers have been gratified” by the imam’s sedition.

9 Al-Washālī, *Dhayl* 43.

10 Ibid.

11 Lewis, *Political* 99.

12 Al-Washālī, *Dhayl* 43.

13 Khadduri, *War* 77–9.

14 Ibid.; Lewis, *Political* 81–2.

The necessities imposed by the Hobbesian character of the Muslims' struggle for survival therefore ultimately override the limitations which adherence to Islamic law would impose. The Sunni jurists of the Middle Ages such as al-Mawardī and others only permit limited war against those who commit *baghy*, refusal on religious or political grounds to accept the lawfully constituted authority of the imam. They are not to be killed if taken captive, and their property should not be destroyed.¹⁵ Wars of extermination are reserved for those who committed *fasād*, "evildoing," or *shaqāwa*, "banditry," conceived as purely criminal disturbances of the peace.¹⁶

In this letter, however, we see a marked departure from these specifically legal limits. Sayyid Muḥammad goes on to advise the imam that his *baghy* "has necessarily caused the wrath of the sultan against you ... and he has taken an oath ... that if you do not keep within your proper bounds (*lam taqif 'inda ḥaddik*) that he will kill you and those who follow you with the sword of your forefather [Muḥammad], because you have undertaken an affair which will destroy the pillars of religion, and excited the action of the people of wickedness (*fasād*)."¹⁷ Therefore, despite the fact that the imam is specifically accused only of *baghy* in the first half of the letter, he is to be kept within bounds by the punishment for *fasād*.

What we see in this letter, then, is a manipulation of the legal ideas historically associated with the Sunni Ottoman state to serve the proto-nationalist philosophy of Pan-Islamism, in such a manner as to justify unrestrained violence in quashing the Zaydi rebellion. Such legal restraints on the ruler as existed in the historic Sunni philosophy of government have been eroded for "reason of state," although such reason is still defined in Islamic terms.

The reduction of the moral argument of the "unity of Islam" policy to the simple sanction of force is made explicit in the final lines of Sayyid Muḥammad's letter. "Upon my life, the Arabs have not the power to make war on the Sublime State under any circumstances but have dug for themselves the pits of punishment and destruction; for the soldiers of the government have descended on Yemen in numbers like the sands. May the Arabs fear God ... and may they be led toward obedience to God and his Prophet through their obedience to our Lord, the Commander of the Faithful."¹⁸

This passage seems to finally lock the government into the policy of violence which the moral rhetoric of the letter has been gradually constructing. Up to this point, the conflict has been between the sultan and the imam as one

15 Khadduri, *War* 77–9; Lewis, *Political* 81–2.

16 Lewis, *Political* 81.

17 Al-Washālī, *Dhayl* 44.

18 Al-Washālī, *Dhayl* 45.

who commits *baghy*, together with the “people of wickedness” who support him. Now the conflict is between the “Sublime State” and the “Arabs,” a term probably referring to the Zaydi tribal population. A rhetoric of government omnipotence almost literally threatens the “Arabs” with extermination unless they submit, in accordance with their Muslim duties as defined by the state.

In short, the moral fortress constructed for the state by Sayyid Muḥammad in this letter is complete, and the guns are trained on the “Arabs” of Yemen. The power and absolute moral superiority of Abdülhamid’s regime render compromise with the imam, who claims a similar right to leadership of the Muslim community, impossible; and Abdülhamid’s duty as the protector of Islam requires him to make war on the imam until he submits or is completely destroyed. The “unity of Islam” policy, like the nationalisms which it partially sought to imitate, thus became an ideology of total war.

2 Total War and Feyzi Paşa

Feyzi Paşa, a man who by the account of his contemporaries was irascible, authoritarian, and cynically corrupt,¹⁹ was ideally suited to implement this strategy. Feyzi Paşa set out to eradicate the insurgency in Yemen by main force, relying on police and counter-guerrilla techniques. War in Yemen therefore began to lose its archaic character as a negotiation by intermittent violence of the boundary between state and tribal power. Instead, it became closer to Clausewitz’ “ideal” war, that is, an uncompromising contest of wills focused on the absolute subjugation of the enemy.

We may describe Feyzi Paşa’s policy as one of “punitive repression,” as opposed to the softer methods of “hearts and minds” counterinsurgency. As developed by a series of colonial military strategists from Bugeaud to Trinquier, “punitive repression” is based on three major principles. First, insurgency is viewed primarily as a military problem, and therefore priority is given to dealing with its military aspects. Second, the use of harsh measures such as the destruction of villages, crops, and livestock is approved as a means of cowering the population into submission.²⁰ Third, the organizational network of the insurgency is crushed by means of forceful police measures. These may include mass arrests, the creation of an extensive intelligence network, and interrogation with torture.²¹

19 Ahmed Izzet Paşa, *Feryadım* 1, 39.

20 See Callwell, *Small wars* 144–8.

21 Trinquier, *Modern warfare* 21–3, 31–40, 43–51.

The guerrilla organization must also be crushed militarily. The government should extend its authority into the “base area” of the guerrillas, the remote region from which they organize their operations. This involves covering the area with a network of roads and military posts, if necessary, and sending out mobile columns to hunt down the guerrilla bands.²²

A government which employs this kind of strategy must have the military power and the resources to bring continuous force to bear in all sectors of a restive society for an extended period of time. This requires a massive investment in manpower, intelligence, and infrastructure. In this context, the appalling dynamics of racism and repression may ultimately result in the destruction of the social base of the guerrillas through deportation or genocide. The French suppression of ‘Abd al-Qādir was essentially based on these kinds of measures, as was the crushing of the Sanūsiyya insurgency in Libya by the Italian fascist government.²³

It has often happened, however, that policies of a punitive and repressive character have been undertaken by governments without the military or financial resources to sustain them. Where these are lacking, repressive policies can result in the rapid rise of armed opposition which quickly outstrips the ability of the state to suppress. In this case, the state often cannot stabilize the situation even temporarily. The fiercer the repression, the fiercer the resistance, so that the state sinks ever deeper into a morass of violence which threatens its very existence.

This was what happened in Yemen during Feyzi Paşa’s tenure as governor. Viewing the situation in Yemen primarily as a military problem, he devoted the bulk of the administration’s limited resources toward strengthening the position of the Seventh Army vis-à-vis the rebels. His major objective was to prevent the rebel bands from gaining a permanent foothold in Ottoman territory. To do this, he implemented a strategy based on both static defense and active engagement.

The construction of new fortifications was the key aspect of static defense. These fortifications had two purposes: to reduce the vulnerability of the Ottoman lines of communication in the event of rebellion, and to provide a network of military posts which the rebel bands would find difficult to slip through. The Ottoman garrisons in the highlands were dependent on the continuous flow of supplies from the port of Ḥudayda to Şan’ā’, and Feyzi Paşa realized that keeping this route open was the key to maintaining control in Yemen.

22 Callwell, *Small wars* 131–42.

23 Danziger, *Abd al-Qadir* 9; Ahmida, *Making* 137–40.

As a result, walled military posts (*karakolhane*) were constructed on the Şan‘ā’-Ḥudayda road throughout Feyzi Paşa’s tenure as governor.²⁴ Likewise, Feyzi Paşa ordered the construction of a ring of fortresses on the mountains surrounding Şan‘ā’, where the besieging tribesmen had taken up their positions in the previous rebellion.²⁵

In this manner, Feyzi Paşa sought to ensure that the Ottoman forces would enjoy an improved defensive position in the event of another uprising. The construction of fortifications, however, was not confined to the major lines of communication. Feyzi Paşa also greatly increased the number of military posts throughout the whole region under Ottoman control “to prevent the bandits from spreading into the interior of the country.”²⁶ The posts were thus to serve as a means of observing and checking the movements of the imam’s *‘iṣābāt*.

This, then, was the static defense aspect of Feyzi’s policy. Active engagement involved the employment of mobile columns which were to engage the *‘iṣābāt* in battle. In the summer of 1894, for example, the imam sent an *‘iṣāba* of 300 men to enter Ottoman territory from the region of al-Ḥadā’ to the east. As a result of timely instructions to the Commandant of Dhamār, however, troop units were dispatched to al-Ḥadā’; and fearing attack by these units, the rebels withdrew into the desert to the east.²⁷

The use of posts and mobile columns does not appear to have been implemented as anything like the systematic strategy envisioned by thinkers such as Callwell or Trinquier. These men envisioned a massive investment of resources to cover a given territory with a network of military posts and to send out mobile columns to systematically hunt down the guerrilla bands. Rather, Feyzi Paşa’s strategy appears to have been primarily reactive in nature.

The Ottoman forces were spread out across the country to deal with the guerrillas as best they could, because it was never known where they would appear; and mobile columns were dispatched against guerrillas whenever news of their appearance in a given region came, in maneuvers that appear as primarily defensive in nature. The military thinkers who have developed systematic strategies of posts and mobile columns stress, by contrast, aggressive

24 Al-Waṣḥalī, *Dhayl* 41. The chronicler mistakenly attributes this program of fortification to Feyzi’s immediate predecessor Hasan Edip Paşa.

25 Al-Wāsi’ī, *Tārīkh* 154.

26 BBA, Y.Mtv 182/39 6 Ağustos 1314/18 August 1898. Memorial (*tahrirat*) from Abdullah Paşa to the Minister of War.

27 BBA, Y.A. Res. 71/48 16 Haziran 1310/28 June 1894. Minutes (*mazbata*) of the Administrative Council of the Province of Yemen, sent to the Council of Ministers (*Meclis-i Vükela*).

seizure of the initiative. Operations ultimately should be extended to the guerrillas' base area for a decisive victory to be achieved.²⁸

The Ottomans never had the resources to do this. Upper Yemen, which effectively constituted the base area of the imam, remained outside the control of the government. In consequence, the initiative remained with the imam, and the policy of suppressing the revolt militarily could never be carried to its logical conclusion. At the strategic level, operations against the *'iṣābāt* in the south could only constitute a defensive holding action, as long as the army could not strike decisively at the imam's capability to organize these bands in the first place.

Similar points could be made with regard to the question of the Ottomans' use of repressive violence in Yemen. It is very difficult for a government that relies on main force to suppress insurgency to succeed without massive police control and the destruction of the social base of the guerrillas. Force applied as intermittent brutality rather than sustained pressure will tend simply to drive the population into the arms of the guerrillas. Apart from the basic immorality and short-sightedness of any repressive policy, this was the main problem with Feyzi Paşa's strategy.

The military operations were conducted with little regard for the well-being of the civilian population. Often, the peasants were punished harshly for real or assumed collaboration with the enemy. When the *'iṣābāt* occupied a fortified village and gave battle, the Ottoman units typically sought to drive them out with massive artillery fire. This, of course, had disastrous consequences for the property of the inhabitants. If the *'iṣābāt* left before the arrival of the Ottoman troops, the latter would burn the village.²⁹ Such measures resulted in substantial disruption of Zaydi rural society without its outright destruction. The Ottomans made themselves unpopular and supplied the guerrillas with willing collaborators at the same time.

The imam's guerrillas, moreover, were usually recruited from the Ḥāshid and Bakil tribes outside Ottoman control; and these tribes remained largely untouched. Destroying the social base of the guerrillas in this context would have entailed the extension of Ottoman control to Upper Yemen, and deportation or internment of the tribes there. This was not done, although such a measure was proposed by an Ottoman officer in 1900.³⁰

28 See Trinquier, *Modern warfare* 81–6.

29 BBA, Y.Mtv 182/39 6 Ağustos 1314/18 August 1898. Memorial (*tahrirat*) from Abdullah Paşa to the Minister of War.

30 Y.Mtv 204/44 23 Haziran 1316/6 July 1900. Report (*layiha*) from the General Staff Colonel Hüseyin Remzi Bey to the Palace.

These, then, were the military measures which Feyzi Paşa put into effect to contain the rebellion. In political terms, Feyzi Paşa implemented repressive policies in keeping with Abdülhamid's policies of dictatorial centralization and promotion of the Ottoman caliphate. François Georgeon has shown that in the 1890s Abdülhamid consolidated and extended his personal rule in a manner which was increasingly repressive. Power was centralized in the bureaucracy of the Yıldız Palace which communicated directly with Abdülhamid. Oaths of loyalty to the sultan were required of government officials on assuming office, draconian press censorship was implemented, and efforts were made to subdue the historically autonomous tribes of the Empire and bring the provinces under closer government control.³¹

Such policies were reflected in Feyzi Paşa's regime in Yemen. As stated, the existence of the imamate constituted an explicit challenge to Abdülhamid's claim to the caliphate. No compromise, therefore, was possible; the imam's political influence was to be eradicated from Ottoman territory in Yemen. Feyzi Paşa thus began a program of mass arrests designed to wipe out the imam's network of political supporters. Anyone suspected of collaboration with the imam was imprisoned, whether the evidence warranted it or not.

This program was begun toward the end of 1892, shortly after Feyzi Paşa returned from an expedition to Upper Yemen. At this time, Abdülhamid issued an order to the effect that the names of the Zaydi military chieftains (*reisler*) and religious propagandists (*müctehidler*) should be supplied to the central government, with a view to their exile from Yemen. Upon this, Feyzi Paşa undertook to arrest a number of shaykhs, sayyids, and qadis on the suspicion that they had links with the imam.³² This action inaugurated a period of severe repression which lasted until his departure from office in 1898.

For these years, al-Wāsi'i complains that the people of Şan'ā' were "greatly oppressed" (*fī zulm shadīd*) by the government's brutal and indiscriminate police measures. The colonel of the gendarmerie regiment in Yemen, Mirza Bey, was particularly notorious in this regard; and in one year "no day passed without [Mirza] beating and imprisoning a number of people."³³

As with the military operations in the countryside, such policies involved the employment of indiscriminate violence without the reserves of force necessary to suppress the inevitable reaction. In response to Feyzi Paşa's oppression, bands of partisans began to carry out acts of "terror" in Şan'ā' and other towns, blowing up government buildings and occasionally killing soldiers.

31 Georgeon, *Abdülhamid* 263–70.

32 Al-Wāsi'i, *Tārīkh* 155–6.

33 Al-Wāsi'i, *Tārīkh* 158.

The government responded by imprisoning everyone in the neighborhoods where the explosions took place, which served only to alienate the population further.³⁴

Since the Ottoman administration did not have a large police force to maintain control of the capital, soldiers who were urgently needed for military operations had to be kept in garrison there. In 1898, Feyzi Paşa reported that he could only send a limited number of troops from Şan'ā' to deal with the rebellion in the countryside because the "people [of the city] ... would rise up" if the garrison there was weakened.³⁵

This was the situation in the capital. In the countryside, it was worse. In July 1894, the *mutasarrıf* of Hüdudya reported to the grand vizier that the shaykhs and people of Yemen were going over to the imam "in droves" (*fevc fevc*) on account of the tyranny of the governor of Yemen.³⁶ Guerrilla war intensified in the region south of Şan'ā', and uprisings broke out in the west and northwest as well.

Feyzi Paşa thus succeeded in driving the Zaydi population into the arms of the rebels without doing much injury to the organization of the latter or extending the control of the government in an effective manner. In consequence, the military situation became more and more difficult for the government to control.

The problem was exacerbated by the poverty and corruption of Feyzi Paşa's administration, together with the poor communications of Yemen. Soldiers were regularly defrauded of their pay and rations by higher officers. Walter Harris, who traveled to Yemen shortly after its reconquest by Feyzi Paşa, noted the contrast between the living conditions of the high officials and the troops in his description of the sights of Şan'ā'. "Again it is some ill-fed, ill-clothed Turkish soldier, ... with his face unshaven and sunk with illness; and as one is still watching him, there rattles past a shabby victoria, in which is seated some fat Pasha or Bey ... and one knows that as often as not, his clothes, his carriage, and his horse are bought with the money that ought to feed the soldiers, for but a small proportion of the pay of the troops ever reaches them."³⁷

Even had the command of the Seventh Army been honest, however, the poor communications of Yemen rendered the distribution of supplies among

34 Al-Wāsi'i, *Tārīkh* 159; BBA, Y.Mtv 99/37 4 Muharrem 1312/8 July 1894. Note from the Minister of War to the Yıldız Palace.

35 BBA, Y.Mtv 178/72 25 Mayıs 1314/6 June 1898. Telegram from Feyzi Paşa to the Minister of War.

36 BBA, Y.Mtv 99/37 4 Muharrem 1312/8 July 1894. Note from the Minister of War to the Grand Vizier.

37 Harris, *Journey* 317–18.

its garrisons of Yemen problematic. We have noted in Chapter Three that before the 1891 rebellion the Ottomans had been entirely dependent on caravan transport to supply their troops, owing to the absence of railroads or roads suitable for wheeled traffic; and this did not change during Feyzi Paşa's tenure as governor. Apart from the slowness and vulnerability of caravan transport, it was always difficult to find enough animals to carry the soldiers' provisions. This was especially true in times of drought, when transport animals died from lack of fodder; and as it turned out, there was a prolonged period of drought in Yemen from about 1893 to 1898. Shortly after taking office, Feyzi Paşa's successor wrote that so many animals had died during the drought that the transport of supplies from Ḥudayda was impossible. The provisions sent from Istanbul were piling up in Ḥudayda and would eventually rot, while the troops in Şan'ā' were going hungry.³⁸

It proved impossible under these circumstances to keep the Ottoman soldiers alive among the abundant microbes of Yemen, much less healthy. The death rate from illness was very high among the Ottoman troops. Cholera plagues periodically decimated the ranks of the soldiers. In the Hijri year 1310 (1892–3), there was a major cholera epidemic in Yemen, so that “many [of the Ottoman troops] died, until only a few were left.”³⁹ One Ottoman officer estimated that by the end of Feyzi Paşa's tenure as governor, the strength of the army in Yemen had dwindled to about 8,000 men as a result of cholera.⁴⁰

The year of the first cholera epidemic was also the year in which Feyzi Paşa put the more repressive aspects of his program into effect. The paşa was thus enforcing increasingly violent policies with what was, in all likelihood, a steadily decreasing number of troops. As the Ottoman soldiers were being decimated by cholera, the numbers of the *‘iṣābāt* were increasing as a result of drought.⁴¹

Raiding in the south was a traditional means of survival for the northern tribesmen when they could not cultivate their fields, and the imam had enough reserves in grain and cash to pay them to do it. When we consider that deep-rooted insurgencies in the twentieth century have taken hundreds

38 BBA, Y.Mtv 180/35 9 Temmuz 1314/21 July 1898. Telegram from the Commandant of the Seventh Army (Abdullah Paşa) to the Minister of War.

39 Al-Wāsiī, *Tārīkh* 155.

40 Atif Paşa, *Yemen* II, 172.

41 Reports from the authorities in Yemen indicate that drought facilitated the recruitment of volunteers for the *‘iṣābāt*. See BBA, Y.Mtv 99/37 13 Haziran 1310/25 June 1894. Telegram from Feyzi Paşa to the Minister of War.

of thousands of troops to suppress,⁴² the impossibility of maintaining control of Yemen with the troops available to the Seventh Army becomes clear.

3 The Rebellion of 1898

The steadily rising tide of unrest culminated in a major uprising of the tribes of the Ḥajūr region and of Ḥāshid and Bakīl in 1898.⁴³ Ḥajūr is a mountainous, coffee growing region in the northwest highlands, and its social and tribal structure seems to be incompletely understood. The sources mention the tribes of Banī Jill, Aflaḥ, Aslam and Nawsān as being important tribes of that region. The events of this rebellion would prove them to be tough fighters against the Ottoman forces.

The chief garrison of this region was the citadel of Qufl. Built by an Ottoman military engineer, the citadel had six fortified military posts surrounding it. The citadel was meant to guard the Ḥajūr region from an attack coming from the region outside government control,⁴⁴ and presumably also to maintain some level of control over the local tribes. At the time of the rebellion Qufl was under the command of Major Bahattin Efendi.

The immediate cause of the rebellion was a tax-collecting expedition undertaken by Bahattin Efendi in the territory of the Banī Jill tribe, an area where there were no government military posts.⁴⁵ According to Rüştü, Bahattin Efendi had come to an agreement with the shaykh of Banī Jill for his aid in collecting taxes from his tribesmen, in return for which he would get a share of the taxes. According to al-Iryānī, however, the shaykh, Yaḥyā ibn Nāṣir al-Imām, was already intriguing with the imam to undertake the jihad on the imam's behalf.⁴⁶

As al-Iryānī tells it, the spark of rebellion was ignited when a tribesman of Banī Jill, angered by the Ottoman force's confiscation of his grain, attacked the Ottoman force with the shaykh's encouragement; and upon this the "common people" (*al-āmma*) rose up and killed several of the Ottoman soldiers.⁴⁷ Whatever the truth of this story, there can be no doubt that the tax-collecting

42 The Algerian insurrection took about 400,000 troops to suppress. See O'Ballance, *Algerian insurrection* 215.

43 BBA, Y.Mtv 178/72 25 Mayıs 1314/6 June 1898. Telegram from Feyzi Paşa to the Minister of War.

44 Rüştü, *Yemen* 80.

45 Ibid.

46 Al-Iryānī, *Sīrat* I, 486.

47 Al-Iryānī, *Sīrat* I, 487.

activities of the Ottomans had caused hardship and bitter resentment among the Banī Jill tribesmen, and that it did not take much for their anger to flare up in open rebellion.

A fierce battle subsequently took place on 26 January 1898 in which Bahattin Efendi was either killed or wounded and taken captive, depending on whether you believe al-Iryānī or Rüştü.⁴⁸ The Ottoman force subsequently retreated to Bayt ‘Albās, Bayt al-Qarwī, and al-Wasaṭ—presumably fortified villages in Banī Jill—and the tribesmen of Banī Jill surrounded them on all sides. Outmanned and outgunned, the Ottoman soldiers asked for the *aman* (that is, a promise of safe conduct in return for surrender). When they went out of the villages, however, the tribesmen fell on them, killed many and took some captive, and seized several hundred Martini-Henry rifles.⁴⁹

News of this battle spread quickly and galvanized the Arabs, and it looked like the Ottoman government might have another major rebellion on its hands. The total number of Ottoman troops in Yemen had sunk to 8,000 men and Feyzi Paşa did not have enough troops to mount a major punitive expedition.⁵⁰

What Feyzi Paşa did, then, was to prepare a force of five battalions under the command of Raşid Paşa,⁵¹ which were assembled from the troops in the Tihama.⁵² His orders to Raşid Paşa stated explicitly that he was not to go up into the mountains but remain at their foot, making a show of force (*irae-i satvet*) on the one hand, and attempting to solve the problem peacefully on the other.⁵³ Feyzi Paşa himself had written to the Banī Jill tribesmen stating that the government had pardoned their killing of the Ottoman soldiers and would only take punitive action if the captured weapons were not returned.⁵⁴

Raşid Paşa, however, did not obey his orders, but pushed deep into the Ḥajūr region to its chief garrison in Qufl.⁵⁵ He adopted an aggressive policy and attacked the tribe of Banī Jill.⁵⁶ Meanwhile, the Banī Jill and the people of the Sharafayn region in Ḥajūr had written to the imam asking for a *maqdamī* to lead them against the Ottoman force. Accordingly, the imam sent to them the Sayf al-Islām Muḥammad ibn al-Imām al-Hādī, with the purpose of uniting the people of Sharaf against the Ottomans.⁵⁷

48 Al-Iryānī, *Sīrat* 1, 487–8; Rüştü, *Yemen* 81.

49 Al-Iryānī, *Sīrat* 1, 488.

50 Rüştü, *Yemen* 81.

51 Ibid.

52 Al-Iryānī, *Sīrat* 1, 489.

53 Rüştü, *Yemen* 81.

54 Al-Iryānī, *Sīrat* 1, 488.

55 Al-Iryānī, *Sīrat* 1, 489.

56 Rüştü, *Yemen* 82.

57 Al-Iryānī, *Sīrat* 1, 489.

At first it looked like Raşid Paşa's aggressive strategy would be successful. The Ottoman soldiers overran the villages of Banī Jill and the rebel forces were forced to retreat before them.⁵⁸ The tide turned, however, when the Ottoman force blockaded a group of the rebels in Bayt al-Qarū, presumably a fortified village in Banī Jill. The Ottoman force set up two guns against Bayt al-Qarū, and we may assume that there was a fierce exchange of rifle fire between the two sides to accompany the bombardment.⁵⁹

What seems to have decided the battle in the rebels' favor was the deadly aim of the Yemeni marksmen when firing at close quarters. The artillery was set up close to the house where the leaders of the rebels were. According to al-Iryānī, none of the shells actually hit the house, but those firing from the house hit the Ottoman officers.⁶⁰ According to Rüştü, the other tribes of Sharaf, including the Banī Aslam and Aflāḥ tribes, joined the battle when they heard the sound of artillery fire.⁶¹ Al-Iryānī, giving a slightly different version of these events, says that these men had taken up positions in the wadis to await the outcome of the battle. The battle continued until evening, with the rebels intending to fight until nightfall and then flee, in accordance with the guerrilla tactics of the Arabs.⁶²

According to Rüştü, the rebels were on the point of fleeing when some of the Ottoman soldiers, unnerved by the loss of their officers, began to retreat; and this caused panic and flight among the rest of the force.⁶³ Rüştü likewise states that the broken terrain and thick coffee forests of Banī Jill made it impossible to keep the Ottoman force under the strict control of the commanding officer.⁶⁴ Al-Iryānī states that the rebels were on the point of flight when they saw that the Ottoman soldiers were attempting to remove their guns before nightfall, and taking advantage of this moment of vulnerability, launched an attack against them.⁶⁵ Apparently the Ottoman soldiers then panicked and took to their heels.

As the Ottoman soldiers were scattering in the broken terrain the Arabs who had taken up their positions in the wadis then fell on them and killed them, in spite of the fact that the Ottoman soldiers threw down their weapons in the hope that this would save them. The rebels then took the rifles and the artillery pieces that the Ottoman soldiers had abandoned. Rüştü gives the Ottoman

58 Ibid.

59 Al-Iryānī, *Sīrat* I, 493.

60 Ibid.

61 Rüştü, *Yemen* 82.

62 Al-Iryānī, *Sīrat* I, 493.

63 Rüştü, *Yemen* 82.

64 Ibid.

65 Al-Iryānī, *Sīrat* I, 493.

losses as twelve officers and one hundred fifty-three soldiers “martyred,” five officers and one hundred twenty-eight soldiers wounded, and three hundred rifles lost to the rebels.⁶⁶ The number of losses among the officers appears especially high, and in addition, we can be sure that Rūṣṭū is minimizing his figures.

After this battle the Ottoman force fell back on the fortified strong points of Banī Madikha, the chief strong point of Qufī Shamir, and Shāhil.⁶⁷ After this there was a general uprising of the “bandits,”⁶⁸ and the imam sought to seize all the strong points of the Ḥajūr region, with the ultimate purpose of taking control of all the highlands and driving the Ottomans down to the Tihama.⁶⁹ The Ottomans lost territory in the Ḥajūr region as the strong points of Shāhil, Qaryat al-Faṣīḥ and some important military posts were seized by the rebels.⁷⁰

In May 1898 the Ḥāshid and Bakīl tribal confederations wrote to the imam asking him to organize them to wage the jihad.⁷¹ The imam feared that they were motivated by the hope of easy plunder rather than a desire to serve God, but nonetheless he sent two *maqādima* to lead them into battle, appointing the sayyid and *‘ālim* Ṣafī al-Islām Aḥmad ibn Qāsim Ḥamīd al-Dīn over Ḥāshid, and the sayyid Ṣayf al-Islām Muḥammad ibn al-Mutawakkil ‘alā Allāh over Bakīl.

Ḥāshid assembled in Khamir, the chief town of their territory, on 29 May 1898.⁷² Bakīl assembled with their *maqdamī* ‘Izz al-Islām in Rijām,⁷³ a wadi seventeen kilometers northeast of Ṣan‘ā.⁷⁴ Both forces then proceeded to advance southward. Hearing that the new governor Hüseyin Hilmi Paşa was in Matna, a town on the road from Ḥudayda to Ṣan‘ā, Ḥāshid advanced against that town, believing that they would obtain easy plunder thereby.⁷⁵

The Ottoman troops were outside their fortifications when the Ḥāshid force arrived; but some of the tribesmen fired their rifles prematurely, and the soldiers were able to enter their fortifications and take up their positions before Ḥāshid could fall on them. As a result, Ḥāshid got hard knocks instead of the easy plunder they were expecting. Fighting continued for four days, and when

66 Rūṣṭū, *Yemen* 82.

67 Al-Iryānī, *Sīrat* I, 495.

68 Rūṣṭū, *Yemen* 82.

69 Rūṣṭū, *Yemen* 83.

70 Rūṣṭū, *Yemen* 82–3.

71 Al-Iryānī, *Sīrat* II, 5–6.

72 Al-Iryānī, *Sīrat* II, 8.

73 Al-Iryānī, *Sīrat* II, 11.

74 Al-Iryānī, *Sīrat* II, 11, n. 4.

75 Al-Iryānī, *Sīrat* II, 9.

Ahmed Feyzi Paşa advanced against them with a force from Şan‘ā’, the Ḥāshid tribesmen decided they had had enough. They retreated north to the tribal territory of Hamdān, from whence they dispersed, leaving their commander with only a few men.⁷⁶

The Bakīl force marched on al-Rawḍa, a town just north of Şan‘ā’. Even before they came to al-Rawḍa, however, their discipline began to break down, and their forces to disperse.⁷⁷ Despite this, they were able to seize al-Rawḍa and take captive Shaykh Muqbil ibn Şālih Dughaysh, a partisan of the Ottomans. After the seizure of al-Rawḍa an Ottoman force advanced from Şan‘ā’ and garrisoned Shu‘ūb,⁷⁸ a suburb of Şan‘ā’ to the north.⁷⁹ The Bakīl force fought and defeated them, driving them back to Şan‘ā’. The next day, however, Feyzi Paşa advanced against them with soldiers and artillery, and the Arabs were defeated and fled.⁸⁰ The united uprising of Ḥāshid and Bakīl thus came to an end, although guerrilla war against the Ottoman forces continued.

The failure of the uprising was due not only to the poor discipline of the Ḥāshid and Bakīl tribesmen but also to timely action by Feyzi Paşa after the Ottoman defeats in the Ḥajūr region. Feyzi Paşa requested a regiment from the Hejaz and when it arrived, sent two battalions of this regiment to Ḥajūr, ordering the commander of the Ḥajūr region Ahmed Paşa to keep these troops in a defensive position. Likewise, the 14th Sharpshooter Battalion was sent to Ḥajūr. In consequence, there were enough forces to defend the strong points in Ḥajūr that were still in Ottoman hands, costing the rebels casualties in their attempts to take them.⁸¹ Similarly, Feyzi Paşa took care to keep the powerful paramount shaykh of Ḥāshid, Nāşir Mabkhūt al-Aḥmar on the Ottoman side.⁸² Feyzi Paşa had previously managed to win the shaykh over to the Ottoman side after the 1891 rebellion,⁸³ and this was probably one of the reasons that Ḥāshid’s rebellion ended so quickly.

In analyzing these events, we can see that the reason for the initial success of the rebels was the Ottomans’ lack of sufficient manpower. We have noted the mass deaths of Ottoman soldiers that took place during Feyzi Paşa’s tenure as governor and the subsequent reduction in the numbers of the Seventh Army. Yemen was a manpower sink for the Ottomans at a time when they had

76 Al-Iryānī, *Sīrat* II, 10.

77 Al-Iryānī, *Sīrat* II, 12.

78 Al-Iryānī, *Sīrat* II, 14.

79 Al-Maḥḥafī, *Mu‘jam* 358.

80 Al-Iryānī, *Sīrat* II, 14.

81 Rūştü, *Yemen* 83–4.

82 Rūştü, *Yemen* 84.

83 Rūştü, *Yemen* 107–8.

pressing military commitments in the Balkans and elsewhere. The Ottoman government in Yemen would not or could not ensure that its soldiers in Yemen had access to nutritious food, clean water, appropriate sanitation or adequate medical care. In consequence, the soldiers sent to Yemen began to die almost from the moment they set foot on Yemeni soil. What this meant was that it was a very chancy thing for the soldiers to venture out of their fortified military posts, with their small numbers, and meet an armed and angry population in battle. This seems to have been the reason for the defeats of Bahattin Efendi and Raşid Paşa.

Second, we can see that one reason for the outbreak of the rebellion in the Ḥajūr region was that the people of that region experienced the Ottoman government as rapacious and oppressive. We have recounted al-Iryānī's story of the man whose grain the Ottoman force had confiscated, and who subsequently ignited the rebellion by attacking the Ottoman force. Al-Iryānī tells another story of a woman who, aggrieved by the loss of her cow to the Ottomans, flung a stone at the captive Bahattin Efendi's head.⁸⁴ These stories may be apocryphal, but they provide insight into how the Ottoman government was viewed in the territories it controlled. And Feyzi Paşa made no attempt to moderate the violence of the government; he was a tough and capable soldier, not a humanitarian. And if Ottoman tax collection was experienced as violent and oppressive, it was also an intermittent violence which aroused resistance but could not crush it. There were no Ottoman soldiers stationed in Banī Jill itself, and hence Bahattin Efendi's force had no support when the Banī Jill tribesmen rose up against it.

The rebellion failed, however, to turn into the general uprising and expulsion of the Ottomans that the imam wanted. Rüştü attributed this to timely action by Feyzi Paşa in requesting more troops and putting them in a defensive position (*tedafüü bir vaziyette*) in Ḥajūr.⁸⁵ What this probably means is that the garrisons in the fortified posts in Ḥajūr were strengthened without an attempt to engage the rebels in open battle. The fortifications and artillery of the Ottoman military posts gave them an advantage over the rebels in siege warfare, since the rebels possessed no artillery. The failure of the Ḥāshid forces to surprise the Ottoman force in Matna when it was outside of its fortifications led to a grueling four-day battle which the Ḥāshid tribesmen were ultimately unable to stomach.⁸⁶

84 Al-Iryānī, *Sīrat* II, 488.

85 Rüştü, *Yemen* 83.

86 Al-Iryānī, *Sīrat* II, 10.

Unless the rebels could besiege a fortification long enough for the defenders to run out of food and water, it was difficult for a tribal force to succeed in a siege. Both al-Iryānī and Rūştü recount an episode in the rebellion in which twenty-five or twenty-six Ottoman soldiers were able to hold off a besieging force of tribesmen in one of the fortified posts of Shāhil for two months. The soldiers only succumbed to the tribal force when they left the post in search of water.⁸⁷ Feyzi Paşa thus adopted a policy based on static defense and containment of the rebellion, rather than its immediate suppression; and his strategy succeeded in attaining that objective. He made no attempt to retake the territory lost to the Ottomans, achieving a standoff rather than a victory.

This standoff demonstrated the limitations of Ottoman power in Yemen and the impossibility of permanently subduing the tribes of the country by force. Despite the imam's failure to turn the uprising of 1898 into a general rebellion, it demonstrated what had been growing increasingly clear in the past several years, that Feyzi Paşa's policies had made the country ungovernable. The uprising thus marked the failure of Feyzi Paşa's policy of punitive repression. In consequence, Feyzi Paşa was deposed; and his successor, Hüseyin Hilmi Paşa, would implement softer policies designed to gain the voluntary support of the Yemenis.

4 Conclusion

In sum, the repressive measures implemented by Feyzi Paşa were an attempt to contain the threat posed by the imam's increasingly effective guerrilla tactics. His strategy was rooted in Hamidian absolutism and the proto-nationalist ideology of the "unity of Islam" policy; and as in other societies where quasi-nationalist ideas shore up traditional authoritarianism, the result was increasing violence by the state and the intensification of internal conflict. This, together with the use of "modern" or nineteenth century techniques of military repression, directed often against civilians, led to a further progression of the conflict in Yemen toward total war. Feyzi Paşa's strategy was ineffective, however, because the Ottoman government could not deploy the massive resources necessary to make repressive policies succeed. Violence angered the Zaydis without subduing them.

Feyzi Paşa's successor Hüseyin Hilmi Paşa would thus try radically different methods of suppressing the Zaydis' revolt. There was no change in the stated

87 Rūştü, *Yemen* 82–3; al-Iryānī, *Sīrat* 1, 500–1.

war aims of the administration; the goal was still to make the imam and the Zaydi tribes submit completely to the Ottoman government. The fundamental idea of Hüseyin Hilmi Paşa, however, was that military operations could be combined with reforms in such a manner that the Zaydis would give their voluntary support to the government; the same premise, in other words, on which modern “soft” counterinsurgency is based. Thus, Hüseyin Hilmi Paşa implemented the second phase of the modernization of Ottoman counter-guerrilla techniques in Yemen, in which the conflict was conceived as a battle to win the “hearts and minds” of the population. We will examine Hüseyin Hilmi Paşa’s policies in detail in the next chapter.

The Policies of Hüseyin Hilmi Paşa

The policies of Hüseyin Hilmi Paşa represented, at least in conception, the polar opposite of those of Ahmed Feyzi. In contrast to Ahmed Feyzi's program of repressive violence, Hüseyin Hilmi Paşa and the Reform Commission which accompanied him would design a program based on the same essential premise as modern "soft" counterinsurgency: the idea that force could be combined with programs of reform and development in such a way as to both destroy the guerrillas and gain the voluntary support of the population.

Yet a combination of factors would doom this program to failure: lack of men and money, quarrels between the military and civilian branches of the government, the continuing brutality of the Seventh Army, and the arbitrary and divisive character of Hamidian absolutism. As a result, Hüseyin Hilmi Paşa's policies failed to stop the rising tide of violence in Yemen; and the consequences of this would become clear after his departure, in the rebellion of 1904.

1 The Development of a Counterinsurgency Program

As in the soft counterinsurgency of the modern era, the policies of Hüseyin Hilmi Paşa were based on the twin components of persuasion and coercion. On the one hand, Hüseyin Hilmi Paşa sought to win the support of the population by programs of government reform combined with social and economic development. On the other, these programs were to be accompanied by military operations to extend the control of the central government further into the countryside.

Hüseyin Hilmi Paşa's policies were described as *islahat*, or "reforms," and he was accompanied by a Reform Commission (*Heyet-i Islahiye*), with which he worked closely in devising policy. Here, we will show how the ideas associated with *islah* in late Ottoman times were used to construct and legitimate a comprehensive program designed to permanently crush the imam's rebellion. Again, we will make use of the concept of "split-up modernization" to analyze both the ideas and the practical dynamics of Hüseyin Hilmi Paşa's policies.

In chapter five we discussed some of the connotations of the terms *işlāḥ* and *maşlahā* in Zaydi political thought and practice. Such ideas were also an integral part of Sunni political thought; inevitably, however, they had a somewhat

more authoritarian cast. *Islah* in Ottoman times came to be associated with the power of the ruler, and his capacity to suppress the evildoers who threatened the integrity of the community.¹ The various good things associated with *maşlaḥa* – right belief, obedience to the Sharia, peace, and prosperity – could only be assured by a strong sultan and state.

In the Tanzimat period of the nineteenth century (1839–76), *islah* came to have the meaning of “reform” in the secular and modern sense. The *islahat* were the programs undertaken by the Tanzimat bureaucrats to remake Ottoman society in what they saw as the rational and ordered image of Europe: the creation of a modern legal code,² the establishment of the infrastructure of a modern economy such as railroads and banks, and the centralization of political power in the state apparatus.³ What Carter Findley describes as the effort to organize the bureaucracy on rational-legal principles could also be subsumed under the rubric of *islah*. This included increasing specialization of function within the bureaucracy and the recruitment of officials on the basis of professional education rather than household connections (*intisap*). Such measures were intended in part to do away with the corruption and personal tyranny which the old patronage networks had fostered.⁴

Now, under Abdülhamid, the secular concept of *islahat* in the Tanzimat was tied once again to Islamic and absolutist concepts. Modernizing reform was conceived as a function of the sultan’s justice and might, aimed at securing the general welfare of the Muslim community.⁵ Hüseyin Hilmi Paşa’s policies in Yemen, then, can best be understood as a state-building project founded on this “split-up” conception of *islah*. To modernize and reform the administration was conceived as an extension of Abdülhamid’s autocratic power. The general benefit of the Muslims was to be secured by imposing the sultan’s own vision of progress and communal unity, rooted both in traditional conceptions of the *ümmet* and European nationalist ideas.

The traditional and Pan-Islamic foundations of Hüseyin Hilmi’s program of *islah* may be seen in a letter from the Zaydi *‘ālim* Aḥmad ibn Muḥammad al-Kibṣī urging al-Manṣūr to submit to the caliph. The purpose was the same as the letter of Sayyid Muḥammad al-Rifā‘ī in Feyzi Paşa’s time, to get the imam to submit. The language, however, reflects the softer side of Abdülhamid’s

1 Katip Çelebi, *Düstur* 136–7.

2 Mardin, *Genesis* 183–4.

3 See, for example, the text of the *Islahat Fermanı* in *Düstur*, 8.

4 Findley, *Reform* 42–3, 120–6.

5 For a statement of the philosophy behind this idea see Mahmud Nedim Paşa, *Ayine* 61. This work was addressed to Abdülaziz, but reflected the ideas which underlay Abdülhamid’s regime.

Pan-Islamic policies. First, we see an initial appeal to the concept of *maşlahā*, although the term itself is not used. The new governor, says al-Kibsi, wants to prevent bloodshed among the Muslims and therefore “cleaves to all those who ... care for the common benefit (*al-manfaʿa al-ʿumūmiyya*) of Islam.”⁶

The “common benefit” is again defined in Pan-Islamic terms. The new governor is concerned about “unity among [the peoples of Islam]” (*al-ittihād baynahā*) which requires their submission to the sultan-caliph. Al-Manşūr is thus urged to desist from seeking the imamate and “enter under the sheltering authority of ... the sultan of Islam and the Muslims, whose utmost aim is the guarding of the pale of Islam.”⁷ The “common benefit” of Islam is thus defined as the political unity of the Muslims in submission to the caliph.

Submission to the caliph is here tied explicitly to the concept of *işlāḥ*, that which, in this context, will secure the internal peace of the Muslim community. Al-Manşūr is urged that he is under obligation to the Muslim community, to see to “that which will make their affairs sound,” (*yuşliḥu umūrahum*) and “ward off tumult and tribulation among them” (*yadfaʿu fitnatahum wa-miḥanahum*). Following a line of argument which in practice derives from Sunni thought, the responsibility for *fitna* is thereby placed entirely on al-Manşūr’s shoulders, as one who disobeys the injunction to submit to the lawful imam.⁸

What this passage does, then, is link the modernizing program of *ıslah* in Hüseyin Hilmi Paşa’s regime to older Islamic concepts of the term. The verb *yuşliḥ*, from which the Arabic noun *işlāḥ* derives, is linked specifically in this passage to the “common benefit” (*al-manfaʿa al-ʿumūmiyya*) of Islam, which is essentially synonymous with the term *maşlahā*. To engage in *işlāḥ* for the larger *maşlahā* means that social peace should be secured by the submission of dissenters to the lawful caliph, a traditional Sunni idea given a Pan-Islamic meaning by its association with the “unity” (*ittihād*) of the Muslims.

The specific manner in which traditional concepts associated with *ıslah* were modernized by Hüseyin Hilmi Paşa becomes clear in the minutes sent by his Reform Commission to the grand vizier on 7 March 1898. Here, language derived from older concepts of *ıslah* is used to denote something like the counterinsurgency policies of the present day.

First, there is the idea of consultation with representatives of the local population to determine the specific problems faced by the people. The document states that the Reform Commission has undertaken this kind of consultation

6 Al-Iryānī, *Sīrat* II, 33.

7 Al-Iryānī, *Sīrat* II, 34.

8 Al-Iryānī, *Sīrat* II, 34–5.

with the religious scholars (*ülema*), “descendants of the Prophet,” (*eşraf*) and “supporters of the government in the country” (*mütehayyizan-ı memleket*).⁹

In consequence of this consultation, it has emerged that the grievances of the people center around abuses of the tax system; that is, the extortion of illegal taxes by corrupt officials and the powerful regional or tribal shaykhs who serve as the government’s proxies. These men are defined in traditional Islamic terms as “tyrants” (*zaleme*). Therefore, the document proposes a sweeping reform of the tax system. All illegal taxes are to be eliminated, corrupt officials dismissed and prosecuted, and the powerful shaykhs removed as intermediaries between the villagers and the government. The purpose of this policy is defined specifically as gaining the loyalty of the population for the government. The term employed here is *isticlab-ı kulub*, “drawing the hearts [of the tribesmen to the government].”

Within this context, the members of the commission also recommended measures designed to reform the bureaucracy and increase its professionalism. In order to ensure the appointment of “capable” (*muktedir*) officials, salaries in the bureaucracy should be increased. Likewise, additional officials should be appointed, especially to the judicial bureaucracy, so that “all may obtain their rightful share in the exalted justice [of the sultan]” (*madelet-i seniye*).¹⁰

To ensure the complete tranquility (*asayiş*) of the country, and to implement the “fundamental reforms” (*ıslahat-ı esasiye*) in the desired fashion, vigorous military measures against the tribes are necessary. Şa‘da and the imam’s capital at Qaflat al-‘Udhar should be occupied, and the major tribes of Hāshid and Bakīl should be “chastised and pacified” (i.e., brought under the control of the central government). The various empty ports of the Tihama should be occupied, and its rebel tribes brought to heel by a “display of military force” (*satvet-i askeriye iraesī*).¹¹ Reform of the state apparatus is thus to be combined with forceful military measures, in the manner of modern counterinsurgency.

Finally, the document advocates extensive programs of social and economic development. The authors advocated the building of a railroad, which, apart from its importance in transporting military supplies, would “result in an increase in wealth (*terakki-i servet*) from trade and agriculture, and be a cause of the prosperity (*umran*) of the country;” they also recommended the improvement of the existing roads. In addition, they called for the construction

9 BBA, Y.Mtv 187/69 23 Şubat 1314/7 March 1898. Minutes (*mazbata*) of the Reform Commission, sent to the Grand Vizier.

10 Ibid.

11 Ibid.

of primary schools (*mekatib-i rüşdiyye*) and the opening of two vocational schools (*sanayi mektebi*) in Şan‘ā’ and Hıdayda, respectively.¹²

In this document, then, the historic use of *islah* as the suppression of “evil-doers” in conjunction with the moral reform of state and society has been remolded to conform to the modernizing aspects of Abdülhamid’s regime. Designed to deal with the serious and ongoing insurgency in Yemen, what has emerged is a program with marked similarities to modern counterinsurgency. How did this program work out in practice?

2 The Implementation of the Reform Commission’s Program

In discussing the manner in which these policies were implemented, we will focus on three major themes: centralization and rationalization, the reform of the behavior of government personnel, and programs of social and economic development.

Regarding the policy of bureaucratic rationalization, the most noteworthy innovation of Hüseyin Hilmi Paşa’s regime was the separation of the military power from the civil. The office of governor of Yemen was separated from the position of commandant of the Seventh Army, to which Abdullah Paşa was appointed. Abdullah Paşa was also appointed as the head of a “Military Pacification Division” (*Fırka-ı Islahiye*), the military counterpart of the civilian *Heyet-i Islahiye* which accompanied Hüseyin Hilmi Paşa.

This separation of powers represented an extension to Yemen of the continuing rationalization of the Ottoman state; that is, the division of the branches of government by specialized function accompanying the overall expansion of the state apparatus. It was an initial step toward modernizing the provincial administration, in preparation for imposing greater central control. Likewise, it represented a partial civilianization of the administration of a disturbed region, perhaps undertaken for the same reason that modern counterinsurgency theorists recommend civilian control: the recognition that policies based on military force alone have failed.

Now, *islah* was conceived as a joint task by the military and civil branches of government, with each fulfilling its particular function in that task. The Military Pacification Division and the Seventh Army were to undertake *islahat-ı askeriye*, the initial military operations necessary to subdue the autonomous tribes. The *islahat-ı askeriye* were to be followed by *islahat-ı mülkiye*, the organization of a civil administration in the areas conquered in this fashion.¹³

¹² Ibid.

¹³ Ibid.

We have seen that, with regard to military pacification, the Reform Commission had set itself ambitious goals: the conquest of Upper Yemen, and the subjugation of the refractory tribal confederations of Ḥāshid and Bakīl. The main purpose of these operations was stated as the “removal of the presence” (*izale-i vūcud*) of the imam.¹⁴ In his description of the major expedition to the northwest, al-Manṣūr’s chronicler al-Iryānī defines these war aims more explicitly as the “complete defeat” (*nikāya*), and “capture” (*akhdh*) of the imam, motivated by the desire to impose the central control of the government (*ṭalab al-nizām*).¹⁵

In practice, then, the operations were defined as total war. They were aimed at the complete political destruction of the regime’s enemies, the sweeping away of the social barriers to bureaucratic control, and the transformation of tribal life to conform to the aims of the centralized state.

But what we will see, however, is that the political objective defined by the Reform Commission, that is the suppression of the imamate and the occupation of the territories outside Ottoman control, was not in fact the military objective of the expedition of the Military Pacification Division. This was because Abdullah Paşa, the commander of the expedition, knew that these goals would require more men and resources than the Ottoman government had. A total objective, in short, could not be achieved with the limited means available to the Ottomans.

Nonetheless, several military operations were in fact carried out, although they fell far short of achieving these ambitious goals. The most important was the above-mentioned expedition undertaken by the Military Pacification Division under the command of Abdullah Paşa to the imam’s capital at Qaflat al-‘Udhar, which we will discuss in the next chapter. This expedition involved about 9,000 troops and took approximately seven months, lasting from November 1898 to May 1899.¹⁶ Likewise, an expedition was sent to the northern Tihama to discipline the Banī Marwān tribes and establish a government presence in the port of Mīdī.¹⁷ Operations were also undertaken to expel the Dhū Ghaylān tribesmen from Lower Yemen.¹⁸

14 BBA, Y.Mtv 186/11 6 Kanun-1 Sani 1314/18 January 1899. Minutes of the Military Commission, sent to the Minister of War.

15 Al-Iryānī, *Sīrat* II, 106, 127.

16 BBA, Y.Mtv 192/160 23 Temmuz 1315/4 August 1899. Report (*layiha*) from the (former) Commandant of the 28th Brigade to the Palace.

17 BBA, Y.Mtv 197/2 28 Tişrin-i Evvel 1315/9 November 1899. Memorial (*tahrirat*) from the Commodore of the Red Sea to the Minister of the Navy.

18 Al-Iryānī, *Sīrat* II, 126.

As noted, the organization of a civil administration (*ıslahat-ı mülkiye* or *teşkilat*) was supposed to be carried out in conjunction with these military operations. Various efforts were in fact made to rationalize and centralize the provincial administration at the local level throughout Hüseyin Hilmi Paşa's tenure as governor. Sometimes this was done in connection with military pacification, and sometimes independently. Broadly speaking, these "civil reforms" had three major goals: the disarmament of the tribes, the removal of the powerful shaykhs as intermediaries between the government and the population, and the installation of a body of civil officials to see to the collection of taxes and other administrative tasks.

The disarmament of the tribes, described by al-Iryānī as being a major aim of the Qaflat al-'Udhar expedition of 1898,¹⁹ was never undertaken in anything like a systematic fashion. Attempts to assert greater central control over the process of tax collection were more serious. Under Hüseyin Hilmi, at least some of the shaykhs were removed from their positions. Taxes were apportioned village by village; and headmen (*'uqqāl*) were appointed in each village to collect the taxes and turn them over to the government. Al-Iryānī notes, however, that the government simply kept the extra money that the shaykhs had previously collected for itself.²⁰ *Islah* as centralization and rationalization took precedence over *ıslah* as moral reform in the service of justice.

The grand project of the "civil reforms" that is, the organization of a civil administration in areas where there had been none before, was carried out only to a limited extent. The limitations of military pacification prevented a great deal from being done in this regard, and I have only found one reference to the organization of a civil administration in a "pacified" area. After the expedition to the port of Mīdī, the area was organized as a *nahiye* and a "director" (*nahiye müdürü*) appointed to administer it, along with gendarmes and customs officials (*rüsumat ve zabıta memurları*).²¹

The program of centralization embodied in "military pacification" and "civil reform" thus had only limited success. The attempt to eliminate corrupt officials from the bureaucracy was implemented on a larger scale, at least in the civil bureaucracy. The most notorious officials of Feyzi Paşa's regime were dismissed, and bribery was strictly punished. One disgruntled official who had been dismissed from his post as a result of these reforms even attempted to

19 Al-Iryānī, *Sīrat* II, 106.

20 Al-Iryānī, *Sīrat* II, 125.

21 BBA, Y.Mtv 197/2 28 Tişrin-i Evvel 1315/9 November 1899. Memorial (*tahrirat*) from the Commodore of the Red Sea to the Minister of the Navy.

assassinate Hüseyin Hilmi Paşa as a result.²² Within this context, Hüseyin Hilmi Paşa implemented one measure which is interesting as a foreshadowing of the idea of cultural sensitivity. In response to a previous complaint by the imam that the Ottoman officials wore the dress of “Christians,” Hüseyin Hilmi Paşa made his officials put on robes and discard the Ottoman fez for the turban.²³

The attempt to reform the culture and behavior of civil officialdom in Yemen was thus fairly thorough. The administration’s plans for social and economic development were less successful. The Reform Commission, as we have seen, had set itself ambitious goals: a railroad was to be constructed, the existing roads improved, and schools built which were to teach the Yemenis both practical economic skills and loyalty to the state.²⁴ There were also plans to aid the peasants by the loan of seed grain from the government.²⁵

It appears, however, that only the educational program was implemented with any degree of thoroughness. Yemeni chroniclers record that Hüseyin Hilmi Paşa did, in fact, establish a Bureau of Education (*idārat al-ma‘ārif*) along with a number of primary schools, a teachers’ school (*dār al-mu‘allimīn*) and an industrial school. The governor “compelled” (*ajbara*) the people to enroll their sons in these schools.²⁶

The schools were designed not merely to win the Yemenis’ gratitude, but to indoctrinate them directly with loyalty to the state. The curriculum thus retained the historical Sunni emphasis on instruction in right belief and obedience to the ruler. Right belief in this context, however, was transmuted into the proto-nationalist identity of the “unity of Islam” policy. Instruction in obedience to the ruler likewise became a demand for an intense loyalty (*mahabbet*) to the caliphate and Sultan Abdülhamid.

Mehmet Emin Paşa’s memorial of the 1880s proposed a curriculum with most of these elements. According to Mehmet Emin Paşa, the primary schools to be established in Yemen should teach that obedience to (*itaat*) and love for (*mahabbet*) the Ottoman caliphate was a duty of each individual Muslim (*farz-ı ayn*). The youth were also to be subjected to intense propaganda concerning the praiseworthy qualities of Abdülhamid, and the blessings associated with sacrificial loyalty (*fedakarlık*) to the caliphate.²⁷

22 Al-Wāsi‘ī, *Tārīkh* 291–2.

23 Mehmet Tevfik Bey, *Bir devlet* 1, 276; al-Iryānī, *Sīrat* 11, 27–8.

24 BBA, Y.Mtv 187/69 23 Şubat 1314/7 March 1898. Minutes (*mazbata*) of the Reform Commission, sent to the Grand Vizier.

25 Al-Iryānī, *Sīrat* 11, 29.

26 Al-Jirāfī, *Muqata‘af* 282; al-Wāsi‘ī, *Tārīkh* 291.

27 Mehmed Emin Paşa, Yemen 6–8 (my pagination).

In addition to mystical loyalty to the state as represented in the caliphate of Abdülhamid, the schools were to teach a fierce love of the Muslim “homeland” and a willingness to defend it from the enemies that beset it. The youths were to be informed of the threat posed by foreign governments, the enemies of faith (*din*) and homeland (*vatan*). They were literally to be taught hatred (*nefret*) of these governments, so that they would not be seduced by their intrigues.²⁸

Reading these lines, it is clear that we have gone beyond the old paternal concepts of Islamic rule into the realm of nineteenth century nationalism, albeit in the service of defending the state against foreign encroachment rather than the aggressive conquests that the European powers pursued in this period. Although identity is based on religion rather than race or blood, there is the same stress on unity, loyalty, and heroic self-sacrifice for the state. This is conceived as a means of ensuring the survival of the community in a hostile international environment.

While this is a prescription for the curriculum of the schools in Yemen that pre-dates Hüseyin Hilmi Paşa’s time, there is no reason to believe that these recommendations did not reflect what was actually later taught. Al-Iryānī notes sourly that the purpose of Hüseyin Hilmi Paşa’s new schools was to corrupt (*ifsād*) the youth so that they would “grow up adoring the state” (*yashibbū ‘alā maḥabbat al-dawla*).²⁹

In short, we see that Hüseyin Hilmi Paşa’s programs employed historic Islamic political language to push for a modernizing project of state-building reform: enforcing strict professional standards in the bureaucracy, bringing tax collection under closer governmental supervision, and asserting the right of the central government to a monopoly of force. Expanding the control of the bureaucratic state in this manner was in turn linked to the effort to impose *İslamiyet* on the Yemeni population; that is, a “proto-national” concept of Islam stressing loyalty to the state and willingness to defend the community against other predatory nations. Such loyalty was to be taught in the schools and reinforced by the government’s manifest attempts to improve the welfare of the population.

This program was implemented specifically as a means to deal with a major guerrilla rebellion, in an attempt to persuade the population to support the government rather than the guerrillas. As such, it could not fail to have similarities to modern counterinsurgency of the “soft” variety; for this kind of counterinsurgency is simply state building in a context where opposition to the state is particularly well organized and violent.

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ Al-Iryānī, *Sīrat* II, 125.

“Soft” counterinsurgency has the same “total” objective as “punitive repression;” that is, the complete destruction of the guerrillas as a military force. The policies of Hüseyin Hilmi Paşa and the Reform Commission, at least as they were planned, did have this character. That is, they were conceived as an attempt to bring all the resources of the state to bear to deprive the imam’s partisans of popular support and crush them militarily. The relationship between the Ottoman administration in Yemen and Yemeni society would be transformed, and the latter made over in the Ottomans’ image.

What was actually achieved in this context, however, fell far short of what was planned; and judged according to its larger goals, Hüseyin Hilmi Paşa’s program of reform had only limited success. The imam was not defeated, the Zaydi population was not persuaded to support the Ottomans, and the authority of the central government was only minimally expanded. How and why did the policies of Hüseyin Hilmi Paşa fail?

3 The Failure of Reform in Yemen

Here, we will analyze both the immediate and structural causes for failure. The immediate causes can best be understood in the light of observations on counterinsurgency by modern military strategists. To analyze the structural causes of failure, we will make use of Findley’s discussion of the inherent contradictions in Abdülhamid’s regime. The modernizing character of Abdülhamid’s policies, in which Hüseyin Hilmi Paşa’s policies were evidently rooted, coexisted with arbitrary and discretionary elements aimed at maintaining Abdülhamid’s absolutist rule. In Yemen as elsewhere, the latter often thwarted the implementation of the former.

The immediate causes for failure may be listed as follows: failure to establish full civilian control of the military, failure to coordinate the actions of the civil and military branches of the administration, failure to reform the culture and behavior of the Seventh Army, and most of all, simple lack of men and money.

Blaufarb and Tanham stress the importance of the assertion of full civilian control over the military. In this context, the various government agencies assigned to deal with the insurgency must be brought under a single authority, with a clear chain of command and a rational division of functions.³⁰ There must be “unified management” of the counterinsurgency program. We have noted that the separation of the military and the civil powers in Hüseyin Hilmi

30 Blaufarb and Tanham, *Who* 29, 39–41.

Paşa's administration marked a step toward the civilianization of the provincial government. Since the chain of command was ambiguous in this regard, however, there was perpetual conflict between the civil and military branches of the administration.

In al-Wāsi'ī's words, Hüseyin Hilmi Paşa "ordered the affairs of the province in a manner that the military refused [to carry out]" (*ta'bāhu al-'askariyya*).³¹ The commander of the Seventh Army Abdullah Paşa sought to block the efforts of Hüseyin Hilmi Paşa and the Reform Commission at every turn. Disagreement over policy soon assumed the dimensions of a personality conflict, for which much of the blame appears to lie on Abdullah Paşa's side.³² Arabic and Ottoman sources agree that he was arrogant, intransigent, and corrupt; and Hüseyin Hilmi Paşa found him so difficult to deal with that eventually he resigned.

In this context, failure to establish full control by the governor's administration over the Seventh Army meant that the latter remained untouched by the reforming zeal of Hüseyin Hilmi and his officials. A basic principle of modern counterinsurgency, as we have seen, is that reform begins with the army. Continuing corruption and indiscipline impair the fighting efficiency of the army and alienate the population. This makes it impossible for the army to reestablish basic security in the countryside, without which programs of civil reform and development cannot be carried out.³³

This was the practical situation of the Seventh Army under Abdullah Paşa. The major expedition to the northwest that we have described previously had resulted in the reestablishment of a government presence in the Shāhil region of the northwest, with the submission of a number of the shaykhs and common people of the area.³⁴ Whatever was accomplished for the government in this regard, however, was undone by the ill-considered actions of Abdullah Paşa. According to one officer who served in the northwest with Abdullah Paşa, the latter behaved with a pompous arrogance (*azamet*) toward the shaykhs who came to submit. He kept several officers from Feyzi Paşa's regime who had distinguished themselves for "immorality" (*su-ı ahlak*), "bribery" (*irtişa*), and "tyrannical actions" (*mezalim*), promoting them to high positions.³⁵

31 Al-Wāsi'ī, *Tārikh* 291.

32 Al-Wāsi'ī, *Tārikh* 293; BBA, Y.Mtv 192/160 23 Temmuz 1315/4 August 1899. Report (*layiha*) from the (former) Commandant of the 28th Brigade to the Palace; Mehmet Tevfik Bey, *Bir devlet* I, 282–3.

33 Blaufarb and Tanham, *Who* 19–22.

34 Al-Iryānī, *Sīrat* II, 57.

35 BBA, Y.Mtv 192/160 23 Temmuz 1315/4 August 1899. Report (*layiha*) from the (former) Commandant of the 28th Brigade to the Palace.

The policies pursued by the Seventh Army in the Shāhil region, once the authority of the government was reestablished there, seemed aimed at terrifying the population into submission rather than gaining their support. Heads were taken by the Ottoman soldiers, extortionate taxes collected by violence, and houses and mosques destroyed.³⁶

The practical continuation of the abuses of Feyzi Paşa's regime resulted in a resurgence of rebellion in the northwest. The tribes of the Shāhil and Sharaf regions reestablished contact with the imam, and the jihad was resumed.³⁷ The northwest became less secure than ever, and in places such as the Ḥajūr region, the soldiers were unable to leave their fortifications except in large numbers.³⁸

Failure to reform the Seventh Army thus seriously hindered the implementation of Hüseyin Hilmi Paşa's policies. This was particularly true in the unsettled area of the northwest, where measures to win the confidence of the population were most essential. The ultimate consequence was that Hüseyin Hilmi Paşa's policies had limited practical effect as a measure to reduce unrest.

Hüseyin Hilmi Paşa's inability to bring the Seventh Army under his full control and reform it, then, seriously hindered the implementation of his policies. Yet more important than Hüseyin Hilmi Paşa's deficiencies as an administrator was simple lack of men; the Reform Commission's schemes of pacification were unrealistic on the scale they were envisioned. A major source of conflict between the Reform Commission and Abdullah Paşa, in fact, was the Commission's constant demand for soldiers to seize control of the outlying regions of Yemen, which Abdullah Paşa usually rebuffed. There were barely enough soldiers to pacify the interior of the province, he said, let alone seize its barren frontier areas.³⁹

Here Abdullah Paşa had a core of military realism which the civilian administrators of the Reform Commission lacked. As he pointed out in a telegram to the Minister of War, how would it be possible to send expeditions to these remote areas when there were no transport animals to carry the provisions and artillery? How could the government finance the long and expensive line of communications which would have to be maintained in order to keep control of these regions?⁴⁰ The Seventh Army continued to face the same logistical and financial deficiencies which had hampered its operations in the past; and

36 Ibid.; al-Iryānī, *Sīrat* II, 56–7.

37 Al-Iryānī, *Sīrat* II, 57–8.

38 BBA, Y.Mtv 192/160 23 Temmuz 1315/4 August 1899. Report (*layiha*) from the (former) Commandant of the 28th Brigade to the Palace.

39 BBA, Y.Mtv 186/54 23 Kanun-ı Evvel 1314/4 January 1899. Telegram from the Field Marshall (*Müşir*) of the Seventh Army to the Minister of War.

40 Ibid.

even if its leadership had been upright and efficient, it is doubtful that it could have carried out pacification on the scale envisioned by the members of the Reform Commission.

Lack of money was as important as lack of men in preventing the full implementation of the counterinsurgency program. The continuing poverty of the administration likewise imposed severe limitations on the programs for social and economic development. The projected railroad was never built, and there is not much evidence to suggest that major improvements were made to existing roads. The scheme to lend grain to the peasants, greeted enthusiastically by the inhabitants of the central plateau, apparently never got off the ground either. According to al-Iryānī, grain was only lent to some of the people in the outlying areas (*ahwāz*) of Şan‘ā’.⁴¹

The attempt to centralize the system of taxation was at least partially reversed, and some of the shaykhs returned to their former positions as tax collectors.⁴² We have noted that Hüseyin Hilmi Paşa did succeed in building a number of schools and appears to have won some popular gratitude as a result. According to al-Wāsi‘ī, the Paşa “compelled the people to be taught (*ta‘līm*), and eventually, the people praised the effect of that.”⁴³ Most of the people who enrolled their children in these schools were residents of Şan‘ā’,⁴⁴ however, where the schools seem to have been concentrated. Thus, they had little effect on the people in the countryside where the guerrilla war was raging.

The overall impression one gets is that Hüseyin Hilmi Paşa’s benevolent reforms had little if any effect on those at whom they were ultimately targeted; that is, the disaffected Zaydis of the northwest and the central plateau. In Şan‘ā’, where his measures had the most effect, Hüseyin Hilmi was well liked by the population.⁴⁵ The provincial administration did not, however, have the financial resources to bring “progress” and “civilization” to the impoverished tribesmen of the countryside. It appears that in this regard hopes were raised and then bitterly dashed, both with the administration’s failure to fulfill its promises and the continuance of the previous regime’s abuses. The frustration of these expectations no doubt played a role in the resurgence of unrest during Hüseyin Hilmi Paşa’s time as governor, after a short period of relative calm; and the situation steadily worsened after his departure.

41 Al-Iryānī, *Sīrat* II, 29.

42 Al-Iryānī, *Sīrat* II, 125.

43 Al-Wāsi‘ī, *Tārīkh* 291.

44 Al-Iryānī, *Sīrat* II, 64.

45 Al-Iryānī, *Sīrat* II, 165; al-Wāsi‘ī, *Tārīkh* 292.

The immediate causes of the failure of Hüseyin Hilmi Paşa's policies, then, lay in the continuing poverty of the provincial administration and the failure to assert control over the military branch of government. The underlying structural causes of this failure lay in the inconsistent nature of Abdülhamid's system of government. Conflict between the military and civil branches of government was not unique to Yemen.⁴⁶ It was a feature of the Ottoman administration as a whole, in both the capital and the provinces; and the roots of such conflict lay in the peculiar logic of Hamidian absolutism. In Sunni and Ottoman political theory it was important that the officials of the state be kept in subjection to the sultan, for only thus could their inherent tendency to oppress the people be restrained.⁴⁷

Shortly before Abdülhamid came to the throne, the traditional theory was restated by Abdülaziz's Grand Vizier Mahmud Nedim in his *Ayine ve Hasb-ı Hal*. The thesis of this work was that the bureaucrats of the Tanzimat had achieved an unwarranted independence (*istiklal*) and were using it to ruin the state and oppress the population. Only the sultan should have *istiklal*, or full power and freedom of action. The Ottoman state could only achieve its former glory by means of a strong sultan who could keep the bureaucrats in their place.⁴⁸ This is what Abdülhamid sought to do, because he had seen first-hand the threat that a powerful ministerial class could pose to his throne.

The practices explicitly sanctioned to maintain this sultanic absolutism were amoral in conception (and often immoral in execution). The sultan was permitted to use all manner of force, craft, and deceit to maintain the subservience of his officials. Mutual spying and bitter interpersonal rivalries were to be positively encouraged, and the officials kept in constant fear of punishment.⁴⁹ Ostensibly, this was done to ensure that officials would remain zealous in service to the state and act with justice toward the subjects. From the standpoint of power politics, the rationale for these practices was to prevent the officials from combining against the sultan and threatening his power.

Abdülhamid's primary concern was to preserve the arbitrary and discretionary authority which Ottoman tradition accorded him, and he exploited these kinds of measures to the full. The sultan therefore created a parallel government of spies to watch the officially constituted one, tolerated corruption

46 See for example Tahsin Paşa, *Sultan* 120–1.

47 See for example Nizam al-Mulk, *Book* 34 ff.; and Katip Çelebi, *Düstür* 136–7.

48 Mahmud Nedim Paşa, *Ayine* 8–10.

49 Mahmud Nedim Paşa, *Ayine* 40; Akgündüz (ed.), *Osmanlı kanunnâmeleri* VIII, 41.

as a means of gaining the loyalty of his ministers, and encouraged discord among the high officials of his government.⁵⁰ Such measures persistently undermined his parallel efforts to make the government function efficiently and professionally. Although much was accomplished by the Hamidian regime in bureaucratic, military, legal and educational reform,⁵¹ the implementation of projects in this system was often hampered by constant discord among the persons and agencies concerned. Evidently, this is what happened to Hüseyin Hilmi's program of reform in Yemen.

Within this context, it should also be noted that the absolutism has historically drawn strength from the image of the wise and just sultan contrasted with his corrupt or vicious officials. This was the case even in Yemen. In one of the imam's letters to the Ottoman government, the blame for the troubles of Yemen is placed on the immoral and tyrannical "officials" (*ma'mūrīn*) of the sultan's government, rather than the sultan himself. Abdülhamid is referred to in respectful terms as "the most Majestic Sultan, through whom God establishes the faith ... and who uproots the fornicators and transgressors."⁵²

In other words, the wicked officials serve as a useful foil for the sultan. They can be used to implement unpopular policies without affecting his personal legitimacy too much and cast aside as a display of his justice and mercy if they go too far. Officials who become too popular as a result of zeal or competence, by contrast, may directly threaten the monarch's power. This is particularly true of modernizing absolutisms, where the forces questioning the system of monarchy might rally around officials who seem to represent modernity and progress. This, as we have seen, had happened just prior to Abdülhamid's accession, with Midhat Paşa and the deposition of Abdülaziz. Therefore, corruption was encouraged in modernizing absolutist states such as those of Abdülhamid or Emperor Haile Selassie.⁵³ Too great a reforming zeal, by contrast, might be "rewarded" with demotion or dismissal.⁵⁴

This seems to be the reason why individuals such as Feyzi Paşa or Abdullah Paşa were allowed to dominate policy in Yemen, while genuinely reformist governors encountered obstacles from within the Ottoman establishment.

50 Findley, *Reform* 227 ff.; see also Tahsin Paşa, *Sultan* 98, for the conflict between the Grand Vizier Sait Paşa and the Minister of War Rıza Paşa.

51 Georgeon, *Abdülhamid* 240–53.

52 Al-Washālī, *Dhayl* 46.

53 Findley, *Reform* 238; Kapuściński, *Emperor* 47, 99.

54 See Keddie, *Roots* 160–4; Kapuściński, *Emperor* 31–4.

A governor who was too successful in pacifying Yemen might achieve support within the military and civil establishments at the sultan's expense. He might even serve as a rallying point for opposition as Midhat Paşa had done, costing the sultan his throne, and perhaps even his life.

Abdülhamid therefore seems to have preferred mediocre officials to superior ones, for the former were more likely to remain dependent and obedient. The sultan was genuinely concerned about the future of the Ottoman state and the Muslims. Yet in the last analysis, he seems to have been psychologically incapable of distinguishing his own desire for personal power from the larger good of the Ottoman state and sacrificing the former in the service of the latter.

4 Conclusion

If Ahmed Feyzi Paşa's policies had represented the repressive side of Abdülhamid's absolutism, those of Hüseyin Hilmi Paşa were based on its reforming aspects. Their ambitious scope, encompassing in theory both large scale military operations and extensive reforms in the civil administration, could have in theory pushed them up the continuum of violence toward total war; a war, however, which represented the soft side of modern counterinsurgency rather than its more violent aspects.

The program could not be implemented as planned, however, because in the last analysis the Ottoman government simply lacked the resources to do so. In addition, this program was hampered from the outset by constant conflict between the different branches of government, with the failure to reform the Seventh Army and bring it under full civilian control; and these conflicts in turn stemmed in part from the peculiar character of Hamidian absolutism, in which government officials were deliberately played off against one another as a means of maintaining the sultan's power.

The contradiction between what was envisioned by the Reform Commission and what the Ottoman government was actually able to do will become apparent in our analysis of the Abdullah Paşa's military campaign against the imam, a campaign some of whose features we have already touched on. What we will see is that, on the one hand, it involved the mobilization of men and materiel on a large scale and hard fighting with modern weapons on both sides, perhaps some of the hardest fighting between the Ottoman forces and the imam's men that had taken place up to that date; and as such, it may be considered as part of the escalation toward total war in Yemen during the period under study.

Yet in practice its goals were limited, to punish the tribes and gain the voluntary submission of the imam. There were simply not enough men to occupy

the tribal areas outside Ottoman control and suppress the imamate by force, which were the stated goals of the Reform Commission. The imam and the tribes were punished but not cowed into submission, and on balance the campaign contributed to the escalation of rebellion in Yemen and not its suppression. We will analyze this campaign in detail in the next chapter.

The 1898–9 Ottoman Military Campaign

Hüseyin Hilmi Paşa's reform policies were accompanied by a military campaign against the imam which lasted for six months and which required all the resources the Ottoman Empire could muster. An analysis of this campaign shows that, as with Hüseyin Hilmi Paşa's civil reforms, the military resources of the Ottoman Empire in Yemen were insufficient to establish the authority of the government in Yemen on a permanent basis. The military objectives of the operation were to "frighten the imam and cause him to flee, and to make a display of military power (*satvet-i askeriye*) to the Arab tribes."¹

The specific military objectives determined by Abdullah Paşa thus conflicted with the objectives recommended by the civil Reform Commission, the occupation of the territories outside Ottoman control and the suppression of the imamate. With regard to the imam, efforts were made to persuade him to submit; but his capture or killing does not seem to have been seriously contemplated. Thus, despite the fact that it was conducted in conjunction with civil reforms designed to increase the power of the central government, the goals of the expedition were limited and not total; and thus, it could only constitute a punitive expedition on a grand scale.

The operation was conducted in two phases. The first phase was conducted in the Western Highlands. Its objective was to recapture the places in the Western Highlands, specifically Shāhil and its environs, which had been lost to the Ottomans in the rebellion of the tribes of that region in the last part of Feyzi Paşa's tenure as governor. A second objective was to punish these tribes for supporting the imam. The second phase consisted of a march through the territory of Ḥāshid north of Şan'ā' to the imam's seat at Qaflat al-'Udhar, accompanied by a stream of letters to the imam urging him to submit. Apparently, it was hoped that even if the imam could not be induced to submit, his inevitable flight from the Ottoman forces would make him look weak and induce the tribes supporting him to submit.

The initial concentration of forces was begun in the western town of Ḥajja, where Abdullah Paşa, the Field Marshal of the Seventh Army, came on 2 November 1898. By order of the General Staff, it was decided that the expeditionary force should consist of battalions of the regular (*nizāmīye*) troops, and

1 Atif Paşa, *Yemen II*, 199–200.

the reserve (*redif*) battalions should be used to garrison the military posts.² The necessity of conducting the campaign with battle-experienced *nizâmiye* troops would be proven by ensuing events.

The force was under the direct command of Abdullah Paşa and consisted of three regiments of infantry, a fortifications company charged with protecting the main encampment, a company of mule riders, and batteries of 8 cm, 5,7-pound and 5,6-pound artillery.³ The force remained in Ḥajja from November 7 to November 19 while provisions and transport animals were procured.⁴

The operation against Shāhil was to be conducted by means of converging columns. The main force, that is, the Ḥajja Division, would proceed to Shāhil by way of Wādī Ḥaqba and Wādī Mawr. Meanwhile a supporting force in Ḥajūr would proceed against Shāhil from that direction and make a feinting attack designed to draw the rebel tribes of the Sharafayn region away from the advance of the Ḥajja Division. The objective was the capture of Shāhil and the expulsion of the imam's men who were encamped there under the command of the Sayf al-Islām [that is, the son of the imam] Muḥammad al-Hādī.⁵

It may be apposite here to examine Callwell's remarks on the nature of "hill warfare" which are mainly based on the experience of British troops campaigning against the Afghan tribesmen on the Northwest Frontier of British India. A rugged mountainous country without roads, he says, makes the movement of the regular troops slow and laborious. The regular troops do not know the terrain, and the local fighters do. Wheeled transport cannot be employed, rendering necessary the employment of lengthy trains of pack animals. Supplies are rarely abundant, and the enemy marksmen on the hilltops inflict considerable losses among officers, men and pack animals.⁶ Callwell likewise notes that the acquisition of rifles by the Afghan tribesmen on the Northwest Frontier "have made their tactics far more difficult to cope with than when they trusted to antiquated matchlocks having neither range nor accuracy."⁷ These were also the difficulties that the Ottomans faced in Yemen, and it was evident that Abdullah Paşa and his men were embarking on a very dangerous operation which would test their military skill and courage to the greatest extent.

In the march up the Wādī Ḥaqba and the Wādī Mawr the force was divided into vanguard, main body and rearguard. The artillery was placed between the

2 Rüştü, *Yemen* 94–5.

3 Rüştü, *Yemen* 95–6.

4 Rüştü, *Yemen* 96.

5 Al-Iryānī, *Sīrat* II, 40.

6 Callwell, *Small wars* 287.

7 Callwell, *Small wars* 289.

vanguard and the main body. The infantry ammunition and the baggage were placed between the main body and the rearguard.⁸ This was presumably to prevent the rebels from falling on the column from the rear and plundering the unprotected baggage and ammunition. With variations, this was generally the order of march adhered to throughout the campaign.

Throughout the campaign parties of men were told off to occupy the crests of the mountains and ridges overlooking the route of march to ensure the safe passage of the main body.⁹ In this regard, Callwell stresses the importance of the principle of “crowning the heights.” In hilly country, the routes follow the course of the valleys, where there are habitations, cultivation, and places suitable for encampment. When not engaged in battle, the regular troops have to remain on lower ground, whether on the move or at rest. The enemy occupies the crests of the hills which the army passes on its march, or which surround its bivouac when it comes to a halt.¹⁰ Therefore, it is necessary to occupy the commanding positions along the route the main force takes, and this was done by Abdullah Paşa.

The march of the Ḥajja Division from Ḥajja to Shāhil took ten days, from 19 November 1898 to 29 November 1898. The rebels kept up a constant harassment of the column through fire from the heights along the route of march, and the division fought four battles, at Aʿraj, Jabal Dabas, Jabal Dār and Jabal al-Amrūr. At Aʿraj, the rebels occupied positions they had fortified on a mountain. Here, the rebels appeared in sufficient force to halt the march of the column and put up a stubborn resistance from the positions they had fortified. They were, however, driven out by artillery fire and a flanking attack.¹¹

At Jabal Dabas, the rebels had again fortified themselves and began to delay the column. This place was also attacked and seized, Major-General Rüştü giving no details of this battle.¹²

The third battle was at Jabal Dār, where the rebels had fortified themselves after abandoning Jabal Dabas. The First and Second Regiments of the Ḥajja Division were detailed to make an assault, while the Third Regiment was detailed to guard the ridges between Wādī Mawr and Jabal Dabas.¹³

8 Rüştü, *Yemen* 101.

9 In Abdullah Paşa's order at the start of the campaign it is stated that “two companies of the First Battalion of the Second Regiment will form the flanking parties to the right and left and protect the flanks of the column on the march.” Rüştü, *Yemen* 101.

10 Callwell, *Small wars* 292.

11 Rüştü, *Yemen* 102.

12 Rüştü, *Yemen* 102.

13 Rüştü, *Yemen* 103.

The rebels were driven out by a surrounding movement against their flanks, and from thence they withdrew to Jabal al-Amrūr,¹⁴ which al-Iryānī describes as the key to Shāhil from the eastern side. The rebels numbered about 400–500¹⁵ men and were under the command of Yaḥyā ibn Ḥusayn al-Kuhlānī. They had been instructed by the imam to guard the road through Jabal al-Amrūr and prevent the passage of the Ottoman force.¹⁶ It was clear, however, that such a small force could not resist an Ottoman force of over 2,000 men armed with artillery.

The reason for the fewness of the imam's men, however, was that another Ottoman force had been detailed to proceed against Shāhil from Ḥajūr, to keep the people of Sharafayn occupied and prevent them from gathering against the Ḥajja Division.¹⁷ That is, the local rebel tribes of Sharafayn, seeing their homes directly threatened by the force advancing from Ḥajūr, would stay in their home region rather than joining the men employed by the imam who had been detailed to guard the road through Jabal al-Amrūr. The strategy of dividing the Ottoman forces to make the rebels divide their own forces proved to be successful.

The operation of the Ḥajūr Division was based on the Third Military Post, apparently a garrison between Ḥajūr and Shāhil. Thus, the operation was supported by a fortification whose rifle and artillery fire could cover the advance of the force, and under cover of which the force could retreat if necessary. Unlike the Ḥajja Division, the Ḥajūr Division would face forces numbering several thousand. When the battalions of the Ḥajūr Division approached the Third Military Post, the rebels opened fire. The commander of the Third Military Post Hadi Paşa, however, ordered the artillery in the post to be turned against them, which cost them about thirty casualties. The soldiers kept good order under fire and entered the Third Military Post.¹⁸

Thus, while the Ḥajja Division was capturing Jabal Dabas, the Ḥajūr Division was attacking Shāhil and Qaryat al-Faṣīḥ. On the first day of the battle, two battalions advanced against Shāhil and Qaryat al-Faṣīḥ, supported by rifle and artillery fire from the Third Military Post. The skirmishing line approached to within 200 meters of Qaryat al-Faṣīḥ without any problems. The number of the rebels, however, gradually increased as the local tribesmen assembled to defend their homes. The rebel tribesmen and the Ottoman troops remained in

14 Rūštū, *Yemen* 104.

15 Ibid.

16 Al-Iryānī, *Sīrat* II, 41.

17 Rūštū, *Yemen* 98.

18 Rūštū, *Yemen* 105–6.

their positions until evening, when the latter retired in good order to the Third Military Post under cover of rifle and artillery fire from the garrison.¹⁹

By the next day, the rebel tribesmen numbered about 4,000. The battalions of the Ḥajūr Division again advanced against Shāhil and Qaryat al-Faṣīḥ.²⁰ Meanwhile, the Ḥajja Division was preparing to attack Jabal al-Amrūr. According to Abdullah Paşa's order, the objective was to seize this mountain, which he described as the left wing of the rebels; its capture would cause their line of defense to collapse. The regiments were to advance against Jabal al-Amrūr under cover of fire of the artillery, to whose emplacement Abdullah Paşa would see himself.²¹ As it turned out, the shaykh of Jabal al-Amrūr submitted without fighting.²²

According to al-Iryānī, there was a battle; but because of the numbers of the Ottomans and the fewness of the imam's men, the latter were forced to withdraw.²³ According to Major-General Rüştü, after the occupation of Jabal al-Amrūr the Ḥajja Division fell on the line of retreat of the imam's men; and Qaryat al-Faṣīḥ was caught in a cross-fire by the artillery of the Ḥajja and Ḥajūr Divisions respectively.²⁴ Shāhil was also bombarded by artillery, although this did not have much effect on its houses, as they were built with double walls of stone.²⁵

The imam's men thus failed in their objective, which had been to guard the road to Shāhil, and the Ottoman forces seized complete control of that road. Al-Iryānī says that the Ottomans had "seized every place and taken possession of every pass" (*qabaḍū jāmi' al-jihāt wa-akhadhū afwāḥ al-ṭurqāt*), and so the imam's men were forced to flee Shāhil by night,²⁶ the night of November 28, 1898.²⁷ Qaryat al-Faṣīḥ was also abandoned.²⁸

The Ḥajja and Ḥajūr Divisions thus came together on November 29, 1898. Al-Iryānī says [the Ottomans] "sought out Shāhil after firing on it with artillery, and when they realized that no-one remained there, they entered it, and they considered that they had achieved what they had hoped for, and rejoiced

19 Rüştü, *Yemen* 106.

20 Ibid.

21 Rüştü, *Yemen* 104–5.

22 Rüştü, *Yemen* 107.

23 Al-Iryānī, *Sīrat* II, 41.

24 Rüştü, *Yemen* 107.

25 Rüştü, *Yemen* 110.

26 Al-Iryānī, *Sīrat* II, 41–2.

27 Rüştü, *Yemen* 107.

28 Ibid.

at that.”²⁹ The first part of the Ottoman operations in the Western Highlands of Yemen must be thus considered as a success. The objective, to drive away the imam’s men from Shāhil and its environs, and to reoccupy the places that had been lost in the rebellion at the end of Feyzi Paşa’s term as governor had been achieved. The imam’s efforts to hold onto these places had failed. What accounted for the Ottoman success?

The effective use of converging columns was one reason. Callwell states that in broken intersected country quick movements of large armies are impossible, and that only a limited amount of supplies can be moved along a route within a given time. Likewise, in this kind of terrain there is little room to deploy, and only a limited force can be drawn up in line of battle. This makes it preferable to move in several columns. In addition, there is the moral effect on irregular warriors produced by the spectacle of several columns pouring into their territory, impressing them with a sense of the superiority of the force.³⁰

The Ottoman use of converging columns, therefore, was suited to the mountainous terrain of the western highlands. When the columns came together, as we have seen, they trapped the rebels in a crossfire which they were unable to resist. Likewise, the moral effect seems to have been considerable. At the battle of Jabal al-Amrūr al-Iryānī says that “with the great numbers of the foreigners and the fewness of the holy warriors, they could not repel them, and they seized that road.”³¹

The Ottoman forces had superior discipline and superior weaponry through their possession of artillery. Major-General Rüştü, however, states that the artillery had its limitations. In the first place, it could only do limited damage to the stone buildings of Yemen. Secondly, the rebels knew how to excavate shelters level with the ground to protect them from artillery fire, and would only come out to attack an advancing force after the artillery fire to cover the advance of that force had ceased.³² Despite these caveats, it does appear that the superior firepower conferred by artillery, together with the numbers of the Ottoman force, was crucial in giving the Ottoman force a degree of battlefield superiority.

The effective use of a flanking attack was another reason for the Ottoman success. According to Callwell, “it is somewhat singular that, taking into account the tendency of irregular warriors to threaten the flanks and rear of

29 Al-Iryānī, *Sīrat* II, 42. He wrongly gives the date of the Ottoman entry into Shāhil as 18 Rajab [2 December 1898].

30 Callwell, *Small wars* 108–10.

31 Al-Iryānī, *Sīrat* II, 41.

32 Rüştü, *Yemen* 109.

the regular forces, such adversaries seldom seem to be prepared for attacks upon their own flank or rear ... such antagonists are always in great terror of having their retreat cut, and if they find the regular troops getting round their flanks they generally abandon their positions in hot haste."³³ Rüştü makes the same point, "it is known that the bandits put up a stubborn defense from the front, but because they are irregulars (*başıbozuk*) they have no power to stand firm and take [appropriate] measures in the face of surrounding movements, however they be conducted."³⁴ What Rüştü says, as we have seen, is that the Ottomans fell on the line of retreat of the rebels after the occupation of Jabal al-Amrūr; and this helped to decide that phase of the operation in the Ottomans' favor.

What we have seen also in the preceding paragraphs, however, is that the manpower of the Ottoman force compared favorably to that of the rebels in this phase of the campaign; and the primary reason for this was political. Nāşir Mabkhūt al-Aḥmar, the powerful paramount shaykh of the Ḥāshid tribal confederation, had fallen out with the imam and refused to send his tribesmen into battle with the imam's men.³⁵ Since Ḥāshid constituted the backbone of the imam's tribal military support, their refusal to fight the Ottoman force seriously cut into the manpower the imam was able to muster.

The political division of the imam's tribal support meant that the military strategy of converging columns, that is, the division of the Ottoman forces in the attack on Shāhil in order to cause the rebels to divide their own forces, was able to succeed. The rebels could not muster enough manpower to fight both Ottoman forces at once, and thus the imam's men were forced to retreat.

In addition, Nāşir Mabkhūt al-Aḥmar owned extensive property in the Western Highlands in the Ḥajja region which he did not want damaged. So, he made the Ottomans to understand that he would not molest them if they left his property alone, undertaking to secure the Ottomans' base of operations in the Ḥajja region, and sending his son Ḥamūd to accompany the Ottoman force. As a result, the Ottoman force was secure from attack from that direction.³⁶

So, the operation to retake Shāhil was a success; and yet, how complete a success was it? Callwell lays great stress on not only beating the enemy in small wars, but beating him thoroughly, with many casualties. Rüştü, however, noting

33 Callwell, *Small wars* 161.

34 Rüştü, *Yemen* 119.

35 Rüştü, *Yemen* 108.

36 Rüştü, *Yemen* 107–8.

that the rebel forces suffered few casualties in this phase of the operation, gives the reason for this as follows: “the continual objective the bandits pursue is to obtain plunder ... they learn very quickly from observing the discipline, numbers and order of march of a force advancing upon them whether they can achieve their goals, and at no time will they choose to suffer unnecessary casualties. This time, because they understood that they would gain nothing, they did not put up a serious resistance.”³⁷

In other words, the rebels had retreated, but they had not been beaten thoroughly and completely demoralized. They had opted for classic guerrilla tactics of melting away in the face of a superior force, only to return to the attack when circumstances were favorable. And as happens so often in small wars, the seizure of a strategic populated place meant the beginning, not the end, of serious resistance to the regular forces.

The next phase of the operation was the punishment of the Banī Jill tribe. The objective was to punish that tribe for their rebellion and to defeat the imam’s men in their territory.³⁸ Accordingly, after Shāhil and the surrounding region had been garrisoned and provisions brought up from Ḥudayda, a division was formed for that purpose which set out on 6 December 1898.³⁹ Two major battles were fought in this campaign, the battle to take Masnab and the battle to seize Jabal Maḥābisha and Jabal Ma’rūf. In the battle to take Masnab, the tactic of converging columns was used once again. The force was formed into two brigades, both of which were to advance on Masnab. The first brigade was to proceed on the right wing and the second on the left. The task of the first brigade was to prevent the Sharafayn tribesmen from joining those of Banī Jill and to protect the flank of the second brigade. As it turned out, this brigade did not encounter serious resistance.⁴⁰

The force was lightly equipped to facilitate rapid movement. Two batteries of artillery were taken with the force, with a column of 20 transport animals and 50 infantrymen to carry their ammunition. Likewise, columns were formed to carry the ammunition of the infantry behind each brigade. The other baggage of the brigades was left behind in their respective camps, with the soldiers carrying with them two days’ supply of bread and biscuit.⁴¹

37 Rūştü, *Yemen* 111.

38 Rūştü, *Yemen* 112–13.

39 Rūştü, *Yemen* 113.

40 Rūştü, *Yemen* 116.

41 Rūştü, *Yemen* 113–14.

The main fighting was done by the second brigade. As the second brigade proceeded along the route, described by Rūṣṭū as a “footpath” (*patika*), it was met with fire on its flanks from the villages of Banī Jill. Callwell advises division of the artillery available to a regular force engaged in a small war into several places on the battlefield, owing to the tendency of irregular warriors to conduct enveloping attacks on their adversary,⁴² and this was done to a limited extent. It appears that the two batteries of artillery were placed on either flank of the second brigade and moved with its advance, firing on the houses from which the Banī Jill tribesmen were firing.

After hard fighting the second brigade eventually succeeded in reaching Masnab, shortly followed by the first brigade. Rūṣṭū describes this battle as a success, stating that only fourteen men were killed and wounded (certainly an underestimation), and that the commander of the second brigade Ahmed Paṣa’s courage and swift movement prevented the tribesmen of Sharafayn from joining those of Banī Jill. As a result, the column was not halted and fighting only took place with Banī Jill.⁴³

Again, however, if we judge the battle by Callwell’s dictum that the enemy should not just be put to flight but thoroughly beaten and cowed, the success of this battle is far from clear. The swift march apparently did prevent the arrival of the Sharafayn tribesmen and the overwhelming of the Ottoman force by superior numbers. Rūṣṭū himself admits, however, that the resistance of the Banī Jill tribesmen was put up in order to gain time to move their families to the territory of the Banī Aslam tribe.⁴⁴ In other words, it was more like a tactical fighting retreat than a determined resistance to prevent the Ottoman force from entering its territory.

And in spite of this, the fighting was hard, probably with many more casualties than Rūṣṭū admits. Al-Iryānī describes it as a “great battle” and both Rūṣṭū and al-Iryānī note that the high-ranking Ottoman officer Colonel Ali Naili Bey was killed in the fighting.⁴⁵ The Ottoman force remained intact and reached its intended objective of Masnab. Despite this, it was evident that it had been roughly handled and that it had not inflicted a crushing defeat on the rebels.

Rūṣṭū himself notes this, “the bandits of the Banī Jill fled to Banī Aslam and continued in banditry, setting ambushes when the opportunity arose. The bandits of Sharafayn were not scattered but took up position on the mountains of Maḥābisha under the commanders sent by Sayyid Ḥamīd al-Dīn [the imam].

42 Callwell, *Small wars* 435.

43 Rūṣṭū, *Yemen* 115.

44 Ibid.

45 Ibid.; al-Iryānī, *Sīrat* 11, 47.

Thus, the assembly of banditry was not scattered and the people of the places seized had not entered into obedience; and so the complete punishment of the bandits was necessary.”⁴⁶

The Ottoman force first seized Jabal Fāyish opposite Jabal Maḥābisha. The men of Sharafayn, under the command of the men sent by the imam were apparently drawn up in two defensive lines on Jabal Maḥābisha and on Jabal Maʿrūf to its right. It is not entirely clear whether the rebel line extended from Jabal Maḥābisha to Jabal Maʿrūf. If it did, the space between the mountains was probably not as strongly held as the mountains themselves. According to Rūštū, the rebel force, consisting of the men of Sharafayn, Ḥajūr al-Shām and Aflāḥ al-Shām and numbering about 4,000, intended to put up a serious resistance and prevent the Ottoman force from entering their villages.⁴⁷

Accordingly, the Ottoman command organized the attacking force into three regiments of four battalions each. The first regiment would attack Jabal Maʿrūf to the right of the Ottoman force, and the second Jabal Maḥābisha to the left, while the third regiment would advance between them.⁴⁸ The attacking force assembled on Jabal Fāyish and advanced before dawn on the morning of 17 December 1898. The instructions Field-Marshal Abdullah Paşa gave to Major-General Reşit Paşa gave the objective as the seizure of Jabal Maḥābisha and Jabal Maʿrūf. The field marshal and the general staff remained in the camp at Jabal Fāyish, and the artillery was emplaced there.⁴⁹

The second regiment advanced against the rebel line on Jabal Maḥābisha, covered by artillery fire from the encampment. The first regiment advanced against the rebel position on Jabal Maʿrūf without the benefit of artillery fire, as the encampment was too far away. The rebels opened fire on the Ottoman force at both points, and hard fighting with strong volleys of fire continued for a time. The matter was decided by a combined flank attack and frontal assault with bayonets undertaken by the Ottoman troops.

Callwell notes the utility of frontal attacks combined with flank attacks “... purely frontal attacks are a mistake, because, in the first place, the enemy gives way before them and because in the second place, from this direction the hostile line of retreat is left unthreatened. Frontal attacks combined with flank attacks are infinitely preferable if circumstances permit of the maneuver.”⁵⁰ This was the measure taken at this battle, and it was a qualified success.

46 Rūštū, *Yemen* 115.

47 Rūštū, *Yemen* 116–17.

48 Rūštū, *Yemen* 117.

49 Rūštū, *Yemen* 118.

50 Callwell, *Small wars* 160.

Callwell likewise notes that a charge with bayonets often demoralizes the enemy “the bravest of them [the irregular warriors] turn and flee before a bayonet charge ... the bayonet charge scarcely ever fails and ... the enemy will not even face it as a rule.”⁵¹ The bayonet charge in this battle seems to have turned the tide in the Ottomans’ favor.

Yet even when all this is taken into account, it is not clear that the rebels were thoroughly beaten and demoralized. Rüştü says that the rebels retreated gradually and put up a defense to cover their retreat,⁵² which does not indicate precipitate flight. Moreover, although the Ottoman force subsequently occupied the important positions of Shamsān, Maḥābisha and Miftāḥ, their presence was not permanent. They would be withdrawn from this region to take part in the final phase of the operation, the march on the imam’s seat at Qaflat al-‘Udhar.⁵³

Major-General Rüştü, and probably Abdullah Paşa as well, thus understood that the effects of the Ottoman operation would be only temporary. “To pacify (*islah*) [the tribes] in a suitable fashion, it is necessary to act in accordance with a well-founded plan ... to leave no place outside government control ... not to withdraw from any place where the soldier sets foot, and in this manner to expel from their territories those tribes who rebel and do not accept the impositions of the government.”⁵⁴

Rüştü goes on to say that he wrote to the Sublime Porte requesting a division of regular troops with sufficient transport animals to carry out this plan of permanent occupation. Otherwise, the military operations could only constitute a “temporary punishment” (*tedib-i muvakkat*), or, in other words, a punitive expedition on a grand scale.⁵⁵

Furthermore, because it was a punitive expedition, the punishments implemented ran completely counter to the civil administration’s efforts to gain the support of the Yemeni population. This is what al-Iryānī has to say about the measures taken by the Ottoman military administration in the Sharaf region: “in the month of Ramaḍān the foreigners greatly oppressed the people of al-Sharaf ... and they demanded the impossible from those who had submitted, until they were alienated, and many fled after having submitted ... and they demanded [their] rifles from them, and made great confiscations by violence ... and every righteous man from among the people fled, and the

51 Callwell, *Small wars* 399.

52 Rüştü, *Yemen* 120.

53 Rüştü, *Yemen* 126.

54 Rüştü, *Yemen* 122.

55 Rüştü, *Yemen* 124–5.

foreigners destroyed most of the houses in the city of Shāhil, and dared to proceed against the great mosques and destroy them; thus was shown the falseness of their profession of Islam.”⁵⁶

The upshot of all this was that the tribes of Shāhil undertook a fierce guerilla war against the Ottoman force, the situation against which Callwell warns in *Small Wars*.⁵⁷ The Ottoman forces destroyed the houses of the Banī Ka‘b and Nawsān tribes in consequence of their refusal to give up the Martini-Henry rifles that they had previously looted from the Ottoman troops.⁵⁸

In consequence, the Banī Ka‘b and Nawsān resumed the jihad, “harassing the enemies of God, the foreigners, in the valleys and high places” and raiding the Ottoman encampment at every opportunity, the imam supplying them with provisions.⁵⁹

Likewise, sickness continued to ravage the Ottoman force, exacerbated no doubt by poor food and what we may safely assume were primitive sanitary arrangements. “God answered his [the imam’s] prayer ... for when the foreigners came to al-Sharaf God struck them with great and fatal sickness, and every day some of them died.”⁶⁰

In sum, the tribes of the northwest highlands were punished but not cowed or pacified. The draconian measures taken by the Ottoman forces, which would have been more draconian had Major-General Rüştü had his way,⁶¹ served to drive the tribes further into the arms of the imam. The Ottomans were unable to control any part of the country apart from the strong points they had retaken after their loss in the previous rebellion. Their forces were inadequate to do so even if they had not been losing men due to illness. The operation was thus only able to achieve a return to the status quo as it had been under Feyzi Paşa: state violence which was unable to suppress the resistance it aroused.

While the Ottomans were in al-Sharaf, moreover, the imam had not been idle. The fortress of Shahāra was the strongest and most inaccessible fortress on the direct route from al-Sharaf to Qaflat al-‘Udhar; and the imam added to its fortifications, garrisoned it and stored three years’ worth of supplies there. As a result, the Ottoman force could not take the most direct route to Qaflat al-‘Udhar and approach it from the west.⁶² In consequence, the base of

56 Al-Iryānī, *Sīrat* II, 56–7.

57 Callwell, *Small wars* 97.

58 Al-Iryānī, *Sīrat* II, 57; Rüştü, *Yemen* 121.

59 Ibid.

60 Al-Iryānī, *Sīrat* II, 48.

61 Rüştü wanted to drive the rebel tribes from their lands and expose them to starvation so that they would submit to the government. Rüştü, *Yemen* 122.

62 Al-Iryānī, *Sīrat* II, 49–50.

operations was changed to ‘Amrān, to which a force was to be dispatched from Ṣan‘ā’.⁶³ The force under the direct command of Abdullah Paşa was to march east and south, instead of directly northeast to Qaflat al-‘Udhar, and enter the territory of Ḥāshid by way of Sūda.

The march to Sūda took several days and was accompanied by hard fighting all the way. The Ottoman force set out from its encampment at Sha‘āriyya on 13 February 1899, encamping successively at al-Rāḥa, Sūq al-Dawm and Bayt Ḥakam before it reached Sūda.⁶⁴ The force followed the usual order of march. One regiment formed the vanguard, one the main force and one the rearguard. The artillery proceeded at the head of the main force, while its ammunition and the baggage followed directly behind the main force. Troops were told off to secure the ridges of the wadis while the three regiments marched on the wadi floors, joining the rearguard when the entire force had passed.⁶⁵

The Banī Nawsān and Banī Ka‘b tribesmen of Sharaf pursued and fought the Ottoman force as it marched.⁶⁶ Two forces of the imam’s men under the commands, respectively, of Shaykh Mas‘ūd al-Bāriq and Sayyid Ḥusayn ibn Qāsim ‘Āmir, were likewise sent to attack the Ottoman force.⁶⁷ These forces kept up a constant running harassment of the Ottoman force, attacking it from the rear, attacking its encampment at night,⁶⁸ and constantly seeking to surround it from the ridges lining the wadis.

The Ottoman soldiers fought back hard. “The battalions were regular (*nizāmiye*) troops who had been in Yemen for a while and participated in many battles ... in consequence, they kept up their courage in fighting back and leaving no stragglers, even among those who fell sick and died, up to their final moments.”⁶⁹ The column, however, was on the verge of running out of provisions when it reached Sūda; and had the shaykh of Sūda not submitted, and provisions been sent there, the column would have been cut to pieces.⁷⁰

The Ottoman force arrived in Sūda on 21 February 1899 and stayed there until 26 February, setting out on the 27th.⁷¹ This was an interval of relative quiet for the Ottomans. Although the rebels fired on the town by night, the

63 Rūştü, *Yemen* 126.

64 Rūştü, *Yemen* 132 ff.

65 Rūştü, *Yemen* 128–9.

66 Al-Iryānī, *Sirat* II, 67.

67 Al-Iryānī, *Sirat* II, 68.

68 Rūştü, *Yemen* 132 ff.

69 Rūştü, *Yemen* 143.

70 Al-Iryānī, *Sirat* II, 70; Rūştü, *Yemen* 144–6.

71 Rūştü, *Yemen* 144–7.

houses of the town were so well fortified that the fire had no effect.⁷² Their supplies were replenished by the provisions that had been sent to Sūda from ‘Amrān.⁷³ Deaths from sickness continued, however, and so many transport animals died that the Ottomans had difficulty in finding animals to transport their baggage.⁷⁴

The final phase of the operation was the march east from Sūda and then north through the territory of the Ḥāshid tribal confederation. For this, the base of operations had been changed to Ṣan‘ā’ and ‘Amrān, because of the greater ease of the road, and consequently of the securing of supplies from that direction.⁷⁵ The objective of the operations was the imam’s seat at Qaflat al-‘Udhar. A force consisting of three battalions and an artillery battery was to advance from Ṣan‘ā’ and ‘Amrān and meet Abdullah Paşa’s force at Sarāra.⁷⁶

As planned, the force from Ṣan‘ā’ and Abdullah Paşa’s force came together at Lawmī and Sarāra.⁷⁷ The total strength of the Ottoman force was thus brought up to sixteen battalions. The combined force then went northward to Sanatayn, from whence it was to proceed northward through Khamir, the seat of Ḥāshid, to the imam’s seat at Qaflat al-‘Udhar.

The force stayed in Sanatayn until the 31st of March, 1899.⁷⁸ From thence, the march to Qaflat al-‘Udhar would take twelve days, the force arriving at Qaflat al-‘Udhar on the 13th of April, 1899.⁷⁹ The order from the Sublime Porte to Abdullah Paşa stated that on the one hand, he was to show strength (*irae-i satvet*) and on the other, persuasion (*utma ve istimale*) to get the imam to submit.⁸⁰

The Ottoman force had several advantages in its favor. First, it was acting on the offensive. Second, the tribal confederation of Ḥāshid, following the lead of its paramount shaykh Nāṣir Mabkhūt al-Aḥmar, had submitted to the Ottomans. The Ottoman force thus encountered no serious resistance from them during their stay in Sanatayn.⁸¹ In fact, Ḥāshid supplied them with transport animals.⁸² Third, and this followed from the submission of Ḥāshid, the

72 Rūṣṭū, *Yemen* 147.

73 Rūṣṭū, *Yemen* 149.

74 Al-Iryānī, *Sīrat* II, 73.

75 Rūṣṭū, *Yemen* 150.

76 Rūṣṭū, *Yemen* 126.

77 Al-Iryānī, *Sīrat* II, 73.

78 Rūṣṭū, *Yemen* 157.

79 Rūṣṭū, *Yemen* 173.

80 Rūṣṭū, *Yemen* 159.

81 Rūṣṭū, *Yemen* 157.

82 Rūṣṭū, *Yemen* 159.

Ottoman force generally had superior manpower in the battles on the way from Sanatayn to Qaflat al-‘Udhar.

The Ottoman force numbered several thousand, while the imam’s forces generally consisted of bands of 100–300 men from his loyal supporters, who were not supported by the Ḥāshid tribesmen of the surrounding country. As a result, the imam’s men generally sought to fight and flee, keeping up a running harassment of the Ottoman force by occupying important positions on the road, fighting to impede their march, and then slipping away by night.

The first battle took place when an Ottoman force came up from Sanatayn and al-Jirāf to attack a party of the imam’s men under the command of the imam’s son the Sayf al-Islām Muḥammad ibn al-Ghayl. (The shaykh of al-Ghayl had repeatedly asked the Sayf al-Islām Muḥammad to leave because he feared that he would bring the Ottomans upon him and his people).

The Ottoman force came up very suddenly upon the imam’s men; but the Sayf al-Islām had previously prepared three positions on the mountain above al-Ghayl, and the imam’s men were able to take up their positions behind their barricades before the Ottomans attacked them. The battle lasted from the afternoon until sunset, after which the Ottomans retreated to Afīra and the imam’s men went north to Wādī‘a.⁸³

The second battle took place in the region of Wādī‘a. There is a discrepancy between Rūṣṭū and al-Iryānī as to the location of this battle. Rūṣṭū says that the imam’s men took up their positions in Wādī‘a,⁸⁴ while al-Iryānī says that the men of Wādī‘a refused to receive the imam’s men.⁸⁵ The imam’s men thus took up their positions in Bayt al-A‘dab when the Ottoman force came upon them in the morning.⁸⁶ The rebels numbered only several hundred,⁸⁷ while the Ottoman force numbered several thousand. The Ottomans set up three batteries of artillery, one of which was a battery of Krupp field guns, and the firing began. The bombardment continued until evening. The Ottoman force had surrounded the village, and the infantry was periodically ordered to attack the village from the front; but they were always driven back by the fire of the rebels, suffering heavy casualties in the process.⁸⁸

In his analysis of the battle Rūṣṭū states that the artillery could not do sufficient damage to the houses and fortifications of the village,⁸⁹ and that the rebels actually used the breaches opened by the artillery as embrasures from

83 Al-Iryānī, *Sīrat* II, 86–7.

84 Rūṣṭū, *Yemen* 163.

85 Al-Iryānī, *Sīrat* II, 87.

86 Al-Iryānī, *Sīrat* II, 87–8.

87 Rūṣṭū, *Yemen* 163.

88 Rūṣṭū, *Yemen* 164; al-Iryānī, *Sīrat* II, 88.

89 Rūṣṭū, *Yemen* 165–6.

which to fire on the Ottoman forces.⁹⁰ The rebels, he says, do not know how to use gun sights and so their fire at long range has little effect; but at short ranges their fire is deadly, and this accounted for the heavy casualties suffered by the Ottoman force. Rüştü says that 25 soldiers were “martyred” and 70 wounded;⁹¹ and al-Iryānī gives the number of Ottoman soldiers killed as over 400.⁹² Assuming that Rüştü is minimizing, and al-Iryānī exaggerating, we can assume that the number of Ottoman casualties fell somewhere between the two estimates.

When night fell the rebels made their escape through the Ottoman siege line. Al-Iryānī says that the Ottoman soldiers knew that the rebels were escaping but pretended not to notice; Rüştü attributes their successful escape to their knowledge of the country and the terrain, which enabled them to move about by night as easily as by day.⁹³

The Ottoman force stayed in Wādī‘a for about a week, storing provisions and making preparations for the march on Qaflat al-‘Udhar.⁹⁴ The Ottoman force set out from Wādī‘a on 10 April 1898⁹⁵ and arrived at Qaflat al-‘Udhar on April 13th.⁹⁶ There was hard fighting all the way. The Ottoman force proceeded in the usual fashion, the main body marching on the road while flanking parties were sent to occupy the ridges lining the road to protect the force from the rebels who had taken up their positions there. The rebels sought to occupy the mountains commanding the road, to fire on the Ottoman column and to surround it.

Battles were fought at Jabal Ḥarāz, Jabal Ru‘us and Jabal Qam‘a. At Jabal Ḥarāz, the Ottoman force surprised the rebels with a dawn attack. The Ottoman forces were on the ridges before the rebels, who only numbered about 80 men, were aware of it; and their commander Shaykh Mas‘ūd al-Bāriq, realizing that he did not have the numbers to resist them, withdrew after a battle lasting until midday. The Ottoman force pursued them as far as al-Bā‘ira, with the rebels continuing their retreat after some fighting.⁹⁷

The Ottoman force advanced as far as the encampment of the Sayf al-Islām at Birkat Quḥāz,⁹⁸ and a very hard-fought battle took place at Jabal Ru‘us. The rebels had occupied Jabal Ru‘us and Ḥajar Ghurāb in force, and at first a single battalion of Ottoman troops was sent against them. The rebels tried to surround it, but Colonel Rifat Bey conducted a surrounding movement against

90 Rüştü, *Yemen* 164.

91 Ibid.

92 Al-Iryānī, *Sīrat* II, 88.

93 Al-Iryānī, *Sīrat* II, 89; Rüştü, *Yemen* 166.

94 Rüştü, *Yemen* 168.

95 Ibid.

96 Rüştü, *Yemen* 173.

97 Al-Iryānī, *Sīrat* II, 91; Rüştü, *Yemen* 171.

98 Al-Iryānī, *Sīrat* II, 91.

them with the 2nd Regiment, while the Ottoman artillery entrenched on the ridges caused casualties among the rebels.⁹⁹

The accounts of al-Iryānī and Rūštū coincide as to the surrounding tactics of the Ottoman force but differ as to the outcome of the battle. Rūštū says that “the bandits were completely cleansed from Jabal Ru’us.”¹⁰⁰ Al-Iryānī says “the foreigners were on the point of surrounding the Arabs from all sides, except that by the beauty of the grace of the Glorious and Praiseworthy One and his excellent management of [His] slaves, a party from among those who were not in the encampment [of the Sayf al-Islām at Birkat Quḥāz] came upon the foreigners from behind, and so at that time the foreigners failed, and lost some of their strength.”¹⁰¹

Whatever the outcome of the battle, it did not stop the Ottoman advance, and fighting continued all the way. Because of contradictions between Rūštū and al-Iryānī it is difficult to reconstruct the tactical details of these battles. What can be surmised is that the fighting was hard and every inch of ground the Ottomans took was contested by the rebels. Rūštū says “the flanking parties proceeded fighting and the bandits withdrew step by step; as for the bandits, they expended the same amount of ammunition as us.”¹⁰²

On the same day, al-Iryānī describes a fierce battle at a mountain called Jabal Qam’a. “When [the Ottoman force] arrived at Jabal Qam’a, they attacked the Sayf al-Islām and those with him, and they met them with gunfire ... to the point that Shaykh Mabkhūt Qufāz drew his knife and charged in among them, and when they saw that they fled after fearful slaughter had been made among them; and among those killed were many of the prominent men of the foreigners ... and [Sayyid ‘Abdallāh ibn Yaḥyā] told me ... that he went around the barricades of the foreigners and found on every one rivers of blood from the great numbers killed and wounded, and God saved the holy warriors.”¹⁰³

Al-Iryānī, as a court propagandist for Imam al-Manṣūr, is probably exaggerating the extent of the Ottoman defeat; and since Rūštū, who was actually present on the campaign, describes a continuous advance, it is not likely that the Ottoman force made more than a temporary and local retreat. Nonetheless, the stubborn courage of the imam’s men is apparent from both accounts.

That day, however, the Ottoman force succeeded in reaching the environs of Qaflat al-‘Udhar and occupying the strategic points on the mountains

99 Rūštū, *Yemen* 171.

100 Ibid.

101 Al-Iryānī, *Sīrat* II, 91–2.

102 Rūštū, *Yemen* 173.

103 Al-Iryānī, *Sīrat* II, 93.

surrounding it, the imam having fled to the mountains on 12 April 1899.¹⁰⁴ In doing so, they surrounded the garrisons that the imam had left in Qaflat al-ʿUdhar and exposed them to fire from above. Some men of the garrisons fled immediately, although the garrison on the north side of Qaflat al-ʿUdhar resisted for a time. And so, the Ottoman force entered Qaflat al-ʿUdhar on Thursday April 13, 1899, six months from the time it had set out from Şanʿā.¹⁰⁵

The entry into Qaflat al-ʿUdhar marked the end of serious fighting in the campaign. The Ottoman force stayed there for two days until Saturday and then returned to Şanʿā through the territory of Ḥāshid, which offered no resistance and in fact allowed the soldiers to stay in their homes.¹⁰⁶

One of the specific goals of the expedition, to frighten the imam and cause him to flee, had thus been achieved. But did the expedition have any lasting effects?

The more ambitious objective of the expedition had been to employ a mixture of persuasion and coercion to get the imam and the tribes supporting him to submit. The military operations had been accompanied by a steady stream of letters urging the imam to submit and offering assurances of safety if he did so.¹⁰⁷ If the imam chose not to submit the objective, as stated previously, was to make him look weak in the eyes of his supporters by causing him to flee from his seat at Qaflat al-ʿUdhar. It is also apparent that the expedition was intended to pacify the region of the northwest highlands, to recapture the towns and strong points in the northwest highlands that the imam's men had occupied and to punish the tribes of that region for their rebellion.

The objective of recapturing the towns and strong points of the northwest highlands was achieved, but the complete pacification of that region was not. The tribes of the northwest highlands waged a relentless guerrilla war against the Ottoman force as it marched through that region. The behavior of the Ottoman soldiers and the element of punishment that a punitive expedition necessarily entailed soon alienated the tribes of the northwest. The Ottoman force destroyed houses and mosques, demanded the rifles of the tribesmen, and may even have committed rape.¹⁰⁸ In short, the actions of Abdullah Paşa's force ran completely counter to Hüseyin Hilmi Paşa's policy of government reforms to gain the support of the population.

104 Rüşti, *Yemen* 173; al-Iryānī, *Sīrat* II, 94.

105 Rüşti, *Yemen* 173; al-Iryānī, *Sīrat* II, 95.

106 Rüşti, *Yemen* 179.

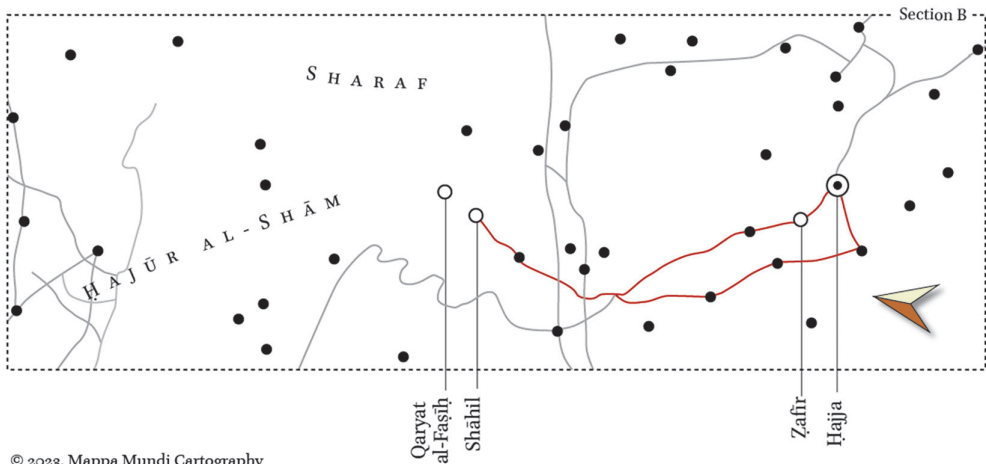
107 See for example al-Iryānī, *Sīrat* II, 42–3.

108 Al-Iryānī states that the Ottoman force left Sūda after they had "brought punishment down on the people of Sūda who had submitted to them and sinned with their women." Al-Iryānī, *Sīrat* II, 73.

Furthermore, the limited success achieved by the flight of the imam was chiefly due to the refusal of the powerful tribal confederation of Ḥāshid and its paramount shaykh Nāṣir Mabkhūt al-Aḥmar to support the imam. Earlier, Feyzi Paşa had given Nāṣir Mabkhūt al-Aḥmar a salary and persuaded him to support the government.¹⁰⁹ As a result of this, and the fact that he had had some kind of falling out with the imam, the shaykh gave his support to the Ottomans.

In sum, the military operations and the policy of the Ottoman government were essentially based on the same traditional principles that we have seen in the earliest period of Ottoman rule: punitive expeditions, divide and rule tactics, and gaining the support of powerful elite figures through honors and emoluments. Only the scale on which these measures were taken was different. As was the case with the civil reforms undertaken by Hüseyin Hilmi Paşa's administration, the resources of the Ottoman government were insufficient for the taking of the comprehensive military measures that would have put an end to the rebellion once and for all.

The most important deficiency in this regard was lack of men. According to Major-General Rüştü, the taking of these measures would have required another division, in other words twice the number of men available.¹¹⁰ Otherwise, the military operations would constitute only a "temporary punishment" (*tedib-i*



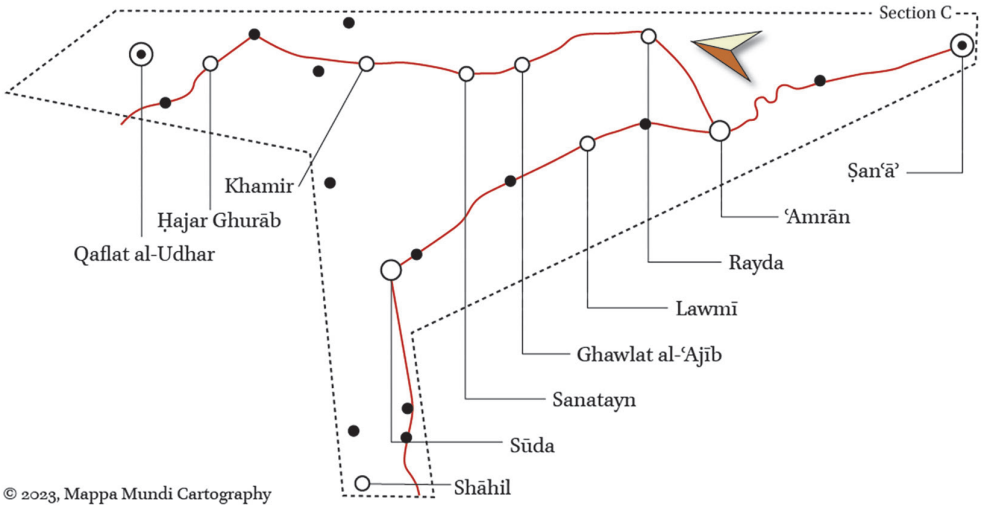
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FIGURE 7 Map showing region of the first part of the 1898–9 Ottoman military campaign, with routes shown in red

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109 Rüştü, *Yemen* 107–8.

110 Rüştü, *Yemen* 124.



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FIGURE 8 Map showing region of the second part of the 1898–9 Ottoman military campaign, with routes shown in red

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FIGURE 9 Artist's sketch of mountains in the region of the route from Sha'ariyah to Suda taken by the Ottoman forces in the 1898–9 military campaign. From Rüşti, *Yemen Hatırası*. Dersaadet [Istanbul]: Matbaa-ı Osmaniye, 1325 [1909], with place names added by the author.

muvakkat).¹¹¹ He asked Abdullah Paşa to request more forces from the capital, but Abdullah Paşa seems to have brushed him off, probably because he knew that this was unrealistic.¹¹² And the Ottoman forces were constantly losing men through illness, probably many more than were killed or wounded in combat.

111 Rüşti, *Yemen* 125.

112 Rüşti, *Yemen* 126.

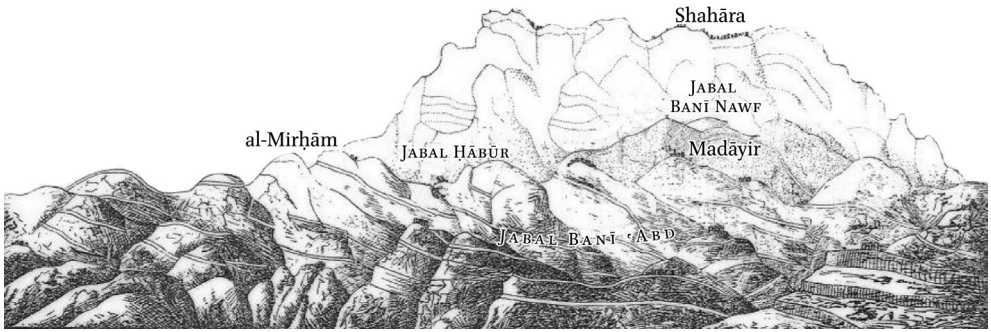


FIGURE 10 Artist's sketch of mountains viewed from the Ottoman encampment at Sūda in the 1898–9 campaign, looking toward the fortress of Shahāra. From Rüşti. *Yemen Hatrası*. Dersaadet [Istanbul]: Matbaa-ı Osmaniye, 1325 [1909], with place names added by the author.

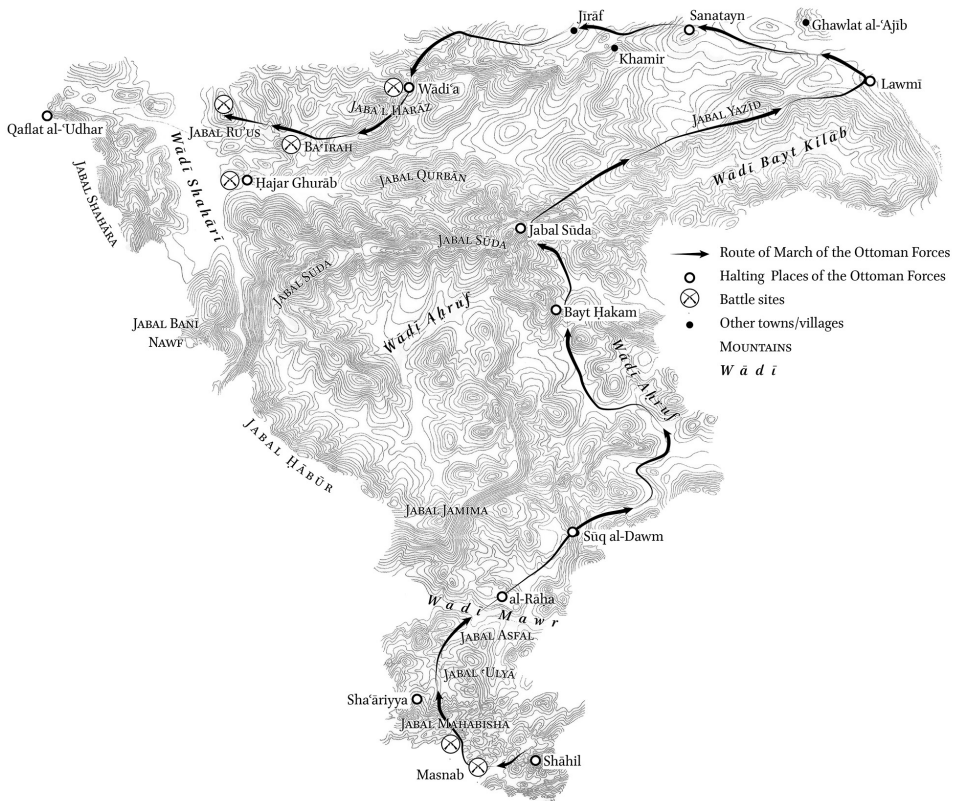


FIGURE 11 Artist's rendering in the form of a topographical map of the routes, encampments and battle sites of the second part of the Ottoman military campaign of 1898–9. From Rüşti. *Yemen Hatrası*. Dersaadet [Istanbul]: Matbaa-ı Osmaniye, 1325 [1909], with place names added by the author

Within a few short years the weaknesses of the Ottoman government would again become apparent in the uprising of 1904–5, when the Ottoman government would face a major rebellion of the tribes of Yemen united around the imam as in 1891. This rebellion marked the high point of the tide of violence which had been steadily rising in Yemen since 1890, and it had many of the dramatic characteristics of total war in the conventional sense: the mobilization of men and *matériel* on an enormous scale, prolonged battles involving massive exchanges of firepower, and strategies designed to wear down the enemy through the depletion of his resources.

The Ottomans would be badly humiliated in this war, and the idea that the imamate could be crushed as a political entity would be permanently discredited. The catastrophes undergone by the Ottoman government in that rebellion would show that the objectives of removing the imam and completely subjugating the tribes were simply not feasible, and after this rebellion the escalation of the conflict toward total war would gradually come to an end. We will analyze this rebellion in detail in the next chapter.

The 1904–5 Rebellion

In Chapter Five we discussed al-Manṣūr's reconstruction of the imamate as a supra-tribal state, and his development of a strategy of long-term guerrilla war to undermine Ottoman authority. In this chapter, we will analyze the rebellion raised by his son Yaḥyā on his accession in 1904. This rebellion was the essential outgrowth of al-Manṣūr's policies; and as a result, it was far more militarily sophisticated and costly to the Ottomans than the 1891 rebellion had been.

The 1904–5 rebellion was distinguished by the following elements: mobilization of the tribes through the *ʿiṣābāt*; the achievement of battlefield superiority over the Ottomans; and the possession by the imam's armies of food stores where the Ottoman garrisons had none, made possible by al-Manṣūr's assiduous stockpiling of grain and money in his treasury. Imam Yaḥyā thus achieved a decisive superiority over the Ottomans on the strategic, tactical, and logistical fronts. This enabled him to accomplish what al-Manṣūr had never been able to do, the expulsion of the Ottoman garrisons from most of the Zaydi highlands.

Given the resources at the Ottomans' disposal, this expulsion could only be temporary; and the Ottomans would eventually restore the status quo through the dispatch of an expeditionary force. The campaign to suppress the rebellion, however, differed dramatically from that of 1891. The imam's partisans were far better armed and more experienced than in 1891 and would resist much more stubbornly. Consequently, the Ottomans had to resort to a strategy which had some of the characteristics of a war of attrition; masses of men, stores, and artillery were brought up to bludgeon their way through the imam's positions. The Ottomans could no longer rely on quick victories through lightning attacks and the easy display of superior firepower.

The 1904–5 insurrection, in short, signaled the final transformation of the character of rebellion in Yemen. The imam demonstrated that he was able to effect a mobilization of the Zaydi population to fight an extended war of attrition against the Ottomans, transcending the spasmodic and fragmented tribal upheavals of the past. The 1891 rebellion took one year to raise and lasted several months before the Ottomans finally suppressed it; the 1904–5 rebellion took several months to raise and lasted for over a year.

In viewing Imam Yaḥyā's rebellion through the lens of total war we may see the following elements: popular mobilization, deadly weaponry, attrition, military operations to achieve a "total" objective and battles culminating in the destruction of entire armies. We have made some of these points before about

the progression of the wars in Yemen on the continuum of violence toward total war. What was different was the scale on which military operations took place in this rebellion, and the disasters which befell the Ottomans in the course of them.

With an enemy who could impose these conditions of war the cost of maintaining control of Yemen became prohibitive for the Ottomans, who were beset by increasingly serious external and internal threats elsewhere; and in consequence, they would begin to seriously reconsider their fundamental policy toward the imamate.

1 The Accession of Imam Yaḥyā

Al-Manṣūr died on 3 June 1904 at Qaflat al-‘Udhar and his son Yaḥyā made his *da‘wa* the next day. The accounts surrounding his *da‘wa* stress its conformity with the central ideas of Hādāwī Zaydism, minimizing its hereditary character and the influence of his father’s partisans. Here again, the idea of jihad played a central role. Zaydi historians writing in Yaḥyā’s reign emphasize that his accession was legitimated by the consensus (*ijmā‘*) of the main Zaydi ulama, from the Ṣan‘ā’, Ṣa‘da, Ḥūth, and Dhamār regions; and this consensus was based on the imam’s personal qualities, his “courage,” (*al-shajā‘a*), “exalted zeal” (*‘ulū al-himma*), and his “nobility of character (*karam al-akhlāq*).¹ These were the qualities which, in the imamate tradition of Hādāwī Zaydism, would ensure that the imam was personally suited to lead the Muslim community in the jihad;² and once elected, the Imam Yaḥyā was required to seal the legitimacy of his election by doing so.

In the letter announcing his accession (*manshūr al-da‘wa*), the imam wrote, “We enjoin on you, o believers ... that which God has decreed: to hear and

1 Al-Jirāfi, *Muqataṭaf* 289; al-Wāsi‘ī, *Tārīkh* 299.

2 We can see this idea in Imam Aḥmad ibn Yaḥyā al-Murtaḍā’s (d. 1437) *‘Uyūn al-azhār fī fiqh al-a‘imma al-aṭhār*, the primary legal text of Hādāwī Zaydism. The prospective imam must be courageous (*miqdām*), possessed of sound judgement (*akthar ra‘yihi al-iṣāba*) and leadership ability (*mudabbir*); he must also be a *mujtahid*, someone able to derive legal rulings from the Sharia through the reasoning process of *ijtihād*. The rest of the section discusses the imam’s rights and duties, and the bulk of this material is devoted to the duty of jihad. The implication is that the personal qualities of the imam are those which will enable him to wage the jihad successfully. The imam must have sufficient force of character to lead the Muslim community in war and endure the hardships that war entails; and he must also have the knowledge and moral authority to direct this war toward the aims of Islam and ensure that it is waged in a disciplined fashion. See al-Murtaḍā, *‘Uyūn* 519 ff.

obey ... to follow the path of the [Muslim] community, to put forth every effort, to hasten to the jihad, and to cleanse God's earth from those who desire wickedness on the earth; for if you do not do this, there will be strife and wickedness on the earth."³ According to Tevfik Bey, the governor of Yemen at the time, "the consideration of those persons who are elected as "bandit chieftain" (*reis-i şekavet*), in undertaking those acts of banditry which they give the name of 'holy war' immediately following their election, is based on the goal of achieving recognition among the Zaydis in general, and strengthening their authority." Imam Yaḥyā's position was not as strong as his father's, he says, and that is why he undertook the jihad.⁴

It would soon become apparent that Imam Yaḥyā was eminently qualified to lead the jihad, whatever the role of heredity and political influence in his accession. The legacy of his father, however, would help Imam Yaḥyā in undertaking the jihad as it had helped in his election. Al-Manşūr had bequeathed to him the institution of the *işābāt*, and it was to the *işābāt* that he initially turned in raising the insurrection.

2 The *İşābāt* and the Instigation of the Rebellion

In Chapter Five we noted that in al-Manşūr's time the *işābāt* emerged as the cornerstone of the imam's tribal quasi-state, and as the essential agents of supra-tribal mobilization for war. Often recruited on a cross-tribal basis, commanded by sayyids, and campaigning on the imam's behalf outside their own tribal territory, they had become increasingly effective in extending the imamate's authority. An *işāba* would arrive in a given region and summon the people to rebellion; and when they had expanded their numbers by the addition of local sympathizers, they would undertake operations against the Ottoman troops.

We also asserted that this process may have accustomed the Zaydis to cooperation with the imam's men. This would have tended to foster a unity of purpose and action between the *işābāt* and the population, allowing them to transcend the particular interests of tribe and region in order to achieve the larger Islamic goals of the imamate. Effectively, this was a form of popular mobilization through Islamic ideologies rather than the nationalist ones associated with modern total war.

3 Muṭahhar, *Sīrat* (Şālihiyya's introduction) 1, 93.

4 Mehmet Tefkik Bey, *Bir devlet* 1, 353.

Now, Imam Yaḥyā fomented the 1904–5 insurrection by undertaking this process on a grand scale. His rebellion marked the mass mobilization of the Zaydi population. It was his success in doing so which marked, in some ways, the final success in the reconstruction of the imamate as a supra-tribal state. The 1904–5 rebellion showed that the imamate had achieved sufficient legitimacy and coercive power to unite the Zaydis as a population against the Ottoman state, regardless of tribal affiliation, and to do so with considerable efficiency.

According to Fuʿād al-Shāmī, Imam al-Manṣūr had had to engage in extensive correspondence with the notables, shaykhs, and ulama to convince them to support his rebellion; Imam Yaḥyā had only to send copies of his *daʿwa*, the declaration of his imamate and summons to rebellion, to the various regions of Yemen, and delegations from all over Yemen came to declare their allegiance to him for the jihad.⁵ The tribesmen were thus mobilized much more rapidly than they had been in 1891, and kept in the field much longer. The ideal of jihad, emphasizing stubborn perseverance in the face of hardship, became a reality for much of the Zaydi population as well as the *ʿiṣābāt*.

Our sources describe the following scenario in the opening stages of the rebellion: a military assembly of the northern tribes around Qafla, agreement on a coordinated plan of action, recruitment of *ʿiṣābāt* from the assembled tribesmen, and then dispatch to their place of assignment. According to al-Wāsiʿī, after the ulama had acknowledged Yaḥyā as imam, “he assembled the tribes from the entire country, and they agreed to obey him ... and ... to besiege the cities in which there were Turks.”⁶ The existence of a prior agreement of this kind implies some level of planning, although we cannot be sure exactly what it consisted of.

The observations of Tevfik Bey, the Ottoman governor of the time, tend to support this. In the first days of October, he informed the Interior Minister that a major concentration of troops was taking place around Qafla.⁷ About a week later Tevfik Bey received news that the imam was collecting taxes and sending notices (*evrak*) urging the people not to pay taxes to the government. The imam himself had come to the south, while “the evildoers who have been assembled would set out for the regions of Ḥajja, Ḥajūr, Kawkabān, Ḥarāz, Ṣanʿāʾ, and perhaps even Taʿizz.”⁸

5 Al-Shāmī, *Alāqāt* 61.

6 Al-Wāsiʿī, *Tārīkh* 299.

7 Mehmet Tevfik Bey, *Bir devlet* 1, 284–5.

8 Mehmet Tevfik Bey, *Bir devlet* 1, 285.

When the first wave of “evildoers” was actually dispatched, they did not go precisely to all these locations; again, in the words of Tevfik Bey “it was understood that one section (*kısm*) of the bandits had gone to Hājja, and one to the Ibb region; likewise, a number had set out from the presence of the imam (*imam nezdi*) in order to come to the environs of Şan‘ā’ or Anis.”⁹ The impression given is one of a coordinated operation based on defined geographical objectives.

That the troops assembled and sent were *‘iṣābāt* is likewise indicated by Tevfik Bey. In a telegram to the Grand Vizier dated 9 October 1904, he noted that the troops assembling in Qafla numbered about 1500, and would ultimately spread out to the *mülhakat* (that is, the outlying regions of the *sancak* of Şan‘ā’). There, they would “disrupt security” (*asayışı ihlal*), raiding the individual *kazas*.¹⁰ This, of course, was the *modus operandi* of the *‘iṣābāt*.

The imam would employ these *‘iṣābāt* in their characteristic function, that is, raising the local population in rebellion and spearheading military operations against the Ottomans; and the subsequent rapid deterioration of the security situation in late October and November was essentially due to this kind of activity. By the second half of November, rebel forces were attacking caravans and military posts along the major routes—Şan‘ā’-Hudayda, Şan‘ā’-Ta‘izz, and Hājja-Hudayda. In a telegram to the palace dated 29 November 1904, Tevfik Bey noted that “the bandit gangs (*eşkıya çeteleri*) whom the imam has assembled and sent are increasing, as the local people join them wherever they ... go.”

He adds “It was known by experience that the people would be prepared [to do this];” in consequence, he had requested the dispatch of reinforcements one month earlier, before the situation had gotten entirely out of hand.¹¹ Such statements suggest that the relatively swift mobilization of the population was in large part due to the cooperative relationship that the *‘iṣābāt* had established with it in previous years.¹²

9 Mehmet Tevfik Bey, *Bir devlet* 1, 285–6.

10 Mehmet Tevfik Bey, *Bir devlet* 1, 284.

11 Mehmet Tevfik Bey, *Bir devlet* 1, 290.

12 In response to a question from the Interior Ministry concerning the extent to which support for the *‘iṣābāt* was voluntary, Tevfik Bey stated that over half the people of the *sancak* of Şan‘ā’ had joined the “bandits” sent by the imam. Even if some of them had been pressured into joining the rebellion, their initial reluctance had been mainly due to self-interested motives, such as fear of the government, or fear that the imam would hurt their private interests. They still nourished a sectarian attachment to the imam in their hearts. See Mehmet Tevfik Bey, *Bir devlet* 1, 352.

What is evident also in this regard is the degree to which al-Manşūr's years of patient effort had made cross-tribal cooperation possible. As we have seen, the Ottoman sources often make a distinction between the "bandit gangs" (*eşkıya çeteleri*) and the "people" (*ahali*). What this seems to indicate was that the former were recruited from the northern tribes outside the control of the Ottoman government (*idare haricinde*), while the latter meant in part the Hāshid and Bakīl tribes within Ottoman territory.

The first *işāba* sent out by the imam was a force of 1500 men recruited from the northern tribes of Arḥab, Dhū Muḥammad, and Dhū Ḥusayn, who were sent to fight the Ottomans in the Ḥarāz region. When forces of a similar size came to besiege Şan'ā', their sayyid commanders were said to have taken under control (*itaate alarak*) the tribes in the immediate neighborhood of Şan'ā', specifically the Banī Maṭar, Hamdān, and Banī al-Ḥārith.¹³ The southern tribes of Hāshid and Bakīl were therefore willing to submit, at some level, to men from the northern tribes as long as the latter were acting in their capacity as soldiers of the imam.

This had happened before, in 1891; but what is significant in this regard is the relatively greater ease with which this was accomplished. The comparatively rapid mobilization of 1904 forms a striking contrast with the situation in 1891. Al-Manşūr made his *da'wa* in July of 1890; and it took almost a year to build up a network of tribal alliances before fighting began in earnest in the early summer of 1891. Even then, the tribes of the Şan'ā' region only gave their unqualified support after al-Manşūr's forces had achieved major successes in the Ḥajja region.

By contrast, the period between Imam Yaḥyā's *da'wa* and the outbreak of serious fighting was six months, and military operations were begun simultaneously in several key regions of the province at once. In short, the *işābāt* permitted Imam Yaḥyā to raise rebellion much faster than his father, and to exert a higher degree of control over the process.

3 The Strategy of the Imam

Any discussion of the imam's strategy must be speculative to a degree, for we do not have documents detailing what such a strategy was. For the northwest and the Şan'ā' region, our sources strongly suggest that a defined strategy did

13 BBA, Y.Mtv 269/9 26 Tişrin-i Sani 1320/9 December 1904. Telegram from General Staff Lieutenant-Colonel Ibrahim, Colonel Hacı Sait, Major-General Yusuf, and the *kaymakam* of Ḥarā'im (error for Ḥarāz?) Hüseyin to the Minister of War.

exist. The objective in this strategy appears to have been to isolate the garrisons in the highlands and starve them into surrender; and in broad terms, it was implemented in the following phases:

1. Arrival of the *‘iṣābāt* in a given region and mobilization of the local tribes.
2. The cutting of the major roads and telegraph lines, with a massive concentration of the rebels along the roads to ensure the complete blocking of all traffic.
3. Siege and capture of the major cities.

These elements were present, at some level, in all the imam’s military operations in the highlands; and with regard to the siege of Şan‘ā’, they did take place in the consecutive fashion described. The rebels began on the roads leading into the city and fought their way in, ensuring that communications were completely blocked, and all the outlying military posts captured. Ottoman observers at the time likened the process to a noose being tightened around the city.

In keeping with this strategy, the month of November was taken up with attacks on the roads, slowing down caravan traffic and finally blocking it completely. When the first *‘iṣābāt* had been dispatched in October, one had come to the *kaza* of Hājja, where it cut the Hājja-Ḥudayda road.¹⁴ Between 13 and 17 November the Ḥudayda-Şan‘ā’ and Şan‘ā’-Ta‘izz roads were cut, as were the Şan‘ā’-Manākha and Şan‘ā’-Ma‘bar telegraph lines.¹⁵ The remainder of the month was taken up by the concentration of rebels along these roads, together with continuous clashes between these rebels and the armed supply caravans of the Ottomans. Finally, on 1 December 1904 the Şan‘ā’-Manākha road was completely blocked; communication with Ta‘izz was likewise entirely cut off at the same time or shortly thereafter.¹⁶ The supply caravans, which up to that point had been able to fight their way to Şan‘ā’, could no longer get through.

Now that Şan‘ā’s chief supply route had been taken by the imam’s partisans, the actual siege of the city could begin in earnest. In the first several days of December, the rebel forces entered Bilād Bustān near the western gate of the city and Rawḍa to the east; likewise, they cut the Şan‘ā’-Kawkabān road, so that “the capital of the province was completely enclosed within a great ring” (*büyük bir daire içinde mahsur kaldı*).¹⁷ At the same time they began to besiege and capture the military posts around the city and on the Şan‘ā’-Manākha road; as these posts fell one by one, Tevfik Bey noted that “this showed that the

14 Mehmet Tevfik Bey, *Bir devlet* 1, 286.

15 Mehmet Tevfik Bey, *Bir devlet* 1, 288.

16 Mehmet Tevfik Bey, *Bir devlet* 1, 291–2.

17 Mehmet Tevfik Bey, *Bir devlet* 1, 291.

‘belt’ of the siege surrounding Şan‘ā’ was gradually narrowing” (*San‘a’yı ihata eden muhasara çemberi gittikçe daraldığını göstermekte idi*).¹⁸

The besieging of Şan‘ā’, in other words, suggests a calculated and deliberate process, whose ultimate aim was its slow strangulation by cutting it off from all outside sources of supply. There was a clear consecutive pattern in the rebel operations in this regard in November–December 1904. First, caravan traffic to the city was blocked from all directions. Second, after this was decisively accomplished, the rebels took up their positions around the city. Third, they consolidated their grip on Şan‘ā’s communications by capturing the military posts in the environs of the city, and on the Şan‘ā’-Ḥudayda road.

Considerable military sophistication was likewise evident in the conduct of operations in the siege itself. In 1891, the specific aim of the imam’s armies was to take Şan‘ā’ by assault; “the intention of the tribesmen was to plunder the weak and the poor, and they shouted this out around Şan‘ā’.”¹⁹ Consequently they frequently attempted to approach the wall, with disastrous results as they came under fire from the Ottoman artillery.²⁰

While assaults of this type did take place in the 1904–5 rebellion, the chief military operations recorded were sorties by the Ottoman troops against rebel positions, in which they were often unsuccessful.²¹ In this siege, then, the rebels seem not to have shown quite the same tendency to waste their manpower in reckless assaults on Şan‘ā’. Rather, they would allow the Ottoman troops to exhaust themselves in futile assaults against the “ring of steel” they had thrown around the city; this again implies a deliberate strategy of starvation through isolation. Here we may see the element of attrition in the imam’s strategy, of wearing down the enemy through depletion of his resources and exhaustion of his fighting power.

Likewise, the rebels seem to have enjoyed a clear superiority in numbers in these battles. While the Ottomans enjoyed some successes in their sorties in the former rebellion, they seem to have had relatively fewer in the 1904–5 rebellion. Their failures were due in large part to the rebels’ acquisition of rifles which were better than those of the Ottomans; and in consequence, the Seventh Army would lose the only battlefield advantage it enjoyed in an insurrection, that of superior firepower.

18 Mehmet Tevfik Bey, *Bir devlet* 1, 295.

19 Al-Wāsi‘ī, *Tārīkh* 276.

20 Harris, *Journey* 301–2.

21 Mehmet Tevfik Bey, *Bir devlet* 1, 299, 301; Atif Paşa, *Yemen* II, 238–9.

4 Small Arms and the Rebellion

After 1891, the soldiers in Yemen had been armed with the British Martini-Henry rifle, and it appears that this was still the weapon in use on the outbreak of the rebellion. Ottoman observers at the time noted that the rifles of the soldiers in Yemen were old; their ammunition was also old, and often would not go off in consequence.²² The Martini-Henry was a single-shot rifle firing a black powder cartridge, whose heyday had been in the 1870s and 1880s. By 1900, however, the major European armies – including the Ottoman forces in Europe – were armed with various brands of the magazine rifle. These, in the main, used smokeless powder cartridges. They had bolt-action magazines holding several rounds, enabling them to fire several times in quick succession. Their range, up to 2,000 meters, was considerably longer than that of the Martini-Henry rifle as well.²³

Now, there is some evidence to suggest that magazine rifles may have been present in sufficient quantity in Yemen to alarm the Ottomans. Ottoman contemporaries noted that at the outbreak of the rebellion the rebels' weapons were superior to those of the Ottomans, with a longer range.²⁴ In a telegram to the Minister of the Interior after the fall of Ṣan'ā', the governor of Yemen stated that virtually all of the Yemeni tribes were armed with weapons of the "new system" (*yeni sistem*), as opposed to those of the "old make" (*kar-ı kadim*).²⁵ This may simply indicate the breech-loading rifle as opposed to the matchlock musket. The chief brands of rifle mentioned in our sources are the Martini-Henry and Gras,²⁶ a single shot rifle of French make. A colonel of the Ottoman General Staff stated in 1900 that the followers of the imam were armed with the Remington rifle "which in terms of its ballistic qualities is equal and perhaps superior to our Martini-Henry."²⁷ In other words, the supposed firepower superiority of the Zaydis may have come in part from single shot rifles perceived to be superior to the Martini-Henry, at least to the worn-out ones the Ottoman soldiers in Yemen had.

22 Mehmet Tevfik Bey, *Bir devlet* 1, 281; Memduh, *Yemen* 17.

23 Hogg and Weeks, *Military* 3.01–2.

24 Mehmet Tevfik Bey, *Bir devlet* 1, 281; Memduh, *Yemen* 17.

25 Mehmet Tevfik Bey, *Bir devlet* 1, 353.

26 BBA, Y.Mtv 269/67, 2 Kanun-ı Evvel 1320/15 December 1904. Telegram from the Regimental Adjutant (*Alay Emini*), in the name of the Commandant of the Hüdudya Division, to the Minister of War.

27 BBA, Y.Mtv 204/44 23 Haziran 1316/6 July 1900. Report (*layiha*) from the General Staff Colonel Hüseyin Remzi Bey to the Palace.

Sinan Kunalalp, however, states that a number of the tribesmen besieging Şan‘ā’ in 1905 were armed with the magazine rifle.²⁸ There was no standardization of equipment in the imam’s armies; weapons for the tribes in Yemen were provided in the main by the private arms traders of Djibouti and Aden, who probably had a variety of older and newer models. In consequence, the rebels apparently were armed with a mix of single shot and magazine rifles.

Despite the heterogeneity of the tribesmen’s weapons, at the outset of the rebellion their perceived superiority in armament greatly worried the Ottomans. In 1891 the rebels had the advantages of numerical superiority, better mobility, and control of the terrain; to this was now added a degree of superiority in small arms, an area where the Ottomans had previously enjoyed the ascendancy. In consequence, the rebels were able to achieve a degree of battlefield superiority over the Ottomans for a time; and this would be disastrous for the Seventh Army. The better weaponry of the imam’s forces resulted in a further escalation on the continuum of total war in Yemen, leading to a tactics of attrition to complement a strategy of attrition.

5 The Tactics of the Imam’s Forces

The effective implementation of the strategy of “starvation through isolation” was, in fact, dependent on battlefield superiority. Communications would have to be blocked for a sufficient length of time for supplies to run out for the Ottomans, and this would mean fighting off any relief forces the Ottomans might send. It was the rebels’ inability to do this which prevented the capitulation of Şan‘ā’ in 1891. Feyzi’s relief force arrived before the situation for the Şan‘ā’ garrison became truly desperate, and the rebels were unable to stop it. In the 1904–5 rebellion, however, better arms and increased tactical sophistication would enable them to thwart every attempt to relieve Şan‘ā’ until the summer of 1905.

In analyzing the tactics employed by the imam’s partisans, the influence of the *‘iṣābāt* is evident. We have seen that the acquisition of rifles by the *‘iṣābāt* in the 1890s had allowed them to engage in extended firefights with Ottoman units. In the 1904–5 rebellion, this happened on a larger scale. At times, the

28 Kunalalp, *Military* 64. Kunalalp states that in the siege of Şan‘ā’, the rebels were armed with Gras and magazine rifles, whose ammunition was smuggled in from Aden. The article is not footnoted. Mr. Kunalalp told me in 1999, however, that it was based on the dispatches of the Austrian military attaché in Istanbul.

rebels would stand their ground and engage in battles of attrition with the Ottoman forces, with the latter often getting the worst of it.

If the situation warranted it, the rebels could also use a difficult stretch of terrain as a theater of mobile war rather than a tract of ground to be defended. We have already mentioned that mobile tactics of harassment, ambush, and withdrawal had been an important feature of *ʿiṣābāt* warfare in the preceding thirteen years, employed particularly against Ottoman columns on the march. In 1905, the rebels fought a major battle of this type against the first sizeable relief force sent to Şanʿāʾ, resulting in a disastrous defeat for the Ottoman troops.

In this rebellion, then, the rebels would employ the characteristic tactics of the *ʿiṣābāt* on a grand scale. That is, they would combine mobile assault-and-withdrawal tactics with hard-fought defensive battles, in such a way as to cause the maximum exhaustion and demoralization of the Ottoman troops. In these battles the rebels likewise distinguished themselves by their high level of discipline and ability to direct the course of the fighting toward the overall strategic goals of the campaign. In tactics as in strategy, then, the rebellion in 1905 showed the influence of the transformation of war which had taken place under al-Manṣūr.

6 Mobile Tactics and the Rout of Rıza Paşa's Expeditionary Force

The rout of Rıza Paşa's expeditionary force showed how far the rifle had transformed the characteristic mobile tactics of the *ʿiṣābāt*. Rıza Paşa's troops were defeated through the rebels' exploitation of the difficult terrain on the Şanʿāʾ-Manākha road as a theater of surprise and ambush, with periodic and sudden volleys of rifle fire against the Ottoman troops. Tactics based on harassment rather than confrontation were required in this case, because Rıza Paşa's force was large and well-armed enough to confront the rebels on relatively equal terms on the battlefield.

Rıza Paşa had arrived in Yemen in the middle of January, overseeing the gradual assembly of the relief force in Ḥudayda until the end of February. The total force to be mobilized consisted of five brigades, that is, 32 battalions or 25,600 men, furnished with a number of field guns and mountain guns. The majority of the troops were from the Fifth Army in Syria; the remainder were from the Third and Fourth Armies, from Rumelia and Eastern Anatolia respectively.²⁹

29 İzzet Paşa, *Feryadım* 1, 27.

Because the Şan‘ā’ garrison was on the verge of starvation, however, Rıza Paşa had then hurried into the interior before the entire force had been made ready. The troops he took with him, however, were still comparatively impressive in terms of numbers and firepower. They consisted of ten battalions totaling about 7–8,000 soldiers, and about 6–700 Ismaili auxiliaries from Ḥarāz and the Yām tribe of Najrān.³⁰

The Ottoman soldiers were armed with Mauser magazine rifles, and their artillery consisted of two field guns and twelve mountain guns. A large baggage train was attached to the force, consisting of 200 camels, 200 mules, 200 oxen, and 2,000 untrained conscripts who were to carry flour.³¹ The size of this train was necessitated by the need to resupply the garrison of Şan‘ā’.

In terms of numbers and firepower, then, the force seemed to be a match for the imam’s partisans. Rıza Paşa’s force, however, had a number of serious internal weaknesses, which were carefully enumerated by Ottoman contemporaries analyzing the reasons for its defeat. First, the soldiers were not properly trained in the use of their rifles. The soldiers of the Fifth Army had been armed with Martini-Henry rifles, and those of the Third Army with small caliber Mausers. At Ḥudayda, they had been given large caliber Mauser rifles and then hurried on into the interior, without being properly shown how to use them.³² This seriously compromised any advantage in firepower they had, as the Yemeni rebels had considerable expertise in the use of their own rifles.

The men were not in good condition. They had marched over deserts and mountains in the winter to reach their ports of embarkation, made a difficult sea journey in badly overcrowded steamships, and then proceeded to the interior of Yemen without being given adequate rest and food.³³ Finally, the Syrian soldiers would show themselves to be unreliable in fighting against fellow

30 İzzet Paşa, *Feryadım* I, 30.

31 Ibid.

32 İzzet Paşa, *Feryadım* I, 27. The small caliber Mauser, using a smokeless powder cartridge, was actually a more advanced weapon than the large caliber Mauser, which fired a black powder cartridge. The variety of small (7.65 mm) caliber Mauser used in the Ottoman Empire had a five-round magazine and a muzzle velocity of 625 meters per second; the large (9.5 mm) had an eight-round magazine and a muzzle velocity of 535 meters per second. In 1887 the Ottoman government had ordered a large quantity of the latter, but quickly switched to the small caliber pattern for its forces in Europe. Consequently, it had a large stock of large caliber Mausers in storage; see Hogg and Weeks, *Military* 3.28–9. These large caliber Mausers in storage may have been given to the soldiers of the Fourth Army in Rıza Paşa’s force, in preference to the usual small caliber Mausers. Despite the seriousness of the rebellions in Yemen, the troops dispatched there were consistently armed with outdated weapons.

33 İzzet Paşa, *Feryadım* I, 27; Atif Paşa, *Yemen* II, 241.

Arabs, as would the Yām auxiliaries when it became clear that the Ottoman force was in serious difficulties. There seems to have been little group cohesion in this heterogeneous force, and thus it would not act as a unit in battle.

The force set out from Manākha on March 10. The order of march had been drawn up by Ruza Paşa's Chief of Staff İzzet Paşa, and was based on the necessity of protecting the column's flanks from ambush when marching through the difficult terrain of Yemen. The column was divided into vanguard, main force, and rearguard, with the baggage train placed between the main force and the rearguard.

While the column was on the march, small units were to be constantly detached from the vanguard and sent to occupy points on either side of the road, where the rebels might set ambushes. The units would remain at these points until the entire column had passed, when they would join the rearguard. During rest periods the excess troops in the rearguard would join the main force, and the deficit of troops in the vanguard would be made good. "In this manner our column would be marching constantly within a security cordon (*emniyet kordonu*)."³⁴

From Manākha to Mafḥaq the march passed uneventfully. The problems began once the force began to wind its way up the chain of wadis, fortified villages, and narrow passes from Mafḥaq to Şan'ā'. According to İzzet Paşa, the chief reason for the subsequent disaster was that his order of march was not adhered to. As a result of the uneventful march from Manākha to Mafḥaq, some commanders became overconfident and allowed the organization of the column to deteriorate.³⁵ The all-important security pickets were not posted; the three main bodies of the force lost contact with one another; and at one point, the majority of the soldiers became mixed up with the supply train.³⁶ Seeing this, the imam's partisans took the opportunity to conduct a skillful running battle of ambushes and surprise attacks from the mountains flanking the road.

Exposed portions of the column were treated to repeated and well-aimed volleys of rifle fire, to which they responded ineffectively. Hurrying to the scene of the first skirmish, İzzet Paşa found the rebels "firing in a well-ordered fashion" from a hill to the south of the road which the vanguard had neglected to occupy. As for the soldiers, they had crouched down behind rocks and "were spraying gunfire in all directions with their eyes closed" (*gözleri kapalı dört cihete ateş püskürüyordu*).³⁷ The language used by İzzet Paşa implies battlefield

34 İzzet Paşa, *Feryadım* I, 29.

35 İzzet Paşa, *Feryadım* I, 30.

36 İzzet Paşa, *Feryadım* I, 30–3.

37 İzzet Paşa, *Feryadım* I, 31.

discipline and experience on the part of the rebels, qualities which the soldiers in the expeditionary force evidently lacked.

Harassment of this type was continuous and intense, and virtually impossible for the column to counter in its disordered condition. At times the rebels appeared in several different places to fire on the column, retreated when artillery or an assault force was brought up against them, and then reappeared elsewhere. The soldiers in consequence became increasingly panicked and demoralized. The cordon units abandoned their positions, and the Syrian troops in particular began to desert *en masse* to the rebels.

The fear created by continuous exposure to the rebel fire thus steadily destroyed whatever organization the column had retained. The possession of rifles made the rebels' tactics of mobile ambush far deadlier than they had been in the earlier years of war in Yemen, when an Ottoman column in difficulties could sometimes extricate itself by a single well-aimed volley of fire. The effect was compounded by the poor discipline of the Ottoman troops and their inexperience in using the large caliber Mauser. The consummate skill of the rebels with their own weapons, coupled with an appropriate predatory sense of the enemy's weakness, made Rıza Paşa's soldiers easy victims for them.

The master stroke of the rebels came just before the column entered the plain around Şan'ā's. The column was facing a long skirmishing line on the Yāzil ridge to the front, while other rebel forces were firing from several positions on the Ottoman flanks. As it happened, however, when the Ismaili auxiliaries advanced to the village of Yāzil they found it empty; there appeared to be a gap in the rebel skirmishing line. Consequently, the column began to advance through this gap, to the south of the village of Yāzil.

As the vanguard was passing, however, Rıza Paşa caught up with İzzet Paşa at the head of the main column and informed him that the baggage train had been captured by the rebels on the Yāzil ridge; the battalion detailed to protect it had fled without resistance. The capture of the baggage train defeated the entire purpose of the relief column, which was to resupply Şan'ā.

In the following two days the order of the column continued to disintegrate under heavy fire from the rebels, the soldiers panicked, and the expedition culminated in a mass flight of the soldiers to Şan'ā.³⁸ In Clausewitz's terminology, the expeditionary force had been "destroyed;" that is, put into a condition where it could no longer carry on the fight.³⁹ And this was not the only time this would happen in the 1904–5 rebellion.

38 İzzet Paşa, *Feryadım* I, 35–8.

39 Clausewitz, *On war* 90.

The major objective of the imam's campaign, that of starving the Şan'ā' garrison into surrender, was thus made feasible in part by the battlefield superiority the rebels had achieved over the Ottomans. The Ottoman forces seeking to resupply Şan'ā' were blocked, pinned down at their destination, or virtually destroyed as fighting units. As the siege was prolonged in this fashion Şan'ā's scanty stores of food dwindled to nothing, and the garrison was forced to capitulate.

The battlefield superiority of the rebels, however, was simply one component in the success of this strategy. The other was the imam's possession of material resources which were vastly superior to those of the Seventh Army, the grain and money left to him by al-Manşūr. He could support his warriors during the months of fighting, while the Seventh Army could not. The imam had thus achieved logistical as well as tactical and strategic superiority over the Seventh Army; and this would enable him to gain the victory (at least temporarily) in his prolonged war of attrition against the Ottoman forces.

7 The Imam's Treasury and Victory through Starvation

We have noted that al-Manşūr had worked assiduously to increase the revenues of the public treasury, and in consequence his son had inherited extensive stores of grain and money on his accession. These stores were particularly crucial for the imam, because as it happened 1904 and 1905 were years of severe famine, with mass starvation in the countryside. In the midst of this, the stores left by al-Manşūr enabled Imam Yaḥyā to maintain his partisans continuously in the field for the entire year of the rebellion.

Al-Wāsi'ī noted that during the rebellion vast numbers of people died of starvation in the villages. If shiploads of grain had not come from Ethiopia and the Sudan "the people would have been destroyed all at once, and not a remnant would have been left, except for he who was a soldier (*jund*) for the imam."⁴⁰ In February 1905, the governor of Yemen learned that the rebels in the Kawkabān region had enough grain and money to last a year.⁴¹

By contrast, the Ottomans were completely unprepared. On his arrival in Şan'ā', Tevfik Bey was met by a delegation from the Commandant of the Seventh Army Abdullah Paşa, who informed him that unless something was done immediately the soldiers would go hungry the following day.⁴² The Seventh

40 Al-Wāsi'ī, *Tārīkh* 300.

41 Mehmet Tevfik Bey, *Bir devlet* 1, 303.

42 Mehmet Tevfik Bey, *Bir devlet* 1, 280–81.

Army's Bureau of Supplies may have been negligent, corrupt, greatly pressed to keep up with current expenses, or a combination of all three. "No importance was given to the storage of even several days' provisions for the troops; instead, the grain which was received was accounted for salaries, and ... used up in other ways."⁴³ Drought and unrest in the countryside made it increasingly difficult to obtain supplies locally through taxation, and difficult to find animals to transport the food brought by sea from elsewhere.

The drought, and the differential between his own supplies and those of the Ottomans, probably determined the main outlines of the imam's strategy. Thanks to the drought, he had virtually unlimited men at his disposal;⁴⁴ thanks to al-Manşūr, he had the material resources to support them. The Seventh Army, as always, was desperately short of both. In this situation, a strategy of attrition through starvation was feasible for the imam.

The strategy was highly successful. Şan'ā' was besieged from 2nd December 1904 to the middle of April in 1905; and because of the lack of food, both the Ottomans and the local inhabitants suffered great hardships. The bread ration of the troops of Şan'ā' was progressively reduced to one-third and one-fourth. When the bread was gone, they ate camels and horses; and when that was gone, dogs and cats.⁴⁵ As the stores in Şan'ā' ran out, the garrison turned to corrupt individuals in the imam's army to meet their needs. The governor Tevfik Bey was at one point subsisting off a large bag of walnuts obtained in this fashion. Years later, he told his grandson that in the worst days of the siege he had begun to watch the frogs in a nearby pond intently, thinking that they might be his last food.⁴⁶

For the citizens of Şan'ā', the situation was worse. Soldiers and police broke into private houses and confiscated whatever food was there.⁴⁷ People sold their possessions to buy food, and many families died. Aubrey Herbert, visiting Şan'ā' after Ottoman control had been restored in 1905, describes conditions in the Jewish quarter as follows: "many of the men were still skin and bone, and the crowd of dark faces with cavernous cheeks, half-hidden by twisted, black elf-locks that hung on either side, begging eyes and clutching hands, were [sic] horrible."⁴⁸

43 Mehmet Tevfik Bey, *Bir devlet* 1, 304.

44 In times of drought the tribesmen were wont to take service with the imam, as they could not support themselves by sowing their fields.

45 Mehmet Tevfik Bey, *Bir devlet* 1, 301, 306, 322.

46 Mehmet Tevfik Bey, *Bir devlet* 1, 306; al-Wāsi'i, *Tārīkh* 300.

47 Al-Wāsi'i, *Tārīkh* 300.

48 Herbert, *Ben* 68.

It does not appear that the condition of the outlying towns and military posts was any better. The soldiers in the outposts on the Şan‘ā’-Manākha road would slaughter their last animals for food, and then flee or surrender to the rebels.⁴⁹ In early February, the *kaymakam* of Kawkabān communicated to Tevfik Bey that he had only a seventeen days’ supply of water for the troops stationed there.⁵⁰

As a result of the lack of food, the garrison towns in the highlands collapsed before the imam’s forces. “The storehouses [belonging to the imam] were numerous and the grain therein abundant, and by means of that the imam took over the [government] centers of Yemen, winning the victory over the Turks” (*fa-kānat buyūt al-amwāl wa-l-ḥubūb bihā kathūra, wa bi-dhālika istalama al-imām marākiz al-Yaman wa intaşara ‘alā al-Atrāk*).⁵¹ Şan‘ā’ capitulated in mid-April, after the arrival of Rıza Paşa’s force had made the situation there impossible. ‘Amrān, Dhamār, Yarīm, Ḥajja, Kawkabān, and Miswār likewise fell. On 17th May 1905, Tevfik Bey reported to the Minister of the Interior that every *kaza* of the *sancak* of Şan‘ā’ had fallen, with the exception of some places in Ḥarāz.⁵²

Al-Manşūr’s years of preparation and determined struggle, then, enabled his son Yaḥyā to fight the campaigns of 1904 and 1905 as a systematic campaign of attrition. This capacity to wage this kind of campaign on a massive scale was not something the Ottomans had ever had to deal with before in Yemen; and to restore the status quo, they would have to resort to a strategy of attrition themselves.

8 Feyzi Paşa’s Second Reconquest of the Highlands

In siege war and battles in the field, a campaign of attrition may be defined as a contest of resources. Each side hurls massive quantities of men and firepower at the other, in the hope of overwhelming or exhausting its adversary; the side which wins is the one that possesses sufficient resources to hold out the longest. We cannot, of course, describe the reconquest of the highlands in 1905 as a campaign of attrition in the sense used for the campaigns of World War I. The rebels still could not meet a really large and well-armed Ottoman expeditionary force on equal terms, and they were accustomed to tactics of harassment,

49 Mehmet Tevfik Bey, *Bir devlet* 1, 300–1, 306.

50 Mehmet Tevfik Bey, *Bir devlet* 1, 310.

51 Al-Wāsi‘ī, *Tāriḫ* 300–1.

52 Mehmet Tevfik Bey, *Bir devlet* 1, 351–2.

defense, and withdrawal. As compared to a conventional campaign in Europe, the reconquest of the highlands was relatively swift and easy.

When we discuss Feyzi Paşa's campaign as a campaign of attrition, however, we are speaking in relative terms; that is, it had certain characteristics of attritional warfare which made it markedly different from the expeditions of 1872 and 1891. In 1891, the emphasis was on swift marches by small mobile columns, which could break up poorly armed concentrations of rebels with relative ease owing to their superior firepower; it was a strategy of "lightning blows" aimed at the swift relief of the besieged cities of Yemen.

In 1905, Feyzi Paşa had to deal with a rebel army which had actually captured the major cities, was often strongly entrenched in fortified positions, and possessed considerable quantities of artillery that it had captured from the Ottomans. Therefore, in 1905 the emphasis was on a "juggernaut" strategy in which the Ottoman forces would bludgeon the rebel forces into submission in a slow, step-by-step campaign.

The force at Feyzi Paşa's disposal was over four times as large as the expeditionary force of 1891 and possessed considerably greater firepower. In 1891, the Şan'ā' relief force numbered approximately 6–7,000 men, who were armed with single shot Martini-Henry rifles. In 1905 Feyzi Paşa had about 48 battalions under his command—that is, almost 40,000 men—together with 20,000 new conscripts to reconstitute the battalions of the Seventh Army.⁵³ The soldiers were armed with Mauser rifles, which seem to have been of the large caliber variety.⁵⁴ The force also possessed a considerable number of field and mountain guns.

As in 1891, considerable use was made of converging columns to restore local security. In that year, however, these columns had often consisted of only 400–800 men, that is, one or two battalions at the battalion strength of the time. In the 1905 rebellion, many columns consisted of five battalions or more. When Feyzi Paşa's forces advanced against the rebels in the Manākha region, they did so in two columns of five and six battalions each; and when Feyzi Paşa set out to restore Ottoman control in the northwest, he did so with a force of eight battalions.⁵⁵

The length of the campaign to restore Ottoman control had increased in similar proportion. In 1891, it took Feyzi Paşa approximately one month to

53 İzzet Paşa, *Feryadım* I, 38.

54 Al-Washālī states that the Mausers of Feyzi Paşa's expeditionary force could fire ten rounds at a time. This is more consistent with the capacity (eight rounds) of the large caliber Ottoman Mauser than the small (five rounds). See al-Washālī, *Dhayl* 69.

55 Atif Paşa, *Yemen* II, 245, 254.

restore Ottoman control in the Zaydi highlands from the time of his arrival in Ḥudayda. In 1905, it would take him over four months. The major towns of the highlands were only retaken by mid-October, about the time that the rebellion had begun in earnest in 1904.⁵⁶

The “attritional” aspects of Feyzi Paşa’s campaign were most evident on the march to Şan‘ā’. Feyzi Paşa had arrived in Ḥudayda on June 1, 1905.⁵⁷ In 1891 the objective had been to relieve Şan‘ā’ as quickly as possible. Therefore he had set out for Şan‘ā’ on the day after his arrival, going ahead of his supply train. Now, however, the objective was to retake Şan‘ā’. Since this could involve a lengthy siege, Feyzi Paşa would have to reestablish complete control of the Şan‘ā’-Ḥudayda route, so supplies and men could be brought up as needed. This meant clearing the road of the rebels who had established themselves in force there.

To do this, Feyzi Paşa would employ the “juggernaut” strategy we have noted. As it happened, Şan‘ā’ itself would be retaken with comparative ease. To clear the Şan‘ā’-Ḥudayda road, however, would take approximately one month. In this campaign, Feyzi Paşa adopted a two-stage system of advance. First, a base would be established, and a large quantity of men, equipment, and supplies concentrated there. Second, the Ottoman troops would advance against the enemy positions on the section of the route east of the base, usually in several well-manned and heavily armed columns. Once the rebels were cleared from that section of the route, the base would be moved forward, and the process begun again.⁵⁸ It was understood that battles might be hard fought and exhausting. Therefore, Feyzi Paşa could not afford to risk losing contact with his supply lines as he had in 1891.

The first base, of course, was Ḥudayda. Feyzi Paşa spent the entire month of June organizing his force and its supply train there, making sure that he had a sufficient number of mules and other beasts of burden to carry his supplies. On June 29, he set out for Şan‘ā’.⁵⁹ On the highland section of the road, the supply base was moved four times: first to Manākha, then to Bayt al-Najd, then to Sūq al-Khamīs, and finally to Sinān Bāshā. In between these times there were intervals of fighting, growing progressively longer and harder as Feyzi’s force approached Şan‘ā’.

In the fighting on this march, the tactics employed were partially derived from those developed by Feyzi Paşa during his years of service in Yemen: bold

56 Atif Paşa, *Yemen* II, 252.

57 Kuneralp, *Military* 67.

58 See Atif Paşa, *Yemen* II, 245–52.

59 Kuneralp, *Military* 68.

assaults against the rebel positions, coupled with attempts to surround their forces. When combined with heavy barrages of rifle and artillery fire, these tactics had been deadly to the poorly armed tribal armies of 1891, and comparatively easy victories had resulted.

Because the rebels had almost achieved parity of firepower and discipline in 1905, however, battles of this type could turn into prolonged and brutal slug-ging matches. This was not inevitably the case, and particularly at the beginning of the campaign, the rebels sometimes fled after offering only a token resistance. The closer the Ottomans got to Şan'ā, however, the stiffer resistance became. The climax came at Yāzil, where the Ottomans had to bring up men and artillery in massive quantities to punch their way through a heavily entrenched rebel force. This battle is particularly interesting, as it shows how the increased firepower on both sides could transform mobile tactical patterns into stationary and attritional ones.

Feyzi Paşa's second-in-command, Şakir Paşa, had been detailed to go up to the post of Sinān Bāshā. The column accompanying him consisted of seven battalions, six mountain guns, and two field guns. The road was intersected by the wadi of Yāzil; and on the eastern edge of this wadi, the rebels had set up an extended line of defense (*hatt-ı müdafaa*), with emplacements for artillery. The line of defense began at the summit of Jabal Shu'ayb and ended at the village of Bayt Sha'bān, a distance of two hours. On the western side of the wadi, they had taken the three villages of Bayt Qaramānī, Bi-l-Mufaḍḍal, and al-Zahr as forward positions (*ileri mevzi*), together with the ridges on which they were located.⁶⁰

Here then, the rebels employed a traditional principle of Yemeni warfare: maximum exploitation of difficult terrain and local fortifications for the purpose of defense. What was new was, in the first instance, the rebels' possession of the Ottoman artillery they had captured. This would enable them to do something which had previously been rare in Yemeni warfare: concentrate men and firepower in field fortifications for an extended battle in the open with a heavily armed Ottoman force, relying almost strictly on defensive tactics.

In 1891, in battles such as the battle of 'Aşur, there had been a tendency to combine mobile surrounding tactics with stationary defense. The rebels would occupy key fortifications directly on the army's path, while launching surrounding attacks from the ridges on its flanks. Because of their poor armament, they could not rely solely on purely defensive tactics in the field, where the Ottoman artillery would have made short work of them.

60 Atif Paşa, *Yemen II*, 250–1.

At Yāzil, however, they had clearly dug in for a stationary battle, based on defense in depth. The line of defense was extended so that the key peaks and ridges on both sides of the road were occupied. In the center, the Ottomans had three obstacles to cross: the forward positions in the villages, the wadi of Yāzil itself, and the line of defense on the eastern slope of the wadi. The defenses may have been made as long and deep as they had to prevent a surrounding attack by the Ottoman forces, to deny them an easy victory and compel them to engage in a grueling battle to force their passage.

This was what happened. To break through this position, Şakir Paşa would have his troops make a frontal assault combined with a surrounding action. One battalion made an assault on the village of Bi-l-Mufaḍḍal, one attacked the rebel positions from the north side of the road, and two others made their attack from the ridges to the south. In doing this, he was employing tactics which had been employed by Feyzi Paşa in his years of conducting military operations in Yemen.

The norm for Feyzi Paşa's expeditionary force in 1891 was to divide an assault force to attack the enemy positions from several places at once. This acted to counter surround-and-surprise tactics by the rebels and facilitate their employment by the Ottoman force; and quick victories could result if the rebels were successfully outmaneuvered in this fashion. At Yāzil, however, the length and the depth of the rebels' defenses would not allow Şakir Paşa to surround the rebel force as a whole. It appears that this initial assault was directed at the rebels' forward positions alone, and this exposed them to very heavy fire from the rebels' main defense line in the rear.

By noon of that day, Bi-l-Mufaḍḍal and Bayt Qaramānī had been occupied, but the rebels still held their other positions. Thus "[the rebels] in a final stubborn and savage despair, undertook an intense rifle and artillery fire," and continued to resist the Ottoman assault until evening. Despite the fact that "shrapnel and shells (*gülle*) were being poured down like rain [from the rebel positions]," the Ottomans managed to take the final forward position of al-Ẓahr after sunset.⁶¹

The fighting was difficult enough that Şakir Paşa felt the need for additional troops. The details of that day's battle were communicated to Feyzi Paşa, and reinforcements requested. On the following day, then, seven battalions, two field guns, and four mountain guns were sent up to join Şakir Paşa's force; and on 21 August, four battalions finally succeeded in crossing the wadi of Yāzil. Evidently Sakir Paşa's force broke through the final defense line on the next

61 Atif Paşa, *Yemen II*, 251.

day, for Atif Paşa records that the Ottomans took the village of Bayt Sha‘bān and a portion of the Sinān Bāshā plain at that time.

It took two more days of fighting, however, before the entire plain and the military post of Sinān Bāshā were finally brought under control; this was on 24 August.⁶² By that time, the fighting had gone on for almost a week. By contrast, the battle of ‘Aşur in 1891 lasted for only one day, and the forces engaged on the Ottoman side would not have numbered over eight battalions. It is evident that the battle was not won by maneuver and surprise, but by hard fighting, with men and firepower in massive quantities.

The battle at Yāzil marked the end of serious resistance by the rebels in the campaign to retake Şan‘ā’. The imam’s garrison at Şan‘ā’ put up relatively little resistance. The Ottoman force was able to get inside the wall through the connivance of the shaykh of the quarter of Bi‘r al-‘Azab, and the imam’s partisans fled. This was at the end of August, two months after Feyzi Paşa’s arrival in Ḥudayda, and one month after he had set out for Şan‘ā’.⁶³

It would take Feyzi Paşa another month to restore control elsewhere in the highlands, in which the Ottoman juggernaut seemed to gain victory after victory. First, Feyzi Paşa conducted a series of campaigns to retake the Western Highlands. The major strong points of Miswār, Ḥajja and Zafīr were besieged and occupied, with the imam’s forces putting up a brief resistance and then taking flight. In particular, the Ottomans’ possession of mortars gave them a decisive advantage. Mortars shoot a high trajectory shell that can arc over the walls of a fortress and fall on the buildings inside, with enough explosive power to blow them up. In the siege of Zafīr, Atif Paşa reports that a mortar shell fell on the house where Nāşir Mabkhūt al-Aḥmar, the paramount shaykh of Ḥāshid and commander of the imam’s forces in the Western Highlands, was staying. The shell killed three or four of his retainers and buried him under the earth, wounding him in the foot so that his retainers had to carry him off by stretcher.⁶⁴

After these victories in the Western Highlands, Abdülhamid sought to push his war against the imam to its final conclusion. After the capture of the citadel of Zafīr, it was communicated to Feyzi Paşa from the Sublime Porte that he would be held responsible if he did not capture the imam within twenty days.⁶⁵ Ideologically, the basis of this command was what it had been all along in the wars in Yemen, that is Abdülhamid’s belief in the illegitimacy of the

62 Atif Paşa, *Yemen* II, 251–2.

63 Kunalalp, *Military* 69.

64 Atif Paşa, *Yemen* II, 260–2.

65 Atif Paşa, *Yemen* II, 261.

imamate and the threat it posed to his caliphate. Abdülhamid's views in this regard had gradually pushed the conflict in Yemen toward total war, for they made Abdülhamid incapable of compromising and sharing power with the imam.

Because of the victories won by Feyzi Paşa Abdülhamid evidently believed he had the military strength to finally suppress the imamate once and for all; to achieve the military destruction of the enemy in preparation for his political destruction. But in the event, it was the Ottoman expeditionary force which was to be destroyed and not the imamate, for the haste imposed on Feyzi Paşa by the sultan's order did not allow him time to make adequate preparations.

9 The Shahāra Campaign

In obedience to the order Ahmed Feyzi Paşa returned from Zafir to Şan'ā'. As was usually the case in Yemen, there were insufficient transport animals and provisions available. Grain was brought up from 'Amrān and Thilā; the collection of tithes was undertaken, and transport animals were procured to the extent possible. The number of soldiers was very large, and it was only possible to procure ten days' worth of provisions. According to Atif Paşa, it was not prudent to set out with such a comparatively small quantity of provisions; but if the march was delayed the crops in the area of operations would be removed, making the procurement of provisions even more difficult. Likewise, orders were pouring in from Istanbul to commence the operation without delay.⁶⁶

Thus, on the fifteenth day after his arrival in Şan'ā', Feyzi Paşa set out for the territory of Ḥāshid by way of the 'Amrān road, with eight battalions of infantry, one mortar, two field guns and eight mountain guns. Likewise, he gave orders to Yusuf Paşa, commander of the garrison of Ḥajja, to set out by way of the Wādī Mawr road and join him in the region of Ḥabūr opposite Jabal Naysā. Yusuf Paşa's force was to consist of four battalions of reserve (*redif*) and three battalions of regular (*nizâmiye*) troops, with six mountain guns.⁶⁷

Provisions were stored in Ghawla, and the main camp was moved to Sanatayn. Three days later it was moved to Khamir, the chief town of the Ḥāshid territory, and one week after this to Bayt Sinān. Atif Paşa says that part of the Ḥāshid tribes had submitted, having been cowed by the defeats suffered in the

66 Atif Paşa, *Yemen* II, 261–2.

67 Atif Paşa, *Yemen* II, 262.

earlier campaigns, and there does not seem to have been significant fighting on this phase of the march.⁶⁸

At this point things began to go wrong. Five additional battalions that were expected from Ṣan‘ā’ did not come, nor did Yusuf Paşa’s force arrive on time. Yusuf Paşa had had to store a reserve of provisions and equipment in the Jabal Naysā region, and this seems to have delayed him. The shaykhs of that region had made a show of outward obedience, and Yusuf Paşa stationed two companies of troops in Sūq al-Dawm in the Ḥabūr region of Jabal Naysā. These troops, however, were attacked by the rebels; and because they were troops of the Seventh Army who had been demoralized by their defeats suffered at the hand of the imam’s forces earlier in the rebellion, they surrendered without fighting and fled to Ḥudayda. The rebels took possession of their weapons and the stores that they had been charged to protect.⁶⁹

Upon this, the people of that region rose up once more, and opened fire from a village near Sūda on a supply column which was coming up from Ṣan‘ā’ accompanied by two companies of soldiers. These men were mostly paid substitutes (*bedel-i şahsî efrad*) of men who had been conscripted into the Diyarbakır Reserve Battalion, and thus apparently were not soldiers of the highest quality. These men surrendered their weapons and equipment to the rebels and turned back.⁷⁰

Despite these setbacks, Yusuf Paşa’s force was eventually able to join Feyzi Paşa’s force, which had meanwhile arrived at Shahāra. The mountain on which Shahāra was built was surrounded by the Ottoman troops on all sides, who took the surrounding rocks and caves as cover.⁷¹ A mortar was brought up by the soldiers and emplaced on the mountain of Ahnūm, of which the mountain of Shahāra is a spur, and the bombardment of Shahāra was begun.⁷²

The difference between the siege of Shahāra and previous sieges undertaken by Ottoman troops in Yemen, however, was that this time the imam possessed artillery as well. According to Atif Paşa, the imam’s forces had captured field and mountain guns from Ṣan‘ā’ and brought them to Shahāra.⁷³ Muḥammad Zabāra states that the imam possessed some guns operated by three gunners commanded by a Turkish artilleryman named Ahmed Ağa.⁷⁴

68 Ibid.

69 Atif Paşa, *Yemen* II, 263.

70 Ibid.

71 Al-Shāmī, *Alāqāt* 115.

72 Atif Paşa, *Yemen* II, 264.

73 Ibid.

74 Zabāra, *A’immat* III, 29 <https://ia802904.us.archive.org/20/items/ZabaraAimatAlayaman14/ZabaraAimatAlayaman14.pdf> (last accessed: 8 December 2023).

Accordingly, there was a fierce artillery duel between the two sides lasting for two days. Atif Paşa downplays the military effect of this artillery duel. “The four sides of the Shahāra mountain are broken and rocky ... and fortified by a strong wall and towers. As a result, the artillery fire, and especially the shells of the field guns, could not have much effect. And although the above-mentioned imam had moved the four-pound field and mountain guns that he had taken from Şan‘ā’ and emplaced them there ... meeting one shell of the soldiers with five shells, the soldiers were protected from the effect [of this fire] being [sheltered] under rocks and hills.”⁷⁵

The moral effect of the artillery barrage on both sides, however, seems to have been considerable. Fu‘ād al-Shāmī states that the people of Shahāra were terrified by the artillery duel and some sought to flee the city. Likewise, he states that the gun operated by Ahmed Ağa was very effective against the Ottoman troops and played a role in changing the direction of the conflict, a judgment that seems to be confirmed by subsequent events.⁷⁶ What this suggests is that the imam’s artillery fire wore on the nerves of the Ottoman troops, already frayed by months of hard fighting, and laid the groundwork for their ultimate defeat.

The sources we are using for our account of the Shahāra campaign give contradictory accounts of the turning point of the siege. Muḥammad al-Zabāra states that the Ottoman force advanced against one of the gates of the city and its other strong points during an artillery bombardment with their mortar. Sayyid ‘Abdallāh ibn Ḥusayn al-Shāmī al-Ḥasanī and Sayyid Aḥmad ibn Muḥammad Ḥajar al-Ḥasanī were detailed to drive them back. The gate was opened, and the Ottoman soldiers rushed against it. The imam’s gunner Ahmed Ağa then directed an artillery barrage against them. The shell fell in the midst of the Ottoman force, which had the effect also of killing the two sayyids. The people of Shahāra went out toward the gate to attack, and the Ottoman force was defeated.⁷⁷

Fu‘ād al-Shāmī interprets this as a pre-planned operation. The imam’s counselors agreed on a plan with the Turkish gunner to conduct a suicide operation. One of the gates of the city would be opened, and the imam’s men would launch a surprise attack on the Ottomans with edged weapons, while the gunner would direct an artillery barrage at the point of attack without regard to

75 Atif Paşa, *Yemen* II, 264.

76 Al-Shāmī, *Alāqāt* 115.

77 Zabāra, *A’immat* III, 31 <https://ia802904.us.archive.org/20/items/ZabaraAimatAlayaman14/ZabaraAimatAlayaman14.pdf> (last accessed: 8 December 2023).

whether he struck friend or foe. This plan, says Shāmī, was carried out, resulting in the mass flight of the Ottoman troops which was the culmination of the siege of Shahāra.⁷⁸

Atıf Paşa, by contrast, states that the flight of Ottoman troops began with an early morning attack carried out by Yusuf Paşa with four battalions of picked men. The attack was conducted by way of a narrow ridge crossing the ravine between the Ottoman encampment and Shahāra. The soldiers were proceeding along the ridge one behind the other when the major commanding the battalion in front approached a tower destroyed by artillery fire with eight or ten men; and when two of the men entered the tower, they were fired on by the imam's men who had set an ambush there, killing them and hitting the major himself. When the soldiers began to flee in confusion, their panic quickly spread to the other troops in the encampment, and so the mass flight from Shahāra was begun.⁷⁹

Zaydi historians are inclined to embellish accounts of the imam's victories, and Ottoman officers to minimize the scale of Ottoman defeats. An authentic account of the siege of Shahāra may have to wait for more sources to become available and more thorough scholarship to be undertaken. Whatever the case, what can be determined with certainty is that the imam's men were able to launch a surprise attack that caught the Ottoman troops off guard and caused them to flee in panic. The disorderly flight of great numbers of the Ottoman troops had a disastrous effect on the Ottoman position in Yemen. The soldiers fled south as far as 'Amrān;⁸⁰ the imam's men and the local tribesmen pursued them, killed some and took some captive, and seized huge quantities of plunder.

This is how a missive circulated by the imam after his victory describes the Ottoman defeat: "when [Feyzi Paşa] advanced against Shahāra, which is protected by God the Most High, God vanquished him with defeat after defeat; and his assembly, by which he fought against God and desired to humiliate the Arabs, did not benefit him ... and the *anṣār* [the imam's partisans] went out against him ... and he was beset in the heights and the low places, so that he abandoned three of his guns which he had brought to harm the Arabs and fight against the Lord. And first he retreated to Sūda, with battle following on his heels ... and the earth was strewn with his men, whom God killed, and made the villages to stink with the corpses of the dead; and the people were enriched

78 Al-Shāmī, *Alāqāt* 116.

79 Atıf Paşa, *Yemen* II, 264–5.

80 Al-Shāmī, *Alāqāt* 116.

with rifles, silver, gold and mules ... provisions, furnishings and baggage, and the winds of victory blew on the *anşār*.”⁸¹

Once again, the Ottoman forces had been destroyed and put into a condition where they could no longer fight. The scale of the Ottoman defeat can be surmised from a report (*mazbata*) to the sultan by the Military Commission (*Komisyon-i Askerî*) in which it is stated that after his retreat from Shahāra Feyzi Paşa had requested an entire division of regular troops (*nizâmiye firkası*) and for this purpose the Military Commission had asked permission for the dispatch of 8,000 new conscripts (*efrad-i cedide*) to Yemen. This was simply for the purpose of ensuring security in the regions which had historically been under Ottoman control, and not for conducting operations outside them.⁸²

And according to Atif Paşa, “that operation, which was conducted in haste, brought about no success, but on the contrary caused the destruction of very many of our soldiers and the loss of equipment, which passed into the hands of the bandits. There is no doubt that the reasons for this consisted of the shortage of transport animals, the flight of part of the soldiers whose morale had been destroyed and the inexperience of some of the high commanders and officers, who were deceived by a group of the shaykhs.”⁸³

We may add to Atif Paşa's reasons the centralization of power in the hands of Abdülhamid. Few decisions in the Ottoman Empire were taken without Abdülhamid's express order, and Abdülhamid was not a military man. Apparently, he believed that he could ride the wave of victories won by the Ottoman forces to the complete defeat, capture or killing of the imam and the crushing of his rebellion once and for all. And since no one dared to defy the sultan's orders, Feyzi Paşa was forced to undertake the operation without adequate preparation.

The escalation of the conflict toward total war was likewise an important reason for the defeat at Shahāra. The 1904–5 rebellion lasted much longer than previous rebellions, was fought with deadlier weapons, engaged many more Ottoman soldiers, and caused much more human suffering among soldiers and civilians alike. All this had a profound effect on the morale of the Ottoman soldiers and their ability to fight. In war the greater the intensity of the conflict, the more wear on the nerves of the men engaged and the sooner they will fray and crack.

81 Al-'Azab, *Tārīkh* 16.

82 BBA, Y.Mtv 282/21 15 Kanun-ı Evvel 1321/28 December 1905. Report from the Military Commission to the Palace.

83 Atif Paşa, *Yemen* II, 270.

Likewise, because the Ottomans had to commit many more men to the suppression of the rebellion, the troops engaged were not always of the highest quality. Rıza Paşa's men had been new conscripts from the Fifth Army in Syria who had not been adequately trained in the use of their weapons. Feyzi Paşa's force contained a large number of reserve (*redif*) troops who were not as experienced and capable as the regular (*nizâmiye*) forces. Likewise, he had to use troops of the Seventh Army whose nerves had been shot by the hard fighting and defeats earlier in the rebellion.

Furthermore, the Yemeni rebels had virtually achieved parity of firepower with the Ottomans. They had captured large quantities of Mauser repeating rifles and used them with deadly effect. At the siege of Shahāra the imam made effective use of the artillery which he had captured from Şan'ā'. According to the account of Muḥammad Zabāra, the employment of this artillery was the reason for the imam's victory in the Shahāra campaign.

The upshot of all this was that while the Ottoman force was formidable in men, weapons and equipment it had serious weaknesses in morale, discipline, experience and overall ability to fight. Such a heterogeneous force was vulnerable in the event of a sudden reverse, and as the fortunes of war would have it, such a reverse took place.

The attempt to suppress the rebellion of the imam once and for all was thus a complete failure; and in 1905, Feyzi Paşa would only restore the status quo, as he had done in the 1891 rebellion. The character of war in Yemen had been transformed by al-Manşūr and his son Yaḥyā. With the transformation of war in Yemen, the cost of maintaining control of that province had become increasingly prohibitive for the Ottomans.

10 Conclusion

The 1904–5 rebellion was the culmination of the trends in warfare which al-Manşūr had set in motion: employment of the *ʿiṣābāt* as a tool to mobilize the population and harass the government, the stockpiling of grain and money in his storehouses to fund the jihad, the acquisition of modern rifles, and adoption of a long-term strategy of guerrilla war to replace the short-term tribal uprisings of the past.

In consequence, his son Imam Yaḥyā was able to raise an insurrection which had all the characteristics of a planned military campaign, rather than a partially spontaneous explosion of popular anger. The employment of the *ʿiṣābāt* to conduct the campaign gave him greater control over its overall direction, as well as furnishing him with a body of well-armed professional warriors who

were experienced in fighting the Ottoman armies. In the 1904–5 rebellion there seems to have been a higher level of strategic planning, better control of the process of mobilization, better command and control of the imam's armies on the battlefield, better weaponry, and more sophisticated tactics than in 1891. This, combined with the stores of grain bequeathed to him by al-Manṣūr, allowed Imam Yaḥyā to wage a sustained campaign of attrition to drive the Ottomans from the Zaydi regions of Yemen.

The imams and their advisors had thus created an increasingly sophisticated system of war out of a warrior culture, in response to the challenge posed by the Ottoman state. A state which had adopted the rationalized methods of war in Europe, in essence, forced its opponent to respond in kind in order to survive. Except in the case of weaponry, however, the imams did not directly “borrow” European methods of war, through the Ottomans or anyone else. They fashioned their system from the indigenous methods of war in Yemen, and the immediate exigencies of confrontation with the Ottoman armies.

Furthermore, the 1904–5 rebellion marked the culmination of the progression of the wars in Yemen on the continuum of violence toward total war. There had been extensive popular mobilization of the tribes by the *‘iṣābāt*; the deadliest weaponry used thus far in the wars in Yemen; the possession of artillery by the imam, enabling him to conduct battles of attrition with the Ottoman forces; a “total” objective, the capture of the imam to put an end to his imamate; and battles resulting in the destruction specifically of the Ottoman forces, who, as per Clausewitz, were put into a condition where they could no longer fight even if they were not physically annihilated.

This steadily increasing violence and intensity of the wars in Yemen, resulting from the development of more sophisticated techniques of warfare by the imam's partisans forced the Ottomans to expend ever-increasing resources to maintain their grip on Yemen; and this was at a time when they were confronted by increasingly serious military threats elsewhere. This in turn would ultimately lead the Ottomans to a political, rather than a military, solution to the war in Yemen. After the Revolution of 1908 the problem of Yemen would become a subject of open discussion among the Ottoman elite; and İzzet Paşa, who had witnessed the waste and expense of the 1905 campaigns, would ultimately formulate the policies which brought about a permanent peace with the imam.

Epilogue and Conclusion

The bloody defeat at Shahāra marked the end of what we have described as the progression toward total war in Yemen. The Ottomans did not again attempt to remove the imam by force, and instead intensified their efforts at negotiation. While guerrilla war continued, culminating in a final major insurrection in 1911, the 1904–5 rebellion had resulted in a fundamental shift in the direction of Ottoman policy; and this change would finally come to fruition in 1911, when the Ottomans concluded a lasting peace with the imam.

We will begin by analyzing the political context of the Young Turk era in which the peace agreement was finally concluded. The Revolution of 1908 allowed a fundamental rethinking of the relationship between center and periphery in the Empire. The prevailing current of ideas between the revolution and the Balkan War of 1912 combined a cosmopolitan Ottomanism with an inchoate Turkish nationalism. Some emphasis was placed on the Turks as the ruling element of the empire (*millet-i hakime*), but the prevailing motto was “unity of elements” (*ittihad-ı anasır*); that is, a common Ottoman identity with equal rights and duties for all Ottoman subjects, regardless of ethnicity, nationality, or religion. What this meant for the Arab provinces in particular was, on the one hand, a promulgation of those cultural and political elements which tied the Arab periphery to the Turkish core (e.g., Islamic unity under the sultan-caliph) and on the other, judicious concessions to Arab demands for a degree of political and cultural autonomy.

For Yemen, the revolution allowed a break with the Hamidian policy of imposing Islamic unity under the sultan-caliph by armed force. Both the CUP and the imam attributed the maladministration and violence in Yemen to the evils of Abdülhamid’s “absolutism” (*mutlakîyet*). Therefore, with a freer and more flexible administration in Istanbul, compromise and negotiation were possible. The rebellion in Yemen did not end with the Revolution of 1908. Guerrilla war continued, culminating in a final major insurrection in 1911. But the channels of communication had been opened; and the general Ahmed İzzet Paşa, who essentially espoused the ideas of moderate Ottomanism, was able to conclude a lasting peace with the imam after military operations to restore Ottoman authority.

1 The Context of the Young Turk Revolution

The Hamidian regime would last for only three years after the 1905 rebellion, and the final denouement of the war in Yemen took place within the political and ideological context of the Young Turk Revolution. In most regards, the Young Turk period witnessed an intensification of the trends which drew the Ottoman Empire into total war: external conflict and internal rebellion, the spread of modern weaponry and centralization under an increasingly bureaucratized nation-state. Peace was possible in Yemen, however, owing partly to the common Islamic frame of reference shared by both parties to the conflict, and partly by the deposition of Abdülhamid, whose insistence on his sole prerogative to rule as the caliph of the Muslims had been the main factor blocking the conclusion of a lasting peace in Yemen.

First, the Young Turk period witnessed the climax of the race toward the destructive internal and external conflicts of World War I, in which the imperial monarchies of Eastern Europe would be destroyed, and the newer colonial empires of Western Europe badly weakened. Apart from the Greek War of 1897, Abdülhamid had managed to keep the empire out of foreign conflicts by adroit manipulation of regional and great power rivalries.¹ Yet throughout his reign internal revolt in the Empire became ever more serious, fueled by the rifled small arms which began flooding into the Middle East, even as imperial rivalries sharpened among the European nations.

In the Arabian Peninsula and the Red Sea region, a complicated pattern of rivalries developed among the French, British, Italians, and Germans. The most aggressively expansionist power in this region was Italy, which had seized control of Eritrea and much of Somalia and had ambitions in Yemen. The Italians provoked repeated confrontations with the Ottoman authorities on the coast of Yemen, on the pretext of attacks by Yemeni pirates against their subjects. As Ottoman allies, the Germans were meanwhile attempting to expand their influence in Arabia through the construction of the Baghdad railway, and the establishment of a coaling station for German ships on the island of Fursān, off the coast of Yemen. The British thus drew increasingly close to the Italians as a means of checking the expansion of French and German influence in the region.²

The 1908 revolution played a significant role in drawing the European states into open war with the Empire to realize their ambitions. Political instability at the Porte after the 1908 Revolution upset the equilibrium established by

1 Tahsin Paşa, *Sultan* 85.

2 Farah, *Sultan's Yemen* 195–205.

Abdülhamid in foreign affairs, tempting adventurism by the European states, and causing the relatively inexperienced Young Turk rulers to draw closer to Germany to protect the Empire. Italy went to war with the Ottoman Empire in 1911, successfully seizing control of Libya. Encouraged by the Italian success, the Balkan states of Bulgaria, Serbia, Greece, and Montenegro formed the Balkan League and invaded the Empire in 1912, seizing Macedonia from the Ottomans and dividing it among themselves.³

These invasions were preceded and accompanied by covert support to rebels against Ottoman authority in the conflict areas. The Balkan War of 1912 was the culmination of a long insurgency in Macedonia dating back to the 1890s, in which the neighboring states had supplied the various Macedonian rebel organizations with arms, money, and bases. In the Ottoman-Italian War, the Italians provided weapons and supplies to a rebel on the coast of 'Asir called the Idrisi, who claimed to be the Mahdī. The heavy cannon which he obtained from the Italians enabled him to win important victories in the Ottoman Tihama. Later the Idrisi would ally with the English, fighting against the Ottomans in World War I along with the other Arabian rebels whom they supported.⁴

The plunging of the Empire into the morass of conflict that would culminate in World War I was facilitated by the slow metamorphosis in the structure and ideology of the state brought about by the 1908 revolution. The bureaucratic and nationalist ideas in the Ottoman Empire, whose emergence we have traced in the Tanzimat and Hamidian periods, increasingly came to predominate over the "traditional" sultanic absolutism on which the regime of Abdülhamid was based. The Islamic and paternalistic traditions of sultanic absolutism which had served to moderate the violence of the Hamidian regime were gradually undermined; and eventually they gave way to a ruthless focus on the supremacy of the bureaucratic state and the national community which it represented, which ultimately came to mean the Turkish nation. In the period with which we are concerned, that is, before the Balkan War of 1912, however, these ideas had not yet fully taken root. Partisans of a moderate Ottomanism were still influential, and it was on the basis of their principles that peace was made in Yemen.

The Committee of Union and Progress, which ultimately established itself as the dominant party of the Young Turk opposition movement, is traditionally associated with the statism, Turkish nationalism, and centralization that came to characterize the later Turkish republic. Carter Findley, however, in his book *Turkey, Islam, Nationalism, and Modernity* has shown that in the period

3 Jelavich and Jelavich, *Establishment* 216–21.

4 İzzet Paşa, *Feryadım* I, 105–6.

with which we are concerned CUP ideology and practice had not yet hardened around these policies.

First, in the period before the Balkan War, emphasis was still placed on a cosmopolitan Ottomanism with the motto of *ittihad-ı anasır* (unity of elements). Non-Muslims were made liable for military conscription, thus theoretically making them equal members of the commonwealth with Muslims, however little they may have welcomed this particular manifestation of equality in practice. The learning of Turkish was seen as a means of promoting a common Ottoman identity,⁵ and not as the homogenization of the population into a single nation of “Turks” or a means to emphasize the domination of state and society by ethnic Turks.

Second, Carter Findley has shown that these conciliatory policies were particularly applied in the Arab provinces of the Empire. “In the Arab lands, the Young Turks made decentralizing concessions and emphasized Islamic unity under the sultan-caliph.”⁶ Local administrative agencies were given substantial powers, and the use of Arabic was permitted in the courts, government schools, and official correspondence.⁷ These policies continued past the period of the Balkan War. “During World War I, the CUP pursued its Islamist policy toward the Arab provinces, continued trying to coopt notables, and made concessions to Arab demands.”⁸ As we shall see, it was policies of decentralization and concessions to local elites that were applied as solutions to the conflict in Yemen.

2 Developments to the Treaty of Da‘ān

Even before the 1908 revolution, however, there had been a gradual shift in Ottoman policy toward negotiation. The 1905 rebellion had been punctuated by three humiliating and extremely costly episodes for the Ottomans: the defeat of Rıza Paşa’s force, the loss of Şan‘ā’, and the debacle at Shahāra. Thousands of men had died, and tons of matériel were lost. Feyzi Paşa had therefore concluded that it was not possible to crush the imam by military means.⁹ Despite the ongoing guerrilla war, then, the Ottomans began increasingly to focus their efforts on negotiation.

⁵ Findley, *Turkey* 201.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Findley, *Turkey* 203.

⁹ Farah, *Sultan’s Yemen* 234.

In 1906, the Ottoman government sent a delegation of the prominent ulama from Mecca to make peace with the imam, whereupon the imam sent a letter listing the conditions under which he would be willing to stop the fighting. He demanded the power to appoint judges, tax exemption for a number of the Zaydi tribes, and institution of the *hudūd* punishments.¹⁰ Such conditions were rejected by the Ottoman government at the time, but eventually formed the basis for the peace agreement concluded in 1911. Later, Abdülhamid himself received a delegation from the leading sayyids and ulama of Şan'ā', who were asked to give their views on the situation in Yemen.¹¹

Second, the Young Turk Revolution gave further encouragement to this trend, sweeping away the rigid Hamidian political order and legitimacy claims. The first year of the revolution was characterized by an atmosphere of hope and magnanimity, with an emphasis on the multi-ethnic brotherhood of Ottoman subjects, and rejection of the despotic methods of Abdülhamid's regime. In Yemen, Abdülhamid became a convenient scapegoat for both sides, who regarded the revolution as an opportunity to settle their differences. Imam Yaḥyā and the Ottoman government called off the fighting by mutual agreement; and the imam sent a delegation of his own men (*khāṣṣa*) to Istanbul at the request of the Porte, again to discuss the affairs of Yemen with the Ottoman sultan.¹²

The Grand Vizier Hüseyin Hilmi Paşa drew up a plan calling for the withdrawal of most of the Ottoman forces from the highlands, and the appointment of the imam as governor of the region under Ottoman suzerainty.¹³ The policy of the first governor of the Young Turk period, Hasan Tahsin Paşa, was to allow the imam's administration to coexist peacefully with his own. Thus, "the men of the imam mingled with the men of the Ottoman authority, and each side respected the other." Imam Yaḥyā made use of this opportunity to further entrench his authority, sending out judges, ensuring that the Sharia was enforced, and collecting taxes.¹⁴

Such policies of decentralization and local autonomy, coupled with pragmatic and flexible leadership on both sides, would ultimately facilitate the resolution of the Zaydi-Ottoman conflict. Before this, however, the period of repression that followed the attempted coup of 1909 would cause the war to

10 Al-Wasi'i, *Tārikh* 365–6.

11 Al-Wasi'i, *Tārikh* 308.

12 Ibid.

13 Farah, *Sultan's Yemen* 243.

14 Al-'Azab, *Tārikh* 56, 58.

break out once again; and the imam would raise a final major rebellion in 1911, before a permanent peace was finally concluded.

This coup attempt by partisans of Abdülhamid in the spring of 1909, the “31 March Incident,” brought the relatively open period of the revolution to an end. Abdülhamid was now formally deposed, and Talaat Bey, a former member of the CUP Internal Headquarters, was appointed as Minister of the Interior. Mahmud Şevket Paşa, who had commanded the “Action Army” that suppressed the coup, became Minister of War. Increasing repression, with martial law in Istanbul and other places, characterized the atmosphere after the coup.¹⁵

The Minister of the Interior Talaat now succeeded in having Hüseyin Hilmi Paşa’s plan shelved, arguing that both the imam and the Idrisî would have to be suppressed by force before any administrative reforms could be discussed.¹⁶ Eventually, a governor was appointed to Yemen who seemed intent on putting the militarist-repressive policies of the new government into practice. Mehmet Ali Paşa succeeded Hasan Tahsin in February of 1910.¹⁷ According to Ahmed İzzet Paşa, he was influenced by officials of Feyzi Paşa’s regime who had managed to enter the CUP club in Şan‘ā’. Such officials advocated a policy of violence and ruthlessness, in keeping with the preferences of their old mentor.¹⁸ Mehmet Ali Paşa therefore sought to impose martial law (*al-idāra al-‘urfīya*) on Yemen, arresting and torturing suspected partisans of the imam.¹⁹ As a result, Imam Yaḥyā declared a jihad once again at the end of 1910. Şan‘ā’ was besieged, and a large force concentrated in Jabal Ḥarāz to cut the Ottomans’ communications with the coast.²⁰

Thereupon Ahmed İzzet Paşa, Chief of the Ottoman General Staff after the revolution, was dispatched by Mahmud Şevket Paşa to suppress the rebellion. With this decision, the problem of Yemen was placed in the hands of someone who generally opposed the hard-liners of the CUP government. By temperament and necessity, İzzet Paşa favored policies of moderation and compromise. He criticized the CUP for what he regarded as its rigidly nationalist and militarist policies.

In this context, it should be noted that Ahmed İzzet Paşa was not of the decentralist party led by Prens Sabahaddin which had separated from the CUP after the 1908 revolution, subsequently constituting itself first as the *Ahrar*

15 Turfan, *Rise* 161–213.

16 Farah, *Sultan’s Yemen* 240–3.

17 Al-Wāsi‘ī, *Tārīkh* 311.

18 İzzet Paşa, *Feryadum* I, 92.

19 Asl-‘Azab, *Tārīkh* 58–9.

20 For an account of the imam’s military operations see al-‘Azab, *Tārīkh* 59–66.

(Liberty) party, and later the *Hürriyet ve İtilaf* (Liberty and Entente) party. The decentralists favored individualism, political decentralization, and cultural and political autonomy for the Empire's various peoples.

İzzet Paşa was equally suspicious of the decentralist party and the nationalists of the CUP. Noting that the "Turkish Hearth" (*Türk Ocağı*) a Turkish nationalist cultural organization, was founded by the CUP as a reaction to the founding of non-Turkish ethnic cultural clubs under the stimulus of Prens Sabahaddin's decentralist ideas, he stated that "I can say that concerning division and discord among the Empire's various peoples, Sabahaddin's Decentralization Party and the Turkish Hearth served as two opposite poles, making their influence felt by completing one another."²¹ Division was intensified both by the exaggerated Turkish nationalism of the Turkish Hearth and the new self-assertion of the Empire's various ethnicities under the influence of decentralist ideas.

Against both these trends İzzet Paşa argued for a moderate Ottomanism. He did believe in the central role of the Turks as the cornerstone of the Ottoman Empire. He did not, however, believe that this role could or should be maintained by force. He believed that the Ottoman dynasty had achieved and maintained its power through attraction rather than coercion. "The Ottoman dynasty was originally founded as a small Turkish community in Anatolia, and afterward by slowly expanding and winning the hearts of the people of each country and land by treating them equally, it made use of its strength to establish the Ottoman state as a very diverse and healthy mosaic. Its survival was dependent on keeping these bonds healthy and protecting them from corruption by outside forces. In consequence, while it was the duty ... of the Turkish nation which formed its foundation to summon these nations and bind them to itself like a pole of attraction, the Hearth made its constant boasting and the belittling and insulting of other nations which it deemed lawful a force of repulsion ... finally coming to the undoing of the bonds of religion, and discord and division were introduced among neighbors who had lived and gotten along like brothers ... in the bond of Islam and Ottomanism."²² İzzet Paşa thus continued to be a partisan of *ittihad-ı anasır* even as political developments in the Empire were slowly rendering this idea irrelevant.

The years 1910 and 1911 were a period of serious internal disturbances in the Empire, in Albania, the *Ḥawrān*, and 'Asīr.²³ The threat of unrest and external intervention was growing in Macedonia, and tensions with Italy over Libya were also rising. In this situation, İzzet Paşa argued first that Empire should as

21 İzzet Paşa, *Feryadım* I, 72.

22 Ibid.

23 İzzet Paşa, *Feryadım* I, 94; Kayalı, *Arabs* 108–12.

far as possible avoid involvement in foreign wars in order to concentrate on settling its internal disturbances, ideas which he said brought him into conflict with the more militarist members of the CUP.

Secondly, İzzet Paşa believed that the internal disturbances of the Empire could only be settled by a delicate combination of force and compromise. Thoughtless and uncompromising military action would only cause the Empire to sink deeper into a quagmire of violence. Of Albanian origin himself, he opposed the harsh punitive measures which the government employed to suppress the Albanian revolt in 1910. The CUP feared nationalist revolt in Albania, he said, in part because the disturbances involved the question of the use of the local language. İzzet Paşa recognized that such cultural demands might conceal political aims for independence. Nonetheless, he argued, the Constitution guaranteed “freedom of thought and conscience.” As a result, cultural self-assertion among the nationalities of the Empire should be welcomed rather than feared. The use of brute force to crush Albanian self-assertion would simply contribute to the internal disorder of the Empire, providing additional pretexts for foreign intervention.²⁴

These views shaped the way in which he conceived the problem of Yemen and the solutions he proposed. As a military man, İzzet Paşa was not opposed to the use of force *per se*. In fact, he had opposed Hüseyin Hilmi Paşa’s plan, arguing that the Ottoman government would lose prestige if it did not retain a strong presence in the highlands.²⁵ İzzet Paşa, however, rejected the idea of a total struggle to eliminate the imamate that had dominated Ottoman policy in the Hamidian period.

The imamate, he argued, was too deeply rooted in Zaydi society to be eliminated by anything other than the genocide of the Zaydis themselves. Genocide, of course, is the logical outcome of total war when a stronger society confronts a weaker; and Ahmed İzzet Paşa’s moral sense, as well as his political beliefs, would not have allowed him to countenance it. Rather, he argued, the Zaydi rebellion should be brought to an end through negotiation and compromise; and if a lasting peace could be secured with the imam, this would give the Ottomans a free hand to deal with more pressing threats elsewhere.²⁶

24 İzzet Paşa, *Feryadım* I, 77–81.

25 İzzet Paşa, *Feryadım* I, 90.

26 In contrast to his position on the Zaydi rebellion, however, İzzet Paşa did recommend the swift and complete suppression of the rebellion of the Idrisî. First, he believed that the Idrisî was an impostor and a tool of foreign intrigue; his rebellion was less deeply rooted in the society of his followers than that of the imam’s and could therefore be suppressed more easily. Second, the rebellion of the Idrisî could be much more dangerous to the Ottomans if it was allowed to spread. The people of ‘Asir were Sunnis of the Shafii school,

Therefore, while the subsequent course of events followed the general pattern of the previous rebellions in Yemen, the use of war as a tool of policy had fundamentally changed. The force mobilized to put down the imam's rebellion was large and well-armed (although smaller than Feyzi Paşa's army in 1905) consisting of 30 battalions of infantry, with a generous complement of mountain and machine guns. As usual, the force landed in Ḥudayda and fought its way to the highlands by way of the Şan'ā'-Manākha road, reaching the capital in early April. The Ottomans had better success in 1911 than in the previous rebellion, owing in part to the fact that the Ottoman garrisons in the highlands had been reasonably well provisioned beforehand.²⁷ Şan'ā' was able to hold out until the arrival of İzzet Paşa's force without experiencing major hardship.

In the Ottoman military operations of the 1904–5 rebellion, the ultimate objective had been the destruction of the imamate as a political institution; and the retaking of the "Ottoman" highlands had been followed by the dispatch of a large expeditionary forces to the north. Now, however, the purpose was to restore Ottoman prestige in order to negotiate from a position of strength. In other words, the suppression of the imam's rebellion was no longer total war in the genuine sense of the word; it was limited war, a regrettable but necessary element in the process of negotiation with political opponents. This was reflected in İzzet Paşa's treatment of the rural population on the march to Şan'ā'. The soldiers were forbidden to bring in heads for a reward. If it was necessary to bombard a village, the inhabitants were given early warning if possible.²⁸ As far as possible, İzzet Paşa wanted to ensure that no lingering bitterness would complicate the eventual negotiations with the imam; and these negotiations were opened shortly after the relief of Şan'ā'.

3 İzzet Paşa and the Treaty of Da'ān

The negotiations with the imam were successfully concluded in October of 1911 with the treaty of Da'ān. İzzet Paşa had adopted a conciliatory posture with regard to the grievances of the Zaydis, and the provisions of the treaty were

belonging to the majority sect of the Arabian Peninsula. Rebellion in 'Asīr therefore might spread and take on nationalist overtones, something which could not happen with the Zaydi rebellion. The recognition of an autonomous imamate would be much less costly for the Empire than a major revolt in the Arabian Peninsula. Ahmed İzzet Paşa therefore believed that peace should be concluded as quickly as possible with the imam, in order to give the government a free hand to deal with the Idrīsī. İzzet Paşa, *Feryadım* I, 91.

27 İnönü, *Hatıralar* I, 63–4.

28 İzzet Paşa, *Feryadım* I, 99.

based to a great extent on the demands the imam had made in his letter of 1906. İzzet Paşa's recognition of these demands was based in part on the principles of his moderate Ottomanism, including respect for the cultural rights of the various ethnic groups of the Empire and the partial devolution of power to local elites in the administration of the provinces.

In the Treaty of Da'ān, the imam was given the right to appoint judges to the Sharia courts serving the people of the Zaydi sect. Likewise, taxes were to be collected in accordance with the Sharia. Allegations of malfeasance in the process of tax collection would be investigated jointly by representatives of the Ottoman bureaucracy and the judges appointed by the imam. The treaty also gave the Zaydis the right to give "gifts" to the imam, thus recognizing the parallel system of taxation the Imams had set up during the years of guerrilla war. A general amnesty was given for past political crimes and outstanding taxes. The tribes of Khawlān and Arḥab, as well as the region of Jabal Shirq in Anis, were exempted from taxes for a period of ten years. Finally, both the Ottoman officials and the "followers" (*atbā'*) of the imam were given the right to move freely about in Yemen, provided that they did not disturb the security of the country.²⁹

The agreement between the imam and the Ottomans also included a number of provisions which were not made public. The imam would undertake not to establish relations with foreign states in return for a yearly stipend from the Ottoman government; the Ottomans would provide aid to the imam to suppress refractory tribes if he asked for it; and the provisions of the Sharia would be implemented with regard to non-Muslims.³⁰

The way to make peace with the imam, then, had been to halt the relentless expansion of the bureaucratic state, and to partially renounce the claims to a complete monopoly of legitimacy on which this centralization was based. As we have said, this policy reflected İzzet Paşa's moderate Ottomanism; and it was also a conservative solution in some respects, reminiscent of the tacit compromises which had historically defined the relationship between local elites and the imperial center in the Ottoman state. The secret provisions of the treaty, based on a monetary stipend to the imam in return for loyalty, and promises of aid against his opponents, established a relationship similar to those obtaining historically between the Empire and local Arab potentates.

Such compromises, based on mutual recognition of the suzerainty of the one and the autonomy of the other, were necessitated by the limitations on the coercive power available to each side. Both Imam Yaḥyā and Ahmed İzzet

29 Al-Wāsi'i, *Tārīkh* 367–8.

30 Ayıışı, *Mareşal* 45.

Paşa were pragmatic enough to recognize that such limitations still applied, in spite of the remarkable expansion of military capability on both the Zaydi and Ottoman sides; and it was in their best interest to come to a mutually advantageous agreement. Otherwise, they realized that they both might become the prey of European powers; and in agreeing to a treaty, the imam was motivated by considerations of Muslim solidarity as well as self-interest.³¹

The document's concluding clause states that "it is incumbent on the two sides not to transgress the limits (*ḥudūd*) indicated [in the treaty] after the sultan's order is issued concerning its provisions."³² If the monolithic centralization and seemingly unrestrained violence of the Hamidian regime had broken the "limits" supposed to govern the relationship between state and society in Zaydi thought, then, the Treaty of Daʿān would reestablish them. Once these limits were put in place, the moral obligation of concord and unity within the Muslim community could come to the fore again. From the Ottoman side, it was clear that this experiment in moderate Ottomanism was successful. By formally renouncing its claim to a monopoly of power and legitimacy the Ottomans did indeed break the cycle of internal revolt and external intervention (at least with regard to the Zaydi revolt). The imam would remain faithful to the Empire to the end of World War I.

It should be clear by this time that there is considerable overlap between the Ottoman experience with insurgency in the nineteenth century and the security problems of the present day. The relationship between "center" and "periphery" remains a central question, from the level of the international social order down to the poorest nations of the world. Islamic revivalist movements, demands for local autonomy, and nationalist conflict continue to trouble the nation-states and trans-national empires of the present. What, in this context, are the relevant lessons of the Ottoman experience in Yemen?

4 The Lessons of the Ottoman Wars in Yemen

First, it should be recognized that there are serious problems with the concept of counterinsurgency itself. Counterinsurgency has been developed specifically to reinforce the monolithic dominance of the bureaucratic nation-state and the empires of the modern world. Both nineteenth century Ottoman statesmen and Western counterinsurgency thinkers assumed the universal legitimacy and moral preeminence of the political systems they were trying to

31 İzzet Paşa, *Feryadım* I, 100–1.

32 Al-Wāsiʿī, *Tārīkh* 368.

defend and were convinced that dissenting groups needed only to be shown the error of their ways. The opponents of their systems were to be crushed through the overwhelming power of the bureaucratic state, which the diverse populations under their control would be persuaded to support.

In Yemen under Abdülhamid, it eventually came to be assumed that the government could and should destroy the imamate as a political entity and assert its complete dominance over the country. It was likewise assumed that the Ottoman government, despite its numerous problems, ultimately did have the capability to win the Zaydis' support against the imam. If only the army would take control of outlying regions, if only corruption among bureaucrats and officers could be eliminated, if only the government would invest in economic development to improve the lives of the people – then, surely, the people would see the benefits of siding with the Ottoman government and realize the folly of continuing to support the “bandits.”

How realistic were these expectations? First, we have reiterated that the Ottoman government simply was too poor to implement this ambitious program and had too many other pressing military concerns. In the rare cases in modern times when counterinsurgency has actually worked, it has usually done so only where circumstances were uniquely favorable: where rebels were isolated geographically or ethnically, where other security threats were relatively manageable, where the timely discovery of oil enabled the government to buy off opposition.³³ Now by any standard, the situation of the Ottoman Empire in the nineteenth century was uniquely difficult. Few states in modern times have faced the number of overwhelming threats, internal and external, with which the Ottoman Empire had to contend; and it was impossible under these circumstances to even begin to carry out the reforms in Yemen which Ottoman strategists envisioned.

Yet lack of resources was only one dimension of the problem. In reading both the memoranda of Ottoman governors and the works of Western counterinsurgency theorists, one is struck by the refusal of both to accept the fact of alien domination as a primary cause of rebellion *in itself*. To do so would call into question the very existence of the political structure in which their lives, careers, and identities were invested. An essential, and essentially flawed,

33 The British victories in Malaysia and Oman are often cited as major success stories of modern counterinsurgency, and *Who Will Win?* devotes an entire chapter to the latter operation. There is no doubt that the commanders in this war were highly capable, and intelligent policies implemented vigorously. On the other hand, one wonders if the problems presented by Communist guerrillas in a tiny corner of a conservative Muslim country might, on balance, prove to be somewhat less intractable than those generally faced by counterinsurgency strategists. See Blaufarb and Tanham, *Who* 49–69.

premise thus runs through much of the vast literature on the suppression of rebellion in the modern era: that alien domination can be made palatable, and even desirable, if only it takes a sufficiently enlightened form.

The subconscious awareness of the self-deceptiveness of this premise, together with the uncompromising nature of nationalist ideology, is almost certainly a major factor in the historic construction of counterinsurgency as total war. The fact of rebellion threatens to arouse the moral unease which the defenders of an imperial or nationalist state must inevitably feel, whether consciously or not. Therefore, rebels must be placed beyond the bounds of legitimate political life and destroyed, as much to protect the self-concept of the military officers and statesmen as the security of the state. Abdülhamid's insistence on the sanctity of his absolutist prerogatives and ruthless suppression of all resistance, real or perceived, should be partially understood in this light.

With this rigid conception of autocratic privilege and bureaucratic centralization as a means to ensure it, it was very difficult to devise a range of flexible policy alternatives. By virtue of claiming the leadership of the Muslim community, even in a very limited sphere, the Zaydi imams were seen to have committed an infringement on the sultan's claims to legitimacy. The incumbent imam therefore simply became the "known bandit" (*şaki-i mahud*) who was to be punished as a disturber of the communal peace, rather than dealt with as a political personage. To define the Zaydi rebellion in this fashion essentially narrowed Ottoman policy alternatives toward something approaching total war, once resistance among the Zaydis had reached a certain level of sophistication.

Now, how well does total war work in its variant of "soft" counterinsurgency? Usually not very well, because of the inherent contradictions of the concept itself. Theories of counterinsurgency necessarily depend on the distinction between "guerrilla" and "civilian" for their internal logic, or between the "people" (*ahali*) and the "bandits" (*eşkyaya*) in Ottoman terms. The "guerrillas" should be isolated from the "civilians" physically, morally, and politically, so that the latter will eventually support the government as it prepares to deal the guerrillas the final blow.

Often, however, the distinction between "guerrillas" and civilians is artificial and even deceptive. The ranks of the guerrillas in many cases will include the sons, brothers, husbands, and fathers of the civilian population that the army is supposedly trying to protect. The soldiers of the regular army will often belong to an alien ethnic group. To gain the willing cooperation of the "civilians" in the destruction of the "guerrillas" requires (at an absolute minimum) extraordinary political skill on the part of the military leadership over a long period of time. This, too, will usually be lacking. Rivalry in the upper ranks of the military

and the threat of assassination tend to shorten the careers of the most capable officers. This is particularly the case in a dictatorial system, where corruption is encouraged as a means of retaining the loyalty of the officer corps,³⁴ and successful generals may pose a direct threat to the dictator's power.

We have seen that this was the case in Yemen. İsmail Hakkı Paşa, who enjoyed some success both in quelling rebellion and gaining a degree of popular support, became the object of Abdülhamid's suspicions and was removed. Hüseyin Hilmi Paşa's plans were thwarted by the interpersonal rivalries which the sultan tacitly encouraged among his subordinates. Abdülhamid's perennial favorite for the governorship of Yemen was Ahmed Feyzi Paşa, who was militarily competent enough to maintain the Ottoman grip on the province but hated for his brutality and corruption by the population. This made him completely dependent on the sultan, which may have been one reason why he was preferred over more humane individuals.

Yet even if the quality of the leadership in Yemen had been consistently high, this would not have changed the fundamental inconsistencies of Ottoman policy. Clausewitz defines war as a dialectic of ever-increasing force, culminating in the utter defeat of one side or the other.³⁵ The theory and practice of total war, as it was emerging in the nineteenth century, presupposed a titanic conflict between armed nations whose purpose was to break the opposing nation's capacity to resist. This was the specific premise of the most important "total war" of the period, the American Civil War. The Confederate rebellion was suppressed by punishing the civilians of the south and destroying their morale, not by gaining their support.³⁶

Now, the idea of "soft" counterinsurgency confronts soldiers with an impossibly contradictory task. They are to wage a total war of elimination against the "guerrillas" while simultaneously gaining the trust and affection of their relatives in the villages. All the dynamics of modern war will work against the achievement of the latter goal. The natural solidarity of soldiers against civilians, of dominant ethnic groups against subordinate ones, of closely knit village societies against outsiders of any kind, is unimaginably intensified in a situation of guerrilla conflict.

The soldiers, embittered by the loss of their comrades, and unable to retaliate effectively against the frustratingly elusive guerrillas, will increasingly turn on civilians. They will come to a visceral understanding of the reality which

34 For a discussion of the problems of politicization and corruption in the officer corps, see Blaufarb and Tanham, *Who* 19–22, 72–5.

35 Paret, Clausewitz 186–213.

36 McPherson, *Drawn* 66–86.

may elude the strategists who are not immediately engaged in the conflict, that they are at war with an entire population. The inevitable dynamics of violence will therefore push them to commit increasing atrocities against the people, whose hatred for the occupying army can be expected to increase in proportion.³⁷

It is evident that such a dynamic was present in Yemen. Ethnic hostilities were an important factor in the conflict, although not necessarily a central one. From time to time the Zaydi chroniclers speak of conflict between “Arab” and “Turk;”³⁸ and a high proportion of the Ottoman soldiers in Yemen were, in fact, Anatolian Turks. Loyalty to sultan and state was evidently ingrained enough in the Anatolian soldiers that they fought well in spite of the abuse to which they were subjected. No doubt, however, they were deeply embittered by the miserable circumstances in which they found themselves, essentially the result of corruption in the high command.

The temptation to take out their frustrations on the Zaydis must therefore have been overwhelming. Apart from this, it was simply impracticable to spare the lives and property of “civilians” in the operations against the imam’s partisans, specifically in those areas where they took refuge in the fortified villages of a sympathetic population. Therefore, the soldiers continued to cut off heads and burn villages in rebel areas, no matter how much reform-minded Ottoman officials deplored their behavior; and in this they seem to have been tacitly encouraged by the high command, possibly as a means of deflecting the resentment of the soldiers from themselves.

All these factors together combined to push the Ottomans into a deepening quagmire of violence in Yemen. The dynamics of this violence forced the Seventh Army and the Zaydi population at large into increasingly bitter confrontation with one another. That is not to say that the policies designed to gain the support of the population never worked. Efforts to reduce corruption and extend education to the Yemenis did win some popular support for the government. Such successes, however, never seemed to be permanent. Periods of reform and relative social peace were relatively short-lived, and always seemed to cycle back into even worse violence than before.

37 For a discussion of some of these kinds of problems in Vietnam, see Blaufarb and Tanham, *Who* 80–81. Philip Caputo’s *A rumor of war*, an account of the author’s service in Vietnam as a U.S. Marine, documents this process on an individual level. By his own account, Caputo began by attempting to show the Vietnamese peasants that Americans were “different” from the colonialist French and ended by murdering an innocent Vietnamese civilian suspected of Viet Cong ties. See Caputo, *Rumor* 88–9, 315–20.

38 See for example al-Wāsi‘ī, *Tārīkh* 293.

The impasse was only broken when Ahmed İzzet Paşa changed the entire direction of Ottoman military policy. İzzet Paşa simply renounced the idea of suppressing the imamate. Instead, İzzet Paşa used his military successes in 1911 as a springboard from which to launch negotiations with the imam. War in this case was used as one tool of policy against an enemy who could be negotiated with, rather than as the only possible policy against an enemy who had to be destroyed.

The larger implications of this for security policy are self-evident. All of the policies associated with the modern idea of counterinsurgency are based on sound experience, and ought to be implemented by governments facing rebellion of one kind or another. Yet to engage in such policies as total war, without leaving other options open, is usually to engage in a self-defeating exercise. Misplaced definitions of self-interest and unwillingness to take responsibility for national wrongs lead governments to declare their enemies as beyond the pale of civilized politics. Where such foes represent deep currents of social discontent, they usually end up having to negotiate with them anyway, often after much costly and inefficient bloodshed.

These are the general lessons for counterinsurgency strategy that can be drawn from the Ottoman experience in Yemen. Now, what lessons can be drawn from the Ottoman wars in Yemen for an analysis of the rise and triumph of the Houthis? We will focus here on the processes which were common to both the Zaydi rebellions in Ottoman Yemen and the wars waged by the Houthis against the Yemeni government, showing how they were both deeply rooted in Zaydi history and at the same time partook fully of the accelerating changes in war and state formation in modern times.

As was the case with some of the previous imamic regimes, the initial geographic locus of the Houthi movement was in the Şa'da region, a traditional stronghold of Zaydism.³⁹ Again as with previous imamic regimes, the Zaydi sayyids of northern Yemen play a paramount role in the Houthi quasi-state. The founders of the Houthi movement are members of the Houthi family, a respected sayyid family long established in the Şa'da region,⁴⁰ as are the core

39 Şa'da was the capital of the first Zaydi imam al-Hādī ilā al-Ḥaqq, and it was also the capital of Imam al-Hādī Sharaf al-Dīn in Ottoman times, from whence he rebuilt the power of the imamate and enabled his successors to launch major rebellions against the Ottoman government. Imam al-Hādī Sharaf al-Dīn took possession of Şa'da in the Hijrī year 1298/1880–1 and died there in 1890. Zabāra, *A'immat* 1, 19, 144.

40 These men were the scholar Badr al-Dīn al-Ḥūthī, whose writings were influential in the Zaydi revival movement in Yemen, and whose son Muḥammad al-Ḥūthī was a co-founder of a Zaydi youth movement, the "Believing Youth;" Ḥusayn al-Ḥūthī, another son of Badr al-Dīn al-Ḥūthī, whose speeches inspired the transformation of the Believing Youth into

members of the movement;⁴¹ and the Houthis seek to make the sayyids the politically dominant group in Yemen.⁴² As we have seen, the Zaydi sayyids assumed a leading role in the rebellions against the Ottoman government in Yemen, and this pattern was replicated in the rebellion of the Houthis.

Likewise, the Houthis have used time-honored Zaydi concepts of rebellion against corrupt and oppressive regimes. President Ali Abdullah Salih's regime was a corrupt, centralizing and patrimonial regime similar in some respects to the regime of Abdülhamid. Ali Abdullah Salih ruled by promoting members of his extended family to the highest commands in the security forces, and by funneling money and state offices to members of his subtribe of Sanḥān and of the Ḥāshid tribal confederation to which Sanḥān belonged.⁴³ The discovery of oil fueled both corruption in his inner circle⁴⁴ and the centralizing drive of his regime.

The Salih regime's combination of nepotism, corruption, authoritarianism and centralization alienated those elements of the Zaydi tribes and religious elites which did not benefit from the regime's closed system of power and patronage. These included especially the people of the Sa'da region,⁴⁵ Bakil tribesmen who perceived that Salih's Ḥāshid dominated state discriminated against them,⁴⁶ and the Zaydi sayyids.⁴⁷ Ḥusayn al-Ḥūthī, whose writings form the ideological foundation of the movement, lamented the marginalization and oppression of the Muslim community in general and the Zaydi community in Yemen in particular in his discourse;⁴⁸ and this seems to have struck a chord among these groups.

the political movement whose members became known as the Houthis; and Ḥusayn al-Ḥūthī's half brother 'Abd al-Malik al-Ḥūthī who assumed the leadership of the Houthi armed rebellions against the government of Yemen after Ḥusayn al-Ḥūthī's murder by government security forces, and under whose direction this political movement was transformed into a quasi-state designed to wage war. See Brandt, *Tribes* 115–16, 133–4, 171.

41 Haykel, Houthis <https://www.hoover.org/research/houthis-saudi-arabia-and-war-yemen> (last accessed 4 January 2024).

42 Ibid.

43 Rabi, *Yemen* 107–8; Day, *Regionalism* 89–97.

44 After oil discoveries in Yemen began in 1984. Salih and his extended family skimmed billions of dollars off the state's oil receipts at the public's expense. See Day, *Regionalism* 104–5.

45 Brandt, *Tribes* 37.

46 Brandt, *Tribes* 285.

47 Bernard Haykel notes that Ḥusayn al-Ḥūthī's perception of discrimination against sayyid families like his own under the Republican regime played a central role in the formation of his ideas. See Haykel, Huthi movement's 19.

48 Ibid.

At the same time, the historic Zaydi discourse of rebellion against tyranny has been transformed by the Houthis into a discourse of rebellion against an unjust regional and international order. The Houthis' famous slogan "God is great, death to America, death to Israel, curse on the Jews, victory to Islam" was supposedly uttered first by Ḥusayn al-Ḥūthī on viewing footage of the killing of a Palestinian child by Israeli forces. It was given further impetus by the American "War on Terror," in which Ali Abdullah Salih allied Yemen with the United States, and by the American invasion of Iraq. The slogan, appealing to the anger and frustration of many Yemenis, catapulted the Houthis into national prominence when it began to be chanted in mosques across the country after the Friday prayer.⁴⁹

What we see here is that modern media, and especially the instantaneous media communication of the twenty-first century, has interacted with historic Zaydi political thought to create an ideology which is in a sense new, or at least rooted in contemporary political developments. Frustration with a global order dominated by the United States and its support of the aggressive nation-state of Israel has its roots in twentieth century Arab nationalism. It was taken over by the Islamic fundamentalist movements which became influential in the Arab and Muslim worlds in the later twentieth and the twenty-first century. The Houthi ideology thus represents the fusion of local Zaydi grievances with international ones, thus signaling the full incorporation of the Zaydis of Yemen into the globalized world of the twenty-first century.

A similar fusion of the old and new can be seen in the jihad waged by the Houthis. What was common to both the Houthis' jihad and the Zaydi imams' jihad was their character as a reaction against the power of an intrusive state which sought to subjugate the tribes and the sayyid leadership by military force, and the escalation of the war beyond tribal norms regulating conflict toward total war.

The Houthi movement did not become a military movement until Ali Abdullah Salih conducted a series of military campaigns in the northern tribal regions of Yemen designed to crush it, partly in response to the chanting of its slogan.⁵⁰ From the outset Ali Abdullah Salih desired to "bring the Houthis to heel,"⁵¹ and not negotiate with them. Army shelling, air bombardment and indiscriminate military violence amounted to a targeting of the civilian population as well as the Houthis; and in consequence, many who had not

49 Brandt, *Tribes* 133–5.

50 Brandt, *Tribes* 156–7.

51 Brandt, *Tribes* 156.

originally sympathized with Ḥusayn al-Ḥūthī joined the movement.⁵² As the wars became increasingly brutal traditional tribal means of containing conflict were eroded,⁵³ causing a further escalation of the conflict on the total war spectrum.

What was new in this conflict was the exponentially increased destructive capability of twenty-first century weaponry and the regional and international dimensions the conflict assumed, in contrast to the relatively isolated character of the Zaydi rebellions against the Ottomans. The Salih regime used all its firepower, including jets, helicopter gunships, tanks and artillery;⁵⁴ the Saudi-led coalition made extensive use of aerial bombing, using bombs as heavy as 1,000 pounds;⁵⁵ and the Houthis also used advanced weaponry, including unmanned aerial vehicles, unmanned surface vehicles and cruise missiles.⁵⁶

Likewise, the war in Yemen was fueled by the involvement of regional and international actors from the outset. The Saudi-led coalition in the Yemeni civil war included Egypt, Morocco, Jordan, Sudan, the United Arab Emirates, Qatar, and Bahrain, supported by the United States,⁵⁷ while the Houthis drew support from Hezbollah and Iran.⁵⁸ Whether intentionally or not, the aerial bombing and the blockade imposed on Yemen by the coalition amounted to a war against the civilians of Yemen as well the Houthis. As with the use of advanced 21st century weaponry, then, the involvement of regional and international powers had the effect of amplifying the character of the conflict as a total war.

This kind of progression is also evident in the state-forming character of the Houthis' jihad. Both the imams' jihad against the Ottomans and the Houthis' jihad against the internationally recognized government of Yemen resulted in the formation of counter states which eventually allowed them to become actual states exercising sovereign control over territory. After the Houthis' initial seizure of Sāda in 2011, the Houthis infiltrated the state apparatus and imposed an unprecedented level of security in the region;⁵⁹ and the subsequent seizure of Ṣan'ā' allowed the Houthis to become the de facto state authority in the northern part of Yemen.

52 Brandt, *Tribes* 162.

53 Brandt, *Tribes* 202.

54 Brandt, *Tribes* 158.

55 Wille, *Targeting Saada* 11–13.

56 Spencer, *Hybrid warfare* 236–7.

57 Wille, *What military target* 2.

58 Riedel, Who are the Houthis <https://www.brookings.edu/articles/who-are-the-houthis-and-why-are-we-at-war-with-them/> (last accessed: 2 January 2024).

59 Brandt, *Tribes* 334–5.

Yet the ideological basis of this state and the form it has taken represent a radical departure from the historic principles of Zaydism. The Houthis reject the traditional disciplines of Islamic theology and law in favor of “a highly politicized, revolutionary, and intentionally simplistic” interpretation of Zaydi principles.⁶⁰ They advocate a return to the Quran as the sole basis for the organization of Muslim society.⁶¹ In addition, they rely on the *Malāzīm*, a series of speeches by Ḥusayn al-Ḥūthī which enunciate the fundamental principles of the movement.⁶² They are particularly inspired by the example of the Islamic Revolution of Iran, which used the modern principles of anti-imperial revolution to establish a regime based on an authoritarian-revolutionary interpretation of Shiite conceptions of governance.⁶³

The Houthis do not seek to revive the Zaydi imamate, at least not in its historic form. Instead, they promote a vaguely defined conception of a kind of “universal leader for the world” who will embody the guidance of the Quran for the Muslim community.⁶⁴ This leader is given the title *‘alam al-hudā*, who “has a practical manifestation in the person of ‘Abd al-Malik al-Ḥūthī,” who “is an authoritarian figure who brooks no dissent, not unlike the Supreme Leader in Iran.”⁶⁵

Such a concept of leadership marks a move away from the historic charismatic or patrimonial model of leadership of the Zaydi imamate toward a model which is similar to the totalitarian dictatorships of the twentieth century. The Houthis have jettisoned virtually the entire body of legal and theological scholarship on which the Zaydi imamate was based, retaining only the Quran supplemented by Ḥusayn al-Ḥūthī’s *Malāzīm*. In practice, they have arrogated the sole right of interpretation of the Quran to the *‘alam al-hudā* as represented in the person of ‘Abd al-Malik al-Ḥūthī. This represents an enormous concentration of spiritual and temporal authority in the hands of a single individual. This concentration of power, defined and legitimated by a limited set of texts, marks a trend toward totalitarianism which is “modern,” albeit in a distorted form.

60 Haykel, Huthi movement’s 19.

61 Haykel, Huthi movement’s 22.

62 Haykel, Huthi movement’s 19.

63 Badr al-Dīn al-Ḥūthī spent some years in exile in Iran, where he was introduced to the political thought of the Islamic Revolution and its emphasis on social justice and resistance to the West. These ideas had broad appeal in the underdeveloped and marginalized Ṣa’dā region. Brandt, *Tribes* 115.

64 Haykel, Huthi movement’s 25.

65 Haykel, Huthi movement’s 26.

Another totalitarian feature of the Houthi regime is the centrality of hate in its discourse. Projection of popular anger and frustration toward hated external and internal enemies, enemies defined by the state, was a feature of the totalitarian regimes of the twentieth century; and it is a feature of the Houthi regime. Hatred toward non-Muslims and the non-Muslim powers dominating the Muslim world is a fundamental principle of the ideology of the movement.

Ḥusayn al-Ḥūthī taught that the “people of the book”, and specifically the United States and Israel, were the historic enemies of the Muslim *umma*; that their aim was to destroy the foundations of the *umma*, specifically the Quran, the Prophet Muḥammad, and the Arabic language; and that therefore it was incumbent on Muslims to fight them.⁶⁶ Hatred such as this may have been present in the time of the Zaydi imamate, and the Jews of Yemen did indeed suffer from the discrimination historically imposed by Islamic law on non-Muslim minorities living in Muslim countries; but hatred does not appear to have been central to the discourse of the imamate in the way it is with the Houthis.

It is apparent, then, that the Houthi movement has both important continuities with the rebellions of the Zaydi imams and significant differences from them. The continuities may be summarized as follows: both were based in traditional Zaydi strongholds in the north of Yemen, both were led by sayyids, both became rebellions which escalated beyond tribal norms of limited conflict into total war, and both resulted in the formation of quasi-states as a result of the exigencies of mobilization for total war. What was new in the Houthi movement and subsequent Yemeni civil war was the internationalization of the conflict, the vastly increased destructiveness of the weaponry involved, and the emergence of a state which was quasi-totalitarian rather than charismatic or patrimonial in character. The triumph of the Houthis does not bode particularly well for the future of Yemen, the Middle East or the world in general; but the Houthis appear to be here to stay, and the rest of the world will have to find some way to deal with them.

66 Abū ‘Awwāḍa, *Ṣafahāt* 79.

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Scholarship on Ottoman Yemen in the 19th and early 20th centuries is still in the beginning stages, and there are no modern military histories in European languages of that period. This book captures the turbulence of late Ottoman Yemen with vivid descriptions of the battles and campaigns between the Zaydī Shiite tribesmen of Yemen and the Ottoman forces. It also provides a clear analysis of the political context of these wars, discussing how the political structures and ideologies of both the Ottomans and the Zaydī rebels impacted the course of these wars and, in turn, how these wars affected these political structures and ideologies.

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