



# REINTEGRATING WARRING YEMENI FORCES: LESSONS FROM OTHER CASES

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# 1. INTRODUCTION

After years of fighting that has led to hundreds of thousands of deaths and a humanitarian disaster, there may be light at the end of the tunnel for a resolution of the Yemen conflict. The United States, under the Biden Administration, has withdrawn support for the Saudi war effort in the country and has reversed the Trump Administration's decision to label the Houthi (Ansar Allah) forces as terrorists. Saudi Arabia, once heading a 10-country coalition in Yemen, is now left standing by itself against the non-state armed forces in that country. This new landscape increases the chances of Riyadh coming to the table for peace talks.

Further, despite sustained internecine conflict, most of the parties to the Yemeni civil war are not calling for secession and the formation of independent states. The one group that still makes this call, the Southern Transitional Council (STC), may not be able to sustain itself as an independent state.

The question arises: is this an endgame or a bargaining position? Instead, for most groups in the country, there remains a commitment to some type of federal system emerging from the peace process—though what shape the system would take is unclear. While the situation in Yemen remains fluid, any sustainable peace deal will require power sharing, a federal structure, and concrete steps to demobilize and integrate former armed forces members into post-war society and its institutions.

## 2. HOW TO SETTLE ETHNIC REBELLIONS

We should look at past efforts in other countries that had internal conflicts—India, Lebanon, and Myanmar—as well as the case of the UAE, where disparate forces were united into a joint military, which suggests that past examples of reintegration may be useful in the Yemeni context.

To find the implications for Yemen in these cases, it is necessary to examine the following issues in each context:

- What was the historical and political context in which the integration of armed forces took place in the various case studies?
- What were structural options for bridging political differences, maintaining autonomy, while enhancing demobilization and integration?
- What were the incentive options based on how individual armed groups perceive value and what they would potentially accept as trade-offs in return for laying down their arms and accepting accountability for compliance?

In addition,

- What were the general experiences of options employed in the case studies covered in the desk review?
- What are key lessons to be learned?

## 3. CASE STUDIES

### 3.1 INDIA

The Indian efforts to bring warring groups, terrorists, and Ethnic Armed Organizations (EAOs) into the fold were based on a multi-pronged approach that took advantage of the coercive capacity of the state as well as its ability, as a democracy, to accommodate differing viewpoints, however imperfectly, into the national mainstream. These policy approaches were built up over time, as the learning curve of the Indian government grew with each successive challenge to the federal structure and the country's unity. These challenges came from internal groups seeking revolution or political reform, secessionist groupings wanting independence from the Indian Union.

The challenges were, in some cases, aided by external actors providing diplomatic, military, and financial support to rebel groups. The Indian response was based on lessons learned from the partition of the country and the challenges to nation-building that ensued in the succeeding years.

When India gained independence in 1947, it was faced by multiple challenges to its territorial integrity and democratic structure:

- The country had been partitioned and the final geographical boundaries of India and Pakistan were still to be determined.
- A mutiny in the Royal Indian Army had created a fighting force, the Indian National Army, one that fought alongside the Japanese and the question remained how to deal with the former combatants.
- Shortly after independence the country was beset by a Communist uprising in a part of India.
- By the 1950s, various ethnic groups in India's northeast had created EAOs to challenge the authority of the Indian government and to seek eventual independence.

In 1947, there were strong indications that the county might not survive as a single territorial entity and, instead, it could break into several countries. Partition had just broken the country into three parts—India, West Pakistan, and East Pakistan—and over a million people are estimated to have died in the ethnic cleansing that took place after the announcement of independence was made. Worse, the former principalities in the two countries were given the option of either joining India or Pakistan or remaining as independent entities. The Nawab of Junagarh, whose population was overwhelmingly Hindu, sought to accede to Pakistan but a popular uprising saw him flee the state and move permanently to Pakistan while the Nawab of Hyderabad and the Maharaja of Kashmir both sought to remain independent.

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### 3.1.1 HYDERABAD

The Indian state used force to retake Hyderabad after the Nawab refused to join the Indian Union. There is, however, another view: a theory that the Indian government carried out the invasion in large part to counter the growing communist agitation in the state. As part of this “police action,” eight of the armies of the former princely states were used alongside the regular Indian armed forces. While Hyderabad was a success, India was to retake only a part of the state of Jammu and Kashmir, which had also initially opted for independence, when India repelled Pakistani regular and irregular forces in a war that went on from 1947 to 1948.

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### 3.1.2 INDIAN NATIONAL ARMY

The second aspect that had important security ramifications was what to do with the troops that had fought alongside the Japanese as the Indian National Army. Opinions in India were deeply divided with the British officers of the Royal Indian Army wanting them to be tried and executed as mutineers, while the general Indian public was far more sympathetic and saw the soldiers as heroes of the Indian freedom struggle. Four of the leaders of the INA were tried in a public trial and sentenced to deportation for life—a judgement that the Chief of the Indian Army was forced to revoke because of the widespread public outcry. Another mutiny by elements of the Royal Indian Navy, coupled with minor revolts by noncommissioned troops in different parts of India, led the British government to conclude that they could no longer depend on Indian troops to be the bulwark of the British Raj in India.<sup>1</sup>

What was done to the soldiers of the INA is interesting. As Cohen points out, the Indian armed forces that had remained loyal to the British were worried that both the British administration and the new Indian government would let the INA soldiers off lightly, allowing them to rejoin the Indian armed forces. The loyal Indian armed forces also feared that the new Indian government would favor the INA veterans over the troops that had maintained discipline and remained loyal to their oath. None of this happened as no INA soldier was allowed to rejoin the military: the new nationalist leadership recognized it needed a professional and apolitical army. Indian leaders thus sought to reassure the military that the discipline that had been achieved under a British-created system would continue. Also, while the INA soldiers were reintegrated into Indian society by giving them jobs in other government departments, they were not allowed to join the army.<sup>2</sup>

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### 3.1.3 MIZORAM

India’s other approach to dealing with former insurgents—and the most successful one—was in the state of Mizoram. The case of Kashmir is too complicated to fit in here since it is also a conflict between two countries—Pakistan and India—over disputed territory. This case is even more complex because a good part of the erstwhile state was given to China by Pakistan in a border settlement and a substantial chunk was seized by Beijing in the 1962 Sino-Indian War. Further, India’s recent response has been to carve up the state, revoke its special status, and implement a strong crackdown in the state, thereby changing the political reality on the ground. Consequently, politics in the state has been in stasis. Until the political dialogue reopens, it is futile to talk about the applicability of lessons from Kashmir.

Mizoram, on the other hand, has lessons to provide for conflict resolution and the reintegration of insurgents into mainstream society.

One of India's northeastern states, Mizoram, had traditionally been dominated by a non-Mizo Assamese elite because the various hill tribes were all included in one mega-state called Assam. Matters came to a head with the famine of the early 1960s, which left the Mizo population starving and an inept response by the state government led to the outbreak of an insurgency.<sup>3</sup> The Indian government's initial response was heavy-handed, with the use of military force including air power—something the Indians claimed they would not use against their own citizens. The Indian government became even more unpopular with its relocation of civilian populations into new sites called "Progressive and Protected Villages."<sup>4</sup> By the late seventies, however, the Mizo National Front had begun to splinter, both because of internal causes and due to the efforts of Indian intelligence agencies. The then Chief Minister of Mizoram, Brigadier Sailo, was able to get a number of insurgents to surrender and reenter the mainstream. By the late 1970s, peace talks between the Indian government and the Mizo National Front led to a peace accord in 1986 whose terms included an interim power sharing agreement with the Mizo National Front, full statehood for Mizoram, and an election that saw the MNF come to power in the state.

The main features of the agreement were: "the MNF coming above ground with their arms, ammunition, and equipment, the MNF was to conform to the provisions of the law, the settlement and rehabilitation of MNF fighters, award of full-fledged statehood to Mizoram, legal immunity for certain religious practices, *ex gratia* payments to martyrs, and government compensation for damage to crops and property."<sup>5</sup> "

The peace has held in Mizoram since the mid-1980s, and the main concern has been how to provide better rehabilitation schemes to the former fighters of the MNF. Thirty-five years later, the state continues to seek more funds for the former combatants since they had not been given the full opportunity to economically integrate into the system.<sup>6</sup>

The Mizoram peace accord was possible for several reasons which were linked not only to India's democratic and coercive capabilities but also to the learning curve on the side of both the non-state armed forces and the government. Central to the support of the accord by the Mizos was the Indian government's decision to federalize the northeast of India and to break the mega-state of Assam into seven separate states. This move gave expression to the people's identity and allowed them to pursue their political and economic agendas more effectively. The Indian government also learned quickly that its coercive actions, most notably the use of air strikes, alienated the population and drove them to support the insurgency. Setting up of a government in the state, discussions with non-state armed forces to surrender, and the final peace agreement were far more successful. Lastly, the Indian government made the decision to negotiate with the Mizos as a whole, represented by the MNF, rather than splintering the movement into different groups that might have been easier to negotiate with. This permitted the creation of a lasting peace agreement.

On the other hand, the MNF was never a large force and its ability to use East Pakistan as a safe haven was taken away with the formation of Bangladesh. Also, the MNF was never able to gain any large-scale financial and military support from foreign powers like China and Pakistan. Thus, by the early 1970s it became apparent to the Mizo leadership that a negotiated settlement was the best way forward.

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#### 3.1.4 ALL OTHER ETHNIC ARMED ORGANIZATIONS (EAOS) IN INDIA

The Indian success at bringing in EAO groups remains mixed. While low level insurgencies continue within most of the northeast, they do not have the numbers or the proximity to India's political heartland to do the type of damage that groups in other countries can inflict on their political centers of power. Thus, even a significant Maoist rebellion in the center of the country did not lead to political tremors in the capital because the rebellion lacked the ability to hurt the major political interests of the leadership.

What was the historical and political context in which the integration of armed forces took place in India? As the successor state, India inherited a bureaucracy, a British style military with a British code of civil-military relations. India's post-independence leadership sought to create a federal country—which the Indians called a Union since it would grant less power to the constituent states than a classic federation—and a set of ethno-religious groups that sought independence.

With a commitment to democracy and federal structure, and the eventual shaping of the constituent state units along linguistic grounds, the Indians created a political structure that allowed for the inclusion of disparate groups. This move allowed them to create regional political parties that were able to give expression to local identities and to gain power at the state level. The head of the MNF, Laldenga, went on to become the Chief Minister of Mizoram when it was given the status of a full state in the Indian Union. The Indians would like to have similar solutions in other parts of the northeast where they face other small insurgencies.

The Royal Indian Army and its successor, the Indian Army, raised battalions and regiments along ethnic and caste lines thus permitting an easy avenue for former non-state armed forces to be brought into the system. This was particularly the case with the state of Nagaland. Ethnic Nagas sought to break away from India and the initial response of the Indian government was to use the army to subdue the population.

Human rights abuses and other problems arose from this approach and the Indian government also tried somewhat successfully to splinter the Naga movement into different groups. While this did slow down the momentum of the Naga movement as the different groups fought each other, it did not help in the long-term plan to bring about peace in the state. The government finally agreed to give full statehood to Nagaland in 1963 and the first of several surrenders by Naga non-state armed forces took place. By 1970, in its efforts to integrate the state into the Indian Union, the government decided to raise a Naga Battalion into which 69 former insurgents were inducted.<sup>7</sup>

The government also created a national armed paramilitary force of over 500,000 personnel which, unlike the military, allowed for recruitment based on affirmative action and included groups from areas where insurgencies had been resolved or had declined to acceptable levels. Because several of the Naga tribes fall within what India calls Scheduled Tribes—formerly called untouchables—this allowed them preferential recruitment into the paramilitary forces. Unlike the military, the standards for these services are lower, but the paramilitary provides all the benefits of a government job including a pension and healthcare.<sup>8</sup> One of the most successful paramilitaries for inducting tribals from India’s Northeast has been the Assam Rifles, which patrols the eastern borders and engages in counter-insurgency operations.<sup>9</sup>

This method of integrating rebel groups into the security structure of the nation has not always succeeded. Such groups, especially in the Northeast, have been comparatively small and were not able to mount significant challenges to the Indian state. They have, therefore, seen the advantage of laying down their arms since the terms the Indian government has offered have been acceptable to these groups. However, in other areas like Kashmir, dedicated support from Pakistan for the non-state armed forces has made controlling the insurgency and rehabilitating former insurgents a more difficult process.

### 3.2 LEBANON

The 15 year long Lebanese civil war had several similarities to the war in Yemen. Warring militias organized on religious lines fought each other and, on occasion, fought co-religionists in attempts to gain greater power. External actors, Israel and Syria, intervened as well, providing arms and assistance to their proxies in the conflict. Additionally, the Lebanese Army, which could have been a force that kept the peace by separating or subduing warring factions, was essentially kept out of the conflict because of Lebanon’s confessional politics. To use the army would have required the consent of the Christian President and Muslim Prime Minister. Since that was not possible, the army stayed in its barracks. Instead of being a peacekeeping force, the army saw large-scale defections as enlisted men either returned home or joined the militias of their co-religionists. According to Shah and Dalton, as many as 80% of those in the military left the formal structure, leaving behind a hollow shell that was rendered further ineffective when a split took place in the military between the competing factions of Aoun and Leboud.<sup>10</sup>

The Taif agreement of 1989 led to an end to the conflict in 1990 and laid down the framework for demobilization, disarmament, and reintegration of militias as well as steps towards bringing about security sector reform in the country. The Taif Accord also called for the reintegration of as many as 30,000 former militia members into the military and the security forces.

As in any such efforts in a post-conflict situation, the results were mixed due to the demands of various groups and the lack of capacity on part of the Lebanese government to enforce parts of the agreement. The various militias were meant to disband but Hezbollah was left out of this arrangement

because it was seen as the resistance to Israel and also because the Lebanese state lacked the capacity to forcibly disarm this powerful organization. Hezbollah had gained the reputation of being the resistance against Israeli assaults since the regular military was in no position to deter the Israeli forces. There was also the fear that the use of the army would lead Israel to order overwhelming retaliation. Hezbollah also gained credibility within Lebanese circles since the organization did not engage in large scale killings within the country even though it did fight rival militias.

In Lebanon, the country did not have the necessary fiscal resources or political commitment heal the wounds of war and to bring about substantive changes proactively. The Lebanese government was more successful in demobilizing and integrating other militias and in starting to change the composition of the Lebanese Army, which had become a symbol of national unity within the country.

Lebanon could not sustain a large military force which could have served as an employment source for former combatants. Reintegrating former militia members was achieved by bringing some into the military and others into the other security services in the country even though the actual numbers were far smaller than that envisaged in the peace accord. The estimates are that of the 30,000 odd militia members, only around 6,000 were brought into the state security system.<sup>11</sup>

More successful was the attempt to reinvent the Lebanese military, whose leadership was Christian-dominated. Command of the military was seen as the pathway to the presidency of the country, a position reserved for a Christian. The intent was to make the military represented equally by both Muslims and Christians, but achieving this objective was constrained by the realities of Lebanese society. Christians in Lebanon were increasingly inclined to not join the military and, instead, migrated to avoid conscription. Consequently, the enlisted composition of the military has become largely Muslim while the officer corps has more Christians in it.

Where the Lebanese government has been more successful was in breaking down the religious/confessional character of the units of the military. The Lebanese army had been built along religious lines with units being formed out of the various religious groups, but after the peace accord, the decision was taken to make the units have a Lebanese as opposed to religious identity. As a result, brigades have gone from representing one religious group to having a more national identity.

Another successful move by the Lebanese government was to remove units recruited in one part of the country and post them in other regions. The partial success of the Lebanese approach can be seen in two achievements: except for Hezbollah, all militias have disbanded and some of the members have been integrated into either the military or even other state administrative positions. Also, the military, which was a bystander in the civil war and in the Israeli invasions, has been actively used to suppress radical forces within the country. Thus, the Sunni militia, which had ties to ISIS, was defeated by the military but, in a deal brokered by Hezbollah and the Syrian government, the rebel fighters were allowed to leave Lebanon.

The efforts of the Lebanese Army have been successful because of the assistance given by external actors—particularly the United States and the European Union—to build up the capacity of these forces.

Thus, while Lebanon’s army is not a force that can defend the borders of the country, because of a more powerful Israel to the south and Syria to the north, the army has become a force that can be used to defeat home-based extremist forces. The sticking point, however, remains Hezbollah.

The United States labeled Hezbollah a terrorist organization and therefore refused to work with it. Instead of building up its capabilities, and, the United States sought to undermine the position of the group with Lebanese society. France, in contrast, sought to work with Hezbollah, recognizing the realities on the ground and that true stability and security require the cooperation of that group.

There are several takeaways from the Lebanon experience that are useful for being applied in other societal and political contexts. First, despite the civil war and the division of society along multiple religious grounds, there remained a belief among the majority of Lebanese that the country could not be split up into microstates but, instead, should remain as a unified political entity. Second, as the case of permitting Hezbollah to retain its military capability and function as an autonomous entity shows, you can leave a major militia actor intact— providing it is willing to play by the overall rules of the civilian government. Hezbollah has not attacked civilian populations in Lebanon and remains the first line of defense against a future Israeli incursion into Lebanon, since the Lebanese Armed forces (LAF) are not deployed south of the Litani River to face Israel. Third, a good-faith effort has been made to stop structuring military units along confessional lines and to make them integrated and representative of the Lebanese nation. Fourth, external actors have worked to build up the capacity of the military and the internal security forces to make them the legitimate source of violence in the state.

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### 3.2.1 LESSONS FROM LEBANON

Lebanon’s security dilemma and its ability to build up military capability has been constrained by two factors:

- The role external powers play in the affairs of the state and particularly in its security framework; and
- In the fact that an archaic power-sharing structure limits the development of true governance within the country.

While a sovereign state, Lebanon has had to live with the reality that its two more powerful neighbors—Syria and Israel —have repeatedly intervened in the nation’s internal affairs. These two countries have chosen sides and armed them, and essentially laid the grounds for how the security sector is shaped in the country. As part of the peace settlement of 1990, Syrian forces were allowed to remain in the country: they only left in the face of public protests in 2005. The Israelis have waged two wars in the country and in both cases the Lebanese military was not involved but, instead, it was Hezbollah that formed the resistance against the invading army. The role of Hezbollah as the resistance to the Israeli Defense Force has allowed it to retain its forces and armaments since the two wars validated the claim that only its militia could stand up to the Israelis and eventually get them to withdraw. Thus, while other militias in the country have been demobilized, Hezbollah’s has been left

intact with its fighting capabilities. While Hezbollah remains a war-fighting force, the Lebanese Army's mandate is less that of a protector of the nation—not having been deployed against Israel—but instead as a symbol of national unity.

As Gaub has pointed out, the Lebanese Army could not be used in the Lebanese civil war since, given its confessional politics, it required the consent of both the Christian President and the Sunni Muslim Prime Minister to deploy the military. Since this was a non-starter—given that at least a part of the civil war was between the Phalangists (who were Christian) and the Palestinians (Sunni Muslims), the army remained a passive observer in the internal conflict.<sup>12</sup> By the end of the civil war, the army was fragmented, significant numbers of enlisted men had left the military for their homes, and the 6<sup>th</sup> Brigade—which was largely Shia Muslim—joined the Amal Militia.<sup>13</sup>

After the war, there were several goals that were required to be achieved for the military for, as Gaub explained,

“When it came back into the political game in 1990, the Lebanese Army therefore had several tasks:

- reunite its scattered remnants,
- restructure the religion-based brigades,
- increase its size,
- integrate former militias,
- get rid of the Christian image, and impose itself as the one and only source of coercion, therefore contributing to the rebuilding of Lebanon as a state and as a nation.”<sup>14</sup>

As Shah and Dalton write, “Historically, the LAF has played a unique role in Lebanon as an apolitical entity buttressing a political goal of broader Lebanese unity and nationalism,” and the goal in the post-civil-war period was to remove the religious based identity of the various Lebanese army brigades and instead create a true national army that would reflect unity and nationalism.<sup>15</sup> This was achieved in part by moving forces around to create religiously diverse brigades that were not confessional but Lebanese in identity.<sup>16</sup> This approach, while positive, was applied to only five brigades and even there the demographic and economic realities of Lebanon became apparent as these units were 70% Muslim and 30% Christian. Demographically speaking, there were now more Muslims and Christians, being more well to do, were less keen to join the army.<sup>17</sup> In 1991 the Lebanese government took the decision to disarm and demobilize the militias and to bring militia fighters into the national administrative and military institutions.<sup>18</sup> Additional ex-militia members were brought into the police, the internal security force, and even the customs administration.<sup>19</sup>

While the inclusion of former militia members in the state centers of authority is promising, the numbers have been far too few compared to the number of militia fighters and, therefore, some militias,

while surrendering their heavy weaponry and removing their uniforms, have retained their organizational structures.

What has helped make the Lebanese Army less confessional and a more professional unit has been the huge flow of foreign aid to the force. Since 2006, the United States has provided \$1.7 billion in military aid to the Lebanese Armed Forces and this sum has gone for purchasing equipment and for training. American aid has been given with the aim of countering the influence of Hezbollah, Iran, and Syria in the country by building up the capacity of Lebanese Armed Forces. In fact, the LAF has scrupulously avoided getting into a confrontation with Hezbollah, and has not allowed itself to take political sides in the internal competition between rival groups.<sup>20</sup>

Lebanon's economic situation has worsened in the last year both because of internal problems as well as the COVID-19 epidemic and there is strong external pressure to use monetary assistance to the beleaguered government as the tool to contain and possibly disarm Hezbollah. Such a move seems shortsighted and likely to lead to internal violence because Hezbollah is unwilling to take such steps and the LAF is not in the position to effectively defend the borders of the country. The solution in the long run would be one that includes all factions within the country in governance and the security sector and as seen below, this has implications for the situation in Yemen.

### 3.3 THE UNITED ARAB EMIRATES

The UAE's military has been described as "Little Sparta" by the former US Defense Secretary James Norman Mattis and it has emerged as a technologically advanced force that punched above its weight when deployed in the Iraq, Libya, and Syria conflicts. The UAE case, however, is not one of a straightforward unification of seven separate principalities into a unified nation and command structure. Instead, it took some time for the different sheikhdoms to unify and particularly, to bring their armed forces together into a unified command. Thus, while six emirates joined the UAE in 1971 and the seventh, Ras al Khaimah, entered the union in 1972, they only merged their armies in 1976 and the air forces in 1999. Dubai brought its forces into the joint force structure only in 1998.<sup>21</sup>

The union of the seven emirates had its share of birthing problems: the countries in the union had sporadic border clashes.<sup>22</sup> The members of the union were jealous of their independence and were concerned about being dominated by the largest and richest member, Abu Dhabi. The British had set up relations with each of the emirates and supported them as independent entities. Also, both Saudi Arabia and Iran had territorial claims on the territories of the emirates.

Even though the seven states brought their armed forces into a single entity called the Union Defense Force (UDF), they had independent responsibility over their armed forces. Sporadic clashes continued between some of the constituents of the UAE. Sharjah and Fujairah had a brief border conflict in 1973 that was contained after the UDF was able to impose control. In the same year, there was a

military incident between Sharjah and Dubai that was deescalated by the intervention of the ruler of Abu Dhabi.<sup>23</sup>

Abu Dhabi is the largest and wealthiest part of the union, with 87% of the territory and the bulk of the oil reserves of the emirates. This imbalance initially led to fears by the other constituent emirates of losing their identities and political authority to a centralized authority dominated by Abu Dhabi.<sup>24</sup> The reason was under the arrangement with the British, whose influence started in 1820 and formally lasted until 1896, the all the emirates—then known as the Trucial States for the treaties they had with Great Britain—had political representation. While Abu Dhabi was generous in disbursing its wealth to the less wealthy emirates, the rulers of the other states held out hope that they would find oil and be able to balance off the richer emirate. As such, there was initial resistance to the centralization of ministries and to the creation of a truly integrated defense force.<sup>25</sup>

The initial British plan to make the Trucial Oman Scouts into the armed forces for a united Emirates rested on the assumption that these forces would be lightly armed and be there for both external deterrence and internal security. Abu Dhabi, as the largest and wealthiest state, however, sought to build up its own military force and in 1966 created the Abu Dhabi Defense Force. The other states were to build their own forces as well because of the political differences between the emirati rulers. As Yates writes:

“The other challenge facing Sheikh Zayed was the political environment. When he assumed power in Abu Dhabi in 1966, the political arrangements were exactly as they had been for over a century—the emirates were protected states of Britain, which meant that Britain was responsible for their external defense and foreign affairs. The emirates’ individual rulers were responsible for internal matters, except where Britain’s interests were concerned. As had always been the case, the rulers of neighboring emirates were a source of competition, and occasionally conflict, despite the British presence. A common approach adopted by the rulers was to establish security against the threat from neighboring emirates by seeking alliances with other rulers. This often led to a checkerboard pattern of alliances where each ruler tended to be close friends with the next ruler but one, and the intermediate ruler traditionally became the opponent of both. These historic alliances, as well as long-remembered insults and injuries, were an important part of intermediate political dynamics across all of the emirates.”<sup>26</sup>

At the same time, external security threats were putting pressures on the new federation to improve its military capabilities and to bring about a greater integration of their forces. Saudi Arabia had territorial claims on parts of Abu Dhabi while the Iranians claimed the islands of Abu Musa as well as Lesser and Greater Tunb from Ras-al-Khaimah. Each of the emirates started to build up their military capabilities but, except for Abu Dhabi and Dubai, lacked the resources to build a capable fighting force.

Abu Dhabi sought to buy more modern weapons and to build up its force capability by importing expatriate fighters particularly flyers for its air force. Dubai, in 1970, established a Dubai Defense force which by 1976 grew to a 2600-man force with tanks and an air force while Ras-al-Khaimah, by 1968, had

started to put together a 120-man motorized infantry unit. In 1972, Sharjah set up its own military while in 1976 Um al-Quwain did the same.

Several factors, however, brought about the integration of the Emirati forces.

- the small populations of the Emirati states
- external threats which the various Emirati sheikhdoms could not have faced alone
- the predominant role that Abu Dhabi had a in the governance, economy, and affairs of the new union; and
- senior members of the ruling families of the various emirates serving as officers in the new forces thus leading to nation building.<sup>27</sup>

External threats were a key factor in making the different emirates put aside their differences and fears of losing their independence over their territories. Saudi Arabia claimed a significant part of Abu Dhabi while the Shah's Iran overran the Tunb Islands and forced the Sheikh of Ras al-Khaimah to agree to the joint administration of the island of Abu Musa. After Iran took the Tunb islands, Ras al-Khaimah, an original hold-out from joining the union, joined in 1972. Continued concerns about the larger countries in the Gulf created the need for a concerted response to such security challenges.

The small populations of the emirates also created the need for greater integration since the total population of the new state was close to a million while the expatriate population was substantially larger. This created both a sense of national identity and a concern about the intentions of the larger non-native population.

Abu Dhabi's role may, however, have been the decider in bringing the union and its constituent armed forces together. With 87% of the territory and the bulk of the oil revenues, Abu Dhabi was always going to be the most influential state even though for some time Dubai was the more visible state in the emirates' decision-making process. Abu Dhabi was to push for federalization and to disburse revenues to the poorer states for the overall development of the emirates. As the other states were not to find substantial oil reserves, their ability to maintain greater autonomy from the federal system was limited. The anti-federal power in these states was further limited because their populations were to appreciate the developmental efforts that the new federal government was implementing.

Additionally, Abu Dhabi was to push for the creation of a more modern military purchasing jet aircraft, better mobile warfare systems, and, recognizing that the new country lacked trained manpower, bringing in trained professionals from around the world—particularly Pakistan—to rapidly build up its capabilities.<sup>28</sup>

These factors combined to bring the recalcitrant sheikhdoms together but even then, it was not a straightforward and easy process. Dubai maintained its own air force till 1999 and the other emirates were reluctant to lose their independent abilities to use coercion. Nevertheless, the UAE experience shows that the existence of external threats, the ability to spread economic largesse, and the creation

of a national identity prevented what could have been the quick dissolution of a federation. Instead, these factors led to the development of an armed force that has been described as Little Sparta.

#### 3.4. MYANMAR

Myanmar is a country that has been beset with internal conflict marked by the existence of EAOs since before independence. The country's modern history has been one of attempting to defeat insurgencies and trying, with mixed success, to reintegrate such groups and their forces into the national mainstream. The roots of ethnic clashes in the country lie in the fact that many armed groups want ethnic autonomy which they believed was promised by Suu Kyi's father, Gen. Aung San, in the Panglong Agreement of 1947, which called for a federal system of government, ethnic minority rights and religious freedom. Instead, years of Junta rule saw serious violations of human rights, killings, and the pillaging of the ethnic people's natural resources.<sup>29</sup>

Attempts were made from the early years of independence to bring warring groups back into the fold and to try and integrate them into the country's security forces. As John Buchanan has shown, these attempts met with mixed results as in some places violence erupted while elsewhere government and business were allowed to carry out socio-economic initiatives.<sup>30</sup> Some EAOs were brought into Tatmadaw-supported militias while others were to be included in the police forces which had been put under the control of the military in the security system.

Yet, such efforts were not fully successful since surrendered groups splintered and the breakaway factions resumed violence. There was also continued violence by those brought into the state system, and as Buchanan writes, one of the reasons violence continued was that these ceasefire and disarmament arrangements did not address the root causes that had caused the initial eruption of such armed conflicts.<sup>31</sup> As Alison Vicary has shown, people in former conflict zones have continued to experience military activity, illegal taxation by different armed groups, and little protection from the state. These reversals were partly due to the fact that under the agreements reached between the government and the militias, the funding was left in whole or in part to the militias.<sup>32</sup> Militia groups have been permitted to create their own business ventures as varied as real-estate, bus lines, and saw mills while others have received concessions from the government to do natural resource extracting like logging as well as gold and jade mining. Moreover, some groups were permitted to enter the highly profitable drug trade.<sup>33</sup> Such measures, therefore, have also encouraged criminality and oppression as well as the alienation of largely rural populations from their means of livelihood. On the other hand, to compound the problem, there has been little attempt to reform the police and judicial sectors that would play a central role in security sector reform by increasing civil trust in the system of government.<sup>34</sup> Thus, the deep-rooted causes of conflict remain in the system and Myanmar has seen a repeated breakdown of ceasefires, the failure of integration efforts, and renewed outbreaks of violence.

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### 3.4.1 LESSONS FROM MYANMAR

The case of Myanmar showed a repeated breakdown of peace agreements which started in the 1950s. The last major effort was the 2015 National Ceasefire Agreement that saw eight groups lay down arms, although as Bertil Linter argues, only two of the eight had any armed forces to be reckoned with. Instead, the major fighting groups stayed out of the process.<sup>35</sup> Myanmar tried to adopt processes like integrating rebel forces into the system, but without taking steps to address the fundamental issues that created the conditions for insurgency in the first place, these efforts were doomed to fail. Further, Myanmar lacked the capacity to fund the forces it had incorporated into the state-based or state-approved security systems. This gap ensured that the militias were to continue using coercion to obtain funds for their preservation.

## 4. LESSONS FOR YEMEN

Recent talks over the future of Yemen have focused on, “...a nationwide cease-fire, a U.N.-led cease-fire monitoring team, a resource-sharing arrangement (including revenues from Marib Oil Company), maintenance of the floating storage and offloading unit SAFER and the Marib-Ras Isa pipeline, reopening Sanaa International Airport for commercial flights, payment of salaries, the formation of a joint COVID-19 committee, easing the collection of revenues from Hodeida’s ports, and the resumption of peace negotiations.” Yet at the same time, “The JD combines many issues in one package but leaves security and military measures that usually help or hinder the cessation of hostilities largely unaddressed.”<sup>36</sup>

Given that the security issues and military measures are not part of current discussions, what lessons can we glean from the case studies above to be of potential use in Yemen? First, the role of external powers in helping bring about union, eventual federalization, and the integration of the military and EAOs is an important one since it can both help and hinder such a process. In the case of the UAE, it was the threats posed by larger states that served as one of the major contributory factors to make recalcitrant sheikhdoms that jealously treasured their independence to move towards unification and, eventually, to have a common integrated army. On the other hand, in the case of Lebanon, Syria and Israel had complicated the security and political processes with Syria having troops in the country till 2005 while Israel, like Syria, funded militia groups within the country.

More recently, the United States and France have influenced the Lebanese political process with the United States seeking to neutralize Hezbollah and to take on Islamic State related groups. Meanwhile, the French are looking for long-term solution to the country’s problems without naming Hezbollah as a terrorist group. Not all external influence is bad, however, as the growing capabilities and de-confessionalization of the Lebanese Army has in part been driven by the economic largesse of the United States to build up the LAF.

In the Yemeni case, while the Saudis and the UAE have shaped the contours of the conflict by providing economic aid, military assistance including fighters, and attempting to come up with political solutions, it has only led to escalation and prolonging of the conflict. Similarly, Iranian aid to the Houthis (Ansar Allah) has made that group less amenable to a negotiated settlement, since they see themselves as eventually winning the war. Iranian aid also made Ansar Allah confident enough to launch drone and missile attacks against Saudi oil facilities with both drones and missiles also supplied by Iran.

Success in attaining and implementing a peace agreement could lie in the external actors agreeing to maintaining a territorial entity called Yemen in a what may be a federalized form. This would require the external actors also agreeing to a long-term economic plan to help rebuild the war-torn nation. Such a step would certainly be in the interests of Saudi Arabia, which is unlikely to want a hostile economically depressed population on its southern border.

The second key lesson is that while both the disarmament, demobilization, and reintegration (DDR) and security sector reform (SSR) processes are both required, they cannot be the starting positions in the reintegration of forces in a country. In Lebanon, Hezbollah was permitted to retain its military force along with its equipment because they were seen as the only viable resistance to Israel along the country's southern border. While other non-state armed forces were disbanded, it is not clear how much of their military equipment was surrendered to the authorities. The Lebanon experiment with demilitarizing non-state armed forces succeeded to the extent it did because it was realistic in its approach of recognizing that the most competent non-state armed forces, especially one with a strong political base, could not be demobilized. From 1990 onwards, there have been sporadic clashes among different groups in the country but nothing that would resemble the outbreak of civil war in the 1970s. Lebanon's greatest threat today seems to come from the unravelling of its economy and the danger that could pose to the fragile unity of the country.<sup>37</sup>

While attempts at political accommodation were somewhat successful in helping demobilization in Lebanon, the lack of serious accommodation in Myanmar led to two outcomes in different EAOs. The first was successive cases of EAOs agreeing to ceasefires, surrendering, then becoming part of the state sponsored non-state armed forces. The second was other EAOs splintering, with the breakaway factions remaining as independent non-state armed forces. In both cases, however, some these arrangements broke down with splinter forces emerging from both government and EAO non-state armed forces, and with forces that had agreed to surrender then taking up arms against the state. A major reason for this recurrence of violence was that the EAOs did not have faith in the government to abide by its agreements and, therefore, were unwilling to give up their weaponry. Moreover, as mentioned above, Myanmar showed that unless the fundamental issues that had sparked an insurgency were addressed, it would only lead to the problem erupting again.

One lesson that became clear from the Indian and Myanmar cases was that while splintering rebel groups might be a short-term solution aimed at reducing their fighting capabilities, it did not help to establish a long-term peace. Thus, in the case of Nagaland the Indians have seen non-state armed forces fracture and any political settlement, therefore, remains incomplete. On the other hand, in the case of Mizoram, the Indian government negotiated with a unified ethnic armed movement and the resulting peace agreement not only saw the political arm of the non-state armed forces come to power in the state government, but it also has led to peace in the state since 1987.

What did come out of the Lebanese and Indian attempts at reintegrating forces was that eventual success also lay in two steps. The first was being able to move ethnic or religious units into the mainstream military of these countries. The second step was to create unified and secular military formations. In Lebanon, the composition of the forces was changed from traditional confessional units to ones that were blended and reflected a broader Lebanese identity. In India, when the Naga regiment was raised, its leadership came from the Kumauni Regiment that had earlier served in Nagaland. Even today, fifty years later, this regiment is 50% Naga and 50% from other parts of India. In fact, the Naga regiment is the only ethnic based regiment raised since 1947.<sup>38</sup>

Based on the discussion above, what takeaways can be used in the context of Yemen? One must discover the existing reality on the ground before suggesting possible solutions to the ongoing civil war.

First, while the United Nations and interested national governments cling to the 2015 UN Security Council Resolution 2216 demanding an end to Violence in Yemen, the reality on the ground has changed dramatically. The internationally recognized *de jure* Yemeni government is not in control of large portions of the country's territory and, therefore, has little ability to administratively determine the fate of its citizens. Instead, the Houthis (Ansar Allah) now have *de facto* control over two-thirds of the population of the country and are seemingly unwilling to negotiate the terms of a national settlement. Ansar Allah resistance is because they believe, perhaps incorrectly, that time is on their side as they seek to control the entire nation. It is unlikely, therefore, that Ansar Allah would agree to standing down their forces and merging them into a national security force.

Second, the Southern Transitional Council (STC) has secession as its stated goal, although it is not clear if it is a bargaining position or an actual endgame for the group. Given the experience from the civil war of the 1990s, the STC is also unlikely to allow itself to be disarmed or to have its forces demobilize unless there are concrete guarantees in place for any settlement to work.

Third, there are those who believe that Yemen cannot be put back together because it has already fragmented into seven different entities whose interests may be difficult to reconcile.<sup>39</sup> In that scenario, Yemen remains a failing state—perhaps resembling Somalia—as it breaks into independently administered units. While these realities would suggest a pessimistic future for the country, there are trends that indicate a more positive alternative to one of fragmentation of the country.

In the first case, evaluations of the situation on the ground argue that no one group will be able to prevail in the country. Independent assessments argue that the Houthis (Ansar Allah), while controlling a large portion of the population of the country, are not in as favorable a military position as they believe themselves to be.<sup>40</sup> The Houthis (Ansar Allah) have been beaten back in their efforts to take Aden and in Marib the government forces, at the time this report is being written, have been able to stave off Ansar Allah offensive. At the same time, neither the STC nor the government looks capable of dislodging the Houthis from their strongholds in the north and thus successfully unifying the country under one group.

Secondly, despite the calls for secession, the STC cannot survive without getting economic rewards from Yemen's mineral rich provinces and, therefore, it would not be an economically viable entity. Nor can the STC depend on continued largesse from the UAE to maintain the current level of forces. Additionally, while the STC has considerable influence in Southern politics it continues to have differences with some of the Southern entities, and it has not been recognized by any of the great powers. The sole external support of the STC comes from the UAE.<sup>41</sup>

Third, the international context that impacts on Yemen's future has changed. The Obama and Trump Administrations had labeled the Houthis as terrorists but the Biden Administration, recognizing the need to end a war that has become a humanitarian disaster, has rescinded that designation—this of course facilitates substantive negotiations. The European Union and the United Nations continue to

work to bring about a peace settlement, but the most important shift has been the changed position of Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates, which both countries which intervened militarily in the war. In 2015, the Saudis entered the war with a 10-country coalition, but today only Saudi Arabia remains in that grouping. Similarly, the UAE has withdrawn its forces from the Yemeni mainland although it has a strong influence on some Southern areas and the island of Socotra. The changed position of international actors makes discussions among the warring Yemeni factions easier since they can adopt a more pragmatic approach and are less beholden to their benefactors.

Further, it is argued that whether it be the Iranians and the Houthis, the UAE and the STC, or the *de jure* government and the Saudis, there are limits to the influence such external actors have on the strategies and objectives of the warring factions. Given these facts, what possible measures could bring about stability in the Yemeni context?

There is a difference between what is desirable and what is doable or achievable in Yemen. The desirable would include an iron-clad agreement leading to a lasting ceasefire, disarmament demobilization and reintegration of non-state armed forces, substantial security sector reform, and a unified central government that delivers goods and services to all its citizens and, thus, is seen as a neutral and honest broker. Given Yemen's recent history, such reforms and measures would take years to implement in any meaningful way. They would also require a considerable infusion of capital into the Yemeni system to bring ambitious programs to fruition. Building a professional military, for example, would require substantial funds for training and armaments—neither of which Yemen has and which external actors will only provide with significant terms and conditions attached.

One must also recognize that given the competing security interests of Iran and Saudi Arabia in Yemen and its maritime spaces—particularly the Bab el-Mandeb strait, separating the southwestern tip of Yemen and the Horn of Africa—we are likely to see external influence that could complicate peace efforts among the warring factions. Thus, a move to what is doable or achievable is preferable to scenarios and recommendations based on the desirable.

In the 2015 draft constitution agreement, there was a call for a national army that had a 50/50 split of personnel between Northerners and Southerners. The goal was to build a professional national army into a recombined army based not on local or tribal identities but instead on a Yemeni national identity. Given the high levels of distrust between the different Yemeni groups coupled with the shifting alliances between them, this will be hard to create quickly. Instead, it is better to seek easily available options for the competing Yemeni factions to consider. Three relatively easy options are creating a national air force, navy, and coast guard.

By their very nature both the air force and the navy, and to a lesser extent the coast guard, would require some degree of technical competence from recruits and this could be used as the criteria to recruit along professional as opposed to confessional lines. The size of these forces would naturally be modest given Yemen's budgetary constraints and the understandable reluctance of external powers to engage in the large-scale funding of these forces. As in the case of Lebanon, however, the role of these forces would be both functional and symbolic. Even small professional forces, recruited on some basis

of meritocracy, would symbolize a Yemeni national unity as opposed to local identity. Such small forces would also have key roles to play to ensure the security and national interest of the Yemeni state.

Yemen's long coastline combined with the large exclusive economic zone (EEZ) it acquires due to its possession of Socotra, the adjacent island archipelagos, and its islands in the Bab el-Mandeb, make a compelling case for building a navy and a coast guard to protect the country's maritime interests. The bonus is that by their very nature, navies foster cohesion since that is a prerequisite to make a ship operate smoothly. Navies also pose little challenge to the national government since it is hard for them to carry out coups—in recent history, only one dictator has been a navy admiral, Admiral Horthy of Austria-Hungary. Neither the navy nor the coast guard must possess large and modern fleets, but their very existence based on a meritocratic process would help develop the first path to security sector reform.

Similarly, a small air force based on merit-based recruitment would serve a symbol of national unity especially since it is not clear if a functioning Yemeni Air Force still exists and, therefore, building it from the ground-up would be an easier task than integrating army units. Before the current civil war, the Yemeni Air Force had nearly a 100 aircraft which were mainly of Russian origin mixed with a small number of obsolescent American F-5 fighters. Reports indicate that the bulk of the aging force was captured by the Houthis (Ansar Allah) and subsequently destroyed by Saudi air strikes but the Houthi success with using drone strikes suggests that they, and the existing de jure government forces, have been able to build a rudimentary air capability.

The destruction of the air force, however, provides the opportunity to rebuild the force by bringing together airmen from different ethnic and religious groups to form a new air force. The air force could also be configured to carry out a different set of missions than what the traditional Yemeni Air Force was tasked with doing. Rather than concentrating on missions of offensive air power, the air force could focus on surveillance missions, the tracking of smugglers, and carrying out humanitarian efforts. A new air force, in the initial process, could be built around transport aircraft and drones, both more affordable and less threatening to Yemen's neighbors. With such missions in mind, recruitment could also be done along the lines of merit since the service would not be perceived as an arm to be used against civilian populations and former warring groups.

In the case of Yemen, it has been suggested that the security sector reform not be army-centric but rather be done from the community level upwards.<sup>42</sup> To achieve this, the emphasis may be placed more on building up the police forces, which have established levels of trust in the rural areas, and to create a gendarmerie-style Yemen Federal Guard that would, "...would build on close ties and interaction with the population (something that cannot be achieved with the army's system of rotating units) and address broader security matters from a local and community-centered perspective."<sup>43</sup> Such a paramilitary unit could be modelled on Indian units like the Assam Rifles that work in close contact with local communities and draw recruits from them. The Yemen Federal Guard would also specialize in different regions of the country on the regionally specific security challenges that manifest

themselves there. Ardemagni suggests these could range from anti-smuggling to anti-terrorism to the protection of natural resources.<sup>4445</sup>

Most importantly, a federal paramilitary and localized police forces would provide a simpler and far less expensive way to integrate former combatants who have disarmed into society. It would be more difficult to build up a large, centralized army and then bring the different warring groups into it. Paying for such a large army would be prohibitive for an economy that is already badly battered. The situation in Yemen is more likely to become like that in Lebanon, where only a fraction of the former non-state armed forces fighters could be brought into the national army.

In conclusion, a modest, bottom-up approach that learns from some of the cases discussed above may be the way to go in the future where it comes to developing land-based forces. With the navy, coast guard, and air force, a top-down system—based on meritocracy and formed to fulfill specific missions—makes more sense. At the same time, it must be recognized that any such progress will be slow. Without the political will and structural changes, it would ultimately be futile.

## ENDNOTES

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