

The Politics of (Re)Unification: Lessons from Yemen for Cyprus

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Abstract

By embarking on a comparative engagement with the histories of division and the politics of (re)unification in Yemen and Cyprus this article draws tentative lessons for Cyprus from Yemen's experience of (re)unification and its repercussions. It argues that the Yemeni case provides Cypriots with strategies for the de-legitimisation of narratives of intractability. However, despite some positive lessons, the greatest lesson the experience of Yemen should teach Cyprus is to avoid engaging in the politics of (re)unification under the guidance of opportunism and without any vestiges of prudence. Therefore, this article argues that for now, in light of the lessons Yemen has taught us, (re)unification should be avoided. It should only be revisited when prudence prevails on both sides.

Keywords: Yemen, Cyprus, (re)unification, intractability, natural gas, prudence

Through the adoption of the comparative approach to the histories of division and the politics of (re)unification¹ in Yemen and Cyprus this article draws tentative lessons for Cyprus from the experience of Yemen's (re)unification and its aftermath. To do that it traces the origins of the political conflicts in the two states that were cemented in the 1960s and 1970s, to both externally driven factors like the effects of colonialism, decolonisation and the Cold War and internal ones such as the entrenchment of the political elites. Further, it examines the efforts made in both cases towards (re)unification. It discusses Yemen's experience of (re)unification, which followed the weakening and eventual collapse of the USSR, and examines the Yemeni state's disintegration following the events of the Gulf War, the Yemeni Civil War and the Arab Spring. Based on Yemen's experience and on Cyprus' failure to move towards (re)unification this article points to specific policies that the Yemenis pursued which, if emulated, could benefit the path of Cyprus to (re)unification along with the actions of Yemeni politicians that should be avoided at all costs.

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1 (Re) is used in parenthesis throughout the article because in the Yemeni case unified polities existed in the past; however no modern unified Yemeni state existed before 1990. Thus, in the case of Yemen it is appropriate to speak of unification whereas in the Cypriot case, where division came after the foundation of the Republic of Cyprus (RoC) in 1960, it is appropriate to speak of re-unification.

Histories of Division

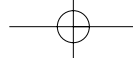
Throughout the past two centuries it would not be a struggle to find similarities between the cases of Yemen and Cyprus since the two states travelled down similar, albeit distinct, paths in the period that preceded and followed decolonisation. The Republic of Yemen (RoY), which was founded on 22 May 1990, is located at the intersection of Africa and the Arabian Peninsula and is home to one of the most impressive natural harbours in the world. Hence, the various *polities* that ruled the Yemeni 'people' consistently attracted the attentions of conquerors, traders and religious mercenaries. Beyond geopolitics Yemen has great religious significance, being central to Islamic history and home to a Shi'ite Zaydi² sect (which includes many *sayyids*³) and a Sunni Shaffei⁴ community. Cyprus sits at the crossroad of three continents making it an important geopolitical location for major empires and powers from Europe, Asia and Africa. Furthermore, it is central to Orthodox Christianity since its church is autocephalous (independent from all patriarchates) and was therefore able to safeguard its treasures from the religious wars of the Orthodox Church, becoming a treasure-trove of Orthodox history and art. Additionally, it is home to a significant Islamic Turkish community as well as to Armenian, Maronite and Catholic communities. Consequently, Cyprus and Yemen share geopolitical, geographical, religious and cultural characteristics that have contributed to their histories of violence. In the 1970s Yemen, like Cyprus, was divided into north and south; however, unlike Cyprus the two Yemeni states were legally equal and eventually reached an agreement to (re)unify.

The origins of the concrete division of Yemen can be located in the age of colonialism and the manifestation of great power rivalries in South Arabia. The British and Ottoman Empires established themselves in Yemen by 1849, finally partitioning the territory of today's Yemen into North and South in 1905. This division was not accepted by the Zaydi Imam of North Yemen, and did not reflect local realities, but it eventually proved fundamental to the two communities'

2 John Esposito writes that '**Zaydis** [are a] Moderate branch of Shii Islam that diverges from other Shii denominations in a dispute over succession to the imamate. (...) Its first state was founded in northern Iran in 864 and lasted until 1126. A longer lasting state was established in northern Yemen in 893, where it endured until 1962. It is the closest of all the Shii factions to the Sunnis. (...) The only qualifications for the imamate are descent from Ali and Fatima, absence of physical imperfections, and personal piety ...' See J.L. Esposito (2003) *The Oxford Dictionary of Islam*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, p. 347.

3 Esposito defines *sayyid* as an [h]onorific title used by those claiming descent from Muhammad, especially through his second grandson, Husain. Sayyids receive the proceeds from a special Islamic tax, khums, to prevent hardship and maintain dignity ...' See J.L. Esposito, *op. cit.*, p. 281.

4 Esposito defines the '**Shafi School of Islamic Law** founded by Muhammad ibn Idris ibn al-Abbas ibn Uthman ibn Shafii in the eighth century. Prominent in Egypt, Palestine, and Jordan with a significant number of followers in Syria, Lebanon, Iraq, Hejaz, and Indonesia and among Sunnis in Iran and Yemen. (...) Considers hadith superior to customary doctrines of earlier schools in formulation of Islamic law. Denied preference (istishan) as source of law'. See J.L. Esposito, *op. cit.*, p. 283.



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respective identities as it came to signify the dissimilarity between northern and southern Yemenis. The differences were centred around political culture as the northern *polity*, which was ruled by Zaydi Imams from 1926 until 1962, was tribal, politically regressive and isolated, whereas in Aden especially, the southern intelligentsia, which matured in the shadow of British colonialism and Arab nationalism, was adverse to the political organisation in the North and ill-disposed to the strength of the northern tribal elites. Because of this, a new strand of nationalism – the Adeni – was created in the South which existed in parallel to Yemeni and Arab nationalism. This has arguably been strengthened over the years that followed 1967 and has resurfaced in the form of the Al-Hirak: the Southern secessionist movement.

Though the division of Cyprus does not share the same trajectory, it too can be traced to the age of colonialism. The roots of the division of the island's two most populous ethnic communities can equally be found in the Ottoman *millet* system, Britain's instigation of 'divide and rule' policies in late 1956⁵ and in the consequential rise of Greek and Turkish nationalisms.⁶ During the nineteenth century the identities of the two communities were constructed accordingly by local actors regarded as the political elites,⁷ and by outside powers as mutually exclusive. The two communities have since been locked in a chronic existential, hence political, conflict whereby each is the other's enemy.⁸ Akin to Yemen, the intervention of the two colonial powers in Cyprus plus the manoeuvrings and responses of the local political elites led to the creation and entrenchment of contrasting identities of two communities; communities that in the past co-existed at times, blurring the lines that distinguished one from the other and even forming hybrid identities.⁹ Nonetheless, unlike Yemen, the division in Cyprus originally had its roots in the ethnic differences

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- 5 A. Varnava (2010) 'Reinterpreting Macmillan's Cyprus Policy, 1957–1960', in E. Solomou and H. Faustmann (eds), *Colonial Cyprus 1878–1960, Selected Readings*, Nicosia: University of Nicosia Press, pp. 163–192.
 - 6 S.P. Papageorgiou (2010) 'The Genesis of the Greek and Turkish Nationalism in Cyprus, 1878–1914: A Common March at a Different Pace', in E. Solomou and H. Faustmann (eds), *Colonial Cyprus 1878–1960, Selected Readings*, Nicosia: University of Nicosia Press, pp. 47–56.
 - 7 J. Choisi (2010a) 'The Turkish Cypriot Elite – Its Social Function and Legitimation', in E. Solomou and H. Faustmann (eds), *Colonial Cyprus 1878–1960, Selected Readings*, Nicosia: University of Nicosia Press, pp. 277–300; J. Choisi (2010b) 'The Greek Cypriot Elite – Its Social Function and Legitimation', in E. Solomou and H. Faustmann (eds), *Colonial Cyprus 1878–1960, Selected Readings*, Nicosia: University of Nicosia Press, pp. 301–334.
 - 8 This analysis is based on Carl Schmitt's the *Concept of the Political*, in which he argued that the 'specific political distinction to which political actions and motives can be reduced to is that between friend and enemy' which 'denotes the utmost degree of intensity of a union or separation, of an association or dissociation' (p. 26). The enemy in Schmitt's account is one that is extremely different and alien, but not necessarily evil or ugly, with whom conflict may turn into a struggle to preserve one's way of existence. According to Schmitt the state is the ultimate political grouping because it can command its citizens to go to war and therefore put their lives on the line. See C. Schmitt (1976) *The Concept of the Political*, New Jersey: Rutgers University Press.
 - 9 C.M. Constantinou (2007) 'Aporias of Identity: Bicomunalism, Hybridity and the "Cyprus Problem"', *Cooperation and Conflict*, Vol. 42, No. 3, pp. 247–270.

of the two communities rather than in variances of political culture. The conflict between the two ethnic communities of Cyprus intensified during the war of decolonisation when the strategic interests of Greece, Turkey and Britain and the overarching rivalry of the Cold War¹⁰ were added to the already explosive mix. Afterwards, following independence, clashes ensued, most notably in 1963 indicating the effect of a power vacuum left in the wake of Britain's withdrawal, which by 1964 necessitated the intervention of the UN. In the end the Greek coup of 15 July 1974 and the Turkish invasion five days later cemented the already existing division.

In Yemen the decolonisation war which started in earnest in the South in October 1963 was preceded, in September 1962, by the start of a revolution followed by civil war in the North. The two conflicts developed in tandem with Britain pursuing a 'divide and rule' strategy throughout both.¹¹ When it became obvious that Britain's goals could not be accomplished in the South and its base in Aden would have to be abandoned, British officials explored the options of stationing Britain's former allies in the northern part of the Yemen Arab Republic (YAR).¹² In 1972, Saudi Arabia, which has always been mindful of its populous and troublesome neighbour, put this plan into practice in order to weaken the revolutionary Peoples Democratic Republic of Yemen (PDRY).¹³ As a result of British, Saudi and Cold War machinations, along with the revolutionary character of the PDRY regime¹⁴ and the claim of both states to be representing the whole of the Yemeni nation, the conflictual relationship between the two states was sealed.

It could be argued that although of different character, the histories of division in the two states share striking similarities. They both had their respective roots in the age of colonialism and were cemented in the wake of decolonisation as a result of local and international factors. This signifies the intrinsic part of colonialism as well as the intervention of outside powers immediately

10 On the role of the Cold War and US strategic planning regarding Cyprus see: W. Mallinson (2007) 'US Interests, British Acquiescence and the Invasion of Cyprus', *The British Journal of Politics & International Relations*, Vol. 9, No. 3, pp. 494–508; G. Warner (2009) 'The United States and the Cyprus Crisis of 1974', *International Affairs*, Vol. 85, No. 1, pp. 129–143.

11 During this time the links to Cyprus became direct with reports that the Yemeni insurgents from the National Liberation Front (NLF) were surely inspired and potentially trained by EOKA. Evidence that the two movements were loosely linked are found in the tactics adopted by the Adeni insurgents; they employed the same subversion tactics used by EOKA (bombings, targeted assassinations etc) collectively referred to as 'terrorist incidents' by Britain. See National Archive at Kew Gardens, Folders: CO/1055/220; CO/1055/202; FCO 8/173. Indications of a direct link can be found in a report written by colonial officers who were involved in the Aden Insurgency which states that 'Such military training as has been necessary [for the NLF] has been provided by the UAR, the Yemen and, according to one account, by EOKA.' See British National Archive at Kew Garden, FCO 8/339; NFL, 15 November 1967, p. 17.

12 FCO 8/260, RGCY, 'The rulers' potential as dissident leaders'.

13 FG. Gause, III (1990) *Saudi-Yemeni Relations: Domestic Structures and Foreign Influence*, New York: Columbia University Press, p. 98.

14 F. Halliday (1990) *Revolution and Foreign Policy, the Case of South Yemen 1967–1987*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

after decolonisation, in the development stages of relations of conflict in these two vulnerable post-colonial states. The *status-quo* created in this period was normalised due to the lack of contact between the populations of South and North Yemen and southern and northern Cyprus, making efforts towards (re)unification complicated and treacherous.

In Cyprus, talks to facilitate (re)unification have been held to no avail under US and UN auspices since 1977.¹⁵ In 1983, Raouf Denktash, the Turkish-Cypriot leader announced the formation of the 'Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus (TRNC)' which has so far only been recognised by Turkey. This move has increased the complexity of (re)unification talks because any engagement with the leadership of the 'TRNC' by the Republic of Cyprus (RoC) can be perceived as a move towards recognition and legitimacy. Further, the failure of the 2004 Annan Plan and Cyprus' accession to the EU as a divided island has made the situation more complicated.¹⁶ The latest round of talks under UN auspices between President Demetris Christofias and Turkish-Cypriot leader Dervis Eroglou came to a standstill when Cyprus took over the Presidency of the Council of the EU on 1 July 2012.¹⁷

The situation could not have been more different in the two Yemens before 1990. In the absence of a UN peace-keeping force and in the context of the Yemens' strategic role in the Cold War, the rivalry between these two countries escalated to armed conflict on more than one occasion. Efforts towards (re)unification were the by-products of the first two conflicts that took place in 1972 and in 1979. When considering the characters of the two regimes and the PDRY's alliance with the USSR, it can be argued that the announcements stating that the two states would move towards (re)unification were made to placate the constituents of both states who at the time still saw themselves as Yemeni and Arab nationals and desired (re)unification.¹⁸ As a consequence these efforts differed to those made by the two Cypriot communities since the Yemen case involved two sovereign states, unwilling to (re)unify, due to their radically different internal make-ups that were supported by Saudi Arabia and the Soviet Union respectively.

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- 15 The framework discussed at the talks since 1984 has been on the creation of a bi-zonal, bi-communal federation. However, it should be noted that the RoC and the Turkish-Cypriot leadership are at odds about what the term means in practice. On the one hand the RoC politicians envision that the two federal entities would not be exclusively defined by their ethnic make-up, though they may possess features that make them more or less Greek and/or Turkish Cypriot. On the other, the Turkish-Cypriot leadership envisions the creation of two entities defined by their ethnic make-up. Further, the two disagree on the powers of the central federal state, with the Greek-Cypriot politicians pushing for the creation of strong federal institutions, while their Turkish-Cypriot counterparts are in favour of devolving as much power to the federal units. For more on the two sides' disagreements regarding a potential solution see J. Ker-Lindsay (2011) *The Cyprus Problem: What Everyone Needs to Know*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, pp. 78–94.
- 16 J. Ker-Lindsay, H. Faustmann and F. Mullen (eds) (2011) *An Island in Europe: The EU and the Transformation of Cyprus*, London: I.B. Tauris.
- 17 V. Morelli (2012) 'Cyprus Reunification Proving Elusive', *CRS Report for Congress*, available at [<http://www.fas.org/sgp/crs/row/R41136.pdf>], accessed 22 November 2012, pp. 12–18.
- 18 F. Halliday, *op. cit.*, pp. 99–139.

Yemen (re)unified

Yemen was officially (re)unified on 22 May 1990. Arguably, one of the most important reasons leading to the (re)unification was the weakening of the Soviet Union and its slow withdrawal from the Arabian Peninsula following the Afghanistan invasion debacle which cost the PDRY its sponsor. In addition, the 1986 civil war that took place in the South left the PDRY devastated. The war resulted in 3,000 members of the ruling Yemeni Socialist Party (YSP) transferring their allegiance from the YSP to the YAR which shattered the former. The exodus of the PDRY's most seasoned politicians also impacted the regime's legitimacy.¹⁹ On the other hand, the YAR's President Ali Abdullah Saleh and his umbrella organisation, the General Congress Party (GCP), found themselves with more power *vis-à-vis* the PDRY and the YSP. As a final point, Robert Burrowes in his volume *The Republic of Yemen: The Politics of Unification and Civil War, 1989-1995*, advocates that (re)unification was also the effect of the discovery of oil resources found by the American Hunt Oil Company in 1984 in the Marib area which borders the two states where only co-operation could warrant favourable results for all.²⁰ In consequence it transpires that the (re)unification was the result of convenient timing and opportunism²¹ as politicians on both sides had much to gain and hardly anything to lose.

During secretive talks which did not include public opinion, the two oligarchic elites of Yemen agreed to (re)unify the states. The agreement, however, was the product of little forethought and a great deal of mistrust. As a result the armies of the two states remained intact until 1994 and no move was made to develop institutions that might reflect the newly created facts of an integrated (re)unified and democratic state.²² Consequently the absence of forethought revealed friction among the elites and strife soon manifested itself among the population, especially within the less populous and economically disadvantaged South. According to journalist Brian Whitaker, it appears that the way democracy was applied in Yemen ultimately created a barrier to unity since the methods of dispute resolution and trust were not there, and because the South was so inherently disadvantaged.²³

Further compounding the situation at the time were regional and international actors, the most important of them being Saudi Arabia. Since the 1970s the Saudi government and prominent individuals have been sponsoring independent power centres and kin groups, hence

19 F. Halliday, *ibid.*, p. 42.

20 R.D. Burrowes (1998) 'The Republic of Yemen: The Politics of Unification and Civil War, 1989-1995', in M.C. Hudson (ed.), *Middle East Dilemma, The Politics and Economics of Arab Integration*, London: I.B. Tauris Publishers, p. 199.

21 *Ibid.*

22 M.C. Hudson (1995) 'Bipolarity, Rational Calculation and War in Yemen', in J.S. Al-Suwaidi (ed.), *The Yemeni War of 1994, Causes and Consequences*, London: Saqi Books, pp. 19-32.

23 B. Whitaker (1997) 'National Unity and Democracy in Yemen: A Marriage of Inconvenience', in E.G.H. Joffe, M.J. Hachemi, and E.W. Watkins (eds), *Yemen Today: Crisis and Solutions*, London: Caravel Press, pp. 22-23.

fostering division and limiting the government's influence in Yemen. Moreover, Saudi resources have been the cornerstone of Saleh's neo-patrimonial patronage network, thus granting the Kingdom influence over Saleh and other pivotal Yemeni actors.²⁴ Finally, until 1990, Saudi Arabia was home to one million Yemeni workers whose contribution to Yemen's economy was of immeasurable importance. This asymmetrical relationship remains Yemen's most noteworthy with a regional and an international actor. Its significance was illustrated during the Gulf War when Saudi Arabia punished Saleh for his adherence to an 'Arab Solution' to Iraq's occupation of Kuwait in the UN Security Council, by expelling one million Yemeni workers from the Kingdom and withdrawing all aid. The consequences were dramatic with unemployment rising sharply from 4% to 25% between 1990 and 1993.²⁵

Even though this mounting crisis delayed the outbreak of civil war between the former northern and southern Yemens, it did not put it off entirely; it eventually broke out in 1994. The civil war was won by Saleh, partly with the help of returnees from the *jihad* against the Soviets in Afghanistan who were recruited by Sheikh Abdel Majid al-Zidani.²⁶ But in spite of this victory secession has been a constant headache for the regime in Sana'a. The northern elites have made Aden an arena where their rivalries are actualised and diffused with the acquisition of land and influence.²⁷ At the same time the population of the South remains disadvantaged; this is evident in the refusal of the RoY to pay pensions to ex-officers of the PDRY's army. This refusal led the officers to form a peaceful protest movement, the Al-Hirak which is demanding secession, but having said that, leadership in the South is lacking. Even though the South is reputedly involved in the upcoming 'national dialogue', a part of the Gulf Cooperation Council's (GCC) deal that ousted Saleh, it is doubtful that it will present a united front. As such, it is unlikely that the Al-Hirak will be able to successfully pursue secession. And it is also improbable that the 'national dialogue' will produce a federal state based on a new agonistic relationship between the South and

24 See I. Blumi (2009) 'Unique Authoritarianism: Shifting Fortunes and the Malleability of the Salih Regime in Yemen, 1990–Present', *EUI Working Papers*, available at [http://cadmus.eui.eu/bitstream/handle/1814/10734/EUI_RSCAS_2009_10b.pdf?sequence=3], accessed 1 October 2012; S. Philips (2011) *Yemen and the Politics of Permanent Crisis*, London: The International Institute of Strategic Studies; S. Dingli (2012) 'Is the Failed State Thesis Analytically Useful? The Case of Yemen', *Politics*, available at [<http://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/j.1467-9256.2012.01453.x/abstract>], accessed 1 November 2012.

25 T.B. Stevenson (1993) 'Yemeni Workers Come Home: Re-absorbing One Million Migrants', *Middle East Report*, No. 181 (March/April), p. 18.

26 A.R.A. Al-Jifri (1997) 'Yemeni Unification, Crisis and Solution', in E.G.H. Joffe, M.J. Hachemi and E.W. Watkins (eds), *Yemen Today: Crisis and Solutions*, London: Caravel Press, pp. 178–201.

27 Interview with Analysts on 14 June 2012; T. Fin and A. Alwazir, (2011) 'A House Divided', *Foreign Policy*, 28 November 2011, available at [http://www.foreignpolicy.com/articles/2011/11/28/a_house_divided?page=0,2], accessed 5 September 2012.

the regime in Sana'a wherein each will not perceive the other 'as an enemy to be destroyed, but as an adversary whose existence is legitimate and must be tolerated'.²⁸

The problematic nature of the Sana'a regime's legitimacy in the South has created a safe-haven for *jihadi* groups, the most important of which is the Al Qaeda of the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP). Its foiled attempts against the USA, most significantly in December 2009 and its growing presence on the ground indicate that this faction poses the greatest danger of Al Qaeda's affiliates in the world at the moment. The inability or unwillingness as stated by some Yemenis,²⁹ of the Sana'a regime to deal with the AQAP has invited the involvement of the USA in the form of a campaign of targeted assassinations which, according to analysts is both unlawful³⁰ and counter-productive.³¹

In the years since (re)unification the regime has faced two other challenges not directly related with its lack of legitimacy in the South. The first has been the Al-Huthi conflict in the governorate of Sa'ada which began in September 2004. Its roots originated in the tribal and religious make-up of Sa'ada and in the economic crisis which plagued the governorate as a result of the Saudi-Yemeni border settlement in 2001,³² while its escalation has been a consequence of the rivalry between ex-President Saleh and Major-General Ali-Muhsin Al-Ahmar.³³ The second crisis is the Arab Spring-style revolution which swept Yemen in February 2011 demanding an overhaul of the corrupt neo-patrimonial system. The manifestation of the revolution in the South was brutally suppressed by the regime in the absence of media presence there, and it was also used as an excuse to detain members of the Al-Hirak.³⁴ In due course the revolution was over-run by the elites and external interests. In November 2011 a deal, brokered by the GCC, ensured Saleh's removal and uncontested elections followed which resulted in the appointment of Abd Rabbuh Mansur Al Hadi. Though it is argued that Hadi, who has previously served as vice-President under Saleh, will

28 C. Mouffe (1993) *The Return of the Political*, London: Verso, p. 4.

29 N. Antelava (2011) 'Has US Policy Catalysed Yemen Unrest?', *BBC Newsnight*, 28 April 2011 [online video] available at [<http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/programmes/newsnight/9470573.stm>], accessed 25 August 2011.

30 See M.E. O'Connell (2011) 'Seductive Drones: Learning from a Decade of Lethal Operations', *Journal of Law Information and Science*, EAP 2, available at [<http://ssrn.com/abstract=1912635>], accessed 20 November 2012.

31 See P. Bergen and K. Tiedemann (2011) 'Washington's Phantom War: The Effects of the US Drone Programme in Pakistan', *Foreign Affairs*, 1 June 2011; W. Mayborn (2011) 'Creating Turmoil: Why UAV Strikes will be Counter-productive in Yemen', *Journal on Terrorism and Security Analysis*, Vol. 6, pp. 79–82.

32 See I. Blumi (2011) *Chaos in Yemen: Societal Collapse and the New Authoritarianism*, London: Routledge; B.A. Salmoni, B. Loidolt and M. Wells (2010) *Regime and Periphery in Northern Yemen: The Huthi Phenomenon*, Santa Monica, CA: Rand Corporation; T.B. Stevenson (1993) *op. cit.*

33 International Crisis Group (2009) 'Yemen: Defusing the Saada Time Bomb', *Middle East Report No 86*, 27 May 2009, available at [http://www.observatori.org/paises/pais_64/documentos/86_yemen___defusing_the_saada_time_bomb.pdf], accessed 20 August 2012, p. 15.

34 US Department of State, 'Yemen Executive Summary', *Country Reports on Human Rights Practices 2011*, available at [<http://www.state.gov/documents/organization/186667.pdf>], accessed 22 November 2012, p. 4.

not bring a change in substance,³⁵ it is yet uncertain what his intentions are or whether he will manage to merge the fractured army and rid the state of the influence of Saleh and his family. In addition, the potential for a substantive and useful national dialogue – one of the stipulations of the agreement – is disputed as argued above.

Lessons for Cyprus from Yemen

Admittedly, the unification project in Yemen has been unsuccessful in both the South and the North since it failed to change the basis of their relationship from antagonistic conflict to agonistic co-existence, resulting in war and constant calls for secession. Further, the constant crisis of legitimacy facing the regime in the South has allowed the creation of safe-heavens for militant organisations that threaten Yemen, the region and the rest of the world. The reasons for overall failure and the lessons it can offer are examined below. Nonetheless, it is first deliberated that from the chaos created because of the botched process some constructive insight may be drawn from specific actions pursued by both the YAR and PDRY regimes prior to 1990.

The first positive step undertaken by the two regimes prior to (re)unification was their rejection of the narratives, in part, imposed upon them by their overlords and internalised through the elites, which suggested that each regime was the other's existential enemy. Before 1990 each was a threat to the other's existence due to the fact that they both claimed to represent the nation, their spatial proximity and their ideological distance. The Marxist ideology of the PDRY was incompatible with the conservative pseudo-republicanism of the YAR, which was based on the power and familial structures of the tribal elites of the highlands and on Saudi investment, and *vice versa*. The rejection of these narratives was a precondition for (re)unification. Yet, in many ways this rejection was already decided, most notably because of the decline of Soviet power and its withdrawal from the Arabian Peninsula. Saleh, realising that the YSP was weakened took advantage of the situation, but he knowingly acted against the wishes of his Saudi overlords who did not want to see Yemen (re)united. To some extent he also acted against the wishes of the Saudis' American counterparts. By 1990 the two sides moved to de-emphasise the perceived intractability of the conflict that existed between them, hence creating the conditions for national (re)unification. However, an agreement was reached not via popular consultation but through an arrangement reached between the elites of the two states. This, nevertheless, was received jubilantly by crowds on both sides of the divide.³⁶

35 A. Alwazir (2011) 'Yemen's GCC Initiative: Cosmetic of Comprehensive Change?', *Alakhbar English*, 30 November 2011, available at [<http://english.al-akhbar.com/node/2088>], accessed 22 November 2012.

36 S. Ismail (2012) 'Unification in Yemen, Dynamics of Political Integration 1978–2000', *Unpublished Thesis*, University of Oxford, available online at [users.ox.ac.uk/~metheses/Ismail%20Thesis.pdf], accessed 20 August 2012.

In the case of Cyprus, the narratives propagated are primarily ethnic. They have been reproduced on both sides of the island through the dissemination of histories that present the two sides as being locked in an intractable, constant and violent confrontation. In line with the case of the two *politics* in Yemen, Anna M. Agathangelou and L.H.M. Ling state that 'both Greeks and Turks stake absolute claims on the island's political, educational, and cultural identity'.³⁷ For these same reasons the conflict is presumed to be intractable and this narrative is embraced by most of the politicians on both sides, while those in the Greek side who oppose this narrative are viewed as traitors and 'turkophiles'. The Yemeni case illustrates that for (re)unification to be even possible these narratives should be abandoned at the expense of local, regional and global elite interests.

Agathangelou and Ling contend that the narrative of intractability benefits the business elites who supervise the division of the economy and engage in lucrative trade with each community's respective sponsor.³⁸ On the other hand, in light of the recent economic crisis affecting Cyprus, the UN Special Envoy, Alexander Downer, has argued that (re)unification 'would reduce the sovereign risk of investing in Cyprus, clear up the problems of investing in property, grow GDP and offer capacity to service and pay off debt'.³⁹ That being the case, another explanation is required to clarify the persistence of narratives of intractability. This can be found in the gains amassed by the political elites on both sides of the divide in the form of status, wealth and power as a result of their claim to represent the two ethnic communities.⁴⁰ As Nathalie Tocci observes, the elites on 'both sides are relatively content with the status quo and thus their incentives to compromise are low'.⁴¹

The case of Yemen demonstrates that the rejection of narratives of intractability – a necessary precondition for (re)unification – is possible. To some extent their dismissal in Yemen was a given fact largely due to the decline of the USSR. Additionally, it was actively pursued by politicians on both sides because it favoured them. The situation in Cyprus is different since the elites do not have sufficient incentive to reject the discourse of intractability. Agathangelou and Ling are aware of this and suggest that the adoption of 'interstitiality' might be the answer. They argue that women could spearhead a movement away from intractable identities towards interstitial, middle, common

37 A.M. Agathangelou and L.H.M. Ling (1997) 'Postcolonial Dissidence within Dissident IR: Transforming Master Narratives of Sovereignty in Greco-Turkish Cyprus', *Studies in Political Economy*, Vol. 54, No. 1 (Fall), p. 19.

38 *Ibid.*, p. 23.

39 Alexander Downer quoted in M. Kambas (2012) 'Both Sides Would Win from Cyprus Unification', *Reuters*, 23 September 2012, available at [<http://www.reuters.com/article/2012/09/23/us-cyprus-un-talks-idUSBRE88M07120120923>], accessed 23 November 2012.

40 H. Lacher and E. Kaymak (2005) 'Transforming Identities: Beyond the Politics of Non-Settlement in North Cyprus', *Mediterranean Politics*, Vol. 10, No. 2 (July), p. 14.

41 N. Tocci (2000) 'The "Cyprus Question": Reshaping Identities and Elite Interests within a Wider European Framework', *CFPS Working Document No. 154* (September).

identities in similar vein to that of mother, daughter or teachers.⁴² The existence of bi-communal organisations for peace and cooperation at the grassroots level also create the ground for a rejection of the prevailing discourse.⁴³ Regardless, it must be said that the inability of these organisations to enter into mainstream politics or make a significant dent in existing discourse puts into question their capacity to influence the situation. In recent attempts at educational reform, initially indicated by the Turkish-Cypriot⁴⁴ and currently by the Greek-Cypriot side, there is potential for the rejection of this discourse. It should, however, be noted that although the reaction by the Greek-Cypriot political and ecclesiastical elites to the suggested reforms is most discouraging, regrettably it is not surprising.⁴⁵

The case of Yemen allows fresh insight into the narratives of intractability strengthening the argument against their permanence: it demonstrates how the interests of the elites coalesce, thus reducing the emphasis on narratives and delegitimising them briefly in time, allowing space for the successful initiation of a (re)unification process. In the case of Cyprus, – as in Yemen – ‘a change of heart’ on the part of the elites would be the most effective tool to combat such narratives. Be that as it may, this has not taken place yet due to a lack of incentives. All the same, ground work has been undertaken and avenues have been opened in the space of civil society. Moreover, if actualised, a review of the education system in the RoC has the potential to generate the foundations that will move Cyprus, like Yemen in the 1990s, toward the creation of a discursive space conducive to (re)unification.

The second constructive lesson that can be drawn from the Yemeni case of (re)unification is the use of newly-found natural resources as a stepping stone to rapprochement. Their decision to co-operate meant a relaxation of border tensions which led to renewed interest in (re)unification as it would potentially allow the elites to benefit equally from the revenues. In the case of Yemen, natural resources combined with the weakening of the Soviet Union and its waning grip on the region, gave enough incentive to the political and economic elites to engage wholeheartedly, though not sincerely, with the (re)unification project.

Cyprus now finds herself in a similar situation to that of Yemen in 1984. Significant natural gas reserves have been discovered in Block 12 of the RoC’s maritime Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ), which is part of the Aphrodite gas field. However, the regional environment that the RoC finds itself in is significantly more unstable than the situation in the Arabian Peninsula in

42 Agathangelou and Ling, *op. cit.*, p. 25.

43 O. Wolleh (2001) *Local Peace Constituencies*, Berlin: Berghof Research Center for Constructive Conflict Management, available at [<http://www.berghof-conflictresearch.org/documents/publications/br8e.pdf>], accessed 20 July 2012.

44 Y. Papadakis (2008) ‘Narrative, Memory and History Education in Divided Cyprus: A Comparison of Schoolbooks on the “History of Cyprus”’, *Memory and History*, Vol. 20, No. 2 (Fall/Winter), pp. 128–148.

45 ΣΚΑΪ, ‘Μαθήματα Κυπριακής Ιστορίας’, *Οι Νέοι Φακέλοι* [ΣΚΑΪ, ‘Lessons in Cypriot History’, The New Files] [video online], available at [<http://folders.skai.gr/main/theme?id=86&locale=el>], accessed 20 July 2012.

1984–1988. The Levantine Basin where the gas field is located is a highly volatile zone because the delineation of maritime borders is constantly contested there.⁴⁶ Also, Turkey contests the sovereignty of the RoC, maintaining that the Republic does not safeguard the rights of its Turkish-Cypriot community residing in the ‘TRNC’. Additionally, Turkey argues that the RoC unfairly refuses to share the revenue from the exploitation of the resources found in Block 12 with the ‘TRNC’ and the Turkish-Cypriot community.

Turkey’s protests stem from an anxiety of being left behind in a game played out in the Levantine Basin to secure natural gas and the rights for its dissemination in Europe. Regarding the regional and international context the International Crisis Group (ICG) claims that the RoC has the right and need to exploit its maritime resources, yet ‘its unilateral start of exploration is a violation of the pledge to share natural resources, and undermines the already fragile reunification talks’.⁴⁷ This observation brings forth the internal aspect of the issue. The discovery of gas in Block 12 came to light at a time when the latest round of (re)unification talks in Cyprus reached a stalemate. Thus, the political leadership of the RoC reacted spasmodically – with the backing of Israel and Greece – when natural gas was discovered, vaguely promising, without commitment, to share revenues. On the other hand, the Turkish-Cypriot leadership – with the backing of Turkey – responded in an equally negative manner with aggressive rhetoric, similarly undermining (re)unification.⁴⁸ These corresponding adverse reactions have expanded the rift between the two communities and strengthened the rhetoric of intractability at the same time. It can be concluded, therefore, that in the case of natural resources and (re)unification, Cypriot politicians lacked the forethought displayed by Yemeni politicians in a similar situation.

The ICG has made recommendations regarding imminent domestic and regional issues which, if accepted, could remedy the now established situation.⁴⁹ But in any event, acceptance would entail the commitment of the political elites on both sides of the fence to first engage the matter of (re)unification and secondly a rejection of self-help as the sole operating logic of the state. Following the ICG’s recommendations could potentially allow Cypriots to build a stepping stone towards (re)unification by permitting them to work together and create a discursive space of trust instead of intractability.

Beyond such tentative positive lessons regarding the establishment of essential stepping stones that may lead to (re)unification, the overall Yemeni case is one that should not be emulated at all costs. Yemeni politicians, as Kostiner reasoned, were both the builders and the destroyers of their

46 For example Lebanon is contesting Israel’s newly defined maritime borders and Turkey is contesting those of Cyprus and Greece.

47 International Crisis Group (2012) ‘Aphrodite’s Gift: Can Cypriots Gas Power a New Dialogue?’, 2 April 2012, available at [<http://www.crisisgroup.org/~media/Files/europe/turkey-cyprus/cyprus/216-aphrodites-gift-can-cypriot-gas-power-a-new-dialogue.pdf>], accessed 5 August 2012.

48 *Ibid.*

49 *Ibid.*

newly established state.⁵⁰ In deciding to act secretly and in their purpose to fortify their respective parties, the politicians from the two sides, condemned (re)unification to failure and, to a certain degree, destined themselves to a chronic effort to control the adverse effects of their actions that have now been aggravated due to regional and international pressures. The tendency of Yemeni politicians to revert to strategies designed to reinforce their particular parties, regions, tribes and clans has left them unable to tackle issues which are crucial to the establishment of a successful state or inspire any real lasting sense of unity in their diverse populations. The above substantiates that fundamentally, prudence, an essential ingredient of 'good' politics and vital for complex political puzzles, was deficient in the years that immediately preceded and followed (re)unification. Because of the reasons outlined, it is suggested that the main lesson to be drawn from the Yemeni case is that for unification to succeed, the *politics* in question need to move nearer to prudential politics.

The concept of prudence, or practical wisdom, as employed here is derived from Aristotle's articulation of *phronesis* which was later embraced by Machiavelli as *prudenza*⁵¹ and has become a cornerstone of classical realist thinking exemplified by the work of Hans Morgenthau.⁵² As such, it is not employed to mean cautiousness; instead, as Chris Brown describes, it is employed as 'the ability to weigh the consequences of one's actions rather than as providing reasons for inaction'.⁵³ This ability, Brown explains, is not borne of theoretical knowledge and cannot be learned by the study of books. Robert Hariman and Francis Beer describe its core characteristics thus:

'the political actor must strive to achieve what is good both for the individual and for the community; doing so requires the capacity for adaptive response to contingent events; this amalgam of ends and means is developed through deliberation; and it culminates in character rather than technical knowledge.'⁵⁴

Thus prudence is a virtue possessed by seasoned politicians who are characterised by reflexivity in their mode of thinking and operation, a quality which the Yemenis lacked in the 1990s. As a consequence they opted for a botched (re)unification process that would provide them with instant benefits, without considering its future trajectory.

In suggesting that the main lesson Cypriots, on both sides, should draw from the Yemeni case is one of the necessity of prudence does not imply that they should be timid and leave such 'hard'

50 J. Kostiner (1996) *Yemen the Torturous Quest for Unity, 1990–1994*, London: Royal Institute for Foreign Affairs, p. 47.

51 N. Machiavelli (1992) *The Prince*, New York: Dover Publications Inc.

52 H.J. Morgenthau (1962) 'The Demands of Prudence', *Politics in the Twentieth Century Vol. 3: The Restoration of American Politics*, pp. 15–18.

53 C. Brown (2012) 'The "Practice Turn", *Phronesis* and Classical Realism: Towards a Phronetic International Political Theory?', *Millennium*, Vol. 40, No. 3, p. 454.

54 R. Hariman and F.A. Beer (1998) 'What Would Be Prudent?: Forms of Reasoning in World Politics', *Rhetoric and Public Affairs*, Vol. 1, No. 3 (Fall), p. 301.

issues like power considerations out of the equation or that they should remain inactive. Indeed, as James Ker-Lindsay notes, the current *status quo* 'is likely to become less and less appealing for both sides'⁵⁵ since the facts on the ground are being shifted to the disadvantage of both communities. In light of his assessment it is argued that action is needed but in order to avoid the pitfalls that the Yemeni politicians have fallen victim to, action should be driven by the postulates of prudence. These dictate that responses should not be motivated solely by the selfish goals of the political elites and consideration for their respective ethnic group. Action should also be driven by attentiveness to what is best for *all* the communities of the island. If an endeavour is to be undertaken along these lines, politicians should, at the very minimum, be expected to support the de-legitimisation of the narratives of intractability that fundamentally hamper the road to (re)unification. This, as the Yemeni case has shown, is within their means. To end, it must be reminded that arguing that Cypriot politicians should practice prudential politics does not lead to policy prescriptions for a new round of negotiations because, as claimed above, an essential element of prudential politics is practical engagement and reflexivity.

Conclusion

This article compared and contrasted the histories of division in Yemen and Cyprus and reveals that, despite their differences, they share some striking similarities. It has been argued that some positive lessons can be drawn from the Yemeni case, the most important one being that the narratives of intractability that lock communities in antagonistic political relationships can be de-emphasised, making room for the creation of a discursive space of trust. This in turn can change the relationship from one of political antagonism to one of agonism, which facilitates co-existence. The case of Yemen also provides pointers for the de-legitimisation of these narratives by emphasising the crucial role of the elites and the possible constructive use of natural resources. It is debated here that Cyprus can and should emulate the Yemeni process by following the ICG recommendations regarding the newfound gas resources. What is more, the plans for reform of the educational system in the RoC should not be abandoned despite the opposition and short-term political costs, since the potential for future gains outweighs the price tag.

Finally, the experience of (re)unification in Yemen should serve as a cautionary tale for Cypriot politicians on both sides of the fence since the weakening and disintegration of the Yemeni state into chaos is largely the result of an absence of prudence on the part of Yemeni politicians when the decision to (re)unify was taken. Accordingly, the outcome should caution everyone against engaging in the politics of (re)unification under the guidance of opportunism and without any vestiges of prudence. As of now, the last round of negotiations between the RoC and the

55 J. Ker-Lindsay (2011) *The Cyprus Problem: What Everyone Needs to Know*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, p. 103.

Turkish Cypriot leadership indicates a conclusion that prudence has been wanting on both sides. This article, therefore, claims that even though action is sorely needed to arrest the detrimental course of events, (re)unification should be avoided for now, in light of the lessons Yemen has taught us. It should only be revisited when prudence prevails on both sides.

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