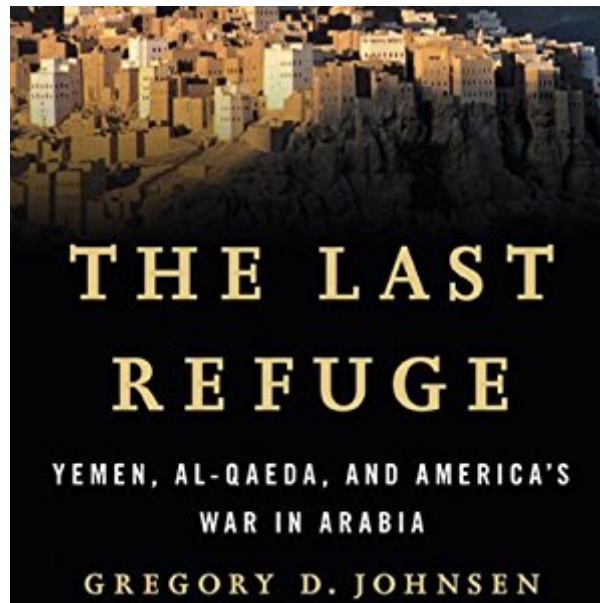


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# The Last Refuge: Yemen, Al-Qaeda, And America's War In Arabia



## Synopsis

A gripping account of how al-Qaeda in Yemen rebounded from an initial defeat to once again threaten the United States. Far from the battlefields of Iraq and Afghanistan, the United States and al-Qaeda are fighting a clandestine war of drones and suicide bombers in an unforgiving corner of Arabia. The Last Refuge charts the rise, fall, and resurrection of al-Qaeda in Yemen over the last 30 years, detailing how a group that the United States once defeated has now become one of the world's most dangerous threats. An expert on Yemen who has spent years on the ground there, Gregory D. Johnsen uses al-Qaeda's Arabic battle notes to reconstruct their world as they take aim at the United States and its allies. Johnsen brings listeners inside al-Qaeda's training camps and safe houses as the terrorists plot poison attacks and debate how to bring down an airliner on Christmas Day. The Last Refuge is an eye-opening look at the successes and failures of fighting a new type of war in one of the most turbulent countries in the world.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

The book is a fascinating read for the specialist or non specialist. Johnsen gives us a well researched narrative that is powerful and compelling and certainly helps one to understand the crisis of Yemen better. Be careful not to expect any kind of analysis of U.S. policy in Yemen. The book, while providing an in depth story, does not come to a set of conclusions or policy recommendations. In the last chapter of the book, the story of AQAP simply ends, without any kind of discussions about the implications of the story the book has so painstakingly laid out. From reading Johnsen's blogs and other materials, it seems like he has quite strong (and very intelligently

put) opinions about U.S. policy in the region, and it is a disappointment that these weren't included in this book.

The history of terrorism in Yemen and the limits of U.S. foreign policy in distant, unfriendly lands are the twin subjects of Gregory Johnsen's excellent book. He is one of the most knowledgeable people in the West on Yemen, having lived, studied and worked there for years and is currently finishing his Ph.D. in Near East Studies at Princeton. Johnsen wears his learning lightly—he seems to know the history and current affiliation of every tribe, ethnic group and political operation in the desert nation but *The Last Refuge* is written for the general reader. Johnsen is a careful stylist but his language is exciting and he paints a vivid picture of how Al Qaeda has affected Yemen and how the people, culture and landscape of Yemen have affected Al Qaeda. Ali Abdullah Salih ruled (or tried to rule) for over 30 years although the government of Yemen never controlled the entire country and often only held sway over Sana'a and the area immediately around the capital. He thought it would be a good idea to send young men to Afghanistan for jihad and then begin using them against his only real opposition, the Socialist Party. He realized too late that while setting a process in motion may seem easy, controlling it or even influencing its direction can become impossible. Many young men left as idealistic defenders of Islam against invasion from infidels and returned as hardened Al Qaeda operatives, experienced in combat and unwilling to live under Salih's kleptocratic regime. And so these returning veterans created Al Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula. Salih was happy to allow U. S. counterinsurgency operations against AQAP but since they consisted solely using drones to kill those suspected of being ranking members of AQAP. The missiles fired by the drones sometime killed tribal or political enemies of the government of Yemen instead of their putative targets and more importantly, killed many Yemenis with no ties to Al Qaeda. Thus was a poorly coordinated rebellion turned into a large scale insurgency. Events caught up with Johnsen—the Salih regime fell shortly after he finished the book but recent events in Yemen including the Houthi occupation of Sana'a and the collapse of the government that followed Salih shows the impossibility of accounting for everything with such a fast changing and unpredictable set of actors. Highly recommended as a detailed history and analysis of the growth of terrorism in Yemen and the U.S. response to it.

An incredibly detailed micro-level description of the people, the intrigue, and the exotic drama of the early days of al-Qaeda, including Osama bin Ladin, Ayman al-Zawahiri and dozens of others less

familiar. The writing is fluent and compelling. One wonders how the author was able to get such micro-level detail. Surely not from publicly available documents and a few well-informed interviews. While all this takes place in Yemen, the book's laser-like focus on Yemen as a staging ground for radical extremists limits its attention to Yemen as an actual country. I was hoping to learn something about Yemen the country and was disappointed not to find even one chapter providing context on Yemen: its history, complex ethnic divisions, geo-political significance, Britain's hasty departure as the colonial power in South Yemen, Saudi-Egyptian rivalry and sometimes cooperation in containing (and at times fomenting) Yemeni radicalism. It's a good read for those who enjoy exotic action dramas, but you'll need to look elsewhere to learn anything about Yemen or to understand the current turmoil in that country.

I had the great fortune of meeting the author, and having him as my next door neighbor. His in depth research and fluency in Arabic displays his understanding of the Yemeni people, and the politics of that country. It was a great book and I would recommend it to anyone that wants a non biased understanding of a part of the Middle East that is imperative for Al Qaida and the growth of terrorism, yet it's rarely talked about.

Very informative! This book deserves more attention than it has received. Well written!

Great comprehensive history of one of the least researched jihadists' hot spot, Yemen. If you are interested in the evolution of AQAP, or Yemen, this book is a must. Despite the dense information and historical facts, the book is so well written making it such an enjoyable and easy read.

Insightful book on the US efforts to stop Al Qaeda and AQAP in Yemen. Gives an inside look at personalities, ideologies and conversations in clandestine meetings of major and minor players. Gives an understanding of how young men are recruited into terrorist organizations. The detailed information was very informative. Reads more like a spy novel than a history book. Greg Johnsen let the facts speak rather than give conclusions or recommendations.

Johnson didn't miss anything in compiling facts for this work. It's hard to believe that it is even possible to amass so many facts and so much background information. I'm not aware of any other book that even comes close to giving such a complete picture of the events and societal forces at play in this complex country.

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