Yemen remains the most unpredictable of Arab lands, a country with a more tortuous recent history almost any other state in the Arab World. But after ten years of on-off fighting, the last thing author Charlie Pratt would have predicted was that the Huthi movement would be able to effectively conquer Yemen from their mountain stronghold in Sa'dah province. The Huthi, nominally a Shi'a Zaydi revivalist movement, but effectively a coalition of disaffected and marginalized tribes from Sa'dah linked to the al-Huthi family, are organised and effective, but the door they pushed it is an open one; their advance exposing the state machinery of Yemen for the sham it was, and is, and revealing much grimmer prospects for the future than previously anticipated.

"I never predicted it because I believed, like many others inside and outside the country, that the Army, Air Force and Intelligence machinery would have enough strength to deal with a force such as the Huthis, and enough loyalty and will to do it", says Pratt. "The current situation has proven that they have neither. What little hope I had for Yemen is gone. I can see no way forward for the country, and no way back. Though the citizens of this cracked, striated land may share a common identity as Yemenis, I can find nothing that unites them, and the cracks in the country are too great now for any political solution, or any greater Yemen to emerge."

That situation is just the way the former President 'Ali 'Abdallah Salih wants it. There are many reasons for the current crisis. The eyes of the Gulf Powers look to Iranian's baleful influence over the Huthis as the catalyst for the crisis. But the crisis hinges on much deeper issues, each of which have found their cause, and their exacerbation in the rule of 'Ali 'Abdallah Salih - the economic woes of a country running pitifully short on water and the oil that powers its GDP, the strength of tribes who brook no state power, the concomitant weakness of a state that is only one power amongst many, the rise of AQAP and the perpetual state of warfare they, the Huthis and the federalist or secessionist wings of the Southern Movement find themselves in.

A squat, powerful tribal man, Salih proved during his 33 years in power to be the only man possibly capable of governing Yemen. He did so by constantly playing divide and rule with politicians, tribes, and even enemies. He did so by building patronage networks of wealth and power across the country, but ensuring that nobody ever got too much power to challenge him. He did so because he utilised each challenge to Yemen to his own advantage, milking every last one for political advantage, but never solving them. And he did so finally, because he always let short-term expediency win out over long-term planning, placing his own political survival about that of his country.

So, oil was used to buy tribal loyalty in the lands it came from, never re-invested in the economy to build sustainability and the answer to the economic woes of many Yemenis. Command of the Army, Air Force and Intelligence Services was split amongst families and loyalists, each of whom incapably ran them as personal fiefdoms and, now deposed, have left little behind capable of tackling Yemen's security issues. Politics became a complex game of divide and rule as Salih made and destroyed politicians who could sustain him in his façade democracy, all the while shutting out the legitimate grievances of Yemenis, both Southern and Northern, who now challenge the state of Yemen. The perfect storm was made, and became the poisoned inheritance for the incumbent President, 'Abd Rabbuh Mansour Hadi, a good man facing impossible challenges that only Salih could create, and only Salih could solve.

Salih is a quite incredible man. That he ruled for 33 years, rising from a lowly tribal background and a primary school education, is testament to his political skill. That he never left after his resignation, and now finds himself at the heart of the current crisis is testament to his venality, and outright malevolence. As the Huthi have stormed through Yemen, Salih has been accused of working in concert with them, using the tribes and security forces still loyal to him, particularly the Special Security Forces in support of their charge. There is little doubt of the truth in this, but there should be every doubt about his future intentions. Salih has only ever fought for himself. If he is in league with the Huthis now, it will only last as long as it supports his political aims. The reckoning will come soon, when Salih deems the Huthis to have become too powerful. "President" Hadi is nothing more than a by-stander to this turn of fate, and the Saudi-led Arab action is too late, and too weakly coordinated – it will make things worse before it makes them better. Even now, the Saudi action plays directly into Salih's hands, solidifying loyalty to him as the economic situation worsens and the inadvertent civilian casualties mount.

Of course, 'Ali 'Abdallah Salih was supposed to have been removed as President following a drawn-out semi-Arab spring, its zenith marked by the assassinations of protesters in Tahrir Square by security forces under his command that forced Salih into a GCC sponsored power transfer deal. But in Sana'a, in the country that he had built around him, Salih never faded away. As President Hadi tried to navigate an immensely difficult National Dialogue process, designed to heal the wounds of the Salih era, the real power – Salih himself – continued to undermine him. In reality, Salih never stopped being President, he just stayed in the shadows and dictated the course of the country, either as the leader of his political party, the General People's Congress, or through his links to those elements of the security apparatus still loyal to him. And as he did so, he set up an alternate future for his country that finds its expressing in today's crisis. As the bombs drop on Aden, he has proved once again, as he has done many times over, the Machiavellian genius inhis unique ability to take advantages of the issues that confront Yemen and turn them to his own short-term gain, and the long-term loss of Yemenis.

It may be over-exaggerating to blame one man for all of Yemen's woes. Clearly, it is a

colossally complex country with challenges stacked against it, whoever is the leader. But no other man could have seen so much opportunity for personal advancement in these challenges, nor failed to answer them in so many ways. The Yemen of today was built by 'Ali 'Abdallah Salih. As the tribes sponsored by him, the security forces led by him, and the rebels backed by him fight their way to a new, and grimmer, future for Yemen, he continues to build it. For now, I can see no way out of the current crisis while Salih remains in the country, but his departure may be just as bad as the Huthis seek ascendancy; the real fight for Yemen is only just beginning.