

# THE YEMEN ARAB REPUBLIC AND THE POLITICS OF BALANCE

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DURING the past few years a relatively high degree of Western and particularly American attention has been focused on Yemen. This interest, however, has been derived less from any intrinsic concern about this historic and mountainous land, than from its strategic location and the vulnerability of its weak government to both external aggression and a myriad of domestic problems. Yemen is sandwiched between Saudi Arabia, a highly important American ally in the Gulf region, and the People's Democratic Republic of Yemen (PDRY), the only Marxist Arab state and one heavily dependent on the Soviet bloc.

Woefully underdeveloped economically and highly fragmented politically, the Yemen Arab Republic (YAR) has little choice but to maintain a balancing act between its two neighbours. On another level, Yemen must also keep a strict balance between East and West, not an easy position to take in the highly-charged atmosphere of superpower politics, especially as exercised in the Middle East. Internally, the Ṣan'a' government must also keep a fragile balance among a wide range of competing political factions, not only diverse in ideological terms but also divided along a traditionalist/modernist dichotomy.

Every Soviet advance in the Horn of Africa, Aden or Afghanistan, and every American crisis over Iran, the Arab-Israeli conflict or oil, makes north Yemen that much more valuable a pawn of the East-West rivalry. Nevertheless, attempts to incorporate Yemen into a new version of the "Great Game", on one side or the other, will in the long run fail without realization that the foreign policy of the YAR is not dictated by ideological persuasion as much as it is by political pragmatism and the need for both domestic and external balance between ideological alternatives and competing interests. Yemen is not unused to serving as an arena for the rivalry of outside powers. In ancient eras, the Persians, Romans and

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Abyssinians all sought to extend their sway over its territory. More recently, the British, Italians and Ottomans sought influence and control there. But the revolution of 26 September 1962, which swept away the traditional, isolationist nomocracy of the Imāmate and ushered in eight years of civil war between royalists and republicans, also opened the door to more intensive outside interference in Yemeni affairs, as 'Abd al-Nāṣir's socialist Egypt and conservative Saudi Arabia conducted a long and bloody war by proxy before Yemeni national reconciliation was achieved in 1970.<sup>1</sup>

While some Western attention had been sparked temporarily by that war, Yemen's political allegiance seemed to gain increasing importance only in the past few years as Soviet and American interests in the immediate region have intensified and been on the point of clashing. As American dependence on Gulf oil increased, so did awareness of the fragility and vulnerability of the political systems of the oil-producing states. The long rebellion in Dhufar, the southern province of the Sultanate of Oman (a key guardian of the entrance to the Gulf), was aided energetically by the PDRY with help from first the People's Republic of China and then the Soviet Union. The rebellion's effective termination in 1975 was followed by the Marxist revolution in Ethiopia. Then, Somalia's alliance shift from East to West resulted in the Ogaden War, embarrassing to the U.S., and the transfer of Soviet equipment and facilities to Aden.

When open warfare broke out between the two Yemens in early 1979, the administration in Washington seemed to see this as an opportunity to draw a line against Soviet advances in Afro-Asia. The American response was particularly decisive in face of criticism over U.S. impotence *vis-à-vis* developments in Iran and pressure from strongly anti-Communist Saudi Arabia. Presumably, Washington felt that its show of support to the north Yemeni régime during this internecine struggle obligated the YAR to assume a pro-American stance across the board: thus, Ṣan'ā's acceptance of Soviet equipment and advisers later in the year violated the American trust. The answer to the riddle of Yemen's behaviour during this period, however, can be found only by closer inspection of the circumstances confronting the leadership in Ṣan'ā.

### Socio-economic Obstacles to National Cohesion

The description of "Fourth World country" may well have been invented for the Yemen Arab Republic, a country whose attempts at socio-economic development only began in earnest a short decade ago. Yemen's development efforts today are hampered by a weak, impoverished government, a barely rudimentary infrastructure and a rugged topography that in itself forms a major barrier to national unity and the process of development. Despite its three major cities of Ṣan'ā, Ta'izz and al-Hudayda, with their combined population of nearly one-half million, Yemen is quintessentially a rural country with more than 50,000 settlements. Many of these are isolated on craggy mountain peaks or in secluded valleys, compounding the usual problems and costs associated

with providing basic road and water systems, electricity and even schools and teachers.<sup>2</sup>

But while obviously undeveloped, Yemen displays an economy of paradoxes. Out of a total population of some six million, 750,000 to one million Yemeni males regularly travel abroad in search of employment. Over half a million are to be found in the labour force of neighbouring Saudi Arabia and nearly 100,000 live in the United States. But this exodus of labour abroad creates problems at home even as it provides the country's largest source of foreign exchange. Fields are left empty with no one to tend them and development projects in the YAR may depend for completion on Sudanese, Korean, Indian and Kenyan companies and labourers. Families left behind in the villages are heavily dependent on the remittances sent back by emigrant workers. After a stay abroad of two or more years, the Yemeni worker returns home with his accumulated savings. Most often, these savings are spent on consumer goods or are invested in land, a taxi or a shop. But the amount of available land is finite, and increasingly expensive, and the country can support only so many taxis and shops. As a result of limited investment opportunities, inflation has assumed the proportions of 40-60% a year. It is cheaper to import foodstuffs, as well as being Yemen's biggest business, than to hire agricultural labour and set up an effective distribution system. The cost of living and services can be crippling. The picture is complicated by the Yemeni national pastime of the afternoon *qāt* chew—a major social occasion also encompassing the conduct of much business while chewing the leaves of the mildly-stimulating *qāt* plant. An afternoon's supply frequently runs to \$20-30 and government offices generally are deserted by noon so that employees may complete their transactions at the *qāt* market.

The government is little more than an observer to many of these economic conditions. Its capability to collect direct taxes is minuscule since the civil war rendered the collection of traditional Islāmic taxes on wealth and produce negligible. The YAR budget is balanced only by substantial Saudi subventions, while nearly half of the government's domestically-generated revenues come from customs duties. But prohibitive duties (ranging more than 100% on some items) contribute to pervasive smuggling and bribery. The former flourishes easily since the régime has only limited control of its borders and very little power to force compliance by the powerful tribes of the north and east. Any systematic attempt to uproot corruption faces serious obstacles because of the large numbers of officials implicated and due to the basic economic fact that even a cabinet minister makes no more in salary than an efficient secretary in the private sector.

Government control of inflation is crippled by the fact that it has only partial control over the money supply—some 85% of workers' remittances never see the inside of a bank and northern areas prefer to use Saudi currency. Large development projects see the light of day only with funds and technical assistance provided by foreign donors; small projects at the village level often see fruition only as the result of the initiative of a local cooperative development association which may provide half the

financing and most of the labour for local roads, piped water and similar improvements.

Underlying the economic difficulties are deep social divisions. Yemenis predominantly belong to one of two subdivisions of Islām. Roughly half are Zaydī, a Shī'ī subsect more akin in belief and practice to the Sunnī majority of the Arab world than to the Shī'ī sect predominating in Iran. Most other Yemenis are Shāfi'ī, one of the four schools of law in Sunnī Islām. This split has more than religious implications, however: the Zaydīs dominated politics during the Imāmate period and the Shāfi'īs consequently tended to be avid republicans during the civil war. Even today, the highest proportion of educated Yemenis is to be found among the ambitious Shāfi'īs, who predominate in big business, the student body of Ṣan'a' University and in the government bureaucracy, yet frequently consider themselves victims of Zaydī discrimination. The Imāmate depended on the great Zaydī tribes of the north for its military requirements and during the civil war both republicans and royalists wooed these tribal *shaykhs*. As a result, the natural inclination of the tribes towards haughty independence was aggravated and effective control over large tracts of YAR territory remains in the hands of these heavily-armed tribes.

### The Promise and Loss of Hamdī

The political weakness of the YAR government is partly a legacy from the civil war, when only massive Egyptian military assistance enabled the republicans to control less than half the territory of Yemen. Increasing republican dissatisfaction with the highhanded nature of Egyptian domination of the government, as well as the toll claimed in human lives and economic hardship, finally resulted in a *coup d'état* in 1967 which replaced the pro-Egyptian régime with a more independent government headed by a widely-respected jurist and traditional politician, 'Abd al-Rahmān al-Iryānī. A noticeable shift of the state to the right was the result of the purge of leftists from the government and army soon after the last major royalist offensive against the Republic—the siege of Ṣan'a' in late 1967 and early 1968—failed.

The negotiated end of the civil war and national reconciliation in 1970, with the subsequent inclusion of royalists in the ruling Presidential Council, cabinet and national assembly, sealed the new conservative status of the Republic, a state dominated by traditional politicians and Zaydī *shaykhs*. The extreme leftists of the revolution had fled to Marxist south Yemen and the liberal modernists, who sought a stronger central government more capable of fostering socio-economic development, found their plans blocked at nearly every turn by the traditionalists. By the beginning of 1974, a tense situation worsened into crisis as Iryānī unexpectedly appointed a self-proclaimed Ba'thī as Prime Minister. The *shaykhs*, traditionalists and Saudis were all thoroughly alarmed at this turn of events and pressures mounted for the resignation of Iryānī and his fellow members of the Presidential Council—which were submitted in June.

On 13 June 1974, control of the government fell to an eight- (later ten-) man military Command Council, with Lt Col Ibrāhīm al-Hamdī at its head. Hamdī was a young and ambitious officer who had played a minor rôle in the civil war and had once served as Deputy Prime Minister for Internal Affairs. He was considered pro-Saudi and close to the *shaykhs*, who were widely regarded as having brought him to power. Four members of the Command Council were from important shaykhly families and the Prime Minister, although considered leftist, was the brother-in-law of one of the two most powerful *shaykhs*. All in all, it seemed as though the conservative coalition had emerged triumphant. But as Hamdī gradually acquired confidence, a power base and an aura of charisma, he worked to free himself of his conservative, pro-Saudi labels.

Gradually, the size of the Command Council was reduced: the tribal figures were transferred to posts as governors or ambassadors; the criterion for continued membership seemed to be personal loyalty to Hamdī. The tribally-dominated Consultative Assembly was suspended and then disbanded; thus its Chairman, the most powerful of the *shaykhs* was suddenly bereft of his influential presence within the government. Then in January 1975, Hamdī dismissed the cabinet and replaced a powerful rival as Prime Minister by an apolitical technocrat, 'Abd al-'Azīz 'Abd al-Ghanī. 'Abd al-Ghanī's new council of ministers largely consisted of men like himself, Western-trained technocrats without any significant power base and whose primary goal was increasing progress on the development front.

Hamdī's goals for the period 1975-77 can be said to fall into three main categories: (1) providing stability through military rule in order to create an atmosphere conducive to development; (2) strengthening the scope and power of the central government; and (3) asserting Yemen's independence internationally, through a non-aligned stance in Third World and pan-Arab concerns and equidistance between Saudi Arabia and south Yemen. He adroitly made use of Saudi financial assistance (paid to the government for the first time instead of handed over to the *shaykhs*) and escalating workers' remittances (indirectly tapped through customs duties on the booming consumer import trade) to finance basic development planning.

But despite Hamdī's effectiveness in achieving these objectives and his growing popularity among the masses, he faced increasing opposition from a number of quarters. These included the Saudis, who wanted a weak government in Ṣan'ā' which would not threaten them but would provide a barrier against the Marxist south; the tribes, who had been frozen out of the government and feared a stronger régime which would be able to curb their new-found independence; the traditionalists, who opposed change on socio-religious grounds and because it threatened their ascriptive rôles of authority; the leftists, who had been kept out of power since the end of the civil war; and various army cliques, ambitious for power and perfectly willing to align themselves with the tribes and Saudis in hopes of overthrowing Hamdī.

In October 1977, President Hamdī and his brother were assassinated in Ṣan'ā' and his supporters were arrested or fled. Leadership of the

Command Council—and thus recognition as head of state—was assumed by Lt Col Ahmad al-Ghashmī, another ambitious officer whose brother was *shaykh* of a Zaydī tribe near Ṣan‘ā’ and who personally was known to be conservative and pro-Saudi. Ghashmī’s tenure as YAR leader was characterized by weakness and uncertainty. Tribal and Saudi influence seemed on the increase, relations with Aden deteriorated and various technocrats abandoned the government in a spirit of futility. In early 1978, Ghashmī handpicked a 99-member People’s Constituent Assembly, which then proceeded to elect him President. This manoeuvre removed the legal basis of the Command Council, thus cutting the ground from under the third member of the Council (the second being the Prime Minister), a Hamdī supporter from the Shāfi‘ī southern region of the YAR. After a brief rebellion, this officer was forced to flee to refuge in Aden and offer his services to other YAR dissidents based there.

### The Challenge from the South

Scarcely nine months after coming to power, Ghashmī was gone, the victim of a power struggle in neighbouring Aden. His death came from a bomb-blast in his office while receiving the ostensible envoy of the southern President, Sālim Rubayyi’ ‘Alī. Less than 48 hours later, ‘Alī was executed following a gunbattle between his supporters and the followers of the chairman of the PDRY’s dominant party, ‘Abd al-Fattāḥ Ismā‘īl. The events of late June 1978 were one more step in the consolidation of the Marxist ruling party’s control over the apparatus of the state; and culminated in Ismā‘īl’s assumption of the mantle of the Presidency of the state in addition to his party offices. Ismā‘īl also represented the hardline faction of the party in its approach to Yemeni unity.<sup>3</sup>

In Ṣan‘ā’, following the confusing aftermath of Ghashmī’s murder, interim leadership fell to the Chairman of the People’s Constituent Assembly, ‘Abd al-Karīm al-‘Arashī, a respected jurist in the tradition of former President Iryānī. A consensus of leading politicians fixed ‘Arashī’s term as Acting President at a maximum of 60 days to allow time for the election of a new President by the Assembly. There was no shortage of initial candidates vying for the attention of the 99 Assembly members but serious contention soon settled on two men. First of all, there was considerable appreciation for ‘Arashī, whose potential Presidency was viewed by some as a return to respectable, democratic, civilian rule.

But ‘Arashī’s chances—as promoted by others though not himself—quickly faded when faced with the aggressive campaign waged by Lt Col ‘Alī ‘Abd Allāh Sāliḥ. A career tank officer from a small Zaydī tribe, whose only formal education had come during an officer’s course in 1973, Sāliḥ had been a strong supporter of Ghashmī and gained widespread popularity among the troops for his command of operations against the rebellious Command Council member in early 1978. Sāliḥ managed also to acquire Saudi backing and thus outflank the Zaydī *shaykhs* who were attempting to gain Saudi approval of their own candidate. In mid-July, Sāliḥ received an overwhelming majority of votes for President; ‘Arashī subsequently was elected Vice-President.

The growing conservative stance of the régime in Ṣan'ā' provoked increasing negative reactions from Aden. When the YAR had been turning to the right in 1972, relations between the two Yemens had deteriorated into open war. The same sequence of events began to manifest itself in late 1978 and early 1979. Both sides had organized and supported dissident groups to conduct guerrilla operations across the border, and clashes between these groups and regular troops intensified and eventually resulted in direct YAR-PDRY confrontation. In February 1979, these incidents escalated beyond the point of no return. While it is widely felt that the PDRY provoked a war between the two countries in order to force the overthrow of Ṣālīḥ from within, there is no hard evidence for this. What is undeniable is that the better-trained and equipped troops of the south quickly moved on the offensive behind a vanguard of their dissident north Yemeni allies, and thrust deep into the YAR.

By the time a final ceasefire finally took hold in mid-March, accomplished with the help of an Arab League mediation mission, the PDRY and allied forces not only controlled the border region but had threatened to cut the major highway between Ta'izz and Ṣan'ā', succeeded in interrupting travel along the Ta'izz/al-Hudayda road, occupied large sections of southern and eastern YAR and had sponsored rebellions in various other regions. The rapid PDRY advance had seemed to run out of steam by the time of the ceasefire—as well as encounter topographic obstacles to further progress—and thus the south was ready to join a beaten YAR in putting an end to the fighting. The easy advance of the south was greatly aided by the collapse and rout of the YAR army—a situation which was only partially ameliorated by the summoning of tribal levies to the front. When the fighting was over, the government of 'Alī 'Abd Allāh Ṣālīḥ was still in charge in Ṣan'ā'—to the supposed chagrin of Aden. And despite the CIA's widely-publicized estimate in early 1979 that Ṣālīḥ's régime had only six months to survive, he not only remained President through mid-1981 but had managed to consolidate and even strengthen his position.

### **The Ṣālīḥ Régime: An Assessment**

The continued longevity of Ṣālīḥ as President is, at least by surface considerations, a surprise. Here is an unsophisticated, semi-literate tribesman with no prior experience in government or financial administration. But such an assessment ignores the ambition and drive of a self-made and clever military officer who has consistently shown himself capable of adroit political manouevring. He has shrewdly co-opted prominent individuals into the government from nearly the entire Yemeni political spectrum and has safeguarded his position by favouring his seven brothers and fellow tribesmen in key military and security posts. Manipulation of the military hierarchy has apparently secured his flanks and he seeks legitimacy through highly-publicized interest in and leadership of the Supreme Corrective (anti-corruption) Committee and the Confederation of Yemeni Development Associations, two organizations founded and heavily promoted by the martyred Ḥamdí.

Over the three years that Ṣāliḥ has been in office, the government has undergone a gradual but definite transformation. Partially, this has been due to outside influences—especially the war with the south—but it also seems to reflect a pattern similar to that pursued by Hamdī. It took Hamdī a year to rearrange the military hierarchy, the Command Council and the cabinet into a more congenial configuration. Ṣāliḥ also has gone along this path, but with the added complication of heightened pressure from the left. As a result of the YAR's defeat in the 1979 war, Ṣāliḥ was forced to drop the faction of anti-Aden conservatives—men who originally had fought the British in Aden but were forced to flee to the north when the radical National Liberation Front took power there—from the cabinet although he retained their active services as Presidential advisers. In their place, several leftists were given portfolios, although it should be kept in mind that a Yemeni “leftist” generally would be considered a moderate in most other Arab states.

The balance of the new régime was illustrated by the three Deputy Prime Ministers who came to hold position by mid-1979. The Deputy Prime Minister for Financial and Economic Affairs was a London-trained apolitical technocrat who has held a number of different ministerial positions since the mid-1960s. The Deputy Prime Minister for Foreign Affairs (and Foreign Minister) was known as a “soft” leftist, being the same individual whose brief stint as Prime Minister in early 1974 provided the immediate spur for the collapse of the Iryānī Presidency. The Deputy Prime Minister for Internal Affairs is an army officer and major 'Zaydī *shaykh* who has won much respect for his military competence in defending Ṣan'ā' during the civil war and in leading the counter-attack against the south during the last war.

Ṣāliḥ also sought to bring back the Septembrists—those who participated in the revolution of 26 September 1962—from their disfavour under Hamdī, and even some of Hamdī's supporters who left the government in the wake of his death. The other powerful *shaykhs* have been given seats in the People's Constituent Assembly and have led ceremonial delegations to other countries but they remain frozen out of any real power. While certain areas of the north and east remain virtually autonomous, the writ of Ṣan'ā' extends considerably farther than it did in Hamdī's last days. Potential rivals for the Presidency have accepted far-away posts as ambassadors. In connexion with these changes, it should be remembered that the trend in cabinet composition over the last half-dozen years has been to emphasize the rôle of apolitical technocrats. The 'Abd al-Ghanī cabinet was no exception, with the majority of the ministers falling into this category. Of the remainder, the so-called leftists were still outnumbered by the conservatives. Indeed, the tone of the cabinet was very much set by the Prime Minister, a Colorado-trained economist whose nearly six years of unbroken office was a YAR record by far.

By early 1980, however, a number of actions seemed to indicate on the surface that the YAR government was sliding left into the Communist orbit. The first of these was the arms deal with the Soviet Union, initiated in August 1979 and producing matériel and additional advisers through

mid-1980. Secondly, talks between various joint YAR-PDRY unity committees, established following the 1979 war, proceeded at a lively pace. Thirdly, the pro-Saudi director of national security was eased out of his long-held post early in January although he retained the emasculated portfolio of Interior. Finally, negotiations between the government and the National Democratic Front (NDF), the Aden-based opposition group which participated in the 1979 fighting, came close to producing a coalition government.

Notwithstanding the surface indications, these developments were far less the product of an emerging radicalization of the YAR than simple pragmatism and an assertion of national independence based on the omnipresent need for a fine balance. Soviet arms and advisers have been present in the YAR since before the 1962 revolution and Russian support was a major factor in breaking the 1967-68 royalist siege of Ṣan'ā'. The YAR's resumption of diplomatic relations with the United States in 1972, one of the first Arab states to do so, and its subsequent request for American arms received little action until the press of events in the Horn and Iran led to President Carter's overdramatic response to the 1979 war.

In addition to granting permission for the transfer of American equipment to Yemen from Saudi Arabia and Jordan, the U.S. government signalled its intention of the accelerated dispatch of 12 F-5E fighters, two C-130 transports, 64 M-60 tanks, 50 armoured personnel carriers, anti-tank missiles, howitzers, grenade and missile launchers, as well as American military instructors. At the same time, several F-15s and AWACS aircraft were deployed to Saudi Arabia and the aircraft carrier *USS Constellation* was moved into the western Indian Ocean.<sup>4</sup> Where had the U.S. been during the similar inter-Yemen war of 1972? In the end, however, the effect of American military assistance was dampened by the nonarrival of the equipment during the fighting and by the Saudi finger on the pursestrings.

To the Yemenis, Saudi Arabia has long been an irritating, interfering influence in Yemeni politics. A border war fought in 1934 between the two countries resulted in the extension of Saudi sovereignty over territory most Yemenis still consider to be part of Yemen.<sup>5</sup> Later, Riyadh supported the royalists against the YAR during the civil war. Following the war's dénouement and national reconciliation, Saudi Arabia continued to keep Yemen weak. Ṣan'ā' was forced to adopt Saudi-approved policies in order that it might receive a budget subsidy and Riyadh continued to make payments directly to independence-minded Yemeni tribes and *coup*-minded officers. The paradox of Saudi policy towards Yemen was aptly demonstrated by the 1979 war. While the fighting was going on, Riyadh pressured Washington to arm the YAR; when the fighting stopped, the Saudis had second thoughts about militarily strengthening the most populous nation in the Arabian Peninsula and stopped payment on the arms. The Saudi status in Ṣan'ā' was hardly helped by their unrealistic insistence on termination of unity talks, highhanded order to kick the Russians out, and ill-timed encroachment on YAR territory along the northern border.

The YAR cannot pursue any course other than cooperation with

Aden; and cooperation depends on the semblance of progress towards unity. The image of a single Yemen is a highly-popular myth in both north and south, even if idealistic and unrealistic. As 1979 proved, the YAR's military is unable to defend its territory should it come to another war. In essence, the north is engaged in a stalling act: any true and complete unity would swamp the north's leadership and jeopardize its economy. At most, a pragmatic "unity" conceivably could involve a nominally federal state, with a titular President and capital, and perhaps a loosely-coordinated foreign policy—but complete autonomy for each region in internal affairs.

If Ṣan'ā' were to sever ties to the Soviet Union, as the Saudis have insisted, not only would it be abrogating its policy of balance but would be sending a deliberately-hostile signal to a long-time ally. This is all the more risky because of Moscow's influence in Aden and the southern régime's opposition to closer YAR-Saudi ties. Such an act would seemingly place Ṣan'ā' at the complete mercy of Riyadh—a state unable to defend itself against Aden let alone defend the YAR—and in the eyes of many Yemenis, would constitute betrayal on the part of Ṣāliḥ. Even the risk of incurring Saudi displeasure, with a consequent cut-off in funds, is a highly popular move in Yemen, all the more so when Riyadh's response is to adopt the humiliating tactic of providing lightened subsidies only on a month-to-month basis, as occurred in early 1980.

Finally, pragmatism played a major rôle in Ṣāliḥ's negotiations with the NDF. A rag-tag organization held together only by common opposition to the YAR government and by PDRY's blandishments, the NDF nevertheless is the recipient of a good deal of circumspect support in the YAR. Its leaders include a Ṣāfiī doctrinaire Marxist, an opportunist former YAR minister who was convicted of corruption before his exile to Aden, a Zaydī *sayyid* (descendant of the Prophet Muḥammad) and Ba'thī, and a pro-Ḥamdī military officer from a northern Zaydī tribe who participated in an abortive *coup d'état* against Ṣāliḥ in October 1978. The Front has managed to gather considerable backing in the southern YAR by intimidating and even assassinating oppressive *shaykhs* and landlords. Because of the diversity of its leadership and perhaps dissatisfaction with Ṣāliḥ based on widespread belief in his complicity in Ḥamdī's death, NDF support is evident as well in other areas of the YAR, as shown by uprisings in widely-scattered regions during the 1979 war.

Thus, the NDF represents a force that 'Alī 'Abd Allāh Ṣāliḥ cannot afford to ignore. Successful negotiations in early 1980 would have produced three ministerial portfolios for the NDF and the replacement of neutral Prime Minister 'Abd al-Ghanī by the highly-political Deputy Prime Minister for Foreign Affairs, Dr Ḥasan Makkī. The deal apparently fell through due to Ṣāliḥ's reluctance to appoint a Prime Minister who could prove to be an eventual rival for power and by 'Abd al-Ghanī's refusal to accept the NDF in his cabinet. But negotiations continue sporadically under the rubric of the National Dialogue and have borne some success in detaching the Nāṣirist party from the Front. At the same time, the continuing threat of destabilization posed by the radical opposition was dramatically illustrated in January 1981 when the pro-

Saudi former head of national security (and newly-named Minister of Local Administration was assassinated on the road from al-Ḥudayda to Ṣan'ā'.

All this said, the Yemen Arab Republic remains a weak and divided state, in perpetual danger of collapse or overthrow. It is inextricably tied to the PDRY régime, with events and trends in one state invariably having an impact on the other, as was dramatically shown in the June 1978 catastrophe. The government in Aden is prey to many of the same problems as its Ṣan'ā' counterpart, faces an even bleaker economic picture and less-than-satisfactory dependence on Communist assistance. The struggle for power among competing factions permeates Aden just as it does in Ṣan'ā': the readjustments made in 1978 were again altered in favour of a more conciliatory faction in early 1980.<sup>6</sup>

Ṣāliḥ's success so far in remaining in command of the political scene masks a deeper and disturbing deterioration in the development process and political fabric of the country. The American-trained technocrat, 'Abd al-Karīm al-Iryānī, reluctantly returned to Yemen to replace 'Abd al-Ghanī as Prime Minister in October 1980 and formed a new government, one similar in composition to its predecessor in many respects.<sup>7</sup> Two of the three Deputy Prime Ministers were retained (the casualty being the technocrat) while a number of army officers were brought into the council of ministers. The new government, however, coincided with the painfully obvious paralysis of the state in its financial affairs and support of development efforts. The President's preoccupation with ensuring day-to-day survival and his Zaydī tribal background contribute to the growing polarization of Yemeni politics, thus reversing a modest but positive trend begun by Ḥamdī.<sup>8</sup>

It can be argued that 'Alī 'Abd Allāh Ṣāliḥ has done nearly all that is possible in the immediate short-run to secure the régime's continued survival. That certainly is no guarantee against sudden upset in Ṣan'ā' but it seems clear that any potential, viable successor will find it necessary to adopt many of Ṣāliḥ's policies, both domestically and externally. A wise course for the West would seem to be recognition of the manifold constraints on the choice of actions of the YAR's leadership and the integral necessity of Ṣan'ā''s politics of balance, whether it be between respect for tradition and socio-economic progress, or between the north (Saudi Arabia) and the south (the PDRY), or between the East and the West. Finally, despite the close parallels between U.S. and Saudi interests and goals in the immediate region, American policy towards Yemen can be improved only by greater reliance on a more direct and objective assessment of the YAR's needs and goals, and less willingness to rely obliquely on Riyadh's egocentric perceptions.

#### NOTES:

1. Good surveys of Yemen's history are contained in Manfred W. Wenner, *Modern Yemen 1918-1966* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1968); and Robert W. Stookey, *Yemen: The Politics of the Yemen Arab Republic* (Boulder, Colo.: Westview Press, 1978). The latter, despite the somewhat misleading title, covers the entire span of Yemen's known history up to the late 1970s, making extensive use of published Yemeni sources. Both

books treat the civil war, as do a number of other works too numerous to mention here. Wenner includes a good but dated bibliography with many of the sources, which can be supplemented by Simoné L. Mondesir, comp., *A Select Bibliography of Yemen Arab Republic and People's Democratic Republic of Yemen* (Durham: University of Durham, Centre for Middle Eastern and Islamic Studies, 1977).

2. Fortunately, there is a growing body of excellent literature dealing with Yemen's economic background and changing society. The World Bank's *Yemen Arab Republic: Development of a Traditional Economy* (Washington, January 1979) provides a good overview of economic conditions. Two other particularly insightful works are Cynthia Myntti's *Women and Development in Yemen Arab Republic* (Eschborn: German Agency for Technical Cooperation, 1979); and Robert W. Stookey's "Social Structure and Politics in the Yemen Arab Republic," *Middle East Journal*, Vol. 28, No. 3 (1974), pp. 248-260, and Vol. 28, No. 4 (1974), pp. 409-418. The Swiss Airphoto Interpretation Team's *Final Report* (Zurich: Swiss Technical Co-operation Service for the Central Planning Organization of the YAR, 1978) on the 1975 population and housing census is useful in a number of ways, including information on administrative divisions, education, settlement patterns, etc., as well as several regional surveys. The phenomenon of labour emigration is the subject of Jon C. Swanson's *Emigration and Economic Development: The Case of the Yemen Arab Republic* (Boulder, Colo.: Westview Press, Replica Edition, 1979); as well as his "Some Consequences of Emigration for Rural Economic Development in the Yemen Arab Republic," *Middle East Journal*, Vol. 33, No. 1 (1979), pp. 34-43. An anthropological examination of Yemeni society is to be found in Tomas Gerholm's *Market, Mosque and Mafraj: Social Inequality in a Yemeni Town* (Stockholm: University of Stockholm, Department of Social Anthropology, 1977), focusing on the central mountain settlement of Manākha.

3. The intricate nature of the interrelationships between the two Yemeni states is well illustrated by Ismā'īl's birthplace being in the Ḥujarīya region of the YAR, not far from those of 'Abd al-Ghañi and the ousted Command Council member mentioned above. The inhabitants of al-Ḥujarīya have long been noted for their propensity to emigrate in search of work and aggressive pursuit of education.

4. The Carter administration's justifications for waiving provisions of the Arms Export Control Act in expediting the transfer of this equipment, and Congressional apprehensions over American involvement in Yemen, are presented in U.S. Congress, House of Representatives, Committee on Foreign Affairs, Subcommittee on Europe and the Middle East, *Proposed Arms Transfers to the Yemen Arab Republic; Hearing, 12 March 1979* (Washington: USGPO, 1979). The charge that the administration had deliberately chosen a small-scale border war to signal its intention to challenge the Soviet Union in the region and to bolster Saudi uneasiness was made by Lt Col John J. Ruskiewicz (retired), the just-retired military attaché in the YAR, in his testimony before the same committee. U.S. Congress, House of Representatives, Committee on Foreign Affairs, Subcommittee on Europe and the Middle East, *U.S. Interests in, and Policies Toward, the Persian Gulf, 1980; Hearings, 24 March, 2 April, 5 May, 1 and 28 July, and 3 September 1980* (Washington: USGPO, 1980). Ruskiewicz alleged that the U.S. government had chosen the YAR as a good place to make a stand as early as 1978 and that the seriousness of the 1979 fighting was single-mindedly exaggerated for domestic political purposes. He also stated that little of the American equipment arriving in Yemen had been actually put in use by the YAR military by the time of his departure.

5. The two negotiators in the 1974 talks to extend the treaty established by that war were both later assassinated, presumably by Yemeni nationalists.

6. The apparent shift to an uncompromising radical left in 1978 turned out to be only one phase in a continuing process. In April 1980, 'Abd al-Fattāḥ Ismā'īl was forced to resign both his positions as President of the state and secretary-general of the party, and was later reported to be held under house arrest along with his close supporters. Both offices were assumed by 'Alī Nāṣir Muḥammad, the unobtrusive survivor of PDRY infighting, who also retained his earlier post of Prime Minister. The new PDRY leader represents the moderate faction in Aden politics, one seemingly more disposed towards accommodation of Saudi Arabia and the Gulf amirates, as well as Ṣan'ā'. But the longevity and stability of any PDRY government is hardly more predictable than that of the YAR. For more detail on recent developments in the PDRY, see Fred Halliday, *Arabia Without Sultans* (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1974; New York: Vintage Press, 1975); *ibid.*, "Yemen's Unfinished Revolution: Socialism in the South," *MERIP Reports*, No. 81 (October 1979), pp. 3-20; Michel

Tuchscherer, "L'Unité yéménite," *L'Afrique et l'Asie modernes*, No. 124 (1980), pp. 1-23; and J. E. Peterson, "Conflict in the Yemens and Superpower Involvement" (in press).

7. Iryānī is a nephew of former President 'Abd al-Raḥmān al-Iryānī and was instrumental in the formation of the Central Planning Organization in Ṣan'ā'. His abrupt dismissal as Minister of Development by Ḥamdī and later clashes with traditionalists while Minister of Education had contributed to his decision to take up a position in Kuwait. After being relieved as Prime Minister, 'Abd al-Ghanī was appointed 2nd Vice-President of the YAR.

8. Ḥamdī's popularity and ability to gather widespread support was partially due to his *qāḍī* background—which in Yemen signifies membership in a respectable social class politically accepted by all elements of Yemeni society—the pre-revolution performance of both his father and himself as competent and impartial judges, his sincere interest and involvement in the development process and his visionary strategy for reforming the Yemeni economic and political environment. Ṣāliḥ, on the other hand, is hindered by his lack of education and experience, the unavoidable identification of him with one particular segment of Yemeni society and widespread perceptions of him as opportunistic.