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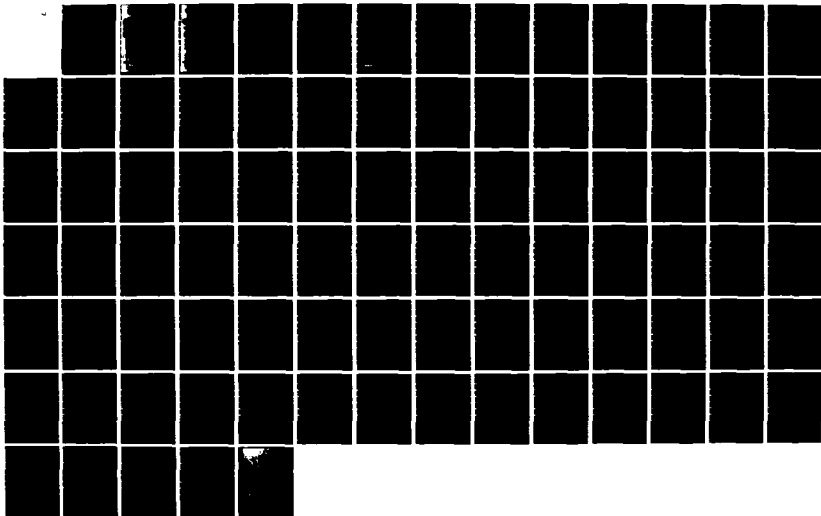
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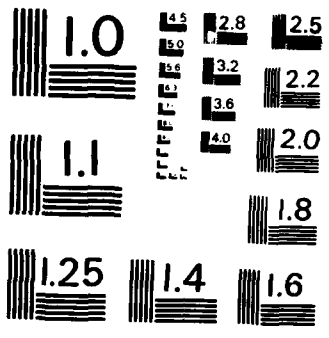
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POLITICS AND THE STATE OF THE UNION IN THE PEOPLE'S  
DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC OF VIETNAM: INTERNAL  
VULNERABILITIES AND REGIONAL CHALLENGES

Laurie Mylroie

December 1983

N-2052-AF

Prepared for

The United States Air Force

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**Rand**  
SANTA MONICA, CA 90406

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Since its independence in 1967, the People's Democratic Republic of Yemen (PDRY) has posed various challenges to the conservative pro-Western states of the Arabian peninsula, and thus indirectly to the United States. This Note describes the evolution of the PDRY's internal political and economic situation and discusses its relations with other states in the region and with the Soviet Union. It also discusses potential changes in the PDRY's relationships with the Soviet Union and with the conservative Arab states and analyzes various U.S. options in relation to the PDRY. The United States can play a background role: U.S. policies that enhance the conservative Arab states' sense of security will contribute to greater rigor in their dealings with the PDRY. In addition to strengthening the PDRY's neighbors, the United States might, in the proper circumstances, consider playing a subsidiary role in the South Arabian detente itself.

**A RAND NOTE**

POLITICS AND THE SOVIET PRESENCE IN THE PEOPLE'S  
DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC OF YEMEN: INTERNAL  
VULNERABILITIES AND REGIONAL CHALLENGES

Laurie Mylroie

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PREFACE

This study of the People's Democratic Republic of Yemen is part of the Rand project "Enhancing U.S. Leverage in Persian Gulf/Middle East Conflicts," sponsored by Project AIR FORCE. It analyzes the internal politics and regional relations of the country with a special focus on elements of Soviet vulnerability.

In light of the complex interrelations of the area, it is hoped that this Note will be of interest to those concerned with formulating policy on either of the two Yemens, while contributing to informed discourse about the region in general.



H 1



## SUMMARY

Since its independence in 1967, the People's Democratic Republic of Yemen (PDRY) has posed various challenges to the conservative pro-Western states of the Arabian peninsula, and thus indirectly to the United States. The original threat to export leftist revolution to neighboring states was followed by the challenge of Islamic fundamentalism, and the PDRY retains the potential to support revolutionaries of either kind on the Arabian peninsula. In addition, a new danger has arisen from the PDRY's close ties with the Soviet Union, which now enjoys access to air and naval facilities in that state.

This Note describes the evolution of the PDRY's internal political and economic situation and discusses its relations with other states in the region and with the Soviet Union. It also discusses potential changes in the PDRY's relationships with the Soviet Union and with the conservative Arab states and analyzes various U.S. options in relation to the PDRY.

- The PDRY and its conservative Arab neighbors are currently maintaining a cautious detente made possible principally by the unwillingness of the conservative Arab states to engage in violent confrontation to topple the PDRY government and the unwillingness of the PDRY to become too isolated from the other Arab states, whose aid it depends on.
- Genuine normalization of PDRY-Arab relations is not possible as long as the PDRY identifies its national interest with Soviet interests and extends support to Soviet forces.
- PDRY-Soviet ties are unlikely to weaken.
- Historically, the United States has not been closely involved in the the affairs of south Arabia. The best course for the United States is to deal indirectly with the current situation: U.S. policies that enhance the security of conservative Arab states, particularly North Yemen, will help those states make their economic and political ties with the PDRY contingent on tangible moderation in PDRY policies.

The current warming of relations remains circumscribed by deep suspicions that reflect the conflicting long-term interests of both sides. Although the current detente is novel in its extent, its origins date back several years. A PDRY-Omani cease-fire and the exchange of diplomatic recognition between Saudi Arabia and the PDRY appeared in 1976. The initial detente suffered a major blow in 1977 when the PDRY supported the Soviet-backed intervention in Ethiopia. Relations deteriorated yet further in 1978 with the PDRY's assassination of the North Yemeni president and the hardliners' assumption of power in the South. Saudi Arabia tried to mobilize an Arab consensus to isolate the PDRY, but the attempt failed; within six months the two announced a "reconciliation." That was followed by an intra-Yemeni war, renewed deterioration of relations, and the resumption within the year of efforts to improve relations.

The conservative Arab states, led by Saudi Arabia, have never been willing to commit their armed forces to the overthrow of the PDRY government and appear even less willing to do so now, given the Soviet presence there. Initially these states pursued a path of confrontation, supporting armed exiles in their fight against the regime, but this strategy offered little hope of toppling the PDRY government. Instead, these states have adopted a policy of cooptation and conciliation, with the twin goals of disassociating the PDRY from the Soviets and ending the PDRY's support for local rebel organizations. The Arabs challenged the new Soviet strategy of developing a more solid position in Third World countries. This approach, most evident since the mid-1970s, includes the development of a unified, Marxist "Vanguard Party" out of the original nationalist liberation front as well as the training of a secret police and people's militia loyal to the party in order to counter independent challenges, particularly from the army.

The PDRY's relations with the Arab states have been closely tied to the shifts in its internal politics, and the present rapprochement is in part a consequence of the recent change in PDRY leadership, but more fundamental factors also underlie the detente. The PDRY's close relation with the Soviet Union has imposed on it a degree of isolation from the other Arab states that has occasionally made the regime feel

uncomfortable. Furthermore, the PDRY's regional isolation has affected its economy. The PDRY is poor, and a good part of the appeal of the Arab connection is the promise of aid from the oil-rich states. The PDRY's incentives for pursuing the detente are further increased by the deleterious economic consequences of the Soviet alliance. Soviet-style centralization of the PDRY's economy has added to the country's economic problems, and the Soviets have been unwilling to provide the resources to sustain the PDRY's economic growth.

**The repeated reemergence of the PDRY-Conservative detente indicates the lack of attractive alternatives for both sides.** Because the PDRY regime appears to have ensconced itself securely against any potential internal opposition, the Arab conservatives view the detente as the only available opportunity to moderate the PDRY. Manipulating the PDRY's need for economic aid to effect a long-term change in its policies is the essence of the Arab strategy. On the PDRY side, even the hardliners fall under heavy pressure to improve the country's dismal economy, and detente offers them that opportunity. Some form of detente, warmer or colder as circumstances suggest, is thus likely to be the trend in the region's politics for some time, even though it may be occasionally interrupted.

Conservative Arab gains are modest, and whether they will prove enduring is open to question. The conservative Arabs have achieved some progress on one of their two major objectives--ending PDRY support for local subversive groups and distancing the PDRY from the Soviet Union. The PDRY has in the past supported rebels in Oman (the Popular Front for the Liberation of Oman--PFLO) and in North Yemen (the National Democratic Front--NDF). The PDRY abandoned its military support for the PFLO in 1976 following a cease-fire agreement with Oman. After the Omani-PDRY agreement of October 1982, concluded under the auspices of the Gulf Cooperation Council, the PDRY abandoned even its political support for the organization. The PDRY has similarly moderated its position toward the North Yemeni rebels, although to a much lesser extent. Since the summer of 1982, when the North Yemeni army drove the NDF completely out of its territory, the PDRY appears to have dropped its military support for the organization, limiting it, for the present at least, to a political role. The situation is fluid, and changes in

either the PDRY's ruling elite or the regional political climate could lead to the reactivation of the rebel groups, the NDF in particular. The current regime is not less opposed in the long term to the conservative Arab states than its predecessor, but it is more pragmatic. It is currently unwilling to pay a heavy price for an ineffectual confrontational policy against the Arab states.

PDRY-Arab rapprochement may, at best, diminish tensions on the Arabian peninsula and perhaps induce some restraint in the PDRY's support for the Soviets, but it will probably not end the fundamental danger posed by the Soviet presence in Aden. Although the current regime may be less inclined than its predecessor to support Soviet policy unreservedly when it conflicts directly with the PDRY's Arab interests, there is no indication so far that the Arab states have weakened the PDRY-Soviet alliance. The Soviets have handled the internal political situation adroitly so far, and any PDRY frustration with the slowness of economic development is compensated for by other benefits from the Soviet relationship. The Russians offer security from external and internal enemies, as well as technical and managerial assistance in nearly every aspect of development. Furthermore, any PDRY leader who contemplated cutting the Soviet connection would face the possibility of drastic and violent Soviet action--a danger that would probably deter all but the most determined or desperate of leaders.

**The United States can play a background role: U.S. policies that enhance the conservative Arab states' sense of security will contribute to greater rigor in their dealings with the PDRY.** The apparent inevitability of continued Arab attempts to reach an accommodation with the PDRY is important for U.S. policy: If the American posture conflicted with that of its allies, it would be at best ineffectual and at worst counterproductive, perhaps leading to increased pressure on pro-Western rulers in the region to refrain from cooperating with the United States. Given the unfriendly relations between the United States and the PDRY, it might appear that the Arab rapprochement excludes any part for the United States. However, if detente is to work to the genuine advantage of the conservative states, they must make economic aid and political ties contingent on real and tangible moderation in the PDRY's policies. But their will to hold out for

favorable terms is most undermined when they feel vulnerable. For this reason, U.S. policies that enhance the conservative Arab states' sense of security will most effectively exploit the detente.

The Yemen Arab Republic (North Yemen) in particular is weak. The United States could take steps to improve its relationship with Sana'a and strengthen the government against any renewed attack from the NDF, while attempting to diminish the not inconsiderable Soviet presence in North Yemen. Such action would require coordination with Saudi Arabia, North Yemen's principal financial supporter. The Saudis are ambivalent about the desirability of a strong North Yemen, and such a policy is more easily proposed than carried out. Nonetheless, strong arguments can be made for the advantages of an American-armed rather than Soviet-armed North Yemen and perhaps a greater degree of coordination developed between the United States and Saudi Arabia with regard to the State.

In addition to strengthening the PDRY's neighbors, the United States might, in the proper circumstances, consider playing a subsidiary role in the South Arabian detente itself. The United States has not had diplomatic relations with South Yemen since 1969. Moreover, the PDRY is currently on the State Department list of countries supporting international terrorism. The PDRY leadership might at some point choose a position more independent of the Soviet Union, but an overly hostile U.S. stance is one more obstacle to such a shift. The United States might consider dropping the PDRY from the State Department list at some appropriate moment, particularly as the sanction has little real effect. To reestablish American relations with the PDRY seems premature. It would probably not lead to improved relations and could be counterproductive if it touched off a Soviet-encouraged putsch that brought the hardliners into power.

Given the PDRY's chronic political instability, Soviet inability to sustain its economic development, and the PDRY's sensitivity to its isolation in the Arab world, the situation in South Arabia will probably remain in flux. Little is lost by keeping a watchful eye on the progress of the conservative Arabs' diplomacy. If their efforts bore fruit in nursing the evolution of a PDRY leadership more open to the West, the United States might have a more active role to play.

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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## CHRONOLOGY OF EVENTS

September 1962	Revolution erupts in North Yemen
Summer 1963	Formation of the National Liberation Front
October 1963	The Radfan revolt; the beginning of the NLF's campaign in South Yemen
November 30, 1967	British withdrawal from South Arabia; NLF assumes control
June 1969	Overthrow of Qaahatan al-Shaabi by the radical faction
August 1971	Ouster of Prime Minister Mohammed Ali Haytham; regime shifts further left
October 1972	Brief war between the two Yemens
December 1975	Omani Sultan declares the end of the Dhofar Rebellion
March 1976	Saudi Arabia and the PDRY establish diplomatic relations
November 1977	Saudi Arabia suspends diplomatic relations with the PDRY after its support for the Soviets in Ethiopia
June 1978	Assassination of the President of North Yemen and execution of the South Yemeni President, Rubay Ali. The most pro-Soviet of the PDRY leaders assumes power
February 1979	Second Yemeni war
April 1980	Ouster of Abdel Fattah Ismail, and his replacement by more pragmatic leadership

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## I. INTRODUCTION

The People's Democratic Republic of Yemen (PDRY) is an impoverished nation on the southern reaches of the Arabian Peninsula. Sharing its northern border with Saudi Arabia and commanding access to the Red Sea on its western border, the PDRY is one of the world's more strategically placed countries. Ever since its independence, the PDRY has posed a challenge to all the pro-Western states of the Arabian Peninsula, most directly to its neighbors, Oman, Saudi Arabia, and North Yemen. In 1967, when the British evacuated South Arabia, revolution appeared to be the inexorable wave of the future, threatening the Arab monarchies with violent upheaval. Within the context of widespread instability in the region, the establishment of the PDRY was a great boon to the radical forces. Psychologically it gave further impetus to a sense of the left's impending victory; materially it provided sanctuary for guerrilla attacks on its neighbors and a base for propaganda broadsides on the more distant regimes.

The present situation, however, differs considerably from that of a decade ago. Despite the multitude of dangers that threatened the conservative Arab states at the beginning of the 1970s, all of them passed into the 1980s intact.<sup>1</sup> The sharp division in the Arab world between radicals and conservatives has blurred; the Arab leftists no longer raise an effective ideological challenge to the conservatives. Likewise, the PDRY's potential for exporting subversion among the conservative Arabs has diminished, and, in fact, the region is witnessing a cautious detente between the PDRY and its neighbors. Thus the PDRY threat might seem less serious now than it did a decade ago.

Nonetheless, for several reasons the PDRY still poses a significant challenge to American interests. Most important, as the ideological threat from the PDRY has been reduced, another element has been introduced--the military presence of the Soviet Union. The PDRY is

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<sup>1</sup> Ironically, the major upheaval of the decade occurred in Iran, the one country whose stability was not generally questioned. For example, see Abir, 1974.

closely allied to the Soviets, who enjoy nearly unrestricted access to naval and air facilities there. The PDRY is strategically located to support action both in East Africa and the Persian Gulf. Its utility has already been demonstrated as a base for Soviet-backed intervention in Ethiopia, and Soviet access to the PDRY would figure in any Soviet-American confrontation in the area. Second, even in circumstances short of a major conflict, the PDRY can advance Soviet interests. PDRY pressure against its neighbors in the past has led the conservative Arab states at times to be more accommodating to the Soviets in the hope that they will restrain their client. Third, the conservative Arabs are still vulnerable to subversive movements, although not primarily from the Arab-nationalist left. The major ideological challenge of the 1980s comes from Islamic Fundamentalism.

A PDRY hostile to the Arab conservatives could support Islamic revolutionaries with almost as much facility as it supported leftist guerrillas. Moreover, some states, particularly North Yemen, remain vulnerable to the leftist challenge. The PDRY gave military support to the rebels fighting the government there as recently as the summer of 1982, and the rebel forces could be remobilized if the PDRY chose again to adopt a posture of confrontation with the conservative Arabs. Finally, the political climate may change in the future, and the left could regain its popular appeal. Then the PDRY would again pose the same danger to America's Arab allies that it did a decade ago. In sum, despite the current detente, the long range perspectives and interests of the PDRY leadership are fundamentally antagonistic to the conservative states.

This Note examines the prospects for change arising from the internal politics and regional relations of the PDRY regime. It does not, however, deal with other aspects of the problem, such as an assessment of the Soviet military threat in the region.

The best chances for a moderation of the PDRY threat to Western interests lie with the possibility of internal political changes in the Aden regime and the challenge of the conservative Arabs to the Soviet position. An historical analysis of both the PDRY's internal political evolution and the course of its regional relations demonstrates the point, clarifies both the strengths and weaknesses of socialist rule in

South Yemen, and helps define the most feasible options for dealing with the PDRY threat. It explains the improbability of the success of coercive action either to overthrow the regime or undermine the Soviet presence. But at the same time the analysis of the internal situation illustrates the regime's chronic instability, which carries potentially adverse consequences for the Soviet Union. On the level of regional politics, considerable changes have occurred since the early days of the PDRY. The best way to appreciate the factors behind the current political dynamic in the region, namely the PDRY-conservative Arab detente, is to understand how this approach has emerged from past attempts at confrontation, which, by making the PDRY pay a high price for its radicalism, succeeded in moderating the regime but failed to topple it. The Arab states now exert some influence on the PDRY through a policy of co-optation. Such an appreciation of the region's politics is a prerequisite to the formulation of any U.S. policy, because the stance of America's Arab allies toward the PDRY plays an important role in defining U.S. options.

Section II analyzes the PDRY's internal politics. It traces the development since independence of the PDRY's political structures, particularly the means by which the original guerrilla organization was transformed, with Soviet bloc aid and advice, into a "Vanguard Party." The limits of the Soviet-style political institutions are also discussed, particularly their failure to overcome the incessant factionalism of the PDRY leadership. Sec. III discusses the non-political elements in the internal vulnerabilities of the PDRY regime, with emphasis on the economy. The PDRY's Arab relations are discussed in Sec. IV, which traces the evolution in Southern Arabia from armed confrontation between the PDRY and its neighbors to a wary and cautious detente. The limits of that detente and potential future developments are explored. Sec. V presents the conclusions and their implications for American policy.

## II. THE EVOLUTION OF THE PDRY REGIME

The regime in South Yemen represents a new Soviet approach to its relations with Third World regimes. The ruling Yemeni Socialist Party (YSP) is one of the first examples of a "Vanguard Party," an institution that increasingly appeared in states that became Soviet allies in the late 1970s and after. The Vanguard Party and its auxiliary police forces are part of the Soviet response to a series of setbacks in the Third World, beginning with the overthrow of pro-Soviet regimes by military leaders in the mid-1960s and continuing with the Soviet expulsion in the 1970s from a number of Arab states even without a regime change.<sup>1</sup> The Soviet setbacks were blamed on the failure to penetrate the society beyond a thin layer of the elites, and a new approach was developed with the goal of establishing a broader base for the Soviet alliance. This analysis of the internal situation in the PDRY will examine the evolution of its Soviet-style political institutions, showing how the radical minority consolidated power and the Soviets gained influence. But those institutions were not able either to maintain the most pro-Soviet of the PDRY leaders in power or to overcome the incessant factionalism of the regime.

The YSP grew out of the victorious faction of the guerrilla forces that fought for independence against the British. The character of the present PDRY regime evolved out of the political configuration of South Yemen before independence. An examination of the revolutionary period clarifies who gained power and how and, in fact, helps explain the unusual openness of the regime to Soviet influence. A group of countryside intellectuals succeeded in mobilizing the support of the most socially backward class, the rural tribesmen. The leaders of the revolution had no experience in political rule and shared no common program for the nation's future. After some period of confusion, they embarked on the Soviet path, which offered protection against internal and external enemies and much needed guidance on how to rule a country.

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<sup>1</sup> For an analysis of this phenomenon see Fukuyama, 1979; and Alexiev.

But the Soviet connection has not proved entirely satisfactory. Soviet-style centralization of the economy has resulted in stagnation, and the Soviets appear unwilling to provide the resources necessary to finance the PDRY's economic development. Moreover, the close Soviet tie has isolated the PDRY from its Arab neighbors and denied it access to oil largesse. For some years the PDRY leadership has debated the appropriate balance between its Soviet and Arab connections. That debate has been a central issue in the power struggle among the PDRY leadership. An examination of the PDRY's internal politics, beginning with the NLF during the revolution, helps explain the shifts that have occurred in its foreign policy and evaluate prospects for future developments.

#### THE PRE-INDEPENDENCE STRUGGLE

At the time of the British evacuation of Aden in 1967, three groups vied for power--the South Arabian League (SAL), the Front for the Liberation of South Yemen (FLOSY), and the National Liberation Front (NLF). Each organization drew on different constituencies both inside and outside South Arabia, and the distinctions among them determined the character of the independent South Yemeni regime.

The differences among these three nationalist factions were rooted in the political system of South Arabia before independence. Within the territory of South Arabia, the urban center of Aden was the only area administered directly by the British. In the interior several tribal rulers held sway. British interest there was minimal and consisted mainly in preventing other powers from pressing claims to sovereignty. Consequently, Britain established treaty relations with the sheikhs of the interior in which she offered each of the 24 rulers and his heirs the "gracious favor of the Crown's protection" in perpetuity in exchange for their agreement, in essence, to concede to England authority over their foreign relations. The area closest to Aden became known as the Western Protectorate and the more remote regions as the Eastern Protectorate, a division that also reflected traditional cultural differences between the peoples of the two areas.

While Aden developed apace under the influence both of direct British administration and its role as a major world port, the tribal hinterlands remained traditional and underdeveloped. The difference existed even within Aden itself. The city possessed a rigid and exclusive social structure that accepted newcomers as "Adenese" only after a prolonged residence. Large-scale immigration from North Yemen and the protectorates eventually led the non-Adenese to outnumber the "Adenese." Nonetheless, the immigrants remained socially distinct and had no political rights in Aden.<sup>2</sup> The distinction between Adenese and non-Adenese, and Aden and the hinterland, shaped political activity in South Arabia.

Of the three nationalist groups contending for power in 1967, the SAL was the oldest and most conservative. It originally received Egyptian support; but with the emergence of more leftist rival groups, the Egyptians abandoned them, and the SAL began to receive Saudi aid. The SAL was closely associated with the Sultan of Lahej (the tribal area closest to Aden), who sought to unify an independent Aden with the protectorates under his rule. But the movement was weakened by several factors. Its top leadership was exiled in the late 1950s, and it never succeeded in gaining broad popularity. Its support in the tribal hinterlands was constrained by its association with a particular sultanate, while in Aden it was unable to compete successfully with the more leftist groups.<sup>3</sup>

In contrast to the SAL, FLOSY was Aden-based and Aden-oriented. It was also the group closest to Egypt. It evolved out of the Aden Trade Union Congress (ATUC), quickly changing from a workers' federation to a forum for nationalist agitation. In fact, the People's Socialist Party (PSP) was created in 1962 to serve as the political wing of the ATUC. The bulk of middle class Adenese supported the PSP, while the white collar Adenese unions effectively controlled the ATUC. The ATUC's appeal was weak among workers from the protectorates.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Bujra, 1970, pp. 89-211. This is an excellent discussion of the political sociology of South Yemen on the eve of independence.

<sup>3</sup> Abir, 1974, p. 78.

<sup>4</sup> Halliday, 1974, p. 203.

The proclaimed political goal of the PSP was the union of Aden and the protectorates with North Yemen. This also provided a platform from which to oppose British plans for South Arabia. As a first step toward independence, Britain sought to unite Aden and the Western Protectorate into one federation.<sup>5</sup> But the PSP and the Adenese as a whole opposed federation, because they feared it would mean domination by the traditional population of the protectorates, which the Adenese regarded with disdain. The political platform of the PSP and the sense of superiority with which Aden viewed the protectorates led the nationalist leadership to ignore the political potential of the hinterland.<sup>6</sup>

The NLF, however, did not neglect the hinterland; rather, it was their first base of support.<sup>7</sup> The leaders of the NLF were almost exclusively non-Adenese, immigrants from the protectorates and, to a lesser extent, North Yemen. In contrast to the Adenese nationalist leadership, they were less privileged, less educated, and less experienced with the world beyond the Yemens. And most important, they were closer to the protectorate tribes.

Initially, the NLF was a loose coalition of diverse groups, deliberately eschewing a specific ideology. While this strengthened the organization by providing a maximum base of support, it took its toll in incessant factional struggles which plagued the NLF before independence and the government of South Yemen after independence. With the overthrow of the North Yemeni Iman, a number of South Yemenis<sup>8</sup> went to the North in sympathy with the revolution. There in the summer of 1963, under Egyptian aegis, seven organizations merged to found the NLF. It

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<sup>5</sup> Part of the British motive for federation was to moderate the seemingly militant nationalism of Aden through association with the traditional society of the protectorates. The PSP and the British, in fact, shared the same understanding of the political consequences of federation.

<sup>6</sup> Bujra, 1970, p. 208.

<sup>7</sup> Halliday, 1974, p. 203.

<sup>8</sup> al-Masry, 1974, p. 220, gives a realistic picture of the organization of the NLF in North Yemen. The number of 17,000 emigre partisans cited by a sympathetic author seems exaggerated. 'Abd al-Fattah, 1974, p. 48.

aspired to be a national coalition of all Yemeni groups with the sole condition for membership being a commitment to armed struggle.<sup>9</sup> It encompassed political orientations ranging from tribal sheikhs to Marxist intellectuals.

In October of 1963 the NLF initiated its strategy of armed struggle by instigating a tribal uprising against the British in the Radfan Mountains, north of Aden. The tribes there had a history of opposition to central authority, mainly British measures to stop their extortion of tolls along the road linking Aden with the North. It took little to spark the revolt beyond the supply of arms to the disgruntled tribes. Although the revolt was indistinguishable in substance from traditional tribal resistance,<sup>10</sup> it was done to the shouting of anti-British slogans, and the NLF marked it as the beginning of the revolution. The Radfan revolt illustrated the NLF's ability to harness traditional behavior to modern revolutionary aims, even though the ultimate goal of the revolution was the destruction of the traditional social system. It proved a potent combination despite the apparent contradiction between means and ultimate ends.

From the beginning the dominant group in the NLF and the faction with the most clearly articulated political doctrine was the protectorate intellectuals, who had previously founded the South Yemeni branch of the leftist Arab National Movement (ANM).<sup>11</sup> The ANM was committed to the political union of the Arab states, a goal it linked with the elimination of Western imperialism, for which it blamed the existing divisions in the Arab world. The ANM initially embraced Nasserism, but with Nasser's setbacks in the 1960s (the break-up of the Syrian union, stalemate in the Yemeni revolution, and the Arab defeat of June 1967), the ANM began to split, with the radicals calling for

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<sup>9</sup> al-Masry, 1974, p. 248. The question of armed struggle led the PSP to reject a union with the NLF. The PSP position was that all peaceful means should be exhausted before resorting to violence.

<sup>10</sup> This is a point on which almost all authors agree. Some view it as opportunism on the part of the NLF. For example, see Kelly, 1980, p. 19. But its supporters saw it as an act of generosity, giving material aid and concrete political goals to an otherwise inchoate tribal rebellion. See al-Shu'aybi, 1972, p. 23.

<sup>11</sup> Halliday, 1974, p. 203.



revolution to facilitate the union of Arab states. The split in the ANM was reflected among the South Yemenis as well. The top leaders of the NLF were consistently more moderate than the second rank. The differences appeared as early as 1964, when Qahtan al-Shaabi, the most prominent personality in the NLF and South Yemen's first president, led a small delegation to the ANM conference in Beirut. He sided with the Nasserites, a position rejected by the bulk of the NLF.<sup>12</sup>

Egyptian pressure led to the reappearance of this split and demonstrated the tenuousness of the leadership's hold on the movement. From the start of the North Yemeni revolution, Egypt had intervened on the side of the rebels, with the aim of extending its hegemony in the Arabian peninsula. This brought Nasser into conflict both with Saudi Arabia, which supported the Imam's forces, and with the British in Aden. Nasser backed the NLF to apply pressure on the British position. But when the Egyptian intervention proved more costly than he had anticipated, Nasser tried to consolidate his control over the South Yemeni nationalist organizations. The Adenese PSP agreed in 1965, at Nasser's urging, to unite with the quasi-tribal SAL. Nasser then sought to incorporate the NLF as well. Failing initially, he finally resorted to the stratagem of detaining several members of the NLF's ruling body, the Politburo--including Qahtan al-Shaabi and his cousin, Faysal Abdel Latif--in Cairo until they agreed to the merger of the NLF into a new organization, the Front for the Liberation of South Yemen (FLOSY). During the six months in which most of the Politburo sat in Cairo, the secondary, more radical leadership of the NLF asserted itself. They convened an NLF Congress and expelled the Politburo members in Egypt. They then elected a new body to replace it, the General Command, which included many of those who subsequently held power in South Yemen, including the first three presidents who succeeded Qahtan al-Shaabi.<sup>13</sup>

Neither Nasser's machinations nor the coup of the secondary leadership had lasting effect. With the return of the detained Politburo members, another NLF Congress was held in November 1966. Qahtan al-Shaabi was reinstated in a shuffle that brought other

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<sup>12</sup> Kelly, 1980, p. 23.

<sup>13</sup> Halliday, 1974, p. 223.

moderates into the leadership, while the NLF annulled its shotgun marriage to FLOSY. Despite the failure to resolve the basic cleavage within the organization, the power struggle was suspended in light of the imminent British withdrawal. FLOSY and the NLF directed terrorist campaigns against one another as each side tried to seize power after the British evacuation.

The NLF emerged the victor for several reasons. First, with its ties to the tribes and the protectorate Arabs, it had a broader base of support than FLOSY. Second, the British saw the Egyptian-backed FLOSY as the greater nemesis. They had little knowledge of the NLF and, forced to choose between the two, preferred the NLF.<sup>14</sup> Most important, with Egypt's defeat in the 1967 war, its position in North Yemen collapsed, with deleterious consequences for its client, FLOSY. On November 20, 1967, the NLF assumed the government of South Yemen. In four short years it had made the leap from a rough coalition of dissidents camped in North Yemen to the rulers of an independent Arab state.

The course of the NLF's struggle initially shaped the external and internal affairs of the newly independent state of the People's Republic of South Yemen (PRSY). In its foreign relations, the events of the revolution contributed to a general isolation from the Arab states. Although close ties with the conservatives were not to be expected, even the leftist Arab states were reserved in their attitude to the PRSY. We have seen how the NLF clashed with Nasser even before independence. The leftist Ba'th party, ruling in Syria and Iraq, had tense relations with the Arab Nationalist Movement. The ANM's leading role in the NLF precluded close relations with those two states.<sup>15</sup> The absence of

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<sup>14</sup> For example, Sir Humphrey Trevelyan, the British High Commissioner, describing the NLF: "The NLF had no friends among the Arab states. Their enemies alleged that they had Communist affiliations, but of this there was no hard evidence." Trevelyan, 1970, p. 218. Qahtan al-Shaabi had not been interviewed or photographed since the Radfan revolt began. The British press referred to him as "the faceless man." Dishon, 1971, p. 480.

<sup>15</sup> Abdul Fattah Ismail, the NLF's leading ideologue and president of South Yemen from 1978 to 1980, complained in a post-independence interview that FLOSY reflected more closely the social bases of the other Arab states, both conservative and nationalist, and therefore received their support. See 'Abd al-Fattah, 1974, p. 74. On negative relations between the NLF and the Ba'th specifically, see Bell, 1970, p. 79.

support from any Arab country coupled with hostile relations with its immediate neighbors created an early sense of regional isolation that remains an issue in South Yemen's current foreign policy.<sup>16</sup>

As for the internal situation, two features of the revolution carried implications for the post-independence regime: the strategy of armed struggle and the brevity of the revolution itself. Both contributed to internal divisiveness as well as to the failure to develop indigenous forms of political administration. The very concept of a coalition among groups whose greatest common denominator was a commitment to armed struggle carried with it the seeds of intense factionalism. The priority given to armed struggle exacerbated this inherent divisiveness. The military commanders in the south built up their own bases of support, independent of the leadership headquartered in the north, and this facilitated their subsequent challenge to that leadership.<sup>17</sup> The brevity of the revolution vitiated both the resolution of the factional strife<sup>18</sup> and the development of political institutions among the population, which could have provided the basis for a stable government after independence. Even as the NLF was beginning its activities, Britain announced in 1964 that it would grant South Arabia independence in 1968. It did not require much pressure to bring about the British withdrawal on terms favorable to the rebels.<sup>19</sup> Consequently,

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<sup>16</sup> Jacob Goldberg, "The People's Democratic Republic of Yemen," in Legum, 1981, p. 665.

<sup>17</sup> Ali and Whittingham, 1974, p. 97.

<sup>18</sup> Ismail himself, describing the division between the "traditional" leadership and the radicals at the first NLF Congress in 1965, noted, "and these two lines continued to be present in one way or another until after the achievement of independence." 'Abd al-Fattah, 1974, p. 68.

<sup>19</sup> South Yemen actually received its independence some months before the beginning of 1968. The Labour Party, which won the elections of October 1964, was particularly keen to terminate the British presence East of Suez. In early 1966 it announced a policy that precluded even a defense treaty with the new state, and the growing violence in South Arabia caused the British to evacuate the territory before the scheduled date. See Kelley, 1980, pp. 29-32, for a biting commentary on the weakness of British resolve to support its own creation, the Federal Government of South Arabia.

the NLF did not face the necessity of mobilizing the population to sustain a prolonged fight. Victory came fairly easily, contributing to the NLF's inexperience in political rule.

Like many revolutionary groups, the NLF looked to the socialist bloc for ideological direction. In addition, the leaders, especially the younger, secondary leadership, sought to import its political institutions. That might be expected in any case, but the NLF's failure to develop its own forms of political administration during the revolution contributed to the tendency.<sup>20</sup> The independent regime began its existence with no firm anchor in the country as a whole, nor with any shared vision of the new society. The result was an incessant power struggle and de facto experimentation with different styles of leftist government.

#### THE INDEPENDENT REGIME

Three principal factions dominated the chronic power struggles of the PRSY's first decade of independence. Each faction's leader advocated positions and built his support on a basis consonant with his ideological orientation. Qahtan al-Shaabi looked to Algeria and the liberation movement that won the struggle for independence there. Moderate and pragmatic in the context of PRSY politics, al-Shaabi was an Arab socialist, a loose term for those nationalist regimes, such as Egypt, Iraq and Algeria, where no self-styled Marxist-Leninist party ruled and no attempt was made to remake the society along the lines of scientific socialism. During al-Shaabi's brief reign, he found his support among the nationalist elements of the army, rather than the organization that brought him to power, the NLF.<sup>21</sup>

The PRSY's first radical president, Salim Rubay Ali, was a populist in the Maoist style. He originally tilted toward the Chinese in foreign affairs and in domestic matters advocated mass movements and peasant

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<sup>20</sup> An African diplomat who had contacts with PDRY officials in the mid-1970s characterized them as a group with no organic links to the countryside, "coffee house politicians," whose political knowledge was based on Marxist tracts and Radio Cairo. (Kifle Wodajo, former Ethiopian Foreign Minister.)

<sup>21</sup> Halliday, 1974, p. 242.

uprising in the manner of the Cultural Revolution. His successor, Abdal Fattah Ismail, was the NLF's leading ideologue. Pro-Russian, he shared the Soviet distrust of mass organizations. He nurtured the evolution of the NLF into a "Vanguard Party," and he built his base of support within the party apparatus. Furthermore, as might be expected in a country like the PRSY--still basically traditional with undeveloped political institutions--these ideological differences coincided with regional distinctions. Ismail was a North Yemeni and could not easily have built support within the Southern population.<sup>22</sup> Rubay Ali came from a farming region east of Aden. His faction consisted of South Yemenis who were able to draw upon tribal and regional loyalties for their support.

After independence the power struggle among these three factions evolved in tandem with the development of political institutions--the party, the government, and the army--which served both as bases for, and objects of, the factional struggle. Originally, the army was the ultimate base of power and the party the source of political legitimacy. The greater unity of the NLF's leftist faction permitted it to impose its programs successively in the face of the army's conservatism. The government remained a weak reed, which the party eventually brought under its control. Although the army has been effectively indoctrinated, the party has yet to establish effective institutional authority over it.

#### **December 1967-June 1969: The Rule of the Arab Socialists**

The fall of the first two governments of independent South Yemen represented successive jerks to the left. Throughout his tenure, Qahtan al-Shaabi, the first president, faced conflicting demands from the left and right; he was overthrown when, in maneuvering between the two, he failed to maintain his support with the right. Even at the time of independence, the NLF majority was to the left of its leadership. But with independence, the existing institutions of the Federal state, especially the army, assumed importance in the balance of forces. Although the new government began to purge officers suspected of

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<sup>22</sup> Bell, 1970, p. 5. Bell describes the early Russian orientation of Ismail and the pro-Chinese tilt of Rubay Ali. He also notes Ismail's preeminence on ideological issues, his unpopularity in the country as a whole, and his control over the internal security forces.

disloyalty, the bulk of the army continued to support the al-Shaabi regime, especially in its struggle with the radicals.

The left brought the issue to a head early on, when it succeeded in convening a fourth Congress in March 1968 in the town of Zinjibar on the coast east of Aden. The assembled National Front ("Liberation" was dropped from the party's name with independence) delegates passed the radicals' platform, including a call for a purge of the army.<sup>23</sup> The army responded by arresting several hundred leftists. The Minister of Economy, al-Shaabi's cousin Faysal Abdel Latif, persuaded the officers to back down,<sup>24</sup> and those detained were released. As a result of the army's move, several radical leaders were dismissed, including Abdal Fattah Ismail, who went to Bulgaria for "medical treatment." The radicals responded with uprisings in the central and eastern parts of the country. The unrest was suppressed by the Aden government, and by the second half of 1968 al-Shaabi appeared to have defeated the leftists. The government felt confident enough in March 1969 to declare an amnesty for the radicals.

But a miscalculation gave the newly returned left its opportunity. In June 1969, al-Shaabi dismissed his Interior Minister, Mohammed Ali Haytham. Haytham was popular in the army, as he had served as liaison to the junior officers during the revolution, and he came from the same Dathina tribe, as many of them. The National Front General Command took advantage of this unpopular step to dismiss al-Shaabi and Abdel Latif. The army did not move, and the left re-entered the government.<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> Dishon 1974, p. 693.

<sup>24</sup> Bell, 1970, p. 81.

<sup>25</sup> The army's apparent passivity was partly the result of poor judgment. The leaders of the army and internal security proposed to Abdel Latif that they would move against the National Front General Command if he would issue a statement justifying their move. He declined, believing that it was impossible that the radicals could maintain themselves in power. al-Shu'aybi, 1972, p. 41; also Stookey, 1982, p. 66.

### June 1969-August 1971: Transition to Radicalism

With the ouster of al-Shaabi, Haytham became the new prime minister. A moderate Marxist, at the Zinjibar Congress he had adopted a position between al-Shaabi and the radicals.<sup>26</sup> His tenure permitted the limited implementation of the leftist platform. His accession to power, however, marked a new turn in the power struggle, which now pitted him against the two radicals, Ismail and Rubay Ali. And once again the radicals succeeded in ousting the more popular figure without provoking the army.

As prime minister, Haytham lacked the pre-eminent position of ex-president al-Shaabi. An unstable coalition existed between him and the leftists, who, although they dominated the National Front, did not feel they had enough support in the country, and especially in the army, to rule directly. The left, however, did enjoy far more influence than it had under al-Shaabi; it dominated the Presidential Council, which replaced the previous one-man presidency. The Council consisted of Haytham, Ismail, Rubay Ali, and two others, both dropped within the year in a cabinet shuffle that moved the regime yet further left.<sup>27</sup>

Regardless of the differences within the new ruling coalition, the government set out to strengthen and broaden its base of support along the lines of the Zinjibar resolutions. This involved purges of the existing political structures, the development of new state institutions, the evolution of the party structure, and radical economic reform.

In the first year of the Haytham government, nearly every existing institution was reorganized or purged--the provincial and local administrations, the National Front itself, and the army and internal security forces. Steps were to be taken in the development of a popular militia to provide a more reliable counter to the army. Haytham, however, with his roots in the military, opposed the creation of a

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<sup>26</sup> Abu Tali, 1979, p. 37.

<sup>27</sup> Of the two dropped, Ali Antar wields influence in the current PDRY regime and played an important role in the power struggle of the late 1970s. When dropped from the Presidential Council he was appointed Chief of Staff of the army and charged with its political supervision.

militia, and its real development did not occur until after his deposal.

In addition to establishing its control over existing bodies, the government began to create new institutions, which the independent state had heretofore lacked. A constitution, written with the aid of East German experts,<sup>28</sup> was announced in 1970, changing the country's name to the People's Democratic Republic of Yemen.<sup>29</sup> More important, the constitution established formal political rights, including an elected legislative body--the Supreme People's Council (SPC), which was declared to be "the highest organ of state power"<sup>30</sup> and given the right to void appointments to the Presidential Council. Although supposedly a vehicle for mass participation, in fact it enhanced the power of the National Front, giving it legal authority over the government. Elections were not held until 1978,<sup>31</sup> and in the long interim, members of the local NF branches served as delegates in the SPC.

In addition to the development of the state structure, steps were also taken to create a more formal party out of the National Front. Ismail was the guiding force behind this evolution. Shortly after al-Shaabi's ouster, he was appointed Secretary General of the National Front. Ismail soon began to involve the Soviet Union in the development of the party apparatus. After a visit to Moscow in June 1970, he stated that the Communist Party of the Soviet Union had agreed to contribute to the development of party cadres, and it was subsequently announced that the Soviets would establish a school for training socialist cadres in South Yemen.<sup>32</sup> It marked the beginning of close ties between the Yemeni

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<sup>28</sup> Abir, 1974, p. 89.

<sup>29</sup> The significance of the change was two-fold. It implied the regime's claim to be the legitimate government of all Yemen, and not South Yemen alone, while "People's Democratic" symbolized the regime's affinity with other Marxist Arab groups, such as The People's Democratic Front for the Liberation of Palestine.

<sup>30</sup> Dishon, 1977, p. 1058.

<sup>31</sup> The delay was apparently due to insufficient confidence that the election results would be acceptable. Abir, 1974, p. 90, suggests that both radicals and conservatives feared the elections would strengthen the other side. al-Shu'aybi, 1972, p. 45, claims that challenges from the workers to the government's list of candidates caused it initially to forgo elections.

<sup>32</sup> The school was indeed established. In 1979 more than 10,000 "activists" were said to have completed training at the Aden School of Socialist Sciences and its provincial branches; the teachers are primarily East German. Gueyras, 1979.



party and a number of socialist bloc parties. Another important development in the party structure was the incorporation of the two small legal parties, the Communist and the Ba'th, into the government. Each was given a ministry. In the short run this was an attempt to broaden support; in the long run it was a preliminary step in the creation of a unified Vanguard Party in a one-party system.

In the third major area of change under the Haytham regime, the economic sphere, the government passed several radical measures, consistent with the Zinjibar platform, including a second land reform, which was preceded and followed by peasant uprisings and land seizures encouraged by the government--especially Rubay Ali--who saw in them a means to facilitate the country's social transformation. The populist uprisings lasted from October 1970 to the summer of 1972, when they petered out. They marked a short phase of experimentation with Maoist doctrine. But the upheaval they created shook the already anemic PDRY economy, and a more bureaucratic Soviet style of economic organization gradually emerged.<sup>33</sup>

Haytham's ouster illustrated how Ismail successfully used his control over the party to gain broader influence. The SPC, consisting of National Front members, held its first session in August 1971 and, exercising its constitutional prerogative, voted Haytham out of office. Since the beginning of the year, the contest between Haytham and the radicals had grown sharper. He had begun to purge the government of its more extreme members, and in light of the PDRY's dire economic straits had indicated a willingness to accept aid from non-Communist sources.<sup>34</sup> Although army moderates still backed him, Haytham lacked the support of the Minister of Interior, the head of the secret police, and the Army's Commander-in-Chief, Ali Antar, whom the radicals had appointed in 1969 to supervise the political indoctrination of the army. As in 1969, the radicals, supported by the National Front, were able to move against the moderates while neutralizing the army. Their consolidation of power in

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<sup>33</sup> Even the regime itself subsequently criticized the peasant uprisings, describing them as often based on a spirit of anarchy and a desire for revenge. Hadi, 1979, p. 150.

<sup>34</sup> Abir, 1974, p. 85.

the intervening two years made them bolder in 1971, and they assumed control in the new government more directly.

### August 1971-June 1978: Radical Populist Rule

Even though the Ismail-Rubay Ali alliance succeeded in ousting Haytham, signs of unrest in the army led to the appointment of Ali Nasser Mohammed, the Defense Minister and an associate of Haytham's, as the new prime minister. Mohammed was less ideological and more of a "pragmatist" than the leaders of the radical faction. Along with Ismail, the National Front Secretary General, and Rubay Ali, the Council's chairman, he was the third man in the Presidential Council. Unlike Haytham, Mohammed posed no obstacle to the radical leadership, which enjoyed free rein in implementing its programs.

As before, the new government marked a new wrinkle in the power struggle. This time the leaders of the two radical factions--Ismail and Rubay Ali--took up the gauntlet. Originally Ismail was seen as the real power holder with Rubay Ali as his front man. But by the second part of 1972, Rubay Ali had asserted himself<sup>35</sup> in the first phase of the power struggle. Ismail's support rested with the National Front; Rubay Ali's support was in the army and provincial administrations. Furthermore, Rubay Ali was more popular with the population as a whole than was Ismail, and he had loyal support in his native region, the third governate.<sup>36</sup>

By June 1978, when the issue broke out into armed conflict, new elements affected the outcome of the power struggle. The PDRY's turn to the socialist bloc brought with it advisors who trained and developed the military and security forces. East Germans assumed the task of organizing the internal security apparatus, while Cubans trained the People's Militia. The secret police were headed by a North Yemeni and a close associate of Ismail, Mohammed Muhsin al-Sharjabi, who exercised his power so ruthlessly that he gained the title "the Beria of South Yemen."<sup>37</sup> Although nominally under the control of the Interior Minister,

<sup>35</sup> Ibid., p. 92.

<sup>36</sup> Hirst, 1978; Halliday, 1979, p. 18.

<sup>37</sup> Seale, 1982.

the security forces were directly responsible to the party's executive committee until 1974, when a separate Ministry of State Security was established, headed by Sharjabi.<sup>38</sup> Until Sharjabi's removal from office in 1979, the internal security forces were essentially a tool of the National Front and of Ismail in particular. The second Soviet-bloc trained organization, the People's Militia, was similarly controlled by the National Front through its local administrative apparatus. The militia was loyal to the party and Ismail, and formed a counter to Rubay Ali's standing in the army. Moreover, Ismail was, by 1978, successfully eroding his rival's position in the army.

The conflict between Rubay Ali and Ismail originally focused on the development of the party. Additional steps were made towards giving the National Front the form of a socialist party at its Fifth Congress in March 1972. To a large extent the changes were formalistic rather than substantive, however, as the various National Front bodies were merely renamed. The Executive Committee became the Politburo, while the old "nationalist" structure, the General Command, was reconstituted as the Central Committee. Although these changes did not affect the distribution of power, they did give the National Front the structure of an orthodox party.

The next step in the evolution of the National Front, however, had more practical significance, and was strongly resisted by Rubay Ali.<sup>39</sup> With the goal of creating a one-party state, Ismail sought to unite the Ba'th and Communist parties with the National Front. Rubay Ali objected to the establishment of a centralized, elite Vanguard Party on the grounds that it was "undemocratic," isolating the leaders from the masses. It also meant, given Ismail's pre-eminence in the party, the strengthening of his influence against Rubay Ali. Ismail's first clear gain occurred in 1975, when the Ba'th and Communist parties joined the National Front, creating the United Political Organization of the National Front (UPONF). The two parties, however, retained an autonomous structure, and the final step in the creation of a Vanguard Party did not come until after Rubay Ali's removal.

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<sup>38</sup> Abir, 1974, p. 29.

<sup>39</sup> Gueyras, 1979.

After gradually tightening the party structure and making inroads into the government as well, Ismail carried the power struggle in its last stages into the army. Ismail achieved a considerable advance in late 1977, when the Defense Ministry was taken from Ali Nasser Mohammed and given to Ali Antar, a leftist who had wavered between Rubay Ali and Ismail, but in 1977 backed the latter.<sup>40</sup> Ismail moved again in April 1978, when the commander of the pro-Ismail militia replaced Rubay Ali as chairman of the influential Armed Forces Organizational Committee, responsible for the political supervision of the army. The next month, Ismail ordered the arrest of 150 officers loyal to Rubay Ali.<sup>41</sup>

In June the intensifying political struggle in South Yemen erupted with the assassination of the North Yemeni president and the execution of the South Yemeni president. Rubay Ali had been in secret contact with his northern colleague, Ahmed al-Ghashmi, perhaps planning a move against Ismail's faction with Ghashmi's support. Rubay Ali's opponents learned of the contacts and, suspecting that a plot was afoot, replaced Rubay Ali's messenger to Ghashmi with one of their own, a cousin of the Interior Minister,<sup>42</sup> Salih Muslih Qassim, himself a member of Ismail's faction. When the envoy arrived at the president's office in Sana'a, he opened a rigged briefcase, and a bomb exploded killing the two men. In the South, the Central Committee met that night, accused Rubay Ali of the assassination, and demanded his resignation. Rubay Ali responded: Army units loyal to him began shelling the Committee's headquarters. The Central Committee mobilized the militia and received the critical support of the Defense Minister, whose backing brought the air force and navy into action, bombing and shelling the Presidential Palace, where Rubay Ali had taken refuge.<sup>43</sup> At the end of the day, the Central Committee regained the upper hand in Aden, as Rubay Ali was captured and executed along with two close associates.<sup>44</sup> Fighting also broke out in

<sup>40</sup> *Arabia and the Gulf*, October 31, 1977.

<sup>41</sup> Goldberg, in Legum, 1979, p. 658; Gueyras, 1979.

<sup>42</sup> *Arab Report and Record*, July 1, 1978.

<sup>43</sup> *Arabia and the Gulf*, July 3, 1978.

<sup>44</sup> *Arab Report and Record*, December 15, 1978. There is a second version of these events, differing principally on the motives and responsibility for Ghashmi's death. Reports from South Yemen contend that Rubay Ali planned the execution in order to spark a crisis with

other parts of the country, especially the third governate, where units loyal to Rubay Ali battled the militia. Sporadic outbreaks continued through November, and by the end of the year the North Yemeni foreign minister estimated that some 2000 refugees had entered the country from the South.<sup>45</sup>

In addition to a personal rivalry, substantive issues also underlay the power struggle between Rubay Ali and Ismail. A key question was the PDRY's relations with the conservative Arab states. Rubay Ali favored a rapprochement with them. This, in turn, required the end of the government's support for PDRY-based rebel groups. Rubay Ali also favored a somewhat more independent stance from the Soviet Union. Ismail preferred the closest possible ties with the Soviets, believing that a rapprochement with the conservatives would weaken the ideological orthodoxy of the country (and his own position as the PDRY's foremost socialist theoretician).

The difference between the two factions, however, was not a clear and simple dispute over the PDRY's orientation. There was discontent with Rubay Ali's style of administration, which tended to rely on trusted personal agents, bypassing both the party and state

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North Yemen that would provide an excuse to move against his domestic opponents. (Gueyras, 1979; Halliday, 1979, p. 18.) But this explanation is unsatisfactory on several counts. First, if Rubay Ali had been planning a coup *at that time* why did he not make preparations, such as moving army units loyal to him into Aden? There has been no suggestion that he did, and even those reporting the PDRY's account note the lack of "material proof supporting the accusation." (Gueyras, 1979) Furthermore, it seems unlikely that Rubay Ali would have trusted the Interior Minister's cousin on such a mission. A North Yemeni investigation identified the assassin and reported that he had replaced the original envoy, Ali Salim al-Awar, a close associate of Rubay Ali and executed with him. Finally, the purported link between a putsch against his opponents and Rubay Ali's assassinating the North Yemeni president is weak. Why would bringing the two Yemens to the brink of war help Rubay Ali eliminate his opposition? And even if Rubay Ali sought to increase tensions with the North, there were other ways to do so short of murder, which even if successful, would have left a host of other problems. The account given seems most plausible in light of the evidence; it is also based on interviews with officials closely involved with the events: John Ruskiewicz, the U.S. military attache in Sana'a at the time, and Joseph Twinam, the American delegate who was to meet with Rubay Ali on the eve of the assassination.

<sup>45</sup> Arab Report and Record, December 15, 1978.

bureaucracies. The result was sometimes mismanagement and corruption.<sup>46</sup> By the end, Rubay Ali lacked the backing of most of his cabinet, as suggested by the fact that no key ministers lost positions in a cabinet reshuffle later in the year. However, the lack of support for Rubay Ali did not translate into support for Ismail.

#### June 1978-April 1980: The Rule of Marxist Orthodoxy

Repeating the familiar pattern of instability, the new PDRY government was the occasion for a new phase of the power struggle. But the features of this contest distinguished it from earlier confrontations. The conflict emerged as Ismail threatened to consolidate unprecedented power. A coalition quickly formed against him, led by Ali Nasser Mohammed and the Defense Minister, Ali Antar. For the first time the result of the power struggle were not a further shift to the left. The heirs to power, although Marxists, were more flexible than their predecessor. Finally, Ismail's downfall marked the conclusion of one facet of the submerged regional rivalries in the PDRY's politics--the North Yemeni faction was ousted from all important positions in the government of the South.

Initially power was shared between Ismail as the party's Secretary General and Mohammed as Prime Minister and the President of a newly constituted Presidential Council. But under the orthodox socialist slogan of strengthening the party's leading role, Ismail succeeded in depriving Mohammed of his second position. His first step was the creation of the long-awaited Vanguard Party. In October 1978, a Party congress was held. The Ba'th and Communist parties were fully integrated into the old UPONF structure, creating the Yemeni Socialist Party. Ismail's second step was the reconstitution of the Presidential Council itself. Elections for the Supreme People's Council, originally promised in 1971, were finally held in December of 1978. Some 91.3 percent of the population elected 111 assembly members, who in turn elected a Presidium to replace the Presidential Council.<sup>47</sup> Ismail was elected Chairman of the Presidium, replacing Mohammed as head of state.

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<sup>46</sup> Halliday, 1979, p. 18; Stookey, 1982, p. 69.

<sup>47</sup> Goldberg, in Legum, 1980, p. 718.

As Ismail added his new title to the chairmanship of the party, the elections were proclaimed to have achieved the unity of the party and state, a goal consistent with the greater emphasis placed on the "leading role of the party" in official statements, following the formation of the YSP.

Throughout the next year, Ismail tried to strengthen his position within the army, the most important center of power still controlled by others. But he failed, and the effort provoked his downfall. In January, and again in June of 1979, differences were reported between Ismail, who relied on the YSP for support, and Antar, backed by the army.<sup>48</sup> In September, Ismail reportedly planned to form an intelligence apparatus within the army but backed down as Antar threatened to move army units against the People's Militia. Early in 1980 several officers loyal to Antar were assassinated, after Ismail's supporters failed in an attempt to kill Antar himself.<sup>49</sup>

The struggle came to a head in April 1980, as Ismail visited Libya for a summit meeting of the Arab rejectionist states. The YSP Politburo met and called for action against several Ismail's supporters, who were accused of irregularities. When Ismail returned, he refused to endorse the decisions. His resignation was demanded and was finally received on threat of "severe consequences" if he continued to refuse. The Central Committee was then convened and accepted Ismail's resignation by a narrow majority.<sup>50</sup>

Details of the balance that decided the outcome of the contest between Ismail and his opponents are not available; comment is necessarily short and speculative. In the past, Ismail was able to manipulate his standing in the party to advance his position. He tried to do so again and failed, although within the YSP he still retained enough support to win a sizable portion of the Central Committee vote. Part of Ismail's mistake may simply have been haste. His grab for power was so open and swift that it united the rest of the leadership before he succeeded in penetrating crucial organizations. A change in the

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<sup>48</sup> Ibid., p. 720.

<sup>49</sup> Goldberg, in Legum, 1981, p. 659.

<sup>50</sup> Ibid., p. 660.

command of the security forces in August 1979 is noteworthy in this context. As part of a general cabinet reshuffle, Ismail's infamous Minister of State Security, Sharjabi, was removed; and Mohammed was appointed chairman of a Committee for State Security. Thus Ismail's principal antagonists headed both the army and the security apparatus. A third force, the People's Militia, which played a key role in the previous power struggle, did not seem to have figured at the moment of Ismail's crisis. The evidence suggests that they were still under his control,<sup>51</sup> but there is no mention of them during the confrontation itself. For any number of possible reasons, Ismail apparently made no attempt to mobilize the militia; it was either insufficient or irrelevant to his predicament.<sup>52</sup>

The Soviet position was also potentially relevant to the outcome of the power struggle. Ismail was the most pro-Soviet of the PDRY leaders. He had always cooperated closely with Moscow, especially in transforming the NLF into a Vanguard Party, the vehicle of his advancement and a principal channel of Soviet influence. During Ismail's reign, the PDRY established its closest links with the Soviets, as evidenced by a Friendship Treaty signed in Moscow in October 1979. But reports conflict on the Soviet attitude to Ismail's deposition. Some postulate an active Soviet role in toppling Ismail, because his rigid, ideological politics exacerbated tensions, supposedly undermining the Soviet regional position.<sup>53</sup> Others, however, claim the Soviets opposed Ismail's overthrow, their ambassador even personally protesting his ouster.<sup>54</sup> A

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<sup>51</sup> For example, in a move designed to undercut Antar, Ismail was reported to have transferred a large number of militiamen to the army in February 1980. *Ibid.*, p. 659.

<sup>52</sup> Many hypotheses suggest themselves: e.g., Ismail did not have the strength to fight it out. In the face of a united armed forces, including the Air Force and the Navy, the Popular Forces would have been insufficient. Alternatively, Ismail may have been uncertain if the Cuban-trained troops would fight for him, especially if the Soviets had backed away from him earlier. Conversely, he may have calculated that he had reasonable chances for a comeback, particularly if he had continued Soviet support, or thought he could regain it.

<sup>53</sup> Perlmutter, 1980.

<sup>54</sup> Halliday, 1981, p. 93.



third interpretation is that the Soviets supported Ismail initially, but acquiesced in his forced resignation, fearing that his unpopularity might undermine their position in the country.<sup>55</sup>

In evaluating these conflicting assessments, reliable information is scarce. The status of the PDRY's relations with the neighboring Arab states, however, particularly Saudi Arabia and North Yemen, does not support the contention that Ismail's dogmatism had become a burden on the Soviet regional position. Rather, the PDRY's regional ties were not bad, and they were improving at the time of Ismail's ouster. The assassination of the Yemeni presidents in June 1978 marked a low point, matched only by the actual clash between the two Yemens in February 1979, itself in part the outcome of the internal upheavals created by the assassinations. But relations with Saudi Arabia began to improve even before the intra-Yemeni war, and relations with the North warmed at the end of the war, with the conclusion of a "unity agreement." From then until Ismail's ouster the unity negotiations proceeded on schedule. Furthermore, the PDRY's performance in the conflict strengthened the Soviet position in North Yemen, ending a long-term, Saudi-instigated process of easing them out of the north. PDRY's demonstrated military superiority led the North Yemeni president to turn again to the Soviets for arms and advisors,<sup>56</sup> despite strenuous Saudi efforts to prevent it.

The atmosphere between the Arab states and the PDRY warmed markedly with Ismail's ouster, but the rapprochement came at the cost of a potential diminution of the PDRY's exuberant support for the Soviet Union. One of the sorest points in the PDRY's Arab relations was the open backing it gave the Soviets in Afghanistan.<sup>57</sup> The PDRY was the first Arab or Islamic state to endorse the invasion publicly, at a time when the Soviets were desperately searching for some kind of international legitimization. Mohammed opposed Ismail's too-exclusive dependence on the Soviet Union, in particular his outspoken support for

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<sup>55</sup> *The New York Times*, April 27, 1980.

<sup>56</sup> The Soviets poured so much equipment into North Yemen on very favorable terms that the government had no use for it. Some of it they eventually sold to Iraq.

<sup>57</sup> Goldberg, in Legum, 1981, p. 661.

the Soviets in Afghanistan. Given the choice between some improvement in already tolerable PDRY-Arab relations under Ismail and a PDRY leadership less inclined to support the Soviets when it clashed with the PDRY's Arab interests, the Soviets are unlikely to have *actively* desired Ismail's removal.

The two other interpretations of the Soviet position ultimately do not conflict with each other. They coincide on several basic points: The Soviets would have preferred Ismail to remain, but at some point in the power struggle acquiesced and did not mobilize their blunter instruments of influence. The troubles in Afghanistan would have been further reason to avoid playing a heavy hand in PDRY politics. And finally, even with Ismail's ouster, there was no immediate threat to the Soviet position. The contending faction was still pro-Soviet, if slightly more independent. Indeed, within a month of taking power, Mohammed visited the Soviet Union and effusive affirmations of solidarity between the two regimes were exchanged.

The ouster of Ismail implied the limitations of the YSP and its auxiliary police forces as a base of support. After a decade of nurturing the party's growth in close collaboration with the Soviets, Ismail found it insufficient to maintain himself in power. Despite the party's claim to the "leading role" in the state and society, Ismail faced a united armed forces whose loyalty he could not draw upon. The army remained an independent force and the ultimate arbiter of power. Ismail's ouster probably implied an upper limit (although quite high) on the the Soviet's ability to determine the PDRY's internal politics without recourse to more violent methods of control.

#### **April 1980-Present: Pragmatic Socialism**

With the new PDRY government came another realignment in the factional struggle. The issues and actors in the present conflict are the reverse of the previous struggle, as the challenge to the ruler. Ali Nasser Mohammed, now comes from the hardliners, led by Ali Antar, his erstwhile ally, and the new Defense Minister, Qassim Salih Muslih. Ismail is another potential rival, by no means inactive despite his exile in Moscow.

Mohammed has succeeded in concentrating more offices in his hands than even Ismail did. He is now head of the party, the state, and the government. The armed forces, however, remain out of his reach. He succeeded in ousting Antar from the Defense Ministry in May 1981. Antar was initially compensated with the Ministry of Local Administration and an honorary post as one of three Deputy Prime Ministers, although he has since lost even his ministerial portfolio. But Antar's successor in the Defense Ministry, Muslih, formerly the Interior Minister, also comes from the ranks of the hardliners. Evidence of both Mohammed's continued attempts to extend his influence in the army and his failure to do so appeared in reports in early 1982 that Muslih had alerted units of the Aden garrison as a warning to the President.<sup>58</sup>

Ismail's revived plotting provides yet another twist to the factional struggle. In the summer of 1981 he flew from Moscow to Bulgaria. There he met with his former Minister of Security, Muhsin al-Sharjabi, appointed the PDRY's ambassador to Sophia after Ismail's ouster, when the Soviets intervened to save Sharjabi from exile in Ethiopia. The PDRY leadership, suspecting a plot, contrived to bring Sharjabi back to Aden in mid-August, where he was promptly arrested and executed.<sup>59</sup> Questions immediately arose about Moscow's role. Speculation ranged from negligence to active collusion, depending on how one assessed the possibility that Ismail's trip could have occurred without Soviet approval and knowledge of its purpose.

Whether Mohammed will be able to maintain his position against both his internal and external opponents is a matter for conjecture. If he should be overthrown, a new power struggle could be expected to ensue, whether between the partners of the current anti-Mohammed coalition or between the returning exiles and the remaining Adenese leadership.

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<sup>58</sup> *Strategy Week*, March 19, 1982.

<sup>59</sup> *Ash-Sharq al-Awsat*, September 7, 1982, London, in *Foreign Broadcast Information Service*, (FBIS)/Middle East and Africa, September 8, 1982.

## Overview

This survey of the PDRY's political evolution since independence suggests both the real gains achieved and the serious deficiencies still remaining. The leadership has succeeded in creating a ruling party with an unambiguously socialist ideology out of an amorphous coalition of left wing intellectuals and Bedouin tribesmen. The party, as it evolved, has maintained itself in power for 15 years, a noteworthy feat among the unstable governments of the Third World. Although there have been challenges to the regime, the effective challenges have come from within the ruling elite and not from without. Compared with other Arab regimes that experienced a revolution, the PDRY government has kept the army's role in politics minimal.<sup>60</sup> No leader has come to power on the back of a military coup. In the PDRY the civilians became officers, and not the officers civilians.<sup>61</sup>

The party's success could not have been achieved without its chief foreign patron, the Soviet Union. Not only did the Soviets support the PDRY against external enemies, but they were closely involved with the evolution of the PDRY's political institutions as well. Various communist parties advised the Yemeni Socialist Party and trained large numbers of its cadres. Even the constitution, written by Eastern bloc advisers, provided a vehicle for the promotion of the party. On at least two occasions--in 1971 and 1978--the provisions of the constitution served to advance the party and its leadership over the prime minister and the government. Soviet bloc assistance in the development of new police forces further buttressed the party. The East German-trained internal security forces under Sharjabi's long tenure acted ruthlessly in support of the party in general and Ismail in particular. The Cuban-trained Popular Militia was consistently closer to the party leadership than to the army, and on at least one occasion--

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<sup>60</sup> This contrast is especially stark relative to Syria and Iraq where another Arab leftist party, the Ba'th, came to power, but was effectively subsumed by the military, ruling in its name.

<sup>61</sup> In October 1978, following the establishment of the YSP, military rank was accorded to six members of the Politburo, including Ismail and Mohammed, who were made brigadier generals. Before that the highest rank in the South Yemeni forces had been colonel.

the clash between Rubay Ali and the Central Committee--its support was critical.

But even with what has been achieved in the PDRY's political development, serious problems remain. The establishment of the YSP as the single Vanguard Party has not succeeded in overcoming the endemic factionalism of the movement, a problem that goes back to its earliest days as a guerrilla organization. None of the several factions that have ruled has adopted a position in opposition to the Soviet Union. Given the intense and sometimes violent splits in PDRY politics, however, the possibility, however remote, cannot be excluded that at some point a faction might appeal for support to an outside power not friendly to the Soviets. Rubay Ali's contacts with North Yemen may have fallen into this category. And speculation of serious Soviet-PDRY strains arose during Ali Nasser Mohammed's tenure following rumors of Soviet backing for Ismail's plotting in Bulgaria.<sup>62</sup> In that event, political means alone might not be sufficient to save the Soviet position, and they would face difficult choices.

In addition to its chronic factionalism, a second and related shortcoming of the YSP is its failure to establish full control over all institutions of the state. The army, in particular, still retains some independence. The importance of the army's autonomy from the party does not lie in any hypothetical right wing coup. The army has been so thoroughly purged and so imbued with socialist doctrine that it is unlikely to challenge the regime's leftist foundation. Rather, the army's independence is in itself a reflection of the factionalism of the ruling elite. Furthermore, it is a reminder that despite the YSP's claim to play the "commanding" role in state and society, the reality falls short of the rhetoric. A clone of the Soviet political system has yet to be established in the sands of South Arabia; what exists is a rough facsimile with some peculiar features of its own.

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<sup>62</sup> Seale, 1982.

### III. INTERNAL VULNERABILITIES OF THE PDRY REGIME

This is not a broad survey of the sub-political system of South Arabia; instead this section examines three problems facing the regime: (1) domestic opposition, (2) incomplete regional integration, and (3) economic stagnation. Although all three issues pose difficulties to some extent, only the third is serious enough to force modifications in the PDRY's policies.

#### DOMESTIC OPPOSITION

Political repression and social upheaval have effectively destroyed the traditional elites that might have challenged the regime. The number of refugees since the revolution--an estimated 600,000 out of a population of under two million--suggests that much of the potential opposition has simply left the country, leaving behind the poorer, less mobile, less educated sectors of the society without a natural leadership to organize and articulate opposition.<sup>1</sup> A ruthlessly effective police control the population that did not flee. Amnesty International estimated some 2000 to 10,000 political prisoners were held in the PDRY's jails in 1976,<sup>2</sup> while several thousand others have simply been murdered.<sup>3</sup> Furthermore, the regime has sought to create a social transformation of the country, the effect of which has been to destroy those classes potentially opposed to it. The government has launched a sustained attack on "tribalism," considered a feudal form of social organization. Leftist economic measures, including the land reforms and the collectivization of agriculture, have contributed to this by depriving the traditional rural leadership, the tribal shaikhs, of their economic bases of power. In all, it is not surprising that the political struggle inside South Yemen has been limited to infighting

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<sup>1</sup> Hirst, 1978.

<sup>2</sup> *Arab Report and Record*, July 1, 1978.1

<sup>3</sup> A former PDRY Prime Minister, Mohammed Ali Haytham, claimed in 1976 that 1500 people had been executed since 1972. Legum, 1978, p. 554.

among the rulers themselves, while the organized opposition to the regime, such as it is, is located outside the country.

Armed exiled groups based in Saudi Arabia and North Yemen failed to topple the regime in the late 1960s and early 1970s. A second major attempt to organize an opposition to the PDRY regime was made in Cairo in 1978, when two prominent South Yemenis, Abd al-Qawwi Makkawi, former Secretary General of FLOSY, and Mohammed Ali Haytham, Prime Minister from 1969-1971, formed the United National Front of South Yemen. Following a sharp and sudden deterioration in relations between Iraq and the PDRY, they shifted their headquarters to Baghdad in the spring of 1980 but returned to Cairo within three months.<sup>4</sup> After the assassination of Rubay Ali, a second, perhaps related group appeared inside South Yemen, calling itself the United National Front. It undertook some acts of sabotage and even succeeded briefly in establishing a radio station before fading. The internal opposition, however, never succeeded in more than harassing the government, and the external opposition alone is incapable of effective action. The most realistic assessment is that the PDRY regime faces no serious threat from its own citizens, whether inside or outside the country.

#### REGIONAL INTEGRATION

The same regional group that seized power in 1967 still holds the reins. Technocratic posts have been given to underrepresented segments of the population, but the control of the army and the internal police remain in the hands of the original clique. The ruling elite's base has, if anything, grown more narrow since the revolution, as factions of the original coalition were successively purged. But in light of the government's unrepresentative character in other respects, the regional bias apparently does not create a much greater threat to its rule.

The exclusivity of the ruling elite involves regional and probably tribal discrimination. The absence of the Adenese nationalist leadership in the original NLF has already been noted. A second area not well represented in the leadership is the Eastern Protectorate, the Hadramaut. Traditionally, the Hadramaut has looked more toward Southeast Asia than Aden. Peculiar as it may seem given the distances,

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<sup>4</sup> Goldberg, in Legum, 1981, p. 664.

many Hadramis, especially before World War II, worked in Singapore and the East Indies, and wealthy families maintained profitable estates there. Among the Hadrami leftists, the same eastward orientation existed, as they supported the "Maoist" faction of the NLF. Actual power, however, was monopolized by Ismail's North Yemeni faction and those from the Western Protectorate. For the most part the Hadrami cabinet level representation has been limited to technocratic positions-- for example, the Hadrami Minister of Construction who, despite all of the PDRY's political upheavals, has served in every cabinet since June 1969.<sup>5</sup>

Despite the government's attack on tribalism, there appears to be a tribal aspect to its rule, although the regime takes pains to conceal it. Given the endless rivalries in the PDRY's politics, traditional allegiances, including tribal support, can be crucial, especially when accompanied by influence in the army.<sup>6</sup> Such a phenomenon is not unique to the PDRY, and it tends to become more pronounced with time and the prolongation of the factional struggle. For example, the leadership in the two ostensibly secular Arab states, Syria and Iraq, is dominated by two narrow sectarian groups, representing 10 and 15 percent of the population respectively.<sup>7</sup> Although counterintuitive, such narrowing may be a prelude to the end of factional strife and some temporary stability. It fosters unity among the ruling elite, which is itself propped up by repression of the rest of the population. The PDRY equivalent appears to be the Dathina tribe, which forms the backbone of the army, and of which the President, Ali Nasser Mohammed, is also a member.

Viewed from the historical perspective, these elements of regional and tribal discrimination look quite different. Emphasis appears not on the narrowness of the regime but rather on the fact that it has

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<sup>5</sup> Such political "tokenism" may result in compensating economic gains. For example, the Ministry of Construction laid 55 percent more asphalted roads in the Hadramaut between 1973 and 1978 than in any other province. World Bank, 1979, p. 150.

<sup>6</sup> Yodfat and Abir, 1977, p. 109.

<sup>7</sup> For an analysis of the evolution of this phenomenon in Syria, see Von Dam, 1979. For a discussion of the ethnic politics of Syria and Iraq, see Schahgaldian.



established control at all over the whole PDRY territory. South Yemen has not been ruled as a single entity in modern times, and the tribes have a long and fierce tradition of resistance to authority. It is a testimony to the efficiency of the regime that it has established one sovereign authority over a disparate population accustomed to an anarchic independence, regardless of regional and tribalistic biases in the PDRY leadership.

### ECONOMIC STAGNATION

The parlous state of the PDRY economy is the most serious internal problem facing the government. South Yemen has always been an impoverished, resource-poor country. It was under the British and remains so today. But the regime's adoption of a socialistic economic system has not fostered economic growth in some key sectors, particularly agriculture. Despite the fact that agriculture received nearly one-fourth of government outlay on development between 1971 and 1977, total production of key crops actually declined.<sup>8</sup> The cause of the deterioration lies in the disruptions caused by the collectivization of agriculture, with its absence of incentives for production and distortions in pricing and marketing. The net result in concrete terms at least in 1979 under Ismail's austere rule was that such basic commodities as rice and sugar were rationed,<sup>9</sup> while other goods, for example vegetables, were usually unavailable after 8:00 a.m. when supplies were sold out.<sup>10</sup> Dissatisfaction with orthodox socialism on the domestic scene extends to foreign economic relations as well. There is a growing disenchantment with Soviet-bloc projects, which have acquired some reputation for poor execution.<sup>11</sup> At the same time Soviet economic aid is insufficient for the PDRY's development needs and is unlikely to increase substantially.

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<sup>8</sup> World Bank, 1979, pp. 27-28.

<sup>9</sup> *The New York Times*, April 1, 1979.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, May 26, 1979.

<sup>11</sup> *The Middle East*, August 1982; *The New York Times*, May 25, 1979.

These problems have led to a greater flexibility in internal policies and a renewed extension of PDRY's economic relations beyond the Soviet bloc. One of the first moves of the new Mohammed government was to relax Ismail's doctrinal economic program with the immediate goal of simply making more goods available in the market. Import prohibitions were relaxed and provisions made for the private marketing of limited amounts of fish and produce.<sup>12</sup>

A more important structural change in the PDRY economy may lie in the attempt to attract foreign capital. The clearest manifestation of the new policy was a law passed in October 1981, providing various rights and incentives to investors, including guarantees against nationalization, the right to repatriate capital after a fixed period, and a five year exemption from taxation.<sup>13</sup> The new atmosphere in Aden has brought about an increasing number of commercial contracts with Western corporations.<sup>14</sup> These developments might appear uneventful by current standards of East-West commerce, but they are revolutionary for the PDRY, which has generally followed a determined course of self-isolation since independence. So intent was the government at one time on preventing outside contacts that a 1974 law even prohibited South Yemenis from speaking to foreigners.

One peculiar feature of the South Yemeni economy has, in fact, pushed for some time in the direction of greater economic liberalization. A large number of South Yemenis--an estimated one in three able-bodied males--work outside the country, primarily in the conservative oil-producing states.<sup>15</sup> The wages they remit back home form the PDRY's single largest source of foreign exchange. Their value in 1977 was six times that of the PDRY's exports and equal to 40 percent of the GDP.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> *The New York Times*, June 22, 1980; *Middle East Economic Digest* (MEED), May 23, 1980.

<sup>13</sup> *Al Nahar al Arabi wi Al Duwali*, No. 252, March 7, 1982, in JPRS, Middle East and North Africa Series, No. 2529, April 21, 1982.

<sup>14</sup> *The Middle East*, August 1982.

<sup>15</sup> World Bank, 1979, p. 43.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 91; Stookey, 1982, p. 90.

The labor migration has economic as well as political implications. To attract the maximum amount of money back into the country, the government must create a function for it, either by providing an attractive supply of consumer goods or a role for private investment capital. Neither of these was compatible with Ismail's dogmatism. Indeed, a major recommendation of a 1977 World Bank review was that the PDRY move more actively to attract worker's remittances, a goal that now appears to be one element behind the government's increased flexibility in economic policy. The political implications of the large number of expatriate workers are less certain, but worth contemplating. If one-third of the male labor force is in the conservative Arab states, they are beyond the reach of the regime's political indoctrination. Furthermore, their view of the world outside of the PDRY is transmitted with the remittances to their families back home. Although the closed nature of the PDRY society makes it difficult to judge with certainty the regime's success in proselytizing its socialist ideology among the population, the large-scale labor migration gives pause for some doubt. Finally, the PDRY's dependence on worker's remittances is politically important in another respect. Potentially, it gives the oil states great leverage. A coordinated movement among them to expel South Yemeni workers would spell economic disaster for the PDRY. Conversely the PDRY could exploit the politically committed segments of its emigrant labor force to incite revolution in the conservative Arab states, but the PDRY's pressing economic needs create a strong disincentive against jeopardizing a major source of foreign exchange.

Such events are less likely now than in the past. The existence of a socialist PDRY has been accepted as fact, however reluctantly, and the PDRY has come to recognize that the attempt to subvert the Arab monarchies carries a high price. The current maneuvering is over how much both the PDRY and the conservative Arab states will concede for a measure of peaceful coexistence.

#### IV. THE PDRY'S REGIONAL RELATIONS

In the fall of 1982 the PDRY's relations with its conservative Arab neighbors were better than they had ever been before. The PDRY and Oman agreed to work for the normalization of relations; and the long-standing, often sporadic, unity talks between North and South Yemen continued. Although it is doubtful that the North really desires union, the talks do serve as a token of the mutual desire to improve relations. The PDRY's Arab rapprochement and its Soviet alliance do not sit easily together, and indeed the South Arabian detente has emerged less out of any positive affinities between the parties than from frustrations on both sides with past policies.

The Arab conservatives never came close to succeeding in their early attempts to overthrow the PDRY regime, and the PDRY's attempts to subvert the Arab monarchies proved equally vain. The PDRY, however, paid a heavy price for its militancy in terms of political and economic isolation and eventually responded by moderating some elements of its revolutionary posture. The stalemate between the PDRY and the conservatives led to a mutual recognition of the advantages of some sort of accommodation. The seeds of this incipient detente were planted at about the same time as the 1973 October War. The war's ramifications within the Arab world further facilitated the South Arabian rapprochement by strengthening the conservatives politically and economically, making them more confident in their dealings with the PDRY, while increasing the cost to the PDRY of persisting in its militant stance. That detente has basically continued since the mid-1970s, advancing in crabwise fashion, subject to setbacks with the vicissitudes of the PDRY's internal politics and occasional polarization in the region prompted by outside crises.

From the conservative Arab perspective, the aim of the detente with the PDRY is two-fold: to end PDRY support for leftist rebel groups and to distance the PDRY from the Soviet Union. Some progress has been achieved on the first point. The most that can be said about the second issue is that although Arab efforts have occasionally stirred internal

debates in the PDRY about its alliance to the Soviets, they have not changed the PDRY's actual policy.

The nature of the present detente can best be appreciated through an examination of the changing course of the PDRY's relations with the conservative Arabs, beginning with their early policy of confrontation with the PDRY, and why it came to be perceived as fruitless, if not counterproductive past a certain point. In looking back to the evolution of the PDRY's relations with its conservative neighbors, we are better able to understand the motives behind the rapprochement, to assess the possibilities for its development or disintegration, and to evaluate its implications for American policy in the region.

#### CONFRONTATION: 1967-1972

Within a short time after the independence of South Yemen, Saudi Arabia organized the PDRY's neighbors in an attempt to overthrow the radical regime. But Saudi efforts were always constrained by the fact that no state, including Saudi Arabia, was willing to commit its army to the conflict with South Yemen. For the most part the conservative attack on the PDRY was limited to support of South Yemeni exiles, who formed armed groups raiding along the PDRY's borders. In 1972 tensions finally increased beyond the level of guerrilla incursions to the point where the armed forces of the two Yemens clashed. The short war, along with longer-term political changes in the region, inaugurated a period of gradually diminishing tension.

Saudi-orchestrated opposition to the South Yemeni regime developed in two phases. Initially, Saudi activity was limited, and a series of events beginning in June 1969 shook the Saudi monarchy and caused the PDRY to appear a far more serious danger. A conspiracy was discovered among the Saudi armed forces, resulting in the detention of some 200 people. As many as one quarter of the air force officers were suspected, and military aircraft were grounded for several weeks.<sup>1</sup> The

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<sup>1</sup> Dishon, 1971, p. 1030; Subsequent investigation revealed that the government had grossly exaggerated a half-baked attempt at sabotage and had rounded up far more people than were actually involved in the plot. Embarrassed at their overreaction, "the authorities made every effort to ensure that the detainees were well treated. They were housed in comfortable villas, well fed, and provided with television. Their families were paid half their salaries." Holden and Johns, 1981, p. 279.

PDRY was not held directly responsible, but its radical posture was seen as contributing to the atmosphere that fostered such events. Moreover, a few months later, in November, PDRY forces captured a Saudi post some 12 miles across the border, raising the suspicion that the PDRY had been encouraged to attack by the vulnerabilities suggested by the summer's unrest.<sup>2</sup> Although Saudi forces recaptured the position ten days later, it marked a considerable escalation of the confrontation between the two countries. These events coincided with a jerk leftward in the South Yemeni regime with the ouster of Qahtan al-Shaabi in June. The rise to power of the radical faction, firmly committed to spreading revolution in the peninsula, caused Saudi fears to increase, especially in light of the contemporaneous assaults on the kingdom.

Before these events, Saudi measures against the PDRY were confined largely to the supply of small quantities of money and arms to South Yemeni exiles, who left the country in large numbers in the years after independence.<sup>3</sup> The more conservative of them--the South Arabian League and the tribal shaikhs--concentrated in Saudi Arabia, and the more nationalist groups crossed into North Yemen. These consisted not only of ex-FLOSY members but of moderate NLF supporters, purged as the regime shifted further leftward. The North Yemeni group was potentially the more effective of the two. Not only did it include many dissident elements from the armed forces, but the terrain was far more favorable for fighting than was the barren desert along the Saudi-PDRY border. Although Saudi Arabia encouraged the exiles' activities, North Yemen did not. The North Yemeni government still maintained some hope of cordial relations with the South. Unlike Saudi Arabia, it was not a monarchical regime, but the moderate faction of the Republican forces that had overthrown the traditional Yemeni ruler. The government of the Yemen Arab Republic (YAR), however, did not exercise sufficient authority to prevent sporadic exile attacks against the PDRY, especially in light of the large numbers of armed refugees fleeing to the North.

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<sup>2</sup> Holden and Johns, p. 281.

<sup>3</sup> Abir, 1974, p. 71.

The Saudis responded to the increasing threat from the PDRY by attempting to organize a more effective challenge to the regime than the earlier haphazard raids. They improved relations with the two other states bordering the PDRY--Oman and the YAR--and they tried to coordinate the activity of the various exile groups as well.

Up until 1970, the Saudis had continued to aid the remnants of the Royalist forces opposed to the North Yemeni government. But in March they struck a deal with the YAR in which the Saudis cut off their aid to the Royalists in exchange for tacit permission to arm and organize the South Yemeni exiles in the North.<sup>4</sup> The agreement gave the Saudis a second, more strategically located base of operations and opened contacts with the better trained exiles.

With Oman, as well, old feuds were buried, somewhat belatedly, to establish a more solid front against the PDRY. A border dispute dating back to the 1940s had led Saudi Arabia to support tribal rebels against the Omani Sultan. Despite the radicalization of the movement and subsequent support from the PDRY, the rebels' old supply route across Saudi territory continued uninterrupted. At the end of 1971, diplomatic relations between Saudi Arabia and Oman were established. The Saudis promised to interdict the rebels' supplies and extended considerable economic aid to Oman, while the Sultan promised diplomatic support for Saudi Arabia in its other peninsular disputes.<sup>5</sup> Furthermore, the agreement resulted in a degree of military coordination in the common fight against the PDRY.

In addition to improving relations with the states neighboring the PDRY, Saudi Arabia began to establish a greater degree of coordination among the exiles themselves. Those on Saudi territory joined in one umbrella organization, the Army of National Salvation (ANS), and those in North Yemen formed the National United Front (NUF). Attempts in 1970 to coordinate a joint attack on the PDRY, however, failed to materialize in the face of the rivalries and jealousies dividing the two groups. The situation deteriorated once again into unconnected and ineffective raids.

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<sup>4</sup> Malone, 1971, pp. 554-5; Stookey, 1978, p. 254.

<sup>5</sup> Abir, 1974, p. 106.

South Yemen, for its part, pressed its own offensive against its neighbors, particularly North Yemen and Oman. With the overthrow of Qahtan al-Shaabi, the PDRY increased its support to rebel groups, especially the rather successful Popular Front for the Liberation of Oman and the Occupied Arab Gulf (PFLOAG), fighting in Dhofar. th Western section of Oman, and operating from bases in the PDRY. On a second front, Abdul Fattah Ismail's prominence within the new leadership led to a harder stance against the YAR. As a northerner, Ismail was a particularly strong advocate of a policy of active subversion of the North Yemeni government. Exiles' raids from the YAR were met by counter-raids and the infiltration of saboteurs across the border.<sup>6</sup> Tensions reached a flash point in March 1972, when South Yemeni authorities assassinated a prominent North Yemeni tribal leader and his retinue. The murders galvanized the tribes against the Southern regime.

Saudi Arabia moved to exploit the opportunity created by outrage at the assassinations to mobilize a coordinated front against the PDRY once again. While 1972 marked the high point of such efforts, the failure of the campaign revealed the inadequacy of the rebel groups alone for overthrowing the PDRY regime. In North Yemen the NUF established its most sophisticated level of organization. It was reconstituted with a political branch that operated in conjunction with a military wing, led by the first Commander in Chief of the independent South Yemeni army. The NUF was bolstered further by unprecedented support from the North Yemeni tribes, a result of the assassinations. The ANS and the NUF stepped up their raids all along the South Yemeni border, and in October 1972 these raids escalated into a direct conflict between the two Yemeni armies. The Arab League intervened to mediate, and under Egyptian and Libyan auspices an improbable unity agreement was concluded between the two combatants.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> Yodfat and Abir, 1977, p. 108.

<sup>7</sup> No one authority in modern times has exerted sovereignty over the entire territory of the two Yemens. In the 19th century, the area was divided between the Ottomans, who exercised nominal suzerainty over the North, and the British in the South. An Anglo-Turkish agreement is the basis for the present division between North and South Yemen. Despite the somewhat legendary basis to the idea of a united Yemen, it is nonetheless an emotive force in both Yemens. Although there may be



Developments on the Omani frontier were also part of the military pressure on the South Yemeni regime. Alarm at the PFLOAG's initial success in Dhofar had led the British to depose the Omani Sultan in 1970 and replace him with his more able son, Qaboos. In the spring of 1972, Sultan Qaboos stepped up his campaign and in July delivered what proved to be a watershed blow in the protracted guerrilla conflict. The concentration of Omani forces along the PDRY's eastern border coincided with the Saudi-sponsored harassment of its northern border.<sup>8</sup> Even this tacit coordination, however, could not overthrow the PDRY regime. At the very least, the direct intervention of Saudi forces would have been required as well, and this the Saudis were either unwilling or unprepared to do.<sup>9</sup>

The 1972 war initiated a slow process of diminishing hostilities. Neither Yemen prevailed in the brief conflict, and each feared the consequences of another round. The war thus reinforced elements on both sides that favored a diminishing of tensions. In the PDRY, Rubay Ali sought a more conciliatory approach to the North. He was less interested in the quickest possible unity between the Yemens, which Ismail sought to achieve through the subversion of the North. Rubay Ali feared that a premature union might lead to the dominance of the North with its far greater population. Moreover, he was sensitive to the heavy economic burden of maintaining the PDRY army in a constant state of alert, in addition to the political cost of regional isolation. The military stalemate, as well as the ascendancy of Rubay Ali for other internal political reasons, strengthened the less bellicose faction. A similar process occurred in the North, where the government had always been divided on the desirability of an aggressive stance toward the PDRY. The unity agreement that the two presidents signed under Arab mediation was greased by the promise of Libyan aid.<sup>10</sup> And although unity

general unanimity on the concept, there is great disagreement ultimately on the character of the putative state and on which of the contending factions would dominate. Furthermore, some powerful groups strongly oppose unity, particularly the northernmost tribes, who fear it would mean subsuming their Islamic sect, Zaydi, under the Shafi'is of the south.

<sup>8</sup> Abir, 1974, p. 11.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid., p. 112.

<sup>10</sup> Stookey, 1978, p. 268, 275.

may scarcely have seemed a realizable goal, given the profound differences in the political systems of the two states, it did affirm the mutual desire to diminish tensions.

The unity agreement did not bring about an immediate and definitive end to conflict between the two Yemens, although hostilities gradually declined. Sporadic acts of sabotage continued, especially in the North, but the negotiating committees established by the unification agreements met throughout the year; and in November the two Yemeni presidents made their first joint appearance. Rubay Ali paid an official visit to the North, where he and his counterpart, President Iryani, appeared before cheering throngs shouting for unity.<sup>11</sup> Relations between the two Yemens continued on the sometimes rocky course of reconciliation until the autumn of 1977, when the North Yemeni president, Ibrahim al-Hamdi, was assassinated on the eve of what was to be the first visit of a YAR president to the South. The assassins were never named, but suspicion fell on those intent on preventing further progress toward unity.<sup>12</sup> Whatever the case, relations between North and South had improved enough that the improbable goal of unity could appear to be a motive.

Tensions between Saudi Arabia and the PDRY declined after the war as well, although relations remained much more strained than those between the two Yemens. Saudi Arabia came to see that its policy of trying to overthrow the PDRY government, given the limited means it was prepared to use,<sup>13</sup> had failed, and perhaps had pushed the PDRY into an even tighter embrace with the Soviet Union.<sup>14</sup> Conversely, the PDRY was being made to feel the heavy cost of its militant stand. Under Kuwaiti mediation, informal discussions began after the 1972 war between the PDRY and Saudi Arabia at the ministerial level,<sup>15</sup> but it took four years

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<sup>11</sup> *Arab Report and Record*, November 1, 1973.

<sup>12</sup> Shaked and Yegnes, in Legum, 1978, p. 661.

<sup>13</sup> *Middle East Intelligence Survey*, August 1, 1977.

<sup>14</sup> Abir, 1974, p. 42.

<sup>15</sup> Litwak, 1981, p. 111.

and further upheavals in the region before these initial contacts were to bear any fruit.

### 1973-1977: THE FIRST DETENTE AND ITS COLLAPSE

A series of events in the Middle East during the period 1973-1977 contributed to a marked change in the regional environment, making possible a degree of rapprochement between the PDRY and its neighbors. The most dramatic of these events, the 1973 October War, shifted the balance from the radicals to the conservatives in the Arab world. With Egypt's dismal performance in the 1967 war, Nasser's brand of nationalism had already lost some of its power. But in 1973, the Arab coalition's first credible military performance, accomplished with equipment financed by Saudi Arabia and supported by the Saudi-led oil embargo, gained new legitimacy for the conservative oil producers. No longer could the Saudis be condemned simply as the reactionary lackeys of American imperialism. Furthermore, the accompanying sharp jump in oil prices gave the conservative oil producers immense economic leverage with which to buttress their newly redeemed standing in the Arab world.

A second development facilitating the PDRY's tentative entry into the Arab fold was Oman's success in suppressing the Dhofar rebellion. As Sultan Qaboos progressed in his fight against the PDRY-supported guerrillas, various Arab parties undertook efforts to mediate between Oman and the PDRY. The military campaign, however, proved more decisive than the political efforts. A Kuwaiti attempt in the summer of 1973 foundered on the long-standing strains in Kuwaiti-Omani relations, when Oman charged Kuwait with tolerating anti-Omani activity in Kuwait itself. Another effort was made in 1974, when an Arab league team was dispatched to the area, but it had no chance of success; it was even refused entry into Aden.

The failure to achieve a formal reconciliation between the two states became less relevant as the rebels were gradually driven back. Beginning with the summer of 1972, the momentum of the conflict shifted in favor of the Sultan. In 1973 a wire and mine barrier across the desert was constructed, blocking the rebel's supply routes; in the same year, Oman received the critical assistance of Iranian forces. By 1974

even the guerrillas seemed to recognize that the tide had turned. In August they announced a new strategy, shifting emphasis from the military to the political struggle,<sup>16</sup> while shortening their name from the PFLOAG to the more modest PFLO, the Popular Front for the Liberation of Oman. Omani efforts proved successful in slowly pushing the rebels further west, toward the PDRY border. As the guerrillas were increasingly squeezed in the last stages of the war, PDRY troops entered the conflict on Omani territory.<sup>17</sup> But their involvement did not prevent the rebels defeat. On December 11, 1975, Sultan Qaboos addressed his nation to declare that the Dhofar war was over.<sup>18</sup> On March 5, 1976, an Arab-mediated cease-fire between the PDRY and Oman went into effect. The PDRY army ceased its shelling, and a month later the PFLO stopped its own bombardment.<sup>19</sup>

Although Arab efforts helped bring about the end of the PDRY's military support for the PFLO, they did not end its political support for the rebels. The PFLO continued to exist as an organization in Aden, even though as an active military force it had withered away. Its mere existence held open the possibility that if the Sultan's position in Oman were to weaken in the future, the PFLO could be reactivated. In the meantime it continued to enjoy access to radio facilities in Aden, broadcasting propaganda against the Sultan.

The end of the Dhofar rebellion had a salutary effect that extended beyond the boundaries of Oman itself. Sultan Qaboos' success demonstrated that the challenge to the conservative rulers posed by self-styled national liberation movements was far from irresistible. His was the first decisively successful campaign against left wing guerrillas in the region, and his victory contributed to a diminishing perception of the threat posed by the PDRY to the other conservative Arab states.

The conservatives of the region were bolstered further by a sudden shift in Iraqi policy toward accommodation with them. Although it had no direct effect on the PDRY, Iraq's move was an element in the growing

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<sup>16</sup> Price, 1975, p. 12.

<sup>17</sup> Jeapes, 1980, p. 221.

<sup>18</sup> *Arab Report and Record*, December 1, 1975.

<sup>19</sup> Jeapes, 1980, p. 228.

detente between radicals and conservatives in the region. The first tangible manifestation of Baghdad's new policy was the surprise resolution of its border conflict with Iran in March 1975, which included Iraq's agreement not to export subversion in the area.<sup>20</sup> It was followed that summer by a settlement of her border dispute with the second conservative pillar of the Gulf, Saudi Arabia. In the early 1970s Iraq and the PDRY had been partners in the support of radical liberation groups from Ethiopia's Eritrean province to the small littoral states of the Persian Gulf. And they then shared the unenviable distinction of being the region's two pariah states. The rapprochement of Iraq's Ba'thist socialist government with the conservatives suggested to the PDRY the possibility of such an alliance and threatened to leave her yet more isolated if she maintained an adamantly revolutionary policy.

Finally, a change of rulers in Saudi Arabia in 1975 contributed one more element to the promotion of regional detente. The assassination of King Faysal in March 1975 marked the end of an era. The last of the Saudi patriarchs, his final decade of rule was characterized by a personal prickliness and an ideological rigidity. His effective successor in foreign affairs, Crown Prince Fahd, favored a more flexible approach, which extended to dealings with the PDRY as well.<sup>21</sup>

The trends toward regional detente had negative implications for the Soviets in this period. Their position in East Africa and the Red Sea was eroding because of the realignment in the Arab world after the October war generally and Saudi petro-diplomacy specifically. After a protracted deterioration in Egyptian-Soviet relations, President Sadat abrogated Egypt's Friendship Treaty with the Soviet Union in March 1976. In May 1977, Russian experts, including military advisers, were expelled from the Sudan. In Somalia, the Saudis calculated how to reduce the Soviet presence there as well.<sup>22</sup> Soviet support for Ethiopia in the

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<sup>20</sup> Chubin, 1982, p. 87.

<sup>21</sup> Stookey, 1982, p. 101.

<sup>22</sup> See Holden and Johns, 1981, p. 473, on Prince Fahd's approach to the United States for weapons for Somalia as early as May 1977, six months before the Soviet expulsion.

Ogaden conflict led to their expulsion from Somalia and the loss of their naval base at Berbera in November 1977. Finally, the Soviet position in North Yemen, which had been declining since the Saudi rapprochement with Sana'a in 1970, reached its nadir with North Yemen's 1975 announcement of a "freeze" in relations with Moscow. In all of these cases, a Saudi hand was to be found offering economic aid and the promise of access to Western arms for a severance of the Soviet connection.

In the context of these developments, the conservative Arab states approached the PDRY as well. The high point in their attempt to integrate the PDRY into the region was the establishment of diplomatic relations between it and Saudi Arabia, an event closely linked to the ending of the Dhofar rebellion. The Saudis treated the questions of relations with the PDRY gingerly, and with seeming justification, as ambassadors were withdrawn within a year of their exchange. The tentative rapprochement fell victim to internal divisions within the PDRY leadership, exacerbated by a sudden polarization in the region stemming from the Somalia-Ethiopian conflict; underlying Soviet opposition to the detente also contributed to its failure.

At Egyptian urging, and through Kuwaiti mediation, Saudi Arabia established formal ties with the PDRY in March 1976. Saudi wariness was evidenced in the stipulation of a six month trial period before the exchange of even junior level representatives, while a Saudi ambassador was not named until 1977.<sup>23</sup> Following the exchange of ambassadors, PDRY-Saudi relations continued to progress for a few more months. The first economic aid agreement was signed in May, and in July, Rubay Ali's visit to Riyadh marked the first such trip of any PDRY president.

The PDRY's improving Arab relations seemed to carry the potential for changes in its relations with the United States as well. The same PDRY faction that supported the rapprochement with Saudi Arabia also favored a restoration of relations with the United States.<sup>24</sup> With Saudi encouragement the United States held talks with PDRY officials at the

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<sup>23</sup> *Arabia and the Gulf*, July 25, 1977.

<sup>24</sup> Shaked and Yegnes, in Legum, 1978, p. 560.

United Nations in the fall of 1977. The discussions led to an agreement to explore the reestablishment of relations, and in January 1978 a Congressional delegation visited Aden.

But even as PDRY-U.S. contacts began and formal progress was being made in improving Saudi-PDRY relations, the detente in South Arabia was collapsing. Although ties with the Saudis offered the PDRY economic aid and an end to its isolation, the PDRY was expected to reciprocate by modifying its revolutionary policies. The establishment of relations with Saudi Arabia was specifically tied to the PDRY's cease-fire with Oman and an end to support for the PFLO. The cease-fire was indeed achieved, although the status of the PFLO remained ambiguous. The PDRY government apparently prevented PFLO guerrillas from crossing into Oman and restricted their political activity on other occasions as well,<sup>25</sup> but it did not disband the organization. In addition, there appears to have been an understanding, at least on the Saudi side, that the PDRY would limit its cooperation with the Soviet Union; circumstances did not favor this, however.

The Soviets saw a threat to their own position in the improvement of relations between the PDRY and Saudi Arabia and actively sought to sabotage the detente. As one author expressed the Soviet perspective:

International reactionary forces are still toying with the idea of turning the (PDRY) away from progressive lines. To this end they resort to the tactics of material promises, attempts to play on nationalist sentiments and capitalize on the idea of Arab unity, which is exploited not in the interests of combatting Zionism and imperialism but to the advantage of imperialism. At the end of 1976 Western and Arab newspapers carried reports that Riyadh which had only recently sent armed mercenaries to the PDRY promised to render its government financial aid amounting to \$400 million and naturally on definite political terms. Reactionary Arab forces spare no efforts to draw the PDRY into the military-political bloc of the countries of the Red Sea basin mapped out for the near future.<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> Ibid., p. 557.

<sup>26</sup> Naumkin, 1978, p. 68.

The Soviets undertook several measures to prevent the development of the PDRY's ties to the Saudis. They cut back their own aid to the PDRY sharply after the establishment of diplomatic relations<sup>27</sup> and were said to be encouraging a reheating of the Dhofar rebellion.<sup>28</sup> PDRY authorities took steps to protect the nascent detente in the face of Soviet opposition. For example, they prevented Fidel Castro from meeting with PFLO members during a visit to Aden in March 1977.<sup>29</sup> Soviet attempts to stir tensions artificially, however, were less important in forcing the PDRY's break than was the spontaneous escalation across the Red Sea in Somali-Ethiopian hostilities.

Soviet bloc intervention in the Horn of Africa conflict forced the PDRY leadership to make a clear and early choice between their Soviet ties and their budding relationship with the Saudis. The decision fell with the former and was the primary cause for the collapse of the PDRY-Saudi rapprochement. Castro's March 1977 visit to the PDRY was part of a tour that included Somalia and Ethiopia. The Saudis observed with concern that following his visit the PDRY began to send military equipment to the Marxist non-Arab government in Ethiopia.<sup>30</sup> Despite strong Saudi disapproval, the PDRY's role in support of the Soviets increased, as the Ethiopian position became more desperate in the face of the Somali offensive. Larger quantities of the PDRY's equipment were shipped across the Red Sea; Aden served as a refueling and staging post in a massive Soviet airlift to Ethiopia in December, and some 250 PDRY troops, mostly tank crews, were dispatched to operate the Soviet equipment, which the Ethiopians, trained on American weaponry, had not yet assimilated.<sup>31</sup> In addition, the Soviet's loss of their facilities in Somalia caused them to turn to the PDRY. Their drydock at Mogadishu was hauled to Aden, and they were reported to be increasing pressure on the PDRY for compensatory access to facilities there.<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>27</sup> *Arabia and the Gulf*, December 5, 1977.

<sup>28</sup> Novick, 1979, p. 9.

<sup>29</sup> *Arabia and the Gulf*, May 9, 1977; Legum, 1978, p. 557, reports the arrest of several PFLO members to prevent their meeting with Castro.

<sup>30</sup> *Arabia and the Gulf*, May 2, 1977.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, December 5, 1977.

<sup>32</sup> *Arab Report and Record*, November 1, 1977.



In addition to the PDRY's support for the Soviets in Ethiopia, tensions between them and the Saudis arose on other issues as well. The continued political existence of the PFLO and its access to radio facilities engendered skepticism about the PDRY's sincerity in its commitment to end its support for that organization. Finally, when Aden Radio repeated charges of Saudi complicity in the October 1977 assassination of the North Yemeni president, the Saudis recalled their ambassador, withdrew all economic aid, and in an attempt to isolate the PDRY asked that other Arab states follow suit. The Saudis even remobilized the exiled South Yemeni tribal forces, and border clashes erupted in the first months of 1978.

Although the PDRY's alignment with the Soviets against the Saudis may have appeared inevitable, there was in fact some division within the leadership over it. The split between the staunchly pro-Soviet Ismail and the more Arab-oriented Rubay Ali extended to the Ethiopian question as well. It was reported that Ismail was particularly insistent on Aden's cooperation with the Soviet airlift, while Rubay Ali opposed the commitment of the PDRY's troops to the Ogaden conflict.<sup>33</sup> It is open to speculation whether Rubay Ali would have sustained the rapprochement with the Saudis on a mutually satisfactory basis if he had been able to maintain control in the PDRY or if the African conflict had not forced the issue so clearly. In any event, he soon lost the struggle with Ismail. His execution and the second assassination of a North Yemeni president, in June 1978, seemed to mark a decisive and dramatic end to an already moribund regional detente.

#### THE SECOND ATTEMPT AT DETENTE: 1978-TO THE PRESENT

Following Ismail's violent assumption of power, tensions increased dramatically between the PDRY and its neighbors. But within two years, by the time of Ismail's own deposition in 1980, the momentum for a limited detente had developed again. The Saudi position, however, had deteriorated since its recognition of the PDRY. In 1976, Saudi Arabia was riding the crest of a number of diplomatic successes. But in 1980, the Saudis' sense of security had been shaken by a series of events and

<sup>33</sup> *Newsweek*, July 10, 1978; Peterson, 1981, p. 16.

Saudi policy developed along a new tack--the cultivation of friendly relations with precisely those forces that constituted a potential danger.<sup>34</sup> The second rapprochement with the PDRY began in this context--one more favorable to Soviet interests.

Foremost among the region's changes was the year-long instability in Iran, culminating at the the end of 1978 with the fall of the Shah and with him the military bulwark of the conservatives in the Gulf. Sadat's trip to Jerusalem in November 1977 and the U.S.-sponsored Camp David accords then isolated Egypt and broke the Cairo-Riyadh axis, which had assumed a dominating voice in Arab councils. Finally, the Soviets established a considerably larger, demonstrably effective military presence in the region. Ethiopia's success in repulsing Somalia was tangible evidence of the Soviet bloc's willingness and ability to mobilize troops and large quantities of equipment to support local allies. And in the PDRY itself, the Soviet presence expanded markedly under Ismail, and was formally expressed in a twenty year Treaty of Friendship and Cooperation, concluded in October 1979. Soviet efforts contrasted with perceived American vacillation in the face of the fall of its major ally, the Shah of Iran, and its seeming neglect of the Saudi position in its support for the Camp David accords.<sup>35</sup>

Immediately after the assassinations of the Yemeni presidents, Saudi Arabia adopted a posture of political confrontation with the PDRY, but it failed to mobilize Arab support, and before the year was up both sides announced a tacit reconciliation. At Saudi and North Yemeni urging, the Arab League voted in July 1978 to "freeze" political and economic relations with the PDRY. But the split in the Arab world over the Camp David accords provided the PDRY an entry first into the "rejectionist" camp and then into the Arab community as a whole. Saudi Arabia accepted its failure to isolate the PDRY, and at the Baghdad summit in November 1978 Crown Prince Fahd and Prime Minister Mohammed formally announced a "reconciliation," while the Arab League voted to lift the "freeze" imposed on South Yemen.<sup>36</sup>

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<sup>34</sup> Goldberg, in Legum, 1980, p.755.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid., pp. 61, 753.

<sup>36</sup> *Middle East Intelligence Survey*, November 16, 1978.

Although both sides continue to view each other with great suspicion and their fundamental perspectives and interests conflict, their cautious reconciliation has survived to the present. The rapprochement has even grown more substantive with time, despite the apparent challenges to it.

The first challenge to the incipient PDRY-Saudi rapprochement was not long in coming, for armed conflict broke out between the two Yemens in February 1979. Much murkiness still surrounds the origins of the war and the aims of the combatants, particularly the PDRY. Certainly a basic factor behind the brief conflict was the simultaneous political instability occurring in both Yemens. North Yemen's two presidential assassinations, in October 1977 and June 1978, triggered coup attempts within the army and the flight of dissident troops across the border, from where they harassed the North Yemeni forces. Likewise, in South Yemen, the purges following Rubay Ali's execution produced yet another tide of exiles to the North.<sup>37</sup> The raids of the two exile groups escalated into a clash between the two Yemen armies, and it appeared that the PDRY, supported by Soviet and Cuban advisors, had exploited the unrest along the border to launch a major invasion of North Yemen.<sup>38</sup> Subsequent investigation, however, suggested that the story was more complex. North Yemen apparently exaggerated the seriousness of the South Yemeni attack in order to gain direct access to U.S. arms, unencumbered by Saudi-imposed limitations. And it is at least open to question whether the YAR did not itself play a role in escalating the conflict because of its anxiety over a perceived Saudi-PDRY rapprochement.<sup>39</sup> The precise story is unlikely ever to be known. At any

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<sup>37</sup> At the end of 1978, the YAR foreign minister estimated that some 2000 officers and men had taken refuge in the North in the previous six months. *Arab Report and Record*, December 15, 1978.

<sup>38</sup> *The Congressional Quarterly*, March 17, 1979.

<sup>39</sup> The same point was made in separate interviews with John Ruskiewicz, U.S. military attache in Sana'a, and William R. Crawford, Deputy Asst. Secretary of State, Bureau of Near Eastern and South Asian Affairs. In Congressional testimony Ruskiewicz described his visit to the combat area and his failure to find levels of damage or conflict approaching that reported by the YAR government. *U.S. Interests in, and Policies Toward, the Persian Gulf*, 1980.

rate, in the course of the conflict PDRY forces succeeded in penetrating some 20 kilometers across the border, where the rough terrain stalled further advance. An early Saudi ultimatum failed to halt the fighting. The subsequent mediation of other Arab states, particularly Iraq, led to a cease-fire within a month of the war's outbreak, and at Kuwait's urging both sides later sealed the war's end with a unity agreement.

Although many observations could be drawn out of the complexities of the brief war, three features of the conflict and its resolution are relevant here. First, the war led to the enhancement of the Soviet position. Second, it increased at least temporarily the influence of the more militant Arab states, particularly Iraq. And third, Saudi Arabia revealed an aversion to even the limited use of its forces in support of the YAR.

The formal end of the 1979 conflict--a cease-fire and unity agreement--repeated the close of the Yemeni conflict seven years earlier. But where the first war ended in a stalemate, the second demonstrated the improvement in the PDRY's military capability in regard to the North in the intervening years. Long-standing suspicions of the dangers to the kingdom from a strong North Yemen led the Saudis to block the flow of U.S. equipment to the YAR once the immediate fighting was over. Consequently, North Yemen turned to the Soviets for arms and advisers. A further benefit to the Soviet tie from the North Yemeni perspective was the hope that a friendly Soviet Union would be more inclined to restrain potential PDRY aggression.

In addition to the Soviet Union, Iraq was another outside power that benefited from the conflict. Although relations between Iraq and the PDRY deteriorated sharply in the late spring of 1979, at the time of the Yemen war, Iraq enjoyed influence in both Yemens and was one of the few Arab states with influence in the South. Its role in mediating the cease-fire gave it enhanced leverage in both Saudi Arabia and North Yemen. In the latter, the PDRY-Iraqi combination forced a leftward shift in the composition of the YAR cabinet.<sup>40</sup>

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<sup>40</sup> Peterson, 1981, p. 24.

Regarding Saudi Arabia, the leverage gained was more subtle, an enhanced ability to influence Saudi policy. It was reported, for instance, that the price for Iraqi mediation was greater Saudi distance from Egypt in the Arab debate over Camp David.<sup>41</sup> Since that time the Iraq-Iran war as well as the split between the PDRY and Iraq have given the Saudis greater leeway in their dealings with Iraq, and the issue is not specifically Iraqi influence over Saudi Arabia through the Yemens. Rather the case illustrates a potential general problem: A state that can manipulate the threat to North Yemen gains leverage over Saudi Arabia as well, for ends that are not likely to be in the American interest.

A third important outcome of the war was the demonstration of Saudi reluctance to become involved in fighting South Yemen. Although Saudi Arabia was prepared to purchase large quantities of American weapons for the YAR when it first appeared that the PDRY attack was serious, it was not willing to use its own forces in support of the North. The Saudis ultimately rejected an American offer to send a squadron of F-15s to provide for Saudi defense while Saudi Arabia sent a squadron of its own planes to aid North Yemen.<sup>42</sup> Some reports attributed the refusal to Saudi Arabia's own doubts about the efficacy of its armed forces against the PDRY.<sup>43</sup> In any event, the reluctance of local powers to confront the PDRY militarily is an important factor in the politics of the regime.

Following the Yemeni War, there was a hiatus in contacts between Saudi and PDRY officials, although no marked deterioration in their tenuous relations. It was not until September 1979 that contacts were renewed, and they eventually culminated in the March 1980 announcement of Ismail's impending visit to Riyadh. It was to be his first trip and the second of any PDRY president, but he was deposed within the month.

That the PDRY was still interested in improving ties with the Saudis may have been surprising, given Ismail's earlier opposition to

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<sup>41</sup> *The New York Times*, May 7, 1980.

<sup>42</sup> *The Congressional Quarterly*, March 17, 1979.

<sup>43</sup> *Strategic Middle East Affairs*, March 14, 1979; *Middle East Intelligence Survey*, March 1, 1979.

such a rapprochement. However, the war had resulted in a period of tranquility between North and South Yemen. Unity talks between the two Yemens proceeded, as did negotiations, stipulated in the cease-fire agreement, between the YAR and the National Democratic Front (NDF), the North Yemeni opposition group supported by Aden. The temporary calm removed one irritant in the PDRY's relations with its neighbors without requiring a specific concession from the PDRY, thus creating an atmosphere more conducive to rapprochement. Second, the regional environment of this rapprochement was more favorable to the Soviets than before, and they may have encouraged it. Since the Baghdad summit of November 1978, the Soviets had adopted a conciliatory approach to Saudi Arabia, which the Saudis reciprocated to a limited extent.<sup>44</sup> Furthermore, the Soviet position in North Yemen grew much firmer after the war, and a regional detente was likely to bolster rather than diminish their influence. Finally, Ismail himself had to maneuver to keep himself in power. In particular, he faced pressures from the faction that ultimately toppled him to improve relations with the Arab states.

Saudi interest in maintaining even a limited rapprochement with the PDRY under Ismail may be as curious as Ismail's interest. The Saudis showed more inclination to deal with threats during this period through conciliation. Furthermore, the PDRY did make concessions on regional issues. After a brief period of renewed PFLO activity in early 1979, improving relations with the Saudis were accompanied by diminished support for the PFLO.<sup>45</sup> The one sphere in which no concessions were made to Saudi sensibilities was in Soviet relations. Not only did Ismail sign the Friendship Treaty with them and permit a considerable expansion of the Soviet presence, but the PDRY was the first Arab state to publicly support the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan. The shift in the YAR's posture after the war, however, gave the Saudis an additional motive for some flexibility on the Soviet issue and for maintaining contacts with the PDRY. The renewed presence of the Soviets in North Yemen alarmed them, the more so because it was part of a broader decline

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<sup>44</sup> Goldberg, in Legum, 1981, p. 754.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid., p. 800.

in Saudi influence on Sana'a. The issue was made particularly acute in light of the Saudi perception of closer YAR ties with South Yemen and its inability to influence the course of the unity talks. As the Saudis felt their leverage decline in the North, contacts with the South offered improved prospects for maintaining influence in the increasingly entangled South Arabian triangle.

Whatever limited rapprochement was effected with Ismail, his ouster and replacement by Ali Nasser Mohammed immediately created a more favorable atmosphere for ties with Saudi Arabia. Even under Ismail, Mohammed was identified as a strong advocate of improved relations with the PDRY's neighbors, who welcomed the change in the PDRY's rulers. Indeed, shortly after assuming power in June 1980, Mohammed visited Saudi Arabia, marking the second trip of a PDRY president to Riyadh. This trend toward improved relations has continued during Mohammed's tenure, and the region currently enjoys an unprecedented degree of rapprochement, albeit within the confines of a very cautious detente.

Within narrow limits there has been a consistent tendency in the PDRY's domestic and foreign policies toward less rigidity and dogmatism. The shift antedates April 1982 but was given a strong boost then, as the PDRY reeled under the impact of devastating spring floods that caused a reported \$1 billion damage.<sup>46</sup> The Arab states responded with emergency aid, King Khalid taking the lead in offering Aden \$5 million, while the small Gulf states provided another \$7.5 million.<sup>47</sup> In the short term, the floods provided the occasion for a display of good will, but given the magnitude of the damage they may also have a longer-term effect, increasing the PDRY's propensity to seek aid from the conservative Arab states. As is usual in South Yemeni politics, the leadership is divided on the policy shift undertaken by the Mohammed regime, and the flooding is likely to have given added weight to the arguments for better Arab relations by the President's faction.

The two basic problems in the PDRY's relations with the conservative Arab states are its ties to the Soviets and its support for insurgent movements. On the first there is little evidence to suggest

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<sup>46</sup> *The Middle East*, July 1982.

<sup>47</sup> *MEEU*, April 16, 1982.

any change under Mohammed. On the second there has been some progress. The two groups of most concern to the Arab states are the PFLO and the North Yemeni opposition, the National Democratic Front (NDF).

The founding of the association of conservative Arab oil producers, the Gulf Cooperation Council, in the spring of 1981 gave the perennial Kuwaiti mediation efforts a new boost. In an early session, it called for the normalization of relations between Oman and the PDRY and charged Kuwait and the United Arab Emirates with mediating between the two. No tangible progress appeared until the devastating PDRY floods. In July 1982 Kuwaiti efforts finally succeeded in bringing about direct negotiations, as Omani and PDRY delegations met in Kuwait. A second round of talks was held in October resulting in a four point agreement that included pledges to abstain from propaganda campaigns against the other state and to work toward establishing diplomatic relations. In apparent fulfillment of the agreement, the Voice of the PFLO stopped broadcasting in early November.<sup>48</sup> Subsequently, as a further step in the implementation of the accord, PDRY and Oman held border talks in January 1983. Although a follow-up meeting tentatively planned for May was not held, Omani spokesmen continued to express satisfaction with the development of relations with the PDRY.<sup>49</sup>

The PDRY-Omani agreement falls far short of establishing cordial relations between the two states. It has not changed the fact that Omani and PDRY gunners still confront each other across the border. But in the context of the deep historical animosity between Oman and the PDRY, the agreement is a marked improvement in PDRY-Omani relations. Moreover, given that it was concluded under the auspices of the Gulf Cooperation Council, the agreement also carries import for the PDRY's relations with the other conservative Arab states.

Indeed the PDRY-Omani agreement has been accompanied by improved relations between the PDRY and other conservative states, including Saudi Arabia. In July 1983 it was reported that Saudi Arabia and the

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<sup>48</sup> *FBIS, Middle East and Africa*, November 9, 1982.

<sup>49</sup> The Omani Foreign Minister on Muscat Domestic Service, May 28, 1983, in *FBIS, Middle East and North Africa*, June 2, 1983; and the Information Minister on the Qatari News Agency, June 18, 1983, in *FBIS, Middle East and North Africa*, June 21, 1983.



PDRY would soon exchange ambassadors for the first time since they were withdrawn in 1977.<sup>50</sup>

A similar, if more entangled, trend has also emerged in PDRY-YAR relations, such that by the summer of 1982 the YAR had beaten back its rebel opposition and relations with the PDRY were as good as they had ever been. The impetus for the development lay in the changing fortunes of battle, which facilitated at least a temporary shift in PDRY policy. Yemen successfully mobilized its forces against the NDF at a time when the April floods weakened the PDRY's ability to support the rebels. It drove the NDF back into the South, completely removing them from YAR territory, and since the summer of 1982 the PDRY appears to have limited the NDF to a political role.<sup>51</sup>

The PDRY leadership had been divided for some time on the question of support for the NDF. The Defense Minister, Salih Muslih Qassim, joined by Ali Antar, advocated the strongest possible support for the NDF;<sup>52</sup> the President, Ali Nasser Mohammed, preferred to cultivate ties with the YAR government, pursuing the unity negotiations. This resulted in a slightly schizophrenic situation in which state-to-state relations slowly improved even as they were punctuated by NDF thrusts and counterattacks by the North Yemeni government.

The complexity of the situation is illustrated by recent events. A renewed thaw in YAR-PDRY relations began in the fall of 1981. The YAR had just successfully repulsed an NDF attack as the two presidents met in September. Agreement was reached on several issues, including abstention from political activity in the territory of the other state, in effect a South Yemeni pledge to abrogate its support for the NDF. But several days after the meeting, Ali Antar, speaking in the name of the Central Committee, informed the North Yemeni president, Ali Salih, that Mohammed did not have the authority to make such a pledge.<sup>53</sup> In

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<sup>50</sup> *Manama Gulf Daily News*, July 24, 1983, in *FBIS, Middle East and North Africa*, July 26, 1983.

<sup>51</sup> Interview with Dr. Malcolm Peck, currently a Middle East Institute Fellow and previously an Arabian affairs analyst at the State Department

<sup>52</sup> *Strategy Week*, April 12, 1981.

<sup>53</sup> *Al Nahar al 'Arabi wi Al-Duwali*, No. 234, October 26, 1981, in the JPRS series on the Middle East and North Africa, No. 2466, January 7, 1982.

November, Kuwaiti mediation brought about a cease-fire, signed by the YAR, the PDRY, and the NDF. In light of the improved situation, Salih made the first trip to Aden of any North Yemeni president, a visit he had previously refused to make in view of the PDRY's support for the NDF. The trip was followed by agreement in January 1982 on a draft constitution for unity between the two Yemens.

But the Kuwaiti-mediated cease-fire collapsed, as the NDF launched a new offensive, while the unity negotiations were suspended and the North proved slow to ratify the unity constitution. With the April floods, the YAR forces once again drove back the NDF. A summit in early May between the two presidents restored the peace; and in August, in a show of renewed cooperation, they jointly toured several Arab states, including Saudi Arabia, in advance of the Fez summit. Since then, with the NDF quiescent, relations between the PDRY and YAR have remained stable.

Despite the current cordiality of the two Yemeni presidents and improved relations between the two governments, the potential for continued conflict exists. The NDF remains an organized body, still supported by important elements of the PDRY leadership. Present restraints on the NDF are linked with Ali Nasir Mohammed's ascendancy. The weakening of his position internally could lead to a resurgence of PDRY-supported NDF activity. Changes in the regional scene could also bring about the reactivation of the NDF. Anything that prompted a deterioration in PDRY relations with the conservative Arabs as a whole would remove much of the PDRY's incentive for a conciliatory stance toward the YAR in particular.

Ironically, even if the PDRY continued to restrain the NDF and PDRY-YAR relations remained cordial, a new problem could emerge. The better the relations between the two Yemens, the more likely an agreement on some form of unity. That would alarm the conservative Arab states, as even a loose federal structure could provide the South the opportunity to extend its radicalism into the North. Keeping the Yemeni pot simmering has been the game in South Arabian politics; the danger is that it may boil over either into war if relations between the Yemens are too bad or into unity if relations are too good.

The increased flexibility of Ali Nasser Mohammed's government toward its Arab ties is also found in relations with the West. Again developments are modest and appear potentially important only in comparison with the isolation of the past. In 1981, for instance, the PDRY foreign minister visited Britain and France, the first such contacts for many years, while Aden recently accredited ambassadors to Denmark, West Germany, Italy, Belgium, Switzerland, and Iceland.<sup>54</sup> As is the case with the Arab states, an important motive behind the expansion of political relations is an attempt to ameliorate the PDRY's dismal economic situation, the details of which have been described above.

### Future Prospects

The policy shifts of the current PDRY regime have not been large enough or sustained enough to provide a firm basis for evaluating the future. The situation is unsteady, with three hypothetical paths of development: a normalization of ties between the PDRY and its neighbors; a continuation of the current armed and wary detente; or a deterioration of relations and a return to the active hostilities of the early 1970s. It is possible to conceive of the development of all three, although the second, with a wide scope for variation in the degree of detente, would appear most likely.

A genuine normalization of PDRY-Arab relations is not possible as long as the PDRY continues to identify its national interest in close parallel with the Soviet interest and extends support to Russian forces. But under some conditions, a dramatic PDRY-Soviet split could occur. For example, given the incessant factionalism of the PDRY's politics, the Soviets might be drawn into backing the losing group, perhaps in a failed coup attempt, or at least be perceived as having done so. The winning faction, in retaliation and fear of a renewed effort, might break its Soviet ties.

A longer term prospect for a diminished Soviet presence could be generated out of frustration at the slow progress in economic development the Soviet connection imposes. Neither scenario can be excluded, but neither is likely, and the first is admittedly remote.

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<sup>54</sup> *The Middle East*, August 1982.

Soviet clumsiness in the PDRY's internal politics cannot be relied upon, and they have handled the situation adroitly to date, although there were reports of troubles in the summer of 1982 between the Ali Nasser Mohammed government and the Soviets. Some speculated at the time about a PDRY-Soviet break.<sup>55</sup> As for the second scenario, frustration with economic development under the Soviet aegis is compensated for by other benefits from the Soviet relationship. Not only do the Russians offer the PDRY regime security from external and internal enemies, but Eastern bloc experts are involved in nearly every technical aspect of life in the PDRY, from tugboat captains in Aden harbor to managers of the PDRY's fish processing plants. Furthermore, if the PDRY leadership ever did begin to threaten the Soviet presence, the Soviets might take drastic action, perhaps covertly through their influence in the internal security apparatus. Such possibilities would probably deter all but the most determined or desperate of leaders.

The opposite case from a dramatic improvement in PDRY-Arab relations would be a deterioration into armed conflict and the renewal of the exceedingly tense and hostile relations of the early 1970s. Such an eventuality is more likely than the first but still is not the most probable of developments. Given the persistence of a minimal level of detente over recent years, only a major change in the regional balance would return the area to sustained confrontation. This could occur as a result of events in North Yemen, for example. If the NDF succeeded in establishing a left-wing regime in Sana'a, the combined Yemeni threat might force the Gulf states into a recognition of the failure of the conciliation strategy and a greater willingness to confront the revived danger of radicalism, perhaps in collaboration with the West. The Saudi contingency for a hostile North Yemen is to create a buffer zone in the Northern half of the YAR, where for many years the Saudis have armed the tribes and maintained their friendship. But even while encouraging tribal rebellion in the YAR, the conservative Arabs might choose not to confront the PDRY, and much would depend on other factors affecting their security, including the state of their relations with the United States. If the Arab states felt vulnerable because those relations were strained, as has happened periodically, or if doubts existed about the

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<sup>55</sup> Seale, 1982.

strength of the American commitment and its ability to project force effectively, or if the Arab rulers felt that internal sentiment did not permit a close identification with the West, then the increased danger could lead at least some states into a redoubled attempt at conciliation with South Yemen.

Other events short of a drastic change in the regional balance could prompt a deterioration in South Yemen's relations with its neighbors. A distinct possibility is a faction struggle that brought the hard-line group into power. Although Mohammed appears to be in control for the present, this historical survey of the PDRY has demonstrated the volatility and violence of political change in Aden. A hard-line faction still exists within the PDRY, skeptical, if not opposed, to Mohammed's policy of detente, while the Soviet Union continues to maintain Ismail in Moscow. A second possibility derives from PDRY-Soviet ties. Aggregate PDRY support for the Soviets could bring about the end of the current detente, as PDRY support for the Soviets in Ethiopia ended the first. But the deterioration in relations provoked by both these scenarios need not be permanent. Contacts on some level might well resume, as the hardliners assumed responsibility for improving the PDRY's economic condition, while the conservative Arabs calculated that maintaining ties provided some moderation of the PDRY's worst potential.

The alternative to a deterioration of relations in the context of an underlying detente is an improvement in relations, but still within the limits of mutual wariness. This would seem to be an equally plausible development. Again, much would depend on the course of the PDRY factional struggle, and would presume that Mohammed, and those who share his concern for economic development, succeeded in establishing firm control. But even if they did, it remains to be seen how far they would go in meeting the Arab states. The indications are that Mohammed is inclined to improve relations with the YAR and Oman at the expense of diminished PDRY support for the NDF and the PFLO. But there is no evidence that Mohammed is prepared to reduce the Soviet presence for the sake of reconciliation, although he might be less inclined than others to cooperate with them in specific instances that were particularly provocative to the Arab states. Given these limits then, a PDRY-Arab

rapprochement could, at best, diminish tensions on the Arabian peninsula proper but probably could not end the fundamental danger posed by the Soviet presence in Aden.

## V. CONCLUSIONS: IMPLICATIONS FOR U.S. POLICY

The long-standing debate among the conservative Arab states on their policy toward the PDRY is a particular instance of a general issue in international relations--how to treat a hostile state that cannot be easily defeated. Is it better to isolate the state politically and economically, or is it possible to moderate it through manipulating economic and political ties? This is also at the heart of debates on East-West relations and is not a bad context for understanding the issues involved in the PDRY case. In South Arabia, however, the situation is distinguished by the prominent role played by U.S. allies. Not only is the United States not the main protagonist, but historically it has not been directly involved in the region. The primary actors, the pro-Western Arab states, have adopted a position of hesitant detente, although it is questionable whether the modest gains to date will prove enduring.

Because of the tenuousness of the detente and its results, U.S. policy, in conjunction with American allies, could still range between the two traditional poles of confrontation and conciliation. It is not unlikely, for instance, that some armed clashes will occur between the PDRY and its neighbors in the future. If a confrontation policy were chosen, the clashes could be the occasion for a coordinated response to the PDRY by the YAR and Saudi Arabia; beyond the peninsula, Egypt; and beyond the Arab states, elements of the U.S. Rapid Deployment Joint Task Force and the French forces in Djibouti--all the pro-Western forces of the region.

But such a contingency would be possible, if at all, only in the longer term. Before it could even be considered, the immediate problem of the weakness of local states, in particular North Yemen, would have to be addressed. The YAR faces a fairly strong insurgent movement, and the Soviets maintain quite a large presence there, far greater than the American. In 1980, the Soviets had 200 military advisors in the YAR, compared with "five or six" Americans.<sup>1</sup> A Western presence would have to

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<sup>1</sup> *U.S. Interest in, and Policies Toward, the Persian Gulf*, 1980, p. 174.

replace the Soviet before the YAR could participate in a coordinated attack on the PDRY. Even if that problem were overcome, however, others would remain. A purely Arab front would face the distinct possibility that other forces would come to the PDRY's aid, perhaps Ethiopians or the 10,000 Cuban troops currently stationed in Ethiopia, in addition to Soviet action to defend the PDRY. If the French and Americans joined to support the Arab force, the situation could easily backfire, with the conservative Arabs charged with collusion with Western imperialism. The French position in Djibouti might be jeopardized, along with the facilities granted the RDF in several Arab states. Given the risks, such measures could only be undertaken with great confidence of their success. That is unlikely, considering the present regional balance.

A posture short of armed confrontation with the PDRY also exists. More active attempts to organize subversion against the regime could be made. But this option, too, meets some of the same objections raised previously. There is little reason to believe that a campaign of sabotage and low-level guerrilla incursions against South Yemen would be more effective than in the past. Furthermore, it would prompt retaliation against North Yemen, the weak link in the pro-Western chain, removing whatever restraints exist now on the PDRY's support for the NDF. A policy of renewed subversion would only raise tensions and increase the vulnerability of the conservative states, without offering much hope of real gain.

If there is no effective strategy of confrontation against the PDRY, then a policy of political and economic isolation might be considered. This was tried as recently as 1978. Although it did remind the PDRY of the heavy cost of a militant stance and probably contributed to Ismail's fall, alone it is insufficient. It is practical only as part of a more complex "carrot and stick" policy. A posture of unrelenting hostility toward the PDRY goes against the determined attempts of some states (e.g., Kuwait) to try to reach some form of gradual accommodation. Moreover, an element of the current detente--the initiation of talks between Oman and the PDRY--has been one of the main diplomatic achievements of the GCC, and in backing the continuation of talks, the organization has implicitly lent its support to a



continued policy of detente with the PDRY. Whatever the Saudi preference may be, there is not an Arab consensus for permanently isolating the PDRY, particularly when the PDRY itself adopts a tone of accommodation and takes some measures to make itself more acceptable to the Arab states. And even should some sudden event prompt a mobilization of Arab sentiment against the PDRY, isolation as a long-term strategy is problematic. It either has no effect on the PDRY, in which case it is useless, or it achieves some minor success, which in turn becomes the basis of a renewed effort at detente.

Thus, independent of any U.S. position, the Arab stance toward the PDRY is likely to be some form of detente, warmer or colder as circumstances suggest. Within this context, there is a background role for the United States to play in shaping the parameters of the South Arabian detente. Ideally the conservative Arab states would make economic aid and political ties contingent on genuine moderation in the PDRY's policies. The South Arabian detente should not develop on terms that amount to the conservatives' capitulation. But the will of the conservative Arab states to hold out for favorable terms is most undermined when they feel threatened, as happened in 1979, following the Yemen war. In general, U.S. policies that enhance the Arab states' sense of security will contribute to more rigor in their dealings with the PDRY.

Specifically, North Yemen's position is weak and confused. The tribal habit of playing both sides against the middle has reintroduced a considerable Soviet presence into the country. This is not the place to launch into an analysis of American-North Yemeni relations. But the United States should consider how to take steps to improve its relationship with the YAR and strengthen the regime against the NDF.<sup>2</sup> Such a policy is not only justifiable in its own terms, but would have a positive effect on the posture of the conservative Arab states toward South Yemen. The implementation of such a policy would require close cooperation with the Saudis, the YAR's principal financial supporters; their assistance dwarfs America's aid program. Saudi Arabia, however, is ambivalent about the desirability of a strong North Yemen, as it

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<sup>2</sup> For an analysis of the causes of Western weakness in the YAR and some thoughtful suggestions on improving relations see Van Hollen, 1982.

fears the YAR's potential revanchist ambitions. Nonetheless, as strong arguments can be made for the preferability of an American rather than a Soviet-armed North Yemen, perhaps a degree of coordination could be achieved between the United States and the Saudis on a policy aimed at circumscribing the Soviet presence in the YAR.

In addition to strengthening the PDRY's neighbors, the United States might under the proper circumstances, consider playing a subsidiary role in the South Arabian detente itself. The United States has not had diplomatic relations with South Yemen since the PDRY broke relations in 1969; indeed, the PDRY is currently on the State Department list of countries supporting international terrorism. As a communist country, the PDRY is subject to export license controls. The only effect of the State Department list is to restrict aircraft sales, and the effect on the PDRY is more rhetorical than substantive. The PDRY leadership might at some point choose a stance more independent of the Soviet Union, but an overtly hostile U.S. posture is an impediment to such a shift. At some appropriate time, the United States might consider quietly dropping the PDRY from the list of countries supporting international terrorism. It could scarcely be argued that this would accord the PDRY international legitimacy, given the frequency and range of contacts already existing between the PDRY and Arab and European states. Rather, such a move would make the U.S. posture more consistent with its allies' established position.

A small, unofficial American presence in the PDRY may evolve on its own. Recent PDRY encouragement of foreign investment has lead a few U.S. companies to explore possibilities there. America's reputation for technological superiority makes U.S. investment particularly attractive, although the PDRY's poverty will severely limit its ability to bring in foreign investors. Nevertheless, the presence of even a few Americans in the PDRY would create a different situation than now exists. The economic contacts could serve as a basis for evolving political exchanges as well, if other considerations were also favorable to such developments.

Some have suggested that the United States adopt a more forward approach and reestablish diplomatic relations with the PDRY.<sup>3</sup> There are,

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<sup>3</sup> For example, see Peterson, 1981, p. 33.

however, reasonable arguments against doing so at this point. Probably little would be gained, either with regard to increased intelligence or improved relations. The movement of foreigners in the PDRY is so restricted that a diplomatic presence would not be likely to contribute much to U.S. information about the country. In addition, the establishment of diplomatic relations could easily lead to very bad relations. There would be little to build upon, as the United States would not be prepared to offer the PDRY what it might want most, arms sales and economic aid; and a quick deterioration of relations would be a distinct possibility.

American-PDRY perspectives and interests conflict on a wide range of issues, including the U.S. presence in Oman as part of the Rapid Deployment Force. The development of the U.S. position there, including exercises with the Omani forces, could prove to be a repeated source of friction, exacerbated rather than diminished by the opportunity to exchange conflicting views. Furthermore, ties with the United States are more difficult for a country like the PDRY to sustain than are relations with European countries. Particularly in the Middle East, in part because of the Arab-Israeli conflict, the United States is the standard whipping boy in anti-imperialist rhetoric. A premature U.S. presence in South Yemen could provoke increased PDRY tensions with the west as a whole. Controversial, hastily established ties with the PDRY might exacerbate its factional strife, perhaps provoking a Soviet-encouraged putsch against the more moderate group. It would be most prudent for the United States to let the Europeans, whose presence is less provocative, take the lead in developing the West's political relations with the PDRY.

U.S. aloofness toward the PDRY, however, ought not to be a permanent policy. This Note has sought to demonstrate that, given the PDRY's chronic political instability, the Soviet inability to sustain its economic development, and the PDRY's sensitivity to its isolation in the Arab world, the situation is in flux. The conservative Arab states are already trying to exploit these indeterminacies, and they are far better positioned than anyone else, including the United States, to do so. Should their efforts bear fruit in nursing the evolution of a PDRY

leadership more open to the West and more independent of the Soviets, the United States would have a role to play. For the time being, the optimal U.S. stance toward the PDRY would be a skeptically open mind with neither naive optimism about tossing the Soviets out nor hard-boiled cynicism about the subservience of the PDRY leadership to the Soviet Union.

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