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Author(s): Robert D. Burrowes

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**Robert D. Burrowes**

## PRELUDE TO UNIFICATION: THE YEMEN ARAB REPUBLIC, 1962–1990

On 22 May 1990, the Yemen Arab Republic (YAR) and the People's Democratic Republic of Yemen (PDRY) carried out their old pledge to unite into a single Republic of Yemen. This historic event occurred less than three years after the YAR, seemingly secure and comfortable in its separateness, celebrated its silver jubilee in 1987. This article traces and assesses political development and socioeconomic modernization in the YAR over this more than 25-year period, and hazards some guesses on the implications of these changes for current efforts to implement Yemeni unification.

The YAR, or North Yemen, as it is often called, is much more to the west than to the north of the PDRY, or South Yemen, and the two parts of Yemen together occupy the southwest corner of the Arabian Peninsula, across the Red Sea and Gulf of Aden from Ethiopia (Eritrea), Djibouti, and Somalia. North Yemen shares roughly half of its landward border with Saudi Arabia, and much of this border in the east and northeast, largely in desert areas, is undemarcated. A small portion of the equally long former border between the two Yemens, the portion nearest their intersection with Saudi Arabia in the Ramlat al-Sabatayn desert, also remained undemarcated at the time of unification.

Only about the size of South Dakota or Nebraska, North Yemen is dramatically varied in geography and climate. The mountainous north–south spine of the country rises abruptly from the Red Sea coastal desert, reaching 12,000 feet at one point, and provides jagged battlements for the high plateau that stretches eastward at elevations of several thousand feet or more. These central highlands then descend very gradually to the east, ending in the sand desert beyond Marib, and more sharply to the southern uplands around the cities of Ibb and Taiz. The southern uplands and the high, rugged mountains on the western flank of the central highlands tease most of the moisture out of the seasonal monsoons, and it is in these areas that most of North Yemen's terraced agriculture and most of its more than 9 million people are found. Here most of the population lives in a few thousand widely scattered villages and tiny hamlets, and only a small percentage is concentrated in the several cities and a few dozen large towns. An even more dispersed settlement pattern prevails in the rest of the country, which is more arid and more sparsely populated.

North Yemen and Afghanistan probably resemble each other more than either resembles any other late-developing country, and the resemblance is as much a

matter of culture and social organization as it is of formidable geographic divisions and widely scattered populations. Like Afghanistan, North Yemen is a pervasively Islamic country, one that over the centuries has had little direct contact with non-Muslims other than its own indigenous Jewish community. Nearly all North Yemenis are either Zaydis, who are Shiʿi Muslims, or Shafiʿis, who are Sunni Muslims, and this sectarian division has been a major basis of social differentiation and identity down to modern times. The Zaydis, in the minority but often socially and politically dominant, have long occupied the highlands, whereas the more numerous Shafiʿis have dwelled in the southern uplands and on the coastal lowlands. While the Zaydis tended culturally to turn inward and to isolate themselves, the Shafiʿis were more open to the changing outside world, to Aden and beyond.

North Yemen, again like Afghanistan, is notable for its tribal organization. In both countries, rather than being vestiges of the past, tribes and tribalism are vital forces that continue to play key roles in the political as well as the social and cultural spheres. Despite the tendency to categorize the Zaydi highlands as “tribal” and the Shafiʿi areas to the south and along the coast as “peasant,” tribes and tribalism are part of the sociopolitical landscape of all regions of North Yemen. Nevertheless, what has distinguished the highlands from the other areas for centuries is the greater importance of the tribe as a unit of identification and action as well as the greater extent to which the tribes could be mobilized and organized into large tribal confederations—namely, the age-old Hashid and Bakil confederations.

The large part of the North Yemeni population that is, and for centuries has been, outside the tribal system—namely, the various “protected” people and the inhabitants of the towns and cities generally—is organized into a parallel system of social stratification that was bounded on top and bottom by castes. On the top are the sayyids, those claiming privilege by virtue of descent from the Prophet, and on the bottom is the servant caste (*akhdam*). In between are the great and not-so-great *qadi* families, the market people (shopkeepers, merchants, and artisans), and others distinguished by more demeaning livelihoods (*muzayyan*). This hierarchical order was more open in theory than in practice.<sup>1</sup>

Hindsight suggests the breakdown of the first quarter-century of North Yemen’s republican era into three periods: (1) the Sallal era (1962–67), the wrenching first five years under President Abdullah al-Sallal, marked by the 26 September Revolution that began it, the long civil war and foreign intervention that immediately followed, and, above all, the irreversible opening of the country to the outside world; (2) a 10-year transition period (1967–77), distinguished by the end of both the Egyptian military presence and the civil war, the Republican–Royalist reconciliation under President Abd al-Rahman al-Iryani,<sup>2</sup> and the subsequent attempt by President Ibrahim al-Hamdi to strengthen the state and restructure politics; and (3) the Salih era (1978– ), a period now identified with both the long tenure of President Ali Abdullah Salih and the change from political turmoil and economic uncertainty at its beginning to political stability and the prospect of oil-based development and prosperity in more recent years.<sup>3</sup> The nearly 28-year history of the YAR ended in May 1990 with the creation of the Republic of Yemen, President Salih at its head.

Many important political and socioeconomic changes have taken place in the YAR since 1962, and many of these changes, especially most of the positive ones, were compressed into the years since the YAR's 15th anniversary in 1977—so much so that a detailed knowledge of conditions in the YAR in the late 1970s would not prepare one well for features evident on its silver jubilee in 1987. Nevertheless, the decade from the late 1960s to the late 1970s was also important, a transitional period in which much-needed time was bought by a few modest but pivotal moves and, most important, by economic good fortune. Above all, global and regional economic events over which YAR leaders had no control facilitated a huge flow of funds into the country in the form of both foreign aid and remittances from Yemenis working abroad. This period of transition was much needed because the changes that had buffeted Yemen in the five years following the 1962 Revolution had left it both unable to retreat into the past and ill-equipped to go forward. In short, the ability to move forward rapidly in the 1980s was largely the result of the possibility afforded for a breather in the 1970s.

#### CONSOLIDATION OF THE MODERN TERRITORIAL STATE

Given the isolation and the fragmented nature of North Yemen's traditional socio-political order, it is not surprising that much of the YAR's first quarter-century would be taken up by what A. F. K. Organski calls "the politics of primitive unification," his first stage of political development, in which an evolving state seeks to establish sovereignty over a territory and the people or nation it contains.<sup>4</sup> Earlier, during the first six decades of the 20th century, the two great imams of the Hamid al-Din family, Yahya and his son Ahmad, had done much to extend their domain and increase their sway over it—to forge a king-state much as the kings of England and France had done centuries earlier.<sup>5</sup> To this end, Yahya and Ahmad strengthened the state by minor borrowings of both personnel and bureaucratic and military organization from the recent Ottoman Turkish occupiers of Yemen and by developing to a fine art such arcane instruments of governance as the hostage system and the punitive billeting of soldiers. The two imams secured the borders and pacified the interior to a considerable degree over this long period. They subjugated many of the lesser tribes and formed alliances with the major tribal confederations, most notably the Hashid and Bakil. They permitted only a few Yemenis to go abroad for work or study, and they let almost no foreigners or foreign goods enter the country. In addition, father and son used their positions as defenders of Yemen against the Ottoman occupation in the north and the British presence in Aden and elsewhere in the south to strengthen their claim to both spiritual and temporal authority over their fellow Zaydis in the highlands and to at least temporal authority over the Shafis in the southern uplands and along the coast. This reenergized the traditional base of a nascent modern Yemeni nationalism.

Even under these willful and able imams, however, the reach of Yemen's traditional theocratic state was not extensive and its sway was by no means absolute. Because of small numbers and limited skills, the bureaucracy had little ability to regulate the behavior of citizens, extract resources from society, and use those resources in productive ways. Government as a set of offices, places wherein

functionaries functioned, was almost nonexistent; instead, the realm was run largely out of the Yemeni equivalent of the back pockets of the imams' sons and a small number of notables and officials. In place of a large standing army, the imams relied on the levy of tribal forces in times of need. As a result, the tribal leaders who controlled these forces were more the allies than the subjects of the imams, trading allegiance and armed support for nearly complete autonomy within their vast tribal domains.<sup>6</sup>

#### *Center–Periphery Relations in the YAR*

The men who made the revolution in 1962 found themselves preoccupied from the outset with the need to create a state with the capacity to maintain public security and provide a minimal level of services. The long civil war that closely followed the revolution both increased this need and interfered with its being met. Many Egyptian advisers helped erect a full panoply of ministries and other state agencies almost overnight. Unfortunately, many of these institutions existed in name only—“ghosts,” as some Yemenis called them. Others looked and functioned like pale copies of the Cairo originals, were largely controlled and staffed by Egyptians, and were focused increasingly on the latter's need to extricate themselves from what they came to call “our Vietnam.” Most paradoxical of all, the YAR did not even get much in the way of a modern military establishment out of the civil war, since it was fought by Egyptian forces that had almost exclusive use of the Soviet weaponry made available for the defense of the republic.<sup>7</sup>

Not surprisingly, the balance of power between the tribal periphery and the state at the center tipped back toward the tribes over the course of the civil war. The territory that imamate Yemen had embraced was quickly divided *de facto* among the Republicans, the Royalists, and the tribal sheikhs, the last coming to see autonomy and subsidies as the fruits of playing the two competitors for the state off against each other. As a consequence, and despite aspirations to modern statehood, the reach of the new YAR extended little beyond the villages and towns along the edges of the triangle in the southern half of the country that was traced by the roads linking the republican cities of San<sup>c</sup>a<sup>2</sup>, Taiz, and Hudayda. Even many areas in the interior of this triangle were beyond the reach of the republican state.

The Egyptian withdrawal in 1967 quickly led to the overthrow of President al-Sallal, and these interrelated events opened the way to the Republican–Royalist reconciliation that finally marked the end of the civil war in 1970. In part, the reconciliation involved for the first time the granting of high state office to leading tribal figures in exchange for their allegiance to the republic. Although this incorporation of the tribalists nominally extended the domain of the state, the power of the regime headed by President Abd al-Rahman al-Iryani was in fact more apparent than real in the tribal heartland to the north and east of San<sup>c</sup>a<sup>2</sup>. The influence of the sheikhs over the fragmented and largely “tribalized” army and in the central government, especially in the quasi-legislative Consultative Council (Majlis al-Shura), enabled them to dilute and deflect efforts to strengthen the state in ways that might later be used against the tribes.

In addition, the Republican–Royalist reconciliation had been purchased at the price of expelling the small modernist Left from the body politic in 1968, and this also compromised moves to increase the domain and sway of the YAR in the early 1970s. This expulsion of the mostly Shafīi Left weakened the position of all advocates of a strong state, undermined the allegiance of the more modern Shafīi population in the southern provinces, and ignited a low-level rebellion in the southeastern borderland adjacent to the newly independent PDRY.

Nevertheless, some state-building of lasting importance was achieved at the center during the al-Iryani era. Some of the ministries and other agencies hastily erected after the revolution were strengthened, among them the Yemen Bank for Reconstruction and Development and the Treasury Ministry (renamed the Ministry of Finance). The Central Bank of Yemen was established, making possible the beginnings of a commercial banking system, and the Central Planning Organization (CPO) was founded. Quickly becoming the YAR's model modern institution, the CPO served as the major interface between Yemen and both foreign development agencies and aid donors, prepared the YAR's first development plan, and conducted its first national census. As these activities suggest, economic necessities as well as tribal and other political constraints caused Yemeni leaders during the al-Iryani era to concentrate on financial and economic institutions rather than the military establishment or the state bureaucracy. Only halting first steps were taken toward creating a modern civil service and toward the reform and reequipping of the armed forces, matters of great political sensitivity.

President Ibrahim al-Hamdi, an advocate of state power by virtue of his traditional training as a qadi as well as his modern training as an army officer, used his three and one-half years in office in the mid-1970s to take several initiatives designed to bolster the state. Unfortunately, his major political move served to shorten the reach of the state at the same time that it consolidated the state at the center. Aware that the big sheikhs were using their new positions in the state to protect the tribal system from state encroachment, al-Hamdi moved quickly and on a number of levels to drive the most powerful of them from those positions in 1975. They reacted with a virtual rebellion, and the long standoff that ensued had the effect of decreasing the domain of the state and extending the area of de facto tribal autonomy. Al-Hamdi's efforts to make up for this loss of support for the state by reincorporating the modernist Left seemed hesitant and even half-hearted, and had not proceeded very far at the time of his assassination in 1977. Despite the failure of his grand strategy, however, al-Hamdi promoted efforts to create or reform state agencies at the center, initiated the first major reequipping and reorganization of the armed forces, and fostered at the popular level an ideology of development and the idea of exchanging the benefits of state-sponsored modernization for allegiance to the state.<sup>8</sup>

The era of President Ali Abdullah Salih followed the eight-month tenure of President Ahmad al-Ghashmi, who, like al-Hamdi just before him, was assassinated. Salih's tenure began in 1978 amid predictions that the regime and possibly even the YAR as a territorial entity were doomed. Defying the doomsayers, his long term of office has been witness to major gains in state-building and those state actions most central to Organski's notion of primitive unification. Indeed, it



seems that this first stage of political development ended late in the first decade of the Salih era, and that only then did the attribute of sovereignty in the republican state clearly exceed that in the imamate at the apex of Imam Yahya's reign. Able and persuasive advisers and the logic of the presidency apparently made a statist of this soldier of tribal background with little formal education.

After a mixed, erratic performance in the late 1970s, the Salih regime slowly increased the capabilities of the state on the provincial level as well as at the center, for the first time making the republican state more than just a nominal presence in the provincial capitals and the countryside. Admittedly, the YAR's relatively small and youthful bureaucracy grew at a faster pace than did its reform, and efforts in the 1980s to improve the workings of the civil service and the ministries and other agencies were modest and mainly cosmetic. By contrast, however, the armed forces were reformed, enlarged, and reequipped beginning in 1979 and most recently in 1986 and 1988. The successful introduction of conscription and professional training for the officers corps strengthened the military at the top and in the ranks. These gains were only partly compromised by the new privileges and arrogance of the military in general and soldiers from President Salih's own tribal region in particular.

The most dramatic evidence of the increasing ability of the YAR to exercise power within its own borders was the political–military defeat of the vaguely leftist National Democratic Front (NDF). With its origins in the expulsion of the Left from the republic in 1968, the NDF rebellion had smoldered with flareups throughout the 1970s and had finally burst into flame over a wide area by early 1980. The armed uprising was virtually extinguished in 1982, and the state was then able finally to establish a real presence in lands bordering the PDRY in the southeast and in pockets inside the triangle in the highlands.

Less dramatic but as important was the Salih regime's successful attempt to increase its presence in and sway over areas historically controlled by the great tribes, especially the large area that fans out to the east and north from the town of Khamr and embraces Wadi Jawf. The substantial military presence in Marib province, the carving out of a new al-Jawf province, the creation of regional development authorities for the east and north, and the launching of projects in remote areas—all achievements of the 1980s—indicate the process by which the YAR has slowly extended its authority out from the triangle towards its nominal borders. While harsh crackdowns on tribal challenges and protest in the east in the late 1980s confirmed this trend, the persistence of much smuggling across tribal land from Saudi Arabia suggests that the YAR's control of its borders remained incomplete.<sup>9</sup> The occasional roadblock, kidnapping, or hijacking by tribesmen also suggested that state authority did not always go unquestioned.

### *One Yemen and Inter-Yemeni Relations*

The consolidation of the modern YAR was complicated by the fact that the political legacy of today's Yemenis, derived from the modern imamate and colonial periods as well as the more remote past, is contradictory: the old idea of one Yemen and Yemeni people, on the one hand, and two modern national political struggles

and territorial states, on the other. Although Yemen in fact constituted a single political entity for only short periods over past millennia, Yemeni unification was the professed goal of North Yemen's two strong imams in the 20th century and of most nationalists from both Yemens in recent decades. In the first two-thirds of this century, moreover, increased commerce and labor migration between the southern part of North Yemen and the thriving port of Aden provided sinew and flesh to the old idea of one Yemen. Opposed to this, the bisecting of Yemen by a boundary drawn early in the century by the Ottomans and the British served to foster the division of the Yemeni people into two very different political systems and two different political cultures, each with its own values, beliefs, interests, and preoccupations. Although the struggles against the imams and the British seemed to many in the 1940s and later to be the two sides of the same Yemeni political coin, the YAR and the PDRY, born in 1962 and 1967, respectively, were destined by choice and necessity to wage their struggles separately for the most part and then to turn inward and follow divergent political paths.

This set of cross-pressures compromised the politics of primitive unification in the YAR and fostered a confusing, shifting pattern of inter-Yemeni relations. Affected from the start by the bad fit between state and nation (singular or plural), relations between the two Yemens have swung wildly between conflict, even war, at the one extreme, and agreements for Yemeni unification, at the other. The fifteen years that followed the creation of the PDRY in 1967 contained two border wars, in 1972 and 1979, and the PDRY-backed NDF rebellion against the YAR regime. Both border wars ended oddly in agreements to unify and elaborate steps toward that goal, almost all of which came to naught.<sup>10</sup>

Although also camouflaged by an accompanying agreement to revive the formal unification process, the suppression of the NDF rebellion and the ending of attendant conflict between the two Yemens in 1982 ushered in a new era of inter-Yemeni relations. This era was distinguished by emphasis upon practical, discrete economic and sociopolitical steps toward greater cooperation and by the close personal ties that developed between President Salih and the PDRY president, Ali Nasir Muhammad. Evidence of the strength and value of their working relationship came in January 1985, when the two leaders stepped in and promptly defused an armed confrontation along the undemarcated border between the Marib and Shabwa regions, the respective areas where the YAR had just discovered oil and the PDRY was actively searching for the same.

Given this personal link, it was inevitable that inter-Yemeni relations would be strained by the blood bath inside the ruling Yemeni Socialist Party (YSP) in Aden in January 1986, a convulsion that caused President Muhammad and thousands of his followers to flee the PDRY and take up residence in the YAR.<sup>11</sup> The Salih regime, in no hurry to embrace the PDRY's new leaders, wanted first to be relieved of the political dangers and financial burden of providing long-term sanctuary for the refugees; it thought that the means to this end lay in a resolution of the PDRY's intraparty crisis through reconciliation between ex-president Muhammad and his successors. For two years after the infamous "January 1986 events," the new regime in Aden tried to wrap itself in the legitimizing rhetoric of Yemeni unification and the YAR just as stubbornly refused both to reciprocate in its declarations and



to convene the institution that since 1982 had come to embody the unification process, the Supreme Yemeni Council. The main barrier to normalized relations remained the unwillingness of the PDRY to allow the ex-president's followers who accepted its amnesty to return, not just as "citizens," but to party, government, and military positions comparable to those that they had previously occupied.

A serious crisis developed in late 1987 when the continuing failure of the PDRY leadership to solve the refugee problem through reconciliation combined with the renewal of tensions in the disputed borderland separating the YAR's new oil fields in Marib and those discovered even more recently (in 1986) in the PDRY's Shabwa region. The participation of the chiefs of staff of both Yemens in meetings allegedly concerned with the "joint development" of this borderland on several occasions in late 1987 and early 1988 lent credence to rumors of minor armed incidents. Amid reports that Russian and American oil exploration teams were conducting surveys in the area for the PDRY and the YAR, respectively, the dispute took a turn for the worse with both Yemens massing their forces in the region in March 1988. At the month's end, the YAR's prime minister went to Aden for talks, and the main topic was the never-implemented January 1985 agreement between presidents Salih and Muhammad to demilitarize and develop jointly the disputed borderland. In mid-April, a summit was held in Taiz between President Salih and the secretary-general of the PDRY's YSP, Ali Salim al-Baydh. On 4 May, after another summit, this time in San'a<sup>2</sup>, President Salih and Secretary-General al-Baydh signed major agreements.

The most dramatic of the 4 May agreements called for reviving the Supreme Yemeni Council and the other unification organs that had functioned from mid-1982 to the "January 1986 events," setting a new timetable for the draft constitution of a united Yemen and establishing a committee to prepare the way for a "unified political organization." Another agreement provided for the free movement of Yemenis between "the two parts of Yemen," an arrangement that was to be implemented promptly and to involve joint border posts and the requirement of only a domestic identity card for such travel. Finally, there was the agreement that resolved the immediate conflict over the borderland. It called for demilitarizing an 850-square-mile neutral zone between Marib and Shabwa, creating a survey team to demarcate the area precisely and establishing a joint oil and mineral exploration and development company specifically for the area.<sup>12</sup>

As in past instances, the two Yemens in May 1988 used the sweeping rhetoric of, and small steps toward, Yemeni unification to camouflage an exercise in crisis management and problem solving. The real achievement, though, was the defusing of the border dispute that threatened to escalate into serious fighting. That dispute may have been revived at the time by either or both the YAR and the PDRY as a means of forcing progress toward a resolution of the PDRY's leadership impasse and the refugee problem; in any case, frustration and impatience with these sources of inter-Yemeni strife had certainly created a climate ripe for a bit of saber rattling on both sides of the border.

Only days after the 4 May agreements, a committee of senior officers from the two Yemens supervised the dismantling of positions and the withdrawal of forces from the borderland, and the tensions of the previous months quickly subsided.

The interior ministers promptly held meetings to work out the plan for the free movement of citizens over the common border, and announced that the plan would go into effect in July. Joint border posts were set up, work was begun to improve physical access to several border crossings, and common administrative procedures were agreed upon. Many PDRY citizens applied to go north to visit relatives and friends among the refugees, and the program proved immensely popular in both Yemens when it began on schedule. The oil ministers also promptly met to create the joint exploration and development company that was to operate in the neutral zone.

Subsequent events revealed a pattern of increased inter-Yemeni cooperation, a revival of the pattern that had begun in 1982. The two Yemens agreed in late 1988 on a major project to construct a Taiz–Aden link between their power grids, and they secured generous Arab fund financing for the project. There was even talk about the possibility of refining crude oil from the Marib basin at the modernized Aden refinery. The new joint venture for the neutral zone, named the Yemen Company for Investment in Oil and Mineral Resources, began operations quickly in early 1989 and within a few months was in serious negotiations with a consortium of American, Russian, French, and Kuwaiti companies for a concession to explore in the zone. Early in the spring of 1989, the secretariat of the Supreme Yemeni Council met on unity affairs for the first time since the “January 1986 events,” and the PDRY announced plans to release many of those convicted of treason for involvement in those events, a move welcomed by the YAR. Relations between the two Yemens seemed normalized and their borders stabilized.

#### POLITICAL CONSTRUCTION TOWARD THE GENERAL PEOPLE’S CONGRESS

The polity revitalized by the imams in the 20th century was archaic and yet, at least until the mid-1950s, adequate to the demands of a traditional agricultural society that was still quite isolated, stable, coherent, and only slowly changing. The flow of demands and support from society to the imamate and of rewards and commands in the opposite direction was handled, not by specialized political bodies such as organized pressure groups and political parties, but informally and face-to-face by officials, notables, and family heads. The absence of parties, pressure groups, and the mass media—the absence of any real need for a differentiated political infrastructure—was a major difference between the traditional polity of Yemen and the more modern systems trying to perform more modern tasks elsewhere in the Arab world at mid-century.

As a consequence, the YAR that was created in 1962 lacked an articulated political mechanism and organized base, and a theme of its first 25 years—arguably the *main* theme—turns on a series of feeble and failed attempts, and eventually considerable success, at political construction, the generation and use of ideas and organization to channel support and demands from society to the regime and, conversely, to channel information, appeals, and directives from the regime to society.<sup>13</sup> The civil war greatly strained and even deformed the new republic, causing both the deferral of any major effort at political construction and the failure of the

very modest initiatives of this sort that were taken in the mid-1960s under President al-Sallal. Egypt's military defense of the republic evolved into what amounted to Egyptian occupation and administration of Yemen, leaving little room for Yemeni national politics and politicians to develop. Yemeni Republicans ended up fighting among themselves, increasingly along Zaydi–Shafi'i sectarian lines, and conspiring with or against the Egyptians. The one feeble attempt by President al-Sallal to create a broad Republican party or movement in 1965 came to naught.

The somewhat more successful efforts to organize the politics of the republic under President al-Iryani after 1967 benefited from widely shared national desires to end the civil war and to place the destiny of Yemen again in Yemeni hands. These efforts came to revolve primarily around the institutions specified in the 1970 Constitution, especially the large, mostly elected Consultative Council. However, political parties were banned by the constitution, and, in the absence of explicit political organization and ideology, the quasi-legislative council functioned as an assembly of notables, oligarchs grouped into small shifting factions and only tenuously linked to one another and to their constituents. The barely clandestine parties and groups that persisted were small and inconsequential, and the one half-hearted attempt by the al-Iryani regime to create something like a national party in 1973 was stillborn. Moreover, the major political achievement of the al-Iryani regime, the Royalist–Republican reconciliation in 1970, had come at the price of both expelling the modernist Left and incorporating the big tribal sheikhs, especially by seating them in the Consultative Council. The result was the narrowly based center–Right Republican regime that, with some changes, persisted from the end of the 1960s through the presidencies of al-Hamdi and al-Ghashmi and into the early years of the Salih era.

After 1974, the charismatic President al-Hamdi quickly came to personify the Yemeni nation, and he successfully advanced this nationalism at the expense of narrow sectarian identities. This notwithstanding, al-Hamdi was unable to embody his unprecedented popularity in political organization or translate it into political strength. Furthermore, he inadvertently narrowed the political base of the regime further when he both succeeded in driving such leading tribalists as Abdullah ibn Husayn al-Ahmar and Sinan abu Luhum from the state and failed in his tentative efforts to reincorporate the Left. In addition to keeping up old ties with a few leftist leaders, his attempt to create a more broadly based center–Left coalition during his 40 months in office involved three separate initiatives: the local development association (LDA) movement, the Correction Movement, and the General People's Congress. The LDA movement, launched in 1974, held out the promise of grass-roots organization nationwide; the Correction Movement offered a means to train and place political cadres at all levels of the state.<sup>14</sup> Despite their initial promise, al-Hamdi seems to have had second thoughts and to have pulled back from efforts to use these two initiatives as bases for a broad, popular political movement, and his subsequent plans for a general people's congress were overtaken by his assassination in 1977. Frustrated by al-Hamdi's inability or unwillingness to grant them reentry into the polity, several leftist groups created the NDF in 1976, and it, in turn, became the basis of the rebellion that challenged the Salih regime a few years later.

The Salih regime began in 1978 with little political support outside the army, an army soon to be demoralized and discredited by defeat in the second border war with the PDRY. After initial efforts to deal with this problem in an ad hoc, shot-gun fashion, the new regime conceived and carried out an impressive program of political construction in a quite deliberate and systematic way during the first half of the 1980s. This phased, sequential program began tentatively in early 1980, only months after the border war, with the drafting of the National Pact (*al-Mithaq*). The pact, described by President Salih as a guide to national life to which all national elements could subscribe, then became the subject of the long national dialogue and the many local “plebiscites” orchestrated by the prestigious National Dialogue Committee and its local subcommittees. Elections to the 1,000-member General People’s Congress (GPC), and its much publicized several-day session, were held in the summer of 1982 for the purpose of amending and then formally adopting the National Pact. This task done, the GPC declared itself a permanent “political organization” that would be selected every four years, meet biennially, and be led between sessions by a 75-member Standing Committee headed by its secretary-general, President Salih.

The Salih regime’s political effort was not very original, the idea of a national pact being reminiscent of a like-named statement of principles drafted on the eve of the 1948 revolution and the idea of a general people’s congress merely reviving a proposal first made by President al-Hamdi in 1977 and then reiterated by President al-Ghashmi in 1978. The element added by the Salih regime was the step-by-step process by which it moved the Yemeni polity from where it was in 1979 to the successful holding of such a congress—i.e., a national dialogue based on the National Pact and supervised by the National Dialogue Committee. This structured process provided for much publicity, ceremony, and popular participation. As important, the unspecified length of its several steps provided the flexibility needed to speed up or slow down the process as political conditions warranted. By design and a bit of luck, moreover, this sustained political initiative did more to strengthen the regime than merely organize its growing but amorphous center–Right base of support. It also provided a political process largely defined and managed by the regime into which elements of the Yemeni Left could be safely incorporated when, in 1982, the NDF rebellion was put down and many of its leaders and followers “came home.” The two dialogues, one between the Salih regime and the NDF as well as the larger, more public one involving the regime and the rest of the nation, converged finally in a structure that facilitated a second national reconciliation.

Many skeptics were surprised when the three-year effort to organize politics around the dialogue on the National Pact did not drop off sharply with the closing gavel of the GPC in August 1982. The new Standing Committee met on a regular basis and acquired stature within the regime and with the public. An ambitious political education program was launched, using new GPC publications and the mass media in general as well as weekly citizen training sessions led at workplaces and elsewhere by newly trained political cadres. The resurfaced Left was allowed its own weekly journal, and, although some declined, many former NDF leaders and followers took their places in the political arena and dialogue as defined by the GPC. President Salih often justified the politics of the National Pact and the GPC

in democratic terms. More candid, Prime Minister Abd al-Karim al-Iryani thought that at this stage of development it was less a matter of democracy than of “legitimacy . . . [of] getting people to accept decisions of the government.”<sup>15</sup>

The second biennial session of the GPC was held in August 1984, and during its meetings a plan was adopted to expand greatly the process by which GPC members would be chosen in the future. This mandate to increase participation and representation in the GPC was carried out through the election of some 17,500 members of local councils for cooperative development (LCCDs) in mid-1985. These elections, judged by observers to be quite open and honest, involved the broadest electoral participation ever in Yemen as well as much official fanfare and public enthusiasm. The LCCDs, new local institutions created out of a merger of the old LDAs and new district-level organs of the GPC, were charged in turn with the task of serving as electors of most of the 1,000 members of the new GPC that was scheduled to meet the following year. The LCCDs did this in mid-1986, and the new GPC held its first session in August under the banner “Popular Participation on the Road to Democracy, Development and Yemeni Unity” and with President Salih describing in his opening speech the benefits of “organized political activity.”<sup>16</sup> The second biennial session of the new GPC convened in November 1988, marking the GPC’s eighth year on the scene.

Although President Salih continued to distinguish between “organized political activity” and the work of a political party, and to insist that the GPC was not one of the latter (which were still illegal), the activities of the leaders and cadres of the GPC and its Standing Committee were clearly aimed at consensus-building, guidance, and control, functions that a political party or movement would be expected to have. By 1984, in fact, most Yemeni leaders were openly admitting that the GPC had become an umbrella political party, a loose organization of organizations in a society that was not well organized politically for many of the tasks of the modern world. Although more episodic and formalistic than some might have liked, it had evolved into being an important factor in Yemeni political life.

The efficacy of the Salih regime’s effort to broaden, but also structure and contain, political participation seems borne out by the relative stability of the electoral results in the YAR in the 1980s. Although a large number of candidates of the Muslim Brotherhood won in the Consultative Council elections in July 1988, causing the regime considerable concern, these results were in line with those from the GPC elections in 1982 and 1986, and from the intervening elections for the LDAs, LCCDs, and municipal councils. Moreover, the Baathist, Nasirite, and other leftist and nationalist tendencies held their own throughout this period, as did the many independents and local notables.

The politics of the GPC and the opening to the Left, although the most important, were not the only ways in which President Salih sought to organize political life so as to build support and legitimacy for himself and his regime. Beginning in 1979, the gathering in of leading political exiles, internal as well as those overseas, was systematically pursued. The expansion in size of the People’s Constituent Assembly, a large, appointed quasi-legislature created by al-Ghashmi shortly before his death in 1978, and the creation of a 15-member Presidential Advisory Council gave President Salih ample room to invite an array of leaders back into

the fold, notably Sheikh al-Ahmar and some of the other big tribal leaders on the outside since al-Hamdi put them there in 1975. Ex-presidents al-Sallal and al-Iryani accepted invitations to return from exile in the fall of 1982, an occasion marked by emotion and symbolic significance. On a more practical level, the political return between 1979 and the mid-1980s included many leading modernists and technocrats, among them Hasan Makki, Abd al-Karim al-Iryani, Muhammad Said al-Attar, and Ahmad Ali Muhani. The new government formed in mid-1988 by Abd al-Aziz Abd al-Ghani, technocrat and prime minister for all but three years since early 1975, consisted mostly of able technocrats and enlightened conservatives, as did its predecessor, also headed by him, and the government led by Dr. Abd al-Karim al-Iryani in 1980–83. The reinvigoration of the Presidential Advisory Council and its enlargement from 15 to 25 members in mid-1988 further confirmed that the Salih regime remained open to leaders of a broad array of groups and tendencies. Few were the leaders who had not been co-opted by the Salih regime in one way or another by the late 1980s.

The GPC and other political innovations notwithstanding, the politics of the YAR continued to revolve largely around notables, traditional as well as modern, and, of course, President Salih and his close associates. Not since the heyday of Imam Yahya's rule, nearly fifty years earlier, had a head of state had as much power and authority over the land and people of North Yemen as did President Salih in the late 1980s; beneath him, the officers' corps in general, and officers from his extended family or from his tribal region in particular, were tied together in a formidable network of power, influence, and privilege. Nevertheless, the very closed traditional pattern of Yemeni politics was structured and enlarged by the political construction of the Salih era, and the YAR as a polity was stronger and more stable as a result of the new organization and broadened participation.

#### CONSTITUTIONALISM AND THE 1970 CONSTITUTION

Given the fate of constitutionalism in much of the Third World in recent decades, it may come as a surprise that the YAR's 1970 Constitution was in place and largely in force at the end of the 1980s. Its capacity to survive the political storms of the 1970s and 1980s is explained, in part, by its identification with the Yemeni nation and the republic. Its adoption in 1970, at the end of the civil war and after the Egyptian withdrawal, was a marker on the path to national reconciliation and the resumption by Yemenis of Yemen's destiny. It is also identified with former President al-Iryani, now perhaps Yemen's most respected elder statesman.<sup>17</sup>

Although basically liberal democratic in form, the 1970 Constitution has its share of escape clauses and silences and was from the outset often honored in the breach. It was suspended outright by al-Hamdi when he assumed power in 1974, and then largely and confusingly reinstated by al-Ghashmi in 1978 without its centerpiece, the mostly elective Consultative Council, and with an amendment that formally established the presidency. Much of the confusion turned on both the simultaneous creation of the appointed People's Constituent Assembly (PCA), a supposedly interim body that assumed many of the quasi-legislative functions of



the Consultative Council, and repeated promises of elections for a new Consultative Council—or for some other body.

Constitutional confusion grew during the early years of the Salih era. To the question of whether the oft-promised elections were to be for the constitutionally prescribed Consultative Council or even for a new PCA were added those of whether the new National Pact was to coexist with the 1970 Constitution or to be the framework of ideas for a new constitution and of whether the planned-for GPC and its elections would coexist with or replace the still-absent Consultative Council and *its* elections. And all the while, the PCA, enlarged and enhanced by President Salih, and looking less and less like an interim constituent assembly, performed its quasi-legislative tasks.

By the mid-1980s, however, most of the constitutional questions were answered. Clearly, it was the 1970 Constitution as amended in 1978 that was enshrined and to be revered as the fundamental law. The newer National Pact was to inform that constitution as well as to guide the nation, and the even newer GPC was to serve as an extra-constitutional political organization; the latter's elections were thus more akin to those internal to a political party than to those of a national legislature. It had also become quite apparent by the mid-1980s that the much-talked-about elections would be for a new Consultative Council that would then replace the appointed PCA. President Salih personally wanted, and often promised, these elections because he viewed his selection as president by the PCA in 1978 and 1983 as lacking the full legitimacy of selection by the Consultative Council as prescribed in the 1970 Constitution; he and his advisers just as often backed away from these elections because they feared, not that he would be ousted by a new council, but that the council that would then serve as a legislature would be dominated by religious fundamentalists and other conservatives, and that this would prove embarrassing if not disruptive. Nevertheless, the promise of elections for a new council was repeated up to and after the YAR's silver jubilee in 1987.

July 1988 advanced the YAR's short, choppy constitutional history and brought closure on a number of outstanding issues. A new Consultative Council was finally chosen on 5 July in accordance with the 1970 Constitution, 128 members through nationwide elections and 31 by presidential appointment, and the 10-year interim PCA ceased to exist. These council elections, the first since 1971 and only the second since the birth of the republic, involved some 1,600 candidates and roughly 1.2 million registered voters in a vigorous campaign, and, despite the formal ban on parties, plenty of campaign material from the Baathists, Nasirites, Muslim Brotherhood, and other religious and secular nationalist groups. In mid-July, the new council elected President Salih to a third five-year term, and, shortly thereafter, gave approval to the composition and program of the new government that President Salih had asked the outgoing prime minister to form. As a consequence, for the first time since the al-Iryani regime was ousted by the al-Hamdi coup in 1974, the head of state and government of the YAR were elected in accordance with the provisions of the amended 1970 Constitution—that is, by a properly selected Consultative Council. Only slightly less important, that council was then in place to ratify, amend, or reject laws as specified in that constitution.

The apparent staying power of the 1970 Constitution was not unimportant. Just as it derived strength from identification with the nation and the republic, so it was itself a potent republican symbol and added to the legitimacy of the still fragile republic and the current regime. Furthermore, this liberal mask for oligarchical if not dictatorial rule laid down a standard, and held out the chance, however remote, of becoming a “living constitution,” a normative framework for truly limited government. The fact that this could even be held up as a possibility at the end of the 1980s suggests how far the YAR had come toward modern governance in its first quarter-century.

#### THE STATE AND SOCIOECONOMIC MODERNIZATION

As with other late-developing countries in recent decades, the immediate task of state-building in the YAR went beyond the creation of a capacity to maintain order and provide defense to include the creation of a capacity to monitor and influence, if not control, the rate and direction of socioeconomic change. The 1962 Revolution ended Yemen’s self-imposed isolation from the outside world, and resource-poor Yemen went from being a largely self-contained, self-sufficient socioeconomic system based almost completely on subsistence agriculture and very little external trade to being one that was increasingly and irreversibly plugged into, and very asymmetrically dependent upon, the modern world and its economic order. The events that from the very outset buffeted the new YAR—the long civil war, foreign intervention, economic dislocation and decline, and drought and hunger—made it obvious that state-building in *all* of its aspects was desperately needed. The viability and survival of Yemen in its new world environment depended upon it.

The civil war finally behind it, the YAR in the 1970s did experience significant socioeconomic development based upon the rapid creation of a modest capacity to absorb economic and technical assistance, the relatively generous provision of this assistance by the outside world, and—most important—the passive inflow of workers’ remittances that by itself fostered widespread and unprecedented consumption and prosperity.<sup>18</sup> Running counter to the usual inequalities of rapid development, the remittances put money and goods into the hands of many people in many parts of the country. Whereas the remittances largely flowed through the private sector and the local development associations,<sup>19</sup> the increase in state capabilities was the critical factor in Yemen’s ability to absorb significantly increased foreign aid. At the start of the decade, the creation of the Central Bank and the redirection of the Yemen Bank for Reconstruction and Development (YBRD) provided the start of the financial system required to support economic and development activities. Shortly thereafter, the setting up of the Central Planning Organization (CPO) and the creation or reform of some technical ministries and agencies increased the capacity of the state both to deliver a few basic services and to prepare development plans and initiate development projects. By the late 1970s, work on a broad array of state-sponsored, foreign-assisted infrastructure, human resource, and agricultural projects existed side by side with high levels of remittance-fueled consumption and economic activity in the growing private sector.

The first-time prosperity in the second half of the 1970s was paralleled by the YAR's increasing economic vulnerability to domestic and external conditions. Accordingly, political uncertainties early in the Salih era at the decade's end helped cause the development capabilities of the state to falter if not decline, and this was followed closely by the worldwide recession and fall in oil prices that led to sharp drops in the levels of aid and remittances to Yemen. Faced with growing budget and balance-of-payments crises, the government headed by Dr. al-Iryani in the early 1980s adopted import and currency controls as well as other austerity measures, and these had some success in forcing the YAR to live within more modest means in a less generous world. Although most of these measures were continued and supplemented with others by the government formed by Prime Minister Abd al-Ghani in late 1983, the future prospects for resource-poor Yemen remained grim.

Several years earlier, in 1976, Dr. al-Iryani, then head of the CPO, had said that he "wanted Yemen to find oil—ten years from now." In the meantime, he explained, "we must both use our poverty to wring aid from the world and develop the manpower and infrastructure needed to put oil wealth to good use."<sup>20</sup> Dr. al-Iryani was prophetic, it seems. In 1984, after the YAR had made fairly good use of the decade from the mid-1970s to the mid-1980s, the Hunt Oil Company discovered oil in commercial amounts in the Marib basin. This event both improved the YAR's long-term development prospects and placed sharply increasing demands on the still very limited capabilities of the state. With the oil find, the twin tasks facing the regime were to maintain the new discipline and austerity of the past couple of years and to gear up to absorb efficiently the oil revenues that were expected to start flowing in late 1987. Despite the politically difficult combination of rising expectations and continued hard times, the regime during this period of economic transition was able to limit imports and government expenditures not related to oil development or to previously planned projects. In 1987, the government completed preparation of the Third Five-Year Development Plan, the first with oil revenues factored in.<sup>21</sup>

Some of the success that the regime has had with the transition is traceable to organizational changes in the state and to key appointments to the Abd al-Ghani government formed in 1983. Former prime minister al-Iryani became foreign minister and deputy prime minister for external affairs in late 1984, and early the next year was also named chairman of the newly created Supreme Committee for Petroleum and Mineral Resources. Charged with setting policy and supervising negotiations in the oil sector, the supreme committee brought together the heads of the several ministries and public finance institutions most directly involved in economic and development affairs. Also in early 1985, Dr. Muhammad Said al-Attar, the man who founded the YBRD just after the 1962 Revolution and then left the YAR in 1968 for a career that led to top United Nations' development posts, was appointed deputy prime minister for economic affairs, minister of development, and chairman of the CPO. In the fall of that year, Dr. Hasan Makki was also named a deputy prime minister and Ahmad Ali Muhani was made minister of the newly created Ministry of Oil and Mineral Resources. With these changes, nearly all of the YAR's leading first-generation modernists and technocrats were in the

government. As Foreign Minister al-Iryani put it in late 1985: "If a mess is made of the opportunity afforded by oil, no one will be able to blame President Salih for not putting good people in top positions. The team now in place consists of the best—the very best—that Yemen has to offer."<sup>22</sup> As of early 1990, 18 months after the elections to the new Consultative Council and the formation of yet another Abd al-Ghani government, this team was still intact and seemed to be continuing to manage the transition to the age of oil with some success.<sup>23</sup>

Oil for export began to flow on schedule in late 1987 and was sold thereafter in an orderly fashion, despite growing turmoil in petroleum markets worldwide. The expected impact of oil revenues was evident in the 1988 budget, which called for a nearly 50 percent decline in the deficit despite a 30 percent increase in expenditures. This happy result was to be made possible by new oil export earnings of several hundred million dollars. Unfortunately, the actual budget and current account figures for 1988 painted a less rosy picture. The larger than projected deficits were the result of rising import costs and smaller than projected levels of remittances and oil revenues. The government had probably lifted restraints on imports and government expenditures prematurely in 1988.<sup>24</sup> Although rising expectations and whiffs of euphoria made the imposition of restraints much more difficult in 1989 than it had been only a few years earlier, soft oil prices and the failure of exploration efforts to turn up much new oil in the YAR made another round of belt tightening imperative. At the same time that it wrestled with these politically difficult matters, the government pressed forward as fast as financing would allow with development of the oil and gas sector as well as with schemes for producing construction materials, electrification of provincial areas, water resource development, secondary roads, integrated rural development, and increased agricultural production.

Its development activities helped the state perform its more traditional functions, and were partly understood and justified in these terms.<sup>25</sup> This was especially the case in the early 1980s when the regime stepped up its efforts to extend its reach into such areas of tribal autonomy as al-Jawf in the northeast and into the NDF-controlled borderlands and enclaves. Prime Minister al-Iryani spoke enthusiastically at this time of the "socio-political value" of development efforts that made the periphery and other remote areas more accessible and made possible the delivery of basic services to places where government is regarded with suspicion or scorn—hence his interest in pushing roads into such areas as soon as they were pacified.<sup>26</sup> President Salih also came to justify development efforts in terms of nation-state building. Development is as important as democratization, he said on the YAR's twentieth anniversary of 1982, because "integration is a must."<sup>27</sup> He asserted months later that one of his two greatest accomplishments in office involved "the geographic and demographic levels," the creation of an infrastructure of transport and communications that facilitates movement, delivery of services, and growth of national integrity and unity based on "feelings of national responsibility."<sup>28</sup> The development activities of the second half of the 1980s, as well as the content of the Third Five-Year Development Plan adopted in 1988, reflect the continuing influence of these ideas.

## YEMENI UNIFICATION AND THE NEXT 25 YEARS

From the mid-1989 vantage it seemed that optimistic predictions about political development and socioeconomic change in the YAR over the next decade could be made with some confidence. Reality appeared to consist of a territorial state with increasing capabilities that was adequately organized by the GPC and both legitimized and, to a degree, contained by the 1970 Constitution. There were grounds for hoping that the political system would become stronger and more effective at the same time that it gradually became more accountable to larger segments of the populace. Despite real concerns about deficits and the scarcity of hard currency and imported raw materials, the economy was beginning to be both fueled and cushioned by the new oil revenues. Private sector ventures and government sponsored development projects were moving forward at a moderate pace with only the usual problems, and considerable new economic activity was in the planning and design stages. In short, much of what had only looked promising in the mid-1980s appeared on the verge of realization as the new decade barely came into view.

The state of inter-Yemeni relations was a major source of the cautious optimism of some in 1989. As a result of repeats on the pattern of two steps forward and one back between 1982 and 1988, relations between the two Yemens had been normalized and borders stabilized. The crowning achievement was the agreement on the neutral zone in May 1988, but nearly as important were the concrete actions taken soon after to implement that agreement, the opening of the borders to the free movement of Yemenis between the two Yemens, and the project to connect their electric power grids. Even to talk about the possibility in the near future of using the excess capacity of the Aden refinery to process crude oil from the YAR's Marib basin assumed mutual trust and confidence in the likelihood of friendly relations over the long term.

In private, the main Yemeni themes clearly were cooperation, coordination, and integration—not unification. Indeed, these relational modes were being touted by many as the desired alternatives to formal political unification, the latter being regarded as too difficult, dangerous, and unlikely. The rhetoric and theatrics of the unification process seemed only to be providing useful cover for the “real” steps toward close, mutually beneficial inter-Yemeni relations.

The pattern of improving inter-Yemeni relations was transformed dramatically—and, to most observers, this student of Yemeni politics among them, unexpectedly—into the politics of Yemeni unification in late 1989. After a lull of several months, a torrent of unification activities began at the end of October with the first-ever meetings of the joint committee for a “unified political organization,” a committee first called for in the original unification agreement in 1972. During a much-publicized summit in Aden a month later, President Salih and Secretary-General al-Baydh committed the two parts of Yemen to concrete steps that pointed toward unification in the very near future. The 30 November agreement directed the two regimes to submit the December 1981 draft unity constitution to ratification by their respective legislatures and to popular referenda within two successive six month periods—i.e., by the end of November 1990, one

year later. If the results of these two steps were affirmative, the new “Republic of Yemen” was to be proclaimed, the new constitution declared in force, and a transitional government formed in the new political capital, San<sup>‘a</sup>. This government was to remain in place only until early elections for an all-Yemen legislature were conducted, a president selected, and a regular government formed.<sup>29</sup>

The several months after the 30 November agreement witnessed hundreds of joint meetings in San<sup>‘a</sup> and Aden, including three joint cabinet meetings. During this period, hard bargaining at two summits between President Salih and Secretary-General al-Baydh and at meetings of the joint committee for a “unified political organization” produced major changes in the nature, stages, and timing of Yemeni unification. Despite all the talk about one or another form of federation, it was decided to merge fully the two parts of Yemen into a unitary system. The date for proclaiming the new Republic of Yemen and for putting in force its new constitution was advanced six months, from November to May 1990, and a 30-month transition period was added in order to allow time for both the complete merger of state institutions and the reorganization of political life. The YAR side had pushed for the earlier unification date, and the PDRY side had insisted on the long transition period.

For practical—and, more importantly, political—reasons, the popular referenda were scrapped and the new national legislative elections were deferred until the end of the transition in November 1992. During the transition, the unified Republic of Yemen was to be governed from San<sup>‘a</sup> by a five-member Presidential Council (which would select the president and vice president from its membership), a 39-member cabinet (which would accommodate most of the members of the cabinets of the two Yemens), and a 301-member House of Representatives (Majlis al-Nuwab) consisting of the 159 members of the YAR’s Consultative Council, the 111 members of the PDRY’s Supreme People’s Council, and 31 new appointees. As in the case of cabinet posts, lesser positions during the transition were to be distributed equally between officials from the two parts of Yemen.

Belying its name, the joint committee for a “unified political organization” opted for a multiparty system in the months after the 30 November agreement. The top leadership accepted its proposal and charged the renamed committee with conducting a dialogue with all national political forces for the purpose of arriving at an acceptable multiparty organization of political life. The transition period was seen as providing the time needed to establish the new multiparty system prior to the national legislative elections that would put the leaders to the test. The multiparty system was justified in the name of political democracy, and was said to presume the freedom of speech and the right to organize.

The December 1981 draft constitution, revised to reflect the decisions of the past several months, was adopted by the legislatures of the two parts of Yemen on 21 May 1990, and on the following day President Salih proclaimed from Aden the birth of the Republic of Yemen. He and Ali Salim al-Baydh were named president and vice president, respectively, the enlarged Cabinet was appointed with the ex-president of the PDRY as prime minister, and the House of Representatives was created by merging and adding to the two legislatures. Represented by President Salih and Vice President al-Baydh, the Republic of Yemen made its debut on the



Arab stage at the Baghdad summit at the end of May. Even before formal unification, the military had withdrawn from the old common border, and units of the one part of Yemen had taken up new positions in the other part of Yemen, sometimes with new commanders from the other part. The process of constituting the new state and polity within its new territory and borders, much of it exhilarating and much of it mundane and prosaic—memos, trips, meetings, discussions, deals, decisions—proceeded at a frenetic pace throughout the summer, suggesting that the transition period would probably be busy from start to finish.<sup>30</sup>

Yemeni unification promises both rewards and risks in terms of recent gains in political development and socioeconomic change in the old YAR. If successful, unification would serve to “domesticate” the question of access to whatever resources may be uncovered in the neutral zone. The history of inter-Yemeni relations suggests that the new zone again could have become a disputed borderland as long as two Yemeni states existed side by side. Containing this potentially explosive issue with a unified Yemen lessens the likelihood of it again becoming a matter of army against army, state against state. The same logic applies to other current and future issues that could put “the two parts of Yemen” into conflict with one another.

If the unification process breaks down or simply stalls, politics within or between the two parts of Yemen could be affected negatively, even poisoned. External enemies of a strong, united Yemen would encourage and benefit from this. Domestic opponents of the present regime could blame it either for attempting unwanted unification or for failing to achieve that sacred goal. Problems with unification could bring discredit to the leaders, institutions, and practices of the old YAR as well as the new Republic of Yemen. Socioeconomic development in general and the further exploitation of oil resources, in particular, could be delayed if not derailed in the process.

The ability of the new state to secure the new borders and to maintain order within a united Yemen depend upon integrating and maintaining the effectiveness of the two military establishments and the two internal security systems, no easy task. The other capacities of the state to make and carry out public policy in the economic and social spheres, after having increased in recent years, will surely suffer initially when the day-to-day work of ministries and other institutions is merged. The patience and support of people who expect and depend upon state services will be put to the test.

The future of the GPC in particular and of other political construction in the YAR in general is thrown into question by Yemeni unification. Will the fragile umbrella organization that the Salih regime used with some success to order and contain politics in the YAR remain a dominant force in the political environment created by the Republic of Yemen? Will the YSP, now largely discredited in Aden and the rest of the southern part of Yemen, survive? What will be the relationship between these two former “ruling” parties (will they, as some suggest, join forces in a new, broader umbrella political organization?), and what will be their relationship, singly or together, to the two dozen old and new political groupings in the two parts of Yemen? The future of politics—and of political construction, past and future—is unclear in the new Republic of Yemen.

The new constitution resembles the 1970 Constitution and should derive some force and effect from this resemblance.<sup>31</sup> And just as the earlier constitution drew strength from its identification with national reconciliation, the new constitution should derive strength and legitimacy from its identification with Yemeni unification—for so long as the latter is highly valued. The ability of the new constitution to come alive—to limit and contain government—remains a matter for the future.

With or without Yemeni unification, questions of further socioeconomic development in Yemen and the application of oil revenues to that goal over the next quarter century turn largely on whether the political leadership is able both to resist the temptation to borrow excessively against future oil revenues and to hold to the gospel of major agricultural expansion. Thus far at least, Yemen's entrance into the oil age has been cautious and prudent, but this age is just starting and over time oil has intoxicated seemingly reasonable leaders in other developing nations. There is also the question of how much oil there is—in the Marib basin, the neutral zone, Shabwa, and elsewhere—to be cautious and prudent about. Enough to fuel Yemen's development for a generation? For decades into the next century? And what about the huge supply of natural gas found in the northern part of the homeland, and the difference it could make for development in the future?

Finally, mention of "development" in this context leads to questions of the uses to which oil revenues will be put. Unlike the remittance economy of the 1970s, which had a leveling effect by benefiting many people in many areas of the country, the capital-intensive oil industry and oil-fueled economy that are emerging probably have built-in biases toward inequality, if not greed and corruption. Will the oil revenues passing through government hands be put to the good use of the many—of Yemeni society as a whole—or be used and even squandered by and for the few? Coming full circle, will state and polity be strong enough and so structured as to favor the former distribution over the latter? And with unity, will the egalitarianism of the ideology that has informed the southern part of the homeland, and the degree of order, organization, and honesty that allegedly marked its public life, tip the balance in that direction?

The foundations and some of the framing of a viable, self-standing YAR were finally and surprisingly in place in 1989 when the leaders in San<sup>c</sup>a<sup>p</sup> even more surprisingly chose to design and construct a larger, differently configured political edifice, albeit one that would be built in part on these beginnings. The political construction and state-building done in the name of the YAR over more than 25 years, and especially during the 1980s, will undoubtedly both facilitate and complicate the more ambitious undertaking to build a strong, united Republic of Yemen. While it is likely that the past work done will help more than it will hinder, the precise balance between positives and negatives and the way they combine to produce that result remain to be seen.

MIDDLE EAST CENTER  
HENRY M. JACKSON SCHOOL OF INTERNATIONAL STUDIES  
UNIVERSITY OF WASHINGTON, SEATTLE

## NOTES

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<sup>1</sup>For an overview of the social and cultural makeup of North Yemen, see Robert W. Stookey, *Yemen: The Politics of the Yemen Arab Republic* (Boulder, Colo.: Westview Press, 1978); Stookey, "Social Structure and Politics in the Yemen Arab Republic," *Middle East Journal*, 28, 3 (1974), 248–60. For a collection that addresses these matters, see B. R. Pridham, ed., *Economy, Society and Culture in Contemporary Yemen* (London: Croom Helm, 1985).

For the tribes and tribal system of North Yemen, see Paul Dresch, *Tribes, Government and History in Yemen* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1989). For studies of towns, where tribal and nontribal systems intersect, see T. Gerholm, *Market, Mosque and Mafraj: Social Inequality in a Yemeni Town* (Stockholm: Stockholm University Press, 1977); Tom Stevenson, *Social Change in a Yemeni Highlands Town* (Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 1985); Richard Tutwiler, "Tribe, Tribute and Trade: Social Class Formation in Highland Yemen" (Ph.D. diss., State University of New York, Binghamton, New York, 1987). See also J. Chelhod, "L'Organisation sociale au Yemen," *L'Ethnographie*, vol. 64, pp. 61–86.

<sup>2</sup>This study follows the common practice of referring in English to the head of the YAR and the PDRY as the "president," even though Presidents al-Iryani and al-Hamdi and their PDRY counterpart, Ali Nasir Muhammad, were not so titled officially.

<sup>3</sup>For a more detailed account of the YAR down to the fall of 1986, see Robert D. Burrowes, *The Yemen Arab Republic: The Politics of Development, 1962–1986* (Boulder, Colo.: Westview Press, 1987). For other accounts that end earlier in the Salih era, see Robin Bidwell, *The Two Yemens* (Essex, Eng.: Longman Group, 1983); John Peterson, *Yemen: The Search for a Modern State* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1982). Most of the major aspects and issues of YAR politics through the 1970s are touched upon in B. R. Pridham, *Contemporary Yemen: Politics and Historical Background* (London: Croom Helm, 1984).

<sup>4</sup>A. F. Kenneth Organski, *The Stages of Political Development* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1965), pp. 1–56.

<sup>5</sup>The similarities between the world of Yahya and Ahmad and that of King Henry VIII are pointed out in Bidwell, *The Two Yemens*, p. 129 and chap. 5 passim. For discussions of the imamate state in the 20th century, see Manfred Wenner, *Modern Yemen, 1918–1966* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1967). See also Stookey, *Yemen: The Politics*, chap. 7; Peterson, *Yemen: The Search*, chap. 2.

<sup>6</sup>For relations between the tribes and the Hamid al-Din imamate, see Dresch, *Tribes*, chap. 6; and Stookey, *Yemen: The Politics*, chaps. 7 and 8.

<sup>7</sup>See Ali Abdel Rahmy, *The Egyptian Policy in the Arab World: Intervention in Yemen* (Washington, D.C.: University Press of America, 1983).

<sup>8</sup>For al-Hamdi's efforts at state-building, see Robert D. Burrowes, "State-Building and Political Construction in the Yemen Arab Republic, 1962–1977," in Peter J. Chelkowski and Robert J. Pranger, eds., *Ideology and Power in the Middle East: Studies in Honor of George Lenczowski* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 1988), pp. 210–38.

<sup>9</sup>See Dresch, *Tribes*, chap. 10.

<sup>10</sup>For a brief but insightful history of inter-Yemeni relations, see Fred Halliday, "The Yemens: Conflict and Coexistence," *World Today*, 40 (August/September 1984), 355–62. For the details of the PDRY side of the equation, see Fred Halliday, *Revolution and Foreign Policy: The Case of South Yemen* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989). See also F. Gregory Gause, III, "The Idea of Yemeni Unity," *Journal of Arab Affairs*, 6 (Spring 1987), 55–87; idem, "Yemeni Unity: Past and Future," *Middle East Journal* 42, 1 (Winter 1988), 33–47.

<sup>11</sup>For an account of the January 1986 events and their effects on the PDRY's relations with the YAR and other countries, see Robert D. Burrowes, "Oil Strike and Leadership Struggle in South Yemen: 1986 and Beyond," *Middle East Journal*, 43, 3 (Summer 1989), 437–54. See also Norman Cigar, "Soviet–South Yemeni Relations: The Gorbachev Years," *Journal of South Asian and Middle Eastern Studies*,

12, 4 (Summer 1989), 3–38; Robert D. Burrowes, “The Other Side of the Red Sea and a Little More: The Horn of Africa and the Two Yemens,” Middle East Institute, Washington, D.C., January 1990.

<sup>12</sup>For the terms of the agreement, see *Foreign Broadcast Information Service (FBIS)*, Daily Reports—Middle East and Africa, Washington, D.C., May 5, 1988.

<sup>13</sup>The author is inclined to divide Samuel Huntington’s notion of “institutionalization” into “state-building” and “political construction,” the latter embracing most aspects of political organization and action. See Samuel Huntington, *Political Order in Changing Societies* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1968), chap. 1. In addition to Huntington, my thoughts on these matters can be traced back to Lucien W. Pye, *Aspects of Political Development* (Boston: Little, Brown and Co., 1966).

<sup>14</sup>See Sheila Carapico, “The Political Economy of Self-Help: Development Cooperatives in the Yemen Arab Republic” (Ph.D. diss., State University of New York, Binghamton, 1984).

<sup>15</sup>*Middle East Economic Digest (MEED)*, November 5, 1982, p. 27.

<sup>16</sup>*FBIS*, August 27, 1986.

<sup>17</sup>For a translation of the 1970 Constitution, see *Middle East Journal*, 25, 3 (Summer 1971), 385–401.

<sup>18</sup>For an early study of Yemeni emigration and the remittance economy, see Jon C. Swanson, *Emigration and Economic Development: The Case of the Yemen Arab Republic* (Boulder, Colo.: Westview Press, 1979). For a more recent study, see Jon C. Swanson, “Emigrant Remittances and Local Development Cooperatives in the Yemen Arab Republic,” in B. R. Pridham, ed., *Economy, Society and Culture in Contemporary Yemen* (London: Croom Helm, 1985).

<sup>19</sup>For the work of the LDAs, see Carapico, “The Political Economy”; John Cohen, Mary Hebert, David B. Lewis, and Jon C. Swanson, “Development from Below: Local Development Associations in the Yemen Arab Republic,” *World Development*, 9, 11/12 (1981), 1039–61; Richard Tutwiler and Sheila Carapico, *Yemen Agriculture and Economic Change: Case Studies of Two Highland Regions* (Richmond, Va.: American Institute for Yemeni Studies, University of Richmond, 1981); and Charles F. Swagman, *Development and Change in Highland Yemen* (Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 1988).

<sup>20</sup>Conversation with the author, San<sup>c</sup>a<sup>2</sup>, August 1976.

<sup>21</sup>For some details of the third plan, see *MEED*, July 18, 1987, p. 28; September 19, pp. 8–9.

<sup>22</sup>Conversation with the author, New York City, November 1985.

<sup>23</sup>For a detailed report on economic conditions in the YAR just before the export of oil began, see Peter Kemp, “North Yemen Special Report: Meeting the Challenge of the Oil Era,” *MEED*, November 9, 1987, pp. 16–24.

<sup>24</sup>For the worsening economic data in 1988–89, see *MEED*, April 21, 1989, p. 30; October 6, p. 30.

<sup>25</sup>The case for reciprocal causation between the institutions and policies of the state, on the one hand, and economic growth and structural transformation, on the other hand, is made in Alan Richards and John Waterbury, *A Political Economy of the Middle East: State, Class, and Economic Development* (Boulder, Colo.: Westview Press, 1990), especially chaps. 1 and 2.

<sup>26</sup>*MEED*, January 8, 1982, p. 39.

<sup>27</sup>*FBIS*, September 28, 1982.

<sup>28</sup>*FBIS*, April 28, 1984.

<sup>29</sup>For the text of the 30 November agreement, see *FBIS*, December 7, 1989. For summaries and implications of the agreement, see *MEED*, December 15, 1989, p. 28; January 19, 1990, pp. 4–5. See also *FBIS*, December 1, 4, 5, 13, and 14. For speculations on the eve of agreement, see *FBIS*, November 29, 1989; and *MEED*, December 1, 1989, p. 27.

<sup>30</sup>For the revised terms of unification and for the events immediately before and after unification, see *MEED*, May 18, 1990, p. 25; May 25, p. 28; June 1, p. 28; June 8, p. 40. See also articles by Jean Guéyras in *Le Monde*, May 23, 1990, p. 1; and June 13, p. 5. For an assessment of Yemeni unification several weeks after the fact, see Simon Edge, “Yemen: Special Report,” *MEED*, July 27, 1990, pp. 9–13. See also Edge’s other features in *MEED*, January 19, 1990, pp. 4–5; July 6, pp. 4–5. For lengthy news analyses, see “At Last, They Tie the Knot,” *Middle East*, July 1990, pp. 5–11; and “Learning to Live Together,” *Middle East*, September 1990, pp. 17–19.

There for research purposes, I was witness to this process in the two parts of Yemen between late May and mid-July 1990. Awed and sobered by what I saw and heard, my thoughts often turned for analogy to the time between the adoption and implementation of the United States Constitution in the late 18th century. The number of things, large and small, momentous and mundane, that have to be rethought

and redone is simply staggering, in the private and mixed public–private sectors as well as in the public sector itself.

<sup>31</sup>An early translation of the new constitution is available from the Republic of Yemen's Mission to the United Nations and from its embassy in Washington, D.C. (Watergate 600, Suite 860, 600 New Hampshire Ave., N.W., Washington, D.C., 20037).