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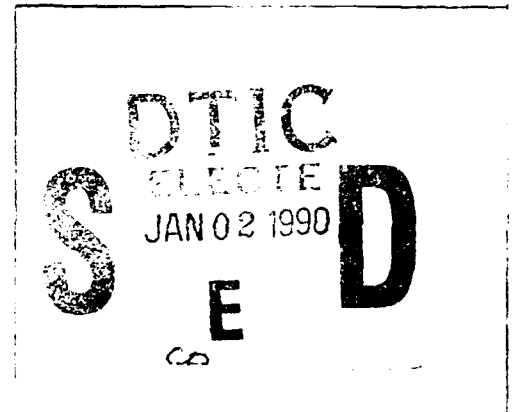
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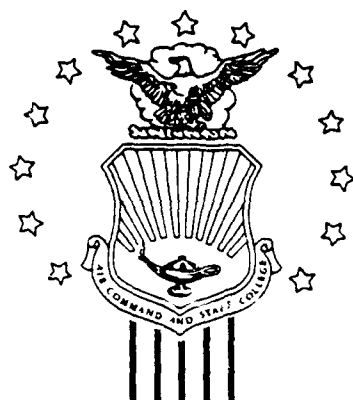
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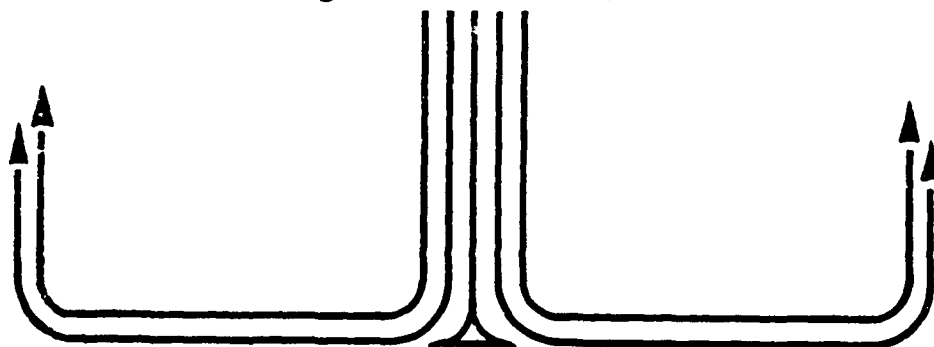
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STUDENT REPORT

MARXISM IN ISLAMIC SOUTH YEMEN

MAJOR MICHAEL G. RUSSELL 88-2280

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PREFACE

Islam and Marxism are diametrically opposed from both the Islamic and Marxist viewpoints. In South Yemen, however, this condition has existed since 1967 when South Yemen won its independence from British colonial rule. There are several reasons why this unique blend of Islam and Marxism came into being and why it has persisted for 20 years. After several centuries of domination by other nations, Yemeni hatred of their foreign rulers fostered the rise of Yemeni nationalism. The oppressive rule by foreign-backed Yemeni nobility created hostility among the people toward the traditional ruling elite. The repressive social system spawned a desire for change. Religious infighting amongst differing sects of Islam produced a pragmatic Yemeni muslim more concerned with tribal loyalty than Islamic doctrine. These internal and external factors combined to make South Yemen the unique country it is today.

This study was conducted for the Middle East Affairs Branch of the United States Special Operations School at Hurlburt Field, Florida. This material will be incorporated into a course on Middle East Affairs as a background reading.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Major Michael G. Russell graduated from Brigham Young University in 1974 with a BS in Anthropology/Archaeology and received his Air Force commission through ROTC. He attended Undergraduate Pilot Training at Moody AFB, Georgia, graduating in 1975. After completing Combat Crew Training in the B-52 he was assigned to the 379th Bombardment Wing, Wurtsmith AFB, Michigan as a B-52 copilot. While at Wurtsmith AFB, he held positions as B-52 copilot, aircrew commander, instructor pilot, and flight commander. In 1981 he was assigned to the 93rd Bombardment Wing Combat Crew Training School at Castle AFB, California. At Castle AFB, he served as a B-52 flightline instructor and as a Central Flight Instructor Course B-52 instructor pilot. In 1984, he was assigned to Headquarters, Strategic Air Command, Joint Strategic Target Planning Staff, Offutt AFB, Nebraska where he served as the Chief, NATO Aircraft Timing Section.

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Major Russell is a senior pilot with almost 5000 hours flying time and 12 years experience in SAC. After graduation from the Air Command and Staff College he will remain as a member of the ACSC faculty.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Preface.....	iii
Executive Summary.....	vi
CHAPTER ONE--INTRODUCTION	
Objective.....	1
Limitations.....	1
Overview.....	2
CHAPTER TWO--ISLAMIC AND MARXIST VIEWS ON GOVERNMENT	
Islamic View of Government.....	3
Marxist Views of Religion and State.....	4
Islam Contrasted with Marxism.....	5
Conclusion.....	6
CHAPTER THREE--HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE ON EXTERNAL INFLUENCES IN SOUTH YEMEN	
British Colonial Rule.....	7
Saudi Arabian Influence in South Yemen.....	10
Conclusion.....	10
CHAPTER FOUR--HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE ON INTERNAL DEVELOPMENTS IN SOUTH YEMEN	
Pre-Islamic Social Structure.....	12
The Effect of Islam on Yemeni Society.....	13
Geographical Influences.....	15
Conclusion.....	15
CHAPTER FIVE--THE COEXISTENCE OF ISLAM AND MARXISM IN SOUTH YEMEN	
Internal Factors.....	17
External Factors.....	19
Conclusion.....	20
CHAPTER SIX--IMPLICATIONS FOR US INTERESTS IN THE MIDDLE EAST	
South Yemen as a Soviet Client State.....	22
Yemeni Relationships with Pro-Western Neighbors.....	24
South Yemen as a Role-Model.....	25
Conclusion.....	25
BIBLIOGRAPHY.....	26

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY



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REPORT NUMBER 88-2280

AUTHOR(S) MAJOR MICHAEL G. RUSSELL, USAF

TITLE MARXISM IN ISLAMIC SOUTH YEMEN

I. Purpose: To determine how a Marxist government came to power in Islamic South Yemen and why Marxism and Islam coexist within South Yemen, and to explore possible implications for United States interest in the region.

II. Problem: Although Islam and Marxism are diametrically opposed from both the Islamic and Marxist viewpoints, the fact remains that this condition has existed in The Peoples Democratic Republic of Yemen (PDRY) or South Yemen since 1967. This is a concern for the United States because South Yemen is an ally of the Soviet Union and has allowed the Soviets to maintain a military presence in their strategically located country. Of equal concern is whether South Yemen's blend of Marxism/Islam may promote revolution in pro-Western oil-exporting Arabic nations. These problems present serious ramifications for both the free world and the United States.

III. Data: Modern South Yemen was molded by unique internal and external factors. Since prehistoric times Yemen has been isolated from its Arab neighbors by its harsh desert and mountainous terrain.

CONTINUED

This isolation nurtured the development of a strongly tribal oriented society. When Islamic forces started the conversion process in the seventh century AD, they were met with fierce resistance by the Yemeni tribes. Eventually all Yemen accepted Islam but they retained much of their pre-Islamic tribal law and social traditions. The Yemeni tribes became pragmatic Muslims more interested in tribal relationships than Islamic doctrine. Another factor that molded Yemen was the centuries of domination by outside powers. During this period of domination a corrupt and despised Yemeni ruling elite emerged. The British used this ruling elite in administering its colony in Aden and the Yemen interior and alienated most of Yemen. With the rise of Arab nationalism Yemen determined to gain its independence from Great Britain. Yemen also had unfriendly relations with its conservative Arab neighbors and considered them enemies. Yemen emerged into the 1960s a poor, backward nation with none of the resources enjoyed by its oil-producing neighbors. After four years of guerrilla war, Yemen gained its independence from Great Britain in 1967. In a brief civil war, the Marxists gained power in South Yemen and have maintained it. After independence South Yemen rejected the West because of its experience as a British colony and because it was an enemy to its conservative pro Western neighbors, they turned to the Soviet Union for leadership and protection. Since 1967 South Yemen has softened its attitude towards its neighbors and no longer actively promotes Marxist revolution in those countries. South Yemen remains a faithful ally to the Soviets but doesn't always agree on issues of mutual concern.

IV. Conclusions: South Yemen adopted a Marxist government because of its dislike for the British and pro-Western Arab states. Oppressive social conditions and a poor economy made the Yemeni people ready for a change and many saw Marxism as the vehicle. Because the Yemeni people are pragmatic Muslims they had little problem accepting a Marxist government. South Yemen remains poor and backward even with Soviet aid. They have not been a role-model for developing nations and have been unsuccessful in exporting their revolution to other Arab states. The greatest threat to US interests in the region is the military presence of the Soviet Union in South Yemen. From its bases in South Yemen, the Soviets can project their power throughout the Middle East.

Chapter One

INTRODUCTION

Ever since the Russian revolution of 1917 thrust its Communist dogma upon an unsuspecting world, the United States and its allies have sought to combat and contain that threat. Since World War II, the number of Communist/Marxist governments coming to power has increased dramatically. Even more disturbing is the fact that some nations considered relatively immune to a Communist/Marxist takeover succumbed, thereby changing perceptions of social and political stability. Marxist governments coming to power in Islamic-Arabic nations is, perhaps, the biggest challenge to the western world. For many years traditional western beliefs held that the ideology of "atheistic Marxism" and theocratic Islam could not coexist within the same nation-state (13:65). Nevertheless this very thing has occurred in the People's Democratic Republic of Yemen (PDY or South Yemen).

OBJECTIVE

The principle objective of this study is to determine how a Marxist government came to power in Islamic South Yemen. A secondary objective is to examine the implications a Marxist/Islamic government presents for pro-Western Arab nations and US interests in the region.

LIMITATIONS

There are several limitations that apply to this study. First, the time allocated for this study limits the research conducted and may restrict the view presented. Likewise, since this topic is not widely debated in print, there are a limited number of references available and this has narrowed the focus of the study. In the author's view, however, this study covers those areas of primary importance sufficiently to help the reader gain a basic understanding of the situation in South Yemen.

OVERVIEW

A brief look at Marxist and Islamic ideology is required to better understand the situation in South Yemen. Chapter Two first discusses the Islamic views of what type of government is consistent with Islamic law. Then it discusses the Marxist views of the relationship between religion and state to determine their compatibility. Lastly, it contrasts these two views to determine if both ideologies can exist side-by-side.

Chapter Three deals with some of the external historical factors contributing to the Marxist takeover. The British ruled the Yemeni people from 1839 to 1967 (7:18). This had a profound effect on Yemeni nationalism and aided the Marxists in their internal power struggle with moderate factions at the time of independence (7:20-29). The relationship between the Yemeni people and neighboring Arab states, especially Saudia Arabia, also affected the Yemeni drift towards Marxism. This outside Arab intervention strengthened Yemeni resolve to chart a course independent of other Arab states (7:141-159).

Chapter Four examines some of the internal historical factors instrumental in setting the stage for a Marxist government in Islamic Yemen. Pre-Islamic social structures still play an important part in modern Yemen (7:5). Also the Islamic expansion in the seventh to ninth centuries was not as successful in Yemen as in other areas (10:2). Lastly, a brief look at the geographical limitations will highlight problems that provoked social unrest and aided the Marxist bid for power.

Chapter Five explains why Islam and Marxism coexist in South Yemen. There are two areas of focus: internal factors that set the stage for Marxist elements to come to power after independence from Great Britain, and external factors that combined with the internal factors to propel a Marxist government into control.

Chapter Six is perhaps the most ambitious as it looks at some of the implications for US interests in the Middle East based on experiences in South Yemen. Three areas of interest will be discussed: South Yemen as a Soviet client state, its relationship with conservative, pro-Western neighbors, and South Yemens success as a role-model for other developing Arab nations. Since the scope of this study is rather limited, no firm predictions for the future spread of Marxism in the region will be forthcoming. Rather, the intent is to provide some thought as to what the potential might be.

Chapter Two

ISLAMIC AND MARXIST VIEWS ON GOVERNMENT

The intention of this chapter is to provide a framework of Islamic and Marxist theory to determine how two strongly opposing political/social ideologies can exist within the same nation-state. To provide this framework it is helpful to look at the Islamic theory of government as determined by Islamic law, then look at Marxist theory to determine its views of religion and government, and, finally, contrast these two ideologies to find a basis or rationale for coexistence.

ISLAMIC VIEW OF GOVERNMENT

To fully understand the impact of Islamic theory on government would require a lengthy study going back to the Prophet Muhammed. However, a generalized overview should provide enough background. Islam, as taught by the Prophet Muhammed and the Koran (holy scriptures), provides the basis for the relationship of God and Man, and defines the social relationships between people (2:21). This provides Islam with a carefully detailed social structure (2:21). In his book, Professor Al-Sayed states;

Starting from the fundamental assumption that all aspects of natural life have been God-willed and possess, therefore, a positive value of their own, the Koran makes it abundantly clear that the ultimate purpose of all creation is the compliance of the created with the will of the Creator. In the case of men, this compliance-called Islam-is postulated as a conscious, active coordination of man's desires and behavior with the rules of life decreed by the Creator (2:21).

Consequently, Islam provides spiritual and social guidance on how people should treat one another. Other organized religions also provide social guidance, but, Islam is specific. Islam contains laws called the Shari'ah covering all areas of human behavior: spiritual, physical, individual, social, economic, and political (2:21). Furthermore, the individual is subordinate to the community, and the community and its government are subordinate to the Shari'ah (2:22).

Although the Shari'ah isn't specific about the type of government to use, its structure must be "guided by the principles of Ijtihad (independent legal judgment arrived at by knowledge and reasoning, according to the circumstances of the time)" (2:23). This provides a great deal of freedom for Islamic people to determine the types and procedures of government but the preferred ideology is Monotheistic Unity (3:14). Monotheistic Unity is the belief in one God and a government based on the "Holy Law" with the following parts: be'that (Continual Spiritual Mission - personal growth and spreading Islam), emamat (Spiritual Leadership - provided by the clergy or Imam), 'edalat (Justice), and me'ad (Point of Return-the concept that Monotheistic Unity is the only path of government) (3:15). In short, the preferred government is an Islamic theocracy (2:23).

However, what evolved over the centuries after the foundation of Islam was not a true theocracy, it was rule by the non-clergy or Caliph, with the support of the clergy or Imams (6:52). The governments of many modern Islamic states are still the same, strong heads of state supported by the Imams. From this view it is possible to say that Islamic fundamentalism would support a form of government that follows the Shari'ah but would reject one that didn't (2:22-24). With this understanding of Islamic government, a look at Marxist theory is necessary to formulate contrasts.

MARXIST VIEWS OF RELIGION AND STATE

Karl Marx, considered by the world to be the father of modern "Scientific Socialism" and Communism, had a rather dim view of religion in general and taught that it had no place in the modern world of socialism. In fact, Marx taught that freedom from the repression of religion has the same priority as political and social emancipation, and is an essential part of revolution (5:119). Marx clearly established his view of the relationship between these three factors:

Man, therefore, was not freed from religion; he obtained freedom of religion. He was not freed from property; he obtained freedom of property. He was not freed from the egotism of business; he obtained freedom of business (5:119).

Thus, Marx dismisses religion, and replaced it with a higher loyalty to material goals (13:87-90). Consequently, theoretical Marxism holds that political, social, and economic evolution is not compatible with religion in the nation-state. This concept is best stated by Ali Shari'ati.

Marxism sees its task as the systematic eradication of all forms of religion. Since it basically considers

religion something not only futile but intellectually damaging, it sees it as an enemy of the people, an obstacle in its path, and it never attempts to conceal the frank words of Lenin: "One must treat religion ruthlessly!" (13:52).

Some applications of Marxism, however, represent a slightly different view. Several contemporary nation-states such as Cuba, Egypt, and Burma have justified the coexistence of Marxism and religion (14:223-251). A contrast of Islam and Marxism is necessary to determine their compatibility within this context.

ISLAM CONTRASTED WITH MARXISM

Islamic fundamentalists believe Islam and Marxism are at odds in several areas. "First, Islam is based on divine law" (2:22) and never changes (2:22). Marxism, on the other hand, is a human product and has changed over the years (2:23). Islam is therefore more correct and uncorrupted. Also, Islam allows the individual to use his conscience to interpret Islamic law, while Marxism allows no room for individual interpretation of the states' law (2:23). Finally, fundamental Islamic doctrine is at odds with Marxist ideology over social evolution. Islam considers the basis for social evolution as the "liberation and purification of the soul, without which, no attempt at improving human life can be successful" (6:151). In contrast, Marxism is concerned with improving the standard of living and is little concerned with the soul. In other words, Islam has the loftier goal of saving the soul and Marxism is concerned only with materialistic goals (13:87). Islamic fundamentalists believe Islam and Marxist socialism can never be reconciled.

Islam and Socialism are two separate, comprehensive, and indivisible systems of thought and living. No reconciliation, or synthesis, is therefore possible between them. If there are occasional similarities between them, this does not warrant their identification with each other, just as the similarities between Islam and Communism cannot be taken as proof that they are congenial or based on the same principles (6:151).

On the other hand, Islamic moderates see Islam and Marxism having much in common and are quick to point out "Islam and socialism are united in their high regard for collectivism, or a balance between corporate and individual interests, state control, and an equitable distribution of wealth" (6:139). The Islamic moderate sees a common basis for the coexistence of Islam and Marxism but doubts they can work together (6:139). Some Islamic radicals even see a

great deal in common between Islam and Marxism, and point out "there is no important barrier to this Muslim-Marxist friendship" (14:151).

CONCLUSION

What can be postulated from comparing and contrasting these two differing ideologies depends upon the perspective one holds. From the Islamic fundamentalist point of view, there is no question that Islam and Marxism are opposed and will forever remain so. As a result there is no possibility the two could ever coexist in the nation-state. As the perspective shifts away from fundamentalism, some Islamic moderates endorse the notion there is some common ground between Islam and Marxism, but doubt they could coexist. But when one shifts to the radical Islamic left there exists a rationalization process that sees Islam and Marxism as complimentary but different means to the same end. In that environment Islam and Marxism can coexist.

Chapter Three

HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE ON EXTERNAL INFLUENCES IN SOUTH YEMEN

- Yemeni history is one of domination. From the conquest of Arabic Islamic forces in the seventh century until the United Kingdom granted independence in 1967, an outside power has governed Yemen (7:11-19). This long period of domination had a great effect on the nationalistic ideals of the Yemeni people. Britain in particular, through rigid colonial policy, created an environment for the rise of nationalism and revolution (15:44-45). The Saudis and other Islamic peoples also helped set the stage by interference in Yemeni domestic and international affairs (15:100-102). To understand how Marxism came to power, it is necessary to look at the external factors developing that foundation.

BRITISH COLONIAL RULE

Although the British ruled Yemen for a relatively short time, they played a significant role in planting the seeds of Yemeni nationalism (15:37-45). A brief historical overview will help put this into perspective.

Napoleon's successes in Egypt in 1799 caused a great deal of concern for British possessions in Asia, particularly India (15:31). Additionally, French corsairs (maritime commercial raiders) and Arab pirates operating in the Red Sea and Persian Gulf were harassing English commercial shipping (15:31). To thwart these threats to their shipping routes and lifeline to India, England sought a permanent naval base in the Persian Gulf (7:12). They accomplished this by establishing a port treaty with the Sultan of Lahej in 1802 (7:12). England established their base at Aden (South Yemen) and developed it into a coaling and resupply station for their military and commercial steamships (7:12). The English looked for a pretext to annex Aden and it finally occurred in 1839 when locals plundered an English shipwreck (17:12). The English invaded and after a short fight with the local Sultan's forces, occupied Aden (7:12). This invasion of Aden caused an immediate armed response from other Yemeni tribes and for the next 128 years England had to hold Aden and surrounding territories through force (12:29).

The next 100 years of colonial rule could be characterized as Yemeni dependence on the British (7:12). This dependence was created by the "chaotic political conditions that the local rulers faced, such as continuous tribal feuds, lack of a strong central government, extreme poverty, and the social/economic/political backwardness of the Yemeni tribes" (7:12). To keep the local leaders weak and dependent, the British gave them protection. In return the sultans allied themselves with the British (7:12). The British placed an advisor in each sultans court to advise, and more importantly, to dictate British policy (7:12).

The British achieved two significant advantages by supporting a large number of weak sheiks and sultans in South Yemen. First, these weak rulers were allied with tribes. The sheik or sultan spoke for a coalition of related tribes, and in turn the tribes were usually submissive to their ruler (7:9). The British controlled the tribes through the sheiks and sultans. And since there were constant disputes and wars between tribes, no one ruler could gain enough power to challenge British authority (7:10). This created bitterness towards the British and slowed the development of a national consciousness (7:10). Secondly, the British were able to dominate the Yemeni tribes for little cost. As one writer put it;

Finally, this elaborate yet simple system of dominance was extremely inexpensive for the British. They paid a mere \$5,435 per year in subsidies for the loyalty of twenty-five sultans. In addition, the British saved themselves the trouble and expense of administering the fiercely independent tribesmen (7:13).

By pushing this policy of dependence, the British were able to spread their influence throughout South Yemen. By 1914, Britain had treaties with virtually every sultan in the area (7:13).

During the period between the two World Wars, Aden became more important to the British. Aden occupied a strategic location in the Persian Gulf that directly affected shipping through the Suez canal and was near the recently discovered Arabian oil fields (7:13). Because of its increased importance to their interests, England declared Aden a Crown Colony in 1937 and established their complete colonial ruling structure (7:13). With Aden as a Crown Colony, the local rulers had even less power, Great Britain alone dictated policy. This caused several minor uprisings and the Yemeni rulers, with British help, used very repressive measures to restore and maintain control over the tribes (7:14).

The environment the British created made it difficult to give Aden its independence after World War II. The British wanted to leave Aden with a constitutional government administered by the pro-British traditional ruling sheiks and sultans (7:14). The Yemeni

tribes, however, saw these elites as British puppets and protectors of the "repressive social and political structures of the interior regions" (7:14) and wouldn't support their rule (7:14). For this reason, the British felt Yemen was incapable of self-government and must remain a colony (4:78-79). This caused more Yemeni bitterness toward Great Britain.

During this time a new force, Arab nationalism, came into being creating new problems for the British. After the 1952 Egyptian revolution, Nasser started to spread his particular blend of Arab nationalism and socialism. In Yemen, he found a receptive audience and he soon swung his support behind the Yemeni struggle for independence (7:15). Great Britain tried to counter. They established a Federation of Arab Emirates in the south protected by the Army and began a series of political reforms including free elections (7:16-18). These measures were basically too little, too late. The elections for the Legislative Council in 1959, angered the Yemeni because the strict property and residency requirements kept most Yemeni from voting and many popular candidates from running for office (7:16). "The Arab population boycotted the polls" (7:16) and the election became an embarrassment for the British (7:16-17). It also failed to establish a popular pro-British government in South Yemen. In 1962 a coup against the Imam, in what would become North Yemen, brought in Egyptian troops and political advisors (7:15). The Egyptians began to help South Yemeni revolutionaries and the independence movement gained renewed strength and momentum in South Yemen (15:61-63).

In the North, Arab nationalist groups, newspapers, and radio stations sprung up, aided by the Egyptians (7:15). Soon "pan-Arab parties such as the Arab Nationalists' Movement (AMN) and the Ba'ath began to organize in the South" (7:15) and gain local support (7:15). This support would have been difficult to obtain without the media. "Through the transistor radio, North Yemen and Egyptian broadcasts brought these developments into the smallest South Yemeni towns and villages, raising aspirations and popularizing the nationalist struggle" (7:15).

Actual armed conflict between the British and insurgent forces began in October 1963 when "the National Front for the Liberation of Occupied South Yemen (NLF) attacked British forces in the mountainous Radfan District" (7:17). Great Britain continued to seek a political solution based on Aden becoming part of a greater South Arabian Federation (7:19). This move had no popular Yemeni support because the British allied themselves with the despised pro-British rulers (7:19). Eventually, the British lost hope of a favorable settlement and granted South Yemen independence, on 30 November 1967 (7:19).

After independence, the question was who would gain power in South Yemen. The two primary groups were veteran nationalist movements: the NLF and the Front for the Liberation of South Yemen (FLOSY). The question was settled by a bloody civil war won by the leftist NLF (7:28). Once the NLF was in power, the Marxist faction began to consolidate its power and later seized the government from the moderate faction (7:35). At this critical time Saudia Arabia again involved themselves in Yemeni affairs (4:241-245).

SAUDIA ARABIAN INFLUENCE IN SOUTH YEMEN

Saudia Arabia had a hand in Yemeni affairs since the Prophet Muhammed. As Islam spread south, it was resisted by the Yemeni people due to their distrust of outsiders (7:11). Eventually the Saudis won out and established Islamic caliphates that ruled all Yemen (7:11). The Saudis exercised a rather loose control of the interior and had trouble collecting taxes or exerting any influence (15:25). Their influence eventually waned and disappeared completely when the Ottoman Turks conquered Yemen in the sixteenth century (15:28-30).

Relations between Saudia Arabia and Yemen became better after World War I. Prior to South Yemen's independence, both countries maintained a stable relationship. In fact, many skilled South Yemeni workers were employed in Saudia Arabia (15:100). Relations soured when Egypt entered the North Yemeni civil war in 1962, and the Saudis, opposed to the leftist leaning Egyptians, entered into the conflict to counter Egyptian influence (15:100). As Egyptian influence increased with South Yemeni radicals, the Saudis worked hard to undermine the Yemeni. Because of Saudi interference, the Yemeni "regarded Saudia Arabia as their most dangerous enemy" (4:241). Furthermore, South Yemen saw Saudia Arabia as nothing more than a British/American/Zionist ally in the middle east (4:242). By 1972, South Yemen had moved squarely into the Soviet camp (4:240).

CONCLUSIONS

The British played a significant role in the movement of South Yemen to a Marxist government. Their colonial rule alienated the Yemeni people by supporting the corrupt sheiks' and sultans' repressive rule. This gave rise to Yemeni nationalism. The nationalists were aided by the Egyptians who influenced Yemeni political thought. Saudia Arabia, representing pro-western moderation also alienated the Yemeni people. In many respects this left South Yemen with no choice but to turn away from pro-Western moderate Arab states and turn toward the Communist block. South Yemen parallels some other nations that emerged out of the colonial breakups of the 1960s, displaying strong nationalism and an affinity for Marxism/Communism.

When the Marxists within the NLF gained power after independence there was little Great Britain or Saudia Arabia could do, short of war, to prevent the Marxist takeover. There are internal factors that also have an equally important part in shaping South Yemen and they are covered in the next chapter.

Chapter Four

HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE ON INTERNAL DEVELOPMENTS IN SOUTH YEMEN

There are several internal factors instrumental in setting the stage for a Marxist government in Islamic South Yemen. Pre-Islamic social structures played an important part in developing modern Yemen (7:5). Tribal relationships were more important than fundamental Islamic law (7:5). The Islamic conversion of Yemen was not as successful as it had been in other areas and the cultural influence of Yemen by other Islamic nations was minimal (7:5). The harsh geography allowed the Yemeni to develop their social structures largely independent of outside influence (7:5). To better understand the role these factors played in the transition of South Yemen into a Marxist state it is necessary to examine pre-Islamic society, the effect of Islam on society, and geographical influences.

PRE-ISLAMIC SOCIAL STRUCTURE

As early as 2000 BC, the Yemeni peoples had developed into a highly organized society with tribal oriented city-states and an organized religion (15:15). They engaged in trade throughout South Arabia extending as far as the Mediterranean (4:2). The basis for society was the tribe (7:6). The following is a good description of this tribal organization.

. . . these tribal units are characterized by an extended segmented structure, with each tribe divided into sub-tribes by lineage, and these further divided and subdivided until the basic building block of tribal society, the clan or family, is reached. Such family groups may be territorial as well as kinship groups, representing perhaps a single village or a portion thereof (7:6).

The tribal structure dominated all relationships within the society whether it was political, economic, or military. As the tribes grew in size and power, leaders called sheiks evolved (7:6). The tribal sheiks were sometimes elected by the tribe, but more often, they obtained their position because of their family influence or power (7:6). It was the tribal sheiks "to whom all members of the tribe look as mediators and judges in inter-tribal affairs and . . . held

certain rights and privileges regarding land use and distribution" (7:6). Tribal support wasn't always consistent. If a sheikh made a judgment against a particular clan, the clan often failed to support the ruling and intra-tribal warfare resulted (15:5).

As trade increased, a system of walled cities grew into small theocratic states and eventually kingdoms (4:2). Within these kingdoms a social stratification began that lasted until the revolution in 1962 (4:2). There also evolved holy places or "sacred enclaves", controlled by priests, that became important as neutral grounds for tribal disputes and propelled the priests into the roll of mediators (4:3).

By the time Islam gained a foothold in Yemen, the social structure was well defined and had operated for thousands of years. Society was organized into theocratic kingdoms and tribal units engaging in commerce throughout the region. Social customs regarding religion and social stratification were deeply ingrained and the Yemeni people enjoyed "a very considerable culture" (4:2).

THE EFFECT OF ISLAM ON YEMENI SOCIETY

The conversion of the Yemeni people to Islam was not an easy process. The Persian governor of Yemen converted in 631 AD (4:6), but the Yemeni people were less enthusiastic. A local religion opposed to Islam disintegrated when its leaders were murdered and its followers persecuted by Islamic occupation forces (4:7). Later, after the death of Muhammad, a rebellion against the new Islamic authority flared up but was quickly and violently stopped by Islamic forces (15:21). One author describes this era this way:

Yemen's initial allegiance to Islam was at best only superficial. In the first three centuries of Islam, after the Arab conquests and after the great caliphates moved the center of Islamic activity far from Yemen, it can be fairly said that Yemen became a backwater and Islam and Islamic instruction were restricted to a handful of key towns and cities . . . We have to look to the concurrent arrivals of the Zaidi and the Isma'ili-Fatimid [sects] in the late ninth century AD . . . to find the true beginnings of the thorough Islamisation of Yemeni society (10:2).

Even though the Yemeni eventually accepted Islam they kept much of the "old law of the Yemen, some of which has in consequence persisted until now" (4:3). Tribal loyalties were stronger than other bonds and remain so today (8:24).

After the death of Muhammad, various sects began to appear in the Islamic world. The Yemeni people became involved and "despite its remoteness, Yemen was to find itself one of the arenas in which . . . issues affecting the whole Muslim world were to be fought out" (4:7). This struggle was a protracted affair lasting three centuries (4:7) and as one author states,

. . . Islam soon brought its own cleavages, which became intertwined with rivalries among Yemeni tribal groupings . . . as their kinship bonds remained the decisive orientation of the tribesmen, they never became truly reconciled to outside authority of any sort. The resulting tensions made Yemen's history under Islam a remarkably stormy and violent one (15:20).

Social stratification became even more pronounced during the 1300 years of Islamic rule (7:6-8). Tribal organization in the hinterlands was very different from that found in larger villages and towns where "social status is a function not only of descent, but also of religious status and occupation" (7:6). At the top of the strata are the town-based sayyids, whose prestige allows them to mediate in inter-tribal disputes (7:8). Next are the "religious sheikhs and town-dwelling tribesmen" (7:8). Then come the masakin (poor) or dhu'fa (weak) who are the artisans and laborers which are further divided into subgroups (7:8). At the bottom are the subayan or servant groups that usually descended from slaves and "have remained outside the mainstream of Yemeni life" (7:8). This structure allowed little if any chance to improve social standing by merit. "Social life was maintained and perpetuated by customs and rules governing social interaction of almost caste-like severity, status was almost invariably ascribed as a function of descent" (7:8). This greatly limited upward mobility for generations and probably fostered frustrations toward this social system.

Islam has been a disruptive influence in Yemeni society since it was introduced. Religious animosity between feuding Islamic sects caused the decentralization of power and kept Yemen a weak and fragmented nation (4:6-15). From this constant turmoil emerged the typical Yemeni who held a rather pragmatic view of Islam.

Few Yemenis were learned in the finer points of Islamic theology and law. Most, at the same time, were profoundly concerned with their souls' salvation, which, in their view, depended on the rectitude of their daily conduct, and they felt the need of guidance by those enlightened in matters of the faith. They could readily be mobilized in support of a strong personality of whose spiritual authority they were convinced, particularly when his enterprises offered the additional prospect of material reward in the form of war booty (15:22).

GEOGRAPHICAL INFLUENCES

An examination of historical internal factors affecting the development of Yemeni society would be incomplete without a brief look at the countries' geography. South Yemen has "some of the most rugged and inhospitable terrain in the region, a fact that has had considerable influence on its social, economic, and political development" (7:2). The rugged costal mountains "have protected the interior regions and have facilitated the development of Yemeni society largely unimpeded" (7:2).

Sheltered from the rest of the Arabian peninsula (and hence from much of the influence of Islamic armies and migrating Bedouin tribes) during the rise of Islam, Islam modified but failed to transform the pattern of social ascription, land ownership and land usage that lay at the root of the existing social order. Thus, within the tribes of modern South Yemen, secular tribal law ('urf) which owes much to pre-Islamic practice, is dominant, rather than the shari'ah (Islamic law). Later, Ottoman Turkish rule was too weak to bring about significant social changes apart from in the city of Aden, and hence South Yemen was not subject to the homogenizing effect of Ottoman administration . . . that so affected much of the rest of the Middle East. The result was the existence in many areas of the south of semi-feudal or slave/retainer-based social structures that differed markedly from those found in other Arab countries (7:5).

Economically the region is poor, with little surplus in either food or natural resources and "local subsistence-level agriculture predominates throughout the country under primitive and exploitative conditions" (7:79). Further aggravating the poor economic situation was the lack of modern transportation systems, such as roads and railroads (7:79). While the geography has protected the Yemeni people from outside intervention, it has also kept them poor and backward.

CONCLUSION

Internal factors played a significant part in South Yemen's transition into a Marxist/Islamic state. Pre-Islamic Yemen had evolved into a highly organized social structure that remained almost unchanged during the years of Islamic domination. The constant war-ring between competing Islamic sects, resulted in Muslims' loyalties resting more with their tribe than a national identity. And although the Yemeni were religious people, they were not learned in Islamic doctrine. The result was the subjugation of Islamic law and government to secular tribal laws and government. The stratified social

structure, that imposed its caste-like system on society, greatly limited upward mobility and social progression. Over the centuries this produced social unrest. In addition, the poor economy, lack of raw materials, and reliance on subsistence farming, produced a low standard of living that intensified rising feelings of animosity towards the system. Within this framework, it is evident that internal factors provided the ingredients for a social revolution in South Yemen.

Chapter Five

THE COEXISTENCE OF ISLAM AND MARXISM IN SOUTH YEMEN

The central issue of this study is, "How can a Marxist government exist within the Islamic state of South Yemen?" The answer to that question is complex and involves many factors. It is beyond the scope of this study to examine all relevant factors. However, reviewing those factors presented in previous chapters provides a picture of how this blending of Islam and Marxism occurred. The primary factors that helped that blending are internal and external, but both had a similar effect, namely the "transformation of the struggle for independence into a social revolution" (7:161). Yemeni social structures and conditions, European imperialism, and rising Arab nationalism set the stage for social revolution. For simplicity, internal factors will be discussed first, followed by external factors and the conclusion.

INTERNAL FACTORS

As discussed in Chapter Four, several internal factors developed over the centuries that effectively set the stage for social unrest. These were the development of pragmatic Muslims, tribalism, social stratification, and deteriorating economic conditions.

Constant conflicts between different Islamic sects created a rather pragmatic Muslim, unlearned in his faith and bound more by secular tribal law than Islamic law (7:5). With loyalties tied to tribal relationships, it became difficult for any one entity to unify Yemen against outside invasion or control (15:30). This led to centuries of domination by outside powers (7:11-19).

Tribalism divided the loyalties of the Yemeni peoples, minimized the effect of Islam as a uniting factor, and established oppressive leadership by a ruling elite (15:20-24). It was this leadership, which had developed over centuries of domination, that the people grew to despise and resist (7:162-163). Even though the British instituted some political reforms, it wasn't enough to repair the damage (7:16). One author stated,

The vast majority of South Yemen's population had little to gain by a mere transfer of power from colonial administrators to an independent government controlled by a class of traditional elites. It was this class, after all, and not the British colonial administrators, who directly oppressed the hinterland. The British were really only visible in Aden; the sultans and sheikhs were their visible counterpart outside the capital. They owned the land and exploited its resources to maintain lifestyles lavish in comparison with the mass of poor peasants who worked it (7:162).

Also, traditional tribal patterns began to change as Yemen tried to make the difficult transition from the thirteenth into the twentieth century and "for the first time, the tribes witnessed the emergence in their territories of cinemas, refrigerators, and gas ovens. Consequently, they became more conscious of the shortcomings of their own society" (16:83-84). The overall effect was a growing discontent by tribal groups and a desire for change (16:84-85).

Social stratification of the society produced a large group of people dissatisfied with the social structure. Upward social mobility was severely restricted and created little hope of advancing in social stature (7:8). Radical ideals, such as social equality and abolition of social classes, emerged during Yemeni independence and there were many who accepted those ideas. In fact, many of the working class believed that "[social reform] could not be built by peaceful cooperation among social classes; it required the militant leadership of the working class" (15:60). They also supported the struggle for Marxist domination in the post-independence government (7:162-165).

The stagnant economy was also a problem. At independence it was "fragmented and largely underdeveloped, gripped by the most severe depression the country had known in modern history" (7:79). Poor agricultural practices had developed over the years and the "situation of the peasants deteriorated because of the unequal distribution of land ownership and the mounting difficulties of renting land" (9:23). The ruling elite controlled most of the land where they "used their traditional control over grazing rights and land allocation to personal advantage and to maintain social control; while in the more densely settled areas the dominant system of land and water rights, rent/sharecropping and money-lending clearly favored landowners over tenants" (7:83). Consequently, the farmers were unhappy with the existing circumstances and were ready to accept land reforms advocated by the revolutionary left (7:83-88).

Because of these internal factors, the Yemeni people were ready for a change. Even though Islam was a significant part of their lives, it also had contributed to their current problems. Further, dissatisfaction with corrupt and weak leaders, rigidly controlled social standing, and the inequitable distribution of monetary resources and land, provided the incentive to accept a new order. The actual thrust to establish a new order came primarily from outside sources.

EXTERNAL FACTORS

The external factors that led to the Yemeni revolution were the rise of Arab nationalism and a growing resistance to British colonial rule. Both factors are interdependent and it would be difficult to have one without the other. Although Arab nationalism developed outside of Yemen, it probably would have found a less enthusiastic audience if the Yemeni were happy with colonial rule.

The strongest supporter of Arab nationalism and anti-British sentiment was Egypt (16:35-42). They had an enduring relationship with Yemeni liberation groups, often stepping to the forefront of the diverse Yemeni groups to force a unified effort in ending British rule (7:27). "The Yemeni nationalists [who] were inspired by Arab nationalism, were determined individuals who desired to reform Yemeni society along the lines of economic, social, and political development" (16:42). As more radical factions in the diverse liberation groups gained power, their intentions also became more radical.

The revolutionary Arab leader, as a "savior of his people," naturally uses Arab nationalism to conceptualize his political system. He appeals to the Arabs as an Arab nationalist whose sole purpose is to regain Arab unity and Arab greatness, presumably under his leadership. Nonetheless, the revolutionary Arab leader endeavors to create an ideological base through which reforms can be achieved. The adoption of socialism becomes not only the means by which legitimacy for the revolution and its leader is attained, but also a vehicle towards Arab unity (16:91).

Nationalism became the driving force for the liberation of Yemen from British colonial rule (15:51-56). As discussed in Chapter Three, Great Britain's deliberate policy of ignoring the interior tribes and supporting the rule of corrupt sultans and sheikhs angered most Yemeni. Although the British trained lower level bureaucrats to handle day-to-day government administration, they failed to find popular leadership for a pro-British, post-independence government. Instead they backed the unpopular ruling elite. British mistakes in administering her colony helped Yemeni nationalism.

Saudia Arabia, a very conservative monarchy, lost its battle with Egypt for influence in Yemen. To Yemeni nationalists, the Saudis represented the preservation of the conservative ruling elite and British colonial interests (15:100-101). The result was Saudi Arabia became their enemy (4:241).

External factors played a key role in preparing Yemen for a Marxist government. British colonial rule alienated most Yemenis and fostered rising nationalistic feelings. Imported Arab nationalist ideals from Egypt united the Yemenis in their struggle against British rule. Although these external factors played a significant part in South Yemen, they must be combined with internal factors to provide the overall picture.

CONCLUSION

Marxism came to power in South Yemen in spite of Islamic influence. The internal and external factors affecting South Yemen created the need for change and Marxist elements within the liberation movement ensured Marxism was the vehicle for the change.

The evolution of this process started with the "armed struggle by anti-colonialist forces" (7:161) and progressed into a social revolution, aimed at radically restructuring Yemeni society (7:161-162). In 1967 "there were few people who would have guessed that an independent South Yemen would emerge as a socialistic government, dedicated to secular revolutionary ideals [Marxism] and the destruction of its conservative Arab neighbors" (15:59). Over the years South Yemen has softened her attitude towards her neighbors (7:163-164) but remains as dedicated as ever to Marxism as the means of social reform (4:100:102).

As stated earlier, Marxism came to power in spite of Islam. Islam has reconciled itself to the situation in South Yemen. Before the revolution, Islamic ideals legitimized the social structure of Yemen (7:164). After the revolution, the government faced the difficult task of blending two divergent ideologies to develop and reform the entire social structure (7:164). Perhaps this explanation says it best,

[South Yemen] has in fact adopted a cautious and accommodating attitude towards Islam. It has done so both by stressing the 'socialist' aspects (egalitarianism, commitment to community and social justice) of Islam and by avoiding actions which might unnecessarily antagonize the faithful (7:165).

Another point of view or possible rationalization was presented by 'Abd al-Fattah Ismail, former Secretary General of the ruling United Political Organization of the National Front (UPONF);

Islam was exposed to extreme distortions and falsification, especially after the Rightly Guided Caliphs. In the Abbasid and Ummayid eras, the aristocratic forces were able to divert Islam to goals and concepts other than that for which it had come. They did that to serve their interests and to serve the thrones, the kingdoms, and the hereditary caliphate which had nothing at all to do with Islam . . . Islam, which came essentially as a revolution, was transformed by feudal and aristocratic forces, de-voiding Islam of its revolutionary essence and diverting it to serve other goals (7:165).

The bottom line is that Islam is officially recognized as the state religion in South Yemen (7:165). The state provides protection, maintains the mosques, provides two hours of instruction in Islam per week in schools, and officially recognizes Islamic holidays. However, all these privileges are contingent on the Yemeni clergy supporting the ruling Marxists (14:165). Therefore, Islam exists in South Yemen but is submissive to the government while Marxism accommodates Islam--a practical compromise that has worked since 1967 (7:165).

Chapter Six

IMPLICATIONS FOR US INTERESTS IN THE MIDDLE EAST

This final chapter looks at some implications for US interests in the Middle East based on the existence of Marxist South Yemen. A concern to US interests is that South Yemen is generally viewed as a Soviet client state (10:137). Also a concern is the potentially destabilizing effect South Yemen might have on its conservative pro-western neighbors (10:208-217). And finally, the threat of South Yemen, with her blend of Marxist government and Islamic social structure, becoming a role model for other developing Arab-Islamic nations in the region.

SOUTH YEMEN AS A SOVIET CLIENT STATE

Soviet involvement in Yemen dates back to the early part of this century when the Soviets, eager to gain ports in the area, signed a ten year basing treaty with the Imam Yahya in 1928 (16:11). The Soviets saw this as the first step in establishing control over the Red Sea area (16:11). Unfortunately for the Soviets, the Imam frustrated Soviet intentions in Yemen and like previous French and Italian efforts, the Soviets failed to gain any political influence (16:11). With the rise of Yemeni nationalism in the 1950's, the Soviets increased their influence in South Yemen by providing arms and training to nationalist groups (12:118). The Soviet Union established a relationship that has lasted (10:208-210).

The Soviet Union and South Yemen currently maintain a friendly relationship. In 1979, the Soviets signed a treaty with South Yemen which "seemed more intimate than those which the Soviets had previously concluded with other Arab countries and, unusually, it was to last twenty years" (4:329). This treaty provides for mutual defense (4:329) and "economic, financial, technical, and cultural cooperation" (15:104). In addition, the Soviets and their allies enjoy unrestricted access to sea ports (including a Soviet floating dry-dock in Aden), airports, and storage facilities in South Yemen (15:105). Also rumored, but not confirmed, is the presence of Soviet submarine pens on the South Yemeni island of Socotra (15:105). Clearly, South Yemen has allowed the Soviets to become a military threat to western interests in the area. The Soviets also have a significant influence on South Yemen's relationship with the rest

of the world (15:105). Although they basically share a common view of the world, they don't always agree. As one author points out, "it is a horrendous over-simplification to attribute the policies and actions of South Yemen since independence solely to the relationship which has developed between South Yemen and the Soviet Union" (10:137). A similar view is South Yemen, although an ally of the Soviet Union, has never "been forced to adopt a foreign policy position contrary to its own perceived national interests" (7:156). In fact, there are several cases in which the Soviets and South Yemen have had differing positions: revolutionary movements in North Yemen and Oman, relations with China, South Yemen's economic developmental strategy, the Polisario's struggle against Morocco, and the Palestine problem (7:156-157). One author states it this way:

South Yemen's foreign policy options are limited by its size, resources, and close ties with the socialist community, they have not been eliminated. In other words the PDRY's 'strategic alliance' with the Soviet Union is not maintained by Soviet control of South Yemeni decision-making, by South Yemen's dependence, or by a threat of Soviet intervention, but rather by a conscious foreign policy decision by Aden, founded on the PDRY's basic principles of foreign policy and a sober appraisal of its regional and international position (7:157-158).

From this viewpoint the case can be made that the current Soviet-Yemen relationship is not one of complete Soviet domination. Further, it is doubtful that South Yemen would support Soviet policies in the region that conflicted with Yemeni national interests (10:140-142).

Except for basing rights and verbal support for Soviet policy, South Yemen plays no active role in Soviet interests in the region (10:140-142). From the Yemeni view they see themselves not as Soviet clients but as an independent ally (7:154-157). Indeed, they recognize Soviet exploitation of situations in the region and realize that long term relationships may not be possible with the Soviets (10:141). As one area analyst theorizes, South Yemen's relationship with the Soviets can take a turn for the worse. "If we may use such other states in the area as Egypt, Somalia, or Iraq as indicators, when the bilateral arrangement is no longer to the satisfaction of the local partner, it is substantially modified, or even completely severed" (10:142). Therefore, South Yemen with its sometimes independent thinking, supports Soviet regional interests that don't conflict with its own. Although South Yemen gives the Soviets considerable advantages in the region they may not always be totally reliable.

YEMENI RELATIONSHIPS WITH PRO-WESTERN NEIGHBORS

South Yemen's relationship with its conservative, pro-Western Arab neighbors has changed over the years since South Yemen gained its independence. Immediately after independence South Yemen saw itself as the vanguard and protector of the Arab socialistic revolution (10:225). Indeed, South Yemen attempted to export armed revolution to its neighbors, which resulted in extremely strained relations (10:225). Although military revolutions were nothing new to Arabic nations (8:137-138), the Marxist orientation of South Yemen's social revolution constituted a new threat to the oil rich monarchies nearby (15:99-101). Oman and Saudia Arabia felt especially threatened: Oman, because South Yemen had directly supported, armed, and trained Omani revolutionaries (15:99-100); and Saudia Arabia, because of its lengthy involvement in Yemeni affairs (15:100). Saudia Arabia and South Yemen, in particular, are directly opposed.

Many aspects of South Yemen's internal policies, such as the nationalization of private property and the public employment of women, are anathema to the Saudi regime as inconsistent with Islam, and the entrenched Soviet position in South Yemen is perceived as a menace to regional security as well as to the life expectancy of the ruling dynasty. For their part, the South Yemenis regard the nature of the Saudi regime, and its close ties with the United States and other Western countries, with undisguised distaste (15:102).

Eventually South Yemen came to realize that a universal "regional socialist revolution" (11:59) wasn't going to happen (11:159). It moderated its attitude towards its neighbors and turned inward to concentrate on its own internal problems (7:159). By the early 1980s South Yemen's attitude had softened enough that "while continuing a course of commitment to anti-imperialism and revolutionary ideals, it has moderated its foreign policy approach to the point of rapprochement with its conservative Arab neighbors" (7:159).

Improved relations with its neighbors has benefited South Yemen in several ways. "It has increased the country's security, reduced the burden on it necessitated by national defense, and provided the conditions under which substantial capital aid could be secured, to fuel economic growth" (7:159). It has also resulted in the "consolidation of the South Yemeni revolution and progress towards socialist transformation amid the otherwise economically and politically inhospitable climate of the Arabian Peninsula" (7:159). Although South Yemen has sought to better its relations with its neighbors, there still is friction between them (15:102). Indications are South Yemen will continue on this path of moderation towards its neighbors in order to "consolidate and advance the socialist revolution at home"

(7:160). However, by its very nature South Yemen will probably remain a threat to its pro-Western neighbors for the foreseeable future.

SOUTH YEMEN AS A ROLE MODEL

South Yemen has not been a very successful role model to other developing Arab nations. From an external view, South Yemen has little to offer. Its economy is underdeveloped and is kept alive by aid from the Soviets and its Arab neighbors (7:108-109). Its social programs, health care, and education are hard pressed to handle its own needs (1:110-111). It also suffers from chronic political in-fighting within the ruling NFL party (15:61-69). Overall, South Yemen presents a poor national image.

It is also doubtful that South Yemen will be successful in exporting its mix of Marxism and Islam. In South Yemen "there remains the precarious balance between domestic and foreign policy that results from the potential tensions of revolutionary commitment versus internal development . . . coupled with the absence of significant revolutionary potential in the region the PDRY [sought] accommodation with hostile neighbors" (7:164). South Yemen is too preoccupied with its own problems to export social revolution. Also most Arab states are "profoundly anti-communist and vigorously opposed to the expansion of destabilizing influences [South Yemen] in the region" (11:149). From yet another perspective, South Yemen is viewed by some conservative Arab states as an Islamic heretic (7:165). From the traditional view "Islam and socialism are two separate, comprehensive, and indivisible systems of thought and living. No reconciliation, or synthesis, is therefore possible between them" (6:151).

CONCLUSION

South Yemen is a poor, undeveloped country plagued by political instability. It has improved its relations with its pro-Western neighbors and supports Soviet policy mostly in words. No longer the fresh revolutionary leader, South Yemen has turned inward to work her own mounting problems. Further, South Yemen has not been successful as a role model for other developing Arab nations. After considering these points the author believes South Yemen alone does not present a significant threat to US interests in the region. However, South Yemen has given the Soviets a significant toe-hold in the Middle East and it is Soviet capabilities and intentions that present a problem for the US.

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