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Unique Authoritarianism: Shifting Fortunes and the Malleability of the Salih Regime in Yemen, 1990-Present

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Abstract

Ever since the political elite of the two Yemeni states agreed to unify in 1989, the dynamics of the newly created country's sociopolitical development has been co-opted by a diverse group of actors, both within Yemen and beyond. In the process of forging this union, a shift took place that changed both the institutional and organizational capacities of the principal constituent groups involved in unification. As a result, the rival interests not only harnessed the coercive capacity of the state in a struggle for ascendancy, but the process ultimately created new channels of interaction for an even broader range of interests. This study recognizes that multiple, often unconnected, dynamics are at work within "Yemeni" society that serve as opportunities, as well as direct challenges, for the regime of 'Ali Abdullah Salih upon securing power in 1994. Paradoxically, it is the nature of the regime's apparent failure to accommodate South Yemeni concerns over a more equitable share of political and economic power that resulted in further concentrating state authority and thus distorting the diffusion of power throughout a broad range of sectors in Yemeni society. It is observed here that the nature of this shuffle actually strengthened the power of those around the Salih regime and in turn weakened his traditional rivals. This is a story, therefore, of how a new form of authoritarian rule evolved out of a set of conditions that, at first glance, seemed to assure the opposite.

Keywords

Introduction

Southwest Arabia has long been the centre of trans-regional rivalries that reflected an internal political, cultural and economic plurality which impeded recent state-building efforts akin to the modern autocratic Middle Eastern state. In fact, "Yemen" has long served as the model example in Middle Eastern studies of both its seemingly rigid social matrix predicated on "tribal" and "sectarian" affiliations as well as a reputation for being an uncharacteristically pluralistic, decentralized political environment. Tied to this contradiction between what social scientists have seen as a rich environment to study a society still informed by diverse, autonomously functioning "tribal" and "sectarian" associations and an autocratic modern nation-state is a frustration that theoretically such a case has yet to be addressed.

Yemen's supposed primordial tribal social structure and sectarian divides—a unique mix of a nominally Shi'a (Zaydi) minority who ruled the Northern highlands until 1962, a larger cluster of Sunni Muslims dispersed between various trans-regional Sufi traditions and the more modern form of "Salafi" fundamentalists—has overshadowed some crucial questions about how "Yemen" actually transformed since unification in 1990. This study will suggest possible alternative interpretive angles that need to compliment the more conventional questions raised by social scientists frequenting Yemen's shores since the mid-1990s. The following, for instance, does not assume Yemen was destined to unify. While it is without doubt a reality today, unless we explore the calculations that compelled at least two distinct sets of political traditions to abandon the independent and largely self-sufficient states of North and South Yemen at the end of the Cold War and then monitor how the various interests fared in the immediate aftermath of unification, we may never fully get out of what I see is the "Yemen-as-unique case" model of analysis. In this regard, the following initiates a revisionist study of the "unification" process by first challenging the utility of asserting that a single set of historical and sociological forces are at play in the region. Upon stressing the contentious nature of this process, fraught with calculations that often contradicted the assumed spirit of the unification process, it is thus possible to reconsider Yemen's "unique" experience in order to explain just why the regime of current Yemeni president Ali Abdullah Salih's is better interpreted as a new type of authoritarianism than a unique form of Middle Eastern democracy.

Theoretical Foundations to Study

It is rarely highlighted in the literature that until the unification process began in 1989, "Yemen" had actually never been administered as a unified entity. In fact, since the 1870s, imperialist struggles over southwest Arabia resulted in the consolidation of two quite distinct political, cultural and economic units that more or less began to function as modern states, either under direct foreign rule—the British and Ottomans—or within the confines of administrations largely unrepresentative of the larger subject population—various Zaydi imamates and "revolutionary" regimes loosely linked to Nasser, Moscow and the ideological currents prevalent in the Cold War. Over the course of the 20th century, these separate state enterprises cultivated distinct associations with a diverse spectrum of political, cultural and economic agents. This ostensibly created entirely distinct societies with important local variances to how the day-to-day affairs of North and South Yemen were conducted. In a word, until the end of the Cold War, southern Arabia consisted of two distinct political systems whose haphazard "unification" in the 1989-1993 period (ending with elections that legally consummated the union) constituted a pretext for internal strife, economic marginalization and competing efforts at political hegemony well into the 21st century.[1]

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[1] For an analysis of the historical conditions that led to the establishment of the recognized boundaries separating North and South Yemen, see Isa Blumi, "Reconsidering the Social History of Ottoman Yemen, 1872-1918" Vitalis and al-Rasheed

The persistence of these divisions after more than two decades of "unification" thus calls into question some underlying assumptions scholars make about Yemen today. First, establishing the historical roots to regionalism still experienced in unified Yemen today helps open the way to asking new kinds of questions about the development of various interest groups as Yemen's political parties openly contest each other for ascendency. This study does not dispute, for example, that there is considerable activism and even room for new forms of political leverage to be secured by disparate advocacy groups in Yemen, in itself a rare example of political "freedom" compared to the region as a whole. That does not mean, however, that actual power in Yemen is diffuse and thus beyond the capacity of the Salih regime to monopolize.[2] Rather, this study will highlight how the plurality we outside scholars love so much to monitor when conducting our studies in Yemen's seemingly unambiguous pluralistic society, actually reflects methods of rule that have enhanced the capacity of the San'a' regime, not diffused it. In other words, rather than being an obstacle to securing greater authority, Yemen's eclectic political environment actually allows the regime to enjoy as much autocratic power as other seemingly more straightforward authoritarian regimes in the Middle East.

The following thus seeks to explain the rise of the Salih regime in a broader context that does not assume the actors that constitute present-day Yemen's political elite necessarily represent a real gauge of political plurality. Instead, the context in which the formation of a unified Yemen became a political necessity for two diametrically opposed political regimes—the southern Marxists tied to 'Ali Salim al-Baydh and the Northern allies of Salih—suggest a set of concerns within at least two distinct political dynasties that cannot be reduced to nationalistic, sectarian or "tribal" terms.[3] This dual heritage impacted the direction of this unification process, one that ultimately led to civil war in 1994 and a less than successful reconciliation process since then. As a result, what has also emerged in the context of unification is a dispersal of factions that struggle for power, creating a plurality of interests that ultimately strengthens the Salih regime to the point that it alone has the capacity to distribute authority and state patronage in unified Yemen.[4]

One may reasonably ask: why, if at the end of the Cold War unification had been so central to the ideological and historical foundations of both states' political elites, has this been such a disaster for everyone except those closely associated with Salih's regime? In order to adequately answer this question without resorting to sociological clichés, another set of issues must first be addressed. First off, this puzzling history points back to the very dynamics within the two Yemeni states prior to unification. Therefore, in order to appreciate how these pre-unification factors affected the institutional development of a fractious state since 1990, it is necessary to frame the analysis in the context of competing interests within the confines of loosely defined Yemeni states since the 1960s.[5]

For one, these contested arenas of "domestic" politics in separate states often reflected a socio-political dynamic during the early stages of the "unification" process that ultimately helped contribute

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(Contd.)

(eds.) *Counter Narratives: History, Contemporary Society and Politics in Saudi Arabia and Yemen* (New York: Palgrave, 2004): 103-119.

[2] A conclusion reached by some political scientists like Lisa Wedeen who, nevertheless, have done important field work to reveal the depth of "civil society" in Yemen. The problem remains the linkage scholars make with open talk around a Qat chew and how that is failing to translate into real political power that can challenge the regime. Lisa Wedeen, *Peripheral Visions: Publics, Power and Performance in Yemen* (New York: University of Chicago Press, 2008).

[3] Greg Gause III, "Yemeni Unity—Past and Future," *Middle East Journal* 42 (1989): 33-47.

[4] For details of the build-up to the initial agreement and a general outline of the official narrative of the pre 9/11 period see, Samir Muhammad Ahmad al-'Abdali, *al-Wahidah al-Yamaniyyah wa al-Nizam al-Iqalimi al-'Arabi* (al-Qahirah: Maktabah Mabuli, 1997), 123-150.

[5] The best example of how we need to develop an appreciation for certain patterns of association over a long duration of pre-unification Yemen is the magnificent work of Gabriele vom Bruck, *Islam, Memory, and Morality in Yemen: Ruling Families in Transition* (Palgrave/Macmillan, 2005).

to the chaos often associated with the post-Soviet world.[6] In southern Arabia, these internal dynamics consistently undermined a plethora of constituent groups in both North Yemen and South Yemen from addressing well-articulated needs collectively. Loyalty to parties or regional-based factions predominated. They also initiated, when it was possible, new forms of social activism that ultimately served the long-term political interests of pre and post-unification regimes in subtle but important ways. Unfortunately, in respect to Yemen, much of these extenuated and ever-shifting local factors are overshadowed by scholarship that has increasingly resorted to themes around political Islam and nationalism. What is thus missing is the kind of political diversity that has only recently been understood to have actually served the Salih regime's long-term interest and ultimately helps explain the development of Yemen's unique brand of authoritarianism.[7] In short, the Salih regime's ascendency since unification needs to be understood outside the traditional analytical framework often used for the Middle East.

For decades now, theorists believed the strength of a state should be gauged by the relative degree to which it can expect compliance from the society at large. For those who have studied power in this way, it has been crucial to point out coercion is not itself an indicator of a state's institutional strength. Rather, the true measure of a viable, stable state points to an ability to intervene into the lives of subjects and if need be, alter large segments of the population with the intention of supplanting desires that may be threatening (or too costly) for the state. This is done by way of concession, intimidation and, sometimes (but never exclusively) force. Michael Mann in particular has noted the importance of "infrastructural power" can serve as a substitute for despotic power. Mann wrote about an ability of the modern state to influence civil society and implement political decisions without the threat of force as a particularly crucial aspect of a well-adjusted state. As the process of implementing policies without conceding any real compromise is thus central for strong and stable states, it is all the more important for long-term regime stability that policies are accepted voluntarily.[8]

Judging from the scholarship, it is rare that such a case could be made in the modern Arab world. Reading the literature, we are led to believe that the entire Middle East has been subsumed by violent interactions between vulnerable, authoritarian states and largely unrepresented societies. In response, a whole genre of scholarship of Arab state/society case studies has emerged to differentiate from the general paradigms of the field. Scholars like Ayubi in particular have distinguished between types of states, thereby identifying those that are "strong" or "weak" in terms not fully applicable in either Mann's or Joel Migdal's often-cited models. In Ayubi's view, most Arab states are not structurally secure in ways associated with "strong" states identified in the literature. Rather, they use violence to coerce compliance and, in the process, shape a kind of "civil society" not fully amendable to remaining on the margins of power. These states' lack of legitimacy results in a complicated set of actions and reactions that Ayubi summarizes as often violent because the state vis-à-vis a plethora of non-state actors is by nature, weak.[9] Note here Ayubi assumes that power necessarily remains in the exclusive domain for state actors in order to be considered viable.

While there is a plethora of case studies, and certainly many applicable models, of states in the Middle East that highlight the traditional definition of an authoritarian regime Ayubi seems to advocate, I suggest Yemen in many ways demands a careful deviation from this literature that reflects

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[6] See for instance, Charles Dunbar, "The Unification of Yemen: Process, Politics and Prospects," *Middle East Journal* 46/3 (1992): 456-476 and Ursula Braun, "Yemen: Another Case of Unification," *Aussenpolitik* 11 (1992): 74-84.

[7] While not quite going so far as this paper, an excellent rereading of what happened in Yemen since 1990 is Sarah Phillips, *Yemen's Democracy Experiment in Regional Perspective: Patronage and Pluralized Authoritarianism* (New York, Palgrave, 2008).

[8] Michael Mann, "The Autonomous Power of the State: Its Origins, Mechanisms and Results," *Archives Européenes de Sociologie* 25 (1984): 185-213, 189.

[9] Nazih N. Ayubi, *Overstating the Arab State: Politics and Society in the Middle East* (London: IB Tauris,1996), 438-445.

more how theorists outside the region understand power. The case of a unifying Yemen introduces a rather unique set of circumstances by which at least two groups of stake-holders initially agreed, in theory, to incorporate two quite distinct institutional and governing traditions into a common state. This is important as the differences between the ways North Yemen and South Yemen were governed prior to unification were vast: The former has long been viewed as a quintessentially "weak" state with quasi independent regions constantly threatening the viability of the San'a' government; in contrast, South Yemen, notorious for its highly centralized Marxist dictatorship during the height of the Cold War, cultivated a governing tradition born out of a bloody anti-imperialist struggle in the 1960s that resembles more a Stalinist, and thus authoritarian model of governance. If anything, the benefactors of this Marxist dictatorship on one side, and a loose and fast history of political expediency on the other, would have seemed constitutionally incapable of translating the political and economic pluralities of a unified Yemen into a viable system that equitably distributed power. And yet, as we will see below, the unification did result in an ascendant, what I call uniquely Yemeni, authoritarian regime.

To understand how this process first began, then contorted, and finally solidified, into a uniquely effective form of authoritarianism, we must return to the paradox of unification itself. Ostensibly, both North and South Yemen, long considered diametrically opposed to each other—indeed, despite some periods of thawing in the 1960s, the borders were as tightly guarded during the Cold War as those separating East and West Europe—were not naturally inclined to unification. What ultimately set the process in motion was a conjuncture of events in the late 1980s that basically created two weak and vulnerable regimes which saw unification as a means to securing long-term security in an otherwise volatile and dangerous political environment. In other words, the dominant interests in both countries needed unification for all of the wrong reasons.

With the benefit of hindsight, it appears both the Northern and Southern political elite at the time of negotiations seemed to have believed that unification would develop their respective authoritarian capacities. Both sides, in other words, calculated that they could successfully hijack the process and not only secure long-term regime security, but perhaps begin to become a dominant player in the larger region. Why this may prove interesting for our purposes is, at one level, the way both sides struggled to engage their assumed constituencies during and after formal unification had been accomplished. To better appreciate this, the next section looks at the context—political, socio-economic, and geo-strategic—in which unification was ultimately implemented. This entails discussing the possible motivations—push/pull factors—for each constituent group involved in unification and then present a narrative that disentangles the very complicated dynamics behind the unification bid.

The Origins of Unification

Long subdued under a strategic imperative the British and then "West" maintained about securing shipping lanes through the Suez Canal, South Yemen's struggle for independence from Britain led to its ascendant rebel leaders facing both isolation as a soon-to-be rouge status with ties to the Soviet Union.[10] A battle-scarred political elite (many of whom spent as much time assassinating rivals as negotiating with them during the war for independence) would emerge from British rule prepared for years of self-entrenchment. This would certainly be characteristic of Aden politics for much of the 1970s and 1980s. That being said, no matter how dysfunctional the politburo seemed, considering the challenges facing them since 1967, South Yemen is a remarkable story of survival.

Part of this must go back to the fact that South Yemen was actually geographically quite fragmented historically with large elements of the eastern Hadramawt region were dispersed

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[10] For a detailed history of that struggle from a British perspective, see Clive Jones, *Britain and the Yemen Civil War, 1962-1965: Ministers, Mercenaries and Mandarins: Foreign Policy and the Limits of Covert Action* (Portland: Sussex Academic Press, 2004).

geographically, socially, economically and culturally well-beyond the reach of the newly formed People's Democratic Republic of Yemen (PDRY). Recall that these Hadramis had for centuries linked Arabia with Sumatra, Borneo and East Africa by way of trading networks, a legacy that made the region and its people impossible to "rule." [11] From the very start then, Aden as an administrative hub of various state enterprises was a world onto itself with much of the population in its immediate hinterland and the distant Hadramawt hostile to any and all state-building enterprises. [12] As a result, Aden had to contend with a long tradition of virtually independent polities in much of the areas east of the capital whose leverage over a resource-poor state considerable. For a new state building on a model of power-distribution that required absolute loyalty to a party, such a legacy of regional autonomy proved debilitating. The subsequent battle for ascendancy clearly had a long-term impact on the way power was distributed among the politically ambitious in Marxist Aden. [13] This legacy would have equally important consequences on the road to unification.

Despite the Hadrami's formal political isolation (and opposition) from Aden, they would prove crucial to the dynamics of unification. Indeed, the resurrected political elite of Hadramawt and Lahej (a region straddling the border separating North and South Yemen) would serve as the backbone of two often conflicting interest groups hoping to secure a political and economic stronghold in both countries. In fact, the first major figure to solicit the political alliance of the Hadramis and natives of Lahej during and after the early unification process was Salih himself, North Yemen's President and Head of the General People's Congress (*al Mu'tammar al-Sha'bi al-'Am*) [henceforth GPC].

The Hadramis and Lahej-natives are a forgotten factor in 'Ali 'Abdullah Salih's strategy to both undermine his southern rivals (by late 1986, consisting of Yemeni Socialist Party (*Hizb al-Ishtiraki al-Yaman* [henceforth YSP] whose party head was also President of PDRY, 'Ali Salim al-Baydh) as well as counterbalance rivals who were constantly threatening his influence within the former boundaries of North Yemen. Both the Lahej and Hadrami migrant communities formed an important substratum of the regional economy in Ta'iz throughout the 20th century. Their patronage of Salih during the struggles for power between traditionalists and Republicans in the 1970s emboldened his regime to confidently pursue the unification strategy in the early 1990s. [14] Not only would these agents of the GPC be crucial to sustaining a commercial link in the south during the unification process, but many of these Hadrami allies would become key actors in Salih's own version of "neo-tribalism" found in Iraq, a strategy that aimed to undermine the ability of the YSP to rival Salih in the unification process. [15]

Such factors help explain a growing link in the late 1980s between San'a' political elite and southern-based forces living a precarious existence under Saudi or Northern Yemeni protection. It also suggests a possible source for Salih's increasing confidence to pursue unification with the socialist South, a strategy that could have easily backfired considering that Salih's regime consistently faced domestic challenges from peasants and Aden's formidable military and broad-based appeal as socialists could have overwhelmed the North's ability to suppress the calls for land distribution and

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[11] Engseng Ho, "Empire through Diasporic Eyes: A View from the Other Boat," *Comparative Study of Society and History* 46/2 (2004): 210-246.

[12] A.S. Bujra, "Political Conflict and Stratification in Hadramaut," *Middle Eastern Studies* 3 (1967): 355-375.

[13] Fred Halliday, *Revolution and Foreign Policy: The Case of South Yemen, 1967-1987* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 41-52.

[14] On the economic leverage these communities enjoyed in North Yemen throughout the 1970s and 1980s, see Kiren Aziz Chaudhry, *Price of Wealth: Economies and Institutions in the Middle East* (Cornell University Press), 139-192.

[15] It should not be forgotten that the links between North Yemen and Iraq were strong and Baghdad had been particularly instrumental in the training of Salih's personal commando units and elite Republican Guard who would be invaluable assets to his regime throughout the 1990s. It would not be surprising if Baghdad's own social control strategies were also adopted in Yemen. Amatzia Baram, "Neo-Tribalism in Iraq: Saddam Hussein's Tribal Policies, 1991-96," *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 29/1 (1997): 1-31.

socio-economic justice. With the Hadrami increasingly backing the Salih regime to regain access to local influence in their home districts, however, the comparative advantage the socialists in the PDRY may have enjoyed in theory did not materialise over the course of unification.

This brings us to the southern political party directly involved in the unification process: the YSP. In the 1986 coup that brought the party's head, 'Ali Salim al-Baydh, to power, the YSP was just barely able to consolidate authority over a well-trained, heavily armed southern Yemeni force. In this context of a quite violent process of consolidating power, Baydh identified unification as an opportunity to not only secure his party's long-term survival, but even gain power over the new state at the expense of Salih and his allies. The fundamental problem for the YSP, however, was the lack of time. Between the violent capture of power in 1986 and the collapse of the Soviet overseas empire, Baydh and his cohort could hardly establish the trustworthy alliances needed. South Yemen's increasing international isolation created a set of challenges to the YSP that no level of autocratic rule could address.

Despite its reputation as an iron-fisted regime, South Yemen throughout the late 1980s proved to be a surprisingly fluid political environment. To the YSP, the future of the party and indeed, South Yemen as a whole, seemed both politically and economically precarious without the secured commercial ties with the outside world lost during Gorbachev's *Perestroika*. Unable to effectively replace the subsidized imports coming from the Soviet block, considerable problems with basic supplies affected domestic stability. South Yemen's diplomatic isolation represented an even more dangerous problem as tensions rose after the discovery of oil in areas claimed by Saudi Arabia (KSA).[16] Basically, without replacing the outside patronage lost with the collapse of the Soviet Union, the new Baydh regime faced an aggressive KSA that actively supported recently exiled factions having fled the 1986 coup. Along with assisting exiled members of the previous regime, KSA instigated, via Hadrami clans flooding the region with Iraq's invasion of Kuwait, internal strife in reaction to reduced living standards, food and fuel shortages and a growing call for religious freedoms. In the end, the combination of the Soviet's departure from the scene and the late 1989 rise of Saddam Hussayn's aggressive opposition to the GCC monarchies created a new set of regional political alliances that compelled southern Yemeni leaders to rush into a process of unification unprepared.

With this in mind, it may be useful to focus more closely on some of the factors that contributed to South Yemen's decision to unify with the North. Despite the North being a much more populous, unruly and vastly underdeveloped neighbour, unification was a gamble the YSP would have to take. For one, unification would provide legitimacy to the YSP that was in short supply. By all accounts, Baydh's regime especially feared that exiled groups based in Saudi Arabia and North Yemen were plotting a counter-coup.[17] From the YSP's perspective, unification with the North would protect the Baydh regime from such forces because unification would provide a new political context from which Baydh and his allies could secure and perhaps expand a constituency beyond the confines of the urban-based party. In short, the well-educated, "modern" socialists of the south believed unifying with a politically unsophisticated North could help expand a base of support that would secure them immunity from future domestic political challenges.

Mindful of this potential, the formal agreement negotiated with Salih for the "sharing" of power in 1990 seemed to assure the YSP a significant role in Northern Yemeni affairs as much as protect the southern base from external attack. In many ways, the YSP maintained access to strategically important assets of a new state—with key portfolios in the future government such as the Prime Minister, Ministry of Defence and Foreign Ministry—that promised a political and economic windfall

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[16] Robert D. Burrowes, "Oil Strike and Leadership Struggle in South Yemen: 1986 and Beyond," *Middle East Journal* 43/3 (Summer 1989): 437-454.

[17] Michael Katz, "Yemeni Unity and Saudi Security," *Middle East Policy* 1/1 (1992): 117-135.

for a southern political elite.[18] For its part, Northern Yemen's leadership invested in the unification process with a similar belief that such a process would help them solidify, if not expand, their hold on power.

For years Salih's base of support had been shifting. While constantly at work in building alliances, power in North Yemen's notoriously "weak" state remained concentrated: Throughout the 1980s, the most sensitive positions in government were distributed to immediate family and those from Salih's region of origin. This common strategy of self-preservation hints at a shrewd survivor to be sure. These manoeuvres, however, also suggest that Salih failed to secure absolute loyalty within his traditional area of operations; periodic challenges from well-funded and heavily armed community leaders were just the most well known examples of the regime's political vulnerability. Indeed, during much of Salih's political career, power in North Yemen was notoriously decentralized whereby competing factions in two or three quite distinct areas of the country operated in virtual autonomy from San'a'. In sum, since taking formal control of the GPC in 1980, Field Marshall Salih had been operating on a highly tenuous stratum of mutually interested groups that coalesced to form just a strong enough cluster of stakeholders to assure that power did not slip out of Salih's hands. Put differently, Salih's long-term survival strategy required a somewhat paradoxical combination of strong, core support from a base personally close to him—members from his own extended family and patriarchs originating from his home region—and the fact that he could never fully trust those in that coalition.

This quality of Salih's political management deserves a closer look. The apparent failure of the North Yemen state to channel popular and elite energies centrally allowed for a plethora of historically competing interests to dominant a contentious political arena. Sheila Carapico argues a number of groups throughout this period secured autonomy and were thus able to thwart efforts to build state power after the 1962 overthrow of the Zaydi (nominally Shi'a) imamate.[19] North Yemen thus failed to follow in the footsteps of other regimes in the period and had to maintain a notoriously loose set of relations with competing, extra-state interests. In other words, despite the rise of Nasserism and the new political elite's modern state-building ambitions in the post-imamate era, research has consistently hinted at a continuation of so-called "tribal" politics in Northern Yemen.

While the so-called "tribal" factor is often overstated when put in these social anthropological terms, it does, however, prove critical in political terms to study the groups that gravitated around these so-called tribal associations. In the end, these community networks constantly challenged the central government's ability to manage the affairs in rural Northern Yemen despite considerable resources poured into the country with the rise of Nasserism. To social scientists, the heart of the issue is if Salih's own "tribal" background contributed (and still does) to the nature of political and economic partnerships in Yemen. It is certainly the case that, much as Saddam Hussayn and Hafaz al-Asad surrounded themselves with members of their specifically self-identified groups, Salih's base of support has often been traced to familial, regional (tribal) associations. At the same time, however, monitoring the last 20 years suggests that Salih personally does not trust anyone exclusively and periodically demonstrates the ability to balance one ally against the other by extending (and extracting) state patronage when required. As demonstrated below, "tribal" loyalties only go so far in Yemen.[20]

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[18] Greg Gause III, *Saudi-Yemeni Relations, Domestic Structures and Foreign Influence* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1990), 75-149.

[19] Sheila Carapico, *Civil Society in Yemen: The Political Economy of Activism in Modern Arabia* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 290.

[20] Martha Mundy usefully suggests that, as always, rural politics is not based on contesting groups associated with "tribes" but more along individual lines much as if the "shaykhs" were politicians. Martha Mundy, *Domestic Government. Kinship, Community and Polity in North Yemen* (London: I.B. Tauris, 1995), 203-204.

It is at this level of domestic politics that Islam, as a political glue in some Northern polities, becomes a factor in explaining Salih's initial motivations behind unification. To put it simply, Salih was constantly compelled to negotiate with powerful constituencies that had at best divided loyalties. Any patronage they received from largely secular San'a' and the affiliated religious institutions were thus no guarantee of political loyalty. That being said, opportunities to those wishing to fill these political black spots abounded throughout Salih's reign. Perhaps the best example of a political alliance made out of mutual expediency is the case of Salih's long relationship with Abdallah ibn Hussayn al-Ahmar. To understand what were Salih's possible reasons for pursuing unification with the South, it is first crucial to appreciate Ahmar's role as a willing ally capable of both bridging the legitimacy gap between at least one "tribal confederacy"—Hashid versus the Bakil—and securing a link to a political force cultivated by KSA (namely *Salafi* [puritanical] groups).[21]

By the early 1980s, Shaykh Ahmar, who has recently passed away, created out of Yemen's shifting domestic fortunes, a third political coalition, *Tajammu' al-Yamani lil-Islah* (Yemeni Congregation for Reform) [henceforth *Islah*] that provided the crucial leverage needed for Salih to envision a future unified Yemen under his domination. *Islah* emerged at a time when so-called tribal alliances were animated by a set of dramatic shifts in the larger regional economy (large numbers of migrant labourers migrating to oil-producing economies in the Persian Gulf) and the juxtaposition between the Cold War and the rise of political Islam from within KSA.[22] Due to political and socio-economic factors largely corresponding to the end of the Cold War, Salih gained through an alliance with the *Islah* a set of political assets that would ultimately secure make him unique in modern history.

As much as Salih depended on Ahmar's alliance throughout much of the 1980-2000 period, this relationship could not ultimately affect how Salih interacted with others. Because Ahmar was Salih's lifeline, many of his borderline allies remained exceedingly nervous. Salih constantly proved vulnerable to *Islah*'s shifting demands for a revised set of concessions, demands that always were backed by overt threats of insubordination. These concessions also often came at the expense of other interests. In the drive to assuage these concerns about regime's long-term commitment to satisfying lesser allies' needs, Salih used unification to promise dividends were forthcoming for those with a stake in the economic windfall bound to materialize in the process.

Ultimately it was under these quite different internal conditions that both Baydh and Salih recognized opportunities with unification. Not surprisingly, as these interests clashed (both Baydh and Salih envisioned securing absolute power at the expense of the other) this process pushed along by both parties for their own internal political reasons ultimately set up a chain of events that assured long-term conflict within a "unified Yemen." The outcome of the unification process discussed below ultimately suggests Salih's calculations proved more realistic. Just how Salih was able to succeed at the expense of the rest of Yemen's political elite needs deeper analysis than simply observing the parameters of the unified state's capacities, however. In the end, a comprehensive reconsideration of how we look at authoritarianism may help us understand differently Yemen's recent political history.

Conditions of Unification

The unification process evolved quickly in the 1989-1990 period. Burdened by a lack of preparation and no relevant template from which to draw a plan, it became clear that not much of a "unified state" existed that could help implement the integration of two vastly different, and ultimately conflicting, traditions of governance. Declared on 22 May 1990, only a small number of government agencies

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[21] For a profile of al-Ahmar since he entered into Yemeni politics in 1959, see T. Koszinowski, "Abdallah ibn Husain al-Ahmar," *Orient* 34 (1993): 335-341.

[22] For a useful discussion on how political Islam, in the form of "Wahhabism" infiltrated Yemen and its consequences, consult Shelagh Weir, "A Clash of Fundamentalisms: Wahhabism in Yemen," *Middle East Report* 204 (July-September 1997).

were initially affected by unification. As a result, for the first three years, a majority of both states were left intact and thus operated parallel of each other. The subsequent co-existent two-state apparatus thus complicated the integration of power because duplicated state resources continued to remain in the hands of two equally ambitious "partners" for at least two and a half years. As a result, the first phase of the union could only really be realized by rhetorically, leading to some stated common policies in customs and taxation but leaving the crucial process of integrating the new country across numerous social and institutional sectors up in the air. For instance, trade unions serving as the power base for the YSP and "tribal" militias loyal to Salih and Ahmar remained basically autonomous and organizationally resistant to interacting. More importantly perhaps for the long-term political development of a unified Yemen was the fact separate army commands continued to exist with only superficial integration at the top. This resulted in the perpetuation of often conflicting interests within units that were dispersed throughout each other's areas of interest, thus creating pockets of potentially hostile armed units loyal to rival political interests. The failure to successfully fuse the two militaries would prove the single most dramatic failure (or success) for both parties in the first period of unification.

Interestingly, this bifurcated system of power allocation actually led to new rivalries in hitherto obscure sectors of society, ultimately creating opportunities for both leaders to exploit these tensions at the expense of the other party while laying the foundation for a post-unification society that would be incapable of fomenting a uniform resistance to the ascendant autocratic regime. This all took place in the context of larger Yemeni society far more enthusiastic about real unification than their leaders. There is evidence that the general public was surprised at how little the unity process had been planned and of its ad hoc nature. As their respective leaders failed to socialize Yemeni citizens into the agenda, the lack of any clear sense of assimilated, shared interests simply intensified the perception among people that they needed to remain loyal to their local associations in order to protect their long-term interests. In other words, there was from the very beginning a multi-tiered set of rationalizations to be suspicious of the unification process despite early indications that it was very popular.[23]

Part of the reason none of the crucial preparation took place was the clear intention of both leaders to keep intact as much as possible the political "cultures" (norms, methods, associations) they had brought with them to the table. Baydh, for instance, was adamant about keeping the southerner's highly organized, bureaucratic form of government. Not only did this make sense in regards to taking advantage of a well-tuned administration that surpassed in organization anything found in the North, this bureaucracy was also politically crucial for the YSP because the state was the primary patron for much of the entrenched urban elite of southern Yemen. In this regard, Baydh loyalists expected their traditional privileges to continue under the new unified state. Any change would have led to whole-scale abandonment of the YSP, a scenario many in the South believed shaped Salih's strategies over the course of the 1990-1993 period.

This kind of political culture also contributed to the way northern and southern factions proved politically and culturally incompatible for much of the unification process. For instance, the clannish and ad hoc nature of the way Salih's party (GPC) ran its affairs turn many potential southern clients away from ever considering developing links. Beyond the cronyism was a sense that Northerners, even those linked to the GPC, held different political, cultural and economic values. Southerners, for example, favoured active woman participation in society, southern advocacy for a woman's public role in society consistently rubbed Northern leaders the wrong way. Similarly, a strong emphasis on education and the protection of secular institutions that had emerged in the South since the 1970s represented a challenge to northern sensibilities. Northern political culture, on the other hand, emphasized a more autonomous, self-sufficient and often independent-minded localism that historically minimized direct interaction between the government and the population. Moreover, the

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[23] Much of this insight is drawn from private conversations held throughout the 1990s in Yemen. Informants are universally to remain anonymous and therefore are not to be referred to again in the rest of the study.

northern political elite sustained their political legitimacy by highlighting conservative and traditionalist values long erased from South Yemen's social existence. Thus schools, sports clubs and other communal venues were extensions of private patronage strategies, not the purview of the state.

It is in this conflicted cultural milieu that negotiations over the integration of the two quite distinct political traditions took place. As both sets of interests had long monopolized the interactions between their respective states and society, unification proved virtually impossible from the start because of a sharp distinction in social values. Moreover, the very role of the state in the day-to-day lives of Northerners and Southerners differed. The utter lack of a government presence in many parts of Northern Yemen was the direct opposite experience for southerners. As only the cooperation between elites could have resolved these issues and thus save the unification process between 1990 and 1993, seeing that even they were firmly entrenched in their respective circles of power, it is not a mystery why many have characterized the unification process as actually heightening tensions by pitting assumed partners against each other as they scrambled for leverage within the new state.[24] These differences ultimately contributed to the distrust that translated very quickly into violence.

A series of strategic steps taken by the various interests marked the crucial two and a half year interim period before elections were held to place a unified administration. The adjustment required of the YSP was significantly different than that demanded of the GPC. From the GPC perspective, the interim system proved ideal as it ensured their domination of the process by weight of their larger constituent base. As was argued on several occasions, the demographic factor was an opportunity to legally and formally eliminate southern politicians from the process. Such thinking in fact explains why Salih conceded to southern demands that Yemen as a whole allow a free press (meaning some southern-controlled papers would circulate in the north) and permit "multiple parties" to participate throughout the unified country leading up to the first elections. Ostensibly, in exchange for preserving the existing power structures in the North, Salih calculated he could afford southern "infiltration" by way of socialist newspapers and workers' parties in the north because he could ultimately count on his numerical superiority to overwhelm any inroads won by the YSP.

The system that formally integrated the two states did establish a discourse on unity by which all parties would have to pay lip service to a pluralistic Yemen Republic. It is in this context that at least 40 political parties emerged, clearly representing a broad spectrum of political interests and the press in Yemen, always an anomaly in the Middle East, supported at least 35 newspapers and periodicals in this period. On the surface, this image of a growing, pluralistic, multi-party society was significant because it would logically lead to a plurality of pressure points that would compel the two major parties to form coalitions in order to secure a majority in the parliament both strived to dominate in subsequent years. The problem was conditions were rapidly changing internationally, contingencies that forced the hand of the two major parties but in the end only favoured one.

The Kuwait Crisis

The biggest source of dissention in Yemen during the interim period leading to unification was the worsening economic crisis caused by the GCC's reaction to Iraq's invasion of Kuwait. As punishment to Yemen's less than emphatic condemnation of Saddam Hussayn's actions, the GCC not only cut off more than $500 million in aid to the struggling country, but proceeded to expel upwards of 800,000 Yemeni workers from their countries.[25] The return of so many people, plus the loss of more than $2 billion in remittances, transformed the political horizons for both parties.[26] In a process still

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[24] Michael C. Hudson, "Unhappy Yemen: Watching the Slide towards Civil War," *Middle East Insight* (1994): 10-19.

[25] Nora Colton, "The Silent Victims: Yemeni Migrants Return Home," *Oxford International Review* 3/1 (1991): 23-37.

[26] Thomas B. Stevenson, "Yemeni Workers Come Home: Reabsorbing One Million Migrants, *Middle East Report* 181 (1993): 15-20.

misunderstood, it seems that the force of this demographic shift ultimately undermined YSP's ability to secure long-term influence in much of the country. In many ways, the labourers who were now without work, angry and vulnerable to mobilization were to become the new king makers of unified Yemen. Perhaps counter-intuitively, the best equipped to exploit this sudden change of events were not the socialists from the South but the Northern political elite.

It would be old patronage networks in rural North Yemen and the mobilizing and resource-rich *Salafi* groups (whose GCC money did not stop flowing) that ultimately catered to the needs of these hundreds of thousands of families suddenly without income. Proving incapable of addressing the nuanced needs of these potential assets, the YSP demonstrated a strategic ineptness when contrasted to the client-building abilities of the *Islah*; the consequences would not only be dear for a political party, but the Yemeni population as a whole.

At the heart of the problem for the YSP was its clumsy attempt to hold onto a traditional means of distributing power. The YSP's lack of flexibility simply resulted in failing to undermine Salih's considerable network of alliances crucial to adjusting to the needs of so many disrupted lives. With the transition period in full-swing, the YSP as a body shared some crucial values and concerns that did not necessarily translate well outside their immediate social milieu. Michael Hudson's revealing study of Yemen at the time noted that the YSP elite tended to promote the recreation of a bureaucratic, institutionalized and formal, state order. Very much a legacy of the Marxist state that existed between 1967 and 1990, most leaders also came from Southern urban centres like Aden and Mukalla and proved incapable of hiding how much they despised the rural traditions they actively sought to eradicate. In the words of one source who spoke to Hudson in 1993: "…our party rejects the use of tribal concepts to impede development or oppose law and order." [27] For southern YSP elite, this may have seemed a winning position to take to the Northern masses long assumed to resent the bullying of Salih and his so-called "tribal-shaykh" allies. It did not prove to be the case at a time of economic and communal turmoil caused by the massive influx of expelled migrant workers.

There were some high-ranking YSP members aware of just how confounding their socialist platform was to the unassimilated farmers and the urban poor in the North. As a result, they consciously kept out of their public statements the more egregious examples of what they believed were Marxist values. Nevertheless, it could not be ignored that most of their polemic in Yemen at the time went against the grain of Northern traditions: from exposure of women to political life to the secularist principles behind which they objected to religious figures playing a role in the state. In so many words, the YSP was ideologically obsolete in the North.

In this context of clashing social policy agendas, the rivalry between the two parties intensified the more the social chaos instigated by the migrations entered into the political debate. At the heart of the problems created by the flood of expellees was the failure of both parties to coordinate a viable policy to address the issue. Instead, the flood served as a pretext for new forms of exploitation that became possible when party officials linked the state apparatus either addressed or ignored the needs of expellees and the communities forced to accommodate them. According to outside observers, corruption and the use of political violence were endemic at the time because the type of intervention usually took on an exploitative and highly politicized nature.[28] Part of the problem was vulnerability translated into leverage for many opportunistic party officials, a callous exploitation of migrant workers that would ultimately push hundreds of thousands into the more "traditional" channels of social interaction.

In this sense, the Northern elite proved more adept at profiting from the growing rivalry by simply resorting to old strategies and leaning heavily on the networks established by *Islah* to help people in

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[27] Michael Hudson, "Bipolarity, Rational Calculation and War in Yemen," *Arab Studies Journal* 3 (1995): 9-19.

[28] *al-Sharq al-Awsat*, 14 March 1991, and *al-Sharq al-Awsat*, 18 October 1991.

need[29] Although armed with limited state funds, Salih and his allies did have the social resources of new Islamic parties and the so-called Hashid confederation under Ahmar's control. Salih as the interim President of unifying Yemen, therefore, continued operating in unified Yemen as he ruled Northern Yemen in the past.

Revealingly, Salih also treated the South according to the principles of Northern politics, making inroads into southern groups through personal contacts, political appointments and economic pressure.[30] In this regard, the ability of GPC and *Islah* to funnel Saudi money and provide services to entrepreneurial southerners signalled they had a good chance of scoring a comprehensive victory in the upcoming elections the more YSP officials failed to address the growing economic crisis. Soon it became clear that the larger Northern population was unreceptive to inroads from the YSP, favouring the GPC and *Islah*. At the same time, the YSP were losing at the margins of its own sphere of influence as unification corresponded to economic collapse.

As a result, the YSP proved especially concerned with the GPC slowly undermining stability in the south. In reaction, YSP simply made things worse by mobilising its bureaucracy to cover party interests, a tactic that more sharply separated the party from local concerns, a phenomenon that appears to have reflected especially poorly on the YSP and thereby undermining their hopes of using the apparatus of the state they controlled to secure new alliances throughout the unified territories. Reflective of this political environment, tensions between Baydh and Salih rose at a personal level. Salih's increasing overtures to southerners through his Hadrami network, much of which was now funded indirectly via GCC channels, started to openly challenge the YSP within the framework of the transitional government.

In face of all this, Baydh not only misused his limited assets, he actually slid further into the political margins by the end of the first year. In one of numerous demonstrations of frustration, he left the Presidential Council in September 1992 as form of protest. At the same time, his YSP allies were feeling the pressure as well, especially the Minister of Defence Haytham Qasim Tahir, a former PDRY chief of staff. Tahir's vulnerability within the still divided military indicates that the GPC was even beating the southern elite at what was supposed to be their strategic advantage: using the armed forces as a tool to secure power in the unified Yemen. Specifically, Tahir wanted to use the professional and tight-knit community of the southern military to the YSP's advantage. Tahir, for instance, demanded during the initial negotiations surrounding the unification that the two armies be immediately unified, a concession that would have given southerners effective control over them. The GPC refused, however, indicating they too had a long term strategy that both recognised the YSP's strategic control over the more professional southern army and its own ambition to gain the military's loyalty. The GPC was thus adamant about maintaining the right to keep the armies separate, thus not conceding the future of the armed forces to the YSP. At the same time, the GSP were able to assure that the southerners were not permitted to infiltrate the Minister of Interior apparatus controlled by Salih's loyalists.

This last failure on the part of the YSP to at least insert some of its former intelligence forces inside the unified Interior Ministry basically left the entire country's internal security apparatus in the hands of the GPC. The end result was without a doubt devastating to the YSP. Almost immediately after the unification program had been agreed upon in 1990, a campaign of violence against YSP members began to take shape.[31] As modern MIG fighter jets and Soviet tanks could do little to stop small-scale, incremental violence targeting individuals, Salih's monopoly on domestic violence is the most important strategic advantage of the pre-election period. The failure to have the assassinations ended proved an especially dramatic indicator of the YSP's political failure. In face of political violence that

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[29] Greg Gause III, *Saudi-Yemeni Relations*, 1-15, 119-162.

[30] Ayubi, *Overstating the Arab State*, 434-437.

[31] *al-Watan al-'Arabi*, 25 October 1991.

overwhelmingly targeted southerners, the failure to infiltrate the Ministry of Interior had dire consequences on the YSP.

YSP members could not feel safe anywhere in the country by the end of the first year.[32] Aside from directly intimidating party members, the violence seems to have undermined the credibility of the YSP among many at the middle tier of the party. As Aden and southern cities became dangerous places (with more than 150 murdered in this period) many of the YSP constituents began to solicit a more direct role for the Salih-controlled Ministry of Interior. To them, the violence was the result of actions taken by southern rivals to the YSP who were forced to flee South Yemen in the aftermath of the 1986 coup. Likewise, unification allowed the return of formally exiled radicals who, under Saudi patronage, became especially useful proxies for conservative groups in both the KSA and the North. The end result was a set of groups who were able to intimidate and ultimately coerce southern community leaders with apparent impunity.[33] It was the failure to restrain the activities of the increasingly powerful 'Abd al-Majid al-Zindani and his KSA-funded *Ikhwan* apparatus that represented a clear and present danger to YSP operatives throughout the south and many began to solicit direct protection from Salih.

While ideology and revenge were important considerations to help explain the upsurge of violence in the south during the 1990-1993 period, the single largest factor contributing to the growing tensions at the time again points back to the economic chaos caused by the mass expulsions. A rising prevalence of violence plagued the cities as they swelled and the unemployable expellees became targets for political manipulation. Dresch reported a clear trend early on by way of mass demonstrations among both the expellees and their host communities demanding state action. The central concerns among the tens of thousands who showed up to these rallies was the scarcity of housing, especially in the south, as well as increased petty crime.[34] YSP Prime Minister al-'Attas would attempt to use the apparatus of his government to provide additional funds to address some of these demands but was always blocked by the GPC who had the power to veto any major spending. The problem for the YSP was that the ultimate blame for the failure to distribute funds to the needy was directed at them.[35]

In these tense days during 1991, both the YSP and *Islah* mobilized support among what should have been their traditional constituencies. The YSP's links with trade unions would seem a logical avenue of mobilization for them. Strikes did break out throughout Southern Yemen during the Spring and Summer of 1991. Salih reacted by permitting Ministry of Interior forces to target the organizers of these strikes as instigators of violence, indicating that the GPC did see the expelled GCC labourers and their YSP sympathizers as a political liability. The GPC's response not only translated into open criticism, Salih frequently used the media to condemn the activism as unpatriotic and dangerous to the nation, but the criticism also opened the door for political violence, resulting in the death of several key members of the YSP and their labour activist partners.[36]

The labour unrest continued all over the country well into September of 1992. Not surprisingly, the political assassinations also continued unabated. Beyond the violence that affected them, the southern elite were also being hard hit financially with a 100 percent inflation rate and the rapid devaluation of

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[32] *al-Khalij* [Sharjah, UAE], 22 November 1992.

[33] Salih would use military units loyal to 'Ali Nasir Muhammad, the southern leader overthrown in 1986 to help fight the 1994 war against the south. David Warburton, "The Conventional War in Yemen," *Arab Studies Journal*," 3/1 (Spring 1995): 20-44.

[34] Paul Dresch, "A Daily Plebiscite: Nation and State in Yemen," *Revue du Monde Musulman et de la Méditerranée* 67 (1993): 67-77.

[35] al 'Attas interview in *al-Sharq al-Awsat*, 30 May 1992.

[36] The media suggested that the main source of opposition to the labor activism came from loyalists to the *Islah*, whose staunch anti-socialist platform seemed to encourage violent opposition to the YSP. *al-Majalla*, 24 June 1992.

the rial. In this context, perhaps the YSP's resources were directed at simple survival and thus did not have the organizational wherewithal to exploit what seemed from afar a perfect opportunity to gain the loyalty of a large number of urban and rural poor. And so, while there was ample opportunity for the YSP to exploit Salih's conservative and somewhat heavy-handed approach to dealing with the migrant worker crisis, the YSP ultimately lost out to the Islamic parties who, with the considerable funds flowing from the KSA, began to monopolize the future loyalties of these people.[37] Indeed, the YSP had been so weakened by the violence directed toward members that they publicly sought to mend fences with the GPC. Recall that Baydh had retreated to Aden in protest earlier in 1992; under the truce, he returned to San'a' in November.

Aside from forcing the parties to return to the task of unifying the country, one of the consequences of the violence was an agreement that the sooner the elections would be held, the better. To this end, both parties agreed on April 1993. While it may be speculative on its own, put into the larger context of what unification was supposed to accomplish for both parties, it is quite possible elections were still seen as a means to a larger, less democratic end: complete domination of Yemen's political scene.[38]

Judging from the increased labour activity in the months after the November 1992 agreement that brought Baydh back from self-imposed exile in Aden, it would seem YSP's calculations were not without merit. A new round of social unrest surfaced throughout the country, with public employees, Central Bank workers, teachers and employees of the Foreign Affairs office, as well as the Federation of Labour Unions collectively demanded wage increases, and, importantly, domestic security. In response, the government announced within a few days an across-the-board 85 percent wage increase for all public employees. This concession, clearly indicating that the GPC were concerned about the direction the violence was going if allowed the fester, averted a nation-wide strike. With the elections just a few months away, the tide seemed to have clearly shifted in YSP's favour despite being seemingly outmanoeuvred by Salih and his allies for much of the interim period.[39]

The problem is, as had been the case throughout 1992, the disturbances did not translate into any cohesive political movement onto which the YSP could link. Most of all the civil disobedience was locally-organized. As a consequence of no national party offering the lead, the labour activism throughout Yemen dissipated into largely self-isolating cells that had no means to pressure the central government. Another explanation for why the YSP seemingly failed to again exploit this massive upsurge in labour activism is the simple fact that the various non-religious parties really did not constitute any formal unit. In the end, the opposition was diluted by a number of third party elements trying to tap into the frustrations of people who were ultimately confused by contradicting claims. As noted by Sheila Carapico, there were factions in the North that were not linked to Salih's GPC or *Islah* and could have easily joined in a broader, trans-regional coalition that included the YSP and other parties. The Bakil confederation in northern Yemen, for instance, proved especially well-suited to open up a third option for what was clearly a large number of disaffected constituents. In fact, early in the election season Bakil had been able to organize a series of cross spectrum conferences that were meant to address the crisis. The same was true of 'Abd al-Rahman 'Ali al-Jifri who successfully galvanized a number of prominent Yemenis, both locally and in the diaspora, in an effort to unify urban intellectuals, teachers and professionals on a common front. Clearly these organizers saw a vacuum that neither the YSP nor GPC/*Islah* could fill.[40]

While these northern secularists hoped to tap into the frustrations of many experience the spectre of a unified Yemen divided between two dominant parties, GCC-funded religious parties had already

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[37] *Al-Wasat*, 6 March 1992.

[38] *Al-Hayat*, 5 May 1993.

[39] Paul Dresch and Bernard Haykel, "Stereotypes and Political Styles: Islamists and Tribesfolk in Yemen," *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 27 (1995): 405-431.

[40] Sheila Carapico, "Elections and Mass Politics in Yemen," *Middle East Report* (November-December 1993): 1-7.

made its triumphant debut in Yemeni politics. Ahmar of *Islah* and his allies were ultimately able to thwart Bakil's attempts at coalition building by calling for their own parallel town-hall meetings, reportedly dominated from the beginning by the *Salafist* Zindani who had already caused so much havoc in the south.[41] At the same time, a southerner turned "Jihadist" and a protégé of Zindani, Tariq al-Fadli, expanded *Islah*'s influence deep into YSP's territory not only in the form of intimidation, but also as community builder.

Resembling tactics used in other Muslim societies at the end of the Cold War, Fadli would prove perfectly willing to use violence and intimidation, a useful agent Ahmar was fully content on mobilizing when threats needed to be backed by deeds.[42] Indeed, Ahmar masterfully shaped these tactics of hard love but in a way that reflected more a strategy of creating the problem and then offering a solution to it. Ahmar thus often diplomatically stepped in, as in April 1993, to protect Fadli from persecution in Yemen's still decentralized courts even though he was being linked to the murder of "atheist" YSP members. In many ways, Ahmar's rhetoric seemed to encourage such violence, but more frequently, his straddling the line between rebel and peace-maker secured considerable influence in regions well-beyond his traditional base. *Islah*, in other words, became Yemen's first real party that transcended North/South barriers.

In light of these interactions, every one possibly undermining the GPC's own agenda to exploit the unification of the two countries, it needs to be emphasized that the rise of political violence in Yemen and the corresponding emergence of political Islam is not a coincidence. Moreover, despite the possibility of *Islah* becoming too powerful, Salih's interests seemed to be better served with Ahmar's growing influence. To put it bluntly, Islamists mobilized forces on behalf of the Northern party elite as much as their foreign patrons of *Islah*. Abdul Rahman Ali al-Jifri, the exiled leader of the Sons of Yemen League put it this way: "'Ali Abdullah Salih presents himself to the world…as someone who is capable of resisting extremism, whilst domestically he has been encouraging this very extremism.'"[43] Clearly, one must establish to what degree Salih was attempting to successfully co-opt Islamic groups or parties into the patronage network which he dominated.[44]

In that regard, leading up to the elections, it is clear that both Ahmar and Salih were careful not to tilt their respective parties too far into the radical Islamist camp. Carapico notes, for instance, that *Islah* ran two types of candidates during the April 1993 parliamentary elections. In the Hashid strongholds that are generally antagonistic to the moralizing of religiously conservative activists, the party ran people chosen more by kinship links with the Ahmar family, while outside these areas, *Islah* ran those more broadly identified with the Islamists.[45] Renaud Detalle argues that the GPC did exactly the same thing.[46]

Amid all of this jockeying there was that underlying dynamic that held the union together for the elections in April 1993. Despite the rivalries and the obvious incompetence or corruption in respect to

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[41] Paul Dresch and Bernard Haykel, "Stereotypes and Political Styles,"

[42] Interview with Ahmar, *al-Hayat* 11 January 1993.

[43] Eric Watkins, "Islamism and Tribalism in Yemen," in Abdel Salam Sidahmed and Ehteshami Anoushiravan, (eds.), *Islamic Fundamentalism* (Oxford: Westview Press, 1996), 225.

[44] Some assumed there was a much longer animosity with southern among those from the North who despised of the secular traditions of the south. Gerd Nonneman, "The Yemen Republic: From Unification to Civil War and Beyond," in Haifaa Jawad (ed.), *The Middle East in the New World Order* (London: Macmillan, 1997), 72.

[45] As Carapico writes, "…parties did not represent tribes nor did party loyalty rest on tribal affiliation. Rather, within each locality (and some families) were many parties and within each party were people of different tribal (and non-tribal) origins." Sheila Carapico, *Civil Society in Yemen*, 166.

[46] "In putting together their slate, the GPC looked for persons well-rooted in their communities, with party affiliation taking second place. Many tribal leaders, of course, but also big merchants and high officials…" Renaud Detalle, "Les partis politiques au Yemén: paysage apres la bataille," *Revue du Monde Musulman et de la Méditerranée* no. 81-82 (1996): 331-348, 335.

failing their governmental duties, neither party believed breaking the union apart was possible. For the most part, the process was still very popular and if either faction moved away from that platform it could have resulted in a political disaster. Unity was by now a sacred cow that was beyond dispute. The leading elites thus settled for maintaining their hold on the traditional centres of authority and securing via proxy as much influence outside their core areas as possible.

At the same time, unification was dragging the rival camps into a perpetual state of conflict. The logic of the situation, from the perspectives of either the GPC or the YSP, led to a "zero-sum;" any gain for the YSP was a loss for the GPC and vice versa.[47] This ultimately prevented the realization of a "democratic transition" and ultimately stimulated the causes of further unrest, which only complicated the task of government officials who had hoped to broaden the reach of the state. Perhaps most important for the future of Yemen was that this systemic impediment, along with the fact that each group had control of quite separate units in the military and paramilitary groups, left a vacuum in coercive power. In other words, with no single entity fully monopolizing power and violence being used a tool of coercion, intimidation and leveraging, the Civil War of 1994 was waiting to happen.

Elections and their Consequences

Despite some instances of disorder and violence, the outcome of the 1993 election indicated a genuine contest.[48] The results of the elections on April 1993, however, did not replicate the power-sharing formula concocted in 1990. The GPC took most of the votes while the YSP not only found itself a very junior partner, but also faced a new rival, the *Islah* which practically took over the position of unified Yemen's second party. Among the approximately 3 million registered voters, about 80 percent went to vote on 27 April 1993.[49] A massive turnout was a clear indicator that this was something Yemenis themselves took very seriously. The vote was for 301 seats in Parliament (COR). Voters had to choose from more than 3,500 candidates. The results published on 1 May gave the GPC 123 seats, *Islah* 62, the YSP 56, while the Ba'thist obtained 7, Nasserist 3 and an assortment of religious and special interests groups made up the rest.[50] From this distribution of votes, problems were bound to emerge. The two northern parties had a wide majority of the seats; Southern Yemenis were in a clear subordinate position, which, while reproducing the previous political matrix, was no longer mediated by the mutual interest in having elections. The goals of sharing power, despite the demographic disparities, were ostensibly forgotten. After the elections, the two Northern parties basically refused to permit a process by which the state would create a doctrine for cooperation among parties.

As the 1990-1993 period failed to integrate the country economically, culturally, socially and clearly not politically, the post-election period would be one of little to no accommodation for the minority party. 'Abdullah al-Ahmar was elected the COR chairman. The YSP, as agreed prior to the election, would keep eight portfolios (GPC 15, Ba'thists 1 and *Islah* 6) and 'Attas would remain Prime Minister. Tellingly, as prior to the elections, the parties still could not agree on how to merge the two militaries. YSP leaders were rethinking their attitude towards unity.

From the outside, the YSP seemed to break at the seams. They appeared to fragment, contradict each other in public statements and were slowly losing their composure. For those at the head of the YSP Political Bureau, the party had a mandate to defend the country's middle classes, the political centre and left from the traditional forces lurking in the north. That meant advocating modernization, democracy, women's rights and opposing religious fanaticism. Other officials however preached strong security that would halt the end of the "terrorism" afflicting the country, an obvious reference

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[47] Hudson, "Bipolarity," 16.

[48] Carapico, *Civil Society in Yemen*, 3.

[49] Iris Glowemeyer, "The First Yemeni Parliamentary Elections in 1993: Practising Democracy," *Orient* 34 (1993): 439-451.

[50] *Al-Majalla*, 26 May 1993.

to the political violence that had targeted YSP members. This entailed disarming the northern "tribes," a position any "national" party could hardly afford to make.

The deputy secretary-general of the party, Salim Salih Muhammad added to this chorus by stating there was a fundamental need for political reform, including expelling political hacks from government and replacing them with technocrats, another reference to the political style that seemed to suit GPC's traditional power base. Local government, Salim Salih Muhammad continued, needed to be transformed. But in what seems to be a contradiction, he claimed the goal was decentralization, perhaps revealing a strategic fissure within the YPC ranks, after it became clear the South had no chance of legally controlling the state.[51]

For its part, the GPC was perfectly content with the results; President Salih's strategy seemed to play out as planned. In statements after the elections, he said he regretted the clear north/south outcome of the elections but said the "people had spoken" and the "march towards democracy" could not be stopped to accommodate those who were not supported by the people. Salih, the winner, was in no mood for sharing power any more.[52]

Already by the summer of 1993, the differing views of the country's future was evident.[53] Proposed amendments to the constitution were submitted to the COR in June, with all parties consenting initially. The document was mostly designed to institutionalize the presidency (two-term limit), vice presidency and create a consultative council that would be accessed by all major parties. It was when the amendments were debated that the new order in Yemeni politics was made clear. Salih seemed happy to allow Ahmar and the *Islah* to raise objections to the very need for a Consultative Council and challenge the idea of holding direct elections for provincial government, all potential sources of YSP power which they could not secure at the national level. Interestingly, it appears that the YSP did begin to enjoy newly emerging pockets of supporters in North Yemen and could gain a foothold in many areas in the north. This was no doubt a reflection of the Bakil/Hashid tensions discussed above. Bakil loyalists were clearly open to forging an alliance with YPC candidates to help thwart the nearly hegemonic power of *Islah*/GPC alliance in the northern rural districts. This debate about locally-held elections and regional autonomy proved especially interesting in light of the defeat in the elections and may excuse Baydh and allies for believing they could have done better if future elections were held to select local governments instead of just contest national platforms. Perhaps, under a different electoral system, which was on the table during the summer constitutional meetings, the balance of power would change in favour of the YSP in the future.[54]

All this was taking place in the context of more riots in the south. The shortages of cash, fuel, jobs and food left the entire region vulnerable to social unrest. Labour activism set into the open the ideological struggle going on inside the YSP with many hardliners wanting to stick to traditional Marxist positions, which they felt, in the context of social unrest, would appeal to the hungry masses. Hardliners like Jarallah 'Umar opposed cooperating with the Muslim Brotherhood at all and publicly condemned the backwardness of the North.[55] To make matters worse for the YSP, 'Umar led a coalition within the party, mostly composed of intellectuals and probably many others linked to the pre-1986 elite silently making their way back into southern politics This internal faction began to publicly oppose the "Hadrami faction," that is Baydh and 'Attas, from ever agreeing to the unity government. 'Umar proposed that the YSP should actually take an oppositional role, a clear indication that many from within the southern party elite were itching for a fight.

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[51] Salim Salih interview in *al-Sharq al-Awsat*, 23 August 1993.

[52] For a detailed analysis of the elections, see Renaud Detalle, "Les élections législatives du 27 avril 1993," *Monde Arabe Maghreb-Machrek*, no. 141 (1993): 3-26.

[53] Sheila Carapico, "Elections and Mass Politics in Yemen," 4.

[54] Baydh interview in *al-Hayat*, 28 August 1993.

[55] 'Umar interview in *al-Hayat*, 18 May 1993.

This was all too much for Baydh and he left San'a' to Aden with no agreement, presumably to placate 'Umar who was gaining support within an increasingly factionalized YSP. Within days of his arrival in Aden, a series of political murders using sophisticated car bombs left several crucial members of Baydh's party dead and his son injured. Within a month, apparently after consultation with his disgruntled party members, the party issued a letter that listed an 18-point ultimatum to the coalition. The list of demands were clearly laid out and obviously the product of some serious brain storming in Aden over the month of September.

'Umar's hard-line tactics clearly won over many of Baydh's base in face of a new wave of violence targeting YSP loyalists. They were particularly lucid in respect to where the differences between the YSP and its Northern "partners" lay in regards to building a unified state. Theirs was a platform of reform that would eliminate the traditional power structures of Salih and Ahmar, such as replacing arbitrary policy and kinship ties, create a government based on laws and have appointments based on merit. There was also a demand that the economy be directly under the supervision of the government; the creation of elected bodies that encouraged, rather than discouraged, the involvement of hitherto excluded social groups, a clear gesture to the social outcasts that existed throughout Yemeni society and who had no direct patron. This last demand was a clear pitch to broaden the political field and could be the first and only clear example of popular politics in this period that reached out beyond traditional "spheres of influence."[56]

The actual progression to open conflict followed violent confrontations throughout the end of 1993 and the Spring of 1994, with what seems like obvious attempts by northern forces to isolate if not eliminate southern military and paramilitary units that were based in the north. These calls for reforms thus only further widened the gap to the point there was no way out for YSP but war. While the war ended with a victory for the northern forces, the battle was not without its moments of doubt and it is clear, without outside arbitration (along with meddling) the war at once proved to be a political stalemate and potentially inconclusive in answering the question of power in unified Yemen.[57]

The details of the bloody war do not need revisiting here. It was a terrifying example of failed leadership and external manipulation. It was also, however, a crucial wedge for GPC hegemony. In sum, Salih had basically calculated he was in a no-lose situation while hard-liners like 'Umar based in the South, were able to capitalize on the war and secured a new place within the YSP. The way the war was conducted, it must be said, ultimately solidified a north/south mutual hatred that is obvious today when one travels the country and certainly served the interests of not only Salih but outside countries as well.[58]

Post-war Yemen

Joel Migdal once noted that state leaders in weak states have to "weigh their need to create effective agencies for political mobilization and security against the risks to political stability and their own survival, which come in creating potential power centres they cannot control."[59] This succinctly highlights Salih's dilemma after the 1993 elections. For a leader such as Salih, the potential challenges to his regime could come from within his inner circle, various factions within the military or those groups, such as the Islamists, he used to help secure the reigns of the unified state throughout the

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[56] For a list of these demands, see *al-Manar* (San'a' weekly) 22 May 1993.

[57] Renaud Detalle, "Pacte d'Amman," *Maghreb-Machrek* 145 (July-Sept. 1994): 113-122.

[58] KSA authorities in particular played a role, at once offering moral support to the efforts to find a diplomatic solution and keep Yemen intact, while supplying weapons and cash to northern Salafi militias to raid the south while, at the same time, as published in a Saudi newspaper, informed the Prime Minister, Abu Bakr al-Attas that KSA was going to recognized the South's call for separation. *al-Sharq al-Awsat*, 28 June 1994.

[59] Joel S. Migdal, *Strong Societies and Weak States: State-Society Relations and State Capabilities in the Third World* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1988), 264.

1980s. One of his biggest problems, therefore, was stepping back from a possible war and beginning to create a viable, unified society on his terms. It is in this section that it becomes particularly clear that Salih had a well-conceived strategy to use the unification process to not only strengthen his authority among northern constituents—a loosely and often highly unreliable base of groups linked by little more than state patronage—but infiltrate previously inaccessible sources of legitimacy in the geographic south. This strategy of co-optation not only intensifies a lurking rivalry between the two power-holders in the unified Yemen, but it ultimately results in the erasure of any leverage non-aligned southern and northern politicians had hoped to sustain once unification was realized. This will prove especially important in the subsequent period, one which follows the bloody if ultimately short war between the factions in 1994, a period of post-unification/post civil war that simply intensified the regional disparity between stakeholders.

Post-war reconciliation in general was by all accounts actually stymied by the northern elite basically plundering the south both materially and psychologically.[60] It is here that the colonial nature of the Salih-led state (i.e. the exploitation of the South for the benefit of a growing number of northerners) is especially important to appreciating the post-war period.[61] Bob Burrowes perhaps best captures the spirit by characterizing post-war Yemen a "kleptocracy" in which "government by and for thieves" led to an ongoing policy of placating allies by allowing them to plunder the South.[62]

Today South Yemen is literally in a state of intermintent revolt. The unrest in Southern Yemen has its roots in northern hegemony following unification, the return of old southern families living for years in exile and the struggle for influence over the area's oil and gas revenues. Post-war reconciliation between North and South was further thwarted by the corruption among the northern oligarchy and by the installation of President Salih's relatives in many top military and security posts that directly administered the South. Successive constitutional amendments centralized power in the executive, leading to a de facto merger between the ruling party and the state, both headed by Salih. In the meantime, the GPC has severed its ties with its old partners, *Islah*. Following Midgal's observations about similar conditions of power distribution, one begins to see the paradox of Salih's situation and the increasing movement towards authoritarianism.

For as much as Salih's party navigated post-war Yemen to assume power, parallel developments in civil society signified the failure of a formal opposition. These moves to secure the rewards of power spurred on a dramatic rise in civil society activity, with self-help groups and local communities fending for themselves as the spoils of power increasingly translated into a disfunctional government. In fact, Yemen in many ways has become the darling of political scientists because of the explosion of grass-roots organizations and the persistence of so-called "third parties" like *Islah* in the face of Salih's drive to secure power in Yemen.[63] In light of the dramatic and rapid change of attitude the GPC has with the rest of the coutnry after the war of 1994, basically changing laws to secure power without the need of coalition members, Sheila Carapico has found a silver lining in this turn for the

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[60] Southern newspapers have been reporting for years the particularly nasty patterns of abduction and rape of women in and around military bases in the south. Often, to add to the anguish and outrage, northern judges would implicate the women for immoral acts, exonerating the northern soldiers. See *al-Ayyam*, no. 265, dated 16 June 1996.

[61] See an important collection of articles that originally appeared in the southern journal *al-Ayyam* smuggled into Yemen. The articles speak of this sentiment that the south is being colonized by the north, Abu Bakr al-Saqqaf, *al-wahdat al-yamaniyya min al-indimaj al-fawri ila-l-isti'mar al-dakhili* (London: Barid al-Janub, 1996).

[62] Robert D. Burrowes, "The Republic of Yemen: The Politics of Unification and Civil War, 1989-1995," in Michael Hudson (ed.), *Regional Integration in the Arab World: Problems of Political and Economic Fragmentation* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1998).

[63] See the excellent work of Jillian Schwedler, *Faith in Moderation: Islamist Parties in Jordan and Yemen* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 103-121.

worse: "Yemen may be the one country where a regime can be forced to move incrementally and unwillingly, to incorporate the real pluralism of its society into the practice of statecraft."[64]

While I agree that Salih must make concessions to the pluralism of society and must be careful to at least appear consultative, especially given Yemeni society is heavily armed, he has not been forced to accept true power-sharing options as prior to the war. In fact, Salih seems to have extended his power at the expense of opportunities to demonstrate a new interest in dialogue. This intransigence is in face of at times terrible violence and disorder plaguing many parts of Yemen since unification.[65]

The short answer to the question of why Salih is not responding to pressure more "democratically," despite his relatively weak state, is because the kinds of resistance that do surface are disparate and often centred on private initiatives easily placated, intimidated or ignored. It is very encouraging at one level that grass-roots organizations have filled a void and provide services the otherwise politically marginal need. At the same time, however, such "charities" basically do the work of the government, thus at the bare minimum Salih's state accommodates people's needs while providing ample opportunity to selectively attack or support these isolated operations via a state apparatus more and more invested to service the needs of Salih and his allies.

At the formal level, which seems to be still important to the United States and other partners eager to steer Yemen's potential as an oil and gas producer in the right direction, Salih increased the number of seats won by his GPC in the 1997 parliamentary elections.[66] This apparent success at the polls, largely given the seal of approval from outside observers, signalled an important asset in the hands of the regime: legitimacy by the ballot. In 1999, Salih was re-elected as President, challenged only by a member of his own party. In 2001, Salih succeeded to force amendments to the constitution guaranteeing his executive power despite opposition from Zaydi rural leaders, *Islah* (now permanently in opposition to the GPC) and the Socialists. By 11 September 2001, those same resources Salih used in the period leading up to 1993—the so-called tribes and Islamic groups—in order to bully southern rivals, were now marginalized by an "electoral" process that successfully pitted them in opposition to Salih. As a result, with the dramatic changes taking place after 9/11, former partners were forced to act outside the "rules" of the state as determined by the Salih regime, thus further intensifying the tendency to use force instead of politics to resolve Yemen's disputes.

The issue in Yemen today is the lack of a significant, unified source of opposition that can contest Salih "legally". Whenever there is an emergent, potential challenge, Salih mobilizes a number of counter forces—from US "anti-terrorism" assistance, to creating factions within groups against each other, or sectarianism—to balance the fact there are sources of loyalty within Yemen other than the state. The argument made here is that the Yemeni system, unique within the spectrum of authoritarian states in the Middle East, is a product of a variety of factors.[67] The most important is its plural society affected by the nature of patrimonial relationships that are in essence political deals that have been made by elites and small, well-intentioned NGOs and grassroots organizations. When need be, Salih can bring the state's limited resources to bear fruit by destabilizing potential challenges, either by co-option or litigation. In 1999, for example, Salih appointed a new 59-man Consultative Council that

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[64] Sheila Carapico, "Pluralism, polarization and popular politics in Yemen," in Korany, Bahgat et al. (eds.), *Political Liberalisation and Democratization in the Arab World: Comparative Experiences.* Volume 2, (Boulder, CO.: Lynne Rienner, 1998), 264.

[65] Violence in both the extreme north of the country, around Saada, and in much of the South has sharpened the intensity of Salih's efforts to balance his own political vulnerabilities with the use of military power against those who invariable have been called "Afghans" "al-Qa'ida" to simple "criminals".

[66] See *Yemen Times*, 5 May 1997 for election results.

[67] There has been a poisoning of relations between Salih's partners following unification, leading to a permanent split in northern Yemen that has resulted in violent conflict for much of the 21st century. For an early analysis of this process, see Bernard Haykel, "Rebellion, Migration or Consultative Democracy? The Zaydis and their Detractors in Yemen," in R. Leveau, F. Mermier, and U. Steinbach (eds.), *Le Yémen Contemporain* (Paris: Karthala, 1999): 193-201.

"…works both as a cushion that absorbs the frustrations of different influential groups and individuals…and as a tool to incorporate and co-opt rivals."[68] This is a classic strategic approach to dealing with opposition when state resources are limited. Going back to Migdal, the distribution of social control among the many organizations in society reveals the capabilities of the "strong" state to penetrate societies, regulate social relationships, and extract resources and determine how they are used. In other words, a leader like Salih can reshape societies by promoting some groups and classes while, at the same time, repress others.[69] Because most developing countries have very weak political institutions, it is this ability to infiltrate by other means that I believe makes Salih's Yemen an especially interesting, and unique case. It is possible that these tactics can easily be adopted by other regimes in the region, thus offering otherwise "undemocratic" monarchies a plausible way to offer "pluralism" while assuring power remains in the dynasty's hands.

While still beset with a vast array of domestic and foreign problems, President Salih announced a reduction of some 50,000 men in the country's armed forces. There were a number of announced reasons for this policy. Salih, for instance, argued that these cuts were made in line with austerity measures recommended by the international lending institutions. Such claims are hard to credit as the cuts were far from comprehensive; they were in fact restricted to recruits of the YSP, those who had not shown themselves strongly loyal to the GPC and those who deserved to retire on a pension. Indeed, it has been observed that these dismissals were confined mainly to the southerners in a comprehensive process of purging. Therefore, these changes actually strengthened Salih's control and tightened Yemen's defensive position. Great attention was paid to the purchase of increasingly sophisticated military hardware and to the modernizing of the military forces, particularly the elite Republican Guards.[70] Clearly, the President was not reducing his military might; he was rather streamlining it and assuring absolute loyalty.

Similarly, the Political Security Office (PSO) has played a very important role in strengthening the position of the President. The PSO is headed by a key figure in the GPC, who is a very close to the President. The PSO expanded its activities all over the country, penetrating different political organizations, military units, government bodies and even the NGOs. Active NGOs were particularly targeted when they had penetrated and established allied civil bodies.[71] A second goal of the PSO was to consolidate all sources of legitimacy which supported the regime vis-à-vis its rivals. In this quest, they apparently formed the National Council for Opposition, which actually supported several new southern power centres and co-opted some sympathetic Islamists in the GPC.[72]

The GPC has thus created a well established frame of control which they inherited from the pre-unification era. This is based on the tribal- military-commercial complex mentioned earlier. Therefore, post-war attention was paid to the expansion of the structure of control in the South and to the merging of it with that in the North into a single network. As a result, it has been suggested that the regime continuously instigates conflict between groups within the Bakil and Hashid confederations in order to prepare groups to seek arbitration under so-called tribal law monitored by Salih's allies. Knowing these communities would not trust civilian courts, the contentious nature of these cases ultimately

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[68] Ahmed Abdul Kareem Saif, *A Legislature in Transition: The Parliament of the Republic of Yemen 1990-99,* PhD Thesis (University of Exeter, 2000), 105.

[69] Migdal, *Strong Societies and Weak States*, 5-9.

[70] For a revealing article listing the large proportion of Salih's family members in the upper levels of the military, see *al-Shura* (Yemeni weekly), 6 March 1994.

[71] For insight into how these groups have been identified as effective counter weights to the regime, see Sheila Carapico, "Yemen between Civility and Civil War," in Richard A. Norton (ed.), *Civil Society in the Middle East* vol. 2 (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1996): 282-316.

[72] In a familiar tactic elsewhere in the Arab world, during hostilities in 1994, preachers utilized their assumed authority to excommunicate (*takfir*) those who resisted the Northern armies, a use of faith that would continue for much of the period covered here. See *al-Shura* (San'a') 20 November 1994.

aspires to undermine the community's autonomous resources. This serves the regime in two ways. First, it deflects regional power away from opposing the regime. In addition, the conflicts within the communities weaken each other, rendering their leaders dependent on the state for either support or mediation. Furthermore, such tactics gives the regime leverage over communities that are trying to create a new generation of leaders after a wave of state persecution. Often, when new leaders do emerge, they do so under new conditions, often compelling them to serve as intermediaries expected to help control society on behalf of the regime.[73]

Yemen has thus become a country of compartmentalized politics, where state policies are strictly geared to satisfying special interests. This has resulted in a strategic compromise, a system of pluralism, yes, but a political diversity that requires endless bargains mediated by the state. But because of an increasing appearance of incoherence in policy and by way of shifting institutions, the nature of this system prevents the emergence of strong and enduring coalitions into interest groups of political parties. Instead, there is always space for personal contacts, patronage or client ties that can serve as spaces for negotiation. It may not be the case, as argued at times, that political integration and state-building can only take place through the eradication of traditional solidarities and intermediary linkages. Patronage and bureaucratic linkages, however, are not necessarily mutually exclusive but can go hand in hand. In corporatist systems in general, individuals and classes do not interact with the state directly, but rather through intermediaries. It appears this is very much the case in Yemen. The problem is the scale: Those who have secured access are increasingly parochial and, by nature, dispersed locally; they do not negotiate for constituencies any much larger than a town neighbourhood.

Here, the cooptation of Islamic parities for the purpose of securing a stranglehold over southern groups and then the management of their role in subsequent years proves to be the most significant development in Yemen since 1994. It is in this light of increased direct authority over even potentially autonomous political forces among the so-called "tribes" in otherwise isolated rural northern communities that Salih's regime proves to be one of the more evocative examples of political expansion in the Arab world today.[74]

Ayubi defines consociation as a "grand coalition" based on "high internal autonomy," with a proportionate measure of representation that allows these actors to block either rivals or the state with something akin to a veto.[75] Ayubi thus assumes corporatism is predicated on collaboration rather than confrontation. It is suggested one can historically identify such periods in the Arab world when class or group hegemony was not possible. The formula of corporatism, as it may apply to Yemen after 1994, could be interpreted as such a mechanism used to avoid conflicts between the GPC and the *Islah*, for example. In some ways, it could be argued that indeed, Yemeni elite and their clients have solved the problem of power. Ayubi's formula appears to be convenient for urban elites wishing to initiate reforms, while controlling its form and direction.

The only problem is Ayubi did not tap into the organizational form by which such collaboration (for the sake of elite stability) would take place in post-war Yemen. I must thus agree that the plethora of union workers, urban poor and rural voiceless have not been institutionally or organizationally incorporated; rather they have been left stuck addressing parochial concerns and often to the state through an intermediary. In other words, there has been no nation-wide effort to consolidate the

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[73] These tactics clearly antagonized old allies like Ahmar, who at various points in the late 1990s openly sided with not only his own constituents in *Islah* or within the Hashid confederacy, but even urban poor who protested the state. See his angry response to attacks levied by state officials against protesters in *al-Hayat*, 24 June 1998.

[74] Yemen to some, develops what Dresch has called a "tribal-military-commercial complex" which was in part a family business in which "…high-ranking army officers and a few great merchant families all had their hands in each other's pockets." Paul Dresch, "The Tribal Factor in the Yemeni Crisis," in Jamal al-Suwaidi (ed.), *The Yemeni War of 1994: Causes and Consequences* (London, Saqi Books, 1995): 33-55, 34.

[75] Ayubi, *Overstating the Arab State*, 190.

political forces of society. In many ways, Yemen has remained largely a fragmented country that empowers Salih authoritarian tendencies in ways that have to be theorized.

This is crucial as continued pockets of instability have persisted, especially among the increasingly marginalized Zaydi Shi'a of the northern regions leaving Salih's state more room to operate.[76] Southerners, as well, with little political role to play and no representation of merit in San'a' have resorted to civil actions, strikes, protests and other forms of civil disobedience. Even in North Yemen, thousands protest in Ta'iz for cheaper food while in the oil producing Marib governorate, demonstrators demand a share of oil revenues, jobs and development funding. In Amran, ten thousand members of the Hashid confederation reportedly demanded governmental reform and teachers, students, doctors, pharmacists, trade unions, unemployed youth, and journalists have held individual and sometimes joint protests in San'a'.[77]

In order for any of this to actually threaten the regime, however, all these activities need to be channeled in some way institutionally. Salih's government is effectively submerging Yemen's vast potential for rebellion by simply allowing endless numbers of local action groups and NGOs to consume the energies and organizational capacities of civil society. Despite the high tenor of demands for relief and reform, Salih's regime is responding with the same tactics that spurred the protests, leading to organizational redundancy as each community, in a fragmented, parochial manner, voice their demands to a local audience. The regime has thus adopted a predictable (and very effective) pattern when responding to civil unrest: characterizing the opposition as agents foreign forces while isolating each manifestation of collective disapproval. On these grounds it can "justifiably" increase violence at strategic moments and persistant judicial repression in ways that are sanctioned by the outside world. Recall that important voices in the interantional community, such as the US and members of the EU demand that "partners" play their part in the "war on terror". Among other tools available to assure that outsiders properly interpret the character of local resistance to Salih's power, hostile media and public relations campaigns effectively avoid addressing the specific issues facing say, the supporters of Zaydi cleric Hussayn Badr al-Din al-Huthi of Sa'ada or southerners who are left with the stigma of having their actions tied to al-Qai'da. As of late, in the process of rejecting any responsibility or refusing to recognize the legitimacy of popular grievances, the regime has begun to use sectarianism when needed, reflecting a new discursive pattern in conflicts throughout the region (i.e. Shi'a vs. Sunni) that usefully exploits the anti-Iranian rhetoric circulating many corners of the world. This micro-management of local (and isolated) pockets of opposition has become a masterful case of post-Cold War survival.

Conclusion

There is regular reference to the issue of unity in Yemeni newspapers, with the periodic message appearing in the official website of the GPC that unity is something "the people" had always wanted.[78] Despite these reassuring messages, Yemen today is facing instability unseen since its 1994 civil war. A war with rebels in the northern Sa'ada province has left over 50,000 internal refugees. The political and economic marginalization of vast segments of society contribute to the rebellion as does governmental corruption, lack of basic services and heavy-handed security measures. These factors are also the catalyst for widespread protests in Southern Yemen, some of which attract over 100,000 protesters. Clearly there are tensions that go beyond labour issues or southern soldiers' pensions. In many ways, Yemen is thus waiting for another sustained armed conflict to arise. With Salih's inevitable departure and the death of *Islah*'s Ahmar last year, it seems a new set of contingencies await

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[76] Iris Glosemeyer, "Local Conflict, Global Spin: An Uprising in the Yemeni Highlands," *Middle East Report* 232 (Autumn, 2004): 44-46.

[77] *Yemen Times*, 18 November 2007.

[78] Website of newspaper: *Al Mithaq*, 22 October 2007.

the reshuffling leadership and plethora of "non-governmental" groups that have sprung up since 1994. And yet, Yemen's vast potential and clearly innovative and creative civil leaders are incapable of sustaining any relevance beyond their immediate environment. To explain this is to recharacterize Yemen as a new kind of authoritarianism.

The very nature of the post-war colonization of the South has created a demographic shift where entire neighbourhoods have been subsumed by newcomers with little or no capacity (or interest) to extend links to previous areas of settlement. In a dynamic very much like that in the United States, where organizational capacities beyond the two major parties are limited to the immediate geographic area, Yemen's largely frustrated and angry population lack a coherent structure. The tension for action is diluted by the parochialism of groups that do not and cannot communicate with each other. This is made most evident in the impressive plethora of media available on any Yemeni city street newsstand.

On any given week in the country there may be hundreds of thousands of people protesting for better wages, cheaper bread or social justice, only to be dispersed by tear gas, a selective gunshot and the organizational gap that separates each and every one from the other. As it would turn out, Salih's gamble with unification proved a great success that pays huge dividends today. Not only has he proven the more effective strategist, he created the coercive resources to shape a new socio-political dynamic in both the South and North whereby he is the ultimate arbitrator. The losers in this quest for authority, Baydh and his YSP partners, proved incapable of harnessing the most likely constituents in Yemen needing a national party. YSP could have potentially been the patron of all the hundreds of thousands who take to the streets periodically today. Instead of mobilizing the masses, the urban poor and the vast number of people entrenched in a patronage system (*Islah*, Bakil/Hashid) empower Salih by fail to organize beyond local NGOs and self-help committees. The authoritarian regime that has a stranglehold on Yemen's human and material resources does it with a minimal amount of state institutional capacity; the remnants of the South Yemeni Marxist elite have been unable to do anything other than issue statements from their posts in exile in Abu Dhabi and London. What became a political disaster as much a strategic blunder for these would-be masters of a unified Yemen has become for southerners in general a nightmare out of which they have yet to awaken.

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