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THE BACKGROUND OF THE YEMENI REVOLUTION OF 1962

WHEN MUHAMMAD AL-BADR of the Raisuli dynasty of Imams (religious-political potentates descended from the founder of the Islamic religion) was still Crown Prince of the Yemen he had much attention and many flatteries showered upon him by President Gamal Abdel Nasser of Egypt. Frequent were the occasions on which Nasser paid public tribute to the heir to the Yemeni throne and Imamate. Nasser described the young prince as a progressive and broad-minded man who had nothing in common with the suspicious and negative mentality of his father, King and Imam Ahmad (1948-1962). Nasser declared that Badr's intention was to liberate Yemen from the backward and outdated customs and institutions that were retarding its entrance into the twentieth century.

There must be many old residents of the Middle East who still remember the fulsome compliments that Nasser used to lavish on al-Badr. "Alhamdu-lillah (Thank Heaven) that the Yemen has Prince Muhammad al-Badr. I have great confidence in him. When he succeeds his father on the throne Yemen will go forward. We shall give him all help and support to assist him to modernize and improve his nation."

Such was the tenor of Nasser's comments concerning the Yemeni prince in the 1950s. The Egyptian president devoted much time and attention to winning the trust and friendship of al-Badr. He wanted al-Badr to urge his father, King Ahmad, into allowing Yemen to join Egypt in the United Arab Republic that Nasser wished to conjure up as a kind of Pan-Arab state.

Through astute flattery in the Egyptian press, and by his gracious personal manner toward the Yemeni heir, Nasser succeeded in winning the confidence of the by-no-means-gullible al-Badr. Nasser's promptings even induced him to accept an invitation to visit Moscow that was tendered by the Soviets. The Russian ambassador in Cairo had requested the Egyptian president to use his influence with the prince to persuade him to accept this invitation. Mos-

cow's gesture was part of its long-range programme of cultivating friendly relations with Arab leaders on the pretext that Russia wished to aid the economic development of their lands.

Although Nasser did convince al-Badr that he ought to visit the Soviet Union, when the prince went there in June, 1956, two Egyptian intelligence men were detailed to keep a close watch upon him. Cairo did not wish to give the Yemini an opportunity to make some kind of deal with the Soviets behind its back. Actually al-Badr's visit to Russia did secure Russian economic and technical assistance for Yemen. The relations of Yemen with Egypt remained on a friendly basis, and when Egypt and Syria were united in February, 1958, to form the United Arab Republic, King Ahmad asked that his country be admitted into the union. Al-Badr himself came to Cairo to sign the Charter of Union that brought Egypt, Syria, and Yemen under a common political roof. Then the Yemini prince accompanied Nasser and President Shakry al-Kuwatly of Syria to Damascus where the trio received an enthusiastic ovation. Almost everyone in Syria at that time was convinced that Arab unity was certain to restore the old glory and power of the Arab world.

Although it retained its monarchical government at home, Yemen remained part of the U.A.R. until 1961. During this period, many Egyptian engineers and technicians entered the country, but although they may have been trained as technical personnel, a considerable number were members of the Egyptian Intelligence Service. Among this category of Egyptians was Lieutenant-Colonel Ali Fahmy, by training an engineer, by choice an expert planner of revolutions. Fahmy set up a cell for Egyptian espionage in San'a, the Yemini capital. He organized another one in Hodeida, the chief Red Sea port. In his capacity of military engineer he travelled widely throughout the Yemen, ostensibly for the purpose of analyzing its technical requirements for the work of modernization that the Egyptians purported to be anxious to bring into being in the backward Arabian land. Everywhere Fahmy managed to win friends and influence people, both military and civil.

Among the new friends that he made in Yemen was Colonel Abdullah Sallal, Commandant of the Military Academy and former tutor of the Crown Prince himself. A native of San'a, Sallal's father had functioned as a collector of stray animals. His duty was to try to find their owners by shouting out traditional "Lost and Found" slogans in the market places of the capital. As a boy Abdullah had helped his father with this job. The family managed to make ends meet but was anything but affluent. Badr's grandfather, King and Imam Yahia (1904-1948), was always willing, however, to help bright boys to

gain an education, and when Abdullah Sallal was brought to his attention he sent him to school at his own expense. In 1936 the young Yemeni was a member of a student group that went to Iraq to obtain a higher education than was obtainable in Yemen. For several years Abdullah attended the military academy in Baghdad. Upon his return to Yemen, Yahia commissioned him as a battalion commander in the Yemeni army.

In 1948 King Yahia was murdered in a third-rate cloak and dagger plot. Sallal was suspected of being involved in this affair and was arrested in the general round-up of the conspirators that was ordered by Ahmad, who succeeded in making good his claim to the throne. Al-Badr, however, soon secured the release of his former tutor, and named him commander of his own bodyguard.

Somewhat later al-Badr secured the appointment of Sallal as Director of the Port at Hodeida. In 1961 King Ahmad visited this place and was wounded severely by a would-be assassin. Among the members of the committee of investigation that was set up to examine the ramifications of this affair was Sallal, and the present foreign minister of the Yemeni Mutawakelite Kingdom, Ahmad as-Shamy. Something of a sensation was produced when, during an interrogation by this committee, a suspect pointed to Sallal as one of the leaders of the murder plot. Sallal denied his complicity and after one day of arrest was released by the investigating authorities.

At this time Muhammad al-Badr was in Italy, where he had to undergo medical treatment. En route back to Yemen he stopped off in Cairo where he conferred with members of the Egyptian government. What the nature of these deliberations may have been remains a matter of conjecture. What is certain is that soon after Badr's return to Yemen that nation withdrew from the U.A.R. and resumed its old status as an unattached Arab kingdom. Al-Badr reappointed Sallal to command his bodyguard. Lieutenant-Colonel Fahmy cultivated Sallal, who soon joined the Egyptian espionage cell in the Yemeni capital.

On September 28, 1961, a coup was carried out in Syria by elements who opposed the Egyptian-Syrian union. Just a week before this incident took place Fahmy had been in Aleppo. Syrian Public Security Police got hold of his baggage, although he himself had gone to Lebanon before the coup. Among the confidential documents and reports that the Syrians found in his luggage was the following:

The union of the Yemen with the U.A.R. will not liberate the Yemeni

people from the Imamic regime unless the throne itself is destroyed as Farouk's [Egyptian King deposed by Nasser in 1951] throne was overturned and replaced by a republic.

As long as the Imamic regime continues to function we shall not be able to impose the same system that we have introduced into Syria which by virtue of its union with Egypt has become part of our nation. It should take little effort to control the course of events in Syria and to retain our authority over it.

On the other hand the Zaidi rite, to which the majority of the Yemeni belong, stands as a stumbling block in the way of the establishment of the Socialist order which constitutes the foundation of the new era that we have brought into being in the U.A.R.

The elimination of the Imamic regime, which is the stronghold and the fortress of the Zaidi sect, will pave the way for the introduction of Arab Socialism. Without the imposition of Socialism upon the Yemen it will be impossible to integrate this backward nation into the United Arab Republic in the same capacity as Syria.

The northern region of the Yemen is quite different from the Tihama coastal area where the bulk of the population are Shafi'is who are hostile to the Imam for religious reasons. On these Shafi'is we can rely if we launch a blow against the Imamic regime, which the Zaidis support.

I have reported previously the causes of the disagreements that have distinguished the relationship existing between the Yemeni Crown Prince, al-Badr, and his father, Imam Ahmad. I might add that the Prince is continuing to gain popularity and will be a much more popular ruler than his father.

Nonetheless we must calculate that upon his accession to the throne he may follow in the footsteps of his father and rebel against us [evidently Fahmy is referring here to Ahmad's action in taking Yemen out of the U.A.R.]. Our friend, Abdullah Sallal, says that it is certain that he will do so. Other Yemeni who now and again visit our Embassy in San'a have said the same thing.

The best tactic that we can adopt to win over the Yemeni to our program is to effectuate a coup d'état. This can be executed successfully through bribing Yemeni army officers who are close to the Imam and who command his confidence. With their assistance the Imam and the princes can be put out of the way without blame being attached to us.

In brief I want to emphasize that all the efforts that we have made to attach the Yemen to us and to carry forward our program of Arab Socialism in that and other nations of the Arab world are doomed to failure unless we can devise an effective plan for the overthrow of the Imamic regime which stands between us and the achievement of our goals.

August 12, 1961.

Signature of Lt.-Col. Ali Fahmy

It is probable that the Syrian coup prevented the assassination of King Ahmad and the members of his family and government. It was the collapse of the Egypto-Syrian union that delayed the execution of the coup in Yemen.

Meanwhile Nasser enlisted in his service another Yemeni of some importance. This was Abdul Rahman al-Baidani, who was born in Egypt of an Egyptian mother and a Yemeni father. As a child he chanced to attract the attention of a visiting Sheikh from the Hadhramaut region of Arabia, which is just east of Yemen. This sheikh, Abdurrahman al-Baidani, adopted the boy and gave him his name.

Later on young al-Baidani was sent to Cairo to school. In 1946 one of old King Yahia's sons, Prince Abdullah, visited the Egyptian capital. Yemeni students resident there petitioned that regular allowances be granted to them by the Yemeni government. The prince acceded to this request and henceforth each student at the Egyptian schools who was of Yemeni origin received from San'a an allowance of two Egyptian pounds per month. Abdul Rahman al-Baidani at once remembered that his father was a Yemeni and thus cut himself in on this stipend. The Yemeni diplomatic representative in Cairo, Sheikh Ali al-Muayad, became interested in Baidani and helped him to gain the Secondary School Certificate that is awarded in Egypt, the G.C.E.

Following Ahmad's succession to the Yemeni throne, al-Baidani attracted attention to himself by giving a talk on Yemen over the Near East Radio in Cairo. He spoke of the new Yemeni sovereign in terms of sheer admiration. When Ahmad heard about the praises that al-Baidani had showered upon him he summoned the young man to San'a. At an audience given to him by the ruler, Baidani prostrated himself before his sovereign, said that he was an orphan, and declared "Your Majesty, I have neither father nor support other than yourself."

Never popular in Yemen, Ahmad was glad to find someone who seemed to like him. He appointed al-Baidani attaché in the Cairo Legation at a monthly salary of thirty Egyptian pounds. Baidani made good use of the time that he spent in the Egyptian capital in the diplomatic service of his country to further his education. He studied in the faculty of law at the University of Cairo, which granted him the degree of B.A. King Ahmad then appointed him Chargé d'Affaires in the Yemeni Legation in West Germany. During his period of residence in Bonn, Baidani cultivated close relations with the staff of the Egyptian Embassy there.

Ahmad had to go to Rome for medical treatment in 1959. On his arrival in the Italian capital he heard that Baidani was in touch with Egyptian Intelligence. Thereupon the ruler recalled Baidani, and when both of them were back in Yemen he demanded an accounting of the dealings carried on by the young diplomat with the Egyptians. Al-Baidani told the monarch a cock-

and-bull story about an English plot to seize Yemen to make up for the loss of their other colonial dominions. But he, al-Baidani, with the help of Egyptian Intelligence, had "foiled the dastardly British plot". Ahmad believed the story since he himself possessed a vast hatred for everything British. Nevertheless he decided to transfer Baidani to the Yemeni Legation in the Sudan rather than allow him to return to Bonn. Early in 1960 the chronically suspicious monarch decided that he had better retire Baidani from the diplomatic service altogether. Accordingly Baidani found himself appointed director of the anti-locust campaign in Hodeida. The ex-diplomat considered that this post was beneath his exalted dignity. Pretending to be ill, he made a trip to Cairo for purposes of medical consultation. Most of his consulting was with Egyptian Intelligence and officials of the Cairo government.

Baidani now threw off the mask and returned to Bonn with funds supplied to him by the Egyptians. He studied at the university there for a time, and then went back to Cairo. In the Egyptian capital he occupied himself with writing articles for various Egyptian newspapers and magazines. He also delivered some orations over the Cairo Radio "Sawt al-Arab", in which he attacked the Yemeni regime with vitriolic fervour.

According to informed Middle Eastern political sources, and to several leading Arab newspapers, Baidani was now acting as liaison man between Egyptian Intelligence, South Arabian Section, and the Yemeni officer cell founded by Lieutenant-Colonel Fahmy. The Yemeni military personnel belonging to this cell were given special training in the technique of revolutionary take-overs during visits that they managed to make to Egypt. Senior experts in Egyptian Intelligence schooled them carefully for the role that they were to play in Yemen when the opportune moment arrived.

The death of King Ahmad in September, 1962, seemed to provide the occasion for which the conspirators were waiting. Muhammad al-Badr succeeded to the throne and immediately issued a number of reform decrees. These called for the election of a Consultative Assembly in which each sixty thousand inhabitants of the country would have one representative. The new king and Imam also promised municipal autonomy under the supervision of an intermunicipal consortium. He decreed the abolition of all feudal dues, an amnesty for political prisoners and exiles, and the end of the system of holding hostages from members of prominent families to insure the good behaviour of their clans. Al-Badr exerted himself to form a government of talented and enlightened people. He entrusted to his new officials the task of drawing up and putting into effect a programme of modern administrative reform in all

departments of the government. In his inaugural Speech from the Throne al-Badr declared his intention of introducing the principle of equality before the law. He called upon all Yemeni to do everything in their power to support the reform programme in "our march forward towards modernity."

The young king's speech was well received in Yemen by all classes of the people. Everyone knew that during Ahmad's reign Badr had been perpetually at odds with his suspicious and reactionary father, who made him suffer for his progressive ideas. The Yemeni people expected great things from their new ruler.

It was now apparent that the conspirators would have to strike before Badr had a chance to put his programme of reform into operation. On the night of September 26, just eight days after Ahmad's death, the officers of the military cell mustered a number of troops armed with heavy modern weapons, including units of artillery. Without informing the soldiers of their intentions they marched them towards the Basha'ir (Royal Palace) where the Imam and a number of his relatives were asleep.

Someone loyal to the king got wind of what was going on and managed to awaken Badr just before the rebel officers turned their guns on the palace. Hence the surprise was not complete, and although the royal residence was not designed for defence and was quickly knocked to bits by the republican artillery, Badr and his guards succeeded in holding out in the ruins for some twelve hours.

By this time it was broad daylight (September 27) and the ammunition of the defenders had run out. Badr decided to make a run for it and somehow contrived to get away across country to Hajjah, some seventy kilometres from San'a. A number of his ministers, members of the Ulema (religious council), tribal sheikhs loyal to the monarchy, and other members of the royal family and of the guards who had defended them, were not so lucky. Even Prince Hasan ben Ali, who had nothing to do with the government, but who was very popular with the Yemeni people, was murdered under circumstances of extreme brutality. During the first two days of the revolt forty-seven known royalist leaders and at least five hundred other people were executed.

It was some time before the news of the Imam's escape became a matter of general knowledge. Radios San'a and Cairo assured the world that he was dead under the ruins of the palace. His uncle, Prince al-Hasan, raised the northern and eastern tribes in behalf of the monarchy and prepared to march upon San'a. The surviving members of the Ulema Council proclaimed

him Imam and King, but as soon as he found out that Badr was alive he at once pledged his loyalty to the legitimate Yemeni ruler.

As the beginnings of popular resistance in behalf of the Imamate began to make themselves felt, the newly-established republican government turned to Cairo for assistance. Nasser sent thirty thousand "legionnaires" to Yemen along with plane, tank, and artillery units. Thus was initiated one of the bloodiest and most protracted wars of modern times, a war that has been almost entirely ignored by the American press. Probably close to a quarter of a million Yemeni of all ages, classes, conditions of life, and political opinions or lack of them have lost their lives to date, while some 25,000 to 30,000 Egyptians have ended their careers for Nasser on the field of glory.

The United States, the United Nations, and the Soviet-bloc nations hastened to recognize the new regime, which was given Yemen's seat in the U.N. Great Britain accorded no such diplomatic recognition to the revolutionary government, and for the past year the British are reported to have been supplying the Yemeni royalists with arms which are sent to them by way of Aden and Beihan, which adjoin the southern frontier of the Yemen.

To this day the Mutawakelite Kingdom still survives in the northern and eastern mountains, and it appears to be extending its control over more and more territory. After his escape Badr formed a new government with Prince al-Hasan as prime minister, Qadi Ahmad al-Siyaghi as deputy prime minister, Sheikh Salah al-Masri as minister of defense, Ahmad Muhammad as-Shamy as foreign minister, Prince Muhammad ben al-Husein as minister of communications, and Qadi Husein Mirfiq as minister of information. This government issued a number of proclamations relative to the programme that it intends to introduce when the Egyptians are driven from the country. It announced among other things its determination to carry out the reform programme proclaimed by al-Badr at the time of his accession. It also promised an intensive promotion of industry, health, education, and social affairs. Externally, the royal government pledged itself to execute all of its international obligations, which include adherence to the Charter of the United Nations and the observance of human rights.

At the end of 1964, Sa'da, the chief town of northern Yemen, fell into the hands of the royalists. This event underlined the complete breakdown of the cease-fire arrangement negotiated by Saudi Arabia that was supposed to go into effect on November 8, 1964. Al-Badr has released statements since the first of the year which claim that the Egyptians have violated the provisions of the cease-fire flagrantly and incessantly. Royalist sources acknowledge that

some of the tribes loyal to the Imamate also flatly refused to observe the armistice terms. Following the fall of Sa'da eight prominent Yemeni republican officials fled abroad. Other republican civil servants refused to take posts offered to them in Ta'izz, the capital of southern Yemen. Informed observers believe that the republican regime has broken down completely. Sallal and Baidani, its chief leaders, fell out with one another soon after the outbreak of the revolution, and Baidani had to take shelter in Cairo.

Whether the Yemeni republic *per se* is still a going concern or not, the Egyptian army remains in Yemen. Today Nasser has 75,000 ground troops in this South Arabian land and no one knows how many planes, artillery, and armoured units. All are Soviet equipped, and the Russians and Czechs have sent thousands of military and technical personnel to Yemen to school the Egyptians in the use of their new weapons. Since 1962, Washington has contributed some \$500,000,000 to the Egyptian war chest, so that Cairo has been able to use its own funds to prosecute the war in Yemen. Russia, however, has outbid the Americans by promising to lend the U.A.R. \$645,000,000. Nasser appears to be more grateful for the weapons and material military assistance that he has received from Moscow than he is for the food and economic aid rendered to him by the United States.

Despite all this material help, the Egyptian economy seems to be cracking under the strain of war. As the casualty lists continue to grow longer and longer, the struggle is becoming increasingly unpopular among all classes of the people of Egypt. Only dogmatic believers in Arab Socialism still continue to applaud Nasser's Yemeni policies.

Now that spring is here large scale hostilities can be expected to erupt at any time. Owing to the inadequate and biassed press coverage given to the Yemeni war in the United States, American public opinion remains altogether oblivious to the implications of the struggle in Yemen. To beat down the resistance of the royalists the Egyptians will have to cut off the delivery of arms from abroad to al-Badr's men. The only way they can do this is to invade Aden and Beihan. Such action is bound to bring on a shooting war with Great Britain, who has no intention of allowing her influence to be ousted from these areas. Even if Saudi Arabia does not take advantage of an Anglo-Egyptian clash to pitch into her U.A.R. harassers, it is a foregone conclusion that the Israelis will take advantage of such an involvement to attack Jordan, Syria, and Lebanon.

As a matter of fact the Arab world is firmly convinced that American Jewry is dictating policies in Washington and is compelling the United States

to support the Egyptian campaigns. As long as the Egyptian army remains in Yemen it can not be used against the Israelis. Such is the interpretation given by the Arab mind to America's support of the Egyptian war effort.

YEMENI REPUBLICAN DOCUMENTS CAPTURED BY ROYALIST
FORCES IN THE JANUARY FIGHTING ON THE JEBEL RAZIH
MOUNTAIN AND IN ARHAB AND KHAWLAN PROVINCES

(1)

From: Arab Republic of Yemen

To: The Foreign Minister of the United Arab Republic. Cairo.

Salutation:

The Foreign Ministry of the Arab Republic of Yemen takes pleasure in enclosing a copy of the presidential decree issued by President Marshal Abdullah Sallal No. 182 dated 28.9.64 for preservation by the United Arab Republic. When the times comes, as specified by the [presidential] decree, that is at the end of the military operations in the Arab Republic of Yemen and the restoration of stability to this country, the United Arab Republic will have the right to see to the carrying out of all of the contents of this document. The execution in due course of the presidential decree will help considerably in recruiting tribal support, in effecting the confiscation of firearms, the collection of fines, and the implementation of the program of planned socialism.

Please accept our salutations.

Seal of Arab Republic of Yemen
Foreign Ministry
Signature of Foreign Minister

(2)

From: Arab Republic of Yemen

To: His Excellency, the Commanding Officer of the U.A.R. Army of Occupation in the Yemen.

Salutation:

We are in receipt of your note dated 30/9/64 requesting the Government of the Arab Republic of Yemen to allocate certain amounts of money from the general budget of the Republic to be paid whenever necessary to the population of Dathimah and other inhabitants in the South of Arabia who are fighting against the English.

Immediately upon receipt of aforesaid note we established telephonic communication with His Excellency, the President of the Republic, Marshal Abdullah Sallal, and discussed the matter with him. His Excellency's answer was that the budget of the Republic cannot bear the payment of any such monies and he offered this explanation: the southern tribes have been incited by the U.A.R. High Command to attack the English.

The adoption of this policy by the U.A.R. was designed to engage these tribes in military operations which would prevent them from giving aid to the Yemeni Royalists. At the same time the policy aimed to so preoccupy the English as to impede their rendering of assistance to the Royalists.

As far as the attitude of the Yemeni Republic towards the tribes in question is concerned it has no sympathy with or for them whatsoever. Nor has it any wish or intention of supporting them. Furthermore the Yemeni Republic is neither willing nor able to pay them any sums whatsoever. They are only groups of treacherous mercenaries. There is no prospect of their ever adhering to the cause of the Yemeni Republic. Nor would they, in their territories, submit themselves to its influence and policies.

This was the answer given to us by His Excellency [President Sallal]. Please accept our salutations.

30/9/64

Seal of Arab Republic of Yemen
Foreign Ministry
Signature of Foreign Minister

(3)

From: Arab Republic of Yemen, Ministry of Justice

To: Arab Republic of Yemen, Vice President Major General Hasan al-Amri.

God's peace, mercy and blessing be upon you.

I should like to suggest to you the idea of fabricating copies of correspondence alleged to have been exchanged between the gang of rebels who belong to the Royal Family [original text reads in Arabic—"House of those who destroy religion"] and their supporters and helpers who assume the commands of the rebellious forces, and the criminal Al Hasan* and the deposed al-Badr.** This correspondence should be filled with disparaging and malicious remarks about the tribal leaders who are supporting the Royalist cause. The imitation of the handwriting of the royal personalities must be perfectly executed.

Every precaution must be taken lest somebody should learn of the actual origin of these letters. Photographic copies will be taken in large numbers. These copies will be distributed to the tribal leaders and their headquarters staffs.

The tribal leaders are stupid and will believe the authenticity of the letters. Thus the Government of the Yemeni Republic will be able to arouse misgivings in the ranks of the Royalists and in fomenting differences between the members of the Royal Family and their followers. It may be hoped that the tribal leaders will be infuriated by this correspondence and will arrest or kill the members of this outcast family.

Enclosed herewith is a draft letter. If you approve of it we will rewrite it saying that it has been exchanged between Abdullah ben-al Hasan and his father and

*Prince al-Hasan, commander of the Royalist Armies of Eastern Yemen.

**King and Imam (religious leader descended from the Prophet, Muhammad).

the traitor Al-Ghadir. Of course you will have to decide about the advisability of this deception yourself.

God keep you and God's peace, mercy and blessing be upon you.

20 Rabi ath-Thani [Aug. 28, 1964]

Seal of Arab Republic of Yemen

Ministry of Justice

Signature of Minister of Justice

NOTE ON SOURCES

Material for this article was drawn mainly from works used in the preparation of the author's forthcoming *History of Yemen*, supplemented by information obtained during his travels in the Middle East and from correspondence with friends still living there.