The Southern Movement in Yemen

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During the past year, people of the former South Yemen Republic have joined a popular movement demanding fair rule and equal citizenship against which the Yemeni government has taken harsh methods. While the western world concentrates on Al-Qaeda and kidnapped tourists, the movement has taken a visible presence on the Internet, which offers a whole new platform for political protest. It was over and what had come to replace it was simply Northern occupation. With unity came also a political culture unfamiliar to the South. Corruption and dishonesty substituted earlier good government.\textsuperscript{2} It also became evident that the multi-party system actually meant choosing the “right” party, one that has access to state funds and can deliver everything from development schemes to land properties and government jobs. Ever since the harmony of the early years of unity when government posts were distributed evenly between Southerners and Northerners, there has been no question that the party that delivers is the People’s General Congress, the party of the Republic’s President.

To the disillusionment of the Southerners, the authoritarian system of one party rule was simply replaced by clientelism which demanded unreserved loyalty to the government in exchange for personal benefits such as a government jobs, expensive cars, or pieces of land; a practice they imagined to have originated in the North. Moreover, hard-line religious moralizing that spread among the Southerners has contributed to the marginalization of women’s earlier visible roles in the public sphere.\textsuperscript{3}

There are also economic reasons for dissent. During the 1994 war factories in Aden were affected. Machines and raw materials were demolished or looted and factories had to send workers, mostly women, home. With a salary from the state, these workers just stayed at home until years later came their retirement. Now these former factory workers, people in their best productive years, are bitter. With a small pension that hardly covers daily expenses, they do not waste time in job seeking since hardly any new job opportunities have been created. Dr Suad Uthman Abdulrahim from Aden University suggests that not only rivalry for markets hit the factories but also greed for huge land properties that the closed factories could release.\textsuperscript{4} Hunt for lucrative land properties has been one of the activities in which the elite has been busyly engaged. According to some estimates, the Northern elite has taken possession of fifty percent of Adeni land. While part of the land acquisitions are disputed and some even litigated in court, most land distributed is state land without previous private owners.

But political and economic factors are not the only sources of dissent; some believe that the two parts of the country have irreversibly different cultures, too. While in the North it was common in the early years of unity to believe that Southerners are “disbelievers” and that their women are “loose,” in the South many viewed Northerners as “ignorant” and “looters of state property.” Despite early hope that the two Yemenans will slowly come together in terms of customs and psychology, Southern women are “loose,” in the South many viewed Northerners as “ignorant” and “looters of state property.”

During the past year, people of the former South Yemen Republic have joined a popular movement demanding fair rule and equal citizenship against which the Yemeni government has taken harsh methods. While the western world concentrates on Al-Qaeda and kidnapped tourists, the movement has taken a visible presence on the Internet, which offers a whole new platform for political protest.

Protests
In late spring 2007 dissent started to culminate in public demonstrations and increased criticism was voiced in opposition newspapers and civil society media. Popular protests spread throughout the former South Yemen and the slogan of infišād (separation) was also raised.
among al-harakat al-ganubiyyat (Southern movement) as the movement is popularly known. The movement is partic-
ularly strong in Hadhramaut governorate to the east where most of oil wealth comes from. The activities there have in-
cluded stopping Northern people from buying or confiscat-
ing land, erecting road blocs to harass drivers with Northern license plates, and pushing demands for getting at least twenty percent of the oil income.

The Southern movement has no national leadership or joint organization and locally takes a variety of forms. It has been most active in small towns in Dhala’ governorate, some hundred kilometres north of Aden where the 1963 Southern revolution had its starting point. These locally based initia-
tives are not necessarily connected to exiled Yemenis who have formed the Southern Democratic Assembly (TAJ) in London, or with the National Opposition Front (MOWJ), an older resistance coalition working from outside but active on the Internet.

The movement unites people of all social strata. It was sparked in spring 2007 by popular protests organized by the Yemeni Retired Military Consultative Association, formed by former military commanders and army men. Following the 1994 reorganization of the army, these men feel they have faced systematic discrimination. Often accompanied by unemployed youth, former civil servants and factory workers, as well as human rights activists, demonstrations have been staged in front of local gov-
ernment premises. Due to lack of job opportunities and discrimination in access to foreign education, youth with university and high school diplomas have also joined the movement. Since the revolution this is the first time young people have taken an active role in politics, which predicts a good future for civil society activities in the South at large.

Notwithstanding the arrest of leaders of the Yemeni Socialist Party (YSP), political parties and the opposition united in the Joint Meeting Parties (JMP) largely remain outside the movement. These parties, most notably the Islah Party (Congregation for Reform) and the YSP took a long time to announce support to the movement. In addition, activists of the movement regard the opposition parties’ cooperation with the government with aven-

cession or federation

While most people in the South view that a change is necessary, not all agree that secession would be the right solution. Another scheme is federation where each governorate (Yemen is divided into 21 governo-
rates) could enjoy autonomy, including deciding on its own norms for public morality. A group of religious personalities recently demanded the establishment of a state body to monitor public virtues in the manner of the Saudi Arabia, causing alarm among the opposition groups.

In another upsetting incidence Nasir al-Shalbani, the former Minister of Religious Endowments (awqaf) and currently preacher in a Northern mosque, issued a fatwa against the protestors calling them “Infidels” and “Communists” who want to “Christianize and Americanize the country,” thus applying rhetoric typical to some Islamist groups throughout the Middle East. In response, the Coordination Council of Military and Civil Retirees Societies, joined by the unemployed persons and committees in all Southern governorates, filed a lawsuit against the former minister accusing him of instigating bloodshed in the demonstrations.

Still the question of secession and re-establishing a state to the ter-

Notes

3. See S. Dahlgren, Contesting Realities: Morality, Propriety and the Public Sphere in Aden, Yemen (University of Helsinki Press 2004).