

CHAPTER 11. Phase I: The Phase of Sampling and Creation

The GDR in Yemen from 1963 to 1970: A Constitutional Draft and the Road to Recognition

As early as its first Party Congress in June 1965, the NLF expressed its intent to create not only a new state but also a new nation based on the ideology of Marxism and Leninism.¹ The Yemeni actors clearly had their own vision of a Marxist state in South Yemen. The following chapter first explores the NLF/NF's early steps on South Yemen's radical political path toward becoming a Marxist state in Arabia and how the GDR gradually became more and more involved in the process. Soviet intentions and its hesitancy towards the new regime in Aden are used to highlight the individuality of East Berlin's engagement during this phase.

1. THE REVOLUTIONARY PHOENIX FROM ADEN'S ASHES: OPTING FOR A SOCIALIST STATE

"[B]adu with long curly black hair wearing indigo tunics, peasants with multicolored fūtahs wrapped around their waists [...] students in shirt-sleeves, soldiers in khaki, surge around the avenues and public squares, which are heavily decorated with posters and huge banners [denouncing ...] 'reaction' and 'imperialism.'"²

(Rouleau's travels in Yemen, published 1967 in *Le Monde*)

Another closure of the Suez Canal in June 1967 exacerbated the already tense economic situation in South Yemen and left the fledgling South Yemeni leadership with vast economic challenges. The rapid British pull-out significantly added

1 | Reference to the first Congress, in: Stenografische Niederschrift der Beratung mit der Delegation der NLF Südjemen am 2.11.1970 im Hause des ZKs, in: BArch SAPMO/DY 30/11407, 11.

2 | Rouleau, in: *Le Monde Diplomatique*, December 1967.

to the economic and political pressures, as this also meant the withdrawal of British and Indian civil servants, military and security personnel, businessmen, and British money.³ Despite their support for the NLF during their fight against FLOSY, the loyalties of the Yemeni military forces trained under British rule were uncertain, and the ranks of the NLF were anything but unified. Also, the NLF was far from being in control of the whole territory of their state and only few of the NLF's leaders "had received any higher education and none had experience in government."⁴ Seeking firm rules and guidance for the establishment of the independent South Yemen seems a logical reaction, and this guidance was offered by the ideological role-models of the partisan struggle for independence. Among the conglomeration of ideologies discussed, Marxism-Leninism soon prevailed as the major doctrine.⁵

1.1 NLF Factions – Qahtan's "Right" and a Fragmented "Left"

Part of this tentative orientation toward socialist state- and nation-building was that the NLF openly prevented the formation of any new political organizations, while the staff of the NLF's General Command, now renamed National Front (NF), swiftly formed a one-party government. However, differences between various factions of the progenitor organizations of the NLF/NF still persisted. After its official formation in 1963, it took more than 15 years until the movement had eliminated all shades and varieties of leftist attitudes. In the beginning, the major figurehead neither had the same approach to everyday politics nor did they put the same emphasis on ideology. While the whole movement was formed by leftist extremists of one kind or the other, the most important divide in the early 1960s runs between a more moderate "right" under Qahtan's leadership and the highly fragmented "left," boasting figureheads like Ali Salem Al-Beidh,⁶ who had also come close to erecting a Maoist regime in Hadramawt.

The "left" was extremely fragmented as well. Two major groups can be identified that would determine South Yemen's destiny after 1970: "ideologues" and "pragmatists." The "ideologues," on the one hand, were mostly Marxists of some sort who rallied around the NLF's chief ideologue Ismail. They focused on the establishment of a Soviet-style vanguard party and entertained close ties to the communist People's Democratic Union (PDU) and their leader, Abdallah Abd al-Razzaq Badheeb.⁷ Badheeb had been among the founding members of the first

3 | The British withdrawal cut the number of ships using Aden by about 75%. The GNP dropped by at least 15% in 1968 and again in 1969, while unemployment drove up to 200,000 people out of the city. Brehony, 2013, 31; Also see: Burrowes, 2010, 278.

4 | Brehony, 2013, 31.

5 | Ismail/Ismail, 1986, 26; 37.

6 | Arabic: ^٤أَلِي سَلِيمُ الْبَيْدَهْ | Also Al-Baydh, Al-Bid, Ali Salim, in: Burrowes, 2010, 53.

7 | Burrowes, 2010, 47; Kostiner, 1990, 19; Naumkin, 2004, 290f.

communist group in South Yemen in 1953, which he later reshaped as the PDU in 1961.⁸ The unlikely alliance between PDU and NLF may not be considered a given, as the PDU rejected violence as a means to an end. But the PDU's intellectual approach was not too far off from some of the ideas of the leftist "ideologues" of the NLF, and when the moderate Qahtan was dethroned in 1969, the previously suppressed communist party PDU joined the corridors of power. As a symbol of unity between the nationalist and violent NLF and the communists, the Higher School for Scientific Socialism of the 1970s was renamed after Badheeb, the "godfather of Yemeni communism." The left's "pragmatists" were a loose coalition that broke several times. Among them were Ali Nasir, Salmin, and the commander during the guerilla war against FLOSY in Aden, Ali Ahmad Nasir Antar (Ali Antar).⁹ Apart from these two major groups, the left consisted of neo-Trotskyists and a motley assembly of tribal-affiliates siding with them out of opposition to Qahtan.

1.2 Unique Yemeni Leadership: Civilian Backgrounds of Revolutionary Leaders

Despite these ideological discrepancies, the leaders united under their first president and father-figure, Qahtan. These initial leaders were held in high esteem throughout South Yemen's short history and were to determine South Yemen's destiny from its birth to its demise.¹⁰ This small circle of "revolutionary leaders" is critical to South Yemeni politics: To create a unified and efficient military, a loyal instrument for the new party-leadership, the "Liberation Army of the National Liberation Front was merged [...] with the units inherited from the British colonial power to form [the] People's Defense Forces [PDF]."¹¹ However, the key members of the new leadership, though all of them veterans of the struggle for independence, were no army men:¹²

8 | Scheider, 1989, 259.

9 | Arabic: 'Alī ʻAlīmād Nāṣir 'Antar; Also see: Encyclopedia of Yemen (Arabic), Vol.3, 2003, 2119.

10 | In the following no transliteration given: Muhammad Ali Haytham, Minister of Interior, Saif al-Dhalal, Minister of Foreign Affairs, Faysal al-Sha'bi, Minister for Economy, Trade and Planning, Ali Salim al-Beidh, Minister of Defense, Mahmud Abdullah Ushaysh, Minister of Finance, Abd al-Fattah Ismail, Minister for Culture, National Guidance and Yemeni Unity. Only the latter three could be considered members of the "left" of the NF.

11 | Burrowes, 2010, 36f.

12 | President-to-be Ali Nasir, for example, had been an elementary teacher previous to his career as a revolutionary leader. Informationsmappe für den Besuch des Generalsekretärs des Zentralkomitees der Jemenitisch Sozialistischen Partei [...] Ali Nasser Mohammed, November 1984, in: BSTU MFS HA II Nr. 28712, 179.

“Ruling parties in the radical Arab states were generally dominated either by the military in uniform or, more often, by former senior military officers now appearing as civilians, the situation in the PDRY was an exception. From the beginning, civilians had full control over the military.”¹³

Even though Yodfat’s final remark in this quote has to be differentiated, as “full control over the military” was never guaranteed, this is one of the decisive differences between South Yemen and other young independent states in the Arab world - a major factor which eased the way for socialist state- and nation-building along the lines of the East German model.

1.3 Planned Social Transformation: Marxism-Leninism as a New “Religion”?

During the years of fighting, it had been the explicit goal of the NLF’s left to “transform [...] existing social relations”¹⁴ by abolishing all pre-existing social structures, namely regional ties and tribal affiliations, and replace them with the vague idea of a new, classless society imbued with socialism. And they were serious.

“[T]he northern sayyids studied the Book of God, while the books of Marx and Lenin became the major reference for the Socialist Politbüro. Chief Politbüro exegete was Abdulfattah Isma’l [sic!], an expert on Socialist doctrine who was known, wryly, as al-Faqih (literally, the scholar of holy writ).”¹⁵

Marxism-Leninism and its transcendent aspiration advanced as a religious substitute for many followers of the NLF. Less than a fortnight after independence on 17 December 1967, all sultans were declared to lose land and title. The first laws on agrarian reform followed soon thereafter.¹⁶ Furthermore, the PRSY regime abolished the traditional names of the provinces – Aden, Lahej, Abyan, Shabwa, Hadhramawt and Mahra. Just as it had happened with the GDR’s “Länder,” the South Yemeni provinces were now labelled with numbers – the First to Sixth Governorates.¹⁷ Tribal names and even the traditional Yemeni dagger, the “jambiyya,” were banned. In January 1968, the NF declared tribal conflict

13 | Yodfat, 1983, 7.

14 | NLF statement in Mukallā, in: Dresch, 2002, 120.

15 | Mackintosh-Smith, 1997, 165.

16 | Informationsmappe für den Besuch des Generalsekretärs des Zentralkomitees der JSP [...] Ali Nasser Mohammed, November 1984, in: BStU MfS HA II Nr. 28712, 139.

17 | Burrowes, 2010, 141; Sharabi, Al-Thaura journalist, PDRY, in: PA AA, MfAA, C 122571, 110-123; Informationsmappe für den Besuch des Generalsekretärs des ZK der JSP [...] Ali Nasser Mohammed, November 1984, in: BStU MfS HA II Nr. 28712, 135.

regulation and ruling invalid. On top of that, they decided on the suspension of tribal disputes, and tried to enforce this decision.¹⁸

However, the NF's policies cannot be taken as unanimously supported as they appeared. Many of the measures taken were promoted by the "left" and connived by the "right" under Qahtan, who would regularly opt for a more practical path. During the fourth NF Congress, held just east of Aden in March 1968,¹⁹ the inner cracks of NF leadership started to show. The "left" presented a kind of charter, the "National Democratic Liberation," that was strongly influenced by the extremist Nayif Hawatma.²⁰ After intense debates, the adapted and officially adopted document was a compromise between the "left" and "right," including the core leftist demands, while leaving unanswered "how the principles would be implemented."²¹ The most important point both wings agreed on was the transformation of the NF to a vanguard party, based on the principles of scientific socialism. This decision implicated most of the other fundamental provisions to change the state's internal and external modes of action: First, the NF was supposed to merge with other revolutionary parties in the country, mainly al-Tali'a, the South Yemeni branch of the Ba'ath Party, and Badheeb's PDU, to establish a one-party system based on "democratic centralism." This move clearly opted against Qahtan's moderate but single-handed leadership, as he had officially prohibited any political activity outside the NLF.²² Second, the economic system was to be transformed into a socialist economy based on production and public planning. These two goals flanked the "integration," or in socialist terms "homogenization," of society. Third, and with regard to external implications, the NF was to pursue a foreign policy oriented towards the Eastern Bloc and its allies to "draw[...] on their experiences."²³ This commitment to international socialism also included the support of the "revolutionary" forces in the north of Yemen as well as the liberation movements in the region.

Compromise aside, the charter nonetheless remained a document proclaiming radical social transformation. Thus, the disputes revolving around the political

18 | Dresch, 2000, 121.

19 | Ibid., 121.

20 | Arabic: *Nāif Huātma*; Movement of Arab Nationalists activist who worked with George Habbash, leader of the PFLP. Also see: Nayif Hawatma, in: Mattar, 2004; Even though the document was not fully approved of at the time, Hawatma nonetheless played a significant role in radicalizing and thus unifying the left between 1967 and 1969. He remained a close ally of the YSP even after his secession from the PFLP with the more radical wing, the future "Democratic Front for the Liberation of Palestine." Brehony, 2013, 37f; Palestine and the Palestine Question, in: Burrowes, 2010, 276.

21 | Brehony, 2013, 38.

22 | Scheider, 1989, 260.

23 | Information über die Lage in der Volksrepublik Südjemen, 1969. in: BStU HV A Nr.151, 170.

orientation appear to have been over minor political differences only. But by this time, an undeniable rift emerged, originating in personal backgrounds and their attitude toward ideology. Qahtan always had aimed for a more pragmatic approach. For example, he promoted the expansion of the British system of administration over the whole territory, “taking over the ministries, armed forces, and police [...] and using them,”²⁴ instead of establishing a new, more centralized system. Not able to enforce his more moderate course, he felt rather cornered by the provisions of the charter. To prevent a looming military coup, Qahtan removed the two most radical of his ministers, Ismail and Minister of Defense al-Beidh, as the latter had intended to transform the army into a branch of the party.²⁵ But it was too late to secure Qahtan’s political survival. While he had fostered a more and more autocratic style of politics and relied on his “elder” status²⁶ among the young revolutionaries, the “left,” led by Salmin as chairman of a five-member presidential council, finally replaced him as president after the “June 22 Corrective Move”²⁷ in 1969. Four days later Ismail was back – as the secretary-general of the National Front. This also once and for all settled another topic at the center of discussions between Qahtan’s right and the new left: South Yemen’s positioning between the fronts of the Cold War in general and towards the new East German ally in particular. A publication on South Yemen by the GDR’s state publishing house emphasizes: “The decision of the PDRY’s government to establish diplomatic relations with the GDR on June 30th 1969 had been one of the first foreign policy decisions of the new regime.”²⁸ South Yemen’s political bed for the next two decades was made.

2. SOVIET ENGAGEMENT IN SOUTH YEMEN: WHEN ADEN SHED ITS GEOSTRATEGIC INVISIBILITY CLOAK

Not much can be said with regard to Moscow’s early contact with the NLF: “It is not clear how far direct links between [USSR and China] and the Front existed before independence.”²⁹ But without doubt, divided Yemen did not come into focus as a major country of interest among the Arab states for Moscow before the mid-1960s. Even after the declaration of independence, Moscow did not get engaged right away: the USSR waited two full days before it recognized the new regime in Aden on December 2 1967. Nonetheless, it set up its embassy in less than a month and diplomatic representation assured continuous exchange. At the time, the Kremlin was occupied with other actors, primarily Egypt, the emerging regional power,

24 | Brehony, 2013, 36.

25 | Ibid., 35.

26 | In the 1950s Qahtan used to be an agricultural officer of the British administration.

27 | For a brief summary of the “resurrection” of the Left see: Brehony, 2013, 42-46.

28 | Gambke et al., 1974, 131f.

29 | Halliday, 1990, 178.

in the region due to the war of June 1967. Soviet political restraint in this context mostly arose from the unpredictable appearance of the new revolutionary regime and its unpredictable behavior towards its neighbors. But due to Aden's longing for security from British imposition, the new regime was looking for a powerful guardian. Hence, al-Beidh's early visit in February 1968 to Moscow comes as no surprise – at least from the Yemeni point of view.

The strategic importance of the otherwise insignificant country obviously helped to diminish Soviet reservations. “[L]ocated at the junction of important military, strategic and commercial lines of communications, the military base in Aden had a special significance for British imperialism.”³⁰ As a consequence and in spite of a certain political distrust toward the young radical regime, Moscow started to engage in the fishing industry and simultaneously began to use the Port of Aden and the waters in its vicinity to station its ships as early as 1968.³¹ In August 1968, the first military agreement was signed, followed by several agreements on trade, economic and technical assistance, culture and science, and support for the PRSY's fishery in February 1969.³² Moscow's political and financial restraint toward the NF regime continuously decreased after the “Glorious Corrective Move” of 1969:³³ South Yemen finally opted for some kind of socialist development. In addition to that, relations between Aden and Bonn, as well as Washington, were terminated, opening up considerable room for the USSR and its allies. In 1970, a visit paid by PDSY President Salmin to the USSR resulted in Moscow's agreement to train South Yemeni personnel in Moscow and start a technical mission to further improve South Yemen's fishing industry. In April 1970, on occasion of Lenin's 100th birthday, Ismail visited Moscow and two months later he officially confirmed extensive future support in party cadre training by the USSR and the GDR.³⁴ Aden had shed its political invincibility cloak and became a potential political ally for Moscow in the region.

30 | Pozdnyakov, E., Narodnaya Respublika Yuzhnogo Iemena, 1968, in: Cigar, 1985, 776.

31 | Cigar, 1985, 776; Halliday, 1990, 203.

32 | Vermerk über ein Gespräch des Genossen Kiesewetter mit dem sowjetischen Gesandten, Genosse K.P. Kusnezow, February 1969, sine diem, in: PA AA, MfAA, C 1223/71, 30-34; Cigar, 1985, 776.

33 | Brehony, 2013, Chapter 3, 31-49 and 81.

34 | From 1972 political training was institutionalized at the College of Socialist Sciences in Aden, Halliday, 1990, 183.

3. THE PHASE OF SAMPLING: FROM FIRST CONTACT TO SOCIALIST NATION- AND STATE-BUILDING

Phase I of East German engagement in South Yemen is an example of the GDR's efforts to pursue a foreign policy in its own right. In late 1967, shortly before independence, external actors in East and West alike expected the revolutionary group FLOSY led by Abdallah al-Asnaj to become the future leading force in South Yemen, while its competitor, the more radical NLF, was almost ignored. Even Moscow was quite uncertain about which of the two to support.³⁵ The GDR, on the other hand, had entertained contacts with a wide range of different actors from South Yemen as early as 1961. East German functionaries had invited Yemeni media multiplicators to East Berlin³⁶ and even met with one of ATUC's leaders, Muhsin Ahmad Alaini,³⁷ in late 1961 to offer the opportunity for two delegates to study at East Germany's universities.³⁸

3.1 Kindred Spirits: East Berlin as Aden's Companion of the First Hour

“I consider the proclamation of the People's Republic of Southern Yemen to be yet another important step in the successful struggle of the peoples against imperialism, colonialism and neo-colonialism.”³⁹

(Letter Ulbricht to al-Shaabi, December 1 1967)

In July 1966, FLOSY leader al-Asnaj visited East Berlin.⁴⁰ However, later that year the SED took hints about FLOSY being “bourgeois-conservative” seriously and East Berlin opted for a double-track policy towards the two major emerging political

35 | Gespräch von Freimut Seidel am 15. November 1967 mit Rat in der Abteilung Naher Osten des MID (Außenministerium der Russischen Föderation), Serjogin Aufzeichnungen von Freimut Seidel, Konsul am Generalkonsulat der DDR in Kairo 1966/67, in: PA AA, MfAA, 1224/71, 16-19.

36 | Einladung des Herausgebers und Chefredakteurs der Tageszeitung Al-Tariq Mohammed Nasser 1963 und 1966 nach Berlin, in: C 1126/71, 113; Vorbereitung der Einladung Al-Asnags in die DDR im Juni 1965, in: PA AA, MfAA, 1226/71, 131f; Kontakte der DDR-Institutionen ab 1965, PA AA, MfAA, 1224/71, 138f; Besuch einer FLOSY Delegation in der DDR 1966, in: PA AA, MfAA, 1224/71, 137. In 1966 Al-Asnag was affirmed to receive military equipment for FLOSY in Hodeidah. See: Gespräch Eggebrecht mit Al-Asnag am 4. Juni 1966 in Kairo, in: PA AA, MfAA, 1224/71, 135f.

37 | Arabic: Muhsin Ahmad al-‘Ainī.

38 | Aktenvermerk über eine Gespräch mit Herrn Alaini, Vertreter der Aden-TUC im Allarabischen Gewerkschaftsbund (ICATU) am 4. Dezember 1961 in den Räumen des Büros des Bevollmächtigten der DDR in der VAR, in: PA AA, MfAA, C 1224/71, 145-147.

39 | Ulbricht, Walter, in: PA AA, MfAA C 744/73, 51.

40 | Kostiner, 1984, 136.

groups in Aden. Accordingly, GDR representatives held exploratory meetings with both groups in October 1967, FLOSY and NLF.⁴¹ When it was the NLF that prevailed after the British pullout, this was quite a surprise for external observers. However, the GDR's diversified strategy gave them the advantage of personal contacts with the radical NLF. Despite its early and positive contacts with FLOSY, East Berlin was able to build on these contacts, especially with Ismail. Now, after several years during which East Berlin had followed its recognition policy in both Yemens, there was a new window of opportunity, as well as fresh perspectives on matters in South Yemen.⁴² Profiling itself as the advocate of the postcolonial world – as opposed to the “imperialist FRG”⁴³ – East Berlin pursued its strategy of the honest broker towards the new regime in Aden. In November the same year, SED dispatched Klaus Gloede with the authority to “recognize South Arabia and to establish diplomatic relations with [the young South Yemen] state.”⁴⁴ This move was supported by East Germany's hope for a swift recognition of the GDR in return.

In the end, East Berlin had to wait for another two years for this hope to be fulfilled. Until then, the GDR focused on its low-profile strategy as part of the GDR's policy of recognition. For this major component of East Germany's Middle East policy, relations between Berlin's and Aden's trade unions are an impressive example. In February 1965, a delegation of the Aden Trade Union Congress had its first meeting with the executive committee of the FDGB, the East German mass organization of trade unions.⁴⁵ When in 1969 official relations between the newly founded Yemeni federation of trade unions and the FDGB were established,⁴⁶ this clearly was due to the SED regime's early contacts with the leaders of the trade unions in Aden. The early engagement of the GDR in the country had built up trust and personal relationships and is one of the major explanations for the swift succession of political steps that followed the establishment of diplomatic relations between the two countries in 1969.

41 | Unterredung in der Residenz der DDR mit Funktionären der NLF am 21. Oktober 1967, in: PA AA, MfAA, 1224/71, 88-94.

42 | On the GDR's focus in South Yemen at the time see: Bericht Wildaus über ein Gespräch des Ministers für Auswärtige Angelegenheiten der DDR Genosse Otto Winzer mit der ersten Delegation der VRSJ in der DDR in: PA AA, MfAA, C 1223/71, 23ff.

43 | Public declaration by MfAA official on April 8 1967, DOKzur AP der DDR XV/2, 1970, 1026f.

44 | Direktive für die Dienstreise des Genossen Gloede vom 21. November 1967, PA AA, MfAA, C 1226/71, 96-98.

45 | Aktennotiz über den Besuch der Delegation des Aden Trades Union Congress beim Bundesvorstand des FDGB, vom 24. Februar bis 1. März 1965, in: PA AA, MfAA C 1226/71, 125-129.

46 | Gambke et al., 1974, 111.

3.2 The GDR's Policy of Recognition in South Yemen: The "Strategy of Focus and Low Profile"

Despite East Berlin's early contact with North Yemen, the GDR in the early 1960s rather had concentrated its efforts on the two major actors in the region, Egypt and Syria. After Ulbricht's invitation on Nasser's behalf in 1965, the GDR had to cope with the disappointed hope of recognition by its main and powerful partner in Cairo. It was East Berlin's early and positive relations with the radical regime in Aden below the governmental level which pushed the GDR's policy of recognition in the Arab world in a new direction. From 1963, personal and institutional contacts had been developed consistently and successfully and provided the perfect environment for East Berlin's "low-profile strategy."

Driven by the hope of swift diplomatic recognition, the GDR tried to accommodate Aden's wishes as far as possible. Just one day after the declaration of South Yemeni independence in late 1967, East Berlin agreed to offer training for South Yemeni political cadres in the GDR.⁴⁷ Half a year later, a South Yemeni delegation stayed for an extended visit in Berlin to intensify cooperation. The GDR's state and party officials discussed the economic possibilities of developmental support for "structurally and politically interesting objects" and delegate Clausnitzer suggested to subsidize communications and electricity.⁴⁸ On this occasion Otto Winzer, minister of foreign affairs, reacted to the PRSY's demand for "advisors on state and administrative affairs" and promised to send an advisory group as soon as possible.⁴⁹ Two months later, the Ministerrat was assigned to review the conditions for a loan comparable to those that had been given to Tanzania, Zanzibar, and the YAR.⁵⁰ The amount of US\$3 million granted by the GDR in 1968 appears rather modest.⁵¹ But added to the costs and the effect of advisory support, East Berlin clearly intended to go the extra mile in supporting the new regime in South Yemen.

In February 1968, Qahtan and his regime still appeased Soviet inquiries about a possible recognition of the GDR by delaying it until an agreement of "all progressive and Arab countries"⁵² was reached. In the end, the NF regime offered

47 | Kiesewetter an Gießmann, in: PA AA C 1226/71, 89f; Zusage Gießmanns am 1. Dezember 1967, PA AA C 1226/71, 88.

48 | MAW Brief von Clausnitzer, Ministerium für Außenwirtschaft, Direktionsbereich Übersee, in: PA AA, MfAA, C 121971, 61.

49 | Brief Winzer an Minister für Landwirtschaft und Bodenreform Ahmed Saleh al-Shair, June 1968, in: PA AA, MfAA, C 1226/71, 37.

50 | Brief Zscherpe an Winzer, August 21 1968, in: PA AA, MfAA, C 1219/71, sine pagina.

51 | Beschlußvorlage [sic!] zur Konzeption Entwicklung der politischen, ökonomischen und kulturellen Beziehungen zur VDRJ 1968, in: PA AA, MfAA, C 1219/71, 42.

52 | Vermerk über ein Gespräch des Genossen Kiesewetter mit dem sowjetischen Gesandten, Genosse K.P. Kusnezow, February 1969, sine diem, in: PA AA, MfAA, C 1223/71, 33.

a consular agreement between Aden and East Berlin.⁵³ Consul Wildau, as well as SED functionaries who met with actors from South Yemen, considered West Germany's presence and policies one of the major reasons for Aden's caution: "[T]he West German Embassy does everything to keep up sole representation [in Aden] and to limit [our] room for maneuver."⁵⁴ They were not too far off from reality.

The GDR's position in South Yemen by no means was secured. In October 1968, consul Wildau reported back from Aden:

"The GDR is well-known and liked by the masses due to its consequential support of the Arab peoples, especially in Aden with its strong working class. [...] Simple people asked when the GDR would open a diplomatic representation and expressed that the West German Consulate, which already had existed under British occupation, had to be closed. Officially though there have been no statements made with regard to the 'German Question' [...]. In the same month, A.F. Ismail acknowledged the GDR's attitude towards South Yemen in a personal meeting with correspondents of Radio DDR and the ADN."⁵⁵

During a delegation visit in June earlier that year, however, South Yemen's minister of agriculture had summarized the PRSY's position:

"Concerning the credit, we are aware that the GDR cannot offer money, but might help with consumer goods. [...] We highly appreciate the GDR's position towards the Arab countries. And we took this into consideration, by visiting the GDR and not West Germany. We hope that [...] these steps take will be appreciated [by the GDR]."⁵⁶

Aden clearly was gambling on profiting from the inner-German dispute. In December 1968, the GDR's Karl Wildau and Wolfgang Hunger joined an official trip for the political missions in Aden - along with the Soviet ambassador, the charge d'affairs of the United States, and British, French and Indian representatives.⁵⁷ East German diplomatic equality with the other states of the

53 | VDRJ, zur Entwicklung des Landes, 1973, in: BStU MfS Allg. S. Nr.332/73, 9.

54 | Brief Wildau an Kämpf January 23 1969, in: PA AA C 1125/71, 63-65.

55 | Informationstelegramm Wildau to the MfAA October 30 1968, in: PA AA, MfAA, C 1125/71, 118-120.

56 | Vermerk über ein Gespräch des Ministers für Auswärtige Angelegenheiten, genossen Otto Winzer mit dem Minister für Landwirtschaft und Bodenreform der VRSJ, Ahmed Saleh As-Shair [sic!], June 25 1968, in: PA AA, MfAA, C 1223/71, 27.

57 | Bericht ueber eine Reise der Genossen Karl Wildau und Wolfgang Unger auf Einladung des MfAA in die 5.Provinz der VSRY, Aden, December 4 1968, in: PA AA, MfAA, C 122571, 69.

international community seemed to be within reach – at least in South Yemen. In March 1969, an agreement over a long-term credit was finally signed and East Berlin added a donation of medical supplies and equipment to express its goodwill.⁵⁸ After the diplomatic recognition by Cambodia, Iraq, Sudan, and Syria, all occurring between April 30th and June 6th,⁵⁹ Aden was meant to follow suit. In early June 1969, Soviet representative Kusnetzov⁶⁰ informed Kiesewetter about a discussion with PRSY President Qahtan, who openly told Kusnetzov about the support offered by West Germany “exceeding everything South Yemen had been offered so far.” According to Kusnetzov:

“West Germany is putting pressure on the Afro-Asian states to prevent a chain reaction of normalization of relations with the GDR. Bonn especially is using economic measures, promises high credits, increases technical assistance, etc. and special emissaries are foremost sent to those countries considered ‘weak links in the chain.’ [But] if extensive help were suggested [by Moscow and East Berlin] the question of recognition [of the GDR] was decided.”⁶¹

Kusnetzov recommended an immediate visit by a GDR delegation to Aden to hamper talks between Bonn and South Yemen. Only days later, the first official high-ranking political delegation from East Berlin arrived at the Red Sea.

After the “Corrective Move” of 1969, one of the first official actions taken by the new regime was the recognition of the GDR, an explicit expression of the political attitude of the new leadership. On July 22, the first East German ambassador was accredited in Aden, the first South Yemeni ambassador to the GDR arrived in East Berlin in August 1970.⁶² Bonn reacted swiftly and froze its relations and its financial aid accordingly.⁶³ East Germany aimed to substitute these losses for Aden at once. Only a few days after the recognition, a governmental delegation from East Berlin travelled to Aden to sign a first mutual communiqué, the agreement on the establishment of relations as well as a protocol on future economic and cultural cooperation.⁶⁴ In September 1969, more solidarity donations, medical devices, medication and other material support arrived.⁶⁵ Other agreements followed,

58 | Quartalsbericht I/69 der Vertretung Aden, in: PA AA, MfAA, C 744/73, 24.

59 | Aufzeichnung des Ministerialdirektors Bahr, July 1 1969, in: AzAP-BRD 1969 Vol.1, 751f.

60 | The Source does not specify whether this was Vice-Minister of Foreign Affairs Wasilij Wasiljewitch Kusnezow or not.

61 | Vermerk über ein Gespräch des Genossen Kiesewetter mit dem sowjetischen Gesandten, Genosse K.P. Kusnezow, June 11 1969, in: PA AA, MfAA, C 1223/71, 64-71.

62 | Gambke et al., 1974, 132.

63 | Wippel, 1996, 22; Halliday, 1990, 76.

64 | Quartalsbericht III/69, Volksrepublik Südjemen, Abt. Arabische Staaten, sine anno, in: PA AA, MfAA, C 744/73, 23.

65 | Ibid., 22.

such as the agreements on air and maritime traffic, which were somewhat more beneficial for the GDR.⁶⁶

Right after Aden recognized the GDR and Sana'a had reestablished its relations with Bonn, the role of North Yemen in East German foreign policy significantly declined, while the PDRY's star was on the rise. As a consequence, the Aden embassy became the major East German representation in the region. The GDR's personnel in the YAR travelled frequently between the two Yemeni capitals, as the embassy in the YAR fully depended on Aden's communication network and for consumer goods and supplies for the GDR's citizens.⁶⁷

3.3 Writing a Marxist State in Southern Arabia: East-German Experts and the First Constitution of Independent Aden

“Based on Scientific Socialism, [the National Front] leads the political activities of the masses and the mass organizations, to further the society's non-capitalist path.”⁶⁸

(Constitution of the PDRY, November 30 1970)

“The German Democratic Republic is a Socialist state based on the German nation. [The GDR] is the political organization of urban and rural workers who jointly realize Socialism led by the working class and its Marxist-Leninist Party.”⁶⁹

(Article 1, Constitution of the GDR, April 6 1968)

In 1971 even West German academic discourse recognized the close kinship between the PDRY's new constitution of 1970 and the GDR's major political document in its 1968 version. And indeed the 1968 Constitution of East Germany may be considered the long-term model for South Yemen's constitutional genesis. From April to June 1970, the GDR initiated what was to become its major tool of foreign policy in South Yemen: To support the NF with the “drafting of a

66 | Quartalsbericht IV/69, Volksrepublik Südjemen, Abt. Arabische Staaten, January 20 1970, in: PA AA, MfAA, C 744/73.

67 | Interview with Fritz Balke on May 23 2011.

68 | German original: [A]uf der Basis des wissenschaftlichen Sozialismus [führt die Nationale Front] die politischen Aktivitäten unter den Massen und innerhalb der Massenorganisationen [...], um die Gesellschaft auf dem nichtkapitalistische Weg [...] voranzubringen, in: Gambke/Jacob/Mätzig, 1974, 98.

69 | German original: “Die Deutsche Demokratische Republik ist ein sozialistischer Staat deutscher Nation. Sie ist die politische Organisation der Werktätigen in Stadt und Land, die gemeinsam unter Führung der Arbeiterklasse und ihrer marxistisch-leninistischen Partei den Sozialismus verwirklichen.” Art. 1, Verfassung der DDR vom 6. April 1968.

new Constitution of the PRSY and the organization of the state and juridical apparatus,”⁷⁰ the SED delegated their first advisory group to South Yemen.⁷¹

The East German constitution undeniably had been South Yemen’s blueprint in many different ways.⁷² While the constitutions resemble each other in structure, content and language, the inclusion of the Leninist principle of the “democratic centralism”⁷³ has to be considered the most relevant similarity – both politically and ideologically. The new constitution of 1970 was intended to promote “the transition from a capitalist and pre-capitalist structure to a Socialist structure of society.”⁷⁴ This indicated that the GDR’s advisors didn’t consider it possible to simply adopt the GDR’s political system wholesale at the time. Rather, South Yemen had to create certain prerequisites to further the state’s development toward becoming a socialist state. From the advisor’s ideological point of view, socialist state-building indicated the first steps to “restructure” society and, most importantly, it required the formation of a vanguard party to foster these social changes.

Much like its East German equivalent, the PDRY’s constitution on first glance heralded democratic values and institutions. The document included an extensive catalogue of political and social rights and entitlements. A number of today’s researchers and political advocates of the former South Yemeni state regularly quote significant improvements in this respect,⁷⁵ especially in comparison to the initial years of “travail” after the declaration of independence. At that time dissidents were imprisoned, executed, or simply disappeared without due process.⁷⁶ Even Brehony, the British author, politician, and certainly not a Marxist, stresses the regime’s positive intentions and achievements with regard to people’s rights.

70 | Quartalsbericht II/70, Abteilung Arabische Staaten (Quarterly Report II/70, Section Arab States), in: PA AA, MfAA, C 744/73, Jahres- und Quartalsberichte der AV in Südjemen 1966-1970, 16f.

71 | Oswald Unger was part of the delegation. In 1971 he summarized the East German contribution to the new Constitution of South Yemen: Unger, Oswald, Die Verfassung für die national-demokratische Entwicklungsetappe der VDRJ, in: Staat und Recht, Nr.20, 2/1971, 1162.

72 | Even single provisions like the “obligation to work,” Art.35 of the Constitution of the PDYR of 30 November 1967, in: Hachicho, 1976, 97.

73 | Comp. Art.47, Constitution of the GDR, April 6 1968; Art.11 Constitution of the GDR, November 30 1967, in: Hachicho, 1976, 99.

74 | Hachicho, 1976, 94.

75 | Brehony, 2013, 55 and 63; Interview with Hans Bauer June 20 2011.

76 | Security Services, in: Burrowes, 2010, 346.

"The constitution was a comprehensive document guaranteeing citizens a wide range of rights and entitlements, though it took some years before the regime was in a position to implement many of them."⁷⁷

However, Brehony and others often neglect the regime's political intentions, the wider political framework, and constitutional reality. In any case these optimistic praises of the achievement of socialism in South Yemen not only have to be modified, but questioned, as they simply do not reflect social reality. To acquire a more complete perspective, several aspects have to be taken into consideration: First, almost any form of self-governance would have provided a certain improvement of political rights in comparison to the conditions during colonial occupation in Aden. Second, South Yemen never approached the living and education standards of its industrialized model states in the Eastern Bloc, especially those of the GDR. Improvements of living conditions were achieved, but these were modest and limited to the urban areas. Lastly, one has to reconsider the standard of comparison: Political freedoms in the Eastern Bloc.

The states under Soviet influence fall far short of the Western approaches to political liberty or juridical security. While social rights with an economic dimension on the one hand mostly could not be achieved due to economic inability in Yemen, the guarantee of political rights on the other hand was always subordinate to possible "progress" toward communism under Marxist-Leninist ideology. Citizens' rights could be overruled by the decisions of the vanguard party at any time. From the outset, the political system introduced by the constitution, including the provided civil rights, were designed to accommodate the establishment and advancement of this party. Based on the principle of "democratic centralism,"⁷⁸ the party was supposed to lead the masses toward a "non-capitalist state" and later on to socialism based on party structures not just paralleling but also overruling state structures. Thus, today's praises of "democratization" in former South Yemen made by former YSP and SED functionaries, as well as by the current secessionist movement, rather glorify a political past as it never existed. These statements simply have to be handled with caution, as more often than not they remain within the logic of socialist state- and nation-building ideology.

Unger, the leader of the GDR's advisory delegation, described the political system of South Yemen as "democratic": "The political fundamental of power exertion by the working people are the Peoples' Councils which are formed through free, general, equal and immediate elections."⁷⁹ Even though Yemenis in 1970 gave the preference to the term "democratic" over "socialist," in constitutional

77 | Brehony, 2013, 55.

78 | The first Party Congress of the SED in January 1949, Avantgardeanspruch und innerparteiliche Diktatur Januar 1949, in: Judt, 1998, 46f.

79 | Unger, 1971, 1170.

reality the meaning of the two terms did not differ. According to Unger, the leader of the GDR delegation, elections for this Supreme People's Council (SPC) were scheduled for October 31 1971.⁸⁰ However, the first SPC simply was appointed. “[T]he first elections for the 111-member [SPC] were not held until 1978.”⁸¹

On paper, the SPC was the PDRY's legislative body, and it also elected members of the Presidential Council and the Council of Ministers.⁸² In reality though, the SPC was constructed as a mere acclamation organ right from the start, wielding no political power, just like the East German Volkskammer. While the Council of Ministers as the executive and administrative organ also pretty much mirrored the role of its East German equivalent, in Aden it was the Presidential Council that decided on all central questions and policies. These were then confirmed by the SPC and implemented by the Council of Ministers. To improve the inclusion of the country's periphery in the system, the SPC was complemented by Local People's Councils. These LPCs

“were to be elected for two-and-a-half year terms to manage [...] affairs on the local level under the supervision of the central government and in cooperation with the mass organizations and the state farms.”⁸³

Clearly, the LPCs did less to empower the periphery and more to control it and achieve centralization. This political structure was designed to transform into a political system led by a socialist vanguard party, just as it had taken place in the GDR. Party structures of the NF at the time already offered a connection between party and state that was gradually expanded in practice until the 1978 constitution came into effect. The new version repeated: “The organization of the state power and its administration are subject to the principle of democratic centralization”⁸⁴ and from 1978 the YSP officially was at the center of all political decision-making:

“The Yemeni Socialist Party, armed with the Scientific Socialism theory, is the leader and guide of the society and the state. It shall define the general horizon for the development of the society and the line of the state's internal and external policy.”⁸⁵

80 | Unger, 1971, 1173.

81 | Elections, PDRY, in: Burrowes, 2010, 110.

82 | Der Staatsaufbau der VDRJ entsprechend der Verfassung vom 30. November 1970, in: Gambke et al, 1974, 102.

83 | Burrowes, 2010, 226.

84 | Constitution of the PDRY of October 31st 1978, published by the Foreign Ministry of the PDRY, 14 October Corporation Aden, 1981.

85 | German Translation: “Bewaffnet mit der Theorie des Wissenschaftlichen Sozialismus ist die Jemenitische Sozialistische Partei Führer der Gesellschaft und des Staates. [...] Sie führt den Kampf des Volkes und seiner Massenorganisationen an, [...] um schließlich den

The GDR's advisors intended to take into consideration the cultural and social characteristics of South Yemen.⁸⁶ But the resulting constitution indeed rather mirrored the ideological ideal, not the possible need of South Yemen for a political system including the existing social structures. South Yemen's constitution was nothing less than a copy of the East German constitution of 1968:⁸⁷ the basic principles of political organization and of Marxist-Leninist ideology were merely complemented by few specific cultural characteristics of South Yemen. Even the attempts to justify radical political measures by referring to religious sources of legitimacy and the inclusion of Islam as the official religion in Art. 46⁸⁸ by the NF was less attributable to the leader's preference for cultural specifics, and more to East German advice: "East German [...] leaders had advised the NF to harness Islam for its cause. [...] Islam could be adapted to the regime's ideology in what was called 'liberation theology'."⁸⁹

4. CONCLUSION: EAST BERLIN'S NEW ALLY BY THE RED SEA

Even though the regime in Aden and its insignificant state appear rather powerless with regard to the acceleration of the GDR's international diplomatic recognition, East Berlin considered it another small, but no less important step in their "Low-Profile Policy" towards recognition. Aden emerged as the most fervent advocate for the acceptance of the GDR as a full-fledged member of the United Nations General Assembly.⁹⁰ After the initial years of insecurity, East Germany had secured the loyalty of an ally not shy of forceful words and saber-rattling on the Red Sea.

Moscow's policy during the first three years of South Yemen's existence is characterized by oscillation between restraint and open support. Similar to other external powers like the British,⁹¹ the Kremlin was not sure whether the regime would be able to stay in power. This first phase of Soviet engagement was characterized by a low level of intensity and solely focused on fields of engagement

Aufbau des Sozialismus zu erreichen." Art.2, Constitution of the PDRY of October 31st 1978, published by the Foreign Ministry of the PDRY, 14 October Corporation Aden, 1981.

86 | The GDR advisors initiated interviews and discussions with Yemenis to become acquainted with Yemeni society, in: Hachicho, 1976, 98.

87 | Schwarzenbach, 1971, 1157.

88 | For example the drafting of a new Family Law in 1976 was justified by "research [...] in the old books of hadith," in: Dahlgren, 2000, 7; Constitution of the PDRY of 31 October 1978, published by the Foreign Ministry of the PDRY, 14 October Corporation Aden, 1981.

89 | Abd al-Fattah Ismail at the 1972 Party Congress, in: Brehony, 2013, 70f.

90 | Quartalsbericht IV/69, Volksrepublik Südjemen, Abt. Arabische Staaten, January 20 1970, in: PA AA, MfAA, C 744/73, 20; Südjemen fordert UN-Mitgliedschaft der DDR, Neues Deutschland, October 1969, 7.

91 | The British ambassador to the PDRY in January 1970, quoted in: Brehony, 2013, 48.

that were first and foremost beneficial for the Kremlin and its immediate interests: Securing another safe haven to station its naval forces in the region. Engagement was exclusively related to military and ideological matters, while involvement in civil matters of state was almost non-existent. Nonetheless, 1969 must be considered the turning point for Soviet-South Yemeni relations. Aden openly committed itself to a socialist path of development and Moscow opted for an active course of support, as will be shown in Phase II.

While Moscow's engagement during the first years of South Yemeni existence as a state can be considered minimal, the GDR had engaged more actively right from the beginning. This is an impressive example of East Berlin's attempts to implement a foreign policy of its own within the narrow scope of action between Soviet and West German interests. First of all, this first phase of East German involvement is characterized by a high number of unknown factors for the SED regime and thus resulted in a hesitant stance towards the new and radical regime in South Yemen. One of these unknowns was Aden's attitude toward the West in general, and the German question in particular. At this time it was not clear where Aden would position itself and whether it would be possible for East Berlin to become active in South Yemen at all. But even though Phase I of East German engagement provided a political environment of high insecurity, South Yemen is an excellent case example for the GDR's policy of recognition and the major strategies of the GDR's policy in the Middle East at the time, "low-profile" and the "honest broker" strategies. Furthermore, a major East German foreign policy tool used widely in the Global South was established during this phase, which also became crucial for GDR-PDRY relations during the 1970s and early 1980s: Political engagement through "advisory groups."

This tool played a big part in easing the way from first contact to socialist nation- and state-building during the Phase of Sampling. Involvement was expanded steadily. But regardless of this new cooperation on the state level, the third sphere of GDR's foreign policy making also continued to play its part in further intensifying East Berlin's presence in Aden, closely supervised by the SED. Right after the recognition by the PDRY, the GDR's foreign media service, the ADN, argued for a swift establishment of a media center for the region, as the recognition by North Yemen

"was only a matter of time and thus international coverage had to be concentrated in one hand. According to the MfAA the establishment of ADN offices in Aden and Khartoum were imperative to be prepared for the expected recognition of the GDR [in the region]."⁹²

92 | Mittwoch, Korrespondentenbüro/Ausland an Direktion Genosse Wieland, Berlin, July 9 1969, in: BArch 900/537, sine pagina.

Even though this appeal by the ADN was not granted right away, it paved the way for the first GDR media presence in Aden: a local journalist supported by an East German official.⁹³

This is a clear indicator of East Germany's intent to stay and get involved in the day-to-day politics of this young state by the Red Sea. East Germany's early engagement in Aden initially had been motivated by the possibility of a swift establishment of diplomatic relations, and thus lacked a comprehensive foreign policy approach. But the political measures taken by East Berlin to further the goal of recognition soon developed a dynamic of its own. During this period, East Berlin acquired the first samples for a possible future cooperation. East German willingness to offer support coincided with the new Yemeni regime's commitment to a radical transformation of Yemeni society: The traditional administrative structures were dissolved, the sultans expropriated and land newly distributed. In addition to that, the NF prevented the formation of new political organizations. The Charter of 1968 assured East Berlin that Aden was leaning towards a socialist path, including the introduction of a socialist economy and a political system based on the principle of "democratic centralism." When East Germany assisted the drafting of a new South Yemeni constitution, it became involved with the whole process of state- and nation-building that was to follow. Based on the principle of "democratic centralism," the constitution laid the foundations for the parallel structures of party and state that were common among states patterned on the Soviet system.

East German fields of engagement, even in this first phase of foreign policy activity, were considerably diverse. East Berlin's intensity of engagement clearly suggests that the GDR wanted more than a mere "diplomatic exchange," as the SED regime did everything to prepare a "close working relationship" and to lift its presence in Aden from foreign policy "influence" to "involvement." First advances had been made in the fields of legal affairs and the cooperation of mass organizations. With its activities during the drafting of the constitution, East Germany already arrived at the brink of "intervention." While the recognition of South Yemen as a state in its own right by East Berlin marks the beginning of East Germany's first phase of engagement in Yemen, the publication of South Yemen's first constitution has to be considered both the culmination of relations between East Berlin and Aden until then and the decisive catalyst with regard to the GDR's future foreign policy approach: Its policy of socialist state- and nation-building.

93 | Redaktion für Auslandssendungen an Korr-Büro Ausland, HA Kader/Bildung, Betr. ADN-Mitarbeiterin in der Volksrepublik Südjemem, August 21 1970; Der außerordentliche und bevollmächtigte Botschafter der DDR in der Volksrepublik Südjemem Wildau an Generaldirektor des Allgemeinen Deutschen Nachrichtendienstes Genossin Deba Wieland, March 9 1970, in: BArch DC 900/410, sine pagina.

