

## **CHAPTER 14. Phase IV: The Phase of Neglect – The GDR in Yemen from 1986 to 1990:**

The “Ice Age” of Relations and the End of Socialist State-Building

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“For both the GDR’s policy and the PDRY, there seemed to exist only one direction – towards steady success.”<sup>1</sup>

GDR EMBASSY COUNSELOR IN ADEN IN 1988 COMMENTING IN 2012

The former Yemeni comrades in arms against British colonialism were at war with each other. The conflict left Ismail dead and Ali Nasir in exile. The events of the “January crisis” fundamentally disturbed East German trust in Aden, the YSP, and the unquestioned success of socialist state- and nation-building. Even though relations somewhat recovered over the years that followed, they never regenerated fully before the GDR joined the Federal Republic of Germany in the West: the coup of January 1986 not only has to be considered another turning point of South Yemeni-East German relations, but marks the beginning of the end of the first and only Marxist state in Arabia.

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**1** | Panecke, Volker, Vorwort, in: Scharfenberg, 2012, 6.

## 1. INTERNAL DEVELOPMENTS: THE LAST THROES OF A WOUNDED AND DYING STATE

### 1.1 The “January Crisis” of 1986: “When Do You People Stop Killing Each Other?”<sup>2</sup>

“Monday, January 13th 1986 – [...] I feel that hard times are lying ahead. In the late afternoon there are shootings [...] in all quarters of the city. [...] I live about two km from the airport. LMGs, tanks and A.A. guns are shelling the airport. Following my intuition, I’m leaping from one corner of the apartment to the other and believe it to be the safest. [...]”

Tuesday, January 14th 1986 – I believe that now you cannot speak of a putsch or a putsch attempt anymore. A cruel, hard, and bestial civil war has erupted. The airport is attacked with heavy guns. [...] There is a hell of a noise all around me. [...] Tanks are rolling through the streets. There is fighting the whole day. [...]

Wednesday January 15th 1986 – [...] Now all hell broke loose. The biggest ammunition storehouse of the PDRY exploded a mere two and a half kilometers away from my apartment. [...] The people in [the quarter] Khormaskar<sup>3</sup> panicked and fled in our direction, away from the blaze. Children, women, the old ones, and pregnant women were trampled down. [...]”<sup>4</sup>

(East German ideological advisor and IMK<sup>5</sup> Dufft on his experiences during the 1986 crisis in Aden)

On January 13 1986, Ali Nasir Mohammed launched a “preemptive strike” against internal rivals, as he himself would justify it later on. In the fighting that followed, an estimated 10,000 people died.<sup>6</sup> Apart from a few military advisors, the PDRY’s allies and other foreign countries present in Aden evacuated their citizens immediately. The Soviet Union, the United Nations and a remarkably active PLO worked out a short ceasefire and started evacuating children and women aboard

2 | Castro, Fidel, about the “1986 crisis” in Aden on occasion of the 27th Congress of the Soviet Communist Party, in: Halliday, 2002, 45.

3 | A suburb of the old city closest to the “Crater” near the intl. airport. Burrowes, 2010, 11.

4 | Informationsbericht über die Lage in der VDRJ, January 25 1986, in: BStU MfS ZAIG Nr.6725, 239f.

5 | IMK – Inoffizieller Mitarbeiter zur Sicherung der Konspiration und des Verbindungswesens. English: Unofficial employee to uphold conspirative communication and exchange, in: Engelmann et al., 2011, 162.

6 | The number was mostly cited by Western media at the time. Estimates today reach up to 25,000 victims, in: Kifner, 1986a and 1986b.

Soviet, French, and British ships on the January 17.<sup>7</sup> The majority of foreign citizens had to wait another four days until they could board the last evacuation ship, the East German *Müggelsee*.<sup>8</sup> Surprisingly, the “1986 crisis” had initiated close cooperation between ideological adversaries. The British ship *Britannia* evacuated East Germans, while the GDR’s *Müggelsee* saved three West Germans a few days later. Not even the state of emergency did much to change internal GDR policies. According to a report of events, the East German embassy even held on to their citizens’ passports in the middle of fighting on the January 21, and in the end, half of the East German builders and engineers were evacuated without their legal documents.<sup>9</sup>

In the first days after the coup, national and international media repeatedly contradicted themselves, as circumstances proved to be extremely confusing. A few months after the incident, Katz summarizes: “Reports claiming that the leaders of each side had been killed alternated in quick succession with reports stating the leaders of each to be alive and victorious.”<sup>10</sup> Ali Nasir had realized that he politically wouldn’t survive the dawning reelection on the three major posts he was holding at that time. He convinced others that a putsch against him was being prepared by his adversaries. Thus, he decided to prevent his downfall by setting up a trap on the occasion of a planned meeting,<sup>11</sup> which the majority of academics today interpret as a “preemptive strike” to prevent Ali Nasir’s looming dethronement.<sup>12</sup> In the course of events, four key members of the Politbüro were assassinated,<sup>13</sup> among them longtime Minister of Defense Ali Antar.<sup>14</sup> The only high-ranking member of the meeting who in the end was able to escape was al-Beidh, as Ismail was killed in the fighting and thus joined the victims of the “preemptive counter-coup” a few days later.

**7** | Telegramm Krause, Aden an König, Sieber, Bunkert, Winter, January 17 1986, in: in: BStU MfS ZAIG Nr.6725, 159; Informationsbericht über die Lage in der VDRJ, January 25 1986, in: BStU MfS ZAIG Nr.6725, 242.

**8** | The ship also picked up an East German construction team and several West German and Filipino citizens at Aden. On January 23, and thirty miles away from Aden, the last GDR citizens came aboard the *Müggelsee*: the FDJ Brigade. Bericht über die Ereignisse auf der Auslandsbaustelle “Bridges Reconstruction in Aden” im Januar 1986, January 29 1986, in: BStU MfS ZAIG Nr.6725, 247.

**9** | Bericht über die Ereignisse auf der Auslandsbaustelle “Bridges Reconstruction in Aden” im Januar 1986, January 29 1986, in: BStU MfS ZAIG Nr.6725, 245-250.

**10** | Katz, 1986, 7.

**11** | Yahia, Hassan Anis, in: Information über die Entwicklung in der VDRJ und internationale Reaktionen, Februar 1986, BStU MfS HV A Nr. 40, Part 1 of 2, 179.

**12** | Burrowes, Robert D., Ali Nasir Muhammad al-Hasani [1939-], in: Mattar (Ed.), 2004, 143.

**13** | Day, 2012, 73.

**14** | Freedman, Rabinovich/Shaked, 1988, 35.

And fighting there was. Over the course of one week, violent clashes erupted all over Aden and its vicinity, usually fought with heavy weapons: A.A. guns, tanks and RPGs. Armed forces were quickly rallied for a counter-attack against Ali Nasir Mohammed and his allies. These troops had been readied as early as late December and gradually moved closer to Aden.<sup>15</sup> Regardless of the official reasons for these military preparations, the maneuver came in quite handy for the “new left” that had been attacked by Ali Nasir in the Politbüro meeting. To Ali Nasir’s allies’ surprise, the army did not fully support him then, as the middle-ranking officers were still loyal to former the ministers of defense and state security, Ali Antar and Muhsin. Ali Nasir’s troops were scattered and had to withdraw to the north, while the naval forces fled to Ethiopia. At the time, Ali Nasir “had no options at his disposal to reclaim his leadership position without external support.”<sup>16</sup> The two former leaders of the PDRY, Ali Nasir and Ismail, had left the political stage of the PDRY for good.

A final conclusion on the actual circumstances and events of the “1986 crisis” still must leave important questions unanswered due to contradictory reports, murky alliances, and the complex network of personal loyalties in the circle of leadership at the time. Tensions had been building up ever since Ismail’s return from Moscow in May the year before. Supported by Ali Antar and Saleh Musleh Qasim,<sup>17</sup> the minister of defense at the time, this “new left” demanded that Ali Nasir share his power and even intensify cooperation with the Eastern Bloc. In early 1986, Ali Nasir’s power was disintegrating.<sup>18</sup> An MfS report on the events refers to a statement of Hassan al-Salami,<sup>19</sup> who claims that “he had been warned of an imminent putsch on January 13<sup>th</sup> 1986 against Ali Nasir Mohammed by a member of the Politbüro.”<sup>20</sup> Regardless of several reports like this, the MfS draws a profoundly different conclusion on the situation:

“The fact that the cadres of leadership killed on January 13<sup>th</sup> 1986 exclusively have to be considered opponents of Ali Nasser [sic!] Mohammed, suggests that Nasir’s opponents were unprepared for a move like this.”<sup>21</sup>

**15** | Brehony, 2013, 155; Halliday, 2002, 45.

**16** | Information über die Entwicklung in der VDRJ und internationale Reaktionen, Februar 1986, BStU MfS HV A Nr. 40, Part 1 of 2, 184.

**17** | Arabic: Saleḥ Musleh Qasim

**18** | Informationsbericht über die Lage in der VDRJ, January 25 1986, in: BStU MfS ZAIG Nr.6725, 238f.

**19** | This clearly marks him as a follower of Ali Nasir Mohammed. Arabic: Ḥassan Al-Salāmī.

**20** | Information über die Entwicklung in der VDRJ und internationale Reaktionen, Februar 1986, BStU MfS HV A Nr. 40, Part 1 of 2, 179.

**21** | Information über die Entwicklung in der VDRJ und internationale Reaktionen, Februar 1986, BStU MfS HV A Nr. 40, Part 1 of 2, 180.

While the “new left” around Ismail and Ali Antar obviously had expected Ali Nasir’s resistance against reelection, they clearly were not prepared for being slaughtered during this exact meeting. Corresponding with the overwhelming majority of personal accounts by South Yemenis and foreigners who had witnessed the events, the conclusion of the MfS report appears to be the most plausible.

## **1.2 Reconstruction and Deterioration: The New Leadership and the Final Years of the Only Marxist State in Arabia**

What followed the final battle of the “comrades in arms of the first hour” in January 1986 were the last throes of a wounded and dying state. On the January 24, the remaining members of the CC of the YSP gathered to decide on a new leadership.<sup>22</sup> A new government was formed, based on the new generation of leaders who had been educated abroad or within the PDRY’s post-dependence system of party education. There were not many possible choices. About “three quarters of the [CC] of the YSP were gone,”<sup>23</sup> either dead, in northern exile, or awaiting their trial in prison. The security forces were significantly decimated. For example, the whole leadership of the police in the Third and Fourth Governorate had fled to the YAR.<sup>24</sup> Over the following weeks, only few of the cadres of the YSP could reclaim pivotal posts in the state apparatus:<sup>25</sup> The technocrat and former minister of fisheries Yassin Said Nu’man<sup>26</sup> became the new prime minister. Said Saleh Salem,<sup>27</sup> who had been a minor actor among the revolutionaries and a generally politically modest man, became minister of state security,<sup>28</sup> and Abd Rabbuh Mansur Hadi (Hadi) was appointed new deputy chief of staff. Almost

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**22** | Zur Lage in der VDRJ – Stand vom 24.1.1986, January 25 1986, in: BStU MfS ZAIG Nr.6744, 45-50.

**23** | Brehony, 2013, 157.

**24** | Bericht Besuch des IM “Klaus Winter,” 1989, in: MfS HA VII 7054, 54-58. According to former OibE Rudolf Nitsche his code-name had been “Winter.” Taking into consideration Nitsche’s service in a GDR mission in an Arab country in 1966, it seems likely that the author of the information provided by IM “Klaus Winter” had been Rudolf Nitsche himself, in: Nitsche, 1994. On the role of the HV A also see Ch 7. The “Three Spheres of Foreign Policy Making”: Party, State, and Society, 3. Foreign Policy Actors, Competencies and the Decision-Making Process.

**25** | Al-Beidh, al-Attas, al-Dhali, Salem Saleh Mohammad and Saleh Munasir al-Siyeli, in: Information über die Entwicklung in der VDRJ und internationale Reaktionen, Februar 1986, BStU MfS HV A Nr. 40, Part 1 of 2, 181.

**26** | Burrowes, 2010, 264.

**27** | Arabic: Sa’id Saleh Sālem.

**28** | Mitglieder der Delegation, in: BStU MfS Abt.X Nr. 234 Teil 1 von 2, 85f.

thirty years later, Hadi was to step into the international spotlight as unified Yemen's new leader in 2012.<sup>29</sup>

In the two years after the coup, al-Beidh was able to somehow integrate the heterogeneous new leadership, but he was not able to emerge as the dominant leading figure. In summer 1987, he aimed at disposing of the majority of the new leading figures, some of whom he considered incapable, others he simply considered a danger to his leadership role in party and state.<sup>30</sup> In a meeting with the Soviet ambassador, al-Beidh suggested dismissing a majority of his ministers, among them al-Dhali. Several members of the PDRY's Politbüro were less than happy "with al-Beidh's [...] style of leadership."<sup>31</sup> MfS reports repeatedly suggest that they were not alone in this. The Kremlin clearly disapproved of abrupt political moves like this, as well as al-Beidh's plan and decisions in general.<sup>32</sup> However, none of the changes in leadership personnel prepared by al-Beidh were realized. The relevant individuals expressed their refusal during the CC conference in 1987, as they were well aware of the Soviet and East German support.

All in all, al-Beidh upheld an extreme course of socialist renewal and constantly feared losing his position. After his partly defeat at the CC conference of 1987, al-Beidh tried to obtain his power through pragmatic concessions. Nonetheless, his leadership appeared indecisive and hesitant. The opposition under Ali Nasir operated from Sana'a, constantly threatening the new regime in Aden, which was planning for Ali Nasir's return as the head of state and secretary-general of the YSP.<sup>33</sup> On top of that, the final years of the PDRY were characterized by even more severe economic hardships. The civil war of January 1986 not only had destroyed much of Aden's infrastructure, central buildings, and factories, but also created instability that repelled any foreign investors who might have had interests in the PDRY. According to East German IM information, Seidel summarized in early

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**29** | Hadi had been vice-president of unified Yemen from 1994-2012 and was appointed president of Yemen after Saleh's downfall in 2012.

**30** | Zusammenfassung der wichtigsten Feststellungen und Gespräche während des Aufenthaltes in der VDRJ am 02. und 03.09.1987, Fiedler HV A III, September 14 1987, in: BStU MfS Abt.X Nr. 234 Teil 1 von 2, 228ff.

**31** | According to Salem Saleh, Mohammed Al-Beidh's style of leadership was of "anarchic" character. Zusammenfassung der wichtigsten Feststellungen und Gespräche während des Aufenthaltes in der VDRJ am 02. und 03.09.1987, Fiedler HV A III, September 14 1987, in: BStU MfS Abt.X Nr. 234 Teil 1 von 2, 229; 232.

**32** | For example his plan to "merge the [PDRY's] KfS and Ministry of Interior." Zusammenfassung der wichtigsten Feststellungen und Gespräche während des Aufenthaltes in der VDRJ am 02. und 03.09.1987, Fiedler HV A III, September 14 1987, in: BStU MfS Abt.X Nr. 234 Teil 1 von 2, 229.

**33** | Brief Ali Nasir Mohammed an Erich Honecker, March 16 1987, BStU MfS HA II Nr.28714, 182-188.

1989: “Practically, the state [is] bankrupt.”<sup>34</sup> The newly discovered oil reserves close to the Saudi and the North Yemeni border did not offer significant economic relief, as extraction only developed slowly,<sup>35</sup> but rather fueled conflict between the PDRY and its neighbors.<sup>36</sup> In this environment of hopelessness, the idea of unity was now gaining speed and offered a supposedly easy way out. There was not much the new leadership could do to prevent the demise of the only “Marxist” state in Arabia.

## 2. “SOVIET DILEMMA AT THE GATE OF TEARS”:<sup>37</sup> BETWEEN INFLUENCE, IMPOSITION AND LACK OF CONTROL

“Life is what happens to you while you are busy making other plans.”

(John Lennon, Darling Boy, 1982)

### 2.1 Moscow’s Role in the Events of 1986: A Comment on Conspiracy Theories

After Ismail’s return from Moscow in 1985, conflict was in the air. Brehony refers to an unnamed member of the Politbüro claiming to have sought for Soviet support in convincing Ali Nasir to give up one of his three posts, but Moscow apparently remained inert.<sup>38</sup> This at first appears rather surprising, as the disagreement between the factions was not only about Ali Nasir’s plenitude of power, but also about his relationship with the Eastern Bloc. Nonetheless, Moscow at this point did not interfere, at least not openly. After the “1986 crisis,” international media had been speculating about possible Soviet interference to replace Ali Nasir Mohammed and to “install a less independent mind.”<sup>39</sup> But the Kremlin clearly had had no interest in replacing Ali Nasir at the time, regardless of Ismail’s return and even though Ali Nasir aimed for more independence from Moscow and the socialist states. Certainly things were more complex and might be illuminated by asking the right questions.

**34** | Abschrift einer IM-Information der HA VII, Abt.1, February 28 1990, in: BStU MfS HA VII 7054, 51.

**35** | Information Nr. 70/IV Erdölförderung in der VDRJ, MfAA, June 13 1988, in: BStU MfS HA II Nr.28714, 267.

**36** | Zusammenfassender Bericht über die Dienstreise nach der VDRJ vom 25.2. bis 11.3.1988, March 18 1988, in: BStU MfS Abt. X Nr. 234, Part 1 of 2, 165; Information Nr. 70/IV Erdölförderung in der VDRJ, MfAA, June 13 1988, in: BStU MfS HA II Nr.28714, 267.

**37** | Landwehr, Andreas, Suedjemen. Das Sowjetische Dilemma am “Tor der Traenen,” Januar 1986, in: BStU MfS HA III Nr.5922, 14.

**38** | Brehony, 2013, 133.

**39** | Kirkpatrick, Jeane, 1986, in: Katz, 1986, 11.

First: *Was Moscow actively involved in the “1986 crisis” by supporting one of the factions?*

Ali Nasir had developed the profile of a pragmatist and began to open South Yemen up to Western investments and “encouraged Western oil companies” to search for oil. Moscow sensed the danger of its ally steering away from Soviet influence.<sup>40</sup> This coincided with calls for Ismail’s return from exile in Moscow in 1983, and while Moscow did not actively promote Ismail, the Kremlin hadn’t done much to keep him from preparing his return either. In 1985, Ismail presented himself in public again and was allowed to meet with high-ranking Arab officials during their visits to Moscow.<sup>41</sup> The very same year Ismail returned to Aden, right on time to chair the preparation committee for the YSP Conference in late 1985. The “new left,” now strengthened due to Ismail’s return, insisted on again intensifying relations with the Eastern Bloc to finally qualify as a “Socialist state” and become eligible for more economic and military assistance.

The “new left” around Ismail, however, aimed to return to the former policy of “revolution export” to their neighbors and propagated unification of both Yemens under socialist terms as soon as possible by overthrowing Saleh’s rule. Ali Nasir, on the other hand, was renowned for his friendly relationship with Ali Abdallah Saleh and a policy of pragmatic cooperation with Sana’a.<sup>42</sup> One may agree with Katz that the Kremlin sent “Ismail home to join the Politbüro [as a warning to Ali Nasir] that he could be overthrown if he went too far on a path towards the West by allowing Western corporations into South Yemen.”<sup>43</sup> Thus, it is highly unlikely that Moscow had tried to get rid of either of the two figureheads. Rather, the Kremlin apparently had aimed to keep both Ismail and Ali Nasir in power and to counterbalance the two competing wings of the YSP leadership and follow its very own agenda in Aden.

Second: *How actively involved did Moscow get after the incident?*

Even though the Kremlin was likely not involved beforehand, the escalation in the end could not have been a surprise to the Kremlin. In the fall of 1985, Cigar, a US Ministry of Defense officer, predicted: “The jockeying for power [between Ali Nasir and Ismail] is likely to intensify as the Congress [of the YSP in October] approaches.”<sup>44</sup> Clearly, Moscow must have been aware of the brewing conflict, though hoping that it would not escalate. Thus, the Soviet Union was able to

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**40** | Katz, 1986, 9.

**41** | Cigar, 1985, 792.

**42** | Brehony, 2013, 140ff; Burrowes, 2010, 28.

**43** | Katz, 1986, 12.

**44** | Cigar, 1985, 790.

decide quickly on how to react to the “1986 crisis” at the time to suit their best interest. Brehony presents the official version of Soviet non-intervention, which without doubt has to be amended:<sup>45</sup> At the instigation of the Soviets, delegates of the opposing Yemeni factions met at the Soviet embassy in Aden as early as January 14, though not much was achieved, as the representatives “lacked the power to implement a cease-fire.”<sup>46</sup>

Within two weeks, Moscow had decided with whom to side. Ali Nasir had retreated to North Yemen and went to Addis Abeba later on to ask for Mengistu’s support. On January 28, the GDR embassy in Addis Abeba reported information from the Soviet embassy: “[A]ccording to Soviet assessments immediate danger of Ethiopian interference averted for now. Soviet ambassador will have talks with Mengistu today.”<sup>47</sup> In the end, Ethiopia refrained from intervention – according to MfS reports, this was due to Soviet efforts and personal engagement by Gorbachev.<sup>48</sup> Furthermore, Moscow appears to have appealed to Syria’s Hafez al-Assad to “change its original position” and support the new government “to assure the USSR’s influence and the influence of progressive Arab forces.”<sup>49</sup> The Kremlin had opted to support the survivors of the coup to stabilize its most important ally in the region and “restore the Marxist order”<sup>50</sup> as soon as possible.

All in all, uncertainty over Moscow’s part in the power struggle before the “1986 crisis,” as well as over the Kremlin’s true intentions, remains. However, speculations about Soviet intervention towards the replacement of Ali Nasir are nothing more than that. First of all, a violent putsch resulting in a civil war which endangered the stability and existence of the USSR’s closest ally in the region clearly could not have been in Moscow’s interest. Furthermore, it has to be doubted that the Kremlin originally wanted to get rid of Ali Nasir. Reconsidering some of the events prior to the coup rather support the argument that the leadership personnel did not matter too much for the Kremlin – as long as the vanguard YSP stayed in power.

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**45** | Brehony, for instance, quotes Yemeni sources that the Soviet ambassador himself on the 15th of January was instructed to inform Saleh in Sana'a that Moscow would not intervene, in: Brehony, 2013, 154.

**46** | Information über die Entwicklung in der VDRJ und internationale Reaktionen, January 1986, No.29/86, BStU MfS HV A Nr. 40, Part 1 of 2, 343.

**47** | Telegramm Jagenow Addis Abeba an Axen, Fischer, Sieber ZK IV, König, January 28 1986, In: BStU MfS ZAIG Nr.6725, 8.

**48** | Zur Lage in der VDRJ – Stand 27.1.1986 – 22,00 Uhr, January 28 1986, in: BStU MfS ZAIG Nr.6744, 56; Abschrift zur Entwicklung in der VDR Jemen, HA II/14, March 13 1986, in: BStU MfS ZAIG Nr.6725, 84.

**49** | Zur Lage in der VDRJ – Stand vom 29.1.1986, January 30 1986, in: BStU MfS ZAIG Nr. 6744, 60f.

**50** | Katz, 1986, 12.

## 2.2 Pushing for a Swift Recovery: Moscow holds on to its Failed Socialist Showcase

“[N]o matter which pro-Soviet faction defeated the other, the USSR would retain its influence in South Yemen.”<sup>51</sup>

(Contemporary Comment on the January 1986 events by Mark Katz)

At first glance, there was not much to gain anymore in Aden after the Soviet Union's loyal allies were removed from power in one way or the other. The showcase example among the closest Soviet allies in the developing world had failed – for now.<sup>52</sup> However, after several days of uncertainty, Moscow launched a strategy to stabilize the new leadership and with it socialism in the country: several years before the collapse of the Soviet Union, Moscow displayed a policy change towards the Global South but also the states of the Warsaw Pact. As part of an approximation to its Cold War adversary in Washington, the Kremlin under Mikhail Gorbachev introduced an *empowering policy* that aimed to create the impression that Moscow was loosening its grip on its dependent allies. And indeed, the Kremlin seemed to grant more maneuvering room and aimed at stimulating more internal and international self-reliance within the respective regimes. In Aden, this policy change could already be felt before the Kremlin reacted to the events of January 13 1986,<sup>53</sup> with the crisis causing a “rollback” of this policy towards more direct control over the YSP regime.

In February 1986, the members of the new government prepared to attend the Party Congress of the CPSU.<sup>54</sup> One month later, the Stasi notes that “the USSR is cooperating with the new leadership” and that Moscow intended to send back their evacuated personnel to Aden as soon as possible.<sup>55</sup> All in all, the USSR continued all of its projects of economic and technical assistance rather soon after the crisis.<sup>56</sup>

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51 | Katz, 1986, 7.

52 | Ibid., 12.

53 | McFaul, 2002, 39.

54 | Vermerk, February 18 1986, in: BStU MfS ZAIG Nr.6744, 85f.

55 | Soviet military advisors hadn't been called back to the Soviet Union at all, while some reports claim that even the majority of technical experts had remained in the PDRY during the crisis. This may be doubted. An East German engineer even reports that on January 20, all Soviet colleagues already had been evacuated while he and his delegation were left behind at the construction site in Little Aden. *Abschrift zur Entwicklung in der VDR Jemen*, HA II/14, March 13 1986, in: BStU MfS ZAIG Nr.6725, 85; *Bericht über die Ereignisse auf der Auslandsbaustelle “Bridges Reconstruction in Aden” im Januar 1986*, January 29 1986, in: BStU MfS ZAIG Nr.6725, 246.

56 | *Abschrift zur Entwicklung in der VDR Jemen*, HA II/14, March 13. 1986, in: BStU MfS ZAIG Nr.6725, 85.

This clearly aimed at a renewal of Soviet-Yemeni relations. In February 1987, the new leader al-Beidh was invited to Moscow. During the extensive consultations, held in the presence of the East German ambassador, al-Beidh repeatedly was “assured of comprehensive support for the current political course” and new agreements on culture and the cooperation between the foreign ministries of the USSR and PDRY were signed.<sup>57</sup>

As a short-term response to the crisis, the Soviet leadership tried to neutralize the opposing factions so that the regime would be able to survive and thus the “Marxist” state could re-emerge as a stable ally once more. The long-term response, however, has to be considered a reversal of the new empowerment tendencies in Soviet foreign policy mentioned above. Moscow obviously intended to uphold their “unbreakable friendship” with Aden, while drawing the PDRY closer again and intensifying “control over the policies of the junior ally [in the region],”<sup>58</sup> a status Aden clearly had gained by then. Halliday considers the replacement of the Soviet ambassador Vladislav Zhukov, a trained diplomat, by Albert Rachov, a party functionary, a telling indicator for this policy change – or rather policy rollback – towards the PDRY.<sup>59</sup> The replacement of personnel on the ground was complemented by more regular visits of party delegations and security advisors. Moscow’s efforts to further integrate South Yemen into the Comecon fits into the picture. By offering trade advantages for the PDRY,<sup>60</sup> Aden on the long run was to increase the share of its total trade and economic cooperation with and thus dependency on the states of the Eastern Bloc.

Regardless of the swift recovery of relations, official Soviet statements on South Yemen’s policies suggest a new mistrust toward the PDRY and a certain dislike of the new leadership. This included open critique and the Kremlin’s reluctance to further display “expressions of friendship,” such as inviting the leaders of the YSP to speak on the occasion of the 70th anniversary of the October Revolution. But the feelings somewhat seemed to be mutual, at least with regard to al-Beidh. Moscow upheld its plan to open its institute for training and education of the PDRY’s KfS cadres in October 1987<sup>61</sup> -

**57** | Telegramm (Blitz) Botschaft Moskau an Sieber, Krolokowski, Winter, Steinhofer, Neumann, Betreff: NO-Verwaltung MID zu Besuch Al-Beidh February 9 to 11, February 10 1987, in: BStU MfS HA II Nr.28714, 159f.

**58** | Halliday, 1990, 203.

**59** | Halliday considers this replacement policy as a repeated phenomenon, as it had happened in Afghanistan in 1979 and Ethiopia in 1980, Halliday, 1990, 209.

**60** | Stellungnahme zur Vorlage für das Politbüro des ZK der SED. “Entwicklung der mehrseitigen Zusammenarbeit der RGW-Länder mit der VDR Jemen,” August 18 1986, In: BStU MfS AG BKK Nr.1850 Bd.2, 57.

**61** | Zusammenfassung der wichtigsten Feststellungen und Gespräche während des Aufenthaltes in der VDRJ am 02. und 03.09.1987, Fiedler HV A III, September 14 1987, in: BStU MfS Abt.X Nr. 234 Teil 1 von 2, 227-243.

even though al-Beidh considered the Soviet advisors “supervisors” exerting control. According to Salem Saleh Muhammad, al-Beidh simply detested their presence.<sup>62</sup>

However, the harsher tone was not accompanied by a decline of Soviet engagement. Even though Brehony speaks of a “subtle downgrade of relations,”<sup>63</sup> in praxis this was not the case.<sup>64</sup> The Stasi summarizes the Soviet position in March 1986:

“The PDRY will remain a country of strategic importance in the future. To maintain [the PDRY’s] socialist orientation is of outmost importance for the distribution of power in the region. To counter all attempts by reactionary circles to stray the PDRY from its progressive path of development, the prevailing conditions in the PDRY have to be obtained and cooperation continued.”<sup>65</sup>

To save its supposedly “failed experiment,” the USSR had quickly sided with the new regime and agreed to support Aden against the ploys of Ali Nasir and his adherents to overthrow the new leadership.<sup>66</sup> In pursuit of this goal, the Kremlin extended its engagement in the field of state security, which was coordinated with the MfS of the GDR. In particular, the increase in financial contributions demonstrates the Soviet Union’s continued interest and engagement. Moscow even sent money for new buildings and restoration in Aden.<sup>67</sup> The new Soviet agenda in South Yemen had “stabilization” on top of its list due to the “significance of the PDRY for the socialist camp.”<sup>68</sup>

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**62** | German: Kontrolleure, Salem Saleh Mohammed would urge Soviet and East German advisors to be careful and keep a close watch over al-Beidh and his policies and relations to the YAR, in: Zusf. der wichtigsten Feststellungen und Gespräche während des Aufenthaltes in der VDRJ am 02. und 03.09.1987, Fiedler HV A III, September 14 1987, in: BStU MfS Abt.X Nr. 234 Teil 1 von 2, 232

**63** | Brehony, 2013, 169.

**64** | In 1988, for example, an Agreement on Health Cooperation and a new Protocol on Economic Cooperation were signed, in: Yemen news items 1988.

**65** | Abschrift zur Entwicklung in der VDR Jemen, HA II/14, March 13 1986, in: BStU MfS ZAIG Nr.6725, 85.

**66** | Geheim. Übersetzung aus dem Russischen. Auskunft über die Reaktion des Ministeriums für Staatsicherheit der VDRJ auf die Tätigkeit der Anhänger von A.N. Muhammed [sic!] in den sozialistischen Ländern, 1987, in: BStU MfS HA II Nr. 22860, 151-155.

**67** | Brehony, 2013, 166 and 169.

**68** | Vorlage zum Stand und zur weiteren Gestaltung der Zusammenarbeit mit dem MfS der VDRJ und zu dessen Unterstützung, Januar 25 1988, by Oberst Fiedler, signed by Mielke, HV A III, Jemen, in: BStU MfS Abt. X Nr. 234, Part 1 of 2, 135.

### 3. THE CAESURA OF 1986 AND ITS AFTERMATH: SED STATE POLICY OR HONECKER-CENTERED POLICY?

The GDR's high level of engagement in socialist nation- and state-building in South Yemen had survived three more or less violent regime changes since Qahtan.<sup>69</sup> But the incident of 1986 finally shattered East German belief in the South Yemenis, or at least the idea of modelling a revolutionary state on East German socialism in Aden. The death and exile of the two most prominent figures of the former NLF liberation movement and long-term allies of Moscow and East Berlin, Ismail and Ali Nasir, had corrupted relations and thus the GDR's policy beyond repair: The time of the SED regime was up before relations could fully recover. As a consequence, the last phase of East German engagement in the PDRY became the "Ice Age" of relations between formerly "best friends."<sup>70</sup>

#### 3.1 Best Friends do not Part: Honecker keeps Faith with Ali Nasir

Once fighting in Aden had ceased, functionaries of the new PDRY leadership approached the remaining diplomatic GDR personnel: "The partners expressed their wish for continuity of the bilateral relations – especially with regard to the security organs."<sup>71</sup> Statements by East German diplomatic personnel and Stasi reports agree that Ali Nasir had been responsible for the assassination of the Politbüro members on January 13,<sup>72</sup> and thus the survivors of the coup remaining in the PDRY were considered the rightful leadership. Meanwhile in East Berlin, the MfAA, namely Vice-Minister Winter, supported by the former ambassador to the PDRY, Freimut Seidel, had even established a crisis group immediately to consult on the events in South Yemen and on future action:

"We concluded that we could not apply the criteria of 'socialist orientation' or the distinction between progressive/reactive to these opposing groups [in South Yemen]. These simply were power struggles [...] and one could not support Ali Nasir simply because he symbolized progress."<sup>73</sup>

The crisis group identified the East German engagement as an imposition not necessarily fitting to the country and its social realities – regardless of the explicit South Yemeni wish for this support. Furthermore, the group agreed to turn their

**69** | Arabic: *Qahtān Muḥammad al-Sha‘abī*.

**70** | Interview with Heinz-Dieter Winter July 3 2012.

**71** | Zur Lage in der VDRJ – Stand 27.1.1986 – 22,00 Uhr, January 28 1986, in: BStU MfS ZAIG Nr.6744, 55.

**72** | Ibid. Another report refers to an internal report of Syria's Ba'ath Party which concludes that Ali Nasir had organized the liquidation of his opponents himself, in: Zur Lage in der VDRJ – Stand vom 30.01.1986, January 31 1986, BStU MfS ZAIG Nr.6744, 62f.

**73** | Interview with Heinz-Dieter Winter July 3 2012.

backs on Ali Nasir and to cooperate with the new regime right away. In addition to the MfS and the MfAA, Moscow also advised Honecker to reconnect with Aden. These instructions confirm the USSR's persisting interest in the country beyond personal or ideological considerations. Aden clearly remained a vital part of Moscow's political strategy in the region. The more surprising response appears the East German reaction: Ignoring internal recommendations, as well as South Yemeni and Soviet wishes, Honecker and the SED hesitated to reestablish cooperation with Aden after the escalation of 1986.

Over the years, Honecker had developed a personal friendship with both the theorist Ismail and the more pragmatic Ali Nasir, as well as several other ministers. These friendships had grown in numerous meetings after the downfall of Salmin.<sup>74</sup> Confronted with Ismail's exile in 1980, the secretary-general of the SED had to focus on Ali Nasir and the personal relations between the two – more or less – sole rulers in their states of "democratic centralism" had even become closer. Demonstrably, Honecker upheld his hopes for Ali Nasir to be reestablished as leader of the YSP until 1987. These personal preferences of Honecker were the major cause for the "Ice Age" of GDR-PDRY relations which then followed: Ignoring Soviet instructions, the majority of experts remained in the GDR after their evacuation during the crisis and the new ambassador Freimut Seidel did not get permission to travel to Aden until half a year later.<sup>75</sup> It took more than two years until the GDR sent a new advisor group to Aden,<sup>76</sup> the FDJ Brigade terminated its activities, and the agreements of 1985 were put on hold. Apart from security and military cooperation, East German engagement was "frozen" for the time being.<sup>77</sup> On top of that, East Berlin expressed its opposition to further integration of the PDRY in the Eastern Bloc as frankly as possible under Soviet control. Even the Koko expressed only restrained enthusiasm for the Kremlin's plan. Though the GDR "[did] not raise any objections to a mixed Comecon Commission – PDRY," it clearly signaled its preference for "bilateral agreements"<sup>78</sup> and made clear that "the GDR [would] neither commit to nor

**74** | After Ismail had been exiled, Ali Nasser and Honecker had met on an almost annual basis. *Informationsmappe für den Besuch des Generalsekretärs des ZK der JSP [...] Ali Nasser Mohammed*, November 1984, in: BStU MfS HA II Nr. 28712, 175; Interview with Fritz Balke on May 23 2011.

**75** | Interview with Fritz Balke on May 23 2011.

**76** | Telegramm Seidel an Ost-Berlin, February 8 1988, handwritten notes by Seidel in: BStU MfS HA VII 7054, 92.

**77** | Zusammenfassung der wichtigsten Feststellungen und Gespräche während des Aufenthaltes in der VDRJ am 02. und 03.09.1987, Fiedler HV A III, September 14 1987, in: BStU MfS Abt.X Nr. 234 Teil 1 von 2, 237.

**78** | Stellungnahme zur Vorlage für das Politbüro des ZK der SED. "Entwicklung der mehrseitigen Zusammenarbeit der RGW-Länder mit der VDR Jemen," August 12 1986, In: BStU MfS HA XVIII 21008, 57.

participate in this Comecon framework.”<sup>79</sup> The East German attitude, that is, Honecker’s attitude toward the new South Yemeni leadership, was clear.

### **3.2 Badheeb’s Asylum and Al-Salami’s Amnesty: Honecker’s Loyalty brings forth Strange Blossoms**

One of the concrete obstacles on the East German side to a normalization of relations between the two states had been the persecutions and extreme punishments of Ali Nasir’s followers. For East Germany these crystallized around two cases: Badheeb,<sup>80</sup> a confidant of Ali Nasir, and al-Salami, the former minister of education. Badheeb had visited the GDR on several occasions, such as in May 1980 when he met with Hermann Axen.<sup>81</sup> According to the HV A, Badheeb was “second on the list after Ali Nasser [sic!] Mohammed to be prosecuted,” as he was considered “one of the major culprits of the bloody events.”<sup>82</sup> After the failed coup of 1986, Badheeb asked for asylum in the GDR. Backed by the “socialist state community,” Badheeb was received as an honored guest “under the condition to abstain from any political activities”<sup>83</sup> in the GDR. Coming from Damascus, he arrived in East Berlin in July 1986.<sup>84</sup> The move had been “ordered by Honecker and with the objective to prevent the [...] forces of Ali Nasser [sic!] Mohammed to unitedly change sides to the reactive Arab and imperialist states.”<sup>85</sup> Thus, Badheeb’s asylum on the one hand appears to have been in the interest of Moscow and its allies. Al-Salami’s case, on the other hand, was quite a different matter.

Personal friendships had developed over the years between al-Salami and several leaders of the SED, first and foremost Honecker himself and his wife Margot.<sup>86</sup> Al-Salami, the former minister of education, had also been the long-

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**79** | Vorlage für das Politbüro des ZK der SED. Betreff: Entwicklung der mehrseitigen Zusammenarbeit der RGW-Länder mit der VDR Jemen, August 18 1986, In: BStU MfS HA XVIII 21008, 56.

**80** | Arabic: ‘Abdallāh al-Razzaq Badhīb.

**81** | Informationsmappe für den Besuch des Generalsekretärs des ZK der JSP [...] Ali Nasser Mohammed, November 1984, in: BStU MfS HA II Nr. 28712, 168.

**82** | Vermerk zur Asylgewährung für [...] Badheeb, HV A/III/AG, August 5 1986, in: BStU HA II Nr. 27366, 2.

**83** | Information zum ehemaligen führenden Funktionär der JSP der VDR Jemen, [...] Badheeb, January 14 1987 (?), in: BStU MfS HA II Nr. 28714, 131.

**84** | Vermerk zur Asylgewährung für [...] Badheeb, HV A/III/AG, August 5 1986, in: BStU HA II Nr. 27366, 2-5.

**85** | Ibid., 3.

**86** | Interview with Fritz Balke on May 23 2011.

time chairman of the East German-Yemeni Society of Friendship.<sup>87</sup> After the “1986 crisis,” he was arrested as traitor who was considered actively involved in the “1986 massacre.”<sup>88</sup> With regard to South Yemeni practices, his execution seemed to be inevitable. However, East Berlin not only demanded al-Salami’s swift release, but also his amnesty. At first, the new Vice-Secretary-General of the YSP, Salem Saleh Mohammed, merely guaranteed Al-Salami’s safety on the occasion of the CC meeting in early February. Al-Salami himself remained in prison, waiting for his trial.<sup>89</sup>

In September 1986, a Stasi MfS delegation travelled to Aden to prepare al-Salami’s safe departure to East-Berlin. At first, the YSP leadership considered the GDR’s wish to release al-Salami an “interference in the PDRY’s domestic affairs” and that “the PDRY would not accept the GDR attaching Dr. Hassan al-Salami’s fate to the cooperation between [the YSP and the SED] and the two countries.”<sup>90</sup> The relevant MfS report does not go into detail about how the delegation finally achieved the YSP’s promise to free al-Salami. But during the five weeks of their stay, the Stasi had contacted the KfS of the USSR and in the end received full support.<sup>91</sup> Considering Moscow’s initially hesitant stance in the matter,<sup>92</sup> East Germany’s success appears rather surprising. It seems as if the delegation was authorized to even threaten the termination of relations: “For this decision of the [YSP] Politbüro, the PDRY’s interest in the normalization and development of relations with the GDR was decisive.”<sup>93</sup> The report mentions “hard discussions” on the topic of al-Salami and the asylum of Badheeb in the GDR, but assures that

“cooperation remained constructive and never lost its character of friendship [...] The method to act on the level of long-term personal relations below the official levels [again] proved successful.”<sup>94</sup>

However, not successful enough at the time. Al-Salami remained imprisoned regardless of the promises given and of considerable improvements in the

**87** | Abschrift zur Entwicklung in der VDR Jemen, HA II/14, March 13 1986, in: BStU MfS ZAIG Nr.6725, 83-85.

**88** | Zusammenfassung der wichtigsten Feststellungen und Gespräche während des Aufenthaltes in der VDRJ am 02. und 03.09.1987, Fiedler HV A III, September 14 1987, in: BStU MfS Abt.X Nr. 234 Teil 1 von 2, 238.

**89** | Vermerk, February 7 1986, BStU MfS ZAIG Nr.6744, 73.

**90** | Bericht über die Dienstreise in die VDRJ vom 1.9. bis 3.10.1986, October 10 1986, in: BStU MfS Abt. X Nr.234, Part 1 of 2, 284.

**91** | Ibid., 283.

**92** | Vermerk Genosse Oberst Fiedler, HV A III, September 5 1986, in: BStU MfS Abt. X Nr.234, Part 1 of 2, 281f.

**93** | Ibid. 285.

**94** | Ibid. 285f.

relations between the countries.<sup>95</sup> The issue remained top priority on East Germany's agenda. Fritz Balke reports of two meetings between Honecker and al-Beidh on the occasion of the CPSU Party Congress and the 70<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Soviet revolution in Moscow that he had witnessed as a translator. "Twice, it was tough bargaining."<sup>96</sup> According to Balke, Honecker at the time even considered terminating relations altogether. Shortly after the CPSU Party Congress, however, al-Salami was released. And while Balke himself did not have an explanation for it, the whole process can be reconstructed with the files of the MfS. A draft on Mielke's line of argumentation for a meeting with the PDRY's minister of state security mentions "the unsolved problems in the relations between our countries (Sallami) [sic!]."<sup>97</sup> Even in February 1989, the topic of the "1986 traitors" was still pressing. Due to Honecker's, wish it was East Berlin's declared goal to achieve an exemption from punishment for al-Salami, so that he would be able to live in Aden again. The YSP regime kept raising their demands to grant this wish,<sup>98</sup> but in March 1989 finally gave in. Al-Salami was released and allowed to reintegrate into society. Without doubt this was the Stasi's doing on Honecker's orders: Minister of the Interior Saleh Munasser al-Siyeli explicitly added that with freeing al-Salami "he [al-Siyeli] had kept his personal promise to Genosse Minister Mielke."<sup>99</sup> In a meeting between al-Salami and an MfS delegate to the PDRY, Oberst Winkler, al-Salami assured Winkler "that he knew about Honecker's share in his [amnesty]" and thanked him repeatedly for the GDR's role in his release.

### **3.3 Before and After Al-Salami's Release: Was there an "Ice Age" of Relations in all fields of Cooperation?**

After the "1986 crisis," the majority of new agreements or the renewal of old ones had either been put on hold, or had their provisions pared back. This was even the case for military relations. In 1987, the PDRY's Ministry of Defense had asked for the continuation of South Yemeni military training for another 50 officers in the GDR.<sup>100</sup> And even though this request was granted, no further steps to

**95** | For example an SED delegation attended the YSP Party Congress in 1987 in Aden, Interview with Fritz Balke on May 23 2011.

**96** | Interview with Fritz Balke on May 23 2011.

**97** | Hinweise für das persönliche Gespräch mit dem Minister für Staatssicherheit der VDR Jemen, Saeed Saleh Salem 25.5.1988, in: BStU MfS ZAIG Nr.5119, 6.

**98** | Abschrift einer IM-Information der HA VII, Abt.1, February 28 1990, in: BStU MfS HA VII 7054, 52.

**99** | Vermerk Entlassung von Dr. Hassan as-Sallami, March 6 1989, HV A III, in: BStU MfS Abt.X Nr.234 Teil 1 von 2, 53.

**100** | Estimated costs for the training: 4 million GDR Marks and about 76,000 VM. MfNV (Ministry of National Defence), Minister of Defense Keßler to Honecker, May 18 1987; Honecker's positive response, May 19 1987, BArch, AZN 32673, Bl. 12f.

extend the cooperation were launched. But again this changed in late March 1989:<sup>101</sup> Ambassador Seidel reports in a blitz telegram after a meeting with al-Dhali: “Pleasant circumstances, after obstacles for [relations] have been overcome, steps for revival or continuation [are launched].”<sup>102</sup> Relations between Aden and East Berlin seemed to be back on track: East Germany finally approved of a new agreement on future military training.<sup>103</sup>

East German non-engagement in the PDRY during this very last phase of foreign policy delivers an outstanding example of East Germany’s capacity for double standards in international activities concerning foreign policy and economic interests. On the one hand, the GDR had held back any further political, cultural, or security commitments until al-Salami’s release, while economic and security matters were pursued in secrecy nonetheless. The KoKo and IMES, the major tools of the GDR’s secret economic policy, were busy doing business with Aden. During the “Ice Age” of relations, their delegations regularly travelled to sell East German and Soviet arms and weapons. East-Berlin presumed South Yemen to dispose of “credit and Valuta from Saudi-Arabia.”<sup>104</sup> And Aden was more than willing to spend these assets on East German arms.

After a visit by the BKK working group, Habenicht reports:

“It’s a fact that the North Yemenis dispose of about 600 to 800 T-55 [tanks], an unreal huge amount – and the South probably does not stand back. So both [sides] have no money, but for arms and ammunition they always have money.”<sup>105</sup>

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**101** | Vermerk über ein Gespräch mit Dr. Hassan as-Sallami [sic!], 1989, in: BStU MfS Abt.X Nr.234 Teil 1 von 2, 53.

**102** | Blitz Telegramm Seidel an MfAA über eine ausführliches Gespräch mit Ad-dali [sic!], March 20 1989, in: BStU MfS Abt.X Nr.234 Teil 1 von 2, 60.

**103** | The two states agreed to extend the time of training to five years and to include military doctors as well, in: Abkommen zwischen der Regierung der DDR und der Regierung der VDRJ über die Ausbildung von Militärkadern der Streitkräfte der VDRJ in der DDR vom 1.6.1989, in: BArch, DVW 1/43671, Bl. 171ff.

**104** | Bericht über die ADR nach Nord- und Südjemen, Arbeitsgruppe BKK, January 30 1989, in: BStU MfS BKK Nr.95 Teil 1 von 2, 33.

**105** | The actual motivation of the visit was to sell a new caliber gun (5.56 mm) produced in the GDR, “System Wieger,” the automatic rifle 940 put together in Wiesa to possibly “establish business with third countries,” in: Bericht über die durchgeführte Dienstreise nach Sanaa vom 9.1.-11.1.1989, in: BStU MfS Ag BKK NR.95 Teil 1 von 2, 80; Telegramm Aden an Schalck-Golodkowski August 15 1988, in: BStU MfS AG BKK Nr.1661 Bd.2, 125; Erzeugnis 940 – Sturmgewehr, August 23 1988, Habenicht, BStU MfS AG BKK Nr.98, 226-229; Telegramm Sanaa an Schalck-Golodkowski, January 2 1989, in: BStU MfS AG BKK Nr.174, 106.

According to Habenicht, South Yemen “aim[ed] to acquire Soviet T-72 [tanks] and heavy machine guns from Poland” and that he, Habenicht, had “agreed to provide these T-72s, though [the GDR’s interest was] to offer used T-55s.”<sup>106</sup> At the time, the BKK working group planned to expand the IMES trade in the Middle East as “there [was] a lot of money to be made.” Habenicht even asked for supporting personnel for the region as he “could not manage the focus areas of West Africa, Yemeni peninsula, and India all by himself.”<sup>107</sup> Clearly, the BKK and IMES were instructed to raise foreign currency in any possible way – even though the trades without doubt violated the GDR’s pledge for international peace and their former vows of friendship toward Aden, which was entangled in permanent conflict with the YAR. Even more surprising, these arms deals simply contradicted the current foreign non-policy towards South Yemen. With the IMES trades being the only exemption, East Berlin had terminated its engagement in all fields, including the military.

The security apparatus was another exemption from the rule. Even before al-Salami’s release, relations between the secret services improved significantly. Seidel mentions the planned steps by the GDR’s Ministry of the Interior and the HV A of February 1988 to send a delegation of the GDR’s security apparatus in his telegrams.<sup>108</sup> Major Wolf and Oberst Fiedler travelled to Aden.<sup>109</sup> In March, Seidel “inform[s] [...] the PDRY’s Minister of the Interior and Vice-President al-Siyeli about the principal possibility of assistance.” According to Seidel, al-Siyeli considered these decisions a “decisive step to overcome the problems in relations after 1986.”<sup>110</sup> Shortly thereafter, the PDRY’s KfS and the Stasi again renewed and even extended their cooperation.<sup>111</sup> The operational group of about ten advisors and two translators from the MfS was to remain in Aden,<sup>112</sup> whereas another group for “operative control” of the MfS, as well as several experts on intelligence, surveillance equipment, and vehicles were delegated. Furthermore, the newly

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**106** | Bericht über die ADR nach Nord- und Südjemen, Arbeitsgruppe BKK, January 30 1989, in: BStU MfS BKK Nr.95 Teil 1 von 2, 33.

**107** | Ibid. 33.

**108** | A series of telegrams that was submitted to the “Party leadership and Minister Dickel [of the Interior],” in: Telegramm Seidel an Ost-Berlin, February 8 1988, handwritten notes by Seidel in: BStU MfS HA VII 7054, 92.

**109** | Zusammenfassender Bericht über die Dienstreise nach der VDRJ vom 25.2. bis 11.3.1988, March 18 1988, in: BStU MfS Abt. X Nr. 234, Part 1 of 2, 163-170.

**110** | Telegramm Seidel an Ost-Berlin, March 9 1988, in: BStU MfS HA VII 7054, 93.

**111** | Protokoll über die Maßnahmen der Zusammenarbeit zwischen dem Ministerium für Staatssicherheit der DDR und dem MfS der VDRJ für die Jahre 1988/1989; Zur Lage des MfS der VDR Jemen, in: BStU MfS Abt.X Nr.234 Teil 1 von 2, 10-16 and 96.

**112** | Zu den Beziehungen des MfS der VDRJ mit dem MfS der DDR und mit Sicherheitsorganen anderer Länder, in: BStU MfS Abt. X Nr. 234, Part 1 of 2, 101.

signed protocol granted another delivery of new equipment for surveillance worth 3.5 million East German Marks.<sup>113</sup>

In May, Vice-Minister of the MfS Schwanitz sent a delegation to inspect the condition of the East German telecommunication equipment and new shipments were planned for 1994-95.<sup>114</sup> In June 1988, the first “delivery of solidarity” since 1986 arrived in Aden.<sup>115</sup> Half a year later, in January 1989, a new protocol between the two ministries of the interior amended the agreement of 1980.<sup>116</sup> Five new experts were promised to be delegated to South Yemen, the head of the delegation and one for the “criminal police, (operative) headquarters, supply services and surveillance” each. Obviously, the GDR’s double standard not only included the economy, but also the cooperation on the field of inner security. The protocols of the security and interior ministries, as well as the engagement of the East German security apparatus before al-Salami’s release, clearly indicate the GDR’s intention to continue its proactive engagement and further guide South Yemen’s socialist state- and nation-building.

### 3.4 A Fiction of Cooperation: Indicators for Future GDR Engagement

Speculations about possible different outcomes in history cannot add to final conclusions on the matter. But one may find traces hinting at the possible future behavior of an actor had events turned out differently. Thus in the following section, some of these traces are meant to offer a tentative glimpse at the possible development of relations between German real socialism and Yemeni Marxism after their expiration date. What could have been East German intentions with regard to the PDRY beyond 1990? An extremely interesting case can be found by reviewing the Stasi reports on East German investments in the South Yemeni security apparatus.

Regardless of East Germany’s early and intensive engagement in the establishment of the PDRY’s security apparatus, the capability and efficiency of the PDRY’s KfS did not meet East German expectations. After the “1986 crisis,” only about half the cadres of the KfS remained.<sup>117</sup> Without clear responsibilities

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**113** | Protokoll über die Maßnahmen der Zusammenarbeit zwischen dem MfS der DDR und dem MfS der VDRJ für die Jahre 1988/1989, in: BStU MfS Abt.X Nr.234 Teil 1 von 2, 12ff.

**114** | Maßnahmen zur solidarischen Unterstützung der Sicherheitsorgane der VDR Jemen, May 2 1988, in: BStU Sekretariat Schwanitz 24, 5.

**115** | Telegramm Seidel an Ost-Berlin, June 20 1988, in: BStU MfS HA VII 7054, 90.

**116** | Protokoll zur Vereinbarung über die Zusammenarbeit zwischen dem Ministerium des Innern der DDR und dem Mdl der VDRJ für den Zeitraum 1989 bis 1991, January 1989, in: BStU MfS HA VII Nr.1094, 12-16.

**117** | Zur Lage des MfS der VDR Jemen; Kadersituation des MfS der VDRJ in: BStU MfS Abt. X Nr. 234, Part 1 of 2, 99.

and the ever-present danger of “deconspiration,” that is discovery of clandestine activities, the cooperation between Sections and Units was considered insufficient. Cadres appeared to be underqualified, including the new minister of state security himself,<sup>118</sup> and the PDRY’s KfS could not rely on an extensive net of IMs. As a consequence,

“[t]he operative information and materials [...] handed over by the Yemeni partners were almost non-utilizable (not sophisticated, lack of preconditions to further analyze the material, low level of the Yemeni partners).”<sup>119</sup>

To improve the situation, the MfS emphasized the need to extend the “authority of the MfS as an instrument of the Party to secure and strengthen the Party’s leadership role.”<sup>120</sup> Both the GDR’s MfS and the Soviet KfS significantly extended their material and cadre support after 1986.<sup>121</sup> The East German MfS concluded: “Without the technical and cadre support by the [USSR’s] KfS and the MfS of the GDR [the PDRY’s KfS] is not functional.”<sup>122</sup> However, the East German security service upheld its goal “to establish a cadre base of the GDR’s MfS in the PDRY”<sup>123</sup> to facilitate operative cooperation under all circumstances.

Similar observations and decisions were made with regard to East Germany’s long-term surveillance project. Regardless of the “Ice Age” of bilateral relations, “Network 3”<sup>124</sup> had been continued, though not expanded. This was remedied right after al-Salami’s release. In February 1989, Oberst Fischer, deputy head of HA III and Oberstleutnant Tronicke, head of Subsection 9 of HA III, travelled to Aden to assess the condition of the radio station and to hand over

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**118** | Ibid., 96ff.

**119** | Zu den Beziehungen des MfS der VDRJ mit dem MfS der DDR und mit Sicherheitsorganen anderer Länder, in: BStU MfS Abt. X Nr. 234, Part 1 of 2, 103.

**120** | Zur Lage des MfS der VDR Jemen; Kadersituation des MfS der VDRJ, in: BStU MfS Abt. X Nr. 234, Part 1 of 2, 97.

**121** | Zu den Beziehungen des MfS der VDRJ mit dem MfS der DDR und mit Sicherheitsorganen anderer Länder, in: BStU MfS Abt. X Nr. 234, Part 1 of 2, 105.

**122** | Zur Lage des MfS der VDR Jemen; Kadersituation des MfS der VDRJ, in: BStU MfS Abt. X Nr. 234, Part 1 of 2, 98.

**123** | Vorlage zum Stand und zur weiteren Gestaltung der Zusammenarbeit mit dem MfS der VDRJ und zu dessen Unterstützung, Januar 25 1988, by Oberst Fiedler, signed by Mielke, HV A III, Jemen, in: BStU MfS Abt. X Nr. 234, Part 1 of 2, 134f.

**124** | German: Aktion Netzwerk 3. In the early 1980s, the MfS had signaled its interest in the PDRY’s radio surveillance and established a military radio station in 1984, Also See: Ch 13. Phase III: The Phase of Continuity and Consolidation, The GDR in Yemen from 1978 to 1986: German Guidance and Yemeni Emancipation.

new equipment.<sup>125</sup> As opposed to the radio surveillance of the South Yemeni's Defense Forces, the MfS radio station was well-equipped with personnel and material.

"The material-technical equipment of the radio surveillance station, financed almost exclusively by East German solidarity allowances, is fully operational and functioning."<sup>126</sup>

But Fischer and Tronicke clearly were not satisfied with the condition of the radio surveillance in Aden after "eight years of continuous advice by the [HA III];"<sup>127</sup> the radio station so far had had "no immediate value for the Mfs of the GDR."<sup>128</sup> The two delegates insisted that this had to change over the period of the next "4 to 5 [sic!] years."<sup>129</sup> Despite the inefficiency of the station, this decision suggests that the GDR's project was to be continued, just like the Mfs' overall engagement in the PDRY and in doing so, to even go beyond the assistance of the 1970s and early 1980s.

Furthermore, one can find other indicators for the East German intention to fully rebuild relations: On the occasion of the inauguration of the new ambassador in March 1989, Honecker promised that the FDJ Brigade, evacuated in 1986, would return to the PDRY.<sup>130</sup> Balke reports about the renewal of the party agreement in June 1989 when he travelled with the high-ranking delegation leader, Head of the CC International Relations Section Günter Sieber. Then Balke remembers al-Beidh as the "last foreign guest received by Honecker" in Berlin on the occasion of the GDR's 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary.<sup>131</sup> Nonetheless, time was running out for both the PDRY and the SED regime. The process of Yemeni unification gained speed, while in East Berlin foreign policy issues beyond the German question clearly were pushed from the GDR's agenda of survival. Any other conclusion on East Germany's foreign policy plans for the PDRY thus remains speculation.

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**125** | Reisebericht über eine Dienstreise im Rahmen der Maßnahme "Netzwerk III," in: BStU Mfs Abt.X Nr.234 Teil 1 von 2, 26-32.

**126** | Ibid., 26.

**127** | Ibid., 29.

**128** | Ibid., 32.

**129** | Ibid., 29.

**130** | Interview with Heinz-Dieter Winter July 3 2012

**131** | Interview with Fritz Balke May 23 2011.

#### **4. CONCLUSION: BELATED AND UNFORTUNATE SELF-CONFIDENCE: EAST-BERLIN WANDERS OFF THE SOVIET COURSE**

As a consequence of the “1986 crisis,” Moscow’s and East Berlin’s closest allies within the Aden regime had been forced out of power. The events of 1986 are an indicator that neither Moscow nor its East German henchman were able to fully control their supposedly homunculus regimes in the Global South. One might reason, though, that these two states drew quite different conclusions. During this last phase of East Germany’s engagement in Aden, the GDR moved away from ideologically inspired nation- and state-building to focus on more commensurable benefits, opting for a significant shift in the fields of engagement: The comprehensive state-building approach before had somewhat balanced civil and security measures. Now civil engagement was simply terminated. Over the following years it regenerated at a slow pace, while support for the security apparatus was picked up with considerable speed after 1987.

Moscow on the other hand upheld its high level of engagement in the country to remain the most important partner of South Yemen, with or without Ali Nasir. Though the Marxist experiment “PDRY” appeared to have turned from an “ideological victory”<sup>132</sup> for the USSR to an “ideological Waterloo,” the Soviet Union did not end its engagement, but rather changed its policy to a more comprehensive approach: Economic aid and assistance became new fields of engagement in an attempt to stabilize the regime and thus the state. This policy change towards Aden has to be considered part of Moscow’s wider regional strategy and the high level of engagement did not wane before the Soviet Union itself began to fall apart.

##### **The GDR and the Kremlin: New Self-Esteem?**

The GDR clearly aimed to decrease its political dependence from Moscow and to prove this not only within the Eastern Bloc, but also on the international stage. Even though the GDR was not able to move beyond the room for action granted by the Soviet Union, it clearly did not fully act in the USSR’s best interest anymore by refusing to reconnect with the old ally South Yemen and their new regime after the “1986 crisis.” While the Kremlin had sided quickly with the new regime in Aden, Honecker had decided otherwise for the GDR. East German engagement with South Yemen was kept at a political minimum to avoid terminating relations with Aden and thus aggrieving Moscow. Furthermore, Honecker’s behavior of individual-centered foreign policy in the “al-Salami issue” clearly brings to mind the bigger picture of his final years as leader of the SED state, when he openly opposed the new course of the Soviet Union and propagated a “Socialism in the colors of the GDR.”<sup>133</sup> Moscow had demanded the GDR reengage in the PDRY and

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<sup>132</sup> | Cigar, 1985, 782.

<sup>133</sup> | Honecker, Erich, Report of the Politbüro to the VII. Conference of the Central Committee, in: Neues Deutschland December 2 1988.

even the MfAA's findings were pointing in this direction. But Honecker clung to the guidelines of socialist foreign policy and his personal preferences, supporting the former revolutionary Ali Nasir. Clearly, this did not improve al-Beidh's weak political standing among the new YSP leadership either.

### **Socialist Foreign Policy: Doomed to “Walk the Talk”**

According to Winter, the “Ice Age” of relations had not thawed before a discussion between himself and the PDRY’s Foreign Minister al-Dhali in December 1989.<sup>134</sup> But as the MfS documents show, the thaw had been underway half a year earlier. Significant investments had been made by the MfS to obtain the release of al-Salami in March 1989. Thus, it had been the relations between the two security apparatuses and the active engagement of the MfS that were able to clear the air in the end. This turned out to be one of the few channels of communication that were upheld throughout this “Ice Age” between East Germany and South Yemen. It was also the foundation upon which relations were rebuilt.

After the “al-Salami issue” was settled, East Germany’s policy in the end somewhat returned to the inflexible tracks of Socialist state- and nation-building, though with significantly less intensity. East German engagement appears to have taken quite a pragmatic turn after the tentative regeneration of relations between Aden and East Berlin. While East-Berlin refused to reactivate its former high level of engagement in various fields, it rather focused on topics more of interest to the GDR itself. For example, the station “Netzwerk 3” at first had been part of the Soviet strategy in the region, but turned out to be inefficient. Nonetheless, East Germany upheld investments in the station, despite Moscow’s retreat from the engagement. Beyond Soviet interest, rumors of huge oil reserves might have kept the GDR on board,<sup>135</sup> while East Berlin sensed lucrative opportunities for arms deals<sup>136</sup> and seemed to hope for its very own MfS base in the Middle East.

During the short period after al-Salami’s release and before the GDR and the PDRY disappeared from the map, relations seemed to be on their way of recovery. Taking into consideration the high number of renewed agreements and mutual visits of the two states, one may even speculate about further intensification of East German engagement, if German reunification had not got in the way. On the one hand, the last four years of East German-South Yemeni relations after the “1986 crisis” ended the history of cooperation between the two states. However, it has to be regarded a path-dependent outcome of the GDR’s foreign policy on the other.

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**134** | Interview with Heinz-Dieter Winter July 3 2012.

**135** | Despite other agreements, such as with France, the USSR signed the first agreement on oil exploitation in June 1988. In 1990, the Kremlin continued its planned extension of oil production, in: *Abschrift einer IM-Information der HA VII, Abt.1, February 28 1990*, in: BStU MfS HA VII 7054, 51; Yemen news items 1987.

**136** | Bericht über die ADR nach Nord- und Südjemen, Arbeitsgruppe BKK, January 30 1989, in: BStU MfS BKK Nr.95 Teil 1 von 2, 30-36.

Honecker's extreme reaction contradicted any sensible foreign policy cooperation. Even though he would evoke ideological arguments, such as "solidarity for the revolutionaries," in reality it was his personal preferences that determined his behavior.<sup>137</sup> To accommodate Honecker's single-handed style of leadership working even against his foreign policy apparatus, a centralized political system like the GDR's was a *conditio sine qua non*.

All in all, the PDRY too was running out of breath in the end. The decline of Soviet and East German support was a decisive blow for the unstable and insolvent PDRY. However, this withdrawal of the Eastern Bloc was not due to a lack of interest, but rather to a lack of ability to uphold cooperation on this intense level. Moscow's priority was to keep its foothold in Aden – the actual circumstances were merely secondary. Both major YSP leading figures had disappeared from the scene in January 1986 and the few competent cadres remaining were not able to heal South Yemen's political and actual wounds to hold the country together. Just like East Germany, South Yemen was not able to adapt to the changing framework in international relations and drifted into unification as the considerably weaker "half" of Yemen: In newly unified Yemen, the few remnants of the former south bit by bit disappeared under the pressure of the politically and socially dominant north. The experiment of the only Marxist state in Arabia had failed and with it the GDR's "policy of state- and nation-building."

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**137** | Interview with Fritz Balke on May 23rd, 2011.

