

# South Yemen Update

*Dream no small dreams for they do not have the power to move the hearts of men*

Newsletter of the Friends of South Yemen

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## Fifty-third anniversary of 1967 revolution:

### WHITHER IS FLED THE VISIONARY GLEAM?

Fifty three years ago 30th November was a glorious day. South Yemen was independent after 129 years of British colonialism. The Aden Colony and Protectorate were gone and a new state was created.

The early 70s were a time of great optimism and euphoria. The people were so enthusiastic about the revolution and the changes it made to Yemeni society that in 1971 workers came out in the streets demanding lower wages and chanting *kafed alrawtib wagib* (a reduction in our salaries is a revolutionary duty). No other nation in history was so politicized on a revolutionary path that people came out in the streets protesting that their salaries must be cut as a duty to the revolutionary cause. Southern people at the time, with hostile regional states and a hostile Yemeni neighbour, wanted so much for their revolution to succeed. The leader of the new state, Salim Rubaya Ali, was perceived as a revolutionary, and many saw him as a saviour of the revolution.

Whither is fled the visionary gleam? The chairman of Friends of South Yemen (FOSY), Abdul Galil Shaif, describing the current political and economic situation, pointed out that for ordinary people in South Yemen life is now a battle for survival, with no salaries, regular power cuts, water and petrol cuts. "But the most acute shortage is revolutionary optimism, a quality that was flowing so abundantly immediately after independence in 1967. The revolution was supposed to build a better country for three million Southerners. Today they complain that it's not the same dream now as it was then, people are disappointed and frustrated that the revolution has turned their country from the new dawn they envisaged into a breakfast in hell."

Shaif believes that amid the chaos, the 30th November independence day has become meaningless to so many Southerners, the revolution has failed in almost all its objectives, politicians on both sides are scrambling to make a deal in foreign lands while the Yemeni state or whatever is left of it is disintegrating into a vacuum for militias and extremists with security deteriorating day by day. Some Southerners go as far as saying, we were wrong to kick the British out, things were much better during the British occupation.

What was unique about the 1967 revolution and why did it fail? In Britain's colonial history, the National Liberation Front (NLF) victory in South Yemen inflicted a defeat which

was unique. In other countries colonized by Britain, in which a nationalist struggle had broken out, the British withdrawal was preceded by lengthy diplomatic negotiations and the subsequent regime soon harmonized its relations with the British state.

This was the case in neighbouring Gulf countries such as Kuwait, the UAE, Bahrain and Oman. But the NLF not only forced the British to withdraw completely from South Yemen but also succeeded politically and militarily in undermining Britain's colonial strategy for transferring power to a pro-

Western state that would be accommodating to British and Western interests in South Arabia and the Indian Ocean.

Public support for independence was immense and there was a revolutionary fervour which at the early stages of the revolution looked uncontrollable. The social implications were certainly tremendous. The rural economy was restructured, the sheikhs and tribal landowners were knocked off their perches, land was redistributed and by 1975 the feudal economic structure was almost dismantled, leading to a marked improvement in the living standards of the peasants. Medical care and other social services which were previously unavailable were provided.

Women had played an important role in the revolutionary struggle to gain independence and this was taken to mean that their struggle must continue and their participation in all walks of life was necessary. Colonialism had for over a century ensured that a backward oppressive, traditional way of life was imposed on Yemeni women, limiting their participation to the management of their own homes and nothing else. This changed radically, women took part in education and literacy programmes and were active in the Yemeni Socialist Party (YSP) which succeeded the NLF. They were also in the armed forces in significant numbers.

A radical transformation also occurred in the army by 1974. The army was fully involved in the social and economic transformation of South Yemen. An example of this involvement was the army's drive towards agricultural collectivization by establishing and operating a number of state farms. Because of the lack of manpower, particularly for labouring jobs, the army made a significant contribution to filling this gap.

The development of a system based on socialist principles was unique to the Arab world. But throughout its 23-year history, before union with North Yemen in 1990, the People's



### CHRONOLOGY

**Nov 16:** The STC sends military reinforcements to Abyan as clashes with forces loyal to the internationally-recognized government intensify.

**Nov 17:** Militia forces loyal to the STC prevent a meeting organised by Hadi's government from taking place in Socotra.

**Nov 18:** Egypt condemns the "cowardly attack" that targeted the medical staff working in the mobile health clinics of the Emirates Red Crescent (ERC) in Taiz.

**Nov 19:** Humanitarian agencies say a possible US designation of Yemen's Houthi group as a foreign terrorist organization would prevent life-saving aid to the conflict-riven country, where fears of famine are rising.

-Britain's Defence Minister confirms that a Saudi air force pilot who crashed while undertaking "operational tasks" over Yemen was taught to fly by Britain's Royal Air Force and the arms corporation BAE Systems.

**Nov 20:** ABNA News Agency reports the Houthis capture the strategic Maas base, which lies approximately 57 kilometres from the provincial capital city of Ma'rib.

-The Houthis free two American hostages in exchange for about 200 of the group's fighters and supporters detained in Oman.

**Nov 21:** Saudi Arabia announces it is resuming consular work at its embassy in Yemen after it was suspended owing to the coronavirus pandemic.

**Nov 22:** UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres says that Yemen is in "imminent danger of the worst famine the world has seen for decades."

-The internationally recognized government of Yemen expresses support for the US move to designate the Houthis as a foreign terrorist organization, despite critics claiming that it could hamper peace efforts and aid deliveries.

**Nov 23:** The Houthis say they launched a missile that struck at Saudi Aramco's oil distribution facility in Jeddah.

**Nov 24:** The Houthis agree to a United Nations mission to inspect and repair the abandoned fuel tanker *Safer*, currently anchored off Hodeida and at risk of causing an oil spill.

-Another Yemeni-Houthi prisoner swap is imminent according to the UN's special envoy on Yemen.

**Nov 25:** Germany's highest administrative court finds in favour of the German government and against Faisal bin Ali Jaber, rejecting a lower court's judgement that Germany has a responsibility to ensure that US drone

Democratic Republic of South Yemen (PDYR) was plagued by disagreements first within the NLF and between the NLF and Egyptian-backed Front for the Liberation of Occupied South Yemen, and later in the YSP which was torn apart by internal conflicts between the more radical elements of the revolution and the more conservative ones.

The radicals were always keen on maintaining the revolutionary fervour which transformed a feudal system into a socialist one. Collective farms had to remain the backbone of agriculture, relations with reactionary Arab regimes, especially Saudi Arabia, were vehemently opposed, and there was no room for the petite bourgeoisie in the economic development of the country. On the other hand the right wing wanted slow and gradual reforms based on the idea of Arab nationalism, and believed that the country had to pass through a capitalist phase with a mixed economy before socialism could take root. Some of those involved in the revolution still alive today describe the radicalism in those years as utopian and regret the internal power struggles. They say it would have been better to develop a relationship with the Gulf states to secure much needed economic assistance.

The YSP's inability to resolve these internal power struggles resulted in the disaster of 13th January 1986 when the conservative leader, Ali Nasser, tried unsuccessfully to execute a military plan to massacre his opponents. Support for socialist ideals following this dropped to an all time low and union with the North was seen as an escape route from bloody power struggles and economic collapse. But after unification came in 1990 the Southerners felt they were sidelined from power by their Northern partners and that investments were concentrated in the capital Sanaa while Aden was neglected and the oil resources of the South were exploited by the regime in the North.

The relationship between Ali Abdullah Saleh, who ruled the North from 1978, and Ali Salem Al-Beidh, the leader of the YSP and vice president of united Yemen, deteriorated and protracted struggles finally resulted in all-out war in 1994 as the Southerners once again demanded their own state. The Northerners emerged victorious and the marginalization of the South, accompanied by gross violations of human rights, continued until the Houthis overthrew the government of the Yemeni state in 2014. The internal power struggles in the unified state have now resulted in new power players with the YSP becoming politically redundant.

The Houthis tried to occupy the South, but after their expulsion to their Northern territory the Southerners were confident enough to establish the Southern Transitional Council (STC) in 2017. Their initial announcement was to restore the independence of the South. The Southerners helped the Saudi-led coalition forces to dislodge the Houthis from the South. The UAE intervened to provide the STC with military backing.

Relations between the STC and the Internationally Recognized Government (IRG) led by President Abdurabbuh Mansur Hadi soured when Hadi dismissed the governors of the Southern governorates, and in January 2018 fighting broke out between the two sides and the STC eventually seized Aden and issued a self-rule declaration, which was rescinded on 29th July 2020. The Riyadh Agreement, an attempt by the Saudis to resolve the conflict, provided for power sharing; it was signed on 5th November 2019, but it was never implemented. Last month the STC withdrew from the latest round of talks on the agreement's implementation as the two sides were unable to agree on the allocation of portfolios in the new government. The STC leaders are now living as virtual hostages in Riyadh\* and only the governor of Aden has taken up his post. Fighting continues between the forces of the IRG and STC in Abyan, ceasefires are constantly violated and a political stalemate continues as the Houthis consolidate their stranglehold on the North and establish an autocratic Islamic state while the whole country suffers from the world's worst humanitarian crisis.

So is there any light at the end of the tunnel from which the South has been unable to emerge for decades?

The eternally optimistic Shaif, in charge of the Aden Free Zone 2008-2014, resigned, unable to work and survive in a corrupt state. He sees a bleak future for the people of the South unless they themselves, throughout the Southern governorates, unite under a common struggle and establish a state in the South united by a common endeavour.

\*See Issue 4 of *South Yemen Update*, "STC under cloud".



*A destroyed building in Aden*



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## Aid to South Yemen: benefits and contradictions

Saudi Arabia and the UAE are pursuing development projects and providing humanitarian assistance to Yemen in tandem with their war strategy. Both countries are eager to win the hearts and minds of the Yemenis as they further their own interests which take priority over the needs and welfare of the Yemeni people.

They count themselves as the largest donors to Yemen, having provided more than \$18 billion since 2015. Riyadh says it alone has offered around \$12 billion.

But Yemenis are questioning the effectiveness of the aid and its distribution and point out the perverse diplomatic charade of starting a fire and then getting credit for providing fire blankets.

"All of this money has been pumped into Yemen, and the standard of living, health, and economy in Yemen is still going from bad to worse, creating questions about the effectiveness," Yemeni activists said in a change.org petition demanding accountability for all aid pouring into Yemen.

Yemenis in some areas are questioning whether the Saudis are using the projects to further entrench themselves militarily. While funding schools and clinics in Yemen's eastern-most governorate of Al-Mahra, the Saudis installed significant military personnel and equipment, fuelling suspicion about their motives, Elisabeth Kendall, a research fellow at Oxford University who frequently visits the area, told AFP. "Investment in this long-marginalised area is much needed. But many locals now refer to a 'Saudi occupation'."



UAE aid project in Socotra

(Masam) which has so far removed 197,982 of the 1.1 million mines planted by the Houthis. In June this year KSrelief extended Masam's contract for a year at a cost of \$30million. There are 32 mine clearance teams which retrieve mines mostly locally made, with some originating from Iran.

KSrelief also launched a fog-spraying campaign in displacement camps in Aden governorate as part of an emergency response project to combat dengue fever. In Mukalla KSrelief is continuing its medical campaign for open heart surgeries for children, as part of the "Saudi Pulse" programme to provide free treatment and operations for heart conditions in Hadhramaut.

The UAE has provided \$465 million to support the United Nations Humanitarian Response Plan in Yemen for 2018, while total UAE assistance to Yemen from April 2015 to June 2018 amounted to more than \$3.76m. Assistance was provided for education, infrastructure, utilities and energy, health and other sectors.

The UAE has been especially active on the island of Socotra where it is establishing military bases (see *South Yemen Update* Issue 5). The assistance programme has been co-ordinated by the Abu Dhabi-based Sheikh Khalifa Humanitarian Foundation. The Emirates News Agency WAM described one key area of activity: the provision of electric power, with a new power station being built in the capital, Hadibu, and other smaller stations in the towns of Qalansiya, Mori and Alama. Over 30 remote villages have been supplied with generators, bringing them electric power for the first time. With a view to promoting sustainability, solar power stations have been installed in Hadibu and Qalansiya, with capacities of 2.2 MW and 800 kW respectively.

Water supplies on the island have been augmented with storage tanks drilled in 40 villages. To improve local transport in Socotra, two storage tanks, each with a capacity of two million litres, for petrol and diesel, have been constructed. Two petrol stations have been built in Hadibu and Qalansiya, with six others currently under construction. The streets in Hadibu have been paved and roads leading inland which were damaged by recent cyclones have been repaired.

A new 90 metre pier has been built and berths dredged to accommodate larger vessels, and a marine ferry service introduced, to improve the island's communications. A new fish market has been built in Hadibu, and new fish-processing plant which can handle 500 tons a month opened.

The projects and amounts spent on this sound impressive but the situation in Yemen remains dire. Yemen's conflict has killed more than 100,000 people and

strikes assisted from Ramstein air base comply with international law. Jaber's relatives were killed by a drone strike.

-Saudi Arabia's Deputy Defence Minister Prince Khalid Bin Salman receives Yemen's President Abed Rabbo Mansour Hadi to discuss the implementation of the Riyadh Agreement.

**Nov 26:** The coalition destroys an explosive-laden boat, causing damage to a nearby oil tanker.

-Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF) announces that the contagious skin condition scabies is spreading among Yemen's internally displaced population, which is estimated to be around four million people, with those most affected living in the populated displaced camps of Ibb province.

**Nov 27:** *Mehr News Agency* reports that the Sixth Brigade of the Border Guards under the command of the Yemeni government disobeyed the order of the coalition to be sent to the Ma'rib Front and went to Sanaa.

-More than 19,000 families have fled their homes in northern Yemen since January owing to fighting between government forces and the Houthis, according to official figures.

**Nov 28:** Thirteen fighters are killed in an exchange of artillery fire between pro-government forces and the STC in Abyan, military sources report.

-The coalition conducts intense air strikes in Sanaa and other cities under the control of the Houthis.

**Nov 29:** Seven civilians are killed and 10 injured after the Houthis bombarded a village in Al Duraihimi district in Hodeidah.

-*Mehr News Agency* reports Turkey has dispatched advanced drones to the battle line in southern Yemen to confront STC forces.

**Nov 30:** *Mehr News Agency* reports that a rocket strikes Tadawin base north of the city of Marib killing eight Saudi soldiers and a commander and wounding seven others.

-The World Health Organization and UNICEF have finished vaccinating children across Houthi-controlled North Yemen against polio. The rest of Yemen will be vaccinated in the first week of December. The aim is to reach 5.5 million children under five.

**Dec 1:** The United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) says the war in Yemen and its aftermath have claimed lives of 223,000 people so far.

-The Houthis fire a ballistic missile which crashed in Saada, coalition spokesman Colonel Turki al-Malki said.

**Dec 2:** The US Ambassador to Yemen, Christopher Henzel, makes a "surprise" visit to the eastern governorate of Al-Mahra.

-The King Salman Humanitarian Aid and Relief Center (KSrelief) signs a joint agreement worth \$12 million with the OCHA to support the humanitarian response plan in Yemen.

**Dec 3:** The UK announces £14 million of new aid which will help 1.5 million households access food and medicines,

and takes the UK's contribution to £214 million this year.

-According to the Integrated Food Security Phase Classification (IPC), an analysis prepared by the UN, 45% of the Yemeni population face "high levels" of food insecurity. 33% of these are in "crisis" conditions, 12% live in an "emergency" situation, while for 16,500 the picture is "catastrophic", the worst level in the special IPC ranking.

**Dec 4:** Clashes between STC forces and the Yemeni army resume in Abyan. -An explosives-laden drone launched by Houthis towards Saudi Arabia is shot down.

**Dec 5:** The United Kingdom Maritime Trade Operations (UKMTO) naval authority says it is aware of an attack on a vessel off the coast of Yemen.

**Dec 6:** A Yemeni university professor, Khalid al-Hameidi, a known critic of Islamic extremists, is killed in a drive-by shooting in South Yemen, local officials say.

**Dec 7:** The President of the Academy of Medical Sciences of the Islamic Republic of Iran, Alireza Marandi, in a letter to the UN Secretary-General warns of the dire situation and starvation of millions of Yemeni people during five years of the war.

-Five Yemeni journalists - Hisham Tarmoum, Hassan Annab, Isam Balghaith, Haytham Al-Shehab and Hisham Al-Yousofi - who were arrested by the Houthis in 2015 describe torture and abuse when they were released.

**Dec 8:** Clashes between coalition forces in Abyan escalate and displace more than 500 families.

-The Chairman of Yemen's Supreme Revolutionary Committee, Mohammed Ali al-Houthi, reveals on his Twitter account a secret message from the United States to Sanaa. He claims the Americans acknowledge that peace in Yemen is in their hands not those of Saudi Arabia.

**Dec 9:** A Singaporean man is detained under the Internal Security Act for taking part in the Yemen civil war and working for a foreign power as a paid agent.

-A vote that could take place in the Senate which would thwart the sale of massive amounts of U.S. arms, including advanced fighter jets, to the UAE.

**Dec 10:** The coalition says it intercepted and destroyed two explosive-laden boats south of the Red Sea.

**Dec 11:** All necessary arrangements have been completed for expediting the implementation of an agreement signed last year between the Yemeni government and the STC, a coalition spokesman says.

**Dec 12:** Hundreds of protesters take to the streets in Taiz to express their frustration after a plunge in the local currency led to a surge in prices and shops to close.

**Dec 13:** The Houthis kill several coalition recruits and destroy a military vehicle in Jawf.

created the world's worst humanitarian disaster, with more than 3 million people internally displaced and two-thirds of the population relying on food aid for survival. Some 24 million Yemenis, or 80% of the country's population, require some form of assistance or protection, according to the UN.

For long-term development and an end to hunger the ravages of diseases and poverty the war needs to end and aid has to be given with an open hand for the right reasons without self interest or hidden agendas.

## Yemen's ancient 'Manhattan of the Desert' risks collapse



The high-rise architecture at Shibam, Hadhramaut

Photo: Jialiang Gao, CC BY-SA 3.0 / Cropped

Dubbed the "Manhattan of the desert" for its centuries-old skyscrapers, Yemen's ancient city of Shibam escaped damage in the civil war – but faces collapse from disrepair amid rains and floods.

Against a backdrop of cliffs looking like America's Grand Canyon, the UNESCO-listed World Heritage Site is strategically built on a rocky spur high above the river valley of Wadi Hadhramaut, in the arid centre of Yemen.

Some of the hundreds of fantastical sun-dried mud-brick towers soar seven stories high, many dating back to the 16th century, all crammed inside a traditional fortified wall built for protection.

The UN describes the city, once an oasis stop for the camel caravans on the spice and incense routes across southern Arabia, as "one of the oldest and best examples of urban planning based on the principle of vertical construction." But Shibam is struggling.

The mud-brick buildings need constant repair, but Yemen's economy has collapsed in the brutal civil war raging since 2014. "The city looks like it was hit by a disaster – without precedent," said Abdulwahab Jaber, a local official in the town, 480 kilometres (300 miles) east of the capital Sanaa. At least four towers have been completely destroyed and 15 others damaged in recent floods, which have killed scores of people across Yemen.

Hassan Aidid, head of the General Organisation for the Preservation of Historic Cities in Yemen, said an emergency response plan in cooperation with UNESCO is underway, with approximately 40 buildings being restored at a cost of \$194,000.

Private donors have also offered to help, including a Saudi businessman who donated approximately \$54,000, Aidid said.

But while restoration plans are going ahead, helped by some funding from the European Union, they are not going fast enough, said Barak Baswitine, head of the Association of Mud-brick Architecture in Shibam.

<https://www.trtworld.com/art-culture/yemen-s-ancient-manhattan-of-the-desert-risks-collapse-41117>



Sultan's Palace Hadhramaut



Damage to the base of the palace, roofs and walks

FOSY has a Facebook page which is updated daily with the latest news of relevance to South Yemen.

Please visit: [fb.me/fossy2020](https://fb.me/fossy2020)

