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WAR IN THE YEMEN

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The war in the Yemen drags on. It has now lasted for eighteen months, since the Imam Bedr was overthrown, on 25th September, 1962, a week after he succeeded his father, by a military coup d'état carried out by a group of pro-Egyptian officers. Their leader, Abdulla Sallal, an unknown officer, assumed the rank of Marshal and proclaimed himself President of the so-called Yemen Republic. The rebels announced that the Imam had been killed when his palace was shelled, but he escaped and retired to the mountains, where he was joined by the tribes who were loyal to him.

This coup d'état was no genuine revolt by the Yemenis against a repressive government. It was the dénouement of a deliberate act of policy on the part of President Nasser of Egypt and his supporters in the cities of the Yemen, many of whom had been trained in Cairo. His part in the affair was clearly demonstrated by the arrival of Egyptian troops in the Red Sea immediately before the revolution and their entry into Sanaa after the attempt to kill the Imam. President Nasser's support assured the success of the revolution in the towns; without it the new Imam would have been able to carry out the reforms which he had announced to his people.

If Nasser succeeded in conquering the Yemen, he would control the frontiers between it and Aden and the South Arabian Federation, which he seeks to disrupt. By arms smuggling and infiltration, he might upset the precarious political situation in Aden and the Federation. He would be on the borders of Saudi Arabia, which he has constantly threatened and denounced, (although there is at present an uneasy peace between that country and Egypt), and within easy striking distance of the Persian Gulf oil fields, whose wealth he covets.

The new régime was immediately recognised by the USSR, the UAR and other Arab republics, by some European governments and by the United Nations, which hurriedly gave Sallal's representative a seat in the Assembly. Saudi Arabia and Jordan supported the Royalists. On 19th December, 1962, America recognised the Republic, with the conditions that non-Yemeni troops should be withdrawn, and that the Republic should honour previous agreements and desist from making claims outside the Yemen. The conditions were ignored. There are now between 30,000-40,000 Egyptian troops in the Yemen, and Sallal constantly reiterates that Aden and the Federation are part of the Yemen. Britain withheld recognition of the Sallal régime on the ground that it was not in control of the

whole country. This was contrary to the views of those MP.s and other observers who visited the Yemen but did not venture outside the area held by Sallal and the Egyptians. Others who went into the Royalist held country had a very different tale to tell.

At the end of 1962, in spite of a heavy build-up of Egyptian forces, provided with tanks, aircraft and modern weapons, many of them of Russian origin, the military position was a stalemate. In addition to the Egyptians, there were a number of Russian so-called 'technicians' employed on building airfields and dealing with aircraft. Their number has been stated to be 1,000-2,000. There are no recent reports of Chinese activities, though there were at one time a number of Chinese in the country. Recently the Republican forces have been joined by Algerians. Then, as today, the Royalists held the mountain country, and Sanaa and the main towns on the coastal plain were in the hands of the Egyptians, sometimes closely beleaguered. The Royalists had help from Saudi Arabia and, at one period, from Jordan. The military situation has remained more or less static, though U Thant's latest report suggests that the Royalists have had some recent successes.

America's position over the Yemen has been a difficult one. In the hope of finding a compromise solution that would help to stabilize the area, she acknowledged the Sallal régime, even though its existence depended on the support of a foreign power, Egypt. At the same time, she had to keep on good terms with pro-Royalist Saudi Arabia, so as not only to avoid provoking interference with US oil interests in that country, but, more importantly perhaps, to prevent any chance of a general conflict that might endanger oil supplies to Western Europe.

In March 1963 the American Government sent Mr. Ellsworth Bunker, with the rank of ambassador, to smooth things out in Saudi Arabia. This was followed by Dr. Ralph Bunche, United Nations' Under-Secretary, visiting Sanaa on a short fact-finding mission, but his investigations did not take him beyond the Republican area. He declared himself 'concerned' at the continued presence of Egyptian troops despite Nasser's previous assurance that they would be withdrawn. The result of Ambassador Bunker's and Dr. Bunche's negotiations was the acceptance by Saudi Arabia and Egypt of the 'disengagement agreement' by which Saudi Arabia agreed to stop helping the Royalists, and Egypt agreed to withdraw her troops, a suggestion which, when it was first mentioned, was greeted with noisy horror by Cairo commentators. But no date was laid down in the agreement for the withdrawal of troops. In recent weeks this fact has been advanced by Nasser as a justification for retaining his troops in the Yemen. He has stated publicly that he will not withdraw until all members of the Imam's dynasty are removed even if this takes one, two or five years.

To supervise the carrying out of the agreement, United Nations sent to the Yemen a mission, under General van Horn, consisting of 200 Canadians and Yugoslavs who were to stay there for four months. As United Nations was heavily in debt, owing to lack of financial support by many of the member states,

it was proposed that the cost of the mission should be paid by Saudi Arabia and Egypt. This was agreed, after some haggling on the part of Egypt who proposed payment in kind not in cash. The cost of maintaining about one third of her military forces in a state of war in the Yemen must heavily tax Egypt's financial resources. Most of the observers, when they arrived, were given the very difficult task of watching the frontier between Saudi Arabia and the Yemen. They were not able to check the arrivals and movements of Egyptian troops, who could freely enter the country by air or by sea. Saudi Arabia, as was later admitted by United Nations, carried out the terms of the disengagement agreement, but it was a very one-sided affair. This evidence of partiality, which has never been explained, is one of the factors which could eventually discredit United Nations intervention in international problems. Responsibility lies heavily on the UN Secretariat who are responsible for the control of UN missions abroad. A similar danger exists in Cyprus where British troops are involved in a United Nations operation.

In Sanaa the Republicans were having difficulties. There were political quarrels, rivalry between members of the Zaidi and Shafi sects and indications of growing dislike by many of the Republicans of their Egyptian allies. A ban was imposed on all political parties and the military college was closed. Sallal went off to Cairo with the avowed object of arranging for the Yemen Republic to be accepted as a member of the UAR, but all that he obtained was an assurance of co-operation.

In June 1963 there was some publicity in the Western press about Egyptian bombing of Yemeni villages, and allegations that poison gas was used. United Nations authorities made no attempt to investigate these charges, declaring that no word about poison gas had been received by them. This was not surprising, for UN ignored the existence of the Royalists, and from press reports it appears that the commander of the observers was forbidden to have any contact with them. Later it was admitted by Egypt that napalm bombs had been used on the civilian population, whose only fault was to resist invasion. The matter of aerial bombardment was raised in July in the American Senate by Senator Hickenlooper of Iowa, a member of the Foreign Relations Committee. He advocated the withdrawal of recognition of the Sallal régime and a reduction in the aid given to Egypt. His proposals were not approved, but towards the end of the year the American Government made it plain that future assistance to Egypt would be affected by her failure to withdraw her troops.

On 20th August General van Horn suddenly resigned, giving as his reason lack of co-operation by UN headquarters and inadequate provision of aircraft and transport. This was a shock to people who put their trust in United Nations, especially to the Scandinavian countries. He was succeeded by General Gyani, who was afterwards sent to Cyprus. After his appointment, U Thant described the work of the UN mission as being in 'full swing' but a few days later he admitted that he had completely failed to secure disengagement, for which he, rightly, blamed Egypt but, perhaps for diplomatic reasons, he

blamed Saudi Arabia as well. The work of the mission had ended in fiasco. It failed to supervise the withdrawal of Egyptian troops, because no withdrawal had taken place, and it ignored reports of indiscriminate bombing of villages, which has been stepped up in the last few weeks, and the allegations about poison gas.

In April 1963 a Yemen Relief Committee had been set up in London under the Chairmanship of Sir Peter Agnew, Bt., MP., with the object of providing medical help for the sick and wounded, especially the civilian population, on the Royalist side. The Egyptians and Republicans were well provided for. The Royalists had neither doctors, hospitals nor medical supplies, and conditions were appalling. The Committee, which is still working actively, has sent out about five tons of medical supplies to the Yemen.

In October 1963 a disturbing report was issued by the International Committee of the Red Cross. The situation on the Royalist side was described as becoming 'catastrophic'. The report referred to hundreds of war orphans, destruction of houses and water supplies, danger of epidemics and 'international indifference' to the sufferings and terrible privations of the sick and wounded and the civilian population in the Yemen, 'where fighting continues as bitterly as ever.' A field hospital was established by the IRC on the Yemen-Saudi Arabia frontier, and has done valuable work in the western section of the fighting area.

At the end of 1963 the Egyptians, with more than 30,000 troops, tanks, artillery and complete air control, had failed to subjugate the Yemen. They and the Republicans knew well that if Egyptian troops were withdrawn the Royalists would regain control of the country within a few days. There was a state of near anarchy among the Republican leaders. Sallal, an ailing man, had become a puppet of Egypt and at the beginning of January 1964 he handed over effective control to the Egyptian commander, General Abdul Mohsen Kamal Murtazi.

The life of the ineffectual UN observer mission had been extended to 4th January when it was replaced for a further period until the first week in May by a political entity of mixed nationalities in place of the patrolling group. It was accepted that Saudi Arabia was carrying out her part in the agreement. A new UN official, Mr. Pier Spinelli, was put in charge of the mission. He showed a more realistic attitude and pressed for contact with both opposing sides, seeking a solution for the future by agreement between the Royalists and Republicans but he was not successful. He, in his turn, like his predecessor, is reported to have been transferred to Cyprus.

The Arab Conference was held in January 1964, attended by thirteen Heads of State and ministers, including King Saud and Sallal. No specific statement was issued about the Yemen but the matter was discussed, and King Hussein of Jordan put up proposals for a settlement, though after the conference it was announced from Saudi Arabia that King Saud had not discussed the Yemen with Sallal. The press release from 'The League of Arab States' referred to the justice of the Arab struggle and the necessity of supporting it against "imperialism" in the

occupied 'Yemen South', by which was meant Aden and the SA Federation. At the beginning of February 1964, on 'Unity Day', Nasser in a speech said that Egyptian revolution was not for export, but at the same time, he claimed the right to interfere in support of Nationalist revolutions. He again produced the excuse of there being no set time limit for the withdrawal of his army. He also threatened that if Britain and America supported Israel over the Jordan waters question, Western bases in the Middle East should be liquidated. In spite of the tremendous drain on Egyptian resources there are no signs that Nasser will be forced to withdraw for financial reasons. He could only do so, without losing face, if the Republican régime could continue without his support.

U Thant's latest report on the Yemen refers to the continued military and political stalemate, lack of implementation of the disengagement treaty, and considerable reinforcement of the Egyptian troops. Meanwhile, there have been visits by both Iraqi and Egyptian delegates to Saudi Arabia with the object of coming to some agreement about the Yemen, but nothing has come of these efforts. Sallal is now visiting Moscow where he is said to be seeking financial support.

The Commonwealth is closely affected by the situation in the Yemen, owing to its propinquity to Aden and the SA Federation and the Persian Gulf oil states which would be threatened if Nasser held the Yemen. He has already declared his opposition to the Federation and to Western bases in the Middle East.

The British Government should continue to withhold recognition of the Sallal régime and use all possible means in consort with the USA, to persuade United Nations to insist on the withdrawal of Egyptian troops. If this can be achieved we need to call for no more than a referendum in the Yemen under a neutral body to decide upon the future form of government and whether the Imamate is to be solely religious or temporal and religious. The reforms which were outlined by Prince Saif al Islam, uncle of the Imam, during his recent visit to London, providing for a democratic form of constitution, could then be carried out, but only if and when foreign troops have withdrawn.