

LEGITIMACY AND POLITICAL CHANGE IN YEMEN AND OMAN

by J. E. Peterson

Not so long ago, the principal function of the Persian (Arabian) Gulf in Western eyes was to protect the approaches to India. In the past few decades, however, its role has changed dramatically. Today, the Gulf is at the center of Western concern and adjacent areas are considered important at least partially for their role in protecting approaches to the Gulf. Obviously, Saudi Arabia and, to a lesser extent, its neighbors along the Arab littoral of the Gulf, viz. Kuwait, Bahrain, Qatar, and the United Arab Emirates (UAE), comprise the core of present Western concern over Gulf security. But the security of the core is highly dependent on circumstances in the surrounding area or periphery. One obvious example of the interrelationship between the core and its periphery comes from the Iran-Iraq war, with potential spillover of hostilities and possible blockage of nearly all oil exports from the Gulf. One can also discern a pattern of potential threats to Gulf security from circumstances on both the east (with the Soviet presence in Afghanistan) and west (continuing strife in the Horn of Africa). But within this broad panoply of challenges to Gulf security, one key area for concern often receives short shrift: the southern rim of the Arabian Peninsula.

This rim consists of three states: the Sultanate of Oman, the People's Democratic Republic of Yemen (PDRY, South Yemen, or Democratic Yemen), and the Yemen Arab Republic (YAR, North Yemen, or simply Yemen). There are a number of reasons why the southern rim states should be of importance to Western political and strategic planners concerned with the Gulf. First, the states occupy strategic locations at the entrances to the major waterways bounding the Arabian Peninsula. Oman's Musandam Peninsula constitutes the southern shore of the Strait of Hormuz, the only point of egress from the Persian (Arabian) Gulf. On the other side, the border between the two Yemens touches the Red Sea at its southern entrance, the Bab al-Mandab Strait. South Yemen's Perim Island almost exactly bisects this key strait.

A second factor of strategic import concerns demography. The combined population of these three states exceeds the five core states.

J. E. Peterson is the Thornton D. Hooper Fellow in International Security Affairs at the Foreign Policy Research Institute, and author of *Oman in the Twentieth Century* (1978) and *Yemen: The Search for a Modern State* (1982). He is also the editor of *The Politics of Middle Eastern Oil* (1983).

It is North Yemen, not Saudi Arabia, that undoubtedly boasts the most inhabitants of any peninsula state. Furthermore, a considerable percentage of the adult male population of Oman and both Yemens works in the core states and constitutes perhaps the majority of the labor force there. A third consideration: Oman and Yemen are traditional civilizations of considerable antiquity, and Omanis and Yemenis rightfully are proud of their heritage in areas such as architecture, agricultural engineering, literature, and scholarship. They tend to consider Gulf Arabs as unsophisticated nouveaux riches and this distinction is reinforced by a legacy of rivalries and even war between the Saudis and the Omanis and Yemenis.

Ideology points to a fourth strategic factor. South Yemen, as the only Marxist state in the Middle East, displays a political orientation completely opposite from the other seven states in the Arabian Peninsula. While Aden's potential—and even its inclination—to promote its ideology throughout the rest of the peninsula has been vastly overblown, it remains true that considerable friction has been present between South Yemen and its three neighbors since its independence in 1967. A related concern involves the existence of a Soviet toehold in the region. Moscow provides considerable economic and military assistance to South Yemen (combined with aid from several other Communist states). North Yemen also receives some aid and advisers from the Soviet Union. Kuwait is the only other peninsula state that even maintains diplomatic relations with Moscow. Finally, Oman's membership in the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC), whose other members are Kuwait, Saudi Arabia, Bahrain, Qatar, and the UAE, provides a fifth reason for outside interest in the southern rim of Arabia. While Oman's oil production pales beside that of Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, and the UAE, its strategic position at the mouth of the Gulf and superior military capability within the GCC make Oman a key element in the council's plans.

In recent years, the United States has made some effort towards strengthening direct political relationships with North Yemen and Oman. Diplomatic relations with South Yemen, however, were broken in 1971. Apart from an abortive attempt at dialogue in 1978, there have been no direct channels of communication between Washington and the PDRY. The United States has provided economic assistance to the North for three decades and, in the past few years, some military aid, including equipment and training. But all too often, U.S. policy regarding the Yemens has been filtered through Saudi perceptions and objectives. Given Yemeni resentment of Saudi interference in internal affairs, such a "secondhand" policy is bound to have serious disadvantages for Washington.

The rekindling of U.S. interest in Oman has appeared even later (the two countries had signed a treaty in 1833 but diplomatic ties

'lapsed early in this century). As in other parts of the Arab Gulf littoral, Britain served as intermediary between Oman and the outside world, notwithstanding Oman's legal independence throughout the modern era. The British connection in Oman only partially has been loosened despite official British withdrawal from the Gulf in 1971. Nevertheless, the United States, seeking facilities for its military forces in the region, has courted Oman spiritedly and has received substantial cooperation from Muscat. It should be kept in mind, though, that U.S. goals have been formulated and action taken entirely without reference to the nature of Omani history, society and politics and the constraints that these factors pose for Oman and by extension the United States.

Such a short-term, short-sighted approach to foreign-policy-making creates considerable, unnecessary risks, and, as has happened elsewhere, is likely to backfire. A productive, mutually beneficial U.S.-Yemeni or U.S.-Omani relationship demands intimate familiarity with the background and essential character of the country and its people. It requires a recognition of the complex political, economic, and social environments in which these regimes and political elites find themselves, and a willingness to accommodate these manifold constraints. At the very heart of politics in these countries lies the search for legitimacy. For any U.S. policy regarding Yemen and Oman to be effective, it must be formulated with this central problem in mind.

Legitimacy and Political Change in Yemen and Oman

This study focuses on the nature of political legitimacy in what are now the Yemen Arab Republic and the Sultanate of Oman.¹ On opposite sides of the Arabian Peninsula, these two countries exhibit a remarkable number of basic similarities in political environment (including geography, economy, society, and religious expression) and historical experience. Similarities have also characterized their political systems until the past several decades. Since then, the two countries have proceeded along divergent paths of political change. (See Table I.) The reasons for this development and its impact on politics in Yemen and Oman constitute the heart of the present inquiry, which seeks to provide answers to two

¹ This interpretive essay has grown out of extensive research on Yemen and Oman at various times over the past nine years. This research provided the material for two books, *Oman in the Twentieth Century: Political Foundations of an Emerging State* (London: Croom Helm; New York: Barnes & Noble, 1978), and *Yemen: The Search for a Modern State* (London: Croom Helm; Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1982), as well as various articles and monographs. Fuller treatment of many points raised in this paper and justification for my conclusions may be found in these publications. An earlier version of this paper was read at a seminar of the Persian Gulf Project, at the Center for Strategic and International Studies, Georgetown University, Washington, D.C., May 12, 1982. I wish to thank the following for their comments on various drafts of this paper: Professors Dale F. Eickelman, George W. Grayson, Joel D. Schwartz, Robert W. Stookey, and J. C. Wilkinson.

fundamental questions: (1) why has the divergence in political evolution between these two countries occurred, and (2) what effect has this divergence had on legitimacy in Yemen and Oman?

The Arabian Peninsula has been the site of illustrious pre-Islamic civilizations, and the birthplace of Islam and center of its subsequent expansion. But in recent centuries, Arabia has been one of the most isolated parts of the Middle East, if not the world. Contact with the world was limited largely to the periphery of the peninsula, with its ancient ports from which seafarers long had made their way to Africa and Asia. Until very recently, however, the interior has remained untouched, with its traditional way of life, culture and values virtually intact. For this reason, the Arabian Peninsula provides an ideal setting to study the effects of recent, rapid change—in economic, social, and political spheres—on what are still heavily traditional societies.

This is especially true for the two countries of direct concern to this paper. Yemen and Oman, the twin citadels of Arabia, stand apart from the rest of the peninsula in a number of ways, being clearly distinct in geography, culture, religion and politics. Arabia has been influenced by two broad cultural traditions, often expressed in terms of the dichotomy between *badū* and *ḥaḍar*, nomadic and sedentary peoples, the desert and the sown. The heritage of Saudi Arabia and the Gulf emirates is principally *badū*, while Yemen and Oman belong to the *ḥaḍar* tradition.² Yemen and Oman have produced “hydraulic” civilizations of great antiquity, and display a history of “national” political organization that stretches back even two millennia. Unlike elsewhere in Arabia, there is a sense of unity and shared identity in Yemen and Oman that far predates the emergence of nation-states there in the twentieth century. Yemen and Oman constitute strongly self-defined, historically self-contained political communities of a “national” character, which stand out in contrast to the localized, tribalized pattern of traditional political organization elsewhere in the peninsula.

The boundaries of the modern states differ considerably from the territory traditionally encompassing Yemen and Oman. These differences are relatively recent in appearance and their emergence in large part derives from the gradual development of modern nation-states in the region. The Yemen Arab Republic comprises only the middle section of geographical Yemen. A separate state has emerged to the south in the People’s Democratic Republic of Yemen, which gained its independence

² A broad generalization at best, this dichotomy does not conform perfectly to present national boundaries. For example, subsistence agriculture is the predominant economic activity in the ‘Asir region of southwest Saudi Arabia, and Mecca, Madina, and Jidda are sophisticated and ancient cities. Fishing and pearling long have been predominant activities for sedentary populations along the Gulf shores. However, sizable *badū* (bedouin) populations are to be found in Yemen and Oman.

TABLE I
COMPARATIVE CHRONOLOGY

Year	Yemen	Oman
1895		Hināwī tribes lay siege to and nearly succeed in capturing Muscat.
1904	Yahyā b. Muḥammad Ḥamid al-Din is elected <i>imām</i> .	
1913		Sālim b. Rāshid al-Kharūṣī is elected <i>imām</i> in opposition to coastal sultanate; Taymūr b. Fayṣal Al Bū Sa'īd succeeds his father as <i>sulṭān</i> .
1915		Imamate attack on Muscat repulsed by Indian Army troops.
1918	Imamate becomes internationally recognized successor state to Ottoman possession of Yemen.	
1920		Sultanate recognizes autonomy of inner Oman as result of agreement of al-Sib.
1932		Sa'īd b. Taymūr Al Bū Sa'īd succeeds his father as <i>sulṭān</i> .
1934	Imamate expansion effectively checked through treaties with Britain and Saudi Arabia.	
1948	Imām Yahyā is assassinated and new imamate established briefly before Yahyā's son Aḥmad gains control.	
1954		Sulṭān Sa'īd uses British assistance to restore sultanate's control of inner Oman, although the process is not entirely completed until 1959.
1962	Army officers instigate a coup d'état and establish Yemen Arab Republic (YAR) with Egyptian assistance; Imām Muḥammad al-Badr escapes and eight-year civil war between republicans and royalists ensues.	
1965		Discontent in southern province of Dhufar flares into open rebellion.
1967	YAR's first president, 'Abd Allāh al-Sallāl, leaves country and is replaced by 'Abd al-Raḥmān al-Iryānī.	
1970	Civil war is finally brought to a close with national reconciliation and incorporation of some royalists into YAR government.	Sulṭān Sa'īd is deposed in palace coup d'état and is replaced by his son Qābūs.
1974	Corrective movement by army officers replaces President Iryānī with military Command Council headed by Col. Ibrāhīm al-Ḥamdī.	
1975		Sultanate brings Dhufar rebellion to virtual termination, with extensive British and Iranian assistance.
1977	President Ḥamdī is assassinated and replaced by Col. Aḥmad al-Ghashmī.	
1978	President Ghashmī is killed in South Yemen—instigated bomb explosion and replaced by Lt. Col. 'Alī 'Abd Allāh Ṣāliḥ.	

in 1967 after 128 years of British control. The northern territories of Jizān, 'Asīr and Najrān were absorbed into Saudi Arabia during the early part of this century and permanently lost to Yemen as a result of its defeat in the 1934 Saudi-Yemeni war.

The disparity between traditional and modern boundaries is just as considerable in Oman. The Arabian Gulf coast of geographical Oman—variously referred to in the past as Peninsular Oman, Trucial Oman or the Trucial Coast—over the last two centuries gradually fell away from political affiliation with the rest of Oman and in 1971 became the independent federation of the United Arab Emirates. Simultaneously, the Sultanate was extending its control to the southern province of Dhufar (Zufār), not traditionally considered part of Oman. Long claimed as the personal property of the Omani ruling family, Dhufar has been truly integrated into the rest of the country only in the past few years. This study is not concerned with the whole of geographical or traditional Yemen and Oman but concentrates on their two heartlands: the full territory of the YAR and the present Sultanate of Oman excluding Dhufar and the northern tip of the Musandam Peninsula.³

Legitimacy is necessarily a fundamental concept in any study of political change.⁴ It may be assumed that a political entity is legitimate when the people believe that it not only has the power but also the right to govern, when it is perceived as both adhering to the political goals and ideals of the community and actually carrying out the responsibilities that the people theoretically have entrusted to it. But legitimacy is not a constant. The current standards of legitimacy in Yemen and Oman differ greatly from the traditional roots of legitimacy. The ability of the Yemen Arab Republic and the Sultanate of Oman to act with legitimate authority founders on a major dilemma, one common to most Afro-Asian nations. Their political systems predominantly are based on new or "modern" concepts and institutions and heavily dependent on Western influences.

³ Comprehensive studies of South Yemen include: R. J. Gavin, *Aden Under British Rule, 1839-1967* (London: C. Hurst, 1975); and Robert W. Stookey, *South Yemen: A Marxist Republic in Arabia* (Boulder, Colo.: Westview Press, 1982). On the background of the UAE and the formation of the independent state, see: Muhammad Morsy Abdullah, *The United Arab Emirates: A Modern History* (London: Croom Helm; New York: Barnes & Noble, 1978); John Duke Anthony, *The Arab States of the Lower Gulf: People, Politics, Petroleum* (Washington: Middle East Institute, 1975); Frauke Heard-Bey, *From Trucial States to United Arab Emirates* (London: Longman, 1983); Ali Mohammed Khalifa, *The United Arab Emirates: Unity in Fragmentation* (Boulder, Colo.: Westview Press; London: Croom Helm, 1979); and Rosemarie Said Zahlan, *The Origins of the United Arab Emirates: A Political and Social History of the Trucial States* (London: Macmillan, 1978). Accurate information on Dhufar is much more scarce. Some background on the province and its people is included in Fawwaz Trabulsi, "The Liberation of Dhofar," *MERIP Reports*, January 1972, pp. 3-11; and J. E. Peterson, "Guerrilla Warfare and Ideological Confrontation: The Rebellion in Dhufar," *World Affairs*, vol. 139, no. 4, 1977, pp. 278-95.

⁴ The following discussion of legitimacy is a synthesis derived from a wide variety of materials. A particularly useful summarization of applicable theoretical discussions on this topic is to be found in Michael C. Hudson, *Arab Politics: The Search for Legitimacy* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1977), esp. chap. 1.

These systems, however, have been uncertainly superimposed on socio-economic milieux that display traditional goals and institutions and that persistently retain the primary allegiance and attention of most of the people.

Because of the difficulty in legitimation encountered in many political systems or regimes, attempts often are made to achieve legitimacy on a personal or ideological basis in the short run, with the hope that this strategy may produce the time to develop structural or institutional legitimacy. But nationalism often provides the only workable ideology, which, although necessary, does not alone provide sufficient cohesion for a political system. As the experience of a single Yemeni nation split into two states shows, nationalism may hinder rather than assist in the process of legitimation. Consequently, many regimes are forced to rely heavily on the personal legitimacy or charisma of their leaders. This route, however, is both ephemeral and extremely risky, as Yemen's unhappy history of assassinations demonstrates.

The process of change is a recurrent theme throughout this study. However belatedly, Yemen and Oman are caught in the throes of modernization, with its inevitable transformation of their economies, societies and political systems. In part, modernization is an age-old process of regeneration. But it also has come to be applied more narrowly to relatively recent concepts of socioeconomic development and at least some degree of Westernization. Thus, Third World governments tend to emphasize some aspects of modernization as a deliberate policy goal, one shared by at least part of their populations, and seek to minimize the disruptions engendered by rapid change. But, just as modernization is not a process initiated by groups or governments, it is not controlled by them. Furthermore, it does not necessarily benefit either the government or the population as a whole. The "absolute benefit" in such a process may be only economic, but even there the frustrations born of unfulfilled expectations may have negative consequences.

One basic component of the modernization process is economic change, reflected in a variety of manifestations. On the national level, the desired goal of economic change is often the transformation of the country's traditional, rural, agriculture-based economy into a developed, nationally integrated and diversified economy that substantially raises the standard of living and facilitates continued and steady growth. Successful development strategy involves the utilization of the requisite factors by a competent central authority according to a rationally conceived planning process. Both Yemen and Oman have experienced substantial inflows of capital in recent years. Their governments' effectiveness in development planning and execution eventually will spell the difference

between a transient rise in personal consumption patterns and the successful harnessing of these capital inflows to help advance overall development goals.

Like most Third World countries, Yemen and Oman also face the problem of radical social change. Part of the process of modernization involves the subtle emergence of new outlooks and broader socialization. No longer is the individual's world primarily defined by the tribe or village, an environment largely self-contained in its economy, politics, and legal and moral prescriptions. The old, rigid structure of society begins to disintegrate as the individual increasingly ignores the traditional occupations and social identity of parents and family. Instead, new avenues of social mobility are pursued, particularly through expanded opportunities in employment, trade and education. International labor emigration in these two countries has had particularly strong impact on social change.

A third arena of change lies in politics. Traditionally, politics in both countries was largely decentralized, with considerable autonomy existing on the local level and little more than an arbiter or "manager" present at the national apex. While the capabilities and functions of the national governments were limited considerably, popular expectations and tolerance of those governments were correspondingly low. The patchwork effect of modernization, however, seems to have raised expectations among some sectors even as the governments' attempts to exercise new functions expected of it have aroused the antipathy and open opposition of other sectors. The contest between center and periphery, uncertainly balanced in the best of times, has intensified. While the modernizing center appears to have the advantage of steadily enhanced capabilities, it faces the actual or at least potential liability of internal divisions, along personal and ideological lines, culminating in fragmentation and violent clashes. Yemen and Oman have experienced well-organized rebellions by modernist movements in recent years. Not only does modernization threaten the existing basis of legitimate authority, but also introduces changing and frequently contradictory requirements for legitimation.

Neither Yemen nor Oman has displayed a simple two-stage progression from a "traditional" political system to a "modern" one. This observation remains true even if "traditional" and "modern" are defined simply in terms of goals and intentions, rather than accomplishments. Since change is a permanent feature of these countries' histories, there can be no purely or absolutely traditional system. Even the creation of a substitute political system, with the outward form, institutions, trappings and commitment to "modern" ideas and constitution, does not displace the existing, largely traditional, society nor does it put an end to the exercise and distribution of power along wholly or quasi-traditional lines.

In the following pages, the process of political change in Yemen and Oman, in response to shifting determinants of legitimacy, is categorized in terms of three broadly defined phases: the traditional, the neotraditional, and the modernizing or post-traditional. Decentralization and limited central authority characterized the political systems of the traditional phase. On both the national and constituent levels, the exercise of power conformed to the goals, responsibilities and constraints long present in a traditional, inward-looking society. The neotraditional phase produced political systems based on the personal strength and direction of a single individual who introduced certain significant innovations into the system—particularly as they enhanced his own authority—in a defensive and ultimately futile attempt to maintain the traditional goals and values of the society. The modernizing phase in both cases was initiated by radical attempts to replace existing regimes and redefine the scope and role of the state. With this step, both states have committed themselves to policies of socioeconomic development, including the consequent restructuring of political systems to advance that goal.

It may be useful to note that the terminology employed here to delineate these three phases is similar to but not congruent with Weber's typology of legitimate authority deriving from either traditional, charismatic, or rational bases. In explaining traditional authority, Weber noted that "obedience is not owed to enacted rules, but to the person who occupies a position of authority by tradition or who has been chosen for such a position on a traditional basis."⁵ Thus, "traditional authority" by definition is not "rational." A premise of this paper, however, is that the institutions of the traditional phase of politics in Yemen and Oman were rationally conceived within an Islamic framework, exercised authority with the consent of the community, and retained legitimacy as long as they performed designated functions in a prescribed manner. Weber's traditional authority therefore may correspond more closely to this paper's neotraditional category. While the Yemeni and Omani political systems are no longer based on traditional or neotraditional sources of authority, they obviously do not conform to Weber's rational/legal type. Nevertheless, they appear to seek that ideal as a goal and thus may be termed "modernizing" or, alternatively, "post-traditional," as S. N. Eisenstadt has put it.⁶

The official adoption of the modernizing course of action is, of course, clearly distinct from the actual establishment of an environment conducive to its accomplishment. It is precisely this gap that in large part

⁵ Max Weber, *The Theory of Social and Economic Organization*, trans. A. M. Henderson and ed. Talcott Parsons (New York: The Free Press, 1964), p. 341.

⁶ "Post-Traditional Societies and the Continuity and Reconstruction of Tradition," *Daedalus*, vol. 102, no. 1, 1973, pp. 1-27.

is responsible for the crisis in legitimacy faced by many Third World states, including Yemen and Oman. The intention of this study is to examine the basis or utility of comparison between these two particular countries, and to analyze their progression through traditional, neotraditional, and modernizing phases in order to evaluate the consequences of political change for legitimacy in Yemen and Oman.

The Political Environment

There are a number of striking similarities between the political environments of Yemen and Oman. This observation applies in particular to certain aspects of geography, society (especially in the nature and role of tribalism), and religion. The location and topography of Yemen and Oman to a significant degree have determined their historical, economic, social and political evolution. These countries lie at the forgotten extremities of the Arabian Peninsula and not, at least in recent times, at the crossroads. Their heartlands exhibit three principal geographic regions: coastal lowlands, mountainous highlands, and inner plateaus.

The coastlines are bordered by narrow plains, sparsely inhabited except along the coast itself. These plains—flat, barren, hot and humid—historically have been vulnerable to invasion. The few ports, past and present, have been windows on the outside world and gateways to trade and settlement in many lands. The emergence of culturally and ethnically mixed populations there, in contrast to the interiors, has been one consequence of the outward orientation of these coastal plains. On the countries' opposite flanks lie the inner plateaus: broad plains separating the heartlands from the sand dunes of the immense Rub' al-Khālī desert. They support few inhabitants, mostly nomads. Largely restricted to these economically marginal plateaus, the bedouin have had little impact on either Yemeni or Omani heritage and culture.

The mountainous central zones constitute the essential cores of Yemen and Oman. Inner Oman's highlands are formed by the elongated Ḥajar range, which stretches from the extreme east of the country in a parallel course to the Gulf of Oman coast until it finally reaches the Strait of Hormuz. The Yemeni highlands are more complex topographically, with extensive cross-ranges, higher peaks and more rugged countryside. These highland zones contain the largest proportion of both countries' population, principally sedentary agriculturalists living in small settlements tucked away in the valleys or clinging to steep mountainsides and highly dependent on efficient irrigation systems. The total population of Oman has never been conclusively determined, as an official census has yet to be undertaken, but the middle-range estimate of 750,000 inhabitants has

come to be widely accepted. Extrapolating from Yemen's 1975 census, current population there is approximately six million.⁷

These countries' similar combinations of topography, climate and agriculture have tended to perpetuate an emphasis on local identification, to preserve the longstanding isolation of the interior, to maintain inherent centrifugal forces tending towards political decentralization, and to sustain the tribal nature of social organization that has existed for millennia. These divisive effects traditionally have been counterbalanced only by Islam, which has fostered a common spirit of brotherhood and responsibility, and contributed to the development of religious institutions embracing administrative functions and preservation of order. However, as will be made clear in the following section, Islam has been successful only sporadically in generating and maintaining a cohesive national unity and statehood.

Even though most Yemenis and Omanis always have shared some broader identification as Muslims and/or members of a vague national entity, their effective universe has been most often defined by the tribe.⁸ Generally speaking, the tribe was—and in some cases remains—a self-contained unit, geographically, socially, economically, legally and politically. Traditionally, emphasis was placed on collective rights and responsibilities within the corporate unit to which the tribesman belonged; there could be no tolerable existence for him outside the tribal context. The tribe occupied a clearly defined territory and largely was economically

⁷ For further information on population distribution, climate, and agriculture, see: Swiss Technical Co-operation Service, Swiss Airphoto Interpretation Team, *Final Report on the Airphoto Interpretation Project* (Zurich: for the YAR Central Planning Organization, April 1978); *Yemen Arab Republic: Development of a Traditional Economy*, World Bank Country Study (Washington: World Bank, 1979); Mark Speece, comp., *Environmental Profile of the Sultanate of Oman* (Tucson: Office of Arid Lands Studies, University of Arizona; for U.S. Man and the Biosphere Secretariat, U.S. Department of State, June 1981); and J. C. Wilkinson, *Water and Tribal Settlement in South-East Arabia: A Study of the Aflaj of Oman* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1977). Discussion of the progressive disuse of the intricate irrigation systems of Oman in recent years is to be found in: id., "Changes in the Structure of Village Life in Oman," Tim Niblock, ed., *Social and Economic Development in the Arab Gulf* (London: Croom Helm, 1980), pp. 122-34; and J. S. Birks and S. E. Letts, "Diqal and Muqayda: Dying Oases in Arabia," *Tijdschrift voor Econ. en Soc. Geografie*, vol. 68, no. 3, 1977, pp. 145-51. Recent developments in Yemen are outlined in Richard Tutwiler and Sheila Carapico, *Yemeni Agriculture and Economic Change* (Şan'ā': American Institute for Yemeni Studies, 1981).

⁸ There is a great dearth of material on tribal society and organization in these two countries. Ethnographic studies on the area to date have tended to focus on such subjects as the social structure of villages and towns or the role of women. Several larger historical treatments contain substantial information on tribes, as do the treatises of traditional historians in both countries. See Robert W. Stookey, *Yemen: The Politics of the Yemen Arab Republic* (Boulder, Colo.: Westview Press, 1978); Wilkinson, *Water and Tribal Settlement*; 'Abd Allāh 'Abd al-Karīm al-Jarāfi, *al-Muqatafa min tarīkh al-Yaman* (Cairo: 'Isā al-Bābi al-Ḥalabi, 1951); 'Abd Allāh 'Abd al-Wahhāb al-Mujāhid al-Shamāhi, *Al-Yaman: al-insān wa-al-ḥadāra* (Cairo: al-Dār al-ḥadītha lil-ṭibā'a wa-al-nashr, 1972); 'Abd Allāh Ḥumayd al-Sālimi, *Tuḥfat al-a'yān bi-sirat ahl 'Umān*, 5th ed. (Kuwait: Dār al-ṭalī'a, 1394/1974); Muḥammad 'Abd Allāh al-Sālimi, *Nahḍat al-a'yān bi-hurriyat 'Umān* (Cairo: Dār al-kitāb al-'Arabi, 1380/1961?); and 'Abd al-Wāsi' Yaḥyā al-Wāsi', *Tarīkh al-Yaman*, 2nd ed. (Cairo: Maṭba'at Hijāzi, 1947). The discussion here is largely based on some firsthand observation and more specific sources as referenced in Peterson, *Oman in the Twentieth Century*, esp. chap. 4; id., *Yemen*, esp. chap. 1; and id., "Tribes and Politics in Eastern Arabia," *Middle East Journal*, vol. 31, no. 3, 1977, pp. 297-312.

self-sufficient. Membership was based on kinship ties, although the assimilation of client groups over the course of several generations often occurred. Legally, the tribesman's primary responsibility was to the tribe: a transgression by any member brought shame on the entire tribe; likewise, insult or attack upon any member had to be avenged or defended by all. In many localities, especially Yemen, codes of behavior were based on 'urf, tribal law, generally antedating *sharī'a*, Islamic law, and varying from one place to another. Until recently, these factors combined to work against tribal cooperation on a national level and against allegiance to a central authority.

Despite the relative proximity of Yemen and Oman to the historical centers of Islam, for many centuries the communities there have functioned largely in isolation from the mainstream of Islamic history and culture. One consequence has been the emergence of religio-political states based on small, variant Islamic sects, which have disappeared almost entirely elsewhere but have been preserved in these mountainous bastions because of their physical invulnerability, cultural insularity, and adaptability to the requirements of local conditions. Although distinct in historical origins, the Zaydī sect in Yemen (one of many offshoots from Shī'ī Islam) and the Ibādī sect in Oman (the only surviving remnant of the early Khārijī movement) resemble each other in a number of ways.⁹ Tenets and practices in both cases are very close to the mainstream of Sunnī Islam, a development perhaps conditioned by the probability of slight Sunnī majorities in the population of both countries. Both Zaydism and Ibādism are characterized by a strongly democratic process of selection of *imāms*, the secular and religious leaders of the community, and by their emphasis on austerity in daily life. The appearance and adaptation of these sects to the Yemeni and Omani environments produced the traditional states or political systems that long prevailed there.

The Traditional States

The traditional "national" political systems of Yemen and Oman were based on their Zaydī and Ibādī cores, only intermittently extending over the Sunnī areas of these countries. The operation of these

⁹ The Zaydis constitute one of the first offshoots from Shī'ī Islam, as a consequence of a dispute over the fifth *imām*, thus their other name of "Fivers." Zaydis today are found only in Yemen. See R. B. Serjeant, "The Zaydis," in A. J. Arberry, gen. ed., *Religion in the Middle East: Three Religions in Concord and Conflict* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1969), vol. 2, pp. 285-301. The Khārijī sect, the first in Islam, soon divided into extremist and moderate parties. Only the moderate Ibādī expression survives today, chiefly although not exclusively in Oman. See Tadeusz Lewicki, "al-Ibādiyya," *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, 2nd ed., vol. 3, pp. 648-60; Roberto Rubinacci, "The Ibādīs," in Arberry, *Religion in the Middle East*, vol. 2, pp. 302-17, and J. C. Wilkinson, "The ibādī imāma," *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies*, vol. 39, pt. 3, 1976, pp. 535-51.

systems rested essentially on two primary elements: the tribe as the basic political unit and the imamate as the only supratribal political institution, serving in effect as a national quasi-government. The tribe functioned as a self-contained ministate, with political autonomy reinforced by such factors as the postulation of shared kinship, economic self-sufficiency, and recognized geographic limits. Tribal leadership was vested in the *shaykh*, who in theory was chosen in democratic fashion but more often took power by hereditary descent from within an aristocratic clan.¹⁰ The *shaykh's* role was not as ruler as much as *primus inter pares*, a mediator and conciliator within the tribe, and its spokesman to the outside world.

Tribal self-containment gave rise to a decentralized, centrifugal political system. Primary identification with the tribe meant that disputes and rivalries between tribes had a natural tendency to escalate into open warfare. A complex and interlocking network of alliances caused many local disputes to expand and embrace more than just the initial tribes involved. On a national level, these alliances were partially formalized into competing confederations. Omani tribes were thus either Ghāfirī or Hināwī; Yemeni tribes were divided into Ḥāshid, Bakīl, 'Akk or Madhhaj alignments—although the latter two confederations gradually have disintegrated in the twentieth century.

This decentralized system concomitantly produced a situation allowing the *shaykhs* of major tribes to acquire positions of power and influence far beyond the confines of their own tribes. As a result, real power on the national level was held by a handful of paramount *shaykhs* who dominated tribal confederations: the *shaykh al-mashāyikh* of Yemen and the *tamīma* of Oman. The chronicles of inner Oman and highland Yemen are replete with references to such family names as Ḥārithī, Nabhānī and Khalilī in Oman, and Aḥmar, Abū Luḥūm and Abū Ra's in Yemen. The aggregation of power in intertribal blocs, of course, did not lead to national unity, nor did it even ameliorate national fragmentation. Though able to exercise considerable power on the national level, no paramount *shaykh* could aspire to overall national leadership. Only Islam served as a supratribal force, linking these disparate units together through the institution of the Zaydī and Ibāḍī imamates.

Responsibility for interpreting Zaydī and Ibāḍī doctrine and upholding Islamic law lay with the '*ulamā'*, the religious scholars, who also functioned as mediators in village and tribal disputes. As a body, the '*ulamā'* were responsible for selecting from their ranks an *imām*, who

¹⁰ On occasion, leadership could be sought outside the tribe. Oman provides the example of the Bani Ruwāḥā extending an offer to the Awlād al-Khalilī clan of the Bani Kharuṣ tribe, which has subsequently provided the Ruwāḥī *shaykhs*, as well as the principal *imām* of the twentieth century. See Peterson, *Oman in the Twentieth Century*, pp. 128-29.

served as the elected leader of the sectarian community.¹¹ The *imām* was not only the religious leader of the Zaydīs or Ibāḍīs but also the temporal head of a political entity.¹² Consequently, his election was not just a matter of concern to the '*ulamā'*' but to the tribal leaders as well. Without their support, no *imām* could function effectively. Without the acknowledgment of both confederations (Ghāfirī and Hināwī in Oman; Ḥāshid and Bakīl in Yemen), no *imām* could appear as a national leader but only as the spokesman for a particular confederation. Thus, a consensus of opinion on a particular candidate was required in order to secure his election and subsequent efficacy.

But the very necessity of wide-ranging tribal support limited the *imām's* role to "chairman" of a very loose political system, rather than its ruler. This in turn required the successful *imām* to display considerable skills in management and negotiation in order to keep the tribes in check and maintain an overall, if loose, cohesion to the polity. The religious tenets of the Zaydī and Ibāḍī sects legitimized the political role of the *imām*, but his power was limited by the lack of any means of physical coercion. Ultimate control rested with the tribes, and armed force could be fully mobilized only by recourse to moral sanctions (such as actions against tribes who violated the law) or when the community was confronted with an external threat.

These factors point to the impermanence of "pure" imamates. While religious qualifications were necessary for candidacy as *imām*, election in a practical sense depended on support from the *shaykhs*, thus creating a tendency towards protégés. When *imāms* were able to enhance their standing in the community and acquire a measure of independence and power, the office often was passed on to a relative and led to the establishment of dynasties. This in turn provoked a reaction and return to a "pure" imamate in a continuing series of cycles. Thus, the traditional political systems in Yemen and Oman were inherently unstable, being uncertainly balanced between deep-seated centrifugal forces and the recurring attempts of ambitious *shaykhs* and *imāms* to extend the range of their authority. By the late nineteenth or early twentieth century, another destabilizing factor came into play: the emergence of externally generated pressures for "modernization."

¹¹ In Yemen, the *imām* necessarily had to be *sayyid*, i.e., a descendant of the Prophet Muḥammad. Many of the '*ulamā'*', both Zaydī and Sunni, are also *sayyid*, and thus constitute a hereditary social class that formerly enjoyed political primacy. Other '*ulamā'*' belong to the *qāḍī* class, which in Yemen signifies another hereditary group traditionally providing lesser-ranking judges and administrators but holding social rank superior to the tribesman. Oman displays far less social stratification than Yemen and there are no formal hereditary requirements for *imāms*, nor are there any *sayyids*.

¹² The functions of the *imām* included issuing opinions on religious matters, arbitration (between individuals and tribes), rudimentary administrative duties, and command of the community's armed forces. Since there was no standing army, the *imām* was necessarily dependent on tribal levies and thus on the *shaykhs*.

The Neotraditional States

Despite the outward trappings and the pronouncements of foreign observers, neither the twentieth-century imamate of Yemen nor the pre-1970 sultanate of Oman fit the category of a traditional state. External circumstances and internal pressures had prompted changes and adaptations, however subtle. While these developments constituted significant departures from the past, they were not sufficiently radical to relieve pressures for further change. In part, these processes of political evolution were the latest manifestations of the continuing cycle of change, disintegration and regeneration endemic to these unstably constituted polities. But they also occurred in response to such newly emergent factors as modernization and the infiltration of nationalist ideas and other secular ideologies.

The immediate response to these changing conditions in both countries was the appearance of neotraditional rulers. These individuals sought to preserve the existing traditional society, values and goals, by enhancing or enlarging their capability to control the state.¹³ In so doing, however, they altered the nature of the decentralized political system, transforming the basis of authority from traditional to neotraditional. A crumbling of legitimacy was the result, for the traditionalists, who opposed any change, and the modernists, who saw not nearly enough change. Facing widespread opposition, the neotraditional rulers moved increasingly towards paternalism and eventually authoritarianism, thereby largely forfeiting claims to legitimacy.¹⁴

¹³ S. N. Eisenstadt draws a clear distinction between "tradition" and "traditionalism." Traditionalism "denotes an ideological mode and stance oriented against the new symbols; it espouses certain parts of the older tradition as the only legitimate symbols of the traditional order and upholds them against 'new' trends. Through opposing these trends, the 'traditionalist' attitudes tend toward formalization on both the symbolic and organizational levels." ("Post-Traditional Societies," p. 22.) While Yemen and Oman's rulers of this era may have been basically traditionalist in outlook, their political actions tended to be somewhat more innovative.

¹⁴ In addition to the citations in note 8, the history of these two countries is covered in Robin Bidwell, *The Two Yemens* (London: Longman; Boulder, Colo.: Westview, 1983); Derek Hopwood, ed., *The Arabian Peninsula: Society and Politics* (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1972), esp. contributions by J. C. Wilkinson, R. D. Bathurst, and J. B. Kelly; J. B. Kelly, *Britain and the Persian Gulf, 1795-1880* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1968); Robert G. Landen, *Oman Since 1856: Disruptive Modernization in a Traditional Arab Society* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1969); Eric Macro, *Yemen and the Western World Since 1571* (London: C. Hurst, 1968); and Samuel Barrett Miles, *The Countries and Tribes of the Persian Gulf* (London: Harrison and Sons, 1919; London: Frank Cass, 2nd ed., 1966). For studies concentrating more directly on the neotraditional era, see Mohamed Anam Ghaleb, *Government Organizations as a Barrier to Economic Development in Yemen* (Bochum: Ruhr University Institute for Development Research and Development Policy, for the YAR National Institute of Public Administration, 1979; originally an M.A. thesis for the University of Texas, Austin, 1960); David Holden, *Farewell to Arabia* (London: Faber and Faber; New York: Walker, 1966); al-Sayyid Muṣṭafā Sālim, *Takwīn al-Yaman al-ḥadīth: al-Yaman wa-al-Imām Yahyā, 1904-1948*, 2nd ed. (Cairo: Jāmi'at al-duwal al-'Arabiya, Ma'had al-buḥūth wa-al-dirāsāt al-'Arabiya, 1971); Ian Skeet, *Muscat and Oman: The End of an Era* (London: Faber and Faber, 1974); Manfred W. Wenner, *Modern Yemen, 1918-1966* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1968); and Mohammed A. Zabarah, *Yemen: Traditionalism vs. Modernity* (New York: Praeger, 1982).

The emergence of the neotraditional state in Yemen began with the election of Yaḥyā b. Muḥammad Ḥamīd al-Dīn as *imām* in 1904. By 1911, Yaḥyā had been sufficiently successful in leading resistance to the Ottoman occupation of Yemen to secure autonomy in imamate-controlled regions and recognition of his spiritual authority in the remaining Zaydī areas of the country. With the Ottoman departure after World War I, acting in the guise of a strong nationalist leader, Yaḥyā aggressively campaigned to unify all of Yemen under his control, including Sunnī (Shāfi'ī) as well as Zaydī areas. By 1934, these efforts had recovered all of the territory now comprising the Yemen Arab Republic. But Yaḥyā's legitimacy as a nationalist leader ultimately suffered from his—and later his son Aḥmad's—inability to dislodge the British in the south and from the "loss" of the northern regions of 'Asīr, Jīzān and Najrān to Saudi Arabia in the disastrous 1934 war.

From 1934 until his assassination in 1948, Yaḥyā redirected his energies toward internal consolidation of his authority and the creation of a viable central government, answerable to him personally. To this end, control of the hinterland was strengthened by the establishment of a standing army and the naming of his sons as governors of key provinces. Tighter control over affairs in Ṣan'ā', the capital, was assured by expanding the scope of administrative functions and appointing other sons as supervisors of old and new political institutions. The regime sent Yemen's first students abroad: military cadets to Iraq in the 1930s and civilian students, the "Famous Forty," to Lebanon in the late 1940s. An early attempt was made to introduce some direction to the nascent national economy by the establishment of a Yemen trading company.

The neotraditional process of consolidation was continued under Yaḥyā's son. Aḥmad moved quickly and surely to enhance the Ḥamīd al-Dīn family's preeminence. With the failure of the 1948 coup d'état against Yaḥyā and Aḥmad's assumption of firm control, many prominent Yemenis found themselves in prison and their property confiscated. Aḥmad continued to depend on family members in key positions and increasingly relied on his son Badr as his deputy. Ties to the outside world became more frequent and regularized, and a small but necessary bureaucracy was created to handle the modest foreign aid schemes offered Yemen. Despite these alterations, the intention of the *imāms* remained essentially unchanged: to maintain the traditional nature of Yemeni society by tightening their control over the state. At the same time, their ability to stifle socioeconomic change steadily decreased. The result was the incomplete military coup d'état of 1962.

Oman's experience was more complicated. The establishment of a new "pure" imamate followed a brief Persian invasion in the mid-

eighteenth century. As had happened before, this imamate degenerated into a dynasty that gradually refocused its attention on the coast and sea. Eventually, the capital was moved to Muscat (Masqaṭ) and a thriving maritime empire was established. It seems likely that only the interference of the British prevented the demise of this Āl Bū Sa'īd dynasty and its replacement by a new "pure" imamate. The Muscat-based dynasty's abandonment of the mantle of religio-political legitimacy, the office of *imām*, was eventually followed by assumption of the totally secular title of *sulṭān*.

Gradually, the expansionism and dynamism of the Āl Bū Sa'īd state dissipated and its fortunes dwindled to the point of physical control only over the capital and coastal regions and financial viability was maintained only by British subsidies and loans. Attempts to rejuvenate the imamate in the interior foundered on tribal bickering and the failure to displace the British-backed *sulṭāns*. A siege of Muscat in 1895 nearly succeeded and Indian Army troops prevented success in 1915. By 1920, a bifurcated situation was formalized through the Agreement of al-Sīb whereby the coastal sultanate relinquished administrative control but not sovereignty over the interior with its reconstituted imamate. This anomalous state of affairs lasted until the 1950s when the sultanate, with British assistance, succeeded in politically reuniting interior and coast.

British influence in Muscat through the first three decades of this century was omnipresent, financially, politically and militarily. The energy of Sulṭān Fayṣal b. Turkī (r. 1888-1913) had been vitiated by adverse circumstances: a deteriorating economy, a rebellious interior, and a haughty if not hostile British attitude. His son Taymūr (r. 1913-1931) showed little interest in governing his state, spent much of his time isolated in the southern province of Dhufar or abroad, and finally was allowed to abdicate, as he had long wanted, when his son came of age. It was left to Sa'īd b. Taymūr (r. 1932-1970) to take the initiative in regaining full control of the sultanate.

Sa'īd's attention first was directed to reasserting the preeminent authority of the *sulṭān* in Muscat. Partially, this involved bringing recalcitrant family members to heel. Simultaneously, Sa'īd patiently worked to erase the state's debt to the Government of India and thus remove a principal reason for British involvement in the sultanate's day-to-day affairs. By the end of World War II, the sultanate effectively had regained its independence from British supervision and the *sulṭān's* self-confidence was such that he began to play plans for reunification of coast and interior. Success in this endeavor was achieved only after the death of the respected Ibāḍī *imām* in 1954 and the raising of a military force, with funds provided by the oil company, Petroleum Development (Oman) Ltd.,

which occupied Oman unopposed in late 1953. Although opposition from several tribes and their *shaykhs* continued until the end of the decade, the sultanate's authority firmly and permanently was re-established in the interior.¹⁵

Following national reunification, Sa'īd was determined to introduce or tolerate as few changes as possible. Leaving the rudimentary administrative structure in Muscat in the hands of a few trusted deputies, the *sultān* retired to his inaccessible seafront palace in Dhufar, never to return to his capital after 1958. But the growth of the oil economies in the Gulf and increasing employment of Omanis there prompted considerable pressure for change. The contrast between the bustling pace of development in Kuwait, Saudi Arabia and Qatar, and the stagnation in Oman became more glaring to many Omanis with every year. Sa'īd's failure to respond to changing circumstances and growing expectations led to increasing opposition to his paternalistic rule and a coalition of forces emerged that finally succeeded in ousting him from power.

Stagnation and Sa'īd's refusal to countenance any change was most pronounced in Dhufar, which was ruled as the personal property of the *sultān*. Not surprisingly, scattered acts of dissidence, particularly in the mountains, flared into open revolt in the mid-1960s, and the rebellion acquired a Marxist complexion by 1968. The serious threat posed by this rebellion largely prompted Sa'īd's subordinates to move against him in 1970.¹⁶ Seeming inaction by the *sultān* after the state began receiving oil revenues in 1968 constituted a second major reason for his removal. It is not entirely fair to say that Sa'īd refused to utilize these modest funds for development purposes. Instead, his earlier experience

¹⁵ The restoration of the imamate in inner Oman in the twentieth century, its challenge to Muscat, and the sultanate's re-assumption of control over the interior have been studied in M. Graeme Bannerman, "Unity and Disunity in Oman: 1895-1920" (Ph.D. diss., University of Wisconsin, Madison, 1976); J. E. Peterson, "The Revival of the Ibādi Imamate in Oman and the Threat to Muscat, 1913-1920," *Arabian Studies*, vol. 3, 1976, pp. 165-88; id., "Britain and 'the Oman War': An Arabian Entanglement," *Asian Affairs* (London), vol. 63, pt. 3, October 1976, pp. 285-98; and Laura Vecchia Vaglieri, "L'Imamato Ibadita dell'Oman: La Ricostituzione dell'Imamato Ibadita nell'interno dell'Oman," *Annali dell'Istituto Universitario Orientale di Napoli*, vol. 3, 1949, pp. 245-82. In his study of the extension of Sultān Sa'īd's authority over inner Oman and the demise of the imamate, Dale F. Eckelman concludes that this relatively smooth transition occurred because Sa'īd "intended to maintain 'the Oman that was,'" without threatening the interests and status of the existing leaders of the interior while promising to uphold traditional Ibādi religious tenets and administration of justice. "From Theocracy to Monarchy: Authority and Legitimacy in Inner Oman, 1935-1957," Ronald Cohen and Judith Drick Toland, eds., *Legitimacy and the State* (Philadelphia: Institute for the Study of Human Issues, forthcoming).

¹⁶ For additional information on the rebellion in Dhufar, see Fred Halliday, *Arabia Without Sultans* (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1974; New York: Vintage, 1975); Walid W. Kazziha, *Revolutionary Transformation in the Arab World: Habash and his Comrades from Nationalism to Marxism* (London: Charles Knight; New York: St. Martin's Press, 1975); and Peterson, "The Rebellion in Dhufar." Accounts by British officers who served there, either in command positions or in the field, are contained in John Akehurst, *We Won a War: The Campaign in Oman, 1965-1975* (London: Michael Russell, 1983); Ranulph Fiennes, *Where Soldiers Fear to Tread* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1975); Tony Jeapes, *SAS: Operation Oman* (London: William Kimber, 1980); and K. Perkins, "Oman 1975: The Year of Decision," *Journal of the Royal United Service Institution*, March 1979, pp. 38-45.

with the link between insolvency and vulnerability to external interference caused him to act too cautiously in instituting development projects. The tangible results from these became apparent only after his ouster.

There are strong similarities between Sa'īd b. Taymūr of Oman and Yaḥyā b. Muḥammad of Yemen and his son Aḥmad, as neotraditionalist rulers. They ruled as strong-willed nationalists, consolidating political authority and control in their own hands, rather than serving as elected *imāms* dependent on the continued approval of the community. They sought to establish and maintain central governments, and increase their control over the state by expanding the functions of these governments, albeit in a limited sense, while simultaneously attempting to minimize the impact of these changes on society. They introduced the first roots of functional bureaucratic organization, regularized the minimal contact existing with the outside world, and assumed a limited degree of responsibility for the national economy. Until the last few years, they were able to counter potential opposition by increasing the state's coercive powers, particularly through the development of standing armies with imported arms, instructors and even officers.

Attempts were made to enhance the rulers' personal powers by circumventing the elites who traditionally had played essential roles as governors and administrators and replacing these with close family members and individuals personally loyal to and dependent on the rulers.¹⁷ Finally, all three men displayed strict personal adherence to traditional social values and religious requirements, and they sought to enforce this outlook and lifestyle on their subjects in the best paternalistic manner. Given the changed circumstances of the time, the only way this could be accomplished, they believed, was through maintaining and expanding their tight control of the government apparatus.

The Modernizing or Post-traditional States

Yemen's 1962 revolution and Oman's 1970 palace coup d'état provided visible proof that the neotraditional states were unable to cope with the wide scope and deep-seated nature of emerging challenges to their legitimacy. Most important, perhaps, were the growing pressures upon the state to allow socioeconomic change and even to promote it through systematic development efforts. Neither state had been able to

¹⁷ Frequently, these rulers relied upon foreigners, who had no independent power base nor any reason to challenge the ruler and thus could be safely relied upon—or so it was thought. A prominent example in Oman was Ismā'il al-Raṣāṣī, a Palestinian governor of Maṭrah and director of various government agencies for Sulṭān Sa'īd, who also employed a number of Indian officials. Imām Yaḥyā in Yemen was heavily dependent on a Turkish Cypriot, Rāghib Bey, as his foreign minister. This tactic was also employed in the armies but with dangerous results, as both Sa'īd and Yaḥyā were to discover.

erect thorough barriers against the intrusions of the modern world. Knowledge of available material benefits began to trickle into the countries, a process to which visitors contributed. The migration of Yemenis and Omanis abroad in search of work further accelerated this process: Yemeni communities sprang up in such disparate environments as Aden, Ethiopia, Britain, the United States and Saudi Arabia; Omanis long had travelled to East Africa and India and later provided a substantial part of the workforce in the oil-engorged Gulf states.¹⁸ But more than just a thirst for a more prosperous lifestyle was introduced. New ideas and a growing dissatisfaction with the restrictions and oppression of existing regimes became apparent.

The first of a myriad of ideological currents to appear were ones concerned with the modernization of Islam and Arab nationalism. These were felt first and more strongly in Yemen, perhaps because of the Ottoman presence and Oman's relatively greater and longer isolation from the Arab world (and corresponding closer ties to India and Africa). In Yemen, these early stirrings crystallized in the Free Yemeni Movement, a liberal grouping supported by the Ikhwān al-Muslimūn (Muslim Brotherhood). The movement cooperated with more traditional reformers in the abortive revolution of 1948.¹⁹ The failure of this attempt to bring about a "more modern" government discredited the Islamic reformer/liberal approach and opened the way for other, more secular and radical ideologies. Nasirist army officers were responsible for instigating the 1962 revolution and it was not until the end of the long civil war that the new republic finally rejected any imprint of Ba'athism, Nasirism, Marxism or the Arab Nationalists' Movement.

For Oman, these ideological currents seemed to be grafted onto longstanding indigenous disputes, further abetted by outside forces. While the controversy of the 1950s was actually a struggle over the sultanate's reassumption of control over inner Oman and the resistance of principally two tribes, it was presented internationally as a fight by Arab nationalist forces (featuring an unlikely alliance of support by Saudi Arabia and Egypt) against a colonialist puppet of a *sultān*. The Dhufar rebellion of the 1960s and 1970s began as a reaction to Sa'īd b. Taymūr's extremely constrictive paternalism and only later acquired Marxist overtones, complete with support from newly independent South Yemen.

The growing discontent over rulers' repressive policies and futile efforts at near-complete isolation fueled attempts at rebellion and

¹⁸ By 1970, it could be estimated that there were 50,000 to 100,000 Omanis abroad, and Yemen's 1975 census showed more than 500,000 Yemenis working outside the country. These figures, principally adult males, represented roughly 10 per cent of each country's total population.

¹⁹ See al-Tayib Zein al-Abdin, "The Free Yemeni Movement (1940-48) and its Ideas on Reform," *Middle Eastern Studies*, January 1979, pp. 36-48.

a defensive alliance between moderate reformers and a new generation of heirs apparent who saw themselves as modernizing monarchs: Oman's Qābūs b. Sa'īd and Yemen's Muḥammad b. Aḥmad al-Badr. While in his teens, Qābūs had been sent to study in England and only returned home after graduation from Sandhurst and a brief stint in the British army. But the *sultān* kept his son inactive and frustrated in Ṣalāla, capital of the southern province of Dhufar. Eventually Qābūs became involved with a small group of Omanis and expatriates who organized a putsch to replace Sa'īd with Qābūs. Substantial changes were visible almost immediately. Development became a primary goal and the governmental machinery to accomplish this was gradually established. The country was reintegrated into Arab and international politics. Eventually, the Dhufar rebellion was put down by a combination of greater and more effective force (including extensive outside assistance) and steps toward rectifying the original grievances.²⁰

In Yemen, Imām Aḥmad quickly and effectively had crushed the "revolutionary" government of 1948, neutralized the opposition, and ruled in the manner of his father. The liberal reformers, unable to generate effective opposition, pinned their hopes on Aḥmad's son, Muḥammad al-Badr. Gradually, Badr acquired a reputation as a "reformer" and "progressive". Left in charge during his father's extended absence abroad for medical treatment in 1959, Badr took advantage of the opportunity and introduced changes in the government by appointing a representative council. He accepted Egyptian teachers and military instructors, purchased Czechoslovak planes, and even arranged to acquire Soviet arms, having earlier visited Moscow. Unlike Qābūs, Badr could neither attract an influential coterie nor hold the allegiance of a British-trained and officered army. Vacillation between naive and incomplete reform measures and the necessity of following his father's orders gained him little support from either the traditionalists and *shaykhs*, who favored his uncle Ḥasan, or from Yemen's relatively more radicalized officer corps.

Upon Aḥmad's death in 1962, Badr apparently decided to follow closely in his father's footsteps. This provoked the army officers to carry out their coup d'état and thus set in motion the long civil war between the supporters of the new republic and the followers of the imamate. It took eight years for the civil war to end, the Egyptians to leave, the extremists on both sides to be rejected, and national recon-

²⁰ Sources treating politics in post-1970 Oman, in addition to those cited earlier, include: John Duke Anthony, "Political Dynamics in the Sultanate of Oman" (unpublished paper written for the External Research Program of the U.S. Department of State, October 1974); J. E. Peterson, "Oman, Persian Gulf and U.S. Security," Z. Michael Szaz, ed., *The Impact of the Iranian Events Upon Persian Gulf and U.S. Security* (Washington: American Foreign Policy Institute, 1979), pp. 165-82; and John Townsend, *Oman: The Making of a Modern State* (London: Croom Helm; New York: St. Martin's Press, 1977).

conciliation to be implemented.²¹ But the Thermidorean, conciliatory nature of the new regime, essentially seeking to re-create the institution of the imamate without the essential figure of the *imām*, doomed it to failure.

In 1974, the military re-entered the political arena, and over the next eighteen months, one officer managed to establish predominance. A number of factors help to explain the success of Colonel Ibrāhīm al-Ḥamdī. A career army officer, he had played a central role in the creation of several key, detribalized, professional units that were fiercely loyal to him. As a member of the *qāḍī* class, he enjoyed neutral standing: being neither Sunnī nor Zaydī, urban nor tribal. Furthermore, he seemed to possess a clear vision of how Yemen could develop and how he could push the process along. At the same time, Ḥamdī was politically astute at removing potential rivals. He showed considerable skill in maintaining the balancing act necessary for any Yemeni leader. Internally, balance must be kept between the myriad of political factions, ranging from the *shaykhs* on the far right to the Marxist components of the dissident National Democratic Front. Externally, Yemen walks a tightrope between archconservative Saudi Arabia on the north and South Yemen, the only Marxist state in the Middle East. The balancing act applies equally to the two superpowers as well.

The promise of Ḥamdī tragically was cut short by his assassination in 1977. He was succeeded by uneducated, unsophisticated, seemingly incompetent Zaydī tribal army officers whose backgrounds served to limit their effectiveness and alienate them from most segments of the population. Their feeble control of the government has continued largely through inertia, coercion, the opportunities afforded by the extreme fragmentation of the political system, and considerable luck.²²

²¹ Politics in the YAR, in addition to those sources cited above, has been the subject of: Robert Burrowes, "Political Construction in the Yemen Arab Republic: An Imperative for the Late 1970s" (unpublished paper written for the External Research Program of the U.S. Department of State, June 1977); id., "State-Building and Political Institutionalization in the Yemen Arab Republic, 1967-77" (unpublished paper presented at the 1977 Middle East Studies Association annual meeting, New York); Patrick Labaune, "Système politique et société en République arabe du Yémen" (doctoral thèse, Université de Paris—I, 1979); J. E. Peterson, *Conflict in the Yemens and Superpower Involvement* (Washington: Georgetown University, Center for Contemporary Arab Studies, 1981); id., "The Yemen Arab Republic and the Politics of Balance," *Asian Affairs* (London), October 1981, pp. 254-66; R. B. Serjeant, "Société et gouvernement en Arabie du Sud," *Arabica*, vol. 14, 1967, pp. 284-97; id., "The Two Yemens: Historical Perspectives and Present Attitudes," *Asian Affairs* (London), February 1973, pp. 3-16; and Robert W. Stookey, "Social Structure and Politics in the Yemen Arab Republic," *Middle East Journal*, vol. 28, no. 3, 1974, pp. 248-60; vol. 28, no. 4, 1974, pp. 409-18.

²² Ḥamdī's immediate successor was Colonel Aḥmad al-Ghashmī, a career tank officer, brother of the *shaykh* of a small Ḥāshid tribe northwest of Ṣan'ā', and Ḥamdī protégé. Ghashmī, as deputy chairman of the ruling Command Council, immediately took power on Ḥamdī's death, with the blessing of the Saudis, and proceeded to remove Ḥamdī's supporters from positions in the army and government. Nine months later, Ghashmī was killed by a bomb exploding in his office, the bizarre consequence of a power struggle in neighboring Aden. A close subordinate, the young and little-known Lt. Colonel 'Alī 'Abd Allāh Ṣāliḥ, was elected president a month later by the People's Constituent Assembly. Ṣāliḥ came from an undistinguished Ḥāshid tribe not far from Ṣan'ā' and also made his career in the tank corps. Both Ghashmī and Ṣāliḥ suffered from the problem that many perceived them as being implicated in Ḥamdī's death.

The Reasons for and Consequences of Political Divergence

By the beginning of the 1980s, Yemen and Oman had come to display a thorough contrast in their political styles. In Oman, a viable and capable central government exercised firm control over the entire country and had taken direct charge of a burgeoning development effort. The sultanate, once on the verge of collapse, appeared to be strong and healthy. Sulṭān Qābūs was the indisputable head of state and the unchallenged center of authority. The YAR, on the other hand, remained a heavily fragmented and often ineffectual state. Extensive areas of the country were outside the government's jurisdiction: the tribes maintained *de facto* autonomy in the north and east; a radical rebel front held sway over much of the south. The YAR was forced to maintain a balancing act between its neighbors and the superpowers, as well as between competing internal forces of tradition and change. Colonel 'Alī 'Abd Allāh Ṣāliḥ uncertainly grasped the reins of power in an office that had seen the assassination of two immediate predecessors and the removal by armed force of the two presidents before these.

The varying courses of political evolution over the twentieth century have produced diametrically different results in terms of political legitimacy. The Sultanate of Oman appears to be relatively legitimate with little or no discernible challenge to its authority. The YAR, however, suffers from a serious lack of legitimacy and is constantly challenged by extremists of the left and right, and by its Sunnis who bitterly resent the continued Zaydi domination of the state. The cause of these two divergent paths of political change seems to lie in the varying impact of factors promoting and/or detracting from legitimacy.

Any assessment of legitimacy in Yemen and Oman must rest on the two questions posed earlier: why has the divergence in political evolution between these two countries occurred, and what effect has this divergence had on legitimacy in Yemen and Oman? One reason for divergence may lie in the contrasting natures of the countries. While it is certainly true that Yemen and Oman exhibit a number of important similarities, the parallel should not be overdrawn. Inherent differences may be nearly as important as similarities in explaining their recent development. The great disparity in population size, with Yemen's six million people overshadowing Oman's 750,000, would indicate a lesser propensity for government control in the larger state. This factor is reinforced by the more rugged terrain of Yemen and the relatively tighter tribal organization of Oman. More pronounced social stratification in Yemen and continuing tension between Zaydis and Sunnis has further reduced national cohesion. Oman's relatively greater and longer isolation also reduced the inflow of new ideas, especially from the Arab world.

A second principal reason for divergence derives from the opportunities provided by oil in Oman and the costs resulting from its absence in Yemen. The potential and then production of oil presented the Omani government with several definite advantages. First, the possibility of oil meant that Sulṭān Sa'īd was provided with financial and military assistance in reuniting interior and coast under the sultanate. Later, oil revenue allowed the government under Sulṭān Qābūs to back up its development rhetoric with tangible results. Oil also allowed the sultanate to reinforce its authority through the creation and maintenance of a strong, centralized, well-trained and equipped military apparatus. Finally, it provided the state with the means to exercise effective control over the national economy and to efficiently utilize the country's resources. All of these factors are missing in Yemen.

A third reason for divergence has been the opposite impact of direct external involvement. For Oman, this influence was principally British and constructive. Britain gradually acquired responsibilities for defense of the state, its financial viability, implementation of the machinery of government and even the education of its rulers. Though the preeminent British supervision was lessened first under Sa'īd and then Qābūs, the outcome has been a capable government exercising full control over its entire territory. In fact, the direct nature of past British involvement may be responsible for the survival of the sultanate and its eventual ability to provide a national rallying point in response to external threats, whether from Saudi Arabia in the 1950s or South Yemen in the 1970s. A related positive factor has been the sultanate's ability since 1970 to generate overriding external support for the government. With the exception of South Yemen, no neighboring state encourages or harbors dissidents.

In contrast, outside influences in Yemen have been destabilizing, serving most often to polarize the country's politics and prevent the development of any sense of national cohesion. The British role here was divisive: Aden and its hinterland were fully and permanently severed from the heartland, unlike Muscat and inner Oman. The civil war of the 1960s opened the way for extensive outside manipulation of both sides: until 1967, the Ṣan'ā' government was heavily directed from Cairo, while Saudi cash and encouragement kept the royalist camp together. The end of the fighting did not reduce external intrusions. Instead, Saudi Arabia replaced Egypt's strong voice in YAR activities and policies, particularly since Riyadh came to contribute a considerable share of the country's operating budget. The Saudis also continued to bankroll the northern tribal leaders and civilian politicians and army officers in Ṣan'ā'. The inability of the *imāms* and presidents to dislodge foreign invaders and/or manipulators of Yemeni politics has had a direct and negative impact on their

standing as nationalist leaders. The YAR also is buffeted from the south by a radical state that advances its claim to be the legitimate government of Yemen and feels no more compunction than the Saudis about interference in the YAR's internal affairs.

A final divergent factor has been the impact of substantially variant experiences in creating new and viable foundations of legitimate political systems: the sultanate in Oman and the republic in Yemen. Both countries have gone through a historical progression from states based on religious authority to states dependent on purely secular foundations. These new systems are patterned on modern, secular ideas and institutions but have been superimposed on still heavily traditional societies. In Weberian terms, the traditional basis of authority has been forsaken; however, neither state has been able to substitute a legal or rational basis and the fragile alternative of charismatic leadership has been successful only fitfully.

Consequently, there has been need of a substitute national political institution, a post-traditional source of authority symbolic of national unity. The sultanate has fulfilled this requirement for Oman, both in the paternalistic figure of the *sultān* and in the ability of the government to provide essential services and maintain order, particularly through the effective and professional armed forces. Conversely, there has been very little "centrality" to Yemen's governments. The failure of the Iryānī regime (1967-74), the first post-revolution attempt to establish a truly national government, was due essentially to its efforts to re-create a largely traditional state without the essential figure of the *imām*. Subsequent presidents also have faced the problem of projecting an image of a fully national leadership, and overcoming perceptions of them as members of specific social or tribal groupings. The acceptability of any Yemeni government is further complicated by the weakness of the central government, fragmentation of the military, and Zaydī-Sunnī divisions.

Yemen, in particular, also faces the serious problem of political factionalization. No consensus exists on a single strategy of political development, nor is there even tacit agreement among competing groups to work together within the system. Instead, personal and ideological rivalries are ubiquitous. At one end of the spectrum are the traditionalists, who oppose any centralization of authority in Yemen. They are divided between those who favor the traditional nature of government and the *shaykhs*, whose power rests on opposition to any government at all (and whose ranks are further fissured along tribal lines). They are opposed by the modernists, who seek to enhance the position of the central government but are divided on the best means for accomplishing this. Here are found Western-style conservatives and liberals, as well as Nasirists,

Ba'athists and Marxists. Some modernists, particularly from the latter categories, completely reject the authority of the existing government and have banded together in the underground National Democratic Front. This results in the proliferation of a large number of cliques operating at cross-purposes and in a situation tending towards stagnation, rather than progression, in terms of state-building.

Oman is not so constrained. Rivalries largely are limited to personal clashes that are moderated because ultimate power rests in the hands of the *sulṭān*. Consequently, factionalism is downplayed and working within the system is rewarded in prestige and financial opportunities. The appeal of secular ideologies still has been largely subsumed in the rush to development and attainment of prosperity. The one radical organization to appear in recent years, the Popular Front for the Liberation of Oman, was unable to extend its following from Dhufar to the rest of Oman. It failed to maintain its position even in the mountains of Dhufar because of both the eventual military superiority of the sultanate and its allies, and the emergence of a new regime in 1970 that was able to respond to the original grievances of Dhufaris and then integrate surrendering rebels into government positions.

Returning to the second central question of this paper, what effect has this divergence had on legitimacy in the two states? Or, put another way, what constitutes essential requirements for legitimacy as suggested by the experience of Yemen and Oman? First, there must exist some consensus on the proper exercise of authority, a provisional agreement on who is to wield power. The wielding may be coercive to some extent but it cannot be, at least as perceived, repressive. That is, there must be a successful adaptation of leadership and institutions from the traditional basis of authority to the post-traditional. Second, there must be a clear ideological direction to the state, in terms of the state's goals, composition and institutions. This can be provided, in part, by nationalism. In the present cases, Oman and Yemen have successfully stressed their place within pan-Arab nationalism. While the sultanate is virtually unchallenged as the defender of Omani nationalism, the YAR faces the serious dilemma of two Yemeni states claiming leadership of a single nation. On another level, ideological direction is present in Oman through the generally accepted, conservative, state-centered, cautiously modernizing approach taken by the sultanate. Yemen, however, is beset with uncertainty and conflicting opinions.

Legitimacy in the long run is highly dependent on the structural or institutional capability of the state to provide two major functions. One is the ability to maintain order. The original appearance of imamates was closely linked to the need for a supratribal institution to ameliorate tribal

warfare. Presently, a major difference between the YAR and the Omani sultanate has been the former's failure and the latter's success in providing order and stability. In addition to this, a principal effect of modernization, however, has been to change the citizenry's expectations of a government. Order is not enough; a government must also take the lead in promoting development and raising the standard of living for all groups and classes. This central function provided a significant difference between the neo-traditional state of Sulṭān Sa'īd and Imāms Yaḥyā and Aḥmad, and their successors.

Both countries share the need for basic infrastructural development, almost from scratch in both cases because of the lateness in adopting development as a major policy goal. Although the needs and goals are similar, there is a wide gap in the states' ability actually to foster this process. The difference essentially comes down to oil, or the lack of it. Oman's production is modest by Gulf standards, but is sufficient to allow the government to give impetus to the development process. The state is clearly perceived as willing and able to provide basic services, such as health care, education, roads and water supplies, throughout the countryside. The YAR's poverty, on the other hand, means that the government cannot provide expected functions and services and consequently little reason exists to accept voluntarily the state's authority. Furthermore, the low level of government income and involvement in the national economy means that it has only marginal control of that economy. Thus, the country is highly dependent on external sources of financial assistance, to fuel its development efforts and even to provide basic budgetary support. This frequently results in obvious and resented dependence.

Oman has been fortunate to have oil revenue to carry out development efforts. Recent Yemeni governments may have been as serious in intent to promote a similar process, but empty coffers and consequent reliance on external aid have hindered their efforts. What Yemen seems to need is a strong and capable leader who can seize control firmly enough to gain time for a charismatic relationship with the population to emerge and to produce visible results in both political and socioeconomic development. Ibrāhīm al-Ḥamdī seemed to be providing the necessary leadership; yet his accomplishments abruptly were terminated by his assassination in 1977. Unfortunately, his successors have lacked the vision, neutral standing, and skill to dominate the political arena. Thus, the YAR remains poised on the razor's edge of disintegration.

Oman seemingly does not face this problem, or at least not acutely, but its situation is also precarious. Personal legitimacy is largely the basis of the *sulṭān's* authority. The state is highly dependent on the

capability and attention displayed by Sulṭān Qābūs and hampered by his lack of a direct heir and questions about the suitability of other family members as successors. On the surface, Oman's oil puts it in the same league as Kuwait, Saudi Arabia, Qatar and the UAE. But Oman's production is far less than its northern neighbors and its needs are proportionately larger. Saudi Arabia and the UAE may be able to afford a helter-skelter approach to development. Oman cannot. The contrast between the rapid development of Muscat into a carbon copy of Riyadh or Abu Dhabi and the relatively tortoise-like nature of change in the interior, introduces the risk of a new split between coastal and inner Oman, particularly once Oman's meager oil reserves are depleted.

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