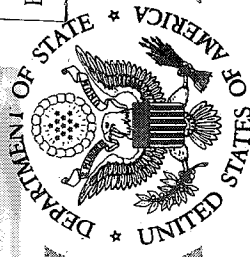


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YAR: THROWING DOWN THE GAUNTLET TO PDRY?

After several years of deteriorating relations, the Yemen Arab Republic (YAR) and the People's Democratic Republic of Yemen (PDRY) appear to be closer to all-out war than ever before.

Insurgents Seize Island. On October 6, anti-PDRY insurgents based in the YAR seized Kamaran Island, administered by PDRY and located off the coast of the YAR. The island, which has about 1500 inhabitants, was turned over to PDRY at independence by Britain, which had administered it from Aden since it was taken from the Turks in 1915. The island had historically belonged to Yemen and there are indications that the YAR might ultimately claim it. Kamaran notables reportedly cabled the YAR government to do so after the island was seized.

The insurgents are a highly disparate and undisciplined group loosely linked together in the National Unity Front (NUF). Financed largely by Saudi Arabia, they have long planned grandiose "coordinated attacks" against PDRY, but none of these was ever launched. Recent reports indicate

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that they are again making such plans. The difference is that this time the YAR may be actively supporting insurgent activities, rather than acquiescing in them.

YAR Warhawks in the Ascendancy. It is doubtful whether the insurgents could have taken Kamaran without the assistance of the YAR government. The YAR must also have known that this act would greatly increase the chances of war with PDRY. Neither the YAR nor PDRY has previously shown a real desire to go to war with the other, although provocations have increased in intensity over the past two years. Both probably realize that full-scale war would be economically disastrous and could have a highly destabilizing effect on their tribally-based societies. Nevertheless, ideological differences -- PDRY is controlled by militant Marxists and the YAR has in recent years become more Western-oriented -- and the presence in the YAR of the Saudi-supported insurgents have brought YAR-PDRY relations to the verge of war on several occasions. The most recent clash occurred in late September when insurgents staged a brief foray into South Yemen. On October 1 PDRY counterattacked, taking the YAR border village of Qa'tabah, but withdrawing from it the following day, apparently to prevent a YAR reaction from sparking major hostilities. An Arab League conciliation team has been visiting both capitals for the past several days in an attempt to mediate between the two sides.

YAR Armed Forces No Match for PDRY. YAR leaders know that the PDRY armed forces are better trained and equipped than theirs. The military equipment and training of both sides has been supplied by the Soviet Union,

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but Soviet deliveries to the PDRY are lagged far behind those to PDRY.

The PDRY army has about 12,000 personnel divided into 18 infantry battalions, a training battalion, a signal battalion, four light artillery battalions, and a military police unit. Its air force, trained and equipped by the Soviets, includes 23 pilots, 18 MIG-15/17 fighter aircraft, and several transports, and has seen action in a tactical support role in PDRY's attack at Wuday'ah in Saudi Arabia in 1969. Opposing this force, the YAR has a 9,000-man army and an additional 7,000-man reserve force, with no mobilization capability. It has about 25 pilots in various stages of proficiency, two MIG-15/17 aircraft, and about 20 other obsolete Soviet-made fighters.

In addition, although the Soviets are giving military assistance to both sides, the YAR will probably assume that the Soviets would support PDRY in an all-out war. PDRY has more to offer the Soviets, including the extensive and strategically located air and naval facilities at Aden. Soviet personnel gave logistical and tactical air support to PDRY in its attack on Wuday'ah, and would be pressed very hard by the Aden regime to do so again in the event of war.

Why Should the YAR Court War? In the past, YAR President al Iryani and Prime Minister al 'Ayni have successfully argued that the YAR could not win a war against PDRY. There have been mounting pressures, however, both external and domestic, for the YAR to engage PDRY, or at least assist the insurgents to do so. Within the government, there are a number of warhawks, led by Sinan Abu Luhum, the Governor of Hudaydah, and Army Chief of Staff

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Masrawi. They also have the support of many of the YAR tribes, which are still incensed over the murder of a paramount tribal shaykh and 65 tribesmen enticed into PDRY for parleys last February.

The Saudis, on whom the YAR is dependent for financial aid and also some military supplies, have also been calling on the YAR to give the insurgents a freer hand. It is doubtful whether the Saudis would or could extend direct military support in case war broke out, but their financial support would be all-important if, as is likely, the war degenerated into tribal skirmishing. Much of it would be given to the tribes to keep fighting. The Libyans have also reportedly promised to aid the insurgents if they could show "concrete accomplishments"; and Tunisia has also reportedly offered some unspecified aid. Libya and Egypt have also given the YAR some tanks which are reportedly to be deployed on the PDRY border. The warhawks appear to have gained the upper hand after Qa'tabah was occupied, calling on the YAR to redeem its honor. Apparently the YAR is estimating that, if war does break out, YAR tribal fervor and outside financial support would offset PDRY's military superiority, and that because of economic and organizational weaknesses PDRY could not mount a sustained military operation at any rate.

At the same time, the YAR is still offering to resolve its differences peacefully with PDRY. PDRY also has stated it wishes to come to a peaceful solution; but unless Kamaran is returned, it is hard to see how the Aden regime can refrain from some sort of retaliation. In effect, the YAR-supported seizure of Kamaran appears to be a throwing down of the gauntlet. PDRY will have to pick it up as best it can.

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