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Authority **NND 969049**

By **CM NARA** Date **6-12-08**

STATE

INFORMATION MEMORANDUM

S/S **JAN 2 1973**

SECRET

TO : The Secretary

FROM: NEA - Joseph J. Sisco

1973-1-2, Iryani Hajvi, Personality

New Prime Minister and
Cabinet Changes in the Yemen

On the heels of reports that Muhsin al-Ayni had resigned as the Yemen Arab Republic's Prime Minister and Foreign Minister, Sanaa radio announced on December 29 that President Iryani had asked Abdullah al-Hajri to become Prime Minister and form a new cabinet. Al-Hajri's appointment reflects a turn to the right. It follows growing criticism leveled at al-Ayni by conservative tribal elements in the YAR and by the Saudis for his socialist bent and moving too quickly to achieve union with South Yemen (PDRY).

Al-Hajri is one of the three members of the YAR Republican Council, the supreme policy-making organization in the YAR. A Zaidi (Shi'a) who has lived most of his life in Sanaa, he was appointed to the Council late in June 1972. The Council's other members are President Iryani and Muhammad Ali Uthman, the latter representing the Shafai (Sunni) religious element in the Republic.

A religious court judge and strong anti-communist, al-Hajri has a number of conservative credentials. Prior to the Republican overthrow of the Imamate in September 1962, he served as provincial governor and Minister of Communications. After the revolution, he refused to accept positions of responsibility with the Republicans because of his strong aversion to their dependence on the Egyptians. Later, he was to play a key role in bringing an end to Saudi involvement in the Royalist-Republican civil war. In March 1969, he led a pilgrimage

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DECLASSIFIED

Authority NND 969049

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- 2 -

delegation to Saudi Arabia where secret discussions were held concerning a possible compromise peace settlement. A year later, al-Hajri was a member of the YAR delegation to the Islamic Foreign Ministers' Conference in Jidda where he participated in the reconciliation talks leading to Saudi recognition of the YAR. Subsequently, al-Hajri was appointed YAR Ambassador to Kuwait, a position he held until nominated to the Republican Council.

Al-Hajri is a contrast to his predecessor. He does not have al-Ayni's urbanity, intellect, or skill in political infighting. But this is compensated for by the changes in the cabinet which should be stronger. Muhammad Ahmad Numan, who was the YAR's Ambassador to France and played an important role in the unity discussions at Tripoli, becomes Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Minister. Well educated and experienced, he is the son of the grand old man of Yemeni politics and leader of the Shafai Muslim minority, Muhammad Numan. The new Ministers of Interior, Development Affairs, and Treasury are well-qualified for their posts. The new Minister for Development Affairs, Ahmad Abdu Sa'id, holds an M.A. from Chicago and was Deputy Premier for Economic Affairs in the 1970-71 al-Amri Cabinet. Although former Prime Minister al-Ayni no longer holds any cabinet position, he has been appointed "Advisor on Unity Affairs" to the Republican Council. This means that if negotiations for unity between the two Yemens which al-Ayni originated should go sour, he will share the blame.

The change in government has several implications:

- a. It should please the Saudis whose Ambassador in Sanaa was openly lobbying for al-Hajri. They will be less nervous about unity discussions between the YAR and PDRY. With expected improvements in financial administration, it will probably be easier for the Saudis to open their purse when the new government asks them for more military and economic aid.
- b. The radical PDRY leadership will react negatively since they can expect a hardening by the YAR during unity discussions. The PDRY may charge that the change is a reflection of the YAR knuckling to Saudi pressure.

SECRET

DECLASSIFIED

Authority **NND 969049**By **CM** NARA Date **6-12-08**

- 3 -

c. The new government will be more sensitive than ever to appearances of being a Saudi tool. Al-Hajri can be expected to mirror faithfully President Iryani's careful approach towards unity between the two Yemens. He has already come out publicly in its favor. He will also want to create some counterbalance to the YAR's heavy dependence on the Saudis by courting other potential aid donors. We can expect the YAR will seek direct military assistance, as well as more economic aid, from the United States and other Western nations as well as from Arab donors like Abu Dhabi.

d. The growing number of economic technocrats in the government should provide a nucleus with which the Saudis, our AID mission, and other aid donors can work effectively on the YAR's economic development.

You have met al-Hajri once. He was at the airport in Kuwait to greet you on July 3, 1972, following your visit to Sanaa.

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Drafted: NEA/ARP: FMDickman: sb
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Concurrence: NEA - Mr. Davies *s/ed*