

DECLASSIFIED

Authority NND 969049

By CM NARA Date 6-12-03

YR Pol S Yemen - Yemen
of State
TELEGRAM

YR Pol Yemen

SECRET 323

YR Pol Saud - Yemen

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ACTION NEA-12

1973-1-11, Iryani Ashaj, Meeting Yemen

INFO 107000 EUR-20 ADP-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-08 H-02

INR-09 L-03 NSAE-00 NSC-10 P-03 RSC-01 PRS-01 SS-14

USIA-12 PASS-00 T-03 OMB-01 RSR-01 10-12 /113 W

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FM AMEMBASSY SANAA
TO SECSTATE WASHDC 1642
INFO AMEMBASSY JIDDA
AMEMBASSY AMMAN
AMEMBASSY BEIRUT
AMEMBASSY KUWAIT
AMEMBASSY LONDON

S E C R E T SANAA 0055 SECTION ONE OF TWO

DEPT PASS CINCEUR FOR POLAD

SUBJECT: AL-'ASNAG REVISITED

1. SUMMARY: FIFTEEN YEARS, ONE WAR OF INDEPENDENCE AND TWO CIVIL WARS LATER, 'ABDULLAH AL-'ASNAG, ADENI REFUGEE NOW SERVING AS YARG MINISTER OF ECONOMY, REMAINS ONE OF SOUTH ARABIA'S MOST DURABLE AND SKILLFUL POLITICIANS. HIS COMMENTS ON THE CURRENT YEMENI SCENE.
2. I CALLED ON YARG MINISTER OF ECONOMY, 'ABDULLAH AL-'ASNAG, JANUARY 8, RENEWING AN ACQUAINTANCESHIP DATING BACK TO LATE 1950'S. I FOUND THE CHANGES IN HIM STRIKING. HAVING PLAYED A LEADING, IF NOT THE LEADING ROLE, IN ADEN'S FIGHT FOR INDEPENDENCE FROM THE BRITISH, FOUGHT AND LOST THE STRUGGLE FOR CONTROL OF SOUTH YEMEN BETWEEN HIS OWN FLOSY AND THE COMPETING, MORE RADICAL NLF, TAKEN REFUGE IN NORTH YEMEN, SEEN THE FINAL YEARS OF ITS ROYALIST-REPUBLICAN CIVIL WAR, AND BECOME A LEADING INTELLECT IN TWO POST CIVIL WAR YAR CABINETS, AL-'ASNAG HAS

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COME A LONG WAY FROM THE DIFFIDENT, CHIP-ON-THE-SHOULDER, TRUCULENT, LABOR LEADER AND DARK-GLASSED BACK-ROOM REVOLUTIONARY, WHOM I HAD KNOWN IN ADEN. BY INTELLECT, COMMON SENSE AND POLITICAL SKILL, HE HAS CARVED OUT AN IMPORTANT PLACE FOR HIMSELF IN NORTHERN YEMEN. THIS FACT IS REFLECTED IN HIS NOW CONFIDENT, CANDID AND FRIENDLY MANNER. WITH EXPERIENCE AND MATURITY, AL-'ASNAG'S GENERAL POLITICAL ORIENTATION SEEMS TO HAVE MOVED SEVERAL PACES TO THE RIGHT; HE NOW COMES THROUGH AS QUITE MODERATE AND UNBIASED, IN SOME RESPECTS EVEN CONSERVATIVE. AS EVIDENT FROM HIS REMARKS, HE SEEMS DEEPLY COMMITTED TO THE WELL-BEING AND PROGRESS OF THE GOVERNMENT HE NOW SERVES. BUT I DOUBT THAT THIS RETOKENS ANY SETTING ASIDE OF HIGHER AMBITION - IF CHANGES IN THE SOUTH SHOULD ONE DAY PERMIT HIS RETURN OR IF EVENTS IN THE NORTH SEEMED TO OFFER HIM PROSPECT OF GREATER AUTHORITY HERE.

3. AL-'ASNAG LAUNCHED IMMEDIATELY INTO DESCRIPTION OF SITUATION IN YAR AS HE SEES IT. YARG, HE SAID, IS AN OBJECT OF DERISION FOR MAJORITY OF ITS CITIZENS, WHO FEEL WITH JUSTICE THAT IT DOES LITTLE OR NOTHING FOR THEM, THAT IT IS CORRUPT AND FINANCIALLY HOSTAGE TO TRIBAL SHAIKHS WHO DEMAND LARGE GOVERNMENTAL SUBSIDIES AS CONDITION FOR COOPERATION. UNLESS YARG'S PUBLIC IMAGE TURNED AROUND, THERE DANGER YAR MIGHT ULTIMATELY SUCCEMB TO IDEOLOGICALLY MILITANT PDRY.

4. PRESENT CABINET, AL-'ASNAG SAID, IS BEST YEMEN LIKELY GET. (AL-'ASNAG WAS AMONG THE MANY WHO WAS NEVER ON GOOD TERMS WITH FORMER PRIMIN AL-'AYNI.) PRIMIN AL-'HAJRI IS A RESOLUTE, NO-NONSENSE TYPE IF NOT A WORLD-BEATING INTELLECT. (DEPUTY PRIMIN/ FONMIN) NU'MAN IS VERY SMART, CAPABLE ACTIVIST. HOWEVER, HE HAS MADE ONE MISTAKE WHICH HOPEFULLY NOT TOO LATE TO REMEDY. BECAUSE OF NU'MAN FAMILY'S SUSPICION OF TIES BETWEEN (FORMER DEPUTY PRIMIN NOW ARMY DEPUTY COMMANDER IN CHIEF, COL. IBRAHIM) AL-'HAMDI AND FORMER PRIMIN HASAN AL-'AMRI, NU'MANS HAVE PLANTED DISTRUST OF AL-'HAMDI IN PRESIDENT AL-'IRYANI'S

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MIND WITH RESULT THAT AL-HAMDI EXCLUDED FROM KEY POLICY DELIBERATIONS OF NEW GOVERNMENT. THIS IS A MISTAKE. IT PARTICULARLY IMPORTANT THAT ALL MAIN MILITARY LEADERS BE KEPT ON BOARD.

5. SAUDIS, AL-ASNAG REMARKED, HAVE HELPED MAKE THIS REGRETTABLE LACK OF HARMONY AMONG YARG'S MILITARY LEADERS. BY PLAYING FAVORITES WITH THEIR MONEY THEY ENCOURAGE COMPETITION NOT COOPERATION AMONG SENIOR OFFICERS. AT THE MOMENT, CHIEF OF STAFF AL-MASWARI IS THEIR BOY AND DOING VERY WELL. ("WE'RE NO LONGER SPEAKING ABOUT A THOUSAND RIALS BUT \$100,000.") IF THEY - AND USG - ARE INTERESTED IN STABILITY OF YEMEN AND IN YAR BEING ABLE TO STAND UP TO THE SOUTH THEY SHOULD USE THEIR INFLUENCE TO MAKE SURE AL-HAMBI IS BROUGHT BACK INTO INNER COUNCILS OF GOVERNMENT. SPECIFICALLY, WHEN NU'MAN AND GDS CRAWFORD

NOTE BY OC/T: PASSED CINCEUR.

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