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YAR/PDRY: MINDBOGGLING UNITY TALKS

Fighting along the borders of the Yemen Arab Republic (YAR) and the People's Democratic Republic of Yemen (PDRY) has run out of steam. The forces of the YAR and the Saudi-supported National Unity Front (NUF), which lately captured the strategic Mukayris area controlling the 7000-foot high escarpment overlooking the lowlands of the Second and Third Governorates of the PDRY, have now been driven back into YAR territory with serious losses. Braving possible flak from Saudi Arabia, which wants the PDRY regime overthrown, and the YAR tribes, which want to keep on getting Saudi subsidies, YAR Prime Minister al 'Ayni has abruptly signed a "unity" agreement in Cairo.

The YAR occupation of Mukayris was extremely brief. For a short time it appeared that the retreating forces might even lose their principal support base in the border region, as PDRY forces attacked the only YAR airbase in the area.

According to one account, the collapse of the YAR/NUF offensive was brought about by the indiscipline of the tribal NUF forces which withdrew from Mukayris after the town had been looted, leaving the regular YAR troops in an exposed position. Other sources ascribe the collapse

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to the YAR's failure to provide effective artillery and air support, and/or to Saudi Arabia's failure to provide promised equipment. There are also reports that the YAR forces are seriously short of money, food, and weapons. Recriminations are rife between the YAR regular forces and the tribal groups and between the YAR and its outside supporters (principally Saudi Arabia and Libya).

Unity Talks. Meanwhile, on the political front, representatives of the two governments have been discussing, since October 21, settlement arrangements in Cairo under Arab League auspices. A draft agreement unifying the two countries was signed by the prime ministers of the two countries on October 28. Reportedly, the unity scheme involves one capital, one flag, one executive, and one legislature. Details of the substance and implementation of the scheme are to be worked out in joint meetings scheduled to start in Libya on November 25. Qadhafi has publicly invited President Iryani of the YAR and President 'Ali of the PDRY to Tripoli for talks. Both sides have been subjected to pro-unity pressure from Libya. The inducements Libya may be offering are not known, but it seems fairly clear that Libya hopes the North Yemeni leadership would be the predominant force in a unified Yemen.

Outlook. There is every reason why the two Yemenis should be unified, and every reason why they probably will not be. Yemen -- North and South -- is a classic example of a geopolitical entity artificially divided by historical circumstance. While North Yemen huddled in

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relative isolation from the outside world, South Yemen was subjected to 100 years of British rule which, although desultory at best, could not fail to inject modern ideological viruses into the Adeni bloodstream.

Ironically, ideological spill-over from Aden to the North produced a revolution of sorts in North Yemen while the British were still hanging on to the South. This chronological anomaly does not alter the fact that today the "modernizing elements" are more prominent in Aden than they are in San'a. However, probably the greatest obstacles to peaceful unification are the personal rivalries between and among the principals of the two regimes, plus the basic conflict of view and interest between the modernizing elements in the two capitals and the traditionalists in the two hinterlands.

Neither of the two Yemens has the military force to impose its will on the other. In fact, both have great difficulty in controlling their own unruly populations. In both countries, paucity of natural resources and contempt for central authority have created extensive opportunities for foreign intrigue. It is consequently difficult to imagine how the two halves of greater Yemen can be peacefully united in present circumstances.

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