CHAPTER 5

The Time of Faits Accomplis (1993–94)

للضرورة احكامها وظروفها

Necessity has its own rules and conditions

Any external observer looking at the political history of unified Yemen would agree that the 1993 parliamentary elections were one of its brightest chapters, just as the 1994 civil war was one of its most sombre. Yemen's experiment in pluralism during the transition period from 1990 to 1993 remains unparalleled in the history of the Arabian Peninsula, for it seemed to suggest that the Yemeni sister states had shaken off their troublesome pasts and, in a joint effort, catapulted themselves from the age of Cold War confrontations, particularism, and one-party rule into that of sisterhood, unity, and democracy. Against this background, the 1994 civil war appeared like an atavism, a relapse into a dark past that was characterized by separation and deep-seated resentments.

Seen from another angle, it could also be argued that in the sequence of events that began in 1990, the parliamentary elections were only a temporary delay that (similar to the moment of retardation in a classical Greek tragedy) momentarily halted a fatal escalation, in a way that still suggested the possibility of a different outcome. Like in a Greek tragedy, however, this hope was bound to be disappointed. The North and South were heading towards civil war with ominous inevitability, and the elections only delayed their path into the abyss.

Anyone looking at the interior workings of this process would agree that the elections, despite a few minor surprises and unexpected events, were not expressions of genuine competition. Its results could have been predicted from the very day of unification. Northern dominance in united Yemen was the outcome of simple arithmetic: since the concept of democracy is based on the will of the majority, the YSP's electoral defeat simply reflected the demographic fact that after unity the southerners had become a minority, amounting to about 20 per cent of the total population. Democracy had disadvantaged the South and the YSP, and they had badly miscalculated the effects of pluralist competition

for political power. Since the very day of unification, northern dominance had been a fait accompli.

For the same demographic reason, and in spite of the desperate efforts of the southern forces, the outcome of the civil war was inevitable, and the northern victory imposed further brutal and irrefutable realities. With his double victory – electoral and military – Ṣāliḥ took full power and implemented a good part of his autocratic policies by exploiting and corrupting the existing democratic system from within – a classic method of autocrats and dictators. Even though he played his part as president of a united, "democratic" Yemen with skill, he could not hide the fact that competition and power sharing were contrary to his inclinations. Once his position at the helm of a united Yemen was cemented, he returned to his earlier erratic, autocratic system of governance. In many ways the post-war situation suited his yearning for non-political politics, and the sham democracy that he introduced into Yemen was in fact the end of open competition and genuine pluralism.

The consequences of the renunciation of politics were soon felt. After taking power, control over the "united Yemen" was exercised by Ṣāliḥ, his extended clan, and those who had supported him in the elections and the civil war. These included ʿAbdallāh al-Aḥmar, who stood firmly on Ṣāliḥ's side during the war and for this reason even fell out (at least temporarily) with his Saudi patrons who had actively supported the southern secessionists to counterbalance the growing power potential of a united Yemen.[1] In the 1993 elections, the Iṣlāḥ party did well, and in the 1994 civil war Iṣlāḥ's Islamist warriors, directed by al-Aḥmar, were instrumental in the subjugation and humiliation of the South. In this way the Islamists, who had been lurking in the shadows at least since the War of the Central Areas in the late 1970s and early 1980s, finally emerged from the darkness and took the spotlight of this national drama to become central actors.

The present chapter follows Mujāhid, whose unwavering support for al-Bīḍ (which was more an expression of his antagonism towards Ṣāliḥ than enthusiasm for al-Bīḍ) seemed to become increasingly disconnected from the political environment, for shaykhly loyalties were rather fluid and subject to incessant

1 In 1994, Saudi support for southern secessionists led to a severe crisis between Sanaa and Riyadh. Since ʿAbdallāh al-Aḥmar sided with President Ṣāliḥ, his relationship with the Saudis temporarily deteriorated, see Dresch 1995: 39. For the Saudi position in 1994, see also Burrowes 1995: 73–77; Katz 1995: 82–85; and Dresch 2000: 196. Khayrullah (2016: 140–143) argues that there was always a line of communication between al-Aḥmar and Ṣāliḥ; al-Aḥmar did not allow this connection to be severed, despite the often intense differences and rivalries between them.

adjustments and recalibrations. While Mujāhid obstinately maintained his alliance with Aden, those shaykhs who had sympathized with the southern cause during the transition period adjusted to the changing power balance that inclined in the direction of Ṣāliḥ. Perhaps Aden might have prevailed against Sanaa in the war if al-Bīḍ had garnered and maintained the support of a substantial part of disaffected northern shaykhs and tribes. For many in the North shared "southern" grievances, and the transition period from 1990 to 1993 showed that many long-standing relationships with Aden, originally formed in the NDF network were still in operation. Yet both sides missed a golden opportunity to close ranks. Aden, through its unclear manoeuvring and secessionist talk, annoyed sympathetic northern tribes. And the northern shaykhs, as soon as their loyalty was put to the test, turned out to be unreliable allies; their notorious penchant for venality and "treachery" arose, however, mostly from a sober consideration of costs and benefits. As a result, and in spite of their better judgement, al-Bīḍ and the northern shaykhs united, only to be deserted by the other in the eleventh hour.

Throughout this time, from 1990 to 1993, Mujāhid's personal biography remained closely linked to the political history of Yemen. This chapter enquires into some of Mujāhid's most ill-fated projects, endeavours, and experiences: his aborted candidacy for parliament, the military defeat of his tribe at the outset of the 1994 civil war, the siege and fall of Aden, al-Bīḍ's revocation of their alliance, and his catastrophic third encounter with Ṣāliḥ. This succession of disasters and milestones on the way to failure put him on the defensive on all fronts. At length, shaken by this succession of blows, and in greater peril than ever before, even endangering those around him, he chose to end the struggle and fruitless exertions that had characterized his shaykhdom. His resolve to leave Yemen and go into exile was as much an admission of failure, a reaction to the enormous tension and disappointed hopes, as it was the result of his overconfidence in his own strength.

1 "Something Wonderful Has Happened in Yemen" (1993)

The whole world seemed to be looking at Yemen when the country's first parliamentary elections were held on 27 April 1993. On this occasion, the *New York Times* headline read "Something wonderful has happened in Yemen," expressing wonder and enthusiasm about the end of the Cold War and its aberrations in South Arabia and the peaceful transformation of two one-party regimes that had been at loggerheads with each other for almost a quarter of a century, into

the only democracy in the Arabian Peninsula – a process that was indeed in many ways unique.[2]

Inspired by the political optimism and the grassroots activism of the transition period from 1990 to 1993, thousands of candidates and more than forty parties contested for 301 constituency-based parliamentary seats. On this occasion, the parties sought to represent themselves in the best possible light. The GPC's electoral programme, vaguely presented as broad and multidirectional, reflected liberal and democratic convictions. The YSP presented itself as a social-democratic party and the champion of democracy, modernization, and order, and as anti-corruption. The Iṣlāḥ party slogan "The Quran and the Sunna supersede the constitution and the law" promoted the central role of Islam in all areas of life and politics, including the constitution. Scores of smaller parties, such as al-Ḥaqq (representing the interests of the Zaydis and the *sāda*), Baathists, and Nasserists vied for the favour of the voters. Despite the multitude of parties, three-quarters of the contenders stood for the elections as "independent" candidates; however, after the elections, many of these "independents" turned out to have been stooges of the GPC or the other large parties who, with this ruse, managed to double and triple the number of their candidates.[3]

One of these independent candidates was Mujāhid Ḥaydar. In the run-up phase of the elections, and despite the discouraging events of the recent years (the military campaigns that targeted him and his tribe, the thwarted Talāḥum party project, the futile efforts to unite the Bakīl and mobilize them against the northern regime, the death threats and attempts on his life), he once again gathered his forces and prepared to run for constituency number 280, Ḥarf Sufyān. He decided to run as an independent candidate because he still clung to the project of the Talāḥum party and viewed himself as an ally, not a member, of the YSP.

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2 *New York Times*, 8 May 1993, p. 20.

3 For the 1993 election programmes and party representatives, see Detalle 1993: 8–9; Carapico 1993a; Carapico 1993b; Carapico 1998: 140–151; Glosemeyer 2001: 83–94; Day 2012: 117–122; and Brandt 2017a: 118–127. The large number of independent candidates has since become a general pattern in Yemen electoral politics. In considering the 2003 parliamentary elections, Longley Alley (2007: 249–250) explains that the GPC's effective use of local and popular figures was matched by their respect for local traditions and norms. When party organizers found, for example, that any person (a sayyid, or a lesser shaykh) was more popular than the area's senior shaykh, they would sometimes allow the senior shaykh to run on the GPC ticket, while encouraging the other candidate to run as an independent. The other candidate would then promise to switch to the GPC after winning the election.

In Aden, the prospect of Mujāhid Ḥaydar running for parliament in the Ḥarf Sufyān constituency caused a stir. When the news of Mujāhid's candidacy reached him, al-Bīḍ expressed alarm, then grave concern. Mujāhid was Aden's loyal ally, that much was clear. Likewise, it was clear that Mujāhid, supported by the strong oppositional underground movement in Sufyān, would in all likelihood win the parliament seat. Yet in Sufyān, in particular, al-Bīḍ did not want an independent candidate, but a true socialist candidate who would bring the prevailing strong anti-Sanaa sentiments among the people over to the YSP. And there were further concerns, as the socialists in Aden were not pleased with the violence they believed Mujāhid and his tribesmen would bring into the political realm. Once the YSP leaders came to recognize the ardent and overwhelming will that motivated all of Mujāhid's actions, they became even more hesitant to openly side with him unless they were urgently in need of his help. They knew very well that the element of passion, the very motor behind Mujāhid's activities, would inevitably lead to problems once he entered parliament.

> I decided to run for parliament as an independent candidate, because ultimately the Talāḥum party did not get al-Bīḍ's support. And ideologically, I was no socialist. Yet, as the proverb goes, "the enemy of the enemy is a friend" (*ʿaduw al-ʿaduw ṣadīq*).
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> In the run-up to the elections, people from al-Bīḍ's office sought me out and told me that al-Bīḍ wanted me to come and meet him in Aden. I went to Aden, and there he said to me, "I invited you because I want to ask you not to run for parliament." I asked him for the reasons, and he told me, "Your opponent ʿAbdallāh al-Aḥmar will run for parliament in his constituency [Khamir], and you would meet him in parliament, and you would fall out with him, and they would exploit this against us because you are considered one of us." He continued, "We have many charges against Ṣāliḥ and al-Aḥmar, and they do not have anything against us, not a single point, and any problem you cause with al-Aḥmar when you meet him in parliament will be used against us." He asked me to identify a person from the Sufyān who would run for the YSP in my stead, and to mobilize the Sufyān to elect this person. I balked at his request, but he kept me in Qaṣr al-Maʿāshīq [the presidential palace in Crater] for two days until he had persuaded me and compensated me with other things: expensive real estate in Aden, heavy and medium weapons, and money.

Indeed, there was hardly a man in highland Yemen who would be less welcome in parliament than Mujāhid. The effect of the physical presence of his

hereditary foe ʿAbdallāh al-Aḥmar or his sons in parliament could easily be imagined: a wrong word, a look, an ill-timed jest, an unexpected personal encounter – any one of these events would have been sufficient to provoke Mujāhid's temper and desire for revenge. For this reason, the YSP leadership asked him to restrain his activities and abandon his plans to run for parliament. Eventually al-Bīḍ's friendly counsel (or urgent orders) kept Mujāhid from running. By promising him compensation, Mujāhid was persuaded, with reservations, to abandon his plans to run for election. He was too much of an activist to be content with the sinecures offered by al-Bīḍ, but he understood that he was standing alone against the northern regime, and that he needed al-Bīḍ's support in order to prevail.

> Al-Bīḍ's request put me in a quandary, but eventually I gave in. I was keen not to lose him, because he protected me in confrontations with my opponents, Ṣāliḥ and al-Aḥmar. At length, I suggested the candidacy of Muḥammad Muṣliḥ al-Shahwānī [from Sufyān], who was a YSP man and heir to Shaykh Muṣliḥ al-Shahwānī.[4] After the death of my brother Ḥaydar [in 1982], Muṣliḥ al-Shahwānī had succeeded him and became the NDF field commander in Ḥarf Sufyān in his stead, may God have mercy on them. Our families were very close, always on the same side. We mobilized the Sufyān to elect Muḥammad al-Shahwānī, and he won the parliamentary seat for the YSP. It was the only seat the YSP won in the far north. [After the elections] al-Bīḍ again asked me to meet him in Aden, where he thanked me profusely. I recall that [the southern politician] Jārallāh ʿUmar told me, "Our success in the Sufyān constituency is equal to ten other constituencies. It is our only bridgehead [into the north]."

In fact, in ʿAmrān's Ẓulayma Ḥabūr constituency (ironically the home constituency of Ḥamīd al-Aḥmar), the YSP had done well, and YSP candidate ʿAlī Ṣaghīr Jamīl asserted himself against Ḥamīd al-Aḥmar, who ran for the Iṣlāḥ party. Yet the course of the elections took an unexpected turn when Ḥamīd al-Aḥmar's escorts removed the ballot boxes at gunpoint and the ensuing quarrel escalated into the destruction, by rocket-launcher, of the YSP headquarters in Ḥabūr. Ḥamīd al-Aḥmar declared himself the winner of the election.[5]

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4 In 1980, when Muṣliḥ al-Shahwānī of the Sufyān took revenge from a Ḥāshid shaykh for the death of one of his tribesmen, the incident became the starting point of the process that developed into the blood feud between *bayt* Ḥaydar and *bayt* al-Aḥmar, see chapter 2.

5 On the Ḥabūr incident see, for example, Detalle 1993: 11; Carapico 1998: 144; and Dresch 2000: 194. On ʿAlī Ṣaghīr Jamīl's assassination, see the interview with his son (*Yemenat*, 25

After the votes had been counted, the results merely confirmed the status quo; that is, each party won almost absolute control over their respective territories of former South and North Yemen. The GPC had won majorities in all the northern governorates, plus three seats in the South. The YSP triumphed in the South and also did well in Lower Yemen – Taʿiz, Ibb, and al-Bayḍāʾ – areas that have a historical affinity to the South. In Khamir, ʿAbdallāh al-Aḥmar won for the Iṣlāḥ party; out of deference, the GPC and YSP had not run against him in his home constituency.[6] Despite the nationwide nomination of dozens of candidates, only two al-Ḥaqq party candidates were successful, both in Ṣaʿda province, one of whom was a certain Ḥusayn Badr al-Dīn al-Ḥūthī. Ironically, in the 1990s Ṣāliḥ and the GPC establishment were exclusively focused on the YSP and Iṣlāḥ party, not having the ghost of a notion that in fact, the inconspicuous success of an al-Ḥaqq party candidate was the first public manifestation of the dreaded revolt that would devour them, and the whole country with them, two decades later. The electoral success of Ḥusayn al-Ḥūthī in the remote mountains of Marrān was the true herald of revolution.[7]

The GPC emerged as the largest party with a total of 122 parliamentary seats, falling short of an absolute majority. The Iṣlāḥ party was a surprise success and won 62 seats. The YSP won only 56 seats. A coalition of GPC, YSP, and Iṣlāḥ was formed, in which GPC and Iṣlāḥ, by applying the percentage of their votes, refused to allocate more than one of the presidential council's five seats to the YSP (previously the YSP had held two).[8] The YSP had badly miscalculated the effects of a pluralist competition for political power. The YSP could count on its long-standing northern connections through the old NDF network, and the YSP's grievances against Sanaa were shared by many in the North, but this did not suffice to mobilize a significant proportion of northern voters for the YSP and maintain a strong position in the presidential council.

In Sufyān, however, the YSP's electoral success was an accomplished and irrefutable fact that epitomized the oppositional spirit among the Bakīl in ʿAmrān and the durability of the clandestine cooperation between Sufyān and Aden. Mujāhid, who had been instrumental in the nomination and support of Sufyān's YSP candidate, considered Muḥammad al-Shahwānī's electoral victory as his personal achievement. As soon as parliament commenced its work,

November 2013). Like Aḥmad Ḥaydar, ʿAlī Ṣaghīr Jamīl was assassinated in al-Rawḍa neighbourhood in Sanaa in 1995.

6 Detalle 1993: 11.

7 On al-Ḥaqq's electoral success in Ṣaʿda province, see Brandt 2017a: 118–131.

8 Day 2012: 122.

he set out to demonstrate that he was undoubtedly, even if by proxy, in parliament as the man behind Muḥammad al-Shahwānī.

> On the day of parliament's opening session, I provided Muḥammad al-Shahwānī with my car and a group of my tribal guards, and they entered the parliament compound in Sanaa along with Muḥammad al-Shahwānī's own guards and car. When ʿAbdallāh al-Aḥmar's guards saw them entering and parking my car next to al-Aḥmar's car, they raised the barrels of their guns and pointed them at my men. This greatly angered my men, who responded by hitting al-Aḥmar's car with the butts of their guns, leading to scuffles between them. The situation was only relieved when the guards of Prime Minister Ḥaydar Abū Bakr al-ʿAṭṭās appeared on the scene and managed to separate them.

2 The Wrong War (1994)

The results of the elections and the dispute over the seat distribution in the presidential council led to a further deterioration of the situation. The YSP leaders were convinced of the bad faith and aggressive intentions of Ṣāliḥ and the Iṣlāḥ party, and their view that the northern regime was waging a campaign against them was confirmed. An undeclared war was being carried out by political machination, intimidation, and assassinations, and thus the YSP leaders began to speak openly of federation.[9]

By contrast, the GPC and Iṣlāḥ leaders believed that they had accommodated the YSP sufficiently, and allowed it a far greater voice and share in the government than its demographic weight (20/80) justified. In the southern federation plans the North saw nothing but a distraction to undermine Yemeni unity, a first step towards secession; they suspected that al-Bīḍ's meetings with foreign powers – Saudi Arabia and the United States – were a conspiracy to divide a united Yemen. Eventually the conflict within the governing coalition prompted al-Bīḍ to leave Sanaa for Aden in January 1994. Neither domestic nor foreign attempts at mediation, including a broad national dialogue aimed at a comprehensive resolution of the underlying conflict, could persuade him to return to Sanaa and cooperate with Ṣāliḥ.[10]

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9 For a summary of post-election developments, see Day 2012: 122–128.

10 On the National Dialogue, see Carapico 1998: 176–180; and Day 2012: 126–128. Sinān Abū Laḥūm's memoirs (2004: vol. 4: 135–137) contain a particularly meticulous description of

Further signs suggested that the days of negotiation and exchanges of proposals were over, that the last round in the struggle between North and South had begun, and that a trial of strength by way of arms had become unavoidable. Nowhere was the atmosphere of exhaustion and sense of resignation with the failure of the political process as palpable as in the intense struggle over control of the armed forces. In violation of the provisions of the 1990 Sanaa Accord, a merger of the northern and the southern armies had never taken place, and the respective army apparatuses had remained in the hands of their former states. The southern minister of defence, Haythām Qāsim Ṭāhir, was excluded from decision-making processes in the North. The YSP had demanded unification of the armies, which would have given Ṭāhir more effective control, but the GPC was determined to prevent the YSP from gaining ground.[11] After the 1993 elections, the North and South began to reinforce, realign, and relocate their respective troops, as acts of sabotage increased, and the armed forces along the former border were put on alert.

After unity, the former states each worked to weaken the other by placing army units in the territory of the other state. Thus, the southern army moved several brigades to the North: The Fifth Brigade was shifted to Sufyān's Jabal Aswad, the Third Brigade went to ʿAmrān city, the Ba' Ṣuhayb Brigade went to Dhamār, the Fourteenth October Brigade went to Khawlān al-Ṭiyāl, the First Brigade went to Yarīm, and some smaller units were sent to Ṣaʿda, al-Jawf, and the Tihāma lowlands.[12] Only two northern brigades were placed in the former South: the Second Brigade near Ḥabīlayn was located at the arterial highway that ran from Laḥj to al-Ḍāliʿ, and the ʿAmāliqa ("Giants") Brigade was sent to Abyan.[13] Yet whereas the southern brigades in the North did not occupy positions of much strategic importance, the northern Second Brigade and the ʿAmāliqa were ideally positioned to enable a massive strategic thrust from the

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the process of alienation that took place between the North and South, including the numerous domestic and foreign initiatives and attempts at mediation.

11 On the difficulties surrounding the merger of the armed forces, see Hudson 1995: 25; Warburton 1995: 23–24; Kostiner 1996: 28. Warburton (1995: 23–24) considers the failed merger in part a "dialectical problem, as the only raison d'être of the armed forces of either former state was to threaten the other."

12 Warburton 1995: 24.

13 The ʿAmāliqa is an elite, non-tribal brigade of the armed forces, established in the early 1970s by former President Ibrāhīm al-Ḥamdī. Placed under the command of his brother, ʿAbdallāh, until their violent deaths in 1978, al-Ḥamdī used the ʿAmāliqa to strengthen his position against the regular and irregular units dominated by the tribes and to gain and maintain control of the YAR during and after the 1974 coup, see Burrowes and Schmitz 2018: 209.

North towards Aden and Ḥaḍramawt. Moreover, most southern brigades in the North were garrisoned along with northern brigades in the same camps, hence the southern units in Sufyān, ʿAmrān, and Dhamār faced northern units of nearly equal strength. By contrast, the northern Second Brigade and the ʿAmāliqa in the South had free rein. Finally, the southern brigades were pervaded by divisions and conflicts of loyalty; some were loyal to (unionist, pro-North) ʿAlī Nāṣir, some to the (federalist, then secessionist) YSP, and others to the (unionist, pro-South) NDF. Needless to say, all of the southern brigades were infiltrated by Ṣāliḥ's loyalists.[14]

Since 1990, and particularly after the 1993 elections, the YSP had tried to mobilize disaffected elements among the northern tribes to join the southern cause. The southern leaders had strategically placed major southern forces in the northern highlands – the Fifth Brigade at Sufyān's Jabal Aswad, the Third Brigade at ʿAmrān city, the Fourteenth October Brigade at Khawlān al-Ṭiyāl – in areas where clandestine underground communication between the Bakīl and Aden were still in place and where southern soldiers would be able to withdraw into the surrounding tribal areas if needed. Even if many disaffected Bakīl tribes were no longer as proactive vis-à-vis the YSP as in the first days of unity, the southern leaders hoped for friendly or at least neutral tribal environments.[15]

Certainly nowhere were the ties between southern army units and the surrounding tribes as old and close as in Sufyān, where the Fifth Brigade was garrisoned at Jabal Aswad after it came along with ʿAlī Nāṣir to the North in 1986. By 1994, the garrison at Sufyān's Jabal Aswad was composed of the southern Fifth Brigade and a northern battalion (*katība*), the latter stationed in an elevated place (*qarn*) towering over the Fifth Brigade's camp. This battalion, which belonged to ʿAlī Muḥsin's Firqa, consisted of radical Sunni Islamists, most of Ḥāshid origin (the battalion's commander himself was from al-ʿUṣaymāt). The fact that since its flight to the North in 1986 the Fifth Brigade had no heavy weapons and was "supervised" by a northern Islamist battalion is an indication of ʿAlī Muḥsin's concerns about the brigade's political orientation.

In mid-February 1994, in a last but futile attempt to find a constructive solution to the crisis, the collective leadership of Yemen signed the Document of Pledge and Accord (DPA) in Amman, Jordan.[16] At the same time, limited

14 Personal communication with Noel Brehony, February 2019.

15 Warburton 1995: 24, 26; Dunbar 1995: 63–64; Whitaker 1997: 25; and Bin Aḥmad 2017.

16 The Document of Pledge and Accord (DPA) was an outcome of the national dialogue process. It favoured federalism, the form of government preferred by the South. The North, by contrast, favoured the Constitution, which provided for national unity, a fact that would

military confrontations flared up in Abyan and several other areas, but were contained thanks to de-escalation measures. However, underlying tensions continued unabated, and the situation of the southern army units in the North deteriorated by the day. Shortly after the signing of the DPA on 27 February, the situation in Sufyān exploded.[17]

> In 1986, ʿAlī Muḥsin had integrated the Fifth Brigade into the Firqa and garrisoned it at Sufyān's Jabal Aswad. Since the Fifth Brigade had come with ʿAlī Nāṣir to the North, ʿAlī Muḥsin assumed that the brigade was sympathetic to the regime in Sanaa and hence hostile towards us, the Sufyān. In the years to come, however, when the soldiers began to feel the bigotry and tyranny of ʿAlī Muḥsin, they started leaning towards us, the tribe of Sufyān, because it was known that we were opposed to him.
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> In September 1993, Aden replaced the Fifth Brigade's commander with YSP-loyalist ʿAbdallāh Shalīl.[18] Shalīl knew about my hostility to Ṣāliḥ, ʿAbdallāh al-Aḥmar, and ʿAlī Muḥsin, and about my close relationship with the YSP. He visited me in [my home village] Wāsiṭ al-Ḍalʿa and asked me to go to Aden and coordinate for him with [the southern] minister of defence, Haythām Qāsim Ṭāhir. I went to Aden, and during my absence ʿAlī Muḥsin appointed a new commander to the Fifth Brigade, [Ṣāliḥ Muḥammad] Ṭaymas, to replace Shalīl.[19] Shalīl disobeyed ʿAlī Muḥsin's orders to hand over the command of the Fifth Brigade to Ṭaymas, and flatly refused Ṭaymas entry to the brigade's camp. Ṭaymas returned to Sanaa and told ʿAlī Muḥsin that ʿAbdallāh Shalīl had refused to implement the order, and shortly after the war broke out [at Jabal Aswad] when I was still in Aden.
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> ʿAlī Muḥsin's forces and the *ikhwanjī* [Islamist] Ḥāshid battalion that was also stationed at Jabal Aswad attacked the Fifth Brigade with heavy artillery. Since the Fifth Brigade had no heavy weapons, the minister of

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also facilitate northern access to the oil fields in Ḥaḍramawt, see Day 2012: 126–128; and Khayrullah 2016: 75.

17 For the battle at Sufyān's Jabal Aswad, see Warburton 1995: 26. Mujāhid's narrative gives a more detailed version that explains why the Fifth Brigade, which was considered loyal to ʿAlī Nāṣir and hence representing northern interests, turned against the North at the very outset of the civil war. For a version in conformity with Mujāhid's narrative, see Nāṣir 2015: 140–141.

18 Shalīl had been a loyalist of ʿAlī Nāṣir, but supported al-Bīḍ in the YSP power struggle of 1986, see Dresch 2000: 195; and Day 2012: 134.

19 In 1986, Ṭaymas joined ʿAlī Nāṣir's flight to the North, where he continued his military career in ʿAlī Muḥsin's Firqa.

defence, Haythām Qāsim Ṭāhir, urged me to summon my tribe to fight alongside the Fifth Brigade, which I did, and we supported it with our tribesmen and matériel from our own arsenal: B-10 recoilless rifles and RPG-7 rocket-propelled grenade launchers. Over the course of the night, we managed to achieve victory over the Firqa and the Islamists.

The next morning, however, army reinforcements in plain clothes arrived from Ṣaʿda on public buses, pretending that they were civilian travellers on their way to Sanaa. We were caught by surprise when suddenly they opened fire on us from the front and rear, and we were in the middle of the battle. When it was over, ten of my tribesmen and a number of soldiers of the Fifth Brigade were dead or dying, and many others had been wounded.[20] The war continued, until dawn of the second day, when the commander of the Fifth Brigade announced that they had run out of ammunition. He and many of his soldiers managed to withdraw into the surrounding tribal areas of Sufyān. The minister of defence asked me to secure their evacuation to Aden, and I instructed my tribesmen, headed by Shaykh Nājī Ḥirshān, to escort them from Sufyān to al-ʿAbla in al-Jawf and from there to al-ʿAbr border crossing point in Ḥaḍramawt, and then, via Abyan, to Aden.

How did you communicate with your tribesmen?

I spent two days stuck to the telephone in Aden and communicated with my tribe through the central telephone that belonged to Ḥarf Sufyān district, in the main communications centre where a landline telephone was run by someone from the city of al-Ḥarf. We called him always, for any matter, and told him, "Move your jeep and bring the *ʿāqil* so-and-so to the call centre, so we can talk to him." I was in a kind of overdrive, talking to my men, gathering information, following-up on the battle; all the time coordinating between my tribe, the Fifth Brigade, and the southern leadership in Aden.

ʿAbdallāh Shalīl and the southern soldiers managed to withdraw into the Bakīlī hinterlands from where they "miraculously passed out to the South," as a local newspaper termed it.[21] It was a kind of triumph when Shalīl, accompanied by surviving soldiers and their Sufyānī escorts, arrived safe and unscathed in Aden; yet it was a triumph that left Mujāhid and the southern leaders who went to receive them with a stale aftertaste. Shalīl's survival could not conceal

20 Dresch (2000: 195) estimates the number of casualties in this battle at approximately 20–30 people.

21 Bin Aḥmad 2017.

the fact that the Fifth Brigade, along with the tribe of Sufyān, had suffered a painful defeat. It was a dark day that forebode even darker days; a bad omen for the coming war.

When I asked why, in these fateful days, when his tribe was in distress and Sufyān was in furious turmoil, he did not return from Aden and take matters into his own hands with his usual energy, Mujāhid's answers were unusually evasive. In retrospect, his atypical lack of action and lingering in Aden suggests that, for the first time, he might have been haunted by doubts, by an unspoken, uncomfortable premonition that he did not yet want to admit to himself; namely, that his return to Sufyān would worsen rather than improve the situation for his tribe. ʿAlī Muḥsin and the northern army had defeated the Sufyān and would not hesitate to further harm the tribe and prove the supremacy of the northern regime. Now northern supremacy was a fait accompli, and little could be done about it.

Indeed, the Fifth Brigade's defeat in Sufyān proved to be only the first step towards the eradication of the remaining southern units stationed in the North. Having delivered this vigorous blow to the Sufyān, the civil war was paused for a short while; this interlude that only emphasized the cruelty of the looming southern defeat. Tensions continued to soar, and after a short lull, on 27 April 1994 – the anniversary of the 1993 parliamentary elections, and exactly two months after the Sufyān battle – Ṣāliḥ gave an inflammatory speech, in which he accused the YSP of fomenting division; the South took this to be a declaration of war, which it undoubtedly was. Within hours after Ṣāliḥ's speech, clashes erupted anew, between the southern Third Brigade and the northern First Brigade stationed at the same garrison in ʿAmrān city. In this way the civil war resumed in full force, from dangerous words and undue stimulation of national passions.

The confrontation between the southern Third Brigade and the northern First Brigade at ʿAmrān developed into an extremely brutal three-day battle, in which both brigades stationed at the same camp aimed their tanks at each other. Due to the concentration of matériel in a position that restricted mobility, an estimated 70 to 200 men lost their lives in this battle and an enormous amount of southern equipment was destroyed.[22] Again, the Sufyān were instrumental in securing the flight of the southern soldiers who managed to escape the carnage.

22 Supposedly, about 80 tanks were lost in the ʿAmrān battle, of which two-thirds may have been southern. For further details, see Warburton 1995: 26–27; al-Bakr 1995; Dresch 2000: 196; and Nāṣir 2015: 141.

> After a brief period, the battle moved to the southern Third Brigade led by Sayf al-Baqrī and ʿAlī Muḥsin's First Brigade in ʿAmrān city. This was the hardest battle, 130 tanks aimed their barrels at each other and fought at point-blank range inside the confined space of the garrison; the Third Brigade was destroyed and nearly annihilated in a terrible manner. After the Third Brigade's defeat, tribesmen from al-Ghūla and ʿIyāl Surayḥ [of Bakīl] managed to evacuate the southern commander, Sayf al-Baqrī, and other survivors to Sufyān, where our tribesmen took over and brought them down to Aden.[23]

The ʿAmrān battle signalled the beginning of fateful events in the annals of Yemeni history; yet in one contemporary document it left scarcely a trace, namely the memoirs penned by ʿAbdallāh al-Aḥmar. In his typical way of glossing over critical situations, he dismisses the battle (or rather massacre) of ʿAmrān, though the death toll was greater than that of Yemen's 1972 and 1979 border wars combined, as "some problems" (*baʿḍ al-ishkāliyyāt*). Al-Aḥmar nevertheless elaborates on why, in his opinion, the cooperation between the southern leadership and the Bakīl was bound to fail: the Bakīl had promised to support the southern leaders in Aden – by rallying their tribesmen to the southern cause, blocking roads, and laying siege on Sanaa, so that the war would take place in the northern capital rather than in Aden – yet in their hour of need the Bakīl did not meet their promises and "let them down" (*khadhalū-hum*).[24]

Indeed, most northern tribes, whose support Aden had sought since unification, were of no help to the South in the civil war. Once again, the YSP was confronted by the way in which tribal leaders shifted with the changing wind. When the civil war erupted, many of the northern shaykhs who had leaned towards the YSP during the post-1990 transition phase, had already re-aligned themselves with those in power. The secession debate had antagonized them.

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23 Warburton (1995: 26) speaks of "fearing a massacre, Southern troops abandoned their heavy equipment and withdrew into previously prepared fortifications in the Bakil, where they were safe." Mujāhid's account corresponds with Day (2012: 131), who writes that during the ʿAmrān battle "southern commanders tried to bring Bakil tribal militias into their compound as a protection force. They hoped that northern Hashid shaykhs would prevent any military actions that could spark an intertribal war. However, the northern troops denied the Bakil tribesmen access to the southern camp. Soon afterward southern troops became pinned down by northern artillery barrages from strategic high ground surrounding the camp. During intense, close range shelling, hundreds of southern soldiers were massacred … the remnants of the southern brigades at Amran retreated under the protection of Bakil tribesmen."

24 Al-Aḥmar 2008: 279–283. For a similar view, cf. Dunbar 1995: 63–64.

In their eyes, the YSP was an unreliable ally, for whom they would not go to war and sacrifice their tribesmen. Many northern tribal leaders were greatly annoyed by Aden's unclear politics, clumsy manoeuvring, and its contradictory and hypocritical attitude towards the northern tribes. Aden's positions frequently oscillated between secret wooing and public contempt, and finally (from a tribal point of view) they were offended by the undignified defensive posture of al-Bīḍ, who remained in retreat in Aden. When the civil war broke out, their lack of support for southern forces made it clear that they would not help in a cause they knew to be lost.

The southern leadership in Aden had itself to blame for the lack of enthusiasm of its erstwhile tribal allies. Yet there were also indications that Ṣāliḥ had manipulated the situation. Al-Bīḍ knew full well that Ṣāliḥ was a master of underground intrigue, and before long he knew this from personal experience. Ṣāliḥ had prepared, in meticulous detail, to take over the united country, and since the Talāḥum Conference he had considered all eventualities. The civil war made it clear that many of al-Bīḍ's shaykhly friends were in truth allies of Ṣāliḥ, and had treacherously deceived their way into al-Bīḍ's confidence. These shaykhs, though often men of exceptional talent, could be bought on easy terms.

> [After unity,] some shaykhs came out [outwardly] in opposition to Ṣāliḥ [while secretly] they were in league with him. Ṣāliḥ wanted al-Bīḍ to invest his financial and military resources in these shaykhs, to make sure that al-Bīḍ's resources would not harm him and that the war would take place in Aden rather than in Sanaa, because these resources went into the hands of the shaykhs who were Ṣāliḥ loyalists, and not into our hands – the hands of those who were Ṣāliḥ's real enemies. The Ṣāliḥ loyalists took al-Bīḍ's resources, but did not use them against Ṣāliḥ. There was a collusion between those shaykhs and Ṣāliḥ. Ṣāliḥ told them, "Between me and al-Bīḍ is a disagreement. Al-Bīḍ has financial and military resources that he could give to our true opponents, and as a result, the war will take place here, in Sanaa. I want you to come out in opposition against me; tell all and sundry how much you loathe me and give al-Bīḍ every reason to trust in you, to invite you [to Aden] and invest his resources in you – and then you ensure that they will not be used against us!"[25]

25 Similar activities seem to have taken place during the War of the Central Areas in 1980–81. In a diary entry, Sinān Abū Laḥūm notes that some northern shaykhs joined the NDF nominally, in order to gain access to southern money and weapons, yet they did not intend to use them against Sanaa, see Abū Laḥūm 2004: vol. 3: 270.

After the elimination of the Third Brigade at ʿAmrān, the war moved on to the southern Baʾ Ṣuhayb Brigade led by Thābit Muthannā Jawās at Dhamār.[26] With air raids in Sanaa and Aden, the civil war began on a large scale. Once the northern army subdued the Baʾ Ṣuhayb Brigade, the way to Aden was open, and a three-pronged northern advance was set in motion, breaking through the former border. As northern forces slowly but steadily advanced on Aden, the southern tribes were of little help to the southern leaders. The ʿAwlaqī, the Yāfiʿ, and the tribes of Radfān, whom the YSP had tried to reduce and detribalize in PDRY times and who loathed the YSP's anti-tribal policies, chose a "neutral" position and put up only a nominal fight when the northern army passed through their territories. Likewise, al-Bīḍ's attempts to rally the tribes of Ḥaḍramawt produced little response.[27]

From the outbreak of the civil war, Mujāhid had lingered in Aden, until he and his companions eventually joined the southern forces. In the battle for al-ʿAnad airbase in Laḥj, where two of the three northern prongs converged on their way to Aden, Mujāhid and his men faced the northern forces in battle.[28]

> We stayed with them [the southerners] and fought with them, as is our custom. We participated in the battle for al-ʿAnad airbase with my tribesmen who had escorted ʿAbdallāh Shalīl to Aden, plus those who had escorted Sayf al-Baqrī to Aden, plus my sixteen personal guards, in total seventy tribesmen from Sufyān. We fought alongside the southerners and helped them confront the northern forces, but our enthusiasm suffered a heavy blow when al-Bīḍ declared southern secession [on 21 May 1994], because basically we were *waḥdawiyyūn* (unionists), not secessionists.
>
> When southern resistance at al-ʿAnad was about to break and the southern forces began to withdraw, we retreated with them, because I had decided not to sacrifice my tribesmen for the sake of southern secession. Since the days of the NDF, we were firm unionists, and the idea of paying for southern secession with the blood of my tribesmen was unacceptable to me.
>
> During our retreat, we stumbled across an arms cache left behind by southern forces, [there were] RPG-7 grenade launchers and 12.7 mm heavy machine guns, and we decided to take our share of these arms. This

26 In 2004, during the first Ṣaʿda war between the Ṣāliḥ regime and the resurgent Ḥūthīs, Jawās was identified as the officer who shot Ḥusayn al-Ḥūthī in the caves of Jurf Salmān in Marrān, see Brandt 2017a: 382 n. 61.

27 Dresch 1995: 38.

28 For the al-ʿAnad battle, see Warburton 1995: 31.

> delayed us and [in the meantime] the northern reconnaissance arrived at the battlefield. Some of us confronted the northern vanguard in order to slow down its advance, while others continued to load weapons on our cars, then we left al-ʿAnad.
>
> There were clear signs that the southern forces had been infiltrated by traitors and [loyalists of] Ṣāliḥ and ʿAlī Muḥsin. On one occasion, southern forces laid a minefield behind the front, so in case of defeat, we would withdraw from the minefield through the safe corridor they left between the mines, which would explode only when the northern army came through. Yet when we withdrew from that place, we lost the safe corridor and were in desperate fear of the mines. But they did not explode. The soldiers who had laid the mines were traitors, they did not extract the arming pins, hence the mines were not armed and did not explode. We withdrew together with the southern forces to the city of al-Ḥawṭa, the capital of Laḥj, then to al-Ḥussaynī. As southern resistance became ever weaker, in the bottom of my heart I knew that the South was going to be defeated.

After the conquest of al-ʿAnad air base, the northern forces continued their advance, forcing the southern army to the defensive on all fronts. By the beginning of July, Mujāhid and his companions were back in Aden. As the city was approached from all sides and the lines of the three-pronged northern advance slowly converged on Aden airport at Khormaksar, an eerie drama began to unfold. Exposed to massive shelling, parts of the city had become a landscape of craters, ruins, and rubble. Bombs had damaged many buildings, blasted out windows, and cut off water supplies to a population of nearly one million, all during the sweltering summer heat. Against a background rumble from heavy artillery, the sound of guns firing in the distance and fronts cracking everywhere, public order gradually dissolved, and the first looting took place. With their defeat at hand, the southern leaders, disappointed by their failure to gain either domestic support or international recognition, boarded ships and left Aden for al-Mukallā.

Mujāhid and his companions remained in Aden when the final assault on the besieged city began with heavy shelling. When al-Bīḍ declared southern independence, it was clear to Mujāhid that he was fighting in the wrong war. Now, however, with the looming defeat of the southern state, it became clear to him that the end was near – not only the end of the southern project, but most likely also his own. Sufyān had been subdued, the northern forces stood at the gates of Aden, and even if he managed to escape the looming carnage, he knew that Ṣāliḥ had instructed the ʿAmāliqa Brigade to pursue and arrest him. As the

end came closer, it became clear to him that his decision in al-ʿAnad – that is, not to sacrifice the lives of his tribesmen for the sake of southern secession – would get him nowhere. It was evident that something far worse than southern secession was about to take place: the military subjection of the South and its retention in united Yemen, forever oppressed by the dominant North. In such a seemingly apocalyptic time, when everything was about to be torn into pieces, and amidst such terrible destruction, he revoked the decision he had made in al-ʿAnad.

> I went to Haythām Qāsim Ṭāhir, the minister of defence, and Ṣāliḥ Munaṣṣir al-Siyaylī, the governor of Aden. I told them that Ṣāliḥ is fighting them together with Islamist warriors of the Iṣlāḥ party, and southerners who left the South together with President ʿAlī Nāṣir [in 1986]. And that they had not yet benefited from those oppressed northern tribes who despised Ṣāliḥ, al-Aḥmar, and the Islamists. I offered to head to the North and rally the tribes to fight alongside the South against Ṣāliḥ and asked them to open al-ʿAbr border crossing point in Ḥaḍramawt to let thousands of Bakīl warriors enter to fight alongside them. They supported my idea and told me to rush to al-Mukallā and convince al-Bīḍ of it. The plan was to go to Aden airport and board an Antonov military transport aircraft to al-Mukallā, because northern forces were already laying siege on Aden from three directions. The ʿAmāliqa stood in Abyan at the gates of Aden, shelling the city and the airport with Katyushas, and the land route to al-Mukallā was impassable.
>
> Yet when we arrived at the airport, there were no planes. I asked the airport director about it and he told me, "We cannot hold any plane at the airport as a result of the shelling. You must be present when a plane arrives, because it cannot wait at the airport. I advise you to dig pits for you and your companions and seek shelter in them until a plane arrives. Get on board as quickly as possible because it won't stop for more than a few minutes!" We dug pits to protect ourselves from splinters, because the airport building did not provide any protection against the airstrikes. The ʿAmāliqa was shelling the airport with Katyusha missiles, and we waited for one week in heaps of rubble, fragments of wall, and scattered rubbish for the arrival of a plane that would evacuate us from Aden.
>
> *One week in a pit?*
>
> Necessity has its own rules and conditions.
>
> *How is this, Katyusha shelling?*
>
> Scary, terrifying. The howling sound is freaking creepy. Like screaming death. The noise of hell.

The first plane that landed on the airport's runway was right away struck by a Katyusha missile and broke apart into halves. The shelling drove us back to the pit, and we kept waiting. At length, some days later, all of a sudden another plane arrived. It was a small military aircraft that seemed to come out of nowhere. The moment it landed, we ran across the tarmac and got aboard.

Were there others waiting for a plane?

Yes, there were some military leaders, and I think Dr Yāsīn Saʿīd [Nuʿmān], but I am not certain. The plane took off again after a few minutes without gaining altitude, and flew for a while extremely low over the sea, it felt like one meter above the water surface, staying as low as possible to remain invisible [to radar] and lessen the chances of discovery and taking a hit. After a while it gained altitude, and finally we reached al-Mukallā. Shortly after we left Aden, the northern forces entered the city.

In al-Mukallā, I found the southern leaders in hopeless perplexity. I ran into a southern brigadier general and told him that I urgently needed to talk to al-Bīḍ. He accommodated me in a hotel room to refresh myself – the past days had not exactly improved my already somewhat dishevelled appearance – and then went to inform al-Bīḍ about my request.

In my meeting with al-Bīḍ, I reiterated my proposal to rally the tribes of Bakīl and send them to the South. Yet in spite of strenuous efforts to gain al-Bīḍ's approval, I was unable to obtain his consent. After being deceived by so many northern shaykhs, al-Bīḍ was not convinced of my idea. He preserved a graceful, suave demeanour, but below the surface he seemed distressed and confused, as if he had lost confidence in the whole North except us, the Sufyān. He said, "No one is with us except you, the Sufyān, and I do not want to sacrifice you."

I looked at him in stupefaction. Then I understood that this man was profoundly scared. This was the voice of one who had been shaken to the depths. He was afraid of letting further northern tribes enter [the South], lest they, too, betray him and direct their weapons against the southerners.

And al-Bīḍ was not all that wrong. While they were meeting in al-Mukallā, the northern army was launching its final assault on Aden, with furious shelling as they engaged the southern forces in a massive artillery duel at Aden airport. When the southern defenders began to vanish, northern forces along with tribal and Islamist irregulars, jihadis, and Arab-Afghan mujahideen entered Aden and moved into Crater, Maʿlā, and Tawāhī. Disastrous scenes took place as they began to loot the city, their violence and vandalism greatly supported

by the obscene hatred that had been created by years of anti-YSP Islamist propaganda. The pillage and destruction of Aden and the treatment of the Adenis by the northern invaders were outrageous and appalling, and can only be explained by the intoxicating feelings caused by uncontrolled violence, and by the systematic incitement and poisoning of public opinion that had been going on for years.

The northern excesses lasted ten days, during which "there was total disorder where you saw people looting and destroying everything."[29] Although the first looting began when Aden was still under siege, in that summer 1994, it was seared in the collective southern memory that again, the northern tribes had descended from the highlands and swarmed toward the South, like locusts, to collect whatever booty they could find, in the process adding to the long-existing southern fears and historical angst about being overrun by the northern tribes.[30] Many at the time drew parallels with the 1948 sack of Sanaa.[31]

> Two days after my meeting with al-Bīḍ, Ṣāliḥ Abū Bakr Bin Ḥussaynūn (the leader of the Ḥaḍramawt front) was killed, and the South suffered a terrible defeat. The southern leaders fled in all directions, to the Sultanate of Oman, Djibouti, Asmara (Eritrea), but I refused to take refuge with them. My companions and I rented cars and headed for al-ʿAbr border crossing in the Empty Quarter. There we met a southern military leader who told us that five hundred tribesmen from Sufyān had arrived at al-ʿAbr and demanded to cross the border into the South to protect me and fight alongside me in Aden, but he had refused them entry. My tribesmen waited at Jabal ʿAlī near the border crossing point for seven days. Then they decided to return home, because – according to the latest news – they believed that I had fallen in the battle for Aden. You have to remember that this was a time before satnav and mobile phones. Once you were on the road, you were really on your own.

29 ʿUmar al-Jāwī, from Day 2012: 148 n. 40.

30 Throughout Yemeni history, northern tribes have repeatedly raided Lower and southern Yemen, see, for example, Dresch 2006: 67 and passim. Some northerners subsequently settled down in these areas, leading to extended family networks. The "locusts" trope goes back to al-Shawkānī, see Dresch 1989: 28. The brutality of these tribal raids contributed significantly to the negative image of the northern tribes in the South. The tribes of Sufyān were no exception: after they raided Lower Yemen at the turn of the eighteenth century, women's earrings, some with ear fragments attached, appeared for sale in markets, prompting public outrage; see Zabārah 1958: 670.

31 For the aborted Constitutional Revolution of 1948 and an eyewitness' account of the sacking and pillage of Sanaa by northern tribes, see Bruck 2018.

> At al-ʿAbr, my companions and I left the South towards the Empty Quarter. We entered Maʾrib and stopped in Sūq al-Jalāl for lunch, then we continued to travel via the desert route towards al-Jawf. I reached my father-in-law's house [in Saraḥāt al-Matūn] in al-Jawf at night and found my wife sleeping. I woke her up. When she caught sight of me, she flung herself into my arms, then she fainted. I picked up a water bottle and splashed some water on her face until she awoke from her faint. She told me that the news said that I had been killed in the war in Aden. The next day, we continued to Wāsiṭ al-Ḍalʿa in Sufyān.

3 First Exile (1994–2004)

Great were the surprise and joy when Mujāhid and his companions arrived back in Sufyān. Hardly had Mujāhid reached his home village, when family and fellow tribesmen thronged around him and congratulated him for having escaped from deadly peril; they paid their respects to their shaykh and his companions whom they believed to have perished in the battle for Aden.

Back in Sufyān, and after months of breathless activism, Mujāhid at length found time to meditate on the abyss into which the defeat of Aden had plunged him. An almost incredible time it had been, perilous and murderous, weighty with destiny, and he had displayed an immense amount of passion and courage, but in the end his overwhelming exertions had been fruitless, and all he could show for was the bare rescue of his life. The scales had tilted definitively in the direction of Ṣāliḥ, who stood in control of a united Yemen and at the very climax of his power.

Indeed Mujāhid returned from Aden to a depressingly changed scene. The consequences of Ṣāliḥ's victories – both electoral and military – soon made themselves felt. Ṣāliḥ, his extended clan and those in league with him, including ʿAbdallāh al-Aḥmar and his sons, had extended their dominance over the whole country. As always, the war, a devourer of men and destroyer of values, proved a profitable business for the victors, for with times of chaos there came splendid opportunities for empowerment and enrichment. After 1994, "all pretences to conceal the presidential family's monopoly of military power were abandoned."[32] There were golden prospects for army contractors and other profiteers of the military-commercial complex.[33] And splendid possibilities

32 Day 2012: 137.

33 On the military-commercial complex and the development of the Yemeni Economic Corporation (YECO), see Seitz 2016. Burrowes and Kasper (2007) argue that after 1994

opened up in the economic sector, where money stuck to the fingers and a redistribution of property was taking place as estates, industrial facilities, and even oil fields changed hands.[34] In this way, the theft and plunder of the city of Aden continued even after the end of the armed battle. To give but one example, after the war the sons of al-Aḥmar asserted their rights over expensive property on the Aden waterfront.[35] Mujāhid, by contrast, never managed to take possession of the estate in Aden that al-Bīḍ had given him out of gratitude for his support in the 1993 elections; his claim was lost in the turmoil of the war.

Likewise in domestic political terms, Ṣāliḥ, now all-powerful, used the war to clear out the last opposition to him. YSP politicians and other adversaries were persecuted, and thousands of southerners fled into exile. The supreme southern leaders, among them al-Bīḍ and Ḥaydar Abū Bakr al-ʿAṭṭās, were tried in absentia for treason, and five of them were sentenced to death.[36] In sum, the civil war of 1994, "erased any vestiges of Southern goodwill towards Sanaa, left the country bitterly divided and reduced to vanishing point the chance of President Ṣāliḥ being either able or willing to lead the country towards political pluralism and economic well-being."[37]

During the war, Ṣāliḥ had counted on crude domination. After his military victory, however, he again assumed the role of a politician who played his cards with deliberation and used the principle of tactical duality to his supreme advantage – his very style of governance, which combined authoritarianism with persuasion, intimidation with promises. Ṣāliḥ knew that in the long term a certain degree of power sharing (or its semblance) with the South and thus the inclusion of a certain number of southerners in the post-war government would be crucial to maintain northern dominance. His enemies must not unite against him, nor should his friends become too powerful. His goal was to keep all of them in well-tempered dependence – this was his style of rule, and on the whole it was successful. However, it goes without saying that he did not appoint true YSP loyalists to the post-war government, rather he appointed loyalists of (pro-North) ex-President ʿAlī Nāṣir. Hence his appointment of feeble, submissive ʿAbd Rabbuh Manṣūr Hādī, who had come to the North with ʿAlī Nāṣir in 1986 and had no power base of his own, to the post of minister of defence. Hādī also replaced al-Bīḍ as vice president.

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democracy was declining, leading to a kind of "arrested statehood" as the regime prevented state-building by encouraging oligarchy, corruption, and incompetence.

34 On post-war resource management, see Day 2012: 154–161.

35 Mercier 1997: 69–70; and Dresch 2000: 198.

36 The death sentences were later revoked, see Day 2012: 137.

37 Dunbar 1995: 58.

In dealing with the tribal shaykhs, Ṣāliḥ signalled that he was ready to let bygones be bygones and work to re-establish not cordial, but at least correct relations with those who had plotted (or rather appear to have plotted) against him in his hour of need. Many shaykhs who had been leaning towards the YSP or Iṣlāḥ party during the transition period and the civil war, now rejoined the GPC because this meant being close to Ṣāliḥ (and his resources).[38]

Given his mutinous record, Mujāhid assumed that he would be excluded from the great reconciliation that was taking place. His conflict with Sanaa had reached a life-and-death struggle that left no room for doubt about his determination to confront Ṣāliḥ and his regime. Another phase of confrontation had begun, and Mujāhid knew all too well that in this phase his back was against the wall. Therefore, he was surprised beyond measure when a phone call reached him from the presidential office; it kindly conveyed the message that the president wished to meet him in Sanaa. Like his second personal encounter with the president in 1988, the events that followed provided him with an intimate glimpse into the sordid games and devious policies at the heart of the regime.

Indeed, Ṣāliḥ considered Mujāhid a troublesome fellow who during the transition period and the civil war had gone far beyond the parameters Ṣāliḥ had put around him. But after the civil war, which Ṣāliḥ had won with the help of the Ḥāshid, Islamist, and jihadi warriors of al-Aḥmar and the Iṣlāḥ party, a struggle for power and position had set in again, and this prompted Ṣāliḥ to turn a blind eye to Mujāhid's scandalous behaviour. In his memoirs, ʿAbdallāh al-Aḥmar never tires of stressing the instrumental role that the Iṣlāḥ party and the tribal and Islamist militias had played in the civil war against the South, and to emphasize the "unity," "solidarity," and "cohesion" of the anti-YSP coalition[39] – and this was exactly the problem. For mystical sentimentalities of this sort meant little to Ṣāliḥ. To him, every partnership was a form of imprisonment. Political and military considerations fettered him to ʿAbdallāh al-Aḥmar and the Iṣlāḥ party, who had supported him during the war and who now wanted more concessions and influence than he was prepared to give them. Ṣāliḥ was looking for ways and means to free himself from these obligations. Moreover, the post-war economic situation brought about rapprochement with Saudi Arabia and the United States. This in turn also required a tougher government line against Islamist extremists, all of which strained the wartime alliance between Ṣāliḥ and the Islamists.[40]

38 See Dunbar 1995: 60–61; and al-Sharjabī 2009: 63.

39 Al-Aḥmar 2008: 289–290.

40 Whitaker 1997: 27. See also Schwedler 2006: 188.

Mujāhid knew nothing of these deliberations when he received the president's invitation. In fact, he felt uneasy for another reason. In 1987, his father had been murdered after such a meeting with the president in Sanaa, and his fate gave Mujāhid ample reason to believe that the invitation also served to lure him from Sufyān to the slippery ground of the capital. The chances seemed against his ever being able to get away unscathed. The whole idea of visiting Ṣāliḥ seemed almost suicidal to him.

Most unwillingly, and with a sense of disquiet and foreboding, at length Mujāhid agreed to go to Sanaa and see what Ṣāliḥ had to offer, but on the condition that Ṣāliḥ provide him with a guarantor to ensure his safe conduct. To his astonishment, Ṣāliḥ immediately consented to his demand and even appointed as his guarantor Shaykh Qā'id Shuwayṭ of Saḥār, who was a friend of ʿAbdallāh al-Aḥmar and a patron of the Salafi teaching centre Dār al-Ḥadīth at Dammāj.[41] After the civil war, which had given the Islamists an enormous boost, Qā'id Shuwayṭ had risen to become a person of some importance in tribal-Islamist circles. It was only in retrospect that Mujāhid understood that in fact Ṣāliḥ had deliberately calculated that Qā'id Shuwayṭ would attend their meeting, listen to their conversation, and inform ʿAbdallāh al-Aḥmar (plus their Islamist friends) about its content; in this way Ṣāliḥ aimed to convey a hidden threat to his former war-time allies who had by then already become a burden to him.

Coming from Ṣaʿda, the guarantor Shaykh Qā'id Shuwayṭ made a stopover in Sufyān in order to bring Mujāhid and his escorts to Sanaa. In the presidential palace in Jamāl Street, in the bustling centre of the capital, Ṣāliḥ surprised Mujāhid with a friendly reception.

> At that time Ṣāliḥ was filled with self-conceit and complacency because of his victory over the South, and during our meeting it surfaced that he also wanted to get rid of the Iṣlāḥ [party]. Ṣāliḥ did not say this expressly, rather he went on talking about common goals, the possibilities of cooperation, and the like. The meaning of that was not lost on me, for I understood all too well that something sinister lay behind his lofty talk, and that he wanted to win me over to counter the influence of al-Aḥmar and the Iṣlāḥ [party]. Yet I loathed him too much to make common cause with him, and the prospect of using my blood feud for his personal benefit remained utterly repugnant to me. Eventually I put an end to his sermon

41 The Salafi teaching centre Dār al-Ḥadīth al-Khayriyya was established in 1979 by Muqbil b. Hādī l-Wādiʿī (d. 2001) at Dammāj in the Zaydi heartland of northern Yemen. Some of the area's shaykhs assumed protective roles towards the centre, see Brandt 2017a: 106–111.

> and interrupted him by saying, "It seems that ʿAbdallāh al-Aḥmar is the real master [of Yemen], because I have met you many times and you have never offered me any solutions."

At this point, Ṣāliḥ's attitude towards Mujāhid changed, and the dialogue that had begun as an amiable talk, took a caustic turn. Ṣāliḥ knew from previous encounters with Mujāhid that his nature was so intrepid, his will so firm, that once he took a decision, he would not give way; that he would continue this hopeless opposition rather than accept a feigned pardon that would give Ṣāliḥ a halo of magnanimity and grace. Annoyed by Mujāhid's renewed, or continued, refusal to cooperate, Ṣāliḥ conducted the rest of the conversation in the icy tone of an outraged great power.

> Ṣāliḥ appeared much exercised over my rebuff. Naturally, he did not like to deal with people who had a strong personality. He only liked [to deal with] yes-men who told him, "Aye, aye, as you like" (*ḥāḍir, ḥāḍir, kayfamā bidak*).
>
> He began scolding me, "Well, then, now I want to hear whatever excuses you care to offer up for your latest enormities. You, and your father before you, you are from Sufyān, there is nothing good in you, you were always against me, you were with the royalists and the Ḥamīd al-Dīn, then with the NDF, then with the socialists. Now, with the socialists defeated, there is no one left to support you except the Jews, if you go to them!"
>
> I replied, "Because of your vanity and tyranny we would gladly put our hands into the hands of the Jews if they supported us. But the Jews wouldn't accept us because you are their first agent in Yemen!"
>
> Ṣāliḥ went black with anger. He reared up like a viper and shouted, "You are an insolent rogue! It is impossible to come to terms with you!" His menacing posture made me leap to my feet and place my hand on my side, ready to defend myself. Then the guarantor Shaykh Qā'id Shuwayṭ, may God rest his soul, also rose from his chair and said, "You are both insolent" (*kilākumā jalafayn*)!

Mujāhid had to listen to a passionate arraignment of himself as Ṣāliḥ assumed the role of a man enraged beyond all bearing. He continued with furious invectives against Mujāhid, his "mania for creating problems" and the "pack of rascals" (*ḥazimat awghād*) – this was aimed at his fellow tribesmen – who, in his eyes, formed a compact hostile body opposed to his government and in permanent rebellion against him.

> Our meeting ended with Ṣāliḥ saying that he was now finally convinced that we would never reach any agreement. When we were done, I left the presidential palace with my companions and we headed towards al-Jirāf [neighbourhood in northern Sanaa], where we planned to pass the night before continuing via the desert route to Sufyān the next morning. We knew that Ṣāliḥ's tantrum meant danger, and we were in a state of heightened vigilance. The traffic was fairly heavy, but we did not hear nor see anything suspicious to give rise to alarm.
>
> However, when we reached Māzdā Street, all at once we got into an ambush of the military police, who launched an attack on us with truck-mounted machine guns. One of my companions suddenly roared in anguished pain and crumpled on his seat, and our car broke down beyond repair. Our second car stopped to defend us. Dashing for cover to escape what was now murderous gunfire, we forced our way into the cover of adjacent buildings, from where we resumed shooting. We were almost suffocating on gun smoke as shots rang out and bullets ricocheted off the walls. After a gun battle of half an hour, our guarantor Shaykh Qā'id Shuwayṭ appeared on the scene and demanded an end to the hostilities. When it was all over, two of us were wounded, and one of the cars was lost. The military police had three wounded people. Later on, we learnt that they were taken to Russia for treatment. After we returned to Sufyān, Ṣāliḥ sent the Firqa on a punitive campaign against us, for flimsy reasons, and demanded my return to Sanaa.

This time, the Firqa's approaching mechanized colossus left the Sufyān little more than their courage. The fall of Aden and the southern military defeat had given them a good scare, and Mujāhid and his tribesmen knew that they no longer stood a chance against the regime. Ṣāliḥ, in cahoots with ʿAlī Muḥsin, would never cease to hatch new plots to harass and punish them for their tenacious opposition. It would take many men and resources to counter the regime's concerted onslaught, and even in Mujāhid's heyday, he hardly commanded that. His tribe was outnumbered and, after the loss of their southern sponsor, they were underequipped and financially exhausted. The situation was hopeless.

Although Mujāhid had demonstrated his courage in the civil war, the southern defeat had reduced him to the role of a failed campaigner, a fifth column working for the other, now defeated side. His issue of revenge with *bayt* al-Aḥmar had left behind a trail of blood, and had still failed to reach its ultimate goal. His Talāḥum party project had been thwarted by Ṣāliḥ's machinations; the political project did not materialize, and the whole movement had collapsed, its members scattered or at odds again. After the excitement

and elation of the transition period, the erstwhile "unity" of the Bakīl shaykhs had again dissolved into strife and feuding; most of them had returned to the routine of petty squabbles and double-dealings with Sanaa. Many dismissed the grassroots activism of the transition period with an irritated shrug. The southern leaders were dead, in jail, or living in exile, and everywhere in the country Islamism was rearing its head. At this juncture, and though he held firmly to the conviction that he had acted rightly, Mujāhid was a man finished and done with.

> I gathered the shaykhs and *ʿuqqāl* of Sufyān and told them, "The tribes have fallen or have been silenced, and no one except us remains to confront the regime. The YSP, which helped with money and arms to keep us on our feet, is gone. Ṣāliḥ will continue to confront us and send out punitive campaigns against us on the grounds of false accusations and calumnies, and our defensive potential is at an end. Peradventure we could achieve a settlement if Ṣāliḥ was the only problem. But ʿAbdallāh al-Aḥmar will never cease sowing discord between us, and the extremisms he introduced into Yemen are not only devouring me and my people, but have even penetrated into the mosques and [fomented] theological debates. And you, my tribesmen, you are brave, you are heroes, you would never abandon me, you would never hesitate to fight alongside me and defend me against our enemies. But I do not want to sacrifice you in defence of myself, especially at this very difficult point in time when Ṣāliḥ is victorious and all the tribes remain subdued."
>
> I told them, "I will leave Yemen and look for a sponsor, a powerful patron. If I find one, I will return to you from abroad. And if I do not find support, I will stay abroad so as to relieve you of my presence, which would attract ever further persecution and spilled blood. For if I leave Yemen, tensions will ease, the punitive campaigns against you will stop, and you will live in safety and peace. My absence from Yemen will save your blood and help you find repose." We discussed this, and we agreed on this, and I left Sufyān and Yemen via smugglers' paths and al-Khaḍrāʾ border crossing point [at Najrān] for Saudi Arabia; later I moved on to Syria. I did not find support and stayed abroad for a long time. And my tribe remained safe during my absence.