History of Yemen

Medieval History

Yemen, no matter how it is defined or what its current political structure, has always controlled the southwestern tip of the Arabian Peninsula—the Babel Mandeb, choke point to and from the Red Sea. It is the closest point to sub-Saharan Africa (especially Djibouti and Ethiopia)—with which it has had a long historic association. It also has been a major caravan route for land trade from the Indian Ocean to the Arabian Peninsula and on to the Mediterranean Sea. The recent discovery of the ancient trading city of Ubar [in today Oman, near the city of Salalah] was accomplished using remote sensing and satellite images. In biblical times, Yemen was the home of the queen of Sheba (related to the Sabaean Empire). In Roman and medieval times, it was the center for the lucrative spice trade, especially frankincense and myrrh. [1]

The Old Walled City of Shibam

The "Manhattan of the desert" has the tallest mud buildings in the world, with some of them over 30 meters. Its distinct architecture is one of the oldest and best examples of urban planning based on the principle of vertical construction. Shibam is now a UNESCO World Heritage Site.

In pre-Islamic times, the area that encompasses the present-day Republic of Yemen was called Arabia Felix—happy or prosperous Arabia—and was ruled by a number of indigenous dynasties in several different kingdoms. The most important cultural, social, and political event in Yemen's history was the coming of Islam around A.D. 630. Following the conversion of the Persian governor, many of the sheikhs and their tribes converted to Islam, and Yemen was ruled as part of Arab caliphates. The former North Yemen came under the control of imams of various dynasties, the most important of which were the Zaydis [a Shi'a muslim dynasty], whose dynasty lasted.
well into the twentieth century.

**Former North Yemen:**

By the sixteenth century and again in the nineteenth century, northern Yemen was controlled in the cities by the **Ottoman Empire** and in tribal areas by the Zaydi imam’s suzerainty. The Ottoman Empire was dissolved in 1918, and **Imam Yahya**, leader of the Zaydi community, took power in the area that later became the **Yemen Arab Republic** (YAR), or North Yemen.

Underground opposition to Yahya began in the late 1930s, and by the mid-1940s major elements of the population opposed his rule. In 1948 Yahya was assassinated in a palace coup, and forces opposed to his feudal rule seized power. His son Ahmad [Ahmad bin Yahya Hamidaddin] succeeded him and ruled until his own death in September 1962. Imam Ahmad’s reign was marked by growing repression, renewed friction with the British over their presence in the south, and increasing pressure to support the Arab nationalist objectives of Egyptian President Gamal Abdul Nasser.

From 1958 to 1961, North Yemen was federated with **Egypt** and **Syria** in the **United Arab States**. Imam Ahmad’s son Badr assumed power after Ahmad’s death but was deposed one week later by army officers, led by Colonel Abdallah al Sallal, who took control of **Sanaa** and created the YAR. Immediately upon taking power, the officers created the ruling eight-member Revolutionary Command Council headed by Sallal. Civil war ensued between the royalist forces, supported by **Saudi Arabia** and **Jordan** in opposition to the newly formed republic, and republicans, supported by Egyptian troops. In 1967 Egyptian troops were withdrawn, and by 1968, following a royalist siege of Sanaa, most of the opposing leaders had reconciled. In 1970 Saudi Arabia recognized the YAR.

**Former South Yemen:**

**British** influence increased in the southern and eastern portion of Yemen after the British captured the port of **Aden** in 1839. It was ruled as part of British India until 1937, when Aden became a crown colony, and the remaining territory was designated a protectorate (administered as the Eastern Protectorate and Western Protectorate). By 1965 most of the tribal states within the protectorate and the Aden colony itself had joined to form the British-sponsored Federation of South Arabia. Over the
next two years, two rival factions—the Marxist National Liberation Front (NLF) and the Front for the Liberation of Occupied South Yemen (FLOSY)—fought for power. By August 1967, the NLF was in control of most areas, and at the end of the summer the federation formally collapsed. The last British troops were removed on November 29. On November 30, 1967, the People’s Republic of Yemen, comprising Aden and South Arabia, was proclaimed. In June 1969, a radical wing of the NLF gained power. The country’s name changed to the People’s Democratic Republic of Yemen (PDNY) on December 1, 1970.

Road to Unification:

By 1972 the two Yemens were in open conflict. The YAR received aid from Saudi Arabia, and the PDNY received arms from the Soviet Union. Although the Arab League brokered a cease-fire and both sides agreed to forge a united Yemen within 18 months, the two Yemens remained apart. The following years saw continued unrest and conflict, culminating in the assassination of the president of the YAR in June 1978. A month later, the Constituent People’s Assembly elected Lieutenant Colonel Ali Abdullah Saleh as president of the YAR. Renewed fighting broke out in early 1979, but in March the heads of state of the two Yemens signed an agreement in Kuwait pledging unification.

In April 1980, Abdul Fattah Ismail, who had been appointed head of state of the PDNY in December 1978, resigned and went into exile. He was replaced by Ali Nasir Muhammad, a former prime minister. In January 1986, Ismail returned from exile and resumed a senior position in the Yemen Socialist Party (YSP). More than a month of violence between Muhammad and Ismail’s supporters resulted in Muhammad’s ouster and Ismail’s death. In February 1986, former prime minister Haydar Abu Bakr al Attas was named president of a newly formed PDNY government. In October a general election took place in the PDNY for the national legislature. In the YAR’s first general election, held in July 1988, President Saleh won a third five-year term.

In May 1988, the governments of the YAR and PDNY agreed to withdraw troops from their mutual border, create a demilitarized zone, and allow easier border crossings for citizens of both states. In May 1990, they agreed on a draft unity constitution, which was ultimately approved by referendum in May 1991. The Republic of Yemen was officially declared on May 22, 1990. President Saleh of the YAR became president of the new republic; Ali Salim al Baydh, secretary general of the Central Committee of the YSP was named vice president; and PDNY President al Attas was named prime minister. Al Attas led a transitional coalition Council of Ministers whose membership was divided between the General People’s Congress (GPC; the party supporting President Saleh) and the YSP (the party supporting Vice President al Baydh).

Unrest and Civil War:

Ali Abdullah Saleh (born 21 March 1942)
Ali Abdullah Saleh Al-Ahmar is the first - and so far, only - President of unified Yemen. He was previously President of the Yemen Arab Republic (North Yemen) from 1978 until 1990.

http://www.nationsonline.org/oneworld/History/Yemen-history.htm
In late 1991 through early 1992, deteriorating economic conditions led to significant domestic unrest, including several riots. Legislative elections were nonetheless held in early 1993, and in May the two former ruling parties, the GPC and the YSP, merged to create a single political party with an overall majority in the new House of Representatives. In August Vice President al Baydh exiled himself voluntarily to Aden, and the country’s general security situation deteriorated as political rivals settled scores and tribal elements took advantage of the widespread unrest. In January 1994, representatives of the main political parties signed a document of pledge and accord in Amman, Jordan, that was designed to resolve the ongoing crisis. But by May 1994, the country was in civil war, and international efforts to broker a cease-fire were unsuccessful.

On May 21, 1994, al Baydh and other leaders of the former South Yemen declared secession and the establishment of a new Democratic Republic of Yemen centered in Aden, but the new republic failed to achieve any international recognition. On July 7, 1994, President Salih’s troops captured Aden, thus ending the civil war. In August 1994, in an attempt to undermine the strength of southern military units loyal to the YSP, President Salih prohibited party membership within the armed forces; he also introduced amendments to the constitution abolishing the Presidential Council and establishing universal suffrage. In October he was reelected president and named GPC members to key cabinet posts; several ministerial posts were given to members of the Yemeni Islah Party (YIP), which had been loyal to Salih during the civil war.

1994 to Present:

Following the civil
war, Yemen's currency, the riyal, was devalued; the cost of fuel doubled, water and electricity were in short supply, and food costs rose. Public demonstrations ensued, and the YIP was at odds with the GPC over economic reforms recommended by the World Bank. In the April 1997 parliamentary elections, the GPC garnered 187 seats and the YIP only 53 seats. A new Council of Ministers composed primarily of GPC members was named in May. The country continued to experience unrest due to economic hardship, coupled with increasing lawlessness, particularly against tourists. In September 1999, the first direct presidential election was held, reelecting the incumbent, President Salih, to a five-year term by an overwhelming margin. Constitutional amendments adopted in 2000 extended the president's term by two years. President Salih was reelected in September 2006. In October 2007, he announced comprehensive political reforms, some of which will not take effect until he is no longer in power, calling into question the prospects for implementation. The September 2006 elections for local and governorate council seats, as well as the May 2008 elections for governorate governors have left power largely in the hands of the ruling GPC. [2]

The 2011 Yemeni protests

The 2011 Yemeni protests followed the initial stages of the Tunisian Revolution and occurred simultaneously with the Egyptian Revolution and other mass protests in the Arab world in early 2011. The protests were initially against unemployment, economic conditions and corruption, as well as against the government's proposals to modify the constitution of Yemen. The protestors' demands then escalated to calls for President Ali Abdullah Saleh to resign.[3]

Sources:

[notes by the editor in brackets]