

KLR-19

INSTITUTE OF CURRENT WORLD AFFAIRS

Katherine Roth
San'a, YEMEN
30 July, 1994

Peter Bird Martin
Institute of Current World Affairs
4 West Wheelock Street
Hanover, NH 03755

**What Saudi and Yemeni Religious Authorities had to say
about the Yemen war**

Dear Peter,

The statements, *fatwas*¹ and recommendations of the Ulema, or Islamic scholars, in this region hold a great deal of weight. In traditional Muslim societies such as Yemen, where the literacy rate remains low and respect for religious scholars runs high, transmission of documents such as those translated below hold a great deal of sway, both among the largely uneducated masses and in official government circles. Religious statements such as the following are widely distributed among the populations and are often posted at mosques, where the news can be read and recounted to the illiterate. Such oral transmission of religious messages remains characteristic of many Islamic societies.

The statements and edicts also circulate internationally in political-religious circles and may be quoted in the Islamist media abroad. On clandestine Islamist radio in Algeria, for example, broadcasts of citations from international statements such as the following is common.

While journalists concentrated on the political maneuvering behind the war, many local lay persons and decision-makers paid just as much attention to how the Ulema read the changing situation, and many Muslim believers based their actions and reactions at

¹A religious decree.

Katherine Roth is a Fellow of the Institute
writing about tradition and modernity in the Arab world.

least partly on the "clarifications" of those considered to have special knowledge of the fine points of the religion.

I have gathered below a few statements issued by Saudis and Yemeni Ulema during and immediately after the war, and find them a valuable reference and source of insight into the manner in which current events are interpreted in a religious context.

The below documents also shed some light on the way the Saudi Islamist opposition and the Yemeni Ulema, while not directly linked, are in dialogue with one another.

What the Yemeni Ulema said after meeting in mid-May to discuss the Yemen war:

Praise be to God who says: *"Ob ye who believe; Obey God, and the Messenger when He calleth you to that which quickeneth you."*² God also says: *And guard yourselves against a chastisement which can not fall exclusively on those of you who are wrong-doers.*³ So I witness there is no god but God, the promoter of his religion, supporter of his believers and betrayer of his enemies. God may give blessing, peace and mercy to those who invoke his name and fight for his sake until they hit the mark. God's blessing and peace be upon the Prophet, his family and companions.

However, let it be known to those present that : *"This is a notification to the people and let them be warned thereof."*⁴

O distinguished and Muslim Yemeni people, as you pass this period of difficult circumstances imposed on you by the renegade and illegitimate apostate forces represented by the socialist party wishing to kindle the fire of sedition, start the hell of war and destroy the religious and peaceful life in the Yemen of faith and wisdom. This party has exercised atheism, injustice, and tyranny and has made the entire Yemeni nation suffer many sorts of afflictions and misfortunes. These misfortunes are registered in history and are remembered with bitterness by the sons of Yemen.

The Yemeni people will never forget the black history of this party, starting from enforcing disbelief on the children of our people in the southern and eastern provinces through school curriculum and the press and by way of Marxist principles and rules which took as their motto: "There is no God and life but reality." The socialists undermined the morals of the society, its tradition of lawfulness and industry, and committed abominations and atrocities which led to the drinking of alcoholic beverages, the destruction of dignity, the disgrace of honor, and the seizure of property.

²Sura VIII, Verse 24. Spoils of War. The Holy Qor'an.

³Cit. Verse 25.

⁴A tradition of the Prophet Mohamed.

Our nation will never forget the massacre of thousands of innocent citizens by the party which used as justification the Marxist theory that: "It is not important whether one exterminates three quarters of humanity, so long as the remaining quarter becomes communist." The socialist party has strengthened its iron grip on the citizens, dishonoring the population, nationalizing its funds, spreading apprehension and humiliating the citizens with its militias and secret service who deemed the forbidden lawful. Still the socialist party was not satisfied with all these things, and it exported its destructive ways to the rest of Yemen. Everyone knows about the planting of millions of mines in central Yemen and the poisoning of northern wells. The story of the hideous crimes against Khawalan sheikhs and dignitaries is not hidden from the nation.

The bloody instincts of the socialist party were clearly demonstrated in the events of 13 January 1986 and the commotion of December 1992, which would have shaken all of Yemen had it not been for God's providence and mercy.

The subversive socialist plan continued. The last link of its chain was the crisis created by the socialist party when its secretary general returned from abroad. Every Yemeni citizen tasted this bitter crisis and was burned by its flame when the party tried stirring up the *jabilityyya*⁵ feuds and fanaticism, emphasizing sectarian, genealogical, tribal, doctrinal, ethnic and regional differences in order to extend its influence and achieve its malicious aims.

It did not take long, then, before this losing party⁶ transformed the crisis into deadly military battles which used military force to spill the blood of the Yemeni people and disrupt the peace in the Capital of Unity (San'a) as well as other towns and provinces, killing women, children and the elderly [such as in the Al-Hasaba quarter of San'a and Al-Rahida hospital].

The religious scholars are not used to keeping silent in the face of such events and the nation is accustomed to listening to what the scholars have to say in such circumstances, based on the saying of the Exalted One: "*And remember when God set out the responsibility of those who had received the Scripture He said: You are to expound it to mankind and not to hide it.*"⁷ The Ulema have continued to fulfill their duty of guiding and advising the leaders, the responsible persons, and the common people, as they did

⁵Pagan pre-Islamic society. This term is widely used by contemporary Islamist to refer to non-practicing Muslims who are as good as infidels. This provocative theory, by which Muslims can in essence be excommunicated if they are not perceived as practicing Muslims, was first presented by the Egyptian Islamist Sayid Qotb, whose books are one banned in many Muslim countries. Sayid Qotb is considered the father of the modern Islamist movement.

⁶It is important to note that only weeks prior to this statement, the socialist party was the second biggest political party in the country.

⁷Sura III, Verse 187. Family of Imran. The Holy Qor'an.

when they demanded that the constitution be amended to conform to Islamic Law. The socialist party failed to heed the advice of the Ulema.

As a consequence, the scholars of the Yemen of faith and wisdom wish to mention the following points to the sons of the nation:

1. The current fighting against the socialist party and its supporters is lawful and constitutes a holy war [jihad] in the name of God in order to protect the Islamic faith against rebels and secessionists and to protect the believers and their land from grave dangers. God, the most exalted, says: *"And fight them until persecution is no more, and religion is in the name of God."*⁸ God also says: *"How should ye not fight for the cause of God and the feeble among men, women and children who are crying 'Our Lord! Bring us forth from out this town of which the people are oppressors! O give us by thy presence some protecting friend! O give us from thy presence some defender!'"*⁹

The Ulema invite believers in unity from the socialist party to review their attitudes since returning to the truth is a virtue. They should rally around the banner of existing legitimacy and renounce publicly the dogmas and acts which go against Islam. The doors of repentance are wide open.

2. The Ulema pay tribute to the heroic stands of the men in the armed and security forces who stand firm in confronting the forces of sedition, separation, oppression and atheism. They praise God who has achieved through them great victories and they advise these good men to stick to their faith and the holy war in the name of God and to fight until God's word becomes the highest one. They should depend on God and be steadfast on the battlefield, invoking the name of God, and remaining obedient to God, His messenger and the authorities. The soldiers of God should beware of injustice and oppression.

God, the exalted, says: *"O ye who believe! When ye meet an army, hold firm and think strongly about God in order to be successful."*¹⁰ *"And obey God and His Messenger and dispute not one with another lest ye falter and your strength depart from you. Be steadfast! Lo! God is always with the steadfast!"*¹¹

3. The Ulema of Yemen call upon all Yemeni people without exception to stand beside their brothers in the armed and security forces at all times and to join the *jihad*¹²

⁸Sura VIII, Verse 39. Spoils of War. The Holy Qor'an.

⁹Sura IV, Verse 75. Women. The Holy Qor'an.

¹⁰Sura VIII, Verse 45. Spoils of War. The Holy Qor'an.

¹¹Sura VIII, Verse 46. Spoils of War. The Holy Qor'an.

¹²Holy War

either by enlisting in the volunteer or reserve forces or by donating money or blood. The Yemeni people should beware of those who sneak suspiciously among the ranks of the people in towns and villages and notify the authorities of the whereabouts of these people and of any attempts these people might make to disturb the peace. Yemenis should also confront the spreaders of false and biased rumors that spread fear and terror among the people, for God the exalted says: *"If the hypocrites and alarmists in the city do not cease, we verily shall urge ye on against them, then they will be your neighbors in it but a little while."*¹³

4. The Ulema support the steps and attitudes taken by the Presidential Council, the parliament and the Council of Ministers. Their moves are wise and courageous. They are trying hard to eradicate the sources of sedition and reject any outside interference in internal Yemeni affairs. The Ulema denounce and condemn the acts of war criminals and the socialist party, which started launching missiles on the Capital of Unity [San'a]. and other areas and cities.

5. a greatly appreciate the courageous stands of the sons of the southern and eastern provinces in standing beside their brothers the sons of the armed and security forces against the tyrannical socialist party and its rebel forces. The omnipotent God says: *"The believers are not else but brothers."* God also says: *"And the believers, men and women, are protecting friends of one another."*¹⁴ God, be exalted, says: *"Thou wilt not find folk who believe in God and the final judgement day loving of those who oppose God and his Messenger even if they be their fathers or of the same clan. As for such, He hath written faith upon their hearts and hath strengthened them with a spirit from Him."*¹⁵

6. The Ulema call upon the sons of the Yemeni nation to truly repent and to devote themselves to the Lord. They should be humble, faithful and honest, supporting victory and the soldiers of Islam in their fight to defeat and dishonor His infidel enemies, who are heralds of sedition, rebellion, wickedness and corruption. Yemenis should pray for the Muslim militants.

So God says: *"And verily our word went forth of old unto our bondmen sent [to war]; that they verily would be helped. And that our host, they verily would be the victors."*¹⁶

¹³Sura XXXIII, Verse 60. The Clans of the Holy Qor'an.

¹⁴Sura XLIX, Verse 10. The Private Apartments. The Holy Qor'an.

¹⁵Sura IX, Verse 71. Repentance. The Holy Qor'an. This quote was cited in Algeria by Islamist militants to defend the rejection and even killing of non-practicing family members in the name of God.

¹⁶Sura LVIII, Verse 22. She That Disputeth. The Holy Qor'an.

God the exalted says: *"God hath conferred on those who strive with their lives and wealth a rank above the sedentary. Unto each God hath promised good, but He hath bestowed on those who strive a great reward above the sedentary."*¹⁷

Lastly, God says: *"As for those who believe, be mindful of your duty to God and seek the way of approach unto Him and strive in His way."*¹⁸

The Prophet Mohamed, God's blessing and peace be upon him and his family, says: *"To serve in the early morning and late in the night [fighting] for the sake of God is better than attaining any worldly pleasures."*¹⁹ And: *"No dust of battle for the sake of God will join the smoke of hell [the Islamic soldier goes directly to Paradise]"*²⁰

We beg God to preserve us our religion and the unity of our country and to show all of us the straight path.

Yemen Ulema Association
15 May 1994

Statement by the Saudi Committee for the Defence of Legitimate Rights issued May 28, 1994. [This important Islamist opposition organization, consisting in part of Saudi Ulema, is based in London].

An elite of the nation's scholars has issued a statement about the fighting in Yemen in which they unmasked the criminal role of the communists in the past and at present and warned Muslims of the consequences of being deceived by false communist slogans. They called upon our Yemeni brothers to stay constant to the religion, abiding by Islam and confronting the enemies of Islam.

While the C.D.L.R. supports this statement [this was a statement issued by the Saudi Ulema], it refers to the fact that this statement emphasizes what the C.D.L.R. mentioned in its Announcement No. 9 [see below] by saying that the Saudi state's stand of supporting the communists is a dictatorial isolated attitude contrary to the nation's view - represented by its Ulema [religious scholars] - and is totally inconsistent with Islam.

¹⁷Sura XXXVII, Verses 171-173, Those Who Set the Ranks. The Holy Qor'an.

¹⁸Sura IV, Verse 95. Women. The Holy Qor'an.

¹⁹Sura V, Verse 35. The Table Spread. The Holy Qor'an.

²⁰Traditions [*Hadiith*] of the Prophet Mohamed.

The C.D.L.R. hails this statement and it expresses its sincere thanks and appreciation to the scholars who have expressed the people's conscience and declared publicly what is right and in so doing fulfilled their religious responsibility of clarifying and publicizing the truth with regard to Islam.

The C.D.L.R. is confident that these scholars will continue to disclose the truth regarding all forms of deviation and injustice and will continue to uphold their religious duty of holding the rulers accountable for representing the best interests of the people.

The following is a complete text of the scholar's' announcement, entitled 'The Saudi Role in Yemen':

Praise be to God; God's blessing and peace be upon the Messenger of God.

The nation²¹ has repeatedly expressed [by way of its scientific and ideological leadership and by way of letters addressed to the leadership] its rejection of the state's perverted practices, including the floundering foreign policy and the expenditure of enormous funds in support of injustice and tyranny. These expressions of discontent were in vain. The rulers ignored them and continued their material and moral support of unjust and oppressive regimes and of dubious movements, acting in the name of the people and using the funds of the people without authorization or warrant.

By taking away the people's right to decide how their funds are used and by acting against the opinion of the nation's intellectuals and reformers, the rulers have forcibly involved the Kingdom in the affairs of Yemen. In so doing, they have acted without any authorization or mandate. The rulers enthusiastically supported the forces of communism and atheism in Aden and paid these forces hundreds of millions of dollars and pressured the merchants of Hadramy origin - emigrated to escape the oppressive and unjust communist regime - to pay contributions to the communists.²² Not satisfied with that, the rulers supplied the atheists with hundreds of military vehicles and armored cars in addition to large quantities of arms and provisions.

It is obvious that these acts contradict the rulers' claim [many time reiterated] of acting in the name of Islam. Saudi Arabia's alliance with an artificial entity [South Yemen] and a losing party [the socialists] are against the country's interest and are wasteful of the people's funds at a time when the country is suffering from a critical economic situation.

²¹This wording is interesting in that the word "nation" is used to refer to the people of Saudi Arabia as separate from the regime, while the term "state" is used to mean "government".

²²Hadramies are those originally from the region of Hadramaut [eastern Yemen]. Many Hadramy families who are descended from the Prophet Mohamed fled to Saudi Arabia and northern Yemen to escape the communist regime. Much of the funding for Islamists in Yemen is said to come from these families, many of whom amassed great wealth in Saudi Arabia.

Now that the rulers have seen the worldwide collapse of the communist party they are trying to support communism and are trying to encourage the United Nations Security Council to pity and assist these infidel allies.

The C.D.L.R. deems as its duty the defense of the rights of the Saudi people and declares that the Islamic nation in the land of Mecca and Madina stands clear of the rulers' policies of supporting unjust and oppressive regimes, especially the dead party of Aden which makes public its hatred of religion. The C.D.L.R. apologizes to all Islamic nations, in which the hatred of the Kingdom is firmly planted, for the acts of the Saudi regime and hopes that fellow Muslims will not hold our helpless people responsible for what has happened. The C.D.L.R. asserts that the position of Saudi Arabia does not represent the expression of the people, who have no decision-making power.

The C.D.L.R. calls upon the sons of the the nation to realize that serious damage is being done to Islam and to Muslims and warns that continuation of such policies will only add to the nation's economic deterioration. Those in charge of the tottering government should save the country and not destroy it.

The C.D.L.R. insists that the people have a right to participate in the decision-making process and to hold the government accountable as required by Islamic Law. The neglect of this right is causing the suffering of people on all levels. The duty of all scholars and intellectuals should uphold their religious duty of making their rulers accountable, especially with regard to the people's dignity.

London. 28 May 1994

What the Saudi Ulema had to say about the war in mid-June

"In the name of God, most gracious most merciful. Praise be to God, we thank him, ask for his help and forgiveness, and repent to him. We seek refuge in mighty God from our evil spirits and shameful deeds. The peace and blessing of God be upon our Prophet Mohamed, master of the mujahedin [fighters]."

The crimes of the communists in the south of the Arabian peninsula continue. Their black history exists today and is kept in our memories. The communists humiliated the people of that good country. They killed the country's sheikhs and religious scholars. They attacked property and honor. The communists separated that region from the Islamic community [*ummah*] for a long period and by force. Allah permitted us to struggle with one another. In this same line of struggle, about 15,000 people were killed in a civil war eight years ago. Today the Socialists have changed their skins. They patched together slogans of democracy, a multi-party system, a modern and civil state, and the resistance

against "extremism and fundamentalism". It is like the past, when they raised their red flags. There is a famous proverb which applies to this case which says: "The citizens of Mecca know the region's mountains and valley passes."

Meanwhile, northern and southern Yemeni people stood against the Socialists. These people were tortured by the Socialist Party. The Yemeni people are well aware of the Socialists' ferocity religion, property, honor, and human rights. But Muslims who are far away and do not know the facts about the battle in Yemen can be misled by false propaganda. They should not wander far from the wisdom of the believers, in which the Prophet Mohamed, peace be upon him, says: "*A believing man does not get bitten twice in the back.*" They should pray to God to uproot the criminals and honor Islam and Muslims. We [the Saudi Arabian religious authorities] are sure it is not possible to crush Socialism unless the Islamic flag is raised high and shows clearly. At the same time, we must deny everything that goes against Islam and abandon deceitful mottos. In the time of revelation the Prophet Mohamed described the Yemeni people as faithful, wise and just. It is best for the Yemeni people, therefore, to be faithful to the religion God honored them with and deny all that might stand against that religion.

We beg God to support the righteous people in life and their supporters and at the same time struggle against polytheism and all its supporters. He [God] is the ruler and capable of this.

Peace be upon the Prophet Mohamed and his family and his companions.

The names of the religious scholars who ratify this communique:

Hamoud Bin Abdullah Al-Shoabi
Abdullah Bin Hamad Al-Jalaly
Abdullah Bin Suleiman Al-Masary
Suleiman Bin Fahd Al-Odah
Dr. Saffer Bin Abdelrahman Al-Hawaly
Ibrahim Bin Mohamed Al-Deeban
Dr. Bakr Bin Fahd Al-Besbr
Dr. Nasser Bin Suleiman Al-Omar
Dr. Abdullah Bin Hamoud Al-Turigry
Dr. Mohamed Bin Said Al-Gabtani
Dr. Suleiman Bin Thonian
Dr. Mohamed Bin Saleh Al-Mufidir
Dr. Mohamed Al-Labim

Dr. Abderahman Bin Nasser Al-Barrak
Suleiman Bin Ibrahim Al-Rashawdi
Dr. Said Bin Zobir
Abmed Ibrahim El-Salifeh
Mohamed Bin Abmed Al-Farag
Yehya Bin Abdel-Aziz Al-Yehya
Ali Bin Khadir Al-Khadiry
Deeban Bin Mohamed Al-Deeban
Abdallah Bin Ibrahim Al-Rais
Ibrahim Bin Saleh Al-Khadiri
Mohamed Bin Hamoud Al-Fanezan
Mohamed Bin Abdel-Rahman Al-Dabikhi

What the Yemeni religious authorities had to say about the war in mid-July:

In the name of God, most gracious, most merciful...

This communique was issued by the Yemeni Religious Scholars' Assembly in a victory conference held in the Republic of Yemen from July 11 to July 13, 1994.

Praise be to God who kept his promise and led his servants to victory. The Messenger Mohamed, peace be upon him, valued his soldiers [believers] highly and defeated all parties who stood against religion. The Almighty gave the believers unity as the essence of their superiority. He paved the way for victory, progress and prosperity. God Almighty says in the Holy Qor'an: *"And hold fast all together by the rope which God stretches out for ye, and be not divided upon yourselves. Remember with gratitude God's favor on you, for ye were enemies and he joined your hearts in love, so that by his grace ye became brethren. You were on the brink of the pit of fire and he saved you from it."*

May peace and blessing be on the final seal of the Prophet Mohamed and his companion.

This religious scholars' meeting comes as a result of continuous efforts to protect Yemeni unity, security and stability. They took into their consideration the fact that unity is a religious duty (a legitimate ordinance) and a patriotic necessity. Preserving unity is a legitimate and holy duty commanded by God.

"And verily this Ummah [community] of yours is a singly nation and I am your Lord and Creator, therefore fear me and no other."

Separation contradicts what God and his Messenger have ordered. It is a cause for inescapable disappointment and failure, because God says: *"And fall into no disputes, lest ye lose heart and your power depart."*

God achieved victory for the legitimate forces²³ against the secessionists who sought to dismember the country, disperse the nation, and disobey the legitimacy that the Ummah agreed upon and around which all parties had gathered.

The religious authorities have studied this situation since the beginning of the crisis and discussed it in a meeting in San'a, a meeting in Al-Jannad (Al-Jannad is an area in the Taz governorate), and again here in San'a. They held these meetings because the religious scholars carry upon their shoulders the great responsibility of analyzing and clarifying the details of this crisis for the Ummah. With regard to their commitment, which God has

²³"Legitimate forces" was the term used by the San'a government to describe forces fighting the southern separatists during the war. To call the troops 'northern' was considered near treason in that it implied a certain legitimacy for those fighting on the other side.

bestowed upon them, the Holy Qor'an says: *And remember that God took covenant upon the people of the Book to make it clear to mankind and not to hide it.*

After studying the matter, the religious scholars confirm the following points:

[Here I've selected a few of the points I found the most interesting]

- 1) The events in Yemen were the result of conspiracies aimed at dismembering the country and dispersing Yemeni unity. Claims by the Yemeni Socialist Party (YSP) were just a mask to conceal all bad intentions and conspiracies seeking to hurt the people.
- 2) It was an obligatory thing and a legal duty upon all Yemenis to stand together to face this gang [the YSP] and defend their belief, unity, and the sovereignty of the country.

Relevant statements from the Holy Qor'an:

"The punishment of those who wage war against God and His Messenger and strive with might and main for mischief through the land is: Execution or crucifixion or the cutting off of hands and feet from opposite sides or exile from the land."

The Almighty also says:

*"If two parties among the believers fall into a fight, make ye peace between them. But if one of them transgresses beyond bounds against the other, then fight ye all against the one transgressor until he complies with the command of God."*²⁴

4.d.) The control of prices and the arrest of all tricksters playing with the prices of goods and currency exchange rates should be strictly enforced, in addition to punishing all those who monopolize goods.

e) The religious authority should increase its efforts to fight all types of usury.

h.) The religious scholars confirm the necessity to create a suitable media policy which best suits the people's beliefs, values and morals.

i.) The Ulema hereby call for the end of co-education in schools and begin the process of changing school curriculum (amending the curriculum in a way which can form a basis for religious belief, correct concepts, and eradicate all the effects of cultural invasion). The cultural invasion was a key cause behind the recent destruction and crisis.

6. The Islamic scholars call for fellow Islamic scholars around the world to understand the situation in Yemen. We hope they will stand behind the Yemeni people and support their just issues. In addition to that they should clarify the Yemeni situation to their people and rulers. The Yemeni religious scholars thank everyone who stood beside the Yemeni people.

Finally, the religious scholars thank God for the victory he has bestowed upon the Yemeni people. The Ulema extend their thanks to the brave and believing Yemeni people who stood as a single man in the crisis. At the front line, the armed and security forces, the

²⁴This quote from the Qor'an is often referred to by Yemenis in both of the leading political parties when asked whether the Socialists still have a future in Yemen. 'If they agree to live by the law of God [*Sharia*], they are welcome back into the fold,' the reasoning generally goes.

brave leadership, and the righteous volunteers who gave their lives to preserve the country and its unity.

Peace be upon the Prophet Mohamed and his Ummah.

This communique was issued by the Yemeni religious scholars in their meeting in San'a Safar 5th, 1414 A.H. -- July 13th, 1994

Best regards,


Katherine

Received in Hanover 8/15/94.