

University of Szeged  
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# **Thesis**

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**Yemen and the socialist countries  
1955–1970**

SZEGED

2008

I.

Clarifying of several event's background and importance, as well as exploring the coherences are on high need related to the history of Yemen in the 20 century. The relationship between the arabic state and the socialist countries is only one of them. Owing to this our aim was to talk about in detail the development and alteration of the political, economic and cultural connections in the cronological border of 1955–1970. With reference to this we endavoured besides using the National Archives document to build in the international publications in our topic.

The conditions choosen as the project of the dissertation was the most dinamic between 1955–1970. This was the reason for the selection of the period mentioned above. The connection between the USSR and Yemen – started in 1928 – can be disregarded. These could not be fruitfull due to the different intersts of the two sides. Contrary to this from 1955 we not only can be the wittness of the reconstructure of the relationship. On the count of the serious conflict with Great Britain the Arabic country needed to widen the scale of its socialist partnership, moreover the content of their sponsorship. The closing date was set by us on the reason of change in Yemen's internal affairs. For the political leadership closing the civil war – started in 1962 – had some condition. One of this was the approaching to the conservative Arabic states, as well as to decrease the partnership with the socialist countries. That's why the latter one started to commit itself to the People's Republic of South Yemen, which was born in 1967.

From the utilized sources Stephen Page Page *The USSR and Arabia: The Development of Soviet Policies and Attitudes towards the Countries of the Arabian Peninsula, 1955–1970*'s book is said to be particulary significant. By looking over the soviet bibliography and the contemporary journalism, the author's analysis of Moscow's relationship with the region eminently meets the scientific requirement. From the publications dealing with Yemen's history from long term perspective Eric Marco's *Yemen and the Western World* and Edgar O'Ballance's *The War in the Yemen* work can be mentioned. In these books the parts of the socialist countries are less stressed. The advantage of this can be that they analysing it in the conditions of the internal and foreign policy of Yemen.

For the deeper and more subbtle discussion of the topic the contemporary journalism's products can be a good help. Such as the *Cikkek a Nemzetközi sajtóból*, wich contains the repretoire of the translated articles of the daily's at the West into Hungarian, the *International Affairs (Moscow)* and the *Nemzetközi Szemle*, which introduce the ponit of views of the socialist countries related to our topic. From the dailys the *Times* – published in London – and

due to the Hungarian respects the *Népszabadság*, *Népszava* and the *Magyar Hírlap* as the official Hungarian media was mentioned in the dissertation.

In charting the appearance of the socialist countries- mainly Hungary- for us the secret and administrative documents from the National Archive meant a great help.

Besides these we have to mention Claudie Fayen's „*A french doctor in Yemen*” work, which is basically novalistic, based on personal impressions. Adam Schmidt's *Yemen: The Unknown War* gives insight into the country's civil war circumstances and changes. His observations talk about the army activism of the socialist experts. From the memories we can mention the American consul Robert W. Stookey's *Yemen: The Politics of the Yemen Arab Republic* work, which provides detailed insight to Yemen's internal politics. Mohamed Szaid al-Attar's *Le Sous-Développement Economique et Social du Yémen* French dissertation talks about the Arabic country's economic conditions during the terms of the monarchy and at the beginning of the revolution. At last we would like to mention Ibrahim al-Rashid's *Yemen under the Rule of Imam Ahmad* work, as Doreen and Leila Ingrams *Records of Yemen* volume in which the exact documents are published without any explanation.

## II.

Our thesis is separated into 10 thematically organised parts. As the history of Yemen is said to be an unknown part of the Hungarian scientific life we do not only focus on the relationship with the socialist countries. In our judgement for the perfect analysis of this difficult and complex relationship the history of the background is indispensable. In accordance with this we paid attention to follow the important events of Yemen's internal policy, moreover its international consequences.

In the first chapter the detailed history of the Arab monarchy was presented. Within the framework of this period we tried to outline the social division of Yemen, the power of the monarchy, the hopeless economic condition as well as the undeveloped education system and healthcare. With reference to this we needed to ascertain that the backwardness of the conservative regime gave lots of chances for the socialist countries to exercise influence in the country.

We also devoted significant place for representing the opposition movements, which appeared with the claim for reforming or even overthrowing the political system. Their birth can be dated from the defeat from Saudi Arabia in 1934. At that time the aim of them was only changing the regime with peaceful instruments. However they started to become drastic due to the dynastical crisis, the experience of the students learning abroad and at last as the

effect of the Arabic nationalism's idea. In accordance with this it can be ascertain that the revolution of 1962 September was bound to happen. Only the time of it stayed uncertain.

In the second unit of our work we studied the relationship between the Yemen monarchy and the socialist countries. Two periods can be separated thematically. The first, almost 10 year long period started in 1928 with having the Soviet–Yemen relations official. The reason of its birth can be found in the mutual dependency among them. In connection with this we reflected the most important foreign policy aim of Yahja imam after the falldown of the Turkish Empire, namely the restauration of Great-Yemen. However the south part of the country was under the supervision of Great Brittain. With this Britain wanted secure the sea routs to India and the oil concernes. Thanks to the limited resources the monarch of Yemen was not able to oppose effectively the British in the shaping confrontation. In this situation he needed to ask for foreign support. Soviet Union was said to be an attractive version from more point of view. Besides the compensation of the Italian influence in Yemen the Soviets had a perfect antiimperialistic policy, moreover the geographical distance could avoid this power to be involved in internal politics.

For the request from Yemen Moscow's answer was positive. It permanantly started to make an attempt to creat economic influence in the Persian Gulf or in East-Africa and to cooperate with the opposite powers of the Muslim states.

We wanted to emphasize that in the case of Yemen between the two world war not even the economic perspectives were important in the Soviet approach to Yemen but the efforts' of the imam against the british and italians were respected too.

Related to the decline of the relationship we can say that it was caused by the Soviet Union's weak economic potential, which could not let using the advantages maximally. Moreover it was helped by the dinamical sudden advance of Italy and Germany, which first lead to the revision of the relation than to the reduction o fit. It's important to emphashize that the Soviet Union was able to make distance from the vision of the socialist revolution of all around the world by depending the connection with the totally different system of Yemen on its foreign policy.

There was a new chance in 1950' for restaurate the relations again. As we have considered, it was due to many new conditions, like the Soviet Unions new approach to the Arabic states after the death of Stalin or the ambition for increas the antiimperialist allies in the cold war. However in the period not only the Soviet Union could renew the connection but we can be a wittness of creating new connections with China and the East-European countries. Although the financial assistance to the monarchy and the slowly modernisation of

the army and infrastructure could not let the previous to deepen the relations. Besides talking about the details of the aids we mentioned the Arabic nationalism's spread which seemed to be the biggest obstacle of the socialist influence. We have stated that their support was only necessary as long as the imam could use it for his national interests. The fall of the United Arab States and the Cairo's action against the monarchy had serious effect on this slowly progressing relation inasmuch the sovereign decided to close it radically for the protection his system.

There was a chance likewise for creating the Hungarian–Yemeni connection, which was analysed in the third chapter. We stressed that the most important reason for that was to break out from the isolation on the stage of the Hungarian foreign policy after the events of the 1956 revolution. In accordance with our country's geographical and financial conditions it was not able to and even did not want to create strategic goals like Moscow. Similar to the other socialist countries the stress was on widening the commercial relations, which turned out to be a failure not even under the monarchy but at the beginning of the republic too.

In the fourth part of the dissertation the events of the revolution in September 1962 is analysed with the problems of the Cairo's interaction and the long process of the recognition of the new republic. It can be considered that most of the Arabic republics and the socialist countries had accepted the new system of Yemen. The main reason for it was the government's nationalist and socialist attitude, as well as his negative standpoint towards the Western camp. Although the question of acceptance became in connection with the inter-Arab conflict soon after the involvement of Egypt, Saudi Arabia, Jordan and Great Britain. In accordance with this the establishment of the diplomatic connections with the new government of Yemen was dependent on the supporting partners point of view, moreover the civil war became the substitute of the Arabic cold war.

In the next chapter the problems of the newly established republic was presented. The overthrowing of the monarchy was not supported mutually by the population. The country became divided into two parts and the civil war began. The dragging on conflict – in our opinion – was due not even to the intervention of the UAR and Saudi Arabia but to the fail of the international attempt to solve the problem, moreover to the problems of the shaping republic. The socialist countries seriously kept the political distance with the republicans, because they did not want to risk the chance of the western intervention and the break down of the balance in the Persian Gulf. Likewise it was ascertained that Saana's direct supportance was only economical and diplomatical to avoid the disturbance of the working relations with Nasser's Egypt.

From the beginning the socialist countries were adherent of the republican system. However their indirect supportance was very moderate until 1964, due to the Egyptian hegemony in the rule of Saana. The first chance for the direct negotiations was in the spring of 1964 when Egypt seemed to leave Yemen for itself by liquidating the military presence in the country. In the sixth chapter we present the negotiations of the Yemen's delegation in Moscow, Prague, Sofia, Berlin, Bucarest, Budapest, and Beijing with deeper stress on the Hungarian visit's results. In connection with the negotiations we reach the conclusion that those were succesful based on the agreements and supporting; however in parctice they showed less efficiency. The commodity was still delivered with Egyptian cooperation. President Sallal could not have accepted himself as the country's sovereign leader, and the internal affairs were still led by the UAR's officials. By reason of this it could be said that the process of conferences could not reach their original aim, therefor it can be rate as a failure.

The period between 1964–1967 was characterised by the different type of solutions such as the diplomatic or the armed kindof it. In the seventh chapter we have sketched the reasons of the divided republican side, the process of the disorganisation, the birth of the Djedda agreement which aim was to finish the civil war, moreover the fulfil of the Egyptian hegemony. From the socialist countries' point of view it meant the continuation of the policy toward Yemen, which also met with Cairo's interests. In practice it meant the realization of the aid promised in the contract of 1964 related to the improvement of the highway system of Yemen, as well as the health care and education system. All of it changed only after the fall of 1967 when the UAR needed to whithdraw its troops from Yemen due to the defeat in the Six Day War.

In the eight chapter the dynamism of the Hungarian–Yemeni relations was presented. After 1964 our country focused on the fullfillment of the assumed obligation related to the contract of 1964. Besides it helped to deepen the two countries relationship. It contained health supply, an economic delegation was sent to check the punctual demands of Yemen. The numbers of the schoolarship between the two countries was raised. A Hungarian crew shot a documentary movie about the country. The most serious supply was the installment of a public health institutions and its cooperation with the Hungarian stuff. It also can be observed that there was no high increase in the trade connection after Sallal president's visit in Budapest, because the Hungarian partner did not see any hope for that.

In the ninth part the Six Day War's consequences in Yemen were analysed. As we have observed the leadership of UAR could not countinue its mission in Yemen due to the defeat from Israel. After the Khartum agreement the UAR gave up its position return for the

financial support from Saudi Arabia with which it was able to recover its damaged economy. After the leaving of the Egyptian forces the republican system seemed to break up but due to the socialist countries' sudden assistance the main attack of the royalist forces turned out to be a failure. Apart from helping in the very critical situations there was no unconditional commitment of the Saana system toward these countries. Moreover the opposite happened when the republicans could do effective activity toward the closing of the civil war, making the peace as well as the stabilization of their weak foreign relations. As far as the internal affairs concerned the socialist countries were disappointed due to the strengthening right-winged political forces and newly refreshed relations with the West in Yemen. Thanks to that the previous start to focus on the revolutionary South-Yemen.

In the last chapter we come to a conclusion that the relationship between Hungary and Yemen stayed being political during our period. In the spirit of solidarity our country offered economy aid, scholarship programmes, training of experts and public health assistance. In contrast with the agreement Hungarian doctors worked in the hospitals installed by Hungarians. Hungary was open-minded toward the wide range of necessities of Yemen but it failed due to the absence of the asked data. As we observed the Hungarians did not expect any change related to this, moreover the sign of the declining relations were the lack of the high-level meetings. After this they focused to the Middle East region, where they hoped more economical and political advantages.

### III

The division system of our thesis contains lots of novelty. Yemen's history itself is said to be specific and less known in our country. In more details we wanted to examine a five decade long period which escaped the Hungarian literature's attention and it was a neglected topic in the international one too. Any work on the relationship among the socialist countries – mainly Soviet Union and China – and Yemen can be said unique. Apart from our summarizing doctoral thesis there is no any work generally writing about the positions of the socialist countries in Yemen.

We consider important to mention on the thesis's approval to the Hungarian–Mediterranean traditionally old relations examination.

### IV.

In the end we would like to draft the possible lines of the research. In accordance with the thesis' comprehensive aspect it examines the relations of Yemen and the socialist countries

extensively. Thanks to that one of the possible chances for the continuation of this research can be the more detailed examination of each part. The socialist countries's relations with South Yemen also can be interesting because it seemed to have more perspective in opposite with North-Yemen till the end of 1980. Besides all of this a separated topic could be Hungary's relation with the states Arabic Peninsula.

V.

In relations of the thesis topic the following articles were previously published:

**Articles and studies:**

Érdek vagy érték: Magyarország és a Közel-Kelet, 1955–1965. In: *Tradíció és modernizáció Európában a XVIII–XX. században*. Szerk.: Bodnár Erzsébet–Demeter Gábor, Hungarovox Kiadó, Budapest, 2008. pp. 425–431.

„Varázsszőnyeg hadművelet” – Jemeni zsidók exodus. In: *Mediterrán Világ Kulturális Folyóirat*, 5. Veszprémi Humán Tudományokért Alapítvány, Veszprém, 2008. pp. 102–111.

A jemeni forradalom nemzetközi megítélése az egyiptomi beavatkozás függvényében. In: *Acta Historica Tomus CXXVI*, Hungaria, Szeged, 2007. pp. 137–154.

Interest or value: Hungary and the Middle East between 1955 and 1965. In: *La Crise des Empires. Suez–Budapest 1956*. Actes du colloque international Szeged, les 29–30 septembre 2006. Université de Szeged, 2007. pp. 101–109.

Ideológia, vagy kényszerhelyzet? A marxista irányvonal hatalomra jutása Dél-Jemenben. In: *Állam és nemzet a XIX–XX. században Konferenciakötet*. Szerk.: Bodnár Erzsébet – Demeter Gábor, Debrecen, 2006. pp. 156–164.

Magyar–jemeni kapcsolatok 1957–1967. között. In: *Tavaszi Szél Konferenciakötet*, Debrecen, 2005. pp. 328–332.

A Dél-Jemeni Népi Köztársaság véres hajnala: Nacionalista szervezetek harca a megalakuló állam vezető tisztségeiért. In: *Kül-Világ – a nemzetközi kapcsolatok folyóirata*, II. Évf. 2005/2–3. pp. 40–50. ([www.kul-vilag.hu](http://www.kul-vilag.hu))

Új fejezet kezdete? Az 1964. májusi magyar–jemeni tárgyalások előzményei, eseményei és eredményei. In: *Acta Historica Tomus CXX*, Hungaria, Szeged, 2005. pp. 113–139.

Open to the Middle: The establishment of the diplomatic relations between Hungary and Yemen. In: *Mediterrán Tanulmányok*, Szeged, 2004. pp. 51–71.

Ideológia és fegyverek: A hadsereg felépítése és a központi hatalomhoz fűződő viszonya a monarchista Jemenben. In: *Öt kontinens*, ELTE, Budapest, 2004. pp. 305–325.

Jemen 1962-63, a törzsek és a központi hatalom viszonya. In: *OTDK Konferenciakötet*, Veszprém. 2003.

**Review:**

Clive Jones: Vereség a győzelem kapujában: a politika uralma a stratégia felett? A dekolonizációs politika kudarca Dél-Arábia esetében. In: *KLIO*, 2008/1. pp. 109–119.

J. Nagy László: Magyarország és az arab térség. In: *GROTIUS*, 2007. (<http://www.grotius.hu/publ/displ.asp?id=ZAGDJX>)

John Ishiyama: Sarló és minaret: kommunista utódpártok Jemenben és Afganisztánban a hidegháborút követően. In: *KLIO*, 2006/3. pp. 183–188.