

## POLITICS AND DEFENCE

A BITTER PAST

THE RECONCILIATION AGREEMENT reached between Oman and South Yemen, signed in Kuwait at the end of October, brings to an end fifteen years of confrontation and hostility by the two countries. After the signing, the Omani Minister of State for Foreign Affairs, Yousef al Alawi said, "The day has come to put the bitter past behind us." It has certainly been a bitter past, from South Yemen's independence in 1967, when the leftist regime in Aden adopted its anti-Sultanate policies, culminating in support until 1975 for the guerilla war in Dhofar, up to the present uneasy antagonism. The mutual suspicion and enmity has cost both countries dearly, as a large proportion of their military resources has been devoted to a possible outbreak of hostilities.

Defused

The full details of the agreement will not be made known until 15 November, after endorsement in Muscat and Aden, and ratification by the Gulf Co-operation Council. It provides, however, for the 'normalisation' of relations and the consequent establishment of diplomatic relations between the two countries. The accord still leaves South Yemen in the tripartite pact with Ethiopia and Libya, and the Sultanate in the basically opposing grouping of the GCC. The South Yemen's twenty-year treaty of friendship with the Soviet Union remains in force, and Oman will keep its arms-length defence arrangements with the United States. But the state of tension between Oman and South Yemen will be reduced, and a potential trouble spot in the peninsula defused.

Different Policies

The agreement is a feather in the cap for the Gulf Co-operation Council, which sponsored the mediation efforts conducted by Kuwait and the United Arab Emirates. The signing also demonstrates the effectiveness of the Kuwaiti approach to the South Yemen-Oman

problem, as opposed to the position taken by Saudi Arabia. Neither Kuwait nor the kingdom regarded the radical stance of the regime in Aden with much favour, but their policies towards it were substantially different. The Saudis largely viewed South Yemen, under its present form of government, as beyond redemption. The kingdom, in past years, made some efforts to bring about a change of regime in Aden, mainly by using its financial power to undermine the government. These efforts failed, and thereafter the Saudis contented themselves with trying to isolate South Yemen and hoping the regime would collapse of its own accord.

Vindication

The Kuwaitis, on the other hand, cultivated relations with South Yemen on their assessment that Aden's isolation from the rest of the Arab world only reinforced a dangerous association with the Soviet Union. The Kuwaitis, certainly, see the signing of the agreement as positive proof of the success of their policies and a vindication of their assessment. This will not cause any hard feelings in Riyadh, where a marked improvement in the overall political security of the peninsula is more important than by whom, and by what methods, it was achieved. In the longer term, the Saudi leaders might now be more receptive to Kuwaiti arguments on the virtues of maintaining normal relations with the Soviet bloc - a long-standing Kuwaiti belief, and a policy they consistently advocate in the GCC councils.

Future Steps

The Oman-South Yemen accord is no more a cast-iron guarantee than any other agreement, that unbroken sweetness and light will hereafter prevail with regard to South Yemen. Oman and South Yemen have got as far as a declaration of principles; future progress and practical steps are to be agreed later in direct bilateral talks. The GCC will be hoping, and it seems not unlikely, that South Yemen will edge away from its present political positions, and become less committed to

the Russian camp and less strident in its brand of Arab radicalism. If it does, then Saudi Arabia could look more kindly on the prospect of an eventual unity between North and South Yemen. The two Yemens announced an agreement on unification last January, but no practical steps were taken, and negotiations collapsed in the spring. The kingdom has always viewed a united Yemen with some dubiety, particularly with one of the partners a dedicated Marxist state. Saudi Arabia's reservations on a united Yemen will not have been entirely dissipated, but they are now diminished. The Omanis, if the agreement works out as planned, will be freed of a costly and heavy burden; South Yemen, by the same token, can look for some political benevolence and practical aid from its neighbours in the GCC.

Kuwait Foreign Ministry Undersecretary, Rashid al Rashid, who was at all the negotiations, has said that South Yemen and Oman will refrain from dependence on 'world powers' for protection after the signing of the accord. He did not, however, suggest which other powers would - or could - replace the existing arrangements the two countries already have. Rashid al Rashid's comment on this aspect of the agreement seems to have been an expression of diplomatic euphoria from the signing of the accord. The Soviet bloc and the Western countries are not likely to be unceremoniously bundled out of South Yemen and Oman in any foreseeable future. The crux of the agreement is the ending of the state of hostility between the two countries. The first test, yet to be passed, is to see the essentials of the agreement working in practice. Then, perhaps, other and consequential issues can be tackled.

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#### THE DOMESTIC SUMMIT

THE THIRD GULF CO-OPERATION SUMMIT, opening in Manama as Newsletters goes to press, looks set to be very much a meeting about the six nations' domestic and parochial affairs. The agenda,

formulated by the GCC foreign ministers' meeting, includes a draft amendment to the GCC basic principles, calling for the formation of a Defence Ministerial Council. Most of the other items to be considered at the summit will be the recommendations of the various previous ministerial meetings, dealing with the co-ordination of the member states in the political, financial, economic and military fields. There will be a handsome acknowledgement of the recently signed Oman-South Yemen agreement (*see previous story*) and the six Arab leaders will be giving their endorsement to the continuing process of integration in the region.

#### Security

Little progress can be expected, however, in moves to set up a regional security pact. The earlier meeting of interior ministers failed to reach agreement on the subject, and it is known that Kuwait has considerable reservations about such a pact. Kuwait is the only country in the GCC group which has not signed a bilateral security agreement with Saudi Arabia, and a multi-lateral agreement would, it was hoped, be acceptable to Kuwait. This appears not to be the case, and a multi-lateral security pact will be shelved for the time being. Part of Kuwait's objections were spelled out in a recent editorial in the local daily 'Al Watan', which pointed out that the country is the only GCC member with an elected parliamentary assembly and a free press. A security agreement could, it is thought in Kuwait, impose unwelcome restrictions on such institutions.

#### Domesticity

The summit meeting will also be reviewing other developments in the Arab world, including the Iran-Iraq war, the situation in the Lebanon and the joint Arab diplomatic efforts to effect a Middle East peace settlement. There were rumours in diplomatic circles that President Gemayel of the Lebanon would deliver a speech to the GCC summit, but this possibility has now been ruled out by Gulf political sources. Referring to this story, the Kuwaiti newspaper 'Al Rai al Am' said such an event