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STAFF NOTES:

Middle East
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MIDDLE EAST – AFRICA – SOUTH ASIA

This publication is prepared for regional specialists in the Washington community by the Middle East - Africa Division, Office of Current Intelligence, with occasional contributions from other offices within the Directorate of Intelligence. Comments and queries are welcome. They should be directed to the authors of the individual articles.

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North Yemen

Conservative Pressure on Colonel Hamdi

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The domestic political scene has been marked during the past several weeks by pressure from traditional tribal leaders on the middle-of-the-road forces led by Colonel Ibrahim Hamdi, head of the ruling military command council. The falling out between moderates and conservatives has reportedly encouraged Iraq and its followers in North Yemen to adopt a rather convoluted strategy by which the Baathists hope eventually to eliminate Hamdi from the government.

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Sheikh Abdallah al-Ahmar, North Yemen's most powerful tribal leader, head of the Consultative Assembly, and client of Saudi Arabia, has been demanding since mid-March that Hamdi bring to a close the so-called "transitional period" of military dominance and return the government to civilian hands. This would, among other things, involve new elections for the Consultative Assembly and restoration of the Republican Council, a collegial executive arrangement. Al-Ahmar anticipates that the assembly would continue to be dominated by tribally-connected members with strong traditional values. He also expects that the three- to five-member Republican Council, from which the head of state has been chosen in the past, would include Abdallah al-Hajri, a religious traditionalist with Saudi ties, and General Hasan al-Amri, another conservative politician.

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Colonel Hamdi has taken the line that he is completely committed to returning power to civilians, but that he intends to delay the transfer until the domestic situation is stabilized. Hamdi took power along with military colleagues in June 1974 following the collapse of the civilian government that had come under conservative pressure for failing to be tough enough on Baathist coup plotters. The US embassy in Sana believes that the "transition period" will last at least until October 1975. The delay is partly attributable to the assembly's failure to complete work on a new election law and to continuing politicking on the size and composition of the Republican Council and the legislature.

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Hamdi reportedly is particularly interested in delaying the transfer until he can secure the total political eclipse of Iraqi-supported Sheikh Sinan Abu Luhum and the removal of several Abu Luhum family members from key military command positions. Ironically, the arch-conservative al-Ahmar has recently been giving aid and comfort to the Abu Luhum group in order to strengthen anti-Hamdi forces in Sana.

Hamdi and his supporters in the army and bureaucracy consider al-Ahmar and the other traditional, locally-oriented sheikhs a drag on modernization and reform and would prefer to do without them. Hamdi realizes, however, that unless the military intends to rule permanently, an accommodation with the conservative leaders will be mandatory.

1-4
Baghdad, which sees Hamdi as the primary obstacle to the expansion of Baathist influence in North Yemen, reportedly hopes to exploit the current split between Hamdi and al-Ahmar. The Iraqi scenario calls for Baghdad and its leftist allies in Sana to give whatever aid they can to the conservative al-Ahmar, hoping that it results in polarization of society or that a far-right wing government comes to power. The Baathists apparently believe they would then have an opportunity to pick up the pieces, presumably with someone like former prime minister Muhsin al-Ayni, a Baathist sympathizer, coming to power. (SECRET NO FOREIGN DISSEM/CONTROLLED DISSEM)

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Algeria

Middle East Role Expanding

Algeria is getting more involved in the politics of the eastern Arab world and is actively working to ensure Palestinian attendance at a reconvened Geneva conference.

President Boumediene is offering to mediate inter-Arab disputes, a role he personally enjoys. He has certain credentials; he is radical enough to have the ear of militant leaders in Syria and Iraq, yet he is sufficiently pragmatic to have working relations with Arab moderates like Egypt's President Sadat.

3 Last December, Boumediene volunteered to mediate the Iraqi-Iranian border dispute. Combined with a parallel Egyptian effort, his work culminated in a reconciliation agreement between the Shah and Iraqi strongman Saddam Husayn in early March at the summit in Algiers of the Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries.

Bolstered by this success, Boumediene is planning to move on to inter-Arab disputes. He is scheduled to visit a number of states soon--Kuwait, Syria, and Saudi Arabia--where he will try to narrow the differences these countries have with Baghdad. Saddam Husayn apparently agreed to this effort when he was in Algiers for the OPEC meeting.

1 + 2 Algeria may also be trying to ease strained relations between Egypt and Syria and between Egypt and the Palestinians. Boumediene met with Presidents Sadat and Asad at King Faysal's funeral, when the two presidents snubbed one another. Boumediene stopped off in Cairo on his way home for further talks with Sadat. Press accounts suggest they talked about how to achieve solidarity among Egypt, Syria, and the Palestinians.

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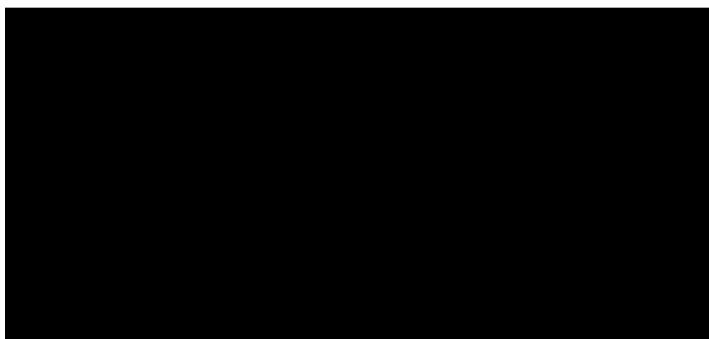
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3 | The Algerian leader has long been a firm supporter of the Palestinians, and he believes they must be included in Middle East peace negotiations. He recognizes that Arab bickering could leave the Palestinians fending for themselves. (CONFIDENTIAL)



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Pakistan

A Fragile Democracy

The Bhutto regime's readiness to employ undemocratic, even illegal, methods against its opponents, particularly in the politically sensitive western frontier provinces, was reflected in the apparent use of large-scale fraud by government supporters to ensure a victory in a recent by-election.

Nasrullah Khattak, the nominee of Prime Minister Bhutto's party and an allied party, won a lopsided victory on April 6 in a by-election for a seat in the legislature of the North-West Frontier Province. The seat had become vacant two months ago when Hayat Mohammad Sherpao, then the provincial home minister, was assassinated. Khattak, a local landowner and former legislator and diplomat, is Bhutto's hand-picked choice to succeed Sherpao as his chief political lieutenant in the province.

Two of Khattak's leading supporters have described [REDACTED]

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[REDACTED] how bogus ballots and voters from outside the electoral district were used to ensure Khattak's election. [REDACTED] there has been at least one other occasion in which the pro-Bhutto forces in the province made very little effort to conceal fraudulent techniques they had used in winning a by-election.

Bhutto's party, the strongest political force in the populous Punjab and Sind provinces, lacks grass-roots organization and popularity in both the western frontier provinces, Baluchistan and the North-West Frontier. In the two western provinces, Bhutto has depended on coalitions with

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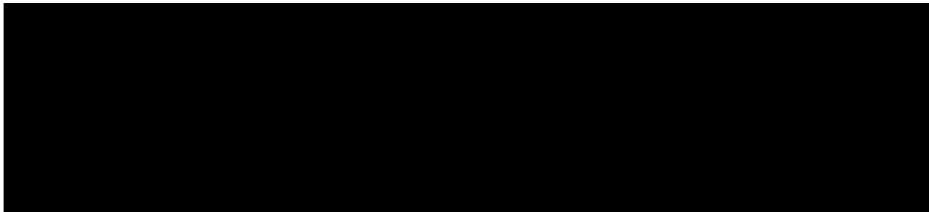
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other parties to maintain majority support in the provincial assemblies. He has also used financial blandishments and intimidation to bring politicians into his party and has sometimes allied himself with local political figures known for their corruption and ineptness.

In addition, Bhutto has taken various steps to restrict opposition activity. He has periodically circumscribed the civil rights of opposition groups and in Baluchistan has used the army to suppress dissident tribesmen. Last February, following the Sherpao killing, he outlawed the opposition National Awami Party, the largest political group in the western frontier provinces, and arrested several hundred of its leaders and adherents. He also suspended the provincial legislature and cabinet in the North-West Frontier, placing the province under direct central government control for a 90-day period.

During his three years in office Bhutto has exhibited an accurate sense of how far he can go in using repressive techniques without stimulating unmanageable unrest or major threats to his authority. Bhutto seems likely to remain pre-eminent for at least the next couple of years, despite such problems as regional dissidence and public restiveness over economic problems. Over the longer run, however, the US embassy in Islamabad believes Bhutto's tendency toward "confrontation politics" could eventually lead to a resurgence of Pakistan's historic political instability.
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