

**Dictator of the Month: January 2006****Early Life and Ascent to Power**

Ali Abdullah Saleh was born on 21 March 1942 into the Hashid tribe in Bayt al-Ahmar, what was at the time the Sana'a governmental region. He joined the army at the age of 16, while continuing his studies. In 1960 he enrolled as an officer cadet and participated in a coup to depose the King of Northern Yemen in 26 September 1962. He became a second lieutenant in 1963. His military career was marked by numerous commendations and he was wounded several times. He specialized in mechanized warfare and armour, after attending the School of Armour in 1964. He would participate in another coup in 1974 to put Ibrahim al-Hamdi into power. In April, 1978 a military revolt against al-Hamdi was quelled, which led to Saleh's promotion to the office of Deputy Commander in Chief of the Army by the Chariman of the Military Council Ahmad Ghasmi. Soon thereafter in June, 1978 Ghasmi would be assassinated, and Saleh would be appointed to Chief of Staff and member of the presidential council. In the next month, he would be elected president of the Yemen Arab Republic by the People's Constituent Assembly.. In October 1978 a military coup led by the National Democratic Front (NDF) against Saleh failed. He would later go on to make a deal with the NDF to share power with them; this would never come to fruition. He would be promoted to full Colonel in 1979. On August 30 1982 Saleh was elected Secretary General of the People's General Congress and awarded the Order of the Republic, which was the highest order of the state in Northern Yemen. In 1983 and 1988 he was re-elected as president of Northern Yemen. On 20 May, 1990, Saleh was promoted to the rank of General. Two days later on 22 May, 1990 after years of negotiations, North and South Yemen merged to become simply the Republic of Yemen, with Saleh in control of both countries. He was re-elected president of Yemen in 1993. His rule was not unopposed however, with secessionist groups operating in a civil war against him until their ultimate defeat in the Summer of 1994. He was elected president of the Republic on 01 October 1994 and promoted to the rank of Marshall on 24 December 1997. He was directly elected

president by the population for the first time, (not by the council) in 1999 by a 96% majority of votes.

It should be noted however that the Socialist opposition party was not allowed to run in the election, and the election was boycotted by many.

He was awarded an honorary Doctorate Degree of Philosophy on 10 October 2002 from Chosun University in Korea

## Economics

Despite the fact that Saleh has been criticized by many for weak economic progress, he should be credited with some improvements in basic infrastructure and modernization, especially since 2000. Certainly he can be credited with stabilizing the Yemeni state after the civil war of 1994 and he has been successful in tapping the land oil for domestic use and export. He has also taken steps to improve education in the country, though education still needs to make significant improvements with reportedly almost half of children unable to attend school.

Despite agricultural plans developed by Saleh to make the country self-sufficient for agricultural production of fruits and vegetables, the starvation rate in the country is in the top 6 in the world outside of Africa. Despite improvements, basic infrastructure and services in Yemen are still way behind the modern world, with the average family having 6.7 children and an unemployment rate at 35%. Moreover, more than 45% of the population lives below the poverty line. Public water utilities are very poor, and medical standards are low. Foreign debt, thanks

to large IMF loans, has ballooned in recent years to almost \$7 billion.

## Politics

Saleh has been accused for much nepotism in his regime, appointing personal friends and family members to important roles in the government. His leadership style is described as autocratic, and some have labeled him a tyrant and there is much opposition to his government in what was South Yemen, yet he does still enjoy widespread popularity in the North. He is extremely repressive of his opposition, and tightly controls the media in the country

## Criminal Activity in the Government? □

Saleh has been sharply accused of allowing and/ or fostering numerous criminal activities, including the smuggling of drugs to Saudi Arabia, trafficking of arms into various countries in Eastern Europe. In fact, during Saleh's regime a large scale

**militarisation has occurred, with the defense budget tripling between 1998 and 2003, despite that the country is the poorest Arab country in the world. Weapon sales from Yemen have been traced to al Qaeda, various other terrorist groups, as well as countries like Somalia, contrary to UN arms embargoes. It is alleged that the Yemeni government is aware of widespread support of al Qaeda members in top levels of the government, but does nothing against it. There are also reports of the Yemeni military using poison gas on rebel groups on more than one occasion.**

**The Under Secretary in the Finance Ministry of the government, Abduljabar Saad, who resigned in the Summer of 2005, cited widespread corruption in the Finance Ministry in his resignation letter, and noted that large amounts of publicly subsidized diesel is being illegally smuggled to other countries- other sources specify diesel smuggling to Africa**

**The Yemeni Central Bank has also been caught circulating counterfeit Yemeni and Saudi currency, and other government agencies have been accused of money laundering via real estate transactions in Dubai, ultimately funneling the money into German bank accounts. The Central Bank has also been used by high ranking officials to move assets offshore.**

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