

TRIBALISM IN YEMEN*

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Significant part of Yemenis retains tribal identification. Most of the southern tribes consider themselves descendants of the most legendary founder of the South Arabian tribes Qathan. Some northern tribes consider themselves descendants of the legendary founder of Northern Arabian tribes Adnan. Among them are syuds, descended from the prophet Muhammad.

Tribalism (cabbala) exists in Yemen for two main reasons. Firstly, it is the weak point of the government in some areas. Secondly, the lack of material resources and as the consequence - the extreme poverty of population, which explains the dominance of tribalism in the northern and eastern governorates of the country. In addition, tribalism remains due to the poorly developed road network, as well as due to the lack of prerequisites to abandon the traditional way of life.

There are approx. 160 tribes in Yemen. Tribes form alliances (tribal confederations). The largest and most ancient of them are Bakil (in the east), Madhadzh (in the central governorates) and Hashid (in the north).

Settled tribes live mainly in the governorate of Hodeidah (tribe al-Zaranik with the center in Beit el-Fakih, the tribe of Bani Soleil with its center in Eze-Zaid, and others). Semi-nomadic and nomadic tribes inhabit desert or located near desert governorates: Marib, Shabwa and Al Jawf. Nomads are approx. 10% of the Yemeni population, that is 230 thousand people.

Life of tribes in Yemen can be considered as a cultural, historical and political as well as a complex, from the structural point of view, social phenomena.

Each tribe lives in a certain area and it has special responsibilities for the place of living. It happened historically that tribes living nearby automatically join unions except the case of "big call" (Al-Nida 'al-Kabir), when the tribe is invited to the union for any reason. Each tribe has the right to accept or reject the invitation.

Tribe reserves the right to conduct military operations, for which it is liable to the other tribes. Militia is convened by tribal sheikhs. All armed groups of Yemen count up to 70 thousand people.

Each tribe has the right to enter into an alliance with tribes of not their union, if it was invited to another confederation by "big call".

Political system in the tribal alliances, not recognized by the state, is based on the independence of

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the tribes. Each such tribe has a special way of life. It is independent in a very specific area, which is considered only its territory. The boundaries of each area are defined and marked with special signs that have force both for the tribe itself and for the neighbors. None of the tribes is not allowed to trespass or usurp part of the territory of another tribe.

Close relations of each member of the tribe with his community gives him a sense of confidence, as gives him the right to a share of social product and protection if necessary.

Tribal customs of legal proceedings are protected in Yemen, including the institute of hostage-taking.

Tribal spirit that prevailed among the Bedouin of pre-Islamic era, doesn't cease to play an important role even today. Tribes, having appeared in new political, economic and cultural conditions can not abandon the intra-tribal relationships and rivalries, which retains a basis of tribalism.

Faced with the challenges of modern civilization and the pressure of the authorities, rivalry between the tribes stops and the desire to avoid new conflicts or contradictions appears, to meet the common threats together, as unified front.

Current social structure of Yemeni tribes is not stratified. However, it's strictly regulated, determining the status and position in the community of each of its members and thereby establishing rights and obligations.

Sheikh - the head of the tribe, is elected formally. After his death, as a rule, his son or any of the next of kin.

Relations connecting sheikh and other members of the tribe cannot be called despotic. Sheikh has the right to act on his own will only if tribesmen oppose his will in tribal affairs.

Sheikhs controlled finance and trade of the tribes. Many sheikhs still collect tribute in their favor. They are entitled to receive payments for the provision of personal security of representatives of official authorities during their stay in the territory of the tribe. Some sheikhs are major owners of movable and immovable property, have foreign partners, thanks to which get financial and moral support. Weekly fairs help to resolve many contradictions and conflicts between tribes.

Generally, sheikhs are treated with respect and the tribesmen mutually support each other. Sheikh gains credibility not for power which he is endowed with, but for the role he plays in protecting the interests of the tribe, rights of the weak and disadvantaged, in solving community problems, including conflicts among its members.

In some cases, the authorities have to seek sheikhs' assistance in solving the problems at the local level. This in turn increases their credibility among the tribesmen.

Customary law ('urf) and traditions of the tribes ('adat) have greater force than the provisions of Islamic law (al-Shari'a) or state legislation (kavanin) in most tribal areas of Yemen. The state has to constantly make great efforts to subjugate the tribal tops to its will.

In the north of Yemen, near the desert Riyadh-Rub 'al Khali, settled population is virtually nonexistent. Here live some nomadic tribes, many of which periodically move to the territory of Saudi Arabia.

Yemen and Saudi Arabia signed Jeddah agreement on final border settlement on June 12, 2000. Nomadic tribes create difficulties in carrying out the final demarcation of the border, since the establishment of permanent protected borders will disrupt the normal course of life of the nomads. But the main factor is psychological, those who still live according to the code of Bedouin-Al-muruvva- cannot accept the fact that they will be obstructed or someone will impose conditions of their stay. In this case,

the authorities of both countries have to reckon with the protests of the nomads and find the ways out of the difficult situations.

Sometimes the tribes take hostages from among the foreigners, not to obtain ransom but to force the government to solve their pressing problems or to resolve the conflicts with state in their favor. Despite the fact that the hostages are treated as honorary guests, kidnapping of such kind is a serious problem for the authorities, as the state by virtue of its responsibility to the other countries has to take measures to liberate the abductees.

In southern Yemen, sheikhs were returned their powers and property after the unification of the country in 1990.

Thus, tribalism in our days remains unchangeable institute of Yemeni society and has significant influence on the course of events in the life of Yemen, its economic development and preservation of cultural and historical traditions of the Yemeni people.
