Days before the American campaign against Afghanistan began, an editorialist of the government journal Al Thawra chose to give an indication of the general mindset of people in Yemeni streets, to publish the words of a corn vendor and some of his clients located on the Sanaa Aden route in the heart of the old country. ‘How dare America claim that it is combating terrorism, while it itself terrorizes the entire world?’ asked the vendor. ‘How dare they accuse us of not being able to protect the “Coke” (destroyer) whereas they themselves were not able to protect their Pentagon?’ ‘Not a bad analysis’, noted the editorialist, ‘maybe we should have him appointed to Foreign Affairs in Sanaa.’ ‘You’re not spot on yet, said his travel companion with a note of irony, ‘it is in Washington, at the State Department, that he should be appointed!’

The editorialist, ex-president of the University of Sanaa, Abdalaziz Mahmeg, is a man of letters renowned throughout the entire Arab world. He is not particularly ‘Islamist’. As an old Baathist, he would have even been inclined to distance himself from that generation. But it is in an almost unanimous fashion that the Yemenite vox (populi) manifests a double reticence. The news that, for once, the pilots were Arab and the victims American, caused the ive reticence to seem an illusion of the old evil spell. Few, however, spontaneously identify with the presumed actors in the suicide attacks against the World Trade Center or the Pentagon. Nonetheless, and all political affiliations taken together, no one accepts the categories of the American discourse of how to evaluate the events, whether one launches the bombs or receives them, depending on whether those bombs come from armament factories of the big ones of the world or the backyards of those who combat them, the juridical qualification of terrorism is, as we know, the object of long-standing controversies. ‘Give us your aeroplanes and we will give you our cradles’ was a phrase already pronounced by Algerian independence fighters to the French colonial forces. In Sanaa, as in the rest of the Arab world, armed resistances to the world order that originated at the end of the 1980s from the breakdown of the USSR are less automatically criminalized. The rhetoric of the hero who apparently succeeded in administering such a terrible blow to the arogant United States indeed arouses a certain degree of curiosity. On every street corner, one is offered recordings of his inter-

views, recent or not so recent. Listening attentively to them can be very instructive for several reasons. Behind the religious rhetoric of legitimation and that nasty habit of, a little like George Bush it is true, dividing the world into two incommensurable camps, we especially discover very profitable and very banal anti-imperialist claims. Usama Bin Laden is the son of a Saudi entrepreneur of Yemen origin, who can boast of having stored the three most sacred mosques of Islam: those of Mecca, Medina, and Jeru-
salem. It is the occupation of the homeland of the former two and the feudalization of a great number of regimes of the Peninsula and of the Arab world that feed the most ev-
ident of Bin Laden’s frustrations. ‘Even a chicken, if an armed man takes some of his territory, will fight the man!’ And that is just a chicken! […] ‘We do not demand anything more than the right given to every living creature, not to mention humans, not to mention Muslims: the right to defend one’s self!’ The occupation of the Al-Qa’ida mosque, symbol of the age-old Palestinian conflict, although chronologically first, comes in second place, he willingly admits. But Palestine has always been present in his preoccupations, contrary to what those who know him well thought. But Palestine has always been present in his preoccupations, contrary to what those who know him well thought. But Palestine has always been present in his preoccupations, contrary to what those who know him well thought. But Palestine has always been present in his preoccupations, contrary to what those who know him well thought. 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The proximity of the political power with the universal (Islamist) enemy at the moment is the parliament of Sanaa not led by an Islamist sheik elected with the votes of the party in power! disturbs a number of Yemeni’s Western partners. Visiting Sanaa, journalists from the world over, with a touching unanimity, have chosen without exception to interpret this complex political Yemen through the prism of Sanaa and of the political ambitions of the party in power! Despite all its limitations, the Yemeni regime is not merely content with manipulating the puppets of pluralism, that is, from Egypt to Algeria, passing through Tunisia, form the substratum of the current Arab ‘Democracy’. In the wake of the 11 Sep-

tember events, President Ali Abdullah Saleh managed to conclude a pact of moderation with those who may have been tempted to act against the United States and its allies. An anti-American demonstration did take place, but this was in Amran, some 50 kilo-

metres north of Sanaa, far from the televi-
sion cameras. This fragile equilibrium ‘that burns the hand of the state leader’ as he him-
self so often seems to his foreign visitors, risks being re-questioned under international pressure. The United States in fact demands that every day more ‘guarantees’ in the battle against terrorism, the frontiers of which we know increasingly little since it includes

henceforth formations of Palestinian or Lebanese resistance. The chief of state could thus at any given moment seize the opportunity of the American injunctions to give in to repressive complaisance. Yemeni will perhaps even come closer to the institutional ‘Arab norm’. The more or less trun-
cated elections (the president-candidate of the presidential elections of 1999 did not tolerate any adversary either) the member of his own party) already form part of the system. The only thing left is the re-

pression by the regime of half or even more of the political landscape. The country will perhaps then attain the felicity of Western recognition and be qualified (according to the formula that the French chief of state employed in 1996 with respect to the Tunisia of General Ben Ali) as an ‘exemplary experiment of modernization’.

Notes


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Le Sanaa Chronicle