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# **North and South Yemen: Comparative Military Capabilities**



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**A Research Paper**

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*NESA 87-10053  
December 1987*

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# **North and South Yemen: Comparative Military Capabilities**

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**A Research Paper**

This paper was prepared by  Office of  
Near Eastern and South Asian Analysis, with  
contributions from   
NESA, and  Office of Imagery Analysis. It  
was coordinated with the Directorate of  
Operations.

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Comments and queries are welcome and may be  
directed to the Chief, Persian Gulf Division, NESA,

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**North and South Yemen:  
Comparative Military  
Capabilities**

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**Summary**

*Information available  
as of 20 October 1987  
was used in this report.*

Neither the Yemen Arab Republic (North Yemen) nor the People's Democratic Republic of Yemen (South Yemen) has sufficient military strength to achieve a decisive military victory over the other. Their armies and air forces are comparable in both quantity and quality of equipment. In a conflict, South Yemen's Army would enjoy an initial advantage because of better training, but neither side has the ability to make significant territorial gains.

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Ultimately, the army with the superior morale and more effective tribal support would perform better in battle. Most Yemeni military personnel have a stronger allegiance to their tribes than to their national governments, making their willingness to fight highly dependent on tribal ties. The ability of either country to enlist the services of powerful tribal militias could decide a Yemeni conflict.

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Moscow has trained both militaries, but more intensive Soviet training has provided South Yemen's armed forces with an operational edge over North Yemen's. The Soviets have not taught the Yemenis how to maintain their equipment, however, perpetuating their reliance on Soviet maintenance personnel.

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The Soviets are in a position to provide the decisive edge in a war between North and South Yemen, but they probably would try to maintain neutrality. Moscow has long-term equities resulting from military supply relationships with both countries and would not risk antagonizing the moderate Arab Gulf states by actively supporting either side. Nevertheless, the Soviets probably would intervene decisively on behalf of South Yemen in the unlikely event that a North Yemeni military operation threatened to topple the regime in Aden. Moscow would use its influence to restrain South Yemen from achieving a decisive victory over Sanaa.

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Both Yemens probably will remain dependent on Moscow for most of their military needs through choice and necessity. Despite anticipated increases in revenues from oil discoveries on both sides of the frontier, neither Aden nor Sanaa will have sufficient independent financing for large arms purchases.

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The Saudis probably would provide substantial military aid to North Yemen if Riyadh believed that Sanaa faced military defeat. The Saudis, however, are careful to limit such aid to North Yemen in peacetime to prevent a North Yemeni arms buildup that could be used against them.

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The Libyans recently provided North Yemen with sizable military assistance in return for closer North Yemeni ties and support for Libya's war with Chad. Over the past year the Libyans have been North Yemen's second-largest source of military aid. 

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Conflict between North and South Yemen would provide the United States with opportunities to increase its military relationship with North Yemen, but Sanaa would try to maintain its Soviet military ties. In the event of hostilities, North Yemen almost certainly would press the United States for a direct military supply relationship that bypasses the Saudis. Sanaa continues to value US military equipment and training, but it probably will favor Soviet and Libyan interests over US concerns as long as Moscow and Tripoli continue to meet North Yemen's arms requests. 

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**North and South Yemen:  
Comparative Military  
Capabilities** [Redacted]

Since South Yemen's establishment as a Marxist state in 1967, North and South Yemen have been involved in two wars with each other and a series of major border clashes. South Yemeni forces invaded North Yemen in 1972 and 1979. The second attack supported a major insurgency in southern North Yemen that Sanaa finally defeated after three years of effort and with substantial military aid from Saudi Arabia and the Soviet Union. Skirmishes continue between North and South Yemeni border forces and occasionally erupt into large clashes, most recently in 1985. [Redacted]

We believe political and economic constraints will preclude full-scale conflict between North and South Yemen in the near future, but the two countries' traditional distrust, ideological differences, and potentially competing oil interests are likely to lead to military clashes over time. Neither Aden nor Sanaa is prepared to initiate a major military confrontation, since both regimes are trying to breathe life into their moribund economies and are encountering domestic political challenges. We believe Aden and Sanaa also are reluctant to risk jeopardizing crucial Soviet military and economic aid by initiating another conflict. [Redacted]

**Comparative Capabilities**

In prolonged ground fighting, we believe neither side would achieve a decisive victory. Major fighting would severely strain the capabilities of both countries' armies and air forces. North Yemen's regular Army has more active duty personnel, but South Yemen would enjoy an initial advantage because it has better training and larger border units. We believe that the ability of either side to seize and hold sizable territory would be severely constrained by logistic problems. In addition, [Redacted] the armies and air forces on both sides depend on their Soviet military advisers and would have difficulty maintaining their sophisticated military equipment without them. [Redacted]

**The Ground Forces**

**Overall Numbers Suggest Parity.** Numerically, the two countries' ground forces are roughly the same.

[Redacted] that North Yemen's regular Army numbers 35,000 men, while [Redacted]

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South Yemen's regular Army numbers 24,000. South Yemen, in addition, has at least 15,000 active duty militia that act in close coordination with its Army. Ground force reserves for both sides are difficult to calculate but could be sizable. [Redacted]

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[Redacted] North Yemen mustered 10,000 Army reservists in the Sanaa area to march in the National Day parade on 26 September 1987, [Redacted]

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[Redacted] Both sides field the equivalent of at least 11 2,000-man combat maneuver brigades, and each has several thousand uniformed personnel serving in special security and paramilitary units. [Redacted]

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North Yemen may have up to 32 units designated as brigades, but many of these are no more than battalion-size formations.<sup>1</sup> [Redacted]

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**Comparable Equipment.** Both armies have military equipment of roughly equal quantity and quality.

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Each relies primarily on Soviet armor and artillery, although North Yemen also has three US-equipped brigades. North Yemen has more armored vehicles than the South, [Redacted] but South Yemen has more artillery and operational [Redacted]

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<sup>1</sup> North Yemen has two brigades—a total of 3,000 troops—serving in Iraq, [Redacted] The contingent is rotated every six months, and the 11th rotation took place in October 1987. Upon their return to North Yemen, many of these brigades retain their honorary designation as Aruba (Arabism) brigades. These units are deployed throughout North Yemen, but their strength is unknown. [Redacted]

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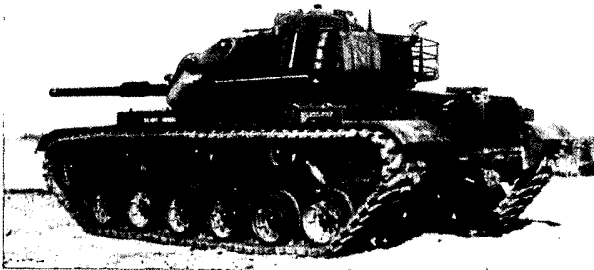
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M-60 tank [redacted]

tactical missiles, including Scud and FROG surface-to-surface missiles.<sup>2</sup> Neither side has been able to acquire and operationally deploy significantly more advanced weapons than the other, and both armies carry large quantities of World War II-vintage equipment, including T-34 tanks. [redacted]

**Unit Deployments Favor South Yemen.** Barring a lengthy period of mobilization, Aden's ground forces would have the initial advantage in a future border war, partly because of its larger border units. South Yemen also has assigned more tanks and artillery to each of its brigades, which provides them with more concentrated firepower. North Yemen's border units are well suited for counterinsurgency warfare but probably would be overrun in a surprise attack by conventional forces. Sanaa has dissipated its overall armor advantage by deploying its tanks in smaller formations. [redacted]

**South Yemen's Training Edge.** South Yemen's forces are better trained in the use of their equipment, particularly artillery and tanks. The South Yemenis conduct more exercises—including frequent use of live ammunition—probably because their Soviet and Cuban advisers plan and oversee such training. [redacted]

[redacted] conduct only one or two major exercises annually and that Soviet advisers often are

<sup>2</sup> The Soviets delivered at least four SS-21 surface-to-surface missiles to North Yemen in early September 1987. The missiles are significantly more accurate than South Yemen's FROGs and Scuds but are not expected to be operational in the near future. We believe that the Soviets will deliver the same system to South Yemen to maintain balanced military relations with the two countries. [redacted]

excluded from planning or participation. [redacted] artillerymen do not understand the concept of indirect fire, preferring to shoot only when they can see their targets. South Yemeni forces probably would receive more accurate fire support from their artillery. [redacted]

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**Limitations on Command, Control, and Communications.** There is close coordination between the Army, Air Force, and Air Defense Force in South Yemen's daily operations. Soviet and Cuban military advisers oversee South Yemeni military operations, [redacted] and probably are responsible for the efficient functioning of military communications. [redacted]

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Command and control for South Yemeni frontline units probably would not function as efficiently in war. Soviet advisers probably would not be directly involved with South Yemeni border units in combat, reducing the accuracy of their air and artillery strikes. Highly centralized command and control procedures practiced by the South Yemenis in Soviet-directed training exercises would break down in actual combat, in our view, with forces on both sides relying on an informal, highly localized command structure. [redacted]

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North Yemen has serious problems coordinating its forces, partly because the Soviets are not permitted to play as large a role in military operations as they do in South Yemen, and partly because of North Yemen's diverse weapons inventory and communications procedures. [redacted]

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[redacted] use Russian, English, and Arabic in military communications and that they have not integrated their Soviet and West European communications equipment. [redacted]

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**Inadequate Logistics.** Logistic problems handicap both sides and almost certainly would limit the ability of either army to move deeply into the other's territory. Mountainous terrain and desert along most of the border would preclude rapid movement or resupply of advancing forces. Vehicular traffic is further restricted by poor national road systems that are subject to interdiction at several key junctions. Resupply already is an acute problem for border units on both sides.

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**North and South Yemen: Regime Protection Forces**

Both Aden and Sanaa maintain sizable countercoup forces near their capital cities, including their best Army units and special paramilitary forces. [redacted]

and commando brigades, and could be called on to counter threats from rebellious Army units or tribal forces marching against Sanaa. Most of the brigades' personnel are drawn from Salih's Sanhan tribe, and each unit is commanded by one of Salih's close relatives. [redacted]

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**North Yemen**

Central Security Forces. This elite paramilitary force was created specifically as a countercoup and riot control force and is commanded by one of President Salih's brothers. The unit is equipped with crew-served weapons, BTR-60 armored personnel carriers, and AML-245/H90 armored vehicles. The Central Security Forces have a strength of 18,000 men, [redacted], with 10,000 personnel serving in the Central Security Forces in the Sanaa area. [redacted]

**South Yemen**

Fully equipped armor, artillery, and tactical missile brigades apparently act as the Aden regime's praetorian guard. [redacted] These units were instrumental in routing overthrown President Ali Nasir's forces from Aden during the 1986 coup. [redacted]

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Special Guards Unit. This 500-man unit is responsible for presidential security and is stationed around Salih's residence, [redacted]

[redacted] The guard is equipped with M-113 armored personnel carriers. [redacted]

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Regular Army Units. An estimated 10,000 North Yemeni troops are garrisoned in the Sanaa area, including fully equipped armor, airborne, artillery,

South Yemeni units have gone without ammunition and spare parts resupply for several weeks even when there has been no fighting. [redacted]

sufficient trucks for troop transport and probably would have to requisition civilian vehicles in the event of major fighting. [redacted]

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Sanaa and Aden lack sufficient air and ground transport to move large quantities of equipment rapidly over long distances. South Yemen's air cargo fleet of 10 Soviet transport aircraft and North Yemen's eight transport planes are used primarily to carry small units and light supplies, [redacted]

**Poor Maintenance.** The maintenance capabilities of the two countries are rudimentary. Both sides are handicapped by a serious long-term shortage of trained maintenance personnel, complicating even routine maintenance. [redacted]

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[redacted] We believe they lack the capability to airlift enough troops, heavy equipment, and supplies to sustain major military operations. Both sides suffer from a shortage of tank transporters. Neither army could move more than 30 tanks over a long distance at one time. The countries also lack

[redacted] have no concept of preventive maintenance, a problem that is compounded by the harsh Yemeni environment.<sup>3</sup> North Yemen

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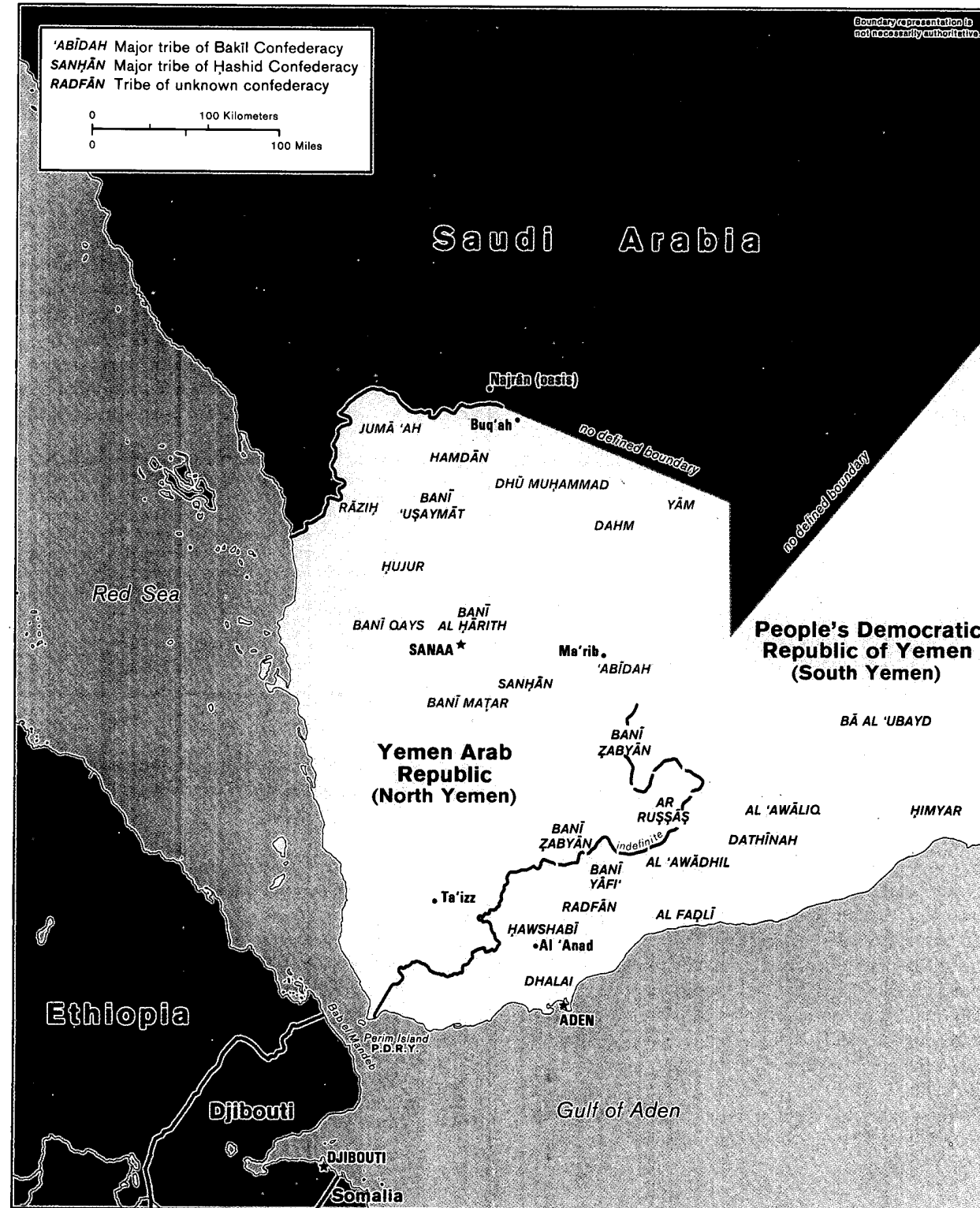
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<sup>3</sup> The heat, humidity, and salt air of the coastal Yemens, particularly the Aden area, rapidly rust and corrode armored vehicles unless they are properly maintained. [redacted]

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### Tribes in North and South Yemen



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Road to Sanaa [redacted]

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has only limited maintenance facilities outside Sanaa, and some North Yemeni brigades have up to 40 percent of their equipment idled by maintenance problems. [redacted] South Yemeni border units also have severe equipment maintenance problems, although they have tried harder than North Yemen to provide field units with equipment for routine maintenance, [redacted]

We do not believe that either North or South Yemen could maintain the bulk of its military equipment during combat without foreign military personnel. South Yemen depends on Soviet and Cuban technicians to keep its sophisticated equipment running. North Yemen has technicians from at least eight countries, including the Soviet Union, the United States, Taiwan, and Jordan, according to the [redacted] and Embassy reporting [redacted] the Soviets do not provide maintenance training to either side, perpetuating the reliance of both countries on Soviet maintenance personnel. [redacted]

**Morale and Tribal Loyalties.** Morale would be a critical factor determining the effectiveness of North or South Yemeni forces and probably would favor the defender. Military units on both sides are recruited from and generally assigned to their tribal areas,

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[redacted] and traditionally fight best when defending their tribal homeland. [redacted] morale is poor in North and South Yemeni units located far from their homes and that these units have high desertion rates.<sup>4</sup> [redacted]

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We believe that tribal loyalties would be the most decisive factor in determining the outcome of major fighting between North and South Yemen. Both

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[redacted] Aden has resorted to forcible conscription in outlying areas because the desertion rate is so high. [redacted] North Yemeni military conscription outside Sanaa is largely in the hands of tribal shaykhs who send a certain quota of men into the Army in return for subsidies from the central government. [redacted]

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**The Yemeni Terrain: Hard on Conventional Forces**

*Mountainous terrain and few roads along most of the North Yemen-South Yemen border limit the movement of conventional forces and offer the defender significant advantages. There are three likely crossing points for invading forces where major roads could handle armored vehicles. The best route is the two-lane Aden-Ta'izz road. Mountainous terrain on both sides of the border would confine movement to the roads, however, and both sides have deployed sizable blocking forces along these routes. Most of North Yemen's key population centers are located in the mountains. Sanaa, for example, is 2,400 meters above sea level.* [redacted]

*The mountainous terrain is ideally suited for insurgency warfare and was effectively exploited by South Yemeni-backed National Democratic Front forces in the early 1980s. Several thousand fighters, operating in small groups and enjoying the support of the local population in southwestern North Yemen, thwarted conventional government forces by using the hills to stage hit-and-run attacks and evade conventional North Yemeni forces. North Yemeni forces could not defeat the insurgents until they also developed small-unit tactics.* [redacted]

armies are factionalized along tribal lines, and allegiances based on tribal affiliation usually override central government authority. Leaders in both Aden and Sanaa acknowledge these loyalties by recruiting personnel from their own tribes to fill the most important military units. Army and militia units stationed in the outlying provinces, however, are recruited from local tribes, who often are indifferent or even hostile to the central government. [redacted]

Both Aden and Sanaa have tried to develop and maintain the loyalty of their militaries. The current leaders in both regimes have filled key military positions with members of their own tribes. [redacted] the most powerful faction in South Yemen's ruling coalition, which includes senior military officers, represents tribes drawn primarily

from the Lahij Governorate—with Dhalai and Radfan tribesmen manning the key armor and artillery units protecting Aden. These same units were instrumental in routing the forces of ousted South Yemeni leader Ali Nasir during the 1986 coup. Ali Nasir's military supporters—fellow Dathinah tribesmen—either fled to North Yemen or have been purged from military service since the coup. South Yemeni Army and militia units in the Hadhramaut and Shabwah Governorates probably would become involved in border fighting with North Yemeni forces but do not strongly identify with the current Aden leadership. During the 1986 coup, these units remained uncommitted. [redacted]

Most of the key North Yemeni military units protecting Sanaa—Army, paramilitary, and Air Force units—are members of President Salih's tribe, [redacted] Salih has deployed units commanded by fellow tribesmen to protect the oilfields at Ma'rib. Salih's uncle, who commands North Yemen's airborne brigade, also acts as military governor for Ma'rib. [redacted]

We believe the powerful North Yemeni tribal confederations outside Sanaa pose a strong challenge to the central government's authority in remote areas, but they are too disunited to march against Sanaa. Government forces firmly control Sanaa, but shaykhs from the Bakil and Hashid tribal confederations control the countryside. The government has recruited tribesmen from the outlying areas for military service, but only after paying subsidies to the local shaykh. [redacted]

Powerful tribal militias in both countries could tip the balance in future outbreaks of major fighting. During previous border fighting the North Yemenis mustered almost 100,000 fighters from various tribes, [redacted]

**Limited Air Capability**

Air power is unlikely to decide future ground battles because of the limited ground attack capabilities of both air forces. Soviet training for South Yemeni pilots probably is more intensive, according to sources

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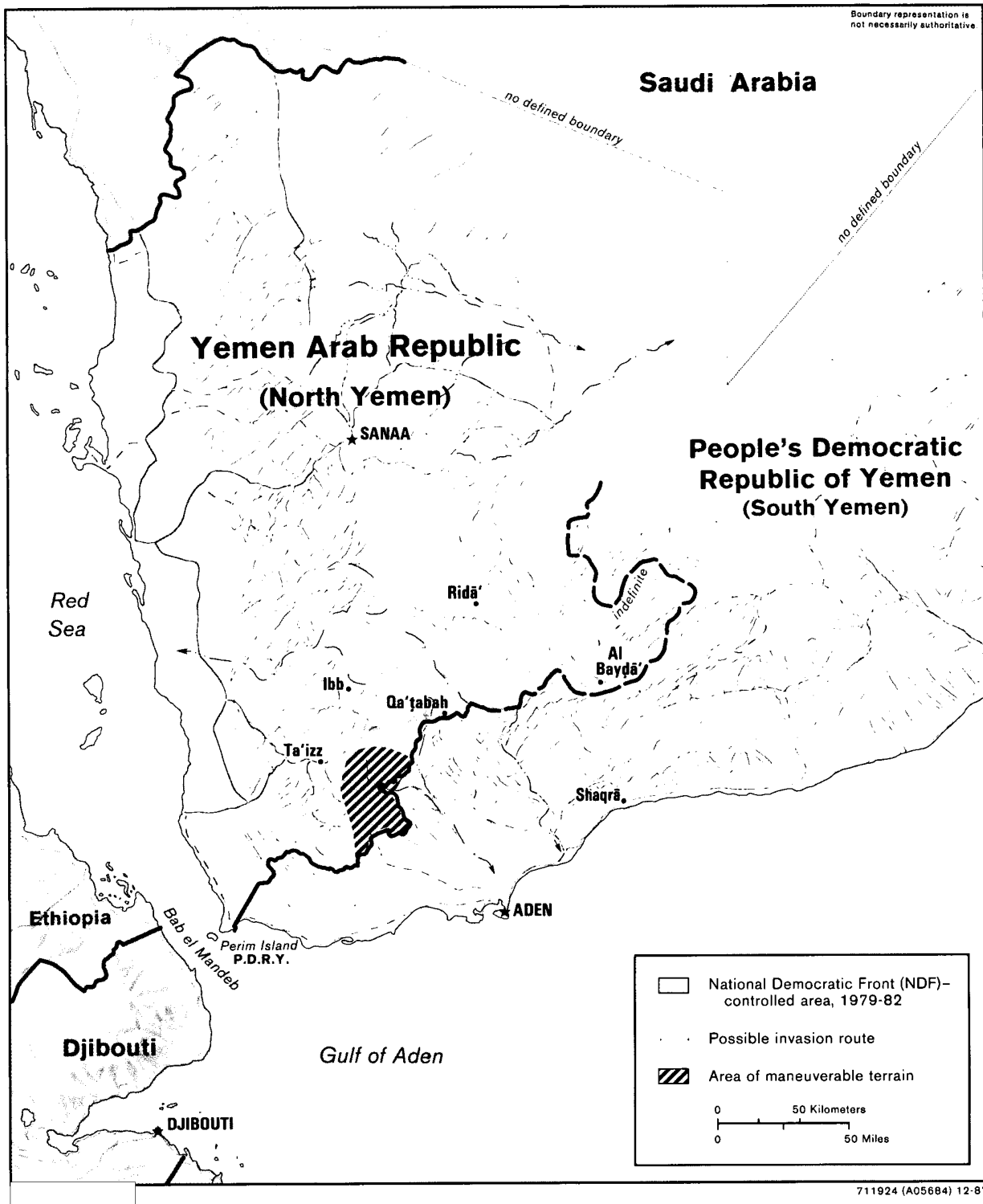
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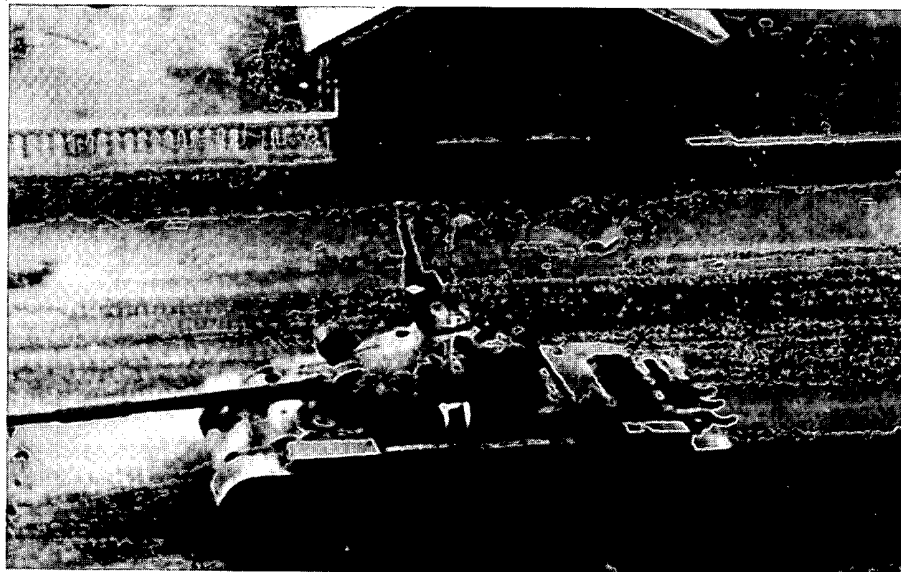


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South Yemeni armor in action during January 1986 civil war fighting in Aden. [redacted]



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of the [redacted] and they conduct more frequent training in airstrike missions. Despite this, [redacted] South Yemen's Air Force has only limited capabilities, and [redacted] most of its better trained fighter-bomber pilots may have defect- ed to North Yemen after the 1986 coup. [redacted]

[redacted] claim is the best ground attack and intercep- tor aircraft on either side. During a conflict, North Yemen's qualitative advantage with the F-5 aircraft, however, probably would be dissipated by competing demands for air defense and ground attack missions. [redacted]

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[redacted] Soviet-equipped air squadrons conduct infrequent air-to-ground training. North Ye- men has lost 25 of its Soviet aircraft to flight acci- dents since 1985, [redacted]

As with ground equipment, operational readiness rates for North and South Yemeni combat aircraft have been seriously affected by limited local mainte- nance capabilities and reliance on foreign military technicians and logistics. South Yemen's Soviet air- craft are better maintained by their Soviet advisers than North Yemen's, [redacted]

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[redacted] and -equipped F-5 fighter-bomber squadron, which [redacted]

[redacted], but both countries— as with other Soviet Third World clients—must ship aircraft and helicopters to the Soviet Union for major maintenance work, with overhauls averaging seven to 18 months. [redacted]

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[redacted] failure to coordinate air traffic control operations that are conducted in Russian, English, and Arabic has contributed to the high military aircraft accident rate. [redacted]

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**North Yemen's Military Mishaps**

*North Yemen's misfortunes with Soviet military equipment since late 1984 reflect poorly on Soviet equipment and have been a major source of tension in the Soviet-North Yemeni military relationship. The North Yemeni Air Force's losses since 1984 have left it with 44 operational combat aircraft, as of spring 1987.<sup>a</sup> The accidents have ranged from at least two midair collisions between MIG-21s on training missions to the destruction of an SU-22 fighter-bomber by its own bombs during an exercise in 1985.*

*Soviet-equipped air squadrons have been forced to cut back training flights because of maintenance problems and plummeting pilot morale. Tensions between North Yemeni pilots and Soviet advisers occasionally have resulted in physical violence, and in one case a North Yemeni pilot pistol-whipped a Soviet adviser. The North Yemeni Air Force commander refused Soviet requests to punish the man.*

*The accidents have cast US training and equipment in a favorable light, based on the performance of Sanaa's one US-equipped air squadron. The squadron has had only one accident since 1983, and that was caused by a Saudi pilot flying an aircraft to Saudi Arabia for overhaul. North Yemeni pilots in the F-5 squadron believe that US equipment and flight training are better, [redacted] citing the greater maneuverability of the F-5 and the US stress on pilot initiative.<sup>b</sup>*

<sup>a</sup> This figure does not include 14 SU-22 fighter-bombers delivered in summer 1987 by the Soviets to offset Sanaa's aircraft losses. The new SU-22s were operational as of fall 1987. [redacted]  
<sup>b</sup> Western fighter-pilot training places a greater emphasis on individual initiative in air-to-air missions. Soviet fighter pilots are taught to rely heavily on direction from ground control sites. [redacted]

[redacted] Sanaa's logistic problems are compounded because the Saudis control maintenance and logistic support for the North Yemeni F-5 squadron. [redacted]

[redacted] F-5s were idled for six weeks this year when the Saudis delivered contaminated aviation fuel. [redacted]

We believe that both Yemens are capable of launching a strategic airstrike that would provide either side a military advantage during a conflict. By attacking first, either Sanaa or Aden could achieve air superiority by destroying the other's combat aircraft and damaging its airfields. North Yemen's ability to detect hostile aircraft is poor, [redacted] but most of its aircraft are deployed away from the border, increasing their survivability. South Yemen's ability to detect an airstrike probably is better, but its Air Force is particularly vulnerable to a quick strike because most of its combat aircraft are deployed close to the border.

Air defense forces on both sides are handicapped by training shortcomings and their reliance on Soviet military advisers. North Yemen's SA-2 and SA-3 surface-to-air missiles are well placed to protect key cities and the Ma'rib oilfields, but poor Soviet training makes their effective operation and maintenance questionable without Soviet advisory assistance, [redacted] South Yemeni personnel probably are better trained to use their air defense weapons, including SA-6 and SA-9 surface-to-air missiles—accurate, highly mobile short-range systems that the North Yemenis do not possess. [redacted]

[redacted] air defense personnel engaged in a training exercise at Ma'rib in December 1986 misfired an SA-2 missile that nearly struck a Hunt Oil Company drilling rig. Several air defense personnel were killed by the missile backblast. The North Yemenis were trying to conduct the exercise without Soviet supervision. An enraged and embarrassed President Salih promptly court-martialed the battery commander and requested refresher training for his air defense officers. [redacted]

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Both sides have a limited capability to launch an airstrike or tactical missile strike against key economic or civilian targets. South Yemen possesses FROG and Scud surface-to-surface missiles with high-explosive warheads that, if launched from South Yemeni territory, could strike Ta'izz or Sanaa, North Yemen's largest cities.<sup>8</sup> North Yemen is concerned that Aden could target its oilfields in the Ma'rib region. Despite this capability, we believe that Aden would consider using its missiles only if military defeat appeared imminent. [redacted]

North Yemen probably would consider using its F-5 fighter-bombers against the South Yemeni oil refinery in Aden or possibly against South Yemen's new oilfields in Shabwah during an all-out conflict. Although North Yemen has recently acquired the highly accurate SS-21 tactical missile, it lacks the trained personnel to maintain and operate the system without Soviet advisers. [redacted]

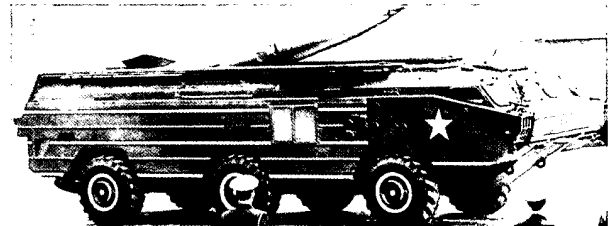
**Navies Not a Factor**

The small Yemeni navies probably would play a negligible role in any fighting. Neither country has a significant amphibious capability for its troops nor the capability to disrupt the other's Red Sea military supply lines. North Yemen has eight seaworthy patrol boats, and South Yemen has six OSA II missile boats that sustained some damage during the 1986 coup. Most of South Yemen's naval personnel defected after the coup, [redacted]

**Foreign Military Support**

**Soviet Potential To Influence Fighting.** We believe that the Soviets are in a position to provide the decisive edge in a war between North and South Yemen, but they probably would remain neutral and try to end the conflict through diplomatic means. We

<sup>8</sup> According to CIA estimates, the FROG-7 has a range of 70 km, while the Scud-B has a range of 300 km. The SS-21 has an estimated range of 80 to 100 km. [redacted]



SS-21 tactical missile [redacted]

believe Moscow prefers to preserve long-term equities resulting from its military supply relationship with both Yemens and wants to avoid antagonizing moderate Arab states. Moscow already has demonstrated its reluctance to become involved directly in fighting between the two countries. During the 1979 war, Soviet advisers were withdrawn from South Yemeni units that invaded the North, [redacted]

The Soviets probably would intervene on behalf of South Yemen if diplomatic efforts failed to halt North Yemeni military operations that threatened the Aden regime. We believe that Moscow would step up arms shipments to Aden while cutting off military aid to Sanaa. If the Soviet Union chose to become directly involved, Soviet and Cuban military advisers could play a crucial role on the battlefield by providing South Yemeni forces with better command and control, directing artillery and airstrikes, and flying combat missions in support of South Yemeni ground forces. [redacted]

We judge that the Soviets would not commit combat units to South Yemen unless North Yemeni troops threatened to overrun Soviet military facilities. The Soviets could airlift a 1,500- to 2,000-man Cuban combat brigade from Ethiopia to [redacted] airfields at Aden and Al 'Anad.<sup>9</sup> [redacted]

<sup>9</sup> If Soviet lives in South Yemen were threatened, the Soviets could call on the naval infantry company stationed on an amphibious assault ship normally deployed with the Soviet Indian Ocean squadron. [redacted]

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**Uncertain Saudi Support.** The Saudis probably would provide significant military aid to North Yemen if they believed that Sanaa faced military defeat. Riyadh considers North Yemen as a buffer against Marxist South Yemen, and it could tip the military balance in North Yemen's favor by subsidizing additional arms purchases and by delivering large quantities of Western military equipment from its stocks. In 1979, the Saudis agreed to finance a US arms package to North Yemen valued at over \$300 million.

[redacted]

Saudi money could buy the temporary allegiance of the powerful North Yemeni tribal confederations, whose military forces collectively would triple the size of North Yemen's Army [redacted]

[redacted] The Saudis also have influence over South Yemeni tribes along the Saudi border, and Saudi-subsidized tribal disturbances could cause considerable security problems for Aden's forces in the Hadhramaut. [redacted]

The Saudis, however, have been careful to limit military aid to North Yemen to prevent an arms buildup that could be used against them. Riyadh regards control over North Yemen's military and economic aid as a vital check on the territorial ambitions of its more populous and fractious southern neighbor. [redacted]

**Possible Sources of Future Conflict**

Unruly tribes along the border area shared by North Yemen, South Yemen, and Saudi Arabia occasionally have provoked inadvertent clashes between North and South Yemeni forces, but they are not a likely source of future conflict between Aden and Sanaa. Tribes in the triborder area have resented central government efforts to impose tighter control over their local affairs, particularly efforts to curtail their lucrative smuggling trade. [redacted]

[redacted] these tribesmen occasionally have attacked central government officials and military personnel. Shootouts between South Yemeni Government forces and tribesmen involved in cross-border smuggling periodically have drawn in North Yemeni border forces caught in the crossfire. These incidents have not been a major irritant in relations between the

Yemens, however, and Aden and Sanaa have successfully used negotiations to contain tensions resulting from tribal unrest. [redacted]

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South Yemen's recent discovery of oil close to North Yemen's oil concession raises the possibility of a future Yemeni clash resulting from conflicting resource claims. Although we do not know the size of South Yemen's oil find in Shabwah, it may overlap North Yemen's oil concession in the undemarcated border area. Both regimes probably regard oil as crucial to their economic rejuvenation and political survival and would not hesitate to defend the oilfields against attack by the other. North Yemen already has shown its willingness to defend forcefully its oil-rich Ma'rib area, where the last major Yemeni border clash occurred in 1985. [redacted]

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Militant South Yemeni exiles protected by North Yemen have caused the most recent tension between Aden and Sanaa, but Sanaa has reduced its support for the exiles, and their future role in South Yemen is in serious doubt. Sanaa initially exaggerated the exiles' military potential to obtain US and Saudi military support and deter the Aden regime from subversive efforts against North Yemen. The exiles have been unable and unwilling to mount credible military operations on their own, however, and would require substantial North Yemeni military support to do so. In our view, North Yemen will not provide such support to avoid provoking a confrontation with Aden. Salih also is aware of South Yemen's demonstrated capability to sponsor subversive military operations in North Yemen. [redacted]

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**Sanaa's Efforts To Diversify Arms Suppliers**

Serious financial constraints have frustrated North Yemen's efforts to diversify its sources of military aid. It has been dissatisfied with the poor quality of its Soviet military equipment and the level of training, maintenance, and logistic support provided by Moscow, according to US defense attache reporting. [redacted]

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[redacted] has solicited help from moderate Arab states that have Soviet equipment, including Jordan and

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**Military Exiles in the Yemens:  
Numbers and Missions**

Many South Yemeni exiles aligned with ousted South Yemeni leader Ali Nasir remain in North Yemen, but they pose little military threat to Aden. Ali Nasir's forces consist of 13,000 South Yemeni military defectors and fellow tribesmen from Abyan Governorate.<sup>a</sup> The exiles have failed to mount significant military operations because of indecisive leadership, poor training, and North Yemen's apparent unwillingness to sanction their military operations. Sanaa retains control of Libyan arms delivered to North Yemen for Ali Nasir's forces and has confined most of the exiles to three military camps along the South Yemeni border. Most of the disaffected exiles are likely to return peacefully to South Yemen. [redacted]

A minority of irreconcilable South Yemeni militants probably will remain in North Yemen, joining a host of militarily dormant South Yemeni exile groups. Most of these groups—notably the South Arabian

<sup>a</sup> Between 35,000 and 50,000 South Yemenis fled to North Yemen after the 1986 coup in Aden, according to US Embassy reporting. [redacted]

League—espouse militant anti-South Yemeni rhetoric but generally appear content to receive annual stipends from Saudi Arabia. The Saudis also have provided quarters for a South Yemeni exile brigade in northwestern Saudi Arabia for over a decade, [redacted] but most of the personnel are long past military retirement age and probably train infrequently, if at all. [redacted]

North Yemeni exiles of the South Yemeni-sponsored National Democratic Front remain a potent political force in South Yemen, but their military activity probably is overstated by concerned North Yemeni officials. The National Democratic Front proved capable of mounting an effective insurgency during the early 1980s, and at the height of its activity it fielded an estimated 12,000 men. [redacted]

[redacted] the front's political leadership probably commands the loyalty of several thousand supporters who could quickly be rearmed by Aden. [redacted]

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\$4 billion of military equipment delivered on a grant or credit basis. Military manpower losses during the 1986 coup in Aden probably increased South Yemeni dependence on Soviet military advisers. Heightened tension with North Yemen would almost certainly prompt Aden to seek more Soviet weapons, providing Moscow with new opportunities to expand the size of its military advisory group and increase its access to South Yemeni port and air facilities. The instability that characterizes Aden's politics is not likely to affect the strong Soviet military relationship with South Yemen. [redacted]

Although Sanaa probably believes that it could reduce Soviet leverage over its policies if it could balance its military supply relationships with Washington and Moscow, we believe that North Yemen has little prospect of reducing its reliance on Soviet

military aid in the near future. The Soviets supply two-thirds of North Yemen's military equipment, delivering over \$1 billion of military equipment to North Yemen since 1979. Sanaa owes the Soviets over \$700 million, according to US Embassy reporting. Despite its preference for Western military arms and advisers, Sanaa lacks the financial resources to buy large amounts of Western military equipment and cannot hire sufficient Egyptian or Jordanian military personnel to maintain its large inventory of Soviet equipment. [redacted]

Future Soviet arms deliveries probably will depend more on Soviet policy objectives than on the countries' oil revenues. Neither North nor South Yemen has a specific military modernization plan, although both

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***Military Advisers in the Yemens—A Strong Soviet Flavor***

*Soviet and Cuban military advisers play a more active role in military affairs in South Yemen than in North Yemen. There are about 500 Cubans and up to 1,000 Soviet military personnel in South Yemen, possibly including Soviet personnel stationed at Aden and Al 'Anad to support Soviet naval operations in the Indian Ocean. Soviet and Cuban technicians do most of the maintenance and may help to operate more sophisticated equipment such as air defense radars. Soviet and Cuban pilots act as flight instructors and may fly routine missions inside South Yemen,* [redacted]

*[redacted] Soviet advisers are assigned to oversee training for each South Yemeni Army brigade,* [redacted]

[redacted]

*North Yemen is host to a sizable Soviet military advisory group and a smaller Saudi mission.* [redacted]

*[redacted] that there are at least 355 Soviet military advisers and technicians in Sanaa and that an additional 150 may have arrived since September to support the SS-21s and new SU-22 fighter-bombers. Most Soviet military advisers support the Army and Air Defense Force. The Saudis have 120 military personnel to oversee maintenance and support of North Yemen's Western equipment. A Taiwanese team maintains the F-5s. A Jordanian team maintains North Yemen's Vulcan air defense guns, and a small Egyptian team teaches at North Yemen's officers college in Sanaa.* [redacted]

have tried to obtain more advanced Soviet weapons from Moscow. The Soviets probably are manipulating their military supply relationships with both Yemens to discourage hostilities, while Moscow tries to woo the moderate Gulf states. The US Embassy in Sanaa reports that North Yemen agreed to expel leading

South Yemeni militants in September, shortly after the Soviets delivered a new weapons package that included SS-21 missiles. The Soviets also significantly delayed the supply of new arms to South Yemen to replace equipment lost in the 1986 coup to rein in radicals in the new government. [redacted]

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***Opportunities for the United States.*** A renewed Yemeni conflict would provide the United States with opportunities to increase its military relationship with North Yemen. Sanaa almost certainly would ask Washington to supply additional military aid, particularly if the North Yemenis anticipated a suspension of Soviet military aid during hostilities with South Yemen. North Yemen probably would seek US military aid to augment, rather than permanently replace, Soviet military aid. [redacted]

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North Yemen almost certainly would use renewed hostilities to press the United States for a direct military relationship independent of the Saudis. Sanaa would ask the Saudis to finance the purchase of large amounts of US military equipment, but it would also appeal to the United States for direct grants to reduce Saudi oversight of North Yemeni military assistance. We believe Riyadh would carefully scrutinize large-scale North Yemeni aid requests to the United States and urge Washington to funnel such assistance through Saudi channels. [redacted]

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Unless the United States increases its military aid to Sanaa, US influence in North Yemen during peacetime is likely to decline. Oil development assistance helps to maintain limited US leverage in North Yemen, but President Salih places a higher priority on bolstering his country's defenses. Although Salih will try to maintain a nonaligned posture, he will probably feel increasingly obligated to accommodate the Soviets' and Libya's interests at the expense of US relations so long as they are his primary military benefactors. [redacted]

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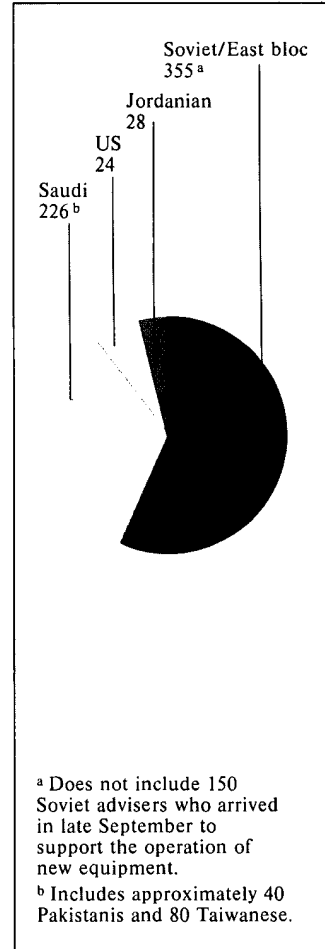
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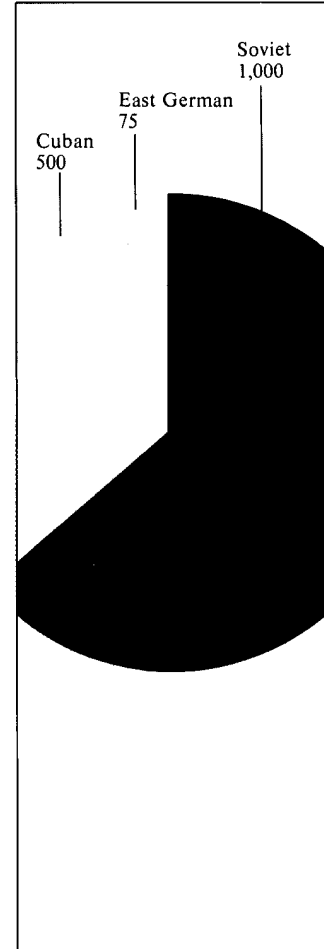
### Foreign Military Personnel in the Yemens

As of September 1987

#### North Yemen



#### South Yemen



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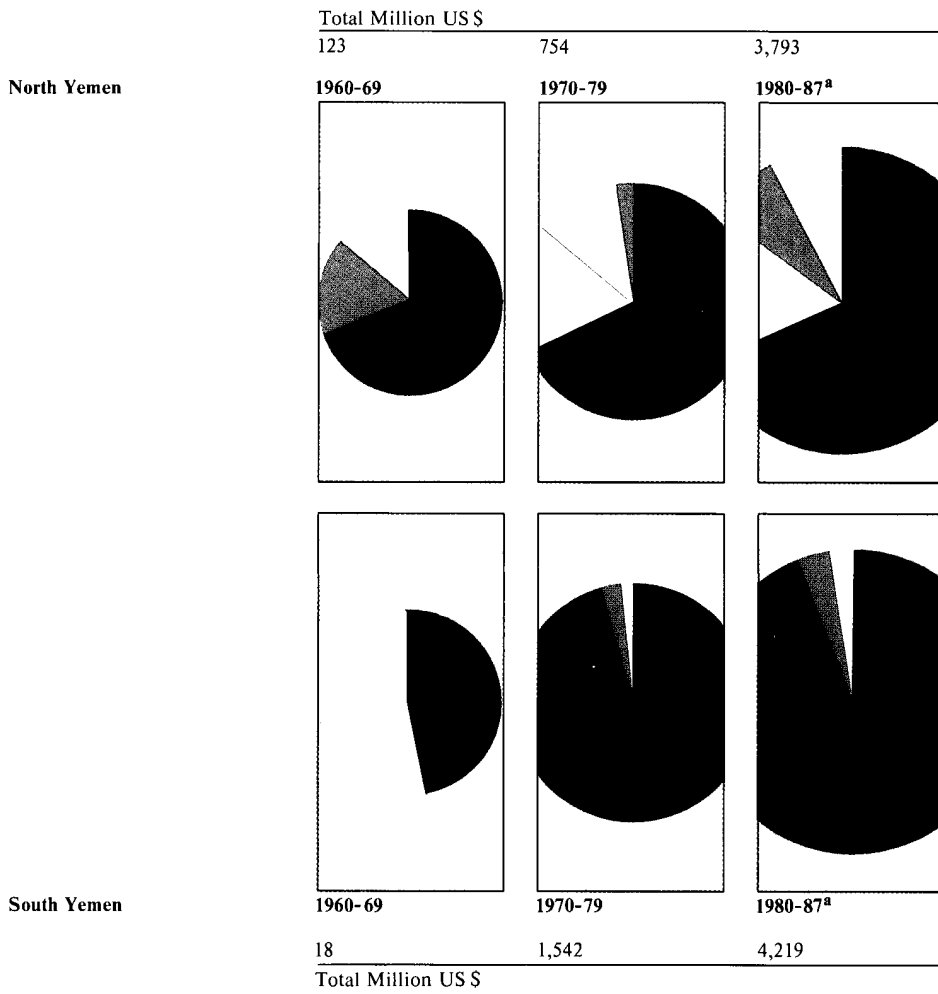
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**North and South Yemen: Arms Deliveries**



<sup>a</sup> Estimated.



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