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The USSR and the Yemens: Moscow's Foothold on the Arabian Peninsula

An Intelligence Assessment

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PA RI-10280
July 1981

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An Intelligence Assessment

Information available as of 16 July 1981 has been used in the preparation of this report.

This assessment was prepared by
Office of Political Analysis.
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This paper was coordinated with the Offices of Economic Research and Strategic Research and the National Intelligence Officers for the USSR and Eastern Europe and for the Near East and South Asia

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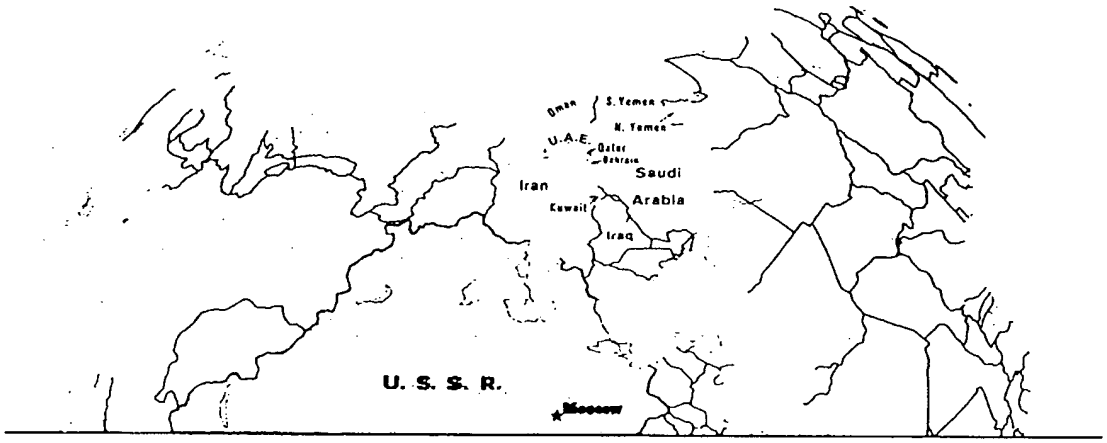

Persian Gulf/Arabian Peninsula as Viewed from Moscow

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The USSR and the Yemens: Moscow's Foothold on the Arabian Peninsula

Key Judgments

The Soviets have been attracted by the Yemens primarily because of their location--adjacent to Saudi Arabia and alongside the strategic Red Sea passageway between the Mediterranean Sea and Indian Ocean. They believe their strong position in South Yemen and improved ties with North Yemen offer the potential for expanding the USSR's influence in an increasingly vital region of the world. They are already using the Yemens to facilitate Soviet military operations in the area and to signal other states that Moscow's influence in the region must be taken into account.

The Soviets are likely to devote more attention to the Arabian Peninsula in the years ahead as they seek to counter increased US military activity and ensure their own access to the region's oil. The Yemens will continue to figure prominently in the Soviet strategy.

Moscow will use its position in the Yemens to apply pressure on the conservative Arab states in the region. The Soviets are also willing to support dissident and insurgent forces which, operating out of South Yemen, could threaten neighboring regimes, notably Oman, over the longer term. If Moscow gains a position in North Yemen similar to what it already has in South Yemen, the USSR would significantly increase its ability to sponsor subversive operations against Saudi Arabia.

The primary basis for the USSR's position in North Yemen and South Yemen is its arms supply relationship with both Aden and Sanaa. This has proved especially useful in North Yemen, where, since 1979, Moscow has been able to exploit President Salih's desires for rapid rearmament. The Soviets are the major arms supplier to each country, providing a broad range of sophisticated military hardware.

Although the Soviets appear determined to protect their investment in both Aden and Sanaa, they consider South Yemen the more valuable client. They will almost certainly resist any threat to Soviet influence there—possibly through direct intervention in internal politics. They apparently believe that North Yemeni President Salih's rule offers the best hope of ultimately achieving a pro-Soviet, leftist government in Sanaa. Should his position be threatened by a pro-Saudi alternative, the Soviets would probably attempt to work through South Yemen to support Salih.

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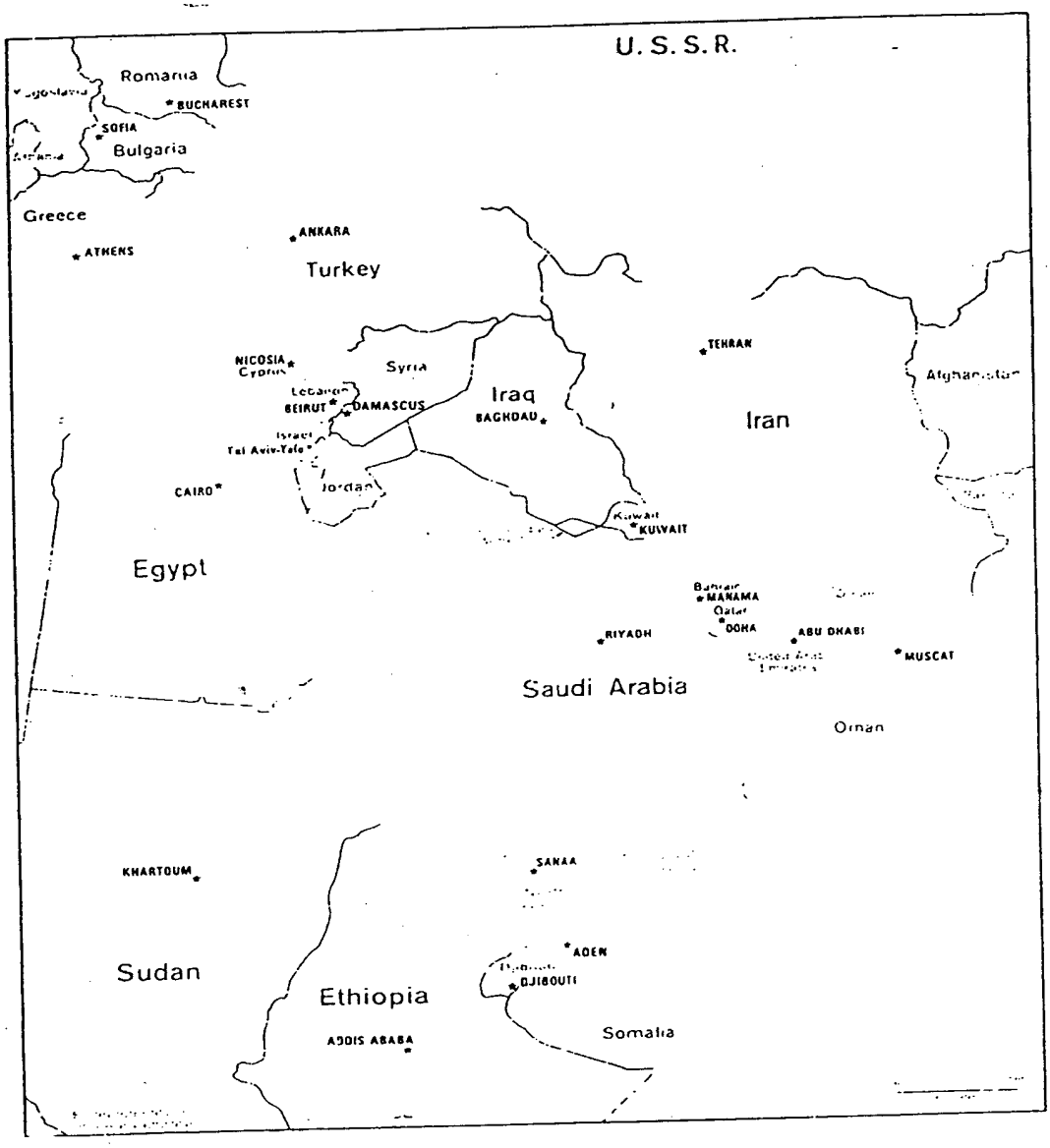
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The USSR and the Yemens: Moscow's Foothold on the Arabian Peninsula

The Soviet Union's efforts to supplant Western influence in the southwest portion of the Arabian Peninsula began in earnest in the early 1960s. Relying largely on military assistance, the Soviets fashioned ties with both the Yemens.[1] The USSR airlifted large amounts of military equipment to the Egyptian-backed republican forces in North Yemen for use against Saudi-supported royalist elements during the civil war that began in 1962. The Soviets also established contacts with elements of the South Yemeni revolutionary front that began their struggle for political independence from British rule in 1963.

Moscow has made more permanent and substantial gains in the south than in the north. The government in Aden was taken over by pro-Soviet Marxists in 1969, two years after the British departure. In 1970 it declared itself the People's Democratic Republic of Yemen (PDRY). In the north, the republican forces that Moscow had supported negotiated a compromise with the royalists during the 1970s, and Sanaa's policy became Western-oriented.

During the past decade Moscow has drawn increasingly close to South Yemen and has become its major military supplier and political patron. Despite friction and occasional border skirmishes between Sanaa and Aden, however, Moscow has maintained a relationship with North Yemen. This has been primarily a consequence of Sanaa's dependence on continued Soviet military assistance and on its distrust of Saudi Arabia.

Soviet Strategic Interest and Military Presence in the Yemens

The principal value of the Yemens to Moscow is their location. Contiguous to Saudi Arabia and situated on the southern Red Sea and the Bab el Mandeb Strait, the Yemens offer a potential site for interfering with maritime traffic passing between the Mediterranean and the Indian Ocean. South Yemen is particularly well placed at the southern entrance of the Red Sea, and its significance is further enhanced by Aden's natural deepwater harbor. North Yemen is three times as populous as South Yemen, however, and the Soviets probably consider it a potentially more important lever on the major Middle East prize, Saudi Arabia.

The USSR's loss of naval access to Somalia in late 1977, the fall of the Shah of Iran in 1978, Moscow's increasing recognition of its allies' and its own future energy needs, and its conviction that the United States intends to expand and make permanent its Indian Ocean military presence have combined to increase Soviet appreciation of the strategic importance of the Yemens. The Soviet Ambassador to North Yemen candidly admitted this in an interview in the Kuwaiti press in January 1981

Over the past year, the Soviets have expanded their naval presence and increased the level of naval activity in the Indian Ocean region. Before 1980 the number of Soviet ships in the area averaged between 18 and 21. In 1980, the number increased to between 30 and 38. Consequently, the importance of Soviet access to facilities in Aden and elsewhere in the region also has increased.

Although access to Aden's deepwater harbor is not essential to a continuing Soviet naval presence in the Indian Ocean, it facilitates logistical support to the Soviet Indian Ocean Squadron. The Soviets use Aden and an anchorage off South Yemen's Socotra Island for replenishment, crew rest, and minor maintenance. They have not used the limited Yemeni facilities in Aden nor shown any interest in improving them

[1] Nomenclature in the Yemens can be confusing. North Yemen, officially called the Yemen Arab Republic (YAR), also goes by the name of its capital, Sanaa. South Yemen, officially the People's Democratic Republic of Yemen (PDRY), is frequently called Aden after its capital and the name it had as part of the British Empire.

[2] The Soviet Union also has access to air and naval facilities in Ethiopia where it maintains a naval support facility at Dahlak Island

In November 1978 the Soviets began to deploy naval aircraft to Aden International Airfield for periodic reconnaissance missions over the Indian Ocean. When the United States increased its forces in the region in response to the Iranian crisis in November 1979, the Soviets began continuous deployments to South Yemen of IL-38 reconnaissance aircraft to monitor US movements. In January 1980 the number in Aden increased to four and continued at that level throughout most of 1980

The Soviets are reportedly assisting with a major expansion of the runway at Aden International Airfield. When completed, it could accommodate the long-range TU-95 Bear reconnaissance aircraft. In addition, the Soviets maintain a small high-frequency communications facility in South Yemen, transferred from Somalia after the expulsion of the Soviets in 1977

The Soviets have also provided assistance to the South Yemeni Navy to upgrade its facilities on Perim Island, which commands the Bab el Mandeb Strait, linking the Red Sea and Gulf of Aden. Soviet naval ships, however, use these facilities only infrequently

Last summer Sanaa granted the Soviets permission to make one naval port call a month in Al Hudaydah, North Yemen's major port. These visits will only slightly enhance the USSR's operational capabilities.

Moscow and Aden—A Shared World View

The clear strategic value of South Yemen is enhanced for the Soviets by their ideological affinity with the South Yemenis. Soviet media emphasize the South Yemeni leadership's adherence to "scientific socialism" and the importance of the Yemeni Socialist Party's (YSP) leadership. The Soviets stress that the YSP is creating the "preconditions for socialism" in South Yemen based on the Soviet experience. Last year senior Soviet officials singled out Algeria and South Yemen as the only two countries in the Middle East that are ruled by "socialist parties."

Moscow has worked to strengthen bilateral contacts between the Soviet Communist Party and the YSP; in late 1979 the two countries agreed to strengthen party ties and formally concluded a "plan of contacts." The Soviets may hope these bonds will enhance the position of the more pro-Soviet elements within the Aden political leadership, ensure that South Yemen remains willing to support Soviet policies in the region, promote more effective internal control, and enable the Soviets to keep tabs on internal developments in Aden

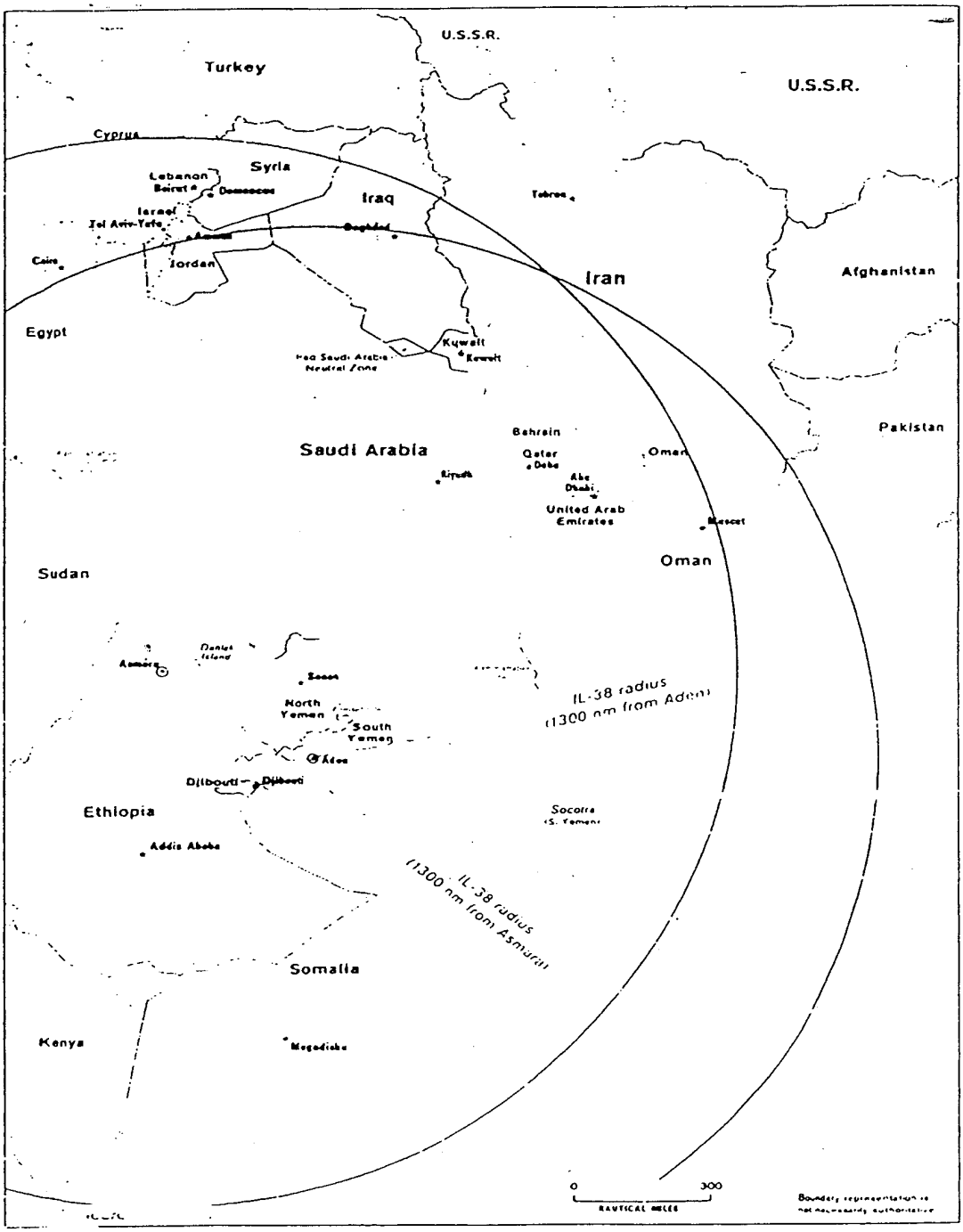
The Soviets and South Yemenis share a commitment to support leftist and dissident groups in the region. South Yemen, for example, is the primary backer of the National Democratic Front (NDF), a group of Marxists and nationalists mostly of North Yemeni origin opposed to the regime in Sanaa. It also sponsors the Popular Front for the Liberation of Oman (PFLO), an organization that seeks to overthrow Sultan Qabus.[1] Aden's direct support of these groups benefits the Soviet because it allows the USSR to remain in the background

South Yemen has provided training for many insurgent terrorist groups, and Soviet and Cuban instructors have participated in at least some of this training.

Moscow apparently is working to achieve closer policy coordination with South Yemen and its other client state, Ethiopia, by seeking to exploit the threat of a permanent US military presence in the area

the USSR, East Germany, South Yemen, and Ethiopia had discussed coordinated measures to counter US military activity in the region.

[1] The PFLO is a leftist organization based in South Yemen that fought a war in Oman's Dhofar Province in the mid-1970s. The USSR provided arms and other assistance to it through South Yemen. Defeated in 1975, it now has only a small number of members who occasionally mount incursions into Oman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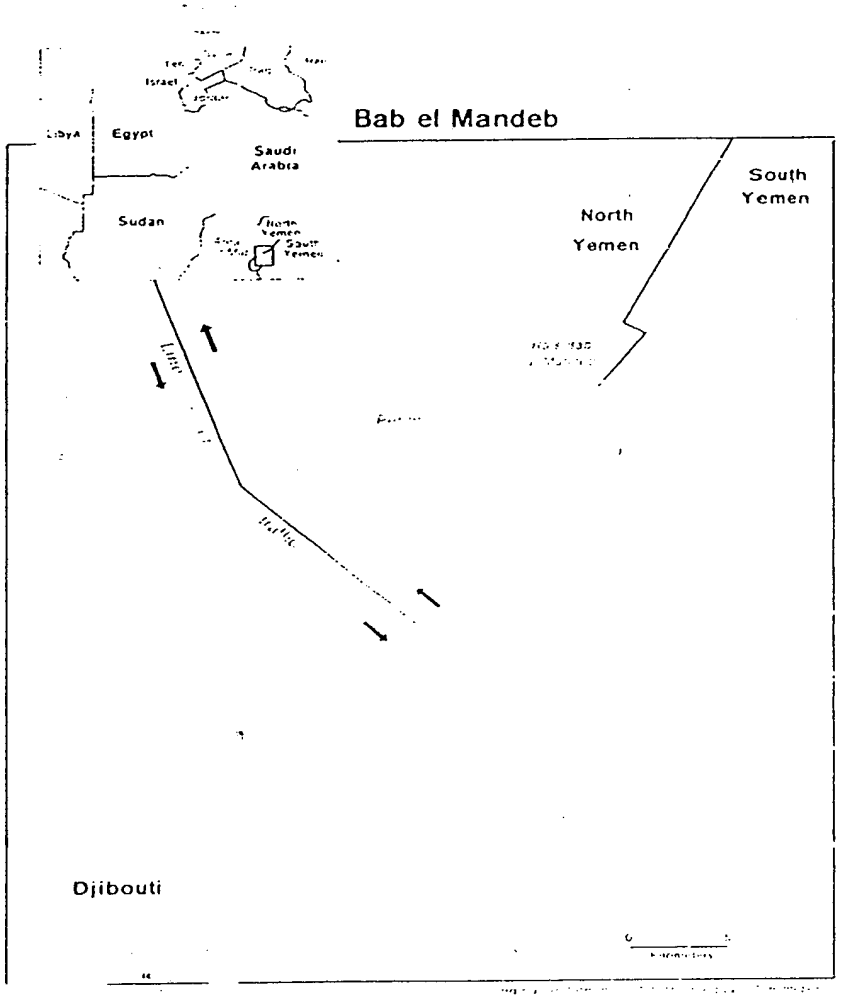

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[redacted] indicate that the Soviets have used the specter of US "threats" to encourage South Yemeni leader Hasani to promote better relations among the Arab countries that belong to the Steadfastness Front. [redacted] both sides [redacted] agreed on the importance of forming a unified Arab front to head off alleged last-ditch US efforts to "salvage" the Camp David Accords by recruiting support from Iraq, Jordan, and Saudi Arabia. [redacted]

[redacted]

Soviet Military Aid to South Yemen. The Soviet Union has been South Yemen's principal source of weapons and military training since the late 1960s. This assistance has increased sharply in the past few years. From 1968 to 1980 the USSR has delivered some $880 million worth of military hardware, half of which arrived in 1979-80:

	Value (Million US $)
1968-76	183
1977	[redacted]
1978	
1979	
1980	
Total	881

Deliveries in the first half of 1981 have fallen off from the pace of the previous two years, although they included the first shipment of SCUD surface-to-surface missiles.

The Soviets have introduced a broad range of sophisticated military equipment into South Yemen. In addition to the SCUD missiles, they have delivered SU-20/22 bombers, MIG-21 fighter aircraft, MI-24 assault helicopters, and MI-8 transport helicopters to the Air Force. The Army has received T-55 tanks, the FROG-7 surface-to-air rocket system, the SA-2 surface-to-air missile, and BMP armored personnel carriers. The Soviets have also provided OSA-II guided-missile patrol boats and a *Ropucha*-class tank ship.

Soviet military advisers are entrenched in all South Yemeni military services. In addition to an estimated 500 to 1,000 Soviets, there are about 500 Cubans and at least 50 East German military advisers in South Yemen.

East German activity in South Yemen complements the more extensive Soviet role and is concentrated on the training of South Yemen's security and intelligence forces. East German advisers are attached to the South Yemeni state security apparatus and to the Army intelligence training schoool. The Cuban military advisers have concentrated on organizing and training South Yemen's paramilitary people's militia.

Soviet economic aid to South Yemen is much less than its military assistance. Since 1967 the Soviets have furnished South Yemen with only about $200 million in economic assistance. Aid provided by other states, mainly Arab, has been more than three times that offered by the USSR. Moscow almost certainly calculates that its indispensable security assistance will overshadow its economic stinginess.

The Soviets and South Yemeni Politics. Moscow is determined to protect the substantial military, economic, and political investment it has made in South Yemen. The Soviets consider their relationship with South Yemen - embodied in the October 1979 Soviet-Yemeni Friendship Treaty—a significant foreign policy success that protects and expands the USSR's interests in the Arabian Peninsula. Socialist rule in South Yemen also represents for the Soviets evidence of progress in the worldwide ideological struggle and evidence of Moscow's global role. Although YSP rule in South Yemen appears firmly entrenched, the Soviets would almost certainly resist any threat to its control there.

The Soviets realize, however, that South Yemen is economically poor and prone to internal convulsions. Since the British withdrawal in 1967, politics in South Yemen has been a continuous struggle between contending leadership factions of the YSP.

While the Soviets try to avoid heavy handed, counterproductive domination, they use their extensive presence and influence to promote stability and unity within the South Yemeni leadership along favorable policy lines. For example, Soviet Premier Kosygin [redacted] used his visit to Aden in September 1979 to help resolve a dispute between leaders of North Yemeni origin (led by former strongman Ismail) and a native South Yemeni group, one of whose key leaders is Hasani

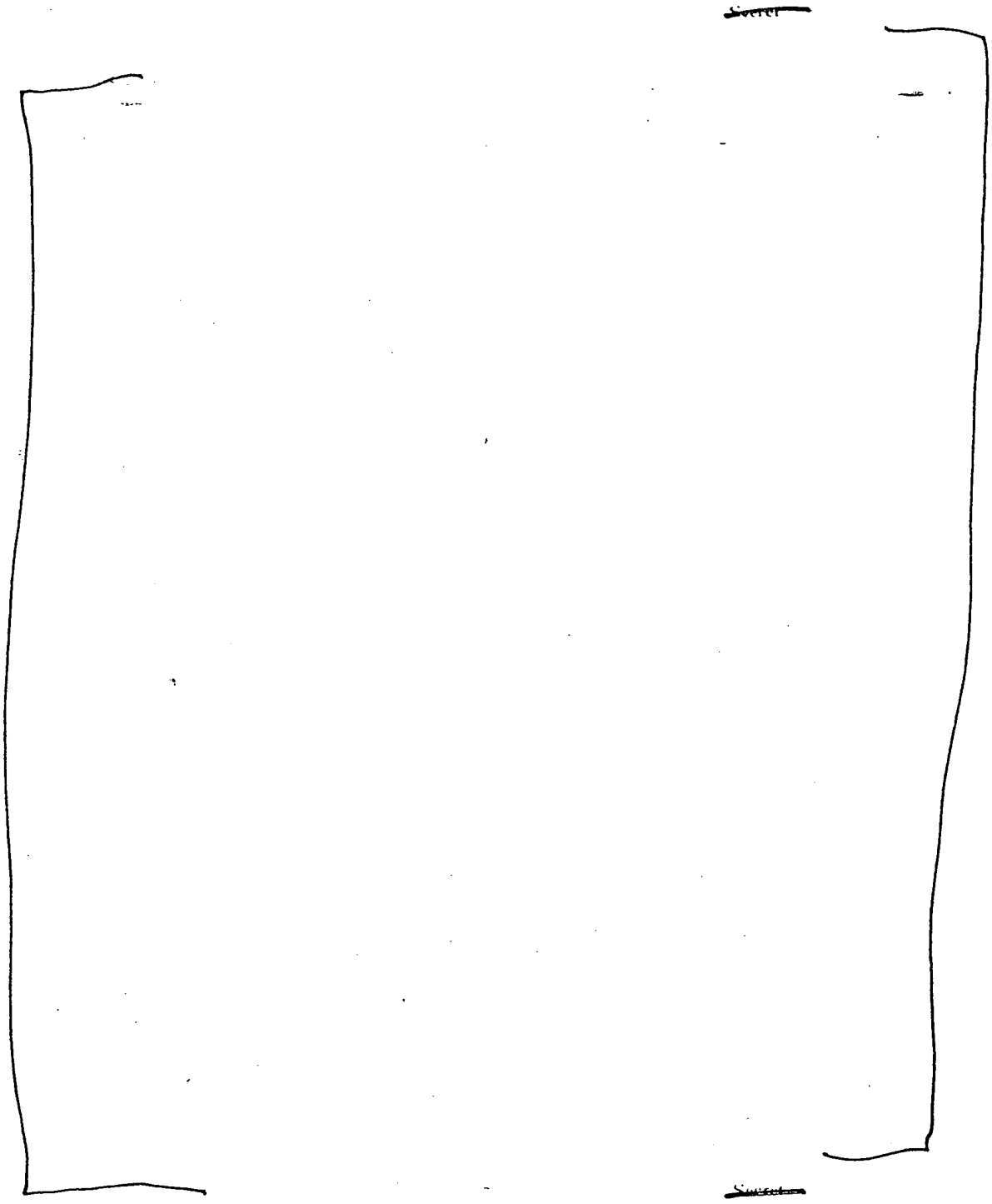
Soviet officials in South Yemen were particularly active prior to the ouster in April 1980 of Ismail, who was long a Soviet favorite. The Soviet Ambassador in Aden met frequently with high-ranking South Yemenis in the two weeks before Ismail's resignation, probably in an effort to ascertain the extent of the differences and damp down the political infighting.

In the end, the Soviets acquiesced in Ismail's removal. They almost certainly wanted to avoid an outbreak of civil war. They also may have concluded that their links with Ismail -- an unpopular and incompetent administrator -- would eventually threaten their own position.

Although the Soviets may have had some reservations about Hasani, they have quickly become reconciled to his rule. Hasani appeared to be on very good terms with the Soviets during his visit to Moscow in May 1980 -- one month after he assumed power. The essence of a close bilateral relationship was reaffirmed as both Hasani and Soviet President Brezhnev stressed the importance of the Friendship Treaty.

The Soviets subsequently have supported Hasani's efforts to consolidate his position as well as to reinforce his allegiance to Moscow. The Soviet description of the removal of one of Hasani's rivals from the leadership late in the summer of 1980 as an "improvement in party leadership" clearly conveyed approval. Similarly, the Soviets emphasized the positive aspects of the YSP conference in October 1980, during which Hasani gained effective control over the ruling Politburo. Moscow said this contributes to more "political unity in the party's ranks." Soviet acceptance of Hasani was also evident in his attendance at the 26th CPSU Congress in February 1981 when he had a [redacted] meeting with Soviet President Brezhnev.

The infighting between Hasani and his leading rival, Ali Antar, continued, however, and intensified in the spring of 1981. In May Hasani achieved undisputed control of the government when he removed Antar from the post of Defense Minister. The Soviets almost certainly monitored this struggle closely and appar-



ently did not oppose Antar's removal. Moscow's agreement to this most recent leadership shuffle was evident in late June when visiting First Deputy Defense Minister Sokolov met with both Hasani and his apparent choice to replace Antar, Major Ulayywah

This type of chronic political infighting in South Yemen has strengthened Moscow's judgment that the South Yemeni political situation is far from stable. The Soviets will continue to look for ways to discreetly influence the internal political situation, exercising influence through their overall close relations with the YSP leadership, but staying aloof from involvement in day-to-day internal affairs. In an emergency, however, the considerable Soviet, East European, and Cuban presence provides them with strong leverage that they would use in an effort to forestall an anti-Soviet coup.

[redacted]

The USSR and North Yemen

The Soviets were able to make a major comeback in North Yemen in 1979, after a decade in which their position had been weakened. Moscow's opening came about primarily because of North Yemeni President Salih's frustration in obtaining the military assistance he wanted from Saudi Arabia and the United States. Sanaa was displeased by Riyadh's foot-dragging and control over the dispensation of the US-supplied equipment. In addition, Salih was apparently convinced that the United States would always put Saudi interests ahead of North Yemen's and would be unwilling to establish close ties with Sanaa independent of the Saudis

The Soviets exploited the delays in the deliveries of military supplies under the US-Saudi program by offering Salih a direct military supply relationship, to include many advanced weapons systems. The Soviet offer proved attractive to Sanaa, which believed this equipment could be quickly assimilated into its predominantly Soviet-supplied-and-trained military forces (the USSR had been North Yemen's main supplier of weapons since the late 1950s).

Soviet Military Aid. A [redacted] arms accord was reached between Moscow and Sanaa in the late summer of 1979, and by November MIG-21s were arriving in North Yemen. Over [redacted] worth of Soviet military equipment was delivered between September 1979 and May 1980, representing over [redacted] of all Soviet arms shipments to North Yemen since the early 1960s:

	Value (Million U.S.$)
1962-76	104
1977	[redacted]
1978	
1979	
1980	
Total	693

In addition to the MIG-21s, this equipment has included SU-20/22 bombers, MI-8 helicopters, T-54 and T-55 tanks, SA-7 and SA-2 antiaircraft missiles, and artillery including BM-21 multiple rocket launchers, and ZSU 23-4 antiaircraft guns. North Yemen also recently took delivery of two OSA-II guided-missile patrol boats

Since the arms deal, the Soviet advisory presence has increased from about 120 to at least 300. Soviet advisers are said to be working in nearly all echelons of the

North Yemeni armed forces. The number of North Yemeni cadets sent to the Soviet Union for military training has also increased. Before the recent arms deal the number of North Yemenis studying in the USSR averaged between 30 and 40 a year; at present, between 1,000 and 1,500 cadets are in the Soviet Union.

The amount and sophistication of the military hardware delivered so far have clearly outstripped North Yemen's capacity to absorb it. The SU-20 tactical bomber program, for example, had to be suspended because there were no North Yemeni Air Force officers qualified to fly the plane. A senior Soviet military officer in North Yemen remarked last September that it was difficult to utilize the "flood" of Soviet equipment because of the North Yemeni military's lack of technical know-how. In November [redacted] that the USSR was sending more military equipment to North Yemen than it could effectively use.

Soviet Influence in North Yemen. The Soviets hope the military supply relationship with Sanaa will help strengthen their influence there. They hope that the arms supply link will further undermine the US-Saudi program—now running a distant second to the Soviet operation—and ultimately replace US and Saudi influence in North Yemen altogether. Alluding to potential political influence, the [redacted] that North Yemen's "fear of Communism" had been partly overcome and pointed to the fact that North Yemeni civilian students had again accepted, after a lapse of several years, scholarships to study in the Soviet Union.

The Soviets recognize that Saudi Arabia's financial contributions to Sanaa and its influence with the northern tribes give Riyadh some leverage over President Salih and hinder Moscow's efforts to make political gains in North Yemen. Nonetheless, they have persevered in bolstering their political relationship with Sanaa, dramatically stepping up and broadening the level of contacts with North Yemen. Since early 1980 the number of Soviet political and military delegations visiting North Yemen has increased markedly; President Salih reportedly is planning to visit Moscow in October. Last summer, Sanaa and Moscow renewed a cultural and scientific agreement that calls for increased bilateral contacts and signed a protocol on exchanges in broadcasting. The Soviets also appointed a new ambassador to North Yemen last summer; he is reputed to be one of the best Arabists in the Soviet diplomatic service.

The Soviets have had some success in persuading Sanaa to adopt policies more favorable to Soviet interests. In addition to granting the Soviets limited port visitation privileges, North Yemen in 1980 leaned toward Soviet positions on such issues as Afghanistan (North Yemen was either absent or abstained on the UN Afghanistan votes), superpower presence in the Indian Ocean, and foreign military bases in the region. Sanaa's attitude, however, may become more balanced as a result of the replacement of the pro-Soviet Foreign Minister last November.

Moscow and the NDF. Moscow has also sought to gain increased political influence in North Yemen through its support of the National Democratic Front (NDF). The NDF is a group of Marxists and nationalists, supported by South Yemen, whose ultimate objective is to assume a dominant position in the government of North Yemen. The Soviets hope that the NDF can serve as a vehicle for expanding Soviet influence in North Yemen and moving the government leftward. They reportedly believe that the Communists in the organization can eventually dominate it, and presumably anticipate that the NDF's inclusion in a North Yemeni government would advance Sanaa's alignment with both South Yemen and the USSR.

The Soviets in early 1980 sought to use the leverage their new arms supply accord gave them to press Salih to include some members of the NDF in the cabinet. Salih, however, was only willing to give the NDF some low-level positions in the government, which the NDF rejected.

The NDF stepped up its military activity in southern North Yemen in early 1981 [redacted] This prompted

retaliation by North Yemeni forces which [ ] included airstrikes against NDF positions. In the wake of these attacks, the NDF temporarily abandoned the use of force. In late June, however, the NDF resumed some attacks in North Yemen and is now [ ] preparing for some large-scale assaults

The Soviets [ ] consider such open civil warfare "primitive" and prefer low-key activity aimed at gradually consolidating its military position. In Moscow's view, these tactics keep open the option for the pro-Soviet elements to gain a position in the Sanaa government. This type of activity also suits the Soviets because it enables them to pursue closer ties with Salih while simultaneously, through South Yemen, supporting efforts to move Sanaa leftward

Moscow's desire to cultivate Sanaa via its arms supply program while at the same time supporting the NDF has forced the Soviets to make some difficult choices. When North Yemen decided to crack down on the NDF in January 1981, [ ]. The Soviets presumably had mixed feelings [ ] but apparently calculated that smooth ties with Sanaa were more important than a temporary setback for the NDF. A Soviet official in the [ ] implied as much [ ] that the NDF bears some responsibility for its repression. Soviet military cooperation was granted only reluctantly, however, and [ ] was only obtained after the personal intervention of President Salih. Soviet participation [ ] has been discontinued [ ]

The Soviets, nonetheless, probably keep hoping that their strategy will eventually pay off in the emergence of a leftist, pro-Soviet government. While presumably disappointed over the NDF's failure to gain a role in the government, they appear to believe that time is on their side. At a minimum, the Soviets calculate that Saudi-North Yemeni relations will remain strained and that this will inhibit possible US moves to improve ties with Sanaa. Consequently, they probably are fairly confident that their improved position in Sanaa will be sustained

This trend toward closer relations between the USSR and North Yemen could change abruptly. Politics in the Yemens are volatile, and Saudi Arabia is now actively trying to reassert its influence in North Yemen. Should Salih's rule be undermined and threatened by a conservative, pro-Saudi alternative, the Soviets would probably attempt to buttress his position. While direct military intervention in North Yemen is unlikely, the USSR might urge and support NDF, South Yemeni, and Cuban intervention to assist Salih, should he clearly request it.

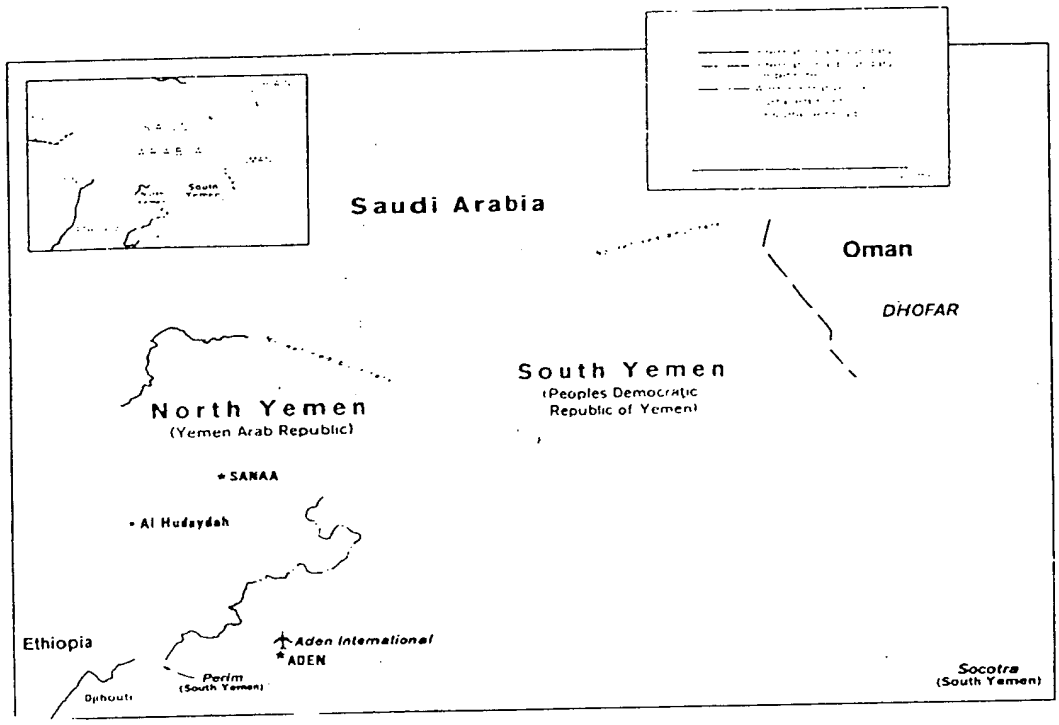
Moscow and Yemeni Reunification

The Soviets have endorsed in principle the eventual reunification of North and South Yemen under Aden's aegis. They have long been concerned about the political isolation of South Yemen—the only Arab state ruled by an avowedly Marxist party—and reunification would hold out the promise of the extension of pro-Soviet rule to Sanaa

The Soviets, however, have differed with Aden over its periodic efforts to achieve reunification through military means. This was demonstrated by Soviet policy during the YAR-PDRY border war in 1979. In the months preceding the war, the Soviets were reportedly encouraging South Yemen to pursue a long-term approach, using subversion and guerrilla warfare tactics rather than direct military attack.

Nonetheless, once the fighting started, the Soviets clearly supported South Yemen. They supplied military equipment, provided logistic support, and advised South Yemeni forces on the use of artillery and on command and control. They may have hoped for a quick South Yemeni victory resulting in the collapse of the government in Sanaa and its replacement by a pro-South Yemeni leadership

The fighting did not go well for Aden. The North Yemeni Government held firm, the majority of its troops remained loyal, and the population, while not enthusiastic about Salih's rule, apparently thought even less of the prospect of a government run by Ismail.



International opposition to South Yemen's actions was strong. The majority of Arab states—operating through the Arab League—supported North Yemen and applied political pressure to end the fighting. Both Aden and Moscow probably were also caught off guard by the rapid US reaction. The United States and Saudi Arabia stepped-up deliveries of arms to North Yemen, and the United States protested to the Soviets twice during the fighting.

In sum, the Soviets found themselves isolated with South Yemen and opposed by a majority of Arab states. They were clearly concerned that Salih would turn against the USSR altogether and thus present them with a significant setback. The Soviets may also have been apprehensive that other Arab states would become involved in the fighting. The Soviets apparently decided to cut their losses and probably encouraged Aden to agree to a mediation.

The failure of the South Yemeni military action presumably has strengthened Moscow's conviction that the best approach for South Yemen to take to achieve unification with Sanaa is a long-term program aimed at gaining a role for the NDF in the North Yemeni Government while strengthening the organization's position in the hinterland. In December 1979 the [redacted] suggested this course of action [redacted] that South Yemen had "learned its lesson" after the border war and that a resurgence of heavy fighting was not imminent.

The Soviets are probably concerned that the renewed fighting in early 1981 between North and South Yemen would jeopardize their gains in the North and are probably relieved that Aden for the moment is pursuing a political strategy to bring about reunification. Soviet media commentary on reunification usually stresses that the reunification process should occur on a "peaceful, democratic basis."

The Soviets probably do not expect reunification to occur soon. Soviet officials privately say that differences in the political, economic, and social conditions of the two countries will inhibit successful reunification for the foreseeable future. In Moscow's view, the development of close Soviet–North Yemeni relations—similar to current USSR–South Yemeni ties—would be just as satisfactory, if not more desirable, than unity; the existence of two pro-Soviet entities might even enhance Moscow's ability to manipulate the situation.

Meanwhile, Moscow's expanded military aid to North Yemen has probably given some pause to the South Yemenis. The Soviet arms deliveries to the North Yemenis have created a rough military parity between North and South Yemen. South Yemen, however, retains a substantial degree of superiority due to its superior training and command and control arrangements. If, over the longer term, the organizational, training, and equipment problems of the North Yemeni armed forces can be ameliorated, South Yemen will be less able to bring military pressure on Sanaa. The Soviets, for their part, appear ambivalent over these prospects and are focusing their energies on strengthening their position in each country.

Prospects and Implications for Regional Security

Moscow is likely to become increasingly preoccupied with the Arabian Peninsula in the years ahead as it seeks to expand its role in the area, counter increased US political and military activity, and ensure its own access to the region's oil. Consequently, Soviet policy toward the area is likely to become even more active and assertive.

The Yemens will figure prominently in whatever Moscow decides to do. The Soviets almost certainly believe that their strong position in South Yemen and the movement toward closer relations with North Yemen will enable them to expand significantly Soviet influence in the region.

The Soviets probably hope that the extension of Soviet influence in the Yemens will lead other Arab states, particularly the conservatives led by Saudi Arabia, to seek some accommodation with the USSR, especially if the United States is perceived to be unreliable or indecisive. These conservative Arabs might consider it in their interest to normalize ties with the Soviet Union in the hope that the Soviets in turn would restrain aggressive Yemeni actions. The Soviets, who already have some limited economic dealings with Saudi Arabia, presumably hope that the Saudis will agree to broaden these links—possibly even agreeing to supply some of the USSR's future energy needs—as an initial step in the normalization of relations. This development would probably pave the way for the establishment of ties between the smaller Persian Gulf states and the Soviet Union.

The Soviet position in the Yemens will taken on additional importance in the face of the expanded US military activity in the area. The Soviets probably will seek to offset the increased US naval presence by maintaining or possibly increasing their own naval presence. Soviet First Deputy Defense Minister Sokolov's visit in late June may portend an even closer Soviet–South Yemeni military relationship. South Yemen's port facilities will thus become more important to the USSR. While the Soviets apparently have free use of these air and naval facilities, they presumably want to gain exclusive access to them by denying them to Western ships.

The Yemens can also play a role if the USSR complements its stepped-up political activity with increased efforts to subvert and apply pressure to the oil-producing states of the peninsula. With the exception of its backing for the PFLO in the early 1970s, Soviet efforts in this regard have been fairly low key, circumspect, and indirect. Should their efforts to deal with existing regimes in the region continue to prove futile and should Soviet oil problems intensify markedly, the Soviets might be tempted to become

more involved in support of radical causes in the region. In addition, if North Yemen does not prove malleable, the Soviets might be tempted to support a renewed South Yemeni effort to achieve reunification by force. Although this approach clearly is not preferred by the Soviets, it could prove more attractive in the years ahead.

The Soviets probably calculate that a pro-Soviet North Yemen would be in a strong position to subvert the Saudi regime. There are some 1 million Yemenis living and working in Saudi Arabia, which has a total population of approximately 6 million. It could also provide an excellent base for insurgent operations against Saudi Arabia.

Soviet willingness to encourage and support such subversion and insurgency under the right circumstances was amply demonstrated by its backing of South Yemen's decade-long efforts to overthrow the regime of Sultan Qabus in Oman, using the PFLO as its vehicle.

The Omani regime will be a continuing target of the USSR and South Yemen, particularly in view of its agreement with the United States for military facilities. In particular, its overthrow would generate more uncertainty in Riyadh. In early 1980 [redacted] the Soviets anticipated that the US presence would provide the Soviet-supported leftist revolutionary organization with cause for resuming insurgent activity in Oman. This report indicated the Soviets were reportedly encouraging both the PFLO—dormant since its defeat in the mid-1970s—and the Popular Front for the Liberation of Bahrain, a group advocating the overthrow of the Khalifa government there, to increase training activities in South Yemen.

South Yemen has already begun encouraging a resurgence of activity by the Aden-based PFLO. Small groups of South Yemeni military forces crossed into Oman [redacted] 1981. The PFLO [redacted] has increased its training activity and plans to resume guerrilla operations in Dhofar Province with arms supplied by South Yemen. The PFLO has also been considering a strategy of urban terrorism, which probably would pose a more serious threat to Sultan Qabus than resumed insurgency

The Soviets are probably encouraging this activity in an attempt to press other regional governments to reconsider their policy of looking to the West, especially the United States, for security assistance. Recent Soviet media attention—ending a long period of inattention—to the PFLO as well as references to the Bahrain National Liberation Front and the outlawed Saudi Communist Party suggest the Soviets want to remind the conservative Arab states that closer cooperation with the United States could carry some costs in the form of internal subversion

The Soviets almost certainly will try to remain one step removed from direct involvement in subversive or military activity in the region. Although they may increase their material and advisory support, their interests in avoiding direct participation will remain strong in view of the possibility of triggering a US response. There are, however, a number of actors willing to take the lead in such activity: the PFLO and NDF, regular South Yemeni forces, Cuban troops stationed in Ethiopia, and advisers in South Yemen. Thus, the Soviets already have a framework that could enable them to apply pressure on the conservative Arabs of the region in the years ahead. Their ability to operate from North Yemen as well as South Yemen would significantly increase their ability to apply such pressure.