

Sanaa and the Soviets

by Mark N. Katz

The Yemen Arab Republic (YAR—or North Yemen) occupies a strategic location at the southwestern tip of the Arabian Peninsula between oil-rich Saudi Arabia and the Marxist People's Democratic Republic of Yemen (PDRY—or South Yemen). North Yemen also borders on the Strait of Bab el-Mandeb through which ships transiting the Red Sea between the Suez Canal and the Indian Ocean must pass. Although figures are not precise, North Yemen's population may exceed 6,000,000, i.e., is larger than that of any other Peninsula state except perhaps Saudi Arabia. The YAR government is relatively weak, and has had to contend with strong internal opposition, including conservative northern tribes (often supported by the Saudis) and leftist forces in the south such as the National Democratic Front (NDF), which has been supported by South Yemen.

Because of its strategic location, large population, and political instability, North Yemen is important to both East and West. The West fears that if a leftist government should ever come to power in North Yemen (either through a successful South Yemeni-backed insurgency or through peaceful unification, which both North and South ostensibly support), Saudi Arabia would be more vulnerable to Marxist subversion than it is now from the direction of the less populous South Yemen. What to the West is a

feared possibility is to the Soviet Union an opportunity: a Marxist government in Sanaa, the YAR capital, would likely put the Soviets in a much better position either to pressure Saudi Arabia and other conservative countries along the Persian Gulf to become more responsive to Soviet foreign policy interests, or to promote revolution in these countries. Nevertheless, North Yemen poses a potential threat to Soviet interests as well: its larger population might one day allow it to defeat South Yemen militarily or to dominate it should peaceful unification ever occur.

The United States demonstrated its concern for North Yemen's security during a 1979 border conflict between North and South, in which the Soviet Union was perceived to be supporting a South Yemeni military effort to overthrow the relatively pro-Western government of Col. Ali Abdallah Salih. That conflict was highly publicized; subsequent events in North Yemen, though of comparable importance, have received much less attention. For one thing, the Soviet Union signed a major arms deal with Sanaa in mid-1979 and promptly delivered the agreed-on weapons. Then, soon after the Arab League negotiated a cease-fire in the North-South conflict, the Aden-supported NDF launched an insurgency in the southern part of the YAR that Sanaa was not able to defeat until mid-1982. The Soviets, in effect, came to support both sides in this battle—through direct supply of arms to Sanaa and indirect aid to the NDF via Aden.

Why has this situation come about? What does the Soviet Union hope to accomplish through its ambivalent policy toward North Yemen? Why does the North Yemeni government rely on the USSR for military assistance when the Soviets directly support its opponent, South Yemen, and indirectly assist the YAR's internal leftist opposition? What can be said about North Yemen's place in Soviet foreign policy toward the Third World generally? Answers will be sought to these questions by examining the NDF insurgency and

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Soviet-YAR military, economic, and political relations. First, however, a brief summary of North Yemen's complicated history is necessary.

Historical Overview

Islam came to Yemen during the lifetime of the Prophet Muhammad, and the Sunni-Shi'a split that has divided the Muslim world since his death has also divided Yemeni society. In the southern part of North Yemen—in the Tihama plain along the Red Sea coast—and in what is now South Yemen, the Shafi'i school of Sunni Islam came to predominate (this is one of four legal schools accepted by Sunnis and differs from the Hanbali school that predominates in Saudi Arabia). In the northern part of North Yemen, the population is primarily of the Zaidi branch of Shi'ite Islam, which differs from the Shi'a religion practiced in Iran.¹ Although there are no accurate statistics available, it is believed that North Yemen's population today is divided roughly equally between

Zaidis and Shafi'is, with the latter perhaps constituting a slight majority. Relations between the two groups are not generally hostile, but the division does have political significance: the Zaidis held political authority in Sanaa most of the time prior to 1962, when Zaidi imams ruled, and have continued to provide most of the leaders of the Yemen Arab Republic since 1962. This situation has sometimes been a source of discontent among the Shafi'is.

The Zaidi imams in Sanaa at one time ruled over the territory that now comprises both Yemens and beyond. In the 18th century, various emirs in southern Yemen broke away from the imams of the north. In the 19th century, the Turks invaded and (with great difficulty) ruled North Yemen, while Great Britain governed Aden as a colony and extended "protection" to the rest of South Yemen. After World War I, the collapse of the Ottoman Empire forced the Turks to leave, and soon the Zaidi Imam Yahya came to rule all

¹On Yemen's pre-20th century history, see Robert W. Stookey, *Yemen: The Politics of the Yemen Arab Republic*, Boulder, CO, Westview, 1978, Chs. 1-6.



The Soviet ship "Latviya" moored at Hodeida, after bringing Soviet dignitaries for ceremonies marking the opening of the new North Yemen port, constructed with the help of Soviet specialists.

—Novosti from Sovfoto.

of North Yemen. He and then his son, Imam Ahmad, ruled the North in a harsh and authoritarian manner, keeping it isolated internationally and underdeveloped economically. Opposition to imamic rule grew, but was ineffectual until after Imam Ahmad died in 1962.²

On September 26, 1962, one week after Imam Ahmad's death, a group of Nasserite army officers led by Abdallah as-Sallal overthrew the Imam's son, Mohammad al-Badr, and proclaimed creation of a Yemen Arab Republic. Al-Badr managed to escape and with military assistance from the Saudis waged an inconclusive war against the Egyptian- and Soviet-aided republicans for the remainder of the decade.³

It might be noted that the Soviets had given some economic and military assistance to Imam Ahmad, but once the republic was declared, Moscow recognized it immediately and by 1964 had signed a friendship treaty with the new government. (The treaty provided for automatic renewal every five years unless either party wished to abrogate it.) Soviet economic aid increased, but military assistance was channeled almost completely through Egypt. Egypt's President Gamal Abdel Nasser wanted to control the YAR himself, and the Soviets did not want to lose his friendship by seeming to compete with Egypt for influence in Sanaa. However, after his defeat by Israel in the June 1967 war, Nasser chose to pull out of the seemingly endless Yemeni conflict. He withdrew his forces in the autumn of 1967 in exchange for Saudi promises to stop aiding the royalists and to start giving economic aid to Cairo. Upon the Egyptians' departure, as-Sallal was overthrown by Abdul Rahman al-Iryani, who was prepared to negotiate with the royalists to end the war. Instead, the royalists launched their biggest offensive and succeeded in surrounding Sanaa in December 1967. The Soviets undertook a direct airlift of arms and food to the besieged capital, and in early February 1968 the siege was broken. The royalists never regained their strength.⁴

It soon became apparent, however, that the YAR was not to be a radical state, and the Soviets seemed to lose interest in it—preferring to concentrate on competing with China for influence with the Marxist National Liberation Front that ruled South Yemen, which had become independent from Britain in No-

vember 1967. The al-Iryani government concluded the civil war in 1970 by allowing the royalists (except the royal family itself) to return to North Yemen, and Saudi Arabia recognized the YAR soon thereafter.

Relations Between the Yemens

While Saudi-YAR relations improved, relations between Sanaa and Aden deteriorated, partly because each government gave refuge to opponents of the other. There was fighting along their common border in the spring and again in the summer of 1972. Despite an agreement on unity signed by both sides after the fighting, relations between the two Yemens remained poor.⁵

In its public statements on the 1972 conflict, the Soviet Union tried to avoid openly taking sides. But afterwards, USSR-YAR relations were strained by increased Soviet assistance to Aden and by Moscow's failure both to deliver arms promised to Sanaa in the 1960's and to provide much additional economic assistance to the North. During the years 1972–78, successive YAR governments sought to improve relations with Saudi Arabia and the United States in order to obtain economic and military aid. The YAR did obtain large amounts of economic aid from the Saudis, but was less successful in obtaining US arms.⁶

In June 1974, Lt. Col. Ibrahim al-Hamdi overthrew the relatively weak al-Iryani government and moved to reduce the power of the tribal leaders and establish a strong central government. In 1976, six small leftist groups formed the National Democratic Front. Displaying a variety of often conflicting ideologies, members of the Front were primarily Shafi'is from the southern part of the YAR who resented the political dominance of the northern Zaidis.⁷ Al-Hamdi was somewhat tolerant of the NDF because it supported his policy of weakening tribal influence on the central government. However, both he and Lt. Col. Ahmad al-Ghashmi, who came to power after al-Hamdi's assassination in October 1977, also engaged in military skirmishes with NDF guerrillas.

Al-Ghashmi was himself assassinated on June 24, 1978—by a bomb carried in the briefcase of a South Yemeni emissary. Two days later, a pro-Soviet faction led by Abd al-Fattah Ismail seized power in Aden on the pretext that South Yemeni President Salim

²For a detailed account of the imamate in the 20th century, see Manfred W. Wenner, *Modern Yemen, 1918–1966*, Baltimore, MD, Johns Hopkins University Press, 1967.

³On the Yemeni civil war, see Dana Adams Schmidt, *Yemen: The Unknown War*, New York, NY, Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1968; and Edgar O'Ballance, *The War in the Yemen*, London, Faber and Faber, 1971.

⁴On Soviet foreign policy toward North Yemen in the 1950's and 1960's, see Richard E. Bissell, "Soviet Use of Proxies in the Third World: The Case of Yemen," *Soviet Studies* (Glasgow), January 1978, pp. 87–106.

⁵See Robin Bidwell, *The Two Yemens*, Singapore, Longman/Westview, 1983, Ch. 8.

⁶*Ibid.*, pp. 286–95.

⁷Tamar Yegnes, "The Yemeni Arab Republic," in Colin Legum, Ed., *Middle East Contemporary Survey: Volume 1, 1976–77*, New York, NY, Holmes & Meier, 1978, p. 653.



Figures in the government that came to power in North Yemen as a result of a coup on June 13, 1974: at left, Prime Minister Muhsin al-Ayni; at right, Lt. Col. Ibrahim al-Hamdi, Chairman of the Military Command Council and leader of the coup.

—SYGMA.

Rubayyi Ali (who opposed excessive dependence on the USSR, had close links with Beijing, and advocated improving relations with Washington) had colluded in the assassination of al-Ghashmi. However, press reports suggest that Ismail's forces had intercepted Ali's emissary and replaced him with another emissary who unknowingly carried the bomb. The USSR, Cuba, and East Germany have also been accused of complicity in all this intrigue, but their role has never been made clear. In any case, relations between North and South Yemen deteriorated sharply.⁸

Col. Salih, the new leader of the YAR, weathered unsuccessful coup attempts in September and October 1978. After these events a large group of officers—supporters of the late al-Hamdi known as the "13 June Front"—fled south and in early 1979 joined the NDF.⁹ The Front demanded freedom to organize and operate political parties and trade unions, creation of a Consultative Council in which leftist forces would be represented, release of political prisoners, unification of the YAR with the PDRY, and a decrease in Saudi influence in the YAR.¹⁰

On February 24, 1979, fighting erupted along the border between the two Yemens. The US government became so concerned about the situation that on March 9, 1979, it was announced that President Jimmy Carter had invoked emergency procedures to send US\$390 million in arms to Sanaa without Congressional approval. The weapons were to be delivered through Saudi Arabia, which would pay from them.¹¹

In the meantime, however, the two Yemens had agreed to a cease-fire. Although some fighting contin-

ued, PDRY and NDF forces pulled back by March 19, and on March 30, Salih and Ismail announced a new unity accord.¹² Perhaps as a condition for South Yemen's withdrawal from YAR territory, Salih next made some changes in his government that gave it a somewhat leftist image and in June 1979 began negotiations with the NDF, which now demanded ministerial positions in the Sanaa government.¹³ Alarmed at this development and at the unity effort, Saudi Arabia quickly reduced the flow of US weapons to the YAR. A North Yemeni emissary flew to Washington in an unsuccessful effort to persuade the US to send arms directly. It was widely reported at the time that the US Central Intelligence Agency was predicting the collapse of Salih's regime within six months due to opposition within his own army and to the NDF insurgency, which had flared up again. Shortly thereafter, Salih turned to the Soviet Union, which quickly concluded an arms deal and began delivering weapons to North Yemen in late 1979.¹⁴

The NDF Insurgency

The NDF insurgents battled on until the spring of 1982, when the YAR government launched a major offensive that resulted in a seemingly definitive cease-fire. Until that time there had been numerous cease-fires and apparent negotiating breakthroughs, none of which took hold. In February 1980 the NDF announced that an agreement had been signed under which the YAR would admit five NDF ministers into a coalition government, release political prisoners, hold free elections, and work toward unity with the South, in return for which the PDRY would reduce its backing of the NDF and withdraw some army units from the border. Yet, a few weeks later, NDF units reportedly moved across the border into the southern YAR,

⁸For more on these events, see Bidwell, *op. cit.*, Ch. 9; and J. E. Peterson, *Yemen: The Search for a Modern State*, Baltimore, MD, Johns Hopkins University Press, 1982, Ch. 4.

⁹Aden Domestic Service in Arabic, Jan. 6, 1979, trans. in Foreign Broadcast Information Service, *Daily Report: Middle East and Africa* (Washington, DC—hereafter, *FBIS-MEA*), Jan. 9, 1979, pp. C/2-3.

¹⁰Haim Shaked and Tamar Yegnes, "The Yemeni Arab Republic," in Colin Legum, Ed., *Middle East Contemporary Survey: Volume 2, 1977-78*, New York, NY, Holmes & Meier, 1979, p. 794. The NDF's commitment to free elections appeared less than sincere since in calling for unity with South Yemen, it did not call for free elections there.

¹¹*Keesing's Contemporary Archives* (Harlow, Essex—hereafter, *Keesing's*), Apr. 18, 1980, pp. 30197-99.

¹²*Ibid.*

¹³J. E. Peterson, "Conflict in the Yemens and Superpower Involvement," Washington, DC, Georgetown University Center for Contemporary Arab Studies Occasional Papers Series, December 1981, pp. 24-25.

¹⁴*Keesing's*, Apr. 18, 1980, pp. 30197-99.

seized a number of towns, removed local sheikhs, and began to govern along Marxist South Yemeni lines.¹⁵

In late August 1980, South Yemeni President Ali Nasir Mohammad (who had overthrown Ismail in April but was, like his predecessor, considered to be pro-Soviet) travelled to Sanaa to negotiate another cease-fire, again short-lived, in which the NDF undertook to stop clandestine radio broadcasts in exchange for permission to publish a newspaper under YAR government auspices. However, hostilities soon resumed, with Sanaa seeming to gain the upper hand against the NDF with the help of the Islamic Front—a tribal force supported by Saudi Arabia.¹⁶

In November 1981, Salih and Ali Nasir met again, this time in Kuwait, where the PDRY President reportedly signed a cease-fire agreement with the YAR on behalf of the NDF. A month later YAR Prime Minister Abdul Karim al-Iryani (a distant relative of the former president) revealed a year-old agreement between Sanaa and Aden "not to support any military, political, or press activity directed against the other."¹⁷ Yet after the November accord, fighting grew heavier than ever. From all appearances, Ali Nasir seems to have preferred a peaceful solution, but two powerful rivals in Aden—Defense Minister Salih Muslih Qasim and First Deputy Chairman of the Council of Ministers Ali Antar—apparently advocated full PDRY support for NDF military activities.¹⁸

The YAR's Salih decided to seek a full military victory over the NDF and in January 1982 dismissed several high-ranking officers who reportedly advocated a less forceful approach in order not to provoke PDRY retaliation.¹⁹ In mid-March, NDF General Secretary 'Uman stated that the Front would give up regions in the center and south of the country if the YAR freed 4,000 political prisoners and guaranteed political and labor freedom, and in April a mediation effort by the Palestine Liberation Organization led to another temporary cease-fire. This broke down when NDF forces

were reported to have seized the town of Juban in North Yemen, six miles from the PDRY border.²⁰

As Sanaa prepared its final offensive, the NDF was in a bad way. Leader 'Uman admitted that the 13 June Front had left the NDF.²¹ Heavy rains and flash floods in late March in the PDRY's southwest made South Yemeni support for the guerrillas extremely difficult. When the YAR attacked in May, it was aided by 6,000 northern tribesmen and a locally recruited militia. In the clash, some 1,000 of the 5,000 NDF fighters defected to the YAR. A final cease-fire was signed a few weeks later by Salih and Ali Nasir.²²

Soviet Role?

The Soviet Union, which had commented relatively little on the 1972 and 1979 border wars, said almost nothing about the NDF insurgency. Moscow did cite the Front's communiqué at the beginning of the 1979 war claiming capture of several North Yemeni towns,²³ but otherwise remained silent about NDF involvement in that conflict and the subsequent insurgency. Indeed, the Soviets behaved as if nothing were happening. They spoke approvingly of relations with the YAR, sent and received messages and delegations, and welcomed Salih when he came to Moscow in October 1981 to negotiate for further arms shipments.²⁴

Whether or not the Soviets gave direct aid to the NDF insurgency is difficult to establish. The Soviets never admitted to doing so, and the NDF never claimed to have received direct Soviet support. The guerrillas certainly received Soviet arms from the PDRY (and to a lesser extent from Libya and Syria),²⁵ and in March 1982, two Su-22 fighters supplied to the YAR by Moscow were shot down by Soviet anti-aircraft weapons in NDF hands.²⁶ However, the degree to which the Soviets were involved in or approved of these arms transfers is uncertain. Moreover, in the internal PDRY power struggle (in which the NDF issue

¹⁵Kuwait KUNA in English, Mar. 4, 1980, in *FBIS-MEA*, Mar. 7, 1980,

pp. C/12-13; also *Keesing's*, Apr. 18, 1980, p. 30199, and Mar. 6, 1981, p. 30743.

¹⁶See Jacob Goldberg, "The Yemeni Arab Republic," *Middle East Contemporary Survey*, Vol. 4, 1979-80, pp. 828-29; *FBIS-MEA*, Sept. 4, 1980, p. ii, Nov. 12, 1980, p. iii, and Dec. 22, 1980, p. iii; *Keesing's*, Mar. 6, 1981, p. 30743; and Kuwait KUNA in Arabic, Jan. 26, 1981, in *FBIS-MEA*, Jan. 29, 1981, p. C/2.

¹⁷See *FBIS-MEA*, Nov. 27, 1981, p. iii; and *Keesing's*, Mar. 12, 1982, p. 31379. Under the terms of the agreement, the border area was to be demilitarized and the cease-fire overseen by a tripartite committee made up of YAR, NDF, and PDRY representatives.

Jean Gueyras gives a slightly different interpretation of this accord in *Le Monde* (Paris) of Jan. 7, 1982. According to Gueyras, the agreement was prepared by the Emir of Kuwait and signed by Salih and NDF General Secretary Sultan Ahmad 'Uman "in the presence of" Ali Nasir.

¹⁸*Ash-Sharq al-Awsat* (London), Mar. 31, 1982, in *FBIS-MEA*, Apr. 1, 1982, pp. C/8-9.

¹⁹*Ibid.*

²⁰Paris AFP in English, Mar. 15, 1982, in *FBIS-MEA*, Mar. 15, 1982, p. C/9; and Radio Monte Carlo in Arabic, Apr. 18, 1982, in *FBIS-MEA*, Apr. 19, 1982, p. C/6. Also *Keesing's*, March 1983, p. 3249.

²¹See interview with *As-Safir* (Beirut), Mar. 28, 1982, in *FBIS-MEA*, Apr. 20, 1982, pp. C/14-15.

²²Nigel Harvey, "New Stability Emerges—But for How Long?" *Middle East Economic Digest* (London), Nov. 5, 1982, pp. 24, 27.

²³Moscow TASS in English, Feb. 27, 1979, in Foreign Broadcast Information Service, *Daily Report: Soviet Union* (Washington, DC—hereafter *FBIS-SOV*), Feb. 28, 1979, pp. F/3-4.

²⁴See, for example, Moscow Domestic Service in Russian, Oct. 27, 1981, in *FBIS-SOV*, Oct. 27, 1981, pp. H/10-11; and Moscow TASS International Service in Russian, Oct. 27, 1981, in *FBIS-SOV*, Oct. 28, 1981, pp. H/2-4.

²⁵*Keesing's*, March 1983, p. 32049.

²⁶David B. Ottaway, "North Yemen's War: Sanaa Turns to Soviets for Military Aid," *The Washington Post*, Apr. 21, 1982.

was admittedly only a part), Moscow appears to have backed Ali Nasir, who evidently opposed all-out PDRY support for NDF efforts to overthrow Salih in the North.

Sanaa said very little at all about any Soviet role in the NDF insurgency (or, for that matter, about the insurgency itself). YAR statements about both the USSR and the PDRY spoke mainly of friendly and cooperative relations. However, the shooting down of the YAR's Soviet-supplied Su-22's by Soviet-supplied SAM's did enrage Sanaa. In an interview with Eric Rouleau published in *Le Monde* on May 7, 1982, YAR Prime Minister al-Iryani charged that the "Yemen People's United Party" (YPUP—founded in February 1982, apparently as the political wing of the NDF) was "a 100 percent Marxist-Leninist party comparable to those that have taken up arms against the El Salvador Government"; that it had its headquarters in Aden; that three of its leaders were also "full members" of the Politburo of the PDRY's ruling Yemeni Socialist Party; that it received arms from South Yemen; and that it had guerrillas operating in the YAR. Sanaa also reportedly recalled its ambassador from Moscow in early May, according to some accounts as a protest against Soviet aid to the rebels.²⁷

Yet the YAR was very cautious in its criticism. Its Moscow embassy immediately denied "deteriorating relations," and claimed the ambassador had returned home "on a working visit."²⁸ Al-Iryani's interview had avoided implicating the Soviets in the PDRY's extension of aid to the NDF:

They [the Soviets] assure us they have no contacts with the guerrillas, and we have no reason not to believe them.

He did add, however,

Moscow could probably advise it [the PDRY] not to equip the rebels on our territory, but I do not think it can give it orders to that effect.

Soon thereafter both al-Iryani and Salih denied any tension in Soviet-YAR relations.²⁹

Despite Moscow's commitment to the People's Democratic Republic of Yemen and possible involvement in the NDF insurgency against North Yemen, the

Soviet Union—as we have already seen—has had a long and continuing relationship with the YAR, one which it does not want to jeopardize. Let us look a bit more closely at the military, economic, and political dimensions of this relationship.

Soviet-YAR Military Relations

Soviet military aid to North Yemen actually began, as noted, even before it became the Yemen Arab Republic. From November 1956 to August 1957, the Soviets delivered eight shiploads of arms, including 50 anti-aircraft guns from Czechoslovakia, some 30 T-34 tanks, and various other weapons. Although these weapons were fairly old, Imam Ahmad hid key parts to many of them out of fear that the army might use the weapons against him. They were, however, the first relatively modern weapons introduced into the country,³⁰ and established an enduring pattern of North Yemeni reliance on Soviet weaponry. As of July 1983, the YAR's inventory of Soviet arms included 500 T-54/55 and 150 T-34 main battle tanks; 40 MiG-21, 10 MiG-17, and 15 Su-22 combat aircraft, and an unspecified number of SA-2 and SA-7 missiles. By contrast, the YAR possessed only 64 M-60 tanks and 10 F-5E fighters supplied by the US.³¹

Estimates of hardware delivered by the Soviets and their allies are similar, though they differ with regard to precise value. Stephen Hosmer and Thomas Wolfe value the transfers at less than US\$30 million in 1955-60; more than US\$30 million in 1961-64; less than US\$20 million in 1965-69; negligible in 1970-74; and about US\$420 million in 1975-80.³² The US Arms Control and Disarmament Agency (ACDA) gives somewhat higher figures: US\$27 million in 1965-74 and US\$625 million in 1976-80. ACDA values US arms transfers to the YAR in 1965-74 at US\$1 million and in 1976-80 at US\$170 million.³³

Figures on the number of Soviet military advisers in North Yemen are also imprecise. However, there have been at least some advisers there ever since the

²⁷Eric Macro, *Yemen and the Western World Since 1571*, New York, Praeger, 1968, pp. 117-18.

²⁸*The Military Balance 1983-84*, London, International Institute for Strategic Studies, 1983, pp. 64-65.

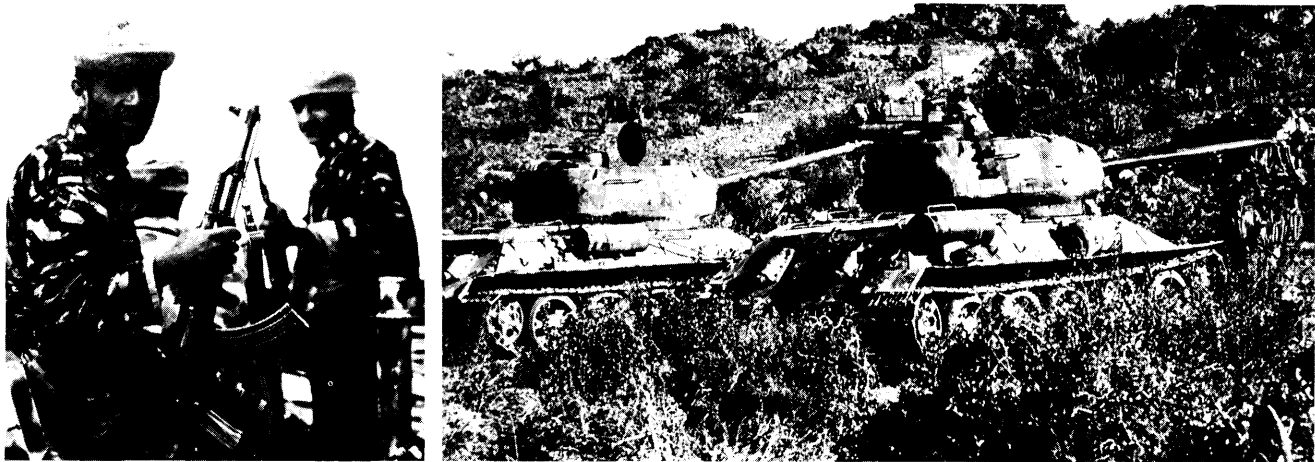
²⁹Stephen T. Hosmer and Thomas W. Wolfe, *Soviet Policy and Practice Toward Third World Conflicts*, Lexington, MA, Lexington/D.C. Heath, 1983, pp. 17, 23, 32, 43, and 74. The authors gave no figure for 1975-80 per se; I derived the US\$420 million sum for those years by subtracting the amount they gave for 1955-74 from their total of "more than US\$500 million" for 1955-80.

³⁰US Arms Control and Disarmament Agency, *World Military Expenditures and Arms Transfers 1966-1975*, Washington, DC, US Government Printing Office, 1976, p. 78; and idem, *World Military Expenditures and Arms Transfers 1971-1980*, Washington, DC, US Government Printing Office, 1983, p. 119.

²⁷Paris AFP in English, May 9, 1982, in *FBIS-MEA*, May 10, 1982, p. C/9; and *The Wall Street Journal* (New York, NY), May 10, 1982, p. 1.

²⁸Baghdad INA in Arabic, May 10, 1982, in *FBIS-MEA*, May 11, 1982, p. C/8.

²⁹*Al-Watan* (Kuwait), May 25, 1982, pp. 11, 15, in *FBIS-MEA*, June 1, 1982, p. C/9; and *Ar-Ra'y al-'Amm* (Kuwait), June 7, 1982, pp. 19, 22, in *FBIS-MEA*, June 9, 1982, p. C/8-10.



Forces of the Yemen Arab Republic photographed during the 1979 border war with South Yemen: at left, troops armed with Soviet-type Kalashnikov rifles; at right, Soviet T-34 tanks.

—Nik Wheeler/SYGMA.

mid-1950's, despite various ups and downs in bilateral relations. Some 35 Soviet instructors and about 50 technicians from the USSR and Eastern Europe accompanied the first shipments of arms in 1956–57.³⁴ During the Yemeni civil war, several hundred Soviet advisers helped both the Egyptian and YAR forces; the USSR reportedly even sent Soviet pilots to fly MiG's during the siege.³⁵ By 1975, the number of advisers had dropped from a high of some 500 to about 100. They stayed at that level through 1979, but their numbers rapidly rose to about 500 in 1981 where they still apparently remain.³⁶

Nevertheless, the YAR experienced considerable difficulty in getting arms from either the East or the West in the period 1969–79. As noted above, Sanaa apparently could not even get the Soviets to deliver what they had previously agreed to supply. By the time of the 1972 border war, the government of North Yemen was openly critical of Soviet neglect,³⁷ and

may have “leaked” rumors that it was considering expelling all Soviet advisers.³⁸

Soviet-YAR relations reached their lowest point during the al-Hamdi era, primarily over the issue of arms. After being removed from the premiership in February 1975, Muhsin al-Ayni claimed al-Hamdi had postponed a pending visit of a Soviet military delegation to Sanaa, and that a new US/Saudi arms package had been substituted for Soviet weapons.³⁹ Lt. Col. al-Ghashmi (not yet in power) stated that the Soviets had not delivered any new weapons in a long time, that Soviet weapons in the YAR were old and deserving of a place “in the war museum,” and that Soviet military experts would leave the YAR in September.⁴⁰ Al-Hamdi himself announced on August 3, 1975, that Soviet-YAR relations were “frozen” and that Sanaa had recently rejected a Soviet offer of MiG-21's; it was also reported in February 1976 that the YAR refused to accept a shipment of Soviet tanks and aircraft that had actually arrived in Hodeida.⁴¹ And in June 1976, al-Ghashmi spoke of a suspension of Soviet-YAR military relations over Moscow's failure to deliver even spare parts for Soviet weapons in the YAR inventory; he also suggested the possibility of US arms supply.⁴²

Yet, perhaps because of Sanaa's threats to turn to other suppliers, Soviet-YAR military relations began to improve in 1978–79 despite the chill in YAR-PDRY re-

³⁴Stephen Page, *The USSR and Arabia: The Development of Soviet Policies and Attitudes Towards the Countries of the Arabian Peninsula 1955–1970*, London, Central Asian Research Centre, 1971, p. 37.

³⁵See Bissell, loc. cit., p. 100.

³⁶As with figures on arms transfers, different sources give different figures for the numbers of Soviet advisers in the YAR, but they do agree on the trends. See *The Military Balance 1973–74*, p. 7; *The Military Balance 1975–76*, p. 9; *The Military Balance 1981–82*, p. 14; *The Military Balance, 1982–83*, p. 17; *The Military Balance 1983–84*, p. 18; US Central Intelligence Agency (hereafter CIA), *Communist Aid to Less Developed Countries of the Free World, 1977*, ER 78–10478U, November 1978, p. 3; CIA, *Communist Aid Activities in Non-Communist Less Developed Countries 1978*, ER 79–10412U, September 1979, p. 4; CIA, *Communist Aid Activities in Non-Communist Less Developed Countries, 1979 and 1954–79*, ER 80–10318U, October 1980, p. 15; US Department of State, Bureau of Intelligence and Research, *Soviet and East European Aid to the Third World, 1981*, DOS Pub 9345, February 1983; and Bidwell, op. cit., pp. 286–87, 328.

³⁷In October 1972, YAR Prime Minister Muhsin al-Ayni complained that no new Soviet equipment had reached North Yemen in three years. Bidwell, op. cit., pp. 239–40.

³⁸See, e.g., Damascus MENA, Oct. 3, 1972, in *FBIS–MEA*, Oct. 3, 1972, p. B/3.

³⁹See *As-Siyasah* (Kuwait), Feb. 13, 1975, in *FBIS–MEA*, Feb. 24, 1975, p. C/3. Moscow's Radio Peace and Progress also attacked the US/Saudi package in an Arabic language broadcast of Apr. 11, 1975, trans. in *FBIS–SOV*, Apr. 14, 1975, pp. F/2–3.

⁴⁰*Akhbar al-Yawm* (Cairo), July 19, 1975, in *FBIS–MEA*, July 24, 1975, p. C/1.

⁴¹*Keessing's*, Apr. 16, 1976, p. 27682. This may have been a North Yemeni ploy to obtain better-quality materiel in larger quantities.

⁴²Doha QNA in Arabic, June 16, 1976, in *FBIS–MEA*, June 17, 1976, p. C/2.

lations. On the eve of the 1979 war, YAR Foreign Minister Abdallah al-Asnaj, even while complaining that his country "could not fight communism on its own," noted that North Yemen had not expelled its Soviet advisers and had no intention of doing so.⁴³ North Yemen's disillusionment over the subsequent short-lived US/Saudi arms arrangement apparently drove the YAR into a huge arms deal with the Soviet Union. Under this agreement, Moscow swiftly delivered 300 T-55 tanks, 40 MiG-21's, 20 Su-22's, and an unspecified number of FROG and SA-2 missiles in the period from November 1979 through February 1980.⁴⁴

Nevertheless, the YAR continues its attempts to diversify its arms sources.⁴⁵ The greatest obstacle to direct US-YAR arms transfers appears to be the US requirement that Sanaa pay full price. The Saudi undertaking to pay for such shipments in 1979 removed this obstacle, but then Riyadh cut the arms flow. Although the Soviets, too, ask for payment, the terms are apparently more generous. Moreover, when Salih visited Moscow in October 1981, the Soviets, far from forcing the YAR to begin repaying its US\$630 million arms debt, reportedly agreed to cancel US\$265 million of that figure.⁴⁶

Despite such Soviet largesse, the YAR apparently does not intend to allow military cooperation with the USSR to extend to the granting of military facilities for the Soviets or expansion of their military presence, as has occurred in the PDRY. For example, in May 1983, YAR Prime Minister al-Iryani said that although the 1964 USSR-YAR Treaty of Friendship would probably be renewed in 1984, it was "certain" that the parties would "not introduce any articles pertaining to security matters."⁴⁷

For its part, Moscow has said little about its military aid to the YAR and virtually nothing about the num-

bers and types of arms provided or the numbers of Soviet military advisers there.⁴⁸ The Soviet Union was reticent even about its role at the time of the civil war in North Yemen, although it later frequently claimed credit for having saved the republic. To be sure, until 1979, Soviet military aid to North Yemen was not very extensive. The reason would appear to have been North Yemen's willingness to accept military assistance from almost anyone, but unwillingness to sacrifice any of its independence in return. The Soviet arms aid "bulge" in 1979 is probably best explained as a Soviet effort to prevent the YAR from relying solely on the US and Saudi Arabia and thereby becoming even less amenable to Soviet influence.

The Soviet-YAR military relationship is also conditioned by Soviet-PDRY military relations. South Yemen has a military establishment somewhat larger than the YAR's, although its population is less than one-third that of its neighbor. The equipment sent by the USSR to Aden is more modern, and there are 1,500 Soviet advisers as well as Cubans and East Germans in the South.⁴⁹ Since the threat that the YAR has faced in its last three armed conflicts has been either the PDRY itself or forces supported by it, Sanaa keeps a wary eye on the relative dimensions of the military support that Moscow gives to each of the two Yemens. There is, however, a limit to how much the Soviets will mili-

⁴⁴The Military Balance 1983-84, pp. 64-65.



Abd al-Fattah Ismail, leader of the People's Democratic Republic of Yemen and of its ruling Yemeni Socialist Party, is met at Moscow airport by Soviet President and party leader Leonid Brezhnev on October 24, 1979, just weeks before the Soviet Union initiated a large shipment of arms to the PDRY's rival, the Yemen Arab Republic.

—TASS from Sovfoto.

⁴³Doha QNA in Arabic, Jan. 30, 1979, in *FBIS-MEA*, Jan. 30, 1979, p. C/5.

⁴⁴The Military Balance 1979-80, p. 105. In addition, the YAR signed an agreement with Poland for 200 T-55 tanks.

⁴⁵Salih reportedly sent a letter to US President Carter reiterating the YAR's anti-Communist posture and expressing a willingness to talk about US arms shipments to offset the Soviet shipments. See *Al-Hawadith* (London), Mar. 28, 1980, in *FBIS-MEA*, Apr. 3, 1980, p. C/6.

⁴⁶*An-Nahar al-Arabi wa ad-Duwali* (Paris), Dec. 6-12, 1981, in *FBIS-MEA*, Dec. 15, 1981, p. C/6; and *Keesing's*, Mar. 12, 1982, p. 31379.

⁴⁷*As-Siyasah*, May 17, 1983, in *FBIS-MEA*, May 20, 1983, p. C/6. On Nov. 12, 1983, al-Iryani was replaced as prime minister by Vice President Abdul Aziz Abdul Ghani. See *FBIS-MEA*, Nov. 14, 1983, p. ii.

⁴⁸The Soviets regularly refer in general terms to their military aid in annual greetings to the YAR's leaders on the September 26 anniversary of the revolution, as well as in joint communiqués and welcoming speeches when YAR officials visit Moscow. In 1981, Oleg Peresypkin, Soviet Ambassador to Sanaa, made the rare admission that there were Soviet advisers in the YAR "at the request of the Yemeni Government." See his interview with *As-Siyasah*, on Jan. 9, 1981, trans. in *FBIS-SOV*, Jan. 15, 1981, p. H/4.

tarily assist North Yemen, since it not only refuses to become closely aligned with Moscow, but also is in conflict with Moscow's ally in Aden.

Soviet-YAR Economic Relations

Trends in Soviet economic assistance have been the inverse of those in Soviet military aid. The bulk of an estimated US\$140 million in Soviet economic aid over the years 1954–81 was concentrated in the period 1954–75, and Moscow has been less generous since.⁵⁰ The most important Soviet aid projects were the construction of a port at Hodeida (completed in 1961), an airport near Sanaa (1963), a road from Hodeida to Taiz (1969), and a cement plant at Bajil (1973). In 1979, the USSR granted the YAR a loan of US\$38 million to expand production capacity of the Bajil cement plant to 200,000 tons annually.⁵¹ Other Soviet aid projects have included a hospital in Sanaa, several schools, various agricultural projects, a survey of water and other resources, and a fish cannery.

North Yemen has not always been very appreciative of Soviet assistance. In two September 1972 articles in Beirut's *An-Nahar*, North Yemeni officials were quoted as comparing Soviet aid unfavorably to Chinese aid. The Russians allegedly had up to that time never sent "any equipment, military or otherwise, that was not defective—either lacking some fundamental part necessary for operation, or lacking spare parts essential for consumer maintenance."⁵²

One area in which Soviet assistance may have had a significant impact is in education. From the 1960's up to the present, there have been 400 to 800 non-military students from North Yemen studying each year in the USSR. The Soviets have also sent a number of economic aid technicians to the YAR over the years; in the mid-1960's there were over 600, but the figure had dwindled to an estimated 175 from the USSR and Eastern Europe together by 1981.⁵³

Until the early 1970's, Soviet economic assistance accounted for a large share of the total foreign aid received by North Yemen; as late as 1972 Moscow could claim that its aid represented one-third of the total.⁵⁴ However, beginning with the Saudi-YAR rapprochement of 1970, Moscow—along with the US and China—soon found itself far outweighed in the aid game. By 1981, Riyadh was reportedly providing US\$250 million a year in direct support to the YAR budget and a comparable sum each year for support of development projects and payments to various sheikhs, military officers, and other leaders.⁵⁵ Sanaa presumably would like to continue to receive these large sums from Riyadh, and this, plus the desire to remain independent, doubtless limits the degree to which North Yemen cooperates economically with the Soviet Union.

Soviet-YAR trade relations date back to 1928. Although the exchange has grown in recent years, it has never been very large and has not grown as fast as North Yemen's trade with the rest of the world. In 1980, Soviet-YAR trade turnover reached a record 48 million rubles (some US\$60 million at the official exchange rate, a five-fold increase in five years), but total YAR imports for fiscal year 1980–81 from all sources came to US\$2.1 billion.⁵⁶

Political Relations

Moscow has sought good state-to-state relations with whoever happens to be governing in Sanaa, and has little loyalty to one-time "friends" who fall from power. Although the Soviet Union praised al-Badr as "a well-known Arab statesman" when he was Crown Prince and congratulated him on his succession as imam in 1962, the USSR was the first country to recognize the new republic one week later and was soon expostulating on the horrors of the imamate.⁵⁷ One could trace a sequence of such expedient shifts in Soviet attitudes toward as-Sallal, al-Iryani, al-Hamdi, and

⁵⁰CIA, *Communist Aid Activities in Non-Communist Less Developed Countries, 1979 and 1954–79*, p. 20; and US Department of State, op. cit., p. 19.

⁵¹Manama Gulf News Agency, Apr. 20, 1978, in *FBIS-MEA*, Apr. 21, 1978, p. C/2.

⁵²*An-Nahar*, Sept. 16 and 23, 1972, in Joint Publications Research Service, *Translations on the Near East* (Washington, DC), No. 847, JPRS 57393, Nov. 1, 1972 pp. 68–81.

⁵³Page, op. cit., pp. 89, 110; CIA, *Communist Aid to Less Developed Countries of the Free World, 1976*, ER 77–10296U, August 1977, pp. 9–10; CIA, *Communist Aid to Less Developed Countries of the Free World, 1977*, pp. 9, 11; CIA, *Communist Aid Activities in Non-Communist Less Developed Countries 1978*, pp. 15, 18; CIA, *Communist Aid Activities in Non-Communist Less Developed Countries, 1979 and 1954–79*, pp. 21–22; and US Department of State, op. cit., pp. 21, 23.

⁵⁴*Ath-Thawrah* (Sanaa), Apr. 24, 1972, in *FBIS-MEA*, May 2, 1972, pp. B/2–3.

⁵⁵*Keessing's*, Mar. 6, 1981, p. 30743. For the period 1954–81, the US extended

an estimated US\$135 million, China some US\$130 million, and East European countries some US\$40 million in aid to the YAR. See the sources cited in fn. 52; and US Department of Commerce, Bureau of the Census, *Statistical Abstract of the United States 1982–83*, Washington, DC, US Government Printing Office, December 1982, pp. 829, 832.

⁵⁶Radio Moscow in Arabic, Mar. 22, 1981, in *FBIS-SOV*, Mar. 24, 1981, p. H/2; and "North Yemen: The Answer Lies in the Soil," *The Economist* (London), May 15, 1982, pp. 87–88.

For a detailed study of the YAR economy, see *Yemen Arab Republic: Development of a Traditional Economy*, Washington, DC, The World Bank, 1979; also Warren Richey, "North Yemen: Land of Donkeys and Camels Learns to Cope with Toyotas, Radios ... and Canned Peas," *The Christian Science Monitor* (Boston, MA) Jan. 14, 1983, pp. 12–13.

⁵⁷Page, op. cit., pp. 33, 48, 65, 74, 76, 77.



Ismail Ahmed Musa, left, a North Yemeni student, with his academic supervisors at the Azerbaydzhan Institute of Oil and Chemistry in Baku in May 1976.

—TASS from Sovfoto.

al-Ghashmi.⁵⁸ So far, Moscow has portrayed Salih in positive terms, but if he is ever overthrown, the Soviets can be expected to quickly embrace his successor.

This Soviet practice of staying on good terms with existing Sanaa governments suggests a dim assessment of prospects that the NDF or some other Marxist group might soon come to power. Indeed, although Moscow has spoken of "a whole spectrum of political forces" in the YAR,⁵⁹ it has been extremely reticent about the leftist opposition to the Sanaa government. As noted above, Soviet statements did little more than acknowledge the existence of the NDF. For example, when al-Hamdi was killed in October 1977, Soviet media cited NDF statements claiming that the Saudis had arranged the assassination.⁶⁰ However, the Soviets gave precious little publicity to the NDF's role in the 1979 war or to its subsequent insurgency against the YAR government. One rare Soviet article on the Front portrayed its members as supporters of the late al-Hamdi, totally ignoring the group's Marxist-Leninist

aspect.⁶¹ This Soviet silence is conspicuous in light of Moscow's more extensive coverage of other pro-Soviet liberation groups on the Arabian Peninsula—e.g., the Popular Front for the Liberation of Oman (PFLO), the Bahrain National Liberation Front, and the Communist Party of Saudi Arabia. Except for the PFLO, the NDF has been the most active of the lot. Moscow obviously felt that good relations with Sanaa were more promising than open support for the insurgency.

At the same time, the Soviets would like to prevent a "reactionary" turn in YAR politics. Thus Moscow has repeatedly warned of the dangers of tribal influence in Sanaa. Tribal leaders are blamed for the 1972 war and accused of serving Saudi interests and blocking North-South unity. Even al-Hamdi—while seen as pro-Saudi—drew Soviet praise for "removing the ruling sheikhs."⁶²

Aside from its quest for economic and military assistance from a wide variety of sources, North Yemen's principal foreign policy concerns center on its relations with its two immediate neighbors, South Yemen and Saudi Arabia. The YAR has also been concerned with a number of issues involving the Arab and Islamic worlds, but has seldom been a major actor in or had its security interests seriously affected by these issues. Events beyond the Middle East and the Horn of Africa have relatively little impact on North Yemen and engage little interest there. These priorities are reflected in the YAR's relations with the Soviet Union.

On the issue of Sanaa-Aden relations, Moscow has often called for peaceful resolution of differences and for Yemeni unification. But, although each clash between the two Yemens has concluded with renewed efforts directed toward "unity" (most recently seen in the August–September 1983 meetings of a Supreme Yemeni Council consisting of top government officials from both sides), as a practical matter, the Soviets would oppose unity if it meant that the PDRY would give up its Marxist-Leninist orientation. The YAR's insistence that a united Yemeni state be based on Islamic principles indicates that North Yemen would not be willing to adopt Marxism-Leninism as the price of unity. Indeed, actual prospects for unity appear fairly poor, not because outside forces oppose it—as both Yemens have claimed—but because neither government has been willing to surrender power to the other. The YAR government probably looks to unity talks as a means of broadening and strengthening the spectrum of elements in the PDRY supporting peace and good relations with the North, although this has not always been the result.

The YAR government has not criticized the Soviet-PDRY Treaty of Friendship and Cooperation signed on

⁵⁸E.g., when al-Iryani was in power, Moscow evaluated positively his willingness to negotiate with the royalists to end the civil war, but subsequently it denounced the domination of the YAR by reactionary tribal elements during his rule. See Page, op. cit., p. 108; and Pyotr Perminov, "Problems and Policies," *New Times* (Moscow), No. 44, October 1981, pp. 24–25.

⁵⁹V. Peresada, "Throwing Off the Burden of the Past," *Pravda* (Moscow), Oct. 26, 1981, p. 6.

⁶⁰Radio Moscow in Arabic, Oct. 26, 1977, in *FBIS-SOV*, Oct. 27, 1977, p. F/2; and "Declaration of the National Front of North Yemen," *Krasnaya zvezda* (Moscow), Oct. 27, 1977, p. 3.

⁶¹"North Yemen," *New Times*, No. 2, January 1979, p. 7.

⁶²A. Stepanov, "The Sana Assassination," *ibid.*, No. 43, October 1977, pp. 14–15.



Soviet-North Yemeni relations over time: at top, YAR President Abdallah as-Sallal signs a bilateral treaty with Leonid Brezhnev, then Chairman of the Presidium of the USSR Supreme Soviet, in March 1964 in Moscow; center, Abdul Rahman al-Iryani, Chairman of the Republican Council of the YAR (second from the left) meets with Supreme Soviet Presidium Chairman Nikolay Podgornyy (in top hat) and deputy chairmen of the USSR Council of Ministers Dimitriy Polyanskiy (far left) Nikolay Tikhonov (far right) in Moscow in December 1971; at bottom, Brezhnev and YAR President Ali Abdallah Salih review an honor guard in Moscow during Salih's October 1981 visit.

—TASS from Sovfoto.

October 25, 1979, probably because of Sanaa's own treaty with Moscow. North Yemen has, however, been less reticent about the Trilateral Treaty of Friendship and Cooperation signed by the PDRY, Ethiopia, and Libya on August 19, 1981, which it sees as paving the way for foreign intervention in the region.⁶³ Sanaa for its own reasons (i.e., military aid from Moscow) chooses to overlook the same implications in the case of the USSR-PDRY treaty.

With regard to Saudi Arabia, both the USSR and the PDRY have frequently warned the YAR of the danger of becoming too dependent on the Saudis, and Riyadh has in turn warned Sanaa of the dangers posed to the latter by both Aden and Moscow. The Saudis have also publicly stated their reservations about Yemeni unity and about the YAR's rapprochement with the USSR after the 1979 war. The Saudis fear that Yemeni unity might mean a Marxist government ruling both Yemens and posing a greater security threat than does South Yemen alone.⁶⁴ The YAR government, on the other hand, has resented Saudi attempts to influence its foreign and domestic policies. Yet, on the whole, both have worked to maintain good relations with each other. So long as the YAR receives such a large amount of *economic* assistance from Saudi Arabia and other members of the Gulf Cooperation Council, the Soviets are not likely to succeed in drawing the YAR away from its close relationship with Riyadh. However, so long as the YAR cannot obtain the level of *military* assistance it wants from Saudi Arabia and the West, Riyadh is unlikely to succeed in persuading Sanaa to end its military relationship with Moscow.

Like other Arab countries, North Yemen opposes Israel and supports the Palestinians and the Arab cause generally in the Arab-Israeli conflict. Most recently, the YAR became the home for a portion of the PLO fighters after their expulsion from Lebanon.⁶⁵ The YAR has criticized the US for supporting Israel, broken relations with Egypt for having signed a peace treaty with that country, and praised Soviet support for the Arabs. Joint communiqués issued after talks between Soviet and YAR officials express their similarity of views on the Arab-Israeli conflict.⁶⁶ However, even though North Yemen did participate in the Bab el-

⁶³ *Uman* (Muscat), Oct. 6, 1982, p. 3, in *FBIS-MEA*, Oct. 8, 1982, p. C/2. See also Kuwait KUNA in Arabic, Nov. 24, 1981, in *FBIS-MEA*, Nov. 24, 1981, p. C/1.

⁶⁴ Cairo DPA in Arabic, May 13, 1979, in *FBIS-MEA*, May 17, 1979, p. C/2; and *As-Siyasah*, Nov. 4, 1981, pp. 10-11, in *FBIS-MEA*, Nov. 5, 1981, p. C/7.

⁶⁵ See, e.g., Herbert H. Denton, "PLO Evacuees in North Yemen Miss Delights of City," *The Washington Post*, Jan. 10, 1984.

⁶⁶ See, for example, Moscow TASS International Service in Russian, Oct. 28, 1981, in *FBIS-SOV*, Oct. 29, 1981, p. H/11. This communiqué was issued after Salih's visit to Moscow in October 1981.

Mandeb blockade against Israel during the October 1973 war, the YAR has not been deeply involved in the Arab-Israeli conflict and has not allowed it to become an obstacle to relations with Washington. Indeed, the YAR was the first Arab state to reestablish relations with the US after the June 1967 war.⁶⁷

Both Sanaa and Moscow have called for making the Red Sea and the Indian Ocean "zones of peace" in which the forces of non-regional powers would be severely restricted, if not banned entirely.⁶⁸ Yet, when al-Hamdi hosted a conference in Taiz in March 1977 attended by the presidents of South Yemen, Somalia, and the Sudan and devoted to transforming the Red Sea into such a zone of peace, the USSR and pro-Soviet Ethiopia objected, fearing that the nations involved would attempt to make the Red Sea an "Arab lake" and seek to exclude Ethiopia by supporting Muslim Eritrean separatists.⁶⁹ Indeed, like most other Arab states, the YAR has supported the demands of Muslim Eritreans for autonomy from Christian-dominated Ethiopia; in May 1977, the YAR allowed the Eritrean Liberation Front to open an office in Sanaa.⁷⁰ Although the Soviet Union itself had supported a Marxist Eritrean group before the 1974 Ethiopian revolution, Moscow has since switched its support to the new Marxist government in Addis Ababa.⁷¹

When Soviet troops invaded Afghanistan at the end of December 1979, most of the Arab world condemned Moscow (South Yemen, however, defended the action). North Yemen remained quiet but did send a delegation to the Islamic Conference meeting called to discuss the invasion. When questioned by North Yemen's own government-supported newspaper *Ath-Thawra* as to why the YAR "did not have a clear stand" on this issue, President Salih responded that YAR participation in the Islamic gathering showed the country's position, but added that North Yemen would not be pushed to adopt the stands of others.⁷² Events in Afghanistan clearly were not viewed as important enough for North Yemen to alter or break relations with Moscow, as Saudi Arabia urged it to do.⁷³

Thus, although there are some aspects of Soviet foreign policy of which the YAR does not approve, Sanaa

has not permitted them to become obstacles to its own relations with Moscow. A similar situation pertains in Sanaa-Washington relations. Sanaa is, however, extremely concerned about Soviet policy toward South Yemen, and could turn to the West—as it has done in the past—if Soviet-PDRY policies are seen as too threatening. Conversely, except in the case of its dealings with South Yemen and the NDF, Moscow has not seemed particularly concerned whether or not Sanaa approved of Soviet foreign policies.

Conclusions

Since the end of the Yemeni civil war, the primary threat to the YAR's security has been the PDRY, and this will likely continue to be the case in the future. In this context, it might appear short-sighted and self-destructive of North Yemen to rely heavily (if only for lack of US or Saudi responsiveness) on the USSR for military assistance—since Moscow gives more assistance to the South, with which it is closely allied politically, ideologically, and militarily. However, YAR leaders are convinced that building and maintaining friendly relations with the USSR is an important means of assuring North Yemen's survival.⁷⁴ Such relations, they feel, make it less likely that the Soviet Union would support Aden in a future conflict between the two Yemens. Instead, Sanaa hopes that the Soviets would be more likely to support a peaceful solution to any such conflict, as they eventually did in the 1972 and 1979 border wars. Although in both cases the USSR did take some actions helping the South, those actions were much more limited than they might have been. North Yemen's inability so far to obtain enough arms on acceptable terms from the West only compounds its caution about antagonizing the Soviet Union.

The YAR has certain obvious attractions for Soviet foreign policy. For the present, the Soviet presence in North Yemen serves to prevent Saudi and American influence from becoming predominant. YAR reliance on Soviet military aid also means that Sanaa is not likely to risk losing this assistance by attacking South Yemen. Indeed, part of the reason Moscow wants friendly ties with Sanaa is that these serve to protect Soviet interests in Aden. Over the longer term, establishment of a pro-Soviet government in Sanaa would put the USSR in a much better position to influence

⁶⁷US-YAR relations were restored on July 2, 1972, in between periods of YAR-PDRY fighting that year. *Keesing's*, July 15–22, 1972, p. 25368.

⁶⁸Both the USSR and the YAR called for a Red Sea "zone of peace" in their October 1981 joint communiqué referenced in fn. 66.

⁶⁹V. Kudryavtsev, "Shadows over the Red Sea," *Izvestiya*, (Moscow), Apr. 16, 1977.

⁷⁰Baghdad INA in Arabic, May 26, 1977, in *FBIS-MEA*, May 27, 1977, p. C/1.

⁷¹See, e.g., Paul B. Henze, "Communism and Ethiopia," *Problems of Communism* (Washington, DC), May–June 1981, pp. 55–74.

⁷²Sanaa Domestic Service in Arabic, Feb. 13, 1980, in *FBIS-MEA*, Feb. 14, 1980, pp. C/8–10.

⁷³London Reuters in English, Feb. 8, 1980, in *FBIS-MEA*, Feb. 11, 1980, p. C/4.

⁷⁴During a visit to North Yemen in December 1982–January 1983, the author heard this view advanced by several Yemenis, including one high-level official at the YAR Foreign Ministry.

Saudi policy and perhaps even promote revolution within Saudi Arabia and other Gulf states. This need not take place through revolution in the North: if the North and South ever do unite—either peacefully or by force—the better-organized party and government apparatus of the PDRY might be better able to spread its influence to the more populous but politically fractured North, rather than the other way around.

Nevertheless, there are also significant obstacles to the achievement of Soviet goals in North Yemen. While the PDRY government is better organized, South Yemen is too weak by itself to impose unity on the North, and if outside forces were brought in to help the South, North Yemen would turn to Saudi Arabia and the US for military support—and might be more successful in obtaining it this time. If, on the other hand, the Yemens unite peacefully, there is no guarantee that the fractiousness of the North would not spread to the South. Even if a pro-Soviet government did come to power in Sanaa, the central government there might not control all of North Yemen. The northern tribes would fight hard to prevent such a government from extending its authority over them

and, indeed, would seek to overthrow it. The Soviet Union is not likely to want another anti-Soviet insurgency—like those in Angola, Ethiopia, Mozambique, and Afghanistan—that could not be easily defeated.⁷⁵

On balance, Moscow and Sanaa each has stronger reasons for keeping their bilateral relations friendly than for allowing them to deteriorate. The Soviets also have an interest in restraining those elements in Aden advocating direct PDRY support for the overthrow of the Sanaa government, since this could provoke large-scale US and Saudi assistance to the YAR.

This commonality of interests might break down should the NDF revive or another Marxist opposition group gain strength. There is, in fact, a good possibility of revived domestic opposition to the Salih regime. Col. Salih is not popular, and his support is based only on the army; all political parties are illegal. Many of the internal conditions that generated the NDF insur-

⁷⁵During a visit to the Institute for the USA and Canada in Moscow in early January 1984, the author was told by one Soviet scholar that the strength of tribal forces in North Yemen was similar to that encountered in Afghanistan.



Traditional tribal warriors in the north of the Yemen Arab Republic.

—Rosy Rouleau/SYGMA.

gency have not disappeared—Shafi'i dissidence, lack of economic development, and dislike of Salih within rival army factions and other groups.⁷⁶ Should a better-organized Marxist insurgency erupt, the YAR government might no longer be able to count on its friendship with Moscow to defend it or to prevent Aden from supporting the opposition. In this sense, the YAR's strategy of relying on Soviet friendship may prove to be a weak one in the long run.

With regard to how the Soviet-YAR relationship fits into the broader scheme of Soviet foreign policy toward the Third World, North Yemen can be regarded as a qualified success. The USSR has traditionally pursued two often contradictory policies toward Third World countries: promotion of revolution, and establishment of good relations with existing governments even when they are conservative. Soviet foreign policy is obviously most successful when socialist revolution occurs in a country and that country remains a close ally of the USSR, as is the case in South Yemen. It is least successful when it is able neither to promote revolution nor to establish good relations with the existing government, as has been the Soviet experience with Saudi Arabia and all the other monarchies on the Peninsula except Kuwait, with which the USSR has friendly government-to-government relations. In North Yemen, the USSR has had success with both policies: Moscow enjoyed good relations with the imamic government, then successfully aided the republican (non-Communist) revolution, and later improved its ties with the existing government in 1979 after almost a decade of cool relations. Although the NDF insurgency failed, Moscow did succeed in retaining and improving its ties with Sanaa even when the fighting was at its height. If North Yemen's experience represented the beginning of a trend for the USSR to improve its relations with Third World governments even when they are fighting left-wing insurgents, then Soviet foreign policy would have grown extremely capable in-

deed. It is difficult to imagine, however, that many other Third World governments in this situation would choose to improve their ties with Moscow as did the YAR.

Part of the reason that North Yemen has turned to Moscow, of course, is that it has been unable to obtain what it wants in terms of military assistance from the US. It should be clear from the foregoing that North Yemen wants to obtain as much economic and military assistance as possible from all sources. Where the US has not been too willing to supply arms recently, the USSR has. And although Washington could be expected to react strongly (as it did in 1979) if the YAR government were seriously threatened, the USSR, by continuing to provide military assistance, ensures that the US will not supplant Soviet influence in this strategic country. At the same time, the USSR is in a position to aid a Marxist insurgency there via South Yemen should one ever occur again.

Yet there are limits to Soviet influence in the YAR, as in other Third World countries—ironically due in part to Soviet success elsewhere. Because the USSR has such close ties with South Yemen and because the two Yemens have often been at odds, North Yemen is wary of Moscow. Had South Yemen become independent under a pro-Western government, the USSR might conceivably have been more successful in acquiring influence in a North Yemen with two pro-Western neighbors. The Soviet Union has, in fact, frequently been unsuccessful in Third World countries due to its close relations with such countries' opponents. Combined with North Yemen's fierce desire for independence from foreign influence, the USSR's increasingly strong politico-military alliance with South Yemen has frustrated and will continue to frustrate Soviet attempts to gain further influence in the YAR.

⁷⁶Many Yemenis (including YAR officials)—both in Sanaa and in Washington—have expressed this fear to the author.