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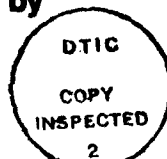
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SOVIET INTENTIONS AND AMERICAN OPTIONS IN THE MIDDLE EAST

by



**Benson Lee Grayson
Senior Research Fellow**

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FOREWORD

Any effective American security strategy for a region must consider the objectives of our superpower rival in the area. While understanding Soviet objectives is a difficult task, especially in the tangled mass of Middle East politics, this is the challenge which the author sets for himself in this monograph.

Dr. Grayson, an historian, begins with a general overview of the Middle East from the perspective of Moscow. He suggests that Imperial Russia's historical goals in the region are still operative. These historic aims, when combined with an appreciation of modern Soviet tendencies such as opportunism and caution, can lead to a reasonable assessment of Soviet actions. Soviet efforts in support of revolutionary Iran, for example, make sense in this context.

The author systematically applies this approach to analyze Soviet intentions in the major Middle East nations. Armed with this interpretation of Soviet intentions, strategists can more rationally design ways to achieve American objectives and check Soviet moves. The author's suggestions for US counter-strategies are consistent with his conceptual approach, and should help to stimulate the thinking of US strategists seeking approaches to the dilemmas of the Middle East.



JOHN S. PUSTAY
LTG, USAF
President, NDU

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Mr. Benson L. Grayson is a foreign affairs analyst with the Department of the Army. He researched and wrote this monograph while assigned as a Senior Research Fellow at the National Defense University. Earlier assignments include: Army Liaison Officer with the Department of State's Office of Intelligence and Research; Foreign Affairs Officer, Department of the Army; and Economist, Program Development Group, Canal Zone. A graduate of New York University (NYU), he holds master's degrees in Soviet Area Studies (NYU), Economics and East Asian Studies (Harvard), and East European History (Columbia). Mr. Grayson, who is also a graduate of the National War College, has written widely on foreign affairs, including the books *The American Image of China* (1979), *Russian-American Relations in World War I* (1979), and *The American Image of Russia* (1978).

1. THE OUTLOOK FROM MOSCOW

NEW OPPORTUNITIES

As the leaders of the Soviet Union look outward upon the international scene, no area of the world offers such promise of success as does the Middle East. To be sure, China to the east and the United States and its NATO allies to the west are assigned a higher priority in the Kremlin's strategic planning because of their status as rival power centers. But while an advantage gained by Moscow in either of these two regions would be of greater import than a similar gain in the Middle East, so too would the risks of failure be much greater. The Soviet leadership is well aware that if driven to a military response, both China and the NATO alliance possess the capability to inflict massive destruction upon the Russian homeland, whose protection is the Kremlin's overriding consideration.

In the Middle East, however, no such limitation applies. No nation to the south of the Soviet Union is sufficiently strong militarily to threaten it. Most are so relatively weak as to constitute a vacuum, inviting Moscow's involvement in their affairs. The three nations bordering Russia between Europe and China—Turkey, Iran, and Afghanistan—were all repeatedly viewed by the Tsars as prime targets for acquisition. Despite Moscow's avowed repudiation of such imperialist designs after the 1917 Revolution, the current Soviet rulers seem no less eager to expand their control over this area than were their imperial predecessors.

Until relatively recently, Soviet ambitions regarding the Middle East were normally held in check. Most of the great powers of Europe, either singly or in combination, took turns in preventing the Kremlin from dominating the region. The collapse of the Ottoman and Austro-Hungarian Empires after World War I, and the relinquishment by Great Britain and France of their possessions in the Middle Eastern area after World War II, weakened the forces which had previously blocked Russian expansion. In the postwar period, the

Kremlin, for a time, was deterred from acting by the military superiority of the United States, and by American-supported collective security arrangements. However, in the 1970s, events have prompted the Soviets to conclude that the balance of forces in the world has shifted, and that they consequently have far greater scope to expand their influence and control in the area. These events include 1) the withdrawal of the British military presence east of Suez; 2) the American defeat in Vietnam; 3) subsequent US reduction in overseas commitments; and, 4) the failure of the United States' plan to create in Iran a defender of Western interests.

At the same time as the barriers to a Soviet drive into the Middle East were eroding, the potential gains from such a move escalated. To Moscow's traditional policy of expanding eastward and southward into Asia was added the new factor of the world petroleum shortage. Continued access to the vast oil reserves of the Middle East became of crucial importance to America and its allies. Indeed, it can be credibly argued that a cutoff of Middle East petroleum would cause such serious economic dislocation in Western Europe and Japan as to bring about the collapse of NATO, and would oblige this country to retreat into a precarious "Fortress America" existence. Further, the addition of petroleum reserves from the region would assist the Kremlin in meeting its own problem of declining oil production. It would also reduce the popular dissatisfaction the Soviet regime might encounter from its own population's reluctance to adjust to the restrictions imposed by an energy shortage.

Concurrent with the increased attractiveness of the Middle East as an area for Soviet expansion, there has been a broadening of the scope of its territorial ambitions. The development of modern means of transportation and communication, and—even more—the replacement of the relatively moderate Tsarist expansionist schemes by the Kremlin's goal of promoting world revolution, have resulted in an enlargement of the Soviet area of interest in the Middle East beyond the nations which touch its borders. In addition to the three adjacent countries of Turkey, Iran, and Afghanistan, more than a dozen others, of varying degrees of importance, and ranging as far south as Somalia, must be included in any analysis of current Soviet intentions toward the Middle East.

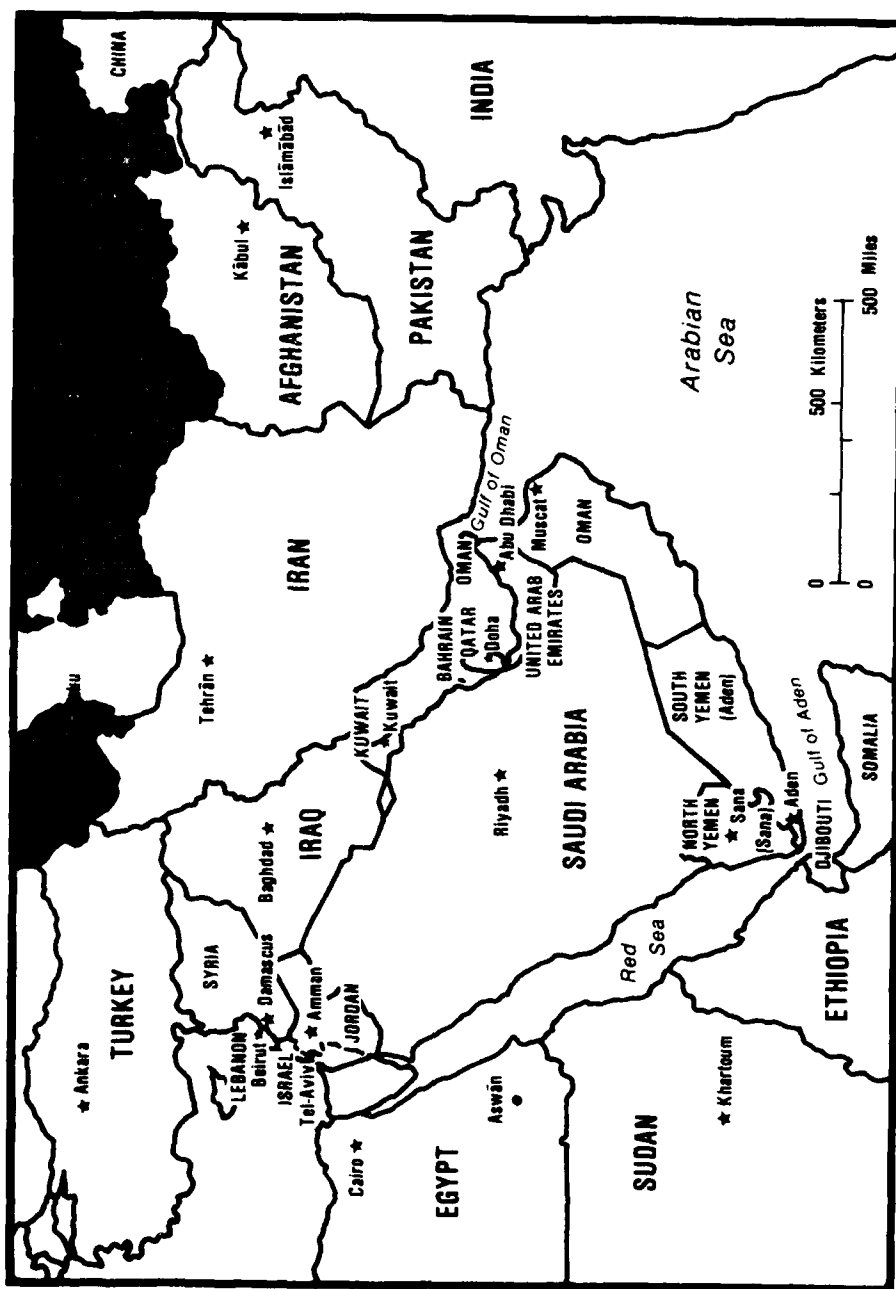
Rather than devoting equal attention to all of these states, this study will begin by looking into the general characteristics of Soviet

policy. These characteristics were found to a significant extent in Imperial Russian policy toward each of the nations of the region. Next will follow discussions of Soviet intentions toward the two nations of the Middle East of greatest importance to Moscow, Iran and Afghanistan; and the two nations of greatest interest to the United States, Saudi Arabia and Israel (see map). Passing treatment will be given to Russian aims in other countries. These include Syria, Iraq, and South Yemen, which are cooperating with and have a commonality of interest with Moscow in certain areas; and Egypt, which is acting in a similar capacity with regard to the United States. Of great interest to both the United States and the Soviet Union, Turkey is excluded from this study. This is because of its unique status in the Middle East as a member of NATO; as such, Turkey is protected by the American commitment to assist the members of that organization. Finally, this study concludes with what is hoped will be a useful section on the measures the United States can employ to counter Moscow's expansionist objectives in the area.

If the task of formulating effective US policy for the Middle East is difficult, the United States is fortunate in one respect. Given the Soviet Union's ambitions in the region, an analysis of its probable intentions and strategy is facilitated by the nature of Russian behavior. In this region, as elsewhere in the world, the Kremlin's actions are consistent, logical, and predictable, in keeping with the premises on which the Soviets operate.

SOVIET EXPANSIONISM

For anyone reviewing Soviet policy toward the Middle East, the most obvious feature is that it is expansionist. In short, there is no country in the region, no matter how backward or remote, over which the Soviet leaders do not desire to establish a measure of influence and control. This is not to say that they plan to annex each and every nation and incorporate it into the Soviet Union, although selected annexations are not to be excluded. Rather, the Soviets intend to establish at a minimum the extent of control they have achieved in Eastern Europe. There, the local regimes are forced to associate themselves with the Soviet Union in a broad range of political, economic, social, and military matters, and to insure that their territories will in no way be permitted to harbor any hostile elements.



MAP: THE SOVIET UNION AND THE MIDDLE EAST

The antecedents of this policy are as old as the Russian state itself. In 1552, only 5 years after he had claimed the title of Tsar, Ivan the Terrible captured and annexed the Mongol Khanate of Kazan, beginning an expansion into Asia which is still continuing. The movement begun by Ivan in many respects resembled the 19th century American expansion westward across the continent, and had much the same motivation. The Russian conquest of Kazan was aimed at bolstering Moscow's power and prestige vis-a-vis its neighbors, and at ending the Mongol raids which had previously despoiled Russian territory. Succeeding Russian rulers followed the same formula. Territory inhabited by less civilized populations was annexed, subjected to raids by the inhabitants of border regions, and then occupied to insure the security of the Russian authorities.

In the following centuries, as winning of imperial glory and commercial advantage became additional Russian objectives, the expansionist drive continued. These latter motives were reflected in the abortive effort of Tsar Paul to conquer India in 1801, and the dreams of Nickolas II, the last Tsar, to annex Afghanistan a hundred years later.

Following the Russian Revolution in 1917, the new Bolshevik government formally disavowed the previous policy of expansion, and recognized the right of the various Muslim peoples of Soviet Central Asia to their independence. This was a mere sham, however. As soon as their situation in the Russian Civil War permitted, the Soviets regained control over Soviet Central Asia through a mixture of trickery and force, and incorporated the regions into the newly proclaimed Union of Soviet Socialist Republics in 1924.

But the new Soviet objectives in Asia were not merely a continuation of those of the Tsars. Both Marx and Lenin, the prophets of communism, asserted that the noncommunist world would be violently hostile to the new religion. Also, the revolutionary paradises to be created by the overthrow of capitalism would not be safe until the last vestiges of the old structure had been ruthlessly eliminated from the face of the earth. Thus superimposed on the old Tsarist expansionist ambitions are the far broader Soviet objectives. The Soviet Government, anxious to protect the Russian homeland from attack (as any Moscow regime would be), created around it a belt of friendly (i.e., puppet) states. Further, it is wedded to the idea of promoting

world revolution by subverting all noncommunist governments and ultimately establishing communist regimes throughout the world.

Whereas to a noncommunist such a program would seem the ultimate in aggressive intent, it is not so regarded in Moscow. Rather, to a true believer, fomenting of national liberation struggles in the Third World and subverting of democracies in the West are altruistic undertakings, just as imposing restraints upon cannibals and eliminating the slave trade appeared to our ancestors. Some of the Soviet leadership may be cynically mouthing propaganda justification for actions which they know to be overwhelmingly motivated by self-interest, and many of their subordinates probably are dubious over Soviet expansionist policies. However, virtually all Russians share an almost paranoid desire to protect their nation from the devastation that would follow another conflict fought on Russian soil. In line with this reasoning, the nations bordering the Soviet Union are seen as particularly vulnerable to Western subversion, and to being transformed into bases for hostile action against Moscow.

SOVIET CAUTION

Fortunately for the peace of the world, the Kremlin's expansionist aims are balanced to a significant degree by the second important characteristic of its foreign policy, toward the world in general, and toward the Middle East in particular—its caution. Far more than other aggressive nations in world history, the Soviet Union retreats when it encounters a strong counterforce, and above all, whenever necessary to remove the risk that Russian territory might come under hostile attack. Not only did Moscow withdraw its forces from northern Iran under Western pressure in 1946, but similar reverses were accepted in the retreat from bases in Egypt in 1972, and in Somalia in 1977. Given the Marxist presumption that the forces of history are continually working to strengthen the socialist world and to undermine the resistance of the West, no other course of action for Moscow would be logical. As a matter of course, the Russians would appear to evaluate all probable foreign policy decisions by weighing the potential gains against the potential risks; and they appear to require a high yield-to-risk ratio before deciding to act.

This is not to say that the Soviet calculations would be rational in a non-Russian context, only that they are logical given Moscow's basic premises. The Soviet decision to invade Afghanistan in Decem-

ber 1979 was predictable on the basis of the sensitivity Moscow has shown to the possible establishment of a hostile regime anywhere along the periphery of the Soviet Union. Conversely, positions in Egypt and Somalia could be relinquished, despite the loss in prestige, because they were geographically far from the Soviet Union, and their abandonment did not in any way represent a significantly increased threat to the Russian homeland.

SOVIET FLEXIBILITY AND OPPORTUNISM

In determining possible moves, Moscow displays great flexibility and pragmatism—other characteristics amply exhibited in Soviet policy toward the Middle East. In circumstances requiring a choice between Marxist ideology and advancing Russian national interests, the latter is virtually always given priority. No regime in the area is too conservative or backward to receive backing from Moscow; Khrushchev in the 1950s provided aid to the feudal monarchy in Yemen. Similarly, the interests of Marxist elements have frequently been sacrificed to those of Moscow. Just two examples from a long list of such occurrences were the following: 1) the Soviet support for the Baathist regime in Iraq in the 1970s, at the same time Baghdad was repressing the Iraqi Communist Party; and, 2) the close ties Moscow established during that decade with the Shah of Iran, at the expense of support for the Iranian Tudeh (Communist) Party.

The rapidity with which the Soviet Union can shift support from one faction or client-state to another is indeed startling. Moscow denounced the Iranian Revolutionary Government through the summer of 1980 for tacitly supporting the Afghan opposition to the Soviet invasion, via bases on Iranian soil. Then, almost immediately after the outbreak of the Iraqi-Iranian conflict in September 1980, Moscow swiftly moved to establish friendly relations with Tehran. As part of this diplomatic revolution, the Soviets wrote off the investment they had made in Iraq, with whom they concluded a 15-year treaty of friendship and cooperation in April 1972. In October 1980 they signed a similar agreement, this time for 20 years with Syria, Iraq's most bitter enemy in the Arab world. This was by no means the first such Soviet somersault in the area. In 1977 Moscow had elected to risk the loss of, and finally to abandon, a considerable investment in Somalia, including access to the base at Berbera, in order to cement ties with Somalia's neighbor and bitter foe, Ethiopia. In each case,

the Soviets coolly weighed the value of close ties with the rival claimants, and then decided in favor of the more important.

Moscow's behavior in these cases casts an interesting light on the long-standing debate over whether the Soviets seek to follow a prearranged plan with regard to their foreign policy, or alternatively, whether they react opportunistically to developments. Obviously both tendencies are represented in Russian behavior, but the rapid shifts in Soviet policy suggest that the latter is probably the more important. Opportunism, indeed, is an important characteristic of Kremlin foreign policy, far more than is the case with the United States or most of the other great powers.

These then are the characteristics of Soviet policy in the Middle East. It is expansionist, it is cautious, it is flexible, and it is opportunistic. Though Marxist in appearance, much of Moscow's policy is based on the traditional interests of the Russian state. Such behavior is evident in Moscow's behavior toward the individual nations of the Middle East, to which we now turn.

2. AFGHANISTAN

Of all the nations of the Middle East, the one that became of most pressing importance to the Soviet Union in late 1979 was the remote central Asian state of Afghanistan. That country became the first area of hostilities to which Soviet combat units were committed since the end of World War II, some 35 years before. But also, by making the decision to intervene militarily, Moscow seriously threatened the continuation of the policy of detente with the United States, which had been and remained the most important element in Soviet foreign policy.

At first glance, such a sharp departure from previous policy appeared surprising. With a population of less than 20 million, no known key natural resources, and an area smaller than the State of Texas, Afghanistan would scarcely seem worth the investment of much Soviet prestige or resources. In fact, however, Moscow's recent moves concerning Afghanistan were virtually identical to the policies followed by the Imperial Russian Government in the 19th century. Tsarist policy saw Afghanistan in two lights: 1) as an area for the continuation of Russian expansion, which had swept to and incorporated into Russia the various Muslim independent Khanates bordering Afghanistan; and, 2) as a sensitive area from which British influence would have to be restricted in order to protect the security of adjacent Russian territory. In 1885 only a threat by Great Britain to go to war to protect Afghanistan from invasion caused Moscow to ease its pressure along the Afghan frontier.

Interestingly, the situation in the 19th century in some respects paralleled recent developments in the Middle East. The Imperial Russian advance came after repeated diplomatic assurances to London that no such movement would take place. Moreover, an agreed-upon Anglo-Russian joint effort to delineate the Afghan frontier was deliberately stalled by Moscow as its advance continued. Finally, the Russian initiative followed a public demonstration of British military weakness—the fall of Khartum in the Sudan, and the

massacre of General Gordon and his forces there in January 1885.¹ Similarly, the Tsarist tactics bore a marked resemblance to the harsh Soviet measures employed in recent days against the Afghan resistance. General Mikhail Skobelev, who played a prominent part in the Russian conquest of central Asia in the 1870s and 1880s, expressed an attitude that still exists when he said, "I hold it as a principle that in Asia the duration of the peace is in direct proportion to the slaughter you inflict upon the enemy."²

Following the Bolshevik Revolution in 1917, weakness forced Moscow to adopt a more conciliatory stance, both worldwide and with respect to Afghanistan. Rather than risk a confrontation with Great Britain, which sought a virtual protectorate over Kabul, the Soviets employed a policy of aid and support toward Afghanistan—a policy reminiscent of that followed by Moscow toward some of its client-states in the Middle East today. A treaty of friendship was signed in 1921 with King Amanullah, anti-British Monarch of Afghanistan. Russia provided him with 5,000 rifles, 25 experts, and a subsidy of some 1 million gold rubles.³

The King was eventually ousted in 1929 after a rebellion by conservative tribesmen. Anxious to prevent a hostile regime from being established along their frontier, the Soviets permitted Amanullah's ambassador to organize on their soil a force to support the King and, after furnishing the force with arms, helped it to cross into Afghanistan. This loyalist army was unable to restore Amanullah to power, however, and Moscow fell back upon its customary cautious policy, accepting without further challenge a reconstituted conservative Afghan monarchy.

For almost the next half century, the Soviets dealt on friendly terms with a semifeudal, traditionalist regime in Afghanistan. Far from seeking actively to export its brand of revolution, or bringing Afghanistan within the Socialist camp, Moscow permitted Kabul to pursue a neutralist foreign policy, and even raised little opposition to the presence in its southern neighbor of a moderate American economic assistance program. As a token of Soviet cordiality, Premier Nikolai Bulganin and Communist Party Secretary Nikita Khrushchev paid a state visit to Afghanistan in December 1955, and sent economic aid and advisors to assist Kabul's developmental efforts. Indeed, from a look at Moscow's relations with Afghanistan through 1978, the most salient conclusion is that the Soviets were surprisingly passive.

Soviet weakness in the period before and during World War II may explain their passivity. Such behavior was, however, inconsistent with Moscow's postwar expansionism elsewhere along its frontiers, particularly in Eastern Europe but also in the Far East. Here, the nominally independent central Asian puppet state of Tannu Tuva was annexed in 1946, and Soviet claims to Chinese territory were only partially concealed. Clearly, the Kremlin saw little risk of Afghanistan being used as an avenue for invasion of the Soviet Union by unfriendly powers, and was prepared to wait until the "unalterable laws of Marxist evolution" dropped Afghanistan like a ripe plum into the Socialist camp, sometime in the distant future.

This relatively happy state of affairs outlasted even the Afghan monarchy, which was overthrown in July 1973, when former Prime Minister Prince Muhammad Daoud ousted his cousin and brother-in-law, King Muhammad Zahir Shah. Moscow's hand was forced, however, when Daoud attempted to crack down on the Marxist Khalq Party, and was overthrown and executed in a surprise coup led by one of the Khalq leaders, Hafizullah Amin. With a new Marxist government installed in Kabul under Nur Muhammad Taraki, the father of the Khalq Party, the Soviets had little choice as the leader of the world communist movement but to hail the establishment of a communist regime in Afghanistan, and to grant it full diplomatic and economic assistance.

Unfortunately for Moscow, the fanatically Marxist Amin, rather than the more restrained Taraki, eventually emerged as the dominant force in Kabul. Assuming the post of Prime Minister, Amin ruthlessly implemented measures to redistribute the land, to abolish traditional Muslim practices, and to purge antirevolutionary elements. When Amin's excesses predictably stirred up a revolt by tribal elements, the Soviets apparently informed Taraki that they were unwilling to intervene in strength to back Amin. Taraki would have to conciliate the population by slowing the drive to communism, even if this required the physical elimination of Amin. The plot to remove Amin misfired, however, and in a face-to-face encounter in September 1979 Taraki, rather than the Prime Minister, was killed. Moscow, showing its characteristic flexibility, was not nonplussed, but instead officially congratulated Amin upon his assumption of power. The note sent by Soviet Party leader Brezhnev may have lacked a certain warmth, but Moscow continued its backing of the Kabul Marxist regime. Moscow reinforced, rather than withdrew, the estimated 1,600

Russian military advisers who were aiding the Afghan army to combat the Muslim insurgents at the time of Amin's coup.

Three months later, to the shock and consternation of many in the West, the Soviet Union intervened militarily in Afghanistan, ousting and executing Amin and replacing him with Babrak Karmal. Karmal was not only a more moderate leader of the Khalq Party, but also far more disposed to accept Moscow's direction. At the time of the Kremlin coup against Amin, Karmal was residing in the Soviet Union, having been exiled abroad as an Ambassador by his rival. The Soviet invasion of Afghanistan in December 1979 marked the first such flagrant Soviet use of force outside of Eastern Europe since the attack on Finland in 1939. As such, it provoked considerable discussion that Moscow had embarked on a new and more dangerous policy of expansionism. This possibly resulted from the conclusion that the balance of force in the world had shifted, and that America's weakness, combined with a demonstrated unwillingness or inability to use its military strength, had made such a course of action far less risky for the Soviet Union.

A review of previous Soviet policy toward Afghanistan, however, indicates that this was not the case. The exact timing of the Kremlin's decision to intervene has not been definitely established. One report from a Spanish correspondent states it was made by the Soviet Party Politburo on 26 November 1979, following the recommendation of the former Ambassador to Kabul, who argued that Amin was too much of a wild man to be left in power.⁴ The available evidence suggests that the Soviets were taking contingency steps in the months following Taraki's replacement to be able to move rapidly into Afghanistan if necessary. However, they were willing to do so only as a last resort, and the final orders were not given until shortly before the invasion.

Thus, rather than preparing the Soviet people for the possibility of a military intervention in Afghanistan to "defend the fatherland," propaganda at the end of November 1979 was hailing a reduction in the planned defense expenditures for the following year. Similarly, Amin's regime was *not* made the subject of a violent propaganda campaign prior to the invasion to document Moscow's case, as was done prior to the Soviet invasions of Hungary in 1956 and Czechoslovakia in 1968. Rather, Party Secretary Brezhnev and Premier Alexy Kosygin sent Amin messages in December commemorat-

ing the anniversary of the signing of the friendship treaty between the two nations the previous year. Amin's warm response was carried in *Pravda*. Also, an authoritative Tass commentary noted Moscow's "profound satisfaction" with the "unswerving development and strengthening of the existing friendly and good-neighborly" Soviet-Afghan relations.

Conceivably, some of the friendly comments may also have been aimed at concealing from Amin the Kremlin plans to mount an invasion, and to prevent him from taking precautions. However, Soviet forces were already deployed in strength in Afghanistan before the invasion. The Amin regime was almost totally dependent upon Russian aid to remain in power. Moscow did not appear similarly constrained to disguise its intentions before the invasions of Hungary and Czechoslovakia. In any case, despite their reluctance to become more directly involved in military operations in Afghanistan, it became clear to the Soviets in the months that followed Amin's ouster of Taraki that his regime's ruthless implementation of revolutionary programs was alienating the overwhelming majority of the Afghan population. Moreover, Amin's policies were strengthening an armed insurgency against his regime, which only a massive influx of Soviet forces could counter.

Under the circumstances, Moscow had only three choices. It could intervene in force to support Amin, whom the Soviets already considered to be an undependable agent, and one whose independence might lead him to become another Tito. Alternatively, the Kremlin could limit or even reduce its support for Amin. However, this would almost certainly insure the continuation of a chaotic and unstable situation along the Soviet frontier. Reduced Soviet support would also quite probably see the emergence in Afghanistan of a militantly Muslim, traditionalist state capable of seeking to incite a Muslim insurgency against the Soviets on their own side of the frontier. Finally, as their third option, Moscow could remove Amin and replace him with Babrak, whose reputation as a moderate might well persuade some of the militant tribesmen to cease their opposition to the Marxist regime in Kabul.

Weighing the available alternatives, it is not surprising that the Kremlin opted for the latter choice. That the Soviets clearly did not expect the strength of the American reaction was an understandable mistake in light of US willingness to accept the deployment of Soviet

forces closer to the United States in Cuba and Angola. Nevertheless, Moscow would almost certainly have invaded Afghanistan even if the American response had been correctly predicted. Whereas the Kremlin was ready to give up outlying gains such as Egypt and Somalia without contesting the outcome, no such possibility existed in Afghanistan. There was no necessity that a communist regime rule in Kabul. The Soviet Union had waited patiently for many decades for history to produce such an outcome, and would have been prepared to wait for many more. But no Soviet Government would tolerate the establishment of an unfriendly state along its frontiers, such as Afghanistan gave every promise of becoming.

A key element in the Soviet decision to intervene in Afghanistan was its fear that "unfriendly powers" (the United States, China, and Muslim forces in Pakistan and Iran) would exacerbate a chaotic situation along its southern borders. The Soviets feared these "unfriendly powers" would encourage Muslim insurgents to continue their attacks against the Amin Government, and possibly seek to utilize Afghan territory to destabilize neighboring Soviet areas. Soviet propaganda alluded to this alleged threat prior to the invasion of Afghanistan, but the level of the campaign greatly escalated after the fact in an effort to justify the move. Thus, on the day following Amin's overthrow and execution, Tass depicted him as an "agent of US imperialism" in reporting his death.

The accusation was hardly to have been believed in Moscow. However, the Soviets are so concerned about any possible threat to their internal security, that they probably sincerely feared that China and the United States, to say nothing of Pakistan and Iran, were aiding the Afghan rebels. This theme was stressed not only in Soviet external propaganda, but also in Brezhnev's own report to the plenary meeting of his Party Central Committee on 23 June 1980. In an essentially apologetic defense of the Afghan invasion, the Soviet leader asserted that the United States and China had engaged in "armed aggression" against the Afghan nation, and that Moscow "had no choice but to send troops" when requested by Kabul to help resist insurgents attacking Afghanistan from bases in Pakistan.

Once enmeshed in the morass of the Afghan civil war, the Soviets found it no easy matter to disengage. Although Babrak took a more moderate course than had Amin, and an increase in Soviet assistance had helped to alleviate the living conditions of the popula-

tion, the new regime could not escape identification as a Kremlin puppet. Despite the commitment to Afghanistan of some 90,000 Soviet troops and supporting air power, the Afghan insurgents refused to lay down their arms. In the months that followed, Soviet casualties continued to mount, running at an average of about 1,200 annually.⁵

Meanwhile, Moscow was becoming aware of its predicament. The American grain embargo, the apparently permanent postponement by the US Senate of ratification of the SALT II agreement, the Western boycott of the summer olympics, and the tide of anti-Soviet sentiment stirred up in the Middle East by the invasion, all bothered the Soviet leaders. They almost certainly would have been prepared to pay the price for reestablishing a measure of stability in Afghanistan, even if they had been aware of the cost beforehand. Nonetheless, the Kremlin probably miscalculated the strength of the American reaction because of US willingness to accept previous moves, such as the deployment of Cuban forces into Angola, the dispatch of Soviet and Cuban troops to Ethiopia, and the presence of an "unacceptable" Soviet combat unit on Cuba.

In any event, Moscow did not wish to see the Afghan situation lead to a termination of the spirit of detente which had been so profitable to the Soviet Union, nor to see the United States embark on a crash rearmament program. Moreover, the Soviets probably viewed their intervention in Afghanistan as a legitimate step to insure their own security. They probably misjudged Washington's expression of concern as a devious effort by elements in the United States seeking to return to the Cold War. Finally, the Afghan adventure was clearly unpopular with at least some segments of the Soviet population. The flow of casualties back to the Soviet Union from Afghanistan, while not particularly large, was nevertheless enough to demonstrate to the population that the invading forces were not welcome as liberators by the Afghan populace. In the official pronouncements on the subject of Afghanistan, Moscow emphasized that the Party leadership was united in endorsing the decision to intervene, a fact suggesting that the reverse was the case. Similarly, in October 1980 the Kremlin went out of its way to internally publicize the discovery of alleged large gas reserves in Afghanistan, and to stress the economic benefits that would accrue to the Soviet economy.

Having achieved its minimum objectives in Afghanistan through the replacement of the intransigent Amin by the tractable Babrak, the

Soviet Union thus moved to bring about an easing of tension with the West. In May 1980, the puppet regime in Kabul launched a Soviet-inspired trial balloon by proposing an "effective halt to foreign armed encroachments on Afghan territory"; the normalization of relations between Afghanistan and its neighbors, Pakistan and Iran; and the "guaranteed nonresumption of all forms of outside interference in internal Afghan affairs." Concerning the Soviet troop presence in the country, Kabul suggested without amplification that this could be settled in the context of the above formula.

To lend substance to the Kabul plan, the Soviets announced on 22 June 1980 that they were withdrawing some military units no longer needed in Afghanistan, with the agreement of the Afghan Government. Interestingly, this announcement was timed for the day prior to Brezhnev's report to the Central Committee plenary meeting, suggesting that it was also designed to convince domestic critics of the intervention that it had been successful. In August 1980, Brezhnev reiterated his interest in a political settlement of the Afghanistan problem, stressing that the only way to accomplish this was for the United States, China, and Pakistan to stop their efforts to "turn Afghanistan into a new springboard threatening the Soviet Union." Brezhnev also stressed the need for Pakistan, and to a lesser extent, Iran, to reach understandings with the Babrak regime.

The record of accomplishment of Soviet peace initiatives is not good. Therefore, it is not surprising that Moscow's proposals concerning a settlement in Afghanistan received only skepticism in the West. In retrospect, this response may well have been a mistake. Afghanistan has come to have considerable importance in Soviet eyes, and Moscow is obviously embarrassed over its involvement there. Knowing this, the United States should have devoted more attention to the Soviet initiatives, and treated the Afghanistan situation as an opportunity to negotiate concessions, either there or elsewhere. Moscow's fixation on safeguarding its security, combined with its wide-ranging ambitions for expansion, limit the Soviet flexibility in dealing with most international disputes. Nonetheless, as discussed in chapter 11, America has some capability for affecting the Soviet position in Afghanistan.

3. IRAN

While Afghanistan is important in the context of Soviet-American relations, primarily as the harbinger of possible future Kremlin aggressive moves, Iran is a vastly different story. The home of one of the oldest and richest civilizations, Iran gained importance in the 20th century as the site of one of the world's first large oil fields. Subsequently, for the space of a few short years, it had pretensions of becoming a regional, if not world, power as the recipient of a vast American military assistance program, and as the apparent heir to the British role of protecting the security of the Persian Gulf. Plagued by the excesses of a revolutionary Muslim leadership propelling it backward into a 12th century mentality and level of operation, Iran has become for different reasons the object of considerable attention in both Moscow and Washington. Today, Iran is the most probable site for a serious clash between those two nations.

The early history of Russian-Iranian relations reflects the importance of the region to Moscow. As in the case of Afghanistan, Iran was eyed greedily by the Tsars as a target for expansion long before the establishment of the Soviet regime. In part, this was because of Moscow's belief that Persia, as it was then called, was a rich nation in which a strong Russian economic presence was desirable. As early as the mid-17th century, the ruler of Persia gave financial assistance to the temporarily impoverished Tsar Alexis, and a colony of Persian merchants resided in Moscow. During this time, Russia attempted unsuccessfully to establish an economic stranglehold over Persia.⁶

The second objective of the Tsars in Persia was strategic. Moscow viewed Persia both as a threat to Russia's own security and as an opportunity for territorial expansion. In the 14th century, the great conqueror, Tamerlane, invaded Russia in pursuit of his enemies after conquering Persia. Subsequently, the Tsars conducted numerous wars to seize and annex border areas from Persia, and to prevent the British administrators in India from bringing Persia within their

sphere of control, thus threatening Moscow. Ultimately, the two great European powers, led by their rising fear of Germany, reached a compromise concerning Persia in 1907. That nation was divided into a Russian sphere of interest in the north, a British sphere of interest in the south along the Persian Gulf, and a neutral area in the center.

This agreement with London did no more than confirm the influence and control the Russians had already established in northern Persia. In the 1880s, Moscow responded eagerly to a request by the Shah of Persia to organize a Cossack brigade for him. Composed of Russian officers, this brigade became the only efficient military force in the country. Russian financial and economic domination was assured through a Tsarist-controlled bank, and through concessions giving the Russians a monopoly on transportation, insurance, and telecommunications in northern Persia. So great did Moscow's economic position become, that in 1910 some 69 percent of all Persian trade was with Russia.⁷ Nor was direct Tsarist military intervention ruled out. In November 1911, Russia forced the Persian Government to discharge William Shuster, an American financial adviser, through use of an ultimatum backed up by the threatening movement of Russian troops from northern Persia toward the capital. Again, during World War I, the Tsarist Government intervened massively in Persia to prevent the establishment there of anti-Russian forces under Turkish and German leadership.

The Bolshevik Revolution in 1917 marked a diminution of Russian interest in Persia, but only for as long as the period of relative Russian weakness lasted. The new Soviet regime renounced with much fanfare the 1907 agreement with Britain and the special position it had established in northern Persia. In spite of this, the Bolshevik leadership made it very apparent that they regarded Persia as strategically important for spreading communism in the Middle East, South Asia, and the Far East. Even more important to Moscow than its expansionist goals, however, was the priority given to protecting the Russian homeland. In February 1921, the Soviets concluded a treaty with Tehran confirming the renunciation of the former Tsarist privileges. This agreement was distinctly generous to Persia except for one clause, which constituted the very heart of Moscow's interests. Article 6 gave the Kremlin the right to move into Persia, and to conduct military operations there should any other nation seek to use Persia for an attack upon Russia. In support of its higher priority defensive goals, Moscow withdrew forces which had been sent into

northern Persia in pursuit of anti-Bolshevik units. It thereby sacrificed a Persian communist regime, which had been established under Soviet protection in the Gilan area of northern Persia.

Throughout the interwar period, Soviet policy toward Iran (as Persia was renamed in 1935), paralleled that toward Afghanistan. Correct relations were maintained with the nationalist revolutionary regime established by Reza Shah Pahlavi, commander of the Cossack Division, who had overthrown the former dynasty and assumed the throne himself. Moscow, however, clearly had far greater interest in reestablishing its influence in Iran than in moving into Afghanistan. It successfully utilized a series of trade agreements with Iran to regain a measure of the influence the Tsars had previously enjoyed in that country.

The same pattern of intermittent expansionist and defensive phases in Soviet policy toward Iran has continued to the present day. During the period of close cooperation with Hitler, following the Nazi-Soviet pact of August 1939, Moscow made its policies clear. In November 1940, the Kremlin negotiated with Germany, Italy, and Japan, reaching a provisional agreement which divided the world into spheres of influence. With these divisions, Moscow clarified that the center of Soviet territorial ambitions was in the area south of the cities of Batum and Baku (near the junction of the Soviet, Turkish, and Iranian borders), toward the Persian Gulf. When this scheme miscarried because of the German attack in 1941, Moscow moved to advance both its offensive and defensive objectives by invading northern Iran in August 1941, in conjunction with British forces who occupied the south.

The Kremlin's ostensible reason, and probably its real one as well, was to combat the admittedly substantial German influence in the country, and to insure that American and British war supplies could be safely transported via the Persian Gulf to the Soviet Union. On the other hand, the Soviets were by no means reluctant to use the opportunity to bolster their presence in Iran. In pursuit of its goals, Moscow followed a twofold policy: 1) it attempted to dominate the entire country through pressure on the central government in Tehran; and 2), it simultaneously supported the creation of a puppet regime in the northeastern province of Azerbaijan. As early as April 1942 when the ability of the Soviet Union to defeat the German invasion was still in doubt, the young Shah of Iran asked the United

States to intervene to stop the Soviet forces in Iran from preventing his troops from acting to put down a Kurdish attack in Azerbaijan.⁸

Moscow's efforts to retain a foothold in Iran at the end of World War II indeed provoked the first, and in some respects the most serious, direct clash that has yet occurred between the United States and the Soviet Union. Seeking to preserve the gains they had made as a result of the wartime occupation, the Kremlin pushed hard to establish a subservient regime in Tehran, and to prevent the central authorities from exercising control in Azerbaijan. The main instrument available to Moscow to accomplish its purposes was the Red Army. Therefore, the Soviets naturally strove to retain their forces in Iran, as the United States and Great Britain pressed them to agree to a joint withdrawal at the end of World War II.

Ultimately, the Iranian Government indicated that it would follow American advice and use force to establish its authority in Azerbaijan. It appealed to the United Nations for assistance in the event of Soviet interference. The Kremlin reluctantly withdrew its forces, and the communist puppet regime in the northeast quickly collapsed. Once again the Soviets had shown that rather than risk the security of the Russian homeland—in this case by hazarding the chance of a clash with an American-supported Iran—they would opt to bide their time until another day. The key element in Soviet considerations was that the Iranian monarchy, as then constituted, represented a lesser threat than would a confrontation with the United States.

The years that followed testified to the wisdom of Moscow's choice. Iran established close ties with the United States, becoming a member of the Baghdad Pact, and subsequently concluding a defense agreement with this country in 1959. However, the Shah of Iran always made sure that his relations with the colossus to the north did not deteriorate to the point where the Kremlin might be prompted to consider seriously a move against Iran. In fact, Iran purchased a substantial quantity of arms from the Soviet Union to help balance those it bought from America; and the Shah traveled to the Soviet Union where he was treated as an honored guest. In turn, Moscow maintained its friendly attitude toward the Shah almost until the time of his overthrow, and exhibited concern that the new revolutionary regime of the Ayatollah Khomeini would encourage the spread of militant Muslim activity across the border into the Soviet Union.

Upon taking power, the Iranian Provisional Government did in fact adopt a hostile attitude toward Moscow, and initially urged support for the Afghan insurgents against the communist regime in Kabul. Following the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan, Iran lined up with the Muslim nations opposing the move; and on 1 January 1980, a mob of demonstrators attempted to emulate the seizure of the American Embassy in Tehran by temporarily occupying the Russian Embassy compound there.

Faced with the prospect of strained relations with the Iranian Provisional Government, Moscow reacted adroitly, with a carrot-and-stick approach. Using a none-too-veiled fist, the Soviet Ambassador visited the Ayatollah Khomeini in Qum on 2 January 1980, and informed him that no repetition of the incident would be tolerated. The Kremlin had the option of providing support to leftist separatist elements in Azerbaijan and other minority areas; it could also simply retain its neutrality at the United Nations Security Council, and let that body approve the American-backed package of economic sanctions against Iran. According to one possibly apocryphal report, a Soviet diplomat, when asked what would happen if Iranian demonstrators captured his embassy as they had the American one, looked at his watch, observed it was then 3 p.m., and declared, "By 3:45 p.m., there won't be an Iran."⁹ Subsequently, after Iran suspended gas sales to the Soviet Union in March 1980, because of a dispute over tariffs, Moscow reacted sharply by banning the free transport of Iranian merchandise through its territory.

At the same time, the Soviet Union attempted to establish itself as Iran's best friend among the great powers. Following the Soviet veto on 7 January 1980 of the Security Council resolution to impose economic sanctions against Iran because of the hostage seizure, Moscow lost no opportunity to accuse the United States of plotting against Tehran, and to portray itself as the defender of Iranian independence. In September 1980, the Kremlin concluded a new agreement providing for the transportation of Iranian goods across the Soviet Union; the Soviets hailed the agreement as reflecting the improved relations between the two nations. Although the Iranian Foreign Minister was assailed by Moscow as accepting cash payments from Washington in return for trying to obtain release of the hostages, Khomeini was treated favorably in Soviet propaganda.

The most difficult choice for the Soviets with regard to Iran came in the fall of 1980, when war erupted between Iran and Iraq. Moscow

had concluded a 15-year treaty of friendship and cooperation with Iraq in April 1972; until the war with Iran, Iraq had been regarded as the Soviet Union's most important Arab client-state. For a time, the Kremlin attempted to preserve good relations with both sides, but it quickly became clear that this was impossible. As early as August 1980, the pro-Soviet Iranian Ambassador in Moscow had warned that he would be recalled if the Soviet Union did not stop providing military aid to Iraq.

Obligated to choose, the Kremlin opted to support the more important of the two antagonists—Iran. Although Iraq was an important oil producer, and the Soviets had invested an estimated \$1.5 billion in arms assistance to Baghdad in the previous 5 years, that nation was simply not as important to Moscow as Iran. Iraq had a smaller population and was not contiguous with the Soviet Union. Never had it been eyed by the Tsars as a prime target for territorial expansion. Iran, by comparison, had been viewed by both Imperial Russia and the Soviets as vital to their security, and high on the list for extension of control. Under the circumstances, there could be little doubt as to Moscow's decision. While outwardly adopting a neutral position, it blamed the United States for *allegedly provoking the conflict*. At the same time, the Soviet Union showed its support for Iran by encouraging propaganda which backed Iran and its client-states in the area—Ethiopia, the People's Democratic Republic of Yemen (South Yemen), and Libya.

The Kremlin's current attempts to cement ties with the fundamentalist Muslim regime in Tehran bear full witness to the essential pragmatism of Soviet foreign policy. Nonetheless, Moscow cannot ignore the extremely unstable situation in Tehran, the possibility that Khomeini could suddenly be replaced by a military government, or alternatively, that Iran could become engulfed in chaos as rival factions struggle for supremacy. It is therefore not surprising that the Soviet Union has concentrated sufficient military forces along the border to be able to intervene swiftly in Iran, should the protection of its vital interests so dictate. All the factors that dictated a Soviet decision to invade Afghanistan would also be at play in Iran. These would be supplemented by additional advantages: 1) Iran is a vital oil-producing state; 2) occupation of the entire country would give Moscow its age-old goal of a port on the Persian Gulf; and, 3) possession of the north side of the straits of Hormuz would permit the Kremlin to cut off the vital flow of Persian Gulf oil to the West.

4. SAUDI ARABIA

Unlike Afghanistan (which has always been far from the center of American foreign policy considerations) and Iran (whose independence and cooperation with the West have been of importance, but are not vital to the United States), Saudi Arabia currently occupies a critical position in this country's strategic plans. Without continued access to the vast Saudi oil reserves, both NATO and Japan, the two pillars of postwar American foreign policy, would suffer severe economic and political shock. This would almost certainly adversely affect their close association with the United States. Even if this country could survive in a "Fortress America"-type isolation, the effect upon our way of life would be profound. Thus preservation of Western access to Saudi oil stands out as a prime US objective.

The Soviet Union, by comparison, has no vital interests at stake in Saudi Arabia, which is geographically remote from Moscow. Further, its traditionalist society and virtually feudal way of life for the vast majority of the population indicate that, if the laws of Marxist development are to be believed, the communist revolution will come to Saudi Arabia long after it has occurred in most other countries. Most of Saudi Arabia is covered by inhospitable desert. And oil, its one important raw material, is a glut on the world market, and plentiful in the Soviet Union until recent years. Therefore, it is understandable that Moscow for many years paid scant heed to developments in Saudi Arabia. While Afghanistan and Iran were considered prime areas for expansion under the Tsars, and even Thailand and Ethiopia the objects of passing interests, the region that today comprises Saudi Arabia was ignored by Imperial Russia.

Following the establishment of the Soviet regime in 1917, the Arabian Peninsula continued to be regarded as an area of scant importance by Moscow. Such attention as the Kremlin accorded Saudi Arabia took the form of friendly overtures toward the monarchy. Since there was no local group capable of launching a Marxist revolution in the country, the Soviets limited themselves to stimulating

Saudi nationalism in the hope that it would redound to the detriment of Great Britain, the Western nation then the most active in countering Russian expansionism.¹⁰

This Soviet policy toward Saudi Arabia continued unaltered throughout the 1930s and 1940s, and even survived the postwar emergence of the Soviet Union as one of the two remaining world powers. Moscow's enhanced military potential and the decline of Great Britain, its once formidable rival for power in central Asia, stimulated increased Soviet initiatives in Iran, Egypt, Syria, and elsewhere in the Middle East. Even so, the Kremlin remained inert with regard to Saudi Arabia, partly because of that nation's remote location and the feudal nature of its society. However, such conditions also applied to Yemen, with which Moscow entered into an arms-supply agreement in the early 1950s. Quite possibly, the simple explanation is that the Soviet leadership simply saw no potential rival group which could be supported to create difficulties for the US-backed Saudi Government.

By the early 1960s, the remoteness from the Soviet Union, which had heretofore protected Saudi Arabia, was increasingly overcome by Moscow's new capabilities to project its influence far afield. This led to a situation which was interesting primarily as a comparison of how little importance Moscow then gave to Saudi Arabia until it finally saw a need for Saudi oil reserves. In February 1963, the Yemeni Monarchy was overthrown and replaced by a revolutionary regime, which became involved in a bitter civil war with Royalist elements backed by Saudi Arabia. Then Soviet leader Nikita Khrushchev jeopardized whatever good will Moscow might have built up in Saudi Arabia by its noninvolvement in Saudi affairs when he pledged support for the Yemeni regime. This opportunity for Moscow to affect developments on the Arabian Peninsula proved abortive, as the Arab nations were able to arrange a negotiated settlement of the Yemeni civil war. Khrushchev's replacement as Soviet leader by Leonid Brezhnev in October 1964 saw the Kremlin temporarily modify its policies in the Middle East to reflect its then limited power-projection capabilities.

Khrushchev's interest in Yemen, however, was a true harbinger of Soviet intentions toward the Persian Gulf. Moscow resumed its previous public position of cordiality to the Saudi regime, and indicated its interest in establishing diplomatic relations with Riyadh,

which the Saudis consistently refused. Further, the dependence of the West upon the oil reserves of the Middle East, demonstrated by the 1973 Arab oil embargo, greatly increased Soviet interest in Saudi Arabia. The first essential step for Moscow—creation of a dependable apparatus for influencing developments in Saudi Arabia—took place in October 1975 when Saudi exiles in Iraq organized a Saudi Communist Party.

The fall of the Iranian monarchy, and the resultant instability in the Persian Gulf, indicated to the Soviets that the pro-Western government of Saudi Arabia might also be toppled. The Soviets feared a movement of American military forces in the Persian Gulf to protect Western access to that area's vital oil supplies. Of the two factors, American military intervention was by far the more important to the Kremlin. The Soviets were prepared to wait indefinitely for a communist revolution in Saudi Arabia, confident that it would eventually occur. But the deployment of US combat forces to the Indian Ocean, and the implementation of preparations to deploy them to the Persian Gulf if necessary, escalated the always close-to-the-surface Soviet fear. To the Soviets, these moves constituted a serious threat to the security of the Russian homeland, notwithstanding the fact that Moscow had itself prompted them by its invasion of Afghanistan. As part of their effort to counter the new American policies, the Soviets pressured Saudi Arabia to avoid cooperation with the United States in this area.

The Soviet diplomatic initiative against Washington was launched in December 1980, during Leonid Brezhnev's state visit to India. In a speech to the Indian Parliament, widely publicized by Moscow, the Soviet leader warned that the United States was dangerously escalating tension in the Persian Gulf and Indian Ocean by deploying a fleet there, and by attempting to establish a network of military bases. Asserting that this country was attempting to justify the moves by pointing to an alleged Soviet threat to the Middle East oil reserves, Brezhnev declared that his country did not intend to encroach upon either the oil reserves or the associated supply routes. To ease the situation, he proposed that the United States, the other Western powers, Japan, China, the Soviet Union, and any other interested nations make a joint pledge. Brezhnev asked them to promise: 1) not to establish military bases in the Persian Gulf and adjacent islands; 2) not to deploy nuclear weapons there; 3) not to use or threaten use of force against nations in the area; and, 4) to respect the rights of the nations in the region to their own natural resources.

The propaganda campaign the Soviet Union mounted on behalf of the speech indicated that Moscow regarded it as an important statement of national policy. The contents probably were influenced by a desire to win Indian support for Soviet foreign policy, and to convince "doves" within the Kremlin that the United States was not interested in an improvement of relations with the Soviet Union. However, the Soviet leadership may well have hoped that Brezhnev's assurances would persuade this country to refrain from further military moves to improve the American military capabilities in the Persian Gulf.

In any event, the speech was followed by warnings to the Saudi Government. On 23 December 1980, Moscow radio reported that the Saudi Cabinet had studied the Brezhnev proposals and expressed regret that Riyadh had failed to give a positive response. Subsequently, the Soviet party newspaper, *Pravda*, noted on 19 January 1981, that the United States offered aid to Saudi Arabia, Bahrein, Kuwait, and the United Arab Emirates in return for the opportunity to establish naval and air bases, and to deploy American assault forces there; *Pravda* pointed out that only Saudi Arabia had given permission for United States AWACS (airborne warning and control system) aircraft to be deployed on its territory. The *Pravda* article concluded that the Saudi Government had decided to "gamble" on cooperation with America. While the primary thrust of Soviet propaganda was the alleged danger to the Middle Eastern nations resulting from US deployments in the area, Moscow did not conceal its own security concerns. In an *Izvestiya* article on 21 December 1980, Moscow displayed concern over the "dangerous interventionist plans" being played out "in a region close to its border."

Although the increased Soviet interest in Saudi Arabia is primarily a reflection of its overriding concern for the security of the Russian homeland, there is no doubt that Moscow is well aware of the importance of the Saudi oil reserves. Clearly, the Soviets see Saudi Arabia as more than a chance to promote the coming to power of a communist regime; more importantly, the Soviets perceive in Saudi Arabia an opportunity to outflank and neutralize NATO by seizing control of its major source of petroleum. As important as this aim is to Moscow, it is far less important than protection of the Soviet state. Unless and until the Soviet leaders come to regard control of the Saudi oil reserves as essential to preserve the continuation of a communist regime in the Soviet Union, it will continue to give lower priori-

ty to expanding its influence in Saudi Arabia than to preventing the emergence of a security problem in Iran or Afghanistan. This is fortunate for the United States since, as noted earlier, the American interests in Saudi Arabia are far greater than in either of the other two nations. This fact is also recognized by Moscow. Consequently, the United States has a far better chance of countering Soviet intentions in Saudi Arabia than elsewhere in the Middle East.

5. ISRAEL

If Saudi Arabia occupies a vital position in American Middle Eastern policy because of its oil reserves, Israel's independence and security were in the past even more important to the United States. Many Americans felt responsibility for the death of millions of European Jews during World War II, and were sympathetic toward Israel because of its democratic and generally pro-American orientation. This sentiment was encouraged by a powerful lobby in this country, which was normally successful in assuring a wide range of American support for Israel.

In contrast to the United States, the Soviet Union attached no great importance to the creation of Israel as a nation, nor to assuring its existence. To be sure, when Israeli independence was proclaimed in May 1948, the Soviet Union was the first nation to grant it full diplomatic recognition distinct from the de facto recognition extended by the United States some 3 days earlier. This early gesture of Soviet support was not genuinely reflective of its good will; rather, the Kremlin desired to see any remaining British claim to retain troops in Palestine removed. The Soviets further hoped that their support would incline Zionist elements in the United States and elsewhere to look favorably upon the Soviet Union. They also calculated that the Arab nations then possessed no real power on the world stage.

Israel initially attempted to pursue a policy of neutrality between the West and the Soviet bloc. However, any semblance of warm relations between the Jewish state and Moscow evaporated in the wake of the trial and conviction of a group of Soviet Jewish doctors for alleged crimes against the state in 1953. Moscow also realized it would gain greater diplomatic advantage from backing the Arab states than Israel in the lingering dispute over the Palestinian refugees. By December 1955, Soviet leader Nikita Khrushchev had fully aligned Moscow behind the Arab states, assailing Israel as an "imperialist tool" used by the West to exploit other Middle Eastern nations.¹¹

This Soviet attitude of hostility toward Israel has continued unabated until the present, and is intensified by the increased priority Moscow has accorded the Arab states because of their petroleum resources. Indeed, the Soviets have probably never ceased congratulating themselves at having disengaged from their initial support of Israel so early, and they most likely remain bewildered by continued US backing of Israel despite the adverse affects it has upon the other Middle East and Muslim nations. Unencumbered by any great interest in securing Israeli good will, the Soviet Union has had the ability to support fully the Arab position on the Palestinian dispute, and has won some credit among the Arab states by this performance. To this end, Kremlin propaganda has most recently devoted considerable attention to the Camp David accords. Attacking the accords as "dead," Moscow reiterated Soviet support for the complete evacuation by Israel of the Arab lands occupied in the 1967 war, and for the creation of an independent Palestinian state.

Israel and settlement of the Palestine question occupy a prominent place in Moscow's public statements. However, this should not obscure the reality that this area is of little importance to the Soviets compared to Afghanistan and Iran, or even to the oil-producing nations along the Persian Gulf. Aside from serving as an issue upon which to earn credit among the Arabs, the Arab-Israeli dispute is of concern to the Soviets primarily because of their resentment at being excluded from the American-Egyptian-Israeli peace negotiations. Secondary considerations include Moscow's claim to act as protector of Russian Orthodox Church properties in Israel, and its concern over the defeats imposed by Israel over the Soviet-equipped military forces of Egypt and Syria. Finally, the Soviet leadership has inherited the same suspicion of the loyalty of its Jewish population as was shared by the Tsars. It views Israel as an unwelcome sponsor of Zionist sentiment, adversely affecting Russian internal security.

The existence of these factors, and the significance Israel has assumed in US policy formulation, have tended to create the impression in this country that Israel is really of importance to the Soviet Union. In fact, the absence of any direct linkage between the Jewish state and Soviet security suggest that this is far from the case, and that Moscow would be quick to alter its policy regarding Israel to gain advantages in higher priority areas. Again, the support from Arab states won by the Soviet Union because of its anti-Israel stance has proven in most cases to be paper-thin and short-lived. Thus the So-

viet Union is unlikely to be able to play a significant role in settlement of the Arab-Israeli dispute, and the attention directed by Washington to influencing Kremlin policy in this regard is probably misplaced.

6. EGYPT

Unlike Israel, which has been the object of Soviet attack and derision for almost 30 years, Egypt was for a long time the linchpin of the Kremlin's policy toward the Middle East. This was not the result of any long-range Soviet planning; rather, it was a fortunate turn of events which elevated Egypt to a key role in Moscow's eyes. In September 1955, Egyptian President Gamal Abdel Nasser decided to enter into an agreement accepting arms from the Soviet Union, Czechoslovakia, and Poland. Soviet ties with Nasser were solidified in October 1956. This coincided with the Eisenhower administration's opposition to the Anglo-French-Israeli effort to overthrow Nasser and reoccupy the Suez Canal zone. On 5 November 1956, confident that the United States would not intervene to protect the Western powers, the Soviet Union demanded the immediate cessation of the invasion of Egypt, and threatened to use force to restore peace in the Middle East.

Even if the United States had stood by and allowed a direct Soviet-Anglo-French clash to occur, it is unlikely that Moscow would have committed more than a limited number of "volunteers" to the conflict. Nonetheless, the stance adopted by Washington during the Suez crisis whetted the Soviet appetite for further involvement in the Middle East. Playing upon Nasser's ambition to act as leader of the Arab nations and the Third World, Moscow encouraged and aided him to stimulate the spread of nationalist and anti-Western feeling in the Middle East, which would force a reduction of Western influence in the area. Over the 20-year period ending in 1974, the Soviets furnished Egypt with some \$4 billion in military aid as well as significant diplomatic support, particularly during their 1967 war with Israel.¹²

Following Nasser's sudden death in September 1970, Moscow attempted to continue the close working relationship with his successor, Anwar Sadat. In May 1971, the two nations signed a 15-year treaty of friendship and cooperation in which the signatories agreed

to cooperate to strengthen militarily the United Arab Republic, as Egypt was then officially called, and to act in concert to meet any threat to peace. This was the first such treaty concluded by the Soviet Union in the area since the start of World War II, and it was widely regarded as representing a significant accomplishment by the Kremlin in strengthening its presence in the Middle East.

Although Moscow furnished Egypt with significant arms aid before and after the attack on Israel in 1973, and was largely responsible for the diplomatic gains achieved by Cairo, the Soviet policy of supporting Egypt ultimately ended in failure. Sadat decided in 1974 to separate himself from Moscow and to cooperate with the United States to obtain an Israeli withdrawal from the Sinai. Sadat's actions forced upon the Kremlin the most humiliating diplomatic reverse it had suffered since the Soviet withdrawal from northern Iran in 1946. Not only were Soviet rights to utilize Egyptian naval facilities ended, but in 1976 Sadat formally abrogated the 1971 friendship treaty. Even then, the end of the deterioration in Soviet-Egyptian relations was not yet in sight, and continues up to the present day. By 1980, Sadat had offered the United States the use of Egyptian military facilities to help counter Soviet expansion in the Middle East. In response, Moscow was repeatedly directing propaganda broadsides against Cairo for allegedly cooperating with the United States and Israel to sell out Arab interests in Palestine.

A close look at the emergence of the Soviet-Egyptian split indicates that the Soviets themselves precipitated it by their failure to give Sadat the full backing he sought to defeat Israel militarily. Although the break with Moscow was not finalized until 1974, it was definitely foreshadowed by Sadat's July 1972 announcement. Sadat ordered the departure from Egypt of the Soviet military advisers then in the country (whose number he gave as 15,000); he also placed under full Egyptian control all Soviet military installations and equipment in the country. Sadat indicated that the reason for his decision was Moscow's refusal to permit Cairo to employ the Soviet equipment and personnel in a major move to crush Israel.

Although the Egyptian President's anger was understandable, so too was Moscow's caution. Despite the value the Soviets placed upon their cooperation with Nasser, they still viewed him as a nationalist rather than as a Marxist leader, more like the King of Saudi Arabia than an East European communist state leader. Thus the risks

that would be accepted to support Egypt were severely limited. The Soviets certainly would not risk the chance of a confrontation with the United States by becoming too closely linked to a Egyptian attack against an American-supported Israel. Moscow was even less willing to back the more conservative Sadat against the Jewish state. Again, evidence that the Soviet leaders regarded Egypt as basically no different from the other Middle East nations was revealed by the nature of the agreement Moscow concluded with Iraq in April 1972. Virtually identical to the treaty of friendship and cooperation signed with Egypt the previous year, the agreement with the nationalist, but not communist, Iraqi regime was clear proof that the treaty with Egypt was not the unprecedented development it had first appeared to be.

Today, the Kremlin continues to look back with nostalgia to the period of its close ties with Cairo, and probably now places a higher priority upon regaining the ground lost in Egypt than securing a similar foothold elsewhere in the Middle East. (The assassination of Sadat in October 1981 raised Moscow's hopes in this regard.) Not only is Egypt strategically located in relation to the Suez Canal, North Africa, and Saudi Arabia, but the Soviets would not be human if they did not wish to remove the stain on their record caused by the forced evacuation from Egypt in 1972. Again, the establishment of a friendly regime in Cairo would prevent the United States from enjoying, as it has since 1974, the fruits of cooperation with a sympathetic government in Cairo. Apart from these considerations, Soviet intentions with regard to Egypt are basically the same as those with respect to Iraq, Syria, and the non-oil-producing nations of the region.

7. IRAQ

The Kremlin's treaty of friendship and cooperation with Iraq in April 1972 reflected the gradual replacement of Egypt by Iraq as Moscow's principal client-state in the Middle East. The Soviets almost certainly did not intend this result, preferring to maintain close ties with both nations. Nonetheless, the Soviet leaders could not have helped concluding that, of the two, Iraq was potentially more important. Although its population of about 12 million was less than a third of Egypt's, Iraq shared few of the horrendous economic problems facing the Egyptian economy. As a major oil producer, Iraq's position as fourth highest among the OPEC (Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries) nations became even more significant to Moscow as the world petroleum crisis developed in the 1970s. However, Iraq was of greater importance to the Soviet Union than Egypt because of its strategic geographic location. Iraq is only about 200 miles from the Soviet Union's southern frontiers, and it also borders Iran and Saudi Arabia. The Soviets reasoned that whereas ties with Egypt could drag Moscow into an unwelcome confrontation with the United States over Israel, Iraq is geographically farther removed from that area of conflict.

Ironically, not too many years earlier Iraq had been a bastion of Western influence in the Middle East. It had close ties with Great Britain and served as the driving force behind the unsuccessful Baghdad Pact alliance, which was established in 1954 by Iraq, Iran, Turkey, Pakistan, and Great Britain to oppose Soviet expansion in the area. However, the leftist-nationalist-led coup which overthrew the Iraqi monarchy in 1958 had radically altered the orientation of the Iraqi Government. And by 1972, the Baathist Socialist regime in power in Baghdad was happy to accept Moscow's offers of economic and military assistance.

As had been the case in its support for Egypt, Soviet cooperation with Iraq represented nothing so much as Moscow's pragmatism

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in using the rising tide of nationalist sentiment in the Third World to weaken the influence of the United States and other Western powers. Despite its socialist bent, the Baathist regime in Baghdad was no more a communist-type government than Egypt's had been, and at various times it even suppressed the Iraqi Communist Party. By March 1978, the Soviet-Iraqi honeymoon came to an end as the Baathists moved to crush the Iraqi Communist Party in reaction to an apparent effort by the latter to eventually assume power. Subsequently, in January 1980, Iraq joined with the more conservative Muslim states in attacking the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan, describing it publicly as neither "justified nor excused."

The Kremlin, for its part, was not eager to have to write off the investment it had made in Iraq, nor to suffer the same sort of humiliating reversal it had incurred in Egypt. Neither, however, was it prepared to make any concessions with regard to Afghanistan, which would constitute an even more galling admission of failure. Accordingly, Moscow once again shifted the locus of its support in the Middle East, this time to Syria, concluding a 20-year treaty of friendship and cooperation with that country in October 1980. The wording of the pact was virtually identical to that of the previous agreements with Egypt and Iraq. The only significant departure was the great propaganda buildup given by the Soviets to the Syrian President's visit to Moscow for the occasion. This was probably an attempt to convince cynics in the Russian capital that the exchange of Middle East client-states was a diplomatic success rather than the reverse.

At the same time, the Soviets did what they could to prevent relations with Iraq from deteriorating to the extent that they had with Egypt. Moscow was well aware of the poor relations existing between the Iraqi Government and the rival Baathist regime in Syria. Any agreement between Moscow and Syria would be regarded as an insult by Iraq. But having decided upon the move, the Soviets did what they could to minimize the likely Iraqi reaction. When the Iraqi-Iranian conflict erupted in September 1980, Moscow publicly assumed a posture of neutrality between the two combatants, calling for a speedy settlement, and blaming the United States for provoking the war.

A closer look at the Soviet position, however, suggests that Moscow recognized the small possibility that it could retain a semblance of its former position in Iraq, and if forced to choose, was pre-

pared to sacrifice this. As the Soviets were the principal arms supplier to Iraq, their refusal to provide arms to either party obviously had a far greater impact upon Baghdad than upon Tehran. The extent to which Moscow has actually reduced or terminated arms supplies to Iraq is unclear, although the Iranian Ambassador to Moscow claimed in September 1980 that he had obtained such assurances. Certainly, Syria and two other Muslim states with close ties to the Soviet Union—Libya and the People's Democratic Republic of Yemen—are supporting Iran in the war. However, Egypt, currently Moscow's *bete noire* in the Middle East, is championing Iraq's cause. Again, while the Soviets have not actually publicly endorsed the Iranian position, they have come close, voicing their sympathy for Tehran's stand on the hostage issue and implying that the United States encouraged the Iraqi attack upon Iran.

For the future, Moscow would clearly like to restore its former close cooperation with Iraq. But, as will be discussed subsequently, Soviet relations with Iraq will be shaped by the nature of its ties with Iran and Syria.

8. SYRIA

When the Soviet Union and Syria signed their 20-year treaty of friendship and cooperation in October 1980, it came as no surprise. Moscow had for many years devoted considerable attention and resources to establishing a position of influence in that country. As early as the summer of 1957, the Soviets mounted a propaganda campaign charging that the United States and Turkey were preparing to invade Syria. They pledged to provide Russian military forces to help punish any Turkish aggression against that country. This was almost certainly an empty threat, but helped the Soviet Union gain enough favor in Damascus to negotiate a treaty of economic cooperation with Syria in October 1957, which included a provision for economic assistance.

In July 1958, America responded forcefully to the Iraqi coup by sending troops to Lebanon to help protect the Lebanese Government against civil war. This caused Moscow to adopt a more cautious attitude toward Syria and toward the Middle East in general. Nonetheless, Syria was always among the most receptive to Soviet overtures of any Arab nation in the region. In part, this was because of the typically poor relations between Damascus and Egypt, Iraq, and its other neighbors. Also, because of its weak economy, Syria saw the Soviet Union as a valuable source of economic and military assistance.

To their joy, the Syrians found Moscow equally interested in establishing close cooperation. Despite that nation's relatively small population, weak economy, and unstable government, the Soviets looked upon Syria as providing a handy alternative to whatever other nation they might be courting in the Middle East at the time. If Damascus and Israel were to clash militarily, Syria's limited arms capability would most certainly spell defeat for that country. Aware of this lack of strength, the Soviets took solace in the fact that Syria was far more resistant than Egypt to overtures from the United States for a compromise settlement with Israel. As Sadat moved in-

creasingly to align himself with the United States, so too did Moscow and Damascus find added incentive to cooperate against their joint enemies in Cairo and Washington.

The March 1979 conclusion of the Egyptian-Israeli Peace Treaty, with active American support, resulted in a further strengthening of Syria's ties with the Soviet Union. Syrian military delegations shuttled more and more frequently to Moscow to obtain fresh promises of arms deliveries, often achieving their objective. Naturally, when most Muslim countries joined in condemning the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan, Syria banded with Libya and South Yemen, Moscow's other Middle Eastern client-states, to defend the Soviet move. In January 1980, at the height of the world campaign criticizing the invasion, Soviet Foreign Minister Andrei Gromyko was warmly received in a state visit to Syria. The culmination of this courtship came in October 1980, when Syrian President Hafiz al-Asad journeyed to Moscow to sign the treaty of friendship with the Soviet Union. He declared during the attendant ceremonies that the pact represented a qualitative change in Syrian-Soviet ties and provided a "framework for special relations" between the two countries.

This new agreement was virtually identical with the previous Soviet pacts with Egypt and Iraq, and probably represented no more of a permanent foundation for prolonged bilateral cooperation between these signatories than the other two pacts did. Syrian President al-Asad, despite his current stance of cooperation with Moscow, is no more of a loyal Marxist than was Nasser, Sadat, or Iraqi President Hassan. Should Syrian national interests at any time diverge from those of Moscow, al-Asad would be as quick to ignore Soviet advice as he was when he sent his forces into Lebanon in June 1976 to maintain a semblance of order there.

This fact, of course, is equally obvious to the Soviet Union. Even during the Syrian President's visit to Moscow to sign the treaty, Soviet propaganda made it clear that the pact was a starting point and not the final stage of Soviet-Syrian cooperation. The Syrian Communist Party is aligned with the ruling Arab Socialist Renaissance Party in the country's National Progressive Front. However, it maintains a separate existence, and quite obviously remains Moscow's principal vehicle for assuring eventual Soviet control over Syria. The Kremlin no doubt does not expect the Syrian Communist Party to attain power for many years to come, and probably would not be surprised if

Damascus at some point should depart from its cooperation with the Soviets, as did Egypt and Iraq. For as long as Cairo and Baghdad remain hostile to the Soviets, Moscow will seek to maintain its ties with Syria. But, should the opportunity arise to resume the previous close cooperation with either of those countries, or should Syria appear to be about to drag Moscow into a confrontation with the United States over Israel, the Soviets would readily sacrifice their present relationship with Damascus, the treaty of friendship notwithstanding.

9. SOUTH YEMEN

Compared to the other Middle East nations with which Moscow has to deal, the People's Democratic Republic of Yemen is an exception. Located over 2,000 miles from the nearest Soviet territory, the tiny former British colony and protectorate of Aden has a population of less than 2 million. South Yemen has become the closest thing to a Soviet satellite that exists outside of Eastern Europe. This development was not a result of Kremlin policy, but came about through a combination of circumstances over which it had little or no control.

Under British rule, Aden City developed an environment rare in the Middle East—a modern urban setting. The educational system spawned a hoard of Marxist teachers, many of whom saw Soviet communism as the answer to their hopes for national development. The British authorities did not employ the ruthless measures to suppress these teachers that more traditionalist regimes in the area might have done. Rather, they concentrated their efforts upon combating a rival nationalist group which was encouraging terrorist activity against the British with the support of Egyptian President Nasser. As a result, when London finally tired of the struggle and withdrew its troops in 1967, the Marxist-led National Liberation Front overcame the Egyptian-backed nationalists and seized power.

In June 1969 a power struggle between moderate and extremist factions of the South Yemeni Government was decided in favor of the extremists. The victors began implementation of a program designed to turn South Yemen into a Soviet-like state. Aden's foreign policy generally coincided with that of the communist nations. Internally, measures were taken against foreign-run and private enterprises. In addition, relations with bordering Arab nations deteriorated to the extent that hostilities occurred at various times with all three of its neighbors—North Yemen, Saudi Arabia, and Oman.

An important step in the establishment of closer ties between South Yemen and the Soviet Union occurred in October 1979. The

President and General Secretary of the Yemeni Socialist Party, Abd al-Fattah Isma'il, traveled to Moscow at the invitation of the Soviet Communist Party Central Committee. In Moscow, Isma'il, the most pro-Soviet of any of the South Yemeni leaders, signed a 20-year treaty of friendship and cooperation similar to that which the Kremlin had concluded with Egypt, Iraq, and Syria. The Soviet treatment of the event, however, indicated that they regarded the Yemeni President as more of a loyal Marxist than Nasser, or any of the other essentially nationalist Arab figures with whom Moscow had done business in the past. Soviet Party leader Brezhnev presented Isma'il with the Friendship of the People's Order. Also, South Yemen was invited to participate in the Socialist Bloc Council for Mutual Economic Assistance (CEMA) in an observer status. And in July 1980, experts from the Soviet State Planning Committee (GOSPLAN) were sent to Aden to assist in drafting the 5-year Yemeni Economic Development Plan.

In the military sphere, Moscow expanded its presence in South Yemen. Yemeni officers were sent to the Soviet Union for training. A political department to watch over the reliability of the personnel was established in the Yemeni forces along the lines of the Soviet model, and an undetermined number of Soviet advisers and military supplies were sent to South Yemen. According to a Kuwaiti press report, "diplomatic sources" in October 1979 estimated the number of Soviet and Cuban military personnel in South Yemen at 9,000, and expected that level to rise to 15,000 by the end of the year.¹³

The evolution of South Yemen into a full-fledged Soviet satellite was temporarily interrupted in April 1980. Isma'il was suddenly replaced as President and Secretary General of the Yemeni Socialist Party by Prime Minister Ali Nasser Mohammed, who had previously been one of his closest collaborators. The official explanation for the change—Isma'il's alleged ill health—seemed unlikely in view of the fact that he had no known medical problems. He had been actively involved in state matters up to the moment of his resignation, which was accepted at a night meeting of the Party Central Committee.

One of the reasons most frequently given outside of Yemen for Isma'il's ouster was that he was too closely linked to Moscow, and as a result had unnecessarily strained his nation's relations with neighboring Arab states.¹⁴ At least circumstantial support for this explanation was afforded by the cautious public position the Soviets initially

gave to the shift. Also, Nasser Mohammed had been in the forefront of Yemeni efforts to establish friendly relations with North Yemen and Saudi Arabia prior to his elevation.

Whatever the circumstances, the new South Yemeni leader moved quickly to reassure the Soviet Union that his nation's orientation toward Moscow would not be altered. The Kremlin in turn was only too happy to accept Nasser Mohammed's professions of friendship, being unwilling to suffer a reverse in Yemen similar to that which had occurred in Egypt and Somalia. In point of fact, the radically nationalist regime in Aden shared a view of the world nearly identical to that of the Soviet leadership. In May 1980, during a state visit to the Soviet Union where he was lionized by Brezhnev and other Soviet officials, President Nasser Mohammed publicly supported the Soviet position on Afghanistan. He also hailed the Warsaw Pact, denounced the Camp David accords, and blasted American efforts to secure facilities in the Persian Gulf. In return, Moscow continued the economic and military assistance to South Yemen.

As a result of South Yemen's acceptance of the Soviet line in international affairs, the Soviets have been given a potentially important base for expanding their influence in the Middle East. Utilizing facilities in South Yemen, the Soviets are greatly aided in supporting the Mengistu Government in Ethiopia, and in pressuring the now hostile Somali regime. Even more important, South Yemen provides a valuable vehicle for operations against the neighboring nations on the Arabian Peninsula—North Yemen, Saudi Arabia, and Oman. Oman is a key object of Soviet ambitions because of its willingness to provide facilities to the United States. Saudi Arabia, more important by far because of its petroleum, is nonetheless probably insulated from immediate moves out of South Yemen because of the vast desert areas between that nation and the Saudi oil fields.

The advantages to Moscow with its position in South Yemen naturally give rise to the question of the extent the Soviets would incur risks to preserve it. As previously noted, the Soviets tamely accepted their walking papers from Egypt and Somalia, and withdrew their forces from those countries. Neither country, however, was "communist." Under the "Brezhnev Doctrine," promulgated by the Soviet leader to explain and justify the Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia in 1968, Moscow will not stand by and see a communist government overthrown. While South Yemen is obviously not seen by the Soviets

as important to their security as the East European satellites, Moscow's propaganda coverage of its relations with Aden would provide justification for a recourse to military means to protect that regime. Brezhnev's rhetoric aside, however, the Kremlin did not intervene to prevent the ouster of the Marxist government of Salvador Allende in Chile, and is similarly unlikely to do so in the case of South Yemen. Thus, as will be discussed in chapter 10, Moscow's intentions with regard to South Yemen are probably of the same limited order as they are concerning Syria and Iraq.

10. SOVIET INTENTIONS

OPPORTUNITIES FOR SOVIET MOVES

A quick review of the options open to the Soviet Union in the Middle East would suggest that Moscow must be pleased with the situation there. Great Britain, which for centuries opposed the spread of Russian influence, has long since withdrawn its forces and left the game. Iran was selected by the United States after the British departure to act as its surrogate in defending Western interests in the Persian Gulf. However, Iran has now descended into virtual anarchy and chaos, with the pro-American Shah replaced by a fanatically nationalist and anti-Western traditionalist regime.

If the Ayatollah Khomeini is as quick to castigate the Soviet Union as the United States, Moscow can take comfort in knowing that Iran's former close military ties with Washington are gone. The Iranian armed forces are incapable of assuring internal order in the country, let alone protecting it from foreign foes; the Tehran Government opposes American policy throughout the Middle East; and the Communist Tudeh Party is preparing for the day when it can attain power in Iran. Even should Khomeini or his successors seek to reverse the current anti-Western stance, and restore to some measure the former close ties with the United States, the newly invigorated separatist movements would give Moscow ready means to oppose and overthrow any Iranian central government it found unacceptable.

Elsewhere along the southern Soviet frontier, the Kremlin has successfully overthrown the independent Afghan regime of Hafizullah Amin, and replaced it with the puppet government of Babrak Karmal. This has not been a total success. Moscow obviously feels itself bogged down in Afghanistan and would like to evacuate at least some of the 90,000 troops it has been forced to deploy to that country to maintain Babrak in power. Nonetheless, the Soviets regard the present status of Afghanistan as preferable to the situa-

tion prior to their invasion, when anticommunist elements controlled large sections of the country and great potential existed for the creation of an anti-Soviet government in Kabul.

Further afield in the Middle East, the Kremlin can find other reasons for satisfaction. Saudi Arabia is the other local nation the United States hoped to use as a surrogate for defending the Persian Gulf. However, the Saudis have become increasingly unwilling to adopt a public stance of cooperating with the United States because of doubts over Washington's resolve. The Saudis have given the United States a measure of assistance in the wake of Afghanistan, but still insist that America defend the Persian Gulf from "over the horizon" rather than from Saudi bases. Riyadh is currently the object of a Soviet propaganda campaign to avoid aiding American defense efforts. However, there is little doubt that Moscow would enter into diplomatic relations with the Saudis, and furnish them with assistance and protection, if needed, to move that nation into a more nationalist and anti-Western stance.

Moreover, Moscow is almost certainly working with the Saudi Communist Party to build an apparatus for an eventual communist takeover of that country. Again, even without the existence of a large communist party, the Soviets see the forces of change in Saudi Arabia as working in their direction. The overthrow of the present moderate Saudi leadership, and its replacement by either a more traditionalist regime or by a nationalist government such as rules Libya, would be almost equally favorable for Moscow. This change would bring with it a reduction of the flow of vitally-needed Saudi petroleum to the West. The seizure of the Great Mosque in Mecca in November 1979 by Muslim extremists was a signal to the Soviets that the Saudi Government's internal security control was not as tight as had previously been thought.

Nor is the list of Kremlin opportunities in the Middle East confined to Iran, Afghanistan, and Saudi Arabia. Syria and South Yemen are both linked to Moscow by treaties of friendship and cooperation and have pledged to coordinate with the Soviets before reacting to military threats. Neither is a totally satisfactory client-state. Syria is too closely involved in the Arab-Israeli dispute, and too inclined to ignore Moscow's advice in conducting its foreign relations. South Yemen, far more loyal, is too small, too weak, and too distant from the Soviet homeland to be supported by Moscow if its government

becomes the object of significant pressure, either domestic or foreign. Nonetheless, for as long as they are available, Syria and South Yemen are useful vehicles for the expansion of Soviet influence in the Middle East.

CONSTRAINTS ON SOVIET MOVES

A listing of the opportunities open to the Kremlin in the area, however, is not the full story. As eager as Moscow is to expand its influence any place on the globe, and particularly in the strategically significant Middle East, it is constrained by conditions elsewhere. Because of the great priority they accord to protecting the Russian homeland from attack, the Soviet leaders are not about to undertake any expansionist move which could result in a confrontation with the United States and the associated risk of a nuclear war.

Moreover, the always extreme Russian caution has been reinforced by what they see as the shift by this country to a more militant and threatening stance. This shift was demonstrated by several events: 1) the American reaction to the invasion of Afghanistan; 2) the creation of the Rapid Deployment Force; 3) President Carter's inclusion of the Persian Gulf in the zone of American vital interests; 4) the further increase in Sino-American strategic cooperation; and, 5) the election of President Reagan and his call for an intensified defense effort. These have all led the Soviets to examine carefully their own and the recent US actions, and to try to do what they can to reduce the risks of war or even of a return to the cold war.

This is not to suggest that Moscow will drastically alter its traditional policies and goals in the Middle East. Rather, just as it sought to exploit what it perceived as weaknesses in American policy by establishing a presence in Angola, Ethiopia, and South Yemen when the opportunity offered, Moscow will now be more cautious in the face of what it regards as greater American militancy and proclivity for risk-taking. Moreover, since the threat of a nuclear war with the United States is their greatest fear, the Soviets are likely to offer concessions in the Middle East to dispel the American sense of alarm, and to increase the likelihood that the Reagan administration's drive for an expanded defense effort will be abortive.

The Soviet invasion of Afghanistan was the immediate stimulus for the heightened American feeling of concern; further, it brought

down upon Moscow the wrath of most Muslim nations. For these reasons, the Soviet Union will almost certainly seek to defuse world tensions by offering concessions in the Middle East. Soviet maneuverability there is limited, since the Soviets are not about to risk a return to the situation that existed before the invasion. Then, an anti-communist insurgency, supported from across the Iranian and Pakistani borders, created the strong likelihood that the central Afghan Government would be overthrown and a militant Muslim regime established. Now in relative control of the situation, the Soviets will devote their best efforts to building an effective communist puppet state in Afghanistan, including a reliable local counterinsurgency force. Moscow will increasingly call for the withdrawal of all nonlocal forces in the area, including its own troops from Afghanistan and American units from the Indian Ocean and the Persian Gulf. This would be done on the assumptions that the United States would not accept such a plan, and that as a result many Muslim nations would blame Washington for a continuation of the Soviet occupation. Ultimately, Moscow would hope that Babrak or one of his successors would establish a sufficiently strong puppet regime to allow withdrawal of all Soviet forces, while insuring that Soviet security would not be jeopardized.

With regard to Iran, Soviet efforts to adopt a conciliatory policy toward the United States are similarly constrained. As it demonstrated in Afghanistan, Moscow will not accept a chaotic situation along its border nor the establishment of a militantly anti-Soviet Muslim regime. The present Khomeini Government is probably the most the Soviets are prepared to accept, and even here Soviet toleration is tenuous. The Kremlin is likely to continue its efforts to conciliate Khomeini and his Muslim extremist supporters by offering economic assistance, by supporting him publicly against the United States, and by keeping Soviet support to the Tudeh Party covert.

Should Khomeini make the mistake of attempting to incite Muslim opposition to Moscow in Soviet Central Asia, or should further chaos develop in Iran, the Soviets almost certainly would invade that country. They would risk an anticipated American response, and count on its not leading to full-scale hostilities with the United States. Moscow would take this chance, not because it had abandoned its traditional cautious stance, but rather because the threat to Soviet security from chaos along its southern border would be deemed more serious than the likelihood of an American military response to

the invasion. Unless the United States warned that it would regard a Soviet invasion of Iran as an attack upon this country and would respond militarily, nothing would lead the Kremlin to back away from a perceived threat to its security in Iran. For this reason, Iran is probably the most dangerous area for Soviet-American relations of all the other potential world trouble spots.

Because of the special security considerations the Soviets attach to the situation in Iran and Afghanistan, any concessions they seek to make in the Middle East will be directed toward neighboring countries. In all probability, they will be linked to avowed guarantees or concessions elsewhere. These would be similar to Soviet Party Secretary Brezhnev's pledge, while in India in December 1980, to avoid any threat to the oil supply routes from the Persian Gulf and his proposal to demilitarize the Indian Ocean. These moves by Moscow to reassure and conciliate the United States will be limited, and may at times be dismissed in this country as propaganda rather than the minimal but real concessions they are.

In Syria, for example, the Soviets will continue to provide military assistance and to publicly endorse Damascus' strong opposition to the Camp David peace settlement. However, Moscow will simultaneously refrain from supplying the Syrians with weapons systems which would alter the military balance of power with Israel, and will seek to restrain Damascus from provoking hostilities with that nation. Moreover, despite the treaty with Syria, the Soviets will be prepared to reduce their ties with that country to a status of secondary importance, to conciliate the United States and avoid being drawn into a confrontation.

Moscow's relations with Iraq, Syria's neighbor and bitter foe, are currently strained by Soviet overtures to Damascus and to Tehran. Insofar as they are able, the Soviets are trying to minimize their losses with Iraq, but apparently have decided that when forced to choose, expanded relations with Iran and Syria are worth a deterioration in ties with Baghdad. Normally, at this juncture Moscow would turn to the Communist Party of Iraq, seeking to bolster it and eventually use it as the vehicle for bringing to power a more friendly regime in Baghdad. In the interests of calming American concerns, Moscow will probably seek to lessen tensions in the area by keeping clandestine its support for the Iraqi communists.

Even worse than relations with Iraq are the Soviet ties with Israel, which Moscow consistently attacks in its propaganda. The Sovi-

ets long ago decided that there was more profit to be made from wooing the Arab States, so that no modification of Soviet policy toward a more evenhanded approach to Israel is to be expected. At the same time, Israel is simply far less important to the Russians than it is to the other players in the Middle East, particularly the United States. As a result, Soviet policy toward Israel is likely to be shaped by Moscow's objectives with regard to the United States. Criticism of the Jewish State would be muted as Moscow seeks to reduce American suspicions concerning Russian initiatives in the Middle East. Should this country attempt to pressure Israel into making concessions for a Palestinian settlement, the Soviets will probably join in calling for Israeli agreement, to win approval in both Washington and the Arab capitals.

Egypt, Israel's partner in the Camp David accords, is also the target of Soviet vituperation as an alleged American puppet. Moscow's interests in Egypt were originally similar to its present interests in Iraq and Syria. Today, however, the Soviets are still particularly resentful over Egyptian President Sadat's unceremonious ouster of their personnel after they had given Egypt substantial assistance before and after the 1973 war with Israel. Sadat offered facilities to the United States in defending the Persian Gulf area from Soviet expansionism, while his successor, President Mubarak, indicated Egypt would remain the firmest American ally of all of the Middle Eastern nations. Accordingly, Moscow will be extremely reluctant to include Egypt in any relaxation of its posture in the area. Some reduction in Soviet public criticism of Cairo may be in store, but the Kremlin is likely to provide clandestine assistance to any elements in Egypt ready to lead that nation away from its present close cooperation with the United States.

Saudi Arabia, regarded as vital by the United States because of its vast oil reserves, is seen by Moscow as a prize target for the same reason. Obviously, the Soviets would like to impede the flow of Saudi petroleum to the West, and ultimately to divert it to the Soviet Bloc. But this objective is not of the same urgency as the West's necessity to defend its access. The Kremlin is well aware of this, and will seek to assure the United States that no threat to the Saudi oil supplies is intended by Moscow. Secretary Brezhnev's assurances in India will probably be repeated at length by the Soviets in their propaganda and in private meetings with Western leaders.

Nor is this pure sham on the part of Moscow. As much as the Soviets desire, and ultimately intend, to control the Saudi oil re-

serves, this control is not as immediate an objective as elimination of the perceived threat to Soviet security from unrest in Iran and Afghanistan, or from a rearmed and militant United States. Recognizing that Saudi Arabia is an immediate and vital American interest, Moscow will be willing to make concessions to the United States in this area if accompanied by an American trade-off elsewhere. It is here that this country should concentrate its efforts in order to effectively protect access to Saudi oil.

Finally, in their consideration of opportunities in the Middle East, the Soviets have available the loyal client-state of South Yemen. South Yemen does provide a handy base for launching insurgencies against its neighbors, particularly the pro-Western government of Oman. However, the Soviet's desire to ease American apprehension will probably lead it to restrain South Yemen proclivities in this regard beyond a few incursions. This would suggest to Washington that the price for Moscow's cooperation—through concessions in Afghanistan or elsewhere—would be worth paying. Again, while the Kremlin will continue to provide economic and military assistance, the price for holding South Yemen against determined opposition is simply not worth that nation's present advantage to Moscow. Under Western pressure, or should an internal coup change the present Eastern orientation, the Soviets would evacuate South Yemen with as little fuss as they did Egypt and Somalia. Given the vulnerable supply lines to Aden, South Yemen is of particular interest to the United States as a spot where Moscow can be placed under American pressure, if desired, with less risk than in other areas of greater importance to the Soviet Union.

In sum, the considerable opportunities the Soviets have for advancing their interests in the Middle East are balanced by nearly equal obstacles there and elsewhere in the world. Thus, the United States can formulate a policy for that area with some assurance of success in blocking the Soviet Union; the United States can even force a change to a more favorable situation for US objectives in the Middle East than now exists. The final chapter will describe the steps the United States can take to best thwart Moscow and advance America's vital interests in the Middle East.

11. AMERICAN OPTIONS FOR COUNTERING SOVIET MOVES

In designing an American strategy to oppose Soviet moves in the Middle East, the primary factor to address is the Kremlin's exaggerated concern for the safety and security of its homeland. What the Soviet leadership does or refrains from doing in the Middle East will depend almost exclusively upon what it envisions as the probable United States response, since above all it dreads the prospect of a nuclear war with this country.

The recent period of Soviet expansionism into Angola, Somalia, Ethiopia, South Yemen, and elsewhere was prompted by the conclusion resulting from the debacle in Vietnam. This expansionism was subsequently reinforced by the United States' lack of intervention to prevent the fall of the Shah of Iran, making it appear that America lacked the will to defend its interests in areas of the world not immediately affecting defense of US soil.

Thus, the measures taken to revitalize the US defense effort, particularly since the invasion of Afghanistan, have caused Moscow to show greater restraint in the Middle East and elsewhere. If the Reagan administration succeeds in increasing the strength and effectiveness of this nation's armed forces, the willingness of the Soviets to initiate actions detrimental to the Western position in the Middle East will be further reduced.

FORCE DEPLOYMENT OPTIONS

Even more important than an enhancement of American military capabilities in deterring hostile Soviet action, however, is convincing Moscow that if this nation's vital interests are threatened, the United States will commit to action the force it has. The organization of the Rapid Deployment Force, trained and equipped to fight in the Middle

East, is helpful, but its existence is no guarantee that it actually will be deployed there. Even more helpful is the assignment to the Indian Ocean of two Navy carrier groups, and the temporary stationing in Saudi Arabia of AWACS aircraft and American air defense experts. And, even better would be the permanent assignment of ground and air combat units to those areas where vital US interests are at stake. Just as the American forces in West Berlin serve as a tripwire to warn the Kremlin that a move against that city could not avoid initiating hostilities with the United States, so too would a small American force act in that regard in the Middle East.

Obviously, the stationing of such forces would be least effective in deterring a Soviet move in those areas where Moscow saw its own vital interests at stake, which is to say protection of the Soviet homeland. Should this country attempt to introduce major combat units into Afghanistan and Iran, for example, Moscow would fear their possible utilization against Soviet territory and conclude that the risk of reacting militarily was less than if it did not respond. Nor would it be logical for the United States to station combat forces in most parts of the Middle East, because such a course would risk repudiation by the American public. The only locations where a permanent deployment can be envisaged are in Saudi Arabia, because of the need to protect the vital oil supply, and, conceivably, in Israel. Deployment in Israel could become necessary to persuade Israel to make concessions for a Palestine settlement, which it would otherwise not accept. The only reasons to station combat units elsewhere in the Middle East would be because those areas were necessary for the defense of Saudi Arabia, and possibly because the Saudis had refused to permit the stationing of American forces on their soil.

Finally, the number of US personnel necessary to act as a tripwire would not be great. One company of infantry would be almost as much of a deterrent to the Kremlin as a division, and would be worth far more in impressing Moscow than any number of divisions in the United States.

The stationing of forces in Saudi Arabia, of course, is no answer to the major concern immediately facing the United States, which is a possible Soviet move into Iran. As discussed previously, Moscow will feel impelled to establish control over the area along its southern border should chaos occur there, or should the Ayatollah Khomeini attempt to initiate a Muslim opposition to the Soviet authorities in

central Asia. While a Soviet takeover of northern Iran would not affect American vital interests, a decision by Moscow to send its forces to the shores of the Persian Gulf would jeopardize the sea lines of communication for Saudi oil to the West, and thus would be intolerable for the United States.

OPTIONS CONCERNING IRAN

Since Iran is the one country in the Middle East where American and Soviet vital interests overlap, US recourse to military measures to counter Kremlin expansion would not be desirable. Fortunately, neither nation needs to deny to the other control over the whole of Iran. The United States could live with a Soviet takeover of the north, as the Soviets could with the presence of American forces in the south. But this would be acceptable only as long as both Washington and Moscow had some confidence that the division of Iran into respective areas of concern would be respected by the other.

While this return to a 19th-century-type diplomacy is not to be desired, it is preferable to the likely alternative of a major confrontation with the Soviet Union. Therefore, this country should pass the word to Moscow, either overtly or through appropriate diplomatic channels, that the entry by Soviet forces into the southern third of Iran would be treated by Washington as a direct attack upon the United States. Moreover, the United States would regard the area of Iran bordering the Persian Gulf as vital to the survival of the West, and would reserve the right to station forces there if necessary to protect the Gulf sea lanes. Word of this policy should also be passed to Iran, since it might strengthen that government's determination to resist a future Soviet invasion.

To make this position more palatable to Moscow, the United States should at the same time inform the Soviets that it appreciates their vital interest in preserving order in the northern third of Iran bordering their territory; and that it would not interfere if the Soviets were forced to intervene there to secure their frontier. Finally, the United States should add that the middle third of Iran would be considered a neutral area, where neither great power could send troops. And, if Moscow violated it from the north, the United States would regard it as an invitation to occupy the southern third of Iran. Moscow accepted an arrangement with the British very similar to this in World War II, and also in World War I. For this reason, Soviet acceptance

of southern Iran as falling within the American area of concern is very probable, particularly if encouraged by the stationing in Saudi Arabia, or elsewhere in the Middle East, of United States forces capable of rapid movement to Iran. As in the case of the forces proposed for deployment in Saudi Arabia, the size of the unit would be less important than the signal to the Kremlin of American determination to employ them.

OPTIONS CONCERNING AFGHANISTAN

Afghanistan, the other immediate problem-state along the southern Russian border, is similar to Iran in that Moscow regards its security as requiring the maintenance of a friendly regime in Kabul. The strong American reaction to the Soviet invasion of that country was important as a signal that we were no longer prepared to passively accept Soviet expansionism, but would act to defend our vital interests. However, Afghanistan was the wrong place for the United States to have made this point, which should have been demonstrated earlier in areas such as Angola or Cuba where the Soviets had no vital interest at stake. As in the case of Iran, Moscow views the risks of *not* acting to prevent the emergence of an unfriendly regime in Afghanistan to be greater than the risks of intervention, regardless of Washington's reaction.

This is not to say that America has no capabilities for influencing Soviet actions in Afghanistan. We should provide clandestine assistance to the Afghan Muslim insurgents, preferably indirectly, to increase the price the Kremlin must pay to keep the Babrak Government in power. At the same time, Washington should move diplomatically to achieve a settlement which would protect Moscow's vital interests, while permitting a withdrawal of Soviet forces and the establishment of a neutral Afghan Government to replace the Babrak puppet administration.

By no means is this an impossible objective. The Soviets have repeatedly indicated their reluctance to pay the high costs, diplomatically and otherwise, associated with their occupation of Afghanistan and their desire to reach a compromise solution on the problem. The settlement proposed by Moscow in its initial form is unacceptable to the West. Moscow's terms are a restatement of the plan first launched by the Babrak regime in May 1980, proposing a normalization of relations between Kabul on one hand, and Pakistan and Iran

on the other. These terms also restate the guarantee by Afghanistan's neighbors of a complete cessation of all forms of outside interference into Afghanistan's internal affairs. Upon reestablishment of peace in the country, which the communists assert would follow the removal of foreign support, Moscow would withdraw its forces.

That the Muslim insurgents received support from across the Pakistani and Iranian borders before the Soviet invasion is of course true. It is also true that Moscow had earlier intervened to assist the communists in Kabul against their opponents.¹⁵ Rather than dismiss the Soviet proposals as mere propaganda, however, the United States ought to be sensitive to the opportunities offered by the situation. There have been rare but significant cases in which Moscow withdrew its forces from areas along its periphery, and permitted the establishment of truly neutral, rather than communist, satellite governments. This occurred in Finland after the end of World War II, and in Austria after the 1955 peace treaty in which the United States, Britain, France, and the Soviet Union guaranteed Austrian independence and neutrality.

The United States, therefore, at the same time that it is furnishing aid to the Muslim insurgents to pressure Moscow toward compromise, should suggest to the Soviet Union that an Afghan settlement satisfactory to both sides is possible. If Moscow would agree to withdraw its forces and permit the creation of a neutral government in Kabul, the United States in turn would join with the Soviet Union, Iran, Pakistan, and other interested parties to publicly pledge support for an independent, nonaligned Afghanistan. While the Soviets clearly will not accept a regime in Kabul unfriendly to their interests, there is a very good possibility they would agree to a Finnish-type solution as preferable to the strain the Afghan occupation is placing on Soviet-American relations.

OPTIONS CONCERNING SOUTH YEMEN

Another area where Moscow is susceptible to American pressure is the Soviet client-state of South Yemen. As noted previously, Moscow is unlikely to use South Yemen, at present, as an advance base for the further expansion of Soviet influence in the area because of the desire to reduce American apprehension and resultant strengthening of our military capabilities. If the Soviets unexpectedly do attempt to utilize South Yemen as a base from which to sponsor

local insurgency movements against neighboring countries, the United States should respond with whatever military force is necessary to obtain a cessation. US response would include support of Yemeni exiles who had attempted to overthrow the regime in Aden, and naval and air strikes against support facilities in South Yemen. The purpose of these operations would not be to protect South Yemen's neighbors per se, but rather to signal Moscow that the spread of Soviet influence far from its territory and near to Saudi Arabia would not be tolerated.

Further, whether or not the pressure relates to Soviet actions in the Middle East, South Yemen should be regarded as providing an excellent spot for the application of pressure against Moscow. If the United States wished to deter a Soviet invasion of Poland, or signal its concern after such a move, it could more easily mount pressure against the client-state of South Yemen than against the Soviet Union in Eastern Europe. The options open to this country for action against South Yemen range from psychological pressure and propaganda to clandestine support for exiled opposition movements. Options also include full-scale land, sea, and air attacks against that country if circumstances require. These types of pressures are by no means to be entered upon lightly. However, they would be far less likely to result in a direct confrontation with Moscow than military pressure employed against Soviet allies or client-states, if such a course proves necessary.

OTHER OPTIONS

Finally, there is the case of the three other Middle Eastern countries with whom Moscow has variously been allied—Iraq, Syria, and Egypt. The Soviets have never trusted the leadership of these countries. They regard them basically as nationalist with whom cooperation may temporarily enhance Soviet objectives, but who in the long run must be supplanted by disciplined communist cadres. Moscow will continue to provide economic and military assistance to the one country it is supporting against the other, and to be extremely flexible in aiding the country that best meets existing Russian goals.

Egypt, which currently is closely aligned with the United States in opposing Moscow, may well reverse its opposition and cooperate with the Soviets. In such circumstances, the Kremlin would probably be quick to shift to supporting Cairo, and be prepared to see rela-

tions with Syria deteriorate. Given this volatile situation, the United States should not commit significant military resources to countering Soviet moves in these countries. Our vital interests are not involved, and our efforts would be of limited utility. Instead, the United States should maintain its flexibility by supporting Egypt at present. However, it ought to be ready to shift support to Syria or Iraq should Cairo resume its former close cooperation with Moscow, and should Syria and Iraq seek backing from Washington for their resulting opposition to the Soviet Union.

DEFENDING VITAL INTERESTS

In summary, the options open to the United States to counter Kremlin moves in the Middle East are many. The great Soviet preoccupation with defending the homeland leads Moscow to be far more cautious on the world scene than is apparent from its harsh-sounding propaganda. Except for Iran and Afghanistan, vital Soviet interests are really not at stake in the Middle East. Moscow will be quick to avoid a confrontation with America except to insure its control over territory immediately adjacent to the Soviet Union. Vital US interests in the Middle East are similarly limited. There is little likelihood that the Kremlin leaders will threaten Western access to Saudi oil—our overriding interest—once they realize that the United States is firmly committed to Saudi defense.

Thus, what is basically called for from the United States is the same determination to defend its interests that Americans have displayed throughout their history. If Moscow continues to believe its perception of recent years that America is weak, the chances of a Soviet miscalculation, a confrontation, and possibly war will increase greatly. A continuation of the new revitalization of the American defense capabilities will encourage Moscow's caution and willingness to respect crucial US interests in the Middle East. Fortunately, the choice open to the United States appears obvious and the chances for success good.

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