

**SOVIET UNION AND
THE RED SEA**

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PREFACE

The period following the Second World War saw the rise of a number of new states on the world map. These were former colonies of the great powers and mainly comprised the continents of Asia, Africa and Latin America. Termed the "Third World" or "developing nations". These states were characterised by uneven economic and political development. These countries harbouring a deep resentment against their colonial masters started taking an active interest in the field of international politics as 'young' states. With the rise of the Soviet Union as a major power during the same period, an opportunity arose for active relations between the USSR and the newly liberated states. Because the Soviet Union had not shared the Western powers colonial policy, she became much more acceptable to the Third World states as an interacting partner. The Soviet foreign policy with its focus on the symbiotic relationship between the national liberation struggles of the developing countries against imperialism and the struggle of their people against capitalist exploitation also proved to offer these new states a better alternative of development to the Western models.

The Soviet Union thus, began to develop active ties with the developing nations. Africa, a vast and complex continent became a major zone of struggle against colonialism and imperialism, and the USSR actively supported the African

peoples fight against imperial oppression. This vast and mysterious continent has been divided into various sub-regions by different scholars according to their ethnic and demographic diversity. One such region is the Red Sea area, so termed because the states covered in this sub region border the Red Sea.

The states under study are the People's Republic of Yemen (South Yemen), the Arab Republic of Yemen (North Yemen), Egypt, Sudan, Djibouti, Ethiopia and Somalia. The division between the Gulf region and the Red Sea region is fluid as in the case of Saudi Arabia with its coastline in both directions. Again, Egypt with the effect of the 'Camp David Process' has to some extent loosened its ties with regional Arab politics. Nonetheless, it does seem justifiable, mainly on account of their traditional neighbourly ties to regard all these states within the Red Sea sub region. This region is one of great strategic importance as it is also a sub region of the Indian Ocean and forms the primary water way for Soviet and Western shipping through the Mediterranean.

The purpose of this study is to discuss and analyze the major events in this important sub region and the Soviet relationship with these states. The United States has time and again raised the bogey of a Soviet threat in this region as elsewhere in the Third World. This study seeks to bring

out whether such a threat really exists or whether it merely stands as an excuse for the further US dominance in the region.

The scope of this study is the 1970s. There are many reasons for this: the Soviet Union transformed herself by the 1970s from a land colossus into a formidable maritime power with a vast naval capability; this region too, saw many changes in the 1970s. The two most populous and most important states Ethiopia and Egypt saw alignments oscillating widely. Opportunities arose for great power interference with the Yemeni civil war, the October war of 1973 and the Ogaden war of 1977. Thus, the region saw intrinsic instability during this decade and provides an interesting focus of study.

The study is divided into four chapters the first being an introduction to the Soviet perception of the Third World in general through the successive stages in her history, and the Soviet perception of this region. The second chapter analyses the Soviet relationship with the countries of the Horn of Africa that is Ethiopia and Somalia; Djibouti has been left out of this study because the state achieved independence only in 1977 and still shares a relationship with her former colonial master France which may well be described as that of a surrogate. The third chapter deals with the Soviet relationship with the countries of the

Arabian Peninsula, namely, the two Yemens. The fourth and final chapter chalks out the Soviet ties with the rest of the countries of the Red Sea region which do not rate a separate study because their relations with the USSR remained largely peripheral and formal in this period. This chapter concludes with an analysis of the Soviet perception of this region and her objectives therein.

I wish to take this opportunity to thank my supervisor Professor Devendra Kaushik. I am indebted to him for his timely assistance, his painstaking correction and advice and also for giving my mediocre efforts in this study a worthwhile shape.

I am also indebted to Gauri, who made an effort to help me as well as to the typist Vijay Mehra, who undertook the tiresome task of typing this work at such short notice and doing it in an excellent manner. I am grateful to my parents and my family for their moral support and encouragement throughout these two years. Needless to say I alone am responsible for any shortcomings in this study.

The methodology adopted in this study is both analytical and historical. A chronological approach has been adopted to lessen the error of missing any important landmark which may have a bearing on the parameters under study.

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CHAPTER - I

INTRODUCTION

The emergence of the Soviet state following the October Revolution of 1917 was a historical political landmark. The desired goal of this first socialist state was the creation of a new world socialist order. Based on the principles of Marxist-Leninist ideology the new Soviet state consequently sought the disintegration of the world capitalist system in the conduct of its relations with the outside world.

The rapid disintegration of the Western colonial system in the post World War II period resulted in the emergence of a large number of newly independent nations on the world scene over a period of two decades. These developing countries or in current parlance the "Third World" offered the possibilities for a new correlation of forces between the world's major competing systems, and in the process created new low risk areas for great power rivalry. In the early period of decolonization, underdeveloped nations though nominally independent found their freedom of action circumscribed and undermined by their own economic backwardness. The interplay of superpower politics often left many of them in their familiar colonial roles as pawns of established world powers. Thus, in the immediate post war period true independence for many nations of the Third World proved elusive.

The continuing subordination of Third World economies and what their leaders perceived as exploitative and unequal trade practices of the Western powers soon resulted in political frustration and sluggish uneven economic development. In this period, the economic and political affinity which might have been expected to exist between the former colonial and the metropolitan countries was replaced by a strong Third World hostility towards the developed capitalist nations of the West.

The hostility of some of the countries of the Third World towards the capitalist and former imperialist nations of the West gave the Soviet Union the leverage it required in its relations with these countries. The Soviet Union assigned a unique role to the countries of the Third World to forge an alliance with them in order to strengthen its goals and to weaken its rivals.

Before discussing the main trends in the Soviet approach to the Third World, a discourse on the ideological input in the Soviet thinking may not be superfluous. This is because the Soviet leadership from the very inception of the new state, as well as the Soviet decision makers organise and evaluate their perceptions of the outside world in the ideological framework of Marxism-Leninism. Marxist-Leninist ideology provides the decision makers with a broad framework for evolving their approach to questions of domestic and foreign developments. While this ideological factor being taken as the sole motive behind Soviet policy would be a

naive assumption, its use for explanations can hardly be denied. Unlike the western view of international relations are primarily the interplay of various nation states striving to promote their national objectives, the Soviets viewpoint is of the continuing struggle among a variety of interests social, political and economic, which cannot be resolved without a major social transformation of the participating nations. While many Western analysts have accused this particular predominance of ideology of being the primary cause for the dogmatism and mechanism of Soviet policy, in the long run this approach has proved to be of greater benefit because of its ever-continuing interaction with reality. Indeed, it is also quite untrue to believe that the Soviet policy is based purely on the ideological input. As the following study will show, strategic considerations and the subjective personality factor have also played a certain role in the shaping and working out of these policies from time to time.

The ideological dimension based mainly on the identity of anti imperialist interests of the forces of world socialism and national liberation provides an important key to the Soviet policy towards the Third World. Lenin first realised the potential of the oppressed colonies, as the developing nations were known then, as an area of revolutionary and nationalistic fervour which could undermine the

West's economic and military power thereby, promoting socialist revolution within the capitalist world. Lenin perceived that it was here (in the colonial world) that the great historical struggle would take place between the forces of communism and imperialism. "...Socialist revolution," Lenin pointed out "will not be solely or chiefly a struggle of the revolutionary proletariat in each country against their bourgeoisie - no, it will be a struggle of all the imperialist oppressed colonies and countries, of all dependent countries against imperialism."¹

In 1916, even before the October Socialist Revolution, Lenin had, underscoring the organic unity of the world revolutionary process and the interdependence of the struggle for socialism and national liberation said:

"To imagine that a social revolution is conceivable without revolts by small nations in the colonies and in Europe, without the revolutionary outbursts of a section of the petty bourgeoisie with all its prejudices, without the movement of the non-class conscious proletariat and the semi proletariat against oppression of the landlords the church, the monarchy, foreign nations etc... to imagine this means repudiating social revolution..."²

1. V.I. Lenin, "Collected Works" Vol.30 p.159.

2. V.I. Lenin, Collected Works, Vol.22 p.356.

Imperialism, Lenin asserted was "the highest stage of capitalism" that would hasten the "general crisis of capitalism", ultimately bring down the world capitalist system and make way for a new international socialist order³.

In Lenin's view imperialism extended the class struggle on a global scale as the European metropolitan power built colonial empires in Asia and Africa and exploited their peoples. Competition, rivalry and war among the capitalist states were inevitable as each attempted to seize new markets and expand its imperial system in a world of dwindling opportunities. The colonies, the "reserve of capitalism" were the main prop of the system. They enriched both the metropolitan capitalists and the proletariat in the imperialist countries and these being temporarily satisfied, forestalled inevitable revolution. However, these colonies were also the "weakest link in the imperial system."⁴ Exploited and abused it was expected that they would rise up in national liberation movements against their exploiters and in doing so, bring down the capitalist system. In the last article before his death in 1924, Lenin left this prophecy for future Soviet leaders:

"In the last analysis, the outcome of the struggle will be determined by the fact

3. V.I. Lenin, Imperialism, the Highest Stage of Capitalism,
(Moscow 1978) p.1-4.

4. Ibid., p.5.

that Russia, India China and so forth account for the overwhelming majority of the population of the globe: as it is precisely this majority that during the past few years has been drawn into the struggle for emancipation with extraordinary rapidity, so that in this respect there cannot be the slightest shadow of a doubt concerning the final victory of socialism which is fully and absolutely assured."⁵

Stalin, Lenin's successor in the Soviet Union too, continued to show an interest in the problems of colonial revolution. Under his aegis the Sixth Congress of the Comintern (1928) adopted the Thesis on the Revolutionary Movement in the Colonies and the Semicolonies which stated:

"The toiling masses of the colonies struggling against imperialist slavery represent a most powerful auxiliary force of the socialist world revolution. The revolutionary emancipatory movements of the colonies and the semicolonies more and more rally round the banner of the Soviet Union convincing themselves by bitter experience that there is no salvation for them except through alliance with the revolutionary proletariat and through the victory of the world proletariat revolution over world imperialism"⁶

The Soviet Union however, could not pursue any further progress in the theoretical formulations on colonies and semicolonies in Stalin's time primarily because she was

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5. Quoted in Roger Kanet, "Soviet Union and the Colonial Question 1917-1953" in Roger Kanet ed., The Soviet Union and the Developing Nations (Baltimore, Md., 1974) p.6.
 6. International Press Correspondence III. (Dec. 12, 1928) pp.1659-76. This text has been reproduced as Appendix VII in George Lenczowski, Russia and the West in Iran 1918-1948 (Ithaca New York, 1949).

concerned with her own survival. In the early years of Stalin's regime the Soviet State was involved in the task of socialist reconstruction and in the early 1440s the war against Germany preoccupied the Soviet leadership. After World War II, under the Stalin - Zhdanov Doctrine of rigid bipolarity, the colonial question still remained largely peripheral. The world was polarized between the two camps, one of imperialism led by the USA and the other of socialism and peace led by the Soviet Union. The main postwar instruments of the American policy according to Zhdanov were the Truman Doctrine (1947) and the Marshall Plan (1947), which were designed to create a bloc of states bound by obligations to the USA. Under such a bipolar scheme, some Third World states who had proclaimed themselves as neutral were even condemned as dishonest, and disguising a client relationship to imperialism.⁷

It was only in the mid - fifties under the leadership of Khrushchev that the earlier importance accorded to the colonial world was renewed. Two policy principles from the pre-1945 Soviet experience of the colonial nations were retained. First, that these areas have long played a useful role insofar as they weaken imperialism through their national movements

7. Andrei Zhdanov, "The International Situation" in R.A. Goldwin and M. Zetterbaum, eds., Readings in Russian Foreign Policy (Chicago, 19) 11nd edn., vol.III p.85ff.

and struggles. Second, they not only weakened the Western powers but also improved the international situation of the Soviet Union. Realising the potentiality of the colonial states who were now slowly attaining freedom, Khrushchev, renovated the ideological posture from the Stalin bi-polar thesis to a "zone of peace" concept.

Khrushchev admitted that there were some countries with an independent position, which belonged to neither camp. The earlier view regarded them as colonies and semicolonies but as these states no enjoyed a formal sovereignty and were characterised by underdevelopment and the struggle to eradicate the remnants of Western influence, they were fighting the return of imperialism under various guises. The hostility that these new states shared against their former colonial masters compounded with their struggle against imperialism in its new forms gave the Third World an independent position which the Soviet Union was able to foresee. Khrushchev first of all at the Twentieth Congress of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (CPSU) presented a different situation in the international order. He stated that the world was still divided into the two opposing camps, one of peace and socialism and the other of war and imperialism, but now, peaceful coexistence between the two differing social systems

was not only possible but desirable, and must be regarded as one of the cardinal principles of Soviet foreign policy. This is because the socialist camp was now a mighty force having not only the moral but the material means to prevent aggression.

Besides the imperialist camp there now existed a third force which opposed the forces of war as did the socialist camp. "War is opposed," Khrushchev said, "by a growing number of peace-loving countries of Asia, Africa and Latin America ... the national liberation movement of the colonies and dependent countries, the world peace movement, and the neutral countries which want no share in the imperialist policy of war and advocate peaceful coexistence."⁸ He included these new states in the zone of peace which linked them together with the socialist camp. The draft programme of the CPSU stated:

"A vast peace zone has taken shape on earth. In addition to the Socialist countries, it includes a large group of non-Socialist countries that for various reasons are not interested in starting a war. There is a growing number of countries that adhere to a policy of neutrality and strive to safeguard themselves against the hazards of participation in military blocs."⁹

8. Manifesto of 81 Communist and Workers Parties, December 5, 1960. (Moscow, 1964).

9. Draft Programme of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union, presented at its 22nd Congress, October 1961.

The stress on peaceful competition was accompanied by the idea that on the internal front in individual countries it was not only possible but in some cases, even preferable to achieve socialism by parliamentary and other nonviolent methods. Khrushchev quoted Lenin in the formulation of this idea. "V.I. Lenin wrote", he said, "All nations will arrive at socialism - this is inevitable - but not all will do so in exactly the same way".¹⁰ With regard to the new states he revived the Leninist concept of the non-capitalist path of development which offered the possibilities for liquidating the backwardness inherited from the colonial past and creation of conditions for transition to socialist development without passing through the stage of capitalism.

Although winning independence and emancipation from imperialism are noted as possible under the present world conditions by peaceful means, the Soviet Union still regarded the wars of national liberation as the most important.

"Communists have always recognized the progressive, revolutionary significance of national liberation wars,"¹¹ stated the 81 parties manifesto. It further stated:

"The peoples of the colonial countries win their independence both through armed struggle and by non military methods, depending on the specific conditions in the country

10. Khrushchev "Report to the 20th Party Congress, Feb. 1956, CDSP vol. VIII, No. 4 (1956).

11. Manifesto of 81, n. 8.

concerned... The forces of world communism contributed decisively to the struggle of the colonial and dependent peoples for liberation from imperialist oppression".¹²

To further the cause of the fight against the colonialists, the concept of the National Front was revived which consisted of all patriotic forces prepared to fight against imperialism and for national liberation, such as the working class, the peasantry, the petty and middle urban bourgeoisie and the intelligentsia. While it was reasoned that such a national front would not end the exploitation of man by man it would limit the power of monopolies, enhance the prestige and political weight of the working class in the country's affairs, help isolate the most reactionary forces and facilitate the unification of all progressive forces.¹³ In 1961, Khrushchev gave an even broader formula with reference to tactics in the colonial areas when he urged communists to seek "support from all persons at all levels of society so long as they opposed imperialism"¹⁴

In the post-Khrushchev era, Soviet analysts further expanded the link between the wars of national liberation and the goal of world socialism. They perceived the

12. Ibid.

13. For a thorough discussion of the national front see A. Benningsen "The National Front in Communist Strategy in the Middle East," in Walter Z. Laqueur, The Middle East in Transition (London, 1958).

14. Khrushchev, Report to the CPSU officials, January 6, 1961 in Current Digest of the Soviet Press, vol. III no. 4, p. 5.

relationship between the Soviet Union and the national liberation movements of the Third World as symbiotic. They continuously stressed the "invincible unity between the world socialist forces (led by the Soviet Union) and the national liberation struggles of the developing countries."¹⁵ To elucidate further, the following statement shows the importance of the Third World for the Soviets:

"World socialism helps the national emancipation of the oppressed people while the liberation struggle contributes to the struggle for socialism and strengthens its positions. The national liberation movement deals heavy blows at the common enemy - imperialism. The national liberation movement bolsters up the socialist and democratic forces in the world arena, opens up new opportunities for launching an active struggle against the imperial policy of plunder and conquest."¹⁶

The above statement draws out that the developing countries were no longer comprehended merely as part of the global struggle against imperialism but also as a likely stage for a new socialist transformation:

"Of paramount significance is the fact that after gaining national independence the former colonies and semi colonies are now moving in the direction of socialism, adding to and making more universal its experience."¹⁷

15. V. Lee, "The National Liberation Movement and the anti Imperialist Struggle" International Affairs, (Moscow), n.12, December 1971, p.71.

16. Quoted in Morton Schwartz, "The USSR and Leftist Regimes in Less Developed Countries", Survey (London) vol.19, Spring 1973, p.210.

17. Ibid., p.210.

The Soviet Union invented the concept of "national democracy" for these states, under which the conditions for the transformation to socialism were favourable. Under the national democracy, the states would strengthen the state sector of the economy, minimize western influence and guarantee freedom of action for "democratic forces" (the local Communist parties) thus, propelling themselves towards socialism. In foreign policy a national democratic state would fight against imperialism and its military blocs and bases on foreign territory, and uphold its political and economic independence by resisting new forms of colonialism.

In the seventies Soviet analysts introduced a new concept vis-a-vis the Third World. In their view the basic interests of the Soviet Union and the developing countries were coinciding a great deal. Hence the socialist world, led by the USSR and the Third World countries were "Natural Allies". This was because by the 1970s the relative positions of the two major power blocs had changed substantially, as well and the USA had acknowledged the Soviet Union as a superpower on par with itself. The collapse of the Western colonial empires and the ensuing rise of numerous anti-Western regimes in the developing world, Western military and political retrenchment, and other developments had resulted in the contraction of

Western political and military influence throughout most of Asia and Africa. As natural allies, the Soviet Union began to take a much more active interest in the regions of the Third World especially those where progressive forces were at work.

As stated earlier apart from the ideological input, Soviet foreign policy is also based upon its own national interest. It may not be wrong to say that this aspect became more pronounced in the seventies when Soviet foreign policy acquired truly global dimensions and significantly acquired the capability to project this power in any part of the world, mainly through the growth of the Soviet navy. The Third World as already stated presented immense possibilities for the Soviet Union to pursue its goals. Given the enormous landmass and population the Third World constituted an impressive constellation of power on the international scene.¹⁸ In view of the rivalry between the two opposing social systems, it is obvious that the prime objective of Soviet policy is the reduction and elimination, if possible, of Western and Chinese influence from the region. This is compounded by the Soviet Union's desire to enhance

18. The Third World occupies over 40 percent of the globe's total land area of 51.4 million square miles excluding Antarctica. Its population constitutes almost half of the world total of 4 billion including China.

its own influence in this region. In this regard the USSR has not hesitated to use the tensions that exist between some of the Third World countries and the West. Any move by the Third World countries against the West has been supported and encouraged by the Soviet Union.

For instance, the socialist rhetoric of the developing nations has been used by the Soviet Union in international agencies like the UNO (where the Third World forms two thirds of the membership) and other affiliated agencies. In pursuit of its objectives the Soviet Union has gained a foothold in certain vital strategic areas for the west, most of which are located in the Third World countries. This development has been used by the Soviet Union in pursuit of its objectives in two ways.

Firstly, most Third World countries border the vital sea communications routes of the Western and industrial world. Particularly, the straits or "choke points" as they are called in naval terminology lie within the Third World jurisdiction; for example, the Persian Gulf surrounded by developing countries of various sizes is the source of oil for the Western industrial world and Japan. This gulf is enclosed in by the Straits of Hormuz: about 90 percent of Japanese oil passes through the Straits of Malacca bounded by Third World countries. The oil bound for the

Western world goes through the Red Sea and the Suez Canal which is again surrounded by the Third World nations. Soviet influence in the strategic sea lanes could become an important factor of leverage in East-West ties.

Secondly, Third World nations border vital Soviet sea communications routes as well such as the Dardanelles, the Red and Mediterranean Seas and the Indian Ocean which connect the Western parts of the Soviet Union with the eastern one. These routes are beyond direct Soviet control and the Soviet Union's interest in these countries is thus essential. Again, in keeping with the Soviet thrust towards a global status, the role of the Soviet Navy is an important instrument. To properly prepare for this mission, the Navy has required the building of an elaborate and carefully selected infrastructure of overseas bases, port facilities, and refueling stations in key strategic areas of the Third World.¹⁹

While discussing the strategic significance of the Third World for the Soviet Union it is equally important to remember its security dimension also. Many countries of the Third World such as Iran, Pakistan, Turkey, India and Afghanistan share territorial boundaries with the Soviet Union in the South. To secure its borders the Soviets have had to pursue an active policy in Asia.

19. John Cooley, "Soviets step up Naval power in the Mediterranean" The Christian Science Monitor (Boston) June 22, 1976, p.4.

Yet another dimension must be remembered, this being the economic importance of the developing countries for the Soviet Union. It serves as a market for Soviet economic goods, military weapons, supplies and equipment. It has provided a source of raw materials and created an opportunity for economic integration to the Soviet advantage. During the Brezhnev era, particularly with the onset of economic rationalization in dispensing economic aid, the Soviets concluded trade agreements beneficial to Soviet economic development. Aid agreements in the 1970s were designed largely to increase the importation of fuel, raw materials and consumer goods from the less developed countries, and to create markets for Soviet machinery and equipment. Such a development strategy served Soviet political purposes in addition to the economic one by creating conduits for the inflow of materials, personnel and ideas from the Soviet Union to the Third World. This expanded the potential area of Soviet influence and power. Elizabeth Kridl Valkenier observes in this context that "...closer economic cooperation involving as it does measures of integration is bound to bring the developing nations into the Soviet orbit."²⁰

The developing countries being rich in raw materials which are necessary for the West, have themselves used

20. Elizabeth Kridl Valkenier, "Soviet Economic Relations with Developing Nations" in Roger Kanet ed., The Soviet Union and the Developing Nations (Baltimore, Md., 1974) pp. 235-36.

this factor as bargaining levers with some countries such as, the oil embargo of 1973. The Soviet Union has understood that the Third World has considerable power if it is organised and united. To them the Third World is a "zone with colossal manpower and materials."²¹

The Third World comprises of Asia, Africa and Latin America. Soviet policy accords primacy to Asia because of its proximity to it Africa is however, of no less importance for the Soviet Union. The continent can be divided up into various sub-regions, one of these being the Horn of Africa and the Red Sea. What is commonly known as the Red Sea region are the countries that border that Sea. The states belonging to it are the People's Republic of Yemen (South Yemen), the Arab Republic of Yemen (North Yemen), Saudi Arabia, Egypt, Sudan, Djibouti, Ethiopia and Somalia.

As already stated, the Soviet Union bases its policy on an ideological framework. The evolution of Soviet policy towards the Red Sea countries especially can be seen and understood within this parameter, that is to say, the Soviet policy in this region is of affirmative ideological action. The phase of affirmative ideological action in Soviet Red Sea policy can be said to begin in

21. G. Apalin "Peking and the Third World" International Affairs no.3, March 1976, p.90.

1974 with the Ethiopian revolution that toppled Emperor Haile Selassie. In discussing this case, the linkages with Somalia and the Eritrean question vis-a-vis Soviet strategy must be established. This will be taken up in the next chapter.

However, this ideological action is also linked up with the question of Soviet national interest in the Red Sea region. The British withdrawal from the Suez Canal zone in 1956 has often been viewed in pro colonial circles as the main reason for the emergence of the Soviet naval power in the Indian Ocean. It must be seen that the transformation of the Soviet Union into a major power after World War II made it incumbent upon her to catch up with the USA in sea power as well. Thus, it was quite legitimate of the Soviets to build up their navy. Indeed, the imperialist thrust of the US following the British withdrawal from the Indian Ocean made it imperative for the Soviet Union to seek a more active policy in the region to secure her own shipping routes. On the contrary, the Soviet Union has shown eagerness to respond positively to the desire of the Third World, particularly the Indian Ocean littoral states to convert the Indian Ocean into a zone of peace, free from all great power activity. It is only because of the heightened American activity in the Mediterranean, the Persian Gulf and the Indian Ocean that

the Soviets are forced to adopt a strategy that for long has been termed as a "threat" by western powers who have legitimised their active role in the area through the bogey of a Pax Sovietica. This is not say that the region is not of strategic significance to the USSR. The following statement brings this out, where a Soviet specialist on Africa while discussing the the Red Sea basin and the Western Policy towards it says:

"...But if we take a closer look at development in this part of the world then it becomes clear that there is a plot between the imperialist countries and those who aid and abet them to prevent the development of progressive tendencies in the African countries situated in the Red Sea basin. The US and their NATO allies are trying to build up a new reactionary military and political bloc in this area which lies at the juncture between Asia and Africa and which is so important for international sea communications."²²

It stands from the above statement that the Red Sea area is of considerable strategic significance to the Soviet Union because of her shipping access. The Red Sea and the Suez Canal are also critical to the U.S. Navy's ability to deploy forces rapidly between the Persian Gulf and the Mediterranean sea. The USA therefore, is very keen on setting up bases in countries of the region. A US naval

22. V. Vorobyov, "Colonialist Policies in Africa" International Affairs (Moscow) no.9, September 1978, p.41.

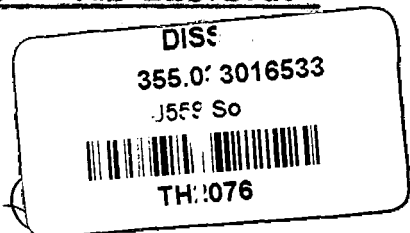
commentator has said in this regard that while "a naval base along Egypt's or the Sudan's Red Sea coast would appear to be of interest to the United States" it would be Djibouti that is "a more favourable strategically situated port from the U.S. Navy's viewpoint"²³ because South Yemen and Ethiopia are in positions to close the Red Sea to all shipping and these two nations are both allies of the Soviet Union. The article thus advocates a US policy of greater thrust in the region.²⁴

The following chapters will deal with the Soviet policy towards each of the countries of the Red Sea region, examining whether the Soviets were genuinely following the principled policy of supporting national liberation movements and progressive regimes or as most Western Sovietologists believe were interested primarily in establishing a stronghold in the region in connection with their own objective of a Pax Sovietica.



23. Alan M. Scham, "Perim on the Red Sea: Geo-Strategic Flashpoint" Proceedings of the U.S. Naval Institute (Washington) March 1982, p.144.

24. Ibid., pp.143-45.



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CHAPTER - II

SOVIET UNION SOMALIA AND ETHIOPIA: BEHIND THE SOVIET SOMERSAULT

The Soviet-Somali Relationship

The Soviet-Ethiopia Relationship

The state of Somalia came into existence in 1960. From its very inception the new Somali Republic laid claims to territories of neighbouring states as these were populated predominantly by Somalis such as the Ogaden region of Ethiopia, the northeastern frontier of Kenya and Djibouti which until 1977 was a French colony. In 1963, the Soviets outbid a Western military offer to become the Somali army's principal supplier of arms. While it is true that from the onset the Somali republic had made clear its intention to unify all territories inhabited by Somalis, prior to the 1964 Organisation of African Unity (OAU) declaration of the inviolability of post-colonial borders, the Soviet Union sympathised with Somali nationalism. The Soviet Union justified their support of Somali nationalism as the words of a Soviet African specialist links this up to the imperialist division of the region:

"The causes of the tension are to be sought in the past, when the imperialists divided Africa up without any regard for the countries' geographic, historical, economic and national features. As a result many tribes and ethnic groups of the present independent states find themselves

within the borders fixed way back in the colonial past. This is true also of the Horn of Africa: Somalis live also in Ethiopia, Kenya and the Republic of Djibouti, and Afars live in Ethiopia and Djibouti."¹

But the Soviet military aid to Somalia during the 1960s remained limited. The \$32 million worth of Soviet credits provided training to an army that by the end of the decade numbered roughly 12,000 men and was equipped with outmoded weapons such as the MIG 15 and 17 fighters and T-34 tanks.² Moreover, Soviet military aid soon experienced difficulties in part because Somalia could not bear the associated interest payments, maintenance and other costs.³ In addition the civilian Egal government sought to restrain the Somali army's growth. To preserve Somalia's nonaligned status, Egal used Somalia's westerntrained and equipped police force as a counterweight to the Soviet trained army. As one Soviet scholar acknowledged, Egal's policies alienated Somali nationalists and military officers alike.

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1. Pyotr Manchka, Problems of Africa Today (Moscow 1979) p.111.
 2. By the late 1960s most Somali army officers had received instruction at Soviet military schools. By 1966 the number of Soviet military aid personnel in Somalia was reportedly 250. See SIPRI, The Arms Trade With the Third World (New York, 1971) p.655.
 3. Ibid. By 1966, shipments of weapons and equipment were reportedly left to rust in port, and no further military deliveries were reported until 1968.

The influence the Soviets brought with their military aid to Somalia was thus latent. The assumption to power in October, 1969 of a military regime led by Army General Mohamed Siad Barre gave the Soviets an opportunity to expand their influence greatly in Somalia. The new government in fact solicited Soviet support. Yet as we shall discuss below, the Soviet Union waited two years to respond. One factor underlying Moscow's hesitation to respond was its endorsement of the 1964 OAU declaration on post-colonial African borders, and consequent withdrawal of earlier support for Somali irredentism. The Soviets also undoubtedly recognized that supplying modern weapons to Somalia would complicate their policy in the region at a time when they were trying to improve relations with Ethiopia.

Soviet misgivings about aligning with Somalia were expressed in a work by the Soviet Africanist I.I. Etinger, entitled Interstate Relations in Africa. Etinger portrayed Siad Barre's military regime as being far more nationalistic than its civilian predecessor and suggested that the regime's anti-imperialist posture was a function of its strong irredentist tendencies. He noted that the most active proponents of Somali reunification were "precisely the most anti-Imperialist and radically-minded elements of Somali society, who regard the movement for the reunification of the entire (Somali) people in the general course

of the struggle against the remnants of colonialism in Africa against Imperialism and pro-Imperialist influential circles in several states of Africa."⁴ Etinger also warned that Somali irredentism was "dangerous for peace in the Horn"; it had led Kenya and Ethiopia to cooperate closely with each other and to rely upon Western support, especially during regional crises.⁵

As stated earlier the Soviets waited two years before responding to the Somali appeal for arms. This was also due to the setting up in January 1971 of the Supreme Revolutionary Council which advocated scientific socialism as its goal. The adoption of the non-capitalist path of development, wherein the nationalisation of a number of foreign banks, insurance companies and oil and other companies such as the British Shell, Italian Agip and American Mobil Gas and Caltex together with the strengthening of the national economy, made the Soviet Union realise that the Somali Republic was pursuing a socialist goal in all earnest. Moreover, in the field of foreign policy Somalia declared that it was ready to work for peace and world security and to fight against imperialism; it would promote friendly relations with socialist countries and with all progressive

4. I.I. Etinger, Mezhdugosudarstvennye otnosheniia v Afrike (Moscow, 1972) p.82.

5. Ibid., p.72-73.

independent states of Africa. At the same time, the leaders of the country repeatedly stated that any disputes could be settled fairly only through peaceful negotiations, on the basis of mutual understanding and without the use of military force.⁶

On the basis of these developments, the Soviets responded to the Somali call for help in modernizing their armed forces. Siad Barre visited Moscow in November 1971 and was described as an "outstanding leader and a devoted patriot."⁷ It was only then that military and economic assistance to the Somalis began. Over the next four years, the number of Soviet personnel in Somalia increased from about 300 to 2,500 the majority of whom were military advisers. About a tenth of the entire Somali army went to the USSR for training. Furthermore extensive modernisation made the army one of the best equipped in Africa; its inventory included 150 T-35 and 100 T-54 tanks, 300 armoured personnel carriers, 200 coastal batteries and about 50 MIG's. In this way the army was transformed from a ragbag band of 10,000 into a finely honed force of 20,000.⁸ This may seem like a small

6. G.V. Fokeev, Vneshne politicheskie problemy sovremennoy Afriki (Moscow, 1975) p.166.

7. Quoted in Robert Patman, "Ideology, Soviet Policy and Realignment in the Horn" in Added Dawisha and Karen Dawisha eds., The Soviet Union in the Middle East: Policies and Perspectives (London, 1982) p.47.

8. Ibid., p.47.

number but the political costs and risks attendant on the Soviet buildup of Somalia's army were far more important than the material costs. From 1972 to 1977 inclusive, the USSR delivered approximately \$270 million worth of arms. During that period, Soviet arms transfers to Somalia accounted for only 1.1 percent of the total value of Soviet arms exports, thus making Somalia the twelfth largest Third World recipient of Soviet arms. However, when Somalia's small population and its poverty are taken into account the relative importance of Soviet military aid to the country is far greater.⁹ In fact, when Soviet arms transfers to each Third World recipient for this period are divided by their respective GNP, Somalia ranks first. Hence, though Soviet military aid was but a small share, it had a major impact there.

In return for the military and economic aid, the Soviet Union was permitted to develop naval facilities at the Somali ports of Berbera, Kismayo and Birikao. This began in 1927 when the Soviets were granted unrestricted access to the port of Berbera and exclusive use of a long range communication station there.¹⁰ This undoubtedly made it easier for the Soviets to maintain a naval presence in the Indian Ocean; following the arrival in the fall of 1972 of a

9. Computed from U.S. Arms Control and Disarmament Agency, World Military Expenditure and Arms Transfers, 1968-77 (Washington, 1979).

10. Information on the Soviet use of these facilities is contained in Charles C. Peterson, "Trends in Soviet Naval Operation" in Bradford Dismukes and James M. McConell eds., Soviet Naval Diplomacy (New York, N.Y., 1979) pp. 37-87.

barrack and repair ship, which improved significantly the Soviet Indian Ocean Squadron's ability to supply and repair its units and rest its crew on station, the frequency of Soviet operational visits increased sharply.¹¹

The increased availability of shore based support coincided with important changes in the pattern of Soviet combatant deployments in the Indian Ocean. First, those deployments lengthened considerably. Whereas prior to establishing major naval support operations at Berbera Soviet combatant deployments in the Indian Ocean averaged roughly five months, in 1973 Soviet combatants deployed there for almost a year.¹² There is a systematic relationship between the Soviet navy's major use of Berbera and its lengthened deployments in the Indian Ocean, as it is connected with the great distances involved in sustaining a Soviet naval presence in the area. The Gulf of Aden, the Soviet Indian Ocean Squadron's principal operating area, is a very long distance (6,700 n.m.) from Vladivostok, the base from which the units were deployed. It took Soviet naval units approximately three weeks with normal transit speeds of 10-12 knots to reach the Gulf of Aden. Prior to 1973, their Indian Ocean squadron thus wasted a high proportion of its total deployment time in transit. By lengthening these deployments, that proportion of time wasted intransit was reduced.

11. Ibid., pp.68-69.

12. Ibid., p.70.

The longer ships are deployed, the greater their need for logistic support and maintenance. Hence, it was important for the Soviet navy to have that kind of ready access that was readily available at Berbera, where repairs more extensive than those that could be performed satisfactorily at sea were made, and where there was direct logistic support.

However, the access that the Soviets enjoyed to Berbera was not essential for maintaining their naval forces in the area. This was clearly demonstrated later during the Ogaden War, During the six months following the loss of access to Berbera and before comparable alternative access arrangements had been made elsewhere, the Soviet Indian Ocean Squadron was augmented by 50 percent and employed in the most demanding (non-combat) mission it had performed till then.¹³

After the initial access agreement was implemented, the Soviets acquired additional privileges. In 1973 the Soviets reportedly began to build at Berbera the so-called "missile handling and storage facility", capable of servicing and storing conventional tactical missiles and other ordnance far more sophisticated than those the Somalis had. They also obtained privileges for periodic staging from

13. Strategy Survey, 1979 (London, International Institute of Strategic Studies, 1980) p.23.

Somali airfields of 11-38 May ASW planes and on one occasion, of Tu-95 Bear D long range maritime reconnaissance aircraft. Operating these aircraft from Somali airfields from 1975 to 1977 greatly expanded and improved Soviet aerial reconnaissance of the Indian Ocean.¹⁴

While Western analysts saw the Soviet-Somali relationship as essentially one of an arms-for-access one¹⁵ it may also be interpreted in another way: as that of the establishing of links between the leader of the socialist community and one of its new members, whose newly found sovereignty being threatened from the onset by the imperialist powers. For instance an abortive coup took place in April 1970 in the midst of rumours, baseless as they turned out, about an impending Ethiopian attack on Northern Somalia. These rumors may have intended to draw Somali army units away from Mogadiscio, facilitating thereby, a takeover by the Somali police, which though half the army's size was equipped and trained by West Germany. It is worth noting that the Soviet naval presence may have played a role in defeating the coup. An official visit by Soviet warships to Mogadiscio during the attempted coup was prolonged. This was interpreted as a sign

14. Tu-35 Bear D aircraft are also capable of providing targeting data for sea-launched cruise missiles. See, Janes All the World's Aircraft 1977-78 (London, 1979) p.460.

15. See Richard B. Remnek, "Soviet Policy in the Horn of Africa: The Decision to Intervene" in Robert H. Donaldson, ed. The Soviet Union in the Third World: Successes and Failures (Boulder, Co., 1981).

of Soviet support for Siad Barre's regime.¹⁶

The Charter of the Revolution adopted by the Supreme Revolutionary Council (SRC) stated that as from October 21, 1970 the Somali Democratic Republic regarded scientific socialism as its sacred goal. Somalia began to pursue a consistent anti-imperialist policy and the non capitalist path of development. Thus in 1971, Podgorny stated:

"The path of independent national development and social progress being followed by Somalia... is far from simple and easy...the struggle of the Somali people and government against imperialism colonialism, and racism will continue to enjoy the complete understanding and support on the part of the Soviet Union".¹⁷

The statement seems to suggest that the Soviet Union knew that Somalia was going through a difficult period of social progress and the offer of military and economic assistance was made in this light. Had the Soviets only shared an arms-for-access relationship with Somalia the offer of military aid would have begun in 1971 after Siad Barre's first visit to Moscow. This visit resulted in a major economic aid protocol that included Soviet assistance

16. Bradford Dismukes, "Soviet Employment of Naval Power for Political Purposes 1965-75" in Micheal MccGwire and John McDonnell eds., Soviet Naval Influence (New York, N.Y., 1977) p.487.

17. Pravda, 17 November, 1971 translated in FBIS, Middle East and Africa Daily Report, (Washington) November 19, 1971, B.3.

in the construction of the Fanole Dam on the Juba River, and only a lukewarm Soviet response to the appeal for arms.

It was during the February 1972 visit to Somalia of Marshal Grechko that important military cooperation agreements that included \$60 million worth of Soviet military aid for upgrading and expanding Somalia's armed forces and Soviet naval access privileges at Berbera, were signed. On the occasion, Marshal Grechko said that Somalia and the Soviet Union were "now linked by strong, excellent and deeprooted ties of friendship" and that both were "struggling for common ideas and fighting in unison against a single enemy."¹⁸ He then appears to have accorded Somalia the status of an ally of the USSR. Referring to socialist countries as a member of a single family he went on to say:

"The Soviet government and people warmly welcome the Somali Democratic Republic on its entry into the socialist community of Nations. You should know that all socialist countries, including the Soviet Union are your true friends and stand by you."¹⁹

Again the Soviet daily Krasnaia Zvezda noted that Grechko wished the Somalis success on the "path of progressive national development and in strenghtening their armed forces."²⁰

18. Radio Mogadiscio, domestic service, 16 February, 1972; translated in FBIS, Middle East and Africa Daily Report, February 16, 1972, p.U2.

19. Ibid.

20. Krasnaia Zvezda (Moscow), February 18, 1972, p.1

Indeed, Soviet arms supplies to Somalia began in earnest only after Somali defense minister Mohammed Ali Samantar's visit to Moscow in July 1972, which resulted in additional aid and trade protocols. This clearly shows that the Soviet-Somali relationship was not an opportunistic one as is believed by many western scholars but one of countries of the socialistic community of nations with the common aim of eliminating imperialism.

Again, the question of the Soviet-Somali ties being pragmatic has been linked to the Soviet scare of the possible formation of a Sino-Somali alignment, to the Egyptian decision of cancelling major Soviet access privileges while evicting Soviet military advisers from Egypt and finally to the Soviet navy's role in the Indo-Pakistan war over the Bangladesh crisis. The First hypothesis can be dismissed for its farfetched beliefs as by 1971 China was seeking better relations with Ethiopia, Somalia's longstanding enemy as well as with the USA and the possibility of a Sino-Somali alignment was therefore remote. The second analysis linking the Soviet-Somali relationship with the souring of ties between Cairo and Moscow again can be cancelled out. Western sources have said that as a result of Sadat's decision the construction of the Soviet naval support complex at the Red Sea port of

Berenice was stopped and that this left the Soviets with no alternative to Berbera for land-based support of their Indian Ocean Squadron. The Soviets are also reportedly to have feared the growing close ties between Egypt and Somalia with foreboding, and feared Siad Barre might follow Sadat's lead. This line of thought can be cancelled out primarily because it is untrue that the Soviets had no alternative to Berbera. Indeed, the Soviet Union had facilities in the infinitely better port of Aden in South Yemen. Further, linking the question of supplying the Somalis arms in exchange for naval access privileges to the Indo-Pak war is also too farfetched to be true because the Soviets invited Siad Barre to Moscow in November 1971 and the war broke out only in December.

The Soviet-Somali relationship was further strengthened during Podgornyi's visit to Somalis in July 1974. In connection with this visit, the Soviet Union wrote off a large part of Somalia's debt and agreed to postpone repayment of the rest. Western analysts have interpreted this as a form of a bribe in order to soft-peddle the Somalis into the signing of a friendship treaty. But, if viewed in the larger context, it can also be seen as the innate Soviet generosity to a socialist ally during times of trouble when the price of oil had increased sharply after the Arab oil boycott resulting in the Somali economy being reduced to

shambles. This argument is further strengthened as the Soviet Union subsequently became Somalia's exclusive oil supplier. In the early 1970s Somalia was also hit by a severe drought which contributed to her woes.

The treaty of Friendship and Cooperation signed between the USSR and Somalia in 1974 differed slightly from the usual treaties signed by the Soviet Union and progressive Third World states. Article 7 of the treaty's Russian text called upon the signatories to combat "colonialism in all its forms and manifestations."²¹ This phrase which appeared only once before, in the 1971 treaty with Egypt, and never since, the Somalis translated as "colonialism whatever its color" codewords for Somali irrendentism vis-a-vis Ethiopia.²² The Soviet Union's respect for Ethiopia's control of the Ogaden is evident even at this stage as ratification and publication of the treaty was delayed for several months to sort out the translation comparison between the Russian and Somali texts. Also noteworthy was the friendship treaty's clause which specified that Soviet military assistance was for "strengthening the defense capability of the Somali Democratic Republic." By contrast the defense clauses of all other Soviet friendship treaties are couched in general terms and do not specify a given state

21. The treaty's Russian text may be found in Izvestia (Moscow) October 30, 1974, p.4.

22. A summary of the Somali text is to be found in October Star (Mogadiscio) October 29, 1975. Cited in endnote n. 27 in Richard Remnek, n. 15, pp. 146-47.

as the beneficiary of military assistance. This proves that the USSR was seeking a pledge from Somalia not to use Soviet-supplied weapons for aggressive purposes.

The formation of the Somali Revolutionary Socialist Party (SRSP) further strengthened ties between the two states. The Party Programme adopted at its foundation congress in June 1976, reaffirmed that scientific socialism - the only true theory providing clear answers to the questions posed by the class struggle, the socialist revolution and the building of a new society - served as the theoretical and ideological foundation of the SRSP. A party and government delegation visited the Soviet Union in August 1976, further cementing the ties between the two states. The Somali leaders repeatedly stated that they did not wish to use the Soviet supplied arms for aggressive purposes. This stand is reflected in the SRSP Programme which stressed that friendly cooperation between African countries, above all those in East Africa, should be promoted, and called for solving the conflicts between them peacefully and through friendly understanding.²³

However, it was to be noted that from early 1977 onwards the nationalistic ambitions of the Somalis were on the uprise. In the words of a Soviet commentator, "they had obviously departed from their progressive course in home and foreign

23. Pyotr Manchka, n.1, pp.116-17.

policies."²⁴ A move by a group of Arab states (Sudan, Egypt and Syria in Khhartoum in February) which sought to turn the Red Sea into an Arab Lake was noted by the Soviets as a Saudi-inspired effort to forge a pro-imperialist military bloc in the area, with the aims of obstructing both Israeli and Soviet shipping through the Red Sea, and of eventually eliminating Soviet influence in the area as well. In March, the second round of these talks were conducted in Ta'izz, YAR and included Sudan, YAR, PDRY, and Somalia. This belief was further intensified with the outbreak of the Ogaden War in the Summer of 1977. Somalia's abrogation of the 1974 treaty and the cancellation of Soviet naval privileges in November 1977 finally led to a close of the Soviet-Somali relationship.

Before analysing the major events of the Ogaden crisis, it is more pertinent to take into account the Soviet-Ethiopian relationship. Ethiopia, was affected by the power game of the European nations from 1936, when it was annexed by Mussolini, who overthrew the Emperor Haile Selassie I. Inside Ethiopia resistance to the Italians never subsided and with the support of many western states monarchial rule was restored in 1941. A major role was played by Britain who while restoring Haile Selassie retained control of the province of Eritrea bordering the Red Sea. This was again retained by

24. Pyotr Manchka, n.1, p.117.

the Americans who "took over" from the British as the pillars of the free, civilized world in the post World War II period. The Americans came into direct conflict with the Soviets who in keeping with their policy of independence to all colonial people, wanted the Eritreans to be granted independence. The Eritreans themselves wanted to be free of Ethiopia. The British however, merged Eritrea with Ethiopia as it provided with an industrial base and an outlet to the sea.

The Soviet-Ethiopian Relationship

Emperor Haile Selassie was an important ally of the West, who recognised the strategic importance of his country. The United States provided it military aid worth \$200 million from 1953 to 1974. The US in return secured a military base at Kagnew in 1953 for monitoring radio broadcasts from the Middle East and Eastern Europe, relaying military communications and tracking space satellites. The United States also trained the Ethiopian army, navy and air force units.

The Soviet Union felt that the Emperor paid only lip service to Ethiopia's nonaligned status and consequently regarded him as a close ally of the US. By the early 1970s the importance of Ethiopia for Washington began to diminish. The need for the Kagnew station was obviated by advances in satellite communications technology. This was also due to

the US reluctance to get involved in Ethiopia which was passing through domestic trials. Corruption was rampant and the armed forces already in mutiny, leading to the dethroning of Haile Selassie in September 1974. He was replaced by a revolutionary military government the Provisional Military Administrative Council (PMAC) otherwise known as the Dergue. The Dergue faced a multitude of problems from the onset. While it required a large number of arms to fight the Eritrean secessionists, the USA did not supply their requirements. A nine point plan for autonomy in Eritrea too, failed to make headway. A military solution seemed to be the only way out but that too met with disastrous results. A 40,000 man peasant militia was easily routed by Eritrean guerillas in the summer of 1976. By the spring of the following year they controlled virtually all of Eritrea except the major towns severely sapping the morals of the Ethiopian army, the mainstay of the new regime. Nationalization, land reforms and other measures designed to uproot the old imperial order likewise, produced a backlash of resistance and unrest in both urban and rural areas. By late 1976 the Ethiopian state was drifting towards disintegration and anarchy.

External forces were also speeding this process along. The Sudanese Government, whose rapidly worsening relations

with the USSR culminated in its expulsion of the Soviet military mission in May 1977, was actively supporting the Eritrean guerillas as well as other Ethiopian opposition groups, such as the liberal Ethiopian Democratic Union. Not surprisingly, tensions mounted along the Sudanese-Ethiopian border.²⁵ The conservative Saudi Arabian also extended support to the Eritrean insurrection, mainly in the form of financial aid. Border tension between Somalia and Ethiopia had also begun in 1976 and the recruitment and training of the Ogaden guerrillas by Somalia led to insurgency in the Ogaden in early 1977.

The Soviet Union recognized that the 1974 revolution was a progressive one. A Soviet commentator has said in its regard:

"The Ethiopian revolution of 1974 which started as an anti-feudal and bourgeois-democratic movement, grew into an anti-imperialist and national-democratic revolution owing to the favourable conditions that had emerged in the country and the coming of the revolutionary democrats to power."²⁶

Political power had been taken away from the Emperor, the feudal nobility and the landed aristocracy by representatives of revolutionary democracy expressing the interests of the broad popular masses. Lenin had stated in this regard:

25. Colin Legum and Bill Lee, Conflict in the Horn of Africa (New York, 1977).

26. Pyotr Manchka, no1, p.92

"...the passing of state power from one class to another is the first, the principal, the basic sign of a revolution, both in the strictly scientific and in the practical political meaning of the term."²⁷

From the Soviet perspective, the events that followed the Ethiopian revolution were a classic case of the "confrontation between the forces of progress and reaction" wherein the reactionary forces deliberately tried to exaggerate and actively exploit the tense situation in Ethiopia. Thus, a Soviet study on the Ethiopian crisis states:

"Starting in 1977, imperialist circles, primarily in the United States, and some reactionary Arab regimes, began plotting the Red Sea military and political bloc to counter the revolutionary gains of the African and Arab peoples, chiefly those of the people of Ethiopia."²⁸

The above statement obviously sought to draw attention to the Saudi Arab led plan to turn the Red Sea into an Arab Lake. What is important however, is that the Soviets realised that revolutionary Ethiopia was being threatened by a reactionary encirclement who were actively supporting the secessionist movement. In such a situation it was but natural that the USSR as the leader of the world socialist community would perform her proletarian internationalist

27. V.I. Lenin, Collected Works (Moscow, 1964), vol.24, p.44.

28. Georgi Galperin, Ethiopia: Population, Resources, Economy (Moscow, 1981) p.21.

duty and aid a socialist nation. With the emergence of Lt. Col. Mengistu Haile Mariam as the new leader of the Dergue on February 3, 1977, the Soviet Union sought a political solution to the problem of the Ethiopian crisis. Moscow proposed a Marxist-Leninist confederation of Ethiopian Somalia, Djibouti and South Yemen. It promised to back the scheme both economically and militarily. Within a month President Fidel Castro of Cuba presented the proposal to both Mengistu and Barre in Aden. His efforts met with disappointment as Barre rejected the proposal saying there could be no room for international solutions until Somalia's national problem had been solved. While the Somalis promised that they would never invade Ethiopia, never carry out a military attack, the Soviets remained concerned.²⁹

In April 1977, the Dergue announced the closure of the Kagnev Communications station and other US facilities. In May Mengistu visited Moscow where he was received with full honours and signed a declaration on "the foundations for friendship and cooperation". The declaration included technical and economic agreements and an arms package deal worth \$400 million, consisting of 48 MiG-21 interceptors, up to 200 T-54 and T-55 tanks, an unknown number of SAM-3 and SAM-7 anti aircraft missile batteries and Sagger anti-tank missiles.

29. Robert Patman, n.7, pp.49-50.

The arms agreement represented a turning point in the Soviet-Somali relationship. Barre openly described the arms deliveries as a danger and began to exercise his Arab option by attending the Ta'izz meeting. Somalia also sought weapons from the west and received them from USA, Britain and France. In July 1977, Somali armed forces attacked Ethiopia on the pretext of supporting the West Somali Liberation Front. Somalia laid claim to the Ogaden region, a considerable part of the Ethiopian territory, on the grounds that about a million Somalis lived there. Subsequent developments showed, however, that the true purpose of the Somali leadership was to annex not only the Ogaden where the Ogaden tribe cogenetic to the Somalis lives, but a far larger area including Harar, Bale and Sidamo, or one-third of Ethiopia's territory. It was obvious to the Soviet Union that the nationalistic ambitions of the Somali leadership had prevailed over their progressive course.

The Somalis also claim that the United States government encouraged their offensive. Washington did announce in late July, when the Somali offensive was already under way that it agreed in principle to meet Somalia's "legitimate defense requirements"³⁰. About a month earlier Dr. Kevin Cahill Siad Barre's friend and personal physician, was reportedly told by a State Department official that the

30. Newsweek, September 26, 1977 pp.42-43.

U.S. Government was "not averse to further guerrilla pressure in the Ogaden."³¹ The Soviet Union's doubts regarding the Somali invasion were thus, further proven as being supported by imperialist circles. Izvestia observed that the "United States uses all methods of neo-colonialism - instigating nationalism and separatism to discredit progressive African regimes and to slander their ties with the Soviet Union and other socialist countries."³² On August 6, 1977 the Soviet Afro-Asian Solidarity Committee appealed for cease fire and reaffirmed its support for Article 3 of the OAU Charter regarding the territorial integrity of each state:

"Practice has confirmed that violation of these principles and attempts to use force in recarving the existing frontiers, no matter what justification is made, damage the anti-imperialist unity of the African peoples and only assist the imperialist forces."³³

The above statement draws out that the Soviet Union, who had consistently adided by the principle of the inviolability of sovereign borders, realised that Somalia did not seek a peaceful settlement to the conflict a fact confirmed by Somalia's refusal to attend the OAU commission

31. ibid., p.42

32. Izvestia, quoted in The Times (London) August 17, 1977.

33. Soviet News, August 9, 1977.

for Somali-Ethiopian reconciliation. She thus, had no choice but to support Ethiopia; as a Soviet commentary explains:

"The Soviet Union, for its part, did everything possible to avert an armed conflict between Ethiopia and Somalia. However, when the leaders of the latter country despite common sense and the efforts of the true friends of the Somali people began in the summer of 1977 military operations against Ethiopia and Somali troops invaded its territory, the Soviet Union, as always in such situations, came out on the side of the victim of aggression: at the request of the Ethiopian government the Soviet Union rendered Ethiopia material aid to repulse the attack. Our country did so proceeding from the principled purposes of its foreign policy, despite the fact that because of this there could have (and did in fact) ensue unfriendly acts by the Somali leadership against the Soviet Union."³⁴

The ensuing unfriendly acts that followed were after Siad Barre's unsuccessful trip to Moscow in August 1977 and the Soviet announcement that all arms deliveries to Somalia had ended. Somalia unilaterally cancelled the Soviet-Somali Treaty of 1974 in mid November 1977 and announced the expulsion of all Soviet specialists from the country. Because of the help rendered to Somalia by imperialist circles, the initial attack on Ethiopia, a country whose manpower and material resources exceeded those of Somalia, was successful. The Soviets and Cubans jointly staged a large scale air and sea lift and eventually succeeded in routing the Somali forces completely.

34. V. Vorobyov, "Colonialist Policies in Africa" International Affairs (Moscow), no.9, September 1978, p.42.

The war with Somalia further cemented the growing ties between the Soviet Union and Ethiopia. In September 1978 the two signed an agreement on economic aid.³⁵ In November 1978 they concluded a 20 year Friendship and Cooperation Treaty which laid special emphasis on respect for territorial integrity and inviolability of frontiers, during the visit of Mengistu to the Soviet Union. Mengistu visited the Soviet Union again in 1980 and in 1982.

During the Ogaden war, Ethiopia faced the problem of the Eritrean secessionists as well. Various groups such as the Eritrean Liberation Front (ELF) and the Eritrean People's Liberation Front (EPLF) took control of over ninety five percent of the Eritrean territory. Before discussing the Eritrean problem as a factor in the Ethiopian-Soviet relationship it would not be incorrect to go back and look at the crisis from the historical perspective. As already stated, when the British restored monarchical rule in Ethiopia in 1941, they retained control of the province of Eritrea bordering the Red Sea. This province had much economic and strategic significance for British colonialism. With the rise of the USA as a super-power British interests in the region were transferred so to speak to the US. As the Eritrean province occupied a strategic position on the Red Sea, the Americans wished to keep it under Western influence by merging it with

^{35.}At its 1978 session in Ulan Bator, the Executive Committee of the Council for Mutual Economic Assistance (CMEA) passed a special decision on the members countries co-operation with revolutionary Ethiopia.

Ethiopia, who was their ally in the region. In this regard the then American Secretary of State, John Foster Dulles told the UN Security Council:

"...the strategic interests of the U.S. in the Red Sea basin and considerations of security and world peace make it necessary that the country has to be linked with our ally Ethiopia."³⁶

The Soviet Union on the other hand, in keeping with her policy of freedom to all colonial peoples wanted and indeed encouraged the Eritrean liberation movement.

Early in the 1950s the UN integrated Eritrea into Ethiopia with total disregard for the wishes of the Eritrean people. Emperor Haile Selassie I who had promised to grant the province a measure of regional autonomy failed to do so. As the movement for the liberation of Eritrea was an anti-imperialist, anti-colonialist one, it received both moral and material help from the Soviet Union and other socialist countries. It also however, received help from conservative Arab regimes who were annoyed with Haile Selassie because of his Israel policy.

The 1974 revolution radically changed the approach to the Eritrea problem. The PMAC proclaimed full national and religious equality for all tribes and nationalities in Ethiopia. The Programme of the National Democratic Revolution stated:

36. Stated in Don Cunnell, "The Birth of the Eritrean Nation", Horn of Africa, vol.3, no.1, pp.19-21.

"Given Ethiopia's existing situation the problem of nationalities can be resolved if each nationality is accorded full right to self government. This means that each nationality will have regional autonomy to decide on matters concerning its internal affairs. Within its environs, it has the right to determine the contents of its political, economic and social life, use its own language and elect its own leaders and administrators to head its internal organs."³⁷

In may 1976, the PMAC issued a special declaration aimed at finding a peaceful solution to the Eritrea problem, which recognized the right of all the peoples of Ethiopia to self-determination through regional autonomy. However, the secessionists who were divided into three main political groups, the ELF, the EPLF and the Eritrean Liberation Front Popular Liberation Forces(ELF-PLF) turned increasingly nationalistic and demanded only a separate Eritrean state. These organizations were backed by Western powers and Saudi Arabia. They began to launch a guerilla war against the Ethiopian regime and by mid 1977 controlled a large part of Eritrea. This included the important Red Sea ports of Assab and Massawa. Had the Soviet Union not given material support to Ethiopia, the revolutionary government might have collapsed under the joint aggression of the Eritrean rebels, the Oganden rebels, the attack

37. Cited in Pyotr Manchka, n.1, p.98.

by the Somalis and the skirmishes on the border with Sudan.

Western sources have cited the Soviet-Ethiopian relationship as a calculated risk, the resignation is viewed as a political move, taken in part because of Ethiopia's manpower and prestige in the African continent. Again, the Soviet-Ethiopian relationship is viewed as part of the larger Soviet goal of establishing a Pax Sovietica in the region, whose proximity to the Indian Ocean makes it a pawn in the great power struggle for control of the Ocean. An objective analysis however, brings out the true picture.

It has been suggested that the Soviet Union was forced to support Ethiopia because of the OAU Declaration and because the Somalis had unilaterally abrogated the Friendship treaty and cancelled the access privileges. It must be remembered that the Treaty of Friendship specified that the Soviet military assistance was for "strengthening the defense capability of the Somali Democratic Republic." The USSR was seeking a pledge from Somalia not to use the Soviet supplied weapons for aggressive purposes. As matters turned out, this clause was not followed by the Somalis. In November 1977 when the Somalis justified the abrogation of the treaty in part on the pretext that the Soviet Union had violated its terms by halting military deliveries to

Somalia, the Soviets were able to retort that Somalia had violated the treaty's security clause by invading the Ogaden in the first place.³⁸ Then, there is the charge that the Soviet Union secretly supplied arms to Ethiopia to be used in the Ogaden and against Somalia which was turning increasingly chauvinistic and pro-Arab in its views. However, the first tanks that the Soviet Union delivered to Ethiopia presumably according to the December 1976 agreement were T-34s from PDRY, not Soviet stocks and with PDRY instructors. Moreover, the tanks were used where they were most needed, in Eritrea not in the Ogaden.³⁹ The Western view that the Soviet Union took a calculated step in supporting Ethiopia in order to compensate the loss of the naval facilities in Berbera by hoping to eventually gain access in Ethiopian ports also does not hold good.

In the first place the Soviet "tilt" towards Ethiopia began in August 1977 much before the loss of facilities in Berbera. Their arms shipments to Ethiopia increased as did the cessation of petroleum shipments to Somalia and the shipment of arms stopped as well. The Soviets would have been naive had they not realized that Somalia would view these moves as a sign of the decreasing Soviet

38. Moscow Radio in English to Africa, November 15, 1977 in FBIS Soviet Union Daily Report, November 16, 1977 p. H.2.

39. Washington Post, May 25, 1977, p.28.

happiness with Somalia. Indeed they may even have anticipated the Somali abrogation of the treaty and welcomed it so that their support for socialist Ethiopia could gain more legitimacy. Secondly, the loss of facilities in Berbera could not have been viewed by the Soviet Union as a great loss. The USSR had already gained alternate access privileges in Aden, a much better port. The argument that in return for supporting the Dergue they might have hoped to gain access to the Ethiopian ports of Assab and Massawa is incorrect too, because by the spring of 1977, these ports had been put under siege by the Eritrean guerrillas and when they might become available for naval facilities remained unclear. Moreover, even if it is true as western authors claim that the Soviets eventually obtained access to the Ethiopian island of the Dahlac archipelago, this is a poor substitute for Berbera.⁴⁰ In that case, had the Soviet Union been interested in her own goal of establishing a pax Sovietica with the eventual idea of controlling the Indian Ocean it would have been more logical for her to support Somalia.

Ultimately, therefore, the Soviet-Ethiopian relationship must be viewed in the larger ideological perspective

40. See endnote 17 in Richard Remnek, n.15, P.145.

of helping a socialist country, striving towards social progress through struggle against colonialism, and imperialism in all its manifestations. By performing their international duty towards a revolutionary regime, by defending the inviolability of its (Ethiopia's) sovereign borders, the Soviet Union proved that it stood for a new world order and would not allow a country with nationalistic tendencies to overpower another at a critical juncture in the latter's history.

CHAPTER III

THE SOVIET UNION AND THE YEMENS A JUDICIOUS MIX OF IDEOLOGY AND STRATEGY

The two Yemens - the Yemen Arab Republic (YAR) and the People's Democratic Republic of Yemen (PDRY) - occupy the strategic littoral of the Arabian peninsula at the entrance to the Red Sea and astride the sea lanes to the Persian Gulf and South Asia. In the 1970s they were threatened both by outside attack and internal subversion, primarily because of their location adjacent to major communications and trading routes. The area has continually been the object of intense interest of powerful countries from as far back as 1839 when the British took Aden as part of their strategy to protect the western approaches to India. After the opening of the Suez in 1869, Aden became much more significant; with its excellent natural harbour and modern port facilities, it became one of the busiest ports in the world. More important it commanded the nearby Bab-al-Mandeb Straits a potential chokepoint in the southern approaches to the Suez Canal, Europe's gateway to the Far East.

This strategic location made Aden a worthy prize and several countries attempted to dislodge the British by establishing control of the hinterland or allying with local Sheikhs to put pressure on British position. This

also resulted in these countries remaining the most backward in economic terms, in the world. This was especially true of YAR as South Yemen did have some form of development though it too was largely one sided and more suited to the needs of British imperialism. As a result of the poverty and isolation of North Yemen, the country went through a period of internal strife and civil war in the 1960s beginning with the overthrow of the local Imam in 1962. The resultant civil war between the Royalists and the Republicans saw the intervention of regional powers with Egypt helping the Republicans and the Royalists being supported by Saudi Arabia. The Soviet Union in keeping with her policy of helping anti-imperialist and anti-colonial regimes had always supported North Yemen. Official relations had been established as early as 1928 and a treaty of friendship and trade signed at that time had been renewed in 1955. The birth of the new republic in North Yemen and the resultant civil war saw the Soviets support the progressive republicans against the feudal royalists who were, in real terms merely pawns of the imperialists. This could be seen in that they were being actively supported by Saudi Arabia which was in turn being controlled by the US and multinational oil companies such as Aramco. The republicans, on the other hand were a revolutionary group dedicated to modernisation and hence to the removal of imperialism. At first, the Soviets merely gave political support to the republicans who were

aided by Egypt but were later actively drawn into the war when the royalists seemed to be gaining ground and the Egyptians had security problems of their own at home which resulted in their giving the new regime only secondary support. Largely because of timely Soviet material and moral aid were the republicans able to regain the lost ground. From 1967 onwards Soviet military assistance began, together with an extensive economic aid programme. Thus, till the early 1970s Soviet relations with YAR were cordial and positive.

Until the British withdrawal in 1967, South Yemen remained a British protectorate. With the establishment of the People's Democratic Republic there, which practised non-alignment, and built a strong state economy and carried out agrarian reforms, the Soviet Union sought to build friendly ties with Aden.

The initial Soviet-South Yemen relationship was not a very deep one because of Moscow's reluctance to support a regime which had continued political and economic instability. Border clashes were compounded by a hostile domestic reaction to the reforms carried out by the new government. The PRSY was also embarking on cordial relations with China. Thus even though a new Constitution was set up in 1970 which established a Soviet type of parliamentary system and proclaimed that the society and government should be developed on the basis of "scientific socialism", the Soviet Union had reservations about the PDRY. R.A. Ulianovski, the authori-

-tative Soviet analyst of Third World ideological trends put forward the Soviet perspective in an article. Ignoring completely South Yemeni pretensions to scientific socialism he wrote that the revolutionary democrats while "gaining ground" were far from complete victory. He pointed out that the noncapitalist path was a "complex process" with stages that could not be skipped. He then went on to stress (although without referring to the PDRY) the need to reduce food imports by promoting peasant agriculture, and the need to earn foreign currency.¹

What may have influenced Moscow's decision to increase its support for the PDRY in the 1970s related to the changing strategic situation in the Red Sea and the Indian Ocean. The USSR-Egypt Treaty of Friendship and Cooperation in May 1971, the failure of the communist coup in Sudan in July, the PFLP commando attack on the Israeli-chartered tanker Coral Sea from the PDRY in the same month and subsequent reports that Israel was establishing some kind of presence on the Ethiopian islands of the Red Sea and the US announcement that the US Navy would begin to send in more patrols into the Indian Ocean, made the Soviets realise that they would have to seek a more active policy in the region for the safeguard of

1. R. A. Ulianovski, "Leninism, Soviet Experience and the Newly Free Countries" New Times (Moscow) nos. 1 and 2, January 1 and 13, 1971, pp. 18-21 and 20-24.

their own security. Undoubtedly, in the value of access to Aden for the Soviet Navy, both for ships and shore-based air support and reconnaissance was perceived to be helpful.

In its internal activities, the PDRY was moving in directions favoured by Moscow. The former prime minister Muhammad Ali Haythem was replaced by Air Nasir Muhammad who was seen to be more progressive. This was also a time when South Yemen's borders were continually being subjected to attacks by Saudi supported rebels. The PDRY was also supporting a rebellion in Dhofar which might contribute to the process of change in the Gulf wherein the correlation of forces might well favour socialism. Thus, by early 1972 the stage was set for much closer relations between the two countries.

The Soviet-PDRY relationship

In early 1972 the peace of Soviet-South Yemeni contacts quickened. Official delegations together with a wide variety of aid projects, particularly military aid expanded. Arms deliveries increased dramatically, totalling approximately \$20 million in 1972 (a fourfold increase over 1971)². This was because the political situation in South Yemen became difficult with internal dissension:

2. US Arms Control and Disarmament Agency, World Military Expenditures and Arms Transfers 1970-1979 (Washington D.C., 1982) p.124.

as well as a war between PDRY and YAR on the border in September. In November 1972 President Salim Rubay Ali visited the Soviet Union with a party-government delegation. The joint communique issued at the end of the successful visit praised Aden's progressive reforms and called for the end to the threat from imperialism in the region. For the first time in an official communique the USSR came out strongly in support of the national liberation movement in the Arabian Peninsula. The South Yemenis in turn thanked the Soviet Union for its efforts to preserve peace in the region and for its military aid. They also gave their strong support to Soviet policies in the Middle East:

"The PDRY party-government delegation highly appraised the Soviet Government's consistent and constructive foreign policy in the Near East and ... expressed profound gratitude to the Soviet Union for its constant support for the Arab people's just struggle for freedom and independence..."³

The October War and Sadat's consequent turn to Washington and the impending reopening of the Suez Canal made the Soviet Union realize that a change in the international situation was in the offing in the Arabian peninsula. The Soviet message on PDRY's national day in 1974 stated that the Soviet Union "greatly appreciates the PDRY's friendship

3. The communique is reproduced in FBIS, USSR, November 29, 1972, pp. B7-11.

and cooperation with the Soviet Union and other socialist countries."⁴ In the winter of 1974 a Soviet delegation arrived to discuss the modernization of Aden's airport, showing the Soviet strategic interest. In February 1975 there were two visits by Soviet ships, and naval visits continued throughout the next few years at three times the previous rate.⁵ Together with this, USSR declared that it supported the littoral states' demand for a "Zone of peace" in the Indian Ocean which was being threatened by Washington's decision to expand Diego Garcia into a "powerful nuclear naval base."⁶

Contacts continued in March 1974 with the arrival of a middle level CPSU delegation to discuss inter-party relations and other issues. The Soviet Union promised to continue supporting national liberation struggles on the Arabian Peninsula.⁷ The National Front (the party) was further described by the Soviet Union as a "vanguard organisation of the people" which is regarded as one step below a communist party.⁸ Aden followed up with a visit of government and party officials to Moscow where a communique was signed. The USSR cancelled \$50 million in South Yemeni debts during the visit and promised further assistance in strengthening the defense capability.

4. FBIS, USSR, November 2, 1973, p.F6-7

5. B. Dismukes and J.M. McConnell, Soviet Naval Diplomacy (New York, N.Y., 1979), p.68.

6. V. Pavlovsky and Iu. Tomilin, "The Indian Ocean: Confrontation or Security?" New Times, no.10, March 1974, pp.4-5.

7. FBIS, USSR, April 10, 1974, pp.F6-7.

8. Ibid.

The National Front meanwhile was beset with a power struggle which affected the course of foreign policy in PDRY. On one side was the more pragmatic faction led by Salim Rubay Ali, which while professing dedication to Marxist-Leninist thought and principles believed that only the oil-rich Arab states could provide South Yemen with the economic aid she badly needed. The other faction led by Abd al-Fattah Ismail which was supported most of the time by President Nasir Muhammad favoured retaining close ideological and other ties with the Soviet Union although they did not wish to be under Soviet control. Rubay Ali's quest was made easier by regional events as they developed after mid 1974. The thaw which had begun as a result of the October War between the PDRY and the conservative Arab states led to agreements by Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates at the Rabat Conference in October 1974 to join Kuwait in giving economic aid to the PDRY. The assassination of Saudi Arabia's King Faisal a bitter opponent of communism and leftist radicalism in any form also increased the scope of improved South Yemeni-Arab ties. While Moscow welcomed aid to the region, she cautioned against the threat from the imperialists and reactionaries in response to Rubay Ali's quest. In September 1974, Rubay Ali also visited Cairo for talks with President Sadat where he declared that the Red Sea was an Arab Lake, a claim that the Saudis and Egyptians

were also asserting.⁹ In addition, during 1975 the PDRY indicated that US participation in economic development projects would be welcome.¹⁰

Another event in South Yemen's internal politics took place which saw the defeat of Salim Rubay Ali in October 1975. A Unification Congress took place which united the three domestic parties with the National Front as the dominant force. It was considered as a defeat for Rubay Ali who was known to be heavily opposed to a bureaucratized vanguard party. The Soviet Union welcomed the move with enthusiasm as they had been urging Third World non-communist countries to institutionalize their power and policies in vanguard parties which included local communists at all levels, including the policy making level.

By mid 1976 the Red Sea region had taken on a new significance in the international arena. The Suez Canal had reopened giving the Soviet Union easier access to the Indian Ocean. However, the Soviets faced hostility from Egypt and Saudi Arabia and Sudan which had started a campaign to establish the Red Sea as an "Arab Lake" by drawing the Yemens and Somalia into some kind of arrangement. Moreover, the US decision to expand the Diego Garcia base and

9. FBIS, Middle East and North Africa, September 17, 1974, pp.C1-2.

10. Fred Halliday, "Yemen's Unfinished Revolution: Socialism in the South" MERIP Reports, no.81, October 1979, 10.

the widespread reports about the US having concluded an agreement with Oman for the use of the the British airbase on Masirah island came as a shock to all the peacer-loving nations of the world particularly the littoral states and the USSR as it threatened their security. It was within this critical scenario that the Soviet Union started building a new air base near Aden and gave further arms and military assistance. An increase Soviet navy visits as well as the visit of Admiral Gorshkov in December 1976 and the Soviet First Deputy Defense Minister General Sergei Sokolov must be seen in this light. It is during the latter's visit that the arrangements to send the tanks from South Yemen to Ethiopia for use in the Eritrea which has already been discussed took place. Cuban leader Fidel Castro visited Aden in March 1977, to promote the Soviet backed plan of a Ethiopian, Somalian and Yemeni federation, which however, failed because of Somalia reluctance.

South Yemen's participation ten days later in the Tai'zz Conference on the issue of the Red Sea as an "Arab Lake" with Sudan, the YAR and Somalia was the balancing factor. The Conference was probably meant to create an anti-Soviet security pact around the Red Sea but the persistence of the PDRY and perhaps the YAR

resulted in the joint statement mentioning only keeping the Red Sea as a "zone of peace"¹¹. Following this on a visit of the PDRY Foreign Minister Muhammad Muti to Moscow in May 1977, a joint communique expressed concern at the "attempts being made by imperialist and reactionary forces to create fresh hotbeds of international tension" in the Red Sea region.¹² South Yemen also acknowledged the great importance and expressed support for the Middle East peace initiative that Brezhnev had launched in March. In addition the two sides joined for the first time in a call for the liquidation of foreign (US) bases in the Indian Ocean region.

The Saudi-PDRY relationship meanwhile took a nosedive with Aden's participation in the Soviet arms airlift to Ethiopia in November. The October 11 assassination of YAR President al-Hamdi on the eve of his first, and the first ever, by a YAR President visit to the PDRY provided the penultimate. Mystery surrounds the reasons for, and the perpetrators of, the assassination; it appears to have been the result, at least in part, of a realization in Riyadh that South Yemen was going to remain aligned to the USSR no matter what the promise of Saudi aid, and the consequent fear that Yemeni rapprochement could lead to Yemenu

11. FBIS, Middle East and North Africa, March 24, 1977, p. 06-7.

12. FBIS, USSR, May 16, 1977, p. F2.

unity on terms inimical to Saudi interest. The Saudis were already dragging their feet over the implementation of their aid. In South Yemen the murder of al-Hamdi and the widespread belief that Saudi Arabia was behind it¹³ led to a cooling of relations resulting finally in the respective Ambassadors being withdrawn.

In early 1978 relations between the PDRY and the Soviet Union continued to grow warmer. In January the South Yemeni troops were withdrawn from Lebanon and sent to Ethiopia. Prime Minister Ali Nasir Muhammad led a delegation to Moscow in 1978. Even before this Abd al-Fattah Ismail had visited Moscow in late 1977 (November). Immediately after his return, Somalia unilaterally abrogated the Treaty of Friendship and Cooperation, after which the Soviet use of access facilities in Aden increased. The Nasir Muhammad visit in February 1978 led to a major aid package for development projects. Ties continued to develop with the arrival of a CPSU delegation in March and Admiral Gorshkov's visit in May 1978. Reports claimed that a secret 15-year military cooperation agreement was negotiated at this time with provisions for: 1) a new naval base for the PDRY which would offer the Soviet fleet facilities for repairs, storage, communications and monitoring

13. Aden News Agency carried Radio Moscow's report from Beirut that the North Yemeni Democratic Front had claimed that the United States and Saudi Arabia had "directed the murderers" EBIS, USSR, October 27 1977 p. F2.

(such as they had in Berbera) 2) a new air force base near Aden which would offer facilities for the Soviets: 3) a major radar network covering the PDRY-Saudi Arabia and the PDRY-Oman border; and 4) Soviet assistance to South Yemen in the event of foreign aggression.¹⁴ It should be noted that 2) and 3) have been built but 1) has not. If 4) was in fact agreed upon, it remains a deep secret.

At the same time the internal power struggle in South Yemen intensified resulting ultimately in Ismail having won out by the beginning of May and the execution of Rubay Ali in June. The Soviet Union appears not to have participated in the fighting in Aden and Soviet efforts throughout the entire period concentrated on making sure that there was no outside threat to South Yemen from Saudi Arabia or US backed nations in the region.

This was because for the first few months following this internal power struggle there appeared to be a real threat to the new regime. The new YAR government issued a stream of bellicose statements, there were reports of North Yemeni and Saudi Arabian forces massing on the borders, and some of the South Yemeni emigre groups and their radio were reactivated. On Saudi and North Yemeni urging

14. FBIS, Middle East and North Africa, July 10, 1978,
p. C4.

the Arab League announced a freeze on economic and diplomatic relations with the PDRY. Inside the PDRY, fighting continued throughout the summer and sporadically in the autumn; widespread purges were carried out in the armed forces, party and government.¹⁵

To help the new regime cope with these various problems the Soviets provided various types of assistance in addition to verbal support.¹⁶ There were reports of Soviet ships being stationed in Aden and near Perim Island "for guard duty."¹⁷ In mid-August, a group of Soviet ships paid a well-publicized visit to Aden where assistance in developing the PDRY Navy was also offered.¹⁸ The Soviet Union also promised \$50 million in economic aid to help offset the Arab League's sanctions against the PDRY.¹⁹

The formation of the Yemeni Socialist Party (YSP) at its first Congress October 11-14, 1978 and the reorganization of the government structure in December institutionalized Abd al-Fattah Ismail's triumph. The party program declared that the YSP would be "guided by the theory

15. Middle East Contemporary Survey, 1977-78, p. 661

16. On July 4, Pravda published a statement by Ali Antar that "if South Yemen is obliged to fight it will not fight alone. The PDRY can count on aid from its allies - both within the Arab world and outside it." Two days later Moscow radio broadcast the statement to the Arab world that "the progressive forces will not leave it (the PDRY) alone to face the danger"; see, FBIS, USSR July 7, 1978, p. F6 and FBIS, USSR July 13, 1978, pp. F3-4.

17. FBIS, Middle East and North Africa, August 22, 1978, p. C3.

18. Ibid.

19. Table 5:15 in P. Wiles ed., The New Communist Third World (New York, 1982).

of scientific socialism and the historical experience of socialist construction above all that of the Soviet Union."²⁰ Ismail stressed the need to strengthen relations in all spheres with the socialist countries, relations which he said were "principled and strategic."²¹ The Soviet Union too, was pleased with the direction the PDRY was taking and confirmed it as one of the countries of socialist orientation. As has been noted, delegations of party workers in all sectors had been frequently exchanged between the PDRY and the Soviet Union. After 1978, this continued along with other socialist countries as well.

The border tension meanwhile continued, particularly with the YAR. Ismail accusing the "reactionary Arab states" of stepping up hostile activities against the PDRY, called for help in mid November. Relations with the Soviet Union, he said, were closer than those represented by "paper treaties" because they were based on proletarian internationalism: the Soviet Union would rush to the defense of the PDRY if the latter's regime were threatened.²² The USSR in turn responded as a true socialist ally. Two days later the Soviet Ambassador to the PDRY "emphasized the readiness of the Soviet people to extend assistance to Democratic

Pravda, October 14, 1978.

21. EBIS, Middle East and North Africa, October 16, 1978, C3.

22. Ibid., November 14, 1978, p. C1.

Yemen in any field and at any time."²³ Ideological support and Soviet support for Ismail personally was underlined by the publication of an article by him in World Marxist Review. At the end of January 1979, the two countries signed an economic and technical cooperation agreement with \$36 million in new aid for agriculture, mineral prospecting, education and port improvements in Aden. Moscow also stepped up its arms near Aden, and began to increase the number of its ships in the area. In January the Soviets promised to deliver more MiG-21s, 15 MiG-23s and SU-22 fighter bombers.²⁴

War broke out on the PDRY-YAR border on February 24, 1979. (The causes and details of this conflict will be examined in the Soviet-YAR relationship). The positive effects of this war was the demonstration of PDRY's strength and the Soviet loyalty to an ally among the Arab world. The conflict demonstrated North Yemen's weakness and when it ended in an agreement to unify the two Yemens the dominance of the South seemed possible. On the negative side however, the United States decided to station a carrier task force in the Indian Ocean; it appeared to have begun

23. Ibid., November 17, 1978, p. C3. The Statement may be interpreted as a warning to the Saudis and the YAR that the Soviet Union was ready to give all forms of material and military assistance should it be required for the defense of the PDRY.

24. The Military Balance (London) 1979-80, p. 105.

a military presence in North Yemen, and there were reports that it had concluded a military access agreement with Muscat. Thus, in such a situation where a hostile Saudi Arabia loomed large. South Yemen would be more isolated than before.

In this situation the Soviet moved to bolster South Yemen's armed forces with 150 T-54 and T-55 tanks and Mig-21s and SU-22s; they promised to supply 50 T-62 tanks, helicopters and two patrol boats.²⁵ In all, the Soviet Union provided \$250 million worth of military aid in 1979, almost double the 1988 level.²⁶ In the summer of 1979, the Soviet carrier Minsk accompanied by five ships visited Aden as part of a long tour to West Africa and the Indian Ocean. During 1979 it became clear that both the Soviet Union and South Yemen were making a major effort to cement political ties with each other and with other progressive regimes in the region. In early April Muti went to Ethiopia, Somalia and Djibouti and a month later Ismail visited Ethiopia. Thereafter in the month of June a flurry of visits including a Soviet delegation led by General Epishev, Director of the Main Political Directorate of the Soviet Army and Navy occurred. This flurry was culminated with Nasir Muhammad's visit to Moscow to attend the session of the CMEA, in which the PDRY was granted observer status, the

25. Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI) World Armaments and Disarmament 1980, (Stockholm, 1981), p.162.

26. U.S. Arms Control and Disarmament Agency, World Military Expenditures and Arms Transfers 1971-80, (Washington, 1983) p. 114.

first ver Arab country to achieve this. This was a very important step in the Soviet-South Yemen relationship as it was the signal for the onset of an organic tie between the socialist camp and the PDRY. Kosygin visited South Yemen in September 1979.

The regional tension in the Arabian Peninsula meanwhile continued to deteriorate with US imperialism showing a much more over policy. The US Navy now deployed a carrier task force regularly in the Arabian Sea; Washington was talking about creating a rapid deployment force, and Oman was rumored to be putting Masirah Island at its disposal. Oman itself was promoting a plan for the defense of the Strait of Hormuz which would involve the US Navy and the Gulf oil states. Thus, in October 1979, the PDRY and the Soviet Union signed a 20-year Treaty of Friendship and Cooperation.

The Treaty was similar to most Soviet treaties signed with progressive Third World countries. It committed both sides to long term all-round cooperation and to cooperation to insure the conditions for preserving and further developing their people's socio economic gains. Both sides promised to promote disarmament and the struggle against imperialism. The clauses relating to defense bring out the Soviet assertion for a socialist ally:

"The high contracting parties will continue to develop cooperation in the military sphere on the basis of the relevant agreements concluded between them in the interests of strengthening their defense capability, (Article 50.

The high contracting parties will consult with one another on important international questions directly affecting the two countries interests."²⁷

The PDRY also signed Treaties of Friendship and Cooperation with East Germany in late November and Ethiopia in early December.

The Soviet-South Yemeni relationship thus, continued to draw closer throughout the 1970s. It can be best described in the words of Ali Nasir Muhammad, President of the PDRY and General Secretary of the YSP; who stressed that the PDRY would:

"...continue strengthening and developing links of militant and fruitful cooperation with the Soviet Union and the GDR on the basis of the treaties of friendship and cooperation signed with these countries. We shall continue strengthening our links with other countries of the socialist community on the basis of proletarian internationalism. It is necessary to raise these links to a level that would reflect the identity of purpose and socialist principles for the sake of which we are fighting against imperialism and reaction, for peace and socialism."²⁸

27. Z. Imam, "Soviet Treaties with Third World Countries" Soviet Studies, no. 35, January 1983.

28. FBIS, USSR April 29, 1980, p.H4.

The Soviet-YAR Relationship

As already noted the two Yemens fell into the antagonism of the conservative and the radical, forcing Moscow to choose between the two. After mid-1969, Soviet military aid to South Yemen grew rapidly, while supplies to the YAR were curtailed. It must be remembered that prior to the British withdrawal from Aden, the Soviets had begun developing ties with the YAR. During the civil war between the republican and royalist forces, Moscow in keeping with her policy of siding all progressive liberation forces had supported the republican side. An emergency airlift of small arms ensured the timely survival of the new republican regime. However the new Sanaa government also made moves to develop closer ties with its conservative neighbour Saudi Arabia. Together with the gradual Soviet-South Yemeni alignment, this resulted in a stalemate in Soviet-North Yemeni ties and indeed a slight deterioration with the curtailing of arms aid. Economic aid nevertheless, continued. Thus, when YAR President al-Iryani and Prime Minister al-Ayni visited Moscow for ten days in December 1971, the arms aid was a mere \$15 million of obsolescent weapons while the economic field proved better fare with a new loan of \$35 million for the expansion of existing projects.²⁹ Moscow however, continued to maintain correct

29. Arab Report and Record, February 16-29, 1972 p.97; Sanaa Radio indicated Yemeni displeasure by referring only to a gift of "some arms" also. USSR and the Third World, no.2, January-February 1972, p.46.

relations with YAR and even on the issue of the border clashes between the YAR and the PDRY which threatened the survival of the PDRY blamed Saudi Arabia and the imperialists who were judged to be poisoning inter-Yemeni relations in order to weaken progressive forces on the peninsula. The Soviet policy of maintaining good relations with all states was seen in that there was very little criticism of the YAR reiterating the belief that the USSR was genuinely interested in preserving peace in the region.

Events in Sanaa proved that the YAR was moving irrevocably the Western camp. In May a Saudi military delegation visited Sanaa, promising direct military cooperation to accompany the financial aid and tribal subsidies which appeared to be tying the YAR tightly to Riyadh. The Saudi connection led to the improvement in YAR's relations with Washington. On July 2, Secretary of State Rogers arrived unexpectedly at the end of a trip of Riyadh for a short visit during which diplomatic relations were restored and economic aid promised. The Soviets saw this as yet another imperialist move to encircle the PDRY and after Sadat's expulsion of Soviet advisers in mid-July, worried about possible US plans to organize an anti-Soviet security bloc in the Red Sea.³⁰ This concern was heightened at the end of July with the

30. FBIS, USSR, 19, 1972 pp. B10-11; FBIS, USSR July 25, 1972, p. B15.

convening of a Red Sea economic conference in Jiddah, to which the PDRY was not invited.

In spite of these moves, the Soviet Union did not follow PDRY's lead in describing the North Yemen regime as "hostile" to the PDRY.³¹ In late September the Soviet Union and YAR exchanged visits and Podgorny's anniversary cable expressed confidence that relations of friendship and cooperation would continue, and wished the YAR progress, well-being and peace.

Meanwhile war broke out between YAR and PDRY and Moscow was in a difficult position of trying to maintain peace in the region. She, however, expressed her preferences by attacking the imperialists and reactionaries for their intrigues against South Yemen. The war ended in October 1972, and moves to restore peace were mooted by other Arab states. To the general relief of the USSR and other peace loving states an agreement was worked out between the two Yemens to unify. The unity agreement failed to make headway primarily because of the staunchly conservative government in Sanaa who, backed by reactionaries like King Faisal of Saudi Arabia demanded that South Yemen change her progressive ways. Moves such as the aim of the proposed new state being

31. FBIS, Middle East and North Africa, July 11, 1972, pp. B1-2
 The Soviets in fact had reason to feel encouraged; in July the government instructed a Sanaa periodical to cease publishing articles critical of Moscow. Arab Report and Record July 16-31, 1972, p.362

socialism (instead of scientific socialism), Islam being the religion of the state and the Islamic Sharia being the source of legislation called for a reversal of the progressive trend. The Soviet Union made their position clear in a Radio Peace and Progress broadcast on January 15, 1973:

"Reactionaries like king Faysal of Arabia... are interpreting the agreement on unity... as demands for a capitulation of the progressive regime in Aden. They demand that the Democratic Yemen abandon scientific socialism, agrarian reform and the growth of the state sector...The main condition for unity would be a break with the USSR ..."³²

It was to be expected that South Yemen too would not sacrifice her revolutionary progress to the demands of the reactionary circles. The Soviet-North Yemeni relationship worsened, but never took a complete break. A Soviet parliamentary delegation visited in April 1973 and the YAR Commander-in-Chief visited Moscow. Many YAR students continued their studies in USSR and infact 60 new scholarships were awarded. In August a North Yemeni delegation went to the Soviet Union. The October War opened the way for better Soviet relations with the Arab world as all the Arabs rallied against Israel and the USA. North Yemen took part atleast symbolically, in the closure of bab al-mandab to Israeli shipping; the prospect of the

32. USSR and the Third World, no.3, January 15-February 18, 1973 p.105.

reopening the Suez Canal gave Moscow an extra stake in improving its relations with the Red Sea states; finally the oil embargo led the Soviets to hope for a breakthrough in Saudi-Soviet relations, and improved Soviet-YAR relations might be of some use in promoting this. For a few months both sides made public relations gestures. Telegrams were sent expressing support and gratitude; religious delegations were exchanged. The Soviets agreed to provide more medical and educational aid, and to expand the port facilities at Hodaydah. In March TASS referred to:

"...YAR's anti-imperialist foreign policy... the identity or proximity of the stands held by the USSR and YAR on many pressing foreign policy issues which creates favourable conditions of all-round cooperation between our two countries."³³

In June 1974, Lt. Col. Ibrahim al-Handi assumed power. He made perfunctory overtures to Soviet friendship calls and moved to develop closer ties with Saudi Arabia. Consequently YAR moved closer to the West, and US Navy ships visited Hodaydah twice, probably to initiate a discussion on establishing a base or at least access facilities. Reports on a proposed US arms sale to North Yemen and a \$250 million loan from Saudi Arabia appeared.³⁴

In November 1975 Moscow tried to improve relations with Sanaa by receiving a YAR military mission led by Abdullah

33. FBIS, USSR, March 22, 1974, pp. F5-6.

34. FBIS, Middle East and North Africa, August 7, 1975, p. C2.

Abd al-Alim confidant of al-Hamdi. The talks were described as "warm and friendly" and the Soviets offered a substantial aid package.³⁵ However, this was rejected and relations remained the same. The Soviet Union meanwhile concentrated in improving relations with other littoral states in the region. With PDRY making overtures to the Saudis, the Soviets turned to the southern end of the Red Sea that is to Somalia and Ethiopia and tried to promote peace in the Horn.

Saudi Arabia meanwhile had emerged as a regional power with its rapidly accumulating oil revenues. Encouraged by Washington, she began to promote the concept of a Red Sea security pact to be joined by all the Arab countries on the Red Sea littoral. Planning went on at a feverish pace in January and February 1977, with Saudi Arabia choosing to remain behind the scenes as much as possible. Sudan and the YAR were the most vocal of the advocates the latter motivated perhaps partly by Saudi pressure, and probably by the desire to consolidate relations with other regional states. Sanaa did not appear to be concerned about the Soviets in the Red Sea as it was about its dispute with Ethiopia over the ownership of some Red Sea islands and Israeli presence there.

To all intents however, the idea of a Red Sea security pact fizzled out with the Ta'izz Conference in March 22-23,

35. United States Arms Policies in the Persian Gulf and Red Sea Areas: Past, Present and Future, U. S. Congress, House, Committee on International Relations, (Washington, 1977) p.80

1977 which was attended by the heads of state of the YAR, Sudan, Somalia, and the PDRY but not Egypt or Saudi Arabia. While nothing emerged, the Soviet Union termed it an imperialist move to prevent the legitimate use of the Sea which was of strategic and commercial significance.³⁶ North Yemen however, joined hands with PDRY in declaring its determination to keep the Red Sea a zone of peace, protected from "imperialist and zionist ambition; al-Hamdi himself increased his contacts with Rubay Ali and announced his intention of making a visit (the first ever) to Aden in mid-October to pursue the idea of unity.

Two days before the visit al-Hamdi was assassinated. The Soviets put the blame squarely on the Saudis whose motive they stated was to stop the growing rapprochement with PDRY.³⁷ This belief was further strengthened by the succession of Colonel Ahmad al-Ghashmi, who had close ties with the Saudis. However, even he remained in power for only a short while, and was killed by a bomb in July 1978. He was followed by President Ali Abdullah Salih who troubled by the unrest promoted by the National Democratic Front (NDF) the banner under which the main leftist groups of southern YAR had grouped, made peace with the northern tribes and sought Saudi aid. North Yemen also asked for and received aid from the USA worth \$360 million.

36. I. Tsaplin, "The Red Sea in Reaction's Plan", New Times no. 17, April 1977, pp.20-21.

37. FBIS, USSR, October 24, 1977, p.F1; FBIS, USSR, October 25, 1977, pp.F4-5; FBIS, USSR, October 27, 1977, p.F2.

YAR believed that the Soviet Union was trying to work against their regime through the tighter military and political relationship with Aden. Their belief was further deepened with the founding of the YSP in October 1978 in which representatives of the NDF participated and publicly attacked the North Yemen regime. Both governments began to name each other as the perpetrator of terrorist acts. War began between the two in February 1979 over the YAR drive against the NDF-held villages on the border with PDRY. Within days the PDRY army had demonstrated their superiority, and the war ended in March (1979).

The aftermath of the war saw an attempted coup in YAR as well as the greater dependence on Saudi Arabia. Under such circumstances relations between the two states merely remained correct. Two long articles had signalled a positive attitude toward Sana'a in 1980-81. The first appeared in *Izvestia* on November 21, 1980 and the second was an extensive interview with the Soviet Ambassador to the YAR which promised the North Yemeni government help in aid in the economic, political and military fields.³⁸ Nonetheless, relations did not improve and the Soviet-YAR relationship remained peripheral at the onset of the 1980s.

To conclude on the Soviet relationship with the Yemens the above essay shows that the Soviet Union has remained true to her

38. FBIS, USSR, January 15, 1981, pp. H4-7.

ideological objectives. Undoubtedly, strategic considerations have played a part. As the Soviet Ambassador to the YAR indicated in an interview with regard to this region:

"...it overlooks an area of extreme importance for the strategies of the major powers regarding both East Africa and the southern Arabian Peninsula...Geographically and politically this area is very close to us and it is located in 'our belly'. We are very interested in knowing what happens in it and around it with regard to developments and changes so that we can reach conclusions which we incorporate in our calculations of our strategic dealings with the powers around us."³⁹

It would be unnatural if strategic considerations did not play a role in the Soviet relationship with the countries of the Arabian Peninsula. The Soviet ships going through from the East coast to the West coast pass through the Red Sea and the PDRY controlled Bab el Mandeb Strait. This strait is divided into two by a small island called Perim Island, the larger channel between Perim and the African coast while the smaller between Perim and North Yemen. On the African coast the Straits are hugged by Ethiopia and Djibouti. Should any of the three states choose to, they could close the Red Sea to all shipping particularly through such easy means as a gun emplacement or missile battery. Viewed in such a perspective, it then seems plausible for the Soviets to have a stake in these littoral states for their own access. The western view then holds: that the Soviet Union maintains rela-

39. Ibid

-tions with these states for her own strategic interest.⁴⁰

In the eyes of Western Sovietologists who have specialised on their Middle East policy, the Soviet role in the region is that of a great power seeking to control the states as a factor of leverage in bargaining with the West. Thus Brzezinski, the National Security Adviser to President Carter claimed in 1979 stated that an "arc of crisis" existed in the Indian Ocean with the Soviet Union consolidating its position in many of the littoral states. This view point is however, very limited as the Soviet Union has no military or naval bases in the Yemens indeed, in the Indian Ocean region. This is in direct contrast to the US who has a number of bases such as the one in Diego Garcia. True, the Soviet Union has access facilities in South Yemen and Soviet ships visit the country quite often. But this should not be equated with military bases in the Red Sea area. Contrary to this, the USSR has always been a propagator of peaceful relations among states and has called for the Red Sea being declared a "zone of peace". The Soviet policy in the region is in keeping with her ideological perspective - supporting national liberation movements and progressive movements as allies of the socialist camp;

40. See, Dieter Braun, The Indian Ocean: Region of Conflict of 'zone of peace'? (London, 1983) pp.150-51; Also Amnon Sella, Soviet Political and Military Conduct in the Middle East (London, 1981) pp.48-51;

CHAPTER IV

SOVIET UNION AND EGYPT AND SUDAN NON-ALIGNMENT TURNS INTO ALIGNMENT

The Soviet-Sudanese Relationship

No discussion on the Soviet Union and the Red Sea would be complete without examining her relationship with the other Red Sea states, namely, Sudan and Egypt. With Saudi Arabia which is also a Red Sea State, the Soviet Union has no diplomatic relations. Incidentally, Saudi Arabia was the first state to open diplomatic relations with Moscow in the their ties, but these relations have now remained suspended over a long time. Soviet relations with these states deteriorated or remained largely peripheral depending on the states concerned. In the case of Sudan following a military coup d'etat in May 1969 Jaafar Nimeri came to power. He proclaimed the Sudan to be a democratic republic and defined the main foreign policy aims of his regime as the support of national liberation movements against imperialism, active support of the Palestinian struggle, and extension of the Sudan's ties to the Arab world and the socialist countries. Domestically, Nimeri proclaimed the formation of a single party of "workers, peasants, soldiers, national bourgeoisie and the progressive intelligentsia." Communists were prominently represented in Nimeri's first cabinet, although the Communist Party like all existing parties, was officially dissolved.

The Soviet Union as part of her progressive foreign policy consolidated her relations with Nimeri's regime. The Sudanese leader was invited to Moscow in November 1969 and agreements were signed for the expansion of trade and cultural and scientific cooperation.¹ State relations continued to improve in early 1970 as vessels of the Soviet navy paid a visit to Port Sudan and the USSR began to supply the Sudan with military equipment.² As Soviet-Sudanese relations improved, the Soviet leaders apparently decided that in order to further solidify ties with that nation the powerful Sudanese Communist Party should dissolve itself and its members should join Nimer's one-party regime as individuals, much as the Egyptian Communist Party had done earlier.³ However, the Sudanese Communist Party was split and the faction led by the Secretary General Abdel Mahgoub apparently refused to comply with the Soviet request. Nonetheless Mahgoub was willing to support the Nimeri regime as he believed that the new regime was a progressive one. Yet, as the situation in the Sudan

1. Sudan News, January 13, 1970 cited in Record of the Arab World 1970, p.419.

2. TASS, January 2, 1970 cited in Record of the Arab World, 1970, p.418.

3. Aryeh Yod a fat, "The USSR and the Arab Communist Parties, " New Middle East, no.32, May 1971, p.33.

developed, it became clear that Nimeri was using the Sudanese Communists to weaken his right-wing enemies, the Mahdists. Once the Mahdists were eliminated as a political force Nimeri arrested and then exiled Mahgoub who had become increasingly critical of Nimeri's policies. While the other faction remained allied to the new regime, it appeared that the future of the Communists in the Sudan was rather bleak as the Sudanese leader merely used them against other political forces.

Faced by the Communist challenges to his power, Nimeri cracked down hard on the Communists on May 25, 1971, arresting seventy Communist leaders, including nearly all the central committee, and dissolving the unions that served as the Communist bases of power.⁴ While Nimeri was careful during this process to pledge that such actions would not harm Soviet-Sudanese friendship, it is clear that the Russians were not at all unhappy when Nimeri was ousted less than two months later on July 19 by a group of army officers opposed to many of his policies. Soviet correspondent Dmitry Volsky, in reporting the goals of the new regime, which though not communist was supported by Maghoub's wing of the party and pledged closer cooperation with the Soviet Union, took the opportunity to comment negatively on

4. Anthony Sylvester, "Mohammed vs. Lenin in Revolutionary Sudan" New Middle East, no.34, July 1971, pp.26-28.

Nimeri. He complained that some of the factories that had been nationalised in 1970 had been turned back to private ownership by Nimeri and that the ousted Sudanese leader had begun to include businessmen in his government as well.⁵ However, only three days later with the aid of Libya and Egypt, Nimeri was to return to power. One of the first actions taken by him was to order the execution of the leading Communists in the Sudan including the general secretary Abdel Mahgoub and the Lenin prize winner Ahmed el-Sheikh who were blamed for instigating the coup.

The Soviet Union first tried to resolve the issue by condemning the crackdown on the Communist leaders, but still holding out the hope for an improvement in the Soviet-Sudanese relationship. A TASS statement of July 28, 1971, commented:

"All Soviet people profoundly sympathising with the friendly Sudanese people, are anxiously following the developments of events in the Sudan. Together with the world's progressive public, they express the hope that the Sudanese leadership will realise the danger of the path onto which it is pushing the country and the danger the present situation poses for the very destiny of the Sudanese national democratic revolution, and will find the strength to return to the path of strengthening the unity of all patriotic forces, thereby ensuring success in the struggle against

5. Dmitry Volsky, "Changes in the Sudan", New Times, no.30, July 1971, p.11.

imperialism and reaction, for the consolidation of their national independence and for the social progress of the Democratic Republic of the Sudan."⁶

When the TASS statement failed to elicit any change in Nimeri's anti-Communist campaign and Mahgoub was executed despite Soviet protest, the Soviet Union attacked the Nimeri regime:

"The wire services are bringing more and more new reports about the unbridled arbitrary rule and mass arrests and executions of patriots in the Sudan. To all intents an atmosphere of the cruelest terror against the country's progressive forces, first of all against the communists has been established in the country."⁷

Despite this diplomatic relations between the two states were not broken although Nimeri recalled his ambassador from Moscow and expelled the counselor of the Soviet Embassy along with the Bulgarian ambassador.

Relations between the two states improved slightly in 1972 and Nimeri announced that the Sudan would restore full diplomatic relations with the Soviet Union by the end of the Year.⁸ However, by and large the Soviet-Sudanese

6. TASS, July 28, 1971, in Current Digest of the Soviet Press 23, no.29, pp.3-4.

7. Pravda, July 30, 1971, in Current Digest of the Soviet Press 23, no.29, p.5.

8. New York Times, October 27, 1972.

relationship remained peripheral throughout the rest of the 1970s as the Sudan moved closer to anti-Soviet regimes such as Egypt. Soviet relations with the Sudan however, resulted in an important policy formulation on the Soviet Third World Policy. Prior to the Sudanese debacle, the USSR had encouraged the merger and dissolution of the local communist parties in the larger interests of the national parties which came to power. The policy change resulted in active encouragement of "national fronts" in the region where the Communists would participate as members of an independent political party although clearly as junior partners. This shows the continued Soviet commitment to its ideological stand of supporting the national democratic revolution.

The Soviet-Egyptian Relationship

The Soviet Union began its ties with Egypt in 1955 with an arms deal which counteracted the US-sponsored Bagdad Pact of the Middle East. Nasser also nationalised the Suez Canal in 1956 and Soviet military and economic aid to Egypt continued on an even larger scale. The USSR was however, faced with a dilemma by Nasser declaring the Egyptian Communist Party to be illegal and keeping its leaders in prison. Thus, while the Soviet union regarded Nasser as a useful ally during the cold war, as the leader of the

Communist movement she felt constrained to try to protect the local Communist Party and protested to Cairo on several occasions. Egypt however, denounced such "interference" in Egypt's internal affairs and relations between the two countries deteriorated as a result.⁹

Despite a brief rapprochement with Nasser in 1960. Khrushchev once again clashed with Egyptian leader in May 1961 during a visit by an Egyptian parliamentary delegation headed by Anwar Sadat, who was then chairman of the United Arab Republic's National Assembly. The clash occurred because of the Egyptian refusal to recognize the link between socialism and communism and the continued priority given to Arab nationalism. In the fall of 1961 Egypt nationalised a large portion of the industry and relations improved. Khrushchev used the term "revolutionary democracy" to describe Egypt, a term used for those states moving along the non-capitalist path towards socialism without the help of a Communist Party. He further urged the weak and faction ridden Egyptian Communist Party to dissolve officially and join the Arab Socialist Union (ASU) which was Nasser's mass political organisation and the only one permitted in Egypt. In another policy innovation the Soviet leadership moved

9. Press Release 50/59 (March 20, 1959) UAR Information Department Cairo, in Walter Laquer, The Struggle for the Middle East, (New York, 1969) p.235.

to establish party-to-party relations with the ASU claiming that this would enable the CPSU to directly transmit its revolutionary experience to the one-party regimes of the Arab states. The Soviet leadership during that period of follow an impulsive and energetic policy with regard to Egypt. During the time of Brezhnev and Kosygin the Egyptian Communist party lay dissolved and the hope of forming vanguard cadres in the ASU with active communist presence was foiled by Nasser who still dominated the political scene. The ASU was regarded as an anti-imperialist party and the Arab struggle was termed as the "struggle against imperialism". But, this policy of branding Israel as the "imperialist wedge" proved to be a misfortune as the USSR got involved in the June 1967 Arab-Israeli war and into an open conflict with Israel and the United States in July 1970.

By the end of 1970 the USSR was actively involved in Egypt providing valuable material assistance to the Egyptians against the Israeli attack. Soviet military and economic aid increased and Soviet troops were stationed in Egypt. Because of the timely Soviet assistance Israel called for a ceasefire together with the US which was accepted by Egypt and the Soviet Union in the larger interests of world peace.

President Nasser died in 1970 and was replaced by Anwar Sadat was in the initial period continued to maintain good

ties with the USSR. There were frequent trips between Moscow and Cairo with the Egyptian Vice President Ali Sabry's long visit to the USSR in December 1970, Soviet President Podgorny's visit following month to celebrate the opening of the prestigious Soviet sponsored Aswan dam, and President Sadat's visit to Moscow in February 1971 to discuss the breakdown of the Arab-Israeli settlement talks. The anti-imperialist federation between Egypt, Libya, Sudan and Syria was also welcomed by the Soviets as an "anti-imperialist force in the Arab world."¹⁰

As with the Sudanese communists, the Egyptian communists led by Ali Sabry opposed the federation and tried to oust Sadat from power. He was removed from the post of vice president and indeed Sadat followed the removal of Sabry by a wholesale purge of all his major opponents in May 1971, including those who believed in maintaining closer ties with the USSR. In spite of these provocations the Soviet Union signed a treaty of Friendship and Cooperation with Egypt in 1971. The treaty was hailed as an important demonstration that the United States had failed in its attempts to "drive a wedge between the USSR and Egypt."¹¹ In a dinner speech following conclusion of the treaty Podgorny stated:

10. Jaan Penner, The USSR and the Arabs: The Ideological Dimension (New York, 1970) p.50.

11. Pravda, May 29, 1971, translated in Current Digest of the Soviet Press, 23, no.22, p.5

"The treaty between the Soviet Union and the United Arab Republic signifies a new blow to the plans of international imperialism which is trying in every possible way to drive a wedge into the relations between our countries, to undermine our friendship and to divide the progressive forces."¹²

Following the treaty however, Sadat took a course in both domestic and foreign policy that was directed against the Soviet Union and the Egyptian Communists. This included the jailing of a number of communist sympathisers, increasing encouragement to foreign and domestic capital and emphasising national unity over class struggle with regard to the trade unions. In foreign policy too, Sadat praised the return of Nimeri to power in the Sudan as a victory of the people's will. Relations between the Soviet Union and Egypt now began to cool as Sadat invited western political leaders to Cairo such as the British Foreign Secretary Sir Alec Douglas Home and the US Secretary of State William Rogers. Sadat's trip to Moscow in October 1971 was largely unsuccessful. Its only gain was a major economic agreement on Soviet aid to construct the \$110 million aluminium plant at Nag Hammadi. His second visit to Moscow in February 1972 similarly only stressed the need for a peaceful settlement of the Middle East conflict. Relations between the two states continued to deteriorate; friction over military officers, the Soviet use of Egyptian airbases, Sadat's

12. Ibid.

increasing alignment with anti-Soviet states such as Libya and Saudi Arabia as well as Egypt's partial restoration of capitalism were some of the many grievances voiced by the USSR. Egyptian discontent of the Soviet refusal in the event of a war against Israel and the failure of a final arms seeking trip by Egyptian Premier Aziz Sidky to Moscow on July 14 led to the finale of the Soviet-Egyptian relationship. Sidky complained that "while our enemy (Israel) has a friend in the world (the USA) which acts rashly and escalates, we have a friend (the USSR) which calculates and cautions."¹³ Sadat announced on July 18, 1972 the termination of the mission of the Soviet military advisers and experts, the placing of all military bases in Egypt under Egyptian control and the call for a Soviet-Egyptian meeting to work out a new relationship between the two nations.¹⁴ Thereafter Soviet-Egyptian relations worsened and the period of the 1970s witnessed the Camp David agreement wherein the USSR was excluded from the peace process proving the Soviet assertion that the forces of imperialism and reaction had expanded in the area.

Soviet relations with Saudi Arabia too remained peripheral throughout the 1970s as Saudi Arabia, a conservative

13. Robert Freedman, Soviet Policy Toward the Middle East Since 1970, (New York, 1975) p.77.

14. New York Times, July 19, 1972.

Arab regime, tried to establish itself as a regional power in the Red Sea region supported by the USA. She actively encouraged the Egyptian break with the Soviets, as well as the Yemeni conflict in an effort to oust the USSR from the region. In such circumstances the Soviet relationship with Saudi Arabia remained formal.

To conclude, Soviet relationship with the other countries of the Red Sea must be seen within her larger Third World policy. The USSR tried to act as a loyal ally of all progressive anti-imperialist regimes in the region and provided valuable military assistance during imperialist attacks. However, from the beginning, opportunistic measures by the states of the region under study, left the Soviets with no choice than to withdraw their military aid at the instance of the recipient Arab States. This proves that despite the importance of the strategic location of these countries the Soviet Union has remained true to the ideological consideration of support for progressive regimes and the cause of national liberation struggle of the Arab people against the US-supported Zionist aggression.

One cannot but agree with the view that estrangement between Cairo and Moscow was not brought about by either detente or the Soviet Union's so-called reservations in supplying arms to Egypt. As Devendra Kaushik sums up, "The road to Camp David and Separate peace treaty with

Israel was only the logical culmination of the weak and compromising policies followed by the ruling Egyptian national bourgeoisie since its advent to power in 1952. Its anti-communist pro-US stance before 1955 gradually changed to a non-aligned posture under the force of circumstances ending up in proximity to the USSR and the socialist camp between 1961 and 1970. The pendulum, however, again began to swing in the last days of Nasser, and Sadat only accelerated this process.¹⁵ The strategy to oust the Soviets from Egypt was chalked out at a meeting in Cairo on 6 November 1973 between Sadat and Kissinger and Sisco. The Saudi Arabian King Feisal, his intelligence chief Kamal Adham and the Shah of Iran also played an important role in building a bridge between Cairo and Washington. In 1976 Sadat unilaterally revoked the Soviet-Egyptian Friendship Treaty of 1971. He visited Jerusalem the next year and followed the Camp David Accord of 1978 with the Signing of the Egyptian-Israeli Peace Treaty in March 1979.

Sadat was only continuing the pro-US tilt that had already taken place in the last days of Nasser. According to Sadat in the summer of 1970 Nasser told him on his return from Moscow, "Whether we like it or not all the cards of this

15. Devendra Kaushik, "Soviet-Egyptian Relations from Nasser to Sadat" in Surendra Bhutani (ed.) Arab East Today, New Delhi, 1981, p.100.

game are in America's hands. It is high time that we talked and allowed the USA to take part in this."¹⁶ With Egypt's turn towards America under Sadat Cairo became active in its pro-US role in Africa, the Red Sea region and West Asia. Egypt offered naval facilities to the US Sixth Fleet in the Red Sea ports and invited the Rapid Deployment Force to hold exercises on its territory.

16. Anwar Sadat, In Search of Identity. An Autobiography, New York 1979, pp.107-108.

CONCLUSION

The Red Sea sub-region of the Indian Ocean is obviously a region of great strategic importance to both the United States and the USSR as it forms the main artery for their shipping through the Mediterranean. Several hypotheses have been advanced to explain the Soviet behaviour towards the Red Sea states. Some have seen in it the old Tsarist drive towards the "warm waters" aimed at acquiring a Soviet capability to practise "gunboat diplomacy" and shape events in the region in Moscow's favour in the period when the British announced their withdrawal from "east of Suez". Others have viewed the Soviet naval deployment as a defensive measure to counteract the US submarine warfare capability in the area. Few have even attributed it to a desire to acquire a capability to threaten the oil lifeline of the Western powers or to control the Gulf oilfields to meet the future requirements of the USSR and its East European allies.

While a combination of defensive strategic objectives behind. The Soviet thrust towards the Red Sea cannot be completely ruled out, it is the context of political developments in the littoral countries which best explains the various Soviet moves in the region. One cannot ignore the fact that the region extending from the Persian Gulf to the

Horn of Africa also happens to be the scene of a vast upsurge of the forces of national liberation and social progress to whose fate the Soviet Union being a socialist state cannot afford to be indifferent. Thus Moscow's presence in Egypt, Sudan Somalia, Ethiopia and the Yemens emerged at a time when the imperialist and Zionist forces threatened their newly-won independence and when the national democratic forces launched their drive towards national resurgence. The Soviets helped Egypt not for the sake of getting access to its Red Sea ports but because Britain, France and Israel attacked it in 1956 and Israel occupied its territory by launching a war of aggression in 1967. Sudan's Nimeri regime was extended Soviet assistance because it pretended to follow the path of progress and social transformation. Similarly, in Somalia the Barre regime received Soviet Support in its professed march along the non-capitalist path of development. As has been shown in the preceding pages Moscow did not turn to Somalia as an alternative to make up for its loss of influence in Egypt. Nor did it try to build up its influence there by playing upon its territorial ambitions towards the neighbouring Ethiopia. The Soviets observed great restraint in giving Somalia military assistance and openly declared their support to the OAU Declaration of 1964 on the post-colonial

frontiers in Africa. They began to support Ethiopia only after Somalia attacked Ogaden in 1977 at the instigation of the United States in violation of its obligation towards inviolability of borders in terms of the OAU Declaration. Moscow encouraged the new Ethiopian regime to issue a special declaration in May 1976 committing itself to finding a peaceful solution of the Eritrean problem on the basis of recognition of the right of all the peoples of Ethiopia to national self-determination through regional autonomy. Moscow agreed to give military assistance to the revolutionary government of Addis Ababa when the Western Powers and Saudi Arabia began to back the Eritrean secessionist forces. As already observed, if the Soviet Union had been really serious about its so-called goal of establishing Pax Sovietica with the idea of eventually controlling the Indian Ocean, it would have been more logical for it to continue to support Somalia for the Ethiopian island, of Dahlak is a poor substitute for. Somalia's excellent harbour of Berbera. Soviet policy towards North and South Yemen also shows a distinct disinclination to exploit their differences by playing off one against the other. During the Civil war in North Yemen the Soviets supported the Republicans. They have strongly supported the initiative of the two Yemens for

a peace zone in the Red Sea against the Saudi sponsored proposal for a Red Sea Security Pact. Even in the case of Saudi Arabia Moscow has avoided taking the advantage of instability in the wake of the 1979 attack on the Mecca mosque to work upon the large Yemeni migrant community in that traditional country.

Of course, a certain level of Soviet naval activity is a natural off shoot of acquisition of superpower status, and global military capabilities. Yet it should not be forgotten that the Red Sea provides the most direct passage for the transfer of Soviet naval units from the Far Eastern ports to the Black Sea. The Soviet Navy's utility for the projection of power is curtailed by a number of constraints. Lack of access to an effective overseas basing system is another disadvantage that the Soviet Navy faces. As Rajan Menon writes: "Although much has been made about the existence of Soviet naval bases in various developing countries, much of the excitement that developing countries, much of the excitement that has been generated can be linked to a tendency to use the term "base" in rather imprecise ways. Since the evacuation of Porkkala in Finland and Port Arthur in China during the mid-50s, the Soviets have been unable to obtain exclusive naval facilities to which access is guaranteed by treaty for a specific period of time. They have not acquired facilities comparable to the US Navy in

Diego Garcia, Subic Bay and Yokasuka."¹⁷

To assert therefore that the Soviet military involvement in Angola or Ethiopia through airlifting the Cubans and large military equipment is a consequence of Soviet power projection capability is to miss the basic direction of the policy of the Soviet Union which, as, Malcolm Mackintosh puts it, is still geared to "its relationship with the United States, its confrontation with the West in Europe and its relationship, and its problems with China.

...Activity in the Rest of the world is regarded in Moscow as a vital aspect of a superpower's rights and duties"¹⁸.

The Soviet Union has shown eagerness to respond positively to the desire of the Afro-Asian peoples to convert the Indian Ocean into an ocean of peace, free from nuclear weapons. As far back as 1964 it had sponsored the idea of establishing a denuclearised zone in the region. In the Indo-Soviet joint statement of 29 Sept. 1971 the Soviet side expressed its willingness to urgently take up the matter of ending the naval competition between the great powers and expressed its willingness to act for the conversion of the Indian Ocean into a peace zone on a basis of equality with other big powers. The same stand was reiterated in the Indo-Soviet communique issued after Brezhnev's visit to India in 1973, Mrs. Gandhi's Moscow visit in 1976 and Brezhnev's Delhi visit in 1980.

¹⁷. Rajan Menon, "Soviet Policy in the Third World", in Roger E. Kanet (ed.), Soviet Foreign Policy in the 1980s, New York, 1982, p.271.

¹⁸. Malcolm Mackintosh, "Soviet Foreign and Defence Policy: A Global View", in The Political Implications of Soviet Military Power, ed, Lawrence L. Whetker, New York, 1977 p.30-31

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