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## INTELLIGENCE NOTE

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1972-1-18 Iryani, Russia, Visit

SOVIET-YEMENI RELATIONS: KEEPING THE DOOR OPEN

Allegedly succumbing to a long-standing official Soviet invitation to visit the USSR, Yemen Arab Republic (YAR) President al Iryani, accompanied by Foreign Minister al Ayni and a group of other senior military and civilian officials, toured Moscow and the provinces December 7-18. Coming at a crucial period when bilateral relations were deteriorating, al Iryani's trip conceivably could have stemmed the downward trend, further exacerbated the existing situation, or paved the way for an improvement.

In the event, bilateral relations were apparently put on "hold".

The Issues. Politically the YAR has become a liability in Moscow's relations with the People's Democratic Republic of Yemen (PDRY), which boasts better port facilities and a radical regime more hospitable to Soviet presence and influence. Nevertheless, the Soviet investment (economic: \$98 million extended, \$63 million drawn through 1970; military \$77 million extended and drawn) is of such a magnitude and Soviet prestige is involved to such an extent that the Kremlin is apparently unwilling to write off the YAR, leave the field to Peking and the US, and concentrate wholly on the strategically more important PDRY.

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GROUP 1

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XR POL USSR - YEMEN

XR POL SYEMEN - USSR

XRAID 6 YEMEN

XR DEF 19-6 USSR - YEMEN

XR POL 13 SYEMEN

XR FN 14 YEMEN

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Perhaps reflecting their own preferences, the Soviets anticipated that the talks with al Iryani would largely concern economic questions, such as debt repayment. At the same time, they would have liked to dissuade the YAR from harboring Saudi-backed, dissident anti-PDRY elements, principally the National Unity Front, which have made repeated incursions into PDRY territory. For their part, the Yemenis would have been pleased to be able to accomplish the reverse -- modify the Soviet tilt in favor of the PDRY, particularly in the matter of arms supply, and discourage the Soviet military from masterminding (as the Yemenis suspect) cross-border punitive forays from the PDRY. Considering the strong military flavor of their delegation, the Yemenis also probably put pressure on the Soviets to regularize a more sophisticated arms resupply (what they have is antiquated) and spare parts flow. In view of their disastrous financial position, it is certain that the Yemenis also pressed vigorously for budgetary support and debt rescheduling.

The Answers. The concluding joint communique was a study in blandness that gave no insights into what transpired, but suggested that unresolved differences remained. The Yemenis apparently saw only Podgorny of the ruling triumvirate, not Kosygin, a fact which allegedly caused al Ayni in particular to be unhappy. There were no military references in the communique, and it is unlikely that either side moved on questions related to the

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major military and political obstacle to improved relations -- the PDRY. On economic questions the communique was ambivalent. It implied that no new aid was agreed upon, but that there would be movement on existing aid projects.

Al Ayni filled in some of the blanks when the returning delegation stopped off in Cairo on December 19. He told MENA that the Soviets would participate in the completion of the Bajil cement plant; construction of silos, grain storage facilities, bakeries, and the Hodeida fish canning factory; and the expansion and deepening of Hodeida port. He implied that new projects and credits were involved. He enigmatically added that the USSR had given the YAR a \$14.4 million "gift". When the delegation returned to Sanaa on December 21, al Iryani told the press his Soviet visit had been "positive" and that there had been "complete understanding" on matters of bilateral cooperation. He expanded the projects listed by al Ayni in Cairo to include fishing vessels and artesian wells and stated that "some weapons have been presented as a gift to the armed forces". Once back in Sanaa, al Ayni reportedly admitted that they had failed in their quest for budgetary support and had been pressured (presumably unsuccessfully) on the question of debt repayment. Al Ayni also claimed he had successfully resisted a Soviet effort to draw up a new friendship-cooperation treaty on the Egyptian model, in the end both sides merely reaffirming their 1935 treaty.

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Conclusions. The Yemenis appear to have given nothing and received little in the way of significant concessions. On the economic side, the Soviets apparently only unbent enough to free some of the frozen, unused portions of earlier Soviet aid extensions. In other words, the Soviets probably agreed that, in lieu of new credits, work could go forward under previous extensions. In fact, the "new" projects were all included in the 1964 line of credit and apparently will be funded from this source. In this connection, al Ayni's statement regarding the improvement of Hodeida port may be overdrawn since a full-scale effort would be an extremely expensive project probably requiring additional aid commitments. On military matters, the Soviets were equally restrained. It is likely that al Ayni's claim of a \$14.4 million "gift" can be equated with al Iryani's acknowledgement of a "gift" for his military forces. If so, this would be consistent with the grant or discount basis of the bulk of the \$77 million in military aid the Yemenis have received heretofore. Compared with this figure, the new "gift" would appear to have been the minimum gesture the Soviets thought would placate the Yemeni supplicants. There are no indications, however, that the problems of orderly resupply and spare parts flow were resolved or that the Soviets responded favorably to Yemeni pleas for more sophisticated equipment.

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The overall result seems to have been that at a very modest cost the Soviets have managed to maintain the integrity of their pro-PDRY policy without completely shutting the door on the possibility of improved relations with the YAR. Although the Yemenis cannot have been ecstatic over the results of their Moscow pilgrimage, tokenism--for the time being at least--has prevailed.

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