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21 July 1981

# Near East/North Africa Report

(FOUO 24/81)

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## NEAR EAST/NORTH AFRICA REPORT

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INTER-ARAB AFFAIRS

ARMS FIND DISRUPTS SYRIA-IRAQ OVERLAND TRAFFIC

PM301322 London FINANCIAL TIMES in English 30 Jun 81 p 7

[Report by Patrick Cockburn: "Syria-Iraq Overland Traffic Hit"]

[Text] Overland traffic from Syria's Mediterranean ports to Iraq, which has expanded its import programme despite the war with Iran, has been disrupted by the introduction of a convoy system from the port of Latakia to the Iraqi border.

The reason for this is the discovery of a truck from Scandinavia filled with arms intended for Syrian dissidents, according to the Syrian authorities.

They say the truck was stopped near the city of Homs, just south of Hama where at least 150 people are reported to have been killed by the security forces in late April in retaliation for attacks against government officials and troops. Homs and Hama are both centres of anti-government feeling.

An important route for traffic to Iraq is through Syria despite the bad relations between the two countries. Many trucks cross Europe to the Greek port of Volos for the voyage to Latakia.

The increasing popularity of this route has led to a fall in traffic through Turkey with berths vacant at Iskenderum and the port of Mersin which is used by many container vessels.

Overland traffic to Iran is now flowing freely with the biggest hold up at the customs in Tehran. Waiting time is four or five days.

Iran has an advantage over Iraq of possessing ports in the southern Gulf away from the war zone. The most important of these is Sandar Abbas.

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IRAN

PAPER CALLS WESTERN JOURNALISTS U.S. SPIES

PM061507 London THE GUARDIAN in English 4 Jul 81 p 5

[Article by David Hurst: "Iranians Accuse Foreign Press of Spying for U.S."]

[Text] Throughout the week, in the wake of the bomb explosion which killed Ayatollah Beheshti and several prominent members of the Islamic Republican Party, Ayatollah Khomeyni and the revolutionary leadership have been urging the people to act as their own vigilantes for the security of the regime.

With America once more bearing the brunt of the propaganda campaign the authorities are apparently trying to incalculates in the masses that every foreigner in the country is a potential American agent.

This is not new but for the small group of foreign correspondents in the country it has taken a disturbing turn. In a front-page unsigned editorial, JOMHURI-YE ESLAMI, mouthpiece of the IRP, said, in effect, that all correspondents in the country are American spies in the employ of the CIA. It called on "the people, along with officialdom, to "bring the activities of foreign journalists under their stern control."

"Most of the information sources of the superpowers," it said, "are composed of journalists, and the CIA has at its disposal more than 1,000 journalists for gathering information. The blows that we have suffered result from the ways that we have not barred.

...the foreign correspondents, whose espionage line we have announced in JOMHURI-YE ESLAMI are an important source of information to the enemy,

"The speed of their word is unimaginable. The news of the catastrophe reached the BBC in perhaps less than five minutes, and experience shows that foreign correspondents are the most dreaded security agents. They work, under the name of such-and-such a news agency, for Israeli radio, Iraqi radio, Bakhtar (the former prime minister now in exile in Paris) and spying networks."

With the banning of Mr Bani-Sadr's newspaper and five others, JOMHURI-YE ESLAMI is more than ever the voice of the regime. Its editor, Mr Hoseyn Musavi, has been nominated as foreign minister.

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Foreign correspondents are preparing a formal protest. For in their view, with this editorial, a fundamental contradiction in the authorities' attitude to the foreign media has been reached. The Islamic Republic has made no secret that it considers most of the Western media to be hostile, and for that reason it is extremely discriminating in granting visas to foreign correspondents.

There are no American journalists in the country and very few Europeans. Those admitted are therefore those who are deemed to have made some attempt to be objective--or "to tell the truth" as the authorities like to put it--especially over the war with Iraq. The foreign correspondents propose to inform the authorities that, in their view, it is one thing to refuse entry or to expel correspondents of whose reporting they disapprove, but quite another to treat them as "friends" one day and "spies" the next.

The particular bete noire of both the government and, it would seem, almost the entire populace is the BBC, not merely for its own coverage but for relaying that of foreign correspondents in the country. It is impossible to mingle with any crowd--such as that which gathered for last week's funeral--without being asked whether one is from the BBC, and given to understand that if one was one would be far from welcome.

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IRAN

BANK OFFICIAL DISCUSSES DOMESTIC GOLD SALES

PM081102 London FINANCIAL TIMES in English 8 Jul 81 p 3

[Dispatch by Terry Povey: "Iran May Sell Gold on Domestic Market"]

[Text] Tehran--Iran's Central Bank may sell gold on the domestic market in order to force prices down, its governor said yesterday. The move may involve Iran buying gold abroad.

Dr Mohsen Nurbakhsh blamed profiteers for the fact that the government-minted "azadi" gold coins were selling at more than four times international levels on the uncontrolled domestic market.

Gold, a traditional refuge of the Iranian merchant and the small saver in periods of political crisis, has been much in demand in Iran over the last two years. Eighteen months ago the azadi coins, which contain just over seven grammes of gold, were selling for rials 9,700 (\$140). At the end of June, after the dismissal of Mr Abolhasan Bani-Sadr from the presidency and the bomb explosion that killed 74 of the region's leaders, it had risen to rials 39,000 (\$480).

World gold prices are low and if the profiteers continue, then we will buy gold on the international market and sell it within the country," said Dr Nurbakhsh. "I am sure we could make a considerable profit on this."

Iran's Central Bank is believed to have about \$1 billion in gold reserves of its own, though much of this is kept abroad.

In the 24 hours between Dr Nurbakhsh's statement and its publication yesterday, rials 2,000 were clipped off the coin's market price and it stood at 37,000. The azadi was yesterday selling at \$460 in Iran compared with its international gold value of \$104.

Spot prices for gold yesterday averaged \$403. Gold coins are used in Iran both for saving and decoration, as jewellery and are often given as gifts to newlyweds. In the villages they, or the half and quarter coins, are sewn onto traditional dresses.

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On Iran's money supply, Dr Nurbakhsh said yesterday the Central Bank would not issue any new notes except for those replacing the currency of the previous regime. The bank's reserves of foreign currency were "enough to meet our needs for quite a long time," he said.

On the settlement of outstanding claims between Iran and the United States, arising from the agreement which freed the U.S. hostages in January, the governor said that 2,200 to 2,500 of the claims were for amounts of less than \$1/4m, which did not, therefore, have to go before The Hague Arbitration Board. These small claims would be dealt with by examining contracts and other legal documents, he said.

Dr Nurbakhsh referred specifically to the contract between Iran and a U.S. company for the completion of the work on the \$1bn Sarcheshmeh copper mine and extraction scheme.

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IRAN

BRIEFS

ABADAN REFINERY RECONSTRUCTION--Bahrain, 6 Jul (REUTER)--A decision on the reconstruction of the war-damaged Abadan Refinery, the biggest in the Middle East, could be expected within a month, an Iranian Oil Company official said in an interview published today. "Abbas Nejan, director of personnel and administration of Kala Limited, a subsidiary of the National Iranian Oil Company (NIOC), made his comments to the Middle East Economic Survey (MEES). The Nicosia-based oil industry journal did not say when the interview took place. The refinery in the southern oil province of Khuzestan has been under Iraqi fire since Iraq and Iran went to war last September. But there have been conflicting reports about the extent of damage to the sprawling installations. Mr Nejan told MEES that the economic embargo imposed against Iran in retaliation for the holding of U.S. hostages had a negligible impact on Iran's oil industry needs. He also said that shortages of specialised skills in the wake of the Iranian revolution were not sufficient to prevent any increase in Iran's oil production, should such a policy be decided upon. [Text] [JN060929 London REUTER in English 0923 GMT 6 Jul 81]

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ISRAEL

INTERVIEW WITH FOREIGN MINISTER ON PALESTINE ISSUE

PM081417 Turin LA STAMPA in Italian 4 Jul 81 pp 1-2

[Interview with Israeli Foreign Minister Yitzhaq Shamir by Arrigo Levi in Jerusalem: "I Defend Greater Israel: PLO Already Has a State"--date not given]

[Text] Jerusalem--"In a few days' time Israel will have another coalition government headed by Menachem Begin": Israeli Foreign Minister Yitzhaq Shamir, regarded as second-in-command in the Likud Party, Begin's political movement, told me that he is certain that this will be the outcome of the current consultations among the parties following last Tuesday's election. Shamir, who received me at the Foreign Ministry in Jerusalem for his first interview since the start of the election campaign, discussed at length both domestic and foreign policy matters: he asserted that the Likud Party has now established itself as one of the two major Israeli parties; he indicated that the new government's first task will be to resume negotiations with Egypt and the United States on the autonomy plan for the occupied territories; and last, though he did not say so explicitly, I believe that he left no doubts about the fact that the Begin government regards these territories as destined to belong one day to a "greater Israel."

[Question] Who won the election?

[Answer] The Likud Party, without a doubt. The Laborites returned to their 1973 position, that is, they regained only the votes that went to Yigal Yadin's Dash Party 1978, as a result of the scandals that exploded within the Labor government. We have further increased our strength, and whereas in the 1973 election we won 34 seats as against Labor's 50, we both now hold about 50. The Likud Party has therefore become one of Israel's two major parties, in some respects similar to the Western countries' major conservative parties. And it is not only Begin's party: it is destined to remain. It is true that a large proportion of its grassroots are among eastern Jews who understand our policy better because they are very well acquainted with the Arabs through direct experience. For the time being we will form a coalition government; but some day one or other of the major parties could even govern alone. The voters showed irritation with the minor parties and their blackmails; the political framework has been simplified and normalized through the strengthening of the two major parties, and this is a positive development.

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[Question] Would a new Begin government be weaker than the previous one, if the new coalition had fewer votes behind it?

[Answer] It will in fact be stronger and more stable, because it will be more homogeneous and compact. The first Begin government lost the voters' confidence until a year ago, because it seemed divided.

With an obvious reference to Moshe Dayan and Ezer Weizmann (who left the government over disagreements with Begin), Shamir pointed out that "the government regained ground following the departure of the major stars. It is difficult to move forward with stars. Without them the government demonstrated greater cohesion and regained the public's favor."

I pointed out that since its foundation in 1948 the State of Israel had only five foreign ministers before Yitzhaq Shamir: Moshe Sharett, Golda Meir, Abba Eban, Yigal Alon and Moshe Dayan. I asked him whether he will remain the sixth even in a new Begin government. He replied: "I hope so."

[Question] What would be your first step if confirmed as foreign minister?

[Answer] I can only make hypotheses, but it is easy to indicate the framework in which the new minister will move, because we have a work schedule and we must observe it. First of all, we must complete the autonomy negotiations, and I hope that we will reach agreement soon. I foresee no difficulties that would justify a delay, because both sides' positions are clear--ours are, at least. After all, we are dealing with an autonomy plan valid for 5 years, during which time we should reach a subsequent agreement on the final destination of the territories of Judea, Samaria and Gaza, and during this period there must be peaceful coexistence. It is to be hoped that it will be easier now to find a solution acceptable to both partners (Israel and Egypt). [answer ends]

Shamir confirmed that the Begin government is "opposed to the creation of a second Arab-Palestinian state" and opposed to the granting of "self-determination," since it is convinced that "the Palestinians already have their state, their country, namely Jordan: therefore the right to self-determination has already been realized." The Camp David agreement was based on the idea that "autonomy is not sovereignty, not independence, and a solution must be sought within the framework of this idea: the Egyptians have accepted Camp David and know that it is impossible to go beyond this framework."

Shamir rejected my reference to "territories occupied" by Israel in 1967, and replied: "The territories were occupied by Jordan in 1948, but their annexation to Jordan was never recognized by the international community. The territories were part of the British mandate over Palestine, according to which there was an obligation to establish a Jewish national home in part of these territories. King 'Abdallah would have liked to call Palestine the Kingdom of Transjordan: Jordan is in fact a Palestinian state; it is part of Palestinian territory and is in fact 80 percent of Palestine: its population, culture, language and religion are all Palestinian, so why establish another Palestinian state?"

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[Question] What, then, is your solution to the "territories" situation?

[Answer] With regard to the territories, there is the problem of the Arab population in these territories, which does not want to live under Israeli military control. This is why we have proposed an autonomy plan, a solution to be found in many of the world's countries, including the Alto Adige in Italy. Such problems arise when there is a population ethnically different from the majority of the population of the state to which the territories belong. [answer ends]

I asked, following these remarks that leave no doubt about Begin's view of the "territories" as part of a greater state of Israel, whether a new Begin government would plan to request the annexation of the territories themselves after 5 years. Shamir replied: "I cannot say now: first we must reach an autonomy agreement valid for 5 years. Then we shall see."

In reply to a question concerning plans to expand Jewish colonies in the occupied territories, Shamir told me that he expects that an autonomy agreement with Egypt can be reached "without Israel's having to abandon these plans." He pointed out that the Camp David agreement was signed despite the clear difference of viewpoints on this point and after Israel had merely been asked to suspend colonization plans for 3 months.

[Question] What if, despite Israel's hopes, the autonomy agreement with Egypt proved impossible on these conditions? Would the peace plan with Egypt still go ahead? Will the final portion of Sinai occupied by Israel still be returned in April 1982?

[Answer] The two things have nothing to do with each other. We have always kept our promises and honored our obligations. In any case, I am sure that we will reach the agreement on autonomy, that the normalization of relations with Egypt will continue and that we will have peaceful relations with Egypt.

[Question] Do you believe that the Palestinians' movement for a Palestinian state could ever disappear?

[Answer] Some day this movement will disappear. There is no other possibility. This organization was born in 1964 and has done nothing for the Arabs of Palestine, has never managed, through terrorism, to stop us leading a normal life or to jeopardize Israel's normal existence. We have less terrorism than many European states, which I will not name, despite all the aid to the PLO from the Arab states and the Soviet bloc. The PLO has been a total failure and will have to draw the necessary conclusions. The Arabs have tried to destroy us first with conventional weapons, then with terrorism and then with nuclear weapons. All these hypotheses have proved infeasible. Only one option remains, and that is peace. They will have to accept us; they will have to live in peace with us.

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LEBANON

INTERVIEW WITH FORMER LEBANESE PRESIDENT FRANJIYAH

LD081439 London THE TIMES in English 8 Jun 81 p 6

[Dispatch by Robert Fisk: "Lebanon's Loneliest Leader Awaits Revenge"]

[Excerpt] Zgharta, northern Lebanon, 7 Jun--In an interview with THE TIMES, his first with a Western newspaper since he left the presidency, he [Sulayman Franjiah] called upon President Sarkis of Lebanon to step down.

"Any man with a minimum of patriotism and a sense of responsibility and a minimum of energy would do more for Lebanon than the current president," he said.

President Franjiah, the Lebanese retain their titles of head of state, admitted that he could not succeed Mr Sarkis if he resigned tomorrow. Lebanese prevents a former president from running for election for six years after his previous term of office expires.

But Sulayman Franjiah clearly has no replacements in mind and his candidature for next year seems an unspoken promise. Even the Syrians, it is said in Beirut, are growing tired of Mr Sarkis.

"What I ask from President Sarkis," Sulayman Franjiah said, "is a choice between two propositions. If he is convinced that the Syrian army in Lebanon is an army of occupation, then his first duty is to tell the Syrians to go back home.

"If he believes the opposite is true, then he must say so and tell the Syrians to get on with their job of maintaining order.

"The Lebanese are waiting for President Sarkis' answer and they are asking themselves how two legitimate armies (the Syrian and the Lebanese) can fight among themselves on the same front line and within only a hundred yards from the Presidential Palace in Beirut. How can a responsible statesman allow this to take place?"

President Franjiah believes that during his occupancy of that palace outside Beirut, he succeeded in preventing Israeli expansion into Lebanon. The Phalange, he maintains, have become Israeli agents and he claimed that their military council in Beirut was now commanded by an Israeli army officer.

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Sulayman Franjiyah's antipathy towards the Isareli state extends further than politics: some might say it bordered on anti-Semitism.

He claimed with angry insistence that the Jewish Talmud provided irrefutable proof of an anti-Christian program by the Jews of Arabia that ended when the Jews put their victims in underground crematoria.

He seemed convinced that hardly a word of what he said would emerge in a Western newspaper undistorted by what he mysteriously called "Zionist pressure."

At one point he shuffled through his private papers to find the official Lebanese government minutes of his meeting with Dr Kissinger at the Lebanese town of Rayak in 1974.

He produced a copy of his private statement to the then American Secretary of State. It insisted upon the rights of Palestinians to return to Israel and emphasized the international status of Jerusalem as a religious capital.

But then it rambled off into a long account of Arab victories over European crusaders and of Arab guarantees of civil rights to Jews throughout history.

What Dr Kissinger made of all this was not disclosed.

President Franjiyah prefers not to link his views with his friendship with the al-Asad family. His father was a close friend of President al-Asad's father and he remembers playing with Hafiz al-Asad and his brother Rif'at when they were all six-year-olds.

Outside, in the roads of Zgharta, the Syrian troops are members of the special forces, the unit personally commanded by Rif'at al-Asad.

There is no doubt who President Franjiyah's friends are. Nor of his own intentions.

The flag of the giants carries a cedar tree surmounted by a large golden broadsword, the weapon with which the Maronites once threw their Ottoman oppressors from the mountains of the cedars above Tripoli.

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SAUDI ARABIA

SAUDIS TO RESUME GOLD OUTPUT, PRODUCE COPPER

LD031245 London FINANCIAL TIMES in English 3 Jun 81 p 5

[Article by Richard Johns: "Saudis 'To Resume Gold Output Soon'"]

[Text] Saudi Arabia should resume output of gold and also become a producer of copper in the near future, it was asserted in London yesterday at a conference on the role of international companies in Saudi Arabia's development plans.

Attention focused mainly on the Kingdom's mineral potential and manpower problems on the second day of the meeting--sponsored by the Saudi Gazette and the Avicenna Foundation--and organised by the FINANCIAL TIMES.

Mr Ghazi Sultan, Saudi deputy minister for mineral resources, said: "It is confidently hoped that mining will start very shortly" from the site at Mahd ad-Dhabab, only half a mile from where gold was exploited from 1937-54 by an American-Saudi syndicate.

He was referring to the positive feasibility study carried out by Consolidated Gold Fields in conjunction with Petromin, the State Hydrocarbons and Mineral Development Agency, with a view to a joint venture that now seems certain to proceed.

Asked about the prospects for copper ore, Dr Abdul Hardy Taher, governor of Petromin, expressed optimism that "within the next three years," exploitation of the deposits 200 miles north-east of Jidda would begin.

Mr Sultan said that iron ore from the Wadi Sawamin might prove competitive as a result of an improved process for the Kingdom's own steel industry, despite a low feed grading of 42 percent and a high silica content.

A pilot project is being developed with a view to completion of a full-scale feasibility study by 1985.

Mr K.B. Smale-Adams, chairman of Riofinex, a wholly owned subsidiary of Rio Tinto Zinc, stated that he was "frankly surprised that there are not more foreign mining companies investigating the mineral scene in Saudi Arabia."

He described the Kingdom's mining code as offering scope for flexibility which had been generally well received by the industry.

From the floor, Mr Peter Tress, an executive director of Consolidated Gold Fields, paid tribute to the mining code as being "exemplary," but foresaw that a major difficulty would be the extent of "Saudi-isation aimed at by the government."

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SYRIA

MINISTER OF STATE DISCUSSES U.S. POLICY, LEBANON CRISIS

PM011313 Turin LA STAMPA in Italian 26 Jun 81 p 4

[Interview with Syrian Minister of State for Foreign Affairs Faruq ash-Shar' by Igor Man: "We Have no Impositions From Moscow; Dialogue Would Be Useful With Washington" in Damascus; date not given]

[Text] [Question] Syria has always had two constants in its policy: nonalignment and Arab solidarity. Now we are confronted with a Libya tied to the Soviet Union by an iron pact. Now we have a Syria that has broken off relations with Iraq, that has had some moments of serious tension with Jordan (relations between the two countries are certainly not at their best), while relations with Libya (with which a merger was even announced) remain uncertain. Minister, what has happened to your nonalignment and Arab solidarity?

[Answer] For Syria the linchpin on which its Arab and foreign policy hinges is the Palestinian cause. Consequently, we have every interest in consolidating Arab efforts in that direction, in doing our utmost to strengthen relations with the Arab countries working for the cause. However, the Arab countries that are seeking solidarity for other reasons cannot have our support (the illusion to Jordan and Iraq is clear; ash-Shar' preferred to ignore the question of Libya--LA STAMPA editor's note).

The same applies to nonalignment: we cannot remain neutral between two super-powers when the USSR is supporting the Palestinian cause and the United States opposing it, openly and stubbornly backing Israeli expansionism. Even conservative Arab states which believe in the Palestinian cause do not question our policy and, moreover, from time to time, despite their profound ties with the United States, they acknowledge the realism of Soviet policy in the Middle East.

Permit me also to correct the term "iron pact" which you used. I would talk in terms of a friendship pact, since the USSR has never tried to impose on us its policy or its way of life, neither before nor after the signing of the friendship pact.

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[Question] Your press, radio, and so forth, fiercely accuse the United States of supporting Israel's policy of aggression. Can any attempt on your part to reestablish dialogue with Washington be considered abandoned?

[Answer] We are convinced that a dialogue with the United States is useful, as long as the U.S. administration does not try to impose its political viewpoint on us, either directly or through Israel's military action. When our press and radio criticize U.S. policy they are merely emphatically pointing out that Washington is on the way to a possible violation of the rules of dialogue.

[Question] You entered Lebanon at the request of that country's government, to halt the disastrous civil war. Now, however, many Lebanese are saying that your "deterrence" forces have gradually become occupation forces, no longer loved and even perhaps, as in the Phalangists' case, hated. What is your answer to that?

[Answer] Let me tell you that you do not give a true picture of the situation. If anything your assertion could apply only to the Phalangists--and not even to all of them, and in any case certainly not to the majority of Lebanese. First, the major mistake made by certain major representatives of the Western press, radio and television is to regard the Phalangists as representatives of the Christians. In fact, they represent 2 percent of them, no more. Second, for your readers' information, the Phalangists are hated by the majority of Christians, as well as by the Muslims in Lebanon. Their "fascist style" has led them to kill in a single day 700 Christians of Camille Sham'un's party, not to mention all the Muslims that they have eliminated.

Syria is not involved in the Lebanese conflict: the Arab deterrent force is under the Beirut government's control. Syria is willing to help all sides, including the Phalangists, as long as "national pacification" can be achieved. But there are two obstacles: Israel's continuous intervention in Lebanon's internal affairs and the Phalangists' connection with the Israelis. When these two obstacles have been removed, we are confident that "national understanding" can at least be reached.

[Question] Do you believe that Habib's mission has failed?

[Answer] I could reply with a simple "yes," but I would rather elaborate on it: only the Israelis can answer that question. In fact Habib's mission can fail only if Israel persists with its aggressive and expansionist demands. Our missiles in Lebanon are purely defensive, as is internationally acknowledged. They are not there to attack anyone, except the aggressor.

[Question] Do you believe that there will be war between Syria and Israel? Do you believe that such a war could spread to other countries?

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[Answer] The same applies here as I have already said. Following the Israeli attack on Iraq we have to take the Israeli leaders' character into account, their deep-rooted militaristic and terrorist tendencies. As I have already had occasion to point out, a war can break out only if Israel decides to spark one off. In that case the war would inevitably involve other countries.

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SYRIA

SOVIET-SYRIAN MILITARY EXERCISES DOUBTFUL

PM061341 London THE TIMES in English 6 Jul 81 p 4

[Dispatch by Robert Fisk: "Syria Discounts Report of Soviet Exercises"]

[Excerpt] Beirut, 5 Jul--Syria today maintained silence over reports of Soviet-Syrian military exercises off Latakia, preferring to suggest that the manoeuvres were a figment of the American State Department's imagination.

"If you really want to know about this, why don't you ask the people who started the story in the first place," one official in Damascus asked, indicating that he regarded the reports as little more than propaganda from Washington.

In reality, there has been considerable military traffic over the north Lebanese border with Syria in recent weeks, and it is indeed possible that Syrian troops are cooperating in some form of ship-to-shore communication exercises with Soviet naval craft in the eastern Mediterranean.

The Russian vessels arrived in the area almost three weeks ago when Israel seemed on the point of attacking the Syrian ground-to-air missiles in Lebanon, but the easing of tension between Syria and Israel has now reduced the importance of the Soviet presence.

Despite the reports from Washington, it seems unlikely that President al-Asad would now permit Soviet marine landing manoeuvres on the Syrian coastline. With most of the Arab world still deeply angered by the Russian military intervention in Afghanistan, President al-Asad--though he has himself never condemned the Soviet presence in Kabul--will not want to risk opprobrium by inviting Russian troops to visit his beachheads.

There are at present perhaps as many as 4,000 Soviet advisers in Syria and their movements are already closely circumscribed by the president who is anxious to prove to his Arab colleagues that he is no lackey of the Soviet Union.

If Syrian-Soviet naval exercises have indeed begun today, they will be the first ever between the Soviet Union and an Arab state, and the most important military contact between Russians and Arabs since President an-Nasir invited 18,000 Soviet troops into Egypt in 1968.

The Russian presence then prevented Israel from continuing a series of air strikes deep inside Egyptian territory and the Syrians would no doubt be happy for the Soviet Union's shadow to pass briefly along the Syrian coast if this were to further dissuade Israel from any military adventures in Lebanon.

President al-Asad, together with General Mustafa Tlas, his defence minister, was reported here to have paid a secret visit to Moscow last May, and at this meeting it is possible that Syria and the Soviet Union agreed on some form of military warning to Israel.

The prospect of a Soviet landing exercise, however, seems to have receded as American intercession lessened the chances of a Syrian-Israeli war.

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YEMEN ARAB REPUBLIC

COUP PREDICTED FOR NORTH YEMEN

LD011511 London THE SUNDAY TIMES in English 31 May 81 p 10

[Article by James Adams: "Ruler They Could Not Kill Now Faces Coup"]

[Text] There have been three assassination attempts on the President of North Yemen, 'Ali 'Abdallah Salih, in the past month, according to sources in the capital, San'a'. The three-year-old regime is looking increasingly shaky and after a series of purges of government officials, the 34-year-old president appears to have been the target of disaffected factions inside the country.

"A coup could happen at any time," says a Yemeni close to the presidential palace. "Salih is now so isolated that every hand is turned against him."

North Yemen has had a violent past, but Salih, a former army lieutenant-colonel, has survived by a combination of political astuteness and a ruthless approach to any opposition. He has shrewdly played up the strategic importance of North Yemen to draw support from east and West while carefully maintaining some semblance of neutrality.

Saudi Arabia, in particular is a close supporter and has been financing the bankrupt Yemeni economy. In return, the Saudis have expected Salih to remain pro-West and distanced from Moscow and the Russian-backed regime in South Yemen.

However, the Saudis have been unhappy about rumors of Salih's impending visit to Moscow which the president has been using to obtain increased aid from both the Saudis and the West. Also, Salih recently arrested the former foreign minister, 'Abdallah al-Asnaj, who is a close Saudi supporter.

Salih threatened to execute Asnaj unless the Saudis increased their aid. The Saudis agreed, but Riyadh appears to have decided that Saleh has gone too far.

"Salih is only hanging on because he has the support of the security police," said one North Yemeni. "The army, as usual, is waiting to see what will happen and dissidents are becoming increasingly active around San'a'."

The atmosphere in the capital is tense. The last two presidents of North Yemen were both assassinated.

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