

reports from London sources of unrest and factionalization at the top rungs of the leadership command. The London-based private newsletter of British-Zionist intelligence operative Jon Kimche recently reported that Syrian Foreign Minister Abdel Halib Khaddam is being put forward by the Soviets to lead a government that will replace an overthrown President Hafez Assad and that will institute a regime under the sway of the radical ideologue wing of the Syrian Baath Party. This report has received no independent substantiation.

A more ominous British media exclusive was the following item in the Feb. 19 *London Sunday Times*, entitled "Arab Hit-Squad Kills Russian":

Syria has imposed a news blackout on the mysterious death there last Saturday of a senior Soviet adviser to its air force. Colonel Vladimir Yakovlevich Dankyevich, posted to Damascus last September, and thought also to be a senior KGB officer, died from injuries received in a car "accident" earlier this month. In fact, he is the latest of nearly a dozen senior Russian advisers in Syria to

be assassinated by a fanatical Moslem group — in similar traffic "accidents."

The Moslem Brotherhood, a pan-Arab movement dedicated to strict observance of religious laws and the eradication of Western "liberalism" regards the presence of Soviet advisers as imperialist aggression and Communist ideas as contrary to the Moslem creed. Western intelligence sources believe the brotherhood has a list of Soviet "intruders" marked for assassination. Its activities are acutely embarrassing to the Syrian government, which is receiving large amounts of aid from the Soviet Union in the form of military supplies and advisers.

The most embarrassing of these was the murder on Sept. 2 of last year of General Yakov Dimitrevich Dibly, a senior assistant to the Soviet military chief in Syria. He died instantly when his car crashed into a lorry driven deliberately across his path in northern Syria. Another victim was the chief Soviet adviser to the Syrian Navy, Rear-Admiral Alexander Alexandrovich Trofimov, killed by a hit-and-run driver in 1975.

## Soviets Move Diplomatically Into Middle East

The Soviet Union is moving diplomatically into the Middle East, with a view to getting peace negotiations going again by establishing a Soviet-Arab-European economic development axis.

Central to the Soviets' recent activities in the region is, surprisingly, their rapprochement with Saudi Arabia, long a bastion of anti-Soviet sentiment. Over the past several weeks, both countries have endeavored to restore the basis for effective outside intervention into the deadlocked Arab-Israeli negotiating process. According to the French daily *Le Figaro*, the increased coordination between the two countries is not limited to the Middle East but will extend to stabilizing the volatile Horn of Africa.

A Feb. 19, Radio Moscow commentary (excerpted below) called for the revival of Soviet-Saudi friendship, pointing out that ties between the two countries date from 1926 when "Soviet goods appeared on the Saudi markets — a matter that made it possible to weaken the grip of the British monopoly on domestic and foreign trade in the Saudi kingdom." The commentary also attacks those circles in the U.S. who are doing Great Britain's dirty work by trying to prevent Soviet-Saudi ties.

However, the Soviets are making it clear that they do not intend to push the U.S. out of the Middle East. Last week, Soviet President Brezhnev pinpointed the Mideast as the area where U.S.-Soviet relations could be stabilized, and attacked those "forces (in the U.S.) that are interested neither in good-neighborly USSR-U.S. relations nor in the relaxation of international tension in general." Brezhnev's emphasis on cooperation reflects Soviet concern to revive the historic Oct. 1, 1977 joint U.S.-USSR communiqué calling for a Geneva peace conference.

### *Soviets, Saudis Against Separate Peace*

As the Soviets know well, Saudi Arabia exerts sub-

stantial economic and political leverage in any peace talks because of its financial sway over the Egyptian government. The Saudis adamantly oppose a "separate peace" deal between Israel and Egypt that would leave the crucial Palestinian homeland problem unresolved and hence open the way for civil war in Lebanon and war in the entire region. Any "separate peace" initiative by Egypt's President Sadat, leaving out the Palestinians, would lead the Saudis to cut off their economic aid to Sadat — as experts on the region emphasize.

Soviet awareness of this political reality was underscored in a Radio Moscow broadcast on Feb. 17 by Georgii Ilich Mirskii, a leading Soviet Mideast analyst for over two decades. (see below).

With an eye to political survival, Sadat is meanwhile keeping lines to the Soviets open, not only because of Saudi opposition to a "separate peace," but also on account of mounting opposition from the Egyptian "Nasserite" military and bureaucracy, which has historical ties to the USSR.

According to *Le Figaro*, Sadat is secretly seeking to reopen relations with the USSR, shut down in 1977, by using Morocco's King Hassan II as mediator. Hassan, who maintains close ties with the Saudis, recently strongly praised the Soviets. A State Department official confirmed the possibility that the "Moroccan connection" is being activated by the Soviets and Saudis to prevent Sadat from making a desperate flight forward to salvage the remnants of his peace initiative towards Israel of last fall.

A potential shift in orientation by Sadat was also evidenced by Sadat's recent interview in *October* magazine, an Egyptian weekly. While criticizing the Soviet leadership, Sadat pointed to Brezhnev as "the best figure in the Kremlin." Sadat added: "If one day Egyptian-Soviet relations return to normal, it will be thanks to the political experience and wisdom of Mr. Brezhnev."

### *Soviets Mean Business*

The Soviets are backing up their gestures towards Saudi Arabia with broader diplomacy in the Arab world and Africa. On the occasion of Syrian President Hafez Assad's extensive visit to Moscow in late February, the Soviet leaders reaffirmed their commitment to Syria politically, economically, and militarily. This was a stern warning that any push for a separate peace between Egypt and Israel that would leave the door open for eventual Israeli military moves against Syria will not be tolerated. Both Brezhnev and Assad are reportedly worried over the continued escalation of fighting in southern Lebanon.

Attending the Assad-Brezhnev summit was Libyan Prime Minister Jalloud. Immediately following the Moscow meetings, Libyan President Col. Muammar Qaddafi made an effort — undoubtedly with Soviet backing — to help cool out the Horn of Africa. Qaddafi hosted Siad Barre in Tripoli: Barre is President of Somalia and the chief instigator of that country's war with Ethiopia.

Jalloud, meanwhile, flew to Turkey to consolidate economic and political ties with the financially beleaguered Turks, who on March 1 implemented an international Monetary Fund-ordered 30 percent currency devaluation. Jalloud offered to reschedule Turkey's sizeable oil debt to Libya and agreed to continue supplying Turkey with oil despite repayment delays and other difficulties. Turkey agreed to extend official recognition of the PLO, a significant move in light of the efforts to dismantle and discredit the organization. The Libyan-Turkish deal follows a \$1 billion Turkish-Soviet trade arrangement and an agreement by the Soviets to spend \$500 million in hard currency for Turkish products.

### *Soviets Call for Geneva*

During the Assad visit to Moscow, Brezhnev reaffirmed the need for Geneva peace talks as the forum for an overall settlement (see below).

The Soviets have also been actively putting pressure on Syria and Iraq to reconcile their differences. The question now is, how will the United States respond?

Numerous Mideast experts blame the Carter Administration for allowing the U.S. position to deteriorate especially vis-à-vis the Saudis, to favor adoption of a non-confrontationist policy in the area. Other sources, however, are capitalizing on the heightened Soviet activities to build a confrontation atmosphere much in keeping with Great Britain's designs to put the two "superpowers" against each other in the Middle East. A spate of rumors charges that the Soviets are prepared to mobilize a 30,000-man military task force into Lebanon to back up Syria in the event of a war with Israel. Other reports attest that the Soviets will include the Syrians in the Warsaw pact and extend a nuclear umbrella over the region should Syria's interests be threatened. Such rumors obscure both the real intent of the Soviet initiatives, and the positive role that Washington can play by coordinating its efforts with Moscow to bring about a lasting solution to the Mideast dilemma, centered around regional development.

## Soviets Broadcast Peace Call Warn Against Separate Peace

*During the recent Assad visit to Moscow, Brezhnev took the occasion to reaffirm the need for Geneva peace talks as the forum for an overall Mideast peace settlement. In a toast to Assad at a state dinner on Feb. 21, Brezhnev stated:*

The question prompts itself: is it not time to stop the unprincipled political maneuvers in the Middle East, maneuvers dangerous to the interests of Arabs, and return the cause of the settlement to the channel of the Geneva conference? This, without doubt, would accord with the cardinal interests of the peoples of the Middle East and make a big contribution to the cause of improving the international climate.

*Only several days before Brezhnev's statement on Feb. 19, Radio Moscow blasted scare tactics used by Cold War confrontationists who are grabbing for full control over Saudi oil and oil revenues to fuel the financial warfare now aimed at destroying the U.S. dollar:*

In pursuit of their narrow and selfish aims, the imperialists are persistently scaring the Saudi ruling quarters with the fictitious communist danger. A matter of some significance in this connection is the statement which Zablocki, Chairman of the U.S. House International Relations Committee made recently. He alleged that the activity of the communists, even far away from the Arabian Peninsula and the Gulf area, creates a long-term danger to Saudi Arabia.

At the same time, far-sighted politicians in a number of Arab states have recently, and with increasing persistence, called for a settlement of Saudi Arabia's relations with the Soviet Union.

Saudi Crown Prince Fahd recently said to the Lebanese paper *An-Nahar*: "It is in the interest of Saudi Arabia that it should have friendly relations with all countries, and Saudi Arabia respects the Soviet Union as a great power which has its own place in the world."

*The Soviet media this week also scored Egyptian moves away from a comprehensive settlement for the Mideast. On Feb. 16, Georgii Ilich Mirsleii warned in his commentary on Radio Moscow, that Egypt would be completely isolated from the Arab world, should President Sadat be forced to sign a separate peace with Israel.*

Should a treaty be signed without even the semblance of a solution of the Palestine problem — and not even Sadat could consent to such a version as the ill-famed Begin plan — should this happen, the Egyptian regime would find itself completely isolated from the Arab world. Sadat may now think he still has a way back, but signing a separate treaty would mean that Egypt had withdrawn from the struggle without any settlement of the Palestine issue — and consequently had completely and officially betrayed the Palestinians. Sadat wouldn't be forgiven for that. Second, Saudi Arabia, Sadat's prop, ally, and creditor, would have to stand aside and cut off its aid; otherwise the Saudis would lose all authority in the Arab world.