

NORTH AND SOUTH YEMEN AS A THEATRE OF A PROXY WAR DURING THE COLD WAR

Filip BRYJKA*

* General Tadeusz Kosciuszko Military Academy of Land Forces, Wrocław
e-mail: f.bryjka@wso.wroc.pl

Received on 20 October 2015; accepted after revision in February 2016

Copyright © 2016 by Zeszyty Naukowe WSOWL



Abstract:

The geopolitical location of Yemen makes the country an area that has always drawn the attention of external actors interested in expanding their influences in the Arabian Peninsula. During the period of the Cold War, the territory of today's Yemen was a theater of geopolitical rivalry, where the interests clashed between both superpowers and regional actors. During the conflict in North and South Yemen, external entities played an important role as they drove the dynamics of these conflicts counting on achieving their own strategic objectives. The purpose of this article is to seek answers to the questions: who, how and why was engaged in armed conflicts in the territory of North and South Yemen during the Cold War era, and what long-term consequences of this commitment can be observed today?

Keywords: North Yemen, South Yemen, a proxy war, the USSR, the USA, Saudi Arabia, Egypt, an armed conflict, the Cold War

INTRODUCTION

The Republic of Yemen was established in 1990 as a result of the merger of two countries: the Yemen Arab Republic (North Yemen) and the People's Democratic Republic of Yemen (South Yemen). The territory of this country has long had a strategic importance for the international community due to its geopolitical position. This Middle Eastern country located at the Arabian Sea, the Gulf of Aden and the Red Sea, which being connected by the Strait of Bab-el-Mandeb have constituted a strategic shipping route between the Indian Ocean and the Mediterranean Sea.



Fig. 1. The geopolitical location of Yemen

Source: [online] Available on the Internet: <https://www.google.pl/maps/>
[accessed on: 27.07.2015]

The geopolitical position at the intersection of the Arabian Peninsula and Africa meant that Yemen has always drawn the attention of many external actors, both regional and global, that sought to increase their influence in that region. The territory of today's Yemen was a very interesting theater of geopolitical rivalry during the Cold War.

The Cold War was a period of intense hostility between the United States and the Soviet Union and their allies, who competed in the political, ideological, cultural and military categories. Superpowers sought to achieve superiority over the enemy through the constant expansion and improvement of their nuclear capabilities. Paradoxically, the nuclear weapons reduced the likelihood of the outbreak of a direct conflict between the USA and the USSR, for power based on the possession of nuclear weapons proved so destructive and awakening fear that the possibility of its actual use was very limited. A nuclear war would be simply far too costly¹. However, the destructive power of an atom did not stop the confrontation between the USA and the USSR. Fights between the superpowers occurred in peripheral areas, where both sides sought to gain the geopolitical advantage over the adversary by enlarging their sphere of influence.

The places in the world where armed conflicts during the Cold War occurred were the so-called shatter belts in the geo-strategic regions (the Middle East and Southeast Asia). Although the conflicts in those areas were of local nature they resulted from rivalry between the United States and the Soviet Union. Peripheral wars were often inspired by the superpowers that had their interests and their allies there². Therefore, it can be easily seen that the Cold War confrontation had primarily indirect character.

¹ J.S. Nye, *Konflikty międzynarodowe. Wprowadzenie do teorii i historii*, translated by Marek Madej, Wydawnictwa Akademickie i Profesjonalne, Warsaw 2009, p. 100.

² A. Legucka, *Geopolityczne uwarunkowania i konsekwencje konfliktów zbrojnych na obszarze porażki*, Difin, Warsaw 2013, p. 29-30.

The powers avoided a direct clash, because it posed a risk of the use of a nuclear weapon, which was too expensive and irrational for both sides. Thus, there were waged the so-called proxy wars in which the superpowers fought using substitute actors (proxies).

In 1964 Karl W. Deutsch defined a proxy war as an international conflict between two powers taking place in the territory of a third country. According to Deutsch, proxy wars are international conflicts, which are only seemingly internal. A proxy war should be understood as the exploitation of the population potential, resources and the territory of a country shattered by a civil war, as a tool for implementing the strategic objectives of external actors³. However, according to Andrew Mumford, such a definition is too state-centric. Deutsch did not take the role of non-state actors into account; he pointed superpowers as the only ones able to conduct a proxy war⁴, while ignoring the role of regional actors.

Chris Loveman suggested a broader definition, since he understood a proxy war as an indirect third parties' engagement in an armed conflict by aspiring to influence the strategic result of this conflict. Proxy wars are a kind of relation between an external benefactor that either can be a state actor or a non-state one and a proxy that receives, among others, weapons, training and financial support from donors. This type of indirect intervention in conflicts is to maximize profits while minimizing possible risks and losses. Proxy wars allow countries to implement their strategic interests without the need for direct involvement in the costly and bloody acts of war⁵.

One of the numerous theaters of proxy wars during the Cold War was Yemen, which was divided into two states. This conflicting region was plunged into chaos, which was driven by the superpowers and regional actors, since it was in their interest. The consequences of this competition can be seen till today. Yemen is one of the poorest countries in the world. This situation has stemmed from the state's chronic destabilization caused by internal conflicts, separatist tendencies, corruption and activities of Salafist terrorist organizations. In order to understand the current political and social situation in Yemen, the Cold War geopolitical rivalry in the region is worth analyzing, since it constitutes the source of problems of modern Yemen.

1. GEOPOLITICAL RIVALRY FOR NORTH YEMEN (1962-1970)

In the past, the territory of today's Yemen was under the control of the Abyssinians, the Persians, the Romans, the Arabs and the Turks. The break-up of the Ottoman Empire caused that in 1918 the northern part of Yemen gained independence. North Yemen remained a monarchy ruled by Zaidi imams until 1962 when the army seized power after overthrowing Mohammed Al-Badr. The proclamation of the Yemen Arab

³ K.W. Deutsch, External Involvement in Internal Wars [in]: Harry Eckstein (ed.), Internal War: Problems and Approaches, Free Press of Glencoe, New York 1964, p. 102.

⁴ A. Mumford, Proxy Warfare. War and Conflict in the Modern World, Polity Press 2013, p. 13.

⁵ Ch. Loveman, Assessing the Phenomenon of Proxy Intervention [in]: Conflict, Security and Development volume 2 issue 3, 2002, p. 30.

Republic led to the conflict between the government troops supported by Egypt and the Soviet Union⁶ and monarchists supported by Saudi Arabia, Jordan, Israel, Great Britain and the USA. At this point the question arises: what factors determined the involvement of external actors in that internal conflict?

North Yemen occupied an important place in the Soviet Union's policy because of its strategic location in the close proximity to oil-rich Saudi Arabia. The USSR perceived North Yemen as a tool for exerting a pressure on the politics of the Persian Gulf States. To achieve its strategic goal, the Soviet politicians took advantage of the alliance with Egypt that along with Libya, Iraq and Syria was the Middle East zone of the USSR's influence in the Cold War rivalry against the United States. Spreading the idea of pan-Arabism, the Egypt's president Gamal Abdel Nasser strived for the reunification of all the Arabs under his leadership, which threatened the position of Saudi Arabia and other monarchies in the region, as they feared military coups inspired by Cairo. The Soviet Union and Egypt used the Yemeni pro-Republican forces as a proxy in order to achieve their vested political interests in the region. However, it should be emphasized that during the Yemeni conflict, Egypt supported the government in Sana'a, both indirectly (supplying weapons - including chemical one!) and directly through engaging their troops in the war operations. Colonel Nasser combined the strategy of a proxy war with a direct military intervention.

In turn, the monarchists' forces acted as proxies for such entities as the United States, the United Kingdom, Saudi Arabia, Jordan and Israel. Although Washington was seriously afraid of the growing Soviet influence in the Arabian Peninsula, the US support at that time was very limited. This was due to the fact, among others, that the Americans attributed greater importance to matters in the region of Southeast Asia.

The British more than the Soviet Union feared the growing position of Nasser, who, in 1956 nationalized the strategic Suez Canal – a shipping route connecting the Mediterranean Sea and the Red Sea. The Suez Crisis led to the military intervention of the United Kingdom, France and Israel, which ended in a fiasco. From that time, London ran a tough policy towards its former colony. The British government became involved in a covert proxy war in Yemen based on the assumption that the Egypt's success in North Yemen would lead to the expansion of Nasser towards the South Arabia Federation (later South Yemen) administered by the British. The British intelligence supported the royalists providing them with money, arms, and leading secret anti-terrorist operations. In addition, mercenaries (mostly former soldiers of the British special forces SAS - *Special Air Service*) paid by the British government fought on the side of monarchists;

⁶ First deliveries of Soviet arms for North Yemen took place already in 1956-1957. Then the Soviet Union and Czechoslovakia besides equipment, also sent 35 military advisers and 50 technicians. Under the treaty signed in 1964 between the Soviet Union and the Arab Republic of Yemen, the Soviet Union passed economic aid directly, while military support was guided through Egypt. Moreover, the number of Soviet military advisers grew to several hundred. See: M.N. Katz, Saana and the Soviets [in]: *Problems of Communism* Jan-Feb 1984.

they were also responsible for training rebels⁷. However, the Saudis were the main donors supporting the royalists, since they together with Jordan sought to undermine the position of Egypt pursuing the increasingly expansionary policy in the region.

At this point the role of another regional actor – Israel should be emphasized, as its intelligence services implemented *the peripheral strategy* on a large scale. The aim of this strategy was to seek allies in the Middle East, which could be used in the fight against anti-Israeli Arab coalition, which was led by Colonel Nasser. Therefore, during the civil war in North Yemen, the Israeli Mossad provided the monarchists with equipment in the framework of the secret operation *Rotev*⁸. Although from 1948 Israel was conflicted not only with Egypt but also Jordan and Saudi Arabia, during the Yemeni conflict the principle *the enemy of my enemy is my friend* was applied.

The situation in North Yemen changed in 1967 after the overwhelming failure of the Arab states in the so-called Six-Day War with Israel. Then, humiliated Nasser decided to suppress the conflict in Yemen in return for a guarantee from the Saudis of not supporting the monarchists. This resulted in the overthrow of the President of North Yemen - Abdullah Al-Sallal, who was replaced by Abdul Rahman Al-Eryani willing to negotiate with the monarchists. However, supporters of the monarchy instead of negotiations took a decision to conduct the offensive and start the siege of the capital Sana'a. In this situation, the Soviet Union decided to create an air bridge that allowed the supply of Republicans with food and weapons. With the support of the Soviet Union, the government forces broke the siege and irretrievably suppressed forces of monarchists. Although North Yemen received substantial support from the USSR during the conflict, after reaching an agreement the authorities in Sana'a redirected its policy towards the West⁹.

The President Al-Eryani allowed the monarchy supporters to return to the country (excluding the royal family). Thanks to the liberal policy he won the recognition of Saudi Arabia that in 1970 established diplomatic relations with North Yemen. Despite the normalization of relations, the Saudis continued supporting the opposition conservative tribes in Yemen¹⁰. Such a policy was determined by religious factors. Wahhabism (a branch of Sunni Islam derived from the Hanbali school) has dominated in Saudi Arabia, while in the territory of North Yemen Zaidism (a branch of Shia Islam) has been dominant. The Saudis were afraid that the increasingly strong Zaidis from North Yemen would inspire separatist movements within the territory of Saudi Arabia, where the Shias accounted for only approximately 10-15% of the population (they mainly have inhabited the territories bordering North Yemen, and along the coast of the Persian Gulf).

⁷ E. Kahana, M. Suwaed, *The A to Z of Middle Eastern Intelligence*, Scarecrow Press, Plymouth 2009, p. 322; C. Walton, *Imperium tajemnic. Brytyjski wywiad, zimna wojna i upadek imperium*, translated by M. Antosiewicz, Wydawnictwo Czarne, Wołowiec 2015, p. 443-444.

⁸ Y. Alpher, *Periphery: Israel's search for allies in the Middle East*, Rowman & Littlefield, London 2015.

⁹ *The USSR and the Yemens: Moscow's Foothold on the Arabian Peninsula*, National Foreign Assessment Centre, CIA Historical Review Program PA 81-10289, July 1981.

¹⁰ M.N. Katz, *op.cit.*, p. 23.

The civil war ongoing in North Yemen in the years 1962-1970 was a proxy conflict at two levels: global and regional. At the global level two superpowers - the United States and the Soviet Union - competed with the support of their allies. On the other hand, at the regional level, the Yemeni conflict was a proxy war between Saudi Arabia and Egypt. An interesting aspect of this local game was a tactical alliance between hostile countries: Israel, Saudi Arabia and Jordan, joined by the common enemy - the growing strength of Egypt of Gamala Abdel Nasser.

When North Yemen was at civil war, the southern part of Yemen (with the strategic port city of Aden) was under the protectorate of Great Britain (1839-1967). In the 1960s on a tide of anti-colonialism and pan-Arabism the National Liberation Front (NLF) began an armed struggle, which ended with the proclamation of the independence of the People's Republic of South Yemen. After the success of the Aden Emergency and the defeat of the Arab armed forces in Israel, the NLF changed ideological direction from pan-Arab to Marxist. In 1970 after communists came to power the name of the state was changed into the People's Democratic Republic of Yemen. The one-party system and socialist economy was introduced. This resulted in the transfer of attention of the Soviet Union from North Yemen to South Yemen, which China was increasingly interested in.

The ideological similarity made the government in Aden quickly become a close ally of the Kremlin. South Yemen played an important role in the Middle East policy of the Soviet Union, because through the Strait of Bab-el-Mandeb it provided free access to a strategic shipping route. It is worth noting that not only harbor capital of Aden played the significant role but mainly the Socorta Island, which was the logistic base for the Soviet fleet in the waters of the Indian Ocean¹¹.

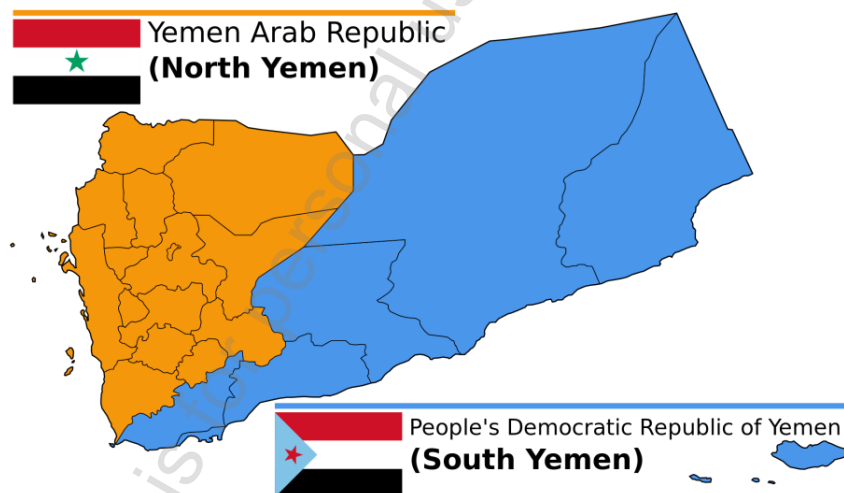


Fig. 2. The division of Yemen into the Yemen Arab Republic and the People's Democratic Republic of Yemen

Source: [online] Available on the Internet: <https://en.wikipedia.org/>
[accessed on: 14.08.2015]

¹¹ The USSR...op.cit.

2. THE ROLE OF EXTERNAL ACTORS IN THE NORTH - SOUTH CONFLICT

North and South Yemen had never formed one state being before. The creation of two separate political entities, which for centuries based their systems of power on local tribal and clan structures had to lead to border conflicts. In the 1970s, numerous tensions between the North and the South occurred, which were caused by massive migrations and shelter provided for opposition groups. In 1972 the conflict took the form of an armed struggle.

At this point, it is worth discussing the attitude of the Soviet Union, which, on the one hand, continued selling weapons to the government in Sana'a. On the other hand, it increasingly supported South Yemen and the left-wing opposition in North Yemen - the National Democratic Front (NDF)¹². In the years 1963-1974 the USSR delivered to North Yemen equipment worth \$ 32 million, which accounted for over 60% of all weapons purchased at that time by the government in Sana'a. In turn, the government in Aden received from the Soviet Union armament worth \$ 47 million, which accounted for over 88% of all weapons purchased in that period¹³. In the following years the significant increase in the sale of Soviet weapons to South Yemen was observed, when the level of sale to Yemen remained constant.

Table 1. The sale of arms to North Yemen and South Yemen in the years 1955-1976
(in US \$ million)

Period	Country	Total	The USA	The USSR	Other NATO states	Other Warsaw Pact states	Others
1955-1960	North Yemen	-	-	<30	-	-	-
1961-1964	North Yemen	-	-	>30	-	-	-
1963-1973	North Yemen	53	-	32	-	1	20
	South Yemen	53	-	47	1	-	5
1965-1974	North Yemen	55	1	26	5	-	23
	South Yemen	92	-	80	1	-	11
1966-1975	North Yemen	65	1	27	5	-	32
	South Yemen	126	-	114	1	-	11

¹² The National Democratic Front was formed in 1976 through the merger of six leftist parties consisting mainly of the Sunnis (from Shaffi'i school) living in the southern part of North Yemen, who opposed the domination of the Zaidis (a branch of Shiism) from the north. See: M.N. Katz, *op.cit.*, p. 23.

¹³ World Military Expenditures and Arms Transfers 1963-1973, United States Control and Disarmament Agency, Washington D.C., [online] <http://www.state.gov/documents/organization/185668.pdf>. [accessed on: 17.07.2015].

Period	Country	Total	The USA	The USSR	Other NATO states	Other Warsaw Pact states	Others
1967-1976	North Yemen	80	1	35	12	-	30
	South Yemen	165	-	151	1	-	11

Source: own study based on reports of the United States Control and Disarmament Agency published in the years 1963-1978, [online] Available on the Internet: <http://www.state.gov/> [accessed on: 20.07.2015]

The Soviet support for ideologically closer South Yemen led to the deterioration of relations with North Yemen that sought economic and military support from the Saudis and the Americans. While the government in Sana'a received substantial economic aid from Saudi Arabia, the US administration focused on the war in Vietnam was not eager to provide substantial military support. Until 1976 it did not exceed it \$ 1 million (see: Table 1).

Coups, which occurred both in North and South Yemen, were probably inspired by external actors and certainly served them. Ibrahim al-Hamdi, the President of North Yemen, who in 1974 overthrew Al-Eryani, centralized power in North Yemen, thus reducing the influence of tribal leaders. The weakening of the Yemeni tribalism resulted in the improvement in relations between the government and NDF. However, during the presidency of Hamdi the relations with the USSR got frozen. The drastic deterioration of mutual relations was the result of the decrease in the supply of Soviet weapon, more and more of which was directed to South Yemen. This resulted in a turn in the foreign policy of Sana'a's towards the USA and Saudi Arabia. Al-Hamdi improved relations with Saudi Arabia, and opposed to Moscow, thus rejecting the offer of Soviet tanks and MiG-21. In addition, the United States increased its involvement in arming the forces of North Yemen. This development was very unfavorable for the Soviet Union and South Yemen. In 1977 Al-Hamdi was murdered. In turn, his successor, Ahmad al-Ghashmi, who fought NDF guerrillas supported by the West and the Soviet Union, died in 1978 in a bomb attack. The explosive device, which killed the President had been delivered by an emissary of South Yemen. It resulted in the occurrence of considerable tension in relations between the North and the South¹⁴.

On the other hand, in South Yemen, Abd al-Fattah Ismail representing the pro-Soviet faction overthrew the anti-Soviet President Salim Rubbayya Ali, who was an advocate of close relations with China and the United States. Extremely important is the fact that these two events (the bomb attack and Ismail's overthrow) occurred only two days apart, which reflected the coordinated operation of special services (most likely from the Soviet Union, Cuba and the GDR).¹⁵

¹⁴ M.N. Katz, *op.cit.*

¹⁵ M.N. Katz, *op.cit.*, p. 24.

3. THE UPRISING IN NORTH YEMEN (1978-1982)

In 1978 the Zaidi Ali Abdullah Saleh came to power in North Yemen, which was not approved of by the former supporters of Al-Hamdi, who had gone to the NDF. The left-ist opposition put forward political demands and declared the desire to connect North and South Yemen, which led to the further internal conflict in North Yemen between the government forces and the NDF. The uprising was inspired and supported by the USSR and South Yemen. Soviet politicians believed that the NDF would prove to be an effective tool for the growth of the Soviet influence in North Yemen. These events alarmed the administration of Jimmy Carter, who in March 1979 without the consent of the US Congress decided to send military support to the government in Sana'a. The American arms went to North Yemen via Saudi Arabia¹⁶.

The US policy towards North Yemen can be considered as part of the Carter Doctrine, in which the President stated that *any attempt to take control over the Persian Gulf region by external forces would be regarded as a violation of the vital security interests of the United States and as such would be repelled by any available means, including the use of armed forces*. Although this abovementioned Doctrine focused attention of the USA on the Gulf region, it assumed the strengthening the position of the USA and the weakening influence of the Soviet Union by supporting local actors in the region of the so-called Greater Middle East. In the Arabian Peninsula, a special role was attributed of course to Saudi Arabia¹⁷.

The Doctrine designed by the Advisor to President - Zbigniew Brzezinski - was primarily a response to the Islamic revolution in Iran and the Soviet Union's invasion of Afghanistan. However, an additional factor was the increased presence of the Soviet Navy in the Indian Ocean region. By the end of the 1980s the number of Soviet warships ranged from 18-21, while in the 1990s there were already 30-38 vessels¹⁸. The maintainance of such activity of the Soviet fleet would not have been possible if it had not been for the logistics base on the Socotra Island owned by South Yemen. In response, the Americans increased the presence of the US Fifth Fleet in the Persian Gulf and the Indian Ocean regions (based in Manama, Bahrain). Moreover, they created a rapid reaction force and established the Central Command (CENTCOM).

Despite the internal political rivalry between various fractions, the leaders of North and South Yemen undertook steps to reach an agreement and put an end to the conflict. However, the attitude of external actors led to an escalation of fights rather than fostering an agreement. Saudi Arabia increasingly supported the radical Islamic Front, which fought against the NDF. In addition, the Saudis reduced the supply of US arms to the government forces, which considerably weakened their position. Despite the efforts of the Yemeni diplomacy, the United States did not decide to directly supply arms

¹⁶ Ibidem, p. 24.

¹⁷ Z. Brzeziński, Presidential Directive/NSC-63, Persian Gulf Security Framework, The White House, Washington, January 15, 1981.

¹⁸ The USSR...op.cit.

to the government in Sana'a. At the time, the Carter's administration was focused primarily on the issue of hostages in the American embassy in Iran. What is more, the President Saleh perfectly understood that Americans would always firstly take into account the interests of the Saudis in the region, not the Yemenis. The deterioration in relations of North Yemen with the United States also resulted from the divergent approaches to the Palestinian issue. The government in Sana'a, like other Arab countries supported the Palestine Liberation Organization, while Israel was the main ally of the United States in the Middle East. It is worth noting that the PLO was one of the main beneficiaries of the Soviet support during the Cold War, which was well regarded by the authorities in North Yemen. Moreover, the PLO fighters took training, among others, on the territory of Yemen. It can be argued that the authorities in Sana'a and Aden used the PLO as a proxy actor in the war with Israel. The common goal of the Arab states and the Soviet Union was to disorder the peace process between Israel, Palestine and Egypt carried out by the USA.

The disappointment with short and not very intensive cooperation with the West and the Saudis caused that North Yemen turned to the USSR. This change was very beneficial to the Soviet Union, which was increasingly afraid of strengthening military cooperation of North Yemen with the United States. Soviet politicians in the 1980s increased the supply of arms to North Yemen, which contained: MiG-21 (40 pcs.) and MiG-17 (10 pcs.) jet fighters, SU-20/22 bombers (20 pcs.), helicopters Mi-8, T-54 and T-55 tanks (a total of 500 pcs.), FROG, SA-2 and SA-7 antiaircraft systems, BM-21 Grad rocket launchers, ZSU-23-4 self-propelled radar guided anti-aircraft weapon system and OSA-2 missile boats. In addition, the number of military advisors in North Yemen rose from 120 to 300 people. For comparison, the Army of North Yemen had only 64 American M-60 tanks and 10 F-5E jet fighters.¹⁹

Moreover, in 1981 the Soviet Union canceled 265 of the 630 millions of the debt, which the government in Sana'a had to pay Moscow. Despite such favorable policy of the Kremlin, the President Saleh tried to diversify the supply of military equipment, preventing the USSR from achieving the monopoly in North Yemen (as in the case of South Yemen). The United States continued to provide North Yemen with weapons, although in much less amounts (see: Table 2). The USA and Saudi Arabia could not completely abandon the indirect impact on the government in Sana'a, because they feared the scenario in which the Soviet Union reached the level of influence in the North and in the South. This would allow the Soviet Union to conduct various kinds of sabotage operations in the territory of Saudi Arabia and other countries in that region²⁰.

¹⁹ The USSR...op.cit.

²⁰ Ibidem. The USSR used South Yemen as a transit corridor for deploying Cuban troops to Ethiopia fighting against Somalia (supported by the Saudis) in the Ogaden War (1977-1978). At this point it is also worth quoting the example of Oman. In the mid-70s South Yemen in cooperation with the USSR and the People's Republic of China supported various separatist groups (including the Popular Front for the Liberation of Oman) that led the rebellion in against the monarchy Zafur. Authorities in Muscat, in turn, received support from the UK, Iran and other monarchies from the Arabian Peninsula. Thus, it is obvious that South Yemen waged a proxy war not only against North Yemen, but also

Paradoxically, the Soviet Union supported both sides of the armed conflict in North Yemen. On the one hand, from its establishment the NDF was unofficially supported through South Yemen (and to some extent, Libya and Syria). On the other hand, after signing the contract with North Yemen, the USSR directly equipped the government in Sana'a. A good example illustrating the effects of the USSR's ambivalent policy towards the parties of the conflict is the case of shooting down two Soviet SU-22 fighters belonging to the government forces of North Yemen by the Soviet air defense system SAM operated by the NDF²¹.

Table 2. The sale of arms to North Yemen and South Yemen in the years 1973-1990 (in US \$ million)

Period	Country	Total	The USA	The USSR	Other NATO states	Other Warsaw Pact states	Others
1973-1977	North Yemen	86	26	30	10	-	20
	South Yemen	170	-	160	-	-	10
1974-1978	North Yemen	180	40	50	50	-	30
	South Yemen	380	-	370	-	-	10
1975-1979	North Yemen	625	110	210	85	105	110
	South Yemen	600	-	575	-	-	5
1976-1980	North Yemen	1 100	170	625	85	110	100
	South Yemen	775	-	775	-	-	10
1978-1982	North Yemen	2 100	230	900	75	270	650
	South Yemen	800	-	775	-	-	10
1979-1983	North Yemen	2 355	200	1 200	35	270	650
	South Yemen	1 510	-	1 500	-	-	10
1981-1985	North Yemen	1 675	90	850	-	160	575
	South Yemen	1 110	-	1 100	-	-	10
1982-1986	North Yemen	1 485	50	1 300	-	75	60

Oman. The Americans and the Saudis feared a scenario in which the territory of North Yemen would become a communist supply base designed to perform similar operations. On the rebellion in Zafur see: M. DeVore, *The United Kingdom's last hot war of the Cold War: Oman, 1963-75*, Routledge, London 2011.

²¹ M.N. Katz, op.cit., p. 25.

Period	Country	Total	The USA	The USSR	Other NATO states	Other Warsaw Pact states	Others
	South Yemen	1 840	-	1 800	-	-	40
1983-1987	North Yemen	1 435	30	1 300	-	5	100
	South Yemen	1 910	-	1900	-	-	10
1984-1988	North Yemen	1420	30	1300	5	-	90
	South Yemen	1 510	-	1500	-	-	10
1985-1989	North Yemen	1 765	20	1 600	-	45	100
	South Yemen	1 400	-	1 400	-	-	-
1987-1991	North Yemen	1 595	20	1 500	-	35	40
	South Yemen	1 400	-	1 400	-	-	-
1991-1993	Yemen	60	-	30 (Russia)	-	-	30

Source: own study based on reports of the United States Control and Disarmament Agency published in the years 1973-1990, [online] Available on the Internet: <http://www.state.gov/> [accessed on: 20.07.2015]

In the 1980s, the number of Soviet weapons supplied to South Yemen increased significantly. Among the delivered arms there were, among others, SCUD missiles, SU-20/22 bombers, MiG-21 fighters, Mi-24 combat helicopters, Mi-8 transport helicopters, T-55 tanks, FROG-7 and SA-2 missile systems, BMP infantry fighting vehicles, OSA -2 missile boats and TOAD amphibious vessels. Also additional military advisers were sent to South Yemen. The number of Soviet soldiers increased from 500 to 1000; moreover, the Cubans (500 people) and the Germans from the GDR (50 people) stationed in South Yemen. The task of the consultants was to train the armed forces, security services, paramilitary groups and the intelligence of North Yemen. It is also worth noting that the Soviet economic support for South Yemen was (as in the case of North Yemen) much smaller than the military support. In the years 1967-1981 it amounted to \$ 200 billion²².

Both internal and external factors led to the escalation of the conflict in Northern Yemen. As a result, fighting, which was stopped by numerous ceasefires, lasted until 1982. This raises the question: what did the Soviet Union intend to achieve through leading such ambivalent policy towards North Yemen?

At first glance, such a policy may seem irrational. But in practice it was a very effective tool through which the Kremlin was able to control both the North and the South. Both

²² The USSR...op.cit.

Yemeni countries *de facto* were the spheres of the Soviet influence, which made them dependent on its military and economic support. Holding the balance of power between the contending parties was an instrument to influence these actors by maintaining chaos controlled by Moscow. The Soviet Union repeatedly called on both countries to reconcile, but it was feared that North Yemen would not adopt the Marxist-Leninist ideology. The Kremlin did not desire the scenario of the creation of one Islam-oriented Yemeni state. In turn, the vision of the creation of one Marxism-Leninism-oriented Yemen was not acceptable to Saudi Arabia, which competed with the Soviet Union for influence in North Yemen. However, the Saudis' inconsistent actions resulting from the vested interests of the Kingdom were less successful than the Soviet Union's. While the Saudi economic support was high, the military support was insufficient²³. When the President Saleh (due to his relations with the United States, Saudi Arabia and other Gulf states) sought to diversify sources of armament supplies, the Soviet Union largely controlled the government in North Yemen, because it had monopolized the area. The Soviet Union won this geopolitical competition with the United States and Saudi Arabia. This was mainly due to the inconsistent policy of Washington, which focused more attention on Vietnam, Iran and Afghanistan. In addition, the Saudis' long-term goal was to remove the Zaidis from power in North Yemen and replace them with the conservative Sunnis, which generated resistance from the authorities in Sana'a.

CONCLUSION

In 1986 an armed conflict between the two fractions of the ruling Yemen Socialist Party occurred in South Yemen. Internal power struggles greatly weakened the political elites in South Yemen, which, in turn, enabled the unification of the North and the South. The creation of the Republic of Yemen in 1990 took place at the end of the Cold War. In the new geopolitical conditions the President Saleh ran increasingly bolder foreign policy supporting the invasion of Kuwait by Iraq in 1990. Such a policy was against the interests of the United States, Saudi Arabia and other Gulf states, which withdrew their support for the government in Sana'a²⁴.

The creation of one state entity generated additional problems related to the security of the state rather than contributed to its stability. The establishment of one central authority did not work in the society divided for years into North and South, which *de facto* recognized only the authority of tribal and clan structures.

In 1994 another armed conflict broke out in Yemen, this time between the General People's Congress (the party of the President Saleh derived from North Yemen) and the Yemen Socialist Party (the party of the Vice President al-Beidh'a derived from South Yemen), which wanted to restore the independence of South Yemen. An important aspect of this conflict was the volte-face of Saudi Arabia, which, contrary to

²³ The Soviet economic support was small compared to the military support. In the years 1954-1981 it amounted to only approx. \$ 140. For comparison, Saudi Arabia annually provided support in the form of approximately \$ 250 million. See: M.N. Katz, op.cit.

²⁴ M.N. Katz, Yemen: The Evolution of Problem, ISS Opinion, European Union Institute for Security Studies [online] Available online: <http://www.iss.europa.eu/> [accessed on: 02.09.2015]

previous practice, supported the Yemen Socialist Party. Despite the lack of outer help the government forces managed to retain power in the country.

Numerous conflicts in the territory of Yemen made this area very unstable. For years, Yemen has been considered a failed state, the central authorities of which have not been able to fully control its territory. A chronic lack of security caused that Yemen became the scene of activities for Salafi terrorist organizations. In 2000 the local branch of Al-Qaeda carried out an attack on the American destroyer USS Cole in the port of Aden. This event brought the Yemeni authorities closer to the US administration leading the global war against terrorism.

In addition, in the first decade of the 21st century, the increasingly authoritarian regime of Saleh had to face separatist movements. In 2004 the Houthis' rebellion broke out in the north of the country; they sought to restore the Zaidi Imamate from before 1962. In turn, in 2009 in the south of the country there was another uprising of separatists from the south. In addition, the growing in power Al-Qaeda of the Arabian Peninsula carried out the intense campaign of terror directed against the Yemeni government.

The events of the Arab Spring of 2011 also had a significant impact on the situation in Yemen. As a result of mass protests the President Ali Abdullah Saleh stepped down after 33 years in power. Abd Rabbuh Mansur Hadi took over; however, he was ousted by the following offensive movement of the Houthis in 2014. The destabilization of Yemen after the Arab Spring led to Al-Qaeda's acquiring control of several towns in the south of the country.

Currently, Yemen is plunged into another civil war, which involves the Houthi movement rebels (supported by Iran), the Salafi terrorist organizations (Al-Qaeda of the Arabian Peninsula / Ansar al-Shariah, ISIS / Daesh) and the government forces supported by Saudi Arabia and other Gulf states. Today's Yemen again became a theater of a proxy war, where the interests of regional states and non-state actors clash.

The complexity of the political situation in Yemen requires conducting further, much more detailed political science analyzes. In the Polish scientific circles the issue of conditions for security of the Republic of Yemeni is the area that requires research. The issues related to the situation in Yemen are extremely important, since the destabilization of the region is a serious threat to international security.

REFERENCES

1. Alpher Y., *Periphery: Israel's search for allies in the Middle East*, Rowman & Littlefield, London 2015.
2. Deutsch K.W., *External Involvement in Internal Wars* [in]: Harry Eckstein (ed.), *Internal War: Problems and Approaches*, Free Press of Glencoe, New York 1964.
3. DeVore M., *The United Kingdom's last hot war of the Cold War: Oman, 1963-75*, Routledge, London 2011.
4. Kahana E., Suwaed M., *The A to Z of Middle Eastern Intelligence*, Scarecrow Press, Plymouth 2009.

5. Katz M.N., *Saana and the Soviets* (in): Problems of Communism Jan-Feb 1984.
6. Katz M.N., *Yemen: The Evolution of Problem*, ISS Opinion, European Union Institute for Security Studies [online] Available on the Internet: <http://www.iss.europa.eu/> [available: 02.09.2015].
7. Legucka A., *Geopolityczne uwarunkowania i konsekwencje konfliktów zbrojnych na obszarze poradzieckim*, Difin, Warszawa 2013.
8. Loveman Ch., *Assesing the Phenomenon of Proxy Intervention* [in]: Conflict, Security and Development volume 2 issue 3, 2002.
9. Mumford A., *Proxy Warfare. War and Conflict in the Modern World*, Polity Press 2013.
10. Nye J.S., *Konflikty międzynarodowe. Wprowadzenie do teorii i historii*, tłum. Marek Madej, Wydawnictwa Akademickie i Profesjonalne, Warszawa 2009.
11. Walton C., *Imperium tajemnic. Brytyjski wywiad, zimna wojna i upadek imperium*, przeł. M. Antosiewicz, Wydawnictwo Czarne, Wołowiec 2015.

DOCUMENTS

1. *The USSR and the Yemens: Moscow's Foothold on the Arabian Peninsula*, National Foreign Assessment Centre, CIA Historical Review Program PA 81-10289, July 1981.
2. Z. Brzeziński, *Presidential Directive/NSC-63, Persian Gulf Security Framework*, The White House, Washington, January 15, 1981.
3. *World Military Expenditures and Arms Transfers 1963-1973, 1965-1974, 1966-1967, 1966-1975, 1967-1976, 1968-1977, 1969-1978, 1970-1979, 1971-1980, 1985, 1986, 1987, 1988, 1989, 1990, 1991-1992*, United States Control and Disarmament Agency, Washington D.C., [online] Available on the Internet: <http://www.state.gov/> [available: 17.07.2015].

WEBSITES

1. <https://en.wikipedia.org/>
2. <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/ym.html>
3. <https://www.google.pl/maps/>

BIOGRAPHICAL NOTE

Filip BRYJKA, MA – a political scientist specializing in international security. He deals with issues of contemporary armed conflicts and asymmetric threats. He works as an assistant at the Faculty of Security Sciences at the Military Academy of Land Forces. PhD student at the Institute of Strategy of the National Defense Academy.

HOW TO CITE THIS PAPER

Bryjka F., (2016). North And South Yemen As A Theatre Of A Proxy War During The Cold War. *Zeszyty Naukowe Wyższa Szkoła Oficerska Wojsk Lądowych im. gen. Tadeusza Kościuszki Journal of Science of the gen. Tadeusz Kosciuszko Military Academy of Land Forces*, 48 (2), p. 19-34, <http://dx.doi.org/10.5604/17318157.1216079>



This work is licensed under the Creative Commons Attribution International License (CC BY).
<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>

