

THREE years ago a well-placed source in an Iron Curtain country told certain Western intelligence organisations that the Soviet Union in the long-term would do all in its power to take Afghanistan, Pakistan and Iran, thereby grabbing Western supplies by the throat and ensuring a sorely needed warm-water port.

The strategy was extended over a 15-year period it was said, and would encompass territories far south as Kenya and other countries on the African coast.

The invasion of Afghanistan on December 27 has pricked the bubble of Western wishful thinking that the Russian presence in Africa and elsewhere was not really serious.

For the first time the West including its traditional leader, the United States, has woken up to the threat of Russian expansionism. Ever communist countries have condemned Russia's action.

America's President Carter intends using air and naval facilities offered by Oman, Kenya and Somalia, to defend the Gulf area against possible Soviet expansionism.

Because of Soviet support for Ethiopia, Somalia kicked the Russians out of their port of Berbera, once regarded by the Soviet Union as the largest and most important of their fleet facilities overseas.

This raises another interesting question: for long South Africa, the whipping boy of the world because of her internal policies, has warned vainly of Soviet aggression in Africa.

Now the Americans find themselves in the situation of beefing up their naval base at Diego Garcia in the Chagos Archipelago in the Indian Ocean while

West's rethink on Cape route?

Simonstown, with ready-made facilities and the strike capability in the Indian Ocean, is disregarded.

The Simonstown naval base now takes on a new

Russia's invasion of Afghanistan has at last alerted the West to the threat to its oil supplies. Will it now admit the importance of South Africa and the Cape route? asks JOHN ROLT.

importance in protecting the Cape sea route carrying oil to America and Europe.

A senior Chinese vice-Premier has proposed a global alliance to check the Russians' operations in which South Africa could, theoretically at any rate, play a key role.

The Afghan crisis has again underlined the world's fears about Moscow's designs on the West's oil life-liners, starting in the shaky Gulf area and winding around the Cape along the super-tanker route to Europe.

The take-over of Afghanistan has been labelled by some Western intelligence sources as a grave step to make a southward thrust to the Indian Ocean, control sea lanes, seize oil-rich areas and outflank Europe.

The South African Navy and Air Force could play a key role in policing the Cape sea lanes and the strategic Mozambique Channel.

An indication of just how seriously the Americans and others regard Russian expansionism is President Carter's announcement of the establishment of a rapid-deployment force with marines at the core.

It will need a major rethink by the West before South Africa could come into her own as a watchdog of the Indian Ocean. The country has the ability, but now needs the support of the West.