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CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY

CIA HISTORICAL REVIEW PROGRAM  
RELEASE IN FULL

THE CURRENT SITUATION IN THE  
MEDITERRANEAN AND THE NEAR EAST

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17 October 1947

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Date 21 Oct/92Copy No. 47HRP 92-4THE CURRENT SITUATION IN THE MEDITERRANEAN  
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## 1. STRATEGIC CONSIDERATIONS.

Access to the oil of the Persian Gulf area and the denial of control of the Mediterranean to a major, hostile, expansionist power are deemed to be essential to the security of the US. From this point of view the major threat to United States security lies in the possibility of progressive Soviet penetration into the Mediterranean and Near East, either directly, through satellites, or through local Communist action.

In viewing the Mediterranean-Near Eastern area as a whole, it must be noted that the strategic position in the western Mediterranean differs in two important aspects from that in the eastern Mediterranean. In the western Mediterranean, the key countries, France, Italy, and Spain, are integral parts of the European as well as the Mediterranean area, not only through their geographic positions on the European shores of the Mediterranean but also because of their colonies in North Africa (Italy at this moment, however, has no control over its African colonies). In consequence, these countries are directly influenced by the over-all developments in Europe as well as by those in the Mediterranean and, conversely, developments in these countries vitally affect both the Mediterranean and European areas. Secondly, they are not contiguous to the USSR, although Italy borders on a Soviet satellite. In the eastern Mediterranean, on the other hand, the key countries can be considered primarily as integral parts of the Mediterranean-Near Eastern area. Two of them, Turkey and Iran, have extensive common frontiers with the USSR, while Greece borders on three Soviet satellites.

From the point of view of the security of the Mediterranean-Near Eastern area, the existence in France, Italy, Spain, Greece, Turkey, and Iran of stable regimes, friendly to the US, would constitute a barrier to Soviet encroachment. Geographically, such a barrier would act as a safeguard against Soviet penetration into the Mediterranean basin and the Near and Middle East. It would not of itself, however, prevent the USSR from developing a dangerous degree of influence in the Arab states and North Africa through exploitation of the antagonisms which exist in those areas.

## 2. CRITICAL SITUATIONS IN ORDER OF IMPORTANCE.

*a. Italy.*

The Italian Government faces an immediate economic crisis. Unless it receives prompt and effective aid and adopts more realistic and vigorous economic policies, there will ensue an economic collapse which might possibly lead to a Communist accession to power. Such an event would not only bring Italy within the Soviet orbit, but would also have a profound psychological effect throughout Western Europe, the

Note: This paper has been coordinated with the intelligence organizations of the Departments of State, Army, Navy, and Air Forces.

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Mediterranean, and the Near East. (While the situation in France is similar to that in Italy, France is not included in the enumeration of critical situations in the Mediterranean because its key position in the European area makes it more appropriate to treat France in that connection. However, as inferred above, Soviet control of France would have vital repercussions in the Mediterranean, particularly North Africa.)

b. *Greece.*

In Greece, the USSR, acting indirectly through its satellites, is in actual process of taking over a portion of the country by force. Unless an early pacification and economic and political rehabilitation of the country are achieved, the situation, already at an advanced state of deterioration, may well pass beyond the possibility of effective remedy. Extension of Soviet control over Greece would give the USSR access to the Aegean and would outflank the Dardanelles.

c. *The Arab States.*

Arab determination to resist the partition of Palestine is such that any attempt to enforce that solution would lead to armed conflict, presenting an opportunity for the extension of Soviet influence. Any firm establishment of Soviet influence in the Arab states would not only be dangerous in itself, but it would also tend to isolate Turkey and Iran. Furthermore, irrespective of the possibility of Soviet penetration of this area, US support of the partition of Palestine might lead the Arab states, on their own, to take steps which would adversely affect US economic and strategic interests in their territories.

d. *Iran.*

Proximity to the USSR and internal weaknesses and antagonisms render the country vulnerable to Soviet pressure and penetration. Unless Iran takes steps to effect long-overdue political and economic reforms, Soviet encroachment will be expedited. Moreover, unless Iran's confidence in the effectiveness of US and UN support against Soviet aggression is maintained, it may accede to Soviet demands, such as the oil concession, which would facilitate Soviet penetration and domination.

3. LESS URGENT SITUATIONS IN ORDER OF IMPORTANCE.

a. *Turkey.*

The situation in Turkey is comparatively stable. The Turks are constantly subjected to Soviet pressure, which they may be relied upon to continue to resist. Even with the material US aid now being applied, however, they are incapable of prolonged resistance to attack by a major aggressor. Extension of Soviet control or dominant influence over Greece, Iran, or the Arab states would tend to isolate Turkey.

b. *Egypt.*

As a leading state in the Arab League, Egypt strongly influences any issue, including that of Palestine (see para. 2 c), affecting any Arab country. Controversial political problems which have affected Egyptian relations with Great Britain have been referred to the UN, and Egypt now tends to place responsibility on the US as well as the UK for any UN decision. If unable to obtain satisfaction on these problems, Egyptian enmity toward the US will continue to increase.

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c. *French North Africa.*

The resurgent nationalism rife in Morocco, Algeria, and Tunisia is inherently a threat to the authority of France and presents an opportunity for Soviet exploitation. Conversely, any possible extension of Soviet control over France would gravely compromise the strategic situation in North Africa.

d. *Libya.*

The situation in this area is presently stable, although it contains latent possibilities for the incitement of Arab nationalism, particularly if the Arab states were to become generally antagonistic to the Western Powers. The immediate problem lies in current negotiations regarding the disposition of the Italian colonies and the participation of the USSR therein.

e. *Spain.*

The political future of Spain is an unsolved problem, but the short-term situation is stable and the regime is definitely anti-Communist.