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## The Soviet Threat in the Middle East

HARRY E. HOY, University of Oklahoma, Norman

The Middle East occupies an unique place in the present struggle between the Communist and the Western Nations. The U.S.S.R. has been able to surround herself with puppet nations on all her land borders except in the Middle East. Thus we see North Korea, China, and Tibet occupying vast areas on the southeast, and Bulgaria, Rumania, Hungary, Czechoslovakia and Poland on the western approaches to the Soviet Union. Although Finland is not a satellite nation, its military potential has been effectively neutralized by developments since 1945.

However, the approaches to the U.S.S.R. from the south and southwest via Turkey, Iran and Afghanistan have not fallen to the enticements of Communism although the Kremlin is aggressively pursuing a policy that would bring them under its control.

The Soviet policy has been one to take advantage of every weakness or conflict between the Western Nations and the neighbors of the Soviet Union. Actions undertaken have ranged from the Berlin blockade to the armed invasion of South Korea, ostensibly by North Koreans. In no case have the armed forces of the Soviet Union been openly used to gain an objective. Use of satellite forces or threat of their use has been partially effective.

The avowed policy of the Soviets is to promote world revolution and thereby bring the world under the domination of the Soviet Government. However, the government of the U.S.S.R. has several more immediate objectives or conditions with which to be concerned.

Of primary importance is the perpetuation of the Communist party in Russia. This may seem academic in that apparently there is no serious threat of its overthrow, but the danger always exists. Any action by the Soviet government takes into consideration the security of the Communist party at home.

Second only to the control of the government by the party is the defense of Soviet territory. Every security measure possible is being used to prevent intelligence of activities and developments inside the country from reaching the rest of the world. Not only are garrisons stationed about the borders but anti-aircraft artillery and fighter and interceptor aircraft are strategically dispersed. An indication of the extreme sensitivity to patrol and reconnaissance planes of our Air Force as well as those of Sweden has been the challenging and even the shooting down without warning of several aircraft over the waters surrounding the U.S.S.R.

The third goal of the Soviets has been the re-orientation of the political, economic and cultural interests of the satellite nations toward Moscow and away from the West. This has created the so-called Iron Curtain. The purpose of this alignment has been interpreted by many to be a defensive one, to others, an aggressive one. It is meaningless to debate this issue because the surrounding dependent states would serve either purpose depending upon the circumstances.

The fourth goal is a natural outgrowth of number three—the extension of the Soviet and satellite spheres of influence beyond their present boundaries. The Korean War, the threat of East Germany against the western zones of Berlin and West Germany, the border incidents between Bulgaria and Greece, Chinese aid to the Viet Minh in Indo China, the occupation of Tibet and the disputed territory between Kashmir and Tibet are but a few of the attempts to expand Communist control. The only serious setback in the continuous advance of Soviet expansion has been in Yugoslavia. Notwithstanding this setback, the Soviets have been very successful in that today about 1/3 of the world's people and 1/3 of the earth's land surface are under the domination of the U.S.S.R.

The final goal of world domination can only be achieved as goal four is successful in extending Soviet influence to the point that opposition to Communism is rendered ineffective.

Pressure and tension in local areas can be expected to continue all around the perimeter of the U.S.S.R. and its satellites but overt action against the sovereignty of any Middle Eastern country would have to be taken by the Soviet Union. It is indeed fortunate that the Soviet occupation and sponsorship of the Azerbaidzhan Republic in Northwestern Iran was thwarted by the firm stand of the United States and Great Britain at the close of the World War II. A puppet Iranian Government in the North-western provinces would have furnished the same opportunity for conflict that resulted from the division of Korea along the 38th parallel.

The Soviet Government may take direct action in the Middle East. This action may be either military or non-military. In the present state of world affairs the Soviet Union is not likely to initiate an invasion of a non-satellite country with its own troops or planes because such action would undoubtedly precipitate World War III. The Soviets would hesitate to invade the Middle East unless she was reasonably certain the Western Nations would not interfere or unless the advantages to be gained by a surprise attack would be worth the risk of starting a general war. The first deterrent to an invasion of the Middle East is a real one. The threat of loss of Iran and its neighbors on the west because of their strategic location along important trade routes and also because they possess over 2/5 of the world's known petroleum reserves, would be unacceptable to the West. Any overt act threatening this oil resource would bring about immediate retaliation. The Soviet Union is probably capable of overrunning most of Iran and/or Afghanistan before United Nations forces could become effective against a surprise attack. If contact with the Persian Gulf could be made in the initial stage of the campaign and if some of the oil fields and the refinery at Abadan could be taken over, such a gain might be worth the consequences of general war. The threat to the west of an invasion and occupation of Iran and even Iraq and Arabia would not be so much the gain that would accrue to the U.S.S.R. as would be the loss of an important source of petroleum to Europe. Without Middle East oil, Europe could not offer effective resistance to an onslaught against Western Europe by Russia and its European satellites.

If one considers the vulnerability to Soviet aggression of the countries of the Middle East individually, a considerable variation is apparent. Only three Middle East nations actually have common borders with the U.S.S.R. These are Turkey, Iran and Afghanistan. Turkey would be in a very dangerous position if the Soviet Union should decide to move southwestward or southward. Turkey's possession of the southern shores of the Black Sea and a common border in the rugged area south of the Transcaucasus Republics of the U.S.S.R. places her in a front row position. However, terrain reasonably easy to defend, a strong will to resist any invader and the equipment and manpower to effectively discourage invasion, all combine to make the subjugation of that country costly and time-consuming. Afghanistan, on the other hand, is unorganized, primitive

and militarily defenseless, although the vast majority of Afghans would probably have the will to resist an invader. However, the control of Afghanistan either by military action or political penetration would be only the first step toward the greater objective: India and Pakistan and the warm waters of the Indian Ocean. Complete Soviet control of Afghanistan would sharpen the points of discord that already exist between Afghanistan and Pakistan and would pose a serious threat to the latter country.

The country that offers the most attractive avenue for expansion in the Middle East is Iran. Not only does Iran offer the shortest as well as an old, established route to the Indian Ocean, but possesses great oil resources itself and access to even more vast quantities to the west. Stalin seemed willing in 1939 to give Hitler a free hand in Western Europe and Africa in return for a free hand in Iran and Iraq. The occupation and domination of Iran would make the oil fields of Iraq and Arabia untenable for the United States and Great Britain. The U.S.S.R. would have driven a wedge between the East and West that would give the Soviet freedom to turn either to the east through India, Burma and Southeast Asia or west to Suez, North Africa, Ethiopia and the Sudan.

Many observers believe that the people living in the belt of land extending from Morocco on the west to Slam and Indo-China on the east hold the balance of power between the Russian brand of Communism and the rest of the world aligned against the spread of Communism. Over most of this area the dominant religion is Mohammedan. The part played by the Moslem world in recent centuries has been largely a passive one. Now a resurgence of nationalism is sweeping the region and the struggle is going on inside of each country to further the interests of the U.S.S.R. on the one hand and the United States, United Kingdom, or France on the other.

The Moslem faith and Communism are not mutually compatible. This is a strong element in favor of the West. However, the long and often discordant relations that have existed between the nations of the Middle East and Western Europe, particularly Great Britain, have built up such a reservoir of ill feeling that the Soviet Union has been able to exploit it to its own advantage. This is particularly true in Iran where disagreements between the Anglo-Iranian Oil Company and the Iranian Government was climaxed by the nationalization of the oil industry. For more than a year now the oil fields and the refinery have been idle. This has affected the economy of Iran but not to the extent expected by Great Britain and the United States. Assistance by the United States through Point Four aid and stringent belt tightening has kept the Iranian economy operating. Attempts to settle the oil issue have been repeatedly made, and although the Company has liberalized its offer to a point that would have been acceptable to Iran early in the negotiations, new demands have prevented a settlement.

Russia has gleefully watched the trend of events and has gained in popular support as the hate-British campaign has developed. The United States finds itself in a very awkward position in the country because of our good relations with Great Britain and a sincere if desperate desire to get the troubles of the area settled. We are certain to incur the displeasure of either Iran or Great Britain in anything we do.

The U.S.S.R. can afford to wait as long as the country remains in a turmoil. Communism already has its foot in the door of Iran and thrives on the disturbed conditions prevailing there. It is not inconceivable that the Communist party in Iran might gain control of the government. This threat has helped to keep the Mossadegh-dominated government in power as Mossadegh has become the strongest man in Iran, partly with the help of the Communists. His death or fall from power at this time would probably lead to mob control out of which the Communists might emerge

on top. Such a development would extend Soviet control to the Indian Ocean and provide the insulation of a satellite on Russia's southern flank which would be but the opening wedge in the conquest of the Middle East.

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