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CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY  
Senior Research Staff on International Communism

THE PROMOTION OF CONSTITUTIONAL STABILITY  
IN AFRO-ASIAN COUNTRIES:  
A Weapon in the Battle Against Communism

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THE PROMOTION OF CONSTITUTIONAL STABILITY  
IN AFRO-ASIAN COUNTRIES:  
A Weapon in the Battle Against Communism

Summary

Nearly all the Afro-Asian countries, some twenty of them newly independent, have failed to establish a constitutional system that promises continued independence, domestic order, and progressive economic and social development. The appeal of Communism is strong for a good many of their leaders and for populations expecting rapid material advancement. This paper suggests that, as complementary to military, economic, and cultural assistance programs, the US and its Western allies give more attention to the promotion of basic constitutional stability. While great obstacles to change exist, and the risks of making bad situations worse are considerable, there is need for the tactful advocacy of constitutional systems having a higher resistance potential to Communism than the regimes now found in many of the Afro-Asian countries.

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The combatting of Communism in Asia and Africa, it is generally recognized, must be carried on in a variety of ways. The nature of the threat differs from area to area, and the resources which the United States and its allies can deploy are conditioned by many local factors. Thus, diplomatic activity, mutual security agreements, military forces, economic and technical aid, and cultural, informational, and propaganda programs have their proper roles in this struggle. Less attention has been given to the promotion of basic constitutional stability as a means of thwarting Communism in the new and underdeveloped countries. The purpose of this paper is to stress the importance of this aspect of the problem and to suggest that political development must be viewed as a necessary complement to the other measures which the Western nations are employing.

1. The Appeal of Communism

The need for achieving a stable constitutional order is almost universal among the countries which stretch in a broad arc from Morocco in the west to Korea in the east. Some twenty of these countries are former colonial dependencies which have won national freedom since 1945. The others, while recognized before World War II as sovereign states, were within the military or economic sphere of interest of one of the imperial powers. Thrust into the turmoil of international affairs, often after the disruption of foreign or civil war, they have had little time in which to develop solid foundations for constitutional growth. Moreover, the population of almost all these countries is composed of a high proportion of illiterate citizens, unaccustomed to political responsibility and excited by the prospects of rapid material advancement. In some cases they are divided by age-old racial, religious, and tribal loyalties that impede the development of a national consciousness. Their leaders,

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often only slightly more experienced than the people they govern, have the problem of turning from agitation and revolutionary zeal to the hard tasks of nation-building.

The appeal of Communism is powerful. Its textbook solutions for old grievances and new problems find a ready acceptance among some intellectual circles - teachers, civil servants, and professional men. There is a widespread impression in the newly independent countries that the methods of rapid development pursued in the USSR, and now in the Eastern European satellites and Communist China, are better suited to their conditions than those advocated by the West. The transformation of a backward, largely agricultural Russia into a strong economic and military power within less than two generations is an example with a strong attraction for many Asians and Africans. That the cost included untold misery and brutality seems relatively unimportant in lands where life has usually been harsh and where there is rarely a tradition in law or religion to support a concept of personal freedom.

Even where the climate is presently unfavorable to the propagation of Communism as an ideology, the USSR arouses few fears. Until recently it was little known except as a champion of nationalism and anti-colonial sentiments; now its emissaries come offering goodwill, unrestricted aid, and strong support against the old imperialist powers. All this sounds attractive, and warnings from the West are laid to jealousy and pique.

It is perhaps well to remember that a good many of the new Asian and African states passed much of their historical experience under the rule of an oriental despotism. As Professor Wittfogel has pointed out, this kind of political and social system bears striking resemblances to the Communist regimes of the USSR and China. A party bureaucracy

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under a dictator rules in the same arbitrary manner as the royal bureaucracy of the oriental despot, and in neither system are there to be found the restraints of property and corporative institutions that checked total tyranny in both feudal and capitalist Europe. In effect, Communist regimes in the Middle East or southern Asia, while representing political regression in Western eyes, may be accepted by the people involved as a reversion to a traditional order, with new names and symbols substituted for the old.

## 2. The Extent of the Problem

A brief survey of the situation will indicate, we believe, that the problem of establishing a stable constitutional order is present in nearly all the countries from North Africa to the Far East. In Morocco the withdrawal of the French protectorate has devolved power upon an absolute monarch. Currently popular as the symbol of independence, he is under increasing pressure to cede control of the government and the army to the Istiqlal party. A period of instability in this strategically located country is the likely result of the developing contest for power. France's other lately freed protectorate, Tunisia, has deposed its reigning bey, and the hero of independence, M. Bourghiba, has assumed the office of president as well as premier. Recognizing that a constitutional system requires more than the presence of one patriot-statesman, M. Bourghiba seems perplexed as to how to create a strong yet democratic state.

The instability of the political systems in the Middle East is advertised in the headlines of the daily press. With the exception of Israel and Turkey, none of the countries of the area can be said to have achieved a settled political order. Some of them, like Saudi Arabia, Yemen, and Libya have been thrust onto the stage of world affairs with governments so primitive that an advance into feudalism would represent progress. Syria, Jordan, Iraq, and Iran are

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ruled, behind a thin facade of parliamentary institutions, by small oligarchies of politicians and military officers. Coups d'etat, revolts, and assassinations are endemic.

India, Pakistan, and Ceylon were fortunate in having at the time of independence considerable groups of politicians who, by education and experience, were familiar with western political principles and practices. Furthermore, they inherited a well organized administrative system and a body of trained civil servants. Even with these advantages, however, they face serious problems in establishing effective governmental systems. Pakistan has had difficulty in drafting a constitution and has yet to hold a national election. It remains to be seen whether the successors to the comparatively competent political leaders and their principal civil servants will be able to carry forward the construction of the era of independence. India has been governed for ten years by the well organized Congress Party, popular among all classes as the vehicle of national independence. But the party now faces the problem of retaining voter loyalty while it deals with the serious and complex issues which trouble and divide the vast Indian population. No responsible opposition party has developed, and it is ominous that the Communists are the largest minority group in the national parliament and have won control of one state government.

In Southeast Asia the need for a stable constitutional order is most vividly illustrated in the case of Indonesia. Starting as a federation of the principal areas of the former Dutch East Indies, Indonesia was transformed by its revolutionary political leaders into a centralized unitary state. This development has proved unsatisfactory to the non-Javanese parts of the archipelago, and within the past year rebel movements have arisen in Sumatra, Borneo and the Celebes. In the face of this disintegration the President, Sukarno, advocates a vague authoritarian regime, while

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the Communists enhance their influence by enthusiastically supporting him and making large electoral gains in Java. Dictatorship, civil war, or a dissolution of the state are all possibilities in the present situation.

The former French empire in Southeast Asia has dissolved into the four states of Cambodia, Laos, North Vietnam and South Vietnam. North Vietnam has achieved political stability - that of a Communist dictatorship. South Vietnam, under the vigorous leadership of President Diem and with substantial American economic and military aid, has established a high degree of internal order and has made progress in meeting its serious problems as an independent state. More time is needed, however, before concluding that a politically and economically viable country is in the making. The same may be said for Laos and Cambodia. The former has the problem of regaining control over a part of the country now ruled by a Communist movement supported by the neighboring Viet Minh. There is a danger that the royal government in its effort to absorb the territory and military forces of the Pathet Lao will itself be subverted. The government of Cambodia is in form a constitutional monarchy. However, no settled political system has developed, partly because of the capricious actions of its actual ruler, Prince Norodom Sihanouk, in moving from the throne to the premier's office or to political retirement.

Thailand, also a constitutional monarchy, has maintained more stability than most of its neighbors despite periodic coups d'etat. These usually bloodless revolutions reflect changing configurations of political and military power among a few leaders who compete for the spoils of office in a relatively wealthy country.

On 31 August 1957 the independent states of Southeast Asia were joined by a new member, the Federation of Malaya.

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It begins its independent existence with the advantages that other former colonies of the British Empire have inherited, namely, a cadre of leaders familiar with Western political principles and practices and an effective administrative system. Endowed with rubber and tin, Malaya's prospects for stability and progress would be bright but for two major uncertainties. The first is the question of whether a Malayan nationality can be developed out of the diverse communities of Malays, Chinese, and Indians. The other concerns the insurrection carried on since 1948 by Communist guerrillas. Now contained and probably reduced to less than two thousand, these guerrillas, mostly Chinese, force the country to bear a heavy cost for policing, and they could again threaten its security if revived and supported by the Communist Bloc.

Two states in the Far East, the Republic of China and the Republic of Korea, have governments built around their respective presidents, Chiang Kai-shek and Syngman Rhee. In both, predictions concerning the prospects for a stable political order probably must await the demise of these elderly men, who not only symbolize the independence of their countries but provide the effective leadership. These prospects will be affected by both internal conditions and the exposed positions of Taiwan and South Korea between the Communist Bloc and the Free World.

### 3. The Need for Constitutional Reform

It is easier to describe and analyze the weaknesses of the new Asian and African states than to prescribe remedies. Time, of course, will help some of them to achieve a reasonable degree of political stability. Habit, practice, and experience will deepen grooves to guide the machinery of state. The considerable numbers of young people being trained at home and abroad will add to the

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efficiency of public and private services. Technical assistance programs provided by the United Nations, the US International Cooperation Administration, the Colombo Plan, and other governmental and private agencies will raise standards and performance in industry, agriculture, and social services. And yet neither time, experience, nor technical assistance is likely to provide a good proportion of these countries with the basic constitutional structures that they need. Before these factors can become influential, some countries will probably be gobbled up by aggressive neighbors, succumb to Communism, or suffer a series of dictatorial seizures by rival cliques and strong-men. Rapid progress toward a settled political order is the requirement in a goodly number of these countries.

It is suggested that the US and the Western European countries, which have such a vital stake in the stability of the Afro-Asian countries, should concern themselves with how they can help develop political systems that give promise of domestic peace and that offer hope of orderly progress to people often bewildered, frustrated, or embittered by their present regimes. Efforts along this line should be pursued in conjunction with essential programs of economic, military, and technical assistance, the purpose being to promote conditions in which these programs will have lasting and beneficial effects.

The obstacles to instigating satisfactory changes are, of course, formidable. No nation will admit that it is incapable of governing itself, and newly independent states are especially sensitive about foreign criticism and advice. Moreover, present governing groups will usually resent any suggestions that change is desirable and will consider such advice as unfriendly. The problem, therefore, must be approached with tact and understanding. It must be recognized, too, that constitutional systems cannot be

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mailed out in Bentham-like fashion as finished models. The new states of Africa and Asia can borrow various institutions, but in the main they must build with native materials. The systems they develop probably will not satisfy all the criteria of democratic government as practiced in the advanced states of the West, but they should be approved and supported if they provide for governing organs that are basically responsive to the popular will, means for peaceful change and legitimate succession, and guarantees of the more fundamental personal and property rights.

#### 4. Some Illustrative Cases

A few examples may make the above discussion less theoretical. The Government of Iran is an oligarchy of politicians and military officers under the domination of the Shah. It is basically unstable because the Shah's death, by a natural or a treacherous cause, would leave both the person and the qualifications of the successor an uncertainty. Moreover, the personal interventions of the Shah in the daily business of government discourage and frustrate the development of capable civilian leadership. The transformation of Iran into a constitutional monarchy with a parliament and a responsible ministry seems a reasonable objective. The throne would remain as the focal point of national loyalty, and effective power would be located in the hands of civilian ministers. There are reported to be politicians of some standing who desire this kind of constitutional development, and the Shah has expressed hopes for the growth of a continuing party system to replace the present cliques and factions. Admittedly, the problem of promoting constitutional change without opening the door to another Mossadeq is serious, but there is great risk, too, in banking upon the ability of a strong man to preserve domestic order and national independence.

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West of Iran lie the Arab states, aspiring to some sort of unity which they assert is being thwarted by the United States and its allies. Unjust as this complaint is, it might be removed by the American advocacy of a Pan-Arab state. It is doubtful whether the present community of interest among these Near Eastern countries is as great as they profess. In any event, it probably could lead to no more than a loose confederation, but that could be announced as a goal of Western policy. Such a confederation could be empowered to handle foreign affairs, defense, and basic economic development, and the Western powers could agree to deal with a central government on such matters. The problem of constitutional form might be settled along the lines of the new Federation of Malaya, with a Saudi and a Hashemite ruler alternating as the nominal head of state. Each state would retain its own governmental institutions, choosing representatives to a council of the confederacy. Jordan, whose life expectancy under present conditions is short, might be divided among its neighbors; or, joined in a union, it might cease to be the object of their plotting. Israel would have to receive strong Western guarantees, but the existence of the Arab confederacy should quiet much of the fear that now possesses her neighbors. And in economic development, supported by large-scale Western aid and some sharing of oil revenues, there might be an outlet for the Arab restlessness and a solution of the refugee problem which contribute to the current instability of the area. The advocacy of an Arab confederacy embracing Lebanon, Syria, Iraq, Jordan, Saudi Arabia, and Egypt, plus any neighbors wishing to join, would at worst remove a grievance, and at best would open the way to orderly progress in the area. Either result would benefit the security interests of the US and Western Europe.

As a third example, there is the case of Indonesia. Developments there since independence indicate that the

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country is not ready for either a centralized form of national state or a parliamentary democracy on the Western European model. The leaders sense this but apparently have nothing definite to offer instead. Thus baffled, they are attracted by the apparent order, discipline, and progress of the Communist states. An alternative might be a federal state which allowed a large measure of autonomy to the constituent parts, thus satisfying their particularism and removing their dislike of Javanese dominance. The central government might consist of a president and a federal council, the members of the latter chosen by the state governments. Indirect election of the central authorities and representation by area rather than population would hinder the exploitation of the electoral system by radical parties and the concentration of political power in populous Java. The states or provinces might be permitted to experiment in devising constitutions suited to their particular requirements.

There are other possibilities which merit exploration. Some of the countries of Southeast Asia, now that they have achieved independence, might be receptive to political and economic arrangements that would enhance their viability. The states of North Africa, if and when there is a solution to the Algerian problem, present another group of countries whose ultimate destiny may lie in some kind of federal union.

##### 5. A Proposal for US Policy

By their nature, projects of constitutional reform are neither quickly accomplished nor immediately beneficial. Nevertheless, we believe that the US Government in its basic policy papers dealing with the Afro-Asian countries should include a statement of the kind of political development it would like to see take place. The statement should be more definitive than one expressing a desire for a stable,

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democratic government; it should propose, at least in general terms, a constitutional order that seems practical in the light of the existing situation. This goal could then be promoted as opportunity allows. US influence would almost always have to be exerted in indirect and tangential ways, but if consistently applied through all the contacts between the US and the various countries concerned, it should gradually have some effect.

US views about constitutional development might profitably be discussed with our NATO allies, thus providing one field of the political consultation that has been advocated. The members of the alliance have a common interest in advancing the stability and development of the Afro-Asian countries. Collectively they have a great deal of experience to contribute, and some of them have extensive contacts with both the present and the emerging leaders of the new states.

After determination of the general lines of development that we think desirable, some practical steps which we might take include the following:

(1) The inclusion in exchange programs of persons who are known by US embassy officers to be seriously interested in constitutional reform (public officials, professors, publicists, party leaders), and their exposure to influences that should enlighten and educate.

(2) The sending of distinguished constitutional lawyers and authorities on comparative government to Afro-Asian countries to teach, lecture, and advise.

(3) The organization, probably through private foundations and professional societies, of conferences and institutes on basic governmental problems facing the new and under-developed countries.

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(4) The dissemination through professional societies, USIS libraries, and university contacts of authoritative documents dealing with constitutional and governmental subjects (e. g. papers on the drafting of the constitution of the Malayan Federation).

(5) Instructions to US diplomatic representatives to utilize opportunities that may arise to promote constitutional reform.

(6) The enlistment of the cooperation of the foundations and universities which have extensive aid and advisory programs in progress in the under-developed countries.

Admittedly, these measures can have only minor influence in comparison with the domestic and external pressures that will determine the course of events in the countries of Africa and Asia. Nevertheless, in view of the security interest which the US has in the development of stable regimes in these states, more attention should be given to the problems of constitutional structure and practice. There are risks in opening doors to change, and a nice balance must be maintained between supporting a currently satisfactory but backward political order and advocating reform. In the end, however, a mutually fruitful relationship between the Atlantic Community and the new nations of Africa and Asia will depend upon our sympathy for political advance as well as for economic betterment. The Communists are busy exhibiting a system which seems to offer order and stability while giving new social classes the fulfillment of their aspirations. With all their political experience, the Western countries should have some imaginative but practical ideas to propose.

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