

Editorial

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Intelligence Memorandum

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INTELLIGENCE MEMORANDUM

SUBJECT: Communist Activity in Near East Increasing

Soviet-Communism is paying increasing attention to the Near East, where political stability has already been weakened by the development of extreme nationalism. Recent events such as the Anglo-Iranian oil nationalization crisis present the Communists with potent material for their propaganda efforts.

The growth of terrorist groups such as those responsible for the recent murders of Jordanian King Abdullah and Iranian Prime Minister Razmara also provides useful tools and powerful allies for the discouragement of pro-Western sentiments among local leaders.

Current Communist activity, however, is not based solely on the expedient of exploiting daily events and ready-made situations. A resolution of the Helsinki World Peace Committee, referring to the Near East as a focal point of tensions, reflects Soviet recognition of the area as one rapidly becoming worthy of more serious exploitation. Although there are currently insufficient data available to conclude that any carefully planned and centrally directed campaign against the Near East has as yet been waged, the outline of a pattern has begun to emerge.

Local Communist parties and some front groups have been banned in many parts of the Near East, but the governments are unable to prevent illegal organizational and propaganda activities. One of the primary points of Communist activity is the Partisans of Peace movement through which numerous non-Communist and fellow-travelling groups might be won over to neutralism. Toward this end a Middle East Peace Congress, one of a series of regional conferences planned at the February meeting in Berlin of the World Peace Congress, is soon to be held. Related to these attempts to link the Near East with over-all Communist efforts is the attendance of about 200 students at the World Youth Festival in Berlin. The majority of this group is Lebanese, but there are also delegations from Syria, Iraq and Iran.

An over-all increase in the amount of Soviet propaganda directed to the Near East has been observed during 1951. Alarm over the violence and vigor of local Communist propaganda, especially in Egypt, has recently been expressed to the US Ambassador in Cairo by both the Secretary General of the Arab League and the Yugoslav Minister.

- 2 -

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Several new Communist newspapers have appeared in Egypt during the summer. Their financial backing appears to be strong, for they flourish without advertising. They also seem to have been unaffected by the shortage of newsprint which has bothered other Egyptian papers. Egyptian publications other than the indentifiably Communist press have been urging friendship with the USSR in a highly organized, skillful and subtle fashion which is not common in Egyptian journalism. Direct Soviet implication in such a development -- at least to the extent of subsidy -- seems obvious.

Ethnic groups with separatist traditions, such as the Kurds, have been given greater attention in Soviet propaganda. While most of the propaganda effort, possibly reinforced by agent activity, is aimed at the Iranian Kurds, it also reaches sizeable numbers in Turkey, Iraq, Syria, and Lebanon. To many of these tribesmen the concept of an independent Kurdistan to be carved out of other Near Eastern states has always been an alluring dream. Its increased encouragement will make them restive and a threat to the stability of Near Eastern states.

Continuous efforts are also being made to use Moslem and Greek Orthodox groups as implements for creating pro-Soviet sympathy. Much emphasis has been put on the freedom of worship granted to Moslem groups inside the Soviet Union. Offers of financial assistance by Greek Orthodox communities in the USSR have been extended to Near Eastern churches. The most amenable to these blandishments has been the Patriarch of Antioch, who signed the Stockholm Peace Appeal and is currently in Moscow, presumably in the hope of obtaining compensation for expropriated church property.

Most of the Greek Orthodox communities in the Near East appear to be anti-Communist, and the dominant figure in the Near Eastern hierarchy, the Patriarch of Istanbul, is firmly so. The poverty of the Church will make offers of financial assistance attractive, however, especially since there have traditionally been close ties between Russian and Near Eastern congregations.

With the exception of Iran, where the Communist Party (Tudeh) is well-organized and has astute direction, Communism in the Near East is in an early stage of development. There is some evidence of consolidation of the links between these parties and the USSR.

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- 3 -

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In the main, Moscow seems content to permit these parties to associate themselves with the indigenous forces that are fostering instability and anti-Westernism rather than openly to avow Soviet aims and Communist ideologies. This concentration on local issues of widespread emotional appeal attracts additional Communist supporters and helps to speed up the existing trend in the area toward political instability.

- 4 -

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