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SECURITY INFORMATION

CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY

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SUBJECT: NIE-42: THE CURRENT SITUATION IN ALBANIA WITH
PARTICULAR REFERENCE TO GREEK, YUGOSLAV
AND ITALIAN INTERESTS

THE PROBLEM

To assess the strategic importance of Albania; to examine
the stability of the existing regime; and to analyze Greek,
Italian and Yugoslav interests in Albania.

CONCLUSIONS

1. In its physical isolation from the Soviet Bloc Albania's importance to the USSR is more latent than manifest. In an area of traditional Russian aspirations, its continuance under Soviet control is a political asset and a matter of prestige to the USSR especially in view of the defection of Yugoslavia and the defeat of Communist aggression in Greece. Economically, Albania is a liability to the USSR. By itself, Albania is of minor military importance to the USSR. However, if overland communication with the Soviet orbit were reestablished, it would regain the limited military value it possessed for the USSR before the Yugoslav defection.

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²/~~3~~. Resistance activity constitutes a troublesome problem for the Hoxha regime but is not an immediate threat. As long as the resistance effort is divided and does not receive substantial external aid, the Albanian security forces will probably succeed in containing it.

³/~~4~~. The interests of Italy, Greece, and Yugoslavia in Albania conflict, and each of these three countries probably prefers continuance of the status quo to a change which would be favorable to the others.

⁴/~~5~~. Italy and Yugoslavia have officially accepted the principle of the creation of a sovereign and independent Albania with its present boundaries and free from Soviet control. However, Greece, because of its claims to northern Epirus, has so far not accepted this principle. Whether or not all three of Albania's neighbors could actually be brought to accept an independent Albania with its present boundaries would probably depend upon the support given the new government by the Western Powers.

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DISCUSSION

THE SIGNIFICANCE OF ALBANIA

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6. Politically, Albania is of importance to the USSR primarily as an outpost of Communism. The USSR would regard its loss as a blow to Soviet prestige, particularly since the defection of Yugoslavia and the failure of the Communist effort in Greece. Economically, Albania is, ~~if anything,~~ a liability to the USSR. Militarily, Albania is of minor importance to the USSR. Although it occupies a strategic location at the entrance to the Adriatic, under modern conditions its capabilities for development are limited. Saseno Island and the port of Valona have ^{SOME} potential value as bases for mine craft, small naval attack craft, and submarines, ~~which might for a short period cause annoyance to naval operations in the Adriatic and Ionian Seas.~~ Saseno Island was a minor Italian submarine base and there have been recurrent but unconfirmed rumors in the postwar years of Soviet efforts to reconstruct these facilities. There is no confirmed evidence of extensive Soviet efforts to build up Albanian air facilities and, although Albania might be of value as an outpost in an early warning system for air defense

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of the Soviet orbit, there is no evidence of Soviet radar installations. Since the defection of Yugoslavia, Albania has lost most of its strategic importance to the USSR because of the lack of overland communication with the Soviet orbit. However, Albania would be of some significance to a land campaign in the Balkans, since operations in conjunction with Bulgaria, if successful, could separate Greece from Yugoslavia.

THE CURRENT SITUATION IN ALBANIA

The Stability of the Regime and Extent of Soviet Control

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7. Prior to the Cominform-Yugoslav rift in June 1948, Albania was closely tied, both politically and economically, to Yugoslavia. Rather than follow Marshal Tito's heresy, however, Hoxha chose the Moscow camp and launched a vigorous campaign for the elimination of "nationalist" elements in Albania. Hoxha not only extricated Albania from its ties with Yugoslavia, but also succeeded in eliminating serious competition for leadership within Albania. Reported rivalry between Hoxha and the Minister of Interior, Lt. Gen. Mehmet Shehu is likely to be of little importance as both men are apparently firmly controlled by the Kremlin.

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^{7.}
~~8.~~ Albania is totally dependent upon Soviet support. Without it, the country's economy would be severely shaken within a few months. Soviet control is reinforced by from 1000 to 1500 Soviet "experts" in key positions in the police, military, and civilian administrations as well as in the party hierarchy.

^{8.}
~~9.~~ With Soviet support Hoxha and Shehu have thus far succeeded in ruling the country through the usual Communist methods of police terror and rigid economic controls. Despite evidence of opportunism and disloyalty in the security forces and particularly in the army, these forces constitute effective instruments for the suppression of opposition.

^{9.}
~~10.~~ Soviet support to Albania, however, has not included a mutual assistance pact, probably because the USSR desires to leave the situation fluid and to avoid a commitment which might prove embarrassing.* Albania has such a pact only with Bulgaria (16 December 1947).

* The only other Satellites which have not concluded mutual assistance pacts with the USSR are Eastern Germany and North Korea.

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10.
~~10.~~ Nevertheless, any change in the Albanian situation which might threaten Soviet control would automatically involve a question of Soviet prestige in an area in which one Satellite has already defied the Kremlin. Under present circumstances, such a change probably could occur only with the support of one or more of the neighboring states. Such a development would necessarily lead to a deterioration of the international situation. Soviet action to counteract a change of this nature would depend upon broader considerations of global strategy.

Resistance to the Present Regime

11.
~~11.~~ Dissatisfaction among the Albanian people continues to be widespread and there has been some overt resistance within the past few years. The regime itself has admitted the existence of "diversionist" elements and attacks upon military and civilian supply convoys. The most dramatic incident of resistance activity was the bombing of the Soviet Legation in February 1951, but local assassination and limited economic sabotage have probably been more effective challenges to Communist authority. Thus far, the Hoxha regime has been able to deal with opposition movements by instituting further repressive measures. For example, Shehu has organized special pursuit battalions which operate in the mountainous areas against individual resistance groups.

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~~12~~. Refugees have reported the existence of various local resistance groups, such as the "National League of the Mountains," "Liberty," "Skanderbeg,"* "Call" and "National Unity," but specific information regarding these groups is lacking. There does not appear to be any established cooperation among the various dissident groups despite their common desire to rid Albania of the Hoxha regime.

¹³
~~13~~. Among the Albanian emigre resistance movements the Committee for a Free Albania, an affiliate of the National Committee for a Free Europe, with operational headquarters in Rome is perhaps the most influential. The Committee comprises three groups: (1) the National Agrarian Democratic Party/Balli Kombetar (National Front) whose following is strongest in southern Albania, (2) the Legality Party (pro-King Zog) which is strongest in central Albania, and (3) the League of Peasants and Villagers (Agrarian Party) which has its strongest following in the extreme north and in the neighboring Yugoslav provinces inhabited largely by Albanians. Although these groups have the common objective of establishing an independent and sovereign Albania, they differ among themselves

* The name of an Albanian hero of the 15th Century.

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as to the type of government to be created. The Committee's activities within Albania have been limited to propaganda work and some subversive efforts by agents. Its most effective operation thus far has been the dropping of propaganda leaflets. These leaflets have caused considerable excitement within the country, prompting periodic official notes of protest to the Italian Government and encouraging Albanians to flee Albania.

¹⁴
~~15~~. In addition to the internal organizations and the Committee for a Free Albania, there are operating within Albania representatives of pro-Italian, pro-Yugoslav, and pro-Greek Albanian emigre groups. Despite their common opposition to the present regime, their ultimate objectives reflect the divergent interests of the three countries. Their activities have been limited because of fear on the part of each country that a change in the Albanian regime might benefit one of the other neighbors and possible for fear of precipitating an international crisis.

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~~16~~. The efforts of both the internal resistance groups and the emigre organizations are uncoordinated and their objectives frequently conflict. These factors have simplified the task of Albanian security forces in isolating and destroying individual groups.

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~~17~~. Under present circumstances, while resistance activity constitutes a troublesome problem for the Hoxha regime, it is not

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an immediate threat. As long as the resistance effort is divided and does not receive substantial external aid, the Albanian security forces will probably succeed in containing it.

CONFLICTING INTERESTS OF ITALY, YUGOSLAVIA AND GREECE

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~~20~~. Albania has long been a bone of contention among its neighbors. Their interests conflict to such an extent that, even under present circumstances, the problem of Albania complicates the development of good relations and cooperation among Italy, Yugoslavia and Greece. Other problems, such as Trieste and Macedonia, are of greater immediate importance in creating dissension among these powers, but Albania would probably become a critical issue if the present regime were overthrown.

Italian Interests

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~~19~~. Italy's objective in Albania has always been to establish Albania as an Italian sphere of influence and to prevent any other power from gaining a foothold from which Italian influence in the Adriatic could be challenged. In pursuit of this objective, Italy supported the creation of an independent Albania in 1912 and later, in 1914, occupied the island of Saseno and the port of Valona.

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Italian troops remained in occupation until 1920. Italy was then forced to evacuate the mainland, but retained Saseno which was converted into a minor naval and submarine base. By a pact of friendship and security with Albania in 1926, Italy established a legal basis for including Albania in Italy's sphere of influence. Italian influence was manifested by loans, management of nearly all important economic enterprises, and training and equipping of the armed forces. In 1939, Mussolini occupied Albania and united it with Italy; in 1940, he launched his invasion of Greece from there. Under the Italian Peace Treaty(1947), Italy recognized the independence of Albania, ceded Saseno Island, and renounced all public and private property rights, concessions, claims, etc. in Albania.

¹⁹
~~20~~. Italy has not given up, however, its basic objectives toward Albania: the denial of the area to other powers and the restoration of Italian economic and political influence in Albania. In its official statements, the Italian Foreign Office has emphasized that continued Albanian independence and territorial integrity correspond with Italian interests. Italian efforts to improve relations with the present Communist regime have made no progress. Formal diplomatic relations were established in 1949 and, despite Communist restrictions on the Italian Legation in Tirana, Italy undoubtedly intends to retain such relations as long as possible.

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^{20.}
~~21.~~ Italy evidently aims eventually to re-establish its influence through the pro-Italian exile group, the National Independent Bloc. The leadership of this group cooperated with Italy before and during the war and enjoys the support of the present Italian government; its newspaper is supported by funds from the Italian Navy. Its activities have been relatively limited, although a few of its members have parachuted into Albania to organize resistance, sabotage, and other anti-government activity on a pro-Italian basis.

^{21.}
~~22.~~ Italy is particularly apprehensive of possible Yugoslav pre-eminence in Albania in the event the Hoxha regime should be overthrown. The Italian desire to avoid the establishment of a foothold by any other power in Albania is so strong that Italy probably prefers continuation of the status quo to the creation of a power vacuum which Yugoslavia and, possibly Greece, would be in a better position to fill.

Greek Interests

^{22.}
~~23.~~ Greek interests in Albania center upon Greek claims to southern Albania (northern Epirus), an area which the Greeks occupied from 1912 to 1916 and which they have consistently claimed on historical, ethnic, strategic and economic grounds. The Greeks also

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recall that Albania served as a base for the Italian attack on Greece in 1940 and, in the postwar years, for Communist guerrilla operations against Greece. Even at present, Albania is a base from which Communist agents are infiltrated into Greece.

²³
~~24~~. Greece, like Italy and Yugoslavia, is attempting to further its policy through the use of Albanian refugees. Those in Greece are primarily from southern Albania and are apparently concentrated in camps along the Albanian border. To date, their efforts have been largely in the field of espionage, propaganda and the encouragement of additional emigration. Some of those in the camp at Yannina are reported to be formed into military units, intended for eventual use in southern Albania.

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~~25~~. The Greeks probably look on partition of Albania between Greece and Yugoslavia as the ideal solution to the problem. They are apprehensive of possible Yugoslav or Italian domination of the entire country, and would probably attempt to occupy northern Epirus in the event of military action in the area, such as a Yugoslav invasion of Albania. For the present, in the absence of Allied assurances against possible Italian or Yugoslav domination of Albania, Greece probably prefers continuation of the status quo at least so long as the Hoxha regime does not resume full scale support to the Greek guerrillas.

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Yugoslav Interests

^{25.}
~~26.~~ Serbia opposed the principle of an independent Albania in the period from 1912 to 1918. Following World War I, the Yugoslavs occupied northern Albania until 1921. In 1926, Yugoslavia finally accepted the Albanian frontier as delineated in 1913. Until the outbreak of World War II, Italian domination of Albania prevented Yugoslavia from exercising any influence.

~~27.~~ This situation changed radically during World War II when Tito, through Albanian Communists, managed to obtain control of the Albanian National Liberation Movement. Tito's control was exercised largely through emissaries attached to the headquarters of the Albanian Army of National Liberation, and, from 1944 to 1948, Albania was a puppet of Yugoslavia. In 1948, Hoxha was able to extricate Albania from its ties with Yugoslavia following the Tito-Cominform rift.

^{27.}
~~28.~~ Since 1948, Tito has ostensibly championed the principle of an independent, sovereign Albania and has condemned both Greek territorial claims and the alleged Greek proposals for the partition of Albania between Greece and Yugoslavia. Yugoslavia is particularly apprehensive of the restoration of Italian influence or domination. In the past several months, Yugoslav propaganda has charged Italy with encouraging the plans of Albanian exiles for an "ethnic"

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Albania which would include the Yugoslav provinces of Kosovo and Metohiya, both populated chiefly by Albanians. Tito's actual objective appears to be the eventual creation of an anti-Soviet, pro-Tito regime in Albania and a return to the status of 1944-1948. It was apparently to this end that the "League of Albanian Political Refugees in Yugoslavia" was formed in May 1951. The League, which claims to represent some 5,000 Albanian refugees, is controlled by Albanian Communists who have fled from Albania since 1948. It was created by Belgrade as an instrument of Yugoslav policy, despite its proclaimed objective of "an independent, free, indivisible, democratic and republican" Albania. The League has already engaged in some espionage, sabotage and propaganda activity, and it possesses a considerable potential for more extensive operations. Yugoslavia's exposed position, however, has probably deterred Tito from using the League to the full. Yugoslav spokesmen have expressed the fear that any substantial efforts to overthrow the Hoxha regime might be taken by the USSR as a pretext for military action against Yugoslavia.

THE POSSIBILITY OF A SETTLEMENT

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29. The existence of an Albanian state has in the past always depended upon the attitude of stronger powers. Although all three of Albania's neighbors would presumably wish to see the eventual

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liquidation of the present regime in Albania, their interests in the ultimate status of Albania are incompatible. Since Albania's isolation from the Soviet orbit in 1948, the policy of each of its neighbors has been directed at establishing a position from which it could profit in the event of the overthrow of the Hoxha regime. As a result, each country has sought to counter the moves of the others. This has led to a diffusion of resistance efforts within Albania. Rivalry among the three countries over Albania is also one of the factors limiting the cooperation of these nations in the development of coordinated defense plans in Southeastern Europe.

²⁷
~~28~~. Italy and Yugoslavia have officially accepted the principle of the creation of a sovereign and independent Albania within its present boundaries and free from Soviet control. However, Greece, because of its claims to northern Epirus, has so far not accepted this principle. Whether or not all three of Albania's neighbors could be brought to accept Albanian independence would probably depend upon the support given the new government by the Western Powers.