

WAR MOVES

Over the Middle East

by

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We are extremely pleased to publish this important article about a vital area very much in the news today and written by an authority on international affairs. We share our good fortune with our readers, knowing that they will be interested not only in the clear presentation of what is happening in the Middle East today, but also in receiving a sober British viewpoint of the situation. For this, we are indebted to the British publication *Labour Monthly*—THE EDITORS.

THE ill-defined region which stretches from the Greek end of the Mediterranean to the Persian Gulf and is now usually called the Middle East, rather than the Near East, has recently come to occupy the forefront of attention in the international situation. The Middle East, no less than the Far East, has become a key battleground in the world-wide struggle between the democratic forces of the people and the forces operating to preserve the existing system of imperialist domination and exploitation.

The present importance of this region arises, however, particularly because this struggle has flared up just at a time when the Middle East has become a vital area for the aggressive war plans of Anglo-American imperialism and the states subsidiary to it. The two phenomena are, of course, closely interrelated. The Middle East has more than half the world's oil resources. It is an area of foreign capitalist exploitation in

which the American monopolies are playing an ever-increasing role.

The war plans of imperialism envisage measures intended in the name of security to hold in check, and if necessary to suppress by force, the national liberation movements for the overthrow of foreign domination and exploitation. But the so-called "global strategy" of the "free world" goes further and comprises in essence thinly-veiled preparations for an offensive war to win back for capitalism the countries advancing to Socialism and even, in some, ambitions to destroy the citadel of Socialism itself, the USSR.

By naked force in the case of Greece, and by military and economic pressure in the case of Turkey, these two countries have been won for the planned ring of anti-Soviet states on the southern borders of the USSR, and accordingly have been admitted into the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), in open mockery of the latter's ostensible character as

a defensive grouping of Atlantic countries. Turkey is strategically situated in relation to both the USSR and the Arab states of the Middle East. Hence the endeavor to use Turkey as one of the bases in extending the Atlantic Alliance by setting up under Anglo-American leadership a regional grouping of Middle Eastern states capable of attacking the vital areas in the south of the USSR. Of course, this is being done in the name of "defense."

British imperialism has always justified its domination in the Middle East on the ground of the vital strategic and economic interests of the British Empire. Now U.S. imperialism has not only penetrated this former British preserve to such an extent that it can adopt the same argument of the need to safeguard its own economic interests there, but it puts forward on its own behalf the same argument of vital strategic in-

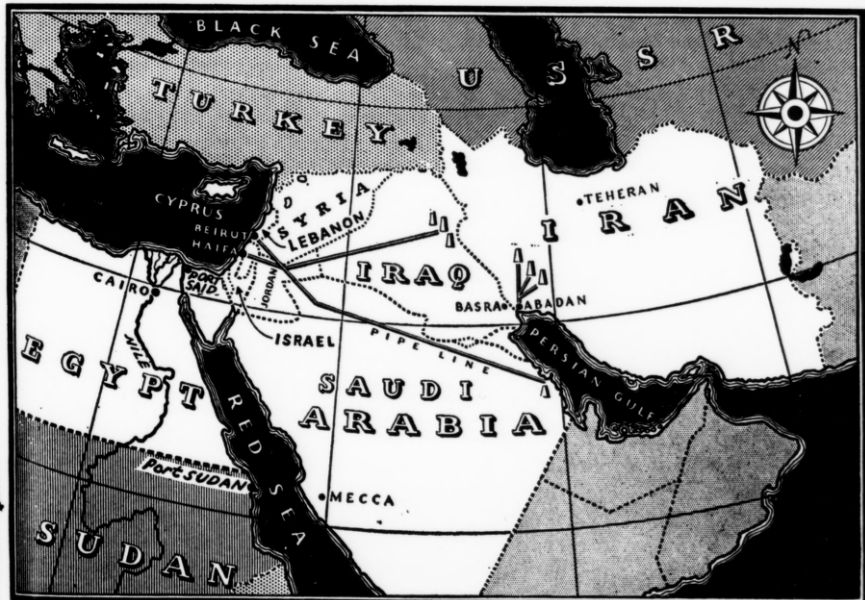
terests. This can be seen, for example, from the U.S. State Department's Mutual Security Program for 1952, submitted to Congress for approval. This says:

The Near Eastern area is important to the security of the United States and of the free world. It lies athwart the principal lines of sea and air communications in the eastern hemisphere. It is a land bridge between Asia and Africa, Soviet control of which would expose the African continent. It is the source of a prime strategic material, oil, the continuing supply of which is essential to friendly nations in Europe and Asia. It supplies three-fourths of the petroleum requirements of Western Europe.

Commenting on this, the *Economist* (August 4, 1951) remarked that it could be added, but is not added in the official document, that:

If Soviet expansion is to be arrested, the Middle East is important also be-

—Labour Monthly



cause it is the site of bases (British in Egypt, Jordan and Iraq, and American in Saudi Arabia) which cause the Soviet Union to reflect that the Caucasus is its soft underbelly.

This is, in effect, a striking admission of the considerations underlying the building up of a "striking force" in the Middle East. Just as the favorite dream of the anti-Soviet war maniacs in 1918 and 1919, and again in the "switch the war" propaganda of 1940-41, was to strike at the USSR through the Baku oil fields, so once again the thoughts of the anti-Soviet warmongers are centered on launching a blow at the Soviet Union through what they hope to be the latter's "soft underbelly."

Following the Ottawa Conference of the Atlantic Pact countries, the United States initiative for extending this Pact by a Middle East regional Pact came to fruition in the invitation made to Egypt, on October 13, to become a partner in a joint Middle East "defense organization" along with the U.S.A., Britain, France and Turkey, an invitation extended jointly by these Powers. An "Allied Middle East Command" on which these five countries would be represented was proposed, and the inducement was held out to Egypt that British troops would then be withdrawn from the Suez Canal Zone, except for those authorized by the Middle East Command to remain as part of an international garrison.

The lure was not very strong and indeed the moment chosen was hardly auspicious. The unprecedented upsurge of the Egyptian mass movement for national liberation and popular sovereignty, had just compelled the Egyptian Government to announce the abrogation of the 1936 Treaty with Britain and to demand

the removal of foreign troops from the Suez Canal.

To answer this demand by proposing that the British war bases should be exchanged for American-dominated ones could only be regarded as more of a threat than a promise. To the Egyptians it looked as if casting out the foreign devil by this means would only involve his return with others worse than himself. Particularly cynical was the proposal that Turkey, the historic oppressor of the Arab peoples, should be a partner in the new foreign military occupation of the Arab countries. Further, the immediate support for the plans expressed by Canada, Australia and New Zealand, whose participation in the command has only been deferred as inexpedient at present, indicated that the term "Middle East Defense" was as much a camouflage as the term "Atlantic Defense."

In vain was it stressed, as *The Times* put it, that the proposals "express a revolution in the diplomatic and strategic thinking of many pow-



erful states" and, in particular, that "Britain, which has been the chief guardian of Suez and the bridge between Asia and Africa, recognizes the shifts in the balance of world power and is now ready to share the guardianship with others."

The essential feature in Egyptian eyes could only be that the country

would remain under foreign occupation while Egypt would be compelled to give all assistance to imperialist preparations for a future war. The annex to the proposal put the matter bluntly:

1. Egypt will agree to furnish to AMEC (Allied Middle East Command) such facilities on her soil as are indispensable for the organization in peacetime of Middle East defense;

2. She will undertake to grant the forces of the AMEC all necessary facilities and assistance in the event of war, imminent menace of war, or apprehended international emergency, including the use of Egyptian ports, airfields and means of communication.

Consequently it is not surprising that the proposals were indignantly rejected by the Egyptian Government. The clumsy pretense of Egyptian "equal partnership" was too threadbare. It was too evident that military control would rest in the hands of the U.S.A. and Britain and that any Egyptian forces would play as subordinate a role as the armies of the smaller European States do in NATO.

The situation in Egypt became more and more tense, and British troops were poured into the country in an inflammable situation. A new version of the plan was worked out behind the scenes and put forward in a Four-Power statement on November 10. It contained a slight change of tone but not of substance. The effort was made to give an assurance that Egyptian internal sovereignty would not be impaired, specifying for instance:

The Middle East Command . . . will not interfere in problems and disputes arising within the area. Movement of those troops placed under the Supreme Allied Commander Middle East's Com-



—Wide World

A British soldier guards an Egyptian at bayonet point during the recent fighting in Ismailia

mand to or within the territories of the States joining in the defense of the Middle East will be made only with the agreement of the State or States concerned and in full accord with their national independence and sovereignty.

Any facilities granted to the Middle East Command by States joining in the defense of the Middle East will be the subject of specific agreements.

The explanations only confirm the essence of the plan as one for the continuation and expansion of foreign occupation. The Egyptian Prime Minister denounced the plan as "worse than colonialism," as a plan for furthering the ambitions of "greedy Great Powers at the expense of smaller nations." The head of the Syrian delegation to the United Nations in Paris said that it was an interference in the sovereign rights of the Arab states.

Nevertheless, under American direction, the plan is being pushed forward and every form of pressure

is being exercised to secure support from the other Arab states. Imperialism relies on its protégés among the rulers and on the corrupt bourgeois politicians who would be swept aside if the movement for national freedom triumphed. The bait is held out to the Arab states that they will receive arms from the U.S.A. and help in the development of their armed forces if they participate, which would otherwise be refused. The Arab-Israel conflict is being played upon, since Israel's support is expected owing to its being more directly under American control. The *Daily Telegraph* voices the threat that in case of refusal by Egypt, the Western powers will make Israel a central part of the defense scheme and that it will thus become more powerful than the Arab states. Above all, the "menace of Communism" is increasingly used as a means to scare the bourgeois political leaders in the Arab countries.

So far all this has had no effect. The Communist bogey is regarded in Egypt as a "fabricated nightmare."

But whatever the outcome, it is clear that a new stage has been reached in the Middle East in which the dominant role is played by the U.S.A., which is seeking not only to oust Britain as the chief exploiter of the Arab peoples, but to secure its own military and political domination in this region. As the *Observer* remarked (October 28): "We have to accept the climate made in the U.S.A.," and Mr. Churchill has

been taken to task for his unqualified admission, in his Guildhall speech, that "the Americans have risen to leadership of the world."

The Anglo-American rivalry goes forward in the new stage although it is now recognized that the British role is subordinate to that of the U.S.A.

Britain has shown a "firm hand" in Egypt, relying on U.S. support. But the U.S.A. is not primarily interested in the protection of British interests. The *Economist* (September 1) commented, "Visiting American dignitaries in Cairo, as in Teheran, have left the impression that they will be glad to see the British removed." In the Foreign Affairs debate in the House of Commons on November 20, Mr. S. N. Evans (Labor) pointed out that there seemed to be two American influences at work. "One seems anxious to put us back on our feet, and the other to do just the opposite."

The enormous augmentation of British troops in Egypt must be viewed also in this light. Not only do they far exceed the limits permitted by the 1936 Treaty but they far exceed any possible requirements for suppression of civil disorder in Egypt. One reason is given by the Egyptian correspondent of the *Sunday Times* (November 18), who says that it "constitutes an effective British claim for playing a major part in the development of plans for a joint Middle East Command."

The Anglo-American struggle for control of material resources and



strategic positions extends even to the Sudan. Despite the Condominium agreement for joint British-Egyptian rule, Britain has treated the Sudan as its colony and covers its imperialist exploitation by claiming that it must protect the Sudanese people whom it is leading towards independence.

But the Sudanese are biting their protector's hand and even the pro-British party in the Sudan is now telling the British to get out. The fact that Mr. Trygve Lie, Secretary-General of the United Nations, who enjoys favor with the Americans, is sponsoring the idea of a Sudan plebiscite in the near future after both Egyptian and British troops have been withdrawn, suggests that the U.S.A. sees here a method of putting pressure on Britain.

Under American leadership, the so-called Western world is rushing headlong towards war. Nor is there any doubt as to what war is intended. The *Manchester Guardian*, in an editorial on the revised Middle East "defense plan" (November 12) tells the Arab states: "The great question . . . is whether they wish, in the event of war, to be counted among the allies of the Western democracies against Russian imperialism." No talk here even of the invasion bogey. They are to be dragged into a war which will be decided elsewhere, in which they will have no say and in which they will be used as tools.

The Soviet Government in its Notes of November 21 and 24 gives serious warning of the consequences

of the steps that are being undertaken. It makes clear that the plans for a Middle East Command have nothing in common with the interests of safeguarding peace and security in the Middle East, nor with the genuine national interests of the states in this region. Their operation would mean the loss of the independence and sovereignty of the Middle Eastern countries and would damage the relations existing between the Soviet Union and these countries.

The Arab peoples do not want their countries to be converted into a battlefield. The national liberation struggle is embracing ever wider sections of the people, who know from their own experience that subjection to foreign imperialism means their exploitation and impoverishment and their use as cannon fodder. Hence the growing mass movement in Egypt, Iran and other countries of the Middle East has a significance far greater than that of a domestic movement for national liberation.

A resolution of the World Peace Council has emphasized the importance to the cause of world peace of this resistance to the imposition of imperialist bases and foreign troops in the Middle East. In the present circumstances this movement takes its place as an integral part of the fight for world peace, as a contribution to the cause of the millions of ordinary people all over the world who are seeking to bridle the warmongers and prevent them from launching a third world war.

THE ATLANTIC FLOWS INTO THE CASPIAN

"THE SENATE approved today, by vote of 73 to 2, an expansion of the North Atlantic Treaty to bring in Greece and Turkey and thus to extend the Western defensive [*sic*] alliance nearly to the Caspian Sea."—William S. White, *New York Times*, Feb. 8, 1952.