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Author(s): Joseph S. Roucek

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## The Geopolitics of the Mediterranean, II

By JOSEPH S. ROUCEK

### France's Interests

THE FRENCHMEN, like the Britishers, view the Mediterranean as a roadway, which especially before World War II, led to Syria, located at the eastern end of the sea, and through the Suez Canal to Madagascar and French Indo China. But France is also interested in the Mediterranean as the chief means of communications with the three French possessions lying directly opposite Marseilles along the coast of North Africa.

Almost touching the eastern side of this French triangle is the Italian island of Sardinia, with an air base at Cagliari, while near the western side of the triangle is the Spanish island of Majorca (which during the Spanish civil war was an Italian naval air base). The newly fortified Italian island of Pantelleria and Sicily were also within easy aerial striking distance of Bizerte and the French colonies of Tunisia and Algeria.

These possessions, Tunisia, Algeria, and Morocco, are isolated from Europe by water, and from the rest of Africa by the Atlas Mountains and the blazing Sahara. They contain a million French people and about 14,000,000 Moslems, and are a profitable source of iron ore, zinc, phosphates, grain and olives. In wartime, France could do without North African wine, olives, and dates, but she needed the mineral ore and grain. And even more she needed its manpower; the Moroccan divisions had always been a very important part of her army, as were those from Algeria.

It is true that France can operate ships between the Atlantic ports of French Morocco, Casablanca and Rabat, and her own west coast—thus communicating with her North African holdings over a route which lies entirely outside the Mediterranean. But the Moroccan Atlantic ports were connected with Algeria and Tunisia by only one single-track railway, and the overland communication line was too thin for comfort. Actually, the French must keep open their Mediterranean route to North Africa—and the importance of this relationship proved itself by the invasion of North Africa by the Allied forces as an opening wedge of invasion of Italy. At any rate, to protect this route, the French maintained a triangle of three powerful naval and air bases in the western part of the sea: at Toulon, near Marseilles; at Mers-el-Kebir, in northwest Algeria; and at Bizerte, in Tunisia.

**Italy's Interests**

ITALY'S BASES were more widely scattered on both the north and the south shores of the Mediterranean and on the islands between. They were mostly embraced within the quadrangle formed by a line from Spezia through Pantelleria to Tripoli, by a line from Tripoli to Tobruk in Libya, thence to the island of Leros, thence to Spezia, which was the main Italian naval harbor. All these points were naval and air bases, as were Taranto, near Brindisi, and Agosta in Sicily. From Marsala, Sicily, to Cape Bon, Tunisia, is only 90 miles, and Pantelleria lies near the half-way point. Upon this narrow passage between the eastern and western Mediterranean, Italy's strategic eye long had been fixed.

The Mediterranean washes Italy's vulnerable coast line for 2,500 miles. "Italy," Mussolini once said, "is an island. Bit by bit Italians must acquire an insular mentality, for this is the only way to place in their proper light questions of the nation's defense. If for the others the Mediterranean is a route, for us it is life itself."

When, under Mussolini, Italy tried to become a great power, her economic strength proved to be too feeble. She had to import virtually all her cotton, coal, copper, and oil; and four-fifths of her wool, steel and iron—to mention a few of the more important materials. With nine railways entering Italy from the north, the Italians are not entirely dependent upon the Mediterranean for their imports. But even when all nine railways are open, Italy must rely chiefly on the Mediterranean. While only a fifth of Britain's water-borne trade passed through this sea, Italy had to look to the Mediterranean for 86 per cent of her normal imports. Three-quarters of these imports came from points outside the Mediterranean, and had to pass through Gibraltar, Suez, or the Dardanelles.

The fact that these importations must pass through these bottlenecks prompted Mussolini again and again to assert that Italy must dominate that sea or become a prisoner in it. When his armies invaded Ethiopia in 1935-36, his real objective was to weaken Britain's hold on Suez by undermining British strength in East Africa. In that same year, Italy began fortifying the small but imposing island of Pantelleria, which rises 2,500 feet out of the Mediterranean, close to French-held Tunisia, and close enough to Britain's fortress at Malta to prevent Britain from closing the Mediterranean in the middle. In 1936, when Mussolini sent his legions to support the insurgents in Spain, his objective was to weaken Britain at Gibraltar (which is vulnerable from the Spanish side), and to flank France's life line to North Africa. When Mussolini's hordes invaded

Albania, by placing Italy's guns on the east side of the Adriatic, he put Italy in a position to close that narrow sea at the Straits of Otranto, thus protecting the north and sea coasts of Italy.

Italy's geopolitical strength before World War II was bolstered by possession of the large colony of Libya which, though poor, separated Egypt and Tunisia, and was capable of supporting an army; of the large, fortified island of Sardinia, flanking the east side of the French route to North Africa; and of the twelve Dodecanese Islands, between Greece and Turkey. Thus Italy effectively dominated the center of the Mediterranean. When controlled by Hitler's grip on Italy, these factors proved to be quite expensive to the Allied expeditionary forces in Sicily and Italy.

#### The Sicilian Channel

IN 1943, the battle of Tunisia, in which a half-million Allied troops were involved, was a deadly struggle for an invisible bridge 90 miles long that spans the Mediterranean. This "bridge" is really an unbridged gap between Europe and Africa, at the mid-Mediterranean's narrowest spot, through which the blue and frequently stormy waters move their almost tideless currents. Between Cape Bon, the northeasternmost tip of Tunisia, and the southwesternmost tip of the island of Sicily only 90 miles of water intervene. This is the shortest distance between Africa and Europe east of Gibraltar. (The English Channel is narrower than the Mediterranean's Sicilian Channel only in its eastern part).

Throughout history, the traffic across the Mediterranean at its central narrows has been so heavy as to create the impression of a bridge. During World War II, this was the route by which the Nazis, under protection of Sicilian-based planes, poured reinforcements into Tunisia. By this same short hop, for a half-century before, numerous Sicilians and Italians had crossed to Africa to build their large non-French settlements in French-governed Tunisia. Four centuries ago the powerful King Charles V of Spain, who was also monarch of Sicily, reached across the Sicilian sea-narrows and snatched Tunis briefly from the Barbary pirates. Four centuries before his time an earlier King of Sicily had stepped across the sea at the same spot and taken possession of choice ports of the African coast.

The Sicilian Channel marks the Mediterranean's division into a well-watered triangular western basin and an oval eastern basin, twice as large, where drought brings the desert in many places almost to the sea. Differences in climates and civilizations have encouraged traffic through the

narrows between the up-and-coming West and the thirsty, mystic Near East. Control of the Channel bottleneck, which means power over inter-basin shipping, has been a favorite dream of Mediterranean empire builders.

Ancient Carthage, rising beside the site of modern Tunis to fulfill Queen Dido's dream, threw a bridge of authority across the narrows about 550 B. C., taking possession of old Phoenician towns of western Sicily which survive today as Palermo and Marsala. The Punic Wars between Carthage and Rome were waged across the narrows, with Carthage in the first war using Sicily as a base against Rome and Rome in the second war turning Sicilian bases against Carthage. When the Moslem Saracens, those careful students of geography, were pushing their empire into the Mediterranean's western basin, they quietly closed their grip on the Sicilian bottleneck by capturing Marsala, in 827 A. D. One of history's distinguished travelers through the Channel was the Apostle Paul, whose voyage to Rome was interrupted by shipwreck at Malta.

The channel is so shallow—about 100 fathoms, or 600 feet—that it is supposed to be an old broken-down land-bridge that sank beneath the waves at some time not too remote in the past. Animals once walked across, including perhaps the dwarf elephants of Malta. Migrating birds still follow this route. Humps on the drowned land-bridge that now appear above the water are such islands as the Malta cluster and the flat, waterless rocks of Lampion and Lampedusa (whose "lamp" names may have come from bonfires lighted to guide sailors). Other islands stand as a monument to the underwater upheavals that brought the land-bridge down. Solitary Pantelleria, within sight of Sicily, is volcano-built. Small Linosa is dotted with craters. (Also a ghost island haunts the narrows, under the names of Julia and Graham's island—a volcanic cone that emerged from the Mediterranean in 1831 and was claimed by England and Naples. Within a few months it had dropped from sight.)<sup>8</sup>

#### The Strategic Aspects of the Adriatic

CUTTING LIKE an immense fiord into the bulk of the Continent, the Adriatic leads straight into the heart of Central Europe to the threshold of southern Germany. In the mountains behind its eastern shores are impatient Yugoslavs and Albania's guerrillas, and the highways and rail lines which Italian engineers have extended eastward toward Bulgaria and the Danube offer passage into the interior of the Balkan Peninsula.

<sup>3</sup> "The Mediterranean's Sicilian Narrows, Waterbridge to Europe," *Geographic School Bulletin*, March 1, 1943.

The Adriatic and its unhampered communications mean as much to Italy as the functioning of the "Eastern Ruhr" did to Hitler's Reich.

The Strait of Otranto, its narrow gate, is guarded to the west by the flat, port-studded coast of Puglia, the heel of the Italian boot, and to the east by Albania. Trieste, after the demolition during World War II of Genoa, Italy's greatest port, dominates the northern end of the Adriatic. Formerly the main maritime outlet of Austria-Hungary, it is the terminal of vital rail communications with Vienna, Budapest and Prague. Each of the five trunks which extend from eastern and southeastern Europe into Italy passes in the vicinity of Trieste. Some of Italy's most valuable ports are located around the Adriatic Sea—ancient Venice, which, before World War II, had become once more the terminal of some of the world's fastest and finest liners; the naval base of Ancona on the calf of the boot; farther south Bari, with its vast warehouses and monumental piers, into which Mussolini recklessly poured the savings of half a generation of Italians, and Brindisi, the Brundisium of the ancient Romans, where Sulla's and Caesar's armies set sail for the conquest of the East. On the opposite shore—from north to south—are the twin ports of Fiume and Susak, Senj, Sibenik and Split, three of Yugoslavia's most promising ports, and on the Albanian coast, Valona and Durazzo, the Dyrrachium of the ancients. (None of these ports was in easy bombing range of the Allies during World War II.)

During World War II, in this virtually raid-free Adriatic, Italy had built up supply depots of her own. Trieste had become the principal terminal for coal shipments from Upper Silesia. By way of the Slovenian capital Ljubiana and Trieste, Italy, after April, 1942, received daily eight to ten oil trains of 30 to 33 tank cars each or approximately 75,000 tons of oil a month; this oil went to refineries in Trieste and Fiume and to the shipbuilding centres of Monfalcone where refineries had been extended after the outbreak of the war. Here most of Italy's aviation fuel was produced. From Trieste, Fiume and Monfalcone oil and fuel were conveyed in tankers to fuel deposits and refineries farther south. From Valona, Italian tankers carried the output of Albania's oil wells across the sea to refineries in Bari and Brindisi. Coal was also distributed by ship along the coast.

To ease the strain upon rail lines across the Alps during the war and to relieve the overtaxed shipping on the Danube, Italian engineers started building several rail shortcuts and highways from Yugoslav ports to the Sava River, a navigable tributary of the Danube, and through Albania

along the ancient Roman highway from Dyrrachium to Constantinople and the Aegean Sea. Despite constant sabotage by Yugoslav, Greek and Albanian patriots, substantial quantities of oil, zinc ore and agricultural products were reaching the Adriatic by these routes; they were also conveyed by Italian bottoms across the sea to Italian ports.

Close to the shores of the Adriatic are some of southern Italy's principal power plants. The remainder of Italy's shipyards is located in the northern end of the Adriatic Sea.<sup>4</sup>

The northernmost corner of Yugoslavia, through which Nazi Germany reached the Adriatic Sea during World War II, is the only depression in the long sweep of the Alpine range. Throughout the ages it has been the scene of invasions from north or south. Five big rail lines and two motor roads traverse this territory: the Munich-Villach-Gorizia-Trieste Line, the Vienna-Ljubliana-Trieste-Fiume Line, the Vienna-Villach-Udine Line, the Budapest-Ljubliana-Trieste Line, and the Susak-Zagreb Line. There are huge war factories all over the Danubian basin which these railroads serve: the former Hermann Goering Werker in Linz, the Steyer Motor Works, the iron mines and blast furnaces of Donawitz in Austria, Skoda in Bohemia, the iron and steel mills of Moravska Ostrava near the Czechoslovak-Polish border and the Rumanian oil wells. With the exception of the Brenner Line, the railroads leading into the northeastern corner of the Adriatic Sea are the most vulnerable of the railroads across the Alps. The Ljubliana route, especially, extends for miles along steep ravines where the rock is brittle and landslides frequent.

#### Greece and the Eastern Mediterranean

GREECE IS ONE of the keys to the Aegean and eastern Mediterranean. Strategic points such as the Straits of the Dardanelles and the Bosphorus, the Suez Canal, the Dodecanese Islands, Crete or Cyprus are of vital concern not only to the countries bordering the eastern Mediterranean, but also to every big power, including the United States.

The loss of Crete Island in 1941 was due to the failure of the British to establish adequate airfields and to absolute reliance on sea power. The airborne invasion of Crete was the first successful operation of its kind in military annals. Crete lies half-way between the mainland of Greece and Egypt, and commands the routes to the Suez Canal and North Africa.

<sup>4</sup> The Nazi interest in the Adriatic was illustrated by the fact that Hitler carved for himself out of the spoils of Yugoslavia a special corridor to the port of Susak, close to Fiume and the northeastern end of the sea. This Nazi corridor separated Italy proper from her temporary dominions on the eastern shore.

By controlling Crete and the Dodecanese Islands, the Axis greatly impeded the Allied war effort, and the struggle in the Mediterranean was prolonged. The Nazis realized that, by remaining on the Dodecanese and Crete, they rendered impossible the flow of war material to Russia through the Straits of the Dardanelles and the Bosphorus. Who holds Rhodes controls the most vulnerable part of the Turkish coastline and the important city of Smyrna. (In some circles it is believed that the Germans used these arguments to intimidate Turkey and to prevent her from actively participating in the war on the Allied side.)

In contrast to Crete, which was lost because of inadequate defense preparations, and to the Dodecanese Islands which were held by Italy since 1912, Malta and Cyprus, because of adequate defense installations, provided invaluable help to the United Nations' war effort.

Cyprus passed under British control in 1878. Its population is 80 per cent Greek, and it has been incessantly demanding that it be united with Greece. The Dodecanese Islands, although 92 per cent Greek, were owned by Italy, until they were handed over to Greece after World War II, with their strong naval and air bases in Rhodes and Leros, two islands of the group.

Syria and Lebanon and Palestine, where the Crusaders fought, are a real problem today. The French grip on Syria and Lebanon was virtually broken after World War II; but geographically and with Palestine these countries form a single unit. (Sometimes used for this region is the term "Greater Syria.") British and French troops left the independent republics of Syria and Lebanon in 1946. Palestine, at first England's unruly ward, is now free, but the region has been chronically unstable. Nations go to the Levant these days not for faith or glory but for oil. The United States, with hundreds of millions of dollars invested in Arabian oil and her own stocks running low, is now as interested as anyone else in the Eastern Mediterranean.<sup>5</sup>

#### **Africa and the Mediterranean**

NORTH AFRICA has been a theatre of military action since the dawn of history. From the sixteenth to the twelfth centuries before Christ the pharaohs of Egypt conquered an empire which extended from the Nile to the Euphrates. Alexander swept around the eastern end of the Mediterranean in 332 B. C., and pushed the border of his empire across Egypt and into what is now Libya. In the fourth century B. C. the city of Carthage

<sup>5</sup> The Eastern Mediterranean situation cannot be isolated from that in Egypt and the strategic position of the Suez Canal, the subject of another study.



in what is now Tunis arose to be the second power of the Mediterranean and twice challenged Rome. Carthage was finally reduced to ruins by Scipio Aemilianus in the Third Punic War and the site of the city sown with salt. In the eighth century the Moorish power reached its height. Since then there has never been a real power in Africa unless one counts the Barbary pirates who held Mediterranean commerce in their grip in the nineteenth century until France and Great Britain subdued them.

During World War I, the African theatre of war was but a side line to the main theatre in Europe. During World War II, the African stakes were bigger. The Axis plans were comprehensive. Italy was to get Egypt, Tunis, the Sudan. Germany revived her old Mittel-Afrika dream, taking her former colonies in the east and west, with the Belgian Congo to link them up. Spain was to be cut in for Morocco and Oran. Britain was to be driven from the dark continent. From the military point of view, only the North African zone counted. A narrow fringe of cultivated land along the Mediterranean coast, wider in some places (Algeria), than in others (Libya), it has always been part of the European scene and was used as such as a theatre of conflict and a significant factor in the strategy of the recent war. For the first time since the days of the Roman Empire, Africa assumed military-geographic importance to Europe—and thus also became highly significant in a strategic sense to the United States. The primary reason for this importance was Africa's geographic location in relation to the great "World Island" of Eurasia.<sup>6</sup>

#### World War II

FOR NEARLY two centuries and a half control of the Rock of Gibraltar and use of the port of Lisbon made the western entry to the Mediterranean a British gate to open or close at will. But in World War I German submarines went in and out of the Mediterranean; and during World War II, thanks not only to the submarines but also to air bases in Sicily and Italy, there was a period when to take a convoy to Malta or Alexandria cost a third or half of the ships. In fact, most of the time until North Africa was conquered ships went around the Cape of Good Hope. Spain and the Balearics remained technically neutral this time, but it was a close call and it would have gone hard with the Allies had it been otherwise. The British once owned Minorca, but neither they nor the other United Nations had any control over the Balearics in World War II. What was infinitely worse for all concerned, especially the British, was to have Italy as an

<sup>6</sup> For more details on this geopolitical aspect of Africa, see: "A Strategic Appraisal of Africa," in G. Etzel Percy and Russell H. Fifield, *Political Geography*, New York, Crowell, 1948, pp. 408-15.

enemy. When one thinks what that meant in terms of ships sunk and men and material lost in the terrible campaign from the toe to the top of Italy, it needs no master strategist to realize that Italy must be a friend and not a foe next time.

#### The Great Shift in Power Relationships

THE EXCITING TALE General Mark Clark has to tell about his submarine mission to Algiers to pave the way for the invasion of North Africa recalls the debate among the top strategists in 1941 and 1942 on where the first Allied landing would be made. President Roosevelt and the Americans favored a cross-channel expedition to the Cherbourg peninsula, but Churchill insisted that the second front should be opened in the Mediterranean. The "soft-under-belly of the enemy" England's Prime Minister talked of so persuasively did not look so soft, General Clark eventually reported, to the men who had to spend two grim years fighting their way across the African coast and up and down the rocky ridges of Italy, by common consent the hardest terrain of the war.

World War II plans obviously changed the geopolitical aspects of the Mediterranean. Whereas in the past the defense of the so-called "empire route" was regarded as the paramount interest of Great Britain, during World War II the United States was pushed into the forefront of the Mediterranean defense line. General Clark's story reads like an Oppenheim thriller, all the more so because the secret rendezvous he kept with Robert Murphy and General Charles Mast in a run-down French village in Algiers led straight to U. S. involvement in Greece and Turkey and thus opened a new chapter in American history. It brought the United States into the Mediterranean and opened the way to the great power shift that tended to keep the United States there.

The war taught the British that they could not defend the Mediterranean alone. Nor was its defense as important to them as it was before the withdrawal from India, which they were striving to hasten, even to the extent of approving separate constitutions for Hindustan and Pakistan.

When the British pulled up stakes in Greece, submitted the Palestine issue to the United Nations, started negotiations for the evacuation of Egypt—a more reluctant move because it trenches on the Sudan and the future of Africa—it was clear that they were definitely and deliberately easing themselves out of their old place as a Mediterranean power.

Britain's policy was of adaptation to new conditions, one of which was that so large a proportion of the world's power and Britain's power had passed to the United States. Consciously or unconsciously the Britishers

were abandoning to the United States positions which front directly on the Soviet zone. In choosing the Mediterranean rather than the Channel for the first invasion of Europe, Churchill was acting to save England from the consequences of the possible failure of an assault that could at that time be delivered in full force. His successors reduced their Mediterranean commitments because again they had to think first of the survival of the home islands. The front line of defense of these islands is Western Europe, and it became evident after the fighting stopped that the British government was preoccupied as never before with its relations to its continental neighbors. The Mediterranean was no longer as necessary as it was for the defense of India, but the Middle East is still the source of oil, and oil is as essential to the life of Britain as bread. Yet to contain the Soviet Union in these areas is not so crucial a problem to the British as to prevent the death or the domination of their immediate neighbors.

#### United States Interests

TO ALL INTENTS and purposes, America entered the Mediterranean with the launching of the North African campaign in 1942, although history shows that racket-smashing was Decatur's mission when he went to the harbor of Tripoli in 1804. (At that time, Britain paid pirate-racketeers tribute and in return enjoyed a monopoly because other nations could afford neither tribute nor the toll of raids.) The Barbary pirates received a return visit from Decatur in 1815, when he forced terms on the Bay of Algiers. Reference to "the shores of Tripoli" in the Marine hymn is a recognition of the role of the U. S. Marines in these campaigns. A Mediterranean squadron was a regular detachment in the days of the "White Fleet" around the turn of the present century.

For a decade before World War I, however, the only appearances of U. S. ships were on occasional cruises. World War I brought America's units there. Relief missions were the chief missions of two squadrons that remained in the area until the early nineteen twenties. An aid to the Greeks was a familiar subject then—as it is now. But the launching of the North African campaign in 1942 found the Mediterranean the theatre of the first big campaign by United States forces.

New techniques of amphibious war were developed at Oran, Algiers, Bougie, Bone, Sicily, Salerno, Anzio. In American eyes, that campaign was mainly a step in the war against Germany. Lacking the preparation of a historic background of contact, there was little interest in Mediterranean politics and less desire to become involved in them save in so far as

they might affect military operations—clearly a very short-range outlook.<sup>7</sup> Such a simple approach could not be maintained for long, and even our initial Vichy gamble brought out the deeper implications of America's African intervention. The same applied to Italy and in 1947 to Greece and the whole Middle East.

The Truman doctrine in regard to Greece and Turkey was enunciated as a result of the glaring shift in the geopolitical situation: the shift of Britain's position from one of a world power with European interests to that of a European power with world interests. The situation forced the United States to recognize the necessity of maintaining a position of power and influence in the Mediterranean. The "unwilling willingness" of the United States to take over the position in the Mediterranean from the weak hands of Great Britain represented a blend of political and strategical considerations. On one hand, Washington endeavored to reestablish a self-supporting Western Europe, and, on the other, it endeavored to check Soviet expansion. Since the British system could no longer work effectively, except in conjunction with American support, the formation of a new internal equilibrium was the linked objectives of American policy in the Mediterranean region. The United States simply had to prevent creation of a vacuum wherein Soviet power could flow, to resist Soviet expansion efforts in the eastern Mediterranean and to utilize its Mediterranean position to facilitate the rehabilitation of Western Europe. To do this, Washington had to treat the entire region as a unit, to rely to a considerable extent on an existing British system of authority in the region, and to develop a policy for maintaining the region's internal stability.

This is true in the case of the Truman Doctrine, where British strategic responsibilities to defend Turkish and Greek independence were recognized as equally important to the United States. It is true in the case of Trieste, where Anglo-American forces have operated under one command since the war's end. It was also true of Cyprus, where a joint base was being slowly developed. In short, both states, deeply committed together, did not wish to see any vacuum created in the Mediterranean Basin which would operate to suck Soviet power southward.

#### U. S. Navy in the Mediterranean

THE U. S. NAVY'S Mediterranean program was publicly announced in September, 1946. That was the date of the formal statement of policy by James V. Forrestal, when Secretary of the Navy. Already at that time a

<sup>7</sup> This thesis is well developed in William Reitzel, *The Mediterranean: Its Role in America's Foreign Policy*, New York, Harcourt, Brace, 1948.

U. S. Mediterranean task force, consisting of three cruisers, ten destroyers, an aircraft carrier with 130 war-planes, plus the supply, cargo, transport and repair ships required to maintain the unit, was in full operation. Forrestal also announced the specific purposes of this task force: (1) to support American occupation troops in Europe; and (2) to protect American interests and policies in this area. Thus the American navy was on duty there many months before the Marshall Plan had even been hinted at.

The United States Navy has become the most powerful force in the Mediterranean merely by rotating there three task forces of America's Atlantic Fleet, keeping one in these waters while the others remain at home. The United States shares naval command of the region only with Great Britain. The war proved disastrous for the French and Italian navies, as well as the German. Russia is not a formidable naval power today. But Britain, in grave financial difficulties, has been compelled to reduce its navy sharply, which explains how the Mediterranean has become an American lake. However, British naval forces here are still organized as a fleet, while the American unit is organized as a task force, composed of units supplied by America's Atlantic Fleet. This difference in nomenclature reflects the differences in the naval positions of Britain and the United States. The British fleet still has its own permanent establishments here, just as it had before World War II. It operates from bases in British territory of Gibraltar, Malta and Cyprus, and it uses facilities administered by the British in Libya. British sailors serve here for years at a time, and bring their wives, and establish homes here. But the wives and homes of American sailors are in the United States (with the exception of the two commanding officers and their staffs).

This task force became the greatest concentration of American military power in Europe after World War II, although nowhere in this wide sea or on the European shores is there a spot which Americans can call their own. Yet, its presence has proved of supreme importance to America's policies designed to "contain" Communist expansion. It is worth noting that America's diplomatic protests have never deterred the Soviets from consolidating any position where diplomatic protests were America's only weapons, whereas the Russians softened their demands upon such countries as Turkey after the strength of America's Mediterranean task force had been reported by Russian intelligence.

#### **Russia's Interests**

RUSSIA'S INTEREST in the Mediterranean is of more recent origin than Britain's, and Soviet power is not nearly so well entrenched in the region

as British. As a newcomer to the Mediterranean, Russia is only now making a serious bid for bases and spheres of influence such as those held by her western rival. Until the time of Peter the Great—the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries—Russia had no ports on the Black Sea and, consequently, little interest in Mediterranean affairs. Even Peter, who increased Russia's power in many directions, was able to accomplish little toward acquiring a southern outlet to the sea for his country. It was one of his successors, Catherine the Great, who really established Russia as a Black Sea power. By the end of the eighteenth century, when Catherine's reign ended, Russia was campaigning actively to create herself trade routes through the Black Sea, the Aegean, and the Mediterranean. Naturally, Russia's effort in this direction drew her into conflict with Britain. In the middle of the nineteenth century, the two countries clashed in the Crimean War. From that time until the present, however, Russia has not been strong enough to challenge Britain openly for the Mediterranean position she wants.

To Russia, the Mediterranean offers warm-water ports and some exit from her land-locked seas. Control of the Dardanelles represents a Russian dream of centuries; Communist domination of Greece would outflank Turkey and in time would probably provide control of the strategic straits into the Black Sea. Italy and Greece dominate strategically and geographically the central Mediterranean; control of the two countries would cut or gravely imperil, as World War II showed, the so-called British "life-line" through the Mediterranean.

In a large sense control of the Mediterranean means to Russia two things—one of defensive, the other of offensive, importance: (1) security from the potential flanking threat posed by the operation of Anglo-American sea-air power in that area; (2) the outflanking of the Anglo-American position in the Middle East and Western Europe and consequent possible communist expansion into those areas, and into Africa.

The idea of extending Russia's domination over the area has, in fact, never been dormant in the minds of Russia's or Soviet Russia's rulers. This intention was more dynamic than ever at the Yalta conference early in 1945, when Premier Stalin requested an alteration of the Montreux convention of 1936, by which Turkey once more was made "guardian" of the Dardanelles—the straits linking the Black and Mediterranean Seas. Since then, there have been several Soviet efforts to obtain a toe-hold on the Mediterranean. At various times the Russians have expressed an interest in the Dodecanese, in Tripolitania, in a Red Sea port and in Tangiers, on whose international commission Moscow is now represented. Enor-

mous pressure has been exerted intermittently since the end of World War II on both Greece and Turkey in an effort to break through the "pie crust" serving as a barrier between the Soviet sphere of interest and blue, warm water. Turkey resisted by proclaiming its intention of fighting to preserve itself. But Soviet policy sought to outflank that stubborn nation by threatening Iran to its east and Greece to its west. Only by powerful counter-pressure in both countries have Anglo-American leaders prevented completion of a diplomatic pincer movement.

Actually the U. S. S. R. did break out to the Mediterranean for the first time in its history when it made puppet states of both Yugoslavia and Albania. But the Yugoslavs got themselves out of the Soviet Union's orbit. The Russians have remained in control of Albania, however, and have been working slowly to improve that country's military potential by constructing railways where there were none, building underground munitions dumps, and, on the island of Saseno in Valona Bay, controlling the mouth of the Adriatic, constructing submarine pens in the rock cliffs. This process has been hampered by the lack of rail connections linking Albania with the Soviet Ukraine across the Balkans. The U. S. S. R.'s shipping capacity is limited, and all material and manpower must be sent to Valona and Durazzo by freighter, through the Dardanelles from the Black Sea, or through the Kattegat from the Baltic.

But the Albanian gamble did not pay off so well. At the end of 1949, the Greek rebels had to call off military operations and on November 12, 1949, Tito's Yugoslavia formally denounced her treaty of friendship with Albania. The Soviets had attached considerable importance to the harrying of Greece by the rebel forces, and as the unreliability of Yugoslavia had become apparent, Albania's importance greatly increased, until at last practically the whole operation against Greece was conducted from there. But when the course of events in 1949 led the Russians, for the time being, to write off the Greek rebels as ineffective, with the end of warlike operations Albania ceased, by 1950, to be of immediate importance to the U. S. S. R. as a base. Concurrently, the collapse of the Greek rebellion by the end of 1949, meant also that the Soviets had given up, temporarily, their efforts to break into the Mediterranean by way of Macedonia (Salonika).

But it must be emphasized that the U. S. S. R. has not given up her basic scheme to realize her Mediterranean ambitions. Russian troops occupy the former enemy countries in the Balkans, historically a breeding place of wars, which the Soviet has made into a "security zone" and a stepping stone toward the warm-water ports of the Mediterranean. Pressure had



been exerted on Turkey to secure military bases at the Straits, and demands voiced to secure influence into three areas that belonged to Italy before the war. In Trieste, Soviet Russia at first backed the demands of the pro-Russian Yugoslav regime for the possession of the Adriatic port, which Italy, backed by Britain and the United States, contested. She has insisted on naval bases in the Dodecanese islands, which would enable her to dominate the approach to the Dardanelles. And she had demanded sole trusteeship in Tripolitania.

#### **The Middle East Aspects of Mediterranean Geopolitics**

ONE IMPORTANT ASPECT of economics and sociology appears to be completely ignored by United States diplomatic strategists in their considerations of the Mediterranean issues. One of the most vital portions of what is strategically considered the Mediterranean area is the Middle East, a backward, ignorant, unhealthy, poverty-stricken area—despite the vast riches of petroleum deposits there.

When the Soviet Union pushes its boundaries westward into Europe, she automatically introduces a lower standard of living that, therefore, automatically encourages strong resistance. But the contrary is true when the Soviet Union pushes southward into the Middle East (or eastward into the Far East). Regardless of what one may think of communism, it, combined with Russian culture, represents an advance to the bulk of the population, whether in China or Iran or Arabia. No contrary sociological force has been created by the United States, or Britain, in the areas menaced by such benefits. Anglo-American diplomacy has worked to safeguard Anglo-American strategic interests through reactionary feudal elements in the Arab world who must inevitably be brushed aside by time. American policy—now so closely tied to that of Britain—has, of necessity, matured very little in the Mediterranean because it is so new to the area. In many respects—mainly strategic conceptions—it has evolved rapidly. But the application of such global conceptions as the Marshall Plan and teaching of the meanings of democracy must be also introduced.<sup>8</sup>

In general, this can be said regarding the fundamental diplomatic rivalry between the West and Russia in the Mediterranean: Western policy is being strategically coordinated and appears to have successfully withstood initial Soviet thrusts. However, in long-range terminology, Soviet propaganda,

<sup>8</sup> Washington has encouraged stability and progress in Italy; yet those very sociological, economic and agrarian reforms that were deemed politically desirable were hampered by the realization that they would possibly slow up Italy's industrial recovery under the Marshall Plan.



which is being accelerated, is bound to make headway in the Middle East itself until more practical economic and sociological goals are adopted by the Western democracies.

#### Contemporary Picture

THE MEDITERRANEAN REMAINS—and will remain for a long time—one of the basic geopolitical areas wherein Soviet policy clashes with that of the Western powers. It has ranked after Germany and after China in the steady series of rounds between the West and the U.S.S.R. To both Britain and the United States the supreme importance of the Mediterranean today is not as a commercial route but as a military one. This vast body of water with its flanking land masses offers a potential strategic gateway into the great Eurasian land mass. It provides, in other words, a field of deployment along the coastal “fringelands” for the arm in which the United States is still strong vis-à-vis Russia—sea-air power.

The eastern part of the Mediterranean region and the North African littoral offer potential bomber bases for United States strategic air power from which many important Russian industrial centres could be reached. In other words, Anglo-American domination of the Mediterranean region gives the United States a strategic ace in the hole. On the other hand, the Middle East offers a wide-open gateway for Soviet aggression.

*University of Bridgeport*

#### *Import Barriers in the United States*

THE LIBERALIZATION of United States import policy will not by itself restore balance in the world economy. But it is an essential condition for the elimination of the dollar shortage and the expansion of international investment, Eugene R. Black, president of the International Bank for Reconstruction and Development, has aptly pointed out. “The United States can hardly reconcile her position as the giant of the world economy with the fear of foreign competition, which is implied, and is indeed expressed, in the maintenance of high tariff barriers and other restrictions against foreign goods,” Mr. Black holds. “The consequence of these restrictions is to deprive foreign countries of the opportunity of earning dollars with which to purchase American goods and to service American capital. These barriers make the world, including the United States, poorer than it would be if foreign products had easier access to the American market.” Mr. Black went on to warn that the world balance recently achieved is precarious. Merely to refrain from reversing the downward trend in United States import tariffs over the last two decades, he noted, would not be enough to put international trade on an even keel.