Cabinet conclusions on Soviet intentions in South-East Asia and the Middle East, 11 February 1946

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In the course of the Cabinet’s discussion about the proceedings in the Security Council on the situation in Indonesia, THE FOREIGN SECRETARY said that he suspected that the real objective of the Soviet Government was to secure a foothold in South-East Asia[[1]](#footnote-1). If they succeeded in their demand for an independent enquiry into the conduct of British troops in the Dutch East Indies, this would be a precedent for demanding the appointment of a similar Commission of enquiry in India if disorders broke out there at the time of the constitutional crisis which was now approaching. As soon as we had overcome the immediate difficulties in the Security Council, we should consider very carefully how far the provisions of the United Nations Charter were likely to permit independent investigations into matters of dispute within territories over which we exercised sovereignty. We might find ourselves in difficulty in this respect by reason of the loose-knit organisation of the British Commonwealth: for, while the Soviet Government would not suggest that the Security Council could concern itself with matters of dispute arising within the United Kingdom, they might be able to maintain the contention that the Council could concern itself with disputes in British dependencies overseas. This was a possibility which the British Commonwealth must consider very seriously as soon as the First General Assembly of the United Nations Organisation was concluded.

The Cabinet should also consider the intentions of the Soviet Government. Their attitude towards Turkey[[2]](#footnote-2) and Persia, their claims to former Italian Colonies in North Africa, and their attempt to secure the intervention of the Security Council in Greece all pointed to a desire to reduce British influence in the Mediterranean.

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1. Large-scale strategic preparation in the eventuality of a Soviet threat in South-East Asia was being carried out by the Post-War Planning Staff back in May 1945. Even scenarios involving Indochina and Siam submitting to the Soviet Union, followed by conquests of Singapore and Malaya were not excluded. For more detail see: Lewis J. Op. cit. p. 156–157. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. In his speech to the House of Common on 21 February, Bevin dwelt especially on the “Turkish Question”, emphasising that ‘I really must be frank and say I do not want Turkey converted into a satellite State. What I want her to be is really independent. I should like to see the treaty of friendship renewed between Soviet Russia and Turkey.’ See: Hansard. Parliamentary Debates. 5th Series. Vol. 419. Col. 1357–1358. House of Commons, 21/02/1946. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)