Foreign Office memorandum by P.J. Dixon[[1]](#footnote-1) on the strategic situation in Africa and the Middle East, 9 December 1946

TOP SECRET

It is incontestable that the “points of friction” countries (i.e. Turkey and Persia, Greece (because from Greece the Straits can be outflanked) and, to a lesser degree, Iraq and Afghanistan) are the nub of Anglo-Soviet relations.

On paper, the obvious solution is to agree with the Soviet Union that this area should be regarded as a “neutral zone”.

But it is doubtful whether such an idea is practical politics.

1. Nature abhors a vacuum, or, to change the simile, the protective pad would not be a dry pad: it would soak up. In other words, Russia would certainly infiltrate into a “neutral zone”.
2. A neutral zone in the “points of friction” countries would mean the loss of the British position in Egypt and Arabia as well. It would, in fact, bring Russia to the Congo and the Victoria Falls.
3. The Mediterranean is no longer of use to us as a communications route in a war. Our interest in retaining our position in it is to keep others out. With the Russian in the Mediterranean, we should lose our influence in Italy, France and North Africa.
4. It may be true that Russia thinks it exaggerated terms of her own security and is thus led to interpret defensive measures on our part as potential offensive measures. But he exaggerated sense of security, which is almost undistinguishable from an imperialist instinct, would lead her to fill a vacuum, if it was there to fill.

(5) In an atomic age we cannot afford to dispense with a first line of defence. Even if a neutral zone was feasible, which is questionable, can we risk having no first line of defence between Central Africa and Russia?

1. In any case, our central African main defence consist only on paper. What happens if we get into trouble in the next ten or fifteen years, having lost our position in the Middle East and Eastern Mediterranean?

P.D.

[TNA, FO 800/475]

Keywords: post-war USSR, Africa, post-war Middle East

1. Dixon, Pierson John (1904 – 1965) – British diplomat, Principal Private Secretary to the Foreign Secretary (1943 – 1948), Ambassador to Czechoslovakia (1948 – 1950), Deputy Under-Secretary of State at the Foreign Office (1950 –1954 ), Permanent Representative of the UK to the UN (1954 – 1960). [↑](#footnote-ref-1)