4 Socialist Countries and Some Problems of the Eastern Mediterranean

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Alvin Z. Rubinstein, an American Professor, has written:

The Soviet position in the eastern Mediterranean has greatly improved over the past decade or so partly because of the sharp increase in Soviet naval power and military capability, but mainly because of the changed perceptions of the Soviet threat by regional actors and the political skill with which the Soviet Union has responded to regional instability. Moscow has resorted to diplomacy — not power — to weaken NATO’s southern flank, it has taken advantage of troubles in the alliance and shifts in the attitudes of ruling elites. . . . The oft-expressed fear that the Soviet navy is somehow on the verge of interdicting the maritime routes in the Mediterranean, the Red Sea or the Gulf in order to cut the West’s oil supply, needs to be put in perspective: there is nothing to suggest that the Soviets are about to start a war in such a way — for that is what would happen — and the reasons that would motivate Soviet interdiction are never specified. Scenarios, like actors, should not be taken too seriously.1

The present writer, while not agreeing with all his conclusions concurs with Rubinstein’s objective method of thinking which differs from general Western thinking about the Soviet threat all over the world, including the Mediterranean. Rubinstein believes
in the ‘Soviet threat’ but ‘doesn’t take it too seriously’. The present writer does not believe in it at all. Nor does the present writer believe in the possibility of a localised war between the two blocs in the Mediterranean. This area involves such great interests of the two blocs, including alliance obligations and oil supplies, that a conflict between them would surely cause a new world war.

Concerning the so-called ‘Soviet threat’ in the Eastern Mediterranean another American expert, H. L. Chambers, has written:

The current US military presence is related to the NATO commitment and is justified on the basis of the need to deter Soviet aggression against Greece and Turkey. . . . The Soviet naval threat seriously constrains US freedom of action to conduct operations in the Mediterranean area and in the Middle East.²

But why should the United States have more major freedom of action than the Soviet Union in an area which is much nearer to Moscow than to Washington!

The present writer agrees with Rubinstein that ‘Moscow appreciates that overmilitarizing the environment in the eastern Mediterranean can be detrimental to its political aims’. That is why Greece and Turkey ‘tend to take a far more relaxed view of the Soviet military presence than their partners in Western and Northern Europe and for the moment none of NATO’s southern members sees any immediate Soviet threat to its vital national interests’. He continues:

Greece and Turkey, the keys to eastern Mediterranean, have reason of their own for downgrading the Soviet threat. Their historical animosity exploded in July 1974 over Cyprus and has simmered ever since. Preoccupied with each other, at odds with Washington, disappointed in Western Europe’s assistance, though hardpressed for alternatives, each casts about for supporters. At present neither fears a Soviet attack. Instead both are engaged in serious efforts to respond to Moscow’s overtures for improved relations: witness the visits by high-ranking Turkish and Greek officials to the Soviet Union. . . . For almost two decades, Greece and Turkey have experienced steadily improving relations with their Communist neighbours. The borders have been quiet. . . . Athens’s generally pro-Arab position on the Arab–Israeli conflict predisposed it to view the