MIDDLE EAST SETBACKS
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The projects for strengthening the defenses of the Middle East have suffered at least temporary setbacks as a result of two developments caused by still unresolved rivalries and ambitions in that area.

One of these developments, which is likely to delay the construction of a "northern tier" for the Middle Eastern defense structure, took place at a meeting of the Arab League in Cairo. There Egypt, Jordan, Syria, Lebanon and Saudi Arabia have thus far turned down invitations to join the projected defense pact between Turkey and Iraq. There are even reports that they have approved an Egyptian proposal for unifying the Arab armies under a single but independent command in a kind of Arabian NATO. Such action would mark a victory for Egypt, which has led the opposition to the Turkish-Iraqi pact and has not only assailed Iraq for breaking Arab solidarity but has also vetoed a proposed visit to Cairo by Premier Menderes of Turkey.

The Egyptian opposition is officially based on the contention that by aligning itself with Turkey, a member of the North Atlantic and Balkan alliances, Iraq, as a member of the Arab League and the Arab collective defense pact, could easily involve the whole Arab world in hostilities should Turkey be attacked. That argument has, however, only formal validity, since all Arab leaders admit that an attack on Turkey could come only from Soviet Russia, and that in such a case every state from the Bosporus to Pakistan would be inevitably and automatically involved. They even concede that Iraq is moving in the right direction by seeking at least indirect ties with the West to strengthen the barriers against such an attack.

But Egypt resents and fears an alliance between Turkey and Iraq as a threat to its claim to leadership in the Arab world. And both Egypt and Saudi Arabia strenuously oppose Iraq's ambition to federate with Jordan, Syria and Lebanon in a Greater Syria, which the alignment with Turkey might promote. The efforts of Lebanon, and presumably Jordan and Syria, to mediate the dispute seem to be unsuccessful.

The situation is further complicated by the conviction of eight Jewish prisoners in Cairo on charges of spying for Israel, two of them being sentenced to death. Israel, left out of Middle Eastern defense plans, strenuously opposes any Western aid to the Arab states, and the execution of the prisoners could easily aggravate existing animosities, from which only the Communists can gain. It might be wise as well as humane if Egypt would temper justice with mercy, and thereby ease the tensions that now afflict the Middle East.

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