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**MILITARY INTELLIGENCE DIVISION  
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## ISLAM: A THREAT TO WORLD STABILITY

The Moslem world sprawls around half the earth, from the Pacific across Asia and Africa to the Atlantic, along one of the greatest of trade routes; in its center is an area extremely rich in oil; over it will run some of the most strategically important air routes.

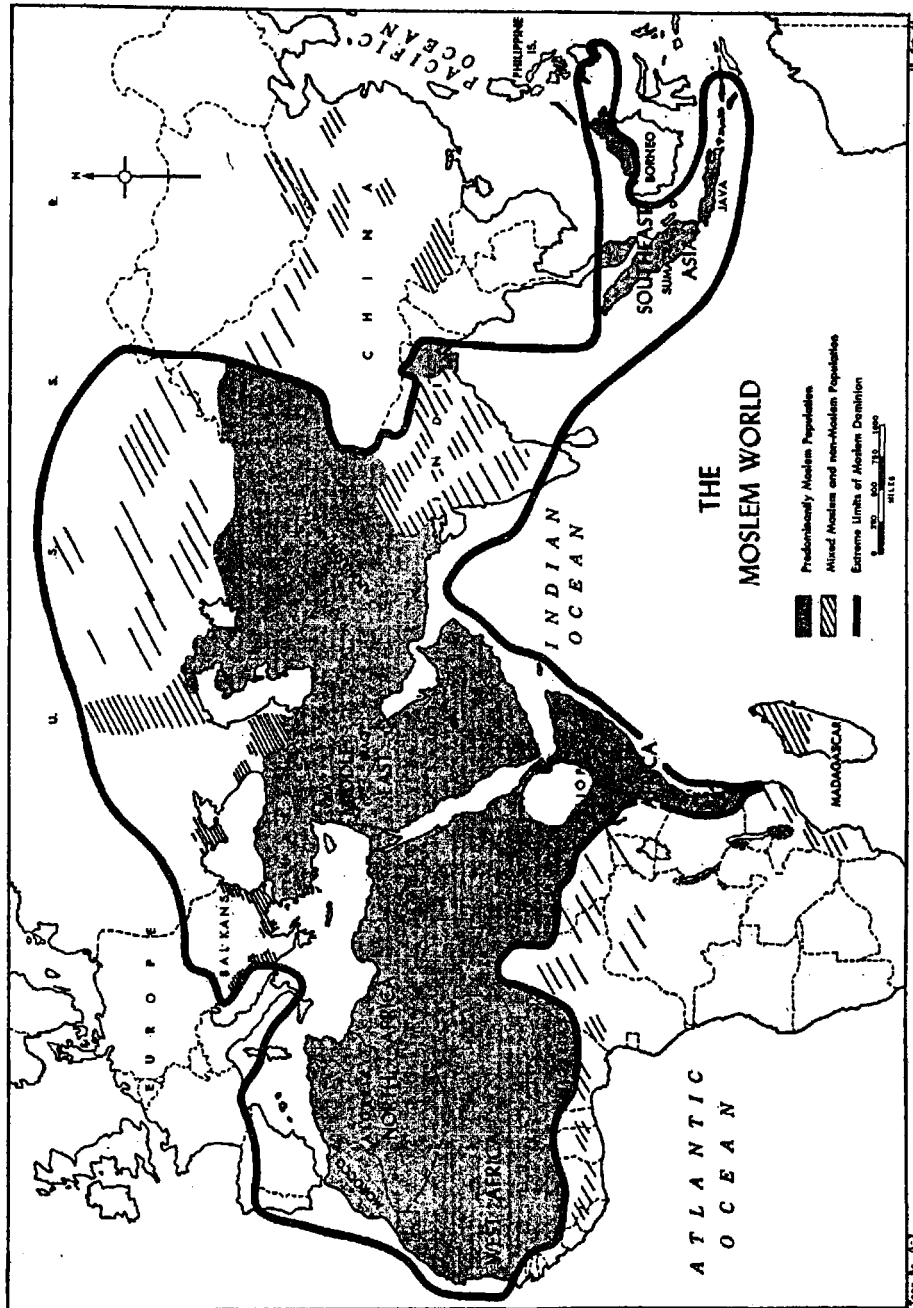
With few exceptions, the states which it includes are marked by poverty, ignorance, and stagnation. It is full of discontent and frustration, yet alive with consciousness of its inferiority and with determination to achieve some kind of general betterment.

Two basic urges meet head-on in this area, and conflict is inherent in this collision of interests. These urges reveal themselves in daily news accounts of killings and terrorism, of pressure groups in opposition, and of raw nationalism and naked expansionism masquerading as diplomatic maneuvers. The urges tie together the tangled threads of power politics which—snarled in the lap of the United Nations Assembly—lead back to the centers of Islamic pressure and to the capitals of the world's biggest nations.

The first of these urges originates within the Moslems' own sphere. The Moslems remember the power with which once they not only ruled their own domains but also overpowered half of Europe, yet they are painfully aware of their present economic, cultural, and military impoverishment. Thus a terrific internal pressure is building up in their collective thinking. The Moslems intend, by any means possible, to regain political independence and to reap the profits of their own resources, which in recent times and up to the present have been surrendered to the exploitation of foreigners who could provide capital investments. The area, in short, has an inferiority complex, and its activities are thus as unpredictable as those of any individual so motivated.

The other fundamental urge originates externally. The world's great and near-great Powers cover the economic riches of the Moslem area and are also mindful of the strategic locations of some of the domains. Their actions are also difficult to predict, because each of these Powers sees itself

# ISLAM



## ISLAM

in the position of the customer who wants to do his shopping in a hurry because he happens to know the store is going to be robbed.

In an atmosphere so sated with the inflammable gases of distrust and ambition, the slightest spark could lead to an explosion which might implicate every country committed to the maintenance of world peace through the United Nations Organization. An understanding of the Moslem world and of the stresses and forces operative within it is thus an essential part of the basic intelligence framework.

### History of the Moslems

The influence which integrates the Moslems<sup>1</sup> is their religion, Islam.<sup>2</sup> This religion began officially in the year 622 A. D., when Mahomet<sup>3</sup> was driven from Mecca because of his preaching of a synthesis of Jewish and Christian heresy, and took flight to Yathrib (Al Medinah).<sup>4</sup> Taking advantage of the age-old feud between the two towns, he soon rallied an army to his side, made extensive compromises with Medinah paganism, and attacked Mecca. At his death in 632 A. D. he was the master of all Arabia.

His successors, the Caliphs (or Khalifs) quickly overran much of the known world; they reached India and penetrated Trans Caspiana and Musa ibn Tariq, and crossed the straits at the western end of the Mediterranean, giving to the mountainous rock at their entrance the name of Jebel Al Tariq (the mountain of Tariq), which the Spaniards later corrupted to "Gibraltar." In 732 A. D.—just one century after the death of the Prophet—the Moslem advance in western Europe was finally turned back at Tours, France, by Charles Martel. To the north of Arabia, the Byzantine Kingdom held back the Moslem tide until the 15th century, when Constantinople fell and central Europe became a Turkish province. From that high point, Moslem expansion gradually receded. Although for centuries the Moslem world had been contributing to western arts, science, and trade, a period of increasing sterility set in, and during the next 400 years the Moslems advanced very little in any phase of human endeavor.

At the present time there are no strong Moslem states. The leadership

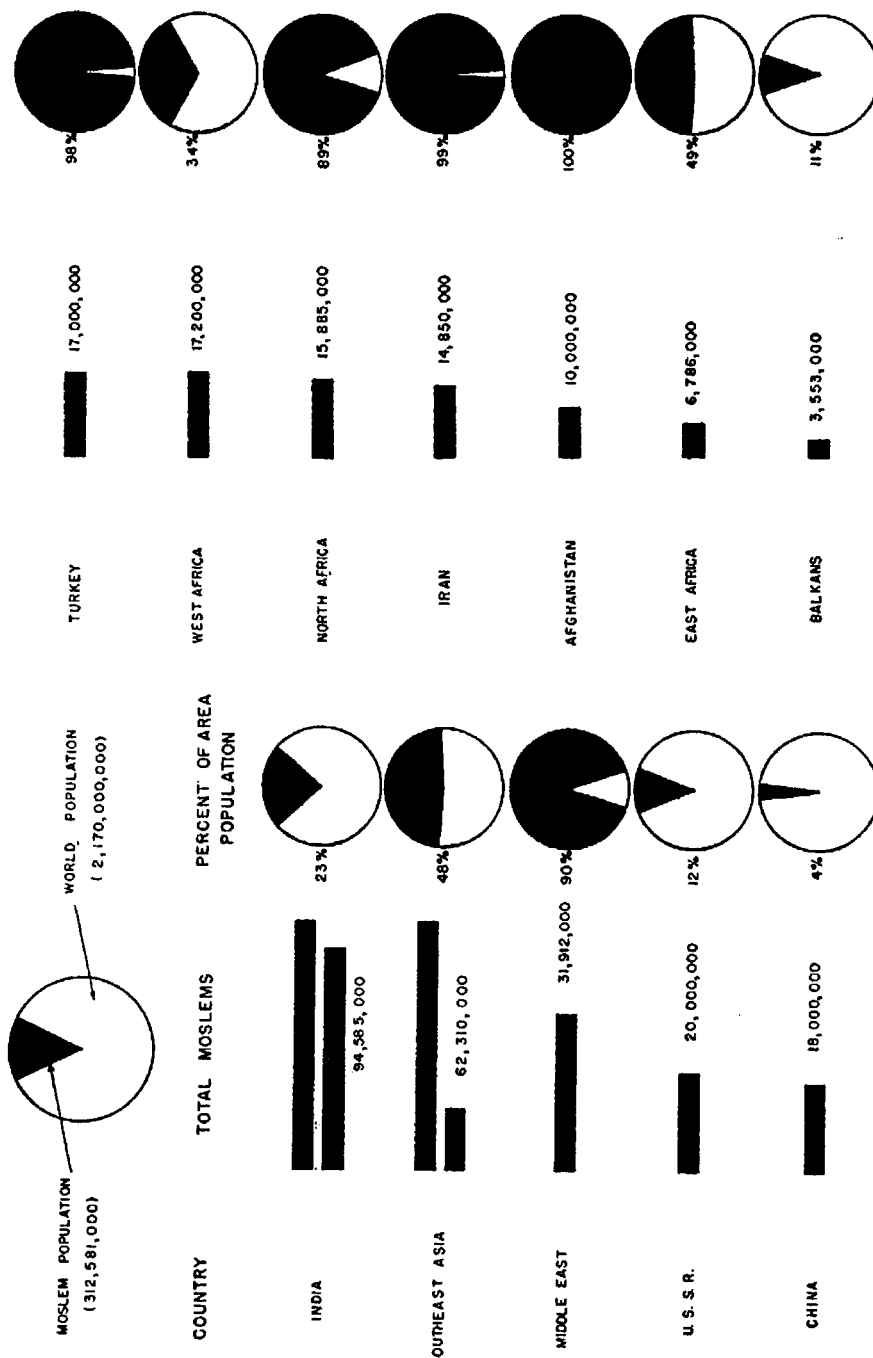
<sup>1</sup> Also called Mahometans, Mohammedans, or Mussulmen.

<sup>2</sup> Also called Islamism, Mahometanism, and Mohammedanism. "Islam" may also refer to the whole body of Moslems or to the countries they occupy.

<sup>3</sup> Or Mohammed.

<sup>4</sup> This flight was The Hegira; the word "hegira" is now used in English to denote any such flight or exodus.

# ISLAM



Number and percentage of Moslem population by areas.

## ISLAM

of the Moslem world remains in the Middle East, particularly in Arabia. This area lies near the geographical center of Eurasia's population, with industrial Europe to the west and the agricultural countries of India, Indonesia, and China to the east. Through it passes the Suez Canal; and north of it lie fabulously rich oil fields around the Persian Gulf.

### Present Forces Tending to Weaken Moslem Unity

The many forces tending to tear the Moslem world apart have been so strong that there has been no central Moslem authority since the 8th century; the factors which generate disunity are discussed briefly below.

1. *Lack of a common language.*—Moslems east and south of the Tigris River (except those in Malaya and Indonesia) usually speak Urdu, Persian, or Turkish. West of the Tigris River, the dominant language is Arabic, but its far western dialects are unintelligible to the eastern Arab.

2. *Religious schisms.*—The oldest of these schisms is the Sunni-Shiah controversy, which arose in the 8th century. The eastern Caliphate, with its capital at Baghdad, gave impetus to the Shiah sect, but it was not until the 17th century that the Shiah creed was officially adopted in Iran. The majority of Moslems, however, belong to the Sunni (unorthodox) sect, although islands of Shiah believers exist in Sunni regions. Neither sect has a recognized leader. In theory the Sunni should have a Caliph, a successor to the Prophet; but the historic Caliphate came to an end in Baghdad about 1350, and there have since been only "captive" Caliphs—puppets set up by secular powers and not generally recognized. The Emir Husayn of Mecca desired the British to recognize him as Caliph in 1916, and in recent years King Faruq (Farouk) of Egypt has made gestures indicating he would be willing to play the part. Nationalism keeps the Moslems apart, however, and no serious bid for the traditional role of a leader of Islam now exists.

Islam is also beset with modern movements which try to make it conform to new historical evidence and to modern psychology and science. These have included a reform movement known as Babism, which appeared a century ago in Iran, followed by Bahatism, which adopted many features of the former.

Along with "the acids of modernity," there have been atavistic movements designed to preserve the original "purity of Islam." In 1703 an

## ISLAM

Arab chieftain, Abdul Wahab, revived a fanatically purist faith, which soon swept over all Arabia. Thousands of "pagan Moslems" were massacred at Mecca by desert adherents of the new faith. Around 1850 the movement suffered eclipse but again appeared in 1903, led by Abdul Aziz of the Saud family. Again it overran the Arabian Peninsula, and it is now the recognized faith of Saudi Arabia. These Wahabis believe that the Koran is the only source of faith and that it contains the only precepts for war, commerce, and politics; they regard any innovation as heresy.

Paralleling this reactionary tendency, there have appeared in Egypt and elsewhere several societies that stress Islamic culture; these are openly anti-European and secretly anti-Christian and anti-Jewish. The best-known is the Ikhwan el Muslimin (Brotherhood of Moslems), which encourages youth movements and maintains commando units and secret caches of arms (it is reported to have 60,000 to 70,000 rifles). The militant societies, such as the Shabab Muhammad (Youth of Mahomet) and the Misr Al Fattat (Young Egypt), are led by demagogues and political opportunists. They issue clandestine pamphlets, attack the government, stir up hatred of the British, and sow the seeds of violence. In recent months, Premier Ahmad Maher of Egypt was assassinated, and former Premier Nahas Pasha was wounded by people associated with these groups. Christian minorities in the Middle East fear these fanatical and nationalistic Moslem societies which exploit the ignorance and poverty of the masses, and even the more enlightened Moslem leaders must cater to their fanaticism in order to retain their positions.

3. *Geographical isolation.*—The Indian Moslem knows little or nothing of his fellow believers in Mongolia and Morocco. To a Sudanese, Turkey and Iran are meaningless terms. High mountains, broad deserts, and great distances separate one group from another, and provincialism has inevitably resulted.

4. *Economic disparities.*—Throughout the Moslem world, social conditions closely approximate medieval feudalism. In Egypt, a few thousand people own the land on which 15 million labor as share croppers. In Saudi Arabia, where the purest desert "democracy" exists, the contrast between the living conditions of the peasant and the feudal land-holding classes is very great. That contrast is common throughout the whole Moslem world, where the lack of industrial development has made it easier than elsewhere

## ISLAM

to retain the feudal system of exploiting the land and the peasants. Social reform has been given only lip service, and the Moslem peasants have a growing conviction, stimulated by Soviet propaganda, that the landowners are their worst enemy. In northern Iran, the peasants have openly revolted under the instigation and protection of the Red Army, and such a revolt can happen anywhere in the Moslem world.

5. *Political rivalries and nationalism.*--The Iranian has always looked upon the Arab as a wild man and upon the Turk as a "son of a dog"; the Turk in turn considers the Iranian a degenerate but agrees with his views of the Arab; and so goes the cycle of animosity. These mutual dislikes have existed for centuries, but they have a deeper meaning in the present era of nationalism. For example, after exiling the puppet "Caliph" in 1923, the Turks completely nationalized the idea of Islam. Pilgrimages ceased almost entirely, the Koran was translated into Turkish, and all prayers were put into that language. Oaths no longer needed to be made on the Koran, but on one's honor. Thus, the roots of Islam were cut, making religion a purely passive phase of nationalism.

Likewise in Iran, during the period from 1920 to 1940, religious holidays were displaced by national fiestas, national heroes were substituted for those of Arab origin, and the old customs of Islam were replaced by new.

Even within the Arab-speaking world, nationalism transcends religion. Egypt is concerned with local issues. Saudi Arabia is absorbed in the age-old feud between its royal family and that of west Arabia. Nationalists in Syria, Lebanon, Tunisia, and Morocco are concentrating on means to throw off the French yoke.

Only when a cause in another region would be of value in their own do the Moslems cooperate. For example, their widespread sympathy for the Palestinian Arab in his struggle against Zionism is translated into action only by the Arab states bordering on Palestine. The largest single group of Moslem believers lives in India, but its principal fear is of being swallowed up in a sea of Hindu millions; to these Moslems the establishment of a colony of Jews three thousand miles to the west is by comparison a matter of little concern.

In addition to the dissension and selfish interests that tend to split the Moslem world from within, various foreign countries have parcelled



it into spheres of influence or areas of outright domination. From 1930 to 1940 only three Moslem states, with a total population of less than 40 million people, had any real degree of independence. They were Turkey, Iran, and Saudi Arabia, and each of these was jealous of the others and on the defensive to protect its national existence against the great Powers.

6. *Prostitution of leadership.*—At the end of the 18th century, Moslem power had fallen so low that a series of self-appointed Protectors of Islam appeared. One of the earliest was Napoleon, who as Governor of Egypt from 1799 to 1802 outdid the old Moslem rulers in celebrating Islamic festivals and reviving decadent customs.

Later, Great Britain assumed the role, but her efforts had small success because her Zionist policy antagonized the Arabs.

Then Mussolini and Hitler represented themselves as guardians of the Moslems. Axis money and intrigue proved effective in many instances, so that with the approach of war the Grand Mufti of Jerusalem and Rashid Ali Al Gailani of Iraq, among others, were in the Axis camp. In Iran, a group of important persons was formed into a loose political party which favored the Axis, and in Egypt the British could trust neither the King nor the Premier.

The most recent claimant as Protector of Islam is the Soviet Union, which before the war showed little interest in championing religion but now realizes the value of such a role as an instrument of policy. Thus, while the London BBC and the Delhi radio have recently broadcast recitations in Arabic from the Koran and admonished the faithful to continue their devotions, Radio Moscow has told of the facilities which the Soviet Union had made available to pilgrims for traveling by air to Mecca.

Recent Soviet broadcasts have quoted the Imam of the Moscow Mosque, Sheikh Nasr ad-Din, on freedom of religion in the Soviet Union. The Imam stated that "every Moslem in the U. S. S. R. is well aware of the fact that the Stalin Constitution is a guarantee for the freedom of expression and belief," and (citing the oppression of Moslems under Christian regimes) that "Moslems in the U. S. S. R. always beseech Allah to protect the Soviet authorities and our great father and friend of all nations, the great and wise Stalin." The Imam was also quoted as saying that "as a result of the consideration shown by the Government toward Soviet Moslems, tombs of distinguished Moslem religious leaders are being maintained" and recon-

## ISLAM

structed. Another Moscow broadcast, directed at Arabic-speaking peoples, declared that rumors circulating in Arab circles regarding the Soviet Union's attitude toward religion, particularly the Islamic, were "nothing but political maneuvers of the imperialists, who are afraid of the Arab march on the road of democracy and true liberty."

The election in Moscow of the Grand Mufti of the Central Moslem Administration is reported to have been scheduled for January. Arab circles are reported to have taken more interest in this assembly of Moslems than in any other Soviet propaganda effort. It is to be anticipated that the election of the Grand Mufti of the Central Moslem Administration may prove as useful propaganda as was the election of Alexius to the Patriarchate of All Russia. The Soviets have also solicited the favor of the Coptic Church in Egypt and that of other religious groups in the Middle East.

The net result of all these intrigues has been that the Moslems are properly suspicious of their leaders. The moment a new leader appears he is tempted by various European Powers to accept their "assistance," and almost inevitably his loyalty and discretion are eventually sold to one of them.

### Present Forces Tending to Strengthen Moslem Unity

1. *The Pilgrimage to Mecca.*—This ancient duty formerly brought many hundreds of thousands of pilgrims from all sections of the Moslem world to Mecca, where ideas were actively exchanged, along with goods. Although the pilgrimage is still made (the last was in November and December 1945), the number participating has dwindled greatly. The scarcity of shipping during the war reduced the usual horde to about 20,000—30,000 per year. While the numbers will probably increase now, they are not likely to reach their former proportions. Turkey discourages pilgrimages; Iran (where the dissident Shiah sect is the official religion) has prohibited them altogether since 1944. Yet they will continue to be a unifying force when Moslems from the East and West meet and repeat prayers in a common language.

2. *Classical Arabic.*—All written Arabic, as well as that spoken in public assemblies, is based on the classical forms. Accordingly, a newspaper printed in Casablanca can be read in Baghdad, or by members of the Lebanese colony in New Jersey. The Arab press is reviving. *Al Ahram*, a daily paper in Cairo, has almost as large a circulation outside the country

as within. Many new books have been published on the lives of the early Moslem heroes, and a "Book of the Month Club" distributes biographies of famous characters, almost all Moslems. The *American Readers' Digest*, in its Arabic translation, sells around 100,000 copies a month, indicating the increasing demand for reading material. It is still too early to know whether this literary revival will tend to break up Moslem solidarity by introducing new ideas, or will lead Islam out of its slough of intellectual inaction.

3. *Modern communications*.—The development of fast, comfortable, and relatively cheap travel is affording a more cosmopolitan outlook to a small group in each country. Radio programs in all the languages of the East flood the air. Thus, for a few, the isolation of the past has ended, and these few will act as a leaven for the rest. Any growth in understanding among the poverty-crushed masses, however, will be very slow.

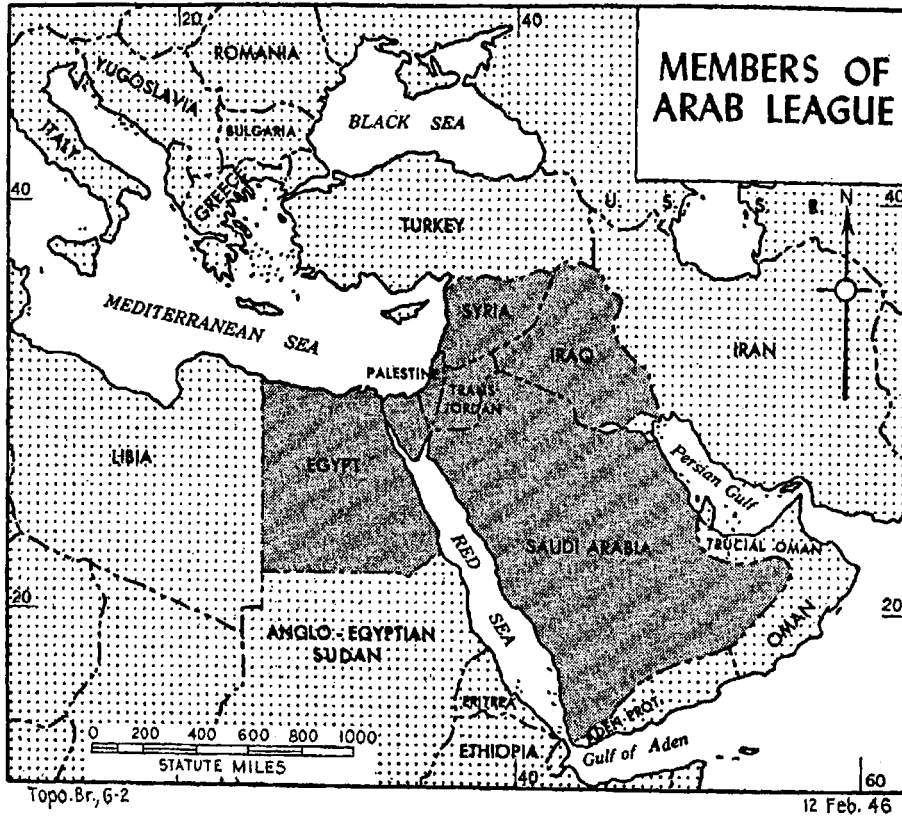
4. *The Arab League*.—After a spasmodic upheaval, such as that led by Lawrence in 1916-20, the pan-Arab movement broke up under the pressure of British and French policies and because of rivalries between the Hashemite family of west Arabia and the Saud family of east Arabia. Nevertheless, two other forces were driving the Arabs of the Middle East toward greater cohesion: (1) hatred of European exploitation and (2) fear of a Jewish state on Arab soil. By 1942, leaders of the Arab world were advancing plans for the formation of an Arab Federation, and in February 1943, British Foreign Secretary Eden declared that Great Britain favored any move toward Arab unity. (See map on next page.)

Soon there was a stirring of political activity, culminating in October 1944 with the announcement of the Alexandria Protocol of the Arab League Conference. A constitution was drafted in March 1945, and seven states (or mandated territories) have become members. The League aims to include all Arabs in North Africa and then to take in Turkey and Iran. It represents the sympathetic and broader vision that is being expressed by the Arabs of both East and West for the first time in centuries. At the very least, the League serves as a rallying point for Moslems, and many of them hope will restore Islam to some degree of political power.

### **The Present Estimate**

If the Moslem states were strong and stable, their behavior would be more predictable. They are, however, weak and torn by internal stresses;

## ISLAM



furthermore, their peoples are insufficiently educated to appraise propaganda or to understand the motives of those who promise a new Heaven and a new Earth.

Because of the strategic position of the Moslem world and the restlessness of its peoples, the Moslem states constitute a potential threat to world peace. There cannot be permanent world stability, when one-seventh of the earth's population exists under the economic and political conditions that are imposed upon the Moslems.