

**REPORT SOVIET
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Admiral Stirling Doubts British Ability to Halt Drive
On Greece.

By REAR ADMIRAL
YATES STIRLING JR.
United Press Naval Critic

NEW YORK, Jan. 7.—Britain for the moment has the upper hand in the great campaign for control of the Mediterranean.

How long she can maintain this advantage, however, is a question.

Reports are current that Berlin finally has obtained Russian assent to a "peaceful" German occupation of Bulgaria, which would open the way for a drive of Greece from the north, the ob-

ject of which would be to obtain control of Salona and, from that base, all of Greece and the Greek islands in the Aegean Sea.

Should this operation prove successful, and the British be driven from their only foothold on the mainland of Europe, the German air force then would be in position to sweep the Eastern Mediterranean and launch heavy attacks on the British naval base at Alexandria and even Cairo.

British Realize Danger

The British, of course, realize the danger which confronts them and one may take it for granted that they are putting up the greatest possible diplomatic resistance in Sofia, Moscow and Ankara.

Bulgaria always has been close to Russia and Turkey has had the closest of relations with the U. S. S. R. in recent years. Neither of these states, hence, would be likely to permit German control of Greece and the Aegean without asking Moscow for advice.

This advice already has been asked, if reports from Sofia are correct, and the Russian reply to Bulgaria has been to avoid resistance and permit the passage of German troops through that country. The Turks presumably have been advised to maintain their policy of non-belligerence since German plans do not call for any passage through Turkish territory.

Free Hand in Finland

In return for these concessions, the Sofia reports state, Germany has agreed that Russia shall have a free hand in Finland—which would mean complete Soviet domination of what is left of the little Finnish republic.

From a naval viewpoint the British fleet probably would be able to defend itself in the Mediterranean, even if deprived of its Greek bases, but whether it could defend itself against overwhelming German air superiority is another question.

A glance at the map will show the possibility for air action which the Axis powers would have if they controlled Greece and the Aegean islands, in addition to Italy with her island bases, including the Dodecanese group off the coast of Turkey.

A number of factors would appear to favor the reported German plan for occupation of Bulgaria and a joint attack with Italy on Greece.

Italian Prestige Low

1. The fall of Bardia in Italian Libya, coupled with Greek successes in Greece and Albania, has brought Italian military prestige to an all-time low during the present war. Germany, as Italy's partner, hardly can let these reverses go farther. There is too much danger that Italy might sue for a separate peace with the British.

2. A vigorous German thrust towards the Mediterranean might force the British to withdraw planes and ships needed for the defense of Britain and thus improve German chances for the long-desired victory of Britain.

3. United States assistance to Britain daily is becoming more effective. The Germans need to move fast and may be prepared to take desperate chances in an effort to achieve a knockout before American support of the British makes a German victory impossible.

The British, however, will prove no push-over, in my judgement, if the German plans unfold as outlined above.

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