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CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY
OFFICE OF NATIONAL ESTIMATES

17 February 1971

MEMORANDUM (Draft for Board Consideration -- CIA Distribution)

SUBJECT: The Arab World After Nasser

Nasser's Role in the Arab World

1. Gamal Abd-al-Nasser was the most powerful leader the Arab world has seen since Muhammad Ali, the Albanian founder of modern Egypt over 150 years ago. Nasser brought about a radically changed relationship between the Arabs and the Western Powers and he came to be the greatest exponent of Arab nationalism. He was an unsettling influence in many ways -- he made the first Arab arms agreement with the Soviet Union, for long he actively promoted subversion of conservative Arab regimes, and he fought to eject Western influence. He was able to bring together the disparate leaders of the Arab world, mute their quarrels, and at times create an impression of common purpose.

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2. On the face of it, the demise of so powerful and charismatic a leader would appear to mean widespread and fundamental change in the Arab world. And the months since Nasser's death have indeed seen changes in inter-Arab relations. But these differences have been subtle, negative rather than positive. This is so because Nasser's ability to influence events in the Arab world had declined substantially in recent years as a result of the humiliating Egyptian defeat at the hands of Israel in 1967. The other Arab leaders recognized that Egypt, as the largest Arab state, would remain important in the confrontation with Israel, but virtually all felt free to refuse to follow Nasser's policy direction. In a sense, then, the biggest "post-Nasser" changes had taken place prior to his death.

3. Moreover, the circumstances which had obtained for several years before Nasser's death continue to condition the Arab world's actions. Since 1967, Nasser's options in the Arab world had been severely limited by the Israeli occupation of Sinai, by Egypt's need for Arab subsidies and for massive Soviet military support, and by a requirement to present at least a facade of unity in the face of Israel. His Egyptian successors have the same needs and, moreover, feel

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compelled to appear to be following in the master's footsteps. Certainly one of the most important foreign affairs legacies which Nasser left to them and to other Arab leaders was his acceptance of and involvement in a process of a negotiated settlement with Israel. Arab leaders would be hard put even to engage in indirect negotiations with Israel today if Nasser's last words had been the once familiar slogan that "warfare is the only solution".

4. In the paragraphs which follow, we survey the state of inter-Arab relations, with particular reference to developments since Nasser's absence.

The New Situation

5. The tripartite "federation" between Egypt, Libya and Sudan -- to which Asad's new Syrian regime has proclaimed its adherence -- is an expression of the old Arab yearning for unity. Its most enthusiastic member is Libya's zealous Qaddafi, who seems to feel that he must carry on Nasser's mission to unify Araby. Egypt, both under Nasser and Anwar Sadat, has taken a much more cautious attitude, emphasizing the need for unity by slow stages. Cairo, while seeing both

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financial and some political advantages in the federation, remembers the ill-fated union with Syria from 1958 to 1961. In addition, a traditional Egyptian reluctance to become deeply involved in affairs outside of Egypt may take on more importance in the future. Historically, Egypt's interests have lain more to the south, in the Sudan and the Nile River's headwaters. It was Nasser's own aspirations, rather than popular pressures, which sparked his country's active and deep pan-Arab involvement.

6. Sudan's revolutionary leader, Numairy, has been more a follower than a leader in striving for unity. His real interest seems to be in a close relationship with Egypt, with a view toward warding off intrigue in Khartoum by Cairo. He also hopes to gain support from Egypt against Sudanese (or external) elements opposed to him. At the same time, he does not want to antagonize the many Sudanese who view Cairo with suspicion. Libya's Qaddafi seems to view the federation as a bulwark against Israel and a vehicle for a social revolution which will bring the downfall of the moderate Arab kingdoms -- Jordan and Saudi Arabia. Like the Sudan, Libya has many people who fear Egyptian domination and the influx of Egyptians

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into Libya has already created considerable resentment. The violence of Qaddafi's attacks on King Hussein for suppressing the fedayeen have been an embarrassment to Cairo, which feels it necessary to present a common front with Hussein toward Israel.

7. While the possibility for cooperation among Egypt, Libya and Sudan in some fields seems fairly good, it is doubtful that any meaningful federation will transpire. At most, the members will develop, mutual beneficial arrangements in such areas as communications, trade, and education.

8. The new government in Syria has associated itself with the Egyptian-Sudanese-Libyan grouping. Prime Minister al-Asad, having ousted virtually the entire leadership of the Baath Party, turned for support to a number of pro-Egyptian politicians. His move to join the three African states was, in some measure, a payment for the support of these men. Al-Asad may also feel that collaboration with pro-Nasser elements in Syria is less risky with Nasser dead. Syria continues, however, to conduct most of its inter-Arab relations without much regard for Cairo's views. While some of its policies happen to be in harmony with Egypt's --

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e.g., antagonism to Iraq; others are not -- e.g., its very tolerant attitude toward Jordan's efforts to wipe out the fedayeen.

9. One significant change in the climate of the Arab world as a result of Nasser's death has been the almost complete ignoring of Cairo's attitudes on a number of issues. Arab leaders no longer look over their shoulders in the direction of Cairo before adopting a policy. This phenomenon is most apparent in Lebanon, the country traditionally most sensitive to Egypt's influence. Contrary to past practice Lebanese leaders no longer make the pilgrimage to seek Cairo's blessing. Neither President Frangie, nor former pro-Nasser Prime Minister Salam, has felt this necessary, a radical departure from the past. Likewise, other Arab political leaders have not felt constrained by Cairo's views on various subjects and have taken actions that would have been unthinkable in the past. This has spread even to the Arab press and radio. Cairo, for its part, realizing the diminution of its influence has not recently attempted to influence policies in the Arab world nearly as much as it had been doing since the mid-1950s.

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10. Jordan has both gained and lost from Nasser's death. His departure removed the person who had directly contributed to political turmoil on many occasions in the past and who could exert a kind of veto on Jordanian policy when it suited him. But Nasser also could, and did, help Hussein when his interests so dictated, most prominently in the Arab-Israeli confrontation and most particularly after 1967 when they were in the same boat in many respects. On the other hand, the current showdown between the Jordanian regime and the fedayeen exemplifies Jordan's gain. In Nasser's day, Arab leaders would have met in Cairo and come up with an "understanding" between the fedayeen and Jordanians, which Cairo would have supported by political and propaganda pressure. Today, Amman feels at liberty to virtually ignore the views of Egypt and Egypt's supporters as it goes about destroying the fedayeen.

11. Iraq's relations with Egypt have been poor more often than they have been good since World War II and Nasser's death has not changed this pattern. Iraq's Baathist regime is antagonistic toward most of its Arab neighbors as well as with Iran. As for Iraq's relations with Syria, the new Baathist regime in Damascus is no better for Baghdad than its

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predecessor, and Iraqi-Syrian relations may get worse as a result of Syria's snuggling up to Cairo in the "federation". Iraqi-backed subversion in the Persian Gulf sheikhdoms continues and no doubt will increase as the time for the British withdrawal nears. As time goes on the Iraqis will do their best to give their Gulf aspirations the aura of an Arab-Iranian struggle for influence or control. Egypt is a refuge for Iraqi political refugees, and a propaganda battle has raged between Cairo and Baghdad since mid-1970. Yet neither country's principal interests or spheres of activity coincide; Iraq can pursue its quarrels with Iran, renew its civil war with the Kurds, and meddle in the Gulf with little regard for what Cairo says on these issues.

12. Much the same is true of Saudi Arabia. Nasser's death removed King Feisal's main antagonist. Feisal's opposition to Nasser was more an effort to thwart what he viewed as Cairo's threat to conservative regimes than a contest for leadership of the Arabs. But, Feisal does take seriously his role of combatting radical forces in the Arabian Peninsula. He will support traditional rulers in the Gulf against, for example, Iraqi subversive efforts. He will almost certainly

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continue for some time to support the mixed bag of ousted tribal leaders, former Sultans, and Adeni politicians in efforts to overthrow the radical regime in South Yemen.

13. Egyptian influence in the two Yemens is low and unlikely to revive very soon. In the Peoples Democratic Republic of Yemen (PDRY) -- formerly Aden and its hinterlands, the radical regime continues to undergo periodic purges, each succeeding clique losing a bit more of Aden's grasp on the provinces. The prospects are likely for increasing near-anarchy, with the primitive tribal and local forces asserting limited independence of or actively fighting the central government. In Yemen proper, the government continues in power to a very considerable extent as a consequence of Saudi subsidies and political support. San'a is involved in the efforts to topple the regime in South Yemen. It would like to have a friendly regime there and eventually to unite both into "national" Yemen, but such a development appears remote at best.

14. In the Maghreb (Morocco, Tunisia, and Algeria), Nasser's death has had little impact. While he was a popular hero to the masses, these countries' leaders -- each for their own reasons -- regarded him as a threat to their positions.

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Indeed, Boumediene saw him as an impediment to Maghreb harmony. Qaddafi's enthusiasm for Nasser did much to thwart a closer Algerian-Libyan relationship. It now seems likely that this situation will not change much, since Qaddafi's new-found enthusiasm for the "federation" and his aspirations to be Nasser's successor as a pan-Arab leader will disincline him to orient Libya's policy westward to any significant degree. However, in areas where there is a community of interest, such as oil policy, limited cooperation is likely.

15. For all its militant, anti-Western postures, Egypt under Nasser was particularly cautious about risking its hard currency income. It not only encouraged American oil companies to come to Egypt, but Nasser used his personal ascendancy over Qaddafi to counsel restraint in Libyan oil dealings. It seems likely that the Libyan regime will be less willing to take such advice from Cairo's present leaders -- if they give it -- and more apt to take precipitate action against oil companies than in the past.

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16. In sum, Nasser's demise has removed the kingpin from the movement for pan-Arab unity. No leader or party can claim to function for the entire Arab polity. Baathism now has at least four mutations; the Syrian and Iraqi regimes, and the remnants that each of these Baathist regimes have ousted in the past few years. Each of these -- ousters and ousted -- claims to be the true Baath leadership. Each of them is contesting for the allegiance of Baathist followers in the other Arab countries, where the branches of the Baath Party are mostly clandestine. In nearly all of these states the Baathists are opposed not only by the ruling regimes, but by rival radical groupings, such as the Marxist-oriented Arab Nationalist Movement, local revolutionary groups, and the local communist parties. While the future of several of the conservative Arab regimes bordering the Persian Gulf seems limited and the prospects for some sort of radicalism look likely, present revolutionary movements seem more likely to fragment than to amalgamate.

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