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Intelligence Memorandum

Soviet-Egyptian Relations: An Uneasy Alliance

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CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY
Directorate of Intelligence
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INTELLIGENCE MEMORANDUM

Soviet-Egyptian Relations: An Uneasy Alliance

Introduction

The past year has seen a number of developments that testify to Egyptian dependency upon the Soviet Union. It has also witnessed the development and exacerbation of a number of strains in relations between the two countries. Moscow finds the situation not entirely comfortable, but, valuing its position as a major power in the Middle East, it is ready to tolerate some degree of friction as the price for preserving this role. The USSR recognizes the important role Egypt plays in its over-all strategy and realizes that Egypt, because of its size, population, and geographic location, is likely to remain foremost among the Arab states.

Similarly, Cairo is willing to endure the adverse consequences of its close ties with the Soviet Union in order to reap the concomitant benefits of Soviet aid. Indeed, Egypt has few alternatives to its present alliance with the USSR, and so long as the impasse with Israel remains unresolved, Cairo finds indispensable the broad range of support Moscow provides.

The Thorny Search for Peace

1. Egypt's persistent efforts to find a political solution to the conflict with Israel have been fully supported by the Soviet Union. The Soviets

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have been careful to back only those settlement terms acceptable to the Arabs themselves; thus they have been unwilling to get out in front of the Egyptian negotiating position, although on occasion they have encouraged Cairo to keep the door open to a political settlement.

2. Currently, the Soviets may be planning a political initiative for the summit meeting with President Nixon in May. Moscow, which has consistently favored bilateral discussions with the US on the deadlock in the Middle East, has indicated to the Arabs that the May summit could provide a breakthrough. The Soviets have also kept alive the idea of four-power talks, but this is a move designed to put additional pressure on the US and Israel rather than a preferred means of arranging a settlement. The Egyptians appear to be setting the stage for the Moscow summit by promising a new pan-Arab initiative "before May."

3. President Sadat has been willing to explore initiatives from virtually any quarter. But the Soviets, anxious to maintain their hand in the settlement process, want no initiatives from which they are excluded. In particular, US efforts to promote an interim agreement have been viewed with special anxiety by Moscow. Although conscious of the advantages for them that would ensue from the reopening of the Suez Canal, the Soviets have also been concerned over the prestige and influence that success in promoting an interim arrangement would confer upon the US. As a counter, they have assiduously fanned Cairo's interest in a resumption of the mission of UN special envoy Gunnar Jarring, perhaps hoping that the renewal of his activities would dampen any lingering Egyptian interest in US-sponsored settlement negotiations.

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4. Soviet concerns extend to the aftermath of a settlement in the Middle East. Moscow cannot be insensitive to the Egyptians' unhappiness over their near-total dependence upon Moscow and must anticipate that following normalization of the situation, the Egyptians will at the least want to reduce the Soviet military presence in Egypt. Cairo's desire to move back to a more balanced position between East and West is indicated by its current interest in restoring normal ties with West Germany. This must give the Soviets pause. But, even if a settlement is achieved, the Soviets are unlikely to be forced out of Egypt completely because of the Egyptians' need for continuing financial and technical assistance. Preparing for such an eventuality, Moscow, in the past year, has concluded a number of long-term agreements to undertake economic projects supporting its 15-year friendship treaty with Cairo. These should guarantee a Soviet physical presence for some time to come.

5. Egypt's mounting frustration over the lack of progress in resolving the Arab-Israeli dispute has contributed to the strains between Moscow and Cairo. Sadat's increasingly bellicose language in late 1971 was greeted with a notable lack of enthusiasm in the USSR. The Soviet media did not report Sadat's militant declaration that the "time for the battle has come," and Soviet officials have privately described this kind of bombast as typical Arab rhetoric, not to be taken seriously.

6. Sadat's trip to Moscow in February offered another example of Soviet discomfort with Egyptian militancy. Prior to his departure, Sadat spoke publicly of the seriousness of the situation and warned he would set the "zero hour" for the battle when he returned. The final joint communiqué, however, played down the military aspects of the talks and instead highlighted the need

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for resumption of the Jarring mission. Soviet officials in Moscow subsequently supported this emphasis, alleging that Sadat had come to discuss a political solution.

The Military Relationship

7. Numerous reports attest that Cairo's frustrations over its military impotence have led to frequent and often bitter points of friction between Egypt and the Soviet Union. Cairo has complained often and bitterly about Moscow's performance in the military relationship. Reports of Egyptian grumblings over slowdowns in the flow of spare parts and new equipment are frequent. Minister of War Sadiq has reportedly charged in private that the Soviets were holding back both ammunition and essential spare parts which, according to the Egyptians, has left their troops with worn-out equipment far inferior to that of the Israelis.

8. Although many of the problems in the military pipeline are probably the result of natural bottlenecks or of poor Egyptian planning, it is easy for the Egyptians to imagine sinister motives for Soviet shortcomings. Egyptian complaints rarely are publicized, but occasional lapses do occur. In a Newsweek interview in December, Sadat complained that he was obliged to pay in hard currency and "through the nose" for certain Soviet military assistance.

9. As the political stalemate has dragged on, Cairo has increased its pressure on Moscow for additional military equipment that would enable it to pry more actively at Israel's grip on the occupied territory. Among other things, the Egyptians have reportedly pressed for more sophisticated aircraft with an offensive capability. Egyptian requests for such weaponry are

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often based on the unrealistic assumption that this sort of equipment would somehow prove to be the key to victory for their armed forces, even though, in fact, they would be incapable of using it effectively without extensive training.

10. Moscow has continually urged restraint. Soviet officials have reportedly warned that it would be suicidal for the Egyptians to attempt to cross the canal in force and allegedly have gone so far as to threaten that the Soviet Union would not replace the equipment lost during any such rash adventure. Although the Soviets may well have agreed to help defend Egyptian territory from an Israeli counterattack, numerous reports say that the Soviets would not support offensive operations designed to regain the occupied territory.

11. Every visit to Moscow by an Egyptian president has been accompanied by widespread speculation about further arms requests. Before Sadat left on his latest trip to the USSR in February, he strongly hinted that he would request new weaponry to offset the impending delivery of additional Phantom aircraft to Israel. The final communiqué spoke only vaguely of agreement to strengthen Egypt's defensive capability. But Soviet Defense Minister Grechko, accompanied by a high-level delegation of military experts, subsequently visited Egypt and, according to the Egyptian press, exchanged views about "increasing Egypt's fighting power." The visit of the delegation, following closely on Sadat's trip to Moscow, suggests the Soviets are conducting a serious review of Egyptian military capability and possibly, also, of their own military presence in Egypt. Even if new types of weapons are eventually supplied to Egypt, there is little the Soviets would provide Cairo that could immediately affect the military balance in the Middle East. Nevertheless, new and more sophisticated equipment might serve as a symbolic gesture of continued Soviet support for a frustrated Egyptian regime.

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12. Adding to the frictions brought on by Egyptian complaints of real or imagined delays in the delivery of military hardware are the frequently reported instances of abrasive relations between Egyptian military personnel and their Soviet advisers. After centuries of foreign domination, individual Egyptians are quick to resent foreign intruders of any sort. This sense of nationalism compounds the natural difficulties inherent in any adviser-client relationship and results in discord. Additionally, the stolid and businesslike Soviet attitude tends to offend the more open Egyptians, who characterize their Soviet counterparts as "bull-necked, arrogant bullies."

13. Frictions of this kind spawn recurrent reports that some or all Soviet personnel will be expelled from Egypt. A series of such allegations recently circulated in the Middle East press.

have alleged that three members of the Soviet Embassy in Cairo and a number of Soviet military technicians will soon be transferred at the request of the Egyptian Government. Although no concrete evidence of any expulsions has yet surfaced, such stories are a predictable product of the long-standing and massive Soviet presence in Egypt.

Egyptian Domestic Policies

14. There is no confirmation of periodic rumors that the Soviets plan to intervene directly in Egyptian domestic affairs. Soviet media from time to time provide subdued hints that more progressive Egyptian domestic policies are desirable, but Moscow has generally found Cairo's socialist orientation acceptable and has contented itself with consolidating the Soviet presence in Egypt in the hope that future developments will be more to Moscow's liking. The Soviet Communist Party is persevering in its mission to cultivate relations

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with the official Egyptian political organization, the Arab Socialist Union, perhaps with the idea that this body might one day develop into a truly effective political force. President Sadat's somewhat conservative image probably does not sit entirely well with Moscow, but the Soviets' primary anxiety is that he is less of a known quantity, and consequently less predictable than was Nasir.

15. Despite their problems with Sadat, the Soviets find the Egyptian leader preferable to the uncertainties of an even less predictable successor. Moreover, they may now be satisfied that they have a hold on the Egyptian President. Sadat has worked to improve Soviet relations with both Libya and the Sudan, where radical nationalists have caused Moscow much discomfort. Unlike Nasir, Sadat was willing to accept a treaty of friendship and cooperation with the USSR and more recently to sign a communiqué denouncing anti-Sovietism and anti-Communism in the Middle East.

16. A number of events over the past year have nevertheless generated a degree of Soviet uneasiness about the Egyptian domestic situation. Sadat's purge of leftists from the government and party last spring eliminated virtually all Egyptians who were openly identified with Soviet interests, including the well-known Ali Sabri. To make matters worse, the purge coincided with a series of high-level contacts between Egypt and the US. Soviet concern was readily apparent. Podgorny hurried off to Cairo and signed Sadat up to a Soviet-style 15-year Treaty of Friendship and Cooperation.

17. Moscow has since had other reasons for concern. During protests in January, student demonstrators asked why Soviet aid was given only in limited quantities. They also demanded to know how it was possible to accept Moscow's preference for a peaceful settlement of the impasse with Israel when

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Arab rights and aspirations dictated that a military solution was the only possible course of action. Soviet leaders must find it galling to hear such criticism in view of the massive amounts of aid they have channeled to Egypt. The Soviet public is also reportedly unhappy, or at least confused, over Moscow's support for Middle East regimes that suppress Communists.

Foreign Policy Differences

18. The Egyptians, for their part, are concerned over some aspects of Soviet policy toward Israel. The recent increase in Jewish emigration from the Soviet Union to Israel is being questioned in Cairo, and Soviet Embassy officers there have admitted being harassed by Egyptians as a result of this development. Most Arabs are extremely sensitive to this issue. They believe that the Soviet policy will strengthen the enemy and encourage its expansionist ambitions. This sensitivity is compounded when the flow of immigrants into Israel comes from a supposed friend and ally.

19. Events in the Sudan have raised further difficulties in Egyptian-Soviet relations. The Communist coup attempt in Khartoum in July 1971 caused fears in Cairo that it would have a hostile backfence neighbor. Although the Soviets urged Sadat to back the Communists against Numayri, Sadat felt impelled to support the successful attempt to restore President Numayri's control of the country. Subsequently, Cairo has apparently attempted--unsuccessfully--to mediate the differences between Khartoum and Moscow, which were exacerbated by Numayri's purge of local Communists. Egyptian efforts to draw the Sudan into the Confederation of Arab Republics, over which Sadat presides, are probably disapproved by Moscow.

20. The confederation itself is a source of worry for Moscow. Although Soviet propaganda and policy statements tirelessly urge greater Arab unity

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and cooperation, Soviet strategists are probably apprehensive about the formation of a locally inspired Arab grouping that could lead to a greater degree of independence from Soviet influence. Additionally, the confederation brings Egypt in close association with Libya's Qadhafi, whose fervent anti-Communism has discomfited Moscow on a number of occasions. The Soviet Union might like to employ its close ties with Egypt to improve relations with Libya and harness Qadhafi to Soviet-approved policies, but Cairo prefers that Soviet influence in Libya be kept at a minimum. Egyptian leaders see Libyan money as perhaps the best hope for ultimately reducing their dependence upon the Soviet Union, a view probably shared by Qadhafi and disliked by Moscow.

21. Communist China is another area where Soviet and Egyptian views differ and where frictions may have developed. Egyptian actions to maintain cordial relations with Peking are followed with close attention and concern in Moscow. The curious handling of former foreign minister Riad's trip to Communist China has caused some speculation that Soviet pressures were somehow at work. Riad's visit to Peking initially appeared to be firmly arranged, with a return via the Soviet Union. Such an arrangement was discussed in the Egyptian press but never confirmed by Moscow. Riad actually started on the first leg of his trip, but was recalled, demoted, and put temporarily on ice. When, as an adviser to the President, he again set out for Peking, no mention was made of a stop in Moscow. The idea of strengthened Sino-Egyptian ties must cause heartburn in the Kremlin, although there has been no public admission of concern.

Conclusion

22. Differences between Cairo and Moscow will continue, but they are likely to remain subordinate to the larger imperatives inherent in the objectives

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of the two nations. Moscow will probably refrain from applying too much pressure on Cairo for fear of weakening the considerable influence it currently wields. Egypt is anxious to reduce its dependence upon the Soviet Union, but cannot effectively do so until the Arab-Israeli impasse is resolved. In the meantime, the tenet that "the enemy of my enemy is my friend" will prevail, and the state of relations between Egypt and the Soviet Union will continue on the uneasy base achieved after the debacle of 1967.

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