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USSR-Egypt: Growing Estrangement

[redacted] the USSR in mid-September "officially protested" Egypt's moves toward improved relations with both Saudi Arabia and Jordan on the ground that closer ties with "reactionaries" were a setback for "progressive" forces in the area. The Egyptians reportedly rejected the protest in some heat, telling the Soviets that Egypt's relations in the Arab world are of no concern to Moscow.

Both President Sadat and his adviser Hafiz Ismail met last week with Ambassador Vinogradov, who had just returned from Moscow, and the cool state of Soviet-Egyptian relations was undoubtedly the chief topic of discussion. Cairo's ties with Saudi Arabia and Jordan are not Moscow's only concern, but these are symptomatic of a trend away from the left in Egypt's domestic and foreign policy that has caused the Soviets considerable apprehension.

Soviet propaganda broadcasts have reflected clear misgivings at the implications of this movement for Soviet interests in the area, and the criticism has grown increasingly strident in recent weeks. Moscow also continues to assert the right to comment on inter-Arab relations. One Soviet broadcast last week, for instance, criticized the policies of "certain functionaries in the Arab world" who are reviewing the subject of Soviet aid to the Arabs, accusing the Soviets of colluding with the US, and opening the door to foreign capital, thus moving from socialism toward dependence on Western industrialists.

This is indeed what Egypt, aided and encouraged by Saudi Arabia, is attempting to do, but the Egyptians have at the same time sought to maintain a balance in

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their relations with the Soviets. Sadat has been at pains, since initiating his policy realignment in July, to portray the Soviets as continuing friends and political allies whose failure to provide military aid is something Egypt must live with and accept with equanimity. Moscow's testy reaction, however, appears now to be causing an angry response from the Egyptians that could further damage Soviet interests. □

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