

81-10158



National Foreign Assessment Center

Approved For Release 2008/07/31 : CIA-RDP06T00412R000200230001-3

STAT

Secret

STAT

25X1

Egypt: The Left and Its Foreign Supporters

An Intelligence Memorandum

State Dept. review completed

Secret

PA 81-10158
April 1981

Copy 126

Page Denied

Secret
[redacted]

25X1

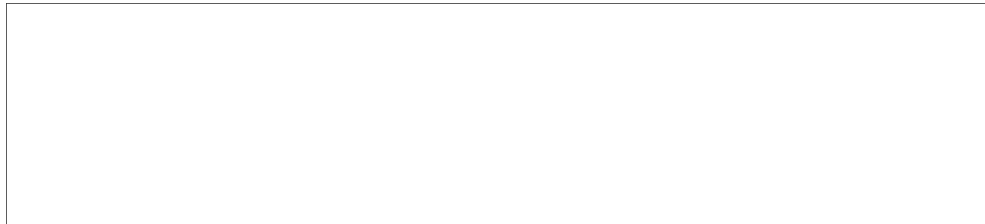
**Egypt: The Left and
Its Foreign Supporters** [redacted]

25X1

Summary

The Egyptian left is composed mainly of intellectuals who oppose President Sadat's policies of opening Egypt to Western investment, making peace with Israel, and aligning the country with the United States against the Soviets. Comprising many different groups and rival organizations, the left lacks mass support and charismatic leadership and has failed to create an alliance with the much larger conservative Islamic opposition. [redacted] 25X1

The left has links with the USSR and its radical Arab allies including Syria, South Yemen, Libya, and extremist elements of the Palestine Liberation Organization. Outside support is critical for some leftist groups which depend on foreign aid for financial support, training, and access to foreign media. Sadat has reduced the Soviet's presence in Egypt to make it more difficult for them to work with Egyptian leftists. [redacted] 25X1



Although the left poses little short-term threat to Sadat, the disillusionment of large elements of the intelligentsia with Sadat's government poses long-term problems for the regime. Sadat has failed to persuade key elements of the opinionmaking elite of the wisdom of his pro-Western policies—a failure that makes his regime more vulnerable to domestic unrest and foreign criticism. [redacted]

25X1

25X1

25X1

This memorandum was written by [redacted] Egypt-North Africa Branch, Office of Political Analysis. It has been coordinated with the Directorate for Operations and the National Intelligence Officer for the Near East and South Asia. Information as of 22 April 1981 was used in its preparation. Comments and queries are welcome and should be directed to the Chief, Near East South Asia Division, OPA, [redacted]

Secret

25X1

**Egypt: The Left and
Its Foreign Supporters**

25X1

Historical Background

Socialism and Communism have long held an attraction for Egyptian intellectuals. As early as 1901 several persons were arrested in Cairo for organizing trade unions and distributing socialist propaganda. The first Communist party in Egypt was founded in 1921 and banned in 1925. Various Communist groups and parties reappeared during World War II and remained active throughout the prerevolutionary period.

25X1

Under President Jamal Nasir the left was a prime shaper of the ideological foundation of his United Arab Republic. Leftists like Khalid Muhyi-al-Din were among the officers who planned the 1952 revolution and governed the country until 1970. Nasir's brand of Arab socialism, which rejected Marxism as atheistic but favored massive land reform and government control of most industries, enjoyed wide popularity in the early years of the regime. This homegrown socialism retains significant support today among the intelligentsia.

25X1

The Communists, however, did not fare well in the early Nasir years. In early 1953, all Communist groups, along with all other political parties, were banned. Tensions between the government and the Communists eased somewhat in the mid-1950s as Nasir's relations with the USSR warmed, but the diminution of hostility was short lived. In 1958 the Communists of both Syria and Egypt opposed the merger of the two countries into the United Arab Republic. The Iraqi monarchy was overthrown, and Iraq, where Communists had great influence for a time, proved to be a rival rather than an ally of Nasir. Nasir arrested Egyptian Communists by the hundreds, Communists denounced him as a fascist dictator, and struggle ensued.

Further swings in international alignment led to dissolution of the Egyptian Communist Party in 1965 and instructions to its members to join Nasir's Arab Socialist Union. For both the Soviets and Nasir the move was a marriage of convenience. Although many Egyptian leftists opposed it because it ended the Communists' independence, some leading leftists and Communists gained positions of influence in the regime and the media.

25X1

President Anwar Sadat's accession to power in late 1970 marked a sharp downturn in the left's influence. In May 1971, after a failed coup attempt by a group of pro-Soviet leftists led by Vice President Ali Sabri, Sadat purged the Arab Socialist Union and embarked on a program of de-Nasirization

25X1

25X1

Secret

Sadat turned toward the West, expelled Soviet military advisers in Egypt, and announced an "Open Door" (*Infitah*) economic policy that welcomed private investment from the United States and Western Europe. At the same time the political system was liberalized and Nasir's police state dismantled.

25X1

The effect of Sadat's policies has been to weaken significantly the Egyptian left's role in the country's political life. Several opposition parties are legal—although not the various Communist parties—but they have only a handful of seats in the People's Assembly. The political system is open enough to allow Egyptian leftists to air their grievances but controlled enough to keep them weak.

25X1

The regime frequently cracks down on leftist activities and periodically arrests members of the legal leftist parties as well as the illegal Communist parties. On 29 March, for example, the Interior Ministry announced the arrest of more than 70 people on charges of forming a clandestine Communist organization. About half of those arrested belonged to the legal National Progressive Unionist Group (NPUG) headed by Muhyi-al-Din.

25X1

An Intellectual Movement

The left in Egypt is very small in numbers. The various Communist groups are estimated to have less than 1,000 members. Leftists, including Nasirists, Communists, and others, have never succeeded in gaining support among the Egyptian peasants and have made only modest inroads among the urban working class. The overwhelming majority of Egyptians are loyal to Sadat.

25X1

Among the intelligentsia, however, including academics, students, lawyers, diplomats, and journalists, the left has many sympathizers. A recent assessment by the US Embassy in Cairo concluded that "most university professors, large numbers of lawyers and judges, and many respected journalists and former diplomats are fundamentally opposed to the regime's foreign and domestic policies" and attracted to the left. Many are liberals who are unaffiliated with any leftist party but who see the left as the only viable opposition to Sadat.

25X1

Many Egyptian intellectuals argue that Sadat has betrayed the ideals of the 1952 revolution. The various elements of the Egyptian left criticize Sadat along similar lines.

- The Open Door policy is blamed for the emergence of a new upper class of capitalist entrepreneurs and faulted for failing to improve the standard of living of the great majority of Egyptians.

Secret

2

Secret

- Sadat's close ties with the United States and the peace treaty with Israel are said to have led to the country's isolation in the Arab world, the abandonment of the Palestinian cause, and the erosion of Egypt's credentials as a nonaligned country.
- Sadat's political liberalization is widely perceived to be a facade for continued one-man rule. 25X1

The extent of Egyptian intellectual discontent with Sadat's policies is impossible to state with precision. Opinion polling in Egypt is a government monopoly. A recent poll of Egyptian students studying in Kuwait, however, indicated that only 10 percent supported the Palestinian autonomy proposal outlined in the Camp David agreements. Although most supported the peace treaty with Israel, more than three-fourths believed that additional Egyptian military and diplomatic pressure should be used against Tel Aviv to further the Palestinian cause. 25X1

Many prominent Egyptian journalists are loosely associated with the left. Muhammad Haykal, formerly a key Nasir adviser, has often criticized Sadat's reliance on the United States and the Open Door policy. Leftist writer Muhammad Sid Ahmed gained recognition in the mid-1970s as the first Egyptian to write positively about living in peace with Israel, but he is now a strong critic of Sadat. Neither is allowed to publish in Egypt. 25X1

These independent leftists have organized loosely into a National Coalition, which occasionally issues statements opposing Sadat's policies, especially the peace treaty. These statements have been signed by large numbers of intellectuals, including prominent figures and former government officials from the Nasir era. 25X1

Strengths and Weaknesses

The left lacks a charismatic leader to rally its followers and is badly divided. Many leftists see the NPUG and other opposition parties as too tame, but the Communists are often regarded as too extreme because of their atheistic image. The Egyptian exile community is divided into many factions.

The left has failed also to establish ties with the far larger Islamic fundamentalist opposition movements. Despite numerous leftist offers to form a broad opposition front, the fundamentalist groups, which are deeply anti-Communist, will not cooperate with even the legal leftists. 25X1

The largest Islamic organization, the Muslim Brotherhood, is particularly opposed to cooperating with the left. It regards even the NPUG as a puppet of Moscow seeking to impose Soviet-style Communism on Egypt. The Brotherhood is willing to work with Sadat in order to weaken Communist activities.

Secret

A principal source of the left's strength is the support it receives from abroad. Various elements of the left have secured aid from several foreign countries including the USSR and its radical Arab allies. The Soviets, Syrians, Libyans, and South Yemenis are involved with exile groups like the National Front, with the various Communist parties, and even legal organizations like the NPUG. Outside aid is critical to these groups and provides Sadat's foreign enemies with a weak but useful tool to use against him. [redacted]

25X1

In the near term the Egyptian left poses no threat to Sadat. Leftist leaders admit they cannot unseat him. Sadat feels confident enough about the left's impotence that he reportedly plans to free Ali Sabri soon. Nonetheless, the widespread dissatisfaction with Sadat's policies among the intelligentsia indicates that the President has failed to persuade a key element of society of the wisdom of his orientation toward the West. [redacted]

25X1

In the long run the intellectuals' disdain for Sadat tends to undermine the stability and political health of his regime. With so many of the country's opinionmakers skeptical of the President's policies, the regime is vulnerable to unrest like the food riots in January 1977 that almost toppled Sadat. [redacted]

25X1

Soviet Views

The Soviets probably share this assessment of the limited political strength of the left. The Soviets presumably consider the Egyptian leftists too isolated and divided internally to be effective in the near term. Consequently, their support has been limited, designed more to foster domestic opposition to Sadat than to engage directly in efforts to subvert the government. [redacted]

25X1

The Soviets almost certainly realize that the Egyptian Communists are too few in numbers to play a significant role in Egyptian politics even if Sadat were to leave office in the near term. On the other hand, leftists like Haykal are probably too independent for Moscow's taste and cannot be considered reliable supporters of Soviet interests. Nonetheless, the Soviets are not likely to find alternative groups in Egypt willing to work with them, and the Soviets have little choice but to make common cause with the Nasirite leftists. [redacted]

25X1

Sadat closely monitors Soviet activities in Egypt. In January 1980 Sadat expelled the remaining Soviet and East European military advisers, closed their consulates and cultural centers, and ordered the Soviets to reduce their diplomatic presence in Cairo to a handful of officials. Relations remain at the charge level. [redacted]

25X1

Secret

Secret

These moves reflect Sadat's deep concern about Soviet meddling in Egypt's domestic politics. Ever since he foiled the challenge to his leadership from Ali Sabri in 1971, Sadat has been convinced that the Soviets want to remove him from power. Soviet and East European officials are often expelled from Egypt for alleged involvement in subversive activities and cooperation with local leftists. [redacted] 25X1

Implications for the US

Anti-Americanism is a fundamental tenet of the left's appeal in Egypt. Leftist parties have sought to exploit Egyptian popular memories of the British colonial past and the massive Soviet presence in the early 1970s to whip up opposition to Sadat's close ties with the United States. The leftists hope that a significant US military, economic, and diplomatic presence in Egypt will awaken xenophobic tendencies in Egypt as the large US presence in Iran did before the fall of the Shah [redacted] 25X1

Leftist parties have denounced Sadat's offer to allow the United States to use Egyptian military facilities for the Rapid Deployment Force. Leftists argue that Sadat is actually giving the United States control of bases in Egypt that will be used to stifle revolutionary movements in other Arab countries, keep Sadat in power, and protect Israel. [redacted] 25X1

The left has recently focused on US offers to provide troops for the Sinai peacekeeping force that will replace Israeli troops in the eastern Sinai in April 1982. The left charges that Sadat is simply replacing Israeli occupation of Egyptian territory with US occupation and that a US presence will undermine Egyptian sovereignty, further isolate Egypt from its Arab neighbors, and erode Egypt's nonaligned status. The NPUG reportedly plans to make opposition to a US role in the Sinai the focal point of its attacks on Sadat in the next year. Some NPUG officials believe that this line of argument will force Sadat to ban the party and undermine his claims of restoring democratic rule. [redacted] 25X1

[redacted] 25X1

Secret

Secret

Appendix**Egypt's Leftist Parties****The Legal Leftist Parties**

The most significant legal leftist party is the National Progressive Unionist Group founded in 1976 by Khalid Muhyi-al-Din. Muhyi-al-Din was among the plotters of the 1952 coup that brought Nasir to power. Known as the "Red Major" for his leftist views, Muhyi-al-Din has long been a supporter of the Soviets, and the NPUG retains close ties to Moscow. He visited Moscow in March 1981 to attend the Soviet Communist Party congress and plans to travel to Bulgaria this spring. In the past Muhyi-al-Din has been associated with Soviet front organizations like the World Peace Conference. Arrested on several occasions during the Nasir era, Muhyi-al-Din has also maintained discreet contacts with the Egyptian Communist Party throughout his career. [redacted]

25X1

The NPUG is closely watched by the Egyptian security services, and its members are frequently arrested during crackdowns on the various illegal Communist parties. Some 300 party members were arrested following the 1977 riots, and Muhyi al-Din was detained briefly in 1979 for opposing the peace treaty with Israel. The NPUG's newspaper *Al-Ahali* was banned in early 1979, but the party continues to publish an internal, semiclandestine journal, *Al-Taqaddom*, which may be subsidized by the Soviets. It is said to have a circulation of about 10,000. [redacted]

25X1

The party is a vehement critic of the Camp David agreements and has sought to stage protests against the peace treaty. NPUG activists attacked an Israeli exhibit at the 1981 Cairo book fair and have sought to demonstrate against Egypt's close ties to the United States during visits to Egypt by senior US officials. Its ideology is a blend of Marxism and Nasirism. [redacted]

25X1

There are no reliable figures on the NPUG's size. One party member claimed 150,000 sympathizers in 1979, but the first party congress in April 1980 was attended by only 500 members. The leadership is said to be divided between Muhyi-al-Din's supporters and a Young Turk faction that favors fewer ties with Moscow and a more activist approach to confronting the Sadat regime. [redacted]

25X1

The NPUG has sought without much success to create a unified opposition front organization of all anti-Sadat parties in Egypt. A National Front was established in 1980 but it has never succeeded in gaining support from the Muslim Brotherhood and other Islamic groups. The NPUG's support for the Soviet occupation of Afghanistan has badly tarnished its credentials with Islamic opposition forces. [redacted]

25X1

Secret

NPUG leader Khalid
Muhyi-al-Din. [redacted]



25X1

The Socialist Labor Party is a much more moderate leftist party. Although it criticizes Sadat's ties with the United States and the peace treaty with Israel, the SLP is widely perceived in Egypt to be the "tame" or "official" leftist opposition. Party leader Ibrahim Shukri heads a handful of SLP members in the People's Assembly. The party newspaper, *As Shaab*, frequently rebukes the government for weakening Egypt's credentials as a nonaligned nation and isolating Egypt from the mainstream of Arab politics.

[redacted]

25X1

**Communist
Organizations**

There are several Communist parties operating illegally in Egypt or among Egyptian exiles in Western Europe. The most significant is the Egyptian Communist Party founded in 1975. The party is pro-Soviet and has close ties to other pro-Soviet Communist groups in the Middle East. It probably has a few hundred members. [redacted]

25X1

The ECP's best known leader and spokesman is Michel Kamil, head of the international relations bureau of the party. A Coptic Christian, Kamil is a journalist with longstanding ties to Moscow. Frequently imprisoned during the Nasir years, he was released in the political liberalization ordered by Sadat in the early 1970s and left Egypt in 1972. He currently lives in Paris and Beirut. [redacted]

25X1

Secret

Secret

25X1

The ECP publishes two papers in Paris, the *Democratic Papers* and the *Arab Left*, and often issues statements from its Beirut office. An underground journal, *Al-Tahrir*, appears irregularly in Cairo. The party occasionally has access to an anti-Sadat radio, the Voice of the Egyptian People, that broadcasts clandestinely from South Yemen. [redacted] 25X1



The Egyptian Communist Workers Party is a separate organization but also has close ties to Moscow. The ECWP was blamed by Sadat for instigating the 1977 food riots—a charge that vastly exaggerated the left's strength in Egypt and ignored the spontaneous nature of the rioting. Massive crackdowns on the ECWP in 1977 and 1979 severely damaged the party's organization in Egypt. [redacted] 25X1



Several other small Communist parties apparently function primarily among Egyptian dissidents in Western Europe. The 8 January Party publishes a magazine in Paris, *Solidarity*, and is composed of dissidents from the original Communist Party who opposed the merger with the Arab Socialist Union in 1965. Another splinter faction, the Egyptian Congress of the Communist Party, publishes *Red Horizon* in Paris. A small Trotskyite group also operates in exile as well as a Maoist group, the Revolutionary Current. [redacted] 25X1

25X1

Exile Groups

The signing of the Egyptian-Israeli peace treaty in 1979 prompted the creation of several exile opposition groups dedicated to overthrowing Sadat and returning Egypt to confrontation with Israel. The largest and best known of these groups is the National Front founded on 27 March 1980 in Syria, the leader of the radical Arab states opposed to the peace treaty. Although the Front has failed to demonstrate any support inside Egypt it has served as a rallying point for exiled dissidents. [redacted]

25X1

Secret

Secret

National Front leader
Shazli in 1980.



25X1

The Front is headed by former Egyptian Armed Forces Chief of Staff Saad Shazli. Shazli had a distinguished military record fighting with the Egyptian expeditionary force in Yemen in the 1960s and was one of the few Egyptian heroes of the 1967 war. He helped plan the attack across the Suez Canal in 1973, but was relieved of command after the Israeli counterattack that encircled the Egyptian Third Army west of the Canal. In his memoir, *The Crossing of the Suez*, Shazli has accused Sadat of bungling the war. Serving briefly as Egyptian Ambassador in London and Lisbon, Shazli broke with Sadat after the Egyptian President's trip to Jerusalem in 1977. Shazli is a Nasirist, and the National Front is composed largely of Nasirists, loosely organized in an Egyptian Nasirist Organization. The Egyptian Communist Party is also a member of the National Front, however, and Michel Kamil has often been named as a senior aide to Shazli.

25X1

25X1

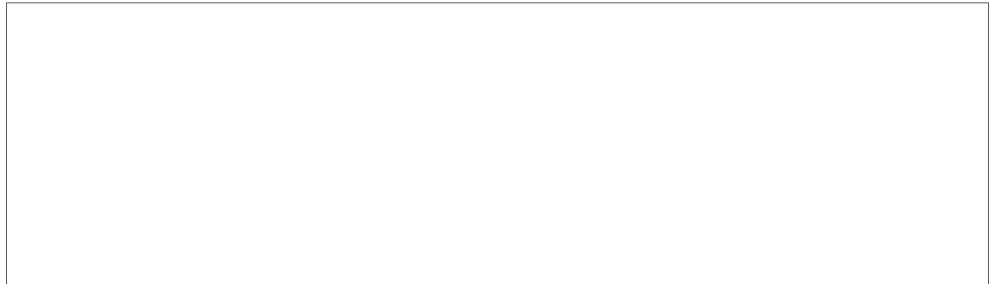
25X1

25X1

Secret

Secret

25X1



Soviet commentary has favorably mentioned Shazli as a leader of Egypt after Sadat is removed. Although he is said to be anti-Soviet, Shazli's close contacts with the ECP indicate he is willing to accept indirect Soviet support. [redacted]

25X1

Iraq supports a smaller, rival exile front organization known as the Vanguard Party. The Vanguards were formed in 1979 by Abd al-Majid Farid, formerly head of President Nasir's office. Farid occasionally has used Iraqi radio to broadcast anti-Sadat statements. [redacted]

There are several other small exile groups in Western Europe and Lebanon including the Union of Egyptian Democratic Youth, the Assembly of Egyptian Nationalists Living Abroad, and the National Union of Egyptian Students. Some have links to the PLO. [redacted]

25X1

25X1

Secret

Secret

Approved For Release 2008/07/31 : CIA-RDP06T00412R000200230001-3

Secret

Approved For Release 2008/07/31 : CIA-RDP06T00412R000200230001-3