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Prospects for Nasser

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PROSPECTS FOR NASSER

THE PROBLEM

To estimate the prospects for Nasser over the next year or two.

CONCLUSIONS

1. We do not foresee any significant challenge to Nasser's control of Egypt during the period of this estimate. His moves are often based on reactions rather than on advance planning. Hence, the years immediately ahead are likely to be uneasy ones, as he continues his vigorous *ad hoc* efforts to remake Egypt's social and political structure and to develop broader support for his regime. (*Paras. 15-16*)

2. Nasser's defeat in Syria has clearly cost him stature, but he remains the most formidable single leader in the Arab world. He will keep up propaganda and subversion against the secessionist Syrian regime and against rival Arab rulers elsewhere. He will remain strongly opposed to Arab communism. He is unlikely to cooperate in efforts to reduce tension with Israel. We do not believe, however, that he feels any immediate compulsion for direct overt use of force against either Israel or his Arab opponents. (*Paras. 19-23, 29*)

3. Nasser's basic suspicions of France and the UK probably will not change. For the next few years at least he is likely to be reasonably restrained in his dealings with both the US and the USSR because of his heavy dependence on the US for food and on the USSR for military and development aid. The nature of his interests and his objectives makes it likely that on many issues his views will be closer to those

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of the Bloc than the West. However, he will be alert to detect and will react vigorously against any attempt by either to use aid as a lever to influence his basic international position or his policies in Egypt and the Arab world. (*Paras. 14, 28-31*)

DISCUSSION

I. THE BACKGROUND

Basic Attitudes

4. Nasser believes deeply in the necessity of major social, political, and economic change in Egypt and the Arab world generally. He looks upon "unity," "dignity," "socialism," and "the end of imperialism," as interrelated aspects of a revolutionary regeneration of Arab society. He sees manifestations of the old order he is trying to destroy both in certain classes and practices in Egypt and in the "reactionary" regimes in other Arab states.

5. In trying to implement his revolution, he tends to respond to opportunities and obstacles rather than to follow deliberate plans; he does not concentrate at one time or another on internal reform at the expense of regional progress or *vice versa*. In the sensitive field of relations with Israel, with "the imperialists," and with those whom he considers their allies, his moves are often based on emotional reactions rather than on advance planning. In general, however, his essentially pragmatic approach brings him up short of catastrophe and occasionally even overrides his ideological preconceptions (e.g., his decision not to attempt a recovery of Syria by force).¹

6. Nasser's own assessment of the past 10 years must reflect a greater than ordinary mixture of satisfaction and frustration. He has wiped out the old order which flourished under King Farouk. Determined efforts by

¹ Nasser himself recently told President Kennedy's Special Representative, Chester Bowles, that many Middle Eastern developments are decided without much strategic planning and represent a pragmatic decision taken on the spur of the moment. He added that in his opinion most estimates on the Middle East, both by his own people and foreigners, are overly sophisticated.

Britain and France to destroy him have come to naught; indeed, their own influence in Egypt has vanished totally. Nasser has modernized his armed forces and launched a major program of economic development and has obtained large-scale aid from both East and West. His status as the most important leader of the Arab world has been established.

7. However, his most conspicuous triumphs were achieved some time ago; more recently, there have been few notable successes and many setbacks. Qasim's Iraq remains beyond his control. Syria has broken away from his dominance. The arch-enemy Israel continues to survive and flourish. Conservative regimes and foreign influence remain in many parts of the Arab world. Egypt itself has serious economic troubles. Thus, while his revolution has made much progress, some of the goals he seeks must appear almost as distant now as they were several years ago.

Recent Developments

8. With Syria's secession from the United Arab Republic (UAR) in September 1961, the pretensions and inhibitions which had masked intra-Arab rivalry in the past few years were cast aside. Jordan and Saudi Arabia offered support to the new regime in Damascus and entered into virulent propaganda exchanges with Nasser. Qasim also made overtures toward Damascus and gloated over the blow to Nasser's aspirations for leadership of the Arab unity movement. Nasser set out to undermine the Syrian regime by propaganda and subversion, he dissolved the United Arab States (UAS) with a blast at the Imam of Yemen, and he renewed his calls for the overthrow of King Hussein and King Saud.

9. Nasser's defeat in Syria has clearly cost him stature in the Arab world. His aura of

invincibility is gone, the unhappiness of most Syrians at the price they had to pay for unity under Nasser is evident to all Arabs, and the inevitability of unity itself has been brought into doubt. Nasser's traditional enemies are no longer as afraid of him as they were. The regimes of Syria and Iraq are openly challenging his leadership of Arab unity and of opposition to Israel. Some reformist elements are probably now facing up to the likelihood that the change they hope for will take longer to accomplish and the possibility that it may have to await other leaders.

10. Despite all this, Nasser remains the most formidable single leader in the Arab world. Even the conservative regimes cannot ignore his role as the prime defender of the Arabs against Israel, his status as an accepted international leader, and his ability to obtain aid from both the USSR and the US. To non-Communist revolutionaries and reformers in all parts of the area there is still no alternative to him as an effective source of support and inspiration.

11. Nasser's own attitudes and intentions toward the conservative Arab regimes have probably not changed fundamentally. He feels that until the governments which now rule in Jordan, Saudi Arabia, Syria, Yemen, Libya, and Kuwait are overthrown by elements sympathetic to him, the cause of Arab unity and socialist progress will be insecure. At the same time, he is probably still convinced that sooner or later the conservative regimes will fall of their own weight. While he can be expected to lend support to any indigenous movement to hasten the end of these regimes, he probably does not feel any compulsion for immediate action to oust them.

12. Both before and after the break-up of the UAR Nasser put into effect a number of radical economic measures. Some of these were probably inspired by the feeling that many of the urban middle class elements to which he had looked as the mainstay of his

revolution were themselves becoming corrupted by money and foreign influences. Others were probably intended principally as a blow against the foreign communities and against those remaining elements in Egypt who were of the same class as the "reactionaries" who had successfully defied Nasser's control in Syria.

13. The measures created confusion and uncertainty in the Egyptian economy, already affected by a dismal crop year. Most foreign and many non-Moslem Egyptian business interests were liquidated. Opportunities for the acquisition of even moderate private wealth were severely restricted. Three-quarters of the corporate sector of the economy, on which Egypt's economic growth largely depends, was brought under direct government control.² It remains to be seen whether or not these measures will seriously affect the moderate progress which had been made in the past few years in implementing development plans while maintaining stable prices and providing for a slight increase in the standard of living of the masses.

14. Nasser's increased dependence on foreign aid has been an equally important though less dramatic development of the past year or so. He has, of course, for some time relied primarily on the Bloc for large-scale economic and technical assistance for the development program and been almost completely dependent on it for military aid.³ More recently, his dwindling foreign exchange resources (which have been falling at the rate of \$50 million a year for the past three years) have led him into heavy dependence on US PL 480 shipments (\$93 million in FY 1961; an estimated

² It should be noted that most of Egypt's economic activity has always lain outside the corporate sector and remains in private hands.

³ As of the end of 1961, Nasser had received military equipment valued at about \$550 million and commitments of \$615 million in economic aid from the Soviet Bloc.

\$160 million in FY 1962) to feed his people and to maintain internal economic stability. The result has been to make him more cautious not to offend the US or the USSR. He has not, however, shown any sign of being willing to modify his policies or attitudes within Egypt or in the Arab world to suit the interests or desires of any of the Great Powers.

II. THE OUTLOOK

Within Egypt

15. We do not foresee any significant challenge to Nasser's control of Egypt during the period of this estimate. The relative importance of the various members of the small group which has long participated in his rule has shifted here and there, but none of them is known to have either the desire or the capability to oppose him actively. Despite an occasional outbreak of localized plotting among the military, the large majority of the officer corps appears loyal. The old upper class, which has long hated Nasser, has been reduced to the point where most of its members are more concerned with getting themselves and their assets out of the country than with trying to overthrow the regime. His Arab enemies outside Egypt clearly lack the capability to oust him. A challenge by Israel or any of the Great Powers, unless pushed home decisively by force, would merely rally his own people and many other Arabs behind him.

16. Nevertheless, there are probably now more disaffected individuals in Egypt than has been the case for some time. Although Nasser remains in close touch with events, he has tended to become less accessible personally and less inclined to trust his associates. His revolution is 10 years old; it has brought obvious benefits to the country but it has also left promises unfulfilled; the popular fervor of its early days is running down. While we do not believe Nasser is likely to resort to a Draconian program to try to rush

through completion of the revolution according to any set timetable, he will continue vigorous *ad hoc* efforts to remake the social and political structure and to develop broader support for his regime. In the circumstances, the years immediately ahead are likely to be uneasy ones in Egypt.

17. The urban Moslem middle class, the most politically conscious group in Egypt and the one which has supported Nasser most strongly in the past, still has a vested interest in the regime. However, Nasser's recent economic measures have almost certainly alienated many of the upper level business and professional members of this group, and, if he presses too hard with his "leveling" program, such discontent will spread. Should it penetrate into the army, it could eventually pose a serious threat to the regime. However, we believe there is little chance of such a development at least during the period of this estimate.

18. Nasser is still relatively young (44) and vigorous. He will, of course, continue vulnerable to the possibility of assassination—although in his case the degree of the threat is less than that faced by most other Arab leaders. He would most likely be succeeded by a junta of his present associates, relying for support on the army. In such an event, no great change of policy would be likely. However, the loss of Nasser's compelling personality and the probability of jealousy and bickering among his successors would probably render both the internal and external policies of the regime less effective.

In the Arab World

19. Nasser will maintain a high degree of activity and interest in the Arab world during the period ahead. Above all, he will feel compelled to respond vigorously to any move which he considers provocative, whether made by his opponents in the area, by the West, or by the Communist Bloc. Should

any of his enemies in the area demonstrate weakness, or should he see an opportunity for a spectacular personal triumph, he will be quick to take advantage of it. We do not believe, however, that he feels any compulsion for immediate action.

20. Nasser almost certainly has no immediate expectations of bringing Syria back into union with Egypt. However, he will be concerned both with preventing an alliance between Damascus and Baghdad or Amman and with promoting the replacement of the present Damascus regime with one more cordially inclined and ideologically acceptable. The instability inherent in the present Syrian situation will provide him with ample opportunities to serve both ends, and he is virtually certain to keep up a fairly high level of propaganda and subversive activity.

21. He will also continue his propaganda slugging matches with Jordan, Saudi Arabia, and Yemen. If these regimes appear to be holding their own, it is possible that eventually he will again be willing to accept temporary truces as he has in the past. However, should local opposition forces in the conservative states reach a point where they have a fair chance of a successful coup, Egyptian support would probably be forthcoming. For the time being at least, this is probably true even in regard to Jordan, despite the increased risk of conflict with Israel inherent in any upheaval there.

22. Nasser will remain deeply suspicious of Qasim and eager to prevent any expansion of the Iraqi leader's influence. He will almost certainly continue his propaganda attacks and maintain contact with opposition forces in Iraq. He will be active in trying to block Qasim's ambitions for control of Kuwait. However, we do not believe he is likely in the near future deliberately to initiate an all-out campaign to bring Qasim down. He will probably continue relatively content with the Abbud government in the Sudan. In the ab-

sence of specific provocation, he is likely to leave the conservative regime in Kuwait pretty much alone. He has refrained from openly attacking Libya on the grounds that, while reactionary, the regime has not gloried in the break-up of the UAR nor used it to abuse him. Nevertheless, Libya, ruled by an aged and ailing King, rich in oil, and geographically accessible, is a tempting target; and should a favorable opportunity occur to extend his influence into it, he probably would not pass it up.

The Neighboring Areas

23. With the ending of his primary responsibility for protecting Syrian territory against Israel and the continuing gradual increase in Egyptian military capabilities, Nasser's sense of security in regard to Israel is probably greater now than it has often been in the past. Nevertheless, he will be obligated both by his own ambitions and by Arab pressure to demonstrate his continued hostility toward the Jewish state. In the circumstances, he is unlikely to cooperate in international efforts to settle the refugee problem or to reduce tensions generally. We do not believe, however, that he will deliberately precipitate any major military clash with Israel during the period of this estimate.

24. Nasser will seek to maintain his contacts and influence with the Algerian leaders, but will probably wait to assess the implications of the settlement with France before determining his future policy toward the North African states.

However, with the emergence of an independent Algeria and the rise of new leaders and groupings of states in black Africa, the northern, central, and western parts of the continent will offer a less promising sphere for the extension of his influence. He will, of course, continue to try to block the expansion

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of Israeli influence there and will remain suspicious of Bloc and Western activities in the area.

25. Nasser will continue to give sporadic support to revolutionaries against the established, pro-Western order even in places where his own direct interests are small.

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He will also remain generally unfriendly to Turkey. His relations with Greece and Cyprus will continue to deteriorate due to the impact of his expropriation measures against the large and long-established Greek community in Egypt.

The Nonaligned States

26. Nasser will continue to take advantage of any opportunities to participate prominently in the politics of the nonaligned states, both to increase his prestige among the Arabs and to sustain an image of himself as an important world leader. He will maintain contact with Nehru, Sukarno, and other luminaries of the neutralist camp, particularly Tito whose brand of socialist progress he admires. However, he is unlikely to try to initiate any major programs or policies for the nonaligned states. He will continue to place considerable value on the UN as a useful means for promoting his policies and for protecting the interests of the smaller powers.

Toward the Great Powers

27. We believe that Nasser will continue to look upon his relationship to the Great Powers in simple terms of self-interest. He probably does not believe that he has any very important common interests with any of them. In any event, he will be much less concerned with defining such interests or coping with ideological issues than with what he thinks the various large nations are likely to do for or to him.

28. It is unlikely that in the next few years at least there will be any significant change in his basic distrust of France and the UK. Even with the Algerian settlement, he will probably continue to regard France as an enemy of the Arabs and an ally of Israel. Likewise, while remaining suspicious of the UK and keeping up such pressure as he can against it in the Middle East, he probably will not see much to be gained either from all-out hostility toward the British or from a major effort to come to terms with them. He will continue to look on West Germany as a useful source of Western technical and financial assistance. He will continue to suspect that European economic integration will become a vehicle for Western "neo-colonialism" at the expense of his policy of encouraging non-alignment, particularly among the new African states. While taking advantage of any opportunities which may occur with regard to Communist China, e.g., for increased cotton sales, he will not give very high priority to relations with Peiping.

29. In some respects, his attitudes toward the USSR and the US will be inflexible also. He will remain distrustful of any sizable Soviet activity anywhere in the Arab world, especially in Iraq or Syria, and will continue to combat Arab communism. He will oppose anything which he considers an expansion of US influence in the Middle East or US support there for Israeli, French, or British objectives. In general, he will not seek or accept any relationship based on broad understanding and trust with either the USSR or the US, nor will he modify his policies and actions within Egypt or in the Arab world to preserve or to improve his relations with Moscow or Washington. Indeed, he will probably remain unable to pass up the opportunity to take an occasional jab at US policies even on such remote issues as Panama or Taiwan.

30. At the same time, he is almost certainly convinced that his security against Israel and the success of his internal development pro-

gram—both essential to any other revolutionary advances—will depend on the continuance of large-scale assistance from both the USSR and the US. He is probably aware also that, however much the mutual antagonism of the USSR and the US and their broader international commitments may inhibit their actions, both Moscow, and to an even greater extent Washington, still possess the power to affect decisively events in the Middle East.

31. For the next few years at least, Nasser will probably be reasonably restrained in his dealings with both the USSR and the US. He will be eager to reach agreement on a multi-year PL 480 agreement, to encourage US economic and technical aid for his development

program, and to pay an official visit to the US. He may feel compelled to balance any visit to Washington with one to Moscow; and in view of the importance he attaches to maintenance of his supply of modern military equipment from the USSR, he will be careful to avoid publicizing any snags that develop in implementation of his trade and aid agreements with the Soviet Union. The nature of his intentions and objectives makes it likely that on many issues his views will be closer to those of the Bloc than the West. However, he will be alert to detect and will react vigorously against any attempt by the USSR or the US to use aid as a lever to influence his basic international position or his basic policies in Egypt and the Arab world.

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