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25 JULY 1973

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USSR - EGYPT

COMMENT ON EGYPTIAN ANNIVERSARY REFLECTS CONTINUED STRAINS

The 21st anniversary of Egypt's 23 July revolution was duly greeted in a message of "heartfelt" congratulations to as-Sadat from Brezhnev, Podgorny, and Kosygin, accompanied by Soviet central press articles placing the usual emphasis on the importance of Soviet assistance to Egypt's economic development.* Anniversary materials on the surface attempted to portray a friendly, ongoing relationship, but there were hints of continued strains and Soviet dissatisfaction with Egypt on various counts. The principal problem is that posed by the U.S.-Soviet detente and Egyptian suspicions that this lessens Moscow's commitment to the Arab cause. Additionally, Moscow seems to be concerned over internal trends in Egypt and a possible turning away from the pursuit of "socialist" principles. Another irritant is the open Cairo press criticism of Soviet policies.

† As-Sadat spelled out his preoccupation with the question of international detente in his anniversary speech in which he outlined three major factors Egypt must consider in preparing its "plan for confrontation" with Israel--Egypt's own resources, those of the Arab world, and "Soviet political and military support." The president noted Brezhnev's reassurances during national security affairs adviser Hafiz Isma'il's recent visit, but added that "to be frank," Soviet-Egyptian cooperation "has really been facing problems, including the question of international detente." Reviewing Cairo's relations with Moscow, as-Sadat revealed that from March 1971 to October 1971, when he went to Moscow, "relations were completely interrupted," and that he had been "surprised" that May when Podgorny requested the signing of the treaty. A second period of soured relations began with the ouster last July of the Soviet military experts; he said that from July 1972 to February 1973 "our relations were almost completely paralyzed." A "relaxation" began in February with the visits of Hafiz Isma'il and later the war minister.

* Soviet treatment of last year's decennial anniversary and Moscow's reaction to the ouster of Soviet military advisers, which had been announced by as-Sadat less than a week earlier, are discussed in the 26 July 1972 TRENDS, pages 13-19.

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TASS in briefly reporting the speech ignored as-Sadat's criticism of the U.S. stand at the Security Council debate on the Middle East, merely citing him as "strongly criticizing" Israel for its "maneuvering" at the United Nations, "supported by the United States." The account noted as-Sadat's expression of appreciation for the USSR's constant assistance and support in the economic, military, and political fields. A Moscow broadcast in Arabic on the 24th drew listeners' attention to these remarks, calling them "a new confirmation of the extraordinary importance of Soviet foreign policy" in the Middle East as well as a "weighty reply" to those who try to distort this policy and harm friendly Soviet-Egyptian relations.

In an anniversary article in SOVIET RUSSIA, Igor Belyayev stressed that "only" in cooperation with the USSR and other socialist countries was it possible for Egypt to implement scheduled development plans. He maintained that positive changes in the international situation in favor of relaxation would undoubtedly promote the solution of "national problems" in Egypt.

The Soviet leaders' congratulatory message also described the course of Egypt's "truly independent development" as "firmly linked" to the establishment and strengthening of firm ties of friendship and comprehensive cooperation with the Soviet Union.

+ The leaders' message, as well as SOVIET RUSSIA and IZVESTIYA anniversary articles, emphasized the importance of the Soviet-Egyptian treaty in the development of the two countries' cooperation. While such comment would be natural on the occasion of the revolution anniversary, it comes against the background of Cairo press hints that Egypt was re-examining the treaty in light of the U.S.-Soviet summit talks. TASS on the 19th implicitly recognized Western press speculation that Egypt was reconsidering the treaty when it reported that Egyptian Foreign Minister az-Zayyat in a LE MONDE interview rejected "concoctions of the bourgeois press about a 'worsening'" of Soviet-Egyptian relations. He stressed, TASS said, that Egypt would not denounce the treaty, an idea he called "absurd from our point of view."

+ A suggestion of concern over internal Egyptian developments came in the PRAVDA anniversary article by Demchenko, who took the occasion to convey his disquiet, previously expressed in a February article, over a growing trend in Egypt to encourage private enterprise, with attendant "negative social consequences." While possibly unrelated, this year's leaders' message, unlike

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the greetings sent last year, made no reference to Egypt's "road of progressive development" or to its transformation of society "on the basis of socialist principles," and did not repeat the 1972 message's call for a "significant role" for the Arab Socialist Union in Egyptian life

+ Cairo press comment on Soviet policies has continued to draw Moscow's fire. Soviet media for three successive days just prior to the revolution anniversary attacked the Cairo weekly AKHBAR AL-YAWM for a "clearly provocative" article claiming that the Soviet Union was preparing for a preemptive strike against China to force it to abandon claims to Soviet territory. The 14 July AKHBAR AL-YAWM article drew an implicit parallel between China's efforts "to restore its lost territories" and those of the Arabs, discussing the possible diplomatic, political, and military means by which Peking might achieve the return of "vast areas of Chinese territories annexed by force." Moscow's rebuttals responded indirectly to the parallel: TASS commentator Krasikov said on the 19th that the Egyptians were aware that the USSR upholds the principles of justice in relations among all states, and that this also applies to the Middle East. And an Arabic-language commentary the following day insisted that the Soviet Union continues to make all possible efforts for the success of the "just Arab cause." PRAVDA complained on the 21st that "it took an extreme lack of political principles" to publish such an article against the Soviet Union, "which is called in Egyptian political circles 'the first of our friends.'"

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NOTES

EGYPTIAN-LIBYAN UNITY: Moscow has conveyed its disapproval of union between Egypt and Libya by its treatment of the "unity march" on Cairo, launched on 19 July, to pressure as-Sadat into signing an agreement. Thus, TASS on 18 July reported that as-Sadat in a message to al-Qadhdhafi that day had called on him to prevent "the so-called 'march of Libyans'" to Egypt, and on the 21st TASS reported his second and stronger message insisting that al-Qadhdhafi take responsibility for controlling the marchers and warning that Egypt "would be compelled to apply 'the force of law'" to prevent the marchers from proceeding to Cairo. A Moscow broadcast in Arabic on the 20th summed up Cairo press comment critical of the march and cited Egyptian Foreign Minister az-Zayyat as saying in a LE MONDE interview that 1 September was the date for holding a referendum and "not for unification." The broadcast said he added that "experience from past failures prompts us to be extremely cautious."

Earlier Moscow had suggested its disapproval of Egyptian-Libyan union simply by virtually ignoring the subject. The Benghazi Declaration last August announcing plans to prepare for Libyan-Egyptian unification by 1 September 1973 was acknowledged at that time only in a brief TASS report. Al-Qadhdhafi's lengthy stay in Egypt in late June-early July for unity discussions also drew no Soviet comment.

JAL HIJACKING: Following past practice, Moscow has reported without comment the 20 July hijacking of a Japan Air Lines Boeing 747 out of Amsterdam to Dubayy and the destruction of the aircraft by the hijackers in Benghazi, Libya on the 24th. The brief Soviet reports made clear Moscow's disapproval of the action, however, and were consistent with Soviet efforts, in previous instances, to dissociate the Palestinian fedayeen organizations from the incident. A Moscow domestic service broadcast on the 21st said the motives and the perpetrators of the "new act of air piracy" were unknown. TASS on the 23d reported that the "unidentified" hijackers said they belonged to an organization called "sons of the occupied territories" and the next day cited the Palestinian resistance leadership in Beirut as calling this a nonexistent organization and describing the hijackers as "adventurists." On the 25th TASS promptly picked up a statement issued by the Palestinian command in Beirut "strongly condemning" the destruction of the aircraft and declaring that such actions "have nothing in common" with the Palestinians' struggle against Israel. TASS

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also noted Libya's denial that it had anything to do with the hijacking and reported Tripoli radio as announcing that the "group of persons" who destroyed the plane would face trial.

U.S. "VIOLATION" OF DRV AIRSPACE: For the first time since the 13 June signing in Paris of the joint communique on implementing the Vietnam settlement, the DRV has officially protested an alleged violation of North Vietnamese airspace by a U.S. reconnaissance plane. A statement by the DRV Foreign Ministry spokesman on 25 July claimed that the violation occurred along the southern coast and over nearby Con Co Island. The statement pointed out that Article 1 of the joint communique stipulates that the United States stop air reconnaissance activities over DRV territory. Following the signing of the peace agreement in January, Hanoi had periodically (beginning in March) protested alleged air violations, most recently on 21 May; Article 2 of the peace agreement--which prohibits military activities but does not specifically mention reconnaissance flights--and "the U.S. Government's commitments" were cited as prohibiting such flights.

PRG AID AGREEMENTS: Against the backdrop of recent moves by the PRG to enhance its stature as a legitimate government in South Vietnam, the PRG this month signed its first formal aid agreements with foreign states. On 5 July LPA reported that Yugoslavia's first vice minister for foreign affairs and the PRG ambassador three days earlier had signed an agreement on "non-refund aid" to "rebuild war-devastated South Vietnam." TANJUG reported the signing on the 2d, indicating that the agreement would cover the PRG purchase of 2.5 million dollars worth of installations and goods in Yugoslavia. A second aid agreement was made public some two weeks later when NCNA, on 19 July, reported that an agreement covering Chinese "emergency supplementary free economic aid" to the PRG in 1973 had been signed that evening by PRC Vice Minister of Foreign Trade Li Chiang and the PRG ambassador. NCNA noted that members of a PRG "economic specialists' group" attended the signing ceremony and had a "very cordial conversation" with Vice Premier Li Hsien-nien--the highest-level Chinese official present. LPA reported the agreement on the 20th, stating that it covered "supplemental urgent gratuitous economic aid."

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