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# U.A.R. Reasons Unclear for Odd Treason Trial

## Charge Against Journalist May Have Been Made to Prove Nasser Independent of U.S.

CPYRGHT BY JOE ALEX MORRIS JR.

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BEIRUT — The United Arab Republic has had many show trials since the 1952 revolution, but few of them as curious as one now going on in the old palace used in post-revolutionary days as headquarters for the military junta that overthrew King Farouk.

On trial for treason is Mustapha Amin, who with Ali, his 52-year-old twin brother, was the founder of modern journalism in the Arab world. He was charged last week with delivering state secrets to a foreign power.

The foreign power was not mentioned in the indictment, but it clearly is the United States. Amin was arrested last July in Alexandria in the company of Bruce Taylor Odell, a political officer at the American Embassy in Cairo, but in fact a representative of the Central Intelligence Agency.

### Admits One Count

Amin pleaded innocent. The charge carries a maximum sentence of death. He admitted a second charge of illegal currency transfers.

The details of the case may never be known, since the trial is behind closed doors before a military tribunal. The prosecution has amassed a pile of supposedly incriminatory tapes and other documentary evidence. But what has appeared in the controlled Egyptian press seems far from treason. For example, an alleged statement reported U.S.-Egyptian relations would never improve

until the U.A.R. changed its policy on Yemen and the Congo.

What gives this case its particularly bizarre flavor is that Mustapha Amin was long considered an important but unofficial channel of communication between the inner Egyptian leadership and the West. This may or may not have been true, but it was an opinion strongly held in the highest diplomatic, journalistic and political circles in Cairo.

### Can Be Understood

That such a channel—outside official lines of communication—was necessary is well understood by anyone who has lived with and dealt with the regime of President Gamal Abdel Nasser.

When U.S.-U.A.R. relations reached their low point last year after the burning of the Kennedy Library in Cairo and a flagrantly hostile speech by Nasser, official U.S. diplomatic contacts with the regime were reduced to virtually zero. As a senior U.S. diplomat in Cairo put it, "The CIA was for a time our only means of communicating with the government on urgent and important matters."

Mustapha Amin was one of those channels. How much he actually knew of the inner working and deepest thoughts of the Egyptian leadership is an open question. It is generally believed in Cairo that Nasser used him to tell the Americans and perhaps others, too, what he wanted them to know and do. Mustapha employed, but it did not increase

his protection against his many enemies. And much of the enmity directed against the bulky, bald brothers was because as professional journalists of a high caliber, they made the rest of the state-controlled Egyptian press look dull grey.

This was something that dated back before the revolution. The Amin brothers started on a pittance in 1944 with a free-swinging weekly journal that introduced modern newspaper techniques to Egypt. They used color, banner headlines, and eight-column layouts with plenty of pictures.

At the start, the Amin brothers were pro-royalist and against the powerful Wafd party. After the revolution, they were often in trouble and Mustapha was jailed several times. The most famous occasion was when they reported Nasser, and not figurehead Gen. Mohammed Naguib, was the real power behind the revolution.

When the Egyptian press was nationalized several years ago, Mustapha and Ali became employees of the paper they founded. By then, it was a mass-circulation daily that constantly outsold its competitors because of sensationalism and good editing.

It often irritated the regime. On one occasion, when other papers headlined the news Nasser was going to Moscow, Al-Akhbar devoted an eight-column headline to know and do. Mustapha employed, but it did not increase

combination of Bing Crosby and Joan Sutherland. While the other papers sold their usual quota that day, Al-Akhbar's circulation leaped 42,000 copies.

### Off to Europe

After fighting government oppression for years, the Amin brothers finally began to give in when a Marxist was made head of their publishing house. Brother Ali became a roving correspondent in Europe for Al-Ahram, the paper edited by Nasser's confidante, Mohammed Hassanein Heikal. Mustapha stayed on. When arrested, he was still working for the paper he founded.

The arrest shocked Western diplomats in Cairo, but they were sure Mustapha would not be brought to trial. Curiously, the indictment was published shortly after the U.S. announced its agreement, in principle to resume surplus food shipments to the U.A.R.

Whether there was a connection is an open question. But many observers in the Egyptian capital think Nasser acted against Mustapha to show he was not in the pocket of the Americans, even though dependent on them for food to keep his burgeoning population alive.

Mustapha's three defense lawyers will soon open their case. The burley journalist has exhibited confidence he will come out on top again, as he has so many times in his turbulent career.

As he declared in the only public session of the trial: "Because I am innocent, I welcome any court." Whether his case is misplaced remains to be seen.

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