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DEPARTMENT OF STATE  
Division of Biographic Information

SABRI, Husayn Zulficar (Air Vice Marshal)

EGYPT

Air Vice Marshal Husayn Zulficar Sabri (generally called Zulficar Sabri) may be the next Ambassador from Egypt to the United States. Zulficar Sabri, who holds the number-two position in the Egyptian Air Force, is the older brother of 'Ali Sabri, Director of President Nasir's Political Cabinet. The Air Vice Marshal was stationed in Sudan from 1949 to 1952, participated in the negotiations leading up to the 1953 Anglo-Egyptian Sudan agreement, and from 1953 to 1956 served on the international commission set up to supervise the Governor General of Sudan. He is currently Senior Air Staff Officer for Administration in the Egyptian Air Force. Sabri is a man who has good family connections and who, at the age of 20, tried his luck as a professional boxer for a few months in the United States. He is reportedly highly respected by his military colleagues and by junior Air Force officers. Quiet and personable, with a grave and serious manner, Zulficar Sabri is said to have a logical mind and a wide knowledge of Western culture. Although he is anti-British and a strong nationalist, he is by no means a firebrand. He seems to suspect U.S. motives at times, but is believed to be basically friendly toward Americans. Sabri has been described as anti-Communist.

During his service on the Governor General's Commission in Sudan, Sabri apparently disagreed with Salah Salim (former Revolutionary Command Council (RCC) member and ex-cabinet officer) over Egypt's Sudan policy; Sabri believed that Egypt should have accepted the inevitability of an independent Sudan and worked for friendly cooperation between the two countries. Strongly opposed to Salim's machinations in Sudanese politics, Zulficar Sabri told a U.S. official that he had once tried to resign on this issue but that 'Abd al-Nasir had persuaded him to remain at his post. Throughout the first year of his service on the Commission, Sabri had the reputation of a moderate whose personal integrity was unchallenged. However, he engaged in a personal feud with the Pakistani member of the Commission and in the ensuing bitter public dispute, public opinion turned against Sabri. It was reported that Zulficar revealed considerable inexperience and political ineptness during this incident.

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Zulficar Sabri was born in 1915 in Cairo of a family which has connections with a number of important figures of the old regime. One official report states that 'Ali Shamsi (former Minister of Education, onetime Wafdist, former Chairman of the Board of Directors of the National Bank) is Zulficar's uncle. An unvaluated report indicates that Sabri's mother is the sister of ex-Premier 'Ali Bahir. Zulficar attended the College de Freres, a school operated by French Roman Catholics, from 1921 to 1931. For the next three years he studied at the Faculty of Engineering at Cairo University, reportedly one of those years was a repeat of an unsatisfactory previous year. While at Cairo University, he took an active interest in boxing.

In 1935 Sabri was sent to Reading University, Berkshire England. He remained there only three months and then departed for the United States after deciding to immigrate to this country. Unable to find employment, he became a professional boxer, using the name of Hassan Sabry. He won his first two fights (in Baltimore) by knockouts, but in his next fight (in Washington, D.C.) he was knocked out in the first round. During this fight he injured his right hand and consequently was unable to continue boxing. Zulficar Sabri then went to Detroit, where he worked for a week as a magazine salesman. However he ran out of money and was forced to return to Egypt.

Sabri entered the Royal Military College in 1936; among his classmates were Anwar Sadat, Zakaria Muhi al-Din, and Husayn Shaf'i, all of whom later became RCC members. Top cadet of his class when he was graduated, Sabri was commissioned second lieutenant in 1938 and received his flying training shortly thereafter.

Early in World War II, Zulficar flew antisubmarine patrols in the Gulf of Suez until appointed second-in-command of ex-King Faruq's special aircraft. Acting on secret orders from Faruq in 1941, Sabri attempted unsuccessfully to fly the pro-German politician al-Masri out of Egypt to the Vichy French in Syria. For his part in the affair, Sabri was charged with "high treason" and imprisoned; however, he was released after four months and all charges were dropped. He was then transferred to the army, where he remained until 1952, when, following the 1952, he was reassigned to the air force. Before the Palestine War (1948) Sabri was stationed in the Canal Zone; during the hostilities he commanded a battalion, and he served for a time with Muhammad Nagib (ex-President of Egypt).

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Zulficar's wife, Sisi, is the sister of his brother 'Ali's wife. Moe. Sabri is an attractive, quiet, French-educated woman. They have two children, a daughter, Nadia, born in 1941 and a son, Amir, born in 1945. Zulficar is a Muslim but is said to be anything but strict in his religious observances. He speaks English and French in addition to Arabic.

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