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 NEXT REVIEW DATE: \_\_\_\_\_  
 AUTH: \_\_\_\_\_ STAT  
 21 APR 1980  
 DATE: \_\_\_\_\_ REVIEWER: 018645 ✓

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CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY  
 OFFICE OF NATIONAL ESTIMATES

30 January 1958

MEMORANDUM FOR THE DIRECTOR

SUBJECT: Repercussions of Syro-Egyptian Union

1. Indications are that Egypt and Syria will soon announce a formal agreement of political union. Although the considerations remain which have always made an effective integration of Syria and Egypt appear improbable, the agreements upon which Syrian and Egyptian officials have been laboring in Cairo during the past two weeks may have more significance than previous gestures toward union.\*

2. Developments to date: Intelligence on recent developments in Syria and Egypt is incomplete and we have been heavily dependent upon

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\* This Memorandum is based on the assumption of an early announcement of Syro-Egyptian union in which Nasser would be the responsible President of both countries. Subsequently, a message has been received from Cairo (Cairo Embtel 1974) \_\_\_\_\_ to the effect that Nasser plans to delay announcement of union two or three weeks. We believe that such a delay might mean that the Syrian and Egyptian negotiators have decided that the practical problems of a working union are insuperable and are preparing to try to get by with another inoperative declaration. In any case, a delay of two or three weeks would significantly reduce the impact of the announcement.

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Egyptian and Egyptian-controlled sources. There is, however, a strong body of evidence to the effect that a conflict developed sometime during the month of November between the pro-Soviet members of the ruling Syrian coalition, supported by the Communist Party, and the advocates of a neutralist position, mainly in the Arab Socialist Resurrectionist Party (ASRP) and probably in league with the Egyptians. At some point the ASRP-neutralist group apparently decided that the Communist Party was developing a capability to win elections which, if unchecked, might give it control of the country. This group acted first to postpone the November elections and then to challenge the position of the pro-Soviet group in the government.

3. The ASRP appears to have decided to redress the balance against the pro-Soviet group by calling in the only outside force capable of changing the situation in its favor. At a climactic moment the ASRP evoked the formula of union with Egypt, probably counting on the magic of the idea of Arab unity to sweep away opposition. In fact, the Communist Party changed its position by passing a vague resolution in favor of unity. Bizri hurried off to try to come to terms with Nasser in Cairo, where he met a cold reception. He was soon followed by representatives of the ASRP who joined the military group already in Cairo in urging Nasser to assume the leadership of a union of Syria and Egypt.

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4. With apparent reluctance, Nasser maneuvered to get the Syrians to accept union on his own terms. Since then, feverish negotiations have gone on between Syrian and Egyptian representatives. It was widely believed that they were seeking to produce an announcement to coincide with the close of the Baghdad Pact Conference and thus gain maximum propaganda advantage, though Nasser has recently stated that the announcement would be delayed for two or three weeks.

5. Thus it appears that the impetus for consummation of the Syrian-Egyptian union emerged from a struggle for power within Syria. Nasser was probably genuinely reluctant to take on the <sup>many</sup> problems which he knows leadership of the two countries would involve. The extent of this reluctance was probably exaggerated, however, for the benefit of the Syrians as well as of the US and USSR. Nasser probably made the decision to accept leadership of the union in order to secure his position and that of his friends in Syria and because of the strong appeal of the idea of union to him and to his followers throughout the area.

6. What kind of Union? In view of the performance of the Syrians and Egyptians in their previous attempts to implement the idea of union, and in view of the very real practical difficulties involved, we believe it unlikely that present efforts will lead to

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actual amalgamation of the two countries. At most, we believe the present agreement will produce a very loose form of federal state, with most of the present dual institutions -- Parliaments, courts, even foreign offices -- remaining active on a separate basis, but with a few joint institutions superimposed.

7. The major change which is almost certain to result from present agreements on union is the establishment of a joint Presidential office, for which Nasser is the only contender. If union had no other consequence, this alone would have profound psychological effects throughout the Arab area. Although there are physical as well as political factors which would impede Nasser from ruling Syria in the direct and personal fashion in which he rules Egypt, he probably cannot afford to give his name and reputation to the Syrian Presidency without reserving the power to protect himself.

8. Nasser is almost certain to assume a dominant role in Syrian foreign and defense policy. He is unlikely to have serious difficulties in the field of foreign policy, as his pre-eminence in this field is widely accepted among Arab nationalists. Furthermore, there is every reason to believe that approval of and support for Nasser's area policy is shared by members of the Syrian group seeking union with Egypt. Previous joint command arrangements may smooth the way for joint defense policy, although it is unlikely that the two armed forces will be made into one operational unit.

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9. Nasser will probably insist on controlling appointments to key positions in Syria, but is likely to work with and through his trusted friends in Syria like Sarraj, Syrian Army G-2, and Hawrani, leader of the ASRP, and will let them and their organizations handle the internal affairs of the country. He will probably seek to give the impression of allowing Syrians to decide strictly Syrian affairs.

10. Beyond this point Nasser faces a number of difficult decisions on the use of his power. He and his friends must face the problem of limiting the power of Bizri and Azm and of the Syrian Communist Party. Nasser will probably seek to control the Communists in Syria by applying the same techniques which he has used against the Egyptian Communist Party. He is likely, however, to find this a great deal more difficult in Syria than in Egypt. The abolition of political parties, which has been reported to be one of Nasser's conditions for accepting union, would be, of course, in accord with his political system in Egypt. It is difficult to conceive of the ASRP accepting and complying with such a condition, but it may be that they have been assured control of the National Union, or single legal party, which has been reported to be part of the plan for Syria under union.

11. In the face of these problems, Nasser will probably seek to keep the degree of his intervention in Syrian domestic affairs to a minimum consistent with the security of his position as President of the union.

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Staying out of Syrian domestic affairs would be possible for Nasser, however, only if the political and psychological effect of union so weakens the position and capabilities of Azm, Bizri, and the Syrian Communist Party that they decide to cooperate with Nasser and the ASRP under the union. If, on the other hand the Communists and their allies decide on an all-out contest for control of Syria, Nasser and his friends are likely to have serious internal security problems. The politically articulate and active part of the Syrian public is likely to go along with the union during a honeymoon period, but it is likely as time passes to become critical of its leadership and susceptible to efforts of the opposition to stir it to take hostile action against the group in power.

12. Although extensive Egyptian interference in Syrian affairs might temporarily stabilize the situation, it is likely in the long run to lead to friction and instability. Thus, Nasser is likely to become more and more deeply involved in Syrian affairs and drawn into the use of more of his powers in an endeavor to maintain control.

13. General reactions to Syro-Egyptian union: The initial impact upon area opinion of the announcement of Syro-Egyptian union will be to strengthen the position of the radical Pan-Arab group and correspondingly weaken that of the conservative Arab governments. The actual position and allegiance of very few people is likely to be changed, the radicals becoming only a bit more confirmed in their radical doctrines and the

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Conservatives perhaps somewhat less certain of themselves and more inclined to move in the direction of neutralism. Such a development, however, would only confirm an existing trend which, unless reversed, is likely to continue to grow.

14. If Syro-Egyptian union were clearly and obviously a success, it would strengthen the already significant hold of Nasser and the radical movement upon the majority in the conservative Arab countries. A union in existence would have a continuing appeal to all Arab nationalists. If, on the other hand, the union were an obvious failure, if conflict and dissention broke out between Egyptians and Syrians, and if the position and interests of the two countries appeared to decline as a result of union, the prestige of Nasser and the radical Pan-Arab position would suffer correspondingly.

15. The Conservative Arab Governments: The governments of Saudi Arabia, Iraq, Lebanon, and Jordan would certainly regard effective union between Syria and Egypt as a serious threat to their position. However, all will recognize the dangers involved in publically attacking the principle of unity and all are likely to reaffirm their support for it. They are all likely to assert that the challenge should be met by an increase in US assistance and plead for a change in US foreign policy toward Israel and other issues which make its allies in the area vulnerable to the attacks of the radical Arab nationalists.

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16. Counter-Union: King Hussein of Jordan, of all the conservative leaders, will feel most directly threatened because of his position between Egypt and Syria and because of the general insecurity of his position in Jordan. He has already sought to explore the possibility of a union of the conservative states to counteract the influence of the Syro-Egyptian union. He has not had an enthusiastic response. King Saud, as an absolute monarch, is opposed to the idea of any sort of union. Lebanon is unlikely to take risks in the present situation without strong guarantees from the US. Iraq is most likely to consider Hussein's proposals favorably, although Iraqi policy has been preoccupied with avoiding entanglement. King Hussein himself, of course, would probably be cautious about union with Iraq alone, a situation in which Jordan would almost certainly be over-shadowed. In any event, any moves toward union which the conservative rulers might make in order to strengthen their position would probably be presented as complimentary rather than antagonistic to Egyptian-Syrian union.

17. The Baghdad Pact: Coming at the time of the Baghdad Pact Conference, the dramatic announcement of Syro-Egyptian union would be likely to give impetus to already strong tendencies within the Pact to demand more affirmative support from the US. Since the union would be regarded as a force competing with the Pact for regional support, it would have some initial unsettling effect, and if it worked out successfully this effect might be substantial.



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18. The Israeli reaction: The Government of Israel is certainly gravely concerned by moves toward union of Egypt and Syria. Israel has several times announced that it would not tolerate such a union and would use force to prevent it. Under present circumstances, however, it appears unlikely that the Israelis are prepared to embark on another action similar to the Sinai invasion of November 1956. They are probably aware that the union of Egypt and Syria is unlikely soon to increase the military strength of the two countries. They probably feel that there is at least an even chance that the union of the two countries will produce political problems which will actually weaken them. Although they are skeptical of Nasser's neutralism, they may feel that the increase of Egyptian influence in Syria will, at least temporarily, reduce the pace of Soviet penetration. We believe it likely that the Israelis will check the status of military preparations for both defensive and offensive action against the Egyptians and Syrians, and await developments.

19. The US Position: The Egyptians and their Syrian friends have taken care to see that the US has from the beginning been given their version of developments within Syrian and of preparations for Syro-Egyptian union, which emphasized that the issue in Syria was neutralism and Arab nationalism versus Communism and pro-Soviet policy. Both countries have made approaches to the US to point out that developments leading to Syro-Egyptian union were in the interests of the US and urging that the US not interfere. The implication of these approaches has been that Nasser's /

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were being borne out in his actions with regard to Syria, and that the US should at least not oppose these developments. Although this account was probably designed to influence the US not to oppose Syrian-Egyptian union, we believe that it is generally in accord with the facts.

20. The Soviet Position: The Soviet Government was apparently aware some time ago that Nasser was taking action to reduce General Pizri's power and that Egypt was entering into the contest between the pro-Soviet and neutralist groups. There have, however, been no indications of active Soviet participation in the events leading to agreement on union. They may have chosen to follow a passive course because they feel that Azm and Bizri were going too fast and too far in forcing obligations upon them, because they feel that over the long run Nasser's type of neutralism will do as much to deny the area to the West and prepare the ground for Soviet domination as more costly and dangerous methods, or because they believe that Syro-Egyptian union is likely to encourage radical Arab nationalist trends favorable to their general interests throughout the area. There is evidence that the Egyptians have sought to represent events in Syria as being in the Soviet interest and have sought to influence the Soviets to accept Syro-Egyptian union. It seems likely that the Soviets will soon publicly announce their support for Syro-Egyptian union.

21. Probable Developments: A precise estimate of the consequences of Syro-Egyptian union is impossible in advance of the announcement of the

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terms of union. We believe, however, that, as a result of union, Syrian domestic affairs are likely to come under the control of a coalition of the ASRP and the military group around Sarraj, and that Nasser will exercise a kind of veto authority over personnel and policies and dominate Syrian foreign and defense policy. In many ways, Syria will remain a separate country. Although the Communist Party's power is likely to be reduced and the pro-Soviet elements removed from the top echelons of government, their influence will remain. The country is likely to continue to be riddled by factionalism. Chances are at least even that there will be serious conflicts between Syrian and Egyptian leaders within the next year or so.

22. The Conservative Arab states are unlikely to take effective counter-action in response to the Syro-Egyptian union. The influence and prestige of the radical Pan-Arab movement represented by Nasser is likely to increase throughout the area as a result of the union at least in the short run.

23. The Soviet Bloc is likely to continue its established approach to the Arab states. It is unlikely to withdraw or modify economic or other support as a result of Syro-Egyptian union or even as a result of the demotion of Azm and Bizri or the harassment of the Syrian Communist Party. It will continue to seek to establish economic control and psychological influence over Syria and Egypt and to encourage antagonism toward the West.

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