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7 October 1970

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PFIAB 9 October 1970

THE MIDDLE EAST

- I. You gentlemen were briefed extensively yesterday on the current situation in the Middle East, and I do not think that there is any more detail I should add at this point, but there are two perspectives I would like to discuss with you.
 - A. First, in the aftermath of the U.S. peace initiative, the Jordanian fighting, and Nasir's death, it would appear to be worthwhile to examine how the Middle East must look, not to us, but to the Russians.
 - B. And secondly, I want to discuss with a little more perspective the probable impact of Nasir's death on the principal problems and issues within the Middle East.

The Soviet Union in the Middle East

- I. Let me start by summarizing briefly our basic assessment of what the Russians are up to in the Eastern Mediterranean, and then we can

Sensitive

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determine whether anything in recent events suggests that the evaluation needs to be revised. Kremlin policy in the area has undergone two strong tests in the past month, first in the clear Soviet concern that the Jordanian developments might evoke Western intervention, and then in the loss of Nasir, Moscow's most effective point of influence with the Arabs. The evidence, however, indicates that while the Russians might have to make some tactical policy adjustments, their fundamental strategy remains unchanged.

II. Since 1955, the USSR has concentrated on expanding its political influence and military power throughout the Middle East--wherever and whenever possible at the expense of the West. It has pursued this goal with considerable success, chiefly by exploiting the bitter Arab-Israeli dispute to its own advantage.

A. The Soviets probably recognize that their interests will be best suited by conditions of endemic high tension, as opposed to all-out

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conflict on the one hand or a settlement on the other.

- B. Full-scale war could destroy the client regimes Moscow works with in the area, and risk a larger conflict with the attendant danger of a direct U.S.-Soviet confrontation.
1. The Russians have accordingly worked-- despite an occasional miscalculation, to reduce the possibilities that the more radical Arabs could initiate or provoke a new war.
 2. They have in some degree limited the number and the quality of the offensive weaponry delivered to the Arabs, in an attempt to prevent them from overestimating their strength.
 3. As an example of Moscow's desire to keep tension short of complete chaos, the Soviets interceded with Syria last year to restrain the fedayeen units which--with support from Damascus--were trying to topple the Lebanese government.
- C. At the same time, while the USSR has made good virtually all of the Arab equipment losses in

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Sensitive

the 1967 war, Soviet propaganda has drummed on the necessity of "eliminating the consequences of Israeli aggression." Arab emotions are whipped up by allegations of imminent Israeli or U.S. attack--a ploy dangerously similar to the miscalculated Soviet maneuvering which led to the 1967 war.

1. Moscow from time to time has induced some flexibility on Arab political tactics when this suited Soviet purposes, but we have no indication that Moscow has ever brought any serious pressure to bear in Cairo or elsewhere in the Middle East for substantive concessions that could facilitate some progress toward a settlement.

III. To measure recent events against this assessment, take the Soviet response to the U.S. peace initiative early this summer.

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- A. Moscow seems to have appreciated that the situation along the Suez Canal was growing steadily more dangerous.
 - 1. Soviet pilots had engaged--and been shot down by--Israeli pilots.
 - 2. The Israelis were showing determination to maintain their superiority over the west bank of the Canal whatever the risk of a direct clash with Soviet forces.
 - 3. There were also signs of growing concern in Washington.

- B. The U.S. peace initiative therefore came at a propitious time for the Russians. It offered a breathing spell along the Canal.
 - 1. The Soviets may also have calculated that the Israelis would not agree to a cease-fire, so that ostensible Arab acceptance would score diplomatic and propaganda points for Moscow and Cairo.

- C. As far as long-range Soviet goals were concerned, however, subsequent developments

SECRET
Sensitive

have indeed made it clear that acceptance of the U.S. peace initiative was no reflection of any change. Far from pressing the Egyptians to enter into serious negotiations, the Russians virtually guaranteed an impasse by their apparent decision that the advantages of completing the air defense system along the Canal outweighed the consequences of their duplicity in violating the agreement.

IV. In reaction to the Jordanian fighting, Moscow appears to have been concerned primarily with the possibility that the Syrian intervention could bring in either Israeli or U.S. forces, to the general detriment of Arab interests and thereby Soviet interests.

A. ~~The evidence is very clear that the Soviets intervened,~~ *There is considerable evidence that once the Syrians*
made a demarche in Beirut warning of this possibility, ~~and making no secret of their disapproval of Syrian intervention.~~ *we do not know how strongly they urged the Syrians to withdraw*

1. We do not believe that the Soviet demarche was decisive in bringing about

SECRET
Sensitive

the Syrian withdrawal, but it shows that the Russians were willing to put some strain on their relations with their more radical Arab clients to maintain a measure of stability in the Middle East.

- V. Nasir's death no doubt was a shock to the Soviets, who must have been concerned that their entire stake in Egypt had suddenly been put on the line. Nevertheless, Kosygin's extended talks with the Egyptian leaders provided him an occasion to express Moscow's desires and at the same time to sound them out on sensitive issues. All in all, Kosygin probably returned home from the funeral with some confidence that the new leadership will at least initially continue Nasir's policies, recognize the necessity of and the price for Soviet aid, and therefore not jeopardize Soviet interests.
- VI. Moscow probably views its prospects in the Middle East generally with considerable hope, despite Nasir's death, the prospect of continued Arab feuding and fedayeen terrorism, and the

SECRET
Sensitive

USSR's own exaggerated fears of Communist Chinese inroads in the area.

- A. The Arab-Israeli dispute, which gives Moscow its main leverage, shows no sign of abating. Soviet military power both in Egypt and in the Mediterranean has been demonstrated to all and has thoroughly ensconced Moscow as a principal power in the Middle East.
- B. Anti-western, "progressive" Arabs have recently seized power in the Sudan and Libya, and have shown at least some interest in expanding ties with the USSR. And the polarization of the area continues to the disadvantage of the United States.
- C. While Moscow is probably aware that there will be short-term setbacks to its efforts, it surely views its prospects as a growing military and political force in the Middle East as very bright.

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The Arab World After Nasir's Death

- I. To turn to my other point, the passing of President Nasir from the scene is bound to have considerably more effect, in both the short term and the long run, on a number of loose ends in the Arab world than it does on Soviet long-range strategy.
 - A. Egypt, which Nasir had made the focal point of Pan-Arabism and resistance to Israel, will be preoccupied with establishing the domestic viability of a successor regime. The United States must look for some new leader with the strength to speak for the Arabs in peace talks. King Husayn has lost a patron in his struggle against Arab radicals and Palestinian extremists. Even the Israelis will have to make a new assessment of what new faces and forces may take control on the Arab side of the Middle Eastern conflict.
- II. Within Egypt, the choice of Anwar Sadat to replace Nasir appears to be an attempt to offend as few people as possible.

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- A. Sadat carries a certain degree of legitimacy to his new position by virtue of the fact that he was one of Nasir's close associates in the revolution of 1952, and was named as Vice President in late 1969.
- B. Since there was no obvious successor to Nasir, those in his inner cricle who now hold much of the power in Egypt avoided controversy by choosing a familiar face.
- C. Unlike Nasir, whose authority was virtually complete, Sadat must share his power with those around him, including Minister of the Interior Sharawi Jumah, Minister of State Sami Sharaf, Minister of War Muhammad Fawzi, and others of lesser ilk.
- D. Sadat may have been a compromise candidate, chosen for his weakness, and it is not yet clear how long he will fill the post of presidency.
 - 1. Nasir's death was a thorough shock to Egypt and it will be some time before a system of leadership to replace his style of one-man rule evolves in final form.

-10-

Sensitive

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2. This process will see further changes in the upper ranks of Egypt's leaders, and there is also the possibility of a grab for power by some disgruntled military groups.

III. The instability of the successorship will probably make Egypt's foreign policy even less flexible now than it was under Nasir.

A. Nasir's strength and popularity allowed him to make possibly unpopular decisions; his more cautious heirs must take more pains to ensure public support.

1. We already have some evidence of this from the discussions in Cairo between Egypt's new leaders and the U.S. delegation to Nasir's funeral.
2. All of the Egyptians were adamant against the unilateral removal of any missiles from the standstill zone along the Suez Canal, and one candidly admitted that such a move would "provöke dangerous

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Sensitive

reactions within the country" which could endanger the new leadership--an obvious reference to the military.

3. On the other hand, they also indicated their desire to see peace efforts continue. Sadat told Secretary Richardson that Egyptian policy would continue to be based on Nasir's acceptance of the U.S. peace initiative, and that Cairo hoped the talks under UN special representative Gunnar Jarring would be resumed soon.

4. On October 6, Foreign Minister Riad *indicated* ~~said~~ Egypt was ready to extend the cease-fire ~~for another three months,~~ provided further peace efforts are made under the UN Security Council resolution of 1967 from which Jarring derives his charter.

B. This decision provides some time for the new leadership to settle down before facing the hard decision on whether or not to pursue the war of attrition against Israel.

SECRET
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1. Many Egyptians are reluctant to resume active hostilities, but if no political settlement is forthcoming, pressures will eventually mount for a try at re-taking the Sinai Peninsula--particularly in view of the improved defensive system installed in Egypt by the Soviets.

C. Meanwhile, Cairo will probably continue to coordinate peace efforts with Jordan, but the Egyptians now have even less influence with the Syrians than Nasir did. They may have to decide--as Nasir came close to doing at times--that when it comes to coordinating peace negotiations, Damascus is a hopeless case which might as well be ignored.

1. In dealings with other Arab states, Egypt may still enjoy some momentum for a while from Nasir's forceful bid for leadership, but without him Cairo's voice in inter-Arab affairs is bound to be weakened, and may continue to diminish.

2. The new leadership, furthermore, will

SECRET
Sensitive

need some time to set its own house in order, and in the interim its prospects for pan-Arab leadership will be neglected.

D. What this all means is that the already unstable Middle East is in for further fragmentation and polarization without Nasir's moderating influence.

IV. The death of Nasir has not changed the nature of King Husayn's problems in Jordan, but he is now thrown back on his own resources in dealing with the Palestinian commandos and with other Arab leaders--particularly in coping with his radical neighbors, Syria and Iraq.

- A. In the past, he could look to Nasir to mollify or even to threaten Arab and Palestinian leaders who objected to Jordan's westward-leaning policies.
- B. Husayn feels he must crack down on the fedayeen to retain the loyalty of his army and the Jordanian East Bank population, and he ~~is~~ ^{is} ~~plans to name~~ ^{is talking about naming} a hard-nosed opponent of the Palestinians, Wasfi Tal, as prime minister.

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1. [REDACTED] he also feels that his principal external threat now comes not from Israel but from his so-called Arab "brothers" to the north and east, Syria and Iraq.
2. Accordingly he plans to ask the Iraqis to remove their ^{15,000}~~27,000~~-man expeditionary force from Jordan, and he is going to reposition the bulk of his military forces to cover the northern border with Syria and the western desert facing Iraq.
3. He will have to move very cautiously with respect to the fedayeen. He by no means won a complete victory in the recent fighting, and he could be in deep trouble if either Syria or Iraq gives substantial help to the Palestinian commandos in a renewed showdown.
4. The fact of the matter is that King Husayn is a convenient and tempting target for the Palestinians, the Syrians, and the Iraqis to work off their frustrations,

--15--

Sensitive

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Sensitive

because none of them seriously intends to take on Israel. Nevertheless, the Syrians have now been burned once, the Iraqis are no more likely to get embroiled in Jordanian fighting in the future than they were in September, and the fedayeen will, at the very least, need some time to recover from the last round. If they operate without outside allies, Husayn can probably handle them.

C. For the fedayeen, the next few months will be a time of regrouping, reorganizing and perhaps redirecting their movement.

1. They will have to sort out their new situation in Jordan and their relationship with the government, which ultimately may not be very different from what it was before.
2. Some fedayeen leaders recognize that they do not pose a real military threat to Israel. They also recognize their dependence on the Jordanian people and government for at least a way station

Sensitive

toward their eventual goal of a separate and independent Palestine.

3. This should lead some of them to work out a new living arrangement with the King.
4. The more radical types, however, are likely to remain hostile to Husayn and the other Arab leaders who, they believe, have abandoned the Palestinian cause. The extremists remain determined to radicalize the entire Arab world against Israel.
5. Terrorist incidents, aircraft hijackings and bombings, kidnapings and attacks on property are thus likely to continue, but now conservative Arab interests may be among the targets.

V. As for the Israelis, their leaders continue to believe that things can only be better in the Middle East with Nasir gone.

A. At a recent Jewish New Year celebration in Jerusalem attended by numerous high Israeli

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Sensitive

officials, an observer who polled the gathering said that "to a man" the Israelis considered that the devil they didn't know would be better than the devil they did.

1. Mrs. Meir said that Nasir had not used his strength "for good," and indicated he would not be missed by Israel. When asked how Israel could hope to do better with a weaker man, Mrs. Meir countered with a strong "Why not?--Why shouldn't things get better sometimes?"

B. This Israeli view derives from three basic factors:

1. Firstly, they looked on Nasir as their Number One Enemy; he had been able--to Tel Aviv's frustration--to stay in power after two massive defeats at their hands. They didn't trust him; they held him as dedicated to the eventual extermination of Israel. He was thus--as they saw things--unwilling to make a peaceful settlement; or, if he did, they didn't

Sensitive

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believe he would keep it. They expect the new regime in Cairo--even if it becomes more radical--to be so preoccupied with political infighting and maintaining power that its diplomatic and military punch will be much weaker. An added advantage would be that a radical Egyptian regime would further weaken Cairo's standing with the United States.

2. Second, the Israelis believe that Nasir's death will set back Arab nationalism ten years. Nasir provided what mortar there was in Arab unity and cooperation. With him gone, they expect more inter-Arab fighting and greater independence of action, or inaction. They think that more and more, Cairo's sway over the Middle East will be sharply reduced and the Arab states will quit "checking it out with Cairo." The Israelis clearly expect that a leaderless, more divided Middle East can be to their profit, if only for its ineffectiveness.

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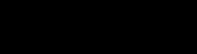
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3. Third, another advantage Israel sees in Nasir's death is that it probably pushes pressure for peace negotiations further into the future. The Israelis were dragged into the peace talks; they didn't really want to negotiate, primarily because they don't believe they can get a settlement now acceptable to them.
4. Their territorial requirements are at such odds with positions of the Arabs, the Soviets, and the United States that a settlement on Israeli terms is impossible. Israel was particularly fearful that the territorial issue, if pressed, would result in a break with the U.S.
5. Now, they reason, if a settlement is postponed, so much the better. Israeli officials figure that the Arabs will come around "sometime," and until they do it on Israeli terms, it's good to have the defensive advantages involved in retaining the occupied Arab territories.

-20-


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C. We can therefore expect that Tel Aviv  25X6

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 will hold to its position of "no talks without a rectification of the Egyptian-Soviet missile deployment along the Canal." Also, we may hear the theme from Tel Aviv that with the moderate Nasir gone, there is no Arab leader left with enough authority to make dealing with him worthwhile.

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