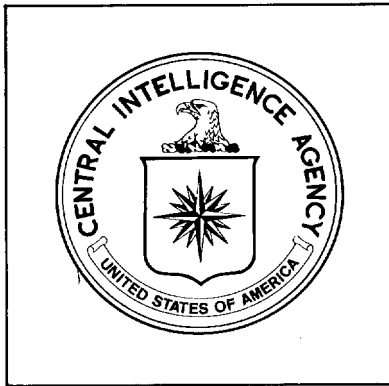


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135

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MIDDLE EAST – AFRICA – SOUTH ASIA

This publication is prepared for regional specialists in the Washington community by the Middle East - Africa Division, Office of Current Intelligence, with occasional contributions from other offices within the Directorate of Intelligence. Comments and queries are welcome. They should be directed to the authors of the individual articles.

CONTENTS

Egypt: Arafat Pays a Visit 1

Seychelles-UK: Results of Constitutional
Conference 3

Pakistan: Identification of Alleged "Assassins"
in North-West Frontier Province 5

Apr 7, 1975

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Egypt

Arafat Pays a Visit

Palestine Liberation Organization Chairman Yasir Arafat is in Cairo, after an absence of several months, attempting to repair recently strained relations with Egypt. In meetings with President Sadat, Arafat almost certainly is arguing against Egyptian participation in another round of step-by-step negotiations and seeking assurances that Egypt will insist on a role for the PLO if the Geneva talks resume.

The Palestinians were pleased at the breakdown of indirect negotiations between Egypt and Israel, and probably believe that the Egyptians are now more likely to accommodate the needs of the other Arabs, including Palestinians. Arafat, who conferred briefly with Sadat at the funeral of King Faysal late last month, may have received some indication that Cairo would now be more receptive to Palestinian desires.

Sadat, who within a few months must face an Arab summit and the prospect of a Geneva conference, wants to reduce the level of Palestinian opposition to his negotiating tactics, but this will not prompt him to make major concessions to the PLO. Sadat will probably seek Arafat's agreement that the other Arabs should be allowed to negotiate the terms and timing of the Palestinians' attendance at Geneva. Sadat is also likely to refuse to defend actively the Palestinians' preferred strategy of an independent PLO delegation. The Egyptians will probably repeat--at least for bargaining purposes--their earlier suggestion that the Palestinians could be represented by the 20-member Arab League.

Arafat and other PLO leaders most likely would not agree to be represented by the Arab League, or to the incorporation of Palestinian representatives into the delegation of a single Arab state. The

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1

Apr 7, 1975

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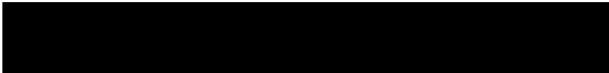
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relatively moderate leaders of the PLO would, however, probably be willing to endure the wrath of their radical colleagues by accepting a formula that designated the PLO as one of several members of a single, joint Arab delegation.

The two parties are unlikely to settle the representation issue--or much else--during Arafat's visit. The visit, however, probably will reduce some of the friction in Egyptian-Palestinian relations, thereby relieving Arafat of the need to rely so heavily on Syria for political support.

Arafat's aim, during the current period of diplomatic uncertainty, is to get on good terms with all of his traditional backers. He has visited six Arab states in the past week, and reportedly plans an early trip to the USSR. (CONFIDENTIAL)

25X1A



Apr 7, 1975

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Seychelles-UK

Results of Constitutional Conference

The two-week conference of UK representatives and leaders of the Seychelles islands' two major political parties ended in London on March 27 without a final agreement on a constitution for the Indian Ocean island chain, expected to become independent sometime before late June 1976. The participants did agree, however, on the elements of an interim constitution; it will go into effect probably within a few months. Another conference will be held next January to resume drafting of an independence constitution for the 60,000 Seychellios.

Under the interim constitution, James Mancham, the islands' chief minister and head of the Seychelles Democratic Party (SDP), and Albert Renee, leader of the opposition Seychelles Peoples United Party (SPUP), agreed to form a coalition cabinet of eight SDP and four SPUP ministers. They also agreed that each party will name five new members to the current legislature; this will make a party balance of 18 SDP and 7 SPUP deputies. These seem to have been concessions by Mancham, perhaps designed to avert a walkout from the London conference by the leftist SPUP. Renee had been demanding new legislative elections prior to independence. He is upset by the fact that his party received 48 percent of the vote in elections last year, but was awarded only 2 of 15 legislative seats.

Renee is determined to prevent a repeat of the 1974 election. As a result, the London talks were dominated by a battle between the two Seychelles parties over the post-independence electoral system and the size and composition of the legislature.

25X6

(Continued)

Apr 7, 1975

CONFIDENTIAL

3

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The thorny issue of the disposition of some disputed islands in the British Indian Ocean Territory (BIOT) was mentioned by the Seychelles' leaders, but never fully discussed. In his opening speech, Renee made the point that Seychellois want independence for all of the country, including the three island groups--Farquarhar, Aldabra, and Isles des Roches--detached in 1965 and joined with Diego Garcia and other islands to become the BIOT. The three island groups, Renee demanded, must be handed back to the Seychelles government in Victoria, the capital. Mancham, who has gradually been forced by Renee's hardline to be more assertive, still sounded a less strident tone, noting the need "to consider the future of those Seychelles islands now incorporated in BIOT."

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25X1A

Apr 7, 1975

4

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Pakistan*Identification of Alleged "Assassins"
in North-West Frontier Province*

After a two month investigation, the government claims it has identified the persons who carried out the murder on February 8 of Hayat Mohammad Sherpao, Prime Minister Bhutto's main lieutenant in the politically sensitive North-West Frontier Province on the Afghan border. According to the authorities, a five-man group plotted Sherpao's murder. The alleged leader was Nisar Mohammad Khan, a prominent landowner who, prior to his ouster from Bhutto's Pakistan People's Party in 1973, had been Sherpao's main rival in the party's frontier provincial branch. The alleged co-conspirators include three members of an anti-government student group and Asfandyar Wali, a son of Wali Khan, the chief of the opposition National Awami Party. The government says two of the students escaped to Afghanistan; the rest of the alleged conspirators are in custody.

US officials in Pakistan, as well as many Pakistanis, are skeptical about the validity of the charges against the five. Some people are claiming, moreover, that the government brought Wali Khan's son into the case only to lend credence to its contention that the National Awami Party was involved in Sherpao's death. The government all along has been blaming Sherpao's murder on the Awami party, despite an apparent absence of hard evidence. Shortly after the murder, the party, which is the largest political group in Pakistan's frontier provinces, was banned and hundreds of its leaders and adherents were arrested.

The government may hope to obtain guilty verdicts by submitting the case to a special tribunal responsible for sabotage matters. In this tribunal, rules of evidence are more relaxed than in the regular courts. The apparent absence of any major threat to the government's authority in the North-West Frontier Province since the

(Continued)

Apr 7, 1975

5

CONFIDENTIAL

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crackdown in February against the National Awami Party may have led Islamabad to conclude that it can now take the further unpopular step of convicting the alleged conspirators on flimsy evidence, without jeopardizing its ability to maintain control in the province. The latest Pakistani actions are likely to stimulate further verbal carping from Afghanistan, long a supporter of Islamabad's opponents in the frontier area. (CONFIDENTIAL)

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Apr 7, 1975

6

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