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Background paper prepared by the head of the Near and Middle East desk at the Soviet Foreign Office, G.T. Zaitsev, for Dimitri Shpilov, before his trip to Cairo

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Summary:

Egypt tries to establish a non-partisan, inter-Arab alliance to help combat supposed imperialist moves by the United States and England through the signing of the 1955 Bagdad Pact between Turkey and Iraq. Egypt also moves towards a cooperative relationship with the Soviet Union.

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1. Egypt's position towards the military alliances established by England and the US during the past few years:

The Egyptian government has decided not to join the aggressive alliances that the US and England are creating in the Near and Middle East. The leading figures in the government publicly criticized the Western Powers' imperialist and colonial policy and especially [their efforts] to pressure Egypt or other Arab countries to join the military pacts. 'We support the right of self-determination and object to wars, [we are] for world peace and want an end to imperialism in all parts of the world' - declared the Egyptian Prime Minister in a meeting in Fiume [Rijeka] in the beginning of this month.

The Egyptian government's position is explained chiefly by the Egyptian people's anti-imperialist mood, a consequence of the 73-year-old English occupation of Egypt. However, we must note that there was a tendency toward neutralism and non-participation in Western military pacts in the Egyptian bourgeois elite, and the same can be said about the current foreign policy of the Nasser regime.

After the US and England organized the signing of the Turkish-Iraqi pact in February and tried to convince other Arab countries to sign it too, the Nasser government, fearing that the strengthening of the Turkish role in the Middle East and the promotion of Iraq to the first tier [of Arab countries] would result in the loss of Egypt's leading position in the Arab world, acted against the widening of the aforementioned alliance to other Arab countries and proposed the establishment of an independent non-Western Arab military alliance, based upon the Egyptian-Syrian-Saudi pact. The Egyptian initiative, supported by Syria and Saudi Arabia, hamstrung the implementation of Anglo-Americans plans to establish an aggressive bloc based upon the Turkish-Iraqi pact.

While the Nasser government is currently opposed to the aggressive alliances, it does not hide its close relations with the Western powers and internally represses the democratic movement [while] declaring publicly that it is anti-Communist. Nasser, in his meetings with Anglo-Americans, said that Egypt's non-participation in a military alliance with the West could be explained by the 'psychological unpreparedness' of the Egyptian public to such an alliance. In an interview on March 20 Nasser told a correspondent of the Sunday Times that, for 'psychological reasons,' the time was still not ripe for Egyptian support of the 'Organization for the Defense of the Middle East,' which is being established by the US and England. It should also be noted that Emile Boustani, the well-known Lebanese politician and capitalist, declared that Egypt 'is one hundred percent ready to conciliate with Turkey and the West, but now feels that the Arab countries can achieve more if they haggle with the West.'

Despite the inconsistency of Nasser's foreign policy, and how it might change if closer relations with England and the US were possible, the current Egyptian position of non-participation in the aggressive blocs certainly impedes the Anglo-American attempts to establish an anti-Soviet bloc in the Near and Middle East, and enables us to take countermeasures.

The Egyptian government's stance against the Turkish-Iraqi military bloc helped Syria, Saudi Arabia and Yemen maintain their position of non-participation, and has recently precluded the governments of Lebanon, Jordan, and Libya, who are closely aligned with the US and England, from joining this bloc. This position has also played a positive role at the time of the Afro-Asian Bandung Conference, where the representatives of Egypt, led by Nasser, stood in one bloc with India, Indonesia, and other countries against openly American agents such as the delegations of Turkey, Iraq, Ceylon, and Thailand. Another encouraging sign is the joint statement regarding international affairs, which Nehru and Nasser released on 12 June.

2. Soviet-Egyptian relations:

The Egyptian government's position regarding the aggressive blocs, and the criticism by several Egyptian representatives of the colonial policy of the imperialist countries, were the precondition for cooperation between Soviet and Egyptian representatives in international forums. More than once, the Soviet Union supported the rightful demands of Egypt to strengthen its government's sovereignty and its national independence.

As a result of the difficulties that Egypt has encountered in its economic relations with the West, it started in the past [few] years to develop its economic, and especially commercial, relations with the Soviet Union and the European People's democracies. In late 1953 and early 1954 the Egyptian government sent an economic delegation to those countries, led by the Deputy War Minister, General Ragab. The delegation presented the Egyptian government's interest in developing economic ties between Egypt, the Soviet Union, and the people's democracies. While the Egyptian economic delegation was in Moscow, the Ministry of Foreign Trade submitted to it a list of projects which the Soviet Union might be able to assist with, such as building industrial facilities and irrigation systems. The Egyptian government did not respond to these offers. In July 1954, Prime Minister Nasser and Deputy Prime Minister Gamal Salem discussed, in meetings with our ambassador Solod and the commercial attaché Alexenko, the possibility that the Soviet Union would aid Egypt financially and technically by building a large irrigation system in the Aswan region (Upper Egypt). The investment was estimated at over one billion rubles. The Egyptian government said it would be useful to know in advance who are the Soviet specialists who would come to Egypt [and added] that five or six Soviet experts could be sent to Egypt. However, the Egyptian government failed to issue visas for those specialists. According to the Soviet embassy in Egypt, Nasser, the Prime Minister, was against inviting the Soviet experts, fearing that it might encourage sympathy for the USSR.

During 1954 a revival of the economic relations between Egypt and the democratic camp countries was discerned...

The Egyptian government has turned to us requesting that we sell it arms. A positive reply was given to the Egyptians and currently a negotiation over the selling of Czechoslovak weapons, manufactured by our license, is going on...

3. Future development of Soviet-Egyptian relations:

Egypt's interests and the Soviet Union's are not opposed. Our stance in regard to the imperialist blocs and the colonial policy of the Western powers has given rise to a great wave of sympathy towards the Soviet Union among very broad segments of the Egyptian public...

The participation of Arab countries in the aggressive blocs which are being created in the Near and Middle East is a very important issue for the Soviet Union. Hence our policy in these countries and especially in Egypt should be aimed at impeding the Anglo-American attempts to make other countries join those blocs.

Therefore it would be useful to find out whether the Egyptian government is going to continue with its policy of non-participation in the Anglo-American military pacts and how it will conduct its relations with the Soviet Union in the future.

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