

September 15, 1955

**Memorandum of Conversation between the Soviet
Ambassador in Egypt D.S. Solod and Egypt's Prime
Minister G. Nasser**

Citation:

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Summary:

President Nasser discusses a Soviet-Egyptian arms deal and claims he is pleased with the agreement. However, he worries that Britain will no longer supply arms to Egypt as a result of this agreement.

Original Language:

Russian

Contents:

Translation - English

Top Secret...When I told Nasser, according to instructions from headquarters, about the signing of the Soviet-Egyptian arms deal on 12 September in Prague, he said that he had heard the same news and had already received the full text of the agreement. He was pleased with the agreement, especially the delivery of airplanes and the financial arrangement that allowed the Egyptian government to pay [only] a fifth of the deal's worth in British pounds... Nasser, hinting at the Americans and the English, saying: "You can imagine what would happen on 25 October when the first shipment of Soviet weapons arrives. This would become the talk of the day from Alexandria to Aswan." Nasser expressed the Egyptian government's concern that an agreement to supply IS-3 heavy tanks, two torpedo ships, and two submarines had not yet been reached. Nasser alleged that the Soviet representatives were not authorized to negotiate over these weapons. The Egyptian government was in great need of these weapons and had no other source of supply, since once the news of the Soviet-Egyptian arms deal leaked out, no Western country would agree to sell weapons to Egypt. Egypt had a contract with Britain for the supply of heavy 'Centurion' tanks and two torpedo ships already paid for, [yet] Britain had not delivered them to Egypt, while it had supplied Israel with two of these ships...Then Nasser noted that the Americans reacted severely to rumors about Soviet-Egyptian negotiations regarding weapons supply by the Soviet Union to Egypt. According to Nasser, the rumors on the supply of Soviet weapons to Egypt had barely started when the American ambassador in Cairo, [Henry] Byroade, asked to meet with Nasser, and dwelt in particular on the danger of the growth of Soviet influence should Egypt purchase Soviet weapons, not only in Egypt but in all of the Arab countries. At the end of the conversation, Byroade produced a list of American weapons which the US could supply to Egypt in any time and in any amount. The document listed over a hundred types of bombers, fighters, and tanks as well as other weapons systems. Byroade allegedly said that if Egypt joined the American collective defense, it would receive these weapons for free. Nasser turned down the American offer, and also declined to purchase American weapons in dollars. He did agree to buy American weapons in Egyptian currency, knowing full well that American law allowed acquisition of weapons in dollars only. After that, Byroade allegedly started 'pestering the Egyptian Foreign Minister Muhammad Fawzy by engaging him in long conversations on this subject'. That was why, Nasser summed up, Egypt could not acquire weapons from the West. Egypt, in this context, would be in a disadvantaged position in relation to Israel, which could get heavy weapons from the U.S. or Britain in any quantity. Considering all of this, Nasser asked me to submit his request for [purchasing] heavy tanks [of the] 'IS-3' type, two torpedo ships, and two submarines from the Soviet government. [A positive reaction, he said] would lead to a renewed balance of power in the Middle East. In order to simplify the negotiations over this request and to explain how detrimental to Egypt's position the situation in the Middle East was, Nasser asked to allow his office director, Ali Sabri, to travel to Moscow to explain why the weapons were so essential for Egypt. His trip to Moscow was essential also because one could not explain all of this in a diplomatic telegram. Nasser also added that without heavy tanks and a navy, the Egyptian army would not be prepared to repel an Israeli attack. The threat of such an invasion always existed. Two weeks prior a war with Israel was on the verge of eruption, and this threat was even more substantial in light of the Western powers' dissatisfaction with the Soviet-Egyptian arms deal. Besides, the Western powers assume that Egypt's first defeat in a war with Israel would open a window of opportunity for the American agents in Egypt, in which they could use the defeat to set the Egyptian people against its government and create anarchy. All of this would pave the way for the overthrow of the current regime and its replacement with some Egyptian pro-Western Pasha...