

May 21, 1955

**Memorandum of Conversation between Soviet
Ambassador to Egypt D.S. Solod and the Egyptian
Prime Minister G. Nasser**

Citation:

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Summary:

President Nasser discusses with Soviet Ambassador Solod possible relations with communist China and his fear of conflict with Israel. Nasser then turns to the economic and political relations between the USSR and Egypt

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Russian

Contents:

Translation - English

According to prior arrangement, I met with Nasser who preferred to discuss the results of the Bandung conference at the beginning of the conversation. He doubted whether the participants would follow its resolutions, since those gave each country the opportunity to interpret them according to [its] liking. He thought that the importance of the conference lay in its moral effect. He remarked that out of the ten points of the resolution whose subject was [world] peace, seven were proposed by Egypt and this was the best answer to the question, 'Does Egypt want peace?' Regarding the contacts that he had with representatives of Communist China, Nasser said that Sheikh Bakuri, the religious endowment (Wakf) minister, and Prof. Mustafa Kamel were currently in Beijing to study the question of whether to establish commercial relations between Red China and Egypt. He also discussed the question of whether to recognize Red China with Zhou Enlai who understood Egypt's constraints in this regard. According to Nasser, the Americans and the British were exerting pressure on the Egyptian government not to have any relations with China. Egypt could not ignore the Anglo-American position for fear that they [the Anglo-Americans] might stop the evacuation of the British forces from the Canal Zone. That was the reason why Egypt abstained during the vote in the UN over the inclusion of China, yet in his [Nasser's] heart of hearts he was for recognizing China. Nasser asked for my advice on this and I said that the establishment of diplomatic relations between China and Egypt was in Egypt's and the other Arab countries' interest because this would strengthen their position in the UN. For instance, during the [25 September 1954] UN vote over the Moroccan question, Egypt and the Arab countries were unable to obtain a sufficient number of votes [in order to inscribe the item on the U.N.'s agenda]. But had China participated in that vote, several abstaining states might have voted otherwise. Then Nasser declared that Egypt was facing the grave threat of Israeli aggression. In his view, the Western powers were supplying Israel with heavy weapons while denying them to Egypt, despite [Egypt's] best efforts. France had agreed to supply Egypt with tanks but later doubled their price, which brought the negotiations to a standstill. Nasser was worried that the Americans might allow Israel to invade Egypt, and the Egyptian army would be wiped out within 24 hours. Of course, the Anglo-Americans would not let such a thing happen, and yet they could appear as arbitrators [in the conflict with Israel] and force Egypt to comply with resolutions it did not accept. That was why the Egyptian government had decided to make the equipping of its army with heavy weapons a top priority. Accordingly, even before his trip to Bandung, Nasser gave Hassan Ragab, Deputy Minister in the War Ministry, instructions to contact the Soviet military attaché and ask him about the Soviet position regarding the purchase of arms by Egypt. So far he has not received any news from Ragab. I answered that on 6 April Ragab called upon the Soviet military attaché and approached him with this question and, as far as I know, on 12 April Ragab got our reply, which was that the Soviet authorities were ready to start negotiations on this subject. Later Ragab had asked that these conversations would be conducted in Prague rather than in Moscow. We had agreed to that as well. Yet, Ragab had not returned to us with any sort of reply and it seemed that it was up to Egypt to make the next move. Nasser answered that if that was the case then 'tomorrow I will send Ragab to negotiate with your representatives'. Nasser then turned to the economic relations between the USSR and Egypt and said that Egypt had no preference for either East or West. Moreover, Egypt wanted to strengthen its economic ties with the Soviet Union; however, it had a limited ability to do so since the Americans and the British had already told Egypt that any move in that direction might have negative consequences. The Egyptian government interpreted that as a threat to stop the evacuation of the British troops from the Canal Zone. Then he started to develop a 'theory,' which stated that strengthening of the economic and cultural relations between Egypt and the Soviet Union would encourage the local communists to intensify their activity against the current regime. In his words, the local communists were behaving in ways which were detrimental to the national interest. Allegedly, they interfered in the establishment of the revolutionary regime and portrayed Nasser as an Anglo-American stooge. Since it was clear that communist activity in Egypt was connected to, and a reflection of, the general policy of Moscow, he assumed that the Soviet Union was poised against the current regime. I told him that he had the wrong impression of Soviet policy. The Soviet Union was interested in the enhancement of world peace and the coexistence of the two systems - both capitalism and socialism. Nowhere and at no time did the Soviet Union interfere in the internal affairs of other countries... Besides, if the

Egyptian government wanted to verify that the Soviet government did not have any kind of egoistic intentions towards Egypt it should suggest to start a discussion on signing an agreement which would contain a clause on mutual non- interference in internal affairs. Nasser did not provide any reply to this question and said that Egypt was in great need of economic assistance. [Nasser added that] this issue had political as well as economic ramifications. I replied that we understood the political aspect of developing the economic ties with Egypt. In particular, when [Abd al-Moneim] al-Kaisouni, the Egyptian Minister of Finance, raised the possibility of starting negotiations over the purchase of rice from Egypt, our positive reply was given with the political dimension in mind. Nasser said he needed to study the issue of economic and technological relations between the Soviet Union and Egypt. Accordingly, he wanted Ali Sabri, the director of his office, and, in his words, 'the man he trusted the most,' to meet with the commercial attaché and other representatives of our embassy to discuss the issue in detail. After hearing Sabri's report he would himself reach a conclusion and instruct the appropriate ministries as to how to approach the issue. However Nasser reiterated that strengthening economic ties between Egypt and the Soviet Union might lead to serious complications in his relations with the US and Britain and thus he could not expedite the process. According to Nasser, Egypt was currently under a lot of pressure, exerted by the Anglo-Americans and caused by its defiant position with regard to the Turkish-Iraqi Pact. Then he added that initially he had no intention of acting against the American plans in the Middle East, but events made him reconsider his position and reach his current stance. The Egyptian government's main goal was the evacuation of the British troops from the Canal Zone and it would achieve that goal regardless of the Anglo-American actions. Afterwards Nasser asked whether the Soviet Union might assist in convincing Syria to sign the tripartite agreement between Egypt, Syria, and Saudi Arabia. When I asked what kind of assistance he had in mind he did not respond...The Soviet ambassador in Egypt D. Solod.