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President Nasser's Visit to Syria

There was nothing surprising about President Nasser's visit to Syria. In the first place, he was due to pay another of his tours of the country. Furthermore, he had just returned from his first visit to the leading country in the Western bloc where he had mixed with world leaders and addressed the General Assembly of the United Nations Organisation as Head of a leading Arab State. It was therefore clearly good tactics on his part to parade himself at this time when reports of his excursion into summit heights were still freshly impressed on the minds of those people who were dissatisfied with the Egyptian administration of their country. His personal popularity among the masses in Syria, though not what it was, is still one of the main means by which the Union is kept together.

The visit provided a good platform to reply to King Hussein and also appear in the rôle of protector of Syria against Jordanian adventures and conspiracies with Israel.

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Jordan's recognition of Iraq

The Iraqi Foreign Minister, Hashim Jawad, took the opportunity of his visit to New York for the United Nations General Assembly, to make friendly approaches to Jordan and the U.A.R. He has long favoured the reduction of tension in the Middle East. The Jordanians, in need of all possible friends (particularly in view of their dispute with the U.A.R.), responded with embarrassing enthusiasm and have been pressing the Iraqis ever since for the rapid re-establishment of normal relations. Communications between the countries have been re-opened and Ambassadors are to be exchanged. This may perhaps help, as seems to be intended by both sides, towards a general improvement in inter-Arab relations.

Tension between the U.A.R. and Iraq

There have been no recent hostile gestures from either side. As a result the situation is a good deal calmer.

The Islamic Party

The proclamation of the Islamic Party and the subsequent arrest of many of its leaders is of some importance although the party is not a major one.

(a) it is the first serious personal attack on Qasim and the inefficiency of his régime. A lot of Iraqis sympathise with the views expressed.

(b) the other Nationalist parties took no open action in support of the Islamic Party and the Nationalists seem as faction ridden and lacking in unity as ever.

The resurgence of Nationalist activity has produced a host of rumours but Qasim is still showing his wonted skill at maintaining himself in power.

The Oil Negotiations [to be used only if questioned-].

The negotiations between the Iraq Government and the Iraq Petroleum Company over the revision of the terms of their concession are still in progress and seem likely to drag on for some time. The principal issue at stake is the question of the proportion of the unexploited concession area which the company should relinquish and when.

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United Kingdom Delegation,  
OTAN/NATO,  
Paris, XVIIe.

November 24, 1960.

Dear Arculus,

May I refer to Peter Murray's letter of November 16 to John Beith about NATO discussion of the Middle East. In the Political Committee on November 22 the following points were made :-

(i) On Iraq, the German Representative said that the recent changes in the Government had mainly been made for technical reasons, but that Quasim's recent speeches suggested that he was at present ready to curb Communist influence. He could afford to do this because of improved relations with the U.A.R. It was agreed that there should be an exchange of views next week on the significance of the recent governmental changes. The French Representative thought that the strikes in Baghdad were a serious portent.

*V10316/27(A)*  
(ii) On Jordan, the French Representative said that the Lebanese Government was worried about anti-U.A.R. Jordanian activities in the Lebanon, but he did not produce any evidence for this concern beyond that in Beirut telegram No. 130 Saving. The Italian Representative said that the Lebanese and Moroccan Governments had urged moderation on King Hussein in the past, but were now concentrating on reassuring Cairo.

(iii) On the Arab League, the Secretariat enquired whether delegations considered there was substance in the rumours of a split in the Arab League on the Jordanian issue that might lead to some open breach in the League.

(iv) On the Sudan, it was agreed to exchange views next week about Nasser's visit.

(v) The German Representative said that Hakim Amer had left for Moscow on November 10 together with Hafiz Ismael. As the latter had taken part in the negotiations for Soviet arms in 1956, a new deal might be in prospect.

2. If you have any comments on the above we should be grateful for them in time for the next meeting of the Political Committee on November 29.

*Yours ever*  
*Peter Petrie*  
(P. C. Petrie)

R. Arculus, Esq.,  
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(V 1071/30)

FOREIGN OFFICE,

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S.W.1.

November 26, 1960.

This is a quick reply to catch the weekend bag to your request of November 24. If there are further developments I may send a chapter in Monday night's bag.

Iraq

2. The German statement on Iraq is correct as to fact but we do not agree with the inferences drawn from those facts. Some rather inefficient Ministers have been replaced by officials; two of them happened to be fellow travellers; Qasim has indeed been making hostile remarks about "anarchists" (clearly alluding to Communists) in one or two speeches; there have been no recent acrimonious exchanges with the U.A.R.

3. It would be wrong however to deduce from all this that Qasim is about to turn against the Communists. Qasim's main purpose since he came to power has been to maintain his position as "sole leader". He, therefore, regards the Communists, as the best organised political party, as a potential threat and connives at anti-Communist repressive acts by nationalist officials which tend to curb Communist strength. At the same time Qasim realises that the Communists constitute the only political group which really accepts him. He therefore finds it necessary to make conciliatory gestures to them from time to time. There is no reason to assume that this basic situation has in any way changed. We would not like to make any predictions at all but, given the motives from which Qasim seems to act, a conciliatory gesture towards the Communists would be just as likely as further action against them.

4. It would be a mistake to draw any conclusions of great significance from the recent government changes. The fact that the new Ministers are officials rather than politicians should be an indication that no major political change has taken place.

5. The cigarette workers' strikes in Baghdad arose because Nationalist officials rigged the Trades Union elections to prevent the Communists from winning. The Communists refused to take this lying down and as a result of the ensuing minor violence there has been a certain amount of Government reaction; the arrest of leading Communists and the suspension of Communist newspapers. However, the whole business is part of the long standing struggle between the Nationalists and the Communists with Qasim maintaining himself skillfully in position between them.

Jordan

6. Activities by Jordanian agents and against Jordan from Syria both remain potentially dangerous. The Jordanian agents do not seem very competent and the Syrians, like the Jordanians themselves, have every reason for the utmost vigilance. But there is always a risk of an incident having serious repercussions, or of agents exceeding their brief.

P.C. Petrie, Esq.,  
United Kingdom Delegation,  
OTAN/NATO,  
Paris, XVIIe.

/Arab League

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Arab League

7. We have seen nothing about a split in the Arab League so serious that it might lead to an open breach. The basic conflict over the Palestine question, of course, remained unresolved at the last meeting, but the Iraqis made considerable efforts to prevent a complete breakdown, and the U.A.R., though discomfited, will certainly try to go on using the League for their own purposes.

Sudan

8. I enclose a copy of Khartoum telegram No. 880 which has just come in. We may have more material anon.

U.A.R./U.S.S.R.

9. We do not yet know what is the main purpose of Amer's visit to Moscow. It may be to sort out difficulties remaining in the Arms deal which has been under negotiations for the last two years and which we believe to have been substantially concluded. It may be that a further effort will be made to secure specific items of importance, e.g. MIG 19's. There might be a new deal in prospect. We should be glad of any information their delegation can contribute. We may be able to let you have more ourselves later on.

(R. Arculus)

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United Kingdom Delegation,  
OTAN/NATO,  
Paris 16e.

V1071/30(A)

November 29, 1960.

Dear Archulus

Many thanks for your letter to Petrie of November 26 (V 1071/30). I was able to use most of this in the NATO Political Committee's discussion this morning. On Iraq, the French representative referred to a report that the Kurd communist leader Basani was in Moscow and had been received by Mukhitidinov. Hooper (in the chair) emphasized that the Kurds were an important factor in the Iraq situation. The Turkish representative was inclined to interpret recent developments as a swing by Quasim against communism; otherwise NATO opinion seemed to be generally in line with ours. Jordan and the Arab League did not come up, but we discussed Nasser's visit to Khartoum. I spoke on the lines of Khartoum telegram No. 880. The Belgian thought that Nasser might be seeking Sudanese support for U.A.R. intrigues in the Congo and referred to a rumour (which sounds a bit improbable) of a meeting between Nasser, and the Commander of the U.A.R. troops in the Congo on the Congo/Sudan border. The French representative said that Nasser had invited Kardelj to visit the U.A.R. in December, while Tito was contemplating visits to Ghana and Guinea.

2. On Amer's visit to Moscow, the Italian and Turkish representatives confirmed your paragraph 9 and added that he might also be discussing the High Dam. The Soviet Ambassador in Cairo had told his Italian colleague that Amer's visit "was of an entirely private character".

*[Signature]*  
(Peter Murray)

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NATO MINISTERIAL MEETING  
PARIS, December 16-18, 1960.

Brief 5

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This paper was drawn up as a result of meetings of Middle East experts at which we were represented by the Head of the Levant Department. Much of the material in it is taken from drafts prepared here, and such comments as we had on the final draft have been taken into account. We have, therefore, no quarrel with the paper which surveys the Middle East generally (straying as far as Saudi-Arabia, the Yemen, Pakistan and Afghanistan) from the point of view of Soviet penetration and tactics.

2. The main development since the paper was written is in United Kingdom/United Arab Republic relations, on which members of NATO have individually been kept fairly fully informed. If the opportunity arises, the Secretary of State may wish to say something about the reason for the Egyptian reluctance to go ahead with the exchange of Ambassadors. This is, in our view, partly due to a certain basic reluctance on the U.A.R. side to take the plunge over Ambassadors, which the attitude of the WAR Mission in London has done nothing to diminish, and to efforts of those in Cairo who wish to put pressure on us about Consulates and delay the arrival of an Ambassador. The expulsion of the U.A.R. Ambassador and his staff from the Congo has not eased the position.

3. There have also been disquieting signs of the Sudan exposing herself to Russian influence, possibly on the advice of President Nasser who visited the Sudan in late November. There are indications that the Sudanese may send a delegation to Moscow fairly soon to discuss a Russian loan and possible military aid. We can only speculate about this at present, but it may be that the Sudanese Government feel in need of some striking success to offset increasing internal opposition; and that President

/Nasser

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Nasser may have advised them to take some Russian aid in order to achieve a more truly "neutral" position according to his standards. We are seeking further information about Sudanese intentions and do not wish to promote discussion at present. The Secretary of State may, however, wish to be aware of the position in case other Ministers express disquiet about the Sudan.