ARABS SPLIT SHARPLY ON PLANS FOR DEFENSE
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ARABS SPLIT SHARPLY ON PLANS FOR DEFENSE

Egypt's Efforts to Form Alliance Fail to Arouse Much Enthusiasm

By ROBERT C. DOTY
Special to The New York Times.

CAIRO, March 12—The fundamental conflicts in interests and ambitions within the Arab world have been stripped bare by two months of envenomed dispute over opposed Egyptian and Iraqi views of a suitable defense policy for the Middle East.

Egypt's frantic and, in the opinion of many observers, clumsy endeavors to unify the majority of the Arab states in opposition to Iraq's westward orientation, as expressed in her treaty with Turkey, appear to have produced an opposite result. There are prospects for a four-way split among the eight states comprising the Arab League.

At two poles are Iraq, seeking security in her exposed position close to the Soviet Union through links with other "northern tier" states, and Egypt, determined that, at least for the present, the defense of the Arab world should be exclusively Arab.

Aligned with Egypt in a new defense grouping committed to the latter view are Saudi Arabia and Syria. Nervous neutrals between the two camps are Lebanon, whose trading interests made it unwise to alienate either, and Jordan, disqualified for participation in Egypt's plan for unified armies by British participation in the financing and command of her defense forces.

Minor Factors

Remote from the struggle geographically and politically are Yemen and Libya, neither of them sufficiently advanced to be an active factor in the defense of the area.

The current disarray of the Arab world focuses attention on a study of the general question of Arab unity and leads to the conclusion that the defense dispute had merely revealed fissures, not created them.

Factors tending to unite the Arabs are their common language and religion, shared cultural traditions of the Arab and Ottoman Empires and suspicion of the big powers who exercised dominion over the area in one form or another for the last century.

Instead the Arab loyalties are divided among eight petty artificial sovereignties set up by Britain and France as they withdrew from the Middle East. Around each cluster groups of politicians, all still proclaiming a devotion to the concept of Arab unity, but unwilling to forego parochial privileges to achieve it.

For the last eight years only common enmity to Israel has maintained the semblance of unity against these forces of disunion. Events of the last ten days have again demonstrated that the threat from Israel is still the most potent incentive to the Arabs to close ranks.

The Israeli attack in force on Egyptian Army units in the Gaza strip rallied all Arab states, regardless of their position in the defense dispute, to moral support of Egypt.

Hopes Are Dimmed

The Gaza attack and acts of Egyptian hostility toward Israel that preceded it, including the seizure of an Israeli ship on the approaches to the Suez Canal and the hanging of two Jews as spies, appear to have ended for a time the hopes entertained in some Western circles that Cairo might take the lead in reaching a settlement of the Arab-Israeli dispute.

These hopes are based on the fact that the degree and intensity of the antipathy toward Israel varies substantially among the Arab states.

Among the Iraqi and Egyptian leaders, Western diplomats thought they detected a more realistic attitude. Although those leaders, in deference to the prevailing public opinion, maintained an intransigent attitude in public statements, in private conversations they acknowledged, however grudgingly and unhappily, that Israel was a reality and likely to remain one.

With this attitude as the starting point, the Western diplomats foresaw the possibility that a revision of the present armistice demarcation lines and some plan for repatriations and possibly compensation for the Arab refugees, underwritten and financed by the West, might pave the way for a peace settlement.

The prospects for such a turn of events were darkened by the current Arab dissension over defense and by the Egyptian anger over the Gaza incident.

Egypt, fighting for an allegiance of the Levant states to a policy of aloofness from defense links with the West, has intensified her hostility toward Israel. Iraq, in these circumstances, is unlikely to make any conciliatory gesture toward Israel that would appear to give support to these Egyptian charges.

Hidden Gloom

Despite the official fanfare with which the agreement of Egypt, Saudi Arabia and Syria to form a new defense and economic grouping was greeted in Cairo, there was ill-concealed gloom behind the scenes over the failure of this move to stir enthusiasm elsewhere in the Arab world.

A glance at the map reveals the reasons for this atmosphere. None of the members of the new alliance has a direct land connection with either of the others and none of them has air or sea power that might overcome this handicap.

The addition of Jordan and Lebanon to the alliance would help to give it some meaning by closing the gap between Syria and Saudi Arabia and by bringing the boundaries of the coalition up to Israel on all sides.

Egypt accordingly has engaged in a great effort to enlist the adherence in principle of Lebanon and Jordan to the new pact before convening a meeting in Cairo late this month for the purpose of drafting a formal treaty.

Thus far, despite both tender inducements and veiled threats, Lebanon has persisted in her attempts to act as mediator between Egypt and Iraq without committing herself fully to either. Hopes of including Jordan in the pact foundered on the fact that the British-officered Arab Legion could not be incorporated into the projected unified Arab army. Egypt has written off Jordan, but continues to exert pressure on Lebanon to bring her into the pact.

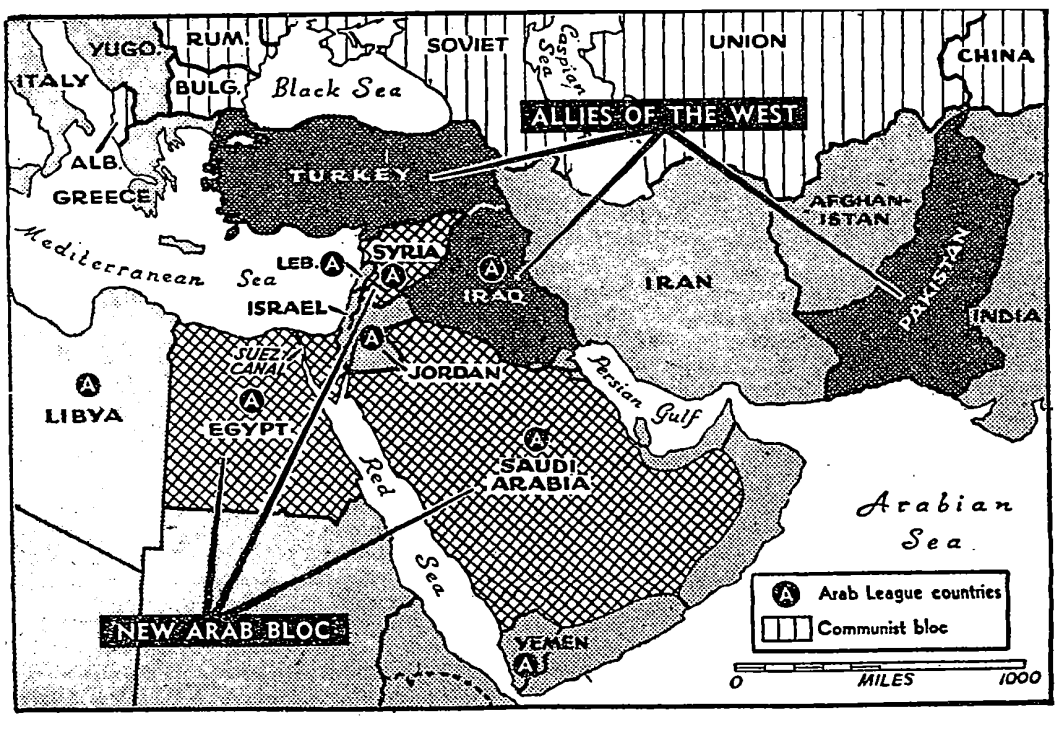
The first hints of this tactic appeared in the controlled Cairo press. Periodicals revealed that Maj. Salah Salem, Egyptian Minister for National Guidance (propaganda) and Sudan Affairs, who has acted as quarterback for the Egyptian diplomatic effort, had been authorized by Saudi Arabia to draw up a plan for economic cooperation open only to states adhering to the new alignment.

Cairo's Assurances

Egyptian officials continue to assert privately that none of their current activity—propaganda attacks on Western imperialism, declarations of solidarity with the Indian concept of neutrality in the 'cold war,' efforts to block Western moves to strengthen the defenses of the Middle East—should be interpreted as showing real hostility to the West. Their quarrel, they say, is with Western methods and timing—seeking to enlist the Arab states one by one instead of together and before public opinion is ready to support such a move—rather than with the basic objective of creating strength in this area.

Despite the apparently bleak outlook for peace, stability and progress in the area presented by these dissensions, Western diplomats cling to the belief that the current storm will blow itself out before too many hot words have been translated into irrevocable acts. They wait for the Arabs themselves to compose their differences and again take the initiative for cooperation with the West in military and economic matters, towards which need, tradition and geography all point.

TWO DEFENSE BLOCS IN THE MIDDLE EAST



Last week Egypt, Saudi Arabia and Syria agreed to set up an economic-military organization to replace the fading Arab League. Turkey recently concluded separate pacts with Iraq and Pakistan, designed to link them with the far-reaching Western defense system.

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