EGYPT SETS NEGEV AS PRICE FOR ROLE IN MID-EAST PACT
By ROBERT C. DOTY Special to The New York Times.
New York Times (1857-Current file); Mar 21, 1955; ProQuest Historical Newspapers The New York Times (1851 - 2002)
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EGYPT SETS NEGEV AS PRICE FOR ROLE IN MID-EAST PACT

Salem Says Israeli-Held Area Must Be in Arab Hands for Line-Up to Be Effective

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

CAIRO, March 20—Egypt indicated willingness today to keep her door open for eventual Arab defense cooperation with the West despite her campaign to keep the Arabs out of such arrangements.

The possibility of eventual reconciliation of the Western and Egyptian views could be maintained, an Egyptian spokesman said, if London and Washington ceased their efforts to block the all-Arab defense grouping set up by Egypt to counter the Western-sponsored Turkish-Iraqi pact.

He added that the key to ultimate organization of effective Middle Eastern defense was the return of the Negev, now held by Israel, to Arab control, thereby providing a land link between Egypt and her Arab neighbors.

Maj. Salah Salem, Egyptian Minister of National Guidance, made the statement in the first press interview accorded foreign correspondents since he assumed direction of Egypt's current diplomatic struggle to retain Arab leadership. Major Salem was the spokesman who, two months ago, denounced Iraq's alliance with Turkey as a defection from Arab solidarity. He is the chief architect of the projected rival grouping of Egypt, Saudi Arabia and Syria.

Easier Terms Held Possible

According to the original announcement, members of the latter alliance would specifically renounce any intent to join the Turkish-Iraqi pact or any other line-up with states outside the Middle East.

Today Major Salem declared there would be no necessity of writing such a prohibition into the new pact if Washington and London agreed to end the efforts the Egyptians charge they are making to block the Egyptian-sponsored plan. Major Salem asserted that Turkey was being encouraged by the Western powers to deliver almost daily threats to Syria in an effort to persuade her to withdraw from the tripartite alliance.

"If the West keeps hands off —refrains from putting pressure on Syria — we can regard the Turkish-Iraqi pact as one fact and our grouping as another, and I think we may agree," Major Salem said. "But if the pressure on Syria continues, I am sure we will make the wording of our pact very explicit and very tight against other alliances."

The impression prevalent here is that the weakly based Syrian Government of Premier Sabri el-Assali—whether as a result of the "pressure" complained of by Egypt or of arguments in defense of the Turkish-Iraqi

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treaty advanced during a Syrian mission's visit to Baghdad — is wavering in its allegiance to the Egyptian plan.

The ceremony planned for today in Cairo for signing the new pact had to be postponed while Syrian Foreign Minister Khaled el-Azm lingered in Baghdad.

Cairo's inability to enlist either Lebanon or Jordan in its defense pact was also attributed by Major Salem to Western interference. This is a mistaken policy on the part of the United States, based on a misreading of the real sentiments and aspirations of the Middle Eastern peoples, he declared.

It is futile both politically and militarily, he said, to talk of organizing a rational Middle Eastern defense system in the face of Arab-Israeli enmity. Lines of communication would have to run from the Suez Canal zone base across the Israeli-held Negev to states that would be the first objects of Soviet attack, he added.

"How could such a defense plan work without linking Israel to the system, and that is something the Arabs would never accept," he said.

West Said to Favor Idea

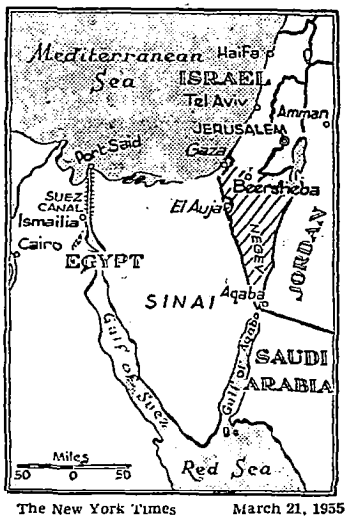
The only solution, he said, would be for the Negev to be taken from Israel and returned to Arab control. British and United States diplomats have conceded that this would make the solution of military problems easier, he added, but have done nothing to bring it about.

The Egyptian Minister conceded that all of Egypt's recent actions had been designed to check the extension of Iraqi influence over the Levant states.

"We found ourselves compelled to defend ourselves because otherwise Egypt would have been isolated from the other Arab countries," he explained.

The main military purpose of the three-power pact is to maintain a check on Israel, Major Salem said. Asked whether the Syrians and Jordanians, apprehensive of Israeli attacks, might not dislike the exclusion of Iraqi strength from the forces prepared to counter an Israeli thrust, he replied, "The Arabs remember that Iraq gave no practical help to their cause during the Palestine war."

Egypt, on the other hand, would go to the aid of either Lebanon or Jordan if they were attacked by Israel, he declared, even if they failed to adhere to the Egyptian-sponsored defense pact.



The New York Times March 21, 1955

ARABS SEEKING LINK: Egypt asked that Israel return the Negev (diagonal shading) to Arab control.

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