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By ROBERT C. DOTYSpecial to The New York Times.
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Cairo Diplomatic Observers Cite Syria's Reluctance to Join Defense Group

By ROBERT C. DOTY

Special to The New York Times.

CAIRO, March 23.—Egypt's efforts to form an Arab defense grouping to counter the Iraqi-Turkish pact are close to failure, in the opinion of diplomatic observers here.

Only Saudi Arabia is firmly in the Egyptian camp. Syria, which early this month signed a declaration of intent to join the two others in an alliance specifically renouncing partnership with any states outside the Arab world, has displayed increasing reluctance to proceed with the plan.

According to responsible Cairo diplomatic sources, Syria is unlikely now to agree to sign any treaty containing a clause that would eliminate freedom of action to make other defensive alliances.

Syria's change of heart stems from several causes, these sources said. First, the Government of Premier Sabry el-Assaly has only a shaky nine-vote majority in Parliament. He must take into account a considerable body of Parliamentary and public opinion that favors closer relations with Iraq.

Second, Ankara has interpreted Syria's original move toward an exclusively Arab alliance as action not friendly to Turkey and has spoken menacingly of reconsidering its present attitude toward Damascus.

Cairo Meeting Cited

Finally, during his recent visit to Baghdad, Syrian Foreign Minister Khaled el-Azm heard from Iraqi Premier Nuri as-Said persuasive arguments in defense of Iraq's decision to ally herself with Turkey and indirectly with the West. Premier Nuri is reported to have stressed the point that the signing of the pact with Turkey in no way reduced Iraq's allegiance to the Arab League or her intentions of fulfilling commitments under the existing Arab collective security pact.

There was a growing tendency in Arab diplomatic circles to regard the whole "crisis" as a spurious one largely created by what they considered to be impulsive reaction of hostility to the Iraqi initiative. There were expressions of weariness at what was described as Egyptian diplomacy by improvisation.

An example of that is the ill-fated and unproductive conference of Arab Premiers, hastily convened by Cairo in January to debate the Turkish-Iraqi pact. Another example is what appears to have been the premature announcement of an Egyptian-Syrian-Saudi Arabian agreement.

There was widespread recognition of the need to liquidate the whole dispute as quickly as possible and with a minimum of loss of face all around. Even those who look with the least favor on Egypt's projected three-power Arab pact conceded that it would probably be necessary for Egypt to obtain agreement to at least a watered down version of the original plan for prestige reasons.

Egyptian negotiators in Damascus were reported today to be still trying to win Syrian acceptance of the treaty clause denying members the right to join other alliances. However, in the draft of treaty prepared last week-end by an Egyptian committee here, this clause was eliminated. It would have foreclosed the possibility of future cooperation with the West for Middle Eastern defense.

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