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Abdel Nasser's Dream, Nasr's Reality: The Mukhabarat and Pan-Arabism

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On my honour as a student of the Diplomatische Akademie Wien, I submit this work in good faith and pledge that I have neither given nor received unauthorized assistance on it.

Abstract (English)

In May of 1980, Salah Nasr took it upon himself to chronicle his life and role in the rise of Egyptian president Gamal Abdel Nasser. Serving as the head of the General Intelligence Directorate from 1957 to 1967, Salah Nasr reformed the Egyptian police state (or mukhabarat) into a powerful tool of surveillance, suppression, and subterfuge that has continued to shape Egypt's domestic and regional policy to this very day. While the impact of Nasr and the mukhabarat are well-known and discussed within Egypt, a surprising lack of coverage has been given to the historical development of this agency in Western sources. During the Cold War, the agency rose to prominence as one of the most powerful intelligence states of the era, and yet the main focal point of most Western research has been on Abdel Nasser's rise to power and championing of Arab unity. While Abdel Nasser and his pan-Arabist dream are important historical developments within the MENA region, a closer inspection of Salah Nasr and the mukhabarat paints a new perspective of these events. By exploring Nasr's firsthand accounts of Abdel Nasser's policies and actions, as well as the role that the mukhabarat played in working to make Abdel Nasser's dream a reality, one begins to reevaluate the legacy of Egypt's influential president. If Abdel Nasser's goal of pan-Arabism was propagated throughout the region at the hands of the mukhabarat, with only the intelligence state remaining a reality following the demise of Abdel Nasser and the death of his dream, then why has such a prominent figure as Nasr been so criminally under-explored? In order to properly understand the impact of Abdel Nasser on the annals of history, one cannot exclude Salah Nasr from the picture as many so often do. Just as the mukhabarat operated in the shadows, so too does Abdel Nasser's public persona and ideological legacy often mask more substantial, tangible byproducts of his rule that should be brought to light.

Abstract (German)

Im Mai 1980 nahm Salah Nasr es auf sich, sein Leben und seine Rolle beim Aufstieg des ägyptischen Präsidenten Gamal Abdel Nasser aufzuzeichnen. Als Leiter des General Intelligence Directorate von 1957 bis 1967 reformierte Salah Nasr den ägyptischen Polizeistaat (oder Mukhabarat) zu einem mächtigen Instrument der Überwachung, Unterdrückung und List, das Ägyptens Innen- und Regionalpolitik bis heute prägt. Während der Einfluss von Nasr und dem Mukhabarat innerhalb Ägyptens bekannt ist und diskutiert wird, wurde die historische Entwicklung dieser Behörde in westlichen Quellen erstaunlich wenig behandelt. Während des Kalten Krieges stieg die Agentur zu einem der mächtigsten Geheimdienste der Ära auf, und dennoch lag das Hauptaugenmerk der meisten westlichen Forschungen auf Abdel Nassers Aufstieg zur Macht und seinem Eintreten für die arabische Einheit. Während Abdel Nasser und sein panarabischer Traum wichtige historische Entwicklungen innerhalb der MENA-Region sind, zeichnet eine nähere Betrachtung von Salah Nasr und dem Mukhabarat eine neue Perspektive auf diese Ereignisse. Durch die Untersuchung von Nasrs Berichten aus erster Hand über Abdel Nassers Politik und Handlungen sowie der Rolle, die der Mukhabarat bei der Verwirklichung von Abdel Nassers Traum spielte, beginnt man, das Erbe des einflussreichen ägyptischen Präsidenten neu zu bewerten. Wenn Abdel Nassers Ziel des Panarabismus durch den Mukhabarat in der gesamten Region propagiert wurde und nur der Geheimdienststaat nach dem Ableben Abdel Nassers und dem Tod seines Traums eine Realität blieb, warum wurde dann eine so prominente Figur wie Nasr so sträflich wenig erforscht? Um den Einfluss von Abdel Nasser auf die Annalen der Geschichte richtig zu verstehen, kann man Salah Nasr nicht aus dem Bild ausschließen, wie es viele so oft tun. So wie der Mukhabarat im Schatten operierte, so verdeckt auch Abdel Nassers öffentliche Persona und sein ideologisches Vermächtnis oft substanziellere, greifbare Nebenprodukte seiner Herrschaft, die ans Licht gebracht werden sollten.

Introduction:

There is much to be said about Egypt's second president, Gamal Abdel Nasser; a prolific Arab leader, proponent of pan-Arabism, and champion of modernization, Abdel Nasser and his impact on the MENA (Middle East & North Africa) region looms heavily over the hearts and minds of many Arabs. In fact, while Gamal Abdel Nasser was no stranger to accruing his fair share of opponents and naysayers, many still treat his legacy with respect, admiration, and even reverence. This can be seen across the entire political spectrum within multiple Arab societies; in essence, while many might not agree with Abdel Nasser's politics or actions while in office, a deep-held respect for Nasser's goals and ideals permeates throughout the vast majority of Arab society. Dreams of a unified Arab state as an avenue for social, political, and economic growth and prosperity are a common talking point throughout the MENA region, and while many lament the failure of Abdel Nasser to implement such a goal, the inherent desire for a powerful Arab leader to unite the region as a major contender on the global stage often resides within the minds of many. There is much written on Abdel Nasser's legacy within Egypt, the MENA region, and beyond; however, a much more insidious byproduct of Abdel Nasser's rule that often is left out of the conversation is the creation of the *Mukhabarat*, or Egyptian General Intelligence Directorate. The GID functioned as Abdel Nasser's eyes and ears within Egypt and throughout the Middle East. A shadowy organization that funded numerous liberation fronts across the region and suppressed dissent and opposition to Abdel Nasser within the borders of Egypt, the GID continues to function as one of the largest intelligence agencies within the MENA region. Acts of espionage, torture, human rights violations, and general subterfuge have been a staple of the GID for nearly 64 years, and can be attributed to the influence of one man in particular: Salah Nasr.

Salah Nasr, an officer within the Egyptian Army and participant in the Free Officers Movement coup of 1952 against former Egyptian King Farouk, served as the second head of the GID from 1957 until his retirement in 1967. Under his control, the GID became a considerable intelligence operation and had a part to play in everything from daily Egyptian life and society to the political affairs of multiple Arab states. While Salah Nasr often accompanied Abdel Nasser to various meetings and was present at key points in the history of Egyptian political development, not much is known about the man himself outside of the region. While many of the acts taken by the GID under Salah Nasr's control are known and chronicled within Egypt and throughout the region, very little of this information has spread to the world at large. In fact, Salah Nasr penned a considerable number of texts on Egypt, intelligence gathering, and more

during his life, and while these books have been published in Arabic, they have not been translated into any other language. These books exist as powerful tools in exploring the life, mind, and impact of the influential yet shadowy person of Salah Nasr. As one combs through the texts, it becomes increasingly apparent how integral the GID and Salah Nasr were to the spread of Abdel Nasser's grand dream of Arab unification under Pan-Arabism. The highly questionable means that the GID used in order to ensure said dream came to fruition often betray the highly-poetic and romanticized view many had, and continue to have, of Abdel Nasser's pan-Arabism. Therefore, one cannot extricate the prolific rise of Gamal Abdel Nasser without exploring the shadowy organization of the *mukhabarat*, as both are closely intertwined with one another. Through extended research, it is understood that an incredible amount of Abdel Nasser's influence on history originates through the decisions taken by Salah Nasr.

As previously mentioned, the number of sources relating to Salah Nasr's life, career, and impact are quite scarce. While this might be viewed as a hindrance to the composition of the thesis, I believe that this relatively-underexplored topic has far greater significance to the development of both Abdel Nasser's legacy and the political climate of the MENA region during the Cold War than many might even realize. In exploring this topic, a more developed understanding of a critical time period in modern history is formed, and hopefully encourages further exploration of the intricacies of Abdel Nasser's Egypt and Arab unity project in the future. As such, it must be highlighted that certain sources will be used repeatedly throughout this thesis. In terms of long-form material on the ins and outs of the *mukhabarat*, very few academic works devote the entirety of their focus to this. Regarding the history of the Egyptian *mukhabarat*, Owen Sirrs' *The Egyptian Intelligence Service: A History of the Mukhabarat, 1910-2009* remains the foremost compendium of Egyptian intelligence operations and information. This book will be a key reference point in the discussion of thesis' topic, and will act as a litmus test with which the most exciting works present in this thesis will be compared against. These works will be the memoirs and works by Salah Nasr himself, which as mentioned have not been translated into English. I have taken it upon myself to work through these texts with my background in Arabic, translating and highlighting key points in Nasr's works that shed light on the reality of Abdel Nasser's pan-Arabist dream and the methods taken to bring it to fruition. In many ways, this is both a hindrance to this thesis, and the core objective. These works are difficult to get a hold of even in their original publishing language of Arabic; however, they offer incredibly exciting insight into the life of Salah Nasr and a powerful exploration of Gamal Abdel Nasser from one of his closest colleagues. As access to classified Egyptian

archives are difficult, the few sources that have been chosen are both important works on their own and even greater tools when examined side-to-side. This behind-the-scenes exploration of Abdel Nasser provides an important understanding of his personality, his motivations, his interactions, and more.

In examining the man who effectively established the Egyptian intelligence state as it is currently known, one achieves a powerful look behind the curtain of Gamal Abdel Nasser's rise to power. As the Egyptian intelligence state persists to this very day, and continually has a say in the local, regional, and foreign actions of Egypt, it is important to explore the secret history of such an influential organization. The hope of this paper is to examine the true legacy of Gamal Abdel Nasser as viewed through the lens of his intelligence service; just as the mukhabarat operated in the shadows, so too does Gamal Abdel Nasser's legacy and historical perception (especially amongst modern Arab communities) often mask more substantial, tangible byproducts of his rule. If one is to properly understand the impact of Abdel Nasser on the annals of history, one cannot exclude Salah Nasr from the picture as many so often do. In this way, this thesis will explore the following statement: Salah Nasr was directly responsible for the rise of the mukhabarat, the spread of Pan-Arabism, and the legacy of Gamal Abdel Nasser. This statement outlines the three different tiers that are closely related: the spread of Abdel Nasser's influence and dream of Pan-Arabism, the acts of the mukhabarat that facilitated the spread of said influence and dream, and the life of the man that ran and shaped the mukhabarat. In analyzing the chronological development of the top two tiers through the lens of Salah Nasr, a more sobering picture is painted of Abdel Nasser's meteoric rise and influence on the development of history and the insidious acts required to implement such a lofty ideal as pan-Arabism. Salah Nasr's creation of the mukhabarat sought to control dissent within Egypt and spread pan-Arabism through the region; however, pan-Arabism fell and Salah Nasr was eventually put on trial for his acts as leader of the mukhabarat. Furthermore, Abdel Nasser's attempts at bolstering the strength of Egypt through the grand vision of Pan-Arabism deflated following a series of defeats, namely to Israel during the Six-Day War. These hollow victories will be explored throughout the thesis in depth, as seen through Salah Nasr and his development of the Egyptian intelligence state. As the Egyptian mukhabarat were closely tied to a myriad of different uprisings throughout the region, all attempting to shed the weight of foreign-backed governments and leaders in favor of more nationalist (and Abdel Nasser sympathetic) leadership, it is paramount that one explores the impact of the Egyptian intelligence state on the proliferation of Abdel Nasser's grand dream within Egypt and throughout the entire region. In essence, Gamal

Abdel Nasser's goals of Pan-Arabism, which are still lauded as a powerful ideology and one which many Arabs echo to this day, were not achieved. However, the mukhabarat had a paramount role in the early heydays of Pan-Arabism.

Chapter 1: Setting the Stage

Foreign Influence and Cries for Independence

The rise of Abdel Nasser as a proponent of Egyptian nationalism, contrasting with the Western colonial powers present within the Middle East, is often marked as the spiritual succession to a popular uprising against foreign intervention and substandard Egyptian socio-economic conditions hundreds of years prior to his birth. This movement, led by a man named Ahmed Urabi, not only mirrored Abdel Nasser's anti-colonial sentiments, but ironically saw the very same colonial power that Abdel Nasser would oppose take precedence over Egyptian politics for the next 40-odd years with the British intervening in Egypt in 1882. A military officer from the Egyptian peasant class, Ahmed Urabi existed as the spiritual predecessor to Gamal Abdel Nasser; leading an anti-foreign movement against the Egyptian government with support from "Egyptian-born army officers and notables", Ahmed Urabi and his popular uprising moved against Ismail and his British benefactors from 1879 to 1882.¹ Urabi, his fellow officers, and the indigenous Egyptian revolt had three main "goals" as highlighted by Eugene Rogan: to seize the remaining military power held by latent Mamluk influence, to gain foreign control of Egyptian finances and politics, and to seize British military dominance.² The Urabi insurrection embodied the anti-colonial movement's growing nationalist identity while simultaneously balancing the segmented backgrounds of the Egyptian people; from peasants and merchants to military officials and religious leaders of different faiths and sects, the Urabi revolt provided large numbers of the Egyptian populus with a rallying cause against the longstanding manipulation of their country by the West. However, as the movement raged across Egypt for two years and threatened the pre-established government and military system, the British eventually decided that enough was enough. Soft power and ties to Ismail's dynasty could no longer hold the tides of revolution at bay; In 1882, following military protests that saw many Europeans in Egypt flee the city or barricade themselves in fortified positions, British forces

¹ Fawaz A. Gerges, *Making the Arab World: Nasser, Qutb, and the Clash That Shaped the Middle East* (Princeton University Press, 2019), 41.

² Eugene L. Rogan, *The Arabs: A History* (UK: Penguin Books, 2018), 126.

intervened in Egypt, suppressed the uprising, and sent Ahmed Urabi into exile. Following Urabi's defeat, British influence only grew in strength within Egypt for the next three or four decades. As the British position in Egypt shifted, Egyptians continued to oppose the drastic separation of upper-class Egyptian nobility and the state of the majority of the people. Prior to British intervention, Egypt had existed as an autonomous vassal state (or *khedivate*) under the Ottoman Empire.³ Following Britain's acquisition of Egypt as a protectorate during the events of the First World War, the former ruling Khedive lineage was removed from power in an attempt to install more British-sympathetic leaders; included in this line would be King Fuad I and his son King Farouk, the latter of which would be deposed by Abdel Nasser with the help of Salah Nasr.

The births of Abdel Nasser, Salah Nasr, and King Farouk all coincided with the peasant revolt of 1919. Abdel Nasser, born in 1918, would have been but a baby during the mass shortages and economic turmoil that gripped Egypt.⁴ These circumstances, compounded with international rejection of Egyptian independence requests, saw a massive popular uprising sweep across the land in 1919. Railroads and transport lines were cut, students went on strike, and the local Egyptian elite refused to cooperate with the legal and judicial system, as the entire country was plunged into revolution against British presence and treatment of the indigenous people.⁵ This struggle for independence, which had been a continual process as previously highlighted, once again exemplified the local sentiments towards both British power and the complicit Egyptian monarchy.⁶ While the revolts were violent in many regards, with hundreds of Egyptians being killed in movements against the British, they would eventually prove to be successful with Britain lifting the protectorate status in 1922.

Two years before this fateful event, both Salah Nasr and the future King Farouk would be born to widely different circumstances. If Abdel Nasser's birth year reflected the critical condition of the Egyptian people and mass unrest against foreign occupation, then Nasr and Farouk's births acted as mirror images of the socio-economic state of Egypt as a whole. Salah Nasr, born in the village of Sintimay to the North of Cairo, was the son of an educated Egyptian man that transcended his peasant background.⁷ While his father had hopes of Salah entering

³ Selma Botman, *Egypt from Independence to Revolution, 1919-1952* (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse Univ. Press, 1991), 16.

⁴ Ellis Goldberg, "Peasants in Revolt — Egypt 1919," *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 24, no. 2 (1992): 271-272, doi:10.1017/s0020743800021565.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 272.

⁶ Botman, *Egypt from Independence...*, 18.

⁷ Ṣalāḥ Naṣr and 'Abd Allāh. Imām, *Ṣalāḥ Naṣr Yataḍḥakkār: Al-thawrah, Al-mukhābarāt, Al-naksah* (Al-Qāhirah: Dār Al-Khayyāl, 1999), 43.

medical school and becoming a doctor, Salah himself had different plans; in 1936, at the age of 16, Nasr joined the Egyptian military college in hopes of becoming an officer.⁸ 1936 was a critical time period in the general condition of Egypt as a whole. King Fuad of Egypt, Farouk's father, passed away suddenly in 1936, leaving the ruling seat of power to his 16-year-old son.⁹ The Egyptian Wafd party, a delegation of nationalists that sought Egyptian state independence from colonial control, opposed both British involvement and King Fuad's position and legitimacy; they would go on to attain power through free elections.¹⁰ Finally, the critical Anglo-Egyptian treaty was signed, removing British military personnel from Egypt except for those assigned to protect and operate the Suez canal.¹¹ King Farouk and Salah Nasr stood on two different sides of the socio-political spectrum. For Salah Nasr, enrollment in the Egyptian military college was a step towards a level of social mobility and constructive order that he craved. While the military college provided Nasr with both the tools and route towards a promising military career, it also saw strong sentiments of nationalism creep into his world view as a byproduct of his colleagues' influence. Salah Nasr notes in the first book of his memoirs that, upon graduating from the college, the director of the college went around asking students where they would like to be stationed and serve. Although many of the students replied with answers ranging from Alexandria to Cairo, the director was seemingly unimpressed until one student stated they would like to be stationed in the port town of Mersa Matruh. Confused as to why, the director inquired and immediately received an answer from the student, whereby the newly-commissioned officer replied "to protect my country from any attack by 'the West'."¹² This impressed the director, who stated that the only threat to the sanctity of Egypt was from "the West" itself.¹³ Such views of "the West" were, therefore, not simply carried by everyday Egyptians but were reinforced by those in positions of power and influence over the future of Egypt. Such beliefs were held, and cultivated, by many within the Egyptian officer cadre, with both Salah Nasr and Abdel Nasser being two key examples. This only fueled the fire of anti-colonial ideology within the minds of many idealistic officers, creating a veritable furnace of nationalistic ideology and rhetoric.

⁸ "Salah Nasr..From the Intelligence Monster to a Scapegoat for the Sins of Nasiriyah," Teller Report, March 06, 2019, <https://www.tellerreport.com/news/--salah-nasr---from-the-intelligence-monster-to-a-scapegoat-for-the-sins-of-nasir-iyah-.r1-je6V6LE.html>)

⁹ Botman, *Egypt from Independence...*, 39.

¹⁰ Rogan, *The Arabs*, 167.

¹¹ Botman, *Ibid.*

¹² Ṣalāḥ Naṣr, *Mudhakkirāt Ṣalāḥ Naṣr* (Cairo: Dār Al-Khayyāl, 1999), 51-52.

¹³ *Ibid.*

“All The King’s Men”: The Free Officers Movement

The meteoric rise of both Gamal Abdel Nasser as the figurehead of Arab nationalism and Salah Nasr as the surreptitious orchestrator of said status can be attributed to the very same phenomenon that saw their eventual fall from grace: war with the state of Israel. The impact of war on a country’s political identity is well-regarded, as the shifting tides of battle mirror the ebb and flow of regimes and power structures. As previously highlighted, the events surrounding the 1948 Arab-Israeli war marked a decisive defeat for Egypt and King Farouk. The king was by no means a popular ruler by the end of the 1948 war; with the Egyptian army’s lack of proper coordination and tactical prowess in the face of Zionist forces, Farouk’s leadership was shaken to its core in light of Egypt’s defeat. Widely viewed by the Egyptian people as an ineffective ruler with a corrupt government and deep ties to the British colonial powers, Egypt’s “disgrace” at the hands of the Zionist state marked further encroachment by Western powers on the Arab world and a king that was either complicit in such affairs or seemingly incapable of staving off further expansion.¹⁴ When news of substandard military equipment spread throughout Egypt following the defeat, public outcry against Farouk shifted from incompetence to full-blown abandonment of Egyptian lives in the face of a major threat.¹⁵ For many groups, such as the Muslim Brotherhood, Young Egypt, and the Egyptian communist movement, the time for new leadership was past due and necessary to ensure the future of Egypt; however, while such groups were paramount in mobilizing vast swathes of Egyptian society against the colonial-backed regime of King Farouk, it would ultimately be a secret council of military officers that would see Farouk removed from power. For the massive casualties experienced by the Egyptian military, as well as the many years of the Egyptian people’s disillusionment with the system at large, would be orchestrated by an officer that was wounded in the chest while leading a unit of Egyptian soldiers in Palestine.

The post-war years of Egypt were marked by constant violence and social conflict; as King Farouk attempted to consolidate his position amidst public cries for change in the government, a series of eight minority governments came and went in hopes of staving off the continual threats and assassinations orchestrated by groups such as the Muslim Brotherhood.¹⁶ Through decisive action and the implementation of martial law, Egyptian prime minister Ibrahim

¹⁴ "Egypt- On the Threshold of Revolution, 1945-52," U.S. Library of Congress Country Studies, accessed May 03, 2021, <http://countrystudies.us/egypt/31.htm>.

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ Joel Gordon, *Nasser's Blessed Movement: Egypt's Free Officers and the July Revolution* (Cairo: American University in Cairo Press, 2016), 20.

'Abd al-Hadi forced the opposition groups underground and rounded up as many members as possible, with said lull in popular unrest allowing for the elections of 1950 to take place. These elections, which provided Egyptians with the hope of radically changing the structural system of Egyptian rule, saw the arrival of a Wafdist Egyptian majority party instilled under the guidance of Wafdist leader Mustafa al-Nahhas.¹⁷ Egyptian sentiments towards the new government seemed positive, as the potential for a majority of sympathetic officials in government promised a new era. Nahhas promised removal of British influence, an end to the repressive police-state that had suppressed dissent for so long, and provision of basic needs and necessities to all Egyptians; however, such hopes would not last long. As the Wafdist government achieved power through the previously mentioned elections, attempts to ensure such power would remain in their hands saw a collaborative effort between King Farouk and Nahhas' government begin to form. The people, outraged at the attempts of the Wafdists to break bread with the enemy and continue the cycle of monarchical rule, became increasingly disruptive. While such events took place in the open, a more secretive organization was collaborating on a transformation in the Egyptian political landscape.

The Free Officer Movement, while composed of Egyptian military officers, was itself not a formation of the military as a whole; in other words, the diverse group of military officers with their own respective political backgrounds and ideologies did not act as representatives of the military as a whole, rather they existed as a form of "political movement within the military" that acted as "a kind of national front".¹⁸ This was invariably a critical aspect of the movement's composition, one which Gamal Abdel Nasser was fully aware of. While different members hailed from different political backgrounds, they shared a few key beliefs and characteristics that allowed them to rally together as effectively as they did. Anti-colonial sentiments, distrust of the monarchy and King Farouk, goals of enforcing socio-economic transformation, and collective military experience as servants of Egypt itself created a bond of trust between the members unified under Abdel Nasser.¹⁹ The core messages of "development and wealth redistribution" as championed through the Free Officers Movement was inextricably linked to the afore-mentioned military experience shared by all members, as the officers' disillusionment with the structure of the Egyptian military and simultaneous respect for the core values that the military instills

¹⁷ Ibid., 17.

¹⁸ Selma Botman, "Egyptian Communists and the Free Officers: 1950–54," *Middle Eastern Studies* 22, no. 3 (1986): 350, doi:10.1080/00263208608700670.

¹⁹ Reem Abou-El-Fadl, "Early Pan-Arabism in Egypt's July Revolution: The Free Officers Political Formation and Policy-making, 1946-54," *Nations and Nationalism* 21, no. 2 (2015): 292-293, doi:10.1111/nana.12122)

provided the catalyst for reforming the entirety of Egyptian society into a more efficient military analogue.²⁰ It was from the seeds of such brotherhood and ideology that Abdel Nasser grew the movement, as well as the notion of pan-Arabism as a whole. Abdel Nasser's discontent with British influence on Egyptian politics lent itself to general apathy towards Western intervention in Arab society as a whole.²¹ Intending to end subservient behavior to the West by what he viewed as essentially a puppet state in Egypt, Abdel Nasser's ideology extended beyond the reaches of Egypt and represented the entirety of the Arab world. In essence, the Free Officers Movement and the variety of individuals found within acted as a litmus test for future Arab revolution and liberation against colonial powers. Such potential for local and regional transformation was succinctly conveyed through Abdel Nasser's ethos of "glory and dignity", which held that such goals could only be achieved by the complete removal of Western powers and any system that aligned itself with them, namely through the implementation of both political and social revolution.²² According to Abdel Nasser, the pursuit of sovereignty and social mobility through both forms of revolution were not exclusive to Egypt but held promise for nearly any country oppressed by Western colonialism and imperialism. However, the goals set by Abdel Nasser and the Free Officers Movement could not be implemented on a wider scale if they did not come to fruition within Egypt itself.

Members of the Free Officer Movement were naturally sworn to the utmost of secrecy; any indication of treason would naturally be punishable by imprisonment or death at the worst. Salah Nasr denotes in his memoirs that the secrecy of the movement was paramount to its survival and success; according to Nasr, he was barred from discussing any matters pertaining to the Free Officers Movement with even his closest friends, and notes that he was incredibly surprising post-coup to learn that many of his close friends were active in the movement without his knowledge at the time.²³ This speaks to the efficacy of the movement's secrecy, and its organizational structure as a whole. In essence, the movement operated through a series of "cells" which allowed specific members to interact with each other, though such interactions were limited in order to avoid potential fallout or compromising of the movement. Often, a member was recruited by a fellow officer and was introduced to Abdel Nasser himself, who brought the member into the fold. These members would receive their input and commands from

²⁰ Abou-El-Fadl, "The Free Officers in Opposition: Imagining Revolution." In *Foreign Policy as Nation Making: Turkey and Egypt in the Cold War*, 102. The Global Middle East. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018. doi:10.1017/9781108566025.004.

²¹ Ibid., 106.

²² Ibid., 109.

²³ Nasr, *Mudhakkirāt Ṣalāḥ Naṣr*, 114-115.

Abdel Nasser directly, ensuring that multiple members never even came into contact with each other.²⁴ Nevertheless, suspicions of the officers and their intentions were slowly rising. As all walls have ears, different murmurings of officers discussing matters in secret made their way to King Farouk. Initially unphased but wary of the possibilities, King Farouk asked for their goings on to be monitored to the utmost of his loyal officers' abilities. Despite such attempts at suppressing the movement through surveillance and infiltration, the majority of meetings, briefings, or recruitment took place within the walls of one's house; hosting parties or smaller get-togethers, the members would essentially hide in plain sight, with Salah Nasr noting that he himself often hosted such small gatherings.²⁵ Such methods of collaboration would prove integral to Nasr's method of operation once he became the head of the GID, as rudimentary methods of gathering and discussing covert affairs over coffee or a cigarette proved to be incredibly effective forums for intelligence gathering. Although such meetings and techniques proved useful, one could not plug every leak. As the Free Officers Movement continued to meet, while simultaneously publishing pamphlets and brochures highlighting the core tenets and goals of their cause, a drip-feed of information began to reach King Farouk; initially, Farouk had been wary of the officers but sceptical that any major action would or could take place. However, as time passed and more rumors of collusion and dissent reached his ears, Farouk became increasingly concerned with the existence of the movement as a whole. Fearing that the entire movement could be compromised, and wishing to strike at the earliest moment possible, the Free Officer Movement decided to carry out a coup against Farouk and his Western-sympathizing officials in the early hours of July 23rd, 1952.²⁶ Salah Nasr, in charge of the 13th division of the Army, highlights the seven main operational parts of the coup (under his command) in his memoirs on pages 145 and 146, which for clarity's sake will be outlined below:²⁷

1. An infantry tank company, along with a battalion of troops with armored vehicles would move to secure the "Frontier Corps" under the leadership of Officer Sagh Salah Saada, ensuring no forces were able to leave the barracks and strike at the revolution in retaliation.
2. An infantry squadron led by Officer Yuzbashi Omar Mahmoud Ali, along with three lieutenants, would move to the headquarters of the Staff Guards in the Qobba Bridge.

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ Ibid., 141-145.

²⁶ Ibid., 146.

²⁷ Ibid., 145-146.

This is where the Armed Forces General Command building was located. This squadron would seize the building by force, if necessary, and arrest all officers within its walls.

3. An infantry platoon led by Officer Yuzbashi Jamal al-Qadi would move swiftly to the main radio and communications building; in doing so, the movement could broadcast any message they so desired, while simultaneously restricting hostile forces from carrying out any form of mass broadcasting and coordination.
4. A company of soldiers would take control of the compound gates to prevent the entry or exit of any individuals “who do not belong to the revolution.”
5. Regarding resistance to the movement, any officer that attempted to counteract the Free Officers Movement would be immediately arrested.
6. An infantry platoon will be sent to the radio station located in “Abu Za’abal” on the morning of July 7th. This will further protect the movement from any radio interference or attempts at sabotaging the coup.
7. Finally, as previously highlighted, the coup would take place at 1 AM on July 23rd. The password in question would be “Nasr”, meaning “victory” but also ironically being the same last name as Salah Nasr himself (Abdel Nasser’s name meaning either the “servant of the Helper” or “servant of the victorious”).

Chapter 2: By Any Means Necessary

Building the Foundations

The coup of the Free Officers turned out to be a resounding success. Following the capture of all designated buildings and military strongholds as highlighted in Salah Nasr’s description of the coup, a public statement was made over the radio. Anwar Sadat, a member of the Free Officers and future president of Egypt following Abdel Nasser’s death in 1970, took to the airwaves to publicly announce the successful coup led by the Free Officers at seven in the morning.²⁸ Highlighting the actions of the Free Officers, as well as their intended goals for the Egyptian political climate as a whole, the speech given by Sadat also identified a single “leader” of the Free Officer movement by the name of Mohamed Naguib. Naguib, a decorated Egyptian general that had been elected as the president of the officers’ club, was identified as the leader and chairman of the Free Officers movement.²⁹ Abdel Nasser, relegated to the position of vice

²⁸ Robert Stephens, *Nasser: A Political Biography* (Middlesex: Penguin Books, 1971), 106.

²⁹ Aburish, *Nasser: The Last Arab*, 40.

chairman in the official declaration by Sadat, would remain in this position for a brief stint before assuming control of the movement and the government as a whole. Following Sadat's radio announcement, peaceful protests broke out throughout Egypt in support of the Free Officers and their actions against King Farouk and his government.³⁰ While the Free Officers initially did not intend to take power in the government, instead claiming to facilitate a shift from the Egyptian monarchy and its influence on Egyptian politics to one more representative of the common Egyptian, the first step in shifting the status quo was quite clear: the removal of King Farouk from power.³¹

Initially, there was confusion amongst the Free Officers as to the exact fate of King Farouk. Some suggested his execution, though Abdel Nasser vehemently opposed such an act. The death of King Farouk at the hands of the revolution would only transform him from a relatively unpopular leader to a martyr for his cause, essentially disrupting the Free Officers' goals before they even had a chance to implement any change in the country. Furthermore, Salah Nasr details that Abdel Nasser was against "staining the cause and legacy of the revolution [by] tainting it with blood."³² Another possibility was King Farouk's arrest, but this would have been a logistical nightmare; as long as King Farouk was present in the country, with the possibility of him being freed from captivity and reinstated through the actions of loyalists and sympathizers with the monarchy, the revolution could be derailed. As such, both options were far from ideal and could threaten the longevity of Abdel Nasser and his fellow officers. In the end, Abdel Nasser decided on securing King Farouk's formal abdication from power, allowing the king to then leave Egypt and exile himself abroad. On July 26, following a twenty-one gun salute by the Egyptian military that was overseen by Naguib, King Farouk left Egypt for Italy on the royal yacht to live out the remainder of his days in luxury and opulence. Eventually, King Farouk would die on March 18th, 1965 due to sudden health complications. While many claim that King Farouk was poisoned by the Egyptian intelligence services, such rumors are quite unsubstantiated. However, there is suitable evidence to show that King Farouk's death was an act of premeditated murder, orchestrated by Salah Nasr himself. While Abdel Nasser's sentence for King Farouk was merciful, allowing the king to slink away from Egypt with his tail between his legs, it seems the final moments of Farouk were indicative of the dark machinations of Salah Nasr and his General Intelligence Directorate.

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ Rogan, *The Arabs: A History*, 284.

³² Naṣr, *Mudakkirāt Ṣalāḥ Naṣr 1*, 157.

As highlighted in Rogan's work *The Arabs: A History*, Abdel Nasser and his Free Officers reflected the ghost of Urabi and his insurrection through both anti-colonial sentiments and a desire to reform the social hierarchy prevalent within Egypt. To accomplish this goal, Abdel Nasser and the Free Officers promptly stripped Egyptian nobility and elites of two key signifiers of status and wealth: titles and land. Regarding titles, honorifics such as *pasha* or *bey*, Turkish terms of status and hierarchy, were foreign titles presented to individuals that profited off of colonial power and presence.³³ Such titles had no place in Abdel Nasser's Egypt and were swiftly abolished. Following the loss of titles, Egyptian aristocracy was stripped of their lands in accordance with the Free Officers desire for agrarian reform. Large swathes of plantations and agriculture, formerly owned by the Egyptian elite, were seized and redistributed amongst smaller landowners throughout Egypt. To avoid a possible resurgence of wealthy landowners and their sizable estates, a cap on the size of ownable property was implemented. The Free Officers' goal of redistributing wealth and land to a larger percentage of Egyptians became a reality, dealing a massive blow to the former Egyptian elite, although such reforms did not actively impact as many Egyptians as one might think; a somewhat few landowners relative to the massive Egyptian population benefited directly from redistributing the former Egyptian aristocracy's property. However, the symbolic power of this act was immense, with the masses perceiving the Free Officers as concerned with the interests of the people and generally in favor of the common Egyptian citizen.³⁴ In light of such support, the Free Officers slowly oscillated from facilitating political change to claiming positions of power within their new Egypt. As political power was seized by the Free Officers, fears of retaliation in the form of a counter-coup, assassinations, or internal conspiracy began to permeate throughout Abdel Nasser's movement. The possibility for the Free Officers and their revolution to fall to the same events that saw their rise became increasingly prevalent in the minds of many, prompting an increased focus on internal affairs and quelling any dissent that might arise. In order to address such concerns, Abdel Nasser and his movement proposed the creation of a new military intelligence office that would ensure intelligence reform while simultaneously erecting a "powerful internal security apparatus."³⁵ The creation of the GID and Egypt's modern intelligence state was soon to become a reality.

The origins of the GID can be traced to Zakaria Muhi al-Din, the appointed head of military intelligence under Abdel Nasser during the early days of the Free Officers' growth in the

³³ Rogan, *The Arabs: A History*, 285.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 285-286.

³⁵ Owen L. Sirrs, *The Egyptian Intelligence Service: A History of the Mukhabarat, 1910-2009* (London: Routledge, Taylor & Francis Group, 2011), 29-30.

Egyptian government. Much like his successor, Salah Nasr, Muhi al-Din had no formal training or experience regarding intelligence operations prior to his appointment as head of military intelligence.³⁶ However, just like Salah Nasr, Muhi al-Din would actively change the landscape of Egyptian politics and society by restructuring the pre-existing police state into a ruthless and effective system of control. The Egyptian people were not unfamiliar with internal intelligence forces prior to the arrival of Abdel Nasser. King Farouk, fearing the spread of communism as a major security threat to his government, had mobilized the “political police” in 1946 to suppress any and all movement of communist cells by arresting thousands.³⁷ The techniques utilized by said police force, namely “intelligence gathering, seizure of seditious materials, surveillance, and interrogations”, would become essential tools utilized by the GID under Muhi al-Din; however, Abdel Nasser’s regime would finetune their implementation of these methods in order to encompass the entirety of Egyptian society. In order to “protect the ‘political work of the revolution at home and abroad’”, Muhi al-Din decided that an expansion of the military intelligence agency was necessary in order to quell internal and external threats to the Free Officers’ Egypt.³⁸ While the military intelligence would continue to operate as a fundamental component of Egypt’s foreign policy, engaging in dialogue with Western powers such as the United States and Britain on matters related to the “communist crisis”, the newly-formed General Intelligence Directorate would revitalize the defunct “political police” to tackle four specific categories: Internal Affairs, Communism, Zionism, and “Foreigners.”³⁹

In collaborating with Western powers on documenting and suppressing potential communist plots throughout the region, Muhi al-Din secured the interest of the US’ Central Intelligence Agency in training the GID members on all manner of valuable tools of the intelligence trade. Owen Sirrs highlights the presence of CIA operatives in Egypt as instrumental to a series of tasks, some of them being “to advise the GID, rebuild its police files and even train [Abdel Nasser]’s bodyguard.”⁴⁰ The presence of the CIA, while initially relatively limited, ran in conjunction with attempts to solidify a strong alliance between the new Egyptian government and the US. The general mistrust of the new Egyptian military junta towards British interests saw the US rise as the most lucrative potential alliance for Naguib, Abdel Nasser, and the Free

³⁶ Ibid., 30.

³⁷ Muhammad Hasanain. Haikal, *The Sphinx and the Commissar* (1978), 47-48.

³⁸ Sirrs, *The Egyptian Intelligence Service: A History of the Mukhabarat, 1910-2009*, 20, 30.

³⁹ Ibid., 30-31.

⁴⁰ Ibid., 33.

Officers.⁴¹ In light of said dynamic, one might assume that the Free Officers' expansion of Egyptian governmental structure was wholly reliant on American involvement. The US had a veritable treasure-trove of funding, military equipment, and experience in intelligence compared to Egypt's immediate position. However, this was not sufficient for the entirety of the junta, as the growing Egyptian intelligence community cast a wider net in their pursuit of training and intelligence support. While Naguib courted US interests in Egypt, hoping to secure a reliable source of financial, political, and military support, Muhi al-Din enlisted the guidance of former SS and Gestapo agents in establishing a powerful police state in 1954. Although Salah Nasr vehemently denied the influence or presence of any Nazi officials in his eventual restructuring of the GID, Muhi al-Din was not opposed to soliciting help from such individuals.⁴² In fact, the marriage of techniques from various intelligence agencies proved to be a crucial aspect of the GID's initial growth; by combining controversial tactics of intimidation, surveillance, and interrogation gleaned from Nazi manuals and protocol with more modern tools and tactics utilized by the CIA, Muhi al-Din established a school for Egyptian intelligence officers that would constitute the basis of the GID.⁴³ As the school grew in capabilities and size, so too did the need for an intelligence agency independent from military intelligence. Therefore, in March of 1954, an official statement by the new junta announced the creation of the General Intelligence Directorate, proposed by Abdel Nasser and headed by Muhi al-Din himself.⁴⁴

Muhi al-Din would serve as the official head of the GID from 1954 to 1955, bolstering the growth of the new intelligence agency while simultaneously bearing witness to a series of radical changes to the Free Officers, their military junta, and Egypt's international standing as a whole. Tension between Naguib and Abdel Nasser over true political power, with Naguib believing his position as Egypt's first president was limited by Abdel Nasser's influence within the Free Officers, saw Abdel Nasser depose Naguib as president and claim the title for his own in 1954.⁴⁵ The following year, Abdel Nasser would accuse the presence of CIA operatives and officials within the Egyptian military/intelligence communities as a plot to oust him from power and return Egypt to foreign control. Paranoid of US interests in his new government, Abdel Nasser would turn his back on their support and approach the USSR for arms and weaponry in

⁴¹ Barry Rubin, "America and the Egyptian Revolution, 1950-1957," *Political Science Quarterly* 97, no. 1 (1982): 77, doi:10.2307/2149315

⁴² 'Abd Allāh. Imām, *Salāh Nasr Yatadakkir: Al Mukābarāt Wa at Taura* (Beirut: Dār Al Wahda, 1988), 43-44.

⁴³ Sirrs, *The Egyptian Intelligence Service*, 34.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 44.

⁴⁵ Rogan, *The Arabs*, 288.

September of 1955.⁴⁶ In light of such dramatic events, Muhi al-Din relinquished control of the GID leadership to his fellow Free Officer, Ali Sabri, who would operate as the nominal head of the GID during the Suez Canal crisis of 1956 while Muhi al-Din operated as head of military intelligence. The events of the Suez Crisis, with Israel, Britain, and France launching a tripartite offensive against Egypt due to Abdel Nasser's nationalization of the canal, saw Muhi al-Din and Sabri preoccupied with managing the Egyptian military response. In an effort to address the external forces invading Egypt, leadership of the GID was neglected and internal affairs were placed on the backburner. However, Abdel Nasser had not forgotten about the importance of the GID; six days before the tripartite aggression took place, Abdel Nasser called Salah Nasr into a meeting to discuss the future of the Egyptian state. Upon completing their discussion, Abdel Nasser informed Nasr that Ali Sabri would soon be given the role of Prime Minister and that Nasr had been chosen as the next head of the GID.⁴⁷ Initially opposed to this decision, Nasr attempted to dissuade Abdel Nasser from proceeding with his decision. As previously highlighted, Nasr had no formal training in intelligence operations much like the first head of the GID, Muhi al-Din.⁴⁸ For Abdel Nasser, there could be no objections to his demands. Concluding their discussion, Abdel Nasser allegedly stated that "this is a mandate from the Revolution, to a man of the Revolution, or else we "end" the Revolution."⁴⁹ With these words weighing heavily on his mind, and following the end of the Suez Crisis and Egypt's resistance to Western intervention, Salah Nasr formally accepted the role of head of the GID on May 31st, 1957.⁵⁰ The Egyptian intelligence community, already a growing force within the Arab region, was primed to expand into a fearsome tool of surveillance, manipulation, and suppression under the leadership of its new chief.

Knowledge Is Power

In 1974, Egyptian author Naguib Mahfouz released his critically-acclaimed novella *Karnak Cafe*; a poignant depiction of life during the height of Abdel Nasser's rule, Mahfouz's novella explores the permeation of the mukhabarat and their use of surveillance, interrogation, and manipulation throughout the fabric of Egyptian society. The premise of Mahfouz's work is relatively simple: an unnamed narrator, a patron of the eponymous cafe, recounts the

⁴⁶ Sirrs, *The Egyptian Intelligence Service*, 54.

⁴⁷ Imām, *Salāh Nasr Yatadakkir: Al Mukābarāt Wa at Taura*, 26-27.

⁴⁸ Ibid., 31.

⁴⁹ Ibid., 27.

⁵⁰ Sirrs, *The Egyptian Intelligence Service*, 60.

relationships built and discussions had with different regulars that frequent the revered Cairo coffee house. Three of these regulars, students by the names of Hilmi, Ismail, and Zaynab, initially enter the cafe with strong enthusiasm for political and social development.⁵¹ However, the students regularly disappear for extended periods of time due to being arrested for involvement in student activism and protests. Upon returning to the cafe following each subsequent incarceration, the students' demeanors grow more cold, distant, and cynical. After the third and final incarceration, only Ismail and Zaynab return; Hilmi, a staunch supporter of the communist movement, had succumbed to the torture he received while in prison.⁵² Upon inquiring into the treatment received by Ismail and Zaynab, the narrator learns that Ismail and Zaynab were also victims of brutal torture methods at the hands of a police chief, Khalid Sawfan. Both students were coerced into working for the police as informants, reporting to Sawfan on the actions of the communist student movement and members such as Hilmi. Neither of them knew the other was an informant. With Hilmi continually attempting to convince Zaynab and Ismail that the communist cause was righteous and worth fighting for, Zaynab eventually reported Hilmi to her handlers in the police in order to protect Ismail, her lover, from further abuse at the hands of Sawfan and his intelligence officers. The emotional toll inflicted on the students, as well as those within the cafe that eagerly awaited their return and prayed for their safety, is a central component of Mahfouz's allegorical representation of Egypt under Abdel Nasser. The constant fear of betrayal, the disappearance of loved ones, and the cruel acts of torture inflicted upon any that might pose a threat either real or invented to the regime were not fictional creations by Mahfouz but rather a well-known reality. In Mahfouz's novella, the architect of this turmoil was Khalid Sawfan, the sadistic police chief; in real life, it was Salah Nasr that propagated such techniques and treatment of the Egyptian people over the ten years he presided as head of the GID.

A well-known aspect of intelligence, espionage, and surveillance agencies is the use of plausible deniability in both internal and external affairs. While there are different interpretations of this term, ranging from an overarching ethos of conduct to a specific form of doctrine, researchers such as Rory Cormac and Richard J. Aldrich have proposed two specific definitions of plausible deniability. On the international scale, plausible deniability is the ability of a state to actively deny any involvement in an act that might be perpetrated by or linked to them; on the domestic scale, it is denial that allows "senior officials—and ultimately the premier—to deny

⁵¹ Najīb Maḥfūz, *Karnak Café*, trans. Roger Allen (New York: Anchor Books, 2008).

⁵² *Ibid.*

personal knowledge and instead punish so-called ‘rogue elephants’ for transgression if the covert action is discovered.”⁵³ Often, such covert action would not remain a secret for long, as word spread from affected communities to those orbiting them, and therefore meant that it was only a matter of time before the general public was made aware of the act. This raises an interesting view regarding plausible deniability on a domestic level. In essence, the point of plausible deniability is not the pursuit of absolute secrecy but rather scapegoating and shifting of blame by the perpetrators in order to safeguard their “integrity”. Regarding both levels, namely external and internal, Salah Nasr embodied the quintessential intelligence chief in his use of plausible deniability. As highlighted in the introduction of this thesis, Salah Nasr’s personal memoirs, writings, and musings are key aspects of this research. In order to examine the impact of the Egyptian mukhabarat on the spread of Abdel Nasser’s pan-Arabist dream, it is paramount that one explores the mind and actions of the man who reshaped the mukhabarat into the powerhouse that it was and still remains. In doing so, one will come across points wherein Salah Nasr claims innocence and feigns ignorance of the acts carried out by his own agency; however, when viewed in context with verified accounts of the GID’s actions in Egypt and the region as a whole, a more complete image of both Salah Nasr and the GID’s operations is formed.

As previously highlighted, Salah Nasr was no stranger to the use of plausible deniability in both interviews and large portions of his memoirs. One particular example stands out as the most blatant instance of this trend: in an interview with Abdullah Imam, a prominent Egyptian historian and chronicler of Abdel Nasser’s Egypt, Salah Nasr was asked about the use of phone tapping, bugging, and general surveillance. In response to such allegations, Nasr stated the following: “The evidence is that there are no citizens against whom the GID has used such methods [to observe] personal or public behavior, and definitely not for purposes of conspiracy or intelligence.”⁵⁴ Nasr maintained that the use of wiretapping and hidden recording devices was only implemented against suspected spies and traitors, and that in such cases wiretapping was but one technique of many used to observe a target; a suspect’s mail was read, their movements were watched and recorded, their social interactions and connections were scrutinized, and more.⁵⁵ Owen Sirrs, among others, contests this statement fully. Sirrs highlights that the use of bugs and wiretapping was a common occurrence under Abdel Nasser, with even the highest members of Abdel Nasser’s cabinet being placed under hidden surveillance in order to ensure

⁵³ Rory Cormac and Richard J. Aldrich, "Grey Is the New Black: Covert Action and Implausible Deniability," *International Affairs* 94, no. 3 (2018): 479-480, doi:10.1093/ia/iyy067

⁵⁴ Imām, *Salāh Nasr Yatadakkir: Al Mukābarāt Wa at Taura*, 57.

⁵⁵ Ibid.

that the “revolution” would not fall to a new coup at the hands of new conspirators.⁵⁶ In fact, wiretapping and surreptitious recording of government officials was so prevalent that Anwar Sadat, Abdel Nasser’s successor as president of Egypt, publicly declared an end to the use of such methods of surveillance upon entering office.⁵⁷ Salah Nasr even stated that cutting-edge surveillance devices were procured from the black market, as well as both CIA and KGB sources, in order to ensure the GID’s methods of operation were as modern as the global superpowers of the day.⁵⁸ Nasr was an open proponent of technological advancement, especially regarding its applicability to the intelligence community; describing the conflict of his time as being “the battle of technology”, Nasr sought the latest in satellite imaging, decoding machines, location tracking devices, and more in order to provide the GID with every conceivable form of surveillance for domestic and regional operations.⁵⁹ Regarding domestic operations, wiretapping was an incredibly viable source of acquiring information on anyone suspected of posing a security threat to Abdel Nasser and his government, and was effectively an open secret amongst the vast majority of Egyptians.⁶⁰ Many Egyptians would speculate that every home, cafe, and beyond were monitored and recorded at all times using hidden microphones and cameras.⁶¹ However, Salah Nasr highlighted an interesting side of such surveillance techniques that the general public failed to take into account: the logistical impossibility of tapping every single individual in Cairo, let alone the entirety of Egypt. According to Salah Nasr, to “prepare a single room of 16 square meters to eavesdrop on those inside” would require the use of “equipment and personnel costing thousands of pounds” in total.⁶² In light of this, and coupled with the claims and evidence that Abdel Nasser’s cabinet was closely monitored by surveillance devices, it seems logical to conclude that only high ranking officials were monitored in such a manner. Furthermore, it seems reasonable for one to assume that the “common man” of Egypt would not warrant proper surveillance through modern equipment except under extraordinary circumstances. While these assumptions could reasonably hold water, assuming one ignores Salah Nasr’s relative lack of reliability in honestly addressing such issues, they do not fully discredit the possibility of Salah Nasr and the GID monitoring the words and actions of the entire country. In fact, a fundamental aspect of the mukhabarat mythos was their ability to have eyes

⁵⁶ Sirrs, *The Egyptian Intelligence Service: A History of the Mukhabarat, 1910-2009*, 63-64.

⁵⁷ Arthur Goldschmidt, *Modern Egypt: The Formation of a Nation-State* (Boulder, CO: Westview, 2002), 155.

⁵⁸ Nasr, *Mudakkirāt Ṣalāh Naṣr* 2, 101.

⁵⁹ Imām, *Salāh Naṣr Yatadakkir: Al Mukābarāt Wa at Taura*, 39.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 58.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*

⁶² Imām, *Salāh Naṣr Yatadakkir: Al Mukābarāt Wa at Taura*, 59.

and ears everywhere. How could one organization accomplish such a task, considering the cost it would take to bug a single room let alone every single individual in Egypt? To answer this question, sometimes the most antiquated methods of surveillance are the most profitable, effective, and applicable on a wider scale. If the GID echoed traits of King Farouk's "political police" in their ability to target potential "enemies of the state", and King Farouk's forces lacked the more cutting-edge equipment made available to Salah Nasr, then it follows that the GID also utilized more traditional methods of spying and subterfuge in their daily operations.

If hidden microphones, cameras, and radios allowed Salah Nasr to spy on the most important individuals in Abdel Nasser's Egypt, reporting back on any and all activity that Abdel Nasser might deem pertinent, then more rudimentary techniques provided Nasr and the GID with a web of information and control that cast an even wider shadow. This web, a massive network of informants throughout Egypt, was invaluable to both Nasr and Abdel Nasser for surveillance, intelligence gathering, and control through fear and intimidation. Much like Mahfouz's novella, wherein both Ismail and Zaynab were coerced into reporting on those around them to the police chief Sawfan, ordinary citizens throughout Egypt would often be employed by the GID in conjunction with local police forces as informants. This was a staggeringly effective system; referred to as the "City Eye", a name initially coined by the people of the Egyptian city of Port Said, the GID worked in conjunction with local police in each Egyptian province and city to employ everyone from hotel concierges and waiters to street beggars and taxi drivers.⁶³ This network of informers allowed the GID to monitor the conversations and movement of both locals and foreigners, which in turn allowed Nasr to pinpoint possible traitors and spies.⁶⁴ Whether or not these individuals were actually threats to Abdel Nasser's state or not was often left to the discretion of the GID.

Once a prospective target was identified, the GID would move to arrest the individuals in a manner once again reflected in Mahfouz's novella *Karnak Cafe*: early in the morning, the individual would be violently roused from their sleep and led away to be interrogated.⁶⁵ Once the suspect was seized, their home would be raided and searched for anything indicative of anti-establishment beliefs and sentiments.⁶⁶ In some cases, the individual's land would be seized as punishment for their apparent insubordination.⁶⁷ In others, their places of work would be

⁶³ Wolfgang Lotz, *The Champagne Spy: Israel's Master Spy Tells His Story* (London: Corgi, 1974), 21.

⁶⁴ Sirrs, *The Egyptian Intelligence Service: A History of the Mukhabarat, 1910-2009*, 72.

⁶⁵ Wilbur G. Landrey. "Nasser Spurs Raids on Reds." *The Washington Post and Times Herald (1954-1959)*, 1959.

⁶⁶ Sirrs, *The Egyptian Intelligence Service: A History of the Mukhabarat, 1910-2009*, 72.

⁶⁷ Egyptian Arrest Drive seen in *Wake of Revolt*." *The Washington Post, Times Herald (1959-1973)*, 1961.

searched as well, with one such occurrence being the seizure and closing of “three Communist publishing houses” in Cairo.⁶⁸ For most cases, the individual would remain in custody for extended periods of time without any information on their location or condition being relayed to their family members.⁶⁹ The GID operated with impunity, arresting and treating their targets as they saw fit. While such acts had a clear and direct impact on the suspects, they also had larger implications for the Egyptian people as a whole. Seeing the arrest of one’s neighbor, friend, or family member and their subjugation to brutal interrogation techniques would not only instill fear in the hearts of many but would also encourage further cooperation with the GID and police in an effort to protect one’s self and immediate circle from receiving the same fate. As such, the interplay between informers and police arrests provided a plethora of information and control over daily life in Abdel Nasser’s Egypt as orchestrated by Salah Nasr and his agency.

The techniques highlighted in this section are but a few forms of information acquisition and societal control exerted by Nasr and the GID. In order to properly understand the other methods, as well as gain a more complete understanding of their impact on Abdel Nasser’s political goals and mission for the Middle East as a whole, one must view them in context with the spread of pan-Arabism and Arab unity. When placed in conjunction with specific historical developments, it becomes clear how Salah Nasr’s handiwork was directly involved in the expansion of Abdel Nasser’s ethos and mythos throughout the MENA region. In doing so, different moments and decisions of Abdel Nasser are viewed in a more complete, and insidious, light.

Abdel Nasser’s Dream, Nasr’s Reality

Following Egypt’s successful navigation of the 1956 Suez Crisis and the blow dealt to Western powers, Abdel Nasser’s view on Arab nationalism developed into the pan-Arabist ideology that would define his persona for the duration of his leadership. According to Gerges, Abdel Nasser reframed the individual success of Egypt in handling external threats from a “strictly Egyptian, eminently nationalistic act” to “anti-colonial defiance...[that] counterbalances Western efforts, which were trying to build up local rivals to his country.”⁷⁰ This shift in perspective saw Abdel Nasser identify his purpose as bigger than simply the president of his own

⁶⁸ Landrey, “Nasser Spurs Raids on Reds”

⁶⁹ OSGOOD CARUTHERS Special to The New York Times. "EGYPT DISCLOSES ARRESTS IN PLOT: Former Foreign Minister is One of at Least 15 Held for Investigations Ex-Minister also Held Denials are Reported El-Din Long Popular." *New York Times (1923-Current File)*, 1957.

⁷⁰ Gerges, *Making the Arab World*, 188.

country; the resilience of Egypt indicated that similar results could be replicated throughout the Arab world and North Africa, and poised Abdel Nasser to be the champion of Arab resistance as a whole. With calls for Arab nationalism being echoed throughout the region following the Suez Crisis, Abdel Nasser realized that he could export his own brand of leadership and “secure his position as the unrivaled leader of the Arab world” with Egypt being the unifying force in a new, anti-imperialist Arab unity.⁷¹ The first step in this process was the unification of Egypt and Syria under the title of the United Arab Republic (UAR) in 1958, with Abdel Nasser presiding over the merger and effectively enforcing Egyptian interests and control on Syria and its new junta.⁷² The dream was now set in motion. With Syria in tow, Abdel Nasser was primed to further his expansion into other Arab countries and solidify himself as the leader of a new era in regional and international politics. In order to do so, Abdel Nasser required tangible means of exerting his influence on these neighboring countries; Arab nationalism, now refined into pan-Arabism as a means of unifying the different states of the MENA region under one banner, would likewise shift from “an idealist political project” into a “product of realist calculations” under the guidance of Abdel Nasser.⁷³ In order to achieve this result, Abdel Nasser turned to Salah Nasr and the GID.

Salah Nasr’s agency was well-equipped to tackle threats to Egypt’s internal security, namely those spearheaded by “foreign agents” such as communists, zionists, and Westerners. Just as Abdel Nasser placed blame on such individuals for undermining his goal of a nationalist government (and in turn, the general condition of the MENA region), with efforts made to purge them at home, so too did the GID have the necessary tools to facilitate Abdel Nasser’s exportation of pan-Arabism by exporting their own brand of surveillance and control. In order to make Abdel Nasser’s dream a reality, the first step would be to mobilize disenfranchised Arabs outside of Egypt through propaganda and Arab nationalist ideology. To do this, Nasr once again turned to his fascination with technology as a means of broadcasting Abdel Nasser’s dreams across the airwaves. The “Voice of the Arabs” radio station was the first step to this endeavor. Initially created in 1953 to help disseminate the Free Officers’ ideology to sympathetic actors within Egypt and abroad, the GIS utilized the “Voice of the Arabs” and the Egyptian State Broadcasting network as tools of foreign subterfuge and influence.⁷⁴ This method allowed pan-Arabist ideology to reach the masses, while simultaneously circumventing education levels

⁷¹ Rogan, *The Arabs: A History*, 307.

⁷² Saïd K. Aburish, *Nasser: The Last Arab* (London: Duckworth, 2005), 151.

⁷³ Gerjes, *Making the Arab World*, 187.

⁷⁴ Rogan, *The Arabs: A History*, 305.

and literacy skills that might have been lacking in more impoverished regions of the Arab world. As messages from Cairo were transmitted far and wide, foreign consultants for the "Voice of the Arabs" in different MENA states would report back to the GID on what shows and messages were best received by the local populations, thus allowing the station's programming to be finetuned and custom-fitted to target a variety of demographics.⁷⁵ The GID would then task the Egyptian State Broadcasting network with transmitting suitable messages and tasks to the local populations, readying the political climate for a shift towards pro-Abdel Nasserist sentiments.

The "Voice of the Arabs" became the first step in Abdel Nasser's expansion of pan-Arabism and subversion of pre-existing governments in nations such as Jordan, Iraq, and Libya to name a few; in the case of Jordan, the "Voice of the Arabs" encouraged the Jordanian people to kill their prime minister Hazza al-Majali, who was inevitably assassinated by agents sympathetic to the UAR in 1960.⁷⁶ This was done in order to subvert King Hussein of Jordan's continual attempts at joining the Baghdad Pact, a collaborative security agreement between Western powers (namely the US and UK) and Iraq, Iran, Turkey, and Pakistan. Abdel Nasser was visibly opposed to Jordan's seeming betrayal of the pan-Arabist cause and proclivity for Western cooperation, and used Egyptian radio propaganda as a means of undermining King Hussein's position in the Arab world by having Radio Cairo denounce the King as "the Judas of the Arabs."⁷⁷ The message was clear in both cases; any Arab government that rejected Abdel Nasser's goal of Arab unification was a traitor to the region and would be dealt with accordingly.

While the existence and impact of "Voice of the Arabs" is well documented in a variety of sources, an interesting point must be raised regarding the GID's acknowledgment of the station; Salah Nasr rarely mentioned said radio station, or the GID's use of this propaganda tool, in his memoirs or interviews. That is not to say that Salah Nasr did not have a hand in the operation of the "Voice of the Arabs", as the influence of the GID can be seen in the impact of the "Voice of the Arabs" throughout the region; however, the lack of comments by Nasr seems to run parallel to the goals and persona of the GID as a whole. As the station was publicly operated by the official governmental broadcasting network of Egypt, with GID input being focused on devising and revising the propaganda, it follows that Nasr would not have much to say about such a blatant tool of ideological warfare. Although plausible deniability entails that not all operations are kept secret, and ensures those in charge of the planning and execution of such

⁷⁵ Sirrs, *The Egyptian Intelligence Service: A History of the Mukhabarat, 1910-2009*, 45.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, 67, 69, 156.

⁷⁷ Avi Shlaim, *Lion of Jordan: The Life of King Hussein in War and Peace* (New York: Vintage Books, a Division of Random House, 2009), 180.

operations can deflect criticism, use of radio propaganda seemingly did not warrant any in-depth discussion by Nasr. In such cases, one might say that the proof is in the pudding. While radio propaganda proved an invaluable asset in disseminating Abdel Nasser's ideology, and the GID was known to have advised the operation of such propaganda, the clear impact of such a tool on the Arab region meant that no further comments on its effectiveness or composition were required by the head of the GID. Once Egypt acquired a foothold in a neighboring state through the use of radio propaganda, the next step would be to arm, train, and fund the separatist movements in those states. If radio was representative of what Gerges referred to as the "idealist political project" of pan-Arabism, then the actual act of financing and arming an independence movement would be the "product of realist calculations" as previously highlighted.⁷⁸ Two key examples of this would be Algeria and Iraq, countries with similar colonial histories to Egypt and important pieces in Abdel Nasser's goal for the MENA region.

The importance of Africa in Abdel Nasser's goal of pan-Arabist resistance to foreign influence was made clear even prior to his acquisition of power in the Egyptian government. During his time as an officer in King Farouk's army, Abdel Nasser began working on a book titled *Philosophy of the Revolution*; published in 1956 and serving as a manifesto of Abdel Nasser's ideology on both the Egyptian condition and the state of the MENA region, Abdel Nasser addressed the need for involvement in African resistance to colonial powers as such:

It is a certain fact that Africa at present is the scene of an exciting ebullition. The white man, representing several European countries, is trying again to repartition the continent. We cannot stand aside in face of what is taking place in Africa on the assumption that it does not concern or affect us.⁷⁹

Abdel Nasser's first foray into African support was the Algerian War of Independence in 1954. Utilizing the Egyptian military intelligence branch under Muhi al-Din, Abdel Nasser developed covert ties with Algerian revolutionaries such as Ahmed Ben Bella (Algeria's first president) and assisted them in creating the Front de Liberation Nationale in "October 1954 as an umbrella for the Algerian nationalist groups."⁸⁰ Salah Nasr noted in his memoirs that Egyptian intelligence was a "driving force" throughout the entirety of the Algerian revolution; according to Nasr,

⁷⁸ Gerges, *Making the Arab World*, 187-188.

⁷⁹ Gamal Abdel Nasser, *The Philosophy of the Revolution* (Cairo: Dar Al-Maaref, 1955), 70.

⁸⁰ Sirrs, *The Egyptian Intelligence Service: A History of the Mukhabarat, 1910-2009*, 47.

“Egypt provided effective aid to the Algerian revolution...as it provided it with weapons...helped it in training the revolutionaries...and in the field of propaganda.”⁸¹ This support would continue until the Algerians eventually achieved independence in 1962, a critical moment in the decolonization process of the MENA region and one of extreme historical significance. In light of such information, one can understand the impact of Nasr’s GID on promoting Abdel Nasser’s goal of anti-colonial, pan-Arabist ideology through tangible actions outside of Egypt.

In a similar fashion to Algeria, wherein the Front de Liberation Nationale was influenced by the Free Officers’ coup, Iraq saw its own coup take place in 1958; however, the parallels between Egypt’s regime change and the coup in Iraq were eerily similar in their composition and execution. To start with, both nations were former British colonies that were ruled by pro-British monarchies, with King Farouk ruling Egypt and King Faisal II presiding over Iraq. Clearly inspired by Abdel Nasser’s revolution, a group of Iraqi military officers led by army brigadier Abd al-Karim Qasim took up the official name of the “Free Officers” and overthrew the government in 1958; in stark contrast to Abdel Nasser’s movement, the Iraqi Free Officers executed both King Faisal and prime minister Nuri al-Said upon seizing power.⁸² As highlighted, the influence of Abdel Nasser on the Iraqi coup was blatant to say the least. However, such similarities did not mean that Abdel Nasser was necessarily a fan of the Iraqi Free Officers and the new Iraqi prime minister, Abd al-Karim Qasim. In fact, Abdel Nasser and Qasim quickly became bitter rivals due to their strong personality differences and disagreements on the future of the Arab region; Abdel Nasser feared Qasim would attempt to “lure Syria out of the UAR” while Qasim opposed Abdel Nasser’s “lofty status as idol of the Arabs.”⁸³ In fact, Salah Nasr even referred to Qasim as Abdel Nasser’s “archenemy” in his memoirs, a dramatic statement that ostensibly indicated the relationship between Egypt and Iraq.⁸⁴ Nasr’s GID was then tasked with devising a method of removing Qasim from power, as Abdel Nasser’s pursuit of pan-Arabism did not allow for any other Arab leader to take the reins or challenge his authority. Thus, the mukhabarat backed a series of revolts, plots, and assassination attempts against Qasim throughout 1959; however, these efforts were unsuccessful and Qasim continued to be a thorn in Abdel Nasser’s side.⁸⁵ Radio propaganda transmitted via the “Voice of the Arabs” continually sought to exploit a weakness in Qasim’s position within Iraq, with the GID resorting to any

⁸¹ Ṣalāḥ Naṣr, *Mudakkirāt Ṣalāḥ Naṣr 1*, (Al-Qāhira: Dār Al-Ḥaiyāl, 1999), 387.

⁸² Rogan, *The Arabs: A History*, 312.

⁸³ Sirrs, *The Egyptian Intelligence Service: A History of the Mukhabarat, 1910-2009*, 69.

⁸⁴ Naṣr, *Mudakkirāt Ṣalāḥ Naṣr 2*, 15.

⁸⁵ Sirrs, *The Egyptian Intelligence Service: A History of the Mukhabarat, 1910-2009*, 69.

method available to hopefully oust Abdel Nasser's foe. It was then quite fortunate for Abdel Nasser that Qasim was overthrown and executed by the Ba'athist revolution in 1963 - Salah Nasr himself stated that "luck helps [Abdel Nasser]", and that the "balance sheets had turned."⁸⁶ Although the GID was not as successful in Iraq as other Arab nations, it is important to highlight this example as not only a representation of Abdel Nasser's quest for power but the lengths to which the GID would go in order to ensure Egypt remained unchallenged as the leader of the burgeoning Arab unification movement. For Abdel Nasser, imitation of his anti-colonial revolution was but the first step in a state's eventual subservience to his dream; Arab nationalism, it seemed, was sidelined in favor of his own interpretation of Arab identity and unity.

The case studies on Algeria and Iraq both present a clear picture of Abdel Nasser's pan-Arabist ideology and the lengths the GID went to in order to ensure it became a reality. While not every attempt was successful, the GID utilized every tactic at their disposal in order to remove Western-backed governments from the MENA region while also ensuring that the new regimes would not only follow Abdel Nasser's goal but also acknowledge him as the true leader of the Arab cause. There was one way of pursuing pan-Arabism, and Abdel Nasser expected complete loyalty and subservience throughout the Arab world. While other examples of the GID's actions in bringing pan-Arabism to life are available, the cases presented above are meant to show the two extremes of Egypt's relationship with the region. As will be explored further in later sections, the GID left a lasting impact on the region by exporting its methods of espionage and control. Regardless of the longevity of an Arab country's ties to Abdel Nasser, or their relationship with pan-Arabism from the beginning, the ripples left by the GID's intervention in numerous regime changes were felt for many years to come, often with unintended side effects. To explore the entirety of the MENA region under Abdel Nasser would require a series of books in order to soak in every detail. Suffice to say, Abdel Nasser's use of the GID in disseminating his own brand of Arab unification left no stone unturned or method unexploited. For nearly 11 years, Abdel Nasser navigated the political climate of the region with a deepset desire to exert his own will and desires on the governments and people of the Middle East and North Africa. While his career was not flawless in terms of victories and achievements, Abdel Nasser's reputation and image loomed large over the socio-political development of the Arab world, in many ways due to Salah Nasr's actions. However, this growth could not last for long, as Abdel Nasser and the Free Officers would eventually confront the very entity that spurred their decision

⁸⁶ Nasr, *Mudakkirāt Ṣalāh Naṣr* 2, 15, 337.

to move against King Farouk and achieve power in the first place. In 1967, Egypt would go to war with Israel for six days and lose, marking the beginning of the end for pan-Arabism.

Chapter 3: On the Shoulders of Giants

Dreams Turn to Dust

While the Six-Day War between Israel and Egypt effectively sealed the fate of pan-Arabism, marking the beginning of its decline from a regional ideology and unifying philosophy into a chapter in the archives of history, it was not the first of Abdel Nasser's blunders. To many, Egypt's greatest mistake was involving itself in the Yemen Civil War of 1962, a long and bloody conflict that saw Abdel Nasser back the Yemeni republicans against British and Saudi Arabian-backed Yemeni royalists. This conflict, wherein Abdel Nasser devoted considerable troops, arms, funding, and intelligence to back the republicans over a five-year period, ultimately resulted in what historians refer to as "Abdel Nasser's Vietnam."⁸⁷ On top of this, tensions had continually grown between Syria and Egypt, threatening the sanctity of the UAR. With Syrians growing more discontent with Egypt's powerful grip on the internal affairs of their state, Abdel Nasser fell prey to the very same tactics that he used and exported through the efforts of the GID. A military coup by Syrian officers against Egyptian government representatives took place on September 28th, 1961, resulting in the expulsion of Egyptian influence, the "deportation of all Egyptians from Syrian soil", and the dissolving of Abdel Nasser's United Arab Republic.⁸⁸ The massive toll exerted on the Egyptian army and intelligence community in dealing with the Yemen Civil War, as well as growing rifts within Abdel Nasser's own government, also contributed to the precarious position of Egyptian combat effectiveness and coordination. This left Egypt vulnerable to the growing capabilities of Israel, one of its most prominent opponents. In light of this reality, Israel struck a blow against Abdel Nasser and his pan-Arabist agenda; on June 5th, 1967, Israel launched an airstrike against the grounded Egyptian air force, decimating the majority of their air power in one fell swoop.⁸⁹ This utter annihilation of the Egyptian air force set the tone for the rest of the conflict, and by the end of the Six-Day War Egypt had suffered major setbacks in their regional position due to their loss. Gaza

⁸⁷ Goldschmidt, *Modern Egypt*, 139.

⁸⁸ Rogan, *The Arabs*, 284.

⁸⁹ Sirrs, *The Egyptian Intelligence Service: A History of the Mukhabarat, 1910-2009*, 94.

and Sinai were seized by Israel, Egypt lost the regional influence it previously had enjoyed, and Abdel Nasser “now entered the twilight years of his political career.”⁹⁰

Egypt’s humiliation in the Six-Day War did not only impact Abdel Nasser; Salah Nasr, pinpointing 1967 as the year in which the pan-Arabist dream began to die, simply referred to 1967 as “the sad year”.⁹¹ In describing the Israeli airstrike on Egypt’s grounded air force, Nasr stated that “the sky rained a torrent of lava.”⁹² The image is striking, and seemingly affected Nasr deeply. Abdel Nasser, apparently disillusioned with his leadership and ashamed of Egypt’s defeat, took to the airwaves to announce his resignation as president of Egypt on June 9th, 1967. What followed was a mass outcry of public support for Abdel Nasser, with thousands taking to the streets to urge Abdel Nasser to remain in leadership. Moved by the love and adoration he received by his Egyptian compatriots, Abdel Nasser announced that he would in fact not step down after all. That is, at least, how the story is often presented. According to Salah Nasr, this was actually a plan devised by Abdel Nasser himself and set in motion by the GID as a way of maintaining Abdel Nasser’s public persona in the eyes of the Egyptians. In Salah Nasr’s third and last published memoir, the entire affair was referred to as a “political game”; Abdel Nasser would step down, appoint a new leader in order to “move the political apparatus”, and then return to power with the support of the Egyptian people.⁹³ In order to accomplish this task, the GID contacted the president of the Egyptian Socialist Union and arranged for a demonstration to be held in support of Abdel Nasser. However, Nasr noted that some of the Socialist Union demonstrators had miscalculated the time, and “arrived at the outskirts of Cairo an hour or less before the announcement of [Abdel Nasser’s] resignation.”⁹⁴ As more and more individuals joined the march, Abdel Nasser eventually had sufficient public support to annul his resignation. His plan, with the help of Nasr and the GID, was a resounding success.

As highlighted in previous sections of the thesis, Nasr should not be taken as the most reliable of narrators, especially given his position as the head of the GID. In multiple cases, Nasr deflects, embellishes, and twists the truth in order to make his position seem more favorable. While this is definitely true, one can discern where Nasr is being uncharacteristically candid by examining the nature of the act in reference, as well as his description of the affair. For the most part, Nasr’s bending of the truth is calculated in order to absolve himself from any responsibility

⁹⁰ Ibid., 94, 102.

⁹¹ Nasr, *Mudakkirāt Ṣalāh Naṣr* 3, 201.

⁹² Ibid., 229.

⁹³ Ibid., 280.

⁹⁴ Ibid.

in an act that was explicitly coordinated by him; however, in cases such as the revelation regarding the theatrical demonstration in favor of Abdel Nasser, Nasr clearly states that the idea was of Abdel Nasser's own design. In this way, Salah Nasr and the GID was simply following orders and were not promoting any deceitful manipulation of the Egyptian political climate. This is also echoed in Nasr's confirmations that Abdel Nasser bugged his own governmental officials and colleagues. As this statement was confirmed to be true, as discussed in previous sections, Nasr's credibility in such cases is more air-tight than regarding his own actions and decisions. As long as Abdel Nasser personally requested his assistance, Salah Nasr was seemingly comfortable exposing the leader in his writings. Regarding his own actions and decisions, Nasr is more cautious in his words and statements. On one hand, this could be seen as Salah Nasr further embellishing the truth by throwing Abdel Nasser under the bus. On the other hand, Nasr's general form of explanation lends the reader to believe that Nasr's beloved "plausible deniability" was continually in effect in order to save his own skin. This becomes even more apparent in the conflicting accounts of Nasr's resignation as head of the GID on August 26th, 1967.

According to Sirrs, there existed a major point in Salah Nasr's eventual fallout with Abdel Nasser: an alleged conspiracy by Free Officer and former representative of Egypt in Syria, Abdel Hakim 'Amr, was underway to overthrow Abdel Nasser, with Salah Nasr apparently involved in the entire affair.⁹⁵ In fact, a statement from the US Director of the Bureau of Intelligence and Research to US Secretary of State Dean Rusk claims that Nasr contacted a US intelligence agent in order to "express disdain for Abdel Nasser" while also hinting at supporting a coup-attempt led by 'Amr and Muhi al-Din.⁹⁶ Apparently, Abdel Nasser was wary of this growing conspiracy, and moved against 'Amr with the help of fellow loyal Free Officers (including Muhi al-Din, which is worth noting) and arrested the conspirator, followed by roughly 50 "senior officers and civilians" including Salah Nasr himself.⁹⁷ Amr would go on to die due to poisoning two weeks following his arrest, leading many to doubt whether it was an act of suicide or premeditated murder. Sirrs highlights that Nasr was subsequently handed a lifetime imprisonment sentence on accounts of murder, use of torture, and other acts that had been perpetrated by the GID while he was in charge.⁹⁸ While Nasr did not end up serving the entirety of his sentence, and was eventually released, the gesture was clear to the Egyptian people. In a

⁹⁵ Ibid., 105.

⁹⁶ Office of the Historian, accessed June 5, 2021, <https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1964-68v19/d339>

⁹⁷ Sirrs, *The Egyptian Intelligence Service: A History of the Mukhabarat, 1910-2009*, 105-106.

⁹⁸ Ibid., 106.

possible attempt to offer up the dreaded head of the mukhabarat as a sign of goodwill towards the people, Abdel Nasser purged the Egyptian intelligence community of its old guard. Salah Nasr was to be relegated to a footnote in Abdel Nasser's pan-Arabist vision for the MENA region. However, as is to be expected, Nasr paints his own perspective of these events in his memoirs. Apparently, Nasr had asked Abdel Nasser to find another head of intelligence prior to the purge of the junta, to which Abdel Nasser vehemently rejected.⁹⁹ This would seemingly indicate that Abdel Nasser wanted Nasr to remain for any variety of reason, although this could in reality be Nasr's attempt at weaving the narrative surrounding his eventual arrest. Further evidence of this theory is found in Nasr's memoirs, as Nasr states that Abdel Nasser increasingly made irrational and destructive decisions, such as firing and arresting officers and friends while refusing to take responsibility for his own actions. Nasr asserts that Abdel Nasser was attempting to frame his fellow Free Officers for shortcomings that were "clearly his own fault."¹⁰⁰ Furthermore, Nasr states that his resignation was borne out of a choice between two options: stand with his men, "good men" that had given everything to the revolution, and resign, or watch his men get "unjustly persecuted", with Nasr opting for the second option.¹⁰¹ These statements are clearly painted by Nasr to portray himself as being morally obligated to resign, though one might find that hard to believe given Nasr's previous actions. All in all, Nasr's stint as head of the GID was concluded; three years following Nasr's resignation, Abdel Nasser would die of a heart attack, leaving the last remnants of Egyptian pan-Arabist policy to slowly fade away.

The Man Behind the Curtain

In December of 1966, *Times* magazine in London published an advertisement for a trading company that claimed to have "19 branches in Africa and hundreds of contacts all over the world".¹⁰² This normally would not raise any suspicions, as such advertisements are quite common in particular magazines; however, further inspection reveals that this company, El-Nasr Export & Import Co., was not as innocuous as one might have thought at first glance. Established in 1958 in Cairo, El-Nasr has relatively little information on its history and operation available to the public besides an outdated website. This website lists El-Nasr company as "one

⁹⁹ Naṣr, *Mudakkirāt Ṣalāh Naṣr* 3, 329.

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, 345.

¹⁰¹ *Ibid.*

¹⁰² "El Nasr Export & Import Co." *Times*, December 30, 1966, 36. The Times Digital Archive (accessed June 8, 2021).

<https://link-gale-com.ezproxy.aub.edu.lb/apps/doc/CS604203934/TTDA?u=aub&sid=bookmark-TTDA&xid=994c5bf4>. Found in the appendix

of the leading public enterprise sector companies”, dealing in a variety of services from “importing strategic goods needed by the Egyptian market” and “internal trading” to “international investments” and “customs clearance.”¹⁰³ Ostensibly, the El-Nasr trading company was founded by Salah Nasr as a front for the GID’s operations and financial investments, a claim which Nasr confirms in his interview with Abdullah Imam.¹⁰⁴ Nasr claimed that this was not unheard of for agencies to do, as according to him the British had been using the Shell petroleum company as a front during the Cold War as well. When placed in this context, the advertisement of El-Nasr company in the *Times* becomes much more insidious than one might have originally thought. The countries listed as hosting branches, such as Ghana and the Congo, were key strategic locations in Abdel Nasser’s anti-colonialist mission in Africa.¹⁰⁵ Furthermore, the reach of the company seemingly extended beyond Africa and into the Middle East, Europe, and beyond. The El-Nasr company allowed funds to be covertly shared and diplomatic ties to be established between Egypt and different MENA states and foreign actors, presumably intelligence agencies such as the CIA and KGB, while posing as a legitimate trading company. This is but one of many instances of the tools and techniques utilized by Salah Nasr in order to expand the GID’s influence throughout the region while feigning innocence and deflecting any assumptions of his true intentions. The lengths to which Nasr and the GID went in an effort to make Abdel Nasser’s pan-Arabist dream a reality, both within Egypt and abroad, are almost too numerous to count. This paper has sought to highlight as many instances as possible, considering that others are still classified and inaccessible except to those with connections in Cairo. For some, these examples might be interesting yet largely unsurprising; given modern discussion on the intelligence operations of the Cold War, and the lengths many leaders went in order to consolidate their domestic, regional, and international position, how are these statements considered revelations by any extent of the imagination?

While it is true that one would expect Abdel Nasser to encourage espionage and covert intelligence operations under his rule, especially considering historical accounts of the police state within Egypt at the time, the importance of these revelations is much greater than one might take at face value. Gamal Abdel Nasser remains a prominent figure of Arab empowerment and unity within the MENA region to this very day, with many throughout the Arab world wistfully yearning for a time where an Arab leader brought a sense of growth and progress to the region.

¹⁰³ EL NASR FOR IMPORT AND EXPORT, accessed June 8, 2021, <https://elnasrexpimp.com/about-e.html>.

¹⁰⁴ Imām, *Salāh Nasr Yatadakkir: Al Mukābarāt Wa at Taura*, 163-164.

¹⁰⁵ Philip E. Muehlenbeck, *Betting on the Africans: John F. Kennedy’s Courting of African Nationalist Leaders* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2014), 124.

Historians often discuss Abdel Nasser's life, including his accomplishments and failures, as running parallel to the larger-than-life image he conveyed to the world and was reflected back at him. However, while it would be foolish to deny Abdel Nasser his place as a prominent figure in the development of the modern Middle East, an exploration of the methods used to create and solidify this image sheds new light on the "Lion of the Arabs". To make an analogy, if Abdel Nasser was the architect then Salah Nasr was the foreman. The GID was critical in establishing and reinforcing Abdel Nasser's goals within Egypt and beyond, but are relatively underexplored due to their shadowy nature of operation. This is, in my opinion, a tragic misstep in the general discussion of Abdel Nasser and pan-Arabism. In fact, bringing Salah Nasr's acts and leadership to light seemingly redirects much of the praise and blame directed towards Abdel Nasser back onto Nasr himself. This raises an important question, namely to what extent should Abdel Nasser continue to receive the accolades he did when Salah Nasr was essentially the one responsible for much of Abdel Nasser's growth? In terms of concrete, tangible actions, should Salah Nasr and his leadership of the GID supplant Abdel Nasser as the facilitator of pan-Arabism?

In 1988, an explosive book on the private life of Salah Nasr was published by his wife, Etimad Khorshid; Khorshid, an Egyptian film producer, alleged that Nasr had forced her into divorcing her previous husband so that he could take her for himself. The book, titled *The Perversions of Salah Nasr*, depicted Nasr as a depraved individual with uncontrollable rage and lust; although the veracity of her accounts can not be established in full, leading many to reject the book as a hit piece and a tactical move to exploit the Egyptian public's hatred for the mukhabarat and its leader, it is important to explore Khorshid's claims in historical context. In the book, Khorshid makes a number of claims about Nasr's abusive nature, sexual exploits, and more, all of which only compounded upon Nasr's public persona. However, a key point that is often neglected in discussing the book is Nasr's apparent confession that he orchestrated the death of King Farouk. According to Khorshid, on the night that King Farouk was rushed to the hospital during his exile in Italy, Nasr paced around his room like "a caged tiger", instructing Khorshid to not touch the phone as he was expecting a call. Upon inquiring into what was bothering him so, Nasr apparently replied that "King Farouk will die tonight".¹⁰⁶ Not long after that statement, Nasr received a phone call that confirmed the death of King Farouk. Although this revelation is remarkable should it be true, one might wonder as to why it was included in this section. After all, there has already been much discussion on the actions of Nasr and their seeming lack of morality, how should this statement be any different? To answer this question,

القاهرة: مؤسسة امون الحديثة, 1988. ed. اعتماد, خورشيد, اعتماد خورشيد شهادة على. انحرافات صلاح نصر. ط. 4, 191 106

one must look back at Abdel Nasser's decision to allow King Farouk to leave Egypt unharmed following his forced abdication. Although different Free Officers called for Farouk's head, Abdel Nasser resisted and permitted Farouk to leave without fear of death. Furthermore, Farouk died in 1965 with virtually no loyal supporters present in his home of Egypt. Had Farouk been stoking the fires of revolution against Abdel Nasser, it would make sense that the GID would go about neutralizing this threat. Salah Nasr himself stated this in his interview with Imam, claiming that there was no reason to kill Farouk on his end as Farouk had no support in Egypt.¹⁰⁷ Why then would Khorshid claim this, besides to add further details to her book? In examining these allegations, one must once again take into consideration Salah Nasr's moments of honesty versus clear denial and deflection.

In the entirety of Salah Nasr's memoirs, no mention was made towards Abdel Nasser's call for Farouk's death in 1965. This falls in line with Abdel Nasser's decision to spare the former king; with the balance of power within the MENA region shifting from former monarchies to the influence of foreign superpowers, Farouk's claim to power was a relic of a bygone era. Should Abdel Nasser have needed to assassinate King Farouk, he would have instructed the GID to do so, and Nasr would have subsequently reported on this in his memoirs. However, after reading through Nasr's writings and discussions, one begins to pick apart the previously-mentioned signs of "plausible deniability" and general deflection. Nasr's response to the poisoning of Farouk reflects the same language and techniques used to protect himself from other accusations that were lobbed against him, accusations that were shown to have been accurate. This leads one to assume that Nasr was indeed guilty of coordinating the hit on King Farouk, and had done so without Abdel Nasser's approval or knowledge. The reason for this is not known; however, it is reasonable to assume that Nasr was indeed the architect of Farouk's demise. In light of this, one is made aware of the full capabilities and reach of the GID, operating on the orders of Salah Nasr without input from the Egyptian president. As Salah Nasr could circumvent Abdel Nasser's authority and carry out his own acts, while also going to great lengths to see Abdel Nasser's explicit commands come true, one understands the true power of the GID. In order to disseminate the pan-Arabist dream throughout the region, Nasr had accrued enough influence to operate at his own leisure in certain regards. To some, this would prove that Abdel Nasser not only owed much of the praise he received to Nasr, but also that Nasr and the GID had considerably more power and influence within Egypt and the region than even Abdel Nasser. If

¹⁰⁷ Imām, *Salāh Nasr Yatadakkir: Al Mukābarāt Wa at Taura*, 113.

Nasr was the foreman of Abdel Nasser's vision, then he was naturally the one with more concrete influence on the development of the project than even the visionary himself.

Conclusion: Re-examining Abdel Nasser's Legacy

With pan-Arabism deflating into a romanticized ideal of Arab power and influence, Abdel Nasser's legacy became his persona and ideological convictions. In stark contrast to this dream, the impact of the mukhabarat throughout the region has seen even further growth than initially intended. The Egyptian mukhabarat exist to this very day, and remain a strong tool in the suppression of dissent and rebellion. One must look no further than the Arab Spring and the claims of repeated brutality and torture of Egyptian citizens at the hands of the secret police. The mukhabarat also remained a strong fixture in Syria, operating under the Assad regime as a means of surveillance and socio-political control; Syria's own mukhabarat continues to have close ties to the Egyptian mukhabarat, seemingly as a result of the relationship developed between the two states under the UAR.¹⁰⁸ The different revolutions, coups, and regime changes orchestrated with help from the GID also contributed to drastic regional changes, all under the guise of spreading Abdel Nasser's dream of pan-Arabism. In re-examining the influence of Abdel Nasser on the region as being closely tied to the actions of the mukhabarat and the guidance of Salah Nasr, one must question the true legacy of Abdel Nasser. It would follow that Abdel Nasser's true legacy is not the lofty ideals he championed but rather the invasive and controversial system of intelligence and control that permeates Egypt and many Arab states to this very day. In his efforts to solidify his power over the region as the only rightful leader of the Arab cause, Abdel Nasser's endorsement and use of subversive and oppressive systems of control impacted the future of both Egypt and the region as a whole. Just as many young revolutionaries still idolize Che Guevara and Fidel Castro's revolution while ignoring the lasting impact of their influence on Cuba and its people, so too do many young idealists in the Arab world ignore the tangible repercussions of Abdel Nasser's quest for hegemonic power within the region.

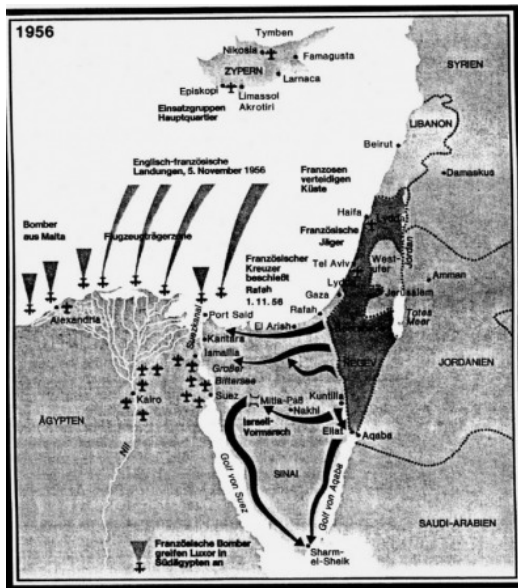
If much of Abdel Nasser's accomplishments, as well as his criticisms, can be directly attributed to Salah Nasr, then it stands to reason that one must blame Nasr for the lasting impact of the mukhabarat on the region entirely. However, this is not exactly true. As explored throughout this thesis, Abdel Nasser was not unaware of Nasr's doings. In fact, Abdel Nasser encouraged much of the methods and actions undertaken by the mukhabarat. As the Egyptian *mukhabarat* were closely tied to a myriad of different uprisings throughout the region, all

¹⁰⁸ Sirrs, *The Egyptian Intelligence Service: A History of the Mukhabarat, 1910-2009*, 183.

attempting to shed the weight of foreign-backed governments and leaders in favor of more nationalist (and Abdel Nasser sympathetic) leadership, it is paramount that one explores the impact of the Egyptian intelligence state on the proliferation of Abdel Nasser's grand dream within Egypt and throughout the entire region. This thesis was an attempt at exploring this impact, with further investigation into the life of Salah Nasr promises even more illuminating revelations. In essence, Gamal Abdel Nasser's goals of pan-Arabism, which are still lauded as a powerful ideology and one which many Arabs echo to this day, were not achieved. However, the *mukhabarat* had a paramount role in the early heydays of pan-Arabism. The rise of the Egyptian intelligence service exists as a more tangible and insidious relic of Abdel Nasser's rule, maintaining a grip on both domestic and regional politics to this very day.

By chronicling the symbiotic relationship between Pan-Arabism and the Egyptian *mukhabarat* (as well as the parallels between Gamal Abdel Nasser and the second head of the Egyptian General Intelligence Directorate, Salah Nasr), I have attempted to explore both the public image of Abdel Nasser, and his goal of leading the Arab people to "unity", as well as the actual methods utilized by Salah Nasr and the *mukhabarat* to make this "dream" a reality. While Abdel Nasser is often the focal point of many historical narratives, he exists as a supplementary character in this thesis. Salah Nasr, the man behind the curtain and the one who pulled much of the strings, was both unleashed on the region at the behest of Abdel Nasser and eventually made an example of. The many accomplishments and failures of Abdel Nasser are therefore critically re-examined in terms of Salah Nasr and the role he played in attempting to weave the notion of pan-Arabism throughout the region by any means necessary.

Appendix



A figure explaining the Tripartite Aggression.¹⁰⁹




Abdel Nasser and his team meet with Nikita Khrushchev during a visit to Moscow. Note Salah Nasr seated at the far left of the table, engulfed in shadow, while Abdel Nasser is seated at the far right directly in front of Khrushchev.¹¹⁰

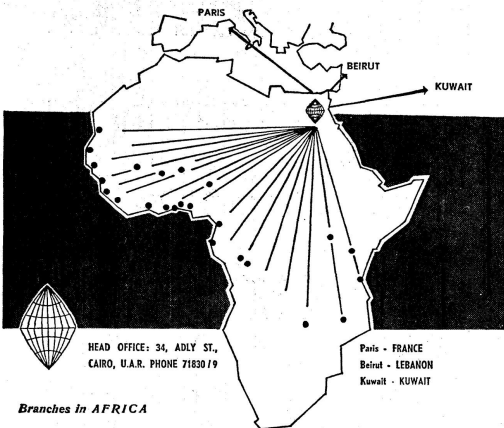
¹⁰⁹ "The Suez Crisis The Tripartite Aggression on Egypt 1956," The Arab-Israeli Conflict, [PAGE], accessed May 21, 2021, <http://israeliwar.weebly.com/the-1956-war.html>

¹¹⁰ Naṣr, *Mudakkirāt Ṣalāḥ Naṣr 2*.



Salah Nasr in Italy.¹¹¹


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El-Nasr company advertisement.¹¹²

¹¹¹ Ibid.

¹¹² "El Nasr Export & Import Co." Times, December 30, 1966, 36. The Times Digital Archive (accessed June 8, 2021).

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