

DECLASSIFIED
 Authority: (NND) 969045
 By: AC. NARA Date: 7/20/01

NEA/UAR: RB Parker: gcb
 (Drafting Office and Officer)

DE

Memorandum of Conversation
1968-4-26, Nasser, US, Contacts

DATE: April 26, 1968

SUBJECT: US-UAR Relations

PARTICIPANTS: Mr. James E. Birdsall - ALGO
 Mr. Richard B. Parker - Country Director, NEA/UAR

COPIES TO: NEA - Mr. Battle (cc)
 NEA- Mr. Davies (cc)
 - USINT CAIRO - Mr. Bergus (cc)

Mr. Birdsall said he had been to Cairo in mid-February and had a long talk with Nasser. The latter had been upset that his private correspondence through Birdsall had been revealed to the UAR Foreign Ministry. He said Foreign Minister Riyadh had been angry with him about his independent efforts to communicate with us. He also said laughingly that he understood the State Department was upset with Birdsall for similar reasons. He implied that he trusted neither the Department nor his own Foreign Ministry and that he had used Birdsall because he wanted to be sure his messages were transmitted accurately and fully.

Mr. Birdsall said that he felt he had done the USG quite a favor in getting Nasser to send a letter to President Johnson. Even though it had been carefully hedged, it had represented a great concession, because Nasser had not wanted to send any letter. That the movement towards a restoration of relations which this letter precipitated had been frustrated by UAR unhappiness with US policies in the area was not Birdsall's fault. He shared the UAR view of our policies and thought it was incomprehensible that we would sacrifice our national interests to a mistaken estimate of the political strength of a small minority of the electorate. Two or three years from now the State Department and the Democratic Party were going to be facing accusations of treason which would make the furor over the loss of China look like a Sunday school picnic. The American people were able to understand where our interests lay. What was needed was some courage from the Department. The people should be told the truth about the Near East. Even his Jewish friends admitted that our policies were wrong when they had things explained to them properly. The area was being lost to the Soviets, and that was not in Israel's interests any more than it was ours, although perhaps the answer was for the entire area, including Israel, to go communist. Then there could be peace.

FORM DS-1254
 3-61

SECRET/LIMDIS
 GROUP 3

NEA/UAR: RB Parker: gcb

POL WAR 1

DECLASSIFIED

Authority Z/WJ 969 C45

By MC NARA Date 7/26/01

SECRET/LIMDIS

2.

Returning to his theme, Mr. Birdsall said that instead of being welcomed with open arms and given a vote of gratitude for his efforts, he was being treated as a pariah by the Department. He could understand a professional's dislike of amateur interference, but he had not stuck his nose into the problem, it had been pulled in by Nasser, for reasons which were still unclear to him. Elwy Hafez and others were even now urging him to return to Egypt because Nasser had something more to say to him. Birdsall was not going, because he didn't like Egypt all that much, but he was ready to be of service if we wanted him.

Mr. Parker said we did indeed owe Mr. Birdsall thanks for his efforts, which were sincerely appreciated. As we had told him before, however, we had had a long history of misunderstandings between ourselves and Nasser. The latter would tell a private visitor such as Mr. Birdsall one thing, and his government would then proceed to act in a quite contrary fashion. When Mr. Birdsall reported that Nasser had not yet received the signed original of President Johnson's note last January, well after that note had been delivered by hand to Nasser's office, we had asked the UAR representative in Washington, who was discreet and well-known to us, to inquire of his contact in the UAR Presidency what was going on. He had never received a reply, but the inquiry he made was undoubtedly what alerted Mahmud Riyadh to the existence of this contact. Mr. Parker was sorry if this had caused Mr. Birdsall unhappiness, but there it was.

As for US policy in the area, Mr. Parker said that we unfortunately had to deal with the totality of political attitudes in the United States. Nasser's actions following the burning of the USIS library and culminating in his breaking of relations in a most hostile fashion had left an indelible imprint on American public opinion, in the Congress and in the Administration. Subjective reactions to insults should not determine our foreign policy, but they were in fact part of the picture. Nasser was poison at the box-office, and this inevitably colored our actions toward him. Whether Nasser's image could be improved at this late date was uncertain. Mr. Parker rather doubted it, and doubted there was anything much we could do about it. Mr. Parker himself was hoping for divine intervention.

SECRET/LIMDIS