

Nasser's Reasoning . . . By Alfred Friendly

Information Seems Deficient

TEL AVIV—In the light of events, it looks as if Col. Nasser's military intelligence was deficient on some points, as for example about which side could win the war. It also seems to have misled Nasser into concluding that an Israeli defeat was thwarted by American air sorties. The charge surely has the facts reversed. They are, rather, that the Soviet Union has a justifiable complaint that Israel's Air Force prevented an American defeat. The view from here may be distorted, but the prevailing notion up to a couple of weeks ago, at least, was that the United States had considerable interests in the Near East.



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They were thought to concern matters of high international policy, balance of power, cold-war considerations and prevention of war, not to mention oil.

There was also the matter of the trustworthiness and effectiveness of American commitments to certain Arab and Moslem nations anxious to avoid becoming subservient to Nasser and thereby to the gentry in Moscow who quarterbacked and bankrolled him.

It was even believed that the White House was anxious to avoid a credibility gap in this part of the world troubled as it is by something of the sort at home.

TO THE LAYMAN at least it appeared that American aims in the Near East were to prevent a Nasser takeover that would have toppled King Hussein of Jordan or rendered him a puppet; that would have neutralized Saudi Arabia; ended

Tunisia's and Morocco's nascent Western orientation and made the Western alignment of Iran and Turkey very uncomfortable for them and in the long run perhaps impossible.

It was also believed that among U.S. aims was the prevention of Egypt's and Syria's chosen supporter, the U.S.S.R., from achieving the position of dominant Big Power in the Near East—from becoming the nation to be reckoned with, the nation whose backing was proven credible and effective, in short, the nation that all the Near and Middle Eastern states had damn well better play ball with.

On the basis of that hypothesis it looked here about one week ago as if the American objectives were encountering some embarrassment or even difficulty or even collapse.

UNHAPPILY, no doubt, but without any other possible choice—so well had Nasser arranged matters—anti-Soviet Hassan of Morocco, settlement-minded Bourguiba of Tunisia, Egypt-fearing Idris of Libya and Nasser-hating Hussein of Jordan joined the jihad.

Even that welcome Washington visitor, Faisal of Saudi Arabia, chafed in impatience to send troop reinforcements to the holy war. The situation now has changed to be sure. But just as Nasser's claim that American air strikes gave the victory to Israel is an insult to the Israeli Air Force, so his claim that America supported Israel in other more general terms is an insult to American diplomacy.

Nasser accused the United States of trying to put together a consortium of Western imperialistic nations to open the Strait of Tiran to Israeli shipping. He could point to President Johnson's declaration that he deemed

the gulf of Aqaba to be an international waterway in proof of America's plotting.

He could even assert—had he known it—that American and British Embassies in Tel Aviv had assured reporters 12 hours before the shooting started that the maritime nations were signing up as fast as pledgers at a United Jewish Appeal banquet and that responsible quarters in Israel's government were swimming in Euphoria at the progress.

But those facts that have been made public tend to give Nasser the lie.

Enrolled with the United States were only Britain, the Netherlands and New Zealand (which hastily added that it wouldn't dream of taking any action to support the declaration) and buoyed by some editorialists the American Government made clear that it would never open the strait by itself, apparently considering unilateral action in behalf of its own interests as unparadoxically rude.

PERHAPS Egyptian intelligence told Nasser that the United States was succeeding so well in its efforts for Israel that he had to start the war.

Perhaps Israeli intelligence, which has proved somewhat better than Egyptian in recent days, believed otherwise. Whichever way it was Russia as noted above can be aggrieved at Israel for now having cast some doubt on the validity of Soviet promises and advice and on the utility of the masses of military hardware and doctrine it supplied to Egypt and Syria.

But the United States can honestly assure Nasser that whatever compliment was implicit in charges that America helped Israel in that course of events, it is quite undeserved.