

The Attitude of the United States of America towards the Coup against Egyptian-Syrian Unity in 1961

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Abstract—This paper contains the perspective of the United States of America to the unity between Egypt and Syria, and their integration into a single state called the United Arab Republic from 1961 to 1958. It shows the USA's policy towards this new state, and its attitude towards the Syrian coup against the state and its separation in 1961. At the end of the paper, we try to answer the question: Is the aggressive US strategy still present? Or changed?

This paper is a documentary study concerning the papers that are available to researchers on the internet from the US State Department. It includes a comparison between these papers and the documents of the Egyptian Ministry of Foreign Affairs that are found in the National Archives in Cairo. These documents are unpublished and only available to researchers under specific conditions.

Index Terms—America and the middle east, Egypt, Syria, united Arab republic, Arab unity.

I. INTRODUCTION

Each Arab country is threatened by division into smaller units according to religious, sectarian, or ethnic grounds. Sudan has already been divided into two states. A part of Iraq aspires to secede and witnesses a sectarian war. South Yemen seeks to secede. The cohesion of Libya is threatened by those who are greedy in its wealth and capabilities. Some Libyans want to divide Libya into three countries: Cyrenaica, Tripoli and Fezzan. Furthermore, Syria faces a confusing civil and sectarian strife which is intruded by outside enemies of the Arab people. The only loser is the Syrian and Arab people as a whole. Here comes the importance of this paper that displays the attitude of the USA as a superpower towards the separation of unity between Egypt and Syria in 1961, giving indications of what is happening in the Middle East.

II. THE PERSPECTIVE OF THE USA TO THE EGYPTIAN-SYRIAN UNITY (1958-1961)

The US strategy about the Egyptian-Syrian unity was established in the light of the unity's impact on three directions: America's interests in the Arab world and the Middle East, US national security, and the American Soviet conflict. At the beginning, the USA was anxious about the Egyptian-Syrian unity because it formed the largest regional state in the Middle East, in terms of area and population; thus upsetting the balance of strategic and political power in the Middle East [1]. The unity was a threat to the western military regulations against the Soviets in the Arab world

because the president of the new state Gamal Abdel Nasser rejected these regulations [2], [3].

This threatened the prestige of the Baghdad Alliance and restricted the pro-western Turkish regime between the Soviets in the north and Egypt in the south. This also influenced the policy of the Soviet Union's restriction.

Consequently, it threatened the US and Western national security because it violated the defense systems that were designed to support the "free world" [4].

Additionally, the Soviet Union provided modern weapon and financial aid to the states of the Union. Thus the new emerging state was granted power to be a willful opponent to the policy of the Baghdad Alliance, or to a new Turkish creeping [5], [6]. Otherwise, the unity threatened Israel which was established to form a human and geographic dividing line to prevent Arab nationalism and unity. Thus Israel ensures constant control on the capabilities of the Arab people. The declaration of the unity has given hope to the Palestinians in their return to their lands [7], so the US national Arabic newspapers described it as "something devastating" [8].

Additionally, the United States of America considers the new state as an expansion of the Egyptian government system and its economic policy that relies on the socialist approach of economic development, and neutrality in foreign policy. This threatens the transfer of oil from the Persian Gulf through the Suez Canal, and across the oil pipeline in Syrian territory, and then threatens Industries of Western Europe [9].

The unity has a bad influence on Western investments and the interests of multinational companies that are mostly owned by the US capital. These vital interests would fall under the control of Gamal Abdel Nasser who intended to direct those resources to Arab development. Thus the unity affected the balance between the two superpowers, which necessitated extreme caution and resistance from the American side [10].

III. THE USA'S POLICY TOWARDS EGYPTIAN-SYRIAN UNITY

The USA used several tools to eliminate the unity between Egypt and Syria, through applying the policy of restriction and containment. It depended on the friendly Arab governments, and used them as agents to restrict the new state.

In the Baghdad Alliance meeting (27-30th January 1958), the USA and Britain decided to not show an anti-reaction to the new state, according to the recommendations of American embassy in Syria [11]. They left the initiative to the allied Arab countries. Thus the conflict appears as if it is internal among the Arabs themselves [12]; therefore, they motivated Iraq to coordinate with the rest of the Arab allies. This Arab action should happen within a few weeks in order to achieve its target [13].

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On the other hand, they formed a working group between America and Britain called “the group of Syria work”. The task of this group was to coordinate the efforts of both countries and develop a common strategy about the danger of Egyptian-Syrian unity. Its task was also to motivate allied Arab governments to initiate team work, in order to save their threatened positions [14], [15]. This group succeeded to launch an organized propaganda war that provoked public opinion in the Northern Territory (Syria) against unity with Egypt [16].

After the exposure of Saud’s plot in 1958, the policy of containment emerged and the group suggested a proposal to improve relations with the state of unity, asking the Arabs to stop threatening their interests and multiplying the allied Arab regimes, especially Jordan [17] (pp. 435-436). Therefore, several options were suggested to solve the situation. These options were: defeating Gamal Abdel Nasser and getting rid of him, deceiving him, giving him full support, or following the policy of “live and let others live”. US administration preferred to follow the last option, for being the best policy to maneuver [17].

In the era of John F. Kennedy, US administration kept the policy of flattering and deceiving Gamal Abdel Nasser to contain him. At the same time, hidden tools kept working to end his unity and shock him [18]. Kennedy planned his policy on two parallel lines. The first is to assist Gamal Abdel Nasser in his dispute with the Soviet Union about the Arab communism. The second is to prevent him from transforming his country into a strategic power in the region and threatening American interests, as he helps the movements of liberation from Western colonialism [19].

While the new US strategy tended to avoid direct confrontation with Arab nationalism, the relations of the unity state with the new leadership in Iraq and the Soviet Union were strained. This was the opportunity for the United States to achieve two targets. One is related to the Soviet Union, and the other concerns the containment of Gamal Abdel Nasser and unity.

Therefore, efforts continued to find a way to separate the two countries, with participation of Arab forces and internal cooperating forces. The United States supposed that the unity state will empower Gamal Abdel Nasser to decide the destiny of Egypt and Syria, and will oppose any other form of Arab nationalism in the Middle East [20], [21]. A study in the US State Department confirmed that the results of ending the unity between Egypt and Syria will be more difficult than what is expected by politicians in both countries [22].

The US strategy developed the previous tools and took advantage of internal mistakes in the United Arab Republic. After the return of King Saud on 21st December 1960 [23], the governments of Saudi Arabia and Jordan cooperated with greedy Syrian figures, coordinated by the US [24]. But King Saud never wanted to come into view because the sensitivity of his position. He supported the cooperation with money [25]. The Syrian figures received money from Jordan [26], [27] and from embassies in Jordan and Saudi Arabia [28]. Alkhumasia company was financed too¹.

The report of “Allan Dallas” confirmed the involvement

of the US in this coup. The report stated that “ the US should not get involved in resisting the unity. It is better to support the antagonists who are deprived from political power and need an opportunity to express their opinion. The US should consult allied Arab countries to co-opt more antagonists of the unity in Northern Territory. Therefore, all of them would provide effective support” [13]. Allen Dellas stated that this cooperation should be secretive, for the benefit of all parties [29].

IV. THE US POLICY AFTER THE SYRIAN COUP AGAINST THE UNITY IN 1961

After the success of Syrian coup on 28th September 1961, the government of separation was formed at the same night. The initiative was from: Jordan, Turkey, Mexico, Iran, the Government of Formosa Chiang Kai-shek in China, and the government of Guatemala. They are managed by American monopolistic companies. Iraq was recognized [26]. Israel promised King Hussein that if he fully withdrew his army, it would not act against him. It wanted to put him at the service of the coup against the rule of Abdel Nasser [30].

King Hussein reassured the US administration that Syrian coup succeeded [31]. But the US asked Israel not to involve in Syria [32] in order to avoid the risk of supporting coup [26]. If Washington or its allies declared a pro-coup, Gamal Abdel Nasser would cooperate with the Soviets to compensate for the loss. He could also take large action against Israel in the light of the coup weakness [33].

The documents of US State Department revealed its concern about the absence of a president, replacing Gamal Abdel Nasser. This means that the new Syrian regime could survive within the State of unity [34]. The US administration gave options to Gamal Abdel Nasser [35]. They were worried that he could use the force after he rejected to resolve the settlement with the coup leaders [36].

The USA decided not to do anything official and avoided the acknowledgement of the new regime. They didn’t want to give Gamal Abdel Nasser a pretext to throw accusations on the United States and Britain [33]. They preferred to deliver covert support to the new Syrian regime through Jordan or Turkey. The friendship of the United States was confirmed, but it couldn’t be announced at that time [37]. They decided to support the new Syrian regime and deter Gamal Abdel Nasser indirectly. They performed this through their agents from the governments of Jordan, Turkey and Iraq [37].

When the president Gamal Abdel Nasser intended to take military action to restore Syria, President Kennedy ordered the ships of the American Sixth Fleet in Istanbul to get ready. The fleet was ordered to move in the Mediterranean during the Egyptian landing in Syria [38]. Emergency actions were taken in Oman, Tel Aviv, Ankara and Iraq [36] (pp. 263). After Gamal Abdel Nasser withdrew the military forces from Syria, Washington Post newspaper published that “Syria was liberated from the United Arab Republic and proved its independence” [39].

Subsequently, the United States was satisfied that the Syrian military coup was a decisive blow to the prestige of Gamal Abdel Nasser, and stabbed his leadership of the Arab world. His national expansion and danger were declining [34]. Such a strike to Gamal Abdel Nasser was not harmful to the interests of the United States. His role was restricted seriously and he would be pliable in the future. His ideas

¹ A personal interview between the researcher and the Ambassador Abdel Fatah Elzeiny former assistant of Egyptian foreign minister, at the Institute of Diplomatic Studies, Dec. 23, 2011.

and energies would be directed to internal developments in Egypt [33], [40]. The US administration was very wise at the time of separation. It encouraged the new Syrian regime indirectly, and wooed Gamal Abdel Nasser [33].

After the trials of members of the separation government in Syria in 1963, the involvement of CIA in the plot of separation was proven. Gamal Abdel Nasser was shocked by Kennedy's deception. He recognized lately that Kennedy was working against him in Syria, while he was close to him. Hesitation pervaded in the relations between the two countries [41], [42].

A number of the American and British documents [43] about the Egyptian-Syrian unity are closed and not released until today. It raises doubts about the role played by the two governments. These documents are not released because they are harmful to their national security. They may reveal long-term plans for the Arab nation security.

The conference of Sir H. Campbell Bonnerman (December 1905 to April 3, 1908) revealed full incompatibility between the objectives of Arab unity and the interests of the colonial powers generally.

Therefore, the US strategy was developed to separate the unity between Egypt and Syria. It will resist any form of Arab unity in the future, because this unity is dangerous for American objectives and interests in the Arab world and the Middle East.

The report of the World Zionist Organization in 1982 proved that this is a long term strategy. According to the report, "the following countries should be divided religiously, ethnically and regionally into small separate states. These countries are Egypt, Syria, Lebanon, Libya and Saudi Arabia. Iraq comes at the beginning because it is rich in oil and divided internally. It is also a threat to Israel. Therefore, Iraq should be divided into three regions: Shias and Sunni in the south and Kurdish in the north. The US strategy should stimulate separation disputes of Kurdish in Iraq, Syria, Barbers in North Africa, Christians in Lebanon, and south of Sudan. Thus no Arab country will emerge as a dominant power and oppose the US's grip on oil resources and Israel's monopoly of nuclear weapons" [44].

A team of neo-conservatives in the United States in 1996 developed a new strategy to secure Israel entitled "a clean break". The strategy stated that "Whoever inherits Iraq dominates the entire the Arab East strategically".

"It called for overthrowing Saddam Hussein, defeating Syria through strikes on selected targets, attaching Lebanon and searching for alternatives to Arafat in Palestine. The Arab community should be reorganized according to tribal alliances. The Israeli-Palestinian conflict should be resolved. The balance of power should be transformed to the north – where Israel, Turkey and Iraq. They should be separated from neighbors under permanent economic control of the US".

In 2005, the United States built 14 permanent military foundations in Iraq, and transformed the Iraq economy to the private sector in order to be a free market. It gave the ethnic and religious minorities in Iraq and the Arab world rights as ethnic and religious entities. It used small countries like Qatar and Bahrain. The role of Egypt declined. Egypt was pressured from the north by the division of Sudan. The debate over the Nile waters was renewed. Pressure increased in Damascus during the siege of Syria [44].

It is clear that the US strategy is present until today. It is a

long-term strategy that seeks to eliminate any form of Arab unity and divide the existing countries into small states. This hostility is a threat to Arab nations. In reality, it is a conflict of survival. After Europe and major countries in Asia became economically independent from the USA, the Arab world became the only place that is still under American control. It means that the loss of this control will collapse the American empire.

V. CONCLUSION

The documents from the US State Department and the Egyptian Foreign Ministry revealed that the United States opposed the unity between Egypt and Syria, which is represented in "the United Arab Republic". The unity state was unfriendly to the United States because Gamal Abdel Nasser refused the military regulations regarding the siege of the Soviet Union. Additionally, his policy was impartial to foreign relations.

The documents revealed also that Washington refused to appear as an opponent to the Arab unity. Otherwise, Washington used secret plans to eliminate the unity between Egypt and Syria. It induced the friendly Arab governments to oppose the United Arab Republic. Additionally, it provided effective support to the Syrians who fought against the unity with Egypt.

The documents revealed also that the United States faced the situation, during the Syrian military coup against the unity with Egypt in September 28, 1961, very wisely. The United States indirectly encouraged the new Syrian Regime. At the same time, it wooed Gamal Abdel Nasser and decided not to officially acknowledge the new Syrian Regime. It was worried that Gamal Abdel Nasser may cooperate with the Soviet Union to compensate for his loss.

This paper assures the continuity of the US aggressive strategy towards the Arab unity. It is a long-term strategy that seeks to eliminate any form of Arab unity. Moreover, it seeks to divide the existing countries into small rival states. The Arab nations are in danger because it is a conflict of existence and survival; the existence of the Arab world and the survival of the US control. The American Empire is threatened after the economic independence of Europe's major countries in Asia.

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