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# SPYMASTER

## FORMER EGYPTIAN INTELLIGENCE CHIEF DISCUSSES PSYCHOLOGICAL WARFARE

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The issue of public diplomacy remains one of the weaker aspects of American policy in the Middle East. There have been admirable tries at reaching the so-called “Arab Street,” yet these attempts have not been successful because they focus primarily on popular cultural icons, sports, and other superficial issues to bring the news from an American perspective. While these can influence opinion, it would be more effective for the U.S. to give voice to Arab intellectuals, thinkers, and security experts who oppose Islamist extremists and their tactics. Al-Jazeera offers the kind of shock TV that, although extremely biased, defies Arab taboos. The United States also needs to offer such programming highlighting Arab opinions that favor democracy, representative governance, and a fresh debate about the future of Islam in the 21st century. A discussion by Arabs on Prophet Muhammad’s interaction with Christians in early Islam (late sixth century AD), or the Christian emperor of Abyssinia’s offer of asylum to Muslims escaping Meccan persecution can begin to stem the tide of hate preached by extremists and radical clerics. Even debates on the origins of the Caliphate, a pre-Islamic notion, would serve to punch holes in the argument of Islamic militants wanting to reestablish this institution.

Public diplomacy as an instrument of war has historically played a significant role in the Middle East. One example is Salah Nasr, a controversial figure in Egyptian modern politics who headed Egypt’s General Intelligence Directorate from the late 1950s until 1967, when he was arrested and tried after the Six-Day War. His reputation as a womanizer came back to haunt him when, shortly after his death, his mistress published her memoirs revealing intimate details of how he exerted significant control on Egyptian President Gamal Abdel-Nasser by throwing in his path real and imagined coups, assassination and terrorist plots — all of which he was responsible for foiling. He also used many tactics in violation of human rights to purge and liquidate opponents of Nasser and the Revolutionary Command Council that toppled the Egyptian monarchy in 1952. Among his chief adversaries was the Muslim Brotherhood. His purging of this illegal faction in Egyptian politics was so thorough that many leaders sought refuge in Saudi Arabia and Jordan. These Arab monarchs were more than willing to provide the Muslim Brotherhood refuge as a proxy army to throw back at Nasser to undermine his pan-Arab agenda that vowed to sweep away traditional monarchies in the region.

Salah Nasr published an autobiography and also a two volume work in Arabic entitled “*Al-Harb Al-Nafsiyah: Maraka Al-Kalimah wal Moutaqad*,” (Psychological Warfare — the Battle of Words and Perceptions) the subject of this review essay. It is perhaps the finest work on psychological warfare in the Arabic language combining not only Arab, but German, Russian, British and American sources.

Salah Nasr was also a prolific writer while incarcerated in Nasser’s prisons when he fell out of favor. He published an autobiography and also a two-volume work in Arabic entitled “*Al-Harb Al-Nafsiyah: Maraka Al-Kalimah wal Moutaqad*,” (Psychological Warfare — the Battle of Words and Perceptions) the subject of this review essay. It is perhaps the finest work on psychological warfare in the Arabic language combining not only Arab, but German, Russian, British, and American sources.

Nasr is a man who combined a vicious and violent passion of subduing enemies of the Egyptian revolution with an intellect in the tradecraft of his dark arts. The two volumes are a survey of psychological warfare techniques in mankind’s history. This review will look at Salah Nasr’s discussions on the inter-Arab techniques used to undermine Nasser’s regime and the tools used by clandestine services in the western world that he viewed as playing a direct role in subduing Nasser’s power and message of Arab unity. It is vital for American military planners and academics in our war colleges to dust off works by Arab authors on warfare, terrorism and military-political affairs, particularly as the United States becomes committed to long-term reform and reconstruction in the Middle East.

Nasr’s Arabic book demonstrates the importance of media wars in many modern Middle East conflicts. Employing this skill in warfare is more complex today because of the Internet and satellite channels, which exponentially increase the average Arab’s exposure to varying opinions. Yet on the whole, the Arab education system does not provide for the synthesis of information or the challenging of ideas from clerics and teachers. There has been a marked decrease in the quality of education in the Arab world brought on by numerous factors, one of which includes an

economic downturn and explosive demographics that magnifies this problem.

### Nasr's Comments on Nasser's Priorities

When the Egyptian revolution succeeded in July 1952, one of the six principles of the revolution was to acquire modern weaponry to equip a national army. Nasser never forgot that the slogans creating the revolutionary environment geared toward defeating Israel one had to go through Cairo, meaning that the regime of King Farouk had to be toppled and an army equipped with proper weapons in order to take it beyond being a ceremonial or internal guard force. Another principle was to declare war on imperialism and colonialism and create the same conditions for a successful revolt in African and Asian colonies. For Egypt, this particular policy found its ultimate expression in March 1955 with the convening of the Bandung Non-Allied Nations Conference in Indonesia. Amidst speeches, Nasser popularized the revolutionary slogans about national independence, political freedom, and social justice. However, within Egypt, Nasser and his Revolutionary Command Council ran the nation like a police state. Nasr discusses that after President Nasser returned from Indonesia, he was even more determined to acquire modern weapons. This triggered the 1955 Czechoslovakian Arms Deal, where Nasser in the end quietly accepted Eastern Block weapons to effectively wage war and deter Israel. The apex of Nasser's power was after the 1956 Suez War, when President Eisenhower realizing the wider Cold War implications of the French, Israeli and British attack on Egypt and possible involvement by the Soviets ordered the three attackers to cease their assault against the Sinai. Although a military blunder for the Egyptians, it would be overall a political success for Nasser, who turned the withdrawal into political capital in the Arab streets, leaving him the undisputed leader who defied the western powers and Israel.

### Salah Nasr Discusses the Radio Media Wars

Aside from suppressing internal dissent and waging an internal war against Islamist extremists, Nasr was also intimately involved in the media wars that were prevalent under Nasser. He writes that Egypt's enemies used the radiowaves as early as 1955 to undermine the Egyptian Republic. Radio Free Egypt and Radio Monarchs were designed by Arab monarchs to undermine Nasser's influence with the masses. By 1958, 11 anti-Nasserist stations were broadcast into Egypt as a result of its union with Syria to create the short-lived United Arab Republic. One such station, Sawt Al-Haq (Voice of the Truth) was broadcast from the home of Iraqi Prime Minister Nuri Said. Lebanese President Camille Chamoun used the Voice of Lebanon to undermine the United Arab Republic and Nasser and compete with the highly successful and widely listened Egyptian radio programming, Voice of the Arabs, which in its day shook the Arab masses like Al-Jazeera does today. Iraqi Colonel Adem-Kareem Qassim (who toppled the Iraqi monarchy of King Feisal II in 1958) established Radio Free Damascus in 1959 to undermine the Syrian part of the union with Egypt. Radio Free Damascus was broadcast from the infamous Abu Ghraib Prison, a site of much pain under Saddam Hussein and a place renowned as the backdrop for the shocking



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*Gamal Abdel-Nasser (middle), shown with Soviet Premier Nikita Khrushchev, served as Egyptian President from 1956 until 1970. Under Nasser, Salah Nasr headed Egypt's General Intelligence Directorate from the late 1950s until 1967.*

abuses of a handful of irresponsible U.S. Army leaders. The Iraqi Baathists, who shared power with Communists, socialists and Arab nationalists, created Voice of the Masses that widened attacks not only on Syria, but also Egypt.

The French, opposed to Nasser's support of the Algerian National Liberation Front (FLN) assisted dissident Arabs and Egyptians with establishing the radio broadcasts Voice of the Free and Voice of Free Egypt. According to Nasr's book, Jacques Sostel, who fought in the Algerian insurgency, was the first to listen to Egypt's Voice of the Arabs and attempted to copy its programming for Radio Kleber (known by its announcement name this is the Algerian Renaissance Movement). This radio station was clever counter-insurgency propaganda, even broadcasting occasional jamming to make listeners think they were tuned to Egypt's Voice of the Arabs. The British angry at Nasser's nationalization of the Suez Canal and harassment of British Forces in the Canal Zone, created Voice of the Near East before the start of the 1956 Suez War.

### The Battle of Ideas and Propaganda

The purpose behind these radio stations was to attack Nasser's governance and legitimacy as leader of the Egyptian people. It highlighted arrests, tortures, terrorism by Nasser's internal security forces, and the futility of his economic and social policies. It also spread rumors in Syria of Egyptian dominance in the union

between the two nations; this was not helped by Nasser's War Minister Field Marshal Amer who ran Syria as his personal fiefdom. Undermining the United Arab Republic (UAR) was a top priority after Nasser had successfully undermined such plans by Britain to create CENTO (Central Treaty Organization) which set Turkey, Iraq, Iran and Pakistan as bulwarks against Communist expansion.

It would be simplistic to think that Iraq, Jordan, Yemen and Saudi Arabia all channeled their propaganda efforts against Nasser that would simplify the tangled political intrigues of the Middle East. Jordan's late King Hussein created Voice of Iraq in July 1958 to counter the military leaders who murdered his cousin, King Feisal II. According to Egyptians (President Nasser and his inner-intelligence circle), the U.S. presence at the Dhahran Airbase in Saudi Arabia coupled with the British presence in the Yemeni port of Aden lent support (material and technical) in the creation of a few of these radio stations.

### Secret Broadsheets, Pamphlet, and Printing Presses

For Americans, the use of leaflets and broadsheets is reminiscent of the American Revolutionary War with such classics as Thomas Paine's writings (*Common Sense* and *The Crisis*) or even World War II. But this lost art of the 18-20th centuries deserves close examination, for today the medium of such publications that undermine a regime can be found on the Internet and faxes. Egyptians found anti-Nasserist leaflets and pamphlets in their mailboxes and under their apartment doors. These pamphlets came by ship, air, and diplomatic pouches and deducing their origins consumed Egyptian intelligence officials. For those who were illiterate, caricatures and cartoons were drawn and altered photos of Nasser and Israeli leader Moshe Dayan were circulated. Some rumors that were circulated in print and radio included:

- Egypt was depleting its gold reserves;
- Egypt was importing wheat because it was unable to feed the masses;
- Assassination attempts against South



African leaders and the 1959 Cuban Revolution were conducted from Cairo.

### Purchase of Newspapers, Journalists and Writers

In the 1960's, Beirut was the scene of a new creation, Dar Al-Sahafa (House of Journalism), which produced one English and two Arabic dailies financed by Britain. That same year, pro-nationalist and pro-Nasserist newspapers were bombed. Iraqi strongman Abdel-Karim Qasem partly financed the Lebanese paper Al-Hayat in the late 1950's, according to Nasr's book. In Sudan, jamming stations targeting Egyptian broadcasts were discovered in 1958. Nasr notes that in 1959, the U.S. Congress voted \$40 million to bolster the Voice of America broadcasts in the Middle East, Africa and Asia. Saudi Arabia's King Saud looked for religious ways to undermine Nasser since the Saudis were fighting a proxy war against Egypt in Yemen from 1962 to 1967. According to Nasr, King Saud prodded his clerics to propagate religious reasons why Egypt's union with Syria was abhorrent. Saudi King Faisal also searched for religious legitimacy to bolster the Eisenhower Doctrine according to Nasr, and found it in fighting godless Communism. There was even an idea passed around among the Saudi rulers for an Islamic union to counter Nasser's UAR. In 1963, the World Muslim League was created and the Saudi religious doctrine of

Wahabism stiffened resistance to pan-Arab nationalism and further radicalized Islamist groups such as the Muslim Brotherhood.

### Conclusion

Salah Nasr's chapter chronicling his perspectives on Arab propaganda efforts of the late '50s to the early '70s clearly shows the importance of media relations in the conflict-ridden Middle East. An estimated 40 million Arabs tune into Al-Jazeera, a mere 20 miles from Central Command, and its lack of objectivity can only be countered by other Arabs who feel that moderate voices have been drowned out by two polarized extremes. Thus, countering Al-Jazeera must be done

through Arabic programming that provides a forum for those Arabs who crave reform. Only they can effectively engage the Arab masses into answering the central question of why the Islamic world was great in the ninth and tenth centuries and the circumstances that put the region on a downsloping trajectory. Those who claim that US assistance of media capabilities to Arab reformers hinder their credibility miss the point, which is to introduce a line of reasoning to the cacophony of noise Arabs see on satellite TV and from such anti-American satellite channels like Hizballah's Al-Manar TV.

Salah Nasr's book also shows that any conflict, be it political, military or economic, must be supported by a media campaign. In the end, only a campaign geared toward changing "hearts and minds" will undermine Islamist extremist ideology. This ideology, blending pan-Arabism and even Communist revolutionary rhetoric, have brought the Islamic world a new and counterproductive interpretation of Islamic history, precedent and laws.

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