



Between Embassy Protocol and State Security: Egyptian Diplomats in Budapest through Hungarian Archival Files (1958–1960)¹

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Abstract:

This article translates and analyses Hungarian state security records concerning two Egyptian diplomats posted in Budapest during the late 1950s and early 1960s: Osman Fawzi and Hassan Maher. The documents preserve the daily mechanics of Cold War contact, including protocol visits, private meetings, requests for legislation, and commentary on third states, while reframing such interactions as objects of risk assessment and operational opportunity. Rather than treating the archive as a transparent window, the study reads it as institutional writing that produces judgments and prescribes tactics, enabling a reconstruction of how ambiguity was managed rather than eliminated. By following the sequence of meetings and requests recorded in the files, the article shows how Egyptian–Hungarian relations could be advanced or obstructed through individual personality, internal discipline in Cairo, and the host state’s calibrated approach to sustained contact. At the same time, we must emphasize that all the characters of these episodes remained loyal to one’s native country, no defection occurred.

Keywords:

Egypt; Hungary; Cold War; Diplomacy; Intelligence History.

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Introduction

Cold War histories of Africa and the Middle East often focus on visible alignments, high-profile crises, and the rhetorical structure of blocs. The archival record examined here highlights a different scale: controlled access, impression management, and the micro-negotiations that occur within protocol offices, private apartments, and social spaces where diplomacy, rumour, and intelligence suspicion intersect. This article presents a translation based on reconstruction of two such episodes in Egyptian–Hungarian relations, centered on the Budapest postings of Osman Fawzi and Hassan Maher, and based on Hungarian state-security documentation preserved in the *Állambiztonsági Szolgálatok Történeti Levéltára* (ÁBTL). The main sources are Hungarian state-security files cited in the source text: ÁBTL, fond 3.2.4, dossier K-440 (Osman Fawzi) and dossier K-910/T (Hassan Maher). These include summaries, reports, memoranda, and proposals written by officers and named interlocutors associated with the Hungarian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, including its Protocol Department. As the archival material is referenced at the level of specific report titles, dates, and page ranges in the original notes, the article keeps archival citations as footnotes embedded in the text in a consistent historical style.

The argument remains deliberately restrained. These files do not provide omniscient access to motives; rather, they show how motives were attributed, debated internally, and codified into recommended practice. The diplomat appears in a dual role: as official emissary and covert channel for intelligence on third states. Conversely, the host state acts both as protocol partner and as evaluator of the partnership itself. The value of the records lies in their sequential density – names, dates, locations, requests, proposed follow-ups – and, above all, in illuminating the administrative mechanics by which diplomatic ambiguity becomes actionable.

Historical Background: From Habsburg Consulates to Nasser's Golden Age

For a long time, Hungary paid relatively little attention to the Arab world, and its early contacts with Egypt developed within the broader context of Habsburg–Ottoman competition. After the Peace Treaty of Passarowitz (Požarevac) in 1718, Vienna gradually established a permanent consular presence in Egypt: an Austrian consular agent began operating there in the late eighteenth century, and the main consulate was temporarily moved from Alexandria to Cairo in 1811 before returning to Alexandria in 1819, with subordinate consular posts in Cairo, Damietta and Rosetta. By 1910, the Austro–Hungarian consular network in Egypt comprised a consulate-general and a consular court in Cairo, consulates in Alexandria and Port Said (both with consular courts), and a consulate in Khartoum (Komár, 2012, pp. 71–74). The First World War interrupted this institutional presence when, in September 1914, British forces ordered the closure of the Austro–Hungarian consulate in Cairo and entrusted the protection of its interests to the United States representative (Agstner, 1995, pp. 7–8).

After the dissolution of the Dual Monarchy and the Treaty of Trianon (4 June 1920), Hungary lost the imperial framework and extraterritorial privileges under which its interests in Egypt had previously been represented. Nonetheless, it sought to maintain a modest but autonomous presence: in 1923 Budapest decided to establish an independent honorary consulate general in Egypt, which began operating in Alexandria in 1924, and in 1928 Félix Parcher, the first Plenipotentiary Minister of Hungary in Cairo, presented his credentials to King Fuad.⁴ That same year saw the conclusion of the first, and one of the most important, Hungarian–Egyptian commercial agreements and the creation of the Egyptian subsidiary of the Ganz company, signalling the growing economic dimension of bilateral relations (Al-Naggar, 2015, pp. 63–83).

In the 1930s, diplomacy was accompanied by high-level economic missions. Regent Miklós Horthy Jr. visited Egypt repeatedly (in 1932, 1934, 1935, 1938 and 1939), spending weeks or months in the country to explore opportunities for expanding trade and establishing joint ventures. Among other initiatives, his mediation led to the creation of the Magyar–Egyiptomi Részvénytársaság (Hungarian–Egyptian Joint-Stock Company) in 1933 and, in 1935, the opening of the HUNEGYPT Travel Bureau offices in Alexandria and Cairo to promote tourism. On the Egyptian side, Prime Minister Ismail Sidqi Pasha's 1932 visit to Hungary, during which he showed particular interest in Hungarian rolling stock, agricultural products and remount horses, further deepened bilateral economic relations; by 1937, Hungarian exports to Egypt had reached 12 million pengő. This promising trajectory, to which Hungarian shipbuilding and maritime transport also contributed, was cut short by the Second World War, and in 1942, under strong British influence, Egypt broke off diplomatic relations with wartime Hungary (Al-Naggar & Prantner, 2023, pp. 163–165).

Diplomatic relations were restored in 1947, after the Paris Peace Treaty, and between 1949 and 1955 bilateral trade stabilised at around three million Egyptian pounds annually, usually with a surplus in Hungary's favour. As the Middle East gained importance in Hungarian foreign policy, mutual trade more than doubled between early 1955 and June 1956. The real “golden age” of Egyptian–Hungarian relations, however, came in the 1960s, during the Nasser era, when political solidarity within the socialist and anti-colonial camp combined with an explicit priority on widening and deepening economic and commercial cooperation, above all to enable Hungary to earn hard currency revenues from transactions with Egypt (Nagy, 2015, pp. 16–21).

The Suez Crisis of 1956 marked a turning point, accelerating Egypt's pivot towards the Eastern bloc. Hungary, alongside other socialist states, provided crucial diplomatic support at the UN and became a key partner in industrial projects (e.g. the Ganz Works' contributions to Egyptian machinery), and cultural exchanges, including the arrival of the first cohorts of Egyptian students in Hungarian universities for engineering and

⁴ Initially, Hungarian interests in Egypt were represented from Bern, and later from Budapest, until the Hungarian legation in Cairo was officially opened in 1939 under the leadership of Hungarian chargé d'affaires Andor Semsey.

medicine by 1958 (Nagy et al., 2024, pp. 11–44; Aboushanab, 2025, pp. 171–201; State Information Service, 2015).

Nabil Fahmy, former Minister of Foreign Affairs of Egypt notes that Nasser's post-revolutionary diplomatic cadre, including figures like Fawzi, embodied this shift, serving as conduits for both economic cooperation and and Intelligence Service oversight in socialist capitals (Fahmy 2020, 147–149).

OSMAN FAWZI: Managed Contact, Information Requests, and the Craft of Ambiguity (1958–1959)

In October 1958, "Takács" (Police Major Endre Torda, head of the Cairo residency) was introduced by the head of the commercial mission to Counsellor Osman Fawzi (born Cairo, 17 April 1916), the second-ranking diplomat at Egypt's Embassy in Budapest (ÁBTL, 1958e, p. 19).

As a representative of the new generation of Egyptian diplomats who emerged after the 23 July 1952 Revolution, Osman Fawzi's career in Budapest can be understood only within the broader transformation of Egyptian diplomacy from a conservative monarchical elite to one closely linked to Gamal Abdel Nasser's nationalist and social project. Under Foreign Minister Mahmoud Fawzi, Cairo systematically restructured its foreign service, combining conventional diplomatic language with new alliances with the socialist bloc and anticolonial movements, while officially maintaining the language of non-alignment, especially after the 1956 Suez Crisis (MERIP, 1982; Aboushanab, 2025, pp. 171–201).

In this context, Fawzi's sympathy for the socialist model and his strong criticism of Western powers, as reflected in Hungarian security reports, appear less as purely personal convictions and more as an extension of a broader Egyptian official discourse in the late 1950s, when Moscow and the capitals of Eastern Europe became key partners in armament, industrialisation and diplomatic support for Egypt at the United Nations, and when political, economic and cultural ties with the Eastern bloc – including Hungary – expanded rapidly (Arab Democratic Center, 2025).

Before returning to Hungary from leave, Fawzi and Torda had lunch together at the Gezira Club.⁵ The resident intelligence officer had heard favourable assessments of the counsellor both at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and at the Hungarian People's Republic's commercial mission in Cairo. The nearly three-hour conversation left a positive impression on Torda, though he could not determine whether his interlocutor's positions were genuine or merely expressions of diplomatic courtesy. By that time,

⁵ The Gezira Sporting Club on Zamalek Island in Cairo was established in 1882 as the Khedivial Sporting Club on land leased from the Khedivial Botanical Gardens. It initially served as an exclusive retreat for British military officers and colonial administrators. By the 1950s, it had become a prestigious venue frequented by Egypt's political, diplomatic, and social elite, including high-ranking officials and foreign diplomats. Following its nationalisation in January 1952 under Nasser, it transitioned from a private aristocratic club to a public multi-sport facility, while retaining its status as a key social hub.



Fawzi had already served in Hungary for four years, about which he held a favourable opinion. He acknowledged the system's achievements and viewed the socialist model as the future. He strongly condemned the Western powers, which Torda attributed unequivocally to Fawzi's being under Nasser's influence, given that he himself had been a military officer sympathetic to the revolutionary movement in the early 1950s. Nevertheless, it was apparent that Fawzi no longer agreed entirely with the Egyptian president's system. The counsellor advocated comprehensive economic planning, as he considered domestic industrial development too haphazard and insufficiently thought-out. At the same time, he emphasized that the abolition of the monarchy alone had failed to resolve the most pressing problems afflicting his country. In his assessment, the policy of neutrality could not be sustained indefinitely; sooner or later a position would have to be taken, which both Nasser and private property owners greatly feared. Demands for social reform were growing, which would have entailed foreign policy commitments; consequently, the government preferred to cling to neutrality. He spoke with sharp criticism of Egypt's ambassador in Budapest, characterizing him as an ossified remnant from the monarchical era, hostile to Hungary, whose connections consisted of representatives of the pre-1945 world (ÁBTL, 1958a, pp. 4–5).

The counsellor did not speak much about his own life, but given the nature of the conversation, Torda saw no point in pressing the matter. During the Second World War, Fawzi had served as an intelligence officer in the Egyptian army before entering the diplomatic service. Torda learned that Fawzi had been military attaché in Prague or had held a subordinate position there. This meant he had worked for intelligence services, and it could not be ruled out that he continued such activities. Fawzi regarded his superior as an obstacle to rapprochement; relations between them were decidedly poor, and he complained about the ambassador repeatedly to Ministry of Foreign Affairs officials. Szijártó believed that Fawzi's deepest desire was for Nasser to remove his superior and install him in his place. He expected support from the Hungarian People's Republic in this regard, though it remained unclear whether his activities were driven by careerism or genuine sympathy for state socialism. Torda nevertheless believed that even in the former case, the diplomat could be exploited, as there was a strong likelihood he would eventually be posted to the Egyptian Foreign Ministry (ÁBTL, 1958a, pp. 4–6).

Fawzi's sharp judgement of his ambassador as a "leftover" from the royal era aligns with literature on Egyptian foreign policy, which describes a post-revolutionary "purge" of the diplomatic corps, as the new regime sought to replace monarchist-linked liberal diplomats with Free Officers and civilians loyal to the July regime. Studies on Nasser-era decision-making emphasise that, throughout the 1950s, many embassies were staffed by two ideologically divergent generations, often resulting in internal tensions and mutual efforts to demonstrate greater loyalty to Nasser's policies on issues such as Iraq, Syria, and the treatment of Arab communists (BBC News Arabic, 2024). From this perspective, Fawzi's denunciation of his superior as both reactionary and anti-communist can be seen not merely as a personal dispute but as part of a broader political

culture within the state apparatus, where professional competition intersected with ideological polarisation, and some younger diplomats used their proximity to socialist capitals to enhance their standing in Cairo by presenting themselves as more committed advocates of closer ties with the Eastern bloc. This internal contestation reflected wider Nasser-era tensions between "old diplomacy" loyalists and a new cadre shaped by revolutionary ideology, a process that Foreign Minister Mahmoud Fawzi institutionalised through diplomatic academy reforms prioritising ideological alignment alongside technical training (Egyptian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2024).

On 3 December 1958, the Cairo newspaper *Al-Misa*⁶ reported that President Nasser had recalled Ambassador Nafe Zade⁷ from his post in Budapest and appointed him to head the Administrative Department of the Egyptian Ministry of Foreign Affairs. The following day, János Radványi (codename "Tinta Pál"), head of the Protocol Department at the Hungarian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, summoned the counsellor (codename "Lovassi") to clarify the situation. When Radványi addressed Fawzi as ambassador, the latter took it as a joke, but upon learning of his superior's recall to Cairo, he was visibly transformed. He then emphasized that the decision had been expected, as Nasser was gradually replacing members of the old diplomatic corps. At the same time, the elder Fawzi had written to inform him that Zade would likely retire, and that his son would succeed him. Osman Fawzi, however, indicated that any promotion would almost certainly be accompanied by reassignment. Radványi then shared the *Al-Misa* report, which evidently surprised the counsellor. The newspaper's editor-in-chief, Mohieddin,⁸ was a friend of Fawzi's whose information typically proved accurate. The position of head of the Administrative Department had long been vacant, making the reported change plausible. The counsellor subsequently emphasized repeatedly how much he enjoyed living in Budapest and that, given his established network of contacts, he could advance bilateral relations. Radványi likewise stated that the government of the Hungarian People's Republic also wished Osman Fawzi to lead the United Arab Republic's mission in Budapest and had already instructed the Hungarian ambassador in Cairo to convey Hungary's preference. Fawzi then declared

⁶ Also well-known as Al-Masaa (Al-Messa') is an Egyptian Arabic-language daily evening newspaper published in Cairo, founded in October 1956 as the first and oldest evening paper in the republic and issued by the state-owned Dar Al-Tahrir (Al-Gomhuria) publishing house, with its early editorial line shaped by leftist and Marxist journalists in the late Nasser era.

⁷ Abdel-Hamid Nafe Zade presented his letters of credence on 19 April 1957. Following the upgrading of Egyptian–Hungarian diplomatic relations to ambassadorial level, he was accredited from 6 August 1957 as Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary of the United Arab Republic in Budapest. For more details, see (Al-Naggar, 2021, p. 289).

⁸ Khaled Mohieddin (1922–2018), Free Officer (joined 1944), Revolutionary Command Council member (1952–54), dubbed "the Red Sergeant" by Nasser for leftist views. Resigned 1954 after calling for democratic return to barracks; exiled briefly to Switzerland. Elected to National Assembly (1957, Kafr Shokr); founded Al-Misa newspaper (first evening daily in republican era); chaired Nubian displacement committee (1960s). President of Dar Akhbar al-Yawm (1964–65); founded Arab Unity Party (1976, later National Progressive Unionist Party).

that he fully agreed with President Nasser's policy toward the socialist countries, which he had also affirmed before Minister Rifaat,⁹ one of the security service leaders, during his most recent stay in Cairo. He simultaneously indicated to the latter that Zade was unsuitable for advancing Hungarian–Egyptian relations because he was sharply anti-communist. Rifaat was an old comrade-in-arms of Fawzi's; on one occasion he had delivered 12,000 rifle cartridges to the insurgents, which Fawzi managed to transport across colonial forces' lines using credentials issued by British military intelligence. During the revolution, he briefly detained Ali Sabri,¹⁰ with whom relations had remained strained ever since. He also revealed a secret instruction sent from Cairo, according to which he was to refute American rumours circulating among staff at the Egyptian embassy in Budapest regarding alleged serious disagreements between Abdel-Karim Qasim¹¹ (president of Iraq) and Nasser. According to Fawzi, the relationship between Qasim and Aref resembled to that which had existed between Nasser and Naguib. The instruction was difficult to execute, as the American chargé d'affaires, Garet Ackerson, would at most return his greeting, while other Western diplomats followed the position of the U.S. embassy. Radványi then indicated that opposing the United States was a common objective, but that Hungary did not interfere in Egypt's internal affairs. What Hungary needed to know it would ask through official channels, and the counsellor would respond within the limits of his capacity. This, however, also applied to Hungary's case. Fawzi accepted this, showed himself willing to cooperate, and asserted that neither he nor Radványi could be bought with dollars (ÁBTL, 1958b, pp. 7–9).

The close connection between Fawzi and figures in the Egyptian security apparatus, as revealed by the Hungarian documents, fits into a broader pattern described in Egyptian diplomatic memoirs and studies of the Nasser period: many Egyptian embassies served as contact points between the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the General Intelligence Service or military intelligence, especially in countries regarded as arenas of East–West competition. Memoirs by contemporaries note the emergence of the “diplomat–officer” type, who combined official representation with intelligence tasks, including the collection of political and security information, surveillance of Arab communities and, occasionally, recruitment of local sources (Armstrong, 2021, pp. 7–

⁹ It is highly likely that the “Rifaat” mentioned in the report refers to Kamal al-Din Mahmoud Rifaat (1921–1977), an Egyptian army officer, Free Officers leader and later minister, who played a key role in armed resistance against British forces in the Canal Zone, in supporting Arab liberation movements (including the Iraqi revolution of 1958), and in the leadership of clandestine operations and guerrilla warfare under Nasser, before serving in ministerial and ambassadorial posts, including as Egypt's ambassador to the United Kingdom in the early 1970s.

¹⁰ Ali Sabri (1920–1991) was a leading Nasser-era politician, serving as head of the Egyptian General Intelligence Directorate (1956–57), prime minister (1962–65), and then vice president (1965–68), before becoming the main civilian casualty of Sadat's 1971 “Corrective Revolution”.

¹¹ Abdel-Karim Qasim (1914–1963), an Iraqi army officer who opposed the monarchy's pro-Western orientation, led the coup (in Arabic sources revolution) of 14 July 1958 that overthrew the Hashemite regime and ruled the new republic until he himself was toppled and executed in the Ba'athist-led coup of February 1963.

34; Al-Ansari, 2014). Against this background, Fawzi's role in transmitting secret instructions regarding Cairo's position on the conflict between Abdel-Karim Qasim and Nasser, or on Ba'athist¹² activities, can be interpreted as part of a systematic policy of managing inter-Arab conflicts within the logic of the Cold War, rather than as purely individual initiatives. Nasser's regime viewed such arenas as direct extensions of Egypt's national security, and considered the struggle against "Arab reaction" no less important than its confrontation with the traditional colonial powers (Independent Arabia, 2021).

On 9 December 1958, Fawzi visited the head of the Protocol Department at his office, but the secretary informed him that Radványi was recuperating at home. The counsellor requested his telephone number to convey his good wishes. However, when he called the department head, the latter immediately asked whether they could meet in person. Radványi explained that, although he was not contagious, he was confined to bed for the day; it was ultimately agreed with the Egyptian that he would make contact the following morning. On the 10th, at one o'clock in the afternoon, Fawzi went to the department head's residence and relayed intelligence he had obtained from Rachman, the Indian ambassador. The latter claimed that, despite the Berlin crisis and rising international tensions, Western intelligence services had reported that the Soviet Union under no circumstances wished for war. In the light of this, Washington and its allies planned to use the coming six months to detach Poland, Czechoslovakia, and Hungary from Moscow. To achieve this objective, they were preparing to infiltrate agents, which Rachman substantiated with a translation of an English-language newspaper article. According to the Indian chargé d'affaires, numerous substantial arms depots were being established in Hungary, for example in Csepel, where the working class had played a significant role in 1956. Fawzi inquired how such large quantities of weapons would be smuggled in, to which he received the reply: under the auspices of the International Red Cross. The counsellor took this intelligence seriously and wished to warn Radványi, as Nasser also had no interest in the collapse of the Hungarian system. He added that Western propaganda was making serious efforts to influence Hungarian public opinion, which one of his most reliable informants had also confirmed. Radványi politely thanked him for the warning and agreed that the Western powers were attacking the countries of the socialist bloc and the Arab world in line with their traditions. The assassination attempt against Qasim and the pressure exerted on Nasser clearly indicated this. Fawzi then read from a green notebook, stating that he wished to obtain recently adopted social welfare, labour protection, and industrial legislation. Egypt wanted to study Hungarian experience, which Radványi welcomed. The counsellor, however, also inquired why János Kádár had not travelled to Prague with the government delegation, and asked about the purpose of the visit. He then turned to the matter of reciprocating

¹² The Arab Socialist Ba'ath Party, founded in Damascus in 1947 by Michel Aflaq, Salah al-Din al-Bitar, and Zaki al-Arsuzi, promoted a centralized, authoritarian brand of Pan-Arab socialism and eventually took power in Syria (1963) and Iraq (1968), where it ruled until being overthrown in the early twenty-first century in Iraq and in 2024 in Syria.



the information he had provided. Fawzi planned to submit a memorandum on Israel's economic boycott against Egypt and requested its wide dissemination. He also asked whether there was a Hungarian–Israeli cultural agreement. Radványi indicated that there were not, yet any exchange programmes. The counsellor then asked whether Israel's five-year plan could be found among the Ministry of Foreign Affairs' materials, as the military provisions would be important to him. The department head committed only to looking into the question, while Fawzi suggested that it would be easier for Hungary to learn about Israeli plans, since the Hungarian People's Republic maintained an embassy in Tel Aviv. He also asked who was serving as Israeli chargé d'affaires in Tuval's absence. Radványi informed him that it was Mrs Kadar Lu, the Hungarian desk officer at the Jerusalem Foreign Ministry. Fawzi noted this in his notebook while complaining that Rachman had said nothing about Israel's Budapest mission, even though his daughter was on good terms with Tuval's son (ÁBTL, 1958c, pp. 10–12).

Police Captain Pál Iglói believed that Fawzi showed sympathy for the system because he realised this was the only way to establish contact with potential sources. Radványi, however, was surprised by the proposal for information exchange, about which Fawzi had informed his superiors. It is likely that he had been instructed from Cairo to obtain materials on Israel through Radványi's assistance, but the reciprocation offered was rather inconsequential. According to Iglói, the Egyptian diplomat was clearly conducting intelligence activities and was primarily attempting to recruit Radványi for operations directed at Israel. He therefore recommended that Radványi summon the Egyptian 8–10 days later to inform him that the social welfare and labour protection legislation would be made available, but that the Israeli five-year plan was not in the Ministry's possession. If the request were specified, however, measures could be taken to procure it. Regarding what Fawzi had reported, the department head should state that while interesting, it was too general. Fawzi had referenced the Indian ambassador Rachman, who had heard all this from his wife. The Egyptian diplomat, however, claimed that the woman was an American agent. Therefore, the counsellor should be asked to obtain proof. If he were not given a substantive task, it would cause a rupture in the relationship; moreover, investigation of Rachman's wife would reveal how much credence could be given to his reports (ÁBTL, 1958d, pp. 13–18).

On 13 March 1959, Fawzi again appeared at Radványi's office, where he orally translated an Arabic-language telegram in his possession. The United Arab Republic praised the Kádár leadership for not permitting the emigration of Jews to Israel. Cairo blamed the United States, arguing that most immigrants came from the Western Hemisphere and were supported by substantial sums from the American Jewish community. Confusion had arisen during the preceding period because emigration from Romania to Israel was transiting through Hungary. Attaché Pasha had observed Hungarian-speaking groups at Keleti Railway Station, but the Ministry of Foreign Affairs clarified that these were not Hungarian citizens. Radványi indicated that Ambassador Szijártó in Cairo had already presented the official position of the Hungarian People's Republic. Fawzi, however, then criticised Nasser's Damascus speech for characterising

Iraqi and Syrian communists gathering in Iran as foreign agents. The counsellor did not understand why this was necessary, since the accused individuals could only have been agents of the Soviet Union and its allied countries, even though only the Eastern bloc showed understanding towards the Arab world. Fawzi believed that Vice Presidents Zakaria Mohieddin,¹³ Baghdadi,¹⁴ and Hornai¹⁵ were influencing Nasser in a very bad direction (ÁBTL, 1959a, pp. 31–32).

On the evening of 19 March 1959, at 8 o'clock, Radványi visited the counsellor at his apartment at 7/a Mihály Street. Fawzi expressed his dissatisfaction with anti-Soviet demonstrations taking place in major Egyptian cities and feared that British intelligence personnel were among the nearly 1,200 British economic experts arriving in Cairo. The counsellor suspected that a coup was being prepared against the president, in which the delegation would also participate. Regarding the visa issue of the Syrian merchant Mohamed Miadmi, he stated that he understood the refusal, as the BUADVOX partner was too closely associated with the Western business world. Fawzi indicated that Nafé Zade would soon return to Budapest, but this would primarily be a farewell visit (ÁBTL, 1959b, pp. 33–34).

HASSAN MAHER

Hassan Maher, as he appears in the Hungarian archival material, represents another type within Nasser's diplomatic elite: a diplomat who formally endorsed the regime's nationalist and socialist rhetoric and professed sympathy for the Soviet Union, yet privately expressed fatigue with the intensity of official propaganda and ideological pressure at home. Arab and international studies on Egyptian elites in the 1960s indicate a current among ambassadors – particularly in Western Europe – who advocated a more pragmatic approach towards the West, fearing that excessive ideological rigidity could harm the economic and cultural relations Egypt urgently needed for its development plans. Maher's complaints about state propaganda on Egyptian radio, and his expectation of an eventual political shift within Egypt, echo broader debates among

¹³ Zakaria Mohieddin (1918–2012), a Free Officer and member of the Revolutionary Command Council, founded Egypt's General Intelligence Directorate in 1955 and served as Minister of the Interior, Vice President, and Prime Minister. Known for his pragmatic stance amid Nasser's radicalism, he clashed over Yemen policy before retiring.

¹⁴ Abdel-Latif al-Baghdadi (1917–1999) was an Egyptian military officer, politician, and one of the original members of the Free Officers Movement. He served on the Revolutionary Command Council and held several key governmental positions during the Nasser era, including Minister of Municipal and Rural Affairs, Minister of Planning, and Vice President of Egypt. Al-Baghdadi was known for his socialist orientation and played a significant role in shaping Egypt's economic policies during the 1950s and early 1960s.

¹⁵ Hussein al-Shafey (also transliterated as Hornai in some Hungarian sources, 1918–2005) was an Egyptian military officer and politician who served as one of the original Free Officers and a member of the Revolutionary Command Council. He held the position of Vice President of Egypt under Nasser from 1961 to 1970, making him one of the longest-serving officials in the revolutionary government. He continued to serve under Presidents Sadat and Mubarak in various advisory capacities until his retirement.



Egyptian elites in the post-1956 and pre-1967 years regarding the limits of Arab unity projects and socialist experiments, and the regime's ability to reconcile its radical discourse with the practical demands of state management in a complex regional and international environment (Sharnoff, M., & Vidal Sassoon International Center for the Study of Antisemitism, 2012, p. 14; Akhavi, 1975, pp. 190–211).

Hassan Maher assumed control of Egypt's Budapest embassy on 10 October 1959. Before this appointment, he had served in Great Britain, France, and Italy. Upon his arrival, he sought to establish cordial relations with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, emphasizing his pro-Soviet orientation and stating that only his advanced age prevented him from joining the Communist Party. Within the Budapest diplomatic corps, he maintained good relations with the American, Italian, and Indian legations. In early August 1960, his wife died unexpectedly; he had her body transported to Cairo on the 11th and subsequently withdrew from public life for nearly three months. When he returned to Budapest on 11 November, he reported the following to network personnel of the Ministry of Interior's II/2 Department. On 7 November 1960, the Egyptian Deputy Foreign Minister summoned him for interrogation concerning the embassy chauffeur and his wife. His superiors reproached him for his romantic relationship with the woman and for allegedly disclosing all embassy matters to her husband. Maher insisted that he had only discussed matters that Tibor Baloványi, his driver, necessarily needed to know, and that he would hardly appear publicly with the latter's wife if there were anything between them. He admitted to having a girlfriend in Budapest whom he would name if requested, though this was not public knowledge in Hungary. At the Deputy Foreign Minister's instruction, he wrote a 12-page report; only thereafter was he permitted to return to Budapest. Maher accused Attaché Esmat and First Secretary Khalaf of defamation; nevertheless, on 30 November 1960, Cairo ordered his recall effective 20 December. The ambassador, however, did not wish to return immediately and made no preparations to do so. Instead, he attempted to intercede with János Radványi, head of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs Protocol Department, proposing that the Hungarian People's Republic purchase from him a Cairo property rented by the Italian embassy in exchange for an apartment in Hungary. Radványi responded favourably to the proposal, planning to offer him a villa on Lake Balaton. Maher wished to spend most of his time there, as he was devoted to Hungary; at the same time, he approached the department head with a request to be placed with a Hungarian foreign trade company as an expert on the Arab world. Maher's cousin had been ambassador in Bern but had also been recalled. According to Hassan Maher, the reason for their fall from favour was their insufficient support for Nasser's policies. The Egyptian government was increasingly sending the president's former comrades-in-arms into diplomatic service. Around 10 December, Maher visited American Chargé d'Affaires Garet Ackerson, before whom he explained that communist ideas had no genuine basis among ordinary people, serving rather as an instrument of protest against Nasser among young intellectuals. The president's propaganda had begun to irritate even him; during their three-month stay at home, he had not once turned on Cairo Radio. Maher

anticipated a political shift in Egypt within a few months, while also proposing the establishment of a Hungarian-Egyptian society under his presidency (ÁBTL, 1960b, pp. 7–9).

Shortly thereafter, however, he stated that he wished to cooperate with the Hungarian People's Republic before the British could approach him. In London, they had tried to win him over by promising him a ministerial post in the Egyptian government. He rejected this, stating that he could not serve two kings. Maher did not elaborate on the type of cooperation he envisaged; however, according to Police Major Tibor Vadász, it would be political in nature. The diplomat admitted he had no understanding of economics, though he undertook to prepare himself in this area as well. Before the competent official of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Maher also acknowledged that he was in a romantic relationship with his chauffeur's wife. Radványi communicated that he would arrange a meeting between Maher and the head of the Chamber of Commerce, whereupon the conversation would at most turn to political matters. The objective was to have him report on his connections with Western legations and the plans of Nasser and his circle (ÁBTL, 1960c, pp. 16–18).

On 16 December 1960, Maher asked Radványi that employees with whom he was on friendly terms - Mrs. Szmolenszki, the chauffeur and his wife - not be subject to harassment by the police. The former ambassador indicated that he had never politicized with those concerned, nor solicited them for anti-state activities. Concurrently, the conversation focused primarily on the chauffeur, whom Maher wished to protect from his successor's dismissal decision. If the new envoy had someone else in mind, he saw the solution in posting Tibor Baloványi to Cairo. Three days later, Maher telephoned with the Egyptian Ministry of Foreign Affairs to announce his resignation. Cairo did not accept this, so the envoy planned to travel home on the evening of the 22nd or the morning of the 23rd via Vienna to make a written statement. At the same time, he indicated his intention to return, entrusting his automobile to Tibor Baloványi. Before the chauffeur on the 20th, he aired the matter that at his meeting with the president of the Hungarian Chamber of Commerce, two other individuals had been present who attempted to corner him. Their objective would have been for Maher to work as an agent against other countries, but as soon as he protested, President Ödön Kallós apologized to him. He attributed the misunderstanding to incorrect interpretation (ÁBTL, 1960d, pp. 21–22).

On 19 December 1960, Kallós received Maher at the Hungarian Chamber of Commerce building, intending to bring Police Captain Imre Borsányi and Police Major Tibor Vadász – whom he introduced as a staff member of the Council of Ministers – into the conversation at an appropriate moment. Maher explained that he wished to visit Hungary from time to time, but Egyptian law permitted this only for official purposes. He had no concrete plan for legalising his entries and awaited assistance in this matter. However, Maher avoided the question of cooperation; Vadász managed only to establish that they would consult the former ambassador on economic and political matters. When asked why he would not remain in the foreign service, Maher

replied only that it was for personal reasons. The police major then indicated that the Hungarian People's Republic did not wish to interfere in Egypt's internal affairs but could assist regarding Yugoslavia's and West Germany's influence on Cairo. Maher stated that he had no information on this matter because he had no connection with his country's special services. At the same time, he emphasised that he could only envisage any cooperation in a form with which his government would also identify. Vadász responded that, to address the questions raised, one need not be connected to intelligence or counterintelligence organs, as his diplomatic career would enable him to learn many things. As the major pointed out that he sensed Maher was merely seeking an opportunity for frequent entry, they could find some contrived possibility at any time. The former envoy then began to consider what awaited him at home, stating that he would only make contact with the Hungarian People's Republic's Cairo mission if the situation became clearer. Vadász agreed with this approach and added that he would be very pleased if Maher continued his foreign service in another country. As an ambassador favourably disposed towards the Hungarian People's Republic, Maher could do much to promote peaceful coexistence. Referring to Radványi's remark, the major urged Maher to raise the issue of the Hungarian-Egyptian society in Cairo as well, where he could also indicate that Budapest was considering his proposal. Vadász would have been pleased if Maher became the society's president; however, this would mean that a visit to Budapest would only be possible once a year. The former envoy proposed awarding Maher a Hungarian decoration, which, according to the major, would have strengthened Maher's position at home. The diplomat also advised caution, as Nasser strictly suppressed any expression of communist ideology. Among the socialist bloc, Egyptian public opinion sympathised with Hungary and the Soviet Union, but not with the others. According to Vadász's assessment, no significant result was expected from the meeting, but the conversation could continue during his next visit to Budapest or, if he were posted elsewhere, in a third country. If his recall did not affect his relationship with the Hungarian People's Republic, engaging with the diplomat seemed worthwhile. The Cairo embassy would need to monitor Maher's movements and employment so that a meeting could later be arranged with him outside Egyptian territory. The conversation was conducted in French, with Borsányi acting as interpreter. With the suspension of the Cairo residency, the material was filed in the archives (ÁBTL, 1960a, p. 29).

Two Models of Diplomatic Engagement

Osman Fawzi and Hassan Maher represent contrasting models of Egyptian diplomacy during the Nasser era, and their divergent paths highlight both the possibilities and limitations of Cold War diplomatic instrumentalisation. Fawzi embodied the ideologically committed, upwardly mobile revolutionary diplomat. Born in 1916, he came of age during the final years of the monarchy and participated in the military ferment that culminated in July 1952. His previous service in Prague and his fluency in the language of socialist solidarity made him appear to Hungarian interlocutors as a

potential asset. The Hungarian files depict him as ambitious, calculating, and willing to exchange information – on Israeli military planning, inter-Arab conflicts, and Cairo's internal debates – in return for Hungarian support for his career advancement. Whether motivated by genuine ideological conviction or tactical careerism, Fawzi consistently demonstrated a willingness to engage beyond protocol: sharing classified cables, criticising his superiors, and positioning himself as an intermediary between Budapest and Cairo. Fawzi's usefulness to Hungarian intelligence remained limited. His information requests – Israeli five-year plans, social legislation, details on Hungarian-Israeli diplomatic personnel – were met with measured responses: sufficient cooperation to maintain the relationship, but not enough commitment to create dependency or expose Hungarian sources. The Hungarians recognized that Fawzi's ambitions made him useful but also unreliable; his criticism of Nasser's vice presidents and his complaints about Egyptian policy incoherence suggested a diplomat out of step with Cairo's official line, potentially a liability if his indiscretions reached Egyptian security organs.

Maher, by contrast, represented the exhausted pragmatist: a career diplomat who had served in Western Europe, professed loyalty to Nasser while privately expressing fatigue with propaganda and ideological rigidity, and sought post-retirement in Hungary not out of political commitment but for personal comfort. His wife's death, the scandal involving his driver's wife, and his recall to Cairo in disgrace all suggest a man whose diplomatic career had collapsed, leaving him vulnerable to Hungarian approaches yet wary of outright collaboration. The December 1960 recruitment meeting reveals this ambivalence: Maher entertained the possibility of "cooperation", proposed the idea of a Hungarian-Egyptian friendship society he might lead (providing cover for continued contact), yet repeatedly insisted that such work align with Cairo's official positions. His caution, combined with his admitted ignorance of economic matters and his focus on securing residency rather than intelligence tasks, led Hungarian officers to conclude that cultivation should continue but expectations should remain modest.

The contrast is instructive. Fawzi was young, ideologically fluent, and professionally ambitious; Hungarian intelligence saw him as a long-term investment whose access might increase with career advancement. Maher was older, politically disillusioned, and professionally finished; his value lay not in active intelligence production but in the possibility that future postings (should he avoid permanent disgrace) might position him for passive observation or introductions to other Egyptian officials. The Hungarians pursued both, calibrating their approach to personality, circumstance, and assessed potential.

What unites both cases are the Hungarian state's willingness to operate in the grey area between diplomatic hospitality and intelligence recruitment. Radványi, as head of the Protocol Department, served dual functions: facilitating official contact and evaluating recruitment potential. His private meetings with Fawzi and Maher created opportunities for personal grievances, political opinions, and professional ambitions to be expressed, recorded, and potentially exploited. Neither diplomat appears to have been formally recruited as an agent, yet both engaged in behaviours – sharing

intelligence, criticising superiors, requesting favours – that blurred the line between diplomacy and espionage.

This blurring was structural, not exceptional. In the Cold War Eastern bloc, every foreign diplomat was a potential source; every protocol officer, a potential handler. The Egyptian Embassy in Budapest existed within this dual framework, where genuine cultural exchange and economic cooperation coexisted with surveillance, assessment, and tactical manipulation. Fawzi and Maher navigated this environment with varying degrees of awareness and success, leaving behind an archival record that reveals the everyday mechanics by which political alignment was translated – or failed to be translated – into intelligence advantage.

Conclusion

The archival material of Osman Fawzi and Hassan Maher highlights three distinct aspects of Cold War Egyptian–Hungarian relations: the mechanics of diplomatic contact under surveillance, the internal contradictions within Nasser's foreign policy apparatus, and the ways in which host states sought to exploit personal relationships for intelligence purposes.

First, these cases show that diplomacy in the Eastern bloc operated within a dual framework: public protocol and covert assessment. Both Fawzi and Maher performed routine functions of representation – protocol visits, trade discussions, cultural liaison – while simultaneously being evaluated as potential intelligence assets. The Hungarian files indicate that every meeting, request, or complaint was archived not only as a diplomatic record but also as operational data. Fawzi's inquiries about Israeli military plans and Maher's comments on Nasser's critics were interpreted as opportunities for recruitment or manipulation. This dualism was not exceptional but structural: in Cold War Budapest, the diplomat was always already a figure of suspicion and potential. Egyptian cases like Fawzi exemplify Owen L. Sirrs' analysis of *mukhabarat* (Egyptian General Intelligence Service) evolution, where embassy staff navigated East-West rivalries as both emissaries and potential assets (Sirrs, 2010, pp. 52–92).

Second, the files expose fault lines within Nasser's diplomatic corps that reflected broader tensions in the Egyptian state. Fawzi's public support for socialism and private criticism of his monarchist-era ambassador highlighted generational and ideological divisions that persisted throughout the 1950s and early 1960s. The Foreign Ministry contained competing visions of non-alignment: older diplomats maintained liberal-monarchist networks and Western cultural ties, while younger officers and revolutionaries viewed Eastern bloc partnerships as essential to anti-imperialism and state-led development. Maher's case illustrates a different tension: the gap between official enthusiasm for socialist solidarity and personal fatigue with ideological conformity. His complaints about propaganda, his longing for a political "turn" in Egypt, and his simultaneous professions of loyalty suggest a diplomat caught between regime expectations and personal disillusionment – a position the Hungarian security apparatus sought to exploit.

Third, the archive shows how host states adjusted their approach to diplomatic contact according to personality, perceived utility, and political calculation. Fawzi was cultivated – but not recruited (!) – because Hungarian officers believed he could provide intelligence on Israel, inter-Arab conflicts, and internal debates in Cairo; his ambition and ideological rhetoric made him seem manageable. Maher, by contrast, was approached more cautiously: his request for post-retirement residence in Hungary and his vague offers of "cooperation" were met with polite interest but little commitment. The Hungarians recognised that his value lay not in immediate intelligence but in the potential for future access should he return to diplomatic service elsewhere. In both cases, the host state acted as protocol partner and prospective handler, constantly weighing whether hospitality, information exchange, or recruitment overtures would serve Hungarian interests without jeopardising the broader bilateral relationship.

Beyond these substantive findings, this study contributes to methodological debates on the use of intelligence archives in diplomatic history. Security files are seductive sources: richly detailed, narratively compelling, and seemingly authoritative. However, they are also distorting mirrors, reflecting the institutional paranoia and tactical opportunism of their creators. By foregrounding the archival voice – its judgments, prescriptions, and omissions – rather than treating it as transparent evidence, this article has aimed to recover not "what really happened" but how diplomatic ambiguity was produced, managed, and inscribed into state practice. Future research incorporating Egyptian archival sources, Soviet bloc files, and oral histories would enable a more polyphonic reconstruction, challenging the one-sidedness inherent in security documentation and recovering the voices – diplomatic, personal, dissenting – that surveillance sought to capture but could never fully contain.

The Egyptian embassy in Budapest between 1958 and 1960 functioned more than a diplomatic outpost; it was a contact zone where competing visions of non-alignment, socialism, and national interest collided, a site where personal ambition and state discipline intersected, and a bureaucratic space where protocol concealed intelligence work. Osman Fawzi and Hassan Maher navigated this environment with varying degrees of success, leaving an archival record that reveals as much about the hidden machinery of the Cold War as about the individuals caught within it.

Conflict of Interest

The authors hereby declare that no competing financial interest exists for this manuscript.

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