

• PROFILES IN POWER •

NASSER



PETER WOODWARD

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PROFILES IN POWER

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PREFACE

Writing this book in 1990 was a reminder of just how much had changed in the Middle East in the twenty years since Nasser's death. He left the region still in a state of confrontation with Israel, and though Nasser's acceptance of the Rogers Plan was seen by his opponents as surrender, the reaction was slight when compared with the shock of Sadat's *rapprochement* with Israel. Economically the Middle East appears largely to have abandoned the attempted industrialisation by Nasser and to be relying ever more heavily on its role as major oil producer for the international economic system. Socially the modernism and secularism Nasser sought to encourage appears to have been lost in the rise of Islamic fundamentalism.

Yet if that suggests that the world has moved on from Nasser, it is appropriate to remember how much greater was the change from 1952 to 1970, the eighteen years that Nasser was in power. Internationally Britain was still the dominant power in the Middle East when Nasser seized power. True, her ally, the United States, was emerging as a major force, but the Soviet Union was nowhere to be seen and the West was determined to prevent it. In 1970 the Soviet Union was allied to the major Arab country, Egypt, and active on other fronts, while the United States was identified primarily with Israel. Economically the Arab countries were still mainly in a pre-industrial stage in 1952, and had come nowhere near the sophistication and coordination that would allow the development of OPEC, a transformation that was nearing its completion by the time Nasser died. Culturally the small seeds of Arab nationalism that existed prior to Nasser had grown to become a major

PREFACE

force led by Nasser. Arab nationalism was firmly on the agenda, and, though frustrated, was nonetheless sharply focused on the injustice done to the Palestinians.

The book was being completed during the Kuwait crisis of 1990, and as war broke out in the Gulf in 1991. Iraq's president, Saddam Hussein, was being likened to Nasser, but the comparison scarcely bore examination. Saddam Hussein had neither the charisma nor the achievements of Nasser. But in another sense there was a point, for this was the fifth major war in the Middle East since the Second World War. The balance of the ingredients was very different from earlier conflicts, as was the mix itself, but the same kinds of issues were being raised as in all previous conflicts: sovereignty, economic resources, pan-Arabism, and outside intervention in the region. It was the Palestine War that did much to change Nasser's thinking, and those issues were to be so central to his career, which has been unparalleled in the region, that it was little wonder he was being evoked as the Kuwait crisis degenerated into war.

My thanks are due not only to earlier authors on whose works I have largely drawn, but also to my research assistants, Carol and Sally Woodward, and to Ann Cade in the Department of Politics, University of Reading, for her cheerful and efficient work on the word-processor.

Chapter 1

EGYPT BEFORE NASSER

The Egypt into which Nasser was born was at its base an old and stable society. The recorded history of the country goes back 5000 years to the first known pharaohs; and though for 2000 years there had been waves of invaders bringing one foreign ruler after another, for most of the peasants (the *fellahin*) life continued much as it had for centuries, regulated as much by the Nile and the miracle of its annual flood, as by successive new masters.

The origins of Pharaonic Egypt are of course older than that and derive from the fact that Egypt is 'the gift of the Nile'. From Wadi Halfa in the south to the Mediterranean in the north, local communities developed settled agriculture along the Nile and in its fertile delta. Hemmed in by the vast Libyan and Arabian deserts to west and east, there was little room to expand, and densely populated stable communities developed in a fertile environment that encouraged political organisation and the emergence of a new level of civilisation. It culminated in 3000 BC in the unification by Menes of upper and lower Egypt and the flowering of one of the world's greatest and longest-lived civilisations.

Though Egypt was later to be ruled for centuries by a variety of outsiders, the sense of an Egyptian identity and the grandeur of the past were never entirely forgotten. Much of the archaeological treasure house decayed, but its sheer scale, coupled with the preserving qualities of the warm dry climate, ensured that a consciousness survived, however much overlain by later political and cultural changes.

It was the many and varied invaders who did much to overlay that consciousness in complex and competing ways. In the later pharaonic centuries Egypt found itself sacked several times by Libyans, Ethiopians, Persians and Assyrians, before being conquered by the Greeks under Alexander in 332 BC. During his rule the great Mediterranean city of Alexandria was established. The Greeks were followed in 30 BC by the arrival of Roman and later Byzantine rulers who were to survive until AD 638. In Western minds the period is associated with the saga of Antony and Cleopatra, but for ordinary Egyptians at the time, one of the greatest legacies was the introduction of Christianity which came to replace the worship of the river and a panoply of associated gods that had characterised the religious life of the pharaonic age. However, the indigenous church that developed in Egypt was that of the Copts, with their own monophysite doctrine which was deemed heretical by the Byzantine rulers.

Byzantine rule became increasingly unpopular with the people, both because of the division on Christianity, and the high levels of taxation exacted. In the seventh century in the Arabian deserts to the east a new message, that of Islam, arose and went out northwards before turning to the west into north Africa. It was only a relatively small Arab army that arrived in Egypt in AD 639, but it was welcomed by many Egyptians anxious to see the overthrow of the unpopular Byzantine rulers. The arrival of Islam and the Arabic language was to mark another of the great turning points in the history of Egypt, and their absorption by Egyptian society went on over a long period, being generally a peaceful and incremental process. Though Arabs did emigrate to Egypt, the large majority of the population was unchanged, and indeed a significant minority of some 10 per cent remained committed Copts.

Arab rule, like that of the preceding conquerors, meant involvement in the wider fortunes of empires and dynasties around the Mediterranean. The Umayyads, a dynasty based in Damascus, seized Egypt in 658, but held it only until 750. During that period the great schism within Islam between *sunni* and *shi'ite* occurred, in which Egypt became associated with the former, as it has remained ever since. The Umayyads were followed by the Abbassids who sent a

series of governors of Turkish origin from their capital in Baghdad. In practice the governors of Egypt were to become effectively autonomous, and Ibn Tulun in particular sought this freedom, bequeathing a new capital al-Qahira (Cairo) at the centre of which was a vast mosque capable of housing his army. After Ibn Tulun's death there was a period of confusion and decay before a new conquest by the Fatimids from north-west Africa in 969. During the brilliant period of the Fatimids the university mosque of Al-Azhar, the oldest surviving university in the world, was built. It was to become the major centre of learning in the Islamic world, and to provide a source of authority for successive rulers of Egypt.

The period of growth under the Fatimids, outside as well as inside Egypt, was checked with the coming of the Crusaders from Europe. In response the Syrian-based Seljuk dynasty fought back, especially through the exploits of the Kurd Salah al-Din (Saladdin as he became known in the West) who himself took Egypt establishing his own Ayyubid dynasty in 1171. Securing himself in the newly built citadel on a hill overlooking the Fatimid city, Salah al-Din also launched his army once more against the Crusaders driving them from Jerusalem in 1178. Under the Ayyubids there was also to be another major development, the raising of a mercenary army of Turkish slave soldiers to protect the rulers. Known as *mamluks* (an Arabic term meaning 'owned') this army raised in the slave markets of the Caucasus and beyond, took over power in 1250 at a time of Mongol threat from the east. The *mamluks* were Turkish-speaking and from their number arose successive sultans to rule Egypt. To protect themselves *mamluks* returned to their slave markets of origin to purchase boys who were then reared in existing *mamluk* households creating an isolated military caste to rule Egypt. Land was parcelled out to major *mamluks* to enrich themselves and this unusual form of alien rule perpetuated itself for several centuries. While militarily strong and able to protect themselves from threat both from without and within Egypt, the *mamluks* were inefficient rulers, and, though they left some magnificent architecture, by the later thirteenth century there was a series of revolts, plagues and famines.

This weakness left Egypt an easy prey for the rising

Ottoman empire that seized the country in 1517, making it then a province of Istanbul and that loosely structured empire that was to dominate the Middle East until 1918. But in practice the new Ottoman rulers worked well, with the Circassian *mamluks* with whom they shared a common linguistic and cultural background. In fact, once taxes had been paid to Istanbul, Egypt was largely left to itself to be governed – and increasingly misgoverned – by an Ottoman-*mamluk* military oligarchy. Cut off from the mass of the people by race and language, the rulers also became increasingly acquisitive in terms of land. Some peasants effectively found themselves forced to become landless agricultural labourers on the estates the Ottomans and *mamluks* carved out for themselves, or even forced into the cities. Under this alien system the conditions of the Arab Muslim masses became ever harsher. And with the hardship and suffering went a slow but real decline in Egypt. At the time of the Arab invasion in 639 the population has been estimated at between 20 and 30 million, but when Napoleon invaded the decaying Ottoman Egypt in 1798 it had been reduced to some two and a half million.

The arrival of the French was to usher in a new era. Egypt was to become shaped and then dominated by European developments of both a political and economic character. Both themes were present in Napoleon's invasion for he hoped to strike a blow against Britain's control of India by cutting the short overland route across the isthmus from the Mediterranean to the Red Sea, and also to develop new trading opportunities for France in the eastern Mediterranean. The *mamluks* came out to meet him in battle, but their colourful medieval cavalry was no match for the modern firepower and discipline of the army of France which won a decisive victory at the Battle of the Pyramids. Napoleon then climbed a pyramid to tell his triumphant forces that 'From these monuments forty centuries look down upon you'. Napoleon, however, was given little time to enjoy his victory. A British fleet under Nelson sailed up to defeat his own ships at the Battle of the Nile; and with bad news from Paris as well, Napoleon slipped away in 1799. Two years later the remaining French troops were confronted by a Turkish-British land force and agreed to be shipped home, to be followed voluntarily by the British.

Perhaps the outstanding legacy of Napoleon's invasion lay with the bevy of experts he had brought with him who created the 'Institute d'Egypte' producing numerous volumes that were to launch Egyptology in the Western academic world and, in time, to remind educated Egyptians of former glories.

The departure of French and British forces left something of a vacuum, which was swiftly filled by another Circassian alien, Mohamed Ali, a wily ambitious Albanian soldier of fortune who had landed with the Ottoman force. Backed by Albanian regiments he manoeuvred skilfully in the struggles between Turks and *mamluks* and after imprisoning the Turkish governor in 1805, persuaded Istanbul to recognise him as Egypt's sultan. Then, in 1811, he cruelly disposed of the remaining senior *mamluks*, massacring them after entertaining them to a feast in the citadel.

Mohamed Ali was a ruthless figure who realised that to exploit his effective autonomy as ruler of Egypt, in the face of the growing power of Europe in particular, he would have to modernise his country. Firstly, he needed to reform the army, and to this end he imported first Italian and later French experts. Europeans and Turks were also engaged as officers, though later a new military college produced some Egyptian officers from better-off families. The peasants were only to serve as conscripts, an unpopular exercise that was to prove a continuing weakness of Mohamed Ali's army. Secondly, educational reforms along Western lines produced not only military officers, but also professionals such as doctors, engineers, and translators. Thirdly, he encouraged health improvements in an effort to raise the standards of hygiene and sought to contain the sweeping epidemics that intermittently tore through the population. Fourthly, Mohamed Ali set out to modernise the Egyptian economy. The state improved irrigation, and organised the growing and exporting of crops (such as cotton, indigo and sugar) for the European market. Land was parcelled out to Mohamed Ali's family and associates and a new, largely Turkish-oriented, class of landowners developed in time, profiting from the growing ties with Europe. Factories were also started, primarily to meet military requirements; but while export crops, especially cotton, were to expand unchecked, competition from European manufacturers,

permitted under the Ottoman capitulations, was to undermine this nascent attempt at industrialisation.

Mohamed Ali's aims were not just to protect Egypt but to make her an expansionist power in the Eastern Mediterranean. He successfully invaded Sudan to the south in 1820, making it effectively a colony, and in some eyes even a part of Egypt. In 1831 and 1833 he went so far as to attack the Turks, until Britain and Russia intervened to protect the Ottoman empire from disintegration. After that, age got the better of him, and both he and his efforts to modernise Egypt languished.

Mohamed Ali had both established the last of the numerous alien dynasties to rule Egypt and begun to lay the groundwork for a modern state on European lines. But his immediate successors, following his death in 1849, made less impression, though the growing French influence in the country did lead to the granting of the concession in 1856 to Ferdinand de Lesseps to build the Suez Canal. It was not until Ismail became Sultan in 1863 (soon changed to Khedive) that there was another major drive towards modernisation, including an attempt to make Cairo the Paris of the East. But the effort proved exhausting for Egypt and by 1875 the country was heading for bankruptcy. This provided the opportunity for Britain's prime minister, Disraeli, to make a swift purchase of Egypt's shares in the canal. A year later the Egyptian economy was effectively in hock, and French and British 'advisers' were running the Caisse de la Dette Publique to sort it all out. In 1879, following attempted trickery by Ismail, Britain intervened with Istanbul to have him thrown out in favour of his son, Tewfik.

The circumstances that led to Britain's growing intervention were also provoking a response among Egyptians. The nineteenth-century impact of Europe on the Middle East was giving rise to critics in the Islamic world. Jamal al-Afghani had travelled widely encouraging religious reform and ideas of liberal constitutionalism, which even had a brief effect on Khedive Tewfik. At the same time Egyptian intellectuals, many of whom were products of the educational links with Europe, were developing ideas of secular nationalism. Meanwhile the financial problems of the country were leading to shortages and arrears of pay in

the public services, including the army, peasants were being heavily taxed and harvests were poor. It all culminated in a rebellion during 1881–82, led by a nationalistic army officer, Colonel Ahmed Arabi. While France hesitated, Britain acted decisively by sending an army to crush Arabi's men at Tel-el-Kebir in 1882, and imposing what was to be in all but name the British occupation of Egypt.

British domination of Egypt was set up by Sir Evelyn Baring (soon to be Lord Cromer and known to his subordinates as 'the Lord'). Though the Khedive was to remain, and would name a Cabinet of Egyptian ministers, all had to obey the directives of Cromer and the other British advisers appointed to reform Egypt. The first concern was the stabilisation of the country's finances. Irrigation was improved, including the building in 1902 of the first dam at Aswan, while the economy was pushed ever more towards the monocrop culture of cotton, primarily for export to British textile mills in Lancashire. There was also reform in many areas of the state, including the rebuilding of the Egyptian army. While there were improvements in standard in a number of areas, Britain's control emphasised the distance between rulers and ruled. Formally the rulers were the Khedive and his ministers, mainly Turco-Circassian in origin, but behind them lay the real power of even more alien masters, the British under what had become known as the 'veiled protectorate'. In time this led to resentment, especially among the growing educated group, who felt the arrogance of the British most directly. To make matters worse the British government repeatedly announced that it would be pulling out of Egypt once the country was on a 'sound' footing. Yet in practice the British seemed to dig in ever deeper. As a result, by the early 1900s, a nationalist undercurrent was developing led by a charismatic young man, Mustafa Kamil, and though there were strikes and demonstrations (which were to become a regular feature of Egyptian political life), Britain remained as unmoved, aloof and arrogant as ever.

The 'veil' was lifted from British domination and a protectorate proclaimed with the coming of the First World War in 1914. Legally Egypt had been Ottoman, and since the Ottoman Empire was siding with Germany Britain was at war with Turkey and hence required to annex Egypt

formally. During the conflict Egypt became a vast transit camp as thousands of Allied troops poured through, moving between Asia, the Antipodes and Europe. It was also a base for the campaigns first in Gallipoli and later in Palestine. Such disruption and the effects it had on the life and economy of Egypt fuelled resentment against British domination. The principle of self-determination enunciated by America's President Woodrow Wilson as the basis for the peace conference in Paris in 1918, led to the request of senior Egyptians led by Sa'ad Zaghlul that a *Wafd* (delegation) be sent to represent Egypt. Zaghlul was of peasant background and was a charismatic figure with great appeal to the public, among whom he was popularly known as *al zaim*, the leader. As a result, when Britain refused the request for the *Wafd* to go to Paris a wave of nationalist demonstrations convulsed Egypt and lasted for much of 1919. Zaghlul and his colleagues had been deported to Malta, but Britain was forced to allow them to go to Paris, though not as negotiators. Britain, though, was still prepared to offer little, for she saw Egypt as a vital strategic position in the post-war world, and agitation broke out once more, with Zaghlul again exiled. In a desperate attempt to meet Egyptian demands and British interest, Britain's new High Commissioner, Lord Allenby, announced in 1922 the ending of the Protectorate and the 'independence' of Egypt. Britain however would retain control of certain reserved subjects: Egypt's defence, including the retention of British bases; imperial communications, especially the Suez Canal; the protection of foreign interests in Egypt; and the Sudan, the route of the Nile waters.

Such 'controlled' independence fitted the general pattern of the thinking of the victorious European powers about the post-war Middle East. Having propped up the Ottoman empire for the latter part of the nineteenth century, Britain and France now set about dismantling it. While Egypt might be sufficiently advanced for a liberal democratic experiment, other states in the region were certainly not. Instead, Britain presided over the shaping of new states and elevated local leaders, such as religious or tribal chiefs into monarchs. Having seen the possibility of Arab national unity advanced during the war dashed, the Hashemite family of Sherif Abdullah of Mecca was now

encouraged by Britain to provide kings for new states in Jordan and Iraq. And while Britain accepted the rise of Ibn Saud in the new country of Saudi Arabia, she also kept faith with the tiny emirates along the western flank of Arabia from Kuwait to Oman, over which she had exercised protection for more than a hundred years. Meanwhile Palestine became a directly administered British mandate, while the French imposed themselves in Syria and Lebanon, and the Italians in Cyrenaica (Libya). Dreams of Arab nationalism raised by the Arab revolt against the Ottomans in the First World War, and then encouraged by Britain by T.E. Lawrence, had thus been turned instead into the reality of separate states, clearly supervised by the two major European victors.

European overlordship, however, was to prove incompatible with the notions of Arab nationalism that had been growing since the end of the nineteenth century; and it was no surprise that this would become apparent first in the most advanced country in the region, Egypt. Egypt's independence had been a unilateral declaration by Britain; and the reservations imposed were to become a running sore in the relations between the two countries. There were repeated attempts to negotiate a more satisfactory agreement, but these foundered in 1924, 1926 and 1929 on the inability to match the aspirations of Egypt for full independence with Britain's perception of the requirements needed to protect her interests. At the same time as Egyptians were frustrated by the reservations, so the internal political arrangements proved unsatisfactory as well. In theory Egypt was embarking on a constitutional liberal democracy, but practice proved something less. The king, Fuad, was an autocratic character determined to exercise power in his own right, and since he had been installed by the British it was felt by Egyptians that Britain effectively underwrote his position. There was an elected parliament in which the Wafd was now the country's leading party and which Zaghlul, who was opposed to Fuad, dominated until his death in 1927. But government needed the acceptance of the king, and in practice the support of the British Residency, making political life a triangular struggle that did little to make the ordinary Egyptian feel that he counted, let alone had a part to play. By the early 1930s

scepticism with liberal democracy was widespread. With the popular Zaghlul dead it seemed as if the British, the king and the old landed ruling class retained power and were becoming more autocratic, negating the nationalist upsurge of 1919–22. Meanwhile, the economy and society, having been drawn ever more tightly into the world economy by the concentration on cotton, were vulnerable to its widening swings which in 1929 culminated in the Wall Street Crash and the subsequent Depression. Such was the disturbed world in which the young impressionable Nasser was to take his first steps in politics in the 1930s.

Chapter 2

THE MAKING OF A NATIONALIST: 1918-52

Gamal Abdul Nasser was born on 15 January 1918 in Alexandria, and grew up in the political turmoil of Egypt between the two world wars. This experience shaped the political ambition that led ultimately to his coup of 23 July 1952. The First World War had kindled hopes and opportunity with an outburst of nationalism that led to Egypt's formal independence from British control in 1922, but by the time of Nasser's adolescence those feelings were turning sour, causing disillusionment among the youthful radicals of whom he was one. The Second World War was to bring about an intensification of the disillusionment with national and international politics that led Nasser to seek an alternative through the organisation of the Free Officer corps and the carrying out of the successful *coup d'état*.

Nasser was to be a figure not only of his time, but of his social background as well. His family was one generation removed from the peasants, and in close touch with the small village of Beni Moor near Assiut in Upper Egypt, where as a boy Nasser spent his holidays. The family was far from being the poorest of the peasants, but Nasser nonetheless had first-hand experience of the poverty-stricken conditions of the rural Egyptians, crammed in along the banks of the Nile on which the whole country depended. Economically the system continued to serve the tiny landed class, most of them of Turkish rather than Egyptian origin, reflecting the centuries of domination by the Ottoman Empire. The introduction of a more commercial economy into the country in the nineteenth century did little to change the basic social structure of the countryside. Politically the life of the peasants was very parochial and

dominated by the local headmen, the *sheikhs* and *omdas*, who served as collaborators of the state. Their tasks included collecting taxes and when necessary producing labourers for public works on dams, canals or bridges; and enlisting the required numbers of men for the army who lacked the money to buy themselves out of national service. Nasser maintained his memories of the peasants all his life and often referred to their plight before even he came to power.

It was the social and political change of the nineteenth and early twentieth century that was reflected both in Nasser's background and in his early political thinking and activity. The making of a modern state provided new opportunities for peasants with some education to move into lower-middle-class occupations. Nasser's father belonged to this growing social stratum, running a post office in Alexandria when Nasser was born and later being transferred to Khatatba, a poor village on the edge of the delta. Coming from upper Egypt he was known as a *saidi*, and as such seen by his countrymen in lower Egypt as a proud, rather prickly personality, with a strong sense of his own dignity: qualities which were inherited by his son. Not that Nasser was very close to his father: indeed his early family relationships seem rather traumatic. He was very attached to his mother, but she died in 1926, while Nasser was away living with his uncle in Cairo. Nasser was not informed of her death until he returned to Khatatba, several months later, when it came as a great shock. He later said it was 'a cruel blow that was imprinted indelibly on my mind'.¹ It was followed by another when his father swiftly remarried, and from then on Nasser was never close to him. He felt estranged from his father and his new family, and for the next few years was back and forth between Cairo and Alexandria living with his uncles and attending different schools. He was not a happy child, appearing uneasy, cautious and of a rather secretive nature. But like many *saidi*, when his pride or dignity were crossed he was capable of fierce anger and determined action.

Nasser's lower-middle-class background contributed to the widening of his political interests beyond those imaginable to the *fellahin*, the peasantry; while at the same time making him aware of the latter's situation, and the political

and economic oppression suffered. In his various schools in lower Egypt Nasser had a certain self-consciousness as a *saidi* and one of peasant background. This may have contributed to the vigour with which he immersed himself in the growing student unrest that was a feature of the political upheavals of the time. Perhaps because of his self-contained nature, the young Nasser was a considerable reader, focusing particularly on historical works. He liked Voltaire, Rousseau, Baroness Orczy and Dickens, and also popular biographies of the famous, including Alexander the Great, Julius Caesar, Napoleon and Bismarck. More contemporary figures who captured his imagination included Gandhi and Attaturk. Another important strand of his reading was romantic Islamic and Egyptian renaissance books. Such works were very popular, conjuring up images of past ages of grandeur, and fostering a yearning for a new future. Mahmoud Abbas al-Aqqad popularised Muslim heroes anew, and Tawfiq al-Hakim, a great favourite of Nasser's, called for the resurrection of Egypt under a charismatic leader. Nasser's self-consciousness found imaginative redirection into a romantic awareness of Egyptian nationalism.

Nasser was later both to draw on that historical legacy, and to be compared to figures from it. He was often to be referred to as a modern pharaoh by Egyptians when he was in power; and in particular the High Dam at Aswan was spoken of as Nasser's pyramid. His sometimes enigmatic expression and behaviour were likened to that of the sphinx in cartoonists' caricatures. In his confrontation with the West over Suez and his arousing of Arab nationalism to confront the intrusive Western position in the Middle East, he was spoken of as a modern-day Salah al-Din. Nasser was also to be compared to Mohamed Ali, with his efforts to modernise Egypt and industrialise his economy, Ahmed Arabi, leading an earlier nationalist uprising, and Zaghlul, *al zaim*, with his popularity among the Arab masses.

But all that lay ahead, and it was not the glories but the deep problems of Egypt in the early 1930s that surrounded the young Nasser. In addition to the impact of the world recession, which contributed to the lower living standards of most Egyptians, the country was becoming politically more repressive. Under the premiership of Ismail Sidqi Pasha (1930-34) there was little attempt to perpetuate the

pretence of democracy and instead a more monarchical constitution was introduced, coupled with growing coercion and repression by government, and a rising tide of unrest and demonstrations amongst the people, especially in the urban areas.

Nasser became involved in these demonstrations as a schoolboy. The tradition of radical students had been established from the time of Mustafa Kamil at the start of the century, and with rising unemployment among school and college graduates a new edge was given to passions and demonstrations. Nasser was by then at El Nahdia, the most active school in student politics in Cairo, and he also chaired the committee of Cairo secondary school students. (In 1935 he also appeared as Shakespeare's Julius Caesar in the school play, an inspired piece of casting.) He took a leading part in demonstrations, during one of which he was nicked by a bullet fired by a British soldier, leaving a permanent scar. He wrote to a friend at this time, 1935, 'Where are the men ready to give their lives for the independence of the country? Where is the man who has to re-build the country so that the weak humiliated Egyptian can stand up again and live free and independent? Where is dignity? Where is nationalism?'²

As the gap between politicians and people widened in the 1930s, the once popular party, the Wafd (founded by the now dead Zaghlul), declined in appeal, and was seen largely as the party of the landed class. In its place new organisations appeared to appeal to the masses. The largest of these was the *Ikhwan al-Muslimeen*, the Muslim Brotherhood, founded by a teacher, Hassan al-Banna, in 1928. It appealed for a return to a more simple approach to life centred on Islamic values, and spread rapidly, in particular among the displaced urban masses. It was social as well as political, with a network of local organisations through which *ikhwan* helped each other with the travails of life in the early 1930s. In time, however, it became identified as a fanatical Muslim fundamentalist movement. A smaller but more overtly political group was *Misr al-Fatat* (Young Egypt). Their model was that of the young fascist movements in Europe, and they especially admired Mussolini's work in Italy, news of which was spread by the Italian community in Egypt among whom fascism was strong. Nasser

joined Young Egypt in 1934 while still at school, acting as an office boy on its newspaper, soaking up the mixture of nationalism and corporatist socialism with which the atmosphere was imbued. Young Egypt had its own green shirt movement (green being the colour of Islam) which marched the streets proclaiming its heady if simplistic ideology.

It might seem strange that a young student radical should have been drawn to a career in an authoritarian organisation like the army. He did think of becoming a lawyer, but his family lacked the means to finance his university studies. As a secondary school graduate in need of a regular income it was natural that he should aspire to state employment, and Nasser's imagination and life-long liking for action scarcely fitted him for the tedium of the Egyptian bureaucracy; rather he was attracted to military heroes like Nelson and Napoleon. Moreover, the army was changing. It had been modernised by the British, and a major shift was made when entry into the officer corps, hitherto exclusively for the upper classes, was opened up in the mid-1930s. In spite of this broadening, Nasser's first application was rejected, and he also failed to gain entry to the police college. But he took a gamble, forcing his way in to meet the under-secretary at the Ministry of War personally, and his audacity and pertinacity were rewarded by a place in 1937. He was 'not so much a soldier who went into politics as a politician who went into the army'.³

ARMY CAREER

Nasser's military training in the academy was highly condensed. The need for more officers, with the recognisable threat to Egypt and Britain from the Italian invasion of Abyssinia (Ethiopia) in 1935, together with the presence of Mussolini's army in Cyrenaica (Libya), led to the introduction of a one-year crash course. The new breed of young officers swiftly formed close friendships which were to underpin their later conspiratorial activities. The majority of Nasser's colleagues in the later conspiracy of the Free Officers were contemporaries at the Military Academy and came from comparable backgrounds. They were from middle peasant families or sons of junior officials, and as the first of the officers drawn from more modest origins

than had been customary, they soon formed close friendships in a largely segregated society where, as in much of the Arab world, close male bonding was very common. Nasser had neither a warm nor outgoing personality, but from the start he commanded respect. Tall and well-built, he had a physical presence backed by a seriousness and intensity of purpose. He still continued to read and to think, and he kept attention almost as much by his brooding silences as his nationalist utterings. After a spell at Mankabab, in upper Egypt, he was posted in 1939 to Sudan. There he spent a rather quiet three years in camp at Jebel Aulia just south of Khartoum, where his friendship with Abdel Hakim Amer flowered, especially over the chess board. An easy-going, genial figure, Amer was something of a contrast to Nasser, but their close relationship gelled swiftly and was to last until Amer's tragic death in 1967. Nasser returned to Egypt and became an instructor at the Military Academy. His seriousness and determination in teaching once more commanded respect and widened his contacts; and some, including Anwar Sadat, were to refer to him thereafter as 'the teacher', a title commanding particular respect in Muslim societies. Sadat in particular was to be much in awe of Nasser and operated in his shadow both before the revolution and after it, becoming eventually vice-president and then succeeding Nasser as president.

While Nasser was away in Sudan, the Second World War had brought growing political awareness to the young officers of the Egyptian army. The acceptance by the government of the 1936 Anglo-Egyptian Treaty had caused some anxiety, for, under the threat of Italy, Egyptian politicians were seen as having finally caved in to Britain's pressure for a military treaty legitimising her military domination of the country. When the war finally did arrive, the British presence was to leave Egypt successively exposed and humiliated. Allied setbacks in the Middle East made Egypt into a vast Allied garrison, which was increasingly under pressure. Axis successes eventually brought the war to Egypt itself as Rommel's army pressed in from the west to within sixty miles of Alexandria. There were even plans to evacuate the British up the Nile to Sudan, while the wealthy also considered how and when to cut and run.

Egypt herself, however, was not officially at war, emphasising the feeling that her suffering resulted from the unpopular Anglo-Egyptian Treaty of 1936 and her British occupiers. British doubts about Egyptian attitudes, particularly those of the army, were well placed. Inside and outside the army Egyptian nationalists were debating the merits of supporting the Axis powers, rather than repressive Britain. Organisations like Young Egypt bred a kind of amateur fascism. Some people were doing more than muttering, and the young Sadat was busy conspiring with German agents, and eventually found himself imprisoned by the British – a detention of which he was subsequently very proud.

It was these British uncertainties about the Egyptians that led to the great humiliation of 1942. Feeling the need to stiffen the resolve of the Egyptian government, the British ambassador, Sir Miles Lampson, ordered King Farouk (the young man in his early twenties he patronisingly referred to as 'The Boy') to appoint the leader of the Wafd Party, Nahas Pasha, as prime minister, believing that the Wafd, having negotiated the 1936 Treaty, was the most popular and pro-British party. When Farouk appeared as if he might demur in the face of this blatant British pressure, Lampson ordered British troops to move through Cairo and surround the Abdin Palace, while the ambassador pushed home his demand on pain of Farouk's forced abdication. Farouk's reluctant agreement was for Britain a small piece of *force majeure* at a time when her whole position in the Middle East was facing its greatest challenge ever. And it was a part of the turning of the tide, for shortly afterwards the British and their allies were victorious at El Alamein on Egypt's western border and began the long march to victory, first in North Africa and later in Europe. But to Egyptians Lampson's treatment of Farouk was an enormous humiliation. Anti-British feeling had produced official neutralism and covert pro-Axis sentiments: now the British, at gunpoint, were telling the monarch of an allegedly independent state who to appoint as premier, and the outcome was both condemned and remembered; not least by Nasser and his fellow officers, sitting on the sidelines as the great world conflict literally rolled over their country, Egypt. Nasser wrote in anger and frustration

to a friend condemning the action and deprecating the inability of the Egyptian army to act: 'You see them [the army] repenting of not having intervened in spite of their obvious weakness to restore the country's dignity and cleanse its honour in blood'.⁴

Shortly afterwards he was to enjoy some personal, if not professional, relief from his sense of anguish when he married Tahia, the daughter of a small businessman. She was to prove a loyal and unobtrusive wife, eventually bearing five children and living unpretentiously in the suburbs of Cairo, where Nasser was to enjoy a simple family life, whenever possible, for the rest of his days.

Married life, however, in no way deflected Nasser from his political concerns; indeed on occasions Tahia was to prove an effective accomplice, running errands for the Free Officers. The official end of the Second World War, far from bringing peace to the Middle East, opened up what was to be a far more significant and long-lasting conflict, that was to be at the heart of Nasser's subsequent career. The defeat of Nazi Germany revealed the full horror of the Holocaust in Europe that had cost the lives of six million Jews, and was to give an enormous boost to Zionism. The movement for the return of the Jews to Israel, for centuries the home of the Palestinians, had begun at the end of the previous century with the activities of Chaim Weizmann and his colleagues. The collapse of the Ottoman Empire at the end of the First World War had resulted in Britain having the mandate from the League of Nations to govern Palestine. By the 1930s London was well aware of growing tensions in the territory as a result of Jewish immigration from Europe. But that was to be the only forerunner of the post-war problem as thousands of Jews sought refuge from the horrors of Europe by fleeing to the Promised Land. As tension mounted between Palestinians and Jews, and the British authorities appeared incapable and vacillating, the legal inheritors of the problem from the League of Nations, the new United Nations, approved a partition plan in November 1947 that was anathema to both the Palestinians and neighbouring Arab states. By the end of the year the war in Palestine had begun. A little over twelve months later, in February 1949, it resulted in a victory for the Jews and the creation of the state of Israel.

The war was to have a major impact on Nasser. It bloodied him fully as a soldier, and in the fighting in Palestine he proved himself a minor military hero. Nasser was wounded by a bullet that struck him near the heart, from which he made a quick recovery. He was also a senior officer in a large unit of the Egyptian army that found itself surrounded by Jewish troops and besieged from October 1948 until the following January in the Falluja enclave near Gaza in southern Palestine. Though offered a chance to surrender by the Israelis, the Egyptian forces fought on bravely. Eventually the final armistice spared the survivors, who were allowed to march out with full honours in recognition of their heroic defence. In addition to his display of coolness and bravery, Nasser had also learned other lessons in the war. Two of them underlined old realisations, but another was new. He saw again the weakness of Egypt, not least because of the betrayal of her rulers. This was most noticeable in the shoddy arms used by her men as a result of a deal by Farouk and others who had enriched themselves by supplying poor quality equipment. It was shown too in just about every aspect of the performance of the military war machine, from poor weapons, food and planning, to inadequate facilities for the wounded, which Nasser experienced himself when shot. There was clearly something rotten in the state of Egypt, as a then better-known war hero, Colonel Ahmed Abdel Aziz, remarked shortly before he was killed in battle in August 1948: 'the supreme struggle is in Egypt'.⁵ It was a sentence which struck a deep chord in Nasser, emphasising this feeling that there had to be a revolution in Egypt if the humiliation of the defeat of the Arab armies by fledgling Israel was ever to be reversed. The war also underlined, in Arab eyes at least, the duplicity of Britain. While Britain had repeatedly shown herself capable of behaving with such high-handedness in Egypt, in Palestine it seemed that the Jews were running rings around her, and this must have been due in part to the duplicity rather than the weakness of such a mighty power. A Jewish officer with whom Nasser spoke after the siege remarked on his repeated criticism of Britain.

The final major lesson was, however, new. The attack on the Palestinians brought a response first from the newly formed Arab League and then from the neighbouring

Arab states. The concept of Arabism received a great boost from the conflict, which defeat intensified rather than undermined, and Nasser's eyes were very much opened to this new dimension. The failure in war was less a failure of the Arabs (and Nasser fought alongside Palestinians, Syrians and even Saudi Arabians) than of the Arab states. He noted especially how much the Hashemite leaders, now monarchs of Jordan and Iraq, owed to the British. Nasser had discovered Arabism; but it was Arabism betrayed, not least through complicity with imperialism.

Conspiracy came naturally to Nasser; and seemed appropriate in Egypt's circumstances. He was a man who was both self-contained and naturally suspicious, good qualities in a plotter. But he was a cautious developer, and not a reckless impulsive figure like the young Anwar Sadat. Loose groups of plotters began to evolve within the Egyptian army from as early as 1939 and there were several by 1944 and 1945. Sadat, in his autobiography, claimed to have begun the Free Officers at the start of the war, but it is unclear how involved Nasser was in those embryonic intrigues, or indeed how many such clandestine groups then existed.⁶ The real importance of such activity began after the defeat of the Egyptian army and the Arab cause in Palestine at the start of 1949. It was then that the Free Officers really began to organise. There were nine officers in the central committee. Abdel Hakim Amer was closest to Nasser; and he was also influenced ideologically by the dashing young Marxist, Khalid Muhiddin. There were two brothers Gamal and Salah Salem, the latter of whom was an excitable and talkative little man. The others were Abd al-Latif al-Boghdadi, who like his colleague Anwar Sadat had been an early activist, Kamal al-Din Hussein and Hassan Ibrahim. They were later joined by Hussein al-Shafi and Zakariyya Muhiddin. Six were from the army and three from the airforce; Nasser was elected chairman and his leadership of the group was to remain unchallenged for years to come. Mostly from a similar lower-middle-class background to Nasser, only one of them had personal experience of Europe, and few knew a language other than Arabic. While broadly nationalist, there was little attempt to formulate a coherent ideology or programme, and there were widely varying views among the growing conspirators.

Between them the Free Officers had contact with other groups outside the army but Nasser was too much of a conspirator, and too convinced of his own Arab nationalist viewpoint, to be closely linked himself. The Muslim Brothers, who had led the Islamic fundamentalist movement before the war, were becoming more fanatical but the emphasis on Islamic themes, coupled with their predilection for assassination, led him to keep his distance. On the other wing, their main rival, the Communist Party with support mainly among the small number of industrial workers, was too inclined towards Moscow-led Leninist internationalism to appeal to Nasser. Thus it was others amongst the Free Officers rather than the men at the centre of the conspiracy who developed contacts with the civilian movements.

In retrospect the Free Officers sound impressively organised with military and civilian sections, as well as branches dealing with various strands of activity. In reality, however, this strength lay in the conspiratorial tentacles. Cells of five men, known only to each other, were established in all the major parts of the army; and even among the Free Officers only two men knew the full extent of the network, Nasser and Amer. This combination of secrecy and widespread links was to be at the core of the success of the movement. Without the former the movement would have fallen prey to army intelligence, always concerned with groups and plots within the military; and without the latter it would not have been possible to mobilise support across the army which was necessary to check the danger of divisions within it should a coup be planned. When fully developed the Free Officers movement had around 1,000 members, though only a small number were very active.

As well as building a successful organisation, it was also necessary to plan lines of action. One existing form of opposition in Egypt was political assassination, and this was actively contemplated. Among those considered for elimination was the king Farouk himself, and there was eventually an attempt to kill a much-hated senior officer, General Hussein Sirry Amer, early in 1952. However, the job was botched, and Nasser later professed his relief at the failure and his rejection of assassination. Another possibility was to try to capitalise on the opposition to the

regime, resulting from economic upheavals of the post-war period, by producing critical pamphlets and linking with subversive groups. Moreover, there was a ready-made instrument in the Muslim Brotherhood with which Sadat, amongst other officers, was in contact. To try to check the Brotherhood, the security forces had already assassinated its leader, Hassan al-Banna, but it was still a militant and potentially violent force. The Free Officers not only had contacts, they produced home-made weapons and distributed some to their potential civilian collaborators.

There were too some political activities. Nationalist leaflets in the name of the Free Officers appeared from 1949; and in January 1952 they succeeded in getting their candidates elected to the committee of the Officers' Club, a clear challenge to the senior and royalist officers against whom they stood – a victory which was much resented by the King who saw the army as his ultimate bulwark. However, Nasser was not the man to risk his carefully made organisation in too much public activity that could rebound against the Free Officers. In the end a coup appeared the most appropriate way forward, both in theory and practice. Nasser was to speak of the army as the 'only force capable of action' to follow up the 'political revolution' of obtaining independence in 1922 by carrying through the second revolution of 'social justice', which Egypt was still awaiting. The army, he alleged, could do this since it provided 'a force concentrated within a framework separating its members to a certain extent from the continual conflict between individuals and classes, a force drawn from the very heart of the people, whose members trusted one another and had full confidence in themselves, a force equipped and capable of swift decisive action'.⁷

Initially Nasser had expected that it would take about five years to be ready for any form of intervention, but prospects were greatly improved by the rapid decay of the political system itself after the defeat in Palestine; as Nasser was later to write 'Thus it was not the Army . . . that determined the role it was to play in the course of events. The reverse was nearer the truth.'⁸ In the end it was to be capturing control of the army itself that posed the only real problem, and that was where the careful work of Nasser and Amer was to prove so vital. They were helped too by

the growing unpopularity of the king, confirmed in the Officers' Club election, and their greater familiarity with the ordinary soldiers when compared with the background of the older, senior, pro-Royalist officers.

The Palestine defeat, coming in the wake of the dislocation and humiliation of the Second World War, was always going to be difficult for any Egyptian government to handle, and it soon proved beyond the capacity of successive administrations. The economic situation, after the heavy costs of the war, proved difficult. The country found itself increasingly indebted, giving rise to an undercurrent of social discontent. Meanwhile there was the thorny question of negotiation with Britain. After the Second World War Egypt had tried unsuccessfully to renegotiate the 1936 Anglo-Egyptian Treaty, since the threat of the Axis powers had been removed. But negotiations had broken down – as so often in the past – on Britain's insistence that Sudan would remain nominally an Anglo-Egyptian condominium, (in reality Britain would maintain control, and surreptitiously nourish anti-Egyptian Sudanese nationalism, thus dividing and dominating the Nile valley). The breakdown of negotiations with Britain had led Egypt to take the case to the United Nations, but that had proved inconclusive. In 1950 the two sides tried again, but though there were new ideas on the table, particularly US encouragement for a new defence arrangement, the problem of Sudan proved once more intractable.

The breakdown in negotiations with Britain was particularly damaging. Britain had had good relations with Nahhas Pasha, leader of the Wafd, for it had been with him that there had been successful negotiation of the Anglo-Egyptian Treaty in 1936; while it was Nahhas whom Britain had insisted King Farouk make prime minister in 1942. The return of the Wafd to power again in 1950 made Britain hope that a new post-war defence agreement would now prove possible, since Nahhas's premiership appeared to offer the best hope of a settlement. The failure to negotiate a new treaty damaged relations between Britain and the Wafd, its main influence among the political parties, and at the same time severely weakened the Wafd government formed in 1950. The Free Officers in particular were to become very disillusioned with the Wafd after 1950. It

seemed more than ever to represent essentially the rich and privileged, and there was little prospect of it becoming a party of major reform.

It was not just in parliament that the government was weak, but also in the country. Anti-British feeling, stirred up by the Palestine war, and encouraged by various radical groups such as the Muslim Brothers, was followed by guerilla attacks on British troops, particularly in the canal zone, to which the Free Officers contributed by smuggling arms to the guerillas. While this violence seemed convenient to Egyptian politicians, who certainly did little to contain it, it had the effect of encouraging more general political lawlessness, including assassinations and violent demonstrations, which also went largely unchecked since successive governments gave the appearance of being too weak to act. The nadir of this situation was reached in January 1952 when the British troops on the canal displayed particular severity. Alleging that the police post at Ismailia was not acting to stop guerilla attacks, the British ordered the officers out, and when the police refused to leave (on orders from Cairo) bombarded the post, killing over fifty. The next day, 26 January 1952, 'Black Saturday', the people took to the streets to put Cairo to the torch, deliberately killing Britons they could find in the process. Meanwhile, the Egyptian authorities did nothing, in spite of British embassy pleas, for both were waiting to see if the other would act. Britain was more than ever an occupying power, and the Egyptian government was both unwilling and unable to cooperate in the process of repressing the understandable anti-British anger of the masses. When the fury of the people was played out, there were further attempts to re-establish government control, but each new administration proved more incredible than the one it succeeded. The king, an increasingly obese and unpopular figure, dismissed the Wafd government, but its rivals seemed incapable of establishing a stable administration, and in the following six months there were four different governments. If ever a country looked ripe for a coup in terms of general unrest and violence, weak government and with an unpopular occupying army, it was Egypt in the middle of 1952.

Nevertheless the idea of a coup still appeared some way from the minds of Egyptian politicians, reflecting their own

preoccupations and rivalries, and lack of imagination. They appeared unconcerned that upheavals in Syria had started army intervention there in 1949, though the fact was not lost on Nasser who took considerable notice of it. The King however had been roused when the Free Officers decided to test their popularity by putting up candidates for the Officers' Club against his favourites: when the former won, Farouk began to express concern at what might be developing in his army and encouraged steps by his senior officers to arrest it.

Nasser was aware of this, and he was also encouraged to speed up moves to act by 'Black Saturday'. The fury of the people against the British, and the unwillingness of the government to intervene, made a significant impression on him; and it was after 'Black Saturday' that it was agreed in principle to act in the coming months. However, as the time to move came nearer, Nasser was conscious that as they were a group of young men all in their early thirties and unknown to the public, it would be useful to be seen to be led by a mature and recognised figure. For this role they hit on General Neguib, a benign pipe-smoking figure with a good reputation from the Palestine war in which he had been wounded three times, including once being left for dead. Neguib proved a ready recruit, though there are conflicting accounts about how far he was let into the details of their plans.

Nasser was also worried at this stage about foreign intervention, especially on the part of the British. His reading of history made him wonder if the British might see him as another Colonel Ahmed Arabi who led the revolt of 1882 and was crushed by the British army at Tel-el-kebir. It has been claimed that Nasser acted with the knowledge of the Americans, with the implication that the latter explained matters to the British when the Free Officers moved.⁹ In reality Britain, which had not intervened to save British lives on 'Black Saturday', could do little to stop a well-planned coup even had she so wished; but it was much on Nasser's mind as the moment drew near.

Although the coup was agreed in principle after 'Black Saturday', it was only two days before it occurred that the final date was set. It was to have taken place on 5 August, but on 20 July Nasser had a tip-off that the King had heard

something and that the noose was about to tighten on the Free Officers, and they decided to move on the evening of 22 July. The plan had already been drawn up by Nasser, Amer and Kamal Hussein for various of the Free Officers to lead units to key posts, particularly Army Headquarters in Cairo. Other targets included the main airport, the telephone exchange and the radio station. By chance, on the evening of 22 July the King received word accidentally that something was about to happen, but by that time the plan was getting into operation, and when the army commanders met at midnight to discuss what was going on it only made it all the easier for the Free Officers to detain them. Fortune was again on their side, for when the King realised how the coup was proceeding he called Neguib, asking him to intercede with the plotters, little realising that he was the official leader of the movement. The nearest point to a hitch came when Nasser, driving around unrecognised in his small car from unit to unit, was briefly detained by guards with orders to arrest senior officers. However, the over-zealous error was soon corrected and all the objectives had been seized without any resistance. By morning a bloodless coup had been completed. The Americans were informed and told to warn the British to keep out, and an announcement was made on the radio by Sadat (after waiting nervously for the completion of the customary reading from the Koran).

The next step was to take control of government and appoint a new prime minister before addressing the problem of the king. Ali Maher, a former prime minister, was asked to form an interim administration of civil servants; meanwhile the Free Officers debated what to do with King Farouk. Several were for putting him on trial and executing him, but Nasser was prominent amongst those calling for the more lenient course of exile: once in Italy he was to prove an excellent advertisement for the depravity of the regime that Nasser and his colleagues had overthrown. As for the populace, they generally welcomed the coup with enthusiasm. Well aware of the need for change, the Free Officers had proved capable of decisive action. But as to what future action they might take now that they had seized power, that was far less certain, not least to the Free Officers themselves.

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THE RISE OF NASSERISM: 1952-58

The first task of the Free Officers was to work out the form of government Egypt was to have. It soon became clear that the dynasty founded by Mohamed Ali had come to an end with the departure of Farouk. This did not present any difficulty for it was itself part of the structure of foreign domination which the revolution existed to overthrow; and though the young Farouk had been applauded, in the post-war period he was an increasingly discredited figure. Beyond this, however, there was uncertainty, with the politicians in particular appearing to believe that bereft of the interfering monarch their hour had come again. Prominent figures such as Mustafa Nahas, the former Wafd prime minister, and Fouad Saraq al-Din, another prominent Wafdist, rushed back from their European holidays away from the intense heat of a Cairo summer, expecting to claim their inheritance as the natural leaders of Egyptian politics from the obscure young officers who had staged what they (the politicians) saw as a coup rather than a revolution.

Indeed it seemed for the first few weeks after 23 July 1952 that there might be some grounds for the politicians' interpretation of events. The Free Officers, reconstituted as the Revolutionary Command Council (RCC) with only a couple of additional members, contained figures with very different ideas, and before seizing power they had not sought to resolve the form of government they wished to establish. The initial declaration had spoken of purging Egyptian political life of 'bad elements', but had been imprecise about the future. Initially the old politician Ali Maher was appointed prime minister, and he selected a

civilian Cabinet mainly of civil servants. At the same time the political parties were not banned, but instead told to cleanse themselves, and they made somewhat perfunctory moves in this direction.

However, though this might have appeared as a return to normality or a period of drift, the RCC was in fact engaged on an intense debate about the future. Night after night, the RCC met in prolonged secret and intense discussion which contributed much to their transformation from a conspiratorial to a ruling group. The central figure in those sessions was Nasser, just as he had been when they were the Free Officers. One of the first concerns was the place of the parties, for some had seen the Wafd as the historic vehicle of Egyptian nationalism and the potential instrument for change. But the Wafd had also been discredited in the period from 1950 in particular, and furthermore it was becoming clearer that behind the facade of a civilian government the RCC were developing a taste for power. In September 1952 came the first strike against the parties, with the dismissal of Ali Maher as prime minister and his replacement by Neguib, though still with a predominantly civilian Cabinet. Then, in January 1953, the political parties were formally dissolved and their property and funds confiscated. It was then announced that the army would be in power for a period of three years, at the end of which there would be a new form of constitutional government. To replace the vacuum left by the banning of the parties a new body, the Liberation Rally, was established to mobilise support for the revolution; and by June RCC members were filling a number of senior Cabinet posts, with Nasser as deputy prime minister and Minister of the Interior, a vital position from which to control the security services. RCC members also appeared more in public, addressing rallies, often in their own home areas, to try and win acceptance for the emerging new regime of military rule. Some members spoke in mosques to emphasise that, while not fundamentalist in character, the RCC recognised the underlying strength of Muslim culture in Egypt as a whole. Nasser for his part was still no more conspicuous than other members, but it was he who made many of the announcements on major domestic and foreign policies, albeit in the rather formal manner of an official spokesman,

which perhaps contributed to what still seemed to outsiders to be his relative anonymity within the RCC.

Following the dissolution of the parties, the next major issue of power arose from within the RCC itself. It concerned General Neguib who had been made prime minister in September 1952. Neguib was an older figure (fifty compared with an average age of thirty-three for the others) and senior, and had been brought in late to serve as a figurehead. In this he was if anything too successful as he toured the provinces. An amiable outgoing personality, he was easier for the populace to identify with than the unknown, earnest young Free Officers, let alone the rather taciturn, brooding figure in the background, Gamal Abd al-Nasser. There are conflicting accounts of how far Neguib had even been let into the plot to seize power on the night of 22 July 1952; but thereafter he was to emerge as the major challenge to the Free Officers and the continuance of Nasser as their guiding star. It was understandable that having been recruited as the ostensible leader, and then swiftly achieving a degree of popular recognition not accorded to his colleagues, Neguib should feel himself the coming man. What was to prove fascinating was the subsequent struggle between Neguib and Nasser for control of the revolution which one had fronted, but the other had orchestrated.

The differences of approach between the two men simmered below the surface from the first months of the revolution, but the longer it went on the clearer it became that it was not just about personalities, but also about objectives. Nasser, like the Free Officers, may have been uncertain over the future form of government, but they were all increasingly clear that they would not readily hand over power. Neguib, on the other hand, put a different interpretation on events, seeing himself as the leading figure who would preside over a constitutional rather than a revolutionary republic: one in which there would be a return to parliamentary government, though shorn of the corrupt monarch and his courtiers. To this end he developed his relations with the old politicians, notably those from the Wafd, to the growing disgust of Nasser.

The difference of approach, as well as rivalry between the two leading personalities of the moment, came out into

the open early in 1954, after Nasser had decided to take a tough stance against the Muslim Brothers. On the face of it a widespread popular movement, Nasser's view of the Brotherhood was that it proclaimed an irrelevant if not anachronistic call for a theocratic state rather than a revolutionary pursuit of social justice; moreover, its popularity was a threat rather than a potential support for Nasser's own plans. The Muslim Brothers appealed to Neguib who, though nominally president and prime minister, had not been consulted. Believing that he had popular sentiment behind him, Neguib decided on 23 February to send a letter of resignation to the RCC.

All but two of the RCC were in favour of accepting the resignation, proclaiming Nasser as prime minister, explaining that Neguib had been attempting to set himself up as an undisputed autocrat, and putting him under virtual house arrest. However, Neguib's growing personal popularity and the contacts he had been cultivating swiftly posed a major threat to the RCC. Demonstrations were held in favour of Neguib and a return to parliamentary democracy by students of Cairo University, during one of which an RCC member, Salah Salem, was manhandled. Protests poured in too from Sudan (where the RCC still hoped for an eventual union when the Anglo-Egyptian condominium ended), for Neguib was half Sudanese and, moreover, the Sudanese were just embarking on liberal democracy. More serious still were rumblings in the army, especially the important armoured regiments, one of whose number, Khalid Mohieddin, had voted against Neguib's ousting in the RCC. Nasser bravely went to confront the armoured officers himself and was noisily told that they wanted Neguib back as president, and would accept Nasser as prime minister only on condition that steps were taken towards creating a new constitutional democracy.

In the hours that followed it became clear that there were deep divisions in the armed forces over Neguib or Nasser, and democracy or revolution, with threatening moves which posed a prospect of a violent clash. Faced with such a threat to the revolution, Nasser's prudence and caution got the better of his rivalry with Neguib and an apparent compromise was reached. Neguib would return as president while Nasser would be prime minister and head of the

RCC, and there would be moves to establish a new, elected, parliament in time for the second anniversary of the revolution.

Yet if Neguib and his supporters, especially among the old politicians, believed that they had achieved a victory, they had underestimated Nasser for whom the compromise was only a tactical withdrawal. Shortly thereafter he was once more to begin the undermining of Neguib, though now in a much more subtle and effective manner. Nasser had decided to use the compromise to underline the stark choice of a return to parliamentary democracy or revolution, and meanwhile to arrange events in such a way as to tilt the scales overwhelmingly in favour of the revolution rather than putting it at risk by a return to the rule of the old parties.

His first move, however, was to take two steps backward, for in March 1954 he resigned the posts of prime minister and the head of the RCC to Neguib, arguing that his situation was untenable since he found himself tied to an unworkable compromise. Having thus freed himself, he then set about forcing the RCC to confront the choice facing the country – democracy or revolution. He even went as far as proposing a resolution that the RCC itself be dissolved and elections held in which the old parties could compete once more, and without competition from any RCC-backed party. As Nasser anticipated, this was agreed by the RCC by a majority of eight to four.

However, this appearance of yet further retreat by Nasser gave him the exact opportunity to carry out what behind the scenes he had been busy arranging. While Neguib was on a visit to Sudan Nasser had had a number of his supporters, particularly in the armoured corps, detained. He had also begun a purge of army and police. Not content with that, he had been mobilising support amongst the trade unions, and was recruiting potential demonstrators.

The public picture was now of Nasser forced to concede the return of Neguib, followed by an RCC vote in favour of elections. This gave every appearance of being not simply democracy, but a return to the old-style system of party rule which had served Egypt ill, and against which the coup of 1952 had been staged. Far from constituting a revolution, it appeared that unless there was a popular protest any

thought of improving on the old system and its manifest shortcomings would be lost.

This was what Nasser's preparations had been designed to bring to the fore, together with a body of opinion which would rise up to demand the maintenance of the revolution. The army, now purged of dissidents, came out solidly for the retention of the RCC; trade unions went on strike against the planned elections and Nasser's supporters duly staged demonstrations against the old parties. With this display of support, Nasser could now return to the attack on Neguib, and the RCC plan to return to democracy which he had himself proposed. On 29 March the RCC announced that in response to popular demand it would be staying in power, and that the planned free elections would be abandoned. Too late did any of the supporters of elections come out to demonstrate (most notably the students of both Left and Right), and for Neguib there was then no longer a ready base of support with which to counter the ruthless manoeuvring and organisational skill of Nasser. On 17 April 1954 Neguib handed over the premiership once more to Nasser, and though he remained president for a further seven months he was a beaten and broken man. He was to admit as much in his memoirs remarking that he had been 'outmanoeuvred by Abdul Nasser and my junior colleagues'.¹

Nasser was now triumphant not only in the army but outside it as well; nevertheless it was the army that had been most significant in the dark hours of February 1954, when it seemed that Nasser had over-reached himself and might be about to split the very force that had brought him to power. The coup of July 1952 had been essentially a takeover not so much *by* the army as *of* the army, and it was in ensuring the unity of the army, and the defeat of his instrument and later rival from within the army, Neguib, that Nasser ensured that he could assume the presidency and prevent the revolution from going out of the hands of the RCC (and even being destroyed through a return to the old democracy by the very parties it had taken power to overthrow). And throughout these manoeuvrings it had been Nasser more than anyone else who led the RCC on its route to triumph, while also ensuring that he always kept the RCC, and through it the armed forces, behind him.

The casualties included not only Neguib and the old parties, but also one of the RCC itself, the young communist Khalid Mohieddin, who left for exile in Europe. Indeed the RCC itself was formally dissolved, its work having been officially finished, though most of the Free Officers were appointed to various posts.

As well as overcoming the political parties, especially the Wafd with its tradition of leading Egyptian nationalism, Nasser had also to tackle the ideological movement of Left and Right. The struggle between Nasser and Neguib had gone some way in achieving this, but the task was still not finally complete by the time Nasser had defeated his rival. The Left was easier to deal with. As in most of the rest of the Middle East it was relatively undeveloped and was at its strongest in the trade unions. Though some of the Free Officers, most notably Khalid Mohieddin, had had their sympathies and contacts, their sense of class consciousness was relatively limited, and constrained by a nationalism that was essentially against alien domination rather than bourgeois rule as such. Moreover, in their minds, and indeed the experience of the time, communism was associated with the leadership of Moscow and the young nationalists had no more intention of handing over power to the other aliens than to those politicians so recently displaced.

The possible challenge of the Left was finally crushed even before it could begin. In August 1952 textile workers took over a factory near Alexandria, and in the riots that followed nine people died. Despite Nasser's personal pleas, the RCC had moved swiftly to confirm the death sentences on two of the ringleaders. The revolution was henceforward not to entertain any spontaneous sequestration of private property by the proletariat, and communists generally were prominent amongst those imprisoned and tortured in the subsequent years. Meanwhile the trade unions were to be thoroughly purged and brought under the discipline Nasser was beginning to exercise over increasing areas of Egyptian society.

It was the Muslim Brotherhood rather than the communists that posed the major threat with popular support. The ideology was more attuned to the religious sentiments of Egyptian society, and the Brotherhood had had an inner core capable of considerable acts of violence, as witnessed

by the part it had played in the Palestine war and the attacks on the British bases on the Suez Canal. The Muslim Brothers initially felt that the RCC would be forced to turn to them with their widespread organisation, especially when the parties were banned. They had close links with a number of the RCC, such as Anwar Sadat, and were represented in Ali Maher's Cabinet. When the parties were officially banned in January 1952 the Muslim Brothers were exempted, being regarded as a religious movement, but tension between them and the RCC rose steadily. Neguib's challenge to Nasser was seen as involving the Muslim Brotherhood and his defeat as a setback for them as well. In October 1954 a man fired a number of shots at Nasser during a rally in Alexandria. Nasser himself behaved with great bravery, as he had in war, shouting 'Let them kill Nasser. He is one among many and whether he lives or dies the revolution will go on.'²

Inevitably it was Nasser's would-be assassin who died, and his identification with the Muslim Brothers led to mass arrests and the execution of three of their leaders. This time Nasser did not appear to plead for the lives of those who challenged his revolution. However, Nasser did not intend to be anti-Islamic, and his revolution continued to respect the quiet faith of Egypt's predominantly *sunni* population. In addition the *ulema*, official religious leaders based on the ancient Islamic University of Al-Azhar and supported by the state, proved a solid theological backing for Nasser, just as they had for his predecessors.

Nasser's rise to the presidency can be seen as both a learning process and an exercise in power. In his *Philosophy of the Revolution* Nasser speaks as if he expected the overthrow of the old corrupt system to be the main contribution of the Free Officers, after which the repressed forces of progress in Egypt could be liberated, but then he swiftly learned how much more there was to be done: 'The reality I found after July 23rd took me by surprise. The leaders had accomplished their mission. . . . The masses did come. But they came struggling in scattered groups. . . . It was only then that I realised with an embittered heart, that the vanguard's mission had not ended at that hour but had just begun.'³ Yet another interpretation suggests the RCC's, and particularly Nasser's, desire to remain in charge

behind the scenes, to draw a parallel from one of his favourite works of fiction, he could be a Scarlet Pimpernel. In the event, maintaining control involved removing¹ the rivals – Neguib, the parties and the ideological movements. The secret of the revolution was slowly being revealed, not least to the RCC itself: Nasser was its leader and all the world increasingly realised it. Perhaps, though, it was not just Nasser's penchant for secrecy or his need to learn, but rather that he had grown in confidence: the detached, withdrawn young man had become a more assertive character capable not only of successful conspiracy but increasingly of communicating with the people. As Nasser became more of a public figure, and with a revolutionary role, it was necessary for him to address the people as he had not done since his days in student politics. The attempted assassination in Alexandria had shown his bravery, and increasingly his popularity grew too as his style changed from ponderous prepared speeches to a much more simple country (*baladi*) style of speech. Rulers hitherto had been of other races, despising vernacular Arabic, and when they did speak publicly it was very formally and with the distant superiority of members from the top layer of a hierarchical society. As Nasser developed his style he became less formal and stilted, and more relaxed and colloquial. He spoke like a rural *saidi* of upper Egypt, and was full of well-known references to daily rural life. Nasser was not just an Egyptian, he was an ordinary Egyptian and this increasingly was the way he was perceived.

As well as becoming a more popular figure with the Egyptian people, Nasser's outmanoeuvring of his rivals had greatly consolidated his own powers. Emerging as president, executive authority was firmly in his hands. He appointed the ministers, who were accountable to him rather than to parliament, and he was thus chief policy-maker in any field of domestic or foreign affairs in which he felt concerned. At the same time he was head of the only permitted political movement, the Liberation Rally. He was also supreme commander of the armed forces, as well as in control of the domestic security services. It was a formidable concentration of power, greater than his immediate predecessors had enjoyed, and Nasser had acquired it in a very short space of time and with no experience of

government before 23 July 1952. He was to hold it, with only minor adjustments, for the rest of his life.

While Nasser was rapidly accumulating power in his own hands and projecting himself as an ordinary Egyptian, the people were waiting to see the directions of policy. For centuries it had been a hierarchical society which expected its leaders to rule, and this contributed to the lack of a spontaneous national force for change which Nasser had appeared to expect. Nasser did not open the floodgates on 23 July 1952, but there was a people waiting to be led, and, for the first time for 2,000 years, an indigenous Egyptian to do it. And on the whole they increasingly liked the direction in which they were being taken. In particular the agricultural reform of September 1952, cutting the maximum size of a family farm to 200 *feddans*, may not have been as radical as it appeared in terms of numbers affected, but it was a clear indication that with the King's going had departed too the small group of large landowners who had been so dominant economically as well influential politically in the many years of the old dynasty. To this was added new social and labour legislation intended to improve the minimum conditions of life for the millions of ordinary Egyptians who appeared for so long to have been the forgotten people of the country's political life.

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BUILDING UP EGYPT

Much has been written of Nasser's concept of three overlapping circles – the Arab, Muslim and African worlds – to which he believed Egypt was central, and around which her foreign policy should be shaped. It was certainly the case that Nasser was to make Egypt an active rather than a passive player in all three worlds and in the wider international effort towards positive neutralism in the emerging Third World. But in his early years Nasser was to be less concerned with defining Egypt's new approach to the various circles than in making its mark with regard to the old world of the West, and in particular Europe's declining dominance in the Middle East.

A more stable period had been during the days of the Ottoman Empire, especially while Britain propped up the Sultanate as cover for her penetration of the Middle East,

including of course Egypt, before the Ottomans threw in their lot with Germany and crumbled after the First World War. Then Britain had to come more publicly to the fore with her 'moment' in the Middle East, which centred on Egypt and the arrangements for her 'independence' in 1922, as well as establishing the Hashemite monarchies in Iraq and Jordan, taking the mandate directly in Palestine, and exercising great influence throughout the Arabian peninsula. Behind Britain had come France with her position in the Maghreb, as well as the home of Arab nationalism, Syria. For Britain, the Middle East had been largely a staging post for the East, to which the French-built, but mainly British-owned, Suez Canal was central. In the inter-war period, however, the growth of oil production around the Gulf was making the region vital not only for imperial communications but for the powering of the international economy as well.

After the Second World War it was clear that the position of the West was unravelling. Britain's empire in the East had been sorely dented, and India's independence in 1947 formally underlined that fact, as well as serving as an inspiration for nationalists elsewhere. In the Middle East itself, Anglo-Egyptian relations were deteriorating rapidly, contributing to the decay of the monarchy and the whole Egyptian political system; British equivocation had contributed to the emergence of Israel out of the Arab débâcle of the Palestine war; the collapse of France in the war had led to the precarious independence of Syria and Lebanon; while the Arabian peninsula looked scarcely more stable. Britain, however, appeared reluctant to accept this decline, especially the Conservative government elected in 1951, led by Churchill and later Eden. There were repeated attempts at settlement with Egypt, but without the mutual fear engendered by Germany and Italy in 1936 no agreement had proved possible. Instead the United States and Britain sought to concentrate upon the 'northern tier', from Turkey to Pakistan, hence the lengthy and apparently successful negotiation of the Baghdad Pact of 1955. The pact had started as a part of the scheme of America's Secretary of State, John Foster Dulles, to contain the Soviet Union with anti-communist alliances on all flanks. Originally involving the non-Arab states of Turkey and Pakistan in

1954, it was Britain that sought in 1955 to bring Iraq into the centre of the pact, which was also signed by Iran.

Britain's decline in the post-war years was not confined to the Middle East or matters imperial, but was the beginning of the end of her position as a world power, however reluctant some quarters, notably the Conservative Party, were to recognise it. In place of the domination of European imperialism there were now the superpowers, the United States and the Soviet Union, whose sheer scale had been converted into the power to win the Second World War and divide Europe; but who had also become bitter post-war enemies in other areas including the Middle East. Though geographically more remote it was the United States, the more cosmopolitan of the two superpowers, for all the proclaimed internationalism of Marxism-Leninism, which took up the running. It also had great interests, notably its oil business in Saudi Arabia, and there was as well growing domestic support for Israel.

There was an ambivalence in American policy towards the Middle East, and in Arab reactions thereto. Ideologically, the United States was as hostile to imperialism as the Soviet Union, while also believing that the European powers were overstretched. Thus at one level there was some recognition of Arab nationalism, if it could take a reforming and moderate line. Yet the above-mentioned interests contributed to deep flaws so far as Arab nationalists were concerned. Foremost amongst these was of course American support for Israel, though under Eisenhower after 1952 it was to prove rather less of a reflex action in Washington than it had been under Truman. At the same time American oil interests were tied up with some of the most conservative and anachronistic rulers in the Middle East, in the eyes of Arab nationalists at least, and hence America appeared linked to reaction rather than progress.

It was understandable that from Egypt's viewpoint all this was not simply a matter of 'foreign policy' but central to the character of political and economic development. Politically she had been ruled by invaders for centuries, and even the 'independence' settlement of 1922 had been dictated by the last occupying power, Britain, and the latter's position had continued, though deteriorating, right down to the revolution of 1952. Egypt's final independence, it

was clear, would depend not only on developments within the country, but in the Middle East as a whole. At the same time, Egypt's economy had been significantly influenced by the industrialisation of the West, especially the growth of the British textile trade. Large landowners, many of non-Egyptian background, had developed their cotton crops which had become the country's leading export. Any major economic change would involve both the landholdings of major producers and the diversification of economic activity.

While this was the general context, there was nothing initially to suggest that the Free Officers, let alone Nasser, had a clear idea of the policy to be pursued, provided that it continued the throwing off of foreign domination and restoration of Egypt's dignity. There was no reason to regard Nasser as intrinsically anti-Western, indeed he had admired through his reading a pantheon of Western heroes, but in addition to his natural caution and suspicion, as well as a certain pride and prickliness, he needed to be treated with care as he found his feet in international politics. The Americans initially seemed quick to appreciate this, with CIA figures Miles Copeland and Kermit Roosevelt developing personal relations with Nasser that contributed to early Egyptian criticism of him. But the real duel was to be with Britain, whose position in the Middle East seemed so uncertain, following the Free Officers' coup.

On the face of it, the central question should have been British troops in Egypt, but as seen, other issues emerged to produce bigger problems in Anglo-Egyptian relations, especially their developing rivalry in the south and north. The rivalry over Sudan has attracted less attention than that surrounding the Baghdad Pact, but in fact it was regarded as crucial by Egypt. Egypt had long claimed Sudan, arguing that there was no meaningful border between the two countries and that Sudan had legally been Egypt's since the conquest at the start of the nineteenth century. Nasser as a *saidi* from upper Egypt was hardly likely to regard a line drawn across Nubia as anything other than a highly artificial division. Egypt's interest was not only historical, for through Sudan flowed the Nile on which Egypt was dependent, and she was potentially a rival for the water which had been divided to Egypt's advantage by Britain in

1929 and was to be renegotiated. In addition to water there had long been suggestions that land-hungry Egypt, with her fast-growing population might utilise the underpopulated Sudan, both to relieve pressure at home and produce more food.

In the repeated negotiations over Sudan, which had continued intermittently since 1924 (with only a brief success in 1936), Egypt had insisted on linking a defence agreement with Britain to progress on Egypt's claim to sovereignty over Sudan, and this had always proved the reason for failure. However, the RCC took a new and radical line by appearing to separate the two questions from the outset. By doing so, and thanks to the success of the half-Sudanese Nuguib in winning over all major Sudanese parties to Egypt's proposal of a free choice on the country's future, the Egyptians were able to force Britain onto the defensive. Much to the chagrin of British officials in Sudan, the Anglo-Egyptian agreement of 1953 on the future of Sudan was largely a surrender of Britain's position coupled with a promise of self-determination for the Sudanese.

With the confidence gained from that perceived success Egypt then prepared to negotiate on the British bases. By then Britain had come to realise how exposed a position she was in. Her huge base (the largest she had in the world) and personnel had been subject to guerilla attacks, which successive Egyptian governments had done little to halt, and to which she could offer little response. At the same time her capacity to intervene in Egyptian politics had long since disappeared, as events of 'Black Saturday' and the 23 July coup had demonstrated. Nasser for his part persuaded his reluctant RCC colleagues of the need for the agreement to include a clause by which the bases could be reactivated in time of war, while the whole deal was helped by the sweetener from America of aid if agreement was reached. Negotiations proceeded smoothly and by October 1954 the treaty was signed. All British troops were to be withdrawn, and British civilian contractors and Egyptians were to work together in the bases which would be maintained for reactivation in the event of attack by an outside power (a provision which specifically excluded Israel).

Thus far Nasser had been engaged in successfully negotiating an end to the old problems of Anglo-Egyptian relations, defence and Sudan. (If on Sudan he appeared to

have the better of the deal, there were those who felt that on defence he had been too moderate, especially on the reactivation clauses.) But in the months that followed the defence treaty, he began to suspect that, far from withdrawing, Britain was, so to speak, really only rearranging the furniture in the Middle East, and once more to the detriment of Egypt. That detriment was most directly shown up in Sudan, when Britain had decided that in being forced into what she regarded as a precipitate withdrawal she would encourage Sudanese politicians of all parties to seek full independence rather than union with Egypt. Indeed events in Egypt, and between Egypt and Sudan, conspired to aid Britain in what was undoubtedly her objective. The fall of the half-Sudanese Neguib went down badly in Sudan, as did the execution of Muslim Brothers in Egypt. At the same time Egyptian-Sudanese negotiations on the Nile waters fared badly since Sudan wanted a less unequal division than that of 1929, and was angered by Egyptian intransigence. By mid-1955 it was clear that the earlier interest of the Sudanese in union with Egypt was much diminished, and Britain underlined this by encouraging Sudan's unilateral declaration of independence that eventually took place on 1 January 1956, without formal prior acceptance by Britain and Egypt as legal co-dominion.

The other area where Nasser's suspicions were being aroused was in the development of the Baghdad Pact of 1955. To Britain the pursuit of the Baghdad Pact was the evolution of the 'northern tier' of Middle East defence, linking countries immediately adjacent to the Soviet Union in a pact that would contain the latter and protect Western interests. To Nasser, however, it spelt the revival of an idea already made to Egypt and rejected in 1951. A way out of the failure of Anglo-Egyptian talks then preferred by Britain, with American encouragement, was a joint defence treaty based on Egypt, but including other Middle Eastern states. Egypt had rejected what was then seen as camouflage for continued British involvement; but it now appeared that the same idea was being proposed, based this time on Iraq rather than Egypt, including also Turkey and Pakistan, and possibly seeking to embrace Syria, Lebanon and Jordan as well. To Nasser the Baghdad Pact was another attempt by large states to dominate smaller ones and

use them in struggles not of their making. Agreements such as he himself had just signed with Britain were quite sufficient and there was no need for further pacts. Moreover, by bringing in non-Arab states and linking them with the northern Arab states the Baghdad Pact was seeking to divide the Arab world. While within the Middle East the pact would promote the importance of oil-rich Iraq to pose a challenge to Egypt's growing leadership in the region.

By this time too another aspect of Nasser's thinking was emerging, that of Arab nationalism. An indigenous Egyptian, his sense of being an Arab is believed to have been considerably enhanced by his experiences in the Palestine war. Egypt also was the home of the Arab League, founded with British encouragement at the end of the Second World War, in the hope that it would contribute to what British Foreign Secretary Ernest Bevin thought optimistically would be a freer and more equal period of cooperation between Britain and the peoples of the Arab world. While the Arab League had hitherto been notably unsuccessful, Nasser saw it as a means of giving Egyptian leadership to the Arabs, centred as it was in Cairo. And the initial task in achieving this was to oppose the division within the Arab world threatened by the Baghdad Pact. To underline Arab unity, Cairo radio station began to broadcast *Sawt al-Arab* (Voice of the Arabs), the first international programmes by a Middle Eastern country. They became highly popular and carried the concept of Nasser's revolution to the Arab masses with notable success. But as well as becoming popular it also both opened up and altered the character of Arab political dialogue. Broadcasts were abusive of Nasser's opponents and highly vituperative, arousing emotions behind Nasser's message of Arab unity and freedom from imperialism and those rulers depicted as its local lackeys. The masses were being invited to join in the game of politics, but their role was less than clear.

The proposed Baghdad Pact would damage Nasser's emerging dream of the fulfilment of the commitment to the Arab circle. In consequence Nasser used all his influence to try to abort the pact, while pouring forth a tirade of propaganda against the rulers who appeared ready to bend to Britain's wish. Bitter though the struggle

was between Nasser and Iraq's pro-British premier, Nuri Said, Nasser did appear ready to compromise, considering at one time accepting the pact if limited to Iraq, Turkey and Pakistan. Britain, however, still hoped for more, particularly from Jordan. And when the Baghdad Pact was eventually agreed, in January 1955, it was an important step in furthering the mutual suspicions of Egypt and Britain; and even personally of Nasser and Britain's new prime minister, Sir Anthony Eden, who had succeeded the ailing Sir Winston Churchill and regarded himself as both an Orientalist and a leading figure in international politics, with experience of confronting the European dictators before the Second World War.

Part of Nasser's opposition to the Baghdad Pact lay in the delivery of British arms to Iraq at a time when Egypt's own armoury was in dire need of modernisation. The agreement with Britain on the bases, and especially the apparent American offer of support once it was completed, appeared to hold out what Nasser sought. But in the months that followed it was increasingly clear that neither country was keen to rearm Egypt, except on stringent terms concerning the use of any weapons supplied – in effect an attempt to link Egypt's foreign policy to that of the West (and to protect Israel) which was precisely what Egypt sought to avoid. For Egypt the situation was worsening, not just due to the Western arm twisting, but because of a more aggressive policy by Israel, concerned to flex her muscles in the face of the new regime in Egypt, allegedly to contain *fedayeen* guerilla raids against Israel. On 28 February 1955 there was a major raid against Egyptian troops in Gaza by Israeli forces, which to the suspicious Nasser smelled of collusion with the West to pressurise Egypt. It redoubled his determination to acquire new arms, and also led him for the first time to encourage *fedayeen* attacks on Israel.

Shortly after this, in April 1955, Nasser went to the first non-aligned conference in Bandung, Indonesia, hosted by Sukarno. Nasser was the youngest leader present, and the meeting was to have an important impact on him. In itself the growth of the non-aligned movement was a response to a combination of the ending of formal imperialism and its apparent replacement by the Cold War, in which the

United States and the Soviet Union appeared as rivals in wishing to extend their influence to the newly independent states. Among these emerging countries a few leaders were achieving a significance that transcended national boundaries, and at the same time seeking to come together to create a new movement, helping each other towards a more neutral international perspective, and a freer, fairer world. These were sentiments towards which Nasser instinctively felt drawn, even before he attended the famous non-aligned meeting at Bandung. There he met and was impressed, perhaps even a little awed, by India's Pandit Nehru, as well as China's Chou En-Lai, who suggested and then arranged for the subsequent arms deal with the Soviet Union. He also met another figure whose support was to be useful in subsequent years, Yugoslavia's Marshal Tito. Tito was to show him that links with the Soviet Union could be developed without the latter becoming the dominant partner in the relationship, as indeed it was never to do in Egypt in spite of its long and vital support to Nasser from 1956 until his death. Such men recognised Nasser's importance in the Middle East and treated him as an equal. He in turn felt the growing confidence to patronise the emerging figures, such as Kwame Nkrumah of Ghana, who in a number of ways aspired to be the Nasser of Africa, and whose name was often to evoke a similar response, whether positive or negative.

The most important immediate outcome of Bandung was the Soviet arms deal which, in a scarcely veiled effort to soften the hostility of the West, was nominally with Czechoslovakia. The Soviet Union showed an initial caution, for her penetration of the Middle East was in reality far less than that depicted by Western scaremongers, while the RCC had taken a tough line with Egyptian communists. But Soviet foreign policy was as much opportunistic as ideological: Egypt seemed too good an opportunity to miss, and a deal was offered on easy terms. Even so Nasser tried to use it as a bargaining card with his preferred suppliers in the West, and waited two months for them to change their policy. But the West now accused Nasser of blackmailing them with threats, just as he had criticised their original terms for supplying him with arms, and they held up their hands in horror when in September 1955 the 'Czech' arms deal

finally went through. After it Nasser remarked, 'We would have preferred to deal with the West, but for us it was a matter of life and death.'⁴

The impact of the arms deal in the West, which saw itself as centrally involved in the Cold War, was enormous. Britain felt that her own agreement with Egypt to leave the Suez bases was rejected, for the reactivation clauses had in effect been in case of Soviet hostility in the Middle East, and now the USSR was supplying Egypt. It undermined the Western monopoly of arms to the Middle East which seemed the major lever with which to try to establish the position there, possibly even leading to negotiation between the Arabs and Israel. With the deal the way was open to escalate an arms race in the region with uncontrollable political results. The concept of the 'northern tier' on which the Baghdad Pact was based of containing the Soviet Union was also aborted at a stroke, for now the Soviet Union had gained a foothold south of that line. For Nasser of course, all this was irrelevant. Rather than trying to control the Middle East by defence pacts, the legitimate claims of Arab states should have been recognised, including the need to rearm Egypt. And while friends warned him of the dangers of over-involvement with the Soviet Union, he had no intention of negotiating Britain's withdrawal only to replace it with Soviet control. He did not share the vision of international politics as dominated by superpower rivalry. On the contrary his visit to Bandung had opened his eyes to the possibilities of non-alignment and closer relations with other developing countries, as well as both East and West.

In Nasser's view he had been driven into the 'Czech' arms deal because of Western reluctance to provide him with the weapons he sought, and he was to feel similarly betrayed in another area he regarded as vital to the attainment of full independence for Egypt – the building of the High Dam at Aswan. The High Dam has been seen as symbolic, as Egypt's new pharaoh building his pyramid, and just about as impractical since it has been criticised for both its position and its effect: it would have controlled the Nile more effectively if sited further south, while some damaging side effects such as silting were being overlooked. Yet there was also a strong case for a new high dam

at Aswan. Throughout the twentieth century there had been repeated plans, barrages and dams designed to improve the hydrology of the Nile, ranging from the Owen Falls dam at Jinja in Uganda, where the Nile leaves Lake Victoria, to the barrages north of Cairo controlling the flow into the delta. Mighty though the Nile is in length, it does not carry a vast flow of water compared with other great rivers of the world, such as the Amazon or Ganges. Moreover, the population of Egypt (approaching 24 million by the time of the revolution) is wholly dependent on the river. More water was therefore needed to irrigate new land and ensure the food security of the fast-growing society. And though hydrologically there was a case for building a new dam further south in Sudan, like the Egyptian dam on the White Nile at Jebel Aulia, just south of Khartoum, where Nasser had been stationed, politically the uncertainty over future relations between the two countries ensured that first priority should be for a high dam on Egyptian territory. From Aswan it would be possible to guarantee water supplies for the foreseeable future, provide for the expansion of the area under irrigation and produce hydroelectricity which would power the growth of industry in Egypt. The combination of a stronger economy and a re-equipped army would finally ensure that Egypt had attained the full independence that had been so much a part of the ambitions of Nasser and his fellow Free Officers.

The background of the 'Czech' arms deal had ensured that from early on in the pursuit of the necessary foreign investment and technical assistance for the High Dam, Nasser knew that he had the option of help from the Soviet Union. Nevertheless, as with the arms, his early expectations lay with the West. British hydrologists had been deeply involved in earlier developments, the United States was the world's richest country, and the World Bank, the most appropriate institution to coordinate such a project, was based in Washington. Initially there was Western support, partly because the US Secretary of State, Dulles, still had hopes of influence in Egypt, and partly because of Eden's wish to keep the Soviet Union out of further involvement there. The first tricky hurdle involved negotiations between Nasser and the World Bank, for the former was no economist and believed that some of the conditions for the

massive project amounted to handing over Egypt's management of economic policy to foreigners again – a spectre which only eighty years earlier under Ismail had led first to creditor-management of the country and then to Britain's invasion in 1882. Eventually, however, there was agreement, but by then America in particular was beginning to have doubts. Dulles was turning against the scheme for a number of reasons associated with his attitude to Nasser, including the pressure of the Zionist lobby in Congress. In addition Dulles was worried by Egypt's recognition of communist China, which Nasser saw as an alternative potential source of weapons when talks between Eden and Khrushchev in London briefly threatened a new arms embargo to the Middle East. Then in the summer of 1955 Dulles announced that the United States had finally decided that the whole project was too big for the Egyptian economy to sustain, and it was pulling out of the funding scheme. (He also thought that it was too big a project for the Soviet Union to take over.) With Dulles's decision, the World Bank and Britain had little alternative other than to follow suit.

Nasser was a man of political imagination, as well as audacity, as the coup had shown, and even before the announcement from America it was clear that he had been contemplating financing the High Dam by seizing the Suez Canal. The canal was owned by an international company dominated by British and French shareholders. Many of its officials, including most of the pilots, were also Europeans, and it was regarded as one of the most vital waterways for Western Europe, indeed in view of the importance of Middle Eastern oil, for the world economy as a whole. The canal agreement with Egypt, renegotiated in 1949, gave Egypt a mere 7 per cent of gross profits and only a minor presence on the board of directors. The Suez Canal Company's concession was due to expire in 1968, but the Company had made it clear that it would only renegotiate the existing terms if that concession period was extended. There is little doubt that for Nasser taking over the canal was not just a matter of money, for in itself the income would be insufficient to build a dam which clearly needed help from a major international power, and it was once more partly symbolic. If the West was withdrawing from financing the dam, why should it continue without

interference to be the primary beneficiary of one of the world's major waterways traversing Egyptian territory?

Nasser's plan had the agreement of the RCC, but very few others were in the know when he went to make a speech in Alexandria on 26 July 1956. Always the careful plotter, he had arranged that when he mentioned the canal's builder, Ferdinand de Lesseps, Egyptian officials and police would move in and seize the Company's offices on the canal. The nationalised canal would then be run for the benefit of Egypt, in particular the building of the High Dam, and Egypt would thereby be taking two major steps to asserting her full independence. Such a master stroke, delivered with such style and timing in Alexandria on 26 July, and simultaneously on the canal itself, was widely hailed as the greatest step thus far by the revolution, and made Nasser a leader not just of Egypt but Arab nationalism throughout the Middle East.

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SUEZ WAR

Nasser's surprise announcement at Alexandria was the beginning of the Suez crisis: a crisis which was to run a course and have consequences which few involved foresaw at the outset – certainly not Nasser. However, Nasser's move in seizing the canal was not wilful or ill-considered; on the contrary he had not only harboured the idea for some time but worked out both what he expected others to do and the line to be adopted by Egypt. With regard to the former he clearly expected Britain and France to huff and puff. Britain he thought might act and he sought intelligence on British preparedness in the region, especially Cyprus, as well as withdrawing Egyptian troops from Sinai; but he also felt the chances of a strike by Britain would diminish as time passed. On Nasser's part his main concern was to keep the canal open, since much was being made by Britain and France of Egypt's alleged inadequacy to operate it herself (backed up by the effort of the company to encourage pilots to withdraw and generally ensure the fulfilment of the Anglo-French prophecy). In this endeavour Nasser was successful, largely due to the prodigious efforts of the minority of pilots of Egyptian origin, and indeed after that

there was never a serious question of Egypt's technical ability to run the canal.

As the British and French governments realised that the canal could still function, and that their own shipping lines were not amenable to pressure to boycott it, the thrust of the reaction was against exclusive Egyptian control of an international waterway. This included identifying Nasser as the sinister personality behind the move, and pointing to the danger of an individual dictator having a finger on one of the most vital arteries of international trade. The two prime ministers, Eden and Mollet, together with Dulles from the United States, met early in August 1956, after which they announced the convening of a meeting of twenty-four leading canal-using countries in London to establish some kind of international system of control. After it concluded Robert Menzies, Prime Minister of Australia, and regarded as a Commonwealth elder statesman, led a deputation to Cairo to argue for the agreed internationalisation of the canal. But Nasser saw the development of an Anglo-French manoeuvre and that Menzies had little intention of negotiating, and the mission duly failed. Worried by the increasingly belligerent view of his major European allies, Dulles now took up the running urging the formation of a Suez Canal Users' Association (SCUA), but Nasser was by then becoming increasingly angered at the attempts of others to arrange the future of the canal without negotiating with Egypt, and he swiftly aborted the proposal.

However, while Britain and France on the one hand and Egypt on the other had been making increasingly uncompromising and belligerent noises, behind the scenes there was a growing realisation that at some time the crisis would have to be resolved by negotiation. Financially Egypt was beginning to feel the pinch of some of the counter-measures being taken by Britain and France. At the same time there was growing pressure in the Arab world, and amongst Egypt's new-found friends in the non-aligned movement, to avoid a possible conflict which neither they, nor Nasser, thought Egypt had any chance of winning. In Britain too the Foreign Office and the military Chiefs of Staff were urging caution, and it seemed that until mid-October Eden was inclined to recognise that in the long run Britain too would have to negotiate. It was not that

Eden's view of Nasser was changing. If anything the reverse was shown in his personalised attacks on the man he increasingly identified as a potential fascist of the Middle East to rival those of Europe whose appeasement he, Eden, had opposed in 1938: the problem was that with the canal functioning and Nasser endangering no one Eden lacked a *casus belli*.

This frustration was seen and targetted by those in Israel, led by Ben Gurion, the legendary founder of the young nation, who in 1955 returned as Prime Minister and Minister of Defence for the second time. These Israeli hawks had been looking for an opportunity to strike at what they identified as a growing potential threat from revolutionary Egypt, as well as a chance to take Sharm el-Sheikh on the Red Sea, from where Egypt blockaded the Gulf of Akaba preventing free movement of shipping to the Israeli port of Eilat. But plans emanating from Israel directly were unlikely to cut much ice with Britain which was concerned particularly by a perceived Israeli threat to Britain's ally, Jordan. The important intermediary was France, which had been having discussions since September with Israel, long before involving Britain. For France the issue was not just the canal but Nasser's promotion of Arab nationalism, in particular the encouragement he was giving to the nationalist FLN in its growing struggle in Algeria, which both the French government and the *colons* were then determined to crush. A move against Egypt that aimed to bring down Nasser would, Guy Mollet believed, ensure the end of the FLN threat in Algeria. It was at these meetings that a plan was hatched that if Israel struck not just at Gaza and Sharm el-Sheikh, but towards the canal itself, then France and Britain could intervene to 'save' the canal.

This collusion was first put to Eden on 14 October 1956 and in spite of warnings from officials he was persuaded that such a secret agreement could be implemented. Once Israel attacked and Britain and France intervened to seize the canal, the alleged belligerents, Israel and Egypt, would be issued with an ultimatum to cease fire and withdraw from either side of the canal. While Israel would accept, and have control of the two areas she sought, Egypt would be bound to reject the ultimatum, thereby giving a pretext to the two European powers to attack Egypt, take control of

the canal and destroy Nasser. Under cover of an apparent move to take the dispute to the United Nations, which served effectively to distract the international community at large, including Egypt, the collusion plans of Britain[†] and France with Israel went ahead with a secrecy that Nasser himself would have admired, and which in retrospect was to serve him far better than its perpetrators.

It was only just over two weeks after Eden was first brought in that Israel launched its attack on 29 October, and the following day Britain and France were delivering their prearranged ultimatum. The attack came as a total surprise to Nasser, who could not initially believe what was happening, thinking at first that it was no more than another Israeli border raid. Even when its extent was recognised, the realisation of collusion did not dawn until the British and French ultimatum, which, as anticipated, Nasser speedily rejected. One or two of his RCC colleagues he consulted wanted acceptance, fearing that war would destroy them all, but for Nasser there was no question that Egypt should fight, though the odds against his forces looked overwhelming. For Egypt to surrender would be to bow once more to foreign domination and lose the achievements of the revolution. Nasser was determined to die rather than capitulate.

Realising early on that there would be no military assistance for Egypt – other Arab states were too weak and the Soviet Union immediately made it clear it would not risk a third world war – Nasser decided to play for time while the British and French prepared; and he hoped that world opinion would be outraged at the self-evident complicity and aggression. Meanwhile, with her airforce swiftly destroyed by Britain (to protect Israeli cities from the danger of Egyptian bombing), Nasser looked to his army to resist as strongly as it could when the invaders attacked Port Said, while making preparations to prolong the struggle through guerilla fighting when Egyptian forces were overwhelmed. As Nasser anticipated, the sight of Egypt's forces resisting against two such powers as Britain and France, did much to swing international opinion to his side. Though Nasser had not been directly in charge of the army, leaving it to his close friend, Abdel Hakim Amer, he did provide very direct, cool and effective military leadership during the short

campaign, his experiences in Palestine only eight years earlier standing him in good stead.

In fact the most significant military decision taken by Egypt was to sink block ships in the Suez Canal. The whole action of Britain and Egypt was allegedly to keep the canal open, and Egypt had proved she could do so on her own. Now, with what was rapidly being seen internationally as an unprovoked assault the two major powers had achieved precisely the opposite – a move which rapidly blocked oil supplies from the Middle East, thus damaging Europe in particular. The irony was not lost on the international community, and particularly the United States, where most of the major international oil companies were based. Of more immediate importance was the hostility of President Eisenhower in Washington. In the months preceding Suez, Eisenhower had been unwell and policy was in the hands of Dulles, a Cold War warrior whose apparent hostility to Egypt over the arms deal and High Dam had encouraged Eden. But the alarmed Eisenhower had intervened personally to establish that he would not support any use of force to settle the canal question. Consequently, at the United Nations America joined with the large majority of member states in condemning the British, French and Israeli action, and called for a ceasefire. It was ironic that the two super-powers whose rivalry in the Middle East had contributed to the background to the Suez crisis should finish up voting together in opposition to the invasion. At the same time Britain was left in no doubt by Eisenhower that America disapproved of her action when a run on sterling was triggered by the cutting of oil to Europe. British and French troops were thus ordered to halt shortly after taking Port Said and well short of the objective of forcing the downfall of Nasser. Though a United Nations force was eventually deployed it was little more than a face-saving device for the international humiliation of the two major European countries which had so recently been the leading powers in the Middle East as well.

Egypt's army had lost the battle, but there was no doubt that Nasser personally had scored a great victory. He had successfully nationalised the Suez Canal, and insisted that it could not be reopened until the invading forces left. He had not only survived an attack intended to overthrow him

personally, but had greatly strengthened his own position in Egypt by his cool command throughout, first politically and then militarily. He had also won acclaim in the Arab world for having successfully seen off the two powers that had until so recently dominated the region.

Meanwhile Britain and France were shaken. Britain's prime minister, Eden, resigned within weeks from 'ill-health'. One consequence of Suez was that it marked the start of the acceptance in mainstream Conservative Party circles that the end of the empire was at hand: from then on British overseas defence commitments were steadily reduced and nationalists in many parts of the empire received a fillip to their efforts. As for France, the Suez fiasco gave a great boost to the FLN in Algeria, which in turn contributed to the collapse of the fourth republic in 1958, and subsequently to de Gaulle's decision formally to leave Algeria and most of the rest of French Africa.

Internationally Suez was to prove a major point in post-war history. Britain, hitherto the leading power in the Middle East, had suffered a setback that was to weaken her permanently within the region. In her place a relatively unknown, young Egyptian soldier-politician had risen as the champion of pan-Arabism against the attempted reassertion of past Western domination. The Arab world had long been prepared to acclaim an outstanding and successful personality – and Nasser had proved himself on both counts. Meanwhile, elsewhere in the developing world Nasser's new-found stature as the major figure in the Middle East swiftly elevated him to become one of the leading personalities of the emerging non-aligned movement. But his political victory over Britain and France had been attained partly as a result of the attitudes of the two super-powers, the United States and the Soviet Union. Though both had opposed the British, French and Israeli intervention to seize the Suez Canal, they were still intense rivals in the Cold War, which, with Britain and France weakened, they were now more free to pursue in the Middle East, as elsewhere on the globe.

The consequences were thus far greater for both Egypt's new president and his adversaries than any of those involved in the Suez crisis thought likely when Nasser first took the move that seemed to him to be a vital step in his

aim of attaining the full independence of Egypt. Initially the seizure of the canal was to help pay for the High Dam, and the High Dam was a vital part of the transformation of Egypt. In the end Nasser's action was to have repercussions in Egypt, the Middle East and world politics, and make him a major international figure.

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NASSER TRIUMPHANT

Having established his full ascendancy over the army, and seen off the parties and other potentially challenging movements, Nasser had emerged as the leading figure of revolution which clearly was more than just a *coup d'état*. The Suez crisis had underlined this especially when Egypt's former dominating foreign power, Britain, had not only been forced out of the country but suffered a major setback to its international position which had conversely boosted that of Egypt, and particularly her new leader, Nasser. The man who had been a rather shadowy personality after the revolution was, less than five years later, dominant in Egypt, the major figure in the Middle East, and a rising star of the new non-aligned movement on the world stage.

Gratifying as all this was to Nasser he was far too cautious simply to accept it at face value. What had been achieved needed to be consolidated and protected, especially politically, and this meant first and foremost Nasser himself. The struggle with Neguib had already begun to make Nasser something more than *primus inter pares* in the Revolutionary Command Council, and when he eventually assumed the presidency the Council was formally wound up. Not that Nasser then detached himself from his former colleagues entirely: they had been his co-conspirators, and some remained trusted and required as ministers, though others were increasingly discarded. But after the Suez crisis they were scarcely a group any more, apart from being revered as such in the inevitable mythology that any revolution creates about itself.

However, while Nasser was emerging as a personal ruler of growing charisma throughout the Arab world, he had still to consider Egypt's institutional development. The

army was solidly behind him, and the people ever more enthusiastic, but there was still something of an institutional vacuum. As early as January 1953 the Liberation Rally had been announced to replace the banned political parties, but it had had very limited success. A bureaucracy had been established, and the Liberation Rally was officially responsible for communicating the revolution's aims to the masses who would in turn become the guardians of these objectives. In reality the ideology of the revolution had scarcely been formulated before the Rally was established and, appropriately for its name, it served as little more than a platform for the RCC. It was at a Liberation Rally gathering that a Muslim Brother had attempted to assassinate Nasser in Alexandria. In the post-Suez stock-taking Nasser realised that something more was required and in 1957 the Liberation Rally was replaced by the National Union.

The National Union was a pyramidal structure with a range of functions. One of the first actions of its senior figures, all three leading ministers and former members of the RCC, was to approve candidates for the National Assembly elections. The Assembly was duly elected, though due to a high deposit (£E50) it was mainly confined to prosperous figures from town and country. In practice it was to be a body for listening and approving rather than debating and legislating. The Union also supervised the various trade unions and was supposed to give guidance at grass-roots level to local government units. In fact, however, it was soon identified with government and failed to develop a major role in the evolving political system.

Equally important, for a man of Nasser's background and character, was not a political institution but the rise of the security services. As a plotter himself he was constantly aware of the possible activities of others – and not without reason. The Free Officers had not been the only conspirators in the army, just the most successful. They were aware too of conspiracies amongst the civilians, and assassinations had long been an intermittent feature of Egyptian life. State security was not new to Egypt either, but under Nasser it was to become a priority.

Nasser himself received information directly from the General Intelligence Service. His close friend Abdel Hakim

Amer, head of the armed forces, had beneath him a Military Intelligence Department; while another former Free Officer, Zacharia Muhiddin, was for several years Minister of the Interior, which had its own General Investigation Department. In practice these intelligence bodies and their various offshoots and sub-departments comprised warrens and empires of intelligence activity which were often more contradictory than complementary. They did though develop a sense of suspicion and fear among the populace and people were constantly encouraged to inform on their neighbours. Inevitably it took time for the services, which had all been purged after the coup of 1952, to develop, but they subsequently created a web of security at the heart of the state. Thousands were detained, many without trial, and torture and even death were recognised features of the regime Nasser was establishing. There were protests, but Egypt had scarcely been a liberal society, and while complaining, many recognised a heavy security presence as an almost inevitable feature of the state.

It was partly security that encouraged the RCC from the outset to try to take control of so much of the state apparatus. The members of the RCC took over all but two ministerial portfolios after the fall of Neguib; while hundreds more officers were redeployed into the civil service at central and regional level, as well as the diplomatic service. In addition, as the state reached out to control more sections of the economy, officers also went into management positions of various kinds. As well as making the state more secure these moves also reflected a belief that the officers had collectively the kinds of qualities which would ensure the achievement of the revolution. The concern with security in the army, let alone society at large, showed that trust was limited even among the officers; while in bureaucratic and managerial posts army officers were as likely to be infected or obstructed by the innate conservatism and corruption of the Egyptian civilian officials as to be able to inject the values and aims of the ill-defined revolution.

The growth of the whole Egyptian state structure, with or without military managers, was greatly enhanced by the economic programme introduced by Nasser. Nasser himself was no economist, either in a professional or an ideological sense. Professionally he had limited understanding of or

patience with the arguments advanced by economists, though he did read up on the subject and joined in discussions. The regime's increasing reliance on 'technocrats' – the application of trained professionals to find the solution to Egypt's problems – meant that professional economists had their say in an era when state intervention of one kind or another was the fashion of most of their trade. Ideologically, a cursory perusal of the *Philosophy of the Revolution* shows that Nasser did not place economic analysis at the centre of his world vision; yet Egypt's economic predicament was important to him. Just as the seizure of the Suez Canal had been part of the achievement of full independence, so Egypt's past economic problems were linked to the exploitative character of the outside world's relations with it and the state should correct that situation: 'What is the way then? And what is *our* role? The way must lead to *economic* and political freedom.'⁵

Initially the role was one of direction rather than total state takeover of commerce, industry or agriculture. Given the lack of ideological economic commitment and Nasser's natural caution, it was understandable that the extension of state involvement tended to be pragmatic and incremental.

The first measure which caught the eye had been the introduction of land reform in 1952. The existence of large agricultural estates owned by the few in the midst of a vast peasant population, many trying to eke a living from a tiny patch of ground, was a manifest injustice, the rectification of which had been discussed for several years. A major obstacle before the revolution, and one which the RCC delighted to dismantle, was that many large landowners were associated with political parties, especially the Wafd. The law of 1952 limited landholdings to 200 *feddan* (a *feddan* is a little larger than an acre), while a further 100 *feddan* could be held by a member of the family. Politically, it looked dramatic, hitting as it did at the old landholding class, but economically it was a relatively minor change to agriculture as a whole. Roughly 10 per cent of Egypt's usable land was redistributed; while the beneficiaries amounted to only some 200,000 of the *fellahin* (the peasants).

Those from whom land was taken were compensated, and it was hoped that they would invest in the industrialisation

that the new rulers wished to encourage. But in fact that did not happen and a more attractive area for investment was in real estate, especially as rapid population growth in the countryside encouraged urban migration; while at the other end of the market offices and hotels were needed as Egypt's international significance and tourism both grew. The new rulers also hoped to encourage foreign private investment in industry, but like Egyptian capitalists overseas, investors remained wary of the new regime and its plans.

A major, if unforeseen shift in Nasser's economic thinking came with the plan for the High Dam. The Dam was intended to be a major plank in the attainment of full independence, yet was initially expected to be financed by the capitalist West. That failure, and the resulting Suez crisis, evoked major steps that involved the state much more directly in the economy. The crisis in relations with the West caused a major break in Egypt's traditional economic relations. The West (essentially Britain, France and the United States) imposed a boycott on Egypt, which lost its major export markets, contributing to a fall in the value of the Egyptian pound and higher inflation. At the same time the Egyptian state acquired large new resources. In addition to the canal itself and the income it brought, the government sequestered all British and French property, thus completing the effective control of the past foreign domination of the economy. These acquisitions included such bulwarks of the banking system as Barclays Bank and Credit Lyonnais. Meanwhile the Soviet Union had not only taken over responsibility for the financing and building of the High Dam, it had also agreed to take Egypt's cotton largely on barter terms (though some of it was subsequently resold by the USSR to European countries for hard currency). While Egypt remained far from Marxist it was inevitable that this new close connection with the Soviet Union should encourage thoughts about a planned economy, though these remained well short of state control of more than a relatively small part of total production.

For Nasser himself this growth of state economic power appeared an increasingly natural concomitant of the political authority he personally had acquired, especially in the wake of the Suez crisis. He appointed Aziz Sidqi Minister of

Industry in 1956 and he became a key figure and close confidant, particularly in the pursuit of industrialisation, for over a decade. Aziz Sidqi was a young man in his thirties, fresh from a doctorate in economic planning in America, and he soon produced Egypt's first ever national plan, apparently at that stage anticipating major private investment. But a combination of suspicion on the part of private capitalists, and increasing impatience on the part of Nasser, wishing to see Egypt's growing international political stature supported by successful industrialisation, led to subsequent further state activity. In 1957 the Economic Organisation was founded to supervise public corporations, including the sequestered foreign businesses, and those mixed activities in which there was a significant public stake; as well as influencing major private enterprises such as the important Misr group constructed by Talaat Harb between the world wars. True to Nasser's style the Economic Organisation was under the control not of Aziz Sidqi but another old RCC member, Hassan Ibrahim. Likewise the National Planning Committee, established in 1957, was successively under other former RCC figures, first Hussein Shafi and then Abd al-Latif Boghdadi. Nevertheless, it was Sidqi who most grew in the eyes of Nasser, and as he did so the initial attempt to divide and contain in the economic sphere gave way to the growth of his ideas and influence.

Thus through the 1950s the overall picture was the growth of state power in what had been a capitalist economy in ways which seemed to be producing state capitalism. Perhaps the major example, apart from the High Dam, was the beginning of the steel works at Helwan near Cairo, with West German assistance. It had been conceived before the revolution, and the Helwan plant was in its way as understandable as the High Dam, and as likely to be the responsibility of the state rather than the private sector from the outset. Yet in 1957 the vision was still, in Nasser's own words, that of 'national capitalism' and there was still a major role for private business activity: 'When the state intervenes in industry it does not mean at all that it is the only capitalist.'⁶ Indeed the takeover of foreign assets after the Suez crisis did provide new opportunities for Egyptian businessmen as well, and some prospered. But there was little coordination between the public and private sectors,

and Nasser clearly favoured the former, regarding the latter as naturally exploitative. Thus though Egypt was evolving a mixed economy in which both public and private sectors received a boost from the outcome of Suez, the relationship was not happy, with each side showing suspicion of the other.

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ARAB NATIONALISM

While economic policy was of prime concern domestically after the Suez war, internationally the major development lay in the world of Arab politics. Having emerged as clearly the dominant figure in Egyptian politics, Nasser had also, by virtue of the Suez war, been projected as the Arab nationalist leader *par excellence*. Much has been made of Nasser's relatively late conversion to the Arab cause, Egyptian nationalism having been an end in itself for most young men of his generation, and it has been suggested that Nasser took up the Arab cause as a result of his experience in Palestine, though he himself referred to his student consciousness. Yet Egyptian and Arab nationalism were compatible. An Egyptian to his finger-tips, it would have been unimaginable for Nasser not to have been an Egyptian nationalist, but, as an avid reader of popular history, the Arab empire was a part of his culture. Perhaps his comments in the *Philosophy of the Revolution* sum it up: 'There is no doubt that the Arab Circle is the most important of those [three] circles and the circle most closely connected with *us*. Its history merges with *ours* . . . neighbourliness has welded us all into a homogeneous whole, strengthened by all those spiritual, historical and national factors.'⁷ That does not mean though that he believed in immediately creating an Arab state, rather that there should be cohesion of the Arab countries in the opposition to foreign domination: a process in which Egypt, led by Nasser, had a central part to play. Speaking shortly after the formation of the union with Syria in 1958 he was to say 'this does not necessarily mean that Arab Unity means that all Arab countries should be combined in one country. What I care for is the creation of Arab solidarity as well as a unified Arab struggle because the Arab destiny and future are similar. . . . The most important thing is that solidarity should

prevail among Arab countries under any circumstances.’⁸

It was inevitable that Nasser should become embroiled in the complex politics of Arab nationalism after 1956 for reasons that were at one and the same time ambitious but also prudential. On the side of ambition, whatever Nasser may have felt initially, the very adulation accorded to him across the Arab world as a result of what was perceived as his victory over the aggressors, gave him a role such as no other had in modern times – a kind of Saladin of his day. As he put it himself, ‘I always imagine that in this region there is a role wandering aimlessly about in search of an actor to play it.’⁹

Nasser, who certainly in terms of heavy workload and lack of material reward seemed to want little for himself, would have been hard put to resist the adulation for his leadership of Arab nationalism after 1956. But just as important for him were the prudential reasons for an active policy in the ‘Arab circle’. The West may have been divided and humiliated in 1956, but the Middle East was far too important politically and economically for it not to have sought to recover its position. No more could there be dreams of bringing Nasser down, such as those that had inspired Eden, but any growth of Nasser’s influence, especially now that he was associated with the Soviet Union, had to be contained if not actively countered by Western policies not only towards Egypt but the Arab world as a whole. Thus the stage was set for a new round of rivalry as Nasser saw it, between Arab nationalism under his leadership and the Western powers as they sought to manipulate and encourage their allies in the Middle East.

The weapons in this struggle were ideological and material. Ideologically Nasser’s charismatic appeal as leader of Arab nationalism won hands down among the masses, but Arab states were not democracies and among ruling élites Nasser secretly evoked much fear, whatever the recognition given the conquering hero publicly. Nasser’s appeal to the Arab masses, and unbridled critical comment on the character and policies of other Arab rulers became the staple diet of *Voice of the Arabs*. More sinisterly, but with a similar purpose of capitalising on this new-found popularity, Nasser’s own special service agents, the *mukhabarat*, were active in many parts of the Arab world.

His perceived major adversaries, the Western powers, could hardly reply ideologically, for their main weapon, liberal democracy, had little appeal to many of their Arab allies, while they themselves were dubious of its applicability in such a volatile region. Their main weapon was in materials, both economic and military, which it was believed could help stabilize shaky élites: at the same time Western countries too could be active conspirators utilising the rivalry and factionalism to be found in so many countries. The major Western initiative, in the wake of the setback to Britain and France, lay with the US pronouncement early in 1957 of the 'Eisenhower doctrine'. Significant though Eisenhower's attitude had been to the outcome of the Suez war, it was in no way an indication that America was enamoured with Nasser: rather it believed that the European powers were overstretched and using inappropriate policies. In particular Nasser was disliked in Washington for his reaching out to Moscow, in spite of his efforts to obtain Western arms and support for the High Dam. The Eisenhower doctrine in consequence offered military and economic aid to Middle Eastern countries seeking help in resisting communist pressure, whether from without or within, and Nasserist Arab nationalism, now with Soviet backing, fell broadly into this category. But like the Baghdad Pact, to which it was obviously intended to be the successor, the Eisenhower Doctrine also posed the danger to would-be takers that they would be swiftly branded as collaborators with imperialism and targetted by Nasser and his charismatic appeal to the masses.

The target in the struggle for the Middle East lay primarily in the Fertile Crescent: that collection of new, arbitrarily defined and heterogeneously populated countries at the head of the Arabian peninsula and its deserts, which by dint of political geography, oil and the birth of Israel, had become a hotbed of pressures of all kinds. The opposite pole to Egypt lay in Iraq, and for all the artificiality of that country from its creation as a British mandate at the end of the First World War, Baghdad had always been one of the great cities and centres of the Middle East. Iraq had had one branch of the Hashemite monarchies (the other was Jordan) created by Britain, but the survival of the monarchy had several times been threatened. In the post-war

period it had survived largely under the guidance of Nuri Said. Nuri had been an Ottoman army officer when he defected to the British-backed Arab revolt of 1916; later as a long-serving politician he always made friendship with Britain, still the dominant power in Iraq, the cornerstone of his policy. Nuri had been Eden's main ally in constructing the Baghdad Pact, and though Nasser's 'Czech' arms deal with the Soviet Union had aborted that effort, he remained a staunch ally and manoeuvrer in regional politics, being suspected in particular of seeking Iraqi dominance of the Fertile Crescent.

The second of the Hashemite kingdoms, Jordan, was more ambiguously pro-British, especially once young King Hussein had come to the throne in 1951 and sought to walk a tight rope both internally and externally. Internally the creation of Israel from the division of Palestine had left Jordan a harbourer of internal pressures from Palestinians, which were largely countered by the support for the monarchy from the desert Bedouin. The latter were particularly strong in the Arab Legion built up and commanded by a British general, Glubb Pasha (and in receipt of a British government subsidy). Externally there had been enormous pressure on Hussein both for and against joining the Baghdad Pact, which he had resolved by rejecting the pact, suddenly ousting Glubb, but at the same time seeking to resist Egyptian pressure in his foreign policy to fall in behind that of Cairo. Throughout the first half of 1957 there was a bitter war of words between Nasser and Hussein, until eventually the former called it off, not least because he had other matters to attend to, and of a very different character.

Syria, like the other Arab states, had its own peculiar characteristics. One of them was its marked political heterogeneity involving different ethnic factions: marked regional differences around major towns; and extremes of wealth among large landowners and businessmen and poverty among peasants on its harsh marginal lands. In addition parties of the Left and Right had emerged, as well as the Ba'ath Party, founded by the young radical nationalists Michel Aflaq and Salah Bitar, which through a vague romantic-sounding ideology espoused Arab unity and socialism. Since France had been forced out of Syria in 1946 the

country had experienced both civilian and military regimes without achieving any long-term stability. Another of its features was that Damascus had from the late nineteenth century been a centre of unambiguous Arab nationalism, and of a more profound and organic character than Nasser envisaged. Partly in recognition of an evolving common outlook, Syria and Egypt signed a military pact in October 1955. Nasser's Suez triumph soon brought a reaction in Syria when leftist pro-Nasser elements were coming to the fore, leading late in 1956 to the breaking of relations with the West and an arms deal with the Soviet Union. The move though served only to deepen division in Syria, where it was feared in particular that the right might turn to the West, which through the CIA had been discovered trying to engineer a coup, and that Syria might become aligned with Iraq, pulling Jordan too into the net.

In the growing chaos in Syria a group of leftist officers began overtures towards Egypt seeking a union of the two major Arab nationalist powers; and after much complex manoeuvring a direct approach to Nasser was finally made. Nasser was initially somewhat uncertain. He had never been to Syria and showed a lack of confidence in understanding its bewildering politics. He seemed to feel that union would present all kinds of unforeseen problems. But while showing his customary suspicion, Nasser felt that he was faced with an option that really left him with little choice. If he missed the opportunity it might never be repeated, and he was now the widely recognised leader of pan-Arabism. Furthermore a failure to accept the union could see Syria swing into the arms of Nuri and the West reinforcing those against whom Nasser believed it was his destiny to act.

For a while it seemed that union might be limited to some kind of federal basis, with the major emphasis on defence and foreign policy, which was probably Nasser's main concern. But this had potential faults: it would have meant coming to terms with Syria's political parties and these were not institutions for which Nasser had any more respect in a Syrian context than he had had in Egypt. Moreover, Nasser was not experienced in working within an institutional framework or sharing power – both necessities if there was to be a federal union. He thus

insisted that if there was to be a union, as the Syrian government was requesting, then it should be a full union and of course he, Nasser, the leader of the much larger and stronger Egyptian state, would be at its head. On 1 February 1958 Nasser and Syria's President Quwaitly stood together in Cairo and proclaimed the foundation of the United Arab Republic (UAR). It appeared a major extension of Nasser's power in the Middle East, and inevitably led to both acclaim and fear among friends and foes. The most immediate consequences were in the two neighbouring countries of Syria that stood to be most directly affected: Lebanon and Iraq. Syria had long regarded Lebanon and its wealthy entrepôt of Beirut as being properly a part of Syria, divided from it by the French in 1920 who had then departed in 1946 leaving a new state shared between its two major confessional groups, the Maronite Christians and the Muslims. Under the leadership of the Christian President, Chamoun, Lebanon, fearful of Arab domination, had been the one state in the Middle East keen to take up the Eisenhower Doctrine. The appeal of the UAR at the same time found a response amongst the Muslims of Lebanon, just as Nasser and his busy agents there intended it should. Fed by arms from Syria it looked in 1958 as if Lebanon might be heading for civil war. Then, dramatically, the situation worsened on 14 July 1958, when it was announced from Baghdad that the Western-backed monarchy run by Nuri had been overthrown. An unknown army officer, Brigadier Abdel Karim Kassem, had staged a coup that had been swiftly followed by the killing of the royal family and Nuri himself. Fearing an immediate worsening of the crisis in Lebanon, Chamoun called on the Americans to send in the marines. Shortly afterwards, and worried too by developments in Iraq, where the king (his cousin) had been killed, Hussein asked Britain to follow America's lead and send troops to Jordan.

The events in Iraq appeared scarcely less significant than the proclamation of the UAR or developments in Lebanon. Not only had Iraq been a bulwark of the West, but with the proclamation of the UAR, a counter Arab Union had been announced between Iraq and Jordan, widely seen as a British and Hashemite plot. The unexpected coup in Iraq brought an immediate end to the newly proclaimed union.

It was also widely assumed that events in the Middle East since Suez had contributed directly to the coup, and that in all probability it was Nasserist in inclination and quite possibly had been masterminded by Nasser himself. As if to underline this view, Nasser met secretly with Kassem's deputy, and a friendship pact was signed which suggested the possibility of Iraq joining the UAR.

Egypt had naturally had its agents at work in Iraq, including those among the factions of the Iraqi army, but the coup was Kassem's own effort and owed much to a moment of opportunism which accounted for its unexpectedness. Kassem and his men were supposed to be on their way to strengthen the Jordanian end of the new union (and some suggested to threaten Syria) when he saw a chance to effect a coup he had been plotting for some time. It was not only the immediate circumstances, but the parallel with events in Egypt on a July night six years earlier, which led the world to assume though that it was in all probability Nasser's handiwork, or at least that it would proclaim itself for Nasserism and the new UAR.

The combination of Kassem's success in Iraq, and the need for the 'reactionary' governments in Lebanon and Jordan to scuttle for help to their Western friends all added to the picture of Nasserism rampant in the Middle East. Throughout the region, from Morocco in the west to Iraq and the Gulf in the east, the waves of his charisma could be felt, not only in pan-Arab states but as a popular movement among those whose rulers were still resisting his call. And with the UAR established as a first step in pan-Arabism, it seemed that a new movement embodied in the personality of and faith in one man, Nasser, had indeed established itself in the Arab world.

It was undoubtedly in the field of foreign affairs that Nasser had achieved his greatest success, and it was seen as very much a personal achievement. Suez had of course been the great glory, indeed the crowning glory, of his rise to power in Egypt, after which he was to remain unchallenged until his death. Though militarily inconclusive Suez was seen as a great political victory, both in confirming that the British had not only left, but could never again return, and in establishing Nasser as the leader of a wave of Arab nationalism reaching out to all corners of the Middle East.

As he once remarked, 'I have an exact knowledge of the frontiers of the Arab nation. I do not place it in the future for I think and I act as though it already existed. These frontiers end where my propaganda no longer rouses an echo. Beyond this point, something else begins.'¹⁰ By the end of the decade in which he came to power that appeal had been translated into the formation of the United Arab Republic. Egypt, the most powerful Arab state, was united with Syria, home of Arab nationalist thinking, and whose capital, Damascus, had once been the centre of the greatest moments of Arab history. As his close confidant, Mohamed Heikal, the editor of the leading daily paper, *al-Ahram* (*The Pyramid*) once remarked, 'In Egypt Nasserism was *hukm* (rule), but elsewhere in the Arab world it was *hulm* (a dream).'¹¹

This international stature accounted for much of the success of the revolution in Egypt, but there were other reasons too. The revolution of 1952 had had its path eased by the lack of roots of the regime it overthrew. The manner in which it focused on the foreign elements, from King Farouk and his courtiers, to the foreign companies sequestered after Suez, meant that it had few internal enemies of substance. Nasser was Egypt's first indigenous ruler for 2,000 years and his manner and style of speech bore this out, making it hard for Egyptians to have serious grounds for objection. Nor had he trod on the toes of many Egyptians in the changes wrought by the revolution. Within the army the old senior officers had soon gone, but the army was well looked after, and military men used in other areas, thus ensuring very little factional struggling within the armed forces. True, different branches were rivals, but within Nasser's hierarchical system rather than seeking to overturn it in the way, for instance, factional military struggles had been a feature of Syrian political instability since 1949. The bureaucracy had swollen, helped by the sequestration as well as expanded social policies, but this too was hierarchical and loyal, if not very efficient. The Egyptian business community faced growing state control, but also new opportunities with the departure of the foreigners; and it was in any case not a group to mount its own political challenge, preferring to manoeuvre within the context of the Egyptian state rather than to challenge

the new system that Nasser topped. In the countryside the land reform had hit the major landholders, but they were few in number, and often of foreign derivation. In the villages the larger peasants were untouched, and continued to serve as the middle-men between the state and the rural masses. The revolution had brought superficial change, but for the vast majority rural relations of all kinds remained relatively untouched. The economy showed some signs of improvement and there was clear evidence that social programmes were being expanded, so that there was certainly no more call for complaint than usual – and thus in much of the country Nasser's achievements were not unrecognised. As one writer put it: 'These really important men of personality and power, who defy the foreigner with impunity and yet speak a language the peasant can understand, these are good men',¹² and Nasser was their undoubted leader.

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Chapter 4

NASSERISM COMES OF AGE: 1959–66

In terms of policy the greatest gamble Nasser had taken thus far in the eyes of the world at large had been the nationalisation of the Suez Canal, but the decision that had caused him greatest trepidation was the union with Syria. The former had been central to Nasser's vision of an independent Egypt; but the latter was the implementation of a dream of pan-Arabism which was much vaguer in conception, not least because of Nasser's own lack of experience of the Arab world as a whole. At the same time, while the Suez affair had contributed so much to the making of Nasser's undoubted charisma in the Arab world, the birth of the United Arab Republic would test the capacity of his leadership to provide a basis for a sustainable Arab union.

Creating a unitary government for a new state consisting of two very different countries several hundred miles apart and divided by hostile territory, Israel, was always going to be a difficult task. While Nasser became president of the UAR the Cabinet comprised figures from both countries, yet from the outset the Syrians did less well than they had, somewhat unrealistically, hoped. The Ba'ath Party, which felt itself to have a distinctive status, different from the banned parties, wanted the foreign affairs and economics portfolios, but Syrians in general were allocated less important posts than their Egyptian counterparts. Some consolation was offered with a number of departments being split with different ministers for the two regions of the UAR. But such appointments and arrangements were to have little bearing on the distribution of political power, whatever the titles conferred (which included two Syrian vice-presidents). Nasser had not proved himself a power-

sharing ruler within Egypt, and it was even less likely that, having been persuaded by the Syrians into the union, he would then propose either to give Syrians power in Egypt or to be a titular ruler leaving Syrians to look after their own affairs – particularly when it was their past failures which had contributed so much to their call for union. Thus the methods by which Nasser ruled Syria were similar to those he had adopted in Egypt. While a panoply of ministers existed, much of the real executive and legislative power was retained in Nasser's own hands. This was confirmed as early as October 1958, when a Cabinet reorganisation reduced the number and importance of Syrian ministers, and ended the regional ministries, thus formally bringing Damascus much more directly under the control of Cairo. Similarly a senior committee established to look into the working of the union and consider ways of developing representative institutions was disbanded by Nasser in October 1959. Instead the Egyptian hold was tightened when Nasser decided to send his close friend and head of the armed forces, Abdel Hakim Amer, to Syria as regional overlord directly accountable to him. Amer increasingly acted as if Syria was his own fiefdom; and with his customary laxity and self-indulgence, which Nasser continued to overlook in his friend, though it was in stark contrast to his own puritanism. Giving Amer control also had the effect of strengthening the role of the military within Syria, just as the revolution of 1952 had enhanced its importance in Egypt. However, it was not Syrian but Egyptian officers who were benefiting, to the chagrin of their northern counterparts.

In addition to wanting to control all the strings himself Nasser also displayed another well-known facet of his character and style of rule in governing Syria. His reliance on political intelligence services had been firmly established in Egypt and a similar arrangement soon operated in Syria. Indeed, the head of Syria's intelligence services before the union, Abdel Hamid Sarraj, had been one of the keenest supporters of union, having become a hero-worshipper of Nasser. Sarraj, an intense and ruthless man, became Minister of the Interior for the Northern Region (i.e. Syria) and remained in charge of political surveillance throughout the duration of the union with an efficiency that ensured growing unpopularity. He became in fact the Syrian on whom

Nasser most relied for his assessment of developments in the Northern Region of his new country. The police state was growing there, as it had in Egypt, at the expense of the politicians who felt that it was they who had made the union possible.

While the heavy hand of state security became increasingly central to Nasser's rule in Syria, another area where Egyptian power was spreading and resented was in the bureaucracy. The Syrian administration had always been light, flexible and often rather lax; but as it came ever more directly under effective ministerial, not to say presidential rule from Cairo, so Egyptian bureaucracy was increasingly imposed. Matters of policy execution, which once had been relatively swiftly decided in Damascus, now had to be referred to Cairo and proceeded ponderously up the many slow-moving rungs of an Egyptian bureaucracy that was expanding as the state extended its responsibilities. It was a style of administration to which Egyptians were accustomed, but one increasingly resented by their less subservient fellow nationals in the Northern Region, many of whom came to regard their country as in danger of becoming little more than a colony of Egypt.

The growth of the power of the state was another of the problems of the union, particularly the changing economic policies of Egypt. Large landowners in Egypt had often been men of alien origin, as had many of the commercial class. But in Syria rural and urban capitalism was more vibrantly indigenous, and thus more resistant to the land reform and the growth of the state control of economic life which was increasingly a concomitant of Nasser's centralisation of the political system, first in Egypt and then in the new UAR. When the union began to come apart at the seams, Nasser himself laid much of the blame on the attitudes of vested economic interests in Syria; particularly on the *khamisiyya* (group of five) who dominated the industrial and insurance sectors.

In fact the most direct opposition to Nasser's rule came paradoxically from those initially most eager for union, in particular the Ba'ath Party led by its founders, Aflaq and Bitar, who had been the ideologues of the pan-Arabism that from 1956 Nasser had seemed so completely to personify. Their own failure to command the posts and

influence they expected had come as a deep source of disillusionment, as had the subsequent feeling that far from being a partner in a union, Syria was being taken over by Egypt. Increasingly the Ba'ath Party began to reject and work against the union, and with its defection there was hardly a group of any significance backing it.

Not that Nasser realised this. Hostile as he was to political parties, and overlooking the significance of the greater pluralism of Syrian society, his main test of the popularity of the regime was, as in Egypt, his belief in his relationship with the masses. And in this he remained successful – if anything too successful. On his visits to Syria his addresses to the assembled multitudes were greeted with even greater enthusiasm than they were in Egypt. This adulation, coupled with his own ignorance of the character and complexities of Syrian society, contributed much to his ability to resist the reports of growing problems in the union which some of his more cautious advisers were pointing out. He knew of those problems only too well: but he also believed that the Syrian people were still ever ready to demonstrate their attachment to him and that in this lay the heart of the union. The union was causing him a lot of sweat, but it was for, and appreciated by, the masses, and therefore worthwhile. If it was this, together with his own commitment to the operation of the style of government he exercised in Egypt (and the only one he knew), then it was to prove a miscalculation.

Just about all the major groups in Syrian society had their grievances and expressed their hostility towards the union. The Right were worried by the economic measures, while on the Left the Communist Party had been persecuted as part of Nasser's determination that the events of 1956 should not leave him domestically in hock to the Soviet Union. The defection of the Ba'athists was the last straw; but in the end, it was the Syrian army that was to make the decisive move in a deteriorating situation – just as the army had in Egypt in 1952. Realising that he was losing control, Nasser had made some reforms in August 1961 which promoted the Syrian role in the union, but it was too late for on 28 September the Syrian army staged a coup and proclaimed the end of the UAR. Briefly Nasser contemplated a landing of Egyptian troops, believing that

his popularity in Syria remained high, but as it became clear that the coup was unopposed he realised that it would be to no avail. The UAR had been born from the conflicts within Syria that had threatened both to make the country ungovernable and lay it open to outside powers; and it was this that had brought her leaders to beg Nasser to create the union. But Nasser's rule had in turn brought a measure of agreement amongst Syrians – to accept the September coup and oust Nasser! Nasser could only lament, saying that, 'It should have been made gradually over a number of years'; and consoling himself that, 'National unity in Syria is a consolidation of Arab unity and true preparation for its realization.'¹

While Nasser himself contributed directly to the failure of the UAR, through his style of government and lack of appreciation of the very different milieu of Syrian politics, there was less that he could do himself about the third possible element of union, post-coup Iraq. It soon became clear that Kassem was far from a Nasserist or pan-Arabist, in spite of speculation when he seized power. The initial contact with Egypt had come not from him but his deputy, Aref, and the two men soon fell out to the point at which Aref was imprisoned and condemned to death, though not actually executed. This emergence of the hitherto little-known Kassem as a narrow-minded and murderous character gave little cause for confidence, but worse was to follow in Nasser's eyes when he began to consort with the influential Iraqi communists, at a time when Nasser was particularly active in suppressing their counterparts in Syria and Egypt. In frustration at the deterioration of relations with Iraq, which had seemed to promise so much in 1958, Nasser's trusted henchman in Syria, Sarraj, was instrumental in plotting a coup against Kassem; but it proved an embarrassing failure and the attempt was easily, publicly and then bloodily suppressed by Kassem. Angered at this humiliation, Nasser turned roundly on Kassem, denouncing him repeatedly, but in the process ensuring that any possible extension of the UAR to include Iraq was well and truly dead only a year after Kassem had come to power and Aref had supported Nasser.

Eighteen months after the collapse of the UAR it appeared briefly and surprisingly that the question of

union between Egypt, Syria and Iraq was occurring once more – but it rose and fell out of the profound instability of the latter two countries, a fact of which Nasser appeared to have little doubt. It began early in 1963 with a further bloody coup by a faction of the army in Iraq which saw the overthrow and death of Kassem and the return of the imprisoned former deputy Aref. Similar chronic factionalism also led to another Syrian coup, and the new leaders in both countries immediately looked towards Egypt for a union, in which they hoped to shelter their new and precarious regimes under the wing of the giant of the Arab world, who their deposed predecessors had rejected. It was just this motivation, together with past experience, that caused Nasser to show great caution in his handling of the weeks of talks in Cairo about the new union. As leader of the Arab world he could hardly refuse to consider a new union, but in the lengthy talks he totally dominated his potential ‘partners’ while also castigating the Ba’athists who he saw as significant in both the new regimes, as well as partly responsible for the failure of the UAR.²

It was mainly the determination of Syria and Iraq to be associated with Egypt that kept the talks going and did indeed produce an eventual commitment to a federal union to be introduced in stages: a clear sign of the caution Nasser felt and his determination not to repeat the disastrous steps of the UAR. In all probability he suspected development of the kind that soon ensured the new federal union would be stillborn. Within weeks, instability in both Syria and Iraq prevented the implementation of the union, and in effect Nasser emerged from the whole abortive attempt able to claim both that he had stood loyal to the principle of Arab unity, and that his suspicions of the resurrection of dreams of unity with the Ba’athists of the Fertile Crescent were well-founded. He had clearly learned a lesson from the failure of the UAR, a union about which he had been hesitant initially and on which experience showed it had been an error to embark.

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YEMEN

The pursuit of union in the Arab world was as central to Nasser’s political vision as governing Egypt itself. True, the

vision was sometimes unclear, in terms of its positive construction, and his relationship with the other main force of Arab unity, the Ba'athists, constantly troubled. However, the corollary of his vision of unity, his view of where the obstacles to it lay, was clearer: they lay not only externally in the ambitions and rivalries of superpowers, but internally in their allies in the Arab world, particularly the kingdoms established at the end of the First World War. Egypt's revolution had thrown off her own corrupt monarchy in 1952, and Iraq had done likewise in 1958, but there were other surviving monarchies in the region that were scarcely more acceptable in character, certainly not to the Nasserists in the Arab world. Nasser had already come into conflict with the young King Hussein of Jordan and the uneasy relationship between the two persisted. Hussein not only had to ride the winds of fortune blowing from Israel, Syria and Iraq, but the regular dose of attack from Cairo's *Voice of the Arabs*. In between bursts of open hostility there were occasional moments of reconciliation, but there was a basic incompatibility between the remaining Hashemite monarch and Nasserism which ensured at best suspicion and at worst covert hostility.

It was that suspicion of Egypt that had contributed to a closing of relations between Jordan and Saudi Arabia, which was itself an unlikely development. The Hashemite dynasty itself originated in the Arabian peninsula, and was seen as a rival family by the fast-rising power of Ibn Saud, who, in the inter-war years, had extended his control over much of the peninsula. At the same time, Saudi Arabia, with its growing oil wealth, soon realised that a much greater threat lay with Nasserism and true to the well-known Arab maxim 'My enemy's enemy is my friend', Jordan, the more exposed of the two in the late 1950s, turned to Saudi Arabia for reassurance. Indeed, the two states were believed to have jointly encouraged the coup in Syria in 1961 that had proclaimed the ending of the UAR. Saudi Arabia, however, was not alone in the Arabian peninsula, and it was inevitable that Nasser would be thinking about that reservoir of vast oil wealth so essential to the West, just as he had shown past interest in opportunities from the Mahgreb to the Fertile Crescent. His opportunity to reach out and extend his influence directly into Arabia came

once more as a result of internal instability, in this case the problems of Yemen.

Nasser's involvement in Yemen was to show that, as in Syria, he had little knowledge or imagination of the contrast it offered with his own environment. In this ignorance he was not unlike other rulers of relatively powerful states who believe they can be decisive in much smaller countries. He himself was later to call it a miscalculation, and it was often referred to as Nasser's Vietnam, or perhaps in more recent comparison, his Afghanistan. Though an Arab country, Yemen was physically and politically very different from Egypt. A fertile coastal plain on the south-west edge of the Arabian peninsula, it is backed by a mountainous and remote interior, and at the country's centre is its capital, Sana'a. Yemen became independent in 1918 with the collapse of the Ottoman Empire, and was ruled then by traditional opponents of the Ottomans, the Imams from the Hamid al-Din family, supported by the Zaydi tribesmen of the mountainous areas. Imam Yehya had tried to isolate the country from outside influences and ruled repressively, but after the Second World War there was growing criticism from merchants, other religious leaders and Western-educated elements, mainly on the coastal plain, which resulted in political instability. The seeds of Nasserism fell on fertile ground in such a situation, for Yemen appeared to offer the contrast between the old Arabia and the new Middle East, which he personified for so many. Ironically, seeking shelter from Saudi Arabia, Yemen's old leader, Imam Ahmed, had loosely federated himself with the UAR, only to act independently and be openly critical of Nasser's Arab socialism. This loose connection had collapsed with the coup in Syria, but it was the death of Imam Ahmed himself on 19 September 1962 that really opened the way for Nasser. Imam Ahmed was succeeded by Crown Prince Mohamed al-Badr, whereupon a group of young army officers, keen to exploit the situation, staged a coup. During the fighting which surrounded the takeover, al-Badr, who was initially thought to have been killed, slipped away and escaped to the mountains where he rallied Zaydi tribesmen to his royalist flag and prepared to carry on the conflict.

The young officers set up a Revolutionary Council under President Abdullah Sallal and executed the royalist leaders

they could lay hands on, thus ensuring the implacable hostility of al-Badr and his men. They then appealed to Nasser for support. As in the case of the Syrian union, it was very difficult for Nasser to ignore such a call. Superficially there were parallels with his own achievement of 1952, and if his call for Arab unity was to mean anything it was hard to resist a plea of this kind. At the same time, in addition to offering a foothold on the Arab peninsula, and therefore a way into Arabian affairs, Yemen was neighbour to Nasser's old adversary Britain's major base in Aden, a position which had become all the more important following British withdrawal from Egypt.

In any case, at the outset Nasser thought that it would take only limited military and technical support for Sallal's regime to become firmly established in Yemen. In this error he once more made the mistake of not investigating himself (he did not go to Yemen personally until 1964), and of relying on his old and trusted colleagues, Amer and Sadat. The former had already let him down in Syria, while the latter was not noted for the kind of cool and informed appraisal that the Yemen required. Consequently, it soon became necessary to send more Egyptian troops who became directly involved in the fighting. And the more Egypt responded to Sallal's frantic requests and frequent visits to Cairo, the more the Royalists, as the Imam's supporters became known, could appeal to their main backers, Jordan and Saudi Arabia. King Hussein of Jordan had been first to support al-Badr's men, recognising a wonderful opportunity to inflict damage on the reputation of his old adversary Nasser. At the same time Saudi Arabia's rulers, after some disagreement, decided that success for Nasser might unleash further republican and destabilising forces in other parts of the peninsula, and they became the major suppliers of the Royalists for the duration of the conflict. In addition some military assistance was to come from Britain, concerned for her Federation of South Arabia, based in Aden, and Israel and Iran which were both opposed to any possible gains for Nasserite pan-Arabism.

Militarily the war passed through different phases as far as Egypt was concerned. As early as December 1962 Nasser was speaking of a military withdrawal if Saudi Arabia and Jordan would do likewise. But they saw Nasser as heading

for an irresistible trap and were reluctant to give him an easy exit. If he pulled back while they continued to supply the Royalists he would lose his already faltering pan-Arab reputation, while if he stayed they could force him into deeper trouble militarily. By the end of 1963, 20,000 Egyptian troops were in Yemen, and a year later the number had doubled, reaching 70,000 – over one-third of the whole Egyptian army. Through 1963 and 1964 the Republicans and their Egyptian allies tried to take the army into the Royalist mountain areas, fighting up the valleys, but having little success in spite of resorting to chemical warfare. Losses were high, about 10,000 Egyptian troops alone were lost in Yemen for, though heavily outnumbered, al-Badr's men were using guerilla tactics and fighting on home soil with all the advantages that brought. From 1965 though Nasser's approach changed, concentrating on reducing losses and costs by holding the centre of the country and the plain, while taking a more active role against Aden where Egypt supported the Front for the Liberation of South Yemen (FLOSY) in the growing anti-British guerilla conflict (though ultimately it was to be the FLOSY's rivals, the National Liberation Front (NLF), which proved triumphant when Britain left in 1967).

The military quagmire in which Egypt found herself, and the heavy cost to her army and economy, led Nasser to seek international agreement for a way out on several occasions after his initial offer of withdrawal. In 1963 he looked to America for assistance, having some faith in Kennedy, and the Americans also brought in the United Nations; but these efforts were to no avail, and after Kennedy was assassinated Nasser had no confidence in Johnson, seeing him as parochial and pro-Zionist. (The Soviet Union, in contrast, though supplying Egypt with arms, remained aloof: Yemen was too remote and intractable for significant superpower involvement.) Then in 1964 Nasser called the first of a series of Arab summit conferences aimed at restoring some agreement amongst the strife-torn Arab states, but his contact with Saudi Arabia brought no immediate outcome, largely because although talks were convened between the various Yemeni parties at Erkowit in Sudan, they were unable to agree among themselves on a new national government for the country. In the end Egypt's involve-

ment was to continue until after the Six Day War of 1967 when, as part of the summit of the defeated Arab countries in Khartoum, agreement was finally reached between Egypt and Saudi Arabia to withdraw. (The Yemenis continued to fight it out, with a seventy-day siege of Sana'a by the Royalists before in 1968 a new, though not very stable, solution was reached.)

The war in the Yemen had proved Nasser's most humiliating setback, especially in the eyes of the Arab world. There were those who thought that Yemen would be the bridgehead of the Nasserite penetration of the Arabian peninsula which in time would bring down not one reactionary monarchy but perhaps Saudi Arabia and the tiny and vulnerable Gulf emirates as well, but to no avail. Saudi Arabia above all stood her ground and contained any threat which might emanate from Yemen. In seeking to turn to the diplomacy of Arab summits to improve relations with the rest of the Arab world any dreams of a Nasserite revolution were being abandoned. But perhaps that was because they were dreams, rather than plans. The brunt of the humiliation was born by the Egyptian army, which appeared inefficient and suffered heavy losses, but still remained unreformed under the command of Nasser's close friend, Amer. Indeed Amer was widely believed to be turning a blind eye to corruption amongst the senior officers in particular who were exploiting the local black market in luxury goods and sending them duty free, and at government expense, for use or sale by their families in Egypt.

Yet while the war in Yemen did much to undermine Nasser's reputation in the Arab world, it was notable how little damage was done to his authority in Egypt. The war was not popular, for Egyptians generally knew and cared little for one of the smaller countries on the backward peninsula. Conscripted Egyptian soldiers suffered from the shortcomings of their own commanders, the harsh terrain in which they were fighting, and the heavy losses experienced, but there were few visible signs of rejection, and instead the army's attitude was one of reluctant compliance, mitigated by special provisions in Egypt made for Yemen veterans. Likewise, people at home saw their sons conscripted, and realised the heavy economic cost of war as

well. It might have been Nasser's Vietnam, but Yemen did not do to him what Vietnam did to Johnson, both because of the more submissive character of Egyptians to the state, and the apparent reluctance to accept that their unprecedented charismatic leader really had feet of clay after all. As for Nasser himself he appeared as a man trapped in his own vision. Not for the first time, his pan-Arab inspiration had encouraged others to lead him into their own quagmires, from which neither he nor they knew how to extricate themselves. Those dreams had been used by Nasser's enemies to trap him, and it was to happen again before death cut short his career.

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INTER-ARAB RELATIONS

The collapse of the UAR and the rivalry between Egypt and Saudi Arabia were the most visible signs of the deterioration of relations among the Arab states in the early 1960s, but they were far from being the only manifestations of a new rancour. Syria and Iraq had fallen out once more; Jordan felt under verbal attack from Syria and Egypt; while in the Mahgreb, Algeria and Morocco had embarked on a bitter border dispute.

Nasser's role in all this had been to take the line after the collapse of the UAR that the aim of Arab unity, of the kind pursued in the previous decade and attempted in the UAR, should now give way to moves to provide popular socialist revolutions in the Arab world and that these should now precede Arab unity. The method was to provide an example in Egypt itself and to encourage revolution outside. Involvement in the Yemen could be justified in these terms. Elsewhere a combination of exhortation against existing rulers and subversion of targeted regimes by Egyptian agents, sometimes embarrassingly revealed, were the chosen weapons. Yet by the end of 1963 it was becoming apparent that the policy was not having the desired effect. Regimes were not falling as Egyptian propaganda suggested they should, in particular the existing monarchies were surviving, and sometimes working together, as in the case of Jordan and Saudi Arabia. And when coups did recur, as in the overthrow of Nasser's *bête*

noire, Kassem, in Iraq, the consequences were not always those intended. Coupled with the poor relations among Arab states, it all suggested not only that Nasser's new Arab revolution was unlikely, but also that he was losing his influence in the Arab world – a situation which he was not likely to take lying down, for to have done so would have been an admission of defeat comparable to the collapse of the UAR.

Always a schemer, Nasser now embarked on another line of approach. He decided that circumstances demanded he accept the existence of the Arab governments for the moment, and that he would try to re-establish his leadership by a more conciliatory line – suddenly calling them together for a summit conference in Cairo in January 1964.

The instrument he used, the Arab League, was close to hand, but had lain largely dormant during Nasser's years in power. The Arab League, with its headquarters in Cairo, had been created with British encouragement at the end of the Second World War, largely to foster harmonious relations between Arab states at a time of continuing, if changing, British influence in the Middle East. As such it had long been suspect in the eyes of keen pan-Arabists, who saw in it an instrument for the maintenance of the status quo. After Nasser's seizure of power it had been somewhat marginalised, though lip service had continued to be paid to it. Now it was to be dusted off and used as a forum once more. Of course there had to be a reason, and the most unifying one, which no Arab state could keep away from, was that of Israel.

Since 1956, when she had shown her teeth so effectively on the battlefield, Israel had been welcoming the disarray of her Arab neighbours, while focusing her attention on building up her economy. One of the plans for agriculture involved diverting the waters of the Jordan from the Sea of Galilee, and thus reducing supplies available to the Jordanians. The dispute had been long-running, but by the end of 1963 the project was nearing completion and thus offered a uniting pretext for an Arab summit.

On this score Nasser's management of the first Arab summit conference in Cairo in January 1964 was largely successful. The heads of state duly assembled and the vitriolic opponents of yesterday became the Arab brothers

once more. Plans were laid for the diverting of tributaries of the Jordan in Lebanon, Syria and Jordan to counter Israel's action; and more importantly there was agreement that the question of Israel should not then be settled by resort to war. This was necessary for Nasser to affirm. Egypt had the largest army, though a considerable part of it was tied down in Yemen and therefore unavailable; but since this could not be admitted publicly, a collective Arab decision to eschew war with Israel let Nasser off the hook. However, there had to be a military dimension to the summit and while it was agreed that there would be no immediate war it was also decided to establish a joint military defence command, to be led, of course, by Egypt.

Behind the main purpose of the conference lay other motives, including, as noted, the attempt by Nasser to work with, rather than against, Saudi Arabia in Yemen. There was too an attempt to improve relations with other recent enemies, most notably King Hussein of Jordan; and though relations with Syria remained cool, within months there was talk of a military union between Egypt and Iraq.

Nasser's skilful change of approach at the January 1964 summit was sustained with a second meeting in September of the same year. One of the main purposes of this gathering in Alexandria was to give full recognition to an earlier meeting of the Palestine Congress in Jerusalem in May. The Palestinians had aroused something of a guilty feeling in Nasser. His memories of the war of 1948 were still strong, but after 1956 and his own rise to prominence, it had been the Arab states towards which he had directed most of his attention, rather than the question of the Palestinians. Egypt had not forgotten the condition of the Palestinians and had helped the 300,000 of them in the Gaza strip, but she had turned something of a blind eye to their political aspirations, and in so doing disillusioned the more radical amongst those who regarded their own plight as central to the pan-Arabism for which Nasser stood. The PLO was now to be established as a government in exile, which would recruit its own army from amongst the Palestinians and have its headquarters in Gaza – clearly it was a force which could no longer be ignored. Fears were expressed by Hussein, worried by the effect of the establishment of the PLO in the West Bank of Jordan, but in the

end he too concurred in the general recognition by the conference of the PLO.

The emergence of the PLO naturally led to speculation and rhetoric about Arab policy towards Israel, and Nasser had to calm it down at a third summit conference in Casablanca in September 1965. This time he declared that the Arab armies were insufficiently trained to take on Israel, and that it would take at least three years before they could be ready to do so. Once again his caution and wish to avoid a confrontation with Israel were accepted by the other participants.

However, the calm of Arab relations which was represented by the period of summitry and consensus from 1964 to the end of 1965, collapsed as suddenly as it had started in 1966. The foundering of the peace talks in Yemen on the disputes amongst the Yemenis themselves led to a rapid deterioration in relations with Saudi Arabia once more, and Jordan again linked up with the latter. Thus the Arab world was once more riven with the sharpest line of division being drawn yet again between the radicals and the conservatives: with the former fearing that Saudi Arabia was trying to organise a hostile grouping against them under the guise of what was called the 'Islamic Pact' – King Faisal's attempt to create an Islamic grouping which he claimed was spiritual renaissance rather than political containment, but included Iran, ruled by the Shah with American backing, which was viewed with fear and suspicion by radical Arab states. Meanwhile in Syria, continuing instability had led to a further coup in February 1966 and the driving out of Nasser's old rivals, the Ba'ath. The new regime won Nasser around to cooperating in attacks on the conservatives, and withdrawing from a further planned summit in Algiers in September. Diplomatic relations between Egypt and Syria were resumed for the first time since the collapse of the UAR and a mutual defence treaty was signed. This was no union, but Nasser was once more tying himself closely to a new Syrian regime, partly it seemed because the latter's radical outlook and support for the PLO and its increasing attacks on Israel meant that he could not afford to stand aside and be outflanked by this new revolutionary regime in Damascus. In doing so he was shifting his immediate focus away from Egypt's commitment in

Yemen and the retention of agreement in the Arab world, towards a more direct involvement in the questions of the PLO and Israel; though his own aim seemed still to be to exercise a restraining hand preventing conflict, which would inevitably involve Egypt, rather than entering into an offensive agreement with Syria. The redivision of the Arab world had another dimension, both real and imagined, in that the superpowers were once more playing an increasing role in the complex and murky politics of the Middle East.

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SUPERPOWER RELATIONS

Viewed simplistically, Nasser's diplomatic success at Suez and the promotion of his charismatic leadership regionally appeared to make him the leading figure in the Arab world – in the broadest international terms. But his coming of age through the early 1960s had made it abundantly clear that he was far from dominant in the region. The collapse of the UAR and the imbroglio in Yemen were only the most obvious manifestations of that. Instead, at the highest international level there were three main actors, Egypt, Soviet Union and United States (as well as a number of important bit players), and the three had a triangular relationship, based on different interests.

Nasser's concern for Arab unity was at heart a wish to see the overthrow of past dominance of the region by foreign empires, first Ottoman and then European, and he had no desire to see either or both of the superpowers replace them. In particular the notion that the setback to Britain and France at Suez had left a vacuum in the Middle East was anathema to him: the Arab revolution would take its rightful place and liberate the region from foreign domination. In broad terms this meant asserting the primacy of Arab nationalism over other ideologies and if one or both of the superpowers could be manipulated to this end then all well and good. It was an attitude which contributed to attempts to play off the two superpowers against each other, sometimes in rather crude ways. What had to be firmly kept in check, however, was America's natural penchant for Israel on the one hand, and the Soviet Union's sense of solidarity with communists in the region on the other.

In fact, however, both superpowers knew enough about the region to realise that whatever their predilections there, realities were such that in their different ways they would have to do business with Arab states and regimes which were by no means their natural soulmates. For both, the Middle East was a very important region, and their interests in it were very different.

The Soviet Union had demonstrated its wish to break out of potential encirclement, as threatened by the Baghdad Pact, with its sale of arms to Egypt in 1955. That suspicion of any Western efforts to reassert a grip, perhaps through some successor to the Eisenhower Doctrine, remained a factor in Soviet thinking, just as it stayed in Nasser's mind. There was too both a sense of obligation with regard to communists (though by no means an overwhelming one when other interests were at stake, as Egypt's own communists had soon learned), as well as the general warmth towards 'progressives', as Arab nationalists were judged, *vis-à-vis* conservative regimes. At the same time the emergence of Khrushchev from the leadership uncertainties following the death of Stalin in 1953, brought to power in the Soviet Union a more adventurous figure who sought to raise his country's presence in the Third World, as it was becoming known, in general. The conservative Arab states were often allied with the imperialist powers in Moscow's eyes, and thus encouragement of 'progressives' would help to undermine the remaining bastions of the West in the region. But the Soviet Union also knew the difference between support and commitment, and while providing the former, particularly, for the region's most powerful country, Egypt, she did not commit her troops, as for instance the United States had done in Lebanon.

United States policy had been concerned with the need to fill the vacuum after the departure of the European powers: yet US interests were such as to make it difficult to achieve that goal even if such a vacuum did exist. Her support for Israel, whose survival she effectively underwrote both economically and militarily, was inevitably anathema to all Arab states, however hypocritical the rhetoric of some of them often sounded. Her other main interest, in oil, was also provocative, providing as it did for a vast increase in the wealth of some of the conservative states, most obviously

Saudi Arabia, at a time when much of the Middle East, including Egypt, was wallowing in poverty.

At the same time as the superpowers pursued their interests in and policies towards the Middle East, they also carried on a continuing rivalry with each other. If the Cold War was becoming somewhat less virulent in Europe, it was because the lines of division had been reinforced, as symbolised by the building of the Berlin Wall in 1963, rather than by any reduction in the underlying rivalry. Indeed that rivalry was spreading in the Third World in the early 1960s, as indicated by the Cuban missile crisis of 1962 and American involvement in Vietnam. It was natural in the circumstances that the simplistic, but in one sense real, division of the Middle East between progressives and conservatives should be loosely associated with the Soviet Union and the United States respectively, and their rivalries and clashes within the region linked, rightly or wrongly, with superpower manipulation. Such rivalry was associated not only with policies openly adopted by the superpowers, but with allegations of their involvement in much of the covert activity which abounded in the region. Much of this was conducted through their own agencies – most cited being the CIA – but other covert work was carried out by their clients. Egypt, in particular, had a widespread network of agents, whose activities in part reflected Nasser's style of politics: while appealing to the masses he did not trust them to respond to his calls purely of their own volition if subversion of existing regimes to which he was opposed also seemed possible.

Nasser's rise had been associated centrally with his achievements in dealing with the major international powers. His triumph at Suez was seen as a victory over the West, while his turning to the Soviet Union for arms and the High Dam were also admired. The expectation was naturally that in the wake of the latter success it would be the Soviet Union to which Nasser would remain centrally committed. Yet while receiving substantial military and economic backing, Nasser also made it clear that he did not intend to follow an inevitable pro-Soviet line. Indeed, in asserting his independence there was a period when he and Khrushchev wrangled loudly and publicly. During the period of the UAR Moscow saw Arab nationalism and

Ba'athism as ideological rivals of Marxism, and Khrushchev lectured and hectored Nasser and his colleagues accordingly. At the same time there were heated exchanges at what the Soviet Union regarded as the tough treatment by Nasser and Sarraj of Syria's communists. Instead Khrushchev seemed to show more favour to Kassem in Iraq who appeared more pro-communist, leading Nasser to complain that, 'the final Communist aim is to establish a "Red" Fertile Crescent'.³

Relations slowly improved in the 1960s, with the Soviet Union proving supportive, if not openly enthusiastic about Yemen. Moscow could understand the dilemma Nasser had been placed in by Sallal's call for help. Moreover, the Soviets were keen to see a blow struck which might reverberate against the British position in Aden in particular, if not against the peninsula's conservative oil producers in general. Thus they continued to supply the heavy volume of weaponry required in the prolonged conflict, as well as training and advising the Egyptian army. Partly because of this improvement in relations, as well as his own shifting calculations, Nasser agreed to go along with the very considerable pressure exerted on him in 1966 to sign a defence agreement with Syria's new rulers. From the Soviet viewpoint it was a communist-influenced regime, and in a strategically crucial country in Middle Eastern politics which had been chronically unstable since the end of the UAR.

It was inevitable that Nasser's relations with the United States would be even more ambivalent in view of its natural concern for Israel and the conservative states. Yet, to avoid being sucked too closely into the Soviet orbit, Nasser needed that counterweight, and the situation was appreciated, at least in some quarters in Washington. True, America's aim to fill the 'vacuum' and then her dispatch of troops to Lebanon in 1958 seemed directly counter to Nasser's policies, yet under Kennedy in particular relations improved. A deal was struck which permitted American grain sales on easy terms, and soon 50 per cent of Egyptian wheat consumption was being supplied by the United States. But by 1966, as Nasser abandoned his summitry and again returned to a radical-conservative alignment, America grew cooler. There was no renewal of the wheat agreement,

forcing Nasser to turn hurriedly to the Soviet Union and China where supplies were less copious. He also believed that it was the Americans who were encouraging their Saudi allies to take a more critical stance towards him after the failure to reach agreement in the Yemen. Certainly he believed in general that Johnson was a much less sympathetic figure than Kennedy had been, and, as mentioned, that he was both less experienced in foreign policy and more pro-Zionist by nature.

As well as trying to build on Egypt's position in the Middle East in superpower politics, in the wider international community Nasser was also keen to develop the non-aligned movement. New states proliferated in Africa in particular as Britain, France and Belgium accelerated their departure from the continent.

The 1960 General Assembly of the United Nations proved a high water mark for the non-aligned group, and also the only occasion on which Nasser visited the United States (in contrast he made a number of visits to the Soviet Union). Nasser felt spurred to action by meeting other radical non-aligned figures at the Belgrade Conference in 1961. His support for the FLN in Algeria helped in the eventual success of its leader Ben Bella, who had spent a substantial time in Cairo. In 1960 Belgium's hurried departure left the Congo in anarchy and Nasser sent arms to the faction of the prime minister, Patrice Lumumba. He was also close for a time to Ghana's flamboyant and influential leader, Kwame Nkrumah, who married an Egyptian. But as the decade wore on Nasser was to experience disappointment in these relationships. A number of those with whom he had worked became victims of the post-independence disillusionment and instability. Ben Bella was replaced in a palace coup by Boumedienne; in Ghana, Nkrumah's army ousted him in 1966; Lumumba was killed and replaced by Kasavubu; in Sudan, Abboud, who had staged a coup in 1958 and then signed a vital Nile waters agreement with Nasser, was overthrown in 1964; in Indonesia, Sukarno was ousted by Suharto; while the Sino-Soviet split and the Indo-China war made the whole concept of the non-aligned movement harder to sustain. Typically, to Nasser this was less an indication of the movement's fragility than an imperialist backlash: and indeed there was some evidence

for it being so, given American policy in the Congo, intervention in Vietnam and containment of revolution in Latin America. It was clear by the middle of the decade that non-alignment was not the force that had appeared possible in 1960; but such was the stubbornness of Nasser that the setbacks only contributed to his determination to work for radical change in the Middle East.

ECONOMIC POLICIES

The shock of the collapse of the UAR has been given as the reason for the sweeping controls of the Egyptian economy taken in 1961. Certainly it was the case that Nasser came to feel that the failure of the first attempt at Arab unity showed the need to build on firmer foundations by encouraging Arab socialism before repeating the experiment. In particular he ascribed the collapse of the UAR less to any shortcomings in his own form of government than to resistance by private capitalist interests in Syria. This in turn raised his suspicions of private conglomerates in Egypt.

However, there is evidence to suggest that Nasser was contemplating sweeping nationalisation even before the collapse of the UAR. Nasser's instinct to manage matters personally encouraged him to think of extending state control of the economy; it was the natural concomitant of his political attitude and behaviour. As one economist remarked 'nationalization is ultimately a political action related to Nasser's drive for hegemony'.⁴ But it was not only instinct. The state had already started land reform soon after taking power, and found itself in control of far more enterprises after the sequestration of British and French assets, as well as Belgian ones during the Congo crisis of 1960-61. In addition the High Dam project encouraged notions of state control of the economy. It was to provide water for agricultural expansion and hydroelectric power for industrialisation. It was the centrepiece of economic growth and central to the planning and running of the expanded economy. What could be more natural than that other major areas of the economy still in private hands should be taken over as well? The actual list of what was to

come into public ownership appears to have been very much Nasser's own in origin. It also came at a time when he was personally inclined to isolate himself from colleagues and consult them even less than hitherto. His detachment may have been influenced by the worsening of his diabetes and his growing discomfiture. In 1961, after remarking to Aziz Sidqi that it was difficult to plan for an economy when major companies were in the hands of 'individuals', Nasser gave him a copy of Egypt's industrial inventory with various companies marked for nationalisation.

The drift towards greater state control of the economy had been progressing since the first land redistribution, and the preparation of the first five-year plan, begun in 1960, was a further step. But in spite of that, few were prepared for the scale of control in the sweeping new measures announced in 1961. The state takeover was not just a matter of seizing control, but of expropriating those who Nasser claimed were exploitative owners. Indeed, among a wave of arrests at this time were 167 'reactionary capitalists', and soon 300 companies, as well as all banking and insurance companies, were being taken into state hands. In return former owners received little, if any, compensation. The 1961 seizures were followed by further nationalisation, especially in 1963 when approximately a further 300 companies were sequestered. As a result of these measures, by the end of the period of the plan, in 1965, the state ran a mass of businesses. It controlled all foreign trade, banking and insurance, as well as all major industries and much public transport. In addition it owned newspapers (nationalised in 1960), major hotels, stores and cinemas. And of course it owned the two major pieces of infrastructure, the High Dam and the Suez Canal.

It was not only undertaken in the name of planning. Nasser's concept of Arab socialism was to include redistribution of income. A heavy progressive rate of income tax was introduced to hit the bourgeoisie and measures were taken to ease the burden of poverty on the lower classes. Subsidies were raised to reduce prices of basic commodities, and rents, fares and educational fees were all cut. Socialism did not involve class conflict, Nasser claimed, but action by the state to dissolve such struggles. There was still to be a significant private sector, but under the benign and

watchful eye of the state. A mass of small businesses remained in private hands: though in all businesses, nationalised and private, there was to be worker representation in management, and workers were to receive a share of the profits. In the countryside, private ownership of land would continue, but now the maximum holding was lowered once more, down from 200 to 100 *feddans* for an individual and a maximum of 300 *feddans* for a family. The state-run banks provided agricultural credit, and also controlled marketing of major crops. There was also to be investment in land reclamation on a major scale, largely depending on the new water the High Dam would make available.

In addition to being an economic policy, nationalisation was for Nasser a nationalistic policy. The major private concerns taken over had been associated with the *ancien régime*, and were often owned and run by those of foreign origin (albeit Egyptian passport-holders), and this led to criticism of Nasser for xenophobia, even of implicit racism in his Arab socialism. But in his mind many of the 'exploitative capitalists' did not regard themselves as truly Egyptian and were remnants of the foreign domination and exploitation of the Egyptian economy. At the same time, their departure from economic management allowed those who had made the revolution, especially Egyptian military officers brought in to supply creative leadership, in conjunction with technocrats, to fulfil the state's purposes. Meanwhile, the ordinary Egyptians, the exploited peoples on whose behalf Nasser felt he was acting to bring radical change, were not to lose their property. Arab socialism meant sequestering the big capitalists, not small operators or small landowners, though they were working in a more regulated environment. There was no overall ideology of a socialist economy, but rather an attack on the remaining bastions of the old system, together with a feeling that greater social justice demanded measures to level down and level up within a system which still allowed the individual to own private property, even if there were now scarcely any opportunities for anyone to amass wealth.

While Nasser can be held directly responsible for the principles of the economic programme so sharply accelerated with the sweeping nationalisation of 1961, he was less responsible for its outcome. Aziz Sidqi was probably the

single person most centrally concerned, but overall it was the structure of the system and its operation which were most influential in the way it worked. As with so many things Egyptian, it was hierarchical, not to say pyramidal, in character. Ministries were the organising bodies to which the public corporations were responsible. Inevitably in such a personalised political system ministers were essentially Nasser's appointees, chosen for his trust and confidence in them rather than for any autonomous base of support they might command. Cabinet meetings were not occasions for full and frank discussions, and Nasser not only dominated but could use a very sharp tongue to embarrass and humiliate those who earned his displeasure. Thus within ministries the willingness of a minister responsible for a significant section of the economy to be innovative himself depended in large part on his relationship with *al-raïs*. Obviously for the most part this promoted caution and control with regard to the enterprises themselves (as well as contributing to the overwork for which Nasser was legendary). At the same time between ministries there was relatively little integration: it was not a team government, and this contributed to the lack of sectoral coordination within the economy as a whole.

Within ministries and the nationalised industries over which they presided much has been made of the shortcomings of the bureaucratic style of management employed, for though Nasser purged the bureaucracy he did little to restructure its hierarchical character. The number of government employees rose dramatically, from 325,000 in 1952 to 1,035,000 in 1966-67, and the style of operation encouraged red tape and constant reference to higher authority stifling initiative at the lower levels. Anthony McDermott sums up the manner of operation thus: 'What became established was a deadly combination of Ottoman complexities, Eastern European inflexible committee rule, a touch here and there of British and French secretive intrigue, and Egyptian indiscipline.'⁵

While there was great attraction in the safety of a government job, and from 1962 all university graduates were guaranteed employment, there was little incentive once employed. Apart from the stultifying character of the work in many of the lower echelons, salaries were low and incentives

limited, a situation which was ripe for the corruption which it duly engendered, as well as much absenteeism and moonlighting. Such critical comments about the general character of the bureaucracy should not though be regarded as criticism of all things Egyptian: there were notable exceptions such as the Suez Canal Company, or the construction of the High Dam (where much of the Egyptian input came from a construction company that remained predominantly in the private sector).

Just as the bureaucracy was noted for quantity rather than quality so too was much of Egypt's growing industry. Planning was generally poor. The one and only five-year plan did appear in 1960, outlining the programme of industrialisation, but there was an absence of microeconomic thinking. Many projects were pushed through, by Sidqi in particular, for which no adequate studies had been undertaken. There was a lack of top-quality managers to promote the mass of projects taken over or being started, and also of skilled workers to operate them.

The overall picture of the economy during the period of the first five-year plan was one of growth, with GNP rising at 5.5–6 per cent per annum, but also of real problems. This figure is somewhat misleading since it includes the fast-growing public-sector payroll, and from 1962 productivity per capita was starting to fall. The very rate of growth also began to give rise to inflationary dangers. The speed of industrialisation had involved capital imports to build up import-substitution industries; but it had proved difficult for Egypt to penetrate external markets for her new products and thus a balance of payments crisis was growing as well. Much of the cost of the imports necessary for industrial expansion had been financed by foreign credits, since Nasser was not keen to squeeze the already impoverished Egyptian peasantry in a Stalinist manner. A further problem for the economy was engendered by the high cost of the civil war in Yemen. As a consequence of all this, by the middle of the decade Egypt was unable to repay her foreign debts, and this combined with the balance of payments problem, led in turn to the approach to the International Monetary Fund (IMF) for assistance. And in December 1966, when Egypt defaulted on repaying debts to the IMF she was on the verge of bankruptcy. The realisation

of the difficulties in economic performance had brought a recognition of the necessity by 1965 to slow down the rate of expansion and Nasser's replacement of Ali Sabri as prime minister by Zachariyya Muhiddin, a former Minister of the Interior experienced in security matters, with a brief to introduce a period of greater austerity. It was also thought that Zachariyya Muhiddin was to the right of his predecessor, and thus more acceptable to the West when the IMF were being approached.

The benefits of this period of what has often been labelled state capitalism, went most directly to those of the middle class, able to obtain and exploit ministerial and senior managerial positions. It was Egypt's version of the East European phenomenon of the 'New Class'. While Nasser may have set a personal example of an austere lifestyle and incorruptibility, the same was not true of all those around him (on whom he liked to collect scandal with an assiduity J. Edgar Hoover would have appreciated). The military in general also benefited, whether still in the services or redeployed to head the state-run enterprises. Below the leadership were hundreds of thousands of new jobs, which were keenly sought, if all too often inadequately performed. Workers enjoyed the employment, though unions were restricted and strikes banned, which, together with the paucity of incentives, meant there was little room for any kind of initiative. In the countryside it was mainly the upper stratum of the peasantry who benefited. Some 400,000 families in all acquired more land as a result of the sequestration and distribution, but for the many on tiny holdings of five *feddans* or less, there was little gain.

In terms of services there was a clear attempt to improve the lot of as many as possible. Education expanded at all levels, especially scientific and technical training in the universities. Health programmes were also expanded with particular effort to set up clinics in the countryside where chronic diseases such as malaria and bilharzia were endemic. There was also an effort at a population control policy, a brave move in a mainly Muslim society, but one necessitated by the realisation that the population was growing at over one million per annum. However, it was not pursued with vigour and in practice did little to limit the growth of Egypt's huge demographic problem, which

in turn was providing much of the push to send people off the land to crowd into the towns and cities that were growing fast. Thus the quality of services, which could not in any case be comprehensive since Egypt simply lacked the resources, was being threatened by the vast numbers seeking to take advantage of them, a situation which was especially apparent in education with its overcrowded classrooms at all levels.

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DOMESTIC POLITICS

While the economic changes of the 1960s were by far the most definite domestic policies being pursued in Egypt, Nasser was also introducing new political moves. Here too there was an element of continuity, and a new urgency. Just as state control had been extending steadily before the nationalisation programme of 1961, so the pursuit of Arab socialism and attempts to create single political movements had also taken place in the form of the Liberation Rally, and later the National Union. Perhaps it was inevitable that after a number of years in power a charismatic leader, such as Nasser had undoubtedly proved himself to be, would need to give greater attention to institutionalising his rule, but there were too other problems occupying his mind. The collapse of the UAR had dealt a severe blow and Egypt required both a new statement of direction and institutions capable of carrying it forward, not only at home but in the Arab world as a whole, in the face of Ba'athist criticism. At the same time the wave of sequestrations and arrests which accompanied the nationalisation also implied a clearer vision of the direction of social change following the confrontation with these local 'reactionaries'. Furthermore, Nasser was having trouble with the army, and especially his old friend, Abdel Hakim Amer, who used his own position as commander successfully to defy an attempt by Nasser to remove him following his failure in Syria. Though Amer did not then aspire to exercise his popularity in the army to challenge Nasser himself, a political counterweight to the military was required. This could be done by some more effective way of associating the populace at large with the revolution being waged on their behalf.

Nasser's political plans were contained in the National Charter, published in 1962. In itself the Charter was something of a compromise between Arab socialists who wished to emphasise Arab and Islamic traditions, and more leftist-inclined elements on the committee which drew it up who favoured scientific socialism. Egypt was indeed to embark on a socialist programme, and it was to set the example politically and economically for the Arab world as a whole.

The most important political outcome to flow from the Charter was the Arab Socialist Union (ASU), the third mass movement Nasser had launched, and he intended it to be a far more substantial body than its predecessors. Yet it had throughout Nasser's years an inbuilt ambiguity in regard to both structure and function. The two major structural differences between the ASU and the National Union lay in the character and significance of membership on the one hand, and the nature of the basic units on the other. The ASU's two predecessors had been open to all, but while the ASU was a mass party, it required admission to membership and payment was necessary. However, there was a great incentive to apply, especially for those with ambition for senior posts, for many could be held only by ASU members. (The single category specifically excluded were the 'exploiters' who had been expropriated.) In all it was claimed that at its largest nearly five million people were successful in gaining membership of the ASU, suggesting that the scrutiny of applicants was not too severe. While the largest number of units was residential, totalling 4,447, the ASU also had for the first time functional units. A major intention here was to give meaning to Nasser's aim that the ASU would serve as a melting pot of groups and classes. Thus workers and peasants were deliberately given particular emphasis (they were to comprise 50 per cent of the members of ASU structures), and in schools and colleges there were also branches: in all these functional units numbered 2,482. In reality residential representation tended to produce local conservatism; while functional representatives tended to appear more radical.

The ambiguity in character lay in the extent to which it was intended to be a mass party or a vanguard party in which the leading cadre would provide dynamic leadership for a revolutionary transformation. Apparently founded as

the former to give expression to popular enthusiasm, it later seemed to be heading in the latter direction. In part, the creation of an initially secret Vanguard Organisation appeared to be due to the release and incorporation of some of the communists, who had been rounded up in 1959 but were released in 1963 and 1964, partly as a result of the influence of Khrushchev with whom Nasser was then reconciled. But there is also the suggestion that Nasser's close confidant, Tito, had influenced him in the direction of the Yugoslav example, where there was almost a party within a party. By 1965 the Vanguard Organisation was out in the open with the ASU as a whole run by Ali Sabri, the leftist former prime minister, in a direction that included 20,000 to be trained as the Vanguard's cadre, and with a newly established Institute of Socialist Studies.

Organisationally, the ASU was (inevitably) pyramidal and in practice very centralised, with communication primarily from top to bottom. But at the bottom the ASU was also very mixed between local conservatism or reform, particularly in the rural areas. It has been seen locally as becoming the stronghold of the rural middle class. The middle-sized peasants, too small to lose land under the redistribution, but large enough to be big men in their villages, soon penetrated and manipulated the ASU for their own local interests; and the ASU lacked the cadres, and had too many protective intermediary levels to check this kind of local élitism. Yet why should the ASU not function in this way: the revolution had expropriated those above the rural middle class, and so surely they were its natural beneficiaries? But there were too other groups in the ASU who were more radical and thought of the peasants in terms of those with much smaller holdings or even landless agricultural labourers: in some areas the Committee for the Liquidation of Feudalism was to be deployed in an attempt to shake-up such local élites, and was later criticised for the petty tyranny of the methods on occasions adopted.

A further area of ambiguity lay in the relationship between the ASU and government. Most senior posts involved membership of the ASU, with Nasser himself topping both. At one time he even appeared to suggest that it was the ASU that had truly won his heart and he would leave the presidency to lead it, but this was forgotten when he was

once more re-elected president in 1965. However, there was a real uncertainty whether the government was running the ASU or the reverse, not only at the top where so many wore both hats, but at the bottom when local bureaucrats as well as middle-class peasants were frequently members.

There is ambiguity too in what the ASU achieved. It is easy to be cynical and see it as window dressing to confer some kind of popular legitimacy upon the president. But it is also clear that while it was less than an overwhelmingly revolutionary body itself, it did help to protect the revolution from its enemies, for there was scarcely a popular challenge to the ASU or to the regime – though in 1966, following an alleged plot by the Muslim Brotherhood, there were mass arrests and its then spiritual leader, Sayed Qutb, was executed.

But perhaps the ambiguity lay with Nasser himself and the varied motives that had led him to establish the ASU. He wanted the masses to join, for he was aware of the charismatic hold he had over them and wished to channel it institutionally; but he wanted them to follow rather than to lead and thus the exercise of party membership was always a constrained affair rather than a release of individual enthusiasm and initiative. He seemed to want a revolutionary instrument, hence the cadres, yet it was the state itself which had taken over much of the economic life and ran it less through revolutionary worker participation in workplace ASU branches, than through the state bureaucracy. He brought in various political strands, yet wanted to contain and control them, after thorough manipulation and manoeuvre, thus often frustrating them rather than utilising their revolutionary ideology or enthusiasm. In all probability it really was as ambiguous as it appeared not least because of Nasser's lack of planning on the one hand, which ensured that at least until Ali Sabri took it over in 1965 its direction was uncertain; and on the other because he both wanted support and yet never wished to concede power, and the ASU was consequently not to be a rival power centre to Nasser himself.

While the ASU was in theory the supreme body, directing even the executive, its instrument of law-making was to be the National Assembly established in the 1962 constitution.

A notable development on paper was that while each of Egypt's 175 constituencies should return two representatives, at least one of them should be a worker or a peasant, while all candidates should be members of the ASU. To ensure participation, if not enthusiasm, voting for the Assembly elections was compulsory. In general the Assembly, which came into being only in 1964, was regarded as little more than a rubber stamp for the government, though theoretically the latter was accountable to it. There were occasions when it was permitted to act as an arena in which some expression of grievances was allowed, or the questioning of policy of particular ministers, but it scarcely captured the imagination of the Egyptian public at large, though the state-controlled media gave it due prominence.

In practice neither the ASU nor the Assembly became significant autonomous bodies exercising the control over the executive in the manner they were alleged to exist to perform. Nasser's personal control was in reality growing greater rather than being transferred to the new institutions. The sweeping nationalisations had brought more power to the state, and since the nationalised companies were run by ministers appointed by the president, they had put more power in his hands. Nasser it was who appointed and dismissed prime ministers and ministers, both moving about the ideological spectrum and manipulating individuals and their personal ambitions against one another.

He had too other instruments less proclaimed than the ASU. While the army was largely left as Amer's fiefdom, the influence of the secret police services was extended during the 1960s. Many political opponents on the Left and Right, especially the Muslim Brothers, experienced arrest and incarceration, which for some involved torture and even death. In the name of the making of Arab socialism, Egypt went a long way down the road to becoming a police state. For Nasser it seemed less a policy resulting from fear than the price that had to be paid by those he or his subordinates in the security forces deemed to be in some way or other counter-revolutionaries. Humour is one of the constant outlets of frustration in Egypt, and one lament for the loss of freedom experienced in the 1960s was the story of an exchange between two dogs, one Egyptian the other Libyan. The Libyan asked why the Egyptian was running

towards Libya: 'What are you coming here for, we are all starving?' to which the reply came, 'I want to bark.'⁶

A central problem of any one-party state is the balance of participation and control. The ASU offered little by way of participation in national policy-making. Locally it did play a part in some areas, if only because it provided a new institution within which local disputes could be pursued. But nationally it did little to bring influence to bear on the executive, which meant above all on Nasser himself. Perhaps the charismatic nature of his relationship with the masses was simply one that, as long as it survived, was beyond institutional participation. As for control, the ASU itself was not permitted to acquire the power to become a major instrument. This was mainly because Nasser was unwilling to devolve that power – and so risk his revolution going off course – and the ASU was thus something of a hollow shell. One study has referred to the whole domestic construction of the 1960s as a 'demobilising corporatist system'.⁷ The state, having taken over control of vast swathes of national life, then sought to incorporate the various elements and achieve a national harmony, with the single party as the major all-embracing institution. Though the term corporatism was unknown as such, the concept is reflected in Nasser's proclamation of Arab socialism in the National Charter, and in the ASU. That it seemed to centralise and increase Nasser's power rather than bring the participatory involvement it proclaimed, especially of workers and peasants, is widely acknowledged; and the beginning of that recognition came even while he was still alive in the wake of the shock of the Six Day War of 1967.

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NOTES AND REFERENCES

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2. Unusually, a full record of these meetings was later made public and shows clearly Nasser's dominating, manipulating and adroit conduct of Arab negotiations. See Stephens *Nasser*. pp. 402-5.
3. Quoted in Nutting *Nasser*. p. 275.
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Chapter 5

CONFRONTATION WITH ISRAEL: 1967–70

By the end of 1966 it was clear that Nasser had somewhat lost his way and was feeling the strain of trying to provide corrective touches on different fronts simultaneously. Domestically the economy had run into problems from the heated pursuit of Egypt's approach to socialism, and he had had to change prime ministers, largely to inject a note of caution and try to reassure the outsiders from whom he needed help, especially in America. But Nasser's own contribution to the economy was limited to overall strategy rather than to detailed conduct of policy – it was in politics, security and foreign affairs that he played the most direct role, and foreign affairs were creating growing polarisation in the Arab world.

Yet Nasser himself identified the problem as not simply one of the relations between Arabs, but of growing Western hostility towards the radical Arab camp, and himself in particular. In this he may have had some grounds for complaint, for clearly President Johnson was more pro-Israeli and aggressive towards Nasser than Kennedy had been, while Britain was annoyed at the activities of what she saw as Egypt's surrogate, FLOSY, in Aden. Nasser also felt that throughout the non-aligned movement, in which he was such a giant, there was a current of Western opposition. The role of the West in backing Mobutu in the Congo (now Zaïre) in his crushing of Lumumbist rebels in the north of the country in 1965, and then the downfall of his personal friend Nkrumah in Ghana in 1966, were both blows in a continent he regarded as an area where Egypt's influence should grow. Meanwhile in the east the super-power rivalry in Asia was building up in the Vietnam war.

The suspicion of an undercurrent of Western antagonism extended too into the Arab world where Nasser felt once more the polarisation of superpowers that he had hitherto tried to play off against each other. In this area too there was an element of truth. The arms race had been proceeding apace in the 1960s, when Israel and Egypt in particular were receiving large amounts of economic aid from the rival superpowers. Nasser detected this growing polarisation as being behind Saudi Arabia's move to create an Islamic summit, bringing in pro-Western Muslim powers such as Turkey, Iran and Pakistan, as counterweights to Nasser's dominance in the Arab world. Meanwhile the tension between Egypt and Saudi Arabia persisted over the Yemen, when the intransigence of the belligerents had prevented agreement and disengagement.

This polarisation of the Arab world, whether due to internal or external differences and machinations, seemed to suggest within the region that Nasser's own position was weakening. In particular his policy for handling the Palestinian issue was looking increasingly threadbare. His policy of summitry had largely been intended to achieve collective restraint with regard to Israel, especially to rein in Syria. But it had produced little by way of achievement, and the more fissures opened up again in the Arab world, the greater grew the criticisms of Nasser for his failure to act. Meanwhile the creation of the PLO, which had largely been a sop to the Palestinians, was producing a Trojan horse in the Arab world, if not a major threat to Israel. Egypt as the largest of the Arab states, apparently bristling with new and sophisticated weapons from the Soviet Union, was actually expected by the PLO to show active encouragement, and ultimately to play the leading part in attacking Israel. The longer time went on without action the less credibility Nasser would retain as leader of the Arabs in facing the Western-backed Zionist state, located at the centre of the Middle East at the expense of Egypt's Palestinian Arab brothers. Yet credibility in that role was just what Nasser did lack, not least to himself. For all the rising pressure on him, and his new commitment to a defence agreement with Syria, there was little to suggest at the start of 1967 that Nasser was preoccupied with the question of Israel, or that the Palestinian issue appeared

significantly more urgent than it had in the past.¹

It was, however, difficult for him to retain his position as leader of the Arab world as a number of factors, over which he had only limited control, began increasingly to make themselves felt. At the heart of this was the growing tension between Fatah, Syria and Jordan on the one hand, and Israel on the other. Fatah (the Opening) represented the more militant wing of the PLO who were not prepared to be merely a sop and wanted the rhetoric of Arab leaders, primarily Nasser, to be turned into reality. Their determination to carry the conflict into Israel through guerilla activities was not only an end in itself, inspired though they were by Algerian and Vietnamese guerillas, but a means of forcing the conventional armies of the Arab world to follow them. The new regime that took power in Syria in 1966 was eager to help Fatah, partly as a way of promoting Syria in the eyes of the Arab states as being truly committed to the cause. Nasser's agreement to the defence pact with Syria had partly been to try and exercise a degree of restraint on Syria, but he did not have control as he had during the UAR, and in particular he judged it undiplomatic in view of the earlier experience to send Egyptian troops to Syria itself. In practice, then, his wish for restraint had little effect, and from late 1966 there was a series of clashes with Israel along the Syrian border involving not only Fatah, but Syrian troops as well.

The role of the Soviet Union as 1967 progressed proved curious. The USSR appeared to want to avoid a major conflict into which its local clients might try to draw it. This would inevitably involve confrontation with Israel's main backer, the United States, and the possibility of nuclear war – a conflagration only narrowly avoided during the Cuban missile crisis of 1962. Nevertheless, it felt a particular responsibility for the new regime in Syria and passed on information about alleged Israeli troop movements which were threatening to Syria. Whether these movements were genuine, or a deliberate and successful attempt by the Israeli military to mislead the Soviet Union, and thus Syria, is not entirely clear, but the effect was to convince the USSR that an attack on Syria was planned, and appropriate warnings were thus passed on to Damascus and Cairo. Thus, at the same time that the Soviet Union was urging

Nasser not to launch an attack on Israel, she was consistently passing on information that warned of an impending attack on the country with which Nasser had signed a defence agreement.

A third vital element which was slipping from Nasser's control was Jordan. Relations between the two countries in the past had for long been strained, though in the era of summitry there had been an improvement. But the entry of Fatah onto the scene and the attacks on Israel brought a new dimension. While it was Syria that encouraged Fatah, Jordan felt the effects of the guerilla raids more directly. King Hussein was from the outset no lover of Fatah. The core of support for his regime was on the East Bank, especially among the Bedouin soldiers of the Arab Legion, and he had long been suspicious of the Palestinians on the West Bank, while using their greater skills in his government. But the long border of Jordan and Israel, together with the fact that much of the border was populated with Palestinians, made it inevitable that Fatah would utilise Jordan for attacks. Nevertheless, the size of the attacks seemed hardly to warrant Israeli retaliation on the scale that saw the destruction of the Jordanian village of Sammu on 13 November 1966. The Sammu raid in turn provoked fierce hostility from the Palestinians, not only towards Israel, against which they could in reality do relatively little, but also against King Hussein for his failure to assist Fatah (though in fact eighteen Jordanian soldiers had been killed defending Sammu). As demonstrations by Palestinians rocked Jordan, the king and his prime minister, Wasfi al-Tal, supported by Saudi Arabia, hit back by taunting Egypt and the Arab command with failure to act against Israel and of hiding behind the United Nations Force (UNEF) which had been installed on the Egyptian side of the border with Israel after the Suez War. The constant repetition of this theme made the continuation of UNEF look like Nasser's Achilles heel as far as the Arabs were concerned. Nasser was attacking Jordan, while appearing to avoid facing Israel himself and taking refuge from his enemy behind the UNEF force. It was a charge which increasingly irked him, even though there was still little thought in his mind of war with Israel.

In Israel, meanwhile, Nasser's loss of control of develop-

ments in the Arab world, and the possibility that he was talking and edging himself into a dangerous and exposed position was noted with great interest. Politically Israel had much more varied leadership than that of any of its Arab neighbours, and there were a variety of strands of thought. Though Prime Minister Eshkol was not the man to seek confrontation, there were two major influences working to encourage a tougher line as the Arab war of words, which while essentially inter-Arab put Israel at its core, grew steadily in the early months of 1967. One of these influences lay in Israeli domestic politics, or more directly in her faltering economy. With unemployment rising, Jewish immigration falling and even some skilled emigration, there was a strong and irresistible temptation to play the Zionist card and rally both Jews and Israel's Western backers around the growing threat apparently presented by the Arabs. The second, and more serious, influence was among Israel's natural hawks, especially in or associated with the armed forces. They had been monitoring the growing build-up of arms on the Arab side since Suez, and while they were aware that the Arab armies were not a serious threat, there was a strong attraction in hitting them once more before they could become so. Those who saw a streak of international Machiavellianism on Israel's part in the months leading up to the June war argued that certain actions were a deliberate come on, reflecting particularly thinking in the military. Thus the troop manoeuvres on the Syrian front, which apparently misled the Soviet Union, and were an alleged provocation to the Syrians, and the scale of the attack on Sammu, have been seen as drawing Syria and Jordan into a conflict, in the confident expectation that the real enemy, the victor of the Suez War, Nasser, could once more be embroiled and this time destroyed. But if there were devious plans to this end afoot in Israel, it was not clear that they would eventually be adopted, especially since the most popular and influential of the hawks, General Dayan, had earlier been removed by Eshkol from the Ministry of Defence.

With the situation in Syria increasingly out of control, Jordan and Saudi Arabia in noisy opposition, and a hardening of attitudes in Israel, Nasser felt that his whole position as the leader of the Arab world was under challenge. To do

nothing in the face of the growing taunts from his Arab rivals and provocation from Israel would severely damage his reputation, for the Palestine question was clearly not one that would go away. Yet to act would involve manoeuvring in difficult and dangerous waters, not only in terms of the region but also the superpowers for whom the Middle East remained an important and volatile area, with memories of earlier conflicts as well as the arms build-up of regional allies. But the superpowers were not the only ones with memories of the past, and Nasser, with his constant suspicion of plots at home and abroad, was once more alarmed at the increasing hostility being shown in the West, partly as a response to Israel's skilful propaganda. His belief that America was behind the right-wing military coup in Greece on 21 April 1967 fuelled his fears that there was a new active American policy in the eastern Mediterranean which, in conjunction with Israel, would force a change of policy if not regime in Syria, and so destroy the new United Arab Command. In his suspicion of such plots he was clearly re-running the conspiracy which preceded the Suez war. It was ironical that just as Eden had then looked back to his own earlier experience facing Hitler, so now Nasser was looking back to the conflict of 1956 out of the ashes of which he had risen to such heights.

However, rather than wait passively as attacks were stepped up, such as Israel's shooting down of six Syrian MIGs and then overflying Damascus in mid-April, Nasser decided he had to answer the taunts of impotence by pushing forward his own troops to the border. In spite of the relative failure of the Egyptian forces in Yemen, and the fact that large numbers were still tied down there, Nasser felt that his army could put up an effective display, at least defensively. In particular the Soviets had supplied large numbers of aircraft to Egypt and trained Egyptian pilots and groundstaff. His old and trusted friend, General Amer, still in command of the army, continued to tell him that his forces were ready for war, and indeed Amer pressed for a first strike. This apparent confidence was reflected in Nasser's declaration on 23 May that 'Our armed forces and all our people are ready for war.'² Not that Nasser felt that the time had come, or would do so in the immediate future. He felt still that war was unlikely, or would be

limited and manageable. While believing that Israel was preparing to strike at Syria, if Egypt showed herself ready to move Israel would know she had to fight on two fronts, and that would be too much, given the size of the Egyptian forces. If Israel should be so foolish as to launch a war on two fronts she might be reined in again by the international community, as she had been in 1956; or if the United States came to her aid, then the Soviet Union would be forced to protect Egypt and Syria.

Thus it was necessary for Egypt to make the first move and warn Israel against attacking Syria, and on 15 May Nasser put the country onto military alert and ordered Egyptian forces into Sinai. At the same time along the Egyptian side of the border there were the UNEF units. Some disagreement remains as to the degree of risk Nasser really intended to take in requesting UN Secretary General, U Thant, to pull UNEF out. Some argued subsequently that the request was only from the border posts in Sinai to warn Israel, and was not intended to apply to the sensitive points of the Gaza strip or Sharm al-Shaikh, which commanded the Gulf of Akaba and Israeli shipping into Eilat. It is claimed that it was the UN which insisted that all UNEF should go or all remain, and this forced Egypt to back down or proceed as she did to these dangerous positions. Certainly Nasser did not have the relationship with U Thant that he had had with his predecessor Dag Hammarskjöld, and this may have contributed to a fatal misunderstanding by U Thant of Nasser's risky game of defensive brinkmanship. Thus by 21 May, following the complete UN withdrawal, Nasser had somewhat hesitantly advanced his troops to Sharm al-Shaikh and ordered the closure of the Gulf of Akaba to Israeli shipping, asserting that he had the right to do so since the Gulf was in Egyptian territorial waters. Publicly Nasser's action was proclaimed throughout the Arab world which had been whipped into war hysteria by the weeks and months of the war of words and the increasingly confrontational positions that had been adopted by all sides. Some argued that such open manoeuvring could not possibly amount to a real intention to attack, while behind the scenes at the United Nations Egyptian diplomats were busy offering concessions on Eilat, such as the possible reflagging of Israeli ships to allow them to

pass, which could have saved face for Nasser.³ But in moving to Sharm al-Shaikh and closing the straits Egypt was providing Israel with a *casus belli* that was too good to miss.

There was one more move which played even further into Israel's hands, when Jordan decided that she too should move into the camp of the United Arab Command. The Jordanian and Saudi campaign against Nasser's impotence in the face of Israeli provocation had itself contributed to the worsening of the crisis. But just as Nasser appeared to think to the last that brinkmanship would prevent or contain war, King Hussein, like the Syrian leaders, really believed in the danger of an imminent attack. If Syria was about to be attacked and Egypt drawn into the conflict, how could the other Arabs, especially Jordan, stand aside, and at a time when their populations had been aroused? The Palestinian pressure might be unbearable for Hussein and his government if they failed to participate. At the same time, if, as Nasser believed, Israel really would be reluctant to attack both Syria and Egypt, how much more threatening would it be if Jordan joined the United Arab Command. If Israel did proceed to drop the threat to Syria, then Hussein as well as Nasser could bask in the glory of an Arab victory. Such thoughts impelled Hussein to Cairo to join his old adversaries on 30 May, apparently increasing the threat to Israel.⁴ Prompted by this, Iraq also joined the Command on 4 June. For the Israelis, Jordan's move was a gift. Egypt had already offered a *casus belli*, and now Jordan's joining gave a chance for the Israeli army to take the old city of Jerusalem as well as the West Bank, both great goals for the zealous Zionists. For moderate Israelis, Jordan's move completed an apparent encirclement of Israel which could serve to give great justification in the eyes of the international community for pre-emptive action. There had been understanding and even sympathy with Egypt's case in 1956, but there were few who appreciated the dangerous game of brinkmanship into which Nasser had been drawn by June 1967. To most of the world, Nasser had behaved with extreme provocation and Israel now stood alone and threatened by its numerically overwhelming Arab enemies.

Having put himself into the net, Nasser and his henchmen still spoke publicly of war, while privately seeking

some way out and planning to send his close colleague Zacharia Muhiddin to Washington, which Nasser believed (wrongly) still lay behind Israel's action. Such a possibility of avoiding war was though by now anathema to Israel. In addition to the military opportunity, Israeli nationalism was itself being whipped up by the Arab propaganda. It was felt that Israel was standing alone, since both superpowers were intent on telling Israel as well as Egypt not to open fire first, when to the Israeli public it was clear that the Arabs were preparing for war. There was then great pressure on Eshkol and his government, and he was forced to admit Dayan back into the Cabinet and then make him Minister of Defence. Once back, the charismatic Dayan and his hawkish supporters in the military were in a strong position to push for a first strike which was conceded, in spite of earlier promises to the Americans for a cooling-off period, and on 5 June the Israeli aircraft attacked Egyptian airfields. There could have been no greater contrast between the precise preparation which the Israeli military had made and Egyptian unpreparedness, in spite of all the talk of war and at least the possibility of Egyptian attack.

With memories of 1956 when they had lacked air cover, the Israelis had been building up their planes, many of which came from France. As well as having carefully trained pilots, the groundwork was such that the planes could be turned round to fly sortie after sortie. They knew too the moment to attack in the morning when the Egyptians were vulnerable preparing for the new day, and indeed on 5 June Amer and the Egyptian high command were actually in mid-air flying to Sinai. In contrast, not only were the Egyptian forces caught off guard and with their leaders out of touch, but all the much vaunted new airforce acquired from the Soviet Union was sitting in neat rows on the virtually unprotected airfields. When the Israelis struck there was almost no opposition and wave after wave of attacks smashed nearly 300 of the 340 planes Egypt possessed. Having decimated the Egyptian airforce in less than three hours, the Israelis went on to wreak similar havoc on those of Syria, Jordan and Iraq in the following twenty-four hours. With air control assured, attacking the Egyptian army was then relatively easy. While some units fought bravely, the overall military position of the forces in

Sinai was swiftly reduced to a shambles, and in three days the Egyptian army was defeated and left to crawl back across the Suez Canal, having lost 20,000 of the 83,000 who had been in Sinai. Once again the Israelis could then focus all their attention on Jordan and Syria, taking old Jerusalem and the West Bank, and Syria's Golan Heights overlooking northern Israel, though only after some tough fighting. Six days after the first assault was launched came the final cease-fire, when Israel had assured herself that she had inflicted all the damage she wished to on three Arab neighbours.

For Nasser the war was first traumatic, and then devastating. Initially unable to find out what was happening he simply could not believe it. It was indicative of both the strength and weakness of his position that his subordinates had difficulty even bracing themselves to tell him how great the damage was; and partly for this reason Egyptian and other Arab radio stations began broadcasting a barrage of misinformation about the progress of the war, claiming all kinds of military successes when in fact none existed. It was not until the evening of the opening day that Nasser was fully informed of the destruction of his air-force which he had proudly displayed to King Hussein only a few days earlier when they had made their peace. And when he did comprehend *al-nakba*, 'the setback', as he was to call it, he could not believe that the Israelis alone could have inflicted it. There were too many planes attacking, and he therefore denounced what had to be American and British collaboration – the fulfilment of his suspicions of a conspiracy against him parallel to that of 1956. The fact that this was due to the efficiency of the Israeli ground crews, comparable to good motor racing pit stops, was beyond imagination. In any case the waves of attack were from the north which surely indicated that they must be from American aircraft carriers or the British base in Cyprus? Instead the Israelis were circumventing Egyptian radar just as easily as the Germans had skirted the Maginot line.

As the days passed, and the news went from bad to worse, Nasser, who had been able to do little to influence the course of events, was close to collapse. When the Israelis decided their work was done and accepted a cease-

fire, there was nothing left for the Arabs but devastation, loss of land in Jordan and Syria, and recrimination. In advance of the latter Nasser decided to come out, accept responsibility for the 'setback' and resign on 9 June. In offering his resignation he claimed that it was of course the Israelis who had started it by threatening Syria, and the West that had aided the crushing victory; but the Arab failure in battle was one for which he, Nasser, was accountable, and he, the leader of the Arab world, was prepared to sacrifice himself in recompense for failure. His emotional performance was high theatre, a totally naked and down-cast admission by the man who had taken on and raised so high the centuries-old dream of the Arab nation. It proved both the nadir and the glory of his rule. After announcing his resignation in favour of the faithful Zacharia Muhiddin (who knew nothing of Nasser's intention), and going off the air, the masses poured out into the Cairo streets. In the warm evening hundreds of thousands surged towards his suburban home, including Muhiddin, his heir apparent, to protest that Egypt could have no other leader and that Nasser must stay. They had overwhelmingly accepted his leadership through the past fortunes of the revolution, and now in defeat they sought him as much as ever. In devastation, all that was left was *al-raïs*, and it was unimaginable that he too should go. It was indicative of the character of the emotional relationship of Nasser and his people, for at that moment Nasser was Egypt and Egypt had to continue, as it had for thousands of years and many previous disasters. Furthermore, Egypt without Nasser was not only unthinkable to the Egyptians, his departure would have been the final victory for Israel: the intention denied in 1956 and which should be rejected in 1967.

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POST-WAR PROBLEMS

The Egyptian people's ready restoration of Nasser, a move formally endorsed by the National Assembly, was reinforced subsequently by the recognition in Egypt that Israel in particular still hoped that the aftermath of the war might yet result in Nasser's downfall, a hope that contributed to continuing Israeli raids. But while Nasser himself escaped the

wrath of the Egyptian masses (though he stood a more bowed and battered figure on his pedestal), those about him were not so fortunate and became the target of the inevitable angry feelings. It was clear that while leaving the army as the private fiefdom of his friend Amer had been popular with the officers at least, it was wholly unwise in terms of military efficiency. Though the military had received masses of hardware from the Soviet Union, it had obviously not properly assimilated the lessons of the weapons' use in battle, as indeed experience in the Yemen should in part have indicated. But instead of more rigorous training there had been a belief that possession was nine-tenths of performance. The officer corps in particular had grown soft and corrupt under Amer, which was a major reason for the easy-going pleasure-loving leader's popularity. The high command had largely proved a shambles during the war, while below it officers had all too rarely displayed adequate qualities of leadership towards their men. The soldiers in turn were many of them simple peasants, largely conscripts with limited education and thus lacking the capacity to work effectively with the weapons the Soviets had deployed. As evidence of these shortcomings emerged, the recriminations led to trials and dismissals. With Amer relieved of his command largely in response to this, and having refused a generous offer of comfortable exile from Nasser, he foolishly became embroiled in a plot to stage a coup, largely to take the pressure off the officers and restore his former position. After his arrest, and with final disgrace and unavoidable execution facing him, he was encouraged instead to take his own life. It was a further personal blow to Nasser, for Amer had been his closest friend for many years, and their families had become linked by marriage.

However, the uncovering of the plot was not the end of public anger with the armed forces. In February 1968 there were student and then worker demonstrations and riots which began in response to the light sentences passed on military officers tried for dereliction of duty in the war. They were the first major demonstrations since the Nasser-Neguib trial of strength back in 1954, and Nasser, always the brave, went personally to address the crowds. He spoke of counter-revolution, but also ordered retrials of the officers, which resulted in longer sentences. In November

more demonstrations followed, this time centred on Cairo's teeming industrial suburbs of Helwan and Choubra al-Kheima; and this time some concessions on working and living conditions were made.

Clearly in the wake of the stunning defeat there was a mood of anger and resentment. Though it was not directed against Nasser personally, it was aimed at the bastions of the regime: the military officers who had taken advantage of opportunities to benefit themselves; and the unpopular security forces, especially the secret police. Nasser's own feelings were shown in the pages of *Al-Ahram*, written under the name of his close friend, Mohamed Heikal, but after his regular discussion with *al-rai*s. The problem was defined as being one of the emergence of secret and autonomous 'centres of power', and these had to be reduced. The death of Amer and the retrial of the military officers showed Nasser's determination to check the 'centre of power', and he then turned against the police. He went personally and at night to break into the office of the head of the secret police, Salah Nasr (at a time when he, Nasser, slept with a revolver by his bed).

The way to tackle the problem of 'centres of power' in the future was to make Egypt a more open society politically. To this end the Arab Socialist Union was to be revamped. The growth of the 'centres of power' had allegedly been as a result of its deficiencies and a more participatory and effective ASU was heralded in Nasser's 'Mandate of Change' speech in 1968, under the slogan 'No socialism without freedom'.⁵ As well as calling for new and more competitive elections for the ASU, there were new elections for the National Assembly, which was supposed to undertake a more active role, and some interpreted this as a degree of rivalry with the ASU which Nasser had to move personally to defuse by redefining the different functions of the two organisations. The Assembly was then dissolved and in January 1969 fresh elections were held with a significant influx of new blood, apparently as a result of redefining the occupational categories of membership, especially the peasants' and workers' representatives.

The attempt to balance the ASU and the Assembly was part of a wider new philosophy of checks and balances in government, which it was said would affect a whole series

of institutions. The National Assembly was to be a check on the executive; the judiciary was to check the security apparatus; while at the grass-roots level local councils were to check local government officials. The whole added up^a to a move towards radical pluralism in a single-party framework. But whether it worked to this end is arguable. It could be said that participatory pluralism had never been much in character with Egypt's homogeneous and hierarchical society, which had been reinforced rather than broken down by the years of revolution from 1952. In particular sullen resentment of the unpopular secret police persisted, and hostility was still shown in the November 1968 demonstrations, after the reforms had been started. There were those who hoped to benefit, but they were never to be fully satisfied. The Left hoped to gain from the autonomy promised to the ASU. Ali Sabri, its new Secretary General, was said to have the backing of the Soviet Union, but he was disgraced and dismissed in September 1969. The Muslim Brotherhood too had hopes of resurrection, especially when it was suggested that a popular militia might be formed to combat any future Israeli invasion and the Brotherhood's role against the British in Port Said in 1956 was recalled. Nasser, however, made it clear he would tolerate no such resurgence. Among the professionals too there were those who thought they detected a more liberal, efficient era, but Nasser's determination to pursue his own brand of socialism and the limitation of effective institutional reform left them largely frustrated as well.

Indeed, whatever the merits of the more open age Nasser appeared to be introducing, it was a difficult time to be pursuing it. In addition to the continuing confrontation with Israel, the economy was clearly in trouble, and contributing to the unrest manifest in the demonstrations.

The problems of the economy in fact predated the war. The wave of economic socialism of the early 1960s had begun to run out of steam by 1965 and there had been a mounting balance of payments deficit. Nevertheless, the war did exacerbate the situation, with the loss of oil from Sinai, industrial output from Suez and Ismailia, hard currency from tourism, and revenues from the canal (though there was compensation from the oil-rich Arab states). Taxes were raised to meet defence costs and with the whole

atmosphere on a semi-war footing (Egypt remained subject to black-out) the economic outlook was gloomy. There was not even much of an official way out. A second five-year plan was not produced, and its substitute, a proposed three-year plan, never materialised. There were of necessity a few concessions to the private sector, which saw some expansion, but it was by no means the beginning of a policy of economic liberalisation, and it was still stressed that Egypt was committed to a path of socialism. Indeed, in an effort to encourage socialist egalitarianism in the countryside, 1969 saw yet another cut in the maximum size of individual landholdings, this time down from one hundred *feddans* to fifty, though for families it remained at the higher figure. Overall, the pattern of bureaucratic economic management, with low levels of productivity in many sectors and the problems encountered from the moves towards socialism, remained largely unredressed. This relative economic weakness contributed to the demonstrations and unrest which in turn were factors in Nasser's launching in 1969 of the 'War of Attrition' with Israel, in an effort to deflect and galvanise the emotions of the Egyptian populace.

The combination of unrest, attempted political reform, and the economic problems, all contributed to Nasser's strain and resulting deterioration in health. After the war, and after an introspective recovery from the shock, he had taken even more tasks on his own shoulders. He formally took over as prime minister, as well as president, and also became Supreme Commander of the armed forces to check any return to the relative autonomy of Amer's days. At the same time he was active personally in intervening in the demonstrations and offering at least some redress. It was not only that he felt it incumbent to try personally to assume even more direct responsibility for Egypt's problems, it was also that he felt increasingly alone and without friends he could trust. The loss of Amer had been a great personal blow to him, and virtually all the other Free Officers had gone too. Zacharia Muhiddin, who was vice-president and unwittingly named as Nasser's successor in his resignation speech in June 1967, was dismissed in the government reorganisation which followed the first demonstrations of February 1968, and left feeling very embittered. Only two remained of the thirteen who had formed the

Revolutionary Command Council, and neither was regarded as very significant: Hussein Shafei, who was a vice-president, and Anwar Sadat, who served as Speaker of the National Assembly before becoming a vice-president in his turn in 1969.

Nasser was still a colossus, as his summons to return to power in 1967 indicated, but he was no longer an unquestioned colossus. His miscalculation of 1967 had led to the most resounding defeat of all at the hands of the Israelis, and with time its magnitude grew, as it became ever clearer that the talk of Western involvement against the Arabs, which had blinded many at the time, was untrue. At home his socialist revolution had not produced either a transformation in government or a sustained improvement in economic performance. The demonstrations of 1968 were contained, but they were unprecedented and revealed an undercurrent of criticism which on occasions went right up to *al-raï*s himself. Nasser, with all his efforts to bear ever more of the burden personally, was becoming increasingly strained, both physically and psychologically.

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INTERNATIONAL POLITICS

It was a time too to reflect not only on miscalculations about Israel and the Egyptian army, but about the superpowers as well. Nasser's initial belief that the West was aiding Israel in the fighting was very wide of the mark, just as were his previous thoughts that the Soviet Union had invested so much that she would defend Egypt and Syria from defeat. Instead the superpowers had both been urging restraint on their clients right up to the last moment, and they were then determined not to risk an involvement in the conflict which would embroil the other side, thereby risking nuclear war. Much public opinion in the West was behind the apparently encircled Israelis, and delighted to see the Arab bullies' noses blooded, and there was no need for Western governments to act. Meanwhile the Soviet Union was not only fearful of involvement but recognised within hours of the first Israeli strikes that the situation was irretrievable. It was the Arabs who would have to bear the brunt of what they had helped to bring down upon them-

selves, and it was the Arabs who would have to try and sort out the mess thereafter.

With the Egyptian masses behind him, and any threat from the discredited military removed, it was to his fellow sufferers, the other Arab leaders, that Nasser had first to turn internationally. With the feeling of shock and recrimination at the defeat of the millions of the Arab nations by the tiny state of Israel, it was clearly going to be difficult to convene an Arab summit, however vital such a meeting might be. The initial call for it came from King Hussein and was hard to resist. Jordan had chosen to fight, her army had performed the best among the Arab armies; and her loss of Jerusalem in particular, the second most important city for Muslims after Mecca, was the greatest blow to Arab hearts.

It was surprising but in a way appropriate that Khartoum, Sudan's capital, was chosen as the site for the Arab summit which was in many ways the most poignant the Arabs had ever held. Sudan had always been very much on the fringe of the Arab world, but the Nile waters were vital to Egypt, while across the Red Sea lay Saudi Arabia, which was to emerge as having a vital and expanding role in Arab politics for years to come. Sudan's then Prime Minister, Mohamed Ahmed Mahjoub, had a keen interest in international politics, and his diplomatic skills at the summit of September 1967 were vital in ensuring that the real differences among those present were successfully resolved. It was an achievement just sitting there together, since some, such as Algeria and Iraq, had still not accepted the cease-fires which individual belligerents had been forced to make with Israel, and indeed Syria chose to stay away. And when assembled, apart from recriminations, there was the fact that two of those present, Egypt and Saudi Arabia, were still in conflict in the Yemen. With Mahjoub's help this issue was finally settled. Though local fighting was to drag on in Yemen for some time to come, and Britain's decision to withdraw from Aden was also most important, it was at Khartoum that Egypt and Saudi Arabia were persuaded to agree. After it, the withdrawal of the remaining Egyptian forces began in order to undertake the very necessary task of trying to rebuild the shattered defences at home. The agreement between Egypt and Saudi Arabia paved the way

for a vital financial arrangement. Egypt and Jordan had been fighting the Arabs' war, and suffered for it; and it was now incumbent on the oil-rich Arabs to pay to repair the damage, and, in Egypt's case, the loss of revenues from the closure of the Suez Canal across which Egyptian and Israeli forces faced each other. Saudi Arabia, Kuwait and Libya agreed to pay £135 million per year until the losses in lands and revenue had been restored, of which the largest slice, £95 million, was to go to Egypt.

With the purely inter-Arab affairs sorted out, the Khartoum summit was able to turn to wider matters. To pay for the repairs it was necessary to agree to lift the oil embargo on the United States, Britain and West Germany. Feelings gradually improved after the June war, though diplomatic relations remained broken. But more important still was to decide on a position towards Israel, and here Khartoum was noted for the 'three noes'. The first 'no' was rejection of a formal peace treaty with Israel, whom the Arabs regarded as the aggressor in the conflict. The second was that there would be no negotiations with Israel, though at the insistence of Nasser in particular it was made clear that there could be contacts and dealings through third parties, since he was keen to see the international community, and especially the United Nations, become involved. Third, there should be no recognition of the State of Israel, though in practice the interpretation of the second 'no' indicated that there could be *de facto* recognition.

Khartoum was traumatic for Nasser, and resulted too in a considerable change of position. It was traumatic in that the leader of pan-Arabism hitherto had had to come in front of his fellow Arabs with the dreams not only of Egypt but the whole Arab world in tatters. Israel had played the part of Hans Andersen's small boy showing that the king really was naked, and *al-raïs* had to appear as such in the face of those he had for so long sought to dominate, and on one of whom (Jordan) he had brought down as much destruction as he had brought on his own country. That he was to be so swiftly and completely absolved by his fellow Arab leaders was a mark of their feeling for him, and also the recognition that he was no longer the threat, to some of them at least, that he had once been. Indeed, Nasser's change of friends was one of the most notable features of

the Khartoum conference. The old division of radical and conservative states in the Middle East was now largely redrawn. True, there were those states that went to Khartoum with a theme of defiant resistance, among them Algeria and Iraq (and on similar grounds the Syrians had stayed away), yet Nasser's pragmatic side found him with a new reality which lined Egypt up alongside past rivals such as Jordan and Saudi Arabia. And while the conference could speak of the 'three noes' the small print made it clear that most Arab leaders, and Nasser in particular, were looking for a political accommodation with Israel as the route to the hoped for reclamation of the occupied territories lost in the war.

The pursuit of a political solution was taken up at the United Nations, especially by the United States and the Soviet Union which wanted no repetition of the Six-Day War, and the growing danger to them of confrontation in the light of the débâcle of the Soviet protégé, Egypt. Behind the scenes there was intense diplomacy towards Resolution 242, of 22 November 1967, which was unanimously adopted by the Security Council. For Egypt, Nasser himself was not directly involved, but his Foreign Minister, Mahmoud Riad, an experienced diplomat, was at the centre of the negotiations and the eventual compromise that looked very much in accord with the spirit of the previous Khartoum conference. The resolution made it clear that territory should not be acquired by force, and that in consequence the Israelis must withdraw. However Israel made it clear, and the United States repeated on her behalf, that she must have permanent and secure borders, and that she would not therefore retire to the pre-June 1967 frontiers. As a result the resolution spoke of her pulling back 'from territories occupied' without specifying exactly where the new borders would be drawn. The eventual borders were also to be safeguarded by demilitarised zones. It spoke too of the ending of a state of belligerency and 'acknowledgment of the sovereignty, territorial integrity and political independence' of *all* the states of the region. There was also to be free navigation of the waterways of the area, meaning of course the Suez Canal and the Gulf of Akaba. As for the Palestinians, whose numbers in the camps had now swelled substantially as a result of

the war, there was according to the resolution, to be 'a joint settlement of the refugee problem'.⁶ While Resolution 242 was deliberately vague, it did contain concessions on both sides since Israel was committed to some withdrawal and had recognised a 'refugee problem'. For their part, the Arabs were implicitly recognising the State of Israel and had been forced to accept a reference to withdrawal which stopped short of the old frontiers. That such agreement had proved possible was clearly largely the work of the superpowers, but it was also obvious that Resolution 242 was only a basis for further detailed negotiation. This task, UN Secretary General U Thant announced, would be conducted in the region itself by a Swedish diplomat, Gunnar Jarring.

Nasser was from the outset pessimistic about the prospects for the Jarring mission, though determined to be seen to try to cooperate. To Mahmoud Riad, Egypt's Foreign Minister, he remarked, 'We will cooperate with Jarring, although we already believe he will fail in his mission.' And the corollary of this view, however distant, was 'that we know from the start that we are the ones to liberate our land by the force of arms, the only language Israel understands'.⁷ Thus from Nasser's viewpoint arose a situation of 'no war, no peace' which was soon to translate itself more onto the military than the diplomatic front.

The war had ended with the Suez Canal on the front line between Egypt and Israel, and as Jarring tried unsuccessfully to negotiate the implementation of Resolution 242, so the major belligerents made the canal between them a running sore. This was partly a matter of the canal itself, for Israel had no wish to see Egypt reopen it until a peace agreement had been concluded; but it was also a determination on the part of Nasser to show that though Egypt's capacity to resist had been shattered, the will remained. Also Nasser had to ensure that he could survive, as there were still hopes in Israel that continued pinpricks, together with the new unrest in Egypt, would finally topple *al-raïs*. Egypt's capacity to put up any kind of a fight was due to the attitude of the Soviet Union. From a Soviet standpoint, Israel's victory in June 1967, and her ever more open military relationship with the United States, made the Soviet Union even more indispensable to Egypt; while a

stricken Egypt was desperate for Soviet supplies. As soon as the war had ended the Soviets acceded to Nasser's request to rearm Egypt, and by the end of 1968 the flow of arms had been so great that all the lost material had been replaced. At the same time some 3,000 Soviet military advisers were sent, far more than ever before. With the artillery newly strengthened, Egyptian forces on the canal were thus able to bombard their Israeli counterparts on the East Bank. The Israelis in turn hit back, especially by exploiting their air superiority, and on occasions struck at targets well inside Egypt as a reminder of the vulnerability of her close-packed population. Israel also shelled and destroyed the oil refineries at the city of Suez, as well as sending occasional commando raids against targets across the canal. Meanwhile, on their own side, they began the construction of the formidable Bar Lev line to prevent direct Egyptian incursions.

With the canal turned from a waterway into a low intensity battlefield, and with a lack of progress on the diplomatic front, Nasser decided to escalate the level of conflict while explicitly recognising the limited nature of what Egypt could swiftly hope to achieve. Two years after the June war, in July 1969, he proclaimed the 'War of Attrition'. From Nasser's point of view it was an expression of frustration with what he saw as the unwillingness of Israel to negotiate and withdraw, and a determination to prevent that reluctance turning the annexation of Egyptian territory into a *fait accompli*.

In addition to artillery attacks, the newly reconstructed Egyptian airforce also conducted a number of raids against Israeli-occupied Sinai. When Israel hit back with repeated air attacks on Egypt, Nasser again turned to the Soviet Union and made a second visit to Moscow in January 1970. While the Soviets were not keen to meet him on offensive weapons, he obtained an outstanding package of air defence. At its centre was a system of SAM-3 missiles, set back from the canal and manned by Soviet personnel, and which became known in Egypt as the 'Rocket Wall'. Squadrons of Mig-21 interceptor aircraft, manned by Soviet pilots, were also delivered. It was not wholly successful, but life was much more difficult for the Israelis, not only militarily with significant aircraft losses, but politically as they,

and particularly the Americans, were anxious to avoid confrontations with Soviet personnel. In all the War of Attrition cost Egypt about 2,000 lives, and many more wounded, and Israel too sustained losses that were increasingly† unpopular domestically, particularly since this was a conflict which Israel could not win. The War of Attrition was thus in a way a relatively successful approach for Egypt militarily since it played to her Soviet-backed strengths. However, the marked increase in the level of violence across the canal from July 1969, brought alarm not only to Israel, but, as was intended, to the United States as well.

America had been particularly pro-Israel under President Lyndon Johnson, including supplying Phantom aircraft, but with the coming of Nixon, and behind him Kissinger, a more diplomatic line was already evolving to which, in Egyptian eyes at least, the War of Attrition gave a new urgency. In fact Nasser had been seeking a new American involvement from the time of Nixon's election. He had reopened diplomatic relations with Britain in November 1967 partly, though unsuccessfully, for that end; and he continued to seek it in order to avoid being solely connected with the Soviet Union (a long-standing aim). In addition he saw America as the major route to try to bring Israel to negotiate, which by 1969 at least he was realising had to be done sooner rather than later if Arab territory was to be recovered.

In the American State Department, Secretary of State William Rogers and his Middle East assistant, Joseph Sisco, had already developed hopes of pursuing peace, though Rogers had been rebuffed by both Egypt and Israel in 1969. However, with the situation worsening in 1970, and Nasser hinting that he could be receptive to a further attempt, the Rogers Plan, as it became known, was put forward in June of that year. The plan called for a ninety-day cease-fire in the War of Attrition, a fresh recognition of Resolution 242, and agreement to work once more towards a peaceful settlement through Gunnar Jarring. Coming from the United States, Israel had little option but to go along with the Rogers plan in principle, though a number of hardliners resigned from the coalition. Nasser seemed surprised by the plan and initially cautious. The War of Attrition and its accompanying rhetoric had seemed like

escalation rather than peace, but there were various factors to consider. The Rogers Plan was very similar to Resolution 242 that Egypt had accepted; it signalled a change of heart on the part of the United States, as well as having already been viewed as acceptable by the Soviet Union. Within Egypt there were signs of an 'Egypt first' attitude in the more outspoken and critical period after the 1967 war, in addition to which the Rogers Plan brought the prospect of a return of Egyptian territory without war. Thus, to the surprise of many in the Arab world, Nasser did decide to accept the plan, while commenting that, 'This time there must be specific directives to Jarring, without which I expect his mission to fail.'⁸

Thus both the main belligerents, as well as Jordan, accepted the Rogers Plan, which was also endorsed by the Soviet Union. The plan was successful in that a cease-fire went into effect, and in fact the War of Attrition was never renewed. However, further steps towards progress with Jarring's resurrected mission proved difficult. Partly this was due to Israeli obstruction, for the success of 1967 had made Prime Minister Golda Meir in particular very intransigent, and she complained of Egyptian violations by new defence emplacements; but much more serious was the response of the Palestinians to the Rogers Plan and the intention to pursue Resolution 242.

The Palestinians had emerged as a major factor after the defeat of 1967 for a number of reasons. First, their numbers had swelled substantially, with some 400,000 having left the occupied West Bank and sought refuge mainly in Jordan, many in camps around the capital Amman. Second, they had become more militant, not only because of the frustrations they felt in their worsening conditions, but because it seemed that Nasser above all had deserted a radical pan-Arab position for the support of conservatives such as Saudi Arabia, and King Hussein of Jordan himself. The latter had been seen as brave in 1967 and his army had fought well, but it had been defeated decisively, had lost east Jerusalem and the West Bank, and in consequence there was considerable uncertainty within the country. Third, the failure of the Arab armies in 1967, coupled with the growing interest in various parts of the world in guerilla warfare which from Algeria to Vietnam seemed to offer

hope of confronting occupying forces, encouraged more radicalised Palestinians to organise anew. The old PLO was seen as having been largely rhetorical, and its old leader, Shukhary, who had produced more words than action, was overthrown in December 1967. However the PLO was not ended, not least because it had a certain recognition in the Arab world, and a younger, apparently more active leader, Yasser Arafat, took over. Arafat also knew Egypt well, having studied in Cairo and he had been part of a Palestinian commando unit that went to Port Said in the Suez crisis. Ideologically the Palestinians developed the idea not of accepting Israel, but seeking a secular Palestine in which Jewish, Muslim and Christian Palestinians could live together, purged of the evil of Zionism. Meanwhile within the Palestinian movement new factions emerged. Some were much more concerned with direct action than Arab political manoeuvres such as Fatah, and on the Marxist front the Popular Front of the Liberation of Palestine (PFLP), led by George Habash, who found a growing following. Israeli targets, especially in the occupied territories, naturally attracted attention, and there was a growing number of guerilla attacks of all kinds. But though these assaults constituted an irritant to Israel, they scarcely amounted to a serious threat, while Israel deliberately retaliated harshly following the attacks. However, Israeli targets were not the only ones. The West was seen as having established and nurtured Israel, and Western targets, especially airlines, proved attractive. In 1969 and 1970 there was a spate of spectacular airline hijackings of an increasingly audacious character. Israel responded dramatically by destroying the Middle East Airlines (MEA) fleet on the ground in Beirut. King Hussein's government in Jordan was also increasingly subject to criticism, not least because of the growing tension between the Palestinian refugees and the Bedouin security forces which underpinned it.

It was the War of Attrition on one front, and the growing violence surrounding the Palestinians on the other, which had convinced the American State Department that the lull after the storm of 1967 was about to break, and that there was once more imminent danger that the Middle East would be cast into war unless action was taken. But in the short term the proposal of the Rogers Plan

served to trigger rather than defuse the problem. The announcement that Egypt, followed by Jordan, accepted the plan unleashed the full wrath of the Palestinians. It began with vilification of Nasser and Hussein, and then came not only a renewed spate of hijackings but confrontation with the Jordanian army in September 1970. Black September, as it became known, was the month in which Hussein unleashed his Bedouin forces against the Palestinians with a ferocity that shocked the world, and stunned the Arabs. Conservatives and radicals there had long been, abuse was the common currency of Arab politics, but slaughter of Arab by Arab in that way was virtually unknown, and above all it was the slaughter of perhaps 3,000 Palestinians, the most suffering part of what had long seen itself as the suffering Arab nation. The humiliation of 1967 was made even sourer by this internecine strife: in the shock and confusion the Rogers Plan was at least temporarily forgotten.

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NASSER'S DEATH

The reconciliation of Jordan's belligerents inevitably fell to Nasser: for all his setback in 1967 and subsequent weakness, there was simply no other figure. His errors in precipitating the war, and his role in accepting the Rogers Plan, which had, taken together, contributed directly to the events of September 1970, were simply outweighed by the realisation that there was no other leader who could bring this fratricidal crisis to an end.

Nasser briefly considered going to Jordan himself, before realising that it would be easier for the two sides to talk on neutral territory, and he summoned them, and the Arab leaders, to an emergency summit in Cairo. From the outset it was clearly going to be the most difficult summit of all. Khartoum had been humiliating after Israel's crushing victory, but the bloody battle underway in Amman plumbed the depths of the Arab nation. It was epitomised when Hussein and Arafat arrived at the first session wearing pistols.

From the outset Nasser gave an outstanding performance both in public and in private. It was he who not only showed understanding of the positions of the Jordanian government and the Palestinians, but also an ability to

control the partisan feelings, mostly pro-PLO, of the radical Arab states. Few believed that any other Arab leader could have exerted such an influence on the summit and brought it to so successful a conclusion. The Jordanians and Palestinians were persuaded to agree to a cease-fire on 27 September, the possibility of alleged intervention by the United States and Syria on the respective sides was averted and even the remaining airline hostages were released.

The eleven hectic days had shown Nasser at his best in the maelstrom of international Arab politics, which, together with appeals to the Arab masses, was probably his most successful arena. The man who had begun a radical upheaval of those Arab states both by challenging imperialism and appealing to the masses to overturn the West's Arab collaborators, had successfully poured oil on the troubled waters of the most direct confrontation of Arab revolutionaries, in the form of the Palestinians and one of the most consistently pro-Western Arab monarchs, a remnant of the order imposed by imperialism in the wake of the First World War and the Arab revolt thereof.

But, despite his achievement, it was also an immense physical strain for Nasser. His health had been failing for some years, and an illness described in September 1970 as influenza had been in reality a heart attack. On 28 September, after seeing his last summit guest off from the airport, Nasser suffered another severe heart attack, and died that evening. The Arab world was stunned: it was as if Nasser had become a martyr to the turmoil at the centre of the Arab states, and the whole region came to a stop in mourning. On 1 October Nasser was buried near his home amidst scenes of mourning unprecedented in Egypt. Millions turned out in a display of totally unabashed emotion; his coffin was carried by ordinary Egyptians, above a sea of people over whom the authorities had no control, to his final resting place.

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Chapter 6

EGYPT AFTER NASSER

Nasser's death left Egypt and the whole Arab world stunned. His ill-health had been a closely guarded secret, and though in public as well as in private it was clear that the defeat in 1967 had been an enormous blow to him, his sudden death had been foreseen by few. It was not only the suddenness of his death but his sheer stature, in spite of his failures, that made it so difficult for Egyptians to believe in life after Nasser. True, in 1969 a new vice-president had been appointed, Anwar Sadat, but though one of the Free Officers, he had been only one of those surrounding Nasser, all of whom he had dwarfed. Sadat's sudden and unexpected promotion to the presidency was thus not so much an expected inheritance as a stopgap move.

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DOMESTIC POLITICS

It was far from clear what form Nasser's legacy would take. He had been such a dominant and personal ruler, and had left so little by way of viable political institutions that scarcely any serious thought had been given to presidential government as a system. A centralised executive presidency had not existed prior to Nasser, and it was uncertain that it would survive his departure; though it was not clear whether any alternative existed. There had been a group around Nasser, not only Sadat, but other heads of the military, the security, the ASU, as well as some senior ministers. Several seemed to have credentials as strong as Sadat's, and many believed there were figures more capable than him and likely to oust him sooner rather than later.

But Sadat, for all his past sycophancy towards Nasser,

had not failed to learn. He had seen the way Nasser had woven a web of power around himself and knew that he (Sadat) had not only to inherit the position at the centre but to exercise in his own right the power of the presidency that Nasser had built up. Within a year of taking over he was to be confronted by his challengers, and swiftly he saw them off. Ali Sabri, whom Sadat had had to make a vice president, hoped to resurrect the ASU and make a reality of its alleged leading role in the revolution. As the challenge built up Sadat moved swiftly to oust Ali Sabri in May 1971, and shortly afterwards dismissed the Minister of the Interior, Shaarawi Gumaa, another prominent old Nasserist. That move prompted a wave of resignations of senior figures designed to force Sadat's hand, but instead he accepted them, and then showed his determination to replace all of them with his own men. It had been a ruthless purge carried out with a determination and dexterity few had expected, and which Nasser would have admired, however grudgingly.

Once established in the presidency, Sadat's approach differed from that of Nasser. In contrast to his predecessor's simplicity and widely accepted style of authoritarian populism, Sadat developed the role of the patriarch, even coming to refer to the Egyptian people as 'my children'.¹ He had grown up as the son of a well-to-do peasant, a village patriarch, and it was an image he not only projected, but sought to cultivate, including occasional retreats to his (improved) family home. It served to emphasise a sense of Egyptian tradition, largely ignored by Nasser, but there was no attempt in that to identify with the rural poor as a class. Nasser had been exceptional amongst the many rulers of Egypt in the modesty of his lifestyle, whereas Sadat was something of a social climber. He had divorced his first wife from the village, rising socially with his marriage to Western-educated Jirhan; and he used his position as president to lead a new Egyptian 'high society'. True, the old ruling class of non-Egyptian origin had virtually gone, but under Sadat's overlordship a new rich élite of fat cats was to emerge whose company Sadat much enjoyed.² Indeed he became linked by the marriage of his daughters to two of the leading figures, Osman Ahmed Osman and Sayyid Marei. He lived well in a string of palaces, and enjoyed an

image not only as the leader of Egyptian society, but as one of an international jet-set entertaining prominent celebrities as well as leading world figures. At the same time, however, he also sought to present himself as a good Muslim, in a more positive, not to say publicity-seeking manner than his predecessor.

From his grandiose platform Sadat was wont to address his 'children' at increasing length as the years went by. Dressed in various outfits and sometimes toying with an avuncular pipe, he would fulfil with obvious relish his early but unsuccessful ambition to be an actor, filling a role that has been called 'presidential monarchy'.³ Egyptians enjoy a performance, and their own favourite actors can often look stylised and exaggerated, but Sadat's roles increasingly lost their effect. When Nasser was being serious, not to say earnest, he was always believable, and when he was in full rhetorical flow the yearning was recognisable and intoxicating. But Sadat's attempt to create his own style of leadership, equally prominent but of very different character, faded. He lacked the charismatic appeal of his predecessor and the 'presidential monarch' became ever more grotesque in his absurdities. He was dressed in Ruritanian attire for the annual military parade on 6 October 1981, when a small group of Muslim fundamentalist soldiers broke from the parade and assassinated him. But it was an event virtually unwitnessed by Egyptians (as was his funeral), which underlined the decline in the popular legitimacy that as president he had inherited from Nasser, and which success in the war of Yom Kippur in 1973 had for a few years developed on his own account.

Perhaps it was partly in response to the self-dramatisation of Sadat that when his own former vice-president, Husni Mubarak, took over immediately after the assassination he proceeded to adopt a colourless, not to say downright grey, style. His rather heavy, immobile, features and total lack of the political excitement or flamboyance of his respective predecessors led Egyptians to start referring to him satirically in bovine terms.

Lack of style, however, has not meant lack of power, and that was one of Nasser's great achievements. Both Sadat and Mubarak benefited directly from the effective creation of the executive presidency carried out by Nasser, and later

sustained by both of them. The manner in which Nasser had taken on the centralisation of power could be used in other ways and for other policies, without undermining the strength of the executive presidency itself. Once Sadat had used it to defeat his rivals following Nasser's death, he never relinquished it. It was still the president who decided the appointees and virtually all the high-level jobs in a country that remained dominated by the state. True, Sadat was less interventionist than Nasser and he had advisers – increasingly his rich cronies – but that did not diminish his own ultimate powers. Sadat ruled through an élite, but he was more than just its leader. He was always alert to prevent autonomous power centres, of the kind that had developed under Nasser, and he thus manoeuvred and manipulated individuals at senior levels. In this Sadat served to consolidate the powers of the executive president, and they have been maintained largely intact by Mubarak. A former foreign minister, Ismail Fahmy, once remarked, 'the way things work in Egypt, once a leader is in power, people continue to support him without much bickering or questioning'.⁴ Such a remark may seem based on the country's long history of a hierarchical society and deferential habits, but it was not always thus. There had been strong rulers before Nasser, such as Mohamed Ali, but formal independence in 1922 had also ushered in a long period of divided power that had contributed to bringing Egypt palpably to the verge of revolution, as with the violence of 'Black Saturday' in January 1952. It was Nasser who had centralised power in his own hands and by its exercise established a pattern of authoritarian executive presidential power which has survived virtually unchallenged as a system in Egypt ever since his death.

A further legacy that had been created by Nasser was the Arab Socialist Union (ASU) with whose existing leadership Sadat had so successfully done battle shortly after his accession to the presidency. But the ASU still existed and with the departure of Sabri and his 'centre of power' the way was open for it to be reformed. There was no longer to be even a pretence that the aim of the ASU was to be a vanguard party formulating a new future for Egypt. Instead it was to become one instrument of Sadat's new hegemony, and since this involved less direct intervention by the presi-

dent the opportunity was created for a slightly more open, umbrella kind of structure. To promote this, by 1976 different political platforms were encouraged within the framework of the ASU as the forerunner of an exercise in guided democracy. After various attempted formulations Sadat ended up as head of the government-sponsored National Democratic Party. It was very centrist in outlook and supported by officials, businessmen and those hoping to promote their careers by involvement in it. On the Left was the National Progressive Union Party, led by former Free Officer, Khalid Muhiddin, and on the Right the *Ahrar* (Liberal) Party.

Because they were so rapidly formed, none of the parties had very deep roots, and in the 1976 elections the power of the government machine, and use of patronage, ensured a comfortable victory for the National Democratic Party. Parliament was then essentially filled by representatives of various segments of the middle class whether formally in the government party or one of the smaller groups of the 'loyal opposition' parties. This step towards a more liberal parliament than Egypt had enjoyed under Nasser was reflected in more critical comment in debates. In addition to testing the new freedom, more open discussion was also due to the growing social and economic problems of the late 1970s, and fuelled by the increasingly controversial direction that Sadat was taking in foreign policy. The increasingly critical spirit abroad in the country in turn provoked a crackdown by Sadat. When the National Progressive Union Party on the Left threatened to exceed its 'licence' its freedom to operate was withdrawn and it was replaced by a more amenable Socialist Labour Party, one of whose leaders was a brother-in-law of Sadat. At the same time the New Wafd Party, which had taken over from *Ahrar* in 1978, was also purged. By the time of the 1979 elections, not only had the parties been purged but the government party and the state organs themselves used strong-arm tactics where necessary to ensure the return of an even more compliant parliament. Nevertheless in 1981 even the remaining party and parliamentary liberalism were curtailed by Sadat faced with mounting problems and responding with growing authoritarianism.

Mubarak was to prove less innovative than Sadat, but he

sought to stabilise the country institutionally around the controlled liberalisation of his predecessor. The government party continued to be in charge, though the opposition parties were permitted to reappear once more, and there was no attempt to increase significantly the degree of licence allowed to opposition, while not having to crack down as forcibly as Sadat had felt it necessary to do.

Above all, however, the limited development of participatory institutions involved very few opportunities for the grass-roots to have any significant input into government; nor were those upper-middle-class elements engaged in these areas of political life mounting any threat to the powers of the president. Under Mubarak, as under Sadat and Nasser, it was the president, not parliament, that appointed ministers, and neither he nor they were effectively accountable to it, or through it to the electorate. At the same time, though nominally the prime legislative body, the presidential powers of decree were such that even without the government party's dominance of parliament, the president could be sure of getting his own way.

The controlled party and parliamentary system of Sadat and Mubarak was an evolution from Nasser's period, but, as in his day both its power and representative capacity were very limited. Beyond it lay control of society through a combination of repression and accommodation. The state's capacity for surveillance, detention and coercion had not begun with Nasser, but it had expanded dramatically in his time. The security networks, directly accountable to him, had verged on becoming virtual 'power centres' in their own right, and Egyptian society had become repressed by a layer of fear made tolerable for many by belief in the revolution and especially the charismatic leadership of Nasser. Under Sadat the liberalisation measures lightened the atmosphere somewhat, but it was only a partial and licensed lifting, and by the late 1970s there was crackdown once more. As in other areas Mubarak's years have proved something of a consolidation of Sadat's. The opportunities for public expression have remained greater than they were under Nasser, but the structure of a police state is still intact and detention and torture remain largely routine, if not widely practised.

Coercion was generally for the purpose of containing

those areas of opposition that lay outside the controlled institutions, which meant essentially the Left and the Islamists. The Left had had an ambiguous relationship with Nasser, while never being permitted to mount an independent challenge. With Sadat's withdrawal from revolution and steady move towards a more liberal economy, it was not surprising that the Left remained carefully monitored and contained. The existence of a licensed leftist party, the National Progressive Unionist Party, and the retention of the corporatist structure embracing and largely emasculating the trade unions, reduced the possibility of any organised threat from this direction. Even so, the economic problems of the late 1970s and Sadat's move towards Israel combined to force him to repress even more, if not wholly destroy, the activities of the organised Left.

Among the great bulk of the population, however, the potentially most threatening movements were those based around Islam. The social change that had weakened traditional *sufi* sects in the first half of the century, had contributed much to the appeal of the Muslim Brotherhood. Nasser had had a direct and early clash with the Brotherhood, and thereafter had moved both to control Islamic organisations, whose formal leadership had generally been amenable to political authority in the past, and to introduce secularising social policies. The situation he bequeathed was always going to be more difficult. The rise of Nasserism was itself an alternative political ideology, but it waned after the defeat of 1967 and there was no secular replacement. At the same time the social change on which the Muslim Brotherhood had fed, especially urbanisation and the swelling lower-middle classes, continued to grow. Sadat had had links with the Brotherhood himself in his Free Officer days, and with his shift to emphasise traditional life, coupled with controlled political liberalisation, he was inclined to seek to incorporate the Brotherhood and other emerging Islamic groupings, and some leaders ended up in parliament. However, this strategy was undermined not only by the growing hostility to Sadat's domestic and foreign policies, but also by the changing international context which saw the growing importance of Islamic sentiment in the Middle East generally. This included not only the Iranian revolution, but the growing importance of

Saudi Arabia and other wealthy Islamic states keen to influence developments in the most populous, and still potentially the most powerful country, of the region. As this sentiment fed back into Egyptian society it provoked clashes and then the inevitable crackdown. In the end it was one small Islamic group within the army that carried out the assassination of Sadat in 1981.

Under Mubarak the situation eased. The assassination of Sadat did not prove a trigger for a wider Islamic uprising, but the basic social tensions rumbled on and with them the continuing appeal of Islamic ideology. The state has continued to contain excesses with force, while going out of its way to avoid the kind of public offence which might encourage it. Thus the élite does not flaunt its opulence and Western-style of life as conspicuously as under Sadat: while in many small and politically insignificant changes, such as stopping the official consumption of alcohol, there are concessions made.

The picture of partial liberalisation of politics, begun by Sadat and sustained by Mubarak, also heralded a new version of the relations between Egypt's rulers and the population at large. Nasser had seen himself as throwing out the old alien rulers and heading a state-led revolution from above freeing the ordinary people. It was this that his own increasingly charismatic leadership, the growing state bureaucracy, and the single political movement, were all intended to achieve. The natural tendency, at least until the shock of 1967, was to become even more authoritarian and less liberal, rather than the reverse. Sadat was inheriting not only the machinery of authoritarianism, but a society that was after 1967 becoming tired and disillusioned with regard to the revolutionary aspirations of Nasserism, and in which the intended instruments in the state itself were, as usual in such a context, increasingly aware of having forged their own vested interests. The old alien upper class might largely have gone, but the expanding state-based middle classes had their own positions to protect and develop. At the same time, though the private sector had been increasingly subordinated in the 1960s by Nasser's economic policies, it had by no means been obliterated, and the clear shortcomings of these policies were to encourage Sadat's move to economic liberalisation.

Controlled liberalisation was the kind of policy with which this middle class was generally happy. The existence of the parties essentially allowed a range of middle-class or bourgeois views to be expressed, essentially centrist in tone and pro-government, but with leftist and rightist tinges as well. This was not just sycophancy, for on the whole Sadat's aims were their aims: stability at home, a more open economy in which they could prosper, and a peaceful international environment, more or less however that could be achieved. If by having 'licensed' parties real power stayed firmly in the hands of government, that too was generally acceptable to Sadat's new supporters.

As for the masses they were largely excluded from active participation – but then they always had been. Nasser's revolution may have been 'for them', but it was not 'of them'. Thus their apparent exclusion was not a major change, and did not mean that Egypt's leaders could afford to forget them. For some, such as industrial workers, there were unions and though 'corporatised' they did provide a voice; while in towns and villages there were local networks and public places such as mosques, where the voice of the common man could make itself heard. There was too a restlessness when things got sufficiently bad, especially on the economic front. Worsening economic conditions had contributed to the nationalist uprising after the First World War, as well as to the growing unrest from the 1930s down to the Free Officers' coup. Sadat was to be sharply reminded by the disturbances he encountered in 1977, as the country was faced by steep IMF-backed price rises from which he had to retreat. The expectations of the vast majority of Egyptians were relatively modest, and few continued to retain the hopes for substantially improved economic well-being that Nasser had once encouraged, but that did not mean that there were not limits. Egypt's growing multitudes, up from some 30 million when Nasser took power to 55 million in 1990, needed to be fed and watered – and no Egyptian ruler could ever afford to forget it. Indeed, the growing difficulty of even achieving that, and thus maintaining a reasonable prospect of continued political stability, became an ever-increasing headache. It required continued attention, not only to the domestic economy, but to foreign policy, especially with regard to

the Nile waters and the sources of grain that had to be imported to make up the shortfall in domestic food production.

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ECONOMIC LEGACY

On the economic front it was perhaps clearest of all that something had to be done to tackle the problems inherited from Nasser, and that had become even more apparent from 1967. The difficulties with Nasser's statist brand of socialism had made themselves clear in the last three years of his life, and the war had heightened awareness of them, as well as creating new problems. The Suez Canal was closed and the important revenues from it were thereby lost. The canal cities, including Port Said and Ismailia, were evacuated, since the waterway was now the front line between two armies. And as most of Egypt's oilfields were in Sinai, the wells were now in Israeli hands. True there were subsidies from the oil-rich Arabs to help ease the situation, but these also had the effect of inhibiting Egypt's freedom of action, while doing little to provide a long-term basis for Egypt's development. (Cynics even believed that some Arab states did not wish to see Egypt so strong again in the Middle East as she had been before 1967 and thus sought only to drip-feed her.)

Sadat became most noted for *infitah*, the open-door economic policy that sought to encourage a free enterprise economy in Egypt. In view of the problems after 1967 it is quite possible that Nasser would have had to pursue a more open economy; and as has been seen there was something of a rebirth of Egyptian enterprise in the late 1970s, due partly to the sequestration of foreign businesses following the Suez war and the subsequent redistribution of some of them to Egyptian entrepreneurs. But it is hard to imagine that Nasser would have shifted policy so markedly towards the private sector, or let it rip in the way that Sadat did.

It was sectors of the economy not associated with Nasser's outlook that benefited most. He had sought agricultural redistribution coupled with the introduction of heavy industry, but neither of these were helped much by Sadat's *infitah* policies. It was light industry rather than

heavy that was attracted from abroad and aimed primarily at Egyptian markets, sometimes in competition with existing indigenous producers. It proved as difficult as it had in Nasser's time for goods manufactured in Egypt to compete successfully in international markets. Thus by the time profits had been repatriated it was hard to see much basic contribution to the Egyptian economy from such investment. Another controversial area that expanded rapidly under Sadat was tourism. It did bring in foreign exchange, but there were also high costs. The many large new hotels involved heavy state expenditure since they were mainly state-funded and owned, though run in conjunction with the well-known major international chains. But while earning much-needed foreign exchange there were also considerable costs incurred in importing the luxury items to equip and maintain the kind of services the international tourists expected. Hotels were but a part of a construction boom, much of which was aimed at the higher-income earners. New suburbs for the middle classes mushroomed faster than low-cost housing for the masses, and a network of new roads and flyovers was constructed to try and keep the growing numbers of private cars moving, especially in Cairo's crowded environs. As often with construction booms it provided opportunities to get rich quickly for those Egyptians fortunate enough to be involved.

Another dimension to the *infatih* policy was an attempt to make Egypt the go-between in the development of the oil-rich Arab states, especially after the oil price rises of the 1970s. The Lebanese civil war ended that role for Beirut, and Sadat sought to make Cairo a substitute. Foreign banks were encouraged to make Egypt an alternative centre of their Middle East operations, even though that required a relaxation of currency regulations that made it easier for both foreign financiers and local businessmen to export profits and capital. Beirut's role as a Middle East playground was also copied, with oil-rich Arabs being catered for by a string of new night clubs and the like, especially along the road to the pyramids. At the same time as rich Arabs were being encouraged to come to Egypt, hundreds of thousands of Egyptians, skilled and unskilled, were seeking work in the oil-rich Arab lands. This migration both eased the pressure on jobs at home and provided a gener-

ally compliant labour force for Egypt's Arab neighbours; while the workers themselves could remit significant amounts of money home to the benefit not only of their families, but the foreign exchange balance of the country as a whole (though a lot of remittances were spent on importing 'luxury' items).

The consequences of Sadat's *infitah* policy for society were broadly the reverse of Nasser's intentions. He had sought to narrow the gap between rich and poor by a measure of redistribution, with heavy taxation of the rich, land redistribution and better services for the lower-income groups. In contrast, during Sadat's years in power, *infitah* involved the enrichment by fair means and foul of the middle classes, and the emergence of a ritzy group of fat cats. At the same time as the new Egyptian élite flaunted their wealth, oilrich Arabs from the Gulf also besported themselves in Cairo, especially after the start of the Lebanese civil war of 1976 which deprived them of their playground in Beirut. This combination of blatant Egyptian and Gulf Arab oil induced a growing sense of resentment and criticism amongst ordinary Egyptians. There was growing support for Islamic fundamentalism, partly in response to the new atmosphere of laxity and indulgence, and in 1977 rioters attacked and burned night clubs and the haunts of the rich.

It was not just the conspicuous consumption of the few that stimulated unrest, there was the tightening of circumstances for the ever-growing mass of the population. The *infitah* policy did not deliberately set out to squeeze them, in fact the reverse, but it came to have that effect. Sadat might have tried to generate capital by a real squeeze on the people, especially drastic reduction in Egypt's vast inefficient bureaucratic state institutions, but they were largely left alone – and continued to grow as the flow of new private economic activity was largely financed by borrowing abroad (at a time when there was much hot money in the international system), and by the late 1970s the cost of the debts was beginning to pinch. Forced to turn to the International Monetary Fund for help late in 1976, the customary conditions, including cuts on subsidies on basic foodstuffs, duly produced the widespread Bread Riots of January 1977, forcing a rapid government climbdown.

Sharp rises were therefore avoided, but with continuing inflation and generally low incomes, life remained difficult for most people. The failure of *infitah* to dynamise the creaking Egyptian economy, and the outburst of popular discontent in 1977 both contributed to the reversion to a more authoritarian style that Sadat showed in his last years. The attempt to institute a controlled degree of political liberalisation was effectively defeated by the failure of *infitah* to produce the trickle-down effect so often proclaimed as the justification for measures of economic liberalisation, but the policies of which have so often, as in Egypt's case, the reverse effect as far as the poorer sectors of society are concerned.

Warned by Sadat's experiences Mubarak followed generally cautious lines. Just as he had little zeal for political reform or experimentation so in economic policies he did little more than steady the excesses of *infitah*. There was no attempt when he came to power to grasp the nettle of restructuring the Egyptian economy, either to promote *infitah* further or to try to return to more socialist or Nasserite policies. The celebration of wealth with which Sadat had become associated in the public mind was replaced by a more sober style, but it remained a comfortable and unthreatening atmosphere for those who had enriched themselves under Sadat. Meanwhile for many millions of Egypt's fast-growing population real living standards advanced little, and overall there was a small but steady per capita fall in incomes. Mubarak's approach may have been 'steady as she goes', but the ship of state was, economically, heading for the rocks. Agricultural earnings from exports such as cotton were hindered by low world raw material prices; while Egypt's heavy industries were still largely those of Nasser's day, old-fashioned, inefficient and overmanned, and thus unable to make inroads into world markets. With her growing population and consequent dependence on foreign aid, especially from the United States, Egypt's economy came ever more under the influence of bodies such as the IMF and the World Bank, but to relatively little avail. The cutting and structural adjustment with which such bodies were associated involved a potential political cost that would threaten the stability of the most populous country in the Middle East, and one which was a staunch

ally of the West. In this respect Nasser's revolution had been brought to a political full circle. In trying to make Egypt economically free, largely to achieve political independence, he had set in chain measures which had themselves been modified by his successors in ways that by the end of the 1980s left Egypt more not less dependent on the West, and thus politically tied rather than freed.

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INTERNATIONAL POLITICS

In foreign policy Sadat was in a very different position to Nasser. He was stepping into the immediate rancour and bitterness in the Arab world following the shock of Jordan's 'Black September' in 1970. From the standpoint of other Arab leaders, Sadat's record included much of the responsibility for the Yemen imbroglio, while initially they wondered if he would survive long as Egypt's president. Above all the Arab states were still preoccupied with the consequences of the 1967 war, and looked to Sadat to see how he proposed to steer Egypt with regard to the Rogers Plan and the suspended 'War of Attrition'.

Sadat appeared to be without the perceptions and preoccupations of his predecessor. It seemed his disposition as much as his calculation which led him to think primarily in terms of Egypt's interests, and never to seek the mantle of pan-Arab identity as Nasser had done. In later years it was to become ever more pronounced that he was an 'Egypt first' president, but it was implicit from the outset. With regard to the superpowers he was similarly lacking in predilections. He certainly had no ideological leanings towards the Eastern Bloc, while his somewhat flamboyant and increasingly posturing personality made for rapport with the more open West, especially the United States.

Initially, however, Sadat found himself inheriting the relationship with the Soviet Union. He was to find Egypt's reliance on the Soviets, and the slightly patronising approach that accompanied it, somewhat constraining and limiting on his freedom of action. At the same time the massive package of Soviet military aid after 1967, while apparently increasing Egypt's dependence, was in fact reaching a level at which Sadat could plan secretly to cut free of his eastern patrons. The provision of greatly improved

Egyptian defences was accompanied by the acquisition of other equipment which seemed less militaristic, such as bridging material, which was later to prove of great use in war. By 1972 Sadat's frustration with what he felt to be the restrictive presence of the Soviet Union led him to surprise them, and the rest of the world, by suddenly announcing the dismissal of the thousands of Soviet experts and advisers of all kinds from the Soviet Union. It was seen at the time as a measure designed partly to court popularity with the war-weary Egyptian people, who had no great liking for their Soviet guests (or new occupiers). At the same time there was something slightly unbelievable about the move. Sadat had declared 1972 'the year of decision' with regard to Israel, and nothing had happened, leading to growing lampooning of the new president: perhaps throwing out the Soviet Union was a matter of being seen to do something in view of the promises of change so vigorously voiced? Sadat himself was to refer to it as an 'electric shock', a phrase he was fond of using, and a tactic of surprising both friends and enemies alike that was to be one of his hallmarks. What was less clear was how far Sadat planned the stages to follow his administering of such shocks, and how far he put tactics before strategy, inventing the latter from the outcome of the former.

By the end of 1972 Sadat's break with the Soviet Union looked less like a step towards fulfilment of the 'year of decision' than a rather desperate short-term step by a man who felt that he had to do something. In fact, though, plans were afoot to launch an attack on Israel. The War of Attrition may have diminished, but from Egypt's point of view the overall situation remained intolerable. She had lost the use of the Suez Canal, together with its cities and revenues, and the oil fields in Sinai; moreover, a huge chunk of her territory remained under occupation. In addition to this, in spite of the hopes of the Rogers Plan, the Israeli government of Golda Meir seemed intransigent to the point of arrogance. Sadat was helped not only by the Soviet arms, but the improvement in the Egyptian armed forces following the débâcle of 1967. With Amer and his coterie gone, and with the Soviets having intensified training to avoid a repetition of the embarrassment at their client's performance in the June war, the Egyptian army

had become far more efficient in the intervening six years as it planned for war. Although the attack in Yom Kippur, October 1973, came as an almost total surprise to the Israelis and to the world, it was in many ways a continuation of both the War of Attrition and Sadat's claims of the previous year. The fortunate point, from Egypt's point of view, was that few had taken such claims seriously, and it thus came as a great shock when the Egyptian forces suddenly launched a blitzkrieg across the Suez Canal, overwhelming the formidable Bar Lev line.

The attack had been coordinated with a Syrian advance to retake the Golan Heights. Jordan, Saudi Arabia, Morocco, Algeria and Sudan joined in as well. Israel, with enormous US assistance, recovered from the initial shock and setbacks, but the outcome of the short war was a moral victory for the Arabs. Sadat had established himself as a man to be reckoned with. Even though he did not receive the personal adulation of the Arab world in the way accorded to his predecessor, he did have widescale acknowledgement, and it was to prove the high point of his presidency. For a while the Egyptians rhythmically chanted the two syllables of Sadat's name as they had once done Nasser's.

The Arab recognition of Egypt's achievement in 1973 might make Sadat's later move towards American-mediated peace with Israel all the more surprising, but as with the October war itself Sadat saw it more as a continuation of Nasser's policy. The War of Attrition had been the prelude to the crossing of the canal: the peace with Israel was the conclusion of the thinking that had led Nasser to accept the Rogers Plan. America had then shown once more her willingness to give massive military aid to ensure the survival of Israel; while the continuation of 'no war no peace' throughout another decade would worsen the great strains on the Egyptian economy, while perpetuating in Sadat's eyes the willingness of the Arabs 'to fight to the last Egyptian'. But after the 1973 war Egypt in particular had shown her fighting capacity and she could thus be brought into a negotiating process with honour. Nevertheless it came as a further great 'electric shock' – as Sadat once more intended it should – when he went to Israel to meet premier Begin in 1977 and subsequently negotiated under the

auspices of American president Jimmy Carter at Camp David. Putting Egypt first did bring real rewards, including the return of most of Sinai, and the placing of Egypt as second only to Israel as a recipient of American aid worldwide – something very important for his fast growing and hungry population. The shock in the Arab world brought Egypt's expulsion from the Arab camp, including the Arab League, which moved headquarters from Cairo to Tunis: gestures which Sadat greeted with scorn and contempt as he delighted in the flattery of the West.

His successor, Mubarak, was to be more pragmatic. He could not afford to denounce the peace with Israel, but he had a more low-key approach to it. Egypt's increasingly pressing social and economic problems, together with her reliance in containing them on aid from the West, made any return to a posture of hostility appear as political suicide to this new, quieter, more cautious president. At the same time, as a former military man himself, he was aware of the problems any pretence at renewed hostilities would mean for his forces, who would be unlikely ever again to catch Israel in such an offguard position as at the time of Yom Kippur in 1973. But as Israeli politics drifted towards the Right in the 1980s and exploited peace with Egypt to show marked aggression towards Iraq in 1981, and then with great barbarity a year later in Lebanon, the strain it placed on Egyptian–Israeli relations proved close to breaking point. Later in the decade it was possible for Mubarak to attempt to use his connections with Israel and the United States to encourage the latter to put pressure on the former to take seriously the search for a solution to the Palestinian problem; though growing Israeli intransigence prevented it even in the face of the *intifada*, the Palestinian uprising of 1988.

For much of the decade, however, even the enormity of Egypt's peace with Israel was partly offset in Arab eyes by the urgency of the long and bloody Iran–Iraq war. In this Mubarak was firmly on the side of Iraq, as were the large majority of Arab states. Egypt gave help both in men and materials, and in so doing did much to rehabilitate herself in Arab eyes, as was indicated in 1990 by the return of the Arab League headquarters to Cairo. But rehabilitation did not mean a return to leadership of the Arab world. It was

clear to all that Egypt remained a central and most important country in the Arab world, but Mubarak was no Nasser, and nor was the Arab world as open to the leadership of one country. There were other more self-publicising figures than Mubarak: Qaddafi in Libya had been trying for years, and there was the more sinister and significant figure of Saddam Hussein in Iraq. However, there were other people and the power centres seeking to limit any attempt at hegemony of the kind Nasser had spectacularly pursued. The huge oil wealth and reserves of the Gulf states ensured the continuing significance of Saudi Arabia; while in the Mahgreb an uneasy conservatism held sway. Even in formerly revolutionary Algeria, Nasser's Arab nationalism had helped drive out the old imperialism, but the Arab world he left was as intricately connected with the West and in some ways more, rather than less dependent. It remained the most delicate and potentially volatile area of the world, and threats to its fragile order offered unforeseeable consequences, rather than simply a vision of a brave new world of free Arab nationalism of the kind Nasser had so seductively held out.

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NOTES AND REFERENCES

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CONCLUSION

A brief review of Egypt after Nasser provides the context for offering an assessment of his own achievement and contribution. In particular, was he the revolutionary he set out to be both at home in Egypt and in the Arab world, let alone a contributor to the broader Third World non-aligned movement? Part of the answer has to be not only with what he achieved, but what he set out to achieve. The charge that Nasser was one who reacted rather than having a clear vision of his objectives can be levelled not only at his deeds, but at his aims. Nasser was generally clearer about what he wanted to overthrow than what he wanted to construct, and it was largely as the targets of his hostility fell that alternative policies took shape. Nasser was a man of some self-education, but he was not an intellectual who had thought through his revolution. That, as much as any failure of achievement in what he did intend, makes the outcome of the seizure of power in July 1952 more than a coup but less than a revolution.

In large measure the time was ripe for a revolution in Egypt in 1952, and Nasser had grown up well attuned to the unrest around him. The decaying traditional monarchy is one of the archetypal conditions for a revolution. Being hierarchical there is a clear summit to be deposed by, or in the name of, the oppressed subjects. In Egypt's crisis that pinnacle was filled by an increasingly gross, prematurely aged and unpopular man, King Farouk. At the same time, his throne rested on a tripartite system, the other two supports of which were similarly discredited: the continuing British political influence and military presence; and the corrupt parliamentary system representing largely major

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landowners and other vested interests.

But a revolution is about construction more than destruction, and it was here that Nasser's contribution was both significantly more than a coup, but also considerably less than a revolution. On the positive side, Nasser instinctively felt the need for a reduction in the manifest economic inequality of Egypt, both by removing the old landed class descended from Mohamed Ali's days, and endeavouring to improve the lot of the peasantry. In reality this was to mean taking land from the wealthy landlords, but the redistribution affected only a minority of peasants, most of whom, with a fast rising population, saw little betterment in their economic well-being. The other side to their betterment was to be a state-led improvement in social services, which was undertaken with some advances in health and education, but which with limited resources could not hope to solve the enormous problems of poverty in Egypt's overcrowded cities and countryside.

The instrument of change was essentially the state. From a limited capacity, created essentially to improve production and security in the interests of the ruling dynasty and foreign economic interests, a new range of responsibilities was to be undertaken not only in the social sphere, but also in the economy. At the centre of this development was the building of the High Dam at Aswan, which transformed water provision and therefore agriculture (not without some detrimental effects) as well as providing hydro-electricity for industry. It has been said that it was only with the period of aggressive nationalisation in the 1960s that full Nasserite socialism was implemented, but the commitment to the dam in Nasser's early years indicates how quickly he saw a major involvement by the state in the economic transformation of Egypt. Possibly at that stage he was envisaging only some kind of Western-style mixed economy, but it was clearly a piece of state investment and control from his early days. Likewise the decision to take the Suez Canal after the withdrawal of the Western offer to fund the dam was a piece of economic nationalism of a similar, and in the end related, character. The socialism of the 1960s was certainly a change in the degree of state control, but the earlier action presaged its possibility in the event, as Nasser judged, that the private sector failed the country. Typically

of Nasser, his socialism was not the implementation of a foreign model, so much as the successive extension of the state's involvement in the economic life of the country, largely on the simple and intuitive basis that the past had failed it. It was a naive rationalisation that with modern economic planning, and state direction and increased control, the economy would grow and the newly generated wealth would be put to the use of the people as a whole.

It was not a very ideological programme, and thus was criticised on that ground alone by both communists and Ba'athists, but it was a failure in other ways too. Amongst its shortcomings was a failure to appreciate the problems of putting so much of the responsibility for the economy into the hands of the Egyptian civil servants and parastatal employees. Perhaps Nasser's lack of imagination was not surprising. He was, after all, still a young man when he came to power and his career in the army had sheltered him from both the worlds of bureaucracy and business. When the former largely subsumed or controlled the latter there was a recipe for inertia and corruption. The bureaucracy had long been hierarchical and stifling, and now that it had vastly more to do it grew in size and complexity to the detriment of efficiency and production. Any thought that an injection of soldiers at the top would have a galvanising influence was also naive, it was the soldiers who were bent to the labyrinthine ways of the officials rather than the reverse, even if the soldiers themselves had been dynamic figures.

It was hard to be centralising and hierarchical in the construction of socialism and yet to see the process as a participatory revolution. In any case the growth of the state in size and role was effectively to far outweigh the successive attempts at a single party as an instrument of popular mobilisation and participation. The Arab Socialist Union tried hardest in this regard, but though it did formally reach down to the grass-roots, it was in practice as a largely token presence – generally only a subsidiary role for local officials and village headmen. The involvement of the people was in idolising and revering *al-raïs*, not in encouraging spontaneous initiatives aimed at transforming society from below. Even had such an achievement been possible, it would have seemed out of character with the customary

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grumbling acceptance by the Egyptian peasants of their leader; and in any case mass participation and decision-making was not what Nasser intended. He saw himself as the embodiment of the peoples' wishes and ambitions, a kind of Rousseauian adolescent romanticism, which he never entirely grew out of.

Far from being a socialism of participation, another aspect of its demobilising character was Nasser's reliance on security and coercion, especially through the encouragement of a climate of fear. In a largely homogeneous society, mainly huddled together along the river, privacy was the exception rather than the rule, and with the new state-sponsored observation, together with detention, torture and even death, there was an increasingly reluctant acceptance of this dark side of Nasser's regime. But though he has to be held directly responsible, it was notable how little it appeared to detract from his own reputation, almost as if it was the inevitable price of having a leader, a characteristic of the political system which went virtually unchecked. In international politics too there was a similar process of learning. Arab nationalism did not come automatically to Nasser, nor yet to Egypt, but having espoused it he led his country into it with a degree of enthusiasm on the latter's part. Just as 'socialism' for Nasser was a rather simple response to manifest inequality, so too was Arab nationalism. Indeed the latter was something of a dimension of the former. Altering the character of Egypt's economic 'dependence' involved tackling the foreign domination, not least of the Suez Canal itself. And while undertaken with Egypt and the High Dam in mind, it was the success of 1956 which precipitated Nasser to the forefront of Arab nationalism throughout the Middle East.

While there were undercurrents of romantic Arab nationalism in Nasser, it was the sense of his instinctive search for a more just political order that took him into the political maelstrom of international politics in the region. Here lay three inter-connected themes that he had pursued in a somewhat stumbling and opportunistic way. His evolving tactics, derived from Suez, of assertion and reaction, often with an apparent strategic follow up, were to start with success but end largely in failure.

The three dimensions he had to master were those of

relations between the Arab states, largely carved out arbitrarily at the end of the First World War; the presence in their midst of an alien implant, Israel, against whose creation they had fought unsuccessfully; and superpowers that were concerned primarily with each other, but in a context in which the proximity of the Middle East to the Soviet Union, combined with the significance of its oil exports to the West, ensured that it would be one of the most crucial areas of the post-Second World War international scene.

From Nasser's viewpoint the common theme of all three was that none of them was indigenous to the area. The state structure, the Jewish state, and superpower rivalry were all impositions of others, and all as they had operated before his time had served to weaken the Arabs. In contrast, collective assertion could correct the situation; this required a leading role from the major state in the region, Egypt, and so from Nasser himself.

Here, too, he was to make a substantial change in the order of affairs, though without bringing about the Arab nationalist revolution. With regard to the Arab states he encouraged the overthrow of the 'traditional' monarchies bequeathed by the First World War with their intimate ties with, and dependence on, the West. Egypt herself had led the way with Nasser's coup, removing the monarchy to which Britain had granted formal rather than real independence in 1922. Nasser's vitriolic attacks were to contribute to similar downfalls in Iraq in 1958, Yemen in 1962 and Libya in 1969, as well as causing others, most notably King Hussein in Jordan, a fair degree of apprehension. Yet inevitably where the policy failed it opened a gulf with those endangered, and tested the degree of Nasser's commitment to the limit. Yemen was to be the epitome of this, not only embroiling Nasser in a civil war which was to damage both his reputation and that of his army, but also leading to open rivalry with Saudi Arabia, determined to prevent Nasserism from establishing a foothold in the Arabian peninsula. The greatest triumph on the pan-Arab front was reserved for the union with Syria, but that also turned out to be one of the greatest disasters. It has been said that the union was more than Nasser wanted, and that he approached it with some trepidation. Yet that did not lead to a looser political style to accommodate Syria and its very

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different political character: Nasser, never a real politician until he became the leader, knew only one way to govern – he would lead and others would follow. While that functioned in the context of hierarchical and homogeneous Egypt, it did not work elsewhere. Similarly, in Arab inter-state politics Nasser could seek to lead, and he could threaten, cajole and mediate, but he could never be the unchallenged leader capable of controlling by authority and coercion in the way he was accustomed to do at home.

Israel was the thorn in the side of the Arabs and therefore, given his pan-Arab posture, Nasser's. But here too the early international success at Suez encouraged delusions. The Suez experience not only lifted Nasser, it made Israel all the more wary of the new colossus with the pan-Arab ambitions displayed thereafter. Nasser could not do other than remain at the forefront of the challenge to Israel, while never really intending to risk further war. In the end it was a posture that was to serve him and Egypt badly. It played into the hands of hawks in Israel, who could point to Nasser's apparent belligerence and encourage both their own defence spending and American support for it. In the end too, by suicidal brinkmanship in 1967, Nasser allowed himself to be trapped into advancing to a point of no return at which Israel could spring and inflict a crushing and humiliating defeat. Far from satisfying Israel, it led to an arrogant entrenchment in the Occupied Territories as well as the annexation of East Jerusalem. It was to force Nasser in the end into first the 'War of Attrition', and then the Rogers Plan – nothing less than the public pursuit of an attempt at peace with Israel. Recovering from her frustrated adventurism of 1956 it was Israel, rather than Nasser, who set the pace of the protracted conflict in the Middle East for the rest of his life.

The superpowers were a third problem. The downfall of Farouk had been the beginning of the end for Britain, confirmed by Eden's absurd posturing over Suez. But America largely saw itself as replacing Britain and ensuring new arrangements to check communism through the Eisenhower Doctrine. Whatever Nasser's initial hopes of doing business with the West might formerly have been, once he had been elevated by his success at Suez (in no small part

due to Eisenhower's stance), his pursuit of pan-Arabism and hope of Arab unity effectively neutralising the Middle East ensured American suspicion. The position was worsened by the Soviet involvement, first in selling arms to Nasser and then financing the High Dam, although a different initial attitude to Egypt by the United States would have avoided the whole situation. But having once made the mistake and seen Nasser embrace the Soviet Union, the United States was not about to raise its hands in guilt, but rather to seek to curtail Nasser and 'support its allies', not only by arming Israel, but even sending the marines into Lebanon in 1958. It was the American military support that was so crucial for Israel's performance in the 1967 war, and many Americans felt it a form of revenge on Nasser for having espoused their enemy's cause in the Middle East. In subsequently pursuing peace through the Rogers Plan, America was seeking to exploit Egypt's manifest weakness, and in appearing to be ready to pursue it Nasser was seen by many in the Arab world as confirming that diagnosis.

Relations with the Soviet Union, though welcome, were never easy. The main Soviet thrust via the 'Czech' arms deal was to break out of the encirclement being pursued through the Baghdad Pact. Nasser, while welcoming both the arms and the High Dam, was not about to embrace Marxism, and this was to be for a while a sore in his relationship with Khrushchev, especially when it seemed at one time that the greater success of communists in Iraq was leading to the favouring of that country over Egypt. Nasser's relationship with the Soviet Union was important once more in the rearmament after the 1967 war, but there was never really a meeting of minds, any more than there was with the Americans. Nasser was above all in international politics an Arab nationalist, and that was something which neither superpower could properly comprehend, and certainly not appreciate in the greater quest of their mutual rivalry and attempts to outmanoeuvre each other in the Middle East as a whole. But their might was far greater than Nasser's and their antagonism too great to ever let the leader of Egypt manoeuvre to play one against the other to the fulfilment of dreams of Arab unity. Their rivalry might have led both to stand with him over Suez, but thereafter they were always to be on opposite and

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competing sides to the detriment of pan-Arabism.

In all the major areas in which he was engaged Nasser's own vision and endeavours made a significant and lasting impact. In this sense Nasser was more than a reformer; but while he left a very different Egypt and Middle East to that in which he had taken power, he did not bequeath an unalterable legacy. As the previous chapter indicated, there were many areas in which Sadat was subsequently to reverse aspects of Nasser's work, such as encouraging private business and making a peace with Israel which split the Arab world, while later Mubarak was to seek to stabilise a policy somewhere between that of his two predecessors. Yet all the time the position of the masses had scarcely been revolutionised. In the countryside the big landowners had been removed never to return; but it has been argued that the major beneficiaries were the larger peasants, sometimes known as the rural middle class, rather than the millions of small-scale peasants for whom life was little changed. Neither politically nor economically was the Egyptian countryside experiencing a revolution. There was certainly change, from rising population on the one hand to a growing impact of urbanisation and industrialisation on the other. But it did not constitute a revolution.

In the Arab world as a whole Nasser left a sense of a great era punctuated by both success and failure. Inevitably, for all the grief expressed over the loss of Nasser personally, it also left a certain disillusionment and a determination to pursue other ways. The perceived success of the 1973 war was followed by the use of OPEC and oil price rises to exact a new toll on the West for its support of Israel. It contributed much to a difficult decade for the world economy, especially with regard to inflation, but the oil-producing countries were at the same time locked into the international economy and needed it to function, albeit on different terms. Egypt, which had lost much of its own limited oil production capacity with Israel's occupation of Sinai in 1967, was only a minor voice in a situation in which Saudi Arabia, the country with the largest role, saw the continued growth of her importance in Arab circles, a process which had been underway since the Six-Day War of 1967. At the end of the decade the dramatic events of the Iranian revolution were to contribute to a sharp

move away from the days of Nasserism, both as a feature of international and domestic politics in the Middle East. Internationally the Iran–Iraq war which followed swiftly on the heels of the revolution was to split the Arab states asunder with the longstanding Syrian–Iraq bad feeling resulting in the former supporting Iran, while most of the rest of the Arab world, particularly the Gulf states and Egypt, backed Iraq. In domestic politics the Islamic fundamentalism that had come to power in Iran found echoes in the very different societies of the Arab world, including Egypt. The failure of Nasserism as an ideology to make the headway it had once suggested, the minority appeal of communism, and the factional rivalry and decay of Ba’athism left an ideological vacuum in the Middle East which was to be pursued by a movement which Nasser himself had always seen as backward-looking, dangerous and irrelevant. It was to be one such fundamentalist cell that assassinated Nasser’s immediate successor, Sadat.

Perhaps in the end Nasser’s contribution was as much negative as positive. He did arrive at a moment of declining imperial control in the Middle East: his own perception of this may have been largely instinctive, but it was certainly correct. In retrospect it looks as if he rode a wave, but as with other Third World nationalist leaders it was a wave that owed much to the work of its leaders, whether as coup-makers or nationalist party creators. The decay of the European empires was mirrored in the decline of their traditional collaborators, leaving the whole structure vulnerable. This Nasser capitalised on, both in Egypt and the Middle East. But because he saw more clearly what he opposed than what should be constructed, his contribution in the latter field, while substantial, is open to criticism. The economic problems and international setbacks, as well as the political authoritarianism he bequeathed to Egypt, owed much to his own actions. Egypt had been on a roller-coaster under Nasser, and it had been exhilarating, frightening and tiring. It was not surprising that after it all the rides and the dreams were over.

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BIBLIOGRAPHICAL ESSAY

Nasser inevitably attracted a substantial literature both during his own lifetime and after his death. Some of it is in Arabic, Nasser's own preferred language, but much is in English, either in the original or in translation.

Nasser himself was not a great writer. Personal communication face-to-face or the telephone came more naturally to him. His best-known work by far is the *Philosophy of the Revolution*, which has been variously translated and widely discussed. This book has quoted from the translation by ES Farag 1972 *Nasser Speaks: Basic Documents*, Marsett Press, which also includes *The Charter*, written in 1962 to launch the Arab Socialist Union. Nasser's mouthpiece for his views was his confidant and friend, Mohamed Heikal. Heikal was closely involved in the writing of *Philosophy of the Revolution*, and subsequently as editor of the leading newspaper, *Al-Ahram*, was believed to directly reflect Nasser's thinking in his paper's editorials. At the same time Heikal was to produce his own works on Egypt, notably in 1972 *Nasser: the Cairo Documents*, in which Heikal reflects on Nasser's relations with various leading international personalities.

Biographies of Nasser started appearing shortly after his death. One useful work was by a journalist and close observer of Egypt, Robert Stephens 1971 *Nasser: a Political Biography*, Allen Lane; and another was by the former British diplomat who resigned over Suez, Anthony Nutting 1972 *Nasser*, Constable. Both these books concentrate more on Nasser's role in international politics than on his impact on Egypt. A French journalist also produced a very intimate portrait, Jean Lacouture 1973 *Nasser: a Biography*, Secker and Warburg, which seeks to explore Nasser's personality

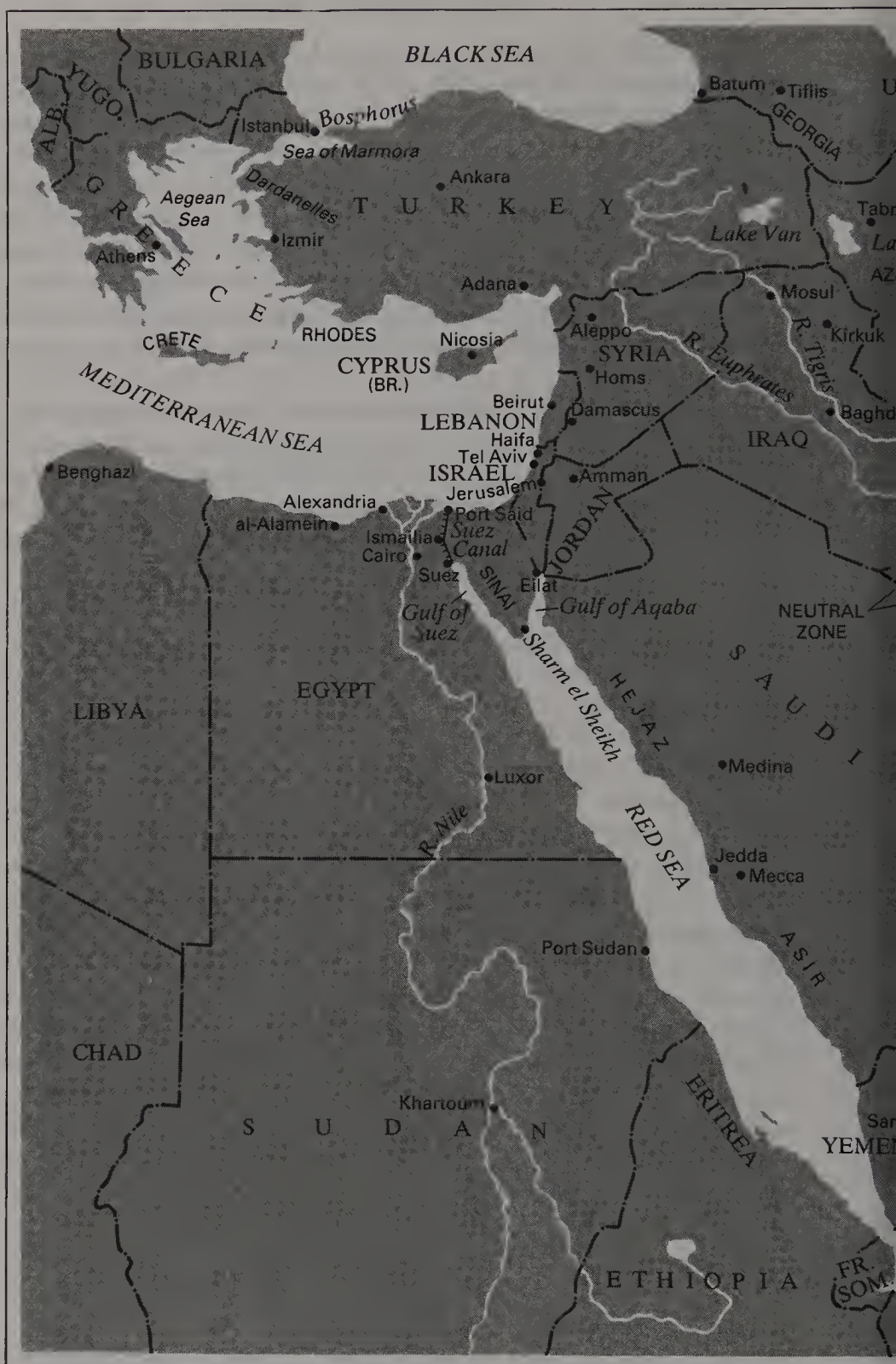
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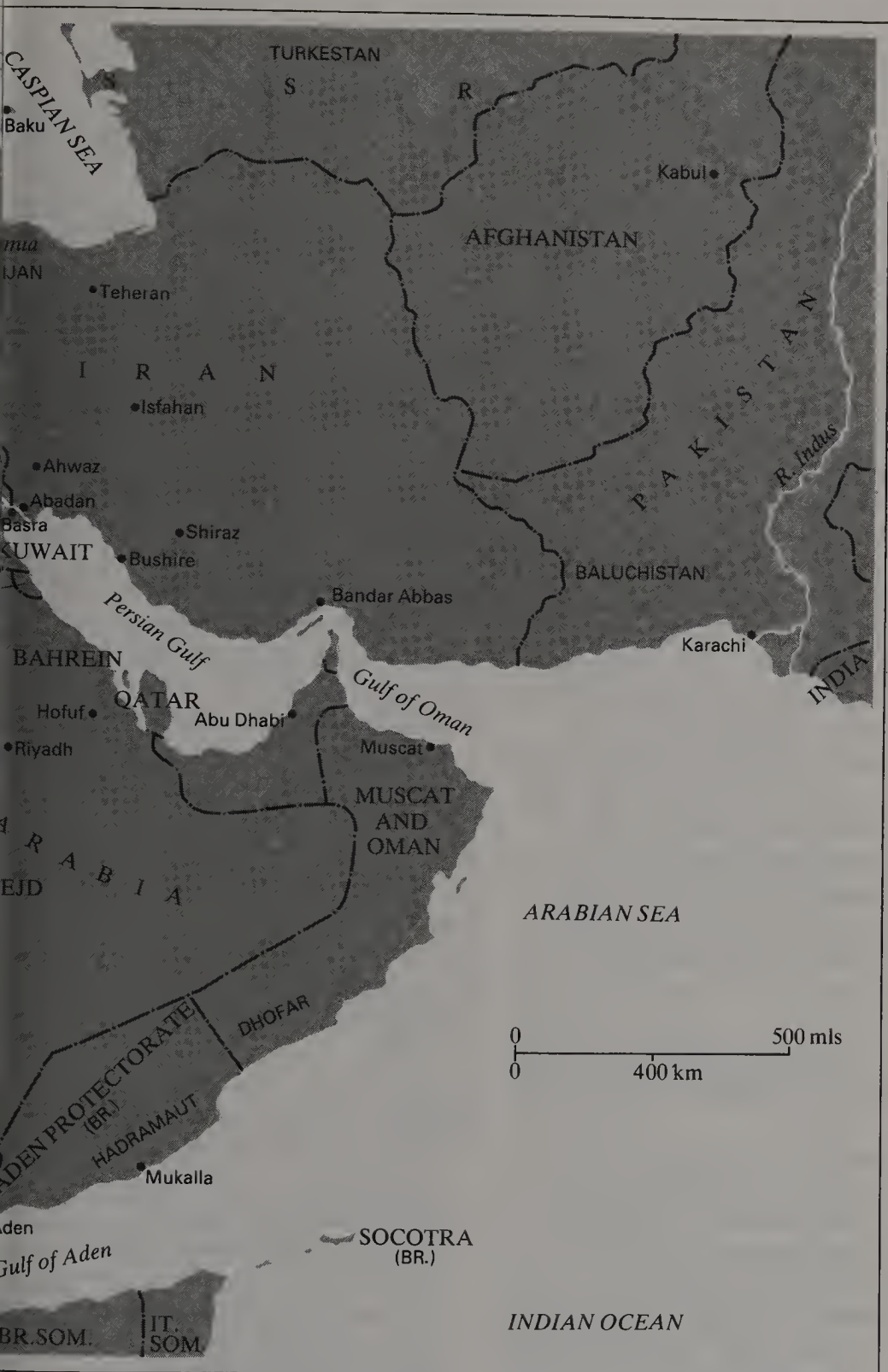
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• PROFILES IN POWER •

General Editor: Keith Robbins, *Professor of Modern History,
University of Glasgow*

Nasser remains even now the outstanding figure of the postwar Middle East. His political achievements, though not all were enduring, are remarkable; but he is a seminal figure, too, because his career embodies so many of the abiding preoccupations of the region and the time – independence from Western imperialism; economic modernisation; Arab nationalism; the vision of pan-Arab unity; the fissiparous reality of Arab politics; the tangled love-hate relationships with Western economic power and Soviet ideology; and conflict with Israel.

Nasser was one of a generation of able, idealistic young activists who sought to challenge the Western imperial powers and their collaborators in the Arab world. A leader of the coup that toppled the Egyptian monarchy in 1952, he became premier of Egypt in 1954 and president in 1956. In the Suez Crisis the same year, his stunning political victory over Britain and France, for so long the effective controllers of Middle Eastern affairs, announced the end of the old imperial order and the start of a new age in Arab relations with the West.

As the unchallenged leader of pan-Arabism, Nasser sought to unify the Arab world. Egypt's formal union with Syria was short-lived, but Nasser was tireless in promoting his brand of radical nationalism throughout the Middle East. His manoeuvrings between the superpowers in his attempts to assert Arab independence were often adroit; and though his confrontation with Israel on behalf of the Palestinians led to military humiliation in the Six Day War of June 1967, his unique ascendancy over the hearts and minds of the Egyptians ensured his political survival.

Nasser remained a wounded hero until his sudden death three years later – when his government, and his achievements, passed peacefully to his successors. For within Egypt itself, his successes were consistent and enduring: politically, he replaced an alien monarchy and landlord class with a truly Egyptian presidency and a strong government; economically, he set the country on a path to industrialisation and socialism which, though modified, has made Egypt the largest industrial power in the Middle East.

In exploring these ideas, Peter Woodward's striking study illuminates not only Nasser the man, but also the Middle East itself. Concise, authoritative and engrossing, it is an ideal introduction to the postwar history of the most sensitive and volatile region of the modern world.

Peter Woodward is Senior Lecturer in Politics at the University of Reading.

*Cover illustration: Nasser on the threshold
of power – as Deputy Prime Minister
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