NASSER
THE SECRET ARCHIVES
By
Hoda Gamal Abdel Nasser
I was filled with enthusiasm when I began work on this book about my father eight years ago, having found top secret documents that had never been published before, including more than 2650 papers in his own handwriting. These documents, which he had written solely for his own perusal, are a genuine reflection of Gamal Abdel Nasser’s ideas and his perspective on matters. They also include his comments on meetings he took part in, whether related to internal or external policies, Arab summit meetings, or individual meetings, particularly those with Soviet leaders in Moscow.

I was deeply impressed by the recordings of his meetings with world leaders who had visited Egypt to see him, particularly after the attack on Egypt which took place on June 5th, 1967. These recordings contain certain facts which my father had disclosed for the first time, and which no one but he could have revealed. There were also recordings of the cabinet meetings which he always headed during times of crisis, notably during the period from June 20th, 1967 to September 7th, 1970, as well as of the executive committee of the Socialist Union which had controlled the political scene since October 28th, 1962.

Listening to these recordings, I felt an overwhelming happiness combined with a deep sense of nostalgia and longing for the past. This was my father speaking; the tones of his voice that I loved so much. I did my utmost to maintain the mindset of a political science researcher when presenting this account of the life of a head of state of the caliber and stature of Gamal Abdel Nasser, but have to admit that my feelings towards my father took precedence when recounting the story of his life.

We, his children, will always see our father looking at us with the same tenderness that he showed towards us throughout his life. In spite of his extremely busy schedule, he made time for us, and it is the little gestures that touch the heart that remain engraved upon our memories. His rare periods of free time were always spent with us, and during his holidays, which he usually spent in Alexandria, we were always by his side.

He never stopped encouraging us to take up all kinds of sports, especially tennis, and football for my brothers. I will never forget that it was he who taught me to drive in Borg El Arab, an area west of Alexandria that he loved, close to Alamein where he had served during WWII under the British.

Our father was very particular about us all having a family lunch together at 3 pm, the usual time for the midday meal in Egypt. Whenever he was late, we would always wonder whether his guest for the day was Syrian, because in that case, we knew the meeting would drag on for ages! At such times, we would raid the fridge for a snack to keep us going till his meeting was over.

He was careful to follow up on our studies in person, and would closely scrutinize our school reports before signing them. If any of my siblings happened to come home with a not-so-good report card, they would try and place it in his room somewhere unobtrusive where he wouldn’t see it! Perhaps one of my most treasured memories is of my father...
coming to attend the end of year concerts at my school; I used to feel so proud seeing him sitting there with the headmistress and my teachers, watching me and my classmates perform.

He was always close to us, an extremely kind and loving father, who spared no effort to make us happy. In return, we did our utmost to win his approval and to follow his advice. He truly was a role model to aspire to. When I finished school, I dreamed of joining the Faculty of Economics and Political Science so that I could work with him, and my dream came true: when I graduated from university in 1966, I joined the Presidency in a 9-month training course with the General Intelligence Service, after which I moved to the Secretariat of the President of the Republic. No words can do justice to the happiness I experienced during that period of my life: I became my father’s closest assistant and we would discuss political matters together, which made me, at just twenty years old, feel quite important! When my father left us – he was only fifty-two – I went through a long period of overwhelming grief at the loss of a tender, loving father whom nothing and no one could replace.

But life had to go on in Egypt, and the political system controlled by Anwar El Sadat was hostile to my father. The many lies that were told led me to decide that I had to reveal the truth. But how? The official Egyptian documents were unavailable; not only those related to the period of my father’s presidency, but all documents since Egypt’s independence on February 28th, 1922!

The first thing I thought of was to try and acquire British, French, and American documents, which I managed to do, except for the French documents which were considered classified information as of 1940. In parallel, I decided to continue with my studies, earning a Ph.D. in Political Science. I now felt it was completely permissible for me to work with my father’s secret documents, which were kept in our home in Mansheyet El Bakry, Cairo. My primary objective was to make these documents available to researchers who could then base their work on the facts revealed by the self-criticism that characterized my father’s papers, whether in his own personal archives or the accounts of the various meetings in which he participated.

In a spirit of pure scientific and academic research, I decided fifteen years ago to make all of these documents available on the website I launched in cooperation with the Alexandria Library, www.nasser.org, and up to the present day, I am continuing to provide the website with more resources from these extensive secret archives.

I also decided to write this book based on the same documents, particularly those my father had written by hand, and the letters he had exchanged with world leaders, as well as the minutes of secret meetings he took part in here in Egypt and abroad. At a round table discussion in which I participated, held to commemorate the 1919 revolution, I was asked the following question by the leader of a political party opposed to my father:

“To what extent have you added your own touches to the contents of these documents?”
I replied that I had neither added nor removed a single word. Nevertheless, his question worried me, and made to decide to use my right to upload all the audio recordings of my father’s meetings to the website, making any addition or omission clear to all.

Gamal Abdel Nasser devoted his whole life to Egypt and to Arab nationalism, and despite the unsuccessful attempts of his enemies to tarnish his history, he has remained in the hearts not only of his countrymen here in Egypt, but throughout the Arab world. He is forever present. Time has proved that the ideas he defended and the policies he upheld are relevant not only to the present time but to the future as well.

For us, his family, we can only thank God that we have lived to witness the period that has restored his reputation and given him his due rights as a leader esteemed, respected, and loved by the Egyptian and Arab people.

Hoda Abdel Nasser
Gamal Abdel Nasser, the man who roused the dormant spirit of Arab nationalism, freed Egypt from tyranny and occupation, rocked the foundations of complacent Arab rulers, and astounded the world by nationalizing the Suez Canal and defying the combined forces of England, France and Israel during their infamous Tripartite Aggression...Who is he? What are his social and cultural roots? What principles did he adhere to till the end? What policies lay behind the many battles he fought?

Nasser was born into a poor family on the 15th of January 1918 in the working-class district of Bacos, Alexandria. He was the eldest son of Abdel Nasser Hussein, who was born in 1988 to a family of peasants residing in the village of Beni Mur, Upper Egypt. Abdel Nasser senior managed to acquire a modicum of education which qualified him to work for the Postal Authority in Alexandria, but his salary was barely enough for the basic necessities of life.

Gamal Abdel Nasser went to nursery school in Alexandria, then to primary school in Khatatba in the Delta area from 1923-1924. In 1925 he moved to the Nahaseen school in the popular Gamaleya district of Cairo, where he lived with his paternal uncle Khalil Hussein for three years, visiting his family in Khatatba during the school holidays.

In the summer of 1926, he arrived home only to find that his mother had died a few weeks before but that no one had had the courage to tell him. He made the discovery himself in a manner that shook him profoundly, as he reminisced to David Morgan of the Sunday Times:\footnote{David Morgan, Sunday Times, 18th June, 1962.}

“Losing my mother was tragedy enough, but losing her in this way was a blow that left a wound which time could not erase. The pain and suffering I experienced at that dark time made it extremely abhorrent to me to hurt anyone throughout my life.”

In the summer of 1928, after having completed his third year in the Nahaseen school, Abdel Nasser’s father sent him to his maternal grandfather in Alexandria, where he spent his fourth primary year in the Attarine school.

A rebel in secondary school

In 1929, Nasser joined Helwan secondary school as a boarder for just one year, then moved to Ras El Tine secondary school in Alexandria after his father joined the Postal Authority there.

It was there that Nasser’s nationalist sentiments began to be formed: in 1930, the government headed by Ismail Sidki issued a decree cancelling the constitution of 1923, a move which fueled widespread student demonstrations calling for the constitution to be restored.

Nasser recounts his first-ever demonstration:
“I was crossing Mansheya Square in Alexandria and witnessed a clash between some demonstrating students and the police. Without stopping to think or hesitate, I threw myself in with the demonstrators without even knowing what they were demonstrating about. I felt no need to ask: members of the public were clashing with the authorities, and I knew whose side I was on.

“For a few moments, it looked as though the demonstrators were in control of the situation, but reinforcements soon arrived in the form of two truckloads of policemen who soon had us in their grip. I remember – in a futile attempt at retaliation – throwing a stone at them, but we were no match for them, and as I turned to escape, a heavy blow struck my head followed by another, and I fell down and was dragged off, blood pouring from my head, together with the other students who hadn’t managed to escape.

“At the police station, while my head wounds were being tended to, I found out that the demonstration had been organized by the Masr El Fata (young Egypt) group to protest the government’s policies.”

Later on, Nasser was to reminisce about this period of his life during a speech he gave at the very same Mansheya Square on October 26th, 1954, describing his feelings during the demonstration and the effect it had on him:

“When I began speaking to you here today, in Mansheya Square, I went back in time to the day when, as a young man, I joined the Alexandrians in their struggle, and for the first time in my life, called out for freedom, for dignity, and for Egypt. The colonialist forces and their agents shot at us; some died, others were wounded, but there emerged from amongst them a young man who, for the first time, understood what it meant to be free, and vowed to fight for the freedom he had cheered for without knowing its meaning, simply that it was a feeling permeating his soul and coursing through his veins from that moment onwards.”

The period he spent in Alexandria was a turning point in young Nasser’s life, turning him from a mere protestor into an ardent rebel imbued with the patriotic fervor that was sweeping Egypt as a result of colonial hegemony and the annulment of the constitution.

The school authorities grew increasingly exasperated with Nasser’s activities and warned his father, who responded by sending him to Cairo where he joined the El Nahda secondary school in El Daher district in 1933. Nasser, however, continued with his political activities, becoming the head of the El Nahda schools’ student union.

Nasser’s passion for reading patriotic and history-related literature was born during this time; he was particularly interested in the French revolution and the works of Rousseau and Voltaire, and even wrote an article entitled Voltaire, the Man of Freedom—which was published in the school magazine. Books about the lives of Napoleon, Alexander the Great, Julius Caesar, and Ghandi, as well as Hugo’s Les Misérables and Dickens’s A Tale of Two Cities, were amongst his favourites.

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2 The article can be found in Appendix 1
He also followed Arab literature, and greatly admired the poems of Ahmed Shawqi and Hafez Ibrahim. He read the life of the prophet Mohamed (PBUH) and other heroes of Islam, and was inspired by reading about the national hero, Mostafa Kamel. The writer Tawfik Al Hakim was a favourite of his, and he read all his books and plays, being particularly fond of his *Awdet el Roh* (The Return of the Spirit) which spoke of the emergence of a new leader of the Egyptians who would unite their ranks, resurrect their patriotic spirit, and drive them to strive for freedom.

In 1935, he starred as Caesar in the school’s production of Shakespeare’s Julius Caesar at the annual concert attended by the Minister of Education. He also began to write a story entitled *For the Sake of Freedom* about the battle of Rashid (Rosetta) in 1807, but he did not complete it.³

The year 1935 saw a significant surge in the activities of the Egyptian national movement, with students played a leading role. Their demands were clear: freedom, and the return of the constitution. A letter from Nasser to his friend Aly dated September 4th, 1935 sheds light on his feelings at the time:

“We have gone from the light of hope to the darkness of despair; shaken off the first indications of a possible new life and ushered in the dust of death instead. Where is the one who can change all this and restore Egypt to its early days of glory when it ruled the world?! Where is the one who can pour new life into the Egyptians, and transform the unheard, bowed down, hopeless Egyptian, who submits patiently to the usurping of his rights and to his country being trifled with, into a strong, eloquent, dignified human being, fighting courageously for freedom and independence? Mostafa Kamel said, ‘If my heart were to move from the left to the right; if the Pyramids were to shift from their immutable position; if the Nile were to change its course, I would never swerve from my principles.’ All this is just a prelude to an even longer, but greater, course of action: we have spoken many times about a deed that would wake the nation from its slumber, speak to people’s hearts and emotions, and touch the innermost part of their souls, but so far, this has not happened.”

Two months later, on November 9th, 1935, British Foreign Secretary Samuel Hoare announced Britain’s refusal to restore the constitution, igniting widespread demonstrations by students and workers, and on November 13th, Nasser led a group of secondary school demonstrators who were confronted by British police forces. The British opened fire at the students, injuring Nasser in the forehead though the bullet did not penetrate his skull. His colleagues rushed him into the premises of the Al-Gihad newspaper which happened to be nearby, and his name was mentioned amongst those of the wounded in the following morning’s edition of the Al-Gihad paper.

In a speech he gave at Cairo University on November 15th, 1952, Nasser spoke of the impact this incident had had on him:

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³ Appendix 2
“My wound left a valuable memento, a scar which serves to remind me every single day of my sacred duty towards my country. On that fateful day, the late Abdel Meguid Morsy fell, a victim of the forces of occupation and injustice; seeing him thus, I forgot my own injury, and it was then that I realized that I had a mission I must dedicate myself to, and become instrumental in achieving: the liberation of my country from the colonialists. And as more and more martyrs fell, so my determination to work towards freedom for Egypt got stronger and stronger.”

Eventually, under increasing popular pressure, especially from students and workers, a royal decree was issued on December 12th, 1935, to restore the 1923 constitution. At that time, Nasser joined the delegations of students who would visit prominent leaders in their homes urging to unite for the sake of Egypt. These efforts led to the formation of The Nationalist Front in 1936.

During this time of upheaval, Nasser wrote again to his friend Aly on September 3rd, 1935, saying:

“God Almighty says: ‘Muster all your forces against them’, but where are the forces we can muster?! The situation is critical, and Egypt is in an even more precarious situation.”

In his book The Philosophy of the Revolution, Nasser describes his feelings at the time:

“During those days, I led a demonstration from Al Nahda school, shouting at the top of my voice and from the depths of my being for complete independence, my colleagues behind me echoing my cries. But our shouts were of no avail, scattered in the wind which turned them into ineffectual echoes unable to move mountains or shatter rocks.”

The unanimous decision of Egypt’s political leaders to agree to the Treaty of 1936 came as a profound shock to Nasser, for it practically formalized, not to say legitimized, the British occupation. According to the treaty, Britain would retain military bases in Egypt to protect the Nile valley and the Suez Canal from any aggression, and stated moreover that if a war were to occur, Egyptian territory, with its ports, airports, and all means of transportation would be put at the disposal of Britain. The treaty also confirmed the continuation of bilateral rule in the Sudan.

Nasser’s intensified political activity during this period was tracked by the police, leading the school authorities to take the decision to expel him on charges of inciting the students to rebel; however, his fellow students went on strike and threatened to set fire to the school, causing the English headmaster to rescind his decision.

Politics had become Nasser’s chief preoccupation ever since the fateful first demonstration in Alexandria. He tried out the political organizations available at the time, first Masr El Fata where he remained for two years till he realized it was going nowhere, then had several contacts with the Muslim Brotherhood, but ultimately

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5 Ibid, page 55.
refused to join any group or party when he found that there was no ‘ideal’ party that combined all the elements necessary to achieve the country’s nationalistic objectives.

During his secondary school years, Nasser’s political horizons expanded to encompass an awareness of the Arab situation as a whole. He would demonstrate regularly with his colleagues every November 2nd, protesting against the Balfour Declaration whereby Britain granted the Jews a homeland in Palestine regardless of its legitimate occupants, the Palestinian Arabs.

When Nasser received his secondary school certificate from the literary department, he decided to join the army. He had realized by then, having come into contact with the politicians and political parties whom he had come to despise, that Egypt would never be liberated by mere rhetoric, and that force must be met with force, and the army of occupation with a national army.

Nasser applied to the Military College and passed the physical examination; he failed, however, in the background check, because he was the grandson of a peasant from Beni Murr and the son of a modest employee with nothing to his name, had taken part in the 1935 demonstrations, and above all, had no ‘connections’.

After being denied entry into the Military College, Nasser joined the Faculty of Law in 1936. He stayed there for six months until the Treaty of 1936 took effect and the decision was made to increase the number of Egyptian army officers regardless of their wealth or social status. In the autumn of 1936, the Military College accepted a batch of students, then announced that they would need a second lot, so Nasser applied, and this time succeeded in meeting the deputy Minister of War, Major-General Ibrahim Khairy, who was impressed by the young man’s frank manner, patriotism, and determination to become an army officer, and agreed to his entering the college with the second round of applicants in March 1937.

Nasser set his sights on becoming a competent officer, and was determined to acquire the knowledge and characteristics that would qualify him for leadership. And so it was: he became a team leader and as of the beginning of 1938, was placed in charge of mentoring new students. Throughout his time at the College, he was never subjected to any punishments, and in fact was promoted to ‘student corporal’. Such was his dedication.

Gamal Abdel Nasser graduated from Military College after seventeen months, in July 1938; graduation had been expedited at that time to provide enough Egyptian officers to fill the gap left after the departure of the British forces to the Suez Canal zone.

The college library was full of valuable books, and a glance at the lending records reveals that Nasser was particularly interested in the lives of renowned historical figures such as Bonaparte, Alexander the Great, Garibaldi, Bismarck, Mustafa Kamel Ataturk, Hindenburg, Churchill, and Foch. He also read books on the Middle East, the Sudan, and the countries of the Mediterranean, as well as military history. He was particularly interested in WWI, the Palestinian issue, and the revolution of 1919.
Amongst his letters to his father written whilst still at Military College was one in which he urged him to quickly send the college fees, and another expressing his concern over his father’s illness.

Following his graduation, Nasser joined the Infantry and was sent to Mankabad in Upper Egypt. His sojourn there gave him the opportunity to get to know the conditions of the fellaheen and their miserable situation.

In 1939, Nasser asked to be moved to the Sudan where he served in Khartoum and in Gabal Awliya. In May 1940, he was promoted to First Lieutenant.

At the time, the Egyptian army was non-combatant, which suited the British whose best interests were to keep it that way. However, a new class of officers began to join the army, officers with a different vision of the future, who saw their role in the army as part of the struggle for a free Egypt.

Nasser went to Mankabad filled with hope and high ideals, but these were soon dashed when he found that most of his fellow officers were “incompetent and corrupt”. This is when the idea of reforming the army and purging it of corruption took hold. His distaste is evidenced in this letter written to his friend Hassan El-Nashar from Gabal Awliya in 1941:

“In any case, Hassan, I am at my wits end here... my problem is that I am straightforward and not given to fancy words and flattery, a trait which you’d think would be respected by one and all, but unfortunately our superior officers can’t stand anyone who doesn’t sing their praises or toady to them; in other words, someone with dignity and self-respect. These people were reared in ignominy and submission under colonialism, and expect us to follow the same path; woe betide anyone who rejects this humiliating state of affairs... It grieves me to tell you, Hassan, that this new generation has been corrupted by the older generation and we are descending into an abyss where hypocrisy, sycophancy and slick toadyism are the rule. I, however, am persevering, which is why I find myself constantly at loggerheads with my superiors.”

Nasser serves at El-Alamein

Towards the end of 1941 when Rommel was advancing towards the western frontier of Egypt, Gamal Abdel Nasser returned to Egypt and was transferred to a British battalion stationed behind the battle lines close to El-Alamein. He recalls this time, saying:

“This was when the idea of a revolution took firm root in my mind; how this was to be accomplished still required much thought; I was still feeling my way towards this, and my main concern was to bring together a large number of like-minded young officers who had the welfare of the nation at heart so that we could work together towards this common cause.”

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6 Interview with David Morgan of the Sunday Times.
On February 4th, 1942, while Nasser was stationed at El-Alamein, a landmark event occurred which was to prove a turning point for Nasser. The British Ambassador, Sir Miles Lampson, after surrounding Abdin Palace in Cairo with British tanks, submitted an ultimatum to King Farouk giving him the choice of either appointing Moustafa el-Nahas as prime minister heading a pro-British government, or abdicating. The king immediately submitted with no objections.

Nasser recollects that nothing stayed the same since that fateful day. On 16 February 1942, he wrote to Hassan El-Nashar:

“I received your letter, which filled me with such bitterness and rage, I thought I would explode! But what can be done after we succumbed so abjectly and submissively to that humiliating act? Actually, I think the British were only trying to intimidate and threaten us, and had they felt that some Egyptians were willing to fight and sacrifice themselves, they would have withdrawn like a whore. As for the army, this incident triggered a new development that influenced out situation greatly; for whereas the officers used to talk about nothing but women and how to amuse themselves, they began to talk of their readiness to sacrifice themselves for the dignity of their country, and one could see that they were filled with remorse because they had not acted and had cut such a feeble picture instead of wiping out this insult to their country with their own blood. Some tried to take action as a form of revenge, but it was too late for that. In any case, this incident or rather this blow, has managed to breathe life back into many of them and made them aware that the dignity of their country is something they have to be ready to defend and fight for. It was a lesson—but a cruel one.”

Nasser was promoted to captain on the 9th of September, 1942, and on February 7, 1943 was appointed as a teacher at the Military College. His reading list at that time reveals him to have read the works of many military historians such as Liddell Hart and Clausewitz, as well as political writers such as Cromwell and Churchill. At this time, Nasser was preparing to join the Command and Staff College.

On June 29th, 1944, Nasser married Taheya Mohamed Kazem, the daughter of an Iranian merchant, whose family he had got to know through his uncle Khalil Hussein. They had two daughters, Hoda and Mona, and three sons, Khaled, Abdel Hamid, and Abdel Hakim. Taheya played an important role in his life, especially during the period of preparing for the revolution and bringing together the Free Officers, and shouldered the responsibility of their little family while he was away fighting in the Palestine war. She even helped hide the weapons Nasser used for training the *fedayeen* to fight against the British base in the Suez Canal in 1951 and 1952.

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7Voluntary freedom fighters.
The formation of the Free Officers

The year 1945 saw the end of World War II and the beginning of the Free Officers movement. I searched high and low for even one document related to the movement to no avail, then remembered that it was a secret organization and thus it was only natural that not one word would have been written down about it. Hence this part of the book relies on what Nasser himself recounted about the movement:

“Up until 1948, I had concentrated my efforts on bringing together a nucleus of like-minded people who shared my discontent with the state of affairs in Egypt and who had enough courage and determination to embark upon making a change. At that time, we were a small group of loyal friends, trying to shape our ideals into a common goal and plan.” 8

After the UN resolution in 1947 to partition Palestine, the Free Officers held a meeting during which they agreed that the time had come to defend the rights of the Arabs against this violation of human dignity and international justice. It was decided that they would help the opposition in Palestine.

The next day, Nasser went to see the Mufti9 of Palestine, who was a refugee residing in Heliopolis, a suburb of Cairo. Nasser proffered his services and those of his colleagues to train and fight alongside the volunteer forces, but the Mufti answered that he could not accept the offer unless the Egyptian government agreed. A few days later, the offer was refused, so Nasser applied for leave so that he could join the volunteers, but before the leave was agreed to, the Egyptian government itself ordered the army to officially join the war, so Nasser travelled to Palestine on the 15th of May, 1948.

His experiences in the Palestine war had a far-reaching effect on Nasser10. To quote him:

“There was no coordination between the Arab armies, and leadership at the higher levels was virtually non-existent, and most of our weapons were revealed to be faulty. Then in the midst of the battle, our Engineering Corps was given orders to build a recreational chalet for the King in Gaza!

“It became increasingly obvious that the high command was intent solely on occupying the largest possible amount of territory regardless of its strategic importance or whether or not it would help us win the battle. I was disgusted with these armchair officers running the battle from their offices without a clue as to what was going on in the battlefields or how the soldiers were suffering.

“The last straw came when I was ordered to lead a force of the sixth infantry battalion to Iraq-Sueidan which was being attacked by the Israelis, only to find that before we had even set off, a detailed account of our movements was published in the Cairo newspapers! This was followed by the siege of El-Faloga which lasted for six months

8 Ibid.
9 Chief Islamic authority in charge of Muslim holy places in Jerusalem.
10 From the confidential military file of Gamal Abdel Nasser, appendix 4.
during which the Egyptian forces continued to resist valiantly even though greatly outnumbered. The war then came to an end with the truce enforced by the United Nations on the 24th of February, 1949. 11

“I recall full well how the Security Council resolutions helped the Jews to achieve their objectives; they managed to reinforce their positions and approach the Egyptian army lines under cover of the truce.”12

During this war, Gamal Abdel Nasser was promoted to major on the 7th of July, 1948. He was wounded in battle twice, and had to be taken to hospital. He was awarded the Military Star of Fouad medal in 1949 for his distinguished role in the war.

While in Palestine, Nasser began to suspect that the Arab people were the victims of a conspiracy that had deliberately kept from them the truth of what was really going on. In his book The Philosophy of the Revolution he says:

“I felt I was defending my own home and my children, when I would come across refugee children under siege amongst the ruins. I particularly remember a little girl about my own daughter’s age, foraging for food or any scrap she could find, in spite of the danger surrounding her. I would tell myself: this could happen to my daughter! I was convinced that what was happening in Palestine could happen to any country in the region so long as they remained resigned to the powers that ruled them.”13

After his return to Cairo, Gamal Abdel Nasser realized that the real battle was inside Egypt, for while he and his companions were away fighting in Palestine, the Egyptian politicians were stacking up the profits they had made from the faulty weapons they had acquired cheaply then sold to the army. He became convinced that efforts should be concentrated on targeting the Mohamed Aly family, and King Farouk became the focus of the Free Officers movement from the end of 1948 up until 1952.

The Free Officers movement after the Palestine war:

After his return from Palestine, Nasser was appointed as a teacher at the Command and Staff College where he had passed with honours on May 12th, 1948. The activities of the Free Officers resumed and an executive council under Nasser’s leadership was formed, later to become the Revolutionary Leadership Council in 1952.

Nasser recounts the first interrogation held with him as an officer, which took place on May 25th, 1949. He had been subjected to such interrogations several times before as a student. He says:

“An officer came to me at one o’clock in the afternoon and told me that the Army Chief of Staff wished to see me in his office. I sensed danger! It turned out that the main accusation made against me was being in contact with Sheikh Hassan El Banna, the

12 Two pages from Nasser’s confidential military file translated into French, Appendix 4.
13 Ibid, pages 66 and 70.
founder of the Muslim Brotherhood, working with its secret organizations, and training its members who were responsible for a number of attacks during the term of Prime Minister Ibrahim Abdel Hady.\footnote{Prime minister from December 1948 to July 1949.}

“The prime minister himself interrogated me in the presence of Lieutenant-General Othman El-Mahdy, Army Chief of Staff, and Major-General Ahmed Talaat, head of the Political Police. The prime minister was in a state of extreme rage, and after firing several questions at me said, ‘the Muslim Brotherhood members who have confessed told us that you had trained them; now all we want from you is to tell us which of your fellow officers took part in this training alongside you.’ He then threatened to have me brought before the Public Prosecutor’s office and the police and have them deal with me.

“I managed to remain completely calm, and asked him to confront me with those who had supposedly confessed to my having trained them. I told him that I did indeed know Sheikh Hassan El Banna, and that he had visited me at home, but that I had not had the opportunity to train the Brotherhood members, and would not have hesitated to do so if I had, because it was our duty to train our people and prepare them for the Palestine war. I told him of my meeting with the Mufti of Palestine in December 1947, and that the Egyptian government allowed the training of volunteers intending to go to Palestine, so such training did not constitute a crime!

“During the interrogation, Prime Minister Abdel Hady asked me if I had any weapons at home, and I replied that I had Jewish ammunition from Palestine amounting to about 200 rounds of ammunition for an M60 gun. He completely lost his temper that day, shouting, ‘Do you want the English to take over Cairo and Alexandria?! We found explosives inside the palace!’

“Seven hours later, I left his office, only to find the Chief of Staff trying to persuade me to confess. Then the prime minister called me back into his office and said, ‘go home, son.’ Lieutenant-General Othman El Mahdy then asked to accompany me back home to fetch the ammunition I had there.’\footnote{An interview with the Al Ahram newspaper, 22\textsuperscript{nd} July, 1953.}

**Preparing for the revolution**

“The interrogation lasted until eight o’clock at night, and later on I met with those of the Free Officers who were in Cairo, and we began to lay our plans that very same day. By the end of the month, all of us were together again. We estimated that we would need five years to mobilize the armed forces and get rid of the whole system, so our target date was 1954, not 1952. We met in different places and different houses, and in August of 1949 I was transferred back to Cairo from Ismailia. In September, we began to organize ourselves in earnest, and to extend the scope of our movement. We had ‘eyes’ everywhere, in the palace, in the General Headquarters of the Armed Forces, within the Political Police, and in all the army units. They relayed to us all the information that the authorities had been able to find out about the Free Officers. We also saw that it was
time to spread our message amongst the officers on a wider scale by secretly circulating pamphlets.\textsuperscript{16}

“We had managed between us to collect enough to buy a Roneo machine for printing and a typewriter, and issued our first Free Officers pamphlet in November, 1949, containing an analysis of the country’s situation and the tragedy of the Palestine war. We distributed the pamphlets in letter boxes and by hand within the army, and printed a thousand pamphlets a time. We acquired the ink and paper we needed from the army.

“The authorities intercepted the pamphlets in the post once; their suspicions were aroused when they discovered several envelopes of the exact same size, so we changed the way we distributed by post and began sending them from different towns.”\textsuperscript{17}

The pamphlets called for the reorganization and re-armament of the army, and for serious training rather than the parades shows it was currently restricted to; they also called upon the rulers to refrain from squandering the country’s resources and to raise the standard of living of the poor. They question of trading in ranks and medals was also touched upon. Naturally, the matter of the faulty weapons was also an issue at the time, as well as some economic scandals in which the Wafd party was implicated. Concerning foreign policy, the Free Officers refused Egypt’s joining the Middle East Command, and insisted on activating Arab solidarity.

On May 8\textsuperscript{th}, 1951, Nasser was promoted to Lieutenant-Colonel and that same year secretly joined, together with his comrades from the Free Officers, the fedayeen war against the British forces in the Canal Zone which lasted until the beginning of 1952. Their participation took the form of training volunteers and supplying them with weapons; the call for an armed struggle had spread amongst young people of varying political leanings, and was an unofficial activity that had nothing to do with the government.

The series of violent events that had begun to take place since the beginning of 1952 led the Free Officers to believe that the assassination of the leaders of the old regime was the only solution to the situation. They began with Major-General Hussein Sirry Amer, one of the army commanders who was implicated in serving the interests of the palace, but he managed to escape death. This was the first and last assassination attempt Nasser ever took part in, and he convinced the others to abandon this idea and to direct their efforts to a more positive revolutionary direction.

Then came the Cairo Fire, which broke out on the 26\textsuperscript{th} of January, 1952 following demonstrations that swept through Cairo in protest at the massacre of policemen in Ismailia by British forces the day before, when forty-six policemen were killed and seventy-two injured. Fires spread in the city and the authorities did not intervene nor was the army ordered to restore order until the afternoon of that day, after fire had

\textsuperscript{16} A sample of the Free Officers’ pamphlets for 1946, 1951, and 1952 can be found in Appendix 5.
\textsuperscript{17} An interview with Al Ahram newspaper, ibid, 22\textsuperscript{nd} July, 1953.
consumed four hundred buildings and left twelve thousand people homeless. The resulting losses amounted to some twenty-two million pounds.

At the time, there was an overt struggle taking place between the Free Officers and the king regarding what came to be referred to as the Military Club elections crisis. The king had nominated Major-General Hussein Sirry Amer, who was hated by the military, to head the club’s executive committee, so the Free Officers decided to submit their own list of nominees, headed by Major-General Mohamed Naguib, who won by an overwhelming majority. Despite the fact that the king issued an order cancelling the elections, the outcome proved to the Free Officers that the army was on their side and backed them against the king. Accordingly, Nasser, who was the head of the founding committee of the Free Officers, decided to bring forward the date of the revolution, which had been scheduled for 1955.

The army began to take action on the night of July 23rd, 1952, occupying the building of the Army High Command in El Kobba bridge and arresting the high-ranking officers who, ironically, were there holding a meeting to discuss how to deal with the Free Officers movement, which they had got wind of.

After the success of the operation, Mohamed Naguib was presented as the leader of the revolution; he had been approached two months beforehand by the Free Officers regarding the possibility of his joining them if the movement succeeded, but the actual authority was in the hands of the Revolutionary Command Council headed by Gamal Abdel Nasser until the 25th of August, 1952, when the Council issued its decision to include Mohamed Naguib as a member, and assigned its leadership to him.
EMPOWERING THE REVOLUTION

The revolution of 1919 led to a merely nominal independence for Egypt on the 28th of February, 1922. The British reserved the right to act in matters concerning the defence of Egypt, and the imperial transport route through the Suez Canal, the protection of the interests of foreigners in Egypt, and the governing of the Sudan. Ever since that date, government in Egypt was based on three entities: the king, the British occupation, and the Egyptian political parties, most prominent of which was the Wafd.

Politics in the first half of the twentieth century revolved around maintaining a balance between these three entities in a manner that did away with democracy, ignored social needs, and saw the political parties place their own interests over those of the nation. Matters were further exacerbated by the corruption of the king himself.

In 1948, a momentous occurrence shook Egypt and the whole of the Arab world: Britain’s enabling the Jews to take over Palestine in May 1948 in implementation of the infamous Balfour Declaration of 1917.

The Arab countries immediately sprang to Palestine’s defence; seven armies from different Arab countries, not acting in unison, and under the control of foreigners: a resounding defeat was the result.

The officers of the Egyptian army, sensing treachery, and faced with faulty weapons that were bought cheaply by the rulers then sold to the army, realized that the battle was no longer in Palestine but in Cairo, and that Egypt itself had to be liberated first. It was necessary to concentrate their efforts on targeting the Mohamed Aly family, thus the king became the primary focus of the Free Officers from the end of 1948 till 1952.

Nasser, who was injured twice in action, was devastated and overcome with anger at the end of the Palestine war, when the UN resolutions only served to help the Jews achieve their aims, allowing them to break the ceasefire several times and to refuse to return to their previous positions.

Immediately following the return from Palestine, new life was breathed into the Free Officers’ movement once more, and they began laying their plans to depose the king and overthrow the government. Nasser realized that the success of the revolution depended on the Free Officers’ being fully aware of the nature of the circumstances Egypt was going through, which could not be changed with a simple stroke of the pen. He knew it was necessary to have two parallel revolutions, political and social.
CHAPTER I: THE BEGINNINGS OF THE REVOLUTION

First: The night of the revolution

The Free Officers had intended to start the revolution in 1955, but events forced them to move much earlier than that. A series of violent incidents occurred, followed by the Cairo Fire on the 26th of January, 1952, in a volatile atmosphere of mutual recriminations within the political parties and anger amongst the masses, with the authorities failing to take action, and only ordering the army to take control in the afternoon, by which time the fire had consumed numerous buildings and caused huge losses.

Matters were proceeding at a speed that was beyond control, going from bad to worse; two new cabinets were formed, and resigned, and the king showed no signs of being prepared to find a solution to the situation! Nasser realized that it would not be possible to delay the revolution given the state of affairs and the rebellious momentum triggered by the current events; moreover, the king’s standing with the people was at its lowest ebb. This was the right time to overthrow the government – if they could carry out their plans quickly and efficiently.

On the night of the revolution, the 22nd of July, 1952, at around ten p.m., an intelligence officer who was a member of the Free Officers came to warn Nasser that the palace had got wind that something was up, and that the Free Officers were preparing to move. The Army Chief of Staff had been alerted and had called for an emergency meeting at army headquarters in the Kubba Bridge district at eleven p.m. The officer was of the opinion that they should cancel the whole operation! Nasser replied that this would not be possible: the wheel had turned, and nothing and no one could stop it. In fact, Nasser added, the meeting of all the high-ranking officers in one place provided a golden opportunity to arrest them all in one fell swoop. As Nasser said:

“An immediate decision had to be taken: if we left matters as they were till the pre-arranged zero hour at one o’clock in the morning of July 23rd, they might get hold of us before we had a chance to get to them first; the problem was that orders had already been given out and it would be extremely difficult to get hold of everyone taking part.

“The intelligence officer, myself, and Abdel Hakim Amer went to collect some forces from the Abbasia Barracks. We were too late: the Military Police had barricaded the barracks. We carried on to the Cavalry and Armoured Vehicles barracks, only to find that they had beaten us to it again and that Military Police forces were guarding all the entrances. It seemed that our whole plan was in jeopardy, with just ninety minutes to go before zero hour!

“We made our way to Almaza Barracks as a last resort, and on our way encountered a line of soldiers marching in the same direction under cover of darkness. They made us get out of the car and arrested us! Thankfully, they turned out to be our own revolutionary troops who were carrying out my orders to arrest any officer they encountered above the rank of colonel without discussion! Not knowing who we were,
they ignored our arguments completely for almost twenty minutes until the commander of the group came to see what the fuss was about. He turned out to be none other than Lieutenant-Colonel Youssef Siddiq, one of my comrades who had moved at the scheduled time and was waiting for zero hour to begin the attack! We joined the line, and moved towards headquarters. We were only a relatively small group, but the element of surprise was on our side.

“On our way, we arrested several high-ranking officers who had been attending the meeting at headquarters. We met with some resistance outside the Army Headquarters building but the struggle was short, and we forced our way in. We found the Army Chief of Staff at the head of the meeting table putting the finishing touches to the plan of action to be taken against the Free Officers! We arrested them all.

“At 3 a.m., the leaders of the Free Officers were themselves seated in the meeting room of the army headquarters! Major-General Mohamed Naguib was sent for; we had already approached him two days beforehand with a view to his joining us should the operation succeed. We had not yet informed him of that night’s events, however it turned out that he already knew, as the Minister of the Interior had phoned him from Alexandria half an hour before to ask him what was happening.

“Our initial steps were completely successful; it remained to ensure that the king would not be able to organize a counterattack. At 7 a.m., the Egyptian people were informed in a radio broadcast that the cabinet headed by Naguib El Helaly had been deposed, and that the country was under the control of the army and in the hands of men whose capability, integrity, and patriotism they could trust.”

Second: The response of the British to the revolution

When the revolution took place, the country was completely under the control of the British, but in spite of the concentration of their forces in the Suez Canal Zone, they were still concerned about the discontent spreading amongst young Egyptian officers and the declining popularity of the king due to his insistence on appointing the officers of his court in key positions in the army.

British reports did not dismiss the possibility of a military rebellion that, if successful, could lead to chaos and rioting on the part of extremists, especially in view of the economic circumstances prevailing. They were therefore prepared to implement Operation Rodeo, a contingency plan to send the British troops garrisoned in the Canal Zone into the Delta and parts of Cairo and Alexandria should critical developments occur on the Egyptian political scene.\textsuperscript{19}

\textsuperscript{18} The interview with Morgan previously referred to.
\textsuperscript{19} ADM 1/23562 "Operation RODEO Flail: requirement for a third RN landing Ship Tank (L.S.T). in the Suez Canal Zone", 1951.
On the morning of July 23rd, the Free Officers initiated communication with the American Embassy followed by the British Embassy to inform that they had taken control of the country and that matters were proceeding in an orderly manner, assuring them that the lives and possessions of foreigners would be in safe hands so long as there was no outside intervention. They assured them that this was an internal matter the prime objective of which was to put an end to corruption in the country.

Almost simultaneously, the leading figures of the fallen regime rushed to contact the British Embassy requesting British military intervention to quell the movement, stating that it was the work of communists and Muslim Brotherhood members, and that the officers taking part in it were extremists opposed to capitalism!\(^20\)

Jefferson Caffery, the US Ambassador in Cairo, informed Sir Michael Creswell, British Embassy’s Chargé d’Affaires, that the king had called him several times since 2 a.m. on the 23rd of July, saying that only foreign intervention could save him and his family. Caffery commented that while the King did not openly request British military intervention, it was tacitly understood that this was what he wanted. He added that the king was greatly agitated, and that he had tried to calm him down and encourage him to face up to the situation, in hopes that he could continue in his position but within the framework of a constitutional monarchy.\(^21\)

The British quietly put their troops in the Canal Zone on the alert, and forbade British planes from flying over the Delta so as not to arouse anti-British feelings amongst the populace.

On the 24th of July, John Hamilton, the British Assistant Military Attaché, asked to meet Major-General Mohamed Naguib to inform him that the British government had no wish to intervene in the internal affairs of Egypt but would not hesitate to do so if it became necessary to protect the lives of British subjects, and that accordingly, instructions had been issued to the British troops in the Canal Zone to remain on the alert. He added that this move was not directed towards the Egyptian military, especially as the statement issued by the revolutionaries stressed that the Egyptian army would be responsible for protecting the lives and possessions of foreigners, which had reassured the British.\(^22\)

**Third: The revolution and the king**

An important question raised itself on the morning of the revolution: how would the king react? And what did the revolutionaries have in store for him?

The king met with Caffery on the afternoon of July 23rd, feeling very bitter at the failure of the British to intervene. He had no recourse but to accede to the demands of the

\(^{20}\) FO 371/96877, "Egyptian political events leading to the military coup d’état of General Naguib", 1952.

\(^{21}\) Ibid.

\(^{22}\) Ibid.
leaders of the movement, which included sacking Naguib El Helaly and appointing Aly Maher as prime minister.

The Revolutionary Command Council met to discuss the fate of the king; opinions were divided as to how to deal with him, some leaning towards the view that he should be tried and executed. Nasser however was still insisting on a ‘white revolution’ and saw that the king should be removed from the country as soon as possible.23

Meanwhile, the king was attempting to escape, having sent several messages to Caffery on the 25th of July between 4 and 5 a.m. asking for a plane or American ship to escape on, especially after learning that his own royal guard had announced its support for the army movement, and that Egyptian army troops and tanks were on the Cairo-Alexandria road and were about to arrive. He feared that the officers of the movement might learn of his contacting the US Embassy, and accordingly asked for British intervention.

Caffery informed the British Embassy of the king’s request, and a search began for the nearest British military ship to the Egyptian coast. Two were found; one was ten hours away and the other six hours from the shoreline, but the British naval commander said that neither could be used for this purpose before consulting with Churchill himself.24

Several messages followed sent by the king to the US ambassador, who in turn relayed them to the British Embassy. At 8 a.m. on the morning of July 26th, the king sent a message from the palace stating that Egyptian military forces had broken into the palace and that gunfire had been exchanged!

On the same day, the army issued an ultimatum to King Farouk at his palace in Ras el Tin in Alexandria, demanding that he abdicate in favour of the heir to the throne, Prince Ahmed Fouad, and that he must leave the country before 6 p.m.25

The king signed the document, and the news of his abdication was announced to the people from the Egyptian Broadcasting Station at 6 p.m. at the same time that the king set sail on the royal yacht El Mahrousia from Alexandria Port. He was attired in his official white uniform as Commander in Chief of the Navy, and a twenty-one gun salute was fired as he left. Mohamed Naguib and the US ambassador were there to see him off.

Immediately, a board of trustees was appointed from independent, non-party members headed by Prince Mohamed Abdel Moneim.

Fourth: The joint position adopted by the British and the Americans

Following these decisive events, the British government refrained from intervening with the excuse that this was an internal affair. The British government had always realized the need to purge Egypt of the corrupt elements in the palace and the government in order to stabilize the country. However, they had concerns regarding rumours that some

23 Morgan, previous reference.
25 The full text of the ultimatum issued to the King can be found in Appendix 7.
of the officers had connections to the Muslim Brotherhood and were afraid that extremist elements might come into power, so the best scenario for them was for Aly Maher’s ministry to remain in office.

The British monitored the reaction of the populace to the military movement, noting the cheers and welcome that the Egyptian officers were met with upon their entry into Alexandria on July 25th, to guard the consulates and secure the city before the departure of the king. Once they realized that the movement was a success, the British began to review the situation, and were not quick to acknowledge the new system, preferring to monitor matters warily until the US government announced on September 3rd that it could be willing to support the movement so long as no communists were to join the government. At this point, the British began to question whether they should also follow suit; this was after Aly Maher’s ministry had been deposed on September 7th and the agrarian reform law issued on September 9th ending the feudal system by limiting land ownership and distributing the land amongst the fellaheen.

This succession of events occurring within just six weeks of the army’s movement led the British to classify the situation in Egypt as a revolution and not just a movement carried out by the military to make changes to the government. At this point, it was decided to show support for the movement, notwithstanding a certain anxiety at the momentum at which events were proceeding in Egypt.26

It was immediately decided by the British and US embassies to hold a joint assessment of the situation, which revealed that their biggest fear was the hegemony of extremists over the new system, widespread chaos, and the possibility of a counter-revolution even though this might take some time.

The joint review resulted in the realization that the two countries must form a consolidated front in order to best serve the long-term interests of the West and assure Egypt’s participation in the Middle East Defence Organization. Accordingly, instructions were issued by the US Foreign Office to provide moral and material support to the new Egyptian system, and to work towards solving the differences between Egypt and Britain, on the basis of the Canal Zone forces being ready in the case of any threats to the region and also on working towards achieving peace with Israel. The US government stipulated that Egypt should provide confidential assurances regarding these conditions, which Egypt refused to do.

The US government decided to enter into direct negotiations with the Egyptians to determine the nature and scope of the cooperation between the two countries, on the understanding that there would be limited economic and military assistance, the latter being restricted to technical aid only.

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The US also decided not to offer weapons to Egypt, and to encourage it to pursue this matter with Britain, its main provider of weaponry, citing the difficulty of arming Egypt before a peaceful settlement was reached with Israel.\textsuperscript{27}

\begin{flushend}
\textsuperscript{27} Ibid.
\end{flushend}

\textbf{CHAPTER TWO: THE DIFFICULTIES OF CHANGING THE OLD SYSTEM}

The Free Officers had six main objectives: putting an end to colonialism, to feudalism, to monopolies, to the government being controlled by capitalists, and establishing social justice, a strong army, and a sound democratic life.

Three days after the revolution, the king abdicated and left the country; in the meantime, the changes had already begun. The day after the revolution, the ministry headed by Naguib El Helaly was deposed and Aly Maher was commissioned to form a new cabinet. Major General Hussein Sirry, Chief of the Royal Border Corps, was arrested, together with a number of others, and Major-General Mohamed Naguib became Commander in Chief of the Armed Forces, after King Farouk had signed an order to that effect. A clean sweep of the army and government was made to get rid of corruption and favouritism.

Support for the movement came thick and fast from various sources; the Muslim Brotherhood led by Hassan El Hudeibi announced their support during the first week, as did the Sudanese, headed by Ismail El Azhari.

\textbf{The Free Officers officially assume control}

The Free Officers had no desire whatsoever to govern the country, but were simply bent on ridding the country of all foreign influence and on implementing a decisive agrarian reform plan that would end the feudal system, a system which Europe had done away with some three hundred years beforehand. They wished to entrust the responsibility of governing to a political party whose leaders could be trusted to work within a framework inspired by the revolutionary spirit.
In the beginning, all the political parties applauded and cheered the movement; the Wafd, the Muslim Brotherhood, and the communists all thought they could take advantage of the revolution and make it theirs. They underestimated the strength of purpose that was its driving force.\textsuperscript{28}

Nasser says:

“I spoke with the leaders of every single party, but found not one person willing to put the welfare of the people before the welfare of his own party. I even offered to transfer control to the Wafd party, on condition that they guarantee the evacuation of the British from the Canal Zone and that they implement the agrarian reforms limiting land ownership to two hundred feddans per person. They refused. We therefore had to shoulder the responsibility ourselves, and did so with heavy hearts.”\textsuperscript{29}

Accordingly, Aly Maher’s cabinet was deposed and the Revolutionary Command Council assigned the leadership of the Cabinet to Major-General Mohamed Naguib on September 8\textsuperscript{th}, 1952. The very next day, the Agrarian Reform Bill was issued, limiting land ownership for the first time in the history of Egypt and paving the way for the eradication of feudalism and the distribution of land amongst the fellaheen. An important step had been taken towards achieving one of the revolution’s main goals: social justice.

**Negotiations regarding the Sudanese question**

One of the first issues encountered by the Revolutionary Command Council was the question of the Sudan and the tripartite relationship between Egypt, Britain, and the Sudan; a situation almost unprecedented in European colonial history!

Britain had occupied the Sudan in September, 1898, under General Herbert Kitchener with the support of the Egyptian army, after which both the Egyptian and the British governments signed an agreement on January 19\textsuperscript{th}, 1899, for joint administration of the Sudan. However, it was Britain who had the upper hand and assumed full control of the Sudan, separating it completely from Egypt, in spite of which the Anglo-Egyptian Treaty of 1936 kept the terms of the 1899 agreement!

It was therefore only logical that the revolutionary government should view the Sudanese question from a completely different perspective than that of the previous decades. Ali El Mirghani, head of the Khatmiyya religious order in the Sudan, sent a message to Major-General Mohamed Naguib on September 21\textsuperscript{st}, 1952, saying the Sudanese people had agreed that direct talks should take place between Abdel Rahman El Mahdi, Head of the Sudanese Umma party, and the Egyptian authorities regarding the situation in the Sudan, and were also willing to negotiate with the British.

Official talks between the Egyptian and Sudanese sides began on October 4\textsuperscript{th}, 1952; this was followed by the Sudanese political parties agreeing to form a unified front as a

\textsuperscript{28} Morgan, ibid.
\textsuperscript{29} Ibid.
prelude to a complete merger, after being convinced to do so by Major-General Mohamed Naguib and Lieutenant-Colonel Salah Salem.

The revolutionary government also began intensified negotiations with the British government concerning the future of the Sudan on October 4th, 1952. Egypt was represented by Major-General Mohamed Naguib and Britain by Ralph Stephenson, the British Ambassador to Egypt. There were no representatives of the Sudanese people, however!

On February 21st, 1953, an agreement was signed allowing the Sudan to decide its own fate. Britain had played a major role in separating the Sudan from Egypt by strongly supporting the Sudanese faction calling for independence from Egypt and placing obstacles in the way of any possible framework for unity proposed by the revolutionary government or by the Sudanese who were in favour of such a union.

Nevertheless, the agreement constituted a victory for the revolutionaries, whereby it was agreed that the Sudan would enjoy self-rule for three years during which the British administration would withdraw its administrative presence completely, and enable the Sudan to decide for itself how to proceed.

**Constitutional changes and declaring Egypt a republic**

On the 9th of September, 1952, Major-General Mohamed Naguib announced the abolition of the constitution of 1923 which had formed the legitimate basis for the old regime. A committee was formed to draw up a new constitution, and on the 10th of February, 1953, a provisional constitution was declared to cover a transitional period of three years.30

On the 18th of June, 1953 a constitutional edict was issued by the Revolutionary Command Council abolishing the monarchy and the rule of the Mohamed Aly dynasty, abolishing all titles held by the royal family, and declaring Egypt a republic to be headed by Major-General Mohamed Naguib as President as well as Prime Minister, with Nasser as Deputy Prime Minister. Abdel Hakim Amer was promoted to the rank of Major-General, and the country was now to be officially known as The Republic of Egypt. Egypt’s flag was also changed. It was decreed that this state of affairs would prevail throughout the transitional period, after which the people would have the final say in determining the nature of the republic and the person who would head it as president once the new constitution was in place.31

The Revolutionary Command Council also decreed the confiscation of the possessions of the Mohamed Aly family and the compensation of the heirs of the leader Ahmed Orabi

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30 The terms of the provisional constitution, Appendix 8.
31 The constitutional declaration abrogating the monarchy and announcing the republic, Appendix 9.
for the wealth confiscated by Khedive Tewfiq after the Orabi Revolution of December 1882.\textsuperscript{32} 

The new regime soon found itself in a state of conflict with the political parties that had held sway during the monarchy and had constantly engaged in quarrels and divisions amongst themselves in a struggle for supremacy. In spite of the fact that the revolutionaries gave them every chance to try and fit in with the new status quo, the attempt was a failure.

\textbf{A map of the political scene in Egypt}

In order to understand the political climate during this period, it is necessary to become acquainted with the map of Egypt’s political parties and their origins and tenets. During the first half of the twentieth century, three political streams prevailed: the nationalist faction somewhat vaguely labelled liberal; the Islamic faction; and the Marxist faction.

\begin{enumerate}
\item \textbf{The Nationalist faction:} 
This is the movement which began with Mustafa Kamel, then carried on after the revolution of 1919, during which the Wafd party came into being. In September 1922, the Constitutional Liberals split from the Wafd, then in 1937 the Saadist Institutional Party (named after Saad Zaghloul) was formed, and the Wafdist bloc in 1943.

These parties, alongside the independent politicians, formed all the cabinets after Egypt’s nominal independence on February 28\textsuperscript{th}, 1922, and the ratification of the constitution in 1923. Their constant rivalry and quarrels enabled the king and the British occupiers to control them, leading to what became referred to as a cyclical balance of power in the government.

After the revolution, the parties clashed with the new regime, particularly regarding the Agrarian Reform Act limiting land ownership.

\item \textbf{The Islamic faction:} 
Sheikh Hassan El Banna founded the Muslim Brotherhood in Ismailia in 1928 as a reaction against the hegemony of foreigners over Egypt politically, militarily, and socially. While he claimed initially that the Brotherhood was a purely religious movement, his methods of recruiting members, and his previous history in joining a religious movement in 1923 following the visit of an American missionary group to Ismailia, then joining the Young Muslims Youth Association when he went to study in Cairo, and his repudiation of the westernized life he encountered in the capital, all pointed to political as well as religious motives. In the 1930s, the Muslim Brotherhood openly entered politics and infiltrated Cairo University, considered the stronghold of secularism, while Sheikh Hassan

\begin{footnotes}
\textsuperscript{32} Wording of the declaration to confiscate the possessions of the Mohamed Aly family and compensate Orabi’s heirs, Appendix 10.
\end{footnotes}
El Banna nominated himself for the elections, and while he failed in his own hometown of Ismailia, this nevertheless constituted a complete immersion in politics on the part of the Brotherhood.

El Banna was a past master at political bargaining to further the cause of his organization; he started off by championing the king, then allied himself with the Wafd after the events of February 4th, 1942. The result of his policies was to render the Brotherhood the most strongly organized movement in the country.

This strategy backfired when the king deposed the Wafdist government in 1944, and when the pro-monarchist government of Mahmoud Fahmy El Nokrashy came to power in 1946, the Brotherhood initiated hostilities with them, which ended in the assassination of Nokrashy on December 30th, 1948.

Pro-royalist forces retaliated by assassinating Sheikh Hassan El Banna less than six weeks later on the 12th of February, 1949. The Muslim Brotherhood suffered a considerable loss with the assassination of its founder and leader; the subsequent heads of the organization were not up to his standard, and divisions began to occur within the Brotherhood itself.

**The Marxist faction:**
Marxism had been illegal since 1924 and Marxists constantly hounded under the government of Saad Zaghloul. The movement was itself divided into different factions owing to divergent beliefs as well as to personal animosities. Despite the fact that Marxism gained only a limited following in Egypt, it nevertheless helped to enrich the political and social discourse in the country, though the Marxists never actually formed part of any ministries.33

In response to the political struggle that existed after the revolution, Major-General Mohamed Naguib announced on the 17th of January 1953 that all existing political parties were to be liquidated and their assets confiscated owing to their having exploited the climate of freedom that prevailed to work against the regime and to create internal unrest. The decree did not include the Muslim Brotherhood as it was considered a religious organization, but it, too, was dissolved on the 14th of January, 1954.

**The power struggle within the Revolutionary Command Council (the crisis of March 1954)**
A noticeable development occurred when Major-General Mohamed Naguib became prime minister then President of the Republic on 18th June, 1953; not

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only did his popularity increase, but people saw him as the real force behind the revolution and that while the members of the Revolutionary Command Council could have a certain influence, they were not readily accessible. When Nasser in one of his speeches said, “I will not plead for cheers or applause!” these words came from a man who felt himself to be the foremost contributor to the revolution, to deposing King Farouk, and to all the events and changes that succeeded it. Meanwhile Naguib was constantly visiting factories, universities, and camps, and being seen everywhere by the people. It seemed that he was establishing a counterbalance to the officers, whose influence was concentrated in the army.34

1. Mohamed Naguib’s resignation:
   Divisions and a power struggle began to surface, and the situation reached its peak on 23rd February, 1954, when Naguib tendered his resignation. The main point of contention was that the officers should retreat and rejoin the ranks of the army, and that parliamentary life should resume as it was before the revolution, or that full responsibility should be his alone.35

   The following day saw the Revolutionary Command Council accept Naguib’s resignation from all of his positions. Nasser was appointed Prime Minister and head of the Revolutionary Command Council, and an official edict was issued appointing him Military Ruler. At the same time, the officers of the Cavalry Corps went on strike, requesting the liquidation of the Revolutionary Command Council and the return of its members to their army positions, the appointment of a Commander of the Armed Forces based upon seniority36, and a resumption of parliamentary life.

   However, this move was countered by officers all over the various army divisions, and a large number of them gathered in army headquarters and outside it, demanding that the Revolutionary Command Council remain, else the revolution would be over!

34 Mohamed Hassanean Heikal in an interview with Al Jazeera channel, September 2006.
35 Sami Sharaf, Years and Days with Gamal Abdel Nasser, Madbouli 2007, page 213.
36 Abdel Hakim Amer had been promoted from major to major-general and appointed head of the armed forces in 1953 as afore mentioned.
2. **The Revolutionary Command Council dissolves itself within four months:**

The Council, after much deliberation, unanimously agreed to go back to barracks and to keep Naguib as president of the republic, and Khaled Moheiddin, who was a member of the Cavalry Corps and popular with his fellow officers, as prime minister. Naguib agreed, but the officers within the General Command of the Armed Forces strongly disagreed.

This tense state of affairs within the army continued for some time, and matters came to a head when the officers of the Artillery Corps surrounded the Cavalry Corps armed with guns, while the air force staged several flights in support of the Revolutionary Command Council.

News of the tension at the top leaked down to the people, and several demonstrations took place in the streets of Cairo as well as in the Sudan, in support of Mohamed Naguib.37

Ralph Stevenson informed Churchill that the situation in Cairo was chaotic, upon which Churchill enquired about the status of the Rodeo plan for British military intervention in Cairo and the Delta and demanded that it be put on the alert preparatory to its implementation, and a pro-British government installed in Egypt. The officers causing the disturbance would be sent to Cyprus!38

The Egyptian General Intelligence observed an increasing number of meetings between the Muslim Brotherhood, the Socialist Party and the communist organizations. The Brotherhood and some of the Wafd leaders supported President Mohamed Naguib even though he had personally signed the decree to dissolve them, but none of the armed forces were on his side, neither were the members of the Revolutionary Command Council. The workers’ syndicates issued a statement endorsing the Revolutionary Command Council’s decision to accept Naguib’s resignation and voicing support for Nasser.

Be that as it may, on February 27th, 1954, a statement was issued by the Revolutionary Command Council reinstating Naguib as President of the Republic to preserve the unity of the nation and announcing his acceptance of the post, and a decree reinstating him as military ruler.

The Revolutionary Command Council met on March 21st to discuss the resumption of parliamentary life, following which Mohamed Naguib

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37 Sami Sharaf, ibid, page 215.
38 Heikal, ibid.
announced that constitutional life would resume in four months’ time. The Council then issued several decrees on 25th March: to form an elected founding committee which would meet in July to discuss and ratify the constitution and take over legislative duties until a new parliament was elected; to cancel censorship of the press, to cancel martial law, and to allow the formation of political parties. The Revolutionary Command Council would be in full control until the meeting of the founding committee; in other words, the Council had taken the decision to dissolve itself and end its role on July 23rd, 1954.

Following the issuance of these decrees, Mohamed Naguib intensified his communications with the leaders of the Muslim Brotherhood and both the Socialist and the Wafd parties. However, on the 28th of March, the Conference of Workers’ Syndicates called for a general strike starting the next day and continuing until the Revolutionary Command Council rescinded the above-mentioned decrees. The following day, Nasser visited the Transport Workers’ headquarters and asked them to end the strike, to which they agreed.

Nasser also met with a number of civilian ministers who informed him that they refused the Revolutionary Command Council’s decision to dissolve itself. He was also confronted by strikes in the army, whose officers also demanded that the Council’s decisions be cancelled. The situation was exacerbated when several demonstrations and strikes spread through Cairo and the provinces, to the extent that King Saud of Saudi Arabia tried to intervene between Nasser and Naguib to solve the differences between them.

3. The end of the crisis between Naguib and the Revolutionary Command Council:
The matter ended with the decision of the Revolutionary Command Council to postpone dissolving itself and for political parties to return until the end of the transitional period. It was also decided to form a national consultancy council.

On the 17th of April 1954, the Revolutionary Command Council issued a decree for the formation of a new cabinet of ministers headed by Nasser; with Naguib to remain as president and as head of the Council.

The March crisis occurred at a time when the British-Egyptian negotiations were broken off, and accordingly created an unwelcome stir which impacted the July regime both regionally and worldwide, resulting in the British forces in the Canal Zone being put on the alert for the possibility of military intervention in Cairo and the Delta according to the afore-mentioned Operation Rodeo. Egypt had now entered into a complicated situation fraught with danger due to several opposing forces internally as well as the British
occupation in the Canal Zone, this at a time when the revolutionary regime was confronting an uncompromising opponent in the negotiations for the evacuation of Egypt, which had broken down as a result. Egypt was also facing global pressure to join an organization for the defence of the Middle East.
CHAPTER 2
THE EVACUATION NEGOTIATIONS

How did the British-Egyptian negotiations begin? Who initiated them? It all began with the Sudan crisis, which did not last long owing to the quick response of the revolutionary regime to the wishes of the Sudanese people for self-rule. It was only natural after that that the leaders of the revolution should wish to begin negotiations with a view to achieving the Egyptian nationalist movement’s main objective since the beginning of the twentieth century: the evacuation of British troops from Egypt; troops which numbered eighty thousand, even though the treaty of 1936 specified that there should be no more than ten thousand!

First: Paving the way for the negotiations
Both parties began preparing for the negotiations, mustering all the forces possible for bringing pressure to bear upon one another. The Egyptian side, headed by Nasser, found themselves confronted with risks that were very different from those faced during any of the previous negotiations from 1920 to 1952.

1. The risks to the Egyptian side:
The most important danger to Egypt was the expansion of the framework for these negotiations, for while Britain was at the forefront, there were other parties that had been pressured into helping Britain achieve its aims.

The first of these was the USA; Churchill had approached President Truman, then President Eisenhower after the 1953 elections, and Eisenhower had issued strategic directions to maintain a presence in the Middle East and achieve stability there, and to bring about a reconciliation between the Arabs and Israel as the means of achieving this objective. These efforts took the form of diplomatic, political, and intelligence activities; military activities were dismissed due to the risks involved owing to the proximity of the area to the Soviet Union, that is, unless the Soviets initiated hostilities. The USA was keen to establish a northern ‘belt’ in the Middle East consisting of Turkey, Iran, and Pakistan, forming a defensive band on the borders of the Soviet Union.

At the same time, Britain began to step back and let the USA take the leading role, as the latter had proved its power during WWII and possessed impressive nuclear and economic resources. Britain knew that the strategic location of the Arab world, at the heart of which lay Egypt, made it a target for possible conflicts over it, so enlisting the support of, and indeed relinquishing leadership to, the USA, was a strategic move.
The American presence in the negotiations steered the talks in the direction of the defence of the Middle East rather than the issue of British evacuation from Egypt. The US National Defence Council set up a plan for the preservation of petroleum sources in the Middle East, rendering them under the control of the US under all circumstances, while preventing the Soviet Union from having access to them, even if this meant destroying the oilfields!

The second element of danger to Egypt in the evacuation talks was Israel, with whom Britain had already held talks with a view to coordinating their position during the negotiations. Israel had expressed its fears concerning the evacuation of the British troops from the Canal Zone and requested that the British consult them first before signing any agreement with Egypt. It was obvious that the Israelis saw the British presence in the Canal Zone as constituting a buffer zone between them and the Egyptian army.39

Churchill warned the British negotiators not to enter into any agreement with the Egyptians that could possibly harm Israel, adding that they must be aware that Israel was a highly important element in any confrontation with the Egyptians. “They have the strongest army in the Middle East, and we might need it at a certain stage”!40

In this context, Selwyn Lloyd, the British Minister of State for Foreign Affairs, confirmed the tripartite declaration between the USA, Britain, and France in the House of Commons, which defined the borders between Israel and the Arab countries, and said that Israel had been notified of the developments.

Yet another player in the negotiations was the Suez Canal Company, which had been sure of its position under the old regime, wielding considerable influence and enjoying strong relations with the palace. So what did the Suez Canal Company seek to gain? The renewal of the concession, which was scheduled to end in 1968. The company constituted what was tantamount to a state within the state, and was linked to the banking system in Egypt – a primarily foreign system – with limitless access to funds. An Egyptian company taking over would put an end to all that.

France was also concerned with the evacuation negotiations and was in constant communication with Britain, not only because it considered the

39 PREM 11/465, "Israel & the defence negotiations with Egypt, request for prior consultation", 1953.
40 Ibid.
Suez Canal Company a French enterprise, but also because it was concerned with the safety of the Mediterranean.

2. The British confrontation with the Egyptian party:
With all the above-mentioned pressures on the Egyptian negotiators, and amidst a global struggle whose rules differed completely from any previous negotiations with Egypt, the Middle East became a target for intervention in the Cold War.

The British found themselves facing a completely new system in Egypt and one to which they were not accustomed. They had previously negotiated with prime ministers such as Mostafa El Nahas, Ismail Sidki, Ahmed Maher, Mahmoud Fahmy El Nokrashy, Mohamed Salah El Din, Naguib El Helaly, and Hussein Sirry, whose social status and abilities they were familiar with, as they were all legislators with a background in law. The leaders of the Free Officers, however, were unknown entities to the British; officers with a military mindset now confronting the British and asking for evacuation and independence.\footnote{Heikal, ibid.}

Accordingly, the British War Office recommended that an agreement be reached with the Egyptians, as holding on to the base in the Canal Zone would simply weaken it to the point where it would be rendered virtually useless, which the Egyptians were capable of doing.\footnote{Ibid.}

Before the negotiations began, Lord Killearn, the former British Ambassador to Egypt, launched a defamation campaign against Egypt, to which Nasser responded:

“Lord Killearn is an antiquated relic completely out of tune with the spirit of the times, where equality amongst people has become an established principle that cannot be denied or even discussed. This archaic way of thinking based on invasion, plundering, and exploitation, and on using force to subjugate a nation, belongs to the 19th century, or actually, way before then! It has no place in today’s world.”\footnote{Nasser to the Egyptian press, 5/4/1953.}

3. The Egyptian preparations for the negotiations:
Nasser and his colleagues were well prepared for the negotiations with the British; they were familiar with the details of the previous negotiations that had taken place since 1920 and had held several intensive sessions to
determine the boundaries they would not transcend during the negotiations.

Nasser had also held a meeting with Trevor Evans, the political attaché at the British Embassy, who spoke of the negative impact the declarations of the Egyptian authorities had had in London; at which point Nasser immediately responded by mentioning the ‘negative impact’ of the British actions taken in the Sudan! He added:

“We need to resolve the issue of trust first of all, and you must know that we will never accept anything that a previous government refused before, so it is pointless to repeat the negotiations that took place in the days of Milner.\(^44\) The people are not thinking of cooperating with Britain: they are thinking only of evacuation.”

Nasser also involved the people of Egypt in the negotiations even before they had begun, and began mobilizing them to confront the British. In a speech he made on February 23\(^{rd}\), 1953, he said:

“Our first objective is unconditional evacuation; the occupation must put their bindle\(^45\) over their shoulder and leave, or fight to the death.”

4. **Coordination between Britain and the US regarding the negotiations:**
Churchill made sure to consult with Eisenhower as soon as the question of the evacuation of British troops was raised, in order to coordinate their actions in this strategically important part of the world.\(^46\) In one of his letters to Eisenhower, Churchill says:

“We do not require military or financial aid from you; our troops in the Canal Zone - 80,000 of them - are strong enough to repel any attack, and even if circumstances necessitate our entering Cairo or Alexandria, everything can be ready within 96 hours’ warning. Add to this the fact that half the Egyptian army – some 15,000 men – are stationed on the eastern side of the Canal to monitor the Israelis, so it would be easy enough to force them to surrender by cutting off supplies. As for Egypt, cutting off petroleum could be a decisive factor!”

Churchill goes on to say:

\(^{44}\) The Saad Zaghloul – Milner negotiations, 1920.
\(^{45}\) Stick with belongings tied to the end of it, like tramps used to use.
“The advantages of our working together are many, and will enable us to achieve successful results without having to resort to violence or bloodshed, or to ask you for any military obligations... We can present the dictator Naguib with a prearranged plan which we both endorse, and which will also support MEDO at the same time.”\(^{47}\)

Churchill went even further, stating, “If an Anglo-American military and diplomatic team were to firmly put our plan before Naguib, matters would be resolved without bloodshed.”\(^{48}\)

The two parties did come to an agreement to join forces to negotiate with Egypt, but Egypt refused to let the Americans be part of the talks. Eisenhower himself backed out of participating, telling Churchill that, “For us to take part in the negotiations without a prior agreement or an invitation to do so might make it seem as though our two governments were presenting an ultimatum!”\(^{49}\)

This stance angered Churchill, who wrote reproaching Eisenhower:

“I hope that although you are not willing to help us, it shall not look as though the US were opposing us... It must not appear to the world that there are political differences between our two countries. We are not incapable of, or afraid of, dealing with Naguib ourselves\(^{50}\)... We shall proceed with the negotiations on our own.”\(^{51}\)

Eisenhower’s decision was:

“The British should begin negotiations with Naguib, then once the question of supplying Egypt with weapons comes up, the interests of the US, and the conditions for supplying these arms, will make it natural for us to be invited to participate in the negotiations, or else abandon the region completely.”\(^{52}\)

\(^{47}\) Letter from Churchill to Eisenhower dated 18/2/1953, ibid, pp 25-26. MEDO is the Middle East Defence Organization.

\(^{48}\) Letter from Churchill to Eisenhower dated 25/2/1953, ibid, p. 29.

\(^{49}\) Letter from Eisenhower to Churchill dated 19/3/1953, ibid, p. 32.

\(^{50}\) Letter from Churchill to Eisenhower, ibid, same page.

\(^{51}\) Letter from Churchill to Eisenhower, ibid, p. 35.

\(^{52}\) Letter from Eisenhower to Churchill, ibid, p.39.
Second: The beginning of the negotiations

The conflict between the objectives of both negotiating parties was clear from the onset of the talks. Egypt’s aim was to sign an agreement stating the unconditional evacuation of all British troops from the Canal Zone, while Britain on the other hand wanted to include Egypt in the Western alliance opposed to the Soviet Union under the pretext of defending the Middle East, in an attempt to secure a legitimate excuse for its troops to remain in the Canal Zone.

1. The dispute during the first stage of the talks:
When the British asked the Egyptian delegation how they visualized the future defence of the Middle East against the danger of communism, Nasser replied:

“This is not an issue we can consider except as an independent country. We must resolve the problem of evacuation and of ending the British occupation which has lasted more than seventy years, and then and only then can we speak as free agents concerning the defence of the free world. Till then, I certainly cannot convince the Egyptians that they must prepare to defend themselves against the Soviet Union, which is 5000 miles away from here and with whom we have never had any form of friction, when we have spent the past decades struggling against the British for our independence! I cannot tell them that all of a sudden the enemy has changed, and that the power threatening us is no longer Britain but the Soviet Union!”

The British then asked how the Egyptians saw their contribution to the defence of the Middle East together with other Arab countries and others in the region, namely Turkey, Pakistan, and Iran.

The following discussion took place during the negotiations on 25th April, 1953:

Nasser: “We agree as to the objective, but differ as to how to achieve it. Seventy years of occupation have created a lack of trust towards you in the Egyptian people, which has to be addressed first, and a friendly spirit created, in order to convince the people that you are not their enemies. At the moment, all they see is the unwanted presence of the British troops – the occupation – in their country, and there is no way they can perceive the Russians as posing a threat at this point in time.”

Robertson:54 “I feel that this region needs the help of the West, and this feeling was confirmed when I visited Baghdad, Amman, Beirut, and Ankara, all of whom requested our help and told us ‘we need you’.”

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53 Heikal, ibid.
54 Brian Robertson, Commander-in-Chief of the British Forces in the Middle East.
Nasser: “This region can only be defended by its own people, and I ask you: where are the men sufficient enough in number to defend the region should it be attacked by the Russians, when you have western Europe to defend?! This region can easily muster enough forces to stand up to any attack until help arrives.”

Robertson: “The problem is that the Arab armies in their current state are not in a fit condition to defend the region without help.”

Nasser: “If the terms of the agreement in any way indicate that the occupation should remain, there will be no result. If you wish to alert the people to the dangers Russia could pose, you must first put an end to the current situation so that they do not remain focused on the British. Furthermore, the Arab Joint Security Pact is the is the only way to defend the Middle East.”

Robertson: “The British government has reservations regarding this, though from my personal point of view, I agree with what you say. I know you will get more than the British people can imagine; it is impossible for both parties to get 100% of what they wanted, but I believe you will achieve 95% of your demands.”

Nasser: “If this is about bargaining, our demands are unconditional evacuation and we will not bargain about that, so help us to make this happen.”

Robertson: “The Canal Zone base is difficult! Who will remain to administer it?”

Nasser: “The base is Egyptian, and the suggestion made by William Slim regarding a joint committee will render any attempt at coming to an agreement useless. However, regarding technicians, we can consider the matter.”

Robertson: “The number doesn’t matter.”

Nasser: “They numbered 5,000 under Naguib El Helaly then 10,000 under Aly Maher; they constitute a continuation of the British occupation.”

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56 Field Marshall William Slim, Governor General of Australia.
57 Minutes of the negotiations, 25/4/1953, from Nasser’s personal papers and in his own handwriting.
Stevenson\textsuperscript{58} “The three problems we need to resolve are...the presence of the base and its importance, the troops in the area, and the Egyptian government’s wish for evacuation.”

Robertson (focused on the strategic importance of the Middle East and of the Suez Canal): “It is in Britain’s interests to secure the Middle East, to fulfil its obligations towards Turkey, and to secure the oil; we also have joint interests with friends in the region and treaties with the Arabs. It is our wish that the countries of the Middle East be strong and cooperative, which is currently not the case.

“The British government is willing to accede to Egypt’s demand for evacuation, but regarding the base, there must be British workers in the store-rooms to take their orders from the British government. There has been a suggestion made that the Egyptian government should take over the base and undertake its security, work force, transportation, and technicians, which is a huge responsibility. However, we feel that technical supervision should be British. Britain wishes to protect the countries of the Middle East and to help them counter any attack. Our forces are not enough for defence purposes, but we can provide reinforcements. We shall look into Egypt’s request to take over the base, but as mentioned before, the technical supervision must be British as must the air defence from the base, and the technical committees.”\textsuperscript{59}

Stevenson told Nasser: “You speak of the base but you know nothing about it. Let me arrange for you to visit it so that you can form an idea of the billions of sterling pounds it costs!”

Nasser considered this invitation an insult, replying:

“It is I who invite others to anywhere in Egypt; no one invites \textit{me} to somewhere in Egypt!”\textsuperscript{60}

2. **The ceiling of Egypt’s demands:**

Nasser had previously discussed the British propositions with members of the Revolutionary Council and with Dr. Mahmoud Fawzi, Minister of Foreign Affairs. He wrote the following in his own handwriting:

“The base will remain Egyptian; technicians can be from Britain or anywhere.”

\textsuperscript{58} Ralph Stevenson, British Ambassador in Cairo.
\textsuperscript{59} Minutes of the meeting of the Egyptian cabinet with the British side in the evacuation negotiations, 27/4/1953, in Nasser’s handwriting from his personal papers.
\textsuperscript{60} Heikal, ibid.
a. Page 162 of the Green Book: \(^6\)
   Expediting the evacuation of British troops immediately after the agreement.

b. Evacuation from land and sea to be accomplished in a period no longer than one year.

c. The base to be handed over to Egyptian forces immediately once the evacuation is completed.

d. British forces to return to prearranged locations when necessary to protect Egypt in the case of any military aggression or in the case of Britain’s becoming involved in warfare as a result of an attack on any Arab country adjacent to Egypt.

e. In the case of the return of British troops as per the above clause, evacuation is to take place immediately upon cessation of military operations within a period no longer than three months. \(^6\)

Negotiations between the members of the Revolutionary Council together with Dr. Mahmoud Fawzy, and the British delegation, took place from the 20\(^{\text{th}}\) to the 24\(^{\text{th}}\) of April 1953. What was to be withdrawn from the base, and what was to remain? The evacuation, air defence, and arms requirements were all discussed.

Egypt’s requests were:

a. Complete evacuation of all British troops within a period not longer than six months, and the abrogation of the Treaty of 1936. \(^6\)

b. Ownership of equipment remaining after the evacuation to be transferred to the Egyptian government. The Egyptian government to request the technical experts required to operate the base, who were to train Egyptians to replace them.

c. Military assistance with building the Egyptian army, as well as economic assistance.

Questions were raised as to the duration of the evacuation process, the base, when would western countries be permitted to use it, would there be a defence agreement? Nasser replied in the negative to the last issue, and when asked what would replace the Treaty of 1936, he replied, quite simply:

“Nothing. There will be no new alliance made. And indeed no agreements of any kind until the evacuation is completed. As for experts, they are to leave once they have trained their replacements.”

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\(^6\) A book containing all documents pertaining to the negotiations on the Sudan between Egypt and Britain from 13\(^{\text{th}}\) February 1841 to the 12\(^{\text{th}}\) of February 1953, compiled by Aly Zein El Abidein Hosny.

\(^6\) Notes from Nasser’s personal papers, 1953.

\(^6\) The 1936 Treaty had been repealed by the Wafd government on 25\(^{\text{th}}\) October, 1951, but the British government had not acknowledged its abrogation.
Dr. Fawzy stated that Egypt would fulfil its duties towards maintaining world peace in accordance with the United Nations Charter regarding defence against aggression, and that after the evacuation the base would be available for defence purposes should Egypt or any Arab country be subjected to an attack.64

Third: The breaking off of negotiations and their resumption

Negotiations reached a deadlock and were cut off a few days after they had begun. The atmosphere was tense on both sides, a tension that was felt by the people of both Egypt and Britain.

Nasser declared:

“We stopped the talks when we realized that it would be futile to continue them, and when it became clear that all the British wanted was to maintain their occupation of Egypt and simply call it by another name.”65

1. The Egyptian reaction:

Nasser made a speech addressing the nation, reminding them of the history behind the situation:

“England entered Egypt with the excuse of being a friendly nation wishing to help the Khedive strengthen and reinforce security and order in the country, promising to leave the country once this was achieved. In fact, they claimed that the continuation of this occupation would bring shame and dishonor to the British! The promises continued in succession, but the British policy was built on lies and deceit, and the British – after seventy long years – are still here, besmirching the soil of our country. The British claim that our adamant demands for evacuation are delaying the negotiations, which is simply a means of avoiding the issue and playing for time! We declare, at the top of our voice, that negotiations are not our aim: our aim is the evacuation of the occupying forces.

“We will set up camps for military training all over the country and muster an army of anyone capable of wielding a weapon to defend our country. This is how we will fill the void they claim will result from the evacuation of their forces; we say to them: the only way to defend our country is to let our own people do it, and we will not agree to defend our country against some hypothetical danger and ignore the real danger right here occupying our land!

“We have had enough of weakness and of surrender, and I say to them: we are different now! Things are different now! Treachery will no longer serve you: Egypt will be liberated, and the forces of the occupation must leave.

64 Nasser’s personal papers, ibid.
65 Note from Nasser’s personal papers, ibid.
“They say: what of the base? And we say: we know what a base is; we are military people and know what a base entails! This base cannot operate unless the Egyptians cooperate, otherwise it will be of no value whatsoever.

“They say: you must join the free world; and I say to them: how can slaves become part of the ‘free world’?!

“They say: America has bases in England, and I say: if the English wanted the Americans to leave these bases, would the Americans refuse to do so?!

“They say: an alliance would be an alliance of the free with the free, and Egypt would thereby become part of the free world, but we say: it would not be an alliance of the free, for the free are never forced into an alliance! So what do you mean by ‘the free world’?!

“If Britain really had good intentions, it would not adamantly oppose the armament of the Egyptian army. I tell you this: we must be ready for the worst possible scenario if we really want to end seventy years of humiliation; we must mobilize our forces for the hour of reckoning.”

In addition, Nasser held meetings with the Chiefs of Staff of the Arab armies on the 25th of August, 1953, stressing the importance of joint cooperation, saying:

“In the light of this understanding as set forth in the Joint Arab Security charter, we are meeting today to embark on a dangerous mission, and to translate the concepts of the charter into actual living deeds.”

A note in Nasser’s own writing dating from this period mentions:

“Building strong ties with the Arabs, pan-Arabism, an Arab socialist society, working towards an Arab union. How to muster the forces of the Arab nation? The Arabs are one nation; the Arab world must be liberated and form one political entity.”

Such were Nasser’s hopes, which he strove to achieve with all the means possible.

2. Fedayeen operations in the Canal Zone:

Nasser wrote:

“Our freedom is non-negotiable; people who bargain for their freedom sign themselves up for slavery... Egypt has announced it loud and clear: we shall

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66 Draft of an unpublished speech in Nasser’s handwriting after the negotiations were cut off.

67 Nasser’s speech to the meeting of Arab Chiefs of Staff, 25th of August, 1953.
obtain our freedom and independence no matter what difficulties we encounter, and must be prepared for the worst.”

Fedayeen operations against the British began in the Suez Canal base, and concurrently, supplies to the base were cut off, and workers went on strike, all of which made it almost impossible to operate the base. The plan was not to resume negotiations until a concise estimate of the position in the Suez Canal base was made. Nasser was well aware that the English would not give Egypt up through negotiations alone, but would have to be forcefully driven out. Accordingly, the eight months before the negotiations were packed with activity in order to obtain as much information as possible on British intelligence operations in Egypt and the position of the occupying forces, as well as preparing the Egyptian fedayeen for battle with training and arms. The Egyptian intelligence service succeeded in obtaining copies of all the British intelligence reports, which were an important source of information. As for the fedayeen operations, they were more effective than the previous attempts which had taken place in October 1951 after the abrogation of the 1936 treaty, as this time they were spearheaded by the men of the July revolution.

On the 20th of May, 1953, the British government issued orders to its citizens to leave Egypt, and two days afterwards, Nasser announced:

“Those whom we do not want here are the forces of the occupation only; all other foreigners, including British civilians, are under the protection of Egypt.”

National defence camps were set up all over the country, in every town and village, to handle requests from volunteers wishing to join up. The revolutionaries knew how vital it was to protect the back of the fedayeen in the Canal Zone and to foil any attempts to cut off the zone from the rest of the country. A mine was hidden in the Qantara desert to use in blocking the Suez Canal, if need be.

An economic blockade was enforced on the British in the Canal Zone where the occupying forces numbered over 80,000 troops, though the 1936 Treaty stated that they should number no more than 10,000. The revolutionary government decided to benefit from this breaching of the treaty by prohibiting food supplies exceeding those sufficient for 10,000 troops! Checkpoints were set up to monitor the movement of supplies, with the aim of demoralizing the British forces by starving them!

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68 Draft of another unpublished speech after the negotiations were discontinued.
69 Kamal Rifaat, pp. 192, 196 with copies of some of the reports.
70 Ibid, pp. 253, 266, 267.
Several incidents against the British troops took place during this time, ranging from killing, kidnapping, and stealing arms and ammunition, to cutting off the water supply, and delaying transportation and trains, in addition to psychological warfare which included showering them with pamphlets and cutting off their newspapers. When negotiations were resumed in July 1954, one of the first things the British asked for was for newspapers to be allowed into the Suez Canal camps again, a request to which Nasser acceded. The fedayeen also set up a secret radio station broadcasting to the British troops in English and explaining the Egyptian point of view regarding the matter of the Suez Canal base.\textsuperscript{71}

On the 19\textsuperscript{th} of March, 1954, Churchill summoned his Secretary of State for War, Anthony Head, to discuss the situation in the Canal Zone, an on the same day the British Ambassador presented a protest to the Egyptian government for its failure – as they claimed – to maintain order and security in the area.

On the 22\textsuperscript{nd} of March, 1954, Britain stopped the release of ten million pounds of Egyptian money it was holding and which it had previously agreed to hand over, in an attempt to put pressure on the revolutionary government.

In May 1954, Selwyn Lloyd requested the resumption of talks with Egypt and asked for the Egyptian government’s help in curbing the dangerous incidents in the Canal Zone!

On 25\textsuperscript{th} June 1954, the leadership of the British forces in the Canal Zone was moved to Cyprus. Two days later, orders were issued by the British to demolish the stores, depots and buildings in the Adiba port overlooking the Suez Canal, the principal port the British troops had depended on for their supplies and reinforcements since WWII.

The British had reached the conclusion that Nasser had planned for all along; namely, that it was useless to keep a British base in the Canal Zone against the wishes of a people who resisted it so violently. They realized that the power of the regime lay in its popularity, and also that there was no other alternative. During the time of the monarchy, a ministry would resign if negotiations failed, but now things were different: if negotiations failed and reached a dead end, this would mean a clash between Britain and Egypt!

\section*{3. Fears of the British side:}
What could the British do if negotiations failed? They began to revive the Rodeo plan, and indications of this were seen in Suez and Ismailia, especially after the

\textsuperscript{71} Ibid, pp. 251-252, 287-288.
Egyptian resistance began in earnest. However, they needed a legal cover to do so, so what were their options?

First of all, to organize a rebellion or invasion, and set up a new regime in Egypt with the help of Mostafa El Nahas, leader of the Wafd party. The British also thought of the royal family; Prince Mohamed Abdel Moneim who was head of the Regency Council and imagined that he could issue a legitimate invitation to the British to intervene. Prince Mohamed wished to exploit the situation, and suggested a plan to the British whereby he would go to the Suez Canal base and issue a statement declaring the return of the monarchy and ask the army to join him and march to Cairo with General Erskine! He acted as though this were the era of Khedive Tewfik, in utter disregard of the wishes of the Egyptian people. He spoke of the legitimacy of the royal family, claiming that Farouk had not abdicated but had been forced to do so, and asking the British to protect the royal family. However, Churchill did not feel that Prince Mohamed was the solution for the situation in Egypt.

It is worth noting that ever since the July revolution and the taking over of government by the Free Officers under Mohamed Naguib, Churchill looked upon him as “having been made, without any electoral foundation, dictator of Egypt. Power has since rested with the military junta”!

Strangely enough, Churchill also announced in the House of Commons that Britain had not requested these negotiations with Egypt, although his correspondence with Eisenhower records the fact that it was the British who were striving to achieve this!

Churchill ended his speech saying: “If our troops in the Canal Zone were to be the object of renewed attacks by saboteurs or even by the Egyptian Army, which is being aided and trained by Nazi instructors and staff officers, and our soldiers were being killed, we should have no choice but to defend ourselves!”

4. The American role in the negotiations:
The Americans played an important role in arranging for the second round of talks; they did not take any steps without coordinating with the British, and discussions between Churchill and Eisenhower were very clear in this respect, down to the last detail.

At the same time, the British were well aware that they were being faced with real problems, for they knew that should the negotiations fail, even if the Egyptians

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72 General George Erskine, head of the British army in the Canal Zone.
73 Heikal, ibid.
74 Churchill’s statement to the House of Commons, May 11th 1953.
were incapable – as the British claimed – of running the base, they were perfectly able to render the presence of the British impossible or at best, of no use whatsoever.

John Foster Dulles\(^{75}\) made an official visit to Cairo in May 1953 after having consulted with Anthony Eden in London. He held talks with Nasser in the US Embassy, hinting at American economic and military assistance to Egypt as well as US support for Egypt with the World Bank regarding the funding of the High Dam project. He referred to the fact that the new Republican government in the US did not owe any allegiance to the Jewish lobby, unlike the Democrats.\(^{76}\)

Dulles also opened the subject of the presence of British troops in Egypt and assured Nasser that they would leave, and that complete Egyptian sovereignty would be acknowledged. He then said that the matter of the Suez Canal base and its administration was of prime importance in the absence of any other arrangements for the defence of the Middle East, stressing how vital it was that it should be properly managed and its resources available for use in Cyprus and Jordan, etc.

Dulles: “The US has no wish to support the United Kingdom in its occupation; we wish to see a free Egypt, but the base and depots are a complicated matter, and cannot be transferred to Egyptian ownership. We urge you not to demand control over the current resources in the base, because this would impede their use for defence purposes.”

Nasser: “Egypt has a problem with trust. I see that our objectives are one and the same; we, too, wish to see the defence of the region properly organized; however, as long as British influence remains in Egypt, any arrangements for such defence will be refused. Egyptians see the Middle East Defence Organization (MEDO) as an excuse for occupation. Our people need to be convinced, and to have trust.”

Dulles: “When can a new defence organization be formed? In two years’ time?”

\(^{75}\) Dulles’ plan rested on three main points as a preliminary solution to the Palestinian problem: 1. Putting an end to the suffering of one million Palestinian refugees by restoring them to their original homes and also settling them in the Arab regions they currently lived in and finding permanent work for them as well as having the Israeli pay them compensations. 2. Removing the state of anxiety that prevailed in the region by taking joint steps to repel any attack, and the readiness of the US to enter into formal agreements to prevent any hostile action by either of the two parties that would change the borders between them, and allowing other countries to participate with the US in achieving these security guarantees, all of which would be under the auspices of the United Nations. 3. Reaching an agreement regarding the borders on the basis that the current lines separating Israel from the Arab countries were the result of the armistice agreement of 1949 and did not constitute a permanent solution, and that the US was willing to participate in finding a solution for the border issue as a preliminary to resolving the other issues including that of Jerusalem.

\(^{76}\) From Nasser’s handwritten notes.
Nasser: “No one will agree to the United Kingdom being an ally of the Arabs; our people would consider anyone suggesting that to be a madman!”

Dulles: “Won’t the evacuation make a difference?”

Nasser: “British influence has to completely disappear.”

Dulles: “But surely, governments can influence the people?”

Nasser: “Yes, in anything but this! Britain sees that Egypt can assume ‘general control’ over the base but still wishes to retain technical control, and also to control everything to do with spare parts and supplies and their transportation to and from the base. However, the Egyptians can be trained to do everything the British do now.”

Dulles: “It is irrational to request this degree of control over the base in the absence of any defence organization. It is the hope of the US that Egypt will lead the Arab countries towards a new system of defence, not the MEDO which has become obsolete, and that when this is achieved, the necessary supplies will be ready in the depots.”

Nasser: “Egypt is capable, and the depots will be ready for use at any time.”

MacArthur\textsuperscript{77}: “Can Britain verify that Egypt will be ready, after the evacuation begins, to join in defending the region with the United Kingdom?”

Nasser: “This will not be acceptable to Egyptian public opinion, who will see this as a disguised form of the hated joint defence project! What the Egyptians want is for the base to be managed by Egyptians when they are in a position to take it over, which we hope will be within a short period.”

Byroade\textsuperscript{78}: “How can you reassure us that the base will carry on functioning as it did before, and that the defence system will be maintained?”

Nasser: “What can we do but promise?! The British are free to maintain the level of supplies currently in the base, but if there were to be any increase in this level, the Egyptian Government would wish to be consulted. Egypt wishes the base to be ready and in working condition, and regarding the British technicians, we need to know how long it will be before they all leave.”

Meade\textsuperscript{79}: “How can Egypt object to the presence of British supervisors?”

\textsuperscript{77} Douglas MacArthur II, Assistant Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs.
\textsuperscript{78} Henry Byroade, Assistant Secretary of State for Middle Eastern Affairs.
Nasser: “Egypt wants the base to be free of any British technicians in as short a period as possible.”

Dulles: “How can the talks be resumed? The situation is critical.”

Nasser: “By persuading the British to agree to the Egyptian point of view. As for the matter of communications in the Canal Zone with regard to supplies to the base, a chain will be established from the British War Office to the British Military Attaché and thence to the Egyptian Ministry of War. Orders do not have to be issued directly to the base. Egypt is also willing to strengthen the Joint Arab Security charter.”

After meeting with Nasser, Caffery commented that the situation in Egypt was, “More serious than the Department has recognized. Negotiations between UK and Egypt are at present suspended with seemingly little possibility of either party assuming the initiative in reopening talks. The base negotiations are stymied on technical points but these assume great importance in an atmosphere of mutual distrust.” He added that, “The regime will not make any concessions to the British: they would rather die martyrs than concede!”

The question – as put forth by Dulles – was, “Whether, if the base were to be in Egyptian hands, it would continue to serve the whole Middle East region. The best solution would be to establish a regional defence organization that would issue directions regarding supplies for the base. In the absence of such a solution, it is necessary for both the US and Britain that the base continue to serve the region, which means that it should not be solely in Egyptian hands.

“With regard to the question of a regional defence organization, it is obvious that to attempt to impose a preconceived defensive arrangement upon the Egyptians will meet with complete failure. This is clearly the general attitude of the Arab States. The Egyptians see defence in the area as the concern of the Arab states alone.”

Nasser wrote, in his handwritten notes, that:

“Dulles is proposing a compromise with Israel if the evacuation takes place... Are we to sign to a legitimate occupation?!”

79 Colonel Steve Meade, Military Advisor to the Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs.
80 The visit of Secretary of State John Foster Dulles and Mutual Security Administrator Harold Stassen to the Near and Middle East, May 9 – 29, 1953, State Department papers.
81 Ibid.
Dulles affirmed that the principal issue for the United States was the question of the conflict between Egypt and England over the British troops in the base.

Eisenhower and Churchill exchanged correspondence regarding their impressions of Dulles’ visit to Cairo and his meeting with Nasser. Eisenhower wrote to Churchill, saying:

“The situation is serious! We need to take urgent steps to reconcile between our need for defence and the Egyptian nationalist sentiment. We need to offer some concessions beginning with a speedy withdrawal of British troops, and make suitable arrangements to maintain the base. To help achieve this - if you wish and if this is acceptable to the Egyptians – I am prepared to send American technicians to help maintain the base.

“There is also the problem of ensuring that the base will be ready when necessary. In the meantime, and until further official arrangements are made, Egypt can pledge to have the base ready and available in the case of a state of war involving the Arab states and their allies, and that should suffice.

“After signing the agreement, it would be possible for Naguib to invite the US and Britain to assist in developing Egypt’s defence capabilities, which would include training and arming the Egyptian armed forces. At this point, we could negotiate the defence requirements of the West, while offering aid to Egypt.”

This letter angered Churchill, and he responded:

“We agreed with Truman, and with you, to offer a number of concessions to the Egyptians...and had hoped for at least moral support and a joint front in addressing the Egyptian dictator, but this has not happened in spite of the far-reaching concessions we have made.

“The Egyptian government has suspended negotiations and we are willing to resume them if they express the wish to do so... If the US decides to abandon us in spite of the agreement between us and all the concessions we have made, I can only say that we are not being treated fairly by our biggest ally, with whom we work jointly in many parts of the world to serve our common interests. And if Naguib, as a result of US encouragement or a promise of arms, were to turn his threats into action, the result will be bloodshed on a scale hard to conceive of.”

Eisenhower’s view was that it was in the best interests of all parties that the talks be resumed in Cairo, “As long as we agree as to the objectives we hope to achieve,

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and which I believe the Egyptians will not refuse; Dulles’ warning to the Egyptians that they will get no weapons as long as there is no agreement, should reassure you.”84

Churchill expressed his displeasure at certain information he had received, and wrote:

“I am extremely concerned at the idea of your giving economic aid to Egypt at a time when our relations with them are so strained. This will definitely have a negative effect in this country with regard to Anglo-American relations... The borders of the Suez Canal Zone are subject to the same instability and potential for conflict as those of the Korean borders... I urge you to reconsider this step and to bear in mind that it is neither in your interests or ours. We do not intend to offer Egypt any further concessions than we have already made during these lengthy negotiations, and war could break out at any moment.”85

The above request resulted in Eisenhower’s refusing to provide military aid to Egypt, and delaying the economic aid that had already been approved by the US Congress.86

**Fourth: The second stage of the negotiations**

Nasser entered into the second stage of the negotiations based on the following premise:

“Circumstances have changed; the base and external forces constitute a barricade surrounding Egypt, and we cannot achieve development or any internal progress without breaking through this enforced barrier.

“What matters to us? That there should be an agreement whereby the forces in the Canal Zone are decreased, thus preventing the possibility of the implementation of the Rodeo plan or any external actions.”87

1. **The British initiative to resume negotiations:**

On the 9th of July, 1954, the British Ambassador requested an urgent meeting with Nasser, asking that it should be on the following day as it was a matter of great importance. During the meeting, which was held at the home of Keown Boyd, the following discussion took place:

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84 Letter from Eisenhower to Churchill, 20/12/1953, ibid, p. 116
85 Ibid.
87 Heikal, ibid.
Stevenson: “The situation on 21st October. 1953, when the negotiations were suspended, was a result of the insistence of both sides on their respective points of view, and we are now eager to end the dispute.

“The two points of conflict, and especially the matter of military uniforms for the technicians, were intended to confer a military status to the base; however now that we have given up the military base, all that will remain will be a few facilities that will be looked after by civilian companies.

“As for the second point of dispute, we have learned that you have agreed to include Turkey with the Arab countries, and we see that Iran could also be added.”

(Egypt had refused the British proposal that the base be deployed, if the United Nations so decreed, in the case of a threat to peace or any form of aggression).

Nasser: “The dispute is still ongoing and has been since October 1953, and has in fact been exacerbated by the lengthy duration of the evacuation process and of the agreement! Furthermore, this new project requires several amendments in order to form a basis for any agreement.”

Stevenson: “The purpose of this agreement is that Egypt should clarify its position and stand by the Western countries and against any communist attack on the Middle East region, which is why you agreed to include Turkey. We need to show British public opinion that we will be working in unison for a long time, and that complete evacuation does not denote the end of cooperation between Egypt and Britain, and accordingly, between Egypt and the free world. This is why we think the agreement should be of a long duration, say twenty to thirty years, or even forty. And as the base will need civilians to supervise the facilities there, and as these will require a training period, we feel that the evacuation should be completed within two years rather than fifteen months.”

Nasser: “All these points have already been covered and replied to by the Egyptian side.”

Benson⁸⁸: “Fifteen months for evacuation are simply not enough; the new proposal is far more extensive than the previous one, and the evacuation process as we see it will take two years to accomplish. We also need to be

⁸⁸ General Edward Benson, Chief of Staff, Middle East Land Forces.
assured that Egypt has joined the free world, and accordingly feel that the agreement should be of long duration.”

Nasser: “How would you define liquidation of the base?”

The British side: “That the deputy chief of the base will no longer be there, and that there will only be some depots left with reserve supplies as well as some workshops to repair the vehicles; if you wish, we can also repair Egyptian vehicles there.”

Nasser: “Then the dispute is still where it has been since October 1953; in fact there are new points emerging now that we had previously settled, such as the duration of the evacuation process and of the agreement.”

The British side: “Does the president find the proposal suitable as a basis for an agreement?”

Nasser: “It requires several amendments for this to be so.”

Benson: “You were concerned about the matter of the uniforms, which is why we have made the base civilian in the new proposal. And you had agreed that the duration of the agreement should be seven years, on the basis that the technicians would be in military uniform.”

Nasser: “We never agreed to uniforms!”

Stevenson: “We have left the duration of the agreement undetermined in the proposal until we come to an agreement regarding it.”

Nasser: “You have added Iran in the new proposal, even though it was eliminated before.”

This meeting clearly demonstrates the eagerness of the British to expedite the negotiation process and bring matters to a conclusion, in order to send a copy of the situation to the British government before the House of Commons session on July 12th, 1954, and announce that the main principles had been agreed upon before the 23rd of July.

2. The signing of the Anglo-Egyptian Evacuation Agreement:

Eventually, a formula was reached that was acceptable to the Egyptians, and the agreement was signed on the 27th of July, 1954.

89 Memorandum from President Nasser’s office on the meeting in the home of Keown Boyd in Cairo, 10/7/1953.
Nasser immediately addressed the public from the Egyptian Broadcasting Station, saying:

“We are now living a glorious moment in the history of our nation and are standing on the threshold of a decisive stage in our struggle; the supreme objective of the revolution has now become a reality: we have signed an agreement ending the occupation and organizing the evacuation of British forces from the immortal land of Egypt. Now, after seventy-two bitter, sad years, our land at last belongs to our people, honourable, cherished, and enduring.”

Nasser also told the delegations of well-wishers coming to express their congratulations on the signing of the treaty:

“This agreement achieves a large part of the country’s objectives, and does not include any form of military alliance or joint defence or indeed any infringement on our rights; and for the first time in history, Britain has agreed to evacuate all of its military forces from Egypt.”

Finally, and after fifteen months of grueling negotiations, Nasser and members of the Revolutionary Command Council signed the final draft of the agreement on the 19th of October, 1954. The British side was represented by Anthony Nutting, Ralph Stevenson, and Edward Benson.

The agreement included the following:

1. The complete evacuation of all British forces from Egyptian territory within a period of twenty months from the signing of the agreement.
2. The announcement by the British government of the termination of the alliance treaty that had been signed in London on August 26th, 1936.
3. Parts of the Suez Canal base to be left in a functional state.
4. In the case of an armed attack on any country which, at the time of signing this treaty, forms part of the Joint Defence Treaty of the Arab League signed in Cairo on the 13th of April, 1950, Egypt is to provide the United Kingdom with the facilities necessary to prepare the base for war, and to manage it effectively. These facilities include the use of Egyptian ports within the limits imposed by absolute necessity.
5. In the case of the return of British troops to the Suez Canal base, these troops are to vacate the base immediately upon cessation of warfare.
6. The Egyptian government is to facilitate the passage of aircraft, as well as landing and all services related to the flights of British aircraft - which Egypt has been notified of - in the Egyptian airports in the Suez Canal Zone.
7. Both signatory governments declare that the Suez Canal – which is an integral part of Egypt – is a waterway of international importance, and
express their determination to respect the 1888 Convention of Constantinople which guarantees freedom of navigation in the Canal.

8. This agreement is valid for seven years from the date of being signed, if the two contracting governments fail to agree to its duration.

Fifth: Reactions to the signing of the agreement

Reactions to the agreement differed greatly, for while Egypt considered it an enormous victory over the British occupation which the Egyptian people had fought against since 1882, the British saw it as defeat and a failure of their Middle East strategy, as it meant forsaking their biggest military base with 80,000 troops and facilities worth millions, and an unparalleled strategic location.

1. The British side:

It was now up to the British government to convince the House of Commons and British public opinion of the validity of this step. Discussions took place around several issues; the first of these was the argument put forth by Anthony Head, the British Minister of War, who stated that the presence of nuclear weapons restricted Britain's naval power overseas, so reducing the number of troops was commensurate with the reduced possibility of large-scale military operations in the Middle East.

And with the entry of Turkey into NATO and its having been armed, its role had assumed a much more significant status in the defence of the Middle East; accordingly, the base in Egypt could be considered far from any potential combat zone. Moreover, the Suez Canal base would be of little use in either war or peace with a hostile Egypt. Unless a friendlier spirit were to prevail, and more cooperation on the part of the Egyptians, Britain could not expect to be granted any privileges from these facilities. Over and above which the number of British forces in the Canal Zone was excessive and must be reduced to relieve the commitments it incurred.

This analysis led to the following conclusion: that it was possible for Britain to keep a smaller base and at the same time strive towards more favourable cooperation with Egypt, and maintain a strategic reserve of the forces to be withdrawn from the Canal Zone.

Head then reviewed the newly-introduced points in the agreement; namely, that the reduced base would be managed by British civilian technicians, whereas as in the previous discussions, the British had aimed at keeping 4000 military technicians. The updated agreement reduced the technicians, facilities, and depots considerably.

With regard to the seven-year duration of the agreement, there were those who would have preferred it to be twenty years or more, while others felt it was only worth the paper it was written on! The main strategic consideration here was the relation of Britain with the Egyptian people and the government of Egypt in the future.
Head criticized the Egyptian government, for ever since it had come to power, it had one objective and one only: getting rid of the British! This had now been realized.

A discussion took place in the House of Commons criticizing the argument put forth by Head, and vigorously denouncing the agreement and Nasser’s description of the years of British occupation as “72 years of bitterness!”

Churchill concluded by saying that it would be impossible for Britain to maintain a base amongst a hostile population, and announced that there were no alternatives. “The day has gone when we could put our bases on the territory of other countries against the wishes of their people!”

In answer to the question regarding what would happen if the agreement were to be breached, Churchill replied: “We would have to threaten to invade Egypt, otherwise by signing this treaty, we would be digging the grave of Great Britain.”

2. The Egyptian side:
   a. Celebrations and opposition:
      Nasser considered the signing of the Evacuation Agreement as the beginning of new responsibilities for Egypt. As he put it:

      “Egypt must coordinate its cooperation with the other Arab states so that Arab unity becomes a fact and the foundations of the Arab world strengthened. Egypt must also coordinate its cooperation with the countries of the Islamic world so that the sum total of these countries – Arab and Islamic – form a bloc that can confront danger and protect its interests. The agreement offers us the opportunity to review our position in the African continent and work on consolidating our influence there.”

      Nasser went on to explain the agreement to the people, pointing out its advantages; namely that within twenty months, there would be not a single British soldier left in the country, and that Britain had formally acknowledged the cancellation of the 1936 treaty, which had entailed a permanent, never-ending alliance between the two countries. He went on to explain the situation with regard to the facilities in the base and the British technicians who would be subordinate to the Egyptian forces. As for the matter of being able to use the base if need be throughout the seven-year duration of the treaty, he explained that this was for the benefit of the countries of the Joint Arab Security and Turkey, added to which it was not a permanent commitment.

      Nasser went on to list the benefits of the agreement to Egypt; for example the article concerning the Suez Canal confirmed Egypt’s right to the Canal in accordance with the 1888 Convention of Constantinople; moreover, Egypt had taken over eighty-eight facilities and equipment worth 32 million pounds,

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90 Commons session, 29/7/1954.
ten fully-equipped airports, an oil pipeline running from Suez to Cairo formerly controlled by the British, four petroleum depots in Port Said, and a number of buildings and camps. Moreover, nothing was to enter the base without first being inspected by the Egyptian authorities.

An Egyptian commander would be the highest authority at the base, and the Egyptian army the only military authority there. The base was to be Egyptian, because the whole area from Suez to Port Said was now restored to Egypt. Indeed, as Nasser said, the agreement was “a giant leap forward that had allowed us to get rid of the occupation.”

It was only natural that the people of Egypt would be ecstatic and celebrate this agreement, which had been reached after lengthy negotiations that had begun since the time of Milner.

The 18th June, 1956, saw the country celebrate the departure of the last British soldier from Egypt. Nasser raised the Egyptian flag over Port Said, and the following day said:

“Yesterday we saw the Egyptian flag raised over our territory and we will not look back, but forward with new hope. Today for the first time in ages, we are masters of our own country. We have resisted, struggled, and fought for this day, the 18th of June, fought for evacuation, honour, liberty, dignity, and independence. Today marks the beginning of a new life; we will forget the past and look ahead to the future... Our policy will be to fight those who fight us and make peace with those who want peace with us.”

However, amongst all the happiness and celebrations in Egypt, there was a faction that refused the agreement, a group unable to control the revolutionary regime and plotting in secret to demolish it: the Moslem Brotherhood.

On the 26th of October, 1954, in a huge public gathering of a quarter of a million people in Mansheya Square, Nasser spoke to the crowds about the agreement, saying:

“Today, I celebrate Evacuation Day and Independence Day with you all; I celebrate honour and dignity...”

Suddenly, eight bullets were shot at Nasser, one after the other! After a period of panic and chaos, Nasser was heard addressing the crowd:

91 Nasser’s speech to the conference of civil servants, 21/10/1954.
92 Speech to the Egyptian press, 19/10/1954.
“Stay where you are...Remain in your places... My countrymen, my blood and my life can be sacrificed for you and for Egypt. If Gamal Abdel Nasser should die, each of you shall be Gamal Abdel Nasser ... Gamal Abdel Nasser is of you and from you and he is willing to sacrifice his life for Egypt.”

The outcome of this dastardly conspiracy was the exact opposite of what its perpetrators intended: the people rallied round Nasser more than ever before, and the very next day set fire to the general headquarters of the Muslim Brotherhood. Congratulations were poured upon Nasser, and articles written denouncing the assassination attempt. The army renewed its allegiance to Nasser and to the Revolutionary leaders.

Three days after the Mansheya incident – as it came to be called – Nasser made a speech, saying:

“I knew that El Hudeibi (the General Guide of the Muslim Brotherhood) had disappeared, and had declared hostilities – against whom?! Against the revolution and its men! Our hard-won freedom will not survive so long as there is deceit, so long as there are bullets, and so long as there are secret organizations! This is why terrorism must end, and secret societies must be eradicated, and deceit must be put an end to even if it is in the name of Islam. For the sake of Egypt, we must destroy reactionism and terrorism, and if the revolution cannot be white, it will turn red rather than be a lame and ineffective revolution.”

Once the relation between President Naguib and the Muslim Brotherhood was revealed, the Revolutionary Command Council issued a decree on November 14th, 1954, relieving him of all positions he held.

b. The conclusive refusal of the Middle East Defence project:

Ever since the negotiations began on 27th April, 1954, the British had been trying to draw Egypt into a project thought up by the West, namely the Middle East Defence Organization (MEDO) as a substitute for the British base in the Canal Zone after the evacuation. Nasser made it clear from the very beginning that Egypt categorically refused to join this organization, as it was a threat to its freedom and sovereignty.

When the negotiations came to a standstill, Dulles visited Egypt and attempted to persuade Nasser of the importance of joining this Western defence organization. However, Nasser repeatedly told him that the real danger was Britain, not an alleged Soviet threat thousands of miles away. Nasser also proposed that the Arab countries, through the Joint Arab Defence and the Arab League, should undertake their own defence without the
participation of superpowers who would try and impose their policies and look after their own interests rather than those of the region.

Accordingly, the heads of state of the Arab countries who had signed the Joint Defence charter met in Cairo on January 22nd, 1955, and unanimously agreed not to join the proposed Iraqi-Turkish alliance formulated by the West for the defence of the Middle East. The need to activate the Joint Defence and Economic Cooperation Treaty was agreed upon, as well as the establishing of a permanent Joint Command with headquarters under the umbrella of the Joint Defence organization. The conference agreed to unify the foreign policy of its member states based on the Arab League charter, the Joint Defence and Economic Cooperation treaty, and the United Nations charter, and pledged that there should be no alliances outside the scope of the Arab League. The conference also warned against the stance taken by Turkey, which was attempting to impose its influence over the Middle East, and was making preliminary moves towards cooperation with Israel.

The day after the conference, Egypt was notified by Turkey of the results of the meeting between Nuri Al Said, Prime Minister of Iraq, and Adnan Menderes, Prime Minister of Turkey. The two countries had signed a defence charter that included the exchange of troops and supplies in the case of an attack on either of them by the communists or Israel, and intended to try and persuade Egypt to become part of this agreement, and were also going to approach Syria, Iran, and Pakistan for the same purpose. Naturally, the pledge taken by the Arab countries under Article 10 of the Joint Defence and Economic Cooperation Treaty precluded their participation in any international alliance outside it.

CHAPTER 3
REGIONAL DEFENCE ORGANIZATIONS, ARMS, AND THE CALL FOR
POSITIVE NEUTRALITY

First: Egypt refuses alliances

Ever since the negotiations concerning the evacuation of British forces began in 1953, Egypt consistently refused the condition Britain and the United States attempted to impose, namely that Egypt should join a Middle East defence alliance that would replace the Suez Canal base. The US colluded with
Britain in trying to achieve this objective and in trying to link the proposed Middle East alliance with the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO).

Egypt had also been asking both Britain and the US to sell weapons to Egypt since the early days of the revolution, but to no avail. When Dulles came to Egypt in May 1953, Nasser told him point-blank that Egypt would not accept being part of any alliances. Dulles, having made a tour of the Arab region, felt that there was a readiness to establish a collective security arrangement in the Middle East, but acknowledged that this could not be forcibly imposed from outside the region as this would be unacceptable to the Arab people.

However, the Iraqi-Turkish declaration was issued in January 1955, clearly in implementation of Dulles’s idea.

Before the prime ministers of Turkey and Iraq met, Salah Salem had travelled to meet with Nuri El Said in order to persuade him to safeguard Arab unity in accordance with Nasser’s conviction that the interests of the Arab world could only be protected by refusing to join alliances and blocs, and that Arab foreign policy should be unified and the Arab League supported. Nuri El Said promised to come to Cairo and in fact did so in August, 1954. Nasser comments:

“The talks began; I stressed the importance of strengthening the Joint Arab Defence agreement which so far was mere ‘ink on paper’! To which Nuri El Said responded, ‘I think we should call in the British and US ambassadors and inform that we want to strengthen the joint Arab defence and ask them how to do this and what they propose!’ Naturally, I objected to this suggestion and was indeed taken aback by the ease with which Nuri El Said was thinking of doing this. He then proposed including Pakistan in the collective Arab security agreement, which we refused because Pakistan was allied with Britain and the West. He suggested including Turkey next, which we again refused as Turkey was a member of NATO. He then said: ‘We should join forces with whoever can help us, the British and the Americans, we can leave out France, but let’s form an alliance with America, England, Iran, and Pakistan and broaden the range of the joint security agreement. We need to ensure that the West will provide us with arms because of Israel – we need to be practical! This Arab nationalism you speak of is not practical! What is Jordan? What is Syria? Who are the Arabs?!’

“Obviously, he had no faith in what I was saying, nor did he believe in the Arab collective security charter; he wanted to form an alliance with the US, Britain, Turkey, Iran, and Pakistan! And sure enough, on the 24th of February 1955, the Turkish-Iraqi charter was signed, constituting the first step towards tying the Arab world with Western defence. Naturally, the move was praised
by the United States in a formal declaration to this effect. Britain then formed a special agreement with Iraq, which replaced the alliance treaty of 1930. They called this alliance the Baghdad Pact, why? To confer an Arab veneer on the arrangement, which Dulles referred to as ‘growth from within’!

“And what happened next? The Arab countries began to be pressurized into joining the Pact, especially Syria, Jordan, and Lebanon, while attempts were made to coerce Egypt into at least not resisting the Pact. A delegation from Egypt was in Britain at the time to acquire weapons; they were told point-blank that there would be no weapons as long as Egypt resisted the Baghdad Pact!”

Iran and Pakistan joined the Pact; conspiracies began against Syria to try and force it into joining, but failed, and pressure was put on Jordan with General Templar going to Amman in December, 1955, but returning defeated. The US then became a supervising member of the Pact.

On March 30th, 1955, Eden issued a statement in the House of Commons saying: “With this alliance, we have reached a stage where we have an organization capable of organizing the defence of the Middle East and have consolidated our influence and have a clear say in Middle Eastern affairs. I support any alliance that will further the influence of my country!”

Nasser comments:

“The objective, then, is to place the Arab countries within the sphere of influence, as Turkey, Iran, and Pakistan are already allied with Britain and America.”

Anthony Nutting, British Minister of State for Foreign Affairs, stated in the House of Commons on 14th April, 1955:

“British policy has long been to establish effective defence resources in the Middle East, and our investment in oil has added another important factor necessitating the securing of sufficient, effective means of defence in this region, which we have managed to achieve with this new agreement with Iraq and our joining the Turkish-Iraqi alliance, which has come to be known as the Baghdad Pact.”

Nasser comments:

93 Nasser’s speech at Cairo University, 22/2/66.
94 General Templar, Chief of Staff of the British Empire.
95 Ibid.
“Pressurizing the other Arab countries into joining the Baghdad Pact is a policy intended to isolate Egypt from the other Arab states and to divide the Arab countries and limit their independence. The age of alliances has ended: people today will no longer tolerate any form of control or ‘protection’. The West has to change its mindset; if it insists on trying to keep its oil and its spheres of influence, in other words its military bases, its troops, and its archaic colonialist ideas, this will only lead to a catastrophe! The only way to secure the friendship of the Arab countries is for their defence system to be based upon the purely Arab joint defence system established by the Arab League, with no connection with any foreign alliance whatsoever.”

Nasser pledged before the army officers on 15th April, 1956:

“I declare, in the name of the Armed Forces and the people of Egypt, that we will never be a sphere of influence for anyone, nor take orders from anyone; we will move forward for the sake of Egypt, its welfare and its dignity, adopting a free, independent policy in the best interests of our people.”

**Second: Israeli attacks on Egypt’s borders**

These attacks began on the first of May, 1953, in the village of Beni Amer near Rafah, leaving eight dead and the rest taken prisoner. Attacks then followed on Khan Younis, and on the Palestinian refugees in the Bourij camp, where fifteen refugees were killed.

On 29th September, 1953, Israeli forces attacked the Al-Awja demilitarized zone next to the Egyptian border, annexing parts of it. When Egypt lodged an official complaint with the Security Council, Israel countered by lodging a complaint with the Council alleging its rights to passage through the Suez Canal.

The attacks on the Egyptian borders were repeated, and after a large-scale attack that took place on February 28th, 1955, Nasser wrote the following note in his handwriting:

“Israel has persistently attacked Egyptian territory, and has attacked Deir El Balah, Gaza, Khan Younis, and Asban. Egypt responded by firing back at the Israeli settlements of Kishurim, Ein Halshushi, and Nur Ebeid. Forty-two civilians were killed and 103 injured.”

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97 From Nasser’s personal papers.
“After the incident of February 28th and Israel’s attack on Gaza, we will defend ourselves, our dignity, and our people to the last drop of blood.”98

Egypt then submitted a formal complaint to the Truce Committee regarding the Israeli attacks, and following Nasser’s meeting with General Burns, Senior Military Observer in Palestine, he reiterated Egypt’s refusal to tolerate any attempt made by Israel to take over Gaza. Nasser also proposed the establishment of a neutral demilitarized zone along both sides of the truce line between Egypt and Israel.

Hammarskjold directed a message to both Nasser and Sharett99 on June 6th, 1955, urging both parties to refrain from any actions that could exacerbate the tension in the Middle East.

The Arab and Islamic reactions to the Israeli attacks were wholeheartedly supportive of Nasser’s position, and of Egypt’s resuming war against Israel should it attempt to annex the Gaza strip.

The Israeli attacks did not stop at the borders; on August 22nd, 1955, an Israeli force attacked an Egyptian position within Gaza, but the Egyptian forces managed to retaliate in kind. Again, on August 26th, just a few days later, Israeli forces broke through the demarcation lines twice and were driven back by the Egyptians. Then on September 21st, 1955, the Israelis attacked the neutral zone of Al Awga and captured the UN representative there!

In retaliation to this attack, Egypt occupied a square mile of Israeli territory in Tirana and penetrated into Israeli land.

On November 2nd, 1955, the Israelis attacked Egyptian positions in the Sabha region south of Al Awga close to the Egyptian-Israeli border, killing fifty Egyptians and taking forty prisoner. Four Israelis were killed and nineteen injured. Syria immediately announced its readiness to take decisive action against the Israeli attack on Egyptian forces in accordance with the military agreement between Egypt and Syria signed in October, 1955.

The question arises: what was the purpose of these continuous Israeli attacks on the Egyptian borders, which started ten months after the Egyptian revolution and were concurrent with the evacuation talks, continuing even after the signing of the British-Egyptian treaty? Nasser commented on this in a handwritten note:

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98 Gaza at the time was under Egyptian administration; from Nasser’s speech in Fayoum, 6/7/55.
99 Prime Minister of Israel 1954-55.
1. Form a secret army for the liberation of Palestine.
2. Set up a secret training camp.
3. Identify leaders for the liberation army.
4. These should be mostly Palestinians.
5. Establish a branch at headquarters for this purpose.
6. Establish contact with the Arabs inside Israel.
7. Establish branches in Gaza, Syria, Lebanon, Jordan, and Israel.
8. Open an account for this purpose.
9. Kamal Rifaat to be in charge of this.

The note also included detailed information on Israel, particularly the Negev.

**Third: The Czech arms deal**

The question of acquiring arms for Egypt was of prime concern to Nasser and had been so since the revolution. He had discussed the matter with the British, but found no positive response, then approached the Americans, who began negotiations then refused to continue after being pressured to do so by Churchill in person!

Nasser reopened the subject during the discussions on the defence arrangements that were to be undertaken by the Egyptians in the Suez Canal base, but with no result.

Egypt’s determination to acquire arms for its defence was further strengthened by the constant Israeli threats, especially when it became known that Israel had secured weapons from France, Britain, and the US. Egypt made further efforts to acquire weapons from the US, but in spite of the fact that the CIA sympathized with Egypt’s request, no military assistance came from the US.

1. **The story behind Egypt’s struggle to acquire arms:**
   Nasser tells the story behind the attempts to acquire weapons for the army:

   “The fifth objective of the revolution was to establish a strong national army, which was no easy task. Heavy weapons were controlled by the superpowers, who would never let us have them except under their conditions, which we refused, as they infringed upon our freedom and independent policies.

   “We tried in every way possible over the past three years to acquire heavy weapons for the army, not for hostile purposes but for the sake of defence, security, and peace. We approached every country we could; England, France, America, as well as others, and what did we get?! Nothing but demands that

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we sign pacts with them, which we announced that we would never do. What was the result?!

“France tried to bargain with us over North Africa, as it had always done, saying they would supply us with weapons only if we supported their position in North Africa – they want us to witness the massacres they carry out there, and keep quiet about it!

“As for the Americans, we had been asking them for weapons ever since the revolution, and they had promised to let us have them, but what was the outcome of these long-drawn out negotiations?! That we could have the weapons on condition that we sign a joint security treaty, in other words, sign up to an alliance! We refused to do so – and could not get one single weapon from the US!

“England told us they would give us weapons, but gave us an insufficient amount that was nowhere near what we needed, while at the same time, the enemy army was being supplied with weapons from several countries all over the world. In fact, the foreign press would boast that the Israeli army was capable of defeating all the Arab armies combined!

“Faced with these attempts to control us, we decided to ask all the countries of the world if they would supply us with weapons – with no conditions attached. We approached the US, Britain, France, Russia, Czechoslovakia, and others with our terms, and received a reply from Czechoslovakia saying they were ready to supply us with the weapons we required on a purely commercial basis. We agreed at once, and signed an agreement to this effect, which also allowed us to pay in Egyptian goods such as cotton and rice rather than cash.”

Nasser told Life magazine:

“Buying weapons for the army from the Eastern Bloc was my idea. I hesitated for two months, but then summoned Daniel Solod, the Soviet ambassador in Cairo, and asked him to sell us weapons, to which he agreed.”

Nasser added:

“There are no Soviet or Czech technicians in Egypt; we sent our own people to Czechoslovakia for training, and some of them are already back and have begun training the others.”

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101 Nasser’s speech at the Military Exhibition in Gezira.
102 Nasser’s interview with the US magazine Life, 10/11/1955.
2. Reactions to the Czech arms deal:
   a. The element of surprise:

   When the news about the deal began to leak out, Dulles, after speaking with Molotov, the Soviet Foreign Minister, informed Eisenhower of the situation with Egypt, saying:

   “It seems the news is correct, and the Russians are going to give the Egyptians a large number of weapons in return for cotton; the deal is worth some 100 million dollars.”

   He went on to say that the British and the French were alarmed, and that in his opinion, the Israelis were likely to initiate an attack, as, “Today, they are in a position to easily beat Egypt.”

   The blow was not only in the fact that Egypt had resorted to the Soviet Bloc, with all the strategic advantages this would afford to the Arab world and the Middle East, but that this change of direction could cause the West to lose control over the amount and kind of weapons obtained by Egypt, which could shift the balance of power in favour of the Arabs over Israel.

   In a meeting between Dulles and Macmillan in New York, Dulles commented that the situation was grave. He also told Molotov:

   “This is a dangerous step that could exacerbate the tension in the region; I hope these reports are unfounded!”

   Molotov responded that this was a commercial transaction with no political implications. Dulles also voiced his fear that the Soviet arms deal could extent to Libya and North Africa.

   Dulles referred to the efforts being made by the US to bring about an Arab-Israeli agreement, and that this Russian development should be viewed from a perspective of its impact on the possibility of such an agreement. He added:

   “We have not made all these efforts to reach an agreement on the Suez Canal base only to hand the base over to the Soviets! This would truly constitute a resounding defeat.”

   Macmillan also voiced Eden’s concerns over the situation, as the latter was largely responsible for the Suez Canal base agreement.

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104 Ibid.
b. **What to do?**

Meetings and communication continued between the foreign ministers of the US and Britain, and the Geneva Conference afforded additional scope for further discussion, plans – and conspiracies!

In the previously-mentioned meeting between Dulles and Macmillan, the latter proposed a number of solutions, namely providing additional support to the Turkish-Iraqi alliance, issuing a declaration welcoming Iran into the alliance, giving Iraq more arms, and encouraging Jordan and Lebanon to join the alliance.

He also proposed using a ‘carrot and stick’ approach by seemingly helping Nasser and allowing him to purchase the least amount possible of arms, and have the US assist in the High Dam project.

Dulles objected, saying:

“We are not in a position to do much regarding military aid without this causing problems with Israel.”

Macmillan retorted:

“We can tell Nasser outright that do not accept this deal, and that it constitutes a breach of the spirit of the Suez Canal base agreement. The world will not stand by and watch the Soviet Union having control of the Suez Canal. We can make life impossible for Nasser, and bring about his downfall in various ways! 106 We still haven’t completed our withdrawal from Suez.”

The other tactic taken by the US and Britain was to address the Soviet Union. In a meeting held in New York to discuss arrangements for the Geneva Conference, Macmillan addressed Molotov, saying: “The United Kingdom is very displeased at the news of the arrangements being made to supply Egypt with large amounts of arms from the Soviet Union. This will intensify the arms race between Israel and the Arab nations and will create a highly risky situation and increase the tension in the area.”

He then asked Molotov outright to prevent the deal, saying that it did not accord with the policy of détente.

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105 Ibid.
Antoine Pinay, the French Foreign Minister, agreed with Macmillan and Dulles that the Soviet deal contradicted “the spirit of Geneva”.\textsuperscript{107} Eden also sent a letter to Bulganin, the Soviet Prime Minister, expressing the British government’s view that selling arms to Egypt constituted a political gamble that represented a threat to peace in the area.

Once the US and Britain realized that preventing or even modifying the arms deal was impossible, they began looking at how they could prevent the other countries in the region from following Egypt’s ‘bad’ example! They began to think of ways of putting pressure on Nasser and forcing him out of office; but were faced with the problem of the lack of a better candidate to replace him! Dulles, however, warned against taking any threatening action against Nasser in order not to alienate Arab public opinion against the West, which would facilitate communist infiltration. This had to be prevented at all costs, because the Middle East oil was vital not only to NATO but to the whole Western world.\textsuperscript{108}

Macmillan was of the view that:

“We have to accept diplomatic defeat, and try to mitigate its effects. We need to reproach Nasser gently rather than angrily, and ask him to decrease his commitments with the Soviet Bloc, and put pressure on him to support the Johnston plan\textsuperscript{109} or to work towards an agreement with Israel.”

Dulles put the question: “What would attract Egypt?” And the answer was: to assist in building the High Dam.

Raymond Hare commented\textsuperscript{110}:

“The Soviet policy is currently moderate, and it would be impossible for us to maintain good relations with the Soviets while simultaneously saying that Egypt should not do the same!”

Macmillan took a more rigid stance:

\begin{footnotesize}
\textsuperscript{107} Memo of Conversation, New York, September 27\textsuperscript{th}, 1955, Dulles, Molotov, Macmillan, Pinay.
\textsuperscript{108} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{109} A project to divide the waters of the Jordan River amongst Israel, Syria, Lebanon, and Jordan as a preliminary to settling the Palestinians in these countries, which was refused by the Arab countries. The project was proposed in 1953.
\textsuperscript{110} Raymond Hare, director-General of the US Foreign Service.
\end{footnotesize}
“Nasser must begin the process of negotiating with Israel; and as for the arms deal, we must make it clear to him that if Egypt buys arms, Israel will do the same!”

He then asked what the Israeli reaction to the deal was, to which Dulles responded:

“Israel wants a defence alliance as well as military assistance. The US cannot possibly join the Baghdad Pact owing to constitutional issues, added to which it would of necessity lead to a defence alliance with Israel, all of which would lead to a further deterioration of the situation in the Middle East.”\textsuperscript{111}

Information was received by the US National Security Council on 6\textsuperscript{th} October, 1955, that the arms deal was confirmed and that in fact the first shipment of weapons had arrived in Egypt. This development would strengthen the Soviet presence in the Middle East, and it was likely that the Soviets would also be increasing the supply of arms to Syria and the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia.

Israel jumped at this opportunity to demand that the Western powers intervene to stop what they called ‘the expected Arab aggression’ and asked for both arms and support from the West.

The matter concluded with the US completely reviewing its policy towards the Middle East.\textsuperscript{112} And though the US did not know the extent of the arms deal, they began to realize that they needed to face the truth, and that Nasser had become ‘the man on horseback’ to the Arabs.

Israel was deeply concerned at what they perceived as a dangerous situation:

“A Middle Eastern country has opened its doors to Russia after it had been far from the region for more than 200 years, which had remained distanced from communist influence since the time of the Russian revolution.”\textsuperscript{113}

\textsuperscript{111} Memo of Conversation, Dept, of State, Washington, Oct. 3, 1955, regarding the Soviet–Egyptian Arms Deal.
\textsuperscript{112} Memo of Discussion at the 260\textsuperscript{th} meeting of the National Security Council, Washington, October 6\textsuperscript{th}, 1955.
\textsuperscript{113} Memo of Conversation, Dept, of State, Washington, Oct. 11, 1955, Israel's concern at Egypt- USSR arms deal and Soviet efforts to penetrate the Near East.
Israel conveniently forgot that Egypt’s actions were in response to the attack on Gaza by the Israelis on February 28th, 1955, a fact noted by Dulles.\textsuperscript{114}

The issue had become global rather than regional, and Eisenhower wrote to Bulganin regarding the arms deal with Egypt, saying:

“I fear that it will prevent any progress in the objectives which I hope we are aligned on; namely, lessening the tension between us, and finding a solution to the Arab-Israeli problem.”

Bulganin responded:

“I received your letter concerning the arms deal with Egypt. I share your view that our joint objective is to alleviate the tension between us and from our side, we are willing to participate in every way to achieve this aim and to find a solution to the various problems, including that of the Near East. However, I assure you that there is no cause for concern.”\textsuperscript{115}

Anthony Eden had also sent a letter to Bulganin on October 5\textsuperscript{th}, 1955, in which he stated that offers had been made to sell Western arms to Egypt, on condition that the Egyptian army should follow the ‘Middle East Command’ and join the military groups that had been established there. It was, he continued, the responsibility of the Great Powers to preserve world peace, and therefore alleviate the tension between Egypt and Israel and in the region in general.\textsuperscript{116}

Reports from the CIA confirmed that the deal had increased the danger of local clashes and had given Egypt aerial supremacy over Israel and had reduced Israel’s predominance in the number of tanks possessed; it also gave Egypt the means to pursue Israeli ships.

As for Israel, the deal came as a blow, as it made the Egyptians far better equipped to face the Israeli border attacks.

The CIA described the Czech arms deal as ‘the most dramatic move made by the Soviet Union in the Middle East’, and that it aimed at strengthening

\textsuperscript{114} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{115} Arms deal: Eisenhower – Bulganin, Oct. 11, 1955. Message from Prime Minister Bulganin to President Eisenhower.
\textsuperscript{116} Eden’s message to Bulganin, October 5\textsuperscript{th}, 1955.
Arab resistance to the West in the region, especially the efforts of the US and Britain to forge defence alliances and retain their bases.\textsuperscript{117}

Faced with all this media uproar, Nasser sent a letter to the Americans via Ahmed Hussein, the Egyptian Ambassador in Washington, clarifying the following points:

Egypt has been facing continuous, provocative threats from Israel over the past years, and was in a weak position militarily. Egypt tried — and failed — to procure arms, so when the Soviet Union offered to supply us, it was impossible to convince our colleagues in the Revolutionary Command Council to do anything other than accept the offer; and Nasser did not have the authority to prevent the deal from taking place!

Nasser stressed in the letter that Egypt had no hostile intentions towards Israel, but merely wanted to fortify its armed forces. As for the Czech-Egyptian deal, this was purely commercial with no political terms whatsoever, and was a one-time deal.

The letter ended by confirming that Egypt wished to maintain its long-standing relations with the US, and hoped to consolidate them in the future.\textsuperscript{118}

Anthony Eden sent another letter to Bulganin on October 20\textsuperscript{th}, 1955, in which he wrote:

“I am writing to avert you to the danger to peace that will result from supplying Egypt and Israel with arms. It has come to my knowledge that large amounts of arms are being given to Egypt, and if this deal does take place, it will be sufficient to destroy any hope of avoiding an arms race between Egypt and Israel.”

Strangely enough, Eden claimed, in this letter, that, “Britain had imposed no political conditions on supplying Egypt with arms” — in spite of Macmillan’s having explicitly stated that pressure should be put on Egypt to force it to join the Baghdad Pact!

Eden goes on to say:

\textsuperscript{117} Special National Intelligence Estimate, 1955-1957, Washington, October 12\textsuperscript{th}, 1955. Probable consequences of the Egyptian arms deal with the Soviet Bloc.

\textsuperscript{118} Memorandum of a conversation, Dept Of State, Washington, Oct. 17, 1955. Call Of the Egyptian Ambassador on the Secretary of State.
“We have endeavoured to keep supplies of arms to both countries within certain limits in order to prevent any increase of tension, and to serve only as a legitimate means of self-defence.”

**c. The results:**
Israel tried to exploit the arms deal to further its own ends; Moshe Sharett, the Israeli Prime Minister, asked Dulles to put pressure on Egypt to stop the deal and to threaten it with withholding any form of Western aid. Sharett also added that in order to be able to match this deal, Israel would need more arms as well as an unconditional security pact with the US, to deter Nasser.

Dulles replied:

“We agree with Sharett’s view of the dangers inherent in the recent developments and that they constitute a threat to Israel, Western Europe, and the free world.”

He added that it had come to their knowledge that the arms were not only for Egypt but for Syria as well. And in view of the fact that Arab oil was indispensable to the economy of Europe, particularly Britain, and was in danger of being withheld, and that Egypt was the gateway to Africa, this state of affairs was the most critical encountered since WWII, more so even than Korea! However, he felt that Sharett’s request to face up to Nasser and ask him to choose between cancelling the arms deal or being deprived of Western cooperation would come to nothing.

As for arms, Dulles said that Israel was already far better equipped with arms than Egypt and added that he was not convinced that the arms deal would lead to an imbalance of power between the two countries. He added that with regard to Israel’s request for more arms, he did not think it wise to encourage an arms race in the area. As for Sharett’s request for a security pact, the Tripartite Declaration of 1950 was sufficient.

However, as a result of Egypt’s being supplied with arms, the danger of war between Israel and its Arab neighbours had definitely increased, as had anti-Soviet sentiment among the American people. Accordingly, the US found itself obliged to sell arms to Israel equal to the kinds received by Egypt.

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119 Message from Eden to Bulganin, October 20th, 1955.
120 The Tripartite Declaration of 1950, was a joint statement by the United States, United Kingdom, and France to guarantee the territorial status quo that had been determined by the 1949 Arab–Israeli Armistice Agreements.
The Soviets, however, were of a completely different opinion. They saw the threat as emanating from Israel rather than Egypt, a matter of great concern.\textsuperscript{121} On November 2\textsuperscript{nd}, Israel had attacked Egyptian positions in the Al-Sabha region south of Al Awga, an incident which had angered President Nixon, who asked what the excuse was for such an attack, adding that neither of the two sides had the right to be present in a demilitarized zone.\textsuperscript{122}

As for Egypt, the CIA was of the opinion that Nasser had gained prestige and had assumed leadership after the Soviet arms deal, and that he would neither come under Soviet control nor would he join a Western alliance; he was still convinced that following a middle path was the best choice. The CIA also felt that if Nasser could maintain his independence and his prestige while coming to an agreement with the West, he would prefer that to dealing with the Soviets, but that if he felt that the West was turning its back on him, he would accept further Soviet assistance and would also drag Syria and Saudi Arabia along with him.

The CIA predicted that the Western negotiations with Nasser would be long and difficult, and moreover, with an uncertain outcome. If the alternative was to isolate Egypt and destroy Nasser, that would be dangerous, as it could encourage Israel to attack Egypt. And if the US were to supply Egypt with economic aid, it would have to give an equivalent aid to other countries in the Middle East.

Matters reached the extent where the matter of assassinating Nasser was deliberated! However, it was felt that the Revolutionary Command Council would carry on, possibly under the leadership of Abdel Hakim Amer, who would be more under the thumb of the army, unlike Nasser. There seemed to be no good solution for the West to take vis a vis Nasser, which meant that the arms deal was a decisive and successful step for Egypt and the Soviets, and a defeat for Israel and the West.

**Fourth: The Bandung Conference and the call for positive neutrality**

The concept of neutrality between East and West was a principle upheld by Nasser from the start, hence his policy of refusing alliances and his insistence on its being the responsibility of the Arab nations to protect their territories. The Middle East should be defended by its own people and no one else.

\textsuperscript{121} Telegram from the Secretary of State to the Dept. of State, Geneva, Oct. 10,1955.
\textsuperscript{122} Memo of discussion at the 264\textsuperscript{th} meeting of the National Security Council, Washington, Nov.3, 1955.
The concept of positive neutrality crystallized and took shape in the form of a call for a conference of Afro-Asian countries in Bandung from the 18th – 21st of April, 1955, in which twenty-seven countries participated. The objective of the conference was to promote cooperation amongst these countries, and to work towards addressing the economic, social, and cultural problems they were facing. It was the first international conference to be attended by Nasser; other leaders attending were Nehru, Zhou Enlai, and Sukarno.

Nasser requested that the Palestinian problem be included in the agenda of the conference, based on the UN resolutions in this regard. In his speech to the assembled members, he stressed that the cooperation between Afro-Asian countries constituted a turning point in improving the global situation. This cooperation, he said, should be based on two important principles: respect for the political autonomy of every nation, and refraining from any interference in other countries’ internal affairs.

He denounced the widespread colonialism in the two continents, declaring that it had no place in the new world order. He praised the upsurge of nationalism that was evident in many countries of Asia and Africa. He also called for putting an end to weapons of mass destruction.

Nasser also denounced apartheid and racism, and the methods of political pressure brought to bear upon the smaller countries by the superpowers in order to further their own ends. He stressed the right of countries to choose the political and economic systems that best served their own interests.

Nasser attacked the position of the French government towards Algeria, Tunisia, and Morocco, which claimed that the United Nations had no right to discuss the problems of Morocco and Tunisia, on the basis that this constituted interference in France’s legislative affairs! With regard to Algeria, France had gone even further, claiming that Algeria was an integral part of the French Union, based upon certain articles in the French constitution, a document issued from one side only, that of the French government, and accordingly not binding to the Algerian people, and which could not change the truth that Algeria was an Arab country and that the Algerian people had every right to be free and to decide their own destiny.

Nasser made the following proposition: in view of the unstable situation in North Africa, whose people were being deprived of their freedom and the right to choose their own way forward, the Afro-Asian Conference should declare its support of the people of Algeria and Tunisia in their right to freedom and to deciding their own destiny, and to urge the French government to expedite the resolution of this issue.

Nasser wrote the following notes in his own handwriting in March, 1956, on the reasons for positive neutrality:
“To preserve the Arab nation from the detrimental effects of the Cold War by refraining from getting involved in the differences of the superpowers; maintaining a policy of positive neutrality and keeping the interests of the Arabs before any other concerns; defending the Arab world must come from within – therein lies our true security.”

The concept of positive neutrality spread and became a proper movement after the Bandung Conference, and the first conference dedicated specifically to this issue took place in Belgrade in 1961 and included countries from Asia, Africa, and Latin America.

Amongst the prominent figures in the movement were Tito, Nehru, Nasser, Sukarno, and Nkrumah; the movement enjoyed considerable success, and was a force to be reckoned with during the Cold War and the end of colonialism.
PART THREE
THE NATIONALISATION OF THE SUEZ CANAL AND THE TRIPARTITE AGGRESSION ON EGYPT

Chapter 1: The circumstances surrounding the nationalisation of the Suez Canal

In Nasser’s own words:

“One of the basic tenets of revolutionary policy was to do away with foreign hegemony and restore the national pride of each and every Egyptian. I was determined to achieve complete independence, and this policy reflected the general mood that had begun to sweep over the Arab world.

“The western leaders did not grasp this fact until it was far too late, and imagined that they were confronted by the determination of one man alone. Dulles was the first to hold a long discussion with me; he had come to Cairo for the purpose of persuading me to link Egypt with the Western alliance. He tried to convince me that communism was the biggest threat to the world and that there was no way to counter it except through a strong military alliance...

“I explained that the issue was not one of repelling an external enemy, and that the danger of communism could only be averted by raising people’s standard of living and replacing slavery with dignity and freedom.

“I made it clear to Dulles that after the huge effort we had made for the sake of independence, I would not be safeguarding the interests of my homeland if I allowed it to be linked to an alliance with the very state that had occupied our country for more than seventy years, against a state with whom we had virtually no connection and which, moreover, was 5000 miles away! I also informed him that it was my intention to build up our military power so that we could protect our borders ourselves.

“And in my meeting with Anthony Eden [on February 20, 1955], I found it yet more difficult to explain our situation to him than to Dulles. I told him: we cannot link ourselves to any global bloc, and that if we should happen to be invaded by the West, I should not hesitate to ask for help from the East. Eden assured me that there was absolutely no question of any Western country invading us... I explained that I was opposed to the Baghdad Pact which Britain and France had established, for the same reasons.

123 See page
124 David Morgan, ibid.
“In February 1956, Selwyn Lloyd visited Cairo to discuss the situation in the Middle East with me. He seemed more open to understanding our point of view, but still could not completely grasp the reasons behind it. He also expressed concern over the propaganda war being launched in the Middle East against the Baghdad Pact.”

First: The problems surrounding the High Dam project

Despite the signing of the Evacuation Agreement on October 16, 1954, and the departure from Egypt of all British military personnel in June, 1956, it was becoming obvious that discord was increasing between Nasser and the West in general.

In this gloomy, troubled atmosphere, the question of financing Nasser’s High Dam project was raised. After an exhaustive study undertaken by Egyptian and German experts, it was revealed that the dam would allow some 836,000 feddans of agricultural land to switch from basin irrigation to perennial irrigation, and would also add another 850,000 feddans of farmland. The dam would generate ten billion kilowatts of electricity an hour, meaning that the average individual’s share of electrical power would rise to 500 kilowatts an hour rather than the former 40 kilowatts per hour, which was the rate in the year before the revolution.

The cost of constructing the High Dam was estimated at 200 million pounds, a huge sum which would have to be funded from abroad. Initial negotiations for this purpose went well, and Nasser found support and encouragement from both the US and The World Bank; even Britain offered to contribute the sum 16 million US dollars (five million pounds) on condition that the US loan should go through.

1. Obstacles hindering the funding negotiations

Difficulties soon arose: the Americans wished to supervise the Egyptian budget and even inspect its accounts! Nasser refused on principle, and began to feel that the Americans had decided not to go through with the loan, especially when they said that they had allocated 40 million US dollars as aid to Egypt, which could be used for the High Dam project!

Discussions took place between the US government and representatives from the British government and The World Bank in December, 1955, following which The World Bank put forth proposals in the form of a letter sent to Nasser. It stated that The World Bank would be willing to participate in funding the High Dam to the tune of 200 million dollars, then went on to lay down conditions, not only linking itself to the US and British loans, but also stipulating that it should be involved in Egypt’s investment and industrial programme – in other words, setting itself up as the Egyptian government’s custodian!

Ibid.
Other conditions stipulated that the Egyptian government should not incur any foreign debts or payment agreements, such as the arms deal with Russia! Moreover, organizing, implementing, and running the project would be subject to an agreement between Egypt and The World Bank.

As Nasser said:

“It was clear that a trap was being laid to control our financial independence. We categorically refuse such conditions, and asked the Americans whether they laid down such stipulations when granting aid to Israel?! Such terms are in complete opposition to our sovereignty, our independence, and our principles.

“At this time, the Russian ambassador came to seem me, saying that Russia was willing to participate in funding the High Dam. I told him we were discussing the matter with The World Bank and would postpone discussing the matter for the time being. The World Bank found out that there was a Russian offer, and also learnt of our objections [to their conditions].

“Then in February, 1956, Eugene Black, head of The World Bank, came to Egypt to discuss the matter. I told him: we are very wary of loans and interest and cannot separate this from politics. We were occupied because of loans, a fact we cannot forget; this history is ingrained in our minds and in our blood and we can never agree to anything that touches upon our sovereignty. Moreover, The World Bank report on the Egyptian economy states that it is sound and that Egypt can carry its share of the costs of the project.

“After lengthy negotiations, he said he could not sign a conclusive agreement at this point in time, as there were legal matters involved, as well as the question of the Nile water agreement between Egypt and the Sudan which had to be resolved, after which, he said, we can embark upon the project...

“I told him that we had decided not to start work on the project until the Nile Water Agreement was signed with the Sudan, and the final agreement with The World Bank signed, and I gave orders for work on the project to stop in order not to give the colonialists a chance to try and control us or exploit us economically after having failed to control us politically.”126

“It was obvious that the negotiations for funding the High Dam were being carried out in an atmosphere of mutual distrust between Nasser and the West, and Britain exacerbated matters when Lord Killearn stood up in the House of Lords and asked, ‘How can we give assistance to Egypt? How can we help them? Egypt that refuses to listen to us, Egypt that is calling for freedom and is spearheading the call for liberation, Egypt that is fighting us: how can we give them five million pounds?!’

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126 Nasser’s speech, July 26, 1956.
“On March 14, 1956, I met with the British ambassador at home, and told him: the kind of talk taking place amongst your members of parliament and your lords is unacceptable to us, and so is Killearn. We did not ask you to help, and only accepted your offer so as not to insult you by refusing it! It was you who offered to pay five million pounds. We are not a rich country it is true, but we can raise the five million pounds ourselves, and if this sort of talk carries on, we will refuse your assistance; our national income is more than 900 million pounds!

“It had happened that Glubb had been kicked out of Jordan,\textsuperscript{127} and that Selwyn Lloyd upon visiting Bahrain had been surrounded and stoned; they say that this is the result of Egypt’s talk! And when there were disturbances in Aden because of workers demanding higher wages, a crusade against Egypt began in the British press last March, to the extent where the member of parliament Hugh Fraser actually said, ‘We must find a way of getting rid of Egypt; we can construct a dam on the Nile from Uganda and Kenya and stop the flow of water to Egypt!’

“Initially, the discussions revolved around Britain’s claiming it wished to be an intermediary between us and the Sudan in order to reach an agreement, and when Selwyn Lloyd came to Egypt in February, we met in my home. He began talks by offering to help solve the water problem between us and the Sudan.

“I told him: your actions prove you to be complicating, rather than solving, matters! Your behaviour in the Sudan, your press, and your broadcasting stations are all aimed at stirring up the Sudanese against the High Dam, relaying messages designed to instill fear and refusal in the Sudanese; not only that, but your embassy in Khartoum actually collected these articles and printed them in a book it distributed, all of which lead me to the conclusion that your objective is to create enmity between Egypt and the Sudan.

“With all this happening, you now come and say that you want to play the part of intermediary between Egypt and the Sudan, or to help solve the outstanding problems between Egypt and the Sudan?! It is glaringly obvious that the English are doing their very best to create a spirit of hatred amongst our Sudanese brothers.\textsuperscript{128}

2. Withdrawal of funding for the High Dam
On the 20\textsuperscript{th} of July, the US issued a statement through its foreign office in which it said that in December 1955 they had joined Britain and The World Bank in offering assistance to Egypt. They went on to say that the High Dam was an enormous project which would take between twelve and sixteen years to complete and would cost an estimated 1300 million dollars, of which more than 900 million dollars would be in Egyptian currency. They went on to talk

\textsuperscript{127} Sir John Bagot Glubb, a British officer who had assumed leadership of the Jordanian army from 1939 until the 2\textsuperscript{nd} of March, 1956, when he was relieved of his duties by King Hussein when he decided to Arabize the Jordanian army, a move which came as a shock to Britain.

\textsuperscript{128} Nasser’s speech, July 26, 1956, ibid.
of the rights to Nile waters, on the basis that this project did not affect Egypt alone but impacted the rights and interests of other countries who shared the waters of the Nile, including the Sudan, Ethiopia, and Uganda.

“Naturally, this was the first time they had mentioned Ethiopia and Uganda, and were also trying to cause trouble between Egypt and the Sudan with this statement. The subject of Ethiopia and Uganda had never been raised before, not even in The World Bank report. I told them to leave the matter of the Sudan alone, and that we did not need them to mediate; we had spoken with the Sudanese and they were in complete accord with us.

“The statement went on to say that there was another consideration to bear in mind regarding the feasibility of implementing this project and the practical use of the US’s offering its assistance, namely Egypt’s ability to deploy its economic resources towards this huge construction program, adding that developments over the past seven months were not conducive to the success of the project! Accordingly, America had concluded that it was impractical in the current circumstances to participate in the project.

“What are the ‘developments’ that have taken place over the past seven months?! They are questioning our economy! Actually, over the past seven months the Egyptian economy and Egyptian production have strengthened and increased, and the United Nations report confirms this. The ‘developments’ over the past few months are developments related to independence, freedom, and dignity; we were determined to arm and strengthen our army, and to have our own independent character.”

Nasser added:

“There is something odd about this statement; the US foreign minister is addressing the Egyptian people, saying that this decision does not denote any change in the warm relations between the US government and people, and the Egyptian people; in other words, the decision is to do with Gamal Abdel Nasser alone and not the Egyptian people; they are talking directly to the Egyptian people!

“What is the purpose of this step? They are punishing Egypt for refusing to stand by the military conglomerates, and for not taking orders from there. When I met Eugene Black, I told him that we have a complex regarding political occupation that stems from economic occupation.”

\[129\] Ibid.

\[130\] Ibid.
As we can see, the withdrawal of funding for the High Dam angered Nasser, who addressed the nation on July 24th, saying:

“A furor was raised in Washington claiming falsely and deceitfully that the Egyptian economy is questionable, to which I say: stew in your own juice! You will never be able to control or tyrannize us.

“We are increasing in strength and determination, and I say to them: Egypt feels that its economy is sound. Production has greatly increased over the past four years, by some 20% in all sectors, education, industry; the national income has risen by 16%; the budget has increased, our projects have increased, our agricultural production has increased.”

In a handwritten note on the subject, Nasser says:
1. The time needed to construct the High Dam is nine years, and starting from the fourth year onwards, material gains will begin to be felt. The economic returns on the electricity generated from the current Aswan dam will improve, and the High Dam will continue to bring about an increase in the national income of not less than 350 million pounds a year until its completion.

2. The cost of the project for the first nine years is 600 million dollars, which includes generating electricity and connecting it to Cairo, and digging ditches and canals; the cost of the second stage is 150 million dollars.

3. As for Egypt’s ability to mobilize its economic resources to construct the High Dam, the changes that have taken place over the past seven months have been for the better.

4. We oppose the US and United Kingdom’s proposal to set up an international committee to monitor the Nile waters.

5. Claims that the High Dam will impact the Sudan, Ethiopia, and Uganda are false.”

Nasser had been on a visit to Brioni in Yugoslavia131 and was returning at night accompanied by Nehru. He was met upon arrival at the airport of the US decision to withdraw the funding of the High Dam. The very next day, Britain announced its decision to follow suit, and on the third day, The World Bank also withdrew its offer to grant Egypt a loan for the construction of the dam.

131 The Brioni Conference, July 18-20, 1956, attended by Tito, Nehru, and Nasser.
Eden was later to write in his memoirs that he never had the intention to give Egypt the five million pounds aid, but differed from Dulles in the manner in which he withdrew the offer, preferring to procrastinate unlike Dulles who took a conclusive decision and was open about his intentions.

**Second: The decision to nationalize the Suez Canal Company and its implementation**

Nasser says:

“After this happened, we began to review the actions we should take to address the situation. It was obvious that the West did not want us to gain in power, or to allow us to break out of its sphere of influence, which had long encompassed the whole region, with its strategic location and its petroleum. The colonialists’ accomplices in the Arab countries were on their side, and of course Israel wished to secure its position and prevent any Arab country from acquiring the sort of power which could constitute a threat to its existence.

“We estimated that we could obtain around 60 million pounds from the Suez Canal; we were currently only getting one million while the other 59 million went to the Anglo-French company. Accordingly, we decided that our answer to the withdrawal of funding for the High Dam would be to nationalize the Suez Canal.”

In his speech on July 26, 1956 - a day which marked four years since the abdication of King Farouk – Nasser related the story of the offer to fund the High Dam project and the subsequent withdrawal of this offer by the US, Britain, and The World Bank, and announced the following:

“In the name of the nation... the President of the Republic... has issued the following law:

Article 1: The Universal Company of the Suez Maritime Canal is to be nationalized and become an Egyptian joint-stock company; all its assets, rights, and obligations are to be transferred to the nation, and all the organizations and committees currently operating it are to be dissolved. Stockholders and holders of founders’ shares will be compensated for the shares they own in accordance with the value of the shares as shown in the closing price of the Paris Stock Exchange on the day preceding the effective date of the present law. The payment of said indemnity shall take place after the Nation has taken delivery of all the assets and properties of the nationalized company.

Article 2: The management of the Suez Canal Transit Service will be taken over by an independent organization endowed with juristic personality and annexed to the Ministry of Commerce. The organization shall have all the necessary

132 Nasser’s speech, July 26, 1966, ibid.
powers required for managing the company without being restricted by government regulations and procedures. The organization shall have an independent budget approved by a decree from the President of the Republic, and will be represented by its chairman before judicial authorities and government agencies.

Article 3: The assets and rights of the nationalized company in the Republic of Egypt and abroad, are to be frozen.

Article 4: The organization shall retain all the present officials, employees and workers of the nationalized company, and they shall continue to carry out their duties.”

Nasser recounts that he called in Mahmoud Younes, who had been a colleague of his when he was a member of the teaching staff of the Command and Staff college before the 1952 revolution¹³³, and assigned the task of taking over the Suez Canal Company to him.

“Everything had been prepared in advance; the soldiers were waiting with stamped orders to occupy the offices of the Suez Canal Company and all its buildings. Mahmoud Younes knew that the codeword for launching the operation was my mentioning ‘De Lesseps’ in my speech... And sure enough, by the time my speech was over, the operation had been accomplished.

“I could never have imagined the extent of joy with which the news of the nationalization was met, not only within Egypt but throughout the Arab world. This was probably the first time Arab unity manifested itself in full force amongst the people.

“As for the West, the reaction was as I expected; the press called for the use of force, but – again, as I expected – they were not ready to do so.”¹³⁴

1. **Reactions in the West:**

   a) **Surprise in Britain and France**

   After the news of the nationalization was announced, Anthony Eden asked to meet the French ambassador and the US Chargé d’Affaires and explained the gravity of the situation to them. Next day, he summoned the Cabinet and the Army Chief of Staff to a meeting in which they unanimously agreed that they could not possibly allow Nasser to take control of the Canal in this way. They decided that if they took a firm stand, they would be supported by all the maritime forces, and that if

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¹³³ He had been appointed as Head of the Suez Canal Authority on May 2, 1956, by a decree from the Revolutionary Command Council.

¹³⁴ David Morgan, ibid.
they failed to do so, the influence of the West in the Middle East would be undermined.

It was also estimated that there would be an immediate threat to supplies of oil to western Europe, as a considerable amount of these passed through the Suez Canal. Britain at this time had reserves that would only last six weeks, while the rest of Europe had even less.

During this emergency meeting, Eden asked the US to help out by sending extra supplies of oil to Britain. The prevailing view was that the long-term prospects were alarming; the Canal was a source of power, and provided vital facilities to the free world. Maritime forces could not allow Egypt to expropriate it and exploit it by using its revenues for domestic purposes regardless of the interests of the Canal users, as they claimed. It was also thought that the Egyptians would not be able to come up with the capital needed for deepening and widening the Canal to meet the projected increased volume of traffic in the coming years!

The conspiracy became obvious when Anthony Eden said they should seize this opportunity to create a system for operating the Canal as an international organization on a strong and permanent basis, and that they should not attempt to enter into a legal dispute regarding the right of the Egyptian government to nationalize what was technically an Egyptian company, or into financial discussions as to the Egyptians’ ability to pay the compensation they were offering.

Eden was of the opinion that they would get nowhere by merely using financial pressure alone, but that the outmost political pressure should be brought to bear upon Egypt, and that to achieve this, the support of all the countries involved should be sought. As a last resort, they should be ready to use force, and to this end, he gave orders to the Army Chief of Staff to draw up a military plan.

In the Cabinet session that was declassified in 2008 – more than fifty years later – Selwyn Lloyd is revealed to have stressed the need for Britain to take a unified stand with the US and France, and that they should act militarily, politically, and economically, as well as of course secure the welfare of the British staff working in the Canal. Eden also comments on the need to avoid any mention of Israeli ships passing through the Canal, as that would draw the rest of the Arab states to stand by Egypt.

The discussion then turned to the nature of the Suez Canal Company: it was an Egyptian company, therefore relying on shares would be weak! It
was their belief that Egypt would not be capable of operating the Canal.\textsuperscript{135}

Eden sent a letter to Eisenhower informing him of the conclusions they [the British] had come to, and proposed that:

“The first step must be for you and us and France to exchange views, align our policies and concert together how we can best bring the maximum pressure to bear on the Egyptian Government. This we cannot easily do by correspondence. A tripartite meeting will, I am sure, be required at the earliest date. It should be at a high level. So far as we are concerned, it could be held either here or in Washington... Pineau is due to come over here for talks with Selwyn Lloyd; could you possibly arrange to send someone over at once who could join in discussions?”\textsuperscript{136}

Eden issued a statement in the House of Commons in which he stated that the decision to nationalize the Suez Canal had been taken unilaterally by the Egyptian government, who had expropriated ownership of the Suez Canal Company without prior notice, accusing Egypt of thus having breached the Concession Agreement thus affecting the rights and interests of many nations. Some MPs saw the nationalization of the Canal as a blow to British honour and ‘a threat to strangle the whole industry of Europe’ as oil was transported there via the Canal.\textsuperscript{137}

In the House of Lords, discussions took a different turn where they began by proposing the construction of an alternative canal from the Gulf of Aqaba through Israel to the Mediterranean! This was rejected by the government, who saw that they should concentrate on the matter in hand, and that moreover, such a canal would be under the control of Israel and that no Arab country would allow its oil to go through it; the government should consider internationalizing the Gulf of Aqaba as a necessary step for such a canal to succeed!

Lord Winster then commented that such a canal would present the most formidable difficulties, owing to the mountainous nature of the country which would have to be traversed. And on the political side, a ‘hostile’ Egypt would be able to make the position of Aqaba or Elat almost untenable, especially if Jordan were also ‘hostile’, bearing in mind the

\textsuperscript{135} Suez Canal. July 27, 1956, Cabinet Meeting 54 (56).
\textsuperscript{137} Commons Sitting, HC Deb July 27, 1956 Vol 557 cc 777-80777
fact that the King of Jordan had congratulated Nasser upon the nationalization!\textsuperscript{138}

\textbf{b) The American position}

From the moment Nasser announced the nationalization of the Suez Canal, the British concentrated on drawing the US into a unified position with Britain and France. Letters were exchanged between Eden and Eisenhower with every step taken; however Eisenhower was taken aback when Eden and Macmillan informed him with the utmost secrecy that they had taken the decision to use military force with no further delay.

Eisenhower was of the opinion that while he appreciated the importance of the Canal to the free world, and the possibility of a use of force eventually becoming necessary to protect international rights, he saw that a conference of nations who had signed the 1888 Convention, as well as other maritime nations, could be used to put pressure on the Egyptian government and would ensure the efficient operation of the Canal in the future. The proposed conference would also inform the world of what the situation; furthermore, public opinion in the US and indeed the world over would be outraged if such an effort were not made.

Eisenhower also wrote that there were several political considerations to bear in mind: use of United States forces was possible only through Congress - which was adjourned at the time - but which could be reconvened were the President to request it for special reasons. If those reasons should involve the issue of employing United States military strength abroad, there would have to be a showing that every peaceful means of resolving the difficulty had previously been exhausted. Without such a showing, there would be a reaction that could very seriously affect the American peoples’ feeling toward the US’s Western allies, which could have the most far-reaching consequences.\textsuperscript{139}

Eisenhower concluded his letter by stressing that the step Eden was contemplating – the use of military force - should not be undertaken until every peaceful means of protecting the rights and the livelihood of great portions of the world had been thoroughly explored and exhausted. Should these means fail, then world opinion would at least understand that every effort to resolve the situation in a just and peaceful manner had been made, but that ultimately it was impossible

\textsuperscript{138} Lords Sitting on Suez, Maritime Communications and the Suez Canal, HL Deb 30 J

\textsuperscript{139} Letter from President Eisenhower to Prime Minister Eden, Washington, July 31, 1956.
to accept a situation that would in the long run prove disastrous to the prosperity and living standards of every nation whose economy depended directly or indirectly upon East-West navigation.\textsuperscript{140}

On the same day – July 31 - Eisenhower also sent a letter to Guy Mollet explaining his point of view regarding the crisis, saying:

“While I recognize that events may ultimately make forceful action necessary, I feel that the present situation demands that we act moderately, but firmly, to bring about a dependable administration of the Canal. I feel that the utmost calm is required in charting the course of the Western nations at this time and it is for this reason that we propose that a meeting of interested states be held promptly. I believe that our efforts now should be directed toward the holding of such an international conference which would have an educational effect on public opinion throughout the world. If the Egyptian Government defies such a conference, or rejects reasonable proposals, then there should result a broader basis than now exists for other affirmative action.

I am convinced that the Western nations must show the world that every effective peaceful means to resolve this difficulty has been exhausted and I sincerely hope that precipitate action can be avoided.”\textsuperscript{141}

\textbf{2. Egypt’s reaction to the tripartite statement}

On August 3, 1956, the Egyptian Ministry of Foreign Affairs received from the British Embassy in Cairo the joint statement issued by the governments of Britain, the US, and France regarding the nationalization of the Suez Canal Company, as well as an invitation to attend the London Conference on Suez on August 16\textsuperscript{th}.

The Governments of France, the United Kingdom and the United States join in the following statement:

1. They have taken note of the recent action of the Government of Egypt whereby it attempts to nationalize and take over the assets and the responsibilities of the Universal Suez Canal Company. This Company was organized in Egypt in 1856 under a franchise to build the Suez Canal and operate it until 1968. The Universal Suez Canal Company has always had an international character in terms of its shareholders, directors and operating personnel and in terms of its responsibility to

\textsuperscript{140}ibid.

\textsuperscript{141}Letter from President Eisenhower to Prime Minister Mollet, Washington, July 31, 1956.
assure the efficient functioning as an international waterway of the Suez Canal.

In 1888, all the great powers then principally concerned with the international character of the Canal and its free, open and secure use without discrimination, joined in the treaty and Convention of Constantinople. This provided for the benefit of the whole world that the international character of the Canal would be perpetuated for all time, irrespective of the expiration of the concession of the Universal Suez Canal Company.

Egypt as recently as October 1954 recognized that the Suez Canal is "a waterway economically, commercially and strategically of international importance," and renewed its intention to respect the Convention of 1888.

2. They do not question the right of Egypt to enjoy and exercise all the powers of a fully sovereign and independent nation, including the generally recognized right, under appropriate conditions, to nationalize assets, on condition that these assets are not of an international nature.

But the governments of the three countries find that the present action does not fulfil these conditions and that it was taken purely to serve national purposes. Furthermore, they deplore the fact that the Egyptian Government has had recourse to what amounts to a denial of fundamental human rights by compelling employees of the Suez Canal Company to continue to work under threat of imprisonment.

3. They consider that the action taken by the Government of Egypt, having regard to all the attendant circumstances, threatens the freedom and security of the Canal as guaranteed by the Convention of 1888. This makes it necessary that steps be taken to assure that the parties to that Convention and all other nations entitled to enjoy its benefits shall continue to do so, consistently with legitimate Egyptian interests.

4. The three governments consider that steps should be taken to establish operating arrangements under an international system designed to assure the continuity of operation of the Canal as guaranteed by the Convention of October 29, 1888, consistently with legitimate Egyptian interests.

5. To this end they propose that a conference should promptly be held of parties to the Convention and other nations largely concerned with the use of the Canal. The invitations to such a conference, to be held in London, on August 16, 1956, will be extended by the Government of the U.K. to the
Governments named in the Annex to this Statement. The Governments of France and the U.S. will take part in the conference.

The Egyptian government did not agree to the contents of this statement, which attempted to portray the Suez Canal Company in a manner contrary to the truth in order to justify intervention in matters that constituted the core of Egyptian sovereignty. It expressed its regret at the statement which was a distortion of the facts, attempting as it did to impart an international nature, as well as mentioning some facts and omitting others that confirmed the Egyptian government’s sovereign rights. Accordingly, Egypt’s nationalizing the Suez Canal Company was a decision stemming from these rights, and any attempt to ascribe an international nature to the Suez Canal Company was nothing more than an excuse to interfere in Egypt’s internal affairs.

As for the statement’s alleging that Egypt’s action constituted a threat to the freedom and safety of traffic through the Canal as guaranteed by the 1888 Convention, there was no connection between the Egyptian Suez Canal Company and the 1888 Convention regarding freedom of navigation through the Canal, and any attempt to link the two was cause for suspicion. The Suez Canal Company was not the entity responsible for freedom of navigation through the Canal; it was the Egyptian government that safeguarded this freedom by exercising its sovereign rights over its territory, which the Canal was an integral part of. This attempt to link the Suez Canal Company with freedom of navigation was nothing more than another effort to create excuses for interfering in Egypt’s internal affairs.

The joint statement stated that the three countries saw it necessary to take steps to establish an operating system run under international supervision to guarantee the continuity of operation in the Canal. This statement constitutes an attack on Egypt’s rights, and an attempt to deprive Egypt of its sovereignty over the Canal, which is an integral part of its territory.

This was the Egyptian government’s statement in response to the tripartite statement issued by the foreign ministers of the US, Britain, and France after the nationalisation of the Suez Canal. The statement refused any attempt to impart an international status to the Suez Canal, or to put it under international supervision, and held fast to the Convention of 1888.

The tripartite statement was followed by the freezing of Egyptian assets in the banks of the three countries concerned, and the announcement by Britain and France that they were mobilizing their reserve forces. An official bulletin concerning the movement of their forces and fleets was broadcast. The Egyptian government objected to these procedures which constituted nothing less than an outright threat to the Egyptian people to force them to give up part of their territory and their sovereignty to a foreign authority – which was in actual fact, international imperialism!
When the Egyptian government announced the nationalisation of the Suez Canal Company, it made clear its intention to uphold freedom of navigation through the Canal.

Nasser posed several questions, jotting down by hand his thoughts on the tripartite statement:

“Regarding the claim that the statement is not couched in hostile terms, is that true? What of the economic sanctions, and the conspiracies to stop navigation through the canal, and the military movements?

The World Bank does not infringe upon the sovereignty of its participating countries. Calling for the London conference for the purpose of setting up an international authority to operate the Canal, and talking of a peaceful solution commensurate with the principles and objectives of the United Nations, well, are threats and economic sanctions compatible with the principles of the United Nations? What has Egypt done that conflicts with the principles of the United Nations? It has simply nationalised the Egyptian Suez Canal Company for a fair compensation.

Our objective is a suitable solution that respects Egypt’s sovereignty and protects the Suez Canal as an international waterway in accordance with the Convention of 1888. Egypt has announced that it upholds this Convention, so has it been affected? What is the connection between the Suez Canal Company and the 1888 Convention?

As for sovereignty, everyone sees it their own way. There are those who practice sovereignty over themselves and others, and there are those who practice only their own sovereignty and see it differently.

As for talking of free negotiations; are they really free negotiations despite all the surrounding circumstances? Or is it a matter of imposing the will of the users of the Canal?! And regarding compensation for using the Canal, is it purely a material issue?!

The purpose of the 1888 Convention was to establish a system for the Canal, entitled ‘freedom of navigation through the Suez Canal’, which came into effect after being signed by the participating countries.

Regarding arrangements for cooperation between Egypt and other concerned parties (the board of directors of the Canal), this would be achieved by negotiations with Egypt. How would this work in practical terms? We would look upon this committee as a joint colonial entity that has usurped our rights. And would this committee be responsible for freedom of navigation? How would it cooperate with hostile people? Who would be responsible for protecting the Canal?
What does protecting the Canal entail? What is Egypt’s responsibility? How can the committee protect the Canal? How can it deal with the workers there? Will this be the end of the problems or the beginning? Was the Suez Canal Company responsible for protecting the Canal? What happened during WWII? Is it simply a matter of operating? How can the committee work in a hostile country?

Distancing the operation of the Canal from the politics of a country, what does that mean? How can the Suez Canal Company be separated from Egypt? Who is responsible for protecting the Canal? The people in Port Said, Ismailia, and Suez, the workers, the political parties?

Refusal to cooperate with the international organization; similarly The World Bank; the board of directors represents countries, so how can it be separated from the politics of these countries?

The London Conference and politics; this committee and politics; what is politics? Colonialism, is that politics? Hegemony, is that politics? Nationalism, is that politics?

Seizing the Canal under what name? How to convince the Egyptians? How can they be controlled after part of their territory is usurped? Is this politics? Politics within the board of directors of the Suez Canal Company?

The critical situation of the Suez Canal; who is responsible for this situation? What happened? Egypt acted within its rights. The Canal would have returned to Egypt in 1968. How will this affect freedom of navigation? What is the purpose of creating this dangerous situation? Would this have happened in 1968, once the Suez Canal Company’s concession ended?

To sum up, the proposed system and the circumstances we are experienced indicate that the purpose is as follows:

1. To force Egypt to agree to relinquish its rights and its sovereignty to the board of directors of the Suez Canal Company; in other words, the users of the Canal want to expropriate the Canal.
2. This will lead to problems and to the disruption of navigation, and will not achieve its purpose, because each and every Egyptian will consider this an imperialist act and will resist it until they put an end to it.

Egypt will protect its sovereignty and its rights; its rights to ownership of the Canal and its rights to operate it. Egypt has announced that it respects the 1888 Convention regarding freedom of navigation through the Canal and complete cooperation with its users; international cooperation, not international hegemony! International cooperation will guarantee freedom of navigation in the Canal for ships of all countries, but international hegemony will have drastic consequences; it will lead to a struggle between the Egyptian
people and the new foreign organization, which in turn will disrupt navigation and damage the economic interests of many countries; eighteen countries consider that their vital interests have been severely harmed.”

Nasser was convinced of Egypt’s right to the action that was taken, and while he had no intention of withdrawing no matter what should happen, he was still willing to negotiate and to reassure all concerned that freedom of international navigation through the Canal would be maintained. He even allowed British and French vessels to pass through without paying the fees imposed by the new administration, in order not to open the door to any possible clashes.142

Regarding the freezing of Egyptian assets in Paris and London, Nasser again wrote down by hand:

“This is a violation of the Bretton Woods agreement that the United States called for; this money was to be directed towards Egypt’s economic development programme. Such arbitrary procedures are not commensurate with the actions of a responsible central bank.”

Nasser then called for the establishment of a union for payments amongst African and Asian states.

3. The London Conference

The idea of the London Conference was conceived by Eisenhower, who wished to check the impetuosity of the British and the French who had decided to use armed force since the very first day the nationalisation of the Canal was announced.

The initial reaction to the proposed international conference in Britain was Selwyn Lloyd’s concern at Russia’s participation in its capacity as one of the signatories of the 1888 Convention, and Anthony Eden’s vehement objection to Russia’s being invited!143 Dulles, however said that he could not see how it would be possible to avoid the fact that Russia had signed the 1888 Convention!

a. The conference – a facade for military action?

During the discussions that took place before the London Conference, Eden was of the opinion that it was imperative to carry out a military operation against Egypt, and that letting Nasser get away with nationalizing the Suez Canal would be catastrophic to British interests

142 David Morgan, ibid.
143 Suez Canal, August 1, 1956, Cabinet Meetings 56 (56), released 2008.
in the Middle East, adding that the French felt the same way regarding their interests in North Africa.

While the British and French hoped that the US would join them in a military operation in Suez, they decided not to depend on this after learning Eisenhower’s views on the matter. They just asked for moral support and economic backing in the form of petroleum products, and also that the US use its diplomacy to neutralize any attempt on the part of the Soviet Union to take part in the crisis. Britain and France would see to the rest.

The Suez crisis arose at a time when the Cold War was at its peak, and when the relations between Egypt and the Soviet Union had warmed considerably after the arms deal of September, 1955.

It is worth noting that the US stated that public opinion in the country would not support a military intervention by Britain and France that could be interpreted as driven by imperial and colonialist ambitions beyond the issue of the Canal itself, which the Canal was still open to navigation.

Dulles, who had flown to London in an attempt to contain the crisis and hold talks with the parties involved, saw that Egyptian resistance to a military intervention might be limited at first, but would in the long run be extensive. He pointed to the situation Britain had faced in the Suez base in 1953, when some 88,000 British soldiers had found it hard to defend themselves against the infiltration and assassination tactics carried out by the Egyptians! His opinion was that the current situation would be a lot worse, for Egypt was now much stronger militarily and was receiving moral and military support from the Soviet Union, apart from the fact that its influence and status in the Arab world was considerably greater.

Dulles pointed out that they would have to count not merely on Egyptian reaction, but on Egyptian reaction backed by assistance from the Soviet Union at least in the form of military weapons and supplies, and perhaps even volunteers. Moreover, in the case of a military operation, all the Arab, and parts of the Islamic world would be arrayed against the United Kingdom and France, and there would be trouble in the United Nations. In short, the consequences throughout the Middle East would be very grave and would jeopardize British interests,
particularly in the production and transportation of oil, even more than Nasser’s nationalisation of the Canal.144

However, it was obvious that Britain was forging ahead with its military plans together with France, at the same time that discussions were being carried on in the British parliament, the press, and the French National Assembly and French media. Pressure was also put to bear by French capitalist shareholders in the Suez Canal Company.

Extremism and emotional overreaction reached its peak in the House of Commons amongst supporters of the British government, who likened Nasser to Hitler and Mussolini! They also raised the issue of the danger this nationalisation would pose to Israel, and the fear that it would lead other Arab countries to follow suit by nationalizing oil. And in a move to ‘punish’ Egypt, the British government took the decision to halt the shipment of all weapons there.

b. Political arguments in Britain favour the use of force:
The matter of finding alternative routes to the Suez Canal was raised in the House of Commons, such as constructing a pipeline from Aqaba to Haifa – a distance of 250 miles – as well as building bigger oil tankers that could go round the Cape of Good Hope.145

In the House of Lords, however, the trend was to differentiate between Nasser and Egypt – how, I cannot fathom?! Fear of an increase in tariff was also raised, a matter which Nasser had personally denied would be the case.

The only member who was fair to Nasser was Lord Stansgate, General William Slim, who announced that Nasser had done nothing to breach the law: the Suez Canal Company was Egyptian, and the only court which the matter could be put before would be the highest Egyptian court. Lord Stansgate added that he had met Nasser, who had told him:

“You and the Americans offer us money, but there are so many conditions, such as, 'You have got to make peace with the Jews', 'You have got to make an agreement with the Sudan', and 'You have got to do something about this and that.' But when the Russians make an offer, they say simply, 'There is the money'.”

144 Memo of Conversation between Prime Minister Eden and Secretary of State Dulles, 10 Downing Street, London, August 1, 1956.
145 Commons Sitting, HL Deb 2, August 1956, Suez Canal Debate, vol 557 cc 1602 - 431602
Lord Stansgate said that Nasser had indeed aimed a blow that had damaged British status and angered the nation, but added that he knew Egypt well, and had taken part in negotiations with the Egyptian government in 1953, and that Britain had to understand that a complete revolution had taken place in Egypt after a hundred years of rule by an Albanian family detested by the Egyptians. It was his opinion that Nasser did not want problems, but simply wanted to protect his revolution, for which he needed money to build the dam and cultivate the desert.

Stansgate proposed a simple and available solution, namely the 1888 Convention which controlled international usage of the Canal, and according to which a body of representatives of signatories to the Convention should be set up and meet once a year in Cairo to make sure that everything was running smoothly. The United States and Russia could be asked to join. In this way, international usage of the Canal would be assured, and Britain’s rights protected, without need for further problems.

Lord Stansgate also warned against taking any punitive financial measures, as Britain had some 300 million pounds in the Suez base, while the French were in an even worse position, with extensive possessions in Egypt.

Stansgate also advised the government not to try and use Israel to fight the Arabs with, which would be a fatal mistake. He also criticized the fact that the British government had done nothing towards Egypt’s preventing Israeli ships from using the Canal.

Regarding punishment, he asked what kind of punishment? He referred to the days of Orabi ‘Nasser’s political ancestor’ and the representative of the Egyptian revolution of 1881, when Britain had sent twenty-two warships to bombard Alexandria then entered Cairo via the Suez Canal. At the time, it was seen as the right way to act, but those days were long gone, together with the British Empire, and it was ‘time to reassess our problems and look at things anew’.

Speaking as a military man, Lord Stansgate advised the government to think of the consequences of an action before taking it: what would be the effect on the British Commonwealth and on the world in general, especially India and Pakistan? What would happen to the Baghdad Pact? And what of Iran, especially after the Shah’s visit to the Soviet Union? What about Jordan? If Britain were to take any violent action
against Egypt, all the Arab League countries and their friends would be on the Egyptian side.

Lord Killearn then asked whether Britain was ready to let Nasser take over the Canal? This was, he said, a time of testing, not only for Nasser but for Britain itself. He went on to agree with the Times newspaper’s description of Nasser’s action as ‘piracy’, adding that it was time to act and the sooner the better.¹⁴⁶

Lord Jeffreys was of the opinion that it was a great mistake on the part of the British government, ‘when Naguib and Nasser first brought off their coup’ on July 23, 1952, not to have acted then; and acted quickly. Britain had certain obligations which were obligations to what he referred to as ‘the legitimate Government of Egypt’, and no obligations whatever to a revolutionary government. Britain then had the troops on the spot, and could have acted, and acted effectively. If Britain failed to act this time, there would be further coups. He added that word had gone round in the East that Britain was weak, and could do nothing more than talk when affronted or injured – a fatal reputation to have in the East.

It was necessary, he said, to show that this ‘seizure’ of the Canal was going beyond the limit, and to act firmly and quickly to stop it. Nasser knew full well that Britain was the largest shareholder in the Canal since the purchase of the Khedive’s shares by Disraeli. If America was not ready to co-operate to the full with Britain, he added, then Britain must act without her, especially as it was the year of the presidential election, a time when the political climate traditionally eschewed strong action. France, however, was on Britain’s side. Further delay would only serve to encourage Nasser, therefore it was necessary to act quickly and offer no concessions to Egypt, as all the Arab countries were watching to see what would happen.

If Nasser failed to agree to Britain’s conditions, he should be treated the same way Orabi was in 1882, when Britain fought him and sent him to Ceylon! If necessary, Britain would fight Nasser and use military force on land, sea, and air, and do so at once, as any delay was in Nasser’s favour.

Lord Birdwood was of the opinion that, ‘Nasser was clever enough to say that he regarded the nationalised Canal Company as a contribution towards the cost of building the High Dam’, but did not say the whole

¹⁴⁶ Lords Sitting on Suez, Egypt and the Suez Canal, HL Deb 2 August 1956, vol 199 c563 95563.
cost. Lord Birdwood proposed two options; that Britain could ‘go it alone’, which given the prevailing conditions might not be possible as it had the Commonwealth to protect, and the oil of Europe passing through the Canal, as well as that of the North Atlantic.

What, he asked, would this course of action lead to? A re-occupation, which might solve the problem for a year or so, but would lead Britain back again in the old cycle? And supposing that such action led to the disappearance of Nasser, who would take his place—the Wafd? And what would happen in 1968?

The Egyptian Government, he added, spoke directly to the people of other governments with the language of ‘diabolical misrepresentation’, so it would be a good idea to start by jamming the Voice of the Arabs radio station!

Lord Grantchester condemned the nationalisation of the Suez Canal, describing it as a criminal act, and asked whether it would be possible to resort to the International Court on the basis that this action constituted a breach of an international agreement. He also raised the question of oil, and asked what plans the British government had made for 1968, when the current concession was due to have ended. It was necessary, he said, to have foreseen a rearrangement of the Concession terms in 1968. He then asked whether it was the purpose of the British government to try to negotiate during the proposed International Conference for a new Concession relating to the maintenance and management of the Suez Canal, or whether the International Conference was to be concerned only with the guarantee of freedom of transport, leaving the Concession arrangements to be commercially negotiated?

The members of the House of Lords were quick to denounce the nationalisation; Earl De La Warr (known in the US as Lord Delaware) said that “Egypt tore up the Treaty of 1936, and is now tearing up the Concession twelve years before it expires.” He added that it was a bid by an Egyptian ‘dictator’ for leadership, for he himself (Nasser) had said: from the Atlantic to the Persian Gulf. And if he succeeded in this challenge, Britain would be reduced to virtually nothing in the Middle East.

He goes on to say that Arabs and certain colonial peoples were taking great pleasure in what they felt to be the humiliation of the West. In a speech by Nehru, he said that this was only another example of the
weakening hold of the West. So if force were necessary, it should be used, and the government should stand firm.\textsuperscript{147}

To sum up, there was an almost general consensus in the House of Commons and the House of Lords, and amongst the three political parties in Britain, that the government should be supported in its call for internationalizing the Canal, and in not hesitating to use military force if necessary even if the United States failed to support this move.

c. **Nasser refuses to attend the London Conference**

Nasser believed in the justice and righteousness of the step he had taken for his country; the Canal was Egyptian, and it was inevitable that sooner or later something would have to be done about it. When he took the decision to nationalize the Canal, he resolved never to back down no matter what happened; nevertheless he was willing to negotiate on any level to provide reassurance regarding freedom of international navigation through the Canal.

Egypt was invited to the London Conference, which included all the maritime countries and countries with an interest in the Suez Canal, and Nasser intended to be there, despite the objection of all his ministers and advisors, who sensed that the atmosphere would be hostile and that there would be nothing to gain from going.

The night before Nasser was to take the final decision on whether or not to go, Eden made a televised speech in which he said spoke \textemdash or rather, ranted \textemdash disparagingly about Nasser! Nasser realised then that it would be futile to sit at a table with Eden to discuss any aspect of the issue, and also that Eden had obviously already made up his mind what to do. It was useless to hold talks with a man blinded by deep hostility amounting to personal hatred!\textsuperscript{148}

Nasser wrote down the following in his notes:

“It is not common practice for a head of state to direct this kind of talk to another head of state, unless he feels confident that he can quickly get rid of him and find someone else he can trust and deal with...”.

The 16\textsuperscript{th} of August took Eden, the British government, and British public opinion by surprise: the Arab nation, from the Atlantic ocean to the Arabian Gulf, united to express its solidarity with Egypt in its struggle to protect its

\textsuperscript{147} Lords Sitting on Suez, Egypt and the Suez Canal, HL Deb 2 August 1956, vol 199 c596 – 27596

\textsuperscript{148} David Morgan, ibid.
rights to the Suez Canal, and there was a general strike in all the Arab countries. Eden realised then that the use of force against Egypt would only result in a threat to British interests throughout the Arab world, and that he was not dealing with Egypt alone but with the whole Arab nation.

Nevertheless, Eden refused to back down and insisted on his plan in the House of Commons, till he was forced during its last session to promise to put the matter before the United Nations. His plot to save himself and his government was now out in the open, and after realizing that there was no bringing back the past in Egypt, and trying - and failing - to find anyone inside the country whom he could approach, he became temperamental and highly volatile.

After Eden and his accomplices failed to penetrate the solid Egyptian front, they turned their attention to the Arab front which had demonstrated its solidarity with Egypt on August 16th, in an attempt to sow dissent between the Arab leaders – to no avail. A tripartite conference was held between Saud, Al Quwatli, and Nasser on the 22nd of September. King Saud sent President Eisenhower three letters on the issue of the Suez Canal, and Saudi Arabia presented Egypt with 20 million dollars.

Eden stated that Egypt’s success in taking over the Suez Canal was a victory for Arab nationalism, after which protecting Israel would be impossible, and that the Arab’s next blow would be to Israel. Then the Israeli attacks on Jordan began...

Britain and France were supplying Israel with heavy weapons, as were some European countries, confirming Eden’s declaration in the House of Commons that he was ‘responsible for protecting Israel’!

In a letter from Eden to President Eisenhower, he writes:

“Nasser’s seizure of the Canal was undoubtedly designed to impress public opinion not only in Egypt, but in the Arab world and in Africa too. I saw his speech at Aboukir on August 1, in which he said, ‘We are very strong because we constitute a limitless strength extending from the Atlantic Ocean to the Arab Gulf’.

Eden adds:

“I know that Nasser is active wherever Muslims can be found... The removal of Nasser, and the installation in Egypt of a regime less hostile to the West, must therefore also rank high among our objectives.”

Eden carried on tirelessly sending messages to Eisenhower that he hoped would turn him against Nasser, exaggerating the danger Nasser posed to the West, particularly with regard to his influence on the other Arab countries, and

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149 Message from PM Eden to President Eisenhower, London August 5, 1956.
stressing the need to get rid of him. He concludes by saying that the difference in opinion between himself and Eisenhower is in estimating Nasser’s plans and his motives, and the consequences on the Middle East of taking military action against him.

On his part, Nasser stated that,

“Arab nationalism is the driving force in the region and we are ready to confront any challenge we come up against. We must depend on ourselves, and will not put the matter before the Security Council. Egypt has no objection to guaranteeing freedom of navigation in the Canal; our objection is to the hegemony of colonialism. The income from the Canal will be enough to us to implement our projects and there will be no need to increase the tariff for transit through the Canal. We have also decided to carry out the project for improving the Canal which the Company had proposed to us before the nationalization.

“We nationalized the Canal, and why not?! The Canal is Egyptian, it is part of our territory, and we have every right to nationalize it. The press says: Nasser has seized the Canal! But the truth is that the colonialist countries are the ones who had expropriated Egypt’s shares, which amounted to 44% of the total shares.

“They want to form an international committee to guarantee freedom of navigation, but what is the use of this committee when Egypt has always guaranteed freedom of navigation in the Canal?! Of what use is an international committee? And how could it guarantee freedom of navigation if the Egyptian people don’t guarantee it? It is just not possible from a practical point of view; for how can a committee guard the length of the Canal if the Egyptian people are not willing to protect it?! And didn’t Egypt safeguard freedom of navigation throughout WW2?!

“We were taken by surprise at the threats, military procedures, and declarations expressing lack of confidence in Gamal Abdel Nasser. Of what is it then to hold talks or negotiate if there is a complete lack of trust?! Our only response is to abstain from attending the conference they are calling for...

“The foreign press has described me as a dictator, and even a pharaoh! But a dictator is one who rules his country against the wishes of its people, and you can find out for yourselves if this is the case in Egypt! We are now ready to face any attack, and will defend ourselves to the last drop of our blood.”

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\[d. \textbf{Preparations for the London Conference:}\]

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\[150\] International press conference held with Nasser after announcing the nationalization of the Suez Canal, August 12, 1956.
Britain, France, and the US agreed that Britain should head the conference in its capacity as the host country, and Dulles was assigned the task of drawing up the tripartite plan. It was decided that the conference should focus on the point that Egypt should not be solely responsible for operating the Canal, but could retain ownership of it.

Eden did not want the United Nations to intervene in the dispute, but merely contacted. He stressed the necessity of making military preparations and the need to be prepared! He said that the plan was completed and that the Labour Party had approved it.

The general consensus in the British Cabinet was that Nasser must be overthrown, but Eden doubted that this could be done without the use of force, stressing the necessity of US support, though the US were not in favour of using force because of the elections.1

Dulles was angered by news in the press of a difference of opinion between the US, Britain and France, and issued a statement denying this.

In a meeting with Dulles, Eden proposed economic sanctions against Nasser, stressing the importance of not letting him get hold of the revenue from the Canal, which could be deposited in a bank abroad and withheld from Nasser, who would find himself in a difficult position. Eden added that if force were to be used, military troops could enter from the Canal and annul the treaty of 1954 regarding the base.

Dulles, however, was of the opinion that no declaration of a solution should be made so that it should not look as though the conference were imposing a resolution on Egypt without having discussed it with the Egyptian side first.2

During the discussions that preceded the conference, one of the main areas of concern for Britain, France, and the US was the stand the Soviet Union would take. They had been obliged to invite the Soviets to attend as Russia was one of the signatories to the Convention of 1888, but Dulles made it quite clear that in spite of the existing differences between the US and the Soviet Union, they both held the same position regarding the need to avoid any hostile activities in the Middle East or indeed any part of the world, as the outcome of any military conflict could not be predicted.

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151 Suez Canal, 14 August 1956, Cabinet Meeting 59(56), released 2008.
152 Telegram from the American Embassy in the UK to the Department of State, London, August 16, 1956.
However, they held different views regarding the nationalization of the Canal, Shepilov put forth the Soviet Union’s point of view, namely that according to international law and historical precedent, Egypt was well within its rights in nationalizing the Suez Canal Company, and that denying this right would be interfering in Egypt’s internal affairs; consequently, the subject of negotiation should only be freedom of navigation in the Canal.

Regarding the economic sanctions and the military preparations being made by both the United Kingdom and France, the Soviet Union saw these as unjustifiable and would not be conducive to a balanced decision. Moreover, the Soviets did not approve of the formation of the conference, as neither Egypt nor 24 other countries who were all users of the Canal, were represented.\textsuperscript{153}

During the discussions that took place before the conference, Dulles met with Selwyn Lloyd and Christian Pineau, in an atmosphere far more fraught with complications than previously, as the implications of a military intervention were now clear to them, as was the fact that their military institutions were not equipped to deal with a venture on this scale.

The French Minister of Defence, Maurice Bourgès-Maunoury, confirmed the difficulty of the military problem facing Britain and France, commenting that the British had not yet decided whether the objective of the military campaign was to occupy the Canal, or occupy Egypt itself!

It was obvious that Krishna Menon, the Indian delegate, wished to perform the role of intermediary between the Western powers and Egypt. Shepilov also made it clear that his country would support Egypt, and that there could be no effective international role in operating the Canal; in other words, they refused the idea of internationalizing the Canal.\textsuperscript{154}

e. Proceedings of the London Conference

1. The position of the three hostile countries: the US, Britain, and France:

The Conference began on August 16, 1956, and after a procedural session, Dulles made a declaration, previously agreed upon with Selwyn Lloyd and Pineau, to the effect that the countries participating in the Conference were aware of the critical situation regarding the Suez Canal and were determined to find a peaceful solution in keeping with the principles and objectives of the United Nations; and that such a solution should respect the sovereignty and rights of Egypt, while safeguarding

\textsuperscript{153} Telegram from the American Embassy in the UK to the Department of State, London, August 16, 1956.

\textsuperscript{154} Message from the US Secretary of State to the President, London, August 16, 1956.
the Suez Canal as an international waterway in accordance with the Constantinople Convention of October 29, 1888. The declaration stated the following:

1. The declaration reaffirms the purpose stated in the preamble of the Convention of 1888, to establish “A definite system destined to guarantee at all times, and for all the powers, the free use of the Suez Maritime Canal”.

2. Such a system must assure:
   a. Efficient and dependable operation, maintenance and development of the Canal as a free, open and secure international waterway in accordance with the principles of the Convention of 1888.
   b. Insulation of the operation of the Canal from the influence of politics of any nation.
   c. Respect for the sovereignty of Egypt.
   d. An equitable and fair return to Egypt for the use of the Suez Canal as an international waterway on Egyptian territory.
   e. Payment to the Universal Suez Canal Company of such sums as may be found its due by way of fair compensation.

3. Canal tolls to be determined, and an agreement regarding them signed.

4. An international board to be set up for operating, maintaining and developing the Canal and enlarging it so as to increase the volume of traffic in the interest of the world trade and of Egypt as a participant in the benefits of the Canal. Egypt would grant this board all rights and facilities appropriate to its functioning as here outlined.

5. The members of the board, in addition to Egypt, would be chosen from among the states parties to the treaty, and would make periodic reports to the United Nations.\textsuperscript{155}

Eisenhower’s comment on this was that if Nasser agreed to negotiate, he would accept the paper, except possibly for the part prescribing the duties of the board, who would be doing the actual operating, maintaining, and developing of the Canal. Nasser could find it impossible to accept all of this. Eisenhower saw no objection to agreeing to a board of directors, but with a supervisory rather than an operating authority. It could also possibly be a board of directors with the operating responsibility assigned to someone appointed by

\textsuperscript{155} Message from the US President to the Secretary of State, Washington, August 19, 1956.
Nasser, subject to Board approval, in which case an organization would be established that would fulfil the ends sought by the West.\footnote{156} Following the US declaration, Macmillan informed Dulles that there were only three possible choices: that Nasser voluntarily accept the contents of the US paper; that he be forced to do so, or that his refusal be accepted, in which case Britain would be ‘finished’ and Macmillan would resign!

Eisenhower however was of the opinion that the British and French should not be allowed to take too tough a line with Nasser.\footnote{157}

The Labour Party Shadow Cabinet in Britain had issued a statement on August 13\textsuperscript{th} opposing the government, contrary to what Eden had previously alleged. The statement contained the following:

1. Nasser’s nationalization of Canal was not wrong in itself except that the arbitrary manner in which it was done had caused great anxiety.

2. Using armed forces in settling the dispute could not be justified except in accordance with obligations and pledges under the UN Charter.

3. Apart from continued stoppage of Israel ships, Nasser had not done anything so far which would justify the use of armed force against Egypt.

4. The government should make it plain that the military measures taken in the previous ten days were purely precautionary and solely for defence against possible aggression.

5. Parliament to be recalled upon conclusion of the Conference.

Dulles’ comment on this statement was that it constituted a hard blow for the Conservatives, and that if Nasser stood firm, the result could possibly be a Labour government that would be more moderate in its stance.\footnote{158}

2 \textbf{The position of the Soviet Union towards Egypt:}
Shepilov gave a speech during the London Conference in which he reaffirmed Egypt’s right to the nationalization, the sanctity of sovereignty, and the removal of the last vestiges of colonialism.\footnote{159}

Dulles attempted to reach a two-party arrangement with the Russians to propose to Egypt, with the exclusion of Britain and France.\footnote{160}
It became clear that of the twenty-two participating countries, twelve supported the US, Britain, and France; six were against, and four were on the fence. Dulles saw that the danger lay in the fact that the ultimate line-up would be almost entirely the West on one side and Asia on the other, with the Soviet Union on the Asian side. The governments of Iran and Pakistan were friendly to the West, but popular sentiment there was so much with Egypt that the governments would hesitate to commit themselves to a course which could seem to be anti-Egyptian.

The Russian position differed greatly from that of the US throughout the conference; Shepilov announced the Soviet refusal of the US paper, saying he had hoped it would be possible to find an acceptable compromise, and that instead of the more rigid and one-sided formula of international operation with Egyptian participation, there might be substituted the formula of Egyptian operation with foreign participation. He felt that Mr. Dulles’ draft was disappointing in that it did not provide a basis for a compromise.

The main reason, in Shepilov’s opinion, was that while containing some general references to Egyptian sovereignty, the question of the right of nationalization - which had been accepted by all - made plain who would operate the Canal. Dulles’ draft proposed an international board to operate and maintain and develop the Canal, with the Egyptian Government called upon to grant this board all facilities! This meant that Egypt would not run the Canal and other members of the board – without Egypt - would have chief responsibility, assigning to Egypt a secondary role. This would not be acceptable to the Egyptian people and would be regarded as an attempt - on an unequal basis - to impose a colonial form.

Shepilov said that he felt that there was also the question of public opinion and that the formula set forth in Mr. Dulles’ draft looked like the application of the principle of a state within a state. It was necessary to avoid any appearance of inequality, as this proposal called for international control in the form of a concession, which could only be regarded as inimical to Egyptian sovereignty.

Dulles’ response to this was that there was just not enough international confidence in Egypt to give it sole responsibility for operating the Canal!161

The London Conference proposed a committee headed by Menzies to negotiate with Egypt. There had been a suggestion from eighteen states that

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Dulles alone could undertake negotiations on behalf of the rest, but he declined.162

Towards the end of the conference, Shepilov made a speech in which he described the US plan as a maneuver of colonialism designed to reimpose Western rule upon Egypt.163

In the final session of the London Conference, Shepilov submitted a draft proposal stating that it was agreed that settlement should be achieved by peaceful means through negotiation,164 on a basis of the sovereign rights of Egypt and freedom of navigation in the Canal according to the Convention of 1888, taking into account changed circumstances.165

Eden was angered at the position taken by the Russians, and expressed this view in a message to Eisenhower in which he wrote of the ‘destructive efforts’ of the Russians during the conference, and that they were using Nasser to further their own ends, namely to dislodge the West from the Middle East and gain a foothold in Africa so as to dominate it. He added that the Russian policy of encouraging Arab unity and the abolition of all military basis and exploitation, was clearly aimed at the Wheelus and Habbania bases as well as the West’s Middle East oil supplies. Meanwhile, the Communist Bloc was providing economic and political assistance to the independent African countries, which would increase even more once the rest of the Western colonies gained independence.

Eden stressed that Nasser must not be allowed to win, and that the more Britain, France, and the US showed a united front, the better the chances were of Nasser backing down, without the need to resort to force. He ended by saying that the current situation was the most ‘hazardous’ they had faced since 1940!166

3 The Egyptian position:
Nasser wrote down the following in his notes:

“The result of the conference was a strengthening of Egypt’s position...Egypt insists on its sovereignty being respected. The arguments regarding nationalization of Egypt’s being unable to operate the Canal

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162 Message from the US Secretary of State to the President, London, August 22, 1956.
163 Message from the US Secretary of State to the President, London August 21, 1956.
164 Telegram from the US Delegation at the Suez Canal Conference to the Department of State, London, August 23, 1956.
165 Message from Prime Minister Eden to President Eisenhower, London, August 27, 1956.
without partners have been defeated. A committee of five would mean ignoring the Indian proposal.

“Egypt’s position must be made clear regarding the main issues of the Canal problem. It must be seen that Egypt will defend its sovereignty to the end; Egypt’s rights to the Suez Canal; Egypt’s right to operate the Canal. It is necessary – through convincing – that Egypt is determined to uphold the principle of freedom of navigation in the Canal and the interests of its foreign users, also that we are wiling to consider suggestions that aim at the establishing of an international system.

“This will pacify the countries concerned with securing freedom of navigation and at the same time will win over those who do not wish to see a struggle taking place over the Canal. We can also consider India’s proposal as well as others raised during the London Conference.

“We should also reveal the foundations upon which Egypt operates the Canal, and highlight the following:
1. Egypt’s position regarding freedom of navigation derived from the principal points of the Convention of 1888, and Egypt’s reiteration of this position on August 2.
2. Egypt’s agreeing to the establishing of a consultant organization comprised of representatives of maritime countries, and to international cooperation with regard to changing the tolls and to technical assistance, and to cooperation with the UN, to counter all the pretexts put forth by the countries that support internationalizing the Canal.

As to the claim that Egypt intends to use the Canal as a political weapon, the answer to this is to announce the main principles governing operation of the Canal by Egypt and that the Egyptian government has set up the Suez Canal Authority which will have no political role whatsoever. It is also possible to describe the Company as legally independent and a corporate body which will safeguard operations in the Canal on the basis of complete respect of freedom of navigation and equal treatment of the ships of all nations with no discrimination.

“The Egyptian company recruits foreign technicians, and we must once more announce the need to hold an international conference in Cairo – as soon as possible – for the countries that use the Canal, in order to agree on freedom of navigation and the relevant methods of international cooperation. Raymond Hare, the US Ambassador in Cairo, described these suggestions as a constructive way of solving the Canal problem.”

167 Raymond Hare, Oral History Project, The Association for Diplomatic Studies and Training, Foreign Affairs,
“It would be a good thing if a huge campaign were launched by the Arab
countries and Asia to support the Indian declaration. Egypt will use its
influence in Indonesia, Ceylon, Burma, and the Arab countries in the
Middle East to gain support for the Indian proposal. Russia has also said it
is sure that if Egypt were to approach the communist countries, they would
support this proposal.

“All this will take the wind out of the sails of the English, the French, and
the Americans, especially as they say they have eighteen countries on their
side and only four on the other. Egypt will have general support.”

Krishna Menon had officially proposed – after convincing the Egyptians –
that a committee of users of the Canal be set up whose task would be to
ensure that the Canal was being operated and maintained efficiently. It
would not interfere at all in administrative affairs, nor would it be of a
supervisory nature, but would simply serve as a communication channel
between the users of the Canal and its new administration.

After some initial hesitation, the Egyptians had accepted the idea of the
committee, and India accordingly put the proposal before the London
Conference. It was refused by Dulles, and therefore had no chance of being
passed in the conference; Eden likewise refused the idea of a committee of
users with only a consultancy role to play!

The Indian proposal was refused, and the Americans and the British,
together with their supporters, appointed Menzies to meet with Nasser and
ask him to change his mind about the nationalization. The crisis intensified.

On September 2, 1956, Nasser announced in a press conference:

“I am willing to accept any solution to the Suez Canal problem on condition
that it does not touch upon the sovereignty of Egypt, but I refuse the idea of
international supervision of the Canal. I am ready to sign a treaty that
guarantees freedom of navigation in the Canal. Egypt is facing threats from
two large powers, England and France and we wish to reach a solution
through negotiations.

“I will not bring the problem of the Canal before the UN because one of the
superpowers could use the right of veto, and I have lost hope in the Security
Council. I would prefer to rely on public opinion, and on decent behaviour
on the part of the world.

“We cannot accept international supervision of the Canal, because it would
mean nothing but joint colonialism; as for the liquidated Suez Canal
Company, it was no more than a remnant of colonialism, and a state within
the state. We do not want war, but will fight if we are attacked.”

July 22, 1956.
Nasser added:

“I am disappointed at Eisenhower’s statement on internationalizing the Canal, which have led Egypt to protest; however, the clarifications he made in his press conference have served to reassure us to some degree.”

4 **Menzie’s proposal to internationalize the Canal is refused:**

In an atmosphere fraught with tension, the Egyptian Ministry of Foreign Affairs received via the Egyptian Ambassador in London a message addressed to Nasser from Menzies asking him whether he would be willing to meet with a committee of five countries, representing eighteen countries, to present their points of view regarding the Suez Canal?

On August 28th, the Egyptian Cabinet of Ministers met to discuss the above message and agreed to negotiate with Menzies’ committee. Sure enough, the committee held several meetings with Nasser from September 3 – 9, during which Menzies presented the proposals made by the London Conference, the objectives of which were to remove the Canal from Egyptian control; these may be summarized as follows:

(1) Egypt’s ownership of the Canal being recognized, it is to her great advantage to have the Canal maintained and improved and made more profitable as the years go on.
(2) The future financial burdens involved in such maintenance and improvement would be carried and handled by a new body and therefore, Egypt would in fact be relieved of them.
(3) Egypt alone would draw profit from the Canal.
(4) A just and fair method of compensating the shareholders of the Suez Canal would be agreed upon.
(5) The dangerous tension now existing internationally would end on terms satisfactory to the user nations and entirely consistent with Egypt’s proper dignity, independence, and ownership of the Canal.  

Nasser commented:

“Menzies has come with conditions that we must either accept or refuse, under the threat of aggression, on the basis that we hand over the Canal and its revenues to them; hand over part of Egyptian territory. This is not negotiation: it is dictating conditions! Our talk with Menzies was clear: Egypt will not accept that any international body usurp part of her land or take control of part of the country’s sovereignty.

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“What is happening? They say they will set up a new organization called the Suez Canal Users’ Association whose purpose will be to collect the toll fees, while preventing Egypt from taking control. There cannot possibly be two different bodies managing navigation in the Canal, else why not say: let’s create an association of users of London Port! Let chaos reign, and do away with international relations and international law! This is not a proposal to set up an association of Canal users: it is to set up an association to declare war and to attack the sovereignty of small countries.

“We asked to negotiate with them and they refused; they want only to impose conditions that will affect our sovereignty; they threaten us with the use of force, but we will defend our sovereignty, and will counter hostility with hostility: we will fight whoever attacks us.”

To sum up, the Committee of Five came to Egypt with a proposal for internationalizing the Canal, and as Nasser said:

“I could only refuse!

“Following this, the British and the French carried out a plot which they imagined would paralyze movement in the Canal: they ordered all their pilots to leave their posts at midnight of September 14th. Under normal conditions, operating the Canal requires some 250 pilots; after the British and French pilots deserted their posts, we had only 26 trained pilots left, and 30 trainees!

“I called Mahmoud Younis\textsuperscript{170} and explained to him that it was crucial that the Canal remain open. Mahmoud Younis assured me that it would. I accuse Selwyn Lloyd in particular, because he met with Peghoux, the Administrator of the Suez Canal Company, ten days ago, and they planned this move together.

“That night, I gave a press conference, and when asked what I intended to do after the withdrawal of the pilots, I simply replied that I had given instructions to facilitate their exit visas. The reporter was stunned, and asked me: "Is that all?" I answered: "No. I ordered a band to play ‘God Save the Queen’ and the ‘Marseillaise’ for them as they left!”

“These were words charged with defiance, but my confidence in Mahmoud Younis was absolute. Nor did he disappoint me. Some pilots worked 72 hours non-stop, and the Canal remained open. No stoppage or accidents

\textsuperscript{169} Nasser’s speech at the graduation ceremony at the Air Force College, Bilbeis, September 15, 1956.
\textsuperscript{170} Mahmoud Younis, Head of the Suez Canal Authority.
occurred, and thus we disproved the final possible objection concerning our ability to ensure the safety of navigation in the Canal.”\textsuperscript{171}

Nasser sent a letter to Robert Menzies on September 9, 1956, in which he wrote:

“I have received your letter of September 7\textsuperscript{th}, 1956, relating to the meetings held between us and the committee headed by you and representing the eighteen governments who participated in the London Conference on the Suez Canal.

You have referred to the eighteen countries as representing 90\% of the users of Canal. Our understanding of ‘users of the Canal’ is that it includes those countries which even though they may not own ships passing through the Canal, nevertheless depend upon the Canal for the bulk of their foreign trade, such as Australia, Thailand, Indonesia, India, Pakistan, Iran, Iraq, Saudi Arabia, Ethiopia, and the Sudan.

The principles of sovereignty, rights of ownership, and the dignity of nations are all linked to the problem of the Canal. The right of the Egyptian government to nationalize the Universal Maritime Company of the Suez Canal cannot be contested, and in nationalizing the Company the Egyptian government stated unequivocally that it considered itself bound by the Convention of 1888 which guarantees freedom of navigation in the Suez Canal, and that it was willing to pay fair compensation to the shareholders.

On August 12\textsuperscript{th}, the Egyptian government announced its willingness to invite the countries that were signatories of the 1888 Convention to a conference where countries whose ships passed through the Suez Canal could review the Convention of 1888 and reconfirm and guarantee freedom of navigation in the Suez Canal.

Navigation has continued smoothly and efficiently throughout the past fifty days, in spite of the difficulties that were created by the governments of France and the United Kingdom, together with former members of the Suez Canal Company.

This crisis was created by the aforementioned parties, and the proof lies in the following:

1. Statements that include threats to use force.

\textsuperscript{171} David Morgan, ibid.
2. The mobilization of forces by the United Kingdom and France and the movements of these forces.
3. Inciting the employees and pilots working in the Suez Canal to abruptly leave their posts.
4. The economic sanctions taken against Egypt.

These are all actions that violate and disrespect the spirit of the United Nations Charter, and an attempt to threaten us and to sabotage navigation in the Canal.

We have studied carefully the proposals made in the London Conference and outside it regarding this issue, including those made by the eighteen countries represented by the committee, and agree with them when they state that the sovereign rights of Egypt must be respected, and freedom of navigation in the Suez Canal safeguarded in accordance with the Convention of October 29, 1888, that Egypt’s right of ownership should be respected, and that the efficient and dependable operation, maintenance, and development of the Canal be ensured.

However, when we examine the ways and means through which the committee proposes to achieve these objectives, we find that they defeat their purpose. The system proposed will be seen by the Egyptian people as built upon hostility and an infringement of their rights and sovereignty, which precludes any cooperation.

Any attempt to impose such a system will be a signal of strife and will plunge the Suez Canal into the turmoil of politics rather than insulate it from them, as the committee claims to want. The delegating of the five-member committee, the deployment of armed forces, and the economic measures – what are all these if not the very essence of politics?!

It is our belief that the real insulation of the Canal from politics is through a solemn and binding international commitment either through a reaffirmation or renewal of the Convention of 1888, both of which are acceptable to us.

I have made it clear to the committee that the government of Egypt is willing to enter into a binding arrangement concerning the establishment of just and equitable tolls and charges.

As for the future development of the Canal, I wish to reiterate that the government of Egypt is determined to do everything possible in this respect.

It is our announced policy that the Suez Canal authority will remain an independent authority with its own separate budget and powers,
unlimited by any governmental rules and systems. We have also announced
our intention to allocate an adequate percentage of the revenues of the
Canal to its future development, and not to use any of this designated
amount for other purposes.

The paper which was circulated amongst the countries invited to the
London Conference proposes the establishment of an international
authority to operate the Suez Canal and reads:

First: France, the United Kingdom, and the United States have agreed that
during the conference, a resolution for the establishment of an
international authority to operate the Canal will be presented.

Second: The purpose and function of this authority will be as follows:
1. To take over operation of the Canal.
2. To ensure its efficient functioning as a free, open, and secure
   international waterway in accordance with the principles of the
   Constantinople Convention of 1888.
3. To arrange for the payment of fair compensation to the Suez Canal
   Company.
4. To ensure an equitable return to Egypt.

In the case of failing to agree with Egypt on points 3 and 4, the matter
would be put to an arbitral committee of three members appointed by the
International Court of Justice.

Third: The constituent organs of the International Authority will be consist
of a board of directors and technical organs.

Fourth: The powers of the International Authority will include:
1. Carrying out all necessary works.
2. Determining tolls and charges.
3. All financial matters.
4. Administration and supervision.

Any study of this paper will lead to only one conclusion; namely, that the
purpose is to seize the Canal from Egypt’s hands and put it in other hands.”

The second London conference was held on September 19 in an atmosphere
of hostility towards Egypt, and ended with the formation of a Suez Canal
Users Association (SCUA) made up of the countries that had participated in
the London Conference, who signed the following statement:

First: The objectives of the Users Association are as follows:
1. To facilitate any steps which may lead to a final or provisional solution of the Suez Canal problem and to assist the members in the exercise of their rights as users of the Suez Canal in consonance with the 1888 Convention, with due regard for the rights of Egypt.

2. To promote safe, orderly, efficient and economical transit of the Canal by vessels of any member nation desiring to avail themselves of the facilities of SCUA and to seek the cooperation of the competent Egyptian authorities for this purpose.

3. To extend its facilities to vessels of non-member nations which desire to use them.

4. To receive, hold and disburse the revenues accruing from tolls and charges.

5. To report to members any significant developments affecting the use or non-use of the Canal.

6. To assist in dealing with any practical problems arising from the failure of the Suez Canal to adequately serve its customary and intended purpose and to study means that may render it feasible to reduce dependence on the Canal.

7. To facilitate the execution of any provisional solution of the Suez problem that may be adopted by the United Nations.

Second: To carry out the above mentioned purposes:

1. The members shall consult together in a Council on which each member will be represented.

2. The Council shall establish an Executive Group to which it may delegate such powers as it deems appropriate.

3. The Council will appoint an Administrator, who shall make the necessary arrangements with shipping interests and who will be appointed to serve under the direction of the Council through the Executive Group.  

5. Egypt is faced with an invasion conspiracy:

Military deployment began in Britain and France immediately after the nationalization of the Suez Canal; the objective here was to try and frighten Nasser and force him to withdraw from the Canal zone, after which they would occupy it, seize the Canal, and take over running it themselves. This move had been delayed under pressure from Eisenhower, who had asked his allies to pursue political methods first, as aforementioned. Eden suspended military attack procedures during the London Conference, though he continued to pressure the Americans to agree to the use of force.

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At the same time, the Canal pilots were withdrawn, in an attempt to make Egypt appear incapable of operating the Canal or of safeguarding freedom of navigation there. This calculated conspiracy also manifested itself in the large number of ships that arrived in the ports of Port Said and Suez – 50 ships in one day! However, 70 Egyptian pilots together with the Greek pilots who refused to be bribed, managed to keep things running without a hitch.\^173

a. **Eden intensifies the pressure to use force:**

Once the London Conference was over, and before Menzies had even completed his mission, Eden resumed pressurizing Eisenhower to use force against Egypt, but the latter held that before thinking of taking any military action, the matter should be brought before the United Nations, after having given the Committee of Five the chance to carry out its mission, and to gauge Nasser’s intentions. Eisenhower stressed that the use of force in the current circumstances, and the evacuation of civilians that would openly take place, would only serve to consolidate Nasser’s position. He wrote to Eden saying:

> “if we are to proceed solidly together to the solution of this problem, public opinion in our several countries must be overwhelming in its support. I must tell you frankly that American public opinion flatly rejects the thought of using force, particularly when it does not seem that every possible peaceful means of protecting our vital interests has been exhausted without result. Moreover, I gravely doubt we could here secure Congressional authority even for the lesser support measures for which you might have to look to us.

> “I really do not see how a successful result could be achieved by forcible means. The use of force would, it seems to me, vastly increase the area of jeopardy. I do not see how the economy of Western Europe can long survive the burden of prolonged military operations, as well as the denial of Near East oil. Also the peoples of the Near East and of North Africa and, to some extent, of all of Asia and all of Africa, would be consolidated against the West to a degree which, I fear, could not be overcome in a generation and, perhaps, not even in a century, particularly having in mind the capacity of the Russians to make mischief.

Before such [military] action were undertaken, all our peoples should unitedly understand that there were no other means available to protect our vital rights and interests. Above all, there must be no grounds for

\^173 Nasser awarded them the Medal of Merit.
our several peoples to believe that anyone is using the Canal difficulty as an excuse to proceed forcibly against Nasser!

“And we have friends in the Middle East who tell us they would like to see Nasser’s deflation brought about. But they seem unanimous in feeling that the Suez is not the issue on which to attempt to do this by force. Under those circumstances, because of the temper of their populations, they say they would have to support Nasser even against their better judgment.”174

At this time, executive procedures began to stop any payments from the Canal from going to Egypt so that Nasser would be faced with two alternatives, either to allow free transit through the Canal, or to close it down, in which case the United Kingdom would be in a position to act.

The United States had frozen more than fifty million dollars of the Egyptian government funds, which was more than adequate to cover any tolls currently being paid at the Canal. Dulles said that he did not see how the US could issue orders to private companies not to continue payment in the usual way?! Moreover, refusal to pay the tolls would be followed by Nasser’s refusal to permit transit, and might well be taken by the public to be a closure justified by the refusal of users to pay dues. Dulles told Eden and Menzies that in his opinion, the British public would not support the use of force. Eden denied this, saying that the British public, except for the Left-Wing Labor element, was strongly behind the government, and that a recent Gallup poll had shown that two-thirds approved the way in which the government was conducting this matter.... The government would have the full backing of the public in any military operation.175

The British Secretary of State for War Anthony Head announced that there were large forces mobilized in readiness, in addition to help from France, Holland, and Belgium. It was his belief that Nasser would not succeed, but that if they launched an attack, public opinion the world over would be against them, as well as in the House of Commons, as public opinion in the United Kingdom was divided on the issue. Moreover, in the case of an invasion, the Arabs would carry out acts of sabotage, even if these were against their own interests. Eden held firm to the opinion that military action was unavoidable, but also proposed resorting to the Security Council as it would be difficult to go to war when public opinion was divided.

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174 Message from President Eisenhower to Prime Minister Eden, Washington, September 2, 1956.
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Eden did not give up hope of convincing Eisenhower of his point of view, exaggerating the dangers that would ensue if Nasser were to keep the Canal to justify the use of force against Egypt. He wrote:

“This question of [military] precautions has troubled me considerably and still does. I have not forgotten the riots and murders in Cairo in 1952...

“What should the next step be? You suggest that this is where we diverge. If that is so, I think that the divergence springs from a difference in our assessment of Nasser’s plans and intentions. May I set out our view of the position... The seizure of the Suez Canal is, we are convinced, the opening gambit in a planned campaign designed by Nasser to expel all Western influence and interests from Arab countries. He believes that if he can get away with this and if he can successfully defy eighteen nations, his prestige in Arabia will be so great that he will be able to mount revolutions of young officers in Saudi Arabia, Jordan, Syria and Iraq. We know from our joint sources that he is already preparing a revolution in Iraq which is the most stable and progressive. These new governments will in effect be Egyptian satellites, if not Russian ones. They will have to place their united oil resources under the control of a united Arabia led by Egypt and under Russian influence. When that moment comes, Nasser can deny oil to Western Europe and we here shall all be at his mercy...

“I agree with you that prolonged military operations as well as the denial of Middle East oil would place an immense strain on the economy of Western Europe. I can assure you that we are conscious of the burdens and perils attending military intervention. But if our assessment is correct, and if the only alternative is to allow Nasser’s plans quietly to develop until this country and all Western Europe are held to ransom by Egypt acting at Russia’s behest, it seems to us that our duty is plain.”

Eden was at this time also discussing the position of the US with his cabinet, and was of the opinion that if they stood firm, the US would act, a belief shared by the French.

Eisenhower responded in a message to Eden in which he further clarified his position:

“We have a grave problem confronting us in Nasser’s reckless adventure with the Canal, and I do not differ from you in your estimate of his intentions and purposes. The place where we apparently do not agree is

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176 Message from Prime Minister Eden to President Eisenhower, London, September 6, 1956.
on the probable effects in the Arab world of the various possible reactions by the Western world.

“Furthermore your belief that Nasser would emerge from this crisis as the acknowledged leader of Islam is, I think, a picture too dark and is severely distorted. It took you eighteen years to put Napoleon in his proper place, but you did it.

“My own conclusions are based to some degree upon an understanding of current Arab feeling that differs somewhat from yours. I believe that we can expect the Arabs to rally firmly to Nasser’s support if there should be a resort to force without thoroughly exploring and exhausting every possible peaceful means of settling the issue.

“Should we act forcibly when there is no evidence before the world that Nasser intends to do more than to nationalize the Canal Company, unless it can be shown to the world that he is an actual aggressor, then I think all Arabs would be forced to support him, even though some of the ruling monarchs might very much like to see him toppled.

“The matter might become even more serious than this. I venture the thought that if any large nation should attempt to settle by force an argument with a small one, without first having exhausted all of the peaceful avenues open to it, the United Nations organization would be badly weakened and possibly destroyed.

“It is for reasons such as these that we have viewed with some misgivings your preparations for mounting a military expedition against Egypt. I think the beliefs I have just expressed are shared by the vast bulk of the American people, including most of those in official life. As it now stands, our main difference seems to be largely the result of differing conclusions as to the probable reaction of the Arab world to the various lines of action open to us.”  

Eden was by no means supported by unanimity of opinion when he decided on military action. In the House of Commons, the position of the Conservative government was put forth, refusing the nationalisation of the Canal, calling for it to be operated by an international body, and advocating military intervention on the grounds that the Convention of 1888 was not sufficient to safeguard the rights of users of the Canal, and that these rights had also been established by long and uninterrupted use of the Canal.  

The situation in the House of Lords was different due to its nature and its freedom from the constraints of party politics. The main point of contention concerned the British government’s use of military force; Lord Silkin criticized the steps taken in this regard, as they went far beyond mere defensive actions to preserve British lives and constituted a definite threat to Nasser at the same time that the government was carrying out negotiations, making it difficult for him even to be as conciliatory as he might want to be if he felt that he was acting under duress.

Moreover, the government never made clear what the purpose of this great show of military force was. Was it purely defensive? Hardly so, because the government said force would be used as a “last resort” without explaining what this last resort actually meant. This vagueness was not calculated to bring about a climate which would lead to successful negotiations.

At this point Lord Silkin asked:

“I should like to ask the Government what they intend to do with this force? Is it their purpose, in certain circumstances, to occupy Egypt? What do they think they can achieve by the use of force? Don’t they know that we shall have the whole of the world against us? And that this would be the one thing that would bring the Arabs together, and thus we should have to contend not merely with Egypt but with the whole of the Arab world?

“Moreover, we should not have even our own friends behind us in the use of force. President Eisenhower has definitely declared himself against the use of force, and I have grave doubts whether the members of the Commonwealth – especially India - would be behind us, and this includes Canada and Australia. So far as the United Nations are concerned, we should be regarded as the aggressors.

“Even more important, I believe that we should have public opinion in this country against us. The Gallup Polls have revealed the answer to the question, "Do you approve of the use of force?", and replies showed that while 34 per cent approved the use of force, 49 per cent disapproved. This indicates that a substantial section of the community is against the use of force, as is the whole of the Labour Party.”

Lord Silkin also asked the meeting to consider the economic repercussions that would ensue, adding:

“If we seriously intend the use of force, then we are embarking upon a most dangerous course and one which is fraught with the gravest of
consequences. If, on the other hand, the government does not really intend to use force and regards this as a demonstration of strength which they feel may have some effect on Nasser—in other words, if it is a piece of bluff—then I am bound to say that it is a stupid piece of bluff!

“The government has taken unnecessary military steps such as permitting the landing of French troops in Cyprus, and the withdrawal of the Canal pilots, which should not have happened. It seems a pity that we should have taken this step while there is still a vestige of hope left that some agreement might be reached. In my view, the government should have gone immediately to the United Nations or the Security Council and abide by their decision. The government must also find alternative means of supplying our oil needs from America, and we must be prepared to abandon the Suez Canal, at any rate for a time. If this would involve hardships on the British people, the hardships of war are far greater.”

And when Lord Silkin asked whether the Suez Canal Company pilots had received instructions to quit work at midnight on the 10th of September, and if the British government had issued these orders, the Lord Chancellor (Lord Kilmuir) denied it!

Lord Atlee objected to France’s participation in the initiative to set up a Canal Users’ Association with Britain and the US, on the grounds that in Africa and Asia, France was looked upon as the last of the old colonial era, added to which France was basically only concerned with its position in North Africa. He asked why it should not have consisted of the eighteen countries involved; why three, to be followed later on by the others?

As for the initiative itself, it was difficult to understand what the purpose of this proposed association was: what, exactly, was its function? Obviously, it was set up to collect transit fees from ships passing through the Canal, which was in Egyptian hands! And if Nasser rejected this plan, what then? Leading to the most pivotal question of all: the Prime Minister spoke of the use of military force, had he considered what this would entail?

Lord Atlee reminded those present of the bombardment of Alexandria, an action which could not be repeated in the present day and age; so what, he asked, did they propose to do? Occupy the Canal zone? Were they intending to overthrow Nasser’s government?! And assuming British forces entered the Canal and occupied the area, would they not meet with the same opposition they had encountered when they tried to occupy other regions against the will of the people? What then? Would

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180 Lords Sitting on Suez, the Suez Canal, HL Deb., September 12, 1956, vol. 199 cc630-724630.
British military forces remain in Egypt and rule it?! The show of power made by permitting the landing of French troops in Cyprus was unwise, and had succeeded only in setting the whole Middle East against Britain. The truth was, Britain had no friends there any more!

It was necessary, he continued, for Britain to seriously reconsider its position in the world. The days of naval warfare when Britain was a maritime force were long gone, and there was no way in which the government could justify the use of force before international law and the principles of justice. Moreover, Britain’s force depended to a great extent on the Commonwealth, most of which lay in Asia, and it must be remembered that India in particular had a mind of its own, not to mention the Islamic renaissance that had taken place in Pakistan.

We hear, he said, that Nasser wants to create an empire, and to rule as a dictator over the Arab world. If so, the attack being prepared against him will only serve to help him do so, and will raise him to the status not only of a hero of Islam, but a hero of the dark races against the white, which would be nothing short of a catastrophe! The best course of action would be to resort to the United Nations at once, and was the only solution available that could stop Britain from hurtling headlong into chaos and war.

Lord Stansgate then began to speak of the history of the Suez Canal, and how Britain had objected to its being dug and had not joined in the Convention of 1888; how the British had incited the Sublime Porte to put every possible obstacle in De Lesseps’s way, then had demanded special rights, all of which made talk of the Canal falling under the control of a ‘dictator’ unpalatable to any honest person.

As for the issue of the pilots, they had been withdrawn, and who would pay their salaries? The government was trying to make things impossible for Nasser; and said they could bring operations in the Canal to a standstill! And who, he asked, would pay the costs of the Users Association?

“We withdraw our pilots, ask people not to pay [the transit fees], then claim that Nasser has breached the Convention of 1888! The truth is that it is Britain who has done so.”

Lord Stansgate refused the government’s declaration, and was the only one to do so when the votes were made. He spoke of his love for Egypt and the Egyptian people, saying that they had been shoddily treated by Britain. Had anyone, he asked, cared about the fellaheen? The British may have governed well, but cared for no one but shareholders!
He then reminded the attendees that Egypt would have owned the Canal in 1968 anyway.

b. Nehru supports Nasser:
At around this time, specifically on September 8th, Nehru sent a letter to Eisenhower urging the United States to use its considerable influence to solve the Suez Canal issue, and not to encourage any talk of using force to do so. Nehru spoke of the Egyptian proposals, saying that they provided several openings for a peaceful solution. Eisenhower responded as follows:

“You may be certain that the United States Government will not abandon its belief that, given good will and the realization of the vast implications of the matter, a peaceful solution can be achieved.

“You have mentioned the Egyptian memorandum of September 10 setting forth a proposal for the formation of a negotiating body to consider the solution of questions involving the Canal and to review the Constantinople Convention of 1888. It is doubtful that it would be practical to negotiate simultaneously with all countries which are beneficiaries of the Suez Canal. Such a group would embrace practically all nations of the world and could not possibly be an effective negotiating body. It is also doubtful that these nations would delegate negotiating authority to a small group, as that would not be compatible with the normal exercise of sovereign rights.

“The procedure followed at the London Conference seems to me the only practical one... To my great regret, the government of Egypt was not represented, but that was entirely due to its own preference to be absent... The convening of a new conference on the basis suggested by the government of Egypt would not be a development helpful in the solution of this difficult issue.”

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181 Message from President Eisenhower to Prime Minister Nehru, Washington, September 15th, 1956.
182 Nasser’s speech on September 15, 1956, ibid.

c. Egypt’s military preparations:
It was only natural that once the British and French military movements began, Egypt would start preparing itself to confront the escalating danger. Nasser announced:

“Today we have enough weapons for everyone capable of fighting; we will fight an organized war, a wholesale war, a guerilla war. Anyone who attacks Egypt will have attacked the whole Arab nation, and must be aware that their interests in the region will be over and done with forever, and that the truly free people are on our side and will support us against injustice and tyranny.”

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When making his military preparations, Nasser jotted down the following notes:

“Reorganizing our troops – closing entrances to Cairo – blowing up all the military depots in Ismailia – the invasion will begin with a word from Eden – weapons as quickly as possible in August.”

The Cold War had intensified between East and West, who were competing to win the support of the countries of the Middle East and to guarantee their oil and their strategic interests in the region.

On his part, Nasser was confident of Arab support for his cause, both from the people and the governments, for even those governments that were pro-Western did not dare to oppose him publicly and only did so behind closed doors! As for King Saud, he played a positive role during the Suez crisis, and sent Eisenhower a message on August 24th in which he said:

“We are confident that you are concerned with removing the causes of tension, and are making every effort to stop the economic and military measures that being taken against Egypt. I, for my part, am working with Egypt to negotiate; thus we are seeking solutions which would guarantee, for all states, free navigation in the Suez Canal, and would maintain, for Egypt, the rights of its full sovereignty. Through this means, it can be possible to avoid this crisis which, if left to itself, can lead to unforeseen results.”

On September 22, 1956, a meeting was held between Nasser, Shukri Al Quwatli, and King Saud as a follow up to the first meeting that had taken place in Cairo on March 7, 1956. The discussions focused on reinforcing Arab security, addressing the Israeli threat, and most importantly on the issue of the Suez Canal. The following was unanimously decided:

The problem concerned all Arab countries, accordingly the conference supported Egypt completely in whatever steps it saw fit to take. The only way to guarantee the interests of those concerned with navigation in the Canal was for interested parties to enter into negotiations with Egypt in its capacity as the owner of this Canal, true to the Charter of the United Nations, and to the spirit of Bandung, and without any form of pressure or attempt to impose a unilateral decision. The conference commended Arab solidarity.

183 Message from King Saud to President Eisenhower, Riyadh, August 24th, 1956.
There existed, in fact, a military agreement between Egypt and Syria that had been drawn up on the 19th of October, 1955, and another between Egypt and the Kingdom of Saudi Arabi made on the 27th of October, 1955.

With the beginning of military movements in Israel, Iraqi troops arrived in Jordan. Nasser sent the following handwritten note to King Saud:

“Awni Abdel Hadi – the Jordanian foreign minister – said that his visit to Iraq was by invitation from the Iraqi government, and that he had discussed sending an Iraqi force to Jordan.

“Nuri Al Said, in a meeting with King Faisal, Abdallah, Nuri, Baban, and Bakr184, said it would be impossible to send a force to Jordan unless it could be confirmed that Israel would not consider this a hostile move, adding that his ammunition was limited and that Britain must promise to provide Iraq and Jordan with ammunition if Israel attacked Jordan.

“Nuri Al Said then called in the British ambassador and asked him to contact his government to ascertain Britain’s views on the two issues.

“In a subsequent meeting attended by the British ambassador, the latter informed them that Israel would not consider the Iraqi troops’ entering Jordan as a hostile act and would not exploit it. Moreover, the British government promised that if Israel were to attack Jordan, it would supply the Jordanian and Iraqi armies with ammunition.

“Nuri said that sending troops to Jordan would require three million pounds. Awni asked me what I thought of Iraqi forces entering Jordan, to which I replied that this was a political rather than a military act, and that the Iraqi army would not engage in border skirmishes, but would remain there until Israel invaded Jordan. It is my opinion that Israel will not invade any Arab country; its policy is to avenge border incidents; in other words, the Iraqi army will remain in Jordan forever, waiting for an Iraqi invasion!

“The Canal issue is on its way to being resolved, but this will not be easy; France is extremely stubborn. Isolating the Canal from politics will be achieved by an international agreement either to reaffirm the Convention of 1888, or to renew it; anything apart from that will be an infringement of Egypt’s sovereignty.”

And contrary to what was told to Nasser about Israel’s not considering the entry of Iraqi troops into Jordan as a hostile act, Ben Gurion sent a letter to Eisenhower saying:

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184 Ahmed Mokhtar Baban, Iraqi Deputy Prime Minister, Abdullah Bakr, Head of the Iraqi Royal Court.
“The entry of Iraqi forces into Jordan would be the first stage in the disruption of the status quo... Israel could not remain indifferent to a move which would bring Iraqi troops over their own frontier and closer to Israel.”

At this time, Egypt began to receive information about secret negotiations taking place between France and Israel. The following comment was handwritten by Nasser:

“These negotiations included supplying Israel with weapons, setting up air bases if needed, and military and political cooperation.”

Hammarskjold tried to intervene and made some suggestions which were refused by Egypt, then the moment came for the matter to be put before the Security Council. On December 23, 1956, representatives of Britain and France in New York submitted a joint letter to the head of the Security Council requesting a review of the situation resulting from the unilateral action taken by the Egyptian government.

The following day, Egypt requested that the Security Council convene to investigate the activities being planned by Britain and France against it.

Nasser had previously met with Arthur Lall, the representative of India at the UN, and discussed the possibility of presenting the case before the Security Council and the political situation in general. Nasser jotted down his comments after the meeting:

“If Russia vetoes their complaint, it’ll be a moral victory for the British because it will give public opinion the impression that they tried all peaceful means – including the Security Council – to solve the Suez issue, which will help justify their taking military action.

“The British believe they can occupy the Canal zone by means of paratroopers in just 48 hours.

“Lall thinks the English are hoping to get rid of the [Egyptian] government and replace it with another that will recognize the legitimacy of the occupation.

“The issue of the Canal is to be discussed with Hammarskjold, who realizes how critical it is; it must be reviewed in the Security Council and the result should be to set up a negotiating authority.”

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185 Message from Prime Minister Ben-Gurion to President Eisenhower, Jerusalem, October 20, 1956.
186 Selwyn Lloyd Declaration, Commons Sitting, HC Debate, October 23, 1956, vol 558 cc 491-6491.
Sure enough, on October 13, 1956, United Nations resolution 118 was issued stating the following:

1. There should be free and open transit through the Canal without discrimination, overt or covert—this covers both political and technical aspects.
2. The sovereignty of Egypt should be respected.
3. The operation of the Canal should be insulated from the politics of any country.
4. The manner of fixing tolls and charges should be decided by agreement between Egypt and the users.
5. A fair proportion of the dues should be allotted to development.
6. In case of disputes, unresolved affairs between the Suez Canal Company and the Egyptian government should be settled by arbitration with suitable terms of reference and suitable provisions for the payment of sums found to be due.

The Security Council convened between 5th and 13th of October, and the Soviet Union used the right to veto, while the Egyptian government agreed to the principles outlined by the Council.

6. Preparations for the attack:
British and French military movements had already begun immediately after the decision to nationalize the Canal, and towards the end of October, mobilization of the military reserve forces took place in Israel. Eisenhower immediately sent a message to Ben Gurion on October 27, 1956, in which he stated:

“I must frankly express my concern at reports of heavy mobilization on your side, a move which I fear will only increase the tension which you indicate you would like to see reduced.

“These are days of great strain. Only statesmanship of a high order and self-restraint by all parties can assure that the tensions in the Middle East can be controlled and prevented from becoming a cause for a breach of the peace in that area and in others affected by the ramifications of those tensions.

“I remain confident that only a peaceful and moderate approach will genuinely improve the situation and I renew the plea which was communicated to you through Secretary Dulles that there be no forcible initiative on the part of your Government which would endanger the peace and the growing friendship between our two countries.”\textsuperscript{187}
The very next day, Eisenhower sent another message to Ben Gurion, saying:

“Yesterday I forwarded to you a personal message expressing my grave concern regarding reports of mobilization in Israel and renewing my previous plea, which had been transmitted to you by the Secretary of State, that no forcible initiative be taken by Israel which would endanger peace in the Middle East.

“This morning I have received additional reports which indicate that mobilization of Israel’s armed forces is continuing and has become almost complete. This further message is prompted by the gravity of the situation as I see it.

“Because of the wide repercussions which might result in the present high state of tension in the Middle East and because of the intentions which the United States expressed in the Tripartite Declaration of May 25, 1950, I have given instructions that this situation be discussed with the United Kingdom and France, which are parties to the Declaration, requesting them to exert all possible efforts to ameliorate the situation. I have also directed that my concern be communicated to other Middle Eastern countries, urgently requesting that they refrain from any action which could lead to hostilities.

“Again, Mr. Prime Minister, I feel compelled to emphasize the dangers inherent in the present situation and to urge your Government to do nothing which would endanger the peace.”

The very same day, President Eisenhower issued the following statement:

“During the last several days I have received disturbing reports from the Middle East. These included information that Israel was making a heavy mobilization of its armed forces. These reports became so well authenticated that yesterday morning, after a meeting with the Secretary of State, I sent a personal message to the Prime Minister of Israel expressing my grave concern and renewing a previous recommendation that no forcible initiative be taken which would endanger the peace.

I have just received additional reports which indicate that the Israeli mobilization has continued and has become almost complete with consequent stoppage of many civil activities. The gravity of the situation is such that I am dispatching a further urgent message to Prime Minister Ben-Gurion.

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188 Message from President Eisenhower to Prime Minister Ben Gurion, Washington, October 28, 1956.
I have given instructions that these developments be discussed with the United Kingdom and France which joined with the United States in the Tripartite Declaration of May 25, 1950 with respect to the maintenance of peace in the Middle East.

While we have not heard of such large-scale mobilization in countries neighboring Israel which would warrant such Israeli mobilization, I have also directed that my concern over the present situation be communicated to other Middle East states urgently requesting that they refrain from any action which could lead to hostilities.

“The Security Council of the United Nations now has before it various aspects of the maintenance of peace in the Middle East. I earnestly hope that none of the nations involved will take any action that will hinder the Council in its efforts to achieve a peaceful solution.”

President Eisenhower was unaware that Ben Gurion, together with representatives of the countries of the Tripartite Declaration, Britain and France, had met together in Sèvres, France from October 22-24, 1956, and had signed the following protocol:

1. The Israeli forces launch in the evening of 29 October 1956 a large scale attack on the Egyptian forces with the aim of reaching the Canal Zone the following day.

2. On being apprised of these events, the British and French governments during the day of 30 October 1956 respectively and simultaneously make two appeals to the Egyptian government and the Israeli government on the following lines:

A. To the Egyptian Government:

   1) Halt all acts of war.
   2) Withdraw all its troops ten miles from the Canal.
   3) Accept temporary occupation of key positions on the Canal by the Anglo-French forces to guarantee freedom of passage through the Canal by vessels of all nations until a final settlement.

B. To the Israeli Government:

   1) Halt all acts of war.
   2) Withdraw all its troops ten miles to the east of the Canal.

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189 Statement issued by President Eisenhower, October 28, 1956.
It was agreed that if one of the governments refused, or did not give its consent within twelve hours, the Anglo-French forces would intervene with the means necessary to ensure that their demands are accepted.

C. The representatives of the three Governments agree that the Israeli Government will not be required to meet the conditions in the appeal addressed to it, in the event that the Egyptian Government does not accept those in the appeal addressed to it for their part.

3. In the event that the Egyptian Government should fail to agree within the stipulated time to the conditions of the appeal addressed to it, the Anglo-French forces will launch military operations against the Egyptian forces in the early hours of the morning of 31 October.

4. The Israeli Government will send forces to occupy the western shore of the Gulf of Aqaba and the group of islands Tiran and Sanafir to ensure freedom of navigation in the Gulf of Aqaba.

5. Israel undertakes not to attack Jordan during the period of operations against Egypt. But in the event that during the same period Jordan should attack Israel, the British government undertakes not to come to the aid of Jordan.

6. The arrangements of the present protocol must remain strictly secret.

7. They will enter into force after the agreement of the three Governments.

(signed)

David Ben Gurion, Patrick Dean, Christian Pineau

At the same time, Egypt offered an initiative expressing its wish to begin direct negotiations on the Suez Canal issue, which the Egyptian Minister of Foreign Affairs, Mahmoud Fawzi, conveyed to Raymond Hare. Mr. Fawzi also expressed his regret at the French movements aimed at hindering any progress on the matter and reiterated that the Egyptian government still wished matters to proceed positively, and had accepted Hammarskjöld’s invitation to meet with the British and the French in Geneva on October 29!\(^{190}\)

\(^{190}\) Telegram from Cairo, October 24, 1956, Department of State, Central Files, 974 7301/10-2456.
Regrettably, that was the very date on which Britain, France, and Israel had agreed, in Sèvres, to launch a military attack on Egypt!

CHAPTER THREE
THE TRIPARTITE AGGRESSION ON EGYPT

First: The Israel attack via Sinai

On Monday October 29, 1956, while we were celebrating my brother Abdel Hamid’s fifth birthday, we were surprised to be called into the house and asked not to make a sound, as my father had guests and was working in his study. Only a small child at the time, I did not realise that the Israeli forces had begun a wholesale attack on Egypt, crossing over the armistice lines.

My father recounts that the Egyptian military forces made their way to the borders in Sinai to repel the Israeli attackers, and that within twenty-four hours the Egyptian forces were fighting the Israelis and inflicting losses upon them. During the first two days of the aerial clashes with the Israelis, our pilots noticed that there were more Mystère planes than Israeli air force planes in the sky! They thought that France had decided to unobtrusively help the Israelis.
At the same time, Anthony Eden announced that Britain would not exploit the conflict between Egypt and Israel to serve its own ends!  

**Second: The Anglo-French warning to Egypt**

On Tuesday, October 30, 1956, a warning was issued to Egypt by Britain and France requesting that fighting cease, while the Israeli forces were still inside Egyptian territory, and that both Egypt and Israel withdraw to a distance of ten miles from the Suez Canal when actually the Israeli forces were very far from this location! Not only that, but the warning asked Egypt to accept that Port Said, Ismailia, and Suez be occupied by British and French forces, to defend navigation in the Canal!

This happened while navigation in the Canal was continuing as usual unthreatened, and while the Egyptian forces were mobilizing to meet the Israeli attackers.

Britain added, in the warning that was given to the Egyptian ambassador in London, that unless a reply were received within twelve hours, Britain would implement the above by force!

Nasser says:

“The warning took us by surprise; we were expecting a hostile act against Egypt by Britain and France, but thought it unlikely that Britain would join Israel in such an act. It was my belief that any military action taken against us by Britain – especially if it were in collusion with France and Israel – could only have catastrophic consequences for Britain, regardless of the military outcome of such a venture. Britain had enormous interests in the Middle East and a foolhardy military act of this kind would put paid to them. Oil, pipelines, commerce, culture, political influence, the Suez Canal, so crucial to Britain, all would be lost.

I felt that Britain did not want us to mobilize all of our forces against Israel thus enabling the Israelis to win a cheap victory, while we were keeping back part of our forces to meet the British.”

The Anglo-French warning was the strangest of its kind throughout history, citing temporary occupation...! Egypt naturally announced its refusal of the occupation of Port Said, Ismailia, and Suez by British and French forces as an infringement upon its sovereignty.

Israel naturally agreed to the terms of the warning, as it was aimed at Egypt; the Israeli forces were the aggressors and the Egyptian forces were pushing them back. The occupation of the three Canal cities was, of course,

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191 Nasser’s statement to the people, November 1, 1956.
192 Ibid, and Nasser’s interview with *Akher Sa’a* magazine, December 5, 1956.
supported by Israel, as it was the only country that had objected to Britain’s withdrawal from the Canal zone in 1954.

On Wednesday, October 31, Britain announced that it had formed an allied command with France to maintain peace in the world, and that they would intervene forcefully to separate the Egyptian and Israeli forces!

On the same day, the British and French command issued another warning that they would destroy military targets, which meant that they had begun to act.

Nasser recounts:

“On October the 31st at seven in the evening, I was at home in a meeting with the Indonesian ambassador when I heard the air-raid warnings, then immediately after that the droning of small planes. I knew at once that it was a British raid; the small planes were jets, and the only jet planes in the Middle East were either Ilyushin 28, which Egypt owned, or Canberra owned by Britain.

“I realised at once that Britain had entered the war, but I wanted to make sure, so I left the Indonesian ambassador and went up to the roof of the house to watch the raid and listen to the sound of the planes to confirm that they were indeed British. Then I heard the Anglo-French announcement that military operations against Egypt had begun.

“The preconceived plan was to have us withdraw our forces into Sinai, then to attack us in the Delta and Canal Zone. After the first raid of Wednesday, October 31, we were fighting on two fronts; Israel on the borders, and the colonialist Anglo-French forces which were threatening to occupy the Canal Zone.

“‘It became obvious that we had to rethink all our plans, and I left the house and went to the General Headquarters of the Armed Forces where, in a decisive meeting, we agreed to the quick withdrawal of our forces from the borders before the enemy’s plan should succeed. Withdrawal was to take place over two nights, October 31st and November 1st.

“We could not possibly withdraw in less than two nights; in fact it was a miracle that we managed to accomplish the withdrawal in this short time with pressure from the British, French, and Israeli planes overhead, the Egyptian air force having left the battle on November 1st. As soon as I was informed that the withdrawal had taken place as planned, I immediately

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193 Ibid.
felt that we had won the battle by foiling the enemy’s plan to destroy all our forces in Sinai and consequently find it easy to crush Egypt.”

On Wednesday October 31, Britain and France also launched air raids on Cairo, the Canal Zone, and Alexandria, their objective being to destroy the Egyptian air force. The tripartite plan was now all too clear: to destroy the Egyptian planes, lure the Egyptian forces into Sinai then isolate and crush them, after which they could occupy Egypt with no resistance.

In his statement to the people on the first of November after the Anglo-French attack, Nasser said:

“And now... as we face this situation, do we fight or do we surrender? We will fight a full-scale war whose soldiers will be the Egyptian people side by side with the armed forces. At this moment, your brothers in Algeria are fighting a bitter battle for their freedom and dignity against half a million French soldiers. I have given orders for weapons to be distributed, and we have plenty of them; we will fight from village to village; every single one of you will be a soldier in the armed forces; let our motto be we will fight and never surrender.

“The attackers believed the Egyptian people would help them, but their plans were built on illusions.”

Third: The United States in the dark!

While Nasser was confronting the Israeli forces in Sinai, and taking the decision to withdraw his forces west of the Canal so as not to fall into the trap laid by the tripartite conspirators in Sèvres, there was another side to the conspiracy, and the other party was the United States of America.

1. US reaction to the Israeli attack on Egypt:
   a) October 29:
      After the general mobilization that took place in Israel, Eisenhower had sent a message to Nasser asking him not to take any steps that could lead to hostile activities. This was on October the 29th, the same day that Israel attacked Egypt!

      Eisenhower immediately called for a meeting at the White House to discuss the Israeli invasion of the Sinai Peninsula. Dulles informed him that France had supplied Israel with Mystère planes in excess of the number originally agreed upon, disregarding the agreement made between the US, Britain, and France regarding weapons in the
Middle East. Dulles also referred to the large number of messages that had passed between France and Israel the previous day!

Eisenhower then recalled that in 1950 and later, the US had said it would support the victim of aggressions in the Middle East. The question now was how to do this? As the 6th Fleet was in the area, the president asked if a blockade would be effective. Admiral Radford replied that the affair would be ‘all over in a few days’; when the president asked him how it could possibly be ended in that time, Radford said that he meant the Israelis would be in Suez within two or three days. He thought Israel’s objective was to occupy the Sinai Peninsula.

Dulles said that the operation went further than that: the Canal was likely to be disrupted, and pipe lines were likely to be broken. In those circumstances, British and French intervention would likely occur, and they might in fact have already coordinated their action with the Israelis.

France was then criticized for having supplied Israel with thirty to fifty Mystéres and perhaps more. Secretary Dulles recalled that the supply of these aircraft was in violation of the 1950 agreement whereby the US was supposed to be notified.

During this emergency meeting, Eisenhower also asked what steps could be taken to support Egypt in fulfilment of the US pledge, and how the British and French would react to this? The president thought that in these circumstances, perhaps the US would not be bound by its traditional alliances, and thought the UN might be the most valuable course to follow. Dulles objected that the USSR might beat the US in resorting to the UN. He added that, strangely enough, there had been no news from the British and French for nearly ten days!

Eisenhower added that going to the UN alone was not enough, and that more definite action should be taken. As the US was the only voice the British and French listened to, the Americans would make it clear that they were considering ways and means of redeeming the US pledge to the Middle Eastern countries, and that if the British were to back the Israelis, they would find the US in opposition.

Eisenhower then stated that he did not care in the slightest whether he was re-elected or, but only that the US should make good on its word. He added that he did not really think the American people
would throw him out in the midst of a situation like this, but if they did, so be it!

It was also recognized that were the US to side with Britain and France, the Soviet Union would stand by the Arabs and in fact, all of Africa, which was why the US should stand by principle in this case.

Dulles said that he had met with representatives of the Baghdad Pact who had told him that it was incumbent upon the US to stop this aggression. Eisenhower commented that it would have been a great chance to divide the Arab world, as some of the countries in the region were uneasy about the developments taking place in Egypt!

It is worth commenting that the positions taken by the Soviet Union and the United States were one and the same in this matter.

In a press released later the same day, the US announced that it would help Egypt – the victim of the aggression – and that it was in consultation with the British and French governments, parties with the US to the Tripartite Declaration of 1950, and planned, in accordance with that Declaration, to take the situation to the United Nations Security Council the following morning.¹⁹⁶

At this point we may ask whether Israel could have lost the support of the United States after this act of aggression?

Ben Gurion sent a message justifying the attack on the same day of the aggression – October 29 – laying the blame for the tension in the Middle East on Nasser and his ‘expansionist policy’ as he called it, alleging that Nasser’s political and military activities stretched from the Atlantic Ocean to the Persian Gulf!

He listed a number of contrived excuses, from Egypt’s importing weapons from the Soviet Union to the joint command with Syria and Jordan, the support given by Iraqi troops to Jordan to help resist the Israeli terrorist gangs, and the resistance to Israeli incursions into the demilitarized zone between Egypt and Israel, citing them as reasons for the aggression.

Ben Gurion’s letter is a deliberate distortion of the facts, and when he also mentioned that Egypt was not permitting Israeli ships to pass through the Suez Canal, he omitted to mention that this was in

¹⁹⁶ Memo of Conference with the President, White House, Washington, October 29, 1956, 7.15 pm.
full accordance with the Convention of 1888, as a state of war existed between the two countries. Ben Gurion ended by saying that the action had been taken to save Israel from being destroyed!

b) October 30:
The US requested an immediate meeting of the Security Council as it had received information to the effect that in violation of the General Armistice Agreement between Israel and Egypt, the armed forces of Israel had penetrated deeply into Egyptian territory. This military action had commenced October 29, 1956 and was continuing in the Sinai area. The situation made imperative an immediate meeting of the Security Council, charged as it was with the primary responsibility for the maintenance of international peace and security as well as responsibility for the observance of the Armistice Agreement. The US asserted that steps should be taken for the immediate cessation of the military action of Israel in Egypt.

In other words, at this stage in the Tripartite conspiracy, the United States stood by the Tripartite Declaration of 1950 and supported the victim of the aggression, even if only within the confines of the United Nations.

Accordingly, the US submitted a draft resolution on the afternoon of the same day, October 30, stating that the Security Council should ask Israel to withdraw, and determine the steps necessary for this to happen.

Inexplicably, Dulles, even though he knew beyond the shadow of a doubt that Britain had supported Israel in its aggression against Egypt, still hoped that Britain would join sides with the US! However, he did tell Eisenhower when he met him that same day that if they did not do so, the US would proceed alone.

Eisenhower then asked whether the French might join, but Dulles informed him that they had evinced no desire to do so and that their position was the same as that of the British, whereupon Eisenhower gave orders that the US was to proceed to the Security Council without them, adding that neither Britain nor France had a legitimate cause for going to war, and that the nationalisation of the Suez Canal did not justify such an act.

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197 Message from Ben Gurion to President Eisenhower, Jerusalem, October 29, 1956.
198 Telegram from the Mission of the UN to the Department of State, New York, October 29, 1956.
Dulles commented that Suez was not the issue, but that it was really a question of Algeria for the French and position in the Persian Gulf for the British! Eisenhower also wondered whether Churchill could be behind it all, as this kind of action was reminiscent of the mid-Victorian mentality!

Eisenhower added that if the pipelines were blown up and ships forced to go round the Cape of Good Hope, oil supplies to Western Europe would be drastically reduced... He added that the British case would be improved if the Egyptians had not simply nationalized the Canal, but had operated it effectively afterward!

Eisenhower was angry, saying that he did not see much value in an unworthy and unreliable ally and that the necessity to support them might not be as great as they believed! Dulles was also worried about being identified with countries pursuing colonial policies not compatible with those of the US.199

At the United Nations headquarters, Selwyn Lloyd objected to the United States' stating that Israel was the aggressor, adding that the British government would be put in an impossible political situation if the US were to stand by Egypt militarily after the Israeli attack. Lloyd expressed his concern regarding around 75 million pounds sterling worth of ships in or around the Canal, adding that he assumed that the Israeli military tactics would be to seize the Canal bridges to prevent Egyptian counter-action.200

The French government was vehemently opposed to the American draft resolution in the Security Council and announced that it would not be party to any resolution condemning Israel. The French stuck to their position, in spite of US concern regarding the effect of the Israeli aggression on the Arab world, whether this should take the form of other Arab countries joining the war or simply the deterioration of Western status in the Moslem world, not to mention the benefits that would accrue to the Soviets as a result of the situation and the possibility that they might actively intervene if the hostilities continued.

The French went so far as to request that a cease-fire be sought by appealing to both parties and condemning neither!201

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199 Memo of a conference with the President, White House, Washington, October 30, 1956.
200 Telegram from the American Embassy in the UN to the Department of State, London, October 30, 1956.
201 Telegram from the American Embassy in France to the Department of State, Paris, October 30, 1956.
Eisenhower objected strongly to this stance in his message to Eden, in which he criticized the failure of the British government to notify the US that it had effectively breached the Tripartite Declaration of 1950, especially as US policies in the Middle East were based upon it!

Eisenhower went on to say:

“All of this development, with its possible consequences, including the possible involvement of you and the French in a general Arab war, seems to me to leave your government and ours in a very sad state of confusion, so far as any possibility of unified understanding and action are concerned. It is true that Egypt has not yet formally asked this government for aid. But the fact is that if the United Nations finds Israel to be an aggressor, Egypt could very well ask the Soviets for help—and then the Middle East fat would really be in the fire. It is this latter possibility that has led us to insist that the West must ask for a United Nations examination and possible intervention, for we may shortly find ourselves not only at odds concerning what we should do, but confronted with a de facto situation that would make all our present troubles look puny indeed.

“Because of all these possibilities, it seems to me of first importance that the UK and the US quickly and clearly lay out their present views and intentions before each other, and that we find some way of concerting our ideas and plans so that we may not in any real crisis be powerless to act in concert because of misunderstanding of each other.”

2. The repercussions of the Anglo-French attack on Egypt:
On October 30, Eden announced in the House of Commons that British and French forces had landed in the Suez Canal zone. And on the same day, the French Ministry unanimously approved French military intervention in the area, and agreed to France’s using the right to veto any attempt to incriminate Israel in the Security Council.

A. US anger:
Dulles informed Eisenhower by telephone of the Anglo-French warning, saying that the British and the French had given a 12-hour ultimatum to Egypt that was “about as crude and brutal as anything he had ever seen.”

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202 Message from President Eisenhower to Prime Minister Eden, Washington, October 30, 1956.
Directions were given immediately: the US State Department requested the necessary authorization from the Government of Turkey to station a US air task group at Adana, Turkey, in order to be prepared to assist in carrying out any directives which might be issued by the United Nations.

Eisenhower also sent letters to the heads of the two attacking countries, Eden and Mollet, saying the following:

“I have just learned from the press of the 12-hour ultimatum which you and the French (UK) government have delivered to the government of Egypt requiring, under threat of forceful intervention, the temporary occupation by Anglo-French forces of key positions at Port Said, Ismailia and Suez in the Suez Canal Zone! “I feel I must urgently express to you my deep concern at the prospect of this drastic action even at the very time when the matter is under consideration as it is today by the United Nations Security Council. It is my sincere belief that peaceful processes can and should prevail to secure a solution which will restore the armistice condition as between Israel and Egypt and also justly settle the dispute about the Suez Canal.”

And although Mollet asked Eisenhower that the US government refrain from pressing for the passage of a resolution in the Security Council until Israel and Egypt had answered the Anglo-French warning, Dulles did not agree this suspension of the proceedings of the Security Council, and strongly criticized the ultimatum, saying that it did not demand that the Israeli forces retire to their own frontier, whereas the draft resolution of the Security Council stated that this should be the case.

Dulles ended by saying that there was no difference between the Soviet brutality against civilians in Budapest and the action taken by the British and French in Suez.

After the attack on Egypt, Mollet even went as far as to ask Eisenhower to approve and support the Anglo-French actions.

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203 Message from President Eisenhower to Prime Minister Eden and Prime Minister Mollet, Washington, October 30, 1956.
204 Memo of a conversation with the President, White House, Washington, October 30, 1956.
205 Message from Prime Minister Mollet to President Eisenhower, Washington, October 30, 1956.
Eisenhower was furious with this deception on the part of his allies, and decided that he did not want to be associated with them before the Arab world. He issued a statement calling for a peaceful solution to the conflict which would restore the armistice between Egypt and Israel and achieve a just settlement regarding the issue of the Suez Canal.

The question of the situation that would ensue regarding oil as a result of the aggression was raised, and Eisenhower’s anger was evident when he remarked that, ‘those who began this operation should be left to work out their own oil problems—to boil in their own oil, so to speak.’ He added that they would be needing oil from Venezuela, and going around the Cape, and before long they would be short of dollars to finance these operations and would be calling for help. ‘They may be planning to present us with a fait accompli, then expecting us to foot the bill!’

He reiterated that he was extremely angry with both the British and the French for taking this action unilaterally and in violation of undertakings that had been agreed upon since the Tripartite Declaration of 1950.206

B. Nasser’s letter to Eisenhower:
Nasser asked to see Edmund Hare on October 30, and sent a letter to Eisenhower with him, saying:

“The Anglo-French ultimatum regarding aggressive action against Egypt at a time when Egypt was defending itself against Israeli aggression has resulted in a very serious situation affecting the freedom of the Egyptian people and the United Nations Charter. Egypt decided to defend her sovereignty and territory against Anglo-French aggression in addition to defending her sovereignty and territory against Israeli aggression. The Egyptian Government has decided to ask for United States support against Anglo-French aggression.”207

When Hare asked what kind of assistance was expected from the United States, Nasser replied that the kind of support would depend on the circumstances. Specifically it would mean military support in case of military aggression. Some people might have expected Egyptian Government to turn to USSR for such aid but Nasser had

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206 Memorandum of a conversation with the President, White House, Washington, October 30, 1956.
207 The letter in Nasser’s handwriting is preserved amongst his personal papers.
thought the matter over carefully and had decided appeal to the US government.

The Egyptian request, said Nasser, was entirely sincere and had been reached after careful consideration and there had been no discussion of turning to Russians. In fact Egyptians had always depended on themselves and this was first time foreign aid had been requested. Khrushchev had suggested furnishing volunteers but Egypt had never replied. It was a matter of life and death for Egypt.  

Eisenhower’s reply to Nasser was that the President and Dulles were making every effort within the framework of the United Nations to bring about a cease-fire and early withdrawal of hostile forces in the Middle East, and that the US had referred the matter of the Israeli aggression to the Security Council.

The Security Council had convened after being requested to do so by Eisenhower, who saw that the foremost objective of the Council was to bring about a ceasefire to stop the war spreading any further. Eisenhower also saw that the US should assume leadership to prevent immediate issuance by the United Nations of a harshly worded resolution that would put the US in an acutely embarrassing position, either with France and Britain or with all the rest of the world.

It was obvious that Eisenhower was determined at all costs to prevent the Soviets from assuming any part of world leadership under the pretext of concern for smaller nations:

“Since Africa and Asia almost unanimously hate one of the three nations Britain, France and Israel, the Soviets need only to propose severe and immediate punishment of these three to have the whole of two continents on their side, thus losing the West’s only hope that some vestige of real political and economic union can be preserved with the Moslem world, indeed, possibly also with India.”

On November 2, Nasser sent another letter to Eisenhower to inform him that he and the Egyptian people were resolved to fight to the end in order to maintain their honor. He asked that Eisenhower be
informed of the continuing heavy air attacks which had now been extended to radio stations as well as military objectives.

Nasser added that the Egyptians had never really believed the Americans when they had indicated the possibility that the British and the French might embark on an independent policy which did not have US approval. Now he recognized he had been wrong.

Regarding the military situation, Nasser said that he had been very worried two days ago regarding the Egyptian army in Sinai which was fighting without air cover. Furthermore, the whole aspect of hostilities had been altered by the Anglo-French intervention and it had therefore been decided to withdraw the army from Sinai as well as Egyptian forces at Rafah, El Arish and Abou Ageila to west of the Canal in implementation of a new plan of not defending the Canal but rather using it as a line of defense. He had consequently been very relieved when a large part of the army got safely back across the Canal on the previous day, as well as some scattered units that arrived during the night. However, small “suicide units” would remain east of the Canal.

Regarding the type of campaign he would fight, Nasser indicated it would be a people’s war; fighting town by town and house by house. There would be no evacuations. For instance his own family would remain in Cairo.

As to air activity, Nasser said his problem was shortage of pilots and he had decided that it would be wasteful to pit them against superior force. He preferred to keep them in reserve for the defense of the Delta. As a result, Egyptian planes had been kept on the ground and heavy losses had been suffered. 211

The situation had become exceedingly complicated for the Americans, with a conflict of interest for the first time between them and their allies, Britain and France, and their protégé, Israel. Eisenhower found it impossible to ignore the deception carried out by the three aggressors, and had even decided to stop US aid to Israel after its attack on Egypt.

Eisenhower saw the situation from a much broader perspective than either Britain or France, and was careful to safeguard the status of the United States and the West in the Middle East and the Moslem

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211 Telegram from the American Embassy in Egypt to the Department of State, Cairo, November 2, 1956.
world. He was also afraid of the Soviet Union would exploit the situation and position itself as the savior from Western colonialism, which is what actually happened.

C. The Soviets begin moving:
Eisenhower was in the process of writing a letter to Eden on October 5, after the British and French forces had landed in Port Said, in an attempt to stop the situation from becoming more tense and complicated, and insisting that military conflict be avoided, when he learned that the Soviets had made the move that from the very first Eisenhower had feared would be their reaction. They had released a statement demanding that the United States join them in an immediate military move into the Middle East to stop the fighting, and rather than just making the proposal directly to the US, they were putting it before the United Nations.212

On the same day, Nasser received a telegram from Shoukry Al Quwatli, who was visiting the Soviet Union, in which he said that the Soviet Union was ‘ready to provide us with all the equipment, planes, and weapons we require, together with as many men as we need under the guise of technicians and experts and not as volunteers.’213 He went on to say that the Soviets were deciding on the best means of carrying this out and were at that very moment discussing the matter with one of Al Quwatli’s men, and that he was going to send another officer to provide them with details of what was needed. He ended by saying that the Soviets, ‘are asking us to stand our ground’.214

Mohamed Awad Al Quni, the Egyptian Ambassador to Moscow, said that when he asked Al Quwatli for further clarification, the latter confirmed the Soviets’ readiness to provide all that was needed, including planes with their pilots, under the guise of ‘experts’. He added that Shepilov had reiterated Russia’s readiness to provide all that Egypt needed, and that the only concern the Russians had was that they did not want to be dragged into a world war.215

1. The Russian warning:

212 Draft message from President Eisenhower to Prime Minister Eden, Washington, November 5, 1956.
213 The Soviet Union had announced its readiness to send volunteers to Egypt, which had raised a furor in the West.
214 Shoukry Al Quwatli’s letter, from Nasser’s private papers.
215 Telegram from the Egyptian Ambassador in Moscow, November 6, 1956, included amongst Nasser’s private papers.
This occurred on the same day in which Bulganin had sent a message to Eisenhower in which he said:

“In a critical moment that calls for us all to assume responsibility for the cause of peace, I am appealing to you in the name of the Soviet government. A week has already gone by since the armed forces of England, France and Israel attacked Egypt without any cause, causing death and destruction. Inhumane bombardments by English and French aviation of Egyptian aerodromes, ports, installations, cities, and centers of population are still taking place. Anglo-French troops have landed on Egyptian territory, and the fires caused by the invaders have destroyed treasures created by the Egyptian people. Day by day human sacrifices are increasing, and before the eyes of the whole world an aggressive war is unfolding against Egypt and the Arab peoples, whose only fault is that they are defending their freedom and independence.

“The situation in Egypt requires immediate and decisive actions on the part of the UN. If such actions are not taken, the UN will lose its prestige in the eyes of the world and will collapse. The Soviet Union and the US are permanent members of the Security Council and are two great powers possessing all contemporary forms of armaments, including atomic and hydrogen weapons. On the US lies special responsibility to put a stop to this war and to restore peace and tranquility to the Near and Middle East.

“We are convinced that if the governments of the of USSR and the USA firmly announce their will to guarantee peace and condemn aggression, this aggression will be terminated and there will be no war.

“Mr. President, in these hours when the highest principles of morality are threatened, and the foundations and of the United Nations are likewise threatened, the Soviet government is turning to the US government with a proposal for close cooperation to stop the aggression and prevent further bloodshed.

“The US has a strong naval fleet in the Mediterranean, and the Soviet Union also has strong naval fleet and powerful air force. A united and immediate use of these means on the part of the US and the Soviet Union, in accordance with a decision by the UN, would be guarantee the termination of aggression against the Egyptian people and against the countries of the Arab East.
“The Soviet government is appealing to the government of the United States to unite their efforts in the UN to adopt decisive measures to terminate the aggression. The Soviet government has already appealed to the Security Council and the extraordinary special session of the General Assembly with appropriate proposals.

“Such joint steps taken by the US and the Soviet Union would not threaten the interests of England and France. The people of England and France do not want war. They — just like our peoples — only want to preserve peace. Many other governments along with England and France are interested in immediate peace and the restoration of a normal functioning Suez Canal currently disrupted by military actions.

“Aggression against Egypt was by no means undertaken for the sake of freedom of shipping through the Suez Canal which was guaranteed. It was a war of piracy, unleashed for the purpose of restoring colonial order in the East which had been overthrown by the people. If this war is not stopped, it is fraught with danger and can grow into a third world war.

“If the Soviet Union and the US support the victim of aggression, then other member-governments of the UN will join them in this effort, and at the same time, the authority of the UN will increase to a significant degree, and peace will be restored and strengthened.

“The Soviet government is prepared to enter into immediate negotiations with the government of the US for the practical execution of the proposals presented above, in order that effective actions in the interest of peace can be undertaken in the nearest future.

“In this tense moment of history when the fate of all the Arab East along with the fate of the world is being decided, I await a favorable answer from you.”

The Soviet government sent similar letters to both Hammarskjold and the head of the Security Council.

216 Letter from Prime Minister Bulganin to President Eisenhower, Moscow, November 5, 1956.
And on the same day, October 5, Eden, Mollet, and Ben Gurion received letters from Bulganin – or rather, ultimatums – in which he stated his ‘full determination’ to resolve the situation in the Middle East by force if need be. He threatened Britain and France with a ‘stronger force’ if they did not desist in their Suez action.

In his letter to Eden, Bulganin asked:

“In what position would Britain have found herself had she been attacked by more powerful states possessing all types of modern weapons of destruction?”

Bulganin informed both Eden and Mollet in his messages to them of the proposal he had made to the US: United States: “To use, together with other members of the United Nations, naval and air forces in order to stop the war in Egypt and to curb aggression.” He added the warning: “We are full of determination to crush the aggressor and reestablish peace in the East by using force.”

In his letter to Ben Gurion, Bulganin strongly condemned Israeli actions against Egypt, and expressed the expectation that the Israeli Government would “come to its senses before it is too late,” and informed Ben Gurion that the Soviet Ambassador in Israel was being recalled to Moscow.\(^{217}\)

In a meeting held at the Department of State to discuss the situation, attended by the French Ambassador Hervé Alphand, the comment was made that the Soviets were trying to divert attention from their activities in Hungary through a propaganda move on the Middle East. The French ambassador added that the Soviets should not be allowed to get away with their attempt to link their brutal actions in Hungary with the British and French action at Suez.

The Americans also criticized the publication of Bulganin’s letter to Eisenhower which had taken place before the US had even received it. Alphand also commented that if the Soviets were to intervene directly, NATO obligations would be applied. He added that 350 French marines had been taken prisoner by the

\(^{217}\) Memorandum of a conversation, Department of State, Washington, November 5, 1956, Soviet Maneuvers on the Middle East Situation.
Egyptians, and that he had no information on any weakening of Nasser’s position! He added that they would be falling into a trap if they allowed the Soviets to divide them, and expressed the opinion that even if the British-French action should succeed in Egypt in the following few days, it would not settle the Algerian question! Alphand also spoke of the damage to oil pipelines in Syria, saying that he wanted to discuss the matter of providing oil to Europe.  

Eisenhower expressed his concern regarding the possibility of Soviet military intervention, saying the Soviets were scared and furious, which was a dangerous state of mind to be in! He added that he wanted to send a letter to Nehru to bring his weight to bear on the side of peace and a limitation of the hostilities. He also sent Nehru Bulganin’s letter, together with the US statement in response to it, and asked him whether he had any suggestions for additional action that could be taken to address the situation.  

Bulganin had sent a letter to Nehru on November 2, saying that he shared India’s position in its support of Egypt, and suggesting that a conference of Afro-Asian countries be held to discuss the matter. The fact that the two superpowers resorted to Nehru in his capacity as one of the most prominent and respected leaders of the Third World proves the extent to which this part of the world had gained in power on the global political arena.

Following is the statement issued by the US government:

“The President has just received a letter from Chairman Bulganin which had been previously released to the press in Moscow. This letter—in an obvious attempt to divert world attention from the Hungarian tragedy—makes the unthinkable suggestion that the United States join with the Soviet Union in a bipartite employment of their military forces to stop the fighting in Egypt.

The Middle East question is now before the United Nations. That world body has called for a cease-fire, a withdrawal of foreign armed forces and the entry of a United Nations force to stabilize the situation, pending a settlement. In this connection, it is to be regretted that the Soviet Union did not vote last night in favor of

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218 Ibid.
219 Memorandum of a conference with the President, White House, Washington, November 5, 1956.
the organization of this United Nations force. All parties concerned, however, should accept these United Nations resolutions promptly and in good faith.

Neither Soviet nor any other military forces should now enter the Middle East area except under a United Nations mandate.... While we are vitally concerned with the situation in Egypt, we are equally concerned with the situation in Hungary.”

The Soviet ultimatum had complicated matters for the US and the attacking countries, while at the same time providing support for Egypt and the Arab countries, in addition to which the Soviet government sent telegrams of support to Egypt, expressing its readiness to provide military assistance. Eisenhower found himself in a predicament where he was closer to his Soviet enemy than he was to his two allies, Britain and France, in his repudiation of the aggression and his call for the attacking forces to withdraw. In spite of this, he tried from the onset of the crisis not to give the Soviets a chance to intervene in the Middle East or to increase their influence there, but to no avail: the Soviet warning had widespread repercussions in the region.

The Soviet ultimatum to Eden and Mollet included the threat to use military force against the three attacking countries, and it came at the right time: on the very same day it was sent, Eden informed Eisenhower that the aerial attack on the Canal zone had begun and paratroopers were landing around Port Said. In an attempt to win Eisenhower’s support, he wrote:

“Now that the action has started, it must be carried through. I am sure that this is the moment to curb Nasser’s ambitions. If we let it pass, all of us will bitterly regret it. Here is our opportunity to secure an effective and final settlement of the problems of the Middle East. If we draw back now, chaos will not be avoided. Everything will go up in flames in the Middle East. You will realise, with all your experience, that we cannot have a military vacuum while a United Nations force is being constituted and is being transported to the spot. This is why we feel we must go on to hold the position until we can hand over the responsibility to the United Nations.

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We do not want occupation of Egypt, we could not afford it! And that is one of many other reasons why we got out of Suez two years ago...
The Middle East is an area in which we could still take practical and effective action together... The future of all of us depends on the closest Anglo-American cooperation. It has been a source of grief to me that this temporary breach in our relationship has occurred.²²¹

A letter from the French government to Eisenhower expressed the former’s great concern at the threat in the letter from Bulganin to Eden and Mollet, adding that France could not exclude the possibility of an attack by the Soviet Union against the UK and France. The French government stressed the importance of the Soviet Union being warned in advance of the result of such a threat of attack, by the U.S. Government recalling the existence of the North Atlantic Treaty and its commitment to resist any attack against its allies.²²²

The main area of concern now, after the Soviet ultimatum, was the West’s fear of Soviet intervention in the Suez crisis, which would help the Russians realise several objectives at once; first of all to reassert the Soviet position as the champion of Egypt and of anticolonial countries generally, which had been achieved by the Soviet warning and its offer of military assistance to Egypt, as well as its support in the United Nations; secondly, to damage the interests and prestige of the UK and France and divide and weaken the Western alliances; thirdly, to distract attention from the situation in Hungary.²²³

In a political move to counter the Soviet ultimatum, the United States contacted the Egyptian government, drawing attention to the monumental effort the US had been making over the previous five days to bring about a cease-fire, the withdrawal of enemy forces, and the formation of a UN force.

And on the following day, November 6, Britain and France both accepted the cease-fire, as did Israel. Hostilities ended at 2 a.m. on the morning of November 7, and the General Assembly

²²¹ Message from Prime Minister Eden to President Eisenhower, London, November 5, 1956.
²²² Memorandum of a conversation, Department of State, Washington, November 6, 1956. Message from the French Government to the President.
²²³ Special National Intelligence Estimate, Washington, November 6, 1956.
convened on the same day to finalize arrangements for a UN force to be dispatched to Egypt as soon as possible.

Raymond Hare was told that Egypt must recognize that the Soviet ‘offer’ was motivated by considerations other than the attainment of peace, and that the US had categorically rejected the Soviet proposal for a joint US–USSR military operation. The injection of other foreign forces outside the context of UN action would be a clear violation of the UN Charter, and it would be the duty of all UN members, including the US, to oppose any such effort. There was no question that Egypt’s interest and security could best be protected by looking to the UN which was acting in a most effective manner, and that Egypt should leave no doubt that it would not welcome unilateral Soviet intervention, the consequences of which would be unpredictable.224

This message delivered to US Ambassador Hare in Cairo reflects the US’s wish to prevent any form of Soviet intervention by warning Egypt not to take the USSR’s offer at face value, hinting at ulterior motives behind it, and confirming the USA’s refusal to engage in such joint action, while advising Egypt not to agree to unilateral intervention by the Soviets either. The message stressed the importance of working within the framework of the United Nations, to prevent any attempt on the part of the Soviets to act independently of it.

D. An appeal from the Egyptian government to the US:
On the day following the Anglo-French invasion of Port Said, the Egyptian ambassador in Washington, Ahmed Hussein, delivered the following appeal to the US government in the name of the people of Egypt:

“At this historic hour of decision when the best values of humanity’s heritage are at stake and the human race is pushed back toward chaos and savagery, when France, Israel and the United Kingdom are launching a treacherous attack against Egypt and are defiantly bearing the standard of lawlessness and of shame, Egypt appeals for help by volunteers, arms or otherwise to all those who, all over the world, care still for the dignity of man and the rule of law in international relations.

224 Telegram from the Department of State to the American Embassy in Egypt, November 6, 1956.
“The people of Egypt are fighting a battle of survival and of honour. They are fighting it not only for themselves and their country but equally for the civilized world. As long as aggression continues against Egypt on her own territory and in defiance of the resolutions of the United Nations Egypt shall go on fighting in all determination and with every shred of its being against the forces of evil.”

This was not the first time Egypt had asked the US for help during the Tripartite Aggression as we have previously mentioned, and in both cases the reaction of the US government was to affirm that resisting the invasion had to take place within the United Nations, with no offer of direct military aid to Egypt.

During Nasser’s meeting with Raymond Hare when handing him a letter to Eisenhower requesting US military aid and the intervention of the 6th Fleet against Britain and France, the US ambassador answered that he did not think they could go to battle with their longtime allies! He then asked Nasser whether the request was genuine, or whether he had made it expecting a negative answer which he could use as justification for turning to the Russians!

Hare remarked later that this was the only time he had seen Nasser angry, and that he had replied: “I mean what I say.”

The reply from Washington was that the US would do all it could within the framework of the United Nations, a response which Nasser received coldly! Nevertheless, the US took a strong stand in the UN, which angered Britain and France.

Fourth: The Tripartite Aggression before the United Nations
At the onset of the Israeli attack on Egypt on October 29, 1956, the United States requested a meeting of the Security Council. Accordingly, three sessions were held on October 30 to discuss a cease-fire between Egypt and Israel and the withdrawal of the attacking forces to a position behind the demarcation lines. The US draft resolution also called upon other countries not to help Israel militarily or economically so long as it failed to implement this resolution.

The US draft resolution was defeated by a British-French veto, at which point the US government immediately began to discuss the cancellation of

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225 Memorandum of a conversation, Department of State, Washington, November 6, 1956, Egypt’s request for help from the US.
226 Hare, Oral History Project, op. cit.
aid to Israel. This comprised the suspension of economic assistance and the delivery of goods to Israel, as well as of all shipments of arms, ammunition, and implements of war; the suspension of all exchanges of military information. No more Israeli trainees were to be accepted in military schools. Dulles agreed to announce these measures, on the basis that they were being taken in the context of the 1950 Tripartite Declaration. The majority then agreed to the Yugoslav proposal to call for an emergency meeting of the General Assembly.

After Nasser refused the Anglo-French ultimatum, Egypt was subjected to an attack by Britain and France on October 31 while it was defending itself from the Israeli attack. That day, British and French planes bombed Egyptian towns and military and civilian airports. The British and French ministries of defence announced that joint aerial operations against Egypt had been launched under the leadership of General Keightley. The conspiracy planned by Britain, France and Israel against Egypt was now exposed before world public opinion, and their objective of subjugating the Egyptian people and undermining their sovereignty and legitimate rights revealed.

That same day, Nasser announced a general mobilization and became the military ruler of the country.

On the first of November, Britain and France intensified their raids on key towns and on the Egyptian troops that were withdrawing from Sinai following Nasser’s orders, to avoid being trapped between the Israeli forces on one side and the Anglo-French forces in the Canal zone. By the end of the day, the Egyptian army had managed to withdraw from the Sinai, thus escaping from the trap that had been laid for them.

The Anglo-French planes followed the withdrawing Egyptian troops, and destroyed the Al Ferdan bridge to stop them from crossing over to the west bank of the Canal. However, the Egyptian Engineering Corps managed to enable the forces to cross the Canal safely.

On November 2, the Syrian government sent a memorandum to the United States stating that they had decided to implement the Egyptian-Jordan-Syrian joint defence pact under its supreme commander Abdel Hakim Amer, Commander of the Egyptian Armed Forces, and that henceforth Syria would be standing side by side with Egypt. The Syrian government sent forces to Jordan, and Iraqi troops were also heading

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227 Memorandum of a conversation, Secretary Dulles’ office, Department of State, Washington, October 31, 1956.
228 A bridge that crosses the Suez Canal.
there, leading Israel to inform the US that it would not be attacking Jordan.\textsuperscript{229}

The General Assembly issued a resolution on November 2, asking all parties involved in the hostilities to carry out an immediate cease-fire and demanding that the attacking forces withdraw. The resolution was approved by an overwhelming majority and opposed by Britain, France, and Israel, who announced that they would not carry it out.

Sure enough, Britain and France continued their bombardment of Egyptian towns, and the Egyptian authorities distributed 50,000 rifles to the people of Port Said and the popular resistance. And on the following day, November 3, Egyptian forces managed to sink five ships at the entrance of the Canal, blocking it completely in order to prevent any attempt to invade Egypt via the Canal, which was what had happened in Orabi’s time. This was after the British had officially announced that they had sunk the ship Akka after bombing it from the air over the Suez Canal.

Some of the enemy ships tried to land their commandos in Suez to get to Port Said, but the Egyptian torpedoes intercepted them and sank three vessels, leading the rest of the forces to withdraw to their base in Aden.

At this point, the Egyptian government decided to appeal to all countries of the world for help in repelling the invasion.

The attackers completely disregarded the General Assembly resolution, and on November 4, a French cruiser approached Egyptian territorial waters in the Mediterranean and was intercepted by Egyptian torpedo boats led by Galal El Dessouki and Gol Gamal, who fired a torpedo that split the cruiser in two, drowning everyone on board. French fighter planes then bombed the Egyptian torpedo boat, and the two officers were martyred. At the same time, French planes bombed Port Fouad, causing devastating damage there.

The General Assembly met again on October 4 and 5, issuing two consecutive resolutions assigning to the Secretary-General the task of preparing an emergency force to monitor the cessation of all naval operations, and an international peacekeeping force under General Burns, who selected a group of observers who were not from countries that were permanent members of the Security Council.

\textsuperscript{229} Telegram from the American Embassy in Israel to the Department of State, Tel Aviv, November 4, 1956.
In Hammarskjold’s report to the General Assembly on November 7, he stressed the temporary nature of the international emergency force and the fact that it had no bearings upon the military or political balance of power in the current dispute; its mission covered the area extending from the Suez Canal to the armistice demarcation line.

Yet again, on November 5, British and French forces bombarded the city of Port Said, with a population of 250,000, in flagrant disregard of the General Assembly and its resolutions, causing untold losses to the lives of its inhabitants.

The heroic resistance of the people of Port Said led the British and French forces to launch a series of naval and aerial attacks that amounted to some fifty raids in that one day, according to joint British-French broadcasts. Homes were destroyed and set on fire, and all utilities stopped functioning.

On the day the Russians issued their warning to the three invading countries, November 5, they presented their draft proposal to the Security Council, calling for joint military action with the US to put an end to the aggression. However, it failed to be included in the Council’s agenda due to the opposition of the US, Britain, France, Australia, and Belgium. Only the Soviet Union, Yugoslavia, and Iran approved its inclusion. 230

Egypt had been previously informed of the contents of the Soviet proposal, and Shepilov had told Ambassador Mohamed Awad El Quni that his government was determined to take immediate and decisive action; and that there was no time to wait for a UN resolution while such devastating damage was being inflicted on civilians by the invaders. When asked by El Quni how his government would react if let down by the US and the Security Council, Shepilov replied: “We will find other fast and effective means.” 231

On November 6, the Egyptian Broadcasting Station was put into operation again after having being bombed by the British and French at the onset of the attack; documents provide ample evidence of Eden’s loathing of the Sot El Arab (Voice of the Arabs) station in particular, reaching as it did Arabs everywhere from the Arabian Gulf to the Atlantic.

That same day, the United Kingdom and France accepted the cease-fire; Eisenhower sent Eden a message in which he said:

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230 Memorandum of a conference with the President, White House, November 5, 1956.
231 Included in Nasser’s private papers.
“The UN Resolution on cease-fire and entry of a UN force must be accepted without condition so as not to give Egypt, with Soviet backing, an opportunity to quibble or start negotiation. It is vital that no excuse be given for Soviet participation in the UN force, therefore all big five should be excluded from the force.”

On November 8, the Egyptian Ambassador in Moscow sent a telegram expressing Shepilov’s suspicions that the cease-fire could be a ‘trick’, and that Khrushchev had told him that the name and reputation of the Soviet Union was at stake, and that the Soviets would fight alongside Egypt against Britain and France if necessary; he did not even bother to mention Israel! The ambassador added that Khrushchev considered Egypt to have defeated Britain and France, who had planned to get rid of Nasser and his regime. Khrushchev added that it was now time for a war of diplomacy, requiring skill and wisdom.

It was certainly true that the invaders’ plan for a swift, decisive war had failed miserably, and that they were unable to break the indomitable spirit of the Egyptian people or to seize possession of the Suez Canal. Finally, they had not realised their objective of getting rid of Nasser; on the contrary, the Egyptian people stood with their leader as one, and never had the Arab nation been more united.

Moreover, Britain witnessed a political crisis as a result of this ill-advised war; the influence of the Labour Party and of all who had opposed the war surged, and talk of Eden’s resigning from office as a result of his deplorable Middle East policies began. The same thing was repeated with the Socialists in France.

**Fifth: The war turns political after the cease-fire**

After the failure of the Tripartite Aggression on Egypt, the political battle began. It was only to be expected that the colonial powers would try and impose their conditions on Egypt, especially with regard to internationalizing the Suez Canal, and would also attempt to enforce decisions or solutions detrimental to the sovereignty of Egypt in order to try and undermine the position of the Egyptian government and those of other Arab countries.

1. **The Soviet position sides with Egypt:**

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232 Message from President Eisenhower to Prime Minister Eden, Washington, November 6, 1956.
233 Telegram from the Egyptian Embassy in Moscow, November 8, 1956, from Nasser’s private documents.
The Soviets believed that the aggressors would try and undermine the friendship that existed between Egypt and Russia and other friendly countries, but now that Egypt’s standing and prestige had considerably increased before the world, it was in a position to hold its own and be on its guard in this political battle.

Regarding the international UN emergency force which Egypt had agreed to, the Soviets advocated placing it on both sides of the armistice demarcation line, which meant that the international force would be able to prevent any clashes between the two sides.

The Soviets also insisted on the withdrawal of British, French, and Israeli forces from all areas of Egypt: Port Said, Sinai, and the islands in the Gulf of Aqaba.

Soviet support reached the extent where they asserted Egypt’s right to demand compensation from the three attacking countries for all the damage incurred during the armed aggression: the suspension of navigation in the Suez Canal and the destruction of Egyptian towns and villages. The Soviet Union offered to place this request before the United Nations through its representative, and went a step further by suggesting that Egypt should ask for the invaders to be brought before an international court for interrogation and punishment, and promised to support this request.234

2. **The position taken by Britain and France:**

The stance adopted by both Britain and France was clear from the onset in their determination to internationalize the Canal, and to extend the duration of the UN international emergency force in order to guarantee navigation in its waters.

Britain insisted that its forces remain in Egypt until the arrival of the international force; while Nasser was fully aware of the dangers and intentions of this force: to occupy all or part of the Canal zone and allow for its internationalization. Mahmoud Fawzi informed Hammarskjold that the emergency force had no reason to remain in Port Said and the Canal zone after the withdrawal of the British and French forces.

Accordingly, Hammarskjold sent a memorandum to both Britain and France on November 9, requesting an immediate and complete cease-

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234 Another letter from the Soviets to Egypt, dated November 9, 1956, included amongst Nasser’s private documents.
fire and the withdrawal of all their forces from Egyptian territory. The Soviet ambassador in Cairo also informed the Egyptian Foreign Office of the Soviet warning issued by their Tass news agency announcing – in the sternest of terms – that any new attack on Egypt would mean intervention by the Soviet Union.

It was agreed on November 20 that some UN units would enter Port Said to facilitate the withdrawal process and put a stop to the atrocities perpetrated by the invading forces against the city’s inhabitants. Hammarskjöld put continuous pressure on the invaders to expedite their withdrawal, and requested that the Egyptian government continue to express its readiness to clear the Canal, pending the complete withdrawal of enemy forces. The Egyptian government meanwhile was alert and on the ready to ensure that the process of clearing the Canal – even through the UN – did not turn into an attempt to internationalize it.

Hostile activities on the part of the British forces continued until the end of December; the British marines took over the Al Akhwein lighthouse in the Red Sea and placed their artillery there on November 30; and a British cruiser and destroyer made their way between the lighthouses of Shedwan and Diba, knowing full well that these lighthouses were Egyptian, which constitutes an assault on territorial waters and a violation of the resolutions of the UN concerning immediate withdrawal. Part of the duties assigned to the international emergency force was to monitor the withdrawal of British troops from the areas surrounding Egyptian lighthouses, and the General Command of the Armed Forces of Egypt asked to lodge a protest before the United Nations.

On December 16, British forces attacked Egyptian civilians in Port Said with tanks and armoured cars, killing one hundred civilians and leaving many more wounded. These forces also carried out widespread searches of the houses, arresting one thousand civilians who were dragged off to British camps and tortured under the excuse of interrogating them. Homes and shops were plundered, and the invaders grabbed all the dry goods and groceries, leading to an acute shortage of foodstuffs in the city.235

The Egyptian government lodged a formal protest at the UN, denouncing the invading forces and holding them responsible for these

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235 Nasser’s orders to Mahmoud Fawzi in New York asking him to reveal these facts before world public opinion; and a comprehensive report from the Egyptian Foreign Office and the Egyptian permanent delegation to the UN; available in Nasser’s private documents.
actions that were in direct defiance of the cease-fire agreement. Mahmoud Fawzi presented a memorandum drawing the attention of the UN to the state of affairs in Port Said in particular and the Canal zone in general, citing the barbaric acts of the British and French against innocent civilians the results of which could not be foreseen if the British and French were to remain in the area. Accordingly, the Egyptian government was requesting that they be made to leave in order to achieve peace and stability in the area and also out of concern for their own lives. 

3. **The Israeli position:**
The Armistice Agreement signed by Israel and the Arab countries in 1949 stipulated that neither party should achieve political or military gains. Israel, however, continually violated this agreement with its recurrent terrorist operations, most notable of which was the attack on Gaza and its surrounding villages on February 28, 1955, followed by another attack on March 5, 1956. As a result, the Egyptian authorities took intensified defensive steps in Cairo against the marauding airplanes as well as passive resistance arrangements in Al Arish and around the Suez Canal.

Israel carried out *thirty-four raids* within just two months in 1956; Israel, who claimed that its widespread attack on Sinai which began on October 29 was to repel Egyptian *fedayeen* fighters!

After the UN resolution declaring a cease-fire and the withdrawal of the attacking forces, Ben Gurion announced in a speech to the Israeli Knesset that ‘the armistice agreement in Egypt was dead and buried and could not be resuscitated, and consequently the armistice lines between Egypt and Israel were no longer valid.’

Perez’s comment on this statement was that it looked as though Ben Gurion was determined not to withdraw from the Sinai! Hammarskjold also complained to Mahmoud Fawzi in New York that he was encountering stubborn resistance from Israel regarding the withdrawal and that he had had a fierce argument with Golda Meier about this on November 20, adding that he had asked for observers to enter the Gaza region, to be followed by UN forces, as the reports coming out of Gaza were extremely disturbing.

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236 Ibid.
On November 20, the Soviets submitted a draft proposal to the UN urging it to enforce respect of its resolutions on Israel, who constantly flouted them.

On their side, the Israeli delegation at the UN informed Hammarskjold that the Egyptian radio had mentioned twice, on December 5, that *fedayeen* operations would increase in intensity.

The Israelis destroyed the roads in Sinai, placed mines everywhere, and blew up the railway lines in order to slow down the entry of the UN task force and gain time. They also stole oil from Sidr and Balaem, and blew up oil depots and water wells, the latter being the only source of water for some 200 thousand inhabitants of Sinai. They then set fire to their houses, forcing them to flee to the Canal zone. In Al Arish, the Israelis completely destroyed the military town and the airport and hangars.

Hammarskjold addressed the Israeli delegation to the UN regarding the withdrawal of their troops saying that he shared with Egypt its insistence that Israel should gain nothing whatsoever from its attack, and should not keep Gaza or the two islands of Tiran and Sanafir.237

On December 19, Ben Gurion declared that Israel would not give Gaza back to the Egyptian authorities, to which Egypt objected that according to the UN resolutions, the situation should be restored to its pre-October 29 status and Israeli forces should retreat behind the armistice lines. Nasser sent a message to Mahmoud Fawzi in New York saying that Egypt would not accept any other than an Egyptian administration for Gaza, and that the issue of the Canal would not be discussed before Israeli withdrawal.

Egypt also asked Hammarskjold to work on restoring the possessions of individuals in Port Said, which were plundered by the British and French forces before leaving.

On December 24, Hammarskjold informed Mahmoud Riad that the withdrawal would take place within a week, with the exception of Gaza, and the island of Tiran. Hammarskjold had insisted on complete Israeli withdrawal to beyond the armistice lines, but Israel made the excuse of Egyptian *fedayeen* operations to delay withdrawal from Gaza, Tiran, and Sharm El Sheikh.

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237 Meeting between Hammarskjold and Mahmoud Riad, December 12, 1956, ibid.
The Israeli withdrawal proceeded at an extremely slow rate, giving them ample time to assault and murder the civilians in Gaza and the Sinai and to demolish the buildings in these areas.

The Arab delegations submitted a draft resolution to the General Assembly on January 9, 1957 stemming from their deep concern over Israel’s refusal to abide by the UN resolutions. The resolution condemned Israel’s defiance of the United Nations and requested the withdrawal of Israeli forces to the armistice lines within 72 hours. It also called on all members to refrain from giving any military, economic, or financial assistance to Israel.

Egypt was subjected to pressure from the UN on February 21, 1957 regarding Aqaba, Gaza, and Suez. An attempt was made to have a resolution issued by the General Assembly that would expand the work of the UN force, particularly with regard to Aqaba and Gaza, then another attempt to remove Gaza from Egyptian administration. There was even a movement made to try and let Israeli ships and goods pass through the Suez Canal, as well as ships from several other countries through the Gulf of Aqaba, in order to impart an international aspect on its waters. There were also attempts to impose a colonial solution to the Suez Canal issue.

On April 11, Hammarskjold expressed his concern regarding what he had heard of a large-scale deployment of Egyptian armed forces in Sinai and on the banks of the Canal on the basis that this was seen as ‘provocation’! Mahmoud Fawzi replied that Israel completely disregarded the UN resolutions such as UN forces being present on the Israeli side not just on the Egyptian side, and referred to the repeated Israeli threats made by the Israelis to Egypt, and the movement of Israeli forces within the occupied territories.238

Israel eventually withdrew behind the armistice line on March 12, 1957, but succeeded in gaining an advantage from its attack on Egypt: passage through the Gulf of Aqaba.

In a handwritten note after the withdrawal, Nasser comments:

“After Israel’s withdrawal, Egypt is ready to enter into negotiations with Hammarskjold to discuss the implementation of the truce. The presence of the international police should not prevent Egypt from practicing its rights.”

238 ibid.
4. The US position:

Nasser appreciated Eisenhower’s position towards the Tripartite Aggression on Egypt, and mentioned this during his speech in Alexandria on July 26, 1957. Indeed, the documents of the period reveal the extent to which Eisenhower and Dulles sympathized with Egypt after the Anglo-French ultimatum which the latter had concealed from them, and which they had only learned of through the press!

And after the attack took place, the US spared no effort in working to achieve a cease-fire and bring about the withdrawal of the invading forces, as well as imposing economic sanctions on Israel. However, this all took place within the framework of the United Nations, and after Britain and France vetoed the first US draft resolution, the political battle moved to the General Assembly, and soon the international emergency force was formed to separate the combatants and position itself on the armistice line between Egypt and Israel. And when the invading forces delayed in withdrawing, the US made a continuous and concentrated effort with Hammarskjold, exerting tremendous pressure to bring it about. Eisenhower exhibited extreme enthusiasm and determination in this regard.

However, the US did not respond to Egypt’s demand for military assistance after the Anglo-French aggression, as this would have meant a military confrontation with its longtime allies. The Soviets on the other hand took the opposite stance, and expressed their readiness to supply Egypt with weapons, aircraft, and pilots. They gave Egypt their full support politically as well, whether within the United Nations or outside of it.

The US position changed after the Soviet Union issued an ultimatum to both Britain and France, hinting at the use of nuclear and hydrogen weapons and threatening direct intervention in the conflict, and also after it proposed the formation of a joint military force with the US to address the aggression.

The US found itself in the unique situation of having the enemy request military collaboration, and being forced to stand against friends and allies!

After Britain and France accepted the cease-fire and began to withdraw, the US began to placate and even assist them; it was a resumption of the nature of US politics in the Middle East, which rested primarily on fighting Soviet influence in the region.
Once Britain and France had completed their withdrawal, it was revealed that the US also had its own plan to achieve the objectives that Britain and France had failed to realise with the use of force, using the ‘peaceful’ methods of economic pressure, hunger, preventing oil from reaching Egypt, and even refusing to sell Egypt the wheat which it had previously agreed to provide in return for Egyptian currency, all for the purpose of causing a famine! Egypt however resorted to its friends, and was able to emerge victorious in this war of economic pressure.

Then began the story of the power vacuum in the Middle East after the withdrawal of Britain and France, and how to fill it: a superpower was needed to fill this so-called vacuum, and thus the Eisenhower doctrine was announced on January 5, 1957.

Ostensibly, the Eisenhower Doctrine consisted of presenting military and economic aid, a principle which Egypt refused: “We adopt a policy which we announced clearly in Bandung and afterwards, which is one of non-alignment and positive neutrality, economic dealings with all countries of the world, and ending the monopoly on weapons. It is a policy based on complete freedom and independence, one that does not allow for spheres of influence; a policy that is built on the truth that the defence of any region must stem from within, with no help from any of the superpowers.”

Nasser saw that the Eisenhower Doctrine, in addition to economic and political assistance, also entailed economic restrictions; it was nothing but an extension of the Baghdad Pact, especially now that the US had joined it.

**Sixth: A review of the aggression**

It has been over sixty years since the Suez crisis put an end to the imperialistic attitude towards smaller countries; countries that were aspiring to live in a world where justice and freedom prevailed and humanity reached its full potential; and today students of history are entitled to an in-depth knowledge of the last chapter in the story of colonialism which is thankfully now over.

The Tripartite Aggression on Egypt took place at a crucial time in international relations after the end of WWII; a time when roles were being redefined in the Middle East and the world over. The Anglo-French invasion was a prominent turning point in bringing about the
downfall of British and French imperialists, their influence in the Middle East replaced by the United States.

A review of the size of the military forces that attacked Egypt reveals the extent to which this foolhardy campaign was a complete failure:²⁴⁰ British forces: 16th Parachute Brigade, 3rd Infantry Division, the Royal Marine Commando Brigade; the second, third, and tenth squadrons that were in Germany, and two centurion tank battalions. British air force: 500 fighter planes and troop carriers. The British navy: 5 aircraft carriers, 6 cruisers, 12 destroyers, 11 troop and tank carriers, 7 submarines, 14 minesweepers, in addition to the marine forces that participated in attacking Suez from the south: 3 destroyers, 8 frigates, one battleship, one aircraft carrier, and some ancillary vessels.

French land forces: the 10th Parachute Division, the 7th Mechanical Division, the 5th Armoured Division, the 4th Infantry Division, all withdrawn from Algeria; two squadrons of tanks, four marine commandos, and armoured vehicles equipped with heavy artillery. French air force: 200 fighter planes. French navy: 3 aircraft carriers, one battleship, 2 cruisers, 4 destroyers, 8 frigates, 3 submarines, and landing boats.

It is estimated that the forces that attacked Port Said on November 6 numbered some 50,000 soldiers.

All these forces amassed by two great powers against a small country that adhered to its sovereignty and to its principles of non-alignment and freedom, refusing to be drawn into military alliances and fighting spheres of influence.

The Israeli attack also failed to achieve its strategic objectives; the Egyptian forces in Sinai succeeded in repelling the Israelis up until they received orders to withdraw in order to address the Anglo-French invasion in the Canal zone. The testimony of Israeli leaders bears witness to this, including the diaries of Colonel Asaf Simhoni, who was killed in Sinai and whose diaries fell into the hands of the Egyptians.²⁴¹

So what did this battle achieve after the withdrawal of the three invading countries?

²⁴⁰ The White Paper issued by the British government on the Suez campaign.
²⁴¹ In Nasser’s private documents.
Egypt won the battle of confirming its independence and its ownership of the Canal. The battle was a victory for Arab nationalism, the policy of positive neutrality, and economic independence. It provided a sense of security to all small countries and newly-independent states, for if Egypt had been broken, the cause of liberty would have been crushed in other countries, too.²⁴²

However, other battles began in the Middle East after its strategic map was changed, all of which targeted Egypt and Nasser, who had acquired tremendous influence in the Arab world, the Third World, and indeed amongst enlightened Westerners.

The new conspiracy against Egypt began with the Eisenhower Doctrine, which Nasser realised was a form of internal invasion and a plot to overthrow the government using an economic war against Egypt. Attempts were made to isolate Egypt in order to curb its liberty-inspiring influence on surrounding countries. But Egypt managed to resist all these conspiracies, moving onwards towards progress and development.

²⁴² Nasser’s speech on Victory Day, December 23, 1956.
THE UNION BETWEEN EGYPT AND SYRIA
1958 – 1961

The early days of the union:

“I received with great joy this evening Syria’s decision to enter into a union with our country. This union is the culmination of a hope held by every single Arab who believes in Arab nationalism and works towards it. The union between Egypt and Syria confirms Article 1 of the constitution of Egypt, which states that Egypt is an independent Arab country and part of the Arab world.”

This was Nasser’s reply, on July 5th, 1956, to the decision of the Syrian parliament which had been preceded by an agreement for joint military leadership signed by the two countries on October 19th, 1955.

The Syrian people had stood by Egypt and supported it during the Tripartite Aggression in October and November of 1956, and in 1957 Shukri Al Quwatli had tried to bring about a tripartite agreement between Jordan, Egypt, and Syria which Nasser had opposed. The Syrians pressurized Nasser to let Jordan join in the joint military leadership, but Nasser resisted the idea, but later on said:

“As a result of the insistence of the Syrians, I agreed to a situation I was not happy with, but capitulated only because of the nationalistic trend that was emerging in Jordan, and also because I felt this agreement would constitute a preventative measure against the dangers threatening the Arab world.”

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243 The true facts behind the union as told by Nasser in the minutes of the Cabinet meeting held after the separation (the first meeting) held on October 19th, 1961. “The story of the union and the necessity of rearranging the political structure.”
After the aggression of 1956, a British plot was implemented and a coup took place in Jordan which put an end to the patriotic movement - which was attributed to Egyptian-Syrian communist elements!

This was the situation before the union took place, and the steps which concluded it were out of the ordinary: on January 14th, 1958, Nasser, who was in Luxor with Sukarno, was informed that a Syrian plane carrying twenty officers had landed in Cairo Airport without permission, and that the officers had gone to meet Abdel Hakim Amer and had told him that Syria was in danger and on the brink of a catastrophe: four political parties were fighting for leadership of the country, and it was feared that the communists would seize control. The officers said that the solution they had all agreed upon in order to save Syria was to ask Nasser for a union between Egypt and Syria. The people of Syria were already keen on such a union, and the Syrian parliament had already decided in favour of it as mentioned above.

The next day, January 15th, Nasser met with the officers and the following conversation took place:

The officers: “We have reached a solution: union with Egypt.”

Nasser: “What do your government and President Shukri Al Quwatli think of this?”

The officers: “We sent a delegation to Shukri Al Quwatli, and he said he would only agree to a union if the army wished it.”

Nasser: “This cannot be accepted, because you are not the government of Syria. Unions do not take place based on emotions in this way; it is a process which would take at least five years to accomplish. It is preferable that we begin with a military, political and cultural union, and then the constitutional aspects would follow, but if we just agree to a union straight away, there will be many difficulties. I am willing to formulate a five-year program as a preliminary to a constitutional union.”

In a long session that took place on the following day, which coincided with the celebration of the new Egyptian constitution, the officers discussed the matter again with President Nasser, the most extreme amongst them being a communist officer, Afif Al Berzi. The following conversation took place:

The officers: “We have received a message from Damascus saying that the government has agreed to our demands, and a representative from the government, Salah Al Beitar, the Foreign Minister, is on his way to formally request the union.”

Nasser: “I repeat, this is an emotional request. We cannot accept a union that takes place in such a rush.”
The officers: “You speak of Arab unity, but Syria will collapse and be lost; it seems as though Syria doesn’t matter to you.”

Nasser: “You are officers in the army; if the union takes place I will have you discharged from the army!”

The officers: “We accept.”

Nasser: “We have no political parties in Egypt, and I don’t want political parties in Syria, because the communist party takes its orders from Moscow, and the reactionary parties take theirs from the West.”

The officers: “We agree to there being no political parties!”

Nasser then met with Salah Al Beitar, representing the Syrian government, who came with a formal request for the union.

The situation was, as Nasser put it:

“The army and the government are asking for a union, and we as leaders of the pan-Arab movement call for unity, then it is offered to us and we refuse it! The excuse they are making for demanding this union is that if it doesn’t take place, Syria will fall!”

It was obvious to Nasser that the request for a union was the result of a military coup in Syria; twenty officers had been sent to Shukri Al Quwatli to ask him to agree to the union, and after deliberations, he consented on condition that the government should also agree. In the end every official in Syria was placed before a fait accompli!

**The union begins and so do the conspiracies:**

Shukri Al Quwatli came to Cairo on January 26th, 1958, and the request for unity was signed. He then stood up and said:

“This is a day in my life... and a day that will go down in history!”

Nasser, in the first Cabinet meeting after the separation, said:

“I know see matters as they really are; history is sometimes written contrary to the facts.”

Matters in Syria were unstable; five officers would attend the Syrian Cabinet meetings, and decisions were made according to what these officers wanted!

As soon as Nasser had agreed to the request for a union, Afif Al Berzi said that they had rushed to ask for a union because they were confident that Nasser would...
refuse: they had intended, when Nasser refused, to claim that Egypt’s talk of Arab unity was just show and meant for local consumption!

One month after the union, preparations began for the first coup in Syria; Afif Al Berzi transferred some communist officers to certain locations, then quarreled with Abdel Hakim Amer and tendered his resignation.

One month and a half after the union, everyone in Syria was preparing to overthrow the system, because they felt that the union had been imposed upon them by the army! Meanwhile, those who had requested the union wished to use it to further their own ends: the capitalists, the Baathists, and members of the army. Nasser refused to let the union be exploited in this way, which was against the principles Egypt upheld.

The three and a half years of the union were beset with difficulties, “To the point where if we took one step forward, we retreated several steps to the rear,” as Nasser described it, adding, “The union during the reign of Saladin only lasted four years.”

The counter-revolutionary elements were soon revealed:

1. The Western countries that had established the Hashemite Union between Iraq and Jordan in February 1958 in order to counter the Egyptian-Syrian union, which was contrary to their interests and affected their standing in the region.
2. King Saud.
3. Political capitalism and minorities such as the Kurds, Turkmens, and others.
4. The Eastern Bloc and Arab communism.

The enemies of the union were countless, whether Arab reactionaries, kings, or those who feared the spread of Arab nationalism and saw it as a threat to their very existence, as well as to Zionism, Israel, and colonialism.

The blows were directed at Syria not Egypt, but it was Egypt that was really targeted via Damascus.

246 Ibid.

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THE REPERCUSSIONS OF THE UNION

First: The West opposes the union

1. The roots of the hostile US position towards Nasser:
The US launched the Eisenhower Doctrine at the beginning of 1957 as a means of consolidating its presence in the Middle East on the pretext of protecting the independence of a nation!

Egypt refused the project categorically, and announced its adherence to neutrality and non-alignment. However, Jordan and Lebanon announced their acceptance of the Doctrine and began to criticize Egypt and all those who had refused it.

At the beginning of 1957, Nasser found himself faced with US attempts to isolate Egypt after the Tripartite Aggression, headed by Lebanon. Beirut became the scene of a series of anti-Egyptian conspiracies and a centre for all those conspiring against Egypt.

Dulles announced, on the occasion of the second Brioni Conference in July 1956, which included Nasser, Nehru, and Tito, that the call for neutrality was unacceptable to US policies. He said:

“We must find a way to counter the impact of this conference and prove to those advocating neutrality that it is impossible. A harsh lesson must be taught, addressed to Nasser, that trouble-maker in the Middle East who is trying to change the status quo in a region that has been living under Western influence for two centuries at least!”

Hence came the decision to withdraw from funding the High Dam.

Dulles held Nasser alone responsible for the failure of US and Western policy in the Middle East! Egypt, by refusing to tie itself to any of the Western alliances or their military projects, and by announcing its neutrality toward the two superpowers, put paid to the US strategy in the region which had hoped to encircle the Soviet Union with military alliances. This was Dulles’s way of thinking before the emergence of long-range missiles. He even went so far as to declare:

“It is up to the Western nations to get Nasser out of the Middle East, or get out themselves!”

Dulles’s analysis of the situation at the beginning of 1957 was:

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247 Newsweek magazine, September, 1957.
“Arab nationalism is the gunpowder in the bomb, and Nasser is the pin in the detonator!”

His greatest fear was that the Middle East should slip away from Western influence. However, he had the sense to see that using force with Egypt would only spell danger, and that an economic blockade was the best weapon, in addition to isolating Egypt in the region, and attacking from within the country by launching conspiracies.

Sure enough, the US began implementing its plan. All Egypt’s dollar assets in the US were frozen, and all contracts between Egypt and American companies were cancelled. The US then launched huge amounts of its stores of long-staple cotton in order to destroy Egypt’s chances of selling its own cotton. Next came its refusal to sell wheat to Egypt: the US had decided ‘not to deal with the current regime in Egypt’!

In parallel, the US media launched a two-pronged attack: shedding doubt on Egypt’s credibility, and calling for an alliance of the oil kings, Saud of Saudi Arabia and Feisal of Iraq.248

2. The events in Jordan:
At the same time, events occurred in Jordan that inflamed the situation in the Middle East: the US used its dollars to bring down the popular government of Suleiman Al Nabulsi in Amman, which was calling for neutrality.

The story began when a group of young officers went to the king in 1956 and informed him that British control over Jordan must come to an end, and that Glubb249 must leave the country. The king acceded to their demands, thus becoming a hero adored by the masses; he was then forced to sign the Arab solidarity agreement.250 However, the US government made its move, and the king got rid of the Al Nabulsi government. Even so, the US plan to isolate Egypt failed. Nevertheless, the Iraqi throne was now under the protection of the Baghdad Pact, and the Jordanian throne part of the Eisenhower project!

3. Successive political crises in Syria:
Syria had been through extremely difficult circumstances since the year 1949, when a series of military coups took place one after the other. The first was the

248 Mohamed Hassanein Heikal, The Psychological Complexes Governing the Middle East, Al Ahram newspaper, 16/1/1958.
249 Sir John Bagot Glubb, a British officer who took over the command of the Jordanian army from 1939 till March 2nd, 1956 when King Hussein relieved him of his duties upon the decision to Arabize the command of the army, a decision which came as a blow to Britain.
250 The Arab solidarity agreement was signed by Egypt, Syria, Saudi Arabia and Jordan on 19/1/1957.
coup led by Hosni Al Zaim, which was not a movement that expressed the will of the people nor was it fully-fledged revolution as such, and just three months later, both the leader of the coup and his prime minister were assassinated!

Next came a coup led by Sami Al Henawi, who was assassinated in Beirut after fleeing there from Damascus as a result of yet another coup, led by Adib Al Shishakli, who also fled the country after an uprising against him!

A period of uncertainty followed these coups, and a number of conspiracies took place. And during this highly volatile situation, the patriotic elements in the country fought to bring about the union, and succeeded.

It was now up to Nasser, in his capacity as the President of the United Arab Republic, to try and restore order and erase the negative effects of Syria’s turbulent past, which was no easy task.

**Second: The executive measures of the union**

“The decision was taken by the parliaments of the two countries to begin work immediately on making the union between Egypt and Syria a concrete reality. Talks were held in Cairo to decide upon the final shape the union would take. These talks were more than just meetings of politicians and leaders; they were the expression of the will and determination of the people who realized that in unity lay true power.”

The discussions ended with the formal announcement of the union, which was signed on the first of February, 1958. The historic document was placed in the office of the Egyptian parliament (the Umma Council), and the newly-created state was named the United Arab Republic, a democratic republic where the executive authority was held by the president, assisted by ministers who reported to him. The legislative authority was undertaken by a legislative council. The nascent state was to have its own new flag, and would henceforth consist of one people and one army in a union where equal rights and duties were enjoyed by all.

The following principles were agreed upon: that the republic was independent; that its people were part of the Arab nation; that it was formed of two regions, Syria and Egypt, each of which would have its executive council headed by a president appointed by the President of the Republic and assisted by ministers appointed by the President of the Republic based upon the nominations of the president of the executive council. The people would form a National Union, and political parties were forbidden. Steps were to be taken to formulate the

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251 Nasser’s speech in parliament on the occasion of the declaration of the bases of the union between Egypt and Syria, 5/2/1958.
permanent constitution of the new republic, and a referendum on the union and on the president of the United Arab Republic would be held on February 21st, 1958.

That day, Nasser announced:

“A great state has emerged in the east today.”

These words, and all they denoted, roused the fears of the West, and in particular the United States, while Iraq, Saudi Arabia, Jordan, and the government of Kamil Chamoun in Lebanon became increasingly paranoid towards the situation, to the extent where, during a meeting of the Baghdad Pact members in Ankara, Dulles assured Bashayan, the Iraqi foreign minister, that in the case of an attack on Iraq with Soviet weapons and volunteers after the union, the US would be ready to intervene in accordance with the Eisenhower Doctrine in coordination with the United Kingdom.252

1. Recognition of the United Arab Republic:
   The US foreign office found itself confronted with a complicated situation faced with the swift catapulting of developments ending with the union. Several US allies in the Arab world were against it, namely Iraq, Lebanon, Jordan, and Saudi Arabia, while those in favour of Arab nationalism sided against the West and considered Nasser a hero!

   However, the US government felt that any delay in acknowledging the United Arab Republic would put it in an awkward position, so it decided to recognize the new state, whilst hoping that it would not engage in political activities that would overthrow the ‘Arab union’.253

   Yemen took a brave step when the Imam of Yemen, Ahmed Al Badr, send a telegram on February 2nd, 1958, to presidents Nasser and Quwatli, announcing Yemen’s wish to join the union. Nasser responded that a union with Yemen would form the nucleus of a comprehensive Arab union, and accordingly the union document was signed in Damascus on March 7th, 1958, between the Arab Republic of Egypt and the Kingdom of Yemen.

   The scope of the union was thus expanded, causing Saudi Arabia to become even more agitated and driving its king, Saud, to conspire to assassinate Nasser by blowing up his plane! A young Syrian officer, Abdel Hamid Al Siraj, was offered two million pounds to carry out the plot. King Saud wanted at all

252 Telegram from the US Dept. of State to the embassy in Iraq, Washington, February 8th, 1958.
253 The ‘Arab Union’ was formed between Iraq and Jordan as a reaction to the Egyptian-Syrian union, on 14/2/1958.
costs to prevent the union between Egypt and Syria, and definitely did not want Yemen to join as well!

Eventually, all countries of the world, with the exception of France, recognized the United Arab Republic.

Nasser wrote the following by hand in his personal notes:

“I returned from Syria where tension was everywhere: on the borders, inside Damascus, armies on the move, blatant threats, attempts to shatter the domestic front and cause a rift between the army and the people! Amidst all this, the will of the Syrian and Egyptian people joined forces and formed the power that created the United Arab Republic.

“History has taught us that Arab nationalism was a concept that brought together Muslims and Christians during the Crusades, and before 1952 it was clear that the natural line of defence for the Arab world lay in its unity: whoever attacks one Arab country attacks them all. The creation of the United Arab Republic has started the process, and in my opinion, means that yet another of the colonialists’ weapons has lost its power.”

2. **Repercussions of the announcement of the union:**

The Egyptian-Syrian union became a live issue after the signing of the joint military agreement between the two countries on October 19th, 1955. Enthusiasm for the union was concentrated more in Syria, where campaigning for this union was revived again and again in the Syrian parliament and the press.

Nasser's influence in Syria was very strong, but he delayed consenting to the Syrians' request for the union, as mentioned before. He finally capitulated and agreed to implement the union within six months, on condition that there should be one president, based in Cairo, one parliament, one political party, one army, and one diplomatic corps.

a. **The American reaction:**

The US was wary of the union from the outset, but realized that the strong union had brought together all the different political factions in Syria, so that even the communist party found itself obliged to issue a statement supporting the union!

The American analysis of the situation found the alternatives to be very limited; the conservative parties in Syria were divided and weak within the army, which was the moving force in Syrian politics. Moreover, the influence of pro-Western Arab countries in Syria was negligible. Overall,
the political situation in Syria was unstable, and the communist influence was growing stronger by the day. The options were either an increase in Egyptian influence and the union with Egypt, or an increase in communist influence which could only be addressed by external forces.\footnote{Telegram from the US Embassy in Syria to the Department of State, January 15th, 1958.}

So in spite of the fact that the Egyptian-Syrian union was contrary to the interests of the US, the US government announced that the matter of an Arab union was the prerogative of the Arabs themselves, and that the US would support a union that stemmed from the free will of the Arab people.

The US saw the repercussions of the union as detrimental to its interests in the long run; that it would facilitate Egyptian control over the Arab world, and have a negative effect on the pro-Western regimes there. It would also lead to the spread of the positive neutrality opposed by the US, and finally, would further complicate the Palestinian problem. Moreover, there was no guarantee that the union would lead to increased stability in Syria.

However, the redeeming feature that balanced out all these negative aspects as far as the US was concerned, was that the union would put a decisive end to communist influence in Syria.

The US realized that it might be in its best short-term interests that Nasser’s standing in Syria should be further strengthened, in the hopes that this would curb communist influence there. However, there was also the fact that the union would lessen any chances of Syria’s strengthening its relations with Iraq in the long run.

There was also the question of the union’s complicating Egyptian-Syrian relations with Israel even further, and the fact that other Arab countries, particularly Jordan, might be pressured to join it. It would also end Saudi Arabia’s influence on Syria, and unsettle the governments of Iraq and Turkey, who would natural not welcome the idea of Nasser’s being in control along their borders.

However, the US had to admit that with both Nasser and Shukri Al Quwatli having announced the union in Cairo on February 1st, and having fixed a date for a referendum regarding it in both countries on February 21st, the union was a fait accompli.
Reactions to the union, both open and in secret, continued.\textsuperscript{255}

b. The Arab Union:

King Hussein considered that the newly-created United Arab Republic constituted a dangerous threat not only to Jordan and Lebanon, but to the whole of the Middle East and indeed the free world, if allowed to carry on unopposed.\textsuperscript{256} He immediately hit upon the idea of forming an organization with other Arab countries, namely Saudi Arabia, Iraq, and Lebanon. The idea sprang from a suggestion to this effect made by Dulles during the Baghdad Pact meeting in Ankara on February 1\textsuperscript{st}, 1958, for the purpose of forming a united front with which to confront the United Arab Republic.

Accordingly, the establishment of an ‘Arab Union’ was announced between Jordan and Iraq on February 14\textsuperscript{th}, 1958, and signed by King Faisal II as president and King Hussein as his deputy. The document stated that each king would preserve his constitutional rights within his kingdom, and that the capital of the union would alternate between Baghdad and Amman every six months. A legislative council was to be formed as well as two local councils to deal with affairs unrelated to the union. The constitution of the union was to be implemented within three months.

The US saw the union as a positive step, and that it was in its best interests as well as those of the free world, to support this Western-oriented union, which in time – and if it succeeded – could play a pivotal role in the Arab arena. The union could also assume a stronger stand before the United Arab Republic.

Nasser was quick to send a telegram of congratulations to King Faisal II on the occasion of the new union on the very day it was signed, stressing that any Arab union meant more power for the Arabs.

c. The Israeli position:

It was only to be expected that Israel would oppose the Egyptian-Syrian union, as it opposed and feared any unanimous activity amongst the Arabs, which it knew would enable them to stand against it, which is why the Israelis joined forces with the colonialists to work against Arab unity.

When Egypt signed the military agreement with Syria and Jordan on October 25\textsuperscript{th}, 1956, the reaction in Israel, as Ben Gurion said, was that

\textsuperscript{255} Telegram from the Department of State to the delegation at the Baghdad Pact Council Meeting in Ankara, January 25\textsuperscript{th}, 1958.
\textsuperscript{256} Telegram from the Embassy in Jordan to the Department of State, February 3\textsuperscript{rd}, 1958.
‘Israel would be like a walnut inside a nutcracker.’ So it was no wonder that the union between Egypt and Syria signified the creation of a powerful new nation in the Middle East, with Nasser – Israel’s sworn enemy – encircling Israel from the north, south, and east with borders 286 kilometers long.

Israel attempted to stage a threat to the United Arab Republic one year after its establishment, by mobilizing it troops on its borders with Syria using fedayeen activities as an excuse. Nasser happened to be in Damascus at the time, and sent directions to Abdel Hakim Amer, the Commander in Chief of the Armed Forces, to mobilize troops in the Sinai to show Israel that their threat to Syria was unacceptable. The mobilization was reported in the media, but the truth is that the ‘mobilization’ consisted simply of spreading out the battalions that were already in Al Arish at the time to make it look as though extra troops had been moved to the Sinai! The ruse succeeded in putting an end to the Israeli threat.

Israel also stirred up a problem around the matter of its ships being allowed navigation through the Suez Canal, by sending the Danish ship Inge Toft to Port Said, knowing full well it would be denied transit through the Canal by the United Arab Republic authorities, as Egypt, in accordance with the Constantinople Convention of 1888, had the right to take the necessary procedures to ensure its defence with regard to the Suez Canal, and a state of war was still ongoing between Israel and the United Arab Republic.

Israel imagined that it could exploit the opportunity of the cooling relationship between the United Arab Republic and the Soviet Union, coupled with the continuing unfriendly relations of the Republic with the West, to benefit from the contrived crisis and present the issue of the passage of Israeli ships through the Suez Canal before the UN Security Council, expecting that this time the Soviets would not use their right of veto against Israel as they had done before in 1954.

Nasser clarified that the position of the United Arab Republic towards the Inge Toft was nothing to do with freedom of navigation in the Suez Canal, but was part of the Palestinian problem. The United Nations had, since 1948, issued numerous resolutions concerning the situation between the Arabs and Israel, and the latter had refused to carry them out, whether with regard to allowing the refugees to return to their homeland, or to compensate them for their usurped properties. In fact, Israel had publicly declared that it did not agree to the UN resolutions and would not

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257 Nasser’s speech on the occasion of the seventh anniversary of the union, February 21st, 1965.
implement them! And now, the Israelis were asking for the right of navigation through the Suez Canal based upon a UN resolution issued in 1951. In other words, Israel wanted to take everything, and grant the Arabs nothing!

**Third: The change in US policy towards Nasser**

Around one month after the union with Syria, the US showed signs of a superficial warming towards Nasser: Egypt’s frozen funds were released after an agreement was reached with the shareholders of the Suez Canal Company; and a program of US aid was arranged covering several phases, beginning with a license for the production of semi-military equipment and some ammunition, as well as spare parts for radio and civil aviation equipment. An immediate sum of 400 thousand US dollars was to be given for road construction and communications, and an exchange program set up between the two countries. It was also decided by the US that if the United Arab Republic continued to acknowledge the danger of communist infiltration, it could also offer agricultural aid and agree to further assistance in the form of development projects. It would also resume the training of United Arab Republic military personnel in the United States.\(^\text{258}\)

On his part, Nasser expressed his wish to establish good relations with the US government, but wished to know the objective behind this new US policy, after they had formerly made it clear that they wished to get rid of him and his regime, which had led him to welcome the Soviet overtures. What, he wondered, were their real motives at this time?! He needed to know, in order to feel that his back was covered! He was aware that his relationship with the US had improved of late, and that there were no major problems between the two countries, except for indirect ones linked to the hostility between the United Arab Republic and the Hashemites.\(^\text{259}\)

On its side, the US government pledged not to interfere in the internal affairs of the United Arab Republic nor to attempt to get rid of him or his regime, citing the US position during the 1956 Tripartite Aggression when the US gave strong support to Egypt, in spite of the detrimental effect this had had on US relations with two of its allies, Britain and France.

However, at the same time this attempt at a rapprochement was taking place, the US sent Nasser a warning regarding the danger of getting closer to the Soviet Union and stressing the importance of his position towards international communism. The US also alluded to the fact that the United Arab

\(^{258}\) Telegram from the Department of State, Washington, to the US Embassy in the United Arab Republic, March 25\(^{\text{th}}\), 1958.

\(^{259}\) Telegram from the Embassy in the United Arab Republic to the Department of State, April 26\(^{\text{th}}\), 1958.
Republic’s continuous attacks on US allies in the region would not help towards improving relations between the US and the United Arab Republic.\textsuperscript{260}

\textbf{CHAPTER II}

\textbf{THE LEBANESE CRISIS}

The political crisis began in Lebanon as a result of the announcement of the Egyptian-Syrian union, when Kamil Chamoun, the President of the Republic, began to worry about the effect the union would have on the Muslim people of Lebanon. This led to his asking the US to move units from the Sixth Fleet into the Mediterranean and place them on the alert.

Robert McClintock, the US Ambassador in Beirut notified Charles Malik, the Lebanese Foreign Minister, that two British battleships and a destroyer and minesweeper would arrive from Cyprus to Beirut the following day, and that the extent to which the US would provide assistance would depend on the nature of the threat, and the proposals made by the government of Lebanon regarding the kind of help they required.\textsuperscript{261}

In actual fact, Dulles had already asked the US Council of Joint Chiefs of Staff on November 8, 1957, to draw up a plan for potential joint military intervention between the US and the United Kingdom in the case of a coup d’état taking place in either Jordan or Lebanon, and the plan was actually made ready for this eventuality, but remained secret.\textsuperscript{262}

Chamoun, after having asked for US military assistance to support him in the political struggle taking place in his country, began to plan for his re-election when the date of the end of his presidency on September 22\textsuperscript{nd}, 1958, drew near. This meant completely disregarding the Lebanese constitution, which stated that the duration of the presidency should not exceed six years, and amending its terms! He believed he had enough support within parliament to carry out his plans, choosing to ignore the havoc this political coup would have on internal affairs in Lebanon!

\textsuperscript{260} Telegram from the Department of State, Washington, to the Embassy in the Arab Republic of Egypt, May 17\textsuperscript{th}, 1958.
\textsuperscript{261} Telegram from the Embassy in Lebanon to the Department of State, January 30\textsuperscript{th}, 1958.
\textsuperscript{262} Letter from John Irwin, Acting assistant Secretary of Defense for International Security Affairs, to the Deputy Secretary of State for Political Affairs (Murphy), Washington, February 6\textsuperscript{th}, 1958.
Chamoun pressurizes the US into helping him breach the constitution with military intervention:
Chamoun asked the US for help in the dangerous step he intended to take, under the pretext of an internal threat to Lebanon. He claimed he had proof that arms were being smuggled into Lebanon by agents of the United Arab Republic via the Syrian mountains and also by boat to Tripoli and Saida., and that if this carried on, the Christians would be forced to ask for arms to confront the Muslim threat!

The US response to this was that the Lebanese elections were an internal affair, and voiced their reservations regarding trying to amend the constitution in order to enable Chamoun to be re-elected, as this would have very negative impacts on internal security in Lebanon.

Chamoun refused to budge, however, and even asked for fifteen million dollars in aid to boost the Lebanese economy, claiming that if the issue were merely an internal matter of Chamoun against his rivals, he could have handled it, but that in his opinion, ‘external forces’ were against him, including the United Arab Republic and Nasser’s supporters everywhere!

Such were the excuses that Chamoun used to pressurize the US into supporting him.

The situation in the Middle East was further complicated by the events in Jordan, which threatened to create yet another crisis in the region. Chamoun took the opportunity of sending an urgent letter to Eisenhower, expressing his concern over what was happening in Jordan.

Eisenhower replied:

“I share your belief that the latest developments in Jordan are important; the independence of Jordan and its safety are of paramount importance to the United States, and we are monitoring the situation closely. We have informed King Hussein of our support, and have expressed our appreciation to King Saud for the effective steps he has taken to support King Hussein and are in contact with the government of Iraq and agree with the mobilization of its troops in readiness to come to the aid of King Hussein if need be. The US has also notified Israel that it has to practice self-restraint toward the crisis in Jordan, and has moved units from the Sixth Fleet to the Mediterranean.”

Chamoun, in an attempt to put even more pressure on the US, cited the Eisenhower Doctrine, which Congress had agreed to on March 9th, 1957 and which

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263 Telegram from the Department of State, Washington, to the Embassy in Lebanon, March 18th, 1958.
264 Eisenhower’s reply to Chamoun.
stated that economic and military aid would be given to any country in the region that requested assistance, and that under specific circumstances the US would move militarily to assist any country in the Middle East that was subjected to an attack.

Britain and France were also pressurizing the US to intervene militarily in Lebanon, which they expressed openly during the NATO meeting in Copenhagen in May 1958.265

Chamoun also announced his decision to run for another presidential term, and his intention to ask parliament to amend the constitution!

Communications then followed in quick succession to the United States: 300 armed men had crossed the border into Lebanon from Syria! The embassies of both the Soviet Union and the United Arab Republic were working 24/7 to destroy Lebanon! Chamoun then personally requested that twenty tanks with ammunition be sent immediately by air, and that a plan be made for the US Marines to be deployed at once in the case of a Syrian-Egyptian attack!266

**Events move thick and fast**

On May 8th, 1958, Nasib Al Matni, a leftist journalist with the opposition newspaper Al Telegraf, and a staunch critic of Chamoun, was assassinated in Beirut, which led to a general strike by the opposition, and an uprising in Tripoli the following day, and the burning of the American Library on the tenth of May.

The sequence of events was as follows: when the opposition heard of Chamoun’s intention to amend the constitution, the Muslim leaders under Rashid Karami, Saeb Salam, Abdallah Al Yafi and Henri Pharaon decided to respond the assassination of Al Matni and began an uprising that would foil Chamoun’s attempts to be re-elected.

The opposition forces demanded the immediate resignation of Kamil Chamoun, who predictably refused. Saeb Salam, Henry Pharaon and Raymond Eddé got in touch with General Fouad Shehab, Commander of the Lebanese Armed Forces, and demanded the resignation of the government of Sami Al Solh, and that it be replaced by a coalition government headed by General Shehab himself.

**The role of the US**

265 Telegram from the Secretary of State to the Department of State, Copenhagen, May 6th, 1958.
266 Telegram from the Embassy in Lebanon to the Department of State, May 7th, 1958.
At this point, Chamoun sent three letters to the heads of state of the US, Britain, and France, stating that, ‘The situation is extremely dangerous!’ and reminding them of the guarantees that had been given to Lebanon regarding its safety and independence. He asked them to send military forces ‘within 24 hours’, adding that he was making this request only after having consulted with the Prime Minister and the Lebanese government. The matter had now transcended the issue of the presidential elections and become a question of the very existence of Lebanon as a nation, regardless of the individuals involved.267

A discussion took place regarding the repercussions of the arrival of US troops to Lebanon, the most important of which was the creation of a wave of anti-Western sentiments throughout the Arab world, and the possibility of Syria cutting off the supplies of oil and the Suez Canal being closed to US and British ships, which could add to a serious oil shortage.

As for the United Kingdom, the government, headed by Harold Macmillan, discussed the possibility of responding positively to Chamoun’s request for military intervention, and decided to do so if the US agreed, leaving the bulk of the mission to the US.

It was also feared that if the US were to receive the support of the Iraqi and Jordanian governments for its military intervention, this backing could lead to the collapse of the governments under popular pressure!

Eisenhower decided to place the US forces on the alert. He discounted the possibility of a Soviet reaction so long as the military intervention was limited to Lebanon alone. He also informed Chamoun that the objective of the US was not to back him in seeking a second term of office.268

It was agreed within the US government to justify the military intervention by declaring that based upon the request of the Lebanese President and government, the US had decided to send some forces to Lebanon for the purpose of defending the lives and possessions of US nationals there and to help the Lebanese government in its efforts to safeguard the safety and independence of the country, which was a matter of vital importance to the interests of the US and to world peace. These forces were authorized to defend themselves when necessary in the form of a counter attack.

The Lebanese government also submitted a complaint to the Security Council 269 at the same time as it was asking for military intervention.

267 Telegram from the Embassy in Lebanon to the Department of State, May 11th and 13th, 1958.
269 Telegram from the Department of State, Washington, to the Embassy in Lebanon, May 13th, 1958.
The repercussions of the US military intervention

a. **Nasser’s reaction:**

This development came as a great disappointment to Nasser, especially as it occurred at a time when he was genuine about wishing to improve relations with the US, and had in fact taken the initiative to try and help solve the crisis in Lebanon, regarding which the US had not been forthcoming. It became obvious to Nasser that the US was intent upon a secret plan to intervene in Lebanon, together with the British army, a suspicion supported by the movements of the American Sixth Fleet, the transfer of British troops to Cyprus, and the visits to Lebanon by US military personnel in civilian clothing. It was clear that the US government was directing these operations and that the situation was unfortunately beyond control.

The Lebanese crisis only served to consolidate the cause of Arab unity; it was only to be expected that Nasser and his supporters would consider the US military intervention as an act of flagrant defiance of the objectives of Arab nationalism, and that Nasser would intensify his campaign against the US, the Baghdad Pact, and the governments hostile to the United Arab Republic, particularly Jordan and Iraq. Nasser would also take strong steps to denounce this intervention within the UN with the support of the Soviets.

It was also expected that Nasser would intensify his secret support of the opposition forces in Lebanon, who would sabotage the Western oil resources in the region.

b. **The position of the Lebanese Army leaders:**

The US was aware of a problem that could occur if it intervened militarily, namely the internal situation in Lebanon. Its military intervention could be construed as supporting Chamoun’s remaining in office in defiance of the constitution, which would not be accepted by the Lebanese army.

The US enjoyed cordial relations with Major-General Fouad Shehab, who was pro-Western; however, Shehab did not wish the US to intervene in such circumstances as this could destroy US influence in the Middle East in the future.\(^270\)

c. **The Soviet reaction:**

The Soviet news agency TASS declared on May 17\(^{th}\), 1958, that a US or Western military intervention in Lebanon could have dangerous consequences not only to Lebanon but also to peace in the Middle East, and therefore the Soviet reaction to such intervention would be decisive, and could include increased

\(^{270}\) Memorandum from Colonel D.J. Decker to Admiral Burke, Chief of Naval Operations,
military support to nationalistic elements as well as volunteers, which would increase the chances of a clash between the USA and the Soviet Union.

d. The impact on the rest of the Middle East:
It was expected that the governments of Jordan and Iraq would welcome the US military intervention as a blow directed against Nasser, while the governments of the two countries would react strongly against it, which would hinder the freedom of these governments to act in support of the intervention. It was also expected that the governments of Libya and the Sudan would likewise welcome this intervention due to their resentment of Nasser’s immense popularity in the Arab world, but would be even more hampered than Iraq and Jordan in publicly voicing their support. As for the governments of Turkey, Iran, and Pakistan, they would be sure to support the US.

e. Israel’s reaction:
Naturally, Israel would welcome the US military intervention, while remaining well aware that any covert cooperation on its part would be frowned upon by the West and would lead to the Arabs uniting. Accordingly, Israel would avoid direct involvement in the situation so long as the struggle remained contained within the Lebanon.

f. The consequences of the US failing to intervene:
There was an opposing view within the US government which saw that failure to intervene would be detrimental to US interests in the region, especially as it had been publicly requested to do so after the collapse of the pro-Western government in Lebanon. Any compromise regarding the Lebanese crisis would lead to a loss of face and a diminishing of US influence in the region. Moreover, the collapse of the pro-Western government without any action being taken by the US would increase the activities of the United Arab Republic and its supporters within Lebanon, and the Lebanese public would look towards the United Arab Republic as a model to be aspired to, in addition to the increased possibility of the collapse of anti-Nasser regimes.

It would thus seem that the two sides of the conflict in Lebanon were Nasser on the one hand, and the US and the West on the other. The US felt that if it were to intervene under these circumstances in response to Chamoun’s request for help, the reactions of the Christians would be divided, while the majority of Muslims would vehemently oppose this intervention. In other words, the US would find itself fighting against not only the patriotic elements loyal to the United Arab Republic, but also a large segment of the Lebanese people who, while not usually anti-Western, nevertheless opposed Chamoun and any foreign interference on principle. Furthermore, the domestic conflict between Muslims and Christians would not only escalate, but would widen in scope to become a battle between Arab nationalism and the West.
Ultimately, in the long run, any regime dependent on the US to this extent was bound to be despised, not only by the anti-Western camp but also by most of the moderate elements as well.

g. Chamoun retreats:
It was suddenly announced by the Lebanese government that it would not, after all, be amending the constitution to allow the president to run for a second term in office; this came in response to Nasser’s expressing his willingness to use his influence with the leaders of the opposition to help resolve the Lebanese crisis. The presidential elections would take place on July 23rd, in accordance with the constitution.

Nasser’s proposals to end the Lebanese crisis:
The US government contacted Nasser on June 7th to ascertain his view on the crisis. Nasser informed Raymond Hare, the US Ambassador in Cairo, that he had no intention of trying to make Lebanon part of the United Arab Republic and that all he wanted was for Lebanon to have a government that was not hostile to the Republic.

Nasser voiced his concern at the way matters were deteriorating in Lebanon and suggested a joint effort be made by both the US and the United Arab Republic as this was the only way that might work. As for him asking Chamoun to pardon the opposition, Nasser did not feel this would be any use as Chamoun disliked him and would accuse him of interfering in Lebanon’s domestic affairs. It would be better, said Nasser, for this request to be made jointly by both the US and the United Arab Republic, or better still, by the US alone. If the Lebanese government were to agree to the US request, Nasser would personally do all he could to persuade the opposition to accept the government’s initiative, just as he would have done had the request been made jointly.

Nasser expressed the view that the elections should not be rushed into at a time when emotions were running high, saying that Shehab was the only eligible candidate to replace Sami Al Solh, the current prime minister, and was also the logical choice for president. He added that Shehab was worthy of trust, even though he was pro-Western and not loyal to Nasser. What mattered, said Nasser, was the security of Lebanon and that meant having a prime minister whom the opposition trusted, then a president regarding whom there was a general consensus. If that were to happen, and Shehab were to be chosen, things would look far more promising.

These suggestions, said Nasser, had not been previously discussed with the opposition, so he was not sure that they would prove acceptable, but it was worth a try.
As to his having attacked the Lebanese government before the trouble began, Nasser said that they had been engaging in anti-Egyptian activities with other countries in the region, notably Jordan and Saudi Arabia, and had moreover allowed Lebanon to become an asylum for conspirators against Syria and Egypt, then against the United Arab Republic later on, and that if these attacks stopped, there would be no more problems.\textsuperscript{271}

The following note in Nasser’s handwriting was amongst his personal papers:

“The provocative procedures the Lebanese leaders are taking against the citizens of the United Arab Republic which include arrest, torture, terrorizing, and expulsion, only go to show that these people have lost their minds and are still looking for ways to antagonize the United Arab Republic so that the domestic quarrels within Lebanon escalate into a quarrel with the United Arab Republic. However, the government of the United Arab Republic will not treat the Lebanese people in the same way, nor will it have them bear the brunt of the hostile, provocative activities of the Lebanese government.”

Dulles was of the opinion that he was not averse to Nasser’s suggestions if they could have an impact on the opposition, but that the US could not take a joint position with the United Arab Republic towards a domestic affair in Lebanon. The US did not share Nasser’s concern over the fate of the opposition leaders; all they could was to convey his suggestions to Chamoun, but could not guarantee that the US could in any way control how an independent government behaved towards its people!

However, eventually the US agreed to the following proposals made by Nasser: that Chamoun should complete his term as president, that Shehab should become prime minister, and that the opposition should be pardoned. In return, the opposition pledged to henceforth pursue its aims in a constitutional manner only, while the United Arab Republic pledged to do everything possible to prevent its territory or resources being used for the purpose of instigating or supporting armed insurrection in Lebanon.

After discussing the above proposals with Chamoun, he agreed to pardon the opposition if the violence were to end and order be restored in Lebanon.\textsuperscript{272}

The violence escalates in Lebanon:
The situation deteriorated, however, and by June 14\textsuperscript{th}, 1958 had become critical. Clashes were now taking place around the presidential palace, and by the following

\textsuperscript{271} Telegram from the Embassy in Egypt to the Department of State, Cairo, June 7\textsuperscript{th}, 1958.
\textsuperscript{272} Telegrams from the Department of State, Washington, to the Embassy in Egypt, June 5\textsuperscript{th}, 9\textsuperscript{th}, 12\textsuperscript{th}, 1958.
day matters had become even worse. Chamoun entreated the US to intervene militarily at once, though his Minister of Foreign Affairs, Charles Malik, objected on the grounds that any Middle Eastern country resorting to military assistance from a Western power would become an object of derision and shame for generations to come! He said such intervention should only be a last resort, and that there must be Arab cooperation or at least support regarding this intervention, even if only verbally; there should also be moral backing from the United Nations, whether the Security Council or the General Assembly.

Eisenhower also recalled what had happened at the beginning of the Fifties, when the British were trying to hang on to the Suez Canal base while the whole country was against them, creating an intolerable situation. He added that the Tripartite Declaration of 1950 referred only to external attacks, and raised the question of what the future would hold if the US were to intervene: how long would they remain there?! Eisenhower felt that the logic the US had used towards the British and French regarding their intervention in Suez could well apply to the current situation, particularly the question of where this military intervention would lead, and how would it end?

In short, Eisenhower did not support the idea of a military intervention at this point, and saw that what Lebanon really needed was a strong leader that the US could support without dragging the US into interfering to save a country that did not want it to meddle in its affairs!

Dulles, on the other hand, was all for military intervention, for a number of reasons: the situation in Iraq was unsettled and shaky, as was the so-called ‘Arab Union’; moreover, Chamoun had a strong case, which had been presented by Malik at the Security Council, proving the intervention of the United Arab Republic in Lebanon. However, neither the Lebanese people nor parliament had accepted this accusation, and a case of civil disobedience ensued. The fundamental reason for all the difficulties Chamoun was faced with, in Dulles’s opinion, was Nasser’s enmity, which was hand in hand with the objectives of the Soviet policies in the Middle East, and so long as Syria was firmly in Nasser’s grasp, there could be no peace in Lebanon. Chamoun also intended to order Shehab to dismiss any officers who were not loyal to him within the army, so as to avoid any confrontation between them and the US marines.273

Dulles then reiterated what he had said before: that if the US did not respond to Chamoun’s cry for help, this would spell the end of any pro-Western government in the region, which meant the US had no choice but to intervene, even if it were the wrong thing to do!

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273 Telegram from the Embassy in Lebanon to the Department of State, July 17th, 1958.
Eisenhower capitulated, and agreed to US military intervention in Lebanon!  

By that time the situation in Tripoli had become explosive; the opposition had a large store of ammunition and battles were taking place using bazookas and mortar; and the situation in Beirut was no better.

Chamoun was not willing to accept a compromise; on principle, he insisted that Nasser had no part to play in the internal or external affairs of Lebanon, and any compromise would weaken the legitimate authority of Lebanon and encourage the rebels. He also refused to negotiate with the opposition so long as there were Egyptians and Syrians on Lebanese soil.

Fourth: the role of the UN in the Lebanese crisis
Based upon the discussions Hammarskjold had held with both Nasser and Chamoun, the UN Secretary-General suggested that the borders be monitored between the United Arab Republic and Lebanon, and Lebanon on the Syrian side. Accordingly, UN observers were sent to the borders, but were unable to confirm the alleged illegal infiltration of men and arms from the United Arab Republic!

Dulles urged Hammarskjold to find a solution that would safeguard the independence of Lebanon and avoid any victory for Nasser (!) by coming up with a political compromise between Chamoun and the rebels. Hammarskjold responded that there could be no such compromise, adding that Nasser had not wished to interfere in the internal affairs of Lebanon and that he had only done so at the insistence of the Syrians, who had led the movement to support the nationalistic Lebanese. Hammarskjold’s opinion was that Nasser was placed in a situation that compelled him to act.

Fifth: The unexpected Iraqi revolution expedites the US military intervention in Lebanon
The world was taken by surprise when the Iraqi revolution erupted on July 14th, 1958; a revolution that overturned the balance of affairs in the Middle East completely. The Iraqi monarchy under King Faisal II, assisted by his prime minister, Nouri Al Said, had headed the pro-Western countries politically and militarily and Iraq was an active member of the Baghdad Pact which was actually named after its capital, and the British military base was stationed there, serving as an important link in the ring surrounding the Soviet Union that the US had plotted for.

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275 Memorandum of a conversation, White House, Department of State, Washington, July 7th, 1958.
The Iraqi revolution from its onset was bloody and violent; King Faisal II was killed as was the crown prince, Nouri Al Said, Fadel Al Jamali and other officials. The revolutionaries took over Baghdad radio station and closed the British Embassy.

The West realized from the beginning that the Iraq revolution was hostile to them and pro-Nasser in its direction. The first step the US took on the day the revolution broke out was to cancel the scheduled delivery of F-86 planes and military equipment to Iraq.

On the day of the revolution, King Saud had urgently requested Eisenhower to intervene militarily using the Baghdad Pact forces in order to quell the revolution and prevent another one taking place in Jordan.

The US was concerned about the situation in Jordan and the fate of the ‘Arab Union’, and began to talk of a connection between the Iraqi revolution and the Lebanese crisis, and felt that there was no choice but to intervene not only in Lebanon, but to be prepared to do so in the whole region! It was decided to share this task with the British in Iraq and in Kuwait, and to review the possibility of Israeli intervention in Jordan and of Turkish intervention in Syria! The US Sixth Fleet was on alert, and the US marines ready to descend on the Lebanese shore within twelve hours of the order being given. As usual, the US was careful to secure UN sanction for the military action before authorizing the invasion!

The expected Soviet reaction was that US military intervention in Lebanon would entail the risk of a full-scale war.276

**Eisenhower reviews the situation in the Middle East after the Iraqi revolution**

A meeting took place in the White House where the information surrounding events in Iraq was reviewed. Concern was voiced over the situation of King Hussein in Jordan, which was seen as critical, especially as he was president of the ‘Arab Union’ and Commander in Chief of the armed forces.

Chamoun continued to urge the US to intervene within 48 hours, and informed the US government that he had made the same request to the United Kingdom and to France.

King Saud also requested immediate intervention, stressing that if the US and the United Kingdom did not act at once, that would spell their end as a major power in the Middle East!

The White House meeting included the following discussion:

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276 Memorandum of a record of a meeting, the White House, Department of State, Washington, July 14th, 1958.
Eisenhower: “We need to act!”

Dulles: “What are the Russians going to do? If we intervene, we must expect threats to Turkey and Iran. The Russians do not have long-range missiles or planes, and if we don’t grab the opportunity now, they will bring pressure to bear on the surrounding countries, who will surrender to them. If we don’t respond to Chamoun’s request, our influence will crumble from Indonesia to Morocco. If we do intervene, we must expect a negative reaction from most of the Arab states; cutting off oil supplies, obstruction of navigation in the Suez Canal, hostile activities throughout the region, and the British will have to invade Kuwait.

“On the other hand, the losses that will ensue as a result of our failure to intervene will be even worse. We will have to send our forces to Lebanon in order not to lose our allies; as for Iraq, it is the responsibility of the United Kingdom.”

Eisenhower: “What worries me more than the issue of what the Russians will do, is the reaction of the people in the region.”

Dulles: “Israel will stay out of it if we intervene in Jordan and Iraq; as for Saudi Arabia, the real power is in the hands of the tribes that are loyal to the king.

“Western Europe will support the United Kingdom with the exception of Scandinavia, and most of Latin America will support the US if pressure is brought to bear upon them to do so. Most Asian countries will be hostile to us, including India and Ceylon, and perhaps Burma. The same goes for most of Africa. We need to request an emergency meeting of the Security Council.”

Eisenhower: “Losing this region as a result of failure to intervene will be worse than the loss of China, because of the strategic location of the Middle East and its resources. The most strategic action to take in the current circumstances would be to attack Cairo, but this we cannot do!”

Dulles: “It will be said that we are doing what we previously stopped Britain and France from doing at the time of the Suez crisis!”

Dulles then listed the dangers of the military intervention in Lebanon, including negative publicity, but pointed out that the situation differed from the circumstances of the Suez war, because this time, a country was in danger of attack and had asked the United States to intervene.

\[277\] Memorandum of a conference with the President, the White House, Department of State, Washington, July 14th, 1958.
The US takes a final decision to intervene in Lebanon:
It would seem that Eisenhower had taken the decision to intervene in Lebanon as a substitute for his desire to attack Cairo! The countdown began, and required several procedures: to inform Hammarskjold that the situation had changed as a result of events in Iraq and that the US was requesting an emergency session of the Security Council as it did not want to take action without notifying the UN, and that the situation involved a full-scale revolution.

At the same time, Eisenhower held a meeting in the White House with the leaders of Congress to win their support for the military intervention in Lebanon, outlining the details of the situation in the Middle East and explaining how dangerous matters there were after the Iraqi revolution, and telling them that the US could not guarantee the freedom of Lebanon in the case of failure to intervene.

Eisenhower explained that what was happening in Lebanon was a civil war stirred up by Nasser! And that he was acting in his capacity as Commander in Chief of the Armed Forces, and was therefore putting the matter before Congress.

It was decided that the US should invade Lebanon alone, without the help of the United Kingdom, and that there should be an element of surprise so that the Lebanese opposition would not have time to organize itself and confront the US attack. The US should also be prepared to intervene in the whole of the Middle East region, which would mean sharing the action with the United Kingdom, which would be responsible for Iraq and Jordan, while Israel could possibly advance to the West Bank, and the Turks to Syria. The scope of Western intervention in the region would depend largely on the nature and extent of the Soviet reaction, bearing in mind that this could lead to a full-scale war.

Harold Macmillan held a telephone conversation with Eisenhower in which he expressed his support for the decision to invade Lebanon, and his willingness to protect Jordan and ‘take care of’ the Gulf states, saying that he had already taken initial steps towards this. He added that the joint objective of both the US and the United Kingdom was not merely to save Lebanon, which was not in itself important, but to confront wider issues resulting from the events in Iraq.

The US military leaders were directed to carry out the invasion of Lebanon, and were informed by Shehab of his fear that his own people would resist the intervention! Safe passage was arranged for the US forces along the road stretching

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278 Ibid.
279 Memorandum for the record of a meeting at the White House, Department of State, Washington, July 14th, 1958, meeting re Iraq.
from the airport to the port of Beirut, with Lebanese forces and tanks lining it all the way. The US forces arrived safely to Beirut port on July 16th, 1958.

On the same day, Eisenhower decided to send Robert Murphy to Lebanon as his own personal representative; this was two days after the Iraqi revolution, and the objective was to establish better relations between the US diplomats and armed forces, and the Lebanese government and military.

**How did Nasser receive the news of the Iraqi revolution and the US invasion of Lebanon?**

Nasser received news of the Iraq revolution whilst on board the Egyptian ship Al Horreya in the Mediterranean, accompanied by this family, on his way back from Brioni in the former Yugoslavia. He issued immediate orders for a general mobilization in the United Arab republic and began military manoeuvres all along the borders of the United Arab Republic with Turkey and Iran.

The first telegram received by Nasser from Baghdad on the day of the revolution, July 14th, was signed by the State Council and said:

“It is with great pride and honour that we present our recognition of the United Arab Republic, asking God to aid us all in the service of Arab nationalism in its glorious struggle and to support all people aspiring to freedom.”

Nasser felt that this telegram placed upon him the burden of safeguarding the Iraqi revolution from the outside:

“This is our duty in any case, even if they have not requested it openly. In their current circumstances, they are faced with the problem of internal security and safeguarding the revolution; we must take care of the external battle to allow them to consolidate their internal affairs.”

Thus, from aboard the ship Al Horreya, Nasser recognized the new regime in Iraq, and declared a state of general mobilization in the United Arab Republic. He moved to the cruiser Nasser and made his way back to Yugoslavia, and from on board ship announced – as the US forces were landing in Beirut – that any attack on Iraq would be considered the same as an attack on the United Arab Republic, and that he was ready to fight if there was to be a war.

Nasser decided to meet with Khrushchev in Moscow to discuss the situation and review the dangers threatening the United Arab Republic from the colonialist countries. Khrushchev welcomed the meeting, which took place secretly in
Moscow. The two leaders discussed putting an end to the aggression against the Arab world and safeguarding the security and independence of the region.  

Nasser then proceeded to Syria by air, where he met with a delegation representing the Iraqi revolution. He immediately gave them his full support and expressed his willingness to fulfil their requests, saying the battle was one, and the destiny was one.

The Iraqi revolution had caused a radical change: within just a few hours, the shadow of Arab nationalism had spread all over the map of the Middle East, replacing that of colonialism except for a few small, scattered pockets! The battle between Arab nationalism and the West had now entered a crucial stage.

The fall of the Baghdad Pact after the Iraqi revolution constituted a victory for Nasser, who had fought against it since its inception in 1955, and had always struggled against spheres of influence, and attempts at hegemony and control.

There followed a declaration from Damascus on July 19th, 1958, announcing an agreement between the United Arab Republic and what was now the Republic of Iraq, the most important articles of which were: the confirmation of the ties and charters binding the two countries, most important of which was the charter of the Arab League; that the two countries would stand united before any attack; full cooperation in regarding international affairs; economic cooperation; and an ongoing interchange of views on all aspects.

Immediately after the US invasion of Lebanon, Nasser declared on July 16th:

“The occupation of Lebanon by US forces constitutes a threat to peace in the Middle East, a dangerous attack on the United Nations Charter, and a blatant threat to the Arab countries who refused to succumb to colonialism and insisted on following a policy of independence.”

It was obvious to Nasser that the US government had used the domestic unrest in Lebanon as an excuse to occupy that small Arab country and to threaten the independent Middle Eastern states. This dangerous act of aggression, under the pretext of alleged United Arab Republic interference in Lebanon, a claim that was officially denied by the United Nations following the report of UN observers commissioned to investigate the situation in Lebanon, exposed the true intentions of the United States towards the independent Arab nations and their attempts to

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281 Nasser’s speech on the occasion of the celebration of the revolution, attended by the Iraqi delegation, July 22nd, 1958.
282 Mohamed Hassanein Heikal in his column, article No. 5, Al Ahram newspaper, December 15th, 1958.
283 Nasser’s speech on December 23rd, 1958.
subjugate and control them, as well as US abuse of the United Nations by flouting its resolutions and hindering its procedures.

As for the situation in Iraq, the government of the United Arab Republic announced once more that any attack on the Arab Republic of Iraq constituted an attack on the United Arab Republic, in which case the United Arab republic would fulfill all its obligations towards the Republic of Iraq in accordance with the Joint Arab Security charter.

Nasser expressed his feelings and those of the Arab world four days after the Iraqi revolution in a speech he made in Damascus:

“Today, we stand stronger than before; today, we feel the flag of freedom being raised in the skies over the Arab world.... Arab nationalism has been set free.

“Today, I speak to your brothers in Iraq and tell them: we stand by you, brothers, because our battle is one and the same... The flame of Arab nationalism will remain forever upheld, because it is not contained in one person called Gamal Abdel Nasser, but represents the whole Arab nation.

“I announce in your name and from this place where I stand before you, that we will all carry weapons to defend the flame of freedom that has triumphed in Iraq... We will all carry weapons to defend Arab nationalism and strengthen its foundations...

“We have seen the threats emanating from the colonialist states; we have seen America occupying Lebanon, and Britain occupying Jordan, and I say, in your names: there was occupation in the past, British and French... where are they now? The age of occupation is over, it has now become ashes, but the flame of freedom will triumph.

“We make peace with those who want peace with us, and are hostile to those hostile to us; and if they turn into enemies, we will fight until the last drop of blood. That is our way, that is our motto.

“They say the United Arab republic has interfered in Lebanon and that that is why they are there, to defend Lebanon! They also say that the United Arab Republic has interfered in Jordan, and that is why they have occupied Jordan! America told us yesterday that we are responsible for the security of American troops in Lebanon; I really don’t know how they can invade Lebanon and occupy it, and consider us responsible for protecting the invasion?!

“We are not afraid of threats, we are not afraid of fleets, we are not afraid of atom bombs! We are ready for the worst possible alternatives, but again I say: we make
peace with those who want peace with us, and match hostility with hostility. Peace never means surrender! The leaders of the Western countries must learn that Arab nationalism is strong and thriving everywhere, and has become a solid truth...

“Today, I feel that our brothers in Iraq have been freed from their shackles; they have torn down the walls of a great prison and together, we can form a great power... we can overcome the enemy!”

Amongst Nasser’s personal papers was the following note in his handwriting:

“The objective of the armed invasion of Lebanon and Jordan is to create a bridgehead in the Arab world, as well as to support the reactionary leaders. I have received information that the invading troops in Lebanon and Jordan are intending to attack Iraq and the United Arab Republic”!

This information was revealed to be true; White House documents proved that Eisenhower had discussed invading Iraq with Macmillan, and Eisenhower – as previously mentioned – had said that the ideal strategic move would be for the US to attack Cairo, but he did not dare to do so.

On September 9th, 1958, Nasser announced during the executive meeting of the council of the United Arab States that the invasion of Lebanon and Jordan constituted a threat to each and every Arab state:

“A threat to Arab nationalism is a threat to the independence of every Arab country... We demand a withdrawal from Lebanon and a withdrawal from Jordan, and demand the liberation of Aden and the south of the Arab peninsular, and demand the independence of Algeria; these were the principles of the United nations that were declared after World War II, then later on, were denied!”

Regarding the situation in Lebanon, Nasser added:

“It was lucky that matters developed in a way that permitted Major-General Fouad Shehab to become President of the Republic of Lebanon.”

He sent a warm, friendly message to Shehab, and later met with him in a tent on the Syrian-Lebanese border on March 25th, 1959. The two leaders agreed on close cooperation between their two countries, to uphold the principles of independence and sovereignty, the right for countries to decide their own destiny, and liberation from foreign hegemony and colonialism.

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284 Nasser’s speech in Damascus, July 18th, 1958.
285 The United Arab States was a short-lived confederation of the United Arab Republic (Egypt and Syria) and North Yemen, and lasted from 1958-1961.
286 Nasser’s interview with the Indian reporter Karanjia, head of the newspaper Blitz, September 28th, 1958.
What exacerbated the situation even further was when the US notified Nasser in an urgent message two days after the Iraqi revolution stating that the entry of US forces into Lebanon was at the request of its government, and had taken place for the purpose of helping to preserve the independence of Lebanon as well as the security of US citizens there, and that the US intended to withdraw its forces once circumstances permitted them to do so. The US government assured Nasser that the invading forces were not on a hostile mission, and that they could not refrain from acceding to the request for protection from a small country that had appealed to it for help, which had become a necessity after the bloody elimination of the legitimate government of Iraq!

The message ended with the warning that if US forces were subjected to an attack from United Arab Republic forces or elements under Nasser’s control, there would be grave danger of the problem widening in scope, and threatening the relations of the United States with the United Arab Republic!  

This message to Nasser from the US government was an attempt to neutralize him militarily and propaganda-wise, which failed to happen. It contained a blatant threat to Nasser, a matter he was accustomed to from the West and which he utterly disregarded.

The truth was that the main stumbling block in any attempt to improve relations between Nasser and the US at this time was the strong relations Nasser enjoyed with the Soviet Union, in addition to his influence on patriotic elements in the Middle East with his call for Arab unity and Arab nationalism, which was anathema to the US and the West.

Another nail in the coffin of US relations with Nasser was the assistance the US gave to the French in Algeria, and its refusal to recognize the wish of the Algerian people for independence. The US also backed Bourguiba when he accused the government of the United Arab Republic of plotting to assassinate him, and presented a memo to the Arab League asking for the matter to be investigated, a fabricated farce which led to the cutting of relations between Tunisia and the United Arab Republic.  

There was always a fundamental issue in Nasser’s relations with the US, which was that he simply did not trust that they would not take the opportunity of a problem with the communists to stab him in the back!

The Soviet reaction to the military intervention in Lebanon and Iraq:

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287 Telegram from the Department of State, Washington, to the Embassy in Cairo, July 17th, 1958.
288 Telegram from the Department of State, Washington, to the Embassy in Cairo, October 28th, 1958.
The Soviet Union issued a statement the day of the Iraq revolution on July 14th, 1958, in which they accused the United States of attacking the Middle East which created a situation that constituted a serious threat to peace. The statement was intended as a warning to the West not to attempt to take any action against the new Iraqi regime.

The Soviet government asked the US government to stop its military intervention in the domestic affairs of Arab countries and to withdraw its troops immediately from Lebanon. The Soviets announced that they could not remain passive towards events that created a serious threat to a region on their borders, and reserved the right to take the necessary procedures to protect its interests and those of peace and security.

This was followed by another statement on July 18th, 1958, in which the Soviet Union called for a meeting of the superpowers to review the global situation and end the prevailing tension which threatened to end in war.

Nasser supported this statement, saying:

“"We are fed up with the Cold War, and with military alliances, and with the world being split into two camps. In short, we are fed up with the threat of war breaking out every single day."”\(^{289}\)

Khrushchev stated that the Iraqi revolution had come as a complete surprise to the Soviets; the Baghdad Pact and its allies suddenly ceased to exist, and in fact Baghdad was now totally against the Pact!

During their previously-mentioned secret meeting in Moscow on July 18th, 1958, Nasser and Khrushchev agreed that attacks against the Arabs must stop, that the security and independence of the Arab countries must be maintained, and all efforts made to promote world peace.\(^{290}\)

The US also saw that the transportation of oil from the Middle East to Europe being under the control of Cairo, whether via the Suez Canal or though pipelines to the Mediterranean, was a threat to US interests and a fearful weapon in the hands of Nasser!\(^{291}\) This led the US to try and improve their standing with Nasser, hoping to do away with what they imagined to be Nasser’s belief that his only friends were the Soviets. The US supposed that Nasser saw the Soviets as a means to achieving his aims of exterminating Israel (as they thought), and overthrowing pro-Western governments in the Middle East, and that the Soviets, being free of ties and

\(^{289}\) Nasser’s speech on July 22nd, 1958, ibid.


\(^{291}\) Ibid.
commitments in the region, were willing to help Nasser achieve his goals, believing that in this way they would ultimately control the region! And as the US could not participate in these (imaginary) objectives, it could not attain the same level of friendship with Nasser as the Soviets.²⁹²

The Soviet position towards the armed Western intervention in Lebanon and Jordan was that its purpose was to support the reactionary governments. They also had access to information – proved by US documents – that the basic purpose was to attack Iraq and the United Arab Republic. The Soviet government expressed its willingness to assist in whatever procedures the United Arab Republic chose to take in the pursuit of peace and stability in the Middle East, and informed Nasser that they had sent a warning to both Turkey and Iran against their participating in the planned invasion of Iraq and the United Arab Republic.²⁹³

The US meanwhile was busy evaluating the Western and Soviet situation in the region. The US knew full well that the mood and general political trend in the Middle East were anti-American and anti-Western, attributing this to two main reasons: the radical Pan-Arab movement, and the introduction of the Soviet Union as a player in the region, conveniently forgetting that the Soviet Union had won Egypt’s friendship by agreeing to supply it with arms after the West had been refusing to do so for more than three years, and by financing the High Dam after the US withdrew its offer to do so in the most antagonizing manner!

The US, aware of the crucial importance of the Middle East oil to its NATO allies, and of securing the transportation of weapons, imagined that the biggest challenge to the interests of the West in the region lay not in Arab nationalism per se, but in the correspondence of many of its objectives with those of the Soviet Union! And that Soviet policy in the Middle East aimed at weakening, then eliminating, Western influence in the region, using Arab nationalism as a means to this end, with a view to substituting Soviet influence instead.

Soviet hegemony over the Middle East would constitute a fundamental shift in the global balance of power and would facilitate Soviet penetration of Africa, in addition to serious repercussions on the standing and status of the US worldwide.

It was clear to the US government that putting a stop to further Soviet penetration of the Middle East depended largely on the extent to which the US could work more closely with Arab nationalism and associate itself as far as possible with the aims and aspirations of the Arab people that were not contrary to the basic interests of the United States. They saw that:

²⁹³ A handwritten note from Nasser’s personal papers concerning his meeting with the Charge d’Affaires at the Soviet Embassy in Cairo on October 10th, 1958.
“In the eyes of the great mass of Arabs, considerable significance will be attached to the position which the United States adopts regarding the principal spokesman for pan-Arab nationalism: Nasser. This must not lead us to accept the inevitability of Nasser’s undisputed hegemony over the whole of the Arab world.”

The US found itself in a conflicting situation; to be cast in the role of Nasser’s opponent would be to leave the Soviets as his champion!

“At the same time, we face the fact that certain aspects of the drive toward Arab unity, particularly as led by Nasser, are strongly inimical to our interests. This is especially true in the Sudan, Libya, Tunisia, and Morocco, and Algeria, where Nasser’s revolutionary influence and his welding together of pan-Arabism and Egypt’s old aspirations in Africa threaten pro-Western regimes. Moreover, the Arabs remain bitter over the U.S. role, as they see it, in the establishment of the State of Israel and over U.S. public and private financial assistance and political support for Israel during the past ten years.”

The US government redefined its objectives regarding its Middle East policies, as follows: firstly, to remove the area to Soviet domination; to guarantee the continued availability of sufficient Middle Eastern oil; to ensure the peaceful passage of the US and its allies in the region; to achieve political evolution and economic and social development in the area to promote stable governments that are popularly supported and resistant to Communist influence; to ensure the continued availability to the US and its allies of important strategic positions, including the right to fly over the region and to maintain bases in the area; and the expansion of U.S. and Western influence in the region, and the countering and limiting of Soviet presence.

The US, while recognizing that the neutralist policy of pan-Arab nationalism could make it incompatible with the political, military and economic interests of the US in the area, realized that it would have to accept the neutralist policies adopted by states in the area, even if these states still maintained diplomatic, trade and cultural relations with the Soviet bloc, or were receiving military equipment from the Soviets.

The crisis resulting from the US military intervention in Lebanon comes before the UN:

a. The Security Council:
   On May 22nd, 1958, the Chamoun government asked for an emergency session of the Security Council to review its complaint against the United Arab Republic

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295 Ibid.
citing interference in the internal affairs of Lebanon, and claiming that it posed a threat to world peace! This interference, as cited in the Lebanese complaint, included the infiltration of armed gangs from Syria to Lebanon, the participation of the United Arab Republic in terrorist activities against the Lebanese government, providing the rebels in Lebanon with arms, and launching a violent campaign in the United Arab Republic press and broadcasting stations calling for the overthrowing of the Lebanese government.

The Security Council began reviewing the complaint on June 6th, 1958, and issued a decision on June 11th, 1958 to send a team of international observers to Lebanon to ensure that there should be no illegal infiltration of men, weapons or any other equipment over the Lebanese borders.

On June 19th, 1958, the team of observers presented their report to Hammarskjold in which it was stated that there had indeed been action around the borders in various locations, but that it had been impossible to determine where the weapons were coming from, or whether these armed persons had come in from outside Lebanon. It was thought that most of them were actually Lebanese.

On June 15th, 1958, the Security Council held an emergency session at the request of the United States, to justify the US invasion of Lebanon and the occupation of Jordan by British troops in accordance with the plan that Eisenhower had previously approved. The US had built its case before the Security Council on the alleged dangerous situation in the Middle East after the Iraqi revolution of July 14th, 1958, and upon the request made by Chamoun – supported by his government – asking the US for help in maintaining the independence and unity of its territory; a request with which the US had complied. The US added that its forces would remain in Lebanon until the United Nations could take over matters there.

As for the invasion of Jordan, the representative of the US government at the Security Council, Cabot Lodge, explained that the conspiracies against Jordan were proof of the dangerous instability prevailing in the Middle East.

The representative of the Soviet Union at the UN, Arkady Sobolev, presented a draft proposal requesting the Security Council to bring pressure to bear upon the United States to cease the military intervention by Western forces and to withdraw its troops from Lebanese territory immediately.

The representative of the United Arab Republic at the UN, Omar Lotfy, pointed out that the US military intervention in Lebanon was simply complicating matters further, and that Article 50 of the UN Charter prohibited such interference in another country’s internal affairs. He strongly criticized the US’s
military invasion, saying that it was clear that the Iraqi revolution was the reason for this dangerous decision on the part of the US.

On July 17th, 1958, the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan submitted a complaint to the Security Council against the United Arab Republic, claiming that it was interfering in Jordan’s internal affairs!

The representative of the United Kingdom, Sir Pierson Dixon, stated that he had not the slightest doubt that there were attempts to overthrow the regime in Jordan and to stir up trouble there, and that Jordan had requested assistance from friendly governments to help maintain its independence, so it was only natural and perfectly justifiable for Britain to act as it did. He added that the British forces had been sent to Jordan by air and that the presence of these troops did not in any way threaten other countries in the Middle East; furthermore, they would be withdrawn once the Security Council was able to make arrangements to protect the legitimate government of Jordan and maintain peace and security.

Lodge also announced that the government of the United States supported British intervention in Jordan. In short, the joint plan drawn up between the United States and the United Kingdom for the invasion of both Lebanon and Jordan was given a veneer of legitimacy on the basis that the military intervention had taken place at the request of the respective governments of the two countries to protect them from the dangerous threat posed by the United Arab Republic. Placing the matter in the hands of the United Nations was a shrewd move that left the occupation of indefinite duration.

The representative of the Soviet Union intervened, declaring that there was no threat of any kind to Jordan, and that the British military invasion proved that there was a conspiracy between the United Kingdom and the US against the peace-loving peoples of the Middle East and particularly against the liberation movements in the Arab world.

The Soviet representative then presented a draft proposal stating that the US and the United Kingdom must end their military intervention in the internal affairs of Arab countries and must withdraw their forces immediately from both Lebanon and Jordan.

The representative of the United Arab Republic said that the excuse of a complaint from Jordan was simply to justify British intervention, as no country had threatened Jordan at all.
On the 18th of July, 1958, the right to veto was used several times against draft proposals presented to the Security Council by the United States, the Soviet Union, and Sweden.

On July 30th, 1958, the team of United Nations observers presented another report on activities on the Lebanese border between July 2nd – 15th, which described the impact of the presence of US forces on Beirut and the surrounding areas, and concluded that while there might be some infiltration of arms, this was only on a limited scale and consisted of small weapons and some ammunition. As for the illegal entry of individuals over the border, this happened naturally as a result of tribes extending over both sides of the border with Syria.

On the first of August, 1958, Jordan announced the end of the ‘Arab Union’ with Iraq and consequently of the joint constitution; accordingly the representative of the said union, Hashem Jawad, now represented the Republic of Iraq only before the United Nations; his credentials as such were accepted by Hammarskjöld on August 6th, 1958.

On July 18th, 1958, the Soviet Union proposed holding an emergency session of the General Assembly, however as a result of the failure to bring together the leaders of the governments concerned as previously suggested by Khrushchev, the Security Council met on August 7th at the request of the Soviet Union, and there was a unanimous agreement to the draft proposal presented by the United States after it was amended. This stated that the Security Council, owing to the inability to reach a consensus amongst its permanent members – in addition to other factors – found itself unable to pursue its responsibility to preserve world peace and security, and therefore called for an emergency meeting of the General Assembly.

The General Assembly:
An emergency session of the General Assembly was held on August 8th, 1958 based upon the above-mentioned decision taken by the Security Council. All in all, fifteen sessions of the General Assembly took place from the 8th – 21st of August, and during the last session, a resolution was unanimously passed requesting the Secretary-General of the United Nations to facilitate the withdrawal of foreign forces from Lebanon and Jordan.

On October 25th, Hammarskjöld presented a report stating that the United States had completed the withdrawal of its forces from Lebanon, and on November 2nd, the British forces had also withdrawn from Jordan. The UN observers had also withdrawn from Lebanon by December 9th, 1958.296

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In conclusion, Nasser emerged victorious from this crisis, and the wave of Arab nationalism spread even wider and took root amongst the Arab nations. The United Nations observers refuted the claims made by the Chamoun government that the United Arab Republic was carrying out destructive activities on the Lebanese borders and was smuggling weapons and individuals over the border, neither was Jordan able to produce any proof of its accusations that the United Arab Republic was smuggling rebels across the border. The US-British plot to occupy Lebanon and Jordan for an indefinite period of time was foiled and they were obliged to withdraw their forces from the region in less than four months under international and Arab pressure!

Nasser had this to say about the mission carried out by Hammarskjold at the request of the UN to end the crisis:

“What could Hammarskjold have done? The problems lie not between King Hussein and the United Arab Republic, but between King Hussein and his own people firstly, and secondly the British occupation of Jordan which was the result of the King’s fear of his own people and his appeal to the British for help! Therefore I say: what could Hammarskjold have done in Jordan? Could he mediate between the palace and the people?!”

Nasser expressed the wish that the efforts the UN to restore rights and peace should prove successful, but that the problem with the task entrusted to Hammarskjold was that he was working on a situation that had no basis in reality, as the accusations spun by the colonialists against the United Arab Republic were figments of their imagination. The investigations carried out by the United Nations’ observers proved that there was no form of intervention by the United Arab Republic whatsoever, whether direct or indirect. The real intervention was that of the colonialists who still insisted on meddling in Middle Eastern affairs in the hopes of returning the region to the sphere of influence it had rebelled against.298

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297 Memorandum of a Conversation, Department of State, Washington, July 17th, 1958, Duration of US stay in Lebanon.
298 Nasser’s interview with the Indian reporter Karanjia, Editor-in-Chief of Blitz newspaper, September 28th, 1958.
CHAPTER III
NASSER’S DISPUTE WITH KHRUSHCHEV

While the US government was pursuing better relations with Nasser, a dispute was brewing between Nasser and Khrushchev!

First: Eisenhower’s attempts to get closer to Nasser
Eisenhower sent his personal representative, Robert Murphy, to the Middle East at the beginning of August, 1958; Murphy met with Nasser, who voiced his anger at the occupation of Lebanon and Jordan. Murphy tried to explain that his visit to Cairo was proof of Eisenhower’s and Dulles’ eagerness to cooperate with the United Arab Republic in solving the problems of the Middle East; however, Nasser informed him that as far as he was concerned, Israel was the crux of the problems of the United States with the Arab world.

Murphy asked Nasser whether pan-Arab nationalism had any specific geographic boundaries, to which Nasser (realizing where the question was going) responded that he had no aspirations to head an extended empire! The United Arab Republic did not pressurize any other Arab country to join an Arab union: Arab unity was a unanimous wish, as it was difficult for small Arab countries to stand alone: Egypt, for instance, was a weak country, and its security lay in Arab unity.

Regarding the matter of improving relations between the United Arab Republic and the United States, which Eisenhower wished to do, Nasser had this to say:

“The real difficulty is finding out what it is the United States really wants in the region; the Americans talk a lot about peace and stability, but what do they really mean by that and what is it they want?”

Murphy’s reply was simple: “We do not want Soviet hegemony.”

Nasser then pointed out that US policies had always been to cause divisions amongst the Arab countries, which was not in the best interests even of the US itself! A case in point was the Baghdad Pact; for at a time when the relations of the US with Egypt seemed promising, the former supported the Baghdad Pact which opposed the joint Arab defence of the region. This collective defence was considered by Nasser to be essential, as it enabled the Arab states to play a proactive role in the global arena on a
basis of equality and dignity. The Baghdad Pact, on the other hand, was led by a superpower, and constituted a form of political ineptitude.

Nasser felt that while the events of 1955 had led to improved relations with the United States for several months, this promising trend had ended with the Eisenhower Doctrine announced at the beginning of 1957, and which Egypt saw as an attempt to isolate it.

As for the latest crisis in the region, for while the reasons for the clash between the United Arab Republic and the United States could be the result of the Iraqi revolution and the crisis in Lebanon, the main reason was the Israeli problem which still remained unresolved.

The US government had taken positive steps towards improving relations with the United Arab Republic, such as military and economic aid with the consent of Eisenhower; however, Nasser’s criticism of US policy towards China on September 3rd, 1958 and his accusation that the US was attacking Chinese communists was seen by the US as regrettable.

In spite of this, the US was still determined to pursue improved relations with the United Arab Republic, and Eisenhower sent William Rountree, Deputy Foreign Minister for Middle Eastern Affairs, to meet with Nasser and express the sincere wish of the US government to improve relations between the two countries.

During the meeting, Nasser brought up the subject of the early years of the July 1952 revolution, when the Free Officers had great expectations of the United States! And while Nasser was grateful for the support the US had given at certain times when the interests of both countries happened to coincide, nevertheless the gradual deterioration that had occurred left him with no option but to believe that the United States was hostile to the United Arab Republic, and to doubt the motives of US policy!

Regarding communists in Egypt, Nasser said that at the beginning of his career, the communists had approached him, thinking they could use him as a means to penetrate the Free Officers! He had studied several books on communism and had come to the conclusion that it was not for him, firstly because he held his religion dear, and secondly because he was averse to violence. Finally, he did not want to see the Egyptian people substitute one form of bondage for another!

299 Telegram from the Embassy in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia to the Department of State, August 8th, 1958.
Nasser then spoke of his recognition of China in 1956, and how Khrushchev had brought up the matter of the relations between the United Arab Republic and the United States when Nasser was in Moscow from April 29th to May 16th, 1958. Nasser had told Khrushchev that even the US government understood Egypt’s wish to remain neutral, adding that the friendship between the United Arab Republic and the Soviet Union should not require that the latter have unfriendly relations with other countries!

Nasser stressed the fact that he had been true to his principles since the day he took office: the principles of independence, dignity, and Arab nationalism, adding that the concept of unity did not necessarily entail political union; this could happen if there was a unanimous consensus amongst the people, but it was not essential. The important thing was that there should be Arab solidarity.\(^{301}\)

Rountree’s conclusion after the meeting was that he felt Nasser was genuinely worried about communist infiltration in the Middle East, and also that he appreciated the support given by Eisenhower, particularly in the matter of sending a shipment of wheat within twenty-four hours of being asked to. Rountree added that Nasser wished to work jointly with the US regarding Iraq, as he was worried about the communist influence with Qassim.

Rountree then proposed to Eisenhower that the US government should work alongside Nasser regarding the situation in Iraq, and that he should send a telegram thanking Nasser and assuring him that Rountree had informed him of the details of their conversation.

The following conversation took place between Eisenhower and Rountree:

Eisenhower: “Do you think Nasser will put a price on this cooperation in the form of action being taken against Israel?”

Rountree: “Nasser mentioned Israel as a serious problem several times, but did not suggest a specific course of action.”

Eisenhower: “If it hadn’t been for Israel, we could have worked with Nasser; he is more capable of dealing with the communists in the region than we are. Israel is no doubt disturbed about the fact that we are giving unconditional assistance to Nasser, but I am positive that we can do something if only Nasser would agree to set aside the Israeli problem.”

\(^{301}\) Telegram from the Embassy in the United Arab Republic to the Department of State, December 15th, 1958.
Rountree: “There are three basic factions in Iraq: the communists, the nationalists who support Qassim, and the nationalists who would prefer a union with the United Arab Republic. We should direct our efforts towards the two nationalist factions, which we could well do if Nasser decides that a union between the United Arab Republic and Iraq is unlikely to happen.”302

The US administration was fully aware, while pursuing its policy of rapprochement with Nasser, that he did not trust the US and suspected they might exploit the problem with the communists to stab him in the back! This was over and above what he expected the British and French, America’s allies, might do.

In the end, it was Nasser himself who proposed that the best thing to do would be to forget the past, and make a fresh start.303

To conclude, this period witnessed a mutual wish on the part of both Nasser and Eisenhower to work together in the Middle East and begin a new phase of cooperation between their two countries against communism, though Nasser made sure to refer to the friendship between the United Arab Republic and the Soviet Union and that it had no bearing upon the proposed cooperation.

**The beginning of the clash with Khrushchev: Nasser attacks the Syrian communist party**

Nasser attacked the Syrian communist party during his speech celebrating Victory Day on December 23rd, 1958, saying:

“The reactionaries rose against the union, and the communist party in Syria is working against the union and against Arab nationalism, but your strength and the strength of the Arab people of Syria drove them into their dens and forced them into hiding, and the union took place after a referendum that revealed the unanimous support of the Arab people.

“Today, ten months after the union, we are on the threshold of a new society, a prosperous society, a cooperative, democratic, socialist society... And our policy is one of neutrality... Conspiracies have begun against the union, and the machinations of the colonialists, their allies, and the Zionists, have begun to appear...

302 Memorandum of a Conversation with the President, the White House, December 23rd, 1958.
303 Telegram from the Embassy in the United Arab Republic to the Department of State, November 7th, 1958.
“Ever since the union took place, I have stressed that the Arab nation must unite; we must unite our efforts against the Zionists and against colonialism: and cannot hope to fight them if we are fighting amongst ourselves! But the communist party in Syria refused this, and even refused the principles of pan-Arab nationalism and Arab unity; and some of their members even announced last week that they are calling for separation!

“But with our union, which we have faith in, with the union of our people, we will resist anyone who works against unity and Arab nationalism.

“We will not accept that our countries be governed by capitalism or feudalism; we have a social doctrine that suits our circumstances, our religion, and our nature: a socialist democratic cooperative society; we do not want our people to be mere wage earners, but rather owners in a country where everyone cooperates.”

This speech of Nasser’s provoked Moscow, and the communists began their attack on the United Arab Republic with the objective of sabotaging the union, which did not serve their interests.

The roots of the animosity between Nasser and the Syrian Communist Party:
The union between Egypt and Syria took the communist party by surprise. It meant that Syria, like Egypt, would have a National Union which brought together all the various faction, and consequently the communist party would have no scope for its activities. All parties would have to dissolve and merge into one entity: the National Union.304

The Iraqi revolution provided an incentive for the Syrian communist party to resume its anti-union activities: the communists in Iraq had supported the revolution, fearing that their fate in Baghdad would be similar to that of the communists in Damascus. The Syrian communist party resumed its opposition to the union, in hopes of retrieving the ground they had lost.305

Nasser’s position towards communism in the United Arab Republic:
The following was handwritten by Nasser in his own personal notes, analyzing the situation:

304 The National Union was a one-party political organization established in May, 1957.
“The communists follow an anti-government policy in the United Arab Republic, whether in Egypt or Syria. Their policy is based upon exploiting the relationship with the Soviet Union to expand the scope of the communist party in both regions, and consolidate friendship with the Soviets.

“The communists have attempted to recruit the public into their activities, particularly workers, fellaheen, and students, in addition to turning people against the government by stirring up domestic problems, criticizing everything the government does, and spreading rumours.

“The communist party in Egypt is in league with the communist parties of Syria and Iraq, and all have adopted a policy that opposes and attacks the union and calls for a federal union with multiple political parties. They call for a patriotic front that includes the communist party in order to find an opportunity to control the populace.

“They have coordinated the activities of the communist party in Egypt, Syria, and Iraq, and have a unified strategy to oppose union between Iraq and the United Arab Republic, and against the union of Syria with Egypt, and have attacked the National Union with all the strength they are capable of, claiming that it is a bourgeois, dictatorial party!

“They have divided Syria into sectors and responsibilities, and have their own newspaper, El Nour, which is consists of flagrant propaganda for the Soviet Union.

“They are confronting Arab nationalism with a counter-attack, such as bolstering the Kurdish nationality and departing from the idea of Arab nationalism to patriotism.

“Contact is maintained between the communists in Iraq, Syria, and Egypt, and the refugee communists in Jordan; they all share the same plan, and are contemplating uniting Jordan with Iraq in the future, and fighting any attempt to join the United Arab Republic; this would make it easier to include Syria later on, making Iraq, Jordan, and Syria one united communist country, whether a federal union or otherwise. In Gaza also, communist activities are linked to the communists in Egypt, whose activities are centred mainly in the countryside, as well as amongst workers and syndicates.

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306 The Light.
“To address the problem, we have to find out more about what they are up to, and counter their activities with the National Union, on a large scale. We must produce pamphlets that expose their plots against Arab nationalism, and collect Nehru’s statements opposing communism and publish them.”

The procedures Nasser decided to take to quell communist activity in Egypt included arresting active communist elements; arresting communists active amongst workers and removing them from workers’ syndicates within a period of six months; arresting communists active in the countryside; purging the press of communists; and finding where their pamphlets were being printed and impounding the equipment used for this purpose; arresting members of their central committee.

In Syria, the following steps were to be taken: the communist Nour newspaper was to be closed down, active communists arrested, and communist activities clamped down upon; communist activities in Jordan and Iraq were to be hindered, and the same in Gaza.

**The deterioration of relations between the United Arab Republic and Iraq:**
The question arises here: what caused the change in the Iraqi revolution and its leader Abdel Karim Qassim? In Nasser’s own words:

“After the revolution in Iraq, we started off well, and made military, economic, and cultural agreements to consolidate cooperation between us. However, there are foreign policies, headed by the British, that do not want to see harmony prevailing between Cairo and Baghdad. In spite of these attempts to create misunderstandings and contrived problems, I believe it is inevitable that Cairo and Baghdad will eventually work side by side for the sake of all Arabs.”

Nasser was visited by a delegation from Iraq headed by Abdel Salam Aref, on July 17th, 1958, three days after its revolution. Aref, the second in command of the revolution, asked Nasser to sign a charter of joint defence, which he did, on the basis that joint activities would include economic and cultural affairs as well as military. The Iraqis also asked for arms and ammunition, and Egypt happened to be in possession of the British arms that were left behind after the evacuation of the Suez Canal base, which would serve the purpose for the Iraqi army.

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307 Nasser’s talk with Woodrow Wyatt for the BBC, January 27th, 1959.
True to his word, ships began the journey from Suez to the Syrian port of Latakia bearing ammunition to Iraq. Vehicles from the Iraqi and Syrian armies formed a continuous, unbroken line from Latakia to Baghdad.

The Iraqis also requested planes and pilots to be at the disposal of the army command in Baghdad, as well as a radar network, all of which were provided immediately.

However, quarrels began several days afterwards between Abdel Karim Qassim and his deputy and partner in the revolution, Abdel Salam Aref, and a jealous strife ensued. Qassim claimed:

“Abdel Salam Aref is taking all the credit for the revolution because he was the one who carried it out, forgetting that I am the leader of this revolution!”

The quarrel developed till it reached the stage where Aref was relieved of his duties as commander-in-chief of the armed forces. Qassim resorted to colonialists, the communist party, and opportunists to back him up.308

The conflict between Nasser and Khrushchev intensifies:
The first intimations of the differences between the two leaders was made clear during the 21st conference of the Soviet communist party at the Kremlin on January 27th, 1959, when Khrushchev said:

“There are differences of opinion between the Russians and some leaders in the United Arab Republic, but this does not affect the cordial relations between our two countries and our joint struggle against imperialism. However, we cannot remain silent before the campaign being launched in some countries against the progressive factions there under the false pretenses of fighting communism.

“In view of the anti-communist statements recently voiced in the United Arab Republic, and the accusations levelled against communists, I, in my capacity as a communist, find it necessary to announce in this conference held by our communist party, that it is wrong to accuse communists of engaging in activities damaging to the national cause, and to sow dissent in our struggle against colonialism. In fact, the opposite is true: for there are none more determined to fight colonialism than the communists themselves.

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308 Heikal, “The Hegemony of the Single Ruler... a frank message directed to Major-General Abdel Karim Qassim, President of Iraq”, column in Al-Ahram, January 27th, 1959.
“There are more than thirty-two million members of communist parties in eighty-three countries all over the world, and the Soviet Union is not in any way involved in directing these foreign communists.”

The implications of Khrushchev’s speech undoubtedly reflected negatively on the relations between the United Arab Republic and the Soviet Union. The difference in doctrine had always existed, and in fact this difference was one of the outstanding features of the friendship between the two countries. As Nasser said during the Arab-Soviet Friendship meeting in May, 1958:

“Our friendship may be considered a wonderful example of peaceful coexistence between a large country and a small one; a country with a certain social system and another with a completely different one; who yet managed to maintain a relationship based on complete equality.”

Nasser was of the opinion - which he stated in Bandung and which the Soviet Union agreed to – that every nation should be free to choose the system that best suited it, and that peaceful coexistence should be maintained amongst all political and social systems regardless of how different they were. No other country, he insisted, had the right to interfere in the internal affairs of another: this was the foundation of stable international relations.

Khrushchev chose in his speech to disregard the fact that the accusations made in Cairo were not addressed to communism as a concept, nor to communists in general: the accusations concerned the members of a certain communist party carrying out its activities within the United Arab Republic: the Syrian communist party. In addition, there were the Iraqi communists and Abdel Karim Qassim in Iraq, as well as the Egyptian communists, all involved in a struggle with Nasser, who found himself in an unenviable position: portrayed as an enemy of communism with an interchange of attacks in the press and radio stations, and at the same time the so-called enemy of the West, who also attacked him viciously in the media! The radio stations directed against Nasser included ‘The Voice of Reform’ and ‘The Voice of Free Egypt’, the BBC, Paris Radio, and ‘The Voice of Lebanon’ which was British-controlled, this in addition to anti-United Arab Republic campaigns in the British and French press.

It was natural therefore that Nasser should be concerned about this media altercation between him and Khrushchev, who, on October 23rd, 1958, had

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309 Heikal: A reproach from Khrushchev, and a reproach addressed to Khrushchev”, Al Ahram weekly column, January 29th, 1959.
committed to providing a loan of 400 million rubles to the United Arab
Republic to help fund the High Dam, work on which had already begun on
November 26th, 1959. The Soviet Union was also funding the Egyptian
industrialization programme. This, however, did not stop Nasser from
adhering to his principles and following the policy which he felt was in the
best interests of nationalism and insisting on complete independence,
refusing to follow any of the superpowers.

Khrushchev began to soften his tone somewhat, and in a speech of his
during the elections of the Supreme Soviet council on February 25th, 1959
said:

“The forces opposed to peace have attempted in every way possible to stir
up trouble and mar the cordial relationship that has grown between the
Soviet Union and the United Arab Republic in order to serve their own
interests, but their hopes will come to nothing! Nasser is an Arab national;
I am a Soviet communist; it is only natural that if we were to speak of
doctrines, ours are different. However, we have never felt that we should
impose our beliefs on other countries; to do so would destroy the chance of
any peaceful coexistence. The internal affairs of any country are its own
concern entirely.”

During this time of strained relations between the Soviet Union and the
United Arab Republic, the government of Romania allowed a number of its
Jewish residents to emigrate to Israel. Israel and Zionists worldwide took
the opportunity to publicize this extensively with a view to destroying the
good relations that existed between Romania and the United Arab republic,
which led the Romanian government to announce that it had allowed some
of its Jewish citizens with relatives in Israel to join them on humanitarian
grounds.

In a speech in Damascus on March 15th, 1959, Nasser attacked the
communists, saying:

“There is a certain faction trying to exploit the fact that the Arab people are
up in arms against colonialism in order to spread their poison in the Arab
world and replace colonialism with a new form of control: the Arab
communists. They have chosen to deny their countries and their
nationalism; opportunists who believe that the end justifies the means,
exploring the noble struggle of the Arab people to spread their communist
dictatorship built on bloodshed. But the Arab people have not struggled for
freedom and independence only to hand them over to communist agents
and become subordinate again to another power.
“The communists have tried everything possible to infiltrate the Egyptian army, but we knew where we were heading and never accepted communism either before or after the revolution, because we believed in an immortal concept: Arab nationalism, and could not change our beliefs to embrace atheism and subordination, which are the principles upon which communism is based.

“The Arab communists poured their hatred upon us here in Egypt, and fought us with countless propaganda campaigns, but we did not succumb to their threats or to their pressure: they are a minority, and have been isolated, and did not manage to spread their message amongst the people of Egypt.

“They have tried to do the same thing here in Syria, to build an atheist communism based on subordination, but the Syrian people believe in their sacred mission: the mission of Arab nationalism, and just as the communists were defeated in Egypt, they were defeated here in Syria; in fact some of them have escaped from the United Arab Republic altogether, defeated!

“Last July, the revolution in Iraq took place, and the communists who had been beaten in Egypt, then in Syria, found a champion in Iraq. I personally sent four different messages to Qassim in Iraq asking that we meet for the sake of the unity of the Arab front, but the inferiority complexes he suffers from are obviously still controlling him... The communists of Baghdad together with the communists who had fled from your country then began campaigns to sow dissent between the people of Iraq and the United Arab Republic, and a reign of terrorism began!"

On the following day, Khrushchev commented on Nasser’s speech during a reception party given in honour of the Iraqi economic delegation in Moscow on March 16th, 1959, saying:

“The Iraqi revolution was met with great support and understanding by the United Arab Republic; and constituted a forceful blow to the aspirations of the colonialists. However, President Nasser’s position towards this revolution gradually changed, and we do not understand the reason for this...How can this change of attitude be explained?

“It would seem that the reason for this is that Nasser’s hopes that the Iraqi Republic would united with the United Arab Republic have not been realized. And while the Soviet Union has not and will not intervene in the affairs of these countries, we can still not remain indifferent to a situation arising in a region that is close to our borders, and it is our right at least to
express our point of view towards the developments that are taking place there.

“We must admit that we have all been displeased by the latest speech given by President Nasser in Damascus, in which he used the language of colonialists when speaking of communism and communists... He described communists as agents of a foreign power, so we may well ask: which power is it that communists can be said to be agents of?!

“It may be asked what shape the relations between the Soviet Union and the United Arab Republic will take as of today?! I believe that they will remain the same as they always have: we have always been aware of President Nasser’s opposition to communism ever since our friendly relations with his country began.

“It is said that pan-Arab nationalism is above the individual interests of the Arab states and their people, but the truth is that it is impossible for the interests of all the Arabs to converge, so any efforts to ignore the interests of sectors of the people and those of the working classes in the name of nationalism, cannot be defended.”

Nasser responded on the same day:

“Mr. Khrushchev’s defence of the communists in our country cannot be accepted by the Arab people. We do not interfere in the internal affairs of the Soviet Union nor do we help one faction against another, and this support and defence of the communists in our country constitutes a defiance of the unanimous will of the people in our republic.”

And in response to Khrushchev’s remark that ‘Nasser speaks of communism and communists using the language of colonialists’, Nasser replied:

“Our people are enlightened enough to understand that our campaign against the conspiratorial communists only aims at protecting our country from a new form of colonialism, and building a strong, nationalistic country free from colonialism and subordination. Mr. Khrushchev’s support of communism in our country defies the will of the people!”

And commenting on Khrushchev’s claim that President Nasser was determined to unite the Iraqi Republic with the United Arab Republic, Nasser said:
“This is a deviation from the truth; we have always declared that Arab solidarity is our aim and that for an Arab union to take place, there must be unanimous consent amongst the people. The Arab people who have fought to free themselves from colonialism can never accept subordination in any form and are determined to remain free from any spheres of influence.”

Matters rose to a head when Khrushchev, during a press conference at the Kremlin on March 19th, 1959, said:

“President Gamal Abdel Nasser has been over-enthusiastic; but in attacking communism in this way, he has shouldered a heavy task that is beyond his capacity. If he were to have enough patience and would truly implement the principle of non-intervention in the affairs of Iraq and other countries, that would further the cause of true unity between the Arab countries!”

On the following day, Nasser, still in Damascus, responded:

“We are armed with the same weapons with which we defeated the colonialists and their allies; and with the same weapons will defeat communism and communist ideas... God willing, we will put an end to communism and to subordination; there will be no new colonialism now that we are rid of Western colonialism.

“And if the head of the Soviet government intervenes on behalf of a small minority in our country against the will of an entire people, this is something we cannot accept. We are free in our country, and adopt the principles that we feel are in our best interests and refuse those that entail subordination and atheism. Now that we have achieved freedom, we can never sell it, not for millions of pounds or rubles or dollars!

“When we speak of strength, it is the strength we derive from our own country and our own people, not from any foreign source; we were not expressing youthful rashness or over-enthusiasm as Khrushchev claimed: we were expressing our faith in our nation. And if Khrushchev commented on our angry defence of our freedom, our country, our Arabism, and our nationalism saying, ‘Abdel Nasser is a young man of forty-one, enthusiastic and impulsive’, I would like to say today: it is not only Abdel Nasser who is enthusiastic and impulsive: the whole Arab nation is enthusiastic and impulsive, and were it not for this enthusiasm, we would not have been able to achieve great miracles, because we depend – after God – on ourselves alone.”

The United States backs Nasser
A few months after the US had begun changing its policy towards Nasser in an attempt to improve matters, when the crisis between Nasser and Khrushchev had intensified, the US government reviewed the situation, realizing that Nasser had set principles he did not swerve from whatever the circumstances. He had always opposed communism on principle, seeing it as irreligious and destructive, but had always acted on the basis of differentiating between Soviet policies and the communist movement. However, he had also known that should the Soviets veer from their policy of non-intervention in Arab domestic affairs, he would attack them as strongly as he had attacked the West because of its colonialist policies. Now that the Soviets had done what Nasser never expected them to, he held true to his word, surpassing even his previous attacks on the West! This time, he took it upon himself to launch a campaign against communism, whereas his previous attacks on the West were made by others, notably the press and broadcasting stations.

The US government found that Nasser was launching a forceful attack against communists and the Soviets that even they could not match, and while his motives were different and more complex, this did not negate the fact that the West was getting unexpected help in its ongoing feud against communism. That being said, the difficulties with the Soviets did not mean that Nasser would veer towards the West, for his principle remained one of non-alignment.

Thus the US realized that the Arab nationalism movement they had seen as extremist could actually be of benefit to the West, and the same could be said for Nasser himself: Arab nationalism was the biggest defence against communism. US policy-makers know saw that the West had been wrong in evaluating the regime in Egypt according to the extent of its cooperation with the West, when it pursued a policy of true neutrality.

However, the US also realized that it would be difficult to cooperate with Nasser on a basis of mutual interests but rather that they should pursue a policy of cooperation with no obligations attached, with the objective of restoring normal relations with the United Arab Republic.

They also noted that while Nasser was keen to restore Iraq to the Arab fold, Syria still remained his main concern; accordingly, any assistance the US could give to Syria would be important to Nasser, especially as it was the only country in the Middle East which the US had no dealings with.

As for the Nasser/Qassim dispute, the US saw it best to remain removed from Arab differences, though they did not apply this policy when the matter took the form of the United Arab Republic versus the communists!
At this point, they reviewed their policies to the extent of actually supporting Nasser, because the alternative would have been not only communist control over Iraq, but further infiltration of the Middle East by the Soviets.

After approximately one year of this policy of restoring normal relations between the United States and the United Arab Republic, and of establishing trust that the US would not exploit any difficulties Nasser might find himself in as a result of opposing the communists or the Soviets, Raymond Hare proposed that economic assistance be extended to the United Arab Republic.

With regard to the media, it was important to the US that Nasser was now attacking their main enemy, as well as falling out with Qassim, all of which made it desirable for US policy to focus on Nasser in unofficial channels such as editorials in the American press. At the same time, there was thought of sending a secret message to Nasser from the US president; for while Nasser had announced that this was a battle he intended to fight alone, a word of reassurance from Eisenhower at this time would carry weight. The message would focus on fighting communism, and this communication could begin verbally.

A flurry of activity immediately took place within the US government to find ways to implement the new policy. Although it was not possible at that time for the US to purchase Egyptian cotton, as Nasser had requested, for reasons related to the US, the US government expressed its appreciation of Nasser’s exposing the true meaning of global communism before the people of the Middle East via the media over the previous weeks, adding that while it had not taken an official stance towards the matter, this should not be interpreted as indifference or disrespect to Nasser’s brave stand against communism but rather to avoid any hostile elements from exploiting the situation.

Hare was then asked to inform Nasser that his firm, uncompromising stand towards communism was appreciated at the very highest levels of the US government, and that assistance to the United Arab Republic would begin.

Nasser was accordingly contacted and the above message relayed to him. He showed understanding of the inability of the US to buy Egyptian cotton

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310 Raymond Hare, US Ambassador to Egypt.
311 Telegram from the US Embassy in Cairo to the Department of State, April 1st, 1959.
312 Telegram from the Department of State to the Embassy in Cairo, April 2nd, 1959.
at that time, explaining that the reason he had been keen to sell it was that
the foreign currency resulting from the sale could have been used for the
United Arab Republic’s economic plans, whereas foreign currency from
other sources was already tied up with prearranged projects.

Nasser also made it clear that he had not asked for assistance from the
United States, and that he could manage his own economic problems
without outside help, adding that he had a backup plan to address the
situation should the Soviets withdraw their aid.\textsuperscript{313}

After financial agreements pertaining to issues arising from the Suez crisis
had been signed between Britain, France, and the United Arab Republic,
the question of a loan from the World Bank to the United Arab Republic
was investigated; the loan was for the purpose of improving and upgrading
the Suez Canal and would amount to on hundred million dollars over a
twenty-year period. Eugene Black\textsuperscript{314} felt this loan to be sound, as the
income from the Suez Canal was forty million Egyptian pounds (equivalent
to 110 million dollars) a year in the form of foreign currency, whereas the
running costs were half this amount. Accordingly, the United Arab
Republic made a formal request for the loan.

The British demanded that the loan be linked to a number of conditions;
namely, that the tariff for transit through the Canal should not be raised
unduly; that there should be no differences made with regard to
international navigation, and that the Canal should not be closed in an
arbitrary manner; which immediately raised the question of the matter of
the passage of Israeli ships through the Canal!

The US government did not agree to these conditions, especially as Egypt
was doing an excellent job of managing the Canal. In the end, the US
decided to support the United Arab Republic’s request for the loan with no
conditions attached. This constituted a difficult political concession on the
part of the United States with regard to the Israeli problem.\textsuperscript{315}

\textbf{Third: Secret communications between Nasser and Khrushchev}

1. \textit{Khrushchev’s two letters to Nasser}\textsuperscript{316}

   a. \textit{The first letter on February 19\textsuperscript{th}, 1959:}
   The media campaign between Nasser and Khrushchev intensified,
   which was not in the best interests of either country. The Soviet Union

\textsuperscript{313} Telegram from the US Embassy in Cairo to the Department of State, April 5\textsuperscript{th}, 1959.
\textsuperscript{314} President of The World Bank from 1949 – 1963.
\textsuperscript{315} Memo from Rountree to the Acting Secretary of State, Washington, April 29\textsuperscript{th}, 1959, on the US attitude with
respect to the United Arab Republic’s application for BRD for Suez Canal improvement.
\textsuperscript{316} Appendix 2
had entered the Middle East by way of selling arms to Egypt when the West delayed doing so for more than three years, during which Israel had taken the opportunity to launch repeated raids on its borders with Egypt. Relations between Egypt and the Soviet Union were further consolidated when the latter granted Egypt a loan to finance the construction of the High Dam after the US had withdrawn its offer to do so. This was followed by further cooperation in implementing the ambitious industrial programme in Egypt and later on in the United Arab Republic, all of which meant an increased Soviet influence in the Middle East, which lies on the Soviet Union’s southernmost border.

It was a partnership based on mutual interests, and was further reinforced as a result of the continuous errors of judgement made by the West as a result of a defunct, colonialist way of dealing with the newly-liberated states. Accordingly, Khrushchev sent a propitiatory letter to Nasser to rectify matters between them, in which he spoke of the suspicions Nasser had harboured regarding the Soviet Union’s positions towards the Arab liberation movements, reminding him of the previous productive cooperation between their two countries, which had flourished despite their ideological differences.

Khrushchev referred to Nasser’s speech in Port Said on December 23rd, 1958, which had triggered the disagreement between them and had forced Khrushchev to reply during the 21st conference of the Soviet communist party. It was obvious, he said, that both presidents were still adhering to their respective points of view, which was only to be expected; however, it was obvious that enemies of both countries were lying in wait for a chance to exploit the ideological differences between them, however, Khrushchev added, the Western powers would not succeed in causing a rift, at least not in the Soviet side.

Khrushchev then went on to say that the main objective of his letter was to express the hope that the imperialist powers would not succeed in finding an opening on Nasser’s side through which they could infiltrate and sabotage the unity of the two countries in their struggle against colonialism.

The governing circles in the West would stop at nothing to find a way to sow the seeds of dissent and hostility between the Soviet Union and the United Arab Republic.

Khrushchev went on to deny the rumours that had spread from Yugoslavian sources to the British and French press regarding the attempt to assassinate Nasser, and hinting at the Soviet Union’s involvement! The truth was that this attempt had been planned by the
French and Israeli secret services. Khrushchev also denied Western reports of the penetration of communist influence in Yemen, insisting that it was the agents of imperialism who were trying to isolate Nasser in order to finish him off.

Khrushchev expressed his appreciation of Nasser’s statement to the Soviet ambassador in which he said that the government of the United Arab Republic had no intention of backing out of the policy of friendship that linked it with the Soviet Union.

As for the matter of communists within the United Arab republic, Khrushchev confirmed that the Soviet Union had not and would not interfere in the United Arab Republic’s internal affairs, even though Nasser, when he sought closer ties with the Soviet Union, was naturally aware that they were communists and could not sympathize with an anti-communist policy!

In conclusion, Khrushchev expressed the hope that relations between the Soviet Union and the United Arab Republic would be reinforced.

b. The second letter on April 12th, 1959:

The media campaign between the United Arab Republic and the Soviet Union continued, leading Khrushchev to send Nasser another 31-page letter expressing his sorrow that the relations between the two countries had deteriorated after having been not only strong and based on mutual trust, but promoting stability, peace, and security in the Middle East.

Khrushchev also expressed his deep regret that matters between the United Arab republic and Iraq were not contributing to solidarity amongst the Arab countries, saying that the imperialistic and colonialist powers would benefit from this division.

Khrushchev also discussed what Nasser had said about the role of the Soviet Union in the Tripartite Aggression of 1956, listing the reasons that had led the Soviet Union to refrain from intervening in the crisis, mainly that it was felt that matters should be resolved peacefully without entering into a war.

He reiterated that the Soviet Union was against intervening in the internal affairs of its neighbours and that it built its relations with other countries on Lenin’s principles of peaceful coexistence.

Khrushchev criticized Nasser’s statement that communists in the Arab countries received their orders from abroad, denying this completely
and stressing that the Soviet Union’s policy was that what went on inside a country was its own business and no one else’s.

He also objected to Nasser’s talk of battling against communism, and considered this an issue that went beyond the boundaries of the United Arab Republic and constituted interference in the affairs of the Soviet Union! He also accused Nasser of joining forces with the global movement against communism, which could not be described as neutrality!

Mentioning the union between Egypt and Syria, Khrushchev stated that this was an internal affair that concerned only the people of the two countries, and that the Soviet Union had recognized and welcomed the formation of the United Arab Republic, even though he felt that it had been rushed into too quickly, and also that Syria had enjoyed more democracy and freedom before the union than Egypt, as well as having political parties, and that after the union the Syrians had been deprived of these democratic liberties and the political parties dissolved.

Khrushchev went on to talk of the ideological differences between him and Nasser, stating that in his opinion Nasser did not differentiate between doctrine and ideology on the one hand and the relationship between countries on the other! However, Khrushchev went on to say, in spite of these differences, there was plenty of scope for cooperation in the interest of peace and security.

Khrushchev also mentioned the Soviet aid that was given unconditionally to newly-liberated countries, with no political or military provisions, unlike the American aid.

He then moved on to what he called ‘the campaign against the Soviet Union’ in the United Arab Republic, hinting that it could complicate matters with regard to the Soviet Union’s commitment to finance the High Dam. He also mentioned the Soviet technicians in the United Arab Republic, and that the Soviet people feared for their well-being! He continued to use the Soviet assistance as a means of pressurizing Nasser by challenging him to refuse it! He then went on to say that the aid presented by the Soviet Union was a prominent factor in the struggle against imperialism.

Khrushchev concluded his letter by expressing the hope that the exchange of viewpoints between him and Nasser would help clear the misunderstandings that had arisen between them.

2. Nasser’s reply to Khrushchev:
Nasser replied to Khrushchev on May 12th, 1959 in an unpublished letter consisting of sixty-three pages! He reviewed the relationship between the two countries beginning with the revolution of 1952, which the Soviet media at the time had referred to as a Fascist movement!

“The Egyptian revolution began by addressing the problem of colonialism before strengthening its relations with the Soviet Union, in accordance with the principles the leaders of the revolution believed in.

“Due to the monopoly on arms, Egypt requested them from the Soviet Union, whose position towards the Egyptian revolution changed as they began to understand it better; following this, relations developed between the two countries and entered a new stage based upon peaceful coexistence. Naturally, the colonialists were taken aback at this form of international relations and tried to disrupt the link between Egypt and the Soviet Union by claiming that the former had become a sphere of influence for the Soviets and even a Soviet colony!

“Relations between Egypt and the colonialists entered a hostile stage, where the latter attempted to inflict punitive measures such as withdrawing the offer to participate in funding the High Dam. Egypt stood firm, and the Suez Canal was returned to the people who had dug it, striking a blow not only at the colonialists but at all those behind it, including the various monopolies left over from the 19th century archaic way of thinking.

“We took this step alone, and did not discuss it with you, knowing from the beginning that it would be an arduous battle. We felt enormous gratitude and esteem towards you when you announced, just thirty-six hours after the nationalization of the Canal, that you supported our action.

“The Tripartite attack on us occurred at the time when we were getting ready for negotiations in Geneva, on October 29th, 1956. In a speech I made in Damascus, I said that we had faced the Tripartite Aggression alone, without seeking or expecting help from anyone, but I gathered from your letter and from various statements you made, that what I said did not please you! I did not at all mean to downplay the importance of the warning issued by the Soviet Prime Minister at that time; I meant that we were alone on the battlefield: our forces were fighting in Sinai alone, and our people fighting in the streets of Port Said alone.

\[317\] Appendix 2
“Shukri Al-Quwatli visited Moscow on October 30th, 1956, and held talks with Prime Minister Bulganin, attended by top-ranking army officials, and I received a message from Quwatli stating your position towards the Tripartite Aggression, namely that the Soviet Union was not willing to enter into a world war and accordingly could not intervene militarily, not even by sending volunteers, and that the most that could be done was to send us some equipment and a few technicians!

“I removed this letter from the file it was included in and put it in my pocket; I did not want anyone to read it whose morale might be negatively affected by its contents. It was subsequently replaced amongst the State documents after the war was over.

“The Soviet warning – whose effect no one can deny – came as a surprise to us, after having spent nine days alone on the battlefield. Everything, including the Soviet warning, was dependent upon the resilience of our people and their willingness to sacrifice.

“What triggered the statement I made on the real state of affairs regarding the Tripartite Aggression - the statement to which you objected - was that your press and radio stations were giving all the credit to the Soviet warning! It was therefore incumbent upon me to put the role of the Egyptian people in its rightful place. We appreciate your position, and it never occurred to us to ask you to wage a world war for our sakes!

“You have accused us of interfering in the internal affairs of others, even in the affairs of the Soviet Union itself!

“As for the union, it was obvious from the start that it did not fall in with your wishes. The communist party in Syria could not accept the unanimous support of the Syrian people for the union, and the leader of the communist party, Khaled Bakdash, chose to escape, taking refuge in countries of the socialist bloc, and lately was seen beside you during the celebrations of the 21st conference of the Soviet communist party, when he attacked the government of his country, a matter which we found highly disturbing and a public violation of the principles of peaceful coexistence!

“Your position was made clear when, after the union was announced in February 1958, you deliberately refrained from expressing an opinion regarding it for more than two weeks. I began to look for an opportunity for us to meet, which we did in April, 1958, and was hoping for stability in our relationship, but this was not to be.
“It surprises me that you would imagine – according to your letter – that I would want your help in a military venture against Arab countries! How can that possibly be, when we consider any threat to an Arab country to be a threat to us?! I was astounded at the contents of your letter referring to our second meeting in Moscow on July 16th after the Iraqi revolution. This revolution was launched by patriotic members of the Iraqi army, and it would not have been possible for us to let the colonialists quell this revolution and nip it in the bud. Our position was clear: we would stand by the revolution no matter what the result would be. Our position was purely defensive; the marines of the American 6th fleet were in the process of landing on the Lebanese shores, and the British paratroopers were descending on Jordan; so would it have been possible for us to carry out any form of attack?!

“The Iraqi revolution saw the beginning of the crisis in our relationship, although much of the content of your letter has made it obvious that the reasons for the misunderstandings between us go back much further than that!

“You claimed in your letter that I had tried to force a specific leadership upon the Iraqi people after the revolution and that this had caused the rift between the United Arab Republic and Iraq, and accordingly one of the reasons for the deterioration in our relations, though I would have imagined that you would be the first to appreciate our support for the Iraqi revolution.

“I find it strange to find Arab nationalism being attacked from various sources! Our solidarity with the Iraqi revolution started a long time ago; several of the leaders of this revolution – including Qassim, the leader of the Iraqi government – approached us before the revolution and asked us to help them plan it. Our advice was to keep their plans secret even from us, and not to ask for help from anyone but their own people, and that no one should draw up plans for the revolution except those responsible for carrying it out.

“After the Iraqi revolution succeeded, and we had done all we could to safeguard it, we did not change our minds and told them not to busy themselves at that crucial time with thinking of forging a union, but rather to work on ensuring the success of the revolution within Iraq. We told them that the extent of our requests was simply Arab solidarity in the form of economic, cultural and military agreements.
“Unfortunately, the Iraqi communist party seized the opportunity to take over control of the revolution, exploiting the differences that arose between Qassim and his deputy Aref to further their own ends!

“Not only did the Iraqi communist party begin sowing dissent between the two leaders, but extended its activities to causing a rift between Iraq and the United Arab Republic by openly attacking the concept of a union, hoping to influence matters in Syria, an objective that the close cooperation between the Iraqi and Syrian communist parties made quite clear.

“I was surprised that you commented on my speech in which I said that the communists were followers who received their orders from abroad. The union between the three communist parties in Egypt made it incumbent upon me, during my speech in Port Said celebrating the evacuation last December 23rd, to refer to the unpatriotic activities carried out by the communist organizations in our country. I explained that I was not attacking communism as an ideology, which is none of our business, but was only targeting those claiming to be communists within our country, but it seems that my attempt to explain was not enough!

“I sent you a letter with your ambassador Dimitri Kiselev explaining that the friendship of the Arab countries is not the result of the activities of their communist parties, but exists in spite of these parties!

“Then came your speech honouring the Iraqi delegation on March 16th, 1959, which made it clear that you had changed your position, and after having been on the side of the patriotic forces, you began to prefer working with the communist parties and strangely enough, began to personally defend them and find excuses for their actions.

“The situation can be summed up as follows: we found ourselves forced to defend our country against the activities of the communist organizations within the borders of the United Arab Republic and against your personal backing of the communist party, and to stand firm before the violent attack on us by communist organizations worldwide.”

Despite this, Nasser interpreted Khrushchev’s letter, in which he called for self-control on both sides, as a friendly gesture, and agreed to stop overt attacks on communists. However, the situation changed due to the continued Soviet intervention in various affairs which they felt
concerned them, and relations between the United Arab Republic and the Soviet Union became unstable, veering towards hostility.

This state of affairs had profound repercussions, particularly with regard to the supply of arms, the delivery of which ceased, and prices raised. The situation with regard to spare parts was particularly critical, and the United Arab Republic began to search for alternative sources of arms, such as Yugoslavia, or local manufacture.

It was obvious that the Soviets were applying a policy of putting pressure on Nasser, though perhaps this was not the case in the economic sphere,\textsuperscript{318} for on January 9\textsuperscript{th}, 1960, Nasser and King Mohamed V of Morocco gave the signal for work to begin on the High Dam, and on January 18\textsuperscript{th}, the United Arab Republic agreed with the Soviet Union to begin negotiations for financing the second stage of the dam. Nasser also met with members of the Soviet delegation on March 22\textsuperscript{nd} to discuss financing large-scale projects in Syria.

So in spite of the rift between Nasser and Khrushchev, which lasted for more than a year, the Soviet Union was careful not to allow matters to go too far and result in a severing of relations between the two countries.

**Third: Nasser meets Eisenhower at the United Nations**

The meeting happened when Nasser went to New York to make a speech before the UN General Assembly in September, 1960, which was an opportunity to meet Eisenhower and have a face-to-face discussion.

The talks between them began when Eisenhower said that the world could only advance through the United Nations, and that when a country – even if a superpower – tried to give bilateral assistance, it was accused of imperialism and economic colonialism, so it was better to act through the United Nations. He went on to talk of Khrushchev’s unjustified attack on the United Nations and its efforts in Africa, saying that the United States wished to see the countries of Africa solving their own problems independently, and that the US intended to support the African efforts to form a confederal union.

Nasser responded confidently, beginning by thanking the United States for its strong support during the 1956 attack on Egypt, and agreeing strongly with the need to preserve the United Nations, especially as Egypt had personally experienced its benefits, for not only did the UN stop the attack

\textsuperscript{318} Telegram from the Embassy in Cairo to the Department of State, September 19\textsuperscript{th}, 1959.
on Egypt, it also forced the attackers to withdraw. However, he went on to say, the United Arab Republic had been astonished to see the United Nations forces occupying Leopoldville Airport and the broadcasting station in the Congo, actions which seemed to be taken against Lumumba! Egypt had objected to these actions which posed a threat to the standing of the United Nations, whose forces had gone there originally to expel the Belgian forces!

Nasser then mentioned the events of 1948, and his distrust of the United Nations when, after spending months in the Negev desert of Palestine because the Egyptian government had trusted the UN, their hopes were dashed. However, he added, his experience with the UN was much better in 1956.

Nasser told Eisenhower that he felt the UN forces in Congo should not have been allowed to take actions that hindered the work of the legitimate government there, and added, “We can never forget that the UN resolutions pertaining to Israel have never been implemented.”

Eisenhower responded that with regard to Palestine in 1948, the United Nations did not have sufficient authority to implement the resolutions, but that he understood the bitterness harboured by the United Arab Republic towards the UN, and that the United States was doing its best to strengthen and reinforce this international organization.

With regard to the Congo, he agreed that matters had gone too far and that the primary task of the United Nations was to enforce the law.

As for the Suez crisis of 1956, Eisenhower said that in spite of the fact that it coincided with the US elections and the strong Jewish lobby, he nevertheless gave full support to the United Nations for the withdrawal of British, French, and Israeli forces, which was not an easy but was a matter of principle, which, he said, should also be applied with regard to the Congo.

Nasser replied that the United States had supported the establishment of Israel in 1948, which had caused the first barrier between the US and the Arab countries, and that the people of the Middle East perceived the US and the United Nations as one and the same, which placed a great responsibility upon the former. Nasser added that the US should not evade its responsibility in the Congo; and that he was as much against Soviet influence in the Congo as in the United Arab Republic itself.

Eisenhower assured him that the US wished to be of help not only in the Congo but in Africa as a whole, and that it had an economic programme for this purpose, adding that the US had no wish to control anyone.
Nasser then said that ever since he had come into power in 1952, he had looked forward to establishing friendly relations with the United States, and had tried his best to bring this about, but that the major obstacle had always been Israel! He had tried to buy arms, but was unable to do so from the West, while Israel received planes from France, tanks from Britain, and guns from the US, all of which constituted a threat to the United Arab Republic.

There had been violent reactions in Egypt to the declarations made by Kennedy and Nixon, who had called for opening the Suez Canal to Israeli ships, with no mention of the rest of the United Nations resolutions! If the US declared that the Canal should be opened to Israeli ships, then it should just as adamantly compel Israel to comply with the rest of the UN resolutions.

At this point Eisenhower said that the United States was tired of allocating twenty-three million dollars a year to the one million Arab refugees, with no progress at all towards a settlement!

He added that he did not want to see an arms race in the Middle East, and that he respected the United Arab Republic’s neutral stand and had no objection to its receiving Soviet arms, but did not want to see it controlled by the Soviets.

Nasser then said he was grateful for the wheat that was sent to Egypt, but added that he did not like discussions around whether this was a donation or not, and under what conditions? Egyptian dignity was at stake here.

Nasser also commented that he did not think a limited war between two small countries was possible these days, which was evidenced by the 1956 crisis. He added that he sought peace and vastly preferred it to war.

Eisenhower then said he looked forward to better relations with the United Arab Republic, adding that the US was always suspicious when the Soviets reached a country! Nasser replied that the United Arab Republic would never surrender its freedom and independence at any price, and that there was a time when its relations were bad with both the West and the East; in short, his country’s freedom, independence, and dignity came before any other considerations. Nasser also explained that Washington’s sudden withdrawal of the US offer to finance the High Dam was a blow to Egypt’s pride, to which Eisenhower replied that the offer was withdrawn only after the US had received information that the United Arab Republic was negotiating with Russia over the High Dam.

Regarding Jordan, Nasser said that ever since 1957, the Jordanians had been claiming that the United Arab Republic was in league with the Soviet Union against Jordan! The truth was that the United Arab Republic had no
agents in any Arab country, but there were people in these countries who trusted him and shared his views, believing as he did in Arab unity, though he did not know who these people were. A few months beforehand, King Hussein had made a hostile speech against the United Arab Republic, to which Nasser did not respond, but then later on, King Hussein made another speech denouncing Nasser as well as the communist influence in Iraq. This time, Nasser broke the silence of months and returned the attack. Then twenty-four hours after the assassination of Hazaa Al-Majali, Prime Minister of Jordan, the United Arab Republic was held responsible! How could they have possibly known who was responsible in such a short time?!

At this point, Eisenhower said that he found it hard to understand why the poorest and weakest of the Arab countries should attack the United Arab Republic? It made no sense, he added. Nasser’s view was that it was a psychological issue: the Jordanians were all for Arab unity, and many of them displayed his pictures and cheered ‘Long Live Nasser’ while the king wished they would cheer ‘Long Live Hussein’; it was all a personal matter!319

After Nasser’s return from the United States on October 5th, 1960, Nasser made a speech in Port Said on December 23rd, 1960 in which he expressed his disappointment that the United Nations had allowed itself to be used by the colonial forces, and had implemented their wishes by overthrowing the patriotic regime and making Lumumba serve as an object lesson to the African continent as a whole! Any politician would now be wary of asking the UN for assistance, knowing that they were playing the colonialists’ game! The UN administration was responsible for the events in the Congo, said Nasser, and had to be changed, otherwise the subordination of this international organization to the colonialists would lead to its demise. He added that the United Arab Republic while battling to protect the patriotic elements in the Congo, was also working to protect the United Nations as an international institution worthy of respect.

The role of the United States also came under fire and its policies strongly denounced in this speech due to their championing of Kasa Vubu, who arrested Lumumba on January 17th, 1961 and handed him over to Tshombe, who killed him. Nasser held the United States responsible for this crime.320

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319 Memorandum of a Conversation at the Waldorf Towers Hotel, New York, September 26th, 1960, with President Nasser.
320 Nasser’s interview with Columbian television, August 26th, 1961.
CHAPTER IV
A REVOLUTION AND AN ARAB AND INTERNATIONAL LEAP FORWARD
1961 – 1967

The period that followed the secession of Syria from the union with Egypt on September 28th, 1961, up until the Israeli attack on Egypt, Syria, and Jordan on June 5th, 1967, witnessed profound political, social, and economic changes. Nasser implemented several revolutionary procedures in the method of government and the country’s political system as a whole.
Nasser established a new popular organization, The Arab Socialist Union, a different concept to the former National Union, and poured the essence of his ideas and experiences garnered over the previous nine years into the National Charter, which was to serve as a roadmap for Egypt’s past, present, and future.

Nasser renounced his powers as president of the republic to a new foundation based upon the collective rule he believed in: the Presidential Council, which became the supreme authority in the country.

As for relations with the Arab world after the conspiratorial breakup of the union with Syria, a struggle began between the reactionary Arab regimes – notably Syria, Saudi Arabia, Iraq, and Jordan – and the progressive countries headed by the United Arab Republic, and joined by Algeria after its independence on July 5th, 1962.

Then came a totally unexpected development: a revolution in the most reactionary and backward of all Arab countries: the Yemen. And when Nasser responded to the call for help by the leaders of the Yemeni revolution and sent Egyptian troops to support them against the deposed Imam, who in turn resorted to Saudi Arabia asking for military aid, this widened the gulf between the United Arab Republic and Saudi Arabia even further. Jordan’s joining forces with Saudi Arabia intensified the conflict between the two parties, and Saudi Arabia cut its diplomatic relations with the United Arab Republic on November 6th, 1962.

Arab relations remained tense until Israel announced its intention to divert the waters of the Jordan River for its own use at the expense of Arab lands. The Jordan River has its sources in Lebanon, Syria, and historic Palestine, and flows into the Dead Sea.

At this point, Nasser called for a summit meeting in Cairo to confront this inimical plan, and the Arab leaders duly met at the headquarters of the Arab League on January 13th, 1964, rising above their differences and taking radical decisions to address the situation.

Several summit meetings followed; Nasser called for another session in Alexandria on September 6th, 1964, then the Arab leaders met again in Casablanca on September 13th, 1965. Nevertheless, the continuing war in Yemen between the Egyptian and revolutionary Yemeni forces on the one hand, and the Saudis and the family of the deposed Hamid Al Din on the other, naturally complicated inter-Arab relations, though it must be said that not one of the Arab countries dared to abandon the stand against the
Israeli aggression on Arab waters or the rights of the Palestinian refugees to return to their land in accordance with the UN resolutions.

This period witnessed revolutions in Iraq and Syria as well as in Yemen, and political systems changed with successive parties taking over, notably the Baath party in both Syria and Iraq. Interestingly, in spite of the animosity between Nasser and the Baath party after the separation, the Baath leaders requested a trilateral union with the United Arab Republic! Naturally, this attempt did not succeed, and it became clear that it was merely a token gesture intended to placate the people in Syria and Iraq who were clamouring for a union with the United Arab Republic.

The negotiations with the Syrian Baath came to an end as soon as the Charter was issued on April 17th, 1963, though meetings to discuss the union with the Iraqi regime under Abdel Salam Aref continued – after a coup removed the Baath from rule on September 14th, 1954 – until November 27th, 1966, but with no result.

Nasser continued to implement the political vision he had outlined in his book The Philosophy of the Revolution in which he had spoken of the African and Islamic circles, calling for African and non-alignment summit meetings to continue the work of the Bandung Conference of April 24th, 1955. The Organization of African Unity was accordingly established in Addis Ababa on May 25th, 1963.

Nasser continued to back liberation movements in the Arab world, Africa, and the Third World, leading to his decision to intervene in the Congo beside the United Nations after the violent crisis with the Belgian colonial forces, but subsequently withdrew his forces when the UN swerved from the liberation process. His stand regarding the Vietnamese war and the Cuban crisis reflect the same principles, even if this angered the United States.

**First: An evaluation of the Egyptian-Syrian union and the impact of the separation:**
Without a doubt, the success of the conspiracy to separate Syria from Egypt on September 28th, 1961, constituted the first defeat to Nasser’s policies and his principles of pan-Arabism and Arab unity. However, he managed, thanks to his vitality and the revolutionary spirit within him – he was only forty-three years old at the time – to turn this setback into a leap forward, particularly with regard to domestic affairs.

Nasser began to reorganize the government, appointing four vice-presidents: Abdel Latif Al-Boghdadi, Abdel Hakim Amer, Zakaria
Mohieddin, and Hussein Al Shafei, all members of the former Revolutionary Command Council.

During the government’s first session, Nasser spoke of the union and the related problems, saying:

“The union was forced upon us in 1958, though our opinion was that it could not be accomplished that easily and would lead to trouble. Egypt sacrificed a lot to save Syria from the inevitable collapse it was heading towards, and the union accordingly took place. However, those who had called for it began to try and exploit it to further their own ends: the capitalists, the Baathists, and even the military. We refused to let the union become the object of ambitions or material gain for anyone, and were subjected to countless attacks from the reactionary Arabs who feared that the spread of Arab nationalist sentiment would threaten their interests and their very existence, as well as that of the Zionists and the colonialists. Add to that the old politicians in Syria; in fact, Cairo was being targeted via Damascus!”

Nasser then went on to say:

“We are going through a most difficult period; everyone is against us, and our enemies are concentrating their efforts on destroying the popular gains we have made. Their broadcasting stations and all their media are attacking us, and have been used against us in Lebanon.”

1. **Passivity and indifference resulting from the neglect of organized political activity:**
With his characteristic courage and openness, Nasser began to list the obstacles he had encountered during the union to the cabinet of ministers, saying:

“Passivity and indifference were amongst the problems that resulted from being involved with action plans and projects at the expense of organized political work, with no attempt to develop our political affairs and mobilize all the forces on our side.

“We constructed the Al Rastan dam in Syria and several other projects such as the Al Forat dam and the railway system, but was that enough?! We did not tell the people what we were doing for their sakes; not organizing ourselves politically meant there was a state of indifference amongst the people not to say passivity.
“Our enemies are aware of this, and are trying to mobilize forces against us as they did in Syria, and I believe if we do not avoid making the same mistake here in Egypt, we will run into trouble in the future. All guns are aimed at Cairo and the efforts against us will intensify.

“Our mistake in Syria was to believe that we could establish a popular organization that would include all factions and social classes; we proclaimed that we wished to put an end to social differences within a framework of national unity and peace!

“However, the intentions of the enemies of the union were otherwise; some of these were even prominent members of the National Union and the Syndicate of Lawyers, and there were those amongst them who had praised the union, then took part in the movement to secede from it! We were taken in by appearances and had the best of intentions, but our enemies, all of whom had joint interests, coupled with the class struggle that prevailed in the country, all combined to work against us!

“Events proved that the manner in which the National Union was formed was a mistake; these are lessons we can learn from here in Egypt, because we will be subjected to the joint forces of all these elements: the West, the reactionaries, capitalists, and communists.

“On a global level, international politics find our policy of non-alignment unacceptable, while we cannot accept any form of alignment. Neither the Eastern nor the Western bloc can come to terms with this and each want us on their side, and believe that weakening us and putting pressure on us will allow them to bargain with us and force us to compromise.”

2. Experience has shown us that we need to establish a political system on a new basis:
Nasser stressed the need to mobilize all the patriotic forces, for as he said:

“Those whose land we took and whose businesses we nationalized, even if they pretend to accept what happened, will not forget it. We need to mobilize our patriotic forces so as to leave no chance to reactionary or capitalist elements to rise to the fore and sweep aside the patriotic elements who believe in us. These patriotic elements must be the political organization that we depend on, because bringing people together the way we did in the Liberation Rally\textsuperscript{321} or the National Union, resulted in contradictions we wish to avoid.”

\textsuperscript{321} The Liberation Rally was the first political organization formed after the revolution of July 23\textsuperscript{rd}, 1952, following the dissolution of political parties on January 17\textsuperscript{th}, 1953, then of the Muslim Brotherhood on January 14\textsuperscript{th}, 1954.
Nasser then explained what he meant by popular patriotic forces:

“Workers, fellaheen, intellectuals, university graduates, students, workers’ syndicates, and women’s societies, in other words everyone except feudalists, capitalists, and opportunists who pretend to believe in our principles simply to further their own ends. In this way, there will be no conflict, but rather unified objectives we will all work towards. We will bring together all those who feel that the revolution took place for their sakes, not those who feel that it diminished them and limited their influence, for they are of no use to us.

“What I want to stress is that even if we make plans and doubled our income in ten years; even if we built dams and iron and steel factories; if we do not build politically in tandem, all these gains will be taken over by the reactionaries, capitalists, and colonial countries!”

3. **For whose benefit is the socialist revolution?**
   As Nasser put it:

   “The revolution has to be both political and social; in 1952, it was political and our aim was to evict the English and end colonialism. It was a patriotic revolution but at the same time a bourgeois one, which did not affect the capitalists. In September 1952, we issued the law that limited ownership, which affected the feudalists but not the bourgeoisie, and the existing laws were still capitalist laws.

   “I consider that the socialist revolution really began with the decrees that were announced in July, 1961 concerning nationalization, progressive taxation, and limited ownership of industries and agricultural holdings. Naturally, now that we have initiated a social revolution, we must carry on to the very end, which means we need a revolutionary action that will consolidate socialism.

   “Many of those for whom these socialist laws were issued are unaware of where their interests lie: migrant workers, fellaheen, etc. They neither read nor take any action, and are always ready to work against their own interests without realizing it! The classes we are working for need to be made politically aware so that they can be mobilized and guided. As for the middle classes, they are cautious, our whole society is cautious and every single person is passive. They imagine that they can make gains in the future, and want to protect these supposed gains.
“We need to identify who the patriotic, working elements are, then mobilize them so that we can confront any situation that arises.”

4. Aspects of the internal struggle:
Nasser then spoke of the anti-regime rumours that were spreading in the country, saying:
“The reactionist elements whom we treated with all kindness and humanity imaged that what happened in Syria could happen in Egypt! I have placed the assets of some 200 persons under sequestration, because leaving this money in their hands means it will only be used against the welfare of the country.

“If we look at the social system in our country, we will find that it has not changed; it would be a huge mistake to imagine that we have changed our society in ten years! We have built factories, but have we rebuilt the social structure of the country, especially in Upper Egypt? There, in particular, things are exactly the same as they were!

“Regarding money, it is still in the hand of the capitalist class, while the people for whom we are working remain weak, absorbed in their daily tasks.

“I consider us to be in the midst of a socialist revolution: if we want equality amongst people then there must be equal opportunities.”

5. Changing the framework of the new political system:
Nasser then spoke of what needed to be accomplished, saying:

“We have an extremely difficult task ahead of us. Our new political organization consists of two parts, the first is the people, the masses whose problems we need to identify and then solve; the second does not exist yet: the leadership calibers who believe in our cause and can guide the masses. We need to find these leadership cadres and link them to similar branch cadres in every single sector.

“There is no unity of ideology and no organization; this must be changed, because the opposing forces are on the move both inside Cairo and outside of it, and they are connected in a way that we are not!”

Nasser accordingly came to the conclusion that the whole system must be changed.

First: The constitution. Reverting to the 1956 constitution would be a step back. It was necessary, said Nasser, to draw up a constitution
commensurate with the progressive socialist steps taken. Accordingly, it was decided that a temporary constitution would be adopted until the permanent constitution was finalized.

Second: The Ummma Council must be reorganized in a manner that would bring together all the patriotic forces in the country for whom a definition should be drawn up. No reactionary elements were to be allowed in.

Finally: the whole governmental apparatus must be reorganized and laws changed.

6. The external struggle and its implications:
In this first cabinet meeting after the separation from Syria, Nasser also mentioned the external forces fighting the United Arab Republic, saying:

“All guns are aimed at us; all the secret broadcasting stations east, west, and communist, are against us. Naturally, the Zionist press attacks us, as does the Israeli radio, and the West: England, France, and America, as well as King Saud and King Hussein and the separatist parties in Damascus and Amman.

“It is almost like a sacred alliance that has brought together all disparate elements, united in one objective only: to get rid of us, because we have come up with a strong ideology that is influencing all those around us.

“In 1955, the West asked us to stay away from the Arabs in return for the assistance we were asking for! Naturally, we refused to become a subordinate country like Turkey or Thailand!

“It is my belief that defending Egypt is not just Egypt alone, but the surrounding countries; we cannot adopt an isolationist policy, because they will never leave us alone. Some might ask: what have we to do with the Arabs?! The Baghdad Pact was intended to isolate us; both East and West want to isolate us; the East because they think they can empower the communists here, and the West because they also believe they can empower those loyal to them under the pretext of parliamentary democracy, which is the worst kind of parliamentary dictatorship; Iran has a parliament, but the West use this so-called democratic parliament to promote certain factions and kill the rest!

“Therefore, we cannot say that we have nothing to do with those around us, because we cannot allow our enemies to penetrate the countries that surround us. They will not leave us alone until they put us within their sphere of influence.”
7. Planning the country’s foreign policy:
Nasser drew up, in his own handwriting, a plan for the country’s foreign
policy after the separation, which included the propaganda policy, the
Islamic conference, Islamic missions, the work of the secret service, the
counter elements and how to overcome them, the Moslem Brotherhood,
the colonialist sympathizers, etc.

With regard to the African policy, all countries with liberation and Islamic
movements would be helped in every way possible.

Concerning Afro-Asian policy, ties must be reinforced and cooperation
take place in various fields: cultural exchange, opening new markets,
commercial relations, publicity, and the Islamic mission. In this context,
Nasser reviewed the United Arab Republic’s position towards a number of
issues, such as the Indo-Chinese problem, the Korean problem, and the
problem of Kashmir.

As for the United Arab republic’s Islamic policy, Nasser wrote:

“Are the facilities available?”

Then went on to list the means of reinforcing Islamic ties and making use
of the Islamic Conference, especially in Africa:

“Bearing in mind that the Asian countries also have large Islamic
communities who look upon Al-Azhar as if it were the Kaaba.”

He then wrote headings concerning the position of the United Arab
Republic towards the colonial Islamic conferences and the conferences of
the Muslim Brotherhood.

Regarding his policy towards the United States, Nasser differentiated
between the official diplomatic and economic policies and the media;
regarding the latter, the need to reach public opinion, and to make use of

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322 Islamic Mission: a town allocated to the board and accommodation of expatriate students coming to study at
Al-Azhar University, constructed in the Abbasia district of Cairo and opened in 1959.
323 The Islamic Conference was established in 1926 after Mustapha Kamel Ataturk abolished the Islamic Caliphate
whose headquarters was in Turkey. He invited King Abdel Aziz Al Seoud to host an international Islamic conference
in Mecca to review the affairs of Muslims, unite them, and look into the various Islamic problems.
324 Al-Azhar is one of the most important mosques of Egypt and the most famous in the Islamic world, built by the
Fatimid Gohar Al Saqalli in 970 AD.
325 Islam’s holiest shrine located in Mecca.
the thousands of letters he regularly received from the US – 30,000 a month – and from various parts of the world: 32,000 a day!

Finally, he put down points related to the United Arab Republic’s policies towards the West, the socialist camp, and Israel.

**Second: Setting up the new popular organization:**
A handwritten report by Nasser two months after the separation from Syrian sets down the after-effects of Syria’s secession upon Egypt:

“This event has breathed new life into the Egyptian reactionary forces and given them hope, and led them to reveal who they are. There was also some hesitation on the part of the intellectuals. But the people have proved they are strong and steadfast and have a greater level of awareness, in spite of the economic problems, housing problems, rations, etc. The army has also proved to be solid, unaffected by all the campaigns directed against our country. The National Union, however, has been infiltrated by counter-revolutionary elements.

“Our country will not stand strong unless we remove all counter-revolutionary elements completely. Eliminating the enemies of the revolution is a popular demand. These people conceal themselves, but will grab every opportunity to achieve their objectives in cooperation with the colonialists.”

On the enemies of the revolution, Nasser wrote:

“Our differences with our enemies necessitate setting up barriers between us. The first thing to be done internally is to crush all the enemies of the socialist revolution, crush everyone who tries to undermine the socialist system, i.e. arrests, deprive them of money and of rights, and protect the country from destructive activities whether internally or external; in short: no freedom for the enemies of the people.”

Nasser then mentions the contradictions within the people, asking:

“Who are the people? They are all the classes and groups who support and contribute to the socialist movement. The differences amongst the people do not necessarily conflict, meaning the differences between the working classes and the patriotic bourgeoisie.

“The country leans upon the people, so democracy must be practiced and the people must be free; all differences amongst them can only be solved using democratic means: discussion, persuasion, educating them, but not
by methods of pressure... This is where the role of leaders comes in; they must depend on persuasion in a democratic way. Self-criticism is the basic way to self-knowledge.”

Nasser called for:

“A conference of selected members of the popular forces representing the people in all sectors, in order to lay down a charter for forthcoming activity. This charter will form the basis of the next general elections to choose members of the popular organization, from which the general conference for political organization will stem, and which will write the permanent constitution for the United Arab Republic. Thus the first step towards establishing a popular organization that can defend the social revolution will have been taken.”

Nasser then defined, in his own handwriting, the meaning of social freedom:

“That every person should have the right to a share of the wealth of his country in accordance with the effort made, and opportunities must be equal.”

In the same document, Nasser continued:

“Reactionism is when a minority of the people monopolize most of a country’s resources and deprive the majority, who have the legitimate right to it, of their fair share. The reactionaries have pretended to embrace socialism, and have succeeded in driving many towards corruption, secure in the fact that the revolution has a merciful heart!

“In whose hands are the industrial projects and the country’s wealth? In 1960, we were on the brink of danger; the reactionaries were about to mobilize the revolution to further their own ends and steer it away from its progressive objectives. Capitalist control of the government does not mean a cabinet composed of millionaires, but a cabinet whose members were decided upon by these capitalists, which was the case before the revolution.

“As for the legendary foreign capital, we only received 8.7 million pounds in ten years! We are now leaning towards loans, rather than open the country up to foreign capital, why? Because foreign capital will transfer its

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326 Nasser’s speech at the meeting of the preparatory committee for the National Congress of Popular Forces on November 25th, 1961.
profits outside the country in hard currency, but loans will be paid within a limited time and will end, and the profits will remain for the people.”

Nasser then spoke of the previous experience and the nonsense spoken about the need to build the confidence of private capital, pointing out that in 1952, investment in industry was a mere 2 million pounds, which reached 88 million in 1960, adding:

“I am not against private capital when it is productive, but I am against it when it exploits and when it deprives others of their chances.”

The obstacles in the way of the social revolution, as Nasser saw them, were:

“Reactionism, exploitation, feudalism, exploitative capitalism, and monopolies; these people inherited money and abandoned the rest to poverty, and ignorance; they inherited everything….

“Political democracy cannot become a concrete reality unless social democracy and equal opportunities are achieved and equality reigns.”

Nasser criticized the Western capitalist two-party system, saying:

“Such a system at present would be nothing but a means of safeguarding the tyranny of capital and cannot provide freedom and rights to the working classes…Who can fund election campaigns? Capitalists and feudalists... We are still a capitalist country gradually transforming itself into socialism!”

In response to the claims that the Syrian uprising was the catalyst for the social revolution, Nasser said:

“This is wrong. The social revolution began with the laws of 1961; and the Syrian uprising was in response to the social revolution. They said there was no feudalism in Syria! How come, when there were those who owned a quarter of a million feddans?! They said there was no capitalism in Syria; how, with the hegemony of capital and monopolies in Syria? And what about the villages with no potable water in Syria?!”

Third: The Charter for National Action, a guideline for the following ten years:
Nasser presented the Charter to the National Congress of Popular Forces, where it was discussed and agreed to. It comprised several decisive directions with long-term effects: half the seats in all popular councils, at
the forefront of which was the house of representatives, were to be allocated to workers and *fellaheen*, the rightful majority, who had long been deprived of proper representation; this means that the power of legislation and supervision was now placed in the hands of workers and *fellaheen*; furthermore, the authority of popular councils now surpassed that of administrative and executive authorities. Nasser thus laid the foundations for the role of the people, the principle of eliminating class differences, and collective rule, affirming democracy.

The Charter differentiated between exploitative, monopolistic capital and patriotic capital working with no exploitation or monopolizing. In effect, the Charter had chosen a different path to the typical two options known worldwide, namely capitalism or communism, and chosen a third way, a way that brought together *fellaheen*, farmers, and national capitalism within the framework of the Socialist Union, the new popular organization that would achieve a constant state of communication between the leaders and the people.327

Nasser explained the difference between the National Union and the Socialist Union as follows:

“The former was established as a framework for bringing together all the contradictions in order to resolve differences peacefully within its boundaries. This included the feudalists and the exploitative capitalists; all had a chance to enter the National Union. However, we learnt a lesson from Syria, when the reactionaries attacked, and when the Arab world joined together against the principles of social justice that we announced in our country. We realized that the basis upon which the National Union was founded was not sound.

“Today, in the Socialist Union, we are avoiding these faults: the Socialist Union is composed of the popular working forces and there is no place for reactionaries, feudalists, or corrupt and exploitative capitalists.”328

The Charter outlined the principle of collective leadership and the renouncement by the president of his powers to the Presidential Council on the basis that collective rule achieves democracy at all levels.

In a speech on September 24th, 1962, Nasser said:

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327 “The Umma (Nation) and its role in making heroes and the role of heroes”, Heikal, the Ahram, May 25th, 1962. On June 1st, Heikal asked: “Are the fellahen and workers up to their responsibilities?”
“We have battled since day one for the cause of true democracy, both political and social, and in ten years, have managed to achieve a considerable socialist transformation: land ownership has been limited to one hundred feddans per family, and 80% of production has been nationalized. Our battle has been to give everyone their rights, and not have the country’s wealth monopolized by the few. Now we must begin to organize the state; the Presidential Council and the Executive Council which is the cabinet of ministers in which authority will also be cooperative and not in the hands of the head of the council alone; in this way, we will get rid of the passivity and individualism that we complained of. A decree will also be issued for the formation of the Supreme Council of the Socialist Union.” 329

From Nasser’s handwritten notes:

“The Presidential Council is the highest authority in the state and undertakes legislative authority and appoints and dismisses the supreme command of the armed forces. Its work ends once the new permanent constitution is completed”; which was on March 25th, 1964.

“The President of the Republic in this system has the authority to issue laws and decrees, to appoint the head of the Executive Council, his deputies, and ministers; to appoint or dismiss the deputies of the National Defence Council and its members; and is the Supreme Commander of the Armed Forces and the Head of the National Defence Council.”

Nasser announced that most of his time would be devoted to the Popular Congress, as the safeguarding of national work was contingent upon its success. It was necessary to mobilize the masses and create leadership cadres, especially amongst young people, who must assume responsibility.

Fourth: The political achievements
By 1963, the Socialist Union had five million members, but it was necessary to create a political entity within it to protect the revolution against colonialism, feudalism, reactionism, and exploitative capitalism: this was the Vanguards Organization.

329 Ibid, pp. 395-420
Nasser explained to the leaders of the Syrian Baath party who came to Cairo to ask for a union on March 19th, 1963, why he had not allowed political parties:

“Parties are selective; their numbers can reach thousands, but this means ignoring the rest of the people, so rather than democracy for the people, we have dictatorship of the party! Parties in Egypt were reactionary and cooperated with the colonialists, all but the National Party whose membership was small. The Muslim Brotherhood carried on after we dissolved political parties on January 17th, 1953, but we had our doubts about them which were confirmed when we clashed with them in 1954.

“Now we have no political parties, but rather the alliance of the popular working force. We have completely banned capitalist and feudalist parties, how? By ending feudalism, by nationalization, and by sequestration. We have carried out a full-scale liquidation of the alliance of capitalism with feudalism: what is their weapons? Money.

“At first we thought of limiting the Socialist Union to three or four hundred thousand members but we did not manage to, for the simple reason that the whole country said: We are with you! And so it was; five million people applied to join; after eleven years of the masses’ support of the revolution, it is time to organize this support and create communication between the base and the people. Needless to say, no one can join the Socialist Union who has been put under sequestration or upon whom the socialist decrees have been applied.

“If we have parliaments without wiping out exploitation and the hegemony of capital, then only a minority will be represented; such organizations would represent the alliance of capitalism with feudalism and not the working people! We are not ruling for the sake of the bourgeoisie, we are ruling for the benefit of the alliance of workers, fellaheen, and intellectuals; for the benefit, in other words, of the whole popular working force.

“With regard to the public sector, we have allocated a percentage of the board of directors to workers in order to address the problem of bureaucracy, and workers also get 25% of profits; workers’ syndicates and the Socialists Union are also represented in our factories; the result is that production had increased. We have set a maximum limit for salaries at 5,000 pounds and a minimum as well.
“Today, we are setting up popular councils in the towns and villages, membership of which will be via elections; they will have authorities similar to those of the council of representatives.

“And to ensure that reactionaries and members of the old class cannot gain a foothold anywhere, the Charter stipulates that 50% of the State Council (the Umma Council) and the popular councils and organizations must consist of workers and fellahen. This is to safeguard against the machinations of the feudalists and reactionaries in any forthcoming elections, because these still have their clannish, classist influence and in this way, we can ensure that the class that ruled the country for so long with their inherited wealth and power, can only constitute 50% no matter what they do.”

Nasser introduced all these changes in the midst of a counter-revolution that took place after Syria’s secession, thinking they could seize this opportunity, but the revolution was stronger and managed to put an end to this opposition. However, as Nasser said:

“The counter-revolution will continue until we bring about complete social change...so long as there is a revolution, there will be a counter-revolution...But it is this counter-revolution which drove us to establish the committee for eliminating feudalism, which succeeded in doing so throughout the country; these counter-revolutionary elements were killing the fellahen and taking the land and had exceeded the land ownership limit!”

Fifth: How to breathe new life into the revolution

On March 25th, 1964, the temporary constitution of the United Arab Republic was issued; the Umma Council would begin work the following day on the permanent constitution, which would then be presented to the people.

Towards the end of 1964, Nasser, with his keen sensitivity towards political matters, began to feel that the general atmosphere was not as it should be, and wrote:

“What is the reason for the prevailing atmosphere? There are several: rising prices, allowing criticism without restrictions... There is inflation, no doubt about that, and increased spending on the part of the armed forces and Yemen, lack of control from local authorities, taking on non-productive

330 Ibid. pp 378-402
projects in the domain of services; overspending on salaries and perks, and an inefficient distribution of the budget that led to a decrease in domestic production and to some factories halting production.

“The whole government apparatus needs shaking up! Employees are oblivious; those at the top want more privileges while those at the bottom are under pressure from the rising prices. Most of those involved in the public sector are trying to create a new class and are irked by any restrictions... As for the diplomatic corps, they are also restless and discontented, especially after the latest drop in salaries!

“As for the countryside, a new class is springing up; and the old landowners still carry influence: where is the fellah of the Agrarian Reform?!”

Nasser then noted the errors in cooperative marketing, and the difficulties of dealing with the credit bank.

Speaking of his emotions, Nasser wrote in the same document:

“Loss of trust is frightening! There is corruption, or attempts at corruption; and a dislike of criticism and hypersensitivity at the upper echelons; in addition, the sequestration procedures have created a class that has been crushed and now speaks unconstrainedly before the remnants of the old class and the new class that is being formed!”

As for the communists, Nasser writes:

“We did not implement a course of action when dismantling them, and the result is that they are regrouping!

“The whole political system is at death’s door; how can we breathe life into it in the current circumstances? An action plan is necessary for the forthcoming period.”

Continuing to criticize the state of affairs in the country, Nasser writes:

“There are disparate trends within the Umma Council coupled with a tendency to lie in wait for the government and a desire to achieve cheap popularity; there is no connection with the Socialist Union, and guidance is weak. As for the ministries, we have no ministry for scientific research, and a plethora of problems in the Ministry of Industry.”
“The situation in the army reflects the state of affairs within the public: incohesive. It is no longer possible to continue based solely upon what was.

“There is a psychological problem, and a sense of rebellion that is being fed by several forces.”

Nasser then began to draw up a three-month action plan which included a programme for reducing prices, settling the sequestration issue, a campaign in the countryside, and forming a central committee of the Socialist Union.

As he put it:

“What we need is to breathe fresh life into the revolution, either from within the ruling system with a comprehensive change – would that be possible? Or from within the Socialist Union by introducing new elements.”

Nasser then writes of the need to restore revolutionary purity to everyday actions, and he brings up the matter of accountability, saying:

“Heads must fall from amongst the governors, the heads of organisations, company directors, wherever there is a need for accountability.

“Procedures need to be taken to address some pending problems and reinstate the principles and objectives of the 23rd of July revolution. The diplomatic corps problem must also be resolved. We must establish a tightly-knit system that is in direct contact with the people, with current problems, and future hopes.”

The plan also included changing the prime minister, Aly Sabri, as well as his five deputies, and establishing a system whereby the deputy ministers in their capacity as a smaller cabinet should meet every morning, and the possibility of having a manager for the prime minister’s office to serve as a minister for speedy communications and who would be required to attend the smaller cabinet meeting and send minutes of the meetings to the president on a daily basis. A system was also to be established whereby the governor would be in touch with the prime minister and the smaller cabinet on a daily basis, as well as with the Socialist Union.

Nasser concluded:

“It is obvious that there is an unusual atmosphere prevailing in the country; and if this seems to be caused by rising prices, the problem of the teachers, and the fact that criticism is allowed to flow unchecked, there are
bigger reasons: there is a real problem with inflation and the government is unfit to address the increasing responsibilities placed upon the state; production is also facing difficulties: bureaucracy, and the unsuitability of some elements. The state has become the biggest producer but has not updated its methods or its means to the standard commensurate with its increased responsibilities.”

Sixth: The beginning of a new revolutionary phase
The cabinet of ministers headed by Aly Sabri tended its resignation on March 27th, 1965, and Zakaria Mohieddin took over as prime minister. Nasser had been nominated as president and was reelected for a six-year period on March 16th, 1965.

Nasser called for a meeting in his home on March 30th, 1965 to evaluate the previous period, in which he spoke of all the negative phenomena he had noticed, demanding a new, revolutionary phase for the forthcoming period, and requesting a report from each minister on the problems and proposed solutions in their respective sectors.

Martial law had been cancelled in March 1964, and political prisoners released from jail, including communists and Muslim Brotherhood members. On April 7th, 1965, the Egyptian communists announced that they were ending the independent status of the Egyptian Communist Party, and sent a copy of the decision to Nasser.

A new conspiracy by the Muslim Brotherhood was discovered in July, when it was revealed that they had formed a secret organization, and had collected arms and explosives, and were receiving funding from abroad and preparing to overthrow the government. Nasser commented on this in a speech he made to Arab students at the Arab Club in Moscow on August 29th, 1965, saying:

“We cannot show lenience towards this: shall we forgive, as we did before?! We forgave before (the attempted assassination attack on October 26th, 1954) but cannot do so again. Everyone is responsible for their actions, and this conspiracy will be dealt with forcefully and crushed. How did we find out about it? A citizen reported it.”

Nasser continued to monitor the counter revolution and its movements, and once again noted down the dangers of the prevailing situation on February 2nd, 1966:

331 Ibid. part 4, pp 849-861.
“The last time there was a true mobilization was in March, 1965, when it reached its peak. The situation today is precarious; after the mobilization, things came to a standstill; the change we aspired to was not practically linked with the programme we had drawn up. Where is the new generation?! A question to the people! There must be more awareness of people’s day-to-day problems; there is no communication between the ministry and the people, and our real achievements are not presented to the public properly. The domestic front is suffering from a state of anxiety!”

Nasser goes on criticizing:

“The misuse of sequestrated flats; the rationing system; the youth organizations; the lack of solidarity amongst the popular working forces; a campaign against army officers which is gaining popularity: the campaign is not new, but the fact that it is gaining popularity is! There is a feeling that a new, privileged class now exists, a class which enjoys a lot of perks and cares little for the people’s needs! There are problems in the countryside, too.

“The only positive thing is the High Dam!

“What is to be done? We need to take the initiative and hammer on the progress that has been made so far, and focus on successes rather than failure. We need to devote more care to the Socialist Union, and the ministry must finish the plan and present it to the governorates and get the people moving. There must be a conference to discuss the plan, which should include the Umma Council members and the executive councils.

“People care little about foreign policy; they care about domestic policies: let us have them participate positively, and discuss the matter of public supervision of services.

“The home front must back me when I engage in any Arab battle; my influence abroad must be as successful as in Egypt... We are now, for the first time, fighting the whole Arab bourgeoisie; we need to attract the middle class both in Egypt and outside of it.

“Naturally, none of the feudalists can accept the limitations on land ownership and the distribution of land to the fellaheen; the exploitative capitalists whose factories have been nationalized can never stand on the side of the revolution; the colonialists whose interests – banks, insurance companies, and factories – have been nationalized, can never side with the revolution but with the counter-revolution.
“The counter-revolutionary forces have tried to exploit sectors of the people ever since the early days of the revolution but have never succeeded; they have only managed to fool some people, and make them afraid of change.”
Second: The conflict in Yemen

1. The surprising outbreak of a revolution in Yemen:

On September 26th, 1962, the High Command of the Yemeni army overthrew Imam Badr, killing members of the royal family, and issued a decree abolishing the monarchy and announcing the establishment of a ‘free republic’, the Yemeni Arab Republic.

Abdullah Al-Sallal, the leader of the revolution, immediately asked for the backing and help of the United Arab Republic.

At the same time, Prince Al-Hassan, the uncle of the deposed king and Yemen’s representative at the United Nations, asked the United States to declare that it was against foreign intervention in Yemen and to acknowledge him as the legitimate new ruler of Yemen. He also asked the US to help him return to Yemen in order to restore the monarchy, to which the US replied that it would not be possible to do so as they did not intervene in the internal affairs of other nations! The very same night, Prince Al-Hassan travelled to London seeking help from the British.

That same day, the US received erroneous reports that the revolutionaries were working in tandem with the United Arab Republic, upon which the US government sent a telegram to its Egyptian counterpart stating that they had no intention of intervening in Yemeni affairs, and that US acknowledgement of the new Yemeni government was pending further information in order to gauge the extent of popular support for the revolution and the extent to which it was in control of the country, as well as confirmation that the new government intended to respect international obligations and was capable of doing so.

The US government took care to stress that the nature of the relationship between the new Yemeni government and the United Arab Republic was a matter which did not concern the United States, but that it hoped, in spite of this, that the United Arab Republic would understand that the US had a vital stake in maintaining the security of the Arab Gulf region, which depended on Britain’s maintaining its status and control in Aden, which in turn, together with its influence in the Persian Gulf, had a direct impact on the interests of the United Arab Republic in maintaining the security of Kuwait. The United States also expressed the hope that the United Arab Republic would use its influence on the new Yemeni regime to ensure that

332 Muhammad Al-Badr (February 15, 1926 – August 6, 1996) was the last king of the Mutawakilite Kingdom of Yemen (North Yemen) and leader of the monarchist regions during the North Yemen Civil War (1962–1970).
333 Telegram from Abdullah Al-Sallal to Nasser.
334 Circular Telegram from the Department of State to certain posts, Washington, September 27th, 1962.
the latter focus on reinforcing internal stability and development rather than venture into external ‘adventures’.335

It can be concluded from this telegram sent by the US to Nasser the day following the Yemeni revolution, that they realized that the crux of the matter lay not in Sanaa, but in Cairo, for the UAR was the only Arab country with the ability to influence matters in Yemen.

Prince Faisal also got in touch with the United States the day after the revolution, asking for US and British assistance in fighting the new regime in Yemen alongside Saudi Arabia! At the same time, Saudi troops began lining up on the borders between Saudi Arabia and Yemen. The deposed Imam Al-Badr had fled to Saudi Arabia when the revolution broke out, asking for help.

The policy adopted by the US at the time, as it informed the UAR, was not to intervene in Yemen, because it considered the Imam’s regime to be one of the most backward in the world. However, it was also in the interests of the US to back the Saud family the same way it backed Jordan. As for US policies towards Nasser, they were designed to turn him inward; and to increase US leverage on him to encourage him to adopt policies less antagonistic to US interests and those of its allies and to continue with US aid so that Nasser should not resort more to the Soviets.336

So in actual fact, the US was an active player in the crisis from the very beginning of the Yemeni revolution, as was Britain. Both countries had huge stakes in the area; oil in Saudi Arabia hence the need to keep the Saud family in power because they provided the desired stability, in addition to the British colonies that still existed, including Aden, and which could be threatened by the revolution in Yemen.

In this context, Prince Faisal arrived in Washington on October 4th, 1962 to meet with President Kennedy, who had already received several reports most important of which was the fact that King Saud was considerably weakened and that Faisal, who was more intelligent, would succeed him, and had come to Washington in person to ascertain to what extent the US would be supporting him. The Yemeni revolution had brought to the fore Saudi Arabia’s fear of Nasserism, and the Saud family feared they would be targeted next after the Yemeni monarchy!

The US reaction to this visit was that it would be difficult to satisfy Faisal in spite of the fact that they confirmed that they supported the Saud

335 Telegram from the US government to the government of the UAR, September 27th, 1962.
336 Memo from Robert Komer of the National Security Council staff, to President Kennedy, October 4th, 1962.
family. Robert Komer noticed that Faisal suspected that the US had changed its policy and was now supporting Nasser, and in order to persuade him that this was not the case, reminded him of the arms credit extended for $13.5 million; the gift of three radio transmitters; and the US economic survey team that was sent. The US also agreed to the Saudi request to keep the military training mission there, and to sell new fighter planes, the F-5A.

The US’s main concern was that the Saudis should press forward with modernization and development, as internal reform in their opinion constituted the best antidote to Nasserism!337

Faisal used every means in his power to persuade the US to back him; he seemed very sure of the situation in Yemen on the basis of the historic method of inheritance in Yemen, saying that the tribes in the hills of northern Yemen would join together to restore the rule of the Imam. Phillips Talbot, Assistant Foreign Secretary, who met with Faisal in New York on October 13th, 1962, stated that the US had valuable assets in Yemen and that it would be obliged to back the Saudi and Jordanian forces in their efforts to topple Al-Sallal. However, the US government said this would not be possible, especially as the UAR was supporting Sallal and might request assistance from the Soviet Union! The situation in Yemen had placed the United States in a difficult possession regarding its relations with the UAR.338

2. The Egyptian forces move to Yemen:
On October 5th, 1962, a limited number of Egyptian troops moved to the Red Sea on their way to Yemen, 1000 miles (1852 kilometres) away from Egypt’s southern borders, in order to support the revolution there, after Saudi troops had crossed over into the north and north-east of Yemen, together with a technical force from Jordan. Apart from the said region, the new Yemeni regime was in full control of the country. Faced with this Saudi intervention, the United Arab Republic acknowledged the new Yemeni Republic and announced that it would not allow the revolutionary regime to be overthrown!

In his meeting with the Presidential Council on September 29th, 1962, Nasser discussed the contents of the telegram he had received from the leaders of the Yemeni revolution, which stated: “We hope for your moral and material support, and are ready to receive your advice and directives.”

337 Memo from Komer to President Kennedy, Washington, October 4th, 1962.
338 Telegram from the Department of State, Washington, to the Embassy in the UAR, October 13th, 1962.
Nasser informed the Council that he had not answered right away but had sent them a message through the Charge d’Affaires there saying:

“We will support you in the case of any outside intervention or attack, especially if Saud intervenes, in which case we will help militarily.”

Nasser added that he had told them to form a government so that people would acknowledge them, and to move quickly without delay!

Nasser added that the day after the revolution, the BBC had announced that newspaper headlines were saying: ‘Nasser again’!

“The truth is, we have no relations with Yemen and our embassy there is closed; however, we can acknowledge the new regime, though of course the British won’t like it, and neither will Hussein.

“The army is backing the revolution, but at the same time the tribes are with the deposed Imam; there could be a civil war.

“We will help them as much as we can, but indirectly; that is to say we can send them arms, but will not engage in an operation that could embroil us in an international crisis, especially with the English or with Saud directly... We can send a small number of commandos to help out. We can help them financially, because no one else will! The Soviet Union has acknowledged the new regime in Yemen.”

A surprising development occurred on October 5th, 1962, after King Saud had mobilized his forces on the Yemeni border: a Saudi military plane flown by a pilot named Rashad Chesha and some of his Saudi colleagues arrived in Cairo. They were carrying weapons to attack the Yemeni revolutionaries with, but had refused to do so and had defected to Cairo.

Nasser continued to discuss the Yemeni issue and the question of Egyptian military intervention during the Presidential Council session of October 10th, 1962, fourteen days after the revolution in Yemen had taken place. Nasser said:

“Matters in Yemen will develop now that Saudi Arabia has intervened. We have a daily airlift to Yemen and can reach Sanaa, and can close the crossings at Saada; we can crush the enemy.

“The question is: is what is happening in Yemen none of our business? The answer is that it is, since we announced our support for the revolution
from day one. The battle is a difficult one, but Al-Hassan\textsuperscript{339} has entered Yemeni territory, and the situation is difficult.

“The success of this revolution means the collapse of Saudi Arabia and of the colonialists in the Protectorates. They are afraid that the present of Egypt there will shift the strategic balance in the whole region.”

He goes on to speak of the Russians:

“After a spell of rather chilly relations, they are now much more forthcoming.”

He goes on to say:

“Our forces in Yemen are increasing; in my opinion this is a battle of defence: we are defending Cairo in Sanaa!

“The situation in Saudi Arabia and also in Syria is shaky and unsettled; they were taken aback when we recognized the new government in Yemen. The Saudis are on the move, as are the Jordanian troops. King Saud is sending vehicles and money to the tribes in Yemen and is cooperating with the Sultans of the south, especially Sultan Behan. What worries me is that it is a decisive battle; some even compare it to the battle of Waterloo and the republics after the French Revolution!

“We have 3000 paratroopers in Yemen. How far will we go there? If planes from Jeddah attack, we will have to do the same.

“I am confident that the revolution will win the battle in spite of all the forces ranged against it; this will encourage all progressive forces, especially in Aden. And of course, we can supply Aden with weapons from Yemen!

“Our plan is this: if the Saudi and Jordanian planes intervene, we have to attack them. We will not attack Saudi Arabia, but will attack their air force on the ground, nor will we attack Aden. The Saudi army has around twelve fighter planes, and the advantage we gained by the Saudi pilots who sought asylum in Egypt is that the Saudis have lost confidence in their air force.

“The English will never attack directly; they will support the sultans and assist the tribes, and could send planes to Hussein. There will be indirect

\textsuperscript{339} Prince Hassan, the deposed Imam’s uncle.
hostilities from the English, and direct hostilities from the Saudis, though they are putting the Saudi troops in Yemeni uniforms! These are Saud’s instructions, to dress them as Yemenis and put Latin number plates on their vehicles; in fact Saud said: ‘Disguise yourselves, because if Nasser finds out, he will attack us!’

“Our forces are still in Saada, while the Yemenis have no army to speak of! We cannot depend on them... It would shameful if our forces were too few and they attacked us; we would look really bad.

“I have told the Yemeni leaders that this is not just a matter of a revolution, but that the political aspect has to be seen to as well: there must be a presidential council and a revolutionary council. It looks as though we are in it for the long haul!”

Faced with the possibility of the UAR’s launching full-scale operations in Yemen rather than the limited intervention that had so far occurred, the US feared that the Soviets might intervene, as it was in their interests to extend their influence in the Red Sea area, not to mention the critical repercussions within Saudi Arabia should their intervention in Yemen intensify. There was no alternative to the current rulers there as far as the US was concerned, and the collapse of the Saudi ruling family would lead to the division of the country and a state of chaos that would threaten the vital interests of the United States. The interests of both the Americans and the British would also be at risk in Aden; accordingly both countries were working in tandem to address the dangers posed to them by the situation in Yemen.340

President Kennedy sent a message to Faisal on November 2nd, 1962 after the latter’s return from Saudi Arabia to the US, where he had met with Kennedy on October 5th. The message confirmed what the president had already told the king; namely that the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia could rely on the friendship of the United States and its cooperation; and that the US had a lasting interest in maintaining the stability of the Kingdom and its continuing prosperity.341

At the same time, the US managed to get a promise from Nasser on November 9th, 1962, that he would not invade Saudi Arabia and was willing to consider a mutual disengagement of forces with Saudi Arabia.342

340 Telegram from the Department of State in Washington to the Embassy in the UK, October 11th, 1962.
341 Kennedy’s letter to King Faisal, November 2nd, 1962.
342 Telegram from the Department of State, Washington, to the Embassy in the UAR, November 10th, 1962.
The US and Britain both expected a negative outcome should the issue of Yemen be brought before the Security Council, as the new regime had acquired legitimacy after having been recognized by the Soviet Union and most of the Arab states. Britain was also apprehensive of the threat to Aden, and accordingly decided not to provide Al-Hassan with direct assistance, but to do so covertly.\(^{343}\)

Nasser concluded that the US had refrained from intervening because, “they are worried about the position of the monarchy in Saudi Arabia!”

Nevertheless, the situation was getting worse for the United Arab Republic, and upon the advice of Field Marshal Abdel Hakim Amer, required additional forces in Yemen, especially on the coastal areas and certain spots in Al-Sarwah, Sanaa, and Omran. It was also decided to change tactics from defence to attack, and that the air force was the best means for this. However, the number of airports was limited and building new ones quickly enough would be difficult; but it was necessary to build at least one.\(^{344}\)

Nasser was of the opinion that:

“This battle will be decisive. The sacred alliance of reactionaries are joining in the battle, and naturally the Americans will help Israel as they are extremely worried about the impact of this revolution on the Israelis. The British also want to quell the revolution, and are so worried that they want to form an ‘Arab union’\(^ {345}\) and keep a number of colonies, so that if a revolution occurs in the protectorates, they will still have Aden as a colony in the region.

“The military plan till now does not consist of organized operations, but is more like guerilla warfare... Badr has not entered Yemen... And the position of our troops at present does not allow us to move; we need to send in more forces... And end the whole operation... The forces we send will be compensated for here, so that the army of the UAR does not decrease in numbers; this will require a budget, because we expect Israel to intervene at any time.”\(^ {346}\)

\(^{343}\) Telegram from the Department of State, Washington, to the Embassy in the UK, October 11th, 1962.

\(^{344}\) Presidential Council, session on November 11th, 1962, ibid.

\(^{345}\) The Federation of South Arabia consisted of 12 sultanates under British protection in 1962, and was joined by the crown colony of Aden in 1963, then by 5 other sultanates in 1964. It did not include the sultanates of Hadramout and Al-Mahra. It was formed under British auspices and came to an end in 1967 after the revolution of October 14th and the establishing of the Democratic Republic of South Yemen.

\(^{346}\) South Arabia refers to the south-western region of the Arab peninsula.
Another defection to the UAR occurred when Suhail Hamza, the Commander of the Jordanian Air Force, arrived in Cairo together with several planes, requesting asylum. He and his companions were received by Nasser, who agreed to appoint them in the UAR Air Force, together with their Saudi colleagues.

In time, the United States was ready to recognize the Yemen Arab Republic after West Germany had recognized it even before East Germany had. Sure enough, on December 19\textsuperscript{th}, 1962, the US recognized the new regime on the basis that it now controlled most of Yemen and that the royalists were unable to resist. Moreover, there was an increased danger of internal dissatisfaction in Saudi Arabia and Jordan should the war be escalated by the Saudis and Jordanians, who backed the Yemeni royalists. The US also feared a rise in anti-American and pro-Soviet sentiment in the Yemen Arab Republic. It is worth noting that Nasser’s promise not to use Yemen to invade Saudi Arabia and to refrain from undermining Britain’s status in Aden constituted a promise of stability in the Gulf region.

Britain, however, informed the US that it would postpone its recognition of the fledgling republic, but added that it had no objections to the US doing so.\footnote{Memo from Rusk to President Kennedy, Washington, November 10\textsuperscript{th}, 1962.}

3. \textbf{Initiatives to end the war in Yemen:}
Three parties agreed that the war should end as soon as possible; these were the United States, the United Arab Republic, and the Yemen Arab Republic. Saudi Arabia, however, rejected this, and Faisal continued to support the Yemeni royalists and to participate in direct clashes with the Egyptian forces.

Events in Yemen developed as follows:

\textbf{a. The first US initiative:}
The UAR issued a statement read by Nasser in the meeting of the Supreme Executive Council on November 28\textsuperscript{th}, 1962:

“The United Arab Republic is proud to have supported the Yemeni revolution since the early hours of its occurrence. We offered our complete and unconditional backing in response to the wish of the Yemeni people to win back their country from the various interventions it was subjected to from neighbouring states. The Yemeni Arab Republic today is standing on its own two feet and is the legitimate government of Yemen. The United Arab Republic does not wish the
bloodshed to continue and is ready to disengage forces and to withdraw gradually from Yemen, if the Saudi and Jordanian forces who are supporting the deposed monarch also withdraw and if external assistance to the royalists is discontinued, or if the government of the Yemeni Arab Republic requests this.

“This withdrawal is conditional, and it is we who will decide.”

Nasser then added that he had received a letter from President Kennedy on November 16th concerning the situation in Yemen, and commented on it, saying:

“They want to end the conflict so that matters do not develop into a full-scale war inside Saudi Arabia with a confrontation between us and them.”

Kennedy also sent a similar letter to King Hussein, Prince Faisal, and Al-Sallal, saying:

“I have been deeply troubled by the recent course of events and am distressed at the difficulties that have arisen between countries with which the United States wishes to preserve friendly relations.”

President Kennedy goes on to voice his concern that the struggle in Yemen was posing a threat to the security of the region, urging the leaders involved in the war to consider carefully the dangers that would ensue should the matter continue to develop unchecked. He proposed an action plan to be implemented as soon as possible, consisting of the following steps:
1. Speedy phased withdrawal of all foreign powers in Yemen.
2. Cessation of external support of the royalists.
3. Speedy withdrawal of all forces on the Saudi-Yemeni borders.

This goes to prove that the US played a pivotal role in this crisis and wished to end it, as it threatened its vital interests in the region. Nasser was fully in accord with this US objective, as he had, since the beginning, been wary of military intervention owing to the material and human burdens it entailed. Faisal, however, wished to continue the attempt to restore the monarchy in Yemen to ensure the continuation of the rule of the Saud family in his own country on the one hand, and to inflict as much damage as possible on the UAR forces on the other!

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He looked upon Nasser as an adversary who opposed reactionism, especially after the latter backed the Yemeni revolution, not to mention that Cairo radio relayed the message, ‘Saud will be next!’ During Prince Faisal’s visit to the US one week after the Yemeni revolution, he expressed his concern that the US had not helped Al-Hassan return to Yemen, and also accused the US of being passive towards Nasser. After receiving the letter sent by Kennedy through Parker Hart, the US Ambassador in Saudi Arabia, which was similar to the one sent to Nasser on the situation in Yemen, Faisal said, in a cold tone:

“At first glance I can tell that this is a truly unfortunate state of affairs! I did not expect the President and his government to put us in such a situation. We have depended greatly on the United States, but the current state of affairs is what Nasser wants, and obviously it is what he has succeeded in getting, and it will be imposed upon us all!”

With regard to the Saudi government’s proposal to receive representatives of the Yemeni Arab Republic and Al-Sallal’s offer to send a delegation to Riyadh, Faisal said he would not under any circumstances agree to receive Al-Sallal’s delegates.

“The Saudi government only recognizes Al-Badr and does not intend to acknowledge the Yemeni Arab Republic.”

The US ambassador reminded Faisal of the promise made by Kennedy during Faisal’s last visit to the US, namely that the US would provide Saudi Arabia with moral and material support. The US had also made it abundantly clear that it would not tolerate any attack on the Saudi regime by the UAR, and that it considered the stability of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia of vital importance to its interests.

The ambassador also referred to Nasser’s reply to the said communication, in which he stated that he had no intention whatsoever of interfering in the affairs of Faisal’s regime.

The US had also provided Saudi Arabia with F-100 fighter planes, a US naval destroyer, and RB 66 destroyers which were sent to Dhahran for support and reassurance.

Regarding Yemen, the US ambassador reiterated his government’s position, which was that the revolution was an accomplished fact, and the UAR was ready to intervene even more strongly to save the Yemeni

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350 Kommer to Kennedy, October 4th, 1962.
Arab Republic, which meant there was a definite danger of escalation. The important thing was that the UAR forces should leave Yemen, in which case the probability of a direct clash between the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia and the Yemeni Arab Republic would be much less. And with US presence in Yemen, it would be possible to monitor the activities of the UAR within the country and more importantly, to follow closely the activities of the Soviet Union, which were markedly intensified in the region. The only power that could neutralize the Soviet Union in Yemen was the US, but its presence could not continue without its acknowledging the Yemeni Arab Republic.

The US ambassador continued:

“The government of the US wishes the fighting in Yemen to stop as soon as possible, and for peace to reign in this country which is in dire need of it.”

Faisal’s angry response to this was:

“No power on earth can stop this battle; one side or the other must win. Anyone who thinks otherwise does not understand the nature of the Yemenis.”

Faisal then asked:

“How can the US government propose such a one-sided plan, which to all intents and purposes means eliminating the monarchists?!”

The US ambassador responded:

“The US was obliged to take a quick and decisive decision, which was to recognize the Yemeni Arab Republic.”

At this point Faisal’s firm rejoinder was that his government would never consent to the US’s recognition of the revolutionaries until all foreign forces had completely withdrawn from Yemen. The Saudi government would continue to recognize Al-Badr and provide him with full support, and nothing and no one could force them to withdraw this recognition and support! This did not mean, he added, that the Saudi government could, or even thought it could, impose its policies upon the United States.

Faisal reiterated:
“Every single foreign element must leave Yemen: the Soviet Union, the United Arab Republic, the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, Jordan, and the United States. And by that I mean military forces.”

The US ambassador agreed with Faisal about this.

Faisal also objected strongly to the fact that the US believed the UAR forces would withdraw completely, saying:

“I advise you not to trust Nasser, and not to recognize the Yemeni Arab Republic until he really has withdrawn all of his forces.”

Faisal pointed out that the battles raging in Yemen were not between the Yemenis, but between the Yemenis and the UAR forces. He added that recognizing the new regime would constitute a harsh blow to the morale of the monarchist forces, especially as it would probably lead to other countries following suit. He asked:

“Why not promise to recognize their new state after the withdrawal of UAR forces? This premature recognition will please Nasser more than anything, because it will make him imagine he won the war.”

The US ambassador explained that the objective of the US was to achieve a mutual withdrawal of the forces on both sides of the conflict, to which Faisal replied that what concerned him was that the Egyptian forces should withdraw; the presence of Yemeni forces on the Yemeni-Saudi border was of no consequence to him, but if the UAR offensives directed at the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia were to continue, he would not tolerate this for much longer. He repeated:

“I implore you to be wary of Nasser and the Yemeni republic; I do not believe what they say!” He added, “Don’t distance yourself completely from Al-Badr!”

The US came up with an initiative for disengaging the UAR and Saudi forces which Nasser agreed to; the Saudis and Jordanians demurred, but were unable to influence the US to do otherwise.

The UAR forces had reached the Saudi borders and stopped there, while the Saudi forces, which included Jordanians and some

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351 Telegram from the Embassy in Jeddah, Saudi Arabia to the Department of State, November 19th, 1962.
352 Memo from Komer to President Kennedy, Washington, November 28th, 1962.
mercenaries and were heavily armed, were mobilized on the Yemeni border.

Not content with his stubborn, angry attitude during his meeting with the US ambassador, Faisal then sent him two letters: the first requested that the correspondence between himself and President Kennedy should not be published, as this would be detrimental to Saudi interests, and the second stated that during his visit to the US, the US administration, headed by President Kennedy, had agreed with him that Nasser constituted a threat to the Arabs and to the peace and security which the US was striving to achieve in the region, and the discussions had revolved around how to address the situation.

He added that the US officials had decided that they would do their utmost to minimize assistance to Nasser, and would continue to exert leverage to stop him from doing any more damage. However, added Faisal, he had noticed a new trend in US policy towards providing Nasser with financial assistance, which would only feed his hostile intentions in Yemen. The biggest proof of this change could be found in the memorandum that all parties had received and the conditions therein. It was a conclusion Nasser could not have dreamt of achieving. And the US’s intention to recognize the revolutionaries would shed legitimacy on the hostilities carried out by Nasser and the usurper, Al-Sallal.

In short, His Royal Highness wished for clarification regarding whether the United States had changed its policies from those that had seemed to prevail during his visit. He wished to express his genuine alarm at this new trend in US policy.353

In Nasser’s speech on Liberation Day, December 23rd, 1962, he spoke of the situation of Egyptian forces in Yemen who had been sent to support the Yemeni people against external aggression, as the fate of the two countries was one. He explained how these forces had been increased in order to address the invasion from Saudi Arabia in the north and the protectorates where the British were in the south. He said:

“After the Yemeni revolution, the English were highly agitated, afraid for their interests, their petrol, and their colonies in Southern Arabia. Aden must be liberated, the south must be liberated from imperialism; the fact that they have placed the region under the banner of ‘Southern

353 The two letters, in Arabic and English, are dated December 10th, 1962 and can be found in the Appendix.
Arabia’ is unacceptable to any Arab, because it is well known that all the Sultans are under British protection, and arrest and torture those who cry for freedom! Each and every Arab knows that there is colonialism in the south of the Arabian Peninsula which must come to an end.”

Next day, President Kennedy sent a verbal message to Nasser which was read out to him by the US Ambassador, John Badeau and which confirmed the US initiative:

“I set great store by the international effort, in which we have both been engaged, to reach an understanding among the parties involved in the current conflict in Yemen. I am confident that your government will cooperate fully with any impartial agencies that may be designated to verify the disengagement and withdrawal process.

“As you know, the conflict has affected our vital interests in Aden, the Persian Gulf area, and throughout the Arabian Peninsula, and I welcome the earlier affirmations of your government that it recognizes these interests. I hope that we can work together to encourage the new Yemen Arab Republic to give special attention to fostering political and economic stability in its territory and to establishing peaceful and friendly relations with its neighbors.

I am also gratified by UAR recognition of the need for orderly progress in a context of political stability in Saudi Arabia. I hope that we both will make every effort to create an atmosphere conducive to a reconciliation between the United Arab Republic and Saudi Arabia. As the US has made clear in the past, we stand fully behind the integrity of Prince Faysal’s regime.”

After the Yemeni revolution took place, the United States realized that it would be better that King Saud, whom the US described as weak, be replaced by Prince Faisal, which is what actually happened on November 2nd, 1962.

Kennedy sent another verbal message to Nasser on December 30th, 1962, stressing American interest in, and determination to further, disengagement, stating that continuation or proliferation of military activity could well threaten the stability of Saudi Arabia and cause direct American reaction. Kennedy referred to the fact that this disengagement was very much in the interest of the Yemeni Arab

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354 Telegram from the Department of State, Washington, to the Embassy in the UAR, December 24th, 1962.
Republic and the UAR, since the Sallal government was still not firmly established, and Egypt was paying a considerable price for its military support.

Kennedy also criticized Nasser’s speech of December 23rd, 1962355 which he called ‘propaganda’! Nasser replied in the presence of Badeau saying that while the UAR had agreed in good faith to participate in disengagement, and intended so to do, he had made no agreement to stand silent in face of attacks upon him or the UAR by the Saudis or the Sheikh of Baihan, and could not remain silent about this.

Badeau responded:

“Such propaganda could affect the Congress’s attitude toward US government aid policies; it is Congress that votes funds for aid and foreign policy programs.”

In other words, Badeau was brandishing the weapon of US aid to the United Arab Republic if it continued with the same attitude!

Badeau then spoke of returning Saudi and Jordanian aircraft, but Nasser objected on the basis that while no overt state of war existed between the UAR-Yemeni Arab Republic and their opponents, in fact war was going on, and Saudi Arabia was building up supplies of arms for use after the withdrawal of the UAR troops, and under these circumstances it would be difficult to return the aircraft. Nasser added that it had come to his knowledge that US pilots were transporting weapons to the battle zones!

In short, new obstacles had arisen regarding a solution to the Yemeni war, most importantly increased Saudi provocation resulting from the monarchists helping both the UAR and the new Yemeni regime, and the dual position adopted by the US where they covertly advocated disengagement while simultaneously providing military aid to the Saudis and therefore to the monarchists!

Nasser’s reaction to the US’s attitude was firm: he carried on regardless of their disengagement proposal, as this applied to one side only, the forces of the UAR, while the Saudi forces were continuing with

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355 Nasser’s speech in Port Said on December 23rd, 1962, in which he said: “If we listen to King Hussein’s radio, we will find that he is angry; he even claims to be angry with the Americans, he says the Americans have recognized the Yemeni regime as a face-saving move for Nasser because he has problems in Yemen and with his troops.” Nasser’s Speeches and Statements, Part 5 pp. 439-473, ibid.

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hostilities. This led the US to reassess their policies towards the UAR in order to realize their own best interests.

The Americans knew that a rapprochement with Nasser – which had already begun with a series of correspondence with him – would damage US-Israeli relations as well their relations with several Arab states and also with the US’s European allies, most of all Britain, who had refused to recognize the Yemeni Arab Republic and had put pressure on the new regime through its colonies in Southern Arabia, notably Baihan. The British press was also strongly hostile towards Nasser, accusing him of having designs on the south and on Aden, which Nasser had categorically denied.356

Nevertheless, the US, in comparing its current position in the Middle East with what it was in 1957, and giving improvement in relations with the UAR a deservedly prominent place, had every reason to believe that this was the right policy to pursue, and that it would be unwise to alter this course without provocation on the part of the UAR, for the following reasons:

- In so far as power and stature were concerned, the United Arab Republic was far and away the most important state in the Middle East, and if it were to turn against US interests, serious damage could occur.
- If the US were to use its power against the UAR by withholding assistance or more directly, the UAR could turn to the Soviet Union, which would increase Soviet influence in the area.

- Egypt’s need to progress economically, coupled with its leaders’ aversion to foreign - including Soviet - domination of the Arab region, provided a platform for a long-range effort to build confidence and to establish solid diplomatic strength in a key position.357

On his part, Nasser refused the US proposal that the United Nations should monitor the disengagement process, saying that his talks with the US were based on the assumption that the US had the ability to make the Saudis withdraw, and that they were aware that Faisal was being stubborn!

356 Telegram from the Department of State, Washington, to the Embassy in the UAR, December 24th, 1962.
357 Telegram from the Department of State, Washington, to the Embassy in the UAR, December 24th, 1962.
“The US say they are responsible for protecting Saudi Arabia, and they want the Saudis to sneak into Yemen and attack it while we do nothing at all to stop them!” 358

After the failure of the first US disengagement initiative as a result of Faisal’s stubbornness and his insistence on continuing to back the royalists with troops, arms, and mercenaries, the military operations escalated again at the beginning of 1963, and the UAR bombed Najran in Saudi Arabia with the objective of pressurizing the Saudis to stop backing the Yemeni royalists.

The US immediately sent a warning to the Egyptian Foreign Minister, Mohamed Fawzi, to the effect that should this bombing be repeated, there would a reaction on the part of the United States. 359

This was followed by a telegram from Kennedy to Nasser on January 19th, 1963, in which he attempted to clear the misunderstanding between the two countries:

“I sense some UAR suspicion that, because Saudi Arabia has not withdrawn its support from the royalists, the US may be pursuing a double policy in Yemen. I assure you categorically that this is not so. We have done and will do what is necessary to protect our important interests in the Arabian Peninsula, but this has been most carefully calculated not to support Saudi policies in Yemen.

“Perhaps more serious is a possible UAR feeling that we ought to be able to force the Saudis to disengage in Yemen. Once again let me say that we have been urging Faysal in his own interest to do just this. However, at this moment he considers his policy toward Yemen as essential to maintaining the very integrity of Saudi Arabia. I am afraid that it is the UAR and Yemeni Arab Republic’s words and actions that have helped bring him to this conclusion.

“Indeed each time we have felt we were making some progress toward disengagement, such actions as the Najran bombings have brought us back to square one. I must tell you in all candor that, as seen from here, they serve not to scare Faysal but to anger him. In my view, this situation needs patience and the exercise of that statesmanship for which we and others have applauded you on earlier occasions.

359 Telegram from the Embassy in the UAR to the Department of State, January 2nd, 1963.
“Let me assure you that we will continue our efforts to bring about disengagement in Yemen on a basis which will permit the new Yemeni Arab Republic to live in peace with its neighbors. We need to find a formula which will provide Faysal with a public basis for disengagement. A suitable formula may best be found by an impartial mediator, and I urge you to agree to such an effort.”

Nasser responded to Kennedy’s message on March 3rd, 1963, as follows:

“I would like to assure you immediately that I accept with no hesitation your constructive proposal to avoid clashes on the Yemeni borders, which was actually the objective of our sending UAR forces to Yemen in the first place.

“Unfortunately, His Highness King Saud, and Prince Faisal after him, misunderstood the situation and imagined that the revolution in Yemen was a struggle between a monarchist and a republican regime, and based on this assumption, mustered all forces to try and invade Yemen.

“I assure you that the UAR has the documents that prove that US pilots joined in transporting supplies and forces from Saudi Arabia and Jordan to the Yemeni border.

“The UAR most certainly does not want a war with Saudi Arabia on the Yemeni borders, but the attacks on Yemeni borders continue, with wave after wave of infiltrators, preceded and followed by a non-stop stream of supplies.

“The UAR does not want to be involved in whatever means you intend to pursue in order to persuade your friends to do whatever you feel is in their best interests.”

Kennedy replied that the US was not adopting a double policy in Yemen, but wished to resolve matters, and that it while it did not support Faisal’s policies in Yemen, they could not put pressure on him.

Nasser was of the opinion that the US could put pressure on Saudi Arabia to stop helping the royalists, and that the solution would be to hit at the Saudi border where the points of infiltration were.

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In response to a suggestion in the Council to open hostilities with the Sultanates in the Gulf, Nasser said:

“We do not want a clash with the British, which would widen the scope of operations and lead to matters getting completely out of our hands! The oil regions are vital to the West, and the English are ready to start a world war for the sake of the Gulf! They actually said so to Khrushchev and Bulganin.

“I think at the present time we should not raise the issue of the Gulf, why? Well, the Russians are not as supportive as they used to be; economically, for instance, they have refused to grant us any loans. The Americans on the other hand have begun to give more, starting two years ago, and this is important to our economic plan.”

Nasser also excluded the possibility of responding to the British, saying:

“I want to rein in rather than open up operations; there are several factors to consider that involve the Russians, the English, the Americans, and Israel.”

Regarding Britain’s position towards the Yemeni revolution and its refusal to recognize the Yemeni Arab Republic, Kennedy had justified this attitude in his previous missive to Nasser, saying:

“The UK hesitations about recognizing the YAR spring clearly from their concern over Aden. Recurrent threats uttered by President Sallal do nothing but heighten these fears, whereas I am convinced that words of reassurance would help bring about UK recognition. I earnestly desire UK recognition but I am not in a position to press the UK to recognize in face of unwise statements from Sanaa.”

In response to a comment from one of the members of the Presidential Council in the afore-mentioned session that the Yemeni issue had become a matter of bargaining, Nasser responded:

“If we tone things down, we run the danger of not being able to stir them up again. We need to look at the matter from a strategic not a tactical perspective; and must proceed extremely carefully.

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“As for the south, they are the ones carrying out operations; if it were I who were instigating them things would be different, but I am not. Why did I mention Aden in my Port Said speech? Because they claimed that I was using Aden as a bargaining tool! But we do not have the power to influence Arabs in certain regions, which is why I said that Aden, and the south, and the British-made union must follow the wishes of their people. We have never ‘bargained’ on any movement in an Arab country; to do so would mean we would lose all credibility.

“I believe the best thing to do now is reach a political solution with the United States, even though I am not very confident in Al-Sallal and his ability to continue ruling, because they have no army and no political base! Add to this that Sallal and Baidani are quarrelling, and the country has no money and is bankrupt; in two months’ time they might not be able to pay salaries. The Russians have agreed to give them some weapons, but no economic aid!

“A revolution in Saudi Arabia could be a solution, and could also be a huge problem: no one knows!”

b. The second US disengagement initiative:
Faced with the escalation of hostilities in Yemen, the US government reviewed the situation once more in the light of the fact that the Yemeni government was incapable of controlling the royalist tribes, which risked the conflict becoming a permanent one similar to the Kurdish-Arab situation in Iraq, and posed a real danger to all parties; over and above which was the matter of the disputes amongst members of the new Yemeni government itself.

Accordingly, the US decided that it was time to take a step forward to end the situation in Yemen. In his previous telegram to Nasser on January 18th, 1963, Kennedy had stated:

“We need to find a formula which will provide Faysal with a basis for disengagement. A suitable formula may best be found by an impartial mediator and I urge you to agree to such an effort.”

It was felt that such a mediator should be connected to the United Nations to render the issue one of international concern; and the matter was put before Nasser officially on January 24th, 1963. During this meeting, Nasser reiterated that the UAR was not seeking to

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overthrow the Saudi regime, and that UAR anti-Saudi activities were aimed only at stopping Saudi support for the royalists.

The UAR had been under the impression that the United States was in a position to easily secure the compliance of the Saudi government to the first proposal, an assumption which turned out to be false! Nasser added that Saudi involvement had increased even more after US recognition of the Yemeni Arab Republic, with Pakistani and Belgian arms pouring in. Moreover, Faisal’s terms for disengagement were obviously a ploy to buy time, on the premise that during the withdrawal of UAR troops, the Saudi government would build up Royalist forces to the point where they could take over the abandoned positions! Yemeni tribes, added Nasser, were loyal to no one but themselves and given gold, ammunition and technical direction would fight for either side. Since the Saudis were in a position to furnish these, the border tribes had continued to fight the Yemeni Arab Republic and would carry on doing so as long as external support available. If this were to stop, things would quieten down, and the UAR would then gladly carry out the disengagement commitments.364

As usual, Kennedy coordinated his policy with Harold Macmillan, the British Prime Minister, given that Britain was an essential element in the crisis. Kennedy sent Macmillan a telegram saying:

“As we move forward on the task of engineering disengagement in Yemen, a task I am persuaded is in both our interests, I’d like to ask about your plans for recognition of the Yemeni Arab Republic. I wonder whether non-recognition still has value? It seems to risk exacerbating relations between you and the United Arab Republic and Yemeni Arab Republic without at the same time increasing the prospect that the royalists will win this battle.

“It seems likely that, while the civil war may seesaw back and forth almost indefinitely, the royalists are not going to be able to crush the superior UAR forces. They may occasionally cut the roads, but they show little capability for seizing the major towns. We gather, for example, that there are some 8000 Egyptian troops in Sanaa.

“While Faysal is undoubtedly hurting Nasser, the latter is so committed now in Yemen that he can’t afford to pull out without achieving victory. Despite some added cost, he can certainly increase his forces there if

364 The meeting between Nasser and Badeau.
needed, and no doubt the Soviets have agreed to replenish any equipment losses.

“Indeed the big risk as we see it is that Nasser and his little brother Sallal will in their frustration adopt more extremist lines. They may well try to foment trouble in Saudi Arabia or elsewhere. I am sure this will suit the Soviets, but you and I would surely be the losers!

“We are equally worried over the effect of Faysal’s unpopular war in Yemen on his own domestic position. He and Hussein think they are defending themselves against Nasser in Yemen, but we think they are making themselves more vulnerable to a Nasser-inspired revolution at home. A revolution or serious disturbance in Saudi Arabia would hardly strengthen our position in Aden and the Gulf.

“If we force the UAR to reinforce rather than reduce its presence in Yemen, and give the Soviets the chance to do so too, we may end up with a situation far more threatening to us.

“I gather that you have been delaying recognition until relations could be resumed with the Saudis and the Aden Federation could be announced. Since that these have come off smoothly, our joint interests might best be served by your recognizing the Yemeni Arab Republic and thus helping to isolate Faisal.”

During this time, changes had occurred in the Arab region that were in the interests of Nasser and the progressive Arab movement, namely the revolution that took place in Iraq on February 8th, 1963 against Abdel Karim Qassim who had roused the enmity of the people, and another revolution in Syria on March 8th of the same year which curbed the influence of the Baath party and encouraged the Syrian people to demonstrate, calling for the return of the union with Egypt. Accordingly, talks took place in Cairo between Egypt, Syria, and Iraq in April, 1963, to discuss a tripartite union between the three countries.

Kennedy meanwhile had sent another letter, this time to Faisal, on February 22nd, 1963, to try and persuade him to agree to the disengagement, in which he wrote:

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365 On January 16th, 1963, the British government announced that it had resumed its diplomatic relations with Saudi Arabia, which had been cut off during the Suez crisis of 1956.

366 Telegram from President Kennedy to Prime Minister Macmillan, January 26th, 1963.
“As you know, over last few months I have authorized adoption of certain US military measures on behalf of Saudi Arabia as proof of US support for Saudi Arabia’s integrity and the need for relative tranquility in which to implement your program.

“At same time I am deeply concerned at the course the conflict over Yemen is taking, and fear that unless the process of disengagement commences shortly, there could be more serious trouble which would benefit no one.

“My principal concern is with the eventual effect on Saudi Arabia of the forces and trends sweeping the area unless the conflict in Yemen can be terminated, stresses reduced, and full energy and resources devoted to your primary task.

“I cannot escape the conclusion that continued Saudi involvement in support of the royalist faction will in time not only undermine your internal situation but will invite outside intervention in Saudi Arabia’s internal affairs.

“There has been no progress toward the withdrawal of the United Arab Republic’s military forces from Yemen as it had publicly undertaken to do, because of continued external assistance to the Yemeni royalists.”

Kennedy then brought up the matter of appointing a UN mediator to seek a solution to the situation in Yemen, which he had previously proposed to Nasser, who had consented on condition that Saudi Arabia suspend help to Yemeni royalists.

**Faisal refuses the second US initiative**
Faisal sent an answer to Kennedy on February 23rd, 1963 refusing the latest US requests to suspend assistance to the Yemeni royalists and to stop allowing foreign aircraft to fly over Saudi Arabia for this purpose. Faisal wrote back saying that the US attitude had come as a violent shock to him, and that he intended to continue taking the measures he saw fit to protect the integrity and security of Saudi Arabia.

The US was displeased at this response, and felt that Faisal was proceeding in a manner threatening to US interests in the Middle East. What was needed at this point was a political formula, not force: the

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367 Kennedy’s message to Faisal on February 22nd, 1963.
368 Letter from Faisal to Kennedy, February 23rd, 1963.
Egyptians were still strongly present in Yemen, and the Russians waiting to gather the spoils, while ‘Faisal was on a course of self-destruction!’  

The US at that time expressed the view that it was in its interests for Yemen to remain for the Yemenis without any commitment for the Imamate to return, and that the UAR forces should withdraw from Yemen and the US remain on friendly terms with both the UAR and Saudi Arabia.

The US accordingly proposed that a mediator from the United Nations be appointed to monitor the disengagement – as previously mentioned – ‘in order to save Faisal’s face’ and to work on replacing Saud with Faisal!

The US thus found itself in a contradictory position: Faisal was insisting on supporting the Yemeni royalists as long as the UAR forces were present in Yemen; he believed that Nasser would use Yemen as a base against the Saudi monarchy, and that prolonging the conflict in Yemen would ‘bleed’ Nasser. Furthermore, he felt his honour and prestige were at stake in the eyes of the Arabs. Moreover, Saudi resources were sufficient to support the royalists ad infinitum. It was obvious that Faisal was trying to pressure the US to side with him against Nasser, and to provide him with more military aid.

The US were sure that Nasser was committed to the survival of the Yemeni Arab Republic, and wished to rid the Middle East of reactionary monarchies blocking the spread of development. The Yemeni Arab Republic wished the Egyptian forces to remain there until the regime was secure.

It was clear that the positions of the parties involved had hardened, and other factors emerged in the region that were not in Faisal’s interests: the Iraqi revolution, the escalation of air strikes by the UAR, and signs of fear and unrest in Saudi Arabia!

As for the US oil companies, they were fearful of Nasser winning, and were strongly against him.  

The US realized that Yemen was only part of a bigger picture that included its relations with other countries such as the UAR, Iraq, and

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370 Ibid.
Algeria, and that if the US were to be overtly biased towards Saudi Arabia while the latter were continuing to support the royalists, this could lead to the deterioration of its relations with these countries with no real gain achieved from bolstering the Saudi regime. At the same time, failure to back Faisal risked the collapse of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia and internal chaos and fragmentation of the country.

Accordingly, the course the US found it most prudent to take was to press forward with its disengagement proposal to end the armed conflict in Yemen, which was detrimental to its interests all round.

It was decided to send a high-level US envoy, ambassador Ellsworth Bunker, to Faisal, with a letter from President Kennedy, and to secretly inform the UN Secretary-General, U-Thant, of this. The US also provided military aid to Faisal, stationing a US fighter-interceptor squadron together with portable early warning acquisition, radar equipment and operating personnel in Western Saudi Arabia for the purpose of demonstrating to the Government and people of Saudi Arabia and to the UAR continued US interest in and support for Saudi Arabia; and of providing a deterrent to UAR air operations against Saudi Arabia.

The US also agreed to train the Saudi air forces and air defense personnel and provide the necessary equipment at Saudi expense in sufficient amounts to improve Saudi Arabian air defense capabilities.

It was also decided to continue to put pressure on Nasser via Badeau, and to continue talks with Jordan and the United Kingdom, who had not welcomed the US initiative, regarding which there had been a dispute.371

At this stage Kennedy asked, “Can we stop Faisal?”, to which his political aides answered with a resounding, “Yes!”. What Kennedy wished to do was tie US military assistance to Saudi Arabia with putting an end to Saudi support of the Yemeni royalists, which would allow for disengagement.

It is obvious that Kennedy wished to protect his friendship with Nasser, so he decided to notify him first before sending the US fighter planes to Saudi Arabia, explaining to Nasser that his motive in doing so was to make Faisal suspend aid to the royalists, and that the squadron would

371 Ibid.
not be staying in Saudi Arabia permanently, but only for a couple of months or so, even though they actually intended to stay longer!\footnote{Memorandum for the Record, Washington, February 25\textsuperscript{th}, 1963, Presidential meeting on Yemen.}

It is to be noted that Kennedy was always concerned about Nasser’s reactions to every US move related to the Yemeni conflict, but it soon became clear from all the military procedures taken that he was biased towards Faisal, where US interests lay!

Bunker, as arranged, went to meet Faisal who began by being rather belligerent; he demanded to know how the US intended to react to the large number of troops and heavy equipment that Nasser was sending into Yemen. However, by the end of the meeting he had agreed in principle to the US proposals, but added conditions related to the withdrawal of the UAR forces that could not be implemented!

President Kennedy sent a verbal message to Faisal on March 14\textsuperscript{th}, 1963, in which he said:

“One problem disturbs me as much as it does you. The proposals you have made for UAR disengagement could not, in our judgment, be successfully negotiated, certainly not within the short time we feel remains in which to avert a broadening of the conflict in Yemen. Events in Iraq and Syria obviously have established a new atmosphere in the Arab world which can only give new confidence to your opponents and bring new pressures on your government. The Egyptian offensive in Yemen seems to us on the eve of success.

“Our intelligence confirms your remarks that revolutionary ideas are spreading in your country. This situation can be corrected if action is taken now. Therefore, frankly I think it is emphatically in your interest that the disengagement process begin. In this case I would of course be prepared to send the air squadron as Ambassador Bunker has informed you.

“Nasser has assured me, and I intend to press him hard on it, that after your cessation of support to the royalists, the UAR force will be withdrawn in phases and expeditiously.

“As you know, we have already taken a number of actions, including naval and other demonstrations and warnings to Nasser, designed to underline our interest in the integrity of Saudi Arabia.”\footnote{Kennedy’s oral message to Faisal on March 14\textsuperscript{th}, 1963.}
During the discussions held between Ralph Bunche, the UN envoy, and Al-Sallal, the latter agreed to mutual disengagement and promised that the Yemeni Arab Republic would allow the UAR to start withdrawing its forces once Faisal had publicly pledged to cease supporting the royalists, and as soon as Yemeni royal princes had left Saudi Arabia, in addition to a commitment from Saudi Arabia to establish diplomatic relations with the Yemeni Arab Republic.\(^{374}\)

President Kennedy was obvious careful to let Nasser know that he personally had made a considerable effort to improve relations with the United Arab Republic, and that he had adhered determinedly to this policy in spite of strong opposition within the United States. He had recognized the new Yemeni Arab Republic, and had accepted the UAR’s activities there, and had, moreover, tried to persuade the United Kingdom to adopt the same policy. He had gone to great lengths to persuade Faisal to accept disengagement, and had sent Bunker as a personal emissary to Saudi Arabia for this purpose.\(^{375}\)

3. Nasser’s response to the second American initiative:
President Kennedy sent a verbal message to Nasser on March 2\(^{nd}\), 1963, in which he said:

“I am deeply concerned over recent events related to Yemen. Because of the rising level of action in and beyond Yemen, I think there is real risk that events might lead to a collision involving the interests of our two countries. The question is how to avoid such a collision.

“As you know, I am dispatching Ambassador Ellsworth Bunker to Saudi Arabia in search for a peaceful termination of the conflict in Yemen. Therefore, I urge you to contribute to an appropriate atmosphere by confining military action to Yemen territory. This will also contribute notably to a fruitful cooperation between the UAR and the US.”\(^{376}\)

Nasser outlined his position to Badeau the following day, saying:

“The bombardments were not intended as deliberate provocation but were an integral element of UAR military strategy that has proved successful; every day of continued Yemen fighting means loss of UAR lives and as leader of the country I cannot escape responsibility.”

\(^{374}\) Memorandum of President Kennedy’s meeting on Yemen, March 11\(^{th}\), 1963.

\(^{375}\) Ibid.

\(^{376}\) Telegram from the Department of State, Washington, to the Embassy in the UAR, March 2\(^{nd}\), 1963.
Nasser also added that the UAR could not wait another five months for disengagement.

When Ambassador Badeau underscored the souring political effect of these attacks, Nasser promised, however, to order Field Marshal Amer to suspend trans-border activities pending the outcome of the Bunche–Bunker mission, which Ambassador Badeau stated would take about two weeks.

Ambassador Badeau also informed Nasser that the US knew the location of the UAR clandestine radio, and suggested that the broadcasts be terminated as they were doing great harm to US–UAR relations. Nasser however gave no commitment regarding this.  

The US government felt that Nasser’s replies were quite positive, after he had justified his bombings as intended merely to cut off Saudi gun-running, not to overthrow Faisal. Nasser also promised to hold off further attacks for a few weeks to give US mediation efforts a chance.

Kennedy sent another verbal message to Nasser on March 18th, 1963 which was conveyed to him by Ambassador Bunker and which indicated his wish to maintain good relations with all parties in the Yemeni conflict:

“The President has instructed me to tell you that his principal concern in this affair has been to support the integrity and honor of all of the parties involved while carrying out his responsibility to his own people to protect vital American interests. Thus if the United States has shown concern for the integrity of Saudi Arabia it has also demonstrated concern for the integrity of the Yemen Arab Republic. If it has shown concern for the security of Aden, it has also demonstrated understanding and respect for the position of the United Arab Republic.

“The President has urged all parties on all occasions to observe moderation, restraint and wisdom, and it is to your sense of statesmanship and political acumen that he again appeals.

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378 Note from Komer to Bundy, Cairo, March 5th, 1963.
“It is the President’s hope that you will explore with me in all frankness the avenues for containing the Yemen conflict and bringing it to an early close.”

On the same day, March 18th, Nasser sent the following telegram to Field Marshal Abdel Hakim Amer in Sanaa:

“I have received a message from Kennedy through the US ambassador in which he says that he is extremely concerned about the raids inside Saudi Arabia, noting that Faisal had asked him to fulfil his obligations towards defending Saudi Arabia, and adding that the situation risked a potential clash between our interests and those of the US, which was committed to defending Saudi Arabia. He said that he was sending me this message to avoid this risk, and that he had sent a special emissary to Faisal to find a peaceful solution to the conflict. Kennedy said that a continuation of the air strikes against Saudi Arabia would not help the envoys’ mission. He ended his message by urging me to limit military operations in Yemen.

“My reply to the ambassador was that we had waited five months for their so-called efforts, with no result, and that bombing Saudi airfields was a strategic necessity to defend our troops; added to which the Saudi operations in Yemen, which have not stopped, are forcing us to intervene in Saudi Arabia. The ambassador replied that sending the President’s special emissary could be considered a final effort, and that the President was trying in every way possible to avoid a clash between the UAR and the United States. I promised him to stop the air raids until we could see if the envoy’s mission was successful and could stop infiltration into Yemen; and that if the efforts failed, we would have no option but to stop this infiltration of weapons, ammunition, and troops from Saudi into Yemen by bombing enemy bases.”

On March 19th, Nasser informed the leaders of the Syrian Baath party, who had come to Cairo to discuss reuniting with Egypt, that, “The situation in Yemen is very good.”

During the March 24th, 1963, session of the Presidential Council, Nasser said:

“Operations in Yemen have quietened down and we have accomplished the main task, which is to close off all means of infiltration and have

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379 Telegram from the Department of State, Washington, to the Embassy in Cairo, March 18th, 1963.
380 Telegram from Nasser to Field Marshal Amer, March 18th, 1963.

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delivered crushing blows to the enemy. There are still pockets here and there inside Yemen, but these are of no importance; the main thing is to cut off all means of supplies into Yemen via Saudi Arabia: we have bombed all the Saudi bases that were taking part in transporting these supplies, going around 100 kilometres into Saudi Arabia. We can therefore conclude that operations in Yemen are successfully over; and our losses when compared to the number of troops we sent can be considered small. We sent 28,000 men there; we had to send a large force because the battle was decisive, not only for Sanaa but for Cairo.”

Nasser then asked:

“How can we conclude this operation and leave? This is the main problem.”

Nasser then spoke of the attempts that had been made to resolve the conflict:

“We informed the British, the Americans, and the Russians that we had no intentions of attacking or invading Saudi Arabia or of keeping military bases in Yemen; our military operations were only to support the Yemeni people’s revolution, which we intended to do to the best of our ability.

“This held true until Kennedy’s letter which I received on January 18th, 1963, while in Aswan, in which he said that the Americans were committed to support Saudi Arabia. On that day, I decided to bomb Saudi Arabia in two days’ time, in order to see their reaction, then a day later, we bombed Najran for the first time. The reaction came as expected: it turned out to be just talk!

“We carried on bombing for four days, during which the US continued to mediate; in the end Kennedy said that he could not stop Faisal from intervening, which resulted in our continued raids on Saudi Arabia.”

During the same session, Nasser said that the US Ambassador had informed him that Faisal was willing to settle the matter on condition that the UAR withdraw its forces from Yemen, but that the matter had not been discussed yet.

Nasser went on to say:
“Then contact was made by the Saudis at the end of last month through Hafez Wahba\(^{381}\) who relayed the message that the Saudis wished to stop the fighting outside the Yemeni borders, and to hold a meeting with representatives of the ministries of defence of the UAR and KSA. I agreed, and the Saudis proposed that the meeting should take place in Rome, but I replied that it should be held either in Hurghada or Yugoslavia and that no journalists should attend, adding that we could settle the matter together.

“My question to them was whether the initiative had come from the government, and I was told it had. Then nothing further happened!

“After the Iraqi revolution, they [the Iraqis] got in touch with the Saudi ambassador and told him that they were concerned about what was going on in Yemen, and that the prolongation of military operations there could damage Iraqi-Saudi relations due to their shared border. The Saudis replied that they were willing to meet with the UAR to discuss disengagement, but that the UAR had refused!

“I was informed of this lately by the Iraqis, and replied that we were willing to meet, and suggested Baghdad; I also told them what Hafez Wahba had said.

“Withdrawing our forces from Yemen and disengaging raises a big question mark; I don’t think we can withdraw all of our troops from there; we must keep a force that can repel any hostile operation. As for Saudi Arabia, they consider the Yemeni revolution a matter of life or death for them, and that if it succeeds, it will demolish them!”

c. **Disengagement in actual practice**

1. **Nasser’s position:**

   Nasser met with Bunker three times, on the first, second, and third of April, 1963, who presented him with the following offer: Saudi Arabia to stop supporting the royalists on a date to be decided, and to prevent their supporters from using Saudi territory. The UAR to stop attacking Saudi Arabia, and a demilitarized zone to be established for 2 kilometres on either side of the Saudi-Yemen border.

   Fifteen days after the cessation of Saudi assistance to the royalists, the UAR would begin withdrawing its troops from Yemen, and would continue to do so in phases until all forces had left the country.

\(^{381}\) Hafez Wahba was born in Cairo on June 15\(^{th}\), 1889 and worked as an advisor to King Abdel Aziz Al Seoud and as the Saudi ambassador in London during WWII, and remained an esteemed political figure in his country.
Neutral observers were to be placed on either side of the border in the demilitarized zone to ensure that Saudi activities had ceased and to prevent UAR troops from moving or receiving arms from ports or airports.

Bunker also requested that the UAR, the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia and the Yemeni Arab Republic should cooperate with the representative of the United Nations Secretary-General or any other approved mediator to come to an agreement regarding the disengagement. He asked that the UAR exercise its influence on Sallal to desist from further inflammatory speeches against the surrounding countries and to reaffirm his desire to live at peace with his neighbors.

Nasser agreed to begin withdrawing his forces simultaneously with suspension of Saudi aid to the royalists, and to complete the withdrawal of troops in stages.

Nasser insisted on the Imam’s family – fifteen in number – being evacuated from the border area and taken to either Jeddah or Riyadh to guard against any acts of sabotage on their part.

As for the Yemeni Arab Republic’s conditions such as that the United Kingdom and Saudi Arabia should recognize the new regime, Bunker said that British recognition would take place after disengagement, and that Saudi Arabia could not possibly remain the only country that refused to do so.382

Nasser discussed these proposals with his colleagues during the session of the Presidential Council held on April 2nd, 1963, saying:

“Regarding disengagement, we are more or less in agreement.”

Then he repeated the question he had asked previously, namely:

“How can we leave Yemen? We want to but are unable to do so; there is a large force – thirty thousand troops – scattered around the country! The main thing is to stop the Saudis from sending in weapons and money, and we must also bear in mind that after this agreement, there will be conspiracies! Ever since last November 17th, when the first mediation regarding Yemen was made, and up until the present time, I

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382 Telegram from the Embassy in the UAR to the Department of State, April 3rd, 1963.
have not refused a single initiative, yet Faisal claims that I do not agree!”

After Bunker had secured the agreement of both Nasser and Faisal to the disengagement procedures, Kennedy sent a verbal message to Nasser on April 18th, 1963:

“Ambassadors Bunker and Badeau have reported to me their recent conversations with you and the fine cooperation which you extended to them. I want to express my appreciation for your constructive and statesmanlike approach.

“I am sure—and I am writing to Crown Prince Faysal in this vein also—that the parties to the Yemen conflict will extend the same cooperation toward the United Nations Secretary General and his personal representative as they have to Ambassador Bunker and will fully and expeditiously implement disengagement and withdrawal from the Yemen conflict. We are counting on your friendly counsel to the Yemen Arab Republic to assure its cooperation.

Ambassador Badeau has also reported to me that you expressed some concern to him lest the United States be changing its policy toward the United Arab Republic. United States policy has not changed, nor do I see any current reason to change it. While the course of our cooperation cannot always be smooth, I am greatly heartened by the fact that through the application of patience, effort and good will we have been able to cushion the shocks, to find escapes from difficult impasses and to point the way towards the solution of problems that might at first glance have seemed impossible.”

In another message from Kennedy to Nasser on May 27th, 1963, which was handed to Nasser after his return from Addis Ababa, Kennedy said:

“With the disengagement process in Yemen hopefully close to commencement it seems to me desirable to be in touch again in light of the developments of the past few weeks.

As I mentioned in my letter of 18 April,2 US policy has not changed, nor do I see any current reason to change it. Of course, the Congress also plays a major role in aid matters. However, it is my policy to continue

383 Telegram from the Department of State, Washington, to the Embassy in the UAR, April 18th, 1963, containing Kennedy’s message to Nasser.
our programs of economic assistance to the UAR and my hope that the Congress will continue to see it that way too.

“I was struck, Mr. President, by several points in your long and thoughtful letter of March 3rd. You said that the UAR does not consider its mission as being the random distribution of the revolution among the other peoples of the Arab world, and expressed your belief that the best the UAR could furnish with regard to its revolutionary mission toward the Arabs was to serve as a practical example of the ability of Arabs to evolve their own lives towards a better future. We sympathize with this belief, and it is for this that we have sought and continue to seek to be of help to the UAR in creating a practical example.

“In the meantime, however, I am sure you share my concern lest, in the current period of maneuver and flux in the Near East, untoward developments take place which will create acute problems for both of us.”

Although Nasser was willing to implement the US proposals straight away, the lag between the presentation of these proposals and the start of the UN task saw an escalation of military operations, and the UAR was confronted by guerilla attacks from the royalists who were backed by the Saudis. Furthermore, the tribes in the demilitarized zone began fighting, again supported with weapons and money flowing in from Saudi Arabia. To complicate matters even further, a propaganda campaign was launched by Al-Badr and the Saudis amongst the tribes claiming that the royalists were on their way to victory!

In spite of all this, the UAR stood by the disengagement agreement and had sent some of its forces back home on the understanding that they would not be replaced. However, the disengagement conditions were not respected, over and above which Al Badr and the Yemeni royal family remained in Jizan, Saudi Arabia.

Nasser at that time assured the US that his objective was to have all his forces back home by August, 1963, as it was expected that the opposition of the tribes in North Yemen would end. Nasser also confirmed that UAR planes would remain far from the borders with Saudi Arabia and would avoid any clashes with the US air force there.

384 Telegram from the Department of State, Washington, to the Embassy in the UAR, comprising Kennedy’s letter to Nasser, May 27th, 1963.
385 Telegram from the Embassy in the UAR to the Department of State, July 11th, 1963.
On June 7th, 1963, Nasser sent a letter to Kennedy expressing his appreciation of the President’s mediation in Yemen and his intention to cooperate in implementing the disengagement, but that continued Saudi activity in opposition to the Yemen Republic would not be tolerated.  

Kennedy responded verbally to Nasser on June 15th, 1963, saying:

“First of all, Mr. President, let me express my personal gratification that, as a result of the Security Council action of June 11, UN observers are now on their way to Yemen. Disengagement can now begin in earnest. The constructive role of your UN delegation and your Embassy in Washington in helping to make this possible has been most useful.”

2. The Saudi position:
Kennedy made a tremendous effort to persuade both Faisal and Nasser to agree to disengagement. On July 1st, 1963, he sent a message to Faisal proposing that the UN intervene to solve the crisis. He wrote:

“We have long felt it prudent to place the United Nations in the forefront of this problem, as observers and certifiers, to avoid charges and counter-charges of violations of disengagement, misinterpretations and distortions of Saudi-American relations which might have resulted from keeping the matter in the hands of the United States alone, and to ensure the best chance to the Yemeni people to make their own ultimate decisions regarding their affairs.

“Despite Soviet obstructionism, the United Nations Security Council has recently adopted a resolution effectuating the dispatch of an observer team to the Yemen and to border areas of Saudi Arabia with Yemen. General Von Horn with an advance party has arrived on the scene and observers are moving into position. We have therefore dispatched to Saudi Arabia the air unit which I undertook some time ago through my emissary, Ambassador Bunker, to send to your country once disengagement was fully established by the UN observers.

“I repose full confidence in Your Highness’ undertaking to assure the complete cessation of all cross-border shipments from Saudi Arabia into Yemen since this undertaking is a key to the success of the disengagement

386 Letter from Nasser to Kennedy, June 7th, 1963.
387 Telegram from the Department of State in Washington to the Embassy in the UAR, June 15th, 1963.
operation, the other key being President Nasser’s undertaking to withdraw the UAR forces from the Yemen.”

During the first half of July, 1963, the Saudis finally stopped military assistance to the royalists, and the UN observers took up their positions in the demilitarized zone as a deterrent. The US also warned the Saudis that it would withdraw the fighter planes it had sent if they breached the agreement.

The US estimated that in spite of the Yemeni war having taken longer than expected, they were on their way to achieving their objectives of preventing it from spreading and turning into a permanent fully-fledged intra-Arab conflict - which could lead to overt involvement by both the US and the Soviet Union - and of protecting their Saudi clients!

Furthermore, the US believed that the rapprochement with Nasser would prevent him from getting closer to the Soviet Union; they imagined that they could now enjoy cordial relations with the Arab revolutionaries without losing their old clients.

On July 29th, 1963, Nasser sent the following message to Kennedy:

“In response to President Kennedy’s appeal for the withdrawal of UAR forces from Yemen, in implementation of the agreement concluded with Ambassador Bunker, President Nasser has decided to withdraw a (sizeable) force from Yemen in the first half of the month of August. He was taking this step despite the fact that he believes Saudi Arabia has not stopped its aid to the royalists and has not complied either with the text or the spirit of the Bunker agreement.”

Komer commented on Nasser’s letter, saying:

“Nasser’s attached message to you is welcome confirmation that he’s pulling out of Yemen. Some reports indicate 1,500 troops have already left. While this will damp growing criticism of our Yemen policy, I would guess it may be 12–18 months before the bulk of UAR forces are out. Until then we’ll get recurrent flak from Saudis and others about UAR not living up to disengagement. But so long as UAR keeps gradually evacuating (and we should keep pressure on to ensure it does), we ought to be able to live with this. Having UN rather than US forces as the buffer in this exercise,

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388 Kennedy’s letter to Faisal, July 1st, 1963.
389 Memorandum from Komer to President Kennedy, Washington, July 12th, 1963.
390 Nasser’s message to Kennedy, July 29th, 1963.
taking the brunt of all the complaints and possible flare-ups, seems well worth the two-month delay involved in involving the UN.”

But after the withdrawal of some of the UAR forces, the question asked by the US remained: how could the conflict in Yemen be truly ended? They feared that leaving the country in a state of chaos would encourage the Soviets to fill the vacuum! It was therefore in the interests of the US that Yemen should have a strong government, but circumstances were not encouraging: the Yemeni military was inadequate, and Al-Sallal was weak. This was why Nasser informed the US that he could not possibly leave Yemen until the civil war was completely over, which meant that disengagement depended on this.

d. The US role in calling for direct secret talks between the UAR and Saudi Arabia:
The US proposed this as a compromise that would help the disengagement process and stop the mutual radio slander between Faisal and Nasser. And in spite of clashes at the border between the UAR and the Saudis, the UN was working in the buffer zone, and the UAR was slowly pulling out, while the Saudi flow of arms was considerably diminished.

Both the Egyptian and Saudi sides responded favourably to the US proposal; the Saudis welcomed Egyptian interest in direct discussions and said they were ready to meet UAR representatives anywhere, including in the UAR. However, they objected to the continuing UAR propaganda hostile to the Saudi government, as it was causing them problems!

On October 19th, 1963, Nasser explained the situation in Yemen to the meeting of the Presidential Council, saying:

“All military operations in Yemen are over, and we are adopting a policy of leniency; a date was set for the meeting between the representatives of the UAR and Saudi Arabia in New York, to be attended by Mahmoud Riad, but the Saudis requested a postponement! It is in our interests to solve the matter diplomatically with the Saudis, because their tribal relations with Yemen could carry on creating problems.
“The Saudis’ last request was that we should cease the media attacks on them, and we replied that we would do so once an agreement had been made and no more weapons were supplied to the royalists. Yesterday, October 18th, they smuggled in 2000 guns to Jizan and Najran, but we are still carrying on with the withdrawal.”

e. US policy hardens against Nasser:
Not much progress was made in the Yemeni situation since the US suggested direct talks between the UAR and Saudi Arabia, which never took place due to the Saudis backing out! In spite of this, Kennedy decided to escalate the situation in Yemen against the UAR and to end the conflict as soon as possible. He accordingly ordered reinforcements of the US air force in the Sixth Fleet as he was concerned about the obvious imbalance of US air power vis a vis the air power of the UAR in the eastern Mediterranean and Red Sea area.

Kennedy also ordered the positioning in Spain of US air force in support of possible operations in the Middle East and to assist in the stabilization of the situation in Saudi Arabia and reduce the reaction time should the use of such forces be required.

Kennedy also decided to contact Khrushchev on the Moscow Link and inform him in advance that some elements of the US strategic air force were being deployed to Spain in conjunction with attempts to stabilize the situation in Saudi Arabia. It was decided that Kennedy should give Khrushchev assurances that these forces would be armed with conventional warheads only and were to be used as a last resort, as the US had to honor its commitments to Saudi Arabia under any circumstances.

Kennedy sided completely with Saudi Arabia politically and militarily even though he continued to maneuver with Nasser, sending him a verbal message on October 19th which said the following:

“I must tell you of my own personal concern over the UAR’s failure to date to carry out its part of the Yemen disengagement agreement. I think it fair to say that the Saudis are carrying out their end of the bargain. Indeed I gather the UAR shares the view of our own intelligence that arms supply over the border has been almost if not entirely cut off. We are confident that the British and Saudi governments are honoring their assurances to us that they are not aiding the royalists. I therefore have no leverage with Faisal when, having carried out his end of the bargain, he continues to see

396 Memo of the meeting between President Kennedy and the Defence Secretary, Washington, October 8th, 1963.
Egyptian troops in Yemen and hear hostile expressions aimed at him from Cairo.

“On the other hand, the UAR has not made phased withdrawals on a scale consistent with our understanding of the spirit of the agreement.

“Because of my own personal role in the matter, I think you will understand why I feel involved when the US is criticized both at home and abroad. This issue is inevitably complicating, not least in the Congress, my own effort to carry forward our policy of friendly collaboration in areas of mutual interest with the UAR.

“If we should let Yemen affect our larger interests in this manner, we would have lost our ability to shape events and have permitted events to dominate us.”397

As for Faisal, he wished to know the US position in the case of the possible termination of the UN mission on the borders between Saudi Arabia and Yemen if the Saudis were to resume helping the royalists then were attacked! In other words, he wanted reassurance before breaching the disengagement agreement!

Kennedy answered Faisal on October 19th, 1963, saying the following:

“It continues to be our firm policy to see disengagement carried out and the United Nations Observation Mission remain until this is achieved.

“We intend to exert strong pressure on President Nasser. The UAR has meanwhile agreed to a further prolongation of the United Nations Observation force in Yemen and we are working to ensure that this essential element in the disengagement structure is preserved.

“If the disengagement effort fails and, resuming aid to royalists, you are attacked, there can be no question of our abiding concern with the integrity of your country. For that very reason, disengagement must not be allowed to fail. We have long since agreed that fulfillment by both sides of the commitments undertaken in the disengagement agreement was the only feasible route for obtaining the peace and stability in the Yemen which is a prerequisite for peace and stability in your country.

“We considered it necessary to recognize the Yemeni Arab Republic largely to preserve the stability of Saudi Arabia, and having established relations

397 Telegram from the Department of State in Washington to the Embassy in the UAR, October 19th, 1963.
with the Yemeni Arab Republic we cannot be an accomplice to renewed attacks upon it. Similarly, we would not condone aggression against Saudi Arabia. We believe in the feasibility of a reconciliation of forces within Yemen, and I hope, therefore, that you will join us in support of that reconciliation.

“The achievement of political stability in the Yemen may take some time; what this may lead to eventually is for the Yemenis to decide, as we have both agreed. To this end, therefore, let us bend our efforts to make disengagement work.”

The US spared no attempts in putting pressure on Nasser to achieve its aims in the Middle East; as Rusk said to the British Ambassador in Washington:

“Nasser must do better on disengagement; his performance thus far has been far from satisfactory.”

In addition to its military movements in the Middle East and outside it, the US government used US aid as a means to put pressure on Nasser. It was made quite clear to Abdel Moneim Kaissouni, the Egyptian Minister of Treasury and Planning, during his visit to Washington, that ‘US aid to the United Arab Republic depends largely on its performance in Yemen’! The US government also referred to the importance of a continuing UN presence in Yemen.

It was also suggested that a broader-based regime be established in the Yemeni Arab Republic. Rusk asked the British Ambassador whether it might be possible to convey to the royalists that Britain approved of Yemeni efforts to establish such a regime, and hoped the royalists would give serious consideration to eventual participation, and to indicate to the royalists that the British government would be prepared to recognize a reconstituted and representative Yemeni Arab Republic regime. The US also hinted at economic aid to Yemen in the case of such a regime being created.

Alec Douglas-Home, the British Foreign Secretary, responded saying that the British government could not carry out the suggestions mentioned by Rusk in his message and could not tell the royalists that they supported

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398 Kennedy’s oral message to Faisal on October 19th, 1963.
400 Ibid.
the idea of a republican regime in Yemen! Home refused to recognize such a regime.\textsuperscript{401}

The situation in Yemen was now as follows: the Sallal republican regime was in control of about two-thirds of Yemen. The royalist northern tribes, which were supported by Saudi Arabia, remained in control of the mountains in the north and northeast. A decisive military victory by either side appeared unlikely.\textsuperscript{402}

\textbf{f. The impact of the change in US administration on the conflict in Yemen:}

During this time, Kennedy was assassinated on November 23\textsuperscript{rd}, 1963, and was succeeded by Johnson, his vice-president, who decided to resume talks with Nasser and Faisal after having read the relevant correspondence that had taken place. Accordingly, on December 19\textsuperscript{th}, 1963, Johnson sent a letter to King Faisal telling him:

\begin{quote}
“The understanding between the United States and Saudi Arabia is imperative and a candid exchange of views is most desirable.

“From the exchanges I have reviewed, I know your concern for our policy toward Yemen. We have only one purpose in regard to Yemen: to protect Saudi Arabia’s integrity. We believe it essential for Saudi Arabia’s security that direct confrontation with the UAR in Yemen be avoided.”
\end{quote}

This letter made it plain that Johnson was siding with Faisal against Nasser, and that he believed Nasser wished to control Yemen, a fact which the latter adamantly denied.

Regarding Faisal’s request that US aid be cut off from the UAR, Johnson said:

\begin{quote}
“Cutting off United States aid to the UAR would not hasten UAR withdrawal but would more likely provoke closer UAR ties with the Soviets, contrary to your interest and our own purposes of minimizing Soviet influence in the Arab world. Let me add that I would be concerned that resumption of Saudi aid to Yemeni royalists now would most likely provide Nasser with provocation for resuming bombing attacks, and drive him to rely even more on Soviet assistance, and attempting to shift to you the burden of responsibility which he now must bear.”
\end{quote}

\begin{footnotes}
\textsuperscript{401} British Embassy in Washington to the Department of State, Washington, October 23\textsuperscript{rd}, 1963.
\textsuperscript{402} National Intelligence Estimate, Washington, November 6\textsuperscript{th}, 1963, the situation and prospects in Yemen, conclusions.
\end{footnotes}
“We and the United Nations are moving the UAR toward a political compromise and withdrawal. These efforts will be pursued resolutely. I hope no actions are taken that will thwart this direction and cause Nasser to commit himself more firmly to remain in Yemen.

“The United States has counseled restraint in the past. Coming into this office now, as I have, I want to renew those same counsels, believing this to be of greatest service to our mutual interests and the interests of world peace.”

On December 23rd, 1963, President Johnson sent his first message to Nasser:

“Being aware of the scope and the candor that characterized the dialogue between you and President Kennedy, I hope this dialogue may be continued. I also intend to continue the policy of seeking to expand the cooperation between our two countries.

“But the continued instability in Yemen confronts our two governments with a serious challenge. I know you have often expressed repugnance to Arab fighting Arab, and we too look forward to the creation of circumstances whereby the conflict can be terminated and disengagement carried out. Only through measures to set an independent Yemeni government squarely on its own feet can we reaffirm our common support for the principle of self-determination.”

Johnson then sent Nasser another letter on February 27th, 1964, commenting on the decisions taken by the first Arab Summit Meeting in Cairo in January, 1964, in which he expressed his appreciation of the Arab leaders’ declaration that disputes must be peacefully solved, adding that he hoped matters would soon be settled in Yemen, and urging self-restraint with regard to the Arab-Israeli conflict.

Nasser responded to Johnson’s letter on April 26th, welcoming the resumption of communications between them and confirming that he agreed with him on many issues, particularly the need to strengthen Arab-US relations, and to cooperate with the United Nations in the quest for peace. However, Nasser had several comments to make:

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First: The battle with colonialism was still ongoing; a case in point was the position adopted by Britain in the Arab peninsula and by Portugal in Angola and Mozambique.
Second: The struggle for unity continued, driven by Arab nationalism and fueled by the wishes of the Arab people.
Third: The region was still undergoing a struggle between progress and backwardness, wealth and poverty.
Fourth: Some areas in the region had only recently come to terms with twentieth-century life.
Fifth: The conflict between the Arab countries and Israel was an overarching issue and likely to remain so.
All the above comments, said Nasser, could be summarized in one sentence:

“Peace cannot prevail or continue unless supported by justice.”

At the same time, Johnson also sent a letter to Eshkol, in which he wrote:

“Among the major problems which we will have to consider in the near future is that of the Jordan waters, on which we stand behind you in your right to secure your allocated share. Also high on our agenda is the assurance of Israel’s future security, in ways which will stabilize rather than upset the situation in the area. We are much concerned, too, with finding a satisfactory way to settle the refugee problem, as a prerequisite to Arab-Israeli peace.”

After Johnson had assumed office, Ambassador Badeau presented him with an evaluation of the position of the US in the Middle East, in which he stated that:

“Egypt is the most important of the Arab states and the leader of the nationalist reform movement. Nasser remains the strongest and most respected Arab leader, which gives the United Arab Republic the ability to influence US interests in the region.

“It is in our interests to undermine Soviet infiltration and secure the access of the West to air and sea routes and to Arab oil.... and our right to navigate the Suez Canal... We must encourage peace and development in the region.

“Our policy is to leverage US aid as a means of pressure... We must also be ready to use our forces and our influence to protect our interests.

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406 Nasser’s letter to Johnson, April 26th, 1964.
“The results of this policy have been an increase in US as opposed to Soviet influence in the region since 1956, while inter-Arab conflicts are becoming more moderate.”

It is my opinion that this last statement is far from being realistic, as evidenced by the war that was underway in Yemen, and the hostility and slanderous propaganda between the Syrian and Iraqi Baath parties and Nasser!

US politicians were under the impression in Kennedy’s time – as a result of the correspondence exchanged between him and Nasser – that the latter’s policy towards Israel had softened somewhat and become more moderate; that in fact, ‘The United Arab Republic has put the Israeli problem in the icebox’, and would not attack Israel unless it began to produce nuclear weapons! An obviously mistaken conclusion, as revealed by the secret sessions of the Arab League meetings.

Badeau continued to brief Johnson, saying:

“The remaining problems between Cairo and Washington can be dealt with; Egyptian withdrawal from Yemen was slow, but they accept the principle of disengagement...The UAR still depends heavily on Soviet military aid, but Western aid – especially PL 480 - has helped maintain neutrality, though the UAR remains opposed to Israel.”

**g. A new phase in relations between Nasser and Faisal**

1. **Saudi Arabia requests US mediation with Nasser on Yemen:**
   This was after Faisal’s visit to Cairo in January, 1964 to attend the Arab Summit meeting that Nasser had called for to discuss the matter of Israel’s diverting the waters of the Jordan river.

   Badeau was of the opinion that the proposition presented by Omar Al-Saqqaf, the Saudi Deputy Foreign Minister, was useless, alluding to a previous occasion when the US had secured the UAR’s consent to carry out bilateral talks with the Saudis, only for Faisal to refuse! Badeau therefore recommended that the US should not get involved in this matter, unless it was directly asked to do so by Faisal.

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407 Telegram from the Department of State to the Embassy in the UAR January 27th, 1964.
408 Transcripts of the secret sessions of the Arab League meetings, January 17th, 1964.
409 PL 480: the US Food Aid programme.
410 Ibid.
411 Ibid.
2. Resumption of diplomatic relations between the UAR and Saudi Arabia:

Diplomatic relations had been cut off since November 6th, 1962, when the UAR sent a military force to support the Yemeni revolution, and were resumed after the first Arab Summit meeting in Cairo.

This period saw an important shift in the Saudi position towards the Yemeni struggle; and military operations between the Egyptians and Saudis came to an end. Britain, however, continued to support the royalists in Yemen and the mercenaries in Aden.

Faisal expressed his willingness to recognize any government in Yemen that the Yemenis accepted – a huge change in his position!

Moreover, despite the fact that the US had informed the UAR that it supported Britain’s status in Aden, it also changed its position and now described it as, “a foolish policy”!  

The USA was also concerned about the reactions to Nasser’s speech of February 22nd, 1964 in which he declared that no country could claim independence unless the foreign military bases on its territory were liquidated. The Libyan Government subsequently announced that it did not intend to renew the treaties whereby the United States and the United Kingdom maintained bases in Libya!

Moreover, the British covert support of Yemeni Royalists engendered dangerous reactions. The British made a retaliatory raid on a Yemeni fort in Harib, Yemen, on March 28th, in response to a Yemeni attack on the Federation of South Arabia, which the US felt was an over-reaction that would lead to much greater Arab pressure on both Britain and the United States, and that accordingly it might be preferable to fall in with the suggestion of the US diplomatic representative in Yemen, namely to cease representing Britain in Sanaa!

The US then was willing to abandon its ally, Britain, in order to preserve its interests in the Arab region, and was driven to do so mainly due to the rapprochement that had occurred between the UAR and Saudi Arabia and to the enormous influence of Nasser’s call for nationalism.

412 Memorandum From Robert W. Komer of the National Security Council Staff to the President’s Special Assistant for National Security Affairs (Bundy), March 30th, 1964.
413 Nasser’s speech on February 22nd, 1964, Nasser’s Speeches Part IV, pp. 13-45, ibid.
414 Ibid.
and liberation over the whole of the Arab world, even pro-Western countries like Libya and the southern Arabia colonies.

h. The Yemeni issue at the United Nations:
The Security Council condemned Britain on April 1st, 1964, when the head of the council declared that Britain had carried out more than forty attacks on Yemen since 1962, the most extensive of which was the afore-mentioned air attack on the Harib fort on March 28th, 1964.415

The resolution to condemn Britain was passed, with the US abstaining from voting! This encouraged Britain to strive to restore its former cooperation with the US on the basis that their interests in Yemen and Aden were one and the same.416

Johnson and Douglas-Home exchanged correspondence concerning what the British saw as the weak stand taken by the US in the Security Council, which Johnson defended in a letter to Home:

“Our decision to abstain was done reluctantly and only because we did not wish to oppose you directly... I, of course, have no illusions about Nasser, but I doubt that at this point in time challenges to the Arabs would be useful for our joint interests, which is why I agree that we should coordinate our policies regarding the Middle East more closely.”417

US politicians were of the view that:

“The Harib retaliation involved excessive political cost; it got all the Arabs - not just Nasser – angry with the British, and focused attention directly at Aden. Moreover, let us remember that the trouble on the Yemen/Saudi Arabian border is largely the result of UK clandestine operations in support of Yemeni royalists”!418

4. Nasser’s battle with the UK over Aden and the south of the Arab Peninsula:
The US opposed the British suggestion that a tougher stance be taken with Nasser, on the basis that this would cost them more than they would gain. The US cited as a case in point the Aswan Dam episode when the US withdrew its offer of assistance which had led directly to

415 Telegram from the Department of State, Washington, to the Mission to the UN, April 1st, 1964.
416 Message from the British Prime Minister, Douglas-Home, to President Johnson, April 11th, 1964.
417 Message from President Johnson to Prime Minister Douglas-Home, April 12th, 1964.
Soviet entry into the Arab world, and Nasser’s nationalization of the Suez Canal.

While the US conceded that:

“It is true that Nasser is trying to oust us from US/UK bases in Libya and Aden, and opposes us on Israel, but our support to him can prevent him from applying too much pressure... One speech on the Libyan bases was quite enough!

“We cannot beat Nasser so long as he symbolizes Arab nationalism. The best thing we can do to preserve our interests is to restrain him, not attack him. A flexible policy, using carrots and a stick, best serves UK as well as US interests.”

The US was of the view that the British, in their frustration and concern over Aden, were grossly over-reacting, and that they could not possibly win there. The US admitted:

“Regardless of the covert or overt pressure, we can’t force Nasser out of Yemen. Since September 1962 he’s repeatedly demonstrated that he’ll send in whatever amount of force is necessary to hold on (it’s 40,000 now). And instead of bowing to covert external pressure he’ll up the ante with counter subversion...

“We and the UK couldn’t win in the UN either. It would become a straight ‘colonial issue’ on which we always lose...

“True, we could bleed Nasser indefinitely in the Yemen (as UK has been doing in fact for months). But this is one of factors which make our disengagement policy fail.

“Worse yet, we’d stand to lose far more than we could conceivably gain. We wouldn’t just be waging war with Nasser: but every Arab state – except for the Saudis - would back the UAR! In fact, we’d solidify the Arabs against us, largely because Nasser would again bring up the issue of US and British support of Israel—the one surefire Arab cause... We must not drive the Arabs to react against our policies with Israel.

“When Nasser attacks, his logical focus will be the bases in Aden and Libya. So instead of preserving our rights to these bases, we would increase the ultimate pressure on them!

\[419\] ibid.
“And in spite of the British talking of a link between the UAR, Yemen, and the Soviets, we feel that Nasser wishes to limit Soviet presence in Yemen for his own reasons, but the UK proposals could drive Nasser towards allowing an increased Soviet presence there!”

The Americans concluded that the British had not thought out their proposals properly, and would only cause them problems, and all just to support a weak government that was on its last legs....

“We don’t want a fight with Nasser while the Arab-Israeli issue is still hot.”420

5. **Nasser’s visit to Yemen:**
The visit took place from April 23rd – 27th, 1964, one and a half years after the Yemeni revolution. Nasser was met with an overwhelming turnout by the Yemeni people; and international news agencies reported that it was a welcome never before seen in Yemen. Tens of thousands of Yemenis left their villages on foot two days before Nasser’s scheduled arrival just to catch a glimpse of him, and his convoy from the airport to the presidential palace took 75 minutes to cover a distance of a mere seven miles, as the Yemenis kept stopping it to slaughter sacrificial cattle before it as was their custom in order to express their welcome.

Heikal described Nasser’s encounters with the Yemeni throngs, writing:

“Abdel Nasser in the midst of a swelling tide of people seemed like a sail in the middle of the sea!” He was, of course, riding in an open car.

George McArthur of Associated Press commented emotionally:

“My God! Isn’t there a single security person anywhere to tell this man that no matter how much he trusts these people he shouldn’t forget that every one of them has a rifle over his shoulder and a dagger at his waist?!”421

I myself was truly taken aback retroactively when I saw the pictures! I thanked God that he had returned safely: he was protected by God’s will and the love of the Yemeni people.

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420 Memorandum from Komer to Bundy, Washington, April 28th, 194.6
421 Heikal: Is this the truth in Yemen today?” – his column in Al Ahram, ibid.
“The sight of Nasser entering the city of Taiz, riding along the valley with green hills on either side, was truly unforgettable. Throngs of people were running down the slopes of the hills towards him, beating their drums and chanting prayers and blessings, their costumes dating back to centuries past.” 422

In his speeches to the Yemeni people, Nasser spoke of the objective of sending Egyptian forces to Yemen, which was to support the Yemeni revolution at the request of the revolutionaries themselves against the conspiracies of reactionaries and colonialists and the tyrannical rule of the Imams, who used religion as an excuse to control the people. In his first speech in Liberation Square in Sanaa, Nasser said:

“As we stand here together in the country of revolutionaries, the country of the free, let us remember the occupied south and the British attack on the land of Yemen, and say: when we determined to be free, we meant what we said; we meant every word; we shall meet aggression with force, and will not allow colonialists to remain in any part of the Arab world. Of course Britain looks at your revolution with hatred and loathing, knowing it has to pack up and leave Aden and the south, for Aden is Arab and the south is Arab, and we hereby make a pledge to God, on this sacred land, the land of revolutionaries, that we will drive Britain out of every single part of the Arab world. 423

“This revolution has been a turning point in the history of the Arab world: the reactionaries and colonialists imagined, after the separation from Syria, that the world was now theirs and that they could place the Arab world in their sphere of influence, but your revolution here in Yemen has put paid to the dreams and illusions of the colonialists and their allies, and has a resounding effect in every single part of the Arab world.

“Let us remember that our brothers in the occupied south and Aden have been subjected to the cruelest forms of terrorism and torture by the British colonialists... We stand with you, dear brothers, with our blood, hearts, and souls, and can never under any circumstances permit colonialism and occupation: Britain has to get out of Arab land, because Arab land is for the Arabs, and must be freed. We must free the rest of the Arab peninsula which the colonialists still control.... The Yemeni people owe a debt to God, because God has supported them... They have a debt they must repay by helping their brothers who are still struggling

422 Ibid.
423 Nasser’s speech in Yemen, April 23rd, 1964, Nasser’s Speeches, Part IV, pp. 103-107, ibid.
against the British colonialists, and who are languishing in the prison cells of these colonialists!"

Nasser’s attack on the British was further fueled by the fact that the UAR had acquired evidence of British arms, money and military support to Yemeni dissidents flowing across the southern borders, resulting in Egyptian troops being killed, which Nasser could not accept.

The British renewed their request to the US to cut aid to the UAR, regarding which Nasser’s comment was:

“Britain is publicly uttering threats against us, and if they can threaten, we can threaten also.”

Nasser met with the tribal heads and religious leaders in Yemen and asked them to support and work towards the liberation of Aden and the Arab south from colonialism, while the revolutionaries in the south sent him a telegram saying, “We are waiting for the day when we can see you in the Arab south, a leader of the Arab world.”

At the conclusion of his visit to Yemen, the Yemenis asked Nasser for a union with the United Arab Republic. Nasser declared it established, with the proviso that the constitutional union would take place after the departure of the Egyptian forces from Yemen.

On April 27th, 1964, the Yemeni constitution was declared after a meeting between Nasser and Al Sallal with the popular working forces of the Yemeni people. This was the main objective of Nasser’s visit to Yemen, namely the organizing of the Yemeni government which was in dire need of acquiring a viable structure.

An agreement to coordinate cooperation between the UAR and Yemen was signed, and a council established to determine the necessary steps for establishing the unity between the two country and cooperation in all fields.

It was natural that this visit should generate a violent reaction from the British, who had one of their biggest military bases in occupied southern Arabia and Aden. The British representative to the United Nations declared that Nasser’s speech calling for battle against colonialism constituted a threat to peace and security! At the same time, the

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424 Telegram from the Embassy in the UAR to the Department of State, May 8th, 1964.
425 The terms of the coordination treaty, July 13th, 1964.
patriotic movement in the south intensified against Britain, leading to increased colonialis
t suppression in these colonies.

After Nasser’s return to Cairo, he spoke of Britain’s position during his speech on Labour Day, May 1st, 1964, saying:

“Britain took over Aden unlawfully before WWI and usurped other parts after the war, and established a fake state subordinate to Britain under the name of the Federation of South Arabia! We say: it is not possible for any Arab territory to be subordinate to British colonialists; we have fought colonialism since the early days of the revolution, and support every country in the world fighting for its freedom.

“The revolution happened in Yemen, and inevitably called for the expulsion of Britain from Aden and the occupied south, and we had to do the same.

“Yemen today has a progressive constitution, a president, and a government and advisory council enjoying full authority. It has leaped ten centuries ahead! Yemen is now 92% under republican rule, the remainder is occupied by gangs and mercenaries backed by the British.” ⁴²⁶

And on the occasion of the signing of the joint cooperation treaty between the UAR and the Yemeni Arab Republic, Nasser said: “It is our duty to support Yemen in all fields, just as we supported it in the military field.” ⁴²⁷

6. The summit meetings and communications between Nasser and Faisal:
As the time drew near for the withdrawal of UN forces from the demilitarized zone, due to take place on September 4th, 1964, a joint attack was launched by UAR and Yemeni forces to clean up the north of Yemen and present Faisal with a fait accompli during the Alexandria summit meeting, especially as the Saudis had sent supplies to the border and had threatened to resume their support of the royalists!

At this point, Faisal sent an emotional plea to Johnson, in which he said that so long as the disengagement process had failed, Saudi Arabia could be obliged to start the war again, and asked if the US would

⁴²⁷ Nasser’s speech on July 13th, 1964, Part IV, pp. 236-239, ibid.
There was a distinct difference of opinion between the United States and the UK regarding the renewal of the struggle between Nasser and Faisal; Dean Rusk saw that it threatened the situation in Yemen and that the latter’s resumption of aid to the royalists would sabotage all Western interests. Butler, however, refused this point of view, saying that a renewal of operations could prevent Nasser from emerging victorious in Yemen, which was in the best interests of both Britain and the United States, as it was feared that Yemen would become an Egyptian sphere of influence. Moreover, as there was no agreement regarding a coalition government, how could there be an agreement between Nasser and Faisal?

Rusk saw that the US and the UK should continue to support Faisal by whatever means seemed appropriate. He admitted that the primary objective of the disengagement agreement was to allow Faisal breathing space in order to address his internal problems, which posed a threat to US/UK interests in the region.

Rusk called for cooperation between the US and the UK, adding that in the total framework of Anglo-American cooperation throughout the world, their differences over Yemen were a friction which it would be better to end. He added that their basic problem seemed to centre around tactics in dealing with Nasser!

Johnson sent a message to Faisal on August 29th, 1964, asking him to practice restraint, to which Faisal replied that the disengagement was dead, and that the presence of UAR forces in the Arab peninsula constituted ‘mortal danger’ to Saudi Arabia! He added that Saudi Arabia would do everything possible to save the royalists from being vanquished!

a. The results of the second summit meeting:
Nasser and Faisal met at the Alexandria conference on September 5th, 1964, and announced that their two countries intended to cooperate fully towards finding a solution to the differences between all parties in Yemen, and that steps would be taken to establish the

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429 Telegram from the Department of State, Washington, to the Embassy in the UK, August 31st, 1964.
430 Memorandum from Komer to Bundy, August 31st, 1964.
necessary communications and to reach a peaceful solution to these differences.

It was the first time after two years of conflict in Yemen that the two leaders had spoken together about the issue, which meant that the problem had now reached a new stage. However, matters did not proceed as smoothly as hoped for: Nasser and Faisal had agreed that republicans would be represented by two-thirds in the Yemeni government and the royalists by one-third, but the republicans refused these percentages!

Nasser later revealed to Charles Helou, the President of Lebanon during talks which were held between them in Cairo on May 3rd, 1965, that he had told Faisal:

“We have no objectives in Yemen, nor do we want to maintain bases there, or to threaten Saudi Arabia from Yemen. We agreed on a number of things, some which were announced, and others that were not. The latter included that Saudi Arabia should stop all assistance to the royalists, put an end to the smuggling of weapons into Yemen, and observe a cease fire. And that the royalists and republicans should have a meeting to resolve their differences and stabilize matters in Yemen. Once these steps had taken place, we would withdraw our troops in stages. We also made it clear that we insisted on isolating the Hamid Al Din family, and on maintaining the republic.

“The Saudis suggested that they would accept a republic on the basis that the president should be a member of the royal family, and that we should oust Sallal! We could not do that.”

In a meeting of the Supreme Executive Council on June 1st, 1966, Nasser said:

“Faisal reneged on our agreement, and put several obstacles in the way of everything we had agreed to; obviously, they were just buying time in order to get rid of King Saud, and get a hold on the country!”

Although the disengagement did not take place, the UAR forces in Yemen refrained from attacking Saudi Arabia, and the propaganda war between the two countries came to an end.

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431 Memorandum of a conversation, New York, December 11th, 1964, the Yemen situation.
The situation in Yemen remained static: the royalists on the Saudi border, the British in the south sending in weapons and completely in cahoots with the Saudis, while the Yemeni government did not succeed in gaining widespread support amongst the Yemeni people; accordingly, Nasser did not withdraw his troops.

Nasser told Charles Helou in the afore-mentioned meeting that the Americans imagined that applying economic pressure would help them achieve their objectives! He said, “We are ready for this, and if we wish to tire the Saudis out, we can! If they think that refraining from aid will stop us, we will prove to them that it will have the opposite effect!

“We cannot abandon Yemen to the English! I told them we had no wish to create trouble in the south or to establish bases, and in return, do not intervene in Yemen or offer the royalists any help. However, they did not listen, and continued to provide the tribes with weapons and to stir them up. It is easy enough for us to create problems for the English; I told the British Ambassador that if they take a step against us, we will take a step against them, and we can also launch operations against Saudi Arabia, which I have not done till now.”

Nasser added to Helou that another problem was that the Egyptian troops who were supposed to be on the Israeli border were stationed in Yemen. However, the troops sent to Yemen trained others to replace them, as the Israeli front had to be prepared at all times.

The situation in Yemen did not remain locked for long: Saudi Arabia announced that it intended to carry on helping the royalists, added to which Iranian assistance to them via the Saudis further complicated matters.

Nasser told Abdel Salam Aref, the Iraqi President, during their joint command discussions on May 19th, 1965:

“We are more fed up with the republicans than with the royalists; we have 50,000 of our troops in Yemen, and sent two more brigades last week, armoured and infantry, so we now have some 60,000 men there and no battles taking place!

“The British are collaborating with the Saudis, and their plan is to bleed us in Yemen! We are spending 30 million in cash in Yemen
and a total of 45 million in consumption of arms, equipment, supplies, and petrol, etc.!

“The royalists are no problem, but the Saudi army is thronged on the border, and infiltration operations and the smuggling in of weapons is still ongoing, and now Iran is sending in money and arms! However, all this is of no consequence – we can beat any operation!

“We went there to help the Yemenis and their revolution out of a sense of national duty, and now they are under the illusion that it is they who are helping us! The republicans are quarreling amongst themselves over leadership and control to the extent of engaging in conspiracies; every one of them wants to overthrow the other, all of which impacts the UAR and the Arab forces.

“We do not rule Yemen; Sallal is weak and the republicans are divided into squabbling groups and indifferent to the situation in the country; they think we will just leave it all and go, which is a real blow to us after all we have done for them. The tribes – even the republicans – take money from us as well as from Saudi Arabia, some just to keep quiet and leave us alone!

“To tell the truth, we are fighting alone in Yemen: the Yemenis are not fighting with us, and we are in the northern part of Yemen where all the problems are.”

Nasser also told Aref of the negotiations with Faisal, saying that they had come to nothing.

“I feel we have no option but to be patient and sacrifice; we must try to build a republic structure in Yemen, which will require an immense effort. The Yemeni affair is not popular in Egypt; if we leave, we will be supported at home, whether Al Badr or whoever else takes control of the country! But the issue is bigger than that: if people give up on the idea of Arab solidarity, we will have helped our enemies achieve their objective.

“We keep getting warnings from the United States regarding carrying out operations inside Saudi Arabia, because the US has pledged to defend it; but in spite of this, we have bombed inside Saudi Arabia several times!”

b. Nasser extends the hand of peace to the Saudis – with no response!
Nasser wrote the following in his notes on April 18th, 1965, on the Yemeni war:

“It was a Yemeni revolution helped by the Egyptians; it is now an Egyptian war with insufficient help from the Yemenis, who are sitting on the sidelines!

“We are now faced with two possibilities: first, to increase our forces in Yemen and keep them there for an indefinite period of time. Second: to withdraw and abandon Yemen to the royalists!”

At the end of the paper he wrote the following:

“When there is no military solution to a crisis, there must be negotiations to end it.”

In his speech of July 22nd, 1965, celebrating the thirteenth anniversary of the July revolution, Nasser presented an initiative to the Saudis, saying:

“We are stretching our hand out in peace, and have a plan to withdraw in less than six months if peace can be achieved.”

Nasser also mentioned the quarrels amongst the republicans in his speech, saying: “They depend on us for help, but they should learn to help themselves first! There must be national unity in Yemen in order for the republic to be stable and firmly established.”

Following this appeal, Nasser warned of the dangers of war should negotiations between the UAR and Saudi Arabia fail, saying: “If we do not come to a peaceful solution with Saudi Arabia, matters will develop into a clash, because we must liquidate the enemy bases that host the forces hostile to the Yemeni Arab Republic.”

This was the first time Nasser had publicly threatened to bomb Saudi territory where the enemy forces were centred.

Strangely enough, the Saudis continued to help the royalists, even though the US advised them to stop and to put the matter before the United Nations. Their position caused considerable
embarrassment to the United States, owing to its commitment to defending the integrity of Saudi Arabian territory and the presence of a US military base there for this purpose in addition to the Sixth Fleet in the Mediterranean which was on the alert.

With UAR-Saudi tension escalating, Faisal asked the US through his Minister of Defence, Prince Sultan Ben Abdel Aziz, to send an additional squadron of fighter planes, and to expedite the visit of the US destroyer to Saudi Arabia, which had been scheduled beforehand to sail to Jeddah. He also requested that the US send some military units to the Saudi-Yemeni border, all with the objective of striking fear into the Egyptians, as they imagined!

I was surprised to discover, during my research, that the US refused Faisal’s demands; the impression was always that the US was wholly on Faisal’s side, but the US reply to his requests was that they were willing to send the destroyer, but would not send any fighter planes to Saudi (as they had previously done in 1963) to quell Nasser, if the objective was to use them as an umbrella for renewing clandestine assistance to the Yemeni royalists!

The objective of this stance was to maintain pressure on both parties in order that they might discuss a settlement in Yemen amongst themselves. The US also informed Faisal that there would be no air deployment without the approval of President Johnson.

i. **Nasser in Jeddah:**

Nasser suddenly announced his intention to travel to Jeddah for a face to face meeting with Faisal in order to end the conflict in Yemen directly and without mediators. The proposal came from the Saudis, who suggested that the two leaders should meet in a neutral location on board a ship in the Red Sea, but Nasser with his characteristic courage and self-confidence, decided to meet Faisal on his own ground, in spite of being advised against this by his counsellors in Cairo! He explained that he had decided on this course of action in order to set his mind and that of the Egyptian people and the whole Arab world at rest, before the situation became too explosive. He also wanted to demonstrate to the Saudi people that Egypt had left no stone unturned in its quest for peace. He added that this was a far bigger issue than personal pride.

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434 Memo from Komer to President Johnson, August 13th, 1965.
Nasser also took this unexpected step because as he said:

“The objective of sending Egyptian forces to Yemen has been achieved, and retaining a military presence in Yemen will serve no purpose: the prison walls have fallen from around the Yemeni people once and for all.”\(^{436}\)

Nasser also knew that the developments of the situation with Israel (after its announcement of its intentions to divert the Jordan river, and the decision of the Arabs during the summit meetings of 1966 to respond to this) necessitated that:

“All Arab forces unite against the Zionist enemy; and the only remaining obstacle to this unity is the crisis of confidence between the UAR and Saudi Arabia.”\(^{437}\)

In another speech to the people, Nasser said:

“Good intentions are prevailing amongst all parties, fueled by the spirit of unity that was born during the summit meeting.”\(^{438}\)

1. **Nasser and Faisal sign the Jeddah Agreement on August 24\(^{th}\), 1965:**

   Nasser’s visit achieved its objective and he and Faisal signed a peace agreement on Yemen, after which he went straight to the airport and back to Cairo.

   The terms of the treaty were a ceasefire in Yemen, and a public referendum on November 23\(^{rd}\), 1966. It also called for cooperation between the UAR and Saudi Arabia for the purpose of holding a meeting between the republicans and the royalists in Haradh, Yemen, on November 23\(^{rd}\), 1965 to discuss arrangements for setting up a coalition government to be followed by the referendum.

   The agreement also included the withdrawal of UAR forces within ten months of November 23\(^{rd}\), 1965, and in return Saudi Arabia agreed to immediately stop its military assistance to the royalists and to refrain from allowing Saudi territory to be used for operations against Yemen.

\(^{436}\) Nasser’s speech on November 25\(^{th}\), 1965, Nasser’s Speeches Part IV, pp. 960-987, ibid.

\(^{437}\) Ibid.

\(^{438}\) Nasser’s speech on February 22nd, 1966, ibid, pp. 50-77.
The meeting of the two leaders in Jeddah was a success by all standards, and Johnson sent a letter to Faisal expressing his pleasure at the agreement; naturally, the US wished to see the conflict resolved by any means in order to protect its interests in the region, and had been putting pressure on both parties towards this end.

Nasser told Ambassador Badeau:

“In the beginning, I was pessimistic, but the Saudis wanted the agreement; in fact the ones who didn’t want it were the Yemeni republicans! I am facing as much trouble with them as I am with the royalists! What really matters to me is the Hamid El Din family should not take control; anyone else is all the same to me!

“The Yemeni issue was very difficult for me; we had more than seventy thousand of our troops there!”

This was before the withdrawal of some of them.

Nasser asked Badeau to pass on a message from him to the US government:

“To be in close contact with Faisal at this critical time so that nothing goes wrong.”

2. Faisal establishes the Islamic Alliance to counter Arab Nationalism:

Tensions began to mount in the Arab region with talk of establishing an Islamic Alliance, an initiative taken up by King Faisal and the Shah of Iran! Nasser saw this alliance as an attempt to respond to the Arab Nationalism movement led by Cairo, and the wave of neutrality sweeping the Middle East.

In short, it was a reactionary, colonialist move stemming from the fear of the West and some of the reactionary countries that the revolutionary fervor in the region posed an increasing threat to the oil monopolies, and that the wave of socialism endangered the whole structure of reactionism.

Basically, exploiting religion as a weapon to achieve the objectives of reactionism and colonialism in order to regain the influence that was

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439 Telegram from the Embassy in the UAR to the Department of State, November 24th, 1965.
shrinking under the influence of the liberation movements in the Arab world.

In the session of the Supreme Executive Council on June 1st, 1966, Nasser said:

“The aim behind the Islamic Alliance was to join together Saudi Arabia, Jordan, and Kuwait, and to try and include Iraq then Iran, Turkey, Pakistan, Libya, the Sudan, Tunisia, and Morocco. The Americans denied that they were behind this plot, but I do not for one moment believe this!

“At the same time of the call for an Islamic Alliance, a vicious propaganda campaign was launched against socialist systems, to which we refrained from reacting!”

In his notes, Nasser wrote:

“We oppose the Islamic Alliance, the only objective of which is to strike a blow at Muslims in the name of religion, and to split up the Arab world for the benefit of colonialism. Our opposition does not mean that we refuse true Islamic cooperation and solidarity.”

3. Faisal sabotages the Jeddah Agreement:
The Haradh meeting, which spawned the Jeddah agreement between the royalists and the republicans to establish a coalition government to be followed by a referendum, turned out to be a failure. Accordingly, the UAR found it impossible to abandon Yemen before such a government was established.

The basic differences within the Haradh meeting were primarily the name of the new state during the provisional government: the Saudis did not like the term ‘republic’! The UAR agreed to replace it with ‘state’. Beneath the surface was the question of the participation of the Hamid El Din family in the future political life of Yemen; the UAR would not accept their return to the country, an opinion shared by an overwhelming majority in Yemen.440

However, the decision not to withdraw UAR forces as a result of the failure of the Yemenis to form a provisional government worried Faisal, who – as usual – resorted to the Americans, and informed

440 Memorandum of conversation between Anwar Sadat, President of the National Assembly in the UAR, and Dean Rusk, February 23rd, 1966.
them though his Minister of Defence, Sultan Ben Abdel Aziz, that he felt Nasser did not intend to honour his commitment to complete the withdrawal by the end of 1966. He went even further, saying that he believed the Soviets were financing Nasser’s remaining in Yemen in order to establish a secure foothold for themselves in the Red Sea region, including a submarine base!

His allegations were rejected by US policy makers, who saw no truth in them, particularly when Faisal added that providing the UAR with food aid in accordance with the PL 480 programme was encouraging Nasser to remain in Yemen. Strangely enough, this incitement against Egypt was in tune with Israeli attempts to make the US cut off aid to the UAR!

The Americans expected that Faisal would continue to aid the royalists if UAR forces did not begin to withdraw, and decided to ask Faisal to exercise patience.441

The Saudi Defence Minister quoted Faisal, saying:

“The threat of communism in the Middle East is the biggest threat in the opinion of the Saudis, and the problem of Yemen and Nasser’s activities there are part of a long-term communist plot to reinforce communism in the region!”

Faisal also claimed that three Soviet ships had unloaded weapons and supplies in Hudayda in Yemen!

Rusk investigated these claims of Soviet activity, and found nothing to support these claims of the presence of Soviet submarines or bases in the region at all.

In a meeting between Nasser and Badeau on March 19th, 1966, the following conversation took place as recorded by Ambassador Badeau:

Badeau: “We believe that both parties in Yemen wish for a settlement.”

Nasser (interrupting, and speaking vigorously): “Do you really believe the Saudis want a solution?!”

441 Memorandum from Rusk to President Johnson, February 20th, 1966, Visit of Saudi Defence Minister.
Badeau: “We believe they do, but the interested parties need to find a way to resume the talks and rebuild the trust that had existed in the past.”

Nasser: “I have instructed my people to keep you completely informed on all aspects of the Yemen problem.”

Badeau: “Will the Haradh conference be resumed?”

Nasser: “Yes, but I doubt whether anything will come of it! My most important problem is the morale of the Egyptian army which would have great difficulty in accepting a defeat in the Yemen! I fear that a clash between the UAR and Saudi Arabia is inevitable.”

Badeau: “I cannot accept that ... the stakes are too great!”

Nasser: ”I understand the relationship of this problem to my relations with you and your country, and I assure you we consider it carefully in that light.”

Badeau: “Can you explain what you meant in your last speech, when you linked the withdrawal of UAR forces with the British position in Aden?” 442

Nasser: “We will not place any of our troops in Aden, nor do we link between Aden and the settlement in Yemen.” 443

Two days after this meeting, on March 22nd, 1966, Nasser spoke during the Socialist Union conference in Suez on the occasion of the city’s national day, and attacked the Islamic Conference, saying:

“The Islamic Conference or so-called Islamic Alliance died before it took shape, for today only two people support this idea: the Shah of Iran, and Bourguiba.

“Reactionism in the Arab world must end; reactionism is trying to defend itself against socialism... It is defending itself in the name of...”

442 In this speech on February 22nd, 1966, Nasser had said: “The talks that took place in Saudi Arabia aimed at finding a solution to the problem of Yemen, and to try and give the Yemeni people a chance to decide their own fate; at the same time, it was decided that our forces should withdraw... One of the results of the Yemeni revolution was that Britain had no recourse but to grant independence to Aden and the occupied south... Today, an announcement was made that Britain had decided to grant independence in 1968; all right, let us stay on then until after 1968!” Nasser’s Speeches, Part 3, pp. 50-77, ibid.
443 Telegram from the Embassy in the UAR to the Department of State, March 20th, 1966.
religion, but religion never, ever called for exploitation: religion calls for equality, religion says that Muslims’ money belongs to Muslims, not to Muslim kings! If reactionism wishes to prove to the world that it is truly in accord with religious teachings, let every one of them renounce his ill-gotten wealth... Why did the Prophet Mohamed not make himself a king?! Why did he not take over Muslims’ wealth for himself?! He set us an example: he was a leader of Muslims, a prophet of Muslims, but when he died, he had absolutely nothing to his name; he even gave his own clothes away!”

Nasser went on to challenge Faisal, saying:

“The process of implementing the Jeddah Agreement did not proceed in the way we intended it to... today... shall we abandon the Yemeni revolution?!... For the Yemeni revolution to stand on its feet and defend itself against the conspiracies of the colonialists and reactionaries, we have to support it. Today, we are readjusting our plans to remain in Yemen if need be for another five years or more; we will reduce the number of our forces there and also reduce our expenditures; we will adopt a new strategy in Yemen: the ‘long breath’ strategy.”

Badeau met with Nasser again after this, and the following conversation took place between them as recorded by the ambassador as follows:

Badeau: “What was the objective of the contents of your speech of March 22nd? Faisal took it as a personal attack against him (here, Nasser nodded in agreement.)! In our opinion, this speech has undermined the results of the meeting that took place between the UAR and the Saudis.”

Nasser: ” We have given up hope... King Faisal imagined that when I agreed to the terms of the Jeddah agreement, that this stemmed from weakness, which is not the case: it was to avoid a clash between the UAR and Saudi Arabia... The Jeddah Agreement has become non-existent... There is no agreement. We are consolidating our troops and will withdraw in large numbers, perhaps even up to half of them, but we can stay in Yemen for ten years! We are not weak. This does not cost us as much as Faisal thinks it does. It does

Note: to have ‘long breath’ is an Egyptian expression meaning to have the patience to sit something out till the desired objective is achieved.
not cost foreign currency. The present cost is 35 to 40 million pounds a year, and with the steps I propose we can reduce that cost to something like 20 to 25 million. This does not mean a resumption of hostilities by the UAR, but what happens depends on the Saudis.”

Badeau: "If you intend to withdraw, why not withdraw as part of your efforts to implement the Jeddah agreement? Perhaps a concession toward implementing the agreement by you would bring concessions from the other side and this new situation might lead to possibilities of a solution.”

Nasser: “This is impossible! The Jeddah agreement is one piece; if I announce that I am implementing that agreement by a withdrawal of troops, I will be prevented from re-entering Yemen if at a later date hostilities have been resumed and they need my assistance!”

Badeau: “We need patience and quiet diplomacy.”

Nasser: “I cannot do what the Saudis do - talk one way and act another! Either there is a basic understanding and friendship between two countries or there is not. I cannot pretend publicly what does not exist in fact, and therefore must honestly state what I feel to be the realities of the situation with respect to dealing with the problem. The Egyptian people have a deep interest in the Yemen and a right to know the truth of the situation.”

Badeau: “This problem cannot be dealt with publicly. There must be a restrained, quiet effort towards a solution.”

Nasser: “I have been restrained—there is much more I could say about the Saudis than I have said! They are spending money in Kuwait, Beirut, and other places against us. I know that, but I have refrained from talking about it!”

Badeau: “My country is still hoping that a dialogue between the UAR and the Saudis can be resumed, and in the light of the present situation the Saudis considered the next move up to Nasser.”

Nasser: (shrugs his shoulders angrily).

Badeau: “I have reason to believe that an initiative by the UAR to send a high level representative to Jeddah to meet with the King
and to resume discussions at the level of representatives of the two countries would be well received.”

Nasser (very firmly): “That is impossible! We will receive a representative from the Saudis, but I will not initiate this, nor can I send anyone there at the present time!”

Badeau: “My country wishes to be of help in solving this issue; have you any suggestions to make?”

Nasser: “I wish you to be informed completely and thoroughly on my actions in Yemen.”

Badeau: “Have you any suggestions concerning Aden, as it is closely related to Yemen?”

Nasser: “I have no suggestions to make.”

Badeau: “With regard to the problem of British withdrawal, we must encourage constructive action that will bring about stability in Aden and a government that reflects the will of the people.”

It was obvious from this meeting, as Nasser explained to the Supreme Executive Council on June 1st, 1966, that:

“The Americans want us to keep completely quiet so that they can get on with their plot with no hindrances. Their principal objective is us, here inside our country; they imagine they can undermine us from within!”

In the secret intelligence case that was discovered in Cairo and that had recruited Mustafa Amin, the Americans were extremely hostile, stating that they had got rid of ben Bella, and now it was time to get rid of Nasser, too!

Nasser saw that the only way to address this plot was to confront them with a very strong external campaign which would cause them problems, and at the same time, scare off other countries which were intending to follow suit.

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445 Telegram from the Embassy in the UAR to the Department of State, April 8th, 1966.
446 Editor in Chief of the Akhbar Al Yom newspaper.
“What I mean is this: we must stand up to the Americans! In my view, there can never be any form of cooperation with the Americans at all.”

A CIA report on the situation in the UAR stated that the US did not see any possibility of a solution within the next two years, and that Nasser would never accept a humiliating withdrawal, but that at the same time, he would avoid the dangers of escalation, though there was some risk of clashes occurring between the UAR and Saudis. They saw that his most likely course would be to hold on to the more defensible areas in hopes of arriving at a satisfactory settlement.447

Nasser announced in his speech on Labour Day, May 1st, 1966, that:

“We are determined to implement the Jeddah agreement, but will not accept any maneuvering in its implementation! The areas that the Egyptian army has evacuated are under the protection of Yemeni tribes and the Yemeni armed forces and have not been abandoned to the royalists.

“The royalists used to sneak in from the Saudi borders with arms to attack the Egyptian forces with, but we did not cross the borders. Today, our policy is different: if there is any infiltration into Yemeni territory from Saudi Arabia, we will bomb the enemy bases – and even occupy them! We are capable of doing so. We are defending our revolution, and we consider the Yemeni revolution our own... the revolution of all the Arabs.

“We can isolate Saudi Arabia from Yemen completely, by taking over Jizan and Najran! The Jizan area is originally Yemeni but was usurped by the Saudis in 1930 in an invasion! The Yemenis can demand Jizan and Najran, and we will fight this battle, Egyptians alongside Yemenis!”448

After this speech Nasser told the Supreme Executive Council on June 1st, 1966, that:

“Faisal realized when I spoke of Yemen, that I was not speaking from a position of weakness but of strength, and our threats turned out to be very effective. The truth is that Faisal is suffering from a...
host of domestic problems, at the same time that we decided to reduce our forces in Yemen by half in order to save money and men.

“The Americans and the British are spearheading the reactionary forces in the Arab region with the objective of doing away with all the progressive regimes in the area, and it is a well-known fact that the basis of this progressive power is Egypt! This is why we are taking the lead in confronting the hostile powers at work in the region.”

The deadlock in Yemen continued until the end of 1966. In a speech on December 23rd, 1966, Nasser said:

“The Egyptian army has not done battle there for a year and a half; the Yemenis have taken over responsibility in most areas.”

US-UAR relations fluctuated over the years, but were mostly downhill! This was the result of the struggle between Nasser and the Pro-Western leaders, notably Faisal, and of the problems between Nasser and the British in the Arab Peninsula, added to Nasser’s rejection of the US policy of using aid as a means of trying to pressurize him, and his conviction that they were increasing aid to his enemies.

j. Saudi Arabia thwarts the Kuwaiti mediation:

On August 20th, 1966, Kuwait asked to support the United States in presenting proposals for a settlement in Yemen. Contact took place in New York between Rusk and Mahmoud Riad, the Egyptian Foreign Minister, during the UN General Assembly meeting. Riad reiterated the position of the UAR regarding Yemen: first, the Hamid El Din family was to withdraw from Yemeni territory once half the Egyptian troops had left; this was the decision of the Yemeni people whose revolution had shown how they felt about this family. Second, the Yemeni people should be asked about the regime they wanted through a referendum.

The Saudis, however, were insisting that all Egyptian forces should be withdrawn first! Riad explained to Rusk that Egyptian public opinion would not tolerate this. Riad added that he had been told by the Kuwaitis that the Saudis had agreed to a Yemeni government that was three-fifths republican and two-fifths royalist, and that withdrawal would begin the moment the new government was formed. He said,

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449 Nasser’s speech on December 23rd, 1966, Nasser’s Speeches part 3, pp. 590-625.
450 National Intelligence Estimate, May 19th, 1966. OP. Cit.
“The areas of difference are simple; if Saudi Arabia wants to, an agreement can be signed immediately.”\textsuperscript{451}

Egypt accepted that the Yemeni regime, in the period preceding the referendum, should be known as the Yemeni State, as per Faisal’s refusal of the term ‘republic’ as mentioned before. Egypt also agreed to withdraw its forces from Yemen within nine months, and that the referendum should be monitored by three Arab states to be agreed upon with Saudi Arabia, each of which would send a nominal force to Yemen of not less than 1000 soldiers to help guarantee the integrity of the referendum.

The point that the Kuwait mediators floundered upon was the matter of banishing the Hamid El Din family from the Saudi borders with Yemen. Initially, the Saudis agreed in principle, then argued about the timing! Egypt felt that this should be after half the Egyptian troops had left Yemen, but the Saudis insisted that it should be after all the Egyptian forces had gone. Obviously, what the Saudis wanted was for the Egyptian army to withdraw from Yemen so that it could intervene freely against the Yemeni revolution!

Throughout the Kuwait mediation, Egypt did not stop trying to communicate directly with Saudi Arabia. Nasser wrote a letter to Faisal, who only answered forty days later, still sticking to his stubborn attitude! Nasser told the Saudi ambassador who had given him the reply:

“Tell your king that if matters carry on in this way, the dispute between Egypt and Saudi Arabia over Yemen will turn into a much bigger clash than Yemen ever was! And tell him that I see no reason for the stubborn stance he is adopting!”\textsuperscript{452}

In September, 1966, the Kuwaiti mediation ended in failure, and a more intense struggle began in Yemen.

7. Escalation between the USA and the UAR after the latter took the lead in the region:
On October 14\textsuperscript{th}, 1966, UAR forces in Yemen noticed unusual military activity and movements indicating hostile intentions on the part of the Saudis, and accordingly began to take precautionary measures by carrying out reconnaissance procedures day and night. An error occurred when an Egyptian military plane bombed Najran, the base

\textsuperscript{451} Memorandum of Conversation, New York, October 7\textsuperscript{th}, 1966, Yemen.
\textsuperscript{452} Heikal: Have We Reached the Point of No Return with Faisal? Al Ahram, February 10\textsuperscript{th}, 1967.
where infiltrators into Yemen were centered and from which they carried out murderous missions against the Egyptians.

The situation escalated when the Saudi government asked the US government to carry out its promise to support Saudi Arabia in the case of an unprovoked attack. And although the US had tried to carry out this commitment using diplomatic means, and had refused the Saudi request to place Hawk missiles next to Najran, this time there was a radical change in the US position. The US government ordered its military training mission in Saudi Arabia to send three officers to the Saudi border region on February 8th, 1966, to offer advice regarding arrangements for Saudi air defence. At the same time, a Hawk missile battery manned by Americans was positioned next to Najran, and became the property of Saudi Arabia. 453

The US however was worried about Nasser’s reaction, as he had prevented US planes carrying arms to Jordan from flying over UAR airspace. The Americans felt that they were caught in the middle between Nasser and Faisal! They neither wanted deteriorating relations with Egypt nor to lose credibility with Faisal. Accordingly, a new initiative was launched by the US for mediation between the two parties.454

The situation was becoming increasingly risky for Saudi Arabia: after Faisal had mobilized his forces to confront the area where the Egyptian army was gathered, he discovered that he was incapable of ordering the Saudi forces to go into battle with the Egyptian army! A marked sympathy for the nationalistic, revolutionary cause began to be seen amongst them. It was feared that should the king issue orders to the Saudi army to fight the Egyptian army, large numbers of them would join the Egyptians! The British government warned Faisal of this and advised him to replace the troops with Bedouin tribes, trained and led by a British military mission. Faisal agreed, and the tribal guards replaced the regular soldiers.

Explosions began to be heard in various parts of Saudi Arabia, in Jizan and Najran near Yemen, then spreading further to Riyadh, 500 kilometres away from the Yemeni border! Explosions took place in the hotel housing the US military mission, ‘The Flower of the East’, and

454 Memorandum from Howard Wriggins of the National Security Staff to the President’s Special Assistant, Rostow, Washington, February 7th, 1967, Yemen Mediation.
amongst the US fighter planes in the military airport in Riyadh. Further explosions occurred in the offices of the Saudi Ministry of Interior headed by Prince Fahd, and the Ministry of Defence headed by Prince Sultan!

It was revealed that Saudi elements were taking part in these operations, military elements, moreover, causing grave concern to the US and Britain, who feared for their interests.

And when the UAR forces bombed Najran, it was to send a warning to Riyadh that the UAR was serious in its intention to bomb enemy bases in Saudi Arabia should the revolution in Yemen be threatened.455

These events were accompanied in parallel by an escalation of the nationalistic movement in southern Arabia, and Britain announced on January 9th, 1968, that it intended to withdraw from the region and from Aden as a result of the constant attacks of the continuous attack of the revolutionary forces there. However, the British government sacked the nationalistic government in Aden which was headed by Abdel Kawi Mekaui and was in touch with the revolutionary movement, and replaced it with a government of sultans from the Protectorates, who were allegiance to the British! Britain then resorted to the United Nations, claiming that it needed to assist in the peaceful transition from occupation to independence!

In parallel with these events, the revolution had begun to spread from occupied southern Arabia to the occupied Gulf of Arabia, at which time oil was gushing forth in huge quantities. Nationalistic centers were emerging in the area, leading to changes in the rulers who had cooperated with the Saudi throne.456

The United States began to take steps towards mediating between the UAR and Saudi Arabia at this crucial period in the Yemeni struggle. Accordingly, Lucius Battle, the new US Ambassador in Cairo, met with Nasser and proposed US mediation, to which Nasser replied that he had gone to Jeddah and had signed an agreement with the Saudis against the advice of his colleagues, but now saw no hope of a solution in the light of the other party insisting on interpreting this as a sign of weakness! However, he wished the US to know that he accepted in

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455 Heikal, “Have we reached the point of no return with Faisal?” Al Ahram, February 10th, 1967, ibid.
principle that Ambassador Raymond Hare should assume the role of mediator.\(^{457}\)

However, the UAR delayed in responding to the US mediation proposal, which was a source of concern to US officials. This concern increased when King Saud surfaced in Yemen, and was welcomed by Sallal as the ‘legal King of the Saudi people’! The US officials were infuriated that Saud was taken to Yemen in an official UAR government airplane and in the company of top-level Egyptian officials, and expressed their concern at the effect of this visit on the prospects for their mediation proposal.\(^{458}\)

Matters were further exacerbated for the US when on April 26\(^{th}\), 1967, riots took place against the US Embassy and USAID compound in Taiz, Yemen. A mob marched through the streets, chanting, “No Americans after today!” The demonstrators numbered some 7,000 and were carrying a coffin. They then gathered in front of the USAID residential compound and burst in, turning over vehicles and damaging buildings. Two Americans were arrested for questioning by Yemeni and UAR security officials in relation with this incident.

In retaliation, the US cancelled the aid programme for Yemen, and withdrew its USAID mission.\(^{459}\)

Field Marshall Abdel Hakim Amer sent a letter to Rusk in response to the latter’s letter to Mahmoud Riad on April 29\(^{th}\), pointing out that while what had happened in Taiz was a matter that fell within US-Yemeni relations, the Egyptian government was keeping a close watch on the development of events, and had tried to prevent a further deterioration of the situation.

Field Marshall Amer also issued directions to the head of UAR forces in Yemen requesting that these forces cooperate in ensuring the security of US citizens and to assist those Americans wishing to leave Yemen.\(^{460}\)

The escalation was renewed, this time on the part of the United States, who informed the United Nations that the UAR had been using nerve gas in bombing attacks inside Yemen since January 1\(^{st}\), 1967!\(^{461}\)

\(^{457}\) Telegram from the Embassy in the UAR to the Department of State, March 28\(^{th}\), 1967.
\(^{458}\) Telegram from the Department of State to the Embassy in the UAR, April 25\(^{th}\), 1967.
\(^{459}\) Circular telegram from the Department of State to certain posts, Washington, April 28\(^{th}\), 1967.
\(^{460}\) Telegram from the Embassy in the UAR to the Department of State, April 30\(^{th}\), 1967.
\(^{461}\) Telegram from the Department of State to the Mission to the European Office of the UN, Washington, May 25\(^{th}\), 1967.
The UAR issued an official statement on February 1st, 1967, stating categorically that it had never used poison gas at any point during the battles in Yemen. The UAR also announced its willingness to accept a UN investigative mission and to promptly arrange travel procedures for this mission to Yemen. The Yemeni government also agreed to offer all facilities to said mission, in order to expose the propaganda lies against the UAR.

8. The conclusion of the war in Yemen:
The struggle in Yemen diminished before the Israeli attack on Egypt, Syria, and Jordan on June 5th, 1967. Some view that the resolution of the problem between Cairo and Riyadh was one of the achievements of the Arab Summit Meeting in Khartoum on August 26th, 1967, but the truth is that the conflict in Yemen came to an end the day Britain announced its decision to evacuate the south in 1968, and scheduled January 9th for finalizing the departure. The British forces actually left Aden on November 39th, 1967, forced by the pressure of nationalist forces there, and before the time previously determined by the British Prime Minister, Harold Wilson. The People’s Democratic Republic of Yemen was born.

This national triumph will also remain a historic reminder of the role played by the Egyptian army in Yemen, and which led to the establishing of a new, liberated, progressive Arab state in the south.

The departure of the British forces from southern Arabia removed the most vicious, ferocious enemy of the Yemeni revolution. The Hamid El Din family fell apart, its power ended, and the walls of isolation that had surrounded Yemen finally fell.

The agreement made between Nasser and Faisal in Khartoum on October 15th, 1967, stipulated that Saudi Arabia should stop all aid to the Yemeni factions that it supported; in return, the UAR would withdraw its army from Yemen. In other words, the implementation of the Jeddah agreement was delayed till after the Israeli aggression of 1967, with Faisal believing he was in a position of power while the truth was that he was forced, before the overwhelming tide of the Arab people, to abandon his obstinate attitude and to offer support to the countries confronting Israel. This is another story, which will be discussed in the next chapter.

The UAR did not intervene in Yemen seeking control, but to resist the mercenary forces that were fighting the people of Yemen, as well as the British forces of occupation in the south.
The Egyptian army left Sanaa in accordance with the Khartoum agreement on October 15th, 1967.

If we analyze the events that took place in Yemen over a period of more than five years, we must take into account the political conditions that prevailed in the Arab world at the time. The Yemeni issue began in the aftermath of the conspiracy to separate Syria from the United Arab Republic in September, 1961, and following the Shatoura conference in August 1962, which the Syrian separatist regime used as a platform from which to attack the Arab nationalist movement. It seemed that the forces opposing Arab development wished to silence any voice calling for Arab liberation.462

These, then, were the circumstances in which the Yemeni revolution took place, only to find itself threatened by the enemies of progress in the Arab world and the colonialists with vested interests in the area. The leaders of the revolution immediately resorted to Egypt for help, in its capacity as the leader of the progressive Arab revolutionary tide.

Nasser consulted his colleagues, asking:

“Shall we let the Yemeni revolution remain alone and easy to quell? What would happen to the whole Arab movement then?!”

The unhesitant reply was that there was no time to waste, else the Yemeni revolution would be lost, and it was seen that a few commandos and one flight squadron should suffice!

Thus, Egypt intervened to save the revolution in Yemen; one has to view the events in Yemen from a nationalistic perspective.

The Egyptian military intervention antagonized the reactionary Arab factions, rousing the enmity of King Saud followed by Faisal. The Saudis mobilized forces and supplies in support of the royalists, which consequently led to an increase in the Egyptian forces in stages, so that by the end of 1965, they numbered some 70,000. Nasser felt that neither he nor the Egyptian people would accept defeat in Yemen.

The Egyptian military presence in Yemen also roused the animosity of the British colonialists, who feared for their extensive military base in

Aden and their vested interests in southern Arabia and the Arabian Gulf.

All this led to the Egyptian army being confronted by enemies on several fronts; the north, the north-east, and the south. Their presence in Yemen had far-reaching effects in the region: the British occupation evacuated the Arab Peninsula, and southern Arabia and the Arabian Gulf were liberated.

Another positive offshoot of the battles in Yemen was that Faisal was forced to carry out a process of modernization in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia upon the advice of the US, who saw this as a means of achieving stability and security, looking towards their own interests there (especially the oil), which were contingent upon the Saudi royal family’s remaining in power.

Egypt lost 5,000 martyrs on Yemeni territory, but this was a sacrifice that it was incumbent upon the UAR to make, in its capacity as the leader of nationalist, liberation movements in the region. Moreover, the radical changes that took place helped establish total Arab sovereignty over the Red Sea with its strategic importance as the link between the Mediterranean and the Indian Ocean. The integrity of the Red Sea had always been maintained during all ages in Egypt, from the time of Thutmose III till that of Abdel Nasser.463

This objective was achieved in 1973 in the war of liberation against the Israeli occupation, when the Egyptian army crossed the Suez Canal to liberate the Sinai and the Yemenis closed the strait of Bab El Mandab in the south of the Red Sea to prevent enemy ships from crossing to the Suez Canal.

To conclude, the struggle against the revolution in Yemen was not just regional, it was a global issue involving the United States, Britain, the Soviet Union, Iran, and Turkey; in other words the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), all the Arab countries, and finally Israel, who was carefully monitoring Faisal’s depletion of Egypt’s forces and resources!

The reason for this was Yemen’s strategic location at the entrance to the Red Sea and accordingly to the Suez Canal, a vital waterway, as well as the fact that it bordered Saudi Arabia where the US had a vested interest.

463 Heikal, Danger On The Red Sea, Al Ahram column, October 27th, 1972, ibid.
in oil, as well as southern Arabia which was occupied by the British and which was struggling for independence.

Furthermore, the war in Yemen was also a struggle between reactionism and socialism; between progress and backwardness; and between freedom and bondage.

History can evaluate the role of Egypt in Yemen and its support of the Yemeni people in their struggle against the ignorant, backward rule of the Imamate, the Saudi rulers who refused all change, and the hegemony of the British colonialists.

What I am sure of – and have personally encountered – is the gratitude of the Yemeni people towards the Egyptians and their appreciation of the sacrifices made by them. This is amply evidenced by the memorial they set up as a symbol of the love between Yemen and Egypt and the area they set aside in Sanaa for the Egyptian martyrs where their names are all inscribed on a roll of honour.
Third: The Arab Summit Conference

1. The first Arab Summit in Cairo (January 13th – 17th, 1964):

Nasser called for a meeting of Arab leaders in his speech made in Port Said on Victory Day, December 23rd, 1963, in order to confront the Israeli threat to the Arabs with the project for diverting the waters of the Jordan River.

Cairo had already witnessed a conference of Arab chiefs of staff from the 7th-10th December, 1963, during which the same issue was discussed, and the conclusion reached that:

“A matter such as this cannot be decided by chiefs of staff; it is a political issue before being a military one, and the military follows politics in such matters.”

This is what Nasser said, adding:

“As we face Israel, who threatened us last Friday, and whose chief of staff said plainly that they would divert the waters in spite of the Arabs, it is imperative that we hold a meeting of Arab kings and leaders as soon as possible and put aside all differences and quarrels: we are willing to sit with anyone we have a disagreement with for the sake of the Palestinian cause!”

Nasser added:

“I propose a meeting of Arab kings and leaders and will inform the Arab League and request that they call for such a meeting as soon as possible. The matter of the Jordan River must be addressed with a conference that includes participants at the highest level from every Arab country: this is not a minor issue; it is one that affects our very destiny.”

The Arab states responded favourably to Nasser’s call for action, and in spite of the stormy weather and the ongoing war in Yemen, not one Arab country refrained from attending and the conference was held in Cairo in the Arab League building from January 13th-17th, 1964.

As is usually the case in such conferences, many discussions on a smaller scale took place between the participants; on January 12th,
In his meeting with King Hussein, Nasser said:

“We are starting afresh and the past is over and done with.”

And when King Hussein asserted that Arab unity was the objective of all Arabs, Nasser responded:

“Unity is wider in scope than a constitutional union; there may be social or political conflicts, but we can rise above these and agree on one unanimous objective.

“Concerning Palestine, the problem can be resolved by reinforcing all the Arab forces, and God willing, this conference will be the beginning of an Arab solidarity that will empower us to confront the colonialisst countries and Israel.”

The discussion continued as follows:

Hussein: “The situation is fraught with danger, and the major risk is that if Israel does succeed in diverting the Jordan river and we Arabs consequently declare war, the Jordanian troops will be at the forefront!”

Nasser: “We cannot declare war, because if we do go to war, we can only reach a certain point beyond which we cannot go; war has to be a last resort. After the meeting of chiefs of staff, I realized that the situation is difficult... Some Arab countries have the ability to fight but lack material resources, while others have the manpower but not the facilities.

“We need to coordinate our military resources and there must be a unified command. Israel has a strong air force and receives support from the West. We need to prepare; how can we declare war without taking all these issues into account and without a unified command?! Is it possible to make an inventory of the military resources of all the Arab countries?!”

Hussein: “Is there a way to help us militarily, and will there be an Arab agreement amongst us all?”

Minutes of these meetings can be found in the appendix.
Nasser: “I will speak with Abdel Salam Aref... The Iraqi army has been exhausted by the Kurdish issue, and they do not have sufficient forces. Some people say that I called for this conference in order to declare war! Freeing Palestine is our objective; but the problem isn’t Israel, but those behind it. We cannot propose going to war, but we need to propose a plan for Palestine that we can carry out.”

Hussein: “Whatever you decide, I am with you.”

Nasser: “We must be prepared.”

On the same day, Nasser also met with Abdel Salam Aref, and the following conversation took place:

Nasser: “I see this conference as an opportunity to solve our problems; from what I hear listening to Israeli radio, I see them going forth with their plans while we Arabs – are no use! The situation is threatening Arab security, and all the Jews’ tactics are based upon the Arab situation!”

Aref: “We are ready for any agreement you want; this is a brotherly speech coming from the heart... What about our difference with Algiers?”

Nasser: “Ahmed Ben Bella has a good heart and is open to discussion; as for this conference it is not for the purpose of declaring war, but unfortunately, the Arab countries act on the basis that Palestine has been lost, and that the question of the Jordan waters is an Israeli expansion within the boundaries of Israel... What I propose is a unified command, to prepare, and to investigate what resources we have in the Arab world. In 1956, we drew our strength from the fact that all Arab states acted as one.”

The discussions between Nasser and ben Bella, and with the Prince of Kuwait, were along the same lines:

Nasser: “If the Israelis take on Jordan by itself, they will demolish it, and the same goes for Syria. Is there a unified command or any planning?”

Al Sabah (Prince of Kuwait): “We are ready for anything.”

Nasser: “We are 100 million Arabs, and together we can do much.”
Nasser’s discussion with King Saud took place on January 15th and was attended by Ben Bella as per Nasser’s request; however, the latter remained silent.

Saud: “Regarding the period of the union, I hope we can close this page. We are all for the national good. The decision taken will be made by the Arab League and accordingly we are all for it. We attended in a positive frame of mind for the welfare of Arab nationalism, and there has been a commendable effort made by the United Arab Republic.”

Nasser: “The basic reason for this conference is to end all differences and problems affecting the Arab world, because this kind of situation only serves to help Israel; the Israelis claim that the Arabs do nothing but talk, and we are the reason for this!

“We must sit together and review our resources, the forces we need, the finances we require, and put an end to this period of talk and broadcasts. We must start a new page: the Jordanian issue has been cleared, and the Saudi one as well, as for Yemen, we wish to restore our relations to the way they used to be and even better.”

The conference began, with a faction vociferously requesting an all-out attack against the Israeli project for diverting the Jordan River, to which Nasser responded:

“If we do not have the means to defend our own projects within our own territories, how can we possibly think of launching an attack to destroy projects Israel has set up on land it has occupied since 1948?!”

Nasser than proposed that the Arabs should study whatever projects they had for using the waters of the Jordan river on Arab land, then go about implementing these projects and diverting the water into their own territories. Simultaneously, the Arabs should begin building up a defence force capable of defending their legitimate rights to safeguard the projects they had set up within their own lands.

Egypt presented three specific suggestions:

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467 King Saud was referring to the conspiracy on Nasser’s life for which purpose he recruited Abdel Hamid Al Serag.
1. Establishing an Arab entity to study and monitor the implementation of Jordan river projects in Syria, Lebanon, and Jordan. Funding for this would be borne by the Arab League.
2. Establishing a joint Arab command that would draw up a plan for the protection of Arab projects, with forces operating under said command.
3. All Arab countries to participate in arming those countries more vulnerable to Israeli attacks on their Jordan river projects.

After three days of discussions, it was agreed amongst the kings and Arab leaders that all differences would end and all hostile propaganda put a stop to.

Concerning military action, it was decided to set up a joint Arab command for the armies of the Arab states, with command headquarters in the UAR, and whose members and chief of staff would be chosen by the UAR government. During the secret meeting of kings and Arab leaders held on January 17th, 1964, Nasser declared:

“The government of the UAR has appointed Major-General Aly Amer as Supreme Commander, who decides where the headquarters of the Command will be, and has selected Cairo.”

During this same secret meeting, it was decided to implement the recommendations regarding the Jordan river, which had been unanimously agreed to on January 13th, namely exploiting its waters and tributaries and establishing an authority for this purpose within the Arab League, with a board of directors chaired by the Secretary-General of the League.

It was also decided to establish a Palestinian entity and to appoint Ahmed Al Shuqueiri as a representative of the State of Palestine within the Arab League, and to form a special committee, also chaired by the Secretary-General of the Arab League, to follow up on the implementation of all the decisions made by the conference. In conclusion, it was decided that the Arab kings and leaders should meet at least once a year.468

The Cairo conference was followed by several more: the Alexandria conference in September, 1964, the Casablanca conference in September, 1965, then a period when things floundered and the

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468 Minutes of the secret meeting of the Arab kings and leaders, January 17th, 1964, appendix.
meetings stopped, to be resumed in the Arab Summit meeting in Khartoum on August 26th, 1967 after the Israeli attack on the Arab world in June, 1967.

But before analyzing the proceedings of the meetings that followed the first, let us ask: what did this first Arab conference achieve?

With regard to clearing the air between the Arabs, it succeeded to a certain extent, ending, for instance, the clash between Morocco and Algeria and the dispute with Tunisia, when Bourguiba invited Nasser to Bizerte, and took a bold socialist step by nationalizing the land occupied by French settlers.

However, on the other hand, no progress was made with the relations between Saudi Arabia and Yemen, nor did Prince Faisal attend this first conference in Cairo, only King Saud; and Saudi operations against the Yemeni revolution did not stop. But overall, the results were positive.469

2. The second Arab Summit Conference in Alexandria, September 5th-11th, 1964:
Before this second meeting was held, the USA sent a message to Nasser expressing concern over the developments that had resulted from the first summit meeting and which they felt could profoundly affect the balance of political and military forces in the Middle East should they continue along the present course. Although the first January summit had led to the wise decision taken by the Arabs, under the leadership of the UAR, not to go to war, nevertheless certain measures which they had agreed upon could, the US felt, lead to the risk of war and a state of instability in the Middle East, particularly with regard to the Joint Arab Command and the armaments programme adopted by the participants. The US also criticized the statements made concerning diverting the waters of the Jordan river, and the matter of establishing a Palestinian entity, which had raised the expectations of the Palestinian refugees whom the US were already supporting with funds. The US was concerned that these funds which were intended to support refugees and promote economic development were instead being diverted to the acquisition of extensive new armaments for the Joint Arab Command.470

470 Telegram from the Department of State, Washington, to the Embassy in the UAR, August 24th, 1964.
The second Arab Summit held eight secret meetings\textsuperscript{471} during which the kings and leaders discussed the Palestinian problem and the Palestinian entity, the Arab projects for making use of the waters of the Jordan river and its tributaries, the Joint Arab Command and the matter of getting the remaining Arab countries to join the Joint Defence Treaty\textsuperscript{472}, British colonialism in the Arab world, and liberating the occupied south and Oman.

The first secret meetings took place on September 5\textsuperscript{th}, 1964, when a review was made of those decisions of the first summit which had taken effect. Politically, disputes had been settled and the air cleared amongst the Arab countries, and all media propaganda had been put a stop to. An agreement to solve the Algerian–Moroccan dispute over the borders\textsuperscript{473} had been signed on February 19\textsuperscript{th}, and normal relations were consequently resumed between the two countries. On February 28\textsuperscript{th}, brotherly relations were resumed between the UAR and the Kingdom of Morocco\textsuperscript{474}, and on March 4\textsuperscript{th} between the UAR and Saudi Arabia, who had cut off diplomatic relations with the UAR because of its support of the Yemeni revolution. On May 26\textsuperscript{th}, an agreement for unified coordination was signed between Iraq and the UAR, and on July 13\textsuperscript{th}, a similar agreement was signed between the UAR and Yemen. On July 28\textsuperscript{th}, Jordan formally recognized the Yemeni republic.

From a military standpoint, the Joint Arab Command was established, and funds allocated for military reinforcements in Syria, Jordan, Iraq, and Saudi Arabia.

As for the issues up for discussion in the second meeting, these were: reinforcing Arab defence capabilities, and including all the Arab states in the Joint Arab Defence treaty.

\textsuperscript{471} The minutes of these secret meetings can be found in the appendix.
\textsuperscript{472} The Joint Defence treaty had been signed in 1950 and included Egypt, Jordan, Syria, Iraq, Saudi Arabia, Palestine, Lebanon, Yemen, Kuwait, Libya, Tunisia, the Sudan, Algeria, Bahrain, Qatar, Somalia, and the Emirates.
\textsuperscript{473} A border dispute, the Sands War, broke out between Algeria and Morocco in October 1963 and lasted for only a few days, ending on November 5\textsuperscript{th}, 1963 after intervention from the Arab League and the Organization of African Unity; a final settlement to the dispute took place in Bamako, the capital of Mali, in February, 1964, but left a lasting tension between the two countries.

\textsuperscript{474} Egypt had supported Algeria in the Sands War border dispute that took place between Algeria and Morocco in 1963; and in July 1963, Egypt received the Moroccan opposition politician Al Mahdi ben Baraka and in October of the same year, the Moroccan authorities closed down the Egyptian cultural missions in both Rabat and Fez.
Furthermore, the authority in charge of channeling the waters of the Jordan river and its tributaries formulated the technical projects due to take place in Jordan, Syria, and Lebanon, which were scheduled to be finalized by the end of 1966.

With regard to the Palestinian entity, Palestine was represented by Ahmed El Shukeiri at the Arab League. The conference on Palestine had been held on May 28th and opened by King Hussein, and during the proceedings, the establishing of the Palestinian Liberation Organization was announced and Shukeiri elected as its president.

Also achieved during this conference were the signing of the Economic Unity agreement and the formation of the Arab Organization for Education, Culture, and Science.

On another note, Aly Amer, the head of the Joint Arab Command, presented a report on the high probability of Israel’s launching an attack on any neighbouring Arab state, stressing the need to take measures to address this contingency. Amer requested the mobilization of forces in the Arab countries bordering Israel and asked that both land and air forces be increased, stressing that these preparations be made before beginning work on diverting the Jordan river.

During the second round of secret talks on September 6th, the Syrian delegation began bargaining as follows:

Amin Al Hafez, the Baathist Syrian President: “During the previous conference, the Joint Arab Command was asked to draw up a plan to be presented to the Arab monarchs and leaders, the main objective of which was to exterminate Israel!”

Nasser: “I called for the first conference because I felt that the Palestinian question was losing its momentum and that unified Arab action was ineffectual; the discussions that took place during these meetings proved to me that the Arabs are incapable of operating within their own borders out of fear of Israel! I attributed this to inter-Arab disagreements, and realized the importance of joint Arab action to protect any Arab country subjected to an attack.

“Therefore the aim of this first call to action was to reinforce Arab defence against any act of aggression on the part of Israel: this is the stage where we should consolidate our forces; there is nothing to
stop us from investigating the possibility of doing away with Israel, but this is another matter altogether.

“I did not announce that we would meet to prevent the diverting of the Jordan river; this is not a question of attacking, or preventing, but rather of addressing the fact that we have insufficient forces defending our borders.

“So before talking of attack, let us be sure that we are able to defend! This should be our first step towards confronting Israel – after that, we can talk of how to exterminate it.”

Al Hafez: “I am talking here of a plan, with a fixed timeline, for exterminating Israel. We were expecting this plan to be ready and to be reviewed over a period of one or two years! We did not come here to talk of reinforcing our defenses, but to lay down a plan with our Arab brothers to stop Israel from diverting the waters of the Jordan river.”

Nasser: “Ever since 1960, the Arab League has been requesting that the waters of the tributaries be diverted, and the Joint Arab Command formed; several political and military meetings were held but nothing was accomplished. There was nothing to stop Israel from diverting the waters.

“And when the Arab Chiefs of Staff met, the Syrian and Lebanese delegations said they could not divert the Banias river because that might lead Israel to invade and occupy them! So actually, the question is not one of stopping Israel from diverting the Jordan river, but rather of our ability to operate within our own borders!

“Accordingly, it is quite clear that we will not be able to take any sort of action unless something is done to enable joint Arab activity, and put the armies of the Arab countries bordering Israel – namely, Iraq, Syria, Jordan, Lebanon, and the UAR – under one command.

“This, then, was the basis for calling for this conference; it was never stated that its purpose was to prevent the diverting of the Jordan river, because doing so would mean attacking, and how could we do so when we are fearful of carrying out a legitimate project within our own borders in case this should provoke an Israeli attack?!
“Our priority is to ensure that we are free to operate within our own borders, and are able to stop any Israeli aggression and oppose it with a counter attack.

“Now, having formed the Command, we are discussing whether we are going to divert the tributaries, whether we will reinforce Arab defenses, and whether we have sufficient funds. Having said that, this does not preclude the investigation of how Arab countries can exterminate Israel.”

Al Hafez: “We agreed in the past to divert the waters of the Hasbani river, on the basis that there was a specific time plan for exterminating Israel! But if the matter is simply one of diverting the waters of the Banias and Hasbani rivers and wasting money, we have a different opinion! The Syrian army is not afraid of Israel!”

Nasser: “There is still a problem of mistrust in the Arab world that we need to address and put an end to. If Israel feels that we will take joint Arab action against it if it should attack Lebanon or Syria of Jordan or the UAR, it will think twice before doing so. What can stop Israel? Nothing but joint Arab action. We need to define our objective and our means of getting there, and eliminate the current lack of trust.”

During the fourth secret meeting of the Arab summit held on September 7th, Nasser said:

“I think that before beginning discussions we should define our objective, especially as there seem to be differences of opinion amongst the participants in the first conference, during which we decided that it was necessary to fortify the forces of the Arab countries bordering Israel to enable them to stand up to and repel any Israeli attacks.

“The first decision taken by the kings and leaders during this first conference was that Israel constitutes a threat to the Arab world, a matter we all agreed upon. We agreed to take the necessary economic, political, and media-related steps to address this danger, but no mention was made of military procedures.

“When we discussed this matter, we agreed not to include any military activities even if the political, economic, and media actions taken did not achieve the desired results. Only when a complete,
unified Arab military preparedness is established can we talk of exterminating Israel.

“Our priority now is to finalize our defenses and protect the projects for diverting the tributaries in order to prevent Israel from using the waters of the Jordan river and prevent it from expanding any further.

“Our long-term objective, one that we have all been thinking of since 1948, is to eradicate Israel and bring Palestine back. But it is our duty now to define our objectives, and if there are several of these, to decide where our priorities lie and discuss them. That is if we wish this meeting to have a positive outcome.”

In the fifth secret meeting held that same day, the following discussions took place in response to the Syrian proposal that the military reinforcements be considered the nucleus of a plan to exterminate Israel in the near future.

Nasser: “When we got together for the first conference, there was no form of unified Arab action whether military or otherwise, then we began to work towards this in January, 1964. Before that date, our meetings were simply ‘ink on paper’: ineffectual. Unified Arab action only began with the formation of the Joint Arab Command and the appointment of its head, who was charged with the task of diverting the tributaries and reinforcing Arab defenses. That was the prime objective, so how can we talk of attacking before we have even finalised our ability to defend ourselves, towards which end we have allocated the sum of 150 million pounds sterling?!

“When the second stage comes, we will estimate its requirements after they have been determined by the Commander in Chief of the Joint Arab Defence; this could be after one year or one hundred years!

Voice: “In a hundred years’ time, Palestine will have been lost!”

Nasser: “In three or four years’ time then; naturally, we all wish we were able to launch this battle at once, but there are obstacles we are all aware of. However, if our unified action continues on the right track, we will be better equipped to do so.”

Voice: “We want to put the extermination of Israel as a clear objective and to agree to it!”
Al Hafez: “We don’t carry about psychological warfare and such things.”

Nasser: “The UAR is not a party to psychological warfare nor to maneuvering, and the proof of this is that we do not want these meetings to end without our having reached a unanimous way of thinking.

“We could have ignored the Syrian delegation’s remarks and forged ahead, but I knew that the danger in doing so lay in the fact that we would all come to the next meeting with the same differences still unresolved. So if the comment made by comrade Amin [Al Hafez] about ‘psychological warfare’ was intended for us, rest assured that we mean well, and wish only that we should all be in complete accord so that we can move forward.”

During the eighth secret session, Amin Al Hafez agreed to the purpose and objective presented by the UAR.

The UAR proposed that all the decisions taken during the first conference be implemented, foremost of which were the Arab projects for utilizing the waters of the Jordan river and its tributaries.

The UAR also asserted that the fulfilment of the ultimate national objective of liberating Palestine necessitated the strengthening of Arab forces and the mobilization of all Arab military, economic, and political resources, and that the Unified Arab Command should draw up a detailed plan for this purpose including all requirements, whether funds, equipment, or time. Each country should also make clear its ability to contribute human resources and funds towards consolidating the Arab forces surrounding Israel.

Voice: “An amendment to the UAR proposal that the ultimate national objective is to exterminate Israel: this should be changed to ‘a plan is to be presented to the Joint Arab Command, or to the council of kings and presidents, specifying the time it will take to eliminate Israel’.”

Nasser: “This is included in the UAR proposal.”

Voice: “The duration?”
Nasser: “This depends on the facilities and on the ability. The report on the situation that will be presented by the Commander in Chief will include a number of options.”

Voice: “We assign the task of estimating the situation to the military commander in the case of an attack, not of defence.”

Nasser: “That comment is a matter of form... We have presented a proposal and it has been agreed to; after that the Syrian delegation can present a proposal with regard to the military or to the plan, then the Tunisian delegation a proposal with regard to a political entity charged with monitoring the Israeli danger, stemming from the conference of Arab kings and leaders and acting in lieu of the conference in between its sessions. This way, we will have covered a long-standing difference of opinion that has lasted from the last session to the current one.”

In his handwritten notes, Nasser jotted down the following:

“The meeting of kings and leaders of the Arab states in its first session was a turning point in unified Arab action.

“Consolidating and strengthening Arab defence: the Arab countries are rising up to their responsibilities in defending the region by reinforcing the Arab armies surrounding Israel and all Arab armies as a whole.

“The authority for exploiting the waters of the Jordan river and its tributaries will be responsible for planning, coordinating and monitoring the implementation of the proposed Arab projects (6,250,000 pounds sterling) and deferred investment projects (65 million pounds sterling). Detailed studies of parts of the project are ready for implementation in Syria, Lebanon, and Jordan.”

The conference was unanimous in asserting the national objective of liberating Palestine from the Zionist occupation, and welcomed the establishing of the Palestinian Liberation Organization and its official recognition as a representative of the Palestinian people, and the formation of the Palestine Liberation army. The conference also paid tribute to the struggle of the Arab people in occupied southern Arabia and Oman against the British colonialists, and agreed to assist in ending this occupation. Finally, the conference agreed on
cooperation amongst the Arabs in nuclear research for peaceful purposes.475

This second meeting was a success as was its predecessor, in spite of Lebanon’s refusal to allow more Arab troops to enter its territory to help defend against any potential attack from Israel once work began on using the Jordan river waters. Nasser accepted the Lebanese point of view in spite of the resentment of some of the participants felt towards the Lebanese reservations.

And while many expected that there would be a clash between the petroleum-owning countries and the rest, at this point there was no role for oil, though it had begun to be realized that it could have a part in the battle.476

3. The Third Arab Summit Conference in Casablanca, September 13th-17th, 1965:

This meeting was held in an atmosphere fraught with tension because of the Palestinian question; the Syrians were calling for the extermination of Israel in the near future, while Bourguiba was advocating making peace with the Israelis and waiving the rights of the Arabs to Palestine!477

This drove Nasser to say, during his visit to Moscow in August 1965 before the beginning of the summit meeting:

“If this quibbling and bargaining over the Palestinian cause does not stop, the UAR will find itself obliged to withdraw from any summit meetings! We will, if need be, bear our historic responsibility towards the Arab struggle alone, at the forefront of which will be the Palestinian cause.”478

However, in spite of these obstacles, the Casablanca conference, headed by Nasser who assumed his role with his characteristic uncompromising directness, was a success. He managed in fact to collect an extra one hundred million sterling, most of it from the oil-rich Arab states, in response to the request made by Aly Amer, Chief

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475 The text of the decisions of the second Arab Summit Meeting held in Alexandria from September 5-11, 1964, is attached.
477 On March 3rd, 1965, President Bourguiba urged the Palestinian refugees to leave emotions aside and recognize the Partition Plan of 1947 with Israel. On April 28th, 1965, the Tunisian government announced that it would withdraw all its embassy staff from Cairo.
of Staff of the Joint Arab Command, to reinforce the Arab defence system in Jordan, Syria, and Lebanon.

An unexpected development took place in Iraq ten days before the meeting when Aref Abdel Razek launched an attempted coup against Abdel Salam Aref while he was away in Rabat, which added to the problems the conference was experiencing.

Nevertheless, the conference resulted in the Arab Solidarity Charter, which focused on the protocols of Arab media and the cessation of negative propaganda campaigns amongst the Arab countries. The remaining decisions made were an extension of matters previously agreed upon during the first two conferences, particularly the Palestinian question in all its aspects and the support of the nationalist movement in occupied southern Arabia.

When Nasser called for the first Arab conference, he was aware that he would not overcome the discrepancies between reactionism and progressiveness that existed in the Arab world, nor would he be able to end the struggle they created. He also knew full well that neither Israel nor the West would welcome the creation of the Palestinian Liberation Organization which resulted from the conference, nor the Joint Arab Command and the plans to arm the Arab world.

He came to the conclusion that, “While the reactionaries had benefited from the truce that the conferences had created, the Palestinian cause had also benefited by the plan for unified Arab action for Palestine.”

With the onset of 1966, signs of impending clashes began again with the failure to achieve a state of peaceful coexistence between the reactionary and progressive forces in the Arab world. Nasser began to realize that he could not trust the reactionaries who were exploiting Islam under the cover of a so-called Islamic conference, which he perceived as a political movement intended to place the Arab world under a colonial sphere of influence; a movement, moreover, directed against the UAR.

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479 Aref Abdel Razek, Prime Minister of Iraq in 1965.
482 Nasser’s speech during the people’s conference in Damanhour on June 15th, 1966, ibid, part 3, pp. 211-235, the Islamic conference.
At this time, the Arab reactionaries under the leadership of King Faisal, notwithstanding the summit conferences, began scheming against the Yemeni and southern Arabia revolutions in collusion with the colonialists, leading Nasser to threaten to bomb their bases. As he said:

“If the reactionaries seized the opportunity of the summit conferences to plot against the Arab nationalist forces, we have the right to question whether these conferences have achieved their objective? And whether it is worth attending in this kind of atmosphere? We cannot sit side by side with these reactionary forces during the forthcoming conferences; this would be according them a status they are unworthy of! The UAR will thus not be attending the next summit conference; this does not mean that we have withdrawn from the summit conferences; we have asked the Arab states to postpone the conference indefinitely. However, we will cooperate within the framework of the Arab League and indeed outside it with those whom we feel share our objectives.”483

The next conference had been scheduled for September, 1966 in Algeria, but was postponed indefinitely.

Fourth: The Algerian question

1. Egypt’s role in the Algerian revolution:

Egypt played a pivotal role in supporting the Algerian revolution, providing arms as well as moral support. The Algerians fought fiercely against the French occupation, leading the revolution to be named the Revolution of a Million Martyrs. The sacrifices and struggle of the Algerian people culminated in the capitulation of the French under General De Gaulle, who had come into power in May 1958 with the aid of right-wing French generals. Algeria was granted its independence in May, 1958, after a referendum was held in France.

Egypt began sending its first arms shipments to Algeria before the revolution began in 1954, and Nasser met Ben Bella, who was a refugee in Egypt, for the first time that same year. Nasser listened to every single leader of the Algerian revolution as they spoke of their hopes for the future: Ben Khedda, Karim Belqasem, and others. He told them:

483 Nasser’s speech in the fourteenth anniversary of the revolution celebration held in Alexandria Stadium on July 26th, 1966, ibid., part 3, pp. 274-289.
“Your main weapon is national unity; the colonialists will try to sow dissent amongst you!”\(^{484}\)

Nasser supported the Algerian revolution wholeheartedly from day one. During the Afro-Asian Conference in Bandung in April 1955, which constituted a turning point in international relations, calling as it did for neutrality and non-alignment and taking place at a time when the people of Asia and Africa were struggling for their independence, he presented the Algerian cause before the conference, commenting on the position of the French government as follows:

“The French government claims that the United Nations has no right to discuss the problem of Tunisia and Morocco, on the basis that this constitutes interference in the legislative affairs of France... The French have gone even further, claiming that Algeria constitutes an integral part of the French Union, a strange claim that they say is built upon the articles of the French constitution!

“Such a document, issued by one side only which is the French government, is not legally binding to the Algerian people and does not change the fact that Algeria is an Arab country and that the Algerian people have a natural right to freedom and to deciding their own destiny.”

Nasser submitted the following proposal to the Bandung Conference:

“With reference to the unstable situation in North Africa, and the continued deprivation of the people of Africa of their right to decide their own destiny, the Afro-Asian Conference declares its support of the right of the people of Algeria, Morocco, and Tunisia to decide their own fate and their right to independence, and urges the government of France to expedite the resolution of this question peacefully and with no delay.”\(^{485}\)

The Bandung Conference agreed to the Egyptian proposal.

The enmity of the French towards Nasser and his regime increased as a result of his support of the Algerian revolution and of African independence in general; as a result, there was an increased cooperation between the governments of France and Israel, France

\(^{484}\) Nasser’s speech to the members of the national conference of popular forces, July 7\(^{th}\), 1962, ibid, pp. 227-238.

\(^{485}\) Nasser’s address to the meeting of the Political Committee of the Bandung Conference, April 22\(^{nd}\), 1955, ibid, pp. 183-185.
providing Israel with arms and nuclear expertise which enabled Israel to build the Dimona nuclear facility.

On March 14th, 1956, Christian Pineau, the French foreign minister, met Nasser in Cairo and held talks with him with a view to coming to an agreement regarding the Algerian situation. Nasser refused this, saying:

“The Algerian revolution has its own leaders, and they alone can speak on behalf of the Algerian revolution. We help Algeria as much as we can, but it is not we who are fighting for freedom, it is the Algerians.”

Nasser denied flatly the allegations of the French ministers residing in Algeria that the revolution had emerged from Egypt, saying:

“It is not possible for a revolution to start in one country and extend to another. There have to be reasons for a revolution to take place and these reasons exist in Algeria.”

Nasser then suggested to Pineau that he should get in touch with the leaders of the Algerian revolution and ask them to send representatives to Cairo, and that France should also send representatives, and that the two parties should hold talks together. Pineau agreed to this proposal and sent two representatives from France, while two representatives of the revolution came from Algeria. Pineau requested that these talks remain secret.

However, a French newspaper published news of the talks, whereupon the French government immediately withdrew its two representatives who were in Cairo without any explanation! Obviously, the government was unable to face the French National Council.487

Nasser’s comment was:

487 Ibid, pp. 590-62
“The French politicians are saying that Egypt and Nasser are responsible for the Algerian revolution! And the French ministers in Algeria are saying, ‘what can we do if there is help coming from Egypt!’ Well, of course we were helping the Algerians, morally and with weapons and in every way we could. The politicians in France imagined that if they managed to subjugate Cairo, they would be able to subjugate the Algerian revolutionaries, and this is exactly what they set out to do with the Tripartite Aggression on Egypt in 1956.”

In fact, Pineau himself returned from Egypt convinced that France could not quell the Algerian revolution except by overthrowing Nasser and the Egyptian revolution!488

Nasser realized their intentions when Israeli raids on Gaza and the Egyptian borders continued, obviously to divert Egypt’s attention from standing by Algeria.489

In fact, Maurice Bourgés-Manoury, Minister of War in the government of Guy Mollet, stated quite openly on the day Egypt was invaded:

“If we succeed in Egypt, this means we will be victorious in Algeria!... Egypt is the heart of rebellion against the interests of France, and if Arab nationalism is crushed, the Algerian revolutionaries will have no one to defend them!”490

France’s conspiracies in North Africa to stamp out Arab nationalism in Algeria were clear to Nasser; his position towards this cause led France to launch a hostile campaign against it and against Nasser personally. The French minister of defence explicitly stated that Egypt had designs on Algeria! To which Nasser responded that it was a preposterous allegation and that all Egypt wanted was to see Algeria liberated. To quote him:

“Our policy is based on non-intervention... We support Arab nationalism from the Atlantic to the Persian Gulf... Our policy is independent; it does not lean towards either East or West... Our

489 Nasser’s speech during his visit to Gaza to inspect the border forces, May 13th, 1956, Nasser’s Speeches, Part 10, p. 576
490 Heikal, Akher Sa’a magazine, Hammarskjold Never Encountered Obstacles in Egypt”, March 27th, 1957.
policy is Egyptian and is for Egypt and its welfare, and for the good of the Arab world.”

The Algerian problem was on the agenda of the Brioni conference which took place on July 17th, 1956, and was attended by Nasser, Nehru, and Tito, all of whom agreed that the matter needed urgent attention in order to restore peace in the region. The three leaders expressed their complete support for the Algerian revolutionaries and their wish for independence, while acknowledging that Algeria was home to numerous inhabitants of European origin whose interests must be safeguarded without standing in the way of the legitimate rights of the Algerian people. The three leaders announced their support of all efforts to reach a fair and just solution, and particularly the need to put an end to all acts of violence.

Needless to say, the colonial powers assisted France in its resistance to the Algerian revolution and the national movements in Tunisia and Morocco. NATO forces moved from Europe to North Africa to join the fight against the Algerian revolutionaries, and the United States and Britain provided their support in this attempt to crush those fighting for freedom and the right to decide their own destiny. In spite of all the forces ranged against them, the Algerians with their simple, limited weapons managed to remain steadfast and face the French.

France began to increase its anti-Egyptian propaganda after the nationalisation of the Suez Canal on July 26th, 1956, accompanied by protests from Britain. Let us remember that most of the Suez Canal Company were owned by the French, and that it had offices in Paris.

Military threats by the British and French began; France had more than half a million troops in Algeria, and threatened to mobilize its naval fleets against Egypt. France had already intercepted an Egyptian ship, the Athos, in the middle of the Mediterranean sea; the ship was on its way to Algiers with arms for the revolutionaries. Needless to say, Franco-Egyptian relations deteriorated still further after this incident.

On October 20th, 1956, French air force hijacked a Moroccan plane going from Morocco to Spain and carrying Ben Bella and his fellow revolutionaries. The plane was forced to land in Algiers and Ben Bella

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491 Nasser’s speech in Alexandria celebrating four years since the revolution, the Nationalisation of the Suez Canal speech, July 26th, 1956, ibid, pp. 755-807.
and four of the leaders of the Algerian revolution, Mohamed Boudiaf, Hussein Aya Mohamed, Mohamed Kheidar, and Rabeh Bitat, were taken prisoner.

Thus, the French army effectively sabotaged the talks between the Algerian revolutionaries and the French government, which were scheduled to take place with the help of Tunisian and Moroccan mediation, and Ben Bella and his colleagues were considered by De Gaulle as prisoners of war! Naturally, this outrageous and treacherous act incensed the Arab world, and a general strike was held throughout.

This dastardly act was followed by a meeting in Sevres between Britain, France, and Israel, attended by Selwyn Lloyd, Christian Pineau, David ben Gurion, and Moshe Dayan. The meeting took place on October 22nd, 1956, to plan an attack on Egypt and a takeover of the Suez Canal. The unsuccessful attempt took place on October 29th, 1956; France’s participation was an attempt to punish Egypt for its support of the Algerian rebels; as Guy Mollet said, “We will subjugate Algeria via Cairo!”

After the uprising of May 13th, 1958 and the return of De Gaulle to power on May 29th, Nasser commented:

“There will be no difference in the situation whether De Gaulle is in power or not; the Algerian people will carry on struggling for independence regardless of who might lead the French government.”

Nasser condemned the French policy of, “Burning Algerian villages and crops, shooting villagers, attacking them using the air force, and depriving them of food.”

At the end of Nasser’s visit to Moscow, which lasted from April 29th – May 16th, 1958, an official statement was issued announcing the Soviet Union’s support of the right of the people of Algeria to decide their own destiny, their right to freedom, and to independence. The Soviet Union and Egypt both denounced the massacres and attacks launched by the French against the Arabs in Algeria.

In 1958, the first Algerian provisional government was formed in exile, headed by Arafat Abbas, and a second, also led by Abbas, in

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492 Nasser’s statement to the press in Budapest on his way back from Moscow to Cairo, May 16th, 1958, Nasser’s Speeches Part 9, p. 54
1960. The third provisional government was headed by Benyoucef Benkhedda from 1961-1962, and it was during this government that the referendum on the Evian Accords was held, which culminated in the Algerian people gaining their independence on April 8th, 1962. (Those in favour numbered 90.8%, with a 75.3% participation.)

Nasser had continuously supported the Algerians and openly declared:

“Egypt is helping the Algerian freedom fighters until they gain their independence; we are helping them in every way we can, and this is the reason for the conflict between France and ourselves. We have set up volunteer centers in Cairo and in Damascus, and are doing our utmost to help.”

Algeria had asked for volunteers to join their army, and Nasser immediately responded to the plea.

Nasser never ceased to publicize the Algerian cause wherever he went, with every head of state he met, and in all international gatherings. Standing before the United Nations on September 27th, 1960, he said:

“It is of vital importance that the United Nations should not forget its charter and its resolutions, otherwise we are just encouraging those who attempt to disregard the UN and ignore its existence. A glaring example of this is France’s policy towards Algeria! France has obstructed all attempts by the UN to put an end to the massacres taking place in Algeria, and the French government imagines that it can change God’s will at gunpoint and make Algeria, which is part of the African continent, an extension of the geography of France, and to turn its people into slaves!

“All the attempts made by the Algerian Free Government, which represents the Algerian people’s struggle for independence, to reach a peaceful settlement, came to nothing, and France continued to pursue these leaders, managing to hijack a civilian plane they were on, forcing it to land in an airport controlled by the French, and arresting them! The war continued for four whole years after that. Regrettably, the French government set up detention camps where it practiced all forms of torture against the Algerian revolutionaries, which led to an international outcry even in France itself!

Beyond the shadow of a doubt, the war still being waged in Algeria, for which the Algerians have sacrificed one million of their people till now, must end with the victory of freedom. It is up to the United Nations now to do its duty, and I do not think I am asking too much in demanding the right of the Algerian people to decide their own destiny through a referendum carried out under the auspices and protection of the UN.”

The result of Nasser’s championing of the Algerian cause was the adoption by France of a long-term policy of creating trouble for Egypt, namely by supporting Israel in creating an atom bomb and supplying the Israelis with weapons that were later used against Egypt.

2. Algeria’s steps towards independence:
The provisional government of Algeria made several attempts towards direct contact with France in the struggle for independence, but the French government kept on stalling. Eventually, after seven long years of armed warfare, when the French realized that they could not stop the hostilities and armed warfare in the towns and villages, and after the peace-loving countries of the world recognized the National Liberation Front of Algeria as the sole representative of the Algerian people and international pressure was brought to bear upon France coupled with condemnation of French brutality, with the UN taking a strong stand and recognizing the right of the Algerian people to self-determination and to decide their own destiny, talks finally began in Evian on May 18th, 1961. The talks continued until De Gaulle conceded, in a press conference held on October 2nd, 1961, that it was necessary to negotiate Algeria’s independence with the National Liberation Front.

The Evian talks were resumed on March 6th, 1962 between the head of the provisional government of Algeria Benyoucef Benkhedda, and Louis Joxe, the Secretary of State for Algerian Affairs, and a ceasefire was agreed to on March 19th, 1962, the most important terms of which were recognition of the independence of Algeria and its absolute sovereignty over its territory, and the right of the settlers to choose between Algerian or French nationality. A four-month transition period was decided on during which a referendum would be held to decide the fate of the Algerian people. The referendum

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494 Nasser’s speech at the UN on September 27th, 1960, ibid, pp. 765-787
began on the first of July, 1962, and on July 5th, Algeria was officially declared independent.

Unfortunately, after the Algerian people won the battle for independence, quarrels began amongst the leaders of the Algerian revolution, leading Nasser to abandon his scheduled topic during his speech at the National Conference of Popular Forces, namely the draft of the proposed new political system, and speak instead of the Algerian question, saying:

“It is incumbent upon me to speak to you of a matter of great concern to us all. I am sure you are all as happy as I am at the independence of Algeria, which was one of the dearest dreams of the whole Arab nation. However, I cannot hide my concern at the conflict that is threatening the unity of Algeria, evidenced by the decision of the Algerian government to get rid of the leaders of the National Liberation Front and Ben Bella’s declaration that he consented to this step. I must tell you that neither we nor anyone else can interfere in this conflict except to plead with all Algerian parties, who have fought and struggled side by side and share the same hopes and ideals, to find a solution to the problem.”

Nasser went on to say:

“Yesterday, I received messages from President Benkhedda and his deputy Ahmed Ben Bella and other leading members of the Algerian revolution. I have had to face many decisions during my political career, but yesterday and for the first time I have found myself at a loss when I learned of these conflicts!

“There is one thing that must be protected, and that is the unity of the Algerian revolution. All its members are figures we esteem and respect, and any danger threatening the Algerian revolution today opens the door again to colonial intervention and threatens the dearly-won independence these heroic people have achieved.”

After sending missives to Benkhedda in Tunisia and Ben Bella in Benghazi in an attempt to bring about a reconciliation between them, Nasser said:

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495 Nasser’s speech to the members of the National Conference of Popular Forces, July 3rd, 1962, Nasser’s speeches Part 5, pp. 227-238.
“The French are still in Algeria... around half a million French soldiers are still there, and administration is still in the hands of the French, who have been governing Algeria for 132 years. If the colonialists succeed in the policy of divide and conquer, it will be a catastrophe after seven years of struggle during which a million Algerians sacrificed their lives!”

Nasser went on to say: “I have tried in every way to reach a solution agreeable to all parties, but have not been able to... There are still divisions within the liberation army... and what more could France want?! In any case, we have not given up hope of bringing about a reconciliation...God help them in the difficult task they have before them: the French have burnt and demolished the country... they have burnt everything; the power stations, the hospitals, as if to say: we will give them back Algeria as we found it when we took it away from them 132 years ago!”

Egypt did not at any time adopt a passive attitude towards the Algerian revolution nor did it remain impartial when conflicts began within the Algerian liberation movement itself, but strove to help maintain the integrity of the revolution and of Algeria.

Ben Bella was made President of the Republic of Algeria on September 25th, 1962, and visited Nasser on May 19th, 1963, receiving an enthusiastic welcome from the Egyptian people. When border clashes began between Algeria and Morocco took place, Nasser remarked:

“It saddens us to see Algeria being exposed to hostilities, and to see two Arab and African countries, Algeria and Morocco, in a violent crisis.”

Ben Bella at that time requested fighter planes from Nasser, who had already sent him six MiG 15 planes before on the understanding that six more would be provided later on. Nasser promptly sent these together with pilots. Ben Bella also asked for naval vessels which Nasser also sent, having already given Algeria a minesweeper. To quote Nasser:

“Egypt never engages in military operations in Algeria, but simply provides the Algerians with means of defence.”

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496 Nasser’s speech in Suez to the troops returning from Yemen, October 22nd, 1963, ibid, pp. 812-829.
The French naturally disapproved of Ben Bella and his policies and supported King Hassan of Morocco, whose troops by October 18th, 1963, had already penetrated 100 kilometres into Algeria. Nasser’s position was that there had to be a political solution, citing the fact that during the Addis Ababa conference of May 22nd, 1963, there were numerous cases of border issues amongst the African countries, and that using force to resolve these would have meant that most of Africa would be up in arms! During this conference, Nasser had called for negotiations to take place and announced that Egypt was against any hostilities.498

Relations between Nasser and Ben Bella naturally grew even stronger, as did the connections between political organizations in the two countries after Algeria’s independence. Nasser was invited to Algeria on May 4th, 1963, receiving a rapturous welcome from massed throngs of Algerians who had travelled to Algiers from all over the country, some even on foot, for a chance to greet Nasser. Hundreds of thousands filled the streets, stretching out their hands in greeting and calling his name. A veritable sea of humanity, in the midst of which stood Nasser, accompanied by Ben Bella and Houari Boumediene, surrounded by troops from the liberation army.

In his speech welcoming Nasser, Ben Bella emotionally declared:

“Algeria has fought and waited for two things to happen: the day of independence, and the day when Nasser would visit us... Algeria has never witnessed a day like the day of Nasser’s arrival – not even the day of independence! I want everyone to hear this, everyone without exception: during our crisis and even before there was a revolution, we found no one, east or west, no one to stand beside us except one man and one man alone: Gamal Abdel Nasser.

“At a time when some Algerians saw no hope of victory, and the political parties were as usual struggling for political supremacy, I found a man in Cairo who did not hesitate for a second to place all Egypt’s material and moral facilities at the disposal of the Algerian revolution!

“Egypt was subjected to a cowardly attack, and one of the reasons behind this was its support of Algeria. The blood spilled in Port Said

498 Nasser’s speech in Suez before the troops returning from Yemen, October 22nd, 1963, ibid, pp. 812-829.
has joined the fate of Algeria to Egypt forever... We declare it openly: no one freed us or led us to victory except Gamal Abdel Nasser.”

In his speech to the Algerian people massed together under the pouring rain, Nasser said:

“I thank God who has given us this opportunity to see wishes become reality; we dreamed of an Arab Algeria and here it is today... I thank God with all my heart for allowing me to live to see this historic day. As I told my brother Ben Bella, when I see the revolutionary people of Algeria, I feel that I am amongst the people of my own country... the sons of Arabism... united by our long battle for freedom and by shared feelings and aspirations.

“Today, I see your flag – the precious flag of free Algeria, raised by your blood and sweat and the souls of your martyrs, flying high to announce to the whole world that the people of Algeria are free.

“I am here with you today, my brothers, fighters, revolutionaries, at a time when your revolution for freedom and independence has ended victoriously, and your great revolution for socialism and social justice has begun, and I say to you: we will always support you in the future as we have supported you in the past.”

A rapprochement between Egypt and France took place after the independence of Algeria when De Gaulle was in power. On March 3rd, 1964, Nasser told Le Figaro newspaper:

“The character of the French president and his independent policies; France’s cooperation with Algeria; its recognition of China; all this has raised its standing above other countries. A new page has begun with France, one which we hope will lead to mutual respect and understanding.”

The following year, Nasser also commented on Egypt’s relationship with France, saying: “The point of contention between us was the issue of Algeria. The moment the war ended with victory and freedom for the Algerian people, we considered that the differences between France and ourselves were over. We did not rush matters, but let the

499 Heikal in his Al Ahram column, Return from Algeria, May 10th, 1963, ibid.
Franco-Egyptian relations develop in a natural way once circumstances had changed.”

A totally unexpected development occurred on June 19th, 1965, when a military coup took place in Algeria. Ben Bella was overthrown and replaced by Houari Boumediene! The perplexing aspect of the affair was that Boumediene was the closest person to Ben Bella; he had represented the military side of the revolution while Ben Bella was the political spearhead.

The conflict had erupted when Ben Bella wished to remove Abdelaziz Bouteflika from the ministry of foreign affairs, which Boumediene opposed, as Bouteflika was one of his men. The strange thing is that Ben Bella was not only the leader of Algeria but highly esteemed and loved by the majority of its people, in addition to being the face of the Algerian revolution, as it were, before the whole Arab world, and before Asia and Africa, whose leaders were due to convene in the second Afro-Asian conference in Algeria in a matter of days.

However, the real crux of the matter lay in the virtual non-existence of a ‘state’ in Algeria. The French had not merely colonized Algeria but had completely eradicated the Algerian character and turned Algeria into an extension of French territory, one of France’s provinces and an integral part of French national sovereignty: the state was France, and the government was in Paris! And all sources of production and revenue were in French hands.

As a result, after independence the first Algerian revolutionary government found itself in a complete vacuum: there were no executive authorities, no trained cadres; the revolutionaries had to create a state and a governing apparatus from a void! Added to this was the fact that the National Liberation Front itself was composed of different factions: old and new political parties, traditionalists and revolutionaries, all of which led to divisions and schisms amongst them. Even the leaders of the revolution who were languishing in French prisons quarreled amongst themselves! The Algerian liberation itself had become two armies, one inside Algeria and the other on the borders of Morocco or Tunisia, and the army leaders had differences of opinion with the politicians and particularly with Ben Bella.

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502 Nasser’s speech in the popular conference held in Mansoura on March 13th, 1963, ibid, pp. 619-629.
Personal and doctrinal differences between the revolutionaries were however the main reason behind this sudden upheaval which occurred after Ben Bella had assumed leadership. He was taken prisoner and was not released until the death of Boumediene on December 27th, 1978.

Confronted with these developments, Nasser sent a message to Boumediene on June 27th, 1965, saying:

“The relationship between Egypt and Algeria rises above personal relations; all I want is reassurance that Ben Bella is safe.”

Nasser then commented:

“Boumediene has promised me that Ben Bella would be kept safe, and I have dispatched Field Marshal Abdel Hakim Amer [to make sure of this] and have sent Ben Bella several letters to which I have received replies.”

Nasser pointed out that the objectives of Egypt regarding Algeria were:

“To maintain friendship and good relations. We have not requested a union with Algeria, because we know that this is not the best time for this to happen. Algeria has been fighting for seven years and they are only just starting to form a government and rebuild their country. Union is a massive undertaking that entails a plethora of problems.”

Boumediene visited Egypt on November 3rd, 1966, during which time Nasser referred to the special relationship between the Egyptian and Algerian revolutions on both historical and human levels as ‘a relationship which represents an unwavering strategic alliance that overrides any circumstantial issues.”

Boumediene was one of the first Arab leaders to get in touch with Egypt after the attack of June 5th, 1967, offering immediate military aid. Egyptian pilots were dispatched to Algeria, returning with forty

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505 Nasser’s interview with the US broadcasting station Columbia on July 9th, 1965, ibid, pp. 763-774.
506 Ibid.
507 Nasser’s speech during the dinner party held in honour of Boumediene on November 28th, 1966, Nasser’s Speeches Part 3, pp. 578-581.
MiG 17 fighter planes which were crucial to the defence of Egypt west of the Suez Canal after the Israelis had destroyed the Egyptian air force while still on the ground.

Boumediene visited Egypt once more on July 9th, 1967, offering help in confronting the enemy and regaining the usurped territory. Sure enough, an Algerian military battalion was sent to support the Egyptian forces on the Suez Canal front.

Fifth: Arab efforts towards unity: the tripartite union
In the period following the separation of Syria from Egypt, several attempts, both individual and official, were made to reestablish the union between the two countries. The first was carried out by a group of Syrian officers who came to Egypt several times – January 14th and 29th, February 3rd, and April 23rd, 1962 – in an effort to persuade Nasser to resume the union, which he refused to do, citing as a prerequisite the rectification of internal conditions and in particular the hegemony of the Baath party.

After the success of the Iraqi revolution on February 8th, 1963, Syria and Iraq approached Egypt with a request for a tripartite unity. Discussions took place between the leaders of the three countries in Cairo, but came to nothing owing to the Baath party’s being in control in both Syria and Iraq. After the charter of April 17th was signed, it was contested by the Syrian and Iraqi Baathists, who resumed their anti-Egyptian policies, but when Abdel Salam Aref assumed power in Iraq, the project for unity was resumed and several meetings held towards this end, spanning the period from September 14th, 1964 to November 27th, 1966.

1. Preliminary initiatives
   a. Nasser’s meetings with the Syrian officers:
      A group of Syrian officers came to Cairo in secret on January 14th, 1962, requesting a union with Egypt! Nasser received them, and discussed the situation in Syria with them, particularly the predominance of reactionism and the move to get rid of nationalistic elements whether in the government or the army. When the subject of the previous union with Syria was raised, Nasser’s comment was:

      “It was a unique case; no union had ever before taken place between Arab countries, and restoring it will not be easy; in fact, it will be extremely difficult: unity as a slogan sounds fine, but actually implementing it is far from easy! Moreover, union has social repercussions; there is a social revolution underway in the
Arab world, a revolution which will always have enemies amongst the professional politicians, the capitalists, and the feudalists, not to mention the colonialists and their allies; the United States, Britain, France, and all the Western world.

“However, it is possible for Arab nationalism as a unifying force amongst the Arab nations to pave the way for an Arab union... If we are to ensure a solid union, there must be patriotic governments; it must not be a union that serves the colonialists – that would be a catastrophe! The colonialists, [king] Hussein, and Nouri Al Said are calling for unity, but can we accept a union that is created to benefit the colonialists?!

“There is a strong backlash in Egypt today, and we need to learn from the previous union. Who are the patriots in the Arab world? The reactionaries are well-organized and are making their presence felt; the patriots do exist but are unorganized! The power behind the politician, feudalist, or capitalist is money: it is more powerful than an armoured tank and can be used every minute of every day. It is a constant, unfailing weapon, but the patriots are armed only with words!

“If we wish to eradicate reactionism, we must change society, which is no easy task and entails divisions and battles and a different way of distributing wealth, which is what we are doing here in Egypt.”

Nasser then went on to speak of the situation in Syria:

“The council of representatives is 80-90% reactionary; the decision to cancel nationalization indicates that reactionism has reached its zenith and intends to wipe out all achievements. Where are the patriotic elements?! The stronger the reactionaries get, the deeper the grave of the patriots becomes! The weapon capitalists always use is to hold elections, because the patriotic elements cannot succeed: the bourgeoisie, the capitalists, and the feudalists have the funds to guarantee victory. The patriotic, nationalist elements have to become stronger: it is important to have a patriotic government first; as for a union, it is debatable owing to the previous mistakes.

‘There is social injustice in Syria. Al Quwatli told me that feudalism does not exist in Syria! Actually, Syria full of feudalists and capitalists! This social disparity leaves only one class is in control.
In my opinion, if a patriotic government rules Syria, we could reach a union.

“Syria by its nature is rife with difficulties, and its secession has hit the pan-Arab ideal hard. It has ten times more problems than Egypt does: economic problems, problems amongst its people, added to which it has always been the target of schemes to take it over and divide it up or merge it into another entity.”

In conclusion, Nasser told the Syrian officers that a union with a reactionary government would be impossible, and that it was necessary to benefit from the previous mistakes and to reason rather than take matters emotionally.\textsuperscript{508}

The Syrian officers met with Nasser again on January 29\textsuperscript{th}, 1962, and asked him a direct question: is it possible for a union to take place? And how long do you estimate it would take for this to happen? Nasser’s reply was:

“We need to be clear that this is a matter of destiny...The destiny of the whole Arab world and of the very concept of Arab nationalism, which, if lost, will break up the Arab world. How do you envisage this union? One state or two? With Yemen, the union was two states; with the United Arab Republic, we were one, and the experiment was a failure; if we had succeeded, we would not have separated!

“And what is the situation with regard to socialism? Today, you are cancelling the socialist decrees! And the reactionaries will not stop fighting the system! To bring back the republic as you suggest will entail problems. Is the army subordinate to the government or independent? Will there be a nationalistic government or not? What are your objectives: just a union, or a union coupled with social justice? Or to establish a socialist, democratic society free of all kinds of political, social, and economic exploitation? I am bringing this up because it is not an easy undertaking, and if this republic is reestablished, all its enemies will join forces to undermine it.”

Faced with the insistence of the Syrian officers that their objective was to establish a union on solid foundations and to learn from past mistakes, Nasser replied:

\textsuperscript{508} Minutes of Nasser’s first meeting with the Syrian officers, January 14\textsuperscript{th}, 1962, appendix.
“The organizational aspect is the easiest, but the main issue is a social one: we cannot have a republic that is socialist and capitalist at the same time! If we do not have a union with one social system encompassing everyone, its sustainability will be questionable. It is our principles that lend us power, not our armies or fleets, and that is the difference between a mission and a façade.”

In his handwritten notes on his meetings with the Syrian officers, Nasser commented on the first one as follows:

“Timing: This must be calculated sensibly, then can come enthusiasm and emotions.
Its form: Re the proposal to begin with a political and social union and defer economic matters, what is the difference between politics and sociology? And between them and economics? Can one separate politics from economics?! Politics and sociology are one and the same; politics does not denote police, army, and the legal system...
The risk? There are many risks involved, not only to the Syrians but to the whole issue of Arab nationalism. The union must be strong and not just a façade, and there must be trust, for we all share the same destiny.
The purpose of socialist laws: Syria suffers from terrible social injustice, with feudalists and capitalists and politicians who have taken out loans from the banks! The banks in Syria are no more than branches of the Beirut banks, and the insurance companies in Syria place their deposits abroad! There are no financial restrictions, which means that investors can make money from the sweat of the people, then simply transfer it abroad!
Socialism: Is a must.
How to organize political work in the country? There must be a political organization and it must carry weight vis a vis the communists. I was thinking of setting up a system similar to that of the communist party system, with a central committee or political bureau above the government that can question everything. This is important; for individuals will eventually go, and there must be political entities other than parliament and the government, and this system brings together all political factions...

“I believe the return of the union will constitute an enormous victory for the Arab cause, and if there are mistakes, we must avoid

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Minutes of Nasser’s second meeting with the Syrian officers on January 29th, 1962, appendix.
them. We can have a union where each region has its own character. The regime must be based on pro-union elements who accept socialism, not the reactionary elements. The main thing is not to change the socialist and agrarian reform decrees.”

After his second meeting with the Syrian officers, Nasser wrote the following:

“The position regarding the socialist laws is what will decide the matter; the union must be socialist!
The next main point is the army: officers expelled because of their unionist leanings must be reinstated, and the appointment of the army commander in chief must be in the hands of the president of the republic.
The system of governance: presidential and decentralized; a political organization with a central committee of considerable authority.
Regarding the future: Collective rule to ensure stability and continuity. The country lacks a political framework for all categories.”

The outcome of the officers’ meeting with Nasser was inconclusive, but consecutive events in the Arab world reinforced the Arab nationalist element in opposition to reactionists and separatists, who believed that the split between Syria and Egypt had put an end to any Arab aspirations towards unity.

The game-changing events that occurred in 1962 were a military coup in Damascus on March 28th, followed by the revolution in Yemen on September 26th.

In his third meeting with the Syrian officers on April 23rd, 1962, Nasser spoke of the previous union, saying:

“This setback does not mean disintegration; we must use it as a driving force for Arab nationalism and consider it an experiment from which we can benefit. We have to start afresh and build up the ideal of Arab nationalism once more, and the concept of an Arab union on a new basis. It was my belief that a union would take five years to achieve during which problems would be addressed and proper foundations laid, which was why I asked for a federation rather than a union on February 4th, 1958, on the basis that there would be a ruler in each of the two countries, but the Syrians objected. I was wary of the experiment and aware of the
difficulties involved. This is why I have deliberately mentioned that there were mistakes, because we must learn from the past.

Nasser then again went on to question the nature of the proposed new form of the United Arab Republic: how would it be run? What of the politicians, political parties, government, and parliament? And more importantly, socialism and socialist measures, bearing in mind that labour and nationalization laws were currently being cancelled? What about the reactionaries, who would not hesitate to attack the new regime?!

Regarding the benefits of the return of the United Arab Republic Nasser commented:

“It will have a profound impact on the Arab world, and could even overthrow thrones! In addition to the shock to all the colonialist countries and the destruction of their plans. A revolutionary tide could spread across the Arab world and expedite the realization of the Arab aspirations and objectives.”

As for the anticipated problems, Nasser said:

“I do not believe in the election process because I am not a professional politician. I support nationalism and socialism; and saying that socialism takes people’s money away from them is simply a way of trying to prevent the eradication of social injustice and the establishing of a just social system which I consider to be a right and not a grant! As for political parties, they will only enable the reactionaries to fight us with their wealth.

“Another thing is that Syria suffers from a duplicate ruling system – the government and the army – which just will not do! Is the army subordinate to the government or vice versa? Is the army completely independent? The situation is unnatural; it is not possible to have a union when the army in Egypt is subordinate to the government and the government in Syria is subordinate to the army! This means the state will disintegrate!”

Nasser then repeated the question:

“What is the objective of this republic? Just to unite? Or a union which establishes social justice and creates a socialist democratic society, free from all forms of exploitation? How can this be achieved?”
Nasser then warned again:

“The day the republic is reestablished, all the hostile and reactionary elements will join forces against it.”

Nasser again stressed the importance of the social aspect, saying:

“The essential point is social: we cannot have a republic which is socialist and capitalist, because the social system is the basis of the state and a unified social system is what will reinforce it.

“We will not bargain nor will we compromise: we have our principles and it is therein that our power lies.

“It will not be easy, and we need to have everything clear before we proceed and know that the opposing forces are many. The resumption of the union constitutes a defeat for Israel, the British, the communists, and the Christians in Lebanon, as well as Iraq, Jordan, Saudi Arabia, and the Imam in Yemen!”

b. The Iraqi revolution and Nasser’s reaction to it:

A bloody revolution took place in Iraq on February 8th, 1963 against Abdel Karim Qassim, led by Abdel Salam Aref and comprising members of the Iraqi Baath party. Leaders of the communist party in Iraq were executed.

After less than a quarter of an hour of the announcement of the revolution, Nasser requested that all resources of the UAR be directed towards its consolidation and support.510

The events of the Iraqi revolution of February, 1963, were discussed by Nasser in the presidential council meeting. Nasser said:

“It began with the national guard, 1000 in number, and consisting of both Baathist and nationalistic elements. It started off as a small operation but other nationalistic factions joined in at night, as the operation was scheduled to take place the following morning. The whole army then announced its support and joined in the operation.”

The Baath party was founded in Iraq in 1952, and numbered a mere 150 members by 1955. When the revolution of July 14th, 1958 took place, its members had reached 400, but they were subsequently persecuted and many of the members fled.

When the Syrian revolution took place one month after the Iraqi revolution, on March 8th, 1963, and Salah Al Betar was made prime minister, it was announced that Nasser wished everyone to know that the UAR would intervene militarily to protect the Syrian revolution should it be subjected to any attack from outside the country; this was after news leaked out of political and military activity in Turkey and Israel. The UAR also hastened to recognize the Syrian revolution.\textsuperscript{511}

The elements that took part in the Iraqi revolution represented all factions of society, and it was notable that the revolutionary government was heterogeneous; and owing to the troubled nature of domestic conditions in Iraq, the deputy prime minister appointed was a Kurd.

At that time, the Syrian Baath party was controlling Iraq, and the Syrian army forming a state within the state; they were working towards creating a union with Iraq under collective leadership.

Nasser, in the presidential council meeting of February 13th, 1963, predicted that there would be struggles amongst the leading figures involved, and that each party would try and enlist Egypt’s support. Nasser added that it was being said that Egypt’s swift backing coupled with its Voice of the Arabs radio station were instrumental in the success of the Iraqi revolution. He added:

“\textquote{The communist newspapers in Iraq today are launching vicious attacks on the Baath party, and it is also my belief that the people will not tolerate the Baathist hegemony, and popular opinion is crucial at this stage. The Baathists have psychological issues and an inferiority complex towards us, and Michel Aflac is unpopular!}"

“We do not want a union with Iraq; it will be nothing but trouble. There must first be freedom, then socialism, then a union, in that order. This is the difference between us and the Baath, who call for unity, freedom, socialism. Having said that, we do not want to take a hostile position towards the Baath, even if they do so towards us;”

\textsuperscript{511}Heikal’s column in Al Ahram, “Greetings, Land of Peace”, February 15th, 1963, ibid.
this is how we behave towards everyone. Saud went on attacking us for three months before we responded, and so did Abdel Karim Qassim, who, if he had remained with us, would not have met the fate he did. His complex about being an independent character made him isolate himself from the whole world! I tried to meet him, and sent him four letters asking to do so, but he refused!”

During this presidential council meeting, Nasser also said:

“We have no organizations in any of the Arab countries; we simply have contacts with several people who have their own contacts and organizations, and can engage in communications without resorting to the embassy. We supported the Iraqi revolution without knowing who had carried it out; we supported the first and second statements issued by the revolutionaries. The revolution took place at 9.30 and by 10.30 our Voice of the Arabs radio station was supporting them! We changed all our programmes and backed them! Our policy is to support principles, not individuals. To reiterate, our position vis a vis the union is: first freedom, then socialism, then unity.

“If a union between Syria and Iraq takes place, it will be opposed by Israel and those who back Israel, the West. It will also be fought by the communists. The reason for this is a strong state that overlooks both the Mediterranean and the Indian ocean will have tremendous strategic importance. There are countless problems within both Syria and Iraq, and in my opinion, we should back this union and encourage it to take place.

“If they try to create a puppet figure out of Abdel Salam Aref, well, we placed Mohamed Naguib above us all and hid behind him. Mohamed Naguib in whose name we spoke knew nothing whatsoever about the revolution. I called him up on the phone, and we went to see him; we stayed there several hours – Abdel Hakim Amer was with me – but we decided not to tell him anything; there were others with him, so we eventually left. After that, we sat in the revolutionary council without him, and it was I who asked that he should join us, which he did. I told him I would step down, but he replied: “No; it is your right.” Then one month after that, he lost his mind! He’d see himself in the newspapers with his picture everywhere, and went crazy!

“Today, Abdel Salam Aref could be in the same position; he is not a Baathist; he might go along with them but he will never take orders
from the deputy prime minister... Moreover, the army could go to Abdel Salam, or Taher,\textsuperscript{512} or Al Bakr.\textsuperscript{513}

“They need us; and suffice it to say that the whole world is saying that the Iraqi revolution is a victory for us... and the pictures that have been hung up... no one told them to hang Gamal Abdel Nasser’s pictures up! The photos that have arrived from Iraq today show that even the tanks have Gamal Abdel Nasser’s pictures hung on them!

“Our objectives are the same as those of the Baath party, but there is a hang-up: this hang-up is Gamal Abdel Nasser! Salah Betar actually told Abdel Hakim [Amer]: we are willing to cooperate with you but not with Abdel Nasser! To which Abdel Hakim replied: I cannot work except with Abdel Nasser!”

Regarding the situation in Syria, Nasser said:

“Syria is in a state of ferment, and anything can happen: there is no government in Syria today!”

The importance of the Iraqi revolution to the Arab world in the historical context in which it occurred, namely Syria’s secession from Egypt a year and a half beforehand, was evidenced in Nasser’s handwritten note in which he wrote:

“In these difficult days, there comes a beacon of hope: the Iraqi revolution, a revolution that has restored power to Iraq after its isolation; a progressive revolution.

“The High Dam – the Yemeni revolution that was a true miracle – the struggle for the sake of progress – the triumph of the Algerian revolution – a revolutionary socialist experiment – success in launching rockets – the national action charter – the Syrian people making themselves heard.

“The struggle between the forces of progress and the thrones of reactionism, friends of the colonialists and enemies of socialism... They imagined that after the setback of the secession that the revolutionary, nationalistic tide had begun to recede!”

\textsuperscript{512} Taher Yehia, Chief of Staff of the Iraqi army.
\textsuperscript{513} Ahmed Hassan Al Bakr, Prime Minister of Iraq.
2. The stages of the tripartite union
   a. The first stage of the negotiations: a rapprochement between Egypt and the revolutionary regime in Iraq:
      During the session of the presidential council held on March 24th, 1963, Nasser explained what had happened:

      “After the Iraqi revolution, a delegation came to Cairo and we held lengthy talks to sort out matters between us, so that no one would be able in future to sow dissent between Cairo and Baghdad and cause us to clash, which would be to the detriment of the Arab world. And in view of the fact that the government in Iraq was Baathist, the talks also turned to our relationship with the Baath party in Syria and the lack of trust they harbour towards us and their suspicions regarding certain events that occurred. We decided to set this issue aside and start a new chapter with the Baathists in Iraq, and I consider that we succeeded in doing so.

      “They brought up the question of a union, and said that while they have reservations regarding it, they agree with us that our objectives are one and the same. We replied that union with us begins with a unified objective, and we parted on very amicable terms.

      “Regarding the revolution in Syria\textsuperscript{514}, a strong force was at work within the army and the country itself, rendering the Syrian government eventually incapable of controlling matters, and losing its status, respect, and authority. Matters disintegrated! The army attempted to rectify the situation, but did not manage to agree upon a course of action! The whole army was involved in this operation, which they found very easy to do; the problem is that it was carried out with no plan and no estimation of the way forward after that!

      “All they did was issue an initial statement, then took a number of decisions: forming a government with Salah Al Betar as prime minister and Nihad Al Qasim as vice president, together with a motley crew of people, some from Baath and others from here and there... there was no proper structure or identity. They carried on for three or four days with no plan whatsoever, then decided to form a revolutionary council from those present – fifty people!

\textsuperscript{514} A revolution took place in Syria on March 8\textsuperscript{th}, 1963.
“Who carried out the operation? They were all unionist officers, only one Baathist officer managed to insert himself into the group!

“For the first few days, people were bewildered; they did not understand what had happened or who had carried out the operation, then it was announced that an Iraqi delegation had travelled to Syria.

“When the Iraqi delegation arrived, the whole country went out to welcome them, crowds stretching from the airport to the presidential guest house. For the first time, there appeared to be a unanimous wish for immediate unity and the return of the United Arab Republic. Demonstrations began that day.

“The Iraqi delegation then moved from the guest house to the Ministry of Defence situated on the road to the airport. The head of the delegation, Aly Saleh Al Saadi, deputy prime minister, presented three proposals:

1. An agreement to be made between five countries, the UAR (Egypt), Syria, Iraq, Algeria, and Yemen for mutual protection in the case of any reactionary or colonialist conspiracy, in which case the armies of the treaty countries would have the right to intervene.
2. A joint defence treaty to be drawn up between the armies of these countries... mutual defence.
3. Form a higher council for political coordination between the said countries.

Nasser commented:

“These suggestions took us by surprise; in fact we heard them for the first time from the radio! The problem is that the Iraqi revolutionary council can’t meet because there are fifty of them and they can never get them all together! This is why they can never make any decisions, because all fifty of them have to agree!

b. The second stage: how did the idea of a tripartite union come about?
During the same meeting of March 24th, 1963, Nasser told the attendees:

“A delegation came from Damascus consisting of the Iraqi foreign minister and a number of Iraqi officers. They asked us what we
thought of the statements they had made in Damascus and whether there was anything we wanted to change, so that we could issue a joint statement announcing our endorsement of these declarations and that we were reviewing the steps that would lead to a union between Egypt, Syria, and Iraq.

“We held two meetings; during the first, we told them that we would not have wished to hear these proposals from the radio; the way they were announced gave the impression that we had agreed to them! They replied that they had not planned the matter, but had decided on it during the flight [to Syria] and that even the revolutionary council in Iraq was unaware of what they intended to say! They said that circumstances had compelled them to take this step in order to protect the revolution. The country, they said, was a shambles, with reactionaries everywhere, and secessionists in the army; no one was capable of making decisions, the government was helpless, the revolutionary council was unable to meet, and the situation was critical in Syria. This was what had led them to make the announcement!

“My reply was that making such statements was not the way to resolve matters in Syria. Such decisions should emanate from within Syria, such as cleansing the army from secessionists, arresting the reactionary and communist elements, taking to task those responsible for what had happened during the period of secession and confining them; these elements represented the viciousness of reactionism allied with communism.

“The delegation left, and the following day we learned from the radio of the demonstrations that had taken place in Syria. The country was in disarray! We then learned, also from the radio, of a statement made by the commander of the armed forces that a delegation was on its way to Cairo to negotiate a union! Then another statement that the plane had entered Egyptian airspace! We made arrangements to meet them without having been informed of their visit! The delegation arrived and we held several meetings.

“During the first meeting on March 14\textsuperscript{th}, 1963, the Syrians asked to be permitted to speak of the mistakes that had been made during the union. They mentioned matters related to the Egyptian employees and officers, namely that there was a feeling of inequality with the Egyptians! I told them that in future this would be taken into consideration.
“I then asked them, who is ruling Syria now, or rather, who are the revolutionary council members? If it is the Baath, we do not trust them and hold them responsible for the crime of secession. And when their ministers resigned and withdrew from the union, they tried to get in touch with some Egyptian ministers to persuade them to resign too!\footnote{Minutes of the first meeting between Nasser and the Iraqi and Syrian delegations, March 14\textsuperscript{th}, 1963, appendix.}

“I told them that we could not discuss Syria with Iraq; and that our relationship with Syria was very different, having lasted for five years. Our issues with Syria had to be resolved before any agreements were made, and this would be discussed with Syria – as was only natural – and not with the Iraqi delegation.

“Regarding the proposals, this was our reply:
1. We do not agree to the first proposal concerning intervention by the armies. Our army would not accept this – it would seem that we do not trust our own army and need to get another army from outside the country to protect us! I believe the same would apply to both Iraq and Syria; the matter could be construed as being against the national armies! This proposal will cause more harm than good, and we do not agree to it.
2. Regarding agreements, we are not averse to military agreements with Iraq; however as regards Syria, we need to first discuss matters related to coordination and organization.
3. Regarding issuing a joint statement, we are willing to make a statement regarding our relationship with Iraq but are not ready to do so regarding our relations with Iraq and Syria.

Nasser went on to say:

“During the second meeting which took place on March 15\textsuperscript{th}, 1963, I again stressed the fact that we needed to talk of the mistakes that had been made honestly and openly.\footnote{Details of the discussions that took place during this second meeting between Nasser and the Iraqi and Syrian delegations on March 15\textsuperscript{th}, 1963, can be found in the Appendix.} And for the second time, I asked them who, exactly, was in charge of Syria? I told them I supported the idea of a union between Egypt, Syria, and Iraq, and saw it as of greater importance than the previous union between Egypt and Syria, as for the first time in more than a thousand years, our three countries would be joined together in a powerful union.
“The Iraqis said they would join the union but that the matter had to be studied and would take a year or two! The Syrians raised a clamour, so the Iraqis withdrew that statement.

“The question of the Baath party was raised again, to which I replied that if the regime in Syria was Baathist, there would be complications, and we did not intend to get involved in a problematic situation. The session ended on the understanding that the officers would consult with their governments.

“However, after the session ended, the Syrians insisted that a declaration be issued to the effect that we agreed to the tripartite union, to which I replied that we could not issue a declaration regarding a matter that was still unclear! They replied that the matter could be resolved so that there would not be a Baathist majority! I still would not agree, and told them that this was a matter of destiny, and a future commitment, and could not be decided based upon vague assumptions. In my view, a tripartite alliance would mean a third, a third, and a third, therefore the Baath would have two-thirds while we would have only a third! We tried for two days to find out the percentages of officers, Baathists, and civilians in the Syrian revolutionary council, and were told that they had not been decided upon yet! An inauspicious start! So I told the officers to travel back and find out more. I was not talking about numbers but rather of the form the government was taking, and wanted the names of the members of the revolutionary council before carrying on with negotiations. I told them to either make contacts or travel to get the information, adding that I was willing to provide them with a plane!

“During the third meeting on March 16th, 1963,517 I began by saying that this was a discouraging start to negotiations and not at all reassuring! And that accordingly, I was withdrawing what I had said about being willing to form a union between Egypt, Syria, and Iraq. I said I would make another proposal, namely to agree in principle to the tripartite alliance but that it should be implemented in stages, starting by forming a union between Egypt and Syria and having Iraq join in six months’ time, during which period we could test the Baath party and see how matters were proceeding. We would thus be dealing with one Baath party only, and be on an equal footing.

517 Minutes of the third meeting between Nasser and the Iraqi and Syrian delegations, March 16th, 1963, Appendix.
“Alternately, a union could take place between Iraq and Syria, to be joined by Egypt after one year, by which time we would have seen the results of the union.

“The Iraqis responded that they would not agree under any circumstances to a union with Syria, but would only join a tripartite union. The Syrians said exactly the same thing: they would not agree to unite with Iraq, and wanted a tripartite union!

“I told them that this was my final decision, and that had they been straightforward from the beginning, there would have been more trust, and that we would never agree to a union that was one third versus two thirds. I also had the feeling that the failure to establish the union would affect the position of the Baath party!”

c. The third stage: Nasser’s meeting with the formal delegations from Iraq and Syria
The two delegations returned to their respective countries, then informed the Egyptian Ambassador in Lebanon that the Syrian delegation would include Salah Al Betar, Luay Al Atassi, Commander in Chief of the army, and Michel Aflac, as well as another member of the revolutionary council.

Nasser recounted what had occurred to the members of the presidential council on March 24th, 1963:

“We spoke quite frankly to them, listing the mistakes made by the Baath party since the beginning of the union, including the fact that they had called it ‘Egyptian colonization’! They continuously attacked Egyptians until the separation took place. I also spoke of how Salah Al Betar had signed the separation document, and how they had tried to encourage some army officers to separate! They replied that they were here to resolve matters and start a new chapter based on trust. I replied that the situation in Egypt was different from that in Syria or Iraq; we had continued for eleven years, and the political parties we had were different from those in Syria and Iraq. After the secession, I realized in retrospect that I should have combined all the nationalist parties in one united front.

“I said that I do not consider the Baath party as representing Syria! We are not forging a union with the Baath, we are doing so with Syria, which to us is represented by the nationalistic factions, many of whom have been imprisoned. We are willing to discuss the formation of a national front in Syria that would combine the
Baath, the Arab nationalists, the socialist unionists, and the united Arab front, all four of whom have struggled for Arab nationalism, and who opposed the secession.

“The representatives of the army agreed, and said that the army would be responsible for establishing this front. I replied that there should be a charter for the front, and that the matter should be discussed with Iraq, because nationalistic elements there were persecuted, imprisoned, and prevented from taking part in any political activity. Moreover, the battle in Iraq with communism and reactionism was waging furious!”

Nasser went on to explain his vision of the shape political activity would take in the proposed union and which he had conveyed to the delegations:

“There must be one front with a single political leadership. If political work is separate in each country, the union will break down as soon as differences appear amongst the separate political organizations, and next time, it will be Egypt that secedes!

“They told me: any Arab union without Egypt cannot last! To which I responded that if the union were to be merely form without substance, we would not accept this, but a genuine union was another matter, and in fact we believed it to be a necessity. We are willing to enter into a constitutional union with any Arab country that shares our objectives, and do not engage in political maneuvers! We are willing to accept a weak, a moderate, or a strong union, but will absolutely not be party to a union in appearance only! Neither will we agree to a complete merger; the union will be a federation of regions.

“They responded that they saw the union as one state, with one president and a unionist government. I told the Syrians that on the 28th of September, they had called for a union without Abdel Nasser! And that I would have been willing to accept this so long as it was a sound union, as unification is a cause I believe in wholeheartedly, and if it did not take place at a time when there was an overwhelming tide of unionist feeling, we would have to wait another 500 years for it to happen!

“They denied completely that this had ever taken place! I told them that the union should be founded on trust and sincerity and that it should be based on equal percentages: we would not accept the
Baath holding two-thirds. The army commander said that they had come up with a solution for this whereby in the unionist presidential council, there would be two representatives from Egypt, and one from each of Syria and Iraq, apart from the head of state. And that regarding the political leadership in Syria, this would comprise all the unionist forces, while in Iraq, there would no longer be a presidential council in three months’ time, as by then the union would have been finalized.

“I told them that we did not see eye to eye with the Baath party, and that it was weak and did not represent Syria! Nevertheless, I said we were willing to allow the Baath party to operate in Egypt and have a branch there, just as we would also set up a socialist union in Syria and in Iraq. They objected to this. So I pointed out that should we fall in with their wishes, we would be effectively wiping out the pro-Nasser unionists in Syria and abandoning them. I insisted on the national front, and asked whether the political leadership would represent all the unionist forces in Syria and Iraq, bearing in mind that the number, twelve to be exact, was limited.

“On the last day, March 17th, they drew up a draft declaration of an agreement between the UAR and the Baath party, which we categorically refused, as mentioning the Baath party in the declaration meant losing our national attribute and imparting a party aspect to the matter, which does not conform with our policies of preventing the formation of political parties.”

Nasser added, “In other words, they were intending to use us as a stepping-stone to give themselves free rein in Syria! The declaration that we insisted upon and that was issued comprised all the nationalistic and revolutionary elements.”

In conclusion, Nasser summed up his views on the situation in Syria, addressing the presidential council on March 24th, 1963:

“The unionists are a majority in the army and the Baathists a minority, and the same applies to the people. The army is strong and the prime force in the country, and the Baathists are aware of their weakness!”

3. Nasser’s opinion of the tripartite union:

518 The statement made on March 17th, 1963, Appendix.
a. **Its importance to the United Arab Republic:**

Addressing the presidential council, Nasser said:

“Ever since the revolution of July 23rd, 1952, we have believed in forging bonds with the surrounding Arab countries, and that isolation would be detrimental to us economically and politically. Furthermore, from a military aspect, Egypt’s isolation meant it would constantly be exposed to political pressure and even hostile military operations.

“Economically, all the Arab countries are importers; no one has any industries except for some manufacturing of silk and similar products. Iraq imports goods worth some 120 million pounds and exports only 12 million pounds worth of products or even less. The goods it imports are all consumer products which we produce here or are in the process of producing.

“After the Iraqi and Syrian revolutions, our markets have returned; there must be a common market. We are encouraging Syrian traders to come to Egypt. Exporting to any other countries is difficult; we cannot export to Europe, while in Africa, there is a lot of competition. We are also discussing a common market with Africa, which will enable us to take our industries to another level. There has also been a suggestion made in Addis Ababa to establish an African League that would incorporate economic agreements.

“The Arab union is going to be met with considerable resistance; but we will be regaining our markets with this agreement. We can also have a common market and commercial exchange and eventually unify our currency and have a huge consumer market.

“We are also increasing at a rate of one million inhabitants a year, and must have scope to encompass this increase. The Iraqis raised the topic of migration, because they have the land but no one to farm it! I told them no one is to leave Egypt!

“With regard to our political weight internationally, if we were not a power to be reckoned with, America would not have given us this year alone 150 million dollars, nor would Russia be giving us loans, etc. Our political clout must be based on one of two things: either the benefits we provide, or ‘beware of the trouble they can cause!’ We don’t provide any benefits; they are wary of us in their political dealings, which is why we have a strong international and political status.”
“I would have preferred a bilateral union between Egypt and Syria, and have accepted the tripartite union reluctantly. However, it will create a state which will stretch from the Arabian Gulf to half of Africa; a state with petroleum wells, the Suez Canal, pipelines in Syria... A state that will impact the Gulf, which is the source of political life for Britain and Europe; a state wielding global power thanks to its strategic location and its impact. There is also the possibility that Jordan, Saudi Arabia, and Yemen may join; it is my opinion that the tide of pan-Arabism will continue in full force, and when I speak of other countries joining, I mean countries that are not reactionary – no reactionary country will join!

“There are counter forces, and problems, regional issues; there could be a coup in Syria, which has always constituted a source of instability surrounded as it is by enemies: Turkey, Iraq during Qassim’s time; Lebanon, the source of anti-Syrian operations, Jordan, which is hostile. However, Iraq’s joining in the union changes the situation which has existed since the end of WWI and up until the present time. Syria now feels it is not alone and that they are backed by Iraq’s army; it will not be so easy for coups to occur, and there will be more stability in a state that includes Iraq than in a state consisting of Syria alone.”

Nasser then addressed the fear that an axis might be created by Syria and Iraq against Egypt:

“As regards the Syrians, they are not an easy people; no one will be able to impose such a scenario upon them: they will resist it. Moreover, Syrians lean more towards Cairo than they do to Iraq. There has always been rivalry between Syria and Iraq, but never between Syria and Egypt; the axis that previously existed consisted of Syria, Egypt, and Saudi Arabia against Iraq and Jordan. Whatever politicians may try to do in order to create such an axis, public opinion in Syria is strong and will remain steadfastly geared towards Egypt. Syrians have mixed with Egyptians more than they have with Lebanese or Iraqis as a result of the union.”

Nasser then brought up the question of Yemen, saying:

“From the very first day, Al Sallal messaged me saying he wanted to be part of the union, which surprised me; however, I felt the time was not right for Yemen to be included, as the battle there is still
ongoing and there are many factions there opposed to a union. It is not in Yemen’s interests to add to its problems.

“As for the British, they are in a state of complete shock, worried about their interests in the Gulf and in Aden! The Americans feel that the union has created a rapprochement between Saudi Arabia and the Gulf, while the Russians are in a state of hysteria after what happened in Iraq! They consider themselves to have lost the battle for communism, and actually claim that it is a union forged by the CIA and the petroleum moguls!

“Regarding the Algerians, I informed Ben Bella of the negotiations, and it is his opinion that they are a provisional government and parliament and thus are not qualified to enter into any form of union yet, but will begin by sharing our objectives in their capacity as part of the Arab nation. They will be holding elections soon, after which they will consider the matter. In our opinion, they still have French bases and forces there, and their inclusion in the union would mean having French bases in our union! Ben Bella supports us and deeply appreciates the efforts Egypt has made for them from 1954 up until now, and has decided to send us a delegation to discuss matters. I told him that we can work together as stated in the Charter, because coordinated efforts can bring together all revolutionary forces in the Arab world regardless of there being an actual union.”

b. Nasser’s position towards the results of the Tripartite Union discussions:

In his meeting with the presidential council on March 24\textsuperscript{th}, 1963, Nasser said:

“I think this time we should proceed slowly, because this will reinforce the process of unity. Regarding the army, there will be a general command and a joint command; it is impossible to talk of

\footnote{The Charter of 1962 states the following: Union cannot – and must not – be imposed, and the greater objectives of all countries must be achieved honourably, therefore oppression in any form is against the concept of unity. Not only is it immoral but it also endangers national unity within the Arab countries and as a result threatens the unity of the Arab world. Arab union does not consist of one constitutional format which must be rigidly implemented; but rather is a long path along which forms and stages may vary till the objective is finally reached. Any Arab government that is representative of the will of its people within a framework of independence constitutes a step taken towards unity, as it will be devoid of any differences that could hinder the realization of this noble goal. And any partial union in the Arab world – representing the will of two or more of the countries of the Arab world – constitutes a progressive step towards a comprehensive union, preparing for it by planting its roots deep in Arab territory.}
merging our armies at this stage – not even ten years would be enough!

“We need, when talking of a union, to be aware that there are regional issues: we are talking of regions that have existed for more than a thousand years and that we wish to abolish in a month! The big mistake is to talk of a union and forget regionalism! We must always keep it in mind!”

Nasser wrote down the following notes on April 6th, 1963:

“We need to solidify the nationalistic trend in each country then form one unified Arab national movement in the three countries. We cannot have a coalition government in the union where each country is represented by a party; this will not make for a genuine union, but will lead to a political struggle which will impact the union.”

Then again on April 7th, 1963, Nasser wrote:

“Before unifying leadership, we must unify our objective. If there are differences in doctrine, how can the political forces come together?! Such differences must be resolved; because they will need to different interpretation of the three concepts we uphold: unity, socialism, and freedom. This is the main point that must form the basis of working towards a union; after that can come organizational matters, etc. However, I believe that it is not a question of different doctrines but rather of psychological complexes and personal issues and quarrels.

“Defining the concepts of freedom, socialism, and unity is far more important than the constitution. We need to have a solid base of understanding and of intellectual conformity, otherwise there will be clashes in the future.

“The political systems have to be unified and to proceed on two levels: governance, i.e. the constitution, and amongst the people. Regarding the latter, we will establish popular organizations alongside the party or front; these will constitute a revolutionary vanguard and will be in charge of leading and directing the people. These two entities – the party and the popular organizations – will be set up together, for without these popular organizations, the party will be isolated from the people and will be akin to a dictatorship!”
“So how will these popular organizations be formed? From the syndicates and from the general public, from the cooperative societies and various authorities, and their members do not necessarily all have to be party members.”

On April 8th, 1963, Nasser wrote again:

“The state that was proposed yesterday contains all imaginable vacuums: a state with no authority, no will, characterized by weakness, and referred to as a federal state! We cannot be a party to this; to do so would put an end to the concept of an Arab union in the eyes of the people!

“It would be far better to draw up a charter based upon which to work towards a union, define the elements necessary to bring it about, and set a period of five years for it to take place. During this period, we would have set up councils for economic, military, cultural, and political unification.

“A country with no defined political course of action simply cannot exist – what will support it?! We need to avoid the mistakes of 1958 and found a country on a popular base, with popular and political organizations, and deep roots.

“What I understood yesterday was that we would be two states within the union; the Baath ruling Syria and Iraq, and the Socialist Union ruling Egypt! Yesterday the talk was not of a union, but rather of an alliance between separate states!

“A unified political framework is a priority for establishing this federal state, to avoid a collision that could end in a setback. Syria and Iraq have one political system represented by the Baath, which means the situation will never be straightforward and there will be constant clashes, which will weaken and eventually put an end to the union.

“The solution is for there to be a national leadership that represents all parties and that it should be the only one, and include the Baath, the Arab nationalists, the unionists, the Arab front, and the Socialist Union. Without one unified national leadership in the republic,

520 This refers to the third meeting of the Tripartite Union talks held on April 7th, 1963, Appendix.
there will be problems, and an axis within the state, and no harmony.”

The situation in Syria, as Nasser explained it, was that the people were putting pressure on the government, and holding demonstrations. As for the discussions that had taken place, they were best described in the words of a Lebanese who had called them ‘a conversation with the deaf’!

Nasser went on to say:

”The Baath party are contacting the Americans, Russians, and communists, and telling them, ‘We can stand against Nasser, so help us; if Nasser swallows us, he will gobble up the whole Arab world!’

“My condition was for there to be a united national front, knowing full well that they would not be up to it! The situation in Iraq is difficult, and in spite of the shortcomings of the Baath party, its collapse with no alternative to replace it could mean a military dictatorship which could lead to the emergence of another isolationist like Abdel Karim Qassim!

“The important question is: if Syria and Iraq unite, will they wage a battle against us? They know full well today that if a union takes place and Abdel Nasser gets to Damascus, he will be able to do anything!”

Nasser then met with Ahmed Hassan Al Bakr, the Iraqi Prime Minister, on April 14th, 1963 in Cairo. Discussions centred round the resolution of Iraq’s problems prior to entering into a union, and Nasser’s opinion regarding the Kurdish issue was:

“Addressing it by waging war on them is not a solution; we will support you in this matter and consider it our duty to do so.”

Nasser also expressed his support for the Iraqi revolution, saying:

“We have waited patiently for this to happen, and hold you in great esteem. They are now talking of ‘Egyptianizing Iraq’, which was a headline in Lebanon! Counter propaganda from the Jewish Observer to radio Israel to the puppet press in Lebanon has created the illusion of a battle with Nasser and Cairo! And the communists... as soon as talk of a union began, they have been
saying: ‘Nasserism wants to expand’! All eyes are on Cairo, because it supports any new liberation movement. The Baathists in Syria are saying, ‘We need to shackle the Egyptian tyranny! A union without Nasserite tyranny!’”

Still addressing Al Bakr, Nasser went on:

“I consider you biased towards the Baath in Syria, so I need to be wary! The situation I see before me is bad: on one side, we have two parties – the Syrian and Iraqi Baath – and on the other, the UAR! Can this situation be ignored? Of course not.

“Our problems lie with the Syrians, not with you, and I speak from experience. The situation there is currently very difficult and no power on earth can control it! Intertwined relationships, with two or three families controlling the army and other corporations! Reactionism carries power in Damascus and has capital, and will attack the union. Damascus is ruled by the money moguls, the capitalists and feudalists, who rule from Beirut and not from Damascus!

“We consider union in the form of a merger impossible, neither can we accept an immediate union. If it is not soundly thought out and planned, we will all flounder! We can start off with a weak form of union, because if we let the opportunity slip by today, it may never come again, which is why we need to be extremely flexible, and no matter how fragile the union is, it will still be a union, on condition that the potential for strengthening it is there, whether in five, ten, or fifteen years. It will be led by those who will succeed us, but we must not let the opportunity slip by.”

Did what Nasser expect to happen, actually take place?

4. Signing the union agreement

Nasser wrote the following commentary on the signing of the union charter:
- Did the Baath want a union or did they want to rule?!
- The union negotiations were the result of popular pressure.
- The charter of April 17th, 1963 stems from the national charter issued in Cairo on May 21st, 1962.
- There is no definition of unity, freedom, and socialism!

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521 The terms of the union charter, April 17th, 1963, Appendix.
One week after signing the union charter, Nasser addressed the presidential council on April 24th, 1963, saying:

“I don’t consider this a union, but rather working towards a union; it will take two or three years till matters are clear! We will soon find out the true motives of the Baath party, who are a minority in Syria and Iraq, and are obviously trying to establish control in both countries. If this happens, conditions will be unstable, because they will hit out at many factions.

“They will have a hard time in Syria, where it is said that they want to get rid of what they call 'Nasserist elements', and are in league with Iraq on this. The truth is that the majority in the army are unionists, but they are weak and lack leadership. The pro-Baath elements are a small minority, but are well organized.

“The Baath are getting rid of anyone who has worked with us; had their intentions been good, they wouldn’t do this! I have discussed the matter with Luay Al Atassi, the Commander in Chief of the Armed Forces, and he said it is because they are afraid of us.

“it is important that the union should not fail, which would have negative repercussions and would constitute a victory for Israel, reactionism, and communism, and we would find ourselves in direct confrontation with the Baath; this is why my opinion was that we should go ahead with this union even if it is weak, then work on strengthening it.”

5. The tripartite union and Israel:
During the same meeting, Nasser mentioned that he was beginning to worry about Israel for the first time, adding: “It is uncertain how the Jordan issue will end; it is spontaneous rather than planned.”

What had happened was that demonstrations had taken place in major Jordanian cities on April 20th, 1963, in support of the declaration of the union. King Hussein had issued orders that they should be fired at, and skirmishes had taken place between the demonstrators and the government forces. Samir Khafagy’s ministry fell, and King Hussein appointed his uncle, Hussein ben Nasser, as prime minister, and dissolved parliament!

Nasser explained the situation as follows:
“The events are all inter-connected; the repercussions of the announcement of the new union gave rise to fear! No one was expecting it to happen; it came as a complete surprise, and the bitterness was evident in the British, American and Israeli press. The Israeli campaign in the newspapers Davar and Histadrut, talked of destroying missile bases and the Al Hamma operation!

“Until the day before yesterday it seemed that this was all political hype aimed at acquiring money and preventing US aid to Egypt, but now I think there is more to it! Yesterday, there was an Israeli cabinet meeting which the Israeli army chief of staff was supposed to attend, but he postponed it to today!

“As for Jordan, a hundred people have been killed so far. I believe King Hussein is in control of the situation, but there will be repercussions!”

Nasser went on to ask:

“If anything should happen in Jordan, will Israel intervene as they say? It is being said that Ben Gurion yesterday asked the cabinet to give him the authority to act according to the circumstances, but even if he is not given this authority he can still do what he likes: in 1956, not even the Israeli cabinet knew what was about to happen! And during the Lavon affair\(^{522}\), signatures were forged and the operation carried out! He manages to get by because of his relations with the army.

“It is my opinion that the Israelis are in a state of fear today, because if the Arab union goes through, the natural outcome will be for Israel to be bombed and annihilated.

“I spoke with Abdel Hakim Amer yesterday about the situation; I am particularly fearful for the air force, especially as it is concentrated in just two or three airports. We decided to declare a state of emergency, and to bring back the forces in Yemen as soon as possible.

“The Jews are beginning to put pressure on America; thankfully, the Russians are beginning to change their policy lately after Aly Sabry’s

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\(^{522}\) The Lavon affair: A failed Israeli undercover operation that took place in the summer of 1954 under the name Operation Susannah. The plan was to blow up Egyptian, American, and British targets to create the impression that the country was insecure and to make the Jewish population feel that they were persecuted in Egypt, and thus encourage them to emigrate to Israel. However, the plot was discovered by the Egyptian authorities and became known as the Lavon Scandal or the Lavon Affair, after the Israeli Minister of Defence at the time Pinhas Lavon who personally supervised the operation. The accused were tried and the Egyptian authorities issued their verdict in December, 1954.
visit to Moscow. They had been attacking the union, then when Aly Sabry talked to Khrushchev, who cut his holiday short to meet him, he sent an invitation to Abdel Hakim Amer, and this shows that they are seeking a rapprochement.

“We have plans regarding Israel, but our situation today with regard to launching an attack is that we can just about reach Beersheba with the resources and forces we have today. However, when it comes to defence, our situation is sound and we are completely capable of defending ourselves. I discussed the matter with Abdel Hakim yesterday, and told him that we needed to finalize the Yemen issue with all speed.

‘So with regard to defence, our position is secure, but when it comes to attack, we are in a difficult position! It is not part of our plans to attack Israel; all we can do is defend ourselves.

“The ‘preventative war’ they are talking about in my opinion means bombing our airports and our missile bases. Will it be a quick raid in the early hours of the morning? Our Russian radars do not pick up low-flying aircraft, which means they can infiltrate our air space! We have missiles in the Delta, Aswan, and the Canal zone, which cost us twelve million pounds, and the British and the Swiss are willing to give us radars.

“Launching an attack would be very difficult to carry out; we would find ourselves stuck in the Negev desert, unable to accomplish anything! Accordingly, our policy is one of defence, based on meeting every blow with a stronger blow.

“We have prepared nine new airports, and in the process have encountered problems such as the supply of fuel, and have asked for TU16 planes and now have two. We have also acquired two hundred tanks for the infantry and armoured divisions and have arranged for two hundred more. We have also requested MiG21 planes. This has all been happening since 1960, based on our strategy of being prepared should Israel decide to attack. We have a line of defense in the Sinai, and two new (secret) airports there, from which we can enter Israel, because it would not be possible to do so from the Canal Zone.

“It could be that Israel’s foremost objective is to paralyze our armed forces by bombing our planes, which would incapacitate us at least temporarily.”

523 Aly Sabry, Head of the Executive Council.
Concerning the position of the USA, Nasser said:

“They are pushing to prevent Germany from helping with the missiles project, and to block aid, to create a state of balance (as they say) between the Arabs and Israel! This line of talk is new and is the first time they have explicitly mentioned Israel, which they always used to avoid doing!

“They claim to be helping to maintain an arms balance between the UAR and Israel; I told them, ‘You said the same thing in 1948, then went and gave Israel weapons, and so did France! I don’t hold with this talk.’ They asked me what the solution was, and I replied that what would help diffuse the situation and quieten things down would be the return of the million Palestinian refugees to Israel – but Israel refuses! The suggestion made in the United Nations last year concerning the return of the refugees did not specify how many, and we refused, because we found out that the figure was [just] twenty thousand!”

Still addressing the presidential council, Nasser went on to say:

“Regarding the possibility of Israel’s occupying the West Bank, if they had intended to, they wouldn’t be announcing it! And if they did take it, with all its Arab inhabitants, it would be a huge problem and would mean that they were letting the one million Arabs living there into Israel! Furthermore, it is a mountainous area and not easy to navigate.

“Israel’s threats are intended to prevent US aid to us; we received 77 million dollars this year, and they know that some of this money is spent on arms and on Yemen, and that if it stops, so will we if only for a while.

“Will Israel strike? In two years’ time, there will be a unified army, but today, the Syrian army is in bad shape, while Iraq is busy with the Kurds. Next year, a few months after the state is established, there will be a unified leadership and consolidated plans, and three months from now, we will have finished training the Iraqi pilots.

“If Ben Gurion and the Jews want to strike, it will be us! The Express newspaper said yesterday (April 23rd, 1963) that the first [leader] to emerge since the Pharaohs was Abdel Nasser!

“There are many spies here, even in the embassies: Argentina, Greece, France, they all work for the Jews! The Americans know about the
weapons that enter Egypt even before I do! We’ve caught Italians and Greeks and even Egyptians working with the Jews!

“At this stage, our policy is defence. Israel’s main strength lies in its air force and its missiles; the situation is unequal because now that they’ve managed to get Hawk missiles with a 250 kilometer range, flight will become more difficult. Our only solution is missiles.

“The priority is the safety of the republic, its air defence, and its land defence. We’ve learned a lesson from 1956 and now have plenty of 100 millimeter anti-aircraft guns. If they bomb towns, so will we!

“The question is: if they bomb Jordan but not us, we cannot remain passive.

“The missiles belonging to the MiG 15, 17, and 21 are not being used; they are for Yemen and we bought them from Switzerland not Russia. We now have more pilots than planes, and yesterday I asked the pilots to return from Yemen.

“If Israel should occupy the West Bank or part of it without launching an attack, what will our position be? I said yesterday that we need to have a plan whereby if they invade Jordan, we intervene! Abdel Hakim assured me that the plan was ready.

“Basically... in order to resolve the Palestine issue, they have to attack us! We must distribute our planes and not concentrate them in three airports.”

In response to a requests made during the meeting that Israel be attacked, Nasser replied:

“Politically speaking, if we embroil ourselves in an attack, we’ll become an easy prey to global forces, and Israel will be given planes and ships, then subject us to a resounding defeat. If we start a war, we will not be able to finish it. The problem is not Israel: the problem is those behind Israel! I cannot calculate and say that Israel has say sixty Mystère planes and thirty Mirage, because that can change within 24 hours! Launching such an attack would be giving them a chance to finish us off!

“As for the union and our position, we pose a greater danger to them than we ever have since the days of Mohamed Aly, and now reach the borders of Iran, Turkey, and the Gulf, so if they get the chance to get rid of us, they will.”
Nasser then returned to the question he had asked before:

“What if the Jews occupy the West Bank or part of it without attacking Egypt, what will our position be? We need to look at the question from all aspects: the Russians are a hundred times stronger than we are, so why did they back down vis-à-vis America?! For the safety of the Soviet Union!

“The Jews say they will impose the date and place of the battle on us!”

On April 26th, 1963, Ben Gurion sent a personal SOS to President Kennedy after the Tripartite Charter was signed between Egypt, Syria, and Iraq, expressing his anxiety and his fear that this meant a military union to liberate Palestine, which posed a threat to stability in the region and to the safety of Israel. To quote him:

“Israel finds it difficult to believe that the United States and the civilized world will give in to these liberation attempts.” He went on to say that, “Egypt is getting substantial financial aid from the US and other Western powers.” He then made a very strange suggestion to thwart the ‘disastrous liberation efforts’, namely a joint United States-USSR joint declaration guaranteeing the territorial integrity and security of all states in the Middle East, and promising termination of all assistance to any state that threatens or refuses to recognize the existence of its neighbours!

Ben Gurion then suggested that he would be willing to fly to Washington to discuss matters without publicity.

He then expressed his appreciation of the Hawk missile deal, but regretted that in the light of new offensive weapons being prepared by Israel’s neighbours, the Hawk alone was not sufficient!524

Kennedy responded to Ben Gurion’s letter on May 4th, 1963, reassuring him of:

“... our own deep concern over the security and integrity of Israel. We are watching closely the current developments in the Arab world, and seeking to ensure that they do not take a form dangerous to the security of any nation in the area...

524 Ben Gurion’s letter to Kennedy, April 26th, 1963, Appendix.  
“Both our countries must continue to be alert to all developing implications of the current movement for Arab unity; the future of this movement and the rapidity of its development are not at all clear at present.

“I agree with your view that it would be irresponsible to make light of continued Arab threats to liberate Palestine, and I fully understand the concern which you and your Government feel with respect to certain phrases in the document of April 17th signed by Egypt, Syria and Iraq. Any policies and purposes supported by such phrases will have the continued opposition of the United States.”

Concerning Israel’s request that the US should discontinue economic aid to Egypt, Kennedy said:

“I continue to believe deeply that the efforts of the United States to develop effective relations with the Arab states are in fact in the long-term interest of Israel at least as much as of the United States or the Arab countries themselves.

“These effective relations are always exercised on behalf of the peace of the area and with full regard for the security of Israel. Thus I really cannot agree with the suggestion that our limited economic assistance to the United Arab Republic can be considered as a force which serves ‘to set the Russian arms in motion against Israel when the opportunity offers.’ Our own belief is that in reality these economic relations reduce the dangerous influence of the Soviet Union and serve as a restraint on any Arab action which might be destructive to the peace of the area and the interests of the United States. We have never allowed Arab objections to affect our continuing policy of support for and assistance to Israel—as demonstrated most recently in our agreement to make Hawk missiles available and, before that, in our agreement to help in the matter of water from Lake Tiberias.”

Kennedy then turned down Ben Gurion’s offer to travel secretly and privately to Washington, saying:

“Experience tells me that at a time like this, when public attention is focused on your part of the world and the role of the United States in it, there is no reasonable prospect that you and I could meet without publicity. I fear that a public meeting would have the effect of increasing the level of tension in the area and of promoting speculation which
could only be dangerous to our common purpose of maintaining stability and peace.”

6. The Tripartite Treaty is revoked by the Iraqi and Syrian Baath:

As Nasser expected, the Baath party reneged on the Tripartite Union Treaty that was signed on April 17th, 1963. Nasser recounted what happened to Abdel Salam Aref during the latter’s visit to Egypt on August 22nd, 1963:

“Negotiations had not being going well; there was a mutual lack of confidence, which is even more pronounced today! We were betrayed after having signed the treaty, which we did at the insistence of the Iraqi delegation and had intended not to!

“Only two days before we had reached a deadlock and were not going to go through with the agreement! But the Iraqis started talking about the best interests of Iraq and their circumstances and I agreed to sign for the sake of Arab welfare, considering this charter part of the process of the union, which it would be a pity to forfeit.

“Even so, four days after the charter was signed, an act of treachery occurred that ruined everything! Unfortunately, it was carried out by Syria in collusion with Iraq! We signed the charter on April 17th, only for this to happen on April 20th?!

“There is no trust between Syria and ourselves, and I was always telling the Iraqis to stay away from our problems with Syria, which have a history going back five long years and are not likely to end soon! The battle is ongoing against the nationalists in Syria, though we insisted from day one that they should form a united front to confront the non-nationalistic elements.

“Our ‘comrades’ have decided to dissolve Nasserism! Which of course has made us withdraw our trust and realize that the future is unsure... a treacherous stab!

“Did I seek a union? I never asked for a union. And when the Iraqi revolution took place, I supported them, and when the Iraqi delegation came here in February, I told them that the union should be one of a shared objective, and that we needed further meetings, and to get to know one another better. We had to address and resolve old grudges in order to build a union on sound foundations.
“Iraq is biased towards Syria, but there are no direct reasons for any differences with Iraq.

“I now consider the charter of April 17th null and void! When it is said that a decision has been made to get rid of all pro-Nasser elements, what does this mean? How can there be trust, or a sense of security?!

“If the Baathist Syrians feel that Nasser wants to rule and control, why do they want to unite with us?! Their motives are unsound. The Baathists in Syria and Iraq are in league with each other, and they suspect us of wanting to control. How can we enter into a union when the parties are suspicious of one another? I said from the very beginning that there were problems with the Syrian Baath that needed to be settled first.

“So the end result is two leaderships wary of one another, and a union in these circumstances would be detrimental to us and to the issue of Arab unity. We need to talk of unified political action else the result would be a violent clash that would put paid to any chance of such a state surviving.

“I announced from the very first session that I did not trust the Baath in Syria and that if they were to rule alone, we would not go through with a union that was doomed to failure! The Baath are separatists and are responsible for the crime of the secession, and began to work towards it just three months after the union of 1958!”

In the presidential council meeting that took place on October 19th, 1963, Nasser spoke of the situation in both Syria and Iraq, saying:

“The situation in Syria is openly hostile. They operate hypocritically; they came here asking for equipment which we initially refused to give them simply because they have no spare parts, but Abdel Salam Aref interceded on their behalf, so we gave them some of the items they had asked for.

“We now have concrete information that they are in touch with Iran and Turkey, and are falling in with the Western plots. Domestically, there is a complete split within the members of the Baath, but the extremist faction is the one in charge, and the same applies to Iraq, where matters are in a state of collapse because of the Kurdish question. They don’t have enough forces and have asked for help from Syria; they want to end the problem before the winter. Their whole army is in the north, except for two armoured battalions and one infantry battalion stationed
in Baghdad, and two infantry battalions in Basra. In the southern region, there are cases of highway blockades and disruption of public transport. All forces are aligned against them! The difference between Syria and Iraq is that the Iraqi army has a large number of nationalists, while Syria has a smaller but dedicated number. As for the economic situation in Syria, it is bad. Both countries are in need of reorganization.”

During the joint presidential council meeting held in Alexandria on September 14th, 1964, Nasser said:

“The concept of having a joint political leadership between the UAR and Iraq is to achieve a union in stages, because leaping into it at once will only result in problems. If we establish a union, all global forces will unite against it: Iran, Turkey, Britain, the US, reactionaries, colonialists, communists, and the Baath. If the union is not able to withstand this, we will have made a mistake.

“An example of the problems we are up against: we have a class of intellectuals who are not in favour of the union! Plus we are not solid enough to face up to attacks.

“The two factors we are depending on for this union are a strong army, and a popular organization that is cohesive and believes in the union. The distance between our countries is 100 kilometres, and you will be responsible for protecting the union; the army cannot administer matters long distance!”

Nasser met with Abdel Salam Aref in Cairo on October 14th and again stressed:

“We need to take our time before making any decisions; the political organization must be finalised and we need to concentrate on internal work in Iraq. Militarily, the army must be completely unified, sectarian problems addressed, reforms made in deprived areas, the Kurdish problem resolved, and overall, the circumstances must be improved internally.

“We agreed to the charter, weak as it is, only because Iraq is part of it and because it is an opportunity that might not come again... a state stretching from the Gulf to the middle of Africa! We look upon the union as a national cause and not just as a political move! There is much

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526 Minutes of the joint presidential council between the UAR and Iraqi leaderships, may 27th, 1964, Appendix.
hostility towards this union, and if the hostility is also to come from within, then the whole matter must be reconsidered! Aly Saleh Al Saady, the Iraqi deputy prime minister and minister of the interior actually said to Baathists students that the obstacle to the union was Abdel Nasser, and this was while negotiations for the union were ongoing! Such talk does not augur well for the possibility of a rapprochement.

“We avoided anything that would negatively impact our relations with the Iraqi Baath, but the turning point came when Iraq took Syria’s side in broadcasting and propaganda, attacking the UAR - these reactionaries, agents, and separatists even claimed that we supported and encouraged the Kurds, which the UAR’s policies would never permit.”

Such, then, was Nasser’s position after the tripartite union was revoked by the Syrian and Iraqi Baathists. In his speech celebrating Revolution Day on July 22nd, 1963, Nasser addressed all Arabs throughout the Arab world, explaining the crisis confronting the cause of Arab unity, and explaining the separatist conspiracy of September 28th, 1961, which was backed by the Baath party who had signed the secession document. Nasser went on to list the hostile tactics employed by the Baath against the UAR after the secession, ending in the revoking of the tripartite union signed on April 17th, 1963.

“I was willing to start with a weak union,” said Nasser, “on the understanding that it would become stronger eventually and that the suspicions harboured by the Baath would end as a result of joint work and a unified political system. I told them that this weak union could not withstand any maneuvers or deceit, and signed the Tripartite Union agreement but with our eyes open; we were not about to be fooled again!

“On September 20th, I was in Alexandria when the secret police brought me a letter sent from Damascus to Baghdad – from the Iraqi military attaché in Damascus to Aly Saleh Al Saady in Baghdad, to be exact – saying that the Baathists comrades had decided to liquidate the Nasserites... and asking for planes and any other help they might require!

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527 Nasser’s Speeches Part 5, pp. 627 – 674, ibid.
528 Nasser referred to Heikal’s article, “I Object”, in which he revealed the conspiracies and maneuvers of the Syrian Baath in his column in the Ahram newspaper on March 31st, 1963, ibid.
“I felt a deep sense of betrayal when I read these words, and knew that the Baath was up to their old deceitful methods of immoral stabbing in the back!

“I told Ambassador Sami Al Droubi who happened to be with me, ‘these are dangerous words that abrogate the agreement, because the whole arrangement was based upon unified political action and a unified political leadership, and upon good intentions and trust! They dismissed around fifty unionist officers – so called Nasserites! I see this as a revolt against the charter the very first week it was signed, and that the Baath betrayed the cause of Arab unity and Arab nationalism by doing this.’

“What followed was that the Syrian unionist ministers all resigned, and widespread demonstrations took place, met with bullets and arrests!

‘We do not feel that the UAR shares an objective with the Fascist system currently in charge in Damascus... There can be no unified objective with a regime based on treachery and backstabbing; moreover we consider the Baath regime in Damascus to be neither unionist nor socialist, but unfortunately see them as a separatist, immoral, inhuman regime! Neither do we consider this government as representing the Syria with which we signed the tripartite agreement, an agreement that was made between revolutionary, nationalistic Arab forces, not governments. The Fascist government in Damascus is not the body that signed the unity agreement; those who signed it are now in prisons and detention camps or hiding away from tyranny and terrorism!

“There will be no union with the Fascist Baath regime, only a union with the struggling Syrian people. And in order to achieve Arab unity there must be a pan-Arab unified movement that brings together all those who believe in Arab unity and Arab nationalism.”

A statement was issued by the Socialist Union handwritten by Nasser on September 18th, 1963,529 exposing the maneuvers carried out by the Baathist party in Syria and Iraq which had led to the failure of the union.

“Yesterday was September 17th, 1963, the day designated for the referendum on the union and the fulfillment of the objectives of the Arab nation... September 17th went by without a referendum... And only

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529 Text of the statement issued by the Arab Socialist Union on September 18th, 1963, handwritten by President Nasser, Appendix.
a few days after signing the union charter on April 17th, the Baath revoked it!

“The negotiations surrounding the proposed union were nothing more than one of the Baath party’s immoral maneuvers to address popular pressure when the people poured into the streets clamouring for a union. Soon after negotiations began, it became obvious that the Baath was coming up with obstacles for the purpose of making the union a façade and not a real union. Egypt then halted the discussions, but Iraq intervened and Egypt agreed to carry on, and the April 17th charter was agreed to.

“The Baath party exploited the issue of the union in order to take control. Unity is an issue of destiny... of the integrity of Arab nationalism... of standing up to Zionism and colonialism... and of liberating Palestine.”

On November 13th, 1963, the citizens of Baghdad woke to the sound of gunshots, bombs exploding, and fighter planes bombing the presidential palace, the Ministry of Defence, and the broadcasting station. A struggle had broken out between the Iraqi Baathists, and the National Command of the Baath party took control of Iraq.530

7. The Unified Political Command between Egypt and Iraq:
An unexpected development occurred when a military coup took place in Iraq on November 18th, 1963, overthrowing the Baath government in Baghdad and removing Ahmed Hassan Al Bakr from the position of prime minister, as well as dismissing many other Baath party members. Abdel Salam Aref took over the presidency of the republic and Taher Yehia – a Baathist – became prime minister; another Baathist, Hardan Al Tikriti, assumed the position of minister of defence.

The agreement to form the Unified Political Command with Iraq was signed on May 26th, 1964 as a first step towards a comprehensive union.531 Nasser considered the union between Egypt and Iraq to have been established since the revolution of November 18th, 1963, on the basis that a unified objective was a true union; both countries were working for freedom, socialism, and unity.


531 Text of the agreement to form a Unified Political Command between the UAR and Iraq on May 26th, 1964, Appendix.
“We want this union to be based on solid foundations, and to be implemented in stages so that we can thwart the enemies of the union.”\textsuperscript{532}

The agreement stated that the sound foundation for the union between the two countries was ‘unifying political activities and establishing a joint political command that would work towards establishing a constitutional union in the shortest time possible.’ It was agreed that the joint political command – the highest authority in both countries – would take steps towards achieving a political union between the Socialist Union in both countries. Accordingly, a Joint Presidential Council was established between Egypt and Iraq on May 27\textsuperscript{th}, 1964.

The Joint Political Command ratified a secret political programme during its meetings in Cairo which took place from 19\textsuperscript{th}-25\textsuperscript{th} May, 1965, which included focusing on achieving national unity in Iraq, which in turn required supporting the Socialist Union and activating the Joint Political Command. The political programme was agreed upon as well as the duration of the transitional period and the date of the parliamentary elections. A socio-economic programme was also drawn up.\textsuperscript{533}

Nasser repeated his views on the union to Aref:

“A union without organized political work and a unified political command could lead to problems we will be unable to extricate ourselves from, first of which could be that we fall out! Therefore, we need to proceed step by step: domestic political work, then a unified political organization, then the union.

“We will start with unifying political work by establishing a command that combines Egypt and Iraq; the people must get to know one another. The relationship between us today is more than just the question of a union, and we are ready to develop it on all fronts except the constitutional aspect. Had there not been repercussions on the Arab world resulting from the union, I would not have delayed!

“One Socialist Union for both countries, with a committee that you and I and a group of people from each of our countries will form. I believe

\textsuperscript{532} Nasser’s speech during the signing of the union agreement with Iraq on May 26\textsuperscript{th}, 1964, Nasser’s Speeches Part 4, pp. 202-204, ibid.
\textsuperscript{533} Text of the secret political programme, Cairo, may 19\textsuperscript{th}-25\textsuperscript{th}, 1965, and the statement of the Joint Political Command, May 25\textsuperscript{th}, 1965 and February 19\textsuperscript{th}, 1966, Appendix.
that the way forward is to move towards a decentralized government; for instance to solve the problem of the Kurds in Iraq, we can set up local rule with its own authorities so long as they don’t have an army or foreign policy...

“As for the Shiites and Sunnis, we must never differentiate between them. If we were to hold a referendum on the union today, neither the Kurds nor the Sunnis would agree to it; they need to be reassured, and to feel that it is one country, not two. If we don’t address this problem before the union, there will be conflicts... We need two years to judge whether unified political work has succeeded or not. In two years’ time, we will be able to decide when to forge the union, and we will have got to know one another better.”534

The Joint Political Command between Egypt and Iraq continued to work towards bringing the two countries closer, and on June 4th, 1967, Nasser signed a joint defence agreement with Taher Yehia, the Iraqi Prime Minister; the matter stopped there.

**Sixth: US-Egyptian relations (1961-1967):**
The United States had become a prime player in the events and policies of the Middle East ever since WWII, and their role intensified with the expansion of US interests in the region. They attempted to induce the Arab states into a Middle East defence zone as a means of foiling the Soviet Union by forming alliances in the region.

However, the majority of Arab states refused to be drawn into such an alliance, even before the July 1952 revolution, and after the revolution took place, things became even more difficult for the US and for the West in general. The revolutionary leaders proclaimed several principles: eradicating colonialism, political freedom, refraining from being party to the struggle taking place between the world powers, and building a strong army.

In the early days of the revolution, there was a rapprochement with the United States, and Egypt asked to buy US weapons after Britain refused this request several times. The US began to stall; Nasser did not know then that Britain and the US had agreed that the latter should refrain from selling arms to Egypt until the Egyptians had made peace with Israel!

The arms deal that allowed the USSR to enter the region then took place, and was followed by the withdrawal of the offer to finance the High Dam

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534 Minutes of the meetings of the Joint Political Command, Appendix.
by the US, Britain, and The World Bank. The climax of the crisis was the Tripartite Aggression of 1956.

Relations continued to fluctuate according to US interests on the one hand, and Egyptian policies on the other, the latter being based upon independence and the interests of Arab nationalism, which often led to differences of opinion between the two countries with covert and even open hostility.

The period starting at the end of September, 1961, which saw the secession between Egypt and Syria, and up until May, 1967, when the preliminaries of the Israeli attack of June 5th on Egypt began, was a pivotal period in US-Egyptian relations during which it became abundantly clear that the relationship between the US and Israel was a binding one, protected by the pledge made by all US presidents to protect the integrity and security of Israel and maintain its military and economic superiority over all the Arab states!

It must not be forgotten that at this time, the Vietnam war was taking place with the US opposed to Ho Chi Minh who was in turn backed by the Soviet Union. The US naturally made efforts to draw the countries of the world to its side and thus impact the view of the UN in the issue. Egypt, however, held its own position and was backed by most of the non-aligned countries, which impacted the decisions of the UN.

The Cuban crisis had also emerged, and led to a direct confrontation between the US and the Soviet Union, placing the world on the verge of a nuclear war. Again, Egypt maintained its independent stance based upon its principles of freedom and peace.

Finally, there was the question of the war taking place in the Congo, where again Egypt’s position impacted its relations with the US.

Nevertheless, bilateral relations between Egypt and the US during this period witnessed a political, economic, and cultural rapprochement. However, differences of opinion began in September 1962, particularly with regard to the question of Yemen, and the arming of Israel where US policies imposed what they called a ‘balance’ between the Israelis and the rest of the Arab world. Added to this was the matter of Kennedy’s attitude towards the Egyptian nuclear programme, and Egypt’s production of missiles with the help of German scientists.

The United States used its aid to Egypt to try and force it to fall in with US policies which were in the interest of the West in general. Letters were
exchanged between Kennedy and Nasser concerning US aid; Nasser sent a letter to Kennedy on June 21\textsuperscript{st}, 1962, concerning the Minister of Finance, Abdel Moneim Kaissouni’s mission to Washington, in which he wrote:

“Dr. Kaissouni informed me of the general feeling he got from all the US officials he came into contact with, a feeling of understanding and appreciation of the problems of countries aspiring towards development... This feeling conveyed to me by Dr. Kaissouni is a new phenomenon that calls for our deep gratitude.”\footnote{Letter from Nasser to Kennedy, June 21\textsuperscript{st}, 1962, Appendix.}

Kennedy responded to Nasser’s letter on August 16\textsuperscript{th}, 1962, as follows:

“I can assure you that there is no change in United States policy toward the United Arab Republic or the Near East in general; nor is there intended any alteration in the basis of our cordial and expanding relationship.

“I understand that Dr. Kaissouni plans to visit here again in September. He will be most welcome.”\footnote{Kennedy’s letter to Nasser, August 16\textsuperscript{th}, 1962, Appendix.}

Nevertheless, Nasser was fully aware of the dangers of this period, and expecting Egypt to be the target of conspiracies from the West, reactionism, and communism. Earlier in 1961, on October 19\textsuperscript{th}, he had addressed the cabinet of ministers, saying:

“With regard to global politics, they do not want us to adhere to the non-alignment policy, while we refuse to do otherwise! This pleases neither the East nor the West, both of whom feel that weakening us and putting pressure on us will lead us to cave in and seek some sort of compromise!

“All guns are aimed towards us, all broadcasting stations, from the East, the West, and the communists: they are all against us! The press issued by Zionists attacks us, as well as Israeli radio, the West – England, France, and America – and also King Saud, King Hussein, and the separatist parties in Damascus and Amman.

“There seems to be a sacred alliance bringing together all conflicting factions to unite towards one purpose: getting rid of us, because our ideology is strong and influences those around us. In 1955, they asked us to stay away from the Arabs and that in return we would receive all the aid we wanted, but we refused, because otherwise we would have become just another satellite state like Turkey or Thailand!”
“I believe that the defence of Egypt is not contained in Egypt alone, but in
the circle surrounding it. We cannot adopt an isolationist policy in our
country, because they will never leave us in peace!

“Some may ask: what have we to do with the Arabs?! Our policy has always
been defensive not aggressive, but the Baghdad Pact was intended to
isolate us; both East and West want to isolate us. The East thinking they
can give the communists a stronghold here, and the West wanting to
empower those loyal to them in the name of parliamentary democracy,
which is nothing but parliamentary dictatorship! Iran has a parliament,
but the West uses this parliamentary democracy to promote its allies and
kill the rest!

“We can’t say we have nothing to do with what surrounds us, and must not
allow them to gain a foothold in the circle around us; they will not leave us
alone until they have put us within their spheres of influence.”

These were Nasser’s expectations of the way things would proceed with the
USA and indeed the West as a whole, who looked upon his idea of the
three circles – Arab, African, and Islamic – mentioned in his book, The
Philosophy of the Revolution, 1953, as ‘opportunism and neo-
colonialism’!

1. The beginning of the Kennedy-Nasser rapprochement:
A new problem arose in the Middle East which led to this
rapprochement, when Israel built a nuclear reactor in Dimona in
addition to the small nuclear research reactor that had already been
given by the US with the proviso that it be inspected.

The US and Britain were concerned that the Arabs would be afraid of
the reactor being used to produce nuclear weapons, and rightly so,
especially as Ben Gurion refused the inspection of Dimona and would
not agree to adhere to the safety procedures of the International
Atomic Energy Agency on the pretext that this would allow Soviet
intervention.

The US and Britain both refused to allow nuclear weapons in the
Middle East and thus agreed to improve relations with Nasser, though

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they said that, ‘nothing would change Nasser’ and that their policy would be balanced, with ‘neither embracement nor hostility.’  

Kennedy then sent a personal envoy, Chester Bowles, to Cairo to investigate further economic cooperation and to invite Nasser to visit the US. Bowles expressed the wish of the US administration that the two countries should resume the mutual trust that had characterized their relations during the period 1952-1955, and the belief that Nasser and Kennedy, both young men of courage and determination, should mark out areas of mutual interest and defend them against any forces that attempted to disrupt their relationship.

Kennedy was eager to work towards political stability, socio-economic development and cultural exchange in the Middle East, and anxious to prevent communist or Soviet penetration in the region and in Africa.

Here we must bear in mind that there was always an obstacle to the improvement of the relationship between the US and Egypt, namely Israel, always in an arms race with Egypt and putting US politicians in a state of constant anxiety over events in the Middle East.

In May, 1962, Shimon Peres, the Israeli minister of defence, asked the US for financial help for increased armament, and to reconsider the US’s previous refusal to sell Israel Hawk missiles. Peres claimed that Nasser’s military force was increasing and that he was committed to attacking Israel once Egypt had achieved sufficient arms superiority!

2. Nasser, Kennedy, and the Palestinian cause
a. The Palestinian refugee problem:
   It was only natural that the Palestinian problem should be the main issue in the relationship between Nasser and Kennedy, being a cause pivotal to the whole of the Arab world. Correspondence was exchanged between the two presidents concerning this, and Kennedy was courageous enough to address the Palestinian refugee problem and support the plan prepared by Dr. Joseph E. Johnson, special envoy of the United Nations Palestine Conciliation

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540 Correspondence exchanged between Nasser and Kennedy from March 2nd 1961 to October 30th, 1961, Appendix.
542 Telegram from the Department of State in Washington to the Embassy in Israel, May 24th, 1962.
543 Letters exchanged between Kennedy and Nasser concerning the Palestinian problem, on May 11, and August 22nd, 1961, Appendix.
Commission, for the repatriation or compensation of Palestinian refugees in implementation of resolution (11) 194 issued by the United Nations on December 11th, 1948, stating:

“Refugees wishing to return to their homes and live at peace with their neighbours should be permitted to do so at the earliest practicable date, and that compensation should be paid for the property of those choosing not to return and for loss of or damage to property which, under principles of international law or in equity, should be made good by the Governments or authorities responsible; and instructs the Conciliation Commission to facilitate the repatriation, resettlement and economic and social rehabilitation of the refugees and the payment of compensation.”

Nasser’s opinion on the Johnson plan was to refuse the proposed quota of 20,000 refugees only to be repatriated, and that the final solution to the problem would only be reached once the majority of refugees had been allowed to return, making Israel a bi-national state with a proportion of Arabs large enough to ensure equal rights, rather than the ‘second-degree citizen’ treatment Arabs currently living in Israel were subjected to. Nasser was fully aware that this solution was in direct opposition to the Zionist concept, and could take seventy years to accomplish!

As expected, Ben Gurion did not agree to the Johnson plan, laying down conditions impossible to fulfil such as Nasser’s agreeing to settle the refugees into the UAR! And to Nasser’s agreeing not to encourage the refugees to choose repatriation!

It is worth mentioning that at that time, the US president had a special aide in the White House representing the interests of the Jews and Israel, Myer Feldman. The Kennedy Administration believed that resolving the Arab-Israeli conflict would not be possible without addressing the refugee issue, unaware of Israel’s expansionist intentions!

The US politicians soon tired of Israel’s constant refusal of all suggestions made to find a solution to the Palestinian problem, and admitted that the Israelis did not even want to discuss the Johnson

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544 Memo from Rusk to Kennedy, Washington, August 7th, 1962, Dr. Johnson’s proposals on the Palestinian refugees problem.
546 From the Department of State, Washington, to the Embassy in the UAR, August 21st, 1962.
plan! This in spite of the fact that the US had agreed to provide
Israel with the Hawk missiles it had asked for, though before the
Johnson plan.

The US felt that this was an opportune time to implement
Johnson’s plan because for the first time, as they thought, they were
able to influence the key to the Arabs: Nasser! They estimated that
their position in the Middle East was higher than it ever had been in
the preceding years.

However, the Israelis were determined not to accept any plan that
would allow the refugees to express a preference with regard to
either repatriation or compensation, which was the cornerstone of
the Johnson plan! The Americans admitted that the Arab-Israeli
conflict had caused them many headaches over the previous fifteen
years, and was likely to cause many more unless a solution were to
be found.

The refuge problem was, ‘one million Arab refugees living
unwillingly in their camps, dependent on UN donations.’ The
Americans asked:
“How long does Israel want to live as a semi-garrison state,
surrounded by a million discontented refugees, and forced to divert
a high proportion of its assets (and our aid) to security needs?!
Israel has lived for a long time within a hostile Arab ring, and time
is against it; its tough policy only serves to feed Arab hostility, not
lessen it.”547

The truth is that the Americans turned a blind eye to the
establishing of Israel in 1948 and the Zionist seizure and
Judaization of Arab lands by bringing in Jewish immigrants from
abroad to replace the original Arab landowners. Time has proved
the Zionist objective of taking over more and more Arab land to be a
fact.

b. The water problem between the Arabs and Israel:
Kennedy took the initiative of discussing the comprehensive plan
for the regional development of water resources in the Middle East
with Ben Gurion, which allocated water quotas from the Jordan and
Yarmouk rivers to Israel, Syria, and Jordan in accordance with the
plan drawn up by the former US Ambassador Eric Johnston.548

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547 Memo from Komer to Kennedy, Washington, December 5th, 1962.
548 The Johnston plan discussions 1953-1955 in which countries of the Jordan and Yarmouk rivers participated.
Kennedy sent a letter to Ben Gurion on June 13th, 1962, in which he began by saying:

“United States policy has consistently included among its objectives the security and progress of Israel...The maintenance of Israel’s integrity and independence and her economic progress will continue to engage our full support.”

Kennedy then proceeded to urge Ben Gurion to maintain the state of calm on the borders and to cooperate fully with the United Nations to ensure that these borders were respected by the Arab neighbours of Israel.

Kennedy supported the water development programme and in his letter, urged Ben Gurion to implement it, expressing his hope that it would be a step towards the ultimate objective of peace in the Middle East.549

Ben Gurion replied to Kennedy’s letter in a convoluted manner using the usual well-worn arguments such as Israel’s democratic system – no mention of its military resources! – and a reminder of the holocaust! But what I had never encountered before was Ben Gurion’s allegation that Palestinian leaders – including the former Mufti of Palestine – took part in killing six million Jews! Then pretending to be afraid that the same thing could happen to the two million Jews in Palestine, if the Israel defence forces were defeated!

Ben Gurion then pretended to capitulate to the water allocation quotas presented in the Johnston plan to make use of the wasted water of the Jordan and Yarmouk rivers, which never actually took place, as the subsequent Israeli projects to divert the Jordan river later revealed.

Naturally, Ben Gurion did not waste the opportunity to vilify the Arabs, saying that they harboured nothing but open hostility to Israel, adding that all these countries – as he claimed – were ruled either directly or indirectly by the military, conveniently forgetting the pivotal role played by the Israeli military institution even before the establishment of Israel in 1948 and the fact that all prominent political positions in Israel were held by officers (Shimon Peres, the

former Israeli president, was an officer, as were Menachem Begin, Moshe Dayan, Isaac Rabin...).

Ben Gurion ended his letter by saying that the very existence of Israel was threatened!

“Therefore, it is of the utmost importance to provide the Israel Defence Forces with sufficient deterrent strength which will prevent our neighbours from making war on us”!

3. Nasser and the Cuban crisis

True to his principle of supporting the cause of freedom wherever it might be, Nasser supported Fidel Castro and the Cuban revolution from the start, and in fact announced this support publicly in a speech in Alexandria in July, 1960.

On October 22nd, 1962, Kennedy sent Nasser a letter stating:

“It has been proved beyond the shadow of a doubt that the Soviet government has secretly built ballistic nuclear missile bases in Cuba, and that further bases are underway. Your ambassador here will be informed of the details. This act on the part of the Soviets is in direct contradiction of the assurance made by Mr. Khrushchev to me personally a few days ago through Foreign Secretary Gromyko that Cuba was being supplied with defensive weapons only.

“It is therefore necessary to impose an immediate nuclear ‘quarantine’ to prevent the Soviet Union from setting up any more such bases in Cuba.

“I have informed Mr. Khrushchev that I hope we can resume peaceful negotiations. I shall also request an emergency meeting of the UN Security Council. I have asked Ambassador Stephenson to present a resolution on behalf of the United States calling for the withdrawal of all missiles and other offensive weapons from Cuba under the supervision of the UN.

“It is my hope that you will ask your representatives in New York to work alongside us and support the above-mentioned move in the UN.”

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550 Ben Gurion’s letter to Kennedy, June 24th, 1962, Appendix.
551 Kennedy’s letter to Nasser, October 22nd, 1962, Appendix.
Nasser presented Kennedy’s letter to the presidential council on October 24th, 1962, stating that the UAR should pay a positive role in this regard and request a resolution preventing any country from providing another with nuclear power.

Nasser’s opinion was that if there were really missiles aimed at the US from Cuba, that was a serious matter, and that ‘while normally we would not agree to this blockade of Cuba, we are against foreign bases in any country and request that they be dismantled as soon as possible and the nuclear weapons removed’.

After this meeting, Nasser replied to Kennedy’s letter on October 31st, 1962, saying:

“First: We appreciate your cooperation with UN Secretary-General U-Thant, and believe, as do most peace-loving countries, that sincere cooperation within the framework of the UN is the right way to solve problems.

“Second: We deeply appreciate the fact that the procedures taken by the US – regardless of our opinion of them – were conducted in a manner free of hostility or aggression.

“Third: We hold in esteem your promise not to invade Cuba, which was instrumental in alleviating the tension.

“We would like to express our belief that the US, with all its power and influence, can be a force for peace like no other, and indeed has a historic responsibility before the whole of humanity in this regard.”

4. US arming of Israel – the theories and the facts
The prime issue for the Zionists was always the security of Israel; accordingly, they made sure to maintain close military ties with the US, their main supplier of weapons as well as donations, loans, and other forms of assistance.

More importantly, though kept secret, was that the US had pledged to guarantee the security of Israel, a promise which was kept by all US presidents, even Kennedy, who renewed his commitment to the integrity and safety of the Zionist state, and was followed by Johnson, who did the same!

552 Nasser’s letter to Kennedy, October 31st, 1962.
Notwithstanding, there were differences in policy between the two countries regarding the raids launched by the Israelis against the Arabs at the borders, and Israel’s refusal to cooperate with the UN and its peacekeeping forces in the Middle East. Other points of contention were Israel’s refusal to solve the problem of the Palestinian refugees, and its objection to the US initiative in asking other countries not to establish diplomatic missions in Jerusalem, amongst others.

All the above led the US to reconsider its policy with Israel at the same time that a US rapprochement took place with Egypt and the Arab world in general. The US made a decision to avoid special military relations with Israel – a decision which was never implemented – on the basis that having an alliance with Israel destroyed the balance the US wished to maintain in its relations with the countries of the Middle East.

This trend was confirmed by the US’s delay in selling Hawk missiles to Israel, wishing to avoid the responsibility of contributing missiles to the Arab-Israeli arms race. However, there was always the option that, if the CIA confirmed that Egypt had – or was about to receive – similar missiles from the USSR, the USA would then present Israel with the Hawks!553

Israel however insisted on repeatedly demanding the Hawk missiles, alleging that Egyptian military power was increasing! Nasser spoke with Badeau of the repercussions of selling these missiles to Israel, explaining that there would be a strong backlash from the Arab governments against the US for breaching its policy of not being an arms supplier to the Middle East, particularly to Israel.

Badeau informed the US Administration that selling Hawk or other missiles to Israel would be countered with a similar Soviet offer to provide missiles to the Arab countries! The US would then only have itself to blame for the increased role of Soviet arms in the Middle East.

Badeau then met with Nasser and informed him of Kennedy’s urgent wish to achieve an arms embargo in the Geneva Conference! Nasser replied that enforcing an arms embargo during the Palestine war had failed, and had operated against the Arabs, while Israel had been allowed to receive tanks and other weapons from France! Moreover, two of the three countries who had signed the 1950 Tripartite Agreement against aggression, supposedly to maintain peace in the

553 Memo from Talbot to Rusk, July 9th, 1962, US Policy Towards Israel.
region, had actually participated in attacking Egypt in 1956, and France had again provided Israel with weapons, aircraft, and pilots! So in view of this past record, Nasser had no confidence whatsoever that any arms limitation agreement would be effective against Israel!

Nasser also told Badeau that the UAR had no intention of attacking Israel, and that its policy was to build its armed forces as a deterrent to any potential Israeli attack, bearing in mind Israel’s expansionist intentions and the bitter experience of the Tripartite Aggression of 1956. 554

At this time, Kennedy was theoretically advocating a policy of arms limitation in the Middle East, and made efforts to achieve this end with both Nasser and Ben Gurion; in fact, the US foreign office was trying to encourage a meeting between Nasser and Ben Gurion, though they expected the former to refuse. 555 The truth is that just making that suggestion proved that the US politicians had no real understanding of the issues involved in the Palestinian cause and its history.

The contradiction in policy soon became evident when the Egyptian Ambassador in Washington, Mostafa Kamel, was informed of the USA’s decision ‘in principle, to sell short-range defensive surface-to-air missiles to Israel’! (It is a well-known fact that there is no such thing as ‘defensive’ missiles!). What was even more astonishing was that the ambassador was told that, ‘this represents no change in our policy or in our desire for long-range cooperation with the UAR!’ And that the US ‘continues to oppose an arms escalation in the area’! 556

In an attempt to win favour with Egypt, a three-year US aid programme, P.L. 480, was signed on October 6th, 1962, after a long delay. The timing was deliberately chosen in order to ‘to reduce the likelihood that Nasser would react violently when the Hawk deal with Israel was officially announced’!

The terms of the agreement granted the UAR a $10 million stabilization credit 557, and it was signed by direct order from Kennedy who had personally expressed interest that the deal be concluded. 558

554 Telegram from the Embassy in the UAR to the Department of State, August 24th, 1962.
555 Memo from Talbot to Rusk, July 9th, 1962.
557 Telegram from the Department of State to the Embassy in the UAR, September 19th, 1962.
558 Memo from Komer to Kennedy, October 5th, 1962.
On July 21\textsuperscript{st}, 1962, Nasser announced the UAR’s success in launching Egyptian-made surface-to-surface missiles with an 800 km range with the help of German technicians. US intelligence immediately conducted an estimation of the situation and concluded that it did not change the balance of power in the Middle East, though it did constitute a psychological blow aimed by Nasser at his Arab enemies and Israel and another step in the arms race in the region. They also concluded that the UAR did not have the capabilities to place nuclear warheads on their missiles, in spite of Egypt’s having a small nuclear reactor for research purposes.\textsuperscript{559}

Kennedy then gave instructions that the CIA take every possible measure to improve US intelligence on the Israeli nuclear programme as well as other Israeli and UAR advanced weapon programmes, and to arrive at a firmer evaluation of their import. Kennedy also requested that the next informal inspection of the Israeli reactor complex be undertaken promptly and to be as thorough as possible.\textsuperscript{560}

Kennedy met with Shimon Peres at the beginning of April, 1963, when the latter took the opportunity to launch an exaggerated diatribe against the UAR, claiming that, ‘it is the only Arab state that Israel truly fears’! He also made sure to mention the missiles owned by the UAR, etc.

Kennedy’s response was to voice the deep concern of the USA over any proliferation of nuclear weapons, expressing the hope that Israel should not develop or acquire this kind of weaponry.\textsuperscript{561}

On April 18\textsuperscript{th}, 1963, Kennedy sent Nasser a letter in which he said:

“I am quite concerned over the risks—and costs—inherent in the arms spiral in the Middle East. At the same time, I can understand your own security preoccupations, as well as those of Israel. I can assure you that we intend to maintain a balanced perspective on this problem, and to approach it in a fair minded and even-handed manner.”\textsuperscript{562}

However, Israeli pressure was unrelenting and the Zionist lobby influenced Congress; accusations began that the US was siding with

\textsuperscript{559} Memo from Komer to Kennedy, Washington, March 22\textsuperscript{nd}, 1963.
\textsuperscript{560} National Security Action Memo, Washington, March 26\textsuperscript{th}, 1963, Middle Eastern Nuclear Capacities.
\textsuperscript{561} Memo of telephone conversation between Talbot and Feldman, Washington, April 5\textsuperscript{th}, 1963.
\textsuperscript{562} Kennedy’s letter to Nasser, April 18\textsuperscript{th}, 1963, Appendix.
Egypt against Israel! And that US foreign policy concentrated only on the Middle East and its oil interests there.

At the same time, the US Administration was aware of the advantages of presenting aid to Egypt and improving relations with Nasser, listing a plethora of positives including seeing it as an opportunity to limit Soviet influence, curb agitation and action against vital Western interests, prevent incidents against US citizens and installations, help ensure the non-activation of the Arab-Israel problem and cooperation with UN peace-keeping machinery, ensure the true neutrality of the UAR on global and cold war issues, foster an increased interrelationship of the UAR with the West in manifold economic, cultural, scientific and other affairs, help modify anti-US propaganda and promote favourable treatment of the US in UAR news media, thus setting the tone for the rest of the Arab world, ensure the continued UAR disposition to suppress local communist parties in the Arab world and Africa, and finally, increase commercial opportunities for US throughout the region.\footnote{Memo from Brubeck to Bundy, Washington, May 8\textsuperscript{th}, 1963, Justification of US Aid to the UAR.}

At this stage, Kennedy sent a reassuring letter to Nasser on May 27\textsuperscript{th}, 1963 in which he said:

“US policy has not changed, nor do I see any current reason to change it. Of course, the Congress also plays a major role in aid matters. However, it is my policy to continue our programs of economic assistance to the UAR and my hope that the Congress will continue to see it that way too.”\footnote{Kennedy’s letter to Nasser, May 27\textsuperscript{th}, 1963, Appendix.}

Kennedy was impressed by the point made by Nasser in his previous letter of March 3\textsuperscript{rd}, 1963, when he had written:

“The UAR does not consider its mission as being the random distribution of the revolution among the other peoples of the Arab world; the best the UAR can do with regard to its revolutionary mission toward the Arabs is to be a practical example of the Arab’s ability to evolve his life towards a better future.”\footnote{Letter from Nasser to Kennedy, March 3\textsuperscript{rd}, 1963, Appendix.}

Kennedy responded to this with:
“I am sure you share my concern lest, in the current period of maneuver and flux in the Near East, untoward developments take place which will create acute problems for both of us.

“First, I am deeply troubled that if Jordan becomes the cockpit of an Arab struggle the peace of the Near East might well be destroyed by Israel’s intervention in Jordan, using the argument of its own security interest. We might be faced with a fait accompli. Should the other Arab states feel compelled to react in such a situation a major conflict might ensue—and one in which our assessment indicates that the Arab forces might not be at any advantage.

“The arms race holds the seeds of disaster, too, for all of us. We are gratified that no Near Eastern state has undertaken development of nuclear weapons, and we will continue to counsel against such a policy. The progress being made by Israel and the UAR in the application of nuclear energy to peaceful purposes bears promise for the welfare of the people of the area. Without proper safeguards, however, power reactors can be diverted to military objectives. Thus, Israel could have the capability to develop nuclear weapons in the next few years if it were to divert its efforts in that direction. Offensive missiles now under development both in Israel and in the UAR would also add a new and dangerous dimension.

“The US is urgently studying what we might do to help avoid serious trouble in the area. In this effort we are keeping Arab views and interests very much in mind. The fact that the security and integrity of Israel are of deep and lasting concern to the US is not a matter which has up to this point prevented the growth of friendly US-UAR relations.”

At the same time, Kennedy reviewed US policies, giving Israel a security guarantee in order to forestall possible Israel preventive warfare and to prevent proliferation of nuclear weapons. In return, the US would obtain firm assurances from Israel that it would not violate the peace, would cooperate more fully with United Nations peacekeeping forces, would desist from propaganda and activities designed to disrupt US relations with the Arabs, and finally, would adopt a more cooperative attitude towards solving the refugee problem.

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The extent of US bias towards Israel and its welfare is indisputable. No such ‘guarantee of security’ – to the best of my knowledge – has ever been given to an Arab country, not even those who are allies of the West! All it did in this regard was revive the tripartite agreement on the security of countries in the region, an agreement which events had proved to be stillborn!

Talbot objected to the guarantee given to Israel, but only on the grounds that the Soviets would then give the Arabs a similar guarantee!

The US Administration was fully aware that the Israelis did not only want a guarantee of their security, but rather to reach a fully-fledged defence alliance with the US, in addition to large-scale military aid!

Kennedy voiced his fears to his aides concerning nuclear weapons and the dangers of war over Jordan and the possibility of Israel occupying its West Bank.568

In this regard, Kennedy sent a personal envoy to Nasser, John McCloy,569 to stress the importance of avoiding an escalation of the nuclear and missile arms race between the UAR and Israel. McCloy proposed to Nasser that the UAR renounce the manufacture and use of nuclear weapons, and check the development or use of offensive missiles. In return, McCloy proposed that the United States monitor and inspect all critical sites to ensure that both sides refrain from breaching this commitment, adding that if Nasser did not agree to this, the United Nations could undertake this task. He also informed Nasser of what he already knew, namely that Israel had a nuclear reactor capable of producing nuclear weapons: the Dimona reactor.

Nasser queried the timing of this proposal, which he found perplexing, adding that he saw a number of difficulties: first of all, why at this time in particular was the UAR the only country singled out from amongst the non-nuclear powers and asked to give this commitment? Secondly, the problem of inspection and observance, as the UAR felt strongly about any form of military inspection and had refused it before several times. Moreover, the matter might be interpreted as an arrangement made between the UAR and Israel, which could cause problems to Egypt.

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568 Memo, President’s Meeting on McCloy Exercise, June 15th, 1963.
569 John McCloy, Presidential Advisor to President Kennedy.
Nasser preferred that Kennedy send him a letter concerning this subject, and expressed his willingness to provide a written reply stating that he had no intention of producing nuclear weapons, and no intention of attacking Israel. Nasser added that his strategy was purely defensive, and that he had had to acquire aircraft to offset Israel’s air force, particularly after the latter had acquired French Mirage planes. The missiles had also been acquired for the same reason; without them, he would have no counter threat.\footnote{Telegram from the Embassy in the UAR to the Department of State, June 28th, 1963.}

In his second meeting with McCloy, Nasser replied to Kennedy’s proposal by saying that while he appreciated the desire of the President to bring about stability in the area, which was in accordance with his own desires, he could not enter into an agreement with the US to renounce the production of weapons previously mentioned, because to do so would amount to a limitation in Egyptian sovereignty through agreement with a foreign power!

Moreover, such an arrangement would, in the atmosphere of political sensitivity pervading the country, be looked on as a sort of ‘protectorate’ or ‘satellite’ relationship, and accordingly he would not be in a position to enter into such an arrangement with the US. It was a matter of principle for him. Nor would this situation be altered if a similar arrangement were made between the US and Israel.

Next, he could not accept any inspection or observation arrangement. This was a traditional attitude on Egypt’s part, and he had to operate in the atmosphere of national and area sensitivity in which Egypt, as a newly independent country, found itself. Besides, so far as nuclear matters were concerned, there was nothing to inspect!

Nasser reiterated that he was not averse to some form of inspection if it were done through the United Nations, but he could not act individually with the US in this respect.

Nasser then referred to Israeli propaganda regarding the intensity of Egyptian military preparations, and that his main concern was the avoidance of any suggestion of individual action in response to Israeli propaganda or any suggestion of impairment of Egyptian sovereignty.

Nasser agreed to declare that he had no intention of producing nuclear weapons or of attacking Israel, stating that his strategy was counter-
strategy and retaliation rather than aggression. He added that he could not trust Israeli statements regarding their peaceful intentions!

Badeau then asked him what his attitude would be if he learned that the Israelis were misusing their reactor for the manufacture of weapon material. He replied with no hesitation, “defensive war. We would have no other choice”. He said he could not permit Israel to develop superiority in weapons! Nasser added that he had recently learned that the Israelis had just made an agreement for the delivery of 96 more Mirages from the French, and he would have to counter this. To maintain his balance with Israel, he had to have planes and missiles.

As for the inspection of missiles and missile development, he did not feel he could accept this, regardless of whether the inspection were conducted by the US or the UN or anyone else. He said he did not intend any great increase in his missile strength, and that it was very costly; hence, he did not intend to pursue it except insofar as he was compelled to preserve the military balance.

Nasser then referred to the US loan to Israel for the purchase of Hawk missiles, and to the step taken by the Bundestag in making illegal the assistance of German citizen-scientists to any foreign countries in the manufacture of weapons! Clearly, he said, this was aimed directly at Egypt and was the result of Israeli pressures. If necessary, added Nasser, he might give the German scientists Egyptian citizenship!571

After having read the McCloy report on his meetings with Nasser, Kennedy sent him the following verbal message on July 7th, 1963; a message which demonstrates sensitivity coupled with personal esteem for Nasser:

“Please inform Nasser that we sense on his part a question regarding why we had singled out the UAR for this approach. Actually this not so. Our concern regarding the spread of nuclear weapons is not limited to Near East but is world-wide... We have not singled out the UAR; on the contrary, we have pressed this matter with a number of countries, notably some of our closest allies.

“With respect to the timing of our approach, we have specific reasons for approaching Nasser at this time. These relate to the fact that both countries are now edging into the missile production field and the

Israelis in particular are well into the nuclear field... They are approaching the stage where they will have the capacity for producing a nuclear weapon within a few years if the arms race should expand into highly sophisticated fields... In our continuing determination to make certain Israel does not go a nuclear route, we want to be able to say to them that if they do not, we can assure them UAR will not and vice versa.

“This brings us to the question of verification. The UAR has indicated that as far as nuclear weapons are concerned, it has nothing to inspect and that it has no intention of going into the nuclear weapons field. We recognize that UAR’s present nuclear facility does not offer a weapons capability. But we would like to point out that when UAR rejects the principle of externally verified safeguards on grounds of sovereignty, it is taking a position which enables Israel to reject verification on the same grounds and maintain that the UAR is developing nuclear weapons secretly.

“Many countries have come increasingly to accept the application of safeguards to nuclear reactors out of the common interest in preventing the spread of nuclear weapons, so the UAR would not be alone in this regard. India, which has in past rejected safeguards, has accepted them for the large reactor at Tarapur, on the basis that the US would do the verification first, and later that the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) should do so. In the case of the UAR, the primary verification role need not be performed by the US but could be done on a multilateral basis such as IAEA or by other countries.

“We recognize that question of missiles presents greater difficulties for the UAR, and on the basis of talks with McCloy, we feel we have a better understanding of how your country views its missile effort. We appreciate your assurance that the UAR does not plan to develop missiles for nuclear warheads, but we wonder if you might not wish to consider how your missile program may look to others and what some of its effects, even though not intended, may have been.

“Public disclosure of the UAR missile program has lent itself to exploitation by others and given them a handle with which to launch their propaganda campaigns... We are concerned that Israel is accelerating its own missile effort in response to the UAR’s missile developments. We do not know where this would lead. Our suggestion that the UAR might wish to consider not pressing its missile development program was made with these considerations in mind.
We did not have in mind any public abandonment of your missile effort, but rather that the UAR exercise restraint...

“We fully understand the UAR’s political apprehensions regarding extensive international verification procedures. It is certainly not our desire to place the UAR in a sort of protectorate or satellite position... Even we in the US in our own relations with the Soviet Union have decided, if satisfactory arms limitations can be agreed upon, to accept verification arrangements which would give assurance both to ourselves and Soviet Union...

“In sum it is our belief that the US and the UAR share a common interest in ensuring that technological development in the Near East does not take what could prove to be a disastrous turn. Protective war is not a solution but a last resort. and one that would be much more costly to the UAR and far less likely to succeed than the approach we are suggesting... We think that arms limitation with assurance for both sides offers a better way.”

Nasser’s reply to this message was that he had consulted his immediate circle, who confirmed Nasser’s immediate reaction that inspection and verification in any form would be difficult for the UAR to accept because it would imply reintroduction of Western control.

Nasser was aware of the dangers inherent in the situation, and in his handwritten notes jotted down the following:

“The Israeli enemy: we need to adopt a strategy that prevents Israel from attacking us. Israel’s policy is built on imposing peace, and imposing peace necessitates waging a battle with Egypt and defeating it.

“Our strategy must be one of quick deterrence; light, mobile troops that can achieve their targets at lightning speed. Traditional means are ineffectual in a war with Israel because of their settlements.”

On July 30th, 1963, Nasser sent a personal letter to Kennedy confirming the UAR’s intention to adhere to the tripartite atomic test ban treaty.

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573 Ibid.
574 Nasser’s letter to Kennedy, July 30th, 1963, Appendix.
Correspondence continued between the two presidents; in a verbal message from Kennedy to Nasser on September 12th, 1963, Kennedy asked Ambassador Badeau to convey his appreciation for Nasser’s prompt support of the limited nuclear test ban treaty and for signing it without delay.

Kennedy added that he was encouraged by Nasser’s statements that the UAR had no intention of attacking any of its neighbouring countries and that the UAR’s missile programme was intended only as a deterrent or to respond to any attack.575

5. **Israel succeeds in sabotaging relations between the UAR and the United States**

The Israeli leaders began their attempts to undermine relations between Kennedy and Nasser; during the visit of Golda Meir, the Israeli Foreign Minister, to New York to attend the UN General Assembly sessions in September 1963, she met with Joseph Sisco576 and told him, “the main problem is Nasser!” She then went on to talk of the high cost of the Yemen war, implying that US aid to Egypt was being used for that purpose!

She also voiced her concern about the German scientists in Egypt who were helping out with the missiles, claiming that the UAR missiles would be capable of reaching Tel Aviv by 1965, saying: “Nasser will not start a war unless he feels he can win! So Israel needs a strong deterrent!” She added that she was particularly worried about tanks and missiles. And for good measure, she alleged that there was proof that the UAR was building a nuclear capability, and was working on advanced chemical and radiological warfare!

Sisco asked her where these facilities were, as US intelligence did not support her claims.577

In a similar vein, Eshkol during his meeting with the US ambassador in Tel Aviv, expressed the hope that the economic crisis in the UAR would not lead to an increase in US aid to Egypt! The US ambassador’s reply was that the US was giving aid to the UAR so that Nasser would find it in his best interests to proceed prudently! And that if this aid were to

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575 Verbal message from Kennedy to Nasser, September 12th, 1963, Appendix.
576 Joseph Sisco, Assistant Secretary of State for Near Eastern Affairs, specializing in matters related to the UN and other international organizations.
577 Memo of Conversation, New York, September 30th, 1963, Secretary’s Delegation to the 18th Session of the UNGA, Middle East Affairs – Israeli Security.
be discontinued, it would have an adverse effect and make Nasser more dependent on the Soviet Union!\textsuperscript{578}

Other Israeli representatives also spoke with US officials, repeating what Golda Meir had said and voicing their fears of the ‘missiles and sophisticated weapons’ the UAR had which could make them confident enough to attack Israel! They exaggerated the UAR’s tank and naval capabilities, taking the opportunity to ask for more tanks and air defence equipment from the US!\textsuperscript{579}

Around this time, the US refused a loan for agricultural products that was scheduled to be given to the UAR. The excuse given by the US Administration was that it was necessary for the UAR to provide proof that the US aid was not going towards paying for part of the cost of the war in Yemen, where more than 50,000 Egyptian troops were stationed!\textsuperscript{580}

This meant that the US had begun to respond to the allegations of the Israeli officials by putting pressure on the UAR using aid as a tool!

Isaac Rabin then met Komer in Washington and explained to him using a map of the region, probable UAR offensive tactics, saying that he expected the attack to be launched from the south of the Gaza strip!

Komer saw through this ruse and voiced the opinion that the Israeli estimate of UAR capabilities was exaggerated. He also doubted the Israeli view that the UAR would be over-confident and a danger to Israel because of the weapons it was manufacturing, nor did he see any deterrent gap of note in conventional weapons between the UAR and Israel and accordingly, no danger of a UAR attack as the Israelis were claiming.

When Rabin reiterated the need for Israel to have a military force sufficient to deter any UAR attack as an excuse for obtaining more weapons from the US, Komer assured him that the US would intervene at once in the case of Israel’s being attacked, adding that Nasser could see that the US had tactical air as close as Adana, the Sixth Fleet was nearby, and UK Bomber Command was in Cyprus.\textsuperscript{581}

\textsuperscript{578} Telegram from the Department of State to the Embassy in Israel, October 30\textsuperscript{th}, 1964.
\textsuperscript{579} Circular Telegram from the Department of State, Washington, to Certain Posts, November 13\textsuperscript{th}, 1963.
\textsuperscript{580} Telegram from the Department of State to the Embassy in the UAR, November 14\textsuperscript{th}, 1964.
\textsuperscript{581} Memo for the Record, Washington, November 14\textsuperscript{th}, 1963.
Only two days later, the US transferred heavy water to Israel for the production of nuclear bombs, in addition to 25 million dollars’ worth of Hawk missiles! Talbot told Rusk that it was impossible to preserve US interests without preserving those of Israel!\(^{582}\)

At the same time - the day after Kennedy’s assassination, to be exact – US officials informed Kaissouni, who was in Washington at the time, that it would be difficult to carry on with US aid to Egypt while the latter was spending large sums on the war in Yemen! Then they laid down more conditions.\(^{583}\)

It is true to say that during the last six months of Kennedy’s rule, a shift had occurred in US policy leading to a further rapprochement with Egypt. The US had recognized the Yemeni Republic in spite of the objection of its ally, Britain, even though this was for reasons related to US interests as previously outlined. And when pressure was applied in Congress to stop aid to Egypt, Kennedy told them to, “remember what happened in Egypt when we withdrew our offer to fund the construction of the High Dam!”. Furthermore, it was Kennedy who supported the implementation of UN Resolution 1949/63 regarding the repatriation or compensation of Palestinian refugees.\(^{584}\)

While the above might not constitute a radical change in US policy, it nevertheless represents an attempt at understanding that had been conspicuously lacking in US leaders since the establishment of Israel in 1948!

Notwithstanding, the truth of US policy – as revealed in Komer’s meeting with Peres – was that despite whatever the US might publicly declare in terms of adopting a neutral policy towards Israel and the Arabs, this was contrary to the truth and the US had, ever since 1947, been biased towards Israel and was its strongest supporter. All that had happened in Kennedy’s time was that the US had sought to appear balanced in its policy in order to maintain its influence in the Arab world and protect its interests and those of Israel (its oil and its bases), while at the same time preventing the spread of Soviet influence in the region. US policy had witnessed a resounding failure in the matter of the High Dam, which had given Khrushchev a golden opportunity to sell Soviet weapons in the Middle East, thus creating a true threat to


\(^{583}\) Memo from Talbot to Rusk, November 23\(^{rd}\), 1963, Opportunities Ahead.

\(^{584}\) Heikal, “Kennedy and his Age”, Al Ahram, November 29\(^{th}\), 1963, ibid.
Israel. The US therefore realised the importance of not driving the Arabs towards alignment with Moscow.

In spite of the belief that the US had switched to a pro-Nasser policy, it had actually attempted to curb the Egyptian role in the region by granting US aid to Libya, the Sudan, Ethiopia, Saudi Arabia, and Jordan – in other words, all the countries surrounding Egypt!

The US thus proved that it was willing to deal with Nasser when that was in its interests, and to avoid his turning to the Soviet Union.

Nasser spoke with Willy Brandt, the Mayor of Berlin, whom he met in Cairo on November 8th, 1963, expressing his bitterness at the US tactics of using US aid as a means of pressurizing him.

“The Suez crisis proved to us that we cannot depend on the West, but US policies during the Kennedy administration led me to hope that things could be different. Now, however, it is clear that we are back to 1957!”

Nasser had already begun to feel the increased pressure exerted upon him by Kennedy during the last days of his tenure regarding the question of maintaining a balance in arms between the Arabs and Israel, Egypt’s nuclear activities and its production of missiles, and the Palestinian refugee problem.

6. The balance swings in favour of Israel in the relationship between Nasser and Johnson

a. US aid and its importance to both Egypt and the US:

When Johnson assumed power, there was a reevaluation of US relations with both Egypt and Israel. The CIA did not see that the production of Egyptian missiles constituted a threat to Israel, as the latter claimed. Israeli leaders had announced that the Egyptian missiles could have a detrimental effect on the Israeli morale and that they could even disrupt military mobilization! At the same time, they had negotiated a deal with a French company for the purchase of 250 surface to surface missiles!586

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586 Special National Intelligence Estimate, Washington, Dec. 4, 1963, the UAR Missile Program & its Implications for Israel.
With the advent of Johnson to the White House, Badeau sent him the following message:

“Egypt is the paramount Eastern Arab state and the leader of the nationalist reform movement. Although the drive for Arab unity has slowed, Nasser remains the most widely respected Arab leader. This gives the UAR a significant independent capacity to affect American interests in the area.

“Our interests are: to blunt Soviet penetration; to preserve Western access to sea and air routes and to Arab oil; and to promote peace and progress in the area. Our policy has featured: extension of economic assistance; evenhandedness in area disputes; and readiness to commit our power and prestige to the defense of our interests.”

Actually, US partisanship of Israel was always abundantly clear, even during Kennedy’s tenure.

In Badeau’s opinion:

“The wisdom of these policies has been shown by an increase in American influence at the expense of Soviet influence since 1956. In addition, inter-Arab quarrels have been addressed.”

Badeau goes on to cite Egypt’s public position on the issue of the Jordan waters as proof of the success of US policies.

Actually, the above claims were contrary to the facts, for in spite of the convening of several Arab summit meetings, the quarrels remained the same. The disengagement of forces between the UAR and Saudi Arabia in Yemen failed, and Jordan maintained its hostility towards the UAR.

Badeau also claimed:

“The UAR has kept the Israeli question in the icebox, and is now considered to be likely to attack Israel only if it believes Israel has begun to produce nuclear weapons.”

The truth is that Nasser never had intended to attack Israel; it was Israel that had claimed Egypt’s intention to attack, a claim which Nasser tirelessly refuted, declaring that his policy was one of defence. As for keeping the Israeli problem ‘in the icebox’, this
never happened, which is amply proved by Nasser’s unchanging stance on the Palestinian refugee problem and the issue of the Jordan river throughout the summit meetings.

Badeau also drew Johnson’s attention to the fact US demands were being met:

“Western access to the Suez Canal seems assured, and the Egyptians have shown an increasing appreciation of the advantage of closer cooperation with the West.”

At this point, I must ask how, exactly, did he come to that conclusion?! The Soviet Union was the essential supplier of arms to the UAR, while the West supplied Israel both openly and covertly with the weapons they needed!

Badeau went on to say:

“The remaining problems between Cairo and Washington are manageable. Egyptian withdrawal from Yemen has been slow, but Nasser recognizes the disengagement principle. There is no present threat to the Saudi Government or to Aden, in fact there might be chaos in Yemen if the UAR moved out too fast.

“The UAR remains heavily dependent on Soviet military aid, but Western aid—especially PL 480—has helped preserve nonalignment.”

Badeau concluded that cessation of U.S. aid to the UAR would not moderate Nasser’s policies, and would only serve to nullify the gains made since 1956 and jeopardize US interests.587

b. The problem of diverting the Jordan river:
The problem of the Jordan river waters came to the fore again with Israel’s announcement that it intended to divert the water to serve its interests. This led Nasser to call for a summit meeting in January 1964, to be held in Cairo for the purpose of discussing the steps that could be taken by the Arabs to address the proposed Israeli projects.

Nasser told Badeau that he had been thinking of holding such a meeting since the summer of 1963 but had felt it would not be feasible as long as the Baath party was in control in Syria and Iraq. He had therefore waited until the Baath collapsed in Iraq, which consequently led to the isolation and weakening of the Baath in

587 Summary of Badeau’s letter to the President, January 3rd, 1964.
Syria, putting them in a position where they could not refuse to attend the conference.

Badeau explained the US's position regarding the Jordan river to Nasser, namely confirming the rights of all states bordering the river to its waters, i.e. championing Israel. Badeau then pointed out that Egypt, as a downstream user of Nile waters originating beyond its borders, should be particularly sensitive to the correct riparian position. Nasser at once responded by saying that the withdrawal of Nile waters was based upon an agreement between the countries concerned and no such agreement had been made between the Arab states and Israel!

Badeau responded that the Johnston Plan had evoked a technical ‘meeting of minds’ by all parties concerned and on this basis the US government believed it to be of benefit to all. Nasser then asked:

“Do you mean if we were to divert headwaters of Jordan, we would be subject to Israeli aggression?”

Badeau responded in the affirmative.

“This means we must be strong and prepared,” was Nasser’s reply.\textsuperscript{588}

c. The US increases its military support of Israel
The US began to feel it was facing a difficult and challenging year with regard to the Middle East. Tensions were on the rise between the Arab nations and Israel, and the US, influenced by the non-stop Israeli propaganda, was concerned for the safety of Israel. Moreover, its strategic interests in the region were threatened due to Europe’s growing dependence on access to Middle East oil, in addition to the US’s need for strategic transit and communications in the region. Last but not least was the importance of curbing Soviet penetration in the area.

Several issues came to the fore which the US saw as detrimental to its position in the Middle East:
1. The strong Arab reaction to the Israeli project for diverting the Jordan river.
2. Israel’s nuclear capabilities after completing the Dimona reactor.

\textsuperscript{588} Tel. from the Embassy in the UAR to the Department of State, Cairo, Jan. 7, 1964.
3. The threat of the arms race between the UAR and Israel.
4. The conflict between the Arab governments and the Western petroleum companies.

The experience of the past few years had taught the US that the key to a constructive policy in the Middle East was to maintain a balance in its relations with Israel and the Arabs, while admitting that this was no easy task.\textsuperscript{589}

The truth is that this ‘balance’ never happened; all that did occur was a rapprochement between Kennedy and Nasser, but the US remained biased towards Israel, committed to safeguarding its integrity and security, providing it with economic aid, weapons, and during Kennedy’s tenure, with Hawk ground-air missiles, as well as unfailingly backing it in the United Nations.

Can that be called ‘balance’?!

The US realised that it would need to address its relations with the Arabs in 1964 to offset the storms that were expected as a result of the above-mentioned issues and to make an effort to counter Arab resentment.

Accordingly, when Israel requested more weapons from the US – five hundred tanks under the Military Assistance Program – and when Prime Minister Eshkol also wrote to President Kennedy in 1963 saying that Israel needed assistance in obtaining naval equipment and missiles, the US’s declared policy was to refuse to become a major supplier of offensive weapons to states likely to be involved in an Arab-Israel war, and encouraged Israel to obtain its requirements for such weapons in Europe, promising to back these requests and recommend that they be fulfilled.

True to its partisanship of Israel, the US compensated for refraining to supply further weapons to Israel by reminding its leaders that Israel had both public and private assurances of US commitment to its integrity and security! And when a review of US military capability to respond to possible aggression against Israel took place, it completely satisfied President Kennedy that the US could deploy its forces to meet any potential threat within 30 hours! Eshkol was informed of this.

\textsuperscript{589} Memorandum from Rusk to Johnson, Washington, January 16\textsuperscript{th}, 1964, Arab-Israeli problems.
The US administration under Johnson saw that this reduced the need for Israel to press towards weapons escalation that would almost certainly throw the Arabs closer to the Soviets.\textsuperscript{590}

Nasser was being completely frank when he informed the US that the acquisition of a nuclear weapons capability by Israel would be cause for war no matter how suicidal for the Arabs. The US realised that it was vital for the preservation of peace in the Middle East to reassure Nasser as to the peaceful nature of the reactor Israel had begun to activate at Dimona and which, up until January 18\textsuperscript{th}, 1964, had no nuclear weapons making capability.\textsuperscript{591}

After an exhaustive review of US policies in the Middle East, Johnson sent a letter to Nasser dated February 27\textsuperscript{th}, 1964, in which he expressed the hope that the mutual respect and the frank and friendly dialogue that had characterized Nasser’s relationship with Kennedy could continue, and that they could carry forward policies of constructive and fruitful cooperation.\textsuperscript{592}

The US had carried out an inspection of the Dimona reactor in 1961 during Kennedy’s presidency, and had asked Ben Gurion to reassure Nasser as to the peaceful nature of the 24-megawatt reactor Israel had activated at Dimona. Israel did not object to this initially; however, during the last exchange of correspondence between President Kennedy and Prime Minister Eshkol in August 1963, the latter did not agree to reassuring Nasser - the only one out of all the nations with whom he took this stance!

The US persisted on passing on the above-mentioned information to Nasser, especially after having sent Hawk missiles to Israel, hoping thus to prevent a drastic UAR move to acquire a new level of Soviet weaponry.\textsuperscript{593}

Johnson sent a letter to Eshkol saying:

“We are disturbed lest the steps which Israel may contemplate taking may unnecessarily contribute to a heightened arms race in the region without in fact contributing to your security...

“We must work together to minimize undesirable repercussions and devise steps to avoid unnecessary increases in Arab antagonism, with the consequent weakening of the forces of moderation. At
stake is United States influence with the Arabs, which we see as an essential component of our ability to help bring about any improvement in the relations between Israel and its neighbors.\textsuperscript{594}

Johnson decided to broach the subject of Egypt’s ground-to-ground missiles with Nasser, the danger of which had been exaggerated by the Israelis. The US saw these as a step forward in the arms race, especially as Israel was demanding more weapons claiming an imbalance between itself and the UAR as a result of the latter’s having acquired Soviet arms as well as developing weapons domestically.

The US was also closely monitoring Israel’s nuclear project and had decided that there was no proof of any nuclear weapons being produced for the time being, though they did not discount the possibility of this happening in the future. Johnson, like Kennedy before him, announced his firm stand against the proliferation of nuclear weapons.\textsuperscript{595}

Komer proposed to Johnson that Nasser should be advised that if he were to continue to acquire weapons from Moscow, then the US would do the same for Israel.\textsuperscript{596} Actually, the US was already giving Israel what it wanted.

Badeau then conveyed the following US proposals to Nasser:

1. Some unobtrusive understanding on limiting the development of surface-to-surface missiles and other sophisticated weapons, with the possibility of verification through inspection! The fact that Nasser’s decision could affect US aid was hinted at. Nasser was also told that the US was not requesting this only for compelling military reasons, but also for very strong economic reasons in both countries.

2. That Nasser should accept inspection by the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) for future reactors; India’s acceptance of this procedure was referred to. Such inspection in no way constituted a derogation of sovereignty, as Nasser had suggested to McCloy, but would encourage the US to place the Dimona reactor under IAEA supervision as well!

\textsuperscript{594} Johnson’s letter to Eshkol, February 20\textsuperscript{th}, 1964.
\textsuperscript{595} Memo from Rusk to President Johnson, Washington, February 25\textsuperscript{th}, 1964. Resumption of Near East Arms Limitation Probe.
\textsuperscript{596} Memo from Komer to President Johnson, Washington, February 26\textsuperscript{th}, 1964.
3. Johnson requested a letter from Nasser stating that the UAR had no intention of developing or acquiring nuclear weapons. Nasser raised the possibility of a collective agreement in this regard.

Badeau also referred to the fact that while the US and the Soviet Union had not come to a formal agreement with regard to arms limitation, they had quietly sought to limit further increases in military budgets, and had concurred in the prohibition of nuclear weapons in outer space. This was an example that the UAR and Israel could follow.

Nasser replied to the US demands by observing that the core of the problem between the US and the UAR was Israel. “It has always been this way!” he added. Nasser went on to explain that the UAR had to maintain its defenses. It did not trust Israel. In 1955, the US had talked about achieving some balance between Israel’s forces and all Arab forces, but Israel had moved into Sinai and suddenly fallen upon UAR units there. The first news he and his officers had heard of this was conveyed by an Israeli broadcast! None of them could forget those days of 1956. There was no point, therefore, in discussing limitation of arms, because the UAR and all Arabs just cold not trust Israel.

As for the missiles, Nasser said that the UAR had begun its missile program in 1960 to develop a deterrent against growing Israeli strength. He had also started building aircraft then. Nasser explained that he felt that the UAR must develop its own aircraft and missiles because at that time, the Soviets, with whom the UAR had some disputes, were refusing to provide spare parts and otherwise making it clear that they were not a completely trustworthy source of arms. The UAR had accordingly sought arms elsewhere, including the US, without success; therefore, Nasser said, he felt that the UAR had no choice but to develop its own planes and missiles, adding that his main task was to increase the quality of their performance, for they were as yet not completely accurate.

Nasser added that the UAR had not acquired SAM missiles from the Soviets as they were very expensive, and the UAR could not hope to cover the whole country or even all important spots, unlike Israel with its US-purchased Hawks. The UAR was vulnerable because, unlike the US, it did not have full radar coverage of its frontiers. These deficiencies increased the need for a deterrent.
Regarding nuclear weapons, Nasser commented during this two-hour meeting that nuclear weapons were another matter, and that the UAR had no intention of developing such weapons. Strategic nuclear weapons could not in any case be used against Israel because of its being such a small country that a strategic nuclear bomb could spread destruction in Arab lands outside Israel! Nasser added that he would consider the matter of confirming that he had no intention of developing nuclear weapons and that he could possible state this in a letter to Johnson.

Regarding the IAEA safeguards, Nasser said he thought it might be possible for the UAR to accept these at the appropriate time. He added that the UAR was now seeking to construct a large nuclear reactor for peaceful purposes. It was possible, said Nasser, that once the reactor was ready to operate, the UAR could announce its acceptance of IAEA safeguards.\textsuperscript{597}

At the same time, Johnson was trying to put pressure on Israel; writing to Eshkol, he said:

“I am distressed to learn from Ambassador Barbour that you feel unable to approve of our reassuring President Nasser about the peaceful character of the Dimona reactor. We are far from confident that apprehension as to Israel’s atomic potential will, as you suggest, help deter Nasser from attacking Israel. Quite the contrary, we believe that Nasser’s fear of a developing Israeli nuclear power may drive him to a choice between accelerating the UAR military buildup or a desperate pre-emptive attack! Either of these choices would have the gravest effects on the security of Israel. We do not intend to provide him with details, but reassuring him will serve to ease Arab-Israeli tensions. Therefore, I hope you will reconsider your decision on this matter, as our ultimate interest, like yours, is Israel’s security”\textsuperscript{598}

Eshkol responded to Johnson by saying that while he appreciated the public and private assurances concerning the security of Israel, Israel’s ‘basic philosophy’ was self-defence. He voiced his doubt that if the UAR backed by the Soviet Union were to attack Israel, the USA would intervene on Israel’s behalf!

\textsuperscript{597} Telegram from the Embassy in the UAR to the Department of State, March 4\textsuperscript{th}, 1964.
\textsuperscript{598} Letter from Johnson to Eshkol, March 19\textsuperscript{th}, 1964.
There followed a string of exaggerations in Eshkol’s letter, including the extent to which the Egyptian missile programme posed a threat to Israel, and the claim that the UAR was first in jets including bombers, and in navy and tanks! All this for the sake of acquiring the 500 tanks they had asked for as well as more weapons – bearing in mind that they had already contracted a deal with France for missiles superior to Nasser’s!

In the same spirit of obstinacy, Eshkol asked whether the US government was ‘certain that the UAR would not put gas warheads on its missiles’?

Eshkol then asked the US to help finance its purchase of tanks from Europe, saying that the cost of French Mirage jets was enormous: 60–70 Mirages cost Israel more than $100 million, plus spare parts and cost of training in France!599

The US side acknowledged Israel’s need to upgrade its tanks after Eshkol drew a comparison with those of the UAR. However, the US also wished to avoid significant arms imbalance in either direction, while stressing that US commitment to Israel was fundamental no matter what US political changes might occur, though ‘absolute security does not exist.’ They reminded Eshkol of the power of the US Sixth Fleet which was ready to back it – which was later proved true during the Israeli aggression on the Arab countries in 1967.

The question now facing the US government was this: could the US further its interests in the Middle East by carrying on its current policy towards Nasser which included a constructive dialogue and economic assistance, or should it work towards restricting Nasser’s freedom of action by cutting off US aid?

The discussion then began. The UAR policies viewed as troublesome by the USA concerned Israel, the refusal by the UAR to allow Western bases in the Middle East, and UAR intervention in neighbouring states, particularly Yemen – all long-standing issues. However, the UAR had the political and economic power, independent of United States assistance, to jeopardize United States and British interests in the region if it should determine to do so. It remained the most populous, most powerful, and most influential of the Arab states, with a capability not only to move but

599 Telegram from the Embassy in Israel to the Department of State, April 7th, 1964.
also to lead other Arab states against Western interests. Cessation of United States aid would not reduce this capability!

It is worth noting that those US officials who advocated ‘tougher measures against Nasser’ were unaware that the UAR believed that the US had already adopted this policy: the US had almost completely frozen US aid to Egypt since mid-1963, and personal attacks against Nasser had taken place in Congress and in the American press, added to which the US had supported Israel’s diverting the Jordan River! All these developments had raised doubts about the intentions of the United States and roused the antagonism of the Arabs towards the US and towards the West in general.600

The events of the 1950s were brought up again when the US had tried in the mid-50’s to push Nasser back by confrontation. The damage done to Western interests had been enormous. And since 1961, the balance had become substantially different. The Middle East was now being swept by the forces of revolutionary modernization, and in any confrontation with the West, the Arabs had the built-in strategic advantage of contesting on home ground, where Western military superiority was nullified by the nuclear stalemate and the force of neutral opinion. In a contest confined to political and economic action, the Arabs could do serious damage to Western interests, and in a struggle between the Arab states and the Western powers, the Soviets would be the only winners!

The Americans realised that any challenge to the UAR would be a challenge to the entire Arab world! US vulnerabilities in the area and the capabilities of UAR propaganda would facilitate the propagation of anti-US and anti-Israel sentiments and would consolidate the Arabs against the US, not only in the Middle East but also in North Africa.

US politicians also knew that the US had enjoyed influence and a degree of immunity from pressures throughout the region in recent years – since the beginning of the Nasser-Kennedy dialogue – and that the challenge of a policy change could reduce US position in the area to the confines of a ‘fortress Israel’ surrounded by a hostile and increasingly powerful Arab world!

600 Action Memo from Talbot to Rusk, Washington, April 20, 1964, US Policy Toward UAR.
At the same time, in the case of the US’s changing its policies and adopting a tougher position towards Nasser, UAR pressures could be mounted against civilian overflight rights (access to Africa, the Middle East, and South Asia), United States commerce (half a billion dollars a year), United States oil interests (a billion dollars a year in direct benefit to the balance of payments), United States presence generally, and against any trend toward eventual accommodation between the Arabs and Israel.

Moreover, a policy change would polarize the Middle East, with the Arabs solidified into an anti-Israel, anti-American bloc, with increased cooperation with the Soviets to confront the United States and its protégé, Israel.

However, US politicians estimated that Nasser had not cast his lot with the Soviet bloc, nor had he turned implacably anti-West. On the contrary, there was evidence that the UAR wished to strengthen its relations with the US, as evidenced by the tapering off of propaganda on the issue of the Wheelus base. Moreover, UAR officials had told the US that anti-United States commentary in Egyptian media had been prohibited!

An analysis of UAR objectives was made; these included reduction of the military threat from Israel, and eventual elimination of western military bases from the Arab region. The point of contention here was that the US needed to retain the Wheelus base through 1970!

As for US objectives in the Middle East, these were premised on an eventual normalization between Israel and the UAR, and on using the US assistance program as the ‘carrot’ which could restrain or contain UAR action against the United States. Without it, they would not be able to maintain meaningful relations with the UAR, and would also promote Arab militancy toward Israel and would put US interests and US bases at risk.

The conclusion was not to change US policy at that point in time, as it provided a durable position for the US in the Middle East for the coming years.

At this time, the CIA also presented a report on Nasser’s policies domestically, in the Arab world, in the non-alignment camp, and worldwide. The objective of the research was to try and ascertain
where he was heading, what he intended to do, and the impact of his actions on the interests of the United States.

In the opinion of the CIA, Nasser’s prime objective was to create a new order in the Arab world, and to build a prosperous Egypt and reinforce its independence and dignity as well as that of the Arab world in general. The CIA also saw that Nasser wished to bring about Arab solidarity under his aegis, and that the elimination of foreign influence was essential for achieving his objectives! He also believed (they thought) that a strong military force was basic to his own retention of power!

Since Western influence in the Middle East was still stronger than that of the Communist states, Nasser’s campaign against the status quo was more damaging to US interests than to the Soviets; having said that, they acknowledged that Nasser’s policies were not based on damaging Western interests but rather on serving the interests of the UAR! Nasser was fully aware of the need to maintain tolerable relations with both the US and the Soviet Union, as he depended on the former for food and on the latter for arms and for help in constructing the High Dam, and on each for the political backing that kept him from becoming unacceptably dependent on the other. His basic consideration was to remain nonaligned; in particular, he would not want to see Soviet military bases and special political positions in the Middle East replace those of the West.

As for their expectations, they estimated that Nasser would continue to work towards establishing governments favourable to him, and to get rid of all Western military and political bases in the Middle East, while supporting Arab nationalists – with the exception of the Baathists – both with propaganda and material aid. They saw that Nasser’s principal short-term target was Aden, where there were opportunities in the form of the people’s opposition to the occupation, but that he would be wary of an open military confrontation with Britain.

The CIA report also estimated that Nasser hoped to see Israel eliminated as a state, and that he felt that in the near future, he would have the military power that would enable him to defeat it. Also, that he would oppose any Western moves to reinforce Israel’s political standing or military strength.601

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The above report, as usual, reflects a lack of understanding, or disregard, of the nature, motivations, and objectives of politics; the CIA seems sometimes to be heading in a direction opposed to the politics of its own government, an example of which was the CIA plot to assassinate Nasser in 1965 during the period when the Nasser-Johnson dialogue was taking place.

The same irrational, biased logic spawned the report on Nasser and his politics drawn up by the CIA!

First of all, Nasser always encouraged Arab solidarity and the union of any Arab countries even if Egypt was not part of it. His belief in Arab unity was genuine and deeply-rooted.

Secondly, to say that Nasser was careful to build a strong military force in order to remain in control is a deliberate fabrication. No one, not even his enemies, can deny Nasser's popularity not only in his own country but throughout the Arab world. The truth is that Nasser was obliged to build a military force to defend Egypt against the dangers of Israeli expansion, which was amply proved on June 5th, 1967, when Israel attacked three Arab countries and occupied their land!

Thirdly, regarding Egypt's relations with the Soviet Union, let us not forget that it was the USSR that agreed to sell arms to Egypt in 1955 when Israeli aggression intensified against the Egyptians and Arabs of Gaza and Khan Younis across the Egyptian-Israeli borders. Egypt's resorting to the Eastern Bloc for weapons only came after both Britain and the United States refused to sell arms to Egypt. British documents later revealed that both Britain and the US had agreed not to arm Egypt unless it made peace with Israel!

Fourth: Nasser believed strongly in the right of all countries to freedom and development, and in not involving Third World countries in the Cold War between the US and the USSR and its allies. This was the reason for his support of liberation movements in the Arab world such as that in Algeria, and in Africa where most of the countries were occupied in the Fifties. He then led, together with Nehru and Tito, the non-alignment movement that began in Bandung in April, 1955, and became a prominent element in global politics and in the United Nations.
d. The announcement of Johnson’s evasive policy for arms limitation:
Johnson announced this policy in a speech, then wished to ascertain Nasser’s opinion regarding it before Eshkol’s scheduled visit to Washington on June 1st, 1964.

Accordingly, Badeau met with Nasser in an attempt to convince him concerning arms limitation, arguing that Israeli financial and technical capability was such that they would match, and even surpass, every step taken by the UAR. The result would be that UAR security would never be completely established, in addition to which the growing financial burden would make it increasingly difficult for the UAR to support weapons and economic progress at same time!

Moreover, Badeau argued, the US - a great power - had embarked on a course of self-disciplined restraint in aspects of weapon development vis-a-vis the Soviets, who had also taken similar steps without formal agreement or special verification procedures steps. In the same manner, some advance could be made in the matter without formal bilateral negotiations with Israel.

Badeau then repeated that the US government was deeply concerned over all nuclear development and particularly over the possibility of nuclear weapons in the Middle East, and asked that the IAEA safeguards be accepted for the sake of peace in the Middle East and in the whole world. In an attempt to persuade Nasser, Badeau said this would be, “one of most effective and practical steps to meet Arab fears that Israel may be developing nuclear weapons.”

Badeau went on to say that although the United States did not share the Arab belief that Israel was an expansionist state (!), the US vigorously opposed any Israeli expansionism beyond its borders and would react strongly to any aggressive threat against states in the area.

Regarding this point in particular, events proved what the Zionist creed had always striven to achieve: a policy of expansion, achieved in stages, the first of which was the Judaization of the territory it occupied as a result of the 1967 aggression, namely the Jordanian West Bank, the Syrian Golan Heights, and Sinai in Egypt!

In conclusion, Badeau asked Nasser to give the US government assurances that the UAR was prepared not to go beyond its present
level on either the number or sophistication of its advanced weapons, particularly rockets. Badeau added that on this basis, it would be possible to obtain a similar undertaking from Israel, and most importantly the eschewing of nuclear weapon development.

The UAR’s agreement to the procedures of the IAEA would assist the US in its worldwide efforts to increase the number of UN member states who were willing to submit to these procedures, most importantly Israel.

After reviewing the balance in the Middle East from the perspective of US interests, Johnson sent a memo to Feldman stating the following:

1. The US regards itself as consistently the staunchest supporter of Israel! It is the US which is expected by the Arabs to come to Israel’s defense if attacked. This has been a fixed tenet of our policy since 1950, reiterated by every President, to deter any military aggression against Israel. We have also, through both public and private means, been Israel’s strongest financial backers. I want you to say again that I am as firmly behind this policy as my predecessors.

2. But we have felt it necessary to maintain at least an appearance of balance (my italics) between Israel and the Arabs, because of our wide interests in the area and the desire not to thrust the Arabs into the arms of Moscow. This policy not only gives us leverage with the Arabs but also helps limit Soviet intervention.

3. One aspect of this policy has been to avoid providing clearly offensive weapons to Israel or to Arab states that could use them against Israel. This policy has not compromised Israel’s ability to maintain a substantial deterrent edge: shrewd purchases from Europe, indirectly subsidized by US aid, have enabled Israel to stay well ahead of the Arabs and it will retain this superiority for several years!

4. This is the year of the Jordan Waters crisis, on which the US is already carrying the main burden of backing Israel. To overload it by such a dramatic shift in US policy as a big tank sale to Israel, especially at the very time when Moscow is bidding for Arab favor, could undermine our relations with the Arabs; not just the UAR, but almost every Arab country. It could jeopardize the position of Jordan, and at the least make it impossible for Hussein to maintain close relations with us. And since Libya has become one of the most fanatical anti-Israel states, we would almost certainly lose our base. Moreover, our restraining
influence on issues like the Jordan diversion would be thrown away just when it is needed most. We must take into account the Arab reaction against the US as a result of the tank deal Israel is asking for, with a major risk of Arab counteraction against our oil, already likely to come under fire because of the Jordan Waters crisis. Khrushchev could end up the chief gainer, not Israel.

Johnson concludes: “For all these reasons, I do not believe that the US can afford a direct sale of tanks to Israel. Nonetheless we are as interested as ever in seeing Israeli deterrent capabilities maintained, though we think that Israel is more pessimistic than it need be, and discounts far too heavily the added deterrent created by Arab belief that the US will intervene [to protect Israel].”

Thus Johnson found a way out by having Israel buy its tanks from the United Kingdom or West Germany, helped by the US! Publicity was to be avoided, however, particularly during Eshkol’s visit to the US. Johnson added that the prices of tanks from the UK or Germany were probably similar prices to what the US would charge. Nor could the US justify giving tanks free while Israel used its own foreign exchange to buy missiles from France.

He went on to say, “I want Eshkol to know of my worry lest Israel get missiles on a scale which would actually serve to accelerate the arms race rather than damp it down. Tell him our experts are convinced that the UAR can’t develop enough missile capability to present much of a threat. Even advanced missiles are of questionable value without nuclear warheads, which are far beyond the UAR.”

A meeting took place with Eshkol within the context of the Feldman-Sloan mission, which was also attended by Golda Meir, the Israeli Foreign Minister, Shimon Peres, Deputy Minister of Defence, and the US Ambassador in Tel Aviv. The following took place:

The US delegation said it would not be possible to sell tanks to Israel, but Feldman added:

“We sent a team, consisting of Sloan and another expert, to the UK and Germany in order to ascertain how those countries might help,
stressing Israel’s need for tanks, and that it should obtain these tanks at the best possible price.”

At this point Eshkol commented that Israel wanted to get the tanks free of charge!

Feldman replied:

“The US is prepared to assist in two important ways: first, we shall assist in every way we can to help Israel get the tanks it needs from the UK and Germany, and second, we are willing to supply to the Germans the engines and guns for these tanks. We are talking to the Germans and will continue to do so.”

Feldman emphasized that need for absolute secrecy in the matter was paramount:

“It is extremely important that it should not appear that the British and Germans have been forced by the US to supply tanks to Israel. Therefore, all discussions about the possible arrangements should be held very closely.”

He asked Eshkol not to discuss the subject with Johnson during his forthcoming meeting with him, and reiterated the importance of secrecy until implementation of the plan!

Eshkol persisted one more, saying that if the US government could not provide Israel with the tanks, and was suggesting Israel should resort to Britain and Germany, then they should at least help out with the financing! Israel was paying for the Mirage planes in dollars, which placed a great burden upon it, he added.

The process of soliciting had begun!

In an attempt to persuade the Americans, Peres said that Israel was concerned about Khrushchev’s visit to the UAR and that it was convinced that the UAR missiles were rapidly improving, and had reason to fear that the Egyptians were working on chemical warheads!

Peres then took the opportunity to discuss the problem of its air strength, adding that Israel needed ‘a few score’ planes heavier than the Mirage, especially as the Egyptians were building airfields further and further away from Cairo! If Israel could acquire some
light attack bombers, he added, the Israeli missile program could be ‘correspondingly limited’.  

At this time, Johnson sent a letter to Nasser on May 20th, 1964, expressing appreciation for, ‘your personal endorsement of the partial nuclear test ban and your Government’s prompt signature of the treaty. Your action contributed greatly toward near unanimity in world support for the treaty.’

Johnson was, however, pursuing a devious strategy. He asked the Egyptian Ambassador in Washington, Mostafa Kamel, to inform Nasser that, ‘the United States would firmly oppose any aggression by Israel against the Arab states, and would oppose Israeli expansionism. By the same token, it would oppose any aggression against Israel.’

The President asked the Ambassador to convey to Nasser that, ‘Israel does not formulate American policy.’ But that at the same time, he would advise the Arabs not to ‘corner’ Israel, for only the Communists could gain by this!

At the end of the meeting, Johnson mentioned the importance of the US base in Libya for the defence of the United States!

When Eshkol arrived in Washington, he met with Johnson on June 1st, 1964, Johnson assured him of the US’s support, concluding by saying that ‘the Prime Minister could leave knowing that the U.S. would help Israel in the future, both morally and financially, as much as possible.’

Prime Minister Eshkol took the opportunity to say that ‘Palestine under Turkish rule covered an area of 100,000 square kilometres, but now Israel had been cut down to only 20,000 square kilometres’- a clear reference to Israel’s objective of expansion: they wanted all of Palestine! I am not sure whether Johnson understood the significance of this remark or not!

Eshkol then went on to say that “the recent visit by Khrushchev served to give Nasser additional prestige, additional armor and

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603 Memo of Conversation, Jerusalem, May 17th, 1964, Tanks.
money. This makes him a dangerous enemy.” Another attempt to persuade Johnson to give him more!

It also became clear during the meeting that Eshkol was still adamant about not informing Nasser of the true situation regarding the Dimona reactor, on the basis that Nasser was the enemy of Israel! He reiterated yet again that, “the UAR is committed to the destruction of Israel.”

He added:

“A message that Dimona is not manufacturing nuclear weapons would have no effect. Nasser has worked for years to become a nuclear power. He will continue to do so. A message that Dimona is not manufacturing nuclear weapons would have no effect.” He then asked:

“Why should we tell Nasser about Dimona if he won’t let us know what he is doing about missiles?”

Concerning arms limitation in the Middle East, Badeau met with Nasser and gave him a letter from Johnson on the matter. He also referred to the ‘declaration of intent’ by the UAR on the non-acquisition nuclear arms and the acceptance IAEA safeguards.

Nasser responded by saying that he was prepared to answer Johnson’s letter with a statement that UAR had no intention of building or procuring atomic weapons. As to the IAEA, he would be prepared to accept this international safeguard when the construction of the nuclear power plant in the UAR was imminent. To accept safeguards before this would put him in a difficult position since he would have no reason to issue such a statement and would be accused of doing so under pressure from a great power. However, once the UAR decided to build the nuclear reactor, he would be willing to do so.

Regarding the arms race and particularly missiles, Nasser said that he had read a report in a Bonn newspaper claiming that the UAR was developing nuclear warheads for its surface-to-surface missiles, and that this was completely untrue. However, Badeau was unable to find out the number of missiles or the type of warheads used!

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606 Memo. of Conversation, Washington, June 1, 1964, Johnson/ Eshkol Exchange of Views.
Badeau then mentioned the arms balance between the UAR and Israel, saying that this was the best time for the arms level to be frozen! How strange that he should say so at the very time when the US was giving Israel Hawk missiles, and helping them to obtain 500 tanks from Europe!

Badeau then offered that the US serve as an unpublicized third party to an arms limitation agreement between the UAR and Israel, given that they could not establish direct contact!

At this point, Nasser said that the UAR’s defensive position versus Israel was much better than it had been five years previously. Israel had a certain advantage in ground to air missiles since the country was so small that a dozen Hawk installations would adequately protect its air fields. In contrast, the UAR was so large that protection by ground to air missiles was not practical. The Egyptian military agreed that surface to surface missiles were necessary to counterbalance the advantage Israel had from its Hawk installations.

Nasser added that arms escalation was indeed underway, because every time Israel acquired more sophisticated aircraft, he had been forced to seek some compensatory weapon. In the beginning, the Soviets had sold arms to the UAR at a 30% discount, but during past few years, they had charged the UAR full price. This applied specifically to the last two purchases of Super MIGs. Nasser said that he was facing a real problem with his military men, who kept pressing for an increase in the quantity and sophistication of arms. “All military men are alike—American, Russian, and Egyptian!” Nasser said. His problem was how to stop missile production without being accused of having been pressurized into doing so by a great power.

In his previous meeting with the US ambassador, Nasser had spoken of the furor Israel had raised about Egypt’s armaments in general, and about the matter of the German experts who were helping Egypt in its missile production programme. As Nasser pointed out to Badeau, the danger of Israel’s expansionist aims made any reduction in arms akin to suicide! Nevertheless, Egypt allocated 15% of its budget to weapons, while Israel spent a whopping 40% of its budget on arms! As for the German experts, Nasser added that his main concern was that the locations they were working in should serve as schools for advanced technology and sciences.
In fact, this is what actually happened. Hundreds of Egyptian scientists and engineers received an opportunity they would otherwise never have had to learn from these German experts, and thousands of Egyptian workers became qualified to manufacture jet engines and missiles. And let us not forget the extermination campaign carried out by Israel against the German experts in the UAR, whether by kidnapping or explosive parcels!\textsuperscript{607}

In the process of reevaluating the relations between the United States and the UAR, Johnson asked Badeau, who had completed his mission in Cairo, how he envisaged the future policies of the US towards the UAR.

Badeau replied that since the July 1952 revolution, the United States had followed four distinct policies toward Egypt due to circumstances that had driven the two nations apart and that went beyond the mere changing of administrations in the United States. A major confrontation took place in 1955, at the time of Egypt’s first arms purchases from the Soviet Bloc. The second resulted from the Suez Canal nationalization, and came to its climax in the landing of American Marines in Lebanon in 1958.

In Badeau’s opinion, the fact that matters did not develop further lay in the mutual capacity to hurt each other’s interests which both Egypt and the United States possessed! Were Egypt determined to do so it could cause considerable trouble for the United States in areas of the Near East where there were basic American interests, such as the recent Libyan response to President Nasser’s call for the abolition of the Wheelus Air Base. Equally, the United States had the capacity to hurt Egypt in areas such as Yemen, Syria, and Jordan if it were determined to do so!

It was this fact that had prevented a major confrontation in the past. The Ambassador believed that it would continue to make a major confrontation unlikely in the future unless the UAR should threaten an American interest of so essential a nature that the United States would be willing to risk imperiling its position in adjacent Arab lands! This meant that American-Egyptian relations might well continue to fluctuate between cordiality and opposition, but always avoiding the final step of major confrontation.

\textsuperscript{607} Heikal: The Matter of the German Experts and Our Modern Weapons, Al Ahram column, June 12\textsuperscript{th}, 1964.
In his opinion, the past three years had been a good beginning to establishing a reasonable and long-term relation with the UAR, while still retaining freedom of movement on specific issues.

Johnson asked whether Nasser would understand such a complex policy, to which Badeau replied that this was the only alternative to the ‘off-again, on-again, gone-again’ relation which had vexed the two countries during the past twelve years.608

The US administration appreciated Nasser’s implementation of his promise to put his previous verbal assurances into writing, namely that the UAR would not be developing nuclear weapons or using them in their defence programme. Nasser’s letter stated the following:

First: Nasser personally reassured Johnson that the UAR had no thought of bringing the ‘terrifying danger’ of nuclear war into the region.

Second: Nasser’s letter stated that the Egyptian people and government ‘have neither the effort nor the resources to devote to weapons of total destruction.’

The US interpreted this as meaning that while Nasser did not intend to abandon his hostility toward Israel, by implication the letter suggested that Nasser did not intend to resort to nuclear weapons to resolve the Palestine problem. The letter also clearly rejected the balance of nuclear terror existing between the West and the Soviet bloc or the imposition of peace by means of nuclear terror in the entire world.

The tone and content on Arab rights in Palestine and the absence of any reference to UAR intentions toward its neighbors suggest that Nasser probably had in mind the possible publication of this letter. He would of course have considered the probable reaction of other Arab countries that had accused Nasser of being soft on Israel.

US appreciation of Nasser’s letter was further reinforced by the Organization of African Unity (OAU) meeting that took place in Cairo during which the UAR introduced a resolution proposing a

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worldwide agreement by non-nuclear powers not to acquire nuclear weapons, which was agreed to by the OAU.\textsuperscript{609}

On August 13\textsuperscript{th}, 1964, Johnson replied to Nasser’s letter, saying:

“I place high value on our correspondence and anticipate that it will continue to yield useful results in the future. It is most gratifying to have your personal assurance\textsuperscript{610} that the United Arab Republic does not intend to devote its efforts or resources to acquiring weapons of total destruction. Your interest in advancing the well-being of your people and the peace of the world is attested by your statement that the United Arab Republic has no thought of introducing the danger of nuclear conflict into the region of which it is a part. I am also encouraged by your statements to Assistant Secretary Talbot and Ambassador Badeau that you are continuing to give thought to the value of international safeguards in looking ahead to the time when the United Arab Republic may build a nuclear power reactor.”\textsuperscript{611}

Johnson sent McCloy to Nasser on September 29\textsuperscript{th}, 1964; the same emissary Kennedy had sent in June, 1963. The purpose of the visit was to end the state of tension in the Middle East and hint at the exorbitant cost of the arms race which should be avoided at all costs – i.e., to follow up on the implementation of the US policy in the region, which was as always biased in favour of Israel at the expense of Egypt and the Arabs!

McCloy presented Nasser with written US proposals which included the following requests:

1. Private assurances, written or oral, would be provided that large land-based surface-to-surface missiles would not be deployed either through the use of mobile launchers or the construction of permanent launching facilities for this purpose.

2. Assurances would also be given that procurement or production of large surface-to-surface missiles for military purposes would be discontinued. As the number of missiles presently available was limited, there would be no question of destroying any existing capacity.

\textsuperscript{609} Memorandum prepared in the Department of State, undated, Nasser’s July 26\textsuperscript{th}, 1964, letter to Johnson.

\textsuperscript{610} Reference is to Nasser’s a/m letter to Johnson dated July 26\textsuperscript{th}, 1964).

\textsuperscript{611} Letter from Johnson to Nasser, August 13\textsuperscript{th}, 1964.
3. Any space research programs would be conducted openly and in a manner consistent with furthering international scientific cooperation. Any production of rockets for use in such programs would be limited to the numbers required for such launchings.

4. With respect to the production or acquisition of missiles, the type of assurances that might be given to create confidence that the above commitments were being carried out could be done without the introduction of any type of inspection (which Nasser refused).

The following written statement by the UAR was proposed:

“The United Arab Republic wishes to provide assurances that its efforts to develop surface-to-surface missiles have been undertaken only for the purpose of self-defense. As a result of its missile development program, the UAR is now in a position to create a large missile force should it be necessary. It will be appreciated that the question of whether the UAR should decide such a force is necessary for its national defense will be strongly affected by the course others in the area may follow. In the long run, the UAR hopes that the real value of the missiles it has developed will be for the role they can play in furthering man’s knowledge of outer space.”

After reading the above US proposals concerning missiles, Nasser told McCloy that the US needed to understand that the problem in the Middle East was not problem of missiles but a problem of Palestine! The Arabs could not accept the present status in respect to Palestine. There must be a solution of the Palestine problem based upon justice. Nothing, said Nasser, could stop the arms race or change the atmosphere in Middle East except a solution to the Palestinian problem. This was fundamental to everything and it would be futile to suppose that an agreement with respect to missiles or any other incidental issue could solve it. He added that this was a profound political problem and that he himself had no solution!

Nasser explained to McCloy that missiles were now very close to the heart of the army. It had no interest in nuclear weapons, but the missiles were a symbol of its renewed strength and confidence, and a counter to the deep reactions suffered in the 1956 invasion!

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612 Memorandum by John McCloy, Cairo, September 29th, 1964.
Whereas the Pentagon in the US might not be involved in political matters, the army in Egypt was, and it had deep political significance because of its fundamental position in the domestic as well as the international security of Egypt. Missiles, therefore, carried strong political implications.

Nasser told McCloy that he would consider the US proposals and discuss them with his advisors, but had to say that he was not optimistic regarding an agreement that would include limiting the production of missiles!

When McCloy suggested that the US had found in its dealings with the Soviet Union that unilateral action of this sort was sometimes productive of improvement in their relationship, Nasser pointed out that the parallel between US and Soviet Union and between Israel and UAR was not a good one: Israelis were occupying Palestine; Arab soil. They had invaded and committed aggression against the UAR in 1956. The parallel would apply only if the Soviet Union were occupying California!

McCloy’s comment on the meeting with Nasser was, “We found Nasser less flexible on missiles than we had hoped!”

McCloy added that while Nasser had given no indication that he would be able to do anything about keeping his missile strength at present levels, he did not reject the US proposal. He was frank in pointing out the political problems, both internal and external, which he would face if he should stop the missile programme.

McCloy also stressed that Nasser had reiterated that he had started missile development because he could not rely on the Soviet Union for his full arsenal.

McCloy then noted that when he conveyed US assurances on Dimona, Nasser made no comment! He also found it significant that Nasser did not mention pre-emptive war to him during this visit—as he had done in the last—in the event of Israel obtaining nuclear capabilities.

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613 Memorandum of Conversation, Cairo, September 28th, 1964.
614 Ibid.
615 Memorandum of Conversation, Oct. 6, 1964, McCloy's Impressions of his Meeting with Nasser.
The contradictions of US policy manifested themselves yet again with regard to the question of arms limitation in the Middle East when the US helped Israel in its arms deal with Europe, a deal that included 150 German M–48s, with an option for 82 more, as well as 250 UK Centurion tanks from the United Kingdom!

Going even further in its bias towards Israel, the US decided to assist in training and delivery and give the same good terms as on Hawk (10 years, 10% down payment, 3–1/2% interest) for the modernization kits and ammunition the US had agreed to sell directly to Israel! All this in addition to the usual financial aid from the US to Israel which Johnson had approved – 20 million dollars!\(^6\) Then they had the audacity to claim that they were following a policy of arms limitation in the Middle East!

e. **The deterioration of relations between the UAR and the USA**

The US reverted to deploying the weapon of US aid to pressurize Nasser into acceding to their demands, or in other words complying with their instructions!

1. **Discontinuing US aid to the UAR:**

The US stopped a 25 million dollar food loan to Egypt that it had previously approved. And during the visit of Ramzi Stino, Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Supply and Foreign Trade, to Washington, it became abundantly clear that indicated aid was contingent on Egyptian manners and behavior! Nasser, however, was always open and frank with the Americans, making it clear that the UAR was independent in its objectives and its actions.\(^6\)

Nasser touched upon this fluctuating American position towards the UAR in his speech on Victory Day, December 23\(^{rd}\), 1964, saying:

“This is our policy... a policy of independence. When we deal with other countries we do so with the understanding that no one shall interfere in our affairs, and if the Americans think that they can give us a bit of aid in order to control us, I tell them we are ready to reduce our consumption of tea and coffee and some other things and preserve our independence... Why am I saying...”

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\(^6\) Tel. from the Embassy in the UAR to the Department of State, Cairo, Feb. 1, 1965
this today? Because yesterday the Minister of Supply met with the American ambassador who was supposed to discuss the food supplies we get from America, but instead said: ‘I can’t discuss this matter now!’ Why? Because they don’t like our behaviour! I say anyone who doesn’t like the way we behave can go drink from the sea!

“What I want to say is that our independence is not for sale... and we are not willing to accept pressure from anyone... we have dignity, we are a people with dignity... if the Americans – as their ambassador said yesterday – are not willing to discuss aid, we say to them: thank you!”

2. American resistance to Nasser’s position regarding the Congo crisis:

It was obvious that the US, by using aid as a way of putting pressure on Nasser, was trying to punish him for the UAR’s position regarding the Congo crisis, which opposed that of the US and Belgium.

As Nasser said:

“When the attack on the Congo took place on November 24th, 1964, and US and Belgian paratroopers descended on Stanleyville, I objected to this aggression. We are opposed to aggression under any form; we support the freedom of nations. Can Tshombe be recognized as representing the people of the Congo?! Tshombe is a murderer618 and if America and Belgium make him prime minister, he will be acting on behalf of America and Belgium! We will never recognize him as a prime minister representing the people of the Congo!”

What really hit the US hard was that the position adopted by the UAR was taken up by other countries, a matter that Nasser mentioned in his speech when he said:

“When Tshombe came here for the Non-Aligned Nations Conference, the participating countries refused to recognize him or agree to his attending the conference as a representative of the people of the Congo!”619

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618 Tshombe killed Lumumba, the first elected prime minister in the history of the Congo.
619 The Non-Aligned Nations Conference was held in Cairo from 5th-10th of October, 1964.
“Who says Tshombe represents the people of the Congo? The Americans and the Belgians. We say he is nothing but an agent of the imperialists... and we can never accept that such an example should succeed in Africa. The patriotic forces in Africa must succeed...

“They say we helped the people of the Congo, and I say yes, we did! We sent them weapons and will carry on sending them weapons! We have no need to deny or hide this, because we do not recognize Tshombe except as an agent of the imperialists, and we know that the patriotic revolutionaries in Congo need all the support they can get from honourable powers the world over.”

The CIA considered the above speech as the most bitter attack on the US since 1956! However, they were also aware of the fact that US interests would suffer if they were to react to Nasser’s comments, especially as the Soviets were waiting in the sidelines for relations between the UAR and the US to deteriorate. Other damage could be done to US interests by the UAR, such as Nasser’s persuading the Kuwaitis to withdraw their banking accounts from London!

The question was, should they confront Nasser or carry on with their long-term policy which aimed at making his policies more moderate?

The decision was made to continue with the US aid programme to the UAR as this was seen to be in the interests of the US and a deterrent to an increase of Soviet influence in Egypt. It was also decided to avoid any actions that could lead to increased deterioration of the relations between the two countries.

Johnson considered the Congo crisis to be the main obstacle in the relations between the US and Egypt, and asked what Nasser proposed in this regard, which was a matter of concern to the US government and to Congress, and the UAR’s position towards the Congo was one of the reasons for the US House of Representatives putting limits on the President’s power to authorize foreign aid!

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The US government denied having any interest or wish in being present in the Congo, stating that it wished to keep the Cold War out of Africa. Rusk expressed his disappointment that the UAR had supplied the Congolese rebels with weapons – particularly as most of these weapons were Soviet-made!

The US felt it in their best interests as well as those of the UAR, to reach a political solution to the Congo crisis and prevent it from turning into a major confrontation in Africa. Accordingly, Badeau informed Nasser that Johnson wished to discuss ways of resolving the problem, which had come to constitute a major obstacle in US-UAR relations. Badeau stressed that popular reaction in the US, especially in Congress, should be taken into account, and that developments in Africa had led the latter to limit the President’s authority over foreign aid – hastening, however, to add that Johnson was determined to oppose this restriction! Johnson was fully aware of the sensitivity of the US aid issue, and its use as a means of putting pressure on Nasser.

Badeau proposed that a political solution be sought, then asked if the Organization of African Unity (OAU) could come up with an initiative in this regard, to which Nasser responded that if Tshombe were removed from office, that would help. Badeau replied that as the US had not put Tshombe in power, it could not depose him; adding that the US supported the legitimate government in the Congo, a country plagued with problems that went far beyond any individual.

The question was, what exactly did the US want the UAR to do in the Congo? The response was strange, namely that Nasser should cease his support of the revolutionaries there, and that he should use his influence in the OAU to gain support for the Central Congo Government.621 When Nasser suggested that the US tell Kasa-Vubu to get rid of Tshombe, Badeau insisted that the US had no control over the Central Government, and that it was a legitimate government that must be respected.

“Someone other than Tshombe must be elected,” was Nasser’s reply.

Badeau responded that this would be up to the people of the Congo themselves.

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621 Memorandum from Rusk to Johnson, January 27th, 1965.
“It would not be difficult to accomplish; and if Tshombe were deposed, it would be easier for the UAR and others who are supporting the rebels, to withdraw this support,” replied Nasser.

Badeau reiterated his request that the UAR help the US resolve the problem through the OAU.

The truth was that the US was concerned about the UAR’s support of African liberation movements, more so its support of the Congolese rebels since the eruption of the Congo crisis, in addition to Nasser’s role in Southern Arabia, the Arabian Gulf, North Africa, Cyprus, etc. Accordingly, on December 31st, 1964, Johnson sent a verbal message to Nasser explaining the US policy regarding the Congo, which was to support an independent, united Congo and assist its development, and which opposed the rebel movement there, which the US saw as allowing the Soviet Union and China to gain a footing and extend their influence in Africa.

Johnson said that their basic problem was not with the December 23rd speech, but with the UAR’s support of the rebellion in the Congo, adding that if Nasser were to continue backing wars of liberation in Africa, then the US and the UAR were heading towards a collision.

It was clear that no amount of US pressure could dissuade Nasser from his policy of working towards the liberation of Africa nor could they manage to make him waver from the principles he so staunchly adhered to.

3. **Relations between the US and Jordan**

The deteriorating relations between the US and the UAR were exacerbated not only by US bias towards Israel and against Nasser, but also towards Jordan, a close friend of the Americans!

The Jordanians had been pressing the US for months asking for weapons and aircraft for the Arab buildup against the Israeli Jordan river diversion scheme. When the US failed to respond, the Jordanians said that they would have to buy Soviet weapons through the UAR!
The US administration admitted that it had been supplying Jordan with weapons for years - with Israel’s tacit consent - in order to keep King Hussein ‘out of Nasser’s clutches’! They estimated that ‘Soviet arms in Jordan would be the beginning of the end, and to be forestalled at almost any cost’!

The US accordingly agreed in principle to some phased arms sales to Jordan - except for supersonic aircraft, as this could aggravate Israel - in order not to drive Jordan into resorting to Soviet weapons. It was also suggested that King Hussein could buy the supersonic aircraft from Britain or France, the same way the US did for Israel.622

f. Leakage of the German arms deal to Israel

News of the German arms deal with Israel began to leak, though the US commitment to modernize the German M–48s remained secret! The US feared that the Arabs might use this to pressurize Hussein into accepting Soviet weapons, and expressed the belief that the Israelis might have been the ones to leak the news.623

In his speech in Assiut on March 8th, 1965, before the referendum on the presidential elections, Nasser mentioned the imperialist support of Israel, saying:

“During the past ten years, Israel took 3700 million dollars from West Germany – that’s more than a million dollars a day in aid! Why should West Germany help Israel in particular by giving them all this money?! 

“They say the Jews suffered at the hands of the Germans during WWII, but was it only the Jews who suffered?! The Jews, the Czechs, the Yugoslavians, and the French all suffered the same fate! Therefore it is clear that there are attempts being made and pressure being exerted to make Israel stronger. Our enemies – the imperialists, Israel, and the reactionaries – are in this together: Israel is getting weapons easily, and secretly! West Germany smiles in our faces then reveals its true imperialist colours by stabbing us in the back and supplying Israel with weapons!”624

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623 Ibid.
624 Nasser’s speech in Assiut, March 8th, 1965.
Amidst these events, Nasser invited Ulbricht, leader of the Democratic Republic of East Germany, to the UAR and welcomed him in Cairo, which West Germany took as an affront, attacking Nasser and claiming that he was jeopardizing relations between Germany and the Arab countries!

Nasser’s response to this was:

“When we tell the Germans that we are aware that they are supplying Israel with weapons, they deny it, while in September, 1964, they agreed to deliver 300 tanks to the Israelis! The underhand actions of the imperialist West German government is what threatens Arab-German relations! West Germany has given Israel weapons, planes, and tanks with which to kill the Arabs!”

As for the German claim that Nasser’s actions were giving free rein to communist influence in the Arab region, his response was:

“Such talk will not affect us any more: no communist, American, English, German, or French influence exists any more: this is talk of a bygone age; an age that will never return! We are against colonialism anywhere and will chase and expose West German colonialism everywhere in the world, not only in Egypt!”

The dispute between the UAR and West Germany intensified: the West German government responded to Ulbricht’s visit to Cairo by cutting off economic aid to the UAR as a form of punishment. Nasser replied to this saying:

“This means that West Germany will not be participating in the UAR’s second Five-Year Plan; we have told them before that we do not take economic aid, we take loans, loans moreover that we pay 6-7% interest on, so don’t say this is ‘aid’! We don’t want aid! What’s more, if they breach our agreement, we have 77 million pounds of theirs which they won’t be able to retrieve! West Germany won’t punish us – we are the ones who can punish them! We have the upper hand.”

After the furor raised by the arms deal with Israel, West Germany had announced its decision not to send any more weapons to areas of tension, and to replace whatever agreements had been made with other items. Nasser’s reply to this was:

625 Ibid.
“They say they have stopped the weapons, but they tell the Jews: we will give you weapons, and you can also buy them from other sources! This is unacceptable.”

At this time, the West German government announced that it was working towards establishing diplomatic relations with Israel, which they said was the normal thing to do and was not in any way addressed to any Arab country! Again, Nasser’s response to this was:

“Anything concerning Israel concerns all the Arab countries. The Arab leaders have met, and have decided to reconsider their relations with West Germany if it should recognize Israel.”626

On March 8th, 1965, the Arab leaders met in Cairo withing the framework of the Arab League, and took the following decisions:

1. To become closer to East Germany in a manner corresponding to that of West Germany to Israel.
2. To sever diplomatic relations with West Germany if it should embark upon diplomatic representation with Israel, or if it supported the Israeli war effort, or gave Israel any form of assistance whatsoever.

At this time, King Hassan of Morocco cancelled a previously scheduled visit to West Germany in protest at the latter’s position towards Israel.

The US government’s reaction to Nasser’s above-mentioned speech was one of relief as it contained no direct attack on the United States and that the ‘preponderance of venom’ it contained was directed towards West Germany, which had recently declared the intention of recognizing Israel.627

The reaction to West Germany’s secret weapons deal with Israel and its subsequent decision to stop further deliveries took place without consulting with the US, a matter which Johnson found disturbing. Johnson said that if a disproportionate arms buildup on the Arab side developed, the US would make direct sales of weapons to Israel on favorable credit terms! Johnson added that he personally had grave misgivings over the potentially disastrous

626 Ibid.
627 Tel. from the Embassy in the UAR to the Department of State, Cairo, March 25, 1965
effects on US relations with the Arab states this might have, stressing that under the prevailing circumstances, the US should employ the utmost delicacy in doing so and avoid disclosure. The US would meet any Israeli needs on a quiet case-by-case basis, with minimum publicity.

Johnson expressed the hope that West Germany might still deliver the remaining 90 M–48 tanks that constituted the rest of the cancelled deal, and that even if not, Israel was already getting 60 M–48s and 247 Centurions from the UK. Should it become necessary, however, the US would later consider compensating for the 90 M–48 tanks!

**Ironically, this was taking place at a time when Johnson was publicly as well as in his letters to Nasser, advocating arms limitation in the Middle East!**

Speaking of Jordan, Johnson said that King Hussein had assured the US that he intended to keep his forces on the East Bank of the Jordan river, not on the West Bank which could pose a threat to Israel! Johnson added that he intended to ask him for a firm private undertaking to that effect, provided that Israel would promise to keep it secret! He added that he regarded the actions proposed by the US as a major contribution to Israel’s security, and that they further demonstrated the firm support which the US had always given Israel!628

In return, Johnson requested the following undertakings from the Israeli government as an integral part of the deal:

1. Israel’s quiet but unmistakable support of the US supply of arms to Jordan, and its help in abating opposition to US efforts to maintain some sort of a presence in the other Arab states.
2. A pledge of full secrecy on all matters discussed with the US and subsequent actions taken until the US should decide, in consultation with Israel, how and when to divulge them.
3. A written reiteration of Israel’s intentions not to develop nuclear weapons, and its acceptance of IAEA safeguards on all of its nuclear facilities; however, there was no need to insist on inspection at the present time!
4. The US would not accept Israeli preemptive action against the Arab river Jordan diversion works, but must instead have Israel’s agreement to take this problem to the United Nations,

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where the US would be prepared to support the principle of the Johnston Plan.

5. Israel must realize that the US had only a few days left before either signing a sales agreement with King Hussein or seeing him go the UAR/Soviet route. The US could not and would not engage in extended bargaining with Israel. It must decide now on which course it preferred: the US would either sell arms to both Israel and Jordan or sell arms to neither! Israel must display an understanding of US problems in the Middle East, which it had not done in the past.

Harriman then informed Eshkol of the US decision to sell arms to Jordan, and that the purpose of this was to keep Jordan away from the Soviet Union.629

Harriman expressly stressed the importance of preventing the Israel-Arab confrontation from becoming polarized on West-East lines, reiterating Johnson’s firm commitment to the security of Israel. He also informed Eshkol that the submarines Israel had requested would be delivered directly by the British!

Eshkol seized the opportunity to demand that the US transfer its embassy to Jerusalem! Golda Meir, who was also attending the meeting, commented on Lebanon and Jordan’s submittal to ‘Nasserist pressure’, describing it as ‘frightening’!630

g. The US confrontation with Nasser:
The reason for this confrontation was the contradictory policies adopted by Johnson. On March 18th, 1965, he sent a letter to Nasser in which he talked of the arms race and the policy adopted by the US, namely a ‘traditional policy of restraint with regard to arms sales’, based upon two principles:

First: “To the greatest extent possible, refrain from selling arms to the parties involved in the Arab-Israeli dispute” – which is not what happened!

Second: “In no case will we sell arms that will give one side a military advantage over the other” – again, this is in direct contradiction to the truth! Ever since Israel was established, all US leaders have been biased towards Zionism and against the interests

629 Ibid.
630 Telegram from the Embassy in Israel to the Department of State, Tel Aviv, February 26th, 1965.
of the people of Palestine and the Arabs, whether within the United Nations or by providing military and economic support!

The US once more resorted to exploiting US aid to further its political objectives, as evidenced by this memo from Komer to Johnson where he says:

“We been keeping monitoring carefully every facet of aid to Nasser. The UAR has requested credit terms for 200,000 tons of corn (about $10 million worth). We would have preferred not to agree, except that Nasser behaved very reasonably when we told him about limited US arms sales to Israel. It would make life a lot easier for us if he carried on being calm! This aid will be evidence that we still wish to do business with him.”[^631]

Komer added that the corn deal was not regarded as aid, but would be a dollar sale on only slightly softer than normal commercial terms, at 4-5% interest, plus 1-1.5% as guarantee, and payment was to be made within a year!

Komer expressed the view that this deal could not be considered a ‘carrot’ to be placed before Nasser; the US had made two previous credit offers to Nasser which were not taken up, and the corn deal was, in his opinion, insignificant and would achieve nothing.

In Komer’s opinion, the US was ‘living on pins and needles lest Nasser blow the whistle on US arms sales to Jordan and Israel.’ Komer added that even such a minor gesture could do a lot to keep alive Nasser’s hope that he could still do business with the US. If Nasser were to decide not to, that would be a problem. The real test, he said, would come over the remaining $37 million in Title I PL 480.

To conclude, Komer felt that if the UAR were to keep quiet about US arms sales to Israel and Jordan, it would be worth ten credit sales, and was much more important than the Congo, where the US was winning despite the UAR.[^632]

The use of aid as a weapon against Nasser was a tactic engaged in by the US again and again as a result of Eshkol’s constant pleas to

[^631]: Memo. from Komer to Johnson, Washington, March 29th, 1965
[^632]: Memo. from Komer to Johnson, Washington, April 7th, 1965.
the US to utilize aid to UAR in order to moderate Nasser’s policies, reiterating – untruthfully – that there was no need or intention for Israel’s territorial expansion!^{633}

Nasser had previously written to Johnson on April 26th, 1964, in reply to a letter from the latter, and they had seen eye to eye on a number of issues, most notable of which was the importance of developing nuclear power for peaceful purposes only, the need to curb the increase of nuclear weapons, and to seek means of lessening conflicts as much as possible.

Nasser however had further points to make:

First: The struggle against colonialism was still ongoing and could not be denied nor its danger to peace ignored. A case in point was Britain’s position in the Arabian peninsula, and Portugal’s in Angola and Mozambique.

Second: The struggle for unity amongst many nations, including the Arab countries.

Third: The global struggle between progress and reactionism, and between rich and poor; exacerbated by the advance of science and technology.

Fourth: The social struggle taking place within many countries to establish and guarantee the freedom of the individual, a struggle for both political and social freedom, which were inextricably linked.

Fifth: With regard to the Middle East, the struggle between the Arab nation and Israel, an entity created to tear apart the very fabric of the Arab world and prevent its unity.

It would be possible to summarize these comments in one simple sentence; namely that peace could never become a reality unless it were built upon justice, and a peace based upon the status quo, even assuming the best of intentions, would only constitute the calm before the storm.^{634}

Nasser summarized the situation to Abdel Salam Aref, the president of Iraq, during the discussions of the Joint Arab Command which took place on May 19th, 1965:

“The United States has decided to arm Israel and has informed us of this, saying that this is simply to calm Israel down after the

^{633} Tel. from the Embassy in Israel to the Department of State, Tel Aviv, April 23rd, 1965

^{634} Nasser’s letter to Johnson on April 26th, 1964.
diversion of the Jordan river tributaries, the establishing of the Joint Arab Command, and the decision of the Arab countries to arm their forces. They also informed us that they would oppose any acts of aggression in the region, and that they would not allow the Arabs to surpass Israel with regard to arms, and would work to maintain the balance of power in the region. This discussion has been going on since 1963, and in 1964 the US made some strange requests:

1. That we pledge not to produce nuclear weapons, and allow them to carry out inspections in our country!
2. That we stop producing missiles, and also give them the right to inspect us!
3. That we pledge not to increase our armed forces, promising us that the same would apply to Israel.

Our response was to refuse, astonished that they should even think that we would let them carry out inspections in our country! And when Johnson took over in 1964, he made the same request, which we again refused, giving the following reasons:

1. With regard to nuclear weapons, the United Nations and the International Atomic Energy Agency that operates under its auspices can arrange for such inspections, bearing in mind that Israel has till now not agreed to accept inspection in spite of having a 5 megawatt reactor, while we have a 2 megawatt reactor! Moreover, the US has promised to give Israel new nuclear reactors for water desalination!
2. With regard to the missiles, the request is unacceptable.
3. We do not accept the ‘balance of power’ pretext put forth by the US and have zero trust in the Americans. Zionist influence is entrenched there.

“When they informed us that they would be giving arms to Israel, we replied that this was an anti-Arab move and that we, too, would buy arms.

“They say that we take economic facilities from them to save on hard currency that we use to buy weapons with! They began their threats in 1963 and 1964, then lately decided to cut off all economic aid to us – it is all about Israel! This has never happened before, that the US should confront the Arabs, give Israel weapons and protect it, prevent Arabs from surpassing Israel in power, and maintain that Israel is here to stay! Whenever we mention Palestinian rights to the Americans, they do absolutely nothing!
“The situation in the Middle East is not an easy one, and we are facing considerable pressure from the West, as are you [Iraq]. Even when the West seems to display good intentions, it is no more than an attempt to lull us into torpor!

“To sum up, our only resource is to depend upon ourselves completely. Who is on our side? The global situation is strange, take the situation of Russia and China with regard to Vietnam. Things are different to how they were in 1956; the Russian warning was to Britain and France, not to America; had the latter joined in the attack, Russia would not have been able to threaten it! Likewise, when the Russians attacked Hungary, the US could not threaten them: they are both nuclear powers.”

**The Arab-Israeli conflict flares up:**
The preliminary success of Arab cooperation on the Jordan river diversion project, and the measure of unity achieved by the formation of the Joint Arab Command, renewed Arab confidence in the ability to confront Israel. This Arab solidarity, supported by the rich Arab countries, made Israel realize that a turning point in the Arab-Israeli conflict had been reached in favour of Nasser.

The US accordingly foresaw the likelihood of tensions increasing and the danger of armed clashes becoming greater. As usual, the US saw this conflict as providing the Soviet Union with the opportunity to increase their influence with the Arabs.

Johnson sent a verbal message to Nasser concerning Israel, in which he raised three points:
1. Israel’s fear of the Joint Arab Command.
2. Israel’s consternation at the diversion of the Jordan river tributaries.
3. The US calmed Israel down by giving them a limited number of arms!

Nasser’s reply to Johnson was:
“With regard to the Joint Arab Command, if Israel attacks, all the Arab countries will retaliate. Israel wants to repeat what happened in 1948 when it attacked five countries that were separated. It was this separation that led to our defeat!

635 The Joint Arab Command discussions with Abdel Salam Aref, May 19th, 1965. www.nasser.org
“As for the Jordan river project, Israel wants to steal Arab water, and when they diverted the waters, you not only failed to object, you actually helped them! You are biased towards Israel, which allows the Israelis to push the limits!

“Regarding arms, you are encouraging Israel to be aggressive, and the end result is that we too are going to acquire weapons. We cannot possibly accept your interpretation of ‘balance’ which is that Israel should have as many weapons as the whole of the Arab nation!

“The US says that the Joint Arab Command is worrying Israel; well, our policy is unified Arab action to oppose Israel, which is why we called for the summit meeting.”

Robert McNamara, Secretary of Defence, conveyed the opinion of US Chiefs of Staff to Johnson:

“US arms policy should not positively identify the United States with either side in the Arab-Israeli conflict. Every attempt should be made to avoid a polarization in the Middle East whereby the United States becomes increasingly identified with Israel and the USSR with the Arab World.

“Such polarization would have the undesirable consequence of promoting an anti-US Arab unity under United Arab Republic leadership. This process would tend to weaken the comparatively moderate, pro-Western Arab governments while strengthening Soviet influence among the Arab states...Selling US offensive weapons, such as tanks and aircraft, to Israel can be expected to generate Arab reactions which would be detrimental to US political, military, and economic interests in the Middle East.”

Accordingly, although Israel requested 75 combat aircraft, the US gave only 24. It was decided that with the addition of Hawk missiles, scheduled to become operational on May 15th, 1965, the Israeli air defense system would provide an acceptable defense against the Joint Arab Command offensive air capability. As Israel’s combat aircraft needs had been filled in the past from the United Kingdom and France, the United States should avoid sale of any US combat aircraft to Israel, particularly bomber aircraft, as this would lead to violent reactions from the Arabs!

The military report ended by saying:

“The United States is committed to provide tanks to Israel of at least the same number and quality as those sold to Jordan, and to facilitate

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637 Minutes of Nasser’s talks with Charles Helou, Cairo, May 3rd, 1965. www.nasser.org
Israel’s acquisition of tanks from West Germany, in addition to other weapons. This is expected to increase Israel’s qualitative superiority. It is expected that the balance of arms will be greatly in Israel’s favour by the end of 1967!^638

This was the year in which, on June 5th, Israel launched its attack on three Arab countries, Egypt, Syria, and Jordan, and occupied their territories!

The US exerts tighter control over nuclear activity

On the other hand, the US was serious about preventing the proliferation of nuclear weapons in the Middle East, acknowledging that the arms race in the region had reached dangerous levels and that Israel was seeking to develop a deterrent weapon for use against the Arabs, possibly to put nuclear warheads on the missiles it had purchased from France.

The US suspicion of Israel’s intention stemmed from the fact that Israel had deliberately misled the US with regard to the nature of the nuclear reactor at Dimona! The US therefore concluded that Israel was likely to make its own decisions about producing nuclear weapons without consulting the US.

US officials reviewed Israel’s strategy towards the UAR, which was namely to target the Nile Delta with surface-to-surface missiles, and bomb and release the waters behind the Aswan High Dam. Destruction of the Aswan Dam would require a nuclear warhead; bombing with high explosives could not be counted on to do the job.639

The question was: what could the US do about it? US efforts to slow down sophisticated weapons programs and potential nuclear weapons programs in India and elsewhere would undoubtedly be influenced by the example the US would set in dealing with Israel. So long as the Dimona reactor continued to operate without publicly-recognized safeguards, the credibility of US efforts worldwide to prevent the proliferation of nuclear weapons would remain in doubt!

The way the US saw it was that Israel had signed the partial Test Ban Treaty, was a member of IAEA, and had accepted IAEA safeguards on its small research reactor provided by the United States. It was therefore reasonable for the US to ask Israel to accept IAEA safeguards on all of its nuclear facilities. This would also place great international pressure on the UAR and other countries to follow suit.

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The UAR, which had always opposed safeguards, was felt to have recently changed its attitude: Nasser confirmed the UAR’s acceptance of the principle of international safeguards to Assistant Secretary Talbot on April 18th, 1965, and it was felt that Israeli acceptance of such safeguards would provide an added inducement, therefore it was necessary to press Israel into accepting IAEA safeguards at once.\(^\text{640}\)

Accordingly, Johnson sent a letter to Eshkol on May 21st, 1965, asking him to place all Israeli nuclear facilities under the control of the IAEA. To persuade him further, Johnson wrote:

“We do not believe that the UAR will develop nuclear capabilities in the near future, and are convinced that the Soviet Union will not provide Nasser with nuclear weapons. However, suspicion that Israel is developing nuclear weapons might encourage Nasser to make concessions to the Soviet Union that could result in a Soviet nuclear support program for Nasser similar to the one the Soviets attempted to pull off in Cuba.”

Johnson ended his letter by assuring Eshkol that Israel could rest secure in the knowledge of its military superiority over the Arabs, reiterating the steadfast assurances of US support against any aggression. He added that Israel’s example would also reinforce US efforts to persuade Nasser to limit sophisticated weapons acquisition.\(^\text{641}\)

In other words, the whole scenario was a conspiracy between the USA and Israel to enable the latter to be capable of attacking the Arabs at any time!

**The US approves the wheat aid to the UAR**

Following the above-mentioned attempts to pressurize Nasser, Johnson finally approved the aid to the UAR, managing to bypass Congress to do so. He wrote the following in his own handwriting:

“Tell Nasser we hope to provide 17 million dollars [worth] in two or three weeks’ time, and can perhaps get Congress to agree to this shortly afterwards, but ask him to bear with us regarding the remaining twenty million.”\(^\text{642}\)

Time went by, and the rest of the deal was not delivered. Nasser considered this failure to deliver the wheat a way of exploiting the UAR’s need for wheat in order to put him in a difficult position,

\(^{640}\) Ibid.
\(^{641}\) Letter from Johnson to Eshkol, Washington, May 21st, 1965
\(^{642}\) Memo. from Bundy to Johnson, Washington, May 31st, 1965
leading the US to fear he might react violently regardless of the consequences.\footnote{Memo. from Komer to P. Johnson, Washington, Jun 16\textsuperscript{th}, 1965.}

Nasser had already informed the people about the US’s putting economic pressure on him and had paved the way for a policy of self-reliance, as previously mentioned. Nasser also told the Colombian broadcasting station, on July 9\textsuperscript{th}, 1965, that ever since he had spoken openly on the matter, no more pressure had been attempted, but before then the US had been threatening to stop providing wheat to the UAR.

“We have used the US aid for our development projects, but if we fail to get it we can decrease these projects and can implement our plans in six years instead of five.

“When Khrushchev attacked us in 1959, we retaliated by attacking him the following day... We do not accept conditions or any form of pressure, whether from the United States or the Soviet Union.

“The Soviets, however, did not attempt to pressurize us in any way. And when the US stopped the shipments of wheat to us, we had a reserve that was enough for only a month and a half, and began negotiating with far-off countries to acquire some: we were in a truly difficult situation! I sent a letter to the Prime Minister of the Soviet Union asking for wheat, knowing that the Soviets imported it, and received a reply fifteen days later saying that they had asked their ships carrying wheat from Canada and Australia to come straight to the UAR – with no conditions attached; not even a commercial agreement, or even an agreement as to the price of the wheat!”\footnote{Nasser’s interview with Colombian Broadcasting on May 9\textsuperscript{th}, 1965.}

And when the UAR, in August 1965, asked the US to agree to a new short-term aid agreement under the PL-480 programme, the request was refused! This despite the fact that Lucius Battle, the US Ambassador in Cairo, had recommended that the decision be in favour of the UAR on the basis that agreeing to the request would constitute an important step in restoring US influence to the 1962-1963 levels when Kennedy was in power, and would benefit US interests in the area.

Battle feared that the US would go the way of Britain before it, with very little contact with UAR authorities and little or no influence on policies related to Palestine, the Arab Peninsula, and Libya.\footnote{Tel. from the Embassy in the UAR to the Department of State, Cairo, August 18\textsuperscript{th}, 1965}
However, in October, 1965, it was agreed that Battle should begin negotiations with the UAR for a new short-term deal under the PL-480 programme. The US justified this change in policy by saying that aid had been suspended for the previous nine months to press the UAR toward policies and courses of action conforming to US interests, but felt that there was now a risk if aid were to be suspended further that Nasser would seek alternative sources of food and would be driven to dependence on the Communist states. It was decided that the new conditions for aid would be more stringent than those of the previous agreement.\textsuperscript{646}

It was a tough deal, and in return it was agreed that the US should pay the toll fee for transit through the Suez Canal in local currency for its ships.

The agreement was signed by Johnson on December 29\textsuperscript{th}, 1965.

**The US resumes its request for UAR arms limitation**

The US seized the opportunity of the resolution of the economic aid problem to reopen the matter of arms limitation. Accordingly, Battle approached Nasser, tackling the issue in general terms with the excuse that the whole world needed to find a solution to the arms race. The following dialogue took place as recounted by Battle:

**Battle:** “The US hopes that the UAR will agree to the IAEA safeguards; we have discussed the question of these safety measures with a great many countries in the hope of encouraging general acceptance of this requirement. All we are asking for is a formal agreement that you accept these safeguards.”

**Nasser:** “Have the Israelis agreed?”

**Battle:** “No, but someone has to start! And we are negotiating with them in hopes that these safeguards will be implemented in the whole region.”

Battle then began talking about conventional arms, expressing the hope that this matter, too, would be solved.

**Nasser:** “And the ‘solution is to sell arms to Israel?! What tanks has Israel received? 300, 400, 500?!”

**Battle:** “These figures are exaggerated!”

\textsuperscript{646} Memo. from Rusk to Johnson, Washington, October 11\textsuperscript{th}, 1965, US Aid to the UAR.
**Nasser:** “If you sell planes to Israel, we will buy planes. If you sell tanks to Israel, we will buy tanks.”!647

Israel at this time was pressurizing the United States for more arms and more economic aid, as well as the matter of nuclear desalination. Johnson promised to look into the matter of the economic aid and the desalination plant, saying that he did not want Israel to feel insecure!648

A meeting took place on February 17th, 1966 between Llewellyn Thompson from the US Foreign Office and the Soviet Ambassador in Washington, Anatoliy Dobrynin, to discuss the issue of arms limitation in the Middle East, and a second meeting was held on March 16th, but nothing came of the discussions.649

The two discussed the matter of nuclear arms in the Middle East and agreed that it would be of no avail to suggest a formal treaty to prohibit them, as the Arabs would not agree to sign a treaty with Israel!

Dobrynin declared that the Soviets would not furnish nuclear weapons to Middle Eastern countries; and that it was assumed that the US would follow the same policy.

However, Rusk did not confirm this, and said that if all the countries involved should accept the IAEA safeguards, that would be a ‘first step’, adding that he was ‘sure that the Israelis had no plans to produce nuclear weapons’ – which the Americans knew was not the case!

Dobrynin showed some skepticism at this, stating that the policy of the Soviet Union was that there should be no nuclear weapons not only in the Middle East, but anywhere in the world.650

**Nasser asks for De Gaulle’s assistance in the nuclear domain**

Nasser sent a verbal message to General De Gaulle with Tharwat Okasha, who met with Louis Joxe, Minister of Administrative Reforms, on February 23rd, 1966. The message said:

“The government of Guy Mollet during the Fourth Republic provided all kinds of military assistance to Israel, particularly in the nuclear domain. This unlimited aid resulted in the considerable progress

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647 Tel. from the Embassy in the UAR to the Department of State, Cairo, Nov. 24th, 1965
648 Memo. for the Record, Washington, Feb. 9th, 1966, President’s Talk with Israeli Foreign Minister Eban.
650 Memo. of Conversation, Washington, May 26th, 1966, Nuclear Weapons in the NE.
Israel has made in setting up its nuclear reactor, and in its ability to have a nuclear bomb by 1970, which the UAR cannot possibly have before 1975. The Fifth Republic has inherited responsibility for this state of affairs.

“President Nasser is fully aware of the futility of the arms race and believes in the principle of non-proliferation of nuclear arms; however, he cannot remain inactive faced with the danger that threatens us: according to your statistics, Israel is at least five years ahead of us in this domain, a period of time during which we are threatened with destruction!

“President Nasser would prefer to spend the country’s national income on solving the country’s problems and raising the living standard of its people rather than get embroiled in this deadly race.

“We initiated our nuclear programme for peaceful purposes and the production of fissile materials; the second stage will be military and will end with testing the bomb.

“The only solution to prevent the proliferation of nuclear weapons is general disarmament, and for the ownership of nuclear power to be in the hands of an international authority with the sole right to monitor and inspect all current and future nuclear facilities, but the Superpowers do not want that to happen!

“As the role played by France in the Middle East – according to General De Gaulle’s words to Abdel Hakim Amer – is to maintain the balance of power in the region, it is time for France to take up this role as a means of expiating the sins perpetrated by the Fourth Republic!

“We require France’s technical assistance to catch up with the standard reached by Israel, which now constitutes a threat to the lives of our people and to the achievements we have managed to make.

“Our nuclear activities are geared towards peaceful objectives – which Israel also claims – but as you know, there are no barriers between peaceful and military objectives.”

**Nasser’s position on armament**

What was Nasser’s position regarding nuclear weapons and the armament policy of the Middle East? In his talks with Ibrahim Makhous, the Syrian Foreign Minister, on June 11th, 1966, Nasser said:

“The Dimona reactor is close to us – just 50 kilometres from the Egyptian border, we have aerial photographs of it. It is my opinion that Israel is making a nuclear bomb; as long as the Israelis have
plutonium, they will! And if they make a nuclear bomb, the status quo will remain as is! Are we to enter into a nuclear war?!

“Israel has reached the same stage as we have with its missiles; the source of this information is Kennedy’s personal representative. Then Johnson claims that they have decided to ‘balance’ armaments in the Middle East because we bought arms from Russia, and that the US will not accept any deviation from this so-called balance – this at a time when the US had given Israel missile projectors to target Egypt and Syria with!”

Israel stuck doggedly to its refusal to accede to IAEA safeguard procedures at their Dimona reactor, in spite of the US’s insistence that they do so, claiming that this was a matter related to ‘national dignity and national security’ (!) and that such inspection would inevitably leak information to the UAR, which would endanger Israel’s security! And how, they added, could the Israeli government explain to its people why it had agreed to IAEA inspection when the UAR had not?!

The UAR had, in fact, agreed to the inspection, but the USA had failed to notify Israel of this.651

Overt US bias towards Israel and the attempts to overthrow Nasser:

The matter began with a comparison between the military power of Israel and that of the Arabs, drawn up by the CIA in September, 1966, to make sure that Israel maintained its qualitative superiority vis a vis any group of Arabs who might potentially engage in hostilities, and also to ensure Israel’s industrial capability to improve on and maintain the armoured cars and planes it had been provided with.

The six Arab countries seen as potential threats to Israel - the UAR, Syria, Iraq, Lebanon, Jordan, and Saudi Arabia - possessed a two-to-one numerical superiority in tanks, three-to-one in major naval units, two-to-two in fighter aircraft and ten-to-one in bombers. As for traditional weaponry, the numerical dominance of the Arab states was offset by Israel’s superior training and maintenance; added to these factors was that of distance, for it was doubtful that Iraqi tanks could cross the Syrian desert fast enough to play a role of note in any confrontation with Israel!

The CIA report saw the drawbacks for Israel as being its limited number of airports and the short time available to launch its planes in

651 Tel. from the Embassy in Israel to the Dept. of State, Tel Aviv, January 11th, 1967.
the event of an attack by its neighbours, all of whom were minutes away from Israel.

The report went on to say that the accelerating arms race was involving both the Arabs and Israel in advanced weapons development, particularly in the missile field. The Israelis would be able to deploy a French-built surface-to-surface missile with a range of about 270 nautical miles by 1967–1968.

The report conceded that the Egyptian navy presented the only significant sea threat to Israel, which has taken the calculated risk of not building up a comparable naval force, in the belief that their air power could neutralize the sea threat.652

The complete and overt US bias towards Israel appeared in full force after the appointment of the Jewish Walter Rostow as Special Assistant to Johnson! Rostow decided to publicly announce the US aircraft deal to Israel, sending a memo to that effect to Johnson and stating:

“Eshkol wants as early an announcement as possible, but will probably accept our timing. This announcement will win loud plaudits from Israelis and from their friends here. I am working on other new things you might do for Israel as you asked.”!

The economic and food aid to Israel was announced in September, 1966, and amounted to 52 million dollars, as was the aircraft deal of some 70 million dollars though the figure was not published, in addition to part of the tank deal for the amount of 21.2 million dollars - all evidence of the US's support for Israel.653

The US informed Nasser of the deal through Sadat, who was on a visit to the US at the time, in the hopes that being forewarned would prevent him from attacking the US publicly, as he was scheduled to make his annual May 1st speech. The US also planned to persuade Israel to delay announcement of the deal till about 13th May—after the Arab Defense Ministers’ meeting in Cairo.654

The US also committed to the following:

1. Support for Israeli technical assistance in Africa.
2. The Haifa Loan: supporting the power plant at Tel Aviv with the sum of 10 million dollars of which 6 million would come from AID money.

653 Memo. from Rostow to Johnson, Washington, April 29th, 1966
654 Ibid.
3. Providing technical support – publicly and privately - for the desalination programme using nuclear power.\(^{655}\)

However, the US alleged that it maintained an impartial stance in the Arab-Israeli conflict! Then came another evaluation of the Arab-Israeli arms situation, which stated the following:

1. Conventional Forces. Israel has a safe margin of superiority over any combination of Arab forces likely to attack it and can be expected to maintain that position for at least the next five years. Israel’s security must be measured by its ability to maintain military superiority over the UAR, the strongest single Arab state that can challenge Israel.

2. With regard to nuclear weapons: Israel is working towards acquiring nuclear weapons and will be in a position to do so within a short time. The Israeli reactor at Dimona is capable of producing enough plutonium to make one or two bombs a year! There can be no assurance that the Israelis are not pursuing a clandestine weapons program elsewhere.

US suspicions regarding this possibility were heightened by the Israelis’ unwillingness to relate what had happened to 80–100 tons of uranium concentrate that they had bought from Argentina four years before. The US had also had reports that Israel had acquired a nuclear chemical separation plant, which would be a significant step toward a nuclear weapons capability!

On the Arab side, it was seen that no state was anywhere near a nuclear weapons capability. The UAR possessed a small 2-megawatt research reactor which could not produce significant amounts of plutonium.

Both Nasser and Eshkol say that their countries will not be the first to introduce nuclear weapons into the area. However, neither the Egyptians nor the Israelis have accepted IAEA safeguards over their entire nuclear programs.

3. With regard to missiles: Israel has contracted with the French firm of Dassault to purchase an unknown quantity of surface-to-surface ballistic missiles with a range of 270 nautical miles and capable of

\(^{655}\) Memo. from Rostow to Johnson, Washington, June 25\(^{th}\), 1966.
carrying nuclear warheads. Israel is also implementing its own missile programme.\footnote{656 Memo. from Katzenbach to Johnson, Washington, May 1\textsuperscript{st}, 1967, the Arab–Israeli Arms Race and Status of US Arms Control Efforts.}

Despite Israel’s military supremacy and its ability to manufacture a nuclear bomb, the US remained anxious regarding its interests in the Arab world (2.75 billion dollars invested in petroleum, 750 million dollars profit a year from production alone, in addition to other projects).

On May 23\textsuperscript{rd}, 1967 – just two weeks before the Israeli attack on the Arab countries – Johnson took the decision to approve the sale of 100 armoured vehicles to Israel for the sum of 3.7 million dollars, a 2 million dollar cash sale of tank spare parts, 14 million dollars in military credit at 5 percent interest for Hawk and tank spare parts, a sale of 27.5 million dollars in food at 2–0.5 percent interest, 20 million dollars in Export-Import Bank loans, and 5 million dollars to help Israel infiltrate into Africa\footnote{657 Memo. from Rostow to Johnson, Washington, May 8\textsuperscript{th}, 1967, Israeli Aid Package.}

Talk then began in the CIA regarding the possibility of changing the Nasser regime! They reached the conclusion that:

“Unless Nasser’s troubles get much more severe than at present, we doubt that his regime will be in serious danger of being replaced! A successful move to do so would require considerable backing from the armed forces; this appears unlikely in the near term. However, unless the government improves its economic performance and manages to revive greater political support, it will become more vulnerable in the long run.”!

Strangely enough, the CIA claimed that US–UAR relations had fluctuated considerably over the years, and were witnessing a downward turn, mainly as a result of the reviving antagonism between Nasser and the more pro-Western Arab leaders, particularly Faisal! The deterioration in US-UAR relations were further exacerbated by Nasser’s troubles with the British in the Arabian Peninsula.\footnote{658 National Intelligent Estimate, Washington, May 19\textsuperscript{th}, 1966, the Outlook for the UAR.}

The UAR was aware of this deterioration in US-UAR relations and warned of it, and in fact, challenged it. The Egyptian people realised that the clash between the two countries was likely not only to last a long time but to get even worse, owing to the fact that US plans for the
Arab world were definitely not in the best interests of the Arab people, including the Egyptians, coupled with the antagonizing, provocative way the US had of implementing its policies.

So what led to this even further deterioration in US-Egyptian relations? For the first time since Kennedy’s presidency, the US had become the official and acknowledged supplier of arms to Israel, in addition to its constant backing of Arab reactionary regimes. Added to this was the economic pressure exerted on the UAR by the US at a time when the latter was backing Israel in every possible way.659

Battle’s last meeting with Nasser before his transfer back to the US as Assistant Foreign Secretary took place on March 4th, 1967, three months before the Israeli attack on the Arab countries. The following conversation took place between them:

Battle: “Is there any message I can relay from you to Washington?”

Nasser: “The UAR is a country that prides itself on its independence and its dignity, and will never succumb to US pressure. We do not want American wheat! When the US was giving us wheat, we could not sleep in peace because we were depending on America for our food! We resented every mention in the US or world press that five out of every eight loaves in our country were given to us by America!

“The UAR will not accept interference by other countries. We are not influenced by Russia and never will be. Whether I continue [to rule] or not, the attitude of the UAR regarding its own independence will remain consistent. The UAR has no designs on other countries, but wants, for example, Aden to be ruled by revolutionary forces and not British stooges! As for Israel, my views are well known: I hope that the Arabs will be able to return!

“Regarding the IMF, why should we pay the IMF 104 million dollars debt when it would not give us the seventy million dollars to which we are entitled? The UAR must stand on its own two feet, and if the IMF and the West refuse to do business with us, we will still survive and make progress... If we do not receive satisfactory treatment from the IMF, we will resort to other countries!

“The UAR would have been better off had it not based its economic plans upon a continued supply of wheat. If any country should attempt to hurt the UAR, the UAR would respond and no doubt could do damage to the US and other countries.”660

660 Tel. from the Embassy in the UAR to the Department of State, Cairo, March 4th, 1967.
Regrettably, it was not only the Israelis and the English who were encouraging the US to continue to withhold US aid to the UAR, but also the Saudis, who were battling Egyptian forces in Yemen. No doubt this pressurizing had an impact on the Americans, who were wavering between cutting all ties with Nasser and maintaining relations with him to avoid the problems he could cause to US interests in the area, especially as he could easily prevent US aircraft from flying over Egyptian territory the same way he did during the US airlift to Jordan on February 12th, 1967, and could also activate an effective Arab boycott of trade with the US, as well as causing a multitude of problems to pro-US regimes in Jordan, Saudi Arabia, and Lebanon. He could cause problems to US shipping in the Suez Canal, raise demonstrations against the Wheelus base in Libya, and stir up more problems for Israel through the PLO. He could even push for the nationalisation or harassment of American petroleum companies!

“Nasser is still the most powerful figure in the Middle East... Despite its mounting economic problems, the UAR has the trained manpower and the will to modernize that will make it the most advanced nation in the area. Two American companies have brought in promising oil finds, which will make the UAR an important source of petroleum. It is difficult to accept that we should burn all our bridges with the capital of the Arab world.”

Naturally, this US position towards the UAR was accompanied by a full compliance with all Israel’s military and economic demands, which were met at full speed!

There were also problems with the CIA, which was creating a problem for its own government! Nasser told Battle on March 4th, 1967 that the UAR had information about two alleged former CIA agents, as well as a third country, who were in contact with the Egyptian army under U.S. direction.

Despite the fact that the CIA denied this and claimed that it was not attempting to overthrow Nasser, Donald Bergus, US Country Director for the UAR, was not convinced of this, saying, ‘this should not be allowed to happen’! He added that hostility towards the Nasser regime could only cause problems for the US in Egypt.

US-UAR relations were further exacerbated by Nasser’s position in the Yemen. Nasser refused to withdraw all the Egyptian forces there so

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662 Memo. from Rostow to Johnson, Washington, April 7th, 1967, Israeli Aid Package.
long as Faisal had not withdrawn his forces from the Yemen-Saudi border. This determination, which was contrary to US wishes, enabled the UAR to control the northern entrance to the Red Sea from the Suez Canal, and the southern entrance near Aden, giving it control over this vital waterway. Furthermore, the Egyptian army had gained a foothold in the Arab Peninsula, the stronghold of US influence and interests.664

**Hostilities on the Israeli border intensify:**

Tensions increased on the Israeli borders with Syria and Lebanon; Israel justified its attacks by saying that it wished to prove to Israeli settlers on the borders that it was capable of defending them against Arab infiltration, the primary source of which was Jordan!

King Hussein in turn expressed his anger at these skirmishes carried out by Israel, saying:

“We cannot continue to put up with attacks of this sort; retaliation is apparently the only language Israelis understand.”665

When asked what he thought the purpose of these Israeli raids was, King Hussein replied that he was unable to comprehend them. He thought surely they must be aware of the fact that such action played directly into the hands of extremists within Jordan, making the pursuit of a moderate course by the government of Jordan more difficult. As a possible reason, he suggested that the Israelis wanted to provoke the Jordanian people to set the stage for a major Israeli attack.

In a meeting between Zalman Shazar, the President of Israel, and Johnson in Washington on August 2nd, 1966, the Israeli president thanked Johnson for selling military equipment to Israel, claiming that Fatah’s 666 raids on Israel had resulted in the murder of innocent Israelis and that Israel had no alternative but to defend itself! It must have military force to deter its enemies.

At the conclusion of the meeting, Johnson reiterated to Shazar the US’s commitment to defending the integrity and security of Israel!667

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665 Tel. from the Embassy in Jordan to the Department of State, Aman, May 2nd, 1966
666 The Palestinian Fatah organization was established on January 1st, 1965 after many Palestinian activists had become disillusioned with the Palestinian Liberation Organization’s failure to carry out operations within Israel. They formed an organization they called ‘Heroes of the Return’, with a branch called ‘The Storm’, after which Fatah was formally announced to have been formed in January 1965 and announced its responsibility for guerilla attacks that had taken place within Israel.
667 Memorandum of Conversation, Washington, August 2nd, 1966, Call on President Johnson by President Shazar.
The incidents on the Israeli borders with Syria and Jordan continued, the most serious of which – from an Israeli perspective – was an attack on Jerusalem inside Israeli territory. The Israeli government informed the UN of these incidents that took place under the name of ‘The Popular Liberation War’ in the beginning of September, 1966. The Israelis attempted to put forth their point of view to the Soviets in New York, and Eshkol also spoke to the ambassadors of the four superpowers, including the Soviet Union, to impress upon Syria the need to stop these border incidents. Needless to say, the Israelis denied that they had instigated the attacks!

On November 13th, 1966, Israel carried out a massive raid on Jordan, using a 3000-strong force, tanks, and planes, an operation whose magnitude far exceeded any of the skirmishes Israel had previously complained of! The US admitted this, saying that an attack of such proportions on Jordan had caused considerable damage to US and Israeli interests and had put paid to any tacit cooperation between Hussein and the Israelis!

The US realised that the Israeli attack had weakened Hussein, on whom they had spent 500 million dollars in an attempt to make him a stabilizing factor on Israel’s longest border, and now Israel’s attack was likely to make even the moderate Arabs feel fatalistically that there was nothing they could do to get along with the Israelis no matter how hard they tried, and would encourage Arab extremism.

The Israelis had proved that they didn’t dare attack Soviet-protected Syria but could attack US-backed Jordan with impunity.

Goldberg issued a statement in New York condemning the Israeli attack on Jordan. Johnson also sent a letter to Eshkol in similar vein on November 22nd, 1966.

In an attempt to justify its action to the US, Aba Eban, the Israeli Foreign Minister, said that there had been a change in Israel’s security situation over the past two or three years. Israel’s deterrent capacity had made the neighboring states avoid military confrontation, preferring to rely on a new method of expressing active hostility: guerrilla warfare. The Arab press, he went on, reflected tremendous interest in guerilla warfare as practiced in Algeria, Vietnam, etc. This technique plus the ideology of adding the ‘sixth entity’, the Palestine nation, to the five opposing Arab states – Egypt, Syria, Iraq, Jordan,

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668 Circular Tel. from the Department of State to Certain Posts, Washington, Oct. 11th, 1966, Arab-Israeli Border Situation.

and Lebanon - served as a liberating force whose activities were creating a serious situation. “The prospect looks ominous.” He defended the attack of November 13th as having taken place to address this problem!

The US, surprisingly, did not share this point of view, emphasizing that the stability of the borders and supporting King Hussein’s regime were prime objectives for the US.670

On January 17th, 1967, Eshkol sent a letter to Johnson complaining of Syrian guerilla operations across the border with Syria, claiming that Israel had practiced restraint and avoided escalation, but that the country was seething with indignation! 671

He concluded his missive by stating:

“Since we agreed to be in close and frank contact I felt bound to share my deep concern with you.”672

Johnson responded the same day:

“I want you to know how fully I appreciate the painful dilemma that you and your colleagues face in coping with continuing acts of terrorism along Israel’s borders... The tragedy is that the search for security can lead to actions which, perversely, threaten to destroy chances for permanent peace.

“I am convinced that there are, fortunately, alternatives to military retaliation that in the long run will provide Israel with a greater measure of security. Your government and mine are already engaged in discussions concerning possible ways in which the technology we are developing might help strengthen the capability of the Israeli border forces to intercept infiltrators.

“I am encouraged by the initiative of Secretary General U Thant in calling attention to the present dangerous situation along the Israel-Syria border and asking both the Israeli and Syrian Governments to agree to an emergency meeting of the Israel-Syria Mixed Armistice

670 Telegram from the Department of State to the Embassy in Israel, December 14th, 1967.
Commission. I welcome your government’s initial favorable reaction to his proposal.”

As always, Israel exploited the situation to its own advantage: Harman, the Israeli Ambassador to Washington, met with the US Under-Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs and asked for additional military assistance as well as public support of Israel by the US in its confrontation with Syria.

Sure enough, a meeting took place between the staff of the US Defence Department and the Israeli military attaché to discuss the possibility of using anti-infiltration technology on the borders. The Israelis refused the idea, saying it provided no solution to the problem of Israeli security! Naturally, what they wanted was to have the freedom to attack all the Arab countries which shared Israel’s borders! They said such technology could not possibly be a substitute for military action against the Palestinian guerillas, the Syrian government, and other ‘enemies’. Passive defence – as suggested by the US – would, they claimed, simply encourage the aggressors! However, they added, there was no reason not to improve Israel’s electronic anti-infiltration facilities.

Regarding the military aid that Israel had asked for, this included 200 armoured personnel carriers, two million dollars’ worth of spare parts for tanks on a grant basis, 14 million dollars credit on ‘Hawk terms’ for follow-on spares for Hawk missiles and M–48 tanks.

The Joint Chiefs of Staff expressed their objection to Israel’s demands, saying:

“We do not consider that a grant of military aid to Israel is justified by any internal or external threat. In addition, Israel’s economic condition does not justify such aid, which would be contrary to US interests in the Middle East. Israel’s present military forces are capable of defending successfully against any individual or collective Arab attack.”

Accordingly, the Chiefs of Staff advised against acceding to Israel’s demands for additional major items of military equipment for several reasons, including the fact that it would aggravate the current unstable internal situation in Jordan, and would serve to establish the
United States as the primary supplier of military equipment to Israel! In addition, it would provoke adverse Arab reactions. Moreover, there were suitable substitutes for their requests in Europe.\textsuperscript{677}

Israel requested the swift delivery of the F-104 fighter aircraft, asking that the deal remain secret. They also requested eight Skyhawk A-4F fighter planes instead of the agreed-upon four!\textsuperscript{678}

On April 7\textsuperscript{th}, 1967, a large-scale military confrontation took place between Israel and Syria in the Southern and Central Demilitarized Zones that lasted for almost a whole day. Mortar, artillery and tank fire and several aerial dogfights took place, and both sides claimed victory in the battle!\textsuperscript{679}

The UN intervened to stop the clashes, a move which was welcomed by the US as the confrontation posed serious problems for King Hussein. The US also advised Israel not to antagonize Syrians on the border.\textsuperscript{680}

Johnson sent a letter to Eshkol on May 17\textsuperscript{th}, 1967, in which he expressed his deep concern over the status of peace in the region, and strongly urged the Israelis to avoid any actions that would result in further violence and tension in the area. He added that he was confident that the Israelis would understand that he could bear no responsibility for any situation resulting from Israel’s acting without first consulting the US.

Border clashes continued until the morning of June 5\textsuperscript{th}, 1967, when Israel launched a large-scale attack on three Arab countries: the UAR, Syria, and Jordan, using all the arms and aircraft it had received from the US, France, Germany, and Britain, succeeding in occupying the Sinai, the West Bank of Jordan, and the Golan Heights in Syria.

\textbf{Many questions arise here: since when had Israel been preparing for this forceful expansion?! Did Johnson know of the Israeli intention to attack? And to what extent did the US and the West intervene in this aggression?!}

\textsuperscript{677} Memo from the Joint Chiefs of Staff to McNamara, Washington, February 2\textsuperscript{nd}, 1967.
\textsuperscript{678} Telegram from the Department of State to the Embassy in Israel.
\textsuperscript{679} Circular Tel. from the Department of State to Certain Posts, Washington, April 7\textsuperscript{th}, 1967.
\textsuperscript{680} Tel. from the Dept. of State to the Embassy in Israel, Washington, April 11\textsuperscript{th}, 1967