

**NASSER**  
**THE SECRET ARCHIVES**



By  
**Hoda Gamal Abdel Nasser**  
Translated by  
**Camellia Hamdy**

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

Foreword

### **Where It All Began**

A Rebel in Secondary School

Under Arms

The Palestine War and the Formation of the Free Officers

Empowering the Revolution

The Revolution and the King

The British and Americans Side Together

Difficulties of Changing the Old Regime

The Sudan Chooses Independence

The Revolutionaries Proclaim a Republic

The Power Struggle Within the Revolutionary Command Council (Crisis of March 1954)

### **Independence At Last**

Negotiations Begin with Radical Disagreements

Egyptian Fedayeen Confront the British

The Evacuation Agreement is Signed

Refusal to Join Global Coalitions

Israeli Border Attacks

Positive Neutrality

### **The Suez Canal Company is Nationalized**

Why Nationalize the Canal?

Nasser Announces the Nationalization of the Suez Canal

Nasser Refuses the Internationalization of the Canal

A Military Attack Looms

### **The Tripartite Aggression on Egypt**

The Tripartite Aggression is Launched

The US and the Soviets Take Action

Withdrawal After the Condemnation of the Attack by the United Nations

## **The Union with Syria and its Repercussions**

The US Attempts to Attract Nasser  
The Lebanese Crisis and the Iraqi Revolution  
The Dispute Between Nasser and Khrushchev  
The Congo Crisis  
The Cuban Crisis  
The Palestinian Cause is Promoted Globally  
The Kuwaiti Crisis  
The Secession Conspiracy

## **The Revolution Needs a Revolution!**

The Need for Change  
Self-Criticism and a New Working Program  
The Conflict in Yemen  
The Yemeni Rebels Ask Egypt for Help  
How To End the Conflict in Yemen?  
The Struggle Ends

## **The Arab-Israeli Conflict Flares Up**

Preliminaries To the Conflict  
Monday, June 5th, 1967...The Longest day in Modern Arab History!  
What Happened on the Egyptian Side During the Israeli Aggression?

## **“Hold Your Head Up, Brother”**

The Impossible War and Rebuilding the Army  
Securing the Suez Canal  
Confronting Israeli Attacks on Vital Utilities  
The Revolutions in Libya and the Sudan Support Egypt  
Israeli Attacks on Cairo Suburbs  
Nasser Appeals to Nixon Who Responds with a Peace Initiative  
The Repercussions of the Rogers Plan  
The Last Summit





## FOREWORD

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](http://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

## Where It All Began

Gamal Abdel Nasser... my father, the man who freed Egypt from tyranny and occupation, roused the dormant spirit of Arab nationalism, 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 15<sup>th</sup> 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 with his father, uncle and brothers in 1929



My father 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:

“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 my father had completed his third year in the Nahaseen school, his 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, my father 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 an end to colonialism and for the constitution to be restored.

My father 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.

“I entered custody as an enthusiastic pupil, but left it brimming with anger.”

Later on, my father was to reminisce about this period of his life during a speech he gave at the very same Mansheya Square on October 26<sup>th</sup>, 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.

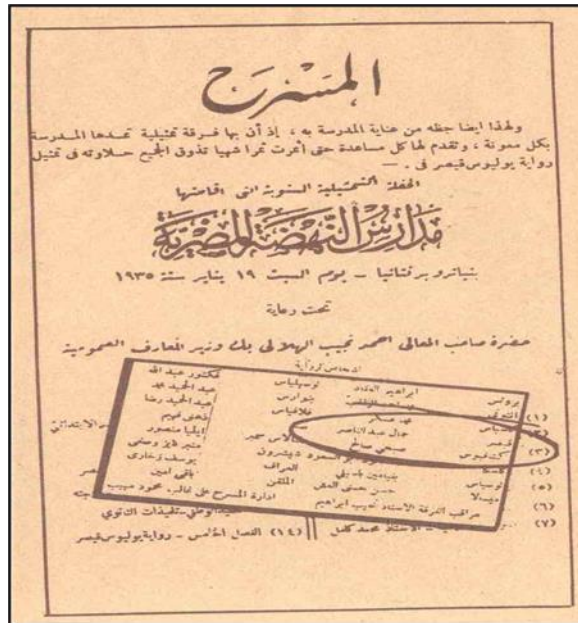
His passion for reading patriotic and history-related literature was born during this time; he was particularly interested in the French revolution and the works of Rousseau and Voltaire, and even wrote an article entitled Voltaire, the Man of Freedom, which was published in the school magazine. Books 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.



Nasser’s article in the school magazine

He also followed Arab literature, and greatly admired the poems of Ahmed Shawqi and Hafez Ibrahim. He read the life of the prophet Mohamed 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.



Gamal Abdel Nasser playing the part of Julius Caesar in the annual school concert held by El Nahda School on 19<sup>th</sup> January, 1935

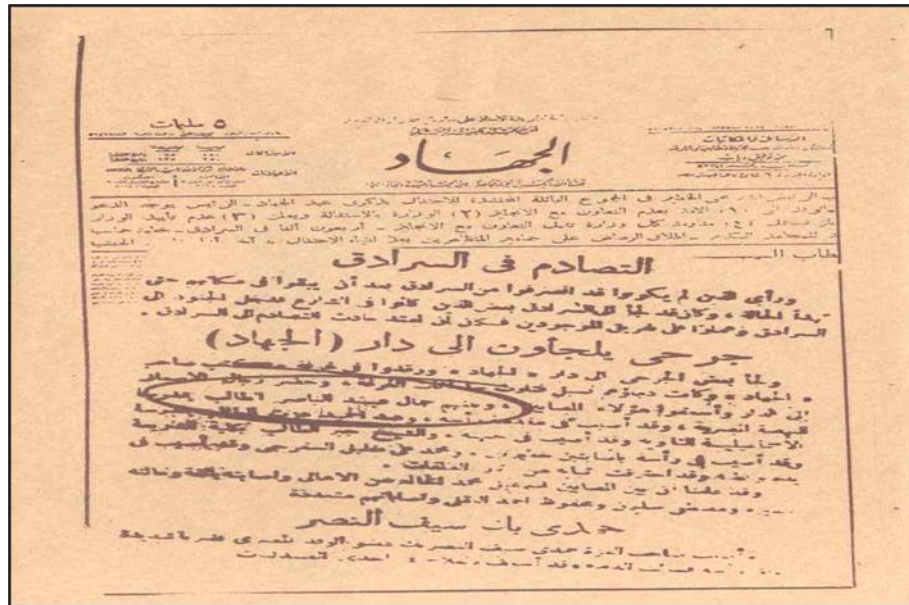
The year 1935 saw a significant surge in the activities of the Egyptian national movement, with students played a leading role. Their demands were clear: freedom, and the return of the constitution. A letter from my father to his friend Aly dated September 4<sup>th</sup>, 1935, sheds light on his feelings 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 9<sup>th</sup>, 1935, British Foreign Secretary Samuel Hoare announced Britain's refusal to restore the constitution, igniting widespread demonstrations by students and workers, and on November 13<sup>th</sup>, my father led a group of secondary school demonstrators who were confronted by British police forces. The British opened fire at the students, injuring him 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.



The name of the student Gamal Abdel Nasser listed amongst the wounded in the demonstrations against the English – Al-Gihad newspaper, 1935

In a speech he gave at Cairo University on November 15<sup>th</sup>, 1952, my father spoke of the impact this incident had had on him:

“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 12<sup>th</sup>, 1935, to restore the 1923 constitution. At that time, my father 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, my father wrote again to his friend Aly on September 3<sup>rd</sup>, 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.”

His book *The Philosophy of the Revolution* 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 my father, 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; it 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.

My father’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. His fellow students however went on strike, and even threatened to set fire to the school, causing the English headmaster to rescind his decision.

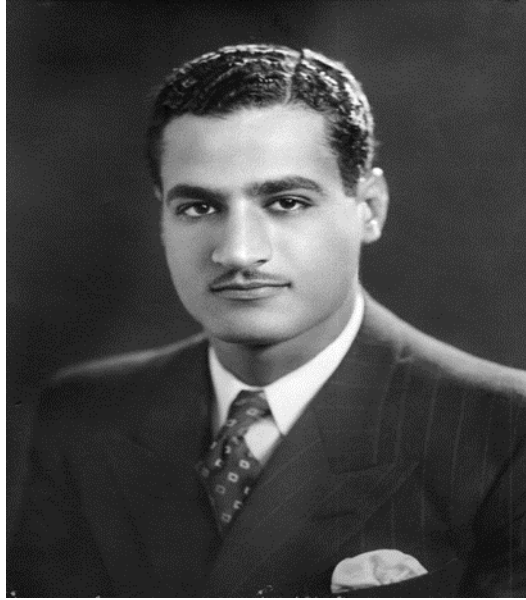
Politics had become my father's chief preoccupation ever since that fateful first demonstration in Alexandria. He sought out the political organizations available at the time, joining Masr El Fata where he remained for two years until he realized it was going nowhere. He also made several contacts with the Muslim Brotherhood, but ultimately refused to join them or indeed any other 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, his political horizons expanded to encompass an awareness of the Arab situation as a whole. He would demonstrate regularly with his colleagues every November 2<sup>nd</sup>, protesting against the Balfour Declaration whereby Britain granted the Jews a homeland in Palestine regardless of its legitimate occupants, the Palestinian Arabs.

### **Under Arms**

When my father 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.

He 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, my father 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 my father applied, and this time succeeded in meeting the deputy Minister of War, Major-General Ibrahim Khairy, who was impressed by his 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.



Gamal Abdel Nasser's membership card in the Union of Egyptian Universities when a law student, 1936/1937

My father 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 was promoted to ‘student corporal’.



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.

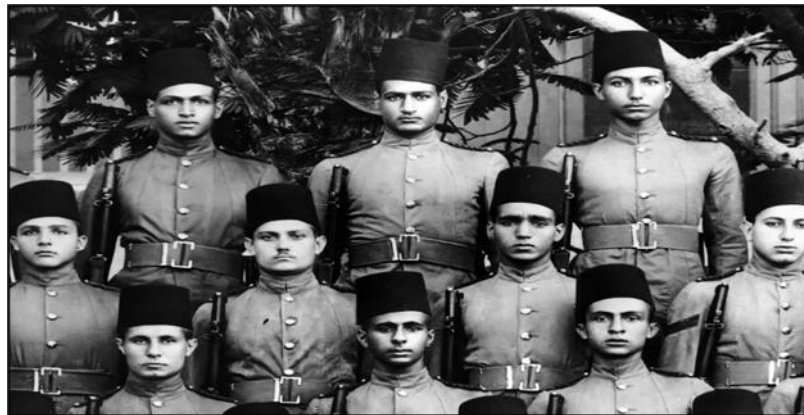




Gamal Abdel Nasser's certificate of graduation as a second lieutenant, 1<sup>st</sup> July, 1938

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 Atatürk, 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.

Upon graduation, my father joined the Infantry and was sent to Mankabad in Upper Egypt. His sojourn there gave him the opportunity to get to know the fellaheen and the miserable conditions under which they lived.



Gamal Abdel Nasser's driving license issued in Alexandria, November 27<sup>th</sup>, 1939

In 1939, he 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.



Abdel Nasser in the Sudan

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.

My father 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.”



Certificate promoting Gamal Abdel Nasser to the rank of First Lieutenant, May 1<sup>st</sup>, 1940

Towards the end of 1941 when Rommel was advancing towards the western frontier of Egypt, my father 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.”

On February 4<sup>th</sup>, 1942, while he was stationed at El-Alamein, a landmark event occurred which was to prove a turning point for my father. 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 submitted unconditionally!



My father 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 our 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.”



My father was promoted to captain on the 9<sup>th</sup> 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

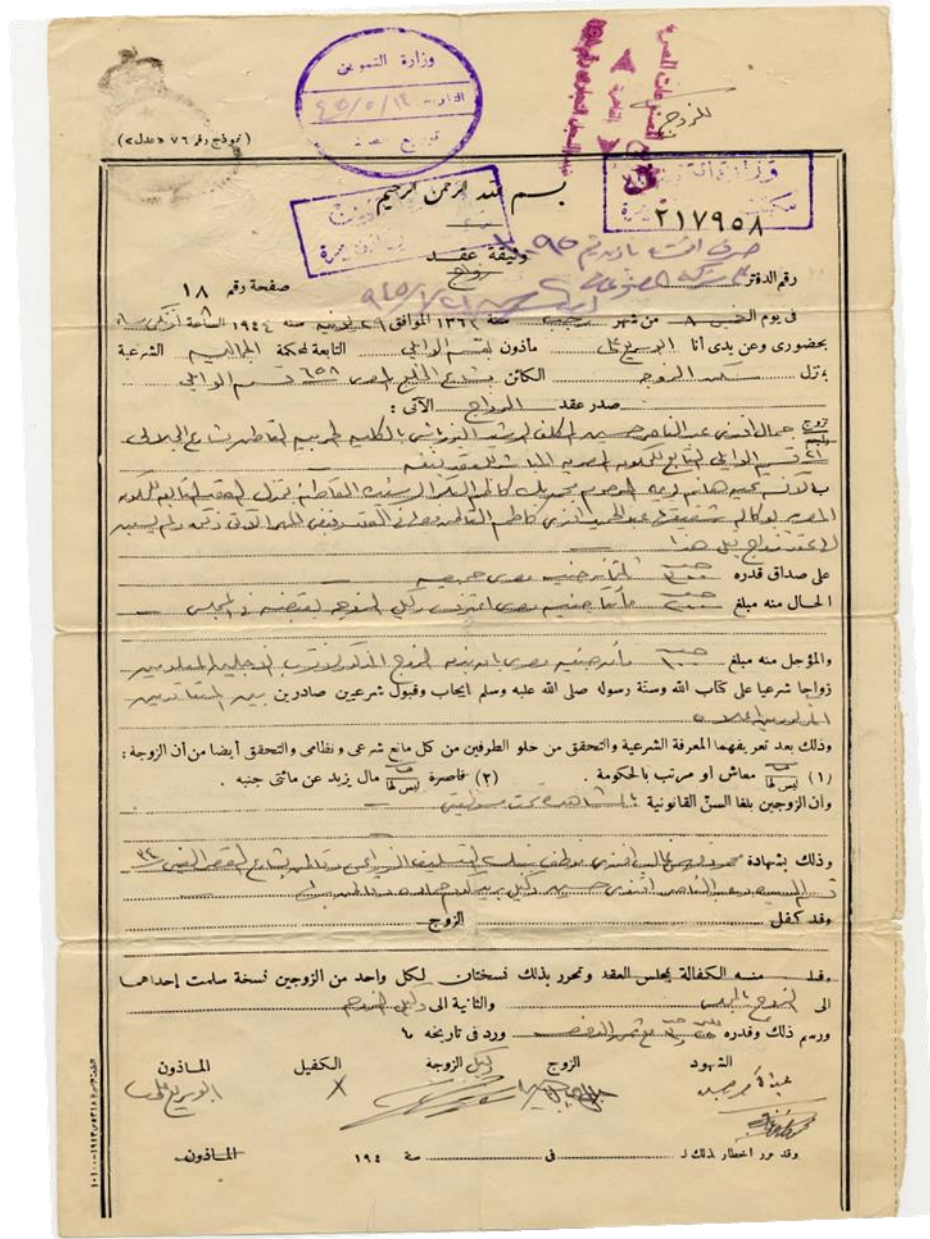
political writers such as Cromwell and Churchill. At this time, he was preparing to join the Command and Staff College.



Gamal Abdel Nasser's certificate of promotion to captain, September 9<sup>th</sup>, 1942

On June 29<sup>th</sup>, 1944, he 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.





Nasser's certificate of marriage to Taheya Mohamed Kazem, June 29<sup>th</sup>, 1944

### The Palestine War and 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 my father 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.”

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



Abdel Nasser during the Palestine war.

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

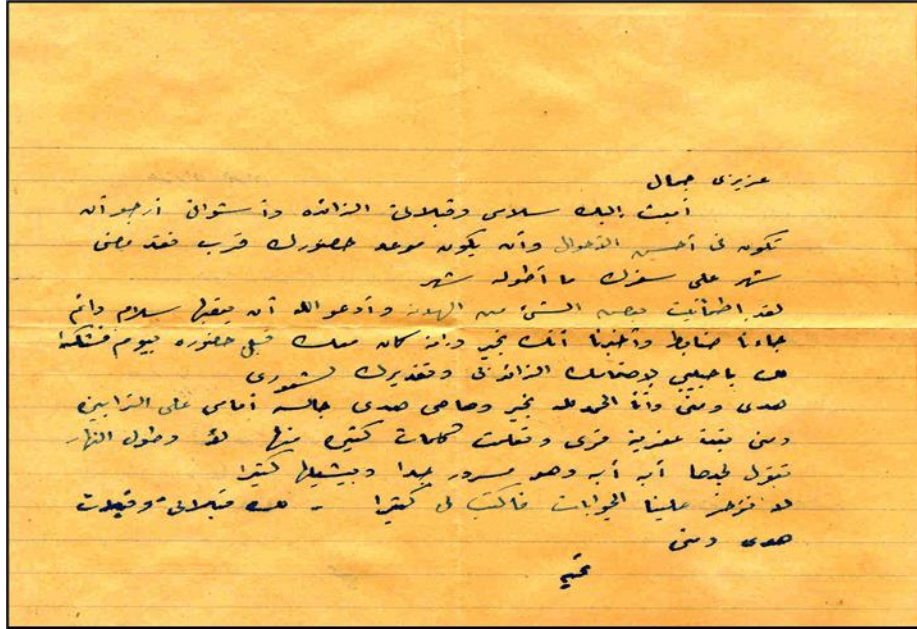
“There was no coordination between the Arab armies, and leadership at the higher levels was virtually non-existent, and most of our weapons were revealed to be faulty. Then in the midst of the battle, our Engineering Corps was given orders to build a recreational chalet for the King in Gaza!

“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 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 24<sup>th</sup> of February, 1949.

Following is an exchange of correspondence between Abdel Nasser and his wife during his time in Palestine; it is worth noting that all officers' letters were opened by the censor in Al Arish.





My dear Gamal,

I send you my greetings, profuse kisses, and yearning. I hope you are in the best of health and that you will soon return; it has been a month since you travelled...and what a long month that has been!

I was somewhat reassured by the truce, and pray to God for a permanent peace.

An officer came to see us and told us you were well and that he was with you the day before he came... thank you my dearest for caring so much and for understanding how I feel.

Hoda, Mona, and myself are well, thank God... Hoda is here sitting on the table in front of me, and Mona has become a little devil and has learned a lot of words, including 'No'... She tells her grandfather "opa, opa" all day long, and he is only too glad to pick her up.

Keep your letters coming and write to me often... Kisses from me, and from Hoda and Mona.

Taheya

And from my father, this short note followed by a longer letter:

Taheya,

Please inform Abdel Hakim's family that we constantly meet and that he is in the best of health.

Gamal

My dear Taheya,

My greetings, kisses, and yearning that I can't express... I am receiving your letters, and wait for the post every day in hopes of a letter from you... I see you before me all the time and imagine you at home when I arrive and when I leave... God willing, I will be back after we win the war... I need you; no words can express how much you mean to me... At this time and particularly during this month of June – the month of our marriage – I remember every single day of the years we spent together... all of them happy days... I feel that you were the reason for his happiness which I pray to God will last.

There is no cause whatsoever for you to worry, things are very quiet here, I am like someone spending the summer in the Levant...

I hope your father is well and that you have received the money I sent you on the 12<sup>th</sup> of this month, and pray that you are living comfortably... As for Hoda and Mona, I send them my kisses and greetings and lots of kisses to you.

Gamal

20<sup>th</sup> June, 1948



أجد أنه يتلنى عنده مع العلم أننا  
 نقابلنا شرا - وصحة أخرى  
 جلال وصحة جلال

مديونتي  
 هذه ذنوبي وتبارني التي لديني أن العبر  
 غلبت ... تعلمه خطا تلك والحقبة إن كل يوم انقضى البعب على  
 أجور جوار نيل ... وأنا ذلك أيام طول الوقت في  
 وأتملك في التزل عن عجزه وفي عجزه ... وأنا  
 الله أعوذ الله بعب الله ... رديب أنه ... عرفت  
 الجايو المر ... والحقبة ناه تملك عنده لا يمكن أن  
 نفسه ... وأنا في هذا الوقت ورشته بوضوالات ... الله  
 الذي استبطا في ... أذكر الله التي قضينا طابعا يوما يوما ...  
 وفي أجورها كل أيام ... وأهم المديونتي كنت في  
 في هذه السارة ... التي أرحو الله التمام ...  
 لديني لدينتنا لك وطقا ناه كل سنة طابعا  
 وأنا كنت يقضي الصبح في الشاء ...  
 أجورانه تكون الوالد شاع وأجورانه تكون بيتك  
 المديونتي التي أيلك في يوم ١٥ المديونتي ... في سنة أنه  
 تكون مناجحة وصحة في ... وفي ملوح يبارني وأنا ... والله  
 في يبارني الزمانه في

جلال  
 ١٩٤٨  
 ج. بوشيد



My father was promoted to major during the Palestine war, 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.



Gamal Abdel Nasser's certificate of promotion to major, July 7<sup>th</sup>, 1948

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."



After his return to Cairo, my father 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.



Heidar Pasha welcoming Egyptian troops returning from Faloga, March 28<sup>th</sup>, 1948

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 12<sup>th</sup>, 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 25<sup>th</sup>, 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 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.

“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.

“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.

“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.”

When I read these pamphlets, I found that they called for the reorganization and re-armament of the army, and for serious training rather than the parades and 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. The question of trading in ranks and medals was also touched upon, as was the matter of the faulty weapons and certain 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<sup>th</sup>, 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 this 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 26th 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 called to restore order until the afternoon of that day, after fire had 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.



## **Empowering the Revolution**

After the Cairo Fire, matters proceeded 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!

My father 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 22<sup>nd</sup> of July, 1952, at around ten p.m., an intelligence officer who was a member of the Free Officers came to our house to warn my father 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.

“We have to call everything off!” said the officer, to which my father replied, “We can't do that; the wheel has been set in motion, and nothing and no one can stop it! We can go ahead and move and change course at the last minute if need be, and actually the meeting of all the high-ranking officers in one place gives us a golden opportunity to arrest them all in one fell swoop.” As my father later said in a press interview:

“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 23<sup>rd</sup>, 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.



Following is the first official statement of the revolution:

Egypt has been through a difficult time in its recent history; a time characterized by bribery, corruption, and an unstable government, all of which had a profound effect on the army, and led to our defeat in Palestine.

In the period following the war, corruption increased even more, and there was a treacherous conspiracy

against the army which resulted in its being headed by persons who were either ignorant, traitors, or corrupt, in order that Egypt should be without an army to defend it. Accordingly, we have purified it of such elements and placed matters in the hands of men in whose integrity, morality, and patriotism we trust. All of Egypt must surely welcome this news with joy.

As for those former officers placed under arrest, they will not be harmed and will be released at the right time. I hereby assure the Egyptian people that the army today is working for the benefit of the country within the boundaries of the constitution and with no other motives whatsoever. I would like to take this opportunity to ask the people not to allow any traitors to resort to acts of violence or sabotage, because this is not in the interests of Egypt. Any such acts will be dealt with severely and its perpetrators dealt with on the spot as traitors, and the army and police force will cooperate in dealing with this.

I would also like to reassure all foreigners of their safety and that of their interests and assets, and that the army considers itself responsible for their welfare. May God be with us.

23<sup>rd</sup> July, 1952

(signed)

Major-General Mohamed Naguib

Commander-in-Chief of the Armed Forces



On the morning of July 23<sup>rd</sup>, 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!

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 23<sup>rd</sup> 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.

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 24<sup>th</sup> 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.

### **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 23<sup>rd</sup>, feeling very bitter at the failure of the British to intervene. He had no recourse but to accede to the demands of the 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.

Meanwhile, the king was attempting to escape, having sent several messages to Caffery on the 25<sup>th</sup> 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.

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 26<sup>th</sup>, 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.



The ultimatum delivered to the king:

From Major-General Mohamed Naguib in the name of the officers and men of the army to His Majesty King Farouk I

In view of the widespread chaos suffered lately by the country in every aspect as a result of your mismanagement, disregard of the constitution, and disrespect of the will of the people whereby everyone in this country fears for their life, possessions, and dignity

And after Egypt's reputation amongst the global community has deteriorated as a result of your behaviour, and traitors and the bribed find protection, obscene wealth and mindless extravagance at the expense of the poor, hungry people

All of which came to a head during the Palestine war and its aftermath, with the scandal of the faulty weapons and the ensuing court cases that were subjected to your

shameless intervention which distorted the truth, shook people's confidence in the judicial system, and helped the traitors to emerge unscathed, as rich and decadent as their ruler

I have therefore been delegated by the army to request you to abdicate the throne in favour of your heir Prince Ahmed Fouad, to be effective no later than 12 noon today, Saturday 26<sup>th</sup> July, 1952 and 4<sup>th</sup> of *Zul Qa'ada* 1371, and to leave the country before 6 p.m. on the same day. The army holds you responsible for all repercussions resulting from your failure to comply with the will of the people.

(signed) Mohamed Naguib, Lieutenant-General Army Staff

Alexandria, 4<sup>th</sup> *Zul Qa'ada*, 1371 26<sup>th</sup> July, 1952



من المرفوع (المراد المرفوع) من حيث يتم فيه الجسد ورجاله الى جوار الملك فاروق اولاد

انه لما لا لوفه البارود في لعمري الوغبر من فرضي شامه تحت جميع  
المرفوع تقيمة سرور قصفكم وعبثكم بالسنه وانزلتكم لارادة لشعب حتى  
اصبح كل فرد من افراده لا يطعمه الى حياته او ماله او كرامته  
ولقد سارت سمعة مصر به شعوب العالم من تبارككم في هذا الملك حتى  
اصبح الموت والمرتبون بجموده في ظلمكم الحماية والؤسه والنزاهة الفاضله  
والارباب الماخذ الى جانب لشعب المائع الفقير  
ولقد تجدد آفة ذلك في حرب فلسطين وما تبطل من فضائح الدولة بفساد  
وما ترتب عليه من محاللات تعرضت لتدخلكم السافر مما افسد العقائد وزرع  
الشك في العدالة وساعد الفتنه على ترسم هذه الخطى فأنزلت من اثرى وفيرس قدر  
وكيف لا والناس على وجه ملوكهم

لذلك ما قد فرضني الجسد المشق لقوة الشعب انه الحق من جوارلكم لبتارك  
من العرسه لسرور في عرشكم لغير اصغر لاد على انه يتم ذلك في مرفوع غياته  
الى لثانية عشره من ظهر اليوم (السنة الالفية ٥٦ من يوليو ١٩٥٤م والاربع من  
ذو القعدة ١٣٧٤هـ) ومقاررة البارود قبل الساعة السادسة من اليوم نفسه  
والجسد حتى جوارلكم كل ما يرتب على علم التزك على رغبة لشعب نتابع

الاسكنديه في يوم الية  
٤ ذو القعدة ١٣٧١ هـ  
٥٦ يوليو ١٩٥٤ ميلادي  
فريق اركان حرب  
التي هي لصورة الاصلية للكتاب مع صاحب الرئاسة رئيس مجلس الوزراء  
ذات سبحة

The king then signed the document announcing his abdication:

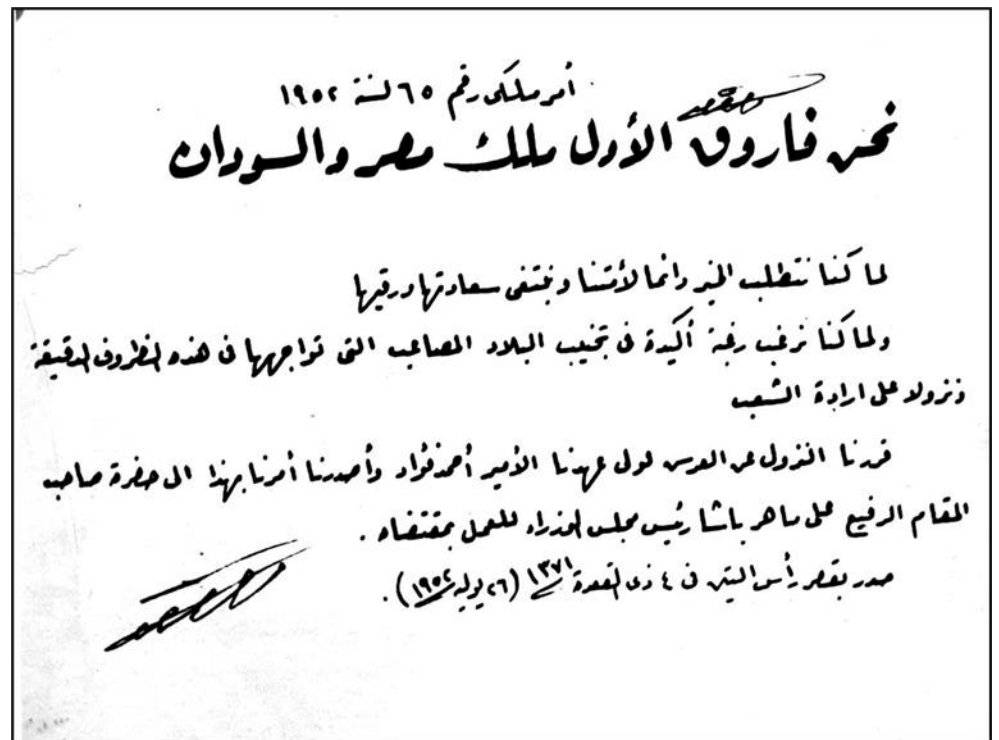
Royal Decree No. 56 of 1952

We Farouk I, King of Egypt and Sudan

Pursuing the prosperity, joy and welfare of our nation;  
harboring a strong desire to prevent the nation from  
facing difficulties under the [present] critical  
circumstances; and complying with the will of the  
people,

Have decided to abdicate in favor of our heir Crown  
Prince Ahmad Fouad, and have issued this decree to H.  
E. Prime Minister Ali Maher Pasha to act upon it.

Issued: Ras al-Teen Palace; July 26, 1952

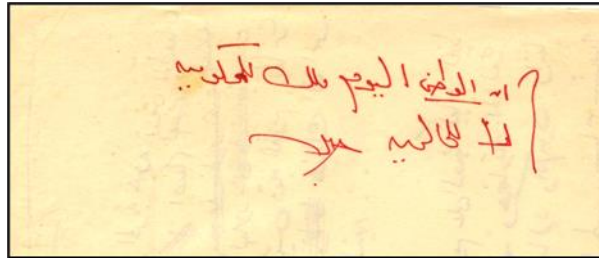


The news of the king's abdication was announced to the people from the Egyptian Broadcasting Station at 6 p.m. at the same time that he set sail on the royal yacht El Mahrousa from Alexandria Port. He was attired in his official white uniform as Commander in Chief of the Navy, and a twenty-one gun salute 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.

Abdel Nasser set down in handwriting:

“Today, the country belongs to the ruled, not the rulers.”



### **The British and Americans take a joint stance**

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 of the officers had connections to the Muslim Brotherhood and were afraid that extremist elements might come into power.

The British observed the reaction of the people to the action taken by the military, noting the cheers and welcome the Egyptian army members were met with when they entered Alexandria on July 25<sup>th</sup> to guard foreign consulates and secure the situation in the city before the king's departure.

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 3<sup>rd</sup> 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 7<sup>th</sup> and the agrarian reform law issued on September 9<sup>th</sup> ending the feudal system by limiting land ownership and distributing the land amongst the *fellaheen*.



Abdel Nasser distributing ownership deeds for agricultural land to the fellaheen in 1953

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.

It was immediately decided by the British and US embassies to hold a joint assessment of the situation, which 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 that the Canal Zone forces should be ready in the case of any threats to the region, and also that achieving peace with Israel should be encouraged. The US government stipulated that Egypt should provide confidential assurances regarding these conditions, which Egypt refused to do.

The US 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.



### **The difficulties of changing the old system**

From the very beginning, the Free Officers laid down the objectives of the revolution: ending colonialism, ending feudalism, ending monopoly and the hegemony of capitalism over the government, establishing social

justice, forming a strong national army, and establishing a solid democracy.

Once the revolution had succeeded, the changes began. The very next day, Naguib Al Helaly's cabinet was deposed and Aly Maher was asked to form a new cabinet and also to become the military ruler of the country. Major-General Hussein Sirry Amer, Director of the Royal Border Forces, was arrested, together with others, and Major-General Mohamed Naguib became the Commander-in-Chief of the Armed Forces after King Farouk had signed an edict to that effect.

Support for the military movement poured in from all quarters, including the Moslem Brotherhood led by Hassan El Hudeiby, who supported the revolution in its first week. The Sudanese, headed by Ismail El Azhary, also voiced their support.

Quick action was also taken to purge the army and the government of corruption and favouritism.



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 inspired to work in a 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.

In an interview with the press, 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.”

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<sup>th</sup>, 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.

### **The Sudan chooses independence**

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<sup>th</sup>, 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 retained the terms of the 1899 agreement!

On October 7<sup>th</sup>, 1951, Mostafa El Nahas cancelled both the 1936 and 1899 agreements unilaterally, a step which Britain refused to acknowledge.

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<sup>st</sup>, 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<sup>th</sup>, 1952; this was followed by the Sudanese political parties agreeing to form a unified front as a 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 4<sup>th</sup>, 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 21<sup>st</sup>, 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.



Nasser with Ismail El Azhari, the Sudanese Prime Minister, 31<sup>st</sup> July, 1954

### **Constitutional changes: Egypt is declared a republic**

On the 9<sup>th</sup> 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 10<sup>th</sup> of February, 1953, a provisional constitution was declared to cover a transitional period of three years.

On the 18<sup>th</sup> 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.



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 for the wealth confiscated by Khedive Tewfiq after the Orabi Revolution of December 1882.

Finding it rather surprising that these two decrees should be contained in one article, I consulted historical records and discovered that Ahmed Orabi's possessions and those of his family had all been confiscated after he was arrested following his confrontation with the Khedive Ismail. And that upon his return from exile in Ceylon, the Khedive had refused to give him a salary: his family could not even afford to pay for his burial when he passed away! Hence the Revolutionary Council's decision to return the wealth of the Mohamed Aly dynasty to the people, and to honour the leader Ahmed Orabi.

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.

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.

#### **1. 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<sup>th</sup>, 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.

## **2. 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 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 4<sup>th</sup>, 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 30<sup>th</sup>, 1948.

Pro-royalist forces retaliated by assassinating Sheikh Hassan El Banna less than six weeks later on the 12<sup>th</sup> 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.

## **3. The Marxist faction:**

Marxism had been illegal since 1924 and Marxists were 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.

In response to the political struggle that existed after the revolution, Major-General Mohamed Naguib announced on the 17<sup>th</sup> 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 14<sup>th</sup> 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 18<sup>th</sup> June, 1953; not 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, deposing King Farouk, and 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.

Divisions and a power struggle began to surface, and the situation reached its peak on 23<sup>rd</sup> 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.

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 seniority – Abdel Hakim Amer had been promoted from major to major-general and had been assigned the leadership of the army - 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!

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.

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!

During this time, 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 27<sup>th</sup>, 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, with a decree reinstating him as military ruler.

The Revolutionary Command Council met on March 21<sup>st</sup> to discuss the resumption of parliamentary life, following which Mohamed Naguib announced that constitutional life would resume in four months' time. The Council then issued several decrees on 25<sup>th</sup> 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 23<sup>rd</sup>, 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 28<sup>th</sup> 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.

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 17<sup>th</sup> 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.



قوات مجلس الثورة رقم  
قبول تخلي السيد اللواء ٠١ محمد نجيب عن رئاسة الوزارة  
وأن يعطى البكباشى ٠١ جمال عبد الناصر بتأليف الوزارة  
١٧ - ٤ - ١٩٥٤

Revolutionary Command Council Decree  
Acceptance of the resignation of Major-General Mohamed Naguib from the  
post of Prime Minister, and assigning the task of forming a Cabinet to  
Lieutenant-Colonel Gamal Abdel Nasser – 17<sup>th</sup> April, 1954

# مجلس قيادة الثورة

بعد الاطلاع على الدستور الصادر في ١٠ شباط ١٩٥٣ :

## قرر

قبول تخطي السيد الرئيس اللواء أركان حرب محمد نجيب عهدة رئاسة الوزارة وأنه يكلف السيد  
الجنرال محمد نجيب السيد الكباشي أركان حرب عماله عبد الناصر حسين بتأليف الوزارة .

صدر في ١٤ شعبان ١٣٧٣ ( ١٧ أبريل ١٩٥٤ ) .

رئيس مجلس قيادة الثورة

لواء

قائد جناح  
كباشي  
كباشي  
صانع  
قائد جناح

كباشي  
قائد جناح  
كباشي  
لواء  
صانع

THE REVOLUTIONARY COMMAND COUNCIL  
After referring to the constitutional declaration issued on  
February 10<sup>th</sup>, 1953

IT HAS BEEN DECIDED

To accept the resignation of Major-General Mohamed Naguib  
from the position of prime minister, and to assign the task of  
forming a new ministry to Lieutenant-Colonel Gamal Abdel  
Nasser

17<sup>th</sup> April, 1954, 14<sup>th</sup> Shaaban, 1373

(signatures follow)

## **Independence At Last**

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!

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 my father, found themselves confronted with risks that were very different from those faced during any of the previous negotiations from 1920 to 1952.

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 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, 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.

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”!

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 Suez Canal Company a French enterprise, but also because it was concerned with the safety of the Mediterranean.

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.



Gamal Abdel Nasser and the British Minister of War Anthony Head after signing the evacuation agreement on July 27<sup>th</sup>, 1954

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.

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 19<sup>th</sup> century, or actually, way before then! It has no place in today’s world.”

My father 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.

My father 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, upon which my father 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.<sup>1</sup> The people are not thinking of cooperating with Britain: they are thinking only of evacuation.”

My father 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<sup>rd</sup>, 1953, he said:

---

“Our first objective is unconditional evacuation; the occupation must hoist their belongings over their shoulders and leave, or fight to the death.”

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. 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:

“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 the Middle East Defence Organization (MEDO) at the same time.”

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.”

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, which angered Churchill.

In the end, Eisenhower decided that:

“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.”

### **The negotiations begin with radical disagreements**

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.

When the British asked the Egyptian delegation how they visualized the future defence of the Middle East against the danger of communism, my father 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!”



Nasser with Anthony Eden and Anthony Nutting

The British Ambassador to Egypt, Ralph Stephenson, told my father that the British government was willing to accede to Egypt's demand for evacuation, but that regarding the base, there must be British workers in the store-rooms to take their orders from the British government.

Stevenson then said, "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 is worth!"

My father considered this invitation an insult, replying, "It is I who invite others to go anywhere in Egypt; no one invites *me* to go somewhere in Egypt!"

In the end, the 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.

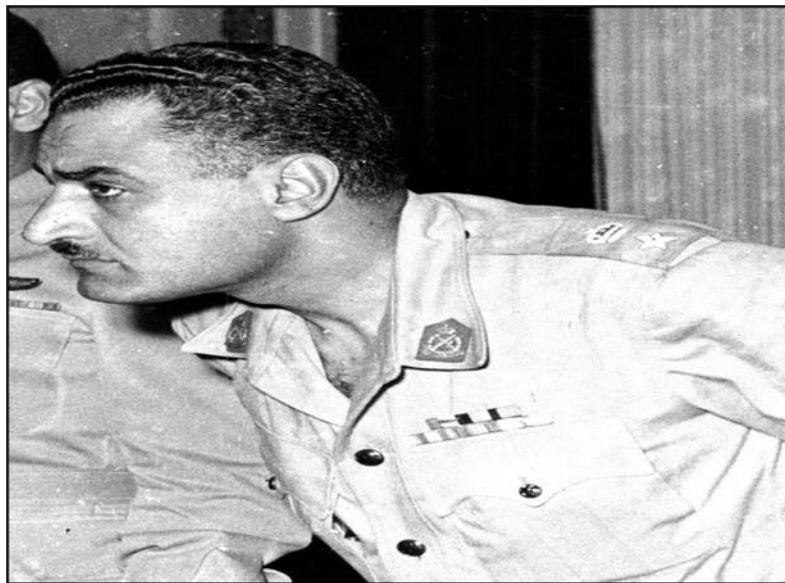
Nasser declared:

"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.”

He then addressed 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.



“My countrymen, 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, my father held meetings with the Chiefs of Staff of the Arab armies on the 25<sup>th</sup> 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 handwritten note of my father’s 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 my father’s hopes, which he strove to achieve with all possible means.

### **Egyptian *fedayeen* launch operations against the British**

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.

My father’s plan was to refrain from resuming negotiations until a concise estimate of the position in the Suez Canal base was made. He was well aware that the English would not give Egypt up through negotiations alone, but would have to be forcefully driven out, and *fedayeen* operations 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 20<sup>th</sup> of May, 1953, the British government issued orders to its citizens to leave Egypt, and two days afterwards, my father 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!

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. 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.

On the 19<sup>th</sup> of March, 1954, Churchill summoned his Secretary of State for War, Anthony Head, to discuss the situation in the Canal Zone, and 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<sup>nd</sup> 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<sup>th</sup> 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!

### **The signing of the Anglo-Egyptian Evacuation Agreement**

On the 9<sup>th</sup> 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, the eagerness of the British to expedite the negotiation process and bring matters to a conclusion was obvious, and eventually, a formula was reached that was acceptable to the Egyptians, and the agreement was signed on the 27<sup>th</sup> of July, 1954.



The signing of the Evacuation Agreement, July 27<sup>th</sup>, 1954

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.”

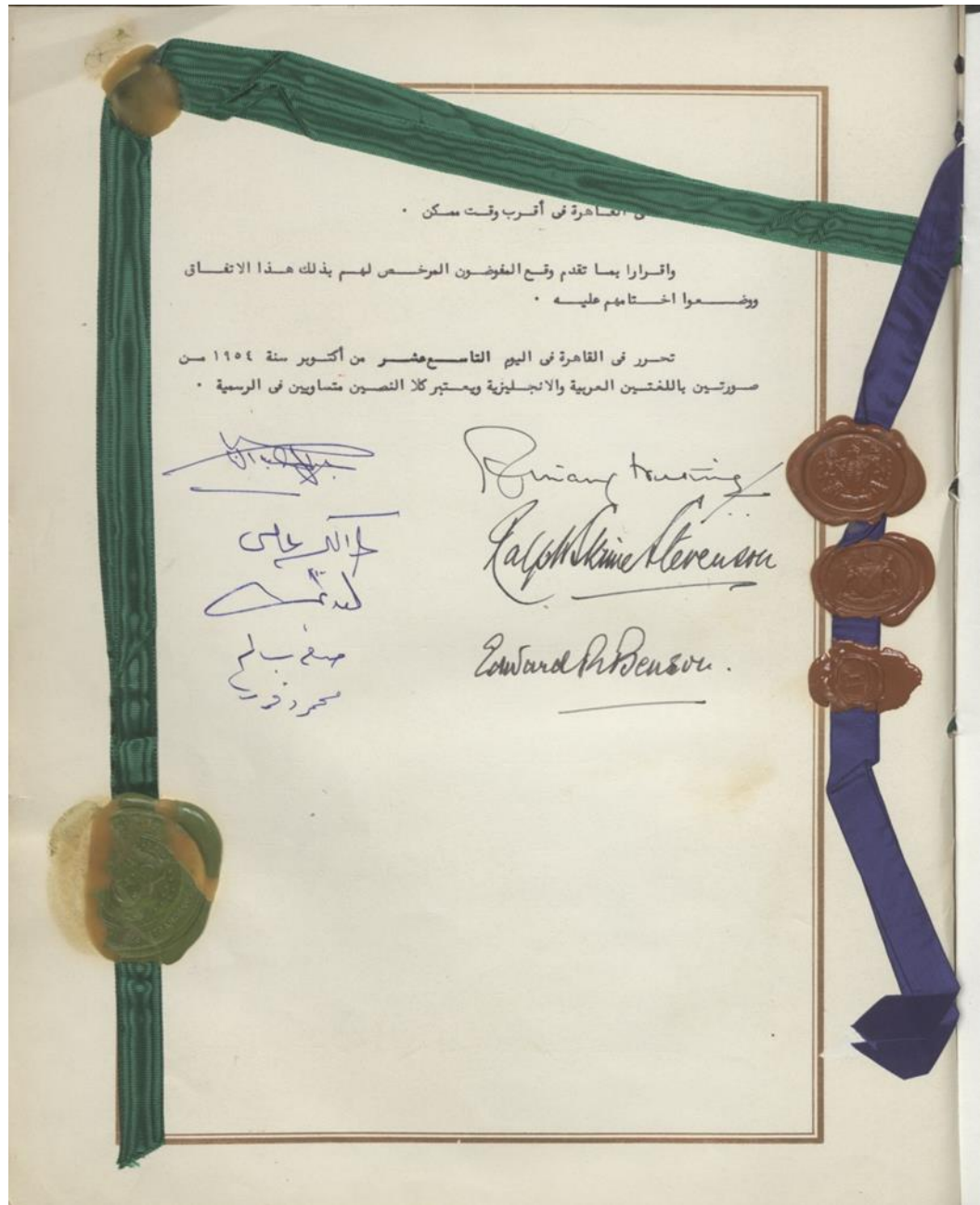
Finally, and after fifteen months of grueling negotiations, Nasser and members of the Revolutionary Command Council signed the final draft of



the agreement on the 19<sup>th</sup> 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 26<sup>th</sup>, 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 13<sup>th</sup> 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.



A copy of the Evacuation Agreement signed by Gamal Abdel Nasser and Anthony Nutting on October 19<sup>th</sup>, 1954

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.

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

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

Seven days after the signing of the agreement, in a huge public gathering of a quarter of a million people in Mansheya Square on 26<sup>th</sup> October, 1954, my father 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 my father, one after the other! After a period of panic and chaos, he was heard addressing the crowd:

“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.



e

Crowds welcome Nasser after he survived the Mansheya assassination attack, 5<sup>th</sup> November, 1954

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

On 18<sup>th</sup> June, 1956, the Egyptian people celebrated the departure of the last British soldier from Egypt, and Nasser raised the Egyptian flag over Port Said. On the following day, he said:

“Yesterday, the Egyptian flag was raised over our land, and we will never look back but rather will look ahead towards new hope. Today, we are masters in our country for the first time in ages. We have resisted, struggled, and fought for this day, for evacuation, freedom, dignity, and independence. Today, we begin a new life, forgetting the past and looking towards the future. Our policy will be to fight those who fight us, and make peace with those who want peace with us.”



President Gamal Abdel Nasser raises the Egyptian flag over the Navy Building in Port Said on June 18<sup>th</sup>, 1956

Nasser also announced the end of martial law, which had been imposed on September 3<sup>rd</sup>, 1939 at the onset of WWII.

In his book *The Philosophy of the Revolution*, he wrote that, “Egypt lies between three spheres: the Arab world, the Islamic world, and Africa, and we must not neglect any of these.”

### **Egypt refuses to join global coalitions**

After the English left Egypt, alliances began to be formed in the region, with the help of Britain and the blessing of the United States. On February 24<sup>th</sup>, 1955, the Turkish-Iraqi charter was signed, forging the first

link between the Arab world and Western defence. They called this alliance the Baghdad Pact, why? To confer an Arab veneer on the arrangement, which Dulles referred to as 'growth from within'! My father comments:

“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, Chief of Staff of the British Empire, going to Amman in December, 1955, but returning defeated. The US then became a supervising member of the Pact.

My father comments:

“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 15<sup>th</sup> 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.”



President Nasser at the graduation of students of the Aviation College, Bilbeis, February 19<sup>th</sup>, 1956

### **Israeli attacks on Egypt’s borders**

All the pressures Egypt was under were further confounded by a series of Israeli attacks that left fifteen Palestinian refugees killed. Egypt made a formal protest to the Security Council, to which Israel countered by lodging a complaint with the Council against Egypt claiming the right of passage through the Suez Canal!

The attacks on the Egyptian borders were repeated, and after a large-scale attack that took place on February 28<sup>th</sup>, 1955, my father penned the following note:



“Israel has continuously engaged with our forces using small weapons, but matters developed lately when the Israeli artillery bombarded Egyptian sites, then Deir El Balah, Gaza, Khan Younis, and Asban. Our Egyptian artillery responded by targeting the Israeli settlements of Kishurim, Ain Halshosha, and Nour Ebeid. Forty-two civilians were killed and 103 injured.

“After the incident of February 28<sup>th</sup> and after Israel’s attack on Gaza, we will defend ourselves, our dignity, and our people to the last drop of blood.”

It is worth noting that the administration of Gaza had been assigned to Egypt after the 1948 war. And after my father’s meeting with General Burns, UN Palestine Truce Supervisory Organization Chief, 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.

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, but intensified, with casualties and prisoners taken on both sides.

My father commented on these repeated attacks in a handwritten note:

“It is imperative that we form a secret army for the liberation of Palestine, and set up a secret training camp. We must identify leaders for the liberation army, who should be mostly Palestinians, and establish a branch at headquarters for this purpose. We must also establish contact with the Arabs inside Israel, and set up branches in Gaza, Syria, Lebanon, Jordan, and Israel. An account is to be opened for this purpose, and Kamal Rifaat is to be in charge of this.”

The question of acquiring arms for Egypt was of prime concern to my father 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!

My father 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 to no avail.

My father 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 we sign pacts with them, which we announced that we would never do: we would never provide our army with weapons at the expense of our independence.”

In an address to the Armed Forces in Gezira on September 27<sup>th</sup>, 1955, my father explained the situation:

“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.”

He 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.”

The deal was a shock to the Western countries, not only because Egypt had turned to the Soviet bloc, thus giving them a footing in the Arab world and the Middle East, but also because this meant that the West would lose control completely over the quantity and nature of the weapons that Egypt would now buy, which could shift the balance of power in favour of the Arabs over Israel.

Dulles spoke with Molotov, the Soviet Foreign Minister, in New York, saying that it was a dangerous move that could exacerbate tensions in the region, to which Molotov replied that it was, “A purely commercial deal with no political implications!”

Macmillan voiced the opinion that this was an extremely dangerous situation, and that this move on the part of the Russians was of hostile intent and a foolhardy action that would lead to rising tensions in the region.

Dulles commented that, “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.”

Meetings and communication continued between the foreign ministers of the US and Britain, during which Macmillan proposed several solutions, saying:

“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! We still haven't completed our withdrawal from Suez."

The Americans, however, realised that any action taken against the Egyptians would turn Arab public opinion against them, and their main concern was to protect their oil supplies. They also knew full well that Nasser could not be forced to do anything, nor could he be overthrown: he was fully in control, added to which he guaranteed the stability of Egypt.

Accordingly, the United States and Britain decided to hold talks with the Soviets in an attempt to stop the arms deal. However, they soon realised that preventing the deal was impossible, so they began to think of ways of stopping other countries in the region from following Egypt's 'bad' example!

At this point, Dulles raised the question: "What could possibly attract Egypt?" To which the answer was, "To assist with the construction of the High Dam." Even 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 had opened its doors to Russia, after more than 200 years during which the region had been distanced from Russia and far from any communist influence after the Russian revolution.

My father gained considerably in prestige and status, assuming leadership after the Soviet arms deal. The Americans realised that he would not come under Soviet influence nor would he join a Western alliance: he was still convinced that a middle route was best for Egypt.

### **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. 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 18<sup>th</sup> – 21<sup>st</sup> 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.



Nasser at the Bandung Conference, April 1955

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 with Ben Bella after the independence of Algeria

Nasser wrote the following notes by hand 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.



Nasser with Tito and Nehru in Cairo



## **The Nationalization of the Suez Canal**

### **The reasons for nationalization**

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...”

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 my father 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.

However, difficulties soon arose: the Americans wished to supervise the Egyptian budget and even inspect its accounts! My father refused on principle.

The World Bank also began 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!

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.

My father understood these stratagems, saying:

“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 point, the Russian ambassador came to my father and informed him that Russia was willing to participate in funding the High Dam. My father replied that the matter was being discussed with The World Bank, and that talk on the matter should be postponed for the time being.

The World Bank found out that there was a Russian offer, and when Eugene Black, head of The World Bank, came to Egypt to discuss the matter in February 1956, my father 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.”

My father then gave orders to discontinue work on the project, “In order that we may not embark upon a venture that could allow the colonialists to control us and try and exploit us economically after having failed to do so politically.”

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?!’

On March 14, 1956, my father 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!”

The very same month, a crusade against Egypt was launched in the British press, to the extent that 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!”

At the same time, Britain was claiming that it wished to be an intermediary between Egypt and the Sudan in order to reach an agreement regarding Nile waters, and when Selwyn Lloyd came to Egypt in February, my father met with him in our home. Lloyd began talks by offering to help solve the water problem between us and the Sudan.

My father 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 drive 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 was obvious that the English were doing their very best to stir up hatred amongst the Sudanese.

The surprise came when, on the 20<sup>th</sup> 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 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.

My father commented on this, saying:

“Naturally, this was the first time they had ever 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.

He went on to say:

“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 them.”

As we can see, the withdrawal of funding for the High Dam angered Nasser, who addressed the nation on July 24<sup>th</sup>, 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.”



President Nasser inaugurates the oil pipeline in Musturud, July 24<sup>th</sup>, 1956

Nasser had been on a visit to Brioni in Yugoslavia from the 18<sup>th</sup> – 20<sup>th</sup> of July, 1956, 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.

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.



Nasser during his visit to Yugoslavia, July 18<sup>th</sup>, 1956

### **Nasser announces the nationalization of the Suez Canal**

My father recounts:

“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

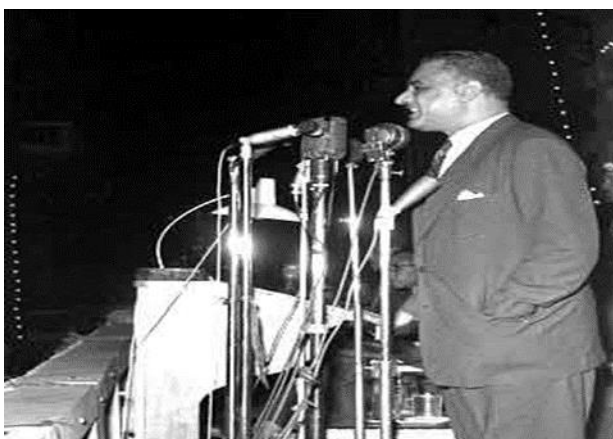


to be transferred to the nation, and all the organizations and committees currently operating it are to be dissolved. Stockholders and holders of founders' shares will be compensated for the shares they own in accordance with the value of the shares as shown in the closing price of the Paris Stock Exchange 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 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.”



President Nasser in Mansheya Square delivering the speech announcing the nationalization of the Suez Canal, July 26<sup>th</sup>, 1956

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 revolution, and assigned the task of taking over the Suez Canal Company to him. Younes had been previously appointed as Head of the Suez Canal Authority on May 2nd, 1956, by a decree from the Revolutionary Command Council.

“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<sup>2</sup>... And sure enough, by the time my speech was over, the operation had been carried out.



Nasser with Mahmoud Younes, Head of the Suez Canal Authority

“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

---

<sup>2</sup> Ferdinand de Lesseps, a French diplomat who launched the Suez Canal project which was inaugurated in 1869

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.”

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 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.

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.

In the Cabinet session that was declassified in 2008 – more than fifty years later – Selwyn Lloyd, the British Foreign Minister, 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

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.

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 and accordingly 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.

Letters were exchanged between Eden and Eisenhower with every step taken; however 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.

It was obvious that the British government had made an irrevocable decision, whereas Eisenhower was sure that the reaction of the US people, and indeed the whole world, to the use of force would be widespread outrage. He asked Eden to reconsider the matter and all its implications before taking any action.

### **Nasser refuses the internationalization of the Suez Canal**

On August 3, 1956, the Egyptian Ministry of Foreign Affairs received a joint statement from the British Embassy in Cairo issued by the governments of Britain, the US, and France regarding the nationalization by Egypt of the Suez Canal Company, together with an invitation to attend the London Conference on Suez on August 16<sup>th</sup>. The statement ran as follows:

“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 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. The three governments do not question the right of Egypt to enjoy and exercise all the powers of a fully sovereign and independent nation 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.

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!

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.

As for Eisenhower's proposal to hold an international conference for the internationalization of the Canal, the initial reaction to this 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! Dulles, however said that he could not see how it would be possible to avoid the fact that Russia had signed the 1888 Convention!

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!

The possibility of finding alternative options 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.

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.

Lord Killlearn 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.

Lord Jeffreys voiced the opinion that it was necessary 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; 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 went on, 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 nationalized Canal Company as a contribution towards the cost of building the High Dam', and touched upon the importance of the fact that the oil of Europe passed through the Canal, as did that of the North Atlantic.

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 nationalization; 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 went 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 fact Nehru had made a speech in which he said that this was only another



example of the weakening hold of the West. So if force were necessary, he added, it should be used, and the government should stand firm.

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.

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 he was to take the final decision on whether or not to go, Eden made a televised speech in which he said spoke - or rather, ranted – disparagingly about Nasser! My father realised then that it would be futile to sit at a table with Eden to discuss any aspect of the issue: it was useless to hold talks with a man blinded by deep hostility amounting to personal hatred!

My father 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...”

In a press conference held on August 12<sup>th</sup>, 1956, my father said:

“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.”



My father wrote down the following:

“The 16<sup>th</sup> of August when the London Conference was scheduled to take place held a huge surprise for Mr. Eden, the British government, and British public opinion, for the whole Arab world from the Atlantic ocean to the Arabian Gulf announced its support of Egypt in its struggle to maintain its rights to the Suez Canal, and workers in all the Arab countries went on strike... Eden sensed that the use of force would not be possible, for any attack on Egypt would jeopardize British interests throughout the Arab world; he would not be facing Egypt alone, but the whole Arab region.”

The following was agreed upon at the London Conference:

1. An international board to be set up for operating, maintaining and developing and widening the Canal. The members of the board, in addition to Egypt, would be chosen from among the states parties to the Convention of 1888, and would make periodic reports to the United Nations.
2. Insulation of the operation of the Canal from the influence of politics of any nation.
3. An equitable and fair return to Egypt for the use of the Suez Canal as an international waterway on Egyptian territory.

The London Conference proposed a committee headed by Robert Menzies, the Australian Prime Minister, to negotiate with Egypt.

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.

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

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.

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.

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!

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.

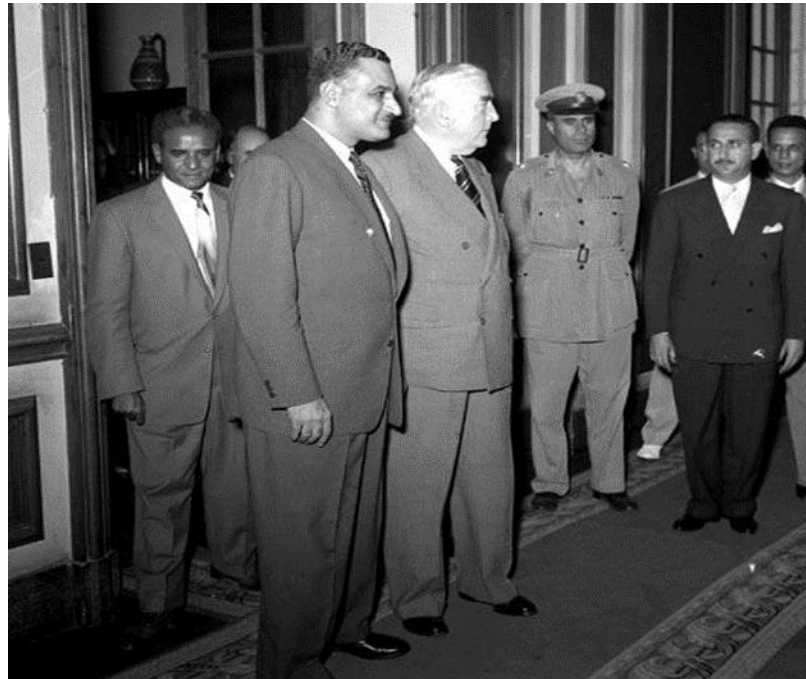
On September 2, 1956, Nasser announced in a press conference:

“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.”

In an atmosphere fraught with tension, the Egyptian Ministry of Foreign Affairs received, via the Egyptian Ambassador in London, a message addressed to my father 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 28<sup>th</sup>, the Egyptian Cabinet of Ministers met to discuss the above message and agreed to negotiate with Menzies’ committee. 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.



President Nasser receives Menzies, representing the London Conference, on September 9<sup>th</sup>, 1956

My father commented on this, saying:

“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.

“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 my father 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 14<sup>th</sup>. 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 and explained to him that it was crucial that the Canal remain open. He assured me that it would: “The Canal will remain open.”

“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 occurred, and thus we disproved the final possible objection concerning our ability to ensure the safety of navigation in the Canal.



Attempts were made by Hammarskjold to have the UN intervene in the crisis; he put forth some suggestions but these were unacceptable to Egypt. Then the matter came before the Security Council: representatives of Britain and France penned a joint letter in New York addressed to the Head of the Security Council and asking that a meeting be held by the Council to 'review the situation resulting from the unilateral action taken by the Egyptian government'!

The next day, Egypt requested that the Security Council convene to discuss the actions being planned by Britain and France against Egypt.

The Security Council accordingly convened from the 5<sup>th</sup> to the 13<sup>th</sup> of October, 1956, during which the Soviet Union used the right of veto. The Council issued recommendations that were agreed to by the Egyptian government.

### **A military attack in the offing**

While Anglo-French military preparations were underway, mobilization of the military reserve forces took place in Israel. President Eisenhower immediately sent a message to Ben Gurion on 27<sup>th</sup> October, 1956, expressing his anxiety. Eisenhower was unaware that Ben Gurion, together with representatives of the countries of the Tripartite Declaration, Britain and France, had already 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 objective 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<sup>th</sup> 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.

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.

At the very same time, Egypt launched an initiative stating the wish to begin direct negotiations around the Suez Canal issue. Mahmoud Fawzi informed Raymond Hare, the US ambassador to Egypt, of this intention, expressing regret at the French movements that were aimed at hindering any progress on the matter. Fawzi stressed that the Egyptian government still wished to proceed in a positive manner, and had accepted Hammarskjold's invitation to meet with the British and the French in Geneva on October 29<sup>th</sup>.

## **The Tripartite Aggression On Egypt**

### **The plot is carried out**

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!

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 should 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 coming in through the Sinai.

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!

My father recounts:

“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.”

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!

My father recalls:

“On October the 31<sup>st</sup> 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 planes.

“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 31<sup>st</sup> and November 1<sup>st</sup>.

“As soon as I was informed that the withdrawal had taken place as planned, I immediately 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.”

That same day, my father announced a general mobilization, and became the military ruler of the country.

On Wednesday October 31, Britain and France began air raids on Cairo, the Canal Zone, and Alexandria, their objective being to destroy the Egyptian air force.

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.”



Nasser giving a speech in Al Azhar mosque, November 2<sup>nd</sup>, 1956

On November 2<sup>nd</sup>, 1956, my father addressed the nation from the Al Azhar mosque, saying:

“My fellow countrymen:

“During these days in which we are fighting for our freedom...the freedom of the people of Egypt...and fighting for the honour of our country, I tell you this: Egypt has always proved to be the graveyard of its invaders; all the empires that have existed over the years, ended and disappeared from existence when they attacked Egypt, but Egypt has remained steadfast and united. The invaders have come to nothing... the empires have disappeared... but Egypt remains, and the Egyptian people remain.

“Today, my brothers, as we encounter an imperialist and unjust attack that aims to violate our freedom, our humanity, and our dignity, as we resist this invasion, we ask God to grant us patience, faith, confidence, and the will to fight.

“Today we ask God to strengthen our hearts and souls so that we can defend our homeland. Death, my countrymen, will come to us all eventually, but if we die, let us do so with honour and with dignity. I announced yesterday, representing all of you, that we will fight...we will fight and never give up...we will fight and never live a humiliating life, no matter what they do or how they continue with their aggressive plot.

“The situation today, fellow countrymen, is better than it was two days ago: the dastardly conspiracy consisted of luring your armed forces to the borders to engage with Israel, thus leaving Egypt with no army and enabling them to do what they wanted.”

He then explained the details of the Anglo-British-Israeli conspiracy to the people, recounting how Egypt had confronted it with strength and honour. He then resumed:

“I would like to inform you that the army is holding fast and is not isolated from you...the army is now west of the Canal, and our plan is to unify fronts and turn them into one united front.

“The army will go on fighting...the orders to the armed forces are to fight to the death...as for the people, I saw yesterday and today the home guard and liberation brigades overflowing with many more volunteers than we asked for, and fighting side by side with the army. We will fight from house to house, and from village to village, that’s how they fought and conquered in the Great War.

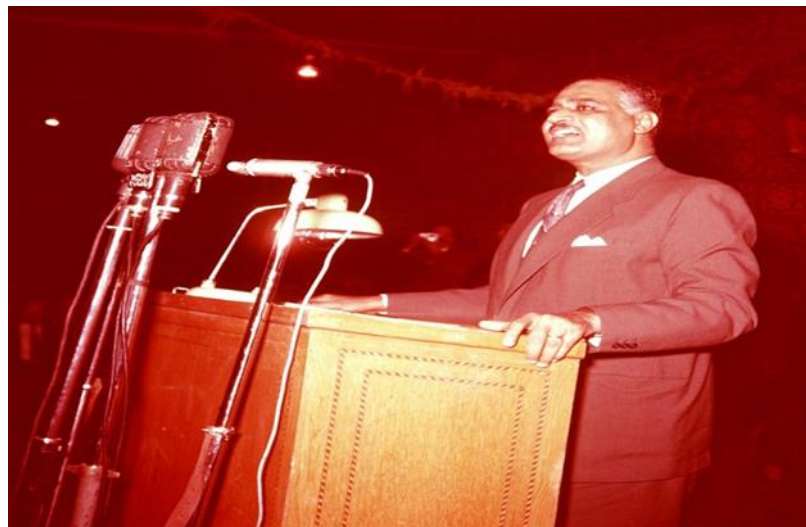
“It is our steadfastness that will decide our fate and that of our country. Today, thank God, the situation is better and our armed forces are fighting side by side with the people. Our motto is “we will fight and never give in,” this is the motto of every member of the army and every single one of the people.

“Today, we are prepared...prepared to fight to the death, my brothers. In the Palestine War, for example, I was in Faloga as you know, where we were subjected to five months of air raids, five months of constant bombardment, five months of attacks...I did not die, why? Naturally, I was out and about, not sitting in a

trench, but the matter is in the hands of God: no one can ever decide their fate.

“We will fight...I am here in Cairo and will fight alongside you against any invasion...I am here in Cairo, and so are my children, I have not and will not send them away. I am here in Cairo and we will fight – as I told you yesterday – down to the last drop of blood and will never give in. We will build our country...build our history...build our future.

“Today, that is the motto of every Egyptian, and if Britain and France think they are great countries, well we are people of faith...our motto will always be God is great...God will strengthen us...God will help us win... we depend on God and on ourselves, and will struggle and fight and win, God willing. *Allahu akbar* God is great...God be with you.”



### **US and Soviet reactions**

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.”

Eisenhower sent letters to the heads of the two attacking countries, Eden and Mollet, saying the following:

“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.”

Eisenhower openly expressed his extreme anger at the British and the French for taking this unilateral action.

On the day of the British-French ultimatum on 30<sup>th</sup> October, my father asked to see Raymond Hare and sent a letter to Eisenhower with him, which said:

“The Anglo-French ultimatum threatening aggressive action against Egypt at a time when Egypt was defending itself against Israeli aggression has resulted in a very serious situation that constitutes a serious violation of the freedom of people and of the United Nations Charter. Egypt has resolved to defend her sovereignty and territory against Israeli aggression, and the Egyptian Government has decided to ask for United States support against the anticipated Anglo-French aggression.”

“The Egyptian request is entirely sincere and was reached after careful consideration, and there has been no question of turning to the Russians. In fact, Egyptians have always relied upon themselves and this is first time foreign aid has been requested. Khrushchev had suggested furnishing volunteers but Egypt had never replied. It is 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.

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.

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.

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 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 in the form of volunteers, arms or otherwise to all those who, all over the world, still care for the dignity of man and the rule of law in international relations.

“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 with all determination and with every shred of its being against the forces of evil.”

In a meeting between my father and Raymond Hare, my father gave him a second letter addressed to Eisenhower requesting US military aid. 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 my father received coldly! Nevertheless, the US took a strong stand in the UN, which angered Britain and France.

Matters were further complicated for Eisenhower when he learned that the Soviets had embarked upon the very course of action he had feared from the start! They issued a statement asking the United States to join them in taking immediate military action in the Middle East to put a stop to the fighting, but did not propose this directly to the US but through the United Nations!



Destruction in Port Said during the Tripartite Aggression

On the same day, my father received a telegram from Shoukry Al Quwatli, President of the Republic of Syria, who was on a visit to the Soviet Union, saying that the Soviet Union was ‘ready to provide us with all the equipment, planes, and weapons that we require, and as many men as we need.’

This occurred on the same day in which Bulganin, the Soviet Prime Minister, 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-

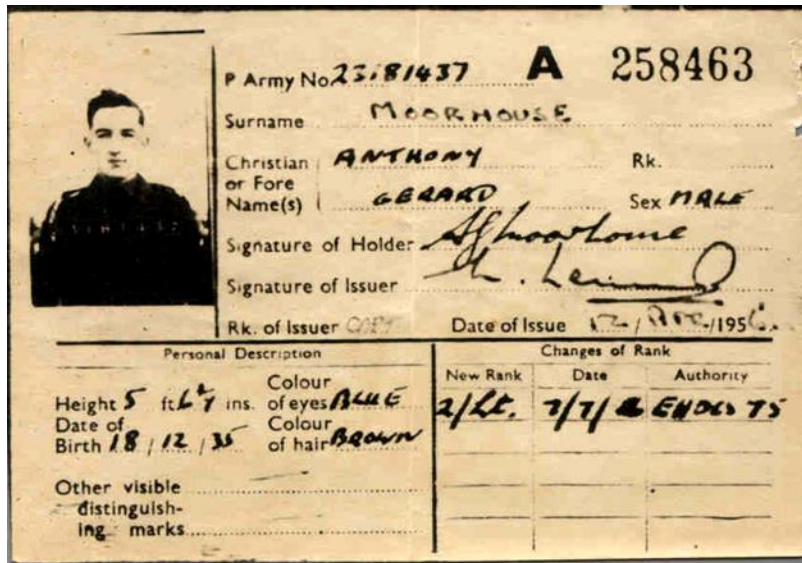
French troops have landed on Egyptian territory, and the fires caused by the invaders have destroyed treasures created by the Egyptian people. Day by day human sacrifices are increasing, and before the eyes of the whole world an aggressive war is unfolding against Egypt and the Arab peoples, whose only fault is that they are defending their freedom and independence.

“The 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. 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.”

On the same day, November 5<sup>th</sup>, 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 Ben Gurion, Bulganin strongly condemned Israeli actions against Egypt, and expressed the expectation that the Israeli Government would “come to

The Americans criticized the publication of Bulganin’s letter to Eisenhower which had taken place before the US had even received it. The French Ambassador to the United States, Hervé Alphand, commented that if the Soviets were to intervene directly, NATO obligations would be applied. He affirmed that 350 French marines had been taken prisoner by the Egyptians, and that he had no information of any weakening of Nasser’s position! He added that they would be falling into a trap if they allowed the Soviets to divide them.



Identity card belonging to the British officer Anthony Moorhouse, who was captured and killed during the Tripartite Aggression on Egypt

Eisenhower expressed his concern regarding the possibility of Soviet military intervention and issued a statement saying that, “Neither Soviet nor any other military forces should now enter the Middle East area except under a United Nations mandate.”

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.

The day after the Soviet ultimatum, November 6<sup>th</sup>, Britain and France both accepted the cease-fire, as did Israel. Hostilities ended at 2 a.m. on the morning of November 7<sup>th</sup>, and the General Assembly convened on the same day to finalize arrangements for a UN force to be dispatched to Egypt as soon as possible.

The US’s message to Egypt focused on warning of the motives behind the Soviet’s offer to work alongside the US, which they said was motivated by considerations other than the attainment of peace, stating that the US had categorically rejected the Soviet proposal for a joint US–USSR military operation. The US also attempted to dissuade Egypt from agreeing to a unilateral Soviet intervention in the conflict.

## **Withdrawal of enemy forces after the condemnation of the attack by the United Nations**

At the onset of the Israeli attack on Egypt on October 29<sup>th</sup>, 1956, the United States requested a meeting of the Security Council. Accordingly, three sessions were held on October 30<sup>th</sup> 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.

However, the US draft resolution was defeated by a British-French veto; eventually, the majority agreed to the Yugoslav proposal to call for an emergency meeting of the General Assembly.

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<sup>3</sup> 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 there, leading Israel to inform the US that it would not be attacking Jordan.

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. On the following day,

---

<sup>3</sup> A bridge that crosses the Suez Canal.

November 3<sup>rd</sup>, 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.

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<sup>th</sup>, 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<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup>, issuing two consecutive resolutions assigning to the Secretary-General the task of preparing an emergency international peacekeeping force to monitor the cessation of all military operations.

In Hammarskjold's report to the General Assembly on November 7<sup>th</sup>, 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.



British tanks arriving in Port Said

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.

On November 6<sup>th</sup> 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:



“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<sup>th</sup> 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.

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.

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.

Hammarskjold sent a memorandum to both Britain and France on November 9<sup>th</sup>, requesting an immediate and complete cease-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<sup>th</sup> 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.



Port Said during the Anglo-French attack

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.

The Egyptian government lodged a formal protest at the UN, denouncing the invading forces and holding them responsible for these actions that were in direct defiance of the cease-fire agreement.

As for Israel, 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.

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.'

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.

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.

On December 24<sup>th</sup>, 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.

The Israeli withdrawal proceeded at an extremely slow rate, giving them ample time to assault and murder civilians in Gaza and the Sinai and to demolish the buildings in these areas.

On April 11, Hammarskjold expressed his concern regarding what he had heard of a large-scale deployment of Egyptian armed forces in the Sinai and on the banks of the Canal on the basis that this was seen as 'provocation'!

Israel eventually withdrew behind the armistice line on March 12<sup>th</sup>, 1957, and while the Israelis succeeded in gaining an advantage from its attack on Egypt, passage through the Gulf of Aqaba, Egypt emerged victorious from the Tripartite Aggression.

My father wrote the following by hand:

“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.”

It has been over sixty-six 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:

British forces: 16<sup>th</sup> Parachute Brigade, 3<sup>rd</sup> 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 10<sup>th</sup> Parachute Division, the 7<sup>th</sup> Mechanical Division, the 5<sup>th</sup> Armoured Division, the 4<sup>th</sup> 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 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.

So what did this battle achieve after the withdrawal of the three invading countries?

As my father said in his speech on July 26<sup>th</sup>, 1957:

“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.”



Nasser in Port Said celebrating Victory Day, December 23<sup>rd</sup>, 1957

## **The Union Between Egypt and Syria and its Repercussions**



After the Tripartite Aggression was dealt with, it became mandatory for my father to work towards realizing the Arab union that would stand firm before the colonial powers. The whole Arab world had backed Egypt during this crisis, and my father received countless letters of support expressing solidarity during those trying days, all of which he kept in his office. Shukri Al Quwatli, who was in Moscow at the time, Mao Tse Tung, Bulganin, all sent messages of support, as did several Gulf states still under British occupation.

Moreover, when the military hostilities were taking place, the Syrians blew up British oil pipelines to cut off oil supplies from Britain and France, and the people of Bahrain actually lay down on the runways to stop the British air force from taking off and heading towards Egypt.

Thus, the Tripartite Aggression resulted in the awakening of Arab hopes for unity, and the Egyptian-Syrian union was the first cornerstone towards achieving this goal.

On January 14<sup>th</sup>, 1958, Nasser, who was in Luxor with Sukarno, the President of Indonesia, was informed that a Syrian plane carrying twenty officers had landed in Cairo Airport without permission, and that these officers had met with members of the armed forces and informed them 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.

My father met with them next day and told them that it would not be possible:

“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 can 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 lengthy session that took place on the following day, the officers discussed the matter again with my father, insisting that they had received a message from Damascus saying that the government had agreed to their demands, and that a representative from the government, Salah Al Beitar, the Foreign Minister, was on his way to formally request the union.

Still, my father saw that, “This is an emotional request. A union is a concrete reality and not a hypothetical proposition. We cannot accept a union that takes place in such a rush.”

The officers enthusiastically replied: “You speak of Arab unity, but Syria will collapse and be lost; it seems as though Syria doesn’t matter to you.”

At this point, my father told them: “You are officers in the army; if the union takes place, I will have you discharged!” To which they replied that they would accept that.

My father then went on to clarify that, ““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.”

To which the officers replied, “We agree to there being no political parties”!

Shukri Al Quwatli came to Cairo on January 26<sup>th</sup>, 1958, and the discussions between him and Nasser ended in the request for unity being signed on February 1<sup>st</sup>, 1958. Al Quwatli then stood up and said:

“This is a day in my life... that will go down in history!”

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.



Nasser signs the declaration of unity, February 1<sup>st</sup>, 1958

On February 21<sup>st</sup>, 1958, my father announced:

“A great state has emerged in the east today.”

This statement of his, and all it implied, aroused the fears of the West, and in particular, the United States!

Then just one month and a half after the union, certain elements in Syria were 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.

Many were opposed to the union, seeing it as a threat: the Western countries and Israel, followed by the Saudis and the capitalist factions, and minorities such as Turkmen, Kurds, and others, as well as the Eastern bloc and Arab communists.

On February 14<sup>th</sup>, 1958, the Jordanians and Iraqis formed the Hashemite Union, with the consent of the Americans, to counter the influence of the United Arab Republic. My father sent them a telegram congratulating them, in spite of his misgivings!

The blows were aimed at Syria not Egypt, but it was Egypt that was really targeted via Damascus.



Nasser in Syria after the announcement of the union

The US foreign office found itself confronted with a complicated situation faced with the swift catapulting of developments ending with the union, as the Arab nationalist movement 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'.

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!

Eventually, the United Arab Republic was recognized by all countries, with the exception of France!



Nasser receiving congratulatory delegations on the occasion of the union with Syria Damascus, 23<sup>rd</sup>February, 1958

My father 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 of unity, and in my opinion, means that yet another of the colonialists’ weapons has lost its power.”



The Syrian people gathering in masses in front of the Guest Palace after the announcement of the union

### **The US attempts to draw Nasser in**

It was only to be expected that Israel would oppose the Egyptian-Syrian union, as the Israelis feared any consolidated activity amongst the Arabs, knowing full well – and this is according to what Israeli leaders have themselves said – that if the Arabs united, they would be able to confront Israel, which is why the Israelis joined forces with the colonialists to work against Arab unity.

Accordingly, when Egypt signed the military agreement with Syria and Jordan on October 25th, 1956, the reaction in Israel, as Ben Gurion said, was that ‘Israel would be like a walnut inside a nutcracker’!

The union between Egypt and Syria foresaw 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.

As for the United States, around one month after the union with Syria, the US seemed eager to draw my father in: Egypt’s frozen funds were released, and a program of US aid was arranged covering several phases.

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.

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: what, he wondered, were their real motives at this time?

### **The Lebanese crisis and the Iraqi revolution**

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.

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 22nd, 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.

Sure enough, Chamoun's decision led to a rebellion by the Lebanese Muslims demanding its cancellation, which resulted in the death of fifteen people and the American Center in Tripoli being set on fire.

At this point, Chamoun sent three messages to the leaders of the US, Britain and France, stating that, "The situation in Lebanon is extremely critical!". The matter, he claimed, had now transcended the issue of the presidential elections and become a question of the very existence of Lebanon as a nation.



Nasser addressing the Syrian people in Damascus

Eisenhower decided to place the US forces on the alert. It was agreed within the US government to justify the military intervention by declaring that it was taking place at the request of the Lebanese President and government.

This development came as a great disappointment to my father, 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 and in fact obviously wanted him to remain impartial.

As for the Soviet Union, it was felt that a US or Western military intervention in Lebanon could have dangerous consequences not only to Lebanon but also to peace in the Middle

Israel, naturally, 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.

The US government contacted my father on June 7th to ascertain his view on the crisis. He informed them 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.

My father also voiced his concern at the way matters were deteriorating in Lebanon as both sides were still armed and bloodshed would lead to even more bloodshed.

Eventually, the US agreed to the following proposals made by my father: 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 would pledge to henceforth pursue its aims in a constitutional manner only, while the United Arab Republic would undertake 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.

The situation deteriorated, however, and by June 14th, 1958, things had become critical. Clashes were now taking place around the presidential palace, and by the following day matters had become even worse. Chamoun entreated the US to intervene militarily at once!

Eisenhower did not support the idea of a military intervention at this point, for how could a country be protected from its own leaders?! However, he realised 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. Accordingly, he capitulated, and agreed to US military intervention in Lebanon!

Based upon the discussions Hammarskjold had held with both my father 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 Syria into Lebanon!

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.

And in the midst of all these events, 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. The British military base was stationed there, serving as an important link in the ring surrounding the Soviet Union that the US had managed to form.



Celebrating the Egyptian-Syrian union in Damascus

The Iraqi revolution from its onset was bloody and violent; King Faisal II and the crown prince were killed, as well as Nouri Al Said, Fadel Al Jamali and other officials. The revolutionaries then took over the Baghdad broadcasting station.

The West realized from the beginning that the Iraq revolution was hostile to them and pro-Nasser in its direction.

The US was concerned about the situation in Jordan and the fate of the 'Arab Union', and talk began of a connection between the Iraqi revolution and the Lebanese crisis, and that there was no choice but to intervene not only in Lebanon, but to be prepared to do so in the whole region! 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.

Meanwhile, Harold Macmillan, the British Prime Minister, 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.

On July 16th, 1958, US forces arrived in the port of Beirut, and operation Blue Bat was launched.

At this time, we were all on a visit to Yugoslavia, having been invited there by Marshall Tito. My father received the news of the Iraqi revolution whilst on board the Egyptian ship *Al Horreya* in the Mediterranean, on our way back. 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, saying, “This is our duty in any case, even if they have not requested it openly.”

Thus, from aboard the ship *Al Horreya*, my father acknowledged 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.

My father 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.

My father 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.

As for us, we went back on the ship *Al Horreya* to the island of Brioni where President Tito lived and where we had been staying, and from

there on a military plane back to Cairo where my father was there waiting for us.

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 collapse of the Baghdad Pact after the Iraqi revolution constituted a victory for my father, 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, notably the charter of the Arab League; the Joint Defence charter stating that the two countries would stand united before any attack; full cooperation regarding international affairs; economic cooperation; and an ongoing exchange of views on all matters.

My father 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.

“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 Amman! “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?!

Nasser in Damascus

“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 my father’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 was revealed to be true; White House documents proved that Eisenhower had discussed invading Iraq with Macmillan, and 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!”

The crisis resulting from the US military intervention in Lebanon then came before the UN, who decided to send a team of international observers to Lebanon. They presented their report to Hammarskjold stating that most of those carrying arms were Lebanese, thus proving the

United Arab Republic to be innocent of any destructive activity or of smuggling weapons in through Syria.

Jordan also failed to prove that the infiltration of rebels had anything to do with the United Arab Republic.

In its final session on the 21st of August, 1958, a resolution was unanimously passed requesting the Secretary-General of the United Nations to facilitate the withdrawal of foreign forces from Lebanon and Jordan.

And on October 25th, Hammarskjold 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.

In conclusion, my father emerged victorious from this crisis, and the wave of Arab nationalism spread even wider and took root amongst the Arab nations. As my father put it, "The real problem in the Middle East is the continuous interference of the colonialists in its affairs, and its insistence on trying to draw it back into the spheres of influence it has rebelled against."

This, however, did not stop Abdel Nasser's revolutionary course from becoming a model to be aspired to, whose influence extended throughout the Arab world.



Nasser in Damascus, February 20<sup>th</sup>, 1958

## **The dispute between Nasser and Khrushchev**

While the US government was pursuing better relations with Nasser, a dispute was brewing between Nasser and Khrushchev!

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, which was appreciated by my father. Eisenhower, however, was aware that Israel resented the US's giving unconditional aid to Egypt.

After discussions between the two sides, my father suggested that the best thing would be to forget the past and begin afresh.

This period saw my father and Eisenhower deciding to work together in the Middle East, and to begin a new phase of cooperation between their two countries against communism, though my father made sure to refer to the friendship between the United Arab Republic and the Soviet Union and stress that it had no bearing upon the proposed cooperation.

However, on December 23rd, 1958, during his Victory Day speech, my father attacked the Syrian communist party, saying:

“The reactionaries rose against the union, and the communist party in Syria is working against the union and against Arab nationalism, and today, ten months after the union, conspiracies have begun against the union, and the machinations of the colonialists, their allies, and the Zionists, have begun to appear...

The communist party in Syria refuses 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.”

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.





Nasser and Khrushchev

The conflict between Nasser and Khrushchev intensified, and was plain to see 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.”

However, this did not deter my father from standing by his principles and adopting a policy stemming from the best national interests, based on true independence and an adamant refusal to be subordinate to any of the great powers.

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, exploiting 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 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!”



Nasser's visit to Latakia, March 4<sup>th</sup>, 1959

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 16<sup>th</sup>, 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 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.”

My father 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.”

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.

“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.”

A few months after the US had begun changing its policy towards my father in an attempt to improve matters, they reviewed the situation when the crisis between him and Khrushchev intensified, realizing that my father had set principles he did not swerve from whatever the circumstances.

The US government saw that my father 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.

Accordingly, the US found that while they had estimated the Arab nationalist movement as gearing towards extremism, it was nevertheless possible that it could become of use to the West, and the same could be said for Nasser himself: Arab nationalism was the strongest defence against communism. They realized that they had been mistaken in their evaluation of the regime in Egypt by judging it according to the extent of its full cooperation with the West, whereas it followed a true policy of non-alignment.



Aleppo welcomes Nasser, 1960

Meanwhile, the media campaign between Nasser and Khrushchev intensified, which was not in the best interests of either country; however, behind the scenes diplomacy found other ways to play out far from the media, and on February 19th, 1959, my father received a secret propitiatory letter from Khrushchev in which he expressed the hope that relations between the Soviet Union and the United Arab Republic be restored.

On April 12th, 1959, my father received a 31-page letter from Khrushchev 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 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.

My father 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, saying:

“I was not attacking communism as an ideology, which is nothing to do with us... The friendship of the Arab countries is not the result of the activities of their communist parties, but exists in spite of these parties!

“It then became clear that while before you used to deal with the nationalists, 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, for on January 18th, the United Arab Republic agreed with the Soviet Union to begin negotiations for financing the second stage of the dam. My father also met with members of the Soviet delegation on March 22nd 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.

## **The Congo crisis**

Relations with the Soviet Union remained strained as a result of developments in the Congo, which had gained its independence from Belgium on June 30th, 1960 and a week later, had witnessed a crisis when the Congolese army revolted, instigated by its Belgian officers. Arms had been distributed amongst Belgian civilians, and chaos reigned, with a complete collapse of order and security.

Three days after this rebellion, Moïse Tshombe, governor of the Katanga province, announced the secession of the province, where most of the Congo's uranium, diamonds and copper were located, a move incited by the Belgian government, who were quick to send 5000 soldiers to the Congo.

Meanwhile, Patrice Lumumba had succeeded in gaining a majority and had been assigned the leadership of the government. Wishing to form a unified centralized government, and to end the prevailing state of chaos in the country, on July 11th, 1960, Lumumba asked the United Nations to send an international peacekeeping force to help restore order and to prevent any Belgian intervention. Lumumba also asked certain African countries, including the United Arab Republic, to take part in this international force.

Shortly after the arrival of the international forces to the Congo, a heated dispute took place between Lumumba and Hammarskjöld as a result of the former's objection to the replacement of some of the UN's African forces by Europeans. Lumumba accused Hammarskjöld of implementing a colonialist policy and of using the international forces to influence the conflict taking place between the central government headed by Lumumba, and the Katanga province under Tshombe.

At this point, my father announced, in the name of the Egyptian people, support for the people of the Congo in their struggle for freedom and putting an end to colonialism, and the readiness of the United Arab Republic to help the Congolese people achieve their aims. He then sent a letter to Tshombe on August 11th, 1960 in which he wrote:

“We support the establishing of one state in the Republic of Congo, for dividing the independent republic will not benefit its people, but rather the greedy colonialists who wish to benefit from the wealth of your newly-independent country... The colonialist



conspiracy against the Congo is a conspiracy against Africa as a whole...

“If a civil war were to take place in the Congo it will cause nothing but devastation and catastrophes and will impact the future of the Congo for generations to come.”

On September 5th, 1960, Kasa-Vubu, the President of the republic, removed Lumumba from office and appointed Iléo, the head of the Senate as prime minister. Lumumba refused this decision, considering it unconstitutional, a stance supported by the parliament. However, Colonel Mobutu, head of the army, announced a takeover of power, dissolved the parliament, and expelled Lumumba. The UN acknowledged this coup, with the result that Moscow supported Lumumba and the US backed Mobutu.

Towards the end of September, 1960, the United Nations fifteenth session was held, and was attended by my father. In his speech before the General Assembly on September 27th, 1960, he said:

“Today, we are witnessing the beginning of a covert form of colonialism which has no scruples even to the extent of exploiting the United Nations itself and using it as a screen behind which to hide its greedy ambitions and carry out its nefarious maneuvers... Belgian colonialism does not face the African liberation movement using force... it uses the United Nations as a façade to achieve its ends.”

My father did not stop at that, but brought up the subject of the Congo during his meeting with Eisenhower in New York on September 26th, 1960, saying that the US had a responsibility towards dealing with the crisis. He added that Africa was in a state of transition and that the United Arab Republic did not wish to see the cold war extend there, and affirmed that he did not want to see Soviet hegemony in the Congo.

My father then withdrew the Egyptian forces that were in the Congo, refusing that they remain under the leadership of the UN. He did his best to find solutions to the crisis, sending numerous messages to African heads of state outlining his suggestions for addressing the colonialist forces there.



Nasser with President Eisenhower during the UN General Assembly meetings, September 1960

My father then received a letter from Lumumba requesting that a meeting of African heads of state be held in Leopoldville at the beginning of September to discuss the shared African objectives of independence and solidarity.

However, on January 17th, 1961, Mobutu's forces captured Lumumba, and Kasa-Vubu ordered him to be turned over to Tshombe, who had him killed immediately! Lumumba's deputy, Gizenga, promptly organized the opposition and a revolution broke out in retaliation.

Israel, meanwhile, was operating in the Congo on behalf of the colonial forces, and had from the very beginning backed Tshombe and his secessionist movement against Lumumba and the nationalist government in Leopoldville.

My father contacted John Kennedy on February 20th, 1960, one month after his inauguration concerning the Congo crisis, driven by three key issues that were troubling him: the first of course being the disastrous results of the barbaric execution of Lumumba which plunged the country into a civil war; secondly, the strange course the UN had taken in the Congo, dashing any hopes of a solution from that quarter; and third, the disappointment felt by African nations hoping for independence after an endless night of colonialism. These nations had watched events unfold in

the Congo with a mixture of anger and sadness over the fate of an independence at risk of being lost. This bitterness, my father felt, should not be allowed to take hold.

In a speech my father made in Damascus on Union Day, February 22nd, 1961, he announced:

“The United Arab Republic, together with the countries of Asia and Africa, have submitted a draft proposal to the Security Council requesting an impartial investigation, a return of the legitimate parliament in the Congo, the disarmament of the forces being exploited politically, and preventing any chances of a civil war taking place in the Congo.”

At the beginning of March, 1961, President Kennedy replied to my father’s letter, stating the points on which both countries were in agreement:

1. The UN should play a bigger role in restoring internal peace in the Congo.
2. The Cold War should stay clear of the Congo.
3. A strong, decisive investigation into political assassinations and their condemnation.

Throughout this crisis, my father felt that the United Arab Republic had a duty to support the freedom of the Congo and indeed all of Africa, because as he said, countries ruled by traitors would put an end to freedom everywhere and would put paid to the United Nations and its Charter.

My father invited the Lumumba family to take refuge in Egypt, where his children pursued their education. We often received them as visitors in our home and became very close to them.



### **The Cuban crisis**

Until Castro's revolution in January 1959, Cuba was an American colony more or less privately owned by US companies. When the revolution took place, the US's Central Intelligence Agency – the CIA – began plotting for the invasion of Cuba, mobilizing the anti-revolution elements in Florida and planting a large network of them inside Cuba to undertake internal acts of destruction.

The crisis began on October 8th, 1961, and reached its peak on the 14th of the month when US reconnaissance planes discovered the presence of Soviet missile bases under construction. The US reacted by imposing a military blockade on Cuba, and asked the Soviet Union to dismantle all the missile basis there and to remove all weapons of attack. The Soviets refused!

This crisis shook the world, leaving everyone in fear of a nuclear confrontation between the US and the Soviet Union. However, the danger was averted on October 28th, when President Kennedy and U-Thant, the UN Secretary General managed to come to an agreement with the Soviets to remove their bases from Cuba on condition that the US should not invade the country.

Sure enough, two weeks after the agreement, the Soviets removed all their missiles and the US blockade of Cuba officially ended on November 20th, 1961.

My father had met Castro for the first time in New York in 1960 whilst attending the 15th UN General Assembly, and they got together on two occasions. As my father put it, "Our conversation about the revolutionary process in our respective countries was extremely interesting; there is a strong bond that links all revolutionaries; we believe in the same cause: freedom."

Castro told my father that he had drawn courage and inspiration from the way in which Egypt had stood resilient before the attack launched by Britain, France, and Israel in 1956, saying that Nasser was a source of spiritual and moral power to his men.

My father also spoke to Castro of the need for a basis for unity amongst the Latin American states similar to the Arab unity he was seeking to achieve.



Nasser receives Castro at his place of residence while attending the UN General Assembly meetings on September 25th, 1960

Actually, this was not the first time my father met with leaders of the Cuban revolution; Che Guevara visited Egypt several times in 1959 and later on; he met with my father and discussed the problems of the Cuban revolution and studied the agricultural reform and industrialization programs in Egypt.



Nasser receives Che Guevara in Cairo, June 15th, 1959

My father sent a letter to Castro on April 18th, 1961, in which he said:

“At these critical moments, while your valiant people are fighting a pivotal battle for their freedom under your leadership, I feel a deep spiritual connection with all you are going through as you face this hostile, reckless storm over Cuba.

“Colonialists never learn and never change their ways, which are nothing but the expression of a nature unfit for this day and age, buried in the mire of the dark ages.

“I want you and the people of Cuba to know that the friends of freedom the world over will not be mere spectators as this crime against your people unfolds; not only is it a crime against a people who only wished for freedom, but a crime against world peace and against the free conscience of humanity. I am

confident that freedom, peace, and humanity will emerge victorious.”

The following day, a joint statement was issued by presidents Nasser and Tito regarding the Cuban crisis:

“After a careful study of the latest foreign intervention currently taking place in Cuba, including supplying invaders with arms and other means of support, and the use by these invaders of foreign territories, we are regrettably forced to conclude that these actions are nothing but an attack against the independence of Cuba in a manner that violates the principles of the United Nations and constitutes an assault on world peace, which calls for a decisive confrontation and for immediate steps to be taken by global society.”



President Kennedy sent a letter to my father on May 3rd, 1961, reproaching him for the contents of the joint statement with Tito, particularly, “invasion, and foreign intervention by imperialism”.

My father replied to Kennedy on May 18th, 1961:

“I find it my duty to inform you that the impression we got here in the United Arab Republic, and which indeed was felt by many the world over, was that the United States was not far removed from the sorry events that took place in Cuba... I cannot hide the fact that this was a huge shock to public opinion worldwide.”

He continued with considerable diplomacy:

“We are full of admiration for the moral courage with which you proclaimed the responsibility of the US regarding the events in Cuba... We also deeply appreciate the non-involvement of US troops in these events... It is a stand that we believe has prevented the situation in Cuba from deteriorating and has saved world peace from a catastrophe that seemed at first almost impossible to avoid.”

Nasser’s position towards the events in Cuba can be clarified by this handwritten note found in his personal papers:

“We believe in non-alignment in our foreign policy... this means we are able to view world problems free from any biased connections and from an independent perspective that enables us to contribute positively to supporting peace that is based on justice and voice our opinion from this standpoint.”

Concerning the manner in which the Cuban crisis was resolved, my father wrote to Kennedy on October 31st, 1962:

“It is fortunate that the people of the world are keen to preserve peace and have made all efforts both within the UN and outside it to do so, in addition to the wisdom, sound judgement, and sense of responsibility exhibited by all parties in the conflict, which enables us to look forward rather than dwell on the past.

“We believe that the United States with all its strength and prestige can support peace in a way no one else can, and that it has a historic responsibility before the whole of humanity in this regard.”





John Kennedy

### **Reviving the Palestinian Cause Globally**

The Palestinian cause had been a major concern in the Arab world ever since the UN decree of November 29th, 1947, which divided Palestine between the Arabs and the Jews, and acknowledged the right of Palestinian refugees to return to their homes or to receive compensation, which was refused by the Jews. The Arab countries then declared war after the founding of the State of Israel on May 15th, 1948, the Palestine War in which the Arabs were defeated and their cause weakened.

It was only natural after the 1952 revolution that the cause of the Palestinian people should be taken up, championing their right to return to their land or receive compensation as per the UN decrees. My father never despaired or gave up on his unfailing support of Palestinian rights and of obtaining them by military means. During the Egyptian-Syrian union – from February 22nd 1958 to September 28th, 1961 – he wrote down the following:

“An army to be formed of the Palestinians in Egypt and Syria in accordance with a set timeline, with brigades of fedayeen commandos who will carry out a campaign of guerilla warfare inside Palestine when the time is right, and establish bases there that can serve as centers from which to operate...

“This is the only way to prevent the colonialist countries from intervening in support of Israel, as this will be a

revolution carried out by the Palestinian people themselves and an attempt to regain their territory.

“This will necessitate that our armed forces should reach the utmost standards of strength and efficiency both in Egypt and Syria, and that we be in contact with the Arabs inside Israel and the inhabitants of the West Bank and organize them in brigades. We will need to study the guerilla warfare tactics employed in China and Vietnam.

“Politically, we need to be ready with psychological warfare for the Arabs and also for the Jews... We also need to reawaken the hopes of the Palestinian people that they will return. This requires a strong anti-espionage entity, because the Israeli intelligence agency is strong as are their psychological warfare tactics.”

The United States’ siding with Israel in the Palestine issue, its acknowledgement of the State of Israel as soon as it was declared, and its unwavering support of the Zionist project politically, militarily, and financially, had a profound effect on the aversion felt by the Arabs towards this skewed, biased policy.



Lebanese and Syrian delegations greeting Nasser upon his arrival in Syria,

March 2nd, 1958

The developments that occurred during the Egypt-Syria union between Khrushchev and my father – as previously described – and Eisenhower’s warmer attitude towards him because of his criticism of communism, a policy followed by his successor, Kennedy, all brought the Palestine issue to the forefront of discussions in a manner unprecedented in US policy.

Kennedy began by enquiring about my father through Henry Byroade, the former US Ambassador in Cairo, who replied on February 5th, 1961:

“You asked about Nasser, and I wish we had more time to discuss this ‘problem’. I have been intimately connected with the Arab-Israeli situation under two presidents, and know, for reasons you will well understand, that this is an even more difficult problem for the Democrats than for the Republicans.

“I have one concrete thought to give you. If we are to regain Nasser’s confidence, I doubt whether it can be accomplished any more solely on the ambassadorial level. It can be done if a personal relationship of confidence (he is a true Arab in this respect) can be established between you and Nasser. You might consider inviting him to the US for this purpose. This would cause you problems, I know, but it might pay off. I am convinced that you and he, and I think Dean Rusk, would get along well.

“If Nasser does come, it would be important for those who plan his programme to know that he is a strict puritan in his way of living.”

Following Byroade’s letter, Kennedy wrote to my father after having received a telegram congratulating him on the success of the first mission to space by an American on May 6th, 1961. Kennedy’s letter stated:

“My thoughts have often turned to the Middle East, an area which has contributed so much to the religious and cultural heritage of the world today, and whose potential for further rich contributions to civilization is great.... I am proud of the tangible encouragement which has been accorded by our government and people to the aspirations of you and your countrymen in the past, particularly during the critical days of 1956. The United States Government, itself the product of a union of several independent states, was pleased to recognize the formation of the United Arab Republic on February 22,

1958, the birthday anniversary of our own first President, Washington.

“You will find us at all times and all places active in the struggle for equality of opportunity; for government of the people, by the people and for the people; for freedom from want and fear; and for the application of justice in the settlement of international disputes.”

Kennedy also expressed the willingness of the United States to provide material and political assistance to all countries of the Middle East and to join in finding solutions for ‘unresolved’ Arab-Israeli conflict.

I read his comments and suggestions regarding the Palestinian problem, and particularly those concerning Palestinian refugees, with a great deal of astonishment, as I found them to be more or less in line with the Arab stand regarding the UN resolutions. In his letter, he went on to say:

“The American government and people believe that an honorable and humane settlement can be found and are willing to share in the labors and burdens which so difficult an achievement must entail, if the parties concerned genuinely desire such participation. We are willing to help resolve the tragic Palestine refugee problem on the basis of the principle of repatriation or compensation for properties, to assist in finding an equitable answer to the question of Jordan River water resources development and to be helpful in making progress on other aspects of this complex problem.

“I am pleased that the United Nations General Assembly recently underscored the necessity to implement more rapidly its previous recommendations on the refugee problem. In this connection, I wish to state unequivocally that this Government’s position is anchored and will continue to be anchored in the firm bedrock of support for General Assembly recommendations concerning the refugees, and of active, impartial concern that those recommendations be implemented in a way most beneficial to the refugees.

“The United States, as a member of the Palestine Conciliation Commission and a nation keenly interested in the long-range advancement of the peoples of the Middle East, takes seriously the task entrusted to the Commission by the United Nations. We are determined to use our influence to assure that the Commission intensify its efforts to promote progress toward a just and peaceful solution. What precise steps the Commission

may be able to take are, of course, not yet clear, but I can assure you that there will be no lack of United States interest in seeing that effective action is taken. It is my sincere hope that all the parties directly concerned will cooperate fully with whatever program is undertaken by the Commission so that the best interests and welfare of all the Arab refugees of Palestine may be protected and advanced.”

This was actually the very first time an American president had addressed the Palestinian question with such honesty and clarity, and with a genuine wish to find a solution to the conflict that jeopardized peace in the Middle East region. My father’s response was in the same spirit of sincerity:

“The Palestinian question and the resulting problems emanating from it, in addition to being a major issue affecting world peace is also inextricably connected to relations between our two countries... It is vital that we should both have a clear perception of the situation... I am trying here to convey our perspective on the matter, and assure you that it is not built on emotions, but on the reality of what has actually taken place.

“First: A party gave away what it didn’t own to another who had no right to it, after which they both, using force and treachery, robbed the legitimate owners of all they possessed. This is the true picture of the Balfour Declaration whereby Britain promised land that did not belong to it but belonged to the Palestinian Arabs, to establish a national home for the Jews in Palestine.

“Second: It is unfortunate, Mr. President, that the United States chose not to be on the side of law and justice, disregarding the American principles of freedom and democracy, driven by local political considerations that have no connection either to American principles or to the global interests of the US. In short, it was an attempt to win over Jewish votes in the US elections...

“Third: The fallacy of a military victory, perpetuated by those who use it to justify the Israeli state’s right to Palestine, is nothing but a delusion created in an effort to hide the truth; the UN documents and the reports submitted by the international truce committees in Palestine prove that the

Israeli forces were unable to occupy the territories they seized while the war was still being waged, and strangely enough, managed to do so during the cease fire.

“We Arabs thought that the Israelis would be punished for disregarding the terms of the international truce, and that the territory they stole under cover of the cease fire would be returned to its rightful owners. It is unfortunate that it is we who were punished for having put our trust in the United Nations.

“Fourth: The danger posed by Israel is not confined to the assault so far perpetrated on Arab rights, but extends to the future of the Arabs and threatens it with the direst consequences. And if you observe the continuous Jewish immigration to Israel and how it is being encouraged, you will see, as we do, that this will create pressure inside Israel that will force it to look towards expanding...

“I assure you on my honour that the stand I am taking on the Palestinian issue is not due to my being the president of the United Arab Republic, but stems from my being an Arab citizen, one of millions of Arab citizens.”



Nasser in Damascus

### **The Kuwaiti crisis:**

Yet another global crisis arose with the announcement on June 19th, 1961 of Kuwait's independence after having been a British Protectorate since 1899. Just six days after the declaration of independence, the Iraqi president Abdel Karim Qasim asked that Kuwait be annexed to Iraq, on the basis that it was a province of Basra, and announced that the Iraqi Republic had decided to 'protect the Iraqi people in Kuwait'! He asserted that the Iraqi government was in possession of historic documents that proved Kuwait to be part of Basra, and that Iraq would demand its right to every inch of land seized by the colonialists!

Sure enough, Iraqi forces seized ten Kuwaiti ships moored in the Iraqi port of Basra, and at the same time a decision to freeze Kuwaiti assets in Iraqi banks was issued.

Iraq then cut its ties with Lebanon, Jordan, Tunisia, the United Kingdom, Iran, and Japan, and also withdrew from the Arab League after Kuwait was accepted as a member on July 20th, 1961 and joined the Joint Defence pact.

Meanwhile, the British navy was preparing to leave Kuwait, but postponed its departure after the prince of Kuwait asked the British government for help; five more British navy units also moved towards Kuwaiti waters.

Kuwait also requested assistance from Saudi Arabia, who responded promptly; King Saud ordering a military force to be sent to help Kuwait immediately.

On June 30th, Britain sent more forces to Kuwait, occupying the length of the borders with Iraq.

On July 1st, 1961, Kuwait requested an emergency meeting of the Security Council to address Qasim's threats, and closed its borders with Iraq.

As soon as the crisis arose, the United Arab Republic issued a statement on June 27th, 1961 refusing the principle of annexation while expressing its willingness to make every effort to support a comprehensive unity in the region which, however, should stem from the wishes of the people concerned and be based on freedom of choice.

In a second statement issued on June 30th after further developments had taken place, the United Arab Republic announced that it, "was following the movements of the British navy with the utmost dissatisfaction; the Arab nation saw no reason for the crisis between Kuwait and Iraq to lead to the possibility of an armed conflict or for foreign colonialist intervention."

A third statement issued on July 5th declared:

“As the United Arab Republic follows the developments of the crisis that has arisen between the government of the Republic of Iraq and the government of Kuwait, it finds it incumbent upon it to raise its voice in warning against the large-scale military conclusion and particularly in Kuwait, and taking advantage of the unexpected crisis that has taken place there.

“The United Arab Republic sees that the mobilization of British forces in Kuwait is occurring on a scale that suggests that the whole operation - if not pre-planned - had been waiting for the slightest opportunity to enable this move.

“The United Arab Republic sees that this mobilization of British forces constitutes a threat to the Iraqi people and to the whole Arab nation.”

One can conclude from these statements that my father found himself in a predicament: on the one hand, he supported Kuwaiti independence and refused the principle of forcible annexation, but at the same time was displeased at the fact that the Prince of Kuwait had resorted to the British for help, and that the fact that British forces were pouring into Kuwait was a threat to its newly-found independence and to liberation movements in the entire Gulf area.

The Prince of Kuwait responded in a letter to my father dated July 9th, 1961:

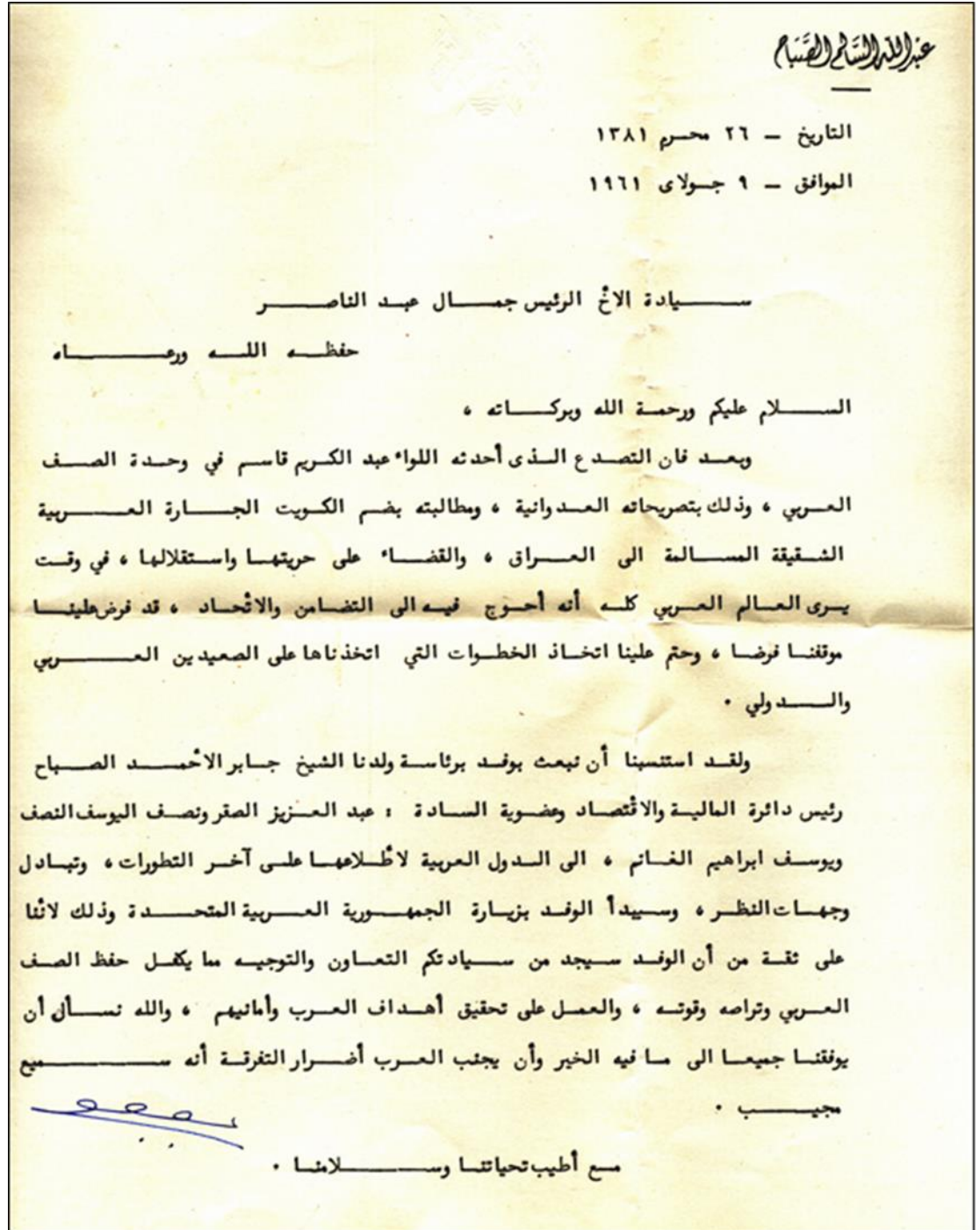
“The rift that Abdel Karim Qasim has caused in the unity of the Arabs with his hostile declarations and his wish to annex Kuwait, a peaceful neighbouring Arab country, to Iraq, and to destroy its freedom and independence at a time when the whole Arab world is in dire need of solidarity and unity, imposed this situation upon us and gave us no recourse but to act as we did.

“We have decided to send a delegation headed by our son, Sheikh Gaber Al-Ahmed Al-Sabah, Head of the Finance and Economy Department, to the Arab countries to inform them of the latest developments and to exchange views on the situation. The delegation will begin by visiting the United Arab Republic because we are confident that they will receive from Your Excellency the cooperation and advice which will



help preserve the unity, power, and solidarity of the Arab front. I pray that God may help us all in doing what is right and that we may avoid the damage that would ensue from being divided. God is All-Hearing and Responsive.

With our kindest regards and greetings.”



Letter from the Prince of Kuwait, Abdullah Al-Salem Al-Sabah sent to President Nasser after Abdel Karim Qasim wanted to annex Kuwait, July 9th, 1961.

My father was fully involved in the Kuwaiti question, and his handwritten draft of a speech he gave on the occasion of the ninth anniversary of the July revolution contains the following notes:

“The values that should guide the Arab struggle - These ideas of regional expansion: what if it takes place?! - Greed and coveting wealth!

“Our stance on the Kuwaiti issue from day one stemmed from principles, and when the crisis - for which there was no reason or excuse – occurred, our main concern was that these were two Arab peoples: the people of Iraq and the people of Kuwait! The United Arab Republic could only adhere to its principles, not only for its own sake but to safeguard the solidarity of the Arab nation.

“The future of the Arab nation cannot be built on stratagems; this is not the way to realise Arab aspirations but rather a way to crush them. This Republic cannot agree to allowing the principle of annexation to govern dealings between Arab nations. We have declared before that we support the concept of unity but refuse that of annexation: the principle upon which a union is built is one of popular consensus. Our objective should be the evacuation of the colonialists from Kuwait.”



Nasser receives Prince Saad, son of the Kuwaiti ruler, and Prince Jaber,  
June 17<sup>th</sup>, 1958

My father replied to the letter sent by the Prince of Kuwait as follows:

“The United Arab Republic is aware that the British have repeatedly attempted to send their troops into Kuwait, attempts which were always met with refusal. The United Arab Republic refrained from sending forces to Kuwait because the matter does not concern Kuwait alone, but the whole Arab nation and indeed the world at large. And if we decided to send our troops to Kuwait, the colonialist forces would do their utmost to portray this as an attempt by the United Arab Republic to try and steal a march on Iraq and control Kuwait before the Iraqis do.

“At the same time, we cannot accept the intrusion of colonialist forces in any part of the Arab world; the United Arab Republic sees the British presence in Kuwait as posing a serious threat that must be dealt with immediately, while we

also need to provide reassurance to the people of Kuwait. We feel that the Kuwaiti proposal to send Arab forces to replace the British troops will provide this reassurance, as will Kuwait's membership in the Arab League and the United Nations, till the crisis is solved within the Arab domain.

“Having said that, the United Arab Republic prefers not to send its forces to Kuwait, which could elicit a stubborn reaction from the colonialists and the Iraqis. The United Arab Republic also needs to keep all its troops concentrated on the borders with Israel, which is why any Arab countries sharing borders with Israel should also be excepted from sending forces to Kuwait.”

On July 12th, 1961, Kuwait applied for membership in the Arab League, and requested assistance from the Arab states against the Iraqi threat. Kuwait also pledged to see to the withdrawal of British forces from Kuwait once the Arab League had replaced them with Arab forces.

Iraq requested the postponement of the Kuwait application for membership of the Arab League, but the United Arab Republic announced, during the second session that was held on July 13th, that such postponement would not solve the issue, and its delegate insisted on Kuwait's joining the Arab League and on the British forces being replaced by Arab forces at once, which is what happened.

During this session, the Arab League accepted Kuwait's membership after the Prince of Kuwait pledged to ask the British government to withdraw its forces once the Arab League forces had arrived.

The Arab forces began arriving in Kuwait on September 10th, 1961, and had all arrived by November 3rd; totaling 2.337 in number. These troops carried on with their duties up until the coup that took place in Iraq on February 8th, 1963, when Abdel Salam Aref took over the presidency of Iraq and began making friendly overtures to Kuwait.

Accordingly, on February 12th, Kuwait requested the withdrawal of the Arab forces, which was completed by February 20th.

In conclusion, the Security Council unanimously agreed, in its emergency session of May 7th, 1963, to acknowledging Kuwait as a member, and in the General Assembly session that took place on May 14th, based on the recommendation of the Security Council, a decree was issued accepting Kuwait as a member of the United Nations.

## **The secession conspiracy**

Inside the country, my father was confronted with a situation that constituted a cruel blow. At dawn on September 28th, 1961, while he was working in our home in Mansheyet El Bakri, he received a telephone call after which he rushed out of the house and straight to the Egyptian Broadcasting Station to speak to the people:

“Today, we are encountering a situation that will affect all the great objectives we have struggled to attain: the armed forces in Damascus – small in number – have taken over the Damascus Broadcasting Station and have surrounded army headquarters; they have issued successive statements announcing the dissolution of the United Arab Republic. What do we do now? We want to avoid bloodshed.”

My father spoke to the people again on the afternoon of the same day, keeping them abreast with developments and with the decisions made:

“Several announcements were made this morning, all of which constituted a unequivocal attack on the Arab union, the United Arab Republic, and the socialist decrees. The second announcement contained wrongful accusations and opposition to the latest revolutionary decrees that called for social justice and the eradication of exploitation and monopoly...”

“What took place this morning leaves no room for bargaining or compromise; this is what I believe, and this is my duty at these crucial moments.”



The people welcoming Nasser upon his leaving the Egyptian Broadcasting station on September 28th 1961

The following day, September 29th, my father explained to the people the decision he had taken after seeing the reaction of the Syrian people, who went out in droves all over Syria denouncing the coup. So how did he react?

“We did not abandon them...the situation in Aleppo and Latakia was beyond the control of this rebellious faction; the people were demanding their rights, their freedom, and their union, so what did I do? I decided to protect the people there by sending armed forces from Cairo and ordered the navy to move at once. I issued orders to deploy all our ships for transporting the troops.”

However, after the secessionist movement had gained control of Aleppo and Latakia, my father explained to the people:

“The situation called for reconsideration: would Arab blood be spilt by fellow Arabs?! An Arab fight another Arab?! For whose benefit would we fight one another when there are enemies lying in wait?!

“Before midnight last night, I had issued orders to all the planes heading to Latakia to turn back, and ordered the forces who had already landed there before midnight last night not to fire a single shot and to give themselves in to the naval commander there; the naval forces had already reached the outskirts of Latakia, and I ordered them to return.

“As we face these crucial moments in our history, there is no better time than this to hold on to our Arabism. I know there are bitter feelings here, and pain, but we must not let bitterness prevail over wisdom and sound judgement.

“There are those who say: did we ask for a union?! It is they who did so, this is true, but we are one Arab nation.

“Are we sorry for what we did? Never, because we responded to our conscience, our Arabism, our very soul...But I find myself at these moments compelled to raise my voice in warning and say that this republic must always remain a fortress of Arab nationalism, and a support for Arab freedom, and a foundation for Arab development towards self-sufficiency and justice.

“I have told you many times before that revolutions, uprisings, and liberation movements can be subject to setbacks, but the people are alive and will not die. The Arab people are alive and can never die...

“However, we must not be governed by pride; we are facing a crisis that requires that we stand upright like men and put emotions aside, put bitterness aside, and keep our reactions to ingratitude to ourselves and just remember that we are free Arab citizens that belong to a free Arab nation with enemies lying in waiting...

“I am asking this nation to rise above its wounds and to think of the Arab people in Syria. Unity is the will of the people, and I will never agree to turn it into a military operation, hence my orders to cancel military operations yesterday.

“The people of Syria achieved considerable gains during the past three years; gains they could not have hoped to achieve in decades: the feudal system has come to an end, the land has been distributed amongst the farmers and many workers on the land have now become landowners themselves. I distributed land

ownership deeds last February in Syria to the farmers and felt for myself their emotion at going from being land workers to landowners, masters of their land and of their fate.

“Other achievements that resulted from the union were the Labour Law that prevented arbitrary dismissal, followed by laws aimed at preventing the dictatorship of capital, monopolies, and all forms of tyranny and control, so that each individual, whether a worker or a farmer, could be master of his own fate. The socialist decrees, which were attacked yesterday in the announcements made by the reactionary colonialist movement, for whom were they made? For one individual? For a political party? For a handful of individuals?! They were issued for the Syrian people, because monopolies and capitalism were the norm, governing prices by controlling imports and failing to encourage industry.

“I am positive, brothers, that the Syrian people will not give up the gains they have made; these gains were not achieved by me: it is not Gamal Abdel Nasser but the Syrian people who achieved all this. Dams have been built, and factories; the Syrian people have a say in the government; a public sector has been established for industry and development. Syria now has a strong, well-equipped army...

“I am certain that the Arab people of Syria will safeguard these gains and that the Syrian army will never become a tool in the hands of reactionaries and colonialists.

“The people of Syria will make their voice heard all over the world; they will adhere to the principles of freedom and will stand up to reactionaries, colonialists, and their lackeys. They will reject capitalist control... they will reject treachery.

“The Arab Republic – my brothers – will move forward stronger than ever, a bastion of freedom, championing the principles that go towards creating a society where social justice prevails. May God help us succeed in doing so.”

Nasser was aware of all the conflicting elements in the situation; he managed to avoid a civil war and bloodshed, and foil the enemies waiting to exploit the situation, for the Sixth Fleet was already moving towards the Mediterranean, while Turkey with its sights set on Northern Syria would have intervened militarily, and Israel could have seized the opportunity to launch an attack.



As always, my father managed to turn this setback into a catalyst for moving forward and eradicating reactionism throughout the Arab world. As he said in his speech to young people four days after the secession: “Let this be a new incentive to move forward.”



Nasser’s speech to youth from Al-Gomhoria Square, September 29th, 1961

Nasser issued another statement about the secession in which he said:

“I refused to use military force to maintain the union, and I now refuse to let a civil war take place. I feel at this time that it is not necessary for Syria to remain part of the United Arab Republic, but it is necessary for Syria to remain! I cannot accept that any sedition or any form of danger should threaten the Syrian people.

“I now call upon everyone who cares about the United Arab Republic and about Arab unity, to realise that it is unity inside the Syrian nation that is the top priority at this point.

“I have just informed the head of the United Arab Republic’s permanent delegation at the United Nations that he is not to stand in the way of Syria’s being accepted as a member of the UN.

The government of the United Arab Republic will not acknowledge any government in Damascus until the wishes of the Syrian people are made known.

“I have done my utmost to do my duty towards the Arab nation, and to prevent any chance of divisions or sedition.”



Nasser's speech in Al-Gomhoria Square after the secession on September 29th, 1961

President Kennedy asked the US Ambassador to Egypt, Frederick Reinhart, to pass on an urgent verbal message to my father. Kennedy said that he fully understood the problems my father was facing as a result of the recent events in the Syrian region of the United Arab Republic, and appreciated the efforts he had made to achieve stability using peaceful means. President Kennedy particularly admired Nasser's speech of September 29th, which demonstrated his skill as a statesman who refused to resort to power or bloodshed as a means of solving the conflict with the Syrian rebels.

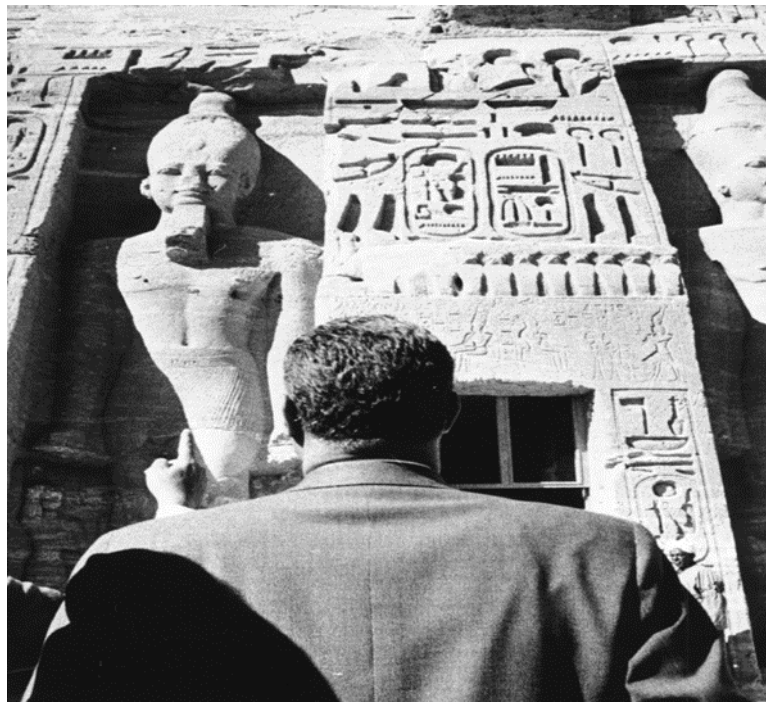
The United States was also careful not to acknowledge the new system in Syria before consulting with the government of the United Arab Republic, especially as it considered that Nasser's announcement on October 5th that the United Arab Republic had no objection to Syria's membership of the United Nations was proof of a more flexible attitude.

At what of Moscow? Khrushchev had opposed the Egyptian-Syrian merger from the very beginning; however, in a meeting with the Egyptian ambassador in Moscow, he declared:

“President Nasser acted with the utmost perspicacity; indeed, the way he handled this problem is an example of true statesmanship and leadership. He showed foresight and wisdom in refraining from resorting to war. The use of force could encourage Israel, Jordan, Turkey, and others to intervene. It is also not in anyone’s best interests to isolate the Syrian people politically.”

Syria’s separation from Egypt was the result of a number of internal and external factors; political errors combined with hostility from the reactionary regimes in the region as well as from the West; everyone feared that the union would be a starting point for the establishing of a large Arab state opposed to colonialism and to communism.

Nevertheless, this experiment in unity will remain a landmark in modern Arab history, and it is to Nasser’s credit that he did not impose it by force – which he could have done – but insisted on popular consensus for it to continue.



## Revolutionizing the Revolution

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.

My father 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, my father spoke of the union

“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!”

“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.”

With his characteristic courage and openness, my father 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.



Cabinet meeting headed by President Nasser on October 2<sup>nd</sup>, 1961

“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 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!”

## **The need for change**

My father went on to expound on the need – and the extent – to which change was required:

“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.”

My father reached a logical conclusion, which was 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<sup>4</sup> or the National Union<sup>5</sup>, resulted in contradictions we wish to avoid.”

My father 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

---

<sup>4</sup> The first political organization to be formed after the 23<sup>rd</sup> July revolution and after political parties were dissolved on January 17<sup>th</sup>, 1953, following which the Muslim Brotherhood was dissolved on January 14<sup>th</sup>, 1954.

<sup>5</sup> A popular organization announced in the constitution that was issued after the 1952 revolution, on June 25<sup>th</sup>, 1956.

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!

“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.”

My father 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 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 Umma 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. My father 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.”

My father 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. My father thus laid the foundations for the role of the people, the principle of eliminating class differences, and collective rule, affirming democracy.



In the Charter, my father 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 24<sup>th</sup>, 1962, Nasser said:

“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.”

From my father’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 25<sup>th</sup>, 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.”

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.

Nasser explained, on March 19<sup>th</sup>, 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 17<sup>th</sup>, 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.

“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 *fellaheen*. This is to safeguard against the machinations of the feudalists and reactionaries in any forthcoming elections.”

On March 25<sup>th</sup>, 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.



Nasser's speech in the Umma Council on the revolutionary experiment, freedom, and democracy.

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 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!



The opening of the Industrial Exhibition, July 3<sup>rd</sup>, 1964

Regarding the situation in the countryside, my father noted:

“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?!”

He 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, 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, my father 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. There are cliques within the Umma Council; no meetings; no coordination; negativity and fear, conflicting statements, and a lot of violent hatred. On top of all that we have a wave of strikes.”

He goes on to describe the situation in the army:

“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.”

My father 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 breath 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.”

He 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 23<sup>rd</sup> 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.

The cabinet of ministers headed by Aly Sabri tended its resignation on March 27<sup>th</sup>, 1965, and Zakaria Mohieddin took over as prime minister. My father had been nominated as president and was reelected for a six-year period on March 16<sup>th</sup>, 1965.

My father called for a meeting in his home on March 30<sup>th</sup>, 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.



Nasser witnessing the launch of a guided missile on July 15<sup>th</sup>, 1963

Martial law had been cancelled in March 1964, and political prisoners released from jail, including communists and Muslim Brotherhood members. On April 7<sup>th</sup>, 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 on August 29<sup>th</sup>, 1965, saying:

“We cannot show lenience towards this: shall we forgive, as we did before?! We forgave before (the attempted assassination attack on October 26<sup>th</sup>, 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.”

My father continued to monitor the counter revolution and its movements, and once again noted down the dangers of the prevailing situation on February 2<sup>nd</sup>, 1966:

“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!”

“The misuse of sequestered 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... 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.”





## **The conflict in Yemen**

On September 26<sup>th</sup>, 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 establishing 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 preserving 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 the latter focus on reinforcing internal stability and development rather than venture into external 'adventures'.

It can be concluded from this telegram sent by the US to the United Arab Republic 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.

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, and the British colonies that still existed, including Aden, which could be threatened by the revolution in Yemen.

In this context, Prince Faisal arrived in Washington on October 4<sup>th</sup>, 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 who 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 family. 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!

### **The Yemeni revolutionaries ask Egypt for help:**

On October 5<sup>th</sup>, 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, following a plea for help from Al Salal, the leader of the revolution, 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 29<sup>th</sup>, 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.”

My father informed the Council that he had not answered right away but had sent them a message through the Charge d’Affaires there:

“I told them we will support you in the case of any outside intervention or attack, especially if Saud intervenes, in which case we will help militarily. I then advised them to form a government so that people would acknowledge them, and to move quickly without delay!

“And at 7.30 a.m. the next morning, the BBC 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.”

A surprising development occurred on October 5<sup>th</sup>, 1962, after King Saud had mobilized his forces on the Yemeni border: a Saudi military plane flown by a pilot named Rashad Sisha and some of his Saudi colleagues arrived in Cairo. They were carrying weapons with which to attack the Yemeni revolutionaries, but had refused to do so and had defected to Cairo.

And on November 12<sup>th</sup>, Sohail Hamza, leader of the Jordanian air force, defected to Cairo with a number of planes. My father received them and agreed to appoint them in the United Arab Republic air force together with their Saudi colleagues.



Nasser receives the three Saudi pilots Rashad Sisha, Ahmed Hussein and Omar Azmarli, October 3<sup>rd</sup>, 1962

My father continued to discuss the Yemeni issue and the question of Egyptian military intervention during the Presidential Council session of October 10<sup>th</sup>, 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 success of this revolution means the collapse of Saudi Arabia and also the end of colonialist rule in the protectorates, which will drive Saudi Arabia to resist it. They also fear that the presence of Egypt in the area will change the strategic balance in the whole region.

“Our forces are increasing in Yemen; in my opinion, it is a battle of defence: we are defending Cairo in Sanaa!

“The Saudis are shaken, as are the Syrians, as a result of events in Yemen; they were taken aback when we recognized the Yemen!”



Nasser receives Chester Bowles, President Kennedy's special envoy, on February 14<sup>th</sup>, 1962

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.

At the same time, the US managed to get a promise from Nasser on November 9<sup>th</sup>, 1962, that he would not invade Saudi Arabia and was willing to consider a mutual disengagement of forces with Saudi Arabia.

Nevertheless, the situation was getting worse for the United Arab Republic, and upon the advice of Field Marshal Abdel Hakim Amer, additional forces were needed 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.

Eventually, the United States became ready to recognize the Yemen Arab Republic after West Germany had done so, before East Germany. And so, on December 19<sup>th</sup>, 1962, the US acknowledged 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.

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.

### **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.

Kennedy sent a letter to my father saying that they wanted to resolve the situation so that matters should not develop into a full-scale war inside Saudi Arabia and a confrontation with the United States.

Kennedy also sent a similar letter to King Hussein, Prince Faisal, and Al-Sallal, requesting a speedy phased withdrawal of all foreign powers in Yemen and the cessation of external support of the royalists.



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!

The UAR forces had reached the Saudi borders and stopped there, while the Saudi forces, which included Jordanians and some mercenaries and were heavily armed, were mobilized on the Yemeni border.

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! My father accepted on condition that the Saudis discontinue their support of the royalists; however, Faisal refused!

My father then asked: “How can we conclude this operation and leave? This is the main problem.”

My father met with Bunker, the US mediator, in April 1963, and agreed to begin withdrawing his forces simultaneously with the cessation of Saudi aid to the royalists, and to complete the withdrawal in stages. He 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.



Nasser receives Ellsworth Bunker, President Kennedy’s Special Envoy on January 4<sup>th</sup>, 1963.

However, although 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, the disengagement conditions were not respected, over and above which Al Badr and the Yemeni royal family remained in Jizan, Saudi Arabia.



Welcoming the troops returning from Yemen upon their return to Port Said on the ships Al-Sudan and Al-Wadi, April 9<sup>th</sup>, 1963.

On June 11<sup>th</sup>, 1963, the United Nations sent observers to 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! However, no great progress was made in the Yemen owing to the Saudis' failure to adhere to their commitment.

As for the British, they were hoping that a continuation of the war in Yemen would bleed the United Arab Republic's resources and weaken it, while helping them to keep their military base in Aden. And though the US had informed my father that they supported the British position in Aden, things changed, and the US decided that it, "had no sympathy with the 'foolish' British policy regarding the Arabs"!

The Americans were also worried about the reaction to my father's speech of February 22<sup>nd</sup>, 1964, in which he announced that, "no country could claim to be free unless it got rid of all military bases on its territory", after which Libya announced that it did not intend to renew the agreements that allowed Britain and the US to maintain bases in Libya!

My father visited the Yemen from April 23<sup>rd</sup> – 27<sup>th</sup>, 1964, one and a half years after the Yemeni revolution. He 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?!"

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.



Nasser's visit to Yemen, April 24<sup>th</sup>, 1964.

“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.”

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.

“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 belongs to the Arabs.”



The Yemeni people welcome Nasser upon his arrival in Sanaa, April 24<sup>th</sup>, 1964.

My father met with tribal leaders and religious men, and asked them to support him and to work towards freeing Aden and the Arab South from colonialism.



Religious men and tribal leaders in Yemen welcoming Nasser in Sanaa, April 26<sup>th</sup>, 1964.

On September 5<sup>th</sup>, 1964, Nasser and Faisal met at the second Summit Meeting in Alexandria, and announced

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, too.”

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.

Nasser and Faisal met at the Alexandria Summit Meeting 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 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.



Nasser with the Arab kings and leaders performing Friday prayers at the Sidi Bishr mosque in Alexandria during the second Arab Summit Meeting, September 11<sup>th</sup>, 1964.

However, for the second time, Faisal reneged on the agreement and began putting obstacles in the way of its implementation. It was soon obvious that they were merely trying to gain time in order to get rid of King Saud.

But in spite of the fact that the disengagement had not taken place, the United Arab Republic's forces in Yemen refrained from attacking the Saudis, and the media war between the two countries also came to an end.

Realizing that the situation in Yemen was at an impasse, my father wrote the following in his notes:

“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!”

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 then 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.

The visit achieved its objective, and a peace treaty over Yemen was signed with Faisal on August 24<sup>th</sup>, 1965, after which my father went straight to the airport and back to Cairo.





The meeting between Nasser and King Faisal of Saudi Arabia at the Al-Khuzam Palace in Jeddah where the Jeddah Agreement was signed. August 25<sup>th</sup>, 1965.

The terms of the treaty were a ceasefire in Yemen, and a public referendum on November 23<sup>rd</sup>, 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<sup>rd</sup>, 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<sup>rd</sup>, 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.

However, the Jeddah Agreement was never implemented! The deadlock in Yemen continued until the end of 1966. In a speech on December 23<sup>rd</sup>, 1966, my father said, “The Egyptian army has not done battle there for a year and a half; the Yemenis have taken over responsibility in most areas.”

On August 20<sup>th</sup>, 1966, Kuwait presented proposals intended to put an end to the situation in Yemen, but these failed owing to Saudi Arabian obstinacy.

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 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.

These events were accompanied in parallel by an escalation of the nationalistic movement in southern Arabia, and Britain announced on January 9<sup>th</sup>, 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 Mekaoui and was in touch with the revolutionary movement, and replaced it with a government of sultans from the Protectorates, who were loyal 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.

### **The conclusion of the war in Yemen**

The struggle in Yemen diminished in importance with the Israeli attack on Egypt, Syria, and Jordan on June 5<sup>th</sup>, 1967. There are those who believe that the resolution of the problem between Cairo and Riyadh was one of the achievements of the Arab Summit Meeting in Khartoum on August 26<sup>th</sup>, 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 9<sup>th</sup> for finalizing the departure. The British forces actually left Aden on November 30<sup>th</sup>, 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.

If we analyze the events that took place in Yemen over a period of more than five years, we will see how the Egyptian military presence in Yemen 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.

And although 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.

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 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.



The memorial to Egyptian martyrs in Sanaa



The Egyptian martyrs' cemetery in Sanaa

## **The Arab-Israeli conflict flares up**

On December 23<sup>rd</sup>, 1963, President Nasser called for a meeting of Arab leaders of state in order to address the provocative Israeli project for diverting the waters of the Jordan River. The Arab countries all cooperated, in spite of the prevailing disputes and the Yemen war, and not one country failed to show up.



The first meeting of the Arab Summit Conference at the Arab League Building in Cairo, January 13<sup>th</sup>, 1964.

The conference began, with a faction vociferously requesting an all-out attack against the Israeli project for diverting the Jordan River, to which my father 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?!”

He then 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.

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, whose members and chief of staff would be chosen by the UAR government

It was also decided to establish a Palestinian entity, the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) and to appoint Ahmed Al Shuqueiri as a representative of the State of Palestine within the Arab League.

### **Preliminaries to the conflict with Israel**

With the implementation of the Arab project to divert the Jordan river at the beginning of 1965, Israel began a series of provocative activities against Syria, Jordan, and Lebanon, on the pretext that the diversion constituted a hostile action. The Israelis began to mobilize their forces on the borders with Jordan and Lebanon, and began to engage in military activities there.

The skirmishes intensified and the Israeli attacks on Syria escalated, accompanied by threats from the Israeli leaders and an increase in the number of troops on the borders. The United Arab Republic accordingly began, on May 14<sup>th</sup>, 1967, to take all precautions necessary to implement the joint defence agreement with Syria that had been contracted on November 4<sup>th</sup>, 1966.

On May 16<sup>th</sup>, 1967, the United Arab Republic announced a state of emergency in the armed forces, and military movements began in the Canal Zone. Communications were continuous between the Supreme Command of the Armed Forces in both Cairo and Damascus, and Lieutenant-General Mohamed Fawzy, the Egyptian Army Chief of Staff, travelled to Syria to check out the situation in person. He found a large assembly of Israeli air force troops in four airports – Israel has eighteen airports – indicating that preparations for an attack were underway.

It was becoming increasingly clear that the situation was precarious and escalating very quickly; accordingly, the US, who could be considered an essential party in the crisis owing to its strong ties with Israel and its interests in the area, began calling upon all parties to practice restraint – ostensibly! The truth was that the US was completely biased towards Israel politically, militarily, and economically, and its actions – and Britain’s – reached the point of conspiring against the Arabs.

As the military situation on the borders between Israel and the Arab countries escalated, General Mohamed Fawzy asked the commander of the United Nations Emergency Force, Indarjit Rikhye, to withdraw all UN international emergency troops from the observation points along the borders. Accordingly, on May 19<sup>th</sup>, 1967, the UN emergency forces official withdrew, leaving the Egyptian forces face to face with the Israeli forces massed upon the Sinai border!

U Thant, the Secretary-General of the UN, announced his intention of visiting Egypt, while Abba Eban sent him an urgent message declaring Israel’s objection to the speed at which the international UN forces had been withdrawn, and claiming that the United Nations should have given the matter more thought!

The essential elements of the Sixth Fleet, which at the time was moored on the southern and western shores of Italy, were mobilized and given orders to move to a point one day away from the eastern Mediterranean, and to do so quietly and unobtrusively.

It transpired that the Americans were afraid of my father’s succeeding in this crisis, which would constitute ‘his largest victory since Suez, even if not one shot were fired’!

On May 22<sup>nd</sup>, 1967, Nasser announced that the Egyptian armed forces had occupied Sharm El Sheikh, thus confirming our rights and our sovereignty over the Gulf of Aqaba which represents Egyptian territorial waters, and that “under no circumstances would the Israeli flag be



allowed to pass through the Gulf of Aqaba.” This meant closing the Straits of Tiran which control the entrance to the Gulf of Aqaba to all ships heading towards the Israeli port of Eilat.

The US continued to exhort all parties to refrain from resorting to military action, while standing firmly alongside Israeli!

From the outset, Britain had declared that “restricting shipping in the Gulf of Aqaba was a matter freedom of navigation, and that if the UN failed to provide effective means of addressing this problem, the British would find ‘other ways’ of dealing with the matter and hoped to find other maritime nations who would join them” – in other words, reopen the Gulf by force!

As for France, De Gaulle remained impartial, and in spite of the US’s continuous requests that France should join the maritime group plotting to forcefully open the Gulf of Aqaba and support it in the UN, he refused to take part in the plot.

The Soviet Union had since the start supported the United Arab Republic, Syria, and the Arabs in general, though it was a passive support that did not go beyond refusing to join the Western countries in their plans either within or outside the United Nations.



Nasser visits a military zone, May 22<sup>nd</sup>, 1967

The position of the Soviet Union developed into a declaration stating that, “a war in this region would incur losses on all the countries involved and would increase tension in the world in general, and that the great powers should intervene to prevent the situation from escalating into a war”. The statement added that the Soviet Union believed that the tension in the region was caused by Israeli policies, and that the Soviets supported the Syrians unequivocally.

On May 23<sup>rd</sup>, 1967, the Israeli cabinet decided to send Abba Eban, the Israeli Foreign Minister, to Washington, London and Paris for discussions with Israel’s allies before implementing their plan of a military attack against Egypt, Syria, and Jordan.

On the very same day, the Israelis mobilized 40-50% of the Israeli army after the Egyptian army was massed in the Sinai. Eshkol also called a

meeting of the Israeli national security council, and declared that any attempt to interfere in navigation to Eilat justified war!

At the same time, the US agreed to sixteen million dollars in military and economic aid to Israel, keeping it secret so as not to alienate the Arabs! The US also agreed to an exchange of intelligence information with Israel; in other words, a complete conspiracy against the Arabs!

My father was completely aware that the problem wasn't just Israel, but those behind Israel: Israel meant America! As he said:

“No fair person could say that any actions taken by us during the past two weeks constituted hostilities or any form of attack. Our forces went to Sinai to repel the enemy, and we simply enforced our rights of sovereignty over the Straits of Tiran. Anyone opposing these rights is the one instigating hostilities. The Gulf of Aqaba is Egyptian; it is a stretch of water less than three miles wide between the coast of Sinai and the island of Tiran.”

My father then praised the position taken by the countries that had stood by the United Arab Republic such as the Soviet Union and African and Asian countries, as well as General De Gaulle.



Nasser meets with the High Command of the Armed Forces in Nasr City, May 28<sup>th</sup>, 1967.

On May 28<sup>th</sup>, the Egyptian parliament unanimously agreed to a law consisting of one article: “The President of the Republic is delegated to issue decrees equivalent to laws in all matters pertaining to the safety and security of the state, and to mobilize all the country’s human and material resources, and to consolidate the war effort in general, in any way he sees fit during these exceptional circumstances.”

My father’s comment on this was:

“I did not ask for this, and I promise you that I will not use this power unless there is a compelling reason to do so.”

On the morning of May 30<sup>th</sup>, a Jordanian fighter plane piloted by King Hussein himself arrived at the air force base in Almaza, Cairo, where my father was waiting to receive him. They immediately began talks.



Welcoming King Hussein at Almaza Airport, My 30<sup>th</sup>, 1967

This visit came as a surprise to everyone; they were then joined by Ahmed Al-Shuqueiri, head of the PLO, who said:

“We have received confirmed reports of mobilization on the Syrian border, and that they are intending to bomb Syria and occupy the region, and will refuse to leave until they impose their conditions and request international forces!”

That same day, a joint defence agreement was signed between the United Arab Republic and Jordan. And on June 4<sup>th</sup>, Iraq joined the agreement when General Taher Yehia, the Iraqi Prime Minister, came to Cairo for this purpose. In this way, there was a united front against the enemy: Israel.

### **Monday, June 5<sup>th</sup>, 1967: the longest day in modern Arab history!**

The Israeli attack on Egypt began at 8 a.m. on June 5<sup>th</sup>, when a large number of Israeli war planes launched a massive attack on all the country's airports. The planes – some of which I saw myself flying over the suburb of Heliopolis – were flying at an extremely low altitude in order not to be spotted by Egyptian radars.

I realised at once that the conspiracy against my father had begun, and consequently, a conspiracy against the whole Arab nation: a military, political, and intelligence conspiracy!

That same day, Cairo cut all ties with the United States because of its support of the Zionist aggression, and a presidential decree was issued on June 8<sup>th</sup> placing the American University in Cairo under sequestration.

The Americans pretended to be taken unawares and surprised by the Israeli attack, and President Johnson issued a statement after the fighting began on June 5<sup>th</sup> claiming that it was not clear who had begun hostilities! The main concern of the Americans was to control the Soviet reaction, for the last thing they wanted was a confrontation with the Russians in the Middle East.

As for Eshkol, he carried on with his deliberate lies, talking of the dangers of the ‘evil’ aggression on Nasser's side and Israel's decision to resort to fighting in order to stop him! As well as outright lies about Egypt's bombarding Israeli villages, which never happened, and claims that the objective was to destroy Israel and that the UN was not doing enough to stop Nasser!

On June 6<sup>th</sup>, a unanimous and very quick decision was taken by the Security Council to cease fire and that the invading forces should withdraw.

On June 7<sup>th</sup>, Jordan accepted the Security Council decision and stopped all military activities in the region, but Israel carried on with its military operations with the objective of completely annihilating the Jordanian army!



The Egyptian people refuse Nasser's decision to step down, June 10<sup>th</sup>, 1967



Demonstrations by the Egyptian people declaring their insistence on Nasser's remaining as their leader, June 10<sup>th</sup>, 1967

News came pouring in of the participation of US aircraft in the large-scale attacks launched on all airports in the United Arab Republic and Jordan on the morning of June 5<sup>th</sup> from the US aircraft carriers in the east of the Mediterranean. King Hussein confirmed this, and demanded that an international investigation be carried out with the US and Britain for their part in military collaboration with Israel in the attack.

Then came the attack on the US spy ship Liberty on June 8<sup>th</sup>, which was operating under the management of the Sixth Fleet close to the Egyptian coast, which constituted an irrefutable indictment of the US's participation in the war, not only with aircraft but also by supplying information and by jamming Egyptian radars!

US documentation admits that the ship Liberty was attacked and hit by Israeli war planes, then twenty minutes later was hit by torpedoes, and



that it was on the edge of Egyptian regional waters northwest of Al-Arish!

The US government protested to Israel regarding the Israeli attack on the ship Liberty; the Israeli response was that they had hit it by mistake! Eshkol sent a letter of condolence to Johnson, as there were ten deaths, ninety wounded, and twenty-two missing according to US reports. The US government asked the Israeli government for compensation for these losses!

Afterwards, my father in his speech on July 23<sup>rd</sup>, 1967, asked:

“For whom was the ship Liberty, with all its scientific equipment, working?! What would have happened had it been Egyptian torpedoes that had hit it?! What did the Americans do when the Israelis bombarded them? They pulled themselves together, covered up the matter, and went to Malta to repair the ship!”

As the Israelis had advanced in the Sinai desert, they disregarded the ceasefire and swarmed into the Sinai peninsula – in spite of the fierce fighting that took place with units of the Egyptian army – until they reached the east bank of the Suez Canal on June 9<sup>th</sup>.

On the Jordanian front, the Israelis advanced to the Syrian heights overlooking the Israeli border settlements, and fighting continued between the Syrians and Israelis in disregard of the Security Council ceasefire decree. The Israelis managed to occupy large parts of the Syrian highlands, as well as occupying the West Bank of Jordan, and Jerusalem. They defied the call of the Pope to make it a city open to both sides!

So, the battles did not proceed as expected in Egypt, and it was obvious that Israel had won this round with its preemptive aerial attack which resulted in destroying Egypt's aircraft on the ground and paralyzing its air force.

### **What really took place on the Egyptian side during the Israeli attack?**

After Nasser informed the military leadership in a meeting on Friday, June 2<sup>nd</sup>, 1967, that events in Israel and on the border confirmed that the Israelis were intending to attack on Monday, June 5<sup>th</sup>, an aerial reconnaissance force was launched on Saturday and another on Sunday; however, on Monday 5<sup>th</sup> no planes took off, as Field Marshal Amer together with leading military personnel were on a plane inspecting the troops in Sinai, and the anti-aircraft guns there were

accordingly restricted! This allowed the Israeli planes to reach the Egyptian airports without being spotted.

It has also been said that the radars and Sam missiles were jammed, and did not work on that day as they should have!

According to my father's version of the defence plan:

“It was correct on paper; but what happened was that the Israeli planes came in from the west over the sea at a low altitude, and we had no aircraft in the air at all!”

Regarding the land forces, as my father told President Houari Boumediene on July 10<sup>th</sup>, 1967:

“Our plan was that if the Israelis made a move, we would attack, so accordingly our main forces were at the front line. When our air force was hit, the enemy planes had our troops to themselves in Sinai, which completely disrupted our forces!

“A complete collapse of leadership occurred in all branches from the first minute, including the air force! I contacted them to tell them to launch our planes, and was told that all our airports had simultaneously been hit!

“Our losses were huge; only 150 tanks returned and the same amount of artillery. And on the second line, there was also confusion, with conflicting orders being issued. The withdrawal was chaotic and lacked an effective plan unlike that of 1956, and our uncovered troops were easy prey for the Israeli aircraft!

“By Thursday, June 8<sup>th</sup>, our army was almost finished! We had no option but to accept the ceasefire, or else the Jews would have been in Cairo in two hours' time! They had already reached Al-Qantara that day, so it was imperative that we should accept the ceasefire.”

The Israeli aerial attack resulted in Egypt's losing 85% of its air force, emerging from the battle with pilots without planes! Help arrived from Boumediene in Algeria, who sent forty Mig-17 aircraft – which the Soviets had promised him they'd replace – but too late!

As soon as the attack had begun, my father drove to the General Headquarters of the Armed Forces together with some members of the

Revolutionary Command Council. He found those in charge in a state of confusion, not knowing what was going on!

He went again on the night of June 8<sup>th</sup>, and being a military man himself, realised that the battle had ended in a military defeat. He informed Amer that he intended to resign.

Sure enough, on the evening of June 9<sup>th</sup>, he addressed the people from the Presidential Palace in Kubbeh, saying:

“We cannot hide from ourselves the fact that we have faced a grave setback during the past few days, but I am confident that we can all overcome this difficult situation in a short time.

“I am ready and willing to bear the full responsibility for what has happened, and have taken a decision which I want you all to help me with.

“I have decided to step down completely and finally from any official position and any political role, and to take my place amongst the ranks of the people doing my duty like any other citizen.”

He then announced the appointment of Zakaria Moheiddin as President of the Republic in accordance with the terms of the constitution in this regard. My father concluded his speech saying:

“This is a time for work and not for sadness; a time for high ideals and not for selfishness or individual emotions. My whole heart is with you, and I want your hearts to be with me, and may God to be with us all.”

My father ended his speech to the nation, and I do not know how, in the blink of an eye, masses of people were thronging to our house in Mansheyet Al-Bakri in Cairo. From our balcony, I could hear the cheers of the people who had begun to gather round the house, then the chanting of patriotic songs began. At the same time, people all over Egypt were pouring into the streets expressing the hope that my father would lead them in having our revenge and getting our land back. It was a nation stunned by defeat, telling its leader that he should not step down but should resume leadership until victory was achieved.



The Egyptian people refuse to let Nasser step down. June 10<sup>th</sup>, 1967.

The day after my father had announced his resignation, the whole Arab nation from the ocean to the gulf was demonstrating in the streets to insist on his remaining as leader of the Arabs, which made us, his family, exceedingly proud.

Telegrams arrived from all over the world asking Nasser not to resign. The next day, June 10<sup>th</sup>, faced with overwhelming pressure from the Arab people, my father decided to accede to popular demand and to remain as President of the Republic. He announced this in the following message to parliament:

“No one can possibly imagine my emotions after the overwhelming reaction of our people and all the people of the great Arab world, who refused my decision to step down from the moment I made the announcement until now. I cannot find words to describe my immense gratitude towards them.”

Nasser accordingly agreed to continue in his post until all traces of the aggression had been eliminated, then hold a general referendum.



**“Hold your head up, brother.”**

A new period fraught with tension began for my father. Restoring the country and ridding it of all traces of the aggression, regaining the lost territory occupied by the enemy: what were his thoughts? What policy had he planned to enable this to happen?

His first step after his decision not to resign was to appoint General Mohamed Fawzi as Commander of the Armed Forces, after having consulted with him by phone. General Fawzi, who was known to be a tough, no-nonsense military man of few words, a reputation he had earned during the Palestine war and during his administration of the Military College from 1952 to 1964, answered simply: “You know me, Chief!” This was exactly what Nasser wanted in order to be able to build a disciplined, well-trained army to replace the one that had been destroyed.

His directives to General Fawzi on the first day he assumed responsibilities, June 11<sup>th</sup>, were, “That the confrontation with Israel should happen at the right time.”

He added:

“I do not want any Judaization of Sinai or the West Bank; the latter of course is the responsibility of King Hussein... As for us, I want Sinai to be a veritable hell for the Israeli soldiers! I want them to feel that remaining in Sinai is unbearable... I want us to prepare for liberation.”

He then told General Fawzi that he had three and a half years at the most to restore Sinai to Egypt.

My father and General Fawzi then decided together to appoint Abdel Moneim Riad as Chief of Staff, Madkour Aboul Ezz as Commander of the Air Force, and Fouad Abou Zikri as Commander of the Navy.



Nasser, General Fawzi, and Lieutenant-General Abdel Moneim Riad at the Suez Canal Front, February 1968

To tell the truth, I don't think anyone would have wanted to be in my father's shoes at that time; all guns were pointed at him, and his enemies inside and abroad were having a field day seizing the opportunity to get back at him! He nevertheless staunchly carried on with his mission, keeping in mind at all times the slogan of the July revolution: "Hold your head up, brother."

It was only natural that my father should depend on the Soviet Union in rebuilding the army with weapons and training. He also needed Soviet support in the political battle inside the United Nations and outside it too, facing the West with its unconditional support of Israel, with the exception of France.

The strange thing was, though, that the Soviet position at first seemed shaky and unsure, for unknown reasons! They were hoping for a political settlement and in this regard, were on a par with the US position. Military operations could not take place with the Egyptian army in the condition it was in, which would take at least three years to become fully functional again. However, eventually, the Soviets agreed to send military consultants and weapons to Egypt to bolster the country's defence.

Believing as he did in Arab nationalism and the unity of the Arab people, it was only natural that my father should turn towards the Arabs after this crushing defeat. And truth to tell, they responded; not only the countries at the forefront of the conflict, Jordan and Syria, but other progressive countries as well: Iraq, Algeria, the Sudan, all came to Cairo one after the other from June 16<sup>th</sup> to July 19<sup>th</sup> 1967 to discuss the situation with my father and to consolidate their efforts in confronting Israel and its allies, especially the US and Britain.



The four leaders Nasser, Boumediene, Al-Atassi and Abdel Rahman Aref attending Friday prayers in Cairo, July 14<sup>th</sup>, 1967

My father at this time was in an extremely difficult position after having acceded to popular demand on June 10<sup>th</sup> and resumed office: the army was shattered, morale was low, and people were demanding the return of the usurped Arab territories as quickly as possible!

When King Hussein called for an Arab summit conference right after the end of the war with Israel, my father decided to attend. He thought perhaps something would come of it and also wished to appease Arab public opinion. As he told Boumediene:

“Let us go and try; if we succeed, well and good; if not, we will have done our duty by attending. However, these people want us to abandon the revolutionary path and walk along the path to treachery!”

Sure enough, on August 26<sup>th</sup>, the date scheduled for the Arab Summit Conference, my father went to Khartoum albeit unwillingly, but he was in for an unexpected surprise!





The Sudanese people welcoming Nasser in August, 1967

I will let my father describe in his own words the legendary welcome given him by the Sudanese people in Khartoum, which he described on his second visit there in January, 1970:

“I came here in August after the defeat, and in this difficult situation was asking myself as I arrived in Khartoum airport...How will things go when I meet the Sudanese people? But when I arrived in your glorious capital, I found the heroic Sudanese people giving me more hope for the future than I could have dreamed of!

“I saw the heroic Sudanese people lined up from morning till night all along the way to the conference, cheering and expressing the determination to carry on with the struggle and to stand firm until victory. Next day the US press was saying, “Khartoum cheers the beaten leader”!

The Khartoum Conference was held in an atmosphere laden with a sense of defeat, while at the same time having to deal with the enmity that still remained amongst some of the Arab leaders! Notwithstanding, it must be said that the Khartoum Conference achieved a considerable measure of success.

The conference was in agreement over almost everything: the door to military action was open; the door to political measures was also open but on conditions that were set by the conference: no peace with Israel, no acknowledgement of Israel, no negotiations with Israel, and no concessions regarding the right of the Palestinian people to their land.

The conference also decided that the oil-producing nations – Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, and Libya – would provide economic support for the countries who shared a border with Israel and part of whose territories had been occupied, Egypt, Syria, and Jordan. The economic support of Egypt would provide temporary compensation for the loss of income from the Suez Canal and from the oil wells in Sinai, as well as from tourism.

As for the dispute in Yemen between Egypt and Saudi Arabia, it had already ended since the day Britain announced – after the continuous activities of the revolutionaries of the Arab South – that it had decided to evacuate the area in 1968, and fixed a date for this, January 9<sup>th</sup>. And during the Khartoum Conference, my father and King Faisal came to an agreement regarding the Yemen; the objective being to establish principles regardless of individuals: it was enough that there should be a national government set in place in Sanaa without Egyptian forces, and that nationals in Aden and the Arab South should take over the government.

I had not seen my father smile once since the Israeli attack, till he came up the stairs of our house upon his return from Khartoum. The people of Sudan had championed him, and he had achieved more than he could have hoped for.



Nasser at the Arab Summit Conference in Khartoum, August 29<sup>th</sup>, 1967

However, a succession of difficult internal situations occurred as a result of the defeat; on February 15<sup>th</sup>, 1968, my father disclosed a secret no one was aware of, which was that on June 11<sup>th</sup> he was faced with insurgencies on the part of some of the army officers who had been fired, who presented a petition asking for the return of Field Marshal Abdel Hakim Amer who had resigned from leadership of the army on June 9<sup>th</sup>. The Republican Guard with their tanks were all in Ismailia at the orders of my father, and he had not one soldier beside him! An armed demonstration of some 700 officers were on their way to our home in Manshiet Al-Bakri, then changed course and headed towards army headquarters.

I learned later that this was the first time my father had ever wielded his revolver!

This was the preliminary to a conspiracy to overthrow the government by the army chiefs headed by Abdel Hakim Amer!

My father acted swiftly on the same day, calling General Mohamed Fawzi and informing him that he had accept the resignation of all the lieutenant-generals, and that all of those who had presented the petition should be retired. He also ordered the return of the Republican Guard to Cairo.

At 5.30 Amer came to see my father who told him, “What on earth are you up to? Am I Khedive Tewfiq?!” He then offered him the position of First Vice-President and membership of the executive council. This had been his opinion ten years beforehand, but he had not been able to implement it.

At the same time, he decided to appoint Amin Huweidi as Minister of War, and announced that he had accepted Amer’s resignation and ordered General Fawzi to arrest all the conspirators.

Matters rose to a head after that when Amer’s supporters began contacting the various army divisions to inform them that a new system was being put in place. Amer’s plot was to depart from Anshas guarded by around 400 officers from the Special Forces and head towards the Eastern Command in al-Qassasin, where it would be announced that he had returned as Commander of the Armed Forces and would begin to issue orders and assume control.

When orders were issued to investigate the matter, General Fawzi and Abdel Moneim Riyad, accompanied by a number of troops, headed to Amer’s home in Giza on September 14<sup>th</sup>, 1967. Amer swallowed something, after which he was taken to Maadi Hospital then to a rest house in the Pyramids area, where he died the same day after taking another dose of lethal poison!

Thus this unexpected saga came to an end: here was a defeated country, with the Jews on the East Bank of the Suez Canal, a domestic situation requiring careful handling and follow up, an army that had lost its weapons with a large number of its troops killed or taken prisoner, a political confrontation in the United Nations before two great powers, the US and the Soviet Union, a disjointed Arab nation, 30,000 Egyptian forces in the Yemen opposing the Saudis, and a critical economic situation with no more income from the Suez Canal, Sinai oil, or

tourism, and here was Amer – the defeated commander – insisting on returning as head of the armed forces or else implement a military coup against the regime!

Truly, my father had every right to say: “I received two blows: the first was Sinai and the Jews, and the second was Abdel Hakim, which makes me conclude that the regime is faulty!”



Nasser on the furthest point of the Suez Canal front opposite the Israeli forces, February, 1968

It was necessary to implement certain economic procedures after the war: the budget was adjusted to reflect austerity, which meant stopping all the country's investment projects and halting all new appointments as well as postponing incentives. Support for private schools was discontinued, and a new national security tax was introduced. Increases were imposed on the prices of goods and services presented by the government, and the individual quota in the monthly ration cards was reduced.

This reflects the extent to which my father was affected by the heavy load of responsibility on his shoulders to eradicate the traces of aggression and address the country's economic problems, even after the support presented by the oil-rich Arab countries to Egypt.

Being a seasoned politician, he anticipated a reaction from the people. The first popular explosion happened on February 20<sup>th</sup>, 1968, when the supreme military court issued its verdicts concerning those responsible for the destruction of our military aircraft on June 5<sup>th</sup>, 1967. They were tried for negligence leading to the horrendous damage that occurred on that day. The court charged the former air force commander with gross negligence and imposed the maximum penalty in accordance with military law, which was fifteen years' imprisonment.

The day after the court ruling, a demonstration set out from a Helwan factory heading towards the station. They clashed with the police, and hoses, stones, and pellets were used. Half an hour later, they were joined by another factory, and by 11 a.m. some 40% of workers in Helwan were taking part in the demonstrations. Their motive was mainly to object to the court rulings, which they felt were weak and should have been stricter.

On the same day and at around 5 p.m., 20-30 students set out from the Faculty of Engineering heading towards Cairo University where they gathered around 100-150 more students from the Faculty of Arts and began discussing the case and the verdict, expressing the need to show solidarity with the Helwan workers.

As well as expressing their dissatisfaction with the verdicts issued, they demanded an investigation into the clashes that had occurred in Helwan, and also demanded a stronger political system, the dissolution of the Umma Council or parliament, and freedom of the press.

On the morning of February 24<sup>th</sup>, a group of students led a demonstration heading towards University Bridge. They were protected

by the police. Their numbers began increasing as they reached Kasr Al Aini downtown, and they made their way towards parliament, chanting slogans. It was obvious that there was a Muslim Brotherhood influence amongst them, as what had begun as the matter of the air force case led into several other issues!

That same day, the demonstrations spread to Ain Shams and Alexandria universities, and continued the next day.

How did Nasser react to these events?

In the cabinet meeting held on February 25<sup>th</sup>, he said:

“In the beginning I asked that no one should stand in the way of the demonstrators except upon orders from me personally. But when they reached the downtown area and matters began to get out of hand, I allowed them to use force in the form of sticks and tear gas.

“The shouts were beginning to differ, and I was careful to find out exactly what they were saying. I told Sharawi<sup>6</sup> that they should be warned, then arrested. Things escalated, and they burnt a police lorry! The number of police injured was three times that of the students!

“People want change; this is not the first time I have heard that, but what change? People are fed up of the government so they ask for change! There are those who say nothing has changed from June 10<sup>th</sup> until now...! I was actually expecting things to be even worse; there are different trends, and people think differently. The country has been stabbed, people are repressed, the Jews are occupying part of our country, and we want to fight! There is a negative mindset affecting the country!

The political system itself includes both communists and Muslim Brotherhood members! And those who started the demonstrations in the Faculty of Engineering are from the Youth Organization!”

---

<sup>6</sup> Sharawi Goma, Minister of the Interior



Nasser at the front in Suez.

My father's state of mind towards this domestic crisis is revealed when he says:

“We have a strange way of doing things! We are neither a western democracy nor a dictatorship handling the country properly! It is my opinion that all the opposition forces today are trying to gain a foothold in universities and secondary schools. What did the Americans do in Indonesia? They worked on the students there, and we have students and workers that they can work on, too!”

And when he found out that the universities had been joined by some institutes and secondary schools, he ordered the closure of universities until matters had been settled, saying:

“The country needs a firm hand to confront destructive elements!”

He then ordered Mohamed Fawzi to announce that the verdict had not been ratified yet, and that the case would be retried, and also to issue a statement to the effect that Sidki Mahmoud was personally responsible.



On March 30<sup>th</sup>, Nasser issued a statement from Qubbah Palace where he announced the following achievements: the ongoing rehabilitation of the armed forces, the people's sacrifices for the sake of economic resilience, the dissolution of the 'centers of power' that had emerged and exceeded their limits after the setback, public trials to reveal the corruption and mistakes of the previous stage, and the concentrated political efforts being made both in the Arab world and globally.

He then spoke of working towards change with a new cabinet of ministers, and forthcoming changes in key positions related to production, foreign affairs, governors, and mayors. He also reiterated that the Socialist Union was the most suitable vehicle for democracy as it comprised an alliance of the working forces of the people, but said he would restructure it by holding elections from the base to the summit.

He added that a permanent constitution would be drawn up concerning which a referendum would be held once the process of ridding the country of the after-effects of war was completed, following which a new parliament would be elected and presidential elections held. A Supreme Constitutional Court would be established which would decide whether laws were compatible with the constitution and with the Charter. A referendum would be held regarding the 30<sup>th</sup> March statement.

The referendum was held on May 2<sup>nd</sup>, 1968 and the March 30<sup>th</sup> statement was endorsed by 99.989% of voters. My father's comment on this result was:

“People have given us more than we deserve, especially regarding the turnout for the referendum – 7.5 million – which shows the sound moral fiber and sheer goodness of this country. What happened is more than anyone could possibly expect! If the result of the referendum is 90% even after the defeat and the resulting low morale, then this is a huge victory. But the coming period is going to be more difficult.”

### **The impossible war and rebuilding the army**

The war of attrition really was an impossible war, for how could we begin a war with Israel when the balance of power between us was zero to one hundred?!

The defence position west of the Suez Canal opposite the Israeli forces who were on the east bank was difficult to say the least. A

defeated army, an unplanned retreat from the Sinai leaving their equipment behind, airports and air force completely destroyed... so what happened?

A war of attrition began with a limited exchange of fire with the Israeli forces; a defence plan on the west bank of the Suez Canal was not put into place until three weeks after the Israeli aggression, when the Ras El Ush battle took place in self-defence and the Egyptian forces managed to stop the Israelis from occupying it.

This was the first step towards resilience and field artillery was put into use, the only remaining strong weapon the Egyptians had. Then came individual operations where forces crossed the Suez Canal to the west bank to blow up the ammunition depots that had been left behind, and disable the tanks that had been abandoned during the disorganized retreat of the Egyptian army on June 6<sup>th</sup>. These crossings began to increase in number and clashes occurred with the Israeli forces there.

As for the air force, though the planes had been destroyed, the pilots had escaped unscathed after the Israeli attack on our military airports on the morning of June 5<sup>th</sup>. President Boumediene immediately put forty Mig-17 fighter planes at the disposal of the Egyptian air force; they were flown by Egyptian pilots from Algeria and compensated for the huge losses incurred by Egypt's air force.

My father was aware from day one that Egypt could not stand alone before Israel, which had allied with the United States before and after the attack. The US had supplied technical and financial aid, as well as equipment and volunteers. It was necessary for him to draw the Soviet Union to his side in order to guarantee the arming and training of the Egyptian army which had physically and morally been utterly destroyed.

He asked the Russians to replace all the weapons that had been lost in the war, and Marshal Zakharov, the Soviet army Chief of Staff came to Egypt accompanied by a delegation to assess the country's needs. The Soviet President Podgorny also visited Egypt on June 21<sup>st</sup> and expressed his willingness to help in whatever way possible; he acceded to all of Egypt's demands for Soviet weapons as well as experts to train the Egyptian army on their use.

My father was primarily focused on supplying the air force and asked for long-range missile firing fighter jets, because as he put it, “otherwise Israel will be able to target us but we won’t be able to hit back, because we have pilots but no planes!” He also asked for the Air Defence forces to be fortified, to prevent Israeli forces from crossing the Suez Canal into Cairo. Israel, at this time, was receiving new planes and volunteer pilots from the USA on a daily basis.



President Nasser receives President Podgorny of the Soviet Union, June 21<sup>st</sup> 1967

Unfortunately, the Soviet's position re arming Egypt changed drastically after the first meeting between Johnson and Kosygin at Glassboro from June 23<sup>rd</sup> – 25<sup>th</sup> 1967, and once Israel had completely replaced all the weapons it had lost during the aggression – for free – all new requests from Egypt were halted and the Soviets' role was restricted to political participation within the United Nations.

Faced with this dilemma, my father's reaction was:

“We have to persuade the Russians to stand by us – the only other option would be to surrender to America!  
How can we possibly stand alone when Israel is getting all it wants from the Americans?!”

Then on October 21<sup>st</sup> 1967, when Egyptian missile boats sank the Israeli destroyer Eilat my father could not believe the news! As he said, it was the first time Egypt had ever sunk a destroyer, and the Israelis would not be able to hide the fact. They were under the impression that Egyptians were incapable of using the Russian weapons they had. How wrong they were!

This achievement greatly boosted the morale of the country; even the Russian experts in Egypt were overjoyed: the whole world would now be wanting to buy their missile boats!

And on November 23<sup>rd</sup> 1967, my father was happy to announce to the cabinet that Egypt had finalised its defence resources and was now capable of preventing the Jews from crossing the Suez Canal and advancing to Cairo.



Nasser with soldiers of the armed forces on the front, February 28<sup>th</sup> 1968

My father carried on with the task of rebuilding the armed forces and turning them into an army capable not only of defending, but of attacking, in order to liberate the occupied territory. The air force however remained a problem, for while the time lapse after a warning was just one minute, in order to reach Tel Aviv, they had to cross the whole of Sinai.

### **Securing the Suez Canal Front**

As the exchange of artillery firing between the Egyptian forces on the west bank of the canal and the Israelis on the eastern side was continuous, the matter of securing the front was my father's prime concern. Civilians in Suez, Ismailia, and Port Said were in the line of Israeli fire, which restricted the Egyptian forces' ability to attack. As my father said:

“We are held by the scruff of the neck with the Israelis controlling Suez and Ismailia; they can inflict severe damage with their mortars. There are 100 thousand civilians in Suez and 150 thousand in Ismailia!”

The daily toll of deaths was far higher amongst civilians than amongst the military. Accordingly it was decided to evacuate Suez and Ismailia, and to take measures to secure the industrial and strategic areas there.

Naturally, once the process of rebuilding the army began it was necessary to call back the Egyptian forces from Yemen, 30 thousand men as well as tanks; in addition to reinforcing the army with much-needed troops, they had the additional advantage of not having been exposed to defeat and were consequently relatively unaffected psychologically by what had happened.

However, as the British had announced that they would leave the southern Arabian peninsula on January 9<sup>th</sup>, 1968, my father decided not to announce a complete withdrawal of Egyptian forces before then, as “if the British have the region to themselves, they’ll massacre everyone there!”

In his first speech to the people after the June 5<sup>th</sup> attack, given on the occasion of the fifteenth anniversary of the July 23<sup>rd</sup> revolution, my father recounted all the military, economic and political developments and the changes that had been made since he resumed office on June 11<sup>th</sup>, saying:

“One of the basic principles I believe in is that what has been taken by force, can only be regained by force. I am confident that the forthcoming generations will look back on this period and say, ‘this was the time when they struggled the most, but they were up to the responsibility and did their utmost with the mission they were charged with.’”

It was a difficult time, a time of neither peace nor war, which affected the spirits and morale of the forces at the front; accordingly, my father paid several visits to the front line, asking the troops there how they were being treated by their commanding officers, and requesting as much leave for the soldiers as for the officers. He would enquire after their families, and try and solve whatever personal problems they had. In this way, he revived their fighting spirit and made them feel that they mattered.



Nasser addressing the troops at the Suez Canal front, March 1968

The situation at the Suez Canal front was as follows: the troops were always in the trenches, with reserve forces behind them, because the Israelis had complete control over the air which gave them freedom of movement and maneuvering; they were also careful to bolster their defences east of the Canal, with several military observation posts and a massive sand wall which came to be known afterwards as the Bar Lev line.

### **Addressing the Israeli attacks on Egyptian strategic targets**

In 1968, Israel began a new phase of attack during the war of attrition, targeting certain vital Egyptian utilities in order to boost morale within Israel. My father realised that things in Israel were not going well, and that the Israelis, after having felt that they had achieved peace, and had actually danced in the streets all night after his resignation, were now saying that peace was now further away than it was on the day of June 5<sup>th</sup>!

And though the Egyptian army was still in the stage of just holding fast and was not yet ready to attack, the exchange of gunfire across the canal was unceasing as were ventures by forces into Sinai to destroy Israeli equipment and kill Israeli soldiers. The Israelis bombed a petroleum

factory in Al-Zaytia on November 2<sup>nd</sup>, 1968, after three patrols had ventured into the eastern canal zone and destroyed enemy vehicles.

Nasser immediately asked the PLO to bombard the port of Eilat with mortar and rockets. Considerable damage was called, as Moshe Dayan and Haim Bar Lev rushed there and concealed the extent of their loss.

The next day, an aerial battle took place between the two sides, resulting in an Israeli plane being hit and exploding in midair.

On October 31<sup>st</sup>, 1968, Israeli helicopters bombed the Nag Hamady Barrages and the sugar factory there as well as the town itself. The barrages, though dating back from 1930, were well constructed which helped minimize the damage, and they were repaired in just ten days.

My father saw this as a reassuring sign that the Israelis were incapable of engaging in direct combat with the Egyptian forces, who were now able to cross the Canal to the eastern side, though without penetrating any further. He said:

“We want to be able, as a first step, to penetrate fifty kilometers deep once we cross to the eastern side...But we have exposed, vulnerable targets that we need to defend first, so we will not think of seeking revenge for the Nag Hamady attack now, in spite of the losses.”

Nasser listed the most important, vital targets to protect: the Aswan reservoir, the High Dam stations, the drainage stations, the Esna and Assiut barrages, etc., in order to protect them with guards and barbed wire.

The Egyptian forces began a new phase in the war of attrition at the beginning of March 1969; reconnaissance and air, land and sea clashes intensified and went deeper into Israeli-held territory. Most of these operations were carried out at night, while the exchange of gunfire and sniping carried on unceasingly. The objective was to destroy the Bar Lev line, and in fact 16-20% of it was demolished. My father vowed not to stop fighting no matter how much the Israelis bombed us or the Americans warned us, even though the Israelis were still superior in terms of their air force and armor.

### **Revolutions in the Sudan and Libya provide support for Egypt**

One of the most important landmarks of this period was the revolution that took place in the Sudan on May 25<sup>th</sup>, 1969, this country providing as it did strategic depth for Egypt into Africa that would provide it with more power.





Nasser receives Numeiri in Cairo, September 3<sup>rd</sup>, 1968

And just a few months later, a revolution took place in Libya, the strategic extension of western Egypt and the center for the two biggest bases in the Mediterranean, the US Wheelus base and the British base producing large quantities of oil (150 million tons a year.)

Naturally, the closeness between Egypt and the revolutions of Sudan and Libyan worried Israel and the US, and were proof of my father's unabated influence in the Arab world.



Nasser receives Gaddafi in Cairo, December 1<sup>st</sup>, 1969

### **Repelling Israeli attacks on Cairo suburbs**

On January 6<sup>th</sup>, 1970, Israeli attacks on Cairo suburbs began, with a detrimental effect on the morale of Egyptians as there were civilian casualties every time. Raids on the front in Suez were continuous and carried on for hours at a time but with limited losses as the forces were fortified inside their trenches and defence measures were complete.

In order to put yet more pressure on the Soviet Union to expedite the supplying of arms to Egypt, my father paid a secret visit to Moscow on January 22<sup>nd</sup>, 1970, which resulted in an agreement that gave us a quantitative edge in weapons: the Soviets agreed to supply three brigades of SAM (surface to air) missiles for air defence on the Suez Canal western front, as well as a complete air force squadron of 120 top-notch Soviet pilots to work in the Egyptian air force. This was after my father threatened to step down in favour of Zakaria Moheiddin, who might well be more prone to side with the US!



Nasser in the Soviet Union during his secret visit there in January 1970

The arrival of the military support from the Soviets to Egypt on April 18<sup>th</sup>, 1970 by order of the Supreme Soviet Council was an exceptional case: the Soviets had not sent a single soldier to any non-communist country since WWII! And in order to justify its position before the United States, the Nixon Administration received a letter from Kosygin stating that if Israel continued to attack Egypt and the neighbouring states, the Soviet Union would be obliged to help the Arab countries in every way. Kissinger saw this as the first Soviet threat to the new administration under Nixon!

The above deal changed the military situation of the front completely; the Israelis tried to prevent the SAM missiles from reaching the Canal Zone, knowing that they would enable the Egyptians to cross the Canal.

And contrary to what they expected in Israel, targeting the depths of Egypt did not result in the outcome they had planned for, and in fact caused a shift in the balance of power in favour of Egypt as a result of the Soviet support. And when the shipment of modern Soviet equipment arrived in Egypt on April 18<sup>th</sup>, 1970, a state bordering on hysteria permeated Israel, the US, and their allies, with their media reporting that this had upset the balance of power in the Middle East – on the premise that this balance should always remain in favour of Israel!

The military situation between the two sides began to veer in favour of Egypt after the Israelis carried out several air raids on Port Fouad and the west and south of Port Said during which they incurred severe losses, with the Egyptian air force joining battle and hitting several Israeli targets on the east bank.

A new refrain now began to be heard: that the Arabs wanted to throw Israel into the sea! Israel was being attacked! Israel, the martyr!

In his speech on the eighteenth anniversary of the July revolution, my father said:

“This is reassuring to us, coming as it does after the conceited tones of 1967 when their statements were to the tune of, “We will bombard them!” “The Israeli army cannot be defeated!” “This is the war to end all wars!”

And with the change in the military situation, and the daring operations carried out by the Egyptian forces against the Israelis in Sinai with Egyptian aircraft reaching Rafah and Al Arish, Nasser issued the following threat:

“We still haven’t attacked inside Israel, but when we do, we have to guarantee that we will carry on.”



Nasser’s speech on the eighteenth anniversary of the revolution, July 23<sup>rd</sup>, 1970

### **Nasser calls on Nixon who responds with a peace initiative**

In spite of the fact that diplomatic relations with the US had been cut since the attack of June 5<sup>th</sup>, my father had not completely closed the door to communication, particularly as the US was about to embark

upon a course of action detrimental to the Arab world, namely to ensure Israeli military supremacy by providing it with 25 Phantom and 150 Sky Hawk fighter planes.

In his speech on Labour Day, May 1<sup>st</sup>, 1970, my father called upon Nixon – after previous communication had taken place with the US – to play a more positive role towards ensuring peace in the region.

“The Arab world will not surrender and will not relinquish its rights; it wants real peace, but peace built upon justice. If the US really wants peace, then it must order Israel to withdraw from the occupied Arab territories. The US is perfectly capable of doing so because Israel will obey orders, surviving as it does at the US’s expense. That is one solution.

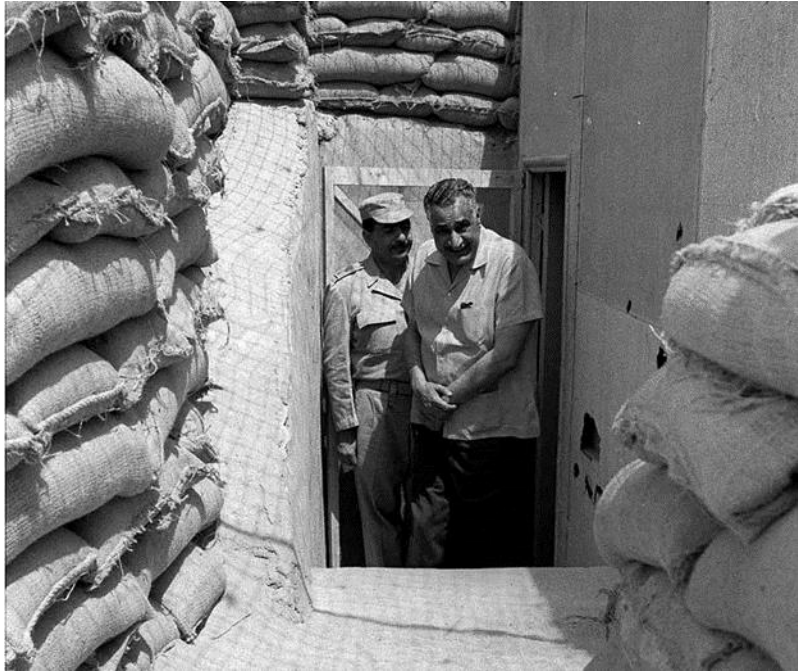
“The other solution, if the US is incapable of doing what we ask, is to at least stop providing further support to Israel as long as it still occupies our territory: no more political, economic, or military support.

“I say to Nixon: we are reaching a critical turning point in Arab-US relations, either a complete break forever, or a new beginning in earnest.”

My father then contacted all the Arab countries for the purpose of forming a consolidated Arab initiative to address any further American aid to Israel.

Nixon replied to my father on June 19<sup>th</sup> in the form of a US proposal which came to be known as the Rogers Plan or the Peace Initiative, comprising the following:

1. That both Egypt and Israel agree to a 3-month ceasefire.
2. Israeli withdrawal from territories occupied during the 1967 conflict.
3. The return of the Jarring mission to reach an agreement that would include UN Resolution No. 242.
4. Both sides to adhere to the Security Council’s decisions regarding the cease fire, beginning July 1<sup>st</sup> up until the beginning of October.



Nasser checking the fortifications on the Suez Canal front, 1970

My father's comment was:

“The whole world is expecting Egypt to refuse this initiative, so by accepting it we will put an end to Israeli and US propaganda. We are now in a stronger position and are not operating from a position of weakness but of strength; our forces' capabilities have been greatly enhanced, and we have political and military support from the Soviets.”

My father was due to go to Moscow on the following day and had no idea what the Soviet reaction to the Rogers Plan would be. After discussions took place there, he told the Soviet leaders:

“I that it would be better to accept the Rogers initiative and so thwart the campaign launched against us these days; however, it will be difficult for Israel to accept.”

After lengthy discussions, the Soviets eventually agreed to the plan, on the understanding that the response should be verbal and not written.

During the meeting of the Supreme Executive Council on July 18<sup>th</sup>, 1970, my father explained that agreeing to the US proposal would mean the cancellation of the ceasefire agreed upon in June 1967,

which had no fixed duration, and replacing it with a three-month ceasefire after which attacks would be legitimate. This would enable Egypt to build more missile bases!



Nasser's visit to Moscow, June 1970

My father decided to accept the US proposal, on condition that the enemy should not seize any more territory, and that the rights of the Palestinian people be upheld. He was aware that the whole process was a result of the US's fear of the Russians having decided to support Egypt with equipment and personnel, and their knowledge that the Russians could not be beaten. However, he was of the opinion that the plan would come to nothing.

Naturally, no peace process could take place without the US putting pressure on Israel, which they began to do: Nixon decided to stop supplying Israel with the planes they had asked for, fearing the Soviets would react by sending more men and supplies into Egypt. He also asked the Israeli government to stop attacking Egypt for 60 days.

Israel reluctantly accepted the US terms; Yitzhak Rabin angrily commented that “the USA had made Israel use the word ‘withdrawal’”! The ceasefire was implemented on August 7<sup>th</sup>, 1970.

The Egyptians had by then destroyed large parts of the Bar Lev Line, forcing the Israelis to withdraw 20 kilometres back, leaving only 17 observation points along the 170 kilometers of the canal.



Nasser with the troops at the front, 1970

### **The repercussions of the Rogers Plan**

In the same way the Rogers Plan caused divisions within Israel, causing the extreme right wing party to leave the government, my father’s acceptance of the plan led to divisions and noisy rhetoric in the Arab world, which had actually already begun, especially on the part of Iraq after the coup which brought the Baath into power on July 17<sup>th</sup>, 1968, as well as Algeria, the Palestinian resistance, and Syria.



My father was greatly affected by the attitude of the Arab states who were vociferous in spouting empty rhetoric at his expense, calling for the use of force to liberate the land and not a peaceful resolution 'as a matter of honour and dignity'! They were calling for the destruction of Israel rather than working towards eradicating the after-effects of the aggression! My father asked:

“Are the Syrians, the Iraqi Baathists, and Algeria going to liberate the West Bank?! If there was even a 0.5% of doing so using peaceful means, why should I forfeit it?!”

King Hussein, however, agreed to the US proposal, and my father assured him of Egypt's full-scale support, telling him:

“In 1967, you took a decision which was for the benefit of Arab aspirations, a decision which was unselfish and which cannot be forgotten; the Israelis attacked us so you, in Jordan, retaliated by attacking them, even though they had contacted you and asked you to stay out of the battle, promising that you would be safe from their attacks if you did so. This is something I personally, as well as all the Egyptian people, will never forget.

You entered the war for us, and we entered it for Syria! We did not do so to attack, but to show that we were standing by Syria. However, it seems that our brothers in Syria have forgotten that!”

Syria, in spite of having received fighter planes from Egypt in accordance with their mutual agreement to defend the eastern front, had not used them once to attack Israel! My father expressed his surprise at their attitude:

“The Syrians are criticizing us for the ceasefire?! They have been practicing a ceasefire since 1967; there are daily raids on the Egyptian front but no battles at all in Syria! And now they are upset because we have accepted the ceasefire, claiming that it would encourage the Israelis to move their forces to the Syrian front! How shameful!”

As for the Algerians, they withdrew their two battalions that were on the Suez Canal front, and Boumediene claimed that this was because of the ceasefire! My father's comment was:

“There has been a ceasefire since 1967! It’s easy for him to talk about fighting when he’s 4000 kilometres away!

“We had sent them a number of officers to teach there and to help them, but after they withdrew their forces from the Suez Canal in this imprudent way, we have seen fit to withdraw our officers from there and the weapons that were with them, to show them that we are not at all pleased with the way they have acted!

“Boumediene says, ‘when there’s a war, tell me and I will send forces’! Is what is happening in the Canal Zone war, or not?! 69 planes lost, and numerous pilots killed! We are fighting a war, so why are they refusing to fight alongside us?”

The strange thing is that the Algerians claimed to be against the ceasefire, and that they did not agree to the mere liberation of the territory occupied in 1967 but wanted the liberation of all of Palestine that had been occupied in 1948 as well as 1967! As my father said, it is indeed easy to talk about liberating land when you are 4000 miles away!

The Algerians said that we should not accept UN Resolution 242 as it ‘impaired our dignity’, and that we must regain our territory by force – then refused to take part in the battle; in other words, they wanted only the Egyptians to do the fighting! Those who had accepted the ceasefire that had been in place from 1967 till August 1970 now did not want Egypt to accept a 90-day truce! Why?!

As for the Palestinian resistance, the Fatah organization had branches in every governorate in Egypt, but when my father accepted the Rogers Plan, they began to attack not only Egypt but him personally. My father then decided to shut down the Palestinian broadcasting station that had been operating out of Cairo, after they went too far in their attacks on Egypt.

In spite of his anger at the position taken by the Palestinian resistance, my father nevertheless asked to meet Yasser Arafat in Cairo. He explained to him what a peaceful solution entailed: the return of the West Bank, Jerusalem, and the Golan Heights, and said that he would have refused the Rogers Plan had it been possible to restore them militarily. He then asked point blank: “Is it possible to regain this

territory by military means?! And when?” He then reviewed the military capabilities of all the Arab armies.

He then spoke of the Rogers Plan from the Israeli perspective, saying:

“There is a clause stipulating that Israel should agree to withdraw in accordance with Security Council Resolution 242, which is why the Gahal party left the government, as they had joined the elections on the basis of annexing all the occupied lands to Israel.

“The Israelis thought we would refuse the proposal, and when we accepted it, that put them in a difficult situation; not only was the government disrupted, but Dayan and six other ministers threatened to resign.

“So why did the Americans come up with this plan? Because the Russians came to Egypt: Russian forces and Russian planes; that is what forced the US to say today that it would enforce the UN resolution.

Actually the US achieved its objective, firstly by Egypt’s agreeing to the plan, and secondly by causing the rift in the Arab world that resulted when some Arab parties refused the 90-day ceasefire, namely the PLO, Iraq, Syria, and Algeria, all of whom were clamouring for an immediate full-scale war – with the Egyptians paying the price!

As for the matter of acknowledging the existence of the State of Israel, my father said that the truce agreement of 1949 meant that Israel existed and that we acknowledged this by signing the treaty. As for the matter of ‘living in secure and recognized boundaries’, this was included as part of the UN resolution.

Regarding the Palestinians’ saying, ‘we either liberate the land from the river to the sea or not at all’, my father’s comment was:

“You can say what you like, because this would mean entering Tel Aviv! You are thus gambling with the lives of one and a half million people living in the West Bank, and if the Israeli right-wing party joins the government again, they will annex the land and expel hundreds of Palestinians and empty the places they want; how long can the people remain resilient?

“And if the peace plan does not work, the missiles that have been placed all along the Egyptian front are ready, and Egypt now has all the electronic equipment

that can match whatever Israel has. Egypt will have to fight and to cross the Canal at the nearest opportunity.

“And if we were to refuse the initiative, Nixon would give Israel 120 fighter planes: and whom will they hit? Us! Syria gets bombed once every six months, but we are bombarded every day!

“Who is doing the fighting? We are the only ones! And when the ceasefire ends, it will be ending with Egypt only, not with Syria or Iraq or Lebanon, because these have an ongoing, never-ending ceasefire!

“As for the Palestinians’ question regarding the fate of the resistance, we have two causes: Palestine, and the resistance, and mixing them together is a mistake. Let us concentrate first on Palestine, and then talk about the resistance. The resistance want to have the upper hand in all Arab affairs; they attacked us in the radio station we set up for them, and published a newspaper in which they attacked us...their position is unacceptable, and they have become full of conceit!”

On September 3<sup>rd</sup>, the US informed the Soviet Union verbally through its ambassador in Moscow of the following:

“The US Government wishes to raise with the Soviet Government a matter of deep concern. We now have incontrovertible evidence of continuing significant changes in the disposition of missile installations in the ceasefire zone west of the Suez Canal. Not only has there been construction continuing on a number of missile sites, but also construction of new sites where none existed at time of ceasefire. Moreover, a number of SA-2 and SA-3 missiles have been installed since the ceasefire went into effect. These are clearcut violations of the ceasefire standstill agreement; they are contrary to Brezhnev’s statement regarding the need for an honest observance of agreement.

“Prompt rectification of this situation is essential. Any continuation of these activities will place on the Soviet Union and the UAR the responsibility for a possible resumption of the fighting.”

### **The last Arab summit conference attended by Nasser**

At the beginning of September 1970, the differences between King Hussein and the Palestinian resistance escalated and reached armed conflict.

The Arab League held an emergency meeting at the request of the PLO to try and control the situation, and on September 6<sup>th</sup>, a unanimous plea was issued by all the Arab countries requesting a cessation of hostilities in Jordan which had resulted in a considerable number of dead and wounded. However, the clashes resumed on September 9<sup>th</sup>.

Faced with this deteriorating situation, a military government was formed in Jordan on September 16<sup>th</sup> and martial law was imposed. The fedayeen were ordered to give in their weapons, which they refused to do, while Yasser Arafat sent messages to the Arab leaders and kings asking them to stand by the Palestinian fedayeen organizations.

My father sent a letter to King Hussein on September 22<sup>nd</sup>, 1970 asking him to cease military operations and pleading with him to respond at once for the sake of the future and the dignity of the Arab world. He affirmed that he would not permit the liquidation of the Palestinian resistance, and pointed out that this conflict could lead to a civil war rather than war with the enemy.

At the same time, he sent a telegram to Yasser Arafat asking him for a 24-hour ceasefire to give the Arab nation a chance to resolve the matter, and began to prepare for a summit meeting in Cairo at the suggestion of Bahi Ladgham, Prime Minister of Tunisia.

Yasser Arafat arrived in Cairo on September 25<sup>th</sup>, 1970, together with a delegation of Arab kings and leaders. After meeting together late at night, both King Hussein and Yasser Arafat gave orders to their forces to cease fire immediately. And on September 27<sup>th</sup>, an agreement was reached in the name of all the Arab leaders to form a special committee to monitor the implementation of the cease fire.



King Hussein and Yasser Arafat shake hands after signing the joint agreement, September 27<sup>th</sup>, 1970.

Thus my father's efforts to prevent Arab bloodshed ended in success, but at the expense of his health. This was the final fruit of his endeavors for the sake of Arab nationalism and a unified Arab stand.

On September 28<sup>th</sup>, after having seen off the last of the attendees, Sheikh Sabah Salem Al-Sabah of Kuwait, my father suffered a heart attack at the airport, and after reaching home, passed away and left us at just 52 years of age.



The last picture taken of my father as he bids farewell to the Prince of Kuwait, September 28<sup>th</sup>, 1970