Chapter VIII

CONCLUSION
The July 1952 Revolution brought about a marked change in Egypt's foreign policy preferences. The change was reflected in its outlook on Africa in an appreciable measure. Unlike the old regime which had insisted on the unity of the Nile valley, the new leadership decided to work for its independence. Accordingly, it accepted the right of the Sudanese people to decide their own future. An Anglo-Egyptian agreement on the Sudan was concluded in February 1953, followed in July 1954 by an agreement on the Suez providing for British withdrawal from the canal zone within twenty months. Master of its own destiny, Egypt now began to shape an independent foreign policy.

A major factor which conditioned Egyptian policy during this period was its conflict with the Western Powers over the signing of a Middle East Defence Pact. Egypt did not want to enter into any such agreement as it considered defence to be its own affair. However, it expected the West to supply arms to it so that it could build a strong army. When the Western Powers mounted pressure on Egypt by going ahead with the Baghdad Pact, Iraq's inclusion in the Pact hardened Nasser's attitude towards the West. Withdrawal of the promised aid for the construction of the Aswan Dam by the West and the French, British and Israeli aggression on Egypt in October 1956 added fuel to the fire. The aggression made Nasser to take a tough posture against colonialism and
imperialism and impressed upon him the need for military strength and diplomatic support to safeguard Egypt's independence.

The West's refusal to supply arms led Nasser to turn to the Soviet Union. Egypt's need for diplomatic support made him consolidate his position in the Afro-Asian countries which had backed his country against the tripartite aggression over the Suez issue. The Suez episode had enhanced Nasser's prestige in the Arab world and Africa and helped him to improve his position in both these areas. It is against this background that Egypt's policy is examined in the preceding chapters.

Egypt had vital strategic and political interests in Africa. Besides safeguarding the waters of the Nile and promoting cultural ties with Africa, Egypt was interested in pushing colonialism as far away from its borders as possible. Nasser also realized that political developments in the new African states could have a great impact on the balance of international forces. Another factor which influenced Egypt was Israel's penetration into Africa which, with its anti-Arab drive, meant Egypt's own isolation from Africa. Besides these political and strategic interests Africa had an economic potential for Egypt which looked upon it both as a source of raw materials and as a market for its finished products.

Despite these vital interests, Egypt had neither adequate contact with nor sufficient awareness of Africa. For quite some time before the July Revolution its awareness of Africa had been limited to the Nile valley (Egypt and the
Sudan) and to its Islamic links. The independence of the Sudan, its joining the League of Arab States and the growth of nationalism in Africa made Egypt re-orient its policy. For this purpose a high-ranking committee was established. This committee's recommendations became the basis of Egypt's Africa policy.

The new policy emphasized the need to create an "African consciousness" among the Egyptian people. This task was entrusted mainly to Egyptian academics and publicists. The establishment of an African Institute was a major step in this direction. A far more important development was the creation of an African unit in the President's office. And after the Bandung Conference of 1955, in view of its expanding diplomatic relations, Egypt also reorganized its Foreign Ministry. A full-fledged African Department was established in the Foreign Ministry and simultaneously the African unit at the Presidency was also expanded. In 1960 it was reorganized as a specialized Bureau of African Affairs. By this time many other government departments and semi-government organizations had also established special administrative or research units for African affairs. Externally, after the independence of African countries Egypt took the initiative to establish diplomatic relations with them. But because of its involvement in African groups, it could not make much headway. After the formation of the Organization of African Unity (OAU), however, it succeeded in establishing diplomatic ties with almost every newly independent country in Africa. Over and above these
institutional arrangements stood the personality of President Nasser who was the supreme policy-maker.

Operationally Egypt attempted to safeguard its interests in Africa by supporting the nationalist movements and, in the post-independence period, by supporting the movement for African unity. The support to the nationalist movements was in a sense a logical outcome of its unhappy experience of colonialism. This anti-colonial stance was further sharpened by the Western Powers' attitude towards Egypt which came out openly against colonialism in general and its presence in Africa in particular.

Egyptian information media played an important role in projecting Cairo's anti-colonial image. The Egyptian broadcasts beamed to sub-Saharan Africa also gave wide publicity to the freedom movements in individual African countries. Indeed, Cairo Radio claimed to have awakened the African continent. While it is difficult to establish the credibility of this claim Egypt's broadcasts to Africa did become a source of irritation to the colonial Powers and invited many protests from them.

The initial difficulties of establishing direct contacts with the emerging African nationalist leaders were partly solved as a result of the Bandung Conference of April 1955 and more particularly of the Afro-Asian Solidarity Conference held in Cairo in December 1957. At these conferences Egypt came in contact with several African nationalist leaders and Nasser promised them active material support in their fight against colonialism. The task of channelizing this help was
entrusted to the African Association established in 1956. Many African nationalist movements readily availed of this help. They opened offices in Cairo and made use of the facilities extended to them by Egypt to propagate and publicize their freedom struggles.

Egypt gave support not only to the African nationalists who came to Cairo but also supported the freedom movements at various Pan-African Conferences where it advocated a radical approach to the colonial problem. Thus, when in the early years some African countries, particularly Ghana, favoured non-violent means to achieve independence, Egypt pleaded for the use of all available means to fight colonialism. Egypt also supported African causes at the United Nations where it vigorously pursued its anti-colonial policy.

In the sixties several African countries attained independence. This marked the beginning of a new emphasis in Egyptian policy on establishing its credentials as an African country. This was considered necessary because, as mentioned earlier, for many years before the July Revolution, Egypt had almost lost its contact with Africa and developed close affinity with the Arab world. In its attempt to establish its credentials, Egypt reminded the African countries that ancient Egypt was essentially an African civilization and blamed the colonial Powers for breaking this contact with Africa. It also blamed the colonial Powers for creating the myth that there are two Africas -- one Arab and the other Negro -- separated from each other by the Sahara. It asserted that the Sahara was not
a barrier but a bridge that joins the north and the south. As regards its links with the Arab world, Egypt explained that the former is a bridge that connects Asia to Africa and that Egypt was proved to belong to both.

In the early years of its relationship with Africa Egypt had greater emphasis on the concept of Afro-Asianism than on Pan-Africanism. It reasoned that it was difficult to separate the African liberation movement from the anti-colonial movements in Asia. A force to reckon with, Africa, along with Asia, would be in a stronger position to fight colonialism. Though Egypt argued against Pan-Africanism in terms of anti-colonialism, it was in fact mainly guided by the fear of being isolated from Asia, more particularly from the Asian Arab countries. So the real reason for Egypt's advocacy of Afro-Asianism was rooted both in its geography and in its history. Geographically and historically, it is an Afro-Asian country rather than only an African or only an Asian country. But Egypt did not succeed in popularizing this concept in Africa mainly because of Ghana's opposition.

With the independence of many African states in the sixties, Africa found itself divided into two groups -- moderate and militant -- on the issues of colonialism (Congo, Algeria) and African unity. While the militant group wanted close African unity the moderate group advocated a loose form of it. The concept of African unity as advocated by the moderate group was closer to Egypt's concept of Afro-Asianism. However, in keeping with its anti-colonial stance Egypt joined the militant Casablanca group.
One effect of African groupism on Egypt's Africa policy was to isolate it from the majority of African states. It was significant that not a single French-speaking state had established diplomatic relations with Egypt till the formation of the OAU in 1963. Another effect was that instead of uniting Africa against the colonial Powers it helped to sharpen the divisions in Africa. Nasser realized this danger and when the majority of African states at Addis Ababa in May 1963 advocated a loose form of African unity, he found no particular reason to oppose it.

The formation of the OAU gave Egypt a permanent link with and place in Africa. It paved the way for its establishing bilateral relations with the majority of African states, particularly with the French-speaking African states. But this did not mean that Egypt had given up its radical anti-colonialism. On the contrary, with the help of his militant friends in the erstwhile Casablanca group Nasser started putting pressure on the moderate African countries to adopt a militant policy on colonial issues. Not only that, when the majority of African countries refused to adopt a militant stand on the Rhodesian issue Nasser tried to go ahead with his militant friends. Of course, this was done, and it was so emphasised, within the framework of the OAU.

Egypt's decision to work within the framework of the OAU without antagonizing the majority of African states was in sharp contrast to its stance in the Arab world. In the Arab world Egypt had both the headquarters and secretaryship
of the League of Arab States since its inception in 1945. In Africa it did not insist on having either the headquarters or the secretaryship of the OAU. This was because of its attitude towards the OAU and assessment of its own position in Pan-Africanism. Egypt viewed Arab unity as a national unity and African unity as a continental unity -- unity of the states of the same continent. It considered Arab unity as an internal matter, and African unity as a matter of foreign policy. On an internal matter Egypt could assert itself, but on an external matter it was bound by several limitations and restrictions.

In regard to its position in Africa, Egypt till the formation of the OAU in 1963, had been isolated from the majority of African states which far from looking towards it for leadership doubted its loyalty to Africa. Egypt was told to choose between the Arab world and Africa.

The question was raised at the Pan-African Conference whether Egypt was pursuing a policy of conviction or one of convenience in Africa. However, one thing is clear, that even when it was simultaneously pursuing its policies of Pan-Africanism and Pan-Arabism, it never figured as an obstacle to the objectives of Pan-Africanism -- the liberation and unity of Africa. In fact by signing the Casablanca Charter it went too far. It tried to swallow what it could not chew. If the African states had been guided by the Casablanca Charter, Egypt's position would have been difficult because had the charter been pursued to its logical conclusion (unification of the general policy of various African states) Egypt would have
faced the dilemma of having to choose between its loyalties to Pan-Africanism and Pan-Arabism. But thanks to the Monrovia group, which advocated a loose association of sovereign states, Egypt's dilemma in Africa was solved.

This inner contradiction in the movement proved helpful to Egypt. Instead of "We the African people", the Addis Ababa Charter began with "We the heads of ... state and government". Ever since Nkrumah's first Conference of Independent African States in April 1958, the sovereign state had been the unit of the African unity movement. The Addis Ababa Charter put it in black and white. The Organization of African States was now an association of sovereign independent states. And as a sovereign state Egypt could claim every right to be a member of any number of organizations of sovereign states. If Nigeria and Ghana could become members of the Commonwealth, there was no reason why Egypt should not become a member of the League of Arab States. The question of choosing its loyalty would only arise if Egypt ceased to be an independent sovereign state merging its sovereignty and identity with the Arab world or in the event of a demand on it to surrender its sovereignty.

Having involved itself in the politics of Africa, Egypt had to take a stand not only on the issue of African unity but also, on many other intra-African issues, including the Congo, border disputes and secessionist movements. Its attitude towards these questions was mainly shaped by two considerations: anti-colonialism (ideological identity) and cultural affinity.
Egypt's stand on the Congo crisis was the manifestation of its ideological orientation, namely, anti-colonialism. Egypt thought that by intervening in the Congo militarily and by supporting Katanga's independence Belgium was attempting to nullify the independence of the Congo and making Katanga a foothold of Western imperialism. Hence, Nasser refused to recognize Katanga's independence and solidly stood behind the central authority in the Congo headed by Kasavubu and Lumumba. Again, when there arose a conflict between Kasavubu and Lumumba Nasser threw his weight behind Lumumba because Lumumba was a champion of anti-colonialism. He tried to resolve the Congolese crisis in favour of Lumumba by the combined initiative of independent African states and the United Nations. After Lumumba's murder he recognized Gisenga's government. Opposition to colonialism was again its main guideline during the second Congo crisis when Egypt came in direct conflict with the United States which was supporting Kasavubu against the Lumumbaist forces whom Egypt was supporting.

On border disputes Egypt in the early years took its stand on the basis of ideological identity or cultural affinity. Its support to Somalia in its disputes with Ethiopia and Kenya was mainly shaped by its cultural affinity with the former. Its support to Morocco in its dispute with Mauritania was the manifestation of its cultural affinity as well as the then existing ideological identity. But Egypt changed its stand after the formation of the OAU unlike the change in its stand on African unity which preceded the formation of the OAU.
Thus, when after the formation of the OAU African states decided not to reopen their border disputes, Egypt considered it expedient to fall in line.

Egypt's attitude towards the three African secessionist movements examined in this study was mainly influenced by ideological preference and cultural affinity. It opposed Katanga's secession mainly because it was allegedly supported by Belgium. Its support to the central authority in Nigeria and the secessionist movement in Eritrea was influenced by its cultural affinity with them. Though it withdrew its official support to Eritrea, it did so only after a strong protest from Ethiopia. However, Egypt still continued to support Eritrea unofficially.

In articulating Egypt's Africa policy stress was also laid on the need for the African countries to consolidate their hard-won independence. Nasser tried to convince them that the imperialists of today might try to dominate the newly emancipated countries not by military means as the old colonialists had done but through the subtler weapons of neo-colonialism, such as aid and trade and economic and monopoly blocs. On a practical plane, Egypt tried to relate this neo-colonialism to Israel's aid to several African countries in terms of technology, joint ventures, loans etc. The argument advanced was that in giving aid Israel was acting on behalf of imperialism because its own economy depended on aid from the United States. Secondly, Israel was projected as wanting to dominate the African economy for its own good. Israel was also compared with Rhodesia and South
Africa where a minority of foreigners came to settle in the country of another people, colonized it under the protection of imperialism, and even sought to uproot or subjugate the indigenous peoples.

There was also a positive aspect of this policy represented by Egypt's technical aid programme to the African countries. This aid was given particularly to those countries who had a militant approach and who could be trusted to fight colonialism and neo-colonialism. It is, however, to be noted that because of its limited resources Egypt could not achieve much in this field.

Egypt's anti-colonial stance extended also to economic questions. It wanted African countries to reduce their dependence on the colonial Powers. It gave a call for economic self-reliance. Its main interest in Africa was the diversification and expansion of its trade, particularly export of its industrial products and import of raw materials. For this purpose, it sent many delegations to Africa and also gave technical and economic aid to it.

For the expansion of its foreign trade, Egypt entered into bilateral payments agreements with many African countries. Its trade with Africa increased from some few thousand pounds in 1952 to £2 12,841,000 in 1970. Another indication of its growing economic relations with Africa was the expansion of El-Nasr Export and Import Company -- an Egyptian company dealing with Africa. The fact that the Company has opened some 26 branches in African countries since its establishment
in 1961 is an index of Egypt's expanding economic relations with Africa.

Along with consolidating its political and economic relations with Africa, Egypt also worked for strengthening its cultural ties with it. In fact, Egypt used its cultural affinities with some African states to consolidate its political and economic relations with them. In its attempt to consolidate its cultural relations with Africa, the Egyptian leadership took advantage of the existence of a large number of Muslims in Africa and their age-old contacts with Egypt. Generous help was given to these Muslims in the form of scholarships to study in Egypt. They were also provided with the services of Egyptian alumni, and money and materials for the construction of mosques and schools. This traditional Islamic tie was further strengthened by radio broadcasts to Africa.

Egypt's cultural activities in Africa were not confined only to Islam. After all, not all African countries are Islamic. To the non-Muslim African states, Egypt exported its idea of anti-colonialism. Egypt's powerful information media came in handy for this purpose. The establishment of the African Association in Cairo in 1966 was another major step in that direction. The Association served as a secular cultural body to bring Egyptians and Africans together.

After the attainment of independence by several African countries in the 1960s, Egypt came in direct contact with them. It started consolidating its cultural contacts with them. Towards that end, cultural agreements were concluded with several
African countries. These generally provided for exchange of scientists, teachers, experts, students, supply of instruments required by educational and religious institutions and opening of cultural centres. A concrete indication of Egypt's growing cultural relations with Africa was the influx of a large number of African students into Egypt. These students were given all facilities, including scholarships, free tuitions, free medical care and a book allowance. Besides this, many Egyptian and African delegations -- political, economic, educational, and cultural -- have been exchanging visits. Nasser himself visited some African countries, and many African heads of State and Government visited Egypt.

The existence of a strong Christian minority in Egypt was also used to strengthen Egypt's relations with African countries. Ethiopia is the best example of this. The Egyptian Church is a member of the African Churches Association. This helps Egypt to keep in touch with African Christians. In fact in African countries having a substantial number of Muslims Egypt projected itself as an Islamic country, and in countries where Christians were in the majority Egypt tried to project itself as a secular country having a substantial Christian minority.

Thus we find that Egypt got more and more involved in Africa after the July 1952 Revolution. Initially it was to renew its lost contact, then to extend its anti-colonial policy and pursue its economic and strategic interests and still later to keep neo-colonialism out of Africa. This deep involvement
of Egypt in Africa to a great extent was the result of Nasser's own ideology. After the July Revolution it was Nasser who formulated Egypt's foreign policy. In fact we see the stamp of Nasser on every stance of Egypt in international affairs. It was Nasser who chose a radical anti-colonial posture, he who provided leadership to Egypt in nationalizing the Suez Canal Company, he who led Egypt in repelling the tripartite aggression, he who opted for the militant Casablanca group when there arose ideological differences among African countries on the issues of Congo and Algeria, and African unity, he who espoused the cause of Pan-Africanism even though he was an advocate of Pan-Arabism as well, he who raised the stature of Egypt in the international community of nations. Egypt's selection on almost every African organization set up to fight colonialism is in fact a tribute to Nasser's leadership.

The success of Egypt's Africa policy must be judged in terms of its objectives. Its main concern was to push colonialism as far away from its borders as possible, and to see the independence of the largest possible number of African states. It sought to achieve the first by challenging the colonial Powers on its own soil and then by helping African countries, both morally and materially, to fight colonialism.

This objective of anti-colonialism was given preference over all other objectives. In fact Egypt's policy of anti-colonialism was nothing but an extension of its domestic policy. In pursuing this wider aim beyond its borders it did not
hesitate to antagonise the majority of African states and joined the militant Casablanca group. To establish its credentials as a champion of anti-colonialism and as a protest against South Africa's apartheid policy it even went to the extent of breaking off diplomatic relations with that country and sacrificed its lucrative trade. In its fight against the Belgian colonialists, Egypt sent troops to the Congo. Over the Rhodesian issue it broke relations with Britain even though most African states had not done so.

From our study of Egypt's Africa policy it would appear that Egypt did play a significant role in promoting the freedom struggles of the sub-Saharan African countries. Thirty-three African countries became independent during the period under study. But this is not to say that colonialism disappeared from the greater part of Africa merely because of Egypt's efforts. However, Egypt played no mean role in this historical process. The work it did for the liberation of Africa enhanced its status in African nationalist circles. This was clear from the fact that Egypt was elected on almost every African organisation set up to fight colonialism.

Egypt's strategic objective of keeping the sources of the Nile secure was achieved, firstly, by working for the removal of colonialism from the countries in the area and, secondly, by maintaining good relations with Ethiopia and Uganda which directly command the head-waters of the Nile.

Containment of Israel was another objective of Egypt's Africa policy. Initially Egypt did not succeed in achieving
this aim. Its propaganda that Israel was a creation of colonialism and an outpost an agent of imperialism did not cut much ice except at the Casablanca Conference in January 1961. This was partly because the African countries had no emotional or historical reasons for joining the Arab camp against Israel. Secondly, after their independence, the African countries were interested in economic reconstruction and social reforms and Israel appeared to be willing to help them in this task. The Africans were, therefore, reluctant to get involved in the Arab-Israeli conflict which did not directly concern them. By 1963 Egypt had discontinued raising this question in African forums and left the matter to African conscience. This perhaps was its greatest sacrifice.

A marked change in the African attitude to the Arab-Israeli problem occurred in the wake of the June 1967 war when Israel occupied Egyptian territory. Israel's subsequent intransigence on the question of withdrawal from Egyptian territory enabled Egypt to win African sympathy against Israel. And there started the process of African countries drifting away from Israel.

Egypt's economic objective in Africa was twofolds to persuade the African countries to reduce their dependence on the former metropolitan Powers and to increase its own trade with the former as part of its programme to diversify its trade. In respect of the first objective Egypt did not succeed much for even today the African countries are heavily dependent on the former metropolitan countries. In respect of the second
objectives, Egypt, starting from scratch, did build up its trade with Africa. However, taking as a whole Egypt’s trade with Africa is not much (hardly three to four per cent). Lack of opportunities for direct exchange of goods and the absence of an efficient communication network were some of the hindrances in the way of rapid development of its trade with Africa. Egypt had also financial constraints in giving liberal credit facilities. But considering the trends in African economic thinking -- reconstruction of the economies and consolidation of ties among themselves -- it might be concluded that Egypt’s economic relations with Africa are likely to improve in the coming years.

The specific objectives of Egypt’s Africa policy -- political, strategic and economic -- must also be seen in the context of its wider foreign policy objective. Essentially, the two were not incompatible with each other. In fact its Africa policy was an extension of its general foreign policy.

Seen thus, Egypt’s Africa policy did not come in conflict with its Arab policy or with its non-aligned stance. In fact its involvement in Africa enhanced its status among both those worlds. It also did not come in conflict with its policy towards the Communist Bloc. It was only in respect of its relations with the West that Egypt’s Africa policy came in direct conflict and invited some trouble for it particularly with Britain over the issue of broadcast to east Africa and on the issue of Rhodesia and with Belgium and the United States on the Congo. But since Egypt’s anti-colonialism in Africa was an extension of its fight against Western colonialism at home
this conflict was expected. In fact, its conflict with the Western Powers added fuel to the anti-colonial fervour.

What then of the future? The foreign policy of a country is guided by its national interests. While perception of the national interests may vary with changes in the international environment and in the domestic conditions, national interests born out of geo-political and historical situations are of a more enduring nature. At least some of Egypt's interests in Africa which are the product of historical and geo-political factors are likely to endure. There are, however, some transitory factors which have influenced the course of Egypt's Africa policy. Important among them are the presence of colonialism in Africa, Egypt's relations with the Western Powers, Egypt-Israel relations, and Egypt's relations with the Arab countries. What course will these factors take? Will colonialism leave the shores of Africa in the near future? Will Egypt have normal relations with the West? Will Egypt and Israel live as good neighbours? Will Arab countries succeed in achieving political unity so as to force Egypt to choose between the Arab world and Africa? Time alone will answer these questions.