Chapter VII

THE REVOLUTION AND THE PROSPECT OF PEACEFUL
SETTLEMENT OF THE SUEZ ZONE
ISSUES WITH BRITAIN

A. EGYPT ANXIOUS TO OPEN TALKS ON THE SUEZ
CANAL QUESTION IMMEDIATELY. BRITAIN NOT
SO ANXIOUS

The conclusion of the Anglo-Egyptian Agreement on
Sudan was expected by Britain and the United States to partially
solve the difficulties referred to by Dulles in his above noted
address. Nevertheless, relations between Egypt and Great Britain
remained tense after that. The Egyptians, now more than ever,
were becoming impatient with what seemed to them British delaying
tactics in regard to the question of British evacuation of the
Suez Canal Zone. (1) In fact the same day the Sudan accord
was reached, General Neguib stated in a Press Conference that
he hoped the accord would 'pave the way for immediate talks on
the British withdrawal from the Canal Zone'. (2) Three days
later, Dr. Mohammad Fawzi, Egypt's Foreign Minister, reported
that his Government had officially informed the British Ambassador
at Cairo, that Egypt was ready for talks on British evacu-
ation. (3) As there was no immediate and satisfactory response

1. Elizabeth Monroe, op.cit., p. 175. See also
   The Times, 5 March 1953.
2. Mideast Mirror, 14 February 1953, p. 4;
3. Al-Ahram, 15 February 1953; The Daily Telegraph,
   16 February 1953.
from the British Government, the Free Officers resorted to threats of guerrilla action against the British forces in Egypt. (4)

The Egyptian Government made it quite plain from the very start of their informal consultations with the British Ambassador, and also made public statements, that they would require 'unconditional British agreement to withdraw all troops from the Canal Zone within a stated period, expressed

4. The New York Times of 27 February was in fact referring to a statement made by Col. Nasser to a Correspondent of the New York Herald Tribune in the mid-November 1952. The Statement as reproduced by Al-Akhbar on 29 December 1952 was as follows:

"We are quite prepared to be reasonable. The British have promised us during the past 70 years to evacuate the Canal Zone but are still there. Egypt will no longer tolerate procrastination and dilatory methods."

"If the Government of the new regime has reason to believe, after its sincere efforts, that Egypt's liberation from the British occupation is not in sight, I assure you that the military leaders will relinquish their official position to lead the people in a struggle against the British. This will not be an officially declared war but it will rather have the character of strong resistance movement in which guerrilla methods will be adopted. Hand-grenades will be thrown in the dark; British troops will be assassinated in the streets and the struggle will be undertaken by Commanders who will make the British pay a high price for the occupation of our country." (Middle East Mirror, 3 January 1953, p. 5).

On 3 January, Ridwan, the Minister of State, repeated the threat uttered by Col. Nasser, cited above, and on the next day Major Abdul Hakim Ameer asserted the Government's primary aim of driving the British out of Egypt and the Sudan. General Neguib also told a large group of students that the revolution had been staged in order to expel imperialists. Major Salim threatened the British of drastic action, including sabotage and boycotting even if Great Britain were involved in a great war'. (The Times, 6 February 1963; for references see Survey 1953, pp. 162-63).
in months rather than in years," (5) as a prelude to discussions about a possible new agreement for mutual defence. (6) Unless unconditional withdrawal of the British troops was an accomplished fact, they were not willing to discuss anything with Great Britain or any other nation. Great Britain, on the other hand, was pressing to make an agreement on the troops and installations in the Canal Zone a part of wider agreement on the defence of the Middle East, in other words, "to make British withdrawal conditional upon a new treaty of alliance." (7)

In its 'Note' of 27 February 1953 the British Government, stating its terms for negotiations on the future of the Canal Zone, insisted on Egyptian agreement to the return of British forces in case of war, and that British or NATO technicians should remain behind to oversee military installations there. The Royal Air Force was to be allowed also to share with the Egyptian Air Force eight bases in the Canal Zone. It was also suggested that if Egypt accepted these terms, substantial American and British economic aid would follow. (8)

The difference between the parties was really one of confidence. Neither trusted the other sufficiently to desert the entrenched positions in which they had dug themselves. Egypt maintained the right of a

5. Al-Ahram, 10 and 11 March 1953; Mideast Mirror, 14 March 1953, p. 2.
sovereign state to choose whether or not to have foreign troops on its territory; Great Britain took its stand on possession, on the 1936 Treaty, and on the necessities of the cold war. (9)

With these rival aspirations being incompatible, there was little likelihood of a rapproachment between the two Governments, at least in the foreseeable future. Another source of friction between the Egyptians and Great Britain were the elections in the Sudan. Both sides charged each other with bad faith. The Egyptians accused the British of coercing, bribing and intimidating Sudanese officials, who were favourable to unity with Egypt. (10) The British denied these charges, and counter-charged the Government of the RCC with interference in the Sudan elections. (11)

Britain hoped that the Sudan would eventually join the British Commonwealth. In his statement issued in Khartoum on 25 March 1953, Selwyn Lloyd, British Minister of State, had stated that membership of the British Commonwealth 'was not inconsistent with independence'; 'that an independent Sudan might suggest any relationship it cared for'. (12)

These reported statements spontaneously created a stir in Egyptian official circles and hardened their attitude on the Canal Zone issue. General Neguib who was then touring the upper Egypt, strongly reacted by telling pressmen:

We want unconditional and total evacuation. There will either be evacuation or annihilation. We will live free or die honest. The whole world knows our viewpoint. (13)

Another Egyptian leader, Wing Commander Abdel Latif Boghdadi, a member of the RCC and a close confidant of Gamal Abdel Nasser, made the following forthright statement on the Canal Zone issue on 31 March:

We ask all Egyptians, everywhere, to be prepared to strike when the time comes because you are able to strike the tyrant and oppressor. You dealt a splendid blow in the past, you will strike again if necessary, without hesitation. ... Nothing will dissuade us until we see the last of the forces of evacuation.

Egypt would not resort to negotiations whatever the circumstances. Evacuation must come first and it should be unconditional. We shall accept no conditions. Once evacuation has been realized we shall negotiate with whom we like for the interest of our country alone.

The day of struggle is coming, there is no doubt about that. Be prepared for it. Prepare yourself and your children how to fight before you teach them how to read and write. Freedom has a price and we shall pay that price however dear it might be. (14)

In a similar tone, Gamal Abdel Nasser declared that the continuation of occupation was incompatible with the revolution.

"Since we took over responsibility, we have been struggling to destroy the foundations of imperialism:

In the south, the struggle has ended with the recognition of the Sudan's right to self-determination. Here in the north we will not boast as others did of 'negotiations'. We will only say

13. Ibid., p. 5.
14. The Egyptian Gazette, 1 April 1953; also Mideast Mirror, 4 April 1953, pp. 6-7.
'Get out of our country. Only the sons of the Nile will defend the Canal'.

"We shall not bargain over our rights";
"We will accept nothing but full freedom". (15)

In an interview with an American Correspondent, General Neguib explained about British attempts to get the Sudan to join the British Commonwealth and accused Great Britain of a long series of broken promises over the Canal Zone; and a few days later he condemned the British attitude as illogical in the face of Egypt's known determination to insist on unconditional evacuation. (16)

Despite these 'bellicose' declarations by some Egyptians in positions of responsibility, the official attitude towards the Canal Zone problem was that Egypt intended to reach a settlement by negotiations. Their insistence on "unconditional evacuation" as the basis of discussions with Britain was merely intended to express their total opposition to commit Egypt to Middle East defence as part of an agreement on evacuation.

In Britain, however, the tone and substance of the statements increasingly built up the opinion that it would be useless and perhaps dangerous to enter into negotiations with the Egyptians in their present mood. (17)

15. Ibid.
On his way back from the Sudan, Selwyn Lloyd called on General Neguib in Cairo and referred to the damaging effect of these recent speeches. (18) It is, however, surprising that the British leaders and diplomats should have failed to realize that much of the contents of these 'bellicose' statements of the Egyptian leaders were meant for local consumption. At the diplomatic level there had been indications that Egypt desired to secure the maintenance of the Canal Zone base and was willing to discuss the retention of technicians to ensure it. (18) Obviously the hardening and confusion of opinion in Britain could be attributed to their inability or unwillingness to reconcile those diplomatic hints with the public utterances of the Egyptians that there could be no negotiations before evacuation.

Churchill's Government being weak in the House of Commons as a result of conflicting opinions on the Canal issue within its own ranks, was not eager to initiate negotiations. "The Churchill Government", wrote Elizabeth Monroe, "also dallied because it needed time in which to bring round its own right-wing supporters to the need for a new policy. The Suez Canal had long held a special place in British esteem; Anthony Eden had once called it "the Swing door of the British Empire",

17. (contd. from back page)

in Cairo Fade" and "Deadlock Over Suez" appeared in the British newspapers. The Daily Telegraph wrote: "There was not the slightest chance to have defence talks leading to anything." The Daily Telegraph,

and to the Conservatives who were soon christened the Suez Group - it was as sacred as British soil. Members of the group called for much party cossetting, for a body of Conservative opinion, of unknown size, was against following the precedent set by Labour Government in India, Burma and Palestine and at Abadan, and scuttling "from the Canal Zone". (19)

Thus with the rising tide of criticism and adverse comments in Britain upon the statements of the Egyptian leaders, it became apparent that talks on the Suez Canal issue would be delayed from the British side. This was confirmed by the announcement that Field Marshal Sir William Slim would proceed to Australia to take up his new assignment. (20) Earlier in February his departure was postponed "in order to advise the British Government in the course of talks on the Canal Zone." (21)

The military Junta of Egypt, on the other hand, was much too anxious to begin the conversation with the British. Having compromised on the question of self-determination for the Sudan, they had hoped to achieve something spectacular and spontaneous on the question of complete evacuation of the Suez Canal Zone.

19. Elizabeth Monroe, op.cit., pp. 175-76; also New York Times, 16 December 1953; see also Mideast Mirror, 21 February 23 March 1953.


At this point, Nasser broke more than two months of "glowering inactivity" by a bold but conciliatory statement of policy of the revolutionary Government and urged the British Government to begin negotiations for a just solution. In an interview given to the correspondent of the Observer on 11 April 1953, (22) he said that by a "just solution we mean the evacuation of British forces from the Canal Zone" and no discussion on Middle East defence. He expressed Egyptian lack of trust, which he ascribed to the delays in beginning discussions to the British attempts to link the question of the Canal Zone with question of regional defence. He also sought to excuse the more flambuoyant statements of the Egyptian leaders by pleading the necessity "to prepare the Egyptian people for the consequences" of British intransigence. He then explained that:

A revolutionary regime inevitably makes enemies at home among the corrupt and privileged group whose power it attacks. Then there are communists who seek to disrupt everything constructive. These elements seek to discredit us in any way they can. In the circumstances we cannot hold out our hands like beggars to Britain when what we are demanding is what every Egyptian believes to be his right. (23)

In the manner of a realist, Nasser frankly admitted that Egypt 'could not maintain such an immense base' unaided and that, since the base had been a British base, "British

23. Ibid.
technicians would be needed." (24) Further inciting Great Britain to compromise, he gave a clever turn to the problem of 'regional defence'. He stated that since the Arab States were all weak and very anxious to strengthen their defences, they could not find better friends than the West to help them do that. (25)

Nasser, however, refused to yield on the future use of the base by the West since any commitment of this would be 'premature' in his view, 'before getting satisfactory solution of her problems with Great Britain'. He also did not fail to remind the British leaders that in the last war "Egypt contributed more than she was compelled to do under the treaty," (26) and warned:

If there is no settlement, you cannot count on such cooperation again. All we are saying is that if Britain does not intend to reach a just settlement, you cannot count on us in peace or war. In fact, you will find us bitter enemies. We can try to be friends. But you cannot expect us to hold out our hands like beggars for what we know to be our national rights. (27)

This statement was quite significant in so far as it recognized the need 'to maintain an efficient base', and indicated that in refusing to negotiate on the Middle East defence, the Egyptian leaders did not want a strategic vacuum in the area. It clearly implied a desire for contact with the West, since the "friends" who could help were undoubtedly to be found among the Western Powers. His criticism of the

24. Ibid.
25. Ibid.
26. Ibid.
27. Ibid.
'disruptive intentions' of the Communists so obviously hinted at that. Moreover, in the presence of the orthodox Muslim Brothers' no Egyptian Government, however strong and progressive, could have thought of identifying itself in any manner with the communist world.

Gamal Nasser had thus in effect made it clear that there was a negotiable position.

The significance of the statement was noted by the British Press in a series of editorial comments, all of which recognized that it had taken the matter a helpful step forward. The Daily Telegraph which had taken a strong line against Egypt on the Canal Zone question, (28) modified its attitude to some extent and advocated a reciprocal gesture from Her Majesty's Government. (29)

At this point, therefore, London had to choose between 'inactivity' and negotiation upon a restricted basis, tacitly trusting that in the latter case the conclusion of an agreement on the Canal Zone would be followed by discussions and agreement on regional defence. (30)

London finally chose to negotiate. Churchill immediately called General Sir Brian Robertson, C-in-C of the Middle East, back to London for consultations, and three days later announced that they would soon begin discussions on the Canal Zone question. (31)

29. Ibid., 12 April 1953.
30. Survey 1953, p. 165; The Times, 12 April 1953,
31. The Times, 16 April 1953.
The announcement was broadcast simultaneously by the Cairo radio, however, emphasising that the negotiations were expected to deal with the technical problems involved in the evacuation of the British and the subsequent maintenance of the Suez Canal Zone. (32)

The announcement also put an end to weeks of uncertainty, during which the atmosphere had shown menacing signs of deterioration. This period had included tentative approaches by both sides to find a basis for discussions and an attempt on the part of Britain and the United States, to persuade the Egyptian Government to engage in tripartite discussions in which the question of evacuation was to be dealt with as a part of the wider problem of Middle East defence. (33) The Egyptians had promptly rejected any official US role in the Suez talks. (34)

B. FIRST ROUND OF TALKS BEGAN AND ENDED TOO SOON.
BRITAIN DECLINED UNCONDITIONAL WITHDRAWAL

On April 27, General Mohamed Neguib and his Foreign Minister Dr. Mahmud Fawzi of Egypt sat down with Ambassador Ralph Stevenson and General Sir Brian Robertson of Great Britain

32. Al-Ahram, 16 April 1953; Mideast Mirror, 18 April 1953, p.1.


34. Ibid., 17 and 19 March 1953. The US Ambassador, Caffery, made a press statement on the 18th saying that the US did not wish any official role in the talks unless she was asked by both sides. United States in World Affairs 1953 (New York, 1955), p. 295.
to try to 'hammer out' a definitive agreement. They tried to find a common ground, but as their basic contentions differed widely, their talks proved abortive. After their sixth meeting concluded on 6 May, their brief communique made no mention of the date for the next meeting. It meant that the first approach towards a settlement had failed.

The Egyptian negotiators wanted a clear statement of the British intention to withdraw before proceeding to discuss in Committees matters which they regarded as comparatively minor points: for Egypt the political decision to withdraw was paramount and all else ranked as consequential military details. But for Britain these other matters of essence of the agreement and the British negotiators refused to give a pledge to withdraw without first discussing the security of the Canal Zone, i.e., the number and terms of service of the retained British technicians and the availability of the base in the event of war or threatening war.

With regard to the technicians there were two competing views, the one that they would be seconded to the Egyptian army for service under its orders and the other that they would be responsible for the maintenance of British property under orders from London. (35)

EGYPT'S REACTIONS.

Egypt had entered into negotiations with the hope that Britain would formally recognize the principle of "total and unconditional evacuation". They had spoken about this fact over and again as the only basis for negotiations. Lastly, on the very eve of the negotiations Col. Nasser had repeated that Egypt's objective was 'complete independence' and at the same time she was ready to cooperate with her "friends". But the existence of British troops in Egypt was the main

35. Survey 1953, p. 166; Tom Little, op.cit., p. 155.
hinderance to friendly relations between the countries. (36) Even in his 11 April statement which is credited to have induced the British to come to the negotiating table, had not concealed this fact. Now Britain's attempt to 'construct a technical agreement through a series of committees which would work from ground up' was, therefore, quite naturally disappointing and irritating. Nasser explained:

We refused to enter into any details without agreement on the basic issue, because there is no need to draw ourselves in committees and details only to find ourselves in the end without a clear and agreed objective. (37)

C. CRISIS OF CONFIDENCE: MAIN CAUSE OF BREAKDOWN

The breakdown of negotiations before they had really got into motion was not so much the result of difference on the question of control of the technicians who should maintain the base in operational condition after the withdrawal of the Combatant troops, but reflected a deep crisis of confidence. "The British", in the words of John Connell, "wanted to trust the Egyptians but could not; the Egyptians were obsessed with the sacred significance of the battle against imperialism." (38)

The British wanted to believe that the Egyptians, and their Arab allies, could one day be persuaded to realize that the common enemy was Communism and that practical arrangements must be made to hold it at bay. The Egyptians, on the contrary,

36. Mideast Mirror, 2 May 1953.
37. Ibid., 9 May 1953.
believed that the real enemies were Western imperialism and Zionism.

The danger of Soviet penetration in the oil-rich Middle East was indeed a real one but even as later as 1953-54 it was comparatively remote and in suspense, while the presence of unwanted British forces and the menace of Zionist expansionism were facts of life. Therefore, the two points of view, so utterly divergent from each other, could hardly be reconciled, without either side willing to giving up its insistence. For Egypt, all that she insisted upon was a matter of rights; for Britain, her stand was a matter of precautions. Rights certainly have a priority over precautions against 'assumed' dangers.

General Neguib's reaction over the failure of the talks was more vehement and forthright. He said:

We have washed our hands of the talks by which the British desire to draw us into a vicious circle where would never end, as happened before. But we have never agreed to deviate from the policy which we have laid down for ourselves. We entered the talks knowing full well that we wanted and determined to say what we wanted briefly and clearly. And we demanded it with determination so that the other side may know that we tolerate no bargaining.

I don't know how such a simple and just demand could be subject to dispute, delay or division. I do not know that prompt acceptance of this demand will be an important factor to stabilization and peace. It is impossible to go back and waste the blood and suffering the people expended to make the country theirs - theirs to own, defend and plan for. (39)

The Egyptian leader concluded his remarks by adding that Egypt did not want a "cheap independence" for which she had not paid. "Some of the price we have already paid and we are fully prepared to pay in full. Independence cannot be granted on paper but only achieved by payment with blood." (40)

The crisis in Egypt's relations with Britain arising from the deadlock in the talks on the Suez Canal became more serious and alarming when Sir Churchill found it necessary to retort at General Neguib by telling the House of Commons that "if Egypt used force in the Canal Zone, British troops would use force in self-defence." (41) His 'retort' was unfortunate as it created the impression that he still regarded Egypt virtually a British colony and that the very thought of evacuation hurt him. The Egyptians remembered what he had said in one of his war-time speeches, "I have not become Prime Minister in order to preside over the liquidation of the British Empire." (42)

But the pattern and forces of international politics had undergone several significant changes since the end of the last war. With the advent of the United Nations and the emergence of assertive nationalism in the hitherto subjugated communities, and the new technological achievements, the British

40. Ibid.
41. H.C. Deb., 5th Series, vol. 515, cols. 885-89; also Documents (RIIA) for 1953, p. 342.
Empire had already started receding to its own narrow confines. He was now the Prime Minister of a country that had not yet fully recovered from the strains and exhaustions of the last war and was closely dependent on American economic and military cooperation, while the new Republican Government of the United States, headed by General Eisenhower, was 'keen' to restore good relations with the Arab world. (43) Churchill could not have ignored these facts. Moreover, the Egyptian Government had decided to maintain peace and security throughout the country. They had completely ruled out sabotage and had warned their people against it. In a broadcast on 20 May, Neguib told the people to restrain until the Government decided to begin a national struggle; "of course, the Government will fix the time for the battle." But he also warned that "we are not going to be reckless." "We are very anxious not to repeat the mistakes of those who preceded us. The disaster of Palestine will not be repeated, nor the tragedy of the Canal which took place after the abrogation of the Treaty in 1951." (44) Therefore, there was apparently no cause or necessity to use force against the Egyptians. The atmosphere in the cities of Egypt remained calm and there was no overt sign of anti-British feeling. Even in the Canal Zone, the number of incidents reported were, if anything, slightly fewer than in normal times. Nevertheless, there was tension and several

44. Al-Ahram, The Egyptian Gazette, 20 and 21 May 1953.
families left Cairo 'against potential dangers'. (45) Gamal Abdel Nasser described the existing state of Egypt's relations with Britain as 'a war of nerves'. (46)

The possibility of resuming negotiations was further put off by the flare up of a new crisis over the disappearance of a British airman from the Ismailia area in the Canal Zone. General Festing, Commanding Officer of the British troops in Egypt, took an 'extremely serious view' of the incident and sent a strongly worded note to the Sub-Governor of Ismailia and demanded that the airman should be returned immediately. The note read:

Lt. General Festing reserves the right to take such action as he considers necessary if the aircraft-man A.V. Rigden, is not returned to the British authorities ... by 09.00 hours on Monday, July 13, measures will be put into force which will cause serious disruption and inconvenience to the Egyptian community in the area of Ismailia. (47)

The disappearance of an 'airman' was not so serious an incident as to justify the action of General Festing. The language and the actions proposed in his letter could not be described but an 'ultimatum'. Egypt's reaction was naturally of vehement denunciation. Major Salem denied that the Egyptian authorities had any knowledge of Rigden's disappearance and

45. The Daily Telegraph, 21 May 1953; The Times, 21 May 1953.
47. The Times, 13 July 1953; Mideast Mirror, 18 July 1953; Al-Ahram, 12 July 1953.
denounced the note as a 'new aggression on Egyptian sovereignty and independence'. (48)

Despite such grave provocation, the Egyptian Government was determined to prevent any untoward incident to happen inside Egypt. Maintenance of law and order was their primary aim when they declared a state of emergency and posted heavy armed guards at the foreign legations and public buildings, and put additional police force in and around the city. They were not prepared to allow panic and lawlessness to weaken their position and authority. The revolutionary regime thus had made a favourable impression in official and non-official circles in London and Washington of its intentions of peacefully negotiating differences instead of stirring mob violence as its predecessors had done.

After the Rigden crisis passed off with the withdrawal of British forces back to their barracks in the Zone. (49) Selwyn Lloyd expressed that HM Government was willing to resume discussions on the Canal Zone, if Egypt so wished. (50)

48. Al-Ahram, 12 July 1953.

49. As warned in General Festing's 'ultimatum', on the failure of Egyptian authorities to return A.V. Rigden by 9 o'clock on the 13th of July, the British forces in the Canal Zone had erected half-a-dozen check-posts, sent out patrol cars and began a search of all road and rail passengers and vehicles into and out of the Ismailia region. Barage traffic on the Sweet water Canal was also subjected to restrictions and search. These restrictions and check-posts were withdrawn as the situation improved in Ismailia after the 16th July.

D. THE UNITED STATES MEDIATES

It seems most probable that behind this new initiative there was American pressure, (51) to come to terms with Egypt. Secretary Dulles seemed to have personally observed the gravity of the Anglo-Egyptian relations during his visit to Cairo and other capitals of the region in May. (52)

It was after this trip, that the US administration decided to help bring about a solution of the Anglo-Egyptian impasse, though by process of 'behind-the-scene diplomacy'. It was hoped in Washington that if the Suez dispute were solved satisfactorily, the last and major stumbling block in the way of creating a Middle East defence system would have been cleared. The British Government also seemed to have taken into account the fact that 'a peace-time station' could not be maintained continually under 'a state of siege'. Moreover, the 1936 Treaty was due for revision in 1956 - so near at hand - and the British would then be illegal occupants, liable to unconditional evacuation. Anthony Eden admitted in his memoirs that an agreement with Egypt at that stage was desirable in the interest of the United Kingdom. (53)

53. Sir Anthony Eden has described the various influences that forced Britain to reach a settlement with Egypt in this manner: "Many influences were at work on Anglo-Egyptian relations that summer, the most powerful was self-interest. Time and modern needs were bringing changes. The Suez Canal remained of supreme importance, the base was yearly less so. The tangled mass of workshops and railways in an

(contd. on next page)
The Egyptian Government, though willing and eager to open negotiations, was however reluctant to take the initiative on account of the recent incidents in Ismailia. (54) London understood the situation and therefore decided to take the initiative by sending back Sir Brian Robertson, joint leader of the British delegation to the Anglo-Egyptian negotiations to Cairo on 19 July. On his arrival the General made the following important and encouraging statement mentioning about Egypt's right to full sovereignty:

Much has happened in the world and in Egypt during the time I have been away, (55) but nothing has happened to detract from my conviction that an amicable agreement between Britain and Egypt to resolve outstanding questions, eminently to the advantage of both countries; an agreement taking full account of Egyptian sovereignty.

This statement was important as it indicated a shift in the British view and thereby helped restore confidence needed for the resumption of contacts. The Egyptian side responded favourably. Two days after the arrival of Sir Robertson, the Revolution Command Council issued a statement which indicated

53. (contd. from back page)

area the size of Wales was cumbersome and dependent upon Egyptian labour. It did not seem likely that in this nuclear age we should ever need a base on the past scale. Smaller bases, redeployment and dispersal would serve our purpose better. The Minister of Defence, Lord Alexander, favoured agreement, so did the Secretary of State for War, Anthony Head, and most military opinion. A treaty seemed to them a method of resolving an outdated commitment. Service in the Canal Zone was also a poor recruiting agent." Anthony Eden, op.cit., p. 260.


55. General Sir Brian Robertson had left for London after the first formal contact with the Government of Egypt became deadlocked on 6 May 1953.
that Egypt was prepared to discuss practical matters 'which the British negotiators had wanted to discuss in April and May last'. (56) It obviously meant the narrowing of gaps which had separated the two sides in May. (57) Cairo's leading and reliable Al-Ahram quoted General Neguib saying "If the British came forward to us with a request for resumption of the talks on the basis of immediate and unconditional evacuation we shall be prepared to do business with them." (58) The use of the word 'business' implying absence of rigidity was indeed encouraging.

First informal contact between the two sides however could not be established before 30th of the month when the hospitality of the Cairo Embassy of Pakistan enabled them to meet at a Dinner. (59)

The party was a means to overcome the first hurdle to any resumed negotiations. The two sides in a brief joint-communique expressed the hope that their first informal contact at the Dinner Party would lead them to further explore the possibilities of an agreement. (60)

56. Al-Ahram, 22 July 1953; The Daily Telegraph, 22 July 1953.
57. Mideast Mirror, 25 July 1953.
58. Al-Ahram, 30 July 1953.
59. The Pakistan Charge d'Affaires, Syed Husain Tayeb, who was also the Chairman of the Sudan Governor-General's Commission in Khartoum, had invited Sir Robertson and Robert Hankey along with all the members of the Egyptian delegation to the May talks, at a dinner at his residence for the purpose of providing a 'neutral' ground for the two sides to meet informally. Al-Ahram, 31 July 1953.
60. Al-Ahram, 31 July 1953.
Thereafter, the two sides met several times, and seriously tried, though still informally, to explore the possibilities of an agreement between their two Governments on the question of the Suez Canal issue. In all fifteen meetings were held, the last taking place on 21 October. During the first few meetings held before Sir Robertson went to London for consultations with Sir Winston Churchill, both sides talked with restraint and cordiality and there seemed good prospects of reaching some understanding. So far they had been discussing, rather 'bargaining', to use Peter Calvocoressi's expression, about the number, control and duration of employment of British technicians and the availability of the base in future. (61)

61. The 6th 'informal' meeting between Britain and Egyptian negotiators on the Suez Canal base issue was held and agreed on:

1. An Egyptian Officer would be "Commander of the base".

2. A British deputy, receiving orders from London, would be "technical supervisor".

3. About 4,000 British technicians would be retained, until Egyptians could be trained to take over the skilled jobs.

4. The British garrison would be evacuated within 18 months after the signing of the agreement. Issues to be still settled included availability of the base for the return of British or Allied armies in the event, or threat, of war.

Middle East Journal, vol. 8, No.1, 1954, p.73; see also The Observer, 27 September 1953.
After his return from London, General Robertson, insisted that 'the British soldier-technicians' must have some form of emblem, even if only a badge on their overalls and a flag at their headquarters, as token of their loyalties and reminder that they were still subject to military discipline. Secondly, the British also asked for the right of re-entry to the base in the event of an attack not only upon a member of the Arab League but also upon Turkey or Persia. The British negotiators made another 'funny' suggestion, i.e., if Egypt was not prepared to retain the 'technicians' for a longer period (they had suggested 7 years against Egypt's suggestion for 3 years), Great Britain would give way provided Egypt agreed to their 'right of re-entry in the event of a threat of war instead of merely in the event of an attack'. (62) (Italics mine).

The Egyptian leaders felt the change of attitude in the British negotiators and warned their people and the world at large against "too much optimism" about the outcome of the 'present informal discussions'. (63) A sharp conflict of opinion had now arisen on the question of 'uniform' for the technicians. The British were so much insistent on the technicians wearing the army uniform and carrying weapons that they were reported to have 'offered to give way over Turkey


63. Mideast Mirror, 10 October 1953, p. 2; The Times, 4 October 1953.
in return for Egyptian concession over the uniforms'. (64)
The Egyptians could not agree to this because the very sight
of continuing presence of British military personnel was totally
averse to their national pride, and meant only a partial
fulfilment of their basic demand of 'Complete evacuation', a
continuing conflict of dual authority in the same area.

The Junta would have indeed found it awfully
difficult to defend themselves against the
criticism of right-wing extremists, especially
the Muslim Brotherhood, and to convince the
people that they had indeed terminated the
occupation, if British uniforms were still to
be seen in the Canal Zone. (65)

In the words of Tom Little, "it was a small point
compared with the number of technicians, the duration of the
argument and the conditions governing reactivation of the base,
but it showed how little the British understood the mind of
Egypt", (66) And finally, the two sides issued an agreed
communique that 'it had not been possible to reach agree-
ment'. (67) (Italics mine)

64. Survey of International Affairs 1953, p. 172; see also
Manchester Guardian, 23 September 1953.

65. Coral Bell, *Survey of International Affairs, 1954* (RIIA,

66. Tom Little, op.cit., pp. 155-56. See also
The Observer, 1 November 1953.

67. Mideast Mirror, 24 October 1953; The Times, 22 October 1953;
Al-Ahram, 22 October 1953.
E. NEGOTIATIONS SLOWED DOWN:  
SPLIT IN THE RCC

Although the joint communique had not closed the negotiations, the Government of Egypt could not devote enough time and attention to the discussions which somehow 'languished' for some more weeks. Elections in the Sudan and the widening of tussle for 'power' between General Neguib and Nasser and the consequent split in the Council of Revolution, (68) delayed the process of reaching a negotiated settlement with Great Britain.

68. At the time of July 1952 coup the military junta had had no idea of setting up a permanent military dictatorship in Egypt. They simply aimed at removing 'the old gang' in the hope and expectation that this removal would liberate the forces of reform which, they assumed, were being stifled by the corruptions of the 'old gang'. Mohamed Neguib had been selected by the young officers as a respected senior officer to act as the titular leader of the coup. But it was not long before Abdel Nasser and the more radical and more perceptive members of the junta realised that reform was not merely a matter of purging corruption. Slowly, probably reluctantly, but inevitably, they came to realise that there could be no reform without revolution. But Mohamed Neguib, who held great titular power in his hands and who, moreover, had won great popularity in Egypt in his role as a father figure, and considerable respect abroad by his role in the Sudan negotiations with Britain, appears to have held to the original idea of the coup and to have continued thinking in terms of a fairly rapid reversion to constitutional life. He came to regard Abdel Nasser and the more radical members of the RCC as young hotheads and was no longer willing to accept his role as a figurehead. He began to claim the right to veto the decisions of the RCC. By the end of the year, there was more or less open disagreement between Neguib on the one hand and Abdel Nasser and the majority of the RCC on the other.

The first 'showdown' came on 24 February 1954 when it was announced by the RCC that Neguib had been relieved of the posts of President, Prime Minister, and Chairman of the RCC and that Abdel Nasser had replaced him as Prime Minister and Chairman, leaving the Presidency vacant.

(contd. on next page)
F. NASSER WINS AGAINST NEGUIB AND RESUMES
NEGOTIATIONS IMMEDIATELY WITH MORE
CONCILIATORY ATTITUDE

After Nasser emerged victorious from the ‘Neguib crisis’ negotiations with the British Ambassador, Sir Ralph Stevenson (69) were resumed without delay. (70) Both sides started afresh with a note of hope and a promise of better understanding and accommodation of each other’s contentions and claims. On the

68. (contd. from back page)

This announcement, which attributed Neguib’s removal to his attempts to monopolise power, was greeted with widespread popular demonstrations of sympathy with Neguib. Within a few days, Neguib was invited by the RCC to return to Presidency. He accepted and, almost immediately, announced dates for elections and for the convocation of a Constituent Assembly, abolished martial law and the Press censorship, and reinstated himself in the Premiership and in the Chairmanship of the RCC. Neguib had, to all appearance, won the day. The RCC announced the intention to dissolve itself, to grant full political rights, to hold free elections, and to allow an elected National Assembly to choose a President. All political internees (except for Communists) were released.

But behind the scene Abdel Nasser, organising his relationship with the Army, with the police, and with the workers’ syndicates, was preparing to strike back. This was the decisive moment for the Egyptian Revolution. On 29 March the RCC rescinded all the liberal decisions they had taken only a few days before. A fortnight later, Abdel Nasser once more replaced Neguib as Prime Minister and Chairman of the RCC leaving Neguib, for the time being, with the Presidency, Abdel Nasser accomplished this without opposition either from his colleagues in the RCC (except for one, who resigned) or from the Army, and without overt opposition from public opinion. From henceforward he was the real master of the country.


69. Sir Ralph Stevenson returned to Cairo after a long leave in January 1954. See Al-Ahram, 1 January 1954.

Egyptian side Nasser appeared more ready to make concessions on points on which he had stood firm in the autumn of the previous year. He agreed to allow the British re-entry in the event of an attack not only on an Arab country but also on Turkey. (71) On the British side, after prolonged debates and uproarious scenes in the Parliament, staged by a section of the right-wing conservatives which was against evacuation from the Canal Zone, (72) the Government was asked to decide that civilians instead of soldiers should man the base installations, bearing no mark of their nationality.

One of the most important factors which seemed to have directly influenced the Conservative Government was the persistent advice of the military leaders and strategists that the base could not be held in a hostile environment. (73) Sir Winston Churchill himself was fully convinced, after he had had discussions on this issue with President Eisenhower in Washington, that to keep a large concentration of men and material in the

71. The Times, 22 July 1954; Mideast Mirror, 31 July 1954. The conditions for an agreement on Suez were among the points of difference between General Neguib and Col. Nasser. Just before the first dismissal of General Neguib, Gamal Nasser is understood to have informed the American and Australian envoys in Cairo that Egypt was prepared to concede the point on Turkey. See New York Times, 21 March 1954; also The Times, 17 March 1954.


73. Anthony Eden, op.cit., p. 260; also "Developments of the Quarter", The Middle East Journal, 1954, p. 446.
Canal Zone was a doubtful expedient in an age of atomic warfare." (74) It demonstrated that the British Prime Minister identified himself with his Foreign Secretary's policy of trying to achieve an agreement with Egypt. (75)

G. HEADS OF AGREEMENT SIGNED

This was in fact the turning point in the discussion about the Suez Canal base then going on in Cairo. Further impetus was added by the arrival in Cairo of Antony Head, the British War Secretary, with 'wide powers' to come to terms quickly. (76) His choice was quite an indication that the Cabinet in England had finally accepted the advice of the Committee of the Chiefs of Staff who believed that the Suez base

74. The United States in World Affairs, 1954 (Council of Foreign Relations, New York, 1956), pp. 339-40. Sir Winston Churchill made considerable use of this argument in answering his domestic critics. On 13 July, two days after the Cairo talks began, the storm broke out in Westminster. The Army Sub-Committee of the Conservative Party's Defence Committee held a 90-minute meeting, which was addressed by Anthony Head, Secretary of State for War, Butler, the Chancellor of the Exchequer, and Sir Winston Churchill. Anthony Head talked about the strategic necessity of redeployment of forces in Cyprus, Libya, Iraq and Jordan in view of the radius of devastation a hydrogen bomb would produce if dropped on the Suez Canal. Butler then spoke about the financial burden involved in running the base - some £150 million a year, being unbearable in the circumstances. After the so-called 'Suez rebels', led by Captain Waterhouse voiced the opinion that British prestige in the Middle East would be irreparably damaged by complete withdrawal from the Suez Canal, the Prime Minister remarked: "You cannot maintain prestige with folly."

75. See Anthony Eden, op.cit., p. 260.

was no longer tenable, under the 'changed circumstances'. (77) Matters were discussed and decided upon with astonishing speed. On the night of 27 July, the two Governments initialed the 'Heads of Agreement', (78) embodying the principles and the main details of the terms under which the British troops were to be withdrawn from Egypt and the Canal Zone military base maintained a state of preparedness.

The official communique expressed the conviction of the two Governments that the agreement 'by removing sources of friction and mistrust will help to bring about growing improvement in the relations between their two countries'. It further declared that the signatories had 'no aggressive purpose in reaching the agreement but that the agreements contemplated will contribute to the maintenance of peace and security, which is the objective of both their governments.' (79) (Italics mine)

The Heads of the Agreement provided:

a) for the evacuation of all British forces from Egypt within twenty months of the signature of the Agreement;

77. This was later confirmed by Antony Head himself in his speech in the House of Commons on 29 July 1954. He said: "... the 'heads of agreement' which had been initialed in Cairo, and the correctness or otherwise of the Government's policy towards Egypt depended to a large extent on strategic considerations and, in particular, on a strategic review carried out by the Chiefs of Staff and agreed to by the Cabinet in the light of present conditions." See, H.C. Deb., vol. 531, cols. 724-31.


79. Ibid. (Emphasis mine)
b) for British bases in the Canal Zone to be main-
tained by the British civilian contractors for a
period of seven years;

c) for British forces to reoccupy the Canal Zone in
the event of an attack by any outside power on
Egypt, or any other country which was a party to
the Arab collective Security Pact of 1950, or on
Turkey. (80)

Details of the procedure and various technicalities
regarding maintenance of the base in the most efficient working
order, including facilities and protections to be provided to
the British Civil Contractors and labour were worked out in the
same spirit of cooperation and compromise. After about two
months of patient and painstaking discussion, the two Govern-
ments finally signed the most important document regarding the
evacuation of the Suez Canal base on the 19th day of October
1954. (81) From the British side the signatories included
Anthony Nutting, Minister of State for Foreign Affairs. (82)

H. TERMS AND IMPLICATIONS OF THE AGREEMENT (83)

The main provisions of the 'epoch-making' agreement
were precisely the same as set out in the 'Heads of Agreement'
in July last. Ratifications were exchanged at Cairo after
nearly six weeks. (84)

80. Text of the Agreement in Appendix No.
82. The Times, 27 September 1954.
83. The Egyptians would not have it called a 'Treaty'
because of the distasteful association the word had for
them.
84. Al-Ahram, 7 December 1954; The Times, 7 December 1954.
It consisted of 13 articles, two annexes, including appendices, 17 exchange of notes elaborating the provisions of the main agreement. This curious structure of the agreement apparently was necessitated by the number and complexity of the technical problems to be disposed of in detail. Thus the essential provisions were set and organization of the base elaborated in the annexes and various legal, financial and other useful arrangements were dealt with through exchange of notes. Article 11 of the main agreement provided that the annexes and appendices to the agreement were an integral part thereof; each of notes consisted a subsidiary agreement.

Article 2 declared the termination of the 1936 Treaty, without specifying the times of termination. This formula was devised to avoid raising the issue of Egypt's unilateral abrogation on 15 October 1951 which was not recognized by Great Britain.

Article 1 of the main agreement provided for the withdrawal of British forces from the Egyptian territory in gradual stages, in accordance with the schedule set forth in Part (A) of the Annex. I. This withdrawal was to be completed entirely within twenty months of the date of signing the agreement (19 October 1954). (85)

Other provisions of Annex, I contain detailed provisions for the progressive transfer of responsibility for security and maintenance of installations from British to Egyptian control. (86)

85. At the time of the ratification of the agreement on 6 December 1954, it was found that the withdrawal was actually proceeding ahead of schedule. See Christian Science Monitor, 29 December 1954.

86. For example a 'hand-over document' of each installation was to be prepared by the British forces in such details
Article 3 of the 'agreement' provided that certain parts of the Canal base were to be kept in efficient working order and capable of immediate use in case the need for reactivation of the base arose.

In Annex II and appendices, thereto, it was provided that Great Britain would maintain and operate certain installations for the duration of the agreement, whereas Egypt was required to 'maintain in good order' other specified installations.

Section 5 of Part A provided that upon the withdrawal of British forces from the base, the Egyptian Government would assume responsibility for the security of all base installations and equipment.

Section 6 provided that the UK Government would maintain and operate the installations listed in Section (2) A and the British equipment therein by concluding contracts with one or more British or Egyptian commercial firms called thereafter as Contractors.

These Contractors according to Section 8 were given the right to employ British technicians up to a total of 1,200 but not exceeding for those recruited outside Egypt a total of 800, as well as Egyptian technicians and such local labour engaged in Egypt as might be required.

Subject to certain specified exemptions, companies and partnerships acting as contractors, as well as their personnel, were to subject to Egyptian law with respect to their activities in Egypt.

Section 6 provided that the British Government was authorized to attach temporary personnel to H.M.'s Embassy in Cairo for the purpose of inspection of the installations referred to in Part I. The maximum number of such personnel was to be agreed upon between the two governments.

Article 4 of the 'agreement' dealt with reactivation of the base. It stated that in the event of an armed attack by an "outside Power" or any country which at the date of signature of the present agreement

86. (contd. from back page)

as may be agreed upon between the respective headquarters and to be handed over to the Egyptian authorities in advance of the transfer to enable the latter to assess the security and maintenance problems and to make appropriate arrangements to deal with them. (Annex. I, Part B, Section B)
(19 October 1954) was a member of the Arab Collective Security Pact or on Turkey, Egypt agreed to afford to the UK such facilities as might be necessary to place the base on a 'war footing' and operate it effectively.

These facilities included the use of Egyptian ports which were to be found 'indispensable' for carrying out the above mentioned purposes.

**Article 6** provided for consultation between Egypt and HM Government in the event of the threat of such attack. The agreed minute attached to the agreement sought to define the expression "outside" as used in Articles 4 and 6, as any country other than those referred in Article 4. Thus the agreement was not to become operative in the event of an attack by a member of the Arab Collective Security Pact upon another member or Turkey or an attack by Israel or any of these Powers.

**Article 5** provided that in the event the base was reactivated in accordance with Article 4, the British occupying forces "shall withdraw immediately upon the cessation of hostilities". The agreed minute expressed the understanding that Article 5 meant that such withdrawal would commence as soon as hostilities ceased or be completed without delay.

**Article 8** explained that two Governments recognized that the Suez Canal was an integral part of Egypt and was waterway "economically and commercially and strategically of international importance", in which the freedom of navigation was to be maintained as guaranteed by 1888 Convention.

**Article 10** affirmed that the right of membership and privileges guaranteed by the Charter of the United Nations and the obligations arising thereto, were to remain absolutely unaffected by signing the agreement. It amounted to recognition and a promise of Great Britain to uphold the sanctity of equal sovereign status of Egypt.

I. **EGYPT'S RESPONSE AND REACTIONS TO THE AGREEMENT**

The 1954 'Zuez Canal Base Agreement' was hailed both by the Egyptian and the British Government as a satisfactory compromise. The signing of the agreement was an occasion of
great rejoicing for the people of Egypt, because, at last long, 72 years of British occupation had come to an end. (87) It was the fulfilment of their greatest national aspiration - completeness of political freedom. They had conceded on the question of Unity of the Sudan and Egypt primarily with the very object of reaching a settlement on the question of evacuation of the Canal Zone. Nasser, whose realism, straightforwardness and - as a matter of fact - approach was mainly responsible for the conclusion of the agreement, asked his people to see the agreement as the point of culmination of the nationalist struggle launched by Orabi and Saad Zaghlul, both pioneers of Egypt's freedom movement. In his nation-wide broadcast the same night Nasser spoke with enthusiasm. He said:

This is a turning point in the history of Egypt. With this agreement a new era of friendly relations based on mutual trust, confidence and cooperation opens between Egypt and Britain and the Western countries. It is the biggest single achievement in Egypt's national aspirations to date. I must pay a high tribute to the British side for their part in reaching the agreement. I want to mention in particular General Sir Brian Robertson for his friendly attitude towards Egypt. Now we want to get rid of hatred in our hearts and start building up our relations with Britain on a solid basis of mutual trust and confidence which has been lacking in our relations for the past several decades. (88)

In an interview with the Arab News Agency Col. Nasser further elaborated that the agreement signed with Britain met all the major requirements of Egyptian sovereignty. "A


succession of politicians of the old regime," he commented, "made much of their nationalism only succeed in making a bad situation worse." (89) He was thus trying to explain and emphasise that the Suez agreement could be concluded because the revolutionary regime, under his leadership, approached the problems of its relations with Britain in a somewhat more realistic manner and by being reasonable, i.e. by taking a balanced view of their own interests and those of others. In this context, reasonableness meant intelligent pursuit of one's own national interest avoiding a clash with the interests of another people. He defended his action by explaining:

Egypt has now secured the evacuation of British troops. This is the basic principle. She always struggled for, and, in achieving it, Egypt has made no concessions against this principle. The lengthy negotiations were intended to ensure that evacuation could be achieved without prejudicing either Egypt's inalienable rights or the mutual desire of Egypt and Britain to ensure the security of the Middle East. (90)

The agreement freed Egypt from the bondage of the 1936 Treaty and consequently strengthened the position of the Revolutionary Command Council vis-a-vis the inside opponents of the regime. With the signing of this 'most important document' Egypt's right to conduct its affairs, domestic as well as foreign, was restored.

89. See Mideast Mirror, 31 July 1954, pp. 6-8; also Al-Ahram, 28 and 29 July 1954.

In his little book, The Philosophy of the Revolution, Nasser referred to the general decline of the British and French political influence in the Middle East and the need of a dynamic personality to integrate the local forces and channellise its vast, mostly untapped economic and man-power resources for prosperity and political discipline. Egypt, being comparatively more advanced, more educated and more populous than the rest of the region, was called upon to play that historic character. In his words:

We cannot look at the map of the world ... without realising Egypt's position on the map and her role by the logic of that position. Can we fail to see that there is an Arab Zone surrounding us? ... Can we possibly ignore the fact there is African Continent which we have been made part of by fate? ... Can we ignore the fact that there is an Islamic with which we are united by bond of religious principle reinforced by historical realities? ... It always strikes me that in this area in which we live is a role running around aimlessly looking for a hero to give it being. ... The role is not one of leadership or domination. It is rather a role of interaction with and response to all the factors mentioned above, which involves making use of the tremendous talent strength in the regions surrounding us to create a great power in this area which will then rise up to a level of dignity and undertake a positive part in building the future of mankind. (91)

To play this 'role' it was necessary that Egypt must have the freedom to make her decisions, and such freedom they could not have so long as Britain insisted on the continuing validity of the 1936 Treaty and so long as the 80,000-men strong British force stay within 'easy' striking distance of her capital.

It was, therefore, an important and urgent task for the Free Officers to get rid of the intimidating presence of the British forces as soon as possible, even if it meant a little bit of bending down to, a little adjustment with, Britain on matters of lesser importance as compared to an agreement on principles. Nasser's acceptance of Turkey being included in the list of countries, an attack on which would justify Britain's re-entry into the base, was primarily motivated to facilitate the conclusion of an agreement on the question of evacuation as such. Nasser would not have conceded on this point without weighing the pros and cons. He was not unaware that the cold war was, until then, centred in Europe and the Far East, and the Soviet interest in the Middle East was not yet of the nature of positive assertion, or at least was not found to be able to interfere in their affairs. (92)

Moreover in Egypt, according to his calculations, the people 'would not care much about Turkey - all that they would be overwhelmed with, would be the fact that at long last, the British were clearing out. The popular acclaim to the agreement and their 'wild rejoicing' in the streets of Cairo and

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92. Soviet Union's somewhat mysterious lack of interest in Arabic speaking part of the Middle East in the post-war years was understood to be due to late Joseph Stalin's fear or caution that an aggressive policy in this region 'would attract American intervention; he preferred that America should be kept away, even if at the cost of tolerating the British presence'. See Guy Wint and Peter Clavocoressi, Middle East Crisis (Penguin Books, 1957). See also, Walter Z. Laquer, "The Appeal of Communism in the Middle East", The Middle East Journal, IX (Winter, 1955), pp. 20-25.
Alexandria, proved that he understood the mind of his
countrymen. (93) Moreover, the inclusion of Turkey was to be
readily welcomed by the Arab League. Iraq, an Arab League
member, was already tied to Turkey through the Sadabad Pact.

Egypt's Minister of National Guidance, Saleh Salim
defended the agreement by saying that an aggression against
Turkey would result in world war, in which event Egypt would
be greatly benefited by having Britain's support. (94) The
Al-Ahram commented in its editorial:

Twenty million Egyptians today lift up their heads,
proudly aware that their national dignity is now
fully restored. Never in the history of the world
has a whole nation been indebted to a handful of
men, as we are today to the leaders of our Revolution.

93. Huge crowds assembled in Sharia Karr el Aini and the
streets surrounding the parliament building, wildly
cheered Col Nasser and his colleagues as they drove away
after the ceremony.

Cairo itself was bright with coloured lights. Public
buildings, houses and shops on main streets and squares
were brightly illuminated. (Egyptian Gazette, 20 October
1954)

Large crowds of people, mostly students and workers
toured streets of Cairo, Alexandria and other big cities,
carrying banners and dancing to the accompaniment of
trumpets and flutes.

They shouted various slogans, including "Long Live
Nasser - Hero of evacuation", "Long Live Independent Egypt"
and "Long Live the RCC".

As a further sign of rejoicing military bands played
nationalist songs in public parks and squares. A torch
procession paraded in the main streets of Alexandria.
Individuals shook hands hugged and embraced each other
with a hearty 'Mubarak'. (The Egyptian Gazette, 21 October 1954)

With faith in CSod, confidence in the people and in themselves, determination and will-power the leaders of the Revolution achieved their greatest objective and freed their country from foreign occupation.

We are now free and our next generation will be born free. (95)

The English daily, The Egyptian Gazette, acclaimed the accord as a great landmark in the history of Egypt.

Editorially it said:

Few acts in modern political history can equal in importance and successful conclusion of the Anglo-Egyptian Treaty. ... It will stand out in the annals of this country as the cornerstone of the new Egypt.

It has confirmed the wisdom of the policy of the Egyptian negotiators, who were determined that the evacuation of the British troops should be settled before any other major problem was tackled. This Treaty, for the first time in many centuries, gives Egypt full sovereignty and independence.

The agreement establishes between Egypt and Great Britain a relationship in accordance with the ideas and standards of the 20th century. ... A new basis has been laid for growing cooperation and goodwill which can only be to the advantage of both parties. (96)

The Al-Akhbar asserted:

The Anglo-Egyptian agreement marked the end of a long period of national struggle which began when foreign troops first occupied this country.

It is hoped that now the UK, the US and the Western democracies will place greater confidence in this country; and cooperate with Egypt for the sake of world peace and international welfare. ... Egypt, now having restored her national rights, is in a better position to collaborate with them to safeguard peace. (97)

95. Al-Ahram, 19 and 20 October 1954.
96. The Egyptian Gazette, 20 October 1954.
The Akher Seä wrote a very suggestive editorial pointing out that now Egypt would have a chance to lead other Arab brothers to evolve a 'realistic Arab policy towards world problems'. The editor, Mohamed Hassamin Heikal (now editor of the Al-Ahram), wrote:

We must all realize that the Agreement is only a step forward towards the realization of our aspirations. ... The battle has not ended ... only a barrier has been removed in our fight against social evils.

We must appreciate that the Evacuation Agreement has added to the responsibilities of both the Government and the people. ... We must now mobilize our all powers and resources in order to speed up the execution of our productive plans.

Greater attention is needed to reorganize the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, now that the restrictions imposed by the 1936 Treaty have been removed. There is urgent need to draw up a new foreign policy based on safeguarding our interests before any other considerations.

A conference of Arab Prime Ministers should be held in Cairo to explain to them the broad lines of Egypt's foreign policy and urge them to draw up a realistic Arab policy towards world problems. (98)

The editor of the Al-Gumhouria wrote:

On July 26, 1952, when Faruk was exiled the evacuation of foreign troops from both Egypt and the Sudan became possible, because the imperialists lost their agents and supporters who were swept out of power by the advent of the Revolution.

We must now spare no effort to build a great future for both Egypt and the Sudan. (99)


It was nevertheless important that the leaders no less than the Egyptian press did not forget to mention that Egypt and Britain would be again friends, and they all hoped for a better and cooperative understanding between the two countries. The Al-Ahram's editorial was typically representative of the common Egyptian feeling towards Great Britain - their staunchest enemy until yesterday:

While we are celebrating today, the evacuation of British troops from Egypt, we must also celebrate the birth of genuine friendship between Egypt and the United Kingdom.

By regaining the friendship of Egypt, the United Kingdom has also regained the friendship of the Arab world. The United Kingdom is now in a position to develop her trade and economic relations with Egypt which deteriorated appreciably following the abrogation of the Anglo-Egyptian Treaty of 1936. (100)

The way in which Egypt looked at the great event was most aptly described by Nasser himself in almost every talk, speech and interview he granted after signing the documents on the 19th of October:

The ugly page of Anglo-Egyptian relations has been turned and another page is being written. British prestige and position in the Middle East has been strengthened. There is now no reason why Britain and Egypt should not work constructively together. (101)

100. Al-Ahram, 21 October 1954.

British experts to Egypt before the abrogation, totalled £40 million; this figure decreased in the last two years to less than £20 million.

J. GREAT BRITAIN'S RESPONSE AND REACTIONS TO THE SUEZ CANAL EVACUATION AGREEMENT

In Great Britain, Her Majesty's Government stoutly defended (102) its decision to withdraw from the Canal base by arguing that the Suez agreement with Egypt was not an end in itself, but a necessary step towards creating a basis for collective security in the Middle East. (103) Nutting who initiated the agreement told the House of Commons that:

This Agreement serves the interests of both Governments; and that it is the intention of Egyptian Government as of Her Majesty's Government to make it work harmoniously. It marks a new and hopeful beginning to the process of rebuilding confidence between our two countries. I have been at pains to emphasise in all my discussions with the Egyptian Prime Minister and his colleagues is a two-sided matter. It is my hope that this confidence will now gradually develop. If that happens, then I believe we shall have taken a step which will serve the cause of stability and peace throughout the Middle East. (104)

The British Government had more than one reason to feel satisfied about the Canal Zone Agreement. Firstly, there was the obviously compelling factor of inadvisability of maintaining a huge base at a tremendous cost of over £50 million a year, the utility of which was now regarded to have been considerably


103. In the United States it was hoped that one consequence of the agreement would be the gaining of a new recruit for what John Foster Dulles in his congratulatory message to Colonel Abdel Nasser tactfully referred to as "great stability and defensive strength in the area." United States in World Affairs 1954, p. 341.

104. H.C. Deb., vol. 531, col. 1610.
diminished as a result of new concepts of defence-strategy and equipment. (105)

Secondly, they seemed now fully convinced that the base, however important it might still be considered by the friends of Waterhouse, the leader of the right-wingers, could not be fruitfully maintained in the face of dissent and protest of the people of the area.

Thirdly, Her Majesty's Government was not a loser if the terms of the agreement were studied carefully. The agreement in fact had preserved Britain's every 'essential requirement'. According to Nutting's own statement, "the most important point' of the agreement was that it gave them a legal right to maintain a base in Egypt. They were to have there, for the duration of the Agreement, a reserve of war-like stores and also full facilities for the running of the workshop which they badly needed for the maintenance and repair of their military equipment in the area.

Furthermore, the contractors who were to look after these facilities and were to maintain the base in 'efficient' working order, were to be British nationals. (106) Nevertheless, they were granted certain immunities, including custom exemptions for most of the equipment and material they imported for the

105. Britain's Minister of War Antony Head explained that with Turkey in the NATO, and with the northern tire arrangements involving Turkey and Pakistan, the old reliance on the Suez base is replaced by a new concept of area defense. New York Times, 30 July 1954.

106. Section 6 of Annex. II.
carrying out of their responsibilities. (107) More than half of the labour to be employed by them could be Englishmen. (108)

These were admittedly 'considerable financial and political concessions for a sovereign Government to make'. (109)

Fourthly, the withdrawal was to be completed over a period of twenty months, (110) and if any untoward incident, such as one defined in Article 4 of the Agreement, happened during that period, there would still be a sufficient number of British soldiers in the base to face the situation. Thereafter, provision was made for their re-entry into the base. (111)

Fifthly, certain more important installations like the one at Tel-el-Kebir were to be maintained by British contractors and technicians. While certain installations which were to be handed over to the Egyptians were assured by the latter to be maintained efficiently at their own cost. Moreover, at two air stations the servicing British technicians were placed under the control of the Royal Air Force. Overflying, landing and servicing facilities for the RAF were also provided in the main Agreement.

107. Section 8 of Annex. II.
108. Ibid.
111. Articles 3 and 4.
Sixthly, Egypt had agreed to waive all its financial claims arising out of the abrogation of the 1936 Treaty in October which amounted to a considerable sum. (112)

Above all, their failure to include Iran in the reactivation provision was significantly compensated for by Egypt's agreement to a commitment that the parties would engage in "mutual consultation" in the event that any state covered by the Agreement came under a "threat of an armed attack". (113) Apparently it was the view of the British Government that an attack on Iran would constitute a threat towards Iraq and thus the consultation provision could be invoked.

Anthony Nutting was, therefore, right when he said in the House of Commons that "the agreement gives us all we require ... while at the same time we have eliminated the main source of friction between ourselves and the Arab world." (114) (Italics mine)

What more Britain could have at any rate hoped to gain from an agreement on the base which was going to be abandoned in any case in 1956. In that event Britain would have had no rights of re-entry or numerous other facilities which she had been able to secure under this agreement. Though the Egyptians were to have the base, it was to remain available for the general defence of the area.

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113. Article 4.
114. H.C. Deb., vol. 532, col. 222.
As a matter of fact, Britain's agreement to transfer her control of the base to the Egyptians demonstrated the possibility of harmonizing local and Western interests in a manner that would facilitate continued cooperation for common ends. In brief, it readjusted an outmoded relationship in a manner that brought substantial satisfaction to both sides - though Egypt's gain was almost entirely psychological.

Perhaps the most appreciative and perceptive comment on this historic agreement between Egypt and Great Britain was offered by their brief joint-communique itself, which they issued after signing the 'great document':

The Prime Minister of the Republic of Egypt and his delegation and Mr. Nutting, Minister of State at the Foreign Office, the British Ambassador and Major-General Benson, have signed today in Cairo an agreement in the Suez Canal base area designed to establish Anglo-Egyptian relations on a new basis of cooperation.

The delegations have laboured intensively to achieve a clear, comprehensive agreement which constitutes a constructive measure in the cause of peace.

They now express, on behalf of their Governments, their sincere desire to work closely and actively together in fulfilling the agreement, and so to promote a new spirit and friendship between their peoples. (115)

K. EGYPT BECOMES A FREE NATION

Now that the Republic of Egypt had achieved relatively complete freedom of choice and actions at the international plain, Nasser and his associates gave preference to build up

115. Al-Ahram, 20 October 1954; Mideast Mirror, 23 October 1954.
Egypt's image as the leading nation in the area by improving her national economy and armed strength, rather than get lost into the intricacies of the cold-war. It is true that Egypt is too strategically located ever to escape the mesh of power-politics. And for that reason alone, Egypt's problem had not been so much the question of whether or not to be involved, but, in fact, with whom and for what purpose? Before the signing of the Agreement in October, they did not have the option even about the party to associate or to be more appropriate, to tie down themselves with. Now at least, the new leaders of Egypt had, for the first time after many centuries, the freedom to make their own decisions and exercise preferences.

The task of making the choice was however easy as it was limited to the Western bloc or the Communists. The revolutionary regime could not align itself with either without losing popularity and even power, depending on the extent of popular reaction to their decision.

For the fulfilment of the 'social revolution' meant eradication of poverty by means of increasing production and employment to the jobless. This depended on improved means of irrigation, technical education and rapid industrialization. The necessary capital, know-how, and equipment could come only from the Western sources. And, these Western sources were quite willing to oblige Egypt but on condition of closer military cooperation. (116) Egypt had had too long and too bitter an

116. President Eisenhower had written to General Nasser as
association with the West to welcome it once again, though in a different form, under different names. They knew that they were already being criticised by the extremists, notably the 'Brothers' for they had conceded the British the right of re-entering into the base. They saw the 'agreement' with so much of disfavour that one of their members tried to sabotage it by aiming at Nasser's life. (117) Moreover, ever since they had dislodged the old politicians from power, they had been reminding the people of the loss of Palestine and the humiliations they suffered in their first encounter with Israel, thus inculcating a sense of revenge against her and all others whom they held responsible for her creation in their midst and were now known to be her patrons and protectors. These were incidentally the same people who were in a position to help the Egyptians in the realization of their various plans and projects, including the construction of the Aswan High Dam. No Egyptian would have appreciated tying of their country with those same powers whose stand on Israel problem differed so markedly from their own.

Any identification with the other quarter, without having built up necessary environment and mental preparedness

116. (contd. from back page)

long as 15 July 1953 that the US was ready to provide Egypt with economic and military assistance once a Suez agreement was reached. Again on 2 October it was announced that Washington was now ready to begin implementing these pledges. Great Britain had already lifted its ban on the sale of arms to Egypt which had been imposed in 1951 following the abrogation of the 1936 Treaty by the Wafd Government. See, United States in World Affairs 1954, pp. 341-42.

117. Al-Ahram, 27 October 1954; The Egyptian Gazette, 27 and 28 October 1954.
to face facts realistically, would have been more dangerous. Going to Moscow for help at that stage would have been too drastic a step for any Government with a predominantly religious community as its body of citizens. Moreover, the Soviet Union was still not actively interested to enter into the Arab areas and thus bring the cold war so near to her own door step. Their main interest was in keeping the area neutral as far as possible. Moreover, the Revolutionary Command Council was not unaware that they were being severely criticised in the Soviet press for concluding the Canal Zone Agreement. The Izvestia had bitterly reproached the Egyptian leaders for having "jumped on the American bandwagon for their shortsightedness and weakness". (118)

The Budapest Radio had been openly accusing these leaders of independent Egypt of high treason and calling upon the Egyptians to revolt against them. (119) Radio Moscow had criticized the Suez Agreement as "the first step towards the inclusion of Egypt in the Western bloc." (120) The Free Officers, who now constituted the main body of the Government were resentful of the Soviet propaganda supporting the anti-Government elements - the Brotherhood against the Junta, Neguib against Nasser, the Wafd against the Liberation Rally. (121)

119. Ibid.
121. Ibid.
Thus it was apparently most difficult for the Egyptians and to identify themselves with either of the two super powers. Nevertheless, the very fact of geography that made it impossible in the past to avoid entanglement with a Great Power, now suggested remaining aloof or non-aligned. A course of determined neutrality was most suitable for Egypt under the circumstances of Great-Power rivalries and contest for supremacy.

Egypt was afraid of Communism and had taken serious repressive measures against local communists, but fear of communism was not the only or even the most important issue in Egyptian politics. Egypt has no common frontiers with the Soviet Union, as has Turkey, nor, to quote Albert Hourani's words, "has her her history conditioned her to think of her greatest danger as coming from that direction." (122) Therefore, they viewed the problem of East-West relations and the necessities of area defence in a radically different light from the British and the Americans.

The overtures and the pledges made by the British and the American leaders, referred to above, therefore fell short of evoking a favourable response. Egypt, if correctly interpreted, was quite eager and willing to receive Western aid in arms and money, (123) but disinclined to undertake the pledges required by the Mutual Security Legislation or to take any other action that could seem to commit them to the Western cause.

Egypt's views on the question of defence cooperation were set forth clearly by Nasser himself when he said:

After the Suez settlement there is nothing standing in the way of our good relations with the West, but this harmony, hammering for pacts will only keep alive the old suspicions in the minds of the people, and the Communists know well how to exploit these suspicions. (124)

This statement of the 'most important man of Egypt' suggested to the Western Powers to keep patience and meanwhile build up confidence in the people of the area. A 'Background Paper' published by the Council of Revolution further affirmed the Premier's views on the subject:

It is only by a period of complete independence during which mutual trust is built up between Egypt and the Western Powers that Egypt will be able to look without suspicion on any closer ties between this country and other powers. Cooperation based on trust and friendship, even though it is not specified by any written agreement, is better than a treaty that is regarded suspiciously by average Egyptian. (125)

This was a true expression of the Arab situation the merits of which were, however, not properly assessed by the policy-makers in London and Washington. They could not see the point that in shying away from the notion of formal defence arrangements with the West, the Egyptian leaders were 'ananimated' by a number of practical and ideological considerations.


They were not immune to the suspicion that 'the Western Powers in pressing for defence cooperation were trying to secure a foothold in the country for their own purposes'.

Moreover, the danger of an outside aggression did not seem to them so very great. If, in their view, there was a threat to their security, it was not from the USSR but from Israel. It was now the central issue to which the two Great Powers - Great Britain and the United States - did not pay the attention it deserved. All future ups and downs in their relations with Egypt and other Arab countries were immediately and directly related to this central issue of Egyptian and Arab Politics vis-a-vis the Great Powers.