ABSTRACT

Egypt's long and arduous struggle to emancipate herself from the yoke of British imperialism can be divided in four stages. The first phase of her nationalism began with the popular uprising of Colonel Ahmed Orabi against the interference of foreign powers in Egypt's domestic matters. The British forcibly suppressed his nationalist campaign and occupied Egypt in 1882.

The First World War and the subsequent promises of the then world leadership assuring self determination and freedom for all non-self governing dominions added impetus to their upsurge and consequently, compelled Great Britain to grant partial autonomy to Egypt to manage her municipal affairs in February 1922. Matters relating to foreign policy, defence, the minorities and the Sudan were still the sole concern of His Majesty's Government. The Egyptians, though bitter about the reserved points, nevertheless, accepted it as a step towards the attainment of full independence.

The Second Phase of Egypt's relations with Britain began with the conclusion of the 1936 Treaty between them. Nahas Pasha the then Prime Minister of the Wafdist Government, accepted and signed the instrument under great pressure of mounting international tension. With the intensifying bitterness and growing hostility between the Allied on the one hand and the Axis
Powers on the other, the danger of a major conflagration had, by then, become almost certain, and, it was a foregone conclusion that in such an eventuality, Egypt was not destined to remain aloof or unaffected. Being a British-occupied territory, she had already become the natural target of the Axis assault. For the same reason she was also denied the freedom to choose sides.

The third important phase of Egypt's nationalist struggle began with the end of the World War II. In the new scheme of things, the United States and the Soviet Union emerged as the strongest and, therefore, the most dominant Powers. Economic prosperity and military strength of Great Britain had been largely reduced by the stresses and strains of the war. The emergence of nationalist campaigns throughout Asia and Africa, inspired by the ideals and objectives of the United Nations, further compelled the British to redefine their relations with the people hitherto under her dominance or subjugation.

The advent of the Labour Party in the United Kingdom held out a hope and a promise to leave Egypt to the sole charge of the Egyptians. Prime Minister Attlee boldly recognized their claim and the need to revise the 1936 treaty, as the circumstances under which it had been concluded had substantially changed. Egypt reciprocated the British gestures of goodwill by adopting moderate and accommodating attitude towards Britain's vital
interests in their country. The two countries had nearly reached an agreement to replace the treaty by a new Pact of friendship and cooperation - the Sirké-Bevin Agreement, but for the question of the Sudan. Due to pressures of domestic politics, Attlee's government backed-out of its pledges regarding the unity of the Nile valley under the Egyptian Crown.

The fate of Egypt's appeal to the Security Council against Britain's occupation of another member's territory without the latter's consent, however, confirmed their suspicion that the United Nations, would never act against the interests of a major Power.

A return to direct negotiations, held between June 1950 and October 1951, accomplished little, except that a plethora of notes and conversations changed hands but yielded nothing essential. Their basic contentions remained irreconciled. Egypt was now more anxious and determined to have her rights, while Britain continued to press her to join a Western-sponsored military arrangement as a pre-condition for a settlement which meant their continued presence in a new form.

Having tried negotiations, international appeal and the hope of a new balance of power, the Egyptians took the courageous step to denounce the 1936 Treaty. After all, how long could a suffering people have patience to continue prolonged
abortive negotiations. Moreover, chances of a Conservative victory at the polls in the U.K., were also an important consideration in taking such an action. The Conservatives could not be expected to concede to the Egyptian demands.

But the denunciation of the treaty did not end Egypt's frustrations or its problems in relation to the West. It is one thing to do away with a piece of paper and quite another to unseat a military occupation. Proclaiming Faruk "King of Egypt and the Sudan" did not really unite the Nile Valley. Britain's reaction was bitter and resentful, she considered Egypt's action illegal and hence ineffective and inconsequential as regards her position under the said Treaty. At Ismailia, Great Britain used force and killed many Egyptian police-man as a preventive measure. The incident led to the sack of Cairo on January 26, 1952.

This chaotic and futile situation paved the way for the new "purification" regime of July 23, 1952. The old party leaders and palace-clique had failed to deal with the national crisis. Nothing was left but to dismiss them and make a fresh start. The process began with the forced abdication of the king on July 26, 1952.

The revolutionary regime soon discovered that the stability and popularity of the new order as well as the implementation of their programme of reform and development were dependent
or an early settlement of their outstanding issues with the British. The question of the Suez Canal evacuation and the Sudan were therefore, taken immediately by the new elite.

After considerable debate and hard bargaining, the Revolutionary Council however, succeeded in resolving their disputes with Great Britain. They showed remarkable straightforwardness, and foresight based on realism and guided by their determination to secure a peaceful settlement. On the question of the Sudan, they recognised the principle of self-determination and finally conceded to the Sudanese the right to their own independent national existence.

An agreement on the evacuation of Suez Canal took longer and more tenuous course of negotiations. The delay was mainly caused by a split in the council of the Revolution on the question of its leadership and direction. Nasser’s victory was seen in Great Britain as a guarantee against political instability and disorder. It also represented a more sober, though determined, approach towards the Anglo-Egyptian controversy. He displayed great diplomatic astuteness by conceding to the British insistence on the reactivation of the base in the event of an attack on the Arab states or Turkey. And thus, at longlast, the two countries reached an agreement on the evacuation of the British troops from the Suez Canal zone on July 27, 1954.
The agreement put an end to the 72 years of Britain's occupation of Egypt. The Egyptians celebrated the conclusion of the agreement as the most glorious event in their history. On this day they became a truly independent nation, capable of shaping their own destiny, without any limitation on her sovereign status.

After the two most important issues of controversy with Great Britain were thus amicably settled, Egypt was quite willing to inculcate better understanding, rather cordial relations with the West. Nasser and his colleagues of the revolutionary council, ruling with widespread popular support but without the hampering pressure of parties and Parliaments, were sincerely determined to transform their country into a really modern and prosperous nation. They expected the Western countries to help them in the realization of this objective. Denied this assistance, they naturally felt inclined towards the other quarter. Great Britain's sponsorship of the Baghdad Pact was considered in Egypt an attempt to keep the Arabs weak and divided. From then onwards, Egypt led the forces of opposition in the Arab world to the western defence schemes and military alliances and became one of the major champions of the policy of neutralism and non-alignment both in Asia and Africa.

In brief, the history of Egypt's relations with Great Britain is a record of a constant conflict between the former's demand for unconditional independence and the latter's concern
for its 'historic' position. To the Egyptians nothing was more important and urgent than the attainment of complete freedom. To realise this objective they willingly sacrificed, rather postponed, their country's socio-economic reform and regeneration. With the passage of time their nationalist struggle became increasingly vigorous and assertive as was occasionally manifested into acts of sabotage and violence. The continued presence of foreign troops inside Egypt, against the will of her people was a constant irritation and a reminder of the incompleteness of their sovereignty, and a reflection on their national dignity. Unfortunately the western scholars, by and large, have tried to complicate the story in order to divert attention from its simple justice. They have purposely attributed Egypt's unrest to her poor economic conditions, and to a low standard of living, while Egypt's contention was that her people hate Britain's occupation and could rest until it was ended. This has been the primary mate of every Government in Egypt. The position of parties and the popularity of their leaders was determined by their ability to deal with the British effectively. Their tenure of governments also depended mostly on their achievements at the popular front. Every new government was finally caught between the dilemma of actual British possession and the pressure of the country for evacuation. Egypt's national development has suffered because the main tempo of her political life has centered around her struggle with the British. It was evident that until the burning issue of her relations with Britain was not satisfactorily solved, Egypt could not hope to have a really stable government so as put international problems of the country in its proper perspective.