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THE STATE OF THE UNION

Observations on the Beginnings of the United Arab Republic

A Letter from Charles F. Gallagher

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PHILLIPS TALBOT
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

Cairo was baked in a blistering heat and covered with dust for the return of President Gamal Abdel Nasser from his eighteen-day trip to the Soviet Union. From early morning van loads of delta fellahin swarmed into the festively-arrayed capital and lined the avenues leading from Liberation Square through the handsome modern suburbs of Heliopolis, which include the President's own modest, two-storied, green-shuttered villa, to the military airport at Al Mazah, where the official welcome-home was held.

All along the highway the attractive but monotonously identical bunting was interspersed with slogans and exhortations in Arabic, hung in streamers across the road. My seat-companion in one of the Volkswagen minibuses being used to transport the journalists invited to the ceremonies turned out to be, after inquiries, Chinese and not Japanese; he was the correspondent of the New China News Agency. After he had unsuccessfully engaged the driver to learn the meaning of some of the signs overhead I ventured a few translations for him, which he assiduously wrote down in English and Chinese, while he noted on the side that it was a "folk celebration." I thought momentarily of the complications that might ensue if I mistranslated a bit, but honesty prevailed. And, in any case, I reflected, as he jotted down "Peace be with you, man of the people," the "salam alaikum" of the Arabic, the peace of God, would not really have the same meaning when it appeared in Peking newspapers. Nevertheless, we did represent for a few moments, as do the juxtaposition on Cairo news kiosks of Time and New Times, Mademoiselle and Women of China, part of the peaceful coexistence which the President's visit to Moscow was officially intended to encourage.

For the return of the President, Cairo had turned out an impressive greeting which was as spontaneous as it was organized. It was a Friday afternoon, everyone was off work, and no one objected to enjoying a colorful parade. It had what Egyptians themselves described to me as typical Egyptian reserve, however. The crowds were on the whole from three- to five-deep along most of the route, but there were empty patches. The applause was certainly more than polite; it was warm and it occasionally became vociferous, although a good deal of it seemed directed as much to us in the press cars, or anyone in the cortege who happened to be reflecting in the glory. There was perhaps even a certain pride in the adultness of attitude; for Egyptians were quick to point out that they could never give anyone, even Abdel Nasser, the kind of frenetic, almost obsessive reception which the Egyptian President got on his visit to Damascus in February at the time of union with Syria.

Much of the really excited behavior came from some of the official personages invited to sit on gilded chairs under a great awning at the airport and to eat sweet pastries to the accompaniment of iced lemonade while waiting the presidential arrival. It was somewhat surprising to hear men, standing on chairs reserved for government officials, give way to their enthusiasm as the President moved along the official and diplomatic waiting line to shake hands, by crying out, in the kind of cry that you would very much doubt ever got cried unless you had been there yourself, "Aish Gamal, rasul al hurriyah" (Long live Gamal, apostle of freedom!), and "Ya Gamal, habib ash sha'b" (O Gamal, friend of the people!). And not the least interesting feature of the attendance was the complete turnout of foreign diplomats. Once before, on Nasser's return from the Brioni conference with Nehru and Tito in July, 1956, the Western ambassadors had failed to put in an appearance, theoretically by oversight. Positive neutrality has come a long way since then.

Internally, of course, every important government official was on hand, and as functionaries and diplomats chatted amiably in small clusters before the touch-down of the special Russian plane with its MIG escort, one of them stood out because of the dignified solitude in which he sat in the first row, vacant seats on either side. It was Afif al Bizri, the ex-Commander in Chief of the Syrian Army and one of the key promoters of the Syro-Egyptian union, now living in Cairo. His

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severe dark-blue double-breasted suit and his quiet demeanor seemed to have little to do with his past military role. Was it a coincidence that no one happened to turn up beside him and sit, or was he really too warm to handle at the moment? In the answer to that question lies much of the story behind the formation of the United Arab Republic.

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It has been rightly said of the Arabs that their principal goal, from which they have little deviated in the past half century despite so many unfavorable factors, internal and foreign, has been to become the citizens of a modern, united, and respected Arab state. Translated simply, the goals break down into independence, unity, and progress.

There has never been any fixed, irrevocable order to these three primary aims, but their precedence in the order listed above has been understood by most Arab leaders; without freedom from foreign control there could be no unity, and without unity on a regional scale they feel, as do many thinking leaders nowadays, that technical progress is impossible in an increasingly competitive world. Now that independence has been achieved throughout the Arab world, during the period ranging from the early 1920's to the mid-1950's, with the major exception of Algeria, and the minor exceptions of the assorted protectorates and treaty-dominated sheikhdoms on the fringe of the Arabian peninsula, it is inevitable that the longings for the second goal, unity, are tending to become the new point of fixation.

Western understanding of the Arabs' hunger for unity is often obscured by a tendency to see the various Arab countries as counterparts of European states -- highly developed state-organisms having existed as political, social, and intellectual units for in many cases four to five centuries or more. This view is compounded by the fact that most Westerners in their lifetime, since World War I, have grown accustomed to thinking of the existing Arab national divisions, from Iraq to Morocco, as areas on the world map which have always been there in approximately the present form, and as standing for quite separate individualistic entities. But a country like Iraq, for example, had no conscious, cohesive existence of any kind before 1918. And while there are formidable differences of race, culture, and even language within the Arab world, and although there are large sub-area groupings, such as the Arab Middle East and Arab North Africa, which are significantly disparate, the key is still unity rather than diversity. The net result of the tendency to apply European norms to the culture of another area is to distort reality.

Apart from certain specific nationalisms which have long had, and still have, strong permanent roots among their peoples, notably in the case of Lebanon, Egypt, and Morocco, it is not rash to say that most Arabs have little patriotic feeling for their own country as opposed to their generalized pan-Arab sentiments. This is a phenomenon to be observed from Algeria to Jordan, but perhaps nowhere is it more strong than in the states of the Levant: Jordan, Iraq, Palestine, and, especially in the "beating heart" of Arabism, Syria.

Historically and geographically Syria is a superb example of the artificiality of the postwar Arab states and, partly out of reaction to that condition, of the psychologically pressing need for integration into a larger, more rational, and more secure body. Geographically divided into a narrow

coastal plain bordered by mountains with many affinities to Lebanon, an interior steppe-desert strung with a series of oases, and a semifertile agricultural area in the northeast -- the Jazirah, whose economic and cultural ties lie with Iraq to the east rather than with Damascus -- Syria has no raison d'être in its present shape. The considerations of great-power politics determined its frontiers in 1920, when, as a reluctant and late return for favors to the Allied cause, the Mosul oil fields went to Iraq as a British mandate, and the Tripoli area was detached and included in a Greater Lebanon. In the same way Jordan and Iraq were meaningless creations of thrones in areas that had been bestowed upon peoples who suddenly found themselves with a hard-to-understand but obligatory allegiance to the new nation-state.

To an Arab this division was doubly irksome. For not only is the Arab historical consciousness without any precise notion of frontiers (a result of early conditioning by bedouinism, by the concept of the universal caliphal state, and by a constant interflow of ideas and personalities between such distant points as Baghdad and Cordova from the 8th century on), but also the Islamic concept of the fundamental unity of the House of Islam has coexisted, admittedly more in dream than in reality, but coexisted and persisted, intertwined with the pan-Arab dream. Skeptical historians often take Arab thought to task for its obsessive insistence upon the halcyon qualities of the "Golden Age" of unity before the final breakdown of the Caliphate in the 13th century. There have certainly been progressive deformations of the legend as it passed from century to century, but the very fact that it survived to take new roots in the so-called Arab Renaissance of the 19th century, is one indication of its strength.

The story of the first stirrings and the subsequent development of the pan-Arabist movement is too complex to trace in detail here, but it should be stressed that Western influence was twofold and contradictory. For at the same time the West, through the introduction of its thought and technique after the Napoleonic invasion of Egypt, held up the light along the way to progress, it imposed its political control -- imperialist in the sense of controlling the strings of power in the Arab East, colonialist in the sense of true usurpation of the land by imported colonists in the Arab West -- as the negation of the same hopes it had raised.

In looking at the events leading up to the first tangible move toward Arab unity, the formation in February of the United Arab Republic, something of this feeling comes out in the account which the unifiers themselves render. There is much in the narration which reveals nothing of the real motivating forces toward the union, as we shall see later, but it is impossible to say that it does not agree with the facts. It may distort what many Westerners see as the facts, but it undeniably represents what a great many Arabs feel in all sincerity and passion -- for it is difficult to forget filmed scenes of the outbursts of joy and relief in Damascus at the time of union -- to be the imperatives of unity.

The official account of the "Birth of the United Arab Republic" published by the Directorate General of Information of the Region of Syria in the United Arab Republic, begins thus:

"The idea of unity between Egypt and Syria and of pan-Arab unity is not new. Prior to interference by Imperialism, all Arabs belonged to one

state. Then came oppressive and covetous Imperialism, dismembered the Arab Homeland and divided the Arab countries into a number of states, so as to facilitate the imposition of Imperialistic domination over the Arabs and the exploitation of the wealth and resources of Arab lands.

"On February 1, 1958 Presidents Shukri al Kuwatly and Gamal Abdul Nasser proclaimed the complete unity of Egypt and Syria and the birth of the United Arab Republic. This proclamation was preceded by talks between Egyptian and Syrian responsible leaders and by preliminary moves aimed at the realization of the unity of the two countries, notably by the resolution taken by the Syrian Chamber of Deputies on July 6, 1956, which said:

'The Syrian Chamber of Deputies, in view of provisions of Article 1 (para. 3) of the Syrian Constitution, which states that the Syrian people is part of the Arab Nation, supports the decision of the Government announced by the President of the Council of Ministers in the present meeting of the Chamber, and expresses the hope that the Government would successfully proceed along this sacred path (of unity) and would soon report to us that result which Arabs in all their countries are awaiting.'

"The Decision of the Council of Ministers to which the Chamber's resolution referred had called for the 'initiation of negotiations with the sister country of Egypt with the aim of realizing between the two countries a federal union, which would be open for all the liberated Arab countries.'

"A speedy response came from Egypt when President Gamal Abdel Nasser, commenting on the Resolution of the Syrian Chamber of Deputies, said:

'This evening I received with great pleasure the news of the Resolution adopted by the Syrian Chamber of Deputies which calls for the establishment of a union between Syria and Egypt. The realization of this union would be the realization of a wish to which the heart of every Arab, who believes in Arab Nationalism and works for it, aspires.'

"After this, official negotiations were commenced between the two countries and several resolutions were taken by the Syrian Chamber of Deputies and by the Egyptian National Assembly calling upon responsible leaders of both countries to realize the unity of the two countries as soon as possible. A number of official declarations and statements was issued by responsible Syrians and Egyptians supporting unity and the talks undertaken to achieve it.

"Early in January, 1958, these talks achieved successful results and the Syrian Council of Ministers sent Foreign Minister Salah Al Deen Al Bitar to Cairo to complete the unity negotiations. There was full agreement between the two sides and it was decided that there should be full unity, instead of a federal union, between the two countries. The United Arab Republic was thus proclaimed on February 1, 1958, and the first foundation was laid for the achievement of an all-embracing Arab unity."

Although this official version is remarkable for glossing over some of the most crucial points in the negotiations, one can still note the

difference between the original call of the Council of Ministers for a "federal union" and the Egyptian response which spoke of "union." And there is indeed much to be read into the cryptic phrase, "And it was decided that there should be full unity, instead of a federal union."

In fact the reality behind the scenes during the several months which preceded the serious talks on unity was quite different. It is necessary, for one thing, to keep in mind the chronological table of events: the Suez Crisis (November 1956); the attempted coup d'état in Jordan resulting in the strengthening of the position of King Hussein and the adoption of a pro-American policy by his government (April 1957); the manufactured foreign plots against Syria in the summer of last year, the agreement with the Soviet Union (October 1957), and the war scare between Turkey and Syria at the end of that month.

All these events had serious repercussions inside Syria, in terms of increasing the country's already highly active xenophobia. "Encirclement" by "hostile" states was completed: Syria was surrounded by an Iraq in the Baghdad Pact, a Western-oriented Jordan which had called for the withdrawal of Syrian troops from its territory; the enemy, Israel; a Lebanon which had accepted the Eisenhower Doctrine, and an ancient and powerful foe on the north, Turkey. Some Syrian leaders continued to cling to the belief that Egypt was the only source of support against the growingly dangerous situation in which their country found itself. Others, more informed by the real knowledge of what had happened to Egyptian forces at Suez, began to think that only Soviet friendship could guarantee Syria's future. The negotiations undertaken with the USSR and the acceptance of Egyptian forces which landed in Lattakia in the late summer, reflected the developing patterns of these schools of thought.

The principal forces contending in Syria were complicated by the presence of the rather conservative People's Party, which had long favored union with Iraq in the Fertile Crescent scheme. But power was actually held by the Baathist coalition, made up of the Baath-Socialists (left-wing nationalists), in alliance with the Nationalist Party, and supported by most of the younger officers of the army who were in majority Baathists. Finally, a working alliance had been instituted with the Communists, although an uneasy one, for the Baathists recognized they were treading dangerous ground in the application of their principle of "occupying Communist positions to prevent the Communists themselves from using them." Relations became more strained during the summer of 1957 as Soviet influence grew within Syria and the Communists began to flex their muscles.

After the signing of the Syro-Soviet technical and financial accord in October, the Baath became really frightened and, while maintaining the official alliance on the surface, it began to take action against the Communists. The first signs were the removal from the army of some pro-Communists lower echelon officers. Politically the Baath decided to head straight for union with Egypt, but a federal union and no more. This was explained publicly as a move to counter the People's Party, who were considered tainted with "Iraqi Imperialism," but it was as much designed to counter the Communist threat.

At this time it occurred to the People's Party that, by the usual means of raising the opponent's offer, it had been presented with a chance to pull the rug out from under the Baath, the Communists, and the army, all at

once -- by demanding, instead of the federal union proposed by Akram Hourani, head of the Baath, a total union. Thus it was in November 1957, when Anwar as Sadat came to Damascus at the head of an Egyptian parliamentary delegation to hold a joint session with the Syrian Chamber, that the People's Party played its card.

When conversations began at the turn of the year between General Bizri and President Nasser, the Baath, with its back to the wall and knowing that total union would compromise its existence as a vital, revolutionary force in the new merged state, prolonged the conversations, with the tacit support of the Communists. Finally, toward the end of January, Nasser tired of the indecision of the Syrian politicians and called Bizri to Cairo to give him what was tantamount to an ultimatum: immediate and total union or nothing, and the alternative would leave Syria adrift in its turbulent waters. Bizri and the Baath, for the General was little more than the creature of the party, were forced to accept. The entire cabinet was rounded up in Damascus and hustled off to Cairo for what some members thought were to be more negotiations. Instead they found everything arranged for their signature. Thus was full agreement reached, and on February 1, 1958, was proclaimed to the world the decision to establish the United Arab Republic.

The decision then had to be consecrated by a plebiscite in which the voters of the republics were called upon to decide for or against the union, and to pronounce on the candidacy of Gamal Abdel Nasser for the post of President of the Republic. The results of the plebiscite in Syria speak for themselves:

	Vote on Union	Vote on President
Number of Electors Registered	1,431,157	1,431,157
Number Participating	1,313,070	1,313,069
Valid Votes	1,312,998	1,312,995
Votes in Favor	1,312,859	1,312,808
Votes Against	139	178

Although there is no possible way of checking the accuracy of the figures, a few comments should be made about the elections. They were by no means what would be considered free elections in a democratic country. For the first time in Syrian history, in order to get as many people as possible to the polls, voting without an identity card was permitted. Voters were, in the words of the official statement "invited" to vote; they were visited by block leaders, party activists, and the army, and assisted in every way to come to the ballot boxes. The ballots were marked in public and any attempt to conceal what the elector was crossing out was ipso facto regarded as a sign of deviation which led to more careful scrutiny.

One Syrian acquaintance told me what befell him when, through a kind of fantasy -- he said he was not particularly opposed to the union -- he voted "no." "But you have made a mistake," said the polling officer incredulously, and perhaps the incredulity was genuine. "No" was the firm answer, "I am voting against the union." The ballot was put into the box (he is not sure how it was finally counted), but on leaving the booth he was arrested and held

for three days near Damascus, at Mezze, before it was decided that he had no "dangerous political attachments." With this sort of happening there would hardly be any need to falsify returns. Even so, impartial witnesses from the individualist, businessmen's city of Aleppo state that the abstention there ran as high as 30 per cent.

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It is not easy to evaluate the state of opinion in a country which has just gone through a major grafting operation, nor to make categorical judgments on the basis of observation during two-months of conversations with selected figures in the political and economic world. But there are some features of the popular climate which may be immediately recognizable to the visitor. And in Syria, two months after the union, the outstanding one still seemed to be relief. As a country which had lived through a decade of internal upheaval and constant revolutionary turmoil, plus suffering an almost paranoiac fear of encirclement by unfriendly neighbors, Syria had literally rushed into the arms of Abdel Nasser -- the father-figure who has so often appeared on the political scene in times of acute anxiety -- in order to be saved from herself. The mood prevails and the honeymoon, at least on a popular level, has gone on blossoming all through the long spring.

The idealized vision of President Nasser suffices for the common man, but for the groups and interests that were struggling for power in Syria before union there are other reasons for sharing in the relief for the moment. To many army officers, particularly the staid professional military at the top, the constant interference of the military in politics, and, worse, of politics in the military establishment, had become intolerable. Some of them were genuinely disturbed at the effect it was having on the efficiency of their forces; others who had from time to time taken part in the battles between juntas had finally lost their taste for the affair; and still others were disquieted by the tendency of younger, often procommunist officers to move forward and displace the established hierarchy. To such men the condition laid down by President Nasser that the military must stand aside from politics and that a national union party on the Egyptian model should be formed, came as an assuagement.

The position of the political parties was more complex. They were by no means enchanted to receive the order to disband themselves, and in fact recent reports indicate that their feuds are going on quite as violently under the surface as before, to the irritation of high Egyptian officials. But they almost all found consolation in the fact that their bitterest rivals were as badly or worse off than they, and it is certain that many political leaders considered the disbandment only temporary. One of them told me in the most guarded way that he thought "at least two" parties necessary, and that he was convinced they would return within a year or two. The organization of the Baath, for example, continues to function in all the neighboring countries and it is transferring its publishing activities to Beirut. But for the Baath the fear of a Communist take-over of Syria is removed, and that would have been infinitely worse than union and dismantlement. The People's Party had the satisfaction of knowing that it was their scheme for total union which had undermined the Baath and brought to an end what it considered a leftist dictatorship heading for satellitism. Possibly only the Communist Party (which alone of the groups refused to commit suicide and whose leader, Khaled Bagdash,

went off into oblivion behind the iron curtain) considered the result totally unsatisfactory. Its reaction has been moderate so far, however, with no further instructions to that section of the press which the Communists covertly support to do anything more than begin to suggest very softly that there is "no real democratic freedom" in the United Arab Republic. Few observers think this attitude can continue long; sooner or later the repressive measures which the Nasser government has taken against the party in both Egypt and Syria are bound to cause a more violent reaction, and the Communist Party will be certain to be on the lookout to take advantage of the first signs of popular Syrian discontent and channel it to its own uses.

To individual leaders of the Syrian state the harsh realities of union have come as something of a blow. Rivalry with the Great Man is a perilous posture for them; no co-billing is allowed with the star, except on his own terms. (In Syria the joint photographs of President Nasser and ex-Syrian President Kuwatly are always larger of the former and smaller of the latter; in Egypt, out of the courtesy of hospitality, perhaps, they are the same size.) President Kuwatly's last great ambition was reported to have been to bow out of the political picture by forging the first permanent bond of Arab unity. He was indeed helpful in the act, but he has also rapidly retired from the public eye. On a slightly lower level, many Syrian state functionaries are torn between the loss of pride involved in the clear second-place of Syria in the union, and sometimes mitigating factors of compensation: diplomats assimilated to the Egyptian foreign service, for example, will receive the new, higher Egyptian emoluments. The take-over of posts by Egyptians on all levels has been quite thorough, and even where an Egyptian is not in charge, there is often the feeling that there is one in the office who is keeping an eye on things. It is here that the first frictions have undeniably developed, but it is far too early to judge what repercussions they may have upon the whole concept of unity in the future.

The most interesting case is that of General Bizri, the lonesome figure of the Cairo reception. He had considered himself an indispensable element in the unity moves, and many indications are that he hoped to profit from the union by enhancing his own position within the Syrian province, to become a kind of proconsul of the north. The results were far from his expectations. Called upon, in the shake-up of the armed forces which took place just after the union, to get rid of a dozen or so younger Communist officers who were his proteges -- Bizri himself was an ex-Communist who still has strong sympathies with the party -- he had the temerity to refuse. He was called to Cairo, the officers were transferred, and he was placed in a kind of mild house arrest which was later transformed into forced residence in Cairo. A while later a spare plum, in the form of membership in an economic planning council, was tossed his way.

In the same way Khaled al Azm, the former Minister of State who negotiated the Syro-Soviet agreement last year, has gone into discreet oblivion. There remains as a popular figure in Syria only the new Minister of the Interior, Abdel Hamid Serraj. This bright and dynamic ex-chief of the G-2 Section of the Army, a bare thirty-three, became something of a public figure this February when he exposed the Saudi plot to assassinate President Nasser and prevent the formation of the union. According to the best-informed sources, it was Serraj himself who suggested, or at least encouraged the plot, in order to lead the Saudi government into a trap. The decoy was an ex-Syrian deputy, Aziz 'Ubad,

who wanted to prove his loyalty to the new regime, and who maneuvered through As'ad Ibrahim, the Syrian father of one of the four legal wives of King Saud. The monarch, rushing in unadvised where his more experienced counsellors would have hesitated to tread, offered twenty million pounds for the successful completion of the plot, of which one million nine hundred thousand was actually paid to Serraj. With the exposure of the conspiracy by the triumphant Serraj came his greatest moment of glory, but it is perhaps significant that he has, either through his own prudence, or by the President's careful planning, been given no further chances for such spectacular demonstrations.

Business circles in Syria remain reasonably optimistic; they were comforted for one thing by the decision not to unify the economies of the two regions in the immediate future. And with the prospects of the Egyptian market open to them, many Aleppo entrepreneurs are coming to Cairo these days full of expansion plans until they learn, as one Egyptian said, "that it takes a year to put through the deal they thought they could make in one week." Nevertheless the combination of Syrian aggressive enterprise and Egyptian labor might make a profitable team. In many respects the free economy of Syria, with its higher standard of living, its business sense, and its already established use of entrepreneurship for agricultural development, together with its tightly-knit trading colonies in many parts of the world, could be a great help to Egypt. To counterbalance this, however, there is the Syrian fear of the burden of the dead weight of 24 million Egyptians huddled at subsistence level in their overpopulated Nile Valley. Early talk of resettlement of surplus Egyptian population in fairly underpopulated Syria has fallen through, both because it had bad psychological effects in Syria, and because even the first studies indicated extreme difficulties in the project. All in all, Syrian businessmen give the impression of being willing to move toward Egypt for whatever quick gain can be had, while always reserving room to retreat into economic separatism if the long-term picture begins to darken.

After all is said about these several groups that make up the sources of power in Syria, however, there are still the people. And there is little doubt that most Syrians are still relieved, happy, and enthusiastic. Abdel Nasser is, after all, more popular in Damascus than he is in Cairo -- and that is not to say that he is unpopular in Cairo but rather that he is viewed as an Egyptian leader by Egyptians, with all his virtues and faults assessed by a people which takes almost everything and everyone with a grain of salt. To Syrians he is much more than another politician; he is the knight in shining armor who has come to save them, just as the story books always said would happen. And it is upon this supercharged emotional pinnacle that his popularity now rests, a popularity which is, furthermore, completely personal and is not shared in Syria by any other Egyptian or by Egyptians as a whole. If and when the President should ever fall from it, the disillusionment would be all the greater.

As far as Egyptians are concerned, perhaps the keynote to their reaction to union is indifference. It is an attitude compounded of Egyptian cultural superiority and recent history. Nothing could be more alien to the desperate Syrian seeking for an identity than the ingrained feeling in every Egyptian of the endless existence of Egypt as an entity and the calm assurance that it will always be one. Egyptian conversion to pan-Arabism, and its place at the head of the Arab States came rather late, and, in spite of the barrage of official propaganda, it is doubtful whether it has made much inroad in the

thinking of the average man. To be sure the Egyptian official, teacher, or clerk is quite content to assume the place he rightfully feels is his within the Arab movement, just as many Egyptians now say they are beginning to feel themselves a natural center of an even vaster Afro-Asiatic grouping. But these attitudes are necessarily constructed on the constant foundation of Egyptianism and the unconscious assumption of their personality.

The historical factor enters from the fact that Egypt has had, for the Middle East, a highly stable government for the past few years, and in particular it has had as its leader a figure who has been able to symbolize to the masses their aspirations toward dignity and a better fulfillment of their lives. Every observer in Egypt today agrees that the most important achievement of the present regime has been to rid the Egyptian of a sense of inferiority which both hindered internal progress and made a satisfactory adjustment of many international problems more difficult. As one foreign resident in Cairo, who had lived through both events, put it: "When the Cairo mobs burned Shephard's in 1952 they were giving vent to their feelings of pent-up rage and insecurity vis-à-vis foreigners. But when the English bombed Cairo in 1956 the Egyptians were really convinced that it was the English who were the barbarians, and it was up to Egyptians to react to the attack in a civilized way. That was, fundamentally, why not one foreigner suffered the least harm during the Suez Crisis."

It is in the same philosophical way that the Egyptians have now accepted Syria. Only a handful have ever been to Syria, and popular ideas of the Levant are remarkably vague, but the general sentiment is that the overwhelming cultural superiority of Egypt, its centralism, and the dynamism of Abdel Nasser, made the step inevitable -- just as they feel it will be inevitable for all the other Arab States in the Middle East some day. And, having thought this, most Egyptians dismiss the subject; Syria plays a very small part in their preoccupations. Even when, in his speech on the return from the Soviet Union, the President was obviously making special effort to stress the concept of union by pointedly referring to the "United Arab Republic, its southern region, Egypt, and its northern region, Syria," the applause at the mention of the new family member was polite and deferent but little more.

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What the future holds for the United Arab Republic, conceived in emotional stress and married in a semi-shotgun ceremony, is still doubtful. Even as this is written the first hidden strains in the tie have been reported from Aleppo, whence they might well be expected to come. Reports of clashes between Syrian and Egyptian officers, the uneasiness over the continued clandestine workings of the Syrian political parties, and administrative irritations are all signs of what may be a gathering storm; but they are vehemently denied by the heavily-controlled information sources in Damascus and Cairo. Syria is a large mouthful to swallow and the process of digestion has hardly begun. It is uncertain whether even the prestige of Abdel Nasser will be enough to contain the effervescent Syrian personality and use it, without giving it the sense of being abused once again by foreign domination. The only sure thing that can be said is that he stands a better chance than anyone else, and, if he fails, the Syrian problem may soon be making headlines that are as grave as they were last summer.

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