

INSTITUTE OF CURRENT WORLD AFFAIRS

WWU - 33

UAR I: SOME ALIGNMENTS DON'T COUNT

Shepherd's Hotel.
Cairo, United Arab Republic.
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Dear Dick:



EGYPT STILL BUILDS: 5000 years ago it was the Pyramid Cheops, then the Sphinx. Now it's Cairo's Nile Hilton.



At the onset of my 13-month, round-the-world study of neutralism and non-alignment last Thanksgiving morning I found myself all anticipation for every country on my itinerary save one: Egypt or, as it has been called since its merger with Syria in 1958, the United Arab Republic. Mainly because of ignorance on my part -- I'll concede -- I've never found the Arab world particularly intriguing. And then there is something else. Before leaving Washington, I had lunch with an official of the UAR Embassy and told him quite bluntly that I had no religion personally but that if he was interested in labels, I was Jewish by heritage. Moreover, I had no intention of filling out a false baptismal certificate in order to obtain a visa into his country. The official assured me that he thought even ex-Senator Lehman could now get into the UAR. But he bowed out from producing the visa, saying my visit was too far off. I tried again with the UAR Embassy in Djakarta, when I was only four months away, and still I was told it was too early. Finally, after a display of stubbornness with the UAR Legation in Vienna, I was granted a visa. But it was for only two weeks, instead of the full 3½ weeks of my intended stay. I had heard that two-week renewals were a means of keeping visiting newspapermen in check. And when it came to filling out the form, I was told that since I was from the U.S. I didn't have to put anything opposite the word "religion." Later,

when it came time for getting my visa extended here in Cairo, the Government insisted that I write something. And when I penned in "none," the clerk indulgently said, "That's quite all right, we've heard your country has free thinkers." Well, I gather Egypt is more sophisticated on this spiritual pedigreeing than its partner state, Syria, whose border guards not only look the applicant over for facial contours, but match his name against the verboten list of "Cohen, Greenberg and Levy." And I am told that Lebanon has also tightened up, while Jordan and Iraq are extremely discouraging, and Saudi Arabia and Yemen totally impossible. I realized that I couldn't indulge myself by completely ignoring the Arab Middle East if I intended to study neutralism. But since my approach was half-hearted at best, I decided to grit my teeth and limit my expedition to Egypt.

I use the word "expedition" consciously for I have been toting around some 10 yards of mosquito netting and a 1-lb. can of DDT powder for the past 11 months in anticipation of anopheles and Cairo bedbugs. The flies were swarming when I arrived at Cairo's Heliopolis Airport, I agree. But I began to feel a little silly when I found that the cabbie's estimate strangely corresponded exactly with the taxi meter reading into town. And I felt a little sillier when the cabbie delivered me to a Nile-side dive with marble stairs, bedrooms with verandahs and individual airconditioning units and tiled bathrooms with twin basins -- called the new Shepheard's. I am just glad I didn't walk in with a pith helmet.

My second disillusion (or disabusement, if you prefer) was a phone call the first thing next morning from an old schoolmate, Dr. Mohamad A. Selim, declaring, "Can you make the Rotary lunch at the Hilton? I'm taking off for Iran tomorrow and it's the only time we can get together." The Hilton, I found, is another Nile-side dive, but newer, and with even more marble than Shepheard's.

But in looking back over these past 3½ weeks, I certainly don't want to tell you that I've come away converted. The individuals I've met have almost always been thoroughly affable and kind. The taxi drivers -- if they are any barometer for visitor popularity awards -- have been scrupulously honest. Cairo, at least, has replaced its grunting camels with grunting autos. Its streets are fairly clean and constantly are being swept. The belly dancers still gyrate, but this modernization business has gone a bit too far and rolled down a gauze curtain over the belly. And even though there are now new steel bridges over the Nile with "Krupp" in neon lights, the fellahin can still be seen using Archimedes' wheel to painfully cup up the water from the river and sluice it over into the muddy irrigation canals. And, more pertinent to my work, UAR officials have copied the shortcomings of bureaucracy and couldn't care less about helping a student of neutrality to see the policy makers concerned with the matter. When I thought I had a sure route to President Nasser via Mohamed Hassanein Heikal, the editor of the Government's announcement organ, Al Ahram, and a close Nasser confidant, I found that two to three phone calls to his office each day for 3½ weeks didn't even produce the courtesy of a single reply. Oh yes, his secretary once did set up an appointment. But when I got there the great man gave me five minutes, taking the whole time to declare, "I can't see you now; you'll have to come back."

Well, I've meandered enough. First off, let me say that I've found that neutralism is not the subject which interests the UAR most today. First attention seems to be going to Iraq with its Kassim and/or communist challenge to Nasser's leadership in the Arab world; second to Syria, with its

border vulnerability to Iraq and its internal need for economic uplift; and down to third place these days is the old war whoop, "Israel." Internally here in Egypt, there seems to be far more interest in agricultural improvement and industrial development than in foreign policy.

But I've certainly heard the expression "Positive Neutralism," and by repeating the questions often enough I've received some answers. Again back to preconceptions. I think the West, particularly the U.S., has slowly and grudgingly come around to acknowledging, perhaps respecting, the position of a neutral in today's world. Yet I also think there is still great skepticism, great suspicion that Arab neutrality might be Arab opportunism. Even in Yugoslavia (WWU-32), I wrote you of one editor telling me, "We don't have the Arabs' 'Positive Neutralism' because that means the playing on the antagonisms of one bloc against the other." Even though the UAR first tried to secure aid from the West and does indeed receive some economic help from the West, it cannot be considered neutral today because all its arms come from the East, primarily Russia. So does the great bulk of its non-military help, specifically the \$92 million loan which Russia so far has granted for the building of the first stage of the High Dam at Aswan on the Upper Nile, the \$175 million in Russian industrial credits, one-third of which already have been drawn down. And if neutral is also interpreted to mean non-aligned (as many countries I've visited so interpret it), the UAR very definitely is aligned. Nasser speaks not only for Egypt, not only for the United Arab Republic, but for the Arab "World," an area which he likes to think encompasses all the followers of Mohammed from Iraq and Saudi Arabia on the Persian Gulf to Morocco on the Atlantic Ocean. And periodically Nasser's domain gets even bigger. He speaks for Africa, even though many Africans are not very conscious of his northeast corner of the continent. And he speaks for Afro-Asia, even though most of the Bandung conferees certainly don't speak for him. And in another aspect of neutrality, the UAR certainly is not neutral toward Israel. The organized fighting has stopped, but the UAR has detained the Inge Toft, the Danish ship with Israeli cargo, in the Suez Canal since last May.

But it's high time I let the citizens of the UAR step up and speak for themselves.



Col. Anwar Sadat is one of the original 11 or so members of Nasser's Revolution Command Council (RCC). He now is both secretary general of the Islamic Congress and of the National Union, an organization which Nasser likes to approximate to a national expression -- in lieu of the absence of all political parties. I saw Sadat in his National Union office, the old RCC Army officers' headquarters on an island in the Nile opposite central Cairo. He wore a sport coat and gold wedding band, used a cigarette holder and spoke fluent English. Sadat is balding now, but I judged him to be in his 'forties.

"An Arab bloc?" Sadat echoed my question. "Since the beginning of our Revolution we believe that this area is one. Iraq has five million; Syria, 3 million; Lebanon, 1 million; Jordan, 1½ million; Tunisia, 4 million; Libya, 1½ million; Sudan, 7 million -- they say 9 million, but it is not so; and Egypt, 23 million in population. These are small nations and every country by itself can't have the resources to defend itself and exercise its voice in the world. So we have to find a way to unify, culturally, economically, in defense -- from the Atlantic Ocean to the Persian Gulf. The Suez crisis proved that to defend

this area no one country can do it by itself. Our situation is different from Yugoslavia and India."

And how does UAR neutrality manage to include Afro-Asia?

"What is our look toward Africa? We consider that in 10 years most of the African countries will achieve their independence. We are an African country and we can't stand with folded hands and wait for any African country to come to us. We want to help these countries. Achieving political independence is the easy battle. But how to protect the political independence is the most difficult problem. There is a great danger now that in 10 years Africa will be Communist, and this danger is not just for America. First of all, it is against us because we are Africans here. (Last December 23, when President Nasser's quarrel with the Soviet Union over Iraq broke out into the open, he locked up a good many Egyptian and Syrian Communists. In a second raid, on Good Friday, he brought the total of apprehended to a reported 750. The Egyptian Communists are now considered non-existent and some 60 of them currently are being tried behind closed doors in Alexandria. Since Syrian Communists were more widespread, the completeness of their break-up is less certain.)

"The Afro-Asia issue started only after the Suez problem and during the isolation scheme of Mr. Dulles. We had an Afro-Asian solidarity conference here in 1957. The President (Nasser) told me, 'Mr. Dulles is trying to isolate us. Let us prove to him that he can't and have an Asian meeting here in Cairo.' I said, 'What about Africa?' I started the arrangements and in December, 1957 the conference took place here. From that time started our Afro-Asia connections. Russia, China, Egypt and others were elected to the first governing board."

What have been the ups and downs of your relations between East and West? "Two years before the Revolution (July 26, 1952), the U.S., United Kingdom, France and Turkey approached Egypt to form an alliance. The King (Farouk) couldn't do anything because of the bitterness against any foreign power, because of the experience with the British. Two hours after our Revolution, we sent a message to the American Embassy saying it was a pure Egyptian Revolution. There was understanding from America. But the State Department wanted still to control. When the Americans asked us to form alliances we told them we are against any pact with any big power. We told them we feel the defense of this area must be the responsibility of the people in this area. At the same time, if there is any attack in this area, we welcome help. Mr. Dulles (Sadat obviously was no admirer of the late Secretary) didn't understand our feeling and our position. We are asked to join the Baghdad Pact, but in such a way that it made us furious. (Nasser looked upon the Western inclusion of Iraq and the attempted inclusion of Jordan and Lebanon as a direct challenge to his leadership in his world. He also warned the Arabs that the Western "imperialists" were using the rallying cry against communism as an excuse to entrench themselves in the Middle East and detract Arab attention from Israel.) Right after the Israeli aggression of February 28, 1955 (in Gaza), we asked America for arms. They said, 'We can't because you have an agreement (for Canal forces) with the British.' During all these battles every day we were convinced more and more that non-alignment is our best policy. With America, even selling military arms was with commitments. But with the Soviet bloc we had it with free trade. If there was any commitments with the Soviets we wouldn't have attacked them vehemently when we felt the communists were invading Iraq. The only power with commitments was the Western power. We don't need any guardian here. But the Americans, notably Mr. Dulles, couldn't understand it. When we find that communism is against us, we attack and we fight it."

And your experience with the negotiations for financing the High Dam at Aswan? "Mr. Dulles' High Dam statement made us a bankrupt country before the whole world (now we are getting to the point) and invited the Egyptian people to revolt against Gamal Abdel Nasser. Then came the (Sinai) aggression and thank God Mr. Dulles was in the hospital at that time and Mr. Eisenhower made the decision to condemn Britain, France and Israel at the UN. (It seems to me I recall Mr. Eisenhower rushing to Dulles' bedside for consultations.) Then Mr. Dulles started the 'Isolation Scheme': To isolate Egypt and create trouble in the Arab world; to isolate the Revolution and create trouble within Egypt. America then sent Loy Henderson to Turkey and was pushing Syria to be communist -- because of this rash policy of Mr. Dulles'. During the invasion (of Sinai) I was on the Revolutionary Council and I was of the idea of asking the Soviet help 100 per cent. It was just the feeling of bitterness. It had been offered. I said, 'Let us drive them (Britain and France) out of here once and for all.' President Nasser said, 'No, I shall not agree to either the Soviet help or the Chinese help. I am not going to make of my country another Korea.' The President said 'No' even though everything was against him personally -- Eden, Mollet, Dulles, the Zionist propaganda."

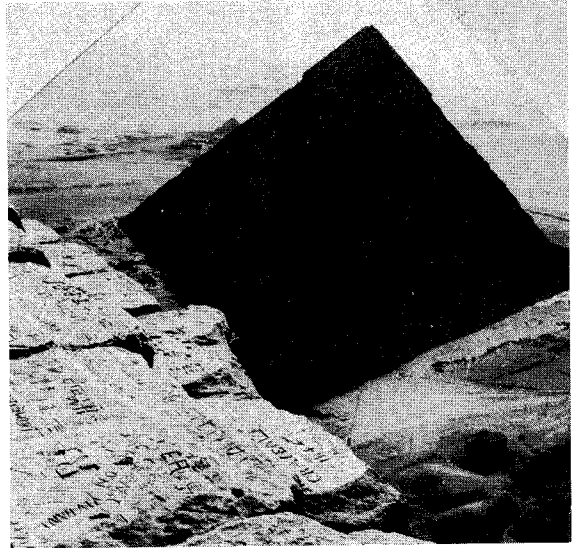
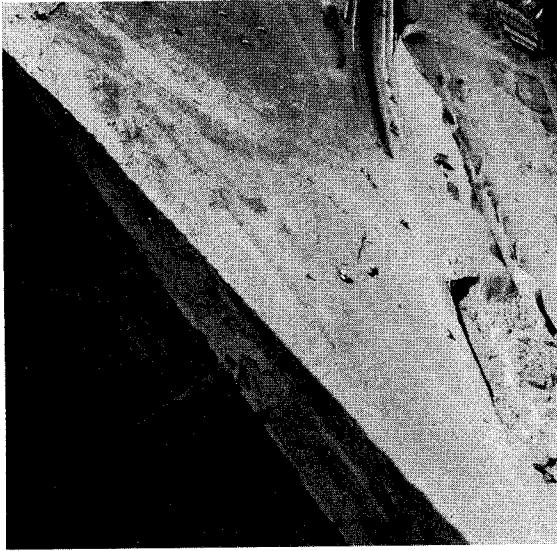
What about your more recent experience with the Soviet Union? "We were on good terms with the Soviets during Mr. Dulles' blockade. After the war, he (guess who?) refused to sell us fuel and wheat and sent it to Israel. The Soviet Union sent us both. And then we came to the moment when we found that the Soviet Union wants to be the guardian of the Communist Parties in our area -- in Egypt, in Syria, in Iraq. We achieved much more than the Americans could in 10 years because when we spoke the whole Arab world listened and trusted us. Our Positive Neutralism is quite clear. It is not for the East. It is not for the West. It is for our country."



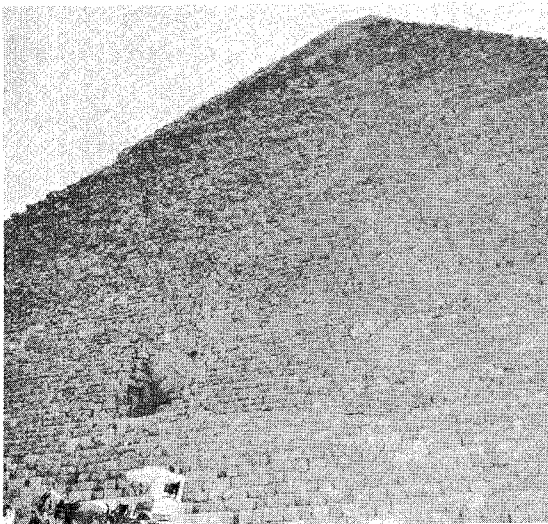
Tunisia's for
Nasser

Another man close to Nasser is Fouad Galal, a former Minister of both Social Affairs and National Guidance who now is the President's adviser on Arab and African matters. He also serves as President of the Arab Graduates, which, I gather, is a sort of political cheer group from the various Arab universities. Galal was a professor of education before the Revolution. I visited him in his home on a Friday morning, the Moslem sabbath, and waited a half hour for him. First I idled my time by staring at the formal square of chairs lining the edges of his reception room, then at the strange mixture of curio-shop Sphinx heads and Japanese dolls which were poked around various tables. Galal finally made his appearance, apologizing that he had overslept and that the servants had been reluctant to awaken him. There were innumerable telephone interruptions from a phone brought into the reception room. But we finally got on with the business at hand as Galal fingered his Moslem prayer beads with the same intent concentration that a doodler puts into his drawings.

"Nobody thinks of neutrality as something permanent," he began. "It is not a Christian give the other cheek. I think the purest form of neutrality would be not to get involved in the Cold War. But there are other conflicts from which we cannot get away. The Arab conflict. That is a problem of self determination. People in Jordan with a free election would not say they like King Hussein. You can say now that the Jordan people prefer Hussein over Nasser, but he (Hussein) is like a man who suspects his wife for being unfaithful. He has dismissed four Chiefs of Staff for 'plots' against him. And in



THE PYRAMIDS. I beg to inform you that the top two pictures were not taken by an airplane but by a would-be human fly named Unna who shrugged off solicitous guides and puffed his way, hand, kneed and elbowed his way, incredibly nearly lost his way, to the top of Egypt's highest edifice, Cheops. On the upper left, you may get some idea of what it is like to hold your breath and look down. On the upper right is a neighboring pyramid of lesser size. The initials? Well, I didn't say I was the FIRST to conquer Cheops. Below left, I'll also concede that the mammoth is notched, not smooth. Looters stripped off the limestone surface. And at the lower right, King Djoser's step pyramid at Saqqara, near Memphis, the oldest of the pyramids and one which really was designed to have notches.



Iraq, we are sure that they would not vote for President Kassim. If an election were held in Tunisia today, the people would choose Nasser over Bourguiba. It is still a game in the Arab world for every King or every ruler to make his people believe that Nasser supports him. This game works to a limit because these people are interested in their own rule. When they invited Nasser to visit them and they saw the popularity he had, a sort of rivalry began to take place with the colonial powers encouraging these heads to drift away from Nasser and start a campaign against him. That explains Bourguiba. That explains Hussein. That explains King Saud for a time. There is no doubt that Britain is playing a very, very big and dangerous part in Iraq. (Britain refused Nasser arms in 1954 but made an arms supply agreement with Iraq this Spring which included some bombers.)

"The Eisenhower Plan (promising U.S. aid to nations threatened by international communism) was to make people denounce communism, accuse Nasser of being a Communist and then start fighting him and getting money from the U.S. And that is exactly what happened...We are not fighting France and Britain as such, but we are fighting the colonialists. We can't stand by when the Algerians are being killed by the hundreds of thousand. The U.S. had a good reputation before it became involved with these countries and gave them aid. Algeria has had U.S. aid. Africa is the same thing (Galal didn't specify who our recipient was there). Israel is like transplanting a foreign body in a human being. Don't forget that Israel is on the borderline, or near the borderline, of all the Arab countries of the Middle East. I have a burglar who is armed and is next to me. He has defeated me once and I am helpless. When we talk of being aligned in the Arab land it is because we feel we are Arabs as much as we are Egyptians. So there is no contradiction in believing in Arab nationalism and in believing in non-alignment."

Cordially,



Warren W. Unna

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