

INSTITUTE OF CURRENT WORLD AFFAIRS

CM-11
Arab Viewpoints

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366 Madison Avenue
New York 17, New York

Dear Dick:

Among the Arabs - friends and critics alike - there is a conviction that American editors and publishers are unfair in their treatment of news from the Arab world. They believe news coverage is neither adequate nor objective, and frequently distorted. There is support for this criticism among American correspondents in the Arab countries.

Arab states, even though they have occasionally hired public relations counsel in the United States, have not been able to tell the Arab story to Americans in a way to make an impact. The Arabs have been prisoners of their own semantics. They have utilized to their advantage relationships with Egyptologists, archeologists, and "indigenous" American groups such as the American Friends of the Middle East. But on the whole the Arabs are amateurs in this business in the United States (although the Egyptians have done well in their propaganda in other Arab countries). They are not able to call upon any substantial group of American citizens of Arab extraction for political support in America.

Regardless of the facts of press coverage of the Arab world (which might be ascertained by a project of the Columbia School of Journalism), the important element in U. S.-Arab relations is what the Arabs believe. They believe they do not get fair treatment in the American press.

To attempt partially to redress the imbalance of fact, or belief, this letter endeavors to present significant Arab points of view in so far as they relate to U. S. policy in the Middle East, particularly as expressed in the United Arab Republic.¹

1. I tried, without success, to see President Nasser. The most significant individuals to whom I talked were Deputy President Zakaria Mohyi El-Din, Director of the President's Office Hassan Sabry El-Kholy, the Governor of Cairo Sabah Desouki, and Editor in Chief of Al Ahram (the "N.Y. Times" of the Arab world) Mohamed Hassanein Heikal.

I believe the conversations with these gentlemen, and others, faithfully reflect the views of the Presidential establishment, especially in light of one of the many political stories going the rounds in Egypt:

It seems that one of the government Ministers attended a meeting of village fellahin and encouraged them to speak up and express their views. To illustrate the point, the Minister said they should ask: "Where's the meat? Where's the rice? Where's the sugar?" Next week the same group of fellahin met. One of them took the lesson to heart. He demanded: "Where's the meat? Where's the rice? Where's the sugar?...Where's the Minister who was here last week?"

Aggression. A recent editorial in the Egyptian Gazette blasted an editorial in the New York Times - described as "one of the main pro-Zionist organs" in the United States. The Times editorial had referred favorably to the development of the new National Assembly in the U.A.R., but concluded, nevertheless, that President Nasser was "still a potential danger in the Mediterranean."

Replied the Gazette:² "It is a strange argument that President Nasser is a potential danger....What dangers have been created by him? Has the U.A.R. a record of threats and aggression? It is a regular practice of the Zionists to reverse the position of their propaganda - and unfortunately they are believed - The U. N. records show from where aggression has come. How many times has Israel been condemned for its violations of the armistice agreement? What happened at Suez? Was it Egypt's aggression? What role did Britain and France play?....Does the U. S. take a stand against Israel's move to divert the course of the Jordan River which is certainly aggression against Arab territory?....The facts answer these questions. They show that no aggression has come from the Arabs. On the contrary, it is the Arabs that need protection against aggression....The U.A.R. is now embarking on a new democratic period....The people of this country want no aggression, neither to be its victims nor to perpetrate it....With responsibility now in the hands of the people (in the U.A.R.), it would help to create better links of understanding if the West showed itself a little more appreciative of the Arab cause....It would be in the interests of all if there could be cooperation and not animosity."

Israel. I asked a number of Arabs if they could ever live at peace with Israel or if they envisaged the day when Israel would be "thrown into the sea."

"Let's put it this way," replied an important figure in the U.A.R., "some emotional Arabs use those words and so do the Zionists in their anti-Arab propaganda. Responsible officials, however, know this would not be possible even if we had the strength. The lesson of Suez was that aggression can't prevail. The Israelis, the British, and the French found that out when they attacked us in 1956. If we tried to throw Israel into the sea - if we aggressed - the whole world would be against us. Even the U. S. can't use force to throw Castro out of Cuba. In view of our past experience, however, we don't trust the Israeli not to use force against us; that's why we must keep our defenses adequate. But we know that Arab aggression against Israel would not succeed."

The point of view set forth in the preceding paragraph is hardly ever expressed publicly because anti-Israel emotions in large sectors of the public are so violent that personal retaliation might well be directed against any public figure taking such a public position. Continuing:

2. The Gazette is a small circulation, English language newspaper in Cairo which doesn't necessarily reflect the Government's views. In this instance it does. Date of editorial, March 31, 1964.

"Next you will ask about Yemen and say we have aggressed there. We came to the help of the de facto government in power which requested our aid. We acted just as the U. S. did in Vietnam.

"The burden is on Israel to accommodate itself to the Arab world within which it must live. Time is on our side because we will develop in national unity and economic strength. Furthermore, the Arab states have the great preponderance of population, wealth, and land.

"Israel is trying to build itself up by increasing its military strength. Military power cannot succeed in this century.

"You Americans expect us in time to forget that one million Arabs were driven from their homeland in Palestine. The Jews remembered their homeland for 2000 years. Our memories are just as good."

Imperialism. Arabs frequently use the word "imperialist" to describe the economic and military threat to their independence which they feel emanates from the West. They believe Israel is an instrument of Western imperialism and since the United States seems to support Israel it is often lumped with the United Kingdom and France as an imperial power in the traditional sense. At the same time there is some uneasiness in this association.

As one of my informants said: "We slip into identification of the U. S. as an imperialist nation largely because of your support for Israel. But the American attitude is quite different than that of the 19th century imperialists. America never 'sucked the blood' of the Philippines as the British and French did of us. The Filipinos may quarrel with you but they will never have the deep animosity that we have for the British and the French.

"Before our Revolution I was editor of a magazine in Egypt with a circulation of over 100,000. I travelled in all the Arab countries and, though only 27, I was well known and highly respected among most Arabs.

"Can you imagine my humiliation and outrage at being ordered out of my car and being frisked by an ignorant British sergeant every time I crossed the Suez Canal as I moved from one part of my country to another? I went through that experience twice and then never again crossed the Canal until the British were gone."

Arab Socialism. There is a tendency for Americans to lump Arab socialism and communism together. Arabs make a strong point that their brand of socialism is unique. As one remarked to me:

"In the U.A.R. we have done almost precisely the things the U. S. insists be done by the Latin American countries if they are to receive assistance under the Alliance for Progress. We have broken up the giant landed estates, but have not abolished private ownership. Today a family may own a maximum of 100 acres. We are helping ourselves and working hard. We impose and collect taxes; we apply strict controls to our imports to be sure we get essential capital goods and not luxury goods. We have broken up the great industrial monopolies controlled from Europe which

were operated for the benefit of the Europeans and not for the benefit of the Egyptians. While we have nationalized many companies, we have not acted against American companies because you help us. Nevertheless, we owe a debt of gratitude to the late Secretary Dulles because he helped our Revolution. At the time Dulles refused assistance in building the Aswan Dam we were furious. But that act led to the seizure of the Suez Canal and gave us courage enough to nationalize other enterprises that were sucking our blood. Your robber barons were boy scouts compared to those we had.

"While we have gone much farther than you like in developing the public sector of our economy, we still try to operate in the pattern of private enterprise. Nationalized banks and insurance company executives will tell you they see little difference in operating in the public sector from their earlier operations. Of course their profits cannot be exported. We still insist that nationalized businesses operate on a profit and loss basis, with 25 per cent of the profits going to the employees of the business. This provides the rewards we think necessary to stimulate production. From 1952 to 1962 our gross national product nearly doubled, increasing from \$1.8 billion to \$3.5 billion. We are still feeling our way and constantly changing our patterns of growth."

AID. "We much appreciate U. S. aid, although you have given more to the small state of Israel than to all the Arab states combined. However, we don't like the way you give us aid. Your aid seems to us like inviting a man to dinner. When he gets there you either throw the plate in his face, or seat him and then remind him after every bite that he is your guest.

"That's one thing about Soviet aid. They get their 2½ per cent interest on loans and they get their repayments in 12 years after the aided project has been finished, but they don't threaten us with withdrawal of aid like you did last year in the Gruening-Javits amendment. We had some terrific fights with Khrushchev when we put communists in jail and opposed communism in Iraq but he never threatened to stop his aid for the Aswan Dam. And now it looks like you will renege on your promise to help us move Abu Simbel."

If there is a single key to understanding the Arabs it is found in President Gamal Abdul Nasser. He has been in power in Egypt for 12 years. He is firmly in charge and seems likely to continue in charge for many years. During the period of his reign he has grown in stature and influence both domestically and internationally. This is remarkable because during this period President Nasser has at various times been at serious odds with the Russians and the Americans and has fought the British, the French, and the Israelis. Within the Arab world he has at one time or another been accused of attempts to subvert most of their governments. He has outlawed the communist party and nationalized large segments of private industry.

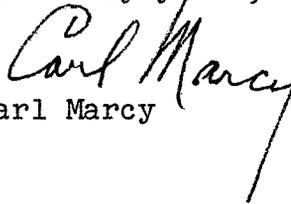
At the same time he has presided over one of the most gentle revolutions of modern times. King Farouk was exiled, not shot, and there is no royalist influence left in Egypt. Only three political opponents have been executed and they were members of the fanatical Moslem Brotherhood

who were convicted of an assassination attempt on Nasser. Wealthy families had their fortunes confiscated, but were left with about \$75,000 of their former wealth - not much in their terms, but more than is customary in social revolutions.

As with most national leaders in new countries, Nasser is loved or hated.³ Very few people seem capable of an objective judgment of the man or his policies - indeed few seem to try. Illustrative of the admiration he commands among his supporters was the statement of the Editor of Al Ahram:

"President Nasser is like your George Washington. What he has achieved in Egypt is more than your first President achieved. His voice has a special appeal because he speaks for 90 per cent of the Arabs. Everywhere he goes he is respected. We have had great leaders in the past such as Saladin. He led with an army. President Nasser is fighting alone - supported only by the Arab peoples. There will not be another like him."

Sincerely yours,


Carl Marcy

Received in New York April 20, 1964

3. Anti-Nasserism in the U.A.R. is found principally among the relatively few people whose wealth has been seized by the State. Some of these have fled Egypt. Among those who remain there is great bitterness but no expectation that the Revolution can be reversed.